

June Luncheon Report – Dr. Amita Raval, CERN Physicist

Hard to believe that we live in a city which is at the heart of an organization that has so changed the face of the world in recent decades!

We were privileged to welcome Dr. Amita Raval particle physicist and research fellow and CERN, to a joint event hosted together with the IMD alumni, who gave us an insight into particle physics, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) and where we stand in the immensity of it all. Some of the figures she presented were mind-boggling as she shared with us the inner activities of scientists, all searching for answers to more and more complicated questions.

And what does all this fundamental research do for society?

Just think beyond the world-wide web and we find medical, industrial, space, IT and other real-world applications – even the arts! The scientists concentrated at CERN provide a pool of invaluable talent and a highly-skilled labour force who after their fundamental research join industry sectors in computing, chemistry and consulting. An amazing 16% of PhD's end up in the finance field alone!

And the good news for women?

There is a distinct trend of a higher recruitment rate of all female applicants to positions at CERN. The hiring statistics of recent years show that women physicists and engineers have equal chances (in fact slightly better) than their male colleagues.

And is CERN worth all the money spent?

Amita cleverly responded by alluding to the question raised by the British Minister of Finance (Chancellor of the Exchequer) to Professor Michael Faraday, whose scientific efforts made electricity viable for use in technology, on the practical value of electricity back in 1850 by answering: "One day you may tax it, Sir!"

During the Q & A session that followed her address, Amita explained to us the headaches of executing major scientific breakthroughs with the dangers of media coverage – for example the breakdown of the LHC on its 1st launch day in March 2010, as well as the delicate subject of religion and the pursuit of answers to explain "the beginning of it all". In the words of Dr. Raval herself, there is always a place for spirituality for all those who seek the answers at CERN.

Laura Cantini
VP Lunches