Communication Plan-Evaluation

How will we know if our communication efforts have made a difference?

Evaluating your communication efforts is challenging, but one of the most important questions you will have to ask yourself is,

"Did our communication efforts help us achieve our command's goal?" Evaluation is the way for you to understand and answer this question.
Process

Evaluation means to determine the value of something. It often is referred to when measuring after the campaign or program has ended. Evaluating communication efforts is focused on tracking progress and measuring impact. Evaluation is ideally conducted before, during, and after a communication campaign. Knowledge outcomes, predisposition changes, and behavior can be measured during evaluation. It should be used to learn what happened and why.

There are three stages to consider when evaluating.

**Stage 1. Evaluating the program design and conceptualization**

*What is the extent and distribution of the target problem or population?*

*Is there a coherent rationale underlying it?*

**Stage 2. Monitoring and accountability**

*Is the communication plan reaching the specific target population?*

*Are the efforts being conducted as specified in the communication plan?*

**Stage 3. Assessment of impact and efficiency**

*Is the program effective in reaching its intended goals?*

*Can the results of the program be explained by another process that doesn’t include the program?*

*Are there unintended effects of the program?*

*How much does it cost?*

We’ve defined evaluation, but here are some things that can help you in your attempt to measure effort and results:

- Establish agreement on the uses and purposes of the evaluation
- Secure organizational commitment to evaluation
- Develop consensus on using evaluation research
- Write program objectives in observable and measurable terms
- Keep complete program records
- Understand the difference between processes (effort and outputs) and outcomes (impact and effects). Common mistakes are listing “results” rather than outputs, e.g. the number of press releases distributed. Understand communication, media effects theory, and audience effects. Impact cannot be assumed simply because information was disseminated to audiences.

An example of outputs is when a detailed report of public affairs activities are presented at a meeting. The boss says, “I don’t care how much work you’ve done and how much stuff you’ve put out. I want to know what impact you have had and what value you have contributed to our organization.” When planning and determining objectives, each objective should clearly indicate a desired effect, specified outcome, magnitude of effect, and target date.

“SMART” is a mnemonic device used to remind students about writing objectives. It stands for ‘specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound’ (Broom, p. 355). If the objectives are constructed according to this standard, this evaluation aspect is built into your plan. When you look at performance against the objective, it allows you a measure of effectiveness. Objectives are covered in detail in the “Plan” portion of Communication Planning instruction.

Now let’s take a look at the first part of that process, preparation evaluation.
Preparation Evaluation

This looks at the quality and adequacy of the information used to develop the communication, the strategy and tactics. There are three areas to consider in the preparation phase:

**Information Base** -- This deals with determining the adequacy of the background information used to develop the plan. For example: Were key publics missed in the original determination of selecting the publics? Were assumptions made early in the process that were later corrected?

**Communication Plan Content** -- This looks at the organization and appropriateness of the plan’s messages and the event’s content. This is done before implementation, and it is a critical review of what is being said and what is being done. Often ‘pretesting’ the content of specific products or messages can tell you how the audience responds.

**Presentation Quality** -- Assessing the technical and production values of messages is the final step of preparation evaluation. Presentation quality looks at technical aspects like ‘readability’ for written copy and ‘listenability’ for broadcast messages. Essentially this category is considering the ‘packaging’ of the communication effort materials.

*Photo courtesy of www.building360feedback.com*
Implementation Evaluation

The implementation evaluation typically involves counting the publications printed, number of news releases distributed, and potential and attentive audiences. Do not mistake this portion with measures of impact. The distribution phase focuses on numbers, e.g. numbers of releases, stories, PSAs, speeches, and other communication products that were produced and distributed.

Placement of these communication products is an important aspect to evaluate too. If the target audiences are not exposed to the messages, there is little hope for an effect. The materials must be available to the intended publics. For example: A news article is more likely to be read if it appears above the fold on the front page rather than on page 14, or a public service announcement that airs at 8:30 p.m. instead of 3:30 a.m.

Potential audience considers the number of people potentially exposed to a communication effort message.

Attentive audience is the number of people who pay attention to the message.

You received a content analysis overview in one of your earlier lectures. Now let’s look at content analysis as an evaluation tool.
Content Analysis

Content analysis helps us understand what's being reported and can also help us make recommendations. As you see below an example of content analysis using a Media Tracking Form for the Walter Reed Medical Center Repairs.

Green: 20+  Yellow: 11-19  Red: 10 and under

Notes for RED scores:
A. Corrective memo sent to reporter
B. Corrective memo sent to reporter

Tone Score
Assign one:
- Positive = 3
- Neutral = 0
- Negative = -3

Prominence Score
Assign one:
- National media outlet = 3
- Regional media outlet = 2
- Local media outlet = 1

Placement Score
Assign one:
- Front page, front section = 10
- Middle page, front section = 8
- Front page, later section = 6
- Middle page, later section = 4
- Radio drive time = 10

Message Analysis Score
Assign one:
- Message/spokesperson featured in first quarter of story = 10
- Featured in top half of story = 8
- Featured in last quarter of story = 6
- Not featured at all = 4

Appendix D
Media Tracking Form
Notional Sample Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Reporter</th>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Message Analysis</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20167</td>
<td>Admin issues cited at Walter Reed</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Review at Walter Reed is Ordered</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Army's VP Approves Repairs Budget</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Gates Orders Review of Walter Reed</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>DOD-Sanctioned Promotions at Walter Reed</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>President Signs Bill for Army Housing</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>IRS Army Pacific auditor's report shows top level of fraud</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Sermons, former Negropeski Foundation at Army's Trip</td>
<td>Steve Case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Main Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As of: Feb 27, 2007

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Content Analysis (continued)

In this example you can see the headings are date, title/reporter placement, outlet, tone placement, prominence, message analysis and total. As you can see on page D2 the scoring system for each area and the final totals and what they mean.

Note that beyond the numbers, colors, and notes in the 'Total' column; the take-away from this may help the PAO's recommendation about future engagements and resource allocation. Perhaps a PA recommendation would be to invite a reporter to meet with the commander to help him understand what is being done to address the issue could come from this analysis.

Keep in mind that content analysis is indicating only what is being reported, not whether or not the audience learned or believed any specific message content.

Now let’s move on to impact evaluation.
Impact Evaluation

Impact evaluation documents the extent to which the outcomes spelled out in the objectives for each target public and the overall communication goal were achieved. The criteria used with impact evaluation identifies both the nature and magnitude of changes in knowledge, predisposition, and/or behaviors of internal and external publics.
Incorporating Evaluation Results

After you have interpreted data based on reliable methods, public affairs professionals can make objective decisions and recommendations. There can be other factors when you evaluate your impact, and they may dictate whether your communication efforts were successful. Faulty theory, program errors during implementation, and weak evaluation methods can lead to mistaken evaluation results.

Photo courtesy of www.wdp-usa.org
Instructions: From the information in this lesson, you should be able to answer the following questions.

Q: The process of evaluating communication efforts is focused on ________________ and measuring impact.

Q: (True/False) Impact cannot be assumed simply because information was disseminated to audiences.

Q: When incorporating evaluation results, you may interpret data and make objective decisions and recommendations to your commander.

Q: When evaluating implementation, we consider distribution, placement, and __________.
Conclusion

After you have interpreted data based on reliable methods, you can make objective decisions and recommendations. There are many factors to consider when you evaluate your plan and they may dictate whether your communication efforts were successful.

We've spent a lot of time going through how to build a thorough communication plan. Research, planning, and implementing various communication activities should be evaluated by objectively considering the preparation, implementation, and impact. If you go to great lengths to plan out a communication effort, you have an obligation to determine if the effort made a difference.
References and Additional Resources
