

The Value of Pragmatic Principle in Politics and Government: Guidelines for Government Staff and Political Advisors from Applied Academic Research

Jennifer Lees-Marshment

Abstract: *The electoral and governing game needs to be played with pragmatic principle and this article outlines*

recommendations for political and government advisors as to how to understand, respond to and communicate with their public and deliver for them in order to achieve long-term aims. It is drawn from in-depth academic interviews with practitioners and provides applied research on market analysis methods, micro-targeting, opposition research, consultants and clients, strategy building, branding, managing volunteers, strategic communication, communicating product change or re-positioning, receiver-responsive communication and delivery management. Practitioners can gain an invaluable insight into perspectives from those with experience carrying out political marketing. It concludes that principle is as important as pragmatism in winning the electoral and governing game and argues that political staff and advisors can use marketing in politics and government to achieve principled aims.

Keywords: *Political marketing, principle, pragmatism, political advisors, government staff*

The Value of Pragmatic Principle in Politics

Political marketing — whether branding, voter segmentation, market-orientation, public relations or e-marketing — is a ubiquitous activity in politics. Presidents and Prime Ministers; politicians and parties; government departments and councils all use marketing in their pursuit of political goals. The academic research and teaching of political marketing management has grown and developed to reflect this (see Butler and Harris 2009, 149, Lees-Marshment ed 2012, Baines 2012 and Lees-Marshment 2014).¹ Political marketing also attracts public attention and debate and has become the focus of many recent movies such as *Game Change*, *The Iron Lady*, *The Ides of March* and *No*; and TV series such as *The West Wing*, *VEEP* and *Scandal* which raise ethical issues of authenticity, targeting ethnic minorities and gender. Academics have also hotly debated the potential influence that political and government staff working in communication, strategy and policy advising have on the decisions made by our politicians, with fears that it might prevent effective leadership and create pandering, phony politicians. For example Pare and Berger's (2008, 58)'s study of how the Conservative Party of Canada won power after adopting a market-orientation in 2006 noted that they strategically chose to avoid 'engagement with contentious policy considerations that appeal directly to contending social values.' Savigny (2008, 1) asserted that: politics, as both elite-level activity and the dissemination of this to the public, has predominantly become a process of marketing ... this use of marketing has played a key role in contributing to the existence of a political malaise as marketing subverts the democratic process and disconnects the public from politics' (see also Henneberg et al 2009; Lilleker 2005 and Coleman 2007). This article seeks to challenge the argument that political marketing prevents principle in politics by presenting findings from in-depth empirical research through 100 interviews with advisors in and outside of government in the UK, US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand including advisors to Tony Blair, Stephen Harper, John Key, Helen Clark, Kevin Rudd and George Bush. Whilst the findings are drawn from research published in a traditional academic monograph (Lees-Marshment 2011), here they are presented in an applied politics form — in a way that will provide practical advice to political advisors to help them navigate the electoral and governing game in a way that will enable them to both win votes and achieve change.²

Methodology

Data was collected through qualitative in-depth interviews with a range of political practitioners who worked in the UK, US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The research adopted a fresh epistemological position, taking an inductive approach

to data collection and analysis instead of trying to find data to support an existing theory, and reflexivity was maintained throughout the project (see Slotte Morris 2009, 214, King 2004, 20 and Desmond 2004, 268) to mitigate any remaining potential theoretical bias. To maximise the inductive nature, multi-methodology was used with different methods employed at distinct stages of the research:

- Data collection: inductive, reflexive, maximum variation sampling, qualitative in-depth elite interviews
- Data analysis: analytic induction
- Theory creation: contextual construction, relative generalisation, inference and grounded theory

100 interviews were completed with 97 practitioners (3 of whom were interviewed twice) in five western liberal democracies: the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Interviews started with Alastair Campbell in London in the UK in November 2005 and finished with Alexandra Evershed of Ipsos Reid Canada in Ottawa in June 2009. When asking practitioners for an interview, the aim was to include as broad a range as possible, therefore taking a maximum-variation sampling approach (Kuper et al 2008, 688). The response rate was approximately 50% rate. There was no predictable pattern to whom would say yes; their reputation, position, level, fame and the researcher's own connections with them had no predictable influence.

Whilst there have of course been many previous studies of campaign consultants particularly in the US, this research included those working in government, parties, consultation and politicians not just campaign consultants and of course they were also asked about the broad range of political marketing aspects and about using marketing in government as well as opposition — rather than just campaigning. Interviews were unstructured, soft and intensive, with content led by the participant — participants were simply guided with the opening question 'what in your experience works in political marketing?' The research was seeking their views, biased or otherwise. The position they held or area they worked in was variable, including strategy, communication, market research, in both opposition and in government, and outside as well as party or civil servant-employed staff. The inductive nature of the project meant that it was not clear what themes would emerge from the data until after collection and once analysis had concluded.

Data analysis was carried out in two stages. The first was to produce a data set from the practitioner transcripts. Points or recommendations for practice were produced by distilling a distinct clear point from the practitioner views. Quotes from the interviews that supported recommendations were placed underneath that subheading. Breaking down each transcript into a broad range of recommendations and putting them back together with other interviews maximized the potential to produce new results. In this way it took a deconstructive approach, which as Sarantakos (2005, 353) explains involves going 'beyond the known': 'texts are converted to small units

of meanings, free from previous meaningful connections, to other units and to contexts, and free from overarching, general assumptions.'

This research therefore collected the perspectives of those who actually 'do' politics and thus provide a more reality based insider perspective. Academic research benefits from a close interaction with practice which encourages a closer feel for reality and makes it easier to see change emerging. As Burnham, Gillard and Layton-Henry (2004, 245) said, 'elite interviewing brings the world of the practitioner and the academic together in a hopefully fruitful mutual dialogue' and as Lilleker (2003, 208) noted, the benefits of elite interviews include 'insights into events about which we know little: the activities that take place out of the public or media gaze.' The research therefore produced collective wisdom from practice on an international scale that individual politicians and their advisors cannot gain by themselves. A review of the book in which this research was first published by *Progress* commented that:

The highlights of the book are the musings of communication directors, political representatives, pollsters and strategists including (amongst many others) Alastair Campbell, Iain Duncan Smith and Philip Gould, on their various electoral battles. Indeed, one wonders if the transcripts of the interviews would be worth publishing in their own right...[the] findings are as relevant to a candidate fighting a local council seat as they are to a team of people who covet the highest of offices.³

However, practitioners are unlikely to read an academic monograph. Thus, whilst the article informed by traditional academic research, it focuses on identifying practical advice from the research in a series of recommendations for government staff and political advisors including how to understand, respond to, communicate with your public and deliver for your public, before drawing overall conclusions about the importance of pragmatic principle in politics. It presents such recommendations in a practice-friendly, accessible manner with key illustrative quotes from the practitioners' interviewed.

Recommendations for government staff and political advisors

Understanding your public

Market analysis methods

Market research offers a range of methods for political elites to understand the public including polling, focus groups, in-depth interviews, talking to people on the street, counting issues raised in letters/emails, internal committee discussions, intuition, and role play; each has advantages and disadvantages and thus a range of methods should be used. You should also use data from different sources — not just one organisation/person. Be careful though, market analysis is an art not just a

science; it has to be interpreted well. Patrick Muttart, who advised Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, said ‘it’s part science and part art... At some point you’ve gone through qualitative research, and focus-groups, and one-on-one interviews; based on your own experience as an individual interacting with other people, you just have to make a judgement call.’

Individualising the market

The market can also be individualized. Don’t treat everyone the same; changes in society have made us much more individualistic. As Matt Carter, former UK Labour secretary/UK PSB researcher, explained:

If the paradigm before was about being on message, the paradigm for this period is about micro-targeting. Rather than saying the same thing to everybody, actually saying something different to everybody...it’s not enough to recognise that in any one constituency there are 15,000 people that you need to talk to in order to win the election, but it’s actually that those 15,000 people may be able to be grouped into smaller groupings, each of whom has their own personal agendas and issues.

Don’t use the old class-based groupings: instead consider geography, behaviour, demography, lifestyle, political views, likely support, family life and turn out. Use informal analysis where there is no computer/data system. Don’t try to get everyone: focus resources on key segments — those needed to win; those whom a policy/service is aimed at, those who need your help most, those who may support your pet policy and so on. Try to understand each segment — work out what they want, what motivates them, how they want to be communicated with. If you have the resources, profile voters/stakeholders and build a long-term database on them, so you can maintain a long-term relationship with them. Be careful though: don’t send conflicting messages, you’ll get found out — and include loyal traditional supporters as a key target group as they are important for fundraising and campaigning in government as well as opposition, as indicated by President Obama’s Organising for America.

Opposition research

Opposition research is an increasingly used tool, though it’s not just about the dirt or digging up scandals and it’s not just about the opposition. It’s about thinking about a range of aspects (governing skills and record, voting record, policies championed, changed positions, positions against public opinion, non-political work, and personal life where it contradicts the public) from different angles: you need to research the strengths and weaknesses of yourself as well as the opposition. Identify positives and then use them to make the successes, achievements and benefits of your argument clear or to concede ground where it makes sense to do so. Identify

negatives and use them to prepare the attacks on the opposition but also your own defence and rebuttal. Try to undermine opposition strengths — Peter Fenn, advisor to the Gore 00, Kerry 04 and Obama 08 campaigns observed how the Republican's 'flip-flop campaign raised the questions about [Kerry's] military service... Sometimes you don't go after and decide somebody's voting procedures are weaknesses, you go after their strengths and do what some of us call a bit of ju-jitsu move on them, you use their strength and then flip them' — but with all attack make sure research and claims are verifiable.

Predictive market analysis

Avoid just analysing the past and the present; aim to look to the future. Explore the 'future' — what would people like to see you do? How would they react if you changed this? Look for a new path: for nuance, not just for and against. When the Labour Party in New Zealand was facing a losing battle to win a fourth term under Helen Clark in 2008, focus groups led to the decision to run the campaign around one of the few strengths — Clark's strong and proven leadership — instead of responding to the desire for something new. Judy Callingham, Clark's media advisor recalled how the public wanted 'a fresh, forward-looking look, and unfortunately the focus-groups dragged them backwards.'

Global knowledge sharing

Global knowledge sharing is another source of ideas — parties can and do copy ideas from other countries successfully. When doing this, you shouldn't just take ideas from one country such as the US but instead look at a range of countries for particular tools to suit particular aspects of similar features with your own market. Practitioners need their 'local-reality lenses' as Muttart (who worked in Australia as well as Canada) argued, noting that the use of social networking in the Obama campaign which was so successful in the US may not be always 'directly exportable' because the US has distinctive factors which enabled that to be successful: 'there's more civic engagement to begin within the United States, the electorate as a whole is more web 2.0 oriented [and] the campaign season is longer.' You need to adapt ideas and develop a unique campaign each time.

Market analysis consultants and clients

The effectiveness of market research is influenced by the consultant/researcher and their relationship. Consultants need to offer objective advice but do so in a way that suggests several options for what to do in response, leaving the politician to make the actual decision. Politicians need to know what they want from the market analysis and ensure consultants are free to do their job. Only commission market analysis if

you really want it. Alex Braun, from PSB Washington who has worked in many different countries noted how it is really worthwhile when campaigns want the research, but ‘sometimes the research is almost done for the sake of research. That’s obviously a waste of money, and a waste of everybody’s time and resources.’ Furthermore, don’t ask pollsters to do unscientifically sound research or research to justify a particular position internally and don’t leave commissioning market analysis too late — such as when the campaign begins.

How to use market analysis

The use of market research in politics has been criticized for leading politicians to follow focus groups — and thus the public — too much. However the rules of the political marketing game suggest that politicians should and do use it in a much more complex way: see the diagrams 1 and 2 which show the different ways it can be used in decision making and communication.

Diagram 1: Using Market Research in Political Decision Making

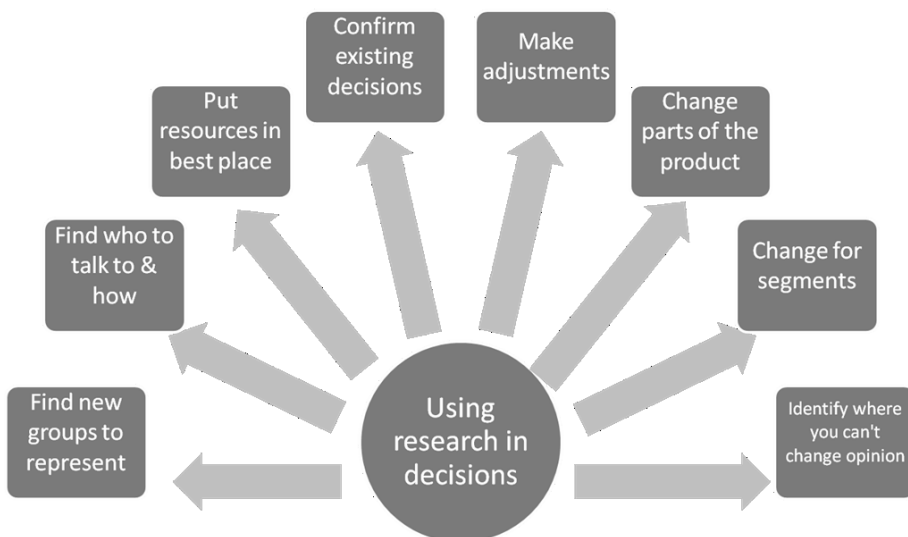
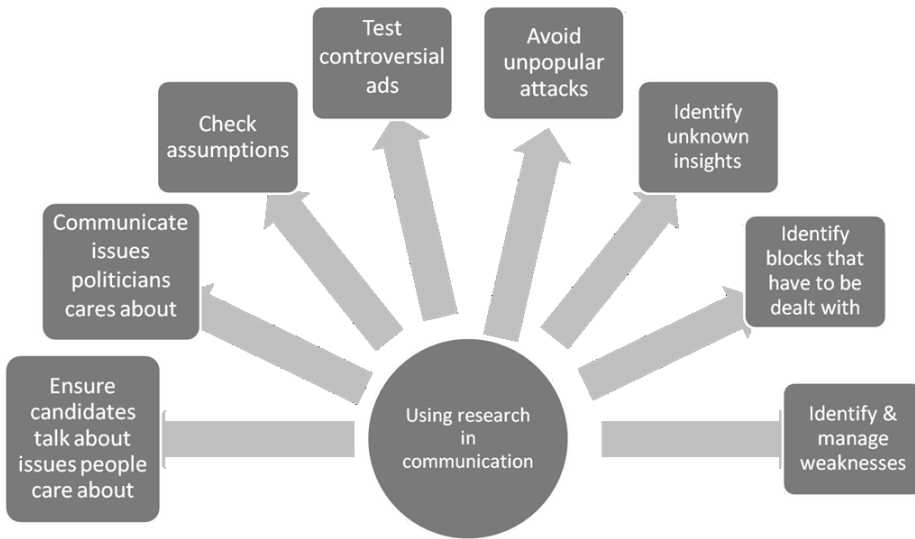


Diagram 2: Using Market Research in Communicating



Overall, do not over rely on market analysis for product ideas — research does not tell you everything.

Responding to the public

Building your strategy

Phillip Gould, advisor to both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, said ‘strategy is the most important thing for winning and losing elections by any measure.’ It is important that you devise your strategy first. Set achievable goals then figure out how to reach them. Iain Duncan-Smith, leader of the UK Conservatives in 2001 conceded that his strategy of ‘*helping the vulnerable*’ was not thought out enough: ‘maybe part of the problem was that we were still finishing it off as a work in progress while we were doing it.’ Allow time for strategy development: make it a core process with leadership support. Of course political strategy is never written down and evolves out of different processes and involving a range of groups. It should respond to market analysis but also involves other factors including belief, constraints, and resources. Strategy needs to be flexible so it can evolve and respond to change. Gould explained:

There's got to be a constancy about it, but there's also got to be a fluidity about it...a good metaphor is sailing a sailing boat across choppy waters. You know where you want to go, but you're constantly adjusting how you get to it.

Braver strategies need more time and to be started sooner. Avoid abandoning a visionary and ambitious strategy too quickly even when faced with public, party and media critique because it may just be a short-term problem that will blow over. Try to anticipate consequences of actions before implementing them — but all the strategising in the world can't predict everything so you need to be prepared that the unexpected will happen.

Developing a brand

The political brand is a long-term, intangible and emotional concept and is difficult to control as it is influenced by many different factors. Branding is important because the way voters perceive a brand can affect how they judge that brand's product and it is hard to change — past behavior and performance creates a brand heritage. Successful development of a positive party brand helps individual candidates. To make a brand successful ensure it is clear and coherent, differentiated, reassuring, aspirational, symbolic of superior internal values, credible and competent, sincere and trustworthy. Managing long-term brands is also important — expect the brand attractiveness to decline and make a plan to reconnect. You need to decontaminate a negative brand before re-branding, or just a single image can reactivate the negativity in the public mind, but unpopular leaders can be re-branded.

Being responsive to the right people

Responsiveness is a key part of political marketing, but involves considering a whole range of stakeholders not just voters. John Utting, UMR pollster and advisor to the Australian Labor Party explained how:

Politicians aren't slaves to opinion polls because politicians are slaves to other more substantial interests like... the internal dynamic level in their party... what their support level is in caucus, what the attitudes of some of their big donors are, the cultural institutional things... they're the kind of real things that they have to sort of balance. A real test of a politician is to be able to take all these factors on board, and to position yourself in a public space in a way to enjoy support.

Marketing internally is important because you need unity for re-marketing to succeed. But members, volunteers, MPs, candidates and key party figures can't just be told what to do — it's not like a business. When parties lose, the internal market also tends to be out of touch and socially unrepresentative, but the party can't function without them. You need to get them on board or strategy/branding won't succeed.

Getting the internal market onside

You can try explaining that a new strategy needs time to work. Explain why you can't do everything they want. Most importantly, make the argument about the need for power to achieve moral goals — it's not just about winning but what you can do once you have won for people who need help. Parag Mehta, Director of Training for the US Democrats 2004–8 made the argument that parties need power

to achieve principles. He trained volunteers to stick with the party line, explaining this was necessary in order to gain the support of that small, narrow group of voters who are truly independent, and reminding them that he too wanted to 'do all the good things we talked about for the jobs, the education, the environment, for Iraq, for healthcare, all those good things' — but they couldn't do a single one of them unless they won. Balancing internal and external demands is not easy and there will almost always be some people unhappy with your strategy. Brad Lavigne, National Director of the minor party NDP which recently made significant gains in the 2011 Canadian Federal election recalled how they cited examples of the good their greater presence in parliament did, such as making the government budget be rewritten so that corporate tax cuts were reduced and the money put into building transit infrastructure, housing and education instead.

Helping volunteers to help you

As for marketing members, if they volunteer it has to be on their terms, not yours. Identify what volunteers want from involvement and apply marketing to their members. Candidates/MPs need that back up and support so you need to maintain organization in all areas/at all levels — don't segment the party organization because targets change from one election to the next but you can't build new local organisations each time. Find out who wants what and create different options for different groups. Accept they can't always do what you want when you want and offer things to do to suit different lifestyles and capacities. Help them help you even more by offering support and training. Assign tasks and promote according to skills — don't just make them wait until the person who's been there 40 years finally moves on! Trust them: parties are now starting to give volunteers leadership positions, access to data, and are letting them organise their own events etc. This is what worked with Obama in 2008. Volunteers could go on their computer to my.barackobama.com, and type in their home address & find 25 targeted voters to contact. Mehta explains the difference: 'now I don't have to go 25 miles away to some Obama campaign office or even to another state and volunteer there. I can volunteer from my own home. I can download a list of those people, their names, their addresses, their age, and their telephone numbers; I can print a script of what to say, I can print flyers with information about Barack Obama's position on issues.' Be careful however and set limits: let them be involved in policy discussion, strategy and the campaign — but within constraints.

Communicating to the public

Strategy and communication

To make communication effective, ensure there is time to think strategically about communication and campaigning. Know and stick to your strategy — don't get diverted by the daily news cycle. New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark's press secretary Mike Munro said 'it's a constant process of revisiting that schedule of activity and making sure it's constant and making sure it fits the themes and strategies you agreed to at the start of the year, at the start of the term.' Neil Lawrence, creative strategist for the Australian Labor 2007 Rudd campaign explained, 'it's axiomatic that you can't have good creative without great strategy. Stuff that looks good, but if it's not firmly rooted in...really sound political strategy that then translates into a very sound communications strategy...may be dangerously irrelevant.'

Communicating a leader

Build positive relationships between politicians and the media through informal contact. The Deputy Press secretary for the Bush White house Scott Stanzel explained that:

Having that opportunity even in an off the record setting, maybe to just sit a bunch of reporters down who are going to cover the White House every day, and off the record just let them chat with the President and see what he's all about; providing that access is very important, because then they have a better understanding of where he's coming from. It's one thing for me to hand a piece of paper to a reporter and say this is our policy and let me explain it to you, it's wholly another thing to have them have the opportunity to talk with him and understand well, why do you think there should be testing in every classroom?

In campaigns, make popular leaders the focus, but put less popular ones to the background or emphasise the overall team including ministers. Use one clear central vision which reflects the candidate's personality so it is genuine; and also make sure the communication has an emotional connection with people. When leaders make unpopular decisions, use market analysis to inform communication of these actions to ease the potential damage to public support.

Communicating product change or repositioning

Communicating change is hard because of the nature of the media. Use unconventional, fresh or new style, colours, label, hinge or logo and start early if you want to communicate repositioning. Lawrence recalled how they 'started by redesigning the entire livery for the Labour Party... the Kevin '07 campaign...was designed as the name for the website. But...once we did the T-shirt and a few of us saw that, the big

Kevin '07, it just took off, so it was a modern campaign, it had freshness of approach.' Maintain unity and make sure communication fits the strategy. Speaking before the Cameron 'win' in 2010 Damian Collins, Managing Director M&C Saatchi UK said 'if you got a big job — and the Conservative party has gone a really big job to change perception or to win a general election — that's going to be a three or four-year project. You can't come in shortly before the election and expect to win for them.' Of course, when politicians change their mind the media will ask questions, so make sure you can explain and justify the change. Show respect for those who oppose you and use market analysis to inform the management unpopular decisions.

Competition Communication

Define yourself before the competition defines you, and if they attack, rebut it. Mehta argued 'whenever you're attacked you must always, always respond immediately. John Kerry waited a month to respond to the flip-flop ads. In that month we lost precious ground and we never got it back.' Differentiate yourself from the competition — Lawrence noted how with Rudd in 2007:

The very last bit of work that we did was called "what's the difference between"...one of the themes that was particularly taken up by the media in the campaign [was] this me too-ism, that Labour was shadowing a lot of the Liberal... there was probably a potential latent danger that you go well, if they're just the same and their policies are the same, why not go to the experienced guy?

Moderate politicians inevitable desire for attacking the opposition as they may not be as unpopular as they want them to be. Scott Reid, Communications Director for Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin and noted how they 'got lucky in 2004 because...just when we were saying shitty things about Harper, he started making a couple of mistakes that made him look like he was shitty.' But without this the critique would not have stuck.

Receiver-responsive communication

Communication needs to develop to be less about selling your view/line, and more about what suits the receiver. Use voter driven communication with visuals that respond to voters — make sure it is relevant to ordinary people and focuses on what voters care most about as identified by market research. Ensure it responds to the reality of how people get their info from politics/levels of interest/knowledge. Targeted communication is one way to make the message suit the receiver as long as conflicting messages aren't sent to different target markets. Get out the vote activities now aim to get people to talk to their neighbours over a long period than the campaign so there is a continual dialogue. Terry Nelson, former Bush campaign advisor, explained that 'the most persuasive form of communication was person to person

communication. So when somebody you knew, or your neighbour, or someone who shared the same interests as you contacted you about supporting the President, that kind of communication would be very impactful.’ E-marketing allows higher-yielding, lower cost method of voter contact through virtual micro-targeting and GOTV but to be effective it requires a holistic/integrated communications approach be successful. Cryus Krohn, E-marketing Director for the RNC argued the possibilities went beyond simply putting material online: ‘with a GPS enabled device you could deliver a targeted political message so succinctly...at the time on that issue when you know they care about it. I can reach a potential voter when they’re on a webpage that pertains to financial matters at 5 o’clock on a Friday payday, about a tax message when they’re looking at how much money has been taken out of their pay check for taxes... [or when] you’re in a lobby of a physician’s office...when you’re waiting for the physician to see you and you’ve read all the magazines in the waiting area.’

Delivering for your public

The importance of focusing on delivery before and after the election

Delivery performance affects public for change whilst in government and re-election. It affects the overall brand and individual MPs. The first head of the UK delivery unit Michael Barber said ‘when I talk to opposition politicians one of the measures I now have in my head about whether they are really serious about running is country is whether they are already thinking about how to do delivery.’ To get voters to think you can deliver you need to convey management and governing abilities at national and local level. Create key pledges or priorities to help manage expectations. Patrick Muttart said experience in the Harper Government taught him that ‘in order for delivery to be a political asset, the electorate needs to understand what your promises are and they need to have expectations of what those outcomes are. When you deliver the outcomes, they have to be clear enough so that the voter links the outcome with the expectation or the promise...having 5 priorities meant that once achieved they were able to say “we came to power, we promised five big things, and we have delivered five big things.”

Making delivery happen

Don’t just assume that just because the leader has given the order it will happen! Alastair Campbell, Blair’s press secretary pointed to self-determination and focus — ‘get on and do it’ — as the secret of success. There are of course many obstacles to overcome — as Murray McCully, NZ National party strategist and current NZ Foreign Minister explained, in government ‘you’ve got all these people in the public service who are trying to run their agenda, including their agenda with your dairy, so ministers of the crown are getting their diaries chocka with stuff that’s been put in by

their officials...So one of the things you have to constantly do is keep re-imposing, reasserting the claim of the political agenda...for the delivery of the outputs you need.' Sit down with bureaucrats after election and go through priorities. Ian Brodie, Chief of Staff in Stephen Harper's Prime Minister's Office, recalled how the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper made it clear within the party, cabinet, and bureaucracy that he remained focused on delivering X,Y, and Z and whilst it took a while to convince them, after that 'everybody said "Oh, OK, they're serious about the GST thing, and they're serious about the childcare".' In parliament, stakeholders can block even popular policies so facilitate networks, relationships and conversations to get legislation delivered. At the actual delivery level, you need will and skill. Give examples of delivery success to create support for change and don't blame public sector staff publicly for problems. Blair exhibited both good and bad examples of this — poorly with his speech saying he was bearing *scars on his back* because of public service reform which became headline news and was heard by 'the deliverers' so did not generate good will, and effectively when he talked to staff without the media to encourage them. James Humphrey, Head of Corporate Communications and Strategic Communications at Downing Street, said 'Blair would go to a staff conference, go talk to them, no cameras, and he would be there because he wanted to engage genuinely with staff and be seen to do that. And staff would respond extremely well to that...[the] Prime Minister's time is precious, but it's a valuable use of his time.' The most important thing is to work not against staff and give them the skills they need to do what you want. Ben Keneally from the NSW delivery unit in Australia said:

My unit's job is not to go in there and sort of kick heads and take names, but to...work with them. I remember one meeting early on with one agency, where it sort of dawned on them that I was saying I'll bring four or five people with me...we'll start doing some extra analysis and some work for you and help... when that penny dropped, suddenly we sort of got a whole lot more collaboration and cooperation.

Managing communication of delivery

There will always be some failures in delivery. Be honest about problems — admit mistakes but then propose a solution. Ben Levin Deputy Minister of Education for the Province of Ontario/Manitoba argued 'you'd be far better off saying yes, we missed that one so we're going to fix it. It's not as if voters are going to believe all the press releases.' Communicate real world great cases of delivery to voters and try to create signature moments to get voters to credit government for delivery. Micro-target delivery communication to make it personalized. Use your own local media to communicate delivery — central government can provide local stories for local MPs to communicate delivery. Simon Pleasants Communications Advisor for the PMO

Office under Helen Clark explained how this can work: ‘say there’s \$25,000,000 in grants being given out around the country. The minister makes that announcement, that’s a nation-wide announcement, and he talks about the big figure. But...[local media] don’t cover it unless they know what’s happening locally. So, what I [do] would be to follow the local stats, numbers... and put those out to the local MPs.’ Communicate a sense of progress over time. Delivery has to be demonstrated not just alleged to get public recognition and be prepared for the reality that public assessment of delivery is not fair — even when the public have a good experience they think the national picture is bad and don’t give politicians credit for delivery. Eric Roozendaal, Australian NSW Labor campaign manager and minister said:

We used to do a lot of campaign training, and one of the skits we used to show is that snippet from *The Life of Brian*, you know “What did the Romans ever do for us? Apart from roads, sanitation, and education, and law and order...what have they done for us lately?”... that’s the challenge of government, and in some ways the heartening part of government. It’s always, what have you done for us lately?’

However practitioners felt the public should always be ambitious for further progress — that’s what politics is all about!

Conclusion and the final lesson: the value of pragmatic principle

This research into the perspectives of political and government advisors has identified that there are a range of marketing tools open to political practitioners, as there is no easy quick way to win and political practice is very complex. Furthermore, the practitioners interviewed also argued that principle is as important as pragmatism in winning the political marketing game. Despite the wealth of tools and concepts available to be used in politics, politicians still have to offer authentic leadership. Marketing can help stop politicians getting out of touch, but it should not prevent leaders adopting a new idea which might not find favour in the first set of focus groups. Phillip Gould put it like this: ‘if you become too much of a listening party you just get nowhere. If you become too much of a leadership government, then you start to disconnecting your voters, which is bad also.’ New Zealand Labour pollster Stephen Mills also pointed to the need for balance: ‘politicians should neither blindly follow nor blindly ignore polls.’ They also can’t change position to suit polls without thinking — they need to make sure anything they do, including branding, rings true. This is not just an idealistic point; the research identified that it is pragmatic to be principled because otherwise voters reject a product that is too craftily designed,

populist and unbelievable. If it doesn't ring true it doesn't get the vote. Canadian pollster Nik Nanos explained how:

People have an innate sense of whether someone is genuine or not...Many politicians weren't successful because they're not true to themselves and voters will say "there's something I can't put my finger on that's not right there."

They also want vision from their leaders — as long as that vision will help improve their lives not just those of the elite. The most effective leadership is a balance where marketing informs decisions but does not dictate them. MPs should not be too cautious and still try to change opinion in some cases, using market research to help you identify the scope for leading the market. Anti-market positions can be managed by showing awareness and respect for opposition, continuing to conduct market analysis and conduct listening exercise to get back in touch. Playing the electoral and governing game is about therefore trying to navigate the stormy electoral waters in a way which reconciles pragmatism and principle. Practitioners need to be aware of this if they want to achieve long-term success.

Academics also need to reflect on these research findings and be at least open to the possibility that marketing might be used more positively in politics. Notwithstanding the abuse of political marketing which undoubtedly occurs around the world, marketing can be used in politics for principled aims. Political leaders and their advisors can find ways to use political marketing to merge pragmatism with principle to achieve broader goals including advancing change; they have options and choices; and marketing does not dictate decisions, it merely informs them. This challenges the concern from previous literature that political marketing damages democracy. It can, in fact, be used more positively. All stakeholders can be considered and market analysis sought from a variety of sources and utilises a range of methods. Market analysis (including consultation) can use methods that seek unity of opinion, open possibilities for change, identify solutions. Leaders can offer a range of responsiveness to market analysis and stakeholders (maintain status quo, small changes, explaining position, change opinion, defend unpopular decisions, change product significantly). Marketing can be used to achieve change and non-consultative decisions are rare but subsequently explained and further feedback sought. Branding and competition management can be used to create distinctive, visionary products, creating choice. The product, brand, position and communication can be authentic and change thought out and justified. Advisors can present options to suit particular situation, goals and strategy. Parties can develop engagement to suit the user, view volunteers as a partner in the campaign, maintain organization and contact in all areas so no one is neglected and maintain vision, belief and value. Communication can respond to varied needs and behaviours and include voter-driven, two-way and citizen-led communication and thus develop the public sphere. There can be room

for freedom and diversification by individual candidates within the overall brand. Politicians can avoid over-promising and adjust their product to make it realistic; in government they admit failures in delivery and communicate progress on delivery in a way which is relevant to individuals, not just about national statistics. This has important ramifications for future research in that it demonstrates the need to be open to positive as well as negative uses of modern tools like marketing in politics. Getting out in the field and listening to those who ‘do’ politics is also an important methodological tool to help us see practice from a different perspective and identify trends that might otherwise go unnoticed from the academic ivory tower. This is a valuable lesson for scholars in the areas of leadership, government, political advisors and democracy.

Notes

- ¹ See also the expanding list of new books in political marketing since 2009 on <https://sites.google.com/site/psapmg/political-marketing-books>.
- ² I would like to thank both reviewers of this article for their very constructive and valuable comments which greatly improved the quality of this article. I also appreciate their openness to my goal to determine practical guidelines from traditional political science academic research.
- ³ <http://www.progressionline.org.uk/2011/03/22/the-political-marketing-game/>

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