

E-Diplomacy the Challenge for Ministries of Foreign Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION FORM THE BASIS OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES. Whenever new knowledge and information management tools are introduced, a discussion of their impact on diplomacy usually follows. This was the case with the telegraph, the telephone, and the radio.¹ In the mid-nineteenth century, after receiving the first telegraph, Lord Palmerston is reported to have exclaimed, ‘My God, this is the end of diplomacy!’

Diplomacy survived the telegraph as well as subsequent technological innovations. In fact, each new major technological device has prompted reactions similar to Lord Palmerston’s. The introduction of computers, the Internet, and other tools described collectively as information and communication technologies (ICT), was no different. The advent of ICT prompted academics, diplomats, journalists, and the general public to deliberate on the nature of possible changes to diplomacy. Diplomacy will survive. However, it remains important to explore the scope and nature of the impact of ICT/Internet on diplomacy, especially with regard to the functioning of foreign ministries.

¹ For more information about the influence of technology on diplomacy in history, please consult: K. Hamilton and R. Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 22–50; and M.S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919*, London, Longman, 1993, pp. 110–19.

Methodology

This chapter tells a story about the use of computers and the Internet in diplomacy. It also aims to bridge the existing gap between practice and theory. The lack of communication between practitioners and researchers has had an increasingly crippling effect in the field of diplomacy.² In today's fast-changing world, well-grounded explanations and sound theories are crucial. However, the speed of modern life leaves practitioners with little time to reflect and to position their efforts within a broader context. This is where theory is needed: theories should elucidate and, possibly, predict.

Practitioners are often discouraged from consulting academic writings because of specialized terminology, complex explanations, and a lack of relevance to practical problems. While the complexity of theories often reflects reality, in some cases the use of specialized terminology is merely a 'turf protection mechanism'.

This chapter aims to bridge the gap between practice and theory. First, it anchors its narrative within a diplomat's daily routine, from early morning to late evening. Second, it divides the coverage of each daily sequence (or activity) into two parts. The first part, entitled STORY, describes the work of a fictitious diplomat named Ana Gabel. After the story section, the section entitled COMMENTS provides reflections on the events of the story, some of them grounded in theory.

The story of Ana Gabel presents a sequence of Ana's activities during a busy working day and depicts a number of situations that use ICT/Internet in diplomatic activities. The storyline combines elements of routine and crisis diplomacy. The crisis elements bring some tacit and discrete forms of diplomacy into sharper focus. Crises often trigger retrospection and reform, in which the trappings of day-to-day routine and inertia are displaced and real problems and issues come to the fore.

In the story, Ana has to deal with an environmental emergency. After an accident at a huge oil storage depot in a neighboring country, oil spilled into a major international river creates a risk to five countries

² Paul Meerts focuses on the relationships between practitioners (diplomats), academics, and trainers in the field of international negotiations. The lack of communication between these three groups is conditioned by both different interests and perceptions. For more information, please consult: Paul Meerts, 'International Negotiation Learning Process; Practitioners, Academics, Trainers: The Chicken and The Egg', *Pin Points Newsletter*, International Institute for Applied System Analysis, no. 26, 2006, p. 7.

downstream. Ana's country will be the first polluted by the oil slick. Major risks to water-supply systems, agriculture, and the overall ecosystem require urgent regional action.

Terminology

Various adjectives and prefixes are used to describe Internet-related developments; these include 'cyber-', 'virtual', 'e-', and 'digital'. Their origins can be traced back to the 1990s. Their use also implies different social, economic, and political influences on the development of the Internet. For example, both 'cyber-' and 'virtual' were used by early Internet communities, mainly academics and Internet pioneers, to highlight the novelty of the Internet and the emergence of a 'brave new world'. The prefix 'e-' is usually associated with e-commerce and the commercialization of the Internet in the late 1990s. In the policy sphere, the European Union started to use the prefix 'e-' in order to describe various ICT/Internet-related policies such as e-science and e-health. 'Digital' came into use primarily in technical fields. It also received prominence in the context of the 'digital divide' discussion.

In the international arena, the prefix 'cyber-' is rarely used, with the exception of cyber-crime found in the title of the Council of Europe's 'Convention on Cyber-crime'. The term 'virtual' is also rarely used in international negotiations. The prefix 'e-', as used in the international scene, appears extensively in the final documents of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in order to describe various fields including e-health, e-science, and e-learning.³ The prefix 'e-' has been particularly favoured by the European Union.

In this paper the prefix 'e-' is used in order to describe the e-diplomat. 'Virtual' describes the 'virtual embassy'. The main reason for the latter usage is to highlight the non-physical nature of such an embassy.⁴

³ In the WSIS preparatory process, the prefix 'e-' was introduced at the European regional preparatory meeting in Bucharest (used 18 times in the final document). After that, Asian, American, and Western Asian countries fully adopted this prefix and used it more than 10 times in the WSIS regional conferences. The prefix 'e-' was clearly established as the main means to describe Internet-related social, economic, and cultural developments.

⁴ 'Virtual' and 'e-' were also used to describe the ICT-driven changes in diplomacy and diplomatic techniques, including virtual diplomacy, e-embassy, and virtual consulates.

Who is Ana Gabel?

Ana, in her mid-30s, is a professional diplomat in charge of environmental affairs. At university, she participated in experimental art projects, round tables on philosophy, social activist projects, and spent time with anarchist groups. Most of her university friends were surprised when Ana joined the diplomatic service. They were very sceptical of government activities and viewed diplomacy as a formal, elitist profession.

Ana's friends from her student days are now active in environmental matters as members of NGOs and civil society groups. She meets them often and tries to explain that diplomacy involves more than the procedural rituals that they perceive as unnecessary and a waste of time. Ana's student experiences have helped her to deal with the multistakeholder environmental scene. She has also found environmental diplomacy to involve a particular blend of her profession (diplomacy) and her activist drive (the environment).

Although Ana is always busy, she decided to invest some of her time in developing ICT/Internet skills. The senior staff members in the Ministry's ICT department were thrilled. Usually, diplomats are sceptical about the use of ICT and the Internet. Ana became their champion and their mutual interest proved to be a good basis for cooperation.

9:00. AFTER A QUIET WEEKEND...A VERY BUSY MONDAY

Story

After a pleasant and relaxing weekend, Ana is back in the office. Monday is not her favorite day. She is startled by a telephone call. A major oil accident posing a huge environmental hazard has just taken place, a situation calling for crisis management. Ana has to travel to the capital of the neighboring country immediately to prepare a regional response. Many thoughts are running through her mind. Where should she start? What documents should she bring? What policy interests will be involved? Does she have all the information she will need? How should she consult the experts? How should she handle the media?

It is difficult to predict the course of the events. Ana needs extensive information to support various possible developments. As she is not sure of access to the Internet from the meeting venue, her first step is to retrieve all the documents and other materials she may need from the ministry's Intranet. Fortunately, a few weeks ago, the ICT department

replaced a hard-to-use search engine with a simple Google-style search tool. What a relief! Nevertheless, her search results in a long list of documents, too many to consult individually during tense meetings. Still, it is better than nothing. She downloads the documents to her notebook.

Another idea! A few months ago, colleagues from the ICT department used her as a guinea pig in the development of a Lessons Learned database. They helped her to create a number of 'lessons learned' sets. One was similar to the current oil spill crisis. She downloads this material.

Comments

TYPES OF INFORMATION USED IN DIPLOMACY

Adequate ICT solutions to the access of information reflect the management of three types of information in diplomacy: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured information.

Structured information has a clear logical structure and is used in consular activities, in administrative support for diplomatic activities, and in archive collections. Typical applications involving structured data are address databases, mailing databases, and library databases.⁵ Semi-structured information and documents dominate diplomatic activities. Most diplomatic documents contain descriptors, such as title, date, type, and keywords, which can be stored within a database. The texts of diplomatic documents can be decompiled through self-sufficient textual elements, such as paragraphs or articles. For example, international treaties can be decompiled into smaller structures. Unstructured information has no consistent structure; it often consists of free narrative-based texts.

These three types of information require different information tools to exploit them. Structured data can be managed through databases and semi-structured data through hypertext techniques.⁶ Unstructured data can, in principle, be managed through expert systems technology. Even

⁵ The address database is a good example of an application that supports structured data. Each record within an address database contains data with the same structure: name, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address.

⁶ Hypertext is a non-sequential way of presenting information, where the author designs a network of ideas, concepts, and information. Ted Nelson coined the term hypertext in 1967 because he believed that a text system should reflect the hyperspace of concepts implied in the text. Hypertext is the conceptual basis of the World Wide Web, today's dominant Internet service, implemented through the hypertext mark-up language (HTML).

in the case of the existence of proper tools, however, the implementation of proper information management systems is a major task that requires changes in operational procedures and professional culture.

The magnitude of the challenge was illustrated by the post-9/11 analysis of the United States security sector's information management systems. FBI director, Robert Mueller, said about his agency's information management system: 'It would have been very nice if at some point in time I could say that you put into our computer system a request for anything relating to flight schools, for instance, and have every report in the last 10 years that had been done that mentions flight schools or flight training and the like kicked out. We do not have that capability now. We have to have that capability. And, beyond that, we ought to have the artificial intelligence that...doesn't require us to query it, but automatically looks at those patterns. And that's the type of technology we need to enhance our analytical capability.'⁷

IMPORTANCE OF ARCHIVES FOR DIPLOMATIC SERVICES

Today, archives are known by various terms, including 'databases' and 'document repositories'. Having adequate and accessible archives is a key precondition for the proper functioning of a ministry of foreign affairs.⁸ Archives are the main container of institutional memory. Some researchers believe that ICTs and the Internet have brought about the 'dark age' for archives.⁹ For example, documents typed on computers and saved on local discs usually remain unarchived. It is not clear what materials and written records will be preserved for future generations. Without proper archiving strategies, our times may leave fewer material traces than previous ones, which used more primitive communication methods including stone, papyrus and parchment. Accessing needed information within diplomatic archives remains the primary challenge of a diplomat, despite technological advances.

⁷ See: www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,52853,00.html.

⁸ Historians usually point to the need for archives and the organized storage of diplomatic documents as the main reason for the establishment of the first ministries of foreign affairs.

⁹ CBS News describes the risk of disappearing records as 'A Digital Dark Age'; Consult: 'Coming Soon: A Digital Dark Age'; available at www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/21/tech/main537308.shtml.

11:00—THE MEETING BEGINS...

Story

After a short flight, Ana is welcomed at the airport by Victor, chargé d'affaires *ad interim* in their embassy. Ana and Victor arrive at the conference center. Ana meets colleagues from other countries including professional diplomats and environmental specialists. As usual in environmental negotiations, inter-professional communication will be one of the main challenges. Ana has many questions and dilemmas. Will we be able to deliver to the high public expectations back home? Can we agree about rapid and coordinated action avoiding prolonged negotiations? Can we avoid a 'zero-sum' approach and find a real win-win solution, as this emergency requires?

Ana needs to connect to the Internet to receive timely instructions from the Ministry and to monitor the first reaction of political and public opinion at home. It would also be helpful to consult the research and academic profiles of a few of the negotiators. Unfortunately, Ana does not have wireless access. Victor proves to be a real asset here. He sets up access via his mobile phone and establishes a Bluetooth connection between his notebook computer and Ana's, creating a small network. However, the security of communication via a public network is still an issue to consider.

Comments

USE OF NOTEBOOKS AND THE INTERNET IN CONFERENCE ROOMS

Internet access is becoming a common facility at many UN meetings. The main breakthrough occurred with the introduction of wireless technology (wi-fi).¹⁰ An evolution in Internet access was observed during the WSIS process between 2002 and 2005. At the beginning of the WSIS process in 2002, wi-fi was a recent technological innovation used by participants from technically advanced countries and only in specially designated areas. At the end of the WSIS process (2005), wi-fi had become a mainstream tool for many participants.

Wi-fi access introduced many developments to traditional conference

¹⁰ 'Wi-Fi' is the underlying standard which is used for wireless communication by computers, cameras, TV-sets, and other digital devices.

diplomacy. It facilitated the participation of an increased number of civil society and business sector representatives at the WSIS meetings. Through wi-fi, they managed to be present at the WSIS meetings and continue their regular work through the Internet. For diplomats, a wi-fi connection provided constant contact with their ministries of foreign affairs and other government departments involved in the negotiations. In some cases, a wi-fi network of notebooks enabled the coordination of initiatives among representatives physically present in the conference room. Computer exchange complemented and sometimes replaced the traditional ambience of diplomatic meetings involving short chats, *tête-à-tête* exchanges, and corridor diplomacy. Physical movements can reveal the dynamics of negotiations or even be part of diplomatic signaling. This aspect of *in situ* diplomatic negotiations will change with the use of wi-fi.

Some small states, and others, created virtual wi-fi based networks in the conference room and were able to react quickly to proposals, amendments, and other interventions proposed at meetings without leaving their computers.¹¹ It was an effective way of coordinating national positions in multilateral negotiations.

The wi-fi connection also provided real-time reporting from diplomatic meetings. Participants, especially those from civil society, commented on developments in the conference room via blog, chat, and other Internet-based facilities.

SECURITY OF COMMUNICATION

Security is an important issue in the use of ICT/Internet in diplomacy. However, the traditional image of secretiveness of diplomatic services can overemphasize problems of security. The problem of information systems security requires a well-balanced approach. An analysis of United States diplomatic practices published in the document, *Equipped for the Future*, suggests that the State Department should exchange its current ICT policy of 'risk avoidance with one of risk management. The atmosphere at State has to change from information policing to information providing. The State Department must accept the fact that in an information-

¹¹ Small island states created virtual networks during the WSIS negotiations, helping them to organize timely responses to new initiatives in the negotiations. They were also able to coordinate interventions and procedural moves.

intensive environment, not having access to information can be riskier than losing control over a particular piece of information.¹²

11:30—THE FIRST PROBLEM...

Story

Ana recalls Murphy's Law: 'Anything that can go wrong, will.' The history of this region provides ample reason for thinking like this. She detects the first signals of diplomatic manoeuvring. Some countries wish to play a leading role in the environmental cleaning efforts and compete for a seat in the 'Ad Hoc Environmental Committee'. Who will host the Committee? Ana cannot change the negotiation dynamics. She has to play the game, which needs new tactics. Given the effects of the oil spill, her country should host the Committee. For this, she has to lobby hard. How can she strengthen her cause? How far can she go in lobbying?

She remembers that some competing countries have not signed and ratified basic environmental protection treaties, but she does not have the relevant facts at hand. The ministry's database will help. She searches for the treaties ratified by her country and not ratified by the other countries. The result is both useful and interesting.

One country pushes aggressively to host the committee. She notices uneasiness around the table. This is the right moment. She brings up the discrepancy between that country's ambition to host the Committee and their weak environmental credentials, including the fact that they are not party to the most important environmental conventions. Ana carries the room with her.

Comments

SEARCH AND DATA-MINING

Today, most people associate searching the Internet with Google. However, Google has its limitations, especially when it comes to structured data. Our story shows one example involving the highly structured data of international conventions. Information about international conventions,

¹² *Equipped for the Future, Managing US Foreign Affairs in the 21st Century*, The Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington, DC, 1998, p. 23.

including texts, signatures, and ratifications, are generally available on the Internet. However, the full diplomatic and political usefulness of locating information is attained only through the capability of advanced searches using various logical operators. In Ana's case, for example, the crucial information was a list of all environmental conventions signed by Ana's country and not signed by other countries. This illustrates how technology can provide value-added elements.

Techniques for extracting data from vast collections are called *data-mining*. The collation of information regarding UN voting patterns is an example of using data-mining techniques in diplomacy. The US diplomatic service gathers and processes voting data from the UN to discover the voting patterns of countries of particular interest to the United States. Thus, interesting information derived from data-mining can be used for further diplomatic activities.

12:30—COORDINATION WITH OTHER COUNTRIES...

Story

Although Ana has a broad negotiating mandate, she is aware of numerous international policy constraints. Her country is a member of the European Union, which has detailed environmental regulations. Whatever she negotiates at this meeting must be in accordance both with European Union and broader international regulations. The negotiations have raised the controversy about the application of the 'polluter pays' principle. She needs to consult with the European Commission and other member states of the European Union. Some of them are present in the negotiation room, but most are not. She uses a simple e-diplomacy tool—the mailing list.

Comments

MAILING LIST FOR INTER-GOVERNMENTAL DIPLOMATIC COORDINATION
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION¹³

The European Union (EU) uses COREU ('correspondence EU') for coordination among member states and their diplomatic services. 'Coreus'

¹³ These comments are based on a description provided by Ambassador Victor Camilleri, Malta's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York.

are generated by the Commission, the EU Secretariat, the Presidency, or individual member states, and are circulated among all EU members through a central point in the EU secretariat. The circulation system is rather well structured—the original coreu message goes to one (or two) points in each member state (usually the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and then it becomes the responsibility of each member state to diffuse each coreu internally according to its own procedures. The system is crypto-protected.

In diplomatic centers, such as New York, EU permanent missions have mailing lists for the coordination of their activities. The EU mailing list in New York is called CIREU. The emails are generated by the Presidency, the Secretariat, or individual member states, and circulated to all missions through the EU Secretariat. Each mission then applies its own internal procedures. This system is not crypto-protected.

Both the COREU and the CIREU systems, while not directly interactive, permit participants to react to developments and to each other in a coordinated way. Any member wishing to send a coreu in response to another coreu is free to do so. Sometimes a ‘silence’ procedure is applied, setting a deadline for responses, e.g. a draft paper on which members are requested to comment.

MAILING LISTS

Mailing lists are often used for communication in international circles. They were particularly important during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process. Some mailing lists, such as the Internet governance list, became focal points for shaping views on Internet governance issues. Although civil society made the majority of postings, those public lists were carefully followed by all stakeholders, including diplomats and governments. Sometimes mailing lists are helpful in testing new ideas and diplomatic signaling.

A mailing list was also the official exchange tool of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG). The WGIG involved four physical meetings, held in November 2004, February 2005, April 2005, and May 2005. Between these meetings, the 40 members relied on a mailing list for ongoing discussions. Thousands of messages were exchanged between regular meetings. The multistakeholder composition of the Working Group (diplomats, business people, NGO representatives, academics) was also reflected in the utilization of the mailing list. Diplomats were very reluctant to use the mailing list as a medium of communication,

confirming the in-built professional caution to put matters in writing that might eventually create an official commitment.

13:00—LUNCH BREAK...TIME FOR INFORMAL LOBBYING

Story

Lunch is a good time for lobbying. The organizers anticipated this and provided a buffet lunch. The seating order for a traditional lunch would have required delicate diplomatic manoeuvring. Ana approaches a colleague from a country that is still undecided about hosting the committee. She comes up with a good opening, remembering that his country is actively lobbying for a top-level position in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Ana proposes some horse-trading.

However, Ana does not know whether her ministry has already pledged support for some other candidate. She uses her personal digital assistant (PDA) that contains a constantly updated candidature database. Good news! Her country has not yet committed support to any candidate. She can offer a swap. She wishes the ambassador were present. Making such a decision is risky, but she has to act. Her colleague accepts this offer. A key player in the negotiations is now on Ana's side.

Comments

CANDIDATURE DIPLOMACY

'Candidature diplomacy' puts pressure on diplomatic services, especially in the main centers of multilateral diplomacy (New York, Geneva) where most 'candidature swapping' takes place. Lobbying for candidates involves many aspects, including a country's prestige, the personalities involved, and an extension of national political dynamics.¹⁴

In the case of dozens of parallel candidatures, a considerable management burden rests on diplomatic services, especially those of small countries. Since every vote counts towards an election in the UN and other international bodies, every country is involved in this process.

¹⁴ The higher the level of a post in an international organization, the more political the candidature process becomes. Lobbying is often a part of national political calculations (e.g., party in power, positioning of former prominent leaders of the country).

- coordination of activities: lobbying takes place simultaneously through different channels; New York and Geneva, bilateral missions, and direct contacts between ministers and senior officials. How does a country ensure that it does not offer support to several candidates for one post? This can be assured through the use of a candidature database.
- coordination of swapping support: hundreds of parallel candidatures for international posts, involving lobbying for the support of almost 200 states, makes this a complex exercise; for government officials, it is important to have access to all the data to determine which support can be swapped.

13.30—THE MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE...

Story

During lunch, Ana receives an SMS from the capital requesting support in drafting the Minister's statement for a press conference scheduled at 15:00. This places an extra burden on her time as she is already busy lobbying; technology provides her the means to multitask and call upon other resources.

Ana logs on to the Ministry's Intranet. Using the Ministry's Skype-based system, she contacts Zoe, her predecessor in the environmental department, currently based at the Embassy in Athens. Ana seeks her assistance in drafting the Minister's statement. Both are advanced users of Mindmapping software, enabling them to open up a drafting space to brainstorm on key elements for the press conference. Ana includes the latest policy information, of which her predecessor is unaware, including their country's candidature to host the Environmental Committee. As Ana is called away, Zoe completes the draft for the Minister's press conference before 15:00.

Ana recalls the considerable public interest in the environmental crisis and has an idea! She is a great believer in blogging and other Web 2.0 Internet tools. She remembers Victor's discussion with a lecturer on public diplomacy about the relevance of the Internet in shaping public opinion. His main point was that Internet-based conversations (many-to-many) are gradually superseding the traditional media broadcasting approach (one-to-many).

Ana asks Victor to use his blogging skills to disseminate positive information about the environmental negotiations through Internet-based communities and professional circles. Victor is in a difficult situation. He is an excellent blogger, but a few years ago he almost lost his job when his ambassador was warned that he was participating in a politically controversial blog popular in the receiving state. Strictly speaking, he had broken Article 41 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations that specifies that diplomats should respect the laws and regulations of the receiving state and avoid interference in the internal affairs of the receiving state. Fortunately, this participation went unnoticed by the receiving state and the incident resulted only in a reprimand from his ambassador.

Ana, who has already taken a few risky steps, decides to accept responsibility for Victor's blogging. They now have to create an appropriate message. It cannot be a standard press release, as nobody in the 'blogosphere' would take this seriously. An informal message is drafted, clearly including substantive information from the negotiation process. The environmental community, NGOs, academia and civil society, maintain an interest and an open 'radar' when it comes to information on key negotiations. The result: numerous replies are posted within a matter of minutes. The blog message contributes to shaping public opinion and creating a positive spin on the environmental negotiations.

Comments

INTEGRATED DIPLOMATIC SYSTEM (MINISTRY AND MISSIONS)

Communication can be optimized through technology. In our story, Zoe moved to a particular embassy due to personal reasons. Her broad experience and knowledge of the environmental field could have been lost. Through the use of ICT, Zoe's knowledge and skills were made available when they were most needed (crisis management). With an integrated diplomatic system, all talents, knowledge, and experience can be activated wherever they are located.

DOCUMENT DRAFTING

Ministries of foreign affairs operate through preparing internal documents, including reports, drafts, internal instructions, and various administrative documents. The management of documents has been substantially

influenced by the development of ICT/Internet, which can be observed by comparing the process of drafting in ministries of foreign affairs twenty years ago with the current process. Twenty years ago, the preparation of any document required an elaborate process. Diplomats would usually handwrite the text and send it to a typist, who would send the first typed version to a superior for comments. The revised version was re-typed and the document gradually went up the hierarchical ladder until the responsible person signed it.

The complexity of the process and the need for the involvement of a typist and other collaborators created a special environment for drafting documents. From the diplomat, it required more concentration, involvement, and responsibility than writing, for example, an e-mail. A typed document had an element of 'finality'. With the exception of the corrections of minor mistakes, any change required a complete retyping of the document. This method of drafting documents also determined organizational structure, the need for personnel, workflow procedures, and control and feedback mechanisms.

Computers have changed the way documents are drafted by making changes simple. What may have required time-consuming retyping of an entire document in the past now demands only a short time using word processing software. The ease of making changes, allowing greater flexibility, can lead to side-effects, such as a lack of attention in drafting and a lack of focus on details.

One potential disadvantage in the electronic preparation of documents is a limitation in the preservation of a document's intermediate versions. Traditional diplomacy archives used to contain all versions of documents, from the first draft prepared by a desk officer to its final version. As now only the final version is kept, it is possible that the wealth of knowledge and information gained in the drafting process may be lost.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public diplomacy is probably as old as diplomacy. Since the early days of the profession, diplomats have promoted the image of their countries. Instead of public diplomacy, however, this was called propaganda and foreign cultural relations. What is new today in public diplomacy?¹⁵

¹⁵ For a comprehensive introduction to public diplomacy, see: Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, London, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2005.

First, with globalization and the widespread use of the Internet, images and appearances have attained a growing importance in international relations. Joseph S. Nye described this as a transition from 'hard power' to 'soft power', which is mainly understood as power over opinion.

Second, increasingly the distinction is blurred between a domestic and a foreign audience in public affairs. Traditionally, diplomatic services had different approaches in cultivating a domestic public and an international public. Since the introduction of the CNN and other global media, both domestic and international audiences are addressed simultaneously.

Third, the Internet and, in particular, 'Web 2.0', has demanded new patterns of communication. Instead of a one-to-many broadcasting approach, the Internet uses a many-to-many conversation approach.¹⁶ Awareness of this difference has been particularly relevant with the introduction of 'Web 2.0' and the growing relevance of blogs. Bloggers have become important shapers of public opinion. For our story, the most important development is the use of blogs in public diplomacy. A few recent cases demonstrate some potential problems in the use of blogs by diplomats and negotiators. The BBC recently reported that Jan Pronk's blog¹⁷ provoked the Sudanese government to expel Pronk swiftly.¹⁸ Pronk's blog, which criticized the Sudanese government policy in Darfur, presented some sensitive diplomatic observations normally dispatched in an encoded format to headquarters or a national capital. In another case reported by BBC, Croatian diplomat Vibor Kalodjera was recalled to his capital due to blog postings which included comments on the US presidential campaign. Finally, the Syrian Ambassador in Washington, Imad Moustapha, is reported to have used a blog as a method to bypass political isolation in Washington.

The use of the Internet in public diplomacy raises many issues. How to adapt to the informality of the Internet? How to train diplomats to communicate through the Internet? Would informal Internet commu-

¹⁶ A recent survey by *The Economist* puts the media challenges of 'Web 2.0' in a broader context: 'As with the media industry revolution of 1448, the wider implications for society will become visible gradually over a period of decades. With participatory media, the boundaries between audiences and creators become blurred and often invisible?... One-to-many 'lectures' (i.e. from media companies to their audiences) are transformed into 'conversations' among 'the people formerly known as the audience' ('Among the Audience, Survey of new media,' 22 April 2006, p. 4).

¹⁷ See www.janpronk.nl/index120.html.

¹⁸ 'Blogs—the new diplomacy?' Consult: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6083632.stm.

nication go beyond the limits of diplomatic communication specified in the Vienna Convention? Ministries' guidelines on communication need adjustment to exploit the communication opportunities and challenges coming from new media.

14.30—COMPOSITION OF THE SECRETARIAT AND OTHER DETAILS...

Story

Diplomatic negotiations are illustrative proof of the saying that the 'devil is in the details'. Ana's diplomatic victory is evident, but now she should make sure that it is not lost in details. The first issue is to negotiate the composition of the secretariat of the future Environmental Committee. This will involve expenditures, particularly relevant because of constant budget cuts. Ana receives an indication from her capital of the maximum budget she can commit for the Secretariat. Other countries have also made financial pledges. She now has to assign sums to various positions and activities in the Secretariat. Her intention is to staff the secretariat with experts, with a minimal administrative structure. In order to negotiate various scenarios, she uses an Excel table. Formulas help her to see the financial effect of each choice.

The next step is to decide the terms of reference for the Committee. Although she has a solid background in environmental issues, oil pollution is new to her. She has to start with understanding the meaning of some core concepts. Her first step is to consult Wikipedia. It is a valuable source, but she is also aware of its limitations.¹⁹ The next step is to consult a small online environmental community back home. She has developed a good rapport with them and she is accepted as a peer. Victor manages to gather this community on Skype so that they can have a quick chat. All open technical issues are clarified. She can finalize her proposal.

Comments

THE DIPLOMAT AS MANAGER AND ADMINISTRATOR

As administrative and support staff are reduced, diplomats, especially in small missions, increasingly deal with managerial and administrative

¹⁹ The main limitation is the reliability of information found in Wikipedia. It does not have the editing and quality control procedures utilized by a printed encyclopedia such as Britannica.

tasks, including human resources, financial matters, computer networks, and logistical issues.²⁰ Surveys of diplomatic training courses show little management training. Courses on time management, human resource management, drafting, reporting, managing information systems and managing a small diplomatic mission may help to address this perceived need.

GENERALISTS VS SPECIALISTS

David D. Newsom stated: 'For most of the Twentieth Century, the international diplomatic agenda has consisted of questions of political and economic relations between nation-states—the traditional subjects of diplomacy. After the Second World War, new diplomatic issues arose, spurred by the technical advances in nuclear energy and electronics.'²¹

The diplomatic agenda is increasingly multidisciplinary. Diplomats need specialized knowledge in areas such as trade, arms control, the environment, and the governance of the Internet. Internet tools can be particularly useful in building and maintaining networks with groups and professional communities that may be important partners in multilateral diplomatic negotiations.

MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIPLOMACY

The introduction of new actors is one of the characteristics of modern diplomacy. The availability of the Internet and ICT has directly influenced the shape of the current international scene. For many non-state actors, mainly NGOs, the Internet is a tool that enables them to participate actively in international relations. They can organize international campaigns, lobby for treaties, and advocate for policies, through the intensive use of websites, discussion groups, and e-mail.²²

²⁰ Some activities, such as managing human resources, were performed by diplomats in the past as well. They had to deal with both superiors and subordinates, which involved necessary motivation, delegation of tasks, and planning of human resources. Currently, those tasks are often placed under a management title. Numerous techniques and tools are available for human resource management, yet management techniques cannot replace human judgement and intuition!

²¹ David D. Newsom, 'The New Diplomatic Agenda: Are Governments Ready?', *International Affairs*, January 1989, p. 29.

²² One of the frequently quoted examples is the negotiation of the Mine Ban Treaty. The initiator of the signing of the Treaty, Jody Williams, who received the 1997 Nobel Prize, indicated that one of her main tools for starting the campaign was the Internet.

Multistakeholderism is particularly noticeable in diplomatic negotiations of highly technical issues such as the environment and Internet governance. Many non-state actors have high levels of expertise and they have become important partners to diplomats. Even if diplomats invest more time to acquire the necessary knowledge, they will still remain novices in the field. It is important for them to develop strong cooperative partnerships with various professional and knowledge communities. Those communities can be found in NGOs, civil society, academic, and research institutions. Multistakeholder diplomacy is becoming an integral part of diplomatic practice.²³

15.30—POINT OF ORDER...

Story

Ana thinks that the negotiations are steadily moving forward. Still, her experience tells her to expect surprises at any time. Suddenly, the representative of the opposing side—competing to host future committees—proposes that the host of the Executive Committee should cover all expenses, and calls for a vote on this point. This would far exceed the funds allocated by Ana's ministry of finance. Ana knows that this vote may get approval because the other countries involved would not object to putting the financial burden on Ana's country to save funds. Ana needs a procedural tool to block this move.

She remembers that a Point of Order can be used in such a situation, but she is not completely sure of its details and needs to look it up. However, she does not have any book or manual nearby. Now she realizes the advantage of online learning: she still remembers the lively debate about the 'Swiss Army Knife of Multilateral Diplomacy', with a one-page presentation of the key techniques of multilateral diplomacy. Ana finds the map in the learning space and reads about how to use a Point of Order. Ana makes the Point of Order to stop the vote on financial aspects and suggest additional negotiations in order to reach a consensus. The negotiators support Ana's proposal.

Ana needs to close the financial chapter. In order to do this, she needs

²³ For a more detailed elaboration of the concept and examples of multistakeholder diplomacy, see Kurbalija and Katrandjiev, eds, *Multistakeholder Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities*, Diplo, 2006.

to send a few e-mails. One is 'internal', for her ministry of finance. The other two e-mails should be sent to two diplomats from other countries. She needs to suggest a few solutions for financial support for the Committee. E-mail provides a good balance between the informality of face-to-face chat and the high formality of an official diplomatic note. However, e-mail is not without risks. Last year she sent a very informal e-mail to a diplomat colleague, which almost led to a diplomatic crisis. Ana has learnt to draft her e-mail messages more carefully.

Comments

INFORMATION GLUT AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Diplomats have to deal with an information glut. In order to preserve their mental and creative potential, they need to externalize unnecessary information. This can be done through storing such materials in an easily accessible format, such as graphical presentations, and accessing this information when needed.

USE OF E-MAIL IN DIPLOMACY

Electronic mail (e-mail) is the most widely used Internet application for both private and professional communication. The use of e-mail in diplomacy can be divided into two areas: internal communication within a ministry and external communication with other institutions and officials abroad and within the country. The usage of these two types of e-mail requires different working procedures, security protection, archiving, and registration.²⁴

Like all communication media, e-mail influences the message, as is indicated in the famous McLuhan adage, 'the medium is the message'. The medium influences the way institutions function. In this respect, e-mail is similar to previous communication facilities. For example, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the introduction of the telegraph centralized diplomacy, with the result that diplomats in missions had less flexibility in their operations. They were 'on the other side of the wire'. The telegraph also influenced the bureaucratization of diplomacy and the

²⁴ For more information consult Baldi, Gelbstein and Kurbalija, *Appropriate Use: Guidelines and Best Practices for E-mail and Other Internet Services*, Diplo, 2003.

introduction of hierarchical structures.²⁵ In its initial phases, the telegraph was very expensive. It forced diplomats to write very concise messages.

A number of elements of e-mail communication may 'influence the message' in diplomacy.

- E-mail is asynchronous. Unlike spoken conversation, we do not have to reply immediately. It introduces a possible pause—not often used—that gives an individual time to reflect before responding.
- E-mail removes many elements of direct communication that are important in diplomacy. Body language, eye contact, the nuances of pitch and stress are lost. This dehumanization has both negative and positive results. According to David Maister, this aspect of e-mail communication 'promotes the importance of reason and logic, and reduces bias due to gender, racial or national background, or appearance. It is profoundly democratic'. However, e-mail can create misunderstandings in communication and potentially escalate minor conflicts. An issue that can easily be resolved in direct communication can become a major cause of conflict in e-mail communication.
- E-mail preserves a written record of communication.

OFFICIALITY OF E-MAIL

E-mail is considered a form of official communication. In the business sector, e-mail has triggered several high-profile lawsuits in the United States. In diplomacy, only one case of legal relevance has occurred regarding a clearly stated official e-mail communication. In early 2002, a suspected hacker intercepted e-mail sent by the EU-representative in Ankara, and leaked it to the press. The content of this e-mail might have seriously endangered the already tense relations between the EU and Turkey. The EU demanded action from Turkish authorities in order to protect its representative's correspondence according to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Ultimately, e-mails sent by diplomats can commit their country. One of the main challenges in keeping e-mail communication official is its use for both private and professional communication. For example, the same

²⁵ 'The cost, secrecy, and aura of importance surrounding telegrams made foreign policy officials hesitant to process them to lower-ranking bureaucrats', in David Paul Nicles, *Under the Wire: How the Telegraph Changed Diplomacy*, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 35.

application can be used for informal discussion on family arrangements for the evening and for an official exchange. Diplomats can easily slip from informal exchange into something that can commit their country.

DENIABILITY AND E-MAIL

Prestige is an important part of diplomacy. Diplomats represent their country, and any failure on their part can be extended from the person to the country. This is one reason why diplomacy is seen as a risk-avoiding profession. Even when risks have to be taken, diplomacy has created mechanisms to help a diplomat retreat gracefully. For example, diplomatic ambiguities can give a diplomat a way to retreat from possible adverse repercussions. In many diplomatic negotiations, 'face-saving' is considered an essential part of a final deal. Ultimately, diplomats have to deliver the result of their work to a domestic constituency. Deniability is deeply entrenched in diplomatic communication.

In e-mail communication, deniability is both difficult and complex. First, the informal nature of e-mail exposes diplomats to unexpected interpretations of messages. The typical way of writing e-mail does not involve careful drafting or the consideration of possible interpretations and the use of a message in other contexts. This risk is multiplied because e-mail can be easily forwarded and disseminated to numerous recipients, limiting the scope for deniability when compared with traditional diplomatic communication. Second, e-mail introduces immediacy into communication. It is expected that a reply should be sent in a matter of days, if not hours. The delayed response, a useful tool in times of slower diplomatic communication, is difficult with e-mail communication. However, some room for deniability still exists, mainly related to technical features of e-mail. These features include undelivered messages and the deletion of messages by spam filters. Unlike diplomatic notes, e-mail may disappear and fail to reach the final destination for numerous technical reasons.

E-MAIL AND DIPLOMATIC SIGNALING

The Internet has caused another change in diplomatic communication. In the past, a clear distinction was made between various types of communication. A spectrum existed, on one side of which one found official written communication and, on the other side, informal, mainly

verbal, communication. Some mixed forms occurred, with such tools as 'non-papers'.²⁶ The spectrum of communication options has had an important effect on diplomatic activities. The choice of a particular form was part of diplomatic signaling. Certain ways of communication helped verify the intentions of other sides in negotiations, helped create coalitions, and aided in other diplomatic, tactical moves. Although highly formal communication through diplomatic letters and notes remains in use, e-mail is increasingly blurring the distinction between various types of communication.

E-MAIL AND THE PRESERVATION OF INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

One of the problems with e-mail is that it is not centrally archived (if it is archived at all!). In most cases, each user manages his or her e-mail, deciding on what should be archived and what should be deleted. Compared to old procedures centered around the exchange of documents, an e-mail exchange carries the risk of losing the wealth of knowledge created within a ministry. Traditional ministry archives, established in the early days of organized diplomacy, were sources of institutional memory. Ministries kept all versions of a document until it reached its final form. Presently, only the latest version of a document is archived.

16.00—VIRTUAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS (VIRTUAL EMBASSY)

Story

A key practical issue is to involve a well-known Kazakh expert on oil pollution. Some years ago, when the expert was approached directly, the Kazakh government complained about bypassing official channels of communication. The expert is a state official; therefore, any request for his assistance should come through official diplomatic channels. None of the countries present at the meeting has a diplomatic mission in either Astana or Alma Ata, and time is not available to send a special envoy to Kazakhstan. Some countries propose sending an official request through the permanent mission in New York. Due to the time difference, and the

²⁶ 'Non-papers' are written documents that cannot be attributed to any author. However, for most non-papers the authorship was well known to those involved in the process. 'Non-papers' were particularly useful in the context of the CSCE/OSCE.

time needed for permanent representatives to meet in New York, the whole operation would require at least one day. The need to engage the Kazakh expert has been one of the main issues during today's meeting.

Ana remembers that her country has an unusual device called a 'virtual embassy' established with Kazakhstan. A few years ago, a debate occurred in Ana's ministry about the establishment of a virtual embassy. Critics came from many circles: traditional diplomats could not understand 'representation through the Internet'. While everything else can be done through the Internet, representation is a core function requiring face-to-face contact. They asked many sensible questions. Is it simply a website of the embassy? How can transactions be done? It was one of those strange proposals that, in spite of much opposition, was adopted. The reason was simple: Ana's country could not establish a 'bricks' embassy. The virtual embassy was an inexpensive option and the other side agreed. Last, but not of least importance, the Minister used this opportunity to appoint an ICT specialist from his party as the first virtual ambassador.

The virtual ambassador eventually went to visit Kazakhstan, and the virtual embassy became, in some ways, a blended form of representation combining official visits and online communication. Along with the ambassador, the virtual embassy has one diplomat: Ana's colleague, Marc, who spends 20% of his working time in the ministry as a virtual first secretary to Kazakhstan.

Ana contacts Marc and he immediately uses the 'alert option' of the virtual embassy. His counterpart based in the Kazakh capital, Astani, receives his 'alert SMS' at home. He immediately contacts Marc who explains the situation to him. The official procedure can start. Marc sends a *note verbale* requesting assistance from the Kazakh expert. The response note arrives from Astani half an hour later.

Ana is delighted. She can inform her colleagues at the meeting that they have received a diplomatic 'OK' from Kazakhstan. What about his visa? Ana contacts Marc again; he can use the consulate section of the virtual embassy. Fortunately, during the discussion about establishing the virtual embassy, the minister overruled the strong opposition of the consular department, which was very concerned about the possibility of submitting visa requests online. Fortunately, the virtual consulate did not lead to an avalanche of applications.

Comments

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL EMBASSY?

When we call an embassy 'virtual', it means that this embassy does not have physical premises. A virtual embassy still has an ambassador—they cannot be replaced by computers. In a real embassy, the ambassador resides in the embassy of the receiving state. In a virtual embassy, the ambassador remains in the capital city of his or her own country and communicates with the other country through electronic means.

WHAT A VIRTUAL EMBASSY IS NOT

A virtual embassy is not the website of a diplomatic mission. Currently, close to 2,000 diplomatic mission websites exist. Most provide information on mission activities (such as their working hours and consular information) and on the countries they represent (basic country data and information on foreign policy). These websites rarely promote any real diplomatic exchange (interactivity).

VIRTUAL EMBASSY AND DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION

The concept of a virtual embassy is linked to the concept of representation, a traditional and vital function of diplomacy. The most common form of representation through resident diplomatic missions has already been challenged by emerging practices. The first new practice was the appointment of non-resident ambassadors based in a third country or in the capital of the sending country. The second challenge to traditional diplomatic representations is the emergence in international relations of entities other than states, including sub-national entities (regions and local communities) and others (non-state actors, business companies, NGOs). Most of them try to acquire some sort of formal recognition and representation in international affairs. These developments will require some changes in the concept of diplomatic representation.

The use of virtual embassies does not change the concept of representation. It only alters the form of representation. In 2001, Diplo initiated a discussion on the virtual embassy.²⁷ At that time, this idea

²⁷ For more information about the discussion on the virtual embassy in 2001, please consult: www.diplomacy.edu/Knowledge/VE/default.asp.

sounded rather futuristic. It is interesting to note changes in perspective after five years. The Internet and ICT blend into daily activities and are hardly noticeable as special technology. They are part of daily routines. In this sense, some functions of the virtual embassy have been gradually implemented through e-mail, web, and other online tools. However, the key conceptual issues are as valid today as they were five years ago.

What are potential scenarios for the use of virtual embassies?

Virtual embassies have a number of possible uses. Two are to maintain basic, but infrequent diplomatic relationships and to provide non-resident representation.

- a) Relations between two countries that have diplomatic relations, but no intensive cooperation

Such diplomatic relations are usually maintained through the Permanent Missions in New York. Important question: do we need a virtual embassy if the level of interaction is low? Is the level of interaction low because:

- no real need exists for more intensive ties (no economic or cultural interests); or
- an infrastructure for interaction does not exist.

- b) In the case of non-resident ambassadors (a roving ambassador, 'Scandinavian' model of diplomatic representation)

In this case, a virtual embassy can cover diplomatic relations between the visits of non-resident ambassadors. This is the most likely scenario for the use of virtual embassies. Blended representation combines the best of two forms of representation: traditional (physical contact, developing personal rapport) and online (low cost, continuous communication).

VIRTUAL CONSULAR RELATIONS

Consulate affairs are usually considered 'computerization' friendly, mainly because consular functions are clearly defined. They are repetitive and predictable activities that use standard procedures, decision-making criteria, and forms. Consular functions are similar to other government and administrative functions. Techniques and tools available for the computerization of consular activities have already been developed for many other e-government functions (e.g. issuing identification documents, requests for administrative support, notary functions).

With the growing political relevance of migration issues, it remains to be seen if and how technology will be used in this field. The future computerization of consular functions will be more a policy issue than a technological one.

17.00—DRAFTING THE FINAL DOCUMENT

Story

All elements of the deal are in place; now they must be codified in written format. The risk still exists that the various parties may hold different perceptions of the compromise reached. Fortunately, the chair from the host government kept an accurate record and began drafting the compromise formulations while they were being negotiated. Through corridor diplomacy during coffee breaks, he informally confirmed them with the majority of participants.

The draft text is projected for all to see in the computer room, and all participants receive a printed copy. The proposed title of the document is 'Final Communiqué'. However, the representative of the country that unsuccessfully lobbied to host the Committee proposes 'Agreed Minutes' or simply 'Report' as a title. Clearly, he would like to reduce the relevance of the document and open some room for future re-negotiations. This is refused. All participants read the text and engage in the usual debate on weak and strong formulations, the use of the conditional, etc. The number of square brackets is substantially reduced. One country has difficulty with the formulation on the 'polluter pays' principle, and finally accepts the text, attaching a statement expressing reservations. The text is ready.

Comments

DOCUMENT DRAFTING

Texts are the backbone of diplomatic activities. Ultimately, any diplomatic activity, from formal to informal, results in the adoption of a particular text, whether it is a legally binding treaty, a diplomatic note or a non-paper. The Latin proverb *verba volant scripta manent* probably applies more in diplomacy than in any other discipline.

Document drafting usually involves diplomats and officials from different countries. Drafting is particularly complex in a multilateral framework with the participation of many countries. ICT/Internet

provides numerous tools for document drafting, starting from the simple use of track-changes in Word and WIKI-based tools, to more sophisticated drafting platforms. These can be used for managing the overall drafting process and working on the text. The quantity of text input has significantly increased with two major procedural developments: giving the right to non-state actors to submit written contributions and facilitating the submission of contributions over the Internet. The last major UN summit—the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)—clearly demonstrates this trend. In the preparation for the WSIS Geneva summit, the Secretariat had around 700 written contributions, with a total of 3000 pages.²⁸ Apart from policy aspects, the major technical and organizational

Table 1. Excerpt from WSIS Compilation of Comments²⁹

<i>Existing text</i>	<i>Sources of Proposed text</i>	<i>Proposed Text</i>
1. We recognize that it is now time to move from principles to action, by encouraging stakeholders to take the Plan of Action one step further, identifying those areas in which progress has been made in implementing the commitments undertaken in Geneva, and by defining those areas where further effort and resources are required.	Informal Coalition on Financing and Gender Caucus (joint submission)	<i>[replace with]</i> 1. We recognize that it is now time to move from principles to action, while considering the work already being done for implementing the Plan of Action and identifying the areas of such progress, all stakeholders must define those areas where further effort and resources are required, and jointly develop appropriate strategies and implementation mechanisms at global, national and local levels. In particular, we need to identify peoples and groups that are still marginalized in their access to and utilization of ICT.
	To go	1. ...those areas in which progress has been made, or is being made, in implementing...

²⁸ Documents are available on the WSIS website: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/index1.html.

²⁹ Compilation of Comments on Chapter One (Implementation Mechanism) and Chapter Four (The Way Ahead) of the Operational Part (Document WSIS-II/PC-2/DT-6 (Rev. 2)). Online at: www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/pc2/working/dt6rev2.doc.

challenge was to process such a huge amount of text. ICT and the Internet were used intensively. First, all documents were made available on the Summit website which provides a permanent repository. Second, the Secretariat used a tabulated presentation of participants' inputs, created using tables in a word processor. Although tables are a simple computer application, they provided a highly efficient negotiation tool. Participants were able to survey individual inputs from various delegations.

WORK ON THE TEXT

LCD projectors connected to computers with word processing software have become a common facility in diplomatic conference rooms. How can their use be compared with traditional negotiations? In traditional negotiations, the chairman distributes successive versions of a text and uses printed copies as the basis for negotiations. With the advent of LCD projectors, the negotiated text is projected on a screen. The chairman is usually assisted by an operator who inputs changes in the main text as proposed by delegates. Participants in the negotiations can immediately see the amended version of the text. This tool is particularly effective with the 'track changes option' in Word for Windows, which can show deletions and insertions in the text. This method of drafting was relied on frequently during the WSIS process. It has many advantages compared to traditional negotiations, including a faster negotiation process, simpler control of changes and avoidance of mistakes, and the preservation of a log of proposals and amendments.

18:30—SIGNING THE FINAL AGREEMENT...

Story

Ana is close to success. Her country will host the Environmental Committee. Personally, she is very satisfied, because action will be taken immediately. The oil spill expert will arrive tomorrow. She can defend the 'diplomat's cause' to her environmentalist friends back home. Ana was particularly pleased that she managed to insert an article specifying online meetings as the main *modus operandi* of the Environmental Committee.

The memorandum of understanding announcing the establishment of the regional Environmental Committee is signed by all countries participating in the negotiations. After a small reception, Victor and Ana head to the airport. This was a great success in their careers. Ana departs.

Comments

DIPLOMATIC DIGITAL SIGNATURES

It is very likely that the signing of diplomatic agreements will remain a physical activity. This is usually a very ceremonial occasion and a public relations opportunity. However, one can envisage some sort of 'diplomatic digital signature' as a form of authentication mechanism. The concept of digital signatures has already been developed in the commercial sector and many transactions are conducted with their use.

ONLINE MEETINGS AND NEGOTIATIONS

Another potential use of technology in diplomacy is that of online meetings. Online meetings can replace certain expert and technical meetings conducted regularly in diplomatic centers worldwide. Since full participation in physical meetings requires human and financial resources often lacking in small or developing countries, ICT and the Internet can provide alternative facilities that enable their participation. More inclusive participation of developing countries can have the political effect of reducing the *de facto* inequality between member states.

Can such meetings be conducted completely or partially online? Technically, it is possible. A wide variety of teleconferencing and other interaction tools are available and affordable. The challenges are organizational and cultural. On the organizational side, online contributions should receive proper formal status. For example, the online submission of texts and resolutions should have the same legal status as those submitted through the processes of traditional meetings. Yet, it can be expected that the professional culture will resist, as online meetings can lead to a considerable rearrangement of traditional multilateral diplomacy. Online meetings can be particularly useful in the preparations for face-to-face meetings. A proper interplay between online and traditional meetings will be the most likely development in this field.

20:00—REPORT TO THE MINISTER AND FOLLOW-UP..

Story

After a long day, Ana is back in her office at the Ministry. She wishes to finish her report tonight, while events are still fresh in her memory, and have a long sleep tomorrow morning. Ana can use reporting software that helps her to report in a specific way.

First, the reporting has to be multi-layered, starting from an executive summary and moving deeper into more detail. In this way, everybody will have access to an appropriate level of information, from a busy minister who can dedicate only a few minutes to this report, to desk officers who need to study it in detail. Second, the reporting software requires her to collect all available documents and links. Finally, she will be able to convey her tacit knowledge, which is very often lost in formal reporting. The ICT department will also upload this new entry into its database of 'lessons learned'.

Ana also plans to send follow-up e-mails to the people who were involved in the day's negotiations. Although some of them may not be completely satisfied with the outcome of negotiations, the group has to maintain good working relations. It can be achieved only through communication. E-mail is a good first step.

Comments

DIPLOMATIC REPORTING

Diplomatic reporting is a standard and old diplomatic function. It can be traced back to Venice's diplomatic missions in the thirteenth century.³⁰ Diplomatic reporting has changed substantially over the last few years. Diplomats used to be one of the main sources of information for the sending state. Presently, they have to compete with powerful media.

Nabil Fahmu, the Egyptian Ambassador to the United States, commented on this development in 1999. 'When I came to Washington less than three years ago, I basically decided I would not compete with the media in sending information to Egypt. It was a futile attempt to get it there first. So I stopped reporting most current information. I assumed that people had the news back home because they watched CNN.'³¹ As a consequence, he shifted approximately 80% of his communication to an open medium. 'The only thing I actually sent confidentially is opinion—my opinion, somebody else's opinion, criticism of my own government, criticism of the US government. That's all I sent confidentially.' In this way, Ambassador Fahmu solved the problem of the 'diplomatic information glut'. By reporting fewer facts, excluding those that could

³⁰ Anderson, M.S., *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy: 1450–1919*, London, Longman Group, 1993.

³¹ Netpolitik, p. 6.

be ascertained via modern media, and by providing more comments and reflections, he assured a necessary level of attention in his capital. One of the key challenges for diplomats is to grab the attention of official decision-makers.

DIPLOMATIC REPORTING AND E-TRANSCRIPTS

The role of diplomatic reporting, at least in multilateral diplomacy, may be changed with the introduction of real-time e-transcripts. This innovation was introduced in public meetings of the UN Working Group on Internet Governance in April 2005. All interventions were transcribed simultaneously by special stenographers and displayed on the big screen in the conference room. It was an interesting example of the procedural cross-fertilization in modern diplomacy. After learning about this technique at a meeting of the Internet Company of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)³² meetings, Markus Kummer, the executive director of the WGIG, introduced e-transcripts in the WGIG working procedures.³³

While delegates were speaking, transcriptions of their speeches appeared on the screen. Given the centrality of text in diplomatic activities, the e-transcription innovation had an important effect on the diplomatic *modus operandi*. A verbatim, written record made many delegates choose carefully the level and length of their verbal interventions. In addition, e-transcripts provide a verbatim report of international meetings available on the Internet to the general public.

This development considerably increases the transparency of diplomatic meetings and will inevitably have an effect on diplomatic reporting that summarises the findings of the event. Anyone can consult those e-transcripts.³⁴

Closing Remarks

INTERNET AND DYNAMICS OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES

One of the main challenges for many diplomatic services is synchronizing the speed of information dissemination with the speed of decision-making.

³² ICANN (Internet Company of Assigned Names and Numbers) is in charge of governing the Internet core resources—names and numbers.

³³ Based on discussion with Markus Kummer.

³⁴ One can find an example of a transcript from the WGIG meeting at: www.wgig.org/June-scriptmorning.html.

While the dissemination of information is immediate, the speed of decision-making processes has not substantially changed. This discrepancy in the speed of information dissemination and of diplomatic processes is more striking today than it was during the era of slow communications. This gap was particularly noticeable in a few recent diplomatic crises, including the UN negotiations prior to the Iraq war, which lasted for two months, and the recent UN negotiations on the Lebanese crisis. In our story, Ana Gabel managed to synchronize the speed of the two processes. The President of the US Institute of Peace, Richard Solomon, described this phenomenon in the following way:

Information about breaking international crises that once took hours or days for government officials and media to disseminate is now being relayed real-time to the world not only via radio and television, but over the Internet as well. Ironically, though, for policy-makers, instant dissemination of information about events both far and near is proving to be as much a bane as a bounty. While the Internet has augmented and expedited the information-gathering phase of policy-making, the amount of time available to policy-makers to digest, analyse, and formulate potential courses of action has been proportionally reduced in relation to how much and how fast information is publicly available.³⁵

RECOGNIZING KNOWLEDGE AS AN INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCE

The primary element in the success of ICT/Internet projects in diplomatic services is the recognition and appreciation of knowledge as an institutional resource. Such knowledge consists of the knowledge that employees bring with them to their work and the knowledge generated through the activities of an institution. Diplomatic services need to recognize that data, information, and knowledge are their vital resources.

Often, these are rhetorically acknowledged as a primary resource of diplomatic services, but when it comes to day-to-day and organizational issues, this is not the case. Paradoxically, an organization's internal accounting system assigns a higher declared value to a piece of furniture than to top expertise. This situation can lead to enormous institutional and political losses. Once data, information, and knowledge are recognized

³⁵ Richard H. Solomon, *The Internet and the Diffusion of Diplomacy* (US Foreign Policy Agenda—3030); canberra.usembassy.gov/hyper/2000/0329/epf319.htm.

as the key resources of diplomatic services, the need for greater knowledge management improvements will become obvious.

CREATING A KNOWLEDGE CULTURE

One of the biggest challenges of knowledge management is the creation of a knowledge culture. It is human to resist change. At first, people thought that computers would replace them in the workplace. As each new level of technology is introduced, people move from their initial distrust and gradually accept, use, and rely on new systems. While computers have certainly not replaced people, they have changed work patterns considerably.

The core issue is how to make people share knowledge when knowledge itself is a source of power and ultimately a determinant of individual roles within an organizational hierarchy. Diplomacy is a profession in which knowledge is highly relevant to success. The challenge for any knowledge management initiative is to encourage people to share knowledge, yet not to affect their personal position in the organization. Unless individuals are willing to share their knowledge, knowledge management tools cannot be effective. This is the make-or-break point for the success of advanced ICT/Internet projects in any organization, including ministries of foreign affairs.