

# Empowering Entrepreneurs—Sitting Down with the Founders of E-Cell, MIT

*E-Cell aims to inculcate an entrepreneurial mindset among students and plans to establish a robust start-up ecosystem for budding entrepreneurs on the campus. In a span of a few months, it has supported over ten student start-ups and provided internships to over fifty students at the institute despite the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Cell has also organised an ideation competition with a prize pool of 1.5 lakhs. Through “Sambhav”—National Level Awareness Program, the Cell holds regular webinars with notable Entrepreneurs such as Ritesh Shergill and Abhinav Arora. The MIT Post had the opportunity to converse with the organisation’s co-founders, Dhwani Shah, Armaan Charania, and Ankit Jajoo.*

## **What was the motivation behind founding E-Cell?**

**Ankit:** The construction of the E-Cell has been long overdue. With the help of our faculty advisor, Dr Sriram KV, we established an organisation under the official MIT body. Our alumni have been successful in research, scientific projects, and placements but have faltered in start-ups and entrepreneurial aspects. We wanted to start an organisation that would push and promote students to develop their ideas and revolutionise entrepreneurship and start-ups in MIT.

**Dhwani:** For example, in my first year, I had an idea, but I lacked the resources to move to the next steps. I was aware of multiple individuals that had taken up responsibilities in different aspects of the entrepreneurship world. However, there was no organisation with the ultimate handbook and

rules, helping with all elements that a start-up or entrepreneur might need to be successful. E-Cell becomes that one-stop destination that students can approach, regardless of what step in their entrepreneurship journey they find themselves in. It is a single central organisation that provides advice, access to networking, and helps with expanding skillsets.

### **What does E-Cell offer students?**

**Armaan:** The mission of E-Cell is to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship within the student community through greater awareness and act as a one-stop destination for all students looking to turn their ideas into viable startups. We want to help empower entrepreneurs by providing them with a vibrant start-up ecosystem and developing their ideas into successful ventures through dedicated mentorship and guidance.

Before E-Cell's formation, no specific body focused on MIT students. Recent AICTE norms mandated the need to have a dedicated entrepreneurship cell in every technical college under the National Innovation Start-up Policy, and this brought about the idea of starting an E-Cell for MIT students. Our fundamental aim is to develop a vibrant start-up culture on campus focusing on innovation, problem-solving, self-employment, and the creation of valuable companies.

The E-Cell will act as a bridge between students with ideas and people with expertise in Manipal Institute of Technology. To further this motive, we plan on creating a network of experts who could mentor the budding students to develop their ideas, providing the students access to the alumni network of MIT, referring students with mature ideas to MUTBI for pre-incubation and funding, increasing the ground outreach and awareness about various government policies for innovation and start-ups and conducting events and activities to promote entrepreneurship ecosystem on-campus: Mentorship meets, Workshops, E-summits, case study competitions, B-model

competitions, etc.

### **What will these workshops and events be about?**

**Dhwanit:** Many students who are aware that their idea could become something significant, often don't know the next step in the process. These students require the essential skills to create a basic business model, conduct market research and build a team. The workshops that we will host will target empowering the students in gaining these skills.

As everyone is affected by the current circumstances, many planned workshops and competitions were hindered in their offline conduct. They will happen in the future, at some point, although we look forward to conducting events like app connect, idea validation meetups, and more, shortly in an online atmosphere.

### **What is the difference between MUTBI of MAHE and E-Cell MIT? Is there a direct liaison between the two?**

**Armaan:** MUTBI is an incubator where a student can approach the team, and they will help the student get incubated, which means paperwork and other legal work. In return for the resources and services they provide, they will take a couple of shares of the organisation founded. There is no direct affiliation between MUTBI and E-Cell MIT. Instead, we coordinate with them when the need arises, but E-Cell MIT is an existing individual body of MIT—an extension of the MIT administrative body.

**Dhwanit:** MUTBI is a professional body with professors, faculty and professionals—not any students. It also pertains to all of MAHE, and Student Entrepreneurship Cell (SEC) serves as the student face of the organisation. In comparison, E-Cell MIT works directly in alliance with the administration of MIT and is run by students, under the direct stewardship of the faculty.

## How does the process generally work in E-Cell?

**Dhwanit:** We have created communities of expertise—accounting, finance, law, and so on. When a student approaches us with an idea, we plan to connect them to a relevant member from the expert team who will direct them professionally. We do not house experts within our organisation. Instead, we help students contact the appropriate people needed for them to gain insight into their endeavours. The list of experts and professionals is a continuously growing community.

**Armaan:** These groups of experts include MIT and MAHE faculty, MIT and MAHE alumni, industry experts of various companies, and other founders who are willing to mentor students looking for guidance. We will pair them with the individual that we see fit and establish these relationships to be long term, where the mentor will help the student develop and mature their idea.

**Ankit:** The process and cycle time of the entire mentorship process will cater to the individual student's idea. It is going to be flexible and customisable, with no generalisation regarding time.

## What is currently in the works for E-Cell that students can be excited about?

**Dhwanit:** The organisation is currently working on a dedicated website and newsletter that will include all updates pertaining to entrepreneurship in MIT, and its students. The website will be unique in its creation. It will have a learning platform that will recommend videos, podcasts, books, and more that focus on providing idea generation and cultivation for students looking for them.

## What is your goal?

**Dhwanit:** E-Cell is spearheading this drive towards entrepreneurship and job creation rather than job seeking. Our

immediate aim is to create awareness about entrepreneurship, expose the lucrative options that entrepreneurship offers, and stir that new mindset. The long term goal is to help create real start-ups that can raise funding, employ people, and add value to the ecosystem.

*Established eleven months ago, E-Cell continues to strive towards empowering budding entrepreneurs to achieve unfathomable heights and is currently **recruiting first-years** to be part of their robust community.*

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