

WEEK 11 & 12

Evaluation

The purpose of evaluation

Final step of the public relations process is evaluation. It is the measurement of result against established objectives set during the planning process.

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of a program and its result. It's a means for practitioner to offer accountability. The desire to do a better job next time is a major reason for evaluating public relations efforts, but another equally important reason is the widespread adoption of the management by the objectives system by clients and employers of public relations personnel.

Objectives: A prerequisite for evaluation

It is important to have clearly established measurable objectives.

First, public relations personnel and management should agree on the criteria that will be used to evaluate success in attaining objectives.

Second, don't wait until the end of public relations program to determine how it will be evaluated.

“Evaluating impact/results starts in the planning stage, you break down the problem into measurable goals and objectives, then after implementing the program, you measure the result against goals.”

If an objective is informational, measurement techniques must show how successfully information was communicated to target audiences. Such technique falls under the rubric of message dissemination and audiences exposure but they do not measure the effect on attitudes or overt behaviour and action.

Although objectives may vary, the following checklist contains the basic evaluation questions that any practitioner should ask:

1. Was the activity or program adequately planned?
2. Did recipients of the message understand it?
3. How could the program strategy have been more effective ?
4. Were all primary and secondary audiences reached?
5. Were the desired organizational objectives achieved?
6. What unforeseen circumstances affected the success of the program or activity?
7. Did the program of activity fall within the budget set for it?

Measurement of production

One elementary form of evaluation is simply to count how many news releases, feature stories, photos, letters and the like are produced in a given period of time.

This kind of evaluation is supposed to give management an idea of a staff productivity. Public relations professionals however do not believe that this evaluation is very meaningful because it emphasized quantity instead of quality. It may be more cost effective to write fewer news releases and spent more time on the few that really are newsworthy.

Media impressions

In addition to the number of media placements, public relations department and firms report how many people may have been exposed to the message. These numbers describe as *media impression*, the potential audiences reached by a periodical or a broadcast program.

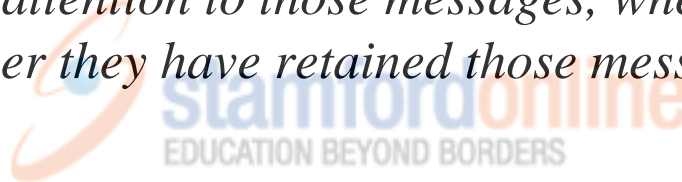
Media impression is commonly used in advertising to illustrate the penetration of a particular message. Such figure gives a rough estimate of how many people are exposed to a message.

Measurement of audience awareness

A higher level of awareness is to determine whether the audience actually becomes aware of the message and understood it.

At this level, public relations practitioners measure whether target audiences group actually received the messages directed at them, whether they paid attention to those messages, whether they understood, whether they have retained those messages in any shape or form.

Another way of measuring audiences awareness and comprehension is the day after recall. Under this method, participants are asked to view a specific television program or a particular news story, then they are interviewed.



Practitioners use of Research week 13 and 14

Research is becoming a vital tool for public relations because the days of intuition and gut feeling are over (by Harry O'Neill).

Five major approaches to research in program management:

1. The no research approach
 - often no input from an organization environment or public into the organization. Research is not used in either the planning or evaluation of program or specific activities. Must explain or defend management decisions or action in which they had no say.
2. The informal research approach
 - the informal research approach may include conducting focus groups then using the result to conduct the entire PR campaign. This type information gathering is much of what passes for research in public relations.

3. The media event approach

- the media event focus is conducted solely to generate attention and news coverage.

4. The evaluation only approach

- evaluation only research tracks the implementation of a program and assesses its effect. This approach is not generated by management as essential of planning a program and thus limits its potential usefulness.

5. The scientific management approach.

- research is done to define the problem situation for the purpose of planning public relations program, then monitor performance accountability and for strategic adjustment. Thirdly, research is done to measure program impact or effectiveness with respect to goals and objectives.

Research adds a layer of complexity to the practice of the public relations and elevates its function.

Doing our homework, examining our critical thinking, posing questions and answering them accurately are the goals of public relations practitioners. An understanding of research theories, persuasion and motivation can help us achieve these tasks in both internal and external settings.

Summary

Research means both defining problem and evaluating solution. Even though intuitive judgment remains coveted and important skill, management must see measurable results.

Nonetheless, informed management recognizes that public relations may never reach a point at which its result can be fully quantified. Public relations job is to keep track, record, and research changing attitude and opinion about the organizations for which they work. Therefore, it will become increasingly incumbent on public relations people to reinforce the value of what they do and what they stand for through constantly measuring their contribution to their organization goals.