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Empowering Parliaments With Strategic Communications

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The parliaments of democratic countries have a responsibility to encourage and protect citizen engagement—as a guarantor of democracy itself. Open communications is a prerequisite of this engagement. By promoting open dialogue, citizen engagement, and government responsiveness, effective communications serve to strengthen democratic institutions and constitute a basic requirement of good governance.

However the three core roles of a parliament (**legislation, representation and oversight**) are weighted, their effective performance requires open communication between parliamentary bodies and citizens. This communication serves a range of purposes, including education, consultation, consensus-building, legitimization, conflict resolution, representation, and scrutiny. All of these aspects promote societal learning, which also relies on the capacity of the media to communicate, interpret, and critique the actions of parliament. Indeed, it has been argued that powerful synergies exist between developing communications capacity as a dimension of good governance and of strengthening parliamentary institutions and the maturation of independent media.

Spurred by the global dissemination of new communications technologies, and as a result of pressures of political reform, the need for better communications between parliaments and their electorates is increasingly being recognized by jurisdictions around the world. Communications approaches are not only expected to reflect the times in which we live by leveraging new technologies, but also embrace the values of openness and accessibility that these technologies have come to represent. In today's world of instantaneous and candid communication through social networking forums such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, there is a growing expectation that the information provided by freely elected governments will have the attributes of transparency and immediacy of access.

Although the adoption of basic communication technologies by parliaments has generally been fast and furious, the depth of resourcing for parliamentary communications in many parts of the world is variable and problematic. How well a parliament is able to deal with change and adapt to new communications technologies is certainly influenced by factors such as institutional history, democratic context and political structure, but it is clear that the strengthening of democratic institutions does require investment in building capacity for parliaments to offer accessible, modern, and multi-dimensional channels of communication with the citizens.

It is worth noting that, in Western democracies like Canada, access to information and to the ability to voice opinions through fast-paced channels such as the Internet has not parlayed into higher turnout at the polls. Thus, there appears to be a paradoxical disconnect between being politically *informed* and being politically *active*. A fundamental challenge for parliaments operating in this new social context is to respond to non-traditional modes of political awareness. Young citizens are indeed “plugged in” but parliaments need to turn them “on” by adapting communications strategies to their lifestyles and coded in the language of the new-age electorate—and marked by genuine openness and non-adversarial pluralism.

This paper proposes a systematic approach to planning for parliamentary communications. The purpose of a strategic communications plan is to address the parliaments' communication needs, strategies and tactics into one comprehensive document. By designing a long-term plan, parliaments will be better positioned to be proactive, rather than merely reacting to the existing environment.

In building institutional capacity to improve communications, expertise and dedicated resources are needed to support development at the level of the parliamentarian, of committees, and of the institution as a whole.

Specifically, parliamentarians and their staff will benefit from a better understanding of the societal contexts of communication modalities and expanding their repertoire of skills in effective spoken, written, visual and interactive communication. They require these skills not only with respect to their own activities as elected representatives, but also with respect to institutional practices. That is, parliamentarians need to be familiar with the fundamentals of drafting a strategic communications plan that will help them to fulfill their responsibility to engage the public in the democratic process.

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1- INTRODUCTION

Parliament is currently failing in its democratic duty. Its organisation, procedures and general ethos are now seriously out of date. It has failed, in particular, to respond adequately to the opportunities provided by modern communications and in doing so has contributed to the growing alienation of the British public. Parliament may be serving its members more effectively, but there is yet to be a matching improvement in the service it provides to the public. Parliament needs to reassert itself, to reconnect with the public and become what it has always striven to be – the fountain of our democratic freedoms.

Putnam Commission, 2006¹

To thrive, democracies must be participatory. A democracy whose citizens are disillusioned with political processes or distrustful of their elected representatives is weak. When citizens—whether through skepticism, apathy, or a lack of access to information—withdraw from forms of civic engagement such as voting, even long-established democracies are vulnerable to being co-opted by the interests of the few, to the detriment of the many. Without citizen engagement, the sustainability of a democracy cannot be guaranteed.

The parliaments of democratic nations therefore have a responsibility to encourage and protect citizen engagement as a guarantor of democracy itself. Open communication is a prerequisite of this engagement. The work of parliamentarians must be the outcome of an open dialogue with the citizens they represent. Communication activities of institutions should be conducted as a fundamental component of good governance rather than as an instrument to some other end. Parliamentary institutions enrich themselves and strengthen their bonds with the public when they go beyond simple messaging and engage in two-way communication with citizens. The premise of this working paper is that by promoting open dialogue, citizen engagement, and government responsiveness, modern and effective communications serve to strengthen democratic institutions and constitute a basic requirement of good governance.

Both long-established parliaments (e.g., in the United Kingdom and Canada) and those in emerging democracies (e.g., Moldova and Bangladesh) have recognized the need to develop strategic and multifaceted communications plans and to provide adequate resources to implement them. To be effective, such plans must reflect the times in which we live not only by leveraging new technologies but by embracing the values of openness and accessibility that these technologies have come to represent. This paper describes the importance of communications activities for parliamentarians and their staff, discusses attributes of contemporary modes of communication that must be taken into account in developing strategic communications plans, and stresses the importance of training parliamentary staff and members in the skills they need to optimize their dialogue with the public.

¹ Hansard Society Commission (2006). *Parliament in the Public Eye 2006: Coming into Focus?* [Putnam Report]. London: Hansard Society.

2 – THE PILLARS OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy—government “by the people”—implies not only that citizens have the right to be heard in all political matters that affect their lives, but also that they have the responsibility to actively participate in the democratic process. The earliest democracies, as in ancient Athens, were “direct,” each male citizen representing himself without an elected intermediary. In modern democracies the will of individuals is expressed through elected representatives in two-party or multi-party systems. However, in recent years, communications technologies have enabled the emergence of a new form of “direct democracy” by which individuals have an opportunity to communicate directly and in “real time” with governments and their officials. These technologies have also facilitated the consultative processes that are integral to building the social consensus necessary to stable governance.

To understand the importance of communications for democratic processes, it is important first to understand the four “pillars” on which democratic systems of government rest: freedom, protection, justice, and participation.

FREEDOM

Democracy is based in political systems through which governments are chosen and replaced by the consent of the majority. The popular will is expressed in free and fair elections at intervals that are non-arbitrary, that is, determined by law or custom. Democracy is a means for the people to freely choose their leaders in all levels of government and to hold them accountable for their policies, initiatives, and actions. In a democracy, the populace is sovereign: the people have ultimate political authority. Power flows from the people to the leaders of government, who hold power only temporarily, at the behest of the electorate: “A democracy is a system where incumbents lose elections.”² Elected representatives at the national and local levels have an obligation to represent and protect the interests of the public. Citizens of a democracy are free to criticize their elected leaders and representatives, to observe how they conduct the business of government, and to ensure that their decisions and actions express the popular will.

PROTECTION

Generally speaking, every citizen in a democratic society has certain basic rights guaranteed by international laws and conventions (e.g., the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights). These entitlements include the right to one’s own beliefs (freedom of conscience and of religion) and to their expression (freedom of speech). Another is freedom of association: with certain limitations—for example, on criminal and terrorist organizations—each person in a democratic society has the right to associate with other people, and to form or join organizations (e.g., trade unions and political groups) and to peacefully protest government actions. The “freedom of the press,” which facilitates open debate on political issues and processes, is in itself a guarantor of the freedoms of belief and of speech: through news media, citizens are exposed to a range of information and opinion, which is

² Adam Przeworski, cited in Sandra Pralong (2006). *Communications Strategy for the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova*. UNDP Moldova.

communicated openly on a daily basis and informs for political decisions made at the voting booth and through other modes of social and political engagement.

JUSTICE

Although individuals play a crucial role in the development of democracy, they do so within a system of law that protects the rights of citizens, maintains order, and ensures justice. All citizens, including elected officials, are equal under the law. Of paramount importance to the sustainability of democracies is that the rule of law places limits on the power of government. No government official may violate these limits. In ideal democracies no one may be discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, ethnic group, or gender. The law is fairly, impartially, and consistently enforced by courts that are independent of the other branches of government.

PARTICIPATION

Democracy requires the active participation of the people. To enjoy the benefits of democracy—freedom, protection, and justice—citizens have a responsibility to be informed about public issues and to judiciously exercise their right to political participation. The most fundamental way to do so is to exercise the right—or duty, as many see it—to vote. Another way is to actively engage in debate on political issues, whether through direct dialogue with elected officials on their actions and initiatives or through the expression of opinion in popular media. Another vital form of participation is active membership in “civil society” through independent, nongovernmental organizations and associations. These represent a wide range of interests, beliefs and constituencies, such as workers, patients, teachers, business owners, religious believers, women, and human rights activists.

It is with respect to participation that the importance of open dialogue, accessibility of information, and the cultivation of knowledge is immediately clear. Communications strategies of parliaments and other democratic governments need to be designed to facilitate, encourage, and sustain citizen participation. By fostering open communication and dialogue with the public, parliaments enhance citizens’ confidence in the integrity of the political system and the relevance of democratic governance and political engagement to their own lives.

3- USING OPEN COMMUNICATIONS TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY

Within the past decade, the revolution in communications and information technologies that has transformed people's lives in developed and emerging economies has come to be viewed as essential for informed and equitable participation in political processes, and hence as a prerequisite for democracy itself. For example, the Internet censorship practiced in closed societies such as China has been condemned by commentators in the West (even though the technologies that enable the control and surveillance of Internet use are provided by Western corporations).³ However, no one disputes that social and economic development must include the dissemination of new communications technologies. In some cases, the uptake of new technologies such as cell phone use has enabled the expansion of communications to leapfrog over traditional media such as print and television, which require more costly infrastructure.⁴

Even in affluent countries with longstanding democratic traditions, governments have turned to information technologies to increase political participation and to counter political apathy and the under-representation of the popular will. To alleviate political alienation, particularly among young people, governments from local to national levels have implemented web-based communications that allow citizens to access information and services and to voice their views on political platforms and public policy. To what extent this "cyber-democracy" has actually helped to sustain and enhance democracy is difficult to say; there is as yet no concrete evidence that these new communication modes have increased voting rates or other forms of political participation. And yet it seems intuitive that open communication has changed the quality of democratic participation. At the very least, in this era of instantaneous and candid communication through social networking forums such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, there is a growing expectation that the information provided by freely elected governments will accord transparency and immediacy of access.

With the introduction of new communication tools to disseminate and create information, people can now more readily access information remotely, and includes documents that are at the source of political and legislative actions. Thus scrutiny and accountability are increased, resulting in a more open democracy.

As new models for a more open styles of democracy evolve, they will provide opportunities for the development of a framework for a new type of politics, moving away from adversarial, zero-sum politics to a more pluralistic and inclusive form that involves building alliances on key political objectives.

OPEN COMMUNICATION AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS

The role of open communication in parliamentary government should be considered with reference to parliament's fundamental roles. The value of open communication is its ability to support the fulfillment of these roles. Parliamentary bodies, whether appointed or elected, are intended as the citizens' representatives on matters of public policy. As agents operating in the interest of citizens, parliamentarians are expected to maintain an understanding of those interests, deliberate on policy issues

³ Robert McMahon (2008). U.S. Internet providers and "The Great Firewall of China." Council on Foreign Relations. Background. 18 Feb. Retrieved 5 Aug. 2009 from: <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9856/>.

⁴ Sharon LaFraniere (2005). Cellphones Catapult Rural Africa to 21st Century. *New York Times*. Aug. 25, 2005. Retrieved 5 Aug. 2009 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/25/international/africa/25africa.html>.

from the perspective of the public good, and to engage citizens in societal learning. The term *societal learning* as used here refers to how citizens learn about their collective interests, the factors affecting those interests, and competing perspectives on those interests. The range of roles that parliamentarians play will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but generally include three core items: (1) legislation; (2) representation; and (3) oversight.

Enacting laws and empowering and resourcing the executive branch of government is often seen as the principal role of parliaments, since it is the most tangible outcome of their activities. However, many observers regard the societal engagement and learning that occurs as part of the open deliberation of policy as the most valuable aspect of a parliament's function, particularly in cases where general understanding and experience of democratic governance is limited. Others, often those from more mature democracies, consider the oversight of government and associated accountability roles as the most important role of parliaments.

Regardless, the three core roles of a parliament are weighted, their effective performance requires open communication between parliamentary bodies and citizens. This communication serves a range of purposes, including education, consultation, consensus-building, legitimization (see below), conflict resolution, representation, and scrutiny. All of these aspects promote societal learning, which also relies on the capacity of the media to communicate, interpret, and critique the actions of parliament.

Exhibit 1. Parliamentary communications and the media

"There are also certain synergies between communication for good governance programs and independent media development programs, although these must be carefully handled in order to avoid compromising professional norms in the media sector. For instance, if the goal is to encourage awareness of an upcoming constitutional referendum, programs might include strategic communication to inform citizens of their role in the process and to encourage public dialogue. In addition to simply communicating messages about the referendum, though, journalists could be trained (by a non-government affiliated institution) to cover these types of referenda, as well as the constitution drafting process. This would then build capacity in the sector as a whole. Radio and other interactive media could encourage call-ins to discuss the constitutional process; this would also develop professional skills among local staff while at the same time accomplishing a strategic communication objective."

The World Bank
Towards a New Policy Model for Media and
Communication in Post-Conflict and Fragile States, p. 3

Indeed, it has also been argued that powerful synergies exist between developing communications capacity as a dimension of good governance and of strengthening parliamentary institutions and the maturation of independent media (see **Exhibit 1**).

In conducting their business, parliaments need to be able to convey information, and to discuss and consult, with respect to the following three functions.

Legislation. Parliaments have a responsibility to educate the public about the substance of legislation, the benefits and harms of legislative remedies to social issues, and the processes by which legislation is tabled, debated, and brought into law. Although fundamental to a parliament's activities, law-making frequently involves arcane matters that are difficult for average citizens to understand. The translation of legislative activities and events to the general public remains a core challenge for parliaments. To take one example, non-partisan analysts with Canada's Parliamentary Information and Research Service

prepare legislative summaries that are posted in a public area of the Library of Parliament's website. However, these summaries are prepared mainly for use by parliamentarians, and most members of the public are unaware that this resource is freely available to them on the Internet.

Representation. Parliament's representation of the aspirations of citizens must occur through the open deliberation of public policy. This might be described as a form of societal learning that is

aimed at forging a consensus; for the individual, such consensus does not necessarily imply agreement with a collective conclusion, but rather concurrence that, for society as a whole, such a conclusion has been reached through a reasonable and legitimate process. For a democratic system to be open to public engagement, and for that engagement to be informed, the substance, process, and stakeholders in policy deliberations need to be communicated.

Oversight. Parliaments oversee the financial and operational administration of the executive; this is sometimes seen as holding the executive to account on behalf of citizens between elections. Parliamentary bodies, particularly those fairly elected to represent citizens, are the essential link between the people and the executive government. Presidential governance systems, in which the head of the executive branch is elected directly, have an additional link to the electorate. The open communication of a parliament's oversight activities is an important aspect of its claim to legitimacy, which is considered below.

The fruits of the successful use of the communication in the discharge of the three roles discussed above are legitimacy and consent. These concepts are discussed in the next section.

LEGITIMACY AND CONSENT

Managing those matters of the people's interests that a country's constitution assigns to its parliament is extraordinarily difficult, if one seeks to do so with broad public consent. Public consent requires, among other things, confidence that the process of decision-making is legitimate.

A number of factors affecting legitimacy are directly associated with successful communication. In addition to the fair and free selection of parliamentarians, legitimacy demands transparency in deliberations and decision-making and requires decision-making practices to demonstrate engagement with and responsiveness to the public. Legitimacy also gains strength from accountability to the public, not only with respect to the results achieved with the money spent, but also with respect to process and propriety in the allocation of public resources.

How parliamentary communications processes are designed, and how parliamentarians conduct themselves in communicating, have a profound influence on the public's perception of and confidence in the democratic process. Communication is at the heart of the democratic effort. Building strategies and skills around communication must be central to the movement toward increased democratization of the political process.

Spurred by the global dissemination of new communications technologies, and as a result of pressures of political reform, the need for better communications between parliaments and their electorates is increasingly being recognized by jurisdictions around the world. Arising from this is a movement to create "e-Parliaments," which the United Nations and Inter-Parliamentary Union have defined as legislatures that are "empowered to be more transparent, accessible and accountable through Information and Communication Technology" (ICT).⁵ A 2006 report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reflects this growing awareness of the urgent need for parliaments to use e-technologies to become more responsive to contemporary society:

⁵ Cited in Kanthawongs, Penjira (2008). Critical success factors of e-Parliament systems to enhance user engagement: a case study of the Thai parliament. Submission for World e-Parliament Conference 2008 25–26 November, 2008.

If the actual aim is to enhance democracy and democratic values, Parliaments can take the lead by developing e-Parliament strategies that carefully consider concrete ways to interact and network with constituents, particularly young people.⁶

Similarly, the Hansard Society, a respected, independent, non-partisan, political research charity based in the United Kingdom, has examined how parliaments can renew themselves by modernizing and reforming their communications strategies. In a far-reaching briefing paper the Society states:

Better communication will help renew representative democracy in an era when representative politics is hemorrhaging support Familiarity breeds support, which in turn contributes to greater levels of public and personal satisfaction—this is essential to improving the relationship between politicians and the public. Communication is crucial to developing such familiarity, thereby enhancing engagement in the future.⁷

COMMUNICATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD

The practice of democracy in developing and under-developed countries has historically been difficult. Those countries that are the world's poorest and most disadvantaged are, for the most part, those that have suffered through centuries of dictatorship. In the past, economic development was viewed as the surest road to the democratic reform of political systems: with economic prosperity comes the opportunity, education and empowerment that enables people to challenge the status quo of one-party systems or one-person tyrannies. Today, the dissemination of information and communications technologies (ICTs) is also viewed as essential not only for economic growth but also for the development and maintenance of democracy. Moreover, there is increasing recognition of the inherent value of communications as “fundamental components of peace building and governance,” especially within the context of “post-conflict and fragile state assistance”: “Specialists in communication for development are beginning to make the case for treating communication as a public good in itself, not merely as a means to an end.”⁸ This public good requires, of course, the expertise, fiscal resources, and basic infrastructure to support it. **Table 1** and **Figures 1** and **2** provide recent statistics on the global penetration of Internet usage.

Table 1. Internet usage: selected countries

Region	Population (2008 estimate)	Internet users	Population penetration, %
Argentina	40481998	20000000	49.4
Turkey	75,793,836	26,500,000	35.0
Bahrain	718306	250000	34.8
Brazil	196342587	67510400	34.4
Mexico	109955400	27400000	24.9
Ukraine	45,994,287	6,700,000	14.6
Egypt	81,713,517	10,532,400	12.9
Indonesia	237,512,355	81,000,000	10.5
India	1,147,995,898	81,000,000	7.1

⁶ United Nations Development Program. (2006). *Empowering Parliaments Through the Use of ICTs*. p. 21.

⁷ Hansard Society Commission (2006), p. 3.

⁸ World Bank (n.d.). *Brief for Policy Makers: Towards a New Policy Model for Media and Communication in Post-Conflict and Fragile States*. Washington (DC): World Bank. p. 4. Retrieved Aug. 5, 2009 from: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGOVACC/Resources/CommGAPBriefs_Post-Conflict_web0908.pdf.

Nigeria	146,255,306	10,000,000	6.8
Ethiopia	82,544,838	291,000	0.4
Bangladesh	154,037,902	500,000	0.3

Data source: Internet World Stats (2009).

Figure 1. Number of Internet users, by geographic region

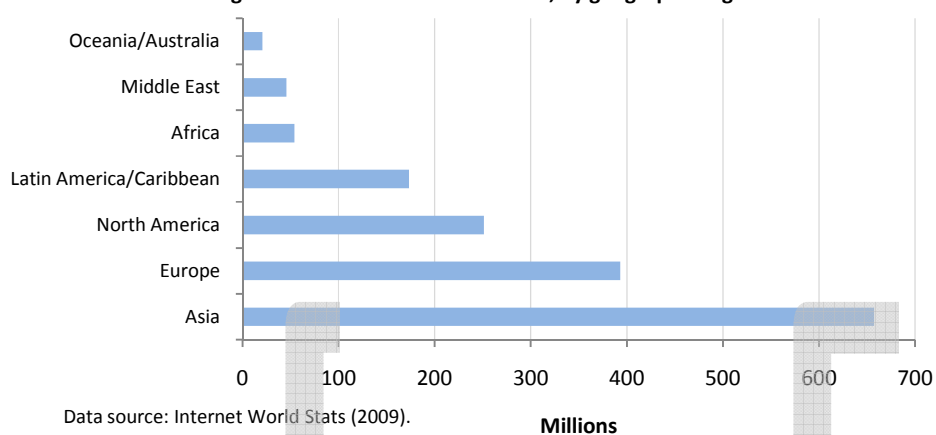
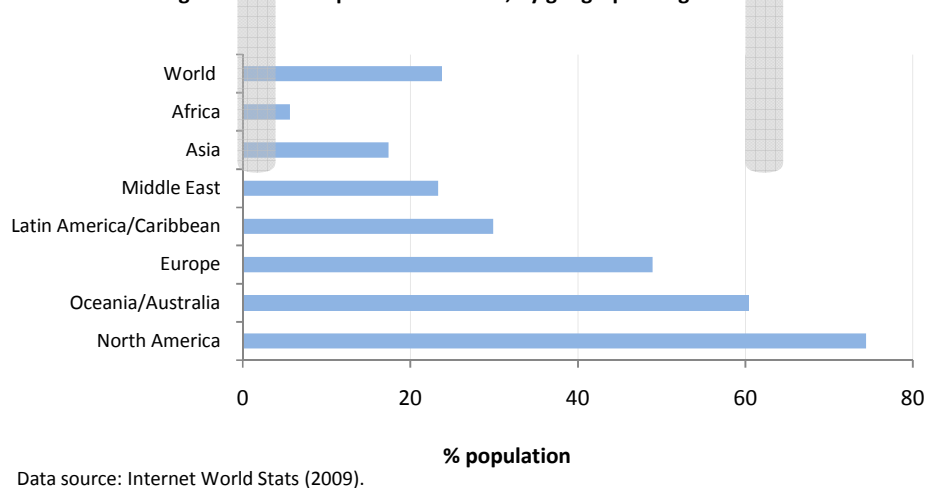
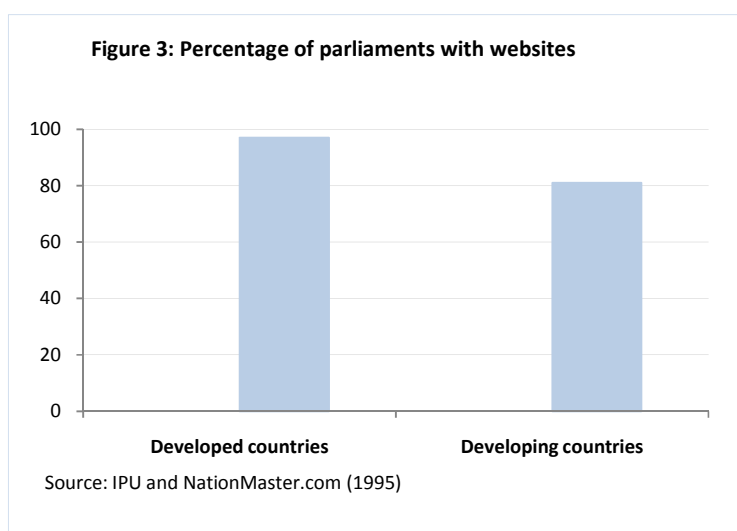


Figure 2. Internet penetration rates, by geographic region



CHAPTER 4 - ICTs AND PARLIAMENTS: DETERMINANTS OF CHANGE

The adoption of basic ICTs by parliaments has been fast and furious. More than 80% of parliaments world wide have a website (**Fig. 3**), and the Inter-Parliamentary Union reports that, in 2007, 91% of national parliaments of the European Union had a website (**Fig. 4**).⁹ However, the depth of resourcing of ICTs for parliamentarians elsewhere in the world is highly variable.



Clearly, Internet connectivity depends largely on the availability of funds, while access depends on the availability of funds as well as the depth of institutional expertise and the technical skills of members of parliament.

As **Table 2** indicates, parliamentarians in Lebanon, India, and Mexico have high levels of Internet connectivity and access. In Lebanon, for example, all members of parliament (MPs) have access to a PC and the Internet. In addition, through an agreement with the University of Albany, the

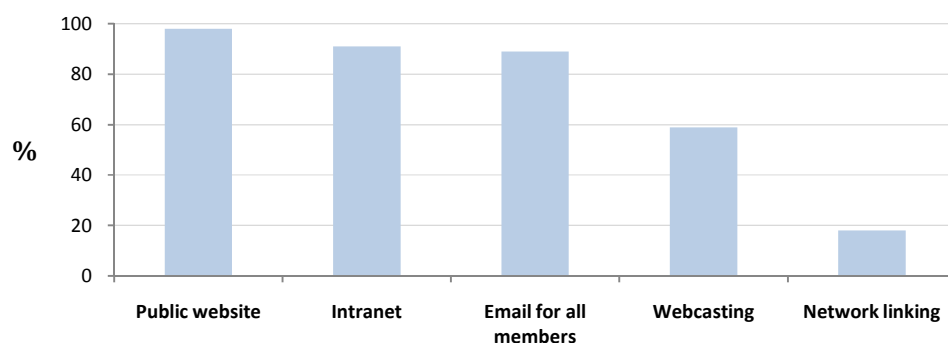
country incurs no cost for Internet connections. Further to having enough connected PCs for all MPs, the Indian parliament also provides 370 MPs in Lok Sabha with palmtops that have inbuilt mobile phones.

The strengthening of democratic institutions around the world requires investment in the capacity for parliaments to offer accessible channels of communication with their electorates. In Benin, Egypt, and Mozambique, however, the situation is less favourable in terms of access, connectivity, and computer literacy. Only 5% to 15% of MPs in Mozambique and 5% to 12% of MPs in Egypt are computer literate. In addition, none of the 718 Egyptian parliamentarians receive a computer, while the country incurs the highest costs of the selected countries for Internet connectivity.¹⁰ Clearly, constraints on access for ICTs can be problematic not only for the general population but also for those their elected representatives.

⁹ Christina Leston-Bandeira (2007). 'The Impact of the Internet on Parliaments: a Legislative Studies Framework.' *Parliamentary Affairs*, 60(4):655–674.

¹⁰ H. Olesen, R. Zambrano, and V. Azzarello (2006). *Empowering Parliaments through the Use of ICTs*. United Nations Development Programme. p. 16.

Figure 4. Use of ICTs by parliaments of member countries of the European Union



Data source: Coleman (2006), p. 276.

Table 2. Access to PCs with Internet connection by members of parliament: selected countries, 2005

Country	No. of MPs / name of national legislatures	PCs available in parliament	PCs connected by LAN	PCs with Internet access	Monthly cost of Internet connection (US\$)
Bahrain	80 (Consultative Council: 40 House of Representatives: 40)		170	170	1,185
Benin	83 National Assembly	50	20	20	2,000
Chile	160 (Senate: 40 Congress: 120)	60 desktops and 60 laptops	120	120	1,000
Egypt	718 (Majlis al-Shaab: 454 Majlis al-Shura: 264)	350	350	350	10,000
India	750 (Lok Sabha: 545 Rajya Sabha: 245)	1,100	1,100	1,100	No cost (borne by the Government of India)
Lebanon	128 (one house: Lebanese Parliament)	200	200	194	No cost (paid by the University of Albany)
Mexico	628 (Senate: 128 House of Representatives: 500)	5500 (500 Senate, 5000 House of Rep- resentatives)	5500	5500	No cost (due to special package deal with ser- vice provider)
Mozambique	250 (Frelimo deputies: 129 Renamo deputies: 112)	130	0	6	400
Uganda	303 (86 elected by interest groups)	180	150	150	2,600

MP = member of parliament; PC = personal computer; LAN = local area network

Source: Olesen et al. (2006), p.16

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS IN COMMUNICATIONS REFORM

Given the collective nature of parliaments, the different voices of numerous stakeholders, and the expensive resources needed for their adoption, the implementation of ICTs for dialogue, scrutiny and knowledge-sharing is often fraught with difficulty.

The nature and effectiveness of communications between a parliamentary body and the citizens it represents is, as **Figure 5** illustrates, the product of the interrelationships of parliament's roles and functions, the technologies available, the stakeholders involved, and various institutional factors, which can serve to limit, or enable, communications processes.

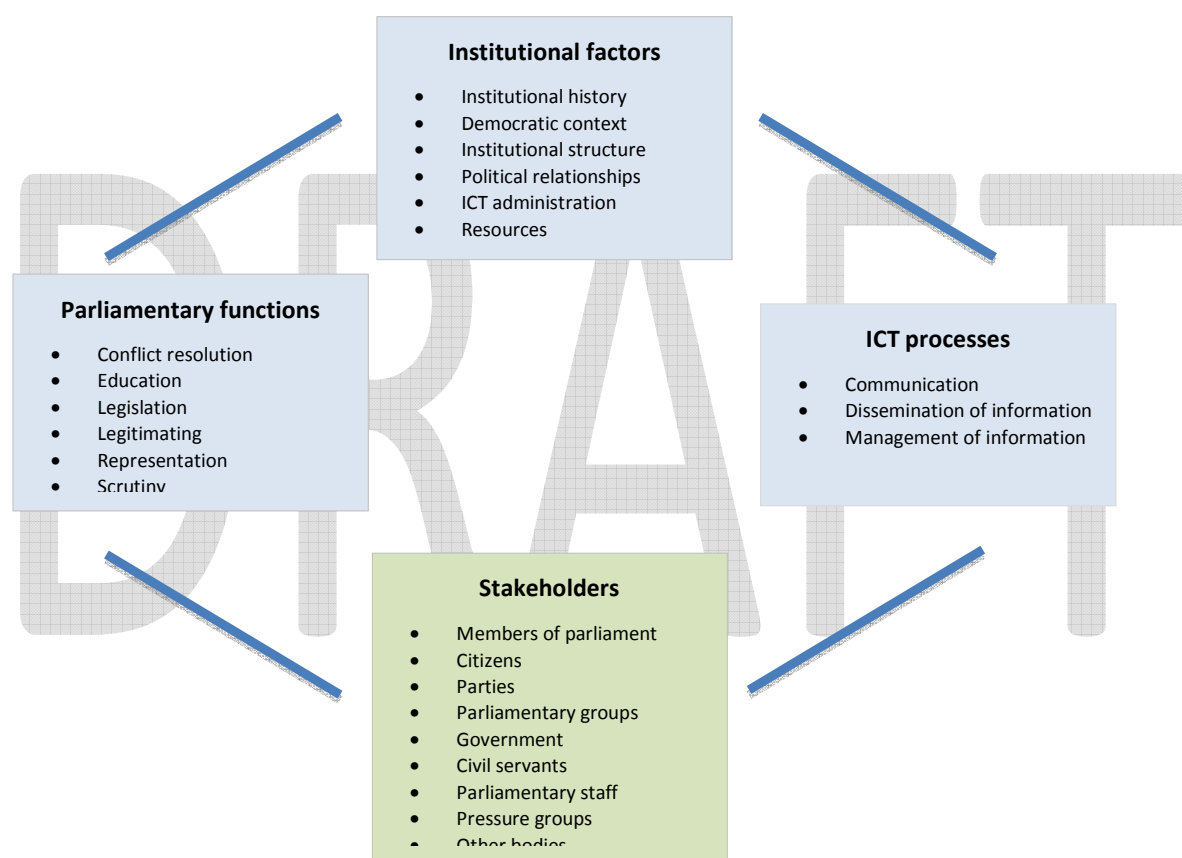


Figure 5. Relationships in parliamentary communications.

Adapted from Leston-Bandeira (2007), p. 663.

How well a parliament is able to deal with change and adapt to new ICTs is likely to be influenced by its **institutional history**. For example, the Flemish and Scottish parliaments, both the recent products of a devolution of political authority, are well positioned to reform the “old democracy” model in favour of a contemporary model that uses ICTs as a basis for day-to-day processes, as opposed to applying new technologies, as an afterthought, to established rules and procedures. Further, the **democratic context** of parliament—that is, its position within the political system of a country and the type of representation and accountability it provides, also shapes the relationship of parliamenta-

rians toward their constituents, along with public expectations about the accessibility and responsiveness of their parliament.

A parliament's **institutional structure**—the organization of work processes and of internal lines of accountability and authority—determines sources of information and the flow of information within and beyond the institution. The number of actors is also very important; the greater the number of committees, organizational substructures, and staff members, the more convoluted the channels of communication. Parliamentary members also have **political relationships** with structures and groups within their respective parties, which can influence sources and objectives of communication.

The distribution of responsibilities for **ICT administration** and the relationship between the various units such as departments, committees, staff, and parliamentarians in their use and access to ICTs also place institutional constraints on communication.

Perhaps most definitively, the development of improved parliamentary communications is determined by the availability of **resources** with respect to both technical capacity and training. Infrastructural constraints and a scarcity of trained staff frequently impede the modernization of communications processes. To keep pace with rapidly evolving ICTs, parliamentary staff need ongoing education and training. Although developmental funds are relatively easy to access for information and public behaviour modification programs, resources to establish fundamental communications programs to strengthen parliaments are scarce. Because the results of this public good are not immediately felt and its benefits are not obvious, the development of communications capacity tends to be chronically under-resourced.

Given the potential obstacles faced by parliaments in becoming more open institutions that engage in interactive dialogue with the public, it is worth emphasizing the value of the effort to do so. The next section explores how recent trends toward greater openness and engagement in parliamentary communication are serving the objectives of understanding and engagement.

5 – ADVANCING COMMUNICATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY PARLIAMENTS

Parliaments in various countries have recognized the need to develop communications strategies that will enable them to educate and inform citizens about parliamentary affairs and the work of parliamentary committees, and to encourage greater public engagement in representative democracy. A communications plan for parliaments thus serves a dual purpose: to increase public *understanding* and to increase public *engagement*. Open communication is not merely a way to “message” the activities of parliaments, but represents a new way of conceptualizing and conducting core parliamentary roles.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Although parliaments exist to represent the public, their processes, actions and decision-making are often obscure. This results from a range of factors, including the arcane nature of some parliamentary terminology and traditions, an imperfect public understanding of the structure of parliamentary systems generally and of their procedural principles, and the lack of profile of various parliamentary committees, many of which conduct their business largely out of the public eye.

To take an example from recent political events in Canada, in October 2008 the prime minister’s request to the governor general to prorogue Parliament gave rise to heated and bitter public debate; although this event did not have an exact precedent in Canadian political history, much of the controversy that surrounded it revealed a lack of public understanding of such fundamentals as the parliamentary authority of the Governor General and the mechanisms of the confidence of the House. At the same time, the media attention given to these events resulted in an extraordinary engagement of the public with technical matters of governance that belies the notion that average citizens are indifferent to such matters.¹¹ This is also a clear illustration of parliamentary communications working with the media to inform, educate, and engage the public.

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

In various jurisdictions, media access to parliamentary activities has been quite circumscribed, and recommendations have been formulated to enable freer access of the media to parliamentarians and their committees and even to parliamentary precincts. This call for enhanced access extends also to the use of a wider range of media formats in reporting. A notable example of this attempt at reform arose from the Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy, established in the United Kingdom 2005 by the Hansard Society and chaired by Lord Puttnam. The Puttnam Report put forward 39 recommendations to improve the British parliament’s communications. These included a recommendation to establish a communications service for parliament, the formation of a joint committee of the two houses of parliament to establish a communications strategy, relaxation of the rules for television coverage in the chambers to allow more engaging techniques, such as reaction shots, close-ups, and panning shots of the backbenches, and extensive improvements to the parliamentary website, educational outreach, the use of more accessible language in communications, and more proactive cross-programming between BBC Parliament and the main BBC channels. These

¹¹ For example, the CBC News story, “GG agrees to suspend Parliament until January,” posted online 4 Dec. 2008, received 6128 comments. See <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/12/04/harper-jean.html>.

recommendations extended even to proposed reforms of the administration of parliament itself as paving the way to more effective communication.¹²

INTERPARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION

Communications strategies are integral to reform movements in modern parliaments, and these movements are supported and sustained by international collaborative efforts to promote democracy. Parliamentarians are frequently involved in regional and global public policy developments—or “parliamentary diplomacy,” as it is sometimes called. Inter-parliamentary communication began with the formation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) a century ago. The objectives of the IPU and the myriad other inter-parliamentary groups created since then have evolved from the initial goal of developing improved understanding to the goal of working together to achieve practical policy results. For example, the IPU now plays an informal oversight and advisory role to the work of the World Trade Organization (WTO) among, of course, many other things. Another example is the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), which pursues a single purpose of strengthening the effectiveness of parliaments and parliamentarians in fighting corruption by improving the effectiveness of the parliamentarians’ roles in governance. A specific GOPAC initiative is to work with the United Nations, Transparency International, and other organizations to ratify and effectively implement the provisions of the UN Convention Against Corruption. For a description of a range of results, see the World Bank Institute’s brief, *Using Networks for Capacity Enhancement: Lessons from Anticorruption Parliamentary Networks*.¹³ Thus parliamentarians can assume leadership roles, working with international executive organizations and international NGOs, and collaborating with their colleagues in other countries to achieve goals of mutual benefit. Such networking is an additional dimension of parliamentary communications. A regional description of inter-parliamentary initiatives is presented in **Table 3**.

ENABLING DIALOGUE THROUGH INNOVATION

There is no disputing that enhanced communications makes parliamentary institutions more accessible, transparent, and interactive. However, even though numerous innovative initiatives are under way to promote dialogue and participation by citizens, most parliaments that make use of ICTs are still providing one-way delivery of information through the use of websites. Typically, there is a limited use of features that promote interaction and involve the citizens to participate in policy deliberations.¹⁴ Institutional support of the World Bank, EU, UNDP, USAID, and technology-based resources (e.g., websites such as www.e-parl.net/eparliament/welcome.do, www.parliaments.info and <http://zunia.org/tag/e-government/>) are making it easier to bring together parliamentary staff from different countries to exchange notes on ways and means to move forward in using technology for effective communications.

¹² Hansard Society Commission (2006). *Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye 2006: Coming into Focus?* [Putnam Report]. London: Hansard Society.

¹³ Meaghan Campbell and F. Stapenhurst (2005). *Using Networks for Capacity Enhancement: Lessons from Anticorruption Parliamentary Networks*. [Capacity Enhancement Brief] Washington: World Bank Institute.

¹⁴ S. Coleman (2006). Parliamentary communication in an age of digital interactivity. *Aslib Proceedings*, 58(5), p. 372.

Table 3. e-Parliament initiatives in a regional context

Region	Description of initiative
Africa	There exist several initiatives in the African region, notably the African Parliamentarians' Forum for New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Pan-African Parliament, the South African Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum, and the Parliamentary Assembly of EU/ACP Countries. The Pan-African Parliament, created in 2004 and representing 44 states, began as an advisory body; however, there are plans to increase its function. On the other hand, the Parliamentary Assembly of EU/ACP Countries has a more pronounced presence, making decisions and implementing them as well.
Asia	In Asia, the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum and the Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme's (APDIP) Asian Parliamentarians' Forum are both in place to facilitate communication between parliamentarians, among other goals. The Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum was also created to help increase knowledge on policy issues by providing a forum for parliamentarians to share ideas. Similarly, the Asian Parliamentarians' Forum allows parliamentarians access to a database of policy documents from Asian countries.
Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States	In Eastern Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly was created to help solidify democracy in the OSCE region, particularly by facilitating communication among parliaments. The OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly has helped with elections in the area and has also collaborated with other parliamentary forums on projects created to advance parliamentary activities. In contrast, the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS is still trying to find its direction, although it was created to foster cooperation within the independent states formerly part of the USSR.
Latin America and the Caribbean	The Latin America and the Caribbean region has numerous examples of parliamentary collaborations, such as the Latin America Parliament (Parlatino), the Central American Parliament, and the Andean Parliament. The Central American Parliament was created to aid in uniting Central American countries. The Parlatino provides information through its website about events and shares documents and information.

Soruce: Based on discussion in Olesen et. al., 2006, pp. 9–12.

In a similar vein, the Canadian Senate has recently undertaken a review to address what it perceives as a lack of public awareness and understanding of the activities of the Senate, and indeed an erosion of the acceptance of the Senate's legitimacy as an unelected body within parliament. In 2005 a comprehensive action plan was drawn up to put in place the resources necessary to communicate and promote the work of Senate committees, to optimize the use of the Internet and of television to provide accessible and, to some degree, interactive information resources, and to relax restrictions on the television coverage of committee proceedings.

In 2006 the parliament of the Republic of Moldova commissioned the drafting of a strategy for the development of a communications strategy within the UNDP objective of "strengthening the institutional capacity" of the Moldovan parliament. This strategy,¹⁵ which appears to reflect lower expectations than in some long-established parliaments and was geared largely toward targeted messaging

¹⁵ Pralong (2006).

related to prospective membership in the European Union, included a number of recommendations on the external and internal applications of websites, a re-packaging of television coverage, language training, and open-house days to allow member of the public to tour parliament.

An interesting case is that of the Scottish parliament, which since the Union of the Crowns in 1707 had been merged with the parliament at Westminster. The Scottish parliament is now housed in spectacular yet controversial new premises whose design reflects the ideals of openness and consensus-building that is part of this “new” parliament’s aspirations. The arrangement of seats in the debating chamber is conducive to dialogue, rather than confrontation; the chamber provides ample accommodation for members of the public and journalists. The Scottish parliament’s use of new communications technologies has been described as “visionary” and “a model for 21st century parliaments.” The Scottish Parliament was the first statutory body in the world to: formally accept e-petitions, provide short biographical films of elected representatives on its website and provide comprehensive webcast access to its proceedings, and has also pioneered the use of interactive forums to support discussions of forthcoming Members’ business.¹⁶

The range of the Scottish parliament’s utilization of web-based ICTs is, however, the exception than the rule. Although overall usage is high, communications remain predominantly uni-directional, and the full potential for interconnectivity and dialogue offered by web-based technologies has not yet been fully realized. The following section considers the value of strategic planning for parliaments striving to achieve this goal.

¹⁶ Scottish Parliament (2005). Praise for Parliament’s information and communication technologies [news release]. June 13, 2005. Retrieved Aug. 4, 2009 at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/nmCentre/news/news-05/pa05-046.htm>.

6 – TOWARD A NEW MODEL OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATIONS

The following sections will describe how parliaments can become more responsive to the public, and more productively fulfill their roles of open deliberation, legislation, and ensuring accountability, by embracing new technologies and communication approaches. These sections will consider different modes of communication, explore the expectations and potential inherent in the contemporary communications environment, and explore ways in which modern parliaments are beginning to re-tool their communications efforts with the strategic adoption of dynamic ICTs. The basics of developing a communication plan are presented. Finally, the need to develop organizational capacity is discussed, with particular attention to the need for education and training for parliamentarians to enable them to meet the opportunities presented by new communications technologies in enhancing participatory democracy.

LEVELS OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATION

Organization communication is conducted on different levels and for different purposes, which may be broadly classified in terms of the nature of the relationship that is being forged with the public. Thus, communication may be described as passive, reactive or participatory.

PASSIVE COMMUNICATION

As stated earlier, building knowledge among citizens about political structures, processes, events and issues is a fundamental component of a parliament's responsibility to engage in dialogue with the public. Passive communication is uni-directional. It suggests a relationship in which power rests with the organization "transmitting" a "message" for the purpose of providing information or prompting behavioural or attitudinal change. The source of the communication provides a "gatekeeper" function, and there is no mechanism for feedback.

This mode of communication has legitimate purposes in a democracy. It can be used to provide information that helps interested members of the public better understand what parliament does. However, in societies where there is a healthy degree of skepticism surrounding official information, the value of such packaged information can be seriously limited, and its impact can be counterproductive. Thus, in most cases, concurrent forms of communication are required to help build credibility.

However, in concert with other communication modalities, the provision of passive information can play an important foundational role: many forums in society seek relevant information; schools, for example, are a particularly important target. Also, given modern information and communications technology, there are many ways to "package" information to make it accessible, interesting, and memorable for both general and targeted audiences.

Accountability. Some components of passive communication address the fundamental obligation on the part of parliament to report to the public on its activities in order to satisfy the requirements of accountability, legitimation, and consent outlined earlier. Given that governments use from one quarter to one half of the average person's income, there is enormous sensitivity on the part of taxpayers to the clarity of explanations of how resources are allocated to programs, regions, and social

groups, the need for each area of expenditure and the results it is expected to deliver, and to how funds are administered to ensure none are wasted or stolen. Budgets, related documentation, and their analyses in committees and elsewhere provide such information and differing perspectives on the wisdom of the many decisions implicit in it. There also needs to be equivalent information and public analyses on the sources of all revenues received, whether from taxes, particular service charges, or the sale of assets such as oil or timber. The global “publish what you pay” initiative is an indication of the importance of such information.

Transparency. With respect to policy decision-making, parliamentary plenary and committee meetings can be held in an open forum and can be televised. All formal discussions in parliament can be documented and made accessible (as through the daily publication of Hansard transcriptions of House of Commons and Senate debates). Parliament can institute access to defined areas of administrative information and can require prescribed executive reporting.

REACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Reactive communication can occur in many ways. A typical example is that of parliamentary committees deliberating on a policy issue. Conventionally, this communication occurs by invitation, as individual and representatives of interest groups are called upon to appear as expert witnesses at hearings of committees. Input is therefore biased by the selection of witnesses, and may favour more vocal or well-resourced members of society. The validity of this system needs to be ensured, therefore, by skillful questioning, supplementation of testimony by survey methods that provide more representative information, and well-researched processes for the identification of potential invitees. Of particular importance in large, regionalized or culturally diverse countries is to hold hearings in regions outside of the seat of government. For example, one of the recommendations of the Puttnam Commission in the United Kingdom, was for select committees to hold meetings and consultations outside of London to facilitate regional participation.

Responsiveness. Essential to reactive communication is the creation of an expectation on the part of citizens that the role of a parliamentarian is to help citizens in any issue related to government. This can be encouraged through outreach communication (such as “householder” newsletters to residents of a riding), attendance at public events, the use of individual websites inviting the public to raise issues and concerns, and by holding regular office “surgeries” where the representative is physically available to discuss such matters of concern to any citizen willing to come by.

Inclusion. Two other related mechanisms are popular. The first is the periodic “townhall” meeting, which is typically held on a single policy issue. The parliamentarian arranges the space and typically serves in the role of chair, but attempts as far as possible to simply listen to the views that are expressed by citizens who attend. The parliamentarian might provide information, but seeks to avoid becoming a lightning rod for any particular policy position. The second mechanism, periodic accountability meetings with the electorate, are almost the inverse. In these gatherings the parliamentarian describes the key position he or she took on recent issues and invites questions and reactions. The idea is to explain why decisions were taken. Although such meetings might invite skepticism, the Canadian experience is that, over time, they can help to provide a basis for the mutual learning that characterizes a higher, participatory, level of communication.

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

A relational communications strategy is inherently superior—especially when married to the principles of democracy based on open communication, participation in dialogue, integration of ideas from multiple sources, and decision-making based on representative participation. A shift in the direction of increased democracy represents a shift away from a power-based set of strategies to an appropriate balance of power, information, and values-based conversations. When an appropriate dialogue occurs between the two parties in the process, the relationship grows and trust is established.

Mutual learning. Participatory modes of communication lead to dialogue and engagement—the most highly developed level of institutional communication. Engagement and dialogue imply not only two-way communication, but mutual listening and learning. Such processes require the active and intense involvement of parliamentarians, research expertise on the subject at hand, and a representative group of citizens. However, less intensive means can also be contemplated. Electronic networks that include parliamentarians, experts and citizens are one such mechanism. Another is the creation of standing committees that over a period of time effectively amass a body of research expertise and bring public attention to its deliberations and reports. Individual parliamentarians have played such roles, building personal networks of experts and interested citizens and becoming known for their expertise and commitment on a particular matter. Mutual learning can also genuinely take place in formal committees in an environment where the parliamentary body is not excessively partisan. In addition, individual parliamentarians can become influential on certain policy issues both within their own party and also across party lines.

A particular form of such an engagement procedure is being pursued by the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), the international anti-corruption network of parliamentarians. On virtually all policy issues or practical anti-corruption initiatives, it joins its members with expert organizations to ensure a combination of political leadership and expertise. Although the objective is a practical policy result, the means of getting there is mutual learning through engaged communications.

HARNESSING INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGIES FOR PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATIONS

Table 4 contrasts traditional, one-way communications with new interactive media. The potential of innovative technologies to enable parliaments to move toward participatory modes of communication through interactive ICTs is clear. Innovative technologies have the capacity to help build new networks, create synergies, and enhance interactivity, but their adoption can be hindered by organizational culture and a habituation to the traditional technologies already in place.

New electronic media offer exciting opportunities to expand the reach and spontaneity of participatory or relationship-oriented communication. Websites can be used to canvass opinion, gather feedback, and provide portals to information and services. By tapping into the technologies and culture of social media, parliamentarians can add value to web-based communication by heightening public confidence in the accessibility and responsiveness of parliament. At the same time, however, it should be borne in mind that the users of these media are savvy about their exploitation as powerful tools for marketing, including political marketing, as in US President Obama's recent election campaign. Therefore, the use of electronic, digital and social media must be ballasted by credibility, honesty, transparency and accountability. They must also “deliver the goods”: as a briefing of the Hansard Society points out,

There is a danger that strategies for implementing further methods of public engagement (e.g. e-Petitions) will offer a “thin” form of democracy—potentially building up (and then frustrating) public expectations rather than providing a platform that delivers ongoing democratic participation. They need to be accompanied by a concerted form of deliberation, with clarity in the processes and outcomes.¹⁷

Table 4: Comparison of technologies as information and communication tools.

	One-way	Interactive
Traditional	Non-digital. End-user: passive recipient. One-to-many, large audiences. TV, radio, etc.	Non-digital. End-user: active participant. One-to-one, difficult to reach large audiences simultaneously. Fixed phone lines, etc.
Innovative	Digital. End-user: “pulling” information. One-to-many, large audiences. Static websites, etc.	Digital. End-user: networks “pulling” and “pushing” information. Many to many, local and global audiences. Dynamic websites, online forums, e-discussions, etc.

Source: Olesen et al. (2006), p. 7.

As the popularity of social media is transforming corporate communications from a B2B to a B2C model, contemporary expectations of citizens/consumers for online engagement with institutions, both private and public sector, is being significantly altered.

Social media success stories to date suggest personalization of an institution is a key component for engagement. Empowering and showcasing individual actors to represent a brand/institution facilitates direct engagement with citizens.

The success of the Lords of the Blog (<http://lordsoftheblog.net/>) pilot project, now a formalized dialogue between Members of the House of Lords and British citizens online (moderated by the Hansard Society) exemplifies the possibilities of personalized political engagement through social media. Unlike certain political blogs which act as ‘directed news channels’ or an electronic repository of press releases and impersonal information, each blog entry is clearly identified with a specific Lord.

A spirit of openness is imperative to any social media endeavour. ‘Half-measure’ social media engagement by institutions can be more deleterious than not participating in social media at all. For example, not enabling comments to publicly appear on a blog can create perceptions that an institution is secretive and is counter-productive to communications objectives enhancing openness.

Use of social media tools to foster political awareness and engagement is helpful only if citizens use them. Expectations by online users for exciting, frequently updated content need to be factored into all communications plans with a social media component. Not updating online content on a regular basis can also create a false perception that ‘nothing is happening’ at an institution.

¹⁷ Hansard Society (2008). Enhancing Parliament’s ability to communicate with members of the public. [Briefing.] House of Lords Debate on Thursday 18 December 2008. p. 4.

Providing access to new content can be as simple as regularly posting images on a photo-sharing site like Flickr. The UK Parliament provides a variety of audio visual content which gives ‘a behind the scenes’ view to citizens online. Not only are politicians featured, but also ordinary citizens who work for the institution such as groundskeepers, art historians, and functionaries. These informal images create positive framing for Parliament, reinforcing the institution as a place for all citizens (http://www.flickr.com/photos/uk_parliament/3829800358/).

Before engaging in social media initiatives, regular monitoring activities need to be conducted. There are many social media tools available and not all will be suitable or appropriate for communicating institutional messages. The social media landscape is forever in a state of transformation and the popularity of certain tools can rise and fall in a very short period of time.

Rapidly advancing cell phone technology offers the potential for direct messaging and other direct-to-citizen interactions and could serve as an important political communications conduit in regions where internet access is limited.

Experience to date indicates that, although much can be accomplished through websites and email, effective networking requires a degree of interpersonal understanding and trust that seems to require periodic direct personal interaction. Face-to-face conferences for international networks of parliamentarians such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union can help parliamentarians share their experiences on specific issues and provide the differing perspectives that encourage a fuller understanding of issues.

RESPONDING TO CONTEMPORARY EXPECTATIONS

From news reporting to entertainment, social media, and advertising, modes of communication have undergone a radical change in the past several years. As today’s newspaper readers turn to web-based news sources and syndicated free dailies, even the most venerable mainstream newspapers are losing readership and advertising revenues and are struggling to devise viable business models (such as on-line user fees)¹⁸ while investing in value-added online multimedia features. Similarly, radio and television audiences are dwindling and their tastes changing, presenting challenges for both private and public broadcasters, who in response repeatedly adjust their programming mix, restructure their organizations and struggle to maintain cost-effective news programming.¹⁹ In the meantime, consumer choice is growing in some respects. Traditional broadcast media—television and radio—are no longer constrained by conventional scheduling: audiences can watch their preferred programs at whatever time of day or night is convenient, on any day of the week, through digital cable television systems or by downloading programs from broadcasters’ websites. Cable television viewers can select a suite of channels to subscribe to, according to their needs and preferences.

¹⁸ Richard Pérez-Peña (2009). Newspaper ad revenue could fall as much as 30%. *New York Times*. April 14. Retrieved Aug. 4, 2009 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/15/business/media/15papers.html>.

¹⁹ CBC news cutting staff in Calgary. *Calgary Herald*. April 4, 2008. Retrieved Aug. 4, 2009 from canada.com at <http://www.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/city/story.html?id=4189fffa-ff47-48b5-a60f-b0b5e77afbe0>.

Music has become downloadable, programmable, personalizable and portable though iPods and MP3 players. Even print media are becoming customized: Time Inc. has designed an experimental print product called *Mine* that enables readers to customize content from a selection of Time periodicals into a personalized magazine.²⁰ There has been an explosion in Internet-based communications through computers and personal devices such as cell phones, email, and websites, supported by “personal digital assistants” such as iPods, Blackberries and “smart phones” that increase the immediacy, connectivity and candour of communications for individuals and organizations. Social media such as YouTube, Facebook, blogs and podcasts are rapidly becoming normative, even beyond the early adopters in Generation Y (those born between 1980 and 1994). These media create a sense of a personalized space within a world that is increasingly complex and, at the same time, increasingly transparent, accessible, and interconnected. (See **Exhibit 2** for a sampling of new technologies applied to parliamentary communications). Meanwhile, in the realm of marketing, product branding has adopted social marketing techniques to associate products with causes and with social and political action, again heightening consumers’ sense of individuation and of choice—including ethical and political choice. In the Generation Y market, which already places unprecedented value on brand identification, the potential influence of social marketing is particularly strong.²¹

Exhibit 2. Ten new ways to enhance parliamentary communications.

1. **Parliamentary website** to store and transmit information, gain valuable feedback and conduct ongoing dialogue.
2. **Direct-to-citizen releases.** Online news releases are inexpensive and easy to control.
3. **Social networking** sites to build relationships and benefit from word-of-mouth at little or no cost. Highly credible and viral. Examples include: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and a wide range of narrow-interest sites.
4. **Blogging.** Committee blogs can help reduce citizen cynicism and inform, educate, and consult with the public about an ongoing debate. Also provides a means of tapping into the ongoing discussions of influential political bloggers.
5. **Wikipedia** represents one of the most powerful tools for sharing and providing information.
6. **Links** inserted in blog posts can direct people to a target website.
7. Inexpensive **ads** on Facebook to divert traffic.
8. **Emails** to send updates, connect, inform, and dialogue.
9. **Life experiences:** podcasts, webcasts, and YouTube.
10. **RSS** (Real Simple Syndication) feed: a popular and inexpensive way of sending out news.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that, in affluent, well-established democracies such as Canada, the expectation of the transparency of government and of speedy access to information and services has increased at the same time as voter participation has declined. The very cohorts that have become discriminating, brand-loyal consumers have been inculcated with skepticism about corporate and institutional behaviour, including that of governments and their representatives. Generation Y, particularly, raised in a non authoritarian style by baby-boomers, do not accept “authority figures” unquestioningly. The majority of young people of voting age are skeptical about politics and politicians. Their capacity to access information and to voice opinions through fast-paced channels such as the Internet has not parlayed into higher turnout at the polls. Thus, there appears to be a pa-

²⁰ Conference Board of Canada (2009). *Turning Green in to Gold: Green Marketing for Profit*. Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada; p. 7.

²¹ Conference Board of Canada (2009), p. 5.

radical disconnect between being politically *informed* and being politically *active*. Without active engagement, knowledge does not translate into power, but seems merely to feed cynicism about the real outcomes of democratic systems. A fundamental challenge for parliaments operating in this social context is to respond to non-traditional modes of political awareness. Young citizens are “plugged in.” But are they “turned on”?

THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

As we have noted, the increased participation of citizens enabled by contemporary ICTs can serve to increase the accountability of parliaments by facilitating the public’s scrutiny of their deliberations. Thus scrutiny and accountability are enhanced, resulting in a more open democracy. As new models for open democracy evolve, they will provide opportunities to develop new frameworks for political activity, moving away from adversarial, zero-sum politics to a more plural and inclusive form of politics that involve building alliances on key political objectives.

Table 5. Technology used by Canadian MPs in 2003 and 2008

Technology	MPs using in 2003 (%)	MPs using in 2008 (%)
Website	67	80
Email	65	75
Contact form	28	22
Petition	—	1
Consultation	0.6	0.7
Poll	—	12
Video/Audio	—	27
Podcast	—	1
Facebook	—	51
Blog	—	4

Parliaments, old and new, need to move away from the unidirectional transmission of communication toward real-time interactive media to connect with individuals. Indeed, various parliaments have been investing in planning and research to determine how ICTs can help to open new channels of communication with the

public. For example, in the United Kingdom, both government and the parliament understand the need for online forums as a means of public engagement. Since 2000 both institutions have undertaken several online forum initiatives.²² There is a growing recognition that social media offer powerful tools to reach out to and interact with the public. **Table 5** provides a snapshot of progress in the Canadian parliament.

EMBRACING INNOVATION

Among the reforms in institutional communication currently under way in contemporary parliaments, one of the most notable is that generated by the Hansard Society, whose key recommendations are presented in **Exhibit 3**.

²² R. Ferguson (2008). Convergent evolution: the development of online engagement in Westminster and Whitehall through the use of online forums. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 61(1), 216–225.

**Exhibit 3: Enhancing parliamentary communications with the public:
key recommendations of the Hansard Society**

- A communications service should be established for parliament.
- Communications strategies for parliaments should be subject to regular consultation, review and evaluation in relation to principles of accessibility, transparency, and accountability.
- There should be a comprehensive review of the language, terminology, and procedures of parliament in accordance with clear communications principles.
- Parliamentary officials should be encouraged to do more to draw media attention to matters of public interest.
- Subject specialist journalists should be allowed easier access to cover parliamentary business.
- The deliberations of committees should be posted on the parliamentary website and made more accessible.
- The parliamentary website should be improved.

Extracted from Hansard Society Briefing Paper, 2008.

The Wiki age. In Canada, after a comprehensive assessment of communication needs, the Senate has developed a new communications strategy that attempts to optimize the “value-added” potential of online communications. **Exhibit 4** outlines proposals being deliberated by the Canadian Senate in drafting a new communications plan. Of particular note is ongoing discussion concerning the appropriate use by parliamentary institutions of Wikipedia, which has become a major source of information for everyone from students to policy-makers. Is it appropriate for governments and parliaments to participate in the “wikification” of information by adding to or editing Wikipedia entries? Does the potential to bias or manipulate information preclude such participation? Or has Wikipedia become a legitimate, genuinely democratic, inclusive, and participatory forum that should be incorporated alongside traditional media into communications activities and strategies?

Exhibit 4: Communications innovations and the Canadian Senate

- RSS feeds on the parliamentary website are being implemented for its committee webpages. Development of other topic specific RSS feeds is under consideration.
- Archiving of committee audio/video feeds for distribution is under consideration.
- YouTube is recognized as a potential conduit for interviews with senators and the “broadcast” of committee proceedings. (Currently there is no policy on this matter.)
- News conferences are webcasted and podcasting is under consideration.
- The use of wikis is increasingly being recognized as an important tool for information-sharing.
- Training sessions for political staff on communications are under consideration.
- The Senate has employed state-of-the-art technology to create its new IntraSen website that facilitates internal communications.
- Non-partisan media relation services are offered to each committee.
- The Communications Directorate proactively provides information to the media and facilitates access to the Senate and its committees.
- Committee spokespersons are encouraged to take interviews and speaking engagements with universities, schools, trade organizations, boards of trade and so on.

Innovations such as those being contemplated by the Canadian Senate are expected to create a more open and direct relationship between citizens and their representatives. The personalization of communications can also entice individuals to get involved by virtue of an increased feeling of “being heard.” For example, the creation of online forums for public consultation and feedback on various files increases participation and achieves greater equity by removing the barrier of distance. Through web-based technologies, citizens can more readily access information remotely, including the documents that are at the source of political and legislative actions.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

To be effective, strategies to enhance and renew communications need to be based on a well-articulated and systematic plan. The purpose of a strategic communications plan is to address the communication needs of all of the political body’s programs, public education and advocacy efforts into one comprehensive document. By designing a long-term strategy, parliaments are better positioned to be proactive, rather than merely reacting to the existing environment. A well-crafted communications plan conveys the importance of effective communications to stakeholders, helping to ensure “buy-in” and commitment to the implementation of relevant communications strategies. Communication strategies need not be complex. In fact, the best are often the simplest. A strategic communication plan fosters the cost-effective deployment of resources and highlights synergies and shared opportunities that help groups within the organization to work together, thus supporting institutional strength and capacity. **Exhibit 5** lists key components of a communications plan.

COMPONENTS OF A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

A communications plan should begin with its **background and purpose**, articulating the institutional context in which it is being developed as well as its main objectives. Why are communications efforts being launched in the first place? What is the organization trying to communicate? Why is the formulation of a strategic plan necessary in meeting these objectives? It is important to articulate what the organization hopes to achieve in the short, medium and long term through improved communications. Such goals could include increased awareness of a specific topic, increased voter participation, or increased feedback from the public.

A strategic plan must take into account the **communications environment** in which it will function, including current public issues that directly or indirectly affect the message. This understanding should be informed by key findings of relevant studies, reports, public opinion research and focus-group testing available internally and externally. Connected with this are **strategic considerations** arising from the environment in which the communications plan will be launched. These considerations may include the history of the file, political relationships, relevant legislation or issues before government, and recent or planned announcements

Crucial to the development of an effective communication plan is a clear vision of **the objectives of the communication** and a sensitivity to the needs, expectations, and sensitivities of the **target audiences**. **Key messages** must be clear, concise, direct and should be formulated with an awareness of synergies and potential **partnerships**. The communications plan should consider the range of **new media** now available to enable open dialogue and should consider these in a dynamic, synergistic way. It is also important to develop a well-articulated **approach** to the communication that is consistent with organizational values. For example, the language and vocabulary should have a citizen focus and demonstrate a commitment to transparency and collaboration²³

Exhibit 5: Outline of a typical communications plan

1. Background and purpose
2. Communications environment
3. Strategic considerations
4. Communications objectives
5. Target audiences
6. Key messages
7. Strategic options/approaches/partnerships
8. New media strategies
9. Values and approach
10. Budget
11. Benchmarking and evaluation
12. Sustainability

²³ See *Building a Citizen Focus into Government of Canada Communications* at <http://commnet.gc.ca/citizen.html>.

Exhibit 6: A sample communications plan for the Canadian Senate

- **Background and purpose:** negative perception in the public eye; need to build public understanding, demonstrate value, and provide senators with communications tools
- **Communications environment:** traditional, historically closed, vs. interactive, open media to which the public is now accustomed
- **Strategic considerations:** current debates on governance, including the possibility of an elected senate in the future
- **Communications objectives:** to promote the work of the Senate and encourage public engagement with its activities
- **Target audience:** media, senators and staff, academics, youth, NGOs, international stakeholders
- **Key messages:** the virtues of a bicameral system, the value of committee work, the broad range of experience of senators, including regional perspective

STRATEGIC COMPONENTS

- Awareness-building projects (publicity work; television coverage of committee work; success stories)
- Short-term committee promotion activities (maximize use of Internet, web pages for media; webcasting)
- Other communications directorate activities (communications toolkit for senators; mechanisms to respond to public queries)
- Web projects (electronic distribution of work; interactive chamber seating plan; webcasting)
- Internal communications (“Intra-Sen” intranet)
- Benchmarking (research other jurisdictions; establish measures of success)
- Plan for sustainability

Naturally, a communications plan should be supported by a realistic **budget** and, to ensure accountability, should specify benchmarks to measure progress and quality and a method for **evaluation**. Finally, the plan should give thought to its own **sustainability**: How can the organization keep up momentum in implementing the plan? How can public engagement be ensured in the long term? Both the development and the implementation of a comprehensive communications plan requires adequate institutional capacity, and relevant expertise. A sample outline for a communications plan that would respond to strategic needs of the Canadian Senate is given in **Exhibit 6**.

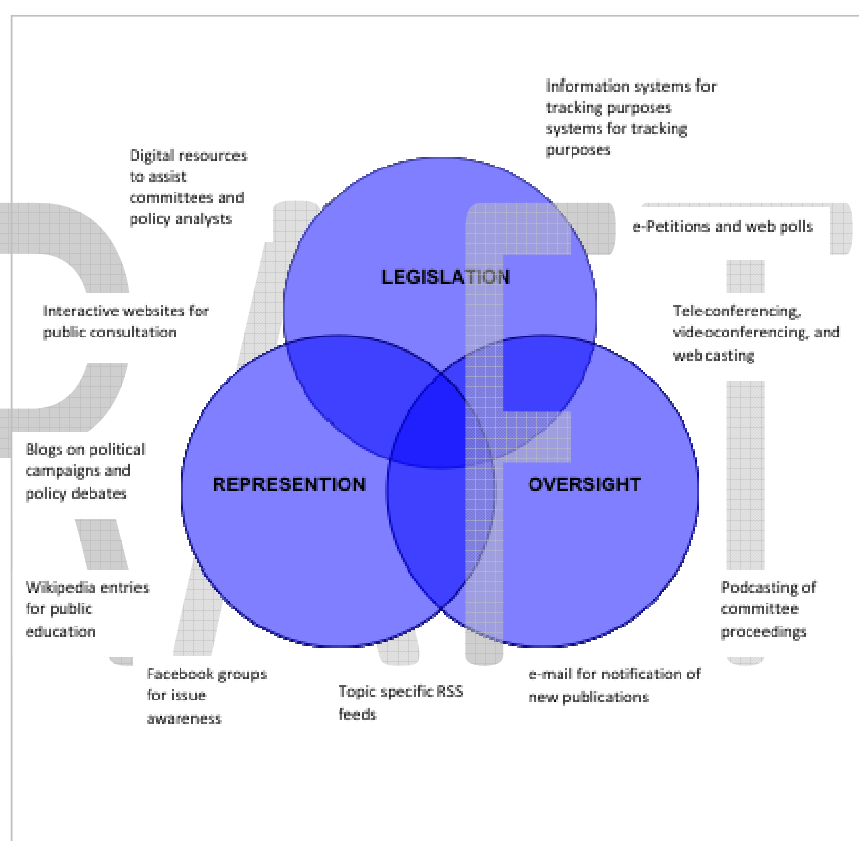
7 – BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR COMMUNICATIONS REFORM

The three primary functions of parliaments—legislation, representation and oversight—are interconnected and can all be supported with the use of ICTs (**Fig. 6**). This implies a potential for synergies in the application of ICTs to support a parliament’s overlapping roles. A well-designed communications plan should seek to maximize these points of connection and to find the best “fit” between specific ICTs, institutional needs, and the target audience. Planning, maintaining, and continually improving communications plans for parliaments therefore merits dedicated resources to identify opportunities to coordinate and optimize the application of ICTs. Incorporating new technologies into such a plan is an important challenge; Appendix B gives an example of how website features can be made to serve a wide range of communications purposes.

In building institutional capacity to improve communications, expertise and dedicated resources are needed to support development at the level of the parliamentarian, of committees, and of the institution as a whole. The Puttnam Commission recommended, as an essential first step, the creation of a formal communications committee to help orient and support communications at these three levels, and to ensure the development of up-to-date and dialogue-oriented communications expertise within the organization.

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY

Individual members. In establishing an interactive relationship with citizens, individual members can consider a number of options, beginning with the provision of basic information about themselves, their ideas and philosophy. Depending on the penetration of the Internet, this might be done predominantly through a member's website or through other inexpensive outreach mechanisms (see **Exhibit 7** and **Figure 6**), with the assistance of communications experts from the organization.



These communications activities can be complemented by periodic appearances at community events

other events, in media scrums, at educational institutions and through any number of electronic en-

Figure 6. The role of ICTs in enhancing open parliamentary communication. Freely adapted from Olesen et al. (2006)

Exhibit 7. How Canadian MPs use ICTs to connect with their constituents

In Canada, Members of Parliament from both Houses are provided with a strong support system to help with ICT initiatives and online awareness. The Senate and the House of Commons administration and Parliamentarians recognize the trend toward Canadian public political disengagement and are exploring new social media to connect with citizens in the online world.

The Library of Parliament provides numerous services for Members of Parliament in the Senate and in the House of Commons, including support, infrastructure, and education (in the form of guidelines as well as technology-related training classes) (personal communication, S. Aube, Aug. 4, 2009). The Parliament also maintains a non-partisan informational website where citizens can access information on different political parties, standard information on Senators and MPs, and links to their personal websites.

Parliamentarians use their personal websites to communicate information about the work of Parliament, their personal views, and to seek comments and opinions from the public (personal communication, S. Aube, Aug. 4, 2009). Similarly, they use emails to respond to inquiries from the public and their constituents.

More recently, parliamentarians have turned to new online communication media such as blogs, online discussion groups, and social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. In many cases, MPs have used online strategies geared toward youth to engage younger constituents in political issues (personal communication, S. Aube, 2009).

Several Senators and members of the House of Commons have blogs. In January 2008, there were 11 blogging MPs; two used interactive blogs, while others updated their blogs less frequently and received fewer comments from readers (Francoli, 2009). Conservative MP Garth Turner, who has maintained a blog since 2005, is a very active blogger, engaging readers who often comment and share views on his posts (Francoli, 2009). As another example, MP Monty Solberg, perhaps the first blogging MP, maintained a humorous blog about issues pertinent to his riding as well as his adventures in Parliament. The blog was less focused on political issues, but succeeded in engaging his constituents and creating a sense of an online community. The blog was closed when Solberg was appointed to Cabinet and had less time to dedicate to the blog (Francoli, 2009). Both examples have garnered both local and national media attention, increasing awareness of the blogs.

Canadian MPs have dashed to social network sites, are exploring blogging, and are just beginning to realize the potential of ICTs that will allow them to engage in a two-way conversation with their constituents. Currently only a few MPs are using petitions, consultations, and polls. However, given the established support provided by the Library of Parliament, Canadian citizens should expect their representatives to begin experimenting with online two-way communication, seeking their opinions on political issues to better represent the views of constituents in the House of Commons.

The Parliamentary Press Gallery also maintains a website where reporters, Senators and members of the House of Commons have direct access to current and archived news releases.

counters. Accountability sessions are similar, but focus on the members rendering an accounting of their actions and initiatives, and of whether their positions have been consistent with their constituents' wishes. It is particularly important for a parliamentary body to receive complaints and treat them seriously. Debating the policy issues of the day is important, but dealing with the practicalities and frustrations with the government in daily life is equally important. While dealing with chronic complainers can be a problem for parliamentarians (as hypochondriacs are for medical doctors), this provides an excellent window to the effectiveness of government services and occasions of wrong-

doing and corruption. Perhaps more importantly, it demonstrates that the government is genuinely there to serve the people—not the reverse. Moreover, if parliamentarians work together to pool their results, they can become a powerful force for change. Harnessing the power of social media will help parliamentarians to share knowledge and expertise and to collaborate toward common goals.

Committees. Unlike the plenary, committees tend to hear witnesses, deliberate in detail on specific and often highly technical topics, and issue reports. Committee work tends to be the nexus of two great needs of democracy—learning and consensus building—actually occur. As the Puttman Commission has pointed out, committee work has traditionally been conducted out of the public eye, in part in an effort to avoid inappropriate influence by special interests. However, in a culture of openness and transparency, greater visibility will lend legitimacy and to the work of parliamentary committees. If they are open to the public, covered by the media, broadcast on radio and television, and connected to the public by means of new interactive media, committees can more readily engage with citizens in ways that enhance societal learning.

The institution. In addition to communicating the actions and initiatives of individual members and committees, parliaments need to convey the attributes, role, and historic and political importance of the organization. Targeting such information toward schools or students' research projects can be particularly helpful in educating engaged citizens for the future. This type of communication needs to occur, however, on an ongoing basis for society as a whole, in order to ensure that, particularly in times of constitutional crisis, citizens understand the structures, limitations, and responsibilities of their parliament and government.

THE NEED FOR COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

Clearly, the role of parliamentarians in communicating with the public and with their peers requires specialized skills, all of which, for better or worse, tend to be learned on the job rather than through of any kind of formalized training. Moreover, the contexts, purposes and modalities of parliamentary communication takes many forms, ranging from in-person, one-on-one communication to appearances before committees, speeches delivered in the upper or lower house, television broadcasts, public appearances, written reports, newsletters to constituents, and community forums such as open houses. Parliamentarians and their staff require not only an understanding of the societal contexts of communication modalities, but also a repertoire of skills in effective spoken, written, visual and interactive communication. They require these skills not only with respect to their own activities as elected representatives, but also with respect to institutional practices. That is, parliamentarians and their staff need to be familiar with the fundamentals of drafting a strategic communications plan that will help them to fulfill their responsibility to engage the public in the democratic process.

One obstacle to delivering communications education to parliamentary staff is, of course, the extreme demands that are already made on their time. Communications training courses should be accessible to the parliamentary staff 24/7, at his/her own convenience. Progress through the course should not time-based: the user may work through the material at his/her own pace, with access to individualized, ongoing feedback. Communications training for parliamentarians delivered in an accessible and convenient form and that is relevant to their particular needs is essential to building the awareness and expertise they need to embrace the challenges of new technologies and evolving forms of citizen engagement.

DRAFT

8 – CONCLUSION

Developments in the information technology sector have had a profound impact how we live, work, socialize, and communicate. In fact, some have argued that since the advent of the World Wide Web and the commercial availability of the browser (around 1995), changes to our lives have been more rapid, pervasive and dramatic than those brought about by technological revolutions such as the invention of electricity, railroads, and the steam engine. As a result, the discipline of strategic communications has undergone watershed changes in the last 10 years. Information technology has “flattened” our world and made popular lofty notions of e-democracy, real-time dialogue with the masses, and unsurpassed openness and transparency. Terms such as “twittering,” “blogging,” “chatting,” “wikis,” and “podcasting” have extended well beyond the lexicon of the Generation Y to become part of the global lingua franca—spoken widely among youth and adults of the world. These trends are expected to continue at a breathtaking pace.

Democracies and parliaments must speak the language of the masses. Indeed, they are starting not only to do so, but also to vastly enhance their ability to legislate, represent, and oversee, through the use of tools such as intranets, wikis, and webcasts and the extensive use of e-repositories, networks, and databases. The benefits of creating and sharing knowledge among parliamentarians and citizens are felt at all three levels (individual, committee, and institutional) of parliamentary activity. Scrutiny and accountability are increased, and people feel truly empowered, through open dialogue. As a result, the democratic institution is strengthened and the cause of good governance is advanced.

The ability of parliamentarians and their staff to understand and fully benefit from communications tools and strategies is hampered by a lack of specialized skills and formalized training. They require not only an understanding of the changed and changing social context of communication modalities, but also an appreciation of the full repertoire of communication tools, approaches and strategies. Parliamentary staff should be familiar with drafting and executing various components of a strategic communications plan that will help them fulfill their parliament’s obligation to engage the public in the democratic process.

APPENDIX A: COMMONLY USED ICT TERMS²⁴

Archie — A network service that searches File Transfer Protocol (FTP) sites for files on the basis of relatively simple search criteria.

Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) — A digital phone-line technology that supports high-speed connections to the Internet using ordinary copper telephone wires. ADSL is “asymmetric” because uplink speeds (64 Kbps) differ markedly from downlink speeds (up to 6 Mbps). ADSL is currently available in selected markets only.

Blogs and Blogging — A blog (a contraction of the term “weblog”) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. *Blog* can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>.)

Browser — Software that provides an interface to the World Wide Web, Netscape and Microsoft Explorer being the two most popular systems.

Central Services Organization (CSO) — A service that facilitates searching for users and addresses in databases.

Domain Name Service (DNS) — The online database that correlates Internet IP addresses (for example, 128.10.3.42) to human-readable domain names such as parl.gc.ca. The database is not stored on any one computer; rather, it is distributed among thousands of name servers spread throughout the Internet.

Extranet — An extranet is similar to a corporate intranet but extends out over the Internet. It allows the organization to access their system across the Internet, while keeping others out.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) — A document with answers to questions commonly asked by users. FAQs are widely available online and cover a broad spectrum of topics.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP) — A common method of transferring files across networks.

Finger — A service that responds to queries and retrieves user information remotely.

Gopher — A text-based, menu-driven information service that allows users to retrieve information without having to know the locations of the resources. The use of gophers has greatly diminished with the rapid increase in the use of the World Wide Web.

²⁴ Except where noted, these definitions are adapted from: Brassard, Daniel (1997) *The Use Of Modern Communications Technology By Parliaments And Parliamentarians*, Science and Technology Division, Depository Services Program, Government of Canada. (<http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp455-e.htm>).

Hit —A single request from a web browser for a single item from a web server; thus, in order for a web browser to display a page that contains three graphics, four “hits” would occur at the server: one for the HTML page, and one for each of the three graphics. “Hits” are often used as a very rough measure of load on a server.

Home Page (or Homepage) — This term has several meanings. Originally, it meant the web page that a browser is set to use when it starts up. Today, the more common meaning is the main web page for a business, organization, or person, or simply the main page in a collection of web pages.

Host —Any computer on a network that is a repository for services available to other computers on the network. It is quite common to have one host machine provide several services, such as WWW and USENET.

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) —A text-based page description language that uses tags to describe formatting idioms and allows richly formatted documents to be created using everyday text editors. HTML is the language used to create Web pages.

Internet Network Information Center (InterNIC) —The administrative organization that is responsible for, among other things, allocating domain names and distributing Requests for Comments (RFCs). The InterNIC is currently run by Network Solutions and AT&T.

Internet Protocol (IP) —The protocol responsible for transmitting packets of data over the Internet and routing them to their destinations. Tagging a packet with an IP address that identifies an Internet host and transmitting it using IP is analogous to addressing an envelope and dropping it in the mail. IP plays the role of post office, allowing the networks and routers involved in the delivery process to talk to each other as the packet finds its way to the addressee.

Internet Service Provider (ISP) —A business or organization that is connected to the Internet and allows access for their clients (users) to the Internet. Typically, service providers provide their users with an email site/address, access to Usenet, Internet web sites, file transfer facilities, free storage space on the service provider’s computer (typically up to 5M bytes free of charge), and frequently free creation and use of each client’s own website.

Intranet —The term intranet was used to describe the first wave of Internet software deployment within companies and organizations such as the Canadian Parliament. Many intranets are built around web servers that deliver HTML. Companies and organizations are seeing that the same benefits apply over the extranet, allowing them to share information with external partners over the Internet itself.

Network News Transfer Protocol (NNTP) —A common method of transferring articles over Usenet.

Online Forum: An online discussion site. It is the modern equivalent of a traditional bulletin board, and a technological evolution of the dial-up bulletin board system. From a technological standpoint, forums or boards are web applications that manage user-generated content. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_forum.)

Podcast: A series of digital computer files, usually either digital audio or video released periodically and made available for download by means of web syndication. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcast>.)

Request for Comments (RFC) —An online document containing proposals, standards, and other information regarding Internet technologies. RFCs are available by anonymous FTPs from a variety of locations, including InterNIC's own ds.internic.net.

RSS (Real Simple Syndication) Feeds: A family of formats used to publish frequently updated works—such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video—in a standardized format. An RSS document (which is called a “feed,” “web feed,” or “channel”) includes full or summarized text, plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS>.)

Social Networking Sites — Web-based services that focus on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as email and instant messaging services. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_service.)

Teleconferencing —Two main variations of teleconferencing exist:

Audio teleconferencing: A telephone conference with several users provided internally by an organization's private branch exchange and externally by telephone companies.

Video teleconferencing: A video conference with several users provided by video cameras and monitors set up in-house or in a public conferencing centre. It requires a high-bandwidth (TV capacity) network that uses coaxial cable, optical fibres, and microwave or satellite transmission. Conventional computer networks cannot handle video. Video conferencing is slowly being integrated into data networks, all of which will eventually provide this capability.

Telnet —A program that allows users following very standard procedures to use computers located on other networks connected to Internet.

Uniform Resource Locator (URL) —A standardized way of representing different documents, media, and network services on the World Wide Web. This unique addressing system is critical to locating information sources on the Internet.

Usenet —The global news-reading network with a very wide range of interests. The range of interest groups increases daily and includes groups in many languages.

Videoconferencing —Video and audio communication between two or more people via a video-codec (coder/decoder) at either end and linked by digital circuits.

Virtual Reality Modeling Language (VRML) —The 3-D counterpart to HTML, VRML is a scriptlike language that permits rich 3-D scenes to be described in simple text files and displayed in VRML-capable Web browsers.

Webcast — A media file distributed over the Internet using streaming media technology. A webcast may either be distributed live or on demand. Essentially, webcasting is “broadcasting” over the Internet. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webcast>.)

Webmaster —The administrator responsible for the management (and often design) of a World Wide Web site.

Whois —A service for tracing the name of a particular user on Internet.

Wide Area Information Servers (WAIS) —A service that allows users to search intelligently for information among the Internet’s databases.

World Wide Web —The initiative that created a universal, hypermedia-based method of access to information on Internet. This has quickly become the dominant form of accessing information on the Internet. A www site at its simplest is a small document with links to other documents that can be directly addressed from anywhere on the Internet. This means that almost any small computer located in someone’s home or office can be connected (via telephone, cable or satellite) through their service provider, who connects the site to the entire Internet. Similarly, one service provider can offer its users their own web site free of charge, with very few means of actually knowing what is on the service provider’s computer.

YouTube: A video-sharing website on which users can upload and share videos. It uses Adobe Flash Video technology to display a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youtube>.)

APPENDIX B: TYPES OF INFORMATION IN A VIRTUAL PARLIAMENT WEB SITE – AN INITIAL CHECKLIST

Descriptive (vs. analytical or processed) information – Internet

- ✓ List of members of parliament and various working groups and committees
- ✓ Information about parliament
- ✓ Annual events schedule
- ✓ Public interact – email us, feedback/comments feature
- ✓ Links to other organizations, contacts plus addresses, etc.
- ✓ Use of search engines
- ✓ Reports on plenary meetings
- ✓ Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding
- ✓ Conventions
- ✓ Library as a database structure

Collective, analytical and lessons-learned, with syntheses and introductions – Internet

- ✓ Portals through subject themes or types of organizations (e.g., anti-terrorism)
- ✓ Recommendations, agreements and decisions made
- ✓ Case studies for lessons learned
- ✓ Guidelines, performance measures, service standards
- ✓ News bulletins, newsletters
- ✓ Evaluations and progress reports
- ✓ Virtual committee and working group reports (finalized and approved)

Interactive information – Intranet restricted to members

- ✓ Workspaces: Executive Committee, working groups
- ✓ Online discussions with syntheses and updates
- ✓ Notices of meetings and administration
- ✓ E-voting – e.g., elections of chairs and other officials
- ✓ Working group draft agenda, minutes, reports, action plans
- ✓ Planning for events
- ✓ Personal views of members on various committees
- ✓ Documentation from parliamentarians for working purposes only
- ✓ Survey responses related to activities of member states

Source: Adapted from Juraitis and Ulrich, p. 11

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