

## Workshop A – Communicating Reforms

Input

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Ladies and gentleman,

I am glad to be here at your workshop and a special thanks to the Bertelsmann Stiftung for the invitation to this input talk.

Political communication is a subject in a permanent change. The development of technology effects the general conditions of communication.

From the Barack Obama campaign we have learned how to organize a grass-root campaign using the instruments of the internet and short message service.

In our world wide knowledge societies the professional use of information is more and more important.

### Introduction

Today I will speak about government communication, the techniques and topics of conveyed information by a government. In Germany it is the Federal Government. I will not speak about Party-Communication or election communication, nor about the special campaigning communication. Although, for me, it would be very interesting to discuss all of these topics. It is important, however, to differentiate all of these subjects. And so we will. I have six catchwords.

### 1. Government communications

We have to separate in two ranges: in information policy – the public information about the government policy and the public relations. In a democracy, political power is a power for a period of time. So it's a top challenge to bid for acceptance for the government policy and their decisions.

In a - what we call – "media-democracy," policy looks for a special media-logic. Government communication has to anticipate that media looks for attention when searching for and selecting news. At the same time, the need for transparency and presentation of policy decisions is growing, due to the complex nature of the topics and the decision-making process in a globalized world.

Political, social and economic changes at cyber speed has to be set in a context, it has to be communicated and commented upon.

A government's information has to be competent and authentic in regard to all citizens, but also as an information-bridge-maker to the media.

That's a particular challenge considering the pressure of reforms, where there won't be any clear winner at the end – for example by the reconstruction of our welfare system. The current world wide financial crisis is another good example for this challenge: the government has to declare to their people, their voters, why they have to pay billions and billions of Euro of taxes for banks or international firms. These decisions and information have to be communication in a form that most people understand in order to accept the decisions.

Professional Government communication uses modern instruments for identification and control of public debates like issue management and campaigning.

You don't get the votes if the voters don't understand you. For the Government the acceptance and the confidence of the people are the basic conditions for their political power. Government communication is therefore one element of the political decision.

making and the basic key of effective governance. Therefore government communication is not only one instrument of governance – it must be a visible and remarkable instrument.

## 2. Structure Federal Government

Having finished the description of government communication, let me now explain the structure of the organisation of the Communication of the Federal Government in a few words:

The government's nucleus is itself: the chancellor, Mrs. Merkel, the Vice-Chancellor, our foreign secretary, Mr. Steinmeier and the whole cabinet with all ministers. You just saw the heart of the government, the chancellery with the hall of cabinet. The whole government has a government spokesman, States Secretary Mr. Wilhelm, head of the press- and information office with nearly 500 members of staff. The politicians are the main players. They are in demand and their answers determine the government communication.

But we also have the principle of autonomous ministries. And all ministers have their own press speakers. You know that in Germany we have regular coalition governments. So the speaker of a minister is first of all engaged for his minister. It's a complex structure with different aspects and this complicates an overall control.

## 3. An integrated approach

The government communication of political projects, of legislation procedure which are involving experts, lobby groups and the media has also the task to arrange connections, to manage the information and to organize the dialogue.

But first the main priority: effective communication of a government needs a common message. This message expresses in a special commitment of all members of the cabinet. This policy is important and binding.

If you conduct a chorus you should make sure that all singers are singing the same melody. Authenticity and acceptance are the guideline for the government communication. One key to effective communication is an integrated approach. To perform this task we need a reconstruction of a small, effective and co-ordinating structure. I propose a small staff at the chancellery with the government speaker as its head. A reduced Press- and Information office for media monitoring, campaigning and organizing the public relations. And we need a new culture and an adequate structure for the intern communication in the administration.

Press- and PR staff are important for the right transfer to the media and the public. From the beginning of the political project they should participate in the project, the intern discussions. If communication is handled as an appendix they won't be successful.

And to communicate in an integrated approach normally neglects an essential criterion(criteria) for a successful communication: the intern preparation. They need an intensive intern communication with all players of this topic in the administration. The administration needs a common message and a common understanding – finally a preparation of the official communication by stakeholders.

To neglect all this intern preparations is one of the most frequent mistakes.

A fussy preparation of the political project means that every single step must be goal-oriented. It is incontestable that reform projects are not successful alone by planned steps. The steps required for implementation must be precisely specified and accompanied by internal and external communication

These are the premises for an integrated approach.

But it also true that government communications aren't predictable. Nevertheless, a conception which comprises the communication is important for success.

## 4. Instruments

What are the instruments for an effective government communication?

The central points are the instruments of active communication to the general public, media and multipliers. You all know the instruments of the Obama Campaign. I worry the many government communicators will try to adopt these instruments. That would be a mistake because we can't transform campaigning instruments one-to-one to government communication. And we can't transform these instruments one-to-one to our media behaviour. What we need is a form of a specific dialogue communication. Mrs Merkel started with a weekly podcasts. She was the first political leader who used this instrument. Media interest was guaranteed. But every week a new message? I think it's the right instrument but it's also the wrong usage. Often advertising - agencies advise the administration. They use advertising instruments one-to-one for government communication. But the government or their political projects are not products. It is a simple misunderstanding.

## 5. The triad

The triad of topics, instruments and target groups

Every topic is to communicate with a specific instrument to a clearly defined target group. The difference between the citizens on the one hand and the media on the other hand is important for an effective communication.

We have to look for the effective use of the instruments. Online Information is really important and I organized the German government communication online from 1998 to 2002. But – if your target group isn't part of the online-community like – for example - the 60 plus- generation you need other accesses.

Only a systematic study of target groups will help you bring your topic with the right instruments to the citizens. And the same conditions are true for the media.

For example, the German government implemented in 2001 a special online - platform for journalists. Here they can get all the daily news, press relevant information and special background information with a password protected online instrument. That's the right instrument for this target group.

## 6. Guidelines

At last let me give you my view to a few guidelines of successful government communication:

- Government communication isn't predictable but we can organise a structure to a successful communication
- Authentic and confident communication are two of the key lines for Government communication
- Only an integrated approach is the fundament for successful communication
- The triad of topics, instruments and target groups
- Instruments: Politics are not a product where you can use the advertisement instruments unevaluated. Dialogue communication – direct, online, no one-way-street.