

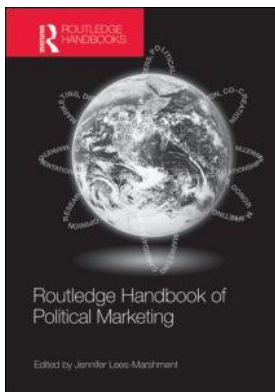
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The party official as political marketer

The Australian experience

Stephen Mills

A campaign is not a time for much original thought; it is a time for tactical manoeuvring and carrying out plans and procedures developed in an earlier more normal climate.

Andrew Robb, Federal Director Liberal Party of Australia (Robb 1996)

The topic: the party official as political marketer

Party officials – the full-time paid professional employees of the party organisation – are often overlooked in accounts of political marketing campaigns, in favour of the more high-profile elected party leaders and external consultants. Yet party officials can perform distinctive functions that the political marketing literature suggests are necessary if the party is to achieve sustained electoral success. This chapter describes these functions and presents examples, drawn from the Australian context, of party officials as political marketers. While party structures and campaign practices differ in democracies around the world, it is argued that greater attention to the role of party officials will provide a more complete understanding of the political marketing process.

Previous research

Party scholarship has long recognised that the ‘party-as-organisation’ represents a distinct element of a tripartite structure alongside the ‘party on the ground’ and the ‘party in office’. The ‘party-as-organisation’ or ‘party central office’ includes the national executive, secretariat and paid party officials, and performs distinctive activities including managing and coordinating election campaigns (Key 1964; Katz and Mair 1993). As party membership declined, and communications technologies rapidly expanded and diversified, party officials transformed from bureaucratic administrators to become ‘electoral professionals’, with skills appropriate for post-ideological ‘catch-all’ campaign strategies (Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Farrell 1996; Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002; Negrine 2007; Smith 2009). Party officials manage campaign organisations and budgets, where volunteer labor and member subscriptions have been supplemented, and in some cases replaced, by professional staff and consultants, corporate donations and taxpayer subsidies (Ware 1996; Young and Tham 2006; Nassmacher 2009).

Yet party officials constitute ‘one of the most under-researched fields in the study of political parties’ (Webb and Kolodny 2006) – not least in the political marketing literature. In Britain, accounts of successful political marketing campaigns have tended to overlook party officials by aggregating their role within a broader narrative that features many other party and non-party actors: leaders, members of parliament, candidates, members, donors, supporters, activists within the party and aligned special interest groups and, not least, specialist external consultants (Lees-Marshment 2001; Wring 2005). Alternatively, US accounts have portrayed party officials as relics of a campaign model long superseded by the candidate-based campaign (Newman 1994; Sabato 1981; Scammell 1997; Medvic 2006), or perhaps as ‘shadowy men of the political backrooms’ (O’Shaughnessy 1990: 12); again, these accounts accord a prominent role to the external consultants.

However, an important contribution to the political marketing literature about party officials suggests that the sustained competitiveness of a political party can be analysed with the resource-based view (RBV). For Lynch *et al.* (2006), the competitive resources of a party include human resources (such as leaders, supporters and policy-developers), intellectual resources (policies) and organisational capabilities (such as campaign competencies, the skills and knowledge with which it crafts and communicates its messages for voters, deploys party activists at national and local levels, and targets voters). With this explicit introduction of the party organisation into the political marketing discussion, and its recognition of organisational skills as key competitive resources, the RBV invites closer consideration of the role of party officials. Critically, Lynch *et al.* distinguish between long- and short-term resources, asserting that short-term resources deployed in the immediate ‘battle’ of an election campaign will be ‘more competitive if they have been nurtured in the years preceding the formal campaign’ (Lynch *et al.* 2006: 86–87) – a view well articulated by the Australian party official Andrew Robb cited at the head of this chapter.

This chapter will argue that party officials can indeed play a key role in political marketing, and that this role extends well beyond the marketing communications functions, to include key decisions about the party’s acquisition and deployment of long-term resources. It will do so by reference to the most senior officials of Australia’s two major political parties – the national secretary of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the federal director of the Liberal Party. There has been no comprehensive or comparative study of Australian party officials, and the available material is scattered among party histories (Hancock 2000, 2007; McMullin 1991), published archives (Weller and Lloyd 1978; Starr 1980), organisational studies (West 1965; Parkin and Warhurst 1983; Warhurst and Parkin 2000), accounts of the new campaign technology deployed by party officials (Mills 1986; Young 2004) and journalist accounts of election campaigns. Despite contributions to the political marketing literature by Australian political marketing scholars (O’Cass 1996, 2001, 2009; Hughes and Dann 2009, 2010), there are few Australian case studies or discussions of Australian practitioners.

Party bureaucrats themselves are notoriously ‘reticent’ (Panebianco 1988: 221) about their role, and political marketing activities are difficult to perceive in real time (Lilleker and Negrine 2006) since parties developing rival political strategies seek to protect their plans against pre-emption. Yet successive national secretaries and federal directors have an interest, post-campaign, in explaining (or justifying) their strategic intentions. Certainly, national secretaries and federal directors have delivered post-election speeches at the National Press Club since 1993, and have participated in post-election academic collaborations (Bean *et al.* 1997; Simms and Warhurst 2000, 2005; Warhurst and Simms 2002; Simms 2009) and other conferences (for example, Young 1986). They have also acted as informants to post-campaign narratives and analyses by journalists (for example Williams 1997; Jackman 2008) and academics (Blewett 1973). These have together provided the basis for the following analysis.

New research: three party officials as political marketers in Australian federal elections

This analysis focuses on three Australian party officials: Mick Young, ALP federal secretary from 1969 to 1972; Andrew Robb, federal director of the Liberal Party from 1991 to 1997; and Tim Gartrell, ALP national secretary from 2003 to 2008. These officials were the most senior executives in their party organisations, elected (in the case of the ALP officials) and appointed (Liberal Party) by their national executive bodies to head the party's secretariat. In this capacity, each of them also held the title 'campaign director'. Each of them managed the opposition party's campaign in two successive elections, losing the first (in 1969, 1993 and 2004, respectively) and winning at their second attempt (in 1972, 1996 and 2007, respectively).

The analysis explores the activities of each official in relation to five distinctive functions that, according to the political marketing literature (Lees-Marshment 2001, 2009; Lynch *et al.* 2006), are necessary for a political party to achieve sustained electoral success. These are gathering market intelligence, designing the product (policy and leadership), building long-term campaign resources, deploying short-term campaign resources, and post-campaign product delivery.

Market intelligence

Gathering market intelligence has been identified as the necessary first stage of a political marketing campaign model, allowing the political marketing organisation to orient itself to voter preferences. Market-oriented parties have come increasingly to rely on market research; party officials play the central role in providing this intelligence.

Public opinion polling had been pioneered in Australian election campaigns by the ALP in its successful state campaign in South Australia in 1968; a key official in that campaign was Mick Young (Blewett and Jaensch 1971: 65–66, 204–5). Now as federal secretary and full-time campaign director, Young insisted that Labor 'use to the full the research and media techniques' that were available (Blewett 1973: 10, citing a planning memo written by Young nearly a year before the 1972 election). Young later acknowledged that national surveys had been used 'extensively' during the campaign, and were 'an integral part of all our decision making' (Young 1986: 98, 106). For example, polling identified weaknesses in the image of party leader Gough Whitlam, leading to a more effective communications style (Blewett 1973: 8) and was also used to pre-test the advertising slogan which carried Labor's message of change: 'It's Time' (Young 1986: 106). Polling was conducted through the party's advertising agency, the expenditure of which Young strictly controlled (Young 1986: 98).

In these early years, polling meant quantitative (random sample survey) research, conducted infrequently as funds permitted. Through the 1980s, both parties increased the frequency and intensity of this kind of polling while also embarking on qualitative (focus group) research, allowing them to segment the marketplace to track and target the attitudes of swing voters in marginal seats (Mills 1986). The frequency and reliability of national polls published in the media allowed both parties to focus their own survey work on marginal seats. While he was still deputy director of the Liberal Party, Andrew Robb had identified a promising young market researcher, Mark Textor; in 1991 he appointed him as the Liberals' in-house pollster. Textor's meticulous, extensive and innovative market research, both quantitative and qualitative, made a crucial contribution to the Liberals' development of a market orientation in the lead-up to the 1996 campaign. Robb distilled his campaign strategy not around a product description but around 'a distillation of swing voter sentiment' (Williams 1997: 100).

Textor's accumulation of attitudinal data allowed him to create what he termed a 'psychograph' of typical middle-Australian swinging voters. These fictional constructs, named 'Phil' and 'Jenny', represented a young married couple with one child, moderate incomes, a mortgage and a car in need of a service; 'Phil' and 'Jenny' had voted Labor in 1993 but their economic and lifestyle concerns made them open to changing their vote this time. This construct was created more than a year before the 1996 election campaign. Robb used it to help Liberal candidates in marginal seats identify and communicate effectively with the voters they needed for victory. He would ask the candidates: 'Have you spoken to Phil and Jenny lately?' According to the account by journalist Pamela Williams, to whom Robb granted privileged access during the campaign, 'Phil' and 'Jenny' became 'the subjects of endless discussion in party meetings, the template family every Liberal candidate needed to know about [and] a code for the entire campaign' (Williams 1997: 65). In all this, Robb's campaign underlines the validity of Lynch *et al.*'s (2006: 86) proposition that parties need to target their messages at voters of strategic significance; different voters – loyal voters as against swing voters – will have different views on the party's key messages. The Australian parties' focus on swing voters is perhaps intensified given that, under Australia's compulsory voting system, they are saved the expense of mobilising their loyalist voting base.

By the time of the 2007 election, Tim Gartrell was conscious of the Liberals' reputation for market research, admitting later 'much has been said about their crucial roles in victories, never defeats' (Gartrell 2007). Gartrell commissioned two separate research operations. For quantitative research, he continued to use the Australian–New Zealand firm UMR Research, whose principal, John Utting, had been engaged in federal and state Labor campaigns for the previous decade. UMR was commissioned to conduct quarterly telephone benchmark surveys of marginal seats; when a rapid response was needed, UMR conducted an 'e-panel' of online marginal seat respondents (Jackman 2008: 110, 151). For qualitative research, Gartrell appointed, on the advice of an earlier Labor research guru Rod Cameron, a new research group headed by Tony Mitchelmore (Jackman 2008: 35). Mitchelmore conducted intensive rounds of focus group discussions – for example, 16 group discussions in six centres around Australia in a fortnight. His techniques to probe the attitudes of swinging voters included using 'whimsical analogies', such as asking 'what kind of fathers' party leaders John Howard and Kim Beazley would make, or how a 'Labor factory' would differ from a 'Liberal factory'. He also asked voters to describe their hopes and fears for their children's future, as a way of assessing whether they thought the country was heading in the right direction (Jackman 2008: 37, 101).

Like Textor, Mitchelmore provided his client not just with reports of voter attitudes but with strategic advice on how to take advantage of this intelligence. This included suggesting words and phrases that Labor spokespeople could use that resonated with swing voters. Labor's description of their target swing voters as 'working families' was, like Textor's 'Phil' and 'Jenny', a product of market research. So was Labor's description of Prime Minister Howard as 'clever' and 'out of touch' (Jackman 2008: 59). On one occasion, Gartrell received a leaked copy of one of Textor's recent research reports for the Liberals (Jackman 2008: 142). Underlining the competitive environment of party research, Gartrell crowed in a speech to the National Press Club after Labor's victory that 'our researchers finally bested the other side' (Gartrell 2007).

In these examples party officials have identified market researchers, hired them as in-house or external agents, commissioned research, distilled communications messages and – particularly Robb and Gartrell – constructed campaign strategies and campaign messages from it.

Designing the product: policy

The second stage of a political marketing campaign is to use market intelligence to design the party's political product, including the policies it presents to voters. Lynch *et al.* identify as a

critical resource the party's ability to develop policies that satisfy and attract current and future voters (Lynch *et al.* 2006: 83). Again, party officials can play a critical role in this process.

This was not an early development: in the early 1970s research was used for packaging purposes, and Young did not seek to influence policies. 'We did use slick marketing techniques, and did package Whitlam to a certain extent', Young conceded, '[b]ut we were only able to do that because there was something to be presented to the electorate. The policies had been hammered out over a number of years' (Young 1986: 107).

By the mid-1990s, however, Robb was closely involved in developing the Liberals' policy platform. At a critical meeting of party leaders and staff in January 1996, Robb addressed the meeting immediately after it was opened by party leader John Howard, and laid down the electoral framework within which policy should be selected. This was a research-driven framework. According to Williams' account, 'Each of the major policies, and its presentation, had to accord with the rhetoric of one or more of four campaign themes: 'to give certainty of security to families, to get small business back in business, to give hope to young people and to restore trust and honesty in government'. Robb also insisted that policies be accommodated in a planned 33-day campaign schedule to ensure a steady stream of announcements to feed the news cycle (Williams 1997: 160). Lynch *et al.* suggest that messages directed to 'swing' voters should be both persuasive (i.e. attracting voters to 'support your party') and dissuasive (i.e. making negative critiques of the other party). This accurately describes Robb's approach, which balanced positive messages around Howard with negative reminders of Prime Minister Keating (Williams 1997: 100).

In 2007 Labor's policies were developed by leader Kevin Rudd, his private staff and party strategists including Gartrell, to accord with the preferences of the 'working families' identified in research. Seeking to position Rudd as 'the future' versus the Howard government as 'the past', Labor promoted fresh ideas, fiscal conservatism and opposition to the government's industrial relations legislation. Announcements of 'reviews' of government policy generated news during the campaign while retaining flexibility on the actual course to be followed if elected (Jackman 2008: 48–51, 110, 154).

Designing the product: leadership

Leaders are one of the primary party resources identified by Lynch *et al.* (2006: 83). Market research provides an intense focus on party leaders, measuring voters' approval of their performance and personalities; research on voting intentions provides a measure of a party's success at orienting itself to the preferences of the electorate. Market research accordingly influences party considerations about whether incumbent leaders are succeeding in their jobs or whether they should be replaced. Since market research is commissioned by, and presented in the first instance to, the party officials, they are in a position to influence these discussions.

Again, this was not the case during Young's time as federal secretary. Whitlam had been elected leader in 1967 and took Labor to victory in 1972 despite having lost the 1969 election. Both Robb and Gartrell, having lost their first campaigns (with John Hewson as leader in 1993, and Mark Latham in 2004, respectively), were closely involved in transforming their party's platforms and leadership, with a view to ensuring their electoral acceptability in the next election. Research commissioned by Robb and later leaked to the media from the party's secretariat, played an influential role in the dumping of Hewson by Alexander Downer. Subsequent research showing Downer's poor standing with voters led to his replacement by John Howard in 1995; Robb himself communicated the findings to Downer and within the party (Williams 1997: 15–21, 55).

Market research was likewise deeply implicated in Labor's dumping of Latham's replacement, Kim Beazley: market research, highlighting Beazley's inability to 'cut through' to voters, was being used internally to destabilise him by the end of 2005. Gartrell himself briefed Beazley on Mitchelmore's latest research on the leader's 'dismal' standing with voters (Jackman 2008: 35, 58). Later, Gartrell tellingly stated that it had been Rudd's replacement of Beazley in December 2006 that marked the start of the trend towards Labor. The implication is that none of the longer-term resources that the party had been developing under Beazley were relevant – a result that Lynch *et al.* would not have predicted. Beazley was an experienced parliamentarian and former senior minister, who had led the opposition to narrow defeat in the 1998 elections and again in 2001. Rudd was untried, a career bureaucrat elected to Parliament only in 1998, where his most senior political role had been foreign affairs spokesman. In fact, Beazley's accumulated experience was regarded in research as a negative, while Rudd's novelty became a campaign asset. Gartrell told the National Press Club: 'our research was telling us that people thought Kevin Rudd was different to the old Labor Party: a new style of Labor leader with an agenda that connected with people'. Labor built its entire campaign messaging including television commercials around introducing this new leader as 'Kevin '07' (Gartrell 2007).

Building the campaign's long-term resources

A critical element of political marketing is its time dimension. Lees-Marshment (2001) sees political marketing as a sequence of activities across the whole electoral cycle; Lynch *et al.* (2006) distinguish between long-term and short-term resources. The practical effect of this for campaigners is that the whole time between elections should be given over to strategic planning and resource development, such as acquiring the organisational skills to research, craft and communicate its message. The Australian examples indicate that party officials are the central players in building the long-term organisational resources of their party.

Young's approach to the 1972 campaign emphasised early planning, professional staffing, maximum possible use of market research and media techniques, expanded fundraising, centralised decision-making and consistent execution – all this in contrast to the 1969 campaign which was 'virtually a last minute effort' (Blewett 1973: 9–10, citing Young's planning memo). When Young was first appointed federal secretary, Labor's secretariat had 'no permanent staff'; he appointed three senior communications professionals and supplemented Labor's long-standing advertising agency with new sources of specialist advice. Young also assembled and, as campaign director led, a nationally coordinated campaign machine via a national campaign committee which included state branches, parliamentary leaders and their staff and agency representatives (Blewett 1973: 10). This was Labor's and indeed Australia's first national campaign structure and it met regularly in the year leading up to the 1972 election. Meanwhile, at the level of the 'party on the ground', 'some Labor stalwarts were aghast at the commercial slickness and fatuity of the "soft-sell" campaign' (Blewett 1973: 14).

Curiously, Lynch *et al.* do not mention financial capacity among the key party resources. Yet given the high cost of new campaign techniques, and the dwindling flow of member subscriptions in the 'catch-all' party model, access to secure funding is an essential party resource. In 1969 Labor had been 'many thousands of dollars' in debt from previous campaign costs (Young 1986: 96). Planning a much more expensive campaign for 1972, Young, along with Whitlam and others, set about raising new funds from unions, businesses, individuals, state and local party branches and – to fund the research survey in 1971 – an unnamed 'group of wealthy Whitlam supporters' (Blewett 1973).

Robb also assembled significant campaign resources for the Liberals' Head Office: in Williams' (1997) account, he hired new staff, including campaign experts from the US; upgraded the IT system and database on marginal seats; began 'overhauling' the party's advertising strategy and replacing its agency, George Patterson, with a bespoke team of creative and strategic professionals; and staffed a unit with special responsibility for marginal seat campaigns. Paying for these new campaign resources represented a significant challenge for Robb and the party organisation. The Federal Secretariat reportedly consumed an annual budget of \$2.5 million, net of one-off election campaign costs. The leadership change to Howard had apparently helped re-ignite enthusiasm among the party's traditional corporate donor base, and the party's bank overdraft was renegotiated. Australian political parties had become eligible in 1984 to receive funding from the taxpayers commensurate to their voting support at the previous election. These funds were paid to state branches, however, and Robb needed to negotiate funding of campaign activities in each state.

As Robb and Young had done, Gartrell set about rebuilding Labor's organisational capabilities in the wake of the 2004 defeat, believing that Labor had been 'badly outgunned' both financially and 'in the way it developed and implemented strategy' (Jackman 2008: 78). In addition to hiring Mitchelmore and UMR, Gartrell appointed a new advertising strategist, Neil Lawrence, and brought in former British Labour politician Alan Milburn as adviser and sounding board. With the assistance of these advisers – Milburn providing copies of Tony Blair's 2005 campaign strategy – Gartrell wrote a 10-point plan for campaign management, which emphasised message discipline, centralised decision-making and close liaison with the parliamentary leader. The 'Kevin '07' theme was launched four months out from the expected campaign, building name recognition of the new leader and enforcing the 'past versus future' positioning (Jackman 2008: 87, 159). On funding, Gartrell as national secretary was the ALP's designated agent to receive the \$22 million in public funding paid after the 2007 election (Australian Electoral Commission 2008; Orr 2010). Labor's campaign was also boosted by significant resources from the trade union movement: its 'Your Rights at Work' campaign, opposing the government's industrial relations legislation, included television advertising, rallies, workplace meetings and 22 full-time union organisers, at a total estimated cost of \$28 million (Wanna 2010).

Deploying short-term resources

The corollary of the emphasis on long-term resourcing is that short-term resources are a less significant 'function of the long term (Lynch *et al.* 2006: 85–86). This insight is borne out in practice by the examples of the three Australian party officials, for whom the election campaign – in Australia, typically of five or six weeks' duration between the issue of writs and polling day – was largely concerned, as Robb suggested, with 'tactical manoeuvring and carrying out plans and procedures developed ... earlier'.

Labor used two electoral cycles to progressively develop its leadership and policy resources before the 1969 and 1972 elections. It built organisational resources, repaid its debt, built a professional team and developed campaign capabilities in the three years – especially, the final 12 months – before the 1972 election. Some 12 months before the election, Young ran a 'mini-campaign' that refined campaign themes and logistics. Four months out, the 'It's Time' theme had been selected and pre-tested, and most of the television commercials – involving a group of celebrities singing the 'It's Time' anthem – had been shot ready for broadcast (Young 1986: 107). Whitlam's policy speech, delivered at the outset of the campaign proper, was described by his speechwriter as 'simply a summary of the work of the previous six years' (Freudenberg 1977: 226).

However, in contrast to Labor's development over two electoral cycles under Whitlam, the Liberals in the 1990s and Labor in the following decade had much less time in which to develop their competitive resources, thanks to leadership instability and policy uncertainty. Robb and Gartrell built organisational capability in less than a single three-year electoral term. Once new leadership (Howard and Rudd, respectively) was in place, policy development proceeded, as we have seen, over a short, intense time frame in 1995–96 and 2006–07, respectively. Once the campaign 'battle' itself was underway, however, both Robb and Gartrell were able to deploy short-term resources effectively, in particular with intense marketing communications activity.

Robb rolled out the '50 or 60' policy announcements that had been agreed at the policy meeting in January (Williams 1997: 99). He created an operational headquarters in three floors of rented office accommodation in Melbourne. He enhanced staff resources with further short-term hires. He embarked on an intense program of television advertising designed to bring previous messaging to a sharp anti-government pitch. He intensified market research including marginal electorate surveys, and used it to rebalance campaign resources such as staff, advertising and direct mail. He prepared carefully for campaign set-pieces such as the policy launch and the leaders' debate.

Gartrell set up campaign headquarters in Sydney in readiness for the campaign and he, too, implemented a previously planned campaign schedule and advertising program. His campaign activities included authorising campaign advertising, arranging preference deals with minor parties and buying advertising. 'We went into those six weeks knowing every single day had to be a good day. No room for error. A gaffe-free zone', he recalled later (Gartrell 2007). Gartrell specialised in exploiting new opportunities for message dissemination during the last three days of the campaign when television advertising is forbidden, including skywriting, SMS texting, distributing DVDs and securing deals to run Labor advertisements on the homepages of popular websites and on the TVs for sale in the RetraVision retail chain (Jackman 2008: 193).

Delivery

Just as political marketing activity begins well before the campaign proper, so it extends long after voting day. Unsuccessful parties must return to the intelligence gathering and product design phases, to refine their offering for the next campaign; successful parties must set about delivering on their promises in government (Lees-Marshment 2001). While it remains unclear just how voters balance past performance with the promise of future gains, political marketing suggests that parties should work after every election to build a sustained relationship with voters over several election cycles, rather than relying for success on a one-shot transactional exchange at a single election.

Having identified political marketing functions performed by these Australian party officials before the elections, it is notable that less than a year after their respective electoral victories, all three of them had resigned. Young and Robb went on to significant parliamentary and ministerial careers; Gartrell remains a prominent social campaigner. None of them remained to assist their newly elected government with the delivery phase of the political marketing sequence. To the extent that the Whitlam, Howard and Rudd governments did deliver on their promises – and the record is somewhat patchy – this did not occur because of any contribution by the party officials who had been involved in winning the election.

Advice for practitioners

Party structures and campaign practices differ in democracies around the world. The campaign management role that in Australia is performed by party officials is typically performed in

US presidential campaigns by personal appointees of the candidate (Plouffe 2009: 24; Institute of Politics 2009) or in British campaigns by a Member of Parliament who is a trusted adviser of the leader (Blair 2010: 3; FT Reporters 2010). In Australia, party officials appear to have stronger institutional autonomy than in Britain: chosen by the party organisation, they are better able to survive differences with the parliamentary leader (for example compare Young 1986: 94–96, and Williams 1997: 57, 275, with Blair 2010: 82).

Yet professionalisation of campaigning has been a global phenomenon, driven by media and marketing revolutions that have transformed campaign management in Australia no less than in the US, Britain and elsewhere (Farrell 1996; Plasser and Plasser 2002). The three cases reported here suggest that party officials can be highly effective political marketers. As party executives and designated ‘campaign directors’, they exercised significant organisational power: they set electoral strategy, engaged market researchers and advertisers, marshalled financial resources including public funding, managed campaign headquarters, recruited staff and volunteers, and coordinated the campaign activities of the party ‘in office’ and the party ‘on the ground’. Their campaign leadership bestowed personal influence on party resourcing across the board, including in policy development and the selection of parliamentary leadership.

Against this, it must be emphasised that they succeeded only as opposition campaigners. Successful opposition campaigns are rare, certainly in Australian politics where there have only been four changes of government at the ballot box in the 16 elections since 1972. Their performance over several years in opposition says nothing about their capacity to meet the political marketing challenge of government since, as we have seen, none of them attempted to do so.

The important point is that campaign managers of all varieties need to be aware of core political marketing concepts and develop expertise in applying them in campaigns. In the absence of formal training programs this can best be acquired through practical ‘on the job’ experience, as indeed was the case with these three examples. Parties seeking to ensure a future supply of campaign expertise should implement career development programs to rotate their officials through a variety of campaign roles and challenges (Mills 2010). This can include subordinate roles in the party organisation, exposure to specific campaign functions, electoral contests at state or local levels, or as volunteers or observers with affiliated parties in foreign countries.

Impact on politics

The impact of political marketing by party officials can be seen most obviously within the party itself. Contrary to the propositions advanced by Lynch *et al.* (2006: 85), party members and local activists do not represent an essential campaign resource. To be sure, there will always be some role for local volunteers, particularly in marginal seats, in doorknocking during the campaign and mobilising voters on election day. Yet a research-driven, capital intensive, nationally centralised style of political marketing places less reliance on bottom-up political expression and activism. Indeed, the centrist strategies arising from research-based marketing communications may serve to reduce levels of engagement and participation by members and activists driven by values or ideology. Thus while membership of Western political parties has been in decline, head offices have grown in size, resources, influence and specialisation.

In particular, the strategic significance of market research bestows organisational stature on whoever in the party controls that research. This can operate at the expense of the members (Smith 2009) and also of elected politicians, whose relative effectiveness and standing is measured by research in stark terms. It may be that in an environment of what has been termed a ‘permanent’ election campaign (Blumenthal 1980), activities across the entire party – by branch

members as well as elected legislators – will be increasingly subjected to the centralising and coordinating role of Head Office. Party officials appear to have been granted – or, perhaps, they have seized – the mandate to make the pursuit of electoral success the overriding mission of the whole party organisation.

This implies a broader impact at the level of the electoral contest. Party officials are effective political marketers regardless of their partisan affiliation or personal political leanings. Of course, party officials may well share the broad values of their party and be personally committed to its success, but their effectiveness as campaign director depends on their professional skills, and they are employed for instrumental rather than ideological purposes: they seek electoral victory. They find political marketing strategies well suited to the task, and these are largely value-free and available to both sides of politics. Indeed, the RBV suggests that parties willing to make the necessary long-term investments in organisational capabilities such as campaigning skills can be expected to achieve more sustained electoral success than those that do not. The electoral contest, then, has shifted decisively beyond the traditional normative drivers of democratic choice – policy and leadership – to turn in part on a contest for campaigning skills, professional staffing and money.

Again, the limits of this transformation need to be noted. The evidence presented here suggests that different stages of the political marketing sequence are the responsibility of different parts of the party. While this requires further research, it seems that party officials – the ‘party as organisation’ – have clear responsibility for gathering market intelligence, building organisational resources and deploying them in the campaign contest. The product design phase is a more collective exercise involving the organisational and legislative components of the party, while delivery appears to be the exclusive preserve of the party ‘in office’. Party members ‘on the ground’ have little role at any stage. Regardless of the attractions of market orientation as an opposition campaign strategy, a gulf may exist between the tasks of winning elections and of governing.

The way forward

The identification of party officials as central to political marketing opens up a challenging agenda of research questions with significant implications for practitioners. Political marketing research needs to include analysis of party officials when considering how campaign strategy and communication is developed. Further studies of party organisations and party officials are needed, including comparative studies across parties and, in particular, comparing parties in government and opposition. Establishing the framework of accountabilities within parties, including the organisational ownership of market research, appears central to understanding the broader process of political marketing. Further research is needed on the process of long-term resource development, expanded to include considerations of financial resources and brand.

Such research could throw light on a critical unresolved political marketing issue. Organisations seeking success in the electoral marketplace must be market oriented, that is, focused on understanding and satisfying the preference of consumers. This is a threshold requirement in the literature, yet its practical implications remain unclear. On the one hand, consumer-voter satisfaction is understood as essential but ultimately subordinate to the goal of the organisation itself (profitability, electoral success); relationship-building and product delivery are vehicles to further organisational success. On the other hand, consumer satisfaction is presented as a desirable end in itself, as it fundamentally considers ‘society’s well-being’ (Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002: 81) or ‘creates value for voter-citizens’ (O’Cass 2009). Where do party officials fall in this debate? The evidence here would place them in the former camp, valuing voter preferences not for altruistic

or normative purposes but for the instrumental purpose of defeating the competition and winning the electoral contest. Moreover, party officials appear to care less for relationship building or policy delivery, seeking instead to generate only just enough voter satisfaction to secure an electoral majority. Further research with practitioner reflection could establish the validity of these observations and consider their implications for political success and democratic health.

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