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PUBLIC RELATIONS EVALUATİON: PROFESSİONAL ACCOUNTABİLİTY

The International Public Relations Association 1994

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The International Public Relations Association (IPRA), founded in 1955, is a worldwide professional organisation. It functions as a network of senior individuals dedicated to the highest standards of practise and mutual understanding between groups, organisations and nations in an increasingly inter-dependent world. It is a network designed to recognise geographic experiences, their differences and similarities so as to successfully cope with the international challenge of communications.

IPRA' s aim is to help members keep in touch with national, regional and international trends and issues via informal contact and official functions. As well as explaining to opinion formers the role of the public relations function, IPRA is particularly concerned with the development of the discipline, and its relevance to management.

The importance of the communications function justifies the need for the highest possible standards of ethics. As such IPRA has a Code of Conduct (adopted in 1961), which sets down the required guidelines for members. An international code, the "Code of Athens" (adopted in 1965) is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. IPRA has formal consultative status with the United Nations.

IPRA is an independent organisation with no formal links to other public relations bodies. However, close functional relationships are maintained with national regional associations, as is evidenced in this Gold Paper.

Membership is open to competent professionals who have practised at senior level for at least five years and who operate internationally or wish to bring an international dimension to their work. IPRA comprises over 1000 individuals in over 60 countries, forming a network and knowledge base of experience and contacts accessible to all members.

Contents

Preface

This Gold Paper has combined the efforts of the International Public Relations Association committee formed to produce an Evaluation Gold Paper, and a Public Relations Institute of Australia (NSW) committee developed by Bill Sherman (PRIA) to look at the practical applications of evaluation.

It was also supported by the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) who joined with us to undertake two research projects. One was among practitioners to ascertain the profession's attitude towards evaluation. This survey was also undertaken through IPRA members. A pilot questionnaire aimed at users was also used by PRISA through its members and this was also used through members of the Registered Consultants Group of the PRIA (NSW).

General assistance and support was given by IPRA' s Bob Grupp, Don Wright and George Foot. However the main work was undertaken by the core committee of Chris Hocking IPRA/PRIA and Gael Walker PRIA (Techniques), Jane Jordan PRIA (Behaviour), Sandra Macleod IPRA (Media Evaluation), Anna Mari Honnibal IPRA (outputs), and Jim Macnamara IPRA/PRIA (Evaluating Departments and Consultancies). Special credit should be given to Bill Sherman who helped develop the approach and contributed throughout, particularly in the area of setting objectives.

The committee recognises that more on the subject had to be omitted than included, but the final responsibility for any inadequacy of contents remains with myself.

Frequent reference is made to Gold Paper No "Quality Customer Satisfaction Public Relations". Its section on Measuring Quality in Public Relations is particularly applicable to the subject of Evaluation.

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1 Introduction

Public relations practitioners can demonstrate their success in many different ways. They can claim success, point to the visibility of their exposure in the media, their usefulness, their artistry, their ability to influence change, or their ability to meet objectives (Crable and Vibbert (1986)).

When their only standard is to **claim success** and expect to be believed without evidence, they have only a subjective, imprecise and intangible measure of what has been achieved. Some rely on the **visibility** of extensive media coverage as their standard. However, media coverage cannot be guaranteed and may not have the required effect with the targeted public, although the existence of positive media coverage can supplement other forms of evaluation.

Practitioners who use a **utility** standard assume that success relates to being available to solve problems. However, being considered useful has no connection with actually achieving results. If they claim an **artistic** standard and rely on showing high quality professional work, they may forget that quality work does not guarantee results.

When their standard is to show **change** there must be some pre and post test method to measure this, the amount of change must be specified, and the contribution of the public relations practitioner must be isolated from all other possible causes of the change. Used correctly, the change standard can produce objective and easily explained results attributable to the public relations function.

The final standard is to meet **objectives**, which requires particular objectives to be satisfied by a program. Such objectives must be realistic and measurable. They are arrived at in consultation with others involved so that there is understanding, and support for, what the public relations practitioner is doing. This last standard can provide a thorough basis for evaluating the work of a public relations practitioner, although some elements of other approaches can be useful additions at times.

From the outset, members of the panel involved in developing this Gold Paper were unanimous that for evaluation to work, management by objectives is necessary. The panel recognised that there is already a large body of knowledge developed on the subject and its aim was to bring this together as a practical guide for practitioners, particularly those who wanted, or were being asked, to prove the worth of their public relations activities.

While evaluation, like many other practices in public relations, is at different levels of development in different places, it appears to be practised little more in any one country than another.

Some organisations, consultancies, and practitioners are advanced in their use of evaluation techniques. However, enquiries in connection with this paper universally showed that the vast majority of practitioners are not incorporating as much evaluation in their programs as they would like. This applies equally to consultancies and in-house departments, and appears unconnected to the type of work undertaken or size of the budged.

The evaluation required for a $1 million annual program is somewhat different from that needed, and appropriate, for a small budged, once-off project. The evaluation that is possible in a major corporate repositioning program is a very different to that which can be afforded by a not-for-profit organisation. Nonetheless, there are evaluation techniques which can be fairly, and easily, applied in all these examples, but the same ones are not appropriate in every case.

Therefore, there is no panacea in evaluation, or one simple formula that applies to all circumstances. There is, however, a wide choice of techniques and alternatives that can be used as appropriate, and a number of basic rules apply.

In setting these out, some readers may think that we are being too basic. Yet there are surveys, to which this paper refers, that show research aimed at evaluation is frequently not undertaken in the top companies in the USA and Australia, or by senior practitioners internationally. Therefore, we feel justified in including a "how to do it" element throughout this publication for the many practitioners looking for guidance.

We also recognise that media relations is a large part of many public relations programs and, although not synonymous with public relations, deserves a special examination.

David Drobis, chief executive of Ketchum, summed it up when he said, *"Everyone talks about strategy. The agencies all think they should be like McKinsey. Let' s not forget that many clients hire PR firms because they want to be in The New York Times and Time Magazine".*

We believe this is true in most countries.

2 Attitudes to evaluation

There have been a number of surveys on evaluation – mainly looking at its use by practitioners and their attitude to it.

With his permission, a section of a survey developed by Walter Lindenmann in 1988 (Ketchum Nationwide Survey on Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation), was taken and the evaluation section extracted and used in 1994 as an international study among IPRA developed questionnaire was also used by the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa.

The full Lindenmann survey had also been used in Australia in 1993 by Gael Walker of the University of Technology, Sydney.

There are certain consistencies that indicate there is international recognition that evaluation is necessary.

	USA	AUST	SA	IPRA MEMBERS
Agree that evaluation is	94.3%	95%	97.7%	94.9%

more talked about than done				
Is recognised as necessary	75.9%	90%	89.1%	89.8%

Against this, the same surveys indicate that evaluation is not a frequently used technique

	USA	AUST	SA	IPRA MEMBERS
Frequently undertake research aimed at evaluating	16%	14%	25.4%	18.6%

Thus there is still more talk than action with evaluation.

Other research among practitioners also shows that the importance of evaluation is widely recognised by practitioners.

A study by Smythe Dorward and Lambert in the Uk in 1991 showed 83% of respondents agreed with the statement *"There is a growing emphasis on planning and measuring the effectiveness of communications activity".*

A 1992 survey in the USA by the Counselors Academy of the PRSA of its 1000+ members identified *"demand for measured accountability"* as one of the top industry challenges by 70% of respondents.

Tom Watson, in a 1992 postgraduate study in the UK, found that 75% of respondents spent under 5% of the total budget on evaluation. He found that while 76% of practitioners undertake some form of review, the two main methods used were monitoring (not evaluating) press cuttings and *"intuition and professional judgement".*

And yet evaluation of performance is considered an essential part of any well conceived management activity-individual management performance is measured, systems value and effectiveness is measured; suppliers` performance is measured; business results are measured.

In this context, it is naïve in the extreme to suppose that the public relations profession can maintain or, even better, build its stature in the eyes of management if it cannot be satisfactorily measured.

Yet despite the volume of self-assessment of practitioners` attitudes to, and use of, evaluation (of which the above research among practitioners is but a sample), little research appears to have been undertaken among users to see the level of **demand** for public relations evaluation.

James Grunig' s Excellence Study for IABC showed that corporate executives believed they received a 235% return on their public relations investment.

Some results of a pilot questionnaire developed by Jim Pritchitt and Bill Sherman for this Gold Paper, applied to consultancy clients in Sydney through the Public Relations Institute of

Australia and public relations users through the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa are shown in the following table.

	Yes answers Australia	South Africa
I believe we get excellent results from our public relations	63.7%	67.5%
We have excellent evaluation techniques in place	30.3%	37.5%
I know when public relations is working in our organisation by feedback I get internally or externally	63.7%	91.25%
It concerns me that our public relations is not evaluated satisfactorily	63.7%	56.25%
Public relations is part of the overall communications program. I don't separate it from other activities.	81.8%	86.25%

This shows respondents do not *really* evaluate their public relations activity at all, are a bit concerned, but at present lump it in with other communication activity. The concern for practitioners should be that if management ever does get pressured to reduce budget or allocate funds to other activities, there is no particular reason why a bit of the public relations budget couldn't go.

The cost of our failing to find acceptable ways of measuring our performance could thus be huge: we will not advance as a profession and we could lose business to advertising agencies, other disciplines or suppliers. At the most basic level, we will lose clients to other public relations practitioners who are able to convince our clients (and employers) that they can do a better job than we can - and why not if the client has no way of proving just how good a job is being done!

It must also follow that our own income levels, total public relations budgets, and therefore job satisfaction, depend on us proving our worth.

Tom Watson' s UK study found that the major incentives (among practitioners) for formal public relations evaluation were:

Need to judge the effects of programs	25.4%
Prove value of campaign/budget	48.1%
Help campaign targeting and planning	27.3%
Help get more resources/higher fees	12.3%

(Multiple answers allowed)

The common thread that runs through these answers appears to be the question of accountability. After all, the only reason one needs to judge the effects of programs is that the people who use our services – be they boss, client or employer – may not allow us to operate at our full potential, or give us the funds, or even heed our advice – if the value of the work is not known.

The last two decades have seen two major management styles develop and flower – the first was management by objectives and the second, and still current vogue, is total quality management, dealt with in detail in IPRA Gold Paper 10.

Fundamental to both is the concept of management setting clear goals and accountability through which improvement can be made. And yet the public relations profession still fights it with arguments like *"much public relations work is intangible and can not be measured"*.

The surveys referred to earlier show many practitioners support this view:

	USA Agree	AUST Agree	SA Agree	IPRA Members Agree
Trying to measure precisely is next to impossible	43%	51%	43.9%	30.5%

This paper presents a number of techniques that, well applied, make precise measurement quite possible.

Is it perhaps that practitioners do not spend the time to develop the professional skills they need to do this job well, or do not wish to have discipline applied to the activities they undertake?

It may be that it is a lack of professional skill that causes a 'fear' of evaluation. Cutlip, Centre and Broom (1994) refer to a study of Chicago practitioners where more than half of the respondents reported that *"most practitioners fear measurement"*, because it can reveal unsatisfactory results and can challenge their logic (and presumably job security).

It is not sufficient to have the majority of practitioners saying that evaluation today is recognised as necessary, if the majority of people in the same studies agree that research is still talked about more than done.

Alfred Geduldig, talking at the 1993 PRSA Conference, had this comment to make:

"The old public relations was based on intuition and instinct; the new public relations is based on the achievement of business results. Creativity remains an essential ingredient of public relations, but today' s resolute public relations practitioners must not only know how to measure results, they must know what to measure, what not to measure, why and how we measure up as a business too!"

This is a key sentiment. Public relations continues to evolve to meet changed expectations. The 1990s manager is more demanding than his or her counterpart of the 1970s or 1980s. 'Trust me' is no longer an acceptable answer. Proof is needed.

James Kotes, of Illinois Bell, sums up the situation:

"To be influential, you have to be at the decision table and part of corporate governance. You can be there if the things you are doing are supported by facts. That is where public relations has generally been weak and why, in most promotions, public relations functions are at a lower

level. The idea is to be where the decisions are made in order to impact on the future of the company. To do so you have to be like the lawyer or the financial officer, the personnel officer or the operations person. You have to have hard data!"

This surely means we must:

- Understand how business works so that we can be part of management, talk the same language as management, and work comfortably under the same ground rules as the rest of management.
- Understand and use research and measurement/evaluation techniques.
- Understand how to set measurable objectives, without which no evaluation/measurement can take place.
- Understand communication theory and practice so that realistic goals can be planned and the correct methods used.

3 Approaching evaluation

If there is such a strong case for evaluating public relations, why isn't it used more widely?

Surveys indicate budget is one problem. Lack of understanding of how to do it and fear of what it might show must also be inhibitors. The very size of what could be involved in a total evaluation project can also be daunting. But while they are disincentives, such hurdles can be overcome. Two points should, however, be made:

- In real life there can be serious difficulties in isolating the effect of public relations from the effect of other factors.
- Measuring or evaluating everything may be a waste of resources.

A realistic argument is that evaluation should be sufficient only to prove that activity is well directed, well implemented and achieving the required result. This can be done either by isolating key components of the program and measuring them, or by evaluating different elements at different times on a rotational basis. Such an approach overcomes to a large extent the 'lack of budget' complaint so often heard or given as a reason for a lack of evaluation/ measurement effort.

Those involved in this paper agree that key ingredients in evaluation are:

- **Measurable objectives**
- **Input evaluation**
- **Output evaluation, and**
- **Outcome evaluation**

Cutlip, Centre and Broom's model is most generally accepted by practitioners to show the different levels of evaluation of public relations. Others have developed similar models. Jim Macnamara has published the Macro Model of Public Relations Evaluation which uses similar steps of inputs, outputs and results with 'objective achieved or problem solved' at the top of the pyramid.

Our model (Linking a public relations planning model with an evaluation model) is based on agreement with management to measurable objectives for the total program. The three phases that follow are **Input** (Cutlip, Center and Broom' s "preparation"); **Output** ("implementation"); and **Outcome** ("impact").

There are a number of simple rules to getting started:

- The evaluation process to measure success of a public relations program cannot be initiated at the end of a program, or even half way through. The measurement criteria must be built in to the objectives.

- Successful evaluation needs measurable objectives. Many objectives developed at the beginning of a program, particularly by consultancies as part of the proposal, are really goals. While this is understandable when a proposal is expected to respond to issues identified in a brief, they should also be broken down in to component program objectives, which can be measured.

- Setting of benchmarks is useful at the outset of most programs or projects, and provides the bases against which the public relations activities can be assessed.

- Evaluation should not necessarily be considered as one total process. Trying to evaluate a total program as a one step process is frequently impossible; it should be broken down into component parts. Evaluation then becomes a serious of processes to measure particular activities.

- It may not be practical to develop a full range of evaluation processes – but that doesn't mean that some, even one, can not be started. Showing management the results of one area of evaluation can be of help in gaining support (and budged) for other evaluation activities.

- Not all evaluation methods are appropriate in every circumstance, and the ones to suit your particular program are all that are needed.

- A common criticism of consultancies is that they promise too much that they do not deliver. In a competitive pitch this may be understandable – but it makes it hard later to prove that you achieved your own objectives.

- The public relations process rarely operates in isolation and measurement must recognise this.

4 Setting objectives

The common thread in the evaluation models referred to is the need to have clearly defined, measurable objectives, appropriate to each phase of the program or project.

In setting these objectives there are certain steps that are necessary:

- To establish a clear starting position – current opinions, current behaviour, and current knowledge of distinctly defined target audiences.

- To establish what the desired position, actions and behaviours of these targets would be.

- To decide whether this position can be achieved and, if so, over what time span and at what cost – is it worth it?

In the process the public relations activities (and outcomes) can be defined – for instance to produce an "x" page quarterly newsletter which is distributed to particular target audiences at "y" cost on a defined timetable.

Some of the best work on the setting of objectives was done by Bill Reddin in the 1970s. He says:

"A sound objective must be measurable; without this quality, its achievement can not be established. It should be quantitative so that clear – cut values can be placed on it. It should be specific rather than general so that what is being measured is unambiguous. 'Most product lines' is not as good a statement as 'product lines A, C, and S'. It should focus on results rather than activities; that is, it should focus on what a manager achieves rather than on what he (she) simply does. It should be an individual rather than a shared objective. Some shared objectives are necessary in certain positions but it is better to tie objectives to individual, not shared performance. It should be seen as a realistic objective to both the superior and subordinate rather than as a minimum objective that would be met anyway. It should be time – bounded with clear time limits for completion rather than be time-extended".

Against this background good or bad objectives are easily identified. For example, an example may be to 'produce and distribute to all employees a four-page newsletter, published by 10th of each month, at a cost of not more than $5,000 per issue'. The only component missing is quality – how good is the newsletter and is it likely to advance the program towards its outcome objective. And to find that out, research may well be needed, and for meaningful evaluation, this must be established.

Another example could be 'for the X government to introduce (specified) legislation by (date)'. Here, the time span will require other objectives to be set for stages along the way. It will be a generous client who will pay the bills for five years without a progress report.

While it is basic to the process of setting objectives that the public relations component or influence is separated from the part played by other departments or conditions, there are times when this may be next to impossible.

For example, if an advertising agency is doing a media campaign in support of a product launch, a direct mail organisation is sending out a mailing, a training organisation is briefing and developing the knowledge and skills of the sales force, what measure would you apply to the public relations part of the launch?

Basic research may be needed; a cost-benefit analysis should be done and a clear picture of the environment in which the program is to be developed must be defined.

This analysis of the environment should take into account both internal and external influences on the results of the program. This could include, for example, in a marketing situation:

External	***Internal***

- **Competitors**
- **Government Regulations**
- **Pressure Groups**
- **Media**
- **Economic Environment**
- **Suppliers**

Price
Distribution
Performance Of Sales
Staff / Distributors
Credit Policy
and so on

The objectives then have to be based around targets in what we have called the Input and Output phases. Outcome cannot be an objective isolated to the public relations effort, although such objectives should still be set.

Another area of particular difficulty has to do with the isolation of particular media. In such a situation, input and output objectives are the critical measurements.

Again, measures of outcomes, such as employees' attitudes, may be hard to apply to particular components of an employee communications campaign. You cannot isolate the staff newsletter when the process includes factory visits for families, briefings by the CEO etc. The correct size of budget too cannot be measured easily.

The final stage of the objectives setting process is as important to the practitioner as the objective itself. That is, the objectives must be agreed with the person paying the bills. It would be a cruel joke to find that the objectives to which the program is geared are not acceptable or appropriate. Commercial sense says that the public relations plan, including its clear, measurable objectives, must be properly signed off.

One unnamed respondent to a PR News Pulse Survey in March 93 summed it up with: "we measure against business objectives established through mutual agreement with the CEO or other internal client".

5 Input evaluation

While evaluation must be considered at the start of a program, it should also ideally be undertaken at each stage of a program. This way what is being achieved can be assessed so that activities can be adjusted as required. Techniques suitable for one stage of evaluation may be in appropriate for another.

Consistent with the approach of management by objectives is the development of an evaluation report prepared at the start of activities. This should summarize the initial proposal or plan, identifying the objectives, and listing the activities agreed. Each objective to be achieved and evaluated can then be documented. With this approach, recommendations for future actions can be convincingly developed.

By providing, or at least having available, systematic written evaluation showing that public relations activity is directed to objectives deemed important by an organisation' s decision makers, the contribution of public relations to achieving the organisation' s mission can be recognised and rewarded.

There are many techniques available for evaluating input, which include:

1. **Analysis of existing data**

Purpose: To ensure that facts are known and correct. Review all available material to examine the facts already known about previous programs, the policies of the organisation, and the potential channels of communication. The review should assess the extent and nature of existing information and identify areas needing more research.

2. **Benchmark Research**

Purpose: To identify the status and environment current at the outset. This can include identifying attitudes, opinions, amount of media coverage currently achieved, readability of publications. It could also include comparison against other organisations.

3. **Focus group discussions**

Purpose: To pre-test attitudes, opinions and strategies. Meet with representative groups from the target audiences and use this opportunity to pre-test key messages and assess their reaction and understanding of these messages. Focus groups allow a high level of control over the form and time frame of responses.

4. **Pilot questionnaire**

Purpose: To identify and reduce misunderstanding. Use draft questions to test and then modify the content and clarity of proposed questions. The feedback from a representative sample of an intended public provides a control mechanism to check that messages are being understood before the main questionnaire is distributed.

5. **Communication audit**

Purpose: To appraise all existing communication. An audit is simply an analysis of the communication process, structure, and activities of an organisation to assess their effectiveness. It involves a thorough review of newsletters, memos, policy statements, brochures, annual reports, graphics and logos, as well as informal interviews with employees, middle and senior management, community leaders, media gatekeepers, consumers, distributors and other influencers.

6. **Review of case studies**

Purpose: To learn from the experience of others. Review past programs of a similar nature to provide an insight into strategies that have been utilised by other practitioners, the solutions used to produce a workable program, and the problems to avoid.

7. **Readability tests**

Purpose: To check the suitability of material. Various tests are available – such as the Gunning or Flesch formulas – to assess the readability and ease of comprehension of written material for particular audiences. These tests seek to review factors such as the number of multi-syllable words, abstract terms, unfamiliar words and long sentences in a sample body of text. Inexpensive software programs are now available which check readability according to target audiences.

8. Expert Review

Purpose: To ensure clarity and quality. Consult experts who can challenge or confirm assumptions and assist in the development of a better understanding of specific issues required to prepare a program.

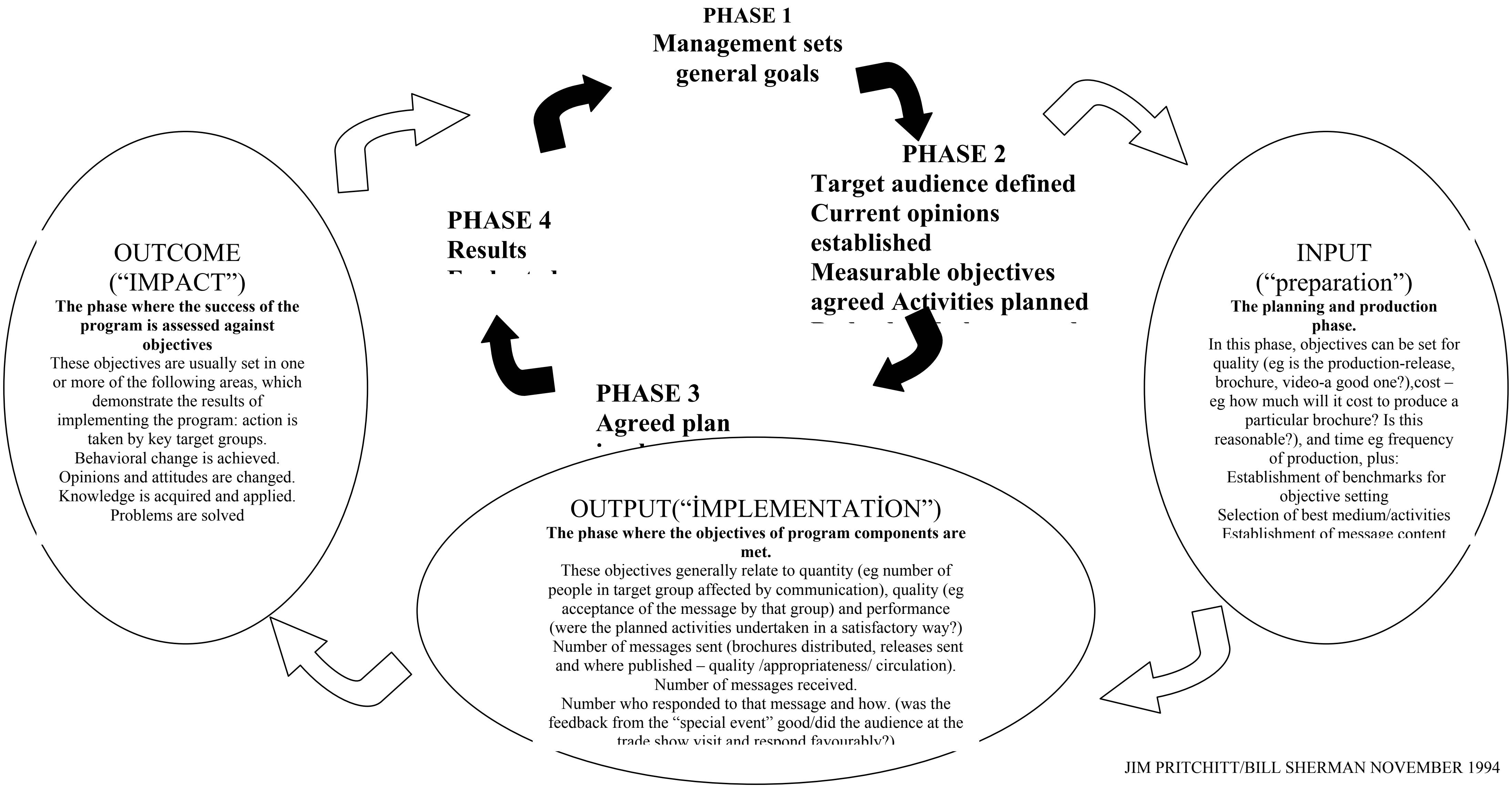
9. Survey of publics

Purpose: Test response to a message. In developing a program, choose representative samples of the target audiences and administer a brief survey to measure their response. This can be done by telephone or mail, in groups or individually, to test the validity and clarity of intended messages.

10. Network Analysis

Purpose: To discover communication pathways and blockages. A system-wide network analysis allows access to formal and informal communication systems within an organisation, as well as identifying potential problems that would impede communication flow. Use a questionnaire to track the movement of key messages and identify individuals who block or filter communication.

Linking a public relations planning model
With an evaluation model



JIM PRITCHITT/BILL SHERMAN NOVEMBER 1994

6 Evaluating outputs

To a large extent, measuring outputs the production of the public relations effort (compared with outcomes which are the end-results of the activities).

Thus in the media relations terms, some consultancies and departments compare the number of releases distributed against a pre-set target, number of interviews arranged, and count the number of mentions achieved, to measure output. Whereas ‘Outcome’ is the effect on the readers, and in particular the defined target audience. All activities in a program should be given output targets-although distributing media releases simply to meet a weekly target has to be questioned.

At the same time, the ‘opportunism’ element of public relations should not be stifled, exceeding targets should be rewarded, and unforeseen circumstances expected.

The discipline of setting output objectives can ensure continuing effectiveness of a program. For example, many brochures are left sitting on an organisation’ s shelves years after their use-by date. But defining the output measurement at the pre-production (input) stage (the number of brochures required; how, and by when, they will be distributed, and defining the audiences to receive them), helps ensure that what is planned will result in an effective output.

Most public relations activities can have clearly defined output criteria developed at the outset which are matched to input objectives.

Techniques for evaluating output include:

1. **Statistics on distribution**

Purpose: To assess communication output. Messages delivered, such as the number of media releases distributed, the number of speeches or presentations made can be totalled to give a quantitative assessment of the activity.

2. **Media monitoring**

Purpose: To measure the extent of media coverage. Calculate the amount of media coverage by monitoring print clippings and broadcast logs to calculate target audience exposure to a program. This method reviews publicity output only and indicates the size of the audience by an estimate of gross impressions.

3. **Media content analysis**

Purpose: To analyse the nature of media coverage. Use a systematic procedure to determine the content and tone of mass media clips and assess the way in which the program' s key messages and activities have been reported. This method identifies the output from the media rather than what has been understood by the target audiences.

4. Audience analysis

Purpose: To measure the effect on an audience. Survey a representative sample of the target public to assess the size and characteristics of the target audiences being reached by a program.

5. Statistical analysis

Purpose: To measure the reaction to a program. Establish a system to quantify the number of physical responses such as visitors to an exhibition, people purchasing a publication, or citizens writing to a targeted official.

6. Response rates

Purpose: To measure the number of enquiries. Establish a systematic method of recording the level of response from target audiences to a specific message from a program so that the relative effectiveness of each method of communicating can be assessed.

7. Coding material

Purpose: To measure the tone of media coverage. Codify the responses to a program as positive, neutral, or negative to allow communicators to produce statistics and tables, which quantify the level and type of response.

8. Attitude and image studies

Purpose: To determine the attitudes of different stakeholders, internal and external, to the organisation. An image study determines the image people have of the organisation and can include comparisons with other organisations. These studies are carried out by means of a survey.

9. Communication audit

Purpose: To analyse the existing communication channels of the organisation. Here the effective use of each communication channel is analysed in terms of reach and quality. The best channels for future communication are also determined.

10. Organisational culture study

Purpose: To look at all aspects of the business which contribute to the formation of the culture within the organisation. It measures aspects such as the perception people have of the organisation, management styles, the decision-making process, where bottlenecks occur, where the organisation should be going, policy decisions, which the organisation should make, and the flow of communication.

11. **Analysis of complaints**

Purpose: To check telephoned and written complaints to identify problems and potential problems. Data so collected can be used in a number of other communication activities.

7 Evaluating outcomes

Outcomes evaluation has been defined as relating to the end-results of the public relations effort. These must relate to the objectives agreed with management at the outset.

As Cutlip, Center and broom (1994) define it "*impact (outcome) measurement documents the extent to which the outcomes spelled out in objectives for each target group and the overall program goal were achieved*".

The outcome of a program or activity could be as simple as whether a particular piece of legislation was changed, or as complex as changing the behaviour of particular target audiences.

Techniques for evaluating outcomes include:

1. **Focus group discussions**

Purpose: To measure change in knowledge or attitude. Reviewing the perceptions of a representative group of people after exposure to the messages of the program allows for direct feedback on the program, particularly the depth of feeling each participant has towards the key messages.

2. **In-depth interviews**

Purpose: To understand the reasons behind beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. A sample of key individuals can be asked questions to identify the motivation for their actions and the reasons behind their beliefs about particular topics.

3. **Surveys**

Purpose: To confirm or measure change associated with a program. Data on representative samples of target audiences is collected through personal interview, telephone interview or mailed questionnaire to produce information about the degree of change to their knowledge, or behaviour after exposure to a program.

4. **Pre and post tests**

Purpose: To provide an objective measure of change. A test can be designed to show the difference in attitudes, belief or behaviour in a representative sample before and after a program.

5. **Unobtrusive data collection**

Purpose: To measure behaviour without affecting it. Observers are trained to collect data on the behaviour of a sample as the basis for estimating the behaviour of that population.

6. **Quasi-experimental study**

Purpose: To separate the effects caused by other factors. A study is designed in which comparable samples are exposed to different approaches so that the effects related to each program can be distinguished.

7. **Activity outcome**

Purpose: To measure the result of a program aimed at a particular target. This may be a change in legislation, company take-over, adding value to a share price, buying a product, number of phone calls to a hot line.

Behavioural Change

Attempting to identify ways of measuring behavioural change inevitably raises more questions than can be answered as part of an Evaluation paper.

Exactly what is the trigger for human action is debatable. In a public relations program aimed at a reduction of energy consumption, who would categorically state that the information campaign was the direct cause -the trigger- for the drop in usage of electricity? Exactly what was the motivating factor to save energy, donate to the blood bank, stop smoking, practise save sex, write a letter to an elected official, or buy a certain product, may be difficult to determine.

In Australia the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority' s (RTA) Road User Safety Branch monitors and evaluates road safety campaigns and programs. It identifies two key steps to evaluating behavioural change – one: knowing exactly the 'target problem' (eg non-wearing of seat belts) and two: identifying the target group, (eg rural men not wearing seat belts).

The ultimate objective of many of the RTA programs is to have behaviour, such as wearing seat belts, become habit. The RTA' s evaluation techniques use survey and control groups to measure whether information was learned or not. (Cutlip, Center and Broom also advocate self-reports and diaries, experiments, as well as surveys and direct and indirect observation of people's behaviour). In campaigns such as its child restraint program, the RTA stationed observers at traffic lights to observe behaviour, and depending on the campaign, combined this with the drivers and/or passengers.

However, there are problems with self-reports. For example, few employees willingly report that they ignored management policy (to stop smoking in the office or on the factory floor). How many drivers will report they were speeding or drink driving or not wearing a seat belt? Similarly, not many taxpayers would mark a survey 'yes, I cheated on my last year' s tax return!'

Robyn Preece, behavioural scientist with the RTA, says that the compliance element is an important factor in their behavioural change. She also believes that you need to give people a good reason to change behaviour, for instance safety of their children.

Measuring Behaviour in Groups

One tool to measure the communication behaviour of groups in organisations is network analysis. This plots the relationships –on communication lines- between groups and or individuals. Using a diary system, participants record all communication interactions over a set period of time – one to several days, depending on the nature of their work.

The diary captures ‘live’ data about who is communicating with whom and about what. It is not only to test and evaluate changes in behaviour, but also to predict outcomes.

There are a number of network analysis programs available to plot the data, such as NetMap an Australian designed program now being used internationally. Linkages can be assessed, cultural change monitored, and communication patterns identified and tracked using these programs.

Indirect Observation

Apart from surveys, direct observations of people’s actions, network analysis and self-reports of behaviour, there is also a need for indirect observation of behavioural change.

Examples of indirect methods for observing behaviour include a social service agency’s records of client appointments, a museum’s maintenance records showing where worn floor tiles are most frequently replaced and library check-out records.

The indirect approach has some advantages. It is unobtrusive, does not depend on the co-operation of others, and the measurement technique does not contaminate the behaviour being observed.

Measuring Change

Planners of campaigns, in particular, have learned, and continue to learn, more and more about what works, when, on whom and why. Governments get (re) elected, ballots are won or lost and people do stop smoking, buy the latest new product or join the latest social movement. So, as professional communicators and planners, we are achieving results. But are we measuring those results and do we ever think about the bigger picture?

We can measure actions, such as how many brochures were picked up from the counter or ordered through the toll-free number; letters sent to politicians, letters-to-the-editor in the national newspaper. We can even measure the success of an exhibition by people’s actions.

But actual behaviour –the decision and the consequent action to stop smoking, wear a sun hat, join a protest march, ring a toll-free number, vote in the ballot- is much harder to measure than measuring activities.

While surveys are used extensively to measure so-called behavioural change and to explain why and what worked, direct observation might be more reliable, although it is labour intensive and therefore costly.

For example, people may state on a survey that they have a commitment to saving energy, but their actual behaviour – leaving lights on and keeping heaters on unnecessarily – may negate their good intention.

The essence of the effort in evaluation is to find the linkages between information, attitude and behaviour. Of these, only the last is truly observable.

8 Media evaluation

Media content analysis can be more than an evaluation tool of media relations. When properly structured, it can make an invaluable contribution to a company's understanding of its image, its competitors, critical issues and business strategy.

Like other forms of market research, its purpose is to help improve communication effectiveness and decision-making. Some public relations managers ask, "Why do we need to research our media? We know what they say about us. We know who the most important journalists are. We have our own 'feelers out' and we have always successfully worked from our professional instinct".

This was fine when there were no other options. Now, the industry can benefit from a far more professional and disciplined assessment that has more to do with objectivity than 'seat of the pants' reaction. As suggested earlier in this Gold Paper, getting started with one evaluation process is perhaps the most important move to make, the media evaluation is perhaps the easiest to start (as long as media has a role in the program).

Media analysis at its simplest level-grading articles as 'positive', 'negative' or 'neutral' is an easy way to get started.

The growth in the interest in media analysis in particular can be assigned to a number of reasons. As Thomas Holtrop, then Vice President of American Express observed: "*In every large company, piles of newspaper articles and the like are collected but nobody has time to tide up the chaos and extract the results-least of all senior management*".

What is the benefit of extensive in-house media relations and monitoring if this service does not provide management intelligence? Information is power and few are as powerful as the media in affecting and reflecting public opinion.

Research in the U.S. has shown that when negative press exceeds 20 to 25 percent of all media coverage, a corporation's image begins to suffer.

Exxon learned this lesson the hard way. In the year following the Valdez oil spill, it spent nearly $1 billion in counter-advertising trying to repair its damaged reputation.

Media content analysis can research, measure and address a number of items both in quantitative and qualitative form, such as: How much coverage was there? How favourable was the coverage? How many potential impressions or opportunities were generated? What was the quality of the coverage? (headline, first paragraph, prominent or passing mention, photographs or logos used, etc.) How favourable are particular media titles and individual journalists? Are there any new media or correspondents? What are they interested in? Whom do they quote and which spokespeople were used? How did we affect coverage/which specific media activities worked? (eg press releases, conferences, interviews, briefings, product loans etc.)

What is our image? What are competitors doing? Are there new competitors? Are we differentiated in the media? What issues were addressed? (corporate, product, legislative, industry-wide, etc.); what messages were carried for and against the organisation? How does this compare to the organisation's key message strategy?

What is happening in the market in terms of trends? Why is it happening? What works, what doesn't and why? Are there gaps in the market to be exploited? (in terms of image, positioning, issues management etc.) What can be done about it? What recommendations can be made?

Access to the increasing number of public databases makes the raw material for this type of analysis relatively easy.

Sources of Information

The sources of information that can be analysed for content generally covers anything in the public domain that has been printed or broadcast, including:

- National Press
- Trade press
- Consumer publications
- Radio
- Wire services
- Brokers' circulars
- Company brochures

- Regional press
- Business publications
- Religious/special interest press
- Television
- Government reports
- Press releases
- Annual reports

Seven Steps in Media Evaluation

Regardless of how it's done, there are seven basic steps to follow in media evaluation:

- *Identify the aims and objectives of the research.* What information will help us? How are we going to use this information?

- *Select the representative database.* Which audiences (and thereby which media) do we need to focus upon? Should we focus on print media only or all media including radio and television? What can we afford to monitor? What can we not afford to miss?

- *Determine the period.* Do we need to establish a benchmark against which future activities are to be measured-eg for the last three months or since the beginning of the year? Is there a particular campaign that we should include, and if so, what is its life-span? What is the start day of our new strategy or campaign, which we may want to monitor continuously? If we go back a year, do we have ALL the relevant material and not just the good or bad items? Can on-line databases supply what we need or are missing? How quickly is the information required?

- *Specify the time and cost.* Do we have the time, skills and resources in-house to do it? What is the opportunity cost of doing it in-house or committing a budget to have it handled outside? Which is the best use of resources? What is the value of information in terms of securing our position/resources/budget, or in terms of cost/risk/loss of opportunity of not fully appraising the situation?

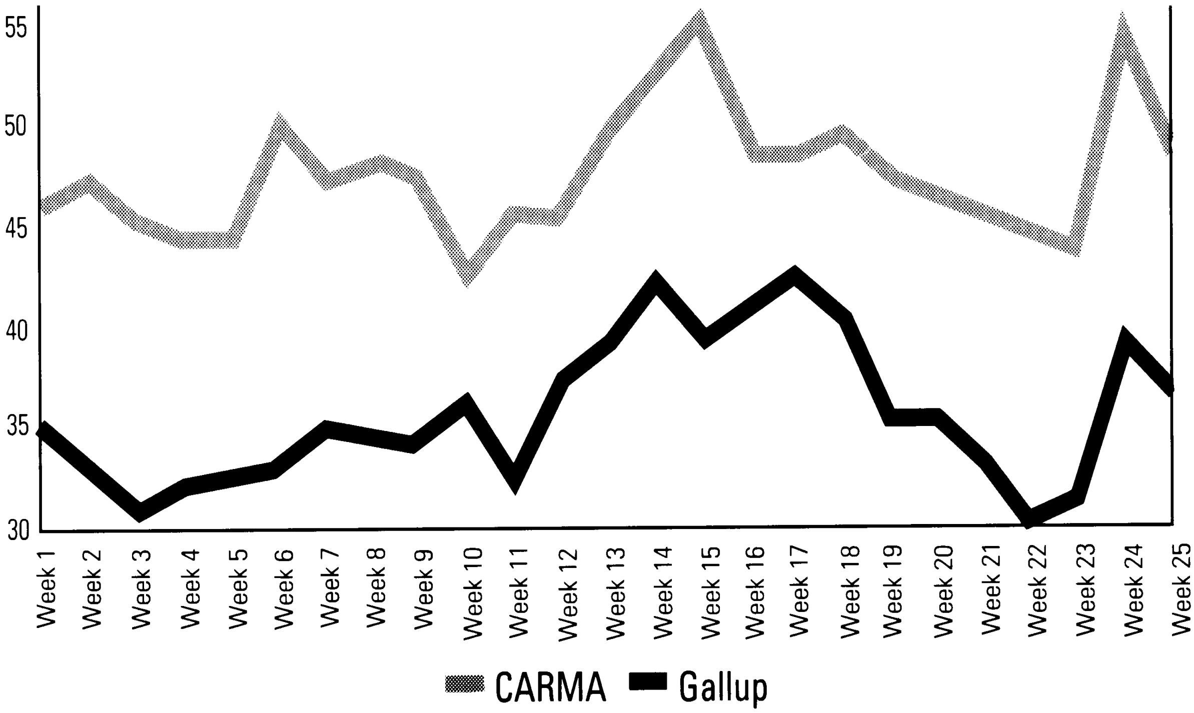
- *Collect the information.* Do we handle the clipping and monitoring in-house or do we use an agency? Given the media focus are there outside agencies more suited to the job (especially for radio and television monitoring)? If we are benchmarking our competitors, do we have all their cutting and TV tapes?

- *Develop the measurement criteria.* What are we going to measure (see objectives of research)? Which competitors do we want to monitor? What's our image and our differentiation? What issues are important to us? What is our message strategy and for which audiences? How do we communicate with the media? What campaigns are coming up? What do we consider 'favourable' and 'unfavourable' news?

- *Analyse the results.* How much information do we need? What level of accuracy is required? How and when are the results to be presented? Who are the likely beneficiaries and interested parties of the research (in the department, amongst your colleagues and advisors in Public Relations, Marketing, Research and Advertising, at Board level, etc.).

Case Study

In Washington DC CARMA International was retained by the Bush Administration in the run up to the 1992 elections. The CARMA team analysed 12,000 articles that appeared in the key media markets nation-wide during the Presidential campaign, and reported on a weekly basis. This was compared to the results of Gallup's voter polls. One of the first things that CARMA established was that it took seven days for media coverage to have an impact on voters, and the coverage of the preceding week was compared to the current week's poles.
CARMA vs. Gallup Poll/President Bush
Media Influence Over Public Opinion



The CARMA line in the chart shows the favourably of George Bush's media coverage on a weekly basis right up to election week. The lower Gallup line provides data on the percentage of voters who said they would have voted for Bush for each of the 25 weeks. When the media coverage was more favourable for Mr Bush, the voters appeared to support him more. When media comment increasingly criticised the President, there was a corresponding drop in voter support.

In this instance, the outcome of the polls relied upon the recent media coverage. For corporations, it can take as much as six months or as little as a bad week to influence a change in behaviour. Whichever is the case, by examining the media, the weather vane of public opinion can be objectively assessed, and communicators can develop a strategy to react and correct before these attitudes become entrenched.

9 Evaluation of consultancies and departments

We have included a chapter to assist departments and consultancies self-check their own standards, as well as help organisations check the performance of the consultancies that work for them. Much of this is to do with Quality, which has been covered in great depth in Gold Paper No.10.

Again, the overriding consideration in evaluating departments and consultancies is their professional performance against clear measurable objectives. To check this requires the type of activities outlined in preceding chapters.

But there are other performance standards, which can be applied to check efficiency. These generally come under the heading of the business relationship that exists between the consultancy or department and the organisation with which it works and which it serves. Public relations consultancy managers need to pay particular attention to this area.

Evaluation of the business relationship between a consultancy and client can include review of:

- The adequacy and timeliness of reporting
- The accuracy and fairness of billings (does the consultancy keep to budget?)
- Responsiveness to requests and directives
- Punctuality in attending meetings and returning phone calls
- Understanding the client's business
- Work being undertaken by appropriate level of consultancy staff
- Consultancy staff stability (as opposed to high staff turnover)
- The adequacy of resources available within the consultancy (e.g. support staff, computerisation, up-to-date media databases etc)

Detailed research on the reasons that consultancy-client relationships break down is difficult to find, but studies that have been undertaken indicate that five of the most common reasons for dissatisfaction with public relations consultancies do not relate to the quality of the professional management of the programs undertaken, but factors such as:

- Overcharging
- Star pitching – high level, experienced public relations executives presenting to a client and then assigning the work to lower level consultancy personnel
- Turnover of consultancy staff leading to loss of experience
- Not understanding a client's business
- Insufficient accountability and reporting

Significantly, all of these are concerned with the business relationship between a consultancy and its clients rather than communication skills or work undertaken.

Lack of attention to the business management side of a consultancy-client relationship may reflect the structure of most public relations consultancies, which typically are founded and managed by communication professionals. Frequently, such executives do not have professional training or experience in financial management, budgeting, cost control, accounting systems, reporting human resource management, and so on. This is an area that warrants further research.

Considered in this wide context, evaluation should also be two-away. Consultancies should review their clients in areas such as:

- The adequacy of briefing
- The adequacy and accuracy of information provided for communication
- The adequacy of budget
- Responsiveness to advice
- Human relations (are they good to work with?)
- Promptness of payment

and so on, to help develop better relationships and more successful programs.

Most of these same evaluation criteria can be applied to public relations departments within organisations. Increasingly, modern management is viewing departments within the organisation as business units, which are expected to operate commercially and achieve international 'Best Price' standards-i.e. equal efficiency and competitiveness with the best within their respective industry. Departments are increasingly treating the management to which they report as their 'client'.

Whether consultancy or department, the basis of reviews should be clearly established up front, preferably at the beginning of a relationship or program. Many managers and executives employing public relations want to be able to measure the effectiveness of public relations programs and projects in terms of numbers such as increased sales. Such results may be difficult or impossible to demonstrate. Even if sales have increased, a causal link may not be able to be established between the public relations program and the result. By taking an educative role or improving understanding in these areas, realistic expectations can be agreed.

The format for activity evaluation can vary greatly to suit individual needs and preferences and client/management relationships. However, one key point is that positive as well as negative feedback should be provided in any review. Evaluation should not simply be a complaints session.

One review format used widely by the advertising industry is for each party – the consultancy or department and the client – to answer three key questions of the other:

- What should we start doing?
- What should we keep doing?
- What should we stop doing?

Another similar approach is to structure an evaluation in three parts based on the following questions:

- What should we do more of?
- What should we do less of?
- What should we keep doing the same amount of?

Another common misconception about evaluation is that it is an annual or periodic activity. Ideally, evaluation should be carried out continually on an on-going basis. Every work-in-progress meeting, in a general sense, is an evaluation.

Specific reviews of performance and business relationship should be carried out more frequently than annually. A formal review should be conducted at least every six months. There are advantages from having quarterly reviews as problems can be identified early and remedial action taken before they escalate in to relationship-threatening issues.

Used in this positive, two way context, evaluation is a valuable tool for building and maintaining productive, lasting relationships between public relations consultancies or departments and clients. Consultancies and departments should be enthusiastic participants in evaluation with their clients. If they are not, evaluation will be conducted by clients unilaterally which can lead to sudden, unexpected changes to, or even termination of, relationships.

10 Rewards from evaluation

In public relations discussions the view is often expressed that practitioners should be ‘on the team’. Practitioners claim they should be part of the executive team making decisions about, and planning strategies for, organisations.

Many public relations people already operate at this level, and perhaps no longer need to prove their worth. Those they work with respect their contribution and see them as playing an important part in executive decision-making. But other practitioners, who still aspire to this role, should perhaps regard evaluation as the key to the executive suite.

Evaluation uses accepted management techniques to prove worth to other managers. Therefore, it can assist practitioners, to whom recognition and status are the ultimate rewards, achieve their personal objectives.

There are also rewards at other levels.

The ability to show that the results obtained were the ones planned must increase job satisfaction – and lead to wider use of public relations.

Evaluation helps effort to be channelled into productive areas earning respect for the process and larger budgets.

The ability to prove the value of the contribution is also a very persuasive argument when discussing remuneration packages. Such proof can be used by consultancies to justify increased fee rates, or even to negotiate new methods of reward.

Performance based fees are still frowned on by Public Relations Associations as leading to unethical practices. Associations wish to distinguish their members from the ‘cowboys’ who offer media placement on a ‘pay for space’ basis. Perhaps the profession has now grown past this. Its leaders argue that public relations is more than media coverage, so we should be able to point to the value of the other techniques offered.

If individual program elements can be evaluated and the total cost benefit identified, is there then an argument for consultancies to receive contingency fees based on the value of the benefit being offered?

Consultants now grumble that their skills gain many millions of dollars benefit to clients for which they receive paltry fees. Even though one suspects that often these benefits are more in the mind of the practitioner than based on reality, if it is true why is it so?

And if a department manager can prove the contribution of his or her department in financial terms, why shouldn’t salary be performance related? Only by proving that the public relations program contributed specific benefits can a reward based on success be justified.

Linking reward to success will require a great deal of further debate to satisfy the ethical standards that National Associations expect from their members.

But without evaluation, proving worth is difficult, accountability is missing, and professional and personal rewards will inevitably be constrained.

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