

**INVESTIGATING TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT OF CANADA
CITIZEN-FOCUSED COMMUNICATIONS**

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Abstract

Government of Canada communications professionals work in an increasingly challenging environment, characterized by an intrusive 24/7 media cycle, a frenetic pace of evolving communication technologies, layered accountability requirements, political tension, and waning public trust. Scholars call on professional communicators to help rebuild public trust, which is intrinsic to a healthy democratic government. The Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication developed by Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins (2007) serves as the theoretical framework for investigating the Government of Canada's approach to transparent citizen-focused communications from the perspective of communications professionals. The model's adaptability to the Government of Canada context is tested through 23 qualitative semi-structured interviews with Government of Canada senior communications advisors, managers and executives. The data is analysed using constant comparative thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate that Government of Canada communicators strongly value transparency. Furthermore, the key components of the transparency model – communications practices, organizational support and provision of resources – encapsulate the factors that influence the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications by the Government of Canada. The study concludes by offering recommendations for future research and practical applications.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Government of Canada employs over 3,000 communicators (Canada, 2007). These professionals work within the framework of the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*. This policy outlines 10 overarching policy statements and 31 specific requirements on such communications activities as informing and serving Canadians, consultation and citizen engagement, and media relations. The first policy statement outlines the Government of Canada's commitment to transparent communications with the public. It reads,

It is the policy of the Government of Canada to:
Provide the public with timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information about its policies, programs, services and initiatives. In the Canadian system of parliamentary democracy and responsible government, the government has a duty to explain its policies and decisions, and to inform the public of its priorities for the country. Information is necessary for Canadians - individually or through representative groups or Members of Parliament - to participate actively and meaningfully in the democratic process. It is required for access to government programs and services. The public has a right to such information. (Canada, 2006a)

A statement to this same effect has been a cornerstone in all iterations of the *Communications Policy*. Notably, this commitment to transparent communications is made without the use of the word transparency or openness. Nonetheless, the commitment is reinforced throughout the policy. In fact, this recognition of the importance of transparent government communications to the health of Canada's democracy was highlighted as far back as the 1969 Task Force on Government Information. The report from the Task Force stated,

We are not arguing that a reform of the Governments' information services is all that's required to keep the world safe for democracy. After all, what governments do, as well as what they say, has something to do with the health of the democratic system. We are arguing, however, that one way to fight the decline of democratic health is to guarantee that the flow of information from the government to the people, from the people back to the government, and endlessly back and forth and back again, is large, fast, trustworthy, correct, credible, open and relevant. (Canada, 1969, p. 43)

The Government of Canada's commitment to transparency is further embodied by specific legislation, namely the *Access to Information Act* and the *Federal Accountability Act*. Freedom of information legislation is the most commonly cited measure that governments put in place to increase transparency. Canada's *Access to Information Act* was enacted in 1983, at a time when only five other countries had such legislation in place (Roberts, 2006). The ATIA established procedures for accessing information and also created the position of Information Commissioner. More recently, when the *Federal Accountability Act* was passed in Parliament in December 2006, Prime Minister Harper said,

We promised to stand up for accountability and to change the way government works. Canadians elected this government to deliver on that commitment and today the *Federal Accountability Act* has received Royal Assent. From this day on, accountability in government is the law and we can all be proud of that fact. (Canada, 2006b)

Furthermore, the *Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service* also highlights transparency as a key professional value. It states: "Public servants should also strive to ensure that the value of transparency in government is upheld while respecting their duties of confidentiality under the law" (Canada, 2003, p. 8).

The Government of Canada's commitment to transparency in the *Communications Policy*, *Access to Information Act*, the *Federal Accountability Act* and the *Values and Ethics Code* is consistent with the "growing international recognition of the importance of transparency for meaningful and effective democratic processes" (Stiglitz, 2007, p. vii). The "right to know" has been labelled as one of the most important battles in today's society (Florini, 2007) and is seen as a foundation for other human rights, such as access to justice (Birkinshaw, 2006). With roots dating back to Rousseau, Bentham and the French Revolutionaries, in more recent years the term transparency has taken on a "quasi-religious significance" (Hood, 2006, p. 3). As such, "the concept of transparency has become an indispensable ingredient in social accountability and is considered necessary for preserving and guaranteeing ethical and fair processes that are carried out within the private, public and non-profit sectors (Vaccaro & Madsen, 2009, p. 101). Park and Blenkinsopp (2011) attribute the growing demand for transparency to three key factors: its acceptance as a fundamental moral claim within a democratic society, its function against corruption and its link with trust and accountability (p. 256).

Despite its popularity, Hood (2007) explains, "Like so many good-governance catchwords in public management, transparency is more often invoked than defined" (p. 193). Scholars agree that a definitive definition of transparency does not exist and, as such, the concept will be further explored throughout this research. Garsten and Lindh de Montoya (2008) offer "Transparency implies

visibility, openness and communication. It is a metaphorical extension of its meaning in the physical sciences: a ‘transparent’ object is one that can be seen through” (p. 4). Its connection to openness and communication is consistent with the line of enquiry for this study. Moreover, Transparency International, which is respected as an influential anti-corruption non-governmental organization (Roberts, 2006) and credited with helping to popularize the use of the term (Ball, 2009) defines transparency in their plain language guide as a: “Characteristic of governments, companies, organisations and individuals of being open in the clear disclosure of information, rules, plans, processes and actions” (Transparency International, 2009, p. 44). It follows that discussions about transparency are inseparable from those on good governance, responsible government, accountability, trust and public confidence.

Furthermore, academics agree that there is an intrinsic relationship between a healthy society and the provision of quality government information (Lippman in Rose, 2000; Fairbanks et al., 2007; Garnett, 1997; Graber 2003). Governments have an “obligation” to communicate with their citizens (Ferguson, 1993; Viteritti, 1997; Hiebert, 1981; Paluszek, 2002; Graber, 1991; Garnett, 1992; Lee, 1999). Examples of essential information that governments must communicate about to maintain their nation’s social, political and financial health, include “census data, economic indexes and forecasts, health and disease statistics, and crime information” (Graber, 2003, p. 226).

Despite the Government of Canada's outward commitment to transparency, ongoing challenges continue to be apparent. In Canada, like other democratic countries, there is evidence of waning public trust. Low voter turnout, decreased party membership and public opinion survey results are telling reports of this (Thomas, 2009a). "Policy-making and the management of government now take place in a 24/7 media environment in which competitive media enterprises, with a voracious requirement for stories, have become more adversarial, aggressive, and negative in their coverage of public affairs" (Thomas, 2010, p. 81). This new media environment can be said to feed, or at the very least reflect the Canadian public's increased challenging of public authority (Aucoin, 2007).

Citizens are increasingly mobilized and have access to a variety of information sources, proliferated by the increasingly widespread use of digital and social media. With increased transparency and an appetite for political scandals, public attention was attracted to such recent scandals as the "billion dollar boondoggle," the sponsorship scandal and the financial dealings between Schreiber and the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. The current environment has also been characterized by a higher number of external monitoring bodies tabling what have often been negative reports on government spending and allocation of resources (Thomas, 2010). Additionally, the *Access to Information Act* and the *Federal Accountability Act*, the very legislation predicated on transparency and accountability is criticized for inconsistent application and contradictory results¹.

¹ For in-depth analysis see public administration literature by Roberts, Alasdair S.; Aucoin, Peter; Savoie, Donald J.

As a result of these factors, Government of Canada communicators², public servants who are the “front-line” workers in communicating with the media and citizens are working in an increasingly challenging environment, arguably more challenging than that encountered by their counterparts at the time of the 1969 Task Force on Government Information. Thomas (2010) attests, “The need to be strategic, careful, and results-oriented in the performance of the communications function has become more critical because the external and internal environments of governments have become more complicated, challenging, and risky” (p. 80).

Within this context, scholars have presented professional government communicators with a challenging task: to play a pivotal role in restoring the faith that the public has lost in its government (Avery et al., 1996 and Heise, 1985 as referenced in Fairbanks et al., 2007). Similarly, the Government of Canada’s Communications Community Office (CCO) affirms,

Preserving public confidence in our democratic institutions and in the professionalism of the public service is a key deliverable for government communicators. It is important for communicators to support their Ministers, deputy heads and departments in these new responsibilities [as outlined in the *Federal Accountability Act*] and ensure that all government organizations demonstrate clearly through their communications the requirements and spirit of the Act. (Canada, 2007, p. 5)

² A 2006 survey of the government communications community identifies a member of the community as a ... university-educated, bilingual female between 30 and 49 years of age. She has worked in communications for at least 5 years and is an Indeterminate IS-3, 4 or 5 [of 6 levels] in her substantive position in a dedicated communications unit within a Department or Agency in the NCR [National Capital Region]. (Canada, 2006c) Sixty-six percent of those surveyed identified their primary role as one of the following: publishing, editing, writing and graphics (17%); client services, advisory services (16%); management (12%); internal communications (11%); and media (10%). Additionally, 56% of survey respondents identified that their communications activities are directed toward an external audience (Canada, 2006c).

Two communications frameworks have been advanced in an effort to specifically theorize the importance of transparency in public sector communication. In 1985, Heise developed the Public Communication Model as a road map to help communicators bridge the confidence gap between the government and its citizens, with open and transparent communication with citizens as the primary driver. Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins (2007) continued Heise's work by developing the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication. The model is built on a foundation of valuing transparency and the three key elements of the model are communication practices, organizational support, and the provision of resources. The degree to which these elements are present influence the transparency of government communications (Fairbanks et al., 2007).

While the role for government communicators in improving government transparency has been called for by scholars and outlined by Government policy and statements, the value placed on transparency by Government of Canada communicators and their perspectives on factors that facilitate and restrict transparent citizen-focused communications remain to be investigated.

Thesis Objectives and Theoretical Framework

Inspired by Heise's Public Communication Model and Fairbanks et al.'s Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication, this thesis seeks to test the applicability and robustness of the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency within the Government of Canada context. This study's

theoretical framework is further elucidated through the use of the two-way symmetrical model for public relations developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984).

The main research question that this study aims to answer is: Does the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication adequately represent the value placed on transparency by Government of Canada communicators and the factors that limit and facilitate the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications? This question is investigated by replicating the American study that was conducted by Fairbanks et al. in the Canadian context. To this end, the three research questions put forward by Fairbanks et al. have been adopted and modified for the Canadian environment. Therefore, the three sub-questions that guide this study are as follows:

- 1: How do Government of Canada communicators value transparency?
- 2: How do Government of Canada communicators incorporate transparency into their communication practices?
- 3: What elements facilitate and limit the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications within the Government of Canada?

The implications of these findings offer potential for future academic research and practical applications.

Methodology

Qualitative research was conducted for this study as it allowed the researcher to understand with “more depth and sensitivity people’s subjective understandings while acting in their social situations” (Nardi, 2007, p. 36).

Specifically, nineteen semi-structured qualitative interviews were held with Government of Canada communications professionals at the senior advisor and manager level. Additionally, four semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with Government of Canada communications executives, in order to gather perspective from a more global level. Qualitative interviews were specifically chosen as a data collection method in order to allow the researcher “to understand in a richly detailed manner what an interviewee thinks and feels about some phenomenon” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 326). The sampling strategy was based on a combination of approaches, including convenience and snowball sampling for the working level communicators, purposeful sampling for the communications executives and sequential sampling for both groups. The data was analysed using constant comparative thematic analysis, whereby “each piece of information is coded and compared to other pieces for similarities and differences in the lives of those interviewed” (Jackson et al., 2007, p. 453). Key themes derived from the findings are then reported and analysed.

Rationale for Study

The field of public sector communications has received limited sustained scholarly and professional attention. In comparison to private sector communications, the risks associated with public sector communications are more significant. In the event that a matter is not communicated about effectively, or if the public feels that the Government is not being transparent, this can have detrimental effects on citizen trust in their government. Low levels of trust can

then threaten the health of a democracy. The risks that are associated with public sector communications are exacerbated due to the power held by Governments, which include the “power to tax, regulate, incarcerate, and even kill” (Garnett, 1996, p. 666). As a result of this power, Governments often communicate about matters of greater importance and sensitivity (Garnett, 1996, p. 666). However, the scope of academic inquiry is not indicative of this greater importance (Liu & Horsley, 2007). This is the foremost reason for further in-depth study in the field of public sector citizen-focused communications. Graber, a strong voice in heralding the need for further study of public sector communications, explains:

Every person’s life, in good times and bad, in peace and war, is affected by the ways in which government organizations, including how thousands of administration agencies, handle [communication]. That is why the study of communications in public organizations is so vital. (As quoted in Liu and Horsley, 2007, p. 392)

The focus on transparency in Government of Canada communications is specifically relevant due to the timeliness of the measures put in place as a result of the *Federal Accountability Act*. This study has also been able to benefit from the recent research that was conducted by Fairbanks et al. It is notable, however, that this existing research was conducted in the American context and a study on transparency in government communications has not been conducted within the Government of Canada context.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. The following chapter, chapter 2, explores the treatment of transparency in public relations and communications

literature, drawing on public sector communications literature when available.

Chapter three then provides the rationale for the study's research strategy, methods and procedures. Following this, in chapter four, the findings collected through 23 semi-structured qualitative interviews are presented according to key themes. Subsequently, chapter five analyses the findings of the research to determine the adaptability of the transparency model to the Canadian context. The final chapter provides a summary of findings and discusses the limitations of the research. The study concludes with recommendations for future academic research and professional applications.

Conclusion

There is a need to investigate the role played by transparency in government communications in light of the ongoing, low levels of public trust, which threaten the very health of Canada's democracy. Government communicators are called on to play a role in rebuilding public trust through their professional function. The Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication will serve as the theoretical framework for this investigation into Government of Canada citizen-focused communications. The following chapter sets the groundwork for this investigation by analysing the relevant literature as it pertains to transparency in Government citizen-focused communications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the existing communications and public administration literature that explores transparency in government communications. The chapter is divided into three sections. To start, it reviews scholarly analysis on the connections between trust, transparency, and communications. This first section investigates the concept of transparency and focuses on both the responsibilities of a government with regard to communicating with its citizens and also the vital role that professional government communicators are called on to play.

In keeping with the importance of transparency to Government communications, the second section explores public sector communications models predicated on transparency. These models have been put forward by scholars to facilitate the role of professional Government communicators and serve as the theoretical framework for this thesis.

The third section of this chapter reviews literature on Government of Canada citizen-focused communications according to the key elements featured in the transparency models. These key elements include open communication practices, the politicization of government communication, and resources dedicated to Government communication.

The chapter then concludes by highlighting gaps in the literature that this study goes on to investigate.

Trust, Transparency and Communications

Many scholars address how crucial public trust is to a government. Roy (2006) explains that trust “connotes the credibility of government as it seeks, retains, and deploys legitimacy in pursuing policies and actions tied to the public interest” (p. xvi). Canadians, like citizens of other democratic countries, increasingly exhibit signs, such as low voter turnout and decreased political party membership, and report, through public opinion surveys, their distrust of politicians, political institutions and, albeit to a lesser extent, the public service (Thomas, 2009a). Thomas (2009a) tells us how in Canada “... the public seems to subscribe to a negative image of the bureaucracy as too powerful, self-interested, rule bound, inefficient, unresponsive, and unaccountable” (p. 217). There is a more significant loss of confidence in the public sector than the private sector (Aucoin and Savoie, 2009). Thomas offers the following potential reasons for low public trust: “mistakes, abuses, unforeseen problems, and, in general the failure to meet elevated public expectations in terms of anticipatory, responsive, and responsible behaviours...” (2009a, p. 227). The potential impacts of low levels of trust in politicians, political institutions, and the public service are conjectured as follows,

If weak trust leads to declining political engagement by citizens (the studies are not conclusive on this point), then recent trends in public attitudes are not a trivial matter. A loss of trust, confidence, and involvement makes it more difficult for governments to mobilize support and to gain legitimacy for their actions. (Thomas, 2009a, p. 243)

Providing insight into the Canadian context, Bourgon (2007), former Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, uses the analogy of the weaver to illustrate how vital trust is to government and democracy, whereby trust is the “warp thread” that “gives the fabric its shape and sturdiness” (p. 23).

There is a fundamental link between trust in government and transparency (Piotrowski, 2009, p. 21). O’Neill (2006) asserts, “Government, corporations, and their critics seemingly converge in seeing transparency as indispensable for accountability and good governance, for preventing corruption and improving performance, for increasing trustworthiness and trust” (p. 76). Rawlins (2009) posits that organizations need three types of transparency, as originally identified by Balkin (1999), in order to regain the trust of their stakeholders. He explains that transparency must be characterized by: “information that is truthful, substantial, and useful; participation of stakeholders in identifying the information they need; and objective, balanced reporting of an organization’s activities and policies that holds the organization accountable” (p. 74).

As stated in the introduction, a mutually agreed upon definition of transparency does not exist. This is true within both academic literature and Government of Canada documents. Many academics, from various schools of thought, have investigated the genesis and rising popularity of the concept and a variety of types of transparency are put forward for examination and discussion. Simply put, transparency may be described as the “open flow of information;” literature that investigates government transparency specifically emphasizes

“openness” (Park and Blenkinsopp, 2011, p. 256). Building on the concept of openness, transparency can be further explained as “the degree to which information is available to outsiders that enables them to have [an] informed voice in decisions and/or to assess the decisions made by insiders” (Florini, 2007, p. 5). In this same direction, Savoie (2010) asserts “transparency is the most important instrument that those without power and influence can use to keep an eye on those who have” (p. 110).

Transparency is closely linked to an organization’s ethics: “...first, it holds organizations accountable for their actions and policies; and second, it respects the autonomy and reasoning ability of individuals who deserve to have access to information that might affect their position in life. (Rawlins, 2009, p. 77)

Likewise, transparency is intrinsic to democratic values:

The essence of representative democracy is informed consent, which requires that information about government practices and policies be disclosed. And in democracies, by definition, information about government belongs to the people, not the government. (Florini, 2007, p. 3)

Rose and Kiss (2005) point to early democratic theorists who lamented that citizens did not have enough access to information. They cite John Dewey, as an example, who argued that citizens were not given the resources—information—to enter into the public debate (Rose and Kiss, 2005). It follows that, “As governments move more into the information providing business and less into service provision, the ability of citizens to access government information is becoming more important” (Rose, 2000, p. 33). The debate for transparency as a fundamental tenet of democracy continues to evolve:

No longer is disclosure primarily seen as an instrument for enabling the public to hold decision makers accountable, although it still serves the vital purpose of allowing “we the people” to determine if “you the government” is doing its job the way citizens want it to. Increasingly, transparency is demanded to enable people affected by decisions to participate in making those decisions. (Florini, 2007, p. 341)

There are forces, however, that work against transparency and openness in government. Critics argue that transparency can have the negative effects of exposing governments to undo criticism and “driv[ing] decision-making into ever more secret recesses” (Birkinshaw, 2006, p. 51). Florini (2007) adds that “fear of how newly released information might be used or misused” and “entrenched habits” can further stall efforts to increase transparency and openness (p. 3).

A frequently cited measure for helping to ensure government transparency is access to information legislation. Rose (2000) asserts that freedom to information legislation is “a testament to the importance of timely access to government information” (p. 33). However, we learn that these transparency requirements are “one-sided because they over-emphasize one aspect of communication, and can be met without any communication whatsoever actually taking place” (O’Neill, p. 81). As an example, Hood (2007) points to the practice of what he calls “snowing,” whereby there is “so much data being produced with so little interpretation or quality control that it has the effect of reducing rather than increasing effective openness and information” (p. 204). Roberts (2006) also cites the possibility of citizens becoming lost in a “data smog,” “a phenomenon exacerbated by the indiscriminate release of government information” (p. 18). The intense media scrutiny faced by public organizations and the media’s calls for

increased transparency are evidence that access to information legislation alone cannot respond to the public's transparency needs (Fairbanks, 2005, p. 2). O'Neill (2006) argues,

Although the advocates of transparency do not mean to endorse the dissemination of defective or misleading material in the name of achieving transparency, they too often take for granted that what is being disseminated will meet adequate epistemic and ethical standards. By emphasizing dissemination rather than communication, with its constitutive epistemic and ethical norms they can lose sight of the basic demands of adequate communication. (p. 84)

It follows that there is an obvious and vital role for government communications. In fact, "obligation" is the word most frequently used by scholars when explaining why a government must communicate with its citizens (Ferguson, 1993; Viteritti, 1997; Hiebert, 1981; Paluszek, 2002; Graber, 1991; Garnett, 1992; Lee, 1999). Viteritti (1997) specifies, "Meaningful communication between government and the people is not merely a managerial practicality. It is a political, albeit moral, obligation that originates from the basic covenant that exists between the government and the people" (p. 82).

In comparison with private sector communications, public sector communications encompass matters that are more important, such as health, security and the economy (Garnett, 1997). This greater importance is also owing to the increased power that is wielded by the government, which includes "to tax, regulate, incarcerate, and even kill" (Garnett, 1996, p. 666). The necessity for transparent communications thereby increases due to power that the government holds in communicating matters of great importance.

Scholars agree that public sector organizations are faced with considerably more media and public scrutiny, often from the official opposition, than their private sector counterparts (Graber, 2003; Garnett, 1992; Liu and Horsley, 2007; Falcione and Adrian, 1997). Falcione and Adrian (1997) explain that there is an expectation that the public sector operates in an open environment and there is “tendency to be intolerant of error” (p. 720). Within the Canadian context, the *Globe and Mail*’s national affairs columnist, Jeffrey Simpson provides the explanation, “Good news doesn’t sell when it comes to government” (As cited in Savoie, 2003, p. 73). Graber (2003) also points to unique and stringent public expectations with respect to “fairness, responsiveness, accountability, and honesty” (p. 8). These higher expectations further necessitate transparent communications between a government and its citizens. Unfortunately, however, Graber explains that as a result of the public’s high expectations about what should be achieved in the public sector, agencies are often obliged to engage in compensatory “image building” (2003, p. 271). This “image building” can then lead to accusations of propaganda, thereby further heightening scrutiny (Graber, 2003).

In a handbook for public sector managers and communicators, Garnett provides the following overarching objectives for communicating with citizens: “to inform or gain information, to influence attitudes, and to affect behavior” (1992, p. 39). He acknowledges that many communications initiatives respond to two or three of these purposes. Rose (2000) asserts that the objectives of

government communications are three-fold: “to maintain legitimacy, ensure compliance with their policies, and fulfill the democratic ideal” (p. 19). In 1985, Heise gave government communications a significant objective: rebuilding public confidence in the government. Avery et al. echoed this call and described it as the government communicator’s role to facilitate “bridging the gap of credibility that is ominously eroding the public’s belief in the government as fair and effective” (Avery et al., 1995, p. 175). Garnett acknowledges that communications with citizens is at once an essential and one of the most challenging management tasks, specifically as a result of the credibility gap (Garnett, 1992).

Public Sector Communications Models Predicated on Transparency

In order to facilitate the role of communicators in responding to the lack of confidence in government, Heise (1985) proposed the Public Communication Model. The model included the following five components: communicating transparently about all positive and negative information; reaching out to citizens through a variety of communications channels; soliciting comprehensive feedback; separating partisan and government communications; and empowering managers, and eventually all employees, in their role as communicators (Heise, 1985). The first and foremost objective of Heise’s Public Communication Model is open and transparent communications. He acknowledged,

It is obvious that a public communication policy based on the quick and unmanipulated release of information—be it “good” news or “bad” news—will be a very difficult standard to abide by. However, by making this tenet an explicit part of a government unit’s public communication policy, it may, in time, countervail the impact of today’s implicit adherence by government to the corporate PR model and help reduce the resulting

dysfunctions in the communication process between public and government. (1985, p. 210)

Appreciating the significance and necessity of transparent communications, Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins (2007) recently conducted research to build on Heise's Public Communication Model. This research was the first that investigated "whether government communicators perceive it as their responsibility to provide the general public access to information, and if they do, how they fulfill that responsibility" (Fairbanks et al., 2007, p. 26). Eighteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with professional communicators working for various departments in the United States federal public service. The research demonstrated that the federal public sector communicators interviewed strongly value transparency and were familiar with the resulting benefits, which they listed as "increased public support, increased understanding by the public of agency actions, increased trust, increased compliance with agency rules and regulations, an increased ability for the agency to accomplish its purpose and a stronger democracy" (Fairbanks et al., 2007, p. 33).

Further to their research, Fairbanks et al. developed the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication (figure 1). The model is described as follows, "The base of this model is a commitment to transparent communication processes, the three sides, or key elements of the model are communication practices, organizational support and the provision of resources" (2007, p. 33).

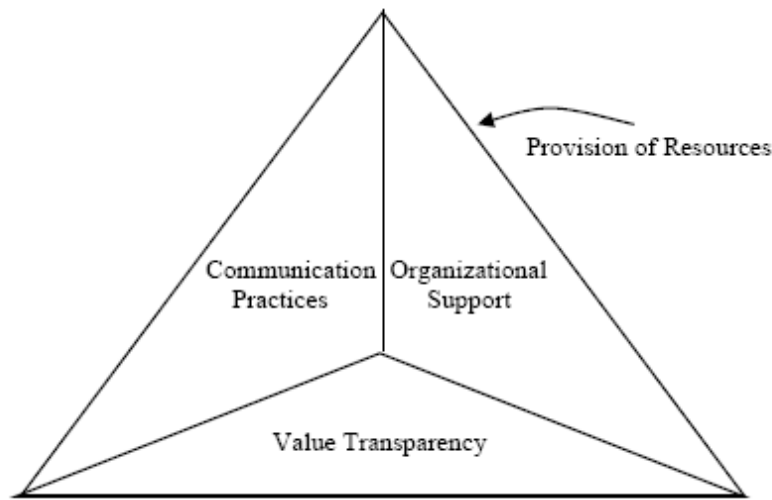


Figure 1. Three dimensional model for transparency in government communication.

Fairbanks et al. (2007) assert, “In order to achieve transparency, communicators must adopt practices that promote open information sharing” (p. 33). This is consistent with the strong theme that emerges in the literature that calls for communications between a government and its citizens to be “two-way,” whereby a government must not only speak to its citizens but also listen (Grunig, 1997; Garnett, 1992; Rose, 2000; Fairbanks et al., 2007; Ferguson, 1993; Heise, 1985). Ferguson (1993) explains the necessity of this evolution towards two-way communications:

Traditionally, governments have seen to be one-way conveyors of information, transmitting only what they want people to know. This model is no longer appropriate. In a society where people at all levels of the hierarchy receive information simultaneously, where control or ownership of information becomes increasingly difficult, the need for an interactive model becomes increasingly acknowledged. Such an interactive model means that large public and private sector organizations must be ever cognizant of public attitudes and behaviour patterns. Because of their high level of external accountability, government departments must ensure the adequacy of feedback loops that allow the ongoing modification of

performance.

Public relations theory also supports these calls for two-way communications.

Grunig (1997) asserts that two-way communications models are both “more sophisticated and effective,” than one-way communications models (p. 262). Of the four models defined by Grunig and Hunt in 1984, the two-way symmetrical communications model is the most useful for this study. It is “based on research and uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics” (Grunig, 1997, p. 262). While the two-way symmetrical model of communications has been criticized as being too idealistic, Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) assert that it represents the normative ideal for public relations practice (p. 316).

Research on public relations models within all types of organizations discovered that in government communications with citizens, the public information model was the most commonly used and the use of the press agency model was also very apparent (Grunig, 1997). However, when two-way models were practiced in government communications, the two-way symmetrical model was more commonly used than the two-way asymmetrical model (Grunig, 1997).

The Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication also illustrates the necessity of organizational support for transparent government communication with citizens. This support can be achieved by “providing communicators a seat at the management table, improving internal organizational communication and understanding the relationship between

the agency mission and transparency” (Fairbanks et al., 2007, p. 34). Politics is an important factor that Fairbanks et al. include under organizational support. Despite the public sector being founded on the principle of political neutrality, scholars contend that politics are inescapable. Falcione and Adrian (1997) explain, “People may pretend that politics are not present because the concept carries pejorative connotations, but in truth politics are usually only thinly veiled” (p. 721).

Compared to typical business firms, intervention from political actors is much more likely to occur in government departments and agencies. This affects the communications function (Garnett, 1992). Fairbanks et al. (2007) uncover that one manner politics can adversely affect transparent government communications is through the direction of government messages (p. 31).

Consistent with the importance that the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication places on organizational support, Pandey and Garnett (2006) identify “red tape” as a unique public sector organizational characteristic that can adversely affect communication performance. They explain, “rigid rules and procedures can be expected to restrict the number of and capacity of communication channels available for transmitting information” (Pandey and Garnett, 2006, p. 39). Additionally, red tape can negatively influence an individual’s incentive to research and provide information required by the public (Pandey and Garnett, 2006). For the purpose of this study, it follows that “red tape” adversely affects transparency.

Government departments must also abide by legal obligations with respect to the information that must be provided to citizens (Falcione and Adrian, 1997, p. 719). For this reason, public organizations may not always have authority over how and what they communicate (Garnett, 1992). Graber (2003) explains how legal obligations can place increased limitations on how communications activities are conducted, specifically with respect to “procedures and spheres of operation” (p. 8).

The third element of the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communications is provision of resources. This element highlights the need for communicators to have sufficient time, and human and fiscal resources in order to be able to communicate transparently (Fairbanks et al., 2007, p. 34).

Investigating Government of Canada Citizen-Focused Communications

This section investigates scholarly analysis on Government of Canada citizen-focused communications according to key elements of public communications transparency models.

Open Communication Practices

As explored in the introduction, a policy statement underlining the necessity of providing citizens with “timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information” has been a cornerstone in all iterations of the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*. Rose (2000), however, takes issue with the policy’s practicality and application:

Unfortunately, there is a sizable gap between the ideals of this high minded policy and the reality. The vague exhortations that typify these kinds of documents leave much room for withholding or delaying information. Moreover, assuming it was possible to provide “full and timely information”, the chances of it being “objective” are very low. (p. 33)

There are also specific concerns that the current Government of Canada consultative efforts are not meeting the needs of its citizens. While Canadians are receiving more information than ever before from their government, only a portion of it engages them as citizens through consultations or collaborations (Kozolanka, 2006). Barker (2008) raises issues with whether the consultations are representative, if they are being conducted only at a superficial level and whether they are initiated too late in the policy development process to affect change. As an example, Roy (2006) criticizes the Government of Canada’s consultation portal (www.consultingcanadians.gc.ca) for its inactivity and lack of organizational support. He explains that the site is “vastly overshadowed in terms of resources, importance, and use in comparison to the literally hundreds of monthly announcements pertaining almost exclusively to positive outcomes or new initiatives associated with government action of one sort or another” (Roy, 2006, p. 133).

In his investigation into Government of Canada public opinion research, Page (2006) asserts that “public servants in communications branches initiate and use opinion research more than their counterparts in strategic-policy positions” (p. 78).

Attention is paid in the literature to the Government of Canada's e-communications efforts. Its main Web portal (canada.gc.ca) has won Canada international status as being a global online leader (Roy, 2006). However, critics of the Government of Canada's e-communications efforts point to two faults: neglecting to provide all Canadians with equal access to online information (Felczak et al., 2009, p. 437) and use of e-government for one-way rather than two-way communications (Roy, 2006, p. 137). In their review of the literature, Felczak, Smith & Glass (2009) explain,

Both Longford (2004) and Middleton & Sorensen (2005) draw attention to the federal government's increasing reliance on the Internet for the provision of information and services despite its failure to develop a comprehensive, longterm strategy to ensure that Canadians are guaranteed some form of basic access to the Internet in order to be able to make use of this information and service provision. (p. 437)

The study conducted by Felczak et al. concluded that "certain segments of the population—namely, Canadians who select or must use free and open source software as a result of cost, public Internet access provisions, or personal preferences—are not always able to use this technology in their communication with the federal government" (2009, p. 455). They also added further criticism about the Consulting with Canadians Web site by citing it as evidence of the government's practice to conduct certain consultations exclusively online (Felczak et al., 2009).

Politicization of Government Communications

The 1980s and 1990s communications environments were characterized by challenges to national stability and unity (Roberts, 2005). Roberts (2005) explains,

“Conservative and Liberal governments responded to these challenges by concentrating more authority at the heart of government, and developing a more sophisticated central capacity to poll public opinion and craft communications programs that advanced its agenda” (p. 6). Managing information and then public relations became a growing priority for government communications (Kozolanka, 2006). The “sponsorship scandal” that broke in the early 2000’s affected both the political and bureaucratic levels of the Government of Canada. One result has been to foster a “cautious, risk-averse, and electorally fixated mind-set, the tone for which is set by the Prime Minister’s Office” (Roy, 2006, p. xxi). Kozolanka (2006) wrote a seminal piece on the politicization of federal government communications wherein she warns, “the sponsorship program is emblematic of the kind of excessive self-promotional activities that have entered into the communications operations of the federal public service” (p. 344). Rose (2000) also cautions that government communication is always designed “to elicit some behavioral or attitudinal change on the part of the public (p. 21). Kozolanka affirms, “if citizen dialogue or information exchange is not the intention, then government communication with citizens has the potential to be inappropriately persuasive and, a step further, potentially partisan” (2006, p. 345). Kerneghan and Siegel (1995) also heed this same warning in their discussion of the “nebulous line between politics and administration” (p. 504). In the most recent analysis of the

politicization of government communications, Thomas (2010)³ posits,

Putting a favourable spin on information and events and seeking to shape public opinion to gain support has become a preoccupation at the political centre of government, and this concern tends to spill over into the administrative culture of the senior ranks of the public service. (p. 117)

Political communications goals are, therefore, seen as never entirely separate from administrative communications conducted by the public service. Determining whether a communications activity or product is partisan or informational is difficult to interpret and is easily swayed by how it is presented, when it is conducted or distributed, and the frequency of its dissemination or occurrence (Kozolanka, 2006). These differentiations become even more unclear in a tense political environment.

Along with the political opposition, the media are quick to expose potentially partisan communications. “Watchdog over government” and “barometer of the citizenry” are metaphors that are used to describe the role of the media that indicate the popular perception of the media’s importance (Rose and Kiss, 2005, p. 332). Kerneghan and Siegel (1995) describe the differing objectives of the media and the government,

... government officials want to get their message to the public without stirring up the political waters. In some cases, this is useful to the media because it provides them with a ready source of up-to-date news at minimal cost; however, the media’s objective of attracting a large audience can often be best achieved by rocking the boat. (p. 502)

³ Thomas was retained to conduct an independent research study for the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Allegations Respecting Business and Financial Dealings Between Karlheinz Schreiber and the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. The research study focused on the Privy Council Office’s correspondence practices and also explored the broader Government of Canada communications environment. The study’s findings generated substantial feedback from various government bodies.

Barker (2008) explains that there exists “almost a Machiavellian-type interaction or game between government and the media” and that both sides may use “morally questionable tactics” to achieve their respective goals (p. 263). He continues to uncover that,

PMO officials in the Harper government have directed ministers to be less accessible to the media and have directed both elected and appointed officials to speak to the media about only the stated priorities of the government. As well, the PMO has instructed all that it would “have final approval for all communication products—even Notes to Editors or Letters to Editors. (Barker, 2008, p. 263)

The media’s working environment has also been radically altered – there is now an insatiable demand for media content due to the perpetual media cycle, technological advances and the working limitations of large-scale media conglomerates (Kozolanka, 2006). This then leads to the government needing to shape its issues (Barker, 2008). Barker explains, “Sometimes this activity of government is associated with the term “spin doctors”—government officials who put a policy, program, or event in just the right light. Often these officials will be the media officers in departments or political operatives found in the Prime Minister’s Office” (Barker, 2008, p. 262).

The role of the Privy Council Office (PCO) in Government of Canada communications is an area that receives further scrutiny for being potentially political. The Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet for Communications and Consultation has been called the “unofficial deputy minister” of PCO (Rose, 2000, p. 81) and has also been criticized as having “overtly political overtones” (Kozolanka, 2006, p. 353). The following headlines are indicative of the media’s

reaction to the role played by PCO: “Mum’s the word till message vetted; Privy Council Office plays key role in screening response to even most routine information request” (Toronto Star, 2008); and “‘Non-partisan’ Privy Council spouts Tory lines” (Winnipeg Free Press, 2006). It should also be noted, however, that Rose (2000) argues that the placement of the communication coordination role at PCO does ensure that “the corporate communications strategy is placed high enough on the federal government’s organizational chart to be given a high degree of legitimacy and importance” (p. 79).

Resources for Government of Canada Communications

Within the Canadian context, Ferguson (1997) explains that “[w]hen funds become limited or budgets strained, public relations units typically are the first to experience cuts, and communication managers find it difficult to mount a credible defense with so little evidence to prove the value of the activities under their administration” (p. 195). The 1990’s were marked by significant cuts to communications budgets and personnel (Redmond & Likely, 2002, p. 6).

Conclusion

We have ascertained that transparency in the public sector is increasingly valued by citizens and more valued in the public sector than in the private sector. When investigating differences between public and private sector communications, significant differences are connected back to transparency, such as the higher levels of public scrutiny, the matters of greater importance that are being communicated about, and the greater likelihood for political interference.

Owing to the value attached to government transparency, it follows that public sector communications theories, namely the Public Communication Model and the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication, attach significant importance to transparency. When Heise developed his Public Communication Model in 1985, open government communications was the foremost element in the model that he proposed to help rebuild public trust in government. As we have learned, citizen trust in Government is a primary building block for a healthy democratic government. There are few things that are more vital. Given the intrinsic relationship between trust and transparency, the theorizing of transparency within the public sector communications context is inadequate. This is especially true within the Canadian public sector environment. The investigation of this study's research questions represents a modest step forward in helping to fill this gap. The following chapter provides detailed rationale for the methodology of the research conducted in response to these research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter illustrates the research strategy, methods and procedures followed for this study. The following topics are explored: qualitative research and semi-structured qualitative interviews, validity and reliability, bias, ethics, sampling strategy and size, procedures and data analysis.

Research Strategy

Qualitative Research

Over the past 30 years qualitative methods have evolved to become key methods of social research (Kvale, 2007). Qualitative research was specifically conducive to this study because of its ability to access and capture a participant's true reality in "rich" descriptions (Jackson, Gillis, & Verberg, 2007, p. 461). Furthermore, qualitative research is, in many instances, "more suitable than quantitative methods for addressing certain questions about culture, interpretation, and power" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 10). However, qualitative research is not without perceived drawbacks. Qualitative researchers are cautioned that they may lose their objectivity as they are so closely involved in the data collection process (Jackson et al., 2007). And yet, "qualitative researchers themselves are an important part of the research process, either in terms of their own personal presence as researchers, or in terms of their experiences in the field and with the reflexivity they bring to the role" (Flick, 2007, p. xi). There is an ongoing debate as to whether qualitative data should be considered "soft" or unmeasurable

(Neuman, 2007a). However, the argument is made that the data investigated by qualitative researchers – recordings, documentation, photographs, etc. – is just as “‘hard’ and physical as that used by quantitative researchers to measure attitudes, social pressure, intelligence and the like” (Neuman, 2007a, p. 183).

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are a commonly used method in communications studies and are consistently employed in qualitative projects (Lindlof, 1995). Qualitative interviews have been described as “construction sites for knowledge” and this was the case for this study (Kvale, 2007, p. 7). While qualitative interviews can be criticized for their subjectivity, Kvale (2007) argues that this can be a strength. He explains,

...the personal perspectives of interviewees and interviewer can provide a distinctive and sensitive understanding of the everyday life world. A controlled use of leading questions may lead to well-controlled knowledge. A plurality of interpretations enriches the meanings of the everyday world, and the person of the researcher is the most sensitive instrument available to investigate human meanings. (Kvale, 2007, p. 87)

A semi-structured interview format was selected in order to allow the researcher to guide the interview, while allowing flexibility to investigate topics raised by the interviewee. An important characteristic of the qualitative interviewer that was abided by is that he/she must remain flexible (Warren, 2002).

Reliability and Validity

A number of methodological procedures were followed to help ensure the reliability and validity of the qualitative design. Reliable qualitative research strives for consistency in how data is collected and recorded (Neuman, 2007b).

The interview guide (available in Appendix G) provided the foundation for the reliable collection of data throughout the interviews. It was followed for each interview and provided both the required consistency for data collection and flexibility for exploring themes raised by the participants.

In order to further facilitate the consistent collection of data, the participants were asked if they would agree to being recorded. The majority of the participants agreed to the recording. In order to maintain the reliability of the data collected in the four interviews that were not recorded, the researcher took verbatim notes and encouraged the participants to review the transcript that was prepared from the notes. Transcripts were prepared for all interviews, which facilitated a consistent approach to data analysis.

It should be noted that the reliability of the research could be perceived to have been threatened as the interviews took place over a span of nine months. However, the consistent use of the interview guide and the preparation of interview transcripts served to maintain reliability. Furthermore, all interviews took place within the same working environment, namely the third session of the 40th Parliament.

With respect to validity, according to Neuman (2007b), qualitative researchers prioritize authenticity, which necessitates “a fair, honest, and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it everyday” (p. 222). The preparation of transcripts, the majority of which were prepared from audio recordings, facilitated the capturing of authenticity or truth. Throughout the

data analysis and reporting phase, if ever a statement in a transcript could have had multiple interpretations the audio recording or notes were referred to, allowing the researcher to present the most authentic viewpoint possible. The opportunity to review the transcript of their interview further strengthened the validity of the data. When participants chose not to review their transcript, this was an indication of the participants' trust in the researcher's ability to authentically present the findings. In addition to the review of transcripts following the interview, during the interviews the researcher would often rephrase information previously provided in order to confirm its authenticity with the participant.

Bias

All efforts were made to help recognize potential bias throughout the research and contra its potentially negative affects, while leveraging the positive impacts. Kvale (2007) explains that while unacknowledged bias may be detrimental, "A recognized bias or subjective perspective may, however, come to highlight specific aspects of the phenomenon being investigated and bring new dimensions forward, contributing to a multi-perspectival construction of knowledge" (p. 86). As such, it is important to disclose that the student researcher has ten years of public sector communications experience, working in support of both the executive and legislative levels of government. This experience facilitated access to potential study participants and increased the student researcher's credibility amongst communications professionals. However, this professional experience also had the potential to bias the results of the study. The student

researcher took a number of steps in order to mitigate this potential impact. First of all, at the outset of the data collection phase, the student researcher formally documented her personal reflections on the interview questions, as if she were a study participant. This step allowed the researcher to later return to her responses to analyse whether key themes arose from the collected data or were imposed upon by the researcher. Secondly, the researcher maintained a personal journal where personal feelings and thoughts were recorded throughout the data collection and analysis phase. Jackson et al. (2007) explain, “Once these ideas are disclosed, they can be set aside. Through bracketing the researcher is made aware of when interpretations of the data reflect personal beliefs rather than those of the participants” (p. 428). In addition to helping to ensure the validity of the data collected, member checks were also conducted in order to help limit potential bias. During the interviews, the researcher would rephrase the data provided by the interviewee for validation and participants were also encouraged to review the transcript of their interview.

Participant Protection

Lindlof (1995) cautions that the “Publication of qualitative studies carries the potential of revealing vital secrets (including “whistle-blowing”), violating privacy, harming reputations, exposing “uncomfortable realities,” and depicting behavior in ways that offend the participants” (p. 103). In order to help increase the comfort levels of participants and encourage the open sharing of information, the participants were assured of their confidentiality throughout the study. To this

end, a number of protective steps were taken and carefully followed. First of all, all participants have been referred to by an interviewee number throughout data collection, analysis and reporting. Secondly, the direct quotations were carefully reviewed to remove all personal identifying information that could have been used to identify a participant. As an example, when a title has been required or relevant, only a generic title has been used. Thirdly, the location of the interview was determined by the interviewee – a confidential location, off-site from the interviewee's place of work was offered. These measures helped to facilitate the open sharing of information throughout the interview process, thereby improving the quality and the breadth of data that was collected.

To help further mitigate the unlikely event of the emotional discomfort of participants, at the outset of each interview participants were reminded that if ever there was a question that made them uncomfortable or they were unable to answer, they may move on to the next question without further enquiry. Notably, all participants provided responses to the questions that they were asked.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board examined and granted ethics approval for this project (notice available in Appendix A). In keeping with requirements, participants reviewed and signed a copy of an Informed Consent Form (available in Appendix B).

Sampling Strategy and Size

The resulting sampling strategy combined convenience, snowball, purposeful, and sequential approaches. To start, the researcher solicited a group of

working level communicators from her professional network. These working level communicators were then asked to refer potential participants to the researcher, thereby soliciting participants “whose attributes are central to the research problem” (Lindlof, 1995, p. 127). The Communications Executives were solicited through convenience, purposeful, and sequential sampling. At the outset of the study, the researcher had aimed to interview 20 working level communicators and 5 communications executives. It was later determined that saturation levels were reached earlier and 19 working level and 4 communication executive interviews were sufficient. Saturation is determined to occur when the data that is being collected affirms what has already been said and becomes repetitive (Jackson et al., 2007).

It was a priority to select interviewees that had “appropriate experience in the cultural scene” upon which they could draw examples (Lindlof, 1995, p. 178). To this end, all participants have a minimum of five years of communications work experience in a department or agency that is subject to the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* (all institutions of the Government of Canada identified in Schedules I, I.1 and II of the Financial Administration Act). Additional information about the study participants is available in a table format in Appendix C. In order to protect participant confidentiality, additional information about the study participants, including language and sex is provided in the aggregate.

Procedures

Soliciting Participants

Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommend the following approach to qualitative interviews:

Find interviewees who know about your research problem from first hand experience or direct knowledge, ask them questions about their experiences and knowledge, and listen intently to their answers. Then keep questioning until you have a good, rich, credible answer to your research problem. (2005, p. ix).

Initial contact was made with potential study participants through an e-mail from the researcher. The recruitment text template for the working level communicators is available in Appendix D. Communications Executives were also contacted by e-mail (template available in Appendix E) and subsequently provided with a fact sheet on the study (available in Appendix F). When a potential participant indicated interest in the study, an e-mail exchange provided additional information on the study, a copy of the informed consent form and logistics surrounding the interview location and time. Follow-up phone calls were also placed, specifically with the offices of the communications executives. In order to secure the participation of 19 working level communicators, 28 communicators were contacted. Securing the participation of the executives proved to be more challenging. In some cases, initial e-mails to executives did not receive a response, and in other cases despite initial interest, scheduling the interview was not possible and communications from the executive and/or their office ceased.

Interview Process

Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and took place in a location chosen by the participant. The guide that was used for the interviews is available in Appendix G. The questions were derived from the main research questions in keeping with the requirement to “translate your research puzzle into one or several main questions that your interviewees can answer more easily based on their experiences” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 152). Before conducting the study’s first interview, a pilot interview was held with a public service executive with more than five years of communications experience. The pilot interview allowed the researcher to refine the interview guide before entering into the field. Furthermore, the researcher specifically conducted 15 interviews with working level communicators before initiating the interviews with the communications executives. This allowed the researcher to build on the knowledge acquired from the working level communicators and strengthened the validity of the research.

Transcription

Of the 23 study participants, 19 agreed to the recording of their interview. As suggested by Lindlof (1995), this allowed the researcher to focus more fully on “the conversation, the nonverbal actions, and other elements of the situation” (p. 209). When the interviews were recorded, transcripts were prepared from the recordings. Participants were then offered the opportunity to review the transcript to help ensure that it accurately reflected the conversation. The transcripts were transformed into a more formal, written style prior to sharing with participants

(when applicable) and analyzing. While reviewing transcripts was encouraged, less than half of the participants decided to exercise this option. When changes were made in the majority of cases they were minimal.

For the four interviews that were not recorded, the researcher took verbatim notes to the fullest extent possible. Three out of these four participants took the opportunity to review and make changes to the final transcripts, adding precisions and additional details. This was especially useful for the researcher, as preparing the transcripts proved to be significantly more challenging when working solely from notes. A potential drawback to sharing the interview notes with participants is that valuable information provided in the interviews could have been retracted. However, this did not occur during the course of this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted from the outset of the data collection process, in order to “address insights gleaned from earlier interviews” (Jackson et al., 2007, p. 448). To this end, throughout the data collection phase, memos were used to specifically capture thoughts that occurred to the researcher for use during the data analysis phase. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested the memos that were noted towards the end of the data collection phase helped to inform the data analysis and reporting (p. 205).

The collected data was analysed using constant comparative thematic analysis, whereby “each piece of information is coded and compared to other pieces for similarities and differences in the lives of those interviewed” (Jackson et

al., 2007, p. 453). The advantages of comparing are that the “researcher is able to do what is necessary to develop the theory more or less inductively, namely categorizing, coding, delineating categories and connecting them” (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). Additionally, this approach is consistent with the data analysis method that was employed by Fairbanks et al.

Qualitative Analysis Software

The data collected for this study was managed and coded using HyperResearch version 3.0.1, a qualitative analysis software. This software was used to manually code each transcript, build and modify the codebook, record annotations, search keywords and generate thematic reports. HyperResearch was selected as it is one of the few tools available for the Macintosh platform. The benefit of using the software is that it facilitated the retrieval of source text according to the key themes. Additionally, it allowed for the re-coding of information as the codebook was developed throughout the analysis. The software itself proved to be easy-to-use, reliable and multi-functioning.

A perceived drawback of using the software is that it could have served as a barrier between the researcher and the raw data, as the coding is done on-screen, rather than on paper. To help ensure that a barrier was not formed, the researcher also kept a hard copy of all interview transcripts for ongoing consultation, referral and note taking. Furthermore, researchers are cautioned that text analysis software only facilitates the role of the researcher and could never replace the researcher’s

role (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Kvale, 2007). This caution was heeded throughout the analysis.

Coding

As advocated by Bernard and Ryan (2010), the codebook for this study was built from the data and from theory (p. 79). The codebook, consisting mainly of thematic codes, was developed and modified throughout the coding process. When moving into the reporting phase, the codebook consisted of 116 codes, which were divided into 17 groups. In order to ensure precision and consistency in the coding, descriptions of the codes were built throughout the coding process. This was especially useful as the data analysis and collection phases stretched over a number of months. In addition to the codes that were manually attached to the data, the “autocode” function was used to further analyse specific occurrences of words, such as “resources” and “minority” to ensure that the analysis would be as complete and thorough as possible. An additional 11 codes were added to the study in this fashion. Once the coding of all of the transcripts was complete, reports were run, grouping together all relevant text, thereby allowing the researcher to analyse and compare all of the relevant data to a specific theme. Reports on the number of occurrences of certain themes allowed the researcher to focus on the most relevant themes for reporting. The final codebook is available in Appendix H.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided justification for the research methodology used for this study. Qualitative research provided the researcher with an opportunity to access an in-depth view of the participants' reality within their social situation. Further to a sampling strategy that included convenience, snowball, purposeful, and sequential approaches, twenty-three semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. This chapter specifically emphasized the measures that were taken to help ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, to limit potential bias on behalf of the researcher and to protect study participants. This chapter then provides a detailed overview of the procedures followed during the data collection and data analysis phases. Data analysis was conducted throughout the data collection phase and followed the constant comparative thematic analysis approach. Qualitative analysis software was used to facilitate the coding process.

The following chapter reports on the findings that have resulted from the operationalization of this study's research methodology.

Chapter 4: Findings

The interviews conducted for this study investigated the perspectives of Government of Canada communications professionals on transparency in Government of Canada citizen-focused communications. This chapter presents the resulting findings of the 23 interviews.

The introductory section presents components of a collective definition of open and transparent communications as derived from the interviews. While the principles of open and transparent communications are prevalent in the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, a standard definition is not specifically provided within the policy itself or other official documentation. For this reason, the researcher asked participants to describe transparent or open communications at the outset of each interview, which allows this research to move towards a comprehensive understanding of transparent government communications.

The chapter is then divided into three sections, one focusing on each of the three sub-research questions: value placed on transparency by communicators, how transparency is incorporated into citizen-focused communications, and elements, structures and practices that facilitate and limit citizen-focused communications. Each of the sections present the findings along the key themes that emerged from the interviews.

The presentation of the findings intermixes the responses from all interview participants, both working-level and executives, although the data from the executive interviews is identified accordingly. A narrated exploration into the perspectives of the participants is provided by representative direct quotations.

Government of Canada Communicators:

Defining Transparent or Open Communications

It should be noted that the researcher introduced transparent communications and open communications as synonymous when initiating the discussions on the concept, as openness is closely connected to transparency in the literature on public sector communications and in professional usage within the public sector. Notably, almost half of the participants explained that transparent or open communications is a difficult concept to define. The reasons for this challenge included the lack of a definition in the *Communications Policy* (Interview 12, July 27, 2010); the evolution of the definition based on the political context (Interview 2, July 13, 2010; Executive Interview 1, August 11, 2010); and the varying interpretations of transparency depending on who you ask and the context of where they work (Interview 12, July 27, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010). Participant 12 elaborates,

Some departments would be much more concerned about issues of transparency than others. I could imagine, for example, working at National Defence or working at the Privy Council Office that you might have much stricter applications than you would if you worked at, for example, Parks Canada – where the idea of openness and transparency may be easily applied day-to-day without having to ask yourself the question as to whether or not this information should be released or whether or not we should be proactively communicating this information. (July 27, 2010)

Additionally, Executive Interview 4 raises the distinction of whether the definition is being investigated within the communications policy perspective or whether it is being looked at it within the broader government context (March 17, 2011). This Executive sees communications as a “support or component of a broader commitment by government to open its operations, essentially and to communicate that in an open, transparent, forthright, proactive manner” (March 17, 2011).

Two main rationales for transparent or open communications emerged from the discussions on defining transparent communications: accountability to the public and facilitating access to services. Illustrating this, Participant 7 explains that open or transparent communications provides “the information that the public needs to be able to access Government of Canada programs and services, be informed about what the Government of Canada is doing and be able to make informed decisions about how their money is being spent” (July 19, 2010).

Participants raise six key attributes of transparent or open communications: accuracy/truth, clarity, format, timeliness, “need to know information” and dialogue. Collectively, the participants also defined open and transparent communications by what it is not. It was raised that communications do not have to be proactive to be transparent and that transparency does not have to come at any and all costs. The key attributes of transparent communications, as well as the

caveats to transparent communications are further explored throughout the following three sections.

Value placed on Transparency by Communicators

Study participants speak passionately on the personal value and the value that the communications community places on transparency in citizen-focused Government of Canada communications. Collective themes surface during discussions on the rationale for transparent communications and situations when transparency has a greater importance. Furthermore, participants draw a strong link between the communications function, transparency and public trust. Participants also point to the irony of how their profession is sometimes perceived as not being transparent, despite the ongoing commitment to “fighting the good fight.” Discussions also surround issues that affect the varying degrees of Government of Canada transparency.

Shared High Value

The study participants were most united when speaking about the value that communicators place on transparency. Unanimously, all study participants attest to placing a high personal value on transparency in Government of Canada citizen-focused communications. Participant 16 elaborates,

I place a very high value on transparency because I think that is essentially the main purpose we have, almost one of the main reasons we have communications in government. Obviously the main driver is to make sure that information gets out to Canadians but it is about sort of demonstrating what the government is doing for Canadians and also making sure that they have the information they need to make informed choices. So I think it's one of the top priorities or values for me. (August 13, 2010)

Participant 14 explains how transparency is a guiding principle in his/her personal life and therefore the value is easily transferred to his/her work life (July 29, 2010). Both participants 15 and 16 explain that the high value they place on transparency led them to their career as government communicators (August 3, 2010; August 19, 2010). Participant 1 and Participant 19 link the high value they place on transparency to their accountability to Canadians (July 12, 2010; August 26, 2010). As Participant 1 affirms, “Always bottom line, we are a public service. We work for the citizens of Canada and we have to always remember that” (July 12, 2010).

Executive Participant 4 elaborates on how communicators can sometimes struggle a bit with transparency, wondering whether the Government should be communicating more; “amongst communicators I think there is an inherent bias towards the value of transparency because that is what we do, we want to talk, we want to communicate, we want to provide information, we want to share it” (March 17, 2011). Executive Participant 1 explains transparency is equally important to all communicators, however, it is expressed and sought out differently: “I [as an experienced communicator] miss the days when we could speak to reporters, but the younger ones miss the fact that they can’t use the instruments [e.g. social media]. So, we miss two different things, but we’re both missing this transparency part” (August 11, 2010). Transparency, while it is not always possible, is a “valuable goal” (Interview 12, July 27, 2010). Building on

this, Participant 16 explained that communicators place a high-value on transparency, although sometimes at the senior advisor level or lower “we can’t always make things work how you would like to” (August 13, 2010).

When discussing the value of transparency, Participant 6 raised the matter of those who leak information, often in the name of transparency and accountability:

I certainly take strong issue with people in government, communicators and others, who leak information thinking that they’re doing the right thing. I think that government needs to manage the information that it provides to a certain extent and there is some information that if provided under the wrong context skews public perception. (July 16, 2010)

Rationale for Transparent Communications

Two main reasons for transparent or open government communications were raised in the initial discussions on defining transparent government communications: facilitating access to services and being accountable to citizens. Participants continue to share more in-depth rationale for transparent communications.

Democracy and due diligence.

Executive Participant 3 asserts that transparent and open government communications are “paramount:”

The role of the government is to ensure democracy/law and at the very highest level it is important to practice what one preaches. The whole point of government communications is inform and engage citizens – this is the role of government and democracy. (January 12, 2011)

Transparent communications help to ensure that Canadians are better informed, hold their government to account and then able to act upon these opinions when it

comes time to vote (Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 7, July 19, 2010).

Demonstrating due-diligence is an additional reason why the government must be transparent in its communications with its citizens (Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 19, August 26, 2010). “[Citizens] are paying for these services so they should know. They should be able to know what exactly it is that their government is doing with their tax dollars and whether they are getting good value for service” (Interview 2, July 13, 2010).

Essential information.

Executive Participant 2 tells us, “One of the biggest assets of the government is information. Sharing this information facilitates access to programs and services” (August 26, 2010). If citizens are not aware of programs or services, they are unable to apply or benefit (Interview 10, July 22, 2010; Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010). Of crucial importance is the fact that the Government sometimes is dealing with “life and death information” (Interview 8, July 20, 2010). Examples of these situations include providing health-related information for First Nations communities or infrastructure information, such as the development of the ice roads, in remote northern communities (Interview 8, July 20, 2010).

Ramifications of not being transparent or being perceived as not being transparent.

Participant 10 affirms that the Government pays the price when it is not transparent with its citizens: “the message is clouded by the fact that you weren’t

being transparent about it” (July 22, 2010). He/she provides the example of releasing a news release on a Friday evening, which could make it seem like there is something to hide. “The same thing goes with something that’s a much larger process, like an advertising project or a website... If you’re not clear how the website is designed, if the information isn’t presented in a clear way, people tend to interpret that you’re trying to hide something. Regardless of whether or not that’s your intention” (Interview 10, July 22, 2010).

Increased Need for Transparency

Crisis situation.

Transparent communications are most important during crisis situations (Interview 3, July 13, 2010; Interview 12, July 27, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Executive Interview 3, January 12, 2011). In fact, the ABCs of crisis communications are to “tell people what you know, when you know it” (Interview 13, July 29, 2010). Executive Participant 3 says that crisis situations are

...when we tend to lean towards being less transparent and we get ourselves into trouble – we turn on the spin. Sometimes, you have to share the bad news. Open and transparent communications can still be measured communications – there is a way to address the situation from a transparent standpoint. There is a need for spokespeople, whether communications or in the case of a crisis situation first responders to have media training. (January 12, 2011)

Furthermore, research indicates that particularly during a crisis situation there is a positive correlation between the more open and transparent you are and the more credibility that is associated with your communications (Interview 12, July 27, 2010). When the information is not available, it is best to be honest, “level with

people” and say: “We’re not sure yet what this means, but we’re looking into it and as soon as we do have some information we’ll be sharing it with you”

(Interview 13, July 29, 2010). The more information that can be provided to the public also makes the public more receptive to receiving directions and precautionary measures from the Government (Interview 15, August 3, 2010).

Correcting an error.

A transparent approach is also of greater importance when the Government has made an error and it needs to be corrected (Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 16, August 13, 2010; Interview 18, August 19, 2010). “When the public perception can be negative towards something it is important to be proactive and transparent just so that it doesn’t seem like we are trying to hide something” (Interview 18, August 19, 2010).

Audience dependant.

Certain audiences are more stringent when it comes to transparent communication requirements – specifically stakeholders and the media. “With stakeholder communications, I think that we have a much larger role with regard to being transparent and the degree to which we need to be open. If we are counting them as stakeholders, they have a key interest in our business and we have to respect that” (Interview 1, July 12, 2010). On top of expecting more detailed information, it is more likely that stakeholders will have a greater knowledge of the issues and understanding of the context, which facilitates a better understanding of the information that is provided (Interview 12, July 27, 2010).

With regard to the media, the provision of clear and transparent information helps prevent additional questioning (Interview 9, July 20, 2010). “The media that cover our files are sharp and know the issues well” (Interview 5, July 15, 2010).

Intrinsic Link between Transparency and Public Trust

The majority of study participants attest that earning or maintaining public trust plays an important role in their professional practice. Executive Participant 2 tells us that the desire to earn or maintain public trust is part of a communicator’s automatic way of proceeding, whether or not they reflect upon public trust on a regular basis. “Advice that is given is based on this filter [of public trust]. We always try to position government information as reliable and credible” (Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010).

A strong link is made between transparent citizen-focused communications and public trust. Participant 1 correlates the level of appreciation and trust that citizens have towards their Government with the quality and openness of communications that they receive (July 12, 2010). “It is important to be seen as transparent in order to foster public trust. If you want to be seen as credible, reliable and trustworthy, then you also need to be seen as transparent” (Interview 5, July 15, 2010). Participant 7 says the result of transparent communications is that the public feels that the Government is not hiding anything and they are working in their best interest (July 19, 2010). He/she continues to describe the impact of not communicating transparently: “[I]t can create cynicism and the public may not actually be able to access the programs that they need” (July 19,

2010). Executive Participant 3 draws the connection to the boy who cried wolf: “If you are not honest, it affects your credibility. You will not have buy-in or the trust of your citizens” (January 12, 2010). Depending on the mandate of the organization, low public trust levels can even endanger public safety (Interview 18, August 19, 2010).

Participants further elaborate on the impact that public trust has on their day-to-day work. Participant 16 explains, “For us obviously we want to consistently be going out with consistent and clear messaging. That is one way to gain that trust and that is essentially what we are trying to do – we want the public to know that we are a resource of information” (August 13, 2010). One way to negatively affect trust levels is to give the public the impression that you are simply “paying lip service” to their cause or that you are only interested in a photo opportunity (Interview 19, August 26, 2010). Instead, public feedback has to be incorporated and addressed (Interview 19, August 26, 2010). It is also important to not only share the positive information: “If you build the whole picture, this goes back to the transparency, and people are much more willing to forgive and support any actions” (Interview 15, August 3, 2010).

The recommended communications approach also changes depending on the public’s level of trust (Interview 18, August 19, 2010). “Communicators operate in a world of public perception, a large part of which is trust and it is very important in every decision that we make and advice that we provide” (Interview

17, August 19, 2010). Executive Participant 4 further illustrates the importance of public trust to communicators:

Frankly, the more your public or your audience or your target group or your stakeholders trust you, the more fun our jobs in communications are. If you don't have that trust, you are usually in a position of correcting information, you are reacting, you are responding, you are climbing up the hill rather than going down the other side... Therefore, trust is a significant driver of how we do our job. It has to be fully factored into the strategies and the advice that we give. (March 17, 2011)

While earning public trust is difficult and can take many years of hard work, regaining or rebuilding public trust is significantly more challenging (Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010). It is also difficult to separate the public's trust in the Government from the public's trust in the public service (Interview 4, July 14, 2010).

Perception vs. Reality – Communicators “Fighting the Good fight”

It is ironic that government communicators are often viewed as not being transparent, when in reality transparency is a core value:

The “spin” label that communicators get I think is often given unfairly and it's often given by what I'll call our program clients who are our departmental colleagues who are not in communications. They generally tend to see us as being less pure I suppose than they might be. People often forget that we are also public servants and our reason for joining the public service is probably as pure as the scientist and really we want to inform Canadians and to assist in any way we can. (Interview 13, July 29, 2010).

Participant 8 speaks of a “tug-o-war” that communicators often find themselves in when trying to provide clear and open communications to the public. Negotiations are ongoing with subject matter experts, policy experts, and legal services

(Interview 8, July 20, 2010). “It’s a battle, but it’s a good battle and I keep trying to fight it” (Interview 8, July 20, 2010). Participant 17 explains,

...[A]ll communicators work under the most recent communications policy. From my understanding, our duty to communicate transparently and openly with Canadians stems from that policy. In that sense it has been my experience that we as communications advisors, at every level that I have occupied over the years and that I have seen, we provide advice that is in line with the policy. I guess you could say it’s fearless advice and then loyal implementation. (August 19, 2010).

Communicators speak of encountering resistance to transparency when working with their colleagues in the program and policy areas (Interview 6, July 16, 2010, Interview 7, July 19, 2010; Interview 8, July 20, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Interview 14, July 29, 2010; Interview 15, August 3, 2010; Interview 16, August 13, 2010, Interview 18, August 19, 2010). As an example, sharing information to the scientific community is often secondary to the work that they do (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). “I don’t think they [program area colleagues] put the same value on transparency – not that they are necessarily not trying to be transparent, but they just feel that if it’s not out there then it’s not necessary to put it in the public domain (Interview 16, August 13, 2010). The desire to share information also varies in accordance with the culture of the organization, in some organizations, senior management is even apprehensive about sharing information internally with employees (Interview 7, July 19, 2010).

Issues affecting varying degrees of openness

Privacy, security and cabinet confidentiality.

Study participants consistently explain that privacy, security and cabinet confidentiality affect the Government of Canada's varying degrees of openness. Executive Participant 2 tell us, "The information that is provided is often dependent on the issue. GoC communicators always aim to provide open and transparent information; however, there may be privacy and security concerns that need to be taken into consideration" (August 26, 2010). However, the public does not always understand the legal and privacy restrictions around why certain information cannot be shared (Interview 1, July 12, 2010). Participant 18 attests to the same situation: "People sometimes don't understand that there are reasons why we don't tell them certain information and it is not because we don't want to. In certain cases we can't share the information as we have to protect personal information" (July 12, 2010). Participant 8 provides insight into the importance of not sharing information due to privacy concerns. He/she explains that in the event of the death of a soldier, it is paramount that the family, immediate and extended, be informed before the detailed information is shared with the general public (Interview 8, July 20, 2010).

Several participants explain that the potential of compromising national or operational security is a further reason why certain information cannot be communicated (Interview 1, July 12, 2010; Interview 6, July 16, 2010; Interview 8, July 20, 2010; Interview 12, July 27, 2010; Interview 15, August 3, 2010;

Interview 18, August 19, 2010; Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010; Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011). The threat emanating from sharing the information could be immediate or in the future (Interview 18, August 19, 2010). While operational specifics must be guarded, general information may still be shared with the public, including key messages on the Government's commitment to keeping Canadian's safe (Interview 15, August 3, 2010).

Cabinet confidentiality is a further reason why certain information cannot be communicated (Interview 3, July 13, 2010; Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 12, July 27, 2010; Interview 16, August 13, 2010; Interview 8, July 20, 2010). "We're often in the position of wanting to be transparent and open and sharing the information but we are also still working with sometimes secret or legislative material that has not yet passed" (August 13, 2010). The most common restrictions on making information public often vary from department to department, as a further example, in some situations, there could be impacts on international agreements (Interview 8, July 20, 2010).

Best interest of the public and the Government.

When discussing factors that impact varying degrees of transparency, several participants raise the theme of sharing information that is in the best interest of the public and the Government. Communicators differentiate between what one participant labels "stupid transparency" versus "well-thought out transparency" (Interview 13, July 29, 2010). He/she continues, "We're obviously communicating on issues that we think are of interest to people and that to a

certain degree puts the department in a favorable light”. In this same vein, Participant 5 elaborates on what he/she sees as being “unduly transparent:” “providing information the public does not need in order to make informed choices, or that is irrelevant and may distract or cloud their understanding” (July 15, 2010). There are situations when the Government needs to manage the information that it provides: “there is some information that if provided under the wrong context could skew public perception” (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). While “controlled communications” often carry negative connotations, Participant 12 clarifies that they are not necessarily bad (July 27, 2010). He/she continue to explain that most private and public organizations try to control their messaging and this is acceptable as long as the information provided is not dishonest or misleading (July 27, 2010). Put into the public sector context, Participant 13 points out,

We get our paycheque from the people of Canada, from the Government of Canada; therefore, we do have to try to put a positive light on all issues when we’re communicating. Some people will refer to it as “spin,” which I do take a little bit of an issue with. But it’s implied that while we are being honest in trying to provide information that we’re not going to go out of our way to do ourselves a disservice or to do the department a disservice just in order to, let’s say, answer a reporter’s questions. If the request for information comes into us and it’s quite clear that the person, whether it be media or just the general public, has an ulterior motive, has already drawn their conclusions, as communicators we don’t really go out of our way to paint ourselves into a corner. (July 29, 2010)

Participant 7 tells us that there is a risk to putting the Government of Canada’s reputation in jeopardy through the information that is provided – the public could lose trust in the institution of Government. He/she continues to explain that, “there

could be unnecessary panic if you give too much or too detailed information. I still think that it's better to communicate, it's just the degree to which you do so that is important" (Interview 7, July 19, 2010). There are situations in which too much information "obscures the issue:" it becomes the communicator's role to break it down and provide the public with the need to know information (Interview 8, July 20, 2010). This is closely linked to the strategic role that is played by government communicators. Executive Participant 4 elaborates on what he/she sees as a communicator's role to "counter or question":

When you are doing communications whether you are in government or in a corporation or in an NGO [non-governmental organization], communications by its nature is meant to be a strategic function. Therefore, you are making choices about what you want to communicate about and what you don't. People will view that as inherently negative. Their view is that you have to communicate about everything. Well no, there is only so much space and there are only so many resources. Strategically our role is to try to help the organization meet its business goals and objectives by aligning the communications function and advice with those outcomes. (March 17, 2011)

Transparent communications can be both proactive and reactive (Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 12, July 27, 2010). It is important to assess whether your strategic approach should be one of proactively sharing the information, or whether the information should be prepared for a more reactive approach, if the need is there – in both situations, you have met transparency needs (Interview 4, July 14, 2010).

*Government of Canada Communicators on Incorporating Transparency into
Government of Canada Citizen-focused Communications*

Practical discussions took place with participants on how they facilitate and encourage transparency in Government of Canada citizen-focused communications. The themes that evolved center on advice that is consistently provided to clients, communications best practices, communications tools, and building relationships. Consistently, the advice provided to clients is the “ere on the side of transparency” (Interview 7, July 19, 2010). Participant 18 tells us how he/she encourages clients to be forthcoming:

I think you have to do case management and try to give them concrete examples of how in the past it had been beneficial to be open and transparent and to also give examples of when it didn’t go so well when you weren’t open and transparent. This helps to create that awareness. (August 19, 2010)

Communications Advisors aim to help their clients clearly understand what transparency means and how it should be applied to the communications strategy and woven through the various products (Interview 15, August 3, 2010).

In Keeping with Government of Canada Policies

Several participants raise how the advice that they provide to clients is in keeping with the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* and other related policies, such as the *Official Languages Act* and Federal Identity Program Guidelines (Interview 2, July 13, 2010; Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 6, July 16, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Interview 14, July 29, 2010; Interview 16, August 13, 2010; Interview 17, August 19, 2010; Interview 19, August 26,

2010). In some cases, specialized areas within a department do not necessarily feel that they fall under the same rules as everyone else (Interview 2, July 13, 2010).

An example of a resulting challenge is that these clients do not see the rationale for publishing a document in both official languages when they are communicating with a specialized, unilingual target audience (Interview 2, July 13, 2010). Other participants attest to drawing on the *Communications Policy* when they encounter resistance to the advice that they are providing to clients (Interview 7, July 19, 2010; Interview 14, July 29, 2010; Interview 16, August 13, 2010).

Clear Communications

A communications practice that is consistently impressed upon clients is the need for clear citizen-focused communications – this affects both the format and the language used in communications products.

Participant 15 explains how his/her department has a legal requirement to post detailed and lengthy documents on citizen obligations. In an effort to make this information more accessible and easier to digest, in addition to posting the legally required document, a shorter citizen-friendly version is now also available, which focuses specifically on the information that citizens are looking for (Interview 15, August 3, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to adapt messages according to your medium: information for the public Web site should be written in plain language, whereas a letter to the editor may be more complex, and a submission to a professional journal would be written in a style conducive to the needs and expectations of the target community (Interview 2, July 13, 2010).

“The advice that I give my clients is: make things clearer, more specific, and more concrete, when possible. Answer questions to the fullest extent possible with the information available” (Participant 5, July 15, 2010). Participant 3 explains that he/she tries to help their clients move away from “technical or convoluted” messages towards clear and straightforward wording (July 13, 2010). Participant 19 speaks to the importance of using “plain language” as stipulated in the *Communications Policy*. He/she provides an example: “I remember having a discussion with a policy analyst over the use of the word carcinogenic and they did not understand why we had to change that to “may cause cancer” because for them it was-self evident” (August 26, 2010). Tying the necessity for clear communications to the current environment, Participant 8 says,

We find that in today’s world things are going so fast and people really want to know what do I need to know? What does this mean to me? So, get to the point very quickly and then go into more details, provide direction to where additional details can be, but get the key overarching point very quickly - in a very plain language, simple way that’s not steeped in bureaucratese. (July 20, 2010)

When reviewing communications products, it is important to ask: “does it make sense?” “does it answer the questions?” and, as heard much more frequently in recent years, “will my mother understand this?” (Interview 9, July 20, 2010).

Information Must Be Truthful and Accurate

The provision of honest and accurate information is a key principle that communicators consistently advocate to their clients (Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010). This follows the fact that honesty is listed as a key component of transparency by many of the participants in the study. As an example,

Participant 14 affirms how he/she would substitute the term “honest” for open and transparent communications (July 14, 2010). Participant 1 explains how the key advice that her team gives to clients is: “be honest, be up front and give people time to digest the information” (July 12, 2010). In some cases, there may be more recent information available, however, the Government must always be cautious and share the most authoritative and accurate information at the time of communication (Interview 12, July 27, 2010). Illustrating the accountability of communicators for the provision of truthful information, Participant 13 tells us, “If you’re communicating with people certain information and that information either is found to be inaccurate or full of errors, then obviously you would be accountable as a public servant and as a communicator for having misspoken to a certain respect” (July 29, 2010).

Provide the Public with “Need to Know” Information

The theme of providing the public with “need to know information” was raised several times throughout the interviews, specifically with respect to finding an appropriate balance between transparency and information overload. There is a difference between “government knowledge” and what citizens “need to know” (Executive Interview 3, January 12, 2011). Put another way, “The general public is not interested by all the information the Government of Canada can provide. We need to ensure that our communications are targeted to those interested or impacted by the subject matter” (Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010). In fact,

one of the most challenging aspects about transparency can be finding the appropriate balance (Interview 1, July 12, 2010). Participant 13 elaborates,

Obviously not every announcement or not every statement or not every issue is going to be conducive to a press conference, so you have to manage, you have to gauge the need. Typically there's always a need for some sort of transparency and also managing the timelines. At what point do you say something, at what point do you not say something? When is it appropriate to engage public or media or stakeholders or whomever? (July 29, 2010)

In working with certain client groups, such as a scientific community, there are often misunderstandings about what information is only relevant to their day-to-day jobs and what information is relevant to the public: "It's my job to tell the difference and get the information I need, which involves sometimes reining them in, or extracting the information I can share" (Interview 5, July 15, 2010). In some situations, providing too much information to the public could even result in unnecessary panic, it is the degree to which you communicate that is the most important (Interview 7, July 19, 2010).

Target to your Audience

A basic tenet of good communications is being "hyper-aware" of the needs of your target audience (Interview 1, July 12, 2010). Executive Participant 2 warns, "It is impossible to speak to everyone – otherwise you run the risk of speaking to no one" (August 26, 2010). He/she continues to explain the need "to target communications to the right audience with the right media" (August 26, 2010). Executive Participant 4 tells us "it is the role of matching target and message, target and information" (March 17, 2011). He/she elaborates how

transparency does not become an issue if the information needs of target audiences are being met (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011). Participant 17 elaborates on how targeting information to a specific audience has evolved in a relatively short timeframe:

A significant influence is your target audience and the best way to reach them. It used to be ten years ago when you would think of communicating with Canadians you would automatically think – Grade 8 language, French/English, print, mail-outs, 1-800, web. But now, you ask yourself: ‘who are my stakeholders?’ ‘what’s the best platform?’ And audience and platforms have changed significantly over the course of the last five years with the arrival of social media new tools, such as Twitter and Flickr, for sharing information and for interacting quickly, in a fast environment. (August 19, 2010)

Frequency and Timing

Participants also point to the requirement for frequent and timely communications. When it comes to a new initiative or a policy, communicators are strong advocates of multi-phased approaches that include “communicating early and often” (Interview 4, July 14, 2010). “Timing definitely plays a huge role in the advice that we give to our clients. You want to get it [the information] out of the door as soon as it is ready to be announced” (Interview 16, August 13, 2010). If there are delays in releasing information to the public, it is important that they be reasonable and justifiable (Interview 12, July 27, 2010). Revealing the challenge with providing both accurate and timely information, Executive Participant 2 says, “In an ideal world it would always be possible to provide accurate information in a timely fashion. However, sometimes it is necessary to take additional steps to ensure accuracy of the information” (August 26, 2010).

Two-way Communications

Study participants discuss two-way communications as a best practice for facilitating transparent communications with citizens. Participant 3 attests, “If you have a better understanding of what your audience is looking for through an ongoing dialogue, you are definitely being more transparent and showing that you are open to change at the same time” (July 13, 2010). Several participants confirm that through social media, two-way communications are becoming easier and are becoming more prevalent. “In the future there will be no excuses for the Government not to be more in tune with their clients and therefore more transparent about what they are hearing and what they are doing to respond accordingly” (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011).

Currently, however, many participants attest that their organizations do not sufficiently engage the public in two-way communications (Interview 1, July 12, 2010; Interview 8, July 20, 2010; Interview 11, July 22, 2010; Interview 12, July 27, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Interview 18, August 19, 2010; Executive Interview 3, January 12, 2011). “We still do tend to view communications as communications out – as one-way. I would suggest that the majority of the work that we do is traditional one-way communication” (Interview 12, July 27, 2010). Several participants cite that two-way communications are very resource dependant (Interview 1, July 12, 2010; Interview 5, July 15, 2010; Interview 11, July 22, 2010; Interview 14, July 29, 2010; Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010). It is also apparent to some that the lack of two-way communications,

through public opinion research and consultations, may be due to political considerations. In terms of public consultations, a “turf war” is said to exist between the policy/program area and communications; as evidence of this, courses on citizen engagement are part of the policy curriculum at the Canada School of the Public Service (Executive Interview 3, January 12, 2011).

Participants provide numerous examples of traditional and new types of two-way communications that their department participates in, which include: ministerial correspondence, media relations, responding to Web site enquiries, 1-800 enquiry lines, exhibit opportunities, and most notably, the use of social media, stakeholder relations and research.

Social media.

Online communications and social media tools are continuing to emerge to help communicators incorporate transparency into citizen-focused communications. Social media are seen as “a great way to reach people, to be proactive and open” (Interview 18, August 19, 2010). Participant 12 says,

I think the whole Web 2.0 movement and the involvement with social media, is certainly very innovative and revolutionary in some ways for government. I still think that we have a long way to go, but we’re starting to think about it and certainly starting to incorporate these concepts of two-way communications in our communications planning. (July 27, 2010)

Social media are a tool for more “flattened” or direct communications with target audiences, as messages are not filtered through a third party (Interview 5, July 15, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010). However, they are a tool that the Government is moving towards slowly and is not ready to embrace fully. “I think the challenge

for governments in any of these new technologies is finding the right fit and purpose. This will take people inside the organization who understand the technology, who understand the media and then an organization that can adapt and adjust and identify where those natural fits are” (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011). However, support for its use and overcoming these challenges is apparent from Communications management. Participant 5 confirms, “There is a genuine interest to develop Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, RSS feeds as communications tools” (July 15, 2010).

Some departments are at the forefront of the social media revolution and are taking advantage of its benefits (Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Interview 17, August 19, 2010). Participant 19 shares the success story of a Facebook portal, wherein an online community was created and non-governmental members started to take ownership of the file and comment on behalf of the Government. In one situation, a member of the online forum was posting very negative about his or her experience with the program. Other online members stepped in and said “well you know this is not the case for everyone. Have you tried to look at this resource or that resource?” In the end, constructive dialogue took place (Interview 19, August 26, 2010).

Stakeholder relations.

The importance of building strong relationships with stakeholders is raised within the context of incorporating transparency into communications practices. Communications is a way to foster positive relations with key stakeholders

(Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010). A department's success at communicating transparently is directly related to its success at building positive relationships with its stakeholders and meeting their needs (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011). Participant 6 explains how his/her department participates in stakeholder relations:

We employ an awful lot of stakeholder engagements, so speaking opportunities in schools, universities, other forums, as well there are multiple feedback mechanisms through the web and through ministerial inquiries and things like that. There's a very high priority put on responding to those things ... There's a huge amount of interaction with community leaders and community groups. I think it's very well managed. (July 16, 2010)

Research.

Public environmental analysis and research are essential to transparent communications practices; communication activities can be a waste of time and effort, if you do not know your audience (Executive Interview 3, January 12, 2011). Executive Participant 3 provides an example,

When working in a region, a literacy study showed us that we were communicating with Canadians with the second lowest level of literacy in Canada. Our communications activities and products had to take that into consideration. This is how research and targeting to our audience offered considerable value added. (January 12, 2011)

Similarly, Participant 6 speaks to the importance of learning about one's target audience, whether through public opinion research, monitoring, or finding out about education levels, etc. This research helps to gauge how much information they can digest on a particular topic or issue (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). Several participants, however, attest that significantly less public opinion research is

taking place within the current environment, which is attributed to political will and fiscal restraints (Interview 7, July 19, 2010; Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Interview 15, August 3, 2010; Interview 17, August 19, 2010; Interview 18, August 19, 2010; Executive Interview 1, August 11, 2010).

Government of Canada Communicators on Elements, Structures and Practices that Facilitate and Limit the Practice of Citizen-focused Communications

Participants had considerable information to share on the elements, structures or practices that impact the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications. A number of key themes emerged, including: the importance of communications being informed, the need for management support, the impact of political influence, the rapidly changing environment, the approval process, the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* and resources for the communication function.

Communications Needs to Know

In order for communicators to be able to facilitate the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications, they need to know about the matter that is under question. “As communicators, we are not the subject matter experts. We do not work in the program or policy area. We have to have the information in order to be able to communicate about it transparently” (Interview 7, July 19, 2010). Participant 18 asks, “Transparency has to happen at all stages, internally too, because if we as communicators are not properly informed of the issues and if we don’t have all of the information, how can we be transparent?” (August 19,

2010). High-level information is not sufficient for communications advisors to be able to perform their work, rather they require details on issues and comprehensive background information (Interview 11, July 22, 2010).

Several participants expressed frustration about communicators being the “last to know,” specifically when there is a lack of support for sharing certain information with the public (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). From Participant 10’s perspective, communications experts are either brought in too late or often policy teams are actually leading on the drafting of communications materials. He/she warns, “So, you’re presenting to Ministers your communications plan, they sign this document and you’re basically rolling out this plan and nobody’s really thought about it strategically or had a chance to really look at it from a communications perspective” (Interview 10, July 22, 2010).

Two practices are essential, in order to ensure that communicators are at the table: “the role of the communications function constantly needs to be explained and promoted and communicators must continue to develop strong relationships with program/policy officers and management teams so communications advice is always sought-after” (Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010). Certain participants have seen an evolution of the role of communications. “At one point we were sort of seen as we come in at the end. In the last five years we have really tried to do a lot of work with our clients to help them understand how we fit into the process and I think most of the clients have an understanding of our role and we are brought in very early on often times so that has been really

great” (Interview 16, August 13, 2010). Participant 6 agrees that in certain departments and agencies communications has “achieved its place at the table”:

Different organizations, depending on their mandate and their mission, may view communications as kind of the typical spin-doctor, the guy that you’re going to fire an e-mail to and he’ll put something up on a Web site. We’re sometimes seen as being there to get the word out, not necessarily to pre-position or strategise or anything like that. We’re taken as a secondary consideration, but I think some organizations have taken the step to include corporate communications as a primary activity. So those organizations are significantly more successful. (July 16, 2010)

Further maximizing the ability for communicators to facilitate transparency is an equal seat at the senior management table (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011).

Client trust.

Closely linked to the importance of communicators being at the table, is the necessity for communicators to obtain the trust of their clients. “It’s important that I have the trust of my clients as well as the trust of the public. We are professionals, we know what we’re doing, and we have tools and research to be able to put that face out there” (Interview 15, August 3, 2010). Participant 6 elaborates, “It is essential to establish those relationships to make sure that when you are providing guidance or advice to somebody, that they will be trusting of you and take your advice and guidance” (July 16, 2010).

Management Support

More than the majority of the study participants mentioned management support as a key enabler to their ability to facilitate transparent citizen-focused

communications. This support is necessary from both the communications management level and from the leader of the organization.

In order to make government communications more transparent, it takes a strong senior management team that will support its communicators. There is a need for senior management that has a willingness to speak truth to power and draw boundaries. This has a trickle down effect through the department. (Interview 7, July 19, 2010)

Explaining why management support is so important, Participant 19 affirms: “If your senior management encourages you share information and to provide that feedback then that’s one of the mechanisms that facilitates it. But conversely, if you have a very risk adverse DG or usually ADM, then you might self-sensor yourself because you don’t feel like it’s appropriate to share.” Participant 2 is in agreement, directly linking the amount of risk that senior management is willing to take, with how open and transparent communications efforts may be (July 13, 2010). The detrimental effect of leaders who do not appreciate open and transparent communications is that these leaders are “more likely to be guarded [with information], which then precipitates mistrust by citizens” (Executive Interview 3, January 12, 2011). Ultimately, it can come down to the leader of the department and as a result of the way that departments are structured, this can either facilitate or hinder the provision of transparent communications to citizens (Interview 8, July 20, 2010).

Many participants spoke highly of their current senior communications managers. To illustrate this,

My bosses here – the upper level management of communications within my department – understand the need for openness and transparency and are seen to be a credible voice. So when there are issues or challenges with regard to the information that we can share, either coming down from our minister's office or from the Privy Council Office or the Prime Minister's Office, my bosses get it. They know what we can or we cannot do and I think that makes a huge difference in the way we can communicate with Canadians in general. (Interview 13, July 29, 2010)

Participant 19 ties management support for transparency to the culture of the organization. He/she explains that at his/her department the Deputy Minister and Associate Deputy Ministers all run active blogs that are open to comments from all employees across the department. "Everybody comments from very positive to very negative things. It's a channel that people now have and issues can be addressed. It's also fostering that culture of transparent communication internally" (Interview 19, August 26, 2010).

Participant 16 also reports that the support for transparency comes from his/her Deputy Minister, and additionally, the Minister's office. He/she elaborates, "We don't often see a situation where it's like "well we are not going to say anything about this. [Rather] [i]t's trying to facilitate a way to get the message out" (August 13, 2010). There are challenges, however, especially when management is busy. Even when senior management's support for transparency is strong, communicators need to know the right mechanisms and the right people and even be "very pushy" if they want to ensure that their products move forward (Interview 18, August 19, 2010).

Political Influence

The impact of political influence on transparent Government of Canada communications emerged repeatedly throughout the study. The line between government and political communications is permeable: communications is referred to as a “close relative to politics” (Interview 13, July 29, 2010). In fact, in this “delicate zone” government communicators are seen as having a dual responsibility – one to their Minister and one to Canadians (Interview 11, July 22, 2010). Ethical dilemmas are sometimes faced by communicators, specifically those working in ministerial communications: “Your primary responsibility is to the public because you’re a public servant, but also your main duty is to provide services to the minister’s office, so that does create a bit of a conundrum” (July 27, 2010). The size of the department and the frequency of relations with the Minister’s Office also affect political influence.

I used to work at a small department and even junior communications officers would have regular contact with the Minister’s Office personnel. The relationships become too friendly and this can blur lines between non-partisan and political communications. There are two different value sets at play and it can hurt transparency. Our focus should be on communicating about programs and policies, whereas a Minister’s Office is interested in re-election and favourable communications about the Minister. (Interview 7, July 19, 2010)

Context of a minority government.

All interviews took place within the third session of the 40th Parliament – a minority government with the Right Honourable Steven Harper as Prime Minister of Canada and leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. Many participants

spoke to the impact of working in support of a minority government (Interview 2, July 13, 2010; Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 7, July 19, 2010; Interview 10, July 22, 2010; Interview 11, July 22, 2010; Interview 12, July 27, 2010; Interview 13, July 27, 2010; Interview 17, 2010, August 19, 2010; Executive Interview 1, August 11, 2010; Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011). The perception of the Government being “even more closed to the public and less transparent” is directly equated to the fact that they are a new minority government (Interview 10, July 22, 2010). A rationale for the different operating environments of majority and minority governments is offered:

...[I]f you have a majority government, that government has a much greater amount of liberty in terms of how they conduct their business and their communications, what types of policies they enact, what they prioritize, than a minority government. In the situation that we work in now, I think that we have to be a lot more cognizant and we have to be a lot more aware of the political realities and those political realities do have a certain influence on the way we communicate. (Interview 12, July 27, 2010)

Another repercussion of a minority government is the challenge of passing legislation through the House of Commons. According to Executive Participant 4, improving transparency in Government of Canada communications necessitates a culture shift, wherein more information and data is regularly and automatically made available to the public. This would necessitate the amendment of the *Privacy Act* and the *Access to Information Act* and the passage of such amendments would be “very rare” for a minority government (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011).

Historical repercussions.

History is another factor that may have resulted in what is perceived as a tentative approach towards transparent citizen-focused communications. Participant 6 offers his/her interpretation and explains that the lack of political desire to speak and engage with Canadians may be as a result of the negative repercussions of past matters that were discussed very openly. “The Gun registry was a very public thing that we spoke on frequently, the Government was engaged in and supportive of, and then issues came out of that and we ended up in a poor situation and having to deal with it” (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). He/she lists the “sponsorship issues” as another example of why both communicators and the Government as whole are “more tentative in terms of getting out and speaking on these things” (Interview 6, July 16, 2010).

Focus on key messaging and controlled communications.

Eight participants specifically used the adjective “controlled” to describe the current Government’s approach to communications.

They stick to the key messages and that’s it. The majority of the communications to Canadians are controlled from the very top. This makes it “easy” to do our jobs, but we are not necessarily communicating well when we only communicate key messages. (Interview 7, July 19, 2010)

This is reiterated by Executive Participant 1 who explains,

The public service itself has been asked to remove itself from having this interface and ongoing dialogue with Canadians and leave more room for politicians and politicians know more about messaging than information, of course. I’m sure if you ask Canadians about transparency, well, they don’t want to hear messages they want to hear information, facts. (August

11, 2010)

The Economic Action Plan Web site is provided as an example of a communications effort that focused on key messages and photo opportunities. While he/she explained that the site itself was a “phenomenal idea” and technologically, it was quite advanced, it was actually quite difficult to find information. There was also a negative reception to the number of photographs of the Prime Minister, as opposed to other Ministers (Interview 10, July 22, 2010).

Another topical example provided during the course of the interviews was the Government’s handling of the long-form census debate and the resignation of Statistic Canada’s Chief Statistician (Interview 8, July 20, 2010; Interview 10, July 22, 2010, Interview 13, July 29, 2010, Executive Interview 1, August 11, 2010).

The optics of the situation are described by Executive Participant 1:

If you look at the debate around the Census right now... and there’s a story today, it’s very timely, about how PCO [the Privy Council Office] has tried to control the messaging out of the former chief statistician. I mean, that does not bode well for Canadians who look at the communications function of government as being a controlling function more than a facilitating function. (August 11, 2010)

Controlled messaging is further discussed with regards to Ministerial Event Proposals or MEPS. Participant 11 explains how a significant amount of government communication is written in order to ensure that the approved messaging is followed: “The Ministerial Event Proposal (or MEP) is an example. It’s a good strategic tool where you can say “okay here’s the event, here’s the focus and here are the key messages that we are trying to convey” (Interview 11,

July 22, 2010). He/she continues to explain how information control also affects relations with the media.

In terms of media relations, where before we used to have departmental spokesperson who would be able to speak with the program, provide them with media training and facilitate their interaction with the media. The program representative would not speak on political matters, but there was a good interaction and balance. Whereas now all answers get run through the process and then we get them approved by the Minister's office. In the end, the messaging is very controlled. Yes we do communicate the proper information, but the process is very heavy. (Interview 11, July 22, 2010)

Lack of trust in public servant communicators.

In addition to the necessity for trust between communicators and their program clients, several participants spoke to need for improvement in the trust between elected officials and the public service. Participant 2 explains how she read a telling editorial about how elected officials believe that there is an anti-Conservative bias in the public service and that public servants are perceived as being less cooperative. "I think that can hinder their trust and the ability for us to communicate and give advice" (Interview 2, July 13, 2010). "Micromanagement from the political side" is how Participant 4 labels the situation. "Because I think by calling it micromanagement it avoids talking about lack of trust" (Interview 4, July 14, 2010). This lack of trust is not only apparent in one department or against one function, it affects the communications function, the program area, and public service leadership in general (Interview 15, August 3, 2010). Ongoing questioning from Minister's Offices, "are you sure that this has been checked," "has everybody

approved it,” makes communicators feel as if they have to be defensive about their professionalism and ability to do their jobs (Interview 15, August 3, 2010).

Positive changes that have been introduced.

While the criticism of the Government’s approach to openness and transparency was acknowledged, a point was made to raise the positive measures that had been adopted by the Government that affect transparent communications: namely, the *Federal Accountability Act*, a “revamped” *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* [most recently amended on August 1, 2006], Common Look and Feel for the Internet 2.0, and the initiation of updates for future Common Look and Feel standards (Interview 17, August 19, 2010). Based on these examples, Participant 17 is of the opinion that “I think there certainly is a good sort of structure and policy foundation for upon which officials and public servants may base their decisions and their advice” (August 19, 2010).

Approvals

A significant number of participants raised the approval process, both within their department and within the Government of Canada, as an element that significantly affects transparent citizen-focused communications.

Negative impacts of the approval process.

The following are representative descriptors of the how participants view the approval process: “very, very taxing” (Interview 18, August 19, 2010); “long-winded” (Interview 9, July 20, 2010) “mammoth bureaucratic process ... not nimble, not quick” (Interview 5, July 15, 2010); “long and cumbersome”

(Interview 4, July 14, 2010 and Interview 5, July 15, 2010); and “like climbing Mount Everest” (Interview 1, July 12, 2010). According to the study’s participants, the approval process often has negative outcomes. In many cases, the message that the public receives is less clear and contains less detailed information (Interview 3, July 13, 2010). “The more people that get involved the more watered down a message may get or an activity may become” (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). Further affecting transparency, a political spin has often been added once the message has gone through approvals at the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister’s Office (Interview 3, July 13, 2010). Participant 2 elaborates,

So there is a lot of control on what we do right now in terms of approvals and that can also hinder transparency and the accuracy of the message. I guess it’s the two worlds colliding – the political and the bureaucratic. So you have your program needs and desires that don’t necessarily always mesh with your political needs which can affect transparency in what we get to say or what we get to communicate to Canadians” (July 13, 2010).

The timeliness of a message is also affected by approvals. Participant 1 worries whether the information is timely once it has received the required approvals (July 12, 2010). Participant 14 sheds light on the number of required approvals in his/her department/agency: “Our approval process needs some work, but I don’t think we’re alone in that. On communication products that I write, there are 12 signatures. That’s not just within this department, it’s right up to PMO [Prime Minister’s Office]” (July 29, 2010). That said, he/she explains that during an emergency or large-scale event, there is a more flattened approval process. The time a communications product spends in approvals, may be due to differing priorities:

So you want to get some information out and you are trying to get approvals and it's just not moving for whatever reason. People have other priorities, it's stuck, MO, PCO, and we just sort of can't get the movement on the file but it's got to go and obviously we identify the risks associated with being delayed and things like that. Sometimes the machinery of government and the mechanics of it don't work for us in a lot of ways and this can have an impact. (Interview 16, August 13, 2010)

Timeliness specifically affects how media requests are dealt with. "If we're trying to compete in a world where it's instant 24/7 news, and we're responding to a media call six weeks later, we're no longer a news item. We've already said no comment from the organization" (Interview 15, August 3, 2010).

Participant 13 elaborates on how approvals are lengthier for complex issues:

Generally the hottest issues or the issues that land on the front page of the newspaper, those are often extremely complex issues that touch upon many areas of either government or even within the department, which tends to make our response even slower, which is ludicrous in many ways because if it's a big deal we've got to get out there quickly. Unfortunately, if it's a big deal it means let's say three associate deputy ministers have to be consulted or branches have to be consulted rather than just the one. So you just tripled, at the very least, your approval time. Therefore, if a reporter's deadline is today at 5:00 and a call comes in at 11:00... There's no way. (July 29, 2010)

When a reporter's deadline is missed due to approvals the result is that the Government's position or information is not shared with the public (Interview 4, July 14, 2010).

Social media, a recurring theme throughout the study, was also raised as a communications medium that is not conducive to long approval processes, specifically due to the emphasis on ongoing dialogue (Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Interview 17, August 19, 2010; Executive Interview 1, July 29, 2010). With social

media, it is essential to “react quickly, concisely and get your product out”

(Interview 13, July 29, 2010). Participant 17 elaborates on this challenge:

Obviously the whole purpose of those [social media] tools is to be timely which, although it is one of our goals and one of our policy objectives, we are not as good at it as our stakeholders are. Certainly in a lot of the cases our stakeholders are much more efficient at the use of those new tools that are out there. (August 19, 2010)

Approvals help to ensure accuracy.

Although typically prefaced by feelings of frustration, communicators also recognize the importance of having content approved and admit that it can be “helpful” (July 22, 2010). “[I]t [the approval process] can also save you as so many eyes are looking at the product from every angle. This helps to ensure that you don’t say something that is inappropriate or not-factual” (July 15, 2010). Participant 9 agrees that he/she would not want to release something that had not been verified by subject-matter experts (July 20, 2010). Participant 2 admits, “It would be nice to have a flatter approval system but everybody says that. I am not sure how I would feel if I was the manager, maybe I would feel like all of those approvals are necessary” (July 13, 2010). Executive Participant 2 points out, “Sometimes it is necessary to take additional steps to ensure accuracy of the information” (August 26, 2010).

Rapidly Changing Environment

A key theme raised by participants throughout the interviews was the impact of the rapidly changing environment on the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications and their work environment. Social media was

consistently raised as a medium that will enable transparent communications with citizens. “Social media, for sure, has shaken up the landscape in the past five years like nothing else has and it forces us to do better, to do things quicker” (Interview 13, July 29, 2010). However, the Government of Canada is not ready to take full advantage of this medium. For some, the speed at which the Government is adopting social media is “inexcusable.” “We are adopting it very slowly, because we’re forced to. We should have been leading this, but instead we are dragging behind, trying to catch up and by the time we get to blogs, they will be passé” (Interview 4, July 14, 2010).

The frenetic speed at which changes to the communications environment are occurring, also expand beyond the introduction of social media. “The speed of media, of communications, of the Web and not simply government communications in the way the Government communicates with Canadians but the speed of communications as a medium is impacting the way the Government does business altogether” (Interview 17, August 19, 2010). The media sphere is overcrowded as Executive Participant 1 explains,

The environment has changed so much. When I started in communications you never heard about Ministers trampling over each other with major announcements in one day. But now, there’s so much out there that the announcements have to be controlled because you don’t want three or four ministers making major announcements in one day because the space they have in the media sphere is limited so they can’t overcrowd it because there’s too much stuff, too much noise. So, there was a requirement for it to be better managed but perhaps we’re over managing it at this point. (August 11, 2010)

The Government needs to compete in a world characterized by an instant 24/7 news cycle (Interview 15, August 3, 2010). The luxury of having eight hours to correct an error before the next news cycle is gone (Executive Interview 1, August 11, 2010).

The use of traditional media is also affected. Recent stats show that the time the general population spends watching television has been surpassed by the time spent on the Internet (Interview 17, August 19, 2010). More and more Canadians do not want to hear from their Government in the traditional ways – through the mail or an advertisement on television (Interview 17, August 19, 2010).

Communications Policy

Participants raised the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* both as a facilitator for transparency and also as a tool that is in need of updating.

Fundamentally, the *Communications Policy* is “a good tool,” it is “what we need” (Executive 1, August 11, 2010). Typically, the policy is used to reinforce good communications practices when communicators run into obstacles with their clients or clarification is required (Interview 7, July 19, 2010; Interview 14, July 29, 2010; Interview 16, August 13, 2010). “I will often refer to [the *Communications Policy*] with clients is to reinforce, if I am seeing some resistance to getting information out, to reinforce our obligations” (Interview 16, August 13, 2010). A strong importance is placed on familiarity with the *Communications*

Policy; however, it is acknowledged that it is “not always applicable” and “not always possible” (Interview 18, August 19, 2010).

Requirement for change.

Changes to the *Communications Policy* could help communicators further support transparent communications by increasing the use of available tools [social media] and being more proactive and engaging in the corporate communications approach (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). There is a requirement to update the *Communications Policy* for a “social media world because communicating though social media is just not the same as communicating one-on-one” (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011). Currently, the work that is being done in social media is “building on the experiences of others” and while a formal policy is not in place, there is considerable sharing of lessons learned amongst the communications community (Interview 12, July 27, 2010). “I think that the more opportunities there are to share information obviously that certainly does encourage citizen-focused communications” (Interview 12, July 27, 2010).

Executive Participant 4 explains how reflecting social media realities will not solve all challenges currently faced by communicators:

[S]trengthening the policy would help but the reality is that some of those other restrictions and constraints are still there – we continue to deal with privacy considerations, political considerations, legal restrictions, official languages, security considerations and so on. Even with social media, these considerations remain. But I think a change in policy would at least send a signal that we need to start being more proactive in this whole area and working our way through those issues. (March 17, 2011)

A further challenge with a policy on the use of social media will be that it will affect its efficiency and timeliness (Interview 2, July 13, 2010).

Internal to departments – communications policies and tools.

In addition to the government-wide *Communications Policy*, Participant 6 and Participant 9 spoke of departmental communications policies and tools that facilitate their transparent citizen-focused communications efforts (July 16, 2010; July 20, 2010).

In our department there is a very strong set of communications policies that are established within the parameters of the *Government Communications Policy*... It sets the box within which we work, it also tells us when we can get out of that box and under what parameters and to what extent.
(Interview 6, July 16, 2010)

At another department, a procedures manual helps improve consistency in quality from communications products that are produced at headquarters and in the regions (Interview 9, July 20, 2010). The manual also provides assistance, especially for communications who are new to the department, on how to specifically write for the department's publics (Interview 9, July 20, 2010).

Resources

The link between sufficient resources and transparent citizen-focused communications efforts was raised several times by interview participants. Due to limited resources, choices must be made when deciding where to focus communications efforts (Interview 13, July 29, 2010; Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010; Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011).

Innovative and engaging communications approaches – limited by resources.

When raising the requirement of engaging the new generation through outreach and interactive communications approaches, Participant 11 regretfully concedes, “you need to have experts, resources and the capacity” (July 22, 2010). As seen earlier in this chapter, two-way communications are specifically cited for being resource-heavy. In addition to the resources being available, they must be attributed to the proper functions. If the structure of public sector and private sector communications shops were to be compared, Participant 17 posits that there would be significant discrepancies: “Very few com shops across government at this time have a very strong social media team. It’s only a handful still. Whereas if you look at the private sector, any big company in the private sector, that is where they are putting their money — web and social media in particular” (August 19, 2010).

Resources dedicated to transparency.

While fully supportive of transparent citizen-focused communications, Participant 5 acknowledges that “transparency is a lot of work” (July 15, 2010). He/she explains,

Think of all of the communicators who are dedicated specifically to reactive communications... We are required to participate in reactive communications – otherwise it looks like we are too closed. But there’s an opportunity cost to reactive communications: program staff may be unable to do their everyday work while communicators may be unable to do long-term planning/plan for pro-active communications. Likewise, proactive transparency requires resources. Think about all of the work and resources that go into proactive disclosure: compiling, editing, auditing, approving

and translating the spreadsheet reports that are posted online... We would be better off if we dedicated these resources to other initiatives. (July 15, 2010)

A significant amount of time and money is also dedicated to fulfilling and supporting Access to Information requests (Interview 7, July 19, 2010). Participant 5 agrees, “There is an opportunity cost to everything. We have limited resources in communications. If I have an urgent ATI communications assessment on my plate and a media request, I have less time to develop a response to the media request” (July 15, 2010).

Impact of strategic review.

Participants also spoke to the impact of strategic review on resources for communications. Sometimes, communications and outreach programs are targeted for initial cuts (Interview 11, July 22, 2010). Participant 14 explains how for major, high-priority projects, they will have the resources that they need, however, for everyday requests, they are tight (July 29, 2010). At his/her department, during the first round of Strategic Review, three positions were cut from the Communications Branch (Interview 14, July 29, 2010). In addition to the impact of Strategic Review, Participant 17 also points to the current environment, marked by an economic recession and fiscal restraint. He/she explains how public servants are required to be extremely diligent about how resources are managed. “Monster” communications shops have diminished in size and significantly more services are being outsourced (Interview 17, August 19, 2010).

Size of communications shop.

The size of the communications shop is an influencing factor in terms of resources available and attributed to communications. Large communications shops sometimes suffer from lack of integration – making it difficult to know where, within the shop, communicators can access the internal resources they need (Interview 5, July 15, 2010). Participant 7 relates the size of the department to the resources dedicated to communications:

A really small department can be hindered due to lack of resources, they will likely not have a public opinion research team or a fully staffed ministerial correspondence group. On the other hand, a really big department can face challenges due to increased layers of approval. I would say that a mid-size department, one with approximately 2000 employees, is best at two-way communication. They likely have sufficient resources and designated groups (media relations, public opinion research) to be able to conduct two-way communications and could therefore do a better job. (Interview 7, July 19, 2010)

Communications expenditures – under scrutiny.

Spending public funds on communications efforts is often criticized. Participant 3 explained how his/her department has grown significantly over the past ten years and the group accomplishes a lot more than was possible in the past. While more resources could be put to good use, it was acknowledged that “I don’t think you’re ever going to see much more come to communications. I don’t know if the public would view that favorably investing that much more” (July 13, 2010). The genesis of this scrutiny may be at the political level,

We need to inform Canadians, but there’s this belief, I guess on the political level, that Canadians will not accept it if we spend their money trying to inform them of what they need to know. Personally, I’m not sure

whether that's true. Therefore our resources are very restricted. There is overdone frugality. And to some extent, our ability to learn new methods of communication is also impeded. (Interview 4, July 14, 2010)

Participant 10 points out the irony of spending upwards of millions of tax payers dollars on a program, that requires participation from the public, but then limiting the amount that is spent on communicating with the public about the program.

“What’s wrong with communicating about a program where you have things that you actively need Canadians to get involved in, like the Renovation tax credit.

Why would you not? If we don’t advertise, how would the public know that it exists?” (July 22, 2010). Participant 15 also acknowledges the reticence to spending money on communications, citing public opinion research as an example; however, as he/she points out that “sometimes it’s better to spend the money up front because you save the money down the road” (August 3, 2010).

Conclusion

The following understanding of transparent government communications emerged from the interviews: *Transparent government communications help to ensure accountability to the public and facilitate access to services. The key attributes of transparent government communications are: accuracy/truth, clarity, format, timeliness, “need to know information” and dialogue. Government communications do not have to be proactive to be transparent and transparency does not have to come at any and all costs.* This understanding of transparent government communications encapsulates the key attributes as discussed by the study participants.

The chapter was then divided into three sections, each presenting the findings according to one of the study's three sub-research questions. First, we learned of the consistent value that is placed on transparency by Government of Canada communicators. Secondly, best practices were brought forward on how communicators facilitate and encourage transparent government communications. Thirdly, participants discussed specific elements, structures or practices that facilitate and limit their practice of transparent citizen-focused communications. During these discussions the impact of the political environment was impressed upon us.

The following chapter focuses on analyzing these findings in relation to the study's main research question: Does the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication adequately represent the value placed on transparency by Government of Canada communicators and the factors that limit and facilitate the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications?

Chapter 5: Analysis

This chapter investigates the study's main research question: Does the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication adequately represent the value placed on transparency by Government of Canada communicators and the factors that limit and facilitate the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications? To this end, the interview findings presented in the previous chapter will be analysed to determine the adaptability of the transparency model to the Canadian context. As explored in the review of relevant literature, the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication is illustrated as a triangle. The base represents valuing transparency and the three sides represent organizational support, communication practices and provision of resources. In order to test the model, the findings will be investigated according to each of the model's components and within the context of the literature.

Valuing Transparency

In keeping with their research finding that government communicators strongly value transparency, Fairbanks et al. (2007) designed the transparency model with valuing transparency as its base. They explain that transparent communications can only occur when communicators have a strong belief and understanding of the importance of transparent communications (Fairbanks et al., 2007). Consistent with the model and the findings of the Fairbanks et al.

investigation, the government communicators interviewed for this study unanimously attest to the high value that they place on transparency. The participants declared their own professional commitment to transparency, as well as the commitment of their communications colleagues. And yet, what was perhaps more telling were the discussions surrounding how they work to convince others within their organizations, including legal, program and policy experts, of the virtues of communicating transparently. To this end, one participant speaks of a tug-of-war (Interview 8, July 20, 2010), another “fearless advice and then loyal implementation” (Interview 17, August 19, 2010).

The participants easily explained why they place such a high value on transparency. The rationale included: facilitating access to services, being accountable to Canadians, upholding democracy, demonstrating due diligence, and providing essential information. Consistently, these rationales for transparent communications also prevailed throughout the literature. Just as Rose (2000) had explained the increasing importance of ensuring that citizens have access to information as governments move more and more away from service delivery, Executive Participant 2 told us, “One of the biggest assets of the Government is information” (August 26, 2010).

The fundamental link between transparency and citizen trust was strongly delineated in the literature (Piotrowski, 2009; O’Neill, 2006). This is in keeping with the findings as they explore various themes relating transparency and trust. Notably, the result of communicating transparently is that the public feels that the

Government is not hiding anything and that the Government is working in their best interest (Interview 7, July 19, 2010). In building audience trust, we learned that it is important to share both good and bad news (Interview 15, August 3, 2010) and that a transparent approach is most important in the event that the Government has made an error (Interview 4, July 14, 2010; Interview 16, August 13, 2010; Interview 18, August 19, 2010). Heise (1985) echoed the importance of sharing both positive and negative information in his public communication model (1985, p. 209). The findings, however, do stress the importance of “well-thought out transparency” (Interview 13, July 29, 2010) and point to the necessity of sometimes managing the information that is provided: “there is some information that if provided under the wrong context could skew public perception” (Interview 6, July 16, 2010). When discussing the value that communicators place on transparency, it is important to further investigate the “strategic function” of government communications, which is defended in the findings as a necessary requirement due to limited resources and space. We were specifically told that communicators need to make choices about what matters are communicated about and that while this role may be viewed as negative it is part of a communicator’s job, which is to question (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2011). What is most important is that the information that is provided is honest and not misleading (Interview 12, July 27, 2010).

The findings present that while the communicators strongly value transparency, it is nonetheless a value that they sometimes struggle with. It is not

always possible to communicate as transparently as a communicator may like. Correspondingly, the elements represented by the three sides of the model affect the facility to which transparency can be achieved (Fairbanks et al., 2007).

Communication Practices

In developing their model, Fairbanks et al. (2007) explain, “In order to achieve transparency, communicators must adopt practices that promote information sharing” (p. 33). Supporting the inclusion of communication practices as a key component of the transparency model, the Government of Canada communicators also discussed at length the communications practices that they employ and champion in support of transparent citizen-focused communications. These best practices include engaging in clear communications (format and language), providing honest and accurate information, providing the public with “need to know” information, targeting to audience needs, communicating frequently and in a timely fashion and engaging in two-way communications.

The findings show agreement with the Fairbanks et al. study on the communications practices that facilitate transparency. Notably, the necessity for two-way communications as raised by Fairbanks et al. is also consistent with public relations theory, namely the two-way symmetrical communications model, which is predicated on research and feedback from target audiences (Grunig, 1997). Likewise, Heise (1985) called for “accurate, systematic and timely feedback on public policy issues from the entire community” in his public communication model (p. 208). However, the findings uncover that the two-way

model is not reflective of the reality of the majority of current Government of Canada communications practices. Several participants echoed the lamentation by scholars that the Government of Canada does not sufficiently engage in two-way communications. The findings attribute the prevalence of one-way communications to a lack of resources and political sentiment. E-communications, however, provide hope for improved two-way communications efforts as it increases opportunities for citizen engagement, facilitates more timely and proactive communications and eliminates filtering by a third party. In the future, as proficiency and comfort with the medium increases the Government will not be able to avoid soliciting and responding to feedback (Executive Interview 4, March 17, 2010).

Within their presentation of the model, Fairbanks et al. (2007) stressed the importance of working to build strong relationships with an agency's publics. The findings are consistent in outlining this important facet of transparent communications. It is clear that the participants see different audiences as having different information needs. As an example, this participant speaks of respect,

With stakeholder communications, I think that we have a much larger role with regard to being transparent and the degree to which we need to be open. If we are counting them as stakeholders, they have a key interest in our business and we have to respect that. (Interview 1, July 12, 2010)

We are cautioned against trying to speak to everyone, which is an ineffective communications approach; rather, there is a need "to target communications to the right audience with the right media" (Executive Interview 2, August 26, 2010).

Correspondingly, research and public environmental analysis are outlined as

communications practices that are vital to transparency, further supporting the structure of the model.

Organizational Support

The transparency model is further built on the necessity of an organizational culture that supports transparent communications (Fairbanks et al., 2007). Just as Fairbanks et al. uncovered the need for communicators to have a seat at the management table and strong internal communications, these themes were prevalent in the findings. Clearly stated, “We [communicators] have to have the information in order to be able to communicate about it transparently” (Interview 7, July 19, 2010). It is evident in the findings that communicators see the need of working hard to establish their trustworthiness and expertise within their own organizations. Notably, the importance of working closely with managers is again stressed both by Fairbanks et al. and in the research findings. Heise (1985), too, called for communications to become a key senior management responsibility. When leaders do not support transparent communications approaches, the effects can be detrimental. There is optimism for the Canadian context in that many participants spoke highly of the commitment of their current senior communications managers to transparency.

Organizational Mission

Organizational support for transparency is also linked to the organization’s mission (Fairbanks et al., 2007). It is clear in the findings that the context of a communicator’s work environment affects how transparency can be applied. The

comparison has been drawn between working at the Department of National Defence or the Privy Council Office and Parks Canada where there would be fewer questions about what could be shared (Interview 12, July 27, 2010). Furthermore, we have learned that organizational openness to transparency affects not only citizen-focused communications, but also the degree to which information is shared internally with employees (Interview 7, July 19, 2010).

Participants explained that there are valid privacy, security and cabinet confidentiality reasons as to why certain information cannot be shared. Falcione and Adrian also attest that government communications must be in keeping with legal obligations (1997). However, Heise (1985) cautions that “The right to privacy and the need to protect data genuinely essential to national security are the most prominent of a limited number of categories of information that may be withheld” (p. 210).

Politics

Scholars offer insight into the negative affects that politics can have on transparent citizen-focused communications efforts. Kozolanka (2006) warns against the politicization of federal government communications and questions the appropriateness of informational products and activities that become overtly promotional. In the same vein, we saw how Kerneghan and Siegel (1985) caution public servants against “performing the minister’s role of defending, or speculating on, public policy” (p. 504). Heise (1985), too, calls for the separation of partisan communications from the Government’s communications strategy. The

challenge that remains for professionals is determining where to draw the line between partisan and informational communications (Kozolanka, 2006). It is not surprising that politics are a prevalent theme in both the Fairbanks et al. (2007) study and in the findings of this research. The model appropriately accommodates the impact of politics under the element of organizational support. The findings, almost overwhelmingly, emphasized the challenges faced by communicators in what was labeled a “delicate zone” wherein they serve their Minister and Canadians (Interview 11, July 22, 2010). Through the findings it became clear that this situation has been exacerbated due to the context of the minority government, which has perpetuated an environment where communications are more “controlled” and there is evidence of lack of trust in public servant communicators.

The study’s findings are consistent with Falcione and Adrian’s (1997) view that “People may pretend that politics are not present because the concept carries pejorative connotations, but in truth politics are usually only thinly veiled” (p. 721). The study’s findings call for increased trust in the communicator’s professional abilities and less “micromanagement” from elected officials and their staff. There are further synergies between the literature and the study’s findings with regard to the role played by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and the Privy Council Office (PCO) in government communications. Barker (2008) spoke about PMO necessitating final approval of all communications products; Kozolanka (2006) labeled PCO as having “overtly political overtones” (p. 353). The findings

shed further light on how communicators see this affecting transparent citizen-focused communications and place significant emphasis on the negative repercussions that approval processes have on transparent citizen-focused communications. It was uncovered that following the approval process the information may be less clear, less detailed and may be couched in political spin.

Provision of Resources

The findings raised the link between sufficient resources and transparent communications as a key theme, thereby supporting the inclusion of provision of resources as a key element of the transparency model. The communicators explained how being transparent is resource heavy and that there is a limit to how far resources can be stretched. As an example, two-way communications, including those conducted through social media, are specifically cited as being both a communications practice that facilitates transparent communications and one that is heavily resource dependant. Likewise, improving the Government's ability to harness social media in its communications is an activity that requires resources and expertise.

Additionally, in certain instances, the fulfillment of transparency requirements (such as preparation for proactive disclosure reports and Access to Information requests) affects a communicator's ability to complete his/her core requirements in a timely fashion. Thomas (2009b) provided similar insight into the public sector work environment when he explained, "Layering new accountability requirements on top of existing arrangements has produced a more complicated,

confusing, and seemingly more demanding accountability environment for both politicians and public servants” (p. 35).

Furthermore, the two studies resulted in similar discussions on the scrutiny that is placed on communications expenditures. This serves to limit the resources attributed to communications and ultimately affects transparency. There is an obvious disconnect between the importance that the study’s participants place on resources for their function and what they perceive to be the level of acceptance by the public. Justifying communications expenditures continues to be a challenging task. Garnett labels this the “performance predicament:” “The costs of government communication are generally easier to measure than are its benefits, making it difficult to demonstrate a favorable performance ratio” (Pandey and Garnett, 2006, p. 37).

The interview findings and literature on Government of Canada communications both also raise the historical tendency for communications shops to become the target for cuts when resources are tight (Ferguson, 1997; Redmond & Likely, 2002). Within the current context, communicators discussed the impact of “strategic review” within their own shops. Likewise, Redmond & Likely reported on the 2001 communications management renewal program that was conducted following cuts to communications resources and personnel in the 1990s (2002). Kozolanka (2006) explained that these cuts to the public service forced the communications function to be “strategic” (2006, p. 349).

Finally, it is worth noting that all government resources are closely tied to the current economic environment, which is marked by an economic recession and fiscal restraint. As such all public servants, not only communicators are required to be extremely diligent about how resources are managed (Interview 17, August 19, 2010).

Conclusion

The themes that were raised during the course of the research for this study have now been grouped under the key components of the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication. The analysis of the findings show the model's flexibility and adaptability to the Canadian context.

Communicators work within an ever-changing environment. A key strength of the model is its flexibility which allows for rapidly changing communications mediums and tools. While the model was first explored by Fairbanks in 2005, only six years later, in 2011, social media has evolved as an important communications medium. All three key components of the model – communication practices, organizational support and provision of resources – are required to leverage this new medium in order to further facilitate the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications. This example demonstrates the adaptability of the model to the current context.

The flexibility of the model is further shown in that it is able to encompass the importance that the participants place on the *Government of Canada Communications Policy*, despite the fact that it was developed based on research

conducted in the United States, where a national government communications policy does not exist. The findings show that the policy serves to provide organizational support for transparent communications, something that could be further strengthened by revisiting the policy within the social media context.

This analysis has investigated the adaptability of the transparency model to the Government of Canada communications environment. By using the components of the model as categories for analysing the key themes of the findings, it has been possible to determine that the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication does adequately theorize the value placed on transparency by Government of Canada communicators and the factors that limit and facilitate the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications. The analysis further pointed to the accurate inter-relation of the model's components and its key strength of flexibility. The now proven accuracy of the model within the Canadian environment offers a number of areas for future exploration that will be presented in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The concluding chapter of this study provides a summary of findings and discusses the limitations of the research. This is followed by an investigation into potential implications for professional communicators and concludes by suggesting avenues for future academic research.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study are based on 23 qualitative semi-structured interviews with Government of Canada communications professionals. The participants included 12 senior Communications advisors, 7 communications managers and 4 executives from a variety of departments and professional experiences. The conversations were rich with detail allowing the researcher to more fully comprehend the working environment and professional challenges faced by Government of Canada communications professionals. The study participants were unified in their commitment to their profession and the strong value that they place on transparent citizen-focused communications – a value that resonated throughout the interviews. However, their ability to facilitate the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications is impacted by a number of factors.

The Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication developed by Fairbanks et al. served as a strong framework for investigating the Government of Canada's approach to transparent citizen-focused

communications from the perspective of communications professionals. The study found that the key components of the model – communications practices, organizational support and provision of resources – encapsulate the factors that influence the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications by the Government of Canada.

Discussions consistently centered on the implications of organizational support on transparent citizen-focused communications. Internal communications, management support, politics and organizational mission were key factors that surfaced in the findings and were in keeping with the findings in the Fairbanks et al. study. The context of the minority government was another influencing factor arising from the findings affecting organizational support for transparency.

The inter-relation of the model's components also proved to be evident in the findings. The practice of two-way communications is an example of the workings of the model. The premise is first that communicators value transparency. Next, they see two-way communications as a practice that facilitates transparent communications as it is predicated on dialogue and feedback. Then they work within an organization with structures and a culture that supports transparent communications. And finally, they are provided with the resources to engage in the two-way communications.

The study's findings are further contextualized through an investigation into relevant communications literature. Heise's Public Communication Model, which was one of the founding blocks for the Three-dimensional Model for

Transparency in Government Communication supported the composition of the model and in many cases echoed the counsel provided in the findings. Discussions on the politicization of government communications and the nebulous zone within which communicators sometimes work were accounted for in the literature. The findings provide a voice to these concerns and rich descriptions of a communicator's work environment within the current context.

Implications of the Findings for Professional Communicators

Facilitating the practice of transparent communications can be a very challenging task. At the outset of each interview, each participant was asked to define transparent or open communications. Almost half of the participants explained that it is a difficult concept to define owing to the lack of a definition in the *Communications Policy*, the evolution of the definition based on the political context, and the varying interpretations of transparency depending on who you ask and the context of where they work.

The findings show that open internal communications channels are an organizational characteristic that facilitates transparent citizen-focused communications. On this basis, it is recommended that the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication be used as a catalyst for conversations amongst communicators on transparency. Through these discussions, factors that influence transparency could be brought to the forefront and various scenarios could be discussed. As Participant 12 explained,

I think that it's important to empower individuals to recognize when there are ethical dilemmas and to be able to raise those and at least have them

recognized and discussed. There needs to be a certain amount of trust and freedom accorded to individuals throughout the process so that they can at least raise their concerns to their manager, to their director, to their director general or just to their immediate supervisor so that at least those issues can be addressed and discussed with the persons involved and a decision can be made. (July 27, 2010)

A starting point for these discussions could be determining a more standardized definition of transparent communications, which could be included in future iterations of the *Government of Canada Communications Policy*. The understanding of transparent government communications that was derived from this research could be used as a springboard. A further catalyst for these discussions could be the implications of social media on transparency.

Limitations of the Research

This study is not without its limitations. Relative to the number of Government of Canada communicators, the sample size of 23 communicators is limited. However, given the data collection method of qualitative semi-structured interviews, a larger sample size could not have been effectively managed.

The researcher was in a privileged position with regards to accessing her sample population. Soliciting participants would have been very challenging without starting by calling on her own professional contacts. A partnership with the Communications Community Office would have offered interesting opportunities for reaching a more diverse target audience and for fuelling other conversations, outside of this research, on the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications. Without having a forum to issue a call for participants, it is very possible that there are other communicators who could have quite enjoyed

participating in the research, had the opportunity been made available to them. The researcher was pleased that several communicators who participated in this study explained how they found the experience to be positive and worthwhile.

A further limitation of the research is that the sample population was comprised only of communicators working in the National Capital Region, excluding regional communicators. Several participants explained that regional communicators would have very interesting information to share on their unique work environments. Given the data collection method, however, it was determined that this additional variable would have produced an unmanageable depth of data.

Possibilities for Future Research

The topic of transparency in government communications is vast and worthy of study due to the primary role of government in the lives of its citizens. This thesis has aimed to make a modest contribution to scholarly enquiry; however, the number of areas within this topic that warrant further enquiry are likely even greater than at the outset of this study.

Social media was consistently raised on a number of occasions within each interview. This is in contrast to the Fairbanks et al. study, conducted just a few years prior. Participants explained that harnessing its power will offer opportunities for increasing transparency. Investigating these opportunities and developing a model theorizing how to do so within the government environment would be a valuable research experience with practical and scholarly implications.

A further venue warranting exploration is the perspective of regional communicators. The Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication, now theorized within the Canadian context, could serve as the theoretical framework in support of this investigation.

Quantitative research methods could also build on this research, thereby reaching more diverse and larger sample populations and further testing the model. These studies could take place at the federal, provincial or local levels of government. Work conducted by Hawes (2010) at the American city level could help shape this research.

The research findings have shown the adaptability of the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication to the Canadian context and also raise high-level questions about transparent communications and power.

A government wields significant power in the lives of its citizens. As a result of this power, the matters that it communicates about are often of great sensitivity and importance. Examples include health-related information for First Nations communities, guidelines on how to access essential social services or infrastructure warnings for remote communities. The risks in failing to communicate transparently about such matters of greater salience are many. Citizens may not gain access to an essential service or the public may lose trust in their government, which can then threaten the health of the democracy.

The nebulous line between politics and government communications was a common theme that surfaced throughout the findings. Where should the power lie in deciding on what and how and when the government must communicate with its citizens? If public servant communicators are called on to rebuild public trust through their professional function, but their efforts are stalled as a result of lack of resources, approval processes and politics, how are they able to effectively fulfill their responsibilities? Communications is a strategic function, but the needs of the audience should be central to decisions on communications strategy. If the information needs of an audience are met, transparency issues are resolved. Will social media be an impetus for change? Will it serve to shift power towards the audience, citizens of Canada, thereby facilitating the practice of transparent citizen-focused communications by professional Government communicators?

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval Notice

File Number: 10-09-09

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 05/25/2010



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
 Service de subventions de recherche et d'éthologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

Ethics Approval Notice Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Evan	Potter	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Kori	Ghargari	Arts / Communication	Student Researcher

File Number: 10-09-09

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: Investigating Transparency in Government of Canada Citizen-focused Communication

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
05/25/2010	05/24/2011	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:
 N/A

File Number: 10-09-09



Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 05/25/2010

Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Service de subventions de recherche et d'éthologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:
http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:
http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des arts
Communication

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Arts
Communication

Appendix B: Sample Informed Consent Form

Title of the study:

*Investigating Transparency in Government of Canada
Citizen-focused Communications*

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Kori Ghergari (Student Researcher) under the direction of Professor Evan H. Potter (Thesis Supervisor), within the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to investigate transparency in Government of Canada citizen-focused communications from the perspective of Government of Canada communicators.

Participation: My contribution to the study will consist of participating in an interview conducted by the Student Researcher. I will be asked to answer questions based on my personal perspective and professional experiences in Government of Canada communications. The interview will be scheduled to last approximately 30 minutes. I will also be invited to review a transcript of the interview in order to ensure that the information I provided is accurately reflected. If I make modifications to the transcript, my modified version will replace the original transcript that was provided by the Student Researcher.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I provide detailed information in an interview setting. The questions could cause emotional discomfort; however, all efforts will be made to ensure that I am as comfortable as possible in the interview setting. I am aware that if ever there is a question that I am not comfortable or unable to answer, I may move on to the next question without further inquiry. This study is being conducted without the authorization of Government of Canada officials. There is a potential for some risk of social marginalization in the workplace if I am found to be highly critical of my employer; however, all efforts will be taken to ensure my anonymity during the conduct of the research and in publications.

Benefits: I will not experience any personal benefits as a result of my participation in this study. However, my participation in this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge about transparency in Government of Canada communications.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information that I will share will remain strictly confidential and that the information that I provide will only be used for the abovementioned study. The information that is collected will be stored securely, password protected and only the Student Researcher and Supervisor will have access to the information. If I choose to review the transcript of the interview, the document will be sent to an e-mail address of my choice and I will receive the password to open and modify the transcript in a separate e-mail. My anonymity will be protected in the following manner: I will be assigned an interviewee number and I will be referred to by this number throughout the duration of the study, in the thesis and in any publications that may result from this research. If I am quoted, any identifying information will be removed. In order to ensure that I am not indirectly identifiable due to my position or title, only generic titles will be used, if a title is required or relevant.

Conservation of data: Both hard copy and electronic data that is collected for this study will be kept in a secure manner in a locked drawer in the Student Investigator's primary residence (during the data collection phase) or in a locked cabinet in the Supervisor's office. Only the Student Researcher and Supervisor will have access to the data. Once the thesis is complete, the data will be conserved for a period of five years, prior to it being destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time. If I choose to withdraw, all data that I have provided until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed immediately.

Audio Recording: The Student Researcher has requested permission to record the interview, in order to help ensure that the information that I provide is accurately documented. I understand that I am under no obligation to agree to this request.

I have indicated my decision, by marking the appropriate box with an X.

☐

I consent to the audio recording of the interview.

☐

I do not consent to the audio recording of the interview.

Acceptance:

I, _____, agree to participate in the
 abovementioned research study conducted by Kori Ghergari, M.A. Student in the
 Department of Communication, under the supervision of Professor Evan Potter.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the Supervisor of the study or the
 graduate student at the following coordinates:

Supervisor:

Professor Evan Potter
 Department of Communication

Graduate Student:

Kori Ghergari
 Department of Communication

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the
 Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa at the following
 coordinates:

Address:

Telephone:

E-mail:

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:	Date:
Researcher's signature:	Date:

Appendix C: Interview Participants

Interview / Participant #	Participant's Title	Interview Date
1	Senior Communications Advisor	July 12, 2010
2	Senior Communications Advisor	July 13, 2010
3	Communications Manager	July 13, 2010
4	Communications Manager	July 14, 2010
5	Senior Communications Advisor	July 15, 2010
6	Communications Manager	July 16, 2010
7	Senior Communications Advisor	July 19, 2010
8	Communications Manager	July 20, 2010
9	Senior Communications Advisor	July 20, 2010
10	Senior Communications Advisor	July 22, 2010
11	Senior Communications Advisor	July 22, 2010
12	Communications Manager	July 27, 2010
13	Communications Manager	July 29, 2010
14	Senior Communications Advisor	July 29, 2010
15	Senior Communications Advisor	August 3, 2010
16	Senior Communications Advisor	August 13, 2010
17	Communications Manager	August 19, 2010
18	Senior Communications Advisor	August 19, 2010
19	Senior Communications Advisor	August 26, 2010
E1	Communications Executive	August 11, 2010
E2	Communications Executive	August 26, 2010
E3	Communications Executive	January 12, 2011
E4	Communications Executive	March 17, 2011

Additional information on study participants:

- Sex: Of the 23 total participants – 11 male, 12 female
- Language profile:
 - All study participants are bilingual and all interviews were conducted in English to facilitate transcription and analysis.
 - Of the 23 total participants, 8 identify French as their mother tongue, and 15, English

Appendix D: Recruitment text template for Working Level Communicators

Initial message

Hello [name],

[Personal introduction based on relationship with potential participant, for ex. It has been too long since we last spoke, I see that you are now working at X, etc.]

In addition to working as a Senior Communications Advisor, I am currently a part-time graduate student in Communication at the University of Ottawa. In this capacity, I am researching the perspective of Government communicators on the value and practice of transparent Government of Canada citizen-focused communications. To do so, I am conducting interviews with experienced communications professionals, in order to obtain an accurate understanding of the current communications environment.

I am hoping that you may be interested in being a part of the study. Your involvement would consist of participating in an interview that would last approximately 30 minutes. Throughout the study your confidentiality and anonymity will be assured and your name will not appear in any documentation that is produced.

With your contribution, the results of this research could have practical applications and facilitate further research interest in Government of Canada communication. Please let me know whether you would be interested in participating. I can then provide you with additional information and we can go about setting up an interview time that would be convenient for you. Of course, I will completely understand if you would prefer not to participate.

Feel free to e-mail me at this address or to call me if you would like to discuss further. Thank you very much for considering this request. I hope to hear from you soon.

Kori

Follow-up Message

Hi (name),

It's great news that you are interested in participating in the study. As promised, I wanted to provide you with some additional information.

The three research questions that I am investigating through this study are:

- How do Government of Canada communicators value transparency?
- How do Government of Canada communicators incorporate transparency into their communication practices?
- What elements facilitate and limit the practice of transparent Government of Canada citizen-focused communications?

With regard to the term “citizen-focused communication” I am referring to communication between the government and its citizens. It therefore includes communication campaigns, consultations, e-communications, media relations, stakeholder relations, ministerial communications, etc.

The interview should last approximately 30 minutes. I can meet you at your work or an off-site location. Would you possibly be available to meet sometime during the next two weeks?

I have also attached an Informed Consent Form. This is a standard process followed at all Canadian universities when primary research is being conducted that helps protect participants. I would ask that you review the form and let me know if you have any questions. I can bring a copy for your signature when we meet.

Thank you again for being a part of this study. I am looking forward to meeting with you.

Kori

Appendix E: Recruitment text template for Communications Executives

Initial Message

Hello [name],

[Personal introduction based on relationship with potential participant / research conducted on the Executive / contact with a member of the Executive's team]

In addition to working as a Senior Communications Advisor, I am currently a part-time graduate student in Communication at the University of Ottawa. In this capacity, I would like to request your guidance and input on a study that I am conducting with Government of Canada communicators on their perspective on the value and practice of transparent Government of Canada citizen-focused communications.

Your participation in this academic study would involve a 30 minute interview. Your feedback will help to ensure an accurate understanding of the current government communication environment. I am hoping that the results of this research could have practical applications and facilitate further research interest in Government of Canada communication. The quality and breadth of the results of the study would be greatly improved as a result of your input.

Please let me know whether you would be interested in participating and I will send you more detailed information. I would also be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Kori

Kori Ghergari
M.A. Student
Department of Communication
University of Ottawa

Follow-up Message

Hello (name),

I am very pleased to hear that you are interested in participating in the study.

To date, I have had very interesting conversations with a number of senior communications advisors and managers from a variety of departments and agencies. The three research questions that are specifically being investigated are:

- How do Government of Canada communicators value transparency?
- How do Government of Canada communicators incorporate transparency into their communication practices?
- What elements facilitate and limit the practice of transparent Government of Canada citizen-focused communications?

With your input, I will also be able to explore whether perspectives on transparency in Government of Canada communication differ depending on experience and scope of responsibilities. Once the final report is complete, I would be happy to send a copy to your office.

I am hoping that you would be able to devote 30 minutes to our meeting. Would you like me to contact your assistant to schedule a time that would be convenient for you?

Attached to this e-mail you will find an Informed Consent Form. As you may know, this is a standard process followed at all Canadian universities when primary research is being conducted that helps protect participants. I will also bring a copy of this form for your review and signature when we meet. I would like to stress that throughout the study your confidentiality and anonymity will be assured and your name will not appear in any documentation that is produced.

If ever you have any questions or require further information, please contact me. Thank you again for agreeing to participate. I am looking forward to learning from your unique perspective and experiences.

Kori

**Appendix F: Fact sheet for Communications Executives
Academic Study on
Transparency in Government of Canada Citizen-focused Communications
from the Perspective of Government Communicators**

Current Status of the Study

To date, the Student Researcher has met with over 15 Senior Communications Advisors and Managers from a variety of departments and agencies to discuss their views and gain insight on the Government of Canada communications environment.

With the input and guidance of Communications Executives, the study will also be able to explore whether perspectives on transparency in Government of Canada communication differ depending on experience and scope of responsibilities.

Research Questions and Interview

This study is investigating three research questions:

- How do Government of Canada communicators value transparency?
- How do Government of Canada communicators incorporate transparency into their communication practices?
- What elements facilitate and limit the practice of transparent Government of Canada citizen-focused communications?

The interview questions are based on these three themes.

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes, subject to the availability of the interview participant. Participant confidentiality and anonymity is assured throughout the study. Additional information is provided on the Informed Consent Form, a standard process followed at all Canadian universities when primary research is being conducted.

Rationale for Study

Currently, there is limited policy research on issues relating to transparency in government communication in the federal public service. The results of this research could have practical applications and facilitate further research interest in Government of Canada communication. Copies of the final report will be available upon completion.

Contact Information

Kori Ghergari, Student Researcher
Department of Communication, University of Ottawa

Appendix G: Interview Guide

Interviews with Communications Advisors / Managers (IS-05 and IS-06)
and Communications Executives
on Transparency in Government of Canada Communication

Introduction (approx. 5 minutes)

- Thank you very much for meeting with me today.
- Rationale for study:
 - limited policy research on issues relating to transparency in government communication in the federal public service
 - you will help to ensure an accurate understanding of the current government communication environment
 - the results of this research could have practical applications and facilitate further research interest in Government of Canada communication.
- The three research questions that I am investigating are:
 - How do Government of Canada communicators value transparency?
 - How do Government of Canada communicators incorporate transparency into their communication practices?
 - What elements facilitate and limit the practice of transparent Government of Canada citizen-focused communications?
- When I talk about citizen-focused communications, I am looking specifically at communication between the government and its citizens. It therefore includes communication campaigns, consultations, e-communications, media relations, stakeholder relations, ministerial communications, etc.
- Consent form / Confidentiality
 - As I mentioned, this is a standard process followed at all Canadian universities when primary research is being conducted that helps protect participants.
 - Have you had a chance to review it? Any questions?
 - I'll remind you that your confidentiality and anonymity is assured throughout this study:
 - Your name will not appear in any documentation that is produced as a result of this research.
 - If ever there is a question that you would prefer not to respond to, just let me know and we will go on to the next question.
 - You also have the option of withdrawing from this study at any time.

- You will have noted on the consent form that I would like to record this interview to help me capture the information that you are providing. [If ok] I will now start recording our conversation.
- The interview portion of our meeting is expected to take 25 minutes. Please let me know if time restrictions ever become a concern.

Questions (approx. 25 minutes)

- 1) We often hear about the importance of transparent or open communication. How would you describe transparent or open communication?

RQ1. How do Government of Canada communicators value transparency?

- 1) What place does transparency have in government communication practices?
 - i. What issues can impact the varying degrees of openness of government departments/agencies?
- 2) What are the benefits of transparent citizen-focused communications? What are the drawbacks?
- 3) What value do you personally place on transparency in citizen-focused communications?
 - i. Is this a value that is shared by your colleagues in communication? What about your colleagues in program areas?

RQ2. How do Government of Canada communicators incorporate transparency into their communication practices?

- 1) How does the concept of transparent/open communication impact the way that you recommend that your clients/organization communicate with its target audiences?
 - i. When are transparent communication practices the most important?
- 2) What role does earning or maintaining public trust play in your professional practice?
- 3) To what extent does your audience influence how much and what type of information that your organization shares?

- i. How would you describe your department/agency's relationships with its publics?
- 4) Is there information about your department/agency that the public does not understand? How is this handled?
- 5) What role does two-way communication play in your organization's communications strategy/approach?
 - i. How is stakeholder input/feedback responded to/incorporated?

RQ3. What elements facilitate and limit the practice of transparent Government of Canada citizen-focused communications?

- 1) What structures/elements/practices within your department/agency are the most helpful to your practice of citizen-focused communications?*
- i. What structures are the most limiting?
- 2) What structures/elements/practices within the Government of Canada are the most helpful to your practice of citizen-focused communications?*
- i. What structures are the most limiting?
- 3) What would need to change, in policy or practice, to make citizen-focused communications more transparent?

Close

- 1) If required and time permitting: Now I'd like to ask you about a few things that you told me earlier...
- 2) Before we wrap up, is there anything further you'd like to discuss? Is there anything that we've missed that would be important for me to know?

That concludes the questions that I have for you. Thank you again for sharing your expertise. If you would like I can send you a transcript of our discussion for your review. Would you like to receive a copy of the study once it has been defended and published?

Note: Questions marked with an asterisk will be slightly modified when meeting with Communications Executives. In order to change the nuance from their practice of communication to the direction they provide on the practice of communication.

Appendix H: Codebook

#	Code Group and Name	Number of Occurrences
Group 1: Description		
1	General	23
2	Accountability link	8
3	Accuracy / truth	7
4	<i>GoC Comms Policy</i>	7
5	Dialogue	6
6	Difficult to define	7
7	Format	3
8	Need to know information	7
9	Timeliness	6
10	Clear	6
11	Part of a bigger picture	1
12	Access to services	2
13	Transparency - not at any cost	10
14	Transparency - not necessarily proactive	4
Group 2: Transparency Drawbacks		
15	General	7
16	Restricts your own communications	4
Group 3: Restrictions to Transparency		
17	Accuracy	3
18	Not in the best interest of the public or government	12
19	Privacy or Legal or Cabinet Confidence	12
20	Security	6
Group 4: Transparency - Importance		
21	High importance - media	3
22	High importance - general	17
23	High importance - responsibility to the general public	12
24	High importance - GoC perspective	5
25	High importance - stakeholders	1
26	Increased importance - crisis	5
27	Increased importance - direct impact on individual	4
28	Increased importance - error	3
29	Increased importance - financial	5

Group 5: Value		
30	Comms community value - high	12
31	Comms community value - gray area	4
32	Comms community value - leaks	1
33	Personal value - high	19
34	Program value - higher than comms	1
35	Program value - need for advice or coaching	14
36	Program value - general	1
37	Policy value	4
Group 6: Advice to Clients		
38	Follow policies	1
39	Frequency and timing	5
40	Be forthcoming	8
41	Clear communications	6
42	Target information to audience's needs	9
43	Communications practice - research	3
44	Communications practices - general	2
Group 7: Audience Influence and Understanding		
45	Audience influence - low	2
46	High audience influence - general public	8
47	High audience influence - stakeholders	11
48	Misunderstood information - lack of consistency	1
49	Misunderstood information - general	11
50	Communications practice - research	3
51	Communications practices - general	2
Group 8: Trust and Relationship Building		
52	Relationship building with publics - positive	4
53	Relationship building with publics - negative	4
54	Role of public trust - high	29
55	Role of public trust - not direct	6
Group 9: Communications as a Strategic Function		
*	Transparency - not at any cost	10
*	Transparency - not necessarily proactive	4
*	Restrictions - not in the best interest of the public or government	12
*	Key theme - balance / information overload	5

Group 10: Two-way communications

56	Two-way communications - challenge	6
57	Two-way communications - growing	5
58	Two-way communications - lack of	8
59	Two-way communications - media relations	4
60	Two-way communications - public enquiry line	5
61	Two-way communications - social media	12
62	Two-way communications - stakeholder groups	13
63	Two-way communications - multiple examples	5

Group 11: Facilitating Transparency

64	Facilitator - Communications needs to know	15
65	Facilitator - <i>GoC Comms Policy</i>	5
66	Facilitator - Communications community	6
67	Facilitator - Management support	16
68	Facilitator - Other departmental resources	1
69	Facilitator - Social Media	8
70	Facilitator - Technology	4
71	Facilitator - Actual Subject Matter	2
72	Facilitator - ATIP	1
73	Facilitator - Com shop itself	9
74	Facilitator - link with internal communications	8

Group 12: Limiting Transparency

75	Limit - GoC-wide approvals	11
76	Limit - Internal to department approvals	10
77	Limit - <i>GoC Comms Policy</i>	4
78	Limit - Communicating simply	3
79	Limit - Focus on key messaging	13
80	Limit - Lack of tools	1
81	Limit - Negative view of bureaucracy	2
82	Limit - Political influence / environment	34
83	Limit - Restricted spokespeople	12
84	Limit - Risk communications	7
85	Limit - Technology	3
86	Limit - Internal trust - Communicators need to be trusted by their clients	10
87	Limit - Internal trust - Public service needs to be trusted by the political level	7
88	Limit - Geographical separation	1

Group 13: Impact on Transparency		
89	Impact on transparency - Resources	11
90	Impact on Transparency - Timelines	4
91	Impact on Transparency - GoC-wide Other policies / codes	7
92	Impact on transparency - fear of transparency	1
Group 14: Needs to Change		
93	Change needed - General	5
94	Change needed - GoC corporate communications approach	5
95	Change needed - Policies	2
96	Change needed - Approvals	8
Group 15: Approvals		
97	Approvals can be necessary	5
*	Limit - GoC-wide approvals	11
*	Limit - Internal to department approvals	10
*	Change needed - Approvals	8
*	Autocode - approval_approve	81
Group 16: Case Studies		
98	Communicating about a large scale, long term initiative	1
99	Communicating about expenditure management	1
100	Economic Action Plan communications	2
101	Statistics Canada	5
Group 17: Key Themes		
102	Balance / Information Overload	5
103	Comments on research	5
104	Comments on research - regional	5
105	Communicator's role re. ATIP	3
106	Current government versus past government	23
107	General comments - field of communications	7
108	Participant's reaction to their department's success at transparency	4
109	Relationship with the media	6
110	Social media - GoC - moving slowly	15
111	Participant's reaction to their job - positive	4
112	Participants reaction to their job - negative	4
113	Perception of GoC comms	7
114	Public versus private sector comms	2

115	Evolution of comms environment	7
116	Fight the good fight	6

Group 18: Autocode

117	Autocode - resources	46
118	Autocode - minority	14
119	Autocode - control	37
120	Autocode - approval_approve	81
121	Autocode - security	19
122	Autocode - crisis	12
123	Autocode - stakeholder	78
124	Autocode - policy	27
125	Autocode - need to know	29
126	Autocode - research	38
127	Autocode - two-way	67

* *Indicates a duplicate code in code book*