The

'Toe bone to the head bone' logic model

An approach to connect PR and corporate communication to organization and business outcomes

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PR and communication academics have been harping about evaluation for 30 years since Jim Grunig uttered his *cri de coeur* about lack of evaluation in 1983. Grunig observed then: "just as everyone is against sin, so most public relations people I talk to are for evaluation. People keep on sinning, however, and PR people continue not to do evaluation research"[1]. When evaluation is done, even today it is largely focussed on measuring outputs, such as the volume and tone of publicity, impressions and Web page views and downloads, with much less identification of outcomes, according to research studies such as the biennial Generally Accepted Practices (GAP) study in the US[2] and a six-year longitudinal analysis of PR practitioners' use of social media by Don Wright and Michelle Hinson[3]. Most importantly of all, PR outcomes are rarely linked to desired organization or business outcomes. This lack of connection to the 'bottom line' – whether financial or otherwise – is the main barrier to further professionalization of PR and corporate communication, according to 75 per cent of 2,200 practitioners surveyed in 2012[4]. In the current global discussion of standards for PR evaluation, fresh attention has been turned to supporting organization and business outcomes, but PR evaluation literature still does not have much to say about how this can be done. This paper presents a logic model approach with a particular twist that has been shown to have some success in identifying and explaining the ultimate value of PR and which, therefore, may make a useful contribution to bridging the gap between communication outcomes and organization and business outcomes.

The measurement and evaluation debate

Much has been written about measurement and evaluation of PR and corporate communication over the past 30 years and this will not be summarized here, as most practitioners and certainly all scholars have heard it many times before. Excellent references include Glen Broom and David Dozier's ground-breaking but unfortunately un-prophetically titled book, *Using Research in Public Relations: Applications to Program Management*; Don Stacks' *Primer of Public Relations Research*, Tom Watson and Paul Noble's *Evaluating Public Relations: A Best Practice Guide to Public Relations Planning, Research and Evaluation* and Don Stacks and David Michaelson's 2010 book, *A Practitioner's Guide to Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation*. As well, numerous journal articles and research reports by these and other scholars and industry leaders including Jim Grunig, Donald Wright and Michelle Hinson, Ansgar Zerfass, Anne Gregory, Walter Lindenmann,

[1] Grunig, J. 1983b, 'Basic research provides knowledge that makes evaluation possible', *Public Relations Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, p. 28.

[2] Swerling, J. Thorson, K. Tenderich, B. & Ward, N. 2012, 'GAP VII: Seventh communication and public relations generally accepted practices study', University of Southern California, Annenberg, Los Angeles, CA. Available at http://ascjweb.org/gapstudy/

[3] Wright, D. & Hinson, M. 2012, 'Examining how social and emerging media have been used in public relations between 2006 and 2012: A longitudinal analysis', *Public Relations Journal*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 1–40.

[4] Zerfass, A. Verčič, D. Verhoeven, P. Moreno, A. & Tench, R. 2012, *European Communication Monitor 2012: Challenges and Competencies for Strategic Communication*, EACD/EUPRERA, Helios Media, Brussels, p. 36.

RESEARCH PAPER

Bruce Jeffries-Fox, Katie Paine, David Geddes, Don Bartholomew, Angela Jeffrey, Marianne Eisenmann, Mark Weiner and this author and others provide background and context.

Recently, a number of important developments have refired and refocussed debate about PR measurement and evaluation. These include:

- The **Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles** adopted at the second European Summit on Measurement in 2010 by more than 200 delegates from a dozen countries which explicitly express a commitment to rigorous, research-based evaluation of PR and corporate communication outcomes. The declaration, now supported by PR and communication organizations globally, included the following principles:
  - "Measuring the effects on outcomes is preferred to measuring outputs";
  - "The effect on business results should be measured where possible";
  - "Advertising value equivalents (AVEs) are not the value of public relations"; and
  - "Transparency and replicability are paramount to sound measurement"[5];
- Formation of the **Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards** in 2011, a coming together of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), the Council of PR Firms (CPRF) and the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) to work collaboratively to develop standards for evaluation of PR and corporate communication;
- Publication by the Coalition of *Proposed Interim Standards for Metrics in Traditional Media Analysis* in 2012[6];
- Formation of the **#SMMStandards Conclave** (Social Media Measurement Standards Conclave) which extended the standards push to include social media and to global collaboration involving 11 professional bodies worldwide and eight major companies representing client and employer perspectives. These included the Coalition members as well as the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management; the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC); the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA); the UK Chartered Institute of PR (CIPR); the Society for New Communications Research (SNCR); the Federation *Internationale des Bureaux d'Extraits de Presse* (FIBEP); the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) and the Digital Analytics Association (DAA). Corporations supporting and involved in the development of standards have included Dell, Ford Motor Company, General Motors, McDonalds, Procter & Gamble, SAS, Southwest Airlines and Thomson Reuters;
- Release of the first stage of social media measurement standards, the *#SMMStandards Sources and Methods Transparency Table*[7] at the 4th European Summit on Measurement in Dublin in 2012 and development of *Social Media Standard Definitions for Reach and Impressions*[8];
- Ongoing collaborative development of standards for defining and measuring higher level outtakes and outcomes including *engagement*, *influence*, *impact* and *value*.

In addition to the extensive collaboration by PR organizations worldwide, the Coalition and the Conclave have worked in close consultation with the Media Ratings Council; the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB); the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA); the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the Web Analytics Association. This greatly enhances the prospects of achieving unified terminology and compatibility of metrics across the corporate and marketing communication field which will reduce clients' confusion – undoubtedly one of the barriers to PR evaluation obscured behind the commonly proffered reason/excuse of cost.

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[5] Barcelona Declaration available at http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/barcelona-declaration-of-measurement-principles/

[6] *Proposed Interim Standards for Metrics in Traditional Media Analysis* available at http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/proposed-interim-standards-for-metrics-in-traditional-media-analysis

[7] *Social Media Standard Definitions for Reach and Impressions* available at http://www.smmstandards.com/category/content-sourcing-methods/

[8] Available at http://www.smmstandards.com/2013/03/proposed-social-media-standard-definitions-for-reach-and-impressions-from-the-digital-analytics-association/

However, challenges remain. In addressing one of these, this paper focusses primarily on evaluation, rather than measurement. While noting that the terms are often used interchangeably, most definitions agree that **evaluation** is the assessment of *impact* and *value* – and sometimes *effectiveness* – of a process or activity in the context of the organization's overall goals and objectives. **Measurement** using various instruments is undertaken to inform evaluation. In the case of PR and corporate communication, measurement involves surveys, interviews, focus groups, content analysis, social media analytics and other methods and their respective methodological procedures. Details of various measurement methods, such as content analysis, are well-explained – some say over-emphasized – in PR measurement literature, as well as in a wide array of research methods texts, and are not the focus here. Linking PR and corporate communication outcomes to organization or business outcomes is part of evaluation and this particular critical stage of evaluation is the challenge addressed in this paper.

Despite their obvious overlap, separating these two processes is useful, not only to provide focus in this analysis, but also because it allows demonstration of the importance of 'measuring what matters'. What matters to businesses and organizations are the outcomes they seek, particularly priority ones. Too often practitioners measure lots of things and produce data that are of little or no significance to senior management because they relate to outputs and outcomes that are not directly linked to the priority organization or business outcomes, or for which they cannot see a connection. Even though measurement is done before evaluation can be undertaken, it needs to inform evaluation specifically in relation to priority organization or business outcomes. Therefore, in terms of strategy and planning, evaluation comes first. Subsuming evaluation under the rubric of measurement, or focussing on measurement before developing an evaluation model, is problematic. The central thrust of this paper could be summarized as 'identifying what matters (strategic evaluation planning) and then measuring what matters'.

Both organization as well as business outcomes will be referred to in this paper, noting that government departments and agencies, institutions and non-profit organizations, as well as commercial businesses, use PR and corporate communication and seek a range of business as well as non-business outcomes.

The Holy Grail of evaluation

The key premise underlying the argument presented here is the two-fold proposition that (a) evaluation of PR and corporate communication should identify *outcomes*, not simply describe and count *outputs* and (b) that the outcomes of PR and corporate communication should be causally linked to achievement of desired organization and business outcomes. The first is now a well-established, albeit still not widely-implemented, principle. Focus on outcomes, rather than outputs, is one of the fundamentals of evaluation adopted in the Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles. It is also strongly reflected in most PR evaluation models, including Cutlip, Center and Broom's **PII model**[9], Macnamara's **Pyramid Model of PR Research**[10] and Watson and Noble's **Unified Model**[11].

However, the second principle remains relatively new in PR literature, which is curious and concerning. For instance, a search of articles published in *PR Week* between 1995 and 2010 using a range of key words found 8,000 articles related to 'pitches' and 'pitching', 5,600 articles related to 'media relations' and 5,000 articles related to 'awareness'. In contrast, the search found only 62 articles related to 'behavioural change' and the term 'business outcome' appeared in only three

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[9]   Cutlip, M. Center, A. & Broom, G. 1985, *Effective Public Relations*, 6th edn, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
[10] Macnamara, J. 2005, *Jim Macnamara's Public Relations Handbook*, Archipelago Press, Sydney; Macnamara, J. 2012, *Public Relations Theories, Practices*, Critiques, Pearson, Sydney.
[11] Watson, T. & Noble, P. 2007, *Evaluating Public Relations: A Best Practice Guide to Public Relations Planning, Research and Evaluation*, 2nd edn, Kogan Page, London and Philadelphia, PA.

articles in the 15-year period[12]. Among research papers specifically discussing PR evaluation on the Web sites of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) and the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), only a handful are focussed on organization and business outcomes, such as those by Angela Jeffrey, David Michaelson and Don Stacks on 'Exploring the link between share of media coverage and business outcomes'[13] and Katharine (Katie) Paine, Pauline Draper and Angela Jeffrey on 'Using public relations research to drive business results'[14]. While useful contributions, it is significant that these papers were published in 2007 and 2008 respectively, with no papers on this topic since. Also, both papers reveal a further problem with PR evaluation – a narrow focus on trying to demonstrate the effects of editorial media coverage, rather than broader applications of PR and corporate communication.

The challenge to link PR outcomes to organization and business outcomes is actually quite complex and this is probably one of the reasons for limited attention to evaluation at this level until recently. This complexity is caused by three key characteristics of organization and business outcomes. First, they are *macro-level*, usually quite a way downstream from day-to-day PR activities. Typically they relate to sales, profits, gaining government or regulatory authority approval for a product or project, making a successful takeover or acquisition, or changing citizens' behaviour in relation to issues such as health, fitness, or road safety. In comparison, PR and corporate communication activities are often micro-level, such as pre-launch publicity to support sales, producing an information kit on the organization, arranging a tour of facilities for journalists and analysts, writing speeches, and so on. Second, organization and business outcomes are often *long-term* and may not be evident for some time after PR activities have been conducted. Third, organization and business outcomes are usually *multi-causal*. They are the result of numerous inputs and outputs, including those of field staff, support staff, marketing, legal, IT, finance and often partners such as retailers. Even when overarching outcomes are achieved, demonstrating that PR and corporate communication played a part can be very difficult, particularly noting that correlation does not equate to causation. As a proverb says, 'success has many fathers and mothers, but failure is an orphan'. When ultimate outcomes are achieved, many hands go up to claim credit, including those of the advertising agency and the CEO and other C-suite executives eager to show that they earned their bonuses.

Some CEOs and senior managers intuitively understand that PR and corporate communication contribute value to their organization and this is probably why the field has been able to grow without developing and systematically deploying rigorous evaluation methodology and systems. The practitioners and consultancies with such bosses are fortunate. But many reporting lines are not so flexible. Also, when management changes, even the comfortably complacent are likely to be heading for a new job, or 're-pitching' for the account in the case of agencies. In her critical assessment of the PR field, Jacquie L'Etang noted that "evaluation has become and remains something of a 'Holy Grail' for public relations"[15]. In particular, it is the final step of evaluation – demonstrating that PR and corporate communication outcomes are positively connected to organization and business outcomes – that lay at the end of the industry's long quest.

One approach advocated as a high-level business outcome measure is to try to calculate the **Return on Investment (ROI)** of PR and corporate communication. However, an extensive study by Tom Watson and Ansgar Zerfass in 2011 reported three problems in applying this concept. First, ROI is

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[12] Smith, A. 2010, 'PR doesn't care about business outcomes: What *PR Week*'s internal search function tells you about the industry' *In Front of Your Nose*, blog, 2 March. Available at http://blog.escherman.com/2010/03/02/pr-doesn%E2%80%99t-care-about-business-outcomes-what-pr-week%E2%80%99s-internal-search-function-tells-you-about-the-industry/

[13] Jeffrey, A. Michaelson, D. & Stacks, D. 2007, 'Exploring the link between share of media coverage and business outcomes', Institute for Public Relations Gainesville, FL. Available at http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/media-coverage-share-business-outcomes/

[14] Paine, K. Draper, P. & Jeffrey, A. 2008, 'Using public relations research to drive business results', Institute for Public Relations, Gainesville, FL. Available at http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/research-business-results/

[15] L'Etang, J. 2008, *Public Relations: Concepts, Practice and Critique*, Sage, London and Thousand Oaks, CA, p. 26.

quite specifically understood in the business world as a financial metric denoting return on total investment, but it is used in "loose" and "fuzzy" ways in PR and corporate communication. Furthermore, PR and corporate communication practitioners usually miscalculate ROI by comparing returns to operating expenditure (*opex*) without including capital expenditure (*capex*). Third, many PR and corporate communication activities do not seek or have a financial return (e.g. government and non-profit PR)[16]. Watson and Zerfass recommended that practitioners "refrain from using the term in order to keep their vocabulary compatible with the … management world" [17].

A logic model approach

Logic models are widely used to plan and track major projects, particularly those with multiple inputs and outputs and multiple parallel activities occurring over some time. Thus, logic models have an immediate application to PR and corporate communication and they have been used for this purpose – albeit not to the extent that they could be. Logic models have the added advantage that they are usually illustrated graphically to provide a simple demonstration of interconnections and 'flow'. Theoretically, for those so inclined, they can be seen to be based on *systems* theory and *management planning* and *process engineering* theories, but also they have gained renewed interest because of their relevance within *network theory* and Manuel Castells' *space of flows*[18]. They are also informed by *complexity* theory. Logic models demonstrate that little, if anything, in complex systems, stands alone; everything is interconnected and interdependent. As well as identifying the various contributing elements, logic models describe the contribution that each element makes and show interconnections and interdependencies. Figure 1 is a sample of a logic model from a health services project, which illustrates the similarity of language used in both PR evaluation and logic models, such as inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact.
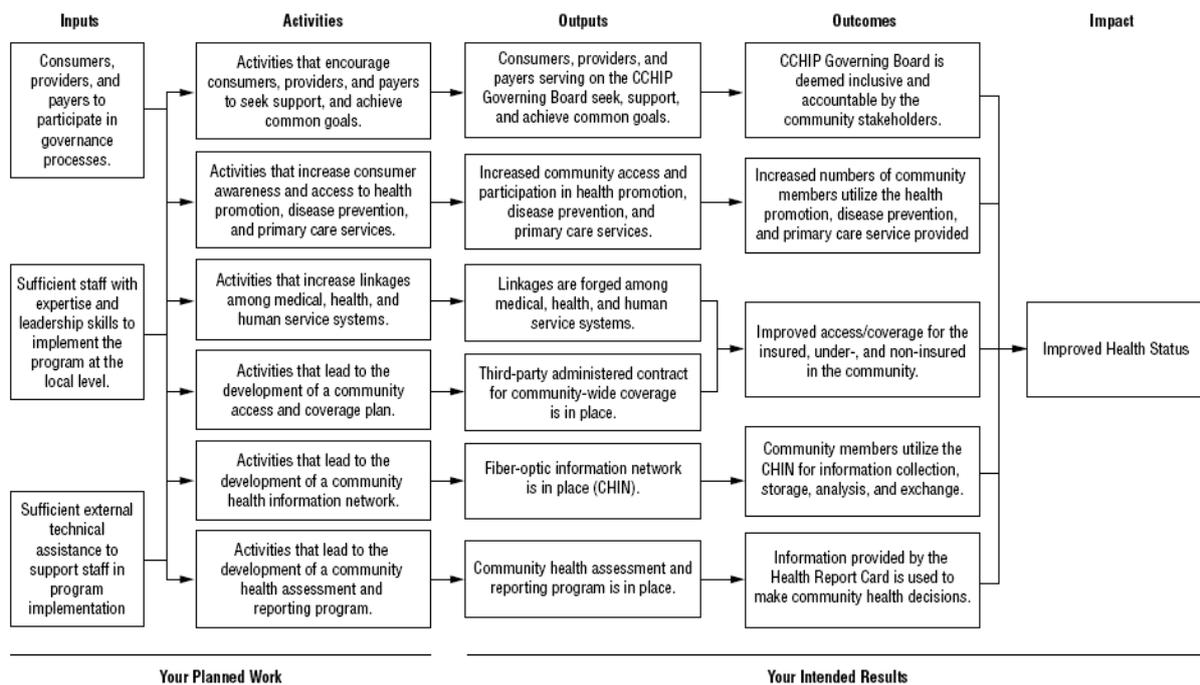

Figure 1. A logic model from the Calhoun County Health Improvement Program. (Source: Open source Web.)

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[16] Watson, T. 2012, The Miami debate – ROI and PR evaluation: Avoiding smoke and mirrors, Institute for Public Relations, Gainesville, FL, 10 July. Available at http://www.instituteforpr.org/2012/07/roi-%e2%80%93-the-miami-debate/

[17] Watson, T. & Zerfass, A. 2011, 'Return on investment in public relations: A critique of concepts used by practitioners from communication and management sciences perspectives', *PRism*, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 11. Available at http://www.prismjournal.org/vol8_1.html

[18] Castells, M. 2000, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd edn, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, UK.

A humanist metaphor and reverse engineered development

The logic model proposed here for evaluating PR and corporate communication is a particular adaptation in two key respects. First, while it visually represents elements such as inputs and outputs as abstract boxes and interconnecting lines on a chart, as most logic models do, it uses a very familiar metaphor as the language for its structure and logic – the skeletal structure of the human body. This has a number of advantages. First, it is a structure with which all people are intimately acquainted and which they can visualize and conceptualize in tangible as well as in abstract ways. Second, it draws on a deep and rich cultural heritage – for instance, the vital connections of bones in the human body have been written and sung about in nursery rhymes and songs for centuries. For example, the following words to an old gospel song, sung by children over many generations, expresses the basic principles of this particular logic model.

> The toe bone connected to the heel bone,
> The heel bone connected to the foot bone,
> The foot bone connected to the leg bone,
> The leg bone connected to the knee bone,
> The knee bone connected to the thigh bone,
> The thigh bone connected to the back bone,
> The back bone connected to the neck bone,
> The neck bone connected to the head bone[19].

Using the metaphor of the human body as the structure for the logic model affords easy and quick understanding, unlike many models and evaluation systems that require considerable explanation and close attention by senior management – the latter being an ingredient that cannot be assumed among busy, information-overloaded C-suite executives. Logic models are much more simple, for instance, than **quantity survey** models used in the construction industry and **project management** models that are important for technical staff (and may be required for day-to-day PR work), but are too detailed for senior management. Furthermore, the grounded humanist nature of the model creates a degree of empathy and emotional engagement in planning discussions. For instance, in explaining the model, I have often used comments such as "the toe bone might be a very small part of the whole and a long way from the head of an organization, but we all know what happens when we have a broken toe". The faces of executives usually scrunch up in remembered pain and some will often voluntarily make statements of agreement such as "yes, I remember when I had a broken toe, it really slowed me down". There is even more empathy and engagement when discussion is elevated to a foot or leg. "Argh, I broke my right ankle once. It put me in a wheelchair for a week". To lighten the mood and hook them, I often note that a toe or foot may only be a small part of the body, but I ask them: "Imagine trying to run without a foot". I have got them where I want them.

The second equally, or even more, significant adaptation applied to the normal logic model process is that the process of developing it is reversed. Traditionally, logic models are developed by the participants in a process identifying the desired outcome, usually taken from a document such as a strategic plan, and then working through each of the steps and elements required to reach the desired outcome from first to last. However, a vital part of the success of the logic model proposed here is involving senior management in a short consulting session and working backwards with them from the ultimate desired outcome or outcomes at the 'head' of the organization (which should not be assumed on the basis of documents, as will be explained later) to identify the neck bone, back bone, thigh bones, knee bones, leg bones, foot bones and even toe bones, as well as joints, sinews and tendons that are necessary to operate effectively and achieve what the [corporate/organizational] body wants to do. While senior management will not know all the elements necessary in their organization or business, particularly at the micro level, most do have a good understanding of the main contributing factors for ultimate success.

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[19]   Old gospel song by an anonymous author.

In truth, many PR and corporate communication activities equate to ribs, legs, feet or even toes of an organization. That is not said to denigrate PR and corporate communication. The logic of the model is to identify each element required for success and its connectedness. For instance, a briefing for analysts and a sponsored seminar are quite small activities by themselves. If they are not connected in some way to higher-level outcomes, it is appropriate to question their value. But if it can be shown that the seminar will be attended by the relevant Minister of Government and that the invitation to her and her support for the event help build good relations with the government which, in turn, is important for upcoming talks about streamlining industry regulation, then the seminar is valuable. It is a toe bone, connected to the foot bone (cordial government relations) connected to the leg bone (favourable regulatory environment) connected to the backbone (major projects approved) connected to the neck bone (increased income) connected to the head bone (profits and sustainability).

Discussion using the metaphor of the human body should not divert focus into an anatomical debate or take the metaphorical device so far that it infantilizes discussion. Once senior management becomes familiar with the process, other more business-orientated terms such as 'milestones', 'stepping stones', 'underpinning foundations' or what I call *sub-outcomes*, can be used. But this way of working remains understood as the interconnected 'toe bone to the foot bone, to the leg bone, etc' model because that is the overarching logic of the model.

Traditional logic models are largely focussed on chronology, coordination and systemization at an operational level. While they work well as planning tools for those involved, senior management has no buy-in to the model and particularly no buy-in to the particular elements in the model. Often senior management does not even understand many of the elements required, or why they are required. The traditional logic model or PR plan belongs to the PR or corporate communication team – it's their processes. Management only wants to see the ultimate outcome. There's the disconnect.

So how do we build what I call the 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model (for short) which gains management 'buy-in' and understanding of the impact and value of PR and corporate communication? The following section explains the principles and steps.

Applying the 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model to PR and corporate communication

It is sometimes difficult to get time with senior management. But it is vital to have access to the 'dominant coalition', as noted in PR Excellence theory[20] and in many widely-used text books and manuals on PR and corporate communication management. When practitioners have access to senior management, it is vital they do not squander the opportunity by doing all the talking. A key part of the success of this model is posing questions to senior management and getting them involved in identifying the various elements, components, milestones, stepping stones and underpinning foundations or sub-outcomes that will ensure success in achieving overall organizational or business outcomes. A well-briefed facilitator can help ensure the right questions are asked, prompt participants and keep discussion on track. For example, the following are good openers.

Q.   *What are the most important outcomes you want for the organization in the next year?*
Q.   *If there was only one thing that you could achieve in the organization in the next year or so, what would that be?*
Q.   *What are the top three outcomes that you want the organization to achieve in order of priority?*

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[20]   Grunig, L. Grunig J. & Dozier D. 2002, *Excellent Organizations and Effective Organizations: A Study of Communication Management in Three Countries*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ.

In the least, management will reiterate the key strategic objectives and/or goals of the organization that you already know from briefings. If that is the case, you will be sure that they are the real objectives. But, if management plays it safe and simply quotes the organization's strategic plan, be persistent and ask: 'Is there anything else?' 'Is there anything you want or need to happen that is *not* in the plan?' Sometimes you will receive surprising, but vital information. For instance, in talking to the CEO of an $80 million a year turnover privately-owned company, under such questioning the CEO suddenly shut his office door and leaned over his desk and said: "Actually, we are looking to sell a majority stake in the company in the next 12 months to private equity investors. These guys are really publicity shy, so this is absolutely confidential. But that is the main game right now." Wow! This changed everything. A typical PR strategy was likely to propose a publicity blitz on plans for a new high-tech office building and bring in journalists for a series of CEO profiles. But the last thing equity capital firms want when they are courting an acquisition is media attention, as this can bring competitive bids and push up the price. And the last thing business owners who are in the midst of a multi-million deal want is an office crawling with journalists and publicity about a new building which means increased costs and even debt for the potential buyers. What do private equity firms and 'exit strategy' business owners want? This could be the next series of questions.

Q. *So, to clinch this sale and have it go through successfully, what is the most important underpinning element? What do you need to have to pull this off?*
Q. *What else needs to be in place to support the sale?*

The answers may be provided by senior management, or worked out iteratively in discussion. In this situation, it is a fairly safe bet that the owners will want business continuity. They don't need fast growth, because they already have buyers. They don't need to slash costs. But they need the business to remain the business that attracted the buyers. It is likely that the fundamental underpinnings required to complete the sale will include **revenue stability** and **staff stability** (no rush of resignations), noting that the latter could threaten the former. Also, if the buyers want to retain the CEO and his team, which they are likely to do (private equity firms are silent investors, not managers), they will want to see focus on the business, rather than personal image building in the media which might look like the CEO and his C-suite colleagues are touting for new jobs.

In the process of building this model, it is useful to record each of the major organization outcomes on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper written inside boxes using brief keyword descriptions or simply numbered, such as X^1, X^2, etcetera. Once the highest level outcomes have been clearly identified, then the process moves down to the next level of connecting questions.

Q. *What needs to be in place to achieve $X^1(a)$?* OR
Q. *If $X^1(a)$ is the neck or part of the backbone to support the sale, what are the ribs and what are the legs that sit under them?* And so on.

Based on the new information provided in the previous example, a PR team in the mid-size private company should put its main focus on supporting sales and client service staff. Activities could include a customer e-newsletter, equipping them with tablet computers to demonstrate the latest product upgrades that need to be seen to be fully appreciated and providing them with design support and training to improve client presentations. Also, Platinum, Gold and Silver client categories could be introduced to reward high-volume and long-term clients. A second major focus should be working in collaboration with HR to improve employee communication and maximise morale and loyalty, such as a monthly employee award scheme and an online discussion forum (e.g. Yammer) to engage staff in collaborative planning of ways to improve service delivery to clients. Such ideas are directly connected to the priority business outcomes. Plans for media publicity should be scaled back to focus on business success stories and client profiles, instead of CEO profiles and statements. Media relations and publicity are *not* the central functions of effective PR and corporate communication in many circumstances.

At this stage, the draft 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model could look something like Figure 2.

OUTCOMES
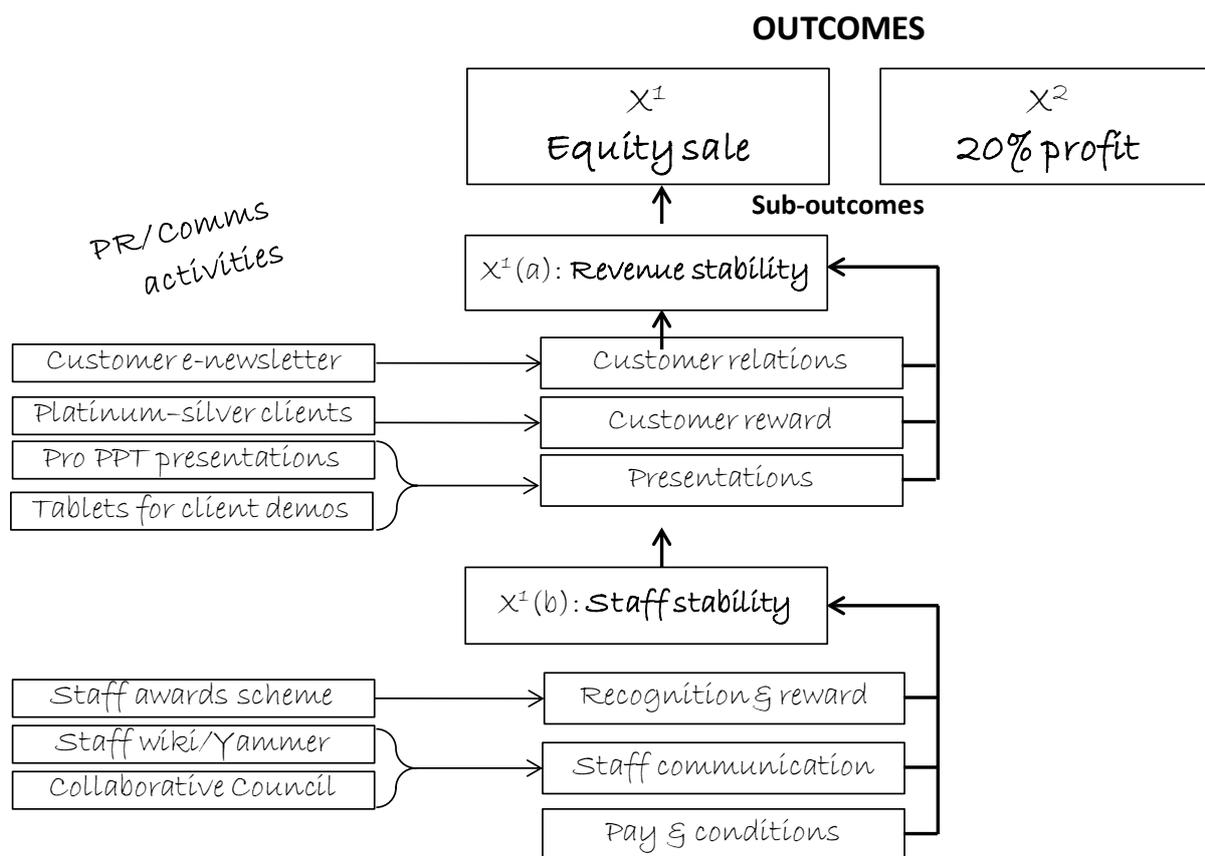
Figure 2. Early stages of a 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model for PR and corporate communication.

This example is illustrative, rather than comprehensive. Actual logic models developed can look far more detailed (see Figure 3). The key points to note are that:

- The organization's key desired outcomes are at the top of the model and remain the primary focus throughout all planning;
- The key elements that underpin and support each of these is shown underneath with the connection illustrated. Each of these can be considered a *sub-outcome*. This is a concept that warrants further research, as it is different to *outputs* and *outtakes*. Not all sub-outcomes, or underpinning foundations or 'stepping stones' will be able to be delivered by PR and corporate communication, but the model should identify those that can be;
- The PR and corporate communication activities proposed are listed alongside each key element in the model, showing what they connect to and support;
- From this, it can be shown that each activity 'flows' into a fundamental part of the business process of the organization and, ultimately, all the way to the overall organization or business outcomes (see Figures 2 and 3).

To achieve deep thinking in these discussions, ask prompted questions as well as open-end questions. For instance, to prompt senior executives, ask questions such as:

Q.   *Does employee morale contribute to this or not?*
Q.   *Do the sales staff have all the information materials that they need?*
Q.   *Are the sales staff's materials of the quality that they need?*
Q.   *What do our competitors do for their sales staff that could win deals?*
Q.   *Is our reputation with major clients an important factor in achieving this outcome?*

In response to such questions, senior management will acknowledge that some things are necessary elements for success. If they say employee morale is important, for instance, the next step is to ask yourself and your team how you can contribute to that sub-outcome. If they say some things are not important, you either have to convince them that they are, or strike them off your list. Sometimes senior management will say they don't know – for example: "you know, we haven't really asked our sales guys whether they have what they need to do the job". In this case, you have just gained a strong basis for proposing research among the sales team to identify how the company can help them be more successful.

Such an iterative planning session can also be used to 'bounce' ideas. For instance, you could ask "would it help achieve the outcome if the CEO invited all our platinum clients to a lunch or breakfast and had a top speaker talk about trends in the industry?" Creativity is important in PR and corporate communication, but it only has value if it is applied in a context that relates to achieving organization or business outcomes. In this iterative modelling process, the communication team can test ideas, seek guidance, warm up management to suggestions and gain their strategic and emotional engagement with PR and corporate communication. Many ideas and suggestions will be thrown out in such a process, so an open frank discussion is important. An independent facilitator or moderator can help achieve this.

A completed logic model for an anonymous organization is shown as Figure 3. The CEO and the head of corporate communication agreed after building this model collaboratively that their entire corporate and marketing PR plan was summarized in the single page and the only additional documents requested were a budget and a timeline. Senior management understood where each PR and corporate communication activity fitted and why it was being done.
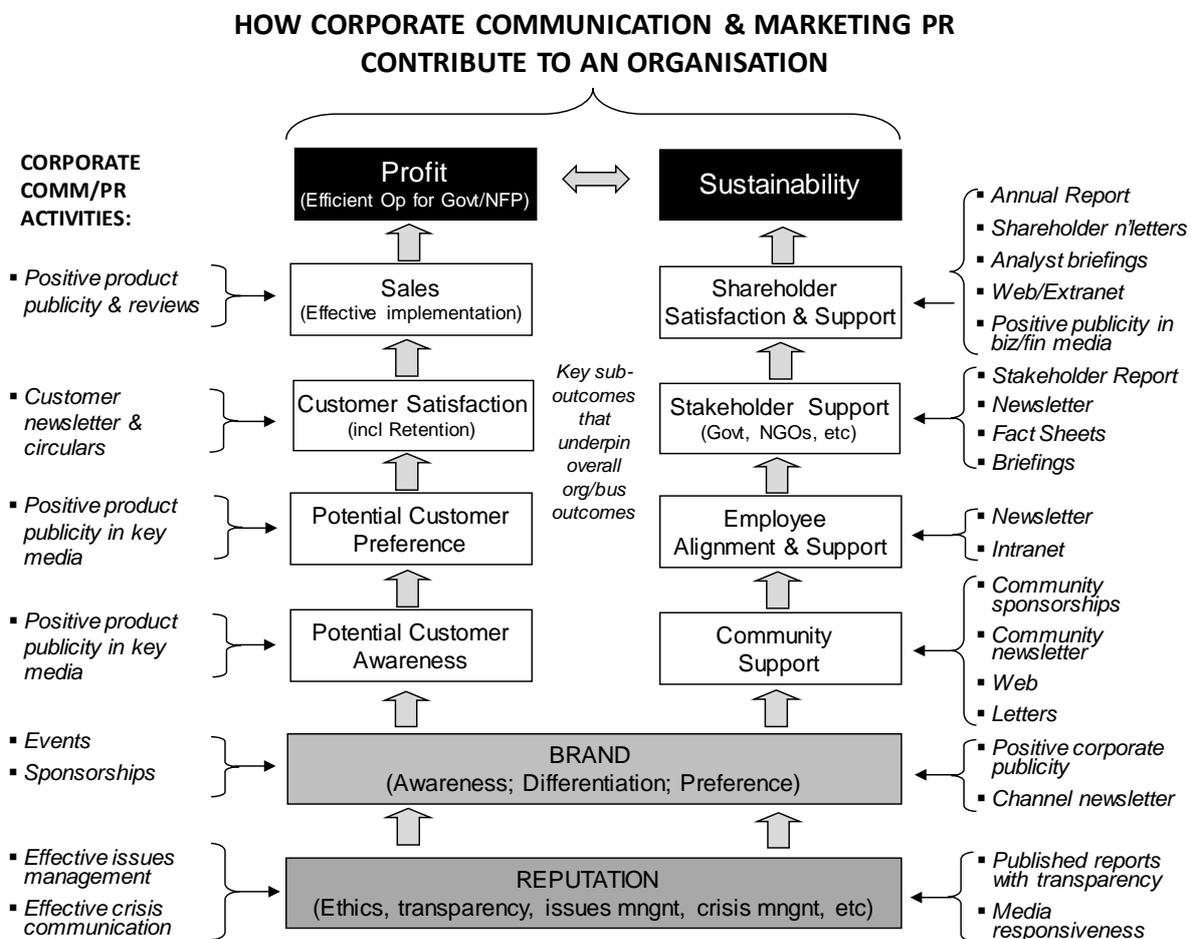

Figure 3. A sample 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model for PR and corporate communication.

For instance, in Figure 3, communication activities as small as production of fact sheets and community sponsorships were included and supported by management because it was shown that they helped maintain the support of local communities in which the organization operated and non-government organizations (NGOs) which closely monitored the activities of the organization. Corporate publicity broadly supported brand building but, in addition, it was shown that a small investment in gaining positive product reviews in trade press significantly helped sales staff in gaining sales.

The method of constructing the 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model for PR and corporate communication and its usefulness is further explained in the following case study in which the identity of the organization has been protected, but all details are factual.

Case study

The national Tax Office of a major developed nation (let's call it the NTO for simplicity here) employed a sizeable team (more than 10) of what it called public affairs staff. The team produced a wide range of information brochures, newsletters, reports and booklets; wrote speeches for the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Taxation; wrote and distributed media releases regularly on changes to tax policy and announcements of prosecutions of tax avoiders; and handled day-to-day media relations involving response to questions, requests for interviews and requests for statistical information.

Public affairs activities were outlined in a 'Public Affairs Plan' which was approved by the Commissioner. But, while having a general sense that the NTO could not operate without public affairs, the Commissioner and most of the senior management committee (SMC) of the NTO were unsure what, if any, contribution the function made to the primary objectives of the organization. They appreciated public affairs expertise and help during crises, such as when the NTO was found to have over-taxed 15,000 citizens and when one of its auditors was arrested for fraud. The skill of the PA team in positioning these incidents as aberrations in a long history of scrupulous public service was recognized as helping preserve the reputation of the organization and keep its political masters, the government, happy. But, beyond these occasional high-profile value-adding functions, the SMC remained confused about public affairs and the PA team was confused about how to show its value.

So the Head of Public Affairs, with the agreement of the Commissioner, convened a one-day workshop involving all of the SMC (nine senior executives) and the six most senior public affairs executives, and invited me to moderate the day as an independent 'measurement expert'.

The day arrived and, to the surprise of the Commissioner and the SMC, the workshop did not begin with a talk about public affairs, or a report on activities during the previous year. It began with a large blank whiteboard, sheets of paper on the table, bundles of felt pens for everyone and a question.

Q.   What is the overall most important outcome that the NTO wants to achieve?

The answer was quick from the Deputy Commissioner: "Have everyone pay their tax on time," he said.

Another senior executive added: "We also want them to pay the right amount of tax – not under-declare and avoid tax."

Everyone nodded, so I suggested that we could combine those outcomes into '100 per cent tax compliance', which requires full declaration of income and payment of the appropriate amount of tax on time, as prescribed in the country's tax legislation. Everyone seemed happy and was ready to move on. So I wrote at the top centre of the whiteboard '100% TAX COMPLIANCE'. Then I asked the next question.

Q.   So what is the most important thing we have to put in place to get 100 per cent tax compliance?
(Implicit in all questions in logic modelling is confinement to the role and responsibilities of the organization. Requirements outside the role of the organization can be side-noted, but are not part of the model. In this instance, having strong clear tax legislation is essential, but that is the role of the parliament. The NTO was responsible for implementation of the legislation.)

A range of answers were given and noted. These included bigger fines; sterner warning letters; more auditors in the field; more staff for checking tax returns; more publicity about offenders being caught; creating awareness of the reputation damage of being a 'tax cheat' and incentives for early submission of tax returns. What was interesting in listening to these suggestions from the group that was now involved in animated discussion was that, while a number of these sub-outcomes, or connecting bones, could be supported with PR and corporate communication, most were directed towards achieving tax compliance by enforcement. So I asked another question.

Q.   You seem to be focussing on achieving 100 per cent tax compliance mainly through enforcement. Is that possible?

A buzz went around the room and lots of mumbling. Eventually a senior executive decided to act as spokesperson and explained: "Well, a hundred per cent compliance is probably never going to happen. But we have got to get close." I followed up the point with another question.

Q.   How close? Should we use a different figure? Should we say '95 per cent tax compliance'?

Heads shook and some muttered "too low".

Q.   OK, what's a realistic figure?

Eventually, the Commissioner said "let's go with 98 per cent as a target figure. Data from developed countries show there is usually a two per cent criminal element that never pays." So I rubbed out the main outcome and wrote '98% TAX COMPLIANCE' and repeated my query of whether enforcement was the best method to achieve that.

The buzz in the room grew even louder and lots of argument broke out. Eventually, a few spokespersons expressed the feelings around the room with comments such as: "Well, here's the thing. Enforcement is what we do. It's what we have done for years. Increases in fines have been shown to reduce avoidance. We have to keep the pressure on." However, others raised contrary points. Enforcement is expensive, because it requires lawyers (it turned out that the NTO had increased its enforcement staff by 400 in the previous two years to try to reduce non-compliance). Enforcement is also slow, because cases go to court and take months or years to resolve. "It also makes us the bad guys most of the time," the HR director added, pointing out that morale in the NTO was low and high staff turnover was occurring as a result. [Sidenote: I went to the board and wrote 'IMPROVE STAFF MORALE – REDUCE TURNOVER?' in box for later discussion.] The public affairs staff also noted that media publicity gained for successful prosecutions of tax avoiders usually reflected negatively rather than positively on the NTO, making them "look like bullies" and "cracking down on people who have made an innocent mistake". "That causes the Minister to be on my back," the Commissioner added. So I asked yet another question.

Q.   So is there another way to gain 98 per cent tax compliance?

"Maybe not 98 per cent compliance, but there *is* another way," came the answer. The Commissioner leant back in his chair and showed his strategic thinking skills saying: "Look, the ultimate outcome for us would be voluntary tax compliance – people voluntarily paying their tax on time. That's the most cost-efficient way of collecting tax revenue a country can have." He went on to explain that it was unlikely that 98 per cent voluntary tax compliance could be achieved. But within seconds several

hands were going up and suggestions were being shouted. I can't recall who proposed it, but as moderator I took a suggestion from the floor and phrased it as another question to the group.

Q. So, below the overarching goal of '98% TAX COMPLIANCE', could we split our model into two strategies and have 'VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE' and 'ENFORCED COMPLIANCE'?

A mild roar went up, like a football team seizing possession from the other side and we were off and running. These were well-known concepts to those present. But identifying them as separate complementary strategies opened up a new way of thinking. Under 'Enforced compliance', a number of existing activities remained relevant, including warning letters, audits, brochures explaining penalties for non-compliance, 'bad publicity' for tax avoiders and so on. As in previous years, there was a role for public affairs in this strategy, but frankly it was modest. However, under the next box called 'Voluntary compliance', the team went into full on attack and a goal was in sight.

Q. So, what would we need to have in place or create to get more people to achieve voluntary tax compliance?

Suggestions came thick and fast and some went beyond the scope of public affairs. Ideas presented as ways to gain increased tax compliance on a voluntary basis included:

- Simplified tax return forms;
- Online tax return forms so citizens could complete them electronically which would be easier and quicker for many people;
- A set of simple, clear instructions on how to complete a tax return, such as an annual 'tax info pack';
- The previous proposal was soon expanded to include a set of simple clear instructions for different categories of citizens, such as self-employed persons and small businesses;
- A new Web site with helpful information and tips, rather than copies of tax laws and lists of fines;
- A number of telephone operators available to give friendly advice to citizens and answer questions about tax;
- A positive media publicity campaign to promote the 'new look' NTO as 'friendly and helpful to citizens; only hard on criminals'.

Even though a number of these initiatives were already in progress or proposed in other sections of the organization, this planning workshop played a role in bringing them together under a strategy. A coordinating committee set up following the workshop hastened the completion of many and ensured their integration. While some activities required expertise beyond public affairs, the PA team was able to show that it could take responsibility for some and make a significant contribution to others.

Redesign of tax forms; creation of a Tax Info Pack for families, self-employed workers and small businesses; information hotlines; a Web site with helpful information and online tax forms all proceeded. The launch of these initiatives was a major PR event resulting in national publicity, as well as extensive feature coverage in many trade and small business journals. Requests for the Tax Pack grew to more than two million – before declining in favour of a fully online tax pack introduced later.

An increase in voluntary tax compliance was achieved to the extent that the NTO substantially reduced the number of court cases (a costly part of its activities) and reduced the number of legal staff it employed, redirecting some of these positions to information and support roles. In short, more tax was collected at less cost. Negative publicity declined substantially and positive publicity about the NTO – something that it had rarely experienced previously – grew significantly. Also, public satisfaction surveys introduced soon after showed growing public confidence in and support for the NTO, which pleased the Minister and improved relations between the civil service and the

government. And, yes, staff morale and retention improved because of these changes and improved internal communication initiated by public affairs, saving the NTO more than $1 million a year in recruitment and retraining costs.

It would be an over-statement to use this case study solely as an example of PR and corporate communication. This overview very briefly outlines the thinking and work of dozens of executives, designers, Web programmers, legal advisers, finance officers and HR, as well as PR and corporate communication professionals. And the logic model developed was only one small part of extensive planning for renewal and innovation, for which credit must go to a large dedicated team of senior civil servants and technical staff. However, this case study does show how PR and corporate communication activities can easily not align with organization and business outcomes and even how organizations can sometimes be uncertain about how outcomes are best achieved. Equally, it shows how a logic model can be constructed in collaboration with senior management that ensures PR and corporate communication connect with and contribute to achievement of organization and business outcomes. In this case, there was unanimous agreement in the organization from the Commissioner down that public affairs played a central role in providing the information and tools to achieve voluntary tax compliance, as well as a support role for enforced compliance.

Conclusion

The human body is one of the most intricately interconnected systems in our world. We inherently understand that each small bone, nerve, vein and artery and each piece of sinew, tendon and cartilage plays a part and is vital to our overall functioning and effectiveness. Other ecosystems and ecologies operate in similar ways. It is productive to view PR and corporate communication as part of an ecosystem.

In such a system, PR and corporate communication activities may be used in various ways for various purposes. Some may even be small components of the system. But they may be vitally linked to and contribute to the primary outcomes sought by the host organization, in the same way that the toe bone is connected to the foot bone, to the leg bone and all the way to the head bone in the human body (as celebrated in the old gospel song). Their value derives from that connection.

This model can be implemented using business language. The metaphor of the 'toe bone connected to the foot bone to the leg bone' and so on is only employed to emphasize the interconnection and interdependency of the key elements in the model. Once the logic of the model is established, its elements can be identified as milestones, stepping stones or sub-outcomes'. Not every PR and corporate communication activity will directly connect to the macro-level outcomes of an organization or business – nor does the work of the accounts department, the IT department or even that of some senior executives. That does not matter and does not prove the activity has no value. But every activity must connect to achievement of some milestone, stepping stone or *sub-outcome* that is connected to the ultimate outcome of the organization or business – just as the toe bone is connected to the foot bone, to the leg bone and all the way up to the head bone.

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