

Working guide

Back it up! A guide on strategic communication based on research & evidence for more effective advocacy of business member organizations



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About the Author

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The role involves representing the views of members and leading proactive press and lobbying campaigns on a range of national and EU issues. As well as feeding into specific Government consultations and public policy debates.

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Introduction

There has never been a more important time for Business Member Organizations (BMOs) to take stock of current campaigning and advocacy work. In the age of technological disruption, social disaffection and political upheaval, BMOs across the world must be at the forefront of key public policy debates. Harnessing data, building a strong evidence base and making effective use of evolving communication channels are all key. The aim of this guide is to review how advocacy strategies are evolving and to suggest a roadmap for continuous improvement.

Advocacy in context

The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer¹ reveals the largest-ever drop in trust across the institutions of government, business, media and NGOs. Trust in business dropped in 18 countries, of the 28 considered, while CEOs' credibility dropped 12 points globally to an all-time low of 37 percent. The scope, credibility and evidence base of BMO campaigning work will have a pivotal role to play in turning this tide.

As well as ensuring a regulatory landscape that enables businesses to grow and create wealth and jobs, strong advocacy is a key factor in retaining and recruiting members. This is a virtuous cycle, as increased membership builds legitimacy and resources, which boosts the ability to influence, which in turn will further increase membership¹.

Building voice and making a tangible impact is not an easy task. The major challenges facing BMOs around the world is how best to prepare for a new era of advocacy and campaigning at a time of constantly evolving communication channels, shifting political landscapes, increasing member expectations and disruptive business models.

Aims and methodology

This is a crucial time to review how BMOs are approaching the new advocacy landscape and to share examples of what is working (and what isn't!). The aim of this complementary advocacy guide is to provide some of the practical solutions and a roadmap for continuous improvement and adaptation. To support this, the document provides practical tips for building a compelling and robust evidence base to underpin strategic campaigning activities and includes a number of bespoke case studies and checklists.

In summary, the aim of this guide is to:

- Take stock of where we are – how are BMOs currently driving advocacy campaigns, what are some of the emerging challenges?
- Learn from what works and what doesn't – based on the activities of BMOs across the world, we have collated examples of effective evidenced-based campaigns.
- Build a roadmap for driving continuous improvement – how can BMOs continue ramping up campaigning activities?

¹ <http://www.edelman.com/trust2017/>

The following guide is based on input from BMOs and sectoral bodies from around the world, including members of the International Organization of Employers (IOE)². Effective advocacy has been a key theme of the Employers' Activities Programme at the ILO's International Training Centre (ITCILO)³. The following guide also includes feedback from ILO capacity-building workshops and other employers-related activities.

² The IOE is the largest network of the private sector in the world, with more than 155 business and employer organization members. In social and labour policy debate taking place in the International Labour Organization, across the UN and multilateral system, and in the G20 and other emerging processes, the IOE is the recognised voice of business. For more information, please visit: www.ioe-emp.org

³ The ITC is the training arm of the International Labour Organization. It runs training, learning and capacity development services for governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations. For more information, please visit: www.itcilo.org

1 The building blocks of effective advocacy

Why does effective advocacy matter and how can BMOs take the next step in building credibility, urgency and influence? The journey starts by putting the right building blocks in place. Strong advocacy is based on solid foundations.

Reviewing the vision

The first step is to ensure that advocacy activities still fit with the overall philosophy and ‘mission’ of the BMO. This often raises the key existential question facing any representative body: is the BMO’s role to lead the business community, or is it simply to reflect the views and priorities of members?

In the words of former CBI Director General John Cridland, ‘business organizations can afford to be one step ahead of their members, they cannot afford to be two steps ahead.’ This underlines the need to ensure that advocacy work fits with the overall vision and strategy of the BMO and that members are actively engaged – even if the BMO takes a (one-step) lead. Clarity of purpose also drives clarity of message.

Checklist 1 – Building the vision

Based on the feedback from BMOs around the world, these are some of the underpinning priorities when reviewing the overall mission and business strategy within which the advocacy work will be taken forward:

- Build it to last – most BMOs will have a three- or four-year business plan with a clear vision. The specific deliverables will change each year. Advocacy work will fit within this overall vision.
- Consider external facilitation – using an external facilitator can help when developing the vision and strategy. As well as having an impartial moderator, it can help build consensus and can sometimes challenge the thinking.
- Get buy-in from the membership – seek some feedback from the wider membership; this will test the thinking that is being taken forward by the executive team and your board council.
- Use evidence and data – in the same way that evidence is key to strong and impactful advocacy work, it is also a cornerstone of building an effective vision and strategy for the organization as a whole. For example, using economic data and business forecasts will be key factors in determining the overriding vision.

Case study – Canada Business Network⁴

Canada Business Network promotes entrepreneurship and innovation, and provides assistance through an organized network of service centres across Canada. The core mission is to provide businesses with the resources to grow and prosper, including a wide range of information and data on government services, programs and regulations.

Specific priorities include reducing the complexity of dealing with multiple levels of government, consolidating business information and enabling members to make well-informed business decisions

⁴ <http://canadabusiness.ca/>

in a global economy. Data is a core part of the offering to members as it provides valuable market research and informs strategic business planning.

Case study – World Employment Confederation⁵

The World Employment Confederation is the voice of labour market enablers (employment and recruitment industry) around the world, representing over 50 national federations. The organization was previously called Ciett and was essentially seen as the global representative body for providers of temporary staff. One key driver for the rebranding was the fact that over 50 percent of the national federations that came under the Ciett banner represented a broader range of employment services – such as permanent recruitment, executive search, interim management and outplacement – in addition to temporary staffing.

The core strategic reason for the rebranding was the desire to reposition the organization's voice on a broader and more ambitious platform: leading in a changing world of work. This is one of the most challenging and topical issues facing national governments, businesses, workers, trade unions around the world as well as international institutions such as the OECD and the ILO. The scope of the organization's advocacy and campaigning work will flow from this new mission and strategic repositioning. The World Employment Confederation's underlying message is that the employment and recruitment industry can play a prominent role in facilitating adaptation to this new world of work.

Honing in on the advocacy – what does success look like?

What can a realistic but successful new advocacy approach look like? Developing and implementing effective advocacy campaigns requires absolute clarity in terms of what the BMO is looking to achieveⁱⁱ. Clear targets can be set, and one of the questions for BMOs engaging in any campaign is: what does success look like?

Sometimes the campaign will have a specific objective – for example to change proposed regulations. On other occasions the aim will be to stimulate a frank and open debate between the business community and the wider population. An important step is also getting internal buy-in from different parts of the BMO so that advocacy messages are consistent. Sometimes the biggest lobbying challenges are internal! Creating common goals and a common understanding is key to ensuring that any BMO is aligned and clear on what the 'end' looks like.

BMOs we spoke to are often engaged in wide-ranging campaigns – for example, promoting the overall reputation of business or working with the national government on a trade deal that will benefit the wider business community and the country as a whole. A good example of this is the signing of a long-awaited trade agreement between Ecuador and the EU, which is predicted to increase exports from Ecuador to the EU by 30 percent, with significant welfare and wage gains for both skilled and unskilled labour. The advocacy outcome here is clear and irrefutable! This example also underlines the pivotal support that international institutions can provide to national governments and social partners, with the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) playing a pivotal role in getting parties back to the negotiations and ensuring that the agreement was finally signed.

⁵ <http://www.wecglobal.org/>

Case study: The Ecuador/EU Free Trade Agreement⁶

The signing of a long-awaited trade agreement between Ecuador and the EU was an important breakthrough and one that was based on evidence and data. This meant that Ecuador would be able to benefit from preferential trade terms that have been available to fellow members of the Andean Community, Colombia and Peru, since 2013.

A key factor in the deal being agreed was the economic modelling and impact assessment, which showed positive effects on the GDP of both Ecuador and the EU. The free trade agreement (FTA) will lead to significant increases in bilateral trade, with EU exports to Ecuador predicted to be up to 42 percent higher and exports from Ecuador to the EU up to 30 percent.

ProEcuador – a government agency with 31 branches around the world – played a central role by gathering data to help exporters and buyers make informed decisions and help close deals. The data helped build an understanding of what consumers are looking for, what they value, what types of products they want to eat, and how trends are developing.

The Ecuador/EU trade agreement also highlights the crucial role that international organizations such as the ILO can play in promoting positive outcomes. With the proposed trade deal seemingly blocked, the practical support of the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) played a pivotal role in underlining the potential benefits and getting parties back to the negotiations. This ultimately resulted in the signing of the agreement, which was ratified by the European Parliament and the Ecuadorian Assembly in December 2016. The agreement entered into force in January 2017.

As well as improving trade between the two regions and aiming to help local businesses compete internationally, the hope is that the agreement will have significant welfare and wage gains for both skilled and unskilled labour and help reduce Ecuador's poverty rates.

Creating the right structure

How are policy lines developed and advocacy campaigns devised? How can BMOs best achieve the mandate they need from members? Creating the right internal structure and mechanism is a vital building blockⁱⁱⁱ. This can involve creating policy and campaigning sub-groups, policy committees, member consultation drives and innovative governance structures.

One of the key attributes of an effective BMO is the ability to respond quickly to external challenges. This agility is sometimes hampered by the internal procedures and governance structures that are in place. For organizations intent on reviewing the effectiveness of their overall advocacy work, taking a fresh look at the underpinning structures is a good start. In a fast-moving political and business world, increasing speed and agility on a BMO's policy interventions is often flagged as a key priority.

Checklist 2 – Building the structure

Below are some of the key questions that BMOs have asked themselves when reviewing existing procedures and structure:

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/andean-community/index_en.htm

- Is the current process for member engagement in policy formulation and campaigns clear, transparent and agile enough?
- What committees and consultative forums are already in place? Are they proving effective?
- What risks and opportunities would come with making a change?
- What is the current budget for advocacy work? Are there more opportunities for external support (for example, using a public affairs consultancy or commissioning additional research from an external body)?
- Are there more opportunities for cooperation with third parties – for example, other business organizations, academic institutions, etc.?

As well as building effective structures to drive formal member engagement, BMOs can boost capacity and scale up their campaigning by harnessing the contribution of the wider membership and deploying a network of ‘activists’ who are keen to take forward key messages and engage with local politicians. As well as buying extra capacity, this can enhance the impact of the advocacy work by creating a network of ‘messengers’ who are business owners, entrepreneurs or functional experts. We will discuss engagement strategies when we look at delivering an effective advocacy campaign in section 3 of the guide.

With research and data as an increasingly integral part of advocacy and campaigning activities, BMOs are considering how best to reflect this. Organizations such as Ibec – the representative body for business in Ireland – have an established internal research unit that produces regular surveys and forecasts. As well as generating data that can support a specific campaign, having a ‘research engine’ can help position a BMO as a key commentator on the jobs market, on the economy and on key sectors such as manufacturing. This in turn can lead to representation on government expert groups and committees. An increasing number of BMOs are coming together to undertake joint-research projects, which provides a means of pooling resources.

Case study – Ibec research unit⁷

Ibec is the organization that represents Irish business and is the umbrella group of over 40 different sectoral industry associations. Ibec and its sectors groups lobby government and policymakers to shape business conditions and drive economic growth. Central to this is the fact that Ibec is a market leader in forecasts and surveys through its own research unit. This has enabled Ibec to take on a role as a public commentator on the economy.

Ibec was one of relatively few organizations to correctly identify the turnaround during the economic crisis and has accurately forecast economic growth rates and the opportunities that these provide for national infrastructure investment. Ibec’s research unit is responsible for the regular and systematic collection of data on rates of pay and conditions of employment, and for surveying key business policy issues. It conducts annual and one-off surveys on a broad range of issues, based on member feedback and current business priorities.

Current research includes pay and working conditions for over 250 different job titles across a number of industry sectors and gathering business sentiment on issues such as confidence, activity,

⁷ https://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/DFB.nsf/vPages/Research_and_surveys~research-unit?OpenDocument#.WTL2Zk0UUVYc

credit availability, environmental issues and business costs. A major twice-yearly survey on HR issues is also carried out by the unit. As well as using the findings from research to inform and support policy and advocacy work, research findings are disseminated to members in order to inform their own business strategies.

Case study – BusinessNZ⁸

BusinessNZ advocates for enterprise and promoting the voice of thousands of businesses across New Zealand. The aim is to ensure that business interests are represented throughout the policymaking process. The organization’s pitch is: ‘What we do affects all New Zealanders, because when business is going well, it affects the wellbeing of our economy, our environment, our jobs, our communities, our families and our futures.’

BusinessNZ produces a monthly Performance of Manufacturing Index – a survey of the manufacturing sector that is an early indicator of activity levels. The seasonally adjusted index tracks expansions, declines or ongoing trends in the sector. It also tracks employment, production levels, new orders and business confidence. As well as boosting the reputation and voice of the organization as a whole, the regular research helps elevate the profile of individual experts such as the BNZ senior economist.

Finding a new gear – Moving from reactive to proactive advocacy

BMOs have to respond to the latest regulatory ‘offerings’ from government, to push back, to fight industry’s corner. This will not stop, it is a core part of the job description. But how can BMOs across the world also seize the initiative and set their own agenda? It’s time to go on the offensive, it’s time to get proactive.

Over the last five years we have seen a significant shift in the number of BMOs getting on the front foot and driving proactive advocacy campaigns. In many cases, the focus is on taking the initiative to address one of the biggest underlying challenges facing BMOs in most countries: the overall reputation and perception business. One example amongst many is the work taken forward over recent years by Svenskt Näringsliv⁹ (Swedish Enterprise) which is based on the mantra ‘that every generation must be won over with regard to the benefit of free enterprise’. The target audience for much of the organization’s campaigning work is not just government but the wider population. Social media is used to drive everyday interaction with opinion leaders and enables Svenskt Näringsliv to tap into other organizations’ online forums. It also facilitates another core objective: to mobilise other advocates and to create a ‘movement of entrepreneurs’ who can showcase the positive role of business within society.

The practical challenge for many BMOs is capacity. If you are already flat out in reacting to the many external challenges being thrown your way, how can you add a whole new layer of proactive activity? This is a fair ‘reality check’, but BMOs are no different from the individual businesses they represent; there comes a point when it is necessary to invest in infrastructure and ramp up activities in order to grow the organization. For BMOs, this will entail strategic discussions around increasing membership numbers, increasing the fees of existing members or seeking new revenue streams^{iv}.

⁸ <http://www.businessnz.org.nz/>

⁹ <https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/english/>

The way forward may well involve a combination of all three of these revenue-generating options and might also entail a further strategic discussion around using reserves to invest and drive new activities.

The feedback from BMOs who have made a step-change in their levels of activity indicates that members will generally be prepared to absorb an increased membership fee if they can see that this additional resource will be used effectively and will deliver quantifiable benefits for their individual business as well as for the wider business community.

Any step-change requires a leap of faith. For BMOs, the aim must be to choose the right issue, then clearly explain to its board and its wider membership the added benefits that the new activity will engender. Having a supportive and enthused inner-circle of members who are right behind the change of emphasis is critical and will help get the wider membership on board.

Proactive campaigns – whether on specific priority issues or on overarching ones, like improving the reputation of business – will often be underpinned by some bespoke research and data. Being proactive means setting the scope and terms of the debate and looking to engage external parties – government, media, the wider public – in this agenda. New data will often provide the hook for grabbing the attention, building credibility and building ongoing engagement with the target audiences. A good example of this is the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) ‘s ‘Great Business Debate’¹⁰ which was kick-started with some fairly stark bespoke data showing that only 32 percent of people think the majority of businesses behave ethically and only 53 percent believe that business makes a positive contribution to society. Although it may seem counter-intuitive to start a campaign essentially aimed at boosting the reputation of business with some negative data, the new research grabbed attention and also provided a benchmark for measuring progress.

As well as generating new data and taking the initiative on specific policy issues, BMOs are finding other ways of being proactive and getting ahead of the game. Working in partnership with international bodies to add momentum to ongoing campaigns – for example, by hosting high-profile events – is one option. A good example here is the active involvement of The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW) in the IOE’s International Business and Human Rights conference which the organization co-hosted and which provided a platform for showcasing the positive role that responsible businesses are playing in addressing global challenges such as undeclared work and forced labour.

BMOs are also ramping up their pro-activity by pre-empting – rather than simply reacting to – emerging policy priorities and potential regulatory developments. Plugging into global-level policy debates driven through the ILO and the OECD is a good way of achieving this crucial foresight, especially as there is an increasing convergence of policymaking and legislation across different regions of the world. Being aware of how other national governments are responding to common challenges and the likelihood of ‘policy migration’ means that BMOs can pre-empt the direction of travel and lay the groundwork for working constructively with policy makers and influencing the way that any changes are implemented in practice.

¹⁰ <http://www.greatbusinessdebate.co.uk/>

Case study – The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW)¹¹

VNO-NCW is the largest BMO in the Netherlands, with over 160 branch associations, representing more than 115,000 enterprises. A good example of a proactive approach to advocacy and to positioning the BMO at the forefront of a hugely topical agenda was VNO-NCW co-hosting the 2017 International Business and Human Rights conference¹² in Amsterdam, alongside the IOE and Randstad, one of the largest HR services provider in the world.

This high-level conference focused on a range of topical issues for governments and international institutions, including the business case for responsible business conduct, ethical recruitment, sustainable global supply chains and the private sector's role in helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event was a great opportunity to position VNO-NCW and its members as solution-providers and resulted in a Ministerial endorsement for the role that leading employers in the Netherlands are playing as 'Human Rights Defenders'¹³.

Case study – Business Mauritius¹⁴

Business Mauritius represents over 1200 local businesses. Its overall advocacy strategy is built around a proactive approach to delivering services that sustain the progress of both business and the community.

The three strategic goals are:

1. Engage business in national economic development which is predicated on being present in the right forums at the right time, proactively participating in policy formulation and focusing on finding the right solutions.
2. Champion the development of a strong Social Capital throughout the business community by re-engineering corporate culture and reinforcing constructive industrial relations.
3. Promote sustainability and inclusive growth by promoting the increased engagement of members in community development and supporting sustainable corporate governance practices.

Checklist 3 – Shifting to proactive advocacy

Here are some key tips flagged by BMOs who have successfully made this shift:

- Identify the right issue – is it a clear priority and is there a genuine opportunity to make a real impact?
- Have a clear end goal – is there a clear vision of what a good outcome will look like, how will this be measured?
- Get members buy in – have we explained what the campaign is trying to achieve and why it matters to individual businesses and well as to the wider business community?

¹¹ <https://www.vno-ncw.nl/>

¹² The event took place on April 19 2017. Background is at: <http://www.ioe-emp.org/index.php?id=4104>

¹³ The term used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights. Information is at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Defender.aspx>

¹⁴ <http://www.businessmauritius.org/>

- Make it credible – do we have the data and/or third-party endorsements to give legitimacy to our arguments?
- Make it stick – is the core message clear and memorable, do we have the ‘stories’ to create an emotional engagement with our target audience?
- Build momentum – beyond a ‘big bang’ launch, how can we create a regular drum-beat with clear milestones for driving ongoing engagement?
- Multiply the messengers – how can we best use social media and other channels to get more people engaged in the campaign and create a ‘multiplier’ effect?
- Take stock and review – what went well, what lessons did we learn for future proactive campaigns?

Understanding the target audience – a government perspective

As part of our research for this guide, we spoke to government officials in a number of countries to get their perspective on what effective, evidence-based advocacy should look like. This view from the ‘other side of the fence’ flagged a number of emerging trends that can help inform the approach of BMOs to advocacy work.

There is recognition for the importance of developing mutually beneficial relationships between BMOs and policymakers. This can be achieved by identifying common objectives and ensuring that objective evidence supersedes ideology and pure politics. Again, this underlines the importance of generating robust data and of identifying some clear common goals. A good example of finding mutual interests is the work of the “Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Colombia (ANDI)” to address trademark violation and the proliferation of contraband products, which is priority for government as well as for the business community. An increasingly topical area of co-operation in many countries is facilitating the transition from informal to formal economy with a specific focus on key areas such as working conditions and supply chain management.

Some government officials see BMOs as a ‘critical friend’. This involves sharing broad policy proposals at an early stage in the process to seek feedback and inform the thinking. Taking key messages and ‘asks’ forward to the right people at the right moment within the legislative process is a core feature of an effective advocacy work. Timing is key. Government officials underlined that they have had most success when key stakeholders (including BMOs) are involved from the start and are part of the process that identifies the problems and policy solutions. As part of this, there are more examples of government departments working with stakeholders to co-design policies, particularly when it comes to ways that new ideas can be best implemented in practice.

This means moving from a process of lobbying governments on policy developments to actually co-designing policy. So how can BMOs prompt more progress towards this more collaborative approach, this ‘brave new world’ of advocacy and campaigning? One way forward flagged by government officials is to understand some of the constraints and parameters – political and financial – within which policymakers are having to operate. Often government policies are based on compromise and resource constraints, and officials will look to stakeholders to provide practical support – for example, by being prepared to raise awareness of a new initiative amongst the membership base. For BMOs, this underlines the importance of in-depth analysis of the political environment to ensure that policy advocacy and engagement with politicians is effective. At the

same time, the challenge for BMOs is to embrace opportunities for a partnership approach with government while maintaining political neutrality and not being seen as simply a ‘cheerleader’ for a particular party.

BMOs have a key advisory role to play by working with policymakers to identify and explain what will and won’t work in ‘the real world’. Generating robust data will clearly support this, but the feedback from government officials is that – while the evidence is really important – often it is not definitive. The key is to back this up with solid qualitative examples which provide more than random anecdotes but are based on experience. At the same time, enhanced collaboration must be a two-way process – for BMOs one priority is to encourage governments to be more open with their own data and evaluation results.

One of the benefits of a partnership approach is that national governments can then become more proactive advocates for the positive role that business plays within society. A good example of this was the IOE’s annual International Business and Human Rights Conference in Amsterdam, where government representatives explicitly recognised the role that leading employers and representative bodies were playing in addressing instances of worker exploitation and modern-day slavery through effective global supply chain management. A number of individual businesses were recognised as ‘human rights defenders’, which reinforces the point that national governments can potentially become allies in helping to redress negative perceptions amongst the wider population of the role of business in society.

In addition, organizations such as the ILO and the OECD have a key role to play by continuing to champion this collaborative, co-design approach and by showcasing examples of where it has made a positive difference.

Case Study – “Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Colombia (ANDI)”¹⁵

ANDI spearheads the high-profile project: “*Contra la Falsificación de Productos y Usurpación de Marcas*”, which is based on an ongoing dialogue between companies (national and international) and public institutions to address trademark violation and the proliferation of contraband products. Key sectors affected by this issue include the pharmaceutical and food industries.

The project provides a platform for exchanging the latest intelligence and targeting enforcement activities to combat infringements which not only impact on business but can also put the well-being of consumers at risk. An important element is raising awareness of these risks amongst the wider population. Specific studies that were conducted, provided a strong evidence base about the economic impact as well as the social costs.

The project has achieved considerable results over the past years, bringing in a large number of companies interested in sharing their data and intelligence. It has also helped the authorities in seize and destroy illegal products seizures and has resulted in a number of prosecutions

¹⁵ <http://www.andi.com.co/Paginas/Index.aspx>

2 Creating the evidence base

Using data to create evidence-based campaigning is the ultimate aim. What are the different options for BMOs looking to generate new data to support advocacy campaigns and position their voice at the forefront of key political debates? In addition to data, providing powerful anecdotal examples can be key to winning the emotional argument. What are some of the practical ways that BMOs can generate and ‘package’ these stories?

Generating the data

BMOs are currently using various means of generating data, with regular polls of members one of the most effective and sustainable ways forward. This provides a way of developing a regular insight into latest business trends, which in turn can boost recognition and the legitimacy of a BMO’s voice. A good example is the highly regarded “*Encuesta de Opinion Industrial*”¹⁶ poll by ANDI.

Specific solutions put forward include ensuring that surveys are short and user-friendly, using webinars and events to capture responses there and then, and ensuring that databases are up to date and effectively maintained. Underlining how important the data is in terms of positioning the voice of business and supporting advocacy campaigns also helps, as does making it clear to members that the information that is generated can directly benefit individual businesses – for example, by informing their own business planning activities. Providing incentives to participating businesses, such as free and/or advanced access to the final report, have also helped to increase response rates.

Working in collaboration with third parties or with other BMOs can provide additional means of generating new, bespoke data to underpin advocacy activities. A good example of this is the work driven by ACT/EMP in Latin America, which led to the creation of REDEMP – a network of 23 pro-business think-tanks with specific areas of expertise through which the most relevant research can be carried out. The research and data generated supports the activities of BMOs across the region.

One cost-effective means of creating evidence-based arguments is to make use of data that is already in the public domain. Existing data and research can be recycled and used to support key arguments; BMOs can become adept at ‘mining’ data that is already ‘out there’ as an alternative to generating bespoke research. Another way forward is to make the most of data generated through other initiatives within the BMO. A great example of this is the benchmarking tool developed by the Chilean confederation CPC, which provides participating businesses with best practice guidance and measurement on key areas such as corporate governance, workforce management and staff development. The insight and data that is collected can also be used for external purposes and for providing a useful overview of overall business trends.

What are the options available to BMOs when it comes to the structure and process for generating regular and authoritative data? Some of the organizations we spoke to have their own internal research unit with a ring-fenced budget and a comprehensive research programme that is revised annually based on campaigning priorities and specific arguments that need to be supported. At the other end of the spectrum, smaller BMOs with limited budgets may produce more ad hoc research and will look at the most cost-effective ways of generating data (while ensuring that the methodology remains robust enough to be credible).

¹⁶ <http://www.andi.com.co/SitEco/Paginas/Encuesta.aspx>

CPC – “Confederacion de la Produccion y del Comercio” (Chile)¹⁷

CPC launched an auto-diagnosis tool which promotes best practice and helps businesses to evaluate potential risks in a number of areas. This auto-diagnosis consists of an online questionnaire which reviews performance and progress in business-critical and reputation-critical areas such as corporate governance, human rights, workforce management, staff development, the environment, competition, supplier management and business ethics.

The best practice guides focus of raising standards and the tool enables businesses work on identified weaknesses to share solutions with other companies in the programme through a series of workshops. An online benchmarking service helps to evaluate progress based on the results of all participating companies. Crucially, this also provides CPC with data, examples of best practices and information on trends that can be used in discussions with external-facing campaigning activities.

Checklist 4 – Creating the evidence base

Based on feedback from BMOs around the world, below are some of the key ways that data can be developed and used to underpin advocacy campaigns:

- Regular member surveys – over time this can enable trends to be established. The regularity can also build recognition amongst politicians as well as the media.
- One-off surveys on specific themes – this may also take the form of a member poll, but will be used to underpin a specific argument or underline the potential impact of a proposed policy.
- Using social media – although most BMOs still use email to circulate member surveys, social media can provide a quick and cost-effective means of generating data from members.
- Webinars – as well as being a good way of communicating with members across the whole country, webinars can also include polling questions that enable data to be collated instantly.
- Third-party collaborations – working in collaboration with third parties – for example, universities, business schools or think-tanks – can add credibility and objectivity.
- Pilot schemes – running a pilot is a great way of generating data and feedback on what works (and what doesn't). This 'evidence' base can be used to scale up and broaden activities.
- Mining existing data – BMOs can use existing academic research and official government data to support key arguments.

Case study – The Singapore Business Federation¹⁸ (SBF) National Business Survey

The SBF conducts a National Business Survey. It is typically administered towards the end of each year, and the underlying aim is to identify the needs, concerns and future plans of SBF members.

¹⁷ <http://www.cpc.cl/>

¹⁸ <http://www.sbf.org.sg/>

The results of the survey are shared with the Singapore Government as input for the Singapore budget. Having a comprehensive annual survey provides a platform for engaging with members and understanding the needs of the Singapore business community. It also provides a high-profile platform for the SBF to influence the policy agenda.

SBF also conducts a post-budget survey immediately after the Singapore budget measures are announced every year. This is seen as a key part of the organization's role as the bridge between businesses and the Government to create and enhance a conducive business environment.

Using data to formulate new solutions

What are other key elements of a modern and effective advocacy programme? Increasingly, the aim is to take the initiative through proactive campaigns and 'lateral lobbying'. This means driving campaigns on issues of common interest and putting forward practical solutions on big concerns of the day such as youth employment. This picks up on the points made by government officials we spoke to who underlined the need for BMOs to position themselves as 'solution providers' and as being willing to work with officials in co-designing policy responses.

Creating a strong evidence base is key when advocating a particular way forward, and BMOs are becoming adept at running pilot schemes that help to demonstrate the value of adopting a specific new approach. A good example of this is the '*Industria + Produtiva*' project run by the "Confederação Nacional da Indústria" (CNI) in Brazil, which use pilot schemes to show how specific approaches could improve productivity. The pilots enabled the benefits to be quantified and resulted in the project being taken forward on a larger scale.

BMOs are also using official data to support campaigning objectives and the development of new solutions. For example, UCCAEP – the representative body for private sector employers in Costa Rica – has used unemployment data to underline the need for a more flexible regulatory framework to enable students to train simultaneously in schools and companies. The 'new solution' here is building closer links between business and schools in a way that provides a win/win for students and employers.

Case study – "Confederação Nacional da Indústria" (CNI)¹⁹

CNI oversees 27 industrial state federations in Brazil. Its '*Industria + Produtiva*' project demonstrated that simple and relatively low-cost measures could make a significant impact by doubling productivity and reducing costs for the companies involved. The results showed impressive financial returns.

The programme was rolled out in 2015 in 4 states in which 18 mid-size companies with revenues between £1 million and £7 million from five different industrial sectors were selected. The average investment was £5,000, the idea being to use existing human resources and already available tools from each company. Consultants from the project analysed the production processes from each business and looked for intelligent solutions to reduce wastage in material and time, with the aim of reducing production costs. A majority of participating companies had stock excesses, made inadequate use of work spaces, had organizational issues and a lack of standardised procedures on

¹⁹ <http://www.portaldaindustria.com.br/cni/>

their assembly lines. Production was increased by 42 percent on average in the 18 participating companies.

The pilot project was developed in a way that companies from any sector and of any size could benefit from it. Increasing company productivity being crucial in Brazil, this project has raised interest from all parts. Its strength is its low cost and its quick implementation.

Case study – UCCAEP²⁰: Driving a new approach to education and technical training in Costa Rica

In order to address the challenge of unemployment, UCCAEP – the representative body for private sector employers in Costa Rica – is pushing, since 2016, its ‘Dual Training’ initiative, which will be soon^v ratified by the Legislative Assembly^v.

The aim is to embed a more flexible regulatory framework for delivering training that would enable students to train simultaneously in schools and companies in a way that would benefit both employers and educational institutions. The starting point is data on unemployment levels – particularly amongst young people – which underlines the need for concerted action.

Building closer links between business and schools is an underlying aim. The project is a win/win for students and employers, as the first-hand experience of the business and its infrastructure ensures a more skilled and qualified workforce, and opens job opportunities for these young workers. In particular, the students have access to equipment that they wouldn’t be operating in schools/training centres.

Making an emotional impact

The feedback from government officials is that data and concrete evidence remain crucial components of any advocacy and campaigning drive, but that this should be backed up with qualitative examples. This helps to bring key advocacy messages to life and can also help BMOs achieve an increasingly important objective: making an emotional impact.

The EU referendum in the UK and other high-profile campaigns have underlined the fact that data and reasoned arguments alone will not necessarily sway perceptions. It is now widely recognised that the “Remain campaign” was too rational, with too much emphasis on negative consequences, which meant that the status quo was not presented as a positive choice.

We need to learn from these examples. If part of the challenge for BMOs is to influence wider public opinion on the positive role of business within society, we need to engage people at an emotional level. One way to do this is: tell good stories!

There are plenty of examples of BMOs and sectoral representative bodies already doing this really well. For example, Federgon – the Belgian federation of HR and staffing service providers – engaged its members in a high-impact initiative to capture the ‘stories’ of individuals they are placing into jobs. The underlying message is that recruitment professionals play a key role in getting people into work, but the emotional impact comes from seeing the potentially life-changing benefits for individuals finding the right job. A further example is the ‘Project for Bolivian Children’ driven by the Confederation of Private Employers of Bolivia (CEPB). As well as telling the stories of individual

²⁰ <http://www.uccaep.or.cr/>

children who have benefited from the project, the underlying narrative is that the business community can drive social action and is a force for good.

Making an emotional impact means delving into the realms of human psychology and behavioural science. Again, the EU referendum campaign in the UK provides a valuable insight into how and why certain messages resonate more than others. The 'take back control' message of the Vote Leave campaign appealed to a basic human desire for control and autonomy. According to leading psychologist Daniel Pink, autonomy is one of our three most important motivations in life, the others being mastery and purpose. Autonomy is something we naturally seek and we feel happier when we are in control of our destiny.

Building an emotional connection and telling good stories are powerful tools of persuasion. They are also likely to be shared as people pass on these narratives through word of mouth or via social media. This is especially important as the aim for many BMOs is to influence wider public opinion in terms of the overall perceptions of business. In practical terms, this has increasing synergy and collaboration between different departments within a BMO, such as marketing, communications and public affairs. It has also ramped up the importance of active member engagement, as this is a key source for stories we need to tell.

Case study – Federgon²¹

Federgon is the Belgian federation of HR and staffing service providers, representing almost 500 members who are active in recruitment, search and selection, outplacement, agency work, training, project sourcing, interim management and household services. Federgon's #jobfie initiative actively engages members by asking recruitment consultants to take a selfie of themselves with the workers they are placing into jobs and uploading the pictures onto a dedicated micro-site. Participants are then encouraged to use Facebook and Twitter to share the picture.

The underlying aim of the #jobfie initiative is to showcase the crucial role that recruitment professionals play in getting people into work. The scheme is also a great example of galvanising the membership base around some collective action that is relatively easy to deliver and also provides some tangible profile-raising benefit for the participating businesses.

Case study – CEPB²² Project for Bolivian Children

As part of its strategy to feed into social actions in Bolivia, the Confederation of Private Employers of Bolivia (CEPB) signed an agreement with UNICEF to promote projects aimed at helping children and adolescents.

The agreement follows clear guidelines that member companies of the confederation who join this initiative must comply with, including contributing to the eradication of child labour, providing decent employment for their workers and ensuring that their products and services are safe.

Participating employers have also been asked to use marketing and advertising campaigns to support this cause and to showcase the work they are doing. The initiative fits within a broader strategy aimed at getting companies more involved in social actions throughout the country.

²¹ <https://www.federgon.be/nl>

²² <http://www.cepb.org.bo/>

3 Delivering the campaign

Building credibility and legitimacy at a time of public distrust in business and politicians is a difficult task. What are the levers for enhancing the overall reputation of business? Understanding the pros and cons of different communication channels and being clear on the target audience for each of these is one way forward. Another priority question for BMOs is: how can we best take the evidence forward by creating a new wave of ‘business messengers’?

Being clear on the target audience

Being clear on the target audience and tailoring messages accordingly is a key building block of any campaigning work and is at the heart of any effective communication strategy^{vi}. A number of BMOs underlined the need to ‘go where your target audience is’, and we will look at the implications of using different communication channels (including social media) below. However, being clear about the target audience is not just about choosing the right communication channels; it is about tailoring the messages and evidence base. There are also real implications in terms of tone and timing.

BMOs are becoming increasingly astute at using different channels for different target groups. LinkedIn is more likely to be used for reaching out to business leaders or potentially journalists, whereas campaigns aimed at the wider public (for example, ones aimed at promoting careers in a particular sector) will be more likely to use Facebook as the primary channel. In some European countries, BMOs have entered into dialogue and built constructive relationships with civil servants, members of parliament and even ministers purely through interaction on Twitter and other social media channels. This would have been unheard of a few years ago.

The feedback from government officials underlined the need to recognise some of the political and financial constraints if the aim is to build a positive dialogue and set realistic advocacy objectives. This in turn will set the overall tone of the campaign. Tone is especially important if the target audience is wider public opinion. The challenge for BMOs is to develop clear and compelling messages about the positive role of business. As the CBI’s ‘Great Business Debate’ example highlights, the key is to avoid being defensive and to welcome challenges and open discussions.

Case study – CBI Great Business Debate²³

The Great Business Debate is a CBI-led campaign to help build public confidence in business. Specific aims include combatting myths about what business does and the contribution it makes, encouraging people to give their views on business and where it needs to do more, and providing an opportunity for business to take part in a constructive conversation about what it does and how it does it.

The campaign includes a specific website and uses other channels such as Twitter to raise awareness and promote open dialogue. In terms of measurement, the key starting point was a survey conducted by the respected research company Ipsos MORI²⁴ on behalf of the CBI, which showed that only 32 percent of individuals think that businesses behave ethically and only 52 percent of people

²³ <http://www.greatbusinessdebate.co.uk/>

²⁴ <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/>

believe business makes a positive contribution to society. Having this data as a starting point will enable the CBI to measure the success of its campaign by repeating the survey and (hopefully!) showing that perceptions have evolved.

As well as overall tone, the language used and the way the campaign is ‘packaged’ will also be critical to how messages resonate with a target audience. Often this is about avoiding business jargon and making things clear and succinct. After all, ‘simplicity is the ultimate sophistication!’²⁵ Being able to summarise key messages in a few compelling sound-bites – as we saw with the ‘take back control’ mantra during the Brexit campaign – is a good way forward and does not preclude having more detailed arguments sitting underneath.

Who are the messengers?

Effective advocacy work is resource-intensive. How can BMOs build capacity and scale up their campaigning work without dramatically increasing their headcount? Effective advocacy requires a sufficient number of advocates – one answer is to harness the contribution of members and to create a network of campaigning activists. As well as buying extra capacity, this can enhance the impact of the advocacy work by creating a network of ‘messengers’ who are business owners, entrepreneurs or functional experts. As we note elsewhere in the guide, effective advocacy is not only about creating a compelling and evidence-based message. It is about delivery and thinking strategically about what kind of messenger is likely to make the most impact on the target audience.

Template letters to send to local politicians and regular briefings can help make it easier to get involved and recognise the fact that members are busy running their own businesses. BMOs are increasingly engaging members around very specific projects and campaigns – the pay-back for volunteers can include enhanced personal profile and improved knowledge and awareness of external developments that can inform their own business planning. Of course, using members to support advocacy work can create some risks in terms of losing control, but BMOs have managed this through regular briefings and by selecting activist members who can be trusted to enhance rather than damage the work and reputation of the BMO.

Checklist 5 – How to harness member engagement

How can BMOs get members actively involved in campaigning activities and create a proactive cohort of ‘business champions’? Based on feedback from BMOs and sectoral representative bodies from around the world, below are some practical tips on building and managing this member engagement:

- Make it easy – template letters, briefing notes and setting clear objectives are all key. Members are busy running their own businesses or departments, so the time implications must be managed. It is also about being very explicit and clear in what is expected of the volunteers!
- Make it matter – it is important to underline the importance of getting involved and how members can make a tangible difference. Ambassadors need to be energised and motivated to make a real impact; reminding them of how important their contribution is can enhance this.

²⁵ Leonardo da Vinci

- Give ongoing recognition – where members have played an active role in advocacy and campaigning, make sure that this is recognised! This is key to keeping the energy levels up and ensuring that advocacy support is sustainable over time.
- Be specific – BMOs are increasingly engaging members around very specific projects and campaigns. These are sometime referred to as ‘task and finish’ working groups to which members can contribute but which have a tight timespan and are focused on a specific issue.
- Manage the risk – developing and deploying a network of volunteer activists from within the BMO can create huge benefits but also creates some risks in terms of losing control and the potential for members being ‘off message’. This risk can be managed through regular briefings and dialogue between the permanent secretariat and activist members.
- Create some added value – while the core motivation is to make a difference by promoting the ‘greater good’, individuals can derive specific benefits such as enhanced personal profile and improved knowledge and awareness of external developments that can inform their own business planning.

As well as using members to deliver campaign messages (as was the case in the ‘Too Big to Ignore’ initiative in Australia – see below), BMOs are going one step further by harnessing the input of individual workers. The more we can get individual workers and jobseekers talking about the role of business in creating economic growth, jobs and career opportunities, and improved social cohesion as a result, the better. Recognising this job-creation contribution was an underlying premise behind MEDEF’s ‘*Beau Travail*’ initiative. The fact that the testimonials were delivered by workers themselves gave the campaign a fresh and authentic feel and has helped to attract people to sectors and job roles that were struggling to find candidates.

Case study – MEDEF ‘Beau Travail’ initiative²⁶

The aim of the ‘*Beau Travail*’ (‘Good Work’) initiative is to raise awareness of different types of job roles and career opportunities in different sectors. The initiative was driven by MEDEF, the French business federation, with support from other organizations such as Prism’Emploi²⁷ – the professional body for the recruitment sector in France.

A number of short clips were initially aired on national television channels and involved workers discussing their current jobs, the skills needed to succeed and the career prospects in their sector. The strapline was: ‘Discover professions that are hiring: everyday a new story, a career path, a profession.’ The initiative also involved its own dedicated website and social media channels were used to circulate the various testimonials from workers and to build awareness.

The ‘*Beau Travail*’ campaign performed an important function – highlighting shortage occupations and the skills needed to succeed in them – but also reinforced MEDEF’s core message around employment and the aspiration of creating a million jobs in five years. The fact that the one-minute testimonials were delivered by workers themselves gave the campaign a fresh and authentic feel and has helped to attract people to sectors and job roles struggling to find candidates.

²⁶ <http://www.medef.com/fr/>

²⁷ www.prismemploi.eu

Case study – Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) – ‘Too Big to Ignore’ campaign²⁸

The core aim of ACCI’s ‘Too Big to Ignore’ campaign is to help small businesses engage directly in the national policy agenda. There are more than 2 million small businesses in Australia, employing more than 7 million people – over 60 percent of Australia’s workforce. The campaign is an attempt to help small businesses make their views and voices heard on key issues such as government regulation, taxation and job-creation.

The campaign centred around using social media among other platforms to deliver four key messages: cut down red tape, simplify the tax system, make it easier to employ people, and build better infrastructure. The campaign has a dedicated website and Facebook page and a Twitter hashtag (#2big2ignore). The initiative is a good example of using social media to galvanise the business community and bring different strands of activity together under a clear and unifying rallying call.

Make the most of different channels

Social media has changed the way we communicate. There are new opportunities, but the ‘democratisation’ of communication and the loss of control have created new risks to manage. Channels are evolving fast and social media is a potential game-changer in the way BMOs deliver campaigns and engage with their members. Using social media is no longer an option; the question is how well we do it.

The Employers’ Activities Programme at ITCILO produced a specific guide to social media^{viii} based on the input from over 70 BMOs and sectoral bodies from around the world, including a survey of 35 BMOs within membership of IOE. Only 37 percent of the BMOs surveyed had a formal social media strategy in place – partly caused by the fact that many organizations see social media as an element of their broader communication and member engagement strategies rather than as something that ‘stands alone’.

Respondents to the survey flagged three main benefits that the effective use of social media can bring to BMOs: raising profile within the media (85.3 percent of BMOs see this as a key benefit), communicating with members (67.6 percent) and influencing politicians and external stakeholders (61.8 percent). This underlines the fact that for BMOs across Europe and the rest of the world, social media channels are providing a tool for taking forward both external messages (aimed at policymakers and the media) and internal communication (aimed at the BMO’s own members). The member engagement benefits are highlighted in the Confederation of Danish Enterprise case study, where social media has provided a means of driving campaigns in a way that involves members from disparate sectors.

It is interesting to note that a high proportion of respondents (44.1 percent) flagged the ability to communicate with potential new members as a core benefit. We can expect BMOs to continue using social media as part of their member acquisition strategy and as a marketing tool to showcase advocacy work as well as other activities.

²⁸ <https://www.acci.asn.au/program/small-business-too-big-ignore>

Case study – The Confederation of Danish Enterprise²⁹

The Confederation of Danish Enterprise is the network for trade, IT, industry and service in Denmark. It represents 17,000 Danish companies and 100 trade associations covering a wide range of areas, including trade, tourism, business services, IT, welfare services and transportation. An ongoing priority is to find ways of creating a collective voice and a sense of unity amongst businesses and trade associations in very different sectors.

Social media provides a means of driving campaigns in a way that involves and engages members from these disparate sectors. The Confederation is proactive in providing development opportunities for its members and boosting competitiveness – for example through overseas business delegations. Social media provides an important means of driving member interest in specific activities and in providing feedback to the wider membership.

Traditional media has changed for good, with social media one of the key drivers of this change. There are fewer journalists and editorial staff looking to provide 24/7 news services through an increasingly varied array of channels.

The key for BMOs is to make the most of this new media landscape and to seize the new opportunities it presents. For example, with fewer staff and a 24-hour news cycle to feed, media outlets are always on the lookout for a good story – especially one that is ‘ready-made’ with some robust data, insightful case studies and interesting spokespeople at the ready. This brings us back to the core challenge facing BMOs: how do we make sure our messages resonate and make a difference in an age of massive over-communication and rapidly evolving channels?

Pre-empting and managing risks

Any advocacy action from a BMO is likely to create a reaction. Thorough scenario planning is one of the best insurance policies. In practice, this means testing the campaign’s key messages (how could they be misinterpreted?, where are we likely to be attacked?) and considering possible external developments that could derail the campaign. BMOs also need to put in place processes and build internal capability for dealing with negative comments. This can involve having to block access to an online forum if criticism becomes excessive and personal, which underlines the need for clear ‘rules of engagement’.

Scenarios raised at some Employers’ Activities Programme workshops included examples of BMOs driving a wide-ranging campaign on the positive role of business that could easily be side-tracked by isolated examples of bad practice (especially if these alleged breaches are perpetrated by businesses within membership of the BMOs). Being proactive means putting your head above the parapet, which inevitably creates a risk of being targeted. Some of the practical tips put forward by BMOs looking to manage reputational risks included ‘devil’s advocate’ sessions, where colleagues play the role of detractors to attack the campaign and its core messages. Human error is always possible; mistakes will happen. Having clear internal policies and protocols in place will help, as will effective training and briefing sessions for staff.

²⁹ <http://di.dk/English/Pages/English.aspx>

BMOs responding to our 2016 survey identified a number of specific risks that social media can create for their organization. The main ones cited are reputational damage (68 percent), the loss of control (50 percent), wasting time and resources (32 percent) and diluting the membership offering (16.7 percent). Reputational concerns for BMOs can take many forms, ranging from poorly judged tweets on sensitive issues to being systematically targeted by individuals or organizations with an anti-business agenda. The concern over the loss of control overlaps with reputational challenges but also refers to one of the central issues for BMOs: who has the responsibility for our social media within the organizations and how do we put in place effective processes to limit risks?

Measuring success

This is perhaps the biggest challenge for many BMOs: how to evaluate what is working and what isn't. Quantifying the return on investment in advocacy work is not easy, but it is a crucial part of the process^{viii}.

What performance indicators are BMOs currently using? Overall success can be measured against a range of elements, including specific lobbying wins, influence metrics (where a record is kept of endorsements and recognitions for the BMO's work), awareness surveys of politicians and key stakeholders, and member satisfaction surveys. Instigating a culture of regular reviews and continuous improvement is also a key way forward.

The feedback from BMOs taking part in Employers' Activities Programme workshops confirmed that one of the key benefits of effective analysis and measurement is to discard initiatives and activities that are not delivering any real benefits. One effective success measure flagged by a number of BMOs was galvanising members into playing an active role in campaigns. As well as amplifying the core messages that the BMO is looking to take forward, this also ticks the member engagement box.

4 What's next? Focusing on continuous improvement in advocacy

The political, social and business landscape will continue to evolve, with the pace of change likely to increase. The ability to adapt will be a key feature of successful BMOs over the coming years and a genuine commitment to continuous improvement will determine the effectiveness of future advocacy work. The immediate priority for many of the BMOs we spoke to is to leverage the advocacy work as a means of growing membership and revenue.

As we look ahead at a future of ongoing disruption and constant changes, here are four key questions for BMOs to consider:

- Can high-impact advocacy leverage membership growth?
- How can BMOs implement a culture of continuous improvement?
- How can BMOs scale up advocacy activities?
- How will the world of work evolve and what will this mean for BMOs?

Can high-impact advocacy leverage membership growth?

As member expectations continue to evolve, BMOs will need to ensure that their offer remains relevant and compelling. Information and updates can be accessed from a variety of online sources, and there is a suggestion that future business leaders may instinctively be less inclined to join the 'club' of a BMO, preferring to nurture their own networks. If information and peer networking can be accessed in other ways, it is fair to argue that the advocacy function – especially one that engages and galvanises its members – will become increasingly important as a hook for retention and new member acquisition.

Without a strong and active membership base, BMOs lose legitimacy, impact and financial stability. Better campaigning boosts respect and recognition, which in turn boosts membership retention and acquisition, which in turn boosts legitimacy and resources, which in turn creates even better campaigning activities. This is the virtuous circle that we are seeking to engineer.

Priorities flagged by BMOs include driving deeper member engagement, creating a step-change in external voice and embedding advocacy work into branding and reputation management policies. Members are often unaware of the breadth of activities and services that the BMO is taking forward on their behalf, which can ultimately impact on the decision to renew membership. An interesting development here is BMOs developing their own apps to consolidate their services and activities. An example of this is MEDEF, the French employers' body, with their app 'L'AppliMEDEF', which brings together all the latest news, campaign updates, economic analysis, member surveys, an events calendar and links to download publications, infographics and videos. Other BMOs have invested in their website to ensure that it is 'mobile-friendly' and provides an effective window into the organization's services and activities.

How can BMOs implement a culture of continuous improvement?

Advocacy and campaigning is an ever-evolving arena. How can BMOs implement a culture of continuous improvement which enables them to continuously review and re-invent their advocacy work? Organizations we spoke to identified a number of ways forward. These include instigating a

regular review process and a culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities, developing and hiring new skills, bringing in external expertise to provide a fresh outlook and learning from good practice within other BMOs.

Exchanges of views and best practice between BMOs is crucial to the continuous improvement process. Organizations such as the ILO, IOE and OECD have a key role to play here, and some programmes will remain pivotal in helping BMOs to learn from each other and build lasting networks.

Checklist 6 – Driving continuous improvement

Based on the feedback from BMOs around the world, here are some practical measures for driving continuous improvement in advocacy work:

- Instigate a regular review process – this includes high-level strategic reviews as well as regular reviews of tactical campaigning activities.
- Learn from failure – a culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities is key to continuous improvement.
- Learn from success – look outwards to learn from other areas (individual businesses, trade unions, governments, NGOs) and look inwards to learn from good practice within other BMOs.
- Develop new skills – develop training and regular briefing sessions for existing staff.
- Hire new skills – create dedicated roles or make social media awareness part of the job description for new recruits in roles such as PR and lobbying.
- Ask the experts – accessing the latest social media expertise from specialist consultancies can be worth the investment if it creates a step-change and results in tangible benefits for the EO and its members.

How can BMOs scale up advocacy activities?

Investing in capability and infrastructure at the right time is not only key to boosting advocacy activities, it is key to the overall sustainability and effectiveness of BMOs.

Staff training was identified by BMOs as one of the most important ways forward – particularly in areas such as social media, which is increasingly embedded in campaigning activities. As one BMO put it, ‘social media is just part of the lobbying toolkit.’ The multiplicity of channels provides new ways of engaging with stakeholders, policymakers and journalists.

Discussions at recent Employers’ Activities Programme workshops focused on the key question of what skills would be needed in future to succeed within campaigning and communication functions in a BMO. The feedback from participants flagged a number of attributes, including strong communication skills, the ability to build relationships, innovation, project management, subject matter expertise, sound judgement, resilience and the ability handle high-pressure situations to learn from failure. It is noticeable that these are all areas where there is a link back to social media – both as a means of building the necessary knowledge and connections to make an impact, and as

core attributes (that is, innovation, judgement, resilience) that will help individuals succeed within a fast-moving communication landscape.

A related topic for BMOs moving forward is the extent to which social media will impact on job descriptions and on the selection criteria used to bring new staff into the organization. Will it be the norm that anyone working in a campaign or communication role within a BMO is expected to be fully up to speed with social media? Quite possibly. It is also fair to say that forward-thinking BMOs with a desire to innovate will find it easier to hire the best talent from future generations of technology-aware and social-media-savvy jobseekers!

A further priority for BMOs is ensuring that internal procedures are in place to 'join up' functions such as marketing, PR and communications, research and public affairs around social media activities.

How will the world of work evolve and what will this mean for BMOs?

Market disruption will continue to make a seismic impact in a number of sectors including transport, energy, hospitality and healthcare. The challenge for BMOs is to try and pre-empt some of the changes as well as the ways that this will impact on established members and on the overall business environment.

BMOs are already taking a lead on major changes in some of these sectors. For example, Union Industrial Argentina has driven a proactive campaign on efficient energy use that quantifies the benefits to employers in terms of both cost and competitiveness as well as the environmental benefits. One of the emerging challenges for BMOs will be how to represent the interests of established businesses who may be impacted by disruption as well as the interest of new businesses who are the purveyors of disruption. This will inevitably impact on the tone and scope of advocacy activities.

Case study – Union Industrial Argentina (UIA)³⁰: “Proyecto de Eficiencia Energética”

The Argentinian Industrial Union underlined its commitment to sustainable energy use by driving a proactive campaign on efficient energy use within the business community. The programme enables companies to access a 90 percent subsidy in order to perform a thorough energy diagnostic; it has been one of UIA's most successful initiatives over recent years.

The initial pilot phase involved 25 companies. Today the project concerns 300 companies spread around Argentina. Specific benefits have included increased production, decreases in companies' energy costs and lower CO₂ emissions. The savings in energy during the production process reach almost 10 percent on electricity and over 6 percent on gas spending. Two of the main goals of this programme are to increase production using the same amount of energy and to make companies more competitive.

³⁰ <http://www.uia.org.ar/>

How are advocacy skills evolving and how can BMOs harness these?

We spoke to a number of recruitment experts who specialise in the search and selection of public affairs and advocacy professionals. The feedback flagged the emerging skills and competencies that will become increasingly key to succeeding in the fast-moving world of advocacy and campaigning.

The general public are increasingly the most effective agents of change when it comes to influencing policy, so public affairs teams of the future will need to be able to demonstrate how they can mobilise a network of advocates. This could happen through a number of channels, but social media is likely to be the most significant, which means that effective digital campaigning will become a key skill. For BMOs, storytelling, writing skills and the ability to create an effective narrative will be increasingly important. The debate around many policy issues will need to be framed around society instead of business, looking at the impact it will have on people's everyday lives.

Advocacy professionals working within BMOs will increasingly need to find creative and innovative ways to get their messages heard, both with policymakers and the general public. Integrated communication skills will become increasingly pivotal as campaigns span broader audiences. One common theme from conversations with BMOs and global confederations was the increasing importance of building alliances with other associations and stakeholders such as NGOs in order to amplify advocacy campaigns.

The feedback from recruitment specialists fits with the views of BMOs and global confederations. Denis Pennel, Managing Director of the World Employment Confederation³¹, which represents 50 national federations, argues that "in the future BMOs will need even more multi-skilled people, combining diplomacy, a deep understanding of the political environment, social media awareness and strong written and oral communication skills – in a nutshell, we need storytellers and community managers."

Cutting through the noise and making an impact will increasingly come down to the drive, creativity and expertise of the individuals working within BMOs. Public affairs professionals we spoke to also underlined a number of other ways that advocacy work is evolving, including the need for a broader knowledge and contact base, awareness of political systems and developments in other countries, and an understanding of how global and EU institutions work. This is where the work of the ILO and its specific initiatives can play an increasingly pivotal role.

Checklist 7 – Building the advocacy skills of the future

Feedback from recruitment experts in the public affairs field as well as from BMOs and public affairs professionals identified new key skills needs:

- The ability to connect and build relationships – interpersonal skills will become increasingly important as advocacy professionals lead the way in mobilising networks of advocates and building alliances with other stakeholders to amplify advocacy campaigns.
- Integrated communication skills – strong written and oral communication skills have always been key features, but storytelling skills and the ability to create an effective narrative will become increasingly important. Integrated communication skills will be key as campaigns will span broader audiences. As part of this, effective digital campaigning will be a key competency.

³¹ <http://www.wecglobal.org/>

- Creativity – advocacy professionals will increasingly need to find creative and innovative ways to get their messages heard, both with policymakers and the general public. From a BMO perspective, cutting through the noise and making an impact will increasingly come down to the drive and creativity of the individuals working within BMOs.
- Resilience and drive – the feedback from recruitment and public affairs experts confirmed that advocacy professionals need to be relentless, resilient, able to see the big picture and learn from failure. As threats to the reputation of business increase, advocacy specialists with BMOs will increasingly be adept at managing high-pressure situations.
- Project management skills – impactful policy campaigns are based on clear and strong project management. This includes effective prioritisation, good measurement and the ability to work across different functions within the organization, such as marketing, research, media, communications and, of course, the BMO’s senior leadership team.
- Subject matter and process expertise – effective advocacy involves expertise in the specific campaigning issues as well as a deep understanding of the political environment and process. This has always been the case, but the variety and scope has increased as has the importance of understanding how global as well as national institutions operate.

A strategic and operational priority for BMOs is to access and develop the increasingly multifaceted skills and competencies needed to fuel an effective advocacy machine. This may involve a push on the development and training of existing staff and/or a focus on hiring in new staff. Further options for BMOs include using external public affairs consultants to bring in additional expertise and capacity, and drawing lessons from effective campaigning activities in other countries. Facilitating these exchanges and learning opportunities is a core part of the ITCILO’s work and will become increasingly pivotal.

The advocacy landscape will continue to evolve at pace over the coming years with key policy debates are being shaped at both a national and international level. BMOs across the world are starting to respond with an increasingly strategic and innovative approach to advocacy and campaigning activities, as highlighted by the numerous case studies above. The priority now is to accelerate and mainstream this trend. The sharing of information and best practice between BMOs has never been more important.

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