

The evolving public affairs, policy & advocacy landscape...

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Synopsis

With the spotlight on Public Policy and Advocacy, the last decade witnessed a steady evolution of this function. The spectrum of Public Affairs function has widened, encouraging inclusivity in decision making and embracing of diverse stakeholders.



Representational image

Public Affairs, Public Policy and **Advocacy** have witnessed a gradual metamorphosis in the last few years. The corporate function which played its tiny part as a sapling in the corporate landscape has now grown into a **sturdy** tree branching into multitude dimensions. Today it not only holds a proud place in boardrooms but has also become an interface between Business, Governments & for enhancing external stakeholder engagement.

With the spotlight on Public Policy and Advocacy, the last decade witnessed a steady evolution of this function. The spectrum of Public Affairs function has widened, encouraging inclusivity in decision making and embracing of diverse stakeholders. This has established a more transparent engagement of Industry and Government with focus on developing a more conducive business platform & building trust. The scope of public policy professionals has grown significantly over the past decade not only in India but across the globe. **Public Affairs Forum of India - Pafi** established on the four **ethos** - aligning with the Government, building trust, network and deepening a talent pool, has always been an advocate to this policy cause.

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There has been a complete convergence of interest amongst stakeholders in the Indian economy. The traditional silos are collapsing. Governments, corporate India and consumers are aligning as equal partners in forging a national public policy response to deal with various challenges. As lobbying evolves into advocacy, public affairs take some more critical role for India Inc.

This year, as we celebrate the 10th year of PAFI's Annual Forum, let me highlight ten important areas which have holistically attributed to the growth of the Public Affairs function.

Firstly, the role of Public Affairs has transitioned into the foray of a strategic corporate function covering a wide range of issues and external stakeholder's engagement. Transparency in interactions has developed pace. Besides, economic conversations, socio-cultural aspects have gained ground. Dialogues and debates among stakeholders have grown more organic.

Secondly, Public Affairs professionals have a crucial role to play in organisations as they are the architects to build trust between industry and government. They represent companies to the external stakeholders especially to the Governments. Organisational behavior is the most watched in today's times. Advocacy requires cognizance of the same.

Thirdly, a transition from lobbying to knowledge-based advocacy. Nurturing of network, although remains a stronghold, fostering thought leadership through research, developing sectoral white papers and preparing reports are the key. One needs to speak, not just about balance sheet and bottom lines but also about how they are seen by the society and its impact.

Fourth, with the function becoming more engaged into business strategy and planning, the Public Affairs professionals are taking burden away from the CEOs and the Boards. With a wider vision and a network-oriented approach, they work as a bridge between the policies shapers in the Government and the corporates.

Fifth, growing significance of Public Affairs is evident with the subject becoming more institutionalized. Colleges and universities have come up with dedicated courses on Public Policy. Institutes teaching government affairs and public policy are garnering importance. There is focus towards capacity building for the function to meet the growing demand of the companies.

Sixth, Government is recognising the role of the policy professionals. Deliberation and consultation between Government and the corporate sector has become more transparent. There is a belonging in the process of policy formation. A more participative approach is seen today. State governments have also become more engaging to conversations.

Seventh, youth and Gen Z have taken to Public policy arena. Young people are coming into this profession. Their innovative ideas, naturally savvy with social media and positive dynamism are reimagining the traditional toolbox of Public Policy.

Eighth, a proactive bureaucracy. There is a shift from being a controlled economy to a more participative one in the last decade. The policy shapers are encouraging ideas and industry stake-holders' consultations are being undertaken consistently. Policy drafting are explored through regular meetings with the corporate sector. Government is increasingly involving industry in the policy-making process.

Ninth, going beyond the traditional perception, today Public Affairs function includes policy analysis, research and advocacy, government interactions, corporate strategy and external affairs; stakeholder engagement including NGO's, Thinktanks, corporate communication, media relationships, nurturing long-term key relationships, building coalitions and corporate social responsibility.

Tenth, the Public Affairs function remains the pivot for crisis management in any organisation. Calibrating and communicating in the proper way is the responsibility of the function. Today, where reputation is the key to sustainable business, the onus on the Public Affairs function is all the more.

For the last nine years, PAFI's Annual Forum has been a platform for interactive deliberations and more importantly, has set the direction for long-term broader policy and economic agenda discussion for public affairs practitioners across sectors and sub-functions.

The upcoming PAFI Annual Forum marking the 10 year milestone will focus on India's Vision @ 2030: 3rd Largest Economy – Issues, Ideas, Implementation. It will explore how well India can continue to sustain and accelerate this positive momentum over the next seven years.

The writer is Co-Founder, PAFI & Chairman, PAFI Annual Forums. Views expressed are personal.

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