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Final Testimonial: MIT Emerging Talent Learners' View – MIT Emerging Talent Learner

When I look back over my path through the MIT Emerging Talent, I remember a year defined not just by the skills I gained but the direction I found myself in and the people I found myself spending time with — not just a year of learning skills but personal growth. I joined the program with no doubt that I wanted to hone my analysis and technical skills and be able to help me in the decisions I would be making in the future regarding better decisions based on the data I would be working with.

Working with the United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations that work with immigrants, refugees, and internally displaced people, for nearly 8 years, as well as being an immigrant myself, I had witnessed firsthand the power of data when it is interpreted correctly and used responsibly.

At the beginning of the program, I would rephrase to my earlier self progress does not require certainty. Often, I struggled with my technical knowledge in the beginning, particularly as someone moving from a largely social and humanitarian upbringing to a more analytical learning style. I discovered, over time however, that development can only come from perseverance, introspection and a capacity to delve into unfamiliar content at length. The program inspired me to give up a self-doubt in favor of confidence — based on training in discipline, not perfection.

Foundations Track and Personal Development

The Foundations Track was a great way for me to get ready for the program's later component. Even though the technical material covered some fundamental points, the things that really helped me was the sessions of Personal Agency led by Megan which had more influence on me than the books. Those times I learned structure, accountability and how to get myself moving with my future learning goals.

As well-known for my introspection and self-reflection ability in any of these sessions, I learned how to reflect on my time and effort, what was struggling, and tweak things that were non-work. And this focus on personal growth and ownership of learning became increasingly important while considering the fact that I was working on studies, being professionals and life-balance.

The Foundations Track taught me how to learn (to do better) in a very different way then what knowledge I was doing, it was that same mindset. This mindset carried over into the Certificate courses and also into my capstone project. The Foundations Track taught me about managing my personal, professional and learning challenges and the process of learning.

Capstone Project and Skills Development

I'm proudest of a project I've done and consider one of the proudest achievements at completion as working on a capstone on immigrant integration in Germany with a mixed methods data analysis. The project also provided an opportunity for me to merge quantitative survey analysis with qualitative expert interviews and thereby tie my professional experience directly into my analytical skills I had developed throughout the program.

The project made it clear that immigrant integration is not the responsibility of individuals to learn language, but rather, a multidimensional and systemic process determined by bureaucracy, social

welfare, and institutional accessibility. I gained a new level of confidence designing surveys, cleaning and analysing the data, constructing indices, interpreting correlations and regression models and translating the findings for non-technical and tech audiences.

Outside the capstone, I'm also proud to see how my relationship with data has changed. That was until now intimidating tasks - structuring datasets, validating results, or visualizing outputs - have become resources that I can use in an intentional way in real life.

Challenges and Growth

The difficulty in the program was the balance between depth, rigor, and time. Managing the coursework, a big capstone project, presentations as well as reflective writing involved careful planning and concentration over an extended period of time.

As a professional with no formal computer or data science training, there were times when the enormity of the task seemed insurmountable. The initial stages of the programme made me feel some pressure to create a perfect product. Feedback from teachers and classmates that time was doing its work helped me to realize that iteration and taking what is not working and learning is very important in both studying and working.

What I Would Do Differently

If I could do the program again I would ask questions and ask for feedback sooner. At first, I considered being unsuccessful was part of the learning journey. I realised afterward that collaboration and dialogue were extremely helpful and that increased understanding and better work rate. This awareness has already shaped a shift I'm making in how I deal with learning and collaboration outside of the program.

Career Direction and Future Learning

The MIT Emerging Talent program showed me how to clarify my career direction, which is one of the most significant result of its completion. After eight years of experience in the United Nations system, I plan to continue working in the United Nations system but to bolster my analytical skills even more.

Data is one of my critical strengths, as I view it to enhance the efficacy, efficiency, and accountability of humanitarian and social services. In the future, it would be helpful to gain more advanced data analysis, policy informed research, and applied analytics skills in an institutional setting. Continued education with additional classes, practical projects and practicing in real-life practice in my workplace will be required for me.

A Shift in Mindset

I think the most significant change for me was a change in frame of mind. I saw data analytics when I starting the program, as a niche of advanced skillset. Today, I consider it crucial for professionals involved in managing our intricate social systems. Data does not supersede human judgement or experience—it serves to fortify human judgment and human experience when used ethically and mindfully.

Conclusion

All in all, all in all this process as a MIT Emerging Talent learner has transformed my life. The program gave individuals the chance to actually develop and trusted participants to be responsible for learning. It honed my technical capabilities, fine-tuned my thinking and reaffirmed my dedication to making evidence-based choices in humanitarian or global work.

The experience is not only a steppingstone in my education, but a stepping-stone in how I will take this next stage of my career – being clear, being confident, and having great faith in data's ability to make a difference in peoples lives.