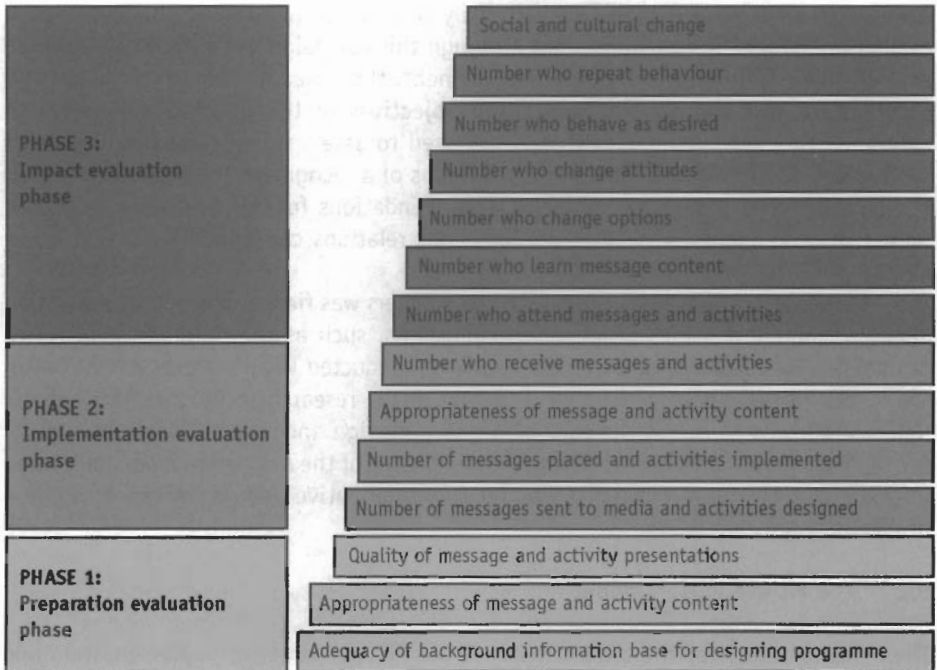


outcome during the impact evaluation phase.

Diagram 1 – Stages and levels for evaluating public relations programmes (Cutlip, et al., 2000:437).



Each stage in programme evaluation contributes to increased understanding and adds information for assessing effectiveness. *Preparation evaluation* assesses the quality and adequacy of information and planning. *Implementation evaluation* documents the adequacy of the tactics and effort, and *Impact evaluation* provides feedback on the consequences. No evaluation is complete without addressing the criteria at each level.

It terms of what has been stated when the second step of a typical public relations campaign has been discussed, the setting of the PR objectives, it needs to be pointed out that the PII model is especially valuable because it distinguishes between outcome(s) and impact. In short, it serves as a synopsis of the public relations programme or campaign (Kitchen, 1997:291).

These levels or phases will be discussed in greater detail when reporting back on the findings of M-Net internal assessment of the M-Net Face of Africa campaign.

8.3 Method of data collection

Six in-depth interviews by means of a structured questionnaire were conducted with the three executive members of the M-Net Face of Africa public relations campaign team, i.e. with E. Heyns (the marketing director), L. Mokwena and H. Pretorius (the programme co-ordinators). The discussions were spread over three weeks: one interview per person per week. The purpose of the interviews was to gather as much information as possible on the background of the campaign, and more specifically on the methods or techniques used by M-Net to evaluate the success of the campaign.

The research strategy was of a contextual nature, which implies a focus on the individual case in its specific context of meanings and significance (Mouton, 1996:158).

8.4 Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the research interviews was constructed from the questions suggested in the PII model (Cutlip, *et al.*, 2000). As also suggested in the PII model, the questionnaire schedule was divided into the three categories of preparation, implementation and impact evaluation.

8.4.1 Preparation evaluation phase

In the preparation phase of the questionnaire, 15 questions were asked, eleven of which were open ended and four closed ended. In this phase of the questionnaire schedule, according to Cutlip, *et al.* (1994:420), evaluation of the programme includes: "a mix of subjective and objective assessments of (1) the adequacy of the background research, (2) the organisation and content of programme materials, and (3) the packaging and presentation of programme materials".

8.4.2 Implementation evaluation phase

The next phase of the questionnaire dealt with how effectively the programme was implemented and communications were disseminated to target publics. Nine questions in this phase were asked to each of the three participants. Six of the nine questions were closed ended, and three were open ended questions.

8.4.3 Impact evaluation phase

The evaluation of the impact of the programme was the last part of the questionnaire. The objective was to measure the extent to which the outcomes spelled out in the objectives for each target public and the overall programme goal were achieved. Eleven

questions were asked, nine of which were closed ended and two were open ended questions.

According to Cutlip, *et al.* (1994:432), "programme evaluation involves a great deal of knowledge beyond familiarity with traditional scientific research techniques". Based on this, Yin (1989) states that in some instances, an in-depth case study in which both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered is the only reasonable approach. Therefore, the principle in practice according to Cutlip, *et al.* (1994:432) is to gather the best available evidence to management and evaluate public relations campaigns.

9. RESEARCH FINDINGS

As previously stated, the in-depth discussions of the PII model are presented here together with the research findings from the personal interviews with the M-Net executive PR team in order to (i) establish the techniques/methods they have used to assess the Face of Africa campaign, and (ii) evaluate the campaign within the three phases presented in the PII evaluation model for PR campaigns.

9.1 Preparation evaluation phase

9.1.1 Discussion of the phase

In the first step of this phase, practitioners may find that important information was missing from the original situation analysis. Done and recorded systematically, this assessment represents an evaluation of the adequacy of the background information used for planning the campaign. Were key publics omitted from the original determination of stakeholder groups? What assumptions about the publics proved to be in error? (Although the terms publics and stakeholders are often used synonymously, Steyn and Puth (2000:5) distinguish between them: *Publics* is normally used by corporate communication practitioners, whereas top management mostly refer to *stakeholders*. For the purposes of the present study, this distinction applies. Did journalists request information that was not available in the background brochures? What last minute crises called for additional research and organisation of information? Had all the key actors in the situation been identified? In effect, this part of the evaluation assesses the adequacy of the information gathering and intelligence steps in the preparation phase of the process.

The second step in the preparation evaluation phase addresses the organisation and appropriateness of the implementation and message strategy and tactics. This is a critical overview of what is said and done, for guidance in future campaigns. Relevant questions at this stage of the evaluation can include the following: Did message content match the problems, objectives and media? Was communication accurate, timely and

appropriate for the intended publics? Were there adverse reactions to messages or actions? Did the events, corrective steps, and other activities support the campaign effort? Did the communication activities capitalise on and complement the action components of the campaign? Were the staff and budget adequate for the task? This phase of the evaluation calls for a review of how well the campaign matched the demands of the situation. The content analyses of materials produced, the speeches and other presentations, press clippings and broadcasts also provide evidence for evaluating how closely the campaign efforts match the plan.

The quality of the message(s) and other campaign element presentations constitutes the final step in the preparation evaluation phase. The awards campaign of many professional societies and groups employ criteria from this step. This step considers the quality of professional performance in view of conventional wisdom and consensus among practitioners as to which are good and bad techniques.

"Clearly, evaluation of the preparation phase of the programme includes a mix of subjective and objective assessments of (1) the adequacy of the background research; (2) the organisation and content of programme materials; and (3) the packaging and presentation of the programme materials" (Cutlip, *et al.*, 1994:442).

9.1.2 *Evaluation results*

The following findings were established in the formal interviews with the executive members of the M-Net public relations team:

- Very few or none of the target publics were omitted out. This is probably because the preliminary study done by M-Net as part of the situation analysis was of a very high standard, having been outsourced to public relations agencies and internally conducted by M-Net.
- There was insufficient focus on American and European target publics, for example international model agencies. This shortcoming was quickly corrected after the success of the first broadcast of the Face of Africa TV programme outside Africa.
- There were no incorrect assumptions about the target publics that proved to be in error. There were, however, incidents during the PR campaign where journalists requested information that was not available in the press releases, because some journalists wanted to provide their own angle to the story. Although this information was not always supplied in the press releases, the required stories, facts and photographs were always made available on request.

The second level of the evaluation model's preparation phase addresses the appropriateness of the implementation strategies as well as the message strategies and tactics. This was found to be of a high level.

- The message content suited the problem, the objectives and the selected media.

This was clear from the fact that the timing of the PR campaign was very good, especially with regard to a political and business perspective, as well as a global emphasis on the African Renaissance. This can be seen by the success of the winners worldwide, not only in Africa.

- The different forms of communication that were used in this public relations programme were accurate and timely. This was evident in the thorough Internet communications during the programme.
- The gala event and other PR activities supported the objectives of the M-Net Face of Africa PR campaign very well. The communication strategy for the campaign is seen as the best in the country. This resulted from the high and accurate reach of target publics and also the fact that the communication capitalised on and complemented the action components of the programme.

The next level of the evaluation model's planning phase is the measurement of the quality of the messages and other campaign elements. The Face of Africa campaign did not receive any awards – a criterion often used in this step in preparation evaluation. This is probably because the programme is unique and there are no similar competitions.

9.1.3 Research undertaken by M-Net

It is clear from the above discussion that apart from the preliminary research done by M-Net internally prior to the introduction of the Face of Africa competition, as part of the situation analysis, no formal research on the evaluation of the PR campaign was undertaken.

9.2 Implementation evaluation phase

9.2.1 Discussion of the phase

This second phase within the PR evaluation model deals with how effectively the programme is implemented and the communications disseminated to various target publics and stakeholders.

Public relations evaluations are most often undertaken in the implementation phase. This approach typically involves counting the number of publications printed; press releases distributed; stories placed in the media; and readers, viewers or listeners (potential and actual). Whereas records of campaign implementation are essential for campaign evaluation, the measures at this level cannot be substituted for programme impact.

The phase begins with keeping records of distribution, i.e. the number of messages sent. It is the documentation of how many letters, news releases, feature stories, publications, public service announcements and other communication were produced

and distributed. It also includes how many speeches, broadcast appearances, audiovisual presentations and exhibits were used. In other words, this step is the documentation of all the materials and activities produced and distributed. During the programme, such records provide evidence that the programme is being implemented as planned.

Regardless of how much is produced and distributed, the number of messages placed in the media determines whether or not target publics have an opportunity to be exposed to campaign information.

The next step is determining how many of the target publics received the messages, that is, the number of people potentially exposed to programme messages and actually having received the messages. Care must be taken to separate the delivered audience from the effective audience. The delivered audience includes all potential readers, viewers, listeners or those attending the event. The effective audience represents only those who form part of the target public(s). Audience size is seldom a major consideration. Rather, the makeup of the audience is more important to programme evaluation.

The number of people who attend to the message constitutes the next criterion in programme implementation evaluation. Readership and viewership studies measure audience attention to media and messages. Readership studies identify how many read and what they read, how much they read, as well as who read and who did not. Studies of broadcast audiences produce similar findings, and researchers/practitioners are developing similar measures of "hits" and other indicators of attention to messages on the Internet (Cutlip, *et al.*, 2000:442-448).

9.2.2 Evaluation results

The results of this phase of the PR evaluation model are as follows:

- This phase begins with recording the number of messages that were distributed during the PR campaign. This step entails the documentation of the number of letters, press releases, publications and other forms of communication that were produced and distributed. This is however not so simple, because there are literally thousands of forms of communication in such a PR campaign. It is thus very difficult to keep a record of the number of communications that are distributed.
- The first level of this phase is the determination of the number of messages that were placed in the media, despite the number of messages that were produced and distributed. According to Mokwena (1999), it is very difficult to estimate this in a programme of this magnitude. The number of messages that were placed and activities implemented in the programme can therefore not be pinpointed exactly.
- Thus, the number of people who received the messages and learnt about the activities cannot be determined either.

- The number of people who paid attention and responded to the messages or activities was estimated at between three and four people per day who responded directly to M-Net employees in Johannesburg. "There were about 60 people who work full time on this project, who each received several responses on a daily basis" (Mokwena, 1999).

9.2.3 Research undertaken by M-Net

According to one member of the executive PR team, no formal assessment of the success of the PR campaign in this phase was undertaken by M-Net. Only rough estimates were used as performance guidelines.

The determination of impact is the next level of programme evaluation according to the PII model.

9.3 Impact evaluation phase

9.3.1 Discussion of the phase

Impact measurement documents the extent to which the outcomes spelled out in the objectives for each target public and for the overall campaign goal were achieved. Formative impact assessments monitor progress towards objectives while the programme is being implemented. Summative impact assessments provide evidence of success or failure in reaching the planned end result.

The number of people who learn message content is clearly the logical follow-up to measure how many attended to the message. Most programmes seek to communicate information to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding among internal and external target publics. Increasing knowledge is often critical to increasing their interest or motivation, a sequence leading to the taking of action.

The key to evaluating what people learned from a programme is to measure the same knowledge, awareness, and understanding variables that were measured before the programme began. To determine change, comparisons must be drawn between at least two comparable measures: by repeating the measures on the same or similar people or by making comparable measures in a control group of similar people not exposed to the programme. This same principle applies to any assessment of programme impact.

The number of people who changed their opinion is the next step of impact evaluation. This step involves the interests shown by the target audiences with regard to the programme. The same surveys used to measure changes in knowledge, awareness and understanding can be used to determine whether the programmes had an impact on audience predisposition. Different questions would, however, be required because

increased knowledge and opinion changes are different outcomes, and one can occur without the other. Similarly, changes in opinions that are specific to a particular issue or situation may or may not reflect changes in more basic underlying attitudes.

The number of people who change their attitudes is a higher-order programme impact. Attitudes represent a broad, cross-situational predisposition. They are less subject to short-term change. They result from a lifetime of reinforcement and experience, so they typically require time and effort to change. What one sees expressed in a situation may or may not represent the underlying attitude.

The number of people who act in the desired fashion – behavioural change – may or may not follow a sequence of knowledge and predisposition changes. Assessments of campaign impact on behaviour include self-reports of behaviour through surveys, direct observation of people's actions, and indirect observation through the examination of official records or other "tracks" left by those engaging or not engaging in the behaviour.

Public relations campaigns are usually designed to increase the number of people who repeat or sustain the desired behaviour. Evaluation must include follow-up measures sometimes continuing for months or even years. Evaluation programme success in changing long-term behaviour calls for an extended period of observation and measurement to document programme impact. At the same point in this series of impact levels, the programme goal is achieved or the problem solved. It should also be clear that evaluation must extend to this level, because it is possible that some or many of the intermediate impact outcomes may occur without the programme goal being achieved.

The ultimate summative evaluation of programmes, and the practice of public relations, is their contribution to positive social and cultural change. This step, being the highest level of the public relations campaign evaluation completes the range of impact assessments.

9.3.2 Evaluation results

According to the model, the final phase of evaluation of the public relations campaign for M-Net Face of Africa is the degree to which the outcomes (spelled out as objectives for every target audience, and for the overall campaign) were achieved. The impact of the messages was estimated very roughly in this phase.

- The first evaluation of impact involves what people have learnt from this programme. This is measured by the number of people who learnt the message content. With the M-Net Face of Africa campaign, the three respondents estimated that roughly 80% – 90% of the audience (incorporating both the illiterates and the sophisticates) had received the messages and understood them.

- Of this audience, a further 50% - 80% showed a response to the messages. These responses were in the form of sponsorships, research articles or a positive feedback in the media (Heyns, 2000).
- According to Mokwena (2000), 70% of the audiences changed their opinion positively on the Face of Africa campaign, especially after the regional finals. (It was not established exactly how these opinion changes manifested themselves.)
- The percentage of viewers who changed their attitude towards M-Net was estimated at between 65% and 70% (Pretorius, 2000).
- The cultural and social changes that took place as a result of this PR campaign are important outcomes: according to all three respondents, many people in the majority of countries in the African continent became more fashion and beauty conscious as a result of the Face of Africa competition.

9.3.3 Research undertaken by M-Net

It is evident from the research findings that no formal research was undertaken by M-Net to evaluate the Face of Africa PR campaign. Again, only rough estimates were used to assess the impact of the campaign.

10. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It is clear that almost no formal and scientific research was undertaken by M-Net, yet the management of M-Net is of the opinion that the M-Net Face of Africa PR campaign has so far proved to be a success and that it was well executed. They base this assumption firstly on the success rate of the campaign and secondly on the success of the winners on international catwalks.

According to M-Net, the planning phase of the campaign was of a high standard. This can be attributed to the fact that thorough preliminary studies and research were undertaken by external consultants, and by M-Net internally. Although no formal research was undertaken in the implementation phase, M-Net management is satisfied that enough was done in this phase. This is gauged from the success of the campaign. The impact of the campaign has been satisfactory in view of the fact that it has had an impact on the social and cultural ideologies of Africa. If the success of the winners of the competition is used as a guideline, it can be concluded that the PR campaign made African models more competitive with regard to the rest of the world.

In the opinion of the M-Net PR team, the M-Net Face of Africa PR campaign was " ... thoroughly executed, and that a lot of money and planning went into it to make it a public relations success".

11. CLOSING REMARKS

There is no denying the apparent success of the M-Net Face of Africa competition as a PR success story. It is, however, the contention of the present researchers that formal and scientific research should be done on all three phases of the PR evaluation model of Cutlip, *et al.* (2000) to validate the informal research findings, estimates and guesswork.

It was stated in the beginning of this article that the M-Net Face of Africa competition offers an ideal research opportunity for South African Corporate Communication scholars. The researchers of the present study suggest that M-Net use an international evaluation model, as suggested by Cutlip, *et al.* (2000), to evaluate future public relations campaigns around the M-Net Face of Africa competition. A general realisation that research is becoming an increasingly important part of any public relations programme is required. Research must not only be accepted, but in fact be practised as a vitally important function in the public relations process. It provides the initial information necessary for the planning and execution of the public relations campaign (formative research), as well as the means and guidelines for the later evaluation of the programme (summative research).

The popularity of the M-Net Face of Africa programme is increasing daily, not only in Africa, but also in the rest of the world. If the quality of the public relations programme of the Face of Africa continues, there is no real reason for failure. M-Net can build on the success of this programme to support the concept of the African Renaissance. If this project continues its high standard and success rate, African models can truly make their mark in the new millennium.

“From Kinshasa to Cairo, Abidjan to Zanzibar ... the search continues...”

References

- ANON. 1999. M-Net – The story of Face of Africa. [Available on the Internet:] <http://www.mnet.co.za/faceofafrica/story.htm> [Date of access: 3 Dec. 1999].
- ANON. 2000. M-Net Face of Africa – newsroom. [Available on the Internet:] <http://www.mnet.co.za/faceofafrica/first.htm> [Date of access: 2 Jan.2000].
- BROOM, G.M., LAUZER, M.M. & TUCKER, K. 1991. Public relations and marketing: Dividing the conceptual domain and operational turf. *Public Relations Review*, 17(3):223.
- BRYMAN, A. & CRAMER, D. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis for social scientists*. London: Routledge.
- COLE, L. 1997. To see communication it has to be measured! *Communication World*, 49-51, Aug/Sept.
- CUTLIP, S.M., CENTER, A.H. & BROOM, G.M. 1994. *Effective public relations*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- CUTLIP, S.M., CENTER, A.H. & BROOM, G.M. 2000. *Effective public relations*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

- DOZIER, D.M., GRUNIG, L.A. & GRUNIG, J.E. 1995. *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- GREGORY, A. 1996. *Planning and managing a public relations campaign. A step-by-step guide*. London: IPR.
- GRUNIG, J.E. 1989. Teaching public relations in the future. *Public Relations Review*, XV(1):18.
- GRUNIG, J.E. 1992. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillside, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- GRUNIG, J.E. & HUNT, T. 1984. *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- HAINSWORTH, B.E. & WILSON, L.J. 1992. Strategic program planning. *Public Relations Review*, 18(11):9-15.
- HAYWOOD, R. 1991. *All about public relations*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- HAYWOOD, R. 1991. *All about public relations*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- HEYNS, E. 1999. Verbal communication with the author. Randburg.
- HEYNS, E. 2000. Verbal communication with the author. Randburg.
- IHATOR, A. 1999. Society and corporate public relations. Why the conflict? *Public Relations Quarterly*, 44(3):33-35.
- KENDALL, R. 1992. *Public relations campaign strategies: Planning for Implementation*. New York: Harper Collins.
- KITCHEN, P.J. 1997. *Public relations. Principles and practice*. London: Thomson.
- LANGBAUM, S. & LANGBAUM, E. 1999. Measuring communications performance. *The Public Relations Strategist*, 5(1):36-38, Spring.
- LINDENMANN, W.K. 1993. An effectiveness yardstick to measure public relations success. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 38(1):7-10, Spring.
- LUBBE, B. & PUTH, G. 1994. *Public relations in South Africa: A management reader*. Durban: Butterworths.
- MACNAMARA, J. 1992. Evaluation of public relations: The achilles' heel of the public relations profession. *International Public Relations Review*, 15(2):19.
- McELREATH, M.P. 1997. *Managing systematic and ethical public relations campaigns*. Boston: McGrawHill.
- MERSHAM, G.M., RENSBERG, R.S. & SKINNER, J.C. 1995. *Public relations, development and social investment: a South African perspective*. Pretoria: JL van Schaik.
- MOKWENA, L. 1999. Verbal communication with the author. Randburg.
- MOKWENA, L. 2000. Verbal communication with the author. Randburg.
- MOUTON, J. 1996. *Understanding social research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- NEWLIN, P.E. 1991. A public relations measurement and evaluation model that finds the movement of the needle. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 36(1):40-41, Spring.
- NEWSOM, D., TURK, J.V. & KRUCKEBERG, D. 2000. *This is PR. The realities of public relations*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- NOLTE, W.N. 1974. *Fundamentals of public relations*. New York: Pergamon.
- PALIN, R. 1986. Operational public relations. (In Howard, W. ed. *The practice of public relations*. London: Heineman.)

- PAULY, J.J. 1991. A beginner's guide to doing qualitative research in mass communication. *Journalism Monographs*, 2(1):125.
- PAVLIK, J.V. 1987. *Public relations: What research tells us*. London: Sage.
- PRETORIUS, H. 1997. M-Net in Africa. Focus on publicity. *PR & Communications Africa*, 7:32-33, Aug.
- PRETORIUS, H. 1999. Verbal communication with the author. Randburg.
- PRETORIUS, H. 2000. Verbal communication with the author. Randburg.
- PRISA. 2000. Code of professional standards for the practice of public relations. *PR & Communications Africa*, 6(2):41.
- ROGERS, S.C. 1996. Launching a public relations programme for your practice. *The National Public Accountant*, 41(5):21-28.
- SEITEL, F.P. 1989. *The practice of public relations*. Columbus: Merrill.
- SIMMONS, R.E. 1990. *Communication campaign management*. New York: Longman.
- SIMON, R. 1986. *Public relations concepts and practices*. London: Collier MacMillan.
- SKINNER, C. & VON ESSEN, L. 1999. *Handbook of public relations*. Johannesburg: Thomson.
- STEYN, B & PUTH, G. 2000. *Corporate Communication Strategy*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- STROH, U. & LEONARD, A. 1999. Communication management research in South Africa: An exploratory study of the current state of affairs. *Communicare*, 18(2):1-32, Dec.
- VISAGIE, J.J. 1993. An integrated approach towards corporate social involvement in a non-apartheid South Africa. Unpublished Master's dissertation, Johannesburg: Rand Afrikaans University.
- WAGNER, N.J. 1999. Picking a medium for your message. *Nation's Business*, 87(2):56-57, Feb.
- WILCOX, D.L., AULT, P.H. & AGEE, W.K. 1998. *Public relations: Strategies and tactics*. New York: Longman.
- WILCOX, D.L., AULT, P.H., AGEE, W.K. & CAMERON. 2000. *Public relations: Strategies and tactics*. New York: Longman.
- WRAGG, D.W. 1992. *The public relations handbook*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- YESHIN, T. 1997. *Marketing communication strategy*. Hong Kong: Graphicraft Typesetters.
- YIN, R.K. 1989. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Newbury Park: Sage.