

ALAN REGO'S VIEWS ON PRESSURE GROUP MANAGEMENT

<i>Right to operate</i>	One of the cardinal rules of corporates is that a company has got to earn the right to operate in a country.
<i>Post-Goa situation</i>	Goa was selected as the site for the Thapar-Dupont project in order to encourage other companies to invest in the State. work began in June 1994. The company did not do a good enough job with the community and vested interests used this against DuPont. The findings of community survey conducted in Oct. 1994 revealed that 2/3 of the community was against the project. Violent demonstrations and protests took place in January 1995 with police firing in which one person was killed.
<i>DuPont's decision</i>	DuPont decided to stay on in India. They commissioned community surveys at 3 sites before announcing relocation to Chennai.
<i>Criticism</i>	There was severe criticism of the choice with such as environmental degradation, water pollution and loss to lives being given as reasons.
<i>Survey findings</i>	<p>The findings of the survey conducted revealed that the people of Gummidipoondi were influenced by what was happening in Chennai.</p> <p>The initial 6 months therefore were spent in dealing with pressure groups in the Chennai environment. DuPont concentrated on making allies of these groups and conducted many press conferences and technical presentations. It was important to remember that a degree of suspicion once raised took a very long to neutralise.</p>
<i>Religious groups</i>	DuPont chose to concentrate on religious groups having learnt a lesson from their Goa venture where these groups played an important role. The company further identified various groups in Gummidipoondi to work with.
<i>2-ringed process</i>	DuPont created a 2-ringed process. The outer ring or Chennai opinion leaders formed of the State Government media NGOs, religious groups, industry, scientists/academic leaders. The inner or Gummidipoondi opinion leaders consisted of the local government, NGOs, schools, religious groups, women, industry and politicians. The outer ring influenced the inner one.

Vehicles of communication

Media - consisting of print publications. DuPont created a faxed booklet on probable questions and answers in both English and Tamil.

A video film with local endorsements for distribution.

DuPont worked with Citizens Groups. Although this activity was time consuming it turned out to be rewarding.

Site visits conducted by DuPont to emphasize on safety and construction practices.

Newsletters through which DuPont reached out to local people. The company revived the Gummidipoondi Industry Association via the newsletter.

Employees who provided an extremely good source of information to others.

Key learnings

The key learnings from this entire exercise both in Goa and Gummidipoondi were many:

Listen before you speak
Do it right the first time
Integrate Public Relations with top management
Involve local people
Be open and consistent
Develop employees into community ambassadors.

Questions and Answers

A delegate asked John Hamilton on how he would face the Cargill problem today. Mr. Hamilton replied that the cardinal rule was to listen first and then act. The company he hoped would be sufficiently prepared and that there would be an established process to follow. A delegate asked Alan Rego (1) Whether DuPont hired a public relations firm post-Goa and (ii) who the survey was conducted by Mr. Rego answered that they had not hired one, but that he had undertaken the job instead. The opinion survey was conducted by a Hyderabad based agency.

Mr. Rego was further asked by a delegate as to how they could convince the people of Tamil Nadu. He replied that in order to do so, DuPont obtained the yarn from them and did soil and water testing every six months.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Alan Rego, Dupont - External Affairs Asean, at PR Pundit's workshop - Emerging Constituencies, held in New Delhi on September 18, 1998)