

Leadership in Corporate Affairs



What defines Corporate Affairs leadership in 2022?

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In our e-briefs on Corporate Affairs, we will share insights and trends on a wide range of issues relevant to the role and success of Corporate Affairs and corporate communications teams. GlobeScan, together with the University of Oxford, has developed a Global Corporate Affairs Initiative which aims to combine research findings with global best practice examples to support Corporate Affairs professionals with insights around a function that is becoming ever more complex and critical to both business success and a better world.

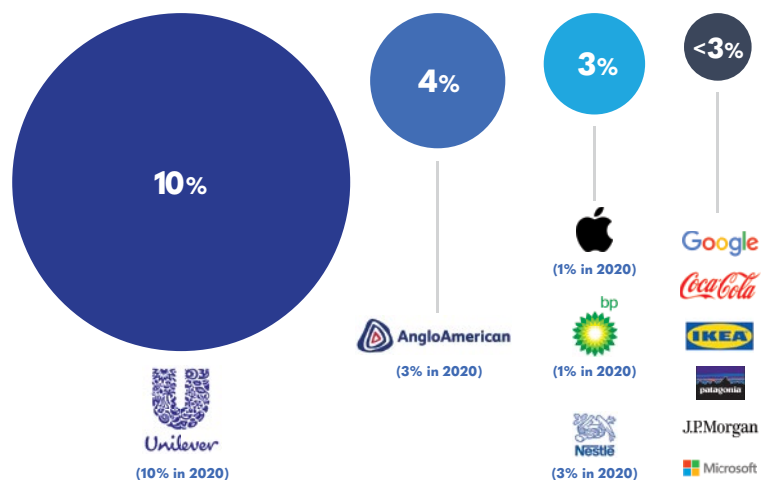
Corporate Affairs Leaders

In the Oxford-GlobeScan 2022 Corporate Affairs Survey, we asked Corporate Affairs practitioners from across the world to identify companies that they believe are the leaders in Corporate Affairs today. In total, 63 companies are mentioned (only 16 mentioned twice or more) representing a range of sectors and geographies. See About the Survey.

Unilever’s Corporate Affairs team continues to lead the pack, followed by Anglo American, Apple, BP, and Nestlé. Google, Coca-Cola, IKEA,

Patagonia, JP Morgan, and Microsoft all round out the top-mentioned leaders in Corporate Affairs for 2022.

Looking across geographies, we see that Unilever (15%), Anglo American (12%), and Nestlé (9%) receive more recognition from Corporate Affairs practitioners in Africa. Similarly, BP is rated by 7 percent as a leader in Europe, compared to 3 percent globally. In Latin America, Apple fared better than the global trend.



Source: Oxford-GlobeScan Global Corporate Affairs Survey, 2022

Defining Corporate Affairs Leadership

What does it take to achieve recognition from peers, and how can Corporate Affairs teams continue to evolve their approach to ensure they are future-fit? According to the Oxford-GlobeScan Corporate Affairs Survey, practitioners identified five success factors for leadership.

Success factor 1

Internal alignment ensures integrated external response

While this may sound obvious, we know that many organisations struggle to be functionally aligned across the enterprise and often find themselves operating in a siloed fashion. It therefore comes as no surprise that Corporate Affairs practitioners mentioned the need to ensure the function is effectively integrated across the business so that all parts of the company are coordinated and offer an integrated and cohesive external response.

The Corporate Affairs function increasingly plays a strong role as a convenor and a nodal point for internal collaboration. Corporate Affairs teams that can muster and effectively synchronise internal collaboration can respond externally in an aligned and integrated fashion. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that the Corporate Affairs function was called upon by CEOs to be the portal for external – and in many cases internal – communication and engagement.

Organisational or functional design and positioning are therefore critical. Is the function positioned in such a way that it can be at the centre of information flows, often playing the role coordinating and interpreting external intelligence streams? Are you able to facilitate cross-functional, enterprise-wide collaboration at pace? Do you have an appropriate oversight role and processes to support it?

Success factor 2

Proactively address reputational risks and opportunities to build trust

Leaders in Corporate Affairs are highly successful at identifying their reputational risks and opportunities to build enduring trust with their stakeholders. Successful Corporate Affairs teams have well-developed reputation monitoring and response strategies. But reputation management is much more than regular assessments across all your key stakeholder audiences.

The role of Corporate Affairs is to “bring the outside inside” and this broader reputation mandate involves identifying what is important to stakeholders within a complex ecosystem of trends and framing a consistent story around which the company can build its purpose and advocacy.

While it is important to have systems in place that ensure robust understanding of the external context and trends (reputation assessments, social media monitoring, dashboards to track reputational health), it is also key to invest time and resources to understand and engage with your strongest advocates and influencers and help guide the company’s response to the shifting external context.

Success factor 3

Embrace stakeholder capitalism

Over the past couple of years, leadership companies, and especially their Corporate Affairs teams, successfully transitioned to a model of multi-stakeholder capitalism and away from shareholder primacy. Effective stakeholder engagement is seen as a critical differentiator for companies such as Unilever, Anglo American, BP, Nestlé, and other leaders in Corporate Affairs. In the face of an increasing amount of business shocks in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, being able to respond nimbly and consistently to stakeholder concerns is key to enduring success.

This means that to be successful, companies need to focus more attention and resources on a broader set of stakeholder groups. It is all about building trust with a wider set of audiences in a hyper-transparent world. Are you scanning and engaging beyond the traditional set of stakeholders? And more importantly, have you developed a clear value proposition for each stakeholder audience? The importance of stakeholder mapping as well as listening and responding are again emphasised as critical success factors.

Success factor 4

Purpose is the golden thread and ignitor for impact

Leadership organisations see the benefits of strengthening and making meaningful connections across all aspects of the enterprise: from group level to business units to distinct brands. Corporate Affairs plays a key role with communication heads and brand or business unit teams to bring together the values of the company. This is a growing imperative as companies shift towards more purpose-led approaches.

“Unilever has a strong voice on issues that span social, environmental, and business. It makes brand decisions that signify purpose, and their leadership is engaged and articulates the company’s perspective in addition to actions it takes.”

Director Strategic Communications, United States

It is therefore no surprise that Corporate Affairs practitioners mention the role of purpose custodian as a key success factor. The Corporate Affairs team is often tasked to lead the journey of developing a compelling corporate narrative that builds synergies in everything the company does and among the stakeholders it engages with. Corporate Affairs is key in creating a strong culture to structure the organisation in a way that ensures it shows up consistently across the social landscape.

Does your organisation have a strong and clear purpose? Are all your stakeholders, including your employees, au fait with the corporate purpose? Understanding the degree to which your employees are fluent in the purpose narrative is critical as they are recognised as important advocates for the business. Similarly, ensuring corporate commitments and performance related to sustainability and ESG demonstrate true purpose to stakeholders.

Success factor **5**

Integrate business and sustainability strategy to ensure impact

Today's leaders in Corporate Affairs invest much time and effort to ensure that business strategy and the sustainability strategy of their organisations remain seamlessly integrated and are portrayed as such in all external engagement. While sustainability issues used to be a sub-component of the Corporate Affairs agenda and the focus was on the prevention of harm and maintaining healthy regulatory relationships, the ESG conversation is now dominating how trust is built and lost for organisations. This requires an organisational approach of blending sustainability and social impact with business risks.

In addition to ensuring an integrated approach to strategy, a key deliverable for Corporate Affairs teams is measuring and reporting the impact of your strategy.

About GlobeScan

We are a global insights and advisory consultancy working at the intersection of brand purpose, sustainability, and trust. We partner with leading companies, NGOs, and governmental organisations to deliver insights that guide decision-making and build strategies that contribute to a sustainable and equitable future. We equip decision-makers with the confidence to lead a new future.

Lead the Future

Know Your World

Our customized research and insight capabilities help you understand the global context you're operating in and the concerns, expectations, and perspectives of your key stakeholders. We give you clear, robust evidence for decision-making based on the key issues facing your organization.

- **Benchmarking and societal trends analysis**
- **Materiality and issues assessment**
- **Research with consumers, employees, and stakeholders**
- **Engagement with consumers, employees, and stakeholders**

Our advisory services help you make strategic decisions with clarity and confidence. We provide expert advice, supported by social science methodologies, that turns evidence into ideas and data into direction and action.

- **Sustainability and ESG strategy development / positioning**
- **Trust building and reputation advisory**
- **Brand purpose and consumer behavior change**
- **Communications and thought leadership**



About the Oxford-GlobeScan Global Corporate Affairs Initiative

The University of Oxford’s Saïd Business School and GlobeScan formalised a partnership in 2019 to deliver enhanced insight into the roles, responsibilities, challenges, opportunities, and themes facing leading global Corporate Affairs professionals around the world. The primary purpose of the partnership is to generate valuable research findings for organisations, senior executives, and Corporate Affairs leaders through a regular “pulse” of novel, timely, and data-driven insights about the evolution of the Corporate Affairs agenda.

About the survey methodology

The findings reported in this e-brief are from the third annual Oxford-GlobeScan Global Corporate Affairs Survey. It was conducted online between 4th March and 6th April 2022 and the data collected provides a view of evolving sentiment during the last year. A robust sample of 221 Corporate Affairs, Corporate Communications, and related practitioners participated in the survey.

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