

Comsats: A Journey of Success

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1. Introduction

When Harvard University set up its business school in 1908, a few of what are now called management principles could be enunciated with confidence. In many countries, educators do not rely on extensive use of the case method. In recent years especially in Pakistan, considerable attention has been attracted by application of the case method. It generally gives confidence to a student to deal with the real life situations in a solid manner.

There are mainly two types of cases. Cases can be classified on the basis of the nature of the main problem e.g. structural problem, human relations problem, low productivity or discipline problem. Cases can also be classified on the basis of success stories e.g. COMSATS University, Rahat Bakers, Savour Foods, Pizza Hut where the main focus is on the leadership style, the management moves, journey of successes and future challenges and we leave it on the readers that what kind of lessons they have learned from that particular success story. In this case study we are going to discuss the real success of COMSATS Institute of Information Technology. COMSATS took a humble start in 1998 and now COMSATS is proudly representing six campuses in Pakistan, much of the appreciation goes to the effective leadership style of the founding Rector Dr.S.M.Junaid Zaidi. COMSATS is now a success story and we are going to explore the key successful factors of COMSATS.

2. Establishment of COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (COMSATS)

The proposal for the development of Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South (COMSATS) was initiated by third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS). The TWAS at that time was steered by the Nobel Laureate from Pakistan, Professor Dr. Abdus Salam. On his idea the Foundation Conference was held in October 1994 in Islamabad. The Conference unanimously adopted the resolution for the establishment of COMSATS; within Pakistan major activities of COMSATS are taking place through COMSATS Internet Services (CIS) and COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (COMSATS). The success and progress of COMSATS has inspired the establishment of similar IT centers in Syria, Iran, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Jordan

2.1 Early Days of COMSATS

COMSATS took a humble start in April 1998 under the leader of Dr. Junaid Zaidi. Dr. Junaid Zaidi did his M.Sc. in Mathematics in 1971 and M.Sc in Physics in 1972. After that he served as a civil servant for some time.

He started teaching in 1976, got a scholarship and was able to complete his third M.Sc. Degree in Operations Research. Eventually he did his PhD from University of Birmingham in 1984. He then worked for the Ministry of Science and Technology. Later on, he joined UNO and was posted to India. On his return he rejoined the Ministry of Science and Technology in 1997. He envisioned something much bigger than government service and as a result he headed COMSATS with the objective of providing quality education and training in the field of computer science and IT.

The earlier days were tough for Dr. Zaidi just having one hundred thousand pak-rupees and few people by his side. The renovation work was started in the building rented from the Higher Education Commission (HEC). In August 1998 short computer courses for novice were launched followed by Post Graduate Diploma in Computer. COMSATS campus took off with one classroom and one computer lab with 16 computers. Later on an office was hired from National Institute for Science and Technical Education (NISTE).

In September 1999 three regular degree programs i.e. Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, Bachelor of Science in Compute Engineering, and Master of Software Engineering were launched, under the affiliation with Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi. A meager 53 students were enrolled in these degree programs. Initially the faculty comprised of 20 members which were mainly responsible for teaching besides other responsibilities (Table 1).

As need for space increased, the Sir Syed Memorial centrally located in Sector G-5; Islamabad was also hired in 2000. It was just a basement, for parking and an entire building had to be constructed to make the space useful. Meanwhile COMSATS was granted Degree Awarding Status by the Federal Government on August 12, 2000. In September 2001 City Campus was hired in Shan Plaza Blue Area, Islamabad to establish the Department of Management Sciences. The construction work was under progress at H-8 campus where the institute had to be shifted. For that purpose development grant of Rs. 37 million was granted by the government but the actual expenditure came out to be Rs. 47 million. Land was provided by the Higher Education Commission. Finally, the H-8 campus was completed and all the departments and offices were shifted under one roof in Fall 2002.

3. Dr. Junaid Zaidi's (Founding Rector) Leadership Style

Leadership is one of the most talked-about, researched and written-about management topics. Leadership qualities can propel a person to a successful and happy career. Leadership can make a difference in performance, though it does not always do so. The leaders behavior can have a positive or negative impact on others performance. Truly outstanding leaders tend to elicit highly effective performance from others. However the number of such leaders is small. These outstanding leaders are called Transformational leaders, in our success story of COMSATS; Dr. Junaid Zaidi is an example of transformational leader.

Dr. Junaid Zaidi was driven by the ambition of creating an institution with excellence in teaching and research. Under his leadership COMSATS has become one of the leading institutes in Pakistan, with a well-established reputation and a wide range of interests and facilities. Dedication and responsiveness to the needs of the students differentiates it from other institutions. The institute is growing steadily. Since the time of its inception, the institute has made significant strides in the field of IT. It is today a multi-campus institute fully equipped to handle the dynamics of the faced paced IT industry.

Dr. Junaid Zaidi is what we call a charismatic leader. He has a realistic, credible, and attractive vision of the future i.e. to make COMSATS a leading IT & Engineering Institution in Pakistan both in terms of education and research and to establish its presence in all provinces of Pakistan and overseas as well. His vision has proved that it fits the times and circumstances and reflects the uniqueness of the institution. He has been very successful in articulating his vision to others in terms of required goals and actions. Jack Welch, former Chairman and CEO of General Electric Said, "Good leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion." Dr. Junaid Zaidi is always engaged in doing something in pursuit of his vision and inspiring his followers to do the same. He has also been successful in acquiring the requisite resources for the institute such as high-quality students, competent faculty, and financial support.

Dr. Junaid Zaidi's personality is characterized by his willingness to take risks, be creative, take initiative and think differently. He believes that leaders grow by making mistakes and treat mistakes as learning opportunities.

His risk taking aptitude is evident from the fact that he wishes to establish the presence of COMSATS in all provinces of Pakistan particularly in the remote areas like Sahiwal, Vehari, Gujrat, Toba Tek Singh, Larkana, D.I. Khan, and Quetta. Hardly any institution of higher education in Pakistan has ever thought about establishing their campuses all around Pakistan especially in remote areas. He also believes in creativity and keeps on introducing new faculties as well as new areas of studies. Establishing Department of Biosciences (where he had lot of trouble finding the competent faculty), Department of Architecture, Department of Metrology, Department of Health Informatics, and recently introducing the Master Program in Project Management and Master Program in Energy Management (Energy crises a burning issue in Pakistan) are few examples. He also drafted the idea for the establishment of Virtual University.

Dr. Junaid Zaidi believes in building teams. He does not believe in command-and-control type things infact he is very good team leader. He has mastered the difficult balancing act of knowing when to leave his team alone and when to get involved by offering support. He believes in empowering employees, creating self-managed teams, and involving employees in making decisions. This is obvious from the fact that each COMSATS campus is autonomous and is run by the 'Campus Director' who is responsible for the day to day activities of the campus. Dr. Junaid Zaidi's personality is characterized by his tremendous ability to solve problems whenever and wherever they arise.

Dr. Junaid Zaidi through his character, ability, integrity, and honesty has won the trust of his followers. He believes in practicing openness, being fair, showing consistency between word and deed, fulfilling promises, maintaining confidence, and demonstrating competence. His personal values and beliefs are very much reflected in the COMSATS culture. Apart from student academic development he strongly believes in student personal development in nonacademic, non-career oriented areas, e.g. socially, emotionally, and culturally.

Dr. Junaid Zaidi has a very good sense of humor which helps him to relieve tension and boredom. He knows how to use humor to energize his followers. He believes humor fosters good camaraderie. In acknowledgment of his admirable continued service to society, the Government of Pakistan conferred upon Dr Zaidi the prestigious national award, "Sitara-i-Imtiaz" in 2007.

4. COMSATS Journey of Success

Since its genesis in 1998, COMSATS has shown tremendous growth in all fronts. Faculty comprising of 20 (Table 1) members at inception has grown into a faculty of 1,715 members during a short span of time (Table 2). Similarly, as compared to meager 53 students at inception presently COMSATS has approximately 13,458 full time students studying a wide range of undergraduate, post graduate, and research degree programs.

COMSATS has also shown remarkable achievements in terms of ranking its engineering degree and the research productivity of its faculty members. HEC in 2006 has carried out an exercise for the ranking of institutions of higher education in Pakistan. According to HEC's ranking of engineering universities, COMSATS is placed at number 8 among the engineering institutions of higher education (Table 3).

In terms of research output, COMSATS has been ranked at number 7 amongst the institutions of higher education numbering more than 114 in the country during 2006, as notified by HEC. During 2011 faculty members in various fields have been able to publish 1,118 research articles. Consistent with its research culture COMSATS has organized numerous seminars and conferences. Under the support of the Academy of Global Business Advancement (AGBA), the Department of Management Sciences hosted its 1st South Asian International Conference SAICON. Despite the deteriorating law and order situation in the country the conference was very successful as several internationally renowned researchers participated in the conference. The theme of the conference was "Globalization and Change: Concerns, Issues and Impact." Recently HEC has given ranking for year 2010-11 to the universities on the bases of quality and research. COMSATS secured first position in the category of Computer science & IT.

Driven by the needs of the students COMSATS has established a number of new campuses and has introduced new programs which have resulted in a significant increase in the enrollment. Presently, COMSATS has seven campuses at Islamabad, Abbotabad, Wah, Lahore, Attock, Sahiwal, and Vehari offering 55 different degree programs in various disciplines (Figure 1). Establishment of campuses at Gujrat, Toba Tek Singh, Larkana, D.I. Khan, Karachi and Quetta are in pipeline. COMSATS also plans to open its campuses overseas. Dr. Junaid Zaidi's vision to make COMSATS a 'multi-campus' institution is well in pursuit.

COMSATS has undertaken and successfully completed several assignments of national and international importance. Such assignments have resulted in establishment of new organizations such as: Virtual University (2002); National Institute of Telecommunications and Electronics (2002); Inter-Islamic Network on Information Technology (2002); National Testing Service (2003); ISESCO Centre for Promotion of Scientific Research (2004).

Dr. Junaid Zaidi puts enormous value to the professional development and quality of the faculty as he strongly believes that improvement of the faculty is the route to excellence. COMSATS has made significant efforts for the development of faculty to provide them with the latest skills, knowledge, and abilities. COMSATS firmly believes that its faculty is its true competitive advantage. In this regard young faculty is generously encouraged to apply to all opportunities for advanced training both in-house and overseas.

British Prime Minister, Mr. David Cameron on his one day short visit to Pakistan on April 5, 2011 visited COMSATS Islamabad campus. He delivered lecture to the students and senior faculty members. He admired the rapid progress of COMSATS and the quality of education. A great landmark was achieved when Prime Minister of Pakistan, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani visited COMSATS Islamabad campus on October 21, 2011 and upgraded COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (COMSATS) to the status of a university now the proposed name of COMSATS Institute of Information & Technology is COMSATS University of Science & Technology. He also announced Rupee 10 million grants for the COMSATS Library.

COMSATS has witnessed phenomenal growth both in terms of its geographical spread and in continuous expansion of its programs and research output. From a single city, single building campus of fewer than 300 students in 2000, today it proudly presents seven sprawling campuses with around 13,458 students and 1,715 faculty members and 55 academic programs. Much of the appreciation for the accomplishments of COMSATS goes to effective leadership style of Dr. Junaid Zaidi.

5. Future Challenges

Although Dr. Junaid Zaidi's vision is to make COMSATS a 'multi-campus' institute is well in pursuit the real challenge is to standardize the quality of education and research at all campuses. Secondly, due to current economic and political slump in the country all the institutions of higher education including COMSATS are facing the problem of acquiring the requisite financial resources to carry on their developmental projects. Presently, HEC has a budget deficit of Rs. 8 billion (Dawn November 23, 2008). Under such circumstances COMSATS has an immense challenge on his hands to devise a system which can help it meet its financial needs from internal sources. Thirdly, COMSATS has enormous challenge to expand its efforts to improve the much needed university-industry liaison. Much has to be done for the career development of the students' something seriously missing in educational institutions of higher education in Pakistan. Although COMSATS is now one of the leading university in Pakistan but the challenge is to sustain its reputation among the competitors. Keeping in mind the political, social, economic & technological environment this is also a challenge for the worthy rector to retain the top performer faculty member. Now the competition is increasing day by day so the students have various choices which might effect on COMSATS intakes in the upcoming semesters. Finally, to continue the hard work of Dr. Junaid Zaidi a thorough procedure for his succession planning has to be undertaken i.e. a need to produce another leader within COMSATS who is in line with the brilliance of Dr. Junaid Zaidi.

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Table 1: Faculty Strength at Inception

S.No.	Designation	Faculty
1.	Advisor	1
2.	Professor	0
3.	Associate Professor	1
4.	Assistant Professor	6
5.	Lecturer	12
6.	Research Associate	0
	Total	20

Table 2: Consolidated Faculty Strength as on 2011-12

S.No.	Designation	Islamabad	Abbottabad	Lahore	Wah	Attock	Sahiwal	Vehari
1.	Advisor	18	5	8	-		2	
2.	Professor	26	8	7	4	1		
3.	Associate Professor	22	7	10	2	-	1	
4.	Assistant Professor	144	114	95	39	18	17	4
5.	Lecturer	348	248	201	85	28	29	6
6.	Research Associate	130	31	37	6	10	3	1
	Total	688	413	358	136	57	52	11

Total Faculty Members = 688+413+358+136+57+52+11 = 1715

Note source undergraduate prospectus COMSATS 2011-12

Table 3: Ranking of Universities by HEC in 2006

S.No.	Top Ten Engineering Universities of Pakistan
1	Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Islamabad
2	National University of Sciences & Technology, Rawalpindi
3	Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering, Swabi
4	University of Engineering. & Technology (UET), Lahore
5	Mehran University of Engineering. & Technology (MUET), Jamshoro
6	University of Engineering. & Technology (UET), Taxila
7	National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Islamabad
8	COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad
9	NWFP University of Engineering & Technology, Peshawar
10	NED University of Engineering & Technology, Karachi

Note

- The rankings published are on the basis of data for the years 2001-2002, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004.
- The rankings are based on data collected on the following key issues with relative weights for each provided respectively: Students (17%), Facilities (15%), Finances (15%), Faculty (27%), and Research (26%).

Source: www.hec.gov.pk

Figure 1: Rector S. M. Junaid Zaidi
Pictures of Seven Campuses with Establishment Dates



Dr. S.M Junaid Zaidi Founder and Rector COMSATS



Sahiwal Campus established on December 2006



Islamabad campus established on April 1998



Wah campus established on September 2001



Lahore campus established on January 2002



Abbottabad campus established on July 2001



Attock campus established on April 2004



Vehari campus established on August 2008