

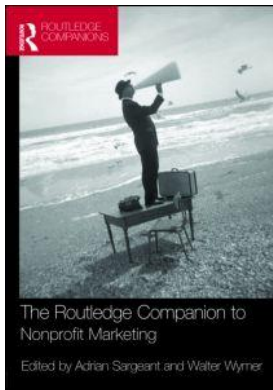
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 27 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to Nonprofit Marketing

Adrian Sargeant, Walter Wymer

Marketing communication of public policy intentions

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203936023.ch25>

Dave Gelders

Published online on: 22 Nov 2007

How to cite :- Dave Gelders. 22 Nov 2007, *Marketing communication of public policy intentions from: The Routledge Companion to Nonprofit Marketing* Routledge

Accessed on: 27 Mar 2023

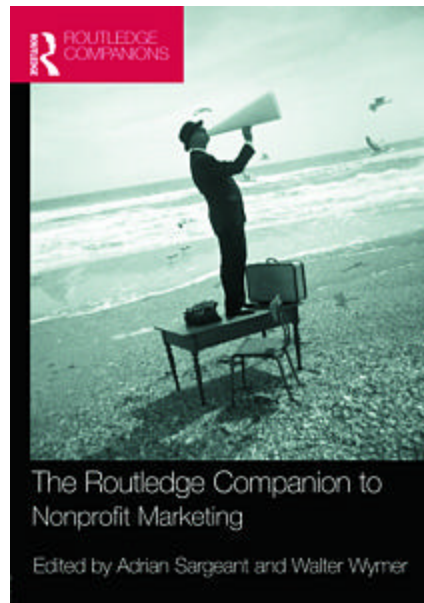
<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203936023.ch25>

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ISBN: 0-415-41727-9, *The Routledge Companion to Nonprofit Marketing*, © 2008 Adrian Sargeant and Walter Wymer for editorial matter and selection; individual chapters, the contributors, Routledge, Page cover.

First published 2008
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset in Bembo by RefineCatch Ltd

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN10: 0-415-41727-9 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0-203-93602-7 (ebk)
ISBN13: 978-0-415-41727-3 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-93602-3 (ebk)

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Marketing communication of public policy intentions

Dave Gelders

Introduction

Public sector marketing can be seen as a form of nonprofit marketing. Though this issue has received some academic interest during the past two decades (see e.g. Mokwa and Permut 1981), recently, it has received additional attention; see the final and broader chapter on public sector marketing in the second edition of the handbook *Marketing Management for Nonprofit Organizations* (Sargeant 2005:375–95) and the explicit reference to this topic in the scholarly journal *Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing*. Public sector marketing has become one of the important facets of human society in addition to third sector and private sector marketing (Sargeant 2005).

Traditional public administration studies consider ‘policy processes’ as a series of stages: preparation, adoption and implementation (for an overview of studies, see e.g. Weimer and Vining 1999). Marketing communication may play a role in each stage. Examples include helping ‘politicians to convey the desirability of particular options and/or portray the wider benefit that will accrue to society as a consequence of a particular option’ or encouraging ‘individuals to exercise their democratic rights to vote’ (Sargeant 2005:380); stimulating citizens to participate in societal debates (Kotler 1988:367–71); and trying to influence knowledge, attitude and/or behaviour of people by public communication campaigns used as a policy instrument in the implementation stage (besides legal and economic political instruments; e.g. Etzel and James 1970; Bemelmans-Videc *et al.* 1998; ‘social marketing/ communication’ in Sargeant 2005:181–210).

Several authors focused on the role of marketing research in public policy decision-making (see Wilkie *et al.* 2002; Hugstad, 1979; Dyer and Shimp 1977; Ritchie and LaBréque 1975; Wilkie and Gardner 1974). This chapter deals with the ‘marketing of public policy’ with specific attention on one element of the marketing mix: the promotion or (external) communication of one aspect of policies such as public policy intentions or policy ideas that are made public by politicians (such as ministers) but that are not yet adopted by higher authorities (such as parliament).

We first describe why such marketing communication has become so important and will then sketch the specific public sector context in which such communication takes place. We

then describe the most important arguments both for and against marketing communication about policy intentions. Finally, we study how the government may increase customers' satisfaction when it communicates about public policy intentions.

Why so important?

Recent developments in citizenry, politics and media clearly indicate that marketing communication about policy intentions is a highly relevant and delicate issue which merits close consideration. Let us note some of the most important and relevant developments: dissolution of political attitudes and affiliations previously thought to be strong anchors (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995); the voting behaviour of the citizenry is less predictable and the citizenry is more demanding. Politicians and political parties are involved in permanent campaigning (Norris 2000) during which the techniques of spin-doctoring, opinion polls and professional media management are increasingly applied to routine everyday politics. It has become common practice to float trial balloons in order to know the acceptable and appreciated policy intentions by the public. Arguing that the policy-making process should be less secretive and more transparent to the public, today's politicians often freely discuss their policy intentions before the eyes of the camera ('open debating culture').

Linsky (1986) states that in the past three decades, media in the USA has become the most important and in many cases is the only source of information used to inform citizens. The media serves as a basic tool for the government to learn about public opinion and needs, which are two basic functions originally executed by political parties. According to Linsky, the media has become the forum for policy discussion both in and out of the government. Where the policy dimension was originally developed outside the media, it increasingly occurs within the public space of the media (Meyer 2002 referring to O. Jarren). More often, one finds politicians floating trial balloons before definitively introducing policy intentions. After the proposals pass a series of tests in the media, politicians may define which proposed policy will become popular. In this way, the media helps to determine which policy will be accepted by political actors in addition to communicating about the decisions of political actors *post factum*. By introducing policy measures or reforms as intentions and not yet as well-developed proposals, politicians may, if the media's reply is negative, easily change their intentions, reformulate them and present them in a different format without consulting the party each time to be assured of their support. This is a negotiation process between politicians and media in which the media claims to reflect the (voice of) public opinion (which may be negative in future elections). In reality, the media does not always present public opinion but constructs it, as is illustrated by Meyer (2002). Cook (1989) also describes how politicians try to get bills adopted by means of the media. Cook states that the so-called 'inside strategies' (contacting a few strategically well-placed people behind the scenes) have not worked for two decades in the US Congress. Cook refers to James Baker, head of the White House staff under President Reagan, when stating that a message should first be sold to the public before selling it to Congress. Consequently, so-called 'outside-strategies' should also be followed. Authorities other than the president use this mechanism such as grassroots organizations (Fraser 1979) and public bodies such as the American Post. Linsky (1986:151-68) describes how the 'American Postmaster General Winton Blount and his associates in the government' conducted a sophisticated marketing campaign (by paid and unpaid publicity; see below) in order to receive broad press attention and support for a reform plan of the postal system, hoping that the coverage would boost the public pressure on Congress to adopt the bill.

Interpretative reporting is a second evolution relevant to explaining the importance of marketing communication of policy intentions. Interpretative reporting is nearly as old as journalism itself but has only recently become the dominant model of news coverage; reporters questioning politicians' actions and commonly attributing strategic intentions to them provide politicians with fewer chances to speak for themselves (Patterson 1996). Striving for a story, the media does not always give the complete picture or exact status of policy issues (i.e. is it about a policy intention or a policy decision?). Consciously or not, the media supplies biased information to citizens whose reactions to policy decisions and policy-makers are based on what the media chooses to communicate and the manner in which they communicate it. This can influence the probability of whether or not a policy measure will be adopted and implemented successfully (Cobb and Elder 1981).

Typically, 'media logic' is that the 'politics of time' has increasingly turned into 'politics of news time' (Patterson cited by Wolfsfeld 2001). Meyer (2002) stresses that the media's perspective currently dominates the political perspective by stating that the (overall) 'media presentism' gives political leaders less opportunity to determine their support and results in a permanent pressure to float trial balloons (see also above). Increasingly, politicians take the news cycle (news deadlines, etc.) into account when communicating policy proposals. They devote more and more attention to the drafting of the message and are advised not to talk too much about general topics but rather about specific issues (i.e. not 'pleading for a traffic-safe city' but 'pleading for more cycle tracks on all school routes'). These proposals should not be communicated in an analytical manner but by means of warm, human-interest stories illustrated by a specific action of the politician presenting his policy intention. Politicians and their media advisers organize media events around their policy proposals. For example, in Belgium, an acrophobic minister parachuted in order to draw attention to a new system encouraging banks to lend money to new, small entrepreneurs. By the minister daring to jump, she hoped to encourage new entrepreneurs to start businesses by taking advantage of the new guarantee regulation of the government.

In addition to important factors such as timing and supporting actions (i.e. the parachute jump), the medium in which the policy intention is communicated has also become increasingly important. In Belgium, a minister announced his intention to host the Olympic Games in 2016 in a popular newspaper about sports and politics.

Specific context

In 1985, the American Marketing Association (AMA) added the concept of 'ideas' to the list of products suitable for marketing (Scammell 1999). Like products and services, (policy) ideas may be marketed. But Sargeant (2005:27) wrote that 'despite the obvious benefits that marketing can offer a nonprofit, there are a number of important differences between the application of marketing in a for-profit and a non-profit context'.

When applied to the marketing communication of policy intentions, Gelders *et al.* (2007, forthcoming) state that such communication is important, but that it is also delicate as a result of the more complicated, unstable environment of the public sector and its political influences. The statutory characteristics of governmental operations result in so-called semi-products that governments communicate about. The complexity of the process is visible when politicians discuss the characteristics of policy intentions up to the 'point of sale' (Scammell 1999:727). Without comparing and contrasting the openness versus closeness of the public and private sectors too much, the deliberative process in the private sector is an internal matter:

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the decision is publicly communicated at the end of the policy-making process. It is hard to imagine that a private company would publicly discuss its product until the product is ready for consumption as often occurs in the public sector, as Scammell argues.

An important difference between the public and private sectors is that public organizations not only strive for efficiency (e.g. efficient policy implementation) but also for democratic values (e.g. respecting the authority of parliament by not anticipating its policy adoption). Public communication about policy intentions is not obvious due to the greater organizational rigidity in the public sector: the relatively strict timing and budgeting of public communication is hard to fit in with the often capricious political policy-making process.

Pros and cons

The importance of marketing communication of policy intentions has already been discussed. During that discussion, there were references to important evolutions in politics, media and citizenry, and that politicians increasingly try to meet the needs of the media. Is this a negative? It depends on how far a politician goes. Though such practices are often negatively evaluated by journalists and opposition parties ('it is only about image ...'), there are positive aspects. Thanks to good timing and drafting of messages, media events (e.g. the parachute jump) about more complicated issues may be made public in a shorter and more comprehensible way, and specific target groups may be reached sparking an interest in the issue. Media events are often 'symbolic events' or 'pseudo events' with no substantial policy consequences and are seen as occasions for politicians to demonstrate that they care about an issue. Media events are not a problem as they may promote the legitimacy of the governmental operation. But it is important that the problems discussed are eventually tackled. Additionally, the difference between the media event and the policy intention should not be too great. If, for example, the target groups, in addition to the broader population, do not see the link between the parachute jump and the guarantee regulation of the government or consider this link to be unclear, weak or irrelevant, the minister may be blamed or punished.

Paid publicity (leaflets, newspaper advertisements, etc.) used by government or ministers is most controversial in the marketing communication of policy intentions. This kind of publicity has been brought into question in several countries. The specific executive position of a minister may cast a shadow over the exact aim of the message. Is it (personal, political) propaganda and therefore a misuse of public money? Is it supplying transparent information in a democratic state aimed at informing and involving citizens and societal organizations regarding the formation of a policy?

These questions were raised during the campaign regarding reform of the Post Office in the USA (Linsky 1986). Leaflets on Operation Rescue and paying for local government did the same in the UK (Scammell 1999) while trial balloons on social security brought communication about policy intentions under discussion in Germany (Jarren cited in Meyer 2002). Other pre-eminent examples include the dissemination of leaflets on the introduction of toll-roads by the Dutch government (Kranendonk 2003) and the dissemination of leaflets on drug policy in Belgium (Gelders 2005).

Pros

Counterbalancing misleading or incorrect information from opponents and the media: an important argument for communication about policy intentions (by paid

publicity) from

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government is that other actors such as the opposition, pressure groups and the media communicate one-sidedly or incorrectly about the policy intentions of government (Committee on the Future of Government Communication 2001). If it wants to be heard, government needs to communicate via paid publicity. When its communication is restricted to the free press (press interviews, press conferences), it is too hard to apply counter-pressure to the misleading or incorrect communication from other actors.

More efficient

Another argument for communicating policy intentions is that it can help government to implement and maintain the adopted policy. As a result, public policy becomes more efficient. Many policies within the formulation process are not controversial. In such cases, government only needs to communicate about a 'reservation of acceptance'. As a result, citizens and organizations can prepare for a policy that will most likely be adopted. For instance, if the rate modifications for the subsidies to be used in January of the following year are only published 'after acceptance by the Senate during the last meeting in December' (translated), Tiemeijer and Rijnja (2001:190), this is considered inefficient for the implementation of public policy. It is also argued that communication about policy intentions reduces or avoids unintended consequences later on, such as surprises, misunderstandings, resistance, frustrations and speculation among citizens and organizations. The extent of support and resistance by the public as well as the importance of the counter-arguments of citizens become clarified, thus creating opportunities to fine-tune the policy or for strengthening the arguments for the (intended) policy.

More democratic

Seydel *et al.* (2002) state that openness and freedom of information have evolved during the past few decades. In the past, openness and freedom of information were crucial conditions for public information provisions in the service of democracy. This idea has now been expanded to include the openness and transparency of the policy-making process itself. Presently, organizations must succeed in the traditional sense as well as in the current sense of procedure: they must be accountable to the often complicated working and policy-making procedures providing the basis of their qualitative products or services (Bouckaert 1995). Today, there seems to be a consensus on the use of paid publicity (e.g. campaigns) if government aims to stimulate citizens into participating in societal debates and thus seeks to stimulate interaction in the policymaking processes.

The proponents of more proactive communication about policy intentions (communication initiated by the government itself) stress that voters must be continuously informed about the political points of view and whether they are controversial. Government would also gain a realistic understanding of the possible reactions by population segments through publicly communicating policy intentions. Some authors even state that one bypasses the intermediary bodies of deliberative democracy (the organizations, pressure groups and parties) that in the past mediated political issues and brokered consensus, thus moving towards a more direct democracy (Meyer 2002).

Defenders of public communication about policy intentions also state that this type of communication clarifies what is going on within the political world ('the organized difference in opinion'). Politics would become more exciting and less detached from everyday life and people resulting in a general public more interested in politics and policies.

Cons

State propaganda

Opponents consider it dangerous when government uses public finances to communicate policy intentions unless its communication is explicitly meant to stimulate participation in interactive policy-making processes (Volmer 2000). Government would become too powerful when compared with the opponents of governmental policy. In addition, such ministerial or governmental communication may easily focus towards the minister as an individual politician rather than the content of the intended policy.

Less efficient

Some believe that prematurely publishing policy intentions may disturb the formulation or development of policy and eventually its success, thus wasting time and money when the plan is not implemented. Moreover, the internal deliberative processes between politicians and civil servants would come under pressure and thus hamper civil servants' operations (Van Gisteren and Wassenaar 2003).

Less democratic

The final important argument against governmental communication about policy intentions deals with the democratic characteristics of the policy-making process. Parliament is no longer the first body to be informed of government's intention and government overanticipates parliamentary adoption.

There is the risk of confusing policy intentions with policy decisions on two accounts: politicians often communicate about their policy intentions via the media and/or because politicians, the media and so on communicate in an incomplete and inconsistent manner.

Satisfying the customer: bridging the gap between expectations and perceptions

Based on the definition of Zeithaml (1981), Gelders (2005) argues that the marketing communication process about policy intentions may be seen as a 'service' that is intangible, inseparable, heterogeneous and perishable. Citizens may also be seen as 'customers' as argued by Bouckaert and Thijs (2003:8). Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) developed a conceptual model about qualitative service delivery (the gap analysis model). This model maps five gaps; the final or fifth gap is between the customers' expected and perceived service delivery (his/her satisfaction). This gap may be explained by the four possible preceding gaps. The four gaps will be briefly described followed by arguments about what they may mean for the marketing communication of policy intentions.

Gap 1: Expected service vs. management perceptions of customer expectations

This refers to the difference between the customers' expected service delivery and the management perceptions of customer expectations that management believes the customer expects. Translated to our specific issue: politicians, or broader policy-makers, do not always know what

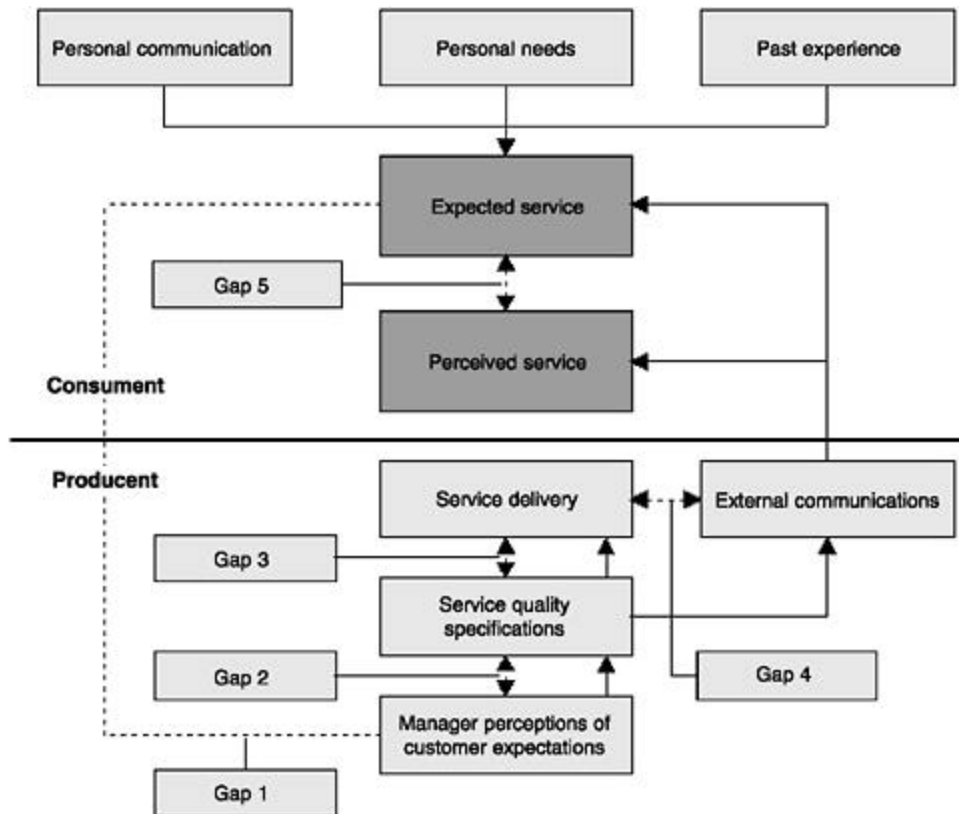


Figure 25.1 Gap analysis model

kind of information citizens would like regarding policy intentions (a down-to-earth or a more high-brow communication), in which format they prefer the information (policy letters of individual ministers, governmental agreements, trial balloons), how often citizens would like to be informed about these issues (every day, floating another trial balloon or not), and the manner in which the message is formulated (do citizens take offence at messages that do not communicate the status of the policy issue within the policy-making process?). Politicians will often be uncertain as to whether citizens would like to be confronted at all with preliminary policy communication. This first gap influences the final customer satisfaction in a significant way (Bouckaert and Vandeweyer 1999). The faults in the 'management perception' may be due to, for example, poor marketing research, improper bottom-up communication and too many management levels.

In order to gain better insight into which communication style, what information and how much information citizens wish to know about policy intentions, politicians may focus on several kinds of formal and informal market intelligence techniques, such as conversations with individual citizens, intermediary organizations, opinion polls, election results and image or reputation research. One should interpret these results carefully. For example, one should keep in mind that citizens do not easily change their attitude towards governmental bodies and policies (Van de Walle 2004).

Illustration

A TNS Media survey conducted among 1,084 Dutch-speaking people in September/ October 2004 in Belgium revealed that there were hardly any changes in party preferences of citizens when compared with the Flemish regional elections as of 13 June 2004. However, the TNS Media survey was conducted after politically turbulent times; many open conflicts and contradictory public declarations of policy intentions in the case of the night flights at Brussels National Airport (Gelders and Facon 2004). ‘Apparently, citizens do not care so much about the day to day political wrestlings as the policymakers and the media’, explained a Belgian political journalist (*De Standaard*, 30 October 2004). According to him, people are willing to ‘see what will come’ and have time to transform their opinion into a political choice.

However, one finds that the gains that politicians make during elections, polls and reputation studies are often seen as an indication of the extent to which politicians’ communication styles are appreciated. For example, the electoral win of the Flemish Christian-Democratic party (slogan: ‘Not words, but deeds’) has been interpreted by several political analysts and politicians as a sign that citizens did not like ‘too much open debating culture’ and that they want ‘more realism in politics’.

Studies about such topics as ‘citizenship styles’ may help to deduce information about customers’ expectations about communication of policy intentions, and consequently, they may help to bridge the gap between the expected service delivery and management’s perception of expectations. We can look to the large-scale survey conducted by Motivaction (2001) among 8,010 Dutch people in 1997 to 2000. Based on this survey, Motivaction made a distinction between four types of citizenship styles: inactive citizens, dependent citizens, conformist citizens and citizens critical of the social structure. Each kind of citizenship is characterized by its own values and a preferred communication style (e.g. preference towards proactive vs. reactive communication). It is useful to study the extent to which such styles relate to citizens’ expectations about the quality of communication of policy intentions.

Insight can also be generated by studies on the sources of citizens’ dissatisfaction with and distrust of government; based on an empirical research, Kampen *et al.* (2005) concluded that a ‘lack of transparency’ (quantity and quality of information, etc.) is a major issue in citizens’ criticism of government.

Studies on the perceived pros and cons of the ‘open debating culture’ are useful. Using two surveys conducted in 2004, we found that Flemish citizens are not as negative towards this issue as politicians and journalists believe them to be.

Finally, one can also research the complaints and the questions of citizens about public communication about policy intentions. But one should be cautious in interpreting the data. Research shows that only 4 per cent of customers experiencing problems report their complaints (Bouckaert and Vandeweyer 1999).

Gap 2: Management perceptions of customer expectations vs. service quality specifications

This deals with the differences between the management perception and service quality specifications. Customers’ wishes may not be correctly interpreted or translated into detailed product specifications. Some wishes cannot be formulated into specific standards; this statement

is contested by Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) in that they consider a lack of involvement of the management in the quality of the service delivery as the cause for poor service quality specification.

Gelders (2005) analysed a series of quality criteria (i.e. factuality, completeness, timeliness) of communication that governments integrated in legal and deontological stipulations on public communication about policy intentions in several countries. These criteria cover acceptable principles but are insufficiently translated into details (Terrill 1994). Graber (2003) stresses that the assessment of quality of information is a highly subjective issue and it is difficult to determine objective evaluation standards measuring the quality of information in all variables: ‘Consequently, officials find it difficult to determine whether available information is good enough to permit valid interferences and to serve as the basis for action.’

Gap 3: Service quality specification vs. service delivery

This refers to the difference between the quality specifications of service delivery and the service delivery itself: organizational members (in this case ministers) cannot or do not want to reach the assumed objectives or quality specifications. Ministers must not only know what customers expect (see Gap 1) and can translate this into standards (see Gap 2), but they also have to (want to) realize these standards. Scoring political points is often so important that even if governments stipulate strict conditions for communication about policy intentions, there will remain a gap between ‘words and deeds’.

Gap 4: Customer service delivery vs. external communications

This deals with the difference between service delivery (communication about policy intentions) and the external communication about this service delivery in that the method of communication must communicate policy intentions. One can find this ‘metacommunication’ in deontological codes, interviews with ministers about their governing and communication style, and so on. For example, if a government states in a deontological code to strive for a cautious way of communicating policy intentions, this will influence citizens’ expectations. The objectives that one formulates in such meta-communication should be realistic and the ministers should behave as such. A proper (meta-)communication policy is necessary as such communication steers the customers’ expectations as well as their quality perception (Bouckaert and Vandeweyer 1999).

Illustration

The new Flemish government led by the Christian-Democratic Minister-President Yves Leterme could not easily drop the ‘open debating culture’ as the government had originally announced. The governmental agreement stressed that the essence of politics is making realistic choices and realizing them to obtain a strong, coherent team and a deontological code which must be respected. The new government affirmed an older code stipulating, for example, that each minister should hold back premature declarations when going public. Though this stipulation was not new, it held special meaning in light of the many statements by the Leterme Government to drop the ‘open debating culture’ and in light of practices illustrating that the open debating culture was

'still alive and kicking' (e.g. night flight debate; Gelders and Facon 2004).

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Thus, there may be a gap between the way one intends to communicate (or wants to communicate) and the way one communicates in practice. The question to what extent the external communication policy about service delivery is more than a mere 'PR stunt' (Terrill 1994) may be brought forward.

Conclusion

Walsh (1994:65) states that 'the way that policy is presented is seen as central to effective implementation' as Deacon and Goldin have previously stated. Public communication is much more than simply transferring information or persuading receivers. It is a tool that several actors use to create meaning in policy-making processes. One can speak of a transition from 'meaning of management' to 'management of meaning'.

Marketing communication on policy intentions is important as citizens and organizations can be informed about policy intentions and can be better involved in the policy-making process. However, this communication is delicate due to a fear of state propaganda and confusion among citizens and organizations between policy intentions versus real decisions. Confusion may be created due to the mere fact that government communicates something relating to as of yet unadopted policies and/or because government communicates in an incomplete and inconsistent manner.

Marketing communication on policy intentions is controversial: (a) several negative features make such communication objectionable, and (b) the question of publicly paid publicity (governmental leaflets, newspaper advertisements) in the policy preparation stage. In the following, there is an attempt to offer a balanced appreciation of these controversies.

Marketing communication on policy intentions: positive aspects

Such communication is not only positive for the image of a politician, party or government, but also for the policy a minister would like to realize. As such, image management is not objectionable. A positive image of a minister may also be good for his/her policy and vice versa. It is advisable to communicate policy intentions in an influencing (commercial/canvassing) manner as a way to stimulate citizens' participation in a societal debate. It may also open up debate with other politicians and citizens on possible new policies. Thanks to this communication, other politicians may be pushed to publish and argue their point of view or to go along with the ministerial intended policy for which the cooperation of other politicians (ministers, MPs) is necessary. Consequently, policy may be realized more efficiently. To the extent that policies strive for noble goals, there is something to be said for publicly communicating policy intentions. How far can a minister go in this matter? When does the activation end? When does putting pressure on colleagues start?

Some politicians, communication professionals and academics plead for discussing all policy ideas internally before going public, as was illustrated in Gelders' research. Others state: 'If you act in this way, the policy will not be enacted' (Gelders 2005). The question still remains regarding what happens when all the means (putting coalition partners openly under pressure) become admissible for reaching particular goals (realizing the policy). In that case, only the soft law of ministerial accountability plays a role. Although there is no real legal sanction, this soft law is not unimportant. If the voter disapproves of such a governmental communication style, he/she can blame government or the minister. A minister who continually communicates his policy intentions without taking into consideration the other parties risks retribution.

In some instances, governments do not want to signal their policy intentions in advance. For example, the US government was very secretive about the recent increase in taxes on US expatriates as part of the tax law approved in May 2006 because the proponents did not want lobbyists to have a chance to mobilize support against the proposal.

Influencing communication on policy intentions to accomplish noble goals

From a political science and communication science perspective, it can be argued that governmental communication about policy intentions should principally meet quality criteria such as a complete, factual, timely, consistent and comprehensible information provision. These criteria should also be applied to the communication occurring in the (free) press as stated by the politicians themselves (and thus not only in paid publicity). Political actions become less attractive in such a scenario. Ultimately, however, striving for quality criteria, as mentioned above, is good for the legitimacy of governmental operations.

The gap analysis model of Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) may be used as a rudimentary step-action plan to deal with the organizational quality policy (Bouckaert and Vandeweyer 1999). Though marketing communication of policy intentions often occurs in a politically strategic context, such a step plan is useful in practice (at least *ex post facto*) in order to know 'why events occurred as they occurred'.

The plan can be described by a means of five questions starting with the fifth and final gap – the gap between the customers' expected and perceived service delivery. If this first question is negatively answered, the other questions dealing with the four preceding gaps should be bypassed and possible corrective actions made. Questions that government can pose are:

- 1 Do citizens perceive the marketing communication of policy intentions according to what they expect? (See Gap 5.)
- 2 Do ministers assess citizens' expectations about such communication in a proper manner? (See Gap 1.)
- 3 Are the correct specific standards available to answer to the citizens' expectations about such communication? (See Gap 2.)
- 4 Does such communication fulfil the assumed standards? (See Gap 3.)
- 5 Does the external communication policy about the marketing communication of policy intentions occur in a proper manner? (See Gap 4.)

An important element in the research and practice of public administrations is the recent transition towards a market-driven mode of governance ('from government to governance'). As Haque (2001) extensively describes, this creates a serious challenge to the 'publicness' of a public organization. In particular, the current businesslike changes in goals, structures, functions, norms and users of public goods and services tend to diminish its publicness; see, for example, eroding public-private distinctions ('public-private partnerships'), shrinking socio-economic role, narrowing composition of service recipients, worsening condition of accountability and declining level of public trust (see also Roberts 2000). It is worth noting that public companies have to distribute commercially neutral products and are to be reserved in societal debates as they are expected to support the policy of their supervising government.

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ISBN: 0-415-41727-9, *The Routledge Companion to Nonprofit Marketing*, © 2008 Adrian Sargeant and Walter Wymer for editorial matter and selection; individual chapters, the contributors, Routledge, Page 414.

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