

A dark blue background featuring a stylized world map. Overlaid on the map is a network of glowing blue lines and dots, representing global connectivity and trade routes. The lines radiate from various points across the continents, creating a sense of dynamic movement and international relations.

Queen's Institute on Trade Policy

Communicating Clearly in Complexity

November 2019

A white graphic element consisting of a thick, curved line that sweeps upwards and to the right, resembling a stylized 'E' or a swoosh.

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Lessons from CUSMA

- Many benefits of focused Maple Charm Offensive
 - Multi-party, multi-government – and horizontal
 - 25 negotiating 'tables' + sectorial tables + Minister's Advisory Council + Formal Canada Gazette + Labour
 - Communications benefits were largely domestic and took the early edge off
 - Canadian exposure to US tax and investment climate also driven home; drove strategy throughout
- The curve ball of US switching to consecutive bilateral negotiations reinforced the vagaries of negotiating with the US under the Trump administration
- The complexity and unpredictability of these negotiations allowed victory to be declared in a different way than CETA



**HURRAY!
IT'S NOT
TERRIBLE!!!**

USMCA

G. Clement
NATIONAL POST. 18

The Macro Narrative on CUSMA

You're Welcome Canada



October 5, 2019: Macleans

Rules-Based Trade Context

- Public acceptance of the net benefits of trade as part of economic resilience remains high
- CUSMA proved trade diversification essential for Canada
- Government began mid-mandate to emphasize deeper trade relationships, for particular sectors and SMEs was an extension of and key to domestic economic strategy
- New new trade or rules-based negotiations is largely for trade policy insiders
- Highly complex from a communications POV. Likely requires a re-frame of benefits and objectives in trade agendas, including collaboration between political and officials




Textbook Communications Context

- Managing communications and consultation processes are often the key to policy and political success
- Narrative has become the driver of political persuasion tactics
 - The battle for narrative control characterizes most controversial issues
 - In much the same way that control of the “ballot question” often dictates vote choice – as we are seeing in the current federal election
- Control of narrative or “framing” allows governments to position an initiative in a way that promotes public acceptance, if not approval
- Once a frame is “set”, it becomes hard to change for either side in a debate
 - Further discussion is often ignored as routine “noise” of government
- Sometimes not communicating avoids the wrong frame settling in
 - Deprives debate of concrete substance and hence real “oxygen”

The Narrative Framework

- Many stages that require ‘narrative’ management
 - The decision to seek an agreement and the launch of negotiations
 - The ongoing domestic consultations with “Insider” stakeholders
 - The final stages of negotiations with the potential treaty partner(s)
 - The announcement of an agreement in principle
 - Drafting of the final text
 - Final approval and ratification (including political process)
 - Implementation
- Each involves careful consultations and communications planning
 - With differing “key messaging” or main narrative constructs
 - Different information requirements and stakeholder outreach



CETA – Week One Headlines

Framing of CETA from the outset was positive

“We have a deal with Europe. Let’s not blow it”

- *The Globe and Mail*

“Harper’s huge EU free trade deal justifies lawmakers’ hyperbole”

- *John Ivison, National Post*

“European free trade deal is a big win for Stephen Harper”

- *Vancouver Sun*

“CETA benefits Western Canada”

- *The Star Phoenix*

“EU trade deal could bring higher drug costs”

- *Toronto Star*

“Feds consider compensation for dairy farmers hurt by EU deal”

- *CTV*

Spheres of Interest

- There are multiple domestic spheres of interest and influence to be considered in the trade negotiation context
 - With varying degrees of access to consultation, input and information
- The insiders (consult and influence):
 - Government policy makers and decision makers
 - Provinces
 - Sectoral voices
 - Industry associations and increasingly, individual companies
 - Labour, Indigenous, civil society (environment, women +++)
- Outside stakeholders (inform and communicate):
 - Adhoc coalitions/alliances for interests
 - Permanently oppositional voices
 - Media
 - “Involved Canadians”
 - The general population

Crossing the Threshold

- Where policy crosses into the public sphere, government no longer has control of the narrative
- Politics are relevant (especially with election dynamics)
- Macro story lines define public space
 - Broader context matters
 - Define your narrative before it defines you
 - Pace of interest and need for response changes
 - Better if pre-positioned to understand underlying issues or trade-offs
- Third parties become more influential, particularly with social media, requires coordination within government
- Scope of the issue and other external factors will define the duration of the communications window

Additional Observations

- Communications and consultation are core to strategy, not an after-thought
- CETA offered textbook lessons for a regional deal, pitched throughout and at announcement. Won in the first week.
- USMCA/NAFTA was defined in protectionist terms and largely won in the same way
- Managing the range of stakeholders and new factors being driven into trade agreements (progressive agenda, environment/trade) means more complexity early
- More than ever, trade negotiators and communicators need to collaborate early in the process to understand
- Time to update and re-frame the overall benefits of trade in new context of CETA, CUSMA and China in 2020



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