



No, Public Affairs Is Not Lobbying



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Risk management for business is an emerging function for public affairs professionals globally. But the approach to risk management may differ from company to company not to mention from country to country. In the case of India, many states have their own framework and unique environments as experienced by different corporate houses in the country. In this backdrop, how should firms perceive and manage risk? What are the lessons for Indian managers from best practices overseas on how public affairs professionals manage risk worldwide?

Furthermore, the perception and leadership of the CEO on the role public affairs can contribute significantly to a company's growth path. The public affairs function is slowly becoming a part of the CEO's office to handle reputation management. In the future, should CEOs integrate the role of public affairs as an integral part of company strategy for growth?

Engaging with MPs and the legislature is more critical than ever to be better understand ground realities for industry. Legislation changes and delays can make or break businesses. The progress of economic legislation-making is especially important for multinationals to prepare their strategies for the country. At times, legislators themselves have poor understanding of issues and need to be kept informed of the changes taking place globally.

In this changing landscape, there is need to alter some of the existing perceptions about public affairs in the country. Over the years, it has grown from pure government relations to addressing larger stakeholder concerns for companies. Today, it is not only about fixing problems, but also about finding solutions to issues that have a bearing on economic growth. This can happen only through a constructive dialogue.

In the emerging landscape, while the legacy of past habits still endures—notably through personality-driven connections—the new

realities are redefining the role of public affairs companies and professionals. In an evolving process for both business and government, industry is taking a more structured approach to government relations.

The community and society have become important stakeholders for public affairs engagement. The traditional view of business was that of a trade-off between environment/community and business. Today, different business models are required to make interests of community and business aligned. The emerging thinking is that stakeholder engagement should move away from the 'least harmful' public policy towards understanding how value is created.

In this process, companies are increasingly engaging civil society to change their business model and satisfy all the different and varied stakeholders. This holistic approach calls for a complete reversal of the perception among stakeholders of public affairs as pure 'lobbying'. Public affairs is a much

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higher level of engagement that contributes significantly to corporate and national value. Many of these questions were raised in a day-long conference organised by the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI). The conclusion was that public affairs is not just managing or lobbying with the government any more. The role of public affairs now covers wider shareholders to include corporate communication (both internal and external), NGOs, think tanks, risk management, policies and politics, reputation and stakeholder Management.

In a new era of politics and policy-making, there is also a growing debate on whether the public affairs profession should be regulated or not. The answer is clearly no. As in many other countries, the best practice should be self-regulation. Public affairs in India needs to fundamentally add new dimensions to reinvent itself: that of, debate, dialogue, discussion and decision-making.

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