

Public relations evaluation in the eyes of New Zealand practitioners

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine New Zealand public relations practitioners' perception and application of evaluation in their practice. Evaluation is a highly topical issue amongst practitioners as a result of the increasing pressure for public relations to prove its value. International research finds that practitioners and clients tend to judge the success of public relations activity primarily by measuring the amount of media coverage in preference to evaluating psychological or behavioural change. However best practice models and recommendations from professional bodies for assessing the value of public relations have moved from a functional, outputs focused emphasis to an increased awareness of the complexity of the attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of communication. The aim of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of practitioners' personal experience of evaluation. Using a responsive interviewing method, nine senior New Zealand practitioners were asked about how they approach evaluation in their practice, and what value it brings to their practice. Analysis of their responses showed some key findings: an appreciation of the complex nature of evaluation; an acknowledgment of professional and practice conflicts around evaluation; that evaluation is tool for gaining influence; that the practitioner–client relationship is a central driver of evaluation decisions because the clients have control of the resources; that evaluation is a way of developing the professional status of public relations and keeping the specialist, strategic role of public relations secure, and that digitisation is rapidly changing the tools and expectations of evaluation. Despite practitioner awareness of formal professional recommendations related to the practice of evaluation, this research found that informal evaluation processes and measurement of advertising value equivalents (AVEs) continue to be used and valued. The research also showed that New Zealand public relations practitioners' practice of evaluation is aligned with that of their overseas colleagues. The research finds that the recommendations from the professional bodies may be more useful if they take greater account of practitioners' daily experience of evaluation, particularly advising on the importance of conversations about the value of evaluation with clients, and that the professional recommendations would be more useful if they showed greater flexibility based on the variability of the unique organisational and social context.


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I declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed  Date 31st July, 2018

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Public relations is a diverse international industry that is growing in scale and influence. The world's largest public relations firm, Edelman, conducts an annual survey of public relations practice. This survey showed that the application of public relations is increasing in both business and social enterprises (Edelman, 2017). Historically established as a media relations and technical function (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), contemporary business credits public relations with increasing strategic and leadership importance to business outcomes (Swerling, Thorson & Zeffass, 2014; Vercic, Verhoeven & Zeffass, 2014). According to the Holmes Report (2016), a leading industry research source, the global industry generates average annual revenue of over US\$14 billion, and this is expected to grow to US\$19.3 billion over the next five years. The range of services offered by public relations agencies and departments is broad and broadening. Beyond the promotion of products and business services, public relations activities include corporate relations, advocacy, public affairs, issues and crisis management, and corporate social responsibility (L'Etang, 2013).

Defining an ideal or universal mode of public relations practice is challenging (Gregory & Willis, 2014; Stacks, 2016). Scholarly definitions of public relations vary widely. They range from intentional business communication based on a carefully considered purpose or plan (Smith, 2016) to a strategic conversation, ephemeral and wide-ranging, often misperceived, and challenging to master because of a lack of message control (Bowens, Rawlins & Martin, 2010). There is also the recognition that finding a universal definition of the field is difficult because its practice varies according to its social context (Gregory, 2015; L'Etang, 2013; Macnamara & Crawford, 2010). These scholars have discussed the relationships that underlie public relations activity, with internal and external stakeholders, the media, and other influential groups. Gregory and Willis (2014) commented on the crucial point that in planning and implementing campaigns or programmes, public relations is situated "at the point where competing priorities and issues arise" (p. 20). Public relations is thus seen as both a business and social enterprise, involving quantifiable resources such as time and money and more complex interpersonal aspects such as creativity, leadership, and efficiency (Gregory, 2015).

As a field of practice, the legitimacy of public relations faces several challenges. One of these challenges is the desire to achieve membership in the 'dominant coalition' – to gain a place at the senior management table where high-level strategic business decision-making takes place (Broom & Dozier, 1986; L'Etang, 2013; Smith, 2016). The public relations industry has long sought empowerment through being part of the dominant coalition where they would be able to engage in decision-making at a strategic level; the alternative is relegation to an operational level. Another concern in the field is the distinction between public relations and competing fields such as marketing and advertising (USC Annenberg, 2016). The 2016 Global Communications Report found that businesses are pushing for more integration between public relations and these fields (USC Annenberg, 2016). This push for integration suggests that in the age of 'big data,' public relations needs to differentiate itself from competing agencies and

departments, and do so quickly, or otherwise accept a more integrated and less specialised role.

The public relations industry is facing new demands in its incorporation of online media. Online, there are increased demands for a more social and interactive approach to public relations messaging (Edelman, 2017; Gregory, 2015; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007; Phillips & Young, 2009; van Ruler, 2015). This call for a more dynamic approach to managing communications is in part because online media involve less message control (Bhargava, 2010; DiStaso, McCorkindale & Wright, 2011; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2017; Swerling et al., 2014). At the same time, there are increasing public expectations of transparency and ethical practice on the part of businesses (Holmes Report, 2016) as stakeholders are also doubting the motivations behind business promotion (Macnamara, 2016). Alongside this, there are calls for a less functionalist, organisation-centric approach to the practice of public relations, towards a more socially aligned way of practising (Berger & Meng, 2014; Edwards & Hodges, 2011).

Academics and practitioners have discussed the mounting pressure on the public relations field to identify and account for its value (Macnamara, 2017; Watson, 2012; Yin, Krishan & Ean, 2012). The question of what this means in the field of public relations is debatable (Christensen & Langer, 2009; L' Etang, 2013), but an emerging professional focus is the development of a best practice model to allow practitioners to prove and demonstrate their value (Broom, 2006; Global Alliance, 2017; Macnamara, 2014; Macnamara, 2018b; Michaelson & Stacks, 2011).

Practitioners have reported some specific ways that clients think public relations' value may be changing. First, recent research suggests that businesses are more interested in understanding the strategic contribution of public relations to financial outcomes than has previously been the case (USC Annenberg, 2016; Zerfass Vercic & Volk, 2017). This increased interest in the impact of public relations appears to reflect greater recognition of the importance of broader contextual insights beyond just standalone metrics (AMEC, 2017b). Second, businesses are reportedly looking to include feedback from a more extensive array of external publics in their strategic business decisions (Russell & Lamme, 2016; Swerling et al., 2014).

Theorists have expressed the hope that standardisation of the field of public relations may help shift practice away from its shadowy association with propaganda and corporate control (Hallahan, 1999; Thurlow, 2009). Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth and van Leuven (2004) argued that the field is moving away from more traditional 'client-centric' models of practice towards more socially aware approaches. Two roles are emerging as foci of recommendations for practice. First is the 'cultural interpreter' role that emphasises the importance of acknowledging cultural differences in both publics and organisational objectives. Second is the 'personal influencer' role that emphasises the significance of building personal relationships with key strategic figures. Despite these emerging perspectives, public relations involves contrasting approaches to practice, including persuasive techniques that seem to lie outside the usual

professional agenda (Kenny, 2016). Lattimore et al. (2004) proposed that conventional recommendations for public relations practice may hold a residual bias towards corporate dominance by prioritising short-term results and numerical quantifications. Bowen (2004) explained that without clear standards to follow practitioners will tend to rely on the circumstances of each situation, which may lead to vague and shifting ideas about what it means to be ethical (Bowen, 2004).

Despite growth in the practice of public relations, the field's aim to achieve the status of a profession has proved to be elusive (L'Etang, 2007). Evaluation is critical from a professional perspective because it is the means by which individual practitioners and the broader industry demonstrate its value to both employers and stakeholders in society. American public relations scholars Sriramesh and Hornaman (2006) claimed that the achievement of professional status is essential in order to give credibility and to improve the industry's reputation, to increase the accountability and credibility of practitioners, to enhance the quality of work produced by practitioners and to give practitioners more significant opportunities to contribute to organisational decision-making. The push towards greater levels of professionalisation in public relations practice reflects a broader shift in the field away from a technical occupation where the practitioner worked to fulfil the client's business objectives, to a profession with social and ethical responsibilities (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Professional associations have existed in the field since the 1950s, but participation in professional associations on the part of practitioners has tended to be minimal (Bowen, 2007; Fawkes, 2014; Pieczka, 2002). One reason given for this is that practitioners have traditionally had more organisation-centred motivations. Fawkes (2014) is referring to this conflict when she described the tension between the short-term demands of clients and the long-term requirements of the profession. This is aligned with research that shows that practitioners value practice-based knowledge more than theoretical or professional expertise (Bowen, 2007; Pieczka, 2002).

A key focus of public relations' pursuit of professionalism has been the development of professional standards (Global Alliance, 2017). Since the 1960s, professional bodies have sought to standardise public relations and establish best practice recommendations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Russell & Lamme, 2016). Theorists have similarly focused on some key aspects that might comprise an ideal mode of public relations: relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), rhetoric (Christensen & Langer, 2009; Hallahan, 1999), planning (Macnamara, 2002, 2017), and, more recently, digitisation (Macnamara, 2008, 2010). Another focus has been questions of power and legitimacy (L'Etang, 2007, 2013). Professional advocates for public relations argue that, ideally, public relations is strategically planned and managed, and beneficial to business and society (CIPR, n.d.; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; PRINZ, n.d.; PRSA, 2017; PRIA, 2017). There is no single understanding of precisely what either ethics or strategy mean for public relations practice (Hiscock, 2017).

Professional associations, such as the Public Relations Institute for New Zealand (PRINZ), provide resources for professional development with the aim of improving the professional status of the industry. In doing so, they commit members to codes of ethics and expose members to resources, competitions and training mechanisms intended to improve their professionalism. The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GAPRCM) has recently taken a step towards identifying a global body of knowledge that underpins the development of professional standards. In 2002, the GAPRCM was established to be a centralised international body for various local professional associations representing 160,000 practitioners and academics (Global Alliance, 2017a). The GAPRCM recently set out to define a global body of knowledge for agreed roles and activities that could contribute to standardising public relations practice (Global Alliance, 2017b).

Newer ideas about professionalism are emerging. The professional associations are working towards more socially aligned approaches to practice, but this is challenging. Fawkes (2014) claimed that there are many conflicting demands faced by professional associations in devising standards of practice: between society and professional members, between subgroups of professional members, and between the short-term, often organisation-centred needs of members and the long-term requirements of the profession. One new concept that is emerging as an element of practice in the field is reflectiveness, where practitioners pause to consider the ethics and consequences of their efforts (L'Etang, 2007; Theaker & Yaxley, 2017; van Ruler & Dejan, 2005). However, despite this industry and theoretical progress, a universal meaning for public relations professionalism continues to evade the field (L'Etang, 2007, 2013).

An essential element of professionalisation of public relations is establishing the strategic value of public relations practice (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Evaluation has been established as an essential tool identifying and demonstrating this strategic value, but also for confirming or challenging organisational decisions and making a strategic contribution to the 'top table' of decision-making (Botan & Taylor, 2004). A prolific scholar in this area is Australian public relations evaluation expert, Jim Macnamara (1999). He described evaluation as the "long-sought key to the boardroom for public relations" (p. 20) at a conference hosted by the Public Relations Institute of Australia. Evaluation identifies the outcomes that can be used to demonstrate the strategic value of public relations activities such that the profession can be held accountable for these outcomes (Macnamara, 2017). It is a process that ideally helps practitioners understand the status of the relationship between organisations and their strategic constituencies, and preferably does so as they are developing, as opposed to waiting to observe, the behaviours that occur as a result (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In light of the professional acknowledgment of the complex and multidimensional scope of the communication process, evaluation also includes consideration of the broader context, a wide range of stakeholders and both quantitative and qualitative analyses (Macnamara, 2017).

Public relations professional associations are actively advocating for formally incorporating evaluation into all public relations activity. As part of a developing body of knowledge, evaluation has been deemed critical for the strategic and professional advancement of the public relations industry (Global Alliance, 2017a). The Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) was founded in 1996 as a global public relations measurement and evaluation advocacy group (AMEC, 2016b). Today it has members from 86 countries worldwide (AMEC, 2017a). AMEC's Barcelona Declaration of Research Principles (the 'Barcelona Principles') is an evolving set of overarching best practice principles for measurement and evaluation of communications (AMEC, 2015) that were initially developed in 2011 and then revised in 2015. A recognition of the complex and changing nature of relationships between an organisation and its publics appears to underlie the development of the Barcelona Principles (CIPR, 2011).

The Barcelona Principles recommend that practitioners follow seven straight-forward guidelines for assessing the value of their activity (AMEC, 2015). The first principle is that all public relations activity should be planned and strategic, with established goals and measures of value that link all activity directly to those goals. Second, communication outcomes (such as attitudinal change and behavioural change) should always be measured, rather than relying on simple measures such as outputs like media releases and Facebook™ likes. Third, the effect on organisational performance should be measured where possible. Fourth, measurement and evaluation processes should entail both qualitative and quantitative methods. Fifth, advertising value equivalents (AVEs) should not be used given their inadequacy in providing accurate insight into the value of communication. Sixth, social media should be measured consistently with other media channels. Seventh, measurement and evaluation processes should be transparent, consistent and valid. The release of AMEC's 2015 Barcelona Principles was accompanied by specific comments on their importance: a more applied focus, a recognition that the world has become more integrated, a need for more focus on evaluation and insights, a need for more focus on qualitative as well as quantitative methods, and a reminder that practitioners should never over-promise about their progress.

Despite the specific recommendations of the Barcelona Principles, precisely what evaluation means in public relations practice remains contested, and there is no consensus on how or even whether public relations can be evaluated (Thurlow, Kushniryk, Yue, Murchland & Simon, 2016). Despite research that shows that the professional aims of evaluation have become more standardised recently (AMEC, 2015), practitioners rarely follow professional or theoretical evaluation guidelines (Macnamara, 2017). Instead, an array of empirical and theoretical research suggests that practitioners may have differing views of how to best assess the value of their practice (AMEC 2017b; Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, & Zeffass, 2009; Xavier, Mehta & Gregory, 2006). Practitioners have tended to assess the value of their public relations using notions developed early in development of the profession—via counts of media clips (and more recently 'likes'), subjective assessments of the value of media uptake

and stakeholder affirmation, judgements based on gut feel or intuition, and arbitrary valuations using the unit of column inches. The split between professional and practical ideas about public relations' value and evaluation is an ongoing challenge for the professionalisation of the field (Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006).

1.1 The Conceptual Focus of this Research

The value of, and approach towards evaluation in public relations practice is the focus of this research. Macnamara (2017) defined evaluation as the process followed to identify the distinct value and influence of public relations practice. Evaluation is a concept that is related to the effects or impacts of public relations messaging. This definition, however, is not clear-cut. Thinking about evaluation is also linked to broader thinking about effective public relations strategy, within a 'planning cycle' of four stages or phases of research: objectives and strategy setting; communication; measurement; and evaluation (Marston, 1963; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Hendrix & Hayes, 2012; Parkinson & Ekachai, 2006; Smith, 2016; Stacks, 2016).

Evaluation is alternatively depicted within conceptual models. An influential model of evaluation has been Macnamara's 1999 'pyramid' model (Watson & Noble, 2007). In this model, first developed by Lindenmann (1993), the process of evaluation occurs in four key phases: 'inputs', 'outputs', 'outtakes' and 'outcomes'. The four terms have become widely accepted as a way of talking about public relations planning (Macnamara & Likely, 2014). Inputs are the components of research knowledge that is used in setting the goals of the programme or campaign while outputs, outtakes and outcomes relate to the identification of public relations results (Stacks, 2016).

One conceptual agreement is that public relations can be measured across outputs and outtakes, which are the visual or subjective accounts of public relations activity. Outputs are the tactical materials produced to support the campaign that mark the beginning of the communication process (Macnamara, 1999; Stacks, 2016). Outputs include, for example, printed publications, media publicity, a staged event, and online posts (Stacks, 2016). Outtakes are a more sophisticated tactical process that identify whether the intended publics (the individuals or groups affected by the consequences of the public relations activity) actually cognitively processed the messages, and changed their behaviour in response (Stacks, 2016). Another way outtakes are measured is by arbitrary measures – estimations on judgements of tone, comprehension, memorability, and favourable or unfavourable (Macnamara, 2014).

Another area of conceptual agreement is that public relations results are evaluated across outcomes, which are the tangible impacts of public relations. Outcomes are changes to attitudes, cognition and behaviours that result from strategic implementation of public relations (Macnamara, 2006; Stacks, 2016). Relationship outcomes are sometimes seen as the professional aim of public relations efforts (Hon & Grunig, 1999). There is also agreement that

outcomes should be evaluated both summatively, at the end of public relations processes, and formatively, to contribute to ongoing strategising (Watson & Noble, 2007).

The distinction between evaluating outcomes, as opposed to measuring outputs and outtakes, is critical to understanding evaluation. The terms measurement and evaluation tend to be used ambiguously and interchangeably by both academics and practitioners (Macnamara, 2017). This is problematic because measurement and evaluation processes vary significantly in scope and sophistication (Braun, 2014; Macnamara; Watson & Noble, 2007, 2014; Volk, 2016). Measurement of outputs can guide evaluation outcomes, but used alone do little to identify or inform public relations' strategic effectiveness (Gregory & Watson, 2008; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Macnamara, 2005, 2015). The difference between measurement and evaluation has not been explored from the perspective of practitioners and hence is critical to this research.

1.2 The Research Problem

There is limited research into New Zealand practitioners' evaluation of their public relations practice and the value they place on evaluation. To date, there has been limited specific research into practitioner perceptions of evaluation within New Zealand's public relations industry, although this is changing. New Zealand researchers have examined perceptions of public relations from the client perspective (Sterne, 2008a, 2008b, 2011), that of practitioners and academics (Jeffrey & Brunton, 2010), and that of practitioners alone (Bhargava, 2010). Sterne's research found that limited interest in the strategic aspects of public relations from clients led practitioners to distance themselves from the title of 'public relations' practitioners, tending to opt instead for more general or business-oriented titles such as communication management or corporate communications. Sterne found that two-way interaction was seen by clients as essential for best practice because they perceived this as showing a reliable knowledge of their clients and publics, and an indication of honesty and integrity.

In a survey of the perceived competencies of communication management, Jeffrey and Brunton (2010) found that New Zealand practitioners and academics agreed on the importance of strategic management of relationships as a goal, with adaptability and leadership as the two most important personal attributes for practitioners. Bhargava (2010) found that practitioners were excited about the potential for the increased digitisation of their practice. They were positive about the increasing responsiveness, but remained concerned about challenges such as cost and time restrictions.

This research aims to add to the research on practitioner experience in the field of public relations evaluation. It seeks to do so in a way that bridges the gap between professional recommendations and practice. More broadly, this research aims to contribute to the public relations body of knowledge about effective public relations management by applying theory to the current practice of public relations evaluation in New Zealand.

1.3 Research Aims, Approach and Questions

The question that this research addresses is: "How do New Zealand public relations practitioners approach and value the evaluation of their practice?" The research aim, question, and approach were developed with the intention of providing insights into public relations practice in New Zealand by investigating practitioners' attitudes to and practice of evaluation, and the factors that enable and inhibit their use of evaluation. As discussed in the previous section, there has been minimal research to date into the experience of New Zealand public relations practitioners and no research specifically related to the field of evaluation. This research aims to address this gap by focusing specifically on the New Zealand public relations context.

The theoretical position that underpins this research is that public relations, like all other fields of human activity, is based in the mutual construction of social realities or ways of knowing and understanding – an idea termed 'social constructivism' (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). A critical element of a constructivist lens, and particularly the qualitative method of responsive interviewing, is that it is "not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 15). A responsive, semi-structured interviewing approach was used to guide the questioning in line with the areas of focus revealed in the literature.

1.4 The New Zealand Public Relations Context

This research is located in the New Zealand public relations context. While there is limited specific research into New Zealand public relations practice at an industry level, there are indications that the local public relations industry is growing. The field of public relations is expected to mostly consist of small-to-medium enterprises of fewer than 20 employees (Ministry of Economic Development, 2018), with pay scales that range from \$35k to \$130k per year (Careers New Zealand, 2017). Despite being a small field, Toledano and Wolland (2011) described the New Zealand public relations industry as dynamic and highly interconnected. Weaver (2013) and Roper (2005) drew on historical and critical analyses to highlight more critical views of the relationship between practitioners and society in New Zealand. However, communications and relationships are recognised as key growth areas of New Zealand's workforce (MBIE, 2017). As the seat of government, Wellington has the largest public relations presence, followed by Auckland. Numerous tertiary education courses are specialising in public relations at bachelors, graduate diploma and master's levels (PRINZ, 2018).

The professional body for the New Zealand public relations industry is the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ). Established in 1964, PRINZ membership has grown steadily to a total of approximately 1,500 members (PRINZ, 2018). PRINZ is a member of the Global Alliance (Global Alliance, 2016) and a member of the Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication AMEC (AMEC, 2017a). It offers an accreditation in public

relations programme (APR), an internationally recognised qualification for practitioners with at least five years' experience who are working at a project management level. PRINZ offers its members formal opportunities for networking, professional development and education, and event hosting, as well as access to international research, and professional advice and support (PRINZ, 2018).

However, despite various forms of encouragement from PRINZ, such as formal recommendations and regular professional development courses related to the topic of evaluation, there are indications that New Zealand practitioners still prefer to assess the value of their practice simply and informally. In the PRINZ 2016 first quarter survey, a research company asked members about their measurement and evaluation practices. While practitioners reported an array of measurement and evaluation practices, there was limited mention of formal evaluation methodologies (PRINZ, 2016). No research has been conducted that explicitly addresses the New Zealand practitioners' experience of evaluating their practice or addresses their preferences for evaluation or measurement. This research aims to address this gap by focusing specifically on the New Zealand public relations context.

1.5 The Intended Audience for this Research

This research is important for practitioners, clients and professional bodies because it offers insights into the status of evaluation in New Zealand public relations practice. The findings are significant for practitioners who are interested in reflecting on the challenges of applying evaluation in their work and gaining insight into the viewpoint of their colleagues. It is relevant for professional bodies, such as PRINZ, who recommend that their members include evaluation as a step in the planning cycle, and for the public relations industry as a whole as it seeks to reinforce its standing as a profession, given that evaluation is a critical element of professional credibility. The research will also be necessary for theorists and academics who are interested in evaluation in public relations practice.

1.6 The Structure of this Thesis

This research explores how New Zealand public relations practitioners approach and value evaluation in their practice. It uses a social constructivist methodology (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This means that it is based on the understanding that evaluation is a socially constructed concept. By discussing evaluation with practitioners this research seeks to understand the forces that influence their practice.

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1, herein, has introduced the topic of public relations evaluation, the motivation behind this research, and the gap that the research aims to address, as well as the research approach. Evaluation was identified as an evolving and difficult-to-define concept, but one that is recognised as a desirable component of public relations practice, and central to public relations' claims of professionalism. However,

practitioners at the heart of the everyday realities have been found to regard the professional conceptualisation of evaluation as of limited relevance.

Chapter 2 focuses on the literature related to evaluation in public relations practice. It examines developments in recognising the importance of evaluation in public relations practice, focusing on an international context because there is very little research into the practice of public relations in New Zealand, and no New Zealand research specifically related to the practice of evaluation. Section 2.0 examines evaluation from current perceptions of evaluation within the practice, identifying it as a challenging but valued and developing area. Section 2.1 looks at evolving ideas about evaluation, highlighting four components identified as important to the discussion. These are; the key theoretical distinction between functionalism and co-constructivism (2.1.1); the professional distinction between measurement and evaluation processes (2.1.2); the importance of not just quantitative but also qualitative approaches (2.1.3); and the shift of evaluation practice online (2.1.4). Following this broader discussion on evaluation, Section 2.2 examines well-known formal models of evaluation, including the pyramid model (Macnamara, 1999), AMEC's Integrated Evaluation Framework and the measurement – analysis – insights – evaluation model (Macnamara, 2015). The last section in the review focuses on ethics, particularly the discussion area about the importance of two-way symmetrical evaluation (2.3).

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical lens that is applied in this thesis and the qualitative research approach that has been used for data collection and data analysis. Section 3.1 describes the research frame of social constructivism. Section 3.2 describes the qualitative approach that was undertaken, including the sampling method (3.2.1). Section 3.3 outlines the process of recruiting the participants. Section 3.4 discusses the protocols followed to develop the interview guide. Section 3.5 discusses the reasoning and application of the pilot interview. Section 3.6 outlines the way the interviews were standardised. Section 3.7 discusses the thematic analysis. Specifically, it explains Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage model that was followed (3.7.1), and the ways trustworthiness was sought in the research process (3.7.2). Section 3.8 outlines the steps taken to ensure that this research meets ethical guidelines. Section 3.9 concludes the discussion of the research methods. As both the collector and interpreter of the data in this research, it is important to acknowledge from the outset that my interest in this research area was motivated by exposure to both sides of the divide between public relations professional theorising and practice, as a student researcher but also working practitioner in the industry.

Chapter 4 presents and summarises the insights that were coded from the interview transcripts. This chapter introduces the nine participants and establishes their credibility as sources of data (4.1). It then summarises and interprets the interview responses, presenting itemised reports on the participants' coded responses and discussion about their overall meanings accompanied by verbatim examples. It describes the participants' responses to the interviews and their definitions of, and approaches to evaluation, including their views on the difference between

measurement and evaluation (4.2). It then outlines the tools the participants perceive as relevant to evaluation and participants' views of the benefits of evaluation (4.3). The third section discusses their views on the opportunities for evaluating reported by these practitioners, including those related to professional recommendations for evaluation (4.4). Finally, this chapter outlines the challenges to evaluation reported on by the participants (4.5).

Chapter 5 discusses the findings from this research and draws these into three key themes. Section 5.1 analyses what the participants said about the impact of digitisation on evaluation decisions. Section 5.2 discusses the practitioners' perceptions of the role that interpersonal relationships, particularly relationships between practitioners and clients, have on evaluation decisions. Section 5.3 discusses what the practitioners said about the links and divergences between professional and practice approaches to evaluation. These three themes are examined in relation to the literature on evaluation reviewed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6 concludes the research. Section 6.1 reflects on the research aims and processes. Section 6.2 discusses the strengths and limitations of the research. Section 6.3 discusses possible directions for future research. Section 6.4 gives an overall conclusion to the research and discusses the implications of the research for the theorising and practice of public relations' evaluation.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature related to evaluation in public relations practice. It examines developments in recognising the importance of evaluation in public relations practice, focusing on an international context because there is very little research into the practice of public relations in New Zealand, and no New Zealand research specifically related to the practice of evaluation. This chapter presents the findings from the literature. It begins with an outline of the research on evaluation to date, exploring how current ideas about its value appear to be gaining significance but that they remain contested in practice. The following section looks closely at the concept of evaluation, and how ideas about what it consists of have evolved (2.1). This is divided into a four-part discussion covering the changes from functional to relational approaches (2.1.1), the professional distinction between measurement and evaluation (2.1.2), the relevance of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (2.1.3), and the impact of digitisation on public relations evaluation (2.1.4). Section 2.2 examines the evolution of formal models of evaluation that may be encountered by practitioners in professional advocacy and education. This section focuses in particular on the role of evaluation in the strategic planning cycle (2.2.1) and the relevance of the Barcelona Principles (2.2.2). Section 2.3 discusses how evaluation is relevant to the ethical development of the field.

2.1 The Developing Significance of Evaluation in Public Relations Practice

The key international professional body for public relations—the Global Alliance—has cited evaluation as one of the essential subject and practice areas of knowledge for practitioners at all stages of their career (Global Capabilities Project, 2017). This reflects an upward trend in the popularity of an evaluation process evident in an array of research from the early 21st century. As ideas about evaluation have developed, a need to distinguish it as a more sophisticated concept than measurement has developed. This is critical because research has continued to suggest that public relations practitioners have tended to measure simplistically with a scientific or structured evaluation concept going undefined. The 2009 Global Survey of Communications Measurement of 520 international public relations practitioners found that the terms ‘measurement’ and ‘evaluation’ are used interchangeably (Wright et al., 2009). The practitioners report on various measurement and evaluation approaches, including media clippings, dashboards, focus-groups and opinion surveys, as well as intended changes to perception and achievement of goals.

Of the 520 international practitioners in the Global Survey of Communications Measurement, 88% reported that the overarching concept of measurement was integral to their practice (Wright et al., 2009). Surveys and interviews investigating the perception of communication professionals from 23 countries by Berger and Meng (2014) agreed that identifying the value of practice was one of the most essential skills for future industry leaders. In 2015, Thorson et al. reviewed a 2013 survey of 200 senior American public relations practitioners to examine the

rate and extent of measurement and evaluation. Their analysis of the survey found that practitioners were aware that these processes were an expanding element of the recommendations from the professional bodies. It also found that practitioners believe that measurement and evaluation processes have potential to gain influence at an organisation-level. Despite the emphasis on the importance of measuring and evaluating in these studies, an exact definition of either process is left unclear.

While a scientific approach is recommended (AMEC, 2015; Macnamara, 2014), the research suggests that practitioners do not generally approach evaluation in either a scientific or routine manner. Personal judgements such as 'gut feel' or intuition appear to be conventional approaches to evaluation (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Xavier et al, 2006). As a consequence, public relations practitioners tend to make ad hoc personal judgements or resort to simply measuring outputs rather than formally evaluating their work. Theorists Lindenmann (1993) and Macnamara (2002) claimed that budgetary and time constraints need not be impediments to evaluation. They proposed that with a creative approach and a range of low-cost and easy-to-use methods and tools, evaluation can be effectively carried out. The tools and outsourced services available to measure and evaluate public relations practice are increasing as practitioners face pressure to identify and demonstrate the value of their practice (Macnamara, 2017).

International research suggests that practitioners tend to measure their practice frequently, and that they tend to rely on these measures to assess the overall value of their work (Baskin et al., 2010; Schriener, Swenson & Gilkerson, 2017; Xavier, Johnston, Patel, Watson & Simmons, 2005). The majority of the 1,209 practitioners in the 2011 Annual European Communication Monitor, an international study spanning 43 countries, reported that outputs of media clippings were the most popular means of identifying value (84.2 percent) (Zerfass et al., 2012). Other preferred indicators of the success or failure of practice were outtakes, the online tracking of engagement (68.9 percent) and interactions (64 percent). A content analysis of the winning submissions to the Public Relations Society of America's Silver Anvil Awards similarly found that professionals favoured media clips as a form of assessing the success of their activities (Schriener et al., 2017). Participants to an email survey by members of the Public Relations Association of Australia reported that measurement of outputs made up 74 percent of the methods used to value public relations efforts compared to 26 percent of evaluation of outcomes (Xavier et al., 2005). Conversely, in Europe, the majority of a sample of providers and suppliers of public relations reported agreeing that an in-depth approach to valuing public relations practice is more effective, but still tended to prefer counting media clippings (Baskin et al., 2010).

Additionally, despite increased recognition that evaluation is an essential element of public relations practice, the majority of practitioners in the Global Survey of Communications Measurement expressed concerns that evaluation is too complicated and time-consuming in

practice (Wright et al., 2009). Watson (2012) discussed how evaluation practices are not distinct; that practitioners may encounter simultaneous objectives that will require many different forms of evaluation to be carried out at once. For example, practitioners may engage in one-way asymmetrical and two-way campaigns simultaneously, through attempts to get media coverage and at the same time engage citizens in focus-groups to help shape the organisation's stance on a topic. This variation in approach may not align with developing recommendations of evaluation for holistic and formative approaches that include a qualitative, as well as quantitative focus. Practitioners may be motivated in their work by organisation-centric concerns about profit, recruitment, advocacy, and agitation (Lamme & Russell, 2010).

Research suggests that many practitioners lack the necessary expertise to conduct evaluation in a scientific manner (Wright et al., 2009; Zerfass, Vercic & Volk, 2017). A quantitative survey of 1,601 in-house communication practitioners from 40 European countries found that they generally lacked the skills needed to conduct robust evaluation, leading them to neglect it in their practice. These practitioners reported that they particularly lack abilities in the areas of empirical analysis and data management, and were generally unable to incorporate insights that were data-driven into reporting and strategy (Zerfass et al., 2017). Despite this finding, most of those interviewed in Zerfass et al.'s research were competent in compiling and interpreting data, developing and managing surveys, performing content analyses and running internet and social media analytics.

An underlying thread in research about the increasing need for evaluation is the suggestion that there is an interdependency between stakeholders and systems which is relevant to practitioners' daily practice. Practitioners are highly dependent on their clients, who ultimately control the budgets for public relations. Clients have historically seen limited need for funding evaluation, in part because they require clear and specific proof about how so-called 'bottom line' profit-based objectives have been met—a demand that the industry has struggled to fulfil (Thurlow et al., 2016; Watson & Noble, 2014).

From a contemporary business viewpoint, interest in evaluating practice appears to be increasing, with louder calls from businesses for clear evidence of public relations' value (Gregory, 2015; Macnamara, 1999; Mersham, 2014; Phillips & Young, 2009; Swerling et al., 2014). This shift in business attitudes appears to be linked to broader social changes. Business priorities have expanded beyond a single bottom line related to profit to consider the sustainable mix that includes people and the planet (an idea termed the 'triple bottom line') (Elkington, 2001). Clients also appear to be becoming more open to funding evaluation as a formal stage of a public relations campaign or public relations activity (Tench et al., 2017; USC Annenberg, 2016). At a broader societal level, Swerling et al. (2014) found that publics are more aware of the influence that public relations activities have on society. As a result, clients appear to be more aware that their public relations activities need to be transparent, and evaluation is a way of providing insight into these activities.

Practitioners have perceived formalised and scientific approaches to evaluation as critical for their aim to gain competitive advantage and to differentiate public relations from competing fields such as marketing and advertising (Broom, 2006). The competing business areas of advertising or marketing fight for the same resources and recognition of strategic value. Practitioners in Xavier et al.'s (2005) Australian sample identified the need to differentiate their field of practice as a critical concern. They argued that if they did not show quantifiable evidence of effectiveness in line with other management functions their strategic activity could be taken over by other more quantitatively focused sectors, in particular, marketing or advertising. Russell and Lamme (2016) found that that another motivation behind practitioners' desire to evaluate was their interest in reducing uncertainty about their role and future status.

Research shows that evaluation is an important activity to carry out in order for practitioners to gain entry to the dominant coalition. Speaking generally of the public relations field, Reber and Berger (2006) discussed the importance of membership of the strategic management team to effective public relations practice, claiming that dominant coalition membership is not permanent or always influential. Instead, they argued that membership can change as the situation and needs change and that broader internal and external communication processes and interactions faced on a daily basis continually influence the public relations practitioner's role. Thurlow et al. (2016) considered the effectiveness of evaluation processes and further pointed out that there is limited point in public relations practitioners evaluating their practice if they are unable to act on that evaluation.

For the professional field to develop, the level of practitioner experience is a significant factor in decisions about whether and how to evaluate (Russell & Lamme, 2016). The literature review shows that there is little empirical research into how practitioners individually and socially make meaning of evaluation (Brown, 2015; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Goldkul & Lagsten, 2012; Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006).

2.2 Evolving Ideas About Public Relations Evaluation

Evaluation of public relations does not have a universal or singular definition. This lack of definitional certainty reflects the wider state of the rest of the field (Botan & Taylor, 2004). This section identifies some distinctions and trends that are important in understanding the evolution of the concept of evaluation. These are the shift from functional to relational modes of professional public relations, the distinction between measurement and evaluation, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluation, and the digitisation of evaluation theorising and practice.

2.2.1 The transition from functional to relational modes of practice

Ideas about the best ways to identify the value of public relations have developed based primarily in a functionalist approach to practice. Botan and Taylor (2004) discussed how the functionalist perspective focuses on communication technique in defining public relations. The idea that underlies this early perspective is that communication and its impacts are top-down and controllable (Lasswell, 1927; Macnamara, 2017). Lasswell's (1927) idea that mass communication operates as a 'hypodermic syringe' implied that communication messages could be transmitted—or injected—into the minds of apparently passive and gullible audiences without any changes to the original nature of the message. Normative theorists Grunig and Hunt (1984) explain that the functionalist mode of public relations has been highly influential in the development of ideas about public relations' value. From this perspective the aim of public relations practice is to achieve organisational goals. Critical theorists Jelen (2008) and L'Etang (2007, 2013) further elaborated upon this idea by identifying the ways in which the public relations industry continues to align itself with managerial or business interests. From this perspective, media relations is a critical element of public relations practice in order to promote the interests of the clients who fund public relations activity (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

A one-way process of media relations has underpinned the functionalist focus of public relations (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In his discussion of the history of public relations, Cutlip (2013) traced the corporate public relations function from its beginnings as an offshoot of journalism that sought to take advantage of emerging mass media such as television and radio. Grunig and Hunt (1984) mark the 1940s as a general beginning for this corporatisation of public relations. Historically, the accepted role of the public relations practitioner was to focus on measuring outputs (tangible products that can readily be measured) that were carried out on behalf of clients (Grunig & Hunt; Macnamara, 2017). Notions of value in the public relations field were measured by the extent to which the public relations practitioner could get positive exposure for the organisation in the media (Cutlip, 2013). The role of public relations communication was a means of achieving business outputs—a quantified assessment of public relations' value in a manner that would appeal to the interests of clients (Macnamara, 2014).

An evolution is occurring in public relations theorising. Botan and Taylor (2004) discussed public relations from a co-creational worldview of communication. From this perspective public relations is a dialogic process that should be strategically managed on an ongoing basis, rather than simply a focus on the end product. The important point about this co-creational or relational perspective of public relations (as opposed to a functional, management-focused approach to communication) is that it positions publics as co-creators of meaning who mutually establish shared meanings, interpretations and goals. This approach is anchored in constructivist approaches to meaning-making that are based on the principle that communication is always long-term with a focus on the ongoing, dialogic relationships between publics and organisations. An influential notion in the field is that two-way communication links with the development of the professional basis for public relations (Fawkes, 2007).

The notion of symmetrical or co-created relationships has been influential in professional theorising since the 1980s. This is linked to another very well-known and highly theorised approach to public relations practice: the Excellence theory. The Excellence theory involved research into the perspectives of business managers and public relations professionals from 321 high-performing American and Canadian companies with interviews and surveys, and an examination of emerging communication and management theories (Broom & Smith, 1979; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2012; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). According to the Excellence theory, effective practice is based on eight principles that focus on the benefit that public relations has for achieving business objectives. These are: empowerment within an organisation's management; integration between organisational departments; autonomy from other departments as a separate management function; a focus on strategic leadership, as opposed to technical operations; an ongoing focus on environmental scanning; the basis of practice in two-way symmetric communication; a fostering of internal and external diversity; and, finally, an application of diverse and ethical approaches to all campaigns. Excellence theory positions public relations practitioners in a boundary-spanning role—as mediators between organisational interest and the interests of those publics with a stake in their organisational decisions. The Excellence theory has been highly influential in scholarly discussion (Stacks, 2016). It is reflected in terminology commonly used to define the broader public relations field, such as 'deliberate', 'planned', 'performance', 'public interest' and 'strategic management function' (L'Etang, 2013).

An underlying premise of the Excellence theory was that public relations' success was based on establishing mutual interests between organisations and publics--the individuals or groups "affected by the consequences of decisions or who might affect the outcome of decisions" (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006, p. 38). Since the original Excellence research, this theory has evolved into a way of discussing power relationships in public relations (Grunig et al., 2002). When an organisation is engaged in persuasion, the interaction was described as asymmetrical. When the communication between the organisation and its publics is based on dialogue and mutual power the interaction was defined as symmetrical, and this involved achieving consensus and compromise. This was considered an 'Excellent' form of practice. From this perspective, public relations can be managed by carefully analysing the attitudes of the publics and taking a systematic approach to changing (or strengthening) their attitudes, cognitions, and ultimately their behaviours in the form of specific outcomes.

Theorising about evaluation has evolved considerably as attitudes towards the Excellence theory have changed. In line with the Excellence approach to public relations practice, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2010) identified how the value of public relations can be established and demonstrated within five broad areas (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2010). The first area concerns the individual messages or media that alter cognitions, attitudes, and behaviours. The second area attends to the systematised programmes that alter cognitions, attitudes, and behaviours. This is the usual focus of evaluation activities. The third area is the contribution of functions and

programmes to effectiveness on an organisation-wide level. The fourth area is the social contribution of the practice and the organisation on a society-wide level. Finally, the overall public relations or communications activity can be evaluated at the functional level by comparing or benchmarking the public relations activities of the department with the best practices or theoretical principles.

Discussion about the role of evaluation has also been developed on the basis of the evolving idea of the role of public relations within social systems. According to systems theory, public relations activity is always contextualised within, and interdependent upon, external relationships in the social, political and economic environments that surround it (Hiscock, 2017). Systems theory underpinned the Excellence theory because it positioned public relations practitioners as boundary spanners who mediated between the interests of their clients and publics to ensure both would experience value from the relationship (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). One of the theoretical foundations of the Excellence theory is that interactive decision-making and open management will deliver the most effective organisational communication (van Ruler, 2014). To be effective and professional, 'Excellent' practitioners need to remain open to, and prepared to respond and adapt to external variables. They achieve this by using scientifically founded information about the external environment in order to advise and lead organisations on strategic decision-making based in ethics and social interest.

A central issue in ongoing discussions about public relations within organisational systems has been the predominance of the influence of the organisation on decision-making. Thurlow et al. (2016) argued that for the Excellence theory to be applicable, it must provide a framework for practice. Thurlow et al. developed an evaluation approach based on the principles laid out in the Excellence theory that was explicitly oriented toward the success of the function in the organisational context. Eight characteristics were identified as warranting evaluation: access to dominant coalition; ethics and integrity; organisational role and function of public relations; proactive worldview; relationship satisfaction; requisite variety; strategic communication planning; and symmetry and mutuality. The specific challenge identified by these authors is the use of evaluation in the influence of the field. Specifically, the need to evaluate in a manner that appeals to the interests of clients who fund the activity. Yet more critical stances have also been taken on the earlier Excellence theorising that question whether it is too functionalist and short-sighted in its view of the potential impact on practice (Reber & Berger, 2006; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

A key consideration for carrying out public relations evaluation is the influence of the practitioner—client relationship. Berger and Reber's (2006) critical research involved several experimental projects in which they interviewed 200 professionals and surveyed more than 1000 professionals (Reber & Berger, 2006). Their study highlights an awareness amongst practitioners of the importance of using internal relationships with relevant decision-making figures to gain influence. They found that the practitioner—client relationship was particularly

important and that clients tended to be influenced by the value of the relationship rather than the use of logic or hard data. The client's attitudes towards evaluation are a highly influential factor in how practitioners practise evaluation, particularly at a strategic level (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). This influence is primarily because it is the perceptions and interests of those who allocate public relations' resources, the organisations or the clients who fund evaluation, which have the greatest influence on practitioners' decisions about whether and how to evaluate. Additionally, theorists have argued that a quantified value on public relations outcomes is not often seen as possible, although it has conventionally been regarded as important to the industry to align itself with the language and business outcomes of management (Macnamara, 2014).

The formative role of evaluation was established as important to developing an integral relationship with either effects creation or dynamic feedback (Macnamara, 2017). Macnamara argued that formative evaluation is the key to helping the industry both prove and gain influence. The strength of this mode, and its value for public relations practice, is that it illustrates the possibility of using evaluation results to alter the strategic public relations approach. This is because evaluation is a continuous feedback loop rather than a standalone process that occurs at the end of the planning cycle. It implies that the essential strategic aim of evaluation is not only to identify and add value to resolutions to public relations problems, but also to help define those problems and resolve potential conflicts of interest (Macnamara, 2017).

2.2.2 The measurement/evaluation distinction

The terms 'measurement' and 'evaluation' are formally used to distinguish between simplistic and more sophisticated, scientific approaches to identifying the value of public relations (Macnamara, 2014). The former approach to valuing public relations developed in the early years of the profession. It is a metric-based process of identifying outputs and outtakes—that is, counts of media clips and more recently 'likes', subjective assessments of the value of media uptake and stakeholder affirmation, and arbitrary valuations using the unit of column inches of printed articles (AVEs) (Macnamara & Crawford, 2010). The distinction between measurement and evaluation is vital because measurement is limited to numerical outputs, and is not able to identify the attitudinal and behavioural changes that can result from public relations activity. Measurements are short-lived in their strategic benefit (Macnamara & Likely, 2017).

In the Excellence theory, Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified measurement as an inappropriate means of identifying the value of public relations because it reflects a "simplistic notion that the only relevant contribution public relations makes is a monetary one—direct to the bottom line" (Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 97). Macnamara (2017) commented as to how the traditional focus on media relations is damaging to the field because it is technical rather than strategic, with no definite indication of changes to understanding, attitude or behaviour.

Continued use of measurement instead of evaluation also appears to have influenced the perception of the public relations industry as a rather shallow occupation (Cutlip et al., 2012). Watson and Noble (2014) described approaches to valuing public relations activity as undertaken instinctively, reactively and often haphazardly. From a professional viewpoint, theories have tended to emphasise the ongoing need for formative evaluation to influence and guide organisational direction. Broom (2006) argued that strengthening knowledge of the processes and methods of evaluation will help practitioners understand why and how to build upon the former and avoid measurement.

While theorists and professional bodies discuss measurement and evaluation as distinct concepts, there is a recognition that practitioners need to be able to apply both in practice. For example, in the Global Body of Knowledge Project, the Global Alliance (2017a) claimed that measurement and evaluation together are a necessary skill for all professional practitioners, of “Measurement and evaluation approaches vis-a-vis objectives and outcomes” (p. 8). An additional section on senior skills and abilities as being not necessary but preferable for excellence notes some evaluation-specific activities. Within what the researchers define as a ‘Planning’ skill set, the professional “identifies specific desired PR outcomes” and “[e]stablishes communication metrics to evaluate success” (p. 6), and within an ‘Evaluation and measurement’ skill set, the professional will “[Determine] if goals and objectives...were met and the extent to which the results or outcomes of public relations programs are supporting organizational goals” (p.6) and “Uses evaluation results for future planning” (p. 6). Curiously, the Global Alliance does not explicitly identify what they mean by either measurement or evaluation.

2.2.3 Qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluation

Another developing area in the discussion about evaluation is the role of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. As mentioned above, the use of both of these methodologies is an established component of professional evaluation practice (AMEC, 2015). The two methodologies offer the industry distinctly different results (Macnamara, 2011, 2017). While a quantitative method of evaluating is desirable in order to show tangible results appeal to financial interests (Thurlow et al., 2016; Watson & Noble, 2014), a qualitative approach to evaluation may be seen as more appropriate in relation to the field’s aspirations towards professional status. In influential research exploring the idea of public relations business outcomes, Hon and Grunig (1999) discussed how effective public relations practice will be evaluated for its contribution to relationships and broader social value for business, and that these outcomes are necessarily long-term and integral to business strategising.

A quantitative evaluation includes precisely defined, standardised, objective, systematic, and controlled approaches that identify “how many think that way” (Macnamara, 2011, p. 48). In this approach, the practitioner assumes an empirical perspective in a manner that allows them to then predict and generalise outcomes to similar individuals or groups that were not necessarily

part of the evaluation research (Macnamara, 2017). While still engaging with empirical data, qualitative evaluation is more unstructured and relies on the subjective evaluations of the researcher. The practitioner would be more closely involved in the research problem, identifying “what people think and why” (Macnamara, 2011, p. 48) so as to enable an in-depth description and insight into a public relations problem.

While a quantitative approach has been conventionally recommended in early evaluation theorising (Jelen, 2008), qualitative evaluation is increasingly seen as a valid and reliable means to effective evaluation by leading academics because it emphasises the attitudinal and behavioural value of public relations (Gregory, 2015; Macnamara, 2014, 2017). However, the exact or scientific contribution qualitative evaluation can make is unclear (Macnamara, 2017). Macnamara found that techniques of qualitative informal evaluation that practitioners might use to evaluate their practice include conversations, experience or instinct. Part of the increasing focus on qualitative research may be because professional researchers and advocates acknowledge that practitioners often rely on a subjective and non-empirical perspective when identifying the value of their work (AMEC, 2016; Macnamara, 2017; Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, & Zeffass, 2009; Xavier et al, 2006), and this suggests it is an important aspect of practice (Macnamara, 2017).

The exact nature and focus of the practice of evaluation in public relations varies. On an informal level, evaluation can be interpreted as addressing the question “How are we doing?” It addresses concerns about how much effort has been applied and how much has been accomplished as the public relations activity is being implemented and data being acted upon (Diggs-Brown, 2011; Watson & Noble, 2014). At the end of a public relations campaign, summative evaluation answers the question “Did we do it?” It examines whether objectives have been met, and the impact of the public relations activity on the target publics (Diggs-Brown, 2011). This is a final or summative evaluation of the success of public relations activity that is evident in theorising from the early 1950s (Cutlip et al., 2012). Formative evaluation answers the question of “What should we do?” by helping plan strategy, target audiences, and create and test messages and content (Diggs-Brown, 2011). The idea of formative, or looped, evaluation became a focus in the late 20th century. It is likened to an open-system type of evaluation (Macnamara, 2010) that is essential to effective public relations management.

Despite indications that relationships may be more influential in clients’ decision making than hard data (Botan & Taylor, 2004), several studies suggest that the pressure to establish a quantified value of their practice is a concern for practitioners. In Place’s (2015) interviews with American practitioners, she found that they often felt under pressure to misrepresent, pare down or withhold evaluation data in order to portray their own or their clients’ efforts in a particular light, to protect their job titles and positions. The Global Communications Survey found actual or expected cost to be the most significant barrier (Wright et al., 2009). It noted two particular concerns: the inability of the practitioner to agree with the client on a precise method

of assessing outcomes; and the fear of the practitioner that the client will question the scientific merit of the evaluation process.

2.2.4 The digitisation of public relations practice and evaluation

Changes in the media environment have profoundly influenced the way public relations professionals evaluate their practice. Perceptions about the strategic value of public relations are changing with the emergence of new channels, stakeholder groupings, and tools. Poster (2010) differentiated the evolution of media into three media ages or stages. The first media age was centralised, state-controlled, one-way media that was directed at a mass audience. The second media age was characterised by a decentralised network of senders and receivers. Poster suggested that the third age was an evolution away from controlled, top-down media approaches where content is mass distributed towards participatory forms of media, called Web 3.0. Web 3.0 facilitates content tagging, faster searching, and more embedded links, as well as more personal information, stored and used for business interests networks and the potential for community-driven engagement. Macnamara (2008) discussed how online media demonstrated the complexity of the communication process: they are “contested spaces...spaces of multimodality, and spaces of multidirectional communication” (p. 20).

Exploring the areas of media, digital public relations and online evaluation, theorists Phillips and Young (2009) and Macnamara (2008, 2010) discussed the impact of the evolving and rapidly changing media environment. The evolution of digital media reflects the general ideological shift in the public relations field away from an understanding of the communication process as controllable, to an appreciation that the communication process contains factors that fall outside of its control (Mersham, 2014).

Macnamara (2008, 2010) drew on these changes in media to explore the influence of media on the evaluation process. Older media followed a “simple evolution with a linear development path” (Macnamara, 2008, p. 20). Macnamara (2008), Phillips and Young (2009) and Volk (2016) discussed the increased potential for use of feedback in public relations evaluation. There are growing opportunities for participating directly in conversations with publics via social media sites, blogs and other virtual environments. Additionally, there are more tools, such as cloud-based and research software, for data gathering and analysis and access to a massive range of data, making evaluation practice quicker and easier (Phillips & Young, 2009). Macnamara (2008) argued that in the digital communication medium the “networks that matter are participants” (p. 20) because they are the “positive resources in the media production and distribution cycle” (p. 20). Additionally, he argued that evolving media will become more intelligent, interactive and easily searchable, making it easier for practitioners to directly involve active publics in the evaluation process (Macnamara, 2008).

Macnamara (2010) conducted a two-year research project into the influence of digital media on

the wider practice of public relations that also has implications for the practice of its evaluation. He found that contemporary publics expect to have increased involvement in business conversations, and they also value transparency in business practices, therefore the social and ethical elements of evaluation (as opposed to measurement) are more valued in the online environment. Macnamara's (2010) research also showed that new forms of media and monitoring analysis beyond clippings are needed to incorporate social media posts. The online environment has created new challenges for practitioners, who must be even more aware of increased online scrutiny where an organisation's reputation is more vulnerable.

The transition of public relations evaluation to include an online component has implications for the professionalisation of the field. An important topic of discussion at the Global Alliance's seventh annual Global Summit in May 2017, *Disruptive Communication: Measurement, Evaluation and Insights in the Age of Change* (AMEC, 2017b), was that traditional and social media have converged, resulting in the increased need for listening and learning about influencer engagement (Daguimol, 2017; Draganovic, 2017). These aspects are important for the strategic relationship building, normative role of the practice (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This suggests that public relations evaluation may need to be more open-ended and recognise the value of qualitative forms of assessment in the online environment (Macnamara, 2010).

Nonetheless, despite the potential for a supposedly more strategic approach to public relations evaluation, the shift to online communication also poses threats to the professionalisation of the industry. Industry spokespersons Weiner and Kochlar (2016) discussed how online practitioners might be tempted to favour inferences drawn from large-scale data ('big data') over scientifically focused analyses. Online data, retrieved simplistically and without following a scientific process, may damage the professionalism of the industry (Daguimol, 2017; Draganovic, 2017). Theorists claim that practitioners can compare, analyse and monitor outcomes more efficiently and broadly than before (Macnamara, 2015; Phillips & Young, 2009; Volk, 2016), yet also that they may do so using simplistic measures that say little about changes to attitudes, cognitions, behaviour or relationships that are the actual outcomes of public relations practice (Berger & Meng, 2014; Gregory & Halff, 2017). Concern about the future of public relations evaluation appears to echo those of the broader industry. A quantitative survey of 2,253 European communication practitioners found that they are experiencing an unprecedented scale of data and pace of change that is contributing to confusion about what their role may involve (Zerfass, Vercic & Wiesenberg, 2016). Macnamara (2014) therefore challenged practitioners to "resist the superficial hype and 'buzz' that are prevalent in the advertising and online marketing fields" (p. 10) and instead to "develop and measure meaningful forms of engagement with publics and stakeholders that involve cognition, emotional connection and participation in conversations as well as even deeper levels of interactivity such as collaboration" (p. 10).

Thinking in terms of the specific evaluation concept, a significant area of change in the digital public relations environment is how practitioners produce and distribute content (Macnamara et

al., 2016; Zerfass et al., 2016). As a way of examining these changes, Macnamara, Lwin, Adi and Zerfass (2016) divided public relations media outputs into four categories. These are paid, earned, shared and owned media (forming the acronym PESO). Paid media are commercially-contracted content such as advertising and marketing communication. Earned media are editorial content that is a result of publicity gained by organisations through public relations activity, including media releases and interviews. Shared media refers to media that can be contributed to and commented upon by followers, friends and subscribers, including Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Owned media refers to publications and digital sites that are owned and controlled by organisations, including newsletters, reports, websites and official social media pages.

While earning coverage from legacy media still plays a dominant role in public relations practice (Macnamara et al., 2016; Watson, 2012), social and commercially contracted content is of increasing importance in the media landscape (Macnamara, 2002; Macnamara et al., 2016; Watson, 2012; Zerfass et al., 2016). In part this appears to be because journalists, who were the traditional media gatekeepers, are increasingly being bypassed and practitioners have more freedom to connect directly with publics (Macnamara et al., 2016; Zerfass et al., 2016). The journalist-practitioner relationship has traditionally been an interdependent relationship that is usually valued by both parties, with practitioners reliant on journalists for coverage and journalists, in turn, reliant on practitioners for access to topical content (Sallot & Johnson, 2006). There is scarce agreement on the 'rules of the game' of the new media relations role within the public relations field (Zerfass et al., 2016).

Some scholars argue that planning and implementing public relations is complex because of the conflict between the long-term and in-depth aspects of relationships (Berger & Meng, 2014; Gregory & Halff, 2017). Kenny (2016) made the point that even with new, enabling forms of technology public relations aims and processes will always be instrumental—oriented towards the company's profit-driven interest in analysis and strategic planning and hence limited in long-term strategic value. This is in line with Robson and James' (2013) finding that organisations may be taking longer to accept the role of social media in business strategy, reflecting the ongoing use of a one-way approach to public relations online. Yet, while practitioners have shown some reluctance to engage with social media (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2011), industry theorising has highlighted the possibility of using participatory technology in a way that responds to ethical or professional, as opposed to predominantly consumerist needs (Macnamara, 2010; Phillips & Young, 2009).

2.3 The Evolution of Formal Models of Evaluation

Nowhere is the evolution of formal approaches to evaluation in public relations practice more evident than in the textbook or theoretical models that depict the evaluation process (Laskin, 2009). Six well-known models, developed over the past 70 years, are discussed in this section to illustrate the evolution of the formal evaluation concept. These are the Preparation,

Implementation, Impact (PII) model (Cutlip et al., 2012); the Public Relations Effectiveness Yardstick ('PR Yardstick') model (Lindenmann, 1993); the Pyramid Model of PR Research (Macnamara, 1999, 2002); the Unified and Continuing Models (Watson & Noble, 2014); the Measurement – Analysis – Insight – Evaluation (MAIE) model (Macnamara, 2015); and the Integrated Evaluation Framework model (AMEC, 2016a).

The first widely recognised formal idea of evaluation was developed in 1958 (Cutlip et al., 2012). The PII model began with a breakdown of the public relations process into three manageable stages of fact-finding, planning, and communication, and was later developed to include a parallel evaluation process. This model recommended that practitioners begin the process of evaluation by referring to the values and appropriateness of the goals established in the 'preparation' stage, measure the number of press releases in the 'implementation' stage, and identify the resulting changes in the 'impact' stage.

Since the 1990s, models of public relations practice have represented measurement and evaluation as two differentiated functions with evaluation serving as an ongoing, dynamic process that includes both summative and formative types of evaluation. This represents an increased sensitivity to changes in the social environment.

A second influential formal model was Lindenmann's (1993) PR Yardstick. This model is an alternative three-step approach that might be more applicable in practice. It consists of Basic (outputs), Intermediate (outgrowths), Advanced (outcomes). Significantly, this model depicts measurement of outputs as an appropriate means of identifying the overall success of the public relations activity (Lindenmann, 1993). This model established the foundational terms 'inputs', 'outputs', 'outtakes' and 'outgrowths' based on the computational metaphors that were becoming popular at that time (Macnamara & Likely, 2017; Watson, 2011).

The models developed after these early models are based on Lindenmann's notion of outputs and outcomes. One highly influential conceptual model of evaluation is Macnamara's Pyramid Model (1992; 1999; 2002). It depicts the three measurement and evaluation phases of outputs, outtakes, and outcomes as hierarchical levels in the shape of a pyramid. The idea is extended in both the 'Continuing' and 'Unified' models of evaluation. These models apply to both long-term and short-term evaluation (Watson & Noble, 2014). They refer to four specific stages in the evaluation process. These are the 'Input,' 'Output,' 'Impact' and 'Effect' stages.

In the late 1990s, as public relations theorising became more engaged with the idea that public relations practice is embedded in a social system, models of the role of evaluation in the planning process evolved from having a less linear approach; evaluation was perceived within a series of continuous feedback loops throughout the public relations communication cycle.

A vital feature of these more recent models is that all the stages interact and continuously refer

back to one another rather than unfolding sequentially or linearly. The 'Continuing Model of Evaluation' was designed for use in long-term public relations activity where there is ongoing campaign development (Watson & Noble, 2014). The strength of the 'Continuing Model of Evaluation' is that its emphasis on ongoing feedback allows the practitioner to alter the strategic approach during the course of the campaign cycle. As opposed to that, the Unified Model of Evaluation (Watson & Noble, 2014) was intended for short-term public relations campaigns.

Macnamara's (2015) (MAIE - Measurement – Analysis – Insights – Evaluation) model was developed to emphasise the crucial points of public relations evaluation, including concerns about the measurement-evaluation distinction, and involvement of client judgement in the evaluation decision-making process. It describes an iterative and collaborative process where the measurement and evaluation process is transparent to clients and Measurement is kept separate from Evaluation, with two additional phases in between. These other phases are the Analysis phase, an in-depth generation of the Insights phase, which will, in turn, improve the communications programme and inform strategising, and also provide data for reporting in the Evaluation phase. The first stage of the MAIE model involves research, combining data collection and analysis to obtain meaningful patterns of data. The second stage seeks to deepen and enrich the data pool through an intensive, in-depth analysis that considers internal data at the same time as looking beyond to other sources that will triangulate and contextualise the measurement metrics. These could include research literature, databases, publicly available 'big data', historical records, case studies and theories and models, and analytical processes of critical analysis, as well as more business-based contextual analysis of the market, competitors and internal operations. The third stage involves identifying key insights to inform future business or organisational strategy. A characteristic feature of each of these early models is that they show the evaluation stage of the model as a process of consecutive steps in the campaign cycle.

The significance of a modular approach to evaluation is that models add predictability to the public relations evaluation process by illustrating why and how certain outcomes are achieved (Stacks, 2016). Added to this they guide thinking around the precise aims of strategy, the publics who are the strategic focus, and the interests that are being responded to (Macnamara, 2018a).

Measurement and evaluation scholars Watson and Noble (2014) discussed some of the shortcomings of the early models of evaluation, notably those prior to the Pyramid Model of PR Research. One problem with early evaluation models is that they present evaluation as a static, step-by-step summative process that mistakenly presents the communication process as able to be broken down into distinct stages and halted (Watson & Noble, 2014). These scholars argue that it is evident that these evaluation models are not sufficiently sophisticated to represent contemporary understandings about evaluation as holistic and formative, because "In the real world of public relations, nothing stops and activity continues—any valid model must reflect the

dynamic, progressive and continuous nature of this process" (p. 62). Another issue is that communication goals of their client might vary considerably and can vary depending on the goals of the public relations activity (Watson & Noble, 2014).

A key difference between the early planning models and more recent models since the Pyramid Model of PR Research (Macnamara, 1999) is that the early defined evaluation goals as linear and objective, focusing on the evaluation of outcomes that occurs at the end of the public relations activity. This was based on functional understandings of communication and business. The most significant aspect of these models was that they present evaluation as the final step in a linear planning process. This suggests that the evaluation stage can be seen as a single summative stage at the end of a campaign or programme, which may reflect what Jelen (2008) described as the 'know-how' element of most early planning recommendations. The high degree of structure of these two models may also reflect understandings of generalisability and objectivity associated with early social scientific approaches to public relations. Dozier and Repper (1992) argued that ideally evaluation is "designed to determine how well public relations programs work" (p. 186), and should be understood from within the conceptual framework of public relations research that belongs to the highly structured field of experimental designs. More recent planning models present evaluation as an on-going and collaborative process throughout the planning process based on the idea that effective strategy is open and constantly responsive to outside feedback and influences.

Some practitioners have critiqued models of evaluation in general as being too simplistic. Van Ruler et al. (2009), for example, reflected on the need for models to document the entire strategic process, not only the outputs, outtakes, or outcomes. Given the lack of a concrete notion of evaluation, models and concepts may be critiqued and examined for how they are defined or whether a standardised approach based on them is needed (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Many practitioners have expressed concern that the planning process involves too many abbreviations and over-simplifies the planning process, and that they are too confining, which may mislead practitioners or others looking to understand the activities required (Smith, 2016; Stacks, 2016). For example, an essential aspect of descriptions of the planning cycle is that of continued or formative evaluation activity that allows practitioners to learn, correct their programs as they are running, and gather necessary information for the next program cycle (Stacks). Though know-how or closed models of evaluation are helpful to emphasise the organisational logics of workability, formality and consistency (Dozier & Ehling, 1992; L'Etang, 2013; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007; Smudde, 2004), these evaluation approaches are problematic because their description of public relations' value is simplistic.

The professional organisations associated with public relations have also developed models of recommended evaluation practice. There are innovative and easily accessible mass-reach tools made available to practitioners by the associations that allow them to compare, analyse and monitor outcomes more efficiently than before (Macnamara, 2015; Phillips & Young, 2009; Volk,

2016). An example is AMEC's Integrated Evaluation Framework (2016a), which is an interactive, simplified step-by-step online process. It is based on the integration of evaluation theory and academic research. Specifically, it is based on the Barcelona Principles which take the user through the planning process, including seven steps with specific questions in areas of Objectives, Inputs, Activity, Outputs, Outtakes, Outcomes and Impact. It concludes with a final report that can be shown to clients or used merely for future reference. The Integrated Evaluation Framework includes relationships as a potential outcome of organisational effectiveness. It has been endorsed by leading academic evaluation researcher Macnamara (2016) who sees it as helpful in bridging the divide between academia and practice. It is also named after its capability to evaluate integrated communication involving paid, earned, shared and owned channels ('PESO') (Macnamara, 2017).

There is the argument that practitioners have not been involved enough in defining evaluation, and that top-down theories in public relations could limit the practical creativity and development of the way success is identified and learned from in the field. While examining the progression of these models is useful, it is important to note that the academic models are rarely discussed beyond academic literature (Macnamara, 2014). The need for greater alignment between academia and practice is an important route to uncover the areas of expertise, or body of knowledge, about which practitioners can provide strategic counsel (Sweling, Thorson & Zeffass, 2014). Evaluation is hence an evolving concept, the development of which appears to rest on the bridging of academic and practitioner perspectives.

2.3.1 The role of evaluation in the planning cycle

Regardless of which model is followed, contemporary textbook approaches to public relations evaluation depict evaluation as a step in an ongoing planning cycle. Emerging approaches go beyond describing evaluation as just one step in the sequence, and there is an emerging consensus that evaluation is an important review across all stages of the planning cycle (Gregory, 2015; Macnamara, 2017; Stacks, 2016). This idea of ongoing feedback and continuity between the various phases of the campaign allows practitioners to continually assess the value of a campaign or project while adding value to their activities. Process evaluation is based on the premise that the more effective the process the more likely the impacts sought will be achieved (Watson & Noble, 2014).

The public relations planning cycle tends to be understood as linked to public relations objectives and organisational goals. Organisational goals are the overall strategic goals of public relations clients or organisations. They can be determined or approved, and there may be potential to negotiate or co-create them with clients (Hallahan, 2015). Both objectives and goals are important foci for practitioners because they are ideally the primary focus of the rest of the public relations process (Hallahan, 2015). Organisational goals differ from public relations outcomes because the former represent "unique executive beliefs and philosophies" (Doran, 1981, p. 35) while public relations objectives serve as "quantitative support and expression to

management's beliefs" (p. 35). Both public relations objectives and organisational goals are ideally continuous and long-term. In their Excellence theory, Grunig and Hunt define public relations outcomes as a specialised pursuit of the industry: the changes in attitude or behaviour by individuals or groups that are necessary to achieve organisational goals (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

An element of the formal, model-based cycles of evaluation in public relations is the widespread practice of formally relating evaluation to SMART objectives. A related widely applied tool is the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) framework (Doran, 1981). As part of this planning approach, early theorists drew on a management structure to help link public relations outputs directly to business objectives in a manner that is still widely used today (Macnamara, 2018a). The SMART goals are a way of assessing communication effectiveness, and to link outputs to communication objectives. Both quantitative and qualitative objectives are important within this planning approach (Doran, 1981).

The SMART objectives approach to planning is based on a foundational business idea in evaluation theorising of a 'management by objectives' approach to practice (Hallahan, 2015). Business planning theorist Peter Drucker (1954, 1974) developed this theory to help motivate managers throughout the process of goal-setting. Drucker argued that effective management is focused on the success of the business as a whole. Managers could contribute to this by linking objectives of separate departments to those of the overall business. In doing so, the risks and responsibilities of the department's activities would be clear and understandable in the scheme of the wider organisation. In line with this management thinking, public relations theorists may argue that the essential function of evaluation is to link strategic management of public relations objectives with organisational goals. For the rest of the planning process, public relations objectives provide an obligation and incentive to keep work focused on the client's interests (Hallahan, 2015).

2.3.2 The relevance of the Barcelona Principles.

The Declaration of Barcelona Research Principles was the first attempt at universal recommendations for the practice of evaluation on the part of the global public relations industry (AMEC, 2015). The principles are significant in that they send clear signals about the importance of accurate, realistic, transparent and ethical evaluation to the profession. They were agreed upon by public relations practitioners from 33 countries in Barcelona in response to the challenge for standardisation in the industry and to align theorising about public relations planning with daily practice. They were developed by industry experts and theorists in order to promote the professional status and practice of the public relations industry in lieu of concrete or standard definitions of evaluation by professional and scholarly experts. The principles are intended to be interpreted as general guidelines rather than hard and fast rules.

The first set of principles was developed in 2011. The original Barcelona Principles were updated in 2015 with a more applied and practical focus that included heightened emphasis on integration, evaluation insights, qualitative methods, and the recognition of the significance of social media (AMEC, 2015). They consist of seven guidelines or principles of evaluation.

The first of the Barcelona Principles emphasises that clear goals must be set in order for outcomes (changes in publics' behaviour or attitudes) to be able to be measured (AMEC, 2015). This goal setting should always begin with the overarching business goal followed by measurable communication tactics related directly to that goal. As the focus and goals of the public relations industry have shifted, so the professional bodies have changed their recommendations about how best to carry out evaluation.

The second principle emphasises that the focus of evaluation should be on outcomes that are based in communication objectives rather than outputs (AMEC, 2015). The importance of distinguishing between measurement and evaluation processes is critical for formal evaluation. It is not just the quantity that matters to public relations results, but the quality of the relationships that are established and developed (AMEC, 2015).

The third principle is that, wherever possible, there should be a focus on isolating evaluation of organisational performance (AMEC, 2015). This is in relation to trends regarding increased value in public relations such as a more integrated, multi-channel and multi-discipline environment that is rapidly changing.

The fourth principle is that both measurement and evaluation require qualitative and quantitative methods to triangulate understandings (AMEC, 2015). The fifth Barcelona principle is that AVEs are not the value of communications (AMEC, 2015). The sixth principle is that social media can and should be measured consistently with other channels of communication (AMEC, 2015). The final principle is that measurement and evaluation should always be transparent, consistent and valid (AMEC, 2015).

In terms of daily practice one of the most significant recommendations from the Barcelona Principles is the fifth recommendation. This suggests that practitioners do not use AVEs to measure the value of their practice (AMEC, 2015). For practitioners this is difficult because AVEs are frequently requested by clients (Macnamara, 2006). There are indications that practitioners have responded to this change in industry recommendations and that they are using AVEs with less frequency to measure the value of their practice. In the Global Business Insights Survey (2016), 18 percent of AMEC members reported that their clients usually specify AVE scores – a significant reduction from 30 percent in the 2015 survey (AMEC, June 2016).

2.4 Ethics and Evaluation

Ethics is another important element of emerging recommendations about evaluation (Macnamara, 2014; Place, 2015; Tilley, 2005). Ethics has been found to be central to the multiple, varying and often conflicting responsibilities practitioners face on a day-to-day basis (Place, 2015), but the ethical role of evaluation in daily practice is not clear (Place, 2015). While evaluation was identified as a component of excellent or normative practice within the broader Excellence theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), the ethical role that evaluation can play in the practice of public relations is undeveloped from a research perspective. Evaluation is advocated as an ethical means of engaging with professional practice because it shows transparency and accountability to organisations and wider publics (Macnamara, 2014). This is particularly the case when public relations is conducted in a two-way symmetrical manner (Baskin et al., 2010). Practitioners further appear to see their inability to evaluate as an ethical concern because this limits their ability to be strategically effective (Lee & Cheng, 2011). Lee and Cheng (2011) found in their study of 22 American public relations practitioners that ethics were difficult to define or talk about, and that they were understood as having more implicit and subjective, rather than concrete goals. In her ethical pyramid model, which can be used by practitioners to guide clients through ethical concerns, Tilley (2005) described ethical practice broadly as “doing good” (p. 8), suggesting a lack of clarity about exactly what ethics might mean for public relations practice.

2.5 Conclusion to the Literature Review

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the field of evaluation in public relations and highlighted six themes. First, public relations evaluation is not a clearly defined or well-understood process. Second, there is limited understanding of how public relations practitioners evaluate their practice. Third, the literature review revealed that decisions about when to evaluate and how much to evaluate are related to challenges located mainly in the practitioner—client relationship because the perceptions and interests of those who allocate resources have the most considerable influence on practitioners’ decisions about whether and how to evaluate. Fourth, the literature contained evidence that the models of evaluation have gradually evolved to emphasise formative approaches to evaluation and to clarify the distinction between assessing outcomes and output and focus more clearly on the former. Fifth, digital technologies are having a significant impact on evaluation practice, and finally, there is a strong focus on evaluation on the part of the professional bodies.

Chapter 3. Research design

3.0 Introduction

The theoretical premise of this research is that public relations evaluation practice is a social and evolving activity. The research is viewed through the lens of social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). This research applies a qualitative approach to understanding New Zealand practitioners' views on evaluation by engaging in conversations with practitioners in order to gain insight into their perspectives as those who are closely engaged in deciding whether and how to enact evaluation in practice. The qualitative research approach involved responsive interviews as the methodology, and a semi-structured interview format as the method. This design was seen as important to adopt as meanings are dependent upon and specific to the surrounding social values and influences (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This complexity was acknowledged and factored in throughout the research.

This chapter describes the research approach undertaken in order to address the research question, "How do New Zealand public relations practitioners approach and value the evaluation of their practice?" First it discusses the methodological lens of social constructivism that forms the methodological approach applied in this research. Second it outlines the qualitative responsive interview methodology that was used to explore the research problem. Following this, aspects of the method are discussed: the procedures undertaken for recruiting the nine research participants; the semi-structured interview guide; the pilot interview; and how the interviews were standardised. The following sections discuss the process used to carry out the thematic analysis and the transcription process, the steps taken to ensure that the data are trustworthy, and the steps that were taken to ensure that the research was ethical.

3.1 The Research Design and Framework

Qualitative research is approached from an interpretative worldview that aims to explore, deepen and expand understandings (Guest et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). It is the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that relates to the social world and the concepts and behaviours of the people within it (Guest et al.). Qualitative theories are never complete but always emerging (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This research approach seeks "to unpack meanings, to develop explanations or to generate ideas, concepts and theories" (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant & Rahim, 2013, p. 116). A qualitative approach reflects the social constructivist lens that individuals make meaning of their experience via everyday social conversation and interaction with socially and historically meaningful objects and ideas (Creswell, 2009). From the outset, qualitative research acknowledges that perceptions and attitudes are not neutral but rather contextualised and dynamic. This approach focuses on 'getting close' to social experiences that surround a topic and to what the individual participants choose to share about their subjective experience in order to provide insight into the reasons, attitudes and motivations that underlie behaviour (Guba & Lincoln, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Social constructivist researchers, Rubin and Rubin (2012), state that qualitative research focuses on developing a relationship with participants in a spirit of open enquiry that acknowledges the value and expertise of participants. It does so by delving into the natural conversation surrounding a topic, with both researchers and participants participating as co-creators of the research outcomes (Banister & Whelan, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). Qualitative researchers are able to be spontaneous, and develop themes and explore threads in conversation (Creswell, 2009). This contrasts with the quantitative approach that would have required the themes to be defined prior to the research process, and therefore pre-empted the participants' contribution.

The social constructivist worldview that underpinned the research emphasises the active role of the researcher in interacting closely with and both shaping and being shaped by the social meanings that arise throughout the research experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Personal judgement is both a technical and ethical responsibility for qualitative researchers; this is because they are closely involved in the research context, and must use their discretion to decipher participants' meaning, whilst suspending their own point of view or judgement (Seidman, 2013). A degree of self-reflection was necessary throughout the research process to ensure the participants could have their perspectives fairly heard (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This involved being mindful that the researcher has the decision-making power to direct the interview, and that this power could influence the research outcomes. This research recognises the impact of the researchers' own background and experiences on the research. My interest in the topic of evaluation was not neutral or detached; I was personally, financially and professionally invested in the industry. I had come from a postgraduate research and practice background, and had become interested in the topic of public relations evaluation as a student nearing the end of an applied Postgraduate Diploma of Public Relations while simultaneously interning at a busy corporate public relations agency. Instead of committing to the working world, I enrolled in a Masters of Communication Studies and directed my attention to discovering more about the role evaluation could play in public relations practice.

This research was underpinned by the changes that are occurring in the fields of business and communications. Communication and public relations scholars have recognised the interdependency between organisations, meaning that business effectiveness will always involve acknowledgement of co-dependency with other groups (Grandien & Johansson, 2012; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Hiscock, 2017; Sandhu, 2009). Pressures on business arise when their aims are not aligned with the interests of co-dependent groups; this is likely to limit profit. In order to understand the nature of these interdependencies, some communication and public relations management scholars have identified three different levels that could be analysed where impacts might be evident within and between organisations: micro (individual), meso (organisational) and macro (societal/professional) (Grandien & Johansson, 2012; Hiscock, 2017; Sandhu, 2009). While not explicitly mentioned in the Excellence research, which identified the basic idea for the idealised norm of evaluation, the idea of systems is an important

framework that recognises that public relations is always socially and culturally embedded within interpersonal, organisational and social levels.

These levels of analysis had been broadly applied in the field of public relations evaluation. Influences on public relations practice have been identified at the micro (individual) (Macnamara, 1999, 2017), the meso (organisational) (van Ruler & Dejan, 2005) and macro (societal/professional) (Theaker & Yaxley, 2017) levels. The individual or micro level of public relations evaluation has been found to be influenced by personal and interpersonal dynamics, such as judgements, intuition and interactions (Macnamara, 1999, 2017). As part of the “many micro-decisions as part of their daily work” (Macnamara, 1999, p. 12), this is likely to be an immediate and non-critical level of practice. At the meso, or organisational level, meaning-making is oriented towards management and financial and internal status and returns (van Ruler & Dejan, 2005). This aligns with international research about the defining role of the organisational culture in public relations decisions (for example, Grunig & Hunt, 1984). At the macro or societal/professional level, decision-making is embedded in social perceptions, involving consideration of professional legitimacy, professional ethics and the wider role that public relations plays in society. Macro level decisions are impacted by social structures and variables in the wider environment (Theaker & Yaxley, 2017).

3.2 The Responsive Interviewing Method

The interviews were designed following principles of responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Responsive interviewing is a co-creational conversational experience that acknowledges a balanced perspective of both researcher and participant in contributing to the research outcomes. This approach to interviewing acknowledges that everyday meaning is dynamic and iterative, and based in conversation. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) alternatively define responsive interviewing as “a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives” (p. 3). This method consisted of initial online and telephone contact with purposefully sampled participants, and then semi-structured interviews (conducted with one participant by telephone, and the other eight in person at the participants’ workplaces) using a semi-structured interview guide. Each of the interviews was between 47 minutes and 100 minutes long. The time allowed for each interview was deemed sufficient to develop a degree of narrative, with a chronological beginning, middle and end.

Responsive interviewing is useful for complex topics because it gives insight into how and why things change within social processes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This approach involves an emerging research design that allows for the questions to be reassessed and reconfigured if the data points in new directions. According to Seidman (2013), the relationship between the researcher and participant will have begun as soon as the participant has heard about the study—in this case through an initial email contact which provided a formal explanation of the study and gave the participants the opportunity to read through the project description before agreeing to participate. Social constructivist theorists, Berger and Luckmann (1991), comment

that social conversations are a rich source of data about meaning-making, especially when they are frequent and intensive. As meanings are discussed in a social setting new and related meanings are bound to arise. These meanings are continuously formed based on individual psychological and social experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Interviews also offer a level of privacy suitable for discussion of sensitive or confidential issues and they are familiar to public relations practitioners for gaining perspectives about subject matter from experts or opinion leaders (Weerakkody, 2015).

Both a standardised approach to direct the research and the flexibility to follow the conversation “wherever it goes” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.17) were employed. Responsive interviewers require a constant pursuit of balance between knowing when to remain silent and listen, and when to intervene and seek control over the research process. Wherever possible the participants were interviewed in their location of choice, following a semi-structured format, and following a semi-formal design that was seen to be appropriate to usual workplace conversations. An interview guide (discussed in Section 3.3) with written outlines of question ideas was used as a collection of prompts to ensure that key themes were not overlooked.

The design was structured to allow participants to freely express their opinions and voice alternative ideas (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Guest et al., 2006; Oltmann, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A degree of structure is necessary in qualitative research in order to achieve the uniformity needed to meet the research aims to the extent that conversational flow can be maintained (Guest et al., 2006). This was facilitated by establishing the conversational tone of the interviews by using small talk and light chatty conversations throughout the interview process, acknowledging instances of disclosure, and giving appreciation for their insights. I also paid attention to non-verbal cues that indicated the need for changes to the interview process and direction, such as apparent enthusiasm or discomfort. This allowed me to explore an idea or issue in greater depth during the course of the interview.

3.3 The Interview Guide

The interviews were structured with several potential opening or introductory questions, followed by a series of open-ended question areas, and ending with three closed demographic questions. This questioning structure used a funnel style of introductory questions, followed by main questions and concluded by wrapping-up questions (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The main questions were structured around three analytical focus areas relating to the three levels of public relations situation within the organisational framework, of micro, meso and macro, discussed in Section 1.1. These were interpreted within the individual level, the organisational level, and the wider professional or social levels of public relations practice (Sandhu, 2009; Grandien & Johansson, 2012). The interview guide is presented in Appendix A.

The individual level questions were about evaluation as it was understood when contextualised in practice situations, as an instrument for examining public relations activity. As an example of

a question that related to the individual (micro) level, participants were asked to discuss a campaign where measurement and evaluation was successful. At the organisational (meso) level the questions focused on evaluation as a function of management. At this level questions were focused on evaluation as an element of the organisational aims, and as a contribution to structured programmes. Questions related to this level were on the challenges or opportunities involved in measuring and evaluating, resources decisions around evaluation, the link between public relations' reputation and evaluation, and changing expectations from organisations and clients in measurement and evaluation. At the professional (macro) level, questions about evaluation focused on public relations as a system that was integrated into wider society. The foci were each participant's awareness of the Barcelona Principles, the perceived value and necessity of industry wide education or training in measurement and evaluation, the potential social harm or benefit that arose from evaluation or lack of evaluation, and what the participant considered might be the future of evaluation in public relations practice. The three final questions were demographic: the participant's length of time in the industry; the size of organisation; and the type of organisation. Each participant's gender was also noted for the purpose of contextualisation.

The 15 questions in the interview were also guided by themes that emerged from the literature review. These themes were: the importance of measurement and evaluation; the purpose and frequency of measurement and evaluation; what resulted in evaluation success; the various tools used in measurement and evaluation; practitioner perspectives of AVEs; the use of social media for determining success; variation in resources; the preferences of clients or organisations; practitioner awareness of the Barcelona Principles; practitioner education or training in evaluation; the ethical implications of evaluation or no evaluation; and future trends in public relations evaluation.

The interview guide was prepared to orient the interview conversations towards the research focus, but to do so in a manner that was relatively loose and able to be adjusted depending on the participants' interests and choices. Questions in the guide were based on the literature review (see Chapter 2), and my academic and professional experience in public relations. I ensured that I had a clear knowledge of the purpose behind each interview question and could explicitly answer this when requested (Guest et al., 2006). I used a flexible approach that was appropriate for the qualitative methodology. I adopted this approach to the interviews in order to avoid overly structured questioning that could cause the interaction to be stilted and might inhibit genuine conversational flow. Throughout the interview, participants were free to deviate from the order of interview questions and raise issues that had not been foreseen in the interview guide. While the questions were not intended to address every variable related to public relations evaluation, they were predominantly open-ended, leaving room for other topics to arise. This meant that the sequence of questions was different for every participant and depended on the participant's particular responses (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Weerakkody, 2015).

3.4 Recruiting the Research Participants

A relationship-driven sampling approach was applied to gain access to nine participants who were credible sources of knowledge on evaluating public relations. Five participants were recruited using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) and four were recruited using snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Purposeful sampling is the targeted seeking of known research participants on the basis of defined criteria that makes them an appropriate source of expertise for the research. Snowball sampling involves the selection of participants on referral from other participants or industry contacts on the basis of expertise (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Academic and professional colleagues and several participants referred the researcher to potentially interested candidates and a number offered themselves as referees. Overall, positive responses were received from 11 of the 14 invited participants, although two withdrew prior to the research commencement.

A sample size of nine participants was deemed acceptable for this research because the selected public relations practitioners were each sufficiently experienced. The practitioners who responded each had a minimum of four years' experience in the public relations industry and were in positions of decision-making concerning public relations evaluation. Based on their experience it was also assumed that the practitioners had the potential to provide rich and detailed insight into how practitioners experience the evaluation problem. The participants were senior public relations practitioners, chief executives, or heads of department. In four cases, they had worked in public relations for more than 20 years. The four participants with more than 20 years' experience in the industry also had diverse experience across different types of public relations. They all had experience and knowledge about evaluation and they all expressed their willingness to participate in research related to evaluation in public relations practice. They are described in more detail in Section 4.1.

Another factor that establishes the credibility of the participants in this research is that they are all current or past members of the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand—the professional body for public relations membership. This may have skewed the findings to some extent because it is highly likely, given their obvious commitment to professional development and the development of the public relations profession, that this group will be more knowledgeable about the professional stance towards evaluation. They may also be more familiar with the current professional position on evaluation because they have access to the professional resources and events offered by PRINZ. A related limitation was a possible sampling bias because a number of the participants were winners of PRINZ awards.

Participation in the research was requested via email between the months of March and April 2017. The recruitment email followed a generic format that identified the researcher, outlined the research aims and processes, and included an information sheet that explained the research plan in more detail. The time and location was established in follow-up correspondence once a willingness to participate was ascertained.

3.5 Conducting the Pilot Interview

The interview process began with a pilot held in early April with a highly experienced senior public relations practitioner. This practitioner gave feedback on appropriate interview etiquette, specifically the importance of treating it like a professional conversation and including a document when discussing the Barcelona Principles as a reference point for professional engagement. I refined my technique to ensure participants were encouraged to feel comfortable and share their interpretations of their experiences.

Prior to the interview, I informed practitioners that the interview focus of the research was on how they perceive evaluation, including the difference between measurement and evaluation. I discussed the interview question and assured the participants that there were no right or wrong answers. During the interview each of the participants was presented with a copy of the Barcelona Principles as I referred to them in my questions.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

The findings from this research are presented diagrammatically, through direct quotes, and paraphrasing. They are not represented numerically. This approach was appropriate because the chosen methodology is qualitative. A qualitative approach uses words and observations; numerical analysis is not appropriate. Numbers are relatively meaningless in qualitative research because each of the nine participants makes their own subjective contribution to the research that is not able to be reduced, compared or generalised without losing the depth and detail of insight sought in the research.

Meanings and theories were generated and inductively drawn out or developed throughout the research process (Creswell, 2009). For the purposes of this social constructivist research, some quantitative structuring was used to support and expand upon the qualitative discussion. My supervisor and other industry experts were helpful sounding boards in developing my thinking on how best to answer the research question.

Thematic analysis was used to identify the significant insights on the topic of evaluation in New Zealand public relations practice. The thematic analysis was applied followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Braun and Clarke's thematic approach involves six general steps aimed at providing an account of the data that is "rich and detailed, yet complex" (p. 5). They steps are: general familiarisation with the responses, coding the responses, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the themes. The authors define this approach as a qualitative systematic method of identifying, analysing and reporting on themes that can be detected in the data.

Following data collection and transcription, the first step was familiarisation with the overall data in order to get a general sense of the meaning of what the participants were saying (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I followed the responsive interviewing technique of listening attentively and taking notes of aspects that were emphasised by repetition, tone and gesture by the participant. I fleshed out these notes immediately following each interview. Once the transcribed interviews had been received, I read through each of the transcripts separately, noting any points that struck me as interesting and relevant to understanding the research problem. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), familiarisation and interpretation are closely related in thematic analysis based on the understanding that insight generation begins as soon as the research interaction takes place.

Once the transcribed data was received, an initial decision was made about how to define the units of the qualitative data. I began selectively coding the data and developing a Coding Schedule. This approach to analysis was selected because it is broad, and able to be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used an open-coding approach, involving systematically reading each interview transcript, and marking off and coding each passage as I saw it occurring. While doing so, I considered ideas about what kinds of insights might be helpful for understanding the research problem (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). NVivo™ was used to help achieve uniformity in coding. Based on this process a Coding Schedule (Appendix D) was developed.

To assist with coding the large amount of data, I used frequency analysis to track the responses within each code. I showed how each sub-topic was related to a broader topic by taking a hierarchical approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This schedule had five code categories, with 29 sub-codes comprised of 193 coded elements. The Coding Schedule (see Appendix D) included an identification and definition of each code. Once the tentative set of coding categories had been developed it was pre-tested by an external independent coder on a sample (10%) of the data. The level of agreement was 78%. This independent coding was then used to help develop a Coding Schedule that was more specific by reassessing codes the independent coder believed were present that were missing in my initial coding (see Appendix E for the Inter-Rater's marked up early version of the Coding Schedule). I sought to avoid coding paragraphs or longer passages to allow for more accuracy in interpretation (Weber, 1990).

I coded words using a 'bottom up' approach in order to identify themes as they arose from within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved paying attention to practitioners' contextualised, lived experiences of carrying out (or not) evaluation in their practice. This technique was intended to capture the key ideas from the data in relation to the research question, treating all units of analysis as equally valid, regardless of any potential positioning in the interview. Data was reviewed line-by-line in detail and as concepts became apparent, a code was assigned. I coded blocks of text to gain more insight into the wider context of the surrounding conversation.

Once this inductive approach to coding had been applied I examined the data deductively in order to ensure that important aspects had not been missed. I applied the three levels of individual, organisational and professional/societal (Grandien & Johansson, 2012; Hiscock, 2017; Sandhu, 2009) as a way help structure the questioning. These levels were considered in the coding and thematic analysis to ensure that the participants had the opportunity to speak about topics that were current in their field. Individual-level questions addressed areas related to individual decision-making, including definitions and tools. Organisational-level questions asked about the influence of organisational culture, including areas such as the practitioner—client relationship (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). At the professional/societal level, questions focused on topics including the influence of digitisation on changing expectations about evaluation (Macnamara, 2010a, 2010b), relationships with media (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), and professional evaluation recommendations, notably the Barcelona Principles (AMEC, 2015). The frequency of the codes was also counted and discussed to offer some points of comparison for the weighting of the qualitative insights (Patton, 2002).

Thematic analysis of the data followed. The third phase involved searching for themes with an in-depth analysis of the coded findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The emphasis here was on the “big picture” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9) ideas and relationships, which became apparent in the interviewing process. I took an open and non-judgemental approach to looking for themes to avoid pre-empting the insights that could be obtained, and identified some key clusters and patterns. In the fourth phase I reviewed the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this point I took a ‘top down’ deductive approach by thinking about and identifying themes as they related to each other and to international research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The next phase was defining and naming the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were refined in relation to the overall meaning captured in the codes, and quotes from the transcripts were used to capture the essence and discrete aspects of the theme. While all transcript data was used to arrive at the themes, it was not necessary for all data to be used to describe a theme.

The final phase in the research process was writing up the conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Wherever relevant I presented the results graphically, in tabular format, or included direct quotations to support and illustrate participants’ responses. Responses and specific comments were attached to each participants’ pseudonym. I focused on describing the qualitative insights in as accurate and detailed a manner as possible in the concluding discussion. Throughout the thematic analysis these procedures were consistently applied not only to ensure the scientific credibility of the research, but also to authentically represent the participants’ views from a position of ethical responsibility (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Research

Trustworthiness is a fundamental concern of this interpretative research. Guba and Lincoln (1982) describe how an effective qualitative methodology will be guided by criteria of trustworthiness, which represent the equivalent rigour usually demanded in quantitative research. There are four criterion identified by Guba and Lincoln (1982): credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The first two criteria are closely linked. Credibility is confidence in the truth of the findings, whereas dependability proves that findings are consistent and could be repeated. Transferability shows that findings are applicable in other contexts. Confirmability is the degree of neutrality or acknowledgement of the extent to which the findings are shaped by the bias or interests of the participants and researcher. Focusing on the criteria of trustworthiness helps ensure that qualitative data are “meaningful, trackable, verifiable, and grounded in the real-life situations from which they were derived” (p. 250). These criteria are not to be treated in isolation but should be considered throughout the research process.

Ethical and effective qualitative research depends partly on the researcher acknowledging their influence as the major factor in data collection and analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This research was approached from within two social worlds, as both an insider participating in the professional and occupational life of a public relations practitioner, and as an outsider, or observer, engaged in participant responses from an analytical perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This enabled me to get a fuller perspective of the research problem: to “see life in the round, from all angles, including multiple sides of a dispute and different versions of the same incident” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 27). Yet it also involved risks such as excessive personal involvement or bias.

Trust was another important consideration in this research. I prolonged my engagement across several interactions with seven of the participants to help establish a trust relationship that would lead to more accurate outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). A concern that was evident from the outset was that participants, as practising business professionals, may be unwilling to discuss their business practice for reasons of confidentiality. The differences between what people say they do and what they actually do is one of the recognised limitations of any person-centered research (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2003). An additional concern is that participants may experience pressure to give answers based on what they perceive is expected of them (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2003). Initial email and phone conversations were used in order to establish a rapport that went beyond the actual research interviews. Additionally, during the interviews I adopted a conversational and semi-formal discussion using friendly topic starters and open-ended questions and hosting the interviews in an environment of the participants’ choosing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I emphasised to each of the participants that their identity would remain confidential so therefore they could speak freely, that they could withdraw from the research at any time (as outlined in the process of ethics approval), and that there were no right or wrong answers.

I continually verified my findings by getting peer scrutiny of the ongoing research project (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Comments from my supervisor and academic peers, as well as feedback from my peers on my research presentation at the annual AUT Postgraduate Forum, gave me fresh perspectives that allowed me to step back from the project to some extent, and refine my approach and discussion. The research data was triangulated by referring to other documents or sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Prior to the development of the research questions and throughout the research process, I discussed the research with a range of practitioners and theorists. In order to develop the research questions, I studied associated research from international and New Zealand researchers in order to compare how congruent these findings were with past studies related to public relations evaluation. Additional to the literature on the New Zealand context, background data was obtained from internal documents provided by the participants.

Ongoing reflection on the research project and my own developing interpretations of the findings was vital to maintaining perspective on the research outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). I carried out the process of 'bracketing' the participants' responses (Vogt, Gardner, Haeffele & Vogt, 2014). Bracketing involves simultaneous and ongoing interpretation of the interviews in relation to each other and the literature in order to suspend judgements of the research outcomes. Constant comparison between the coded elements helped me clarify whether they reflected the same concept (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011). My decision to view the research through a social constructivist lens informed my focus on social consequences rather than effectiveness, emphasising processes of legitimacy, communication and reflection. This helped ensure that there was a fit between the views of the practitioners and my own interpretations. While reflection was an ongoing process throughout the research, the major reflections that had a specific impact on the findings are outlined in Section 5.2.

Another important aspect of this research was the acknowledgement of complexity. Subjective experiences and conversations are complex and messy, meaning that conclusions can never be made fully or definitely (Guest et al., 2011). The interview transcripts that will be discussed in Chapter 4 were highly contextualised and complex, involving nuanced meanings and many tangents and digressions from the research focus. The detailed or 'thick' description of the phenomenon in Chapter 4 helps to accurately convey actual situations and the contexts surrounding the findings outlined (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Despite this complexity, all contributions are valid in qualitative research and should be treated as such. Focus was placed on acknowledging the complexity of qualitative insights in this research by continuously seeking contradictory evidence, or outliers, that might be distinct from other research findings (Ritchie et al., 2013). As this chapter has outlined so far, it was necessary that some simplification and reduction was used on the research data for the data to be able to be interpreted. The strengths and weaknesses of the research are discussed and reflected on in Section 6.2.

3.8 Ethical Considerations in the Research

This study raised numerous ethical complexities about the ideal ways to undertake qualitative research. Since the focus of the research is the in-depth experience of human beings, it was critical in this research to ensure that their viewpoint was fairly represented and their wellbeing was protected (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A chief benefit of qualitative research is that participants are empowered to contribute to the research outcomes. Gubin and Lincoln (1982) describe how qualitative research participants have autonomy because they are positioned as conversational partners who are experienced and knowledgeable on the topic. The method of responsive interviewing and use of a semi-structured design emphasised openness and transparency (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Weerakkody, 2015).

Yet the qualitative research process raises issues such as anonymity and intrusion into the participant's thoughts and beliefs (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Unpredictable responses are likely to arise and a degree of emotional risk is unavoidable (Sanjari, Bharmnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi & Cheraghi, 2014). Along with giving the participants a degree of control over the research process, several additional techniques were used to minimise distress. This approach was oriented around ensuring that participants were informed about the aims of the research, had opportunities to contribute to and lead the direction of the research, and that they were informed of their freedom to withdraw their participation at any point. The information sheet was devised in collaboration with my supervisor with the intention of being as accessible as possible. Practitioners were informed in the recruitment email and at the beginning and end of each interview about their freedom to withdraw from or participate in the research. This was also facilitated by the loose approach to interviewing.

The close involvement of researchers' perceptions in qualitative design and outcomes also poses challenges to the research's interpretative validity (Guest et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). I had personal, professional and educational experience with evaluation in public relations, experiences that would potentially have coloured my perception throughout the research. For example, in a past role at a public relations agency, one of my consistent responsibilities was media relations, including pitching, measurement and tracking. Several of the practitioners in this agency voiced a view that they believed this was a rather shallow and limited focus, leading me to wonder if this was a belief held by others in the industry. These experiences may have led me to develop my research approach in a biased manner that could have shaped my research design and questions, posing risks of pre-empting the worldview of the sample of practitioners in this research. I reflected on the research and suspended judgement throughout the research process for as long as possible to ensure emotional distance and neutrality from the research outcomes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013).

Confidentiality is another central and constant concern in qualitative research (Kaiser, 2009). I ensured that only my supervisor and I had access to the research data and that all discussions between us surrounding the research took place privately.

Approval for this research was gained from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee for all stages of the research. AUT's seven key ethical principles were followed, involving key areas of avoiding harm or vulnerability, and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The preliminary and final Ethics Committee approval for the research is included in Appendix F and G, and for amendments to the research is included in Appendices H and I.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology and methods that were applied in this research. It described the theoretical lens—social constructivism—that was applied and the qualitative research method that was used for data collection and data analysis. It described how qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were applied in the research. The chapter explained, too, the responsive interviewing method and discussed the interview guide, content and strategies that were applied throughout the research. It then presented the process used to carry out the thematic analysis, the transcription process and the coding system. Finally, it examined the steps taken to ensure that this research met ethical guidelines. The findings of the nine interviews are discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4. Findings and Themes

4.0 Introduction

This research addresses the question: 'How do New Zealand public relations practitioners approach and value the evaluation of their practice?' The previous chapter outlined the exact processes followed in the recruitment and interviewing of the participants, as well as the coding and thematic analysis of the interview data. This chapter reports on the identified code areas. As fitting with the social constructivist, interpretative basis for qualitative research, each insight is treated as valuable in its own right. The codes were also counted to allow for some comparison and perspective on the scope of agreement between the themes (Patton, 2002).

This chapter introduces the nine participants and establishes their credibility as sources of data (4.1). It then summarises and interprets the interview responses, reports on the participants' coded responses and discusses their overall meanings accompanied by verbatim examples. It describes their definitions of and approaches to evaluation, including their views on the difference between measurement and evaluation (4.2). It then outlines the tools the participants perceive as relevant to evaluation and participants' views of the benefits of evaluation (4.3). The third section discusses the participant practitioners' views on the opportunities for evaluating, including those related to professional recommendations for evaluation (4.4). Finally, this chapter outlines the challenges to evaluation reported on by the participants (4.5).

Chapter 3 (Section 3.1) outlined the guiding focus areas used to structure the questioning, the coding and thematic analysis. These were the individual (micro), organisational (meso) and professional/societal (macro) levels (Grandien & Johansson, 2012; Hiscock, 2017; Sandhu, 2009). Questions within these levels were developed based on what the literature showed about overseas experiences of public relations evaluation, and what theorists believed the main influences are on evaluation. While the three levels of analysis are not clearly distinguishable, they are a useful way of thinking about the complex field of social meaning making (Hiscock, 2017). On an individual level, practitioners believed that evaluation is an important (Berger & Meng, 2014; Wright et al., 2009) yet complex and challenging pursuit (Wright et al., 2009). Research suggests that they often approach evaluation simplistically or unsystematically (e.g. Baskin et al., 2010; Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Schriener et al., 2017). On an organisational level, several studies showed that practitioners' evaluation decisions are heavily influenced by the viewpoint of their clients who may be becoming more interested in allocating resources to evaluation (Tench et al., 2017; USC Annenberg, 2016). On a professional or societal level, the ethical and social role of evaluation was becoming clearer (Thorson et al., 2015). There was awareness that online technologies were influencing evaluation at all levels (Zerfass, Vercic & Wiesenbergs, 2016). An important aspect of the evolving discussion on public relations evaluation is the role of professional recommendations, particularly the Barcelona Principles (AMEC, 2016a; Macnamara, 2017). No research has thus far been conducted into practitioners' attitudes towards the Barcelona Principles.

4.1 The Research Participants

The nine participants in this research were working in the New Zealand public relations industry at the time of the research. They consisted of one in-house marketing manager, four agency account directors, one agency chief executive, two independent consultancy chief executives, and one in-house department head. Appendix C lists some specific details about each of the practitioners: the type and title of their roles; their years of experience in public relations or communication management roles; specific details about the location and length of each interview; the number of words in the transcribed interview; and the recorded interview time. Appendix C presents a breakdown of their relative experience level.

Chapter 3 (Section 3.4) outlined the recruitment processes for the participants, who were approached on the basis of their credibility as expert sources of information about evaluation. All participants are active in the field of public relations. They all have at least four years' industry experience and had held at least one public relations or communications position in another organisation before taking up their current position. Their collective experience in the communications or public relations industries equals approximately 139 years, with an average of 15.3 years, according to the data provided on their LinkedIn profiles. The marketing manager's role differs from the other participants in that it was foremost marketing focused, however other factors identify her as a credible source: she led the public relations for her organisation, had been a member of PRINZ, and had studied in the field.

The participants' work experience varied significantly. Their experience level ranged from four to 26 years and sometimes includes backgrounds in other fields such as advertising and education. Several participants had studied communications or public relations at tertiary level. Many have international experience. Most of the participants are from Auckland while one is from Wellington (New Zealand's two largest cities). Six of the participants are female and three are male. Their organisational affiliations are diverse, including independent agencies, a family-owned manufacturer with less than seven employees, mid-sized public relations agencies with international reach, and one of New Zealand's largest tertiary education institutions.

4.2 Coded Interview Responses

The codes identified in the analysis of the interview transcripts were grouped under five categories. The coded categories were definitions of evaluation, definitions of measurement, opportunities for evaluation, challenges with evaluation, and tools of evaluation. These codes are presented and discussed in this section.

4.2.1 Definitions of evaluation.

The participants were asked how they defined evaluation at an early stage in each of the interviews. This question was important because of the lack of clarity about what evaluation means, particularly from the perspective of practitioners. This broad focus was also essential to establish a baseline insight into participants' understanding of the concept, whether there were any common understandings, and how their working definitions of evaluation related to the definitions provided by theorists and professional bodies. The participants offered a variety of definitions and descriptions of what it means to evaluate their practice. Figure 1 shows the participants' eight definitions. The participants defined evaluation as identifying outcomes (5/9), reflecting on effectiveness (1/9), collaborating with audiences or publics (2/9), collaboration with colleagues (1/9), collaboration with clients (4/9), developing strategic approaches (7/9), data contextualisation (1/9) and formal data analysis (5/9). On average, three participants agreed with each definition ($M = 3.25$).

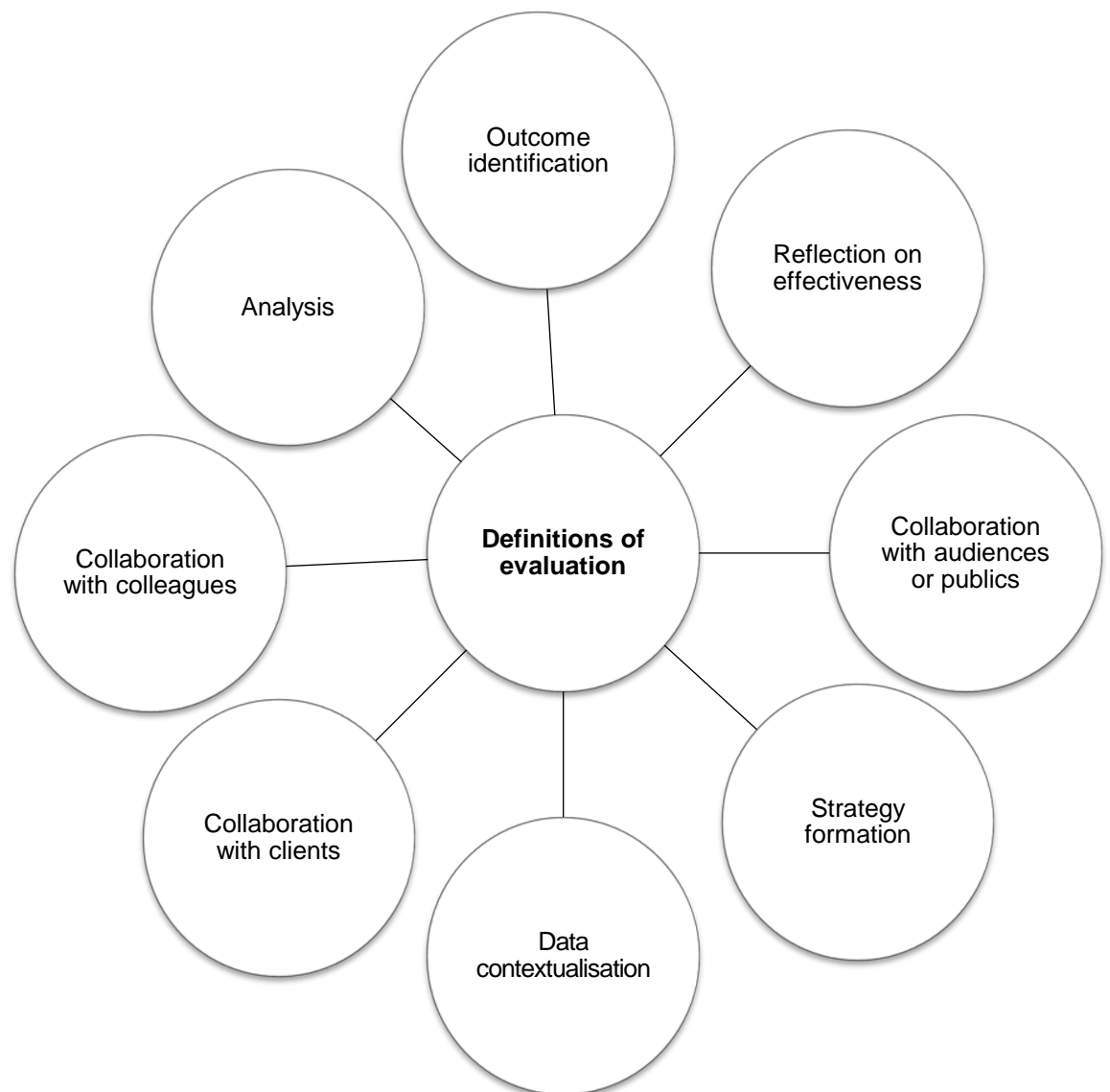


Figure 1: Definitions of evaluation provided by the participants

The definitions given for evaluation showed a broad and varied understanding of the evaluation concept, seen in both formal and informal terms. The participants each had their own working definitions of evaluation. All of the definitions of evaluation commented on by the participants reflected standard or evolving discussion areas in the literature. However, these tended to be explained in terms of activities in their daily practice rather than related to the formal or professional definitions of evaluation. The participants described their evaluation practice using formalised terms such as “analysis”, “rigour”, “outcomes” and “feedback”. The participants also frequently described an informal and largely unstructured approach to evaluation, evidenced by descriptions of the evaluation as involving ‘conversation’, ‘collaboration’, ‘instinct’, ‘experience’ and ‘trust’.

As part of the focus on defining evaluation, the participants were asked about their views of the difference between measurement and evaluation. This question was important because there is evidence that the two terms are not easily differentiated in practice (Macnamara, 2017). It was intended to help establish whether practitioners differentiated between the two concepts in their daily practice, and the ways in which they did or did not. Participants’ descriptions of the distinctions between the two terms are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Participants' Descriptions of Measurement and Evaluation

Participant 1	Evaluation descriptors	Measurement descriptors
Participant 1	"...analytical in approach" "...about impact on the public"	"...more of a numerical quantitative kind of thing" "...how many people you will reach with a certain online activity"
Participant 2	"...analysis of what the outputs were" "insightful" "...what are the moves for next time" "...did it actually work?"	"...do the basics" "...a talk" "...knowing how the business is doing" "...hard...numbers" "...knowing volume" "...outputs"
Participant 3	"...detailed analysis" "...a record of how it went and what to improve on"	"...bums on seats" "...level of impact...according to the key themes" "...outputs...reach" "...how many times the university is mentioned"
Participant 4	"...has it changed the dial?" "...it's listening to the stakeholders" "...what you did, how you did it"	"...how much media there is"
Participant 5	"...real analysis"	"...a list of the clicks that were achieved" "...the hard stuff relating to the objectives"
Participant 6	"Evaluation...that's about outcomes"	"how much engagement you've had on your social media"
Participant 7	"...takes on much more of the contextual elements that might have affected your campaign"	"...seasonality versus other current newsworthy items" "...how many articles you got published"
Participant 8	"...whether your brand is having an impact"	"...more number oriented" "Have they seen it? Have they liked it? Have they engaged with it?" "...how many pieces of media coverage were positive in the sentiment? How much engagement did this post have on social?" "...putting a figure against it, stacking KPIs versus result"
Participant 9	"...solving a specific problem" "...what worked well, what didn't, what could have been done better, what should we have done differently" "...desk research on whether a PR campaign on your brand is having the impact that it desires"	"...counting the coverage around the way they're solving the problem" "...more metrics based" "...the impact of the story, which is positive, negative, neutral. Does it carry your key messages?"

The distinction between measurement and evaluation was critical to the interpretation of this research. The participants all agreed that there is a distinction between the two concepts. Table 4 shows the various distinctions they gave. The participants generally appeared to understand the theoretical distinction between the concepts of measurement and evaluation. Participant 9, an independent consultant, described measurement as a way of counting “the coverage around the way they’re solving the problem” and evaluation as a way of determining that “the problem’s solved or it’s not”. Participant 2 described evaluation as a process of finding out “did it actually work?” Given that there was some uniformity between measurement as a simplistic numerical or subjective process and evaluation as a more complex or analytical process, it was deemed appropriate to generally refer to this as a baseline distinction to clarify the rest of the interpretation.

However, the participant responses showed that while they agreed that the terms measurement and evaluation did have different meanings and they readily gave distinctions to this end, there was considerable overlap in participants’ understanding of the two terms. Some of the activities related to measurements, such as counting clips or social media ‘likes’, were specifically referred to as acts of evaluation during the interviews, suggesting some confusion or uncertainty about the distinction between the two concepts. For example, participant 5 defined evaluation as the “real analysis,” but similarly referred to measurement as “the hard stuff related to the objectives”. Ensuing questions in the interviews further showed a casual approach to the distinction between measurement and evaluation, as the participants frequently referred to the two concepts interchangeably. For example, distinctions between measurement and evaluation offered by participant 1 (the marketing manager) contradict other observations about the value of each concept. She described measurement on the one hand as “...more of a numerical quantitative kind of thing”, “...how many people you will reach with a certain online activity”, and evaluation on the other hand as “...analytical in approach” and “...about impact on the public”. Nonetheless, a concern that “it can be really difficult to measure the impact of what you’re doing” from participant 1 illustrated some definitional overlap the two concepts.

4.2.2 Tools used in evaluation

The participants were asked what tools they used to evaluate their practice. This question was important because the literature review showed that the tools that are available and applied by practitioners to evaluate their practice have a significant influence on the decisions that practitioners make about how to assess the value of their practice (Macnamara, 2010a, 2010b). This focus area was seen as necessary to gain insight into how practitioners think about the practical ways they will implement their programmes or campaigns. When asked about the tools they used in assessing the value of their practice their responses were: stakeholder surveys (6/9), focus-groups (1/9), online or social media analysis (8/9), wrap reports (1/9), Google™ (4/9), and outsourced research services (4/9). Figure 2 shows the six tools identified by the participants. On average, four participants agreed on the tools they used (M=4.00).

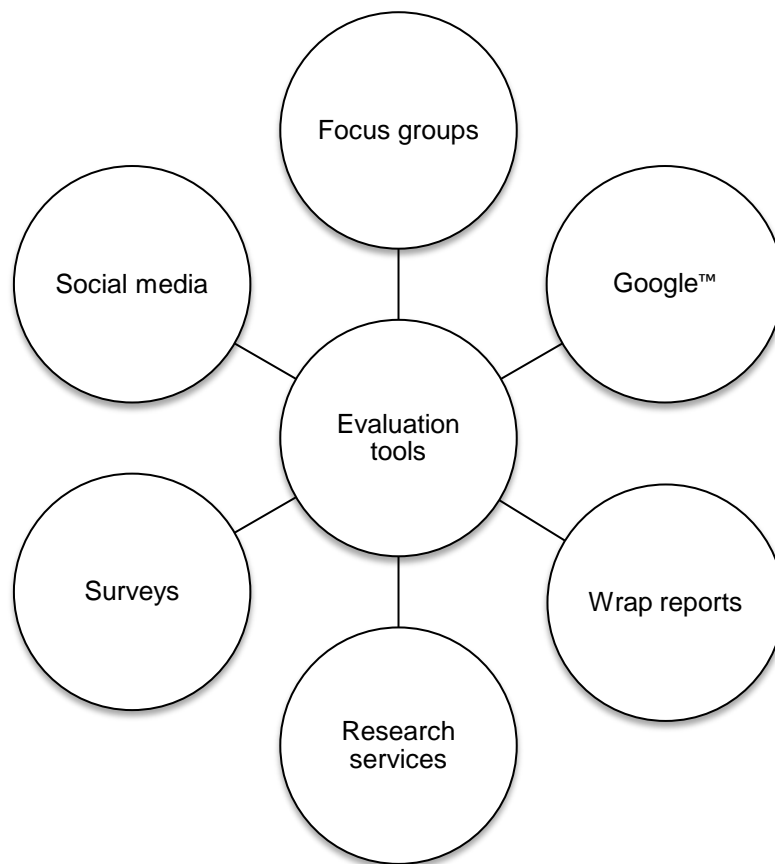


Figure 2: Evaluation tools mentioned by the participants

The participants collectively reported applying both quantitative and qualitative tools in their evaluation practice, with several saying they preferred quantitative approaches to proving the business value of their public relations activity. Participant 9, an independent consultant, reflected on a change that was occurring in the industry. The success of media releases had been “really the main metric for PR for a long, long time...how much, and how good was your media coverage” toward “much more emphasis in Australia and New Zealand on qualitative analysis”. He said that now, ideally, numbers will not be the only value that is focused on in evaluation. He discussed how insights and instinct is important: “if you can couple that with your own instinct or insights from focus-groups that are actually closely affected by whatever your campaign is, then you can find a really nice balance in how you go into a campaign”.

Participant 9, a current PRINZ fellow as well as an independent consultant, pointed out that the increased application of qualitative methods was providing a more accurate representation of the value of public relations practice: “...now that the qualitative element has increased and the fact that PR has moved more and more into behaviour and attitude change aligned itself with

research models that support that there is more ambition about how PR demonstrates its impact and value". Yet, from a wider professional standpoint, participant 9 also said that "...whether PR can be evaluated or not... I wouldn't say that has a huge impact on the reputation of PR..."

Several participants reported that they use AVEs to evaluate, but in each case this was because of client preference for AVEs as a valid way of assessing value. Participant 2, an account director, said that larger, international public relations agencies were more likely to use AVEs. Participant 7, another account director, described how "I think essentially it's just so bloody hard to put a value on PR...sentiment, word of mouth, even brand tracking...it doesn't tick the same box for a brand or for their CEOs and financial officers as putting a dollar value against it". This participant elaborated, "Using the AVE... gives you a dollar figure which is something that everyone understands, it's universal". Participant 7 said that she used AVEs as a way of assessing value because her clients requested AVE measures, and because they were a useful way of differentiating her public relations function when competing with marketing for budget allocation. Participant 1, the marketing manager, reported that AVEs continued to be used but they did not equate to the value of communications, which she described as "really frustrating because it's so arbitrary". Participant 2, the account director, described how such a belief is deceptive:

...AVE is... there is always so many deals that happen, the rap rate that if you look up a price for an advertisement is what the actual figure is really lurky, particularly when you go online and you buy online in packets of a 1000 hits, so how many hits did your thing get and an article is worth so much more than a banner.

Participant 1, the marketing manager, emphasised that she would usually recommend to clients that they not use AVEs, but that if they still wanted to use them she would do so. She said "I get why clients want it, and if a client said they really, really wanted it, after I had talked to them about why it was done, I would still do it".

Despite the push from clients to use AVEs, amongst the participants there was general recognition that AVEs were a flawed way of assessing value. Participant 6 said that AVEs were not a valid PR measurement and her perception was that AVEs were used by practitioners who "aren't part of the mainstream PR family [who] still think: AVEs, yeah, that's the way we'll do it".

Changes to online evaluation tools were a contentious subject for this sample of practitioners. Two of the practitioners (participant 3, participant 6) predicted that online tools would continue to evolve, and that this evolution would continue to influence their approach to evaluation. Participant 6, an independent consultant, agreed that "the tools and processes that people are using will increasingly be more measurable than they have been in the past". Several participants (1, 3) commented favourably on the effect that increased access to large amounts of numerical data would have on their ability to make identifying attitude and behaviour change more feasible. Participant 3 specifically referred to social media as having more organic evaluation capabilities. She described it as being "built-in", "granular" and "analytical".

Participant 1, a marketing manager, commented with regard to online posts, that "...you can see how many people are going to see that, you can see how many who will view your website, and people taking action because they've emailed you about something". Participant 3 also said that online measurement offers a visible benchmark because "you can actually potentially see the clicks". She contrasted this with traditional media where the impact was not as transparent: "You pop an ad on the telly, and who really knows what's going on with that?"

4.2.3 Opportunities for evaluation

The participants were asked why they might evaluate their public relations practice. This question is important because it explores participants' motivations underlying their evaluation practice. The analysis of the transcripts revealed 10 reasons for evaluating. The participants agreed that evaluation was an important component of effective public relations practice, each giving at least one reason why it is important. The reasons given for evaluation practice were: adding rigour (3/9), advising the client (5/9), identifying outcomes (2/9), general importance (6/9), social accountability (6/9), business accountability (4/9), going beyond measurement (5/9), improved tools and processes (4/9), increased business value in evaluation (5/9), and identifying outtakes (1/9). These are presented in Figure 3. The average level of agreement between the reasons for evaluating was just less than half ($M=4.10$).

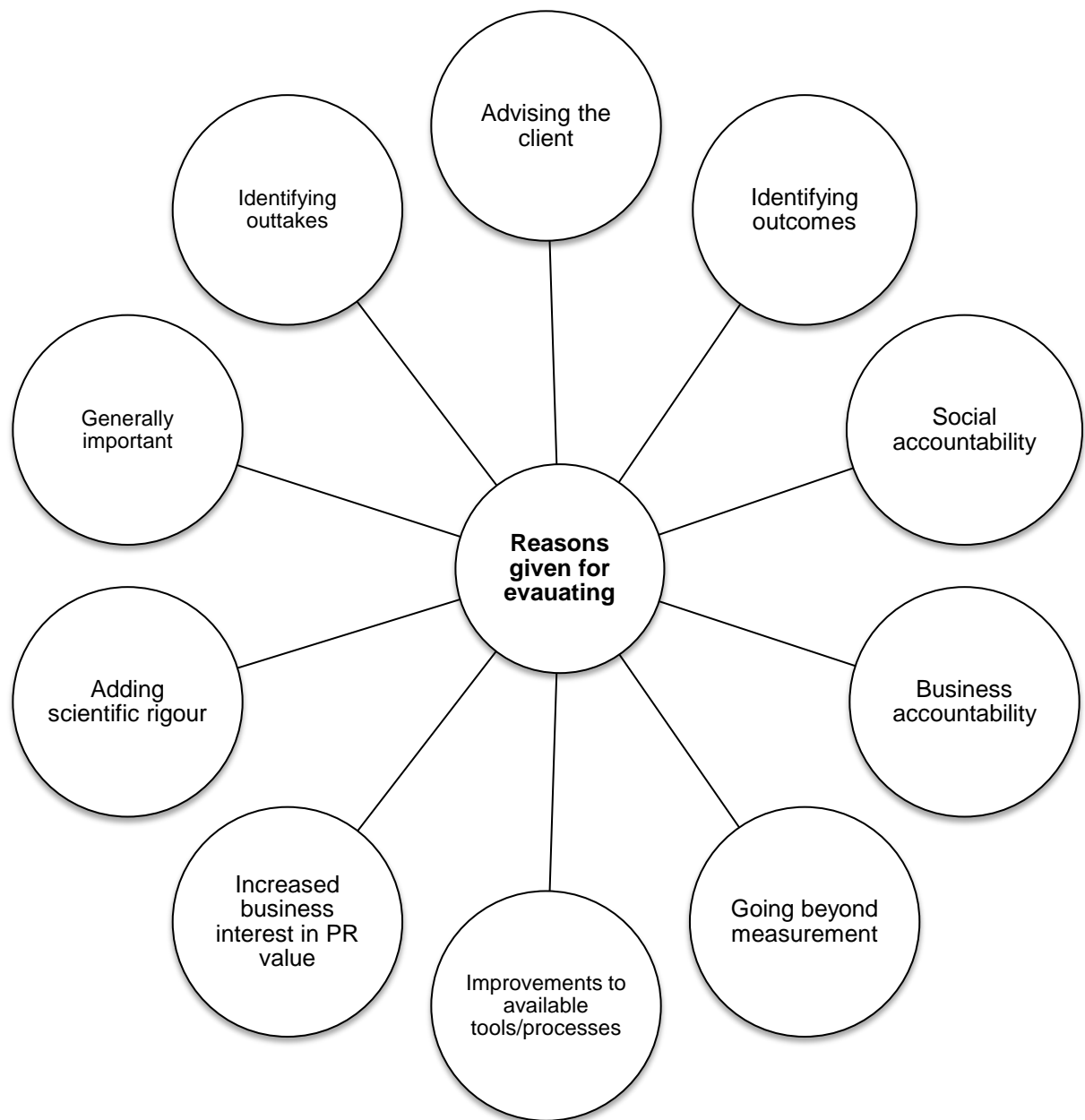


Figure 3: Reasons given for evaluating

There was overarching agreement from all of the participants that evaluation is important. All of the participants reported on reasons why this is the case and Participants 2, 4, 7, 8 and 9 gave specific reasons for this importance. Discussing evaluation generally, five participants described evaluation as an important activity (Participants 1, 2, 4, 7, and 9). Participant 1, 4, 7, 8 and 9 agreed with the value of evaluation using descriptions such as “exceptionally important”, “really important”, “critical” and “important”. Participants 2, 7 and 9 emphasised this importance with further details about the overall value of evaluation to the industry. Participant 2, an account

director, commented that the main reason that evaluation is so important is because practitioners are asked about what public relations success means: "...we get questions like what does success look like? That's probably the main thing: how do we know we're successful?" Participant 7, an account director, elaborated on its integral role in the rest of public relations activities: "It determines your strategy... if you don't have your objective, if you're not clear with your client and integrated network or team what it is that you're setting out to achieve, then you need to be able to measure it at the end, and I guess we call it validation too, so to demonstrate the value of the service we offer and the impact that we make so that then our client can validate that within their organisation and to their internal stakeholders as well". Participant 9, the independent consultant, reported that "Whether PR can be evaluated or not... That's probably an important point of purchase of PR services". Together, these broad insights about the importance of evaluation suggest why it is a highly valued aspect of public relations that has implications for its accountability as an industry.

First, an overarching reason evaluation was seen as important is to improve the strategic effectiveness of public relations practice and wider industry. The participants reported on the contribution of evaluation in terms of its use in identifying outcomes, adding scientific rigour, increasing advisory value, and being professional from both social and business viewpoints. Three participants (Participants 2, 5 and 6) discussed the scientific merit of evaluating, particularly doing so from the perspective of the client. Participant 2, an account director, said that "...we get questions like what does success look like? That's probably the main thing: how do we know we're successful?" This account director also commented that "the biggest thing for clients is evaluating the success of whatever you do" which she equated with "making sure that you've got rigour around your KPIs". Participant 6, an independent consultant, commented on the importance of rigour to legitimately respond to the client's monetary investment in public relations: "It is important if someone is willing to invest 'x' amount of money into it that you are actually putting some rigour around it as well". Participant 5, an account director, agreed that "it's really important that you do have some sort of rigour involved". Five participants (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7) discussed the advisory contribution that could result from evaluation. Participant 3 discussed this value in terms of the need to discuss any points of disagreement with the client's brief:

...if we get a brief or a client kind of has a clear view on what they think we should do and we don't agree with, 100% we have to talk to them about it because if it doesn't work, at the end of the day we can't turn around and go we never really liked the idea anyway.

Several practitioners described how evaluation could be used to advise clients on changes needed to align more with the perspectives of publics. Participant 7 discussed how evaluation can help public relations contribute to aligning the direction of the business with the interests of stakeholders:

...if the stakeholders are unhappy or even if they're just suggesting an improvement, you're aware of that and you're really important part of the function is to be able to go

back to the organisation and say: the organisation's the thing that needs to change, not just that problem.

Participant 4 discussed how public relations practitioners want to understand changes to perspectives of publics, but that doing so requires budgets that often go beyond what the function is allocated:

...what you wanna know is has it changed the dial and what's the sentiment, and so you wanna get to that point as well where you can, and again, you often don't have a lot of funds for that sort of thing.

This idea of using knowledge about the interests of stakeholders to advise the client was expanded on by Participant 4 with an example of a time such data was used to influence business strategy:

...a client that I have here was relaunching, they took a product away from the market, people were really unhappy...I rung the client and said actually, I think if we just tell them half, then leave two months, then tell them the other half

Several practitioners (Participants 1, 2, 8) commented that formal evaluation is useful, particularly in terms of organisational-level value. They reported that it could validate their practice and also change their clients' perspective on public relations practice. Participant 2, an account manager, saw evaluation as a process that had the potential to both shape campaign direction and support improved professional performance. She reported that not evaluating can be detrimental to the learning and advancement of practitioners' personal aims: "...if you don't evaluate it hurts you because you don't learn and you never get the chance to do these incremental learnings... to actually improve". Participant 1 stated that "... if you do it [evaluation] correctly and the findings are really valuable and you implement changes or improvements off the back of measurement and evaluation I would say it's worthwhile". Evaluation was seen as proving the value of public relations by participant 8, an agency CEO, who claimed that evaluation is "absolutely critical" because it is linked to identifying the effectiveness of strategy and objectives.

Participants 1 and 7 reported that evaluation data are especially powerful when relevant technologies are considered. Participant 7 suggested that public relations practitioners might be able to use their knowledge of integrated communication to redirect clients' resources:

That's been one of the biggest learning curves and one of the biggest benefits of working in this agency for me is that everything we do is integrated and that is what I meant before about the channel neutral approach and that we might say no, take all your money and put it into TV.

This strategic importance is particularly reported on in terms of its rigour and quantitative aspects that are linked to the preference of clients for tangible or monetary proof of the value of public relations. Participant 5, an account director, commented that evaluation is necessary to "make sure that you've got rigour round your KPIs". Participant 9, an independent consultant, offered a reason why this rigour might be important to clients. He noted that this had significance for companies who need to discuss business matters internally because, "there is

an expectation of accountability and report of money spent". As the business value of public relations increases, Participant 9 also predicted that, "...there'll be a larger expectation that they'll be measuring and evaluating more what they do". Participant 9 also noted that a quantitative approach to evaluation can be especially influential internally because, "numbers do speak volumes".

Participant 1, the marketing manager, described the difference evaluation can make to business from an advisory viewpoint that would allow her to contribute to business direction and outcomes,

...how you do your job as an advisor...?. If the comms had been trusted by the individual, you can suggest ways to do things differently as a critical component of what we do and I think it's probably also how we can increase the reputation and standing of the industry in front of people you know when you can take that top management, executive level approach to things...I think that's when you can really have a lot of impact when you can be involved in strategic decision-making about where the business is going rather than just, 'Oh we can start up a Snapchat account' I think there is a lot of difference in those two things.

Participant 1, the marketing manager, described how evaluating her practice helped her to respond to the publics who were central to the strategic success of the programme, to "respond to those voices we've asked to be heard and make changes off the back of that as well". The client-public relationship was seen as intertwined with the practitioner—client relationship. For example, one practitioner (participant 7) described how the public relations process affected both clients and their publics:

I suppose it does affect the public. Yes because any evaluation should encompass their feedback as well and it should be a holistic view on how it affected all parties involved and in that sense if it was doing damage to them it would equally be doing damage to the brand.

The perceived strategic scope of evaluation also extended to the broader professional credibility and development of individual practitioners and the industry. There was general agreement with professional aims for evaluation, such as those in the Barcelona Principles. The participants all said that they were aware of the Barcelona Principles and that the framework that they provided was helpful in terms of focusing on the topic of industry-wide standards of reference. The participants generally agreed that the Barcelona Principles provided a valuable guide for their evaluation practice. Participants 1, 3 and 4 reported that the Barcelona Principles provided an aspirational guide for how to conduct professional approach to evaluation. They described the Barcelona Principles as being "very worthwhile", and that "they help foster professionalism", and they "benefit everyone". Participant 5, an account director, said that the Barcelona Principles were useful on an "analytical" "intellectual" and "academic" level. Participant 3, head of communications, said "if you look at them [the Barcelona Principles] specifically, yep, there is a need for it. The idea of thinking about your internal audiences, organisation comms...I think that the one thing about that is that it is aspirational". Several of the participants (2 and 4) said that the Barcelona Principles were particularly useful for practitioners in the early stages of their career, suggesting that they may be less useful for more experienced participants, and more

appropriate “for people who have zero idea about measurement, and need to be reminded about this”.

Beyond this general agreement with the Barcelona Principles, evaluation was credited with having strategic influence over the profession by many of the participants. Participant 9, an independent consultant, questioned the relationship between value and actual results:

“Accountability and effectiveness, sort out how to demonstrate your effectiveness, yeah... well how do I know any of this PR is doing any good?” Participant 2, an account director, said that decisions about the practice of evaluation was the responsibility of the practitioner:

...if we get a brief or a client kind of has a clear view on what they think we should do and we don't agree with, 100% we have to talk to them about it because if it doesn't work, at the end of the day we can't turn around and go we never really liked the idea anyway.

The importance of a rigorous approach to evaluation was emphasised by Participant 7, an account director, to improve the reputation and credibility of public relations. She referred to evaluation as helping her clients take the function seriously:

...you also get that stigma put against you of just glitter and ribbons, and you almost have to fight harder to be able to prove yourself and it's really important that you do take it seriously, it is PR not ER. It is important if someone is willing to invest 'x' amount of money into it that you are actually putting some rigour around it as well.

Participant 1, the marketing manager, reported on another way evaluation is important to the professional reputation of the industry. She described it as a process that can improve professional reputation and individual status in the organisation.

...within organisations I definitely think that the more you can prove how effective your comms are I think the more respected the function would be and as individuals probably going to be claiming higher salaries.

Participant 1 further described the increasing importance of evaluation in response to the business need to respond to issues and crises, a trend that was becoming more relevant with social media:

I think in the past that's been a big tendency that companies were happy to bury their heads in the sand and think, “Oh well, that's not going to damage us,” but now when you see a Tweet can go viral...really companies can't be complacent about that kind of thing anymore and it's not just crisis management when they flare up but it's constant issues management and evaluating what you would do in a given situation.

Another motivational area these practitioners focused on was the informal qualities of public relations evaluation. The participants offered various descriptions of the value of informal conversations or chats with clients as a form of evaluating. Participant 3, the in-house department head, supported this by discussing how some form of evaluation is expected by clients, but that this can differ in formality: “I think all of our clients expect evaluation, I think it's probably whether our clients expect it to be presented as a PowerPoint™ or whether we just have a conversation”. An informal approach to evaluation was evident when participants used terms such as “catch-up” and “conversation” to describe their practice. This client preference for

ongoing informal conversations about progress was another reason that was given as to why evaluation was not formally carried out. For example, Participant 2, an account director, described a 'chat' with clients as a typical way to gain understanding of both campaign effectiveness and areas of future improvement from their point of view:

I'm gonna ring up the client and go are you happy? How do you feel it went? I've got some bits that I think were a bit more stressful than it needed to be, do you agree? Do you want us to do something different next time? Is there any kind of coverage that you really hoped that we'd get that we didn't? That part of the evaluation will be much more insightful for the both of us.

This quote from Participant 2 is important because it highlights the perception that conversational informal evaluation reflect the summative and formative qualities of formal evaluation, but also include a valuable personal aspect. She described how a direct conversation with her client over the phone allowed for critical insights associated with the formal aims of summative ("How do you feel it went?") and formative ("Do you want us to do something different next time?") analyses. This direct approach allowed more personal- and resolution-focused discussion points ("I've got some bits that I think were a bit more stressful than they needed to be, do you agree?"). While not elaborating on why a conversation with his client would be insightful, Participant 4, an account director, also saw a personal approach as valuable. He described how the informal mode of evaluation commonly used in his workplace could be in the form of "really nice internal comment...great emails sent to the Managing Director saying the team is such a great partner to us, or the team has done so much on this for us, or it has been so great to have XYZ person". Another informal mode of evaluation he argued for is simply when "you are achieving things for them and you know that from the fact they pay their bill, they stay as a client. An independent CEO (Participant 9) said that the use of an informal approach to evaluation could avoid an overcomplicated and potentially unnecessarily drawn-out process:

...a lot of the really good struggle that goes on is still really quite instinctual... someone making a gut call about this is what the campaign needs to be about, and we're not going to measure it to death but we're just going to do it.

Another reason that the client's perspective was influential in evaluation decisions was the degree of trust in public relations practice. The marketing manager (Participant 1) described how practitioners might not be easily "trusted" by the client organisation, and that this influenced practitioners' involvement in the "impact" and "strategic decision-making about where the organisation is going".

Participant 2, an account director, noted the importance of the client/practitioner relationship to evaluation when she referred to evaluation as: "...a journey that you have to have some conversation throughout the way...so everyone is kind of clear on this is what success looks like, did we meet it, did we not?" Similarly, Participant 4, another account director, stated that she had used conversation to keep her client in the loop with her findings about the perspectives of the target publics: "...a client that I have here was relaunching, they took a

product away from the market, people were really unhappy...I rang the client and said actually, I think if we just tell them half, then leave two months, then tell them the other half".

Participant 4, an account director, said that client feedback was a form of evaluation in itself:

...the evaluation that we do here in a way is also when the team get really nice client feedback. They get really great emails sent to the Managing Directors saying 'the team is such a great partner to us', or 'the team has done so much on this for us', or 'it has been such great to have XYZ person always there doing'...remember that clients don't always act entirely on numbers... some of them make big calls based on instinct and feelings.

Several participants identified the personal value of their role in advising their clients on the reasons for evaluating. Participant 2, an account director, commented that "individual experience would be far more informative...than if someone used PR once and they had a really good outcome than if someone didn't so they've never used PR ever since and they just do all their work through marketing and advertising". Participant 9, an independent consultant, confirmed that evaluation "can totally change a client's perspective and your own perspective on how best approach a brief".

Another overarching concern of the practitioners is that online and social media are seen as having a critical impact on public relations evaluation. The participants were aware of a strong link between evaluation and changing media capabilities. Participant 3, the head of a department, described one aspect of the pivotal role the media plays in dictating where participants should focus their evaluation activity: "... don't just evaluate what you're doing, but evaluate the channels and where people wanna find things. That can change. And that changed a lot of the work we did and how we did it". Some key opportunities within this changing media environment for evaluation were highlighted.

First, the participants generally believed their clients were becoming more interested in public relations evaluation. This was seen as part of the increasing recognition of the need to consider social interests as an element in business decisions. Participant 8, an agency CEO, described evaluation as an opportunity to justify practitioners' presence within the business: "validation... to demonstrate the value of the service that we offer and the impact that we make so that then our client can validate that within their organisation and to their internal stakeholders, as well". Another overarching theme was the increasing interest in evaluation on the part of clients. Participant 4, an account director, stated, "maybe that is the future of evaluation, clients make us more accountable and set KPIs because they talk in that way, and they behave in that way internally, so why shouldn't we?" A related comment in the context of the evaluation was from Participant 8, an agency CEO, about a tightened focus on investment decisions:

...post-GFC clients got very tight on any fad, any unnecessary cost. That was certainly, in terms of proper research budgets and things like stakeholder audits and stuff like that, there was a tendency to make do with what they had or to cut back that investment. So, since then, however, I would say that there tends to be more investment.

Second, digitisation was seen as bringing about more interest in evaluation on the part of business because of increased public scrutiny associated with the online environment. Several practitioners noted that digitisation has increased the pressure they feel to evaluate their practice. Participant 3, the head of a communications department, discussed how improved online tools have “upped the ante in terms of what people expect to see” because more data can more easily be collected. Participant 9, an independent consultant, said that the affordances of digital evaluation were a real game changer: “...the trend lines down the digital path...are going to mean that why do anything if it's not measurable”. Participant 3 further described an increased willingness on the part of business to be open to the strategic potential of public relations in order to link business to social commitments:

...because of the advent of social media, the phasing of how things become issues and the journey of that process is much quicker. I think businesses are much more aware and most of them are much more willing to listen to PR people, but you've still gotta make sure that you position it well. It's kind of like: I'm not accusing you of this. This idea of saying: well, out there in the world, in the audiences we're listening to and the things we're seeing, this is a point of view that we need to address.

Participant 5, an account director, said: “And this is the thing that happens as well, it goes from social to mainstream media and then it just becomes really difficult. So, monitoring social media, particularly for industries that are in the news a lot, is super-important...issues can gain momentum with social that would take a lot longer in days of yore”.

Third, digitisation influenced how practitioners related to other disciplines and departments in their evaluation decisions, particularly in terms of an increased need for evaluation insights to be integrated. Discussing public relations' role with other departments, Participant 3, the head of department, stated that “PR probably should be the lead” but also paradoxically that “then there's the eternal debate between marketing and PR. And there is more merging”. Participant 8, an agency CEO, commented that it was challenging that “often PRs see themselves in silo to other media channels and are often put in silo” but that actually “everything we do is integrated”. This thinking about integration appears to also be focused on linking with and responding to the perspectives of consumers. Participant 9, an independent consultant, described how “nowadays with this whole customer centric model ... your brand only exists based on what consumers or the public think of it, so if, so you can't narrate what people think of your brand, they decide that for themselves, and so this idea that marketing is doing one thing and PR is doing another is kind of futile, you're just confusing the consumer”.

Fourth, online evaluation is seen as able to involve more quantitative analyses. Participant 1, the marketing manager, described how the online environment was very useful for evaluating financial public relations because of an increased analytical breadth and rigour. This participant reported that budget-linked analyses could be very effectively carried out online, and that there were “...so many opportunities when you combine the power of the Internet and its ability to analyse data and trends which are those really hard-line reporting things people want to know - we've spent this money, what's happened because of that?”

Fifth, digitisation is seen as associated with increased autonomy from journalistic media amongst practitioners in terms of public relations evaluation. Participants 2, 5 and 6 reported that increased engagement with social media led to a reduced reliance on journalists' ability to decide what will or will not be published in the media. These participants reported that they expected this to be increasingly the case in the future. Participant 2, an account director, reported that this was changing from a situation where "we still very much need journalists because they publish our websites with authority" to one where "what we will see is more New Zealanders being comfortable going to other types of news sites", and us asking "how do we leverage our own assets to deliver the same kind of information to people?" Participant 6, commented that online this new approach to strategising and evaluating was easier because "...on social you are the journalist. So you can write whatever you want in your channels, dictate who it goes to at the click of a button in terms of sharability. All it takes is for a few people to share it for it to become a lot bigger and bigger". Participant 5, an account director, commented that with regard to issues that are spread through social media "rather than setting the agenda, traditional media is now following that agenda".

Sixth, online communication, social media and big data were making the processes of evaluation easier because they allowed the practitioners to adopt a more experimental and agile approach to evaluation. Participant 3, the head of communications, said that digitisation would allow a more specialised focus on evaluation: "Because our media consumption is digitising and specialising...the evaluation will be in some ways easier because there are those great tools". Participant 8, an agency CEO, contrasted evaluation before and after the Internet, noting a reduction in time and energy involved in the evaluation process. She described evaluation prior to the Internet as being very basic, consisting of "cutting out media clips and scanning them to clients". In contrast, she described evaluation in the online environment as "very commoditised and a light touch versus the deep analysis that was required before from a skilled person". Participant 3 went on to highlight that online technologies meant that practitioners could respond more directly to the interests of publics: "using evaluation to understand audiences better" and as "a way of going straight to the audience and doing it in a way that was of interest to them". Participant 3 also referred to "lots of opportunity" online "to try that out in different ways and then adapt the programme and the project". Participant 8 also agreed that the tools of new media provided her with a more dynamic approach to evaluation: "I think you just go with the flow, but our ability to turn stuff around is faster as well because of the tools that we've got available to us".

A final common thread that appeared in many of the practitioners' reflections about why they evaluated was in order to go beyond measurement. A typical example of their comments was given by Participant 9, an independent consultant, who reported that "...evaluation considers things beyond that that can solely be measured". Participant 3, the in-house department director, expressed regret that practitioners may not consistently think about or practise

evaluation. As she reported, "I think maybe people like me haven't got it right and got quite caught up in how it's hard to make it right"

4.2.4 Challenges for evaluation

Although the nine participants were not specifically asked about any challenges they might experience with evaluating, the analysis of the transcripts revealed more reasons for not evaluating than for evaluating. Just as the reasons to evaluate were many and diverse, so too were the various reasons not to evaluate, as reported by participants. The participants' 11 reasons for not evaluating were identified in the interview transcripts. The reasons given included the difficulty or complexity of evaluating impact (6/9), the financial cost of evaluation (7/9), organisational preference for use of measurement (6/9), organisational preference for use of AVEs (4/9), the validity of instinct (2/9), variation in evaluation needs (7/9), greater risk or complexity with evaluation online (5/9), the usefulness of measurement (3/9), the ease of measurement (6/9), that measurement can be linked to budget (2/9) and evaluation guidelines were too broad or generally not applicable (6/9). These are shown in Figure 4. The average frequency of agreement about why not to evaluate was 4 (M=4.91).

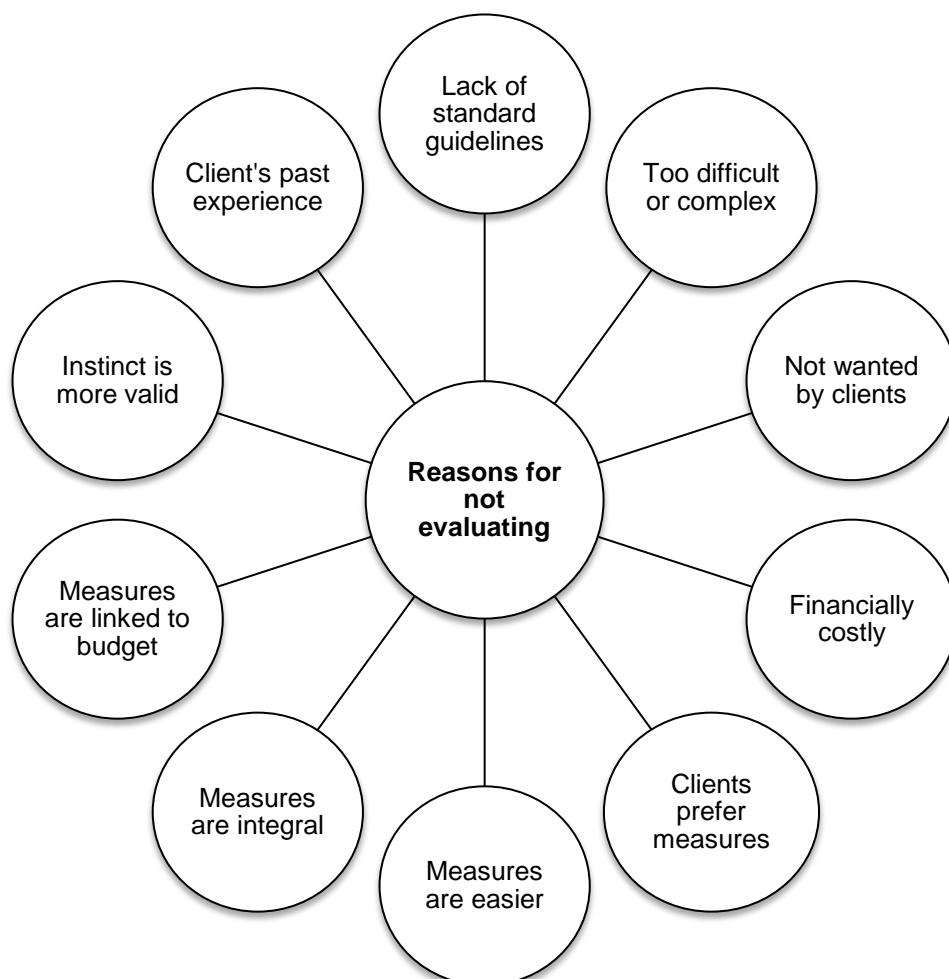


Figure 4: Reasons given for not evaluating

Five participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8) reported that the evaluation recommendations from the professional bodies were in conflict with the everyday realities of their practice and that their own experience was more relevant. Several critiques were offered of the Barcelona Principles that also illuminate how practitioners might perceive the scholarly or professional concept of formal evaluation. A comment from Participant 1, the marketing manager, shows how a rigorous notion of evaluation may contradict with the day-to-day realities of public relations practice, particularly with the developing pressures for timeliness associated with evolving media. She comments that,

...things have to be practical as well... in this fast paced world where everyone wants information all the time, constantly need to be communicating I think that sometimes those two can be at odds with each other. It's just interesting and this conversation is making me think a little bit more about what we need to be doing and it's PR people that have to be driving it more than anyone else because if a client or an employer isn't really asking about that stuff then of course you're not going to necessarily put your hand up to lead a really comprehensive evaluation programme because it's going to take you away from your daily activities that are often more important internally.

Participant 2, an account director, made the point that, while important, a formal concept of evaluation was often unrealistic in practice, where on-the-job learning may be more relevant:

...yes it's analytical and intellectual and I do corporate work...but for PR, I think this is the type of industry where you learn from people who are willing to teach you...I think in terms of measurement, it is a really good thing to be taught, I think that's probably the most academic part of the job...

The participants did not always see that the application of the Barcelona Principles was feasible in their practice. Participant 2, for example, reported that the Barcelona Principles were not specific enough to hold participants accountable. She specifically discussed the second Barcelona Principle which states the need to prioritise communication outcomes over outputs and that this could give the participants "...a bit of an out..." Participant 3, the head of communications, said that the Barcelona Principles were something to aspire to but "...in the real world we often fall short". While Participant 4, an account director, reported that the Barcelona Principles are helpful for newcomers to the industry, he agreed that they have little value beyond this. He described how it is "...good to have them there for people who have zero idea about measurement, and to remind people of this. But that is not really enough".

Participant 8, an agency CEO, commented that the Barcelona Principles "seem pretty standard" and added that "There's nothing revolutionary in there". This suggested that she perceived the Principles as being already adequately incorporated into practice. A particularly telling aspect of the participants' attitudes towards the Barcelona Principles is with regard to their use of AVEs. The Barcelona Principles rejects AVEs as a way of valuing public relations, identifying them instead as simply a means to measure the cost of media space (AMEC, 2016c). While the participants indicated they agreed with the Barcelona Principles, four participants (Participants 2, 4, 5, 7) also reported that they used AVEs because clients claim that AVEs had calculable value and demanded their use. Several of the participants described how they are often forced to prioritise the services they offer clients because of small budgets.

A consistent underlying thread evidenced in all of the participants' transcripts was that their decisions about how to identify value are primarily based in the preference of clients. This was suggested by all of the participants, related to concerns about variation in the clients' demand for evaluation (7/9), financial cost (7/9), preference of clients for measurement (6/9) and AVEs (3/9), and the belief that measures could be linked to budget (2/9).

Four of the participants (Participants 2, 5, 6, 8) specifically reported that evaluation decisions always begin with the aims of clients, and that these aims may vary considerably. Participant 6, an independent consultant, pointed out that ultimately the intended outcomes for their practice were based in what their client is seeking, and that this can often differ considerably. He pointed out that: "The outcomes at the end of the day are going to be much more closely related with what the organisation is looking for. For a commercial company, it would perhaps be the sale of the product. For a political party, it would be: did you vote for them?" Participant 8, an agency CEO, described how measurement and evaluation decisions are made in relation to other important public relations components "...our challenge as an agency is probably budgetary constraints for clients and where they're at in terms of what they're prepared to invest in measurement and evaluation versus the rest of the programme". Participant 2, an account director, went so far as to comment that evaluation is "sometimes exceptionally irrelevant". One participant (Participant 5) described some ways that their evaluation decisions might be aligned with business needs in the New Zealand context, with its small organisations a contributing factor to why not to evaluate:

I think those smaller, it is the smaller businesses, small to medium enterprises that don't really see the value of it. It is your bigger corporates that do because you know, those brands have gone through the process of reshaping their vision, reshaping the way that they communicate. That's where PR plays a huge value in it and it's happened well overseas...or what not. They do see the value of it.

Public relations evaluation was reported from a client's perspective as either not always necessary or self-evidencing. Participant 9, the independent CEO, discussed how "the kinds of stuff I'm dealing with they [clients] can see for themselves either it's working or it's not... in my line of work, it's not critical to have other evaluation structures around". Elaborating on this, he commented that the "ultimate success is seeing the clients' results", suggesting that public relations outcomes are more obviously linked to visible business performance. For him, some clients are reluctant to evaluate because it is not a priority: they are "not at a point where they're engaging with the measurement and evaluation part". On the other hand, Participant 9 reported that clients sometimes paid for evaluation separately, meaning it is not always a required component of his practice: "Typically even in the larger consultancies I've worked in evaluation was paid for separately by the client. So it wasn't necessarily part of our budget – we would include media monitoring and a little bit of evaluation but for sort of full evaluation we would typically go that's an additional evaluation on top".

Yet another area where the client's interest level is seen to vary was with regard to their understanding about the complex value of public relations, and how this might contribute to

smaller budgets in relation to other communication industries or departments. Participant 2 explains:

...in terms of evaluation if you get somebody who is very linear in their thinking, who is very measurement based, who is very black and white about the world...a lawyer or somebody from the supply chain, it is very hard to explain what success looks like in PR... I think that maybe part of why, generally speaking, PR gets smaller budgets than marketing...historically that has to do with that marketing and above the line is much more straightforward to measure so CEOs and CFOs and COOs, people who have very rarely come from a marketing background or a PR background, don't actually understand. They don't understand how to measure PR so they don't really understand how to fund it.

Participant 1, the marketing manager, also described how interest in evaluation amongst clients might vary depending on their interest in or knowledge of public relations' value:

...the organisations who are more interested in structure are always going to be more interested in outcomes because they understand the value of PR in the first instance. If you don't really care about comms that much and are just a "do this onetime thing" I think you are going to look at it quite differently.

Participant 2, an account director, said that it was not always easy to reach a common understanding about the meaning of public relations success:

I think in terms of evaluation that if you get somebody who is very linear in their thinking, who is very measurement based, who is very black and white about the world... it is very hard to explain what success looks like in PR, and that it is usually is a journey, and that you have to have some conversation throughout the way and set some KPIs up front so everyone is kind of clear on this is what success looks like, did we meet it, did we not?

Another element influencing the complexity of evaluation was the practice of using outsourced research companies and tools. Participant 1 believed that in the small and interconnected New Zealand context it made sense to outsource evaluation:

...we would include media monitoring and a little bit of evaluation but for sort of full evaluation we would typically go that's an additional evaluation on top and often times when you think of the New Zealand context a lot of the clients have a direct relationship with iSentia™ media monitoring anyway, who are the biggest media monitoring and evaluation company in town.

Seven of the participants identified cost as an influence on their evaluation decisions.

Two participants (Participants 1 and 2) described links between measurement and budget.

Six participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9) reported that their clients prefer measurement to evaluation. This is generally in response to their clients' overall preference for measuring outputs as opposed to evaluating outcomes. However, while sometimes this was going against practitioners' beliefs at other times practitioners themselves saw the value in measurement. Six participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9) described how measurement was an important component of their practice. Participant 2, an account director, said that "measurement and evaluation are both exceptionally important to our clients". Participant 1 described how clients may not be interested in "taking results further" than counts of publicity. Participant 5, another

account director, explained how, despite a wide breadth of public relations services, clients tend to continually focus on media outputs in considering the value of public relations: "It's really interesting, particularly among some multinational clients, that, even though our programme of activity might be broad, covering stakeholder engagement, reputation management, events and activations, you name it, we're measured on media coverage". Participant 9 added that the influence of clients' experience with public relations is "far more informative...than if someone used PR once and they had a really good outcome than if someone didn't".

Regarding the nature of measurement, it is apparent that media relations were a dominant feature of the participants' daily practice. Participant 1, the marketing manager, described how using a simplistic approach to measurement in media relations is useful because it is easy and immediate: "Media relations is always easy to track because you can say this journalist, this publication has X amount of readers and therefore you can see straight away whether it was worthwhile or not but in other ways". Participant 2, an account director, said that "...if it's a media relations campaign, often measurement happens naturally because you have to keep track of your coverage to know where to pitch to next, so it doesn't take heaps of time". Participant 2, an account director, also reported that she used measurement in her practice: "What we look to, in terms of results, is did we get good eye messages, was it good quality coverage that we liked?" Participant 5, an account director, commented that measurement is useful to ensure that there is a focus on getting picked up in the media, and that this is important to drive public relations results: "...what gets measured gets done...for example, my role where I look after earned media, we could be out there pitching a million stories a year...but if they're not landing, they're not changing audience perception, so what's the point?" Participant 6, an independent consultant, believed that this success in getting news releases published was essentially a much easier process because of his personal awareness of media interests. He prefers to adopt a measurement approach to assessing his success in getting stories in the news media: "...the research is embedded in the person. I know that publication will not be interested in this thing here...Outputs might be measured, so your success with a news release might be simply whether the thing's picked up and printed".

This preference for measurement over evaluation was also reported as being closely linked to the budgets allocated for evaluation. This need to fit in with the clients' budget allowance in terms of evaluation is a source of frustration for seven of the participants (Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9). Participant 3, the head of department, identified the value of outcomes as "much more expensive". Participant 4, an account director, explained how he might feel forced to do the project without focusing on how they identify its value when clients are "not prepared to put the resources into it". Emphasising the importance of the client's interest, when asked about whether a client considered it appropriate to evaluate in a particular campaign, Participant 7, an account director, commented that "I don't think we would have got sign-off necessarily". Participant 9, an independent consultant, agreed that some clients are reluctant to evaluate and "it's quite hard to sell that". These insights suggest that evaluation may not be emphasised in

practice if clients do not value it. Added to this, Participant 9 discussed how clients' decisions about whether to fund evaluation are often tied up with feedback from other business stakeholders, and that this often leads them to have a rather specific focus in their evaluation practice, if it is requested at all:

...what I do has kind of specific outcomes that are quite, not all the time, but that can be quite binary, either the programme gets up or it doesn't or they get approval from the group they're seeking approval from or they don't, so in that sense there's not a strong emphasis on broad spectrum evaluation.

Four participants (Participants 2, 4, 5, 6) reported that clients may see AVEs favourably.

Participant 4, an account director, explained that her use of AVEs depended on the perspective of her clients who may be eager to use them: "I get why clients want it, and if a client said they really really wanted it, after I had talked to them about why it was done, I would still do it".

Participant 6, an independent consultant, suggested that AVEs may continue to be popular because there is no standardised mode of public relations evaluation. He described how,

...essentially, it's just so bloody hard to put a value on PR and so using the AVE or EAV...gives you a dollar figure which is something that everyone understands, its universal... sentiment, word of mouth, even brand tracking - you know when brands actually really invest heavily into that it doesn't do the same - it doesn't tick the same box for a brand or for their CEOs and financial officers as putting a dollar value against it which is really frustrating because it's so arbitrary...

Participant 2, an account director, noted that it is particularly "... big corporates with head offices in America that still want AVEs. It's a way they fight for more money against marketing".

Participant 5 similarly reported that it is practitioners who "aren't part of the mainstream PR family, but they've got big important jobs and they still think: AVEs, yeah, that's the way we'll do it".

Another motivation present in the interview transcripts that influences the decision not to evaluate is that measurement and AVEs were often presented as more closely linked to business values and necessary to gain influence in the organisation. An account director stated that measurement "enables you to have business-focused conversations". Participant 3, the head of communications, said that if there was "a limited amount of budget", in her experience, clients always chose measurement over evaluation because it was much more straightforward. Much of the commentary surrounding measurement qualified or justified its predominant use. Some saw the hard or numerical assessments of values obtained via measurement as legitimately linked with budgets. For example, discussing social media engagement or outtakes, Participant 1, the marketing manager, described how "...you can do a Facebook post for \$10 and you can say this reached 10,000 people, that's an instant return...so there's links with budgets to measurement". Sometimes the participants suggested that measurement had the potential for scientific rigour, albeit in a quantitative sense. For example, Participant 6, an independent consultant, defined measurement as "the hard stuff relating to the objectives". Participant 7, an account director, similarly appeared to see measurement as able to establish conclusions about overall objectives. She defined measurement as "Putting a figure against it,

stacking KPIs versus result". It is unclear whether this scientific association is due to a mix-up between, or collective view of the two terms 'measurement' and 'evaluation'. An account director (Participant 5) emphasised the importance of having specific measures related to reach because this made the value of public relations visible in investment terms:

Reach is a key one in terms of you need browsers click-through. All those things from a media perspective are the things that we look at seriously. Then it's not, I've seen a lot of PR agencies go, 'We got on TV One. Over half a million people watch that', etc. etc. You've got two minutes. We talked to our media guys and we go, "How many people watched it on that day at that time?" So whilst your rate will say half a million, you might find that 110,000 people watched it. That's the stuff that you put into the product because they need to see the realities of what they've invested into.

Alongside this, practitioners generally described evaluation as a costly or time-consuming process. Participant 6, an independent consultant, reported that clients are particularly averse to a formal mode of evaluation that they perceive as expensive and time-consuming. Participant 3, the head of communications, relayed that clients tend to opt for simple measures such as AVEs because evaluation is "much more time-consuming" than measurement. She pointed out that formal evaluation is more challenging to carry out than measurement, given the constraints of time, the demands of multiple simultaneous projects, and a need to weigh up the costs or benefits related to each strategic focus. She believed that "...detailed analysis should be done wherever possible... [but]...given the pace that we work at, you're overlapping projects and you're doing things all the time...[it] is really important when the stakes are high". She said that when it is not possible to formally evaluate, an informal approach such as having a brief discussion about successes and failures is helpful: "But if you can't do that, there's this idea of let's just take five minutes in a room and say: what worked and what didn't? And let's take that with us. Because those are the things that you should be learning from naturally, but it's sometimes quite good to be explicit about them".

These participants do not entirely trust the accuracy of the formal evaluation process. Six of the participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9) agreed that evaluation is a difficult or complex process. An overarching concern that was raised in the interviews is that determining the exact value of public relations is unreliable and that it is ultimately tricky for either the practitioner or the client to be entirely confident of the results. A comment from Participant 9, an independent consultant, characterised the apparent uncertainty: "Whether PR can be evaluated or not.... That's probably an important point for purchase of PR and services". The marketing manager, Participant 1, summed up this concern in relation to online public relations by asking, "What's the value of a really beautiful photo that a consumer generates that gains really great traction online? You can't put a figure on that". Participant 4 elaborated on this concern by commenting that identifying the cause of why a campaign or strategy worked is impossible due to the many other variables that influence outcomes:

If you have a goal of getting 500 people to sign up to an app say, and you do media, and then 500 sign up. But then there would have been a lot of other things going on, so it is very hard to isolate the reason why 500 people signed up.

Participant 3, the in-house head of a department, explained that the recommended academic or scientific methods of evaluation were problematic because “behaviour change and attitude change...are very, very slow to measure”. Participant 9 provided a more illustrative explanation of why seeking to determine the value of public relations might be considered unrealistic:

Some things resonate and some things don't... And there's no control—you can have the best media campaign in the world and someone flies a plane into the twin towers and there's no news... there are things you can't anticipate, predict.

The complexity of evaluating was reported by one participant to be a main reason why the public relations function struggles to gain influence within organisations. Participant 1, the marketing manager, reported that “you can't always just track it back to one single instance of communication... There's kind of a lot of elements where PR will really struggle with to be taken seriously on board”. Participant 2, an account director, identified other public relations needs can influence how much budget can be allocated to evaluation: “...we did some quite detailed analysis...and then you go: okay, so it's giving you a steer and you can course-correct, but you spend a chunk of your budget doing that. Is it enough?”

Five of the participants (Participants 1, 2, 5, 6, 8) reported that digitisation had complicated and challenged their evaluation practice. While online technology is seen as promoting a more responsive communication environment where public relations evaluation may be more valued, several participants commented on more uncertainty, pressure and complexity in the evaluation process. Participant 5, an account director, explained how uncertainty about what online technology means for business is contributing to an attitude of cautiousness: “I think a lot of brands are a lot more wary of the dangers of social so they play it safe as a platform”. Participant 5 elaborated on how evolving technologies come with pressures that might limit the amount of time he has for rigorous evaluation: “The phenomenal shift in technology means that we are constantly chasing our tails, sort of thing and trying to be ahead of it”. The pressure to revert to more superficial approaches to identifying value was identified by Participant 1, the marketing manager, who described how online there is the danger that digitisation will change participants' perceptions of public relations practice to something that has more superficial value with a “constant need for more and more communication ... [there is the] risk that people will just see comms that just needs tapping all the time and which needs to be assigned and checked”. Participant 9 further claimed that brands may not yet acknowledge the importance of social media: “in spite of the fact that we're so much more exposed to media... a lot of clients still need really basic help”. These insights suggest a lag in the uptake of evolving communication technology and social media on the part of clients, and that more pressure to act rather than plan may divert practitioners from evaluating.

As has been outlined in Section 4.2.1, the distinctions these practitioners draw between measurement and evaluation are not always clear. While the practitioners identified going beyond measurement as a reason for evaluating, at other points their reasoning around the purpose of evaluation appeared contradictory, involving reference to measurement processes. For example, Participant 5, an account director, believed evaluation was important to identify outtakes — “the likes of sentiment, engagement”. The blurring of these two processes suggests that evaluation is not always seen as a distinct concept, and that there may be some confusion in detaching it from the concept of measurement.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter reported the coded responses from the nine interviews. The interview transcripts were coded and analysed following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, as well as the focus areas of micro, meso and macro levels (Grandien & Johansson, 2012; Hiscock, 2017; Sandhu, 2009) that were followed in formulating, guiding and interpreting the interviews. The findings outlined in this chapter show that evaluation is an important but highly complex consideration for the interview participants. The participants generally distinguished between measurement and evaluation processes, have a range of working definitions of evaluation, and use several tools to evaluate their practice. This sample of practitioners generally believed that evaluation is an important pursuit to add strategic and professional value to their practice. They identified 10 reasons why it was important, including general contribution to the professionalisation of public relations field, social accountability, and business value. However, this sample of practitioners also reported that evaluation practice is not always possible and that decisions about evaluation tend to revolve around the perspective of their clients. They identified 11 reasons not to evaluate, including the financial cost of evaluation, organisational preference for use of measurement, and variation in the needs of clients. There was general agreement that evaluation practice is being impacted by digitisation as clients become more receptive to its importance, online tools become more responsive, and practitioners gain more autonomy in the online communicating environment. Chapter 4 will analyse these findings in relation to the corresponding literature from overseas and present the three main themes identified in the research.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Themes

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from this research and draws these into three key themes. It does so in relation to the scholarly and empirical literature on evaluation that was reviewed in Chapter 2. It analyses what the participants reported about the influence of digitisation on evaluation decisions (5.1). It then discusses the practitioners' perceptions of the role of interpersonal relationships, particularly relationships between practitioners and clients, in evaluation decisions (5.2). Finally, it discusses what the practitioners reported about the links and divergences between professional and practice approaches to evaluation (5.3).

5.1 The Impact of Digitisation on Evaluation

The first theme identified in the interviews is that digitisation is a significant influence on how practitioners value and approach evaluation. Literature from both theorists and professional bodies has shown that digital technology is highly influential in changing how practitioners might consider and approach the evaluation of their practice (Macnamara, 2010a, 2010b). Some upward trends have been noted with regard to the public relations process related to digitisation. Increased focus on digitisation in terms of evaluation has been noted in various areas: 1) expectation for proof of public relations value from clients (USC Annenberg, 2016; Zerfass et al., 2017); 2) social scrutiny of business practice (Holmes Report, 2016; Macnamara, 2016); 3) the range of tools available for assessing value (Phillips & Young, 2009); and 4) focus on evaluation in professional recommendations and priorities (AMEC, 2016a). Digital public relations theorists Phillips and Young (2009) observed how the digitised environment is creating publics who expect businesses to be accountable to broader social concerns and who increasingly expect to be involved in organisational decision-making. The 2017 Edelman Global Communications Report raised similar concerns about lack of trust and increased demands for ethical behaviour and transparency on the part of business.

This sample of New Zealand practitioners confirms that digitisation is influencing how they approach and value evaluation in their practice. They saw a greater need for transparency and accountability in the digitised communication environment. They commented on more scrutiny of public relations and business practice by publics, and that their evaluation practice, as well as their client's perspective on evaluation, is changing in line with this trend. Several of the practitioners saw the potential for evaluation as way of leveraging these increasing calls for transparency in order to encourage practice that is more professional, and more socially responsible.

The practitioners sampled here were excited but concerned about the impact of digitisation on their evaluation practice. They highlighted speed, ease, and access to a more significant range

of data as giving them new evaluation capabilities, but also described an increased focus on evaluating simplistically. The practitioners were concerned about the complexity of working with unfamiliar and rapidly changing technologies. A concern raised was the risk of reverting to simplistic approaches (such as counting 'likes' and 'shares') for identifying value, given the complexity of the online environment. This concern reflects discussion from Macnamara (2016), and Phillips and Young (2009) who argued that although digital tools have the potential to make evaluation both more accessible and more participatory, they also carry the risk of a more superficial focus. Participants themselves expressed some concern about the pace of change that was occurring with online evaluation technologies. Complexities encountered online may risk leading practitioners towards an unstructured approach to evaluation, lacking the standardisation and rigour needed to gain credibility as an aspiring profession. The insights from these practitioners support findings from America and Europe where practitioners reported their clients are more concerned with the need to respond to social interests (Swerling et al., 2014).

Another insight evident in the interviews is that practitioners are experiencing greater autonomy from the watch-dog function that journalists conventionally claim as being part of their role. Media relations is the traditional mode of public relations industry practice that has had a significant influence on how public relations practitioners behave and evaluate (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Watson, 2012). Macnamara (2015) proposed that strategically or professionally progressing the industry is unlikely to be possible as long as media relations is a fixed part of practice. New Zealand theorists Theunissen and Sissons (2018) discovered a high degree of pressure experienced by practitioners as they seek to maintain positive relationships with journalists to gain and thereby secure the media coverage that is valued by their clients. They found that the relationship between practitioners and journalists is often tense, and requires compromise and diplomacy on the part of the practitioner. Their research showed that practitioners reported becoming more independent from their traditionally interdependent relationship with journalists. This is a promising sign for the professionalism of public relations because it suggests that the link between assessing the value of practice and media monitoring is breaking down. As digitisation lowers media gateways with a more open and accessible media climate, practitioners appear to be finding themselves more able to step away from media relations and towards a more autonomous role in defining their strategic and professional value. Nonetheless, the participants in this research reported remaining reliant on media monitoring because it is much easier to track in assessing the value of their practice.

Participants in this study also discussed their changing relationships with other departments and disciplines in the face of the digitised media landscape and reflected on the pressure to be more integrated with marketing and advertising. However, these practitioners did not identify the use of evaluation as a way of differentiating their practice, particularly the value of their practice, from the competing fields of marketing and advertising. This lack of focus on distinguishing public relations from adjacent fields contrasts with the concerns of a sample of Australian practitioners who raised this as a principal area of change (Xavier et al., 2005).

5.2 The Strategic Role of Practitioner—Client Relationships in Evaluation

The second overarching theme identified in the thematic analysis is the idea that evaluation plays a strategic role in practice decisions. Evaluation is seen from an academic viewpoint as essential to the strategic role of public relations, particularly in terms of relationship management and membership and influence within the dominant coalition (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Macnamara, 2017). However, the exact aims of this management are a subject of contention. Following on from the tradition of the Excellence theory, Hon and Grunig (1999) explained how the ideal mode of evaluation is focused on maintaining and building the ongoing relationships that contribute to business success.

The practitioners in this research agreed with the idea that there are multiple levels of personal influence regarding public relations evaluation. This interpersonal element is especially apparent in the practitioner—client relationship, and requires the practitioner to be very aware of relationship management as an essential element of strategic planning and decision making about practitioners' approach to evaluation. This theme confirms and builds upon the evolving idea of the strong influence of organisational culture on evaluation practice (Grunig, 2006; Lindenmann, 2006; Moss, Likely, Sriramesh & Ferrari, 2017; Thurlow et al., 2016). In particular, this research confirms that the practitioner—client relationship drives much of what practitioners consider to be best practice (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). It is evident that these practitioners perceived strategic value as a relationship-centric pursuit. This focus is clearly evident in the numerous references to the importance of the client perspective and the ease and relevance of conversations with clients.

Limited budget, competition for resources and time pressure are some of the factors cited by the practitioners as to why they might avoid a focus on evaluation. The concerns about limited budgets for evaluation reflect those mentioned in the overseas literature by other public relations practitioners (Johansson, 2017; Wright et al., 2009; Place, 2015). As practitioners struggle to demonstrate their value to clients who are from the outset reluctant to fund evaluation, they considered how they might align themselves with their clients' viewpoint. In place of a standardised or less costly approach to formal or professional evaluation, these practitioners believed three alternatives to a formal or professional approach to evaluation were feasible: measurement, AVEs, and conversation.

The continued usage of measurement, AVEs and conversations in place of formal evaluation, as reported by these practitioners, has some notable implications for organisational value. First, the continued use of AVEs and measurement supports the idea that many of the obstacles to evaluating are located within the personal preference of the client, which is tied to an apparent financial link, suggesting that these practitioners may agree with Thurlow et al. (2016) that there is limited point in public relations practitioners evaluating their practice if they are unable to act on that evaluation. This is in line with research conducted by Yin Krishan and Ean (2012) who

found that the business environment puts more pressure on public relations managers to be accountable to their organisations and to prove the value of their public relations practice in measurable terms. International public relations research showed that when requesting evidence of business contribution, managers will tend to demand hard facts (Berger & Reber, 2006).

Second, while they focus on the preference of the clients, these practitioners use interpersonal interactions, in particular conversations, to gain insights about their relationships with clients in a manner that is ongoing and formative. The importance of formative evaluation is critical from an academic viewpoint to helping advance the strategic effectiveness of the industry and professional field (Macnamara, 2017). This research supports the idea that relationships are a significant component of public relations evaluation practice and influence, as suggested by Reber and Berger (2006) and Theunissen and Sissons (2018). An insight that came through in the research was of a conversational form of evaluation as a valuable practice that allowed practitioners to understand strategic effectiveness, and form and discuss future strategy. This emphasis on dynamic interpersonal aspects supports the idea that a quantifiable value of public relations is an evasive pursuit in the industry (Macnamara, 2014). Interpersonal processes were reported as jointly essential to the process and the results of evaluation.

This finding supports an emerging idea in public relations literature about the value of interpersonal relationships in demonstrating and gaining influence. Reber and Berger's (2006) interviews and surveys of public relations professionals found that practitioners understood that the value of their relationships was more important to clients than logical processes or hard data. While a quantified value of public relations may continue to evade the industry (Macnamara, 2014), this finding suggests that practitioners can use their relationships with clients to develop their understanding of the expertise of public relations in identifying and building upon its value. This opportunity through relationships supports an idea that has been recognised in Macnamara's (2015) MAIE model, that clients should be included closely in the evaluation process, and his later acknowledgement that an informal or qualitative approach might be a more legitimate means of evaluating public relations than previously realised (Macnamara, 2017). This idea is an important one because qualitative forms of research have been noted as a deficit in formal theorising that is not well understood or respected in the industry (Macnamara, 2017).

While the practitioners tended to describe evaluation as more strategic than measurement from a professional and formal viewpoint, they saw measurement as more valued from the perspective of their clients, as well as more useful in their everyday practice. One reason the participants gave for this was because measurement, AVEs and informal conversation were seen as more easily carried out in practice than formal or professional approaches to evaluation. The practitioners described measurement as integral because it links to their media relations practice or is able to identify or at least give the appearance of identifying a

relationship between public relations strategy and budget. They saw evaluation as a complex and costly process by comparison, a finding that is consistent with Macnamara's (2015, 2017) research. Curiously, this sample of practitioners did not explicitly raise any concerns about not having enough strategic influence with their clients within their organisations. In other words, they appeared content with the status quo.

5.3 Practitioner Responses to Professional Recommendations

The third theme identified in this research is the practitioners' perspective on professional recommendations. While there is no single or universal definition of public relations evaluation, there are some common areas of agreement identifiable in the literature. At the forefront of the academic and professional discussion about evaluation are the various models and recommendations (Laskin, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1), these models have developed over the past 70 years and together show how ideas about public relations evaluation have shifted in favour of a summative, ongoing and interpersonal process. This progression highlights a formative and ongoing basis for public relations, as notably established in the Pyramid Model of PR Research (1999, 2002). Yet more recent models such as the Integrated Evaluation Framework model (AMEC, 2016a) and the Measurement – Analysis – Insight – Evaluation (MAIE) model (Macnamara, 2015) also focused on the importance of aligning evaluation practice with the demands of clients. Theorising about evaluation, and its relation to the wide planning cycle, continues to develop (Stacks, 2016). To gain insight into the influence of the evolving formal or professional attention bestowed on evaluation practice, a consistent focus within the interviews was AMEC's (2015) Barcelona Principles, which were prompted by a printout summary of the 2015 updated version. This involves the seven guidelines that were outlined in Chapter 2, with principles that appear to reflect the developing theory about evaluation as continuous, transparent and looped (AMEC, 2015, 2017b).

The thematic analysis identified that practitioners' views on evaluation align with many of the formalised areas of agreement on the concept. The practitioners all recognised AMEC's (2015) Barcelona Principles, and several described their importance as an aspirational standard of practice. These practitioners identified summative and formative aspects as in the developing formal evaluation concept (Gregory, 2015; Macnamara, 2017; Stacks, 2016). They supported the view that evaluation should consider the client objectives, involve both quantitative and qualitative methods, and add strategically to public relations programmes in a client-advisory mode. Their deliberations about evaluation also touched on several additional benefits: higher levels of professional accountability and credibility, higher levels of autonomy in their organisations, and a greater sense of the social value of their work. They mentioned some formal tools such as surveys and focus-groups, and generally differentiated evaluation from measurement. Practitioners are aware of, and concerned about the distinction between evaluation and measurement. There is an awareness that evaluation has the capacity to go beyond measurement, which they for the most part defined as output-focused, simplistic and numerical.

While the theorising and awareness-raising may be aligned with developing ideas about an ideal formal process of evaluation (Macnamara, 2017), the collective insights of these practitioners suggest they are not always practically feasible. Analysis of the themes that arose in the interviews also revealed gaps in the recommendations from the professional bodies (notably the Barcelona Principles) and the experience of practitioners. The participants specifically reported that the Barcelona Principles are overgeneralised or irrelevant to their everyday practice. They suggested that a main reason for their inadequacy is that they do not take the influence of the wishes of the client into account. This is particularly important because the clients often do not see value in evaluation, or any reason to pay for evaluation. This preference for a client-centred, as opposed to formal, professional approach to evaluating reflects findings from an array of international research (e.g. Baskin et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2009). This area of mismatch suggests that for the recommendations from the professional bodies to be useful there needs to be closer alignment between professional recommendations related to evaluation and the experience of the practitioner.

This insight further suggests that a workable approach to evaluation would need to be aligned with the professionals' everyday practice, which is primarily contextualised within the organisation. An apparent contradiction was evident in the interviews about practitioners' attitudes towards the value and role of measurement. The practitioners generally agreed with the professional perspective on measurement as a simplistic, low-level technical function, defining it primarily in terms of outputs and outtakes and acknowledging that evaluation is a more sophisticated process. This confirms the established idea from leading public relations management scholars, Grunig and Hunt (1984), that a focus on media relations and measurement processes undermines the industry's ability to gain strategic credibility within organisations. Measurement and evaluation specialists Macnamara and Likely (2017) elaborated on this idea by discussing how simplistic approaches to evaluating were formed on the basis of one-way communication and contribute to an ineffective and self-referential approach to business. However, this study's practitioners also commented that measurement is a viable and useful process for gaining influence within their organisation. Their insights support developing evaluation theory that acknowledges the value of measurement from an applied perspective, particularly that clients prefer measurement over evaluation because clients prefer so-called hard data (Macnamara, 2017; Stacks, 2016).

The perceived complexity of the communication environment was another reason why several of the participants preferred measurement over evaluation. The practitioners appeared to understand the importance of evaluation within a boundary spanning role, starting with the organisation and having wider implications for the profession. However, these practitioners were also doubtful about the possibility of evaluating such a complex activity as communication. This finding aligns with the literature that accepted that the impacts of communication are difficult to control and understand validly or reliably (for example, Botan & Hazelton, 2010; Grunig & Hunt,

1984; L'Etang & Powell, 2013). L'Etang and Powell (2013) described how public relations' cognitive, attitudinal or behavioural outcomes are similarly too complicated ever to be fully or accurately evaluated. As a result, practitioners' approaches in practice may vary greatly from scholarly recommendations as a result.

The use of measurement, AVEs and conversation also builds upon the findings of the international research about the ideal aims of evaluation. Thurlow et al. (2016) developed a model for evaluating the normative theory of Excellence within the organisational system. They concluded that evaluation must be realistically aligned to the everyday needs of the practitioners' to be feasible. This would involve greater consideration of both qualitative and quantitative aspects of evaluation, and both the internal and external environments. This research confirms Thurlow et al.'s (2016) argument that evaluation is most effective when clients are receptive to its value. The contextualised insights from this study's participants show that their clients' preferences underpin their evaluation decisions.

Curiously, the practitioners did not raise concerns about ethics or transparency in relation to evaluation. This is surprising given that these aspects are prolific in the emerging discussion about the role of the public relations industry (AMEC, 2015; Holmes Report, 2016). Nonetheless, these findings support Place's (2015) ideas that practitioners have a working definition of ethics, as evident in her interviews with American practitioners. Like American practitioners, this sample of New Zealand practitioners saw both instinctive and more systematic and thought-out evaluation approaches as valid means of contributing to the professional field.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings in relation to the literature and identified three main themes. Overall, the thematic analysis revealed that practitioners think that while an ideal—a formal or professional model—is important, it is neither clear-cut nor always possible in practice. First, public relations evaluation is being influenced by digitisation. Second, public relations evaluation is being influenced by the practitioners' relationship with their clients. Finally, public relations practitioners are responsive to professional recommendations for evaluation, offering a range of feedback that could be helpful to the ongoing discussion about its ideal process. Together, these themes highlight the social role of the evaluation concept, as it is interpreted in relation to changing technologies, business relationships, and professional recommendations. The next chapter will discuss the wider implications of this research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Looking Forward

6.0 Introduction

This research builds upon on a growing body of literature about the concept of public relations evaluation (AMEC, 2016a; AMEC, 2015; Cutlip et al., 2012; Lindenmann, 1993; Macnamara, 1999, 2002; Macnamara, 2015; Macnamara, 2017; Watson & Noble, 2014). It does so qualitatively, by applying applied a social constructivist lens to address the research question “How do New Zealand public relations practitioners approach and value the evaluation of their practice?”, and thematically analysing the interview responses of nine New Zealand practitioners. This research contributes to the growing literature on the topic of public relations evaluation with first-hand insights from practitioners who are directly involved in its practice to the discussion on public relations evaluation.

This chapter concludes the research. First, it recaps the main findings of the research (6.1). Second, it reflects on the research aims and processes, particularly discussing the limitations of the research, and possible directions for future research (6.2). Third, it discusses possible directions for next steps regarding future research on evaluation (6.3). Finally, it provides an overall conclusion to the research (6.4).

6.1 Summary of the Findings and Themes

A consistent finding from this research is that formal or professional evaluation is important to this sample of New Zealand practitioners. Not only were they aware of the Barcelona Principles but they agreed with their fundamental value as a guide to improve the strategic value of their practice. They said that formal evaluation provided them with the ability to plan and carry out well-developed communication strategies rather than relying on simple measures or ad hoc hunches. These insights support the idea of a broader shift away from functionalist or organisation-centric approaches to communication, where communication outcomes were understood as controllable and carried out on behalf of the client or organisation, towards co-constructivist or public-centric methodologies, where communication outcomes are understood as manageable (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This evolution appears to position practitioners more closely in a boundary-spanning role, where they respond to and mediate between business and broader social interests.

However, these practitioners believed that the formal concept of evaluation is contested and difficult to define. Although the practitioners all supported the idea that evaluation was an essential element of their practice, at least intellectually, they also described a variable and pressured practice experience where evaluation is not always warranted or possible. While they emphasised the professional value of evaluation and offered various working definitions of an evaluation concept, they were not able to define it in a single or absolute manner. This is not

surprising because, as the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (2017) and numerous theorists have discussed (Macnamara, 2017; Place, 2015), there is no standard definition of the evaluation concept and no standardisation evaluation process.

Even though the practitioners in this sample were affiliated with professional associations, and considered evaluation as important in order to be accountable to both business and society, they did not always follow the formal or professional recommendations of including evaluation in their practice. Instead, the central driver in practitioners' evaluation decisions was in response to the objectives of their clients who controlled the funding and with whom they often had close relationships. While the approaches taken to evaluating by these practitioners are not always formalised or structured, they are strategic, as they use whatever methods they can to appeal to the interests of budget-holders. The viewpoint of professional or formal advocates is less important to their decisions about evaluation. They tended to believe that their clients preferred visible and conversational evidence of the value of their work. To respond to and gain influence with their clients, these practitioners tracked counts of media visibility, calculate AVEs, or engage in conversations that they saw as more feasible and often more insightful.

Beyond being often built into their media relations efforts, the practitioners noted that the numerical aspects of measurement outputs or outtakes allowed them to engage in more focused conversations with clients, and to discuss resourcing issues with the clients. This reflects theorising that has identified quantitative methods as appealing to the financial mindset of business (Thurlow et al., 2016; Watson & Noble, 2014). International research has similarly found that measures are a preferred means by which to identify the value of public relations work (Schriner et al., 2017; Xavier et al., 2005), despite practitioners appearing to agree that evaluation is a more legitimate process (Baskin et al., 2010). Some of the practitioners in this research also believed that AVEs, a now outdated measure of competitive value, served a similar purpose to measures of appealing to clients' interest in quantified public relations results.

The informal and ongoing conversational forms of evaluation referred to by this sample of practitioners were often used as a substitute for a formal or structured process of evaluation, particularly when resourcing issues limited the application of formal evaluation. The focus on an informal conversational approach to evaluation concurs with Macnamara's (2017) latest thinking that less prescribed and more qualitative ways of evaluating, such as those practiced by the participants in this research, are also valid in contributing to the value of the profession. It also reflects a broader notion in the field about the professional role and goal of relationship building as central to effective public relations practice (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

This sample of practitioners believed that evaluation has professional value, however they saw this as less important relative to organisational concerns. Recommendations for evaluation from scholars or professional associations, particularly the Barcelona Principles, were seen as a

more academic process, disconnected from practice, and not always helpful. Yet this sample of practitioners also supported a developing discussion area in the literature about the role of digital technology in shaping public relations practice. These practitioners echoed topics in the literature about ways evaluation processes will change in the future. The driving force for change is online technologies that contribute to new ways of thinking about how, what and why to evaluate (Macnamara, 2008, 2010; Phillips & Young, 2009). This sample of practitioners agreed that evaluation is increasingly possible online, with more autonomy from journalism, more socially aware publics, and increased expectations for accountability from clients. They also believed their clients are becoming more open to the idea that their public relations activities can and should be evaluated (Swerling et al., 2014).

The practitioners agreed with scholars that public relations evaluation is becoming more complex. Digital public relations experts Phillips and Young (2009) and public relations evaluation expert Macnamara (2008, 2010) discussed how public relations is becoming faster and more reactive with evolving digital technologies, and with this there is a parallel increase in expectations of business and social accountability. The sample practitioners described their evaluation practice as complex, competitive and time-pressured. Underpinning the enthusiasm of these practitioners for a growing potential in the field was a concern about the complexity of evaluating, and uncertainty as to whether they will ever be able to do so in a manner that can accurately represent the field. Phillips and Young (2009), too, made the point that while digital tools have the potential to make evaluation both easier and participatory, they also carry the risk of reinforcing a superficial and broad focus in the field.

Overall, this interpretive research illustrates that what is perceived as 'evaluation' varies depending on the experiences or values related to the practical, organisational and professional systems associated with the concept. The views presented by the practitioners touch on some key aspects of formal evaluation theorising, and highlight a diminishing gap between theorising and practice in the broader public relations field. Yet not only did the practitioners not have a precise definition of evaluation, they did not include evaluation practice as a systematic component of the planning cycle. Instead, it was valued and approached situationally thus viewed as embedded in day-to-day relationships with stakeholders (Macnamara 2015, 2017).

6.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research

This research examined the question of how and why New Zealand public relations practitioners approach and value evaluation in their practice. It did so by asking practitioners about their experiences, and identifying themes in their responses. The research decisions were guided by time and resource concerns and my theoretical worldview of knowledge as a socially constructed phenomenon. This section discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

It is important to note that the qualitative approach used in this research is part of an evolving school of knowledge. Adopting an interpretative approach meant that findings were not able to be generalised to other contexts or situations. This research does not claim to be either objective or representative of wider attitudes towards the role of evaluation in New Zealand. Nor does the research make claims about the generalisability or objectivity of the findings. Yet, what this research lacks in terms of reliability or representativeness of the studied population, it makes up for in terms of validity.

This research has empirical strengths in relation to relevance and scientific validity. A social constructivist worldview (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) combined with a qualitative methodology (Patton, 2002) underpinned this research. A social constructivist worldview of public relations practice understands that it is always contextual and embedded in relationships, both within and outside of their business context (Botan & Taylor, 2004). This worldview shaped decisions about the research question, recruitment process, interview method, and thematic analysis. Fitting with this perspective, interviews are the most valid way to obtain insights about experiences because conversations are the primary place where meaning-making occurs (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). A responsive and semi-structured approach helped focus these interviews and highlighted the role of the relationship between the researcher and participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Care was taken to avoid pre-empting the responses from this sample of practitioners, who are credible sources of insight into public relations practice. This is important because interview narratives are contextualised and free flowing, thus benefit from not being fitted into predetermined frames or preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A degree of variability makes sense in qualitative research because social insights are subjective, incomplete and continuously changing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The coding was checked by an external researcher, and verified against one of the interviews. However, the inevitable variability that comes with qualitative research will ideally be contained between parameters focused on the research question. A degree of uniformity was facilitated by a partly standardised responsive interviewing approach with uniform broad focus areas that ensured a consistent focus on the research problem.

The recruitment of participants for this research was easier than expected. Probability sampling would have allowed the research findings to be more generalisable, however this was not possible as the exact number of public relations practitioners in New Zealand is not known. Purposive (Patton, 2002) and snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) were deemed the ideal recruitment approach to ensure industry access and credibility. These practitioners, who were all in positions of seniority, readily gave up their time and energy to discuss their thoughts and experiences on evaluation. Others provided me with additional information about evaluation they used in their work, in the form of campaign examples and final wrap-reports. The participants were interested in evaluation and eager to share their perspectives. A major loss to

the depth of this research was the inability to retrieve the two interview recordings that were on a damaged device.

Ongoing reflection was useful throughout the research and led to several changes to the research aims and processes. Reflection is important to qualitative research because it can help the researcher identify ways to improve the research aims and processes as new depths and details about the research problem were revealed (Agee, 2009). As I carried out this research I was engaged in two social worlds, as both occupational insider and analytical observer, experiences from which are likely to have helped me remain neutral in my approach and interpretation in the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A reflective approach throughout the research helped me to “see life in the round, from all angles, including multiple sides of a dispute and different versions of the same incident” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 27).

The choice of the research question was one critical aspect of the research. There were two iterations of the research question, based on a need to broaden my scope of focus so as not to pre-empt or limit the practitioners' insights. My original research question was, “How do practitioners value the ethics of evaluation in their practice?” This original research focus proved to be too limited in scope, and I realised that a broader focus on ethics was needed to avoid pre-empting beliefs about the subject matter. I found the focus-groups were not easy to organise and, more critically, involved some significant issues of honesty, privacy and confidentiality, particularly given my inexperience as a facilitator. I developed a new research question, 'How do New Zealand public relations practitioners approach and value the evaluation of their practice?' and sought to approach this through a personal interview approach that would allow the focus to still be conversational but able to maintain a degree of privacy to facilitate more honest insights and ease of access at a time and location suitable to the participants.

Another important reflective decision was concerning the research method. I had originally intended to explore the evaluation subject using a qualitative focus-group methodology, a method familiar in the general communications industry (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). I found the focus-groups were not easy to organise and, more critically, involved significant issues of honesty, privacy and confidentiality, particularly given my inexperience as a facilitator. I decided that an interview method was more effective to engage practitioners in a manner that would allow them to co-construct the discussion and facilitate a greater depth and deeper detailed insights. A personal interview approach that would allow the focus to still be conversational but able to maintain a degree of privacy to facilitate more honest insights and ease of access at a time and location suitable to the participants.

In the end, I used semi-structured, semi-formal interviews and a text-based thematic analysis. Miller and Glassner (1997) explained that paying attention to the situation of the person being interviewed helps deepen understandings of their perspective beyond just what the narrative of the transcripts facilitate, using “honest and intelligent theorizing about social life” (p. 11). The

office, café and virtual locations that the practitioners chose to discuss evaluation therefore also facilitated a more comfortable experience that tells us something about their willingness to discuss the topic. The analysis began as soon as the first interview was conducted.

The choice of research location was another influential aspect of this research. Research location influences the scope and depth of the interview content that can be identified (Miller & Glassner, 1997). An ideal research location for responsive interviews may be one that is participant-oriented: it offers scope not just for the collection of rich natural data, but also for flexibility about the research topic (Miller & Glassner, 1997). Adherence to the research methodology, time constraints, and convenience for participants were aspects that I considered in my decision. I had initially considered meeting at the university but later considered that this would involve extra time and effort on the part of the participants. The decision about the location of the research was in the end left up to the participants.

Along with its strengths, this study has several limitations. There was a high degree of variability in this research. For example, interview times ranging from 30 minutes to one hour and locations ranging from a noisy cafe with numerous interruptions to a phone interview (see Table 1). All aspects of each particular context are likely to have influenced response patterns. Another limitation that arose was that I submitted the full list of interview questions to the university ethics committee before the research was carried out. This limited the changes that I could make once the study was underway; the validity of the study would be at risk if I changed or modified the questions too much during the research process.

Additionally, the empirical data was restricted to a small sample, and involved a finite number of questions within a limited time-frame. One of the limitations of this research was scope. Evaluation is a complex field of practice, which theorists suggest will encompass many and various perspectives (Fawkes, 2014). Simplifying the topic was necessary to access the topic, however, might not have enabled participants to fully describe their evaluation experience. A related limitation of the research is that the time-frame was not long enough for familiarity and trust to develop in the relationship between the interviewer and the participant, and therefore the depth of insight that could be obtained may have been limited (Seidman, 2013). There is no quick route to developing a trust relationship that maximises the value of qualitative interviews, but a single phone call and a meeting are definitely not enough time to develop trust. My close involvement in the research also posed complications for the reliability of the results. This is always a factor with qualitative research where insights are filtered through the researcher's own ideological and social perceptions. It is possible that I became immersed in the individual experiences of the participants (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). I was involved with the public relations industry on a personal level as both a student and later an employee. While I made a conscious effort to remain neutral throughout the research process, my own professional bias or desire to protect my reputation may have played a role in the research outcomes. Although I implemented various techniques to ensure uniformity in my coding of the

transcripts—including use of the NVivo™ software—the coding process inevitably has a degree of subjectivity. Furthermore, the ongoing process of interpreting and writing up separates the material more from the participants' originally expressed meanings (Guest et al., 2011; Patton, 2002; Vogt et al., 2014). While the role of the researcher is acknowledged in qualitative research outcomes, several issues arose that risked introducing bias and variability into the research outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The limited timeframe and personal biases may have risked my neutrality in the interpretation of the data. Having established relationships with some participants but not others prior to the research process is also likely to have introduced variability into the research outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

6.3 Directions for Future Research

This research has suggested that public relations evaluation is a contextually significant phenomenon that is particularly influenced by the viewpoint of clients and trends in digitisation. The findings of this research indicate some areas for future research about public relations evaluation in terms of both aims and methodologies. It also suggests some important topic areas for future research.

The findings of this research could be verified and expanded upon using a wider range of participants and methods. This would diversify and contextualise scientific knowledge of the phenomenon (Guest et al., 2011). The significance of particular topics may have been missed in this research because it is only the verbal element of the conversation that was recorded; other forms of communication were not considered (Oltmann, 2016). An important emphasis on future research may be a multi-modal focus on data collection and analysis. A multi-modal approach to research incorporates different forms of communication beyond words (Oltmann, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The incorporation of multimodal clues, such as gestures, emotional reactions, eye contact or vocal tone, can provide valid insights because it helps identify the complexity of responses of participants. For example, surprise and frustration, may suggest a reluctance in discussing the topic, and enthusiasm or calmness may suggest an interest in discussing the topic.

Additionally, having now ascertained that many senior practitioners are eager and open to engage in the topic of evaluation, a focus group methodology may be reconsidered as an option in follow-up research. Focus-groups are especially helpful for 'why?' and 'why not?' because they elicit greater candour regarding feelings and perceptions at personal and group levels (Barbour, 2007). The competing narratives that potentially arise when a number of individuals get together to engage in focus-groups can spark ideas that may not otherwise be considered.

This research has implications for future research regarding the concept of evaluation, as well as the broader public relations field. It would be useful to include a more diverse and more extensive sample of practitioners who, for example, differ in experience level, have experience in different fields of public relations, and hail from different regions. The research suggested that

feedback from other parties is relevant to stakeholder decisions (for example, "...we get questions like what does success look like?"; "...it should be a holistic view on how it affected all parties involved"). Exploring this insight further would help explain how evaluation fits within the broader strategy of organisational communication. Ethnographic studies are one way to gain a detailed understanding of evaluation in different contexts and cultures.

Another focus area for future research is how evaluation can be used to contribute to the professionalism of public relations. This study's practitioners agreed that evaluation has a professional role. They were interested in how evaluation might help them perform their everyday role more effectively, a role that they appeared to see as involving both business and social interests. This emphasis on multiple system levels reflects what is described in public relations professional literature as the 'boundary spanning role' (Theaker & Yaxley, 2017). In this mode, public relations professionals are ideally placed to contribute to the efficacy and ethics of the relationships between business and broader society. These practitioners suggested that they see evaluation as a means to gather the information from internal and external publics that can verify and contribute to this relationship-building and ongoing sustainability of a business. They highlighted its importance on both meso (organisational) and macro (professional or societal) levels.

This research suggests that the perspectives of clients are essential to understanding practitioners' evaluation decisions. These practitioners saw evaluation as highly important to contribute to their organisational context, in particular, their relationship with their clients. Future research might consider how practitioners should best leverage this close relationship to educate or advise clients about the importance of a formal approach to evaluation. Future research should consider clients' attitudes towards evaluation and understandings of its role in their use of public relations services. These insights are also likely to help the profession gain insight into the particular aspects of evaluation that they should emphasise in professional recommendations in an attempt to convince clients of its importance.

6.4 Overall Conclusion

This research highlights some apparent contradictions in public relations practitioners' experience of evaluation in their practice. It confirms that New Zealand practitioners face challenges that are similar to those of their international counterparts. The findings showed that, like their international counterparts, practitioners are interested in evaluation and see its importance for the credibility of their practice, for their position as strategists rather than mere technicians, for higher levels of transparency and for the professionalism of the industry. These New Zealand participants were aware of formal and professional recommendations related to evaluation, and that scholars conceptualise best practice evaluation as continuous, transparent and looped (AMEC, 2015). However, the findings revealed a gap between the recommendations from the professional bodies, such as AMEC (2015) and the Global Alliance

(2017a), and the practitioner experience which provided them with reasons for continuing to prioritise the use of measurement or AVEs. Additionally, for this sample of New Zealand practitioners, evaluation can be approached informally to help their strategic and professional practice. These findings indicate that New Zealand practitioners tend to practice short-term and ad hoc forms of evaluation. The practitioners reported that their evaluation practice often consists of a dynamic series of reasonably informal conversations that involve both clients and colleagues. This finding aligns with the international research that shows that evaluation is not always carried out as a systematic component of a planning cycle. The lack of close engagement with professional perspectives on evaluation could mean that public relations practice might continue to lack the standardisation and rigour needed to gain credibility for either the business or the profession. Similarly, the continuation of the current unstructured approach to evaluation could suggest that the strategic element of public relations activity will be unrecognised, and practitioners will be unable to claim value regarding outcomes that are valid or unreliable.

A key finding was that the practitioner—client relationship is central to decision making about how to evaluate, and the extent of evaluation. This relationship has clear implications for public relations practice because the clients control the purse strings. Professional associations have sought to standardise public relations evaluation by developing a series of formal recommendations (Global Alliance, 2017). However, this research suggests that these recommendations do not adequately acknowledge the unique context that influences evaluation practice, particularly the client-practitioner relationship. The practitioner responses indicated that while they are aware of, and agree with recommendations from the professional bodies, they desired more recognition of the resourcing and interpersonal parameters that are set by the client. The research also shows that practitioners are well-positioned to positively influence their clients' attitudes towards evaluating public relations practice because they are already closely engaged in ongoing discussions with their clients—as indicated by the practitioners' claims that clients use casual conversation as a means of evaluating. It would be very beneficial for practitioners if the professional recommendations included guidelines about how to have conversations about the value of evaluation with clients.

While the formal role of public relations evaluation continues to evolve, researchers know less about the place and significance of informal, interpersonal approaches to evaluation (Macnamara, 2017). This research suggests that the future professionalism of evaluation within the industry will require greater consideration of the various interpersonal difficulties and opportunities faced in practice. The insights identified and discussed in this research suggest, in particular, that the professionalism of the industry will benefit from greater recognition that practitioners have to work within resourcing parameters that are established by the client. Greater incorporation of the organisational and social context in professional evaluation discussion would add to the usefulness of the recommendations from the professional bodies.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Opening questions
Could you please describe your current role generally?
Could you please describe your experience as a public relations professional?
Transition questions
What activities do you spend the most time on in your campaigns?
Have you observed any changes in what your clients' request in the time you have been working?
How do you approach a PR brief?
Key / central questions
<i>INDIVIDUAL IMPLEMENTATION</i>
How important is measurement and evaluation to a campaign's success?
What do you believe is the main purpose of measuring campaigns?
What do you believe is the main purpose of evaluation?
How frequently do you believe campaign results should be measured and evaluated?
Can you think of an example of a campaign where measurement and evaluation was successful? How do you know it was successful?
What sorts of tools do you use in measuring and evaluating?
Have you heard of AVES and, if so, do you use them and what are your views on them?
How do you use social media for determining the success of your campaigns?
<i>ORGANISATION IMPLEMENTATION</i>
What challenges or difficulties, or conversely opportunities and strengths, do you face in measuring and evaluating client/organisation campaigns?
To what extent does the response to spend resources evaluating vary from client to client?
Have you observed any changes to what clients / your bosses want in terms of measurement and evaluation?
<i>INDUSTRY IMPLEMENTATION</i>
Have you heard of the Barcelona Principles, and if so, what do you know about them? (> pass the participant the BP)
Have you undergone any education or training in measurement and evaluation, and how necessary do you believe education or training is for practitioners?
How much of your time do you spend on structured programmes and how much do you spend on issues or crisis management?
Could doing / not doing evaluation lead to harm for e.g. the organisation or public?
Where do you, as a public relations professional, think evaluation is going?
Closing questions
<i>How long have you been in public relations?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 5 years • 5 to 10 years • More than 10 years

What size organisation do you work for?

- *Less than 9*
- *Between 9 and 20*
- *More than 20*
- *More than 100*

What sort of organisation do you work for?

- NFP
- Corporate
- Local government agency
- Council controlled organisation
- Small business
- Self-employed
- Other

Do you have any questions? Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Table 2*Breakdown of Interview Participants' Work Experience and Interview Length*

<i>Participant identifier</i>	<i>Role type & title</i>	<i>Minimum time spent in communication/public relations roles</i>	<i>Location of current employer</i>	<i>Medium of interview</i>	<i>No. of words in transcribed interview</i>	<i>Interview Time (minutes)</i>
Participant 1	In-House Marketing Manager	six years, nine months	Wellington	Telephone	3089	37
Participant 2	Agency Account Director	eight years, ten months	Auckland	In-person	10024	66
Participant 3	In-house Head of Department	26 years, two months	Auckland	In-person	6937	54
Participant 4	Agency Account Director	20 years, seven months	Auckland	In-person	8315	50
Participant 5	Agency Account Director	Four years, 10 months	Auckland	In-person	6670	47
Participant 6	Consultancy CEO	24 years, three months	Auckland	In-person	11202	100
Participant 7	Agency Account Director	10 years	Auckland	In-person	5860	49
Participant 8	Agency CEO	17 years, seven months	Auckland	In-person	6899	56
Participant 9	Independent Consultancy	20 years, one month	Auckland	In-person	6765	51

Note. Minimum time in role calculated according to online LinkedIn record of communication or public relations management roles.

Appendix C: Table 3

Distribution of Participants Based on Years' Experience in the Public Relations Industry

Years of experience in public relations practice	Number of participants
1–6 years	2
7–11 years	2
12–17 years	1
18–23 years	2
24–29 years	2

Appendix D: Table 5

Coding Schedule

PPNT #	CODED ELEMENT
Definitions of evaluation – How practitioners described the evaluation concept	
Analysis	
P1	"...to evaluate it is a little bit more analytical in approach"
P2	"Evaluation is analysis of what the outputs were"
P3	"...has it changed the dial?"
P5	"...at the end looking at or evaluating its success or otherwise is...really important...here we do wrap reports, however, I often think they are just a list of the clicks that were achieved without any real analysis"
P8	"...the outcomes side you've also got research, so you know organisations that can afford it doing desk research on whether a PR campaign on your brand is having the impact that it desires"
Outcome identification	
P2	"Evaluation is...did it actually work"
P3	"...using evaluation to understand audiences better, I felt we got lots of opportunity to try that out in different ways..."
P4	"...evaluation I think helps you look at what you did, how you did it"
P5	"...at the end looking at or evaluating its success or otherwise is about impact on the public...really important...here we do wrap reports, however, I often think they are just a list of the clicks that were achieved without any real analysis"
P9	"...in the evaluation phase we would look at what worked well, what didn't, what could we have done better"
Reflection	
P9	"...part of reflection of what worked well, what didn't, what could have been done better, what should we have done differently.."
Strategy formation	

	"...we have to make sure we respond to those voices we've asked to be heard and make changes off the back of that as well"
P1	"Evaluation is....what are the moves for next time cos we have campaigns that we run 2 times a year, every year so it's really important that at the end of the campaign you record your thoughts of what you might be able to do differently next time you roll it out."
P2	"...if you don't evaluate it hurts you cos you don't learn and you never get the chance to do these incremental learnings... to actually improve" (Participant 2)
P3	"...evaluating its success or otherwise is I think really important because if you were to then do it the following year you have a record of who it went and what to improve on."
" "	
P4	"...using evaluation to understand audiences better, I felt we got lots of opportunity to try that out in different ways and then adapt the programme and the project."
	"So, it's listening to the stakeholders, and if the stakeholders are unhappy or even if they're just suggesting an improvement, you're aware of that and you're really important part of the function is to be able to go back to the organisation and say: the organisation's the thing that needs to change, not just that problem."
P7	"...if you do it correctly and the findings are really valuable and you implement changes or improvements off the back of measurement and evaluation"
	"...evaluation I think helps you look at what you did, how you did it, and how you could do better next time"
P8	"...in the evaluation phase we would look at what worked well, what didn't, what could we have done better."
P9	"Evaluation data...can totally change a client's perspective and your own perspective on how the best approach a brief because numbers do speak volumes. And I think that's when if you can couple that with your own instinct or insights from focus-groups that are actually closely affected by whatever your campaign is, then you can find a really nice balance in how you go into a campaign."
" "	
Data contextualisation	
P7	"...evaluation I think to me takes on much more of the contextual elements that might have affected your campaign"
Colleague collaboration	
P3	"... given the pace that we work at, you're overlapping projects and you're doing things all the time, detailed analysis is great and you should do it where you can, and you should do it when the stakes are high, that work is really important. But if you can't do that, there's this idea of let's just take five minutes in a room and say: what worked and what didn't? And let's take that with us. Because those are the things that you should be learning from naturally, but it's sometimes quite good to be explicit about them."
Client collaboration	

P2	"I'm gonna ring up the client and go are you happy? How do you feel it went? I've got some bits that I think were a bit more stressful than it needed to be, do you agree? Do you want us to do something different next time? Is there any kind of coverage that you really hoped that we'd get that we didn't? That part of the evaluation will be much more insightful for the both of us."
P3	"... given the pace that we work at, you're overlapping projects and you're doing things all the time, detailed analysis is great and you should do it where you can, and you should do it when the stakes are high, that work is really important. But if you can't do that, there's this idea of let's just take five minutes in a room and say: what worked and what didn't? And let's take that with us. Because those are the things that you should be learning from naturally, but it's sometimes quite good to be explicit about them."
P4	"I think the evaluation that we do here in a way, is also the team get really nice client feedback, they get really great emails sent to the Managing Directors saying the team is such a great partner to us, or the team has done so much on this for us, or it has been such great to have XYZ person always there doing, you know like sort of you are achieving things for them and you know that from the fact they pay their bill, they stay as a client, they send lovely feedback"
P5	"I often have a conversation with clients about value and how do you demonstrate the value that you're delivering but the kinds of stuff I'm dealing with they can see for themselves either its working or its not, um, it's not, in my line of work, it's not critical to have other evaluation structures around."

Definitions of measurement - When practitioners described the measurement concept

Client collaboration

P2	"...how we do measurement... [I] do the basics, have a talk and much more interested in knowing how is the business doing, like have you had a good quarter? Do you feel like you need to fill the pipeline? What can we do to help?"
P3	"The other thing I always like to do, and I try and do it now, albeit informally, is it's not a quantitative measure but it's a piece of qualitative measuring you can do around meeting as a team. We've done this piece of work, we've done this project, campaign, whatever it is. What are the 3 things that worked really well and what 3 things would you do differently or didn't work?"

Data contextualisation

P3	"...what we tend to do at the moment with our media coverage is we look at how much media there is, how many times the university is mentioned and what context. But we also measure the level of impact, so it's one thing just to get a mention, but we've got some impact we measure according to the key themes that we're trying to promote for the university, and then we assess those pieces of coverage and say: is that a high impact, medium impact or a low impact?"
P7	"It's [measurement] seasonality versus other current newsworthy items"

Counting outputs

P1	"Measurement is probably more of a numerical quantitative kind of thing"
P2	"I think any hard measure in numbers, like how many pieces of coverage, how many people attended our event, how many people received a letter from, all of that stuff is useful to know the volume of our work."
P3	"...so we're looking at the outputs and we kind of know in those campaigns what the potential reach is going in, unless someone has a massive drop of in followers."
P4	"...what we tend to do at the moment with our media coverage is we look at how much media there is, how many times the university is mentioned"
P7	"You can measure...how many articles you got published"
P8	"...more number oriented"
P9	"Measurement is... the types of things that we would look at might be how many people did we get to attend events? How many pieces of media coverage were positive in the sentiment? What was the share of voice? So, more metric- based."
Counting outtakes	

P1	"Measurement is...how many people you will reach with a certain online activity"
P2	"We do a lot with social influencers so we're looking at the outputs and we kind of know in those campaigns what the potential reach is going in, unless someone has a massive drop of in followers. What we look to, in terms of results, is did we get good eye messages, was it good quality coverage that we liked"
P3	"...what we tend to do at the moment with our media coverage is we look at how much media there is, how many times the university is mentioned and what context. But we also measure the level of impact, so it's one thing just to get a mention, but we've got some impact we measure according to the key themes that we're trying to promote for the university, and then we assess those pieces of coverage and say: is that a high impact, medium impact or a low impact?" Participant 3
P4	"You can measure...how much engagement you've had on your social media"
P6	"And then you get into all of the other measurement things in terms of news releases, for example, the opportunities to see if something's published, if you're talking about a broad mass market of people so that you will say through traditional or social media: have they seen it? Have they liked it? Have they engaged with it? And of course, the engagement is a much stronger measure than just seeing it. Somebody's actually taking some action."
P8	"...measurement is... How many pieces of media coverage were positive in the sentiment? How much engagement did this post have on social?"
" "	"...it's literally the qualitative value of the impact of the story, which is positive, negative, neutral... does it carry your key messages? Yes, no, maybe, you know, how many of your key messages have come up, so it's those which are quite basic sorts of measurements that were introduced during my"
Identifying or demonstrating ROI	
P5	"...measurement should be the hard stuff relating to the objectives" "The outcomes at the end of the day, are going to be much more closely related with what the organisation is looking for. For a commercial company, it would perhaps be the sale of the product. For a political party, it would be: did you vote for them?"
P6	'Putting a figure against it, stacking KPIs versus results"
Reasons to evaluate - When practitioners identified reasons to evaluate	
Adding academic or scientific rigour	
P2	"...the biggest thing for clients is evaluating the success of whatever you do. So making sure that you've got rigour around your KPIs"
P5	"...it's really important that you do have some sort of rigour involved"

- P6 "It is important if someone is willing to invest 'x' amount of money into it that you are actually putting some rigour around it as well."

Advising the client

- P1 "...how you do your job as an advisor I know, if the comms been trusted by the individual, you can suggest ways to do things differently as a critical component of what we do and I think it's probably also how we can increase the reputation and standing of the industry in front of people you know when you can take that top management, executive level approach to things,
- P3 "...if we get a brief or a client kind of has a clear view on what they think we should do and we don't agree with, 100% we have to talk to them about it because if it doesn't work, at the end of the day we can't turn around and go we never really liked the idea anyway."
- P4 "You can measure physically how many eyes you've got, how much engagement you've had on your social media, that's pretty sensible on a particular project or story, as well as how many articles you got published, or whatever. You can do those things, but then what you wanna know is has it changed the dial and what's the sentiment, and so you wanna get to that point as well where you can, and again, you often don't have a lot of funds for that sort of thing.
- P5 "...a client that I have here was relaunching, they took a product away from the market, people were really unhappy...I rung the client and said actually, I think if we just tell them half, then leave two months, then tell them the other half"
- P7 "That's being one of the biggest learning curves and one of the biggest benefits of working in this agency for me is that everything we do is integrated and that is what I meant before about the channel neutral approach and that we might say no, take all your money and put it into TV."
- " " "...if the stakeholders are unhappy or even if they're just suggesting an improvement, you're aware of that and you're really important part of the function is to be able to go back to the organisation and say: the organisation's the thing that needs to change, not just that problem."

Identifying outcomes

- P6 "The outcomes at the end of the day, are going to be much more closely related with what the organisation is looking for. For a commercial company, it would perhaps be the sale of the product. For a political party, it would be: did you vote for them?"
- P8 "...on the outcomes side you've also got research, so you know organisations that can afford it doing desk research on whether a PR campaign on your brand is having the impact that it desires"

General importance

- | | |
|-----|---|
| P1 | "They [the Barcelona Principles] are very worthwhile...the help foster professionalism...they benefit everyone..." |
| P2 | "...we get questions like what does success look like? That's probably the main thing: how do we know we're successful?" |
| " " | "[evaluation is]...exceptionally important" |
| P4 | "...looking at or evaluating its success or otherwise is I think really important" |
| P7 | "Critical, absolutely critical because you need to know. It determines your strategy... if you don't have your objective, if you're not clear with your client and integrated network or team what it is that you're setting out to achieve, then you need to be able to measure it at the end, and I guess we call it validation too, so to demonstrate the value of the service we offer and the impact that we make so that then our client can validate that within their organisation and to their internal stakeholders as well." |
| P8 | "...evaluation is important..." |
| P9 | "Whether PR can be evaluated or not.... That's probably an important point for purchase of PR services " |

Social accountability

- | | |
|----|---|
| P1 | "I think PRINZ do a pretty good job in New Zealand and I know that around the world as well that all the PR institutes and bodies are really kind of focused on comms and ethics and professionalism and being more vocal in the media when there is an issue around social medial law or advertising or campaigns." |
| P2 | "...maybe that is the future of evaluation, clients make us more accountable and set KPIs because they talk in that way, and they behave in that way internally, so why shouldn't we?" |
| P6 | "...The guy who spoke about this at a PR conference in Australia goes: who would've imagined that the PR person needs to understand what Subway's tax policy is? But you do, because you need to be across everything that could be a risk for that organisation in terms of its reputation, because that will affect both its bottom line and its balance sheet and its value. Because if a whole lot of people turn away from the company and just say: we're not gonna eat there, it'll affect both. That's the scenario that I'd like to see, is to say: PR people build up their expertise to be rightfully the ones who are going: we're keeping an eye on this stuff. It's about your reputation and your relationships, and we're the ones that have crossed this and we will help you. Because that's at the highest level of an organisation, and it's also about organisations behaving ethically as well, being good, doing the right thing." |

“ “	“From the public’s perspective I suppose, I might be thinking of this in the wrong way but I think it would be more that it just would lose its ethicacy and so their engagement with it would diminish and in that sense they just wouldn’t be engaging with that brand, but from the client’s perspective because of that if you’re not evaluating it or if you’re not evaluating it and it is doing harm to the brand or to – I suppose it does affect the public. Yes because any evaluation should encompass their feedback as well and it should be a holistic view on how it affected all parties involved and in that sense if it was doing damage to them it would equally be doing damage to the brand”.
P7	“...We were able to track the NPS scores of JetStar year on year and see a significant spike in launching that and also tracked the social media sentiment that increased positively at that campaign period and those two coupled together or being able to correlate that data was a really great proof point of ethicacy for that campaign”.
P8	“Accountability and effectiveness, sort of how to demonstrate your effectiveness, yeah. And I’ve had that conversation in house and in consultancies, particularly in-house roles, well how do I know any of this PR is doing any good?”
P9	“...now that the qualitative element has increased and the fact that PR has moved more and more into behaviour and attitude change um aligned itself with research models that support that there is more ambition about how PR demonstrates its impact and value... and that will only get more and more, the trendlines down the digital path for example are going to mean that why do anything if it’s not measureable... “

Business accountability

P3	“...outcomes is kind of marrying it to your objectives, did it achieve the objectives you set out to with the work or programme or project”
P4	“...in consultancy you probably should evaluate more because you are proving your value to the client”
P6	“The outcomes at the end of the day, are going to be much more closely related with what the organisation is looking for.”
P7	“we do do a lot of fun stuff but you also get that stigma put against you of just glitter and ribbons and you almost have to fight harder to be able to prove yourself and it’s really important that you do take it seriously, it is PR not ER. It is important if someone is willing to invest ‘x’ amount of money into it that you are actually putting some rigour around it as well.”

Going beyond measurement

P1	“...the measurement itself doesn't tell you very much, it's more about the evaluation...it's not necessarily gathering all of these interviews, it's when you go away and analyse them and try to pick through tensions and things and what was effective”
P2	“Evaluation is the analysis of what the outputs were”
P3	“I think it needs to be there for everyone. I think maybe people like me haven't got it right and got quite caught up in how it's hard to make it right, but some of the newer practitioners will think about it a little differently, and maybe bring different skills and ideas into it. Yes, getting them up to speed with what we've got and what we can do and then letting that grow, absolutely.”
P4	
P9	<p>“The other day we sent a media release out, it was quite a small regional story and it got in Business Day on Stuff which is big for the client, we got nine pieces of coverage which for a little thing was pretty good, and so it sounds good and it is good, and so if you don't count it, you don't have a record of what you achieved from an output, but it just, that then sits in isolation, it doesn't then say XYZ company is now perceived better by business or XYZ company has a better relationship with government or you know it doesn't do anything other than sit in isolation and we just reckon that happens.”</p> <p>“...evaluation considers things beyond that that can solely be measured”</p>
Improvements to available tools/processes	
P1	“I think in the past that's been a big tendency that companies were happy to bury their heads in the sand and think, “Oh well that's not going to damage us” but now when you see a Tweet can go viral...really companies can't be complacent about that kind of thing anymore and it's not just crisis management when they flare up but its constant issues management and evaluating what you would do in a given situation.”
P3	“I think we're gonna get better at using digital because it's all there and you can use people's behaviour online to assess how much they're engaging.”
“ “	“I think that because our media consumption is digitising and specialising so much, I think it's probably in that space, and that the evaluation will be in some ways easier because there are those great tools.”
P8	<p>...I think, too, the other part is now with digital, the analytics and analysis that we have available to us, in that area it's very effective and cost-efficient as well, which is a good thing....Some things that would've taken you forever and a day years ago, it's like pshhh, done. When I started we would still cut out media clippings from the newspaper, literally, and fax them to our clients. That's only 20 years ago. And we used to have a business here that would read media clippings and interpret them and do media reports for clients, so that need isn't there as much anymore because you've got software that can do that. It may not pick up on sarcasm, and stuff like that, but it's very commoditised and light touch versus deep analysis that was required before from a skilled person.”</p> <p>“I think you just go with the flow, but I think expectations around responsiveness and</p>

<p>“ “</p> <p>P9</p> <p>“ “</p> <p>“ “</p>	<p>turnarounds are certainly higher. But then our ability to turn stuff around is faster as well because of the tools that we've got available to us.”</p> <p>“I think generally the trend is that evaluation is important and will continue to be important and get more important, and we would argue that the tools and processes that people are using will increasingly be more measurable than they have been in the past.”</p> <p>“...if you think of digital um have got a transparency around them in terms of what they deliver and what the outcomes are, and they're immediate and measurable, and they're completely measurable”</p> <p>“... what's really changed in more recent years is the fact that um engaged audiences can be tracked directly through digital tools, through social media, and so if you move away from media being the only channel to some of these other channels, some of those being completely measurable in terms of response, impact, you know if you [] on social media likes, do people like it or not, do people engage with it or not, do people act in a certain way if they had a call to action...”</p>
Increased business interest in PR value	
<p>P1</p> <p>“ “</p>	<p>“I think we've seen a real shift in analysis and commentary in popular forums about PR and those factors combining the public perception will be improving. I think that within organisations I definitely think that the more you can prove how effective your comms are I think the more respected the function would be and as individuals probably going to be claiming higher salaries.”</p> <p>“I think that PR has an improving reputation for sure, and evaluation is part of that. I think that there's probably for the older generation there's an overhang from war time propaganda but I think that's probably eroding more and more...”</p>
<p>P4</p> <p>“ “</p> <p>P5</p> <p>P8</p> <p>P9</p> <p>“ “</p>	<p>“...maybe that is the future of evaluation, clients make us more accountable and set KPIs because they talk in that way, and they behave in that way internally, so why shouldn't we?”</p> <p>“...because of the advent of social media, that phasing of how things become issues and the journey of that process is much quicker. I think businesses are much more aware and most of them are much more willing to listen to PR people, but you've still gotta make sure that you position it well. It's kind of like: I'm not accusing you of this. This idea of saying: well, out there in the world, in the audiences we're listening to and the things we're seeing, this is a point of view that we need to address.”</p> <p>“So it's no longer just that PR release and what not. It is the request for the influencers. It's the request for social engagement. It's the request for content. It's all stuff that they don't know that we did. You know, that once they found out then that's really started to bring in briefs and when it comes into the biggest thing for clients is evaluating the success of whatever you do.”</p> <p>“...do you think they might be asking for [measurement and evaluation] more than they were in the past? Or a bit more open to it than they were in the past?”</p> <p>“I think they definitely are since the GFC, so post-GFC clients got very tight on any fad, any unnecessary cost. That was certainly, in terms of proper research budgets and things like stakeholder audits and stuff like that, there was a tendency to make do with what they had or to cut back that investment. So, since then, however, I would say that there tends to be more investment”.</p> <p>“certainly at the larger expectations where there is an expectation of accountability and report of money spent that they'll have, they'll have to do that, so the larger the organisation the more likely there'll be a larger expectation that they'll be measuring and evaluating more what they do. So yeah I think that's definitely the trend.”</p>

Identifying outtakes	
P5	"But we need to evaluate whatever we do so how we do that is through the likes of sentiment, engagement"
Reasons to not formally evaluate - When practitioners identified reasons not to formally evaluate	
Too difficult or complex	
P1	"It can be really difficult to measure the impact of what you're doing...you can't always just track it back to one single instance of communication...there's kind of a lot of elements where PR will really struggle with to be taken seriously on board"
P2	"I think that the evaluation is much more difficult conversation to have....I think this idea that PR is a kind of science, we're not psychologists, we don't, as part of our communications degree, we don't do psychology papers ... so let's not pretend that we're anything more than we are...Where it gets tricky is where you're talking about behaviour change and attitude change, which are very, very slow to move measures"
" "	"...there's probably an element where the business is doing really well, everyone wins. I think though when the shit hits the fan, its PR people who are fixing it and we are best placed to fix it so maybe we're entrusted that way and I think also that PR does have the ability to do some spikes and I think that probably saves us."
P3	"...I think maybe people like me haven't got it right and got quite caught up in how it's hard to make it right..."
P4	"But then also other people will also so you don't want to undervalue what we do by giving a whole lot of numbers because actually lots of it is about people and feedback and what they did differently, and those sorts of things which are really hard to measure."
P6	"I think essentially, it's just so bloody hard to put a value on PR."
" "	"So do you ever think, you know, you get to the end of a campaign and you haven't had a kind of comprehensive evaluation or measurement approach, do you ever kind of look back and you're a little bit like, oh that worked, I don't know how it worked?"
" "	Aw, sometimes. Well its but that is part of the vagaries of PR really because some things resonate and some things don't and some things, you know you get lucky on some campaigns. Um. And um. What you, to give you an example, whoever was doing PR campaigns and trying to get a big media hit last Thursday and Friday would have been incredibly frustrated because all the oxygen was sucked up by the political news....So they had no shot of getting a real cut through, if they were going for a national media hit. Yeah. And there's no control – you can have the best media campaign in the world and someone flies a plane into the twin towers and there's no news... there are thing you can't anticipate, predict."
P9	"I don't know if we'll ever completely nail it, because when you get a good, positive outcome for an organisation or a brand, it's going to be the sum of many things. It's gonna be about the experience somebody had talking to an employee of that brand, it's gonna be about the ad they saw and really loved, or not. It's gonna be about, if it's a product, it's gonna be about whether they enjoy the product. It's gonna be about the history of the brand. There are so many other things. So, to say that that outcome is directly linked to PR is pretty tricky, and that for me feels like I don't know that you're ever gonna get past that. You've got to be able to allow for that."
" "	"...the kinds of stuff I'm dealing with they can see for themselves either it's working or it's not... in my line of work, it's not critical to have other evaluation structures around."
Financially costly	
P2	"I think in terms of evaluation that if you get somebody who is very linear in their thinking, who is very measurement based, who is very black and white about the world, often think of a lawyer or somebody from the supply chain, it is very hard to explain what success looks

	like in PR and that usually is a journey that you have to have some conversation throughout the way and set some KPIs upfront so everyone is kind of clear on this is what success looks like, did we meet it, did we not? But yeah, I think maybe part of why, generally speaking, PR gets smaller budgets than marketing, I think in part historically has to do with that marketing and above the line is much more straight forward to measure so CEOs and CFOs and COOs, people who have very rarely come from a marketing background or a PR background don't actually understand. They don't understand how to measure PR so they don't really understand how to fund it."
" "	"I think with Vodafone we did some quite detailed analysis working with what's now ISentia, we went so far as to talk about the key messages we were trying to promote and they were able to use their... they've got tools as well as individual analysts who can assess your media in that context, and that's very, very, it's pretty detailed, pretty powerful. Again, very, very expensive, and then you go: okay, so it's giving you a steer and you can course-correct, but you spend a chunk of your budget doing that. Is it enough?"
P3	"To measure outcomes is...much more expensive."
P4	"One of the challenges with... it's interesting to look at the challenges of measurement, and this is organisations going: we're not prepared to put the resources into it.... They either aren't aware of it, or don't place enough importance on it, or they'll say: we've only got a limited amount of budget, we'll just do the project without doing the measurement, which is massively frustrating because if you don't know whether you've achieved or not... so, sometimes practitioners I think do have to go: right, we're just gonna do this and we'll just do it as inexpensively as we possibly can."
P5	"Evaluation is one of those things that to do it well does cost money, even a decent media evaluation through a company like ISentia or one of those, you're probably looking at \$2,000 - \$5,000 for an evaluation report."
" "	"Yes we generally include both [measurement and evaluation]. I suppose it depends on whether you're using third party tools for measurement or the evaluation and if there's a hard cost involved."
P6	"I guess our challenge as an agency is probably budgetary constraints for clients and where they're at in terms of what they're prepared to invest in measurement and evaluation versus the rest of the programme."
P7	"I don't think we would have got the sign-off necessarily"
P9	"...it's just sometimes it's just tied up in the way they do their budgets you know and spending money on PR: I want you do some evaluation for me and I don't want to pay any extra for that. But I've always found, despite the fact we're all going this is a good thing to do, when it comes to a client actually paying for it in a consultancy world it's quite hard to sell that."
Variation in client demand for evaluation	
P1	"I would say that definitely the organisations who are more interested in structure are always going to be more interested in outcomes because they understand the value of PR in first instance. If you don't really care about comms that much and are just a "do this onetime thing" I think you are going to look at it quite differently."
P2	"Evaluation is...sometimes exceptionally irrelevant."
" "	"...in terms of evaluation if you get somebody who is very linear in their thinking, who is very measurement based, who is very black and white about the world...a lawyer or somebody from the supply chain, it is very hard to explain what success looks like in PR... I think that maybe part of why, generally speaking, PR gets smaller budgets than marketing...historically that has to do with that marketing and above the line is much more straightforward to measure so CEOs and CFOs and COOs, people who have very rarely come from a marketing background or a PR background, don't actually understand. They don't understand how to measure PR so they don't really understand how to fund it."

P3	"I think it's understood that you should put some evaluation, whether it's externally, develop ones or not, that's a little bit remains to be... you've gotta work it out for the project and for the organisation...there is just all different makeups of clients."
P5	I think those smaller, it is the smaller businesses, small to medium enterprises that don't really see the value of it. It is your bigger corporates that do because you know, those brands have gone through the process of reshaping their vision, reshaping the way that they communicate. That's where PR plays a huge value in it and it's happened well overseas...or what not. They do see the value of it.
P6	"The outcomes at the end of the day, are going to be much more closely related with what the organisation is looking for. For a commercial company, it would perhaps be the sale of the product. For a political party, it would be: did you vote for them?"
P8	"It's a contributing factor but it's not critical to have other evaluation structures around... "...because of the diversity of the work that we do...it might be that a financial markets deal is successful and shareholders accept it, or it might be around having the most share of voice in media compared to a competitor, or number of people who're turning up to events...the ultimate success is seeing the clients' results"
" "	"...our challenge as an agency is probably budgetary constraints for clients and where they're at in terms of what they're prepared to invest in measurement and evaluation versus the rest of the programme."
P9	"Typically even in the larger consultancies I've worked in evaluation was paid for separately by the client. So it wasn't necessary part of our budget – we would include media monitoring and a little bit of evaluation but for sort of full evaluation we would typically go that's an additional evaluation on top"

Client preference for measures

P1	"...they had other people saying to them, "We saw a nice story in the Herald on Saturday" then that was a success but they weren't really interested in saying take it further than that – "what did all the other readers think about it?"
P2	"...measurement and evaluation are both exceptionally important to our clients"
P3	"It's really interesting, particularly among some multinational clients that even though our programme of activity might be broad, covering stakeholder engagement, reputation management, events and activations, you name it, but we're measured on media coverage."
P4	"Actually we are all doing it all the time, but in any way that perhaps a CEO or a CFO or COO maybe wants to see with numbers."
P5	"Yea, just seeing the clips or whatever, they don't want the analysis"
P9	"...whether PR can be evaluated or not... I wouldn't say that has a huge impact on the reputation of PR... and I think ...individual experience would be far more informative...than if someone used PR once and they had a really good outcome than if someone didn't so they've never used PR ever since and they just do all their work through marketing and advertising"

Clients value AVEs

P2	"Advertising value equivalency ... big corporates with head offices in America, they still want AVE. It's a way they fight for more money against marketing"
P4	"I get why clients want it, and if a client said they really really wanted it, after I had talked to them about why it was done, I would still do it."
P5	"I find people all the time who aren't part of the mainstream PR family, but they've got big important jobs and they still think: AVEs, yeah, that's the way we'll do it."

P6	<p>"It comes down to the tools that you've got. If you haven't got the tools then you go back to the base of AVE in PR."</p> <p>"I think essentially it's just so bloody hard to put a value on PR and so using the AVE or EAV...gives you a dollar figure which is something that everyone understands, its universal... sentiment, word of mouth, even brand tracking - you know when brands actually really invest heavily into that it doesn't do the same – it doesn't tick the same box for a brand or for their CEOs and financial officers as putting a dollar value against it which is really frustrating because it's so arbitrary"</p>
Instinct is more valid	
P8	"Remember that clients don't always act entirely on numbers... some of them make big calls based on instinct and feelings"
P9	"I mean there's a counter argument in marketing and comms that a lot of the really good stuff that goes on is still really quite instinctual, you know, someone making a gut call about this is what the campaign needs to be about, and we're not going to measure it to death but we're just going to do it"
Lack of effective or applicable guidelines	
P1	"...things also have to be practical as well.....in this fast paced world where everyone wants information all the time, constantly need to be communicating I think that sometimes those two can be at odds with each other. It's just interesting and this conversation is making think a little bit more about what we need to be doing and it's PR people that have to be driving it more than anyone else because if a client or an employer isn't really asking about that stuff then of course you're not going to necessarily put your hand up to lead a really comprehensive evaluation programme because it's going to take you away from your daily activities that are often more important internally."
P2	"I learnt more from my time working in an agency than I did, in PR I think in part that's just the nature of the game, I don't think it's necessarily bad, it's not like the courses are bad. I just think this is a practical, yes it's analytical and it's intellectual and I do corporate work...but for PR, I think this is the type of industry where you learn from people who are willing to teach you and I have that view quite strongly and I'm quite open about it...I think in terms of measurement, it is a really good thing to be taught, I think that's probably the most academic part of the job so it feels like the Universities definitely should be."
" "	"...if I look at the 2nd one, measuring communication outcomes is recommended, it is still kind of giving you a bit of an out."
P3	"...in the real world we often fall short."
P4	"...good to have them [the Barcelona Principles] there for people who have zero idea about measurement, and to remind people of this. But that is not really enough."
P5	"...we only use them if a client wants us to use them"
P8	"...they seem pretty standard. There's nothing revolutionary in there."
Greater risk or complexity online	
P1	"As far as measurement and evaluation – it's kind of a tricky one because on the one hand because we've talked about this constant need for more and more communication I think there's probably a risk that people will just see comms that just needs tapping all the time and which needs to be assigned and checked..."
" "	"...if you have a goal of getting 500 people to sign up to an app say, and you do media, and

	then 500 sign up, but then would have been a lot of other things going on, so it is very hard to isolate the reason why 500 people signed up"
P2	"I think a lot of brands are a lot more wary of the dangers of social so they play it safe as a platform."
P5	"And this is the thing that happens as well, it goes from social to mainstream media and then it just becomes really difficult. So, monitoring social media, particularly for industries that are in the news a lot, super-important."
P6	"...issues can gain momentum with social that would take a lot longer in days of yore...but also traditional media takes their news from social or digital channels. So, rather than setting the agenda, traditional media is now following that agenda. And then you know the whole fake news thing is a whole other conversation, as well, because it's like whereas Google's got an algorithm to sort out around what's credible, if you look at Facebook the algorithm is around shares and likes. So, there's not that other kind of ring around it. But equally, people trust Google. We see that the number 1 brand, but a number of people do not understand that to get to the top of the Google rank there is a paid for element behind that as well."
P8	"The phenomenal shift in technology means that we are constantly chasing our tails sort of thing and trying to be ahead of it".
Measures are integral	
P2	"Outputs ... are really useful ...in terms of benchmarking ... and was this month as successful as last month or ... are we trending up? Are we trending down? Are we stagnating? Versus is this success?"
P3	"...so you do a thing on social and you can see what happens or what doesn't happen.... We always used to make social media, and we still do, jump through a lot of hoops, especially when it was new. How do we know it's working? And those tools came in. You pop an ad on the telly, and who really knows what's going on with that? You've got these potential viewers. And arguably the same with an article in the newspaper. Potentially reached that many people. But if it's online you can actually potentially see the clicks. Digital has given us a lot more of a benchmark, I suppose."
P5	"I think it's that old, what's the phrase, what gets measured gets done. So I just believe strongly that, so for example my role where I look after earned media, we could be out there pitching a million stories a year right but if they're not landing, they're not changing audience perception what's the point? I think too measurement's really important because it enables you to have business focused conversations".
Measures are easier	
P1	"Media relations is always easy to track because you can say this journalist, this publication has X amount of readers and therefore you can see straight away whether it was worthwhile or not but in other ways."
	"I think you can easily measure how many people you will reach with a certain online activity"
P2	"...if it's a media relations campaign, often measurement happens naturally because you have to keep track of your coverage to know where to pitch to next so it doesn't take heaps of time"
P3	"...we talked about digital and how much analytical information is available so quickly, I think that because our media consumption is digitising and specialising so much, I think it's probably in that space, and that the evaluation will be in some ways easier because there are those great tools."

P4	“...it's almost sort of measuring the work on the way through as part of the tactics...to achieve whole sort of media coverage and did you achieve it”
P6	“If you're in a competitive environment, measuring how much positive noise you're able to make versus your competitors, and that's one that can be done. You can do it yourself and also it can be done quite rigorously by some of the organisations that specialise in that. That can be useful.”
P 6	“Outputs might be measured, so your success with a news release might be simply whether the thing's picked up and printed.”
Measures are able to be linked to budget	
P1	“...you can do a Facebook post for \$10 and you can say this reached 10,000 people, that's an instant return... So there's links with budgets to measurement”
P2	“...clients need that measurement to be able to put up against their PO”
“ “	“I still, I think any hard measure in numbers, like how many pieces of coverage, how many people attended our event, how many people received a letter from, all of that stuff is useful to know the volume of our work. It's useful to say well that's why I charged you so much, it's a lot of work.”
Evaluation tools: When practitioners mentioned specific tools for evaluating	
Focus-groups	P7
Google™	P1 P5 P6 P8
Research services (iSentia™, Meltwater™, Nielson™)	P2 P3 P7 P8 P9
Wrap reports	P2 P4
Social media (Facebook™, Twitter™, Instagram™)	P1 P2 P3 P4 P5 P6 P8 P9
Surveys	P1 P4 P6 P7 P8 P9

Appendix E: Table 6*Inter-Rater's Mark-up on an Early Version of the Coding Schedule*

Code	Definition	Is code present?	Please note the coded elements, if present
Descriptors of evaluation process - When practitioners described the evaluation process			
Advising on the brief	Reference advising on the brief when describing evaluation	NO	
Analysing	Reference to analytical processes	YES	Evaluation is the analysis of what the outputs were, did it actually work and ...

	when describing evaluation		what are the moves for next time
Describing	Reference to descriptive processes when describing evaluation	NO	
Collaborating	Reference to collaborative processes when describing evaluation	YES	We just have a conversation ... I'm gonna bring up the client ... Do you want us to do something different next time? Is there any kind of coverage that you really hoped that we'd get that we didn't?
Comparing	Reference to comparative processes when describing evaluation	NO	
Contextualising	Reference to contextualising processes when describing evaluation	NO	
Forming	Reference to forming processes when describing evaluation	YES	what are the moves for next time
Listening	Reference to listening to stakeholders when describing evaluation	NO	
Quantifying	Reference to quantitative processes when describing evaluation	NO	
Reflecting	Reference to reflection processes when describing evaluation	YES	at the end of the campaign you record your thoughts of what you might be able to do differently next time you roll it out.
Responding	Reference to responding to stakeholders when describing evaluation	NO	
Summing	Reference to summing up when describing evaluation	NO	

Descriptors of the measurement process - When practitioners described the measurement process			
Collaborating	Reference to collaborative processes when describing measurement	NO	
Comparing	References to comparative processes when describing measurement	YES	outputs ... useful in terms of benchmarking ... and was this month as successful as last month or ... as a comparison, are we trending up? Are we trending down? Are we stagnating?
Counting outputs	Reference to counting processes when describing measurement	YES	you've got X number of pieces of coverage in X regions around the world and ... it's got a potential reach of blah, blah, blah
Identifying engagement	Reference to identifying online engagement when describing measurement	YES	What we look to, in terms of results, is ... Did people engage with it?
Identifying or demonstrating ROI	References to identifying or showing client value when describing measurement	YES	Then PR value is about saying we know that ... editorial is more valuable than advertising so therefore we say the PR value of your piece of coverage is 3 times the advertising value.
Identifying reach	Reference to identifying online reach when describing measurement	YES	you've got X number of pieces of coverage in X regions around the world and ... it's got a potential reach of blah, blah, blah
Identifying tone or sentiment	Reference to identifying tone or sentiment when describing measurement	NO	
Learning	Reference to	NO	

	learning when describing measurement		
Quantifying	Reference to quantitative processes when describing measurement	YES	measurement is purely, it's much more likely to be numbers and records of the outputs
Descriptors of reasons why practitioners evaluate - When practitioners described specific reasons for evaluating			
To add rigour	References to value of evaluation to add rigour	NO	
To be accountable	References to accountability value of evaluation	NO	
To be professionally recognised	Reference to professional reward processes when describing evaluation	NO	
To go beyond measurement	Reference to expanding upon measurement processes or outputs when describing evaluation	YES	Evaluation is the analysis of what the outputs were, did it actually work and ... what are the moves for next time
To identify or demonstrate ROI	Reference to identifying or demonstrating return to employer when describing evaluation	NO	
To learn	Reference to learning when describing evaluation	YES	if you don't evaluate it hurts you cos you don't learn and you never get the chance to do these incremental learnings to make, to actually improve

To link with objectives	References to value of evaluation to link with objectives	YES	an outcome is has we changed somebody's behaviour or have increased their propensity to want to consider this bank or buy this milk powder or buy a domain name
To maximise digital capabilities	References to value of evaluation to maximise digital capabilities	NO	
To show return on investment	References to value of evaluation to show return on investment	NO	
Descriptors of reasons to measure - When practitioners described specific reasons for measuring			
Measurement is easier	References to ease of measurement	NO	
To identify Return on Investment	References to ability to link to budgets of measurement	YES	we got 6% of the overall marketing budget and there was KPIs set for 2 months ... and by the first 7 days, we hit the 2 month KPI of sign ups and ... that was really clear to go actually guys by the time that 94% of your money started to be spent, actually you've achieved most of your results with the 6% that you spent with me.
Measurement is more specific	References to specificity of measurement	YES	any hard measure in numbers, like how many pieces of coverage, how many people attended our event, how many people received a letter from, all of that stuff is useful to know the volume of our work. It's useful to say well that's why I charged you so much, it's a lot of work.
To show PR value internally	References to capacity of measurement to show PR value internally	YES	Then PR value is about saying we know that ... editorial is more valuable than advertising so therefore we say the PR value of your piece of coverage is 3 times the advertising value.

Descriptors of challenges with evaluation - When practitioners described specific challenges experienced with evaluation			
Difficulty or complexity evaluating impact	References to the difficulty or complexity of evaluating or identifying PR impact	YES	I think in terms of evaluation that if you get somebody who is very linear in their thinking, who is very measurement based, ... it is very hard to explain what success looks like in PR
Evaluation too expensive	References to expenses involved in evaluation	YES	industry standard would be that we have research out in market asking our target ... Have you heard from us? Do you like us? But as budgets get tighter, research is something we can strip down
Organisational aims or preferences may not be for evaluation	References to the irrelevance of evaluation to organisational aims	YES	sometimes exceptionally irrelevant
Organisations already have evaluation systems in place	References to organisations own evaluation systems	NO	
Organisational preference for use of AVEs	References to organisational preference for use of AVEs	YES	If you have that AVE kind of approach of trying to put a money figure, how do you put money on having your CEOs being in a trans-Tasman business circle?
Organisational preference for use of measurement	References to organisations preference for measurement	YES	I think in terms of evaluation that if you get somebody who is very linear in their thinking, who is very measurement based, ... it is very hard to explain what success looks like in PR
Practice is too variable for practice to be feasible	Reference to varied practice regarding evaluation	YES	I don't ... know if success for clients is 10 pieces of coverage or 40 pieces of coverage or no pieces of coverage, sometimes that's success

Descriptors of the Barcelona Principles - When practitioners described the Barcelona Principles			
Aspirational	References to aspiration value of Barcelona Principles	YES	this is kind of the gold star best practice of what we can do
Encouraging	References to encouragement value of Barcelona Principles	NO	
Obvious	Reference to obviousness of Barcelona Principles	YES	I look at this and go yip, goal setting is fundamental, outcomes over outputs – to me that's a no brainer
Insufficient	Reference to insufficiency of Barcelona Principles	YES	I think, if I look at the 2 nd one, measuring communication outcomes is recommended, it is still kind of giving you a bit of an out.
Descriptors of trends or expectations for measurement and evaluation - when participants described specific trends or expectations for measurement and evaluation			
Improved capabilities online	Reference to improved measurement and evaluation capabilities online	NO	
Greater risk and complexity online	Reference to more risks and complexity with measurement and evaluation online	YES	how do we know we're successful in digital because we are programmed to think that ... if you get coverage on the front page of The Herald, that's success but we're on the online as equivalent to that, if you get on The Herald online, what's the placement I should care about?
Need to consider more pluralistic publics	Reference to more need to consider pluralistic publics or cultures in evaluation	YES	look at mental health campaigns and things, public health campaigns, not evaluating and learning from them is a huge impact on the public.
Need to consider a	Reference to more	YES	I've seen quite significant changes in

wider range of channels	need to consider a wider range of channels		what would be deemed best practice because the channels people use are different, society is changing
More need for responsiveness	Reference to more need to be responsive	YES	I'm gonna ring up the client and go are you happy? How do you feel it went? I've got some bits that I think were a bit more stressful than it needed to be, do you agree? Do you want us to do something different next time? Is there any kind of coverage that you really hoped that we'd get that we didn't? That part of the evaluation will be much more insightful for the both of us
More integration between disciplines needed	Reference to more need to integrate evaluation with other disciplines	YES	the mind-set that as a PR profession our main competitors are other disciplines, it's earning the respect to sit at the board table and be part of that senior conversation
Increased professional industry focus on qualitative element	Reference to more professional focus on qualitative evaluation	YES	industry standard would be that we have research out in market asking our target ... Have you heard from us? Do you like us? We do a lot with social influences so we're looking at the outputs and ...What we look to, in terms of results, is did we get good key messages, was it good quality coverage that we liked.
Organisations more open to or desiring of evidence of value	Reference to organisations being more open to or desiring of evaluation	YES	M: ... have you noticed any changes with regard to clients being open to or expecting measurement with the digital or more recently? L: Oh yeah, we get questions like what does success look like? That's probably the main thing, how do we know we're successful in digital
Measurement and evaluation tools - <i>When practitioners offered specific tools used in measurement and evaluation practice</i>			
Email	When practitioners mention 'email'	Y	

Facebook	When practitioners mention 'Facebook'		
Google	When practitioners mention Google		
Instagram	When practitioners mention 'Instagram'		
iSentia	When practitioners mention iSentia		
LinkedIn	When practitioners mention 'LinkedIn'		
Meltware	When practitioners mention Meltwater		
Nielson	When practitioners mention Nielson		
PowerPoint™	When practitioners mention 'PowerPoint/s™'	Y	
Reports	When practitioners mention 'report/s'	Y	
Twitter	When practitioners mention 'Twitter'	Y	

Appendix F: AUTECH Letter with Conditions for Ethics Approval of Research

8 December 2016

Petra Theunissen

Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Petra

Ethics Application: 16/433 Perceptions of the ethics of public relations evaluation amongst New Zealand practitioners

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. I am pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 5 December 2016, subject to the following conditions:

1. Clarification of whether the Institute is providing funding for the research, and if yes, disclosure of this in the Information Sheet;
2. Justify the use of video recording and provide consistent advice of this to

participants;

3. Provide the exact location for the storage of data and the consent forms;
4. Clarify what effect requesting participants to speak to the employers about participating has on participants being able to consent for themselves;
5. Amendment of the Recruitment Protocol eliminating the requirement for CEO's to nominate potential participants. The Committee prefers a recruitment notice/advertisement to be provided and interested participants to get in touch with the researcher directly; The Information Sheet will need to be updated in the 'how was I identified' section to reflect the amended protocol;
6. Clarify how non institute members will be identified and approached;
7. Remove advice of the koha from the advertisement;
8. Amend the Information Sheets as follows:
 - a. Limit the confidentiality that may be offered due to the nature of focus-groups;
 - b. Remove offer of reviewing and confirming transcripts, since this is a focus group.

Please provide me with a response to the points raised in these conditions, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTECH also requires copies of any altered documents, such as Information Sheets, surveys etc. You are not required to resubmit the application form again. Any changes to responses in the form required by the committee in their conditions may be included in a supporting memorandum. Please note that the Committee is always willing to discuss with applicants the points that have been made. There may be information that has not been made available to the Committee, or aspects of the research may not have been fully understood.

Once your response is received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. Full approval is not effective until all the conditions have been met. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. If these conditions are not met within six months, your application may be closed and a new application will be required if you wish to continue with this research.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely



Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: catherinemules@gmail.com

Appendix G: AUTECH Letter with Ethics Approval and Process Requirements of Research

5 December 2016

Petra Theunissen

Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Petra

Re Ethics Application: **16/433 Perceptions of the ethics of public relations evaluation amongst New Zealand practitioners**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 15 December 2019.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTECH:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through

<http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 15 December 2019;

- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 15 December 2019 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTECH is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTECH approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,



Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Cc: catherinemules@gmail.com

Appendix H: AUTECH Letter with Ethics Approval for Amendment to Research Data Collection and Aims

22 March 2017

Petra Theunissen

Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Petra

Re: Ethics Application: **16/433 Perceptions of the ethics of public relations evaluation amongst New Zealand practitioners**

Thank you for your request for approval of amendments to your ethics application.

The minor amendment to the data collection protocols and research aims is approved.

I remind you that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following

to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC):

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 15 December 2019;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 15 December 2019 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this. If your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply there.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,



Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Cc: catherinemules@gmail.com

Appendix I: AUTECH Letter with Ethics Approval for Amendment for External Transcription

15 May 2017

Petra Theunissen

Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Petra

Re: Ethics Application: **16/433 Perceptions of the ethics of public relations evaluation amongst New Zealand practitioners**

Thank you for your request for approval of an amendment to your ethics application.

The use of transcription by a 3rd person is approved.

I remind you of the Standard Conditions of Approval.

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.

2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEK prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEK Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEK Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEK grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor

Executive Manager

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: catherinemules@gmail.com