The 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model to connect public relations and corporate communication to organisation outcomes

Jim Macnamara

University of Technology Sydney

Abstract

Public relations and communication academics have been advocating evaluation for more than 30 years, but studies show that rigorous evaluation is still under-developed and under-utilised. When evaluation is done, it continues to be largely focused 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. Most importantly of all, public relations/communication outcomes are rarely causally linked to overarching organisation outcomes. In the current global discussion of standards for public relations evaluation, fresh attention has been turned to supporting organisation outcomes, but public relations evaluation literature still does not have much to say about how this can be done. This conceptual paper seeks to make a contribution to this problematic gap in measurement and evaluation literature by presenting a customised application of a logic model approach to planning and reporting that has been successful in the case study reported and which potentially can make a useful contribution to bridging the gap between communication outcomes and organisation and business outcomes.

The measurement and evaluation debate

Much has been written about measurement and evaluation of public relations and corporate communication in the 30 years since Jim Grunig uttered what Watson and Noble (2007) describe as his cri de coeur about lack of evaluation. Grunig famously lamented that, "just as everyone is against sin, so most public relations people I talk to are for evaluation. People keep on sinning, however, and public relations people continue not to do evaluation research" (Grunig, 1983, p. 28).

The foundational theories and history of public relations measurement and evaluation are well documented and will not be repeated here. Excellent texts include the groundbreaking, but unfortunately un-prophetically titled book *Using research in public relations: Applications to program management* by Broom and Dozier (1990), *Primer of public relations research* (Stacks, 2002, 2011), *Evaluating public relations: A best practice guide to public relations planning, research and evaluation* (Watson & Noble, 2007, 2014), *Public relations metrics: Research and evaluation* (van Ruler, Verčič & Verčič, 2008) and *A practitioner's guide to public relations research, measurement and evaluation* by Stacks and Michaelson (2010). In addition, background and context are provided in numerous book chapters, journal articles and research reports that have been published by scholars and industry leaders such as Jim Grunig, Donald Wright and Michelle Hinson, Ansgar Zerfass, Anne Gregory, Walter Lindenmann, David Geddes, Bruce Jeffries-Fox, Katie Paine, Angela Jeffrey, Marianne Eisenmann and Mark Weiner, as well as this author and others.

Watson (2012a) has provided an insightful, if concerning, historical summary of the long and winding road towards measurement and evaluation of public relations and corporate communication. It is concerning because of the paucity of major progress in measurement and evaluation, particularly in relation to *outcomes* – with much focus placed on measuring *outputs* such as media publicity. For example, as

Macnamara, J. (2014). The 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model to connect public relations and corporate communication to organisation outcomes. *PRism 11*(1): http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html

recently as 2009, counting of press clippings was the most used public relations measurement method and the third most-used method was Advertising Value Equivalents (AVEs) to measure editorial publicity, employed by 35% of practitioners at that time (Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, Daniels, & Zerfass, 2009), but widely regarded as invalid and spurious in most applications (Macnamara, 2000, 2012) and condemned in the Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles (Institute for Public Relations, 2010).

Nevertheless, the importance of measuring outcomes is now strongly reflected in public relations evaluation models, including the PII model (Broom, 2009; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985), the Pyramid Model of PR Research (Macnamara, 2002, 2005, 2012) and the Unified model (Watson & Noble, 2007), and explicitly stated in the Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles adopted in 2010 at the second European Summit on Measurement by more than 200 delegates from 33 countries (Institute for Public Relations, 2010).

Recent milestones

Following the Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles, a renewed focus has been placed on measurement and evaluation and a number of significant initiatives have been launched to try to finally 'crack the code' for calculating the value of public relations and corporate communication. In 2011, the Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards was established by 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 public relations and corporate communication. Subsequently, in early 2012, the Social Media Measurement Standards Conclave (#SMMStandards Conclave for short) was formed, which extended the standards push to include social media and to global collaboration involving 11 professional bodies worldwide and eight major companies representing 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, McDonald's, Procter & Gamble, SAS, Southwest Airlines and Thomson Reuters (Marklein & Paine, 2012).

In addition to the extensive collaboration by public relations and communication organisations worldwide, the Coalition and the Conclave have worked in close consultation with the Media Ratings Council (MRC); the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB); the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA); the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the Web Analytics Association (WAA). This has been an important step to try to achieve consistency in terminology and metrics across the corporate and marketing communication field, which will reduce confusion and facilitate evaluation of integrated communication and comparative studies.

The first draft standards documents were released in 2012, including *Proposed interim standards for metrics in traditional media analysis* (Eisenmann et al., 2012), the *Sources and methods transparency table* (SMMStandards, 2012a) and *Social media standard definitions for reach and impressions* (SMMStandards, 2012b). While these continued the focus on media evaluation, the "march to standards" (Marklein & Paine, 2012) is continuing through six stages, designed to culminate in publication of standardised terms and guidelines for measurement and evaluation of outtakes and outcomes including

engagement, *influence*, *impact* and *value* (Marklein & Paine, 2012; Paine, 2012).

The Holy Grail of evaluation

In addition to calling for a focus on outcomes rather than outputs, the Barcelona Principles go further and explicitly state that: "the effect on business results should be measured where possible" (Principle 3). This should be read broadly as including contribution to achievement of organisational goals and objectives, as well as those of businesses, noting that public relations and corporate communication are deployed by many government and non-profit organisations. An ability to connect public relations and corporate communication activities to business and organisational outcomes has been an aspiration of many practitioners and a claim of some evaluation service providers for some time (e.g. CARMA International, n.d.; Weiner, 2009).

However, academic and professional public relations literature still does not have much to say about how this can be done. For instance, a search of articles published in PR Week between 1995 and 2010 using a range of keywords 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 articles in the 15-year period (Smith, 2010, paras 1–4). Among research papers specifically discussing public relations evaluation on the websites of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) and the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), only a handful are focused on organisation and business outcomes, such as those by Jeffrey, Michaelson and Stacks (2007) on *Exploring the link between share of media coverage and business outcomes* and Paine, Draper and Jeffrey (2008) on *Using public relations research to drive business results*. While useful contributions, it is significant that these papers were published in 2007 and 2008 respectively, with no papers on this topic in the past five years. Also, both papers reflect a narrow focus on trying to demonstrate the effects of media publicity, which has been a preoccupation of the field, rather than broader applications of public relations and corporate communication.

The challenge to link public relations activities and outcomes to organisation 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 organisation and business outcomes. First, they are macro-level, usually quite a way downstream from day-to-day public relations 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, public relations and corporate communication activities are often micro-level, such as pre-launch publicity to support sales, producing an information kit on the organisation, arranging a tour of facilities for journalists and analysts, writing speeches, and so on. Second, organisation and business outcomes are often long-term and may not be evident for some time after public relations activities have been conducted. Third, organisation 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 public relations and corporate communication played a part can be very difficult, particularly noting that correlation does not equate to causation. As a proverb notes, success has many fathers and mothers, but failure is an orphan[1]. When ultimate outcomes are achieved, many hands go up to claim credit, including those of the advertising agency, the marketing department and C-suite executives eager to show that they earned their bonuses.

Some CEOs and senior managers intuitively understand that public relations and corporate communication contribute value to their organisation and this is probably why the field has been able to grow without developing and systematically deploying rigorous evaluation methodology and systems. Practitioners and consultancies with such bosses are fortunate in one sense – albeit a lack of evaluation is not usually considered good management. In an era of increasing accountability and widespread use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), benchmarking, and performance reporting, demonstration of outcomes rather than reporting outputs is increasingly expected. In her critical assessment of the public relations field, L'Etang noted that, "evaluation has become and remains something of a 'Holy Grail' for public relations" (2008, p. 26). In particular, it is the final step of evaluation – demonstrating that public relations and corporate communication outcomes are positively connected to organisation and business outcomes – that lies at the end of the industry's long quest.

For example, in a survey of 2,200 practitioners across Europe conducted by Zerfass Verčič, Verhoeven, Moreno, & Tench (2012), 75 per cent identified inability "to prove the impact of communication activities on organisational goals" as a "major barrier to further professionalisation". The only barrier rated more highly was "a lack of understanding of communication practice within the top management" (84%) and most industry leaders agree that this is largely caused by lack of reliable and credible evaluation (p. 36).

One approach advocated as a high-level business outcome measure is to try to calculate the Return on Investment (ROI) of public relations and corporate communication. However, an extensive international study by Watson and Zerfass (2011) reported three problems in applying this concept. First, ROI is 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 public relations and corporate communication. Furthermore, public relations and corporate communication practitioners usually miscalculate ROI by comparing returns to operating expenditure (*opex*) without including capital expenditure (*capex*). Third, as Watson (2012b) noted in an online discussion, many public relations and corporate communication activities do not seek or have a financial return (e.g., government and non-profit public relations). Watson and Zerfass (2011) recommended that practitioners "refrain from using the term in order to keep their vocabulary compatible" with the management and business world (p. 11). Also, progress reports on the development of international standards for measurement and evaluation have agreed that ROI does not offer a convincing metric for reporting the value of public relations and corporate communication (Marklein & Paine, 2012; Paine, 2012).

Therefore, the search goes on for measurement and evaluation methods, tools or strategies that can validly and reliably connect public relations and corporate communication to organisational and business outcomes.

Methodology

The following discussion is presented as a conceptual paper based on critical analysis using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1997). While grounded theory is sometimes deployed as a 'rhetoric of justification' to give small sample qualitative analysis a methodological stamp of approval, this analysis intentionally steps outside traditional research approaches, as 30 to 40 years of traditional empirical research has not resolved the impasse evident in public relations evaluation. A substantial gap between theory and practice remains.

Grounded theory refers to inductive analysis conducted in an iterative process of collecting data and undertaking analysis in a series of stages, rather than the traditional research approach of collecting all data and then undertaking analysis. Grounded theory is also antithetical to traditional 'scientific' research in that it does not begin with a hypothesis, but

rather explores a wide range of data (quantitative and qualitative) and considers theories and practice to ask, "What's going on?" in a particular situation.

The logic model approach outlined here was trialled in three organisations: a medium size company undergoing expansion, a large national government agency, and a large corporation. Because of space limitations, this analysis is based primarily on one detailed case study in which a logic model approach was developed and tested with public relations/communication staff and senior management to whom they reported. The case study involved a number of face-to-face discussions, 'whiteboarding' to collaboratively develop a logic model customised to the organisation, and post-development review of its effectiveness. In total, development and review involved three meetings totalling 10 hours of discussion.

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 a period of time (Julian, 1997; McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999; Rush & Ogbourne, 1991). Milstein and Chapel (2014) summarise that logic models describe and visually illustrate "the logic of how change happens" (para. 5). As Milstein and Chapel note, the term 'logic' has many definitions and is often associated with the rational 'scientific method'. However, they point out that logic models draw on "another meaning that lies closer to the heart of community change – the logic of how things work" (paras 6–7). In particular, they note that logic in the context of logic models refers to "the relationship between elements and between an element and the whole" (para. 8).

In this sense, logic models have a direct application to public relations 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 causal relationships. 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 shows the similarity of language used in both public relations evaluation and logic models, such as inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact.

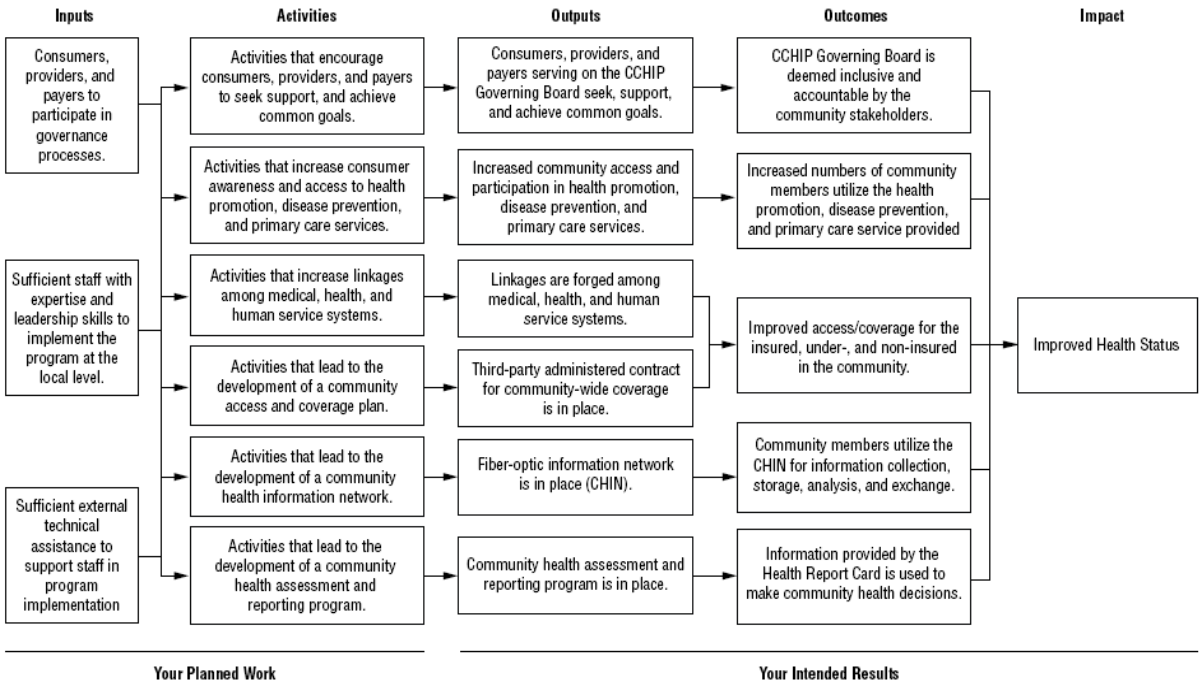

Figure 1. Example of an outcome orientated logic model from the Calhoun County Health Improvement Program (Kellogg Foundation, 2004)

A humanist metaphor and reverse engineered development

The logic model outlined here for evaluating public relations 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 visualise and conceptualise in tangible, as well as in abstract ways. Second, it draws on a deep and rich cultural heritage – the vital connections of bones in the human body that have been discussed and celebrated in song, prayer, and rhymes for centuries. For example, the following words to an old gospel song sung by 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[2].

Much scholarly literature makes no place for such simple analogies and metaphors. However, learning and education literature shows the powerful effect of metaphors, similes, and figurative language as illustrational and instructional tools (e.g., Dagher, 1995; Gibbs, 1994). Narrative theory further attests to the power of human story telling (Fisher, 1995).

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 are difficult for management to understand and require time to explain – the latter being an ingredient that is in short supply 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 public relations work),

but are too detailed for senior management. Furthermore, the grounded humanistic nature of the model creates a degree of empathy and emotional engagement in planning discussions, as will be shown.

The second significant adaptation of the normal logic model is that the process of developing it is reversed. Proponents of logic models note that reverse logic can be applied in developing logic models. As Milstein and Chapel (2014) say: "This approach begins with the end in mind. It starts with a clearly identified value, a change that you and your colleagues would definitely like to see occur, and asks a series of 'but how?' questions" (para. 45).

Furthermore, while traditional logic models are developed by the operational participants in the process (not senior management), who identify the desired outcome usually taken from a document such as a strategic plan and then identify and record each step and element required to reach the desired outcome from first to last, a vital part of the success of the logic model proposed here is working backwards from the ultimate outcomes required at the top (head) of the organisation. In the language of the 'toe bone to the head bone' metaphor, this process identifies 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 the goals of the corporate body (business, organisation or department)[3].

These high-level outcomes should not be assumed or even based on published documents such as business or strategic plans. There are often confidential matters, hidden agendas and dynamic plans that are important to senior management, as will be demonstrated in the case study analysed. The key to developing a relevant, strategically significant logic model is involving the senior management to which public relations/corporate communication reports in a collaborative planning session, ideally led by a facilitator.

The humanistic logic model proposed is not intended to infantilise the process. It is useful and practical because, in reality, many public relations and corporate communication activities equate to ribs, legs, feet or even toes of a corporate/organisational body. That is not said to denigrate public relations and corporate communication. The logic of the model is to identify each element required for success and its connectedness to other parts of the organisation. 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).

A benefit of this humanistic version of a logic model is that the metaphor can be used to gain emotional buy-in by senior management – a factor often not considered in a world dominated by quantitative research and rational, reasoned planning (Newman & Benz, 1998; L'Etang, 2008, pp. 12, 249). For instance, in explaining the model during the case study reported, the facilitator 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 organisation, but we all know what happens when we have a broken toe". The faces of management executives scrunched up in remembered pain and some voluntarily made 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. When the facilitator of one planning session asked "How well can the body run if it doesn't have feet?" one senior executive replied: "Argh, I broke my right ankle once. It put me in a wheelchair for a week

and on crutches for a month". The 'toe bone to the foot bone to the leg bone, etc.' model creates deep understanding of the interconnectedness and dependencies of various elements and functions in a corporate as well as a human body and gains both emotional and rational/cognitive buy-in from senior management.

Once senior management becomes familiar with the process, other more business-orientated terms such as 'milestones', 'stepping stones', 'underpinning foundations' or what can be called 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.

Applying the 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model

At a practical level, it can be difficult to schedule time with senior management for a planning process such as called for here. That was certainly the experience in the case study reported. But it is vital to have access to the 'dominant coalition', as noted in PR Excellence theory (L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Dozier, 2002) and in many widely used textbooks and manuals on public relations and corporate communication management. Traditional planning sessions and models, including traditional logic models, are usually focused on chronology, coordination and systemisation at an operational level. While they work well as planning tools for those involved operationally, senior management has no buy-in to the model and often senior management does not understand many of the elements required for success, or why they are required. The traditional logic model or public relations plan belongs to the public relations or corporate communication team – it is a reflection of their processes and priorities. Senior managers are typically focused on ultimate outcomes and, when they see their ultimate goals achieved, they often do not recognise many of the elements and connections that contributed. Therefore, there is a disconnection created from the outset in many public relations and corporate communication plans that this iterative collaboratively developed model can overcome.

A strategic planning meeting to build a 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model is most-productive if, in addition to the public relations/corporate communication team, it is be attended by the CEO and several or all of the C-suite executives. Each will have a contribution to make – and each will take away new insights. While sometimes difficult to arrange, such a meeting is usually required only once a year or even once every two years.

When practitioners have access to senior management, it is vital that 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 organisation or business outcomes. A facilitator can help ensure the right questions are asked and keep discussion on track. For example, in the case study the following questions were used as discussion openers.

Q. What are the most important outcomes you want for the organisation in the next year?

Q. If there was only one thing that you could achieve in the organisation in the next year or so, what would that be?

Q. What are the top three outcomes that you want the organisation to achieve, in order of priority?

In the least, management will reiterate the key strategic objectives and/or goals of the organisation that the public relations/communication staff or consultants already know from business plans or briefings. If that is the case, practitioners can be sure that they are the real objectives. But, if management simply quotes the organisation's strategic plan, it is advisable to be persistent and ask: 'Is there anything else?' 'Is there anything you want or need to happen that is *not* in the plan?' The case study revealed the value of such probing. In response to such questioning, the CEO of an $80 million a year turnover privately owned company suddenly shut his office door, 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."

This changed everything. A typical public relations strategy was likely to propose a publicity blitz on the company's plans for a new high-tech office building and bring in journalists for a series of CEO interviews. 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 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? That can be probed in 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?

In such interactive planning sessions, the answers may be provided by senior management, or worked out iteratively in discussion. In the case of the business preparing for a private equity sale, it is a fairly safe bet that the owners will want business continuity. They do not need fast growth, because they already have buyers. They do not need to cut 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 (i.e., no major client losses and no sudden staff turnover), noting that the latter could threaten the former. Also, if the buyers want to retain the CEO and his team (it was a male CEO in this case), which they are likely to do (private equity firms are 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 a logic model of public relations/communication, it is useful to record each of the major organisation outcomes on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper written inside boxes using brief keyword descriptions or simply numbered, such as X1, X2. 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?

OR

Q. If X is the neck or part of the backbone for this deal, what are the ribs and what are the legs that support them? And so on.

Based on the new information provided in the previous example, a public relations team in the mid-size private company should give high priority to supporting sales and client service staff. Activities could include a customer e-newsletter, equipping sales staff 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 human relations to improve employee communication and maximise morale and loyalty, such as a monthly employee award scheme and an online wiki or discussion site (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 cocktail events for journalists. Media relations and publicity are *not* the central functions of effective public relations 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.

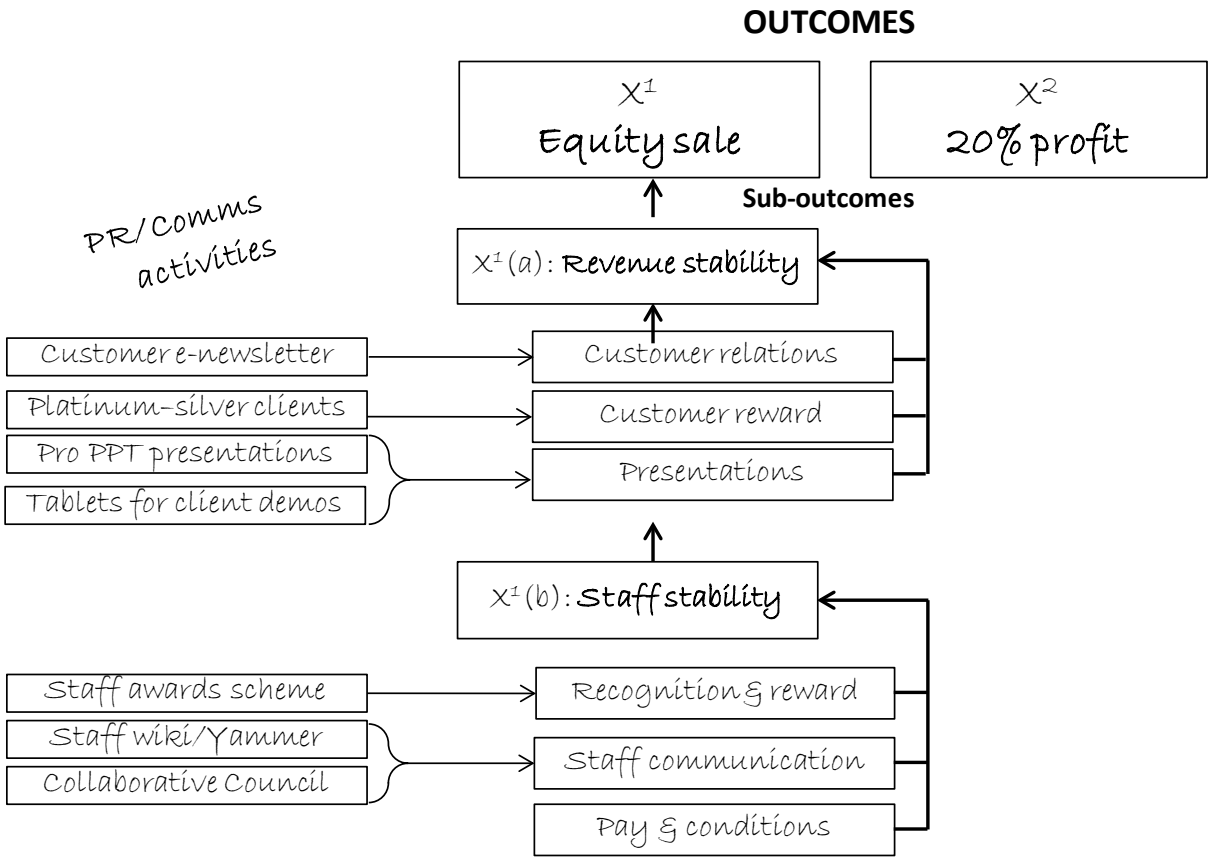

Figure 2. Early stages of a sample 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model for public relations and corporate communication.

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:

- The organisation'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 are 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, outtakes and outcomes that are discussed in most evaluation models. Not all sub-outcomes, or underpinning foundations or 'stepping stones' will be able to be delivered by public relations and corporate communication, but the model should identify those that can be;
- The public relations and corporate communication activities proposed are listed alongside each key element in the model, showing what they connect to and support;
- The model shows that each activity 'flows' into a fundamental part of the business process of the organisation and, ultimately, all the way to the overall organisation or business outcomes (see Figures 2 and 3).

To achieve deep thinking in these discussions and identify all key milestones, stepping stones, underpinning foundations or sub-outcomes, facilitators should ask prompted questions as well as open-ended questions. For instance, to prompt senior executives, questions can include:

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 lure away our top sales people?

Q. Is our reputation with major clients an important factor in closing this deal?

In response to such questions, senior management in the case study readily acknowledged that some things are necessary elements for success. If they say employee morale is important, for instance, the next step is to consider how public relations/corporate communication can contribute to that sub-outcome. If they say some things are not important, practitioners either have to convince management that they are, or strike them off their activity list because no benefit or value will be perceived. Sometimes senior management will say they don't know, as occurred in this case study when the marketing director acknowledged: "you know, we haven't really asked our sales guys whether they have what they need to do the job". In this case, the public relations team has 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 test ideas. For instance, senior management could be asked "would it help 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 public relations and corporate communication, but it only has value if it is applied in a context that relates to achieving organisation or business outcomes.

A completed logic model for the major corporation involved in trials of this approach is shown as Figure 3 to illustrate a more sophisticated communication logic model. The CEO and the head of corporate communication agreed after building this model collaboratively that their entire corporate and marketing public relations plan was summarised in the single page and the only additional documents requested were a budget and a timeline. Senior management understood where each public relations and corporate communication activity fitted and why it was being done. 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 organisation operated and non-government organisations (NGOs) which closely monitored the activities of the organisation. 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 orders.

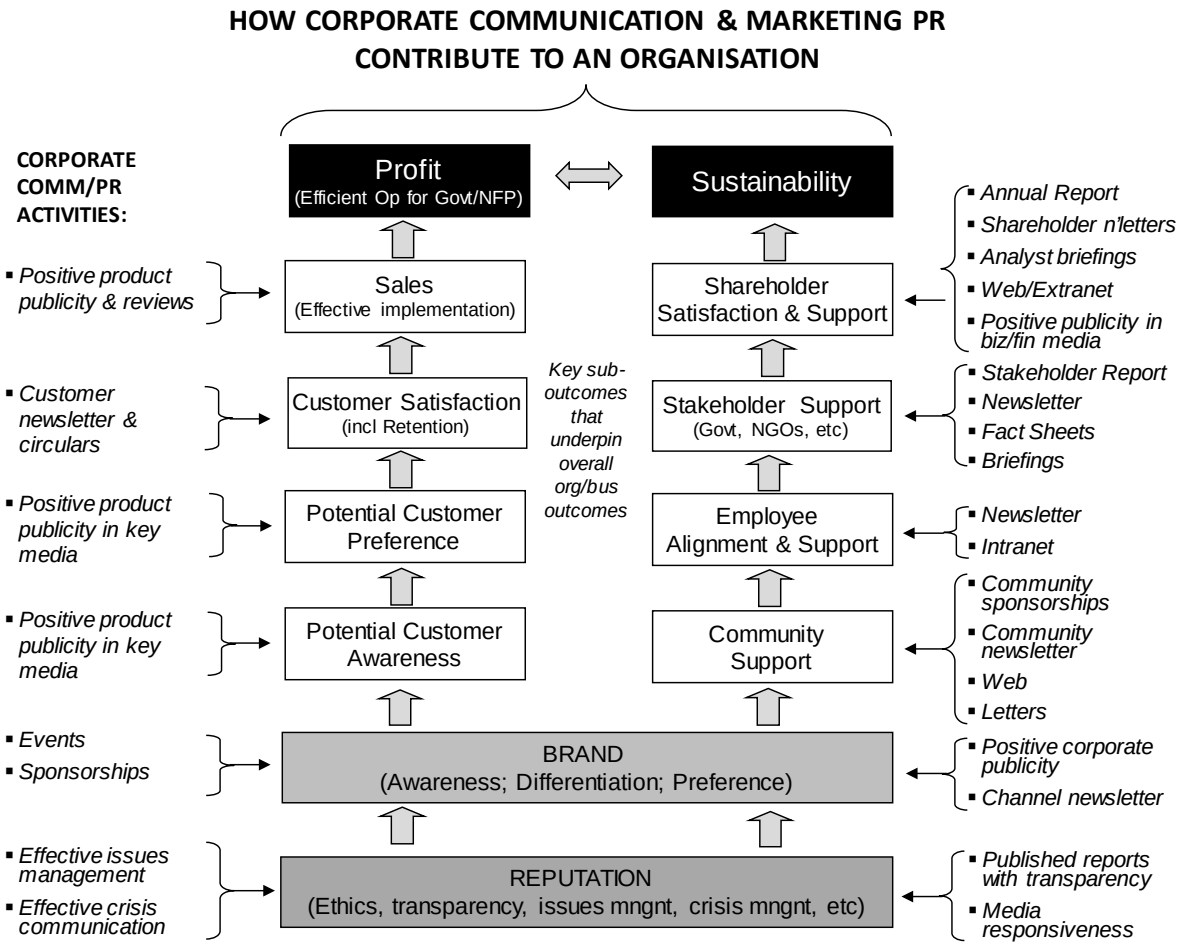

Figure 3. A sample 'toe bone to the head bone' logic model for public relations and corporate communication in a major corporation.

Organisation vs. stakeholder and societal outcomes

A qualification that needs to be made is that, while the focus of this article has been on organisational objectives and outcomes without discussion of the interests of stakeholders and society, a narrow organisation-centric approach is not advocated or supported. The approach taken here has been to address the specific research finding that public relations has been mostly unable to demonstrate its impact on organisational objectives and outcomes (e.g., Zerfass et al., 2012). Logic models can also be used to illustrate the impact and effects of public relations activities on stakeholders, communities, and society.

Conclusions

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 public relations and corporate communication as part of an ecosystem.

In such a system, public relations 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 organisation, 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. Their value derives from that link.

This model can be implemented using business language if preferred. The metaphor of the 'toe bone connected to the foot bone to the leg bone' and so on is only employed to emphasise the interconnection and interdependency of the key elements in the model and to deploy a simple metaphor and narrative to 'tell the story' of the contribution of public relations and corporate communication. Once the logic of the model is established, its elements can be identified as milestones, stepping stones or sub-outcomes. Such a graduated interconnected approach is necessary because not every public relations and corporate communication activity will directly connect to the macro-level outcomes of an organisation or business – and nor does the work of the accounts department, the IT department or even that of some senior executives. That does not mean that activities undertaken have no value. But every activity must link to achievement of some milestone, stepping stone or sub-outcome that is connected to the ultimate outcomes of the organisation 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.

References

Broom, G. (2009). *Cutlip & Center's effective public relations* (10th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Broom G., & Dozier, D. (1990). *Using research in public relations: Applications to program management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

CARMA International. (n.d.). Link to organisational outcomes using CARMA Connect. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.carma.com/carma-connect/

Cutlip, M., Center, A., & Broom, G. (1985). *Effective public relations* (6th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Dagher, Z. (1995). Review of studies on the effectiveness of instructional analogies in science education. *Science Education, 79*(3), 295–312.

Eisenmann, M., Geddes, D., Paine, K., Pestana, R., Walton, F., & Weiner, M. (2012). *Proposed interim standards for metrics in traditional media analysis*. Gainesville, FL: Institute for Public Relations. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/proposed-interim-standards-for-metrics-in-traditional-media-analysis

Fisher, W. (1995). Narration, knowledge, and the possibility of wisdom. In R. Goodman & W. Fisher (Eds.), *Rethinking knowledge: Reflections across the disciplines* (pp. 169–192). New York, NY: State University of New York Press Suny Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences.

Gibbs, R. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language and understanding*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Grunig, J. (1983). Basic research provides knowledge that makes evaluation possible. *Public Relations Quarterly, 28*(3), 28–32.

Grunig, L., Grunig J., & Dozier D. (2002). *Excellent organisations and effective organisations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Institute for Public Relations. (2010). Barcelona declaration of measurement principles. Gainesville, FL. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/barcelona-declaration-of-measurement-principles

Jeffrey, A., Michalson, D., & Stacks, D. (2007). Exploring the link between share of media coverage and business outcomes. Gainesville, FL: Institute for Public Relations. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/MediaCoverageAndVolume.pdf

Julian, D. (1997). The utilisation of the logic model as a system level planning and

evaluation device. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 20*(3), 251–257.

Kellogg Foundation. (2004). *Logic model development guide*. Battle Creek, MI. Retrieved from http://www.epa.gov/evaluate/pdf/eval-guides/logic-model-development-guide.pdf

L'Etang, J. (2008). *Public relations: Concepts, practice and critique*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Macnamara, J. (2000). The 'ad value' of PR. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, 2*(1), 99–103.

Macnamara, J. (2002). Research and evaluation. In C. Tymson & P. Lazar, *The New Australian and New Zealand Public Relations Manual* (21st Century ed., pp. 100–134). Sydney, NSW: Tymson Communications.

Macnamara, J. (2005). *Jim Macnamara's public relations handbook* (5th ed.). Sydney, NSW: Archipelago Press.

Macnamara, J. (2012). *Public relations theories, practices, critiques*. Sydney, NSW: Pearson.

McLaughlin, J. A. and J. B. Jordan (1999). Logic models: a tool for telling your program's performance story. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 22*(1), 65–72.

Marklein, T., & Paine, K. (2012, June). *The march to standards. Presentation to the Fourth European Summit on Measurement*, Dublin, Ireland. Retrieved from http://amecorg.com/downloads/dublin2012/The-March-to-Social-Standards-Tim-Marklein-and-Katie-Paine.pdf

Milstein, B., & Chapel, T. (2014). *Developing a logic model or theory of change. Community Tool Box*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Work Group for Community Health and Development. Retrieved from http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/models-for-community-health-and-development/logic-model-development/main

Newman, I., & Benz, C. (1998). *Qualitative-quantitative research methodology: Exploring the interactive continuum*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.

Office of the Federal Registrar, National Archives and Records. (2005, November 23). *The public papers of the presidents of the United States.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Digital Library. Retrieved from http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/ppotpus?key=title;page=browse;value=j

Paine, K. (2012, October). *Standards for social media measurement: A progress report*. Presentation to Federation Internationale des Bureaux d'Extraits de Presse (FIBEP) conference, Krakow, Poland. Retrieved from http://ebookbrowse.com/standards-for-social-media-measurement-a-progress-report-katie-paine-pdf-d434658158

Paine, K., Draper, P., & Jeffrey, A. (2008). *Using public relations research to drive business results.* Gainesville, FL: Institute for Public Relations. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/research-business-results/

Rush, B., & Ogbourne, A. (1991). Program logic models: expanding their role and structure for program planning and evaluation. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation 6*, 95–106.

Smith, A. (2010, March 2). 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 post. Retrieved from 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/

SMMStandards. (2012a). *Sources and methods transparency table*. Retrieved from http://www.smmstandards.com/category/content-sourcing-methods/

SMMStandards. (2012b). *Social media standard definitions for reach and impressions*. Retrieved from http://www.smmstandards.com/2013/03/proposed-social-media-standard-definitions-for-reach-and-impressions-from-the-digital-analytics-association/

Stacks, D. (2002). *Primer of public relations research*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Stacks, D. (2011). *Primer of public relations research* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Stacks, D., & Michaelson, D. (2010). *A practitioner's guide to public relations research, measurement, and evaluation* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Business Experts Press.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (Eds.). (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Van Ruler, B., Verčič, A., & Verčič, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Public relations metrics: Research and evaluation*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Watson, T. (2012a). The evolution of public relations measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Review*, *38*(3), 390–398.

Watson, T. (2012b, July 10). *The Miami debate – ROI and PR evaluation: Avoiding smoke and mirrors*. Gainesville, FL: Institute for Public Relations. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/2012/07/roi-%e2%80%93-the-miami-debate/

Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2007). *Evaluating public relations: A best practice guide to public relations planning, research and evaluation* (2nd ed.). London and Philadelphia, PA: Kogan Page.

Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2014). *Evaluating public relations: A best practice guide to public relations planning, research and evaluation* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Kogan Page.

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*, *8*(1), 1–14. Retrieved from http://www.prismjournal.org/vol8_1.html

Weiner, M. (2009, November 20). *Connecting public relations performance with business outcomes*. The Public Relations Strategist. New York, NY: Public Relations Society of America. Retrieved from

Wright, D., Gaunt, R., Leggetter, B., Daniels, M., & Zerfass, A. (2009). *Global survey of communications measurement 2009 – final report*. London, UK: Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication. Retrieved from http://amecorg.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Global-Survey-Communications_Measurement-20091.pdf

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

Author contact details:

Professor Jim Macnamara PhD
Professor of Public Communication
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology Sydney
Phone: +61 2 9514 2334
E-mail: jim.macnamara@uts.edu.au

Copyright statement:

[1] An axiom or proverb of unknown origins, used in various forms including by Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Ciano, in his WWII diaries and by John F. Kennedy in a speech, as recorded in *The public papers of presidents of the United States 1962* (Office of the Federal Registrar, 2005).
[2] Old gospel song by an anonymous author.
[3] The term 'corporate body' is used here to mean any type of structured body or organisation, drawing on the Latin terms *corpus* (singular) and *corpora* (plural).