

# Managing strategically: Canadian federal government communication branches evaluated against five of the Generic Principles of Public Relations

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## ABSTRACT

The Government of Canada employs over 4000 public relations/communication specialists at the federal, national political level. These practitioners are public servants, employed by a government department or agency, with the vast majority working in a designated unit called a communication branch. Since 2000, in order to compare management practices between and among these discrete communication branches, four comprehensive government-wide benchmarking studies were conducted. From a review of three of these studies' findings, this paper examines the practice of strategic management by Government of Canada communication branches and their heads, in particular the concept of managing strategically. Five of the generic principles, part of the General Theory of Excellent Public Relations and derived from the work of the Excellence Project, are tested. Evidence from the findings of these benchmarking studies suggests that Government of Canada communication branches indeed were managed strategically by 2008.

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The quantitative survey utilized in the major research study Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management, funded by the International Association of Business Communication Research Foundation, included 14 government organizations located in Canada (out of a total of 57 Canadian organizations) (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). Data from these 14, which included municipal, provincial and federal governments, were combined with data from government organizations in the United States and

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the United Kingdom). These government organizations represented a mix of “federal, regional, state-provincial, local and political agencies” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 35).

This mixture of government agencies was compared to the other types of organizations (corporations; associations; not-for-profits) and said to differ in the following ways:

The senior public relations person in government agencies is more likely to report being in a technician or media relations role than in other types of organizations – especially in comparison to corporations. However, he or she is about average for the managerial role, participation in strategic management, and being in the dominant coalition. Such a combination of roles suggests that the historical public information or public affairs definition lives on in government – of disseminating information to the general population directly or through the media. At the same time, the data suggest that the government agencies are moving toward a more managerial and strategic role. ... Government agencies seem to be moving toward a strategic, managerial and symmetrical role; but they are not quite there yet. (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 86-87).

While the Excellence study has been replicated (for example Grunig, Grunig, & Vercic, 1998) or the generic principles (Vercic, Grunig & Grunig, 1996) derived from the study’s General Theory of Excellent Public Relations have been examined in other countries (for example: Lim, Goh & Sriramesh, 2005; Rhee, 2002; or see Sriramesh, Rhee & Sung, 2013 for a list of such studies), no detailed study has been conducted since in Canada besides one recent study – a case study on municipal government communication in Canada – that addressed a few of the generic principles (Killingsworth, 2009). But, overall, this lack of research does beg the question: Are the statements made in the Excellence study and ascribed to government public relations still applicable? In particular, are they applicable to today’s practice of communication in the Canadian federal government?

The purpose of this research is to examine if Canadian federal government communication practices have moved positively “*toward a strategic, managerial and symmetrical role ...*” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 86-87). To do so, current practices are compared to the generic principles found in the General Theory (Vercic et al., 1996). This study focused on five:

- Empowered by the dominant coalition or by a direct reporting relationship to senior management;
- Separate from other functions;

- Integrated in to one function;
- Headed by a manager rather than a technician;
- Diversity is embodied in all roles.

Together, these five generic principles address the question of whether a Canadian Federal government communication branch is *managed strategically*. The remaining principles deal with whether the communication branch participates in the strategic management of the department it is in or of the government as a whole. This study did not examine participation in strategic management since the study focused on the public service bureaucratic level of government and did not include the political level of government. The two combined contribute to the strategic management of a government. As well, this study did not look at the principles in relation to the theory's specific variables (political system; economic system; culture; extent of activism; level of development; and media system), variables that need be addressed when the principles are applied to different nations (See Likely, 2009 for a brief overview of a Canadian application of each of these variables).

## Background

In each of the fiscal years 2000-01, 2002-03, 2004-05 and 2007-08, a study was conducted of Canadian federal government communication branch management practices. An office within the Canadian federal government, the Communications Community Office, sponsored the studies and the communication management firm Likely Communication Strategies conducted the four studies (Redmond & Likely, 2002a, 2002b; Amyot & Likely, 2004; Frappier & Likely, 2005; Lahey, 2008; Seymour, 2010). These studies served two purposes. First, they collected statistics about such basic management information as the number of positions, number of employees, position classification levels of employees, budgets and numbers and sources of recruits. This was information that, while individual branches may have gathered much of it for their own use, had not been shared as a package to all heads of communication branches. Second, the studies described the management opportunities and challenges heads were experiencing. Again, while this was information that may have been shared between two or a few heads 'off the record', it was not information that was aggregated, analyzed and shared broadly among all heads. The reports emanating from these studies allowed heads of communication branches to benchmark management information and practices against

their peers, as well as to analyze how the management practices (for example: reporting; organizing; planning; budgeting; controlling) of their branch were evolving over the course of a decade. These reports were stand-alone documents and only twice have they been repurposed to provide a second level of analysis (communication branch heads' leadership verses management roles: Likely, 2004; history of the federal government communication community: Likely, Rudolf & Valin, 2012).

## Literature Review

### *Government PR/Communications*

Though various researchers have commented on the paucity of study on communication in and by governments and the management of that communication (for example: Clemons, 2009; Glenny, 2008; Lee, 2008; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Fairbanks, Plowman & Rawlins, 2007), the 2000s did see a flurry of research activity. Much of it was research on roles of government communication specialists (for example: Clemons, 2009; Edes, 2000; Gregory, 2006; Liu, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Thomas, 2009; Vos, 2008 & 2006), with special attention to specific practices such as information dissemination by communication specialists (for example: Gelders & Ihlen, 2009; Gelders, Bouckaert & van Ruler, 2007; Lee, 2001a; Lee, 1999). That said, a distinct model for government communication, particularly one that is comparative across countries at various political levels (national; region/state/province; and/or municipal/local) has not been developed and tested. Different analytical frameworks in use are ones that compare the public sector to the private sector (Fairbanks, 2005; Gelders, Bouckaert & van Ruler, 2007; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007). Or, they suggest that similar models may be applied to both (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999). Grunig and Jaatinen stated that: "the (genetic) principles of public relations for government are the same as for other types of organization, but that the specific conditions to which the principles must be applied are different" (1999, p. 1). Gelders, Bouckaert & van Ruler (2007) identified four 'conditions': a more activist environment; a greater legal and regulatory umbrella; more formal processes; and greater diversity in stakeholders and thus communication objectives. While the environment around and the situation of government in that environment are different, very little research has been produced on the effect of the conditions on the application of the generic principles in government, with the exception

of a handful of works such as Grunig & Grunig (2001), Killingsworth (2009) and Vos (2008).

### *General Theory of Excellent Public Relations: Generic Principles*

The Excellence Project researchers defined the generic principles as “that in an abstract sense, the principles of public relations are the same world-wide” (Grunig et al., 2002). J. Grunig (2009) listed the generic principles as:

- empowerment of public relations;
- integrated communication function;
- a separate communication function;
- headed by a strategic manager rather than a communication technician or an administrative manager who supervises technical services;
- involved in strategic management;
- two-way and symmetrical communication;
- diverse; and
- ethical.

These eight J. Grunig called essential, noting that: “the generic principles have been described in different ways in different publications” (2009, p. 2). Originally, nine principles, derived from the fourteen characteristics of excellent public relations programs identified in the Excellent Project, were described as follows (Vercic et al, 1996):

- Involvement of public relations in strategic management;
- Empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition or a direct reporting relationship to senior management;
- Integrated public relations function;
- Public relations as a management function separate from other functions;
- The role of the public relations practitioner;
- Two-way symmetrical model of public relations;
- A symmetrical system of internal communication;
- Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations; and
- Diversity embodied in all roles.

Subsequently, the generic principles have been tested in a variety of (Grunig et al., 1998), Korea (Rhee, 2002), Singapore (Lim, Goh & Sriramesh,

2005) and Bosnia (Kent & Taylor, 2007). A tenth principle - ethical - was added post Slovenia (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 545). The number of generic principles has varied from the original nine (Vercic et al, 1996), to ten (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 545; Rhee, 2002), to eight (Grunig, J., 2009) to ten again (Sriramesh, Rhee & Sung, 2013).

The study in Singapore followed the strategy of the Korea study and limited the number of principles addressed to four: involvement of public relations in strategic management; empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition - direct reporting relationship; use of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations; and knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical communication. Rhee (2002, p. 166) restricted her research to "the principles related to the core concept of strategic management of public relations in the excellence theory."

Of the studies involving Slovenia, Korea, Singapore and Bosnia, only Lim et al. (2005) included public relations practitioners from "government ministries" in their survey sample, though they were not broken out as a separate category for detailed discussion in the findings of the study. Yun (2007) employed a population of embassy personnel in a study of a mix of both strategic management and managing strategically principles, but this study did not include mainstream government public servants. Interestingly enough, none of the researchers who have demonstrated an on-going research interest in government communication have sought to examine the General Theory and generic principles in a typical public sector setting.

This study, then, sought to examine whether communication branches in the Canadian federal government were managed strategically, by applying five of the generic principles. It also sought to show if and how these communication branches evolved to be managed strategically.

It should be noted that a number of public relations scholars have criticized the General Theory of Excellent Public Relations and, thus, as a consequence, some or all of the generic principles derived from that normative theory. Some rhetorical scholars (for example: Heath, 1993; or Coombs, 1999) and critical scholars (for example: L'Etang, 1997 or McKie & Munshi, 2007) argue that the general theory is either not a complete theory in itself or is but one in a number of competing approaches to theory making. They view it as a systems theory or a structural functionalism theory, one that is to a detrimental extent "... heavily focused on process ..." (Heath, 2009, P.20). J. Grunig responded in support of public relations as a strategic management function (Grunig, 2001, 2006).

Toth (2009) has called the General Theory of Excellent Public Relations

the Symmetry/Excellence Theory. Here, her emphasis is placed on the five generic principles that apply to strategic management: involvement of public relations in strategic management; two-way symmetrical model of public relations; a symmetrical system of internal communication; knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations; and ethical. Indeed, most of the criticism of the General Theory itself (and thus the genetic principles) has been on the aspects of the theory that concern the concept of strategic management, particularly the concepts of symmetrical and ethical. There has been limited specific argument, with the exception of the concept of dominant coalition (for example see Berger & Reber, 2006), from the rhetorical or critical schools with the generic principles that refer to managing strategically: empowered by the dominant coalition or by a direct reporting relationship to senior management; separate from other functions; integrated in to one function; headed by a manager rather than a technician; and diversity is embodied in all roles.

## *Research Questions*

The following research questions were developed for this study:

**RQ1:** To what extent is the head of the communication branch empowered?

**RQ2:** To what extent is the communication branch separate from other departmental branches?

**RQ3:** To what extent does a head lead an integrated communication function in the department?

**RQ4:** To what extent is the head of the communication branch a strategic manager rather than a communication technician or an administrative manager who supervises technical services?

**RQ5:** To what extent is there diversity within the communication branch?

## *Methodology*

In this study, findings from three of the four proprietary benchmarking studies of Canadian government communication branch management practices, commissioned by the Communication Community Office, were analyzed. Results from the 2005 study were not included since this study focused

primarily on the regional communication offices of government departments, while the other three dealt with the main, headquarters communication branch. A non-probability, purposive sample was employed, with data drawn from 16 communication branches. A total of 35 communication branches participated in at least one of the three benchmarking studies, but these 16 were the only ones to have participated in all three (2001, 2003 and 2008) and to also have remained in a constant organizational form. (Many federal government departments were amalgamated, formed or ceased to exist in the 2000s, and as such, their communication branches also amalgamated, formed or disbanded.) To respect the protocols established for the re-use of the benchmarking study data, individual government departments, communication branches and heads are not identified by name in the findings and discussion that follows. Of the 16 departmental communication branches in the sample, they represent departments in all fields of government work: policy; regulatory; program; and operational. The communication branches vary in size from small (less than 50 FTEs) to very large (more than 150 FTEs). It should be noted that participation in the original benchmarking studies was voluntary, although the Communication Community Office provided strong encouragement and incentives.

Each of these benchmarking studies employed the same methodology. First, heads were e-mailed a survey questionnaire and asked to report on various statistics concerning topics such as reporting relationships, composition of their management team, number of approved permanent and term positions and number of employees, classification levels, salary and operating budgets as well the number of and source of new employees. Second, heads were interviewed in-person for between one and two hours and asked about the challenges they faced and the changes they had made, such as to the overall structure, organization and reporting, to and within various service sub-units, to the Branch budget and resource allocation situation, to working and management relationships, to Branch policy, planning and performance measurement systems and to the HR management regime. Heads were also asked to explore how they saw their leadership role in the Branch, in the department and across the communications community. These were semi-structured interviews, with heads receiving an interview guide with a list of interview themes a week or so before the interview.

For this paper, only the survey and interview questions that provided evidence relevant to the five research questions were re-analyzed. Data gathered from organizational charts and government policies were used to corroborate the evidence from the three reports. The approach to analysis reflects an



interpretation of reality that is constructivist (Leedy & Ormond, 2004). "Quality research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world ... They turn the world into a series of representations, including filed notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The analysis of the questionnaire and interview representations was deductive, aggregating the data or question answers into quantifiable data. Each of the five RQs was analyzed differently.

For RQ1 (To what extent is the head of the communication branch empowered?), the analysis covered the following questions from the original survey or from the interviews: Please indicate to whom the Head of Communications reports; Has this changed since x?; Is the Head of Communications a member of the department or agency Executive Committee (the highest level management committee?); Please indicate if there is a department-wide communications committee. If yes, please indicate who chairs this committee and list its members by title and classification levels; Please describe any challenges to and changes in working and management relationships since 2001; and Please describe how you see your role and responsibilities and how they unfold on a daily basis.

With RQ2 (To what extent is the communication branch separate from other departmental branches?), the analysis covered a review of the organizational charts of the 16 communication branches in this study as well as this question from the survey: Please indicate the total number of separate 'satellite' units with communications (formal communication units independent of the Branch) at headquarters and the total number of communications positions in independent 'satellite' units at each.

With RQ3 (To what extent does a head lead an integrated communication function in the department?), both the organizational charts and these questions from the original interviews were analyzed: Please indicate the members of your Communication Branch senior management team by title and classification level; Please indicate the total number of Regional Offices across Canada with communications units, the total number of communications staff in these offices and the number of positions at each classification level; and Please indicate the total number of separate 'satellite' units with communications (formal communication units independent of the Branch) at headquarters and the total number of communications positions in independent 'satellite' units at each.

For RQ4 (To what extent is the head of the communication branch a strategic manager rather than a communication technician or an administrative manager who supervises technical services?), the following questions were

reviewed: Please describe how you see your role and responsibilities and how they unfold on a daily basis; Please describe your Branches' policy, planning and performance measurement systems; and Please describe the pressures, threats, issues and opportunities facing your department/agency and Branch.

Finally, for RQ5 (To what extent is there diversity within the communication branch?), data from existing federal government surveys were analyzed.

To ascertain if there was an evolution towards a greater degree of managing strategically over the period, where possible, tables were developed to plot data taken from each of the three reports in series.

## Findings and Discussion

**RQ1:** *To what extent is the head of the communication branch empowered?*

Vercic, Grunig and Grunig (1996, p. 37) described empowerment as "the senior public relations practitioner executive usually becomes part of the dominant coalition." Rhee (2002, p. 164) also portrayed empowerment in that way but included an or as well "... or by a direct reporting relationship to senior management."

Questions in each of the three benchmarking studies of Canadian Government communication branch management practices asked heads to report their reporting relationships and whether they were permanent members of the highest level executive committee in the department. Data are presented in Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages.

The 2002 Government of Canada Communications Policy defines the head of communication as the "senior official designated to support the deputy head (Deputy Minister) in co-coordinating and directing their institution's implementation of this Policy. Heads of communication are members of senior management and report directly to deputy heads. They are accountable to deputy heads for managing the communication function ..." (Government of Canada, 2002). There are grey areas in the application of the Communications Policy. Where in Table A it shows that the head of communication reports to an ADM, the head of communication still has been assigned primary responsibility for "coordinating and directing their institution's implementation of this Policy" and for "managing the communications function." But even so, they as Director Generals report to ADMs with communication in their titles, such as ADM of Regions and Communications, of Corporate Services and Communications or of Policy and Communications. In some cases,

**Table 1:** Communication branch heads reporting relationships

<b>Branch</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>A</b>	DM <sup>1</sup>	DM	DM
<b>B</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>C</b>	ADM	DM	DM
<b>D</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>E</b>	ADM	ADM	DM
<b>F</b>	DM	ADM	DM
<b>G</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>H</b>	DM	DM	ADM
<b>I</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>J</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>K</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>L</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>M</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>N</b>	ADM	ADM	ADM
<b>O</b>	ADM	ADM	ADM
<b>P</b>	DM	DM	DM
<b>Total</b>	12 DM / 4 ADM	12 DM / 4 ADM	13 DM/ 3 ADM

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1. DM is a Deputy Minister, the typical title given the public servant who is the most senior executive in a department or agency. An ADM is an Assistant Deputy Minister, an executive who reports to the DM and who is in charge of a major part of the department's business.

**Table 2:** Heads as Permanent Members of Highest Level Executive Committee

<b>Branch</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>A</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>B</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>C</b>	No	No	No
<b>D</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>E</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>F</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>G</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>H</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>I</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>J</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>K</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>L</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>M</b>	No	Yes	No
<b>N</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>O</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>P</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Total</b>	11 Yes / 5 No	15 Yes / 1 No	13 Yes / 3 No

while communication reports reports to an ADM, the head of communication works directly with the DM and sits on executive committee (as noted by the examples in Table 2). That said, four of the heads of communication are themselves ADMs, the rest being Directors General. These four ADMs have other responsibilities besides their main responsibility of communication, such as: ministerial correspondence, consultations, parliamentary affairs and/or stakeholder relations. To a great extent, these are complimentary services to communication.

Considering the Communications Policy was introduced in 2002, empowering the role of head of communication in policy, there were only a few cases of policy non-adherence with regard to reporting relationships and membership on the highest management committee. At the end of a decade, are heads more empowered now? The answer would be slightly more so – from an average of 75-80% of heads to 85-90%, based on these two criteria. That said, in the 2008 benchmarking study, the following statement was made about how heads saw their leadership position in the dominant coalition:

Heads suggest that the community has made significant gains in enacting a leadership role. They see more Heads at the table. They also see Heads, through personality and competence, gaining credibility while at the table. They appreciate this even more so since they feel "it is a difficult, risk averse environment" for the communications function currently, where managerial implementation skills seem to be valued more than leadership, strategic or advisory skills. (Government of Canada, 2008)

That comment brings the discussion of RQ1 back to the definition of dominant coalition in a government. Thus far, dominant coalition is presented as the executives or senior leaders in the neutral, non-partisan public service and does not include a government's political leadership. Certainly, it does not include the Minister and the Minister's advisors (his or her senior political exempt staff that include one or more communication advisors) with whom the head of communication would have regular and direct contact. Though other authors have commented on this relationship (Akin, 2010; Blanchfield & Bronskill, 2010; Government of Canada, 2009; Kozolanka, 2009a, 2009b & 2006; Stanbury, 2009; Thomas, 2009), the original benchmarking studies did not address the question of a political or the government-in-power aspect of a dominant coalition and thus the relationship to the empowerment of communication.

In summary, by 2009, it can be said that there is a fair degree of empowerment of the communication function within the Canadian public service, the government bureaucracy.

**RQ2:** *To what extent is the communication branch separate from other departmental branches?*

The evidence presented in RQ1 also suggests that the communication branch is separate from other branches. In only a limited number of departments are the communication groups part of a larger branch that includes functions other than communication. Even in these cases, the head of the communication groups works directly with the most senior executive and in approximately half the situations sits as a permanent member of the top management committee along side her or his direct supervisor.

Between 2001 and 2009, the number of heads of communication branches in the ADM classification (a step up from the typical Director General classification) increased from one to six - within this group of 16. As noted above, the ADM, Communication position came with a larger branch - a

branch made larger by the addition of other, complimentary services. The trend was to increase the size of the communication function, through additions of complimentary service lines, through adding new communication services such as e- and on-line communication and/or through integrating existing communication service lines existing in other branches (see RQ3). The tables that follow illustrate the growth in communication branch size, as a separate function:

**Table 3:** Communication Branch Budgets from Fiscal Years 2000-01 to 2007-08

Dept. / Agency	2007-08 Total A-base <sup>2</sup> Budget	2007-08 Salary Budget	2007-08 O&M Budget	2003-04 Total A-base Budget	2003-04 Salary Budget	2003-04 O&M Budget	2000-01 Total A-base Budget	2000-01 Salary Budget	2000-01 O&M Budget
A	\$21.3M	\$13.2M	\$8.1M	\$18.8M	\$6.0M	\$12.8M	\$2.62M	\$5.4M	\$20.8M
B	\$20.4M	\$11.8M	\$8.6M	\$17.3M	\$7.4M	\$9.8M	\$5.1M	\$3.3M	\$1.8M
C	\$14.8M	\$10.8M	\$4.0M	\$7.8M	\$5.2M	\$2.6M	\$16.8M	\$3.6M	\$13.2M
D	\$9.9M	\$5.1M	\$4.8M	\$3.9M	\$2.2M	\$1.7M	\$5.0M	\$1.9M	\$3.1M
E	\$12.4M	\$10.5M	\$1.9M	\$3.4M	\$2.0M	\$1.3M	\$5.4M	\$3.0M	\$2.4M
F	\$7.7M	\$5.2M	\$2.5M	\$5.8M	\$4.0M	\$1.8M	\$4.6M	\$2.7M	\$1.9M
G	\$8.2M	\$4.5M	\$3.7M	\$5.7M	\$3.7M	\$2.0M	\$5.4M	\$3.2M	\$2.2M
H	\$7.4M	\$4.8M	\$2.6M	\$7.1M	\$4.6M	\$2.4M	\$6.4M	\$3.2M	\$3.2M
I	\$12.6M	\$7.7M	\$1.3M	\$7.1M	\$3.2M	\$3.9M	\$7.0M	\$2.5M	\$4.5M
J	\$4.7M	\$4.0M	\$700K	\$5.8M	\$5.1M	\$700K	\$3.2M	\$2.7M	\$500K
K	\$6.6M	\$4.3M	\$2.3M	\$5.2M	\$3.6M	\$1.6M	\$4.2M	\$2.6M	\$1.6M
L	\$6.9M	\$4.1M	\$2.8M	\$4.8M	\$3.6M	\$1.2M	\$4.0M	\$1.3M	\$2.7M
M	\$3.6M	\$2.8M	\$800K	\$3.7M	\$2.6M	\$1.1M	\$3.0M	\$1.9M	\$1.1M
N	\$3.7M	\$3.0M	\$700K	\$2.0M	\$1.6M	\$400K	\$1.8M	\$1.4M	\$400K
O	\$3.1M	\$2.4M	\$900K	\$2.9M	\$1.9M	\$1.0M	\$2.3M	\$1.2M	\$1.1M
P	\$4.8M	\$3.2M	\$1.6M	\$3.4M	\$2.3M	\$1.1M	\$4.8M	\$2.1M	\$2.7M
Total	\$148.1M	\$97.4M	\$50.7M	\$104.4M	\$59.0M	\$45.4M	\$105.2M	\$42.0M	\$63.2M

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2. The A-base budget is the approved on-going base budget. B-base budgets are add-on funding that will sunset.

**Table 4:** Communication Branch Number of Approved Positions and Number of Employees in Those Positions

Department / Agency	Total Number of Approved Indeterminate and Term Positions Followed by Total Number of Indeterminate and Term Employees in Communications Branches Involved in All Three National HQ Studies					
	2008		2003		2001	
A	260/260		272/273		193/150	
B	178/180		182/171		81/87	
C	208/171		206/140		121/105	
D	170/134		67/67		27/32	
E	158/120		53/42		52/52	
F	140/115		68/62		63/66	
G	111/96		73/73		49/53	
H	99/92		76/76		54/55	
I	111/75		126/87		62/62	
J	72/66		70/65		59/55	
K	71/60		54/56		49/50	
L	70/56		52/52		55/53	
M	58/46		59/42		43/46	
N	43/43		28/39		26/26	
O	54/42		28/38		26/34	
P	41/39		47/44		43/45	
<b>Totals:</b>	Positions 1844	Employees 1595	Positions 1461	Employees 1327	Positions 1003	Employees 971

Communication branch budgets grew in this period because salary budgets grew absolutely and as a percentage of the total budget. None of these 16 communication branches are sublimated to any other branch within their departments, even though some are within a branch that combines other functions. Overall, these 16 communication branches operate as separate functions – able to “move communication resources from one strategic public to another” (Vercic, Grunig, J. & Grunig, L., 1996, p. 38; Rhee 2002, p. 164; Grunig, J., 2009, p. 2). The evidence presented in RQ3, next, also supports this conclusion.

3. An indeterminate position is a fully and on going funded permanent position.

*RQ3: To what extent does a head lead an integrated communication function in the department?*

J. Grunig (2009, p. 2) describes integration as “all public relations functions into a single department” or the coordination of the “departments responsible for different communication activities.” Only integration makes it “possible for public relations to develop new communication programs for changing strategic publics – that is, to manage strategically” (Vercic et al., 1996, p. 38). From RQ1 and RQ2, we learned that the Canadian government’s 2002 Communications Policy assigns communication branch heads accountability for managing the department’s total communication function, or in other words: integration.

Evidence from the benchmarking studies demonstrates how heads worked through out the 2000s to integrate the function. In the Background section of this paper, a point was made that at the end of the 1990s, program and operations branches in many departments had invested in their own communication units. These units were created for publishing, internal communication, marketing communication and/or outreach/public education purposes. They were separate from similar units within a communication branch and independent of communication branch authority and accountability.

In 2001, 11 of the 16 communication branches included in this study reported that there were independent ‘satellite’ communication units in their department. Four of the 11 said there was somewhat of a semi-formal, functional relationship between the satellite(s) head and the communication branch head. The rest did not have a working relationship. Branch heads described being either in the process of conducting or planning to conduct a review of satellite units, primarily to get a handle on the department resources given to communication activities carried out outside of the role of the communication branch. By 2003, four of the 11 had repatriated the satellite units in their department in to the communication branch. Another three were repatriated between 2003 and 2008, leaving only four of the 16 with independent satellite units. Even with the remaining four, there were steps taken toward functional reporting – driven by new government requirements for business planning and performance reporting across all departments. Though regionally based communication branches were not part of this study, the same trend appeared, both in terms of repatriation of previous independent regional communication offices to become units within the communication branch and with regard to greater functional reporting. Certainly, it can be said that by 2008, in any given department there was greater integration of the communication function. The



2002 Communication Policy provided the authority. Towards the end of this period, as noted previously, the centralization philosophy of the government in power also fueled the need to integrate the communication function. The centralization of approval processes in the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office, both for giving the green light to any communication initiative and for the signing off of communication products, forced all communication units in a department to follow a single approval format.

*RQ4: To what extent is the head of the communication branch a strategic manager rather than communication technician or an administrative manager who supervises technical services?*

Likely (2004) examined the data from the 2001 and 2003 benchmarking surveys to determine the roles that heads of communication enacted. He discovered that heads enacted three roles: technician; manager; and leader. He argued that the leader role was different than the manager role, be it as an administrative manager or as a strategic manager. Talking about all heads that participated in the 2001 and 2003 studies (not just the 16 portrayed here), he stated that:

*"The executive leader role takes many of the activities described as part of the enactment of the manager role to a higher level of conceptualization. Where the manager, for example, developed goals and objectives for the branch, managed the branch budget, managed people or planned public relations programs, the executive leader repositioned the branch (vision; direction; purpose), identified, acquired and re-allocated resources, developed a comprehensive HR regime and developed an integrated planning framework. The executive leader also designed organizational structures, developed learning and training programs, created centres of expertise and formalized relationships with clients. From the evidence, this conceptualization of a higher level role is more than simply a fuller depiction of the manager role." (Likely 2004, p. 143).*

The evidence from those studies suggested a daily juggling act, as heads moved from one role enactment to the next:

*"Regardless of the size of the communication function, heads reported in interview that they also enacted the manager role. A number stated they were active as technicians as well.... All heads stated that they "got their*

dirty” when the problem or issue was of major importance and its management involved the Minister and/or Deputy Minister.... On an irregular basis but when the importance of the issue demanded it, up to half of the heads claimed they were also doers: they wrote, edited or produced messages (briefing notes; Q&As; speaking points; media lines; etc.).” (Likely 2004, p. 142).

As the number of service offerings increased and thus the size of the communication branch grew throughout the 2000s, it became more difficult for heads to juggle these three roles. Data from the three benchmarking studies describes a reorganization of executive positions in the branch, a reorganization intended to allow the head to perform higher-level roles on a more consistent basis. In 2001, seven of the 16 communication branches involved in this research study had established a second-in-command (2IC) position to support the work of the head. By 2003, eight branches had this position. By 2008, 15 of the 16 employed this role.

The 2IC was a position a classification level below the head and one or two classification levels above the rest of the executives on the management team.<sup>4</sup> Evidence from the three benchmarking studies points to two models for the operation of the 2IC position. The more prevalent model is to have the 2IC responsible for the daily media relations, issues management and communication product approval processes. The 2IC would oversee the media relations unit, the account executive units (communication advisors assigned to individual internal client units) and the ministerial support communication unit. This portfolio would handle response to reporter inquiries, issues and ministerial needs (announcements; speeches; events; etc.) as well as handle the approval mechanisms for communication products (media lines; Qs & As; media releases; speeches; briefing notes; etc.) through a long and complicated government approval process. Ultimately, the head is part of the approval process and would get involved if the issue was deemed serious enough that the Minister and/or Deputy Minister were also actively involved but the management of this technical work – as well as writing and editing as a technician when required (mostly because experience gained from a longer career in the federal government and greater experience within the department handling business line clients and their accompanying issues) - would fall to the 2IC. In this first model, the head has responsibility for the management of other

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4. There are a number of levels to the Canadian government’s classification schema for executives (EX). If the head is a Director General (DG) at the EX-03 level, the 2IC would be an EX-02 with the rest of the management team at the EX-01 level. If the head is an EX-04 (ADM), the 2IC would be an EX-03.

communication branch effort including research, planning and production activities as well as leadership activities around human resource recruitment, retention and staff development, liaison with clients/heads of other branches, branch and department business and performance measurement programs and strategic support to the Minister, Deputy Minister and the department's management team. For the second model, the roles of the head and 2IC are reversed. By the end of the 2000s, there was only one communication branch employing the second model. The first model was predominant. By the end of the decade for the 16 communication branches in this study, the head enacted both the manager and leader roles but not the technical role.

In support of this statement, heads stated in the interviews conducted for the three benchmarking studies their increased involvement in business planning and HR recruitment and retention. In the third study in 2008, heads complained about the time required to adhere to the government's new accountability framework and the effort needed to develop business plans for the branch as well as performance measurement reports. Almost all of the 16 communication branches had a comprehensive HR Plan, most of these integrated with a business plan and a strategic communication framework and/or plan. Employee turnover rates in many of the communication branches were approaching 40-60% in the late 2000s (Government of Canada, 2008b). Some of this was from retirements and short-term parental leaves, but most of the turnover came from the "churn" within the government's communication community brought on by a sellers market: there were more available positions than there were qualified candidates to fill them. The head's role in trying to maintain a critical mass in his or her cubicles can be summed up in this statement from the 2008 benchmarking report:

Many Heads believe that, in today's market, the No. 1 job of the DG is recruitment. This is a three-pronged role. First, Heads must create an environment in the branch that will be attractive to potential hires. This includes an appropriate work/life balance, a sense of community and great team spirit, and professional development opportunities including the provision of second language training. Second, the Head can't rely on Human Resources and must build staffing capacity and capabilities in the branch. Included in building capacity and capabilities are a living HR Plan, assignment of an EX or IS as a senior staffing lead, and constantly running competitions. Finally, the Head plays a hands-on role as chief recruiter. A good amount of time is spent networking, identifying talent and then calling and pitching potential recruits (Government of Canada, 2008a).

In summary then, over the decade, heads moved from a combination of technical and managerial roles to a combination of managerial and leader roles ensuring the heads were in a position to be able to manage the branch strategically.

*RQ5: To what extent is there diversity within the communication branch?*

Diversity is described as the inclusion of: “both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds” (Grunig, J., 2009). The practice of excellent public relations and the ability to manage the communication function strategically is not possible without a diverse workforce – one that matches the diversity in any given society.

Heads of Canadian government communication branches, as with heads of every other departmental unit, much ensure a degree of diversity within their staff ranks. Each much match a formula for the number of women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of racial minorities in their employee mix. This mix must match the workforce availability percentages of these groups within the Canadian society. For example, the percentages for 2005-06 were: women 52.2% (average across government 53.5%); Aboriginal peoples 2.5% (average across government 4.2%); persons with disabilities 3.6% (average across government 5.8%); and members of racial minorities 10.4% (average across government 8.6%) (Government of Canada, 2006a). Heads must report the percentages in their yearly HR Plan and establish remedial steps if needed. Evidence from the 2008 benchmarking study suggests that heads usually were making three or four of their quotas, in the same situation as any other function head. There was diversity represented in the communication branch. The data did not give a breakdown of how this diversity was spread throughout the classification levels.

In 2008, while the number of women increased to 53.8% across the full public service, the numbers differed per employment category. In the EX category, the percentage of women was 41.7% (this is a large category from EX-01 Directors to EX-05 Deputy Ministers). The percentage of women in the communication IS category (IS-01 entry level to IS-06 managers) was 69.2%. The last figure did not include women in the communication EX or executive category. That figure was unavailable. But, from the three benchmarking studies it is possible to determine the number of heads of communication who were women, as the next table illustrates:

Table 5: Gender Diversity

Branch	2001	2003	2008
A	M	W	W
B	M	M	W
C	W	M	W
D	M	W	W
E	M	M	M
F	W	W	W
G	W	M	M
H	W	W	M
I	W	W	W
J	M	M	W
K	M	M	M
L	M	M	M
M	W	W	W
N	M	M	M
O	M	M	W
P	M	W	W
<b>Totals</b>	6 W / 10 M	7 W / 9 M	10 W / 6 M

It appears that as the number of women increased within the communication branch, the number of women in the head position grew as well. Within the communication officer cadre (Information Services classification) as a whole, 69.2% of the employees were women in 2008. Within the group of heads of communication, women filled 62.5% of the head positions in our sample of 16 in 2008. Contrary to the finding of the Excellence Study that women supervised communication branches of a smaller size than men, that was not the finding here (Grunig et al., 2002, p.184). Women were heads of small, medium and large communication branches.

In summary, there appears to be growing diversity within the communication branch.

## Conclusions and future research

This study demonstrated that five of the generic principles as presented

by Vercic et al (1996) and redefined by Grunig (2009) are applicable as a test of the concept of managing strategically in a Canadian federal government communication branch. On all five counts, this study demonstrated that Canadian government communication branches had moved throughout the 2000s to a position where it could be said that they are managing the communication branch strategically. This is said with caution since the sample size of this study only represented a little less than one-half the total number of communication branches in the last benchmarking study in 2008. The sample, though, includes a very good representation of the major departments in the government, departments with communication branches that employ the majority of government communication practitioners.

The applicability of the other generic principles (involvement of public relations in strategic management; two-way symmetrical model of public relations; knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations; and ethical) was not evaluated. First, the data from the benchmarking studies did not provide the data required to address these principles, since these benchmarking studies focused solely on the public service, bureaucratic level of government. Given that each benchmarking study only dealt with communication management practices at the public service level, it would be problematic to probe concepts such as strategic management, symmetrical public relations and ethics without research at the political government level as well. To more fully understand if the communication practices in the Canadian federal government can be explained by the excellence theory, future studies could augment this research by focusing on communication management practices at the public service – political interface.

The importance of the Government of Canada's 2002 Communications Policy should be noted (See also Likely, Rudolf & Valin, 2012). This document laid out a list of policy requirements that were both descriptive as well as prescriptive. Four of the five generic principles examined in this study were related to these policy requirements, including: empowered by the dominant coalition or by a direct reporting relationship to senior management; separate from other functions; integrated in to one function; and headed by a manager rather than a technician. The fifth - diversity is embodied in all roles - was affected by other Government of Canada policies.

Finally, we agree with Liu et al (2010, p. 211) that it is "time for communication scholars to catch up, providing a better link between government communication practices, applied communication research, and theoretical development." We would also add that it is time for researchers who focus on government communication to utilize the excellence theory and the generic

principles in their studies and for scholars knowledgeable about the theory and principles to apply them to government communication management practices in other settings.

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