

## **OFFICE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

### **CAREER PATH: Operations Management Steps for Developing an Operations Management Career**

#### **Introduction**

The Office of Career Development (OCD) created the *Career Path* series to assist students with the career search process. Each *Career Path* handout examines a common business functional area in which Ross graduates pursue jobs each year. The first four steps of OCD's recommended career search process are detailed for each specific business field.

#### **Operations management Overview**

Traditionally, operations management was considered to be plant management at a manufacturing organization. This is no longer true. There has been a marked increase in the number of operations people employed in the service sector, and many recent graduates of the Business School operations program have taken jobs in consulting. In addition, recent graduates have also found opportunities as supply chain managers in corporate headquarters.

#### **Career Search Step #1: Conduct Self-Assessment**

Based upon CareerLeader, operations managers have high interest in application of technology, quantitative analysis and enterprise control. Like Sales Managers and Marketing Managers, Production and Operations Managers often enjoy leading people. They have an engineering-like approach to business problems evidenced by their interest in application of technology and quantitative analysis. Their very high enterprise control score illustrates the fact that they like to "own a process."

Several skills and attributes are important to success in the operations environment:

- **Technical knowledge** (understanding of systems and engineering processes).
- **Strong interpersonal skills** (the ability to work effectively with and through other people).
- **Leadership.**
- **General business knowledge** (multi-disciplinary).

- **Strong analytical/problem solving abilities** (creativity).
- **Negotiation skills (ability to negotiate effectively with different parties, e.g. suppliers, internal customers and unions).**
- **Presentation skills (a successful operations manager will often interact with corporate senior managers, often in a non-engineering, more business language).**

A career in operations management in a corporate setting can potentially mean a more balanced lifestyle than in a consulting environment. Although it should be noted that corporate manufacturing problems may disrupt personal plans, there is significantly less travel involved in a corporate setting. One lifestyle note worth mentioning: operations management assignments are often at manufacturing plant facilities. Upward promotion may require relocation to other plants throughout a career. On the other hand, supply chain positions exist both at headquarters and the manufacturing facility.

Operations management in a corporate setting is not as lucrative as other fields business students may pursue. A career in this field although provides a great deal of variety, power and influence. As global manufacturing becomes more important, international opportunities are becoming fairly common.

### **Career Search Step #2: Investigate Possible Career Opportunities**

#### **MBA Career Opportunities:**

Operations management offers excellent career potential in the short and long term. It is unlikely, however, that you will be able to come into a position of significant authority immediately out of school. Companies must trust the judgment of their high-level line managers, positions gained after several years of experience. Movement in an operations function can be very rapid, however, if performance is strong. If you feel that line operations management is where you would like to make a career, you may want to focus all your resources on obtaining such opportunities right out of the business school. These kinds of positions are a great way to learn about the industry and the company and generally lead to roles of increased responsibilities in the future.

Operations jobs are not limited to managing a production line in a factory. As organizations are developing complex and global supply chains, challenging and exciting opportunities in the Supply chain management are opening up. Other operations management jobs include:

- Operations management consulting

- Internal auditing groups
- Operations strategy
- Distribution and logistics planning
- Inventory planning and control
- Supply chain management
- Business process improvement or reengineering
- Strategic planning
- Manufacturing Strategy
- Support activities in the services/financial industry

The Operations area is a good entry point in the organization in order to move towards more general management positions.

**BBA Career Opportunities:**

BBAs may also pursue careers in the above mentioned fields of operations management. BBAs need to be willing to engage in entry-level assignments, often in manufacturing facilities, in order to gain credibility for future advancement into management positions. Also, technical experience in terms of internships and/or other education outside of the Business School is very helpful in landing operations positions after graduation. Specifically, it is helpful to have a strong background in math, computer science and/or engineering.

**Career Search Step #3: Research and Conclude on Immediate Post-Graduate Employers**

The number of candidates interviewing for operations jobs on campus is generally relatively small. The number of companies recruiting operations people is also relatively small. This means that competition is as intense for these positions as for those in other fields. Fewer recruiting companies may mean that the specific firm or industry you have targeted may not recruit on campus. As a result, it is strongly recommended that you conduct an extensive off-campus job search.

The number of companies hiring for operations management jobs is increasing as companies recognize the need for MBA skills within their organizations. Companies in a wide range of industries are recruiting for operations positions. This includes industries like high tech, pharmaceuticals, retail, financial services and the traditional industrial sector. For example,

United Technologies' two year management training program is designed for MBAs pursuing careers in manufacturing organizations. Manufacturing organizations understand that they need top talent and salaries are rising. Many employers have started realizing the importance of talented people with leadership potential in operations positions. In order to build their leadership pipeline an increasing number of employers have started an Operations Leadership Program. In addition to increased visibility such programs are rotational in nature and allow the employee to quickly gain a broad exposure of the organization's operations. Research the OCD company database to identify companies with such programs.

#### **Career Search Step #4: Develop a Career Search Strategy**

Some specific search steps include:

- **Networking.** As discussed earlier, there are relatively few opportunities for recruitment on campus. At Michigan, the Tauber Manufacturing Institute has a close relationship with companies that hire MBAs and BBAs interested in operations. Nevertheless, opportunities do exist, also within these companies, to non-TMI fellows. Networking with these companies is strongly advised. Your off-campus search should include researching various industries, networking with RSB alumni in operations management discipline and soliciting informational interviews at target companies.
- **Research.** If you are conducting your job search in a specific geographic area and looking for a job with a manufacturing firm, there are several state directories of manufacturers in the reference section of the library. These directories are broken down by city as well as SIC code. Information provided for each firm, in addition to the address and phone number, includes the business or industry, number of employees, dollar sales, and names and positions of key people. These directories are especially helpful in identifying small and medium-sized companies. Remember that plant locations can vary widely for each firm. Kresge Library has other resources to assist in the of-campus search process, including the operations management search packet.
- **Attend company presentations.** Inform yourself about on-campus opportunities to determine if they are right for you. If companies are not overtly soliciting for operations, ask the company campus representative if they are hiring and/or interviewing for operations.
- **Prepare yourself.** Join the Operations Management Club and register for courses applicable to your career interest. Faculty can help with discussing career opportunities. If you are not

a TMI fellow, include an informational interview with TMI personnel as part of your strategy.

- **Utilize OCD services.** OCD sponsors a number of workshops that will help you market yourself to target firms. Workshops include resume and cover letter preparation, interview skills and the off-campus job search. Office hours are available for counseling for all aspects of the career search and skills development process. Career counselors and staff members with operations management experience are available to provide specific functional perspective.

Manufacturing organizations that do not recruit on campus may generally have less experience in recruiting MBA candidates. Consequently, part of the job search for the operations candidate will consist of an educational process for the company.

Many firms recruit candidates with engineering background for positions in operations management. If you have such a background it is still essential that you differentiate yourself from other engineering candidates. Your resume should point out strengths in both business and technical areas if possible. It is also possible for non-engineers to succeed in operations management field. Quantitative abilities, interpersonal skills and interest in this type of work are all important to manufacturing firms.

There is often less advance recruiting done in the operations management area. Companies hiring in the finance and marketing areas interview and extend offers earlier than those in the operations area, so DON'T PANIC when your colleagues in other fields are getting early offers.

### **Commonly Asked Interview Questions**

Behavioral questions that address the candidates' business skills (leadership, teamwork, analytical, etc.)

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Why do you want to be in operations?

Why do you want to work for this company?

What are your long-term and short-term career goals? How will you get there?

Give me an example where technological change has taken place for "change sake."

Do you want a line or staff position? Why?

How do you feel about supervising more experienced people?

Tell me of an example where your technical and interpersonal skills were used to successfully resolve a problem.

What is your opinion of JIT?

Why not pursue another engineering degree instead of an MBA?

What do you feel are the differences between managing union vs. non-union employees?

How do you utilize your education when dealing with low or non-educated hourly workers?

Operations management is often viewed as a support function out of the mainstream of the company. How do you feel about this?

Tell me how you feel operations management might play a role in the development of a firm's overall corporate strategy.

What was the best operations management course you took at Michigan and why?

Tell me about your decision to pursue an MBA and then about your decision to focus on the operations management area.

### **Interview Tips**

- Interviews will include general background/fit questions.
- Recruiters are interested in candidates that will occupy senior management positions in the future. They will look for general business skills (leadership, teamwork, creativity, problem solving and analytical skills, ethics, etc). Usually, a previous operation experience is a plus, but not a requirement.
- Brainstorm your previous experiences in light of the skills above mentioned. Analyze each example and put them in the CAR format (Context, Action, Results). The more examples you have, the more prepared you will be for your interview.
- Recruiter may be interested in candidate's knowledge/interest in industry and the company...be prepared!
- Different companies have different intentions. It is important to speak with alumni and current employees in order to understand if the company is looking for a person who will follow a career in operations or who has a strong interest in operations but aims to have experiences in other areas (some companies will value this flexibility a lot).
- Recruiter may try to assess candidates' interest in operations by discussing popular operations/manufacturing topics.

### **Resume Writing Tips**

- Resumes should include examples of key skills necessary for operations management positions.
- Engineers and those with technical backgrounds should avoid filling resume entirely with examples of products they have designed and the computer programs they have written
  - Include focus on processes involved (working on teams, etc.).
  - If using examples of projects, try to quantify the size of the project or the dollar impact of the project when possible.
- Non-engineers should also translate their experiences into skills applicable to operations management.

### **Bibliography of Information Resources**

- Consulting Career Packet, Kresge Library. If you are looking for a position in operations consulting, there are several directories of consultants and consulting firms listed in the CRC career packet on consulting. These directories are available in the reference section of the library.
- CareerLeader™
- Wet Feet Press
- Business periodicals

# TMI Timeline

## August/September

- Complete Career Leader
- Attend OCD Workshops (see list of workshops on back)

## October

### MBA1 Resume Book Deadline

- Attend OCD Workshops
- Schedule initial career counseling sessions
- Schedule resume reviews
- Meet TMI mentor
- Attend TMI “Industry Advisory Board Career Panel”
- Input Resume into iMpact

## November/December

- Schedule mock interviews
- Conduct informational interviews
- Target and research specific employers/industries
- Attend “Meet Last Year’s TMI Interns” Panel

## January

- TMI Project Presentations begin early to mid January
- Bidding for the TMI projects interviews begin
- Attend TMI Bidding and Cover Letter Workshop
- Attend TMI project presentations and submit resumes/cover letters for interview closed lists

## February

- TMI Interviews begin early February
- Conduct on-campus interviews
- Submit project ranking preferences

## March

- Project matching announced