



## **Evaluation and the New Public Diplomacy**

Presentation to the Future of Public Diplomacy 842nd Wilton Park Conference

2 March 2007

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## Introduction

Presentation draws on recent work for the UK's Public Diplomacy Board, scoping a system for measuring public diplomacy performance for the FCO, British Council and BBC World Service.

Not tied to those organisations or specific to the UK context. Instead will provide an overview of the role evaluation can play in developing a new approach to public diplomacy. Lessons also relevant to more traditional public diplomacy approaches (nation branding, for example).

Thanks to Patrick Spaven and Colin Talbot – two leading British experts in performance management – who collaborated on work for public diplomacy board. Also to Alex Evans – who leads a programme on transboundary global risks as part of NYU's Center on International Cooperation – and has provided useful thoughts on public diplomacy and global issues.<sup>1</sup>

## Scope of presentation

“Don't get involved in partial problems, but always take flight to where there is a free view over the whole single great problem, even if this view is still not a clear one.” Wittgenstein

Planning to take Wittgenstein's advice for a number of reasons:

- Wide spectrum of skills and expertise in the audience – some of you know more than me about evaluation; some of you may be fairly new to the subject.
- Evaluation is about asking big questions and then looking high and low to find evidence to answer them. There are essentially two fundamental questions.
  - The first involves looking outwards and asking ‘have we achieved concrete outcomes?’ By concrete outcomes, I mean results that the people who pay the bills really care about.
  - The second requires introspection: Are we fit for purpose as an organisation or coalition of organisations? In other words, are we organised to deliver concrete outcomes as cost effectively as possible?
- These questions cannot be answered in isolation. They require an understanding of all aspects of an organisation's environment, strategy and operations. A ‘systems approach’ is therefore vital – where evaluation is one element in an integrated approach to managing organisational performance (see figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Spaven, Consultant, Spaven Research & Evaluation; Colin Talbot, Professor of Public Policy and Management, Manchester Business School, University of Manchester; Alex Evans, Senior Policy Associate, Center on International Cooperation, New York University.

- A systems approach is especially important for the ‘new public diplomacy’ – where goals are usually highly ambitious, strategies complex, and tools varied in their nature, intent and use.
- Key point: public diplomacy is badly in need of an evidence-base if it is to move into the mainstream of international relations. A broad research agenda – with evaluation at its heart – can help provide that evidence base.

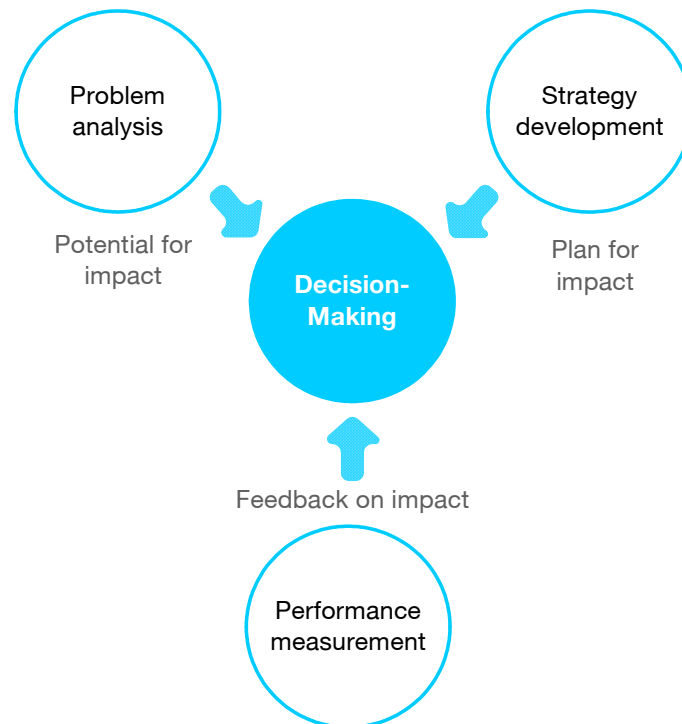


Figure 1 - The Role of Performance Measurement

### The New Public Diplomacy

- So what is the ‘new public diplomacy’?
- As Lord Triesman pointed out, the demands placed on public diplomacy are growing.<sup>2</sup> This is happening for two main reasons:
  - First, foreign policy itself is changing. Few of our pressing challenges are bilateral. Immediate crises – Iran, Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process, Afghanistan – require action from shifting coalitions of international actors. Meanwhile, slow burning drivers of instability demand growing attention – poverty and fragile states, climate change and energy security; avian flu and HIV, global economic imbalances and international trade policy.
  - Relatedly, we are witnessing the growing importance of non-state actors to international relations.

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<sup>2</sup> Presentation by Lord Triesman of Tottenham, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, 1 March 2007

- Security challenges are increasingly asymmetric. As Sir John Kiszley, director of the UK's Defence Academy, has pointed out that, in a counter insurgency, armies need to focus on complexity, uncertainty, politics, long-term solutions, building coalitions to deliver a comprehensive approach, interacting with unfamiliar cultures, talking to enemies etc.<sup>3</sup> This is a long-way from traditional hard power.
  - Global issues demand an approach with many of the same features. They evoke passionate responses from 'the public' as a whole, the media; and various policy elite all have overlapping influence on the decisions governments take. When looking for solutions to these issues, governments matter a lot less than they'd like to.
- Implications:
- Need to define and understand what public diplomacy *can* achieve – in other words develop a *theory of influence*. Gordon Brown, in a recent speech, was talking about the debt campaign. "What started with a call by a few," he said, "developed into a campaign by many, and then into a consensus among all."<sup>4</sup> We don't know enough about how this process works. How do challenging ideas become received wisdom? What's the best way to go about changing minds? How should we act to achieve maximum leverage – to achieve a big change from a small intervention?
  - Need to understand the interactions between three types of audience: the public; policy elites or influencers; and the media (see figure 2). Through what metaphors does each of these audiences see the world? What will trigger them to reframe the way they think about an issue? And if they think differently, how will their behaviour change?<sup>5</sup>
  - Need to get better at dealing with issues that do not respect organisational boundaries. This will often mean developing capacity to run multi-agency *campaigns* – bringing organisations together around a common agenda. Incidentally, campaigning probably occupies the same intellectual space for the NPD as branding did for approaches that focus on international reputation.

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<sup>3</sup> Sir John Kiszely, '*Learning about Counter-Insurgency*', RUSI Journal, December 2006

<sup>4</sup> Remarks by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Rt Hon Gordon Brown, at the launch of the Stern Review on the economics of climate change, 30 October 2006

<sup>5</sup> The Frameworks Institute's work on global interdependence provides a useful example of the benefits of this approach. See *Communicating Global Interdependence: A FrameWorks Message Memo*, Susan Nall Bales, 2001, The Frameworks Institute. This and other relevant papers at: <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/global.shtml>

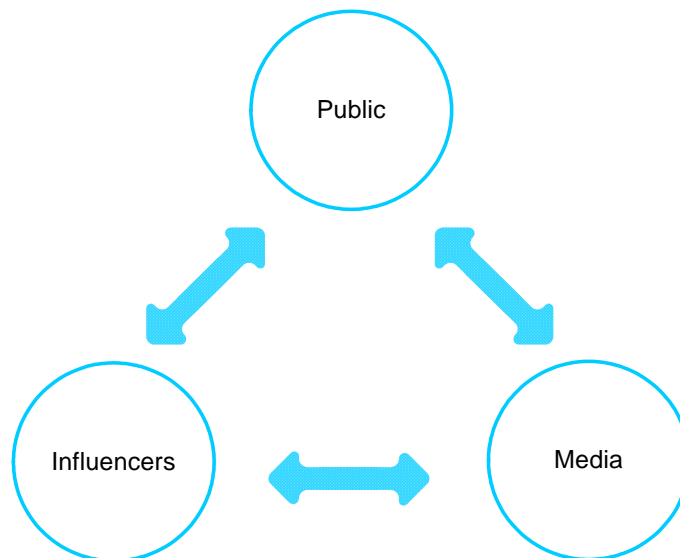


Figure 2 - Key Audiences for the New Public Diplomacy

- All of this makes research and evaluation – and the analytical capacity that comes with an effective research programme – more important. Done well it can provide a platform for:
  - Developing a new understanding of what public diplomacy can and cannot achieve.
  - Informing strategies that break down silos within and across organisations and providing a platform for partnership working.
  - Bringing public diplomacy into the mainstream of international relations and helping it ‘dock’ with traditional diplomacy, international development and hard security.

### A strategic model

- So how can evaluation be integrated into a broader performance management system?
- River Path uses a very simple model to illustrate the strategic process that we believe organisations need to cycle through. This does two important things - forces a focus on what needs to happen *before* a strategy can be developed, and also on what needs to happen *after* that strategy has been implemented.
- The model has four stages (see figure 3):
  - First, foresight – where an organisation looks outwards to understand the challenges it faces and set broad priorities.
  - Second, strategy. Where an organisation – or more likely a coalition of organisations – develops cross-cutting strategies at a high level, and then starts to translate them into campaigns that can be implemented on the ground.

- Third, implementation – both of public diplomacy programmes and of the change management programmes needed to ensure an organisation is fit for purpose.
- And finally, review, where we look at what has and hasn't worked and feed this learning back into further foresight and strategic processes.
- Throughout this cycle, we need the evidence that a research and evaluation programme can provide.<sup>6</sup>

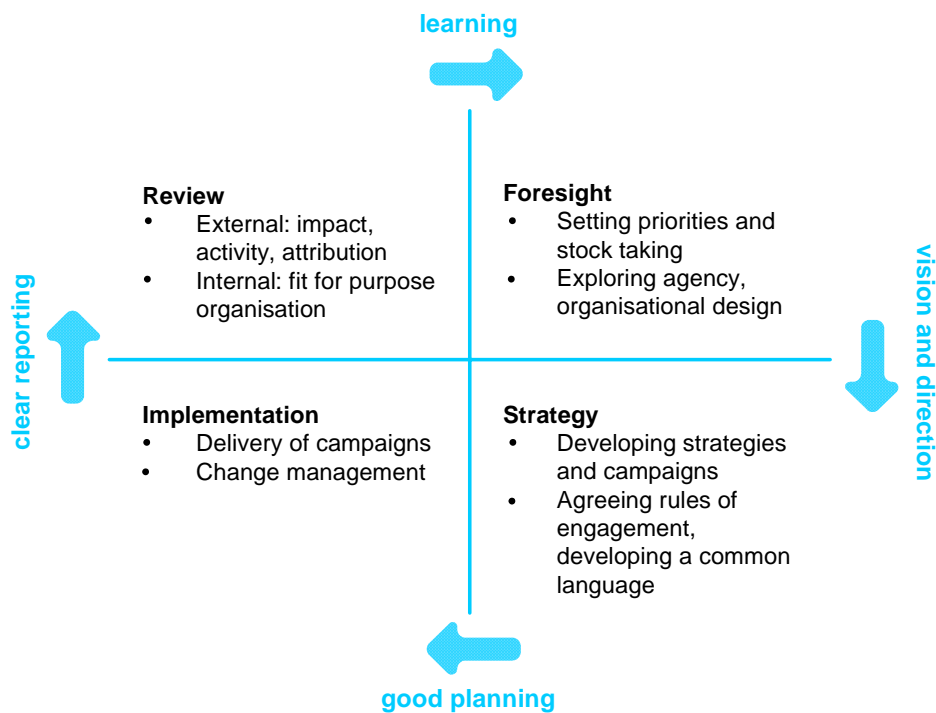


Figure 3 - A Strategic Model for Public Diplomacy

### Foresight, strategy, implementation...

- In the foresight quadrant, organisations have two main external tasks:
  - *Setting priorities* – deciding which policy areas to concentrate resources on; defining what success would look like in each area.
  - *Stock tacking* – making a full inventory of what is being done in each priority area, and by whom.
- Simultaneously, they to need to tackle the following internal tasks:
  - *Agency* – what kind of influence does an organisation have? What kind of change can it hope to deliver (if everything goes to plan)?

<sup>6</sup> There are obvious parallels with John Boyd's OODA loop (observe, orient, decide, act). See John Boyd, Patterns of Conflict, 1986, unpublished but available from Defense and the National Interest (<http://www.d-n-i.net/>)

- *Fit for purpose organisation* – how do we need to design an organisation and/or coalition to have a chance of delivering these results?
- In the strategic quadrant, organisations have the following planning tasks:
  - Developing and agreeing strategies. Strategies should be over-arching and high-level. Three main tasks: (i) umbrella objectives; (ii) overview of how activity is likely to lead to desired outcomes; (iii) broad disposition of resources and authority to allow for implementation.
  - Strategies then need to be broken down into a number of discrete missions or ‘campaigns’. Campaigns have the potential to drive action across organisational boundaries, bringing smaller, leaner, networked teams into play.
  - This approach is designed to ensure a layer of high level co-ordination that is *as light as possible*, devolving as much initiative as possible to those implementing public diplomacy programmes – hopefully in innovative and creative ways.<sup>7</sup>
- Looking inwards, organisations must also complete two tasks that are vital to ensuring effective evaluation:
  - First of all, they must establish *rules of engagement* – this allows organisations to work together in coalitions and encourages *force differentiation*. You need an understanding of where you should turn if you have a particular kind of task that needs completing.
  - Second, they need to develop a *common language*. Cross-cutting strategies are impossible unless organisations develop common terms for describing their objectives, defining their audiences etc etc.
- Third quadrant: implementation.
  - The external task is *delivery* using a wide range of public diplomacy tools.
  - Internally, the challenge is *change management*. New public diplomacy requires massive cultural change. No-one should underestimate the scale of this task. And the scale of the task grows exponentially as the number of agencies involved increases.

### **Creating the conditions for review**

- Actions taken in the first three quadrants depend on, but also create the conditions for, the fourth quadrant: review.

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<sup>7</sup> Maj David S Fadok, ‘*Air Power’s Quest for Strategic Paralysis*’, by John Boyd and John Warden, Air University Press, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, February 1995

- Throughout the cycle, we need the evidence that a research and evaluation programme can provide. But we are also making decisions that determine whether an effective research and evaluation programme will be possible.
- Without *analytical capacity*, organisations will not be able to make effective decisions about what their priorities should be or where they have the potential to achieve change.
- Without clear *rules of engagement*, we will not be able to form effective partnerships within and across organisations. And if partnerships are dysfunctional, organisational antibodies will quickly reject any new evaluation system.
- Without a *common language*, organisations will never develop a shared understanding of what they are trying to measure and how. To use the old cliché, they will be comparing apples and pears.
- If strategies are not *structured* in the correct way, they will not support effective performance measurement – of which more later.
- Finally, in the implementation phase. Do we have structures in place to systematically collect, store and report evidence?
- And does our organisational culture support evaluation? Are we prepared to work in a way that allows for measurement of performance? Or is there an inherent resistance to allowing comparisons of effectiveness across the organisation? Or between organisations? Or do staff lack confidence that the proposed arrangements for measuring performance are fair? Or feasible?

### **The structure of strategies**

- Of all these issues, the structure of strategies is probably the most important.
- In the UK, the Public Diplomacy Board is using *logical frameworks* to force strategists to start with the public diplomacy impact they are trying to achieve and then work backwards from that (see figure 4).
- This is an approach many of you will be familiar with. Each programme has one of the UK's International Strategic Priorities at its apex.
- Beneath this comes a *longer-term outcome* – the impact we hope to achieve against this ISP through our public diplomacy effort.
- Then comes an *intermediate outcome* – more immediate impact that we can expect to achieve over a 0-5 year time period.
- Then we have *outputs* – direct results from our public diplomacy activities.
- And finally, *inputs* – the resources needed to deliver these activities.

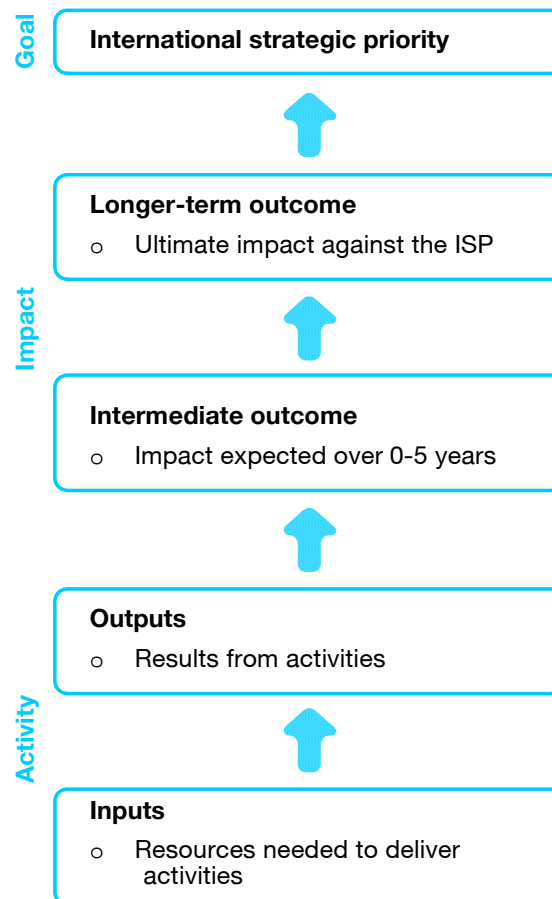


Figure 4 - Use of Logic Models in UK Public Diplomacy

- Using a logical framework, strategists articulate a case for why proposed activities can be expected to deliver impact against their desired outcome. *Testing these assumptions* becomes the main task for a performance measurement system. The strategy is the hypothesis. Implementation becomes an experiment. Evaluation analyses the results of that experiment and compares it to the original hypothesis.
- Logical frameworks are vital – but new public diplomacy programmes are likely to be very various. In the UK – climate security; democratic development; and promoting business. *Typologies* are used to tie diverse campaigns together, ensuring they are expressed and structured in a similar way (common language again).
- A sample typology for intermediate outcomes (see figure 5). Takes us back to the *theory of influence* and the notion of *agency*. Starting point is idea that there are only a limited number of ‘types’ of intermediate outcome that public diplomacy is equipped to deliver. In this case – five.
  - *Changing perceptions* – core public diplomacy territory,
  - *Setting an agenda* by reframing the way an issue is debated and creating pressure for change
  - *Building networks* that support delivery of change.

- *Developing capacity* within organisations to allow them to understand and respond to an issue.
- *Changing institutions* – influencing policy, strategy, resource allocation within a set of organisations (often government, could be private sector).
- So logical frameworks provide a common *way of thinking* about strategy. And typologies a *common strategic language*. Both are fundamental to effective evaluation.

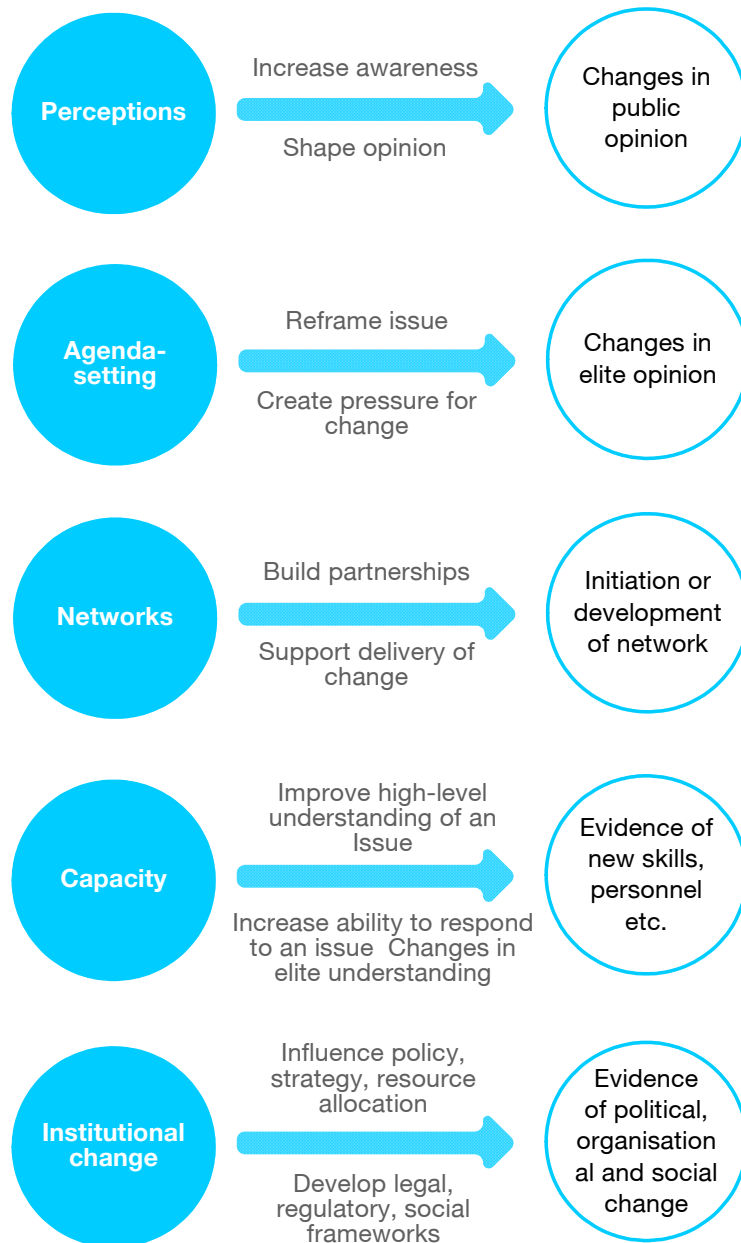


Figure 5 - Sample Typology of Public Diplomacy Intermediate Outcomes

## The review process

- So what kind of questions do we need to ask during the review process?
- Need to distinguish between internal and external review.
- External review needs to be driven by senior decision makers – not evaluation technicians. Brings us back to Wittgenstein's great problem. Requires them to ask hard questions of their organisations and to tolerate ambiguity in the response. Even in the best case, answers are likely to be partial – they have to learn to read *weak signals*.
  - First, questions about *impact*. What evidence do we have to show progress against our desired outcomes? The answer for long-term outcomes is likely to be – 'none, as yet'. The answer for intermediate outcomes should be 'some'. Not a complete picture. But 'weak signals' from a number of sources that can be patched together into a 'best estimate' that says one of three things – we're moving in the right direction/we're moving in the wrong direction/we're stuck in neutral.
  - Second, questions about *activity*. Are we able to provide a complete account of the resources that were spent on various elements of a public diplomacy strategy? And do we have a complete record of the direct results from each activity that these resources paid for? Again, it may not be possible to paint a complete picture. But it's vital to know what is known – and to plan for plugging gaps in the future.
  - Finally, questions about *attribution*. Can our analysts establish plausible links between activity and impact? Have we made a contribution to achieving change? What other factors have been in play? What difference would it have made if we hadn't turned up at all?
- Review should also be about looking inwards:
  - Are we fit for purpose as an organisation?
  - Do we know what our priorities are? Do resources genuinely follow these priorities?
  - Do our strategies drive implementation? Or are they used to paper over business as usual?
  - Are our systems up to scratch?
  - And are we gathering sufficient evidence to say where we add most value?
- The results from external review help clarify priorities and provide a clearer view of *agency* – the kind of impact an organisation has the potential to achieve. Feeds into better strategies and programme design.

- Results from internal review feed into partnership development and organisational design. They also provide vital material for an area of great importance: an internal influencing strategy that aims to explain what the NPD can and cannot do – communicating within and across organisations.

## Evaluation Instruments

- Am now going to look briefly at some of the instruments that can be used to collect evidence for the review stage.
- An important principal is that you are looking to collect evidence at all levels of the logical model. But plan to focus on intermediate outcomes – the heart of the new public diplomacy.
- Choosing instruments depends heavily on the type of intermediate outcome you're interested in – which brings us back to the typology shown earlier (see figure 6):
  - *Changing perceptions* – instruments that can show broad changes in public opinion
  - *Setting an agenda* – instruments that can track changes in perceptions of an issue over time; also looking for changes in the way elites think and behave on an issue.
  - *Building networks* – instruments that can track the development and functioning of a network
  - *Developing capacity* – instruments that can show whether and how organisations are changing
  - *Changing institutions* – [also] instruments that can show whether and how organisations are changing
- Some instruments are familiar and have been regularly used – such as wide-scale opinion polling. Though this tool has limitations – should only be used when PD programmes can realistically hope to shift aggregate public opinion *as an intermediate outcome*.
- Want to highlight three types of tool that are: less familiar and have the potential to provide us with valuable information on the new public diplomacy.

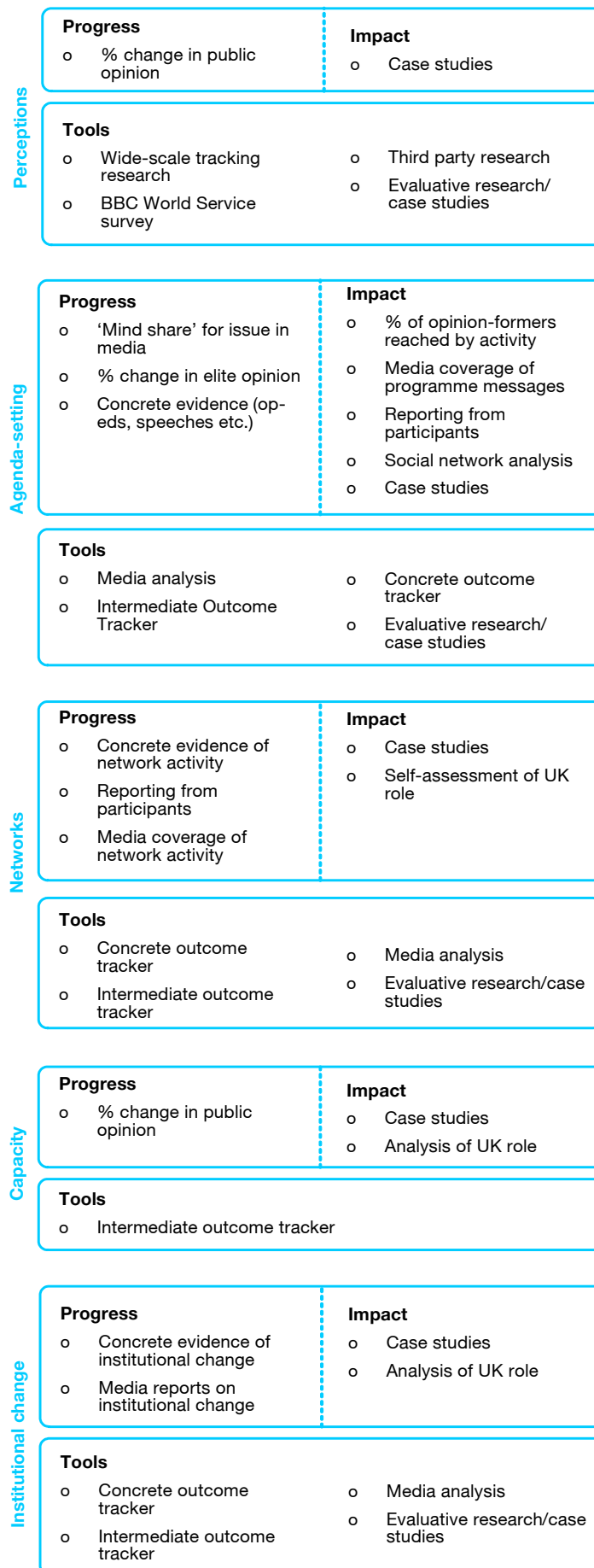


Figure 6 - Collecting Evidence to Show Progress against Intermediate Outcomes

- Concrete outcome tracker:
  - The new public diplomacy increasingly aims to contribute to the achievement of concrete outcomes – changes in a country’s policy; the establishment of a new organisation etc. Recently in Pakistan, for example, the UK sponsored a conference on free and fair elections. Off the back of a debate initiated at the conference, diplomats successfully lobbied for the appointment of an Independent Election Commissioner.
  - This should be the gold standard. If public diplomacy makes a difference – likely to be because of thousands of instances such as these where PD contributes to the achievement of incremental change.
  - Problem is that most organisations are not fully conscious of the fact these changes are occurring. Someone somewhere knows. Information may well be reported back home in some format. But there is no way to access this information at a high level – no file you can open that shows – say – all the small changes in climate change policy across 20 or 30 priority countries that taken together may add up to a significant shift in the international communities stance on that issue.
  - Concrete outcome tracker – a simple system where an organisation – or a coalition of organisations – collects data on these changes. At its simplest, we’re talking about a list with three or four headings. What happened. When. How consequential the change is (say on a 10 point scale). The role PD played.
  
- Media analysis
  - If concrete outcomes are the gold standard, then influencing the debate around a particular issue would win a silver medal for significance. Often this will be about reaching out to a particular group of leaders or – e.g. “Encouraging US business leaders to see climate change as an issue critical to the future of their businesses.”
  - Internationally, the UK currently uses media analysis in two ways. We analyse the *content* – often using informal methods – when thinking about policy. We count *mentions of the UK* and its activities – with somewhat more formal systems – when looking to evaluate the impact of our work.
  - Need a new approach to media analysis that collects, in a much more systematic way, different types of evidence. Principally, we should be looking to see if there are changes in the way that an issue is treated over time. Should also be looking to track key messages – or memes<sup>8</sup> – and see if they are successful in the evolutionary battle for media attention. And we

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Dawkins, ‘*The Selfish Gene*’, Oxford University Press, 1989

can also use media analysis to catch reports of concrete outcomes and to see who influences who and why. All this will enable us to report effectively on our intermediate outcomes. For example, we could be asking: does a systematic analysis of the media in a particular country show that climate change is being seen as an increasingly important business issue.

- Not going to go into detail on the techniques, but there are a growing number of tools being developed – many of which are now commercially on the market. All rely on the digitisation of the media. Most cover both formal and informal media – blogs, bulletin boards etc. Many cover growing numbers of languages. None of them are perfect – but their use of key word analysis and social network analysis certainly merits further exploration. And I believe investment.
- Influencer tracking
  - Have talked about influencers in a slightly unstructured way – based on the conviction that NPD will most often be about trying to change the way opinion formers think and behave. Opinion formers are multipliers – they can also be reached on limited budgets.
  - Often NPD strategy is going to involve asking a question. Do we target the six scientists that we believe shape the way the President of a particular country – and everyone else downwards – thinks about climate change science? Or do we attempt to shift the way six million 25-30 year olds think about the subject?
  - Most organisations – public and private sector – cannot quickly tell you who their key influencers are. The information is there, somewhere in the organisation. But it is not systematic. They also cannot tell you whether influencer opinion has changed over time.
  - Influencer tracking research is not hard to do. Three steps:
    - Identifying influencers, using clear criteria, and rank their importance
    - Tracking their opinions and behaviour over time
    - Analyse relationships within network of influencers
- So three instruments. None of them perfect. But each with the following features:
  - They all relate to whether we're achieving our policy goals – the heart of the NPD.
  - They relate to impact – achieving results we really care about.

- They're systematic and produce results that can be 'summed up' to allow decision-makers to take a high level view.

## Reflections

- Have provided a broad overview of what research and evaluation can contribute to the New Public Diplomacy – and hope I've provided a few insights into how an evaluation programme should be structured and executed.
- Want to close with eight reflections.
  1. Aim to be *comprehensive, ambitious, knowledge rich*. You're looking to embed research and evaluation into all stages of the strategic cycle or system. It's about developing antennae – or investing in a listening function.
  2. But...*perfect is the enemy of the good* (Voltaire). Avoid paralysis. Some evidence is better than no evidence – need to make sense of weak signals.
  3. *Brutal honesty is needed* – organisations often lie to themselves. The process is best started by making a very simple request – “bring me all the evidence we have that shows we make a difference.” External validation should also be used throughout the analytical process. And resist the temptation to fire the messenger.
  4. *Know what you want*. Clear outcomes cannot be emphasized enough. NPD programmes are inevitably doomed if we don't know what we're trying to achieve.
  5. *Force the analysis*. Most organisations spend too much time on collecting data – too little on working out what that data means (see figures 7 and 8). If evidence doesn't drive your decisions, don't collect evidence. One useful discipline – ranking. You may not be able to quantify precisely how effective various programmes have been. But you can compare one programme with another and judge – on the basis of the available knowledge – whether one programme has been more effective than the other.
  6. *Don't obsess over attribution*. Attribution often paralyses organisations – but it's a third order problem. First, you need to know whether the world is moving in the direction you want it to or not. Then, you need to be able to make an accurate account of what you have done to try and change things. Only turn to attribution when the first two questions are answered.
  7. *Don't underestimate the scale of the change*. Massive shift in culture is needed to fulfil even part of the vision laid out here. Leaders need to ask simple, penetrating questions over and over again. What evidence do we have to show we make a difference? Otherwise, it *will* be business as usual.
  8. *Finally, change your investment mindset*. From bank managers...spreading risk across a large portfolio; avoiding loss more important than encouraging gain. Approach is hard to measure and doesn't address the big challenges we face. To

venture capitalists...smaller portfolio made up of sizeable investments; looking for a big win or none at all; using the big win to justify ongoing investment. Easy to detect success; grabs the attention of stakeholders

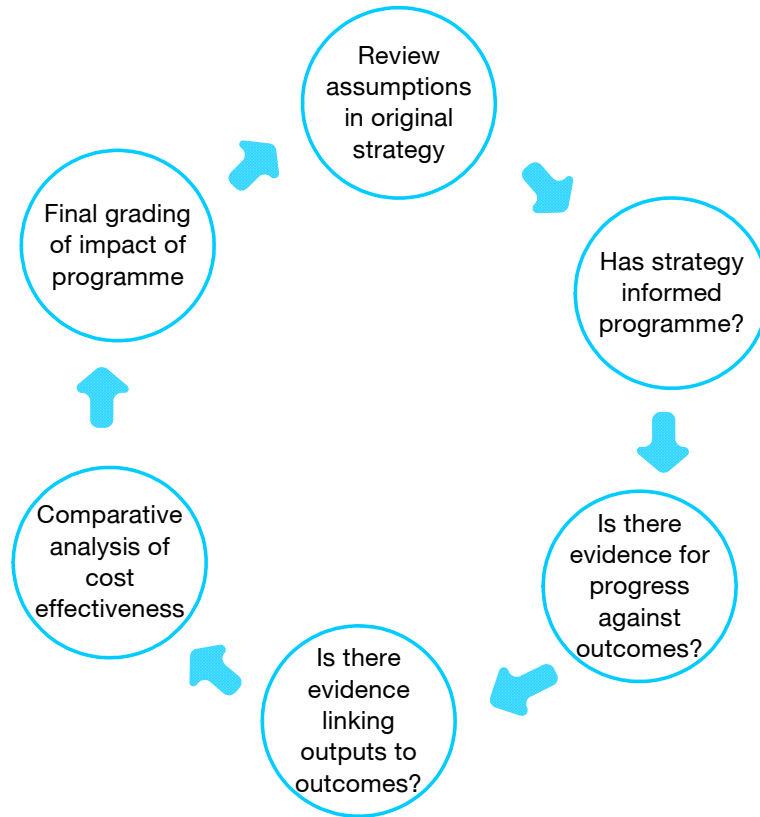


Figure 7 - Analysis of Public Diplomacy Effectiveness

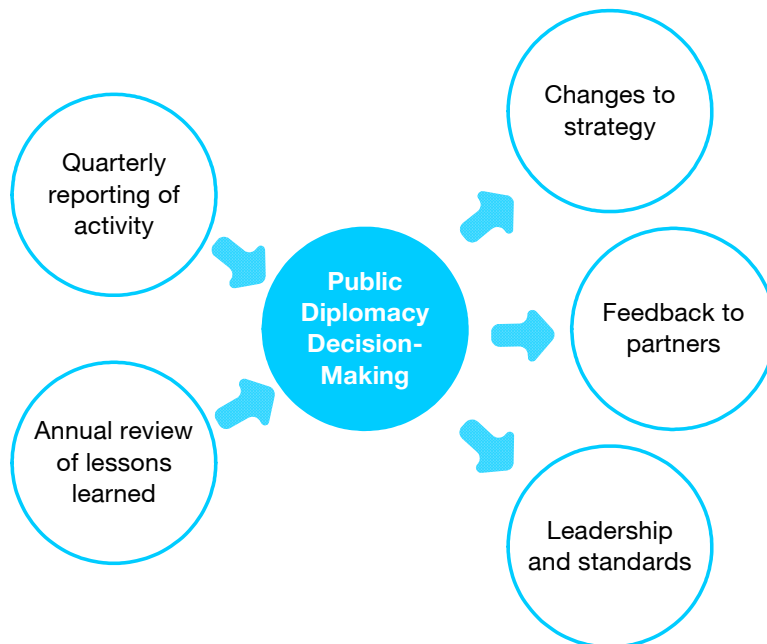


Figure 8 - Evidence-Based Decision-Making

David Steven is a policy analyst, strategic consultant, writer and researcher. He co-founded River Path Associates in 1997 and is now Managing Director. River Path specialises in responses to complex global issues and has clients in the private and public sectors.

Over the years, David has led a number of reviews of public diplomacy strategy for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Council. In 2006, David completed a scoping study exploring the feasibility of a joint evaluation system for the FCO, British Council and BBC World Service.

David has designed programmes a number of public diplomacy programmes, in areas such as climate change and education. He has also pioneered the use of new technologies in public diplomacy, running blogs at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the World Summit on the Information Society.

David has published widely, on subjects such as globalization, international development and public health. He regularly collaborates with the Harvard School of Public Health and is an associate researcher at the University of East London's SMARTLab.

He is currently working with New York University's Center on International Cooperation on a project exploring transboundary global risks.

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