

COMMENTARY

Lobbyism and sustainability: Two sides of the same coin

The renowned Nobel laureate Milton Friedman considered a company's social responsibility to consist solely in increasing profit. How fortunate that this misconception didn't prevail.

Once upon a time, charity and generous patronage arose from individual industrialists' sense of ethical or moral obligation. Today, a company's commitment has long since developed into a strategic approach in line with stakeholder expectations. Some refer to this as corporate (social) responsibility; others call it sustainability management.

At its core, however, this kind of commitment is not a concession to external expectations. Rather, it follows the reasoning that long-term business success is only possible in a stable context. Thus, companies are acting in their own interest if they make resources – knowledge and money – available for addressing issues that affect society as a whole. In this process, credibility comes from exercising the greatest possible transparency and public accountability.

There is no point in deliberating over whether the support of educational or environmental programs shouldn't actually be the task of government. Where there is a lack of collective goods, they simply must be produced through public-private partnership. And where government regulation fails, businesses and civil society must set standards. The real-world line between the government and business sectors was never as distinct as it is in theory anyway.

On the other hand, we needn't look far to find opportunities to boldly take on responsibility. The more a company succeeds in convincing the public that the business's particular interests lie in society's general welfare, the better its chances of finding a sympathetic ear for its concerns in the political sphere.

In other words, in and of themselves, sustainability and lobbyism are in no way incompatible. On the contrary, the two go hand in hand – assuming, of course, that dishonest methods and backroom deals are taboo. Companies need a culture of corporate citizenship, now more than ever. And every society is dependent on businesses that act responsibly.

“Business success is only possible in an intact context.”



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