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Increasing significance of stakeholders engagement

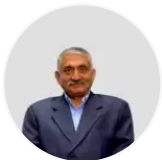
November 28, 2022, 5:07 PM IST / Ajay Khanna in Voices, India, TOI

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Ajay Khanna

Co-founder, PAFI (Public
Affairs Forum of India) &
Chairman of PAFI
Annual Forum

The last decade has witnessed a major shift in how public affairs and the policy advocacy space is perceived in India. This evolving idea has established a more transparent engagement of industry and government with focus on developing a more conducive business platform, building trust & enhance stake holder engagements.

WRITE

Public Affairs practice in India encompasses a multitude of dimensions. These include policy analysis, research and advocacy, government, corporate and external affairs; stakeholder engagement, corporate communication, media relationships, nurturing long-term key relationships, building coalitions, crisis management and corporate social responsibility. As Public Affairs practitioners contribute to a progressive democracy by joining the dots across the business world, political parties, society, policy regulators, industry associations, academia and think tanks, they must abide by the responsibly compliant, structured and ethically righteous code of conduct. At the same time, it seems pertinent that their career paths are carefully nurtured and lead them towards their individual, societal and professional sustainability for benefit of all concerned.

Recently, Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI) and Ipsos, one of the largest market research and insight companies in the world released a report on **Public Affairs Career in India: A Turning Point**. This report was based on a survey undertaken to identify and understand the ongoing and future prospects for the Public Affairs professionals in India. The survey aimed to explore, document and identify the career progression path, remuneration trends, and occupational

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advancement of Public Affairs professionals in India. It was conducted amongst Public Affairs professionals working in a wide range of organizations across various sectors having varied annual revenue, employee size and tenure of business operation belonging to diversified sectors such as in the digital, manufacturing and from MNC sector, with global headquarters located outside India.

The survey comprehensively covered all aspects of public affairs such as employees' size in organization, remuneration, retention challenges, and professional challenges, impact of the pandemic and requisite skills. Interestingly, it also covered the legacy of Public Affairs Function. I strongly believe public affairs professionals have a key role to play in the organizations as they are the architects to build trust between industry and government. This function has always been there – historically in the form of corporate liaisoning and lobbying and now transitioning fast into the foray of a strategic corporate function covering a wide range of issues & external stakeholder's engagement.

Primarily, the central goal of this study was to capture the macro trends in the career and development opportunities for professionals working in the domain of

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Public Affairs in India. Some of the key findings of the survey are:

One, Public Affairs is an existing function. Almost, 38% of companies have had this area for almost two decades. Over the last few years, this function has been gaining importance and credibility with the administration irrespective of the government in power.

Second, very important aspect of Public Affairs is that it is entrusted with big responsibilities on select few people. Individual capacities matter.

Third, regulatory complexities at the state and central level are a part of businesses. Advocating on easing regulatory challenges towards ensuring business continuity has created more opportunities for the function.

Fourth, Public Affairs is a well-paying career. However, wide range in each experience-band depicts lack of standardized practice in team structure and seniority of members. This often leads to blurred roles of the work area.

Fifth, particularly this function calls for specialized skills, acquired through experience and there is low threat of lateral entry.

Sixth, the growth opportunities in the area are considerably high. However, lack



of recognition and unrealistic expectations of the organizations often makes retention of employees a challenge for the companies.

Finally, for charting a proper career growth path, the companies have to work on making the KPIs clear – for performance and progression.

While this survey clearly depicts a renewed enthusiasm and focus towards the Public Affairs function, the transition of it being enriched by bigger responsibilities is evident. Reiterating the significance of the Function, I would emphasize that the organizations should focus on increasing the orientation of Public Affairs in the broader role of Corporate Strategy to make it more effective. We need a buy-in from the Board & CEOs to recognize this function as a key to succeed in this complex global & Indian business environment. It is time to leverage Public Affairs more than just for crisis management. The governments have started acknowledging the value of engaging with Public Policy professionals. It's time now for corporates to give the due recognition, appreciation and perceive the role from a more strategic perspective.

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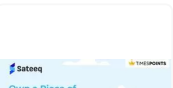
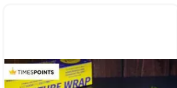
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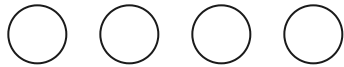


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