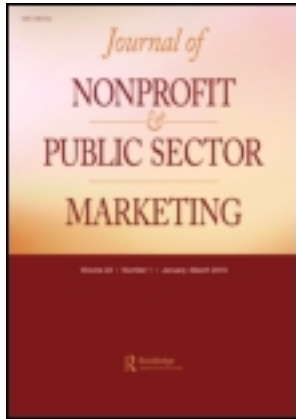


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Marketing Government Reforms

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Dave Gelders
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SUMMARY. This article examines government communication on two large-scale Belgian governmental reforms: the Federal Administration and the police forces. Using Lees-Marshment's typology of marketing processes, we identify the marketing of the changes by the Federal Administration as sales oriented: a finished product or an expert-developed administrative reform project to be sold to the public. Declining enthusiasm for communication and growing product disagreement gradually forced this reform to disappear from the market. The Police reform followed a market-oriented marketing process. It responded to public outrage. The Government merely reacted to external information. This explains why it failed to deal with a changed market situation. A content analysis of articles in both popular and quality newspapers examines the representation of both reforms in the media and seems to confirm our

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observations. This article shows that marketing reforms are extremely difficult when there is no shared understanding of the product to be marketed. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Political marketing, sales-orientation, market-orientation, change management, policy reform, public communication, government communication

INTRODUCTION

The general population usually views governments, specifically public services and civil servants, in a negative light (Goodsell 1985; Van de Walle and Bouckaert 2003). Popular explanations for this distrust point to a lack of communication by the government and to the malfunctioning of the government machinery. However, an in-depth research on the government's image (Ringeling 1993) shows that the negative image has not so much to do with the government's performances, but rather with the way citizens evaluate the government (focusing on negative aspects, unjust comparisons with the business sector, and high expectations). This is linked with the role and the impact of the media. Most citizens have limited encounters with the government, which makes media coverage a main source of information. The media is also often blamed for being a main source sustaining the negative, stereotypical image of the government (Lichter et al. 1999; Council for Excellence in Government 2001).

This article examines government communication on two large-scale Belgian governmental reforms: a wide-ranging reform of the entire Federal Administration (the so-called "Copernicus reform") and the Police reform. First we use Lees-Marshment's typology of marketing processes (2001; product-orientation; sales-orientation; market-orientation) to understand the marketing approaches used for both reforms. Lees-Marshment's typology distinguishes between a product-orientation where a product is designed and subsequently delivered, a sales-orientation where the product design phase is followed by a market intelligence phase used to support delivery or sales, and a market-orientation where collecting market intelligence precedes the product design. We find that in the marketing of the Copernicus reform used a sales-orientated strategy while the Police reform used a market-orientation strategy. The dif-

ferent marketing approaches were determined by differing citizen attitudes towards these two administrations: citizens feel that the police are short-handed while they feel public administration should be non-existent as it is considered redundant. After applying Lees-Marshment's model, we analyse the manner in which the media (two Flemish newspapers) covered the reforms and their core issues.

Both reforms will be dealt with separately. We start each case by describing the political context and some key elements, and then apply Lees-Marshment's model to this reform. Afterwards, we compare the marketing approach of the two reforms.

THE COPERNICUS REFORM

A Clean Break with History

Following an historic election on June 13, 1999, the new Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, installed a "purple-green" cabinet composed of the (French-speaking and Dutch-speaking) liberal, socialist and green parties. The Verhofstadt Government introduced a different style of governing and communicating in Belgian politics. The Prime Minister himself regularly announced a "clean break with history" by emphasising the decisiveness of his cabinet as compared with the presumed immobility of the preceding Dehaene cabinet.

The new Federal Government stated that Belgium must become a "model state" and considered the modernisation of the governmental apparatus a top priority (<http://www.copernicus.be>; Depauw and Deweerdt 2002; Fiers and Deweerdt 2001; Nomden 2002; Van Hemelrijck and Auwers 2001). In a joint press conference on February 16, 2000, Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt and the Minister for Civil Service and Modernisation of Public Administration, Luc Van den Bossche, presented a plan for the modernisation of the Federal Belgian administration. They presented it as a radically new project. A journalist from the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* used the expression "The Copernicus programme" to label the governmental plan by making an analogy with Nicolaus Copernicus, who discovered the earth ("administration") turned around the sun ("citizen") and not vice versa. Political initiators copied this clear and ambitious product name.

The Copernicus programme was inspired by New Public Management principles (economy, efficiency, effectiveness) as were many other Western public sector reforms (Osborne and Gaebler 1993). In order to improve governmental efficiency and the citizen's trust in the Government, the Copernicus programme worked to redesign the hierarchically structured administration

into a matrix organisation, to introduce modern HRM and staff assessments, and to improve the Federal Government's processes involving internal and external communication.

Sales-Orientation

We argue that the marketing process used for the Copernicus reform is characterised by a "sales-orientation." The stages are: (1) product design; (2) market intelligence; (3) communication; (4) campaign; (5) election; and (6) delivery. Market intelligence was a central feature in the marketing of the Copernicus reform but was not the first stage of the marketing process. The Copernicus program is an all-encompassing reform plan and is largely developed by experts. The "product" had to be sold to the citizens and the civil servants. Therefore, the Copernicus reform does not follow a product or market-orientation.

Stage 1: Product Design. The Federal Government set up the Copernicus programme. The Copernicus programme is a fundamental reform of the entire Belgian Federal Administration, covering approximately 60,000 civil servants and all aspects of public administration. As a result, the designed "product" is heterogeneous and complicated and must target many levels. The process itself should be communicated professionally to gain support from internal and external target groups and to aid in the implementation of the programme.

Stage 2: Market Intelligence. Successful implementation depends on the ability to identify key players (e.g., trade unions and segments of the general public) not currently supporting the reorganisation reform but might support it further down the road. Therefore, the Federal Government used market intelligence for both internal and external target groups.

Market intelligence for internal target groups. The Federal Government commissioned an independent research bureau to examine the opinion of civil servants regarding the Copernicus programme and the communication used to disseminate information. The project was called the "Artemis Project" and was conducted in the autumn of 2000 (<http://www.copernicus.be>). The Artemis project distributed a questionnaire to 9,949 civil servants; 3,947 or 39.7% responded. The response rates of high and low-ranking civil servants differed significantly. The Artemis project reveals the following conclusions: (1) Due to negative comments by citizens and politicians, many civil servants created a bunker around themselves and often interpret the announced reform as criticism rather than constructive change. Nevertheless, civil servants have a positive self-image. They are convinced it was the system that failed, but not themselves as individuals; (2) Internal communication (specifically, that concerning the Copernicus programme) was impeded by a lack of communication

and the bureaucratic characteristics of the organisation; (3) There are few official and objective information sources about Copernicus. As of December 2000, with the exception of one letter from the competent Minister in September 1999, civil servants received most pertinent information from trade unions or the press; (4) The existing communication channels, such as staff magazines and the intranet, might be improved. They might be used to inform civil servants about the Copernicus programme.

Market intelligence for external target groups. Prior to the Artemis project, a large-scale postal survey (“referendum”) among the entire Belgian population (all Belgian citizens of 16 years or older) was conducted concerning the Copernicus reform. Through a structured questionnaire, the population was surveyed on whether or not it agreed with the abolition of the ministerial cabinets, the promotion of civil servants on the basis of personal competence, etc. A leaflet was enclosed to describe the modernisation initiatives. Based on the survey results, the responsible ministers argued that the proposed modernisations of the public administration were supported by an overwhelming majority of the population. However, there was a great deal of criticism vis-à-vis the survey. First, the response rate was 9.2%: only 750,000 ballots out of the 8.2 million were sent back. Opponents of the reform interpreted this low response rate as resistance to the modernisation programme of the Federal Government. Second, there were several methodological concerns such as the compulsory and biased way the questions were posed. As a result, the outcome of the survey was not surprising: only 4% of the respondents were opposed to the modernisation of the civil service. Third, the cost of the survey (€1.98 million) and the alleged violation of the respondents’ privacy were criticized as well. Last but not least, opposition parties considered the survey to be a popularity poll of the competent ministers and of the Government as a whole and paid for by the citizenry. However, such an initiative can also be seen as an interesting market intelligence tool to foster the necessary support for the planned reforms.

Stage 3: Communication. The Federal Government underwent several internal and external communication initiatives.

Internal communication. In the beginning, the lack of direct, official and unbiased information turned the press and the trade unions into the main communicators. Based on the Artemis project, a communication policy was implemented to inform the civil servants about Copernicus and then to influence their feelings towards the Copernicus programme (Van Hemelrijck and Auwers 2001). During the process, several communication channels were used: leaflets (e.g., “Setting a new course is absolutely necessary”), road shows, newsletters (e.g., “Today Tomorrow”), monthly magazines, a website (with specific sec-

tions targeting the civil servant; <http://www.copernicus.be>), national television broadcasts, press briefings, networking, and personal enquiries.

External communication. In several interviews, the competent ministers stressed the fundamental characteristics of this reform and focused on the accomplishments. By means of various news media, they tried to convince the citizenry that a historic project was being realised and they had passed the point of no return. Direct public communication, such as the leaflet accompanying the questionnaire, informed the citizenry about the necessity and the general outline of the reform. The external communication faced fierce resistance. Generally speaking, the question arose to what extent it was the Government's first and principal aim to improve its image rather than to aid in the implementation of the reform programme (Gelders 2002). As the Auditor General of British Columbia (1995) states: "It is a generally-held view that, while it is acceptable for governments to incur expenditures for communicating about government programs, the taxpayers (. . .) should not have to pay for communications that are of partisan political nature." Referring to Safire's New Political Dictionary, "partisan" is defined as "placing party advantage above the public interest." Many governmental communication guidelines, such as the UK basic conventions from 1985, stipulate that "It is entirely proper to present and describe the policies of a Minister, and to put forward the Minister's justification in defence of them, and this may have the effect of advancing the aims of the Political party in Government. (. . .) It is possible that a well-founded publicity campaign can create political credit for the Party in Government. But this must not be the primary or a significant purpose of Government information or publicity activities paid for from public funds."

Stage 4: Campaign. In the build-up leading to the parliamentary elections on May, 18, 2003, the Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt used the slogan "Our country is back." In several speeches and interviews, he proudly announced that, due to his Government's efforts, Belgium has become an internationally acclaimed "model state." At the same time, he argued that the former Dehaene Government failed to tackle the issue of public sector reform. According to Verhofstadt, this was ultimately demonstrated during the dioxin crisis of May 1999 in which Belgium was portrayed foolishly both nationally and abroad for a lack of coordination between the governmental departments, communicating too late and for taking unclear or confusing measures.

Stages 5 and 6: Election and Delivery. The mere scope of the Copernicus reform meant that implementation could not be completed during one term in office. It is difficult to establish the extent to which the Government's aim, delivering quality products and services and finally regaining public trust, has already been realised. In the time leading up to the 2003 elections, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Civil Service and Modernisation of Public Ad-

ministration admitted that the reforms did not occur as fast as they had expected. There was growing disagreement within the Government, mainly between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking ministers. Several ministers publicly stated dissatisfaction with the reforms, thereby undermining the general communication strategy and hindering the selling of the “Copernicus product.”

We now discuss the Police reform. Before applying Lees-Marshment’s model to this reform, we describe the former Belgian police system subject to the changes in the Police reform.

THE POLICE REFORM

A War Between Three Police Forces

The former Belgian police system was composed of three police forces: the Municipal Police, the federal Gendarmerie and the Judicial Police. The Municipal Police was controlled by the individual municipalities (the ultimate authority being the mayor) and had a local role. The federal Gendarmerie (federal police force) was at one time a branch of the military. Like the Municipal Police, the Gendarmerie had a law and order mission (prevention and protection) but also performed judicial tasks (investigations). The Gendarmerie was the largest branch and consisted of local brigades and central offices (such as central investigative units). Its many functions ranged from traffic control to judicial investigations. The Judicial Police was solely an investigative unit (no law and order tasks) ultimately supervised by the Minister of Justice but investigating under the daily guidance of the office of the public prosecutor. The Judicial Police, a relatively small force, often complained that the Gendarmerie encroached on its terrain and that it was often not informed about operations carried out by the Gendarmerie (Couttenier 1997).

Market-Orientation

We argue that the Police reform is characterised by a “market-orientation.” The stages are: (1) market intelligence; (2) product design; (3) product adjustment; (4) implementation; (5) communication; (6) campaign; (7) election; (8) delivery.

For decades, there had been unsuccessful attempts to reform the police forces. A product-orientation would therefore not be sufficient. Market pressure actually forced the Federal Government to start designing a new product. The Government had failed to recognise the subtle signs of unhappiness and

saw itself suddenly faced with public outrage. Market intelligence, or better, market pressure, thus played a key role in the initiation of the Police reform. In the Police reform, the Federal Government was confronted with the demands from the market before the new product was designed. It is striking that the Federal Government did not take the initiative itself to discover the market demands. As will be shown, it was actually only after the Dutroux scandal that the Police reform began to take shape. The general public put pressure on the policymakers to create a new police product ("The Integrated Police Force").

Stage 1: Market Intelligence. On August 9, 1996, a fourteen year old girl was kidnapped in Bertrix (Belgium). Following testimonies, Marc Dutroux, his wife and a collaborator were arrested. Two days later, the police found the girl, along with a second girl kidnapped more than two months before, alive in a cage in one of Dutroux's houses. In subsequent weeks, the human remains of four other girls kidnapped during the years before were found on his premises.

This scandal shocked the country in an unprecedented way, especially after it emerged that Dutroux had previously been convicted as a sexual predator and that the police had suspected him in this case but failed to find the girls in an earlier search (Maesschalck 2002). The general public experienced a break in trust with everything that represented "the system": politicians, administrators, the police, the judiciary and even the intellectual elite. The public outrage peaked following a controversial verdict of the highest Belgian court of October 14, 1996. The protests following the verdict culminated in the "White March" on Sunday October 20, 1996; the biggest post-war demonstration in Belgium gathering about 300,000 protesters in the streets of Brussels.

Stage 2: Product Design. The Government needed to respond. The first task for Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene was to change the White March from an act of protest into an act of "additional encouragement" for those in power "to deal with the problems" and as such indicate that the message was understood (Maesschalck 2002). The Government also needed to make decisions to show its willingness to deal with the problem. However, with an issue as large as a "lack of trust in public institutions," the focus of the decisions was limited. In the case of the White March, there was no clear organisation and there was no clear list of demands. Instead, there was an enormous group of individuals expressing general discontent with the management of the country as a common characteristic.

Confronted with these unfocused demands, the Prime Minister tried to focus attention on the issue by stressing the police and judicial aspects and by referring the issue to a newly created committee; the "Dutroux" House Committee of Inquiry was set up a few days before under the presidency of Marc Verwilghen, an opposition MP. This Committee investigated the mistakes made during the previous investigations into the kidnappings and to prevent

these failures in the future. By explicitly referring the inquiry to the Committee, the Prime Minister not only (re-)focused the “police and justice reform” issue, but also allowed for a restoration of the image of this issue.

The Committee’s hearings attracted a large and continuous interest stimulated by live coverage on television. Those hearings revealed problems previously formulated but that now had a higher profile. There were symbolic examples such as the images of an officer of the Gendarmerie and a magistrate giving contradictory accounts of the same events. The constant and intense media coverage of the search for human remains also worked to keep focus on the issue. During the hearings, the Committee’s chair, Marc Verwilghen, gradually emerged as a policy entrepreneur, strongly supported by the media. By managing the hearings and the subsequent debate on the policy recommendations, he helped to structure the broad and still somewhat unfocused issue of “police and justice reforms.” He split the issue into manageable sections about which agreements were reached between the Committee’s members (Maesschalck 2002).

Following the “Dutroux” House Committee recommendations, the Federal Government announced an integration of the three police forces into one unified police force structured at two levels: the “Federal Police” and the “Local Police.” At the federal level, the former central offices of the Gendarmerie and the former Judicial Police would have to be merged in order to take care of inquiries, the maintenance of public order and traffic-regulations. At the local level, the former local brigades of the Gendarmerie and the former Municipal Police would have to be merged as well in order to take care of the basic daily police tasks.

Stage 3: Product Adjustment. The internal target groups were insufficiently involved in the reform process. The creation of the new police structure was created under enormous external pressure exerted by the general public, but was not based on the needs or wishes of the internal target groups. Many internal reactions and public discussions followed regarding the new but not yet completed police product. Several institutions such as the Flemish Association of Towns and Municipalities, trade unions of police officers and the “Dutroux” House Committee voiced their opposition and proposed alternatives to the reform plans (Fiers and Deweerdt 1998). During the debates, a central role was played by MP’s who were also mayors and thus responsible for the municipal police force. They had an interest in the Police reform as an integration of Municipal Police forces in “inter-police zones” would reduce the mayor’s power over the police. The cleavage between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking mayors-MPs was particularly deep and dominated the debate. The French-speaking parties claimed, and eventually obtained, a larger say for the mayor in leading these new local inter-police zones.

The debate continued during the subsequent months. Given all of this, the actual reforms would have been rather modest without one of the most spectacular events in recent Belgian history: the escape of public enemy number one, Marc Dutroux, on April 23, 1998 (Maesschalck 2002). Again, external pressure forced the Police reform to pick up steam. Although Dutroux was caught within a few hours, the political world felt that quick and decisive action was necessary “to restore trust in the institutions.” On May 11, 1998, the leaders of the four governing parties and of the four opposition parties started the so-called “Octopus”-negotiations under the presidency of Prime Minister Dehaene (Fiers and Deweerdt 1999). The pressure on the negotiators was heavy. Particularly, the media demanded action. None of the parties could afford to be responsible for a failure of the negotiations. The Octopus agreement proposed the integration of the police forces both on a national and a local level and was presented to the press on May 24, 1998, one month and one day after Dutroux’ escape.

It rapidly became apparent that the reform operation would not be finalised before the parliamentary elections on June 13, 1999. To increase pressure on the Government and on the MPs of the Octopus partners, the trade unions of the police forces organised three protest campaigns between February and May 1999. The elections on June 13, 1999, impeded the process of reforming the police forces until January 31, 2000. Negotiations were difficult and on numerous occasions police officers marched through the streets of Brussels to stress their grievances. On July 2, 2000, a final agreement stipulated the specific measures at a cost of € 198.3 million. Later, the Minister for the Home Department responded to complaints by the mayors and confirmed that none of the costs would be redirected to the budgets of the local authorities, as the Government had budgeted € 458.6 million to support the local authorities in implementing the new structure.

Stage 4: Implementation. In implementing the Octopus Agreement, the Federal Police took off on January 1, 2001, followed by the set up of the Local Police. During the implementation stage, there were still discussions regarding the police personnel’s legal position, their disciplinary code, their social security, their retirement statute and their pay. Wage increases followed, making the reforms very expensive.

Stage 5: Communication. Communication about the Police reform process was started during the earlier stages of this process before the overall plan was determined. Many communication channels were used in addition to the official channel from the Home Department. Communication about the Police reform was far from perfect for several reasons. First, the police personnel often had to rely on news media rather than on their own commanders for informa-

tion; as a result, the principle that good internal communication is required for facilitating good external communication, is violated. Second, the new Minister for the Home Department often gave information to the public first instead of cooperating with his administration. As a result, there were several hasty, incomplete, inconsistent and polemical statements in which the Minister communicated policy intentions as if they were already realised (Gelders forthcoming). Third, negative statements released by several high-ranking police officers cast a shadow on the reform. Fourth, the unified police tried to make its new characteristics visible by means of new uniforms, a new house style (emblem, colours, etc.) and by their presence at public events such as the national holiday parade and at events organised around the popular Flemish television series "Flikken" ("Cops," a fictional series dealing with non-fictional items of everyday police life in the Flemish city of Ghent). But this attempt incurred problems due to the new uniforms being unavailable for the national holiday parade on July 21, 2002, and due to several demonstrations by the staff in which they marched against the governmental reorganisation plans. Various news media outlets reported about protesting Gendarmerie personnel occupying the main roads around Brussels, about drunken and fighting Judicial Police officers, etc.

Stages 6, 7 and 8: Campaign, Election and Delivery. Marginal issues within the reform dominated communication. Because external pressure faded, attention gradually shifted from the general reform plans to the negative side-effects and the imperfect implementation. The Police reform was not an issue in the 2003 elections.

We now compare the main political marketing elements used in the two government reforms as described above.

THE COPERNICUS REFORM VERSUS THE POLICE REFORM

The Copernicus reform and the Police reform are two recent fundamental government reforms. Issues common to both reforms are: (1) their products are heterogeneous; (2) there is a multiplicity and diversity of target groups and messages; (3) the governmental plans and actions affect many people with great consequence; (4) initially little attention was paid to the communication towards internal target groups; (5) there is great politicisation; (6) there is scrutiny from the media, trade unions, and the general public; (7) there is public disagreement among the policymakers themselves about the product both during the product design stage as well as the implementation stage.

The application of Lees-Marshment's typology shows a somewhat different marketing approach for each reform. The Copernicus reform is character-

ised by a sales-orientation: the reform had been designed by experts and needed to be sold to the public and to the civil servants. The Police reform, on the contrary, is characterised by a market-orientation with an atypical appearance in which the market intelligence did not stem from an anticipative governmental behaviour but from public outrage. In the Police reform, little attention was paid to internal market intelligence which explains the fierce resistance in the product adjustment and implementation stages. The main difference between the two reforms is that the Copernicus reform was not inspired or accelerated by an external crisis such as in the Police reform. Convinced by the necessity and the importance of a fundamental reorganisation of the entire Federal Administration, the Minister for Civil Service and Modernisation of Public Administration, Luc Van den Bossche, had a clearly defined plan in mind. In order to sell the product (the reform) internal and external target groups needed to be convinced these changes were necessary. In the Police reform, it was the general public itself who claimed changes to the system were necessary after experiencing a public scandal. In this case, the external target group did not need to be convinced; the market itself asked safety for children, efficient police services, etc. But, contrary to the Copernicus reform, the internal target groups were not systematically involved in the reform process. There was a clash of interests, competition, and much external communication without the appropriate preceding internal communication.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TWO FLEMISH NEWSPAPERS

The Copernicus reform and Police reform are large-scale and unprecedented. They took a prominent role in the political discourse and it can be expected that press attention for the reforms is correspondingly extensive. The Copernicus reforms had to be sold to the general public, while the Police reform had to accommodate public outrage. Successful reform thus implies that media coverage has to be extensive.

In order to compare news coverage on the Copernicus reform and the Police reform, we selected two Flemish newspapers, *De Standaard* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, for the period of 1999-2002, a period corresponding to the first Verhofstadt Government legislature. For the selection of specific newspaper editions, we used the technique of the constructed week (week 1: Monday, week 2: Tuesday, etc.). Thanks to the constructed week technique, each date has the same chance of being selected for the sample and each day of the week is proportionally represented. Within the selected editions, we analysed all articles on the Copernicus reform and on the Police reform. *Het Laatste Nieuws* is a popular newspaper with a large distribution, while *De Standaard* is the

leading quality newspaper. The analytical tool was tested during several training sessions. The tool continued to be refined until an inter-coder reliability of at least 80% had been found. The coding was done by a group of 11 undergraduate students as part of a seminar on communication science research techniques. Two coders coded each article. Though many codings were subjective, inter-coder reliability (number of identical codings/total number of codings) proved to be very high (92%). The final dataset was constructed by randomly selecting one out of the two codes per article.

Our content analysis focused on three issues:

1. *The coverage* of both reform projects in the two newspapers;
2. *The framing of the title and the article body*: the general attitude of the article's writer in the titles as well as in the article (objective, subjective positive or subjective negative framing);
3. *The key topics and stumbling blocks of the reforms*: 9 issue-topics were selected, 8 of which were common to both reforms (laziness of civil servants and police officers, payment, efficiency, corruption, infrastructure, evaluation, flexibility, cost of the reform) and 1 of which is particular for each reform (the civil servant's statute for Copernicus and safety for Police).

Coverage

Our sampling resulted in 216 articles, 132 in *De Standaard* and 84 in *Het Laatste Nieuws* (Table 1).

Seventy-four percent of the 216 articles dealt with the Police reform. More articles were found in the quality newspaper, *De Standaard*, which also published more on the Copernicus reform than *Het Laatste Nieuws*. In *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 17.9% of the articles dealt with the Copernicus reform, which differs significantly from the 31.1% of articles dealing with the Copernicus reform in *De Standaard* ($\chi^2 = 4.660$, $df = 1$, $p = .031$). This trend was confirmed by a quick-scan of the Mediargus newspaper article archive (<http://www.mediargus.be/vowb>): in the period 1999 to 2002 we found 24 articles mentioning the

TABLE 1. Type of Coverage \times Newspaper

	<i>De Standaard</i>	<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	Total
Copernicus reform	31.1% (41)	17.9% (15)	25.9% (56)
Police reform	68.9% (91)	82.1% (69)	74.1% (160)
Total	61.1% (132)	38.9% (84)	100% (216)

word Copernicus for *Het Laatste Nieuws*, as compared with 166 in *De Standaard*.

The articles were longer in *De Standaard* than in *Het Laatste Nieuws*. This is surprising given that *Het Laatste Nieuws* tends to publish page-wide articles on certain topical items. The same goes for the illustrations accompanying the articles: the mean size of the illustrations is almost 50% larger in *De Standaard*.

The relatively low number of articles concerning the reforms and the relatively small size of articles and illustrations in *Het Laatste Nieuws* suggest that the reforms are considered to be a less important topic in this popular newspaper. Of our 216 articles, 32 are editorials or opinion articles, three fourths of which are published in *De Standaard*. This is another illustration of the difference in issue salience for the two newspapers.

Citizens are featured more frequently in articles on the Copernicus reform. This should not come as a surprise as the guideline for the Copernicus reform is that the administration (“earth”) should rotate around the citizen (“sun”) instead of the citizen (“sun”) around the administration (“earth”). When politicians are featured in the article, there is a greater chance of the article being placed on the front page.

Framing of the Title and the Article Body

When we look at the content of the title and of the article, no differences can be found between the two newspapers. Thirty-eight percent of the articles in *De Standaard* are categorised as objective/informative, and 45% are said to have a negative undertone. In *Het Laatste Nieuws*, the number of objective/informative articles is 27% with 52% of these articles having a negative undertone. These differences are not significant.

Although a frequency count (Table 2) reveals no difference at the general level, there is a significant difference in the content of title framing and the content of article framing within the individual title-article combinations ($\chi^2 = 92.493$; $df = 4$; $p = .000$). Seventy-four percent of the articles with a subjectively negative title result in a subjectively negative article, while in 52% of the articles objective/informative titles results in a purely objective/informative article. Combinations of titles and articles differ according to the newspaper. In the popular *Het Laatste Nieuws*, a subjectively negative title usually results in an article with a negatively coloured content. This general tendency also holds for *De Standaard*, but in a quarter of the cases in *De Standaard*, a negatively framed title results in an objective article.

TABLE 2. Framing of Title and Article Body

	<i>De Standaard</i>		<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	
	Attitude in title	Attitude in article	Attitude in title	Attitude in article
Objective (Informative)	38%	38%	43%	27%
Subjective positive	13%	17%	9%	20%
Subjective negative	49%	45%	48%	52%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Topics

The articles were scanned for 9 possible topics to which the actors could refer. Table 3 shows the topics mentioned for both reforms.

The most important topics mentioned in both reforms are: efficiency, the (often failing) infrastructure of the public services, and the payment of civil servants and police officers. The (failing) infrastructure in the Federal Administration and the introduction of a staff evaluation system means that these two items are mentioned more frequently in relation to the Copernicus reform. The most important difference deals with the cost of the reforms. This is clearly a topic in the Police reform while it is not in the Copernicus reform. In *De Standaard*, the actors mention efficiency and staff evaluation more often, while actors in *Het Laatste Nieuws* devote considerably more attention to the cost of the reform.

Apart from this inventory of topics, coders were asked to indicate the general attitude towards the reform of the actors (except for employees) in the newspaper articles. The predominant attitude towards the Police reform is negative for all actors involved. For the Copernicus reform, citizens and politicians tend to be positive, while employees and trade unions are negative. Trade unions are, in both cases, the most negative actors with more than 80% of the articles showing a union spokesperson with a negative attitude. Trade unions protect their members and, as a result, they tend to lean towards a “resistance to change.” The attitudes towards Copernicus reflect those generally to be expected from the actors: politicians defend the reforms and citizens support them while unions are hostile. As for the Police reform, the overall negative attitude can be explained by the excessive costs associated with this reform. The overall attitudes of the actors do not differ depending on the newspaper.

TABLE 3. Topics

	Copernicus reform	Police reform
Laziness	2.0%	0.7%
Payment	17.9%	15.6%
Efficiency	21.9%	23.3%
Corruption	1.3%	1.5%
Infrastructure	21.9%	17.8%
Evaluation	10.6%	7.4%
Flexibility	9.9%	9.2%
Cost of reform	4.6%	15.6%
Safety	n.a.	8.9%
Statute	9.9%	n.a.

Note: % of total topics mentioned

CONCLUSIONS

Recently, the Belgian Federal Government embarked on large-scale reforms of the Federal Administration (Copernicus) and the Police. Using Lees-Marshment's typology of marketing processes, we identified the Copernicus reform as a sales-oriented marketing process: a finished product, an expert-developed administrative reform project had to be sold. Declining enthusiasm for communication and growing disagreement about the product gradually made the issue disappear from the market. The Police reform followed a market-oriented marketing process. The Police reform was designed to cater to the public's fierce demand for profound and fast changes. However, the absence of new scandals and public outcry made it clear that Government was not actively collecting market information by itself. It merely reacted to external information. This explains why it failed to recognise new market signals. An analysis of newspaper coverage of both reform projects seems to confirm this trend.

Apparently, the Government did not manage to control the communication on its ambitious reforms. The Police reform was nothing more than a reaction to a number of shattering events. Communication failed because of growing disagreement among the actors involved. The product (the Police reform) was tailored as a response to the public outrage, but this "market information" was gradually replaced by pressure from police officers, trade unions, and mayors. Because of the sudden change in the "market," politicians and the media

shifted their attention from the pressing need for reforms to the dysfunctioning of the reforms themselves. The Government failed to recognise that the market for the reforms had changed.

We presented the Copernicus reform as a product to be sold. This administrative reform was at first accompanied by a large-scale communication offensive that quickly faded. Government-initiated communication failed due to insufficient attention towards internal communication and due to disagreements within the Government on the nature of the reforms making further marketing impossible. This explains why the administrative reforms quickly became a non-issue in the press. The popular press in particular did not pay attention to this administrative reform.

Our analysis of government marketing efforts of two large-scale reforms showed that the marketing of reforms is extremely difficult when there is no shared understanding of the product to be marketed. Marketing reforms becomes even more difficult when the public does not consider the reform to be important. The public supports the Copernicus reform but is at the same time rather indifferent, as it does not consider the public administration as an important factor in their life. This makes it very difficult for the Government to keep the reforms on the agenda. As for the Police reform, the marketing of the reform was designed using outdated market intelligence. The reform and the communication referred to shattering events and public outcry but failed to recognise that the market had changed. The marketing did not focus on the new key players within the market, the police unions and the mayors.

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