

Communications Concepts and Practices in Canadian Public Administration

Chapter Summary

Communication is one of the most important concepts in the study of public administration. Government communications initially involved the mainstream media who served as “gatekeepers” of information from government to its citizens. The current use of social media and the emergence of the digital age have modernized all internal and external political communication. The author acknowledges that these digital communications and the centralization of decision-making have created a “branding ethos in the public sector.” Throughout the chapter, the author identifies various communication strategies and argues that all political communication is biased and that the corresponding theories of news management, issues management, political marketing, and image management have all become prominent strategies to examine the impact of communication on public administration.

The structure of the government is also identified as an integral component in the facilitation of government communications. The author likens this structure to a pyramid, with the cabinet and the prime minister at the top, appointing all ministers. When a minister introduces policy priorities, a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) must also be attached that includes a two-page strategic communications strategy outlining communication objectives and considerations, an analysis of the public environment, anticipated reaction, storyline, and core government messages, and the announcement strategy. The Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), staffed by political staff and the Privy Council Office (PCO) to support the prime minister, the cabinet and committee members, and the Minister’s Office (MO) all contribute to and develop the internal communications among these offices and the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS). In particular, the TBS is responsible for the Government of Canada’s Policy on Communications and Federal Identity as well as managing the government’s corporate image.

New federal government initiatives symbolize the potential openness of government from Access to Information legislation, and what the author advocates is needed regarding a new branding strategy. The strategy he suggests would be a revision of Savoie's (1999) model that suggests that the political power is held by a few people who have access to the prime minister and the new public governance (NPG) model. With Marland's (2016) model, the author establishes the "branding lens" that lies in the middle between Savoie's centre government and the public administration and external audiences. This model addresses the pervasive aspect of communications in political decision-making.

Annotated Weblinks

- 1) <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/trnsprnc/ccss-nfrmtn-prvc/index-en.aspx>

Through Public Safety Canada, this site outlines the Access to Information and Privacy Acts, specifically identifying how to make a request for information, the process involved, and also a personal information request to the Government of Canada.

- 2) <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/about-the-cfia/newsroom/stay-connected/protocol/eng/1380562698834/1380564418191>

This is the Canadian Food and Inspections Agency Protocol for Official Communications Use of Social Media, which sets out the main principles, logistics, and policy options for using social media in their main communications.

- 3) <https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/biens-property/sngp-npms/bi-rp/conn-know/comm/pdcsdc-cpcs-eng.html>

A template for a communications plan by Public Services and Procurement Canada for how a team will communicate a project along with various forms and prescribed procedures.