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**EXPERIENCES IN EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF
COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA**

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EXPERIENCES IN EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA

Summary

The paper presents the ways in which Statistics Finland acquires feed-back information on its communication activities aimed at the media. These are as follows: 1) press-clippings service and the related analysis, 2) survey interviews and free discussions with journalists and 3) general data on public opinion regarding Statistics Finland. The feedback system is fairly comprehensive, but the analysis of the acquired data should be more thorough.

Statistics Finland has three main ways of gathering information about the efficiency of its communication activities directed to the media. The most routinely used one is the press-clipping service, which is used on a daily basis. At least once a month we have visitors from one of the central journalist organisations in Finland. During these visits we can have thorough discussions with journalists regarding our services. The client survey conducted annually and the survey on public opinion also serve as sources of feed-back information.

Press-clippings

Press clippings are collected daily for Statistics Finland by a private organisation. The number of clippings is about 15 000 a year. The papers followed amount to 400, whereof about 50 are daily papers.

The clippings are immediately mailed to Statistics Finland. They are then piled by the release they relate to or, if there is no such release, by the statistical unit which is the source of information used in the story. The clippings which need to be commented on are then quickly sent to the statistician in charge of the problem.

The incoming data is then reported statistically once a month by organisational unit and release in our internal bulletin board system. Statistics are based on the number of clippings. The number of so-called negative clippings is also calculated. The level of 'negativity' of a story is evaluated in the press office of Statistics Finland.

In order to obtain more information out of the data a sample of about 1 000 clippings is picked out. The sample is analysed more thoroughly: the size of the story as well as the use of pictures, graphics and tabulations are counted. The type of the paper and that of the story are also coded.

The sample study is reported annually with more qualitative analysis of the press-clippings.

Interviews with journalists

The most important journalist organisations in Finland are invited to visit Statistics Finland. We have groups of about ten journalists visiting about once a month; more groups in wintertime and less in summertime. Journalists are normally interested in getting acquainted with Statistics Finland. The

programme of the visit begins with a general presentation of Statistics Finland, continues with special themes of interest or demos and ends with free discussion. Most often the visits lead to some kind of co-operation afterwards. These visits have been very useful from the point of view of the changes we have planned in our releasing system or other services.

Statistics Finland has also participated in a survey research conducted among Finnish journalists. This survey will hopefully give some information regarding our success with journalists compared to other Finnish organisations.

General data on Statistics Finland

A general survey on public opinion concerning Statistics Finland is conducted every other year. There are about 1 000 respondents in the survey, which is conducted by a private survey organisation. The survey has been performed since the 1970s, which means that we have great time series based on it.

In a way this survey gives us the end result of our PR-activities: an indicator of how many people know Statistics Finland and an overall profile of attitudes connected with us. The profiles of attitudes towards other Finnish organisations are also included for the sake of comparison.

The results of this survey seem to correlate reasonably in time with the press clipping data: the growth in the number of clippings seems to connect with the rising knowledge of Statistics Finland. The attitudes of the stories seem to be reflected in the attitudes of the public.

In addition Statistics Finland conducts annually a survey among its clients. Although news media is allowed a considerable amount of free service, they are often among the paying clients, too. The evaluation in the survey does not make distinction between different kinds of services. Thus the feedback is obtained on the news service as well.

Problems

Although the feedback system of Statistics Finland's communication activities is reasonably good, there are problems as well. The number of press clippings is so immense and their processing such a tedious job that there is not enough time to analyse the material. If the clippings could be bought in a digital format, this would provide better opportunities for quick and thorough analysis. For instance, it would enable experimentation with different kinds of releases in order to guarantee that information is disseminated as correctly as possible and to as large an audience as possible.

Another problem is that we don't get a good and clear feedback from electronic media.

Good comparability between organisations is of utmost importance in survey research. We can make comparisons with other Finnish organisations, but owing to the special nature/role of a statistical agency that is not enough. It would be useful to have internationally comparable indicators on how many people know the name of the statistical agency and what kind of attitudes people (or journalists) have towards statistics in general.

When working with journalists the lack of time is always a problem. Thus journalists are not very eager to take part in evaluation surveys. That is why it is often difficult to get systematic and reliable data on their attitudes. On the other hand, they give their criticisms very freely, when they see concrete problems in their work.