

A VISUAL PATHWAY

Approaches and challenges inherent in the evaluation of International and Non Governmental Organisations' Communications Campaigns. A step-by-step manual for efficient evaluation and the golden rule of involving partners.

by Glenn O'Neil

International organisations (IOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs) increasingly use communication methods to achieve their goals; placing new priorities on government agendas, influencing attitudes and behaviours of publics on issues, or building relationships with private and public partners. As more budgets and resources are allocated to communications, accountability is more important. Managers and donors will look to communicators for answers about 'what it is all worth'. Therefore, communicators must find efficient and economical ways to show the impact of their communication campaigns and activities. Communicators in IOs/ NGOs essentially focus on two main tasks:

Managing institutional communications by supporting their organisations with general image, visibility and other basic communications tasks and - running communication campaigns, usually on specific issues or themes. The first task should not be underestimated. Many communicators are busy today supporting the many staff and programmes by transforming technical information into consumable content. The experience of this author is that these mainly technical tasks overwhelm many communicators, distracting them from more essential strategic matters such as research and evaluation.

SPECIFIC & MEASURABLE CAMPAIGNS Most communication campaigns aim to change individual attitudes and behaviours, mobilise public and decision-maker support for policy change, or a combination of both. The first and fundamental step in evaluating a campaign is to ensure that its objectives are specific and measurable. For example, in considering a campaign to introduce more environmentally-friendly behaviour amongst citi-

zens, objectives should be precise, not vague. Vague: "In 2007, ensure that citizens adopt environmentally-friendly behaviour". Precise: "In 2007, have 40 per cent of citizens carry out at least one environmentally-friendly behaviour, such as using recyclable paper, cycling to work, reducing their household water consumption or purchasing a hybrid car". It is then possible to evaluate if a campaign was successful or not by easily identifying indicators that can be measured (for example, by asking the target audience if they have undertaken one of the environmentally-friendly actions).

WHAT AND HOW TO EVALUATE Most communicators focus on evaluating output: measuring message distribution or communication performance (e.g. number of press releases issued or events held). Although this can be useful initial feedback it is far more important to measure outcomes: did communication activities result in any change in opinion, attitude and/or behaviour amongst targeted audiences or contribute to changes in policy, practices and activities of the private and public sectors? A visual representation of the pathway between

EXAMPLE

**Fictional Campaign
Simplified Evaluation Map****Organisational Goal**

Fight corruption globally in the health sector.

**Campaign Objective**

By 2008, raise awareness globally of corruption in medical facilities amongst members, partners and health staff; governments take a stand on the issue.

**Communication Objectives**

By end 2008, at least 50 per cent of members, partners and health staff in 20 key countries are aware of the issue of corruption in medical facilities and at least ten Health Ministries publicly take a stand to combat corruption in medical facilities.

**Communication Activities**

- Create website on corruption issues.
- Hold five press conferences in key regions.
- Create training packs for members/partners.
- Establish coalition with peak bodies.
- Conduct ten meetings with health ministries.

**Evaluation Indicator**

Visibility: Number of items published in media. Knowledge (awareness): level of awareness about corruption amongst members, partners and health staff. Behaviour (individual): Number of actions taken by members and partners to endorse campaign. Behaviour (government): Number of governments that publicly take a stand to combat corruption.

**Evaluation Methods**

Visibility: media monitoring of relevant media. Knowledge: survey with members, partners and health officials of representative sample of 20 key countries. Behaviour: tracking mechanism to record number of members who sign up for the campaign and take website actions, number of partners that endorse & use campaign material. Behaviour: tracking mechanism to record number of government public statements on corruption.

communication activities, the intended outputs, outcomes and impact can assist communicators in defining the evaluation approach to take. Once it is clear 'what' is to be evaluated, it is essential to identify the tools and methods to be used to carry out the evaluation. This choice depends on various factors including the type of activities to be evaluated, the make-up of the target public and the resources available. Some of these methods may be familiar to you as they are commonly implemented in market research and social sciences in general. These methods are not only useful for evaluating a campaign once it is over or during an annual review, but also for monitoring the progress towards achieving objectives during a campaign,

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particularly media monitoring, web analytics and tracking mechanisms. The latter is a way of following systematically when indicators are met: how many people sign a petition, refer a web page to a friend or number of governments that introduce a new policy.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE Many of you are probably thinking now, “That’s very good in theory – but how does it work in practice?” Don’t worry; I’ve heard this many times from experienced communicators! Let’s take a practical example from a communications campaign that would be typically run by an IO/NGO. A health NGO decides to launch an ambitious campaign to fight global corruption. Bearing in mind that communication campaigns should be time-bound and aim to achieve specific goals, the team convince their organisation to focus on corruption in medical facilities and raise awareness amongst its partners, members and health staff globally. Secondly, they seek to push governments to take a public stand on the issue. Although the campaign is global, emphasis is put on 20 key countries. Precise objectives are developed for each of these target publics and activities planned and implemented: a web site on the issue, press conferences and events, training packs for partners and members, a coalition is established with peak bodies for health workers, high-level meetings are arranged with select Health Ministry officials. At the same time, evaluation indicators and methods are determined to match the



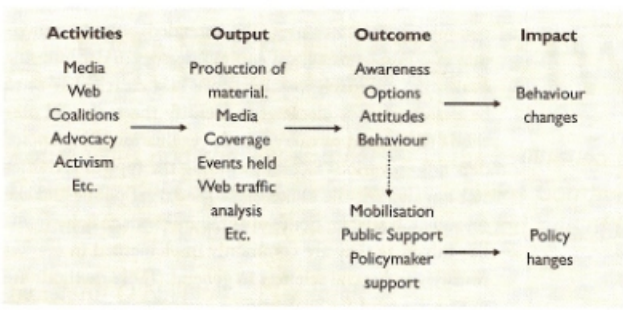


Figure 1 | Visual pathway of evaluation

set objectives, with some methods put in operation immediately to monitor the progress of the campaign. Once the main campaign activities are complete, an evaluation using the selected methods and indicators is undertaken by the communication team. From this evaluation, the NGO gauges how successful or not its campaign has been and draws lessons for future campaigns and activities. This fictional campaign is mapped out in the adjacent chart which illustrates the path from broad goals to evaluation indicators.

Glenn O'Neil

Lecturer International
University in Geneva



Glenn O'Neil teaches research & communications courses at the International University in Geneva. Specialised in the fields of communications, training & public education, he leads evaluation projects for international organisations, NGOs & companies. In the decade prior, he managed communications field programmes for the International Red Cross in Africa, Asia & Eastern Europe.

CHALLENGES These questions show the intersection between theory and the complex world we work and communicate in. Talking with communicators from IOs/NGOs, I have seen that many come across these issues when struggling with evaluation. I offer some responses, as follows:

Global challenge: considering evaluation for campaigns launched on a global scale can be overwhelming at first but an evaluation should not set out to measure every action – a representative selection of countries, target publics and/or activities would have to be made. (as seen in the fictional campaign).
Proof challenge: People

often want to see solid “proof” that communication campaigns were the cause of the results seen. However, it is rarely possible to show direct “proof”. Evaluation can help provide evidence that a campaign contributed to a change but rarely solid “proof”. Press challenge: Unfortunately, many people often judge the success of a campaign by media visibility, and even more so, by the media that they consult themselves. Although coverage in the media can be important for some public campaigns, increasingly campaigns use person-to-person communications, coalition-building and lobbying, which renders media coverage irrelevant/insignificant as a measure.

Effectiveness challenge: Evaluation can look at the different communication activities/channels used assessing which were most effective with a given public e.g. measuring the reach of a channel by asking certain publics how they learned about the campaign. **Behaviour challenge:** many evaluations rely on “self-reporting” for measuring changes to individual behaviours. This is where, in surveys/interviews, publics describe what actions they have or have not taken. On non-sensitive issues most people will usually tell the truth. Many individual behaviours desired by campaigns can be observed directly, such as people signing petitions, linking their blogs to a web page or making donations. IOs/NGOs face increased demands from managers and donors to evaluate across-the-board (the number of monitoring and evaluation units sprouting up in these organisations is a clear sign of this). The time has also come for communicators to resist only “doing” but to ask the question “What are we trying to achieve – and how can we measure it?”