Creating a 'Democracy for everyone'

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Strategies for increasing listening and engagement by government

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FOREWORD

The digital era offers the possibility of transforming the art of government. The information sources now available to government, as evidence for policy-making or as reflections of its citizens' lives, have been profoundly transformed. It has also recently become possible to involve citizens in the development of policy in radical new ways, as Beth Noveck, former President Obama's first e-government adviser, wrote in her book *Wikigovernment* at the start of the decade. But managing the resulting flows of data and their implications for governmental process creates huge challenges.

Few writers, if any, are more qualified to reflect on these challenges than Professor Jim Macnamara. After a distinguished professional career, Jim has enjoyed a remarkably prolific second career as a leading global academic in the field of strategic communication. At The London School of Economics and Political Science, we have been honoured to host Jim as a Visiting Professor where he was based in the Department of Media and Communications. We were delighted to provide Jim with a base as he pursued his recent fieldwork with the UK Government.

This report is the outcome of that fieldwork but also, more broadly, of the profound and searching work Jim has been conducting over a number of years in relation to the practices of *listening* in organizations, both corporate and governmental, in Australia, the UK and the USA. Indeed, the concept of listening offers a particularly helpful route into thinking practically about how the extraordinary communication potential of the digital age can be harnessed for good management and good government.

What is unusual about this report is that it combines a very strong conceptual base with an acute sensitivity to the complexities of governmental processes, combined too with an appetite to imagine new possibilities for organizing communication processes.

It is gratifying for us in London that Jim's work has found such a constructive partner in the UK Government. But this report's implications go even wider, offering insights for professional communicators in many countries and in many fields of work.

I hope you will enjoy reading these latest findings from a research programme of major international significance.

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[1] Nick Couldry is the author of *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism* (2010) and *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*, which critically examine voice and listening in political and social contexts.

INTRODUCTION

On 13 July 2016 immediately following her appointment as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Theresa May stated a commitment by her government to create "a country that works for everyone"[2].

This commitment has been made more specific in speeches by the Prime Minister in which she has pledged the UK Government to creating an *economy* that works for everyone; a *society* that works for everyone; a *country* that works for everyone; and a *democracy* that works for everyone. For example, in addressing the 2016 Conservative Party Conference in October 2016, the Prime Minister said:

> **Our society should work for everyone, but if you can't afford to get onto the property ladder, or your child is stuck in a bad school, it doesn't feel like it's working for you.**
>
> **Our economy should work for everyone, but if your pay has stagnated for several years in a row and fixed items of spending keep going up, it doesn't feel like it's working for you.**
>
> **Our democracy should work for everyone, but if you've been trying to say things need to change for years and your complaints fall on deaf ears, it doesn't feel like it's working for you.[3]**

This report presents research that shows **complaints as well as correspondence, submissions to public consultations, feedback through research, and other expressions of voice by citizens have been falling on deaf ears in a number of democratic countries.**

Importantly, this report goes further than identification of breakdowns and failures in communication to examine some significant causes of the 'democratic deficit'[4] and to identify **strategies and approaches designed to create more equitable and sustainable democratic societies.**

This report is based on two and a half years of in-depth research in Australia, the UK, and the USA as well as a number of interviews and consultations in Europe that directly inform two of the above objectives – creating a democracy for everyone and a society for everyone.

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[2]   May, T. (2016, July 13). Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May. London, UK: The Prime Minister's Office. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may

[3]   May, T. (2016, October 5). Address to the Conservative Party Conference, Birmingham, paras 43–45. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/05/theresa-mays-conference-speech-in-full. See Appendix 1 for an extract of Theresa May's speech.

[4]   A growing 'democratic deficit' has been discussed by a number of researchers including, most notably, Norris, P. (2011). D*emocratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; as well as Couldry, N. (2010). *Why voice matters: Culture and politics after neoliberalism*. London, UK: Sage; and Curran, J. (2011). Media and democracy. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, p. 86.

The largest part of the research reported here was conducted in the UK working with the UK Government Communication Service (GCS), which is headquartered in the Office of the Prime Minister (Number 10 Downing Street) and the Cabinet Office (70 Whitehall) and supports all national government departments and agencies, as well as in several major UK government departments and arm's length bodies (ALBs) referred to as government 'agencies' in this report. This included a six-month period conducting research full-time within the GCS from 1 July to 31 December 2016 while a Visiting Professor at The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In addition, the study involved examination of public communication activities of two major US government organisations in Washington DC; several Australian federal and state government bodies in Sydney and Canberra; and the European Commission in Brussels. Thus, it spans national, regional, and state governments in a number of democratic countries.

METHODOLOGY

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on in-depth qualitative research undertaken in four countries between 2014 and 2016 in two stages as follows:

> **Case study analysis of the public communication and stakeholder engagement of 36 organisations** in Australia, the UK, and the USA in 2014–2015. This examined a range of organisational functions involved in public communication and interaction including public relations, corporate communication; government communication; political communication; public consultation; customer relations; complaints processing; correspondence; social media; and social and market research;

> **Participatory action research** in which the lead researcher worked intensively with staff in two major UK government organisations and in close consultation with staff in 10 other UK government departments and agencies over a six-month period to evaluate government communication and engagement with citizens and to develop, trial, and test strategies for improving communication and engagement.

This report focusses particularly on the second stage of research conducted in 2016, referred to as The Organisational Listening Project Stage 2, as the first stage has been extensively reported.[5]

Furthermore, the participatory action research (PAR) conducted in Stage 2 of the project was important in enabling this study to extend beyond identification of breakdowns and failures in communication to development and testing of proposed solutions.

The focus on **listening** emerged as a primary theme in this study, as explained in the sections presenting the research findings (Stage 1 and Stage 2).

Sample

As the purpose of Stage 1 of The Organisational Listening Project was to examine the public communication of various types of organisations, the sample included corporate, government, and non-government organisations (NGOs) in Australia, the UK, and the USA as shown in Table 1.

De-identification was provided to participating organisations as part of **Human Research Ethics Committee approval (HREC Ref. No. 2013000359)**, except in the case of organisations that agreed to be identified.

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[5]   This report should be read in conjunction with Macnamara, J. (2015, June). Creating an 'architecture of listening' in organizations: The basis of engagement, trust, ethics, healthy democracy, social equity, and business sustainability. Report of The Organizational Listening Project. Sydney, NSW: University of Technology. Available at http://www.uts.edu.au/node/134066

TABLE 1. SAMPLE OF ORGANISATIONS STUDIED IN STAGE 1 OF THE ORGANISATIONAL LISTENING PROJECT.

ORGANISATION TYPE	AUSTRALIA	UK	US	TOTAL
Government	2	14	2	18
Corporate	3	3	8	14
NGO/Non-Profit	2	1	1	4
Totals	7	18	11	36

With an objective of conducting in-depth action research in organisations with an identified need to improve communication with stakeholders and citizens, Stage 2 of The Organisational Listening Project involved a purposive sample based on (1) willingness to participate and (2) the social and political environment.

The social and political environment in the UK in the period 2014 to 2016 was characterised by increasing and unprecedented signs of citizen discontent with the national government and major political institutions. This was evidenced in the **Scotland Referendum** in 2014, which saw the highest voter turnout in any UK election or referendum (84.6%) and which, while retaining UK unity, saw 44.7% of Scottish citizens vote to leave the UK. Furthermore, in June 2016, Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said that a second referendum on Scottish independence was "highly likely"[6].

Even more so, in the **EU Referendum** on 23 June 2016, UK citizens made an historic decision to leave the European Union against the strong recommendation and campaigning of the government. The decision, commonly referred to as *Brexit*, shocked the government, leading to the resignation of the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, and was unexpected even by the 'Leave' campaign and its leading proponents including Boris Johnson, and against the predictions of most polls and opinion surveys. For example, the 2016 *British Social Attitudes* survey published just a few weeks before the referendum reported that 60% of UK citizens were in favour of remaining a member of the EU and only 30% supported Britain's withdrawal from the EU.[7]

The UK Government Communication Service (GCS), headquartered in the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office, agreed to support Stage 2 of the research by providing access to departments and agencies and funding towards research costs. The UK **Department of Health** was nominated as a specific site for research in addition to the **Government Communication Service (GCS)** generally. Also, a number of other departments and agencies volunteered to participate in the research as it evolved. Thus the sample for Stage 2 of the research was as follows.

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6   De Freytas-Tamura, K. (2016, June 24). Scotland says new vote on independence is 'highly likely'. *The New York Times,* Europe edition. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/25/world/europe/brexit-scotland-independence-referendum.html?_r=0

7   NatCen Social Research. (2016). British Social Attitudes study, No 33. Retrieved from http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-33/euroscepticism.aspx

Primary sites/participants:

> The UK Government Communication Service (GCS), Cabinet Office, 70 Whitehall;

> Department of Health, 79 Whitehall.

Secondary sites/participants:

> Department for Exiting the EU (DExEU), Number 9, Downing Street;

> Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC), 100 Parliament Street;

> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, King Charles St, Whitehall;

> Department of Work & Pensions (DWP), Caxton House, Tothill Street, London;

> Department of Transport, 33 Horseferry Road, London;

> Department of Energy, Business and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), 3 Whitehall Place;

> NHS England, Skipton House, 80 London Road and 133 Waterloo Road;

> Public Health England (PHE), Skipton House, 80 London Road and 133 Waterloo Road;

> Scotland Office, Edinburgh, Scotland;

> Scottish Government, Edinburgh, Scotland.

In addition, during Stage 2 of the study the **Directorate-General for Communication (DG-COM) of the European Commission (EC)** invited review and analysis of several aspects of its public communication and citizen engagement. Several visits were made to Brussels for meetings and workshops in 2016.

Research Questions

The overarching research question explored in the first stage of this research was **'how, and how well, do organizations listen to their stakeholders[8] and publics'[9],** noting that listening is a fundamental corollary of speaking to achieve two-way communication, engagement, dialogue, and create and maintain relationships as identified in communication literature.

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[8] The term 'stakeholders' refers to individuals or groups beyond stockholders or shareholders on which an organisation depends or which depend on an organisation in some way (e.g., employees, service delivery partners, affected communities, etc.). See Freeman, R., & Reed, D. (1983). Stockholders and stakeholders: A new perspective on corporate governance. *California Management Review*, 25(3), pp. 88–106.

[9] 'Publics' refers to groups of people with whom communication is desirable or necessary.

The research questions for Stage 2 of The Organisational Listening Project were:

1. What are the specific requirements for an effective 'architecture of listening' and how can these be implemented in practice?
2. What are the most effective listening strategies, processes, and mechanisms for organisations?
3. What technologies work best to increase organisational listening capabilities?
4. What challenges need to be overcome to improve organisational listening?
5. Can organisational listening be improved within current budgets and resources by reallocating and prioritizing activities and eliminating wastage, as recommended by research to date?
6. Can a scalable model of organisational listening be developed and, if so, what does it look like?
7. Ultimately, what is the cost-benefit comparison of improved organisational listening?

Methods

Analysis of case studies in Stage 1 was based on triangulation of data from three research methods as follows:

> **In-depth interviews** with senior staff involved in government communication, policy development and advice, engagement, and specialised fields of communication-related practice such as social research, public consultation, complaints processing, customer service, and correspondence;

> **Content analysis** of documents related to government-citizen communication and engagement such as communication and engagement strategies, plans, and reports; and

> **Field experiments** involving contact with a sample of organisations to test their response (e.g., inquiries, requests for information, feedback, and complaints).

The participatory action research (PAR) conducted in Stage 2 used:

> **Ethnography** (i.e., first-hand observation of and participation in activities during an extended period of time);

> **In-depth interviews** with senior management executives and senior professional staff involved in government communication, policy development and advice, engagement, and specialised fields of communication-related practice such as social research, public consultation, complaints processing, customer service, and correspondence; and

> **Content analysis** of documents including strategic communication plans and reports of communication campaigns, consultations, complaints analysis, and correspondence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> **Governments and political parties spend hundreds of millions of dollars, euro, pounds, and other equivalent currency on public communication.** Apart from the vast amounts spent on election campaigns, particularly in the USA, governments have ongoing programs of public communication. For example, the UK national government spends around £300 million a year on communication to inform and engage citizens. Even state governments spend $100 million a year or more on activities such as advertising and PR. The European Commission has conducted single issue communication campaigns across its 28 member states costing upwards of €30 million.[10]

> Despite major investments in public communication, there are signs that democracy is breaking down or broken in a number of Western democratic countries. This is evidenced in:

  - **Low levels of trust** in government, politicians, and political processes as well as in other institutions central to democratic and civil society;

  - **Disengagement** from traditional political participation. For example, while a few political parties have gained support recently (e.g., the Scottish National Party), membership of the three major political parties in the UK (Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat) totalled just 1.6% of eligible voters in 2016[11];

  - **Declining voter turnouts** in elections other than some recent 'protest votes';

  - **Increasing radicalisation and extremism** ranging from the rise of Far right political parties in a number of countries to youth becoming 'foreign fighters' with violent extremist organisations. (See 'The Context: Why Governments Must Act', pp. 15 – 19)

> Research reveals that one of the causes of dissatisfaction and disengagement is that public 'communication' by organisations is predominantly focussed on distribution of their messages – i.e., *speaking*. **Organisations including government departments and agencies "listen sporadically at best, often poorly, and sometimes not at all"** according to research, which shows that **80% to 95% of the communication resources of organisations is focussed on top-down, one-way dissemination of information and promotion.**[12]

> Furthermore, when organisations do listen, **organisational listening is predominantly instrumental – that is, it is undertaken selectively to achieve the organisation's objectives** such as gaining 'intelligence' and insights' to help sell products, services, or policies. (See p. 20)

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[10] Figures obtained from HM (Her Majesty's) *Government Communications Plan 2015/16* (see https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/government-comms-plan), the New South Wales Government Web site http://www.advertising.nsw.gov.au/advertising/advertising_expenditure, and other sources.

[11] Keen, R., & Audickas, L. (2016). Membership of UK political parties. Briefing Paper. London, UK: House of Commons. Retrieved from http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05125

[12] Macnamara, J. (2016). *Organizational listening: The missing essential in public communication*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, p. 236.

> In addition to the ongoing erosions of democracy listed above, recent events have dramatically demonstrated a lack of listening by governments and political institutions including:

- *Brexit*, **the 2016 UK referendum vote to leave the European Union,** was a stark illustration of a lack of listening by government, as the UK national government strongly campaigned for and confidently predicted a 'remain' decision, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the views and concerns of citizens;

- **The 2016 shock election of Donald Trump as President of the USA** also dramatically demonstrated that the major political parties and the 'political system' in Washington DC were out of touch with public opinion and have substantially lost public support.

> In addition to direct engagement between politicians and their constituents, **organisational listening by government can and should be undertaken through social research; consultation; processing of correspondence (e.g., letters and e-mails to Ministers and MPs); processing of complaints; social media monitoring and analysis; direct stakeholder engagement; and specialist research methods such as behavioural insights.**

> However, new research identifies a number of failings and breakdowns in these important activities including:

- **Research conducted by government is mostly quantitative** (e.g., surveys and polls), which provide statistically reliable but limited data about *means* (i.e., averages), but do not reveal deep insights into perceptions, attitudes, and concerns; (See discussion on p. 23)

- **Consultations, which are potentially a major channel for listening to stakeholders and citizens, fail to provide representative information and feedback** for a number of reasons including:

  - Many **consultations are framed narrowly with specific questions** that the government wants to ask, which limits what can be said to government;

  - Many use **technical and official language** (i.e., jargon);

  - Some have **short time frames** for response;

  - Most **do not acknowledge** submissions, leading to assumptions of lack of listening and disengagement;

  - Most **attract submissions from the 'usual suspects'** such as major industry organisations and professional lobbyists;

  - Consultations **lack outreach** – most use a 'sit and wait' approach, which means that the voices of many groups such as those who cannot easily articulate their views or those who feel marginalised and disenfranchised are not heard;

  - There is a **lack of in-depth analysis** of consultation submissions, especially when large numbers of responses are received. Government departments and agencies studied did not have the specialist tools or skills to conduct large-scale qualitative textual analysis;

- There is **little reporting back following consultations**. An official report is posted on Gov.UK, but stakeholders and citizens who go to the trouble of making a submission do not receive a 'thank you' or report on what has been learned and what will happen as a result; (See details and examples of these issues on pp. 24 – 26)

- **Correspondence is processed in terms of individual responses, but is not analysed collectively to identify key issues, trends, and patterns,** despite hundreds of thousands of letters and e-mails being received by government departments and agencies each year; (See details on p. 29)

- Similarly, **complaints, while dealt with individually, are not analysed over time to identify patterns, key issues, trends, etc.,** which can inform policy and proactive strategies (e.g., to launch an initiative to address a cause of complaints); (See discussion on p. 30)

- **Social media are predominantly used for disseminating organisations' messages** despite their interactive capability and the large volume of public comment available online, which can be analysed at low cost and in real time to identify public response to policies and announcements and 'hear' conversations about issues; (See discussion on p. 31)

- **Stakeholder engagement is often undertaken as 'pitch rolling'** – that is, meeting with key stakeholders only when the government wants something such as support for a policy. Stakeholder engagement should involve ongoing interaction and relationship building, which includes listening as well as talking and telling. (See discussion on p. 32)

> **The UK Government, one of the main case studies examined, has no central insights database or knowledge management system** to store and share feedback from stakeholders and citizens. Despite marketplace hype about using 'big data', millions of words spoken and written by stakeholders and citizens sit in '**data siloes**', unable to be searched or retrieved by other than the department or agency that collected them. It is believed that many other governments similarly do not have central systems for sharing insights, while protecting privacy (e.g., through de-identification). (See details including obstacles to be overcome on pp. 33 – 36).

> **The public communication of many governments is heavily focussed on campaigns.** Campaigns address what governments want to say, when they want to say it, and involve top-down, one-way transmission of information and persuasive messages. Along with campaigns (which are speaking), governments need to recognise the concept of '**government as audience**' (i.e., listen more) and adopt **'always on' communication** with stakeholders and citizens rather than periodic communication conducted on the government's terms. (See discussion on pp. 38 – 39)

> Digital media including Web sites and social media afford opportunities for low-cost engagement with many stakeholders and citizens and are still under-utilised. However, it needs to be recognised that digital communication and service delivery are not used by some sectors of society (e.g., many older people and many in low socioeconomic circumstances). Therefore, governments need a mix of digital and 'analogue' methods of communication and engagement, as well as face-to-face interaction (e.g., direct community engagement, partnerships, etc.).

> Politicians listen, but they mostly listen to and are influenced by:

  - Traditional media – often spending much of their time garnering publicity and monitoring media such as newspapers, TV, and radio in the belief that these channels both influence and reflect the views of stakeholders and citizens. With 'audience fragmentation'[13] and a major decline in trust in traditional media, this belief is misplaced. Large sections of society now derive their news and information via social media and do not read newspapers or watch TV for news or current affairs. Also, many media organisations reflect partisan views;

  - Political parties – most major political parties have flagging membership and no longer represent or speak for the majority or even a significant minority of the sectors of society that they purport to serve. As noted previously, despite membership increases in some minority parties, membership of the three major political parties in the UK (Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats) amounts to just 1.6% of eligible voters in the UK.

  - In summary, the major sources of information and feedback that politicians rely on are declining institutions that do not represent the voice of stakeholders and citizens.

> Politicians, political parties, and governments need to recognise that to a significant extent democracy has relocated from traditional sites such as mass media (press, TV, and radio), political parties, trade unions, and other institutionalised organisations to new sites of political participation and voice such as social media, social movements, and community organising groups. Instead of focussing only on institutionalised politics, engagement needs to expand to a broader range of organisations, groups, and media. (See discussion on pp. 41 – 42)

> The UK Prime Minister's commitment to creating a "society that works for everyone" and a "democracy that works for everyone", as well as an economy and country that work for everyone is commendable and deserves support. However, the stated goals will not be achievable without a sustained commitment to listening to stakeholders and citizens.

> A number of pilot projects were established as part of the participatory action research that informed this analysis. These are briefly outlined in this report (see highlighted sections on pp. 27 –39). The pilot projects were ongoing at the time of this report and tracking their effectiveness in addressing some of the communication breakdowns and failings will be informative.

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[13] Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York, NY: New York University Press, pp. 238, 242.

THE CONTEXT –
WHY GOVERNMENTS MUST ACT

The following factors highlight the relevance and significance of the research reported in this analysis and the recommendations made.

The 'democratic deficit'

There is extensive and growing evidence that democracy is breaking down or broken in the UK and in a number of democratic societies as evidenced by the following.

> **Declining voter turnouts** – After falling to its lowest level since WWII in 2001 (59.4%), the percentage of eligible voters who voted in the 2015 national UK election was only slightly higher at 66.1%. In some parts of the UK, voter turnout could be described as in crisis. For instance, in a 2012 by-election, only 12% of the constituents of Manchester Central in north-west England voted – the lowest voter turn-out since 1945. Under a headline 'Apathy central: where people see no point in casting a vote', *The Guardian* commented: "Either the people of Manchester Central have given up on Westminster politics or it has given up on them".[14]

> **The decline of major political parties** – Membership of major political parties is falling in most developed Western countries. In the UK, membership of the three main political parties (Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrat) reached an historic low of just 0.83% of eligible voters in the UK in 2013 and, despite some increases in the run-up to the 2015 national election and 2016 EU Referendum, remained at just 1.6% of eligible voters in 2016.[15]

> **Declining trust in government** – The OECD reported in 2014 that only 40% of UK citizens trust the national government and that this has declined since 2007. This reflects findings in a number of developed democracies such as the USA where only slightly more than one-third of citizens trust the national government, and France where less than 30% of citizens trust the national government.[16] Young people, in particular, do not trust government. For example, a recent Harvard University study found that only 14 per cent of 18–29 year old Americans trust the US Congress and only 20 per cent trust the federal government (civil service).[17] Factors such as the largely-expected findings of the Chilcot Inquiry into the UK's entry to the 2003 Iraq War only serve to further undermine public trust in government.

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14 Booth, R. (2015, April 24). Apathy central: Where young see no point in casting a vote. *The Guardian Weekly*, p. 15.
15 Keen & Audickas (2016), see footnote 7.
16 OECD. (2014). Trust in government [Web site]. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm
17 Harvard University. (2015). Trust in institutions and the political process. Boston, MA: Institute of Politics. Retrieved from http://www.iop.harvard.edu/trust-institutions-and-political-process

> **Citizen disillusionment and disengagement** – A number of studies have identified citizen disillusionment in and disengagement from democratic politics in the UK as well as elsewhere. For example, a 2013 study of *How Voters Feel* in Britain by Professor Stephen Coleman at the University of Leeds says "moments of voting are remarkably fleeting" and "inflected by the weight of thwarted experience"[18]. Coleman says that "the rules of the political game seem too much like imposed rules and someone else's game" and concluded that democratic practice has deteriorated for most citizens to "a discourse of arid proceduralism".[19]

> **Radicalisation and extremism** – At its extreme, citizen disengagement is leading to radicalisation and extremism, ranging from the rise of Far Right political parties in a number of countries to 'foreign fighters' from Western countries joining organisations such as ISIS[20].

Fundamentals of democracy

Democracy is fundamentally based on the concept of the will of the *demos* (citizens) influencing and shaping the *krátos* (the institutions of power and the policies and decisions of government), with that will and influence being expressed and communicated through *vox populi* – the voice of the people.

However, to be realised and effective, democracy must not only provide opportunities for citizens to freely express their voice, but those elected or appointed to govern them must pay attention and give consideration to what citizens say. Much emphasis is placed on voice, but democracy is about **listening, not only speaking**.

Nick Couldry has identified the importance of what he calls "voice that matters"[21] in society and politics and defined 'voice that matters' as "the implicitly linked practices of speaking and listening"[22]. Similarly, eminent communication studies scholar Robert Craig describes communication as "speaking and listening"[23]. Throughout the large body of communication studies scholarship and research, communication is defined as a *two-way* process.

Pippa Norris says of political communication: "The process operates downwards from governing institutions towards citizens, horizontally in linkages among political actors, and also upwards from public opinion towards authorities".[24]

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18 Coleman, S. (2013). *How voters feel*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–4.

19 Coleman, S. (2013), p. 192.

20 ISIS is an acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and simply as the Islamic State (IS). Western leaders also refer to the Islamic State as Daesh.

21 Couldry, N. (2010). *Why voice matters: Culture and politics after neoliberalism*. London, UK and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

22 Couldry, N. (2009). Commentary: Rethinking the politics of voice. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 23*(4), 579–582, p. 580.

23 Craig, R. (2006). Communication as a practice. In G. Shepherd, G. St John, & T. Striphas (Eds.), *Communication as … Perspectives on Theory* (pp. 38–49). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, p. 39.

24 Norris, P. (2001). Political communication. In N. Smelser & P. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 11631–11640). Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Elsevier, p. 11631.

If what flows upwards from citizens is not listened to, then the voice of citizens has no value. It does not matter in Couldry's terms.

To paraphrase Harold Lasswell's famous description of communication[25], democratic communication and engagement are about *who gets to speak and who listens, to whom, how well, with what effect*.

Despite wide understanding of the fundamental principles of democracy and an emphasis in contemporary communication on **audience understanding and dialogue**, studies have revealed that little attention is paid to listening in much government and political communication. For example, in 2014 Professor Andrew Dobson from Keele University concluded in his book *Listening for Democracy* that "honourable exceptions aside, virtually no attention has been paid to listening in mainstream political science". He added that efforts to improve democracy have mainly focussed on "getting more people to speak"[26] and critically observed that "much less attention has been paid to the way in which speech is received and processed"[27].

Recently, a number of democratic countries have committed to **open democracy** and **open government**. This seeks to extend the basic concept and principles of democracy to provide citizens with ready access to all information that they require and enable them to have a say in all matters that significantly affect their lives, rights, and responsibilities.
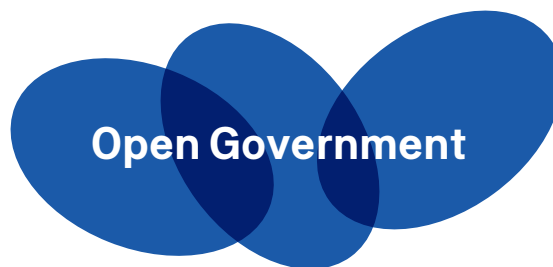
Open Government

Political and social scientists emphasise the importance of communication between governments and citizens and for that communication to be meaningful and effective, as evidenced in the following:

> "... meaningful communication between government and the people is not merely a management practicality. It is a political, albeit moral, obligation that originates from the basic covenant that exists between the government and the people".[28]

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[25] Harold Lasswell described what was termed 'mass communication' at the time as "Who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect" (Lasswell, H. [1948]. The structure and function of communication in society. In L. Bryson (Ed.), *The communication of ideas* (pp. 37–51). New York, NY: Harper, p. 12.

[26] Dobson, A. (2014), *Listening for democracy: Recognition, representation, reconciliation.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p. 36.

[27] Dobson, p. 17.

[28] Graber, D. (2003). *The power of communication: Managing information in public sector organizations.* Washington, DC: CQ Press, p. 226 quoting, Viteritti, J. (1997). The environmental context of communication: Public sector organizations. In J. Garnett & A. Kouzmin (Eds.), *Handbook of administrative communication* (pp.79–100). New York, NY: Marcel Dekker, p. 82.

> "… members of the public have equal rights to access comprehensive information about government policies, programs and services which affect their entitlements, rights and obligations".[29]

> "Fundamental to … policymaking and the design of public services is the recognition that the citizens in a democracy have both rights and duties, and that democratic governance provides opportunities for citizens to participate actively in shaping their world".[30]

The Organisational Listening Project reported here supports and extends other studies such as those of Stephen Coleman and Andrew Dobson by examining the channels and methods through which governments and political institutions listen as well as speak to stakeholders and citizens. It presents incontrovertible evidence of a lack of listening and makes recommendations for actions that are essential for increasing trust, democratic participation, and social equity.

Why focus on UK government communication and citizen engagement?

While Stage 1 of the research informing this analysis was conducted in the USA, UK, and Australia, the second stage of intensive research was conducted in the UK for three reasons.

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29 Department of Finance. (2014). *Guidelines on information and advertising campaigns by non-corporate Commonwealth entities*. Canberra, ACT: Author, Clause 8a, p. 3. Retrieved from http://www.finance.gov.au/advertising/campaign-advertising/guidelines

30 Holmes, B. (2011, July). Citizens' engagement in policymaking and the design of public services. Research Paper No. 1, *Parliamentary Library Information, Analysis, Advice*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Parliamentary Services, p. 1. Retrieved from http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1112/12rp01

First, the UK Government Communication Service (GCS) responded positively to Stage 1 of this research by inviting a presentation of the findings in the Cabinet Office, Whitehall, and offering support for Stage 2 of the research. As noted under 'Methodology', GCS agreed to support the research in partnership with the UK Department of Health as a primary site for investigation, in addition to facilitating access to other UK government departments and agencies.

Second, Stage 1 of The Organisational Listening Project found public communication by the UK GCS and a number of UK government departments and agencies to be equal to or better than practice in other public and private sector organisations studied in terms of commitment to evaluation, listening, and engagement. As the aim of this research was to focus on common practice and best practice, rather than selective negative exemplars, the purposive sample selected for further detailed study was deemed appropriate.

Third, as also noted under 'Methodology', the political environment in the UK in the period 2014 to 2016 was characterised by increasing and unprecedented signs of citizen discontent with the national government and major political institutions, as evidenced in the **Scotland Referendum** in 2014, which narrowly maintained UK unity, and particularly in the 2016 **EU Referendum** referred to as *Brexit* in which citizens made an historic decision to leave the European Union after 40 years of membership against the policies of the government.

The surprise and shock that greeted the *Brexit* decision was a clear indication that UK politicians and some sections of the Government were out of touch with the views and wishes of citizens – a concerning and dangerous situation acknowledged by the incoming Prime Minister Theresa May in a speech to launch her campaign for the leadership in July 2016 in which she said "there is a gaping chasm between wealthy London and the rest of the country".[31]

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[31]   May, T. (2016, July 11). Theresa May: Speech to launch leadership campaign [Web site]. Retrieved from http://www.ukpol.co.uk/uncategorized/theresa-may-2016-speech-to-launch-leadership-campaign

FINDINGS – ORGANISATIONAL LISTENING PROJECT (STAGE 1)

The 'architecture of speaking'

The Organizational Listening Project Stage 1 conducted in 2015–2015 found:

> **Organisations including government departments and agencies, corporations, and some NGOs and major institutions spend millions and even hundreds of millions of dollars, pounds, euros and other currency a year on communication.** This is done through media advertising, public relations, Web sites, events, publications, customer relations management (CRM), political campaigns, and corporate and organisational communication;

> **However, on average, 80% of the public communication resources of private and public sector organisations are devoted to disseminating the organisation's messages – i.e.,** *speaking*. In some cases, **up to 95% of the public communication of organisations is focussed on 'speaking'.** Even interactive social media are mainly used by most organisations for disseminating their messages[32]. In short, despite theories and claims that it is *two-way* and *dialogic*[33], organisation-public communication is overwhelmingly comprised of organisational speaking;

> **When organisations do listen, it is mainly instrumental – that is, undertaken selectively to achieve the organisation's objectives** such as identifying populist opinion to help win elections or gaining 'intelligence' to help sell products or policies or persuade citizens to comply with social marketing goals (e.g., pay tax, donate blood, etc.), referred to as '**strategic listening**'[34].

Stage 1 of The Organisational Listening Project concluded that, in the name of communication, most organisations deploy an '**architecture of speaking**' through large investments in advertising, public relations, Web sites, events, and other public communication activities.

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[32] Macnamara, J. (2016). *Organizational listening: The missing essential in public communication*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, pp. 157–174.

[33] Grunig, L., Grunig J., & Dozier, D. (2002). *Excellent organizations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; Taylor, M., & Kent, M. (2014). Dialogic engagement: Clarifying foundational concepts. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(5), 384–398; Palmatier, R. (2008). *Relationship marketing*. Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute.

[34] Bartholomew, D. (2012). Where is your organization on the social media listening maturity model? London, UK: Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication. Retrieved from http://amecorg.com/2012/10/where-is-your-organization-on-the-social-media-listening-maturity-model

An 'architecture of listening' – missing essentials

The study recommended that organisations need to counter-balance their 'architecture of speaking' with an '**architecture of listening**'. It proposed that an architecture of listening requires:

> A **culture** of listening (organisations and their senior management must want to listen);

> **Policies** for listening;

> Addressing the **politics** of listening (e.g., who is listened to and who is not);

> **Structures and processes** for listening;

> **Technologies** for listening;

> **Resources** for listening;

> **Skills** for listening; and

> **Articulation** of listening to decision-making and policy making.

Understanding organisational listening and its role

In recommending that private and public sector organisations deploy an *architecture of listening*, The Organisational Listening Project Stage 1 defined organisational listening as involving what it called the '**seven canons of listening**' as follows:

1. **Recognition** of others as having a right to speak and be heard. William James, the founder of American pragmatism, stated that the most "fiendish" way to deal with another person is to ignore them[35];

2. **Acknowledgement** – ideally quickly. Research shows that if there is no acknowledgement, those who speak usually assume that they are not being listened to;

3. Paying **attention** to what others say;

4. **Interpreting** what others say as fairly and receptively as possible;

5. Trying as far as possible to achieve **understanding** of others' views, perspectives, and feelings. Charles Husband suggests that the right to speak should be replaced by or at least incorporate a right to be understood[36]. Stephen Covey says that to feel understood is the deepest psychological need. However, in his popular book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey says that "most people do not listen to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak"[37] – what Jacqueline Bussie calls "re-loading our verbal gun" [38]

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35 James, W. (1952). *The principles of psychology*. Chicago, IL: William Benton.

36 Husband, C. (1996). The right to be understood: Conceiving the multi-ethnic public sphere. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences, 9*(2), 205 – 215. Husband, C. (2000). Media and the public sphere in multi-ethnic societies. In S. Cottle (Ed.), *Ethnic minorities and the media* (pp. 199–214). Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

37 Covey, S. (1989). *The seven habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in person change.* New York, NY: Free Press, p. 251.

38 Bussie, J. (2011). Reconciled diversity: Reflections on our calling to embrace our religious neighbours. *Intersections, 33,* 30–35, p. 31.

6. Giving **consideration** to what others say;

7. **Responding** in an appropriate way. Beyond initial acknowledgement, a more substantial response is usually required after consideration of expressions of voice such as inquiries, complaints, submissions, and petitions. However, 'appropriate' does not necessarily mean acceptance or agreement. There may be good reasons why a request or suggestion cannot be agreed to. In such cases, an appropriate response should contain an explanation.

The findings of this stage of the research are briefly summarised here as they have been reported in detail in the following publications (from most recent to first):

> Macnamara, J. (2016). *Organizational Listening: The Missing Essential in Public Communication*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

> Macnamara, J. (2016). The work and 'architecture of listening': Addressing gaps in organization-public communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 10*(2), 133–148.

> Macnamara, J. (2016). Organizational listening: Addressing a major gap in public relations theory and practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *28*(3–4), 146–169.

> Macnamara, J. (2015). The work and 'architecture of listening': Requisites for ethical organization-public communication. *Ethical Space: Journal of the Institute of Communication Ethics*, *12*(2), 29–37.

> Macnamara, J. (2015, June). Creating an 'architecture of listening' in organizations: The basis of engagement, trust, ethics, healthy democracy, social equity, and business sustainability. Report of The Organizational Listening Project. Sydney, NSW: University of Technology. Available at http://www.uts.edu.au/node/134066

> Macnamara, J. (2014). Organisational listening: A vital missing element in public communication and the public sphere', *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, *15*(1), 90–108. Available at https://ojs.deakin.edu.au/index.php/apprj/index

FINDINGS – ORGANISATIONAL LISTENING PROJECT (STAGE 2)

The following analysis and recommendations are based on six months of intensive observation, interviews, participation in planning and evaluation, and examination of documents inside the organisations cited and among their stakeholders and audiences. This period of review followed more than two months of on-the-ground research among eight UK government departments and agencies conducted as part of the Organisational Listening Project Stage 1 between mid-2014 and mid-2015.

1. Social research

The UK Government extensively uses social research as a basis for evidence-based policy and decision-making. This includes major national studies such as the British Social Attitudes survey conducted by **NatCen Social Research**, bespoke research conducted by independent firms such as **Ipsos MORI**, **GfK NOP**, and **Kantar TNS**, academic studies, internally conducted online surveys, and traditional and social media analysis. Overall, the UK Government conducts a large amount of research – possibly even more research than needed, as will be discussed in the following.

However, two issues became evident in relation to social research during this study as follows.

> First, social research conducted by the UK and a number of other governments is **predominantly** *quantitative* (e.g., polls, surveys, quantitative media monitoring, economic analysis, etc.). A much smaller investment is made in qualitative research. This is compounded by the lack of analysis of large qualitative data sets collected from public consultations, correspondence, and complaints, as discussed in the following sections. While generalizable quantitative research is important, research that probes beyond scores and ratings; explores ranges and diversity beyond *means* (i.e., averages); and accesses *affective* (i.e., emotional) as well rational *cognitive* responses are necessary for understanding stakeholders and citizens. Such insights require increased qualitative research. This recommendation has been made to the UK Government Communication Service and senior communication and policy staff[39] in a number of departments and agencies.

> Second, **the extensive data gained through social research are often not shared across relevant organisations** because there is no central insights database or knowledge management system in place. This issue affects all of the communication and engagement activities reviewed in the following sections, so it is discussed later under 'Data sharing and knowledge management'.

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[39] Social research is commissioned and used by both communication and policy staff in most government departments and agencies.

2. Consultation

Under open government and open policy making strategies, the UK Government like many governments has made a major commitment to consultation. Indeed, it could be said that consultation is one of the central platforms for citizen engagement and participation, occurring much more frequently than elections and affording opportunities for detailed comments and feedback.

The development of a single official Web site for announcing and reporting consultations (**Gov.UK**) is an important step that was recommended in several previous reviews and studies such as the UK *Power of Information Task Force* report[40] and the *Digital Dialogues* report[41]. However, the Gov.UK consultation site does not provide a full service consultation function. It serves as a central location to:

> Announce consultations;

> Provide a description and details of consultations (e.g., background information, terms of reference, and sometimes questions for response); and

> Post summary reports of consultations.

Typically, consultations announced and described on Gov.UK link to specialist Web consultation applications such as Citizen Space, which is widely used by UK government departments and agencies (e.g., **Highways England** for an August 2016 consultation on managing freight vehicles through Kent and the **Department of Education** for a consultation on funding for early years education), or Crowdcity (used by the **Ministry of Defence**).

Even these specialised tools need additional applications and plug-ins to be effective. For example, Citizen Space developed by **Delib** is best used in conjunction with **Dialogue**, a complementary application that allows participants in Citizen Space consultations to rate suggestions and ideas using a peer rating system to produce what Delib calls an "ideas lab".[42]

Furthermore, experienced consultation staff in the UK Government note that public consultations need to be actively promoted and explained beyond what is possible on the Gov.UK Web site to make stakeholders and citizens aware of them and encourage participation. One approach used is to publish a **blog** specifically devoted to publicising and discussing issues relevant to the consultation (e.g., using **Wordpress**). **E-mail** to known stakeholders such as organisations is also used.

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[40] UK Cabinet Office. (2009, February). Power of Information Task Force Report. Retrieved from http://powerofinformation.wordpress.com/2009/03/04/final-report

[41] Miller, L., & Williamson, A. (2008). *Digital dialogues: Third phase report August 2007–August 2008*. London, UK: Hansard Society. Retrieved from https://digitaldialoguesuk.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/digitaldialogues3.pdf

[42] Delib. (2014). Using Citizen Space and Dialogue App together – suggestion 1: start an Ideas Lab. Bristol, UK: Author. Retrieved from http://blog.delib.net/using-citizen-space-and-dialogue-app-together-suggestion-1-start-an-ideas-lab

These learnings draw attention to the fact that considerable skills are required among government policy and communication staff to conduct effective consultations, as well as a number of specialised tools. Such skills and use of tools such as those noted above are patchy across the government. For example, in planning a consultation in relation to disability, some policy and communication staff involved confessed unfamiliarity with consultation methods and tools.

From observation, interviews, examination of consultation reports, and analysis of consultation submissions, the following 10 failings in consultation were identified:

> Many consultations are **framed narrowly with specific questions** written by government department or agency staff that limit discussion to the government's agenda;

> A number use **technical and official language**, even when addressing the 'general public';

> In most cases, submissions to consultations are **not acknowledged**;

> Many have **short time frames** for comments, which may be practical for major industry and professional organisations that have expert resources to prepare submissions, but which disadvantage or preclude many citizens and small groups from participation;

> The preceding limitations are created largely because of a **one size fits all approach** to consultation. Some consultations are aimed at experts and industry and some legitimately have a very specific and limited scope. However, others seek (or should seek) views from a wide cross-section of the public. But there is no clear distinction between the different types and levels of consultation in terms of language, accessibility, time frame, etc.;

> Most consultations **attract and are dominated by the 'usual suspects'** – i.e., major organisations and even professional lobbyists. The following point exacerbates this bias, but suggests solutions;

> **Consultation lacks outreach**. All consultations studied involved a passive approach in which the government calls for and then waits for submissions to be made. This ignores the reality that some groups and individuals affected by a policy or issue under consultation are unlikely to initiate a submission. This particularly applies to those with low socioeconomic status and/or low education levels, and those who are not easily able to articulate their views. Consultation can be productively enhanced through outreach to affected groups, such as:

  - **Visiting affected areas** to talk to local organisations, leaders, and individuals;

  - **Interviewing** in local communities, such as 'button hole' interviews in shopping malls or community centres in relevant areas;

  - Even **door knocking** in key affected areas; and

> - Establishing relationships with a wider range of organisations (i.e. beyond the 'usual suspects') including c**ommunity groups, social movements, and activist organisations**. For example, in the UK groups such as Fixers[43] work with marginalised people, particularly youth. But such groups are seldom recognised or contacted in consultations and debate on relevant policies and programs;

> There is a **lack of analysis of consultation submissions**. Focus is predominantly on collecting *inputs* and often little planning and scant resources are devoted to how submissions will be analysed to produce *outputs* and *outcomes*. Also, many departments and agencies lack the tools to analyse large volumes of unstructured data (i.e., text). (See 'Data analysis' for an example and further discussion of this issue);

> There is **no sharing of the findings of consultations** when there is content relevant to other government departments and agencies, as noted in the previous section and discussed in detail under 'Data sharing and knowledge management';

> There is also a **lack of reporting back following consultations**. Reports of consultations are posted on Gov.UK. However, while major stakeholder organisations which 'understand the system' might readily access these reports, citizens are unlikely to search for the results of a consultation. Proactive reporting to relevant stakeholders and citizens should be undertaken. This can be easily managed today with technology such as auto-generated e-mails when e-mail addresses are provided, or simply publishing reports and summaries in relevant media such as local newspapers, trade journals, and specialist publications (e.g., organisation newsletters). Research shows that acknowledgement and reporting back substantially increase trust in the process.[44]

An overall conclusion is that many consultations are **more about meeting legal requirements than listening**. With consultation a legislated requirement in many circumstances, focus is often on meeting the specified criteria, which results in formulaic and minimalist approaches.

EXAMPLE

The NHS Mandate public consultation conducted in October 2015 to develop the mandate for the NHS for 2016–2017 illustrates the under-utilisation of public feedback and data received by the UK Government through lack of data analysis, as well as opportunities for improvement.

Typically, such consultations attract around 300 submissions. In 2015, the NHS Mandate consultation attracted **127,400 submissions.** In addition to 140 organisations that responded, individual public responses included:

> 114,000 that were attributed to a campaign by 38 Degrees, a membership organisation which campaigns on a range of issues (this was identified through the appearance of common terms and phrases closely linked to 38 Degrees policies, suggesting use of a form letter or template);

> 470 that were attributed to a campaign by the National Autistic Society;

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[43] See http://www.fixers.org.uk.
[44] Studies of the 2008 Obama presidential campaign show that short acknowledgement e-mails sent to all donors, supporters, and general inquiries created wide public satisfaction and support.

> 270 that were attributed to 'Our NHS', a campaign to promote a fully nationalised, comprehensive health service;
> 170 that were attributed to the Wheelchair Leadership Alliance;
> 12,500 that were unique replies from individuals expressing personal views. This included 8,880 responses submitted via Citizen Space.

NHS England staff manually analysed the large volume of submissions, identifying the above factors and a number of findings including:

> **Opposition to further private sector involvement** in the NHS;
> Concern that there is **insufficient funding** to achieve the aims of the mandate and the NHS's *Five Year Forward View*;
> Concern that the mandate **does not mention staff issues** such as safe staffing levels and calls for improved pay and conditions;
> Concern about **seven-day services**, which were being introduced at the time of this study;
> Strong support for **improving mental health services** but concern about lack of funding;
> Strong **support for focus on prevention** of ill-health, but concerns that public health, community and social care funding is insufficient to achieve aims;
> **Shortness of the consultation period** and lack of publicity to make people aware of the consultation.

Civil service staff are to be commended for the analysis they did without any specialised text or data analysis tools. However, the additional findings gained from analysis conducted as part of this research project illustrate the importance of in-depth data analysis and the tools and skills for conducting such analysis (see 'Pilot project' findings below).

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVES

In July and early August 2016, the NHS Mandate consultation submissions were re-analysed using a sophisticated textual analysis application, **Method52**. This Web-based application developed by the University of Sussex in partnership with DEMOS uses natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning, but maintains active analyst control throughout processing allowing analysts to correct classifications and add categories (e.g., of topics or issues) if required (referred to as *active learning*). The application allows both *inductive* and *deductive* analysis[45], which is important for discovery research, gaining detailed insights, testing hypotheses, etc. This analysis confirmed some of the findings derived in manual human analysis, but found some important additional insights including:

> Many citizens **don't trust government consultation**. A significant number commented that the NHS Mandate consultation was a "smokescreen" for privatisation of health;

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45 Inductive analysis identifies specific characteristics in data (e.g., it identifies major topics, themes, and issues that are discussed in transcripts of focus groups or consultations) and draws general conclusions from these. Conversely, deductive analysis tests pre-determined hypotheses and generalisations in data (e.g., it looks for the frequency of a *priori* determined concepts and messages).

> Major concern was expressed over **profits being taken out of the UK health system** by private providers (an issue that it would seem needs to be addressed);

> There was **confusion over who the consultation was for** – health experts or the general public;

> **Personal experiences were reported by health professionals** including doctors and consultants – some with 20 plus years of experience – providing considerable 'expert' feedback;

> Also, a substantial number of **patient experiences** were reported; and

> **Postcodes** were given in many submissions, allowing geo-location analysis to show regional trends and patterns.

In late 2016, the UK Department of Health purchased an upgrade to its e-mail system that allows **automatic e-mail acknowledgements** to all those sending a submission. The same software also can send automated acknowledgements in response to correspondence that provides an e-mail address.

The Department of Health also expanded its public consultation in 2016 to include **digital engagement** with relevant groups. While noting that digital communication does not reach all sectors of society, e-mail and social media contact can supplement traditional consultation methods.

In addition, a recommendation was made to the Cabinet Office that consultations be **categorised and structured at a number of levels or by types** with appropriate public promotion, access, language, timeframe, and scope. For example, it was proposed that consultations could be classified as: (1) *expert/ technical* consultations that can be highly technical and confined to relevant experts; (2) *implementation/option* consultations that are limited to specific choices; and (3) *open public* consultations that should be widely accessible. This recommendation will require a policy change and potentially redrafting of regulations.

NOTE

The participatory action research including the pilot projects initiated as part of it and reported here made no long-term commitment to using any particular tools such as Method52. Consideration was given to a number of technology platforms and software applications including **R**, an open source text mining and analysis tool and, in particular, a text analysis program based on it called **Quanteda** (Quantitative Analysis of Textual Data)[46] developed by **Professor Ken Benoit**, Head of the Department of Methodology at The London School of Economics and Political Science. As an action research project, all tools and methods proposed were the subject of trials and evaluation.

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[46] R and applications based on it such as QUANTEDA use quantitative methods incorporating statistical analysis, but they work with unstructured qualitative data and are able to translate qualitative findings into empirical data, according to Professor Ken Benoit, a world expert in textual and content analysis.

3. Correspondence

Many national government departments and agencies receive between 40,000 and 70,000 pieces of correspondence a year. These come in the form of Ministerials[47] and letters and e-mails direct from stakeholders and citizens. E-mail is increasingly used, meaning the text of correspondence is received and stored in digital form – an important factor for the following recommendation.

As far as could be ascertained, departments and agencies have reliable systems for receiving, recording, and processing correspondence, including referral and escalation procedures when information needs to be sought from particular branches, units, or senior management. Most use databases to hold correspondence records.

However, none of the departments and agencies studied during the two stages of this research conducted qualitative analysis of the content of correspondence over time (e.g., annually or even over several years). Such analysis can reveal the most frequent topics and issues raised, themes, and patterns in what is a large body of information received by the government. While some correspondence is quite issue-specific, letters and e-mails often range over a number of issues and include general comments – positive as well as negative.

Content analysis of correspondence can be conducted using textual analysis software (also referred to as text analysis). With the advent of natural language processing and machine learning, such programs partly or largely automate analysis that identifies key words, themes, and patterns, making such analysis relatively time-efficient. A large number of textual analysis applications are available ranging from high-end tools such as **NVivo**, **Leximancer**, and **Method52** discussed previously to low-cost and even freeware applications such as **MaxQDA**, **QDA Miner**, **MeaningCloud**, **TextSTAT**, and **WordStat**.

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVE

In late 2016 the UK Cabinet Office agreed to analyse letters and e-mails to the Prime Minister using Method52 to identify major themes, common issues, and patterns. It was also planned to analyse correspondence to the Department of Health and, if fruitful, analysis of correspondence could be rolled out across all government departments and agencies. The aim of this analysis, proposed to be undertaken quarterly, half-yearly, or even annually is to add to the insights available on the major concerns and issues of interest to stakeholders and citizens.

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[47] Ministerials are letters sent to a government Minister, department, or agency by a Member of Parliament or Congress on behalf of citizens.

4. Complaints

Like correspondence, complaints received by UK government departments and agencies are processed systematically and effectively in terms of the specific nature of each complaint. Rating systems are in place and escalation procedures ensure that serious complaints (e.g., patient safety matters in the health system) are expeditiously referred to the appropriate authorities.

However, three weakness were observed in complaints systems as follows.

> **Rating systems are orientated to volume** – The rating system observed in some departments (e.g., Health) is weighted by volume. For instance, an NHS Trust or a hospital with a high volume of complaints is assumed to pose a greater risk than one with a low volume of complaints. However, many complaints are often in relation to quite minor matters (e.g., car parking). Social psychologists at The London School of Economics and Political Science have developed a **Health Complaints Analysis Tool (HCAT)** that weights complaints qualitatively in terms of risk posed as well as frequency. This tool is being used by a number of NHS Trusts. The HCAT tool could be modified for broader use, providing increased insight and intelligence from public complaints.

> **Lack of holistic analysis over time** – Even more importantly, no evidence was found of complaints data being analysed over time to identify patterns, trends, prominent issues, and 'hot spots', even though academic studies have shown the deep and valuable insights can be gained from such analysis.[48] This is a process that could be undertaken annually or even more frequently using the same textual analysis applications used for consultation submissions and correspondence.

> **Complaints via social media** – Some government organisations do not accept or even monitor complaints via social media. While processing of serious complaints requires an 'official' complaint and supporting data, social media are increasingly used by people to voice complaints. Often the first signs of dissatisfaction or concern can be identified in social media. Broader monitoring (i.e., listening) via social media is desirable, as noted in discussion of 'Social media'.

The importance of listening effectively to complaints was starkly illustrated in the final report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry Chaired by Robert Francis QC which stated:

> **Building on the report of the first inquiry, the story it tells is first and foremost of appalling suffering of many patients. This was primarily caused by a serious failure on the part of a provider Trust Board. It did not listen sufficiently to its patients.[49]**

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48 Reader, T., Gillespie, A., & Mannell, J. (2014). Patient neglect in 21st century health-care institutions: A community health psychology perspective. *Journal of Health Psychology, 19*(1), 137–148; Reader, T., Gillespie, A., & Roberts, J. (2014). Patient complaints in healthcare systems: A systematic review and coding taxonomy. *BMJ Quality and Safety,* 1–12.

49 Stationery Office. (2013). Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry, p. 3. Retrieved from http://www.midstaffspublicinquiry.com/sites/default/files/report/Executive%20summary.pdf

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVES

In late 2016, the Economic and Domestic Secretariat (EDS) and the Government Communication Service agreed to review the potential for the **Health Complaints Analysis Tool (HCAT)** developed by researchers at The London School of Economics (LSE) for analysing all types of complaints. The GCS tasked a special committee to investigate wider use of the HCAT (see footnote 51).

In addition, the Government Communication Service and departments including the Department of Health are considering **textual analysis of complaints** over extended periods such as six months or a year to identify common themes, prominent issues, and patterns (e.g., geo-location analysis).

5. Digital and social media

Research in Stages 1 and 2 of The Organisational Listening Project found widespread use of social media, but a predominant focus on posting messages (i.e., speaking). There was evidence of a shift towards more dialogic approaches over the course of this study. For instance, the UK Department of Health has established a specific **Digital Insights** team to conduct **social media listening.** This team does not post comments – staff members simply listen and report insights on key issues to communications and relevant policy staff in weekly and monthly reports. This is in line with professional and academic recommendations for the use of Web 2.0 platforms.[50] Use of social media for listening offers a cost-effective method of gaining insights and feedback. However, this approach was not found to be widespread. Some departments and agencies did not systematically monitor and analyse social media at the time of this report. This indicates that **use of social media for listening can be further expanded** in line with policies such as the UK Government Digital Strategy.

Tools for social media listening and analysis are available in many departments and agencies, such as **Brandwatch**, **Sysomos**, **Tableau**, **Coosto**, and **Social Mention**, as well as freeware such as **Google Analytics** and **Twitter Analytics**. There are also service providers that can provide quantitative and qualitative social media tracking and analysis such as **Gorkana** and **Kantar Media** in the UK, as well as similar service providers in the USA, Europe, Asia Pacific, South America, Africa, and the Middle East (e.g., **CARMA**, **Cision**, and **iSentia**).

Also, perhaps because of the relative newness of digital and social media, staff responsible for these channels are often housed in separate units rather than integrated with other insights or media teams.

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[50] Boler, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Digital media and democracy: Tactics in hard times.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Macnamara, J. (2014). *The 21st century media (r)evolution: Emergent communication practices.* New York, NY: Peter Lang; Siapera, E. (2012). *Understanding new media.* London, UK and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVES

During this research project, partly in response to interim findings of this research and partly due to a scheduled restructuring in the Department of Health known as DH 2020, the department integrated its **Citizen Insights, Communication Insights, and Digital Insights units into a single Insights unit.**

Digital and social media analysis staff increased focus on **digital listening**, noting that social media provide early and often real-time insights into the views and reactions of stakeholders and citizens.

The Department of Health **linked its e-mail system to its Citizen Space consultation platform** to provide enhanced feedback (e.g., participants and interested parties can sign-up to be advised of the outcome of consultations and notified of future consultations).

As noted under 'Consultation', the Department of Health also committed to **digital engagement** with relevant groups (e.g., proactive e-mail and social media contact with stakeholders) as a supplement to traditional consultation methods.

A GCS committee[51] led by Stephen Hardwick, Director of Communications for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) was asked to investigate steps to ensure all government departments and agencies have **access to appropriate social media analysis tools** such as Brandwatch.

6. Stakeholder engagement

Overall, there is an active stakeholder engagement program within the UK Government. For instance, The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has extensive contact with business and industry and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) works closely with the financial sector, particularly accountants, tax agents, and financial advisers.

However, a weakness of stakeholder engagement observed and reported by some staff is that it is often conducted around specific policy announcements. In such cases, it is seen as 'pitch rolling' to smooth the way for implementation of policies. In some cases, this is too late. And it can be seen cynically as government calling only when it wants something.

Stakeholder engagement theory[52] and best practice advocate an 'upstream' focus – that is, building and maintaining working relationships in advance of announcements and activities for which cooperation or support is sought and giving stakeholders a chance to influence decisions, not simply communicating unilateral decisions to them. It also should include proactive contact to listen to

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[51] This committee was also tasked to investigate the legal status and methods of sharing public response and feedback including the addition of an opt-out box on consultation sites (see sub-section 8) and use of the Health Complaints Analysis Tool (see sub-section 4).

[52] Neil, J. (2009). Stakeholder engagement: A road map to meaningful engagement. Bedford, UK: The Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility, Cranfield School of Management. Retrieved from https://www.networkedcranfield.com/doughty/ Document%20Library/How%20To%20Guides/Stakeholder%20engagement %20A%20road%20map%20to%20meaningful%20engagement.pdf

stakeholders' views and concerns. Government is often risk-averse in relation to contacting major stakeholder groups in advance of specific initiatives for fear of "stirring up an issue". However, relationships and partnerships only work if they are two-way and built on trust and mutuality.

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVES

During this research project the Department of Health restructured its stakeholder engagement unit to **upgrade the priority of this area** and adopt **a more proactive approach** focussed on building relationships with key stakeholders and expanding engagement beyond the 'usual suspects'. This was partly stimulated by this participatory action research and partly by the initiative of the head of stakeholder engagement and the department's management team.

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7. Data analysis

A major over-arching finding of this research that emerged from analysis of consultations, correspondence, and complaints is that insufficient data analysis is conducted on much of the information and data received and held by the government. Greater commitment and capability should be created for qualitative as well a quantitative (statistical) analysis.

This will require staff training as well as specialist tools as discussed in previous sections of this report (e.g., textual analysis software, complaints analysis tools, etc.).

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVE

An internal report of this research to the UK Government recommended that **advanced data analysis skills, including methods for qualitative data analysis, and more effective 'listening' to stakeholders and citizens be embedded into the Government Communication Service professional development program** – an ongoing program of short courses and workshops to increase the skills and capabilities of GCS staff. This recommendation was accepted by the GCS with implementation beginning in 2017.

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8. Data sharing and knowledge management

It can be seen from this analysis that a vast amount of information about public attitudes, perceptions, concerns, and views exists across the UK Government in the form of quantitative and qualitative social research such as surveys and polls, focus groups, interviews, and ethnography, as well as data collected in the form of public consultation submissions, correspondence, complaints, traditional and social media analysis, and evaluation reports. This information is processed and used to meet the specific needs of the commissioning organisations. However, despite some initiatives that have attempted to share data – e.g., the former Central Office of Information (COI), which was closed down in 2012; a spreadsheet containing a partial index created in the Cabinet Office; and an Excel list of research studies maintained by the Citizen Insights Network (CIN) in the Department of Health – much public feedback resides in '**data siloes**' and is not shared. There is currently **no central data warehouse or knowledge**

management system that collectively represents the voice of stakeholders and citizens and provides audience insights to inform communication with the British public. This represents:

> A lost opportunity to gain insights and understanding;

> A political risk when important information is missed (which conveys non-listening to the public);

> A cost through undertaking unnecessary new research or duplication of research in some cases.

It should be noted that data sharing is occurring in some instances through interpersonal relations and the initiative of civil service staff. However, staff attrition and mobility, particularly during a time of cut-backs, make such methods of sharing data tenuous and unsustainable. More systematic methods are required to avoid lost opportunities and potential wastage through duplication.

Insights2020 (i2020), a major study conducted by Kantar Vermeer and published by *Harvard Business Review* in September 2016 found that "67% of the executives at over-performing firms (those that outpaced competitors in revenue growth) said that their company was skilled at linking disparate data sources, whereas only 34% of the executives at underperformers made the same claim". The researchers concluded: "**What matters now is not so much the quantity of data a firm can amass but its ability to connect the dots and extract value from the information**. This capability differentiates successful organisations from less successful ones".[53]

The Modern Communications Operating Model (MCOM) adopted by the UK Government Communication Service in 2015 states: "The GCS will create an **Insight Centre**" (Recommendation 8).[54] At the time of this study, which concluded in December 2016, this had not been implemented.

In the very least, a central searchable insights centre or knowledge management (KM) system should be established for storing and sharing **reports of social research**. In many cases, social research commissioned by one part of the government contains information and insights relevant to other departments and agencies.

In addition, there is a strong argument that data collected through **public consultation submissions, correspondence, complaints, social media analysis,** and other methods should be centrally stored in searchable form for sharing across government. This data has been voluntarily provided by citizens and it can be reasonably assumed that most citizens would expect government to give consideration to their feedback, comments, requests, and complaints in all forums, committees, departments, and agencies that have responsibilities and roles relevant to the issues discussed.

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[53] van den Driest, F., Sthanunathan, S., & Weed, K. (2016, September). Building an insights engine. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2016/09/building-an-insights-engine

[54] Government Communication Service. (2015). Modern Communications Operating Model. Retrieved from https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/6.1288_CO_CP_Modern-Comms-Team-Document_for-print-FINAL-2-2.pdf

Despite the logic of sharing data across government, **legal interpretations provided to a committee commissioned to investigate data sharing as part of this study indicated that there are legal barriers to sharing public feedback** provided in consultation submissions, correspondence, and complaints – even in de-identified or anonymised form. Whether this is a case of risk aversion in government, or a legitimate barrier is a matter for further investigation (see 'Pilot project initiatives' below).

The sharing of public consultation submissions is further complicated and prevented by the lack of a central UK government online consultation platform. As noted under 'Consultation', the official Gov.UK Web site publishes the terms of reference and reports of consultations, but does not accept submissions. Most UK government departments and agencies use third party consultation software such as Citizen Space, resulting in fragmentation of data across multiple servers in multiple formats.

It should be noted that the data under discussion here does not include personal records or sensitive information such as medical records.

Furthermore, data to be shared can be **de-identified and/or anonymised**[55] to protect privacy.

Even further, the full text of consultation submissions, correspondence, and complaints does not need to be shared and, in any case, is likely to cause information overload. Insights and understanding are more likely to be gained from *analyses* of such data (e.g., textual or content analysis that identifies key issues, themes, patterns, trends, etc.). Reports generated from analysis are the intellectual property of the author (e.g., the government).

Concerns about privacy and permission to share data also can be addressed by including a 'check box' on all consultation forms and other online templates for feedback, complaints, and correspondence for users to agree or disagree that their feedback and comments can be shared in de-identified form with all government bodies with responsibilities relevant to the content.

There appears to be no legal or logical reason why analysis of consultation submissions, correspondence, and complaints (i.e., reports that interpret the data and summarise key findings) cannot be shared with other organisations, particularly those acting in the public interest.

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVES

As reported under 'Pilot Project Initiatives' in sub-section 5, as part of this participatory action research project the UK Cabinet Office established a committee to investigate:

> The **legal status of sharing data** from various sources including social research, public consultation submissions, correspondence, and complaints within the UK Government;

> The process required to **add a 'check box' to online forms and templates** for public consultation submissions, correspondence, and complaints with

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[55] De-identification involves removing names from data to be reported or published, but retaining records. Anonymisation involves irreversibly severing a data set from the identity of the data contributor in a study.

> a default agreeing to sharing of the content with all government bodies with responsibilities relevant to the content (see footnote 51).

On the recommendation of the researchers, senior staff in the UK Government Communication Service also sought **advice from knowledge management experts** in universities and UK Data Archives on creating a central 'data warehouse' or searchable index of all relevant data in relation to public feedback, comments, complaints, perceptions, and attitudes.

The potential for the Government Digital Service (GDS) to establish a **central online public consultation site on the official Gov.UK Web site** as a uniform platform with a central database for storing consultation data was also being investigated in late 2016.

A relatively new method of gaining audience insights in which the UK Government was a pioneer is **behavioural insights** (also referred to as behavioural economics, although the practices differ in some respects), colloquially referred to as *nudge marketing* based on the book by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein[56] and referred to as *choice architecture* in academic research. A behavioural insights team (BIT), also known as the **Nudge Unit**, was established in Whitehall in 2010. Number 10 Downing Street subsequently divested the unit in 2014 as a 'social purpose company' headed by **Dr David Halpern** (see **www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk**).

Behavioural insights have been used by the UK Department of Health (e.g., for reducing missed hospital appointments[57]), NHS Blood and Transplant (for increasing blood donations), and the former Department of Business and Industry (now Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy). At the time of this research, a behavioural insights team was based within the policy research team in the Science Research and Evidence Directorate and a number of UK government departments employed behavioural insights specialists. In the USA, Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government has established the **Behavioural Insights Group (BIG)**, and the White House set up a Nudge Unit in 2014[58]. In Australia the state government of New South Wales has established a **Behavioural Insights Community of Practice** to share knowledge across departments and agencies (see **bi.dpc.nsw.gov.au**).

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[56] Thaler, R., & Sunstein, C. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[57] Hallsworth, M., Berry, D., Sanders, M., Sallis, A., King, D., Vlaev, I., & Darzi, A. (2015). Stating appointment costs in SMS reminders reduces missed hospital appointments: Findings of two randomized controlled trials. *PLOS One*. Retrieved from http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0137306

[58] Nesterak, E. (2014, July 13). Head of White House "Nudge Unit" Maya Shankar speaks about newly formed social and behavioural sciences team. *ThePsychReport*. Retrieved from http://thepsychreport.com/current-events/head-of-white-house-nudge-unit-maya-shankar-speaks-about-newly-formed-us-social-and-behavioral-sciences-team

Proponents argue that this research and analysis method can identify audience needs, interests, and preferences in mutually beneficial ways. However, there are concerns that behavioural insights involve selectively listening to 'target audiences' only in order to influence their behaviour in ways desired by an organisation – i.e., it is organisation-centric and potentially manipulative. Careful consideration needs to be given to ethics if this method is to contribute to enhanced listening.

9. Evaluation

Another area in which the UK Government has arguably been a world leader is in evaluation of communication. While formative evaluation (i.e., *ex-ante*) could be considered part of social research (see sub-section 1), summative evaluation (*ex-post*) is equally relevant to this study and worthy of special attention because it requires research to identify the reactions and responses of stakeholders and citizens to government initiatives and communication, as well as overall factors such a satisfaction and trust. Therefore, evaluation should involve careful, attentive listening.

Since 2012 under the leadership of Alex Aiken and coordinated by specialist appointees such as Paul Njoku, who was seconded from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), and advocates such as Elayne Phillips in the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the GCS has introduced:

> An **Evaluation Council** made up of a mix of senior government communication directors and external research experts, which reviews all proposed UK Government campaigns[59];
> 'Evaluation Champions' in departments and agencies to advocate and advance standards for rigorous evaluation;
> **Professional development** of GCS staff in evaluation methods through workshops and seminars;
> **Templates and guidelines** for reporting the outcomes and impact of government communication.[60]

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[59] GCS (Government Communication Service). (2017). Evaluation Council. Retrieved from https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/evaluation/evaluation-council
[60] Macnamara, J. (2017). *Evaluating public communication: Exploring new models, standards, and best practice.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Notwithstanding, evaluation remains under-developed in the field of public communication generally, as identified by many researchers[61]. Review of the evaluation practices of the UK GCS found an over-reliance on quantitative data with a corresponding lack of collection and analysis of in-depth qualitative data, and a focus on media metrics in particular. Discussions at the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) 'Summit on Measurement' in 2014, 2015 and 2016 indicate that this is common across the public communication field[62].

10. Campaigning

A major focus of communication in many governments as well as corporations is campaigning.

Campaigns are predominantly top-down *one-way* transmission of information and persuasive messages – whether through paid media advertising or other methods. As such, they do not comprise *communication* as it is defined in extant literature and as it is expected by citizens and stakeholders.

While provision of information to citizens is an important part of a government's role, and persuasion is a legitimate goal in many instances (e.g., to reduce health risks, improve road safety, etc.), governments in democratic systems also have a responsibility to engage in communication with stakeholders and citizens – i.e., two-way *dialogic* interaction involving both speaking and listening.

Notwithstanding, like a number of other government bodies, the UK Cabinet Office, which is responsible for supporting the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, and particularly Number 10 Downing Street (the office of the UK Prime Minister), focus considerable attention on campaigning. UK Government campaigns are increasingly much broader than media advertising, but they are nevertheless focussed on:

> Distributing the **messages of the government**
> On **issues decided by the government**
> At **times determined by the government.**

The position of 'audience' needs to be a shared one, not the permanent status of stakeholders and citizens. In other words, '**government as audience**' is a central concept for an effectively functioning democracy as advocated by Andrew Dobson, Stephen Coleman and others cited in this study.

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[61] Likely, F., & Watson, T. (2013). Measuring the edifice: Public relations measurement and evaluation practice over the course of 40 years. In J. Sriramesh, A. Zerfass, & J. Kim (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: Current trends and emerging topics* (pp. 143–162). New York, NY: Routledge; Macnamara, 2017.

[62] Macnamara, J. (2015). Breaking the measurement and evaluation deadlock: A new approach and model. *Journal of Communication Management, 19*(4), 371–387; Macnamara, J., & Zerfass, A. 2017). Evaluation stasis continues in PR and corporate communication: Asia Pacific insights into causes. *Communication Research & Practice.* doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2017.1275258

Furthermore, two-way communication requires that organisations not only listen selectively and at times of their choosing to achieve their objectives, such as in conducting social or market research, but that they are open and responsive to stakeholders and citizens at all times – including when stakeholders and citizens choose to speak to the organisation. Democratic government requires **'always on' communication** with stakeholders and citizens – not only periodic communication when a government chooses to communicate or engage.

Some public communication campaigns of governments and corporations continue to use traditional **socioeconomic audience segmentation**, which categorises people as A, B, C1, C2, D, or E in which A, B, and C1 generally equate to middle class (e.g., from senior managers and professionals to skilled workers), C2 and D equate to working class from semi-skilled to unskilled, and E denotes those on welfare.[63] This method of audience segmentation is increasingly criticised as simplistic and inaccurate in reflecting perspectives and attitudes. For example, **sense making methodology** (SMM) [64] rejects such arbitrary categorisation, arguing that people travel through 'space and time' in today's mobile and globalised world and their views reflect circumstances at a point in time, rather than being fixed based on socioeconomic circumstances. For instance, a single at-home mother, who would be categorised as a D or E on the NRS-developed social scale[65], may be in the process of starting her own business and planning to send her children to university. Conversely, in this study the researcher met senior business executives who had retired to become activists for social change[66].

PILOT PROJECT INITIATIVES

As part of this research project, a recommendation was presented to the UK Government Communication Service to reduce campaigning in favour of more listening and responsive communication. A senior official pointed out (correctly) that campaigns are necessary and important in some instances (e.g., for public education about health, to encourage blood donations, etc.). While agreeing that more listening is needed, he also commented that a major shift away from campaigns "is not going to happen. The Prime Minister and the government want campaigns" (Anon, interview, December 19, 2016).

The UK Government is moving away from A, B, C1, C2, D, and E audience categorisation to more sophisticated qualitative methods based on audience insights, which is supported by this study.

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63 Ipsos MORI. (2009). Social grade: A classification tool. London, UK: Author. https://www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1285_MediaCT_thoughtpiece_Social_Grade_July09_V3_WEB.pdf

64 Dervin, B., & Foreman-Wernet, L. (2013). Sense-making methodology as an approach to understanding and designing for campaign audiences. In R. Rice & C. Atkin (Eds.), *Public communication campaigns* (4th ed., pp. 147–162). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

65 The A, B, C1, C2, D, E socioeconomic scale was developed by the UK National Readership Survey. See http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade

66 For example, see A Blueprint for Better Business - http://www.blueprintforbusiness.org.

11. Political communication – 'Gridlock' and declining institutions

Political communication was not examined in detail, but it was explored through interviews with former politicians (including a former Prime Minister of an EU member country), the secretary-general of a major European political party, discussions with media advisers of politicians in Australia and the UK, and meetings with a range of industry and community organisations engaged in public affairs.

A retort made by interviewees to the criticism that there is a lack of listening by organisations including governments was that politicians listen to their constituents through a range of electoral activities, as well as through research and other channels. The use of research has been discussed already in the first section of 'Findings – Organisational Listening Project Stage 2', noting a reliance on quantitative research, particularly polls that yield superficial and often unrepresentative findings.

In relation to the broader argument that politicians listen to stakeholders and citizens in elections and processes of political representation such as meetings with constituents, research for this study revealed that politicians and many of their key advisers rely primarily on two key reference points and sources of information in forming their understanding of social and political reality as follows.

> **Traditional media** – All politicians and politicians' media advisers interviewed indicated that traditional media were major sources of information about issues and constituent attitudes and concerns, as well as channels for information dissemination. In the UK, Number 10 Downing Street has planned its media communication since the early 2000s using what is known as 'The Grid'. This is a spreadsheet listing known events, announcements, and other activities that are likely to be of interest to media into which media advisers schedule their activities so as to avoid clashes with other newsworthy activities. To some extent, 'The Grid' is simply a schedule to ensure that all parts of the government know what is happening and coordinate announcements. However, for critics it is much more than that. Many see it as a tool for manipulation of media. In terms of this discussion, the key issue of concern is that political and government communication are heavily influenced by 'The Grid' and the associated media strategies conceived in Number 10 Downing Street and promulgated throughout Ministries and government departments. 'The Grid' and the focus of most media advisers and 'press officers' (as the name suggests) is on gaining headlines and coverage in major media, and on monitoring the news stories, editorials, and opinion columns of so-called *mainstream* media – major newspapers, TV networks, and radio. However, many such media are increasingly not mainstream. While newspapers, TV, and radio remain important channels of public communication, the circulation and ratings of most traditional media have been in severe decline for more than a decade. Many sectors of society, such as young people, increasingly do not

read newspapers or watch TV for news and current affairs, relying instead on a range of new media such as Facebook, YouTube, BuzzFeed, etc. Also, many media groups have been shown to be partisan and politically biased. Traditional media represent a declining percentage of citizens and often reflect unrepresentative views.

> **Political parties** – The other major source of information about citizens' views, interests, needs, and attitudes for politicians is their political party. Politicians are usually pre-selected (i.e., invited to stand for election) by political parties. Many if not most of the policies adopted and advocated by politicians emanate from their political parties. And, on a day to day basis, politicians' visits to their electorates, meetings, and many of the events that they attend are arranged by their political party. However, the minuscule proportion of citizens who are members of a political party – e.g., as noted previously, the **membership of the three major political parties in the UK totals just 1.6% of eligible voters** – means that this reference point and source of citizen insight is also far from representative. Membership data indicates that most political parties are declining political institutions. In interviews conducted in Stage 1 of this study, the national secretary of a European political party and a former prime minister both expressed concern that parties are losing, or have lost, legitimacy and public support.

Along with their declining membership, the institutionalised practices of political parties further erode their capacity to provide elected politicians with reliable representative insights into citizens' views, attitudes, interests, and expectations. The party national secretary pointed to the communication activities of political parties such as tours, visits, and rallies during which the "party faithful" are organized to attend as 'cheer squads' for MPs and members of Congress, and meetings with voters that are attended by invitation only and 'stacked' with supporters. Dissenting voices are usually removed – sometimes forcefully. As a result, politicians engaging through their political party are often not listening to "real people". They are mostly hearing the loud voices of power elites and the platitudes of sycophants because party 'machines' have turned politics into highly organised, professionalised processes focussed on set piece staged events and rehearsed forms of engagement (Anon, interview, May 6, 2015).

The political party executive's description of the political hustings reminds one of the popular aphorism that the Queen of the UK and Commonwealth countries believes that the whole world smells of fresh paint because everywhere she goes has been painted in preparation for her visit. She rarely if ever sees the back streets and 'struggle streets' of society.[67]

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[67] Mooney, D. (2011, May 19). Derek Mooney: Queen is nice, but it's Obama we're really looking forward to. *The Evening Herald*, Dublin, Ireland. http://www.herald.ie/incoming/derek-mooney-queen-is-nice-but-its-obama-were-really-looking-forward-to-27980302.html, para. 11.

In reflecting on the citizen disengagement, lack of trust, and lack of listening discussed in this report, some have speculated that 'democracy is dead'[68] in some developed Western democracies, or that they are approaching the *end of democracy*[69] or what political scientist Colin Crouch calls *post-democracy*[70]. However, while trust in and support for some traditional sites of political participation are in decline, there is evidence that **democracy is not dead or ending. It has relocated** to a substantial extent from traditional sites such as mass media, political parties, and institutionalised trade, industry and professional organisations to new types of social movements, community groups, and activist organisations.

For example, a range of new types of **social movements** have formed and are forming in many countries and sectors of society representing citizens. In the UK today these include groups across a broad spectrum such as Fixers (a national group of around 20,000 marginalised young people focussed on 'fixing the future' through more than 2,000 projects in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland); Flatpack Democracy (a grassroots political movement focussed on reforming local government); A Blueprint for Better Business (a group of mostly retired senior business executives campaigning for more ethical and sustainable practices in business).

Also there are indications that volunteerism and activism are increasing (e.g., witness the rise of major protest movements following the controversial **election of Donald Trump** as President of the USA).

Furthermore, there is a growing number of community organising and advisory groups that assist citizens and communities exercise and amplify their voice through media and other means such as Change.Org, The Company of Community Organisers, Involve, and Keystone Accountability, which operates to collect and analyse feedback through its **Constituent Voice**™ methodology.

While these groups are not the focus of this study, they are noted because the presence, growth, and active role of such organisations, along with social media, indicate that the voice of citizens, including those in marginalised sectors of society, is being raised in myriad ways. However, to matter, and have value, politicians, government departments and agencies, and the myriad other types of organisations that are central to complex industrial and post-industrial societies, need to listen as defined in this report. Governments need to recognise this shift in the sites of democratic participation to listen effectively and remain in touch with their constituents.

[68] Hendriks, C. (2016, December 6). Who says democracy is dead? Canberra, ACT: Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University. Retrieved from https://crawford.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/8965/who-says-democracy-dead

[69] Hix, S. (2003). The end of democracy in Europe. Working paper. London, UK: London School of Economics and Political Science. Retrieved from http://personal.lse.ac.uk/hix/Working_Papers/Hix-End_of_Democracy_in_Europe.pdf; Buchanan, N. (2016, November 25). Are we witnessing the end of democracy? *Newsweek Europe*. Retrieved from http://europe.newsweek.com/neil-buchanan-are-we-witnessing-end-democracy-524169?rm=eu

[70] Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Continuing failure of democratic governments and institutions to listen effectively will exacerbate the declining trust and disengagement in traditional political institutions and processes, and is likely to lead to further 'hung' parliaments[71], shock elections results, activism, and even radicalisation and extremism. A democracy 'for everyone' may never be fully achievable, but better listening can create meaningful engagement and participation and contribute to more representative policy making, and ultimately a more inclusive and equitable society.

12. Postscript

While much of the most recent stage of this research project has focussed on the UK Government, and to some extent the European Commission, and therefore the findings are not generalisable, the scope of Stage 1 of this research and the literature reviewed suggest that the issues raised apply to many organisations in the both the public and private sectors to some if not a large extent.

The extent to which organisations may or may not address the issues raised will depend on a number of factors, starting with their culture. As identified in defining organisational listening and proposing an *architecture of listening*, the first key element of organisational listening is that an organisation, particularly its senior management, must want to listen and engage with stakeholders and publics.

In that context, and in the interests of fairness and balance, a comment needs to be made about the participants in this research. Despite this study being critical and exposing a number of failures in public communication, the individuals and organisations involved participated in an open, constructive way, acting with goodwill and commendable commitment to the public interest at all times. In many cases, the participants were proactive in seeking to improve processes and implement change, and responded positively and even enthusiastically rather than defensively to recommendations. The culture exhibited in the UK civil service, in particular, and observed in the European Commission, was a positive and pleasing discovery in this research project that deserves noting and recording as an overall finding.

The Executive Director of the UK Government Communication Service, Alex Aiken, actively engaged with the research and, while challenging some specific conclusions, demonstrated leadership in both supporting the research in the first instance and in supporting implementation of the pilot projects. The other civil service staff acknowledged in the front of this report, as well as many others working behind the scenes, also deserve recognition for their openness to change and improvement.

The pilot projects that are briefly outlined in this report are evidence of that openness and commitment to change and improve, and they provide examples of how democracy can be reinvigorated and made to work for everyone and create a society for everyone.

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[71] 'Hung' parliaments refer to those in which no political party or coalition wins sufficient seats to govern, as occurred in Australia in its 2010 federal election and almost occurred again in 2016 when the ruling Coalition gained 76 seats in the 150-member House of Representatives – just one more than the seats held by Opposition parties.

APPENDIX 1 – Extract from Speech by Theresa May

EXTRACT FROM THE CLOSING SPEECH BY THE RT HON THERESA MAY, PRIME MINISTER OF THE UK, TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE, BIRMINGHAM, 5 OCTOBER 2016

A democracy that works for everyone

This is a bold plan to bring Britain together. To build a new united Britain, rooted in the centre ground.

An agenda for a new modern Conservatism. That understands the good government can do. That will never hesitate to face down the powerful when they abuse their positions of privilege.

That will always act in the interests of ordinary, working class people.

That's what government's about: action. It's about doing something, not being someone.

About identifying injustices, finding solutions, driving change. Taking, not shirking, the big decisions. Having the courage to see things through.

It's not always glamorous or exciting, but at its best it's a noble calling.

And where many just see government as the problem, I want to show it can be part of the solution too.

And I know this to be true.

For as I leave the door of my office at Number 10, I pass that famous staircase – the portraits of prime ministers past lined up along the wall.

Men - and of course one woman - of consequence, who have steered this country through difficult times - and changed it for the better too.

There's Disraeli, who saw division and worked to heal it. Churchill, who confronted evil and had the strength to overcome. Attlee, with the vision to build a great national institution. And Lady Thatcher who taught us we could dream great dreams again.

Those portraits remind me of the good that government can do.

That nothing good comes easy.

But with courage and vision and determination you can always see things through.

And as I pass them every day, I remember that our nation has been shaped by those who stepped up to be counted when the big moments came.

Such opportunities are rare, but we face such a moment today.

A moment that calls us to respond and to reshape our nation once again.

Not every generation is given this opportunity.

Not every generation called to step up in such a way.

But this is our generation's moment.

To write a new future upon the page.

To bring power home and make decisions… here in Britain.

To take back control and shape our future… here in Britain.

To build an outward looking, confident, trading nation… here in Britain.

To build a stronger, fairer, brighter future… here in Britain.

That is the opportunity we have been given.

And the responsibility to grasp it falls upon us all.

So to everyone here this morning – and the millions beyond whether leavers or remain – I say:

Come with me and we'll write that brighter future.

Come with me and we'll make that change.

Come with me as we rise to meet this moment.

Come with me and together let's seize the day.[72]

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[72] Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/05/theresa-mays-conference-speech-in-full

APPENDIX 2 – The Researchers

LEAD RESEARCHER

Jim Macnamara PhD, FAMEC, FAMI, CPM, FPRIA is Professor of Public Communication at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and a Visiting Professor at The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Media and Communications Department.

He is an internationally recognised researcher in relation to evaluation of public communication, and his research in relation to organisational listening has attracted worldwide attention.

His recent experience and roles include:

> Chair of the **Academic Advisory Group of the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC)** headquartered in London and one of the architects of the **AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework** launched in June 2016;

> An advisor on development of the **UK Government Communication Service (GCS) Evaluation Framework** in 2015 and a member of the GCS **Evaluation Council** in 2016;

> A member of the **Institute for Public Relations (IPR) Task Force on Standardisation of Communication Planning and Evaluation Models** in the USA;

> In 2015 he was commissioned to **review government advertising and communication by the state government of New South Wales** in Australia and he developed the NSW government's new evaluation framework introduced in 2016.

Jim is the author of 16 books including *Evaluating Public Communication: Exploring New Models, Standards, and Best Practice* (Routledge, UK, 2017); *Organizational Listening: The Missing Essential in Public Communication* (Peter Lang, New York, 2016); and *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* (Peter Lang, New York, 2014).

He holds a BA in journalism, media studies and literary studies, an MA by research in media studies, and a PhD in media research.

He also has extensive practical experience having had a 30-year career spanning journalism, corporate and marketing communication, and media research before joining UTS in 2007. After working in media and communication roles with a number of large organisations including the Australian Department of Defence and international consultancies including Hill & Knowlton, he founded and headed a leading strategic communication agency for 13 years before founding the Asia Pacific office of the global media analysis firm CARMA International and heading the firm for more than a decade.
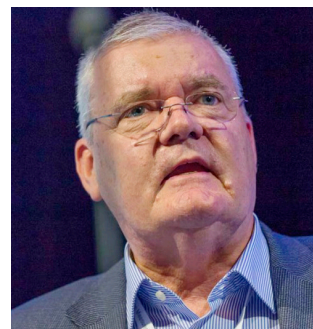
CO-RESEARCHERS

Stage 1 of this project was assisted by **Associate Professor Roger Dunston** from the University of Technology Sydney; **Dr Gail Kenning** from the University of Technology Sydney; and **Mr Paul Long**, an organisational systems consultant who works in Australia and the UK.

Stage 2 of this project was assisted by **Associate Professor Alex Gillespie** and **Associate Professor Tom Reader** from The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), who developed the Health Complaints Analysis Tool (HCAT) used in this research, as well as **Professor Nick Couldry** from LSE who provided advice throughout, and **Professor Ken Benoit** from LSE, who provided specialist advice on large-scale textual/content analysis.

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