Introducing Microsoft’s New Chief Executive Officer

UWM Alum Satya Nadella,
College of Engineering & Applied Science

SPRING 2014

CREATING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

TOUGHER, STRONGER, SMARTER CONCRETE

UWM WRENCH PUTS SAFETY FIRST

BIOMEDICAL BREAKTHROUGH ALLOWS SAFER TRANSPLANTS VIA OPTICAL BIOPSY

NSF CAREER GRANTS FUND BREAKTHROUGH RESEARCH
The new CEO of Microsoft Corporation – and only the third chief executive officer in the famed company’s history – has strong Milwaukee ties. Satya Nadella, an alumnus of UWM’s College of Engineering and Applied Science, is remembered as an extremely talented graduate student who was one of scores of students from India attracted to UWM’s strong computer science program.

Nadella, who was once described by Business Week as a member of Bill Gates’s “kitchen cabinet of techno-whizzes,” was about 20 years old when he began the master’s degree program in computer science here.

“His prior academic background was in electrical engineering,” says K. Vairavan, emeritus professor and former chair of the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. “But he took less time to complete our challenging and strong MS program than most students who already had a solid computer science background. I would attribute his impressive success to his intellectual ability, hard work and razor-sharp focus.”

In fact, Vairavan remembers finding a sleeping bag in his lab on the seventh floor of the Engineering and Mathematical Sciences building. “I was told by another student that Satya had slept there several nights, after working late hours on his research. Such was his dedication to his goals.”

**Master’s Degree in 1990**

A native of Hyderabad, in south-central India, Nadella earned a master’s degree in computer science from UWM in 1990, after completing his bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from Mangalore University in India.

“I think Satya being named CEO of Microsoft helps our students know the kind of education they get on our campus will take them anywhere they want to go,” says Dean Brett Peters.

In his first interview after the appointment, Nadella says he had always wanted to “build things” and had developed a passion for computer science as a means to achieve that.

“I am a learner,” he says. “I fundamentally believe that if you are not learning new things … you stop doing great and useful things. Our industry does not respect tradition – it only respects innovation.”

Professor Hossein Hosseini, Nadella’s former thesis adviser, agrees that Nadella is the perfect role model for students. “You got a sense that he had a burning passion for learning,” says Hosseini. “I have always used him as a good example of student success: how to dream big and work hard in developing strong interpersonal and technical skills that foster success in life and career.”

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– Hossein Hosseini, professor
Satya Nadella to lead tech industry giant, Microsoft

Nadella has been with Microsoft for 21 years, mostly recently as executive vice president of the Cloud and Enterprise group. He succeeds Steve Ballmer, who stepped down from the Microsoft helm after 14 years, and Bill Gates, the company’s first CEO and current chairman.

Graduate Teaching Assistant

As a graduate teaching assistant at UWM, Nadella participated in the college’s Upward Bound program, helping to teach college preparatory courses to inner-city high school students and hosting them on campus for a summer.

After graduation from UWM he joined Sun Microsystems’ Chicago office and earned a master’s degree in business from the University of Chicago. By 1992, he had taken a job with Microsoft in Seattle.

Early in his Microsoft career, he stood out. In a 1999 Businessweek article, Nadella and four other Microsoft employees were described as the “new crew” needed at Microsoft to implement Gates’s technical vision for the company.

When he was named president of Microsoft’s $19 billion Server and Tools Business in 2011, Ballmer told the media that Nadella “will define the future of business computing” and help the company realize the business potential of the cloud “in game-changing ways.”

He has also served as senior vice president of R&D for the Online Services Division, which includes the Search (Bing), Portal (MSN) and Advertising platforms, and vice president of the Microsoft Business Division. Most recently, he has been responsible for building and running the company’s computing platforms, developer tools and cloud services, including “Cloud OS” – Microsoft’s next-generation back-end platform.

Chancellor’s Innovation Award

In 2012, UWM Chancellor Michael R. Lovell met with Nadella in Seattle and discussed ideas for advancing UWM, including a possible link between UWM’s School of Freshwater Sciences and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s efforts in clean water research.

At that meeting, Nadella also expressed interest in the UWM partnership with Johnson Controls around battery research and in UWM’s computer science program.

Last year Nadella visited the UWM campus to accept the Chancellor’s Innovation Award and speak with students and faculty. The award recognizes a visionary whose professional achievements show entrepreneurial drive; creative, intelligent risk-taking; transformative thinking; effective change management; and a passion for lifelong learning.

True to his character, when he received the award, instead of talking about the products he developed for Microsoft, he talked about how he learned empathy on the campus by working with students from local high schools and getting engaged in their success.

In 2000, UWM recognized Nadella with the Dean’s Award for Outstanding Achievement. In 2012, UWM awarded Nadella with the Chancellor’s Innovation Award.