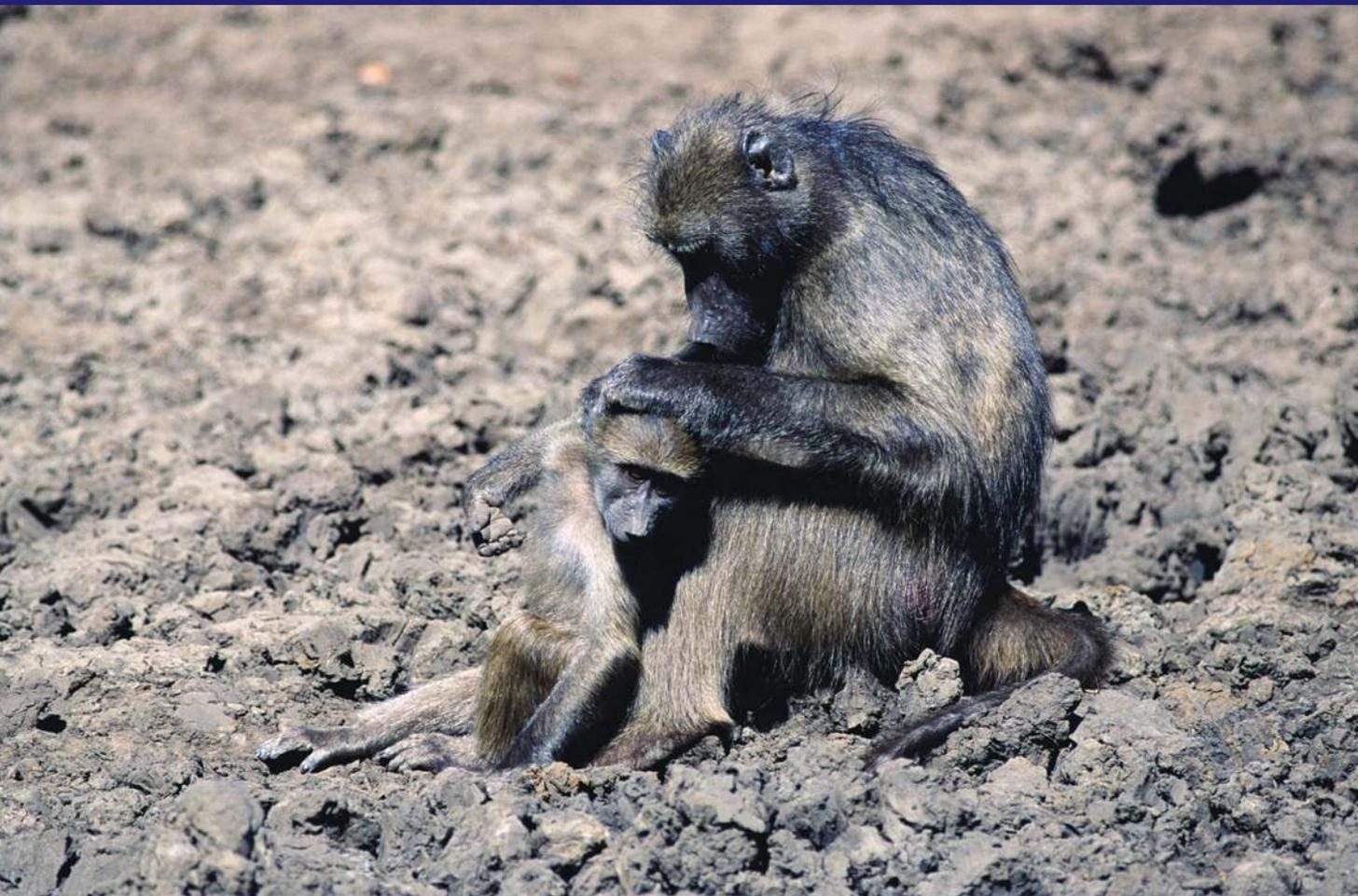


## CHAPTER 11

# Public relations research and evaluation



## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- identify the role of research and evaluation in public relations practice
- define and describe both quantitative and qualitative research approaches
- apply relevant research methods
- understand the different theoretical and practical approaches to evaluation in public relations.

## Structure

- Context of research in public relations
- Designing research
- Qualitative vs quantitative research
- Research methods
- Designing research instruments
- Research applications
- Evaluation

## Introduction

Research plays a crucial role for many different reasons in public relations. First, it is an integral part of the public relations planning process. Without research it is difficult to set communication objectives, identify publics or develop messages. Second, research is also undertaken to evaluate public relations efforts. Evaluation has been one of the biggest and most talked about issues over many years for the entire public relations industry. Evaluation helps practitioners understand and improve programme effectiveness through systematic measurement and proves the value of public relations efforts to clients, management or other disciplines, such as marketing or integrated communications.

Research and evaluation can also reveal a lot about the current state of public relations practice as well as contribute to the development of the public relations theoretical knowledge base. Research findings have business benefits too and can facilitate attempts to show how public relations can improve the bottom line. This chapter will explore the research process, the most commonly used research methods in public relations and the theory and practice of evaluation. The principles of research approaches and methods would fill a book, therefore in this chapter only the basic principles will be discussed.

## Context of research in public relations

Academic research aims to generate theories and models, to describe and analyse trends in public relations. Academic journals, such as the *Journal of Public Relations Research* or *Public Relations Review*, are concerned with theory building and are among the major outlets of academic research. Another important contribution comes from students in the form of undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations and theses as part of a degree. The ability to understand and carry out systematic research highlights the importance of education. Practitioners with a degree in higher education are better equipped in the complex world of research as opposed to those who use only 'seat-of-the-pants' methods.

Research can have different purposes and origins. The primary purpose of research is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of public relations, even if such research does not deal with the real problems of practice ('basic research'). But the purpose of research is also to answer questions that come out of practice or are imposed by a client ('applied research').

Nevertheless, if we use the term 'research' – either basic or applied – we always mean 'scientific' research, not 'informal, 'quick and dirty' or 'everyday-life research' – as it is often understood by practitioners. For example, Lindenmann (1990) reports results of a survey among public relations professionals in which about 70% of the respondents thought that most research on the subject was informal rather than scientific (Cutlip et al. 2000; Gregory 2000).

In contrast to scientific research, informal research is based on subjective intuition or on the 'authority' of knowledge or 'tenacity', which refers to sticking to a practice because it has always been like that (Kerlinger 1986). It is subjective if information is gathered in an unsystematic way by talking to a couple of people, looking at guidelines ('Five Steps to do World Class Public Relations') or just based on feelings.

Other examples of public relations practice based on informal research are:

- a practice might be considered as best practice because the senior manager of a well-known consultancy declares it to be the latest trend in public relations (based on 'authority')
- an advisory committee, panel or board recommends it (based on 'authority')
- an organisation writes news releases in the same style they have used for the last 10 years ('tenacity' – 'it is the right way because we have always done it like that').

Scientific research is systematic and objective: it follows distinct steps and uses appropriate research design. In doing public relations research we have to guide research by:

- defining the research problem (what to research)
- choosing a general research approach (qualitative or quantitative)
- deciding on research strategy (primary or secondary research)
- selecting the research method (survey, content analysis, focus group, etc.)
- deciding on the research instruments (questions in a questionnaire or categories in a content analysis)
- analysing the data (e.g. Wimmer and Dominick 2003).

See Think about 11.1

## Research and evaluation in public relations planning and management

Research is an integrated part of public relations management, which means that it should be included in each step of the public relations planning process. This might sound controversial, since models such as the RACE model – **r**esearch, **a**ction, **c**ommunication and **e**valuation – suggest that research is only undertaken in the first and the last steps: 'research' and 'evaluation'. Nevertheless, this does not mean that research is limited to these steps; it is

### think about 11.1 SWOT and PEST – research or not?

To identify internal and external environmental factors, SWOT and PEST (or EPISTLE) analyses are often considered to be useful techniques (see Chapter 10). This might be conducted in a meeting in which practitioners of the in-house public relations department gather and do a brainstorming session about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of their organisation. But can this be considered as research? SWOT and PEST brainstorms may offer guidelines about what to research but they are not research in themselves. For example, to explore the weaknesses of an organisation, a focus group discussion might be conducted. Only by doing a SWOT or PEST analysis with proper research methods does it become research. Doing a SWOT or PEST analysis by subjective intuition might reveal interesting ideas but is not research.

crucial in each step. The following four points refer to the four stages in the Cutlip et al. (2000) planning process shown in Chapter 10:

- using research to define public relations problems
- using research to assess public relations plans and proposals
- using research during programme implementation
- using research for programme impact.

### Using research to define public relations problems

Research findings such as problem definitions or identifying publics are key inputs for programme planning. For example, an organisation might have a bad image in the media and turn to a public relations consultancy to address this problem. The consultancy is very likely to use research to find the reasons for the image problem, before developing a strategy to address it. This process can be defined as *problem definition* and *situation analysis* and should address the following research questions (see Chapter 10 for more detail):

- What are the internal and external environmental factors that affect the organisation?
- Who are the publics?
- What do they know? What do they think about key issues?
- How are public–organisation relationships characterised?
- What media do publics rely on or prefer for information?

### Using research to assess public relations plans and proposals

Before implementing a plan, its various elements can be tested through a variety of measures: expert assessment; using checklists as criteria; testing messages in focus group discussions; or in a survey among key publics. Initial identification of publics, messages, strategies or tactics included in the plan might be subject to assessment. The assessment might result in changes in the programme.

### Using research during programme implementation

*Process research* aims at improving programme performance and takes place while the programme is in operation (in process). It is also referred to as *monitoring* or *formative* evaluation. It enables the public relations

practitioner to modify campaign elements, such as messages (too complicated, misunderstood, irrelevant), channels (inappropriate choice for delivering a particular message) or the chosen strategies and tactics. Research during implementation enables the practitioner to make corrections according to circumstances and issues that were not foreseen during the planning process, especially in the case of complex and long-term programmes. It can also document how the programme is being implemented, including the practitioner's own activity, resources allocated or timing of the programme.

### Using research for programme impact

Finally, research is done to measure programme impact or effectiveness with respect to goals and objectives. Principles of programme evaluation will be discussed in the second half of the chapter.

## Areas of research

Lerbinger (1977) offers a classification that defines areas of public relations research less concerned with the process of programmes. He distinguishes four major categories of public relations research as: environmental monitoring (or scanning); public relations audits; communication audits; and social audits. Table 11.1 identifies these categories of research and defines the scope of each approach.

## Designing research

After identifying questions that help assess the initial situation, we have to decide how to research them. This demands a research plan that answers the following questions:

- What types of data are of interest?
- Which research approach should be followed: qualitative or quantitative research?
- Which research methods are appropriate?
- How should the research instruments be designed?

### Type of data: primary or secondary research?

Information or data can be gathered in two basic ways: through primary or secondary research. Primary research generates data that are specific for the case under investigation. Primary data are directly retrieved ('in the field') from the research object through empirical research methods – interview,

TABLE 11.1 Categories of research and their scope (source: based on Lerbinger 1977: 11–14)

Categories of research	Scope of research
Environmental monitoring (scanning)	Issues and trends in public opinion Issues in mass media Social events which may have significant impact on an organisation Competitor communications analysis
Public relations audit	Assesses an organisation's public relations activities
Communication audits	All forms of internal and external communications are studied to assess their consistency with overall strategy as well as their internal consistency Narrower than a public relations audit
Social audits	Measures an organisation's social performance

focus group, survey, content analysis or observation (Wimmer and Dominick 2003).

Secondary research or 'desk research', in contrast, uses data that have already been gathered, are available through different sources and can be analysed sitting at the desk as opposed to gathering data 'in the field' (Neumann 2001). The term 'secondary' implies that somebody else has already collected this information through primary research and documented the results in various sources. A specific type of secondary research is 'data mining', which is the exploration and analysis of existing data with reference to a new or specific research problem.

Data about size and composition of media audiences such as newspaper readership or television audiences are available to the practitioners and are published regularly. Table 11.2 is an example from *The Guardian's* media supplement.

Secondary data are available from many different sources like libraries, government records, trade and professional associations, as well as organisational files. The following list includes some of the large UK and European datasets:

- Annual Employment Survey, which covers about 130,000 businesses ([www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk))
- British Social Attitudes survey ([www.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.natcen.ac.uk))
- Chartered Institute of Public Relations posts useful resources of research on its website ([www.cipr.co.uk](http://www.cipr.co.uk))
- Eurobarometer, which monitors public opinion in member states on a variety of issues (enlargement, social situation, health, culture, information technology, environment, the euro, defence policy, etc.)
- Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities

TABLE 11.2 UK national daily newspaper circulation excluding bulks, February 2005 (source: adapted from Guardian Unlimited, 1 March 2005, [www.media.guardian.co.uk/circulationfigures/tables/0,11554,1437317,00.html](http://www.media.guardian.co.uk/circulationfigures/tables/0,11554,1437317,00.html) Copyright Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005. Data from Audit Bureau of Circulations)

Title	Feb 2005	Feb 2004	% change
<i>Daily Express</i>	887,574	906,738	-2.11
<i>Daily Mail</i>	2,330,665	2,311,849	0.81
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	1,719,743	1,900,250	-9.50
<i>Daily Record</i>	480,417	494,212	-2.79
<i>Daily Star</i>	854,291	909,240	-6.04
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	855,994	873,380	-1.99
<i>FT</i>	394,892	415,534	-4.97
<i>Guardian</i>	340,499	352,005	-3.27
<i>Independent</i>	227,305	222,799	2.02
<i>Sun</i>	3,273,016	3,397,372	-3.66
<i>Times</i>	638,723	614,610	3.92

**activity 11.1****Secondary research**

You are commissioned by the Department of Health to design a public relations campaign to raise awareness of obesity in the UK. You are interested in hard facts about this disease. What types of secondary sources would you turn to? Put together a small research report on the topic.

**Feedback**

Start with the following link: [www.official-documents.co.uk](http://www.official-documents.co.uk).

- online research services such as LexisNexis ([www.lexis-nexis.com](http://www.lexis-nexis.com))
- population census, which is held every 10 years ([www.census.ac.uk](http://www.census.ac.uk)).

Caution must be taken when interpreting and using secondary research findings since they can reflect the views and interests of the sponsoring organisations. (See Activity 11.1)

**Starting research**

As a first step to start research in Case study 11.1, research questions must be developed. Key questions in the first stage of the planning process are:

- 1 What do residents know about the service?
- 2 What do residents think about recycling?
- 3 Are residents willing to recycle?

A next step is the question of which type of data to use to answer these questions. Primary or secondary

**case study 11.1****Research and evaluation: 'Bin There Done That'**

The following case study on Westminster City Council's campaign about recycling will be used throughout the rest of the chapter.

**Background**

The improvement of doorstep recycling formed part of a new Westminster cleansing contract. Recycling was seen as a critical part of the cleansing service. Getting doorstep recycling right was seen as essential for the council to meet government targets by 2010. Large increases to landfill tax and costs of incineration also made the success of the new service vital.

**Objectives**

- To change the behaviour of residents to increase take-up of service by one-quarter and thereby recycle a greater proportion of waste – from 30 tonnes per week to 50 tonnes per week
- To position the authority as the leading recycling authority through raising the City Survey satisfaction rating from 43% to 60% for recycling
- To increase awareness of recycling service among target audience to drive up usage to help us meet government targets for tonnage of recycled household waste by 2010

**Planning and implementation****Audit**

Westminster City Council's (WCC) in-house public relations department examined its market extensively before committing to the final campaign. Quantitative research surveying 502 residents in July 2003 found that:

- 60% of residents did not feel informed about the service
- 98% said that recycling was important
- 72% said they would recycle only if the council made it easier first.

To accurately target audience and message, WCC conducted two focus groups of Westminster residents drawn from across the borough in July 2003. One group recycled regularly and one had never recycled.

The focus group research found that there was a shocking lack of knowledge about WCC's recycling service, confusion over what materials could be recycled and an emphatic desire for the process to be made easy.

Two campaigns were market tested to the groups. Both groups unanimously opted for a 'we've made it easy, you make it happen' message.

**Strategy**

WCC had to vastly improve the information sent to households, providing clear, concise and accurate information about the types of material that could be recycled.

Its communications had to:

*Reinforce that the Council had made the service easier (a single bin for all goods) promote two way communications (a helpline and website were introduced) deliver strong messages that were easy to understand.*

The Bin There Done That (BTDT) campaign was adopted after trialling a number of alternatives, as it met these criteria. The research had shown that messages must be clear, simple, easy and immediately



### case study 11.1 (continued)

recognisable as WCC. The campaign included:

- a two-week teaser campaign (something's coming to your doorstep)
- rollout of service information campaign (ways to recycle)
- advertising campaign (Bin There Done That)
- intensive field marketing follow-up campaign
- follow-through information campaign.

#### Evaluation and measurement

Evaluation was ongoing. Trained council staff surveyed over 16,000 homes and as a result some new messages were adopted, e.g. how to order replacement bins that neighbours had stolen! Final evaluation compared the council's 2002/3 City Survey conducted by MORI with the 2003/4 MORI City Survey, a specially commissioned populus survey on communication messages and analysis of tonnages and rates of participation.

Results of analysis were then compared against objectives.

- *Objective 1: change behaviour of residents to recycle a greater proportion of their waste – increase from 30 tonnes per week to 50 tonnes per week.* Tonnage for doorstep recycling increased from 30 tonnes per week to 85 tonnes per week.

After seeing the campaign, people were much more likely to recycle: 68% of those aware of the campaign now recycle whereas only 45% who were unaware chose to do so.

Of residents who were aware of the campaign, 73% thought that the council had made recycling easier for

them. This is nearly twice as many (40%) as those who had not seen the campaign.

- *Objective 2: position the authority as the leading recycling authority through raising City Survey satisfaction rating from 43% to 60% for recycling.* There was almost a 20% increase in satisfaction rating to 61% for the recycling service (City Survey 2002/3 to 2003/4). The Association of London Government Survey of Londoners 2003 found an increased satisfaction rating for recycling of only 7% across all London boroughs.

The City Survey 2003/4 found that residents felt more strongly about the importance of recycling. Recycling was the fourth most important service. In 2002/3 recycling did not even make an appearance in the list of top 10 services.

Residents also believed that recycling was the second 'elective' (voluntary) service that they most benefited from, behind libraries (53%) – recycling 35%. This shows an increase from 2002/3 of 25% (City Survey 2002/3 to 2003/4).

Of the public that were aware of the campaign, 84% thought it was a good idea to recycle compared with 70% who were unaware of the campaign (December 2003).

- *Objective 3: increase take-up rate of service by one-quarter.* The increase in take-up for the doorstep recycling service has almost trebled – from 4843 participants in May 2003 to 12,572 in December 2003.

Source: [www.cipr.co.uk/member\\_area](http://www.cipr.co.uk/member_area) and Westminster City Council Communication Team

research might be conducted. An example of secondary research would be to find and use research data that has been gathered by other city councils in the UK or use data from research in other countries about the acceptance of recycling. Nevertheless, the validity of such data would be questionable since the local situation, awareness and traditions would not have been considered. Therefore it is more appropriate to conduct primary research.

### Qualitative vs quantitative research

The question of whether to use qualitative or quantitative research methods is widely discussed in the academic and professional community. However, the answer depends on each research question: *qualitative*

approaches are often used to explore areas about which no knowledge exists yet and results are expressed in words ('qualities'); *quantitative* approaches are used to deliver comparable, generalisable results, expressed in numbers ('quantities').

**Definition:** *Qualitative* research aims to identify and explore in depth phenomena such as reasons, attitudes, etc.

**Definition:** *Quantitative* research aims to quantify variables such as attitudes or behaviours and points out correlations between them. Results can be generalised which means research that generates findings that can be applied to a wider public or situation.

Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are complementary and should be combined rather than used as alternatives. In research terms this is often



PICTURE 11.1 Research 'in the field': data gathering can take place in a wide range of settings. (Source: Jack Sullivan/Alamy.)

described as the *mixed method* approach (Lindlof and Bryan 2002). Mini case study 11.1 gives an example.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches both have advantages and disadvantages, which are summarised in Table 11.3 (overleaf).

Westminster City Council's BTDT campaign is another good example of how qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined. The focus groups found that there was a lack of knowledge about the

council's recycling service, confusion over what materials could be recycled and a huge motivation for the process to be made easy. Especially since the motivation of residents to recycle ('are residents willing to recycle?', 'What might determine their willingness to recycle?') was rather an unexplored issue, it was appropriate to use a qualitative approach. The results of the focus groups could then be used in the survey that gave a representative overview of what Westminster residents know and think.

## Research methods

The main research methods used in public relations research and evaluation are:

- qualitative: intensive or in-depth interviews and focus groups
- quantitative: surveys and content analysis.

In the case of the BTDT campaign, focus groups or surveys were used as methods to research knowledge, attitudes and motivation of Westminster residents to behave in a certain way. But it is not always so obvious what the most appropriate method is, as Think about 11.2 (overleaf) demonstrates.

## Intensive or in-depth interviews

Intensive interviews are a specific type of personal interview. Unlike surveys, they do not attempt to generalise answers. So when is it appropriate to use intensive interviews? Their main purpose is to explore attitudes and attitude-relevant contexts. The biggest advantage is the wealth of detail that they can provide. On the negative side, they are sensitive to interviewer bias. The answers might easily be influenced by the behaviour of the interviewer, so well-trained

### mini case study 11.1

## Qualitative or quantitative?

The Inland Revenue (UK tax-gathering authority) is a public sector organisation that wants to research its image among employees, prior to developing a corporate identity programme. Since this is the first time that the internal image has been researched, not a lot of information is available about issues that are relevant in the eyes of the employees. Therefore, the first step might be to hold focus group discussions as a

qualitative approach. The goal is to explore relevant features of the image. The second step would be to analyse the results of these focus groups to develop standardised questionnaires that are then distributed to all employees. The features of the image that were explored in the focus groups are assessed by the employees and provide a general view of the employees of their organisation.

TABLE 11.3 Advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research techniques (source: adapted from Neumann 2003: 150)

	Potential advantages	Potential disadvantages
Quantitative approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generate comparable results</li> <li>Results can be generalised</li> <li>Can be guided by less experienced researchers (e.g. interviewers)</li> <li>Higher acceptance by clients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quantitative methods can only find out what is put in through prepared questions or categories</li> <li>Can guide respondents into a rather irrelevant direction</li> <li>Do not allow deeper analysis of reasons</li> </ul>
Qualitative approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide insights into causes and motivations</li> <li>Explore information that is completely unknown or unpredicted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time consuming and demand financial resources</li> <li>Demand qualified researchers</li> <li>Limited generalisation</li> <li>Results are influenced by researcher</li> </ul>

interviewers are needed to minimise the bias. Intensive interviews are characterised by:

- generally *smaller samples* of interviewees
- *open questions* that probe the reasons *why* respondents give specific answers: they elaborate on data concerning respondents' opinions, values, motivations, experiences and feelings
- *customised* – or reactive – to individual respondents in so far as the order and/or wording of questions can be changed, or new questions added, during the interview depending on the answers given
- *non-verbal behaviour* of respondents is recorded and contributes to the results.

**Focus groups**

Focus group or group interviewing is like an intensive interview, with 6 to 10 respondents who interact

with each other. Focus groups generate qualitative data. The interviewer plays the role of a moderator leading the respondents in a relatively free discussion about the topic. The interactions between the group members create a dynamic environment that gives respondents additional motivation to elaborate on their attitudes, experiences and feelings.

Main disadvantages are that groups can become dominated by a self-appointed group leader who monopolises the conversation. Focus groups depend heavily on the skills of the moderator who must know when to intervene to stop respondents from discussing irrelevant topics, probe for further information and ensure all respondents are involved in the discussion.

In the BTDT campaign, focus groups were not only conducted to explore attitudes of the residents; they were also used to test messages for the campaign. The use of focus groups helped the public

**think about 11.2 Evaluation of a news release**

After releasing a news story about new online services on behalf of its client, a large telecommunications provider, ABC public relations consultancy discusses how to evaluate the outcome of this activity. Should it:

- measure the media coverage by monitoring media (newspapers, radio, TV, www) and analysing circulation numbers and readership figures using available media data, or
- conduct a representative survey among relevant publics?

**Feedback** With the first suggestion, it can be very precisely tracked in which media the news has come up. Additionally, the media data provide figures on the number and type of reader (age, gender, education, income, etc.) who might have seen or read the news. But this is already the weak point in the evaluation: it remains unclear whether they have read the news, what they think about the news and whether they can recall the news.

Using a survey, in contrast, gives clear evidence of what people know and think about the online services of the telecommunications provider. But it remains rather vague as to where they have obtained their information. It might be that the information originates from sources other than the media coverage of the news release.

**box  
11.1****How to conduct a focus group study**

There are 12 basic steps in focus group research:

- 1 Is a focus group study really appropriate?
- 2 Define the problem.
- 3 Decide who will moderate.
- 4 Determine the number of groups necessary.
- 5 Design a screening questionnaire for selecting a sample.
- 6 Recruit participants according to screening results.
- 7 Develop question guideline for the moderator.
- 8 Brief the moderator.
- 9 Select and brief focus group observers.
- 10 Prepare facilities and check catering arrangements.
- 11 Conduct the session.
- 12 Analyse the data and report findings.

Source: Broom and Dozier 1990; Wimmer and Dominick 2003

relations department to understand that the main criterion for residents doing recycling is convenience. If a survey were used as the only method, it could have provided misleading results. A survey would have measured positive attitudes of the residents about recycling. But why do only few practise it? The focus groups could explore and explain in-depth the gap between attitudes and behaviour: the inconvenience of recycling.

Box 11.1 gives some rules for conducting a focus group study.

## Surveys

The survey among Westminster residents illustrates the kind of decisions that have to be taken when conducting a survey.

Which type of survey should be conducted?

Table 11.4 (overleaf) details the types of survey and their advantages and disadvantages. (See Activities 11.2 and 11.3.)

How many people should be interviewed and how will you select them?

Since most research cannot reach all members of a population (all units of consideration to be researched), a sample has to be drawn. There are various sampling designs that can be used to select the units of research. For example, in our case of the BTDT campaign, the population consists of all residents of Westminster from which a sample is drawn.

The sample consists of 502 residents, which is a sufficient sample size to ensure validity of the results.

What do you want to measure?

Before developing a survey questionnaire, you need to decide what you want to measure. A basic distinction is to research awareness/knowledge/beliefs (cognitions), attitudes, behaviour.

In the BTDT campaign the key research questions cover these aspects:

- What do residents know about the service (knowledge)?
- What do residents think about recycling (attitudes)?
- Are residents willing to recycle or what prevents them from recycling (motivation/behaviour)?

What are you going to ask?

The next step is to develop 'instruments for measurement', that is, framing the right kind of questions. The key research questions in the BTDT campaign indicate

### activity 11.2

#### Types of survey

In the BTDT campaign the sample consisted of 502 residents. But which type of survey would be the most appropriate method to collect data?

Consider and write down:

- How will respondents be reached?
- What might be the response rate?
- Think about cost and time effectiveness, too.

TABLE 11.4 Types of survey

Method	Requirements	Advantages	Disadvantages
Mail survey – self-administered questionnaires (self-explanatory)	Mailing list Reply envelope Cover letter (separate) Incentives Follow-up mailings	Anonymity Specific mailing lists available Low cost, little time to prepare and conduct Respondent convenience	Response rate Slow data collection Only standardised questions Response: only motivated respondents – not representative
Telephone survey	Telephone numbers Interviewers Training and instruction (manner of speaking, what to say . . .)	Interviewers can clarify questions Speed, costs Control, probing complex answers High response rates, completeness of questionnaires	Reach of respondents Limited use of scales, visual materials
Personal interview (face to face)	Interviewers and training	Interviewers can clarify questions Use of scales and visual materials	No anonymity Expensive Interviewer bias
Online surveys	Website Email list	Inexpensive Respondent convenience Anonymity	No control who is contacted Only internet users Not representative Low response rates

‘what’ is to be measured, but they are not yet the questions that are used in a questionnaire. In general, the objects of research – in this case, knowledge, attitudes, behaviour – can be measured with various types of question and scale. Developing questions means to develop instruments that measure knowledge, attitude, etc. These concepts are *operationalised* through the questions (Wimmer and Dominick 2003).

**Definition:** *Operationalisation* of a concept (knowledge, attitudes, behaviour) means showing how this concept is to be measured.

### Are you going to measure attitudes or images?

Images or attitudes can be measured using a variety of different techniques and instruments. Instruments are the specific questions or scales with which attitudes are measured. The next section gives an idea about the instruments that can be used depending on the object (e.g. attitudes about fast food), the respondents and the situation. The instruments are either quantitative, with standardised scales, or qualitative, going more in depth and providing insights that are not generated by quantitative approaches.

### activity 11.3

#### Developing a questionnaire

One key question in the BTDT campaign was to find out the attitudes of Westminster residents about recycling. Develop a short questionnaire to measure this.  
Which instruments do you use?  
Do you measure them directly or indirectly?

Further instruments can be classified as direct or indirect. Direct instruments clearly reveal the purpose of the questioning, for example, ‘Do you intend to recycle?’ Indirect instruments are used when there is the danger that respondents might answer in a ‘socially acceptable’ manner or follow existing stereotypes in their answers, instead of revealing their real attitudes.

An example of the choice of the instrument influencing the results are surveys about fast food. Fast foods and restaurants serving them seem to have a rather negative ‘image’ among university students, according to many surveys, if they are directly asked about their attitudes. There seems, however, to be a gap between the results of surveys and the behaviour of the students, who constitute one of the biggest customer groups of fast food restaurants.

### example 11.1

## Item pairs

Please assess the Royal Mail according to the following terms:

Boring ..... Interesting

Honest ..... Dishonest

### Designing research instruments

#### Quantitative instruments to measure attitudes or images

*Semantic differential* (Example 11.1) is one of the most frequently used instruments in image measurement. It consists of pairs of contrary items by which the object of interest (organisations, persons, advertisements, issues, etc.) is evaluated. This approach draws on semiotics, an approach to the study of words, signs and symbols, which discovered that people tend to group objects in simple either/or categories. Cars, councils, celebrities, baked beans can all be assessed by asking people whether they think these things are either luxury or basic goods, for example. You can go on to ask if they are old/young, male/female, etc. These either/or polarities can be either descriptive-direct or metaphoric-indirect. Item pairs that are descriptive-direct are *denotative*, that is, they relate to the perceived functions of the subject. Metaphoric-indirect items are *connotative*, that is, they relate to the emotional or mental associations of the item being researched. It is useful to use either denotative or connotative items. For example, if you evaluate a car, then item pairs such as 'slow-fast', 'expensive-good value' are denotative. Pairs like 'female-male' or 'warm-cold' are rather connotative.

**Definition:** *Denotative* meaning of a word is its dictionary definition. It refers to the specific, generally agreed on definition. *Connotative* meaning of a word refers to all the associations connected with the word (feelings, attitudes) that go beyond the denotative meaning (Neumann 2003).

The advantage of semantic differentials is that it is a highly standardised instrument with which different objects can easily be compared. A disadvantage is that it might consist of items that are rather irrelevant to the respondent's attitude about an object. If the research object is new and unexplored, then the relevance of items can be unclear.

*Likert scales* (Example 11.2) ask how far a respondent agrees or disagrees with statements about an object. The statements should cover all relevant facets of the research object. Nevertheless, it remains open as to how relevant statements are for respondents in their attitude about the object.

In *rank ordering* (Example 11.3, overleaf), respondents have to place research objects – often listed on separate cards – in order from best to worst. This can be combined with open, qualitative questions that ask what they most like/dislike about the objects. This explores which features are relevant for their assessment. A problem with rank orders is that each object is only evaluated

### example 11.2

## Likert scale

How much do you agree with the following statement: 'BT is a progressive corporation'?

**Please tick one box.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**example 11.3****Rank order**

In front of you there are 10 cards with telecommunications providers. Please put the card with the telecommunications provider you like the most in the first position, the one you like the second best in the second position, and so on.

in comparison with the others but not on an absolute scale. An advantage is that the object is assessed as a whole entity and leaves it to the respondents to decide which features determine their opinion.

The *Kunin scale* (Example 11.4) is an example of how to assess objects non-verbally, which is easy for children or elderly people to understand.

**Qualitative instruments to measure attitudes or images**

*Free associations* (Example 11.5) are considered to be a qualitative instrument because the respondents are

not guided by existing categories for their answers.

If there is a danger that respondents might not admit or even express their real opinions, it makes sense to use a *projective question technique* (Example 11.6). The respondent is asked to answer a question as if replying for somebody else. The respondent projects their real answers into that person.

In the *balloon test* (Example 11.7) as a *specific projective instrument* the respondent gets a drawing with two people and is asked to fill in the empty 'balloon'. The idea is that the respondent projects their thoughts into the person with the empty balloon.

Box 11.2 on page 223 provides an example of measuring relationships by surveys.

**example 11.4****Kunin scale**

Please mark how much you like Virgin Trains.

**example 11.5****Free associations**

Question: Please write down everything that comes into your mind when you hear the words 'Royal Mail'.

Possible answers: post, expensive, conservative, reliable, etc.

Additionally, the respondents might be asked in a follow-up question to assess all their answers and state whether they consider them 'positive (+)', 'neutral (0)' or 'negative (-)'. This avoids subjective misinterpretations of the researcher:

*Post (0), expensive (-), conservative (0), reliable (+)*

**example 11.6****Projective question**

In your opinion, what do other people think about the Royal Mail?

**Media content analysis**

Media monitoring, collecting and counting press clippings, is widely used in public relations to track publicity. However, collecting data or output is only a first step in conducting a media content analysis. Only the systematic analysis of these materials according to a set of criteria can be considered as content analysis. 'Content analysis is a method to analyse media reality, verbal and visual output (content of newspapers, magazines, radio, television and web) which leads to inferences about the communicators and audience of these contents' (Merten 1995: 15).

Content analysis itself does not directly measure outcomes – for example, the image of an organisation in the mind of the audience – and might only be considered as an indicator of certain effects. Web logs, online newsgroups and chatrooms can be monitored, too. Computer-assisted content analysis uses specific software programs, which analyse frequencies of words

or other categories. There are specialist research firms that offer services in this field (e.g. [www.romeike.com](http://www.romeike.com), [www.waymaker.co.uk](http://www.waymaker.co.uk)).

In general, a content analysis is conducted in eight discrete steps (Wimmer and Dominick 2003).

**Formulate the research question**

Table 11.5 (overleaf) presents an overview of typical questions that can be answered by content analysis. The particular research question determines the further steps in the process of a content analysis.

**Define a population**

By defining the time period and the types of media (population) that will be analysed, the researcher sets the frame for the investigation.

**example 11.7****Balloon test**

TABLE 11.5 Examples of questions researched through content analysis (*source: adapted from Merten and Wienand 2004: 5*)

Media	Issues and actors	Image
Which media/journalists dominate the media coverage?	Which issues dominate the media coverage?	Which image is portrayed?
How do media report about the organisation? (positive/negative/neutral)	Which actors dominate the media coverage?	Which factors dominate the image?
How many and which audiences are reached?	In the frame of which issues does the organisation and its representatives appear?	How is the organisation positioned in its sector?
		What do competitors do?

For example, a content analysis might compare how fast food providers are covered in mass media. Since the general public might be considered a relevant audience, daily newspapers are defined as the population in question.

### Select a sample from the population

As stated above, it is not possible to survey all members of a population all the time. So a smaller number of outlets and a specific period of time must be selected.

For example, the time period of the last half-year is the period in which the media coverage is analysed. Smaller newspapers reach fewer readers, so only the top five daily newspapers with the highest readership are selected.

### Select and define a unit of analysis

There needs to be agreement about what exactly is being counted in the analysis. For example, each newspaper article in which the name of a fast food provider or the term 'fast food' is mentioned is a unit of analysis (in other words, not every mention of hamburger or of chips is counted).

### Construct the categories of content to be analysed

The categories are determined by the research questions. In our example, this might be the rating of an article as 'positive/negative/neutral', the topic of the article, the sources quoted, etc. It is important to define indicators which determine what 'positive/negative/neutral' mean.

### Establish a quantification system

The category system used to classify the media content is the actual measurement instrument. For each category, subcategories must be created. An example of a category might be 'corporate social responsibility'.

Subcategories could be 'donations to charity', 'employee volunteering' and 'environmental policy'. The subcategories should be exhaustive, in that they cover all aspects of 'corporate social responsibility' that occur in the articles, and exclusive, which means that they should not overlap or denote the same.

### Train coders and conduct a pilot study

To obtain valid results, different researchers, or coders, must assess the same article in the same way. A pilot study, or trial run, can point out weaknesses in the categories or instructions for the coders. In practice, this will involve analysing a small sample of articles to test the instrument – the category system.

### Code the content according to established definitions

Finally, all sample articles have to be assessed for each category and given a number for that assessment. The assessments are determined by the definitions associated with each category. For example, a mention of 'donations to charity' as a subcategory of 'corporate social responsibility' might be given a number code 1 to denote 'donations to charity'. Numbering like this helps with the data analysis, particularly across a wide range of categories and subcategories.

## Research applications

### Internet as a research tool and object

The internet has become an increasingly important research object as well as a research tool. Research objects can be issues which are discussed in web logs or chatrooms. Another increasingly relevant issue is the measurement of the chatter and discussion about an organisation in cyberspace, which can be used to help understand an organisation's image or reputation. The same criteria used in analysing print and broadcast

articles can be applied when analysing postings on the internet, which is referred to as cyberspace analysis (Lindenmann 1997). Another output measure of cyberspace might be a review and analysis of website traffic patterns. For example, some of the variables that ought to be considered when designing and carrying out cyberspace analysis might include examining the requests for a file of website visitors, a review of click-throughs or flash-click streams, an assessment of home page visits, domain tracking and analysis and assessment of bytes transferred, a review of time spent per page, traffic times, browsers used and the number of people filling out and returning feedback forms (Lindenmann 1997).

The internet also offers new opportunities to conduct research in online focus groups, online interviews or online surveys. Online focus groups can be conducted in 'real time' or in 'non-real time', or using a combination of both. It allows access to populations in disparate places and is highly cost effective. Nevertheless, the problem of participant verification (who is recruited as participant through the internet) remains a problem in all forms of online research techniques (Mann and Stewart 2000).

### Identifying publics: social network analysis

One tool that is used to identify relevant publics and opinion leaders and to understand the communication

flow and lines of influences within and between groups of people is social network analysis (SNA) (Scott 2000). Social network analysis is the mapping and measuring of relationships and flows between people, groups or organisations. It can be used for external and internal analysis (organisational network analysis) of relationships. But like a PEST (or EPISTLE) or SWOT analysis, the social network analysis is not a method itself. The network has to be explored, for example, through observation or interviews.

To understand the network, the location and context of the actors (people whose relationships are being observed) has to be evaluated first. For example, with whom does an actor interact? How many connections does an actor have? Is a person central in a network or peripheral? Is a person connected to well-connected or poorly connected people?

Of further interest in network analysis is:

- structural equivalence: which actors play similar roles in the network
- cluster analysis: find cliques and densely connected clusters
- structural holes: find areas of no connection between actors that could be used for communication
- E/I ratio: find which groups in the network are open or closed to others (Scott 2000).

### Communication audit

Communication audits assess the tangible and intangible communications resources of an organisation. A

#### box 11.2

#### Using survey research to measure relationships

A typical research project for the study of relationships between an organisation and its publics is Hon and Grunig's (1999) measurement of relationships. So the research object is 'relationships'. Hon and Grunig specify 'successful relationships' as control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship and communal relationship. The research method is conducting a survey.

In order to measure the concept 'relationship' they operationalise – 'make measurable' – the idea of relationship. They explore the six factors mentioned above by generating a list of statements for each factor, for respondents to agree or disagree with.

For example, the factor 'trust' is measured by statements:

- This organisation treats people like me fairly and justly.
- This organisation can be relied on to keep its promises.
- Whenever this organisation makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.
- I feel very confident about this organisation's skills.
- I believe that this organisation takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.

With these statements they conduct a survey among publics who evaluate their relationship with different organisations by how much they agree/disagree with each statement.

Source: Hon and Grunig 1999

very formal and thorough audit may take months to complete. Communication audits examine:

- face-to-face communication
- written communication in the form of letters, memos and internal reports
- communication patterns among individuals, sections and departments
- communication channels and frequency of interaction
- communication content, its clarity and effectiveness
- information needs of individuals, sections or departments
- information technology
- informal communication, particularly as it affects motivation and performance
- non-verbal communication
- communication climate (Hamilton 1987: 4–5).

## Evaluation

### Importance of evaluation

Evaluation is the evergreen topic of the entire practice and one of the areas where both practitioners and academics have a vast common interest. In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations has initiated and coordinated research on evaluation and encouraged practitioners to evaluate their efforts in a systematic way by using a variety of methods.

Evaluating public relations activities is essential for many reasons, including accountability, assessment of programme effectiveness and professionalism.

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the impacts of public relations activities. It a purposeful process, carried out for a specific audience. Audiences include numerous parties that have an interest in the evaluation – the organisation, the public relations practitioners involved, target publics and the evaluators themselves. (Sometimes an external agency, such as a media monitoring company, does media evaluation.) (See Activity 11.4.)

#### activity 11.4

##### Evaluation – who benefits?

Identify the ‘audiences’ in the Westminster City Council’s campaign who could have an interest in, or be involved in, evaluation.

##### Feedback

Westminster City Council’s employees and the council’s senior management are just two examples. You could add residents, local businesses, central government, and so on.

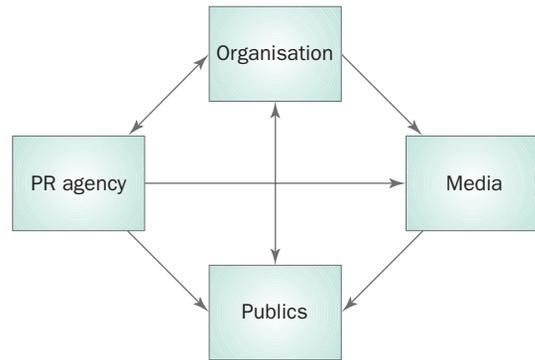


FIGURE 11.1 Actors and their influence

In a typical public relations campaign, the following actors are present: the *organisation*, which can commission a *public relations agency* to work on its behalf to reach and communicate with a variety of *publics* through the *media*. Figure 11.1 visualises the actors and their influences.

Out of these four actors, the emphasis has been on media, and print media evaluation still dominates the field of evaluation. Measuring effects on, and changes in, the targeted publics’ knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in the form of outcome is also paramount. During the early 1990s the organisational dimension was emphasised, demonstrating how public relations can add value to achieving organisational goals. Around the turn of the millennium a new dimension emerged, measuring relationship in the client/agency and client/publics contexts. Table 11.6 summarises the aims of evaluation according to orientations.

For an extensive evaluation, each of these orientations should be considered. However, the emphasis often remains on only one or two of these dimensions. Evaluation often serves as budget or action justification. In the media orientation approach the emphasis is on the quantity (how many articles were generated, how big is the circulation of the newspaper in which an article appeared) and quality of media coverage (negative, positive tone). See Mini case 11.2.

Public relations practitioners overemphasise print media evaluation. Despite the fact that the world is moving more and more towards image-based communication, public relations practice has been slow to embrace methods of evaluating TV and other types of image. Fathers4Justice is a pressure group in the UK whose aim is to highlight the problems of fathers separated from their children by divorce or relationship breakdown. They have performed ‘stunts’ to attract media attention to their issue by dressing up as children’s characters. They have climbed government buildings, bridges and the Queen’s London residence, Buckingham Palace to create visually sensational, shocking images that can be easily transmitted into the living rooms of millions and grab attention. (See Activity 11.5.)

TABLE 11.6 Orientations of public relations evaluation

Orientation	Aim of evaluation	Levels
Media	Quantity and quality of coverage	Programme, societal
Publics	Effects on publics, how they have changed their knowledge, attitudes or behaviour as a result of public relations activities	Programme
Organisation	To demonstrate how public relations can contribute to achieving organisational goals	Organisational
Persuasion	Demonstrates return on investment (ROI) to clients or management; value of public relations; accountability of public relations professionals or departments	Individual, programme
Relationship	Client/agency, organisation/publics	Individual, organisational

### activity 11.5

#### Measuring media stunts

Examine the Fathers4Justice campaign (visit their website: [www.fathers-4-justice.org](http://www.fathers-4-justice.org)). How would you conduct content analysis of TV coverage of one of their campaigns?

#### Feedback

*Quantity:* how many times was the name of the pressure group mentioned? How long was the entire coverage? Was it a leading piece of news?

*Quality:* What was the context of the coverage? Who was interviewed? How did the newsreader comment on their actions (favourably or unfavourably)? Do you now understand their demands more clearly?

- assessed at individual, programme, organisational and societal level, depending on the level of effectiveness.

As we saw earlier, formative evaluation (or process research) takes place while the programme is still in operation. Summative evaluation aims at assessing outcomes and impacts as they take place towards the end of a programme or after its conclusion. Summative research evaluates results against objectives. This can be feasible only if SMART objectives have been set: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (see Chapter 10).

Evaluation purposes and circumstances dictate which type of evaluation (summative, formative or goal free) is most appropriate in a given case. Bissland's

## Dimensions of evaluation

Public relations evaluation can be:

- *formative, summative or goal-free evaluation*, depending on the time of intervention

**Definition:** *Formative* means the evaluation takes place during the public relations programme or campaign. *Summative* means it is conducted at the end of the programme of activity. *Goal-free evaluation* examines a programme or campaign after any intervention, in terms of the situation, not of existing goals or objectives.

## mini case study 11.2

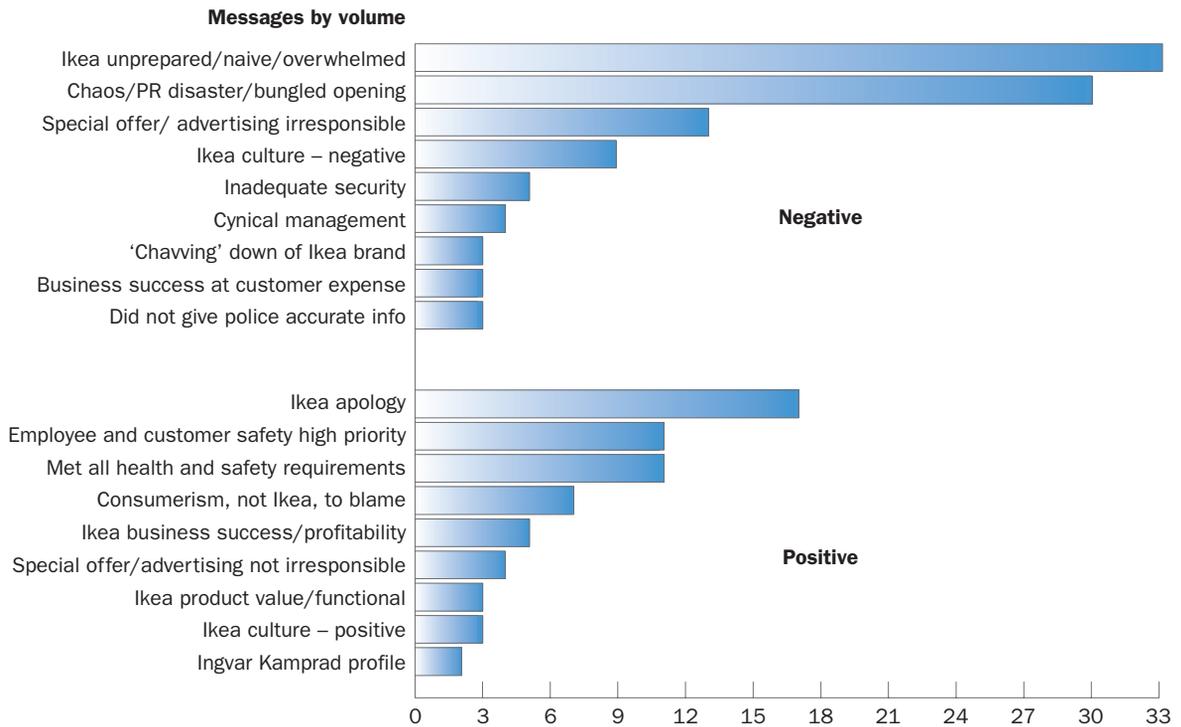
### The IKEA story in the media

The media reported extensively the chaotic opening of London's Edmonton IKEA store in February 2005. Beyond the negative headlines was an undercurrent of hostility towards the company. The IKEA consumer experience, deemed to come a poor second to low prices, was singled out for particular criticism: 'IKEA treats its customers so badly, a riot is the least it might have expected' wrote *The Guardian* (10 February 2005), cataloguing an absence of internet ordering, insufficient stock, poor customer service and lengthy

queues. Others accused it of irresponsibly stimulating demand with heavy advertising and special offers in a deprived area: 'Does it pay to advertise?' (*The Times* 10 February 2005).

Figure 11.2 (overleaf) is a typical example of evaluating media coverage, counting how many times certain types of messages occurred and assessing the tone of the coverage.

Source: [www.echoresearch.com](http://www.echoresearch.com)



Based on 62 articles, from 10-13 February 2005

FIGURE 11.2 IKEA's image in the print media after opening a new store (source: a weekly snapshot review of 'messages in the news' prepared by Echo Research for trade journal *PR Week*. Echo Research, <http://www.echoresearch.com>)



PICTURE 11.2 Fathers 4 Justice using media stunts to raise their campaign's media profile. (See: <http://www.fathers4justice.org>) (Source: Alisdair Macdonald/Rex.)

**box  
11.3****Four categories of performance measure**

*Input:* background information and research that informs initial planning.

*Output:* measures the result of public relations activity such as media coverage or publicity (exposure to messages, quantifiable features such as number of press releases sent out, consultation sessions scheduled, telephone calls answered or audience members at speech events). Output measures are short term, concentrate on visible results and do not say anything about audience response.

*Outcome:* the degree to which public relations activities changed target public's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. It may take weeks, months or even years for these changes to occur.

*Outtake:* describes an intermediate step between output and outcome. It refers to what people do with an output but what might not necessarily be a specific outcome as a set objective of a campaign. Whereas outtake is related to the output, outcome is to be seen with reference to the objectives set. For example, people might remember the message (outtake) of a communication campaign but might not change their behaviour (outcome).

Source: adapted from Gregory 2000: 169–71

(1990: 25) definition illustrates that in public relations literature evaluation is frequently used as a summative activity: 'Evaluation is the systematic assessment of a program and its results. It is a means for practitioners to offer accountability to clients – and to themselves.'

### Levels of effectiveness

According to Hon (1997) effective public relations occurs when communication activities achieve communication goals. She conceptualised effectiveness at four levels.

#### Individual practitioners

The first level is that of individual practitioners, measuring how effective they are at achieving whatever is expected of them. This is closely related to performance measurement, partly because consultancy practitioners work on a fee basis. Depending on the positions and experience, the hourly rate of consultancy practitioners

can vary. Another dimension of the individual level is the quality and nature of relationship between the consultant and the client. Client/agency relationship has become the focus of many evaluation studies, moving beyond the simple programme evaluation level.

#### Programme level

The second level is the programme level. Effectiveness in public relations is quite often synonymous with effectiveness at the programme level and this level is usually the focus of evaluation. The results of public relations activity can be further assessed by means of four categories of performance measures: input, output, outcome and outtake. Box 11.3 summarises these measures. (See Think about 11.3.)

#### Organisational level

The third level of effectiveness is organisational level. The typical question at this level is, 'How do public relations activities and efforts contribute to achieving

### think about 11.3 Output or outcome evaluation

The National Archives commissioned an agency to publicise the launch of its 'Secret State' exhibition, which looked at government activity during the Cold War. The campaign objectives were to:

- raise awareness of the National Archive
- increase visitors to the museum
- explain that the exhibition was of interest to everyone.

Source: PR Week 13 August 2004, campaigns section – 'National Archives wins visitors with "Cold War"', p. 31

What are the main problems with these objectives?  
What could be the output and outcome measures?

**box**  
**11.4**
**Fathers4Justice (F4J) press coverage**

On behalf of F4J, Reputation Intelligence, a research agency, analysed more than 10,000 articles from 330 UK newspapers published between 2000 and 2004. Media evaluation showed that:

- Articles on fathers' rights have increased by over 700% since F4J mounted its high-profile media campaign.
- F4J has engaged the politicians to speak on fathers' rights and encourage opposition parties to take up its fight.
- Compared to other political campaigning organisations, F4J is grabbing a high ratio of headlines to article mentions (see Figure 11.3).
- F4J is well placed to turn this profile into clear messages on policy reform.

Source: Reputation Intelligence

organisational goals, such as being the market leader or increase sales figures?' Assessing effectiveness at organisational level also includes the aggregates of different public relations activities, as in the case of a multinational organisation, which has regional or national offices with their own public relations plans and programmes. If public relations objectives are not in line with organisational goals, it might be difficult to evaluate the programme at this level. Another issue at this level may be the difficulty of separating public relations effects from other effects (advertising, direct mails).

### Societal level

As Hon noted, the final level of effectiveness is at the level of society. This level is usually examined from either a systems theory or a critical perspective (see Chapters 8 and 9). The systems theory approach asserts that public relations plays a positive role in

society; according to the critical perspective, public relations activities have negative consequences on the society at large.

### Evaluation methods

Earlier we discussed surveys, focus groups, interviews and content analysis as most frequently used methods to conduct research. They are used to evaluate public relations programmes as well but there are other methods available for public relations practitioners.

*PR Week* commissioned research in 1999 among 200 public relations practitioners to gauge their attitudes and behaviour with regard to evaluation. About 60% of respondents said that they used media content analysis or press cuttings to evaluate their public relations activities. The next most frequently used technique was opportunities to see (OTS), which is the number of occasions that an audience has the potential

#### Article mentions versus headlines

Press set: UK newspapers

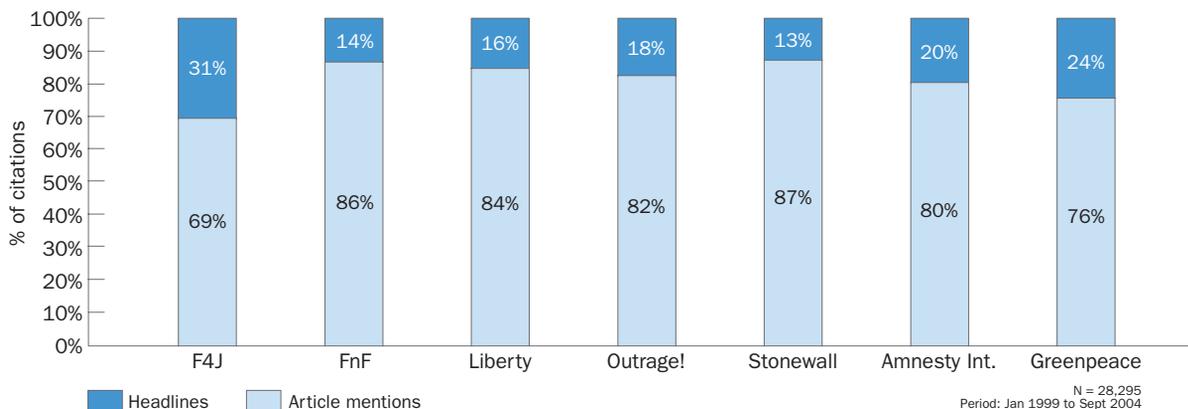


FIGURE 11.3 F4J grabbing headlines (source: Reputation Intelligence)

to view a message. The circulation numbers of the British daily newspapers presented in Table 11.2 includes these opportunities in the case of print media.

Surveys, focus groups and advertising value equivalents (AVEs) are also often used to evaluate public relations programmes. AVE is the notional equivalent cost of buying editorial. It is a controversial method and practitioners are being discouraged from using this method because it compares advertising and public relations. However, national and international research confirms this method remains widely used by both in-house and consultancy practitioners. (See Box 11.4.)

Organisations do not always want to get publicity. In the case of a crisis, for example, the company may prefer minimal exposure to media. Nor is publicity the same as understanding – newspaper coverage may be extensive without clearly explaining the goals of those seeking publicity.

## Evaluation guidelines

'Is it possible for those of us who work in the public relations field to ever develop generally accepted models or standards of public relations evaluation upon which everyone in the industry can agree?', asked Walter Lindenmann (1997: 391), a well-respected research specialist in the field.

The search for an objective, simple and effective methodology for evaluating public relations programmes occupied much academic literature in the 1980s. Pavlik (1987: 65) commented that: 'Measuring the effectiveness of PR efforts has proved almost as elusive as finding the Holy Grail.' The search was over at the beginning of the 1990s, as Lindenmann (1993: 9) commented: 'There is no one simplistic

method for measuring PR effectiveness... An array of different tools and techniques is needed to properly assess PR impact.'

Searching for a single and universal method was replaced by practitioners focusing on compiling an evaluation toolkit based on the best practice guidelines. In 1997 a 28-page booklet entitled *Guidelines and Standards for Measuring and Evaluating PR* was published by the Institute of Public Relations Research & Education in the USA. In Europe, two booklets were produced with a more focused purpose, covering how to prepare measurable goals and objectives prior to the launch of a campaign and how to measure public relations outputs.

In the UK, a research and evaluation toolkit was compiled in 1999 utilising the findings of the above-mentioned *PR Week* survey on evaluation. This toolkit spells out the best reasons for employing research and evaluation in campaigns and gives guidance on how to set about it. The author of the toolkit argued that the UK is taking a leading position on research and evaluation. In 2003 the Institute of Public Relations published the 'IPR Toolkit: Media evaluation edition'.

## Evaluation models

A number of evaluation models have been developed to serve as guidelines in terms of what to evaluate and how to evaluate. Most are three-stage models embracing a variety of techniques. Cutlip et al., 'stages and levels of public relations programme evaluation', represents different levels of a complete programme evaluation: preparation, implementation and impact (Figure 11.4). This first level assesses the information and planning, the implementation evaluation deals

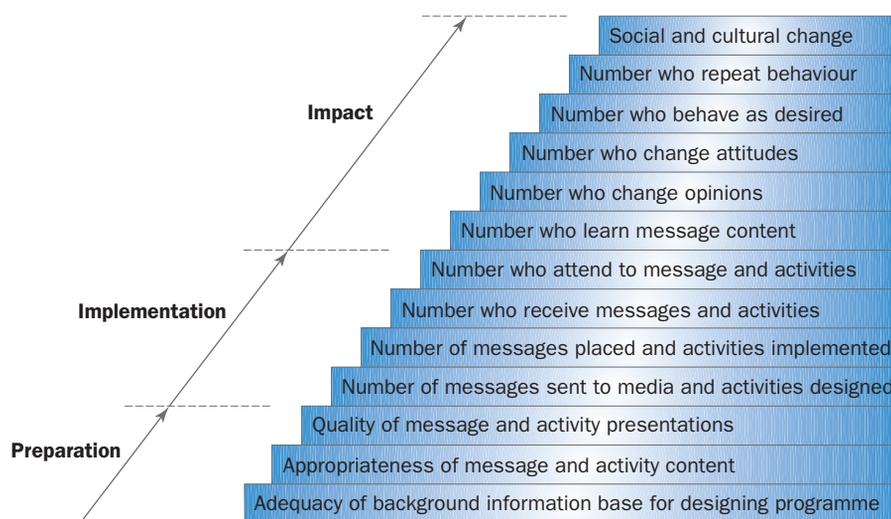


FIGURE 11.4 Stages and levels of public relations programme evaluation (source: Cutlip, Scott M., Center, Allen H., Broom, Glen M., *Effective Public Relations, 8th Edition*, © 2000, p. 437. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ)

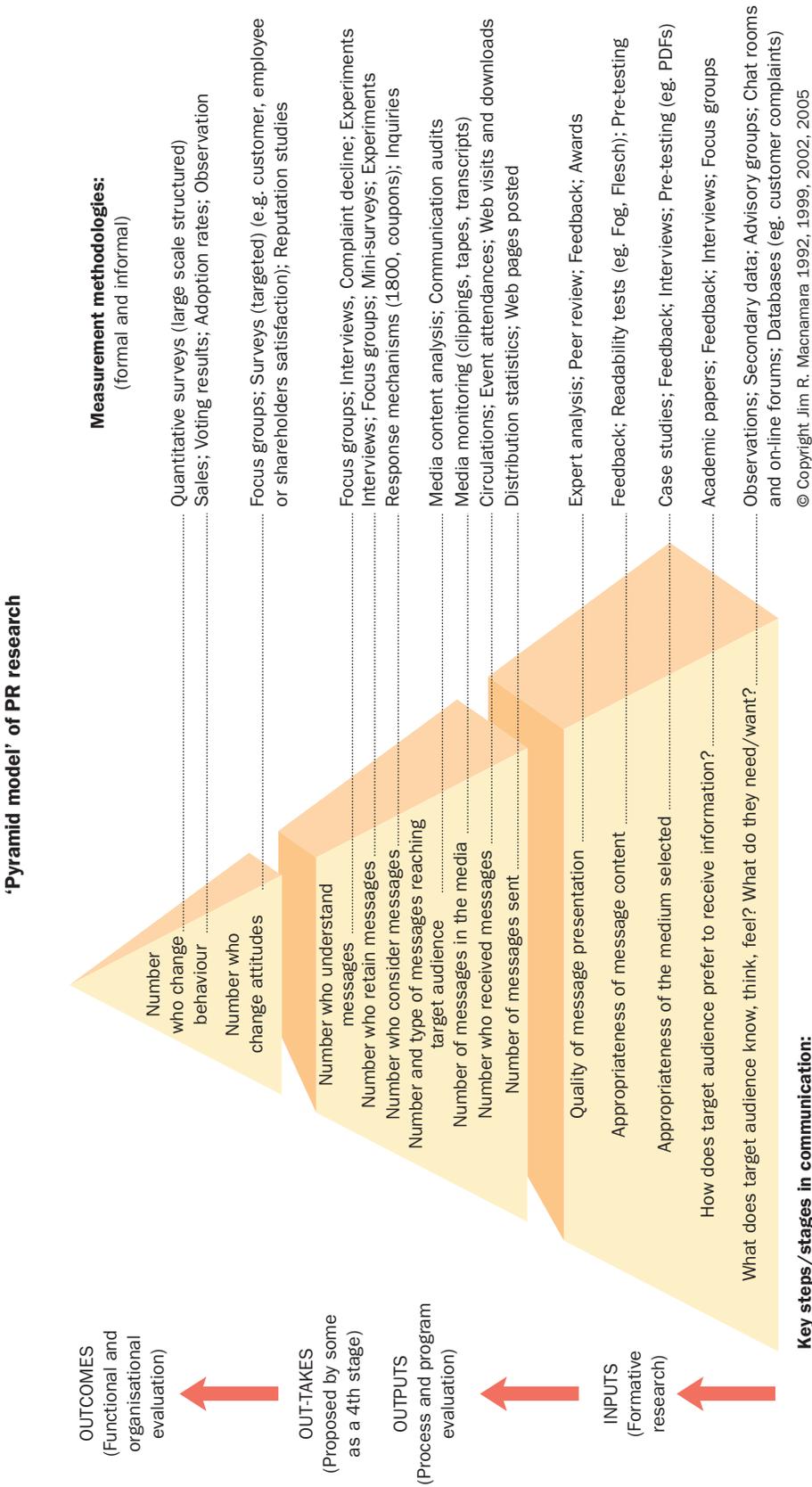


FIGURE 11.5 Macnamara's evaluation model (updated) (source: Macnamara 1992: 28)

with tactics and activities while the impact evaluation provides feedback on the outcome.

Preparation evaluation assesses the quality and adequacy of information that was used to plan the programme. Some key publics might have been unidentified at the planning stage or some issues overlooked. This stage is very similar to the plan assessment we discussed earlier.

At the second level, implementation evaluation assesses the number of messages distribution and measures outputs. The final stage, the impact level examines the extent to which the defined goals of the campaigns have been achieved. This level is primarily concerned with the changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

As the authors noted, the most common error in programme evaluation is substituting measures from one level for those at another (Cutlip et al. 2000).

Macnamara's (1992) model is similar but uses different terminology: inputs, outputs and results. (Output is usually the short-term or immediate results of a particular public relations programme or activity.) This model lists evaluation methodologies that can be applied to each step, but for different steps different methodologies are required. The model is presented in a pyramidal form starting from inputs

through outputs to results (see Figure 11.5; see also Activity 11.6).

Barriers and challenges to developing and using effective research in public relations activities can be summarised as follows. Watson (1994) found that the barriers to evaluation uncovered in his survey were mirrored worldwide:

- lack of time
- lack of personnel
- lack of budget
- cost of evaluation
- doubts about usefulness
- lack of knowledge
- can expose practitioner's performance to criticism
- aversion to scientific methodology.

The challenge of the profession lies in overcoming these difficulties.

### activity 11.6

#### Macnamara's model

Review the evaluation of the Bin There Done That campaign. What are the inputs, outputs and results that are measured in this campaign? What does it tell you about the extent or depth of evaluation?

## Summary

This chapter outlined the principles of research, which is a central activity in any public relations programme. A variety of research methods have been presented that enable public relations practitioners to conduct systematic and objective research, and scopes of research and evaluation have been outlined.

Since an organisation's public relations are related to other communication activities such as marketing

communications, research must also be integrated with these areas. Public relations research and evaluation cannot be seen in isolation from an organisation's other communication research (see Chapter 26). If we talk about integrated communications, then we also have to talk about 'integrated communications research (and evaluation)'.

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