

INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY LAWYERS IN INDIA



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Within the legal industry in India, we have seen an increasing number of lawyers transitioning into positions in governmental advisory, policy-making and lobbying. With many different commercial sectors undergoing regulatory changes, there has been a paradigm shift in the number of professionals from the legal field joining the policy teams of companies or advising independently.

Historically, large multinationals have been bound by international laws and codes of ethics, and the policy work was dictated as such. Post liberalisation, as India is establishing its place in the global market, it has become apparent that policy-making is now integral to running a successful business in a country with its own unique set of challenges. "With ever growing economic legislation in India, working with Government Departments or handling government relations for a company is a great opportunity. This gives exposure of dealing with policy matters and maintaining industry - government relations for the betterment of business as well as the country's economy. Lawyers certainly have an extra edge to play a leading role in policy matters and advisory due to their overall legal-policy-economic understanding better than any other profession", opined Manish Sharma, Assistant Director (Govt. Relations and Legal Affairs) of the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association.

There are three broad kinds of companies that require policy lawyers:

- Established multinational companies reviewing their policy and adapting to ever changing laws and regulations.
- Multinational companies entering the Indian market creating new policies in a new market and field of business.
- Indian start-up companies looking to create new pathways.

It's not a phenomenon confined to commercial businesses - law firms are also jumping on the policy bandwagon. Experienced legal professionals and law firm partners are on committees, drafting policy and guideline codes from sectors such as banking and finance, as well as infrastructure, transport and health amongst others, thus indirectly servicing their clients as well as having their say in integral changes.

The skills that are fundamental to a lawyer are proving transferable to policy roles, such as drafting and knowledge of the existing legislation and regulations. Many companies are looking at candidates with a prerequisite of skills such as advocacy, ability to monitor legislative, judicial and policy reforms, suggest amendments and offer support to take adequate measures to mitigate any risks or negative impact to the organisation. Lawyers are also inherently practised in communicating complex concepts quickly, concisely and effectively and can be held to high ethical standards. In a perusal of the current available Governmental Advisory or Public Policy vacancies listed in India, more

than half have stated a preference for candidates with legal qualifications or experience. A large number of these positions are also at a senior or management level, indicating that they are not mere support roles, but are in charge of taking an active governance role.

This trend is relatively recent, in the last 3-5 years, and there is still much work to be done as India does not yet have a legal framework that supports lobbying. Students attending law school have little awareness that their law degrees can be used in a plethora of roles outside of the main choices of becoming in house counsels or private practitioners. In 2014, National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, became the first law school to start offering a post graduate course in public policy. More than 35% of that first batch of graduates in 2016 received job offers in the field immediately. Employers included Big 4's, large multinational companies and state governments. Just as we saw the changes many years ago that brought lawyers with specialisations in company secretary, compliance or MBA's become part of the mainstream, lawyers specialising in policy and ethics will create a new generation of legal professionals.

About the Author



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Yashna is a Senior Consultant at Aquis Search, focusing on legal in-house recruitment in Mumbai.

She has experience working with clients to provide recruitment services and market intelligence across various sectors including financial services, media, pharmaceuticals, information technology and manufacturing. Prior to joining Aquis, Yashna worked in a boutique consultancy firm on legal recruitment in the in-house market in Mumbai and as a Trade Union Advocate in London.

Yashna holds an LLB (honours) from Cardiff University, United Kingdom, and a PGCE in Human Resource Management from Middlesex University, London. She is fluent in English, Bengali and Hindi, and conversational French.

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