

The Practice of Social Research
Doctoral Training Centre

Evaluation Research

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Why Evaluate?

- *To build* a broader understanding of your audience and the impacts you can have on them.
- *To inform* your plans and *to predict* which communication methods and content will be most effective for your target audience.
- *To understand* or 'to know' whether you have achieved your objectives.
- *To re-design* your approach to be even more effective in future communication practice.

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Evaluation Research

- Evaluation = sub-category of 'social research' (thus all principles of social research apply)
- Distinguishing feature of evaluation: **Focus on objectives / claimed outcomes** (*practitioners must specify these outcomes*)
- In order to evaluate them, practitioner objectives should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Targeted.

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Translating Practitioner Objectives into Evaluation Research Questions

- The evaluation process begins with concepts / ideas that a practitioner is aiming to deliver or communicate.
- Evaluation measures the degree to which these objectives (e.g. 'learning') are realized.

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The Evaluation Process: 1st steps

- Vital process of translating abstract / general ideas / concepts (e.g. scientific literacy) into concrete, measurable variables.
- Easier said than done.
- This is called 'Operationalization' – consider:
 - How would you know that a particular kind of change has happened?
 - Think about what people would say or do if you were successful.

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Definition:

Evaluation Research Design

Process of choosing how to most effectively assess intended outcomes from your communication / intervention.

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EVALUATION (formative and summative)

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Options

- **Quantitative Evaluation Methods**
Are used to answer any counting related question:
 - How many? What proportion? What percentage?
- **Survey Research**
Structured Observation of Audiences / Visitors)
- **Qualitative Evaluation Methods**
Any study involving non-counting data (e.g. words, drawings, etc.)
 - These can be converted into quantitative data

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Measurement

- Operational definitions are required for the more abstract practitioner or institutional goals that are typically the focus of evaluation research:
 - A key issue is what will be captured on a particular measure (i.e. 'what counts?')
 - Measurement error is an issue. (i.e. error due to measurement approach/tool)