



National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC)  
Higher Education Commission, H-8, Islamabad



# "Business Education in a Time of Change: Towards a New Normal for Business Schools in Pakistan"



April 06<sup>th</sup> - 07<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
(Evening)

## Conference Report 2021



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**DEANS &  
DIRECTORS  
CONFERENCE 2021**

# REPORT ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> DEANS AND DIRECTORS CONFERENCE, APRIL 6-7, 2021

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## I. PREFACE

Recent years have seen many changes in the environment for business education. The world of work is changing dramatically under the influence of digital technology, raising questions about the scope and content of business education in the future. The technology involved in the delivery of education is also changing at a rapid pace, raising questions about ideal models of teaching and learning. Finally, the sudden onset of a global pandemic forced higher education to go online for the most part of 2020; will this continue and, if so, with what consequences?

The 8<sup>th</sup> Deans and Directors Conference was organized in the context of these ongoing changes affecting business education. Panels and panelists were selected with a view to getting first-hand information on how different business schools, in Pakistan and abroad, were responding to such changes.

Given the prevailing pandemic, the Conference was conducted as a virtual, online event. This turned out to have several advantages. First, it allowed us to include participants from all over the country, including from remote locations. Close to 400 participants registered for the event and maintained a steady online connection over the two evenings covered by the event. Second, it allowed us to reduce registration fees, something that may have contributed to the relatively high registration we experienced. Third, it allowed us to include panelists from abroad without incurring the costs and inconvenience of long distance travel. Indeed, in one session, we had panelists from both Canada and Australia, spanning fourteen time zones between them. Fourth, we were able to reduce event expenses substantially in comparison with the prior seven (physical) gatherings. This is an important consideration as we are a financially autonomous body and must cover our expenses from our own activities and from sponsorships. Fifth, NBEAC staff learned a lot about organizing and managing digital conferences in the process, knowledge that will undoubtedly prove useful in arranging such events in the future.

We present in this Report the main takeaways from each of the six sessions that comprised the conference. The takeaways were prepared from initial drafts provided by session moderators. I am grateful to the session moderators who cooperated with us to arrange for a timely Report. I am also grateful to the panelists who provided concise remarks tailored to the issues at hand.

Farrukh Iqbal  
Chairman

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## II. KEY SESSION TAKEAWAYS

### Session A: Evolving Environment of Business Education

Speaker	Designation
Dan LeClair	CEO, Global Business Support Network
Stephanie Bryant	Executive Vice President and Chief Accreditation Officer, AACSB
Dr. Farrukh Iqbal	Chairman, NBEAC

Panelists discussed ongoing changes in the environment of business schools and appropriate responses to these changes. The main takeaways were the following:

- (a) The world of work has been changing such that what is now required are competencies rather than skills, general as well as domain specific knowledge, and the flexibility to engage in lifelong learning. Accordingly, business schools have been modifying their curricula and formats to ensure that new graduates are equipped to meet these evolving needs of the business world.
  - (b) The technology of teaching has been changing rapidly to incorporate more online tools and formats. The pandemic that started in 2020 pushed the entire universe of higher education further in this direction.
  - (c) A new vision of business education is emerging which emphasizes social impact alongside quality. Vanguard schools are putting this in their strategic plans and then designing programs and curricula around this objective.
  - (d) Executive education and related programs are enjoying rising demand, in line with the emphasis being placed by the market on lifelong or continuous education. The lifespan of skills and domain knowledge is shrinking and so business schools need to re-envision themselves as hubs of lifelong learning.
  - (e) International accreditation agencies and business school networks have developed standards, programs and training to guide members in this rapidly changing environment.
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## Session B: Emerging Issues for the Business School Curriculum

**Moderator:** Dr. Syed Zahoor Hassan, Lahore University of Management Sciences

Speaker	Designation
Monis Rahman	CEO, Rozee.pk
Qasif Shahid	CEO and Co-Founder, Finja
Muhammad Yar Hiraj	CEO, Oneload
Dr. Zartash Afzal Uzmi	Associate Professor, LUMS
Dr. Ussama Yaqoob	Assistant Professor, LUMS

Panelists discussed the opportunities and challenges presented by the growth of e-commerce and the role of Pakistani business schools in this evolving context. The key takeaways were as follows:

- a) E-commerce offers great opportunities to grow the pie rather than competing for a larger share of it. This implies a focus on new ideas, processes, products and markets rather than on traditional ideas relating to cost control and profit maximization, on finding your own niche rather than competing in existing niches. Accordingly, business schools need to move away from the scarcity paradigm to one in which new ideas are highlighted.
- b) E-commerce has grown rapidly in recent years with much new activity being in the mainstream (middle class) population. Business schools need understand this segment better and ensure that their students are able to operate in this growing e-commerce space.
- c) The informal economy offers considerable opportunities both from a management as well as an entrepreneurial perspective. Business schools should engage more actively with small and micro enterprises in terms of research and teaching. More experiential learning will be required with local context-specific teaching, learning tools and materials (exercises, case studies and projects).
- d) Business school faculty should collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines like technology and social sciences to understand how digital technology is transforming business and society. Collaboration is no longer an option but a necessity!
- e) The ability to collect, analyze and leverage data will be a key requirement for business graduates. This requires the integration of basic computing, statistics, business intelligence and data analytics into the curriculum of management programs.
- f) In a nutshell, the growth and potential of e-commerce suggests three key shifts for business schools: in paradigms, from scarcity to abundance management; in target groups, from large firms to informal sector and small scale enterprises; and in curriculum content, from theoretical constructs to more evidence and data driven management (data science, statistics, computing, visualization) along with understanding the lives of those at lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder.
- g) The current crop of Pakistani business graduates is generally not capable of operating in this new environment. The above changes are required to make business schools and their graduates relevant to the enormous potential of e-commerce for national and individual growth and prosperity.

## Session C: Virtual Teaching: Lessons of Experience

**Moderator:** Dr. Naveda Kitchlew, Associate Professor, University of Management and Technology

Speaker	Designation
Dr. Murtaza Haider	Professor, Data Science and Real Estate Management, Ryerson University, Canada
Prof. Dr. Syed Irfan Hyder	Vice Chancellor, Zia-ud-din University, Karachi
Dr. Osama Nasim Mirza	Assistant Professor, University of Lahore
Dr. Amir Mahmood	Dean, Business School, Western Sydney University, Australia

Panelists discussed the challenges and opportunities encountered in virtual teaching in Pakistan and elsewhere. The key takeaways of the session were as follows:

- (a) On the part of teachers, virtual teaching requires more time and effort to engage students, to ensure learning retention and to conduct fair and comprehensive assessments. It should not be thought of as simply talking to a camera instead of a class. If virtual teaching is to be successfully mainstreamed, more training will have to be provided to teachers to modify content and delivery in a way that better engages students. The role of the teacher will have to be shift towards that of a curator of relevant information for participants.
- (b) On the part of students, virtual learning requires more discipline to prepare in advance and maintain concentration in non-class settings. Students will have to become better at self-learning while being guided to relevant information sources and explanations. For this to happen, universities will have to make the relevant technology support more reliable and accessible.
- (c) For both teachers and students, the shift to virtual teaching has involved greater stress. Managing such stress should be a matter of high priority.
- (d) At the same time, digital education offers the possibility of huge improvements in access to higher education, an objective that is critical for Pakistan. Despite its challenges, digital education must be pursued vigorously because of this potential.
- (e) Digital education also offers the prospect of some other beneficial changes, such as a shift from testing memory to testing understanding through the adoption of open-book examinations or testing teamwork rather than individual performance through group projects.
- (f) We should take advantage of the pandemic-induced shift to virtual education to entrench at least a hybrid form of education and not just treat virtual teaching and learning as a passing phase, to be abandoned once the pandemic has been controlled.
- (g) University managers should build into their strategic plans strategies and resources (funding, technology, training) to accommodate a switch to virtual teaching in times of emergency as well as a more durable shift towards hybrid teaching.

## Session D: UEP and Business Education: Challenges to Implementation

**Moderator:** Dr. Naukhez Sarwar, Principal and Dean, NUST Business School, NUST

Speaker	Designation
Dr. Syed Zulfiqar Gilani	Program Specialist, Academics, Higher Education Commission.
Dr. Zaki Rashidi	Associate Dean Accreditation and Director QEC, IQRA University Karachi
Dr. Sadia Nadeem	Dean, FAST School of Management, FAST-NUCES, Islamabad
Dr. Nauman Abbasi	Director, Institute of Management Sciences, Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan

Dr. Zulfiqar Gilani presented an outline of the new Undergraduate Education Policy (UEP). Discussants then considered some implementation challenges. The key takeaways were as follows.

- a) The emphasis of the UEP on a broad-based education focused on competencies was appreciated. Business schools were particularly well-placed to follow this approach because many shared the underlying philosophy and were already implementing approaches designed to enhance the job-market prospects of their graduates. Some would, of course, have to find resources to make some new General Education courses available that may not yet be in their curricula.
- b) Among implementation challenges would be the readiness of students (and parents) to enter a university without knowing the degree that they would eventually obtain. In practice, however, the new approach simply meant postponing admission to a field of study by one year. Students would have the opportunity to compete for admission to preferred fields of study a year after admission to the university. The initial year would be reserved for exploration across several fields in order to determine the best fit between abilities and opportunities.
- c) Another implementation challenge was likely to be that of mobilizing resources to ensure that Practical Learning Labs (PLL) are properly accommodated. The PLL requirement of four hours per week for two years will not be popular among students since no credits are to be assigned to this work. Attendance and follow-up may prove challenging.
- d) Making it mandatory for students to participate in a nine-week internship was considered a good way to introduce students to the world of work while still in college. However, the opportunities for internships would vary considerably across schools and would be particularly sparse for schools in rural and remote areas.
- e) Highlighting the importance of academic advisement was also considered an important feature of the new UEP. The challenge would be for universities to find resources to do this and train faculty to take on this role.
- f) Additional resources will be available to help universities implement the new UEP. In particular, Teachers Handbooks have already been prepared by HEC for every relevant domain and an implementation manual is under preparation. Some flexibility in the implementation of various UEP requirements, such as the PLL and Internships, will also be possible. HEC is also available to hold implementation-related discussions with NBEAC as well as with individual business schools.

## Session E: Nonstandard MBA Programs: Lessons of Experience

**Moderator:** Dr. Abdul Raziq, Dean, Loralai University, Balochistan

Speaker	Designation
Muhammad Saleem Umer	Program Director, Institute of Business Administration, Karachi
Talib Karim	President, Institute of Business Management, Karachi
Jon Foster-Pedley	Dean and Director, Henley Business School Africa
Dr. Zaki Rashidi	Associate Dean Accreditation and Director QEC, IQRA University Karachi

Panelists discussed why demand for nonstandard MBA programs was high in Pakistan as well as globally and how business schools should continue to meet this demand. The main takeaways were as follows:

- a) Engagement with a formal process of business education is often more productive when students have had some experience of work and of practical business challenges. However, this is also a time when students have other obligations such as to jobs and to families. Accordingly, nonstandard programs are most successful when they are designed in a modular and flexible fashion to fit with lifecycle needs of students.
- b) Many Pakistani business schools are running successful Executive MBA programs conducted over weekends. Some also have part-time options where the teaching is conducted a course or two at a time during evenings and the degree program is stretched across several years. Part-time options are especially useful for those who are entrepreneurially minded and may be running their own businesses.
- c) The market response to such programs has continued to be supportive. Many employers finance the weekend or part-time education of their employees. Many employees report career-enhancement as a consequence of having participated in such programs. This is a growing segment of the portfolio of programs offered by business schools.
- d) Nonstandard programs have also been found to be compatible with broader objectives, such as enhancing social impact. Participants can better appreciate the integration of a social impact objective into their programs and can more easily find practical ways of achieving such impact within their careers. In this way, academia is able to serve society as well as individuals.
- e) While remaining aligned with regulatory guidelines, nonstandard programs can be designed to respond faster than standard MBA programs to evolving market needs and trends.



## Session F: Management Consultancy in Pakistan: Opportunities & Challenges

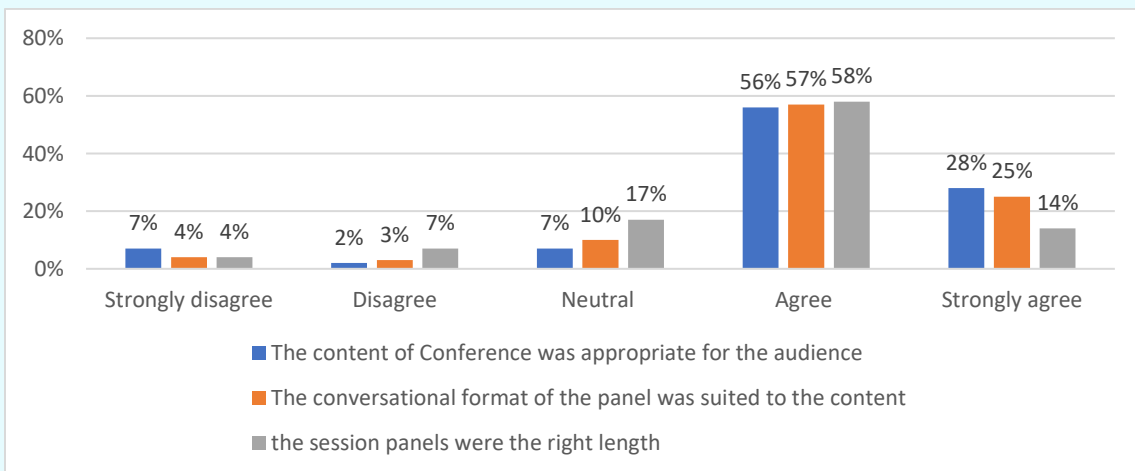
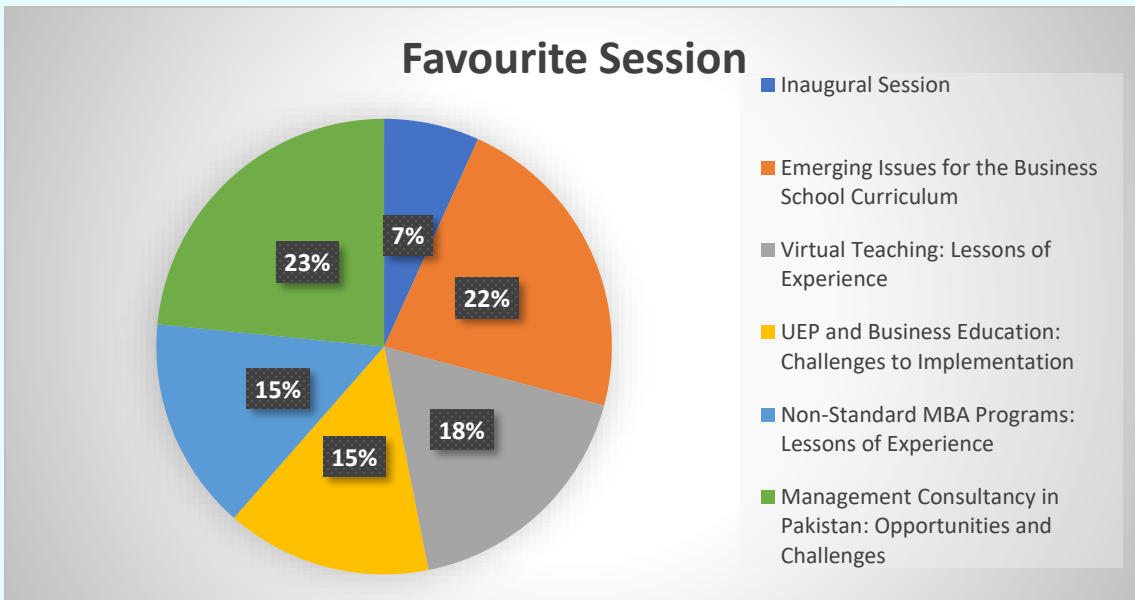
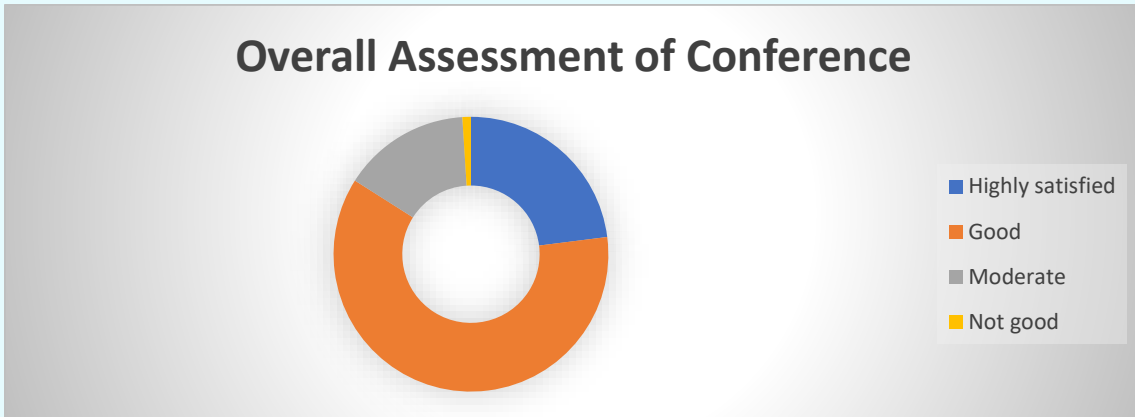
**Moderator:** Dr. Farrukh Iqbal, Chairman, NBEAC

Speaker	Designation
Ali Ansari	Chair, Advisory Board of the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development, IBA Karachi
Asim Rashid	Chairman & CEO, Creative Swan
Asad Ali Shah	CEO, Asad Ali Shah Associates
Iftikhar Taj	President, ICAP

This session considered the demand and supply characteristics of the management consultancy industry in Pakistan, with a view to explaining why it was a small and relatively minor industry in the country. The key takeaways were as follows:

- a) The scope and content of the management consultancy (MC) sector in Pakistan is primarily a consequence of demand characteristics. Effective demand for MC services has traditionally been low and has shown no tendency to grow.
- b) Those Pakistani corporates that do interact with MC suppliers take advice principally in the area of taxation, followed by information technology. Advice is not generally sought in the area of management which is supposedly the forte of MC suppliers globally.
- c) There is little demand for local MC in the public sector as well. If MC services are being paid for by international donors, there is generally a preference for international providers of MC. If local funds are involved, the procurement rules often dictate a preference for low cost bids over those that are professionally sound but relatively expensive.
- d) In part, the lack of demand for MC services is related to the dominance of the “seth” culture among Pakistani corporates. Family-run businesses often hold the view that their success to date has been due to their own management prowess and so there is little need for paid external professional advice in this regard.
- e) On the supply side, MC services are offered primarily by big audit and accountancy firms, building on their networks among local chief executives and their knowledge of local business practices and conditions.
- f) MC services are rarely provided by faculty of Pakistani business schools. Faculty have limited exposure to local businesses and teach largely from books rather than from personal experience. Furthermore, faculty research is oriented towards publication and not towards problem-solving.
- g) Looking to the future, there are opportunities for MC in the public sector where there is a big need for professional management and administration. However, for this need to be translated into effective demand, the procurement process will have to be reformed to allow the technical quality of MC service bids to be given much more weight than is the case at present.
- h) Looking to the future, opportunities for MC services may also arise in non-traditional sectors, powered by digital technology and led by young and innovative companies. The lack of a seth culture here may open a space for professional management expertise.

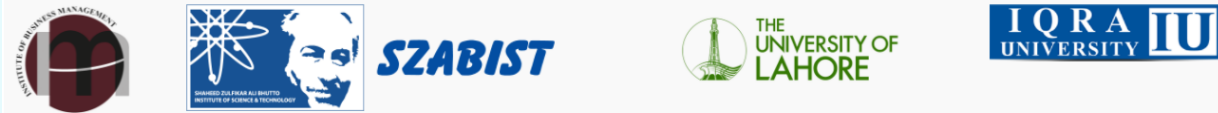
### III. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK



## IV. NOTE ON SPONSORS

Mr. Ahtesham Ali Raja noted with gratitude the role of all universities and corporate sponsors who had provided financial support to the Conference. He stressed the fact that such support was critical to improving the quality of discussion and debate on business education in Pakistan.

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## **V. NOTE ON CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION**

Much credit is due to the members of the Organizing Committee who took on a new challenge this year, that of organizing a virtual conference. Their dedication, hard work, and planning paid off in the form of a very successful event.

Mr. Ahtesham Ali Raja was responsible overall and particularly for arranging sponsorships.

Ms. Sania Tufail handled contacts with speakers and related conference program matters.

Ms. Nomeeta Maqsood managed participant registrations and online technology matters.

Mr. Muhammad Usman helped with the sponsorship campaign.

Mr. Asad Khan managed financial and administrative aspects of the conference.

Mr. Usman Ali Jadoon helped with sponsorships and registrations.

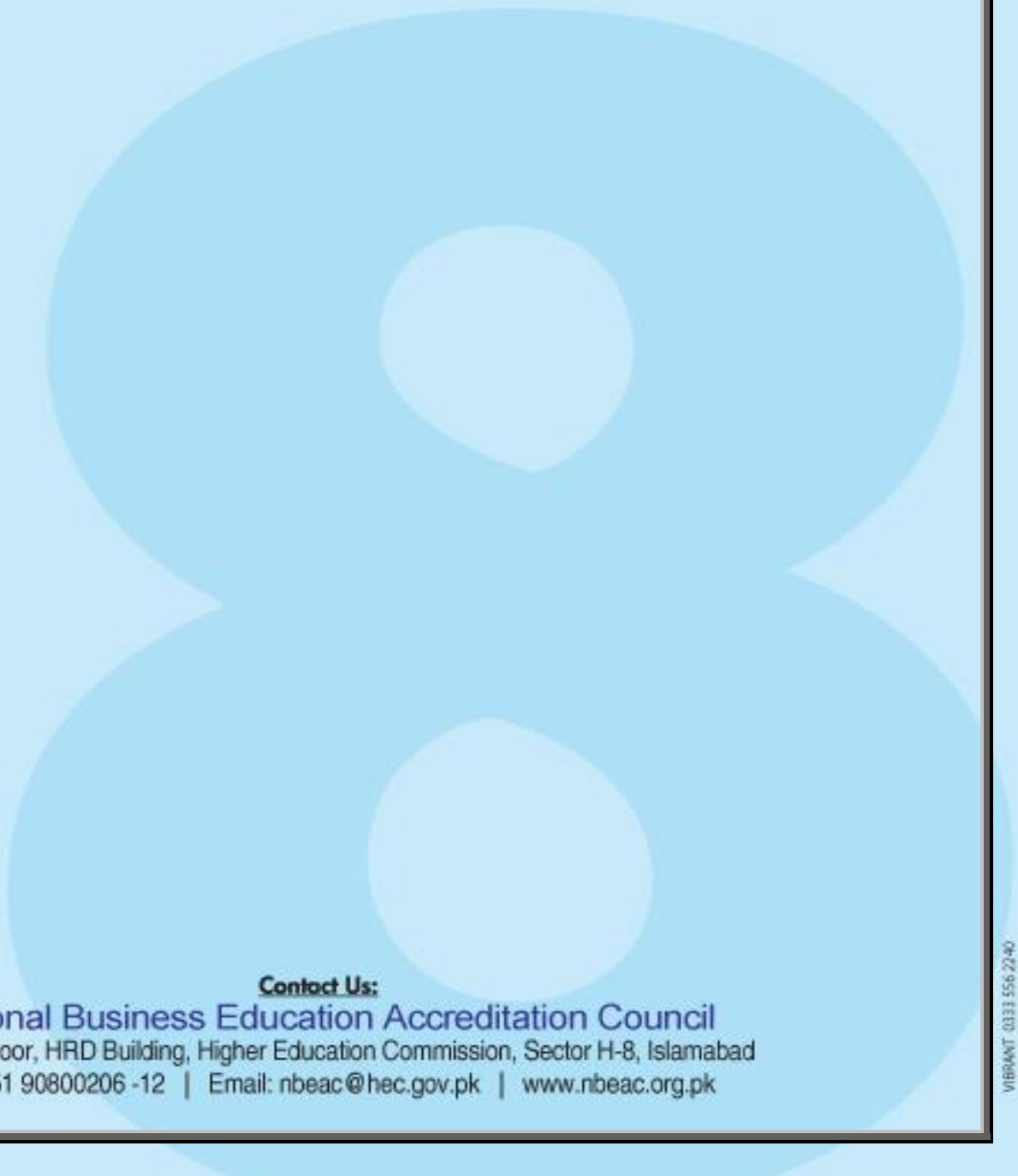
Mr. Muhammad Irfan Khan helped with program matters.

Mr. Muhammad Tahir designed the conference material and managed all Zoom and IT related issues.

Mr. Usman Khan helped with registrations.

Mr. Muhammad Noman helped with accounts, public relations, and registrations.





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