



By Stacie Oshima, Former Graduate Counseling Intern, UCLA Career Center

Mark Oshima received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics at the University of California, Irvine and his Master of Business Administration from the John E. Anderson Graduate School of Management at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is currently the Operations Leader for the Corporate Structuring and Change Consulting Practice at Hewitt Associates, a human resources consulting company headquartered in Lincolnshire, Illinois.

SO: How did you get your start in human resources consulting?

*MO: I actually got my first job at Hewitt from the UCI on-campus recruiting program. Prior to my job at Hewitt, I held a number of leadership positions during my undergraduate experience. I ran UCI's administrative intern program, was a peer academic advisor, worked for a stockbroker, and held various officer positions in student organizations.*

SO: Please describe your first job at Hewitt.

*MO: I was specifically doing retirement planning consulting, which involved the technical administration of retirement plans. This would include accounting for the money that was put into 401K plans. I also ran tests against these plans to make sure they were in compliance with governmental regulations such as tax law, labor law, etc. For example, you have to conduct non-discrimination tests to make sure the companies don't discriminate against lower paid employees.*

SO: Can you tell me about the job that you got once you graduated with your Master of Business Administration?

*MO: Although it was with the same company, it was a totally different job. I became part of a charter group called the Organizational Effectiveness Practice. The job had more to do with working with human resources (HR) departments to develop HR strategies and organizational designs that helped the company get the most out of their HR and employees. For example, strategies such as what choices the company was going to make to attract, maintain, and motivate employees in order to improve the organization. That could include what types of compensation programs to put in place to attract the right talent. It could include employee motivation surveys that identified changes that they should make in HR policies. We also looked at managerial effectiveness and training and tools to help managers motivate their employees. It could also include trying to structure the organization to take advantage of team based organizational structures. Basically, it varied depending on the organization. We would go in and assess what types of things would best help these organizations perform better and make recommendations as to what changes they should make.*

SO: I understand that the job you are currently doing has changed from then. What do you do now?

*MO: I now work with clients who have been through mergers and acquisitions, helping them through integrating human resource practices and policies such as compensation, benefits, organizational design, training, staffing, etc. For example, organizations typically have different benefit programs, and when two organizations merge, you have to determine which benefit program to use. That includes legal analysis, costing of those benefits, the employee impact of harmonizing those programs, employment law issues relative to adding or taking away benefit provisions. All those things need to be taken into account. It would be the same for compensation, when two organizations merge, you have to create one compensation program for the new company. You have to analyze and understand the impact that the change would have on various employee populations as well as the impact on the business in terms of the cost and financial issues.*

SO: How often do you travel? Do you travel domestically or internationally?

*MO: It depends. Typically human resources consultants travel a few times a month. I travel 50-60% of the time. Typical business strategy consultants, however, can travel 80-100% of the time. In my line of work, I do some international travel, but it's mostly domestic.*

SO: What are the typical hours of someone who is just getting into the field of human resources consulting? How might those hours change as that person moves up in management roles?

*MO: Starting out, a HR consultant can work 50-60 hours a week. For management roles, it's about the same, although it's a different type of work. You're doing less analytical work and more strategy or sales.*

SO: What might be a typical workday for someone just starting in a human resources consulting role?

*MO: They would probably be working on a number of different spreadsheets, doing a lot of analysis, and writing reports. Sometimes you have the opportunity to go to client meetings, but beginning consultants don't do much presenting at those meetings.*

SO: Do consultants have to be business majors? What are some key skills of successful consultants?

*MO: No. You can be any major, however it's helpful be creative and have analytical skills as well as written and verbal communication skills and presentation skills.*

SO: What are some key student clubs or professional organizations in which students can get involved to learn more about this field?

*MO: Toastmasters would be helpful because it gives you experience in public speaking. Any on campus business association would also be good, as would any club that gives you experience in leadership or opportunities for you to facilitate meetings and work on facilitation techniques. Being able to read an audience is very important in consulting and is a very different skill than just speaking in front of people. Regarding professional organizations, there is the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), the Human Resource Planning Society (HRPS), and the World at Work.*

SO: Is it necessary that a HR consultant get an MBA?

*MO: No, not necessarily. You can also get a JD, CPA, or even a Masters in Organizational Psychology. The MBA is helpful but not required. If you pursue an MBA, it's helpful to have at least three years of full time, professional experience prior to getting your graduate degree. Getting an MBA can be helpful, because it helps you understand the language and concepts of business, but if you look at the leadership of a lot of companies, not everyone has an MBA. It can make you more competitive in the field, but it won't guarantee you a promotion. If you were doing general strategy consulting, the MBA is probably more important.*

SO: How does getting an MBA impact your compensation?

*MO: Going to business school could increase your pay by 20-40%, but there's also a cost associated with the loss of two years' income. The value of the degree is reflected in improved long-term compensation opportunity rather than short-term increase in salary. Your post-MBA pay opportunity is improved because you have gained more skills and experience from the MBA degree which, in turn, allows you to take on more responsibility and broader roles.*

SO: What do you like best about consulting?

*MO: I like the challenging assignments, client interaction, and solving a client's problem. Working with clients is always interesting, because each organization has a different set of issues and problems to address. The reason they hire you is because they can't solve the problem internally.*

SO: What is one of the hardest things about being a consultant?

*MO: For me, it's the travel. It's also hard, because sometimes you don't get to see things through to full implementation. Companies hire you for the initial analysis and strategy, and as a consultant you're paid for your time. Oftentimes, your job is finished once you deliver your strategic recommendations and companies don't hire you for the implementation of your strategy.*

SO: What advice do you have for students who are interested in getting into this industry?

*MO: Get broad business experience and focus on those transferable skills across multiple disciplines. Be a good writer and oral communicator. Explore what you really like to do and do that. Identify what you're good at, and then pursue those things that you have an aptitude for.*

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