

JOHN HAMILTON'S VIEWS ON PRESSURE GROUP MANAGEMENT

| | |
|--|--|
| Cargill Seeds | <p>The Branch H.O. of Cargill Seeds Ind. Pvt. Ltd. was ransacked in December 1992 by a large number of persons representing the Karnataka State Farmers' Association (KRRS). There was measurable damage to assets and some element of violence. The KRRS alleged that the presence of MNC Seed Companies in India, Cargill in particular, was contrary to the best interests of India, and Indian farmers. WTO, patenting, dis-diversity and genetic heritage were at issue. A second attack was made on a Cargill facility at Bellary in July 1993 when a building under construction was pulled down. For two years, Cargill became the subject of intense public scrutiny and the business process of Cargill was disrupted.</p> |
| Relevance of Public Relations Agencies | <p>Cargill which had been a relatively low key organisation was faced with the dilemma of how to tackle the situation. Having no experience of tackling has tile pressure group, they turned to the PR firm, Good Relations.</p> |
| Communication Programme | <p>Cargill worked GR to design a communication programme which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• responded to the allegations of KRRS• Cargill was always on the defensive and had to give factual and detailed presentations to counter these allegations• Focussed on the contribution of Cargill in the agri environment.• Systematically exposed and discredited the position of the KRRS. |
| Lessons learnt | <p>Cargill thought they were understood and were aware of then environment....</p> |
| Communicating with all publics | <p>Their Communication focus was aimed only at Policy makers, end users and the distribution system - they were not talking to all then publics and perhaps talked ... a degree of annoyance</p> <p>They focused on the application of science instead of more closely examining the implications.</p> <p>Cargill felt insulated by who they were - a US\$ 50 billion</p> |

Right and invitation got confused

company with a presence in 65 countries.

They were confused into thinking that they had a right to be in India when all they had was a invitation.

Cargill was totally unprepared as this had never happened in India, and more so, never to a low profile company like the..... Thus there was no experience in dealing with a situation like this.

Disaster Recovery, until this event, meant looking after the financial software/records.

Invest in the communication process

Further lessons learnt were that it was important for the company spokes person (i.e. Chairman) to speak authoritatively on behalf of the company Cargill unfortunately did not sound convincing. What was critical was to become familiar with, and willing to discuss, the key issues. Cargill felt that it was important to get reporters on their turf through a simple communication process - they thought to bridge the gap between Cargill and the farmers. Then PR agency advised them to:

- a) Communicate with a larger audience
- b) Concentrate on one-on-one interviews and not call a PC

Beware the 'enemy' within

It pays to know that in times of crises not everyone within the organisation is behind you. Look out for Qu's

- Who got us into this mess (i.e. who can I blame?)
- I am not interested in social issues, I want to know when sales will improve?
- Could not we just pay these guys off? Surely that's the easiest way out? - this is generally seen as the most expedient way out.

More lessons

You are likely to have many 'partners' they should all figure somewhere in planning.

Do you recognise all the stake holders in a JV? It is important to note that in a JV, you are really communicating with all the people concerned.

Cargill's suppliers then and today are farmers. Cargill worked with farmers and had many of them supporting them. Cargill ended up with a very good communication

process.

Cargill encashed on this crises - yes, they did lose money, but instead developed support from the media, i.e. began to publish pro-Cargill stories.

Learning curve

- Controversy had turned Cargill into a household name. It was a learning curve for many people as well as a lesson on how to deal with a foreign environment.

Research the future

-
- Conflicts generally escalate - it is vital to understand the likely directions.
- Very often, business and/or industry groups can often be a big help
- Foreign companies operating in India should keep missions updated.
- Build linkages to companies with similar problems
- Expect the unexpected.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by John Hamilton, John Hamilton & Co., at PR Pundit's workshop - Emerging Constituencies, held in New Delhi on September 18, 1998)