CHAPTER 5

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION IN OTHER COUNTRIES WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE USE OF RESEARCH

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The Comtask group came to the conclusion that "the principle of creating a dialogue between government and citizens is well established in many countries" (Comtask, 1996b:43) and that "opinion polls and research form an important part of the work of most governments" (Comtask, 1996b:74).

The researcher's objective in this chapter is to investigate and record the use of research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information by other governments

To introduce this chapter, the researcher provides an overview of international trends in government communication and dissemination of government information.

5.2   INTERNATIONAL   TRENDS   IN   GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION – AN OVERVIEW

The Comtask appointed by Thabo Mbeki in 1995 to contribute to the process of transforming government communications in South Africa (see paragraph 4.2.3), made the "identification of best practice in communications within the

international community" (Comtask, 1996b:39) one of its priorities. Members of Comtask visited a large number of countries[15], arguing that it would provide "a very important template of ideas and practices to discuss South African solutions" (Comtask, 1996b:39).

The Comtask group concluded from their visits to these countries, that "most governments have a central information or service provision agency", and that these bodies were increasingly not spokespersons of government but ensured good standards and centralised the analytic capacity (Comtask, 1996b:41). According to the Comtask report, the responsibilities of these mainly included:

- Corporate buying of advertising space for government: to reduce cost and improve the impact of information campaigns

- Training and development: offering support for the development of the use of new technologies for other government users and communicators

- Research and analysis: from providing a press clipping and/or transcript service to supervising research on public attitudes (opinion polls) and tracking media stories

- Maintenance of a corporate identity for government through standardising imaging

- Core data: providing or coordinating the provision of basic data on the country and ensuring accessibility, for example maintaining a homepage on the Internet

- Publishing, editing and strategic planning services to other "consumers" (departments/parastatals) in government

- Providing press accreditation and support services to the media, especially in developing countries

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[15] The countries were: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, Hungary, India, Israel, Malaysia, Senegal, Singapore, Tanzania and the United States of America.

- Visiting services: arranging programmes for foreign visitors (Comtask, 1996b:41-42).

Other observations from Comtask following their visits to central government communication and information agencies include the following:

- The tendency was for the central agency to outsource the production and supply of many required services (e.g. advertising, public relations, video production and research) to the private sector.

- Central government communication structures were becoming more streamlined, do not employ large numbers of people, and operated not in a controlling but in a coordinating capacity.

- An important responsibility was to strategise around policy and appropriate messages.

- In tune with strengthened notions of accountability of government to the electorate, the core group tended to be in direct and constant touch with top management – such as Cabinet and senior politicians and was usually located in the office of the President or Prime Minister.

- The core group of communicators generally consisted of the head of the central government communication agency together with the heads of communication in the various ministries, achieving coordination of government messages.

- The emphasis was on professionalism and top communicators enjoyed comparatively high status and rank: in some cases they were political appointees of the various ministers and in others they were civil servants.

- Substantial cost savings were effected through bulk-buying of services such as advertising and research (Comtask, 1996b:41-42).

The researcher is of the opinion that the Comtask group was correct in arguing that the identification of best practices in government communications within the

international community could provide ideas and practices to discuss South African solutions. Three of the conclusions from the Comtask group of specific relevance to this study are the following:

- The responsibility of the 'central information or service provision agency' in most countries included the service of supervising research on public attitudes or opinion polls.

- The tendency in government communications was to outsource many services – including research – to the private sector.

- Bulk-buying of research services for government could result in substantial cost savings.

5.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO RESEARCH – THE POSITION IN THREE COUNTRIES USING RESEARCH TO A RELATIVELY LARGE EXTENT

In paragraph 5.3 the researcher provides information regarding government communication and the dissemination of government information in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom (UK). Specific reference is made to the use of research. According to information available to the researcher, the governments of these three countries make more use of research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and dissemination of government information than most other governments.

5.3.1 Australia

After introducing the history, role and functions of the central information agency of the government in Australia, the researcher provides information regarding general guidelines provided to government departments. Lastly, in terms of

information activities, specific attention is given to the use of research in the communication campaign development process.

5.3.1.1   The history, role and functions of the Government Communications Unit

Australia's Government Communications Unit (GCU) "traces its origins to the Commonwealth Advertising Division established in 1941 to coordinate government advertising, and to the Information Coordination Branch established in 1982 to improve the delivery of government information. These units merged in 1984 and became the Office of Government Information and Advertising (OGIA) in 1989. In 1997 the OGIA transferred from the Department of Administrative Services to the Department of Finance and Administration. In October 1998 it was established as the Government Communications Unit (GCU) in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet" (Australia, GCU, 2001a).

The role of the GCU is "to provide advice and support on communications issues to the Government and the Ministerial Committee on Government Communications (MCGC) and to manage the Central Advertising System (CAS)" (Australia, GCU, 2001a). To be more specific, the key GCU functions are to:

- provide strategic advice on proposed communications issues to the Prime Minister and the MCGC
- maintain a whole of government overview of current and forecast communications activities
- provide advice to the MCGC on major and/or sensitive campaigns
- provide advice on communications best practice, including research, public relations and advertising, to the MCGC and departments and agencies
- monitor industry developments and trends
- provide a secretariat to the MCGC

- maintain a register of communications consultants (including advertising agencies, public relations consultants, market research companies, graphic designers, writers and the like) interested in undertaking government work which is drawn on by departments and agencies seeking to engage consultants for communication activities

- assist in developing communication strategies and briefs for consultants

- manage the Central Advertising System (CAS) to achieve effective media planning and cost-effective media placement for government advertising (Australia, GCU, 2001a).

Government departments and agencies need to submit their communication and related strategies and projects to the MCGC through the GCU. Projects to be submitted include all advertising, significant and sensitive information activities, consultant selection and communications related research (Australia, GCU, 2001a).

5.3.1.2   Guidelines to government departments and agencies

The *Guidelines for Australian Government Information Activities: principles and procedures*, compiled by the GCU, includes the following two principles (a total of ten principles are listed in the document), relevant to the use of research to work towards successful communication and information programmes:

- The Government expects all departments and their information units to employ the highest standards of communication knowledge and techniques in the conduct of their information programs.

- All information programs conducted by departments should be as impartial and as complete as practicable and based on the information needs and capacities of the target audience. Information programs should be based on relevant research, and contain feedback and evaluation mechanisms where possible (Australia, GCU, 2001b).

The GCU also developed the following documents – available on the GCU website - as guidelines to government departments and agencies:

- *How to write a communication strategy*

- *How to write a brief for a market research consultant*

- *How to write a brief for a creative advertising agency*

- *How to write a brief for a public relations consultant*

- *How to write a brief for a graphic design consultant*

- *How to write a brief for an Internet website designer/provider*

- *How to write a brief for a video consultant*

The document *How to write a brief for a market research consultant* identifies as many as twenty steps in the process of writing a research brief, explains what a good research brief is and provides a checklist for writing a research proposal. The guidelines even include a summary of industry standards that apply to different research methodologies such as face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys, audits and observations, recruitment for qualitative research and non-field company standards (Australia, GCU, 2001c).

The guide *How to write a communication strategy* frequently refers to research. The document explains that research is useful in planning a communications strategy with regard to the following:

- if an information campaign is needed at all

- what the campaign is trying to achieve

- who the people are you are trying to reach and where they are

- the existing attitude, knowledge and behaviour of these people

- what the messages are you want to deliver

- how you are going to deliver these messages.

(Australia, GCU, 2001d).

An interesting point made in the guideline document on writing a communication strategy is that at least 10 percent of the budget for a communication campaign should be allocated to research and evaluation: "As a rule of thumb, you will need to allocate at least 10% of your budget to research and evaluation but this will often be determined by the nature and complexity of the campaign. This would be allocated amongst initial research (environmental scanning, audience segmentations, concept testing), tracking the campaign (testing messages and strategies, reporting on coverage and readership of your issue, checking recall) and evaluating the outcomes (checking for change in target audience attitudes, knowledge, behaviour)" (Australia, GCU, 2001d).

5.3.1.3   Use of research in the campaign development process

In providing guidance to government departments on the campaign development process, the GCU presents the process sequentially in eight stages, but points out that "some parts of the process may need to be repeated, while other parts may be undertaken concurrently" (Australia, GCU, 2001e). From the following summary of the GCU guidelines for campaign development, it is obvious that the GCU considers the use of research as being of substantial importance to enhance the effectiveness of campaigns – from needs analysis, developmental research, development and refinement of creative and communication strategy, benchmark and tracking research and evaluation:

- Stage 1: Needs analysis

    A needs analysis will assist in clearly defining the issue or problem to be addressed. Examining currently available research or literature will assist in clearly defining the nature and extent of the issue. Where insufficient data exists, an additional survey or other research may be required. The GCU is able to provide advice on the need for additional formative research.

- Stage 2: Developmental research

Developmental research is a critical component of the development of any education and information campaign. It allows for the needs of the target groups to be assessed, and can assist in the identification of appropriate strategies to effectively communicate with the target audience. Developmental research is often exploratory in nature, with the prime objective to establish existing levels of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of the group or groups to be targeted by the intervention. The findings of this research will inform the development of the communication strategy and consultants briefs. The GCU can advise if developmental research is necessary. If so, the client department or agency will need to develop a research brief for consideration and comment by the GCU. The GCU maintains a *Register of Consultants* in the fields of research, evaluation, advertising, public relations, marketing and other areas of public communications, which might be used to develop a list of suitable consultants. If the research is sensitive or the research budget is greater than $100 000,00 the MCGC needs to approve the research brief before any tender process can be undertaken. The GCU is able to advise whether or not the research brief needs to be approved by the MCGC. For communication research not acquiring MCGC approval, the GCU is still involved in the selection process. It is considered as good practice for consultants to be given the opportunity to attend a *Question and Answer* session prior to submitting their proposal. A GCU officer is involved in attending these sessions, assessing the proposals, and is a member of the selection panel selecting the research consultant.

- Stage 3: Communication strategy development

The communication strategy should define very specific objectives to provide a clear framework within which to formulate strategies, and against which to evaluate outcomes. At this point, key decisions will need to be made, and described within the communication strategy. This will cover the range of integrated information activities to be implemented;

how the external consultants will be used; the available budget; the timeline; the evaluation plan; and the roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders in the strategy. The communication strategy should clearly articulate how all the various components of the strategy will be coordinated and managed in order to achieve its objectives most efficiently and effectively.

- State 4: Consultant's briefs

  Once a strategy has been approved, a consultant's brief will need to be drafted – this may include advertising and/or public relations briefs. The GCU is able to provide assistance with clarifying the briefs, and in developing lists of suitable consultants, based on the briefs.

- Stage 5: Development and refinement of creative and communications strategies

  Once the briefs are approved and sent to the selected list of consultants, the process of managing the selection of consultants and refining strategies is undertaken. The advertising selection process includes the usage of research, and the GCU process involves the following steps:

  - It is good practice for consultants to be given the opportunity to attend a *Question and Answer* session prior to presenting the advertising creative. A GCU officer is involved in attending the *Question and Answer* session.

  - Advertising agencies usually present their concepts and submit their proposals to the evaluation panel on the same day. The evaluation panel consists of representatives of the client department and the GCU. The competing concepts are then tested by a research company consultant (this is normally the same consultant that undertook the developmental research).

  - Based on the research results and an evaluation of the proposals, generally at least two agencies are shortlisted to present to the MCGC. The responsible Minister must first confirm the evaluation

report and the recommendation on the shortlisted agencies, and then the shortlisted agencies present their strategies to the MCGC at a scheduled meeting. The research consultant also presents the concept testing results to those agencies.

- The MCGC selects an agency after consideration of the presentation, the proposals, the concept testing research, and the recommendation of the evaluation panel. The client department then enters into a contract with the consultant.

- Once the creative strategy is developed, the master media planning and placement agency can compile a detailed media plan. The MCGC approves of the plan and, on receiving written authorisation from the client department to book, the master media agency will book the media.

- Additional concept testing may be needed to ensure the creative materials are performing well against the communication objectives. The MCGC approves all final creative material before it appears in the media, and requires concept-testing results to be presented by the research consultant at the same time.

- Stage 6: Benchmark and tracking research

Prior to the launch of a campaign it is usual that a quantitative survey is undertaken with a representative sample of the target audience in order to quantify existing levels of awareness, understanding and knowledge in relation to the particular issue. At an appropriate point in time after the commencement of the campaign, this quantitative survey will be repeated to assess changes in levels of awareness and knowledge as a result of campaign activity. Depending on the length of the campaign, several rounds of tracking research might be appropriate. The results of tracking research can be used to monitor the progress of the communication strategy implementation and make adjustments to the strategy where necessary, or can be used to inform the development of subsequent

phases of campaign activity. A measure taken after the completion of the campaign can be used to assess the success of the campaign in meeting its communication objectives. While it is good practice that all information activities are evaluated, smaller activities may not require benchmark and tracking research. The GCU will be able to provide advice on appropriate evaluation strategies. Where television advertising is used, it is also good practice to consider benchmark and tracking research. The initial research brief used to select a consultant for the developmental research may have included the need for benchmark and tracking research as well. If that was not the case, a separate brief is provided to the GCU for comment, a list of suitable consultants and possible MCGC approval. Again, the GCU is involved in any selection process.

- Stage 7: Implementation

  This phase includes the launch of the campaign, the development and distribution of campaign publications, the placement of advertisements in the media and the implementation of public relations activities.

- Stage 8: Evaluation

  The final step in the process is to evaluate the overall campaign to assess the impact and effectiveness of the information activity, and whether or not the various activities met the stated communication objectives. This may take the form of market research with the target audiences as outlined at Stage 6 (Benchmark and trading research). In addition, media monitoring, calls to hotlines (call centers) and hits to a website and so forth, may be other measures of assessing target audience reactions to communication activities.   Consideration should be given to evaluating the overall effectiveness of the media campaign in achieving the stated communication objectives. The media agency is able to provide a report, which will indicate actual media placements against planned activity and whether or not any value added media extras were achieved during the campaign (Australia, GCU, 2001e).

The GCU emphasises that "the outcome of the above evaluations may lead to an improvement in the implementation and management of future campaigns and ultimately enhance the overall quality of government communications", and that "the *Guidelines for Australian Government Information Activities* indicate that the MCGC will scrutinise the formal evaluation of each information campaign" (Australia, GCU, 2001e).

5.3.1.4   Summary: Government Communications Unit – the role of research

The provision of communications research advice to government role-players is one of the key GCU functions. All government departments and agencies have to submit their communication related research projects to the MCGC through the GCU – a practice that can contribute to improved quality of government communications research and to eliminate duplication of communication research by different role-players in government communications.

The GCU perceives it as a matter of principle that all government information progammes should be based on relevant research, and that research needs to be conducted throughout the lifecycle of any campaign.

An important and interesting guideline from the GCU is that at least 10 percent of the budget of a communication campaign should be allocated to research and evaluation.

A guideline document was developed by the GCU to assist government communicators in writing a brief to a research consultant and a research proposal.

From the information available, the researcher's interpretation is that from the guidelines and advice available from the GCU, government communicators in Australia should be able to:

- Realise the importance to conduct research at different phases in the lifecycle of any information/communication programme

- Prepare appropriate research proposals and briefs to research consultants

- Motivate for the funds necessary to conduct research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information.

5.3.2   Canada

The researcher provides information regarding the mandate, roles, structure and responsibilities of the central government information agency in Canada. Reference is made to some of the research that the organisation conducts and to its use.

5.3.2.1   Mandate and roles of the Canada Information Office

The Canada Information Office (CIO) was established on 9 July 1996. According to the CIO's Performance Report for the period ending 31 March 1999, "the Government of Canada assigned the organisation at its creation with the mandate to inform Canadians about their country, about each other, about the renewal of the federation and about the role of the Government of Canada in meeting the needs of Canadians through the delivery of programs and services." Its mission at that time was "to contribute to Canadians learning more about their country in order to build a stronger Canada" (Canada, CIO, 2001a).

According to the CIO's *Report on Plans and Priorities* for 2001-2002, the organisation develops "nationally and regionally responsive citizen-focused
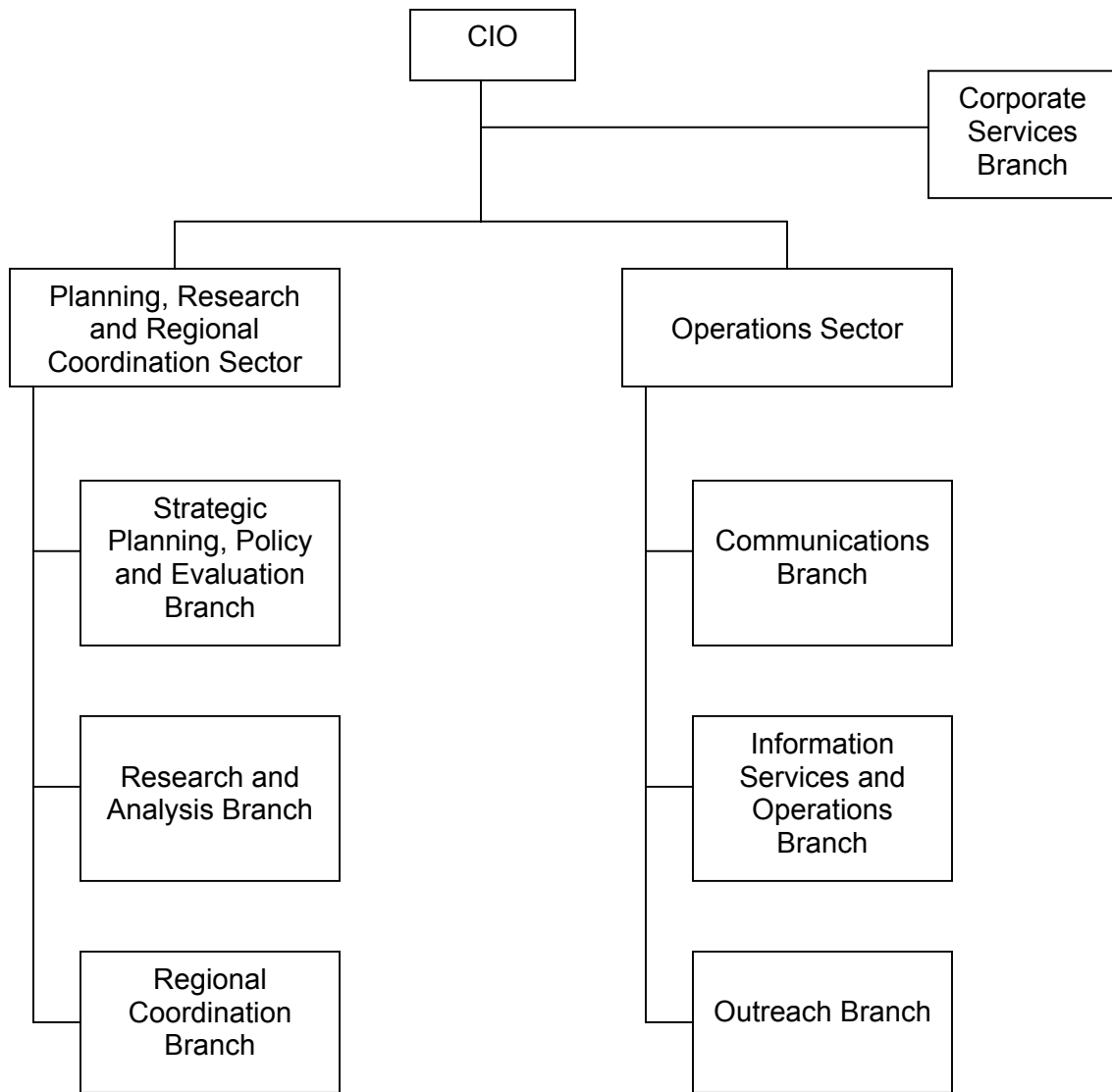
corporate communication initiatives" on the basis of "public opinion and communications research." These initiatives are most often undertaken in partnership with other government departments and agencies including regional councils of senior federal officials, non-government organisations, and the private sector. Their purpose is to inform Canadians about Canada, particularly the Government of Canada's priorities, and a wide array of programs and services. These corporate activities complement and provide a context for departmental communications activities. The CIO also provides ongoing advice and support to the Standing Committee of Cabinet on Government Communications (CCC). The Executive Director of the CIO reports to the Chair of the CCC. The CIO provides operational advice and support to the CCC and implements its decisions through a variety of communications, research and community-based activities" (Canada, CIO, 2001b).

In order to improve the coordination of government communication in the regions and to promote a corporate approach to government communications, some new responsibilities were added to the mandate of the CIO, during the year 2000: the coordination of regional communications, fairs, exhibitions and public opinion research (Canada, CIO, 2001b).

5.3.2.2   Structure and responsibilities

The CIO has two principal sectors namely the Planning, Research and Regional Coordination Sector, and the Operations Sector. Supporting the activities of these sectors is the Corporate Services Branch.

Figure 5.1:   *CIO –   structure, 2001*[16]

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The responsibilities of the two principal sectors (Planning, Research and Regional Coordination Sector and the Operations Sector), as outlined on the CIO website and in figure 5.1, can be summarised as follows:

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[16]   Researcher's own compilation

- Planning, Research and Regional Coordination Sector

  This sector sets out the CIO's strategic framework, plans and goals, and evaluates, measures and reports on departmental activities. It is also responsible for the CIO's regional coordination function. Through its public opinion and communications research, environmental scanning and analysis, and network of regional coordinators, the Planning, Research and Regional Co-ordination Sector provides strategic advice, evaluations and recommendations that help guide the CIO, other government departments and the ad hoc Cabinet Committee in developing and implementing activities, policies and programs relating to government-wide communications across the country. The Planning, Research and Regional Co-ordination Sector is composed of three branches: Strategic Planning, Policy and Evaluation; Research and Analysis; Regional Co-ordination.

  - Strategic Planning, Policy and Evaluation Branch

    This branch sets out the CIO's strategic framework, plans and goals. It also evaluates and measures departmental activities, and accordingly prepares performance reports. The Branch provides strategic advice for the CIO's activities and advises on policies and programs relating to government-wide communications.

  - Research and Analysis Branch

    In collaboration with other branches, this branch determines the CIO's research objectives, needs and priorities. It then designs, develops and implements relevant research-related activities and products. These are shared throughout the Government of Canada to increase understanding of the societal trends, factors, issues and events affecting government communications. The branch also coordinates public opinion research for the Government of Canada as a whole in order to ensure concerted planning and sharing in this area of activity.

- Regional Coordination Branch

  With a communications office in each province, CIO's Regional Co-ordination Branch aims to make Canadians more aware of the programs and services available to them in communities throughout the country. Regional communication coordinators work closely with senior officials of federal departments to improve corporate communications for the Government of Canada.

- Operations Sector

  This sector, in partnership with governmental and non-governmental partners, designs and delivers communications products, services and activities that respond to Canadians' needs and desires for information. Through its media monitoring and tracking of government-related events and co-ordination of Ministerial tours in Quebec, the Operations Sector is able to monitor current and emerging trends that influence the achievement of the CIO's strategic objectives. Through its outreach and community relations programs, the CIO is able to reach out to various segments of the population and inform them about the government's key priorities, programs and services. The Operations Sector is composed of three branches: Communications; Outreach; and Information Services and Operations.

  - Communications Branch

    The Communications Branch develops new products and services that respond to Canadians' needs and desires for information about their country and the programs and services available from the Government of Canada. Among the branch's activities are communications planning, advertising and marketing, publishing, media relations, coordination of the federal program of fairs and exhibits and public education projects. The Communications Branch works with a variety of government departments to achieve greater coordination of the government's communications activities

and to ensure that they are relevant and reflect the realities of Canada's various regions and communities.

- Information Services and Operations Branch

    This branch is responsible for following media coverage of current events for the Canada Information Office and for the Government of Canada. It regularly prepares and distributes calendars of activities related to those issues. The Branch also assists in the co-ordination of Ministerial tours in Quebec.

- Outreach Branch

    Outreach runs a community relations program that helps improve communications between the government and Canadians. The Branch works with decision makers, community and opinion leaders, and associations. Through partnerships with these groups, Outreach undertakes citizen-focused activities at national, regional and local levels to promote Government of Canada programs and services to the public. These activities help inform Canadians about the presence and relevance of government across the country and in their local communities (Canada, CIO, 2001b).

5.3.2.3   *Some of the research conducted by the CIO*

"Research and analysis helps the Canada Information Office and government departments respond better to the information needs of Canadians. The CIO conducts research to find out what's on the minds of Canadians, what information they want, and what form they want it in. They do this through:

- public opinion polls, surveys, and other research
- consultation with citizens and national, regional and local groups
- media monitoring.

The CIO shares their findings to add to understanding of Canadians' communications preferences, their top concerns and priorities, and how they differ across the country and over time. Research findings are available on the CIO website. Armed with their research findings, the CIO works with government departments to plan communications that meet Canadians' needs" (Canada, CIO, 2001c).

Since 1998, the Research and Analysis Branch of the CIO has been conducting quarterly communications surveys amongst Canadians through a private sector research company. The *Spring 2001 Listening to Canadians Communications Survey* was conducted in May 2001 by means of telephone interviews with a total sample of 4 704 adult Canadians aged 18 years and older. The maximum margin of error for the total sample at a 95 percent confidence interval, is 1,5 percent. In addition to the Spring survey, the CIO conducted four sets of focus groups in May 2001 to add further insight into the quantitative analysis (Canada, CIO, 2001d).

Through the *Listening to Canadians Communications survey* "the CIO's public opinion research continues to measure Canadians' views on public policy priorities and their assessment of how the government responds to their priorities. The Spring 2001 survey also focused on the public's evaluation of the government in its role as a provider of a wide range of services to Canadians. The research looked at satisfaction with methods of service delivery, views on the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods, and expectations for future service delivery. The research also continued to track Canadians' use of the Internet and government websites" (Canada, CIO, 2001d).

From the conclusion contained in the *Spring 2001 Communications Survey Report*, it is obvious that the results of this research project can be used extensively for strategic and corporate communication strategy planning:

The survey reveals above all a shifting public environment.

In Spring 2001, Canadians were less optimistic about the short-term prospects for the economy than they were in Spring 2000. This lower level of optimism has negatively impacted on the government's performance assessment on managing the economy and its overall performance assessment.

Canadians gave higher priority to the environment, food safety and Canadian unity. In contrast, the priority accorded to taxation declined. Top-of-mind mentions of health also declined.

There were increased performance evaluations in a number of areas including the environment, food, safety, crime and justice, promoting trade and farm income.

Management of the economy and service ratings appear to be the most important drivers of the government's overall performance evaluation.

For the most part, Canadians were satisfied with the service they received from the Government of Canada. They contacted the government by the method of their choice and the information they received met all or part of their needs.

Awareness of the 1 800 number is increasing among those who use the telephone to contact the government.

Awareness of the government's main website is also higher among those who use the Internet to contact the government.

The Internet is driving Canadians' expectations of improving service delivery in the future, and is part of the reason they believe government service has improved over the past five years. However, focus groups suggest that Canadians are concerned about people without Internet access and the ability of these people to access services. Therefore, in the near future, regardless of changing technology, personal service via the mail, telephone and in person will remain important to Canadians (Canada, CIO, 2001d).

5.3.2.4   *Summary: Canada Information Office – the role of research*

The two principal sectors of the CIO are the Planning, Research and Regional Coordination Sector, and the Operations Sector.

Through the Planning, Research and Regional Coordination Sector, the CIO coordinates public opinion research for the Government of Canada as a whole and develops corporate communication initiatives for government on the basis of public opinion and communications research. Research results are shared throughout the Government of Canada and increases understanding of societal trends, factors, issues and events affecting government communications.

Through a quarterly quantitative survey outsourced to a private sector research company, the CIO tracks public opinion on various issues relevant in government communications. The results of this research project are available to all Canadians – on the CIO website. Since May 2001 this quarterly quantitative research project is complemented by focus group research – an initiative increasing the understanding gained through the quantitative research.

The Operations Sector works in partnership with both governmental and non-governmental partners to design and deliver communication products, services and activities in response to the information needs of Canadians. The Sector's

responsibilities include media monitoring, tracking government-related events and reaching out to various segments of the population to inform them about the government's priorities, programmes and services.

5.3.3 United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom (UK), both the Central Office of Information (COI) and the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS) have a role and responsibility regarding government communication and the dissemination of government information. The researcher describes the role and responsibilities of both organisations, as well as the use of research by these two organisations in the UK to enhance the effectiveness of government communications and information work.

5.3.3.1   The Central Office of Information

(a)   History and statutory background

According to COI's Annual Report for 2000-2001 (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a), the organisation "was established in 1946 after the demise of the wartime Ministry of Information when responsibility for information policy was resumed by departmental Ministers. COI became a common service agency, concentrating expertise to avoid a wasteful duplication of specialists throughout Whitehall and taking advantage of centralised purchasing. In April 1981 the then Prime Minister approved the move to a repayment service, which was introduced on 1 April 1984."

It was only on 5 April 1990, more than fourty years after its establishment, that COI became a Vote funded executive agency, and on 1 April 1991

became a trading fund under the Central Office of Information Trading Fund Order 1991 (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

On 22 June 1992 Ministerial responsibility for the COI was transferred to the Minister for the Cabinet Office from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Since that date COI has been a department of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, who is accountable to Parliament and its Select Committees for all COI's activities. Taking into account the advice of the Chief Executive, the Minister determines the overall policy and financial framework within which COI operates but does not normally become involved in day-to-day management (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

The Chief Executive of COI is also the Accounting Officer and is formally responsible to the Minister for the Cabinet Office for the operations of the agency within the overall framework set out in COI's framework document. COI continues to receive, outside of the trading fund, a small voted provision in respect of central advisory services. This service is accounted for separately through COI's appropriation account (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

(b)   Purpose, role, aim and objectives

According to its Annual Report for 2000-2001 (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a) the purpose, role, aim and objectives of COI are:

As the government's executive agency for publicity procurement, COI's purpose is to help departments and agencies secure their policy objectives, while achieving:
-       Maximum effectiveness; and
-       Best value for money.

The role of COI is to offer central government consultancy, procurement and project management in a range of marketing and publicity services, also providing it with a direct representation service to the regional news media. In essence, COI acts as an agent between central government and private sector suppliers. It does not seek to carry out activities for which a sustainable and effective private sector market exists, and regularly reviews and redefines its business in the light of marketplace developments.

The aim of the COI is to enable central government to secure its policy objectives through achieving maximum communication effectiveness and best value for money.

COI's objectives are to improve the effectiveness of and add value to its clients' publicity programmes through its consultancy, procurement and project management services across all communication channels and through its direct representation service to the news media in the regions.

In line with the principles of 'Service First', COI is committed to providing a measurable quality of service to its customers, with specific targets for improvement in its customer satisfaction levels, as well as meeting financial and efficiency targets set by its Minister.

The GICS explains on its website that: The COI is tasked with recovering the cost of the services it provides to its clients, but not with making a profit. To enable clients to budget effectively, it issues cost estimates for the services to be provided and these costs are fixed, unless the brief changes, or there is a clearly viable element to the cost (for example response-handling projects). In most cases the cost of the COI's input

into the project will be shown as a time charge that is added to the cost (net of discounts obtained) of services it buys in on the client's behalf (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

It is important to note that departments are not compelled to use COI services but that the rational for doing so is based on the value its services can add to the project (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

(c)   Core services and structure

The COI's core services, according to the 2000-2001 Annual Report of the organisation, are threefold:
-       providing strategic advice to departments and agencies on achieving their communications objectives
-       providing purchasing and project management services for implementing those strategies
-       supplying directly those services which, for propriety or other reasons, can only be provided by a government organisation (such as those provided by the COI Regional News Network (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

The COI's services are provided to government departments and agencies through a structure of five line-function or servicing units. The serving units are supported by the Central Servicing Unit, responsible for the administrative and/or corporate services aspects – see figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: *COI – structure, 2001*[17]

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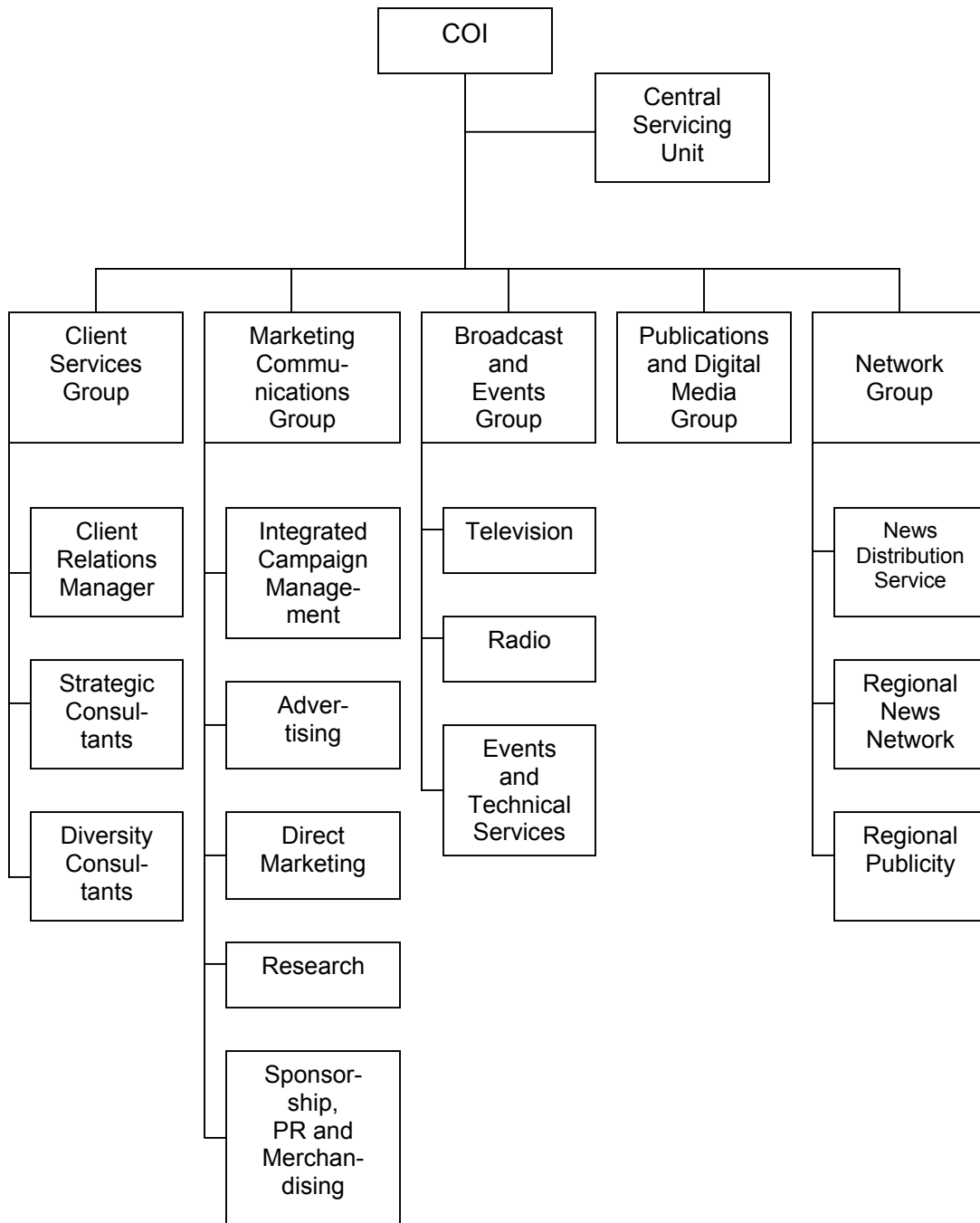
[17] Researcher's own compilation

The COI's services available to clients, as delivered through the different service groups, are:

- Client Services Group

    This group offers clients the following:

    - a dedicated client relations manager, who if required, will lead an integrated COI client or project team

    - strategic consultants who will develop creative, innovative and effective communications and marketing strategies

    - diversity consultants who can advise on how best to communicate with minority ethnic communities or with people with sensory impairments or learning difficulties.

- Marketing Communications Group

    - Integrated Campaign Management

        For an integrated approach COI can provide advice on setting objectives, communication strategy, budget requirements and the inter-media decision. As a communications consultant COI integrate a comprehensive mix of marketing tools to achieve effective results. This service also extends to campaign websites and digital broadcast.

    - Advertising

        COI project manages advertising campaigns to ensure that client objectives are achieved. From appointing an agency, to carrying out research and analysing the response, COI will initiate a campaign and manage it through to completion. COI's centralised media buying unit also enables clients, whether large or small, to gain maximum value for money.

    - Direct Marketing

        COI's direct marketing services include telemarketing, response fulfilment, direct mail, household drops and inserts. Clients are assisted in the planning, procurement, project management and

evaluation of all activities. Bulk and complex distributions are also undertaken, as well as database construction and application.

- Research

    COI uses its research expertise to create effective and measurable communication strategies. With its in-depth knowledge of the research industry, COI devises, plans and manages strategic, developmental and evaluation research for all types of communication.

- Sponsorship, Public Relations (PR) and Merchandising

    COI generates financial and in-kind support for government and public sector initiatives and coordinates editorial activity to promote campaigns through the media. Services include project management, consultancy, strategic and tactical planning, research, editorial services and merchandising.

- Broadcast and Events Group

    - Television (TV)

        COI undertakes the procurement and management of TV commercials, public service TV fillers, corporate and specialist videos, video news releases, Digital Versatile Disks (DVDs), Compact Disk-Read Only Memory (CD-ROMs) and websites involving new video footage. COI also markets TV fillers to BBC, Independent Television (ITV), cable and satellite stations and other appropriate outlets.

    - Radio

        COI procures and manages the production of radio commercials, audio tapes, live interviews, editorial material, public service fillers and audio material for websites.

    - Events and Technical Services

        COI delivers a full service for large and small conferences, seminars, press launches and exhibitions, in the UK and overseas.

Additional services include: supplying and procuring equipment for outside broadcasts; duplicating videos, DVDs and CD-ROMs; and Houses of Parliament TV and audio links.

- Publications and Digital Media Group

  COI provides solutions across a broad range of print and digital media to help clients reach diverse audiences and achieve their communications objectives. Services for all print and digital media publications include: project management; writing, editing and proofreading; web production, including websites, CD-ROMs, kiosks and other digital media; graphic design; procurement specialists and print production; branding and design management; translations; information architecture design; web usability and access consultation and testing; parallel publishing; and indexing.

- Network Group

  - News Distribution Service (NDS)

    COI distributes news releases to national broadcast and print media as well as the main regional groups in the UK. Operating a 24-hour service, news releases are sent by hand, by post or electronically. News is also distributed on the Internet and on CD-ROMs.

  - Regional News Network

    COI operates a network of 11 regional offices to manage press activity across the UK. Services include: representing clients to regional news media; initiating press releases and writing features for a local audience; organising VIP visits; media monitoring and analysis; media training; emergency media planning; and crisis management.

  - Regional Publicity

    COI implements regionally focused communications through its countrywide network. Services include: advertising; media buying;

brochures/leaflets;   television, radio and video services;   and exhibitions (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

From the perspective of this study, the following remark by the Chief Executive of the COI in the foreword of the organisation's Annual Report for 2000-2001 is meaningful and encouraging: "Existing services have been in great demand, particularly in the area of research, as our clients and we increasingly focus on measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of communications"   (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

5.3.3.2   *The Government Information and Communication Service*

The role of the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS) is to help government to fulfill its duty to communicate to the public and to exercise its right to be heard. The GICS has four strategic objectives:

-       to explain the working policies and actions of Ministers and their departments, including their executive agencies

-       to create awareness of the rights, benefits and obligations of individual citizens and groups of citizens

-       to persuade groups of citizens to act in accordance with agreed policies in defined circumstances; and

-       to ensure and demonstrate the proper use of taxpayers' money

(United Kingdom, GICS, 2001b).

GICS staff are employed across government – by all government departments, the Prime Minister's office and the Cabinet Office, and in a great many executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies. It is one of the few professional disciplines to do so. Communication directorates in the different institutions "usually comprise two major branches – News and Marketing Communications. The work of the News and Marketing staff is intertwined – the integrations of paid

and free media, coordinated with an organisation's policy, is an essential part of all communication strategies. The aim is to ensure that clear messages are conveyed to the whole target audience in the most cost-effective way" (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001b).

The directorates in the different government institutions do not all look exactly the same. For example, smaller departments or agencies often have multidisciplinary staff, covering both news and marketing (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001b).

The work of the two major branches usually, comprising communication directorates in the different government institutions, is explained on the GICS website:

A typical large News Branch comprises a press office with desks allocated to groups of policies or ministerial responsibilities. Press officers will:
- work with other officials to draw up handling plans for issues or announcements
- answer news media telephone enquiries
- draft and issue press notices and press articles
- organise press conferences
- organise and support the media aspects of ministerial visits.

News branches are open all hours and seven days a week. Their aim is to get maximum positive publicity for announcements and to act quickly and effectively to correct errors and omissions in reporting.

The News branch will often have a coordination and planning unit:
- compiling a detailed forward diary

- liaising with the Strategic Communication Unit (SCU) at 10 Downing Street (Office of the Premier)
- monitoring and contributing to the on-line interdepartmental diary and briefing system (AGENDA) and other electronic briefing systems
- dealing with long-term strategy, campaign extension and the non-news media.

Co-ordination staff work through a range of contacts: press and publicity officers, officials in the Department and its agencies, and Downing Street colleagues. Individual plans complement overall campaigns or presentational strategies that consider how a whole range of departmental issues and messages fit together over time.

The Marketing Communications Branch will use paid publicity to present departmental policies to target audiences, through a range of paid-for techniques. These can include advertising, publications, exhibitions, conferences, films, videos or a mix of some or all.

The Marketing Communications Branch will have publicity desks covering policy areas. They will work with policy officials to draw up direct communication strategies to support policy implementation. Business skills are critical to much of this work and all publicity officers have to be expert project managers. Spending money to market departmental policy in this way needs careful consideration and advance planning. It is only undertaken as part of clear strategy that also maximises the opportunities for free publicity and takes account of the needs of the news media (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001b).

Many Communication directorates now have additional areas of responsibility, e.g. internal communication, website management, the departmental library and public enquiries. A modern directorate's portfolio can therefore include all the

forms of mass communication used to reach internal and external audiences (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001b).

5.3.3.3   Government communications research in the United Kingdom

The importance of using research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information is repeatedly emphasised in official documentation of both COI and GICS. The *GICS Toolkit* provides practical benchmarks for good practice across many GICS fields.   It picks up some themes in detail and describes the core standards and facilities that departments and major agencies are expected to provide. With regard to research the *Toolkit* states: "Research is about increasing the change that your publicity campaign will be successful by investigating the target audience, the means of communication, or both" (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

Research is one of the professional services that can be provided to government departments and agencies by COI. Leading research agencies are employed to carry out research on behalf of government (United Kingdom, COI, n.d.: 52). Using their "research expertise and in depth knowledge of the research industry", COI "devise, plan and manage strategic, developmental and evaluation research for all types of communication" (United Kingdom, COI website, 2001).

The *GICS Toolkit* (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a) provides the following short description to explain above-mentioned types of research:
- *Strategic research* helps to establish which messages will be most effective in reaching the target audience and which forms of communication should be used. It is usually best achieved by qualitative research. Representative samples of the target market are interviewed in an unstructured way to identify their relevant attitudes, feelings and behaviour relating to the subject of the campaign, and their media habits.

- *Creative development research* establishes the best way to execute or express a communication strategy using a chosen medium. It usually involves qualitative research, looking at early, unfinished versions of advertisements or other types of publicity. The aim is to see which creative route best communicates the agreed strategy.

- *Evaluating research (audience and media)* finds out how well the campaign has performed against predefined objectives. It usually involves quantitative audience research to take robust measurements of spontaneous awareness of the campaign and of the media used, prompted awareness/recognition of the campaign and attitudes, knowledge and behaviour relating to the campaign messages. It can also be useful – especially with lower-budget, PR-based campaigns that are unlikely to be measurable in audience research – to conduct media evaluation. This will provide an objective measure of the extent to which your desired (and other) messages are reported on in the media.

In order to minimise duplication of effort, all "government surveys of the general public" need to be notified to the Office of National Statistics (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

According to guidelines provided in the *GICS Toolkit*, the starting point in the development and evaluation of any campaign needs to be a "review of what is known about similar campaigns and about the target audience. This is best achieved by looking at related past research reports" (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a). The COI updates a catalogue covering research over a period of ten years twice a year, and send it to clients. "This catalogue can be searched by client, subject audience, date and methodology to find studies that might be relevant. Once departments or agencies contact the COI and inform them about the research findings they are interested in, the COI will contact the relevant

client and check whether they would be comfortable to share the findings"
(United Kingdom, COI, 2001b).

It is emphasised that "an effective campaign can only be produced efficiently if a
full and clear brief is given to whoever is contracted to do the job" (United
Kingdom, COI, n.d.: 22), and that research can play "an important part in
informing the brief" (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a). COI "uses its research
expertise to create effective and measureable communication strategies" (United
Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

It is furthermore emphasised that research should "preferably (within financial
and time constraints) be carried out at key stages to evaluate effectiveness.
General research milestones are:
-       during the planning stages – to help define the target market and its
        current knowledge of the subject
-       in the creative formulation stage – to ensure that the audience is receptive
        to the campaign material
-       after the campaign has been completed – to measure its effectiveness"
(United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

The GICS shares the viewpoint that research should not be a once-off exercise,
and emphasise that research results can be useful in planning communications
in future:

Ideally, the research process should be seen as continuous; strategic research
precedes and feeds into creative development work, followed by evaluation after
the campaign, when findings from the whole campaign are fed into an ongoing
body of knowledge. Campaign planners can then use this knowledge as
reference when starting a new or related campaign. In addition, the results of the

evaluative research should enable realistic targets to be set at the start of the next related campaign (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

The GICS perceives the measurement of performance as essential for "demonstrating value for money and effectiveness, and for reviewing systems and efficiency." Departments are advised that they should evaluate campaigns against their objectives through:

- tracking research (but watch the cost)

- coverage analysis, records and evaluation reports for Ministers (occasionally through commercial systems; routinely in-house

- COI regional reports

- surveys of Ministers and clients

- compilation of records and cuttings

- wash-up sessions: lessons learned for manual and training

(United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

Providing advice to government communicators with the objective "to make government information and advice more accessible to women", the GICS emphasises the importance of media research to enable communicators to choose media that can enhance "accessibility and communication" with the target groups: "Readership, circulation, listenership and viewing figures are available for most titles, channels and programmes to help you (and the agencies working on your behalf) select the most accessible media opportunities for your audience. Media research systems such as TGI (Target Group Index) provide broad media preferences that can be analysed in many ways – both demographic and behavioural. Even if you are not placing paid publicity, consulting such data may help you choose which PR opportunities to pursue" (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

Evaluating the success of coverage of a campaign in the media is described by GICS as "a complex exercise, but one that provides valuable data about whether the objectives of your campaign were achieved – in terms of audience reach, content and volume". It is emphasised that "evaluation needs to be built into planning, not tacked on as an afterthought. If a campaign includes paid publicity elements, make sure that evaluation of all elements is compatible". GICS furthermore explains to the government communicators that "there are many potential approaches to evaluation: the key is to start with clear objectives. Keep it simple and ensure that results are presented in a clear and understandable form – evaluation is wasted unless the results are read and acted upon. Avoid superficially attractive but meaningless measurements such as advertising value equivalents; results must be credible, verifiable and objective" (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

Three examples of the government communication research conducted in the United Kingdom, are:

- In 1999, towards the end of the previous millennium, the COI managed a monthly research monitor which tracked public concern about the *Millennium Bug* and assessed the impact of the campaign. According to the research monitor, the campaign was shown to have been "extremely effective:
  - around 70 percent of those aware of the Bug recall the campaign
  - public concern about the effect of the Bug has declined
  - nearly 60 percent of people who had received a copy of the booklet claim to have kept it for future reference.

  Since the launch of the campaign the number of people who were of the opinion that the government was providing people with enough information about the *Bug* increased significantly" (United Kingdom, COI, 2000).

- Secondly, research conducted into direct mail shows evidence to suggest that "there is a male and female writing style and that men and women react differently to certain features of written communication (bullet points, use of picture, colour etc)" (United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

Also interesting is the COI's Customer Satisfaction Index:

Customer satisfaction is a vital measure of quality. The Customer Satisfaction Index is compiled from the questionnaires the clients complete at the end of each job. Marks range from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (extremely satisfied). The target average mark for 2000-01 was 8.25. This was exceeded, with an average score of 8.34. The COI exceeded targets for response rates and for minimising unacceptable scores (United Kingdom, COI, 2001a).

As part of its *Toolkit* GICS developed a checklist to assist GICS officials to conduct market research and campaign evaluation in marketing communication with the objective "to provide objective evidence from the marketplace with which to help in the development and/or evaluation of a publicity campaign." The *GICS Toolkit* provides the following:

- find out whether research already exists on similar campaigns or audiences
- consider and plan the use of research at three different stages: strategic, creative and evaluative
- allow time for each of these stages
- revisit the definition of your target audience (this needs to be crystal clear for research purposes)
- revisit your campaign objectives (are these quantifiable and realistic for evaluation purposes?)
- allow time for access to customer or other lists for research purposes

- allow time for design and production of publicity material to be evaluated in research, if appropriate

- allow time for ministerial approval and for Office for National Statistics approval (of large surveys of businesses)

- issue contract

(United Kingdom, GICS, 2001a).

5.3.3.4 Summary: COI and GICS – the role of research

Research is one of the many professional communication services that can be provided to government departments and agencies by the COI. According to the COI its research services are in great demand as both the organisation itself and its clients increasingly focus on measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of communication.

Both COI and GICS repeatedly emphasise the importance of using research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication initiatives.   Both organisations also emphasise that research should not be a once-off exercise – that relevant research should be conducted at various key stages of any communication initiative.   GICS points out that results of evaluative research should enable realistic targets to be set for a next related campaign, and developed a checklist to assist their officials to conduct market research and campaign evaluation.

Although departments are not compelled to use COI services, the services offered can help departments and agencies to achieve maximum effectiveness and best value for money. In order to minimise duplication the Office of National Statistics must be notified of all government surveys conducted amongst the general public. Making available a list of such surveys together with a catalogue

of government communications and information research updated by COI twice a year can contribute to sharing of findings and minimising of duplication.

5.4 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO RESEARCH – A SHORT DISCUSSION REGARDING THE POSITION IN SOME OTHER COUNTRIES

The researcher shortly discusses government communication and dissemination of government information in various other countries – that is countries that, according to information available to the researcher, do not make use of research to the same extent as Australia, Canada and the UK to enhance effective government communication. Specific reference is made to the application of research – or the absence thereof.

5.4.1 Europe

5.4.1.1 Denmark

In *Denmark* the information service of government is "a mere database and editorial entity that compiles and distributes information documents. It also gives professional advice on communication" (Comtask, 1996c:52-53). Unfortunately the researcher does not have information available regarding the kind of "professional advice" provided. Departments are not obliged to use this service that they need to pay for if used. Every government department in Denmark "has a small information section – three persons for a large department and one or even none for smaller departments. There are no spokespersons in the ministries or departments" (Comtask, 1996c:52). According to the Comtask group, the Ministers themselves are "exceptionally" accessible. Ministers have

weekly press briefings and every Friday at 19:00 the government has a five minute slot on television to relay information. The television corporation has the ultimate say as to what information will be used and how (Comtask, 1996c:52). The Comtask group expressed the sentiment that this five minute television broadcast "fails from a communication point of view" (Comtask, 1996c:52).

The need for appropriate research was obvious from discussions the Comtask group had in Denmark. Senior people interviewed at the information service of government complained that they receive no feedback on the information that is relayed. Furthermore, according to people in the media, "the state floods them with useless information" (Comtask, 1996c:53).

The researcher realises that, since the investigation of Comtask in 1996, some changes may have been introduced in government communications in Denmark – including the use of research to enhance effectiveness. Unfortunately relevant information on the website of the Prime Minister of Denmark is only available in Danish (Denmark, Statsministeriet, 2001).

5.4.1.2   *France*

In *France* the Cabinet's spokesperson can be any minister – not necessarily the minister responsible for any specific department. "After every Cabinet meeting it is decided what will be communicated at a weekly press conference. The aim is not only to announce government decisions, but to motivate decisions for public consumption. The spokesperson relays information about all departments at the press conference of the Cabinet" (Comtask, 1996c:47). The approach of the *Service D'Information du Gouvernement* (SIG), the information service of the government, is increasingly on centralisation. SIG is part of the Office of the Prime Minister and the director of SIG is in continual communication with the

Prime Minister or his communication staff. The services rendered by SIG include the following:

- liaison with advertising agencies with regard to particular campaigns (the SIG get discount prices for the advertising campaigns of any department)

- organisation of surveys regarding certain matters

- public relations

- passing on of policy information to members of Parliament and to the public service

- passing on of information to the media

- documentation about all aspects of the government

- coordination of different messages from state departments, and

- passing on of information to the public

(Comtask, 1996c:47-48).

Although "organisation of surveys" is listed as one of the services rendered by SIG, no specific information could be obtained in this regard from either the Comtask report or the relevant website. Information regarding the services of the SIG is available on the website of the Office of the Premier – unfortunately only in French (France, Site du Premier Ministre, 2001).

According to discussions the Comtask group had with a prominent advertising agency, the French government "does not communicate, but seems to be more in the manner of decrees from the top" (Comtask, 1996c:46). The advertising agency further suggested that "government communication must abolish one-way communication" and that it "should be moulded in dialogue situations and context, e.g. phone-in television and radio programmes, discussions with businessmen, etc." (Comtask, 1996c:47).

5.4.1.3   Belgium

In Belgium, the Federal Information Service is part of the Office of the Prime Minister.   The Board of Directors is "the umbrella body that consists of representatives of ministries and ministries of the political parties represented in Parliament.   Under leadership of the director-general (a public servant), the Information Service consists of four main sections:

-      distribution of information via the media, Internet, post offices and publications
-      the editorial board that has to compile the information
-      a section for government campaigns or priorities and projects about focal issues (general socio-economic administrative issues and political decisions of the federal cabinet, and
-      a section for documentation and databases"

(Comtask, 1996c:49).

The Federal Information Service outsources many projects to the private sector. Every ministry also has its own departmental and political communication section that is autonomous, but according to the Comtask group, there is a kind of "cautious control" of the communication services of ministries by the office of the Federal Information Service (Comtask, 1996c:49).

No reference was made by Comtask to any research conducted by the Federal Information Service to enhance the effectiveness of their work, but the researcher realises that some changes may have been introduced since the Comtask investigation.   Unfortunately no relevant information is contained on the applicable website (Belgium, 2001).

5.4.1.4   Germany

In Germany every department has its own information service standing on two legs: a political leg consisting of the minister and his/her spokesperson and a leg for general government information.   Overall government communication is centralised in the *Presse- und Informazionsampt der Bundesregiering* (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government) in the Office of the Chancellor. The Press and Information Office gathers information that can be of use to the government by means of a 24-hour monitoring system of world media.   They provide two documents daily to senior public servants, members of Parliament, ministers and the Chancellor about news in the world media that may be of relevance to the German government.   The Office furthermore helps with the coordination and formulation of government's point of view, publishes and distributes official government statements after consultation and is available for press enquiries 24 hours a day.   The Office also has a publication section that publishes widely – both nationally and internationally – through the use of private companies (Comtask, 1996c:54-55).

According to the report of the Comtask group the German Press and Information Office "uses opinion polls extensively for feedback" and also "develops further strategy on the basis of the opinion polls" (Comtask, 1996c:55).   Unfortunately the Comtask report does not contain any information on whether the German Press and Information Office provides research support and/or advice to the information components of the different ministries and departments. Attempts by the researcher to obtain more and updated information failed – primarily because the information contained on the website (Germany, 2001) is only available in German.

5.4.1.5   The Netherlands

In the Netherlands each minister has an information service at its disposal. These services are responsible for handling press contacts, issuing press releases, distributing information brochures, organising mass media information campaigns, handling internal information and developing other information activities in their specific ministry's policy areas.   The ministers also have a collective responsibility for government policy as a whole. The Prime Minister's role in coordinating general government policy means that he is also responsible for providing information about this policy (Volmer, 1994:1-2).

The Netherlands Government Information Service or *Rijkvoorlichtingsdientst* (RVD) plays a central role in information about government policy. It forms part of the Ministry of General Affairs which is the Prime Minister's department, responsible for coordinating general government policy. The RVD has a different role than the other departmental information services, providing a coordinating and supporting function and providing services to other information departments. The RVD's involvement in general government policy mostly concerns information about weekly Cabinet meetings. The RVD furthermore provides the Prime Minister, his advisors and senior civil servants within the Ministry of General Affairs with information about developments and issues which may be relevant, either directly or indirectly, to the policy to be adopted (Volmer, 1994:8). The task of the RVD is summarised as follows on the RVD website: "To communicate with the media on behalf of the Prime Minister and the government; to provide public information on government policy, the Prime Minster and the Ministry of General Affairs, and the Royal House; to coordinate, facilitate and advise on public information matters involving more than one ministry; and to provide public information on behalf of all the ministries" (The Netherlands, Government Information Service, 2001).

The RVD has a special department that produces and distributes information material, films, videos and exhibitions for use by government bodies and helps to develop multi-media communication strategies and plays an important role in the exploitation of audio-visual material. Using the RVD can be of financial benefit to departments as the service uses its centralised contracts with the media to obtain bulk discount on advertising for customers (Volmer, 1994:9).

The organisation also provides support to ministries in preparatory and evaluatory research for information campaigns and other purposes. This includes research into specific target groups, advising on the different media available, pre-testing information material and assessing whether information activities have been effective (Volmer, 1994:9).

5.4.2   Africa

5.4.2.1   Namibia

In Namibia each Ministry has a responsibility to make information available regarding its field of responsibility. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting provides an information service through three sections:

- The Media Liaison division is "tasked with the responsibility of gathering and disseminating news and information eminating from all government institutions to local and foreign media, foreign missions in Namibia and the public.

- The Directorate Print Media and Regional Offices is responsible for the production of printed material and collection, processing and dissemination of information on government policies and initiatives through printed media and through its library and regional offices. One of its key objectives is to plan and execute national information campaigns and publish printed material, including a monthly magazine, *Namibia*

Review, that provides information on government policy and developmental issues (Namibia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting, 2001).

• The Directorate Audiovisual Media and Namibia Communications Commission (NCC) has to produce and disseminate audiovisual material on the government, its policies, its programmes and actions and to educate and entertain the public, especially in areas where the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) cannot reach. The NCC is tasked with the licencing of telecommunications equipment and frequency management on a national level.

"The Ministry has been a lead player in civic education campaigns on various issues including voters' education, gender, population, health and international expositions in which Namibia participates" (Namibia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting, 2001).

No information is provided on any initiatives to get feedback from clients through any means – e.g. perceptions expressed in the media, community meetings or through applying any research methodology.

5.4.2.2   Botswana

The role of the Department of Information and Broadcasting in *Botswana* is "to win and retain the consent of the people to the policies, aims and objectives of the government and to *provide feedback[18].*" The other role is "to educate and entertain the people, in accordance with the national development aims and goals" (Botswana, Ministry of State President, 2001).

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[18] Researcher's emphasis

The Department consists of three main media organs:

- the Botswana Press Agency and Publication section resorts under the *Information Division*

- the *Broadcast Division* consists of Culture and Entertainment, and News and Current Affairs

- the *Engineering Division* comprises of the Transmitter and Studio sections and its responsibilities include the planning of the frequencies of the transmitters, making specifications for studio and transmitter equipment as well as technical production and transmission of Radio Botswana programmes (Botswana, Ministry of State President, 2001).

Despite reference to "providing feedback" as being part of the aims and objectives of the Department of Information and Broadcasting, no information is provided on how the Department goes about to provide feedback from the people to the government. No reference is made to any research conducted by the Department of Information and Broadcasting to enhance effectiveness of government communication and information dissemination.

5.4.2.3   Zambia

According to information obtained from the website of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services, the Ministry "is responsible for policy information, analysis and coordination, and facilitates mobilisation of resources for effective implementation of media programmes. This involves liaising and networking on all media related issues with the media industry at national, regional and international levels to ensure media responsiveness to the needs of society" (Zambia, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services, 2001). No information is provided on the website regarding the processes followed by the Ministry to formulate policy, to do analysis and how they identify the needs of society.

The Zambia Information Services (ZIS) "serves as the public relations unit of the government. Its roles include carrying out awareness campaigns of national activities, highlighting government polices and providing a feedback mechanism between government and the citizenry. ZIS plays a vital role in the dissemination of information to the public through its six provincial newspapers, 'Z' magazine, ad hoc publications, through news as well as the production of videos which are mostly used by the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC)" (Zambia, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services, 2001).

Although it is mentioned on the website that the roles of ZIS include "providing a feedback mechanism between government and the citizenry", no information is provided to explain how this role of feedback is fulfilled.

5.4.3 Other countries

5.4.3.1 Barbados

The Barbados Government Information Service (BGIS) "is responsible for the dissemination of public information to the various news media and the general public." The BGIS furthermore "highlights and elucidates various government policies, plans, programmes and projects." The organisation is "actively involved in training other Departments of government in the public relations discipline, servicing information requests from the public as well as the monitoring of public response to government's work" (Barbados, Government Information Service, 2001).

Because no information is provided how BGIS monitors public response to government's work, it is not known whether it is done through applying appropriate research methodologies. Other duties of BGIS include "coverage of Parliament, facilitating members of Cabinet at Parliamentary sittings, press

conferences and briefings for Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and other top public officials.   The BGIS also provides press coverage of some overseas activities of government" (Barbados, Government Information Service, 2001).

5.4.3.2   Jamaica

 The Jamaica Information Service (JIS), positioned in the Office of the Prime Minister, is "the multifaceted information agency of the government that gathers and disseminates information on government policies and programmes, locally and overseas."   As an Information Agency, the JIS provides a full range of information and communication services to government ministries and agencies, including the following:
-        public relations programmes
-        media consultancy
-        research services
-        cover national and other news-making events
-        news and feature writing
-        research, write, design and print sundry publications
-        develop and implement advertising campaigns
-        speech writing
-        produce radio and television shows
-        meeting planning
-        provide videographic services
-        provide town crier services
-        provide photography services
-        mount exhibitions

(Jamaica, Information Service, 2001).

Although no reference is made to specific research projects conducted, the researcher's interpretation of the information provided on the JIS website is that

the organisation indeed makes use of relevant research methodologies to enhance the effectiveness of government communication. A question remains whether JIS attends to most of these communication activities through own capacity as opposed to outsourcing it. The perception and question arise from the following statement on the JIS website: "The Jamaica Information Service has the physical infrastructure, equipment, resources and competence to become one of the largest public relations, advertising, research and printing facilities in Jamaica and the Caribbean" (Jamaica, Information Service, 2001).

5.4.3.3   Hong Kong

The mission of the Information Services Department in Hong Kong is "to publicise and promote the policies, actions and services of the government to the public in Hong Kong and the wider community abroad. The Department is organised in five divisions: Public Relations, Publicity, Overseas Public Relations, Visits and Information (Hong Kong, Information Services Department, 2001).

The News Sub-division in the Public Relations Division "is responsible for issuing to the media all government announcements, varying from information on matters of government policy to routine notices and weather reports. It channels information to newspapers, news agencies, radio and television stations; deals with press enquiries 24 hours a day; and, in times of emergency, becomes the nerve centre of all communications." The Media Research Sub-division "monitors the print and electronic media to keep the government informed of public opinion." Within the Publicity Division, the Promotions Sub-division "is the government's in-house advertising agency" and "plans and implements major government publicity campaigns and supports promotional campaigns to educate the public on issues of major concern and to create awareness of civic responsibility". The Creative Subdivision is responsible for all government design

and display services, and film and photographic work. The Publishing Sub-division is Hong Kong's biggest publisher in terms of the volume of publications it writes, edits, prints, sells and distributes on behalf of government" (Hong Kong, Information Services Department, 2001).

Other than the work of the Media Research Sub-division that monitors the media to keep the government informed of public opinion, no reference is made to any research that is conducted by the Department to enhance the effectiveness of their work or the communication of other departments and ministries. Because most of the information products are produced in-house it becomes even more important to conduct research by means of appropriate methodologies amongst the various target groups to ensure successful and cost-effective communication that is sensitive to the profile, needs and perceptions of customers.

5.4.3.4   India

In India the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), "through the mass communications media consisting of radio, television, films, the press, publications, advertising and traditional mode of dance and drama, plays a significant part in helping the people to have access to free flow of information. It also caters for the dissemination of knowledge and entertainment to all sections of society, striking a careful balance between public interest and commercial needs, in its delivery of services. The MIB is the apex body for formulation and administration of the rules and regulations and laws relating to information, broadcasting, the press and films. The Ministry is responsible for international cooperation in the field of mass media, films and broadcasting and interacts with its foreign counterparts on behalf of the Government of India" (India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2001). MIB has eleven media units:
-        Press Information Bureau
-        Research, Reference and Training Division

- Publications Division

- Photo Division

- Registrar of Newspapers for India

- Directorate of Field Publicity

- Song and Drama Division

- Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity

- Films Division

- Directorate of Film Festivals

- National Film Archives of India

(India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2001).

The Research, Reference and Training Division (RRTD) "functions as an information servicing agency for the MIB, its Media Units and their field offices. It serves as an information bank as well as an information feeder service to the Media Units to help in their programming and publicity campaigns. It also studies trends in mass communication media and maintains a reference and documentation service on mass communication. The division provides background, reference and research material and other facilities for the use of the Ministry, its Media Units and others involved in mass communication. The division also looks after the training aspect of the Indian Information Service (IIS) officers in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication" (India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2001).

From the information provided in the previous paragraph, it is clear that the Research, Reference and Training Division does not conduct or commission any research within the context referred to in this research project. The functions of the Press Information Bureau include the responsibility to "provide feedback to their assigned Ministries/Departments on people's reactions being reflected in the media towards government policies and programmes" (India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2001). The functions of the Directorate of Field

Publicity include "[gathering] people's reactions to various programmes and policies of the government and their implementation down to the village level" (India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2001).

5.4.3.5 United States

The United States (US) has no information ministry to inform Americans within the borders of the country about their government's policies, programmes and initiatives – it is prohibited by law. The White House (Office of the President) has a centralising and coordinating function regarding the provision of information to the media, and identifies stories of the day. The US government relies on a free and critical media to get its message across and to keep the government transparent and accountable (Comtask, 1996c: 7).

The internationally well-known market research company, Gallup, mentions on their website that "the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 mandated that customer satisfaction become a major consideration in determining the manner in which federal agencies are run in the US. Executive Order 12862 of 11 September 1993, states that the standard of quality for services provided to the public shall be: Customer service equal to the best in business" (The Gallup Organisation, 2000).

Unfortunately no information could be obtained from either the report on Comtask's visit to the US or from any official US website to determine whether the US government conducted any research to determine whether either the population or the media is satisfied with the communication and information service they receive from the government.

The United States Information Agency (USIA) is the foreign communication and information service of the US government. The sole aim of USIA is "to

understand, inform and influence publics outside the USA in the promotion of the national interest of the US and to broaden dialogue between Americans, their institutions and counterparts abroad" (Comtask, 1996c:30). USIA assesses the world's view of the United States through monitoring the media in each country where they have an embassy. According to the Comtask groups' report on their international visits (Comtask, 1996c:32) USIA "also commissions public opinion polls on bilateral affairs."

5.4.3.6   Brazil

In Brazil the Department of Social Communication is responsible for the process of informing Brazilian society about government. This Department works directly under the Presidency, headed by a Secretary with the status of a minister. The Secretary has three sub-Secretaries who deal with internal matters and he has a special advisor who is responsible for promoting Brazil abroad with the Department of Foreign Affairs. The responsibilities of the three sub-Secretaries are the following:

- The first deals with administration, and is also responsible for educational radio and television through the Pinto Foundation.

- The second deals with press relations, is the spokesperson for the President and attends Cabinet meetings. He provides information about government with the focus on the President at daily news briefings. With the support of this sub-Secretary, the Secretary attempts to coordinate information between departments and parastatals.

- The third, called the 'institutional secretary', deals with government advertising, the corporate image of government, develops a coordinated approach in negotiations with the media for advertising space and also oversees the production of brochures and pamphlets for use overseas (Comtask, 1996c:37-38).

Radio *Nacional* (or Radio Braz) is the state radio station which has five AM, FM and shortwave stations and one television station. It broadcasts in Brazil as well as to North and South America, Europe and Africa in Portuguese, French, German and English. Funding is 20 percent from advertising and the rest comes from government. The principle objective is to transmit government news and to act as a news agency for political and economic news to 400 stations. This is the home of *Voice of Brazil*, a one-hour programme which contains 30 minutes of government news followed by 30 minutes of excerpts of congressional debates. By law all radio stations in Brazil have to broadcast the *Voice of Brazil* at 19:00 each day. The Comtask group that visited Brazil, reports that they "asked everyone about the popularity of the programme and everyone said they switched off when the programme came on" (Comtask, 1996c:37). The Comtask group also remarked that "people in rural areas who did not have access to newspapers and other media listened because it was the only way they could learn what the government was doing" (Comtask, 1996c:37).

According to information available to the researcher, no research is conducted by the Department of Social Communication or by Radio Braz to assess the effectiveness of their initiatives.

5.5 CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN SOUTH AFRICA LEARN FROM OTHER COUNTRIES IN TERMS OF THE USE OF RESEARCH TO ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION?

One of the secondary research objectives for this research (see paragraph 1.2) is to investigate and record the use of research by other governments to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information.

The most important lessons learnt from this investigation are:

- Corporate communications initiatives for government are developed on the basis of public opinion and communications research in some countries (Canada, Australia, Germany, The Netherlands, Jamaica)

- The provision of communication research advice and support to government is one of the functions of the central information agencies in some countries (Australia, Denmark, Germany)

- Guideline documents to assist government communicators in writing a brief to research consultants and/or to prepare research proposals were developed by the central information agencies in a few countries (Australia, United Kingdom)

- In some countries research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication is coordinated by the central information agency for government as a whole (Canada, United Kingdom, The Netherlands)

- The tendency is to outsource government communications research to the private sector (Canada, United Kingdom, Belgium)

- Bulk-buying of communications research services for government results in substantial cost savings (United Kingdom, The Netherlands)

- In some countries all government departments and agencies have to submit their communication research projects for approval and/or registration to a central office. In some countries these submissions are made to the central information agency whilst in other countries the submission is made to the central statistics agency in government (United Kingdom, Australia)

- Communication research results are sometimes shared throughout the government (Canada)

- In some countries a catalogue of government communications and information research is available to government communicators (Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, India)

- It is a matter of principle in some countries that all government information programmes should be based on relevant research (Australia, Jamaica)

- The importance of conducting research throughout the lifecycle of campaigns and not as a once-off exercise, is emphasized (United Kingdom, Australia)

- The results of evaluative research should assist in planning for future related campaigns, including the setting of realistic targets (United Kingdom, Germany)

- Different research methodologies – e.g. qualitative and quantitative – are used to complement each other in increasing the understanding of the research problem (Australia, Canada)

- Research into the needs of specific target groups is conducted additional to research amongst the broader population (United Kingdom, The Netherlands).