

Managing Knowledge for Information Age Public Diplomacy

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Summary. The objective of this study is to examine the role of information technology in public diplomacy. We will examine the extent to which a web portal can aid U.S. public diplomacy officials by facilitating the public image-tracking process. We will develop and test a prototype web portal designed to help public diplomacy officials gather, organize, search, and analyze information regarding the opinion of foreign publics about the U.S. and our policies. Throughout the development process, we will examine the institutional and organizational factors that influence the use of web portals and other knowledge management technologies.

This three-year study will address the following research questions:

- How can web portals be leveraged to improve the efficiency of the image tracking process?
- How can decision-makers use the capabilities of a web portal to improve decision-making and for effective knowledge management?
- Can web portals enable process changes in the conduct of public diplomacy in general, and image-tracking activities, specifically?
- What are the institutional and organizational impediments to the effective use of web portals to support public diplomacy image-tracking activities? How can government agencies overcome these impediments to effectively use web portals for public diplomacy?
- What are the critical success factors for using web portals for knowledge management in public diplomacy?

The “Digital Diplomacy” project goals are consistent with the developing national agenda for digital government research as identified at the May 2002 National Center for Digital Government Workshop (see Fountain 2002). This project embodies the issues outlined under the first strategic priority – information technology, governance and organizations as its focus is on understanding the strategic, operational, and other management issues relating to the implementation and use of information technology for public diplomacy. We will examine the ways in which information technology can increase both the efficiency and the effectiveness of public diplomacy practices.

We will address the research questions stated above by conducting in-depth case studies on the development, implementation, and use of a web portal to support the public image-tracking process as conducted by public diplomacy practitioners. Not only will the image-tracking portal enhance the ability of practitioners to keep pace with the constant flow of information and provide real-time analyses of the opinions of foreign peoples

about the U.S., but we expect that the results of this study will help clarify the factors that lead to successful use of web portals to support the practice of public diplomacy.

Results of the “Digital Diplomacy” project have the potential to play a significant role in the war against terrorism. Many public diplomacy experts believe that more effective tracking of the U.S. image abroad must be a key component of U.S. foreign policy strategies as we fight the war against terrorism (Council on Foreign Relations 2002). The “Digital Diplomacy” project will aid this effort by giving public diplomacy practitioners the ability to increase data handling efficiency, and to enhance their ability to find patterns in and make stronger inferences about the data. As a result, this project is uniquely poised to further both the intellectual digital government research agenda and the practical goal of enhancing the quality of life for the American people.