

Chapters *To Go*



Planning and Managing Public Relations Campaigns: A Strategic Approach, Fourth Edition

by Anne Gregory
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Chapter 09: Knowing What Has Been Achieved—Evaluation and Review

Measuring Success

Public relations is no different from any other business function in that it has to demonstrate that it adds value to the organization. Practitioners need to know how effective they've been in meeting their objectives and if they've not been as effective as they thought they should have been, they need to discover why. They also need to be able to demonstrate an appropriate return for the investment that has been made, although it's a mistake to believe this can always be quantified in financial terms. Albert Einstein said: 'Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.'

First, defining terms. **Evaluation** is an ongoing process when talking about longer-term campaigns or programmes. Thus, there will be regular evaluation of the performance of the website by making a monthly critical analysis of activity. As a result of this there may more focused effort on particular sections of the website, or its navigability features. This ongoing evaluation is often called monitoring.

Similarly, at the end of a specific campaign, there will be an evaluation of the results. So if the objective was to prevent the closure of a factory, there will be a clear-cut indication of the result at the end. The organization has either succeeded or failed. If the objective was to raise awareness by a fixed percentage, then awareness will need to be researched to come to conclusions about levels of success.

Review is a regular management practice. It is extremely sensible to take a good, hard look at the campaign or programme each year. Review involves looking at what the evaluation over the year has shown, revisiting the programme objectives and scrutinizing the strategy. The circumstances surrounding the project will also be looked at. Have there been changes that now render it irrelevant, even though evaluation shows it is very successful in itself? It could well be that the project proceeds as before, but it may be that a complete reorientation is needed. More on this later.

In a nutshell, evaluation is both monitoring as the project proceeds and an analysis of the end results of a campaign or programme, while review is a periodic step back to identify any more strategic changes that need to take place.

The Benefits of Evaluation

If undertaken properly, evaluation both helps spot danger signs before real problems develop and it helps prove a campaign's worth. Here are a few reasons why evaluation should be built into campaigns and programmes:

- **It focuses effort.** If it is known that the campaign is going to be measured on a number of agreed objectives, it will be focused on the important and keep the urgent in perspective.
- **It demonstrates effectiveness.** There is no success like success! If the practitioners achieve what they have aimed to achieve, they are able to demonstrate their contribution to the organization.
- **It ensures cost efficiency.** Because the things that should take priority are being concentrated on, the budget and time (which is also money) will be spent on the things that count and achieve the big results.
- **It encourages good management.** Management by objectives, having clear goals, brings sharpness to the whole public relations operation. The irrelevant will be quickly identified and rejected.
- **It facilitates accountability.** Not only the practitioners' accountability to produce results, which is perfectly in order, but it also makes other people accountable in their dealings. The public relations professional can quite legitimately say, 'If I spend time doing this unscheduled project, it means that I cannot complete this important, planned activity. Which is it to be?' Then clear choices can be made about what may be new and pressing priorities. If the planned activity is also essential, then extra help may be needed – so the practitioner is in a powerful position to ask for more people or extra budget. Good managers not only accept accountability for themselves, but they are in a strong position to challenge others to be accountable and to gain access to valued resources.

Why Practitioners Don't Evaluate

In their book on evaluation for this series, Watson and Noble^[1] conclude that many practitioners lack confidence in promoting evaluation methods to clients and employees.

When questioned about their motives for undertaking evaluation, 'prove value of campaign/budget' came out a very clear

leader, followed by 'help campaign targeting and planning' and 'need to judge campaign effects'. Another reason, 'help get more resources/fees', came a distant fourth.

Watson's own research showed that practitioners were defensive about their activities. They used evaluation techniques to present data on which they could be judged rather than using evaluation to improve programmes.

The most used technique was providing an output measure for media relations (eg the range of publications in which coverage was obtained) rather than measuring the impact of the media relations campaign itself. Generally speaking, output measurement was seen to be more relevant than gauging impact or gaining intelligence so that programmes could be improved.

Watson also pinpointed the main reasons why programmes were not formally evaluated. These were, first, lack of knowledge (possibly disinclination to learn about evaluation techniques), second, 'cost', followed by 'lack of time' and 'lack of budget'. When added together, 'cost' and 'lack of budget' became the dominant reasons.

There are other reasons why evaluation is seen to be problematic.

- **Understanding what it is that has to be evaluated.** The levels at which evaluation takes place will be discussed later in this chapter, but at this stage suffice to say that often what is measured is output not outcome. There is still an emphasis on media relations and the size of the clippings file. There may be some more sophisticated forms of media analysis like trying to measure the worth of a clipping depending on its position on the page, its size, the number of key messages it contains, whether it is routine or negative and so on. There are several companies that provide such a service. Some will provide a more detailed analysis, for example, a breakdown of how many times specific publications or journalists used press stories and the types of treatment the story received.

However, in the long run it doesn't matter how big the clippings file is; what matters is what those clippings achieved (the outcome). For instance, was there a 20 per cent increase in attendance at the AGM and did they vote in favour of the motion? Has the attitude of key publics altered?

- **Understanding what can be achieved.** Public relations practitioners need to make sober assessments on this. It is just not possible to get the chief executive on the front page of the *Financial Times* every month unless he or she or the organization is exceptional in some way (or notorious!). What is required is an honest appraisal of what can be achieved. That knowledge comes with good research and the benefit of experience of similar situations. Managing expectations is a key practitioner task.

Unrealistic expectations on what can be achieved belies a lack of knowledge of the psychological art of the possible. As detailed in Chapter 5 it is very difficult, or at least will require a very determined and skilful campaign, to convert people who have a fixed view to take on a different view. It is a less onerous task if the target public has no view at all, or it is reasonably well disposed because the organizational message confirms or aligns with its own desires or beliefs. Again research will identify attitudes and therefore the size of the public relations task.

- **Aggregation.** Sometimes it is difficult to identify precisely what the public relations' contribution was if there were other forms of communication activity, such as special promotions or favourable comment in a social network.
- **Range of evaluation techniques required.** Public relations is unlike some other forms of marketing communication, such as selling through a website, where the evaluation is relatively simple: the number of returns and the business transacted. Public relations addresses many audiences in many different ways and different types of evaluation technique are needed. So practitioners need to be aware of the different research techniques available and to have the knowledge and resources necessary to undertake them.

More recently there have been a number of positive developments that have moved the evaluation agenda along and there are useful guides and books on the subject, such as the CIPR^[2] evaluation policy document, the German Public Relations Association^[3] online resource on evaluation and, for Government, the publication by the UK Government Communication Service (GCS).^[4] The GCS helpfully also provides a list of free-to-use evaluation tools and resources.^[5] The most comprehensive set of evaluation materials are freely available from the American Institute for Public Relations^[6]. The book by Prof Tom Watson and Paul Noble in this series provides a comprehensive and practical overview of evaluation. These contributions have helped to take some of the mystique and fear out of the subject.

It is impossible in this book to give an evaluation blueprint for every type of public relations activity. For some activities evaluation will be relatively easy. If a practitioner is running an exhibition stand it is a simple, quantitative exercise to count the number of product enquiries, take contact addresses and then trace back subsequent product orders.

Other things like the effects of a long-term sponsorship programme are much more difficult to evaluate.

[1]Watson, T and Noble, P (2014) *Evaluating Public Relations*, Kogan Page, London

[2]CIPR (2011). Research planning and measurement toolkit. Available to CIPR members at www.cipr.co.uk

[3]DPRG (2011). Available at www.globalalliancepr.org

[4]GCS (2014) https://gcn.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/GCN-Evaluation-Book_v6.pdf

[5]GCS (2014) <https://gen.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Free-to-use-evaluation-tools.pdf>

[6]Available at www.Instituteforpr.org/research/measurement_and_evaluation

Principles of Evaluation

There are a number of principles of evaluation that help to set the context and make the task easier.

- **Objectives** are critical. Public relations campaigns can be seen to be effective when they achieve their objectives in a well-managed way. So objectives need to be achievable and measurable and, to ensure that they are, they need research and pre-testing wherever possible. 'Raising awareness' is not a good objective unless qualified by how much (1 per cent or 99 per cent?) and with whom (define the public). Research will help to show you what is possible. There is also likely to be a timeframe over which to work. A long-term campaign to change the general attitude towards the decriminalization of drugs is likely to have patchy, incremental results over a long period. However, even in this situation it is possible to lay down clear benchmarks. For example, a legitimate objective would be to persuade the majority of police chiefs to support the campaign by the year 2020, or give up the campaign.

The achievement of objectives is the clearest way to evaluate any programme or campaign. Hence, it is also imperative that these and the measurement criteria that will be used to assess them are agreed with those who will judge success.

- **Evaluation** needs to be considered at the beginning of the process. It's too late to ask the question 'How did we do?' at the end if the mechanisms for measurement were not built in at the beginning.
- **Evaluation** is ongoing. Programmes should be monitored as they progress and initial findings scrutinized to judge both whether the indicators point to success, and to fine-tune the programme where adjustments need to be made.
- **Evaluation** is at all stages of the communication process. The decisions that have to be taken all along the communication chain affect the communication outcome. Practitioners have to decide on the content, the tone, the medium, the level of exposure, whether the target is receiving and interpreting the communication correctly. If one element is wrong, the desired outcome will be in jeopardy. Unfortunately, the converse is not true. Just because each element is right doesn't mean automatic success, but getting any of the elements wrong diminishes the chances of success.
- **Evaluation** must be as objective and scientific as possible. This means that public relations practitioners need to be proficient themselves or need to enlist the services of specialists who know about social scientific research and evaluation methods. Sometimes less rigorous research gives an indicator and in all that is possible to do, but even here evaluation must be valid and demonstrably reliable if it is to be taken seriously.
- **Evaluating** programmes and processes. Public relations programmes and campaigns require evaluating for the results of the communication activity, and also for their management. It is useful to separate out and list the achievements of programme objectives (eg sponsorship achieved objective of 20 per cent awareness in target group) and the fact that the campaign was managed well (eg 10 per cent under budget).

Evaluation Terminology

There are a number of terms that are often used in evaluation that merit explanation. For each programme or campaign there will be:

- **Input.** This is what the public relations professional 'puts in' to their communication 'products'. For example, they might write, design and produce an in-house journal. When evaluating inputs, elements such as the quality of the background research, writing, effectiveness of design, choice of font and size, paper and colour can all be evaluated.
- **Output.** This is how effectively 'products' are distributed to and used by the target publics, either by the target public

directly (eg how many employees received and read the journal) or by a third party who is a channel or opinion former to the target public (eg how many bloggers used the key messages?). So evaluation of outputs often involves counting and analysing things, for example, readership and circulation, reach of websites and content analysis.

- **Out-take.** This is the intermediate position between an output and an outcome, and describes what an individual might extract from a communications programme, but it may or may not lead to further action that can be measured as a result. If a message in the house magazine is about discounted membership of the local cinema club, how many employees actually remember that message can be measured, ie have extracted the relevant information from the article, but there is likely to be a difference between the number who demonstrate an out-take from the magazine and those who go on to sign up for membership.
- **Outcome.** This involves measuring the end effect of the communication. How many employees who read the magazine took up the opportunity to join the local cinema club at a reduced rate?

Outcomes are measured at the three levels at which objectives are set (see Chapter 5):

- – changes at the thinking or awareness level (cognitive);
- – changes in the attitude or opinion level (affective);
- – changes in behaviour (conative).

To measure these outcomes sometimes requires sophisticated research, including attitude surveys, focus groups, tracking web or social networking traffic and content and individual interviews. For some campaigns, however, measurement can be relatively easy, for example as sales at the launch of a product.

However, what is clear is that if changes in opinion are wanted as the result of the campaign, this will be the objective, and to evaluate the programme opinions will need to be measured. It is not good enough to provide newspaper cuttings that contain the message practitioners wish to get across in order to change opinions. Media relations is a route by which the end may be achieved, and success in this area is worth noting, but it is not the end result. Success in the media is an output, not an outcome.

Measuring success at the output level and claiming that by implication an outcome has been achieved is called 'level substitution' and is invalid. Of course it is perfectly legitimate to measure outputs as an indicator along the way, but that is how they must be described. [Figure 9.1](#) shows how the UK Government uses these terms when evaluating websites and social media communications.

Inputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website, social media or other digital space and related content created to meet communication objectives • The cost
Outputs
<p>These will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of the end audience visiting the site or digital space at least once during the evaluation period (unique users) • The source of visitor referrals.
Out-takes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What people think, feel or recall about the webspace. You may also be able to infer attitudes and understanding from comments that people leave on your website or social media space.
Intermediate outcomes
<p>These will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average length of time spent on site • Bounce rate • The number watching any videos or embedded content on your site (starting to watch and watching whole clip) • The number of pages visited. <p>Also consider including metrics that look at actions carried out on social media websites, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of 'likes' on Facebook • Number of retweets on Twitter. <p>Always ensure that you tie these standard metrics back to your website or digital space's objectives and consider what you are trying to get people to do (register, read a particular piece of content, retweet content etc). This will enable you to interpret the data appropriately.</p>
Final outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final outcome measures should assess whether your website or digital space met its overall communication objective, and its effect on the overall policy objective that you are working to and the effect that this has had. Choose performance metrics that enable you to measure the activity's impact on both.

Used with permission of the Government Communication Service (GCS). Correct as of going to print: March 2015

Figure 9.1: How the UK Government uses evaluation terms

Outflow

'Outflow' is not a common term used in the literature, but it is helpful. It is the long-term cumulative effects of public relations in terms of individual programmes, or the aggregated effect of several campaigns and programmes. Hence, this may be, for example, improvement of the reputation of the organization as a result of numerous campaigns over time; or it might be a long-term change in one particular behaviour as a result of several campaigns, or one long campaign that comprises several stages each with their own outcomes, but whose cumulative effect is more than the aggregate of those campaigns. For example, smoking is decreasing in the Western World, but that is the result of many different campaigns over several years. The outflow of this programme is not only a cut in *smoking* with the attendant health benefits, which was the original outcome aimed for, smoking has become less socially acceptable and individuals are making routine choices not to invest in tobacco companies.

Levels of Evaluation

Chapter 1 described the contribution of public relations at four levels: societal, corporate, stakeholder/value chain and functional levels. In a similar vein, evaluation can be undertaken at these various levels. At the societal level, apart from the

societal contribution that organizations can make, public relations can have a role to play in bringing to the public agenda things that are significant for the whole of society, such as, for example, explaining and convincing people of the need for action over climate change. It can also bring to public notice the concerns of minority groups who might otherwise lack the power to claim attention. Hence, the plight of elderly people who find difficulty in paying their fuel bills can be highlighted by activist groups who use public relations very effectively. Public relations can be involved in bringing together groups who are in conflict, as in Northern Ireland, with profound positive social effect.

As Chapter 1 explains, for organizations, public relations at the societal level can be used, for example to promote social responsibility and be the eyes and ears of the organization, helping it to adapt to changes in the environment.

Evaluation of the impact of public relations activity at the societal level requires tools that will measure things such as public opinion: hence public opinion polling by the interested organization, whether that be government or a corporate body, or by one of the larger opinion survey organizations, such as Ipsos MORI, will provide feedback. Other tools such as quantitative and qualitative surveys and detailed dialogue with a range of societal stakeholders are also relevant here. At this level, as for the other three levels, awareness, attitude and opinion and behaviour towards the organization will need to be evaluated.

At the corporate level, public relations will make a contribution to the overall reputation of the organization by ensuring management decisions are informed. It may also contribute directly to profits. As Chapter 1 indicated, intangible assets now account for 80 per cent of organizational value. Being the guardian of the organization's reputation and safeguarding the quality of key relationships with stakeholders will be invaluable. Profit is a tangible asset that can be added to the balance sheet, but reputation and the quality of relationships form part of the intangible assets of the organization and are not immediately amenable to a financial measure. However, when the organization comes to be sold, these intangible assets begin to realize their true value. Organizations that are taken over are often paid more for the value of their brand (that is, their reputation and the relationship people have with the brand) than for the tangible assets (buildings, money, equipment, etc). Hence, organizations now often use the balanced scorecard approach to assess their worth. Balanced scorecards attempt to evaluate both the tangible and intangible assets of an organization and therefore provide a fuller picture of its value than a summation of its financial worth alone. [Figure 9.2](#) gives an example of how such a scorecard can be adapted to evaluate public relations' contribution at the corporate level, along with two example questions that might be asked under each heading.

Financial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did our financial PR efforts increase share value? • Did PR contribute to product sales? 	Reputational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the organization held in higher esteem than it was 5 years ago? • Has the level of negativity about our corporate decisions decreased in the last 5 years?
Relational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have the right relationships in place and are they strong enough for us to gain support for our business decisions? • Do our key partnerships last longer than they did 5 years ago? 	Cultural <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there closer alignment between what we say and do internally and externally than there was 5 years ago? • Can we assure ourselves that decisions are value-based rather than primarily profits-based?

Figure 9.2: A balanced scorecard approach to evaluating corporate-level public relations performance

To evaluate at this level there will have to be in-depth qualitative and quantitative research using techniques such as: focus groups, one-to-one interviews, opinion surveys, online discussion groups, online opinion sampling and organizational profiling, in-house questionnaires and surveys, analysis of sales returns and so on.

At the value chain level much more detailed work needs to be done on producing solid evaluations. At this level every stakeholder group connected with the organization will need to be analysed to judge the status and quality of the relationship

that exists and its trajectory: is it improving or deteriorating? Is this a relationship that needs fostering or maybe it is time to move on because a common agenda no longer exists. Stakeholder relationships fall into several categories as the analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrated. Those stakeholders who are regarded as Key Players and who need to be partnered will need a close and well-looked-after relationship which will need to be carefully monitored and regularly reviewed to ensure it is being maintained and enhanced.

Those with much Interest but little power can be very demanding of time and that relationship will need oversight to ensure they are informed, but not over-served. It is likely that these stakeholders will always want more communication than can be sustained within the resources available, so it has to be accepted that there could well be a level of dissatisfaction. As long as it is carefully monitored to ensure it is within a band of tolerance, the organization can be kept safe. However, issues management with this group is crucial.

Those with power, but less interest will expect their needs to be satisfied, but may well wish to be left alone until there is something that prompts or merits their interest. Again, monitoring the status of the relationship with this group is essential.

All these nuances need to be taken into account when making judgements about the quality of relationships with stakeholders. Relationships can last for a long or a short time. Sometimes groups come together for a particular purpose and then dissolve. Sometimes relationships are long lasting and it is important not to take them for granted. It is enlightening and helpful to monitor their quality from time to time.

The best way to gain a judgement about the quality of relationships is to ask those involved. This can be done quite simply, but a comprehensive survey instrument to do this has been written by Linda Hon and James Grunig^[8] and it is readily available. It's advisable to 'temperature check' the quality of enduring relationships every 12 months or so. It is also helpful to track the progress of long-lasting relationships over time. Aggregating the results of the annual temperature check over a number of years can be very revealing. A tracker such as the one shown in [Figure 9.3](#) shows graphically the direction of travel of these crucial relationships. The upward arrow shows a more positive response to the quality questionnaire to the previous year, the downward arrow a more negative response and a horizontal arrow means no difference year on year. The RAG rating (Red, Amber, Green) shows the level of risk that is attributed to the relationships and shows immediately where action needs to be taken. Looking back over the history of the quality of the relationship indicates where relationships are stable and progressing, but also where they are unstable and/or fragile and where care and work needs to be judiciously applied.

	Year 1 Direction of relationship	Year 2 Direction of relationship	Year 3 Direction of relationship	Year 4 Direction of relationship	Year 5 Direction of relationship	Risk rating
Stakeholder 1 ↑	↔	↑	↑	↑	↑	G
Stakeholder 2 ↔	↓	↔	↑	↔	↔	A
Stakeholder 3 ↔	↑	↔	↑	↑	↑	G
Stakeholder 4 ↑	↑	↔	↓	↓	↓	R
Stakeholder 5 ↓	↔	↔	↔	↑	↑	A

Figure 9.3: Relationship tracker

At the functional level, as Chapter 1 indicated, the public relations function advises other departments and determines for itself which public relations activities have to be undertaken to help the organization meet its objectives. Again this requires public relations to monitor and evaluate the relationships it has with these other departments (and senior management) and the kind of survey mentioned above, along with good customer care, formally measured through satisfaction surveys can help keep track of that.

The other major task here is to monitor and evaluate the public relations programmes and campaigns that public relations undertakes and the next section covers this in detail.

^[8]PR Academy (2015) Trends Survey. Available at www.pracademy.co.uk/wp-content

A Campaign Evaluation Model and Some other Measures

It is possible to come up with a generic model that can be applied to most programmes, but there is no set blueprint for evaluation – individual programmes and campaigns need tailor-made evaluations.

However, a useful device widely used today is the macro model of evaluation devised by Jim Macnamara^[7] (see [Figure 9.4](#)). The model forms a pyramid.

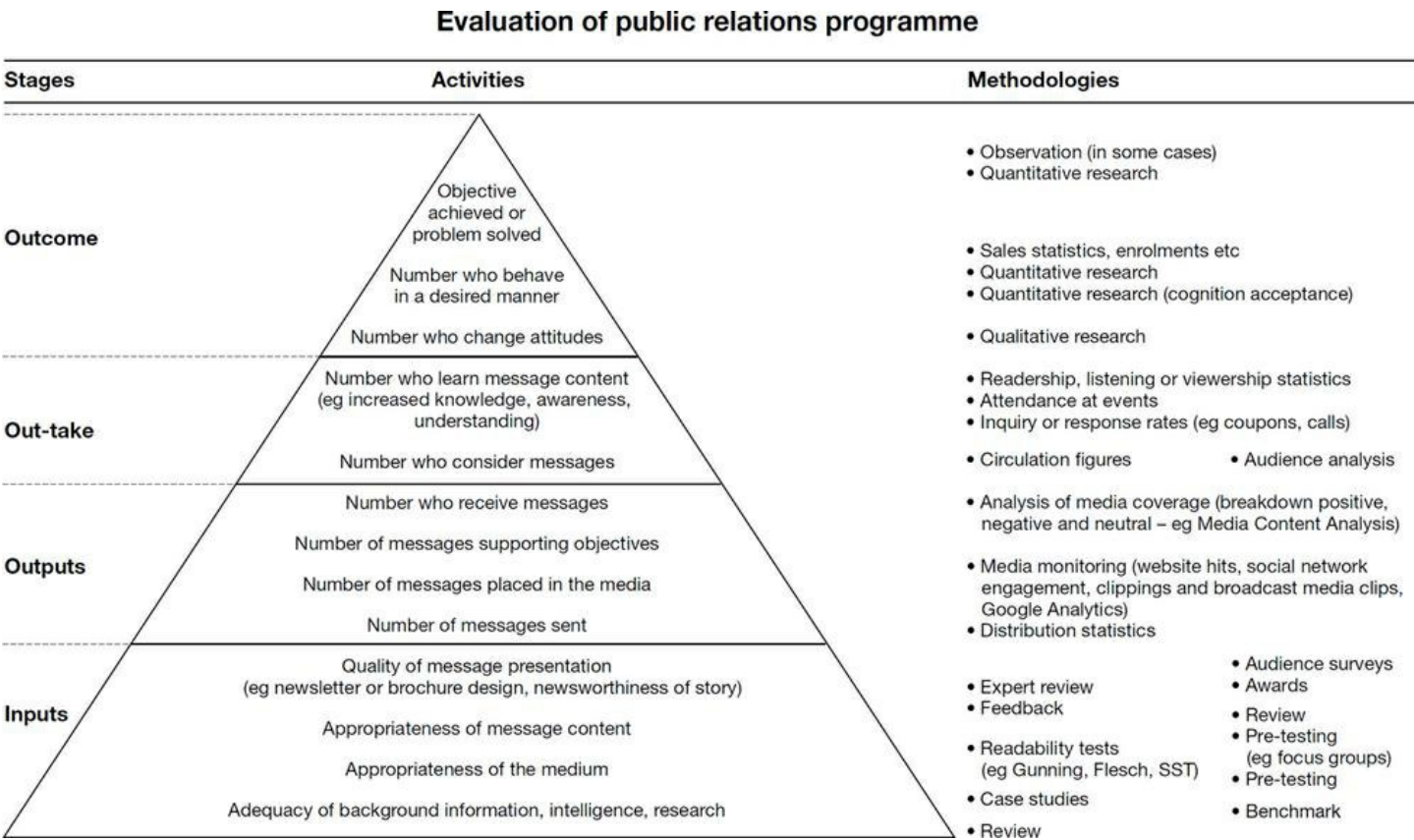


Figure 9.4: Macnamara's macro model of evaluation adapted by Gregory

At the base are inputs, basically information and planning, and at the peak, objectives achieved. Each activity is split down into the various steps of the communication process. At the input stage the model asks the user to make a judgement on the quality of information, the choice of medium and the content of the communication. It then considers outputs, that is the communication produced, for example, the newsletter, the press release, the brochure, the website. It goes on to look at out-take, that is, what receivers have paid attention to and retained, and then it considers the results or outcomes – what the communication actually achieved. Alongside the steps is a list of evaluation methods that might be used for a media campaign, a newsletter, a website and so on.

The model needs to be customized for each project, but the principles remain the same. Its strength is that it recognizes a range of evaluation methods and allows flexibility.

The more advanced evaluation methods further up the pyramid measure outcomes. They are more sophisticated and of course more expensive. The ones lower down the pyramid are more basic and can be seen as tests that things are being done right, more akin to quality control. However, these basic checks are not to be missed. There can be more confidence of success higher up the pyramid if the basics are right.

In practical terms how does this translate into reality? Here is a resume checklist of critical factors to consider when planning evaluation into a campaign or programme:

- set measurable and realistic objectives;
- build in evaluation and quality checks from the start;
- agree measurement criteria with whoever will be judging the success of your work;
- establish monitoring procedures that are open and transparent, for example, monthly reviews of progress;
- demonstrate results.

As mentioned earlier in this book (Chapter 5) communication is not only about rational engagement; emotions also play a

significant role. While the author would always recommend evaluation to be scientifically evaluated, it is true that subjective as well as objective measures are made.

Objective Evaluation Measures

Typical objective measures that might be employed are:

- changes in behaviour (if an activity is given public relations support, behaviour can be tracked);
- responses (return of coupons, website comments, social media traffic, salesforce quotes, etc);
- changes in attitude, opinion and awareness – especially important for opinion-former work (can be measured through telephone research, questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, online surveys);
- achievements (80 per cent of retailers came to promotional conference);
- media coverage, content, distribution, readership, share of voice (content analysis, readership data);
- budget control and value for money (a process measure).

It is sometimes relatively easy to put in checks when measuring the effectiveness of editorial when working on a product promotion programme, if working in conjunction with other marketing colleagues. For example, when the author worked in-house for a large financial institution, she was able to place editorial material next to a financial product advert that had been running for a few weeks in the *Sunday Times*. The number of policies that came from the two adverts previous to the editorial were 27 and 21 respectively. The advert with adjacent editorial resulted in 94 policies being sold tracked with a unique advertising code.

Similarly, for another financial product it was found that adjacent editorial doubled the returns from a series of adverts in the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Subjective Evaluation Measures

Apart from quantitative objective measures, subjective measures of performance are also inevitably employed. Public relations is a human business and human judgements will be used. These factors may be especially important in the client/consultancy relationship, but are also highly prized in the relationships that in-house departments build with other departments within their organization. In fact what often wins business for consultancies (all things being equal) and ready cooperation from other departments are these subjective yardsticks:

- enthusiasm;
- efficiency and professionalism;
- creativity;
- initiative;
- an instinct for what is right in a given situation (based on judgement gained through experience);
- people chemistry.

Evaluating the Process

A critical part of evaluation is to monitor how the campaign is managed: the process. Part of this is the effective deployment of both staff and budgets. Regular, rigorous monitoring of both is required.

Staff need to be continuously developed to cope with and exploit the rapidly changing communication environment. It is also essential that public relations staff are well motivated and well directed. They are, after all, the handlers and managers of the organization's reputation in a most overt sense. If they do not believe in what they are doing, how can they do their job proficiently and professionally?

Likewise, the management and effective use of budgets is a duty laid on every manager, including the public relations professional. With so many options open on how to spend what is often quite a limited budget, he or she must have a keen regard to the careful stewardship of resources. Every pound should count. Chapter 8 gives a more detailed exposition on how

budgeting can be done effectively.

Evaluation remains an issue for the public relations industry. Research by the PR Academy⁸ in 2015 among its students who are all practising communicators found that 35 per cent of still do not evaluate. Until this issue is firmly addressed the profession will continue to struggle demonstrating its contribution.

CASE STUDY Evaluating the impact of AkzoNobel's corporate reputation

This case study demonstrates how research and evaluation is crucial to demonstrating the value of effective communication. It illustrates how benchmarking research sets the baseline for effective evaluation and how building in evaluation metrics from the start can build an evidence base for important business decisions.

Is having a famous product brand enough?

Is having the world's most famous paint brand enough, or does the reputation of the corporate organization behind the brand actually matter?

For most people around the world, the Dulux dog comes to mind. For others, it's the speciality coating in Formula One. Others praise its anti-malaria paint, saving lives across India. Few think AkzoNobel synonymous with these well-known and well-regarded products. The exam question posed to the executive team by the AkzoNobel board was: does this actually matter? Is there real material advantage to be gained by building corporate reputation?

AkzoNobel is one of the world's largest paint and coatings companies and is a leading producer of speciality chemicals. The organization has a long and distinguished history dating back hundreds of years, with the last two decades seeing the merger of Akzo and Nobel as well as the acquisition of two high-profile companies, Courtaulds and ICI. Today, with operations in more than 80 countries and about 47,000 employees, AkzoNobel has transformed from a diversified conglomerate into a focused chemicals and coatings company.

Despite owning Dulux, the world's best-loved paint brand, and being responsible for ground-breaking innovations from fire-retardant coatings for the Apollo space missions to high performance finishes for McLaren Formula One cars, AkzoNobel as a corporate entity is little known outside of its home market of the Netherlands. It was with this in mind that AkzoNobel partnered with Mindful Reputation to conduct the most comprehensive audit of corporate brand awareness and reputation ever undertaken by the company.

For AkzoNobel's Corporate Communications Director the starting point was: 'If we are going to have our future licence to exist as mega corporations, society will increasingly say I know I can buy your product but what do you stand for? Do I like you?'

The reputation research brief aimed to measure corporate brand awareness by market, stakeholder audience, segment and product brands; understand drivers of trust and behaviour; and assess the relationship between the corporate brand and the product brands. The programme had to:

- provide a baseline to track progress over time, benchmarked against a host of international competitors,
- develop an integrated Reputation Scorecard for the Board, and
- deliver actionable, evidence-based insights for the leadership and communications teams.

Priority markets were identified as the traditional home markets of the Netherlands and UK, and also fast-growing and hugely important emerging markets such as Brazil, India and China.

Research approach

The team sought to determine the alignment or otherwise between how AkzoNobel sees itself, how the outside world experiences it and expects it to be, and how the owned, earned and paid-for communication positions the group from Brazil to China. Given the scope of what was needed, the research was both quantitative to provide key KPIs and drive insights for the business, and also qualitative to get behind the 'why' and 'why not' questions.

As part of the planning stage, the AkzoNobel leadership from a variety of functions in each of the target markets explained how they saw the organization. This was used to frame the questionnaire for the external phase as well as providing a snapshot of AkzoNobel's identity.

AkzoNobel is a highly complex business with both a B2B and B2C focus. The research included external audiences consisting of three main groups:

- consumers;
- business customers – the research used set sample quotas across each business segment from automotive to industrial;
- opinion formers – media, the financial community, government, NGOs and industry experts.

The research method and materials were adapted to each of these three groups – an online survey was recommended for consumers while business customers and opinion formers respond best to a semi-structured telephone interview. Importantly, each of the business leaders were involved in the targeting and research process which proved essential on sharing the findings and ensuring that they were actioned.

Finally, as most organizations only have some 30–50 publications that actually drive their brand and reputation, the team worked with the countries and businesses to focus on only the top-tier print, online and social media to benchmark AkzoNobel's profile and relationships against chosen competitors across each market.

Results

The findings provided statistically robust evidence that AkzoNobel, as a corporate entity, is little known by consumers outside its home market of the Netherlands. However, AkzoNobel enjoys an excellent reputation among those consumers, business customers and opinion formers who know them.

The corporate brand endorsement strategy was validated by findings that consumers and business customers (who know AkzoNobel) are more likely to purchase a product if AkzoNobel is known as the manufacturer. A direct result of this was CEO approval of proposals by the corporate brand team for more consistent and prominent corporate logo placement across the entire product portfolio, and broader corporate brand stories focusing on innovation and excellence to generate greater recognition of AkzoNobel's strong reputation.

Findings on AkzoNobel's 'employer attractiveness' among sub-groups of potential employees and students of chemistry, engineering and business were used by AkzoNobel's global recruitment HR team to feed into their strategy for developing the employer brand.

AkzoNobel's corporate communications and media relations teams took on the research insights, including a renewed focus on storytelling and messaging around innovation and sustainability and an enhanced corporate social media presence. AkzoNobel has since restructured its corporate communications team to facilitate this.

The storytelling and messaging is also being driven by the company's global Human Cities initiative, which was launched in June 2014. It builds on the fact that a significant percentage of AkzoNobel's business comes from products and services that are linked to the urban environment. Designed to help cities become more inspiring, energizing and vibrant, it is focused on six main pillars: colour, heritage, transport, education, sport and leisure, and sustainability. The initiative also involves partnering with major organizations such as The Rockefeller Foundation. A key reputation driver, Human Cities plays a vital role as it links the company to an important global issue – the challenge posed by rapid population growth in urban areas – and is an ideal platform for AkzoNobel to explain why its products are so relevant to today's world. AkzoNobel has since restructured its corporate communications team to facilitate both the research findings and the new focus on Human Cities.

Results

The results of the benchmarking research and the ongoing media tracking can be seen in the charts shown in [Figure 9.5](#).

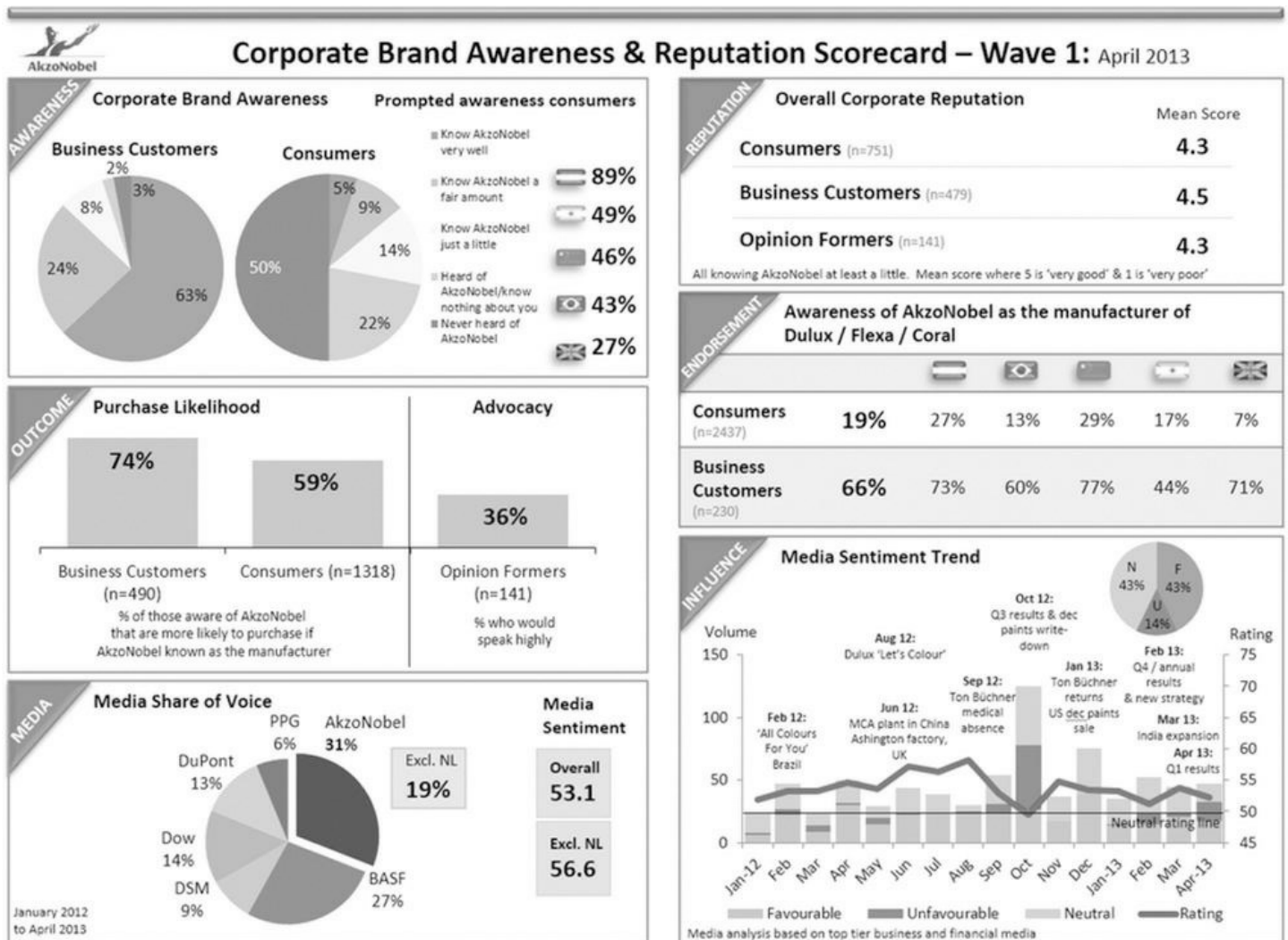


Figure 9.5: AkzoNobel's benchmark research and ongoing media tracking dashboard

Ongoing media analysis already shows an improvement in AkzoNobel's proactively generated media profile. More broadly, the research has worked hard for multiple internal stakeholders at a country and global level and has set a baseline for tracking progress over time.

Not least, presentations to AkzoNobel's CEO and Executive Committee and the AkzoNobel Board focused on the evidence of materiality and where 'money was being left' on the table as the research demonstrated the impact of corporate brand awareness (or otherwise) on likelihood to purchase product. This has put AkzoNobel's corporate reputation and communications engagements at the centre of the group's growth strategy.

Points about This Case

- Setting research-based benchmarks is the key to rigorous evaluation.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation provides key insights on how existing activities should be adjusted and fine-tuned.
- In this case ongoing monitoring and evaluation provided evidence of new and unexploited opportunities.
- Providing evidence has allowed communication to position itself as a strategic asset for AkzoNobel and secured ongoing resources for its activities.
- Through the persuasive evidence of research and evaluation the communications department has placed itself at the heart of AkzoNobel's business strategy.
- Rigorous research generating an evidence base is taken seriously by senior management and Boards.

[7]Macnamara, J R (1992) Evaluation of public relations: the Achilles' heel of the PR profession, *International Public Relations Review*, **15**, November

Reviewing the Situation

While monitoring and evaluation takes place on an ongoing basis, a thorough review takes place less often. As explained earlier (Chapter 4), a major review including extensive research may well be triggered by a significant event such as a takeover or a new Chief Executive arriving. That will entail a close examination and analysis of both the external and internal environments, and probably a repositioning of the organization, as well as all the aspects of constructing a viable plan outlined in this book.

While it is essential to tweak tactics as a plan unfolds, especially in the light of information that ongoing evaluation brings, the plan itself should remain as the route-map, with some flexibility to accommodate opportunities and problems as they arise. This approach is sound as long as the objectives remain the same and the strategy holds good. However, it is essential to bear in mind that public relations is conducted within a dynamic environment and there must be the capability to respond as soon as possible, either in a proactive way to lead or forestall events, or in a reactive way to deal with an emergency situation. A review is required if the overall objectives need to be changed or if the strategy is seen not to be working.

It is also good practice to undertake a regular review of campaigns irrespective of whether there are major changes that demand such a response. A look every 3 or 6 months and a longer look every 12 months ensures that everything is on track, and that any new situations are taken into account.

The annual review will need to be tough and may involve examining new or ongoing research. A day or couple of days away from the office with colleagues who are working on the campaign is time well spent to ensure that all is in order. It is done in addition to the full evaluation at the end of a campaign.

The Strategy's Not Working

If the underlying strategy for a campaign turns out to be wrong, this is a very serious business. To get the strategy wrong indicates fundamental flaws in research or the interpretation of research. An example will illustrate. Suppose a company wants to launch a high-quality new product and the public relations strategy is to mount a traditional and social media relations campaign including a press launch with product demonstrations, merchandising packs for the regional and consumer press, on- and offline competitions, consumer offers, Twitter and Facebook activities and a couple of stunts designed to attract the attention of traditional and online media.

Suppose after all this, the product doesn't sell at all well. There are a number of explanations and here are just a few:

- The product is sub-standard. As soon as the public relations professional becomes aware of this the company must be advised accordingly. If the company insists on going ahead, at least it was told. The public relations professional may resign over such an issue. The damage to long-term reputation could be severe.
- The product is a 'me too' and has no distinguishing features. No amount of good public relations will persuade people to buy this type of product rather than their current favourite, unless of course there are brand strengths. Public relations should not over-promise.
- The product and the contents of the campaign are aimed at the wrong target markets. There is a major flaw in research.
- The content is not being accepted. It could be that the wrong things are being said, or in the wrong way, or that the medium or the timing is wrong. There is lack of research or misinterpretation of information.
- The product needs to be sampled by consumers for them to really appreciate it. Then why choose media relations as the main communication vehicle?
- The press aren't interested. The right media hook has not been identified: they are not being approached in the right way. It could be lack of research. Maybe another big consumer story is breaking at the same time as the launch. Sometimes all the market intelligence and research in the world can't protect from this nightmare. In this case the strategy may even be right, but either that or tactics will have to be changed quickly to get back on the front foot again. Creativity counts.

If the strategy is not working two questions need to be asked:

- **Are the objectives right and realizable?** If the answer to that is 'no' then no matter how brilliant it is the strategy will not work. If the answer is 'yes' then the second question is necessary.

- **What's wrong with the strategy?** What basic points have been overlooked or misinterpreted? This means a return to the research, and a careful analysis. Were the right questions asked in the first place? Were they all asked? What do the unanswered questions really indicate? Is there a clear understanding of publics and what can be achieved? Do the messages have credibility and can they be delivered via the tactics selected? Is the campaign too ambitious or perhaps not sufficiently ambitious? Is the campaign adequately resourced? The killer question is whether a media relation campaign was the right strategy at all.

It is embarrassing to say the least to get the strategy wrong but, if careful research has been done and there can be confidence in the interpretation, it is likely that the tactics, not the strategy, needs correcting. However, as with all things, it is better to admit when something is wrong and correct it, rather than limp along wasting time and resources, and damaging professional reputations.

External and Internal Review Drivers

Through the regular evaluation and review process, adjustments will be made to campaigns or programmes. Objectives might be refocused or given a different priority and tactics may be altered. This is part of being effective and in tune with changing requirements. Minor ongoing changes can be expected. However, all the best-laid plans are subject to major review or even reversal if fundamental changes in the external or internal environment call for it. Thankfully these 'drivers' occur relatively infrequently, but it is wise to have contingency plans ready to deal with them if or when they do arise, because they usually require fast-footed action. Careful risk analysis should help in preparing for these eventualities along with an issue management programme (see Chapter 7 for more on risk assessment and management).

The list below gives a flavour of the sort of external drivers that could force a review:

- legislative change that either threatens or gives expanded opportunities to the organization;
- competitor activity, which threatens or gives opportunity;
- takeover or acquisition (note, if a company is taken over through a hostile bid it then has to switch its public relations endeavour from actively campaigning against the acquirers to working for them);
- major product recall or damage to corporate reputation;
- action by a well-organized, powerful, opposing pressure group.

Internal drivers can also make a review essential. The kinds of scenarios that would force this are:

- restructure with new priorities, which may entail the splitting up or restructuring of the public relations function;
- changes in key personnel such as the chief executive (or the director of public relations);
- budget changes, meaning that public relations activity is significantly cut or expanded;
- future needs: a programme or campaign may end or run out of steam; a fresh look is then required to reactivate and refocus the public relations work.

Once having decided on a review, the planning process then begins its cycle again. Figure 3.3 on page 46 outlines the process. Again the basic questions have to be addressed:

- What am I trying to achieve?
- Who do I want to reach?
- What do I want to say?
- What are the most effective ways of getting the message across?
- How can success be measured?

By systematically working through these questions, all the essentials of planning and managing a successful public relations programme will be covered.

And Finally

This book has given the basic framework for putting together a well-founded public relations campaign. Careful, systematic planning will make life much easier. Add one more vital ingredient – flair, the ability to think creatively and not be bound by history or current working conventions, and work in public relations will be immensely rewarding. There is nothing more exciting than seeing a communication campaign work and take on a life that can only come from the sort of skills the public relations professional can provide. Communication is about making contact, developing relationships, building trust and achieving results which add to the success of the organization because key stakeholders are supportive. Careful planning and management lies at the heart of that.

Notes

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