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CHAPTER 19

Integrating Planning and Evaluation

Evaluating the Public Relations Practice and Public Relations Programs

TOM WATSON

This chapter offers an overview on the nature of public relations evaluation, the attitudes of practitioners toward it, and the models on which it can be based. My aim is to guide the reader away from the discussion of specific methodology, which obsesses many practitioners, and toward the integration of planning and evaluation in the development of public relations programs.

The chapter begins with a discussion of evaluation and objective setting. It then considers the culture of public relations practice and the barriers to widespread use of evaluation techniques. Finally, it reviews existing models for evaluation and two new approaches that I developed.

A TOP PRIORITY

In a Delphi study conducted by White and Blamphin (1994) among U.K. practitioners and academics of public relations research priorities, the topic of evaluation was ranked number 1 in the development of public relations practice and research. But what is evaluation of public relations? Is it measuring output or monitoring progress against defined objectives? Is it giving a numerical value to the results of programs and campaigns? Is it the final step in the public relations process or a continuing activity?

When discussing this topic, there is considerable confusion as to what the term *evaluation* means. For budget holders, whether employers or clients, the judgments have a "bottom-line" profit-related significance. J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) wrote of a practitioner who justified the budgetary expenditure on public relations by the generation of a large volume of press coverage. He was flummoxed by a senior executive's question of "What's all this worth to us?" (p. 129). In the United Kingdom, articles in the public relations and marketing press refer to evaluation in terms of "justifying expenditure," which is similar to J. Grunig and Hunt's example. White

(1991) suggested that company managers have a special interest in the evaluation of public relations: "Evaluation helps to answer the questions about the time, effort, and resources to be invested in public relations activities; can the investment, and the costs involved, be justified?" (p. 141).

Many definitions emphasize effectiveness—"systematic measures of program effectiveness" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, p. 406); "evaluation research is used to determine effectiveness" (Pavlik, 1987, p. 23); "the systematic assessment of a program and its results" (Blissland, 1990, p. 25); "measure public relations effectiveness" (Lindenmann, 1993, p. 7). A development of these definitions are those that are related to program or campaign objectives, a reflection on the management-by-objectives influence on public relations practice in the United States. Cutlip et al. (1994) concluded that evaluation research (a term interchangeable with *evaluation*) is "used to learn what happened and why, not to 'prove' or 'do' something" (p. 410). Definitions of evaluation, therefore, can be seen to fall into three groups: commercial (which is a justification of budget spend), simple effectiveness (which asks whether the program has worked in terms of output), and objectives effectiveness (which judges programs in terms of meeting objectives and creation of desired effects).

For effective evaluation to be undertaken, starting points must be set out, a basis of comparison must be researched, and specific objectives must be established. Weiss (1977) said that the

> purpose [of evaluation] should be clearly stated, and measurable goals must be formulated before questions can be devised and the evaluation design chosen. The start point and the objective must be set as part of the public relations program design. Its waypoints can be measured and the effectiveness and impact assessed. (p. 4)

White (1990) argued that "setting precise and measurable objectives at the outset of a program is a prerequisite for later evaluation" (p. 9).

Simplistic media measurement or reader response analysis considers only output—volume of "mentions"—and not effects. "Objectives" of, say, more mentions in the *Financial Times*, which might be sought by a quoted company, are little more than a stick with which to beat the public relations (or, more correctly, press relations) practitioner. Dozier (1985) referred to this approach as "pseudo-planning" and "pseudo-evaluation." Pseudo-planning is the allocation of resources to communications activities in which the goal is communication itself, and pseudo-evaluation is "simply counting news release placements and other communications" (p. 18).

Historically, the measurements of column inches of press cuttings or mentions on electronic media were seen as adequate evaluation techniques. They fail as objective measures because they cannot demonstrate the requirements for validity and reliability. They can be skewed by the subjectivity of different personalities undertaking the judgment, and they cannot be replicated. Some are little more than sales lead measures, and others that consider "tone" of articles (cf. rigorous content analysis), opportunities to see, or media ratings are judgments that are made to suit the client/employer rather than to measure the effectiveness of reaching target markets. Too often, the evaluation is determined after the campaign has been set in motion.

Another method of judgment is advertising value equivalents (also called advertising cost equivalents), where an advertising space value is given to media coverage. This is a measure often claimed from media coverage. The typical use of this measure is to observe the amount of exposure in time or column inches of the news or editorial coverage in a news story. For example, a British public relations consultancy might claim that a product it is promoting could receive the equivalent of £375,000 in advertising. The weakness of such conclusions is that they are not based on measures of the impact of this publicity. Such measures might include awareness, attitude formation, and attendance at a sponsored event.

McKeone (1993) said, "The whole concept of AVEs is based on false assumptions, and any conclusions based on them are misleading and dangerous" (p. 10). Wilcox, Ault, and Agee (1992) described this methodology as "a bit like comparing apples and oranges" (p. 211) because advertising copy is controlled by the space purchaser, whereas news mentions are determined by media gatekeepers and can be negative, neutral, or favorable. It also is inherently absurd to claim a value for something that never was going to be purchased.

PRACTITIONER CULTURE

Evaluation is a subject widely written about at the academic and practitioner levels. Pavlik (1987) commented that measuring the effectiveness of public relations has proven to be almost as elusive as finding the Holy Grail. Cline (1984) reviewed approximately 300 articles and reports during the mid-1980s and found no consensus of effective methodology. She commented, "There was a pervasive desire to reinvent the wheel" (p. 68) rather than to apply proven social science methodology.

The culture of public relations practitioners is a fundamental issue when considering attitudes toward evaluation and the methodology used. In textbooks and articles about public relations, writers and academics are almost unanimous in their advice that programs must be researched during preparation and evaluated during and after implementation. However, researchers have found that a minority of practitioners use only scientific evaluation methods.

J. Grunig (1983a) has a celebrated cri de coeur on the subject:

> I have begun to feel more and more like a fundamentalist preacher railing against sin, the difference being that I have railed for evaluation in public relations practice; just as everyone is against sin, so most public relations people I talk to are for evaluation. People keep on sinning, however, and PR [public relations] people continue not to do evaluation research. (p. 28)

Dozier's research on evaluation over the past 15 years or so has encompassed local (San Diego), national (Public Relations Society of America [PRSA]), and international (International Association of Business Communicators [IABC]) samples (Dozier, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1990). One consistent finding of his studies has been that evaluation of programs increases as the practitioner's management function develops, whereas it either plateaus or falls away if the practitioner has a technician role (e.g., writing, media relations, production of communication tools). Dozier (1990) said,

> Some practitioners do not engage in any program research, [whereas] others conduct extensive research. Practitioners vary in the kinds of research methods they use from intuitive, informal "seat-of-the-pants" research to rigorous scientific studies. Although little longitudinal scholarly research is available, the best evidence is that—over time—more practitioners are doing research more frequently. (p. 4)

Although there have been many small-sample studies, the main extensive national and international studies have been conducted by Dozier among PRSA and IABC members, by Lindenmann (1990) among a selected group of U.S. practitioners, and by Watson (1993, 1994) among Institute of Public Relations (IPR) members in the United Kingdom.

In 1988, Lindenmann (1990, pp. 7-9) undertook a nationwide survey among major corporations, large trade and professional associations, large nonprofit organizations, and the 20 largest public relations consultancies and academics. The key findings were that 57.4% believed that outcomes of public relations programs can be measured (41.8% disagreed). Fully 75.9% agreed that research is widely accepted by most public relations professionals as a necessary part of planning programs. In addition, 94.3% agreed that research still is more talked about than done (54.2% *strongly* agreed). Research was undertaken for the purposes of planning (74.7%), monitoring or tracking activities (58.1%), evaluating outcomes (55.7%), conducting publicity polls (41.1%), and tracking crisis issues (36.4%). (Multiple responses were sought for this question.)

The expenditure on research and evaluation showed wide variations. Many respondents, principally in large corporations, utilities, trade associations, and nonprofit organizations, claimed that it was included in budgets, but they were almost equally balanced by those who claimed not to have budgets for this activity. Lindenmann (1990) found that the 89 respondents who did allocate funds for research indicated that the sums were small; specifically, 22.5% said that it was less than 1% of the total public relations budget, 31.5% said that it was between 1% and 3% of the budget, 21.3% said that it was between 4% and 6% of the budget, and 12.3% said that it was at least 7% of the budget.

The issues that Lindenmann (1990) considered negative were

> the acknowledgment by better than 9 out of every 10 PR professionals that research is still talked about in PR than is actually being done. Also of concern was the finding that, in the view of 7 out of every 10 respondents, most PR research that is done today is still casual and informal rather than scientific or precise. (p. 15)

Watson's (1994) survey among IPR members found that evaluation was viewed very narrowly and that they lacked confidence to promote evaluation methods to employers and clients. Practitioners claimed that they lacked time, budget, and knowledge of methods to undertake evaluation. They also feared evaluation because it could challenge the logic of their advice and activities. Yet, they said that public relations suffered as a communication discipline because of the inability to predict and measure results. It also was not easy to isolate its effects from other variables such as advertising and related promotional activity. They believed that future public relations performance would be aided by applied measures, probably based on software.

The most widely used techniques relied on some form of output measurement of media coverage. There was a reluctance to pretest or research when preparing public relations activities. Most often, practitioners relied on experience, knowledge of markets and the media, and client/employer imperatives. The picture that emerged was of the practitioner as a "doer" rather than as an adviser or a consultant.

There were some evaluation strategies occasionally undertaken such as "attending relevant meetings and hearings," "monitoring relevant meetings and hearings," and "interviews of the public to check impact." The bulk of responses indicated that output measurement was considered more relevant than either gauging impact or gaining intelligence to further improve programs.

The lack of knowledge or, possibly, the disinclination to learn about evaluation techniques also showed up as the most commonly offered reason why programs were not formally evaluated. This was followed by "cost," "lack of time," and "lack of budget." When the results for "cost" and "lack of budget" were added together as a global financial excuse, they became the dominant reason.

Motives for undertaking evaluation also were sought. By nearly double any other category, public relations practitioners nominated "prove value of campaign/budget," followed by "help campaign targeting and planning" and "need to judge campaign effects" and, as a distant fourth choice, "help get more resources/higher fees."

The use of evaluation techniques to improve programs or to judge the effects of current activities was considered to be half as important as "proving value," implying that practitioners were defensive about their activities. They aimed to present data on which they would be judged rather than to act proactively to improve or fine-tune campaigns.

Indications of the lack of self-confidence in the U.K. public relations profession are evidenced in an article in the *Financial Times* (Houlder, 1994). White (1991) argued that the need of practitioners to evaluate activities was "partly a matter of professional insecurity." Mike Beard, the 1994 president of the United Kingdom's IPR, agreed with White but pointed out that other professions rarely have standard evaluation systems: "Other professions are not obsessed by this issue, nor should we be" (cited in Houlder, 1994). Taking a different tack, another prominent practitioner, Quentin Bell, then chairman of the United Kingdom's Public Relations Consultants Association, said, "Unless we can get clients to insist on evaluation, there will not be a PR consultancy business in 25 years' time" (Bell, 1992, p. 22).

An indicator of attitudes that might be slowly changing was the snapshot study undertaken by Blissland (1990) of entries in the PRSA's annual Silver Anvil case study competition. Blissland compared entries from 1988-1989 to those at the beginning of the decade in 1980-1981 to see whether there were changes in attitude toward evaluation methods over the period. A cosmetic change was that during the early 1980s, only one entrant used the term *evaluation*, but 88% used the term *results*. By 1988-1989, 83% used *evaluation* as the term to describe their outcomes sections. They also used more evaluation methods; this number increased from a mean of 3.60 methods/winner to 4.57 methods/winner.

The statistically significant changes were the use of behavioral science measures and two measures of organizational goal achievement: inferred achievement and substantiated achievement. Blissland (1990) concluded that by the end of the decade, there was marginally greater reliance on the output measure of media coverage, which rose from 70.0% to 79.2%. However, when this is linked to the inferred (i.e., unsubstantiated) achievement claims (which increased in winning entries from 53.3% to 87.5%), it is hard to agree with Blissland's conclusion that "clearly, progress has been made" (p. 33).

European research on evaluation, which can be compared to the U.K. study on practitioner attitudes, has been undertaken in Germany. Baerns (1993) studied attitudes among German in-house public relations managers in 1989 and 1992 and found results similar to those in Dozier's studies. She said, "Almost all West German public relations experts in managerial positions regarded analytical work as important in the context of public relations. However, almost all of them rarely analyzed and controlled what they had accomplished irregularly or never" (p. 67).

Baerns (1993) found that the majority of respondents (55%) regarded long-term public relations planning as "indispensable," whereas 39% referred to the priority of day-to-day events. A small number (7%) regarded planning in public relations as "impossible." Baerns then explored the ways in which planning took place and found a considerable gap between the reported attitudes toward planning and the reality of what took place.

Baerns (1993) found that 63% of respondents believed that "scientific findings" play only a minor part in public relations practice. This corresponds with the seat-of-the-pants attitudes identified in the United States and the United Kingdom by Dozier (1984, 1985, 1988b) and Watson (1993, 1994), respectively. Baerns's concluded that when evaluation or monitoring took place, it was "mostly as press analyses."

Among the U.S. studies are contributions from Chapman (1982), Finn (1982), Hiebert and Devine (1985), and Judd (1990). Chapman (1982) found that practitioners in Chicago relied less on the media for evaluation purposes, but there was a seat-of-the-pants category called "general feedback" used by 83% of respondents. Finn (1982) found that 38% of senior communications executives in major companies were studying the impact of programs. Judd (1990) found that 67% of PRSA members used formal research or evaluation and that regional practitioners in Texas were only marginally lower at 66%. He also cross-checked his results by analyzing whether those who said that they evaluate actually do so and was satisfied that there is a clear correlation between saying and doing. His results, however, are at variance with those of most U.S. and overseas practitioner studies. Hiebert and Devine (1985) found the reverse in an earlier study of government information officers in the United States, 85% of whom thought that evaluation "was either an important or very important activity" but who conducted almost no research.

Research in Australia by MacNamara (1992a) also detected a gap between saying and doing but, more significantly, detected a reliance on measurement of media indicators and the absence of objective research methods. He found that only 3 of 50 senior public relations consultancies surveyed could nominate an objective methodology used to evaluate media coverage even though 70% of respondents claimed that they undertook qualitative judgment of media coverage.

THE BARRIERS TO EVALUATION

There are many barriers to the more widespread evaluation of public relations activity, as has been demonstrated heretofore. Dozier (1985) indicated several reasons—previous working experience of practitioners, lack of knowledge of research techniques, the manager-technician dichotomy, and the practitioner's participation in decision making. Lindenmann (1990) believed that practitioners were "not thoroughly aware" of research techniques. He also found that respondents to his survey complained of a lack of money, with 54% spending 3% or less (often much less) on evaluation. Watson (1993, 1994) indicated that time, knowledge, budgets, and costs were the principal difficulties for U.K. public relations people. Baerns (1993) found similar barriers in Germany, with time, lack of personnel, inadequate budgets, and doubts about the process all being important. MacNamara's (1992a) research found that practitioners lacked knowledge of methodology but did not explore other explanations. In the United Kingdom, one strong reason advanced by Bell (1992) was money and client reluctance to spend it:

> And the problem I fear lies with money—too many clients are still not prepared to allocate realistic budgets to pay for the process. But I concede that it's a catch-22; until clients have become accustomed to what's possible on evaluation, they won't begin to demand it. That's the basic problem that our industry as a whole must aim to solve. (p. 22)

These barriers follow a circular argument. Most practitioners' education does not include social science research techniques; therefore, they do not use them but instead concentrate on technician skills, and this means that they do not rise into the manager roles and participate in decision making. This would give access to budgets for planning and evaluation, thus creating programs and campaigns that can enhance their personal standing and meet the objectives of their clients or employers.

MODELS OF EVALUATION

When practitioners undertake evaluation, there is a tendency to take a narrow view of the methods used and to concentrate on simplistic methodologies. However, there are at least four models that are familiar to the more widely read practitioners. In this chapter, two more models are proposed, based on recent research. In the United States, one of the best known models is that of Cutlip et al. (1994), which has been included in many of the seven editions of their standard text, *Effective Public Relations*, widely used in undergraduate education.

Cutlip et al.'s (1994) evaluation model is widely taught to students in the United States. Known as *PII* (preparation, implementation, and impact), it is a step model that offers levels of evaluation for differing demands. It does not prescribe methodology. The authors make the key point that the most common evaluation error is substituting measures from one level for another. For example, an implementation measure such as the number of press releases disseminated is used to claim impact. This "substitution game" frequently is seen when reading articles in the trade press or when reviewing award entries.

Each step in the PII model, according to Cutlip et al. (1994), contributes to increased understanding and adds information for assessing effectiveness. The bottom rung of preparation evaluation assesses the information and strategic planning, the implementation evaluation stage considers tactics and effort, and the impact evaluation stage gives feedback on the outcome.

The PII model is valuable for its separation of output and impact and for counseling against the confusion of these different measures. It acts as a checklist and a reminder when planning evaluation. However, like many academic models, it assumes that programs and campaigns will be measured by social science methodologies that will be properly funded by clients/employers. As a model, it puts short- and long-term public relations activity together without allowing for their often very different methodologies and goals.

The importance of PII, through its widespread teaching, is highlighted by the next model discussed—MacNamara's (1992b) *macro* model. MacNamara's model, which he calls macro communication, is similar to PII and represents public relations programs and campaigns in a pyramidal form, rising from a broad base of inputs, to outputs, to results, with the pinnacle being "objectives achieved." The base inputs are similar to PII and include background information, appropriateness of media, and quality of message. In the middle of the pyramid is a sequence starting at message distribution and ending with data on readership. The results section is concerned with stages of research and ends with the judgment on whether or not objectives have been reached or problems have been solved.

The model separates outputs and results. For example, a news release can be evaluated as an output in terms of quality, readability, and timeliness but not as to whether a communication effect has been achieved. The macro model lists evaluation methodologies that can be applied to each of the steps in an attempt to develop a completed measurable process. MacNamara (1992b) claimed that it "presents a practical model for planning and managing evaluation of public relations" and that it recognizes communication as a multistep process.

Lindenmann's (1993) public relations *yardstick* model differs from the other models because its staging does not progress from planning to objectives. It encapsulates Lindenmann's experience in advising the international public relations consultancy and aims to make evaluation more accessible. He argued that it is possible to measure public relations effectiveness and that there is growing pressure from clients and employers to be more accountable. He added, "Measuring public relations effectiveness does not have to be either unbelievably expensive or laboriously time-consuming. PR measurement studies can be done at relatively modest cost and in a matter of only a few weeks."

The yardstick model consists of a two-step process: setting public relations objectives and then determining at what levels public relations effectiveness is to be measured.

Three Levels gauge the extent of measurement. Level 1 is the basic level, which measures public relations "outputs"—the ways in which the program or campaign is presented through, typically, media relations. It is measured in terms of media placements and the likelihood of reaching the target groups.

Level 2 is termed by Lindenmann (1993) as the intermediate level, which uses "outgrowth" or "out-take" measures. These judge whether or not the target audience actually received the messages and so evaluates retention, comprehension, and awareness. Practitioners will use a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques such as focus groups, interviews with opinion leaders, and polling of target groups.

"Outcomes" are measured in Level 3. These include opinion, attitudes, and behavioral changes. Lindenmann wrote that this is where the role of pre- and posttesting comes into its own with the use of before-and-after polling, observational methods, psychographic analysis, and other social science techniques.

Lindenmann (1993) concluded his article with a statement that emphasized his practical approach in developing the yardstick model: "It is important to recognize that there is no one simplistic method for measuring PR effectiveness. Depending upon which level of effectiveness is required, an array of different tools and techniques is needed to properly assess PR impact" (p. 9).

UNIVERSALITY OF THE MODELS

The three models just discussed have varying provenances. Cutlip et al.'s (1994) PII is well known. MacNamara's (1992a, 1992b) macro model is much less well known. Lindenmann's

(1993) yardstick model has been publicized in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Research among practitioners (Watson, 1995) has found, however, that existing evaluation models are too complex, do not have an integral relationship with the creation of effects, and lack a dynamic element of feedback. These models all fit that hypothesis. They are essentially static, step-by-step processes that, to quote Cutlip et al. (1994), are "the final stage in the [public relations] process" (p. 410). Yet, public relations activity is not a "start/stop" communications process in which, for example, a company stops all interactions with its many publics while it measures the results of a media relations program.

To develop a more complete approach to planning (and subsequent evaluation), the "effects-based planning" theories put forward by Van Leuven and colleagues are valuable (Van Leuven, O'Keefe, & Salmon, 1988). These are closely associated with management-by-objectives techniques used widely in industry and government. Underlying Van Leuven's approach is the premise that a program's intended communication and behavioral effects serve as the basis from which all other planning decisions can be made. The process involves setting separate objectives and sub-objectives for each public. Van Leuven et al. (1988) argued that the planning becomes more consistent by having to justify program and creative decisions on the basis of their intended communication and behavioral effects. It also acts as a continuing evaluation process because the search for consistency means that monitoring is continuous and the process of discussion needs evidence on which to reach decisions. Effects-based planning, according to Van Leuven et al., means that programs can be compared without the need for isolated case studies.

TWO NEW EVALUATION APPROACHES

Taking into account the need for accessible dynamic models of evaluation, two models were proposed by Watson (1995): the *short-term* model for short-time-span, largely media relations-based campaigns and activities that seek rapid results and the *continuing* model for long-term activities in which the consistent promotion of messages is a central strategy and the outcomes may occur after long periods (1 year or more) of continuous activities.

These models link with J. Grunig's four summations of public relations activity (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The short-term model is similar to the press agentry and public information one-way summations in that it does not seek dialogue or feedback. The continuing model fits with the two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric models that cover a broader band of communication methods and rely on feedback for campaign monitoring and modification of messages. These models can be expressed graphically.

The Short-Term Model

The short-term model (Figure 19.1) has a single-track, linear process with an outcome. It does not set out to measure effects, and because it does not have a continuing existence, there is no feedback mechanism. Typically, a public relations campaign has a simple awareness objective with one or two strategies. A common example of public relations practice in the public information summation is the distribution of news releases about products or services to the media. This is a technician skill of assembling information and photographs or drawings in the manner most acceptable to the media. Measuring achievement of the objectives can be by media analysis, sales responses, or phone research among the target audience.

Using the short-term model, the objectives could be set on the basis of obtaining coverage in specific media (chosen for relevance to target audiences), the number of sales responses (realistically set according to the appropriateness of the media and the attractions of product or service), or quantitative techniques such as phone research and mail surveys. The judgment of success or failure, therefore, is made on whether or not the targets are reached. If the client or employer sets unrealistic objectives, then this simple model will be as irrelevant as a step-by-step model or an informal seat-of-the-pants judgment. The quality of the model's results depends on the professionalism of the practitioner in designing the campaign.

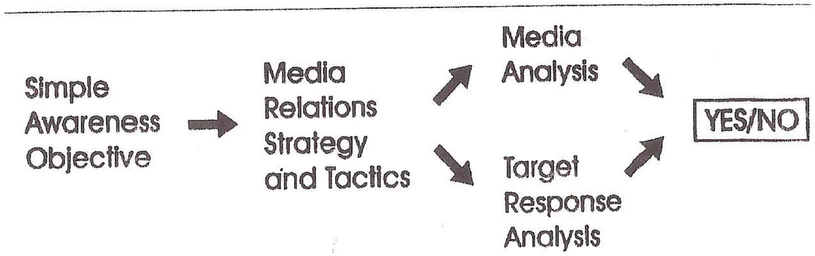

Figure 19.1. Short-Term Model of Evaluation

The Continuing Model

The continuing model (Figure 19.2) has been designed for use in long-term public relations activities. In reviewing the case studies, the need for a dynamic model to cope with ever changing circumstances was identified. A program such as that for major land use changes (with long-term corporate and planning objectives) or for an industrial redevelopment (with a medium-term objective of planning permission and a long-term objective of improved relations with the local community) needed a flexible evaluation model.

The continuing model offers elements that have not been included in step-by-step models. It has an iterative loop and takes into account the effects that are being created by the program. An additional element is that it offers an opportunity to make a judgment on "staying alive"—the important stage in a long-term, issues-centered program when keeping the issue in the decision frame is important. The continuing model epitomizes Van Leuven et al.'s (1988) effects-based planning approach. By adopting these principles within the continuing model, a dynamic and continuing evaluation process is created because the search for consistency means that monitoring is continuous.

The evidence from the long-term case studies reviewed in the research shows that the search for consistency is one of the most difficult practical issues facing public relations practitioners. The continuing model, using effects-based planning, offers a more disciplined approach that allows the parameters of the program to be more closely defined and enables continuous monitoring to replace after-the-event evaluation. The consistency of effects-based planning also aids validity and reliability of data.

The elements of the continuing model are an initial stage of research, the setting of objectives and choice of program effects, followed by the strategy selection and tactical choices. As the program continues, there are multiple levels of formal and informal analysis from which judgments can be made on progress in terms of success or "staying alive." The judgments are fed back to each of the program elements. These iterative loops assist the practitioner in validating the initial research and adding new data, adjusting the objectives and strategy, monitoring the progress to create the desired attitudinal or behavioral effects, and helping with the adjustment or variation of tactics. This model is a continuing process that can be applied to a specific program or to the overall public relations activities of an organization.

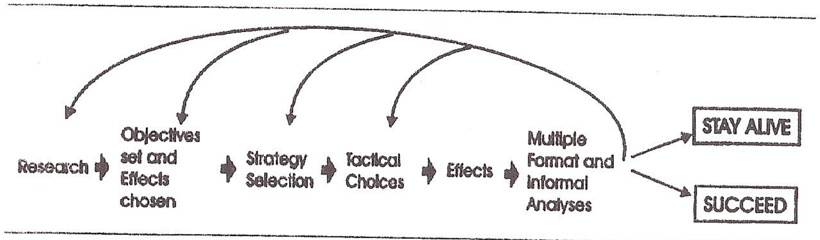

Figure 19.2. Continuing Model of Evaluation

CONCLUSION

The search for consistency is one of the most difficult practical issues faced by the public relations professional. A more disciplined approach will allow the parameters of the program to be more closely defined and for continuous monitoring to replace a single postintervention evaluation. It also will bolster the objectivity of the evaluation process.

Unless evaluation becomes less of a mystery and a more accessible process, it would appear that a generation of better educated practitioners is needed to break the technician mold. Technicians always will be needed to carry out the operational aspects and tactical implementation of programs and campaigns, especially those that are based on media relations and publications.

If the evaluation models are simpler to operate, then technicians can participate in them. Given that they are producing many of the materials for the strategy, it makes sense for them to aid in the evaluation process. Money and time always will be in short supply, but simpler models to enable evaluation to take place more frequently would prove to be a more convincing case to employers or clients when budgets are set.

CHAPTER 20

Media Effects Research for Public Relations Practitioners

BETH OLSON

The promise of understanding media effects can be seductive—a search for knowledge of cause and effect and the relationship between human behavior and consumption of media. This chapter explores the theory and research of media effects that may be applicable to public relations practitioners by defining media effects, presenting a historical overview of media effects models, outlining traditional categorizations of media effects (e.g., level of analysis, form vs. content), and exploring how the more powerful media effects models may be applied to the study and practice of public relations in an ever changing media environment.

DEFINING MEDIA EFFECTS AND EARLY EFFECTS MODELS

This section discusses both formal and informal definitions of media effects and examines shifts away from fear of dominant or direct effects. If these dominant effects did occur, then a public relations practitioner with a sound grasp of media could essentially achieve what is called the magic bullet effect—load a message into a medium and pull the trigger. Whereas early understanding of mass media effects was grounded in the magic bullet model, subsequent research disproved key assumptions found in the model.

Discovering how mass media researchers define media effects is complex and typically is inferred from context. "Mass communication involves the scientific study of the mass media, the messages they generate, the audiences they attempt to reach, and their *effects* on these audiences" (Tan, 1985, p. 3, italics added). Effects can be broadly based, from effects on an individual to societal effects, ranging from a child's fear reaction to an R-rated film to undecided voters casting ballots for a third-party candidate. Effects generally include any of the psychological or sociological outcomes following mass media consumption. More specifically, media effects may be defined by a categorization scheme such as type of effect or duration of effect. The term *mass media* has grown to include print media, electronic media, and computer-generated media, with content ranging from advertising to news and to informational and entertainment programming.

Early intuition about media effects assumed a direct effects magic bullet model from the early 1900s to the 1940s. Most mass media were in their infancy, and the emergence of each new medium, from film to radio to television, was met with public fear about potentially harmful effects as the consequence of exposure. For example, the initial hysteria reported following the 1938 radio broadcast of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* added fuel to the public's growing concern that new media were capable of producing direct, and negative, effects (Hadley, 1940). The pendulum of media effects began at the far right.

Historically, the scientific empirical study of media effects has evolved from the fields of psychology and sociology, most notably the research work of psychologist Paul Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). As a result, the majority of scientific investigations have been generated in the social science quantitative tradition. Lazarsfeld debunked early ideas about direct media effects and became a proponent of a limited effects model during the early 1950s, sending the pendulum from direct effects to weak or limited effects, swinging the pendulum to the extreme left.

The limited effects model led to the development of the two-step flow model (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) and the uses and gratifications line of research (Katz, 1959). Both research theories postulated the importance of the individual's thoughtful use of media messages in the media communication process, thereby reducing the power of the media. The two-step flow model identified the importance of opinion leaders in diffusing media messages to individuals, whereas the uses and gratifications approach focused on the differences in the ways in which individuals sought and received gratifications from media use. However, the "front end" of the communication process often is overlooked. That is, the intent or purpose of those people that produce the messages seldom are investigated. As a result, little is known about the place of effects derived from a specific purpose such as the effect created when a public relations practitioner successfully places a news item in a broadcast news program. The limited effects model also is supported by Klapper's (1960) work, which concluded that the media have very limited power and might only be capable of reinforcing preexisting ideas.

This tradition gave way during the 1970s to a powerful media effects model. The powerful effects model may be visualized as a softening or midway point of the media effects pendulum swinging back to center. The powerful effects model, which also has been referred to as a moderate effects perspective (Baran & Davis, 1995, p. 16), may be perceived as a compromise between the two extreme positions; under certain conditions for some people, the media can contribute to strong effects or outcomes.

CATEGORIZATION OF MEDIA EFFECTS

The theme in this section is that, on the one hand, the media can have a substantial impact, but that on the other, they might have limited effects. We may realize, therefore, that effects vary. The reasons for such variance may be informative to practitioners, and the variance can be grouped according to the following typologies. Basil (1997) offered five categories of media effects: level of analysis, type, nature, intention, and whether effects are the result of form or content. Level of analysis considers whether the research examined the media effects on individuals, groups, or societies. Type of effects may be split into one of three primary subcategories: affective, cognitive, or behavioral. Nature of effects includes the processes first identified by Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) when studying voter behavior. Does the consumption of media create activation (new belief), reinforcement (confirmation of existing belief), or conversion (change to a different belief)? Intention considers whether the effects were intended or unintended. This also may be extended to include long-term versus short term effects and manifest versus latent effects. Finally, form versus content examines the medium of delivery versus content. For example, most people would spontaneously report that reading is more cognitively engaging than viewing television, but studies on similar content have reflected little difference between cognitive processing (and subsequent learning) of print and cognitive processing of televised images (Meadowcroft & Olson, 1995).

Level of Analysis for Effects

Most of the research conducted that tests media effects assumptions includes the individuals as participants or survey respondents. However, effects may be present at the cultural and societal levels as well as at the individual level (Geiger & Newhagen, 1993). Group and societal studies occur less frequently, although most of the effects on individuals are extrapolated to the aggregate, namely society at large. However, results from experimental research typically conducted on individuals contain an inherent caveat against such extrapolation due to low external validity and small sample sizes. Responses of individuals are grouped to represent subgroups of society, which may serve to inform us about groups and societal attitudes and behavior. For example, individuals may be placed in subcategories for their responses to be reported, perhaps by demographic attributes such as gender, age, and ethnicity or by psychological attributes such as attitudes or comprehension levels. One example of research on the individual level that may be generalized found that the television viewing styles of individuals were correlated with comprehension of plot material, indicating that people who actually spent more time staring at the television screen were less likely to comprehend the plot (Hawkins, Pingree, Bruce, & Tapper, 1997). One interpretation of these results is that staring is part of passive viewing and, as a result, lowers comprehension levels. Active viewers, on the other hand, tend to "check in" and are able to recall more plot points.

The categorization of effects is applicable to public relations in a number of ways, centering on knowledge of target audience. Knowing that the audience was exposed to one's message in the media is no guarantee that it will produce the desired effects. Some audience members are more difficult to reach because of their individual styles of media use such as the passive "couch potato" viewer described earlier. As a result, messages designed for effective impact would best be placed in programs most watched by active selective viewers. In this manner, individualist data may be applied to larger groups. The individual level of analysis appears to be the most powerful tool of those interested in level of analysis because it may be generalized from smaller individual effects to larger group effects. Knowledge of the individual is the building block on which to construct knowledge of the audience.

Type of Effects

The categorization for type of effect includes the human responses of cognition, affect, and behavior. Cognition, when compared to affect, often is considered to be the result of a "stronger" central processing route in human thought and subsequent persuasion, whereas affect or emotional response is produced much more quickly and with less concentrated effort via the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Further investigation of the processes and their relationship to persuasive advertising messages indicated that use of product information (e.g., presenting a product in a problem-solution scenario) precipitated cognition but was negatively related to affect, as was the use of spokespersons (Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995). Commonly used advertising messages such as excitement, aggression, and sexual content were labeled as mood arousal (or affect) dimensions. These messages, along with status appeals (featuring a reward [for using the product] or a punishment [for not using the product]), were positively related to affect but negatively related to cognition, much the same as Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action or Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (1991) and classical conditioning of association to product (see, e.g., Staats & Staats, 1958).

The issue of identification stands in contradiction to these findings. As Basil (1996) pointed out, identification (through the use of spokespeople) might be the single underlying factor among Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, Kelman's (1961) theory of opinion change, and Burke's (1950) dramatism theory. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) posits that identification with a model increases learning; Kelman's (1961) theory includes the components of compliance, identification, and internalization; and dramatism theory (Burke, 1950) offers speculation on the level of identification that a viewer has with a fictional character. Whereas the previous study (Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995) found the use of spokespeople to be considered less effective because it was a predictor of negative affect, Basil (1996) postulated that identification best explained effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. In his study following Magic Johnson's announcement of the basketball star's HIV status, respondents' predictor variables (age, gender, sexual experience, reliance on media, and media use) mediated the message; those who identified with Johnson reported more behavioral and attitudinal changes following the announcement. Identification, as a component of affect, might be most effective when employed by a celebrity spokesperson, although this study did not measure affect explicitly.

Other research findings proposed another contradiction: Affect (or emotion) might be placed in the central processing route because public service announcements (PSAs) with strong emotional appeals pertaining to AIDS produced higher recall levels (Lee & Davie, 1997). However, gender also was an important mediating variable for recall, a feat probably not replicated with other non-sexually related content. Female respondents recalled more of the emotional messages than did male respondents, whereas male respondents recalled more of the rational appeals than did female respondents. Both rational and emotional appeals were more engaging (depending on respondent gender); therefore, both could be considered as participating in the central processing route. An example of a PSA judged to consist of a rational appeal contained a visual of putting on a sock and accompanying narration, suggesting that a simple act could save one's life. Emotional PSAs included people giving personal testimonials about how they thought they never could contract AIDS.

Behavioral responses are the single definitive manifestation of responses to media message consumption. Respondents typically are asked to report behaviors; direct observation of behavioral changes rarely is employed. For example, those people participating in the survey on attitudinal change following Johnson's announcement were asked their levels of agreement with statements such as "I will definitely limit my sexual activity in the future because of AIDS" and "I will likely get a blood test for HIV infection within the next 6 months," and they were asked to provide the number of sexual partners they likely would have during the subsequent 18 months (Basil, 1996, pp. 292-293). Researchers have been stymied by the findings that attitudinal change does not necessitate a subsequent behavioral change (see, e.g., Ajzen, 1988). In fact, behavior might not correspond to attitudinal beliefs, as health awareness campaign designers are well aware (see, e.g., Brown & Walsh-Childers, 1994). Fazio (1990) offered a counterexplanation: Behaviors are spontaneous and not carefully deliberated through the central processing route, especially when there is little risk involved in the decision. The ability of the presence of an attitude object to change a behavior suggests that behavior can be produced by either route—central or peripheral—which greatly adds to the complexity of understanding human behavior.

How can public relations practitioners use such research findings? Public relations practitioners should address audience characteristics in designing messages and in determining which component to be targeted—cognition, affect, or behavior. The central processing route appears to be the prized form of media consumption because it might be the strongest predictor of thoughtful behavioral choices. Practitioners can construct message content based on the effect desired such as sexual imagery for affective component, problem-solution format for cognitive component, and identification/modeling for behavioral change.

Nature of Effects

In research conducted on voter behavior in the 1940 presidential election, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) determined three media functions: activation, reinforcement, and conversion. These three concepts make up the category of nature of effects. Activation occurred when voters who were predisposed to vote for a particular candidate did so after the media messages aroused interest in voting; this led to increased exposure, which in turn activated selective attention and the voting decision. Reinforcement occurred via selective attention when voters already knew their decisions and selected media messages to reinforce their decisions. Conversion was the smallest of the three effects; it occurred when people changed their vote from one candidate to another.

Conversion, more recently, has been found to be very likely when a voter attends to media coverage and does not have strong feelings for any of the candidates (Graber, 1989). Reinforcement actually might be more common than conversion because of the selective perception inherent in people who already have candidate preferences and party preferences (Lanoue, 1992). In addition, another type of reinforcement is indicated by the way in which experimental participants have reported who "won" a presidential debate; those inclined to favor a candidate were more likely to say that their favored candidate was the winner (McKinnon, Tedesco, & Kaid, 1997).

Here it becomes apparent that public relations practitioners, especially those working in the political arena, can be most successful when their job is partially completed before they begin—reinforcing attitudes that audience members already possess so as to lock in their preferences.

Intention for Effects

Categorization of intent of media messages includes distinctions such as intended effects versus unintended effects, short-term effects versus long-term effects, and manifest effects versus latent effects. The summative research conducted during the early years of the television program *Sesame Street* exploring the knowledge gap hypothesis may be considered an example of intended versus unintended effects. (Note that the knowledge gap hypothesis predicts that as media information becomes available, people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to acquire the material at a faster rate than do people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, thus creating a gap in the knowledge between the two groups [Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970].) The program's original purpose was to assist at-risk preschoolers in narrowing the achievement gap between them and more advantaged children (Ball & Bogatz, 1970) by teaching rudimentary skills in language and math for children 3 to 5 years of age. The summative research indicated that the program's content did accomplish this goal for the at-risk children who viewed the program (intended effect). However, the children from advantaged backgrounds watched the program too, and they watched more of it. As a result, these children made similar gains in their achievement scores, and this contributed to widening the knowledge gap between the two groups rather than reducing it (unintended effect) (Cook et al., 1975).

Unintended effects may arise from the most benign intent and, as such, might be nearly impossible to predict, as might manifest versus latent effects. The investigation of short-term effects versus long-term effects might best be approached by a longitudinal study, designed to assess attitude change over time. Researchers may investigate other contributing variables, such as audience characteristics, when creating, pretesting, and disseminating messages. In the case of *Sesame Street*, if creators had possessed the knowledge of their audience and also had known the effectiveness and popularity of the program, then they might have been able to predict the higher levels of use. However, as with most informational or educational media campaigns, the benefits to all outweigh the alternative of limiting access to some. Obviously, it would be impossible to prevent non-at-risk children from watching "too much" *Sesame Street.* However, it was possible to increase the viewing levels of the at-risk children and to offer supplementary instructional materials to narrow the gap.

Public relations practitioners will take care to note as many outcome scenarios as possible so as to prevent a campaign from being negated by unintended, latent, or unforeseen long-term effects. Again, knowledge of the target audience combined with knowledge of possible outcomes is advantageous.

Form versus Content for Effects

The "medium is the message," McLuhan's (1964) oft-cited quotation, is at the core of form versus content. The channel through which a message is sent might intuitively seem to have an effect, namely on cognitive processing, learning, memory, and subsequent behavior. Most people would automatically report that reading printed material is more cognitively engaging than viewing that same material presented via television. Singer (1980) maintained that humans are active information processors whose cognitive skills are facilitated by print characteristics, whereas the formal features of television, such as rapid pacing, make it more difficult to employ cognitive skills while processing the message. Television "trains us to watch it" by providing a constant stream of images to capture a viewer's attention, creates a "system overload" by presenting information in both audio and visual channels, and adheres to a pace over which the viewer has no control (Singer, 1980). Other research has indicated that reading results in a larger degree of invested mental effort because people expect it to be more difficult. These expectations, however, have been overcome in experimental conditions in which participants were instructed to allocate mental effort to a television watching task (Clark, 1983; Salomon, 1979).

In an effort to test these information-processing assumptions, four experimental treatment groups were exposed to one television condition and three print conditions that contained an identical stimulus from a 60-minute *NOVA* program on PBS about chaos theory (Meadowcroft & Olson, 1995). The edited version was approximately 12 minutes in length; the print conditions were exposed to transcriptions of the audio text and included one of three versions: no images, helpful photographs (taken from video screen) that contributed to understanding of the theory, and nonhelpful or unrelated photographs. Attention was measured by self-report of the amount of invested mental effort and a surrogate measure of attention that also assessed allocation of mental effort. The surrogate measure consisted of performing a secondary task—responding to randomly spaced audio tones—while engaging in the primary task of reading or watching television. The response time needed to push a button after tone presentation was converted to a reaction time. Consistent with Kahneman's (1973) theory, it is assumed that the quicker the reaction time, the less cognitively engaged one is in the material and vice versa. Form versus content might be a moot argument; results from participants indicated few differences in the ways in which readers and television viewers process information when examining attention, elaboration, memory of central content, enjoyment of content, and recall memory. However, readers did report more visualization of content than did television viewers (Meadowcroft & Olson, 1995). Given the informational/educational nature of the PBS program and the information-processing assumptions surrounding content versus form, it is speculated that the results of this study may easily be extended to other printed or visual communication. In addition, the emergence of "blurmercials" (Mandese, 1993), living infomercials (Elliott, 1994), and "documercials" (Wells, 1993) is erasing the traditional boundaries among news, advertising, and entertainment programming (B. Stern, 1994), and this further muddies the distinctions.

Form versus content also may be broken down into other dimensions, and in so doing, other finite differences may be uncovered. For example, form versus content may be further dissected into dimensions of television and audiences. The characteristics of a medium also may be varied to produce an effect. Participants gave political candidates who appeared in fast-paced television political advertisements more positive evaluations than they did candidates in slower paced commercials featuring static images (Geiger & Reeves, 1991). Cognitive abilities of the audience also need to be considered. Form versus content did produce a difference when age was included as an independent variable. In particular, the elderly, as a growing segment of the population, present a challenge to determining message form and content because they have been shown to have difficulty in processing information (for learning and retrieval) regardless of form (Cole & Houston, 1987). Older audiences, who might have limited information processing skills, might learn less and recall less than do younger audiences and, in fact, had more difficulty than younger participants in processing information in a print media condition and learned less from the television condition (both stimuli consisted of news and advertising content) (Cole & Houston, 1987).

Public relations practitioners often might face the dilemma of deciding where their messages should be placed. The review of research findings reported in this section lead to several key conclusions. First, consumers approach media in a predetermined way, but this ultimately has a limited impact on information processing when the message is the same. Second, message designers should exploit the formal features of the chosen medium to maximize effectiveness (e.g., television messages use attention-getting production techniques, print is used to present complex information). Third, a target audience's cognitive abilities need to be assessed to aid in determining how the message is constructed.

Cost and size of audience might be the most pertinent criteria given that the research shows little processing differences across media. The increasing numbers of people who obtain information from the Internet pose an interesting problem for researchers concerned with form versus content. Are information-processing assumptions changed when printed text is presented in a more traditionally visual (monitor) format and information from a screen is downloaded and printed in text form?

POWERFUL EFFECTS THEORIES

This segment builds on the insights learned in the previous sections. It suggests that we might misunderstand the concepts of direct or limited effects when the goal is more accurately a powerful effect. A sharper insight into this phenomenon of powerful effects and its theories offers an important implication for public relations, namely the capacity for cumulative effects.

The theories of cultivation, agenda setting, and spiral of silence all may be considered powerful effects theories. Cultivation theory predicts that heavy media use will result in consumers expressing opinions and beliefs similar to those messages featured predominantly in the media such as a belief that the world is a mean and scary place (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979). Agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) postulates that media consumers will determine that issues predominant in media messages will be correlated with those issues they find to be important such as the danger of nuclear weapons (Miller & Quarles, 1984) and U.S. defense capability (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982). Spiral of silence has a similar attitudinal/public opinion focus (Noelle-Neumann, 1973, 1980). It predicts that people who believe that their viewpoints are in the minority will be less willing to speak publicly about their viewpoints, leading to an increasingly larger group of people who choose not to voice their opinions. Opinions presented in the media as being those of the majority become stronger and face less and less vocal opposition, leaving the media as a powerful developer of public consensus.

All three of these are cognitively based theories; cultivation theory and agenda setting have been referred to as "theories of accumulation" because they predict cumulative effects over a long period of time (Jeffres, 1997). Cultivation theory's contribution to public relations comes in the form of its accrued creation of attitudes that correspond to media content. Cultivation speaks to the presence of broad-based ideological messages such as those messages supporting "consumption, materialism, individualism, power, and gender, race, and class status quo" (Shanahan, Morgan, & Stenbjerre, 1997, p. 309). For example, themes pervasive in content, such as the impact of science, technology, and pollution on the environment, produced a cultivation effect of general apprehension about the environment in heavy viewers. However, this group of heavy viewers also was less likely to make behavioral changes such as engaging in recycling behavior (Shanahan et al., 1997). Public relations practitioners could find that broad public information campaigns might conceivably produce a cultivation effect in viewers (particularly heavy viewers) who adopt the media message in developing a similar attitude, but behavioral consequences rarely are part of cultivation theory's prediction. Public relations practitioners might find the theory of agenda setting useful because once they are able to place issues on the news media agenda, the public's agenda theoretically will follow with increased importance subsequently allocated to those issues. Spiral of silence could be the weak point of a communication campaign; the so-called "silent majority" might sabotage any public relations efforts based on faulty beliefs about public opinion.

Much of Edward Bernays' public relations efforts appear to be aligned most closely with a powerful effects model, namely agenda setting, although when he began his early campaigns the magic bullet model was commonly assumed to be operating in conjunction with the budding mass media in this country. One of the earliest examples of a powerful media effect, the power of media promotion, and a successful Bernays campaign occurred in 1929 when elegant women were shown in evening gowns smoking Lucky Strikes in cigarette holders and espousing the slogan, "Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet." Bernays spearheaded the campaign, which included hiring women to march in the New York City Easter parade and to smoke in public—something unheard of for women at that time and typically associated with prostitutes. The next day, the event made front-page headlines across the country (and the world) (Pollay, 1990), revolutionizing the social acceptability of women's consumption of cigarettes. Bernays relied on a Freudian analysis from a psychoanalyst to market cigarettes to women, invoking the personal freedom (and oral fixation) that cigarette use symbolized. At that time, cigarette smoking was synonymous with males, not females, and women's liberation was paralleled with the societal freedom that men already enjoyed (Brill, cited in Ewen, 1976). Bernays, as one of the earliest recognized practitioners of public relations, combined the field with psychology and sociology (i.e., media effects). However, not all observers were complimentary of this mix; one author called it the "science of ballyhoo" (Flynn, 1932). Bernays spent the latter part of his life trying, in a sense, to "undo" what he had accomplished in marketing tobacco use so successfully, stating, "No reputable public relations organization would accept a cigarette account since their cancer-causing effects have been proven" (quoted in Buffett, 1999, pp. 148-149). Media depictions of smoking continue to be criticized because cigarette use in the media still is considered to be the stuff that role models are made of. Fully 17 of 18 films examined from 1997 included at least 1 incident of smoking a cigarette, and half of them featured more than 15 scenes of smoking ("Smoking Seen," 1997).

A more recent example of a perspicuous publicity promotion started in July 1996 when the Tyco Toys public relations firm sent a Tickle-Me-Elmo doll to talk show host Rosie O'Donnell (for her then 1-year-old son) and another 200 dolls to the show's producer. However, the doll did not appear on the show until October, when O'Donnell threw it into the audience every time a guest (unknowingly) said the word "wall," in a takeoff on the Groucho Marx game show *You Bet Your Life*. Given that a portion of the audience demographics for *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* consists of stay-at-home mothers with preschool-age children, the marketing ploy, combined with knowledge of audience, hit the jackpot. The doll experienced another television promotional opportunity when *Today* host Bryant Gumbel held a Tickle-Me-Elmo doll on his lap for most of a show in November (the doll had been part of a segment on popular holiday gifts and was mentioned in passing as a gender-free toy). Prior to Christmas 1996, the furry red doll spun off from the *Sesame Street* character was so scarce that people were asking $2,000 per doll (it retailed for about $30). Sending the doll to O'Donnell was no spur-of-the-moment fluke. The public relations firm had successfully linked Cabbage Patch dolls to pregnant *Today* host Jane Pauley in 1983 and wanted to repeat the event with Tickle-Me-Elmo and O'Donnell. At the peak of the pre-holiday craze, Tyco Toys actually tried to halt the media effect and pulled its Tickle-Me-Elmo commercials off the air, fearing that the very sight of the toy would increase discontent among the children who did not have the toy (unintended effect) (Pereira, 1996).

Public relations practitioners can see from these illustrations that, regardless of the time period, public relations efforts can have wildly successful and powerful outcomes when content is carefully matched to an audience. Bernays' work provides an example of an unintended or long-term effect not originally foreseen—widespread knowledge of the health risks of tobacco use. Tickle-Me-Elmo's marketing created such a desire that, in some ways, it produced an unintended effect of discontent and frustration for children and parents who were unable to locate the toy or afford the inflated purchase price.

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

As anyone even peripherally involved in observing the media industry will attest, the media environment is constantly transforming. The changing consumption patterns still display some consistent and intuitive findings related to socioeconomic status, age, and exposure to news and, ultimately, the path to potentially powerful media effects.

As Stempel and Hargrove (1996) noted, the mass media environment is changing, necessitating a continuing examination of the mass media audience. The authors specified the ways in which the media sphere has changed—(a) the prevalence of CNN and the proliferation of television news programs such as NBC's *Dateline*, (b) the addition of Internet and on-line news sources, (c) the ability of grocery store tabloids to set political agendas, and (d) the deregulation of radio during the 1980s and the subsequent elimination of radio news. A national survey of adults who matched census figures was conducted in 1995 (Stempel & Hargrove, 1996) and evaluated the use of 11 media: local and network television news, television magazine programs (e.g., *Hard Copy, A Current Affair*), daily newspapers, radio news, radio talk shows, news magazines (e.g., *Newsweek, Time, U.S. News and World Report*), political magazines (e.g., *New Republic, National Review*), grocery store tabloids (e.g., *National Enquirer*), and Internet and on-line computer services (e.g., CompuServe, America Online).

Local television news was the most regularly used medium and was highly correlated with use of network television news. Demographically, media use increased with age for most media. Assuming that younger people use media more is likely a common misconception. Younger people, who began their educational careers by learning the ABCs from television, actually used media less. Print media and radio news use increased with higher levels of education; college graduates were less likely to view television magazine shows and less likely to read grocery store tabloids (or at least less likely to *say* that they read grocery story tabloids!). Use of newspapers, political magazines, and news magazines increased with income, whereas lower income respondents reported that they were regular users of television news magazines and grocery store tabloids. The traditional forms of media were the most used, and despite all the hyperbole, use of computer media lagged behind use of other media use and still would even if use of computer media tripled.

The high level of viewership in local television news is a plus for public relations practitioners who are particularly interested in getting video news releases (VNRs) on the air. Public relations practitioners, however, have some obstacles to overcome such as mistrust of information provided in a VNR and television news' emphasis on visual storytelling. Research indicates that approximately 80% of news directors use VNRs in television newscasts ("Nationwide Survey," 1990) and that 78% of television stations use VNRs in some fashion once a week ("Survey of News Directors," 1991). A content analysis of stories generated from a VNR on local television news indicated that extensive production costs probably were wasted. Results showed that most stations used portions of the VNR for the "America Responds to AIDS" campaign rather than the packaged story provided (Cameron & Blount, 1996). Stations used "B-roll" (video pictures that match reporter or anchor audio), mobilizing information, and sound bites from official sources that were placed closer to the beginning of the story than those sound bites toward the end of the story. Also, contrary to popular opinion positing that stations with limited resources are more likely to use VNR stories in their entirety, "resource-poor" stations did not use more of the packaged story when compared to their resource-rich counterparts (Cameron & Blount, 1996). An experiment testing viewer responses to VNRs indicated that participants reported that VNR-based messages were more credible than similar-source material and showed a positive relationship between the credibility of a newscast and VNR recall (Owen & Karrh, 1996).

News also may be an advantageous placement for public relations issues for several reasons, and news content is likely to be a product of public relation efforts. Conservative estimates place the percentage of news that is derived directly from public relations efforts at 40% (Stauber & Rampton, 1995). News content has been shown to facilitate more learning about political information when compared to learning from political advertisements, the rationale being that audiences have a greater chance of being exposed to the information in news than in ads (Zhao & Chaffee, 1995). Prior research from the 1972 presidential campaign had shown just the opposite; people learned more from the political ads because ads contained more issue-oriented information than did newscasts (Kern, 1989).

Although political advertisements are not PSAs, results from learning about issue-oriented content may be applied to PSAs because the average viewer might not have the visual literacy necessary to make the distinction between a commercial announcement and a PSA. News content, like advertising and PSAs, is one of the few media messages in which the message is more or less consistent across media. Its pervasiveness, therefore, is more likely to contribute to powerful media effects. That consistency and pervasiveness, combined with what we know about socioeconomic and age-specific media consumption, have media selection implications for public relations.

CONCLUSION

Bernays' writing from more than 70 years ago continues to sound fresh and applicable for public relations and media effects. In *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (Bernays, 1923), and in a public address (Bernays, 1925), he summarized three points for public relations practitioners. First, the practitioner must be a careful student of media to know how people develop their "pictures of the world" (Bernays, 1923). Second, the practitioner should be knowledgeable about sociology and anthropology to know how attitudes are formed through culture and social structures (Bernays, 1925). Third, the practitioner should be knowledgeable of the individual's psychological processes; practitioners can then tailor their efforts for maximum effect (Bernays, 1923).

Understanding of direct, limited, and powerful effects models, coupled with a working categorization of effects (level of analysis, type of effect, nature of effect, intent of effect, and form vs. content), can serve to inform choices made by public relations practitioners. Research on the intersection of issues pertinent to practitioners, under the rubric of media effects, helps bring clarity to an unavoidably inexact science. This poses a challenge to academic researchers to further explicate theory into practice.

A recurring theme throughout this chapter has been the importance of knowing audience characteristics. People interested in media effects never can know too much about the audience under scrutiny. Unfortunately, much of what occurs in an audience's mind—the black box—is unknowable simply because individuals are unable to express their thought processes accurately; research on media effects has been based primarily on self-report measures (Geiger & Newhagen, 1993). Nevertheless, the audience is the necessary lynchpin underlying media effects.

CHAPTER 21

Stewardship

The Fifth Step in the Public Relations Process

KATHLEEN S. KELLY

It is easier to keep a friend than to make a new friend. In terms of public relations, reinforcing attitudes and behaviors of individuals who already think and act in ways desired by an organization is a strategically sound objective. Yet, theories of how public relations is and should be practiced ignore the importance of *previously established* relationships. Specifically, models describing the process of public relations, such as Marston's (1979) popular RACE (research, action plan, communication, and evaluation) formula, end with the final step of evaluation, thereby implying that friendships resulting from one instance of programming are of little or no value to future efforts.

Contradictorily, contemporary definitions of public relations hold that the function is responsible for establishing and *maintaining* relationships between an organization and its key publics (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000). Recent research on relationship management has shown that factors such as trust, involvement, and commitment—developed through multiyear efforts—differentiate members of publics who react positively toward an organization from those who react negatively (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998b). The findings support J. Grunig's (1993a) contention that the contribution of public relations to organizational success is dependent on practitioners "building long-term behavioral relationships with strategic publics" (p. 136).

Current process models, then, are seriously flawed because they ignore ongoing relationships. This chapter introduces a new model with the fifth step of stewardship, which prescribes maintenance of relationships and makes the public relations process truly cyclical; that is, the process does not begin each time with completely unknown publics. The five-step process of ROPES (research-objectives-programming-evaluation-stewardship) better explains what practitioners do—or should do—to make public relations effective and efficient.

ROPES PROCESS

ROPES originally was conceptualized as a descriptive and normative theory of fund raising, one of the specializations of public relations (Kelly, 1998). It draws from a public relations model by Hendrix (1998), ROPE, which does not include the stewardship step or account for the fund raising specialization. As explained shortly, stewardship of previous donors is essential to raising future gifts—a principle widely accepted by fund raisers. Literature suggests that practitioners in other specializations, such as investor relations, also devote much of their attention and time to known groups and individuals who have demonstrated their support of the organization in the past. In contrast to current models, ROPES provides a comprehensive theory of relationship management; that is, it explains how relations with all publics—whether donors, investors, community residents, government officials, members of the media, consumers, or others—are and should be managed. Figure 21.1 displays the ROPES process.

As shown in Figure 21.1, the public relations process begins with research in three areas: (a) the organization for which practitioners work; (b) the opportunity, problem, or issue faced by the organization; and (c) the publics related to the organization and opportunity. Failure to conduct research in all three areas dooms public relations to sporadic results that contribute little to organizational effectiveness. The second step in the process is setting objectives that are specific and measurable. They are of two types: output (which deals with public relations techniques or the work to be produced) and impact (which deals with the intended *effects* of programming). Both types of objectives flow from the organization's goals; that is, their attainment directly supports organizational plans.

The third step, programming, consists of planning and implementing activities designed to bring about the outcomes stated in the objectives. The fourth step is evaluation, which is conducted on three consecutive levels: messages and techniques are tested (preparation evaluation), programming is monitored and adjusted (process evaluation), and results are measured and compared to the set objectives (program evaluation). Finally, stewardship completes the process and furnishes an essential loop back to the beginning of managing relationships. Four elements are basic to stewardship: reciprocity, responsibility, reporting, and relationship nurturing.

A full description of stewardship is given later, followed by an overview of the other four steps in ROPES. Before doing so, the chapter first examines communication effects, recent research on relationship management, and the importance of previous behavior.

COMMUNICATION EFFECTS

Most process models require that objectives precede and govern programming decisions and that, in turn, evaluation is based on how well the programming met the set objectives. In other words, the intended effects of public relations are specified in the objectives chosen early in the process.

Communication scholars break down impact objectives, or those specifying intended effects, by creation, change, or reinforcement of cognitions, attitudes, and behavior. Cognitions are further broken down to concepts dealing with awareness, knowledge, and understanding, each a progressively higher order of thinking. J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) drew from theory and research to conceptualize a taxonomy of public relations objectives, which they grounded in McLeod and Chaffee's (1973) coorientation model. More recently, Hunt and J. Grunig (1994) refined and presented the five impact objectives for programming: awareness, accuracy, understanding, agreement, and behavior. The objectives—combined with creation, change, and reinforcement—represent all intended effects of communication and are increasingly difficult to achieve as they ascend from awareness to behavior.

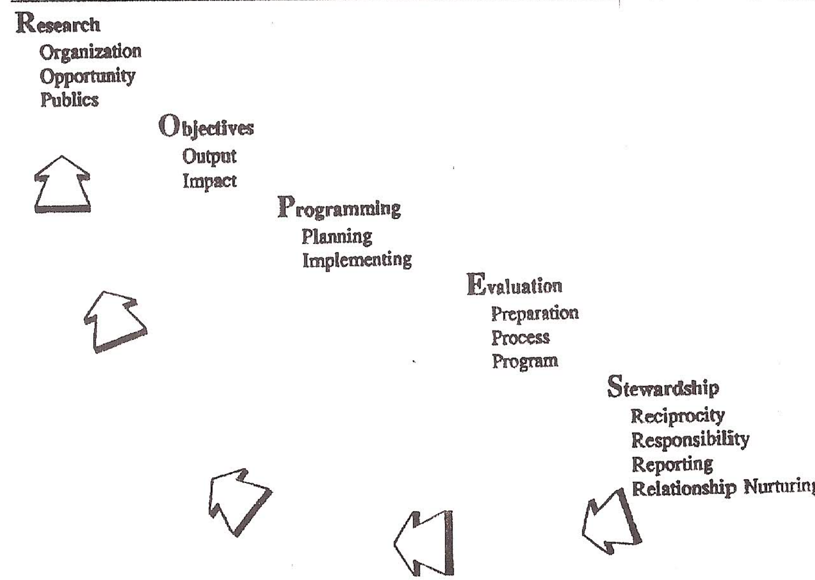

Figure 21.1. Public Relations Process of ROPES

Although it is relatively easy to get people to form new cognitions or to change them (e.g., a story in the mass media can create awareness), it is much more difficult to affect attitudes and behavior. Situations calling for creating *new* attitudes or behaviors are unusual (e.g., people's first exposure to new innovations such as Web sites). Changing them rarely is achievable through short-term programming. As Hunt and J. Grunig (1994) explained, communication can change attitudes and behaviors of publics, but the objectives often take years to accomplish. "Only simple behavior generally can be changed in the short run" (p. 17). "If bringing about a behavior is a must," J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) advised, then "identify the people who are already active publics for the behavior you want" (p. 366).

Despite such advice, public relations scholars pay little more than lip service to reinforcing either attitudes or behavior, which are central to effectiveness. Hunt and J. Grunig (1994), for example, barely mentioned objectives dealing with reinforcement in their theoretical framework for public relations techniques. Although Broom and Dozier (1990) designated "repeat behavior" as a high-level effect in their program impact criteria, they provided weak justification for its inclusion, saying only that maintaining desired behaviors over an extended time "[is an outcome] sought by many public relations programs" (p. 86).

The stewardship step in ROPES ensures that the public relations process is continuous; it does not stop and then later start with entirely different and unknown publics. This additional step makes ROPES superior to other models, which ignore crossovers in situational publics and critical objectives of reinforcing positive attitudes and behavior. It offers greater congruency with findings now emerging from research on relationship management.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

According to Ledingham and Bruning (1998a), the field of public relations is undergoing a paradigm shift as attention increasingly focuses on managing organization-public relationships rather than on producing communication activities. The authors explained, "The essence of public relations as relationship management... is to use communication strategically to create, develop, and *nurture* a relationship between an organization and its key public(s)" (p. 2, italics added).

The conceptual change began with Ferguson's (1984) work more than 15 years ago and has been advanced by scholars such as Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997); J. Grunig (1992a, 1993a); and Ledingham and Bruning (1998a, 1998b). For example, whereas J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined public relations during the mid-1980s as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics" (p. 6), J. Grunig (1992a) more recently described the purpose of public relations as "building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission" (p. 20).

Recent studies have identified and tested factors contributing to successful relationships and have provided evidence that such relationships have beneficial consequences for organizations. Ledingham and Bruning (1998b), for example, found that among a telephone company's current customers, those who perceived high levels of trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment in the relationship likely would continue to purchase phone services from the company, whereas customers who perceived lower levels of the relationship variables would likely sign up with new providers or were undecided about what they would do. The researchers concluded, "Building trust, demonstrating involvement, investment, and commitment, and maintaining open, frank communication... impacts the stay-leave decision in a competitive environment" (p. 61).

In subsequent research, Ledingham and Bruning (1998a) verified that perceptions of the relationship between an organization and members of a key public significantly influence loyalty to the sponsoring organization. They found that awareness of a company's performance on the relationship factors "creates a favorable *predisposition* toward the organization" (p. 9, italics added). In turn, favorable predispositions can positively affect an organization's financial well-being. Ledingham and Bruning argued, therefore, that relationship *building* should be a cornerstone of public relations practice. The importance that they assigned to existing relationships has long been acknowledged in fund raising and marketing.

IMPORTANCE OF PREVIOUS BEHAVIOR

A fund-raising principle given almost the status of law is the following: "The best prospects are previous donors." Consultant James Gregory Lord elaborated, "Experience shows that the best prospects for the immediate future are those who have given in the past" (Lord, 1983, p. 49). Previous donors have a higher probability of making gifts than do nondonors, regardless of all other factors. Furthermore, the more a person gives, the more likely he or she will give again (Seymour, 1966/1988). Conversely, Lord (1983) warned, "It's very difficult to turn a non-giver into a giver" (p. 85). Greenfield (1991) summarized practitioner wisdom: "Donors are and will always remain the best prospects for more giving" (p. 40).

Effects theory holds that changing behavior is more difficult than reinforcing behavior. Nichols (1992), drawing from theory and experience, argued that it takes five times as much work to acquire a new donor as it does to renew an existing one. Based on observation, practitioners estimate that about 75% of an organization's lower level donors renew their gifts the next year (Mixer, 1993). Therefore, reinforcing repeat behavior is a fundamental objective for annual giving—one of the two primary programs of fund-raising (Kelly, 1991). Practitioners also strongly assert that most major gifts, the second primary program, come from previous donors.

Repeat gifts cost significantly less to raise than do new gifts. Levis (1991), for example, estimated that the cost ratio for raising an average gift of $10 from new donors is 100%, whereas it is only 35% from renewed donors. An average gift of $1,000 from new donors costs 25%, but it costs only 10% from renewed donors. Based on systems theory, continued funding by repeat donors reduces financial uncertainty by providing a relatively dependable stream of dollars.

The critical difference in probability of giving between an organization's previous donors and nondonors was documented by Independent Sector (1994) in its biennial survey of U.S. giving and volunteering. It found that 85% of the respondents would be very likely or somewhat likely to make gifts in response to mail solicitations from organizations that they had regularly supported in the past, whereas only 45% would be very likely or somewhat likely to contribute to organizations that they had not previously supported.

Summarizing this discussion, a simple fact of fund raising is that most annual gifts, and nearly all major gifts, come from individuals, corporations, and foundations that have given to the organization in the past. Therefore, how donors are treated *after* they make their gifts largely determines future success. It also costs less to raise gifts from past donors than from new donors.

Touching briefly on marketing, common sense dictates the necessity of keeping customers in today's competitive global economy. For example, during 1998, Hyatt International Corporation concentrated on "retention marketing" to survive the downturn in the tourism industry caused by the Asian currency crisis. Sharon Barlow, Hyatt's corporate public relations manager, explained the strategy in a recent presentation: "Take care of those customers [who] we do have and offer value for their hard earned money. It is these customers who we look after today who will be loyal to us tomorrow" (Barlow, 1998). Furthermore, marketing studies show that it costs seven times more to get a new customer than to keep a current one (Microsoft, 1997).

Public relations needs a process model that acknowledges the desirability of stewarding existing friendships.

STEWARDSHIP

According to Greenfield (1991), the purpose of stewardship in fund raising is to thank donors who have made gifts and to "establish the means for continued communication that will help to preserve their interest and attention to the organization" (p. 148). Worth (1993) added, "Because the best prospects for new gifts are past donors, programs that provide careful stewardship and provide donors with timely information on the impact of their gifts can pay significant dividends in continued support" (p. 13).

As noted earlier, the stewardship step in ROPES consists of four alliterative elements requiring the attention of fund raisers and other public relations practitioners: (a) *reciprocity*, by which the organization demonstrates its gratitude for supportive beliefs and behaviors; (b) *responsibility*, meaning that the organization acts in a socially responsible manner to those who have supported it; (c) *reporting*, a basic requirement of accountability; and (d) *relationship nurturing*. Embedded in the elements are ethical standards that hold moral duty above other considerations. In other words, the added step of stewardship not only ensures continuity in the public relations process but also promotes ethical behavior by practitioners and their organizations.

According to Jeavons (1994), stewardship is thought of too narrowly as dealing only with the management of contributed funds. The original meaning, he argued, is larger and fuller—responsibility for overall administration. "Steward speaks of a person who is concerned with the right ordering and management of all the affairs and concerns—including what we now call economic concerns—of a household or community" (p. 111).

As stewards, then, public relations practitioners are attentive to every aspect of the organization's behavior that might affect relations with supportive publics. They serve as agents of accountability and the organization's conscience. Jeavons (1994) explained, "Real stewardship has inescapably moral obligations and responsibilities" (p. 115).

Reciprocity

The norm of reciprocity, conceptualized by sociologist Alvin Gouldner, holds that "those whom you have helped have an obligation to help you" (Gouldner, 1960, p. 173). Therefore, Gouldner concluded, "If you want to be helped by others, you must help them; hence it is not only proper but also expedient to conform with the specific status rights of others and with the general norm" (p. 173).

According to Gouldner (1960), reciprocity is a universal component of all moral codes. Studies by anthropologists have shown that it is cross-cultural and fundamental to all people; human interaction requires stable practices of give and take (Becker, 1986b). For individuals, reciprocity is a mandatory virtue (Martin, 1994b); for organizations, it is the essence of social responsibility (J. Grunig & White, 1992). Therefore, when publics support organizations by adopting positive attitudes and behavior, the organizations receiving the support must reciprocate.

Repaying obligations helps to maintain social balance, and as M. W. Martin (1994) explained, "Mere taking upsets the balance" (p. 70). Becker (1986) further emphasized that reciprocity affects respect of self and the other party. When socially ingrained expectations of reciprocity are not met, respect is put at risk. Conversely, when expectations are met, they strengthen a sense of *equal worth*—a characteristic of symmetrical public relations. Lombardo (1995) elaborated, "An unbalanced relationship has been temporarily created, which can be put into balance through reciprocity" (p. 297).

At the applied level, reciprocity simply means that organizations show gratitude to those who have supported them. Gratitude is broken down by acts of appreciation and recognition. The most common and expected way of demonstrating appreciation is to say "thank you." Whereas marketers have adopted this basic rule of reciprocity to help keep customers, public relations practitioners rarely thank publics on whom the organization's success depends. As Howe (1991) advised fund raisers, "The more prompt and personal the expression of appreciation, the more favorable the carryover toward further giving" (p. 32).

According to Ryan (1994), "Recognition displays your institution's style and gratitude. It shows good stewardship. It says you're thoughtful, attentive, and caring" (p. 64). An effective and simple form of recognition is to personalize, whenever possible, all future communications to supportive publics, thereby recognizing their special status to the organization. More elaborate acts of appreciation and recognition also are recommended. For example, when community residents and government officials have supported expansion of a company's facility, the company can reciprocate by inviting members of the publics to a special event, such as an open house, at the completion of construction.

Scholars have found that patterns of reciprocity lead to further helping by exchange partners. An illustration is provided by Dayton Hudson, the Minneapolis, Minnesota-based conglomerate that owns more than 1,000 department and discount stores including Marshall Field's and Target. A longtime leader in corporate philanthropy, Dayton Hudson is one of the few large U.S. corporations that annually contributes 5% of its pretax income—a policy it adopted in 1946 (Gray & Moore, 1996). During the past 50 years, the corporation has given more than $350 million, or roughly $19,000 a day, to charitable organizations in the various communities in which it operates. Reciprocity, as well as other elements of stewardship, by the recipients encouraged repeated contributions. The long-term relationships paid off royally in 1987 when community organizations rallied to the corporation's aid and helped it survive a hostile takeover attempt by the Dart Group of Landover, Maryland.

According to Ann Barkelew, Dayton Hudson's then vice president of corporate public relations, in June 1987 the corporation confronted "the very real possibility of being taken over by people we knew would 'bust up' the corporation and sell off its assets to finance the takeover" (Barkelew, 1993, p. 8). The chief executive officer (CEO) of Dayton Hudson asked Minnesota's governor to call a special session of the legislature to tighten the state's anti-takeover laws, thereby providing greater protection for the company. Legislators took action just 7 days later, largely because of a groundswell of support from the media, other businesses, government officials, and, as stated in the *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*, "groups that have received millions of dollars of contributions" (quoted in Barkelew, 1993, p. 8).

The experience reinforced Dayton Hudson's commitment to philanthropy, and community organizations continue to benefit from the corporation's giving program. Significantly, the normative model of public relations, the two-way symmetrical model, envisions public relations as a process of continual and reciprocal exchange between an organization and its key publics (J. Grunig, 1993a).

Responsibility

Stewardship demands that organizations act in a socially responsible manner to publics that have supported the organization and its goals in the past. The concept of social responsibility simply means that organizations act as good citizens. It is rooted in systems theory in that organizations are interdependent with people and other organizations in their environment.

At its most basic level, responsibility requires organizations to keep their word. Promises made when seeking support must be kept (e.g., a pledge to reduce air pollution). More generally, organizations must demonstrate through their actions that they are worthy of supportive attitudes and behaviors. Public relations practitioners counsel senior management about promises and expectations that must be fulfilled if the organization is to succeed. Betraying public trust is expensive; building goodwill with people who already are aligned with the organization saves money.

Heath (1997) argued that achieving high standards of corporate responsibility is vital to strategic management, and he placed the obligation for meeting key publics' expectations on the public relations function. Congruent with the stewardship step, Wilson (1994) contended that the focus of public relations ought to be on the development of "relational responsibility."

Reporting

Organizations are required to keep publics informed about developments related to the opportunity or problem for which support was sought. Reporting to publics reinforces positive attitudes and behaviors, and it increases the probability that supportive publics will react similarly in future situations.

Organizations are accountable to specific publics as well as to society in general. Accountability is the degree to which organizations continually reinforce public confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of their performance (Dressel, 1980).

On a general level, accountability is closely related to the concept of social responsibility. All organizations—for-profit companies, government agencies, and nonprofits—have an obligation to serve societal needs because society grants them the opportunities to operate (J. Grunig, 1992a). As pointed out by J. Grunig and Hunt (1984), almost all discussion about social responsibility is concerned with companies, yet these authors rightfully asserted, "It is as important for governmental and nonprofit organizations to be socially responsible as for business firms" (p. 48). A former president of the General Electric Company explained the basic philosophy: "We know perfectly well that business does not function by divine right but, like any other part of society, exists with the sanction of the community as a whole" (Cutlip et al., 2000, p. 24).

On the specific level, an organization is answerable to constituencies that are affected by or may affect the organization's behavior. Of particular importance are those publics that have supported the organization in the past. Relationships cannot be maintained if the organization only communicates with friends when it seeks more help.

Relationship Nurturing

The head of fund raising for Carnegie Mellon University justified time and resources spent on stewardship: "It's easier to get a second gift from a donor who is treated well the first time than it is to get a new gift" (Dundjerski, 1994, p. 22). Treating publics well goes beyond reciprocity, responsibility, and reporting; relationships so critical to the organization's success must be nurtured. Grace (1991) said that whereas "traditional notions of stewardship refer to the gift and ensuring that it is spent wisely and in accordance with the donor's wishes," contemporary fundraisers have adopted "an expanded sense of stewardship, one that includes continued relationship building with the donor" (p. 158). "This new view of stewardship," she explained, "lets people know on a regular basis that you care about them, respect their support, appreciate their gifts, and want their interest and involvement" (p. 158).

As described earlier, recent research has documented the value of nurturing relationships with publics other than donors, and scholars have recommended that relationship building form a cornerstone for public relations practice. Culbertson, Jeffers, Stone, and Terrell (1993) provided the rationale: "There is reason to believe that involvement enhances genuine, long-term behavioral support" (p. 98).

The most effective means of nurturing relationships is quite simple: Accept the importance of supportive publics and keep them at the forefront of the organization's consciousness. Information and involvement are fundamental, and both should flow naturally from the organization's work. For example, publics that have been supportive in the past should receive copies of the organization's publications including its annual report. They should be among the groups represented when advisory boards are formed. Opportunities to nurture relationships are numerous and occur on a weekly basis.

Public relations and the organizations it serves can benefit from following fund raising and adopting stewardship as an essential component of relationship management. Lord (1983) summarized the thrust of this discussion as follows: "Good stewardship is well worth the extra effort it requires. It is the bedrock on which the future of an organization is built" (p. 93). The chapter concludes by presenting an overview of the four steps preceding stewardship in the ROPES process.

RESEARCH

Regardless of the emphasis here on stewardship, the most important step in the public relations process is the first—research. Without solid research, public relations is reduced to flackery—hit-and-miss activities without direction and with little respect. Research provides knowledge, formulates strategy, inspires confidence, and ensures that practitioners achieve desired results. As Cutlip et al. (2000) proclaimed, research "is the essential ingredient that makes public relations a management function as well as a managed function" (p. 364).

Following Hendrix (1998), the first step in ROPES is broken down into research in the three areas of organization, opportunity, and publics. Practitioners must be thoroughly familiar with the organization's history, finances, personnel, products and services, and past public relations efforts. They must develop a solid understanding of operations and industry issues.

A logical progression from knowledge about the organization is research on the opportunity, which is grounded in coorientation theory. Models of coorientation, such as Broom and Dozier's (1990) model, emphasize the importance of determining the degree of agreement and accuracy between an organization's views of an opportunity, problem, or issue and its constituencies' views before programming begins. If differences are found, then the organization must change its intended behavior or correct misperceptions.

Effective and efficient public relations demands that publics be matched to the organization and the opportunity, and this can be accomplished only through research. J. Grunig's situational theory of publics (e.g., J. Grunig & Repper, 1992) guides practitioners in identifying groups to which public relations should target its communications. The three predictor variables—problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition—distinguish publics that are active, aware, latent, and nonpublics. Logically, research on publics starts by determining the status of individuals and organizations that have been supportive in the past (i.e., those with whom relationships have been maintained and strengthened through previous stewardship). The research then extends outward to strangers.

OBJECTIVES

Goals of the public relations department evolve from the organization's goals. Based on the research step, goals are broken down into objectives. The objectives are formulated to state the results desired from programming. Paraphrasing fund raiser Joel Smith, without objectives derived from organizational goals, public relations is destined to be more random than rational—an amateurish effort around which serendipitous accomplishments occasionally will occur but by which they rarely are caused (Smith, 1981).

Goals are general statements that express broad desired results, whereas *objectives* are specific statements that express results as measurable outcomes. Objectives consist of five parts: an infinitive verb, a single outcome stated as receiver of the verb's action, the magnitude of the action expressed in quantifiable terms, the targeted public, and a target date or time frame for achieving the outcome. For example, one public relations objective might be as follows: To hold at least 20 meetings with leaders of civic and professional groups throughout the county to discuss tax policy between July 1, 200_ and June 30, 200_. Another objective might be: To increase the percentage of county residents who understand the company's position against higher property tax rates from 20% to 55% by November 1, 200_. These examples illustrate output and impact objectives, respectively.

Output objectives, according to Hendrix (1998), are "stated intentions regarding program production and effort (or output)" (p. 25). Impact objectives, on the other hand, "represent specific intended effects of public relations programs on their audiences" (p. 26). Whereas impact objectives deal with the five communication effects (awareness, accuracy, understanding, agreement, and behavior), output objectives focus on the public relations techniques used to communicate with publics (e.g., small group meetings, speeches, direct mail, special events, newsletters, story placements, public service announcements). Both types of objectives are valuable to the ROPES process, which contradicts the assessment of most authors: "In the best of all possible worlds, PR directors would use only impact objectives" (p. 25).

Output objectives do not address the consequences of one cycle of programming. If used appropriately, however, they do contribute to the eventual attainment of longer term goals. Stated another way, output objectives, strategically selected and based on research, increase probabilities for future success; specifically, they enhance the climate for changing attitudes and behaviors.

Such objectives are valued in fund raising and are used to guide an important part of programming known as *cultivation*. For example, practitioner wisdom holds that a major gift typically requires a minimum of nine cultivation contacts over a period of 2 to 3 years before solicitation (Kelly, 1998). Therefore, a common fund-raising objective is as follows: To meet with 25 nondonors who are prospects for major gifts to discuss mutual interests and needs by June 30, 200_. Astute fund raisers generally reserve the bulk of impact objectives for reinforcing the behavior of previous donors.

A general rule for public relations, then, is that output objectives should be used to direct programming that will contribute to future success, whereas impact objectives should be formulated to direct programming that will *create* awareness, *change* accuracy and understanding, and *reinforce* positive attitudes and behaviors.

Objectives must be reviewed and approved by senior managers. Not only does approval ensure that objectives support the organization's goals, but evaluation of public relations programs and practitioners' performance will be based on the extent to which the objectives are met.

PROGRAMMING

The programming step consists of two parts: planning and implementing. The first part results in a written public relations plan. A convenient format is to first divide the plan by programs or specializations, such as government relations or investor relations, and then to subdivide each by the related objectives. A synopsis of the research supporting and shaping each objective is given, followed by an outline of the activities and tasks required to accomplish the objective, including selected public relations techniques. (A decimal system explained by Kelly, 1998, is helpful.) Planning tools are used to present time lines and personnel assignments. The means by which the objective will be evaluated and plans for stewardship are described. Budgets are a fundamental component, including line items for contingency (10%), research (10%), and stewardship (3%).

Implementing programming is the most familiar part of the public relations process. To avoid repetition of common knowledge, the discussion skips over this major component and moves to the evaluation step, which often is given short shrift by practitioners.

EVALUATION

Organizations are effective when the goals they formulated are met. As stated earlier, the public relations department's goals are formulated in support of the organization's goals, and measurable objectives are specified to meet departmental goals. Guided by the objectives, programming is planned and broken down by activities and tasks. When implementation is complete, programming is evaluated by the degree to which it accomplished the set objectives. If objectives are met, then goals will have been attained. In this systematic manner, the department advances the organization by helping it to achieve its overall goals and to fulfill its mission. In other words, the public relations department contributes to organizational effectiveness when it meets the goals and objectives it formulated to support the organization's goals.

Practitioners conduct preparation evaluation, testing messages and techniques for their appropriateness. For example, readability studies determine whether messages are written in a style suitable to the educational level of targeted publics. During programming, practitioners conduct process evaluation to monitor progress and to make adjustments when necessary. They use methods such as telephone surveys to periodically check the outcomes of activities. Once programming is completed, practitioners evaluate their efforts by comparing the results attained to the results sought, as expressed by the set objectives. Whereas in-house counting tells them whether output objectives were reached, survey research and other methodologies are needed to assess programming designed for impact objectives.

Findings of program evaluation document the contribution of public relations to organizational effectiveness and are used to improve future efforts. An add-on value of the fourth step is that by *listening* to publics through evaluative research, practitioners engage in two-way communication, and the research itself provides quality interaction; that is, research serves as a cultivation and stewardship activity.

CONCLUSION

The public relations process is incomplete without stewardship. The relationships established and developed through the steps just described should not be discarded. Publics who have demonstrated that they are friends of the organization are deserving of continued attention.

Public relations practitioners must ensure that expressions of appreciation are provided, recognition activities are planned, responsibility is monitored, a system of reporting is in place, and strategies for relationship nurturing are carried out. A key issue, however, is that others in the organization must be as concerned with stewardship as the public relations department. CEOs and other senior managers who deem relationships important when seeking support, but who do not take a role in stewardship after support is given, are acting under false pretenses. As in all steps of ROPES, public relations must be an advocate for both the organization and the publics on which the organization's success and survival depend.