

“I feel I contributed to Cambodia’s broader workforce.”

A Conversation with Chhuon Chipon, graduate of Digital Divide Data

Socheata Hean
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Socheata Hean: Can you please introduce yourself and your relationship with DDD?

Chhuon Chipon: I am from Battambang province, and I am a former staff member of DDD. I graduated from university in 2010. I joined DDD in 2006, starting as a volunteer, and stayed until 2020. During my time there, I kept getting promoted from one role to another—starting as a project associate, then moving up to team leader, project coordinator, project manager, and finally working as a production manager before I left.

After DDD, my second job was with ABA Bank, where I currently work as an IT Business Analyst. So far, I’ve only worked in two places: DDD and ABA Bank.

When I first joined DDD in 2006, it was as a volunteer for six months. At that time, DDD had two offices in Cambodia—one in Phnom Penh and one in Battambang. Since Battambang was my hometown, I joined the Battambang office. After my six-month volunteer period, I went through a three-month probation under the “work-study program.” This program allowed us to both work and study, giving us flexibility. For example, if I studied in the morning, I could work in the afternoon, and vice versa. I studied business management while working at DDD.

In 2012, DDD decided to merge the two offices, so the Battambang office was closed, and most staff, including myself, were transferred to Phnom Penh. That marked a big shift in my career path and life.

Socheata Hean: Since you were with DDD for 14 years, moving from one role to another, what have you learned from all those roles in terms of capacity building?

Chhuon Chipon: If we talk about capacity building and personal growth, it's really a lot. In school, we mostly learned theory, but at DDD, I gained real practical experience. For example, communication—how to behave and communicate with different groups of people: peers, supervisors, and leaders. It wasn't only about direct or face-to-face communication, but also how to communicate effectively through email in English.

I also learned leadership skills from my supervisors and managers. They mentored me and guided me on how to prepare myself for future goals and career readiness—what skills and knowledge I would need for different jobs.

What I love about DDD is that they saw potential and determination in us. That's why they promoted me into new roles with more responsibility. Each promotion gave me new opportunities to learn and build different skills.

In my last roles as project manager and production manager, I had the chance to train around 300 newly recruited staff. I trained them on communication, work guidelines, patience, and how to overcome weaknesses. Then I assigned them to roles based on their potential and capability. That was a big part of my work.

Socheata Hean: What knowledge and skills did you gain from DDD that are applicable in your current job at the bank?

Chhuon Chipon: From my 14 years at DDD, I developed many skills, especially in communication and management, that I now apply at ABA Bank. These include email writing, project management, teamwork, and people skills.

However, my current job is very technical. I work closely with web and app developers on advanced IT projects. The banking sector requires specialized knowledge, particularly in FinTech, which is quite different from what I did at DDD. So, when I first moved to ABA, it felt like I was starting my career over again. The environment, the people, the culture, and the work processes were all new to me.

Still, the soft skills I gained at DDD—like communication, leadership, and problem-solving—gave me a strong foundation and helped me adapt quickly to the banking world.

Socheata Hean: What skills and knowledge did you need to develop after moving to the bank to perform well in your new role?

Chhuon Chipon: What I lacked most was specific knowledge of FinTech and banking systems. Changing sectors required patience and openness to learning new things. I had to study hard about banking processes, how the sector works, and I kept detailed notes. I also read a lot of documents to catch up.

I've kept those notes, and I now share them with new staff who, like me, switch from another sector into banking. I want to make it easier for them, so they don't have to struggle as much as I did in the beginning. I see it as a way to be helpful to younger colleagues and the next generation.

Socheata Hean: With your updated perspective from working at the bank, have you reflected on any shortcomings of DDD's training?

Chhuon Chipon: Before leaving DDD, I had no idea how competitive the job market outside was. I didn't know what to prepare for jobs beyond DDD. Looking back, I think transition readiness is an area where DDD could do more.

For young people preparing to leave DDD, I would suggest they focus on being flexible, open-minded, and improving their communication and English language skills. Technology is also very important because it is moving quickly. For example, banks today are moving from manual processes to digital automation, and candidates with strong tech skills will be in higher demand.

Socheata Hean: Back during your time at DDD, technology and AI were not widely discussed. Now AI is everywhere. How should DDD catch up with this trend?

Chhuon Chipon: I remember during my last year at DDD, DDD was already preparing for projects involving machine learning and AI. DDD had developed a master plan for this several years in advance. I believe they are now actively working on AI and machine learning projects.

The challenge is that these projects are usually outsourced from abroad, and in Cambodia, it is very rare to see other companies working on similar things. At DDD, most of our work involved using systems that had already been built—things like data entry or digitizing files. Those tasks helped us develop basic computer and typing skills. But equally important were the workplace habits, teamwork, and communication skills we learned along the way. These are transferable skills that remain valuable in any sector.

Socheata Hean: What are three things you think DDD should improve or do differently?

Chhuon Chipon: First, I think DDD should enhance its training in advanced technology areas, such as software development and coding, especially as the world moves into the era of AI and Industry 4.0.

Second, I believe DDD should strengthen its alumni network. I'd like to see stronger connections between current staff and alumni. It would help create more opportunities, and it would also leave departing staff with a positive impression of DDD. Unfortunately, I know some alumni left unhappy, and I think this is an area worth addressing.

Third, I'd like DDD to continue maintaining its unique culture—its supportive environment, its flexibility for staff to pursue education, and its willingness to forgive mistakes and give people second chances. These are rare and valuable qualities in any workplace.

Socheata Hean: Have you ever thought about what your life would have been like without DDD?

Chhuon Chipon: I honestly don't think I could have become who I am today without DDD. The organization gave me a strong foundation—professionally and personally. Without DDD, I might never have moved to Phnom Penh, worked in such a professional environment, or met the great mentors and colleagues who shaped my journey.

DDD opened the door for me to grow, to learn, and to dream bigger.

Socheata Hean: How have the skills and knowledge you gained from DDD benefited you, your family, and society?

Chhuon Chipon: On a personal level, DDD gave me valuable work opportunities, including the chance to travel abroad to DDD's offices in Laos and Kenya. Even though it was the same DDD, the experience allowed me to learn about different work cultures and broaden my perspective.

For my family, I have been able to provide financial support, which has improved their stability and well-being.

On a social level, my role at DDD allowed me to train and mentor many newcomers. I guided them in career readiness, both for working at DDD and for moving into jobs

outside the DDD. In this way, I feel I contributed not only to DDD but also to Cambodia's broader workforce.

Socheata Hean: In your view, how has DDD influenced Cambodia's tech scene?

Chhuon Chipon: I think DDD has played a major role in building human resources for the tech sector. During my time, whenever people heard we were from DDD, their first impression was always that we were strong in computer skills.

For many students from the provinces, joining DDD was an eye-opening experience. It showed them how important technology and computer literacy are, and it inspired many to pursue ICT-related majors at university. In this way, DDD has contributed significantly to developing top-quality human resources for Cambodia's growing tech ecosystem.

Socheata Hean: Thank you.

Socheata Hean is a Cambodian multimedia journalist dedicated to training the next generation of independent reporters through digital storytelling. Since 2013, she has built her career in journalism, producing impactful stories and advancing media innovation.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*