



# Breaking the PR measurement and evaluation deadlock: A new approach and model

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The search for methods to measure and demonstrate the value of public relations date back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the birth of modern PR, or even longer, according to a review of the history of PR measurement by Tom Watson.<sup>1</sup> So we have been on this quest for more than 100 years!

Watson noted that measurement and evaluation of PR and corporate communication have been the subject of intensive focus since the 1970s.

However, while giving due credit to those who have devoted themselves to this quest, in considering our progress I am reminded of the popular saying about philosophy that it is like “searching for a black cat in a coal cellar at midnight”.<sup>2</sup>

2013 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what Tom Watson and Paul Noble<sup>3</sup> described as Jim Grunig’s *cri de coeur* – his cry from the heart – about the lack of evaluation of PR, when Grunig famously lamented in 1983 that he felt like a fundamentalist minister railing against sin. He said “most public relations people I talk to are for evaluation. People keep on sinning, however, and PR people continue not to do evaluation”.<sup>4</sup>

2014 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of publication of the International Public Relations Association Gold Paper on Evaluation<sup>5</sup> that was the first global rallying call by industry leaders for practitioners to conduct valid and rigorous measurement and evaluation of their activities.

I was one of the co-authors of that Gold Paper in 1994. Just the year before, I completed a Master of Arts by research into measuring the impact of PR on media. The following year, in 1995, I bought and launched the Asia Pacific franchise of media analysis firm CARMA International, which marked the beginning of a decade in which I worked full-time on research to measure and evaluate PR and corporate communication.

I believed then that I was going to become exceedingly rich because measurement and evaluation, as John Pavlik commented in 1987, is “the Holy Grail” of PR<sup>6</sup>. Well, that didn’t happen, although I learned a lot in the following decade and by the time I sold CARMA International Asia Pacific in 2006, we had all made some considerable progress.

But, despite that progress and despite further major efforts over the past seven to eight years, we have still not really cracked the measurement and evaluation nut.

David Michaelson and Donald Stacks concluded as recently as 2011 that “public relations practitioners have consistently failed to achieve consensus on what the basic evaluative measures are or how to conduct the underlying research for evaluating and measuring public relations performance”<sup>7</sup> – particularly rigorous reliable research.

The 2012 European Communication Monitor reported that 75 per cent of European practitioners identified inability “to prove the impact of communication activities on organizational goals” as a “major barrier to further professionalization and growth.”<sup>8</sup>

While there are some shining lights in measurement, practitioners mostly measure *outputs* and are still caught in a deadlock when it comes to identifying the *outcomes* of PR and corporate communication and its *value* to an organization – and its stakeholders.

## Standards breakthrough, but still gaps and inconsistencies

In a review of the development of standards that I wrote for *Public Relations Inquiry* published earlier this year,<sup>9</sup> I commended the efforts and progress made by AMEC globally, by the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in the US, by other organizations and by a number of my academic colleagues, commercial research firms, and practitioners.

However, my analysis identified some inconsistencies and gaps that remain. For example:

- **Thirty or more metrics** are used for measuring PR and corporate communication (see Table 1). While I strongly support my colleagues who argue that there is no single ‘silver bullet’, the plethora of metrics is more confusing than clarifying, a preponderance relate to basic, low-level output measurement, and some are of questionable validity and value.

| Basic output metrics       | Outputs → Outtakes | Outtakes → Outcomes        |
|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Counts of press clippings  | Unique visitors    | Engagement                 |
| Audience                   | Views              | Influence                  |
| Reach                      | Likes              | Impact                     |
| Target audience reach      | Followers          | Awareness                  |
| Impressions                | Fans               | Attitudes                  |
| Opportunities to see (OTS) | Clickthroughs      | Trust                      |
| Share of voice             | Downloads          | Loyalty                    |
| Cost per thousand (CPM)    | Comments           | Reputation                 |
| Hits                       | Tone               | Relationships              |
| Visits                     | Sentiment          | Return on investment (ROI) |

Table 1. Metrics used in PR and corporate communication measurement and evaluation literature.

- We still have differing definitions of some key terms. For instance, with great respect to my esteemed colleagues who produced definitions in the standards and in the latest edition of the *Dictionary of Public Relations Research and Measurement*<sup>10</sup>, these are inconsistent with **reach** and **impressions**, for instance, described as the number of *people* reached, the number of *times* an item was displayed, and as the number of *exposures* to an item or message, which can be quite different things (see Table 2).
- In most advertising, marketing and PR literature, **engagement** is poorly defined and described in superficial ways that regard clickthroughs, ‘following’ and ‘likes’ as engagement when, in fact, engagement is a deep psychological concept, involving significant levels of emotional involvement and participation.

| Definitions   | Source  |
|---|---|
| "... <i>reach</i> represents the total <b>number of unique PEOPLE</b> who had an opportunity to see an item"  | #SMMStandards, 2012, para. 15.  |
| <i>Impressions</i> – "the <b>number of PEOPLE</b> having the opportunity for exposure to a media story; also known as 'opportunity to see' (OTS) ... usually refers to audited circulation ..." | <i>Proposed Interim Standards for Metrics in Traditional Media Analysis</i> , Eisenmann et al., 2012, p. 3. |
| <i>Impressions</i> – "the <b>number of PEOPLE</b> who might have had the opportunity to be exposed to a story"  | <i>Dictionary of Public Relations Measurement and Research</i> , Stacks & Bowen, 2013, p. 14                |
| " <i>Impressions</i> represent the number of <b>TIMES AN ITEM WAS DISPLAYED</b> "   | <i>Social Media Standards Definitions: Reach and Impressions</i> , Digital Analytics Association, (2013).   |
| " <i>Impressions</i> represent the <b>gross NUMBER OF ITEMS</b> that could have been seen by all people, including repeats"   |   |
| <i>Impressions</i> "indicates the <b>NUMBER OF POSSIBLE EXPOSURES</b> of a media item to a defined set of stakeholders" ...   | <i>Dictionary of Public Relations Measurement and Research</i> , Stacks & Bowen, 2013, p. 14.               |

Table 2. Varying definitions of 'reach' and 'impressions'.

- Even though a progress report on standards presented at the fourth European Summit on Measurement in Dublin in 2012 quite appropriately recommended that "ROI should be strictly limited to measurable financial impact" when this occurs,<sup>11</sup> the search for an ROI still goes on in many sectors of the PR industry. In my research, I identified 10 different types of **ROI** and "quasi-ROI" discussed in industry literature. This is not conducive to standards or to achieving understanding of the value of PR and communication.
- Meanwhile, a number of other tools for measurement and evaluation have not been given significant or, in some cases, any attention in the 'march to standards'. For example, *Benefit Cost Ratio* (BCR) using a *compensating variation* approach borrowed from economics, which has been applied to PR by Jim Grunig and colleagues as far back as the Excellence study<sup>12</sup> and *Cost Effectiveness Analysis* (CEA) developed by Fraser Likely in the US<sup>13</sup>, while having limitations, are based on sound research and business principles.
- Similarly, *market mix modelling* advocated by Mark Weiner in the US<sup>14</sup>, *logic models* to connect PR processes to organizational outcomes, which I have used successfully in Australia<sup>15</sup>, and *communication performance management* and *communication controlling* advocated by Ansgar Zerfass in Germany<sup>16</sup> are rarely applied – although I have concerns with the notion of 'control' and the quantitative approach of some of these methods, which I will return to in a moment.
- Also, the "march to standards" has not engaged with reporting bodies such as the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) and its development of an **Integrated Reporting Framework** that includes recognition and reporting of *social and relationship capital* as well as financial capital.<sup>17</sup>

So there is still work to do in relation to standards.

But even if we address these gaps and refine draft standards, two big questions remain:

1. Why are we still here after more than 40 years of intensive efforts unable to reliably and clearly demonstrate the *value* of PR and corporate communication; and
2. How can we break the deadlock in implementing measurement and evaluation in practice?

These are hard questions. But I am going to try to shed some light on both of them today. I am going to cast the net widely and address some broad issues about human knowledge and various types of research and data in the first instance to identify **three barriers** that I believe are causing this deadlock – beyond the usual suspects such as *cost* and *lack of time*<sup>18</sup> – and then draw these thoughts together to discuss some specific proposals for a new paradigm and model of PR measurement and evaluation.

### **Our love of numbers – victims of the ‘Enlightenment’ and positivism**

Let me launch a response to the dilemma outlined and the questions posed with a brief detour into Western history. Buried deep in our belief systems and our psyche today are the products of the Renaissance and the so-called Enlightenment. This was a period that followed the so-called ‘Dark Ages’ after the Fall of Rome in 476 BCE and the Middle Ages, which saw a major shift in human knowledge and thinking. (*I said I was going to start broadly, but bear with me. There is a point.*)

Commencing with the Renaissance in the 1300s through to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and escalating with what we refer to as the Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Western societies turned from spiritualism, mysticism, superstition, religion and tradition as primary sources of knowledge to **science**. Science was the locus of the revolution that took place in Western societies between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and which led to the Industrial Revolution and Modernism.

The key characteristics of science and scientific knowledge are that it is based on *empiricism*, the collection of observable data and evidence and analysis using **deduction** and **rational logical reasoning**.

In particular, the ‘scientific method’ relies on *quantitative* research and the language of science, empirical data, is primarily expressed in **numbers** – nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio numbers expressing counts, levels, percentages, degrees, intervals and other factors.

Modernist societies, seeking what Stephen Coleman from Leeds University calls the “seemingly unassailable aura of scientificity”<sup>19</sup> became obsessed with numbers for classification, compilation and **quantification**. Coleman says “the work of counting people, things, time and money has preoccupied society from the eve of modernity”.<sup>20</sup>

*Social science*, while being concerned with social issues and society, followed this focus on scientific methods of research. Early psychology and sociology used quantitative data such as demographics and scientific experiments – sometimes in laboratories using electricity and chemicals – to try to understand and influence how humans think and behave.

The shift from spiritualism, mysticism, Black Magic and other ‘primitive’ belief systems, and reliance on ‘everyday ways of knowing’ such as tradition, to science is to be welcomed in most respects. Few of us would want to live without medical science, computer science, agricultural science and so on.

However, a corollary of the rise and celebration of scientific and social scientific knowledge has been a lessened focus on the third major approach to knowledge – the *humanistic* perspective as pursued in the humanities.

While acknowledging that numbers have “a rigor and logic” about them, another writer who I admire very much, John Durham Peters, says that numbers have “a serene indifference to the world of human things”.<sup>21</sup>

What Coleman, Peters and many other contemporary critics of modernism, positivism and behaviourism in the social sciences are challenging are:

1. The **reductionist** processes of science which limit knowledge to certain types of observable data;
2. The notion of *commensurability*, a belief that diverse qualities can be measured by a common standard and reduced to a **metric**; and
3. The underpinning claim of the scientific method to *objectivity* achieved through *detachment*. Scientific research is purportedly conducted from a dispassionate perspective, detached from all human subjectivity and emotion. Therein lay its greatest limitation as a method for studying human communication

Quantitative methodology dominates the research landscape generally<sup>22</sup> and is influential in the dominant paradigm of PR<sup>23</sup> as well corporate and marketing communication.<sup>24</sup> For instance, the tag line of the major PR industry research organization, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), is “the science beneath the art”. This clearly indicates a view that PR should be underpinned by scientific knowledge and quantitative methods of research.

I would like to challenge this notion, not to weaken PR and corporate communication, but to liberate them from the straightjacket of quantitative scientific paradigms and allow us to reveal their true value.

## Understanding human communication and relationships

Postmodernism, which emerged as an intellectual movement in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century involves a number of philosophical shifts, some controversial and debated, but a central increasingly accepted element is a re-recognition and refocussing on human **interpretation and perception**. (I say *re-recognition* because the humanities and humanistic knowledge date back to ancient Egypt, Greece and China and the writings of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Confucius.)

We have all heard and probably use the phrase ‘perception is reality’. But in our modernist focus on science and quantitative data, we forget or ignore that our reality is constructed with perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and feelings as much as it is with stone, wood, bricks and minerals turned into metals. As a simple illustration, think of what makes your home your home, and you will recognize the humanistic and social construction of reality that exists in parallel with the physical dimensions of our world, and which is often more important.

When we look at human communication and practices such as public relations and corporate communication, we need to recognize that the *outtakes* and *outcomes* include:

- *Awareness* of a product, service, feature, problem or condition – not simply in terms of level, but qualitatively such as positive awareness rather than negative awareness;
- *Perceptions*, such as reputation and brand attributes;
- *Attitudes*, such as goodwill, support, or intention to buy;
- *Opinion*, which involves attitudes but is often publicly expressed, whereas attitudes may remain latent;
- *Engagement*;
- *Trust*;
- *Loyalty*;
- *Relationships*; and
- *Behaviour*, such as buying, joining, voting, getting fit, advocacy, and so on.

Even a cursory review shows that most of these outtakes and outcomes are human **interpretations and feelings**, not independently and objectively observable phenomena. Even observable behaviours are heavily influenced by interpretation and *affective* as well as cognitive processing. That is to say, interpretations and feelings are based on emotion as well as rational logical reasoning. They are subjective, not objective. They are socially, culturally and contextually constructed, not scientific facts. They are infinitely variable and diverse, not stable phenomena. They are humanistic, not scientific. As such, they do not yield easily to numerical quantification and are simplistically represented in arbitrary scales and ratings.

Yet, we try to measure and evaluate these outtakes and outcomes using scientific methods and quantitative data.

Let me give you a demonstration of why this is problematic. Think about the relationship you have with the person who is closest to you in the world – such as your wife, husband, or partner. I would like you all to now do a short practical exercise. I would like you to write down the value of that relationship in numeric terms, such as a financial value or a score out of 100. And, by the way, you need to be prepared to show it to your loved one and be able to scientifically prove that it is a correct calculation.

If you can't calculate that value in numeric terms today, I would like you to write down the scientific formula that you would use to calculate it.

If it is possible to value feelings and relationships in numbers, you should be able to do it for the one you know best and who is closest to you in the world. Right?

Having trouble?

The point of this simple demonstration is that human interactions, relationships, feelings, attitudes, loyalties, perceptions and engagement do not yield easily, if at all, to numeric quantification and some things cannot be explained in scientific terms.

Yes, it is true that we could get into a conversation about love being chemical and hormone reactions in the human body, but I don't think your wife, husband or other loved one would appreciate such an evaluation. And I don't think either you or they would think chemical formulae accurately or adequately describe the perceptions, attitudes and feelings that you have and the value that you place on them.

It is understandable that we yearn for the certainty that science and modernism promises – and many in senior management educated in the ‘hard sciences’ of mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and their derivative disciplines of economics, accounting and so on, hold to their faith in science and quantitative data. But, when applied as the way to understand human interaction, human thinking and human behaviour, science alone does not have all the answers. This is something that scientists themselves are increasingly recognizing.

In focussing predominantly on quantitative research and searching for numbers to define our work and our value, *we are trying to measure air with a ruler.*

Contrasting scientific quantitative research, postmodernist approaches, and humanistic thinking in particular, apply **interpretive qualitative research** to understand human perceptions, attitudes, opinions, relationships, and behaviour.

Qualitative research is not a softer or weaker type of research. In fact, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and ethnography, often applied longitudinally over time, are usually more difficult to do well than simple self-reporting surveys which are a common quantitative research method. Quantitative research produces averages, ratings, scores, pretty charts that look good in marketing meetings, and generalizations. They give rudimentary ‘temperature gauge’ measures of organization reputation and stakeholder perceptions. Only qualitative research can provide **understanding** and insights into human thinking, perceptions, attitudes, and so on.

One researcher says *quantitative research is reading a temperature gauge and a barometer to describe the weather; qualitative research is being out in it.*

And so I come to back to the practical problem at hand – measuring and evaluating public relations and corporate communication – having identified the first of three major barriers as a preoccupation with scientific research and quantitative data. But if not numbers, what do we have to show our value? To answer this, there are two more barriers to measurement and evaluation that need to be dismantled.

## Untangling measurement and evaluation

The first is the conflation of measurement and evaluation. We habitually refer to ‘measurement and evaluation’ in the same breath and in most models the two elements are seen as conducted concurrently or as conjoined linear processes, as symbolized in Figure 1.

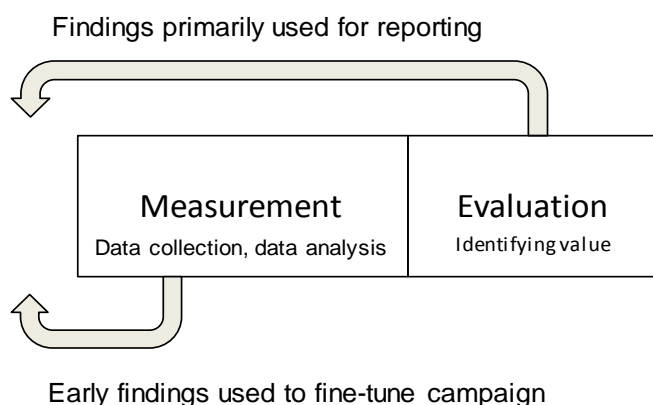


Figure 1. Traditional M&E approaches which blur and conflate measurement and evaluation.

There are at least two things fundamentally wrong with this approach.

First, evaluation conducted at this point is based on a narrow and limited range of data. Evaluation fused on to or conducted concurrently with measurement is focussed exclusively on metrics collected in the measurement processes undertaken by the organization – what is referred to as *endogenous* data (inside data). It does not consider other information that might be available and useful, referred to as *exogenous* data, which I will come back to in a moment.

Second, and even more fundamentally, while they are related, measurement and evaluation are two quite different processes. *Measurement* is the taking of measures such as counting items, collecting ratings on a scale, or recording comments in interviews, and analyzing these. Measurement involves two key stages – *data collection* and *data analysis*.

*Evaluation* is defined in both the Oxford and Merriam-Webster dictionaries as “to judge” or “make a judgement” about the *value* of something.<sup>25</sup> While it may be informed to some extent by metrics, value is a perception. Furthermore, it is a perception formed from a perspective and in a context.

This is clearly evident in many fields. For example, real estate agents estimate a price for a house or apartment based on quantitative data from market surveys and recent sales in an area. But the *value* of a property is determined by potential buyers and sellers, and others such as bankers based on their perspective and perceptions. The nature of value further underlines the importance of qualitative information and delineates evaluation as a separate stage from measurement.

## **Shifting focus from looking back to looking forward**

The third major barrier to demonstrating the *value* of PR and corporate communication is that measurement and evaluation processes predominantly look backwards – at what has been done in the past<sup>26</sup>. As shown in Figure 1, some early findings from measurement are fed back into fine-tuning a campaign, and evaluation is primarily undertaken for reporting and planning the next stage of communication.

In most cases, measurement and evaluation fail to give an organization and its stakeholders anything other than a retrospective performance review of work done. Sometimes M&E is seen as little more than an exercise in post-rationalization and self-justification by practitioners.

So what should we do? Let me now introduce you to a new model of measurement and evaluation that changes the game considerably.

## **A new paradigm and model for PR measurement and evaluation**

Measurement and evaluation obviously must begin with measurement, involving data collection and data analysis. But, my first key point about this new model is that measurement should collect *qualitative* data as well as quantitative data.

Measurement should then be followed by in-depth analysis. The second stage of this expanded model looks beyond measurement metrics collected by the organization. It can draw on contextual information, published research literature, databases, case studies, theories and models, and involves intensive analysis deploying what academics call *critical analysis*. This stage can also incorporate *market analysis*, *competitor analysis* and *business analysis*. This

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provides a deeper richer data pool, including ‘big data’ if relevant, and a focussed process to produce findings.

This deep analysis is undertaken for two reasons. First, before evaluation, analysis informed by measurement and other data is designed to identify **insights** that can inform future business or organization strategy – the third stage of this model. Rather than simply reporting past achievements, insights are forward-looking, creating potential for value adding initiatives by the organization, whether these create value through increases (e.g., in sales, reputation, or employee loyalty) or reductions (e.g., in costs or risk). Whereas traditional evaluation findings are descriptive, insights involve inferences, predictions, suggestions and recommendations.

Insights might include, for example, identification of a gap left by competitors, an opportunity to seize thought-leadership on an emerging issue, a likely legislative initiative based on patterns of political comment, or a mood swing among stakeholders that can be productively addressed at an early stage.

This forward-looking approach designed to provide insights that contribute to future business or organization strategy, as well as inform performance management, addresses two other key obstacles that have been identified in recent research.

1. It helps bridge the gap between PR and organizational outcomes, which a number of studies have identified as problematic.<sup>27</sup> Rather than trying to retrospectively link PR to business or organizational outcomes, which can be seen as *post hoc* rationalization, this approach produces positive contributions to the future success of the organization.
2. It addresses a troubling contradiction at the heart of the PR measurement dilemma – that is, despite demands for results and accountability, employers often will not pay for and sometimes even do not want rigorous measurement and evaluation, as Otis Baskin and his colleagues reported from studies in Europe.<sup>28</sup> Their research indicated that many users of PR either feel they have sufficient information about what was done in the past or they simply feel that ‘what’s done is done’. Many do not want to pay for what they feel they already know and what cannot be changed. But they are far more likely to pay for what they don’t know and what can change the future.

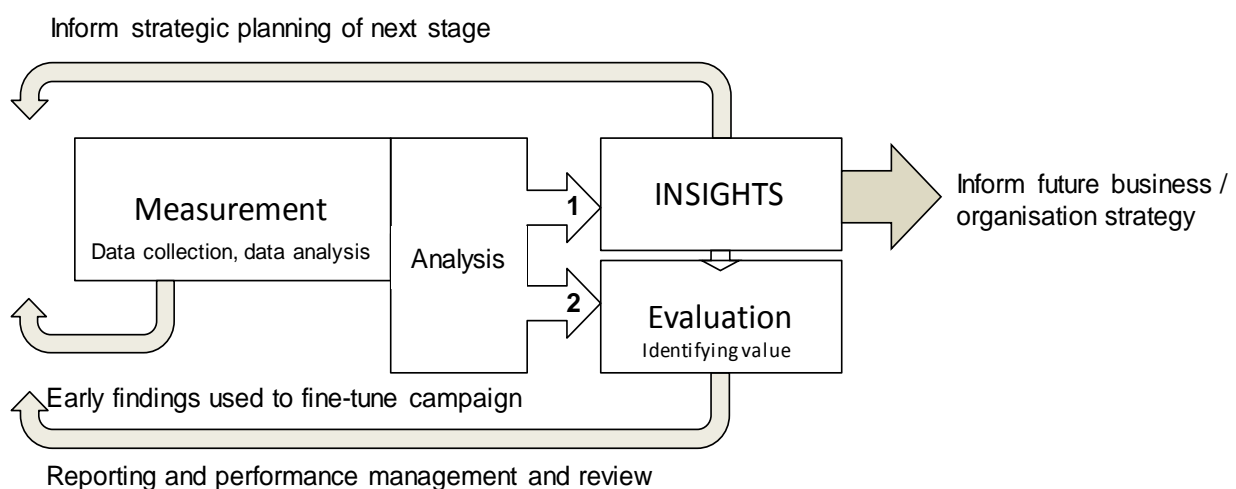


Figure 2. A new MAIE model of measurement and evaluation.

The second purpose of the additional stage of in-depth analysis and the fourth stage of this model is **evaluation**. In this model, which could be called the MAIE Model<sup>29</sup>, evaluation is two-steps further on from measurement – undertaken after in-depth analysis and after identification and presentation of insights to management.

The effect on evaluation undertaken at this stage should be obvious. Evaluation undertaken concurrently with or post insights is able to capture the value-add provided to management in insights and is therefore likely to reflect a much higher level of appreciation and perceived value among internal stakeholders. Noting that value is primarily perception, not a scientific fact or an arbitrary metric, again qualitative research is advocated. Similarly, insights which recognize external stakeholders' perspectives and lead to organization actions to improve communication and relationships are likely to lead to increased value in the eyes of external stakeholders.

### Where do insights come from?

I am cognizant that it is easy to propose insights as part of the solution to the deadlock in measurement and evaluation and to suggest that they are derived from analysis. Like many intellectual tasks, gaining insights is easier said than done. So let me go a little further and tackle the question of how do we generate insights?

Generally speaking, insights are gained when multiple pieces of information and perspectives coalesce or collide. Insights generally do not emerge from a single data set and they do not simply pop into one's mind. They very often emerge from conflicting data, contrasting data, and combining data.

One of the other barriers to effective measurement and evaluation already identified in a number of studies is lack of research knowledge among practitioners and there is no escaping that professionals today need high levels of knowledge. Here are some examples of analysis steps and techniques that can operationalize an insightful value-adding approach to measurement and evaluation:

1. The first requirement in any quantitative or qualitative research is to **make sure you have enough data**. Usually, the more the better, provided you have tools and skills for analyzing large amounts of data (see following points). Today we have the potential to analyze 'Big Data' – terabytes, petabytes and even zettabytes of data available digitally. But we must remember that data are not just numbers; data include descriptions of people's feelings, perceptions, concerns, and desires. Text, video, and recorded speech are also data;
2. **Triangulation** – this involves collecting and comparing two, three or more data sets related to the same issue. If one data set suggests something, it is possibly a correct conclusion, but if two or particularly three data sets gained in different ways all suggest the same thing, you can be very confident of the finding;
3. **Immersion in the data** – there is no substitute for deeply immersing oneself in relevant data. Pore over it, re-read it, ponder over it, sleep on it. Read every quote, every statistic. Too many times we skip over data and reports, picking up the general sense of them. A general sense does not produce insights. They are hard-won, gleaned out of mountains of material through perspicacity and perseverance;

4. **Data reduction and display** – notwithstanding the need for immersion in the data, it is essential in research to reduce data, particularly in processing large data sets and ‘Big Data’. Data reduction is done by summarizing data in lists such as rankings, tables, diagrams, charts, graphs, infographics, and maps such as network maps. Qualitative data in text form such as interview transcripts can be condensed by coding and categorizing, and visualisations such as ‘tag clouds’. Expert researchers say “you know what you display”<sup>30</sup>; “good qualitative analysis involves repeated and iterative displays of data”<sup>31</sup>;
5. **Team analysis** – for example in content analysis of media articles and interview transcripts, use multiple coders whenever possible and do intercoder reliability assessment to identify common patterns of meaning.<sup>32</sup> Also, at an analysis stage, colleagues who come fresh to the data (the opposite of ‘immersion in the data’) and who have no bias towards particular strategies or activities can sometimes see things that those most involved cannot;
6. The **refutability principle** should be applied, which involves trying to refute initial assumptions or findings to see if they can stand up to scrutiny and contradiction.<sup>33</sup> In other words, deliberately try to prove your own findings wrong;
7. The **constant comparative method** can also be used, which involves constantly looking for cases to test provisional hypotheses and initial findings and conclusions<sup>34</sup>;
8. **Avoid the “rush to theorize”** – that is, jumping to conclusions about findings or insights without adequate data or analysis.<sup>35</sup> Following the previous recommendations will usually ensure findings, conclusions and insights are valid;
9. Apply **reflectivity**. Allow time to reflect on findings – what we colloquially call a ‘cooling off period’ or ‘gestation period’. It is very productive to come back to data and re-draft conclusions some time after they are first drafted, as often new insights can be gained.
10. Ask yourself repeatedly the important research question: ‘**So what?**’ For every finding and conclusion you draw, quantitative or qualitative, ask yourself what does it mean? What are the implications? What should the organization do? What should the organization not do?

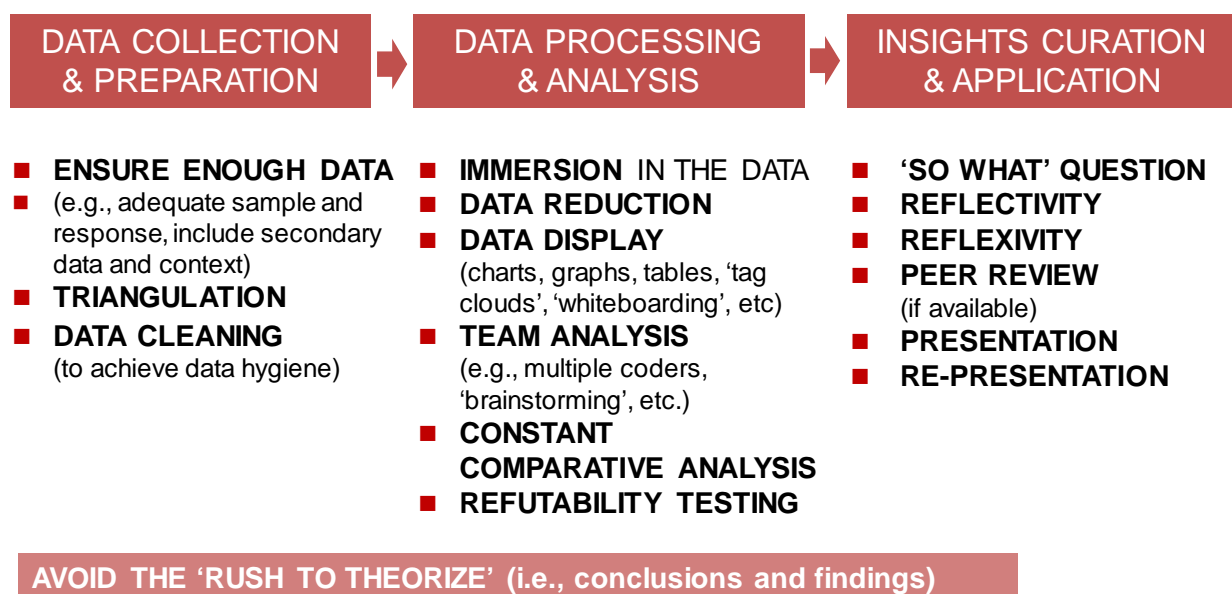


Figure 3. Steps and techniques for analyzing and interpreting data (Macnamara & Kumar, 2014).<sup>36</sup>

There are also a number of other things that researchers do to interpret data and gain insights into their significance and implications including *peer review* and *presentations* to groups to test findings and gain feedback (see Figure 3).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this analysis has identified three barriers that stand in the way of credible measurement and evaluation for PR and communication that have so far not been adequately recognized, namely:

1. An over-emphasis on quantitative research, which seeks to reduce everything to numbers such as averages and aggregates but does not describe or explain human feelings, perceptions, and the *value* of relationships and communication from the perspective of stakeholders. Beware of ‘dumb data’ and lost humanity – that is, becoming obsessed with arbitrary metrics and forgetting that public relations and communication are about people;
2. A conflation of measurement and evaluation, which are two distinct stages and processes;
3. A lack of *insights* that inform future business or organization strategy, which are far more valuable to management than retrospective knowledge that a PR activity worked in the past, or post-hoc rationalization and self-justification by PR practitioners.

To address these barriers I have proposed a new model of measurement and evaluation and also what could be described as a new paradigm, as it involves a shift from a primarily scientific quantitative approach to an interpretative approach and adds a new stage and a new primary output to the process. In summary:

1. Measurement and evaluation should involve collection and analysis of *qualitative* as well as quantitative data, noting that numbers do not tell the whole story of human feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and they describe relationships only in the most arbitrary way;
2. The MAIE model identifies measurement and evaluation as separate and different stages and processes. After measurement involving *data collection* before, during and after activities and *data analysis*, this model proposes further deep analysis to inform an important third stage, which is a missing link in the value chain;
3. A key purpose of measurement and evaluation should be to provide *insights* that help inform future business or organization strategy and management. And a number of tools and steps have been identified for producing insights that can be valuable;
4. Finally, evaluation should be undertaken, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, concurrently with or post insights, as shown in the MAIE Model, at which point it will capture a higher perception of value among management and most likely among external stakeholders if insights lead to improved communication and relationships.



**Reference:**

Macnamara, J. (2014, June). A new paradigm and model for measurement and evaluation of PR and corporate communication. Paper presented to the Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) International Summit on Measurement, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

- \* Jim Macnamara PhD, FPRIA, FAMI, CPM, FAMEC is Professor of Public Communication at the University of Technology Sydney, a position he took up in 2007 after a 30-year professional career spanning journalism, public relations and media and communication research. After nine years working as a journalist and 15 years in PR and marketing communication, he founded and headed the Asia Pacific office of media analysis firm CARMA International for more than a decade, before selling it to iSentia. He is the author of 15 books including *Public Relations Theories, Practices, Critiques* published by Pearson in 2012 and *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* of which the second edition was published by Peter Lang, New York in 2014.

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Watson, T. (2012). The evolution of public relations measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Review*, 38(3), 390–398.
- <sup>2</sup> The saying is attributed to a number of people, including Charles Darwin (Shaaf, 1948), English judge Lord Charles Bowen (Foote, 1911) and science fiction writer Robert Heinlein (Brainy Quote, 2014). See Shaaf, W. (1948). *Mathematics, our great heritage: Essays on the nature and cultural significance of mathematics*. New York, NY: Harper; Foote, J. (1911). *Pie-powder: Being dust from the law courts – Collected and recollected on the western circuit by a circuit tramp*. London, UK: John Murray; Brainy Quote. (2014). Cellar quotes. Retrieved from <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/cellar.html>.
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- <sup>29</sup> Maie is an alternative spelling of the female first name May or Mai. Notable uses include Baroness Ethel Marian Sumner 'Maie' Casey AC, FRSA (1892–1983), an Australian pioneer aviator, poet, biographer, memoirist and artist and *Granny Maie*, a brand of confectionary or candy.
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- <sup>36</sup> This model was produced by Jim Macnamara based on this paper with input from R.P. Kumar of Ketchum.