

Rahul Sharma On Mrigashira

Hi, Rahul. Welcome to Mrigashira. Allow me to congratulate you for the strategic partnership with we communicate. And we would love to know more about the partnership. What synergies are you looking at, given the changing dynamics in the Barney world?

Rahul

Thank you. Thank you for this opportunity. Charu delighted to be here. I think, you know, we are, we are all in a situation where we are experiencing the changes at a very rapid pace. I'm not talking about COVID. I'm not talking about the war. But despite all that, I mean, we have triggered many, many changes. But despite all that, I think the reality is that we go back to understanding the whole saying that change is the only constraint. And increasingly, the changes are surprising us because a lot of us are not prepared for it. And that's where I think we are looking at that we need to be in a situation. There, we need to be in a position where we are ready to anticipate and not only anticipate that we have the right tools to deliver to our clients, you have the right knowledge, we have the right analysis, we have the right understanding of the issues. And I think a lot of us miss out because we are constantly running. I think we'd like a lot of us miss out on one simple fact that I was taught in my years as a journalist, and a newspaper editor was that the need and the ability to connect the dots, we get very focused on tactical stuff in delivery. And we miss out the bigger picture. Today, increasingly, it is extremely necessary to focus on the big picture. Because when that is going to come in which you and I'm not talking about, I'm not talking only about firms like ours, but more from a client's point of view. The client is also focused on a day to day run, you know, there are issues to be managed. And a lot of them when they're sitting where they are, they get just sucked into daily routine that in itself, the bigger picture. So you need somebody to be there to support them. And that's becoming increasingly critical. And I think that's one need that where we come in and fill it up very well because we do tend to take another look at the global picture tripod into dots and come up with suggestions that will be of help to our clients. And then I think as we look to grow in this market, we are looking at you know, joining hands with like minded people. when we

communicate, we found that there is a lot of synergy. And so we said fine, we will start with such small, we start looking at things together. Start by creating content together and then take it from there. So that is where we are. We are excited about it. And you will hear more from us.

Charu

Great. No, I think you've made very valid points. I think short sightedness is something which companies need to be aware of and do away with and have to look at the big picture and we see that all around us, and only the companies will have the ability to connect the dots are able to foresee and plan ahead and I don't know, somehow my experience, I feel that it's particularly true where start ups are concerned, they somehow seem to be a little more short sighted, as opposed to some of the, you know, bigger firms. And but anyway, so that's a discussion for I think start up

Rahul

Maybe could come into play, I think start ups are, you know, essentially started. So looking at the second round of funding. And they do not understand the larger policy system and the environment that they work into. And then they get hit by something, boom, one fine morning, and they had not had, they've not even thought about. And at another level, nobody told them, because none of these are young people who, you know, who are starting out, they're excited. They see opportunities, and they have great ideas. But eventually, those ideas in place and make them worthwhile and take them on a long road and turn them into sustainable businesses, you know, that is where they miss out. So they need some, you know, I personally feel they need, they reach a point where they sit back and think, Okay, this is the business I want to do. This is how I want to run it. And these are the kinds of challenges that I will face. A lot of them don't do it at this point of time. But they as they grow, they realize that they need to take this.

Charu

Yeah. So with the emergence and continual development of the Internet, a door has opened for a new form of advocacy, right? That social media aligned well, enabling individuals to participate in dialogue about social issues, policy changes, or even collaborate on

change efforts. I mean, how has social media changed the advocacy landscape.

Rahul

But social media allows you to reach many targeted audience. What has happened over the period of time, I mean, social media is also this, this vast jungle where many times you won't even know what's happening. And sometimes you'll see bursts and then you know, everything dies out. So it's, you got to be very careful how you deal with social media. I personally will, let's not get too excited about, okay. People come in most people on social media or in transit, right? You put out something there'll be seven likes, but that doesn't mean it has been seen. But yeah, I mean, in terms of how do I put it in terms of actually getting some numbers in fix. So for example, if you tell the story in the newspaper, you don't really know who's reading it, or who it's getting out to, right. You know, certain number of people read the newspaper, and therefore, you take it for granted that those many people might have let that headline story. In social media, if you're putting out a post on LinkedIn, or, you know, you've got X number of followers, you know, you can buy space, you can, you know, kind of make it go viral. expand your reach. So, those advantages are there. But should we get terribly excited about what's coming in, in terms of information? Or sometimes, yes, most times not. I mean, that is what my beliefs is. But yeah, I mean, as a tool definitely allows you to reach out to audiences, you were not able to reach out earlier. You're on mute.

Charu

So let's just look at this. Again, what I'm trying to look at is that if when I'm going to look at influencing people, for discussing social issues, policy change, related our social media be just a layer to my strategy, or should be, should it be a big focus area of a very small focus areas, what I'm understanding from what you're saying,

Rahul

Here, it is definitely a focus area depends on what issue you're looking at, if you're looking at social issues, depends entirely on who you want to reach out to. In many cases, if you're looking at critical policy issues,

you need to have quiet back in discussions with the government and reserve the right. If you go and start firing on social media, times it doesn't work. The point I'm trying to make is that, you know, it's case to case faces. There is no general thumb rule for everything. It's not the same medicine for everybody. You need to be very clear what the issue is, what you're trying to achieve, who you're trying to reach to. What kind of influences are you looking at and whether those influences do have a space in the conversations that you want to create isn't just reaching out to them going to be helpful, or you need to go beyond that. So you have to formulate a strategy case to case basis, depending on what the specific aspects, sometimes you're looking at issues that are going to take long longer to resolve, especially policy, policy, roadblocks, that they don't happen overnight, you need to put in a proper effort, you need to build strategies, you need to get a lot of people together, like minded and otherwise and create a debate. That means we have worked on the instances when we have worked on policy changes for our clients, and been strategies that have gone up to as long as 24 months. Right. So when you're getting into the space, the one thing you got to realize is that there is no quick solution. Unless and until you have a very strong case, which is going to be useful for more than one. Damage don't like to deal with individual instances, they would like, you know, it's like, larger, good for larger number of people, which is what works well. So to get that reach that point, it takes time. I mean, if you look at the database that the government has put out, I mean, it took a long time for a lot of people who have a lot of conversations and many layers before this, you know, you've reached a point where they said, Okay, fine, we need to tweak and we need to make changes, and we'll come back after taking all your suggestions. So the thing is that we are in an interconnected world, you have large global companies here, they have their issue, they have issues in many other countries. geopolitics plays a role to commerce place. And so there, it's not that simple. Like what I'm trying to make say that it you cannot make it into a very simplistic, direct, simplistic form and say, Okay, these are the 1234 things we will do. And therefore, it's a it's a game that has to be played over a long period of time. understood well. And then work on strategy.

Charu

Yeah, absolutely. So just looking at how businesses are really riding high on the Sustainable Innovation wave, right. So how can policy advocacy firms lead to shape the policies, especially right now, when people are just not sure, but so many aspects and they're still figuring out? So how? How can your role, you know, can really be stepped up? Or what is it that you could bring to the table, the policy advocacy firms, because this is what we need right? Now, some better policies.

Rahul

Here we are, at any given point in time, we are in a evolving situation, right? There are many things that play a role in formulation of policy. There are many insecurities, many certainty there are many places where you get knowledge from, say, five, but I think what's happening we, we are supporting governments, firms like ours, we are supporting governments and businesses to understand a few things. One is that if you really look at the point you made, people's expectations are very different. And they are as if they are constantly evolving. People have greater access to information, they have greater awareness about sustainable future, and companies and organizations. They are facing far greater demand to innovate sustainably than they were before. So there is also the flipside is also this, you know, how do I put greater self awareness among business leaders, to not just give back to society, but also proactively think of mitigating social environment? So I think what we try to do is support governments and businesses to understand these evolving expectations. And, and then help them to adapt to the changes. So few things that we'll want, what we try and do is obviously like I said, sensitize them and prepare them on what the environment so we it's what I said earlier connecting the dots, how are things evolving the directions that they might go, what will not block but more importantly is knowledge development at think that's really critical, because now you got to help stakeholders to understand the subject matter. Take for example, USG, right? It's a complicated area, there is a view that it will work that is a struggle view that it won't, you know, it's a lot of gibberish, let me put it this way. These are, you know, acronyms that are created for the benefits of putting people into using the brakes, which came in at some moment in time, it worked very well. But today, you see, it's not. So there are timely acronyms that are introduced to the system, you can buy into it, don't buy into the FCC really sit back and look at where things are going. Nobody has any clarity. Maybe on the E

part, but definitely not the SMG part. Those are the that's the whole deal of confusion. So it's going to take a lot of time for to actually for these three things to pick together, if at all. The other thing is, of course, you know, for businesses, it's also to understand that partnerships are important. And you have to have the right partners. Because otherwise, I mean, a lot of things you can't do a lot, you need to do it in partnership for the greater good or greater number of people to reach a larger audience to make sure that a lot more people are benefiting from that. So obviously, the need is to work with, you know, sustainable leaders and partners. And we help to bridge this gap, we try and identify with this alliance, what are the common points that everybody has worked on. And the other important thing that we need to do when we continue to do is, you know, build better practices for a partner with the regular policy dialogues, bringing the right people together, so that, that continues to encourage them to adapt responsibility, and responsibility, responsible and sustainable practices, because unless you have all these four things that I said together, the journey can always be a bit difficult. I mean, everybody makes the journey, some will make it better than others. But I think to ensure that we are fine tuning the processes, we get all these things, right. It's very common, I think the journey becomes easier.

Charu

Right? So what worked yesterday may not necessarily work today or tomorrow, right? So advocacy campaigns continue to evolve. And you said that right, rightly and it's a journey always so this is my last question to you. What are the major trends which are emerging? And how challenging? Is it to differentiate the messaging when everybody seems to be talking the same language?

Rahul

It's, you know, like I said, at the start, it's a difficult one, you know, we are faced with challenges that we have never faced before. I mean, we can say that every time there's a new challenge that you never faced before, but the reality is that there was a time when the world moved fast, slower than it does today. It was not as well connected as it is today. It did not get impacted by something. You know, there was a great article I was reading yesterday, basically said, Nancy Pelosi has left Taiwan. The Troubles begin now. So the thing is that what is Indian

business? You might think, Okay, so number one, who is Nancy Pelosi? How does she impact my life, but she does impact your life, because she goes to a place, which is not considered a country by its neighbour, which thinks it's part of it, and it's going to take steps, which are going to make life difficult for businesses. Eventually, we are in a situation today where we see you know, there's a whole degree of nationalism that's happening all across. You see here, people want to most countries want to be self reliant, because of the shocks that COVID is created to supply chains. You know, United States wants jobs back. You're talking about offshoring for ensuring the kinds of stuff eventually, increasingly, businesses are getting hit by politics. What's happened. So I remember for example, when soon after Donald Trump became the US president, there was a team of racing Yes, of these affairs regulatory people from a very large global pharma company that was in town and they wanted me to come in sort of give them a presentation. And there were about 50 million people from various parts of the world, including us, the entire team, and I asked them I said, How many of your Twitter and if I remember correctly, none of them said, you run a global pharma business, right, including in the US. You if you're not on Twitter, you have a problem. Because guess what? President Trump's just kicked one of the major un us automaker very hard on Twitter. And those guys are still recovering from that shock what happened? Because if the President is going on Twitter to make a policy statement, which is going to impact your business, and you're not even aware of it, it becomes a problem. So the thing is that anything and everything I mean, what's happening between China and the world today is critical to be understood, because for the last many decades, China has been very much a part of, you know how the world works. And that's not going to change in a hurry. It'll change slowly, but it's not going to change. So for the period, that it doesn't change, those challenges have to be kept in mind, we have to continue to evolve our thinking, keeping in mind, what's happening around us, just not in our business, but more importantly, what's happening around us. That's particular. So the point here is that is there is a far greater need to be agile, very, very smart, very, very quickly move to make sure that you are keeping up with the changes, whether it's the pandemic technology, whether it's climate, and you got to be resilient. So how does what does it mean to be resilient? Basically, it's all about being prepared, that you have a plan B, you cannot just live with plan fail.

Sometimes you need a plan and see if that plan is in place. But I think eventually the trends that we are picking up or probably need to take shape for the betterment of businesses with ID three, looking at businesses in simulator COVID, how do we prepare ourselves for the shocks, like I said, you know, building a stronger, more inclusive and diverse workforce. Now that's critical, it's important. It's difficult, because the nature of the workforce has also changed was pandemic, you're not it's getting difficult to get people back to work workers, you know, people have gotten used to working from home, how do you therefore, you know, enhance your, you know, your organizational cultures, your organizational behaviour, how do you make the team's work better, everybody is used to working in isolation. And they love it. Especially the younger people, they don't, many of them don't want to even like last one, because we're used to working in an office environment. But I think the other thing is you need to sort of look at other things, new practices, such as, you know, energy transition and secondary economy, you know, which climate action leverage technology, there's a lot of it that's happening, how best you can use it to create your narratives and your message, identify the platforms you want to take it to. So that there's better connectivity. People, your consumers understand you better. The advantage of being online is that everything works on phones now. And people spend an alarmingly high number of hours checking their phones, then probably looking at their laptops, in workplaces, which I will coming back I think, you know, I a lot of my work gets done mobile phone number, but sometimes there are days where I'm traveling, I need my laptop and the limitations are expensive. But I think the other critical part is talent. We need to retain talent, which is slightly difficult, because increasingly, the younger people are more than happy to move on. Not necessarily because they are getting more money, but because they just want to do something. I mean, this is the shift that you see in post pandemic when the post cold war. I have done this for three years, I want to try out something new. So I want to go, which is fine. You can't question that. It's an individual choice. But I think these changes, which, at one point in time seem kind of small shifts are beginning to impact the thought process of business because unless and until you are, you know you're in a happy space internally because difficult to sort of connect with the outside world. So always thinking in terms of messaging, I think it is more important to

understand that, you know, we are speaking only when we are able to differentiate. Not necessarily that we have to speak all the time. You know, there is a there is a global troop that's outside, but there is your troops to which you want to take out when you're already working. And make sure that the messages are built on strong foundation, which is research, which is where which we come in, because then going out and saying something which is not backed up with research, Darwin's refreshing mark, ensure that you are addressing diversity and inclusivity. And just keep updating as things evolve. It's, you know, I, if people come in, tell me, how do you take the world to be? Or how do you prepare yourself? I always tell them one day at a time.

Charu

Yeah, no, absolutely. It is one day at a time and grappling and everyday learning and following. And on that note, thank you so much.

Rahul

Yeah, but at the same time, make sure that you have a wider view of the world. And then one day at a time becomes easier than

Charu

Yes, absolutely. Thank you so much for joining us, America show pleasure having you.

Rahul

Thanks. So thank you. Great talking to you.