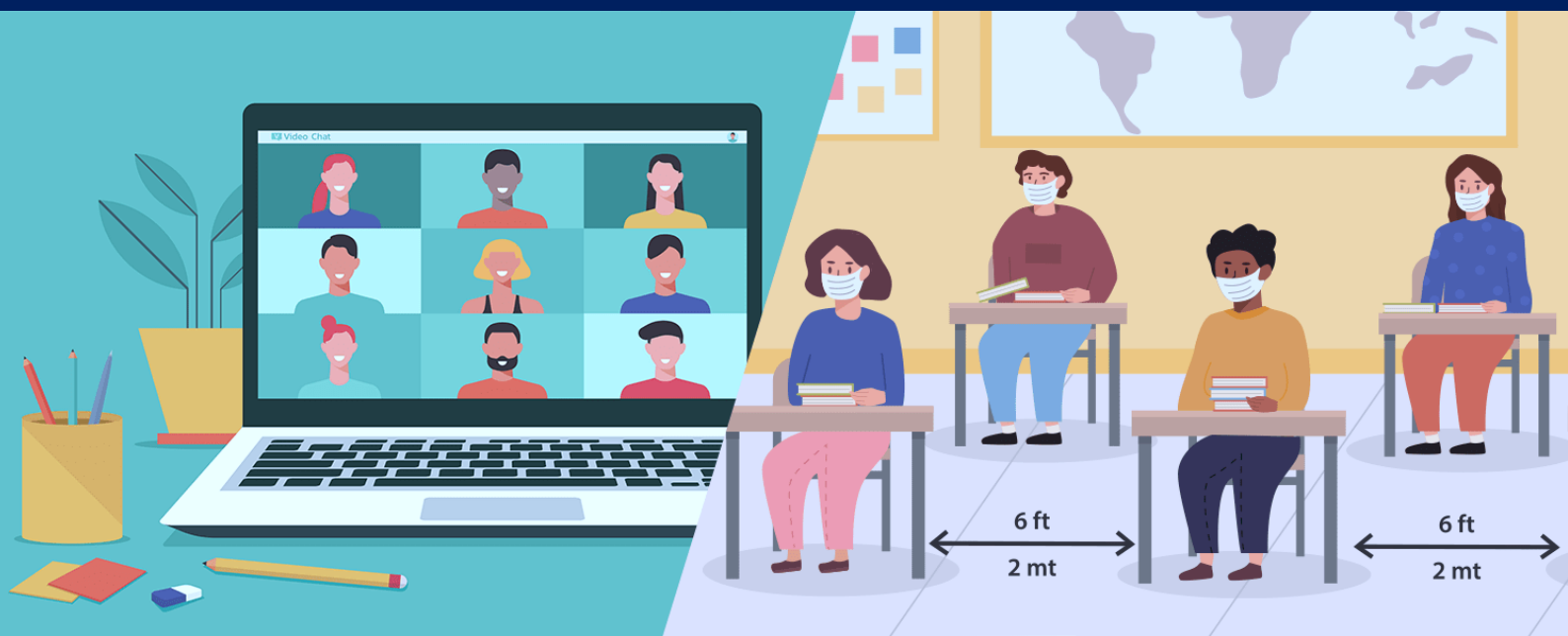


# *AMDISA Network Responses on*

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

## *Challenges for Management Education*

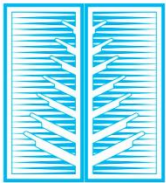


**Association of Management Development  
Institutions in South Asia**

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**E&OE**



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**Business Education and Engagement during COVID-19 and Beyond:  
Insights from Pakistan**

In this article, I argue for a multi-stakeholder approach to higher education, with a focus on business and management education, and the need to develop a socially responsible response to COVID-19 where institutional continuity and stakeholders' well-being are equally valued. These reflections are based on my personal experiences, observations, and contributions to institutional responses to COVID-19 and derive from my exposure to several institutions and national bodies of higher education in Pakistan and wider South Asia.

First and foremost, it must be acknowledged that COVID-19 has not only highlighted our failure as a human society but also the failure of our higher education institutes and business schools. As Ghalib says: qarz ki peete the mai leikin samajthe the ke haan/Rang lai gi humari faaqa masti aik din (free translation: We used to drink wine on borrowed money but hoped that one day our merriment in adversity will come to fruition). In another line, Ghalib says: meri taameer mein muzmir hai ik soorat kharaabi ki (transl: There is a seed of destruction hidden in the very way I've been constructed.) What I mean to say is that COVID-19 has highlighted or re-highlighted a crucial intersection between business and society, and the failure of educational institutions to pay attention to this vital intersection. The pandemic has shown that businesses and business/management schools cannot and must not disconnect themselves from society-at-large, with a narrow focus on creating and enhancing shareholders' value or the financial bottom line. Indeed, Covid-19 started as a public health crisis and quickly spiralled into a financial, economic, and social crisis. As the pandemic made its way across the world, no organisation or academic institution was spared. There is, thus, a need to rethink our approach to education and multiple stakeholders and to address endemic concerns such as declining public health and education, neglected diversity and peace, increasing inequality, climate degradation, rising corruption, deteriorating public institutions, and the increasing risk of pandemics. The rapid spread of the coronavirus has reminded us of how our wellbeing is interconnected with education and management, and this makes the role of university leaders and educators much more important and challenging.

From a stakeholder and engagement perspective, two key principles may be identified which, in my view, are also valid in the context of business education and engagement during COVID-19. I discuss these principles as follows.

First, all stakeholders should have a right and opportunity to participate in decision making, particularly in those decisions and responses to COVID-19 which affect them. For example, at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), the focus has been concurrently on the learning experience and well-being of students who we consider the most important stakeholder, followed by faculty, staff, alumni, businesses, board members and trustees, society, and government. For public

sector universities, government has a very significant role because of its influence on their funding and sustainability. So, all stakeholders should have a right and opportunity to participate in decision making. An important starting point in this regard may be an honest acknowledgement and realisation by university administrators and managers that they have a responsibility to consider the interests of all stakeholder groups, not just board members or government officials, not just students or faculty, but the legitimate interests of the entire variety of stakeholders.

The second principle is that a university's mission or objective, particularly in a crisis, ought to be revisited and aligned to cater for all stakeholders. While COVID-19 poses a threat to institutional operations and business model, it also offers an opportunity to all administrators of universities and higher education policy bodies to reframe the entire issue, to look at this crisis as an opportunity to revisit institutional mission and goals and consider interests and needs of all stakeholders. In other words, no single stakeholder group should have primacy over others.

These two interconnected principles may serve as a key theoretical framework upon which a university's response to COVID-19 and engagement could be based or evaluated. However, such response also needs to be context sensitive.

In my research and publications in the past two decades or so, I have been arguing that while we should continue to benefit from experiences and research insights from north America, Europe and elsewhere, at the same time, ample attention should be given to contextual and indigenous wisdom, experiences, sensitivities, and innovations. This also applies to how we formulate and implement our response to COVID-19.

Arguably, there is a need to develop and utilise indigenous insights, for example, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist insights in South Asia, in terms of their common emphasis on philanthropy, humanity and collective well-being in a crisis. The idea is not to treat one specific religion or ideology as superior to others, but to benefit from all such insights, and at the same time, consider the cultural and societal sensitivities while identifying and engaging with diverse stakeholders. For example, from an Islamic perspective, according to the Quran, humans are God's trustees on earth. Thus, as government leaders or university leaders, it is important to consider that we are the trustees of the Divine, and life on earth is a test for all of us. So, the notion of trusteeship is the first principle from an Islamic lens. And secondly, we must be mindful of the rights of all stakeholders. That, as leaders and administrators, we are responsible and accountable to fulfil our responsibilities and stakeholders' rights enshrined in Islamic teachings. For example, there is a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, a Hadith, which says: give to everyone his or her right. So, it is important that people's rights, whether they are students or teachers, women or men, staff or alumni, businesses, or wider community, must be respected because we are accountable as leaders and managers. The term which has been used in the Islamic and Arabic literature is *haq*, or *huquq* in plural, which denotes something that can be justly claimed or the rights that different groups and individuals have been granted in law or religion. Similarly, Hinduism's approach to philanthropy can be found in the notion of *daana*, which involves nonreciprocal giving without the motive for immediate self-interest. Indeed, the reference point here is not only religious teachings but also the rights which have been granted within the domain of law or which are deemed to be a social and ethical responsibility.

The impact of COVID-19 has been diverse and enormous on universities across the world. It has, generally, not only reflected the pattern of the academic year and the mode of teaching but is also shaped by the respective university's financial model such as its reliance on international students or

faculty members. For example, given the over-reliance on international students in many universities in Australia and elsewhere, the entire university system may be crumbling due to stricter controls on international borders and immigration. In Pakistan, this is not the case given that almost all students at Pakistani universities and schools happen to be local.

From a teaching perspective, for several universities, the pandemic emerged midway through the academic year while the teaching term was still on, so drastic changes had to be incorporated to cater not only to students' teaching needs but also to full academic programs and external regulatory requirements. In Pakistan, for example, some of the external requirements were imposed not only by the health ministry of the government but also by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The first COVID-19 case appeared in Pakistan on 26th February 2020, the situation escalated quickly, and a complete lockdown was imposed on 23rd March 2020 to effectively overcome the effects of this pandemic. In a very brief period of a few weeks, the universities were required to go virtual. This means that the universities had to shut down their regular face to face teaching and routine operations. The universities had to struggle not only in terms of managing academic programs but also the disparate expectation of students, faculty members, staff, and other stakeholders. For example, students were given extensions to submit their thesis, dissertations, and other written assignments. Moreover, the universities had to rapidly adapt their teaching pedagogy and approach to student assessment. Faculty members were concerned about virtual teaching and the ways to monitor and ensure students' progress and performance in different courses and programs. Many teachers had to design and incorporate a mix of assessment tools such as quizzes, polls, and mini assignments in the online teaching to keep the students engaged and make the lectures more interactive and assessable.

These developments not only affected the on-campus teaching but also other elements of operations and stakeholder engagement. For example, LUMS has an active and widely respected executive education centre, the Rausing Executive Development Centre or REDC, which serves three important purposes, i.e., engagement with the industry, faculty development and financial revenue. Owing to COVID-19, REDC, at least for the first few months, was visibly affected as the corporate sector had limited interest in virtual trainings and the centre did not have adequate infrastructure to comply with COVID SOPs or to offer virtual or hybrid programs. As a result, at least temporarily, engagement with businesses was affected. Other auxiliary services also suffered such as physical access to library, hostel, and cafeteria. Hostels had to be vacated due to health precautions, and strict SOPs were implemented in the food outlets. In addition to these immediate challenges, COVID also, to some extent, affected student recruitment and external engagement. All in all, these developments adversely affected financial inflows.

Universities in developing countries such as in India and Pakistan were particularly affected because they were not well equipped for online education. There are several pre-requisites for online classes by any university: availability of the Learning Management System (LMS), faculty readiness, course readiness for the online mode of learning, technology readiness, i.e., platform to conduct online classes, and last but not the least, students' readiness to learn online. Other contextual challenges facing individual students and staff members included the following: low internet low bandwidth, electricity fluctuation or outage, unavailability or unaffordability of personal desktop/laptop, a lack of a dedicated space for studying, juggling between family life and education, physical and mental health issues, fear of being infected, gender discrimination and domestic workload. There is a related issue of digital divide due to differences in social class, age, and gender.

Universities had to engage in dynamic and innovative ideas to address these issues through a planned and structured adaptation to the new normal, e.g., through gradual changes in infrastructure, such as ventilation and air-conditioning system, open air classrooms, mandatory masks and hand sanitising, social distancing, hybrid classrooms, provision of Zoom and other online teaching and interaction platforms, as well as changes in institutional culture, such as training of faculty members and staff, adjustments in assessing students' class participation and performance, etc. Traditionally, online education was viewed with scepticism and only a small number of faculty members were interested or engaged in online teaching. The pandemic radically changed this pattern and online teaching not only became a norm, in the new normal, but also became an organisational and job requirement.

To better engage with stakeholders, i.e., students, faculty members and support staff, awareness posters and SOPs, in English and Urdu languages, were displayed all over the campuses, clarifying specific guidelines by the government and the WHO. New SOPs were introduced, and relevant staff members were trained. For example, at the entry points of the LUMS campus, security staff were trained in terms of using infrared thermometers and disinfectants. Personal hygiene and safety behaviours such as regular hand washing and social distancing were promoted and strongly encouraged. Hand sanitisers were provided in each building or at the classroom entrance. There was an increased frequency of cleaning of classrooms, labs, washrooms, and other facilities. Large-scale meetings and gatherings such as annual convocation and scholarly conferences were cancelled. Until now, LUMS has not started the face-to-face teaching mode on a full scale although gradually, such classes are being offered, and hostel and food facilities are being opened, albeit with strict SOPs.

Another thing that LUMS did around mid-2020 was to create a new professional post, i.e., Director of Health Services (DHS), a medical expert who monitors and ensures that in its everyday operations and decisions, employees and students' well-being is not compromised. DHS is also a part of the steering committee responsible for designing and evaluating the university's response to COVID-19.

In other measures, quarantine wings were created in hostels to accommodate and take care of the affected students. Additionally, a system of student monitors was introduced to educate, encourage, and implement social distancing on campus. Furthermore, 24/7 medical support was made available on campus. Random COVID tests were offered, free of cost, to those faculty members and staff who came to campus on a regular basis.

At the same time, issues of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility were considered. Some faculty and staff members as well as students had connectivity issues, particularly those from rural and remote areas. (In Balochistan, for example, nine out of 32 districts do not have internet facilities, while others have poor internet connectivity due to lack of the fibre optic transmission lines. In Gilgit Baltistan, a reliable and stable internet connection is a rare commodity.) There were issues of the right quality of internet connectivity or infrastructure in terms of a good laptop at home. Many employees had pressure of managing work life balance, concurrently handling the home front and the office front. This was natural because they had not designed their work lives to be working from home. Thus, in addition to providing infrastructural support such as laptops or Wi-Fi devices, LUMS also made use of two-way communication. Several open house meetings and live sessions were organised to disseminate latest information as well as brainstorm about the collective way forward. Staff were assured that their jobs were safe though the new model required some readjustment in terms of the nature and delivery of their work. At the same time, regular communications from health services, HR and the university administration ensured physical and psychological well-being of the university community. LUMS also started a COVID-19 Campaign to raise PKR 50 million to address

financial problems faced by students and staff. Similar measures were taking by other universities. For example, IBA Karachi, in coordination with District Health Office, carried out COVID-19 PCR tests for students, staff and faculty members. Moreover, as a precautionary measure, isolation rooms at both the campuses and boys and girls' hostels were designated for individuals exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. IBA also initiated a student liaison and counselling office to virtually connect the student body with different departments.

According to Prof Alnoor Bhimani, Honorary Dean of the Suleman Dawood School of Business (SDSB) at LUMS, at the onset, the university struggled to understand COVID-19 and its unfolding implications. Multiple meetings were held a day to discuss these issues. Initially, there were two major sets of discussions. The first set of discussions concerned how to alter systems to cater to the existing ongoing teaching and other activities. Here the university had to deal with a rapid transition to online teaching which implied a shift of resources. Much of this was affected of course by who/how many could access the campus when there was a need. There were ongoing activities around registry, admissions, convocation, and other day to day university operations. The second set of discussions focused on the next academic year. So, monitoring national and other institutional bodies' guidance and policies, how the university budgets were being affected, whether the university was likely to get the students sign up to online classes, launching new programs, making investments now that would allow the delivery of quality instruction, etc. There were wider decisions also on not decreasing the workforce and how the university could cope with a much tighter budget to allow this.

Professor Bhimani further said:

*“Considering our experience and difficult times that we have somehow endured in the past one and a half year, we hope that in the future we will be more pandemic-ready. Also, we will invest in smart classrooms and virtual platforms. The whole process of instruction and administration will maintain the same intents but alter in how they are run. Clearly, there are many positives out of this. We now know people can adapt when there is an absolute need. Also, there is more positivity to teaching, meeting and doing things using technologies and sometimes that works better.”*

The pandemic reminds us that as leaders of universities, businesses, and organisations, we are not only responsible for our core operations but also for the well-being of our stakeholders, which in this case are students, faculty members, staff, employers, and others with whom we physically interact. At the same time, we should be concerned about the issue of strategic continuity.

Last year, I happened to facilitate a high-profile panel discussion in our executive education centre on the topic of 'Leading and managing businesses in the new normal'. Several top leaders from public and private sector organisations participated in that panel. One common theme that emerged from the panel was the concurrent emphasis on two dimensions of organisational response to COVID-19. The first dimension was the well-being of employees and other stakeholders, and the second dimension was business continuity.

In my view, these two issues are also relevant to universities and business schools. That is, while we should focus on and ensure well-being of all stakeholders including students, faculty, alumni, and staff, we should also be concerned about our operational continuity as a university. For example, despite the challenges and pitfalls of social distancing and campus closures, faculty and staff may learn to work remotely to ensure continuity of university's mission and operations. Accordingly, measures may be taken to ensure a relatively smooth transition and to adjust to the new normal.

From a slightly different angle, COVID-19 may also be seen as a unique opportunity to reimagine and reconfigure the education system for the future. In terms of businesses, e-commerce, and essential supplies sectors such as online supermarkets, domestic sanitation as well as healthcare brands have experienced unprecedented levels of demand. Similar positive implications may also be capitalised in the education sector. For example: online learning can reduce the overall cost to students and the institution, even if the tuition charged to students is the same as the tuition for face-to-face instruction; online education may not only save the transportation costs of students but may also reduce the opportunity costs of travel time; blended learning can save institutions the cost of new facilities by reducing classroom demand and allowing institutions to reduce the impact of commuter student traffic and use of on-campus facilities and services; some features of online teaching such as breakout rooms offer efficient use of small group discussions and efficient use of time; and virtual teaching also enables inviting guest speakers who are otherwise hard to invite due to issues of logistics and time.

Of course, technology has a great role to play in facilitating institutional responses to the new normal. For example, several universities in South Asia, such as IIM, IIT, IBA and LUMS have provided individual subscriptions to platforms and tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to faculty members, as well as mobile Wi-Fi devices and laptops depending on faculty members' needs and job requirements. Some universities have adopted the mixed mode of synchronous and asynchronous teaching which helps faculty to deliver lecture notes and recorded lectures via email, digital repositories, or deliver live lectures using software tools such as Microsoft Teams, Google or Zoom. Digitisation and curation of traditional courses and academic programs, incorporation of written class participation (CP) along with oral CP, the use of interactive tools such as online polls and chat spaces, provision of audio-visual devices and managing the diverse expectations of heterogeneous stakeholders are some of the current trends. For those students who do not have access to internet, suitable Wi-Fi connections or devices have been provided at LUMS. To facilitate faculty's rapid familiarisation with online teaching, training sessions have been designed and offered by LUMS Learning Institute. Some of these sessions have been led by the VC, Prof Arshad Ahmad, who has an expertise and special interest in teaching and learning.

In terms of the pitfalls and the complexities of online teaching and assessment, and how online courses and programs may be improved in terms of industry engagement, faculty members may find it challenging to engage with the industry in a virtual format. For my own MBA and undergraduate classes at LUMS, for example, I encourage students, whenever they are required to present a project based on a field study, to conduct video interviews with relevant industry leaders and managers. Similarly, corporate leaders and academics from Pakistan and abroad are routinely invited as guest speakers and panellists in academic and executive education programs.

Students are, evidently, the most affected stakeholder due to this pandemic. I acknowledge that, occasionally, there is evidence of anxiety and frustration from the students' side as they want the university administration to open the campus. It may be noted that students at LUMS not only value faculty interactions and meetings but also cherish the campus ambience and the overall learning and social environment. That is something which students greatly miss during the lockdown. LUMS is currently implementing a gradual approach to allowing students on campus. Depending on their individual circumstances and needs, students are being allowed to come back to the hostel on a gradual and incremental basis, and the university continues to monitor the situation.

LUMS has coordinated with relevant government departments to ensure that all its faculty members and staff and most students are vaccinated before the start of the Fall term 2021. Moreover, free of cost voluntary tests have been introduced to check the incidence of COVID-19 on campus to ensure that the university offers a safe environment to all the stakeholders.

In terms of financial sustainability, LUMS, like several other universities, has faced some hardship but also strives to act in a responsible manner. Last year, a routine annual increase in the tuition fee was waived off in view of COVID-19's adverse impact on public, which in turn affected the university's financial inflows. (Some other universities such as the UET Lahore faced major financial challenges and had to drastically cut down their teachers' salaries.) This was an additional burden given that LUMS' revenue streams such as from executive education, consultancies, hostels, and cafeteria had already suffered. And, of course, there are fixed costs which must be borne. In this entire crisis, the university has adopted a consultative model. LUMS administrators including the VC, Provost, and Deans, continue to consult various stakeholders including faculty members and staff but also students who are represented in various committees and councils. I have the honour of representing the business school (SDSB) as an elected member of the LUMS University Council where important matters are discussed and members' input is solicited.

There is no denying the fact that, at the most basic level, COVID-19 has posed a challenge to the core activities of teaching and developing students through curriculum and co-curricular experiences. Of course, face-to-face and personalised delivery systems have been compromised. The pandemic has highlighted the need to build resilient and flexible models of education that should enable continuous adaptation to different phases of the new normal. We should, thus, continue to design and redesign courses and programs that would help decision makers formulate models and approaches that deal with complex problems and uncertainty. The COVID crisis not only poses a challenge in terms of physical and financial threats, it also gives us an opportunity to forge, test and refine our leadership skills. In the foreseeable future, virtual and remote models will be an integral part of the education system. This may in turn enable greater inclusion and access.

It may be hoped that, in this new normal, most of us have learnt that although we are socially distanced, still, we may remain spatially connected. We cannot allow this pandemic to disconnect us from each other and from our stakeholders. Arguably, social distancing is prompting business schools and businesses to rethink how they are connecting with their stakeholders, and while spatial connecting may be the new norm, the future is likely to be more hybrid than pure. This hybridity will also reflect in pedagogies and learning experiences because teachers and students will need to learn how to use technology in academic programs and other interactions. At the same time, individuals and institutions will realise the crucial role of physical interactions and human contact in building relationships, work life balance and team solutions.

To recap, COVID-19, along with its constituent uncertainties, anxieties and ambiguities, is the new normal. Such anxieties and ambiguities, along with individual and collective conduct, may be guided through consistently aligned and reinforced organisational vision and values. Regular and transparent two-way communications are particularly crucial during the crisis, e.g., to clarify who is responsible for communication and on what issues, clarification of health-related SOPs, making sure that students come back to campus in a gradual manner while complying with SOPs, etc. A participating approach may be enabled through a robust structure of consultation and inclusion. Corporate world is rapidly adapting to this new normal because, for them, it is a question of survival. In a similar fashion, educational institutions need to adjust to the new normal. More importantly, they need to revisit the

content and intent of their academic programs and curricula to consider the multiplicity of stakeholders with a particular focus on common and far-reaching issues such as health, climate change, diversity, and peace. There are indeed challenges involved in this journey but that's the real test of leadership in a crisis. Finally, technology can alleviate but not completely replace the warmth of the face to face and personal interactions. As teachers, we know there is no substitute to the energy of fifty students in front of us. Yet, with all these caveats, challenges and opportunities, future will be hybrid and fluid. We can safely predict that remnants of the new normal will be the normal of the future.

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## About AMDISA

AMDISA - Association of Management Development Institutions in South Asia is a network of Management Education and Management Development Institutions in South Asia. Its mission is to “Promote management education and management development activities in South Asia.” It is the only Association which networks management development institutions across the eight South Asian Nations through exchanging information, facilitating inter-country research initiatives, conducting regional conferences, workshops, colloquia and programs, and thereby providing a forum for interaction among academics and business leaders.

AMDISA launched the global benchmark quality assurance and accreditation system for Business Schools - acronym SAQS. SAQS is the quality assurance scheme run by AMDISA as a service to the management education profession worldwide. SAQS emerged in an EFMD-AMDISA cooperation through a European Union funded Asia-Link project in 2003–04. It is inspired by EFMD's EQUIS criteria guidelines.

SAQS Quality Label is a recognition to the institution’s commitment to Quality and Quality Assurance through continuous improvement.

AMDISA publishes a quarterly double blind refereed journal, the South Asian Journal of Management (SAJM). SAJM is a prestigious and a scholarly journal published quarterly, publishing empirical papers, review papers, executive experience-sharing, research notes, case studies and book reviews. It reaches major world libraries, subscribers and AMDISA member institutions in South Asia. It also publishes a Newsletter containing information about activities, programs, happenings and articles on contemporary matters.

AMDISA organises the South Asian Management Forum and academic conference every two years where member institutions and faculty share their research findings, interact with business leaders, policy administrators and other academics from different parts of South Asia and outside. Each of these Forums has led to a scholarly publication which is distributed free to all member institutions. Since its inception, AMDISA has organized fifteen biennial South Asian Management Forums (SAMF) by rotation in all the South Asian countries.

The permanent Secretariat is located in the University of Hyderabad Campus, Hyderabad, India.



**Association of Management  
Development Institutions in  
South Asia (AMDISA)**

**Hyderabad, India**

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