AN EVALUATIVE MEASURE FOR OUTPUTS IN STUDENT-RUN PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS AND APPLIED COURSES

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

REBECCA A. DEEMER

DISSERTATION ADVISOR: DR. ROGER D. WESSEL

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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APPROVED BY:

Roger D. Wessel, Committee Chairperson	Date
Roy Weaver, Committee Member	Date
Glen Stamp, Committee Member	Date
W. James Willis, Committee Member	Date
Jill Miels, Committee Member	Date
Robert Morris, Dean of Graduate School	Date

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
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ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: An Evaluative Measure for Outputs in Student-Run Public Relations Firms and Applied Courses

STUDENT: Rebecca A. Deemer

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A valid, reliable survey instrument was created to be used by public relations student-run firms and other applied public relations courses to gauge client satisfaction. A series of focus groups and pilot tests were conducted to ascertain themes, refine questions, and then to refine the entire instrument. Six constructs to be measured, including strategies used by the students, project management, communication tools, professional demeanor, communication skills, and overall effectiveness, emerged as themes needing to be assessed. The final instrument included 40 scale questions, six follow-up questions (one for each set of scale questions), and four open-ended questions. As an outputs evaluation within General Systems Theory, this evaluative tool provides a feedback loop that did not exist prior for public relations applied courses and student-run firms. This survey, when used by public relations educators, will provide a standardized tool from which discussions can ensue and pedagogy may advance.

Keywords: public relations, public relations education, survey instrument, evaluation

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Public relations is an activity that is geared toward conveying goodwill and establishing and maintaining a favorable relationship with all of an organization's publics (or people who have an interest or a stake in an organization). Activities for an individual practicing this profession may include, but are not limited to, writing press releases, planning and executing events, creating promotional materials, writing content for websites, utilizing social media, conceptualizing radio spots and public service announcements, and speech writing and giving (Broom, 2009). Such activities are vital to the success of many companies and organizations in the not-for-profit, for-profit, government, sports, and entertainment industries. Public relations professionals work with many groups such as employees, consumers, investors, distributors, media, and other important parties. The US Department of Labor (2010) reported "employment of public relations specialists is expected to grow 24 percent from 2008 to 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations" (para. 2). Functionally, "public relations as a discipline encompasses far more generalists in small organizations than specialists in large organizations" (Brody, 1990, p. 46). Due to the aforementioned demand, paired with the fact that public relations practitioners are required to be broadly sufficient, public relations education must also continue to grow. This, of course, becomes a challenge for public relations educators, as various aspects of several areas need to be taught to ensure student readiness. This quandary of time constraints versus the need for a vast curriculum is a hefty challenge.

Because of curriculum issues, several scholars and practitioners alike have cited that there has been strong opposition for years regarding public relations being part of (or within) a journalism or communication program, the location where they are typically found (Bernays, 1978; Brody, 1991; Fischer, 2000; Walker, 1989). Gibson (1987) asserted that there is an overemphasis of journalism in most public relations curricula. He felt that managerial education had been ignored, and could consequently be added to the training that students in communication and journalism departments are required to endure prior to program completion. Echoing his thought, in a survey of practitioners, many noted that they felt that they would have been better prepared if they had more experience in business (Walker, 1989). In recent years, "the major shifts . . . suggest a movement away from simple message preparation and towards managing complex relationships" (Fischer, 2000, p. 20). This relationship management is not typically taught in communication or journalism but may indeed be taught in business. Gower and Reber (2006) ascertained that public relations students do not have some basic business skills that are needed in the field. Students' understandings of concepts seem to be strong while business skills need improved upon. Practitioners frequently view themselves as liaison persons and educators yet they are not trained for such roles (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Such training would usually occur in business courses or social science courses such as Bernays (1978) suggested. Bernays long advocated that public relations is indeed an applied social science and should be treated as such. He felt that the assessment should precede the use of communication tools. To clarify, Bernays felt that if emphasis was put on writing and speaking skills, the future practitioners would know how to convey the messages, but not how to appropriately assess the situations at hand or how to deal with those involved appropriately.

To add to the aforementioned deficiencies, the teaching approach generally used in public relations education could also be a perceived shortcoming. Many current undergraduate public relations programs are grounded in the teaching of theory. "The goal of the theory-based M.A. program is to prepare graduates for study in a theory-based Ph.D. program, rather than for professional practice in public relations" (Vasquez & Botan, 1999, p. 117). So, then, one may question why the undergraduate program is also theory based in many institutions. Obviously, most of these students are not preparing for a Ph.D. Sparks and Conwell (1998) suggested that "many universities depend primarily on a lecture format for teaching lower level courses, and a more informal, group based format for teaching upper level students" (p. 44). Again, this illustrates a lack of opportunity for application. With both undergraduate and graduate programs typically following a standard five-course system, thoughtfulness must be put into creation of all courses (Shen & Toth, 2008).

Much still needs to be done to ensure that the above-mentioned deficiencies in public relations education are remedied. This is not a problem unique to the United States. In other countries, such as Spain, it is quite problematic that the burden to teach aspects of public relations are now facing the industry itself. In fact, the industry cannot cope with practical training for so many graduates who are truly unprepared when they enter the workforce (Xifra, 2007). This is diminishing the practice of public relations in Spain. The same could happen in the United States if questions are left unanswered and curricula left unchanged. To effectively address the aforementioned issues, courses that teach business practices and social science by way of practical experience need introduced. One such course will be used as an example.

Applied Public Relations (COMM140) is a course that is taught every semester at the University of Indianapolis (University of Indianapolis, 2011). Students not only construct public relations tactics for clients, but strategize and execute plans. This course requires student-led public relations teams to service not-for-profit organizations throughout the entire semester. Each team (led by a student account manager) is assigned a different organization. Each organization has a different objective. The teams not only formulate a strategic plan; they bring the plan to fruition (with the time constraints of the semester possibly leaving minimal work to be executed by the client). The students are in a business relationship with the client for the duration of the semester. The student managers must learn to manage not only the client relationship, but the teams as well. Having five to six members per group, the subordinate students also gain valuable experience in working with a team and performing public relations and business activities. This course is open to any student with no pre-requisites. A first semester freshman may enroll. The students are encouraged to take the course as many times as they wish during their tenure at the University. Those that are engaged in the course are by default a member of the on-campus public relations agency, Top Dog Communication (TDC). No student can be part of this agency in any given semester without enrolling in the course.

As stated earlier, knowledge of social science is truly what makes a public relations practitioner understand human behavior, thereby making them aptly decide on and pursue advantageous paths. Working constantly with clients and team members, an applied course teaches about human behavior via experience. Business skills, including managerial competencies, and social science foundations, including relationship management and liaison practices are constantly utilized as the ongoing relationships with group members and clients ensure these experiences. As can be seen, a course such as this can help eliminate many complaints about, and deficiencies in, public relations education.

This course, like any other, needs evaluative measures to ensure continual growth and maturation for student and course development. Such evaluation is a large part of fostering and ensuring positive growth (Allen, 2004). All courses in a public relations sequence in higher education should be evaluated. Applied, or hands-on courses, can be especially problematic to aptly evaluate, as many of these courses operate as stand-alone public relations firms for which the traditional classroom evaluative methods alone will not suffice. As many of these courses or student-run agencies exist nationally, a study to construct a reliable instrument for this unique educational setting will help further public relations education and aid in sustaining these courses that remedy the deficiencies in public relations education discussed above.

Setting of the Study

The University of Indianapolis is a private, coeducational liberal arts university affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The University, consisting of approximately 5,000 students, offers bachelors, masters, and doctoral programs.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University houses several departments, including the Department of Communication. The Department of Communication at the University offers major areas in public relations, journalism, electronic media, human communication, and sports information. The researcher is an Assistant Professor of Communication and the faculty advisor for the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapter, as well as the faulty advisor for TDC at the institution. To clarify, PRSSA is the largest pre-professional organization in the world for future public relations professionals. This organization aspires to give students opportunities to learn more about the industry and to begin a solid network prior to graduation.

All students majoring in communication must successfully complete four applied courses. The applied course requirement can be met by enrolling in Applied Television, Applied Radio, Applied Journalism, Forensics, or Applied Public Relations, and working for the on-campus entity which that particular class staffs. The entities include a television station, a radio station, the school newspaper, the speech and debate team, or the public relations firm. At least one of the four applied courses that the student takes must be in the entity associated with his or her declared major area, or intended specialization. Therefore, all students claiming public relations as their major area must take at least one semester in the COMM140 course; many choose to enroll in the class more often. Many students claiming other major areas choose to enroll in COMM140 to meet their remaining applied class requirements. The course has also become popular with students not majoring in communication. Those students take the course as an elective. Although the course currently meets three times a week for 50 minutes each meeting, as well as requiring much outside work, the students are awarded only one credit hour per semester upon successful completion.

Different non-profit organizations are chosen each semester to work with TDC. Each team, led by a student account manager, works with a different organization. Each organization is asked to choose one constant contact for the students. This person is the team's client. The teams and their respective clients work together to formulate one objective for the semester. Objectives are geared toward awareness, acceptance, or action and all have a given deadline. For instance, the March of Dimes sought for the students to actuate 500 college-aged walkers to participate in their Walk for Babies event by the end of the semester. After conducting research and analysis, the team made public service announcements, created brochures, wrote and pitched press releases, conceptualized and executed an event to educate college campuses about the March of Dimes and the Walk for Babies, created and implemented a social media plan, and did several other things en route to trying to meet their objective. Finally, they evaluated the plan to see if they were successful. This is just one example, but all teams formulate a strategic plan including research, analysis, communication, and evaluation, to fulfill one objective and to bring the plan to fruition. The students are in a business relationship with the client for the duration of the semester.

The work given to the organization and the constant dealings with the client must be evaluated by the clients themselves to ensure growth of the public relations agency. The proposed instrument, the outcome of this dissertation, must be developed properly and tested to be effective. Although instruments have been used to ascertain client satisfaction previously in COMM140, none have been tested and little has been gained from instrument administration.

Framework

A system is defined by Bertalanffy (1969) as a group that functions as a set of interdependent parts or elements that form a whole. Understanding how these parts are interrelated and how they can better work is the major reason for studying General Systems Theory (GST). Knowledge of this theory benefits both individuals in the system and the system as a whole as such knowledge can better the policies, procedures, and communication within a given system, helping to ensure improvement and sustainability.

COMM140 fits very well into GST. In this instance, GST provides a framework to help foster growth and to prevent system failure. The theory promotes that systems are independent of the environment, but consistently effected by it (Bertalanffy, 1969). There are three basic elements described in GST. Input is what comes into the system from the outside environment. Throughput is the performance of individuals or things within the system. Outputs are products or services that are sent from the system back into the environment. GST states that if proper evaluation is not done at each point that the system will not cycle properly, hindering positive development and possibly resulting in death of the system.

COMM140 currently aptly evaluates two of the three above-mentioned elements of GST. For example, input, as it relates to COMM140 includes things such as pedagogy, lesson plans, or life experiences that the educator may bring into the classroom to aid in teaching. The course inputs are evaluated by administration of standardized forms which provide reliable formative assessments of learning objectives in relation to said inputs. Throughputs in this case include work that is produced by the students but kept internally. Throughputs could include tests, quizzes, or client work that is remitted to the professor for grading, but has not yet been given to the client. Summative assessments or grades are a reliable evaluation of throughputs. Outputs are not currently reliably evaluated for COMM140. Outputs include communication tools and tactics that are remitted to the client, or even the interactions occurring between the students and the client.

To be clear, the output evaluation will focus on the output only; it will not focus on the impact that the output eventually makes. An impact evaluation would gauge how the communication tools produced by the students, once given to the organization's intended audience, changed thoughts or actions of said audience. This output evaluation will focus on ascertaining how the communication tools and business dealings were evaluated by the client only. This output evaluation will help sustain and improve the system (COMM140 and TDC) itself. Impact evaluation, although also valuable, is not the next piece of the systems evaluation cycle, nor is it the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Currently, COMM140 cannot be properly evaluated. Without an instrument to reliably test output, there is a gap in the GST evaluation process. This gap, if not filled, could be detrimental to the system (COMM140) as the system cannot effectively improve (or may not sustain) without this evaluation. The course must continually improve for student development and this evaluation is a missing piece to the process. Furthermore, if the course does not persist due to lack of reliable evaluation, the opportunity to remedy the deficiencies in public relations curriculum discussed above, by successful implementation of this course, will no longer exist at the University.

Many like firms, or courses, nationally need to construct the same type of evaluation and may not have the basis to do so. This study provides a solid foundation for others with the same needs. This potential benefit exists for hundreds of student run firms nationally. In addition, 33 such firms are currently PRSSA nationally affiliated firms, which means that PRSSA approves of their standards, structure, and client work, and has chosen to associate their organization with said student firms. TDC is one of these firms and wishes to retain such affiliation but currently does not have a good output evaluative measure in place. The affiliated firms are mandated to survey clients to gauge the satisfaction of student output. With little adaptation, this instrument could potentially be used by other affiliated firms in an attempt to meet the required evaluation of firm output.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to produce an instrument that could confidently be used to evaluate outputs for COMM140 at the University of Indianapolis. Furthermore, it will provide a solid example for others needing to do like evaluation, with adaptation of the instrument created.

This study will provide an evaluative tool that others who advise public relations firms or applied public relations courses, or those engaging in client work, may build upon and benefit from. This audience includes, but is not limited to, the 33 PRSSA affiliated firms in the nation that are currently mandated to evaluate outputs of their respective public relations firms, all other student run firms and applied courses, public relations educators, and all potentially all practitioners working with clients.

Significance of the Study

This study will allow effective evaluation for COMM140 at the University of Indianapolis. System improvement and survival is necessary to ensure students the continued experiences found in COMM140 that are otherwise lacking in the public relations curriculum.

Educators who advise student-run public relations firms or applied public relations courses can benefit from this study, as they can adapt and use the instrument created. Furthermore, this tool will provide a standardized measurement scale for outputs evaluated by external clients in regard to public relations work completed by students. This tool will be useful in fostering public relations educators' abilities to have a common ground from which to work, and to compare their results. When an educator is doing something well, and the results will illustrate this, and the pedagogy or curriculum used can be shared with other public relations educators, potentially furthering the field.

This audience to benefit from use of this tool includes, but is not limited to, public relations educators, the 33 PRSSA affiliated firms in the nation that are currently mandated to evaluate outputs of their respective public relations firms, and any other applied courses or firms needing to do outputs evaluation.

Definition of the Terms

Applied course—any class that implements hands-on client work to advance real-world experience and learning opportunities while also depending on foundations and theories of the respective subject area.

Client or *clients*—anyone designated by his or her organization as the primary contact person while working on a public relations project with students enrolled in COMM140 at the University of Indianapolis or other like university entities.

COMM140—Applied Public Relations at the University of Indianapolis. In this course, students engage in client work all semester. This is a hands-on class stressing professionalization and practical "real-world" application. Members of this class staff Top Dog Communication, the on-campus student run public relations firm.

Firm—an on-campus, student-run, public relations firm at an institution of higher education in the United States of America.

General Systems Theory—this concept looks at systems holistically rather than as a group of interrelated parts (Bertalanffy, 1969).

Input—input is information and resources acquired through a system's permeable boundaries (Miller, 2003). Inputs equate to organizational activities in many cases and "are the resources that are required to operate the program—they typically include money, people, equipment, facilities, and knowledge" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 47).

Outcomes—the intended results of the system (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006).

Although a direct result of outputs, outcomes are the effect that the outputs had on the external environment.

Output—output is a transformed work that enters the environment from the system (Miller, 2003).

Participants—those who took part in the focus groups and pilot tests. Participants gave input, suggested ideas, and gave feedback to help evolve and refine the instrument.

PRSSA—an accepted acronym for the "Public Relations Student Society of America." This is the largest pre-professional organization in the world for public relations students. The organization aspires to give students knowledge, skills, and a networking base.

Public relations—the practice of building and maintaining positive relationships with all parties associated with a company or organization.

Reliability—is defined by Reinard (2001) as "the internal consistency of a measure" (p. 202). Producing stability, reliability provides consistent measures in comparable situations (Fowler, 2009).

Respondent—a person who provides feedback regarding student projects once the project is complete and the instrument is finalized for use.

Sampling—"the science of systematically drawing a valid group of objects from a population reliably" (Stacks, 2011, p. 196).

Stock—the elements of the system that you can see, feel, count, or measure at any given time" (Meadows, 2008, p. 17).

Student-run public relations firms—entities at institutions of higher education that allow students to function as a part of a public relations agency while acquiring hands-on experience and engaging in client relationships under the supervision of a faculty advisor.

System—a “system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something” (Meadows, 2008, p. 11).

Systems thinking—studying and analyzing systems to “help us manage, adapt, and see the wide range of choices we have before us” (Meadows, 2008, p. 2) regarding the system itself.

Throughput—throughput is a transformation process; it is what a system does with the inputs given to it (Miller, 2003). Moreover, it is the “interdependent components of a system acting together” (p. 75).

Top Dog Communication—the student-run public relations firm at the University of Indianapolis.

Validity—“the term that psychologists use to describe the relationship between an answer and some measure of the true score” (Fowler, 2009, p. 15).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. This chapter, the introduction, has provided a compelling case for the study. The second chapter will review the relevant literature regarding General Systems Theory, public relations, public relations education, and survey instrument design. Chapter Three will outline the methodology for this study. Chapter Four will report the findings of the survey construction process. Finally, Chapter Five will present the developed instrument and visit recommendations about future research and use. Last, references and appendices are included.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of this study was to produce an instrument that can confidently be used to evaluate output for COMM140 at the University of Indianapolis. Furthermore, it can be used with adaptation by others needing to do like evaluation. Course improvement and survival is necessary to ensure students the continued experiences found in COMM140 that are lacking elsewhere in the public relations curriculum, as discussed in Chapter One.

This study will provide an evaluative tool that others who advise public relations firms or applied public relations courses, or those engaging in client work, may build upon and benefit from. This audience includes, but is not limited to, the 33 PRSSA affiliated firms in the nation that are currently mandated to evaluate outputs of their respective public relations firms, other non-affiliated firms, applied courses, public relations educators, and all practitioners working with clients.

Conceptual Framework

General Systems Theory

A "system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something" (Meadows, 2008, p. 11). From a digestive system to a football team to a student-run public relations firm, systems are everywhere. Understanding of systems is critical, as ideally in a system, all individual efforts need to become linked into a “unified whole” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 51). Systems have some common elements including identifiable parts and can affect one another, and those respective parts produce an effect that is different than the effect that would be produced with all parts separately. Furthermore, a system effects behavior over time and persists in a variety of different circumstances (Meadows, 2008).

General Systems Theory (GST) “has become a recognized discipline with university courses, texts, books of reading, journals, meetings, working groups, centers, and other accoutrements of an academic field of teaching and research” (Bertalanffy, 2009, p. xvii). Simply, this theory promotes thinking of systems holistically rather than as small interdependent parts. Having wide applicability in many areas from social sciences to biology, this theory has a place in several disciplines. There are “models, principles, and laws that apply to generalized systems” (p. 32). Looking at these things is known as systems thinking (Senge, 1990). “Systems thinking will help us manage, adapt, and see the wide range of choices we have before us” (Meadows, 2008, p. 2). Systems thinking is both comforting and disturbing. It is “comforting in that the solutions are in our hands. Disturbing because we must do things, or at least see things and think about things, in a different way” (p. 4). Senge (1990) described systems thinking with the following analogy:

> A cloud masses, the sky darkens, leaves twist upward, and we know it will rain. We also know that after the storm, the runoff will feed into groundwater miles away, and the sky will grow clear by tomorrow. All these are distant in time and space, and yet they are all connected within the same pattern. Each has an

> influence on the rest, and influence that is usually hidden from view. You can only understand the system of a rainstorm by contemplating the whole, not any individual part of the pattern.
>
> Businesses and other human endeavors are also systems. They, too, are bound by individual fabrics of interrelated actions, which often take years to fully play out their effects on each other. Since we are part of that lacework ourselves, it's doubly hard to see the whole pattern of change. Instead, we tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system, and wonder why our deepest problems never seem to get solved. Systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively. (p. 6-7)

Furthermore, systems thinkers think of how "A causes B, . . . how B may also influence A—and how A might reinforce or reverse itself" (Meadows, 2008, p. 33).

A system is defined as either open or closed (Barker, Wahlers, Watson, & Kibler, 1979). A closed system "is completely isolated from its environment" (p. 21). An open system is defined as "a system in exchange with its environment, presenting import and export, building up and breaking-down of its material components" (Bertalanffy, 2009, p. 141). The common qualities of an open system include interdependence, hierarchy, self-regulation and control, interchange with the environment, balance, and equifinality (Barker et al., 1979). Miller (2003) added the element of permeability. Interdependence simply means that all elements within the open system affect one another. Hierarchy alludes to the set of subsystems that form a whole. Self-regulation and control includes having written and unwritten rules, but also demands that the "system adapts to the environment based on feedback" (Barker et al., 1979, p. 23). This adjustment to feedback of outputs is sometimes known as cybernetics. Cybernetics "can be readily applied to organizational and human systems" (Miller, 2003, p. 80). Another quality, interchange with the environment, ensures that the system indeed engages with the outside environment. The quality of balance ideally "ensures that a group has more inputs than outputs" (Barker et al., 1979, p. 24), knowing that said balance suggests a constant state of change. Equifinality "suggests that the final state or goal can be reached by using different starting points or methods" (p. 24). Finally, permeability, or permeable boundaries "allow information and materials to flow in and out" (Miller, 2003, p. 74). "The open systems approach has not only prospered, but now dominates our view of public and non-profit programs" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 42).

Elements of the System

Input is information and resources acquired through a system's permeable boundaries (Miller, 2003). McDavid and Hawthorn (2006) noted that inputs equate to organizational activities in many cases and "are the resources that are required to operate the program—they typically include money, people, equipment, facilities, and knowledge" (p. 47).

Throughput is a transformation process; it is what a system does with the inputs given to it (Miller, 2003). Moreover, it is the "interdependent components of a system acting together" (p. 75).

Output is a transformed work that enters the environment from the system (Miller, 2003). Output, when evaluated, alerts the system of changes that are necessary for system maintenance and correction (Meadows, 2008). McDavid and Hawthorn (2006) added that outputs are the primary interactions between the organization and the outside environment, and "are typically ways of representing the amount of work that is done as the program is implemented" (p. 49). Outputs are typically seen as the most tangible items produced by the system.

Feedback is critical to all stages of organizational functioning and helps to ensure corrective action and regular system functioning (Miller, 2003). This feedback is usually the result of proactive solicitation.

Outcomes are "the intended results" of the system and usually take more time to evaluate (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006). Although a direct result of outputs, outcomes are surely different as they are truly the results rather than the production.

Stock is "the foundation of any system. Stocks are the elements of the system that you can see, feel, count, or measure at any given time" (Meadows, 2008, p. 17). "Whoever or whatever is monitoring the stock's level begins a corrective process, adjusting rates of inflow or outflow (or both) and so changing the stock's level" (p. 26). Since the stock level is dependent on the signals from the feedback, it is imperative that feedback exists.

Utilizing feedback, however, can actually fail to improve the system if the feedback is unclear or hard to interpret (Meadows, 2008). In populations, feedback loops can actually be reinforcing. This means that feedback can actually enhance the system in the direction in which it is going, either positive or negative. For instance, in a business, the output feedback can help guide changes to the input and to the stock.

There are many traps that can cause a system to fail (Bertalanffy, 2009). The best way to avoid such traps is to set up feedback loops so a constant adjustment is occurring based on said feedback. “The information delivered by a feedback loop—even nonphysical feedback—can affect only future behavior that drove the current feedback” (Meadows, 2008, p. 189). McDavid and Hawthorn (2006) added that “program evaluations and performance results can be thought of as a part of the feedback that affects programs and organizations” (p. 42).

Public Relations

Public relations is geared toward conveying goodwill and establishing and maintaining a favorable relationship with all of an organization’s publics, or people who have an interest or a value in an organization (Newsom, Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2009). Public relations professionals range from spokespeople to those in media relations, from publicists to event planners. The profession is concerned with media, employees, consumers, distributors, regulators, and any group with which a respective company or organization needs to build positive relationships. Public relations professionals research situations, strategize, use a variety of talents to create an array of communication tools, and evaluate their efforts.

What has become known as public relations in the United States began on a very rocky foundation. The first glimpse that a young country had of the profession was of the political nature (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, & Toth, 2007). As a matter of fact, “the Federalist Papers, which led to the ratification of the U.S. Constitution has been called 'history's finest public relations job'" (p. 21).

The Industrial Revolution, coinciding with an increase of population in America, began to steer public relations in another direction. "Industrialization altered the structure of society and gave rise to conditions requiring public relations expertise" (Lattimore et al., 2007, p. 23). It was then that public relations finally began to be viewed as something beneficial to the public. Public relations pioneers began to pave the way for the practice to be more ethical and directed toward the common good. Even with a new conceptualization, public relations was not seen, for the most part, as desirable (Newsom et al., 2009).

As the practice was used for politics, it was also used in wartimes. There were public relations efforts in World War I (The Creel Committee) and in World War II (The Office of War Information) to gain citizen support of the war efforts (Guth & Marsh, 2006). As many viewed such efforts as propaganda, the perception of public relations only worsened with activities such as press agentry and promoters. Press agentry was seen as "increasingly outrageous, exploitive, and manipulative" (Lattimore et al., 2007, p. 22) and was epitomized by P. T. Barnum of circus fame. His outlandish acts were perceived by the public as the essence of what public relations truly was.

As the image of public relations was once again trying to recover, "the fifty year period between the end of WWII and the Internet explosion was characterized by professionalizing the practice" (Lattimore et al., 2007, p. 33). As years passed and most were still unimpressed with the practice, it became evident that measures needed to be taken to drive ethical practices. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was established as was testing for certification and licensing among practitioners (Guth & Marsh, 2006). This establishment brought perceived professionalization to the practice. Although membership and participation was not (and still is not) mandatory, it became an important measure to standard-setting in the practice.

Still today in the U.S.A., one can often hear negative statements about the practice of public relations. Many Americans still seem as if they feel swindled by the public relations practitioners. With the most publicized public relations efforts being those of celebrities, it seems logical that most Americans feel as if the practice is not credible (Seitel, 2007). Since public relations strives to establish, maintain, and strengthen positive relationships with a company or organization's publics, changing the perception of the practice is a constant but necessary uphill battle.

By the 1960s, the thought that it would be mutually beneficial to have a dialogue with publics was becoming more of an accepted idea (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2006). As the true goal of effective public relations is relationship building, this activity serves the practice the best (Guth & Marsh, 2006). Striving for feedback and then working to base future communication off of said feedback is the intent of those practicing in this way (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This practice is seen by many practitioners today as the best practice (Guth & Marsh, 2006). More changes were also evident. Historically, public relations decisions were made with intuition being the guiding principle with little or no research being done (Seitel, 2007). Today "research is widely accepted by public relations professionals as an integral part of planning, program development, and evaluation process" (Wilcox et al., 2006, p. 129). Although it is not clear if these changes have been the reason for rapid growth of the practice, it is indisputable that such growth exists.

The US Department of Labor (2010) reported that “employment of public relations specialists is expected to grow 24 percent from 2008 to 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations” (para. 22). That is not the only positive outlook, though many negative perceptions still exist. Gibson and Gonzales (2006) reported that present-day “not everyone has a negative impression of public relations, of course, but a substantial part of the population of the United States does” (p. 12). Conversely, White and Park’s (2010) study found that most respondents viewed public relations favorably, as an important activity and not necessarily as a practice that attempts to hide the truth. However, the same respondents stated that their perception is that public relations practitioners were attempting primarily to advance their company or organization’s own respective agenda. Supporting an upswing in ethical behavior, Kang (2010) found that often public relations practitioners leave their jobs when ethical conflicts cannot be resolved, rather than partaking in unethical behavior.

Public Relations Education

The placement and included offerings of public relations programs has long been debated. Gibson (1987) avowed that “public relations education, like the weather, typically elicits considerable commentary without resulting in concrete action to foster improvement” (p. 25). Public relations practitioners are faced with the fact that they are required to be broadly sufficient. “Public relations as a discipline encompasses far more generalists in small organizations than specialists in large organizations” (Brody, 1990, p.

46). This, of course, becomes a challenge for public relations educators, as sometimes aspects of several areas need taught and placement of public relations programs directly influences the curriculum offered in the programs. For ease in understanding, one must have knowledge of the fact that public relations programs are usually found within schools or departments of journalism or communication. Regardless of these two particular placements (journalism or communication) in many instances the same curricula would be found in either location because communication and journalism are placed together in many university organizational structures. For instance, Grunig and Hunt (1984) stated that “public relations education probably will be the most at home in a school of journalism . . . which is, most accurately, a ‘school of professional communication’” (p. 79). When asked if PR programs should be in schools or departments of journalism, Stacks, Botan, and Turk (1999) reported that roughly 17.6% of educators strongly disagreed, 17.6% disagreed, 18.9% were not sure, 28.4% agreed, and 17.6% strongly agreed. This illustrates vastly differentiating opinions. Those that advocate keeping public relations programs within the departments or schools of journalism or communication feel strongly, especially, about the writing skills needed in the public relations profession. Marconi (2004) felt that writing skills paired with ethics training were the most essential components that any public relations practitioner should have. Most employers agree that written and oral communication skills are at the top of their desires for a public relations team member (Broom, 2009). Survey research by Stacks et al. (1999) highlighted that practitioners expect recent graduates to have superb writing abilities. Mirroring that opinion, the slight majority questioned in said survey felt that public relations should have a home in journalism. However, many prominent practitioners and academics disagree. Several cited that there has been strong opposition for years regarding public relations being part of (or within) a journalism or communication program (Bernays, 1978; Brody, 1991; Fischer, 2000; Walker, 1989). Gibson (1987) asserted that there is an overemphasis of journalism in most public relations curricula. He felt that managerial education had been ignored, and could consequently be added to the training that students in communication and journalism departments are required to endure prior to program completion. Echoing his thought, in a self-report survey of practitioners, many noted that they felt that they would have been better prepared if they had more experience in business (Walker, 1989). In recent years, "the major shifts . . . suggest a movement away from simple message preparation and towards managing complex relationships" (Fischer, 2000, p. 20). This practice of professional relationship management is not typically taught in communication or journalism but may indeed be taught in business. Gower and Reber (2006) ascertained that public relations students do not have some basic business skills that are needed in the field. Students' understandings of public relations concepts seem to be strong while business skills need improved upon. García (2010) concluded that management and business practices were lacking and Vercic and Grunic (2003) declared that public relations in and of itself is actually a management function. Practitioners frequently view themselves as liaison persons and educators yet they are not trained for such a role (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Erzikova (2010) found that ethics training was also seen as highly necessary. Such training would usually occur in business courses or social science courses such as Bernays (1978) suggested years prior. As shown, most of the complaints about public relations education being placed in the area of communication or journalism is not due to what *is* taught in those areas, but what *is not* taught. Sometimes, however, one may simply perceive what is being taught.

Pointing out more problems in public relations education, Brody (1991) noted that it was "not unusual to find a 'public relations' curriculum in a speech communication department with only one or two writing courses" (p. 17). Further, some students graduate without taking any writing courses depending on the exact placement of the public relations program. As illustrated, there are many complaints regarding program placement and resulting curricula. Few experts have gone beyond this argument to propose a totally new placement. Bernays (1978) did just that.

Bernays (1978) long advocated that public relations was indeed an applied social science and should be treated as such. He likened placing a public relations program in a communication department to teaching a surgeon only to use instruments without prior knowledge of the human body. He felt that the assessment, of course, preceded the use of communication tools. To clarify, Bernays felt that if emphasis was put on writing and speaking skills, the future practitioners would know how to convey the messages, but not how to appropriately assess the situations at hand. To echo his thought more recently, McCleneghan (2007) found in his study that both public relations counselors and executives alike utilized critical thinking as their number one skill set.

Walker (1989) reported that public relations has not gotten the resources it deserves because it has been a stepchild of journalism or speech communication. Those areas do not have the commitment to public relations to make the program reflective of what should be taught. The same problems may persist no matter where the subject is housed, assuming that there will never be schools or departments dedicated to public relations. Yet another thought of placing the programs in schools of business may sometimes be proposed. This, too, is problematic as "the heart of public relations is persuasion" (Gibson, 1987, p. 30) which is not taught at any length in business programs. Citing that professionals in many fields need business skills, Gibson also asserted that it would be an error to move public relations into schools of business. Moving the program from one suprasystem to another would present the same problems with different instructional deficiencies surfacing (Walker, 1989). A move such as Bernays (1978) proposed would have the same ramifications. Therefore, the real problem exists within curriculum rather than placement.

Aforementioned aspects of program issues are partially a result of the placement of public relations programs. These, however, are not the only curriculum issues. There are also matters of theoretical teachings versus applied or practical teachings. It is now becoming commonplace for an educator to emphasize the entire public relations process (i.e., research, planning, action, evaluation) as it is no longer acceptable to act without using all key components of the process (Lattimore et al., 2007). This ensures a more thorough public relations endeavor. Students are being encouraged to use two-way communication to ensure public-centered public relations (Marconi, 2004). This practice focuses on the needs and the wants of the clients and many feel this relatively new approach will change the current stigma associated with the practice of public relations.

These are some practical applications that were found in review. However, there were many more theoretical.

Many current undergraduate public relations programs are grounded in the teaching of theory. It has been stated that “the goal of the theory-based M.A. program is to prepare graduates for study in a theory-based Ph.D. program, rather than for professional practice in public relations” (Vasquez & Botan, 1999, 117). So, then, one may question why the undergraduate program is also theory based in many institutions. Obviously, most of these students are not preparing for a doctorate. Sparks and Conwell (1998) suggested that “many universities depend primarily on a lecture format for teaching lower level courses, and a more informal, group based format for teaching upper level students” (p. 44). Again, this illustrates a lack of opportunity for application. However, Coombs and Rybacki (1999) stated that “the strength of public relations pedagogy is its vitality” (p. 56), as they claimed that public relations curriculum across the United States, on the whole, is actually driven by an interactive learning approach and that things such as projects, tactic creation, and presentations are the bulk of public relations curriculum in America.

Stacks, Botan, and Turk (1999) found that 74.5% of educators and 72% of practitioners feel that once the profession of public relations is more established and appreciated, that public relations education will then become more respected. One may question, however, how a profession can become “more established and appreciated” if the education, the groundwork of most practitioners, is not, on a whole, remedying curriculum deficiencies.

When surveying several educators about interest in furthering public relations pedagogy, Sparks and Conwell (1998) found an "extremely high response rate . . . indicating an interest by faculty in preferred teaching methods and curricula for future public relations practitioners" (p. 44). With both undergraduate and graduate programs typically following a standard five-course system, thoughtfulness must be put into creation of such courses (Shen & Toth, 2008). Ideally, those students majoring in or concentrating in undergraduate public relations in the United States should, at a minimum, take an introductory course, a writing course, a research course, a strategy course, and an applied course, as suggested by the Public Relations Student Society of America (2011). This should help ensure student readiness and a better chance of sustaining the profession.

In other countries, such as Spain, it is quite problematic that the burden to teach aspects of public relations are now facing the industry itself. In fact, the industry cannot cope with practical training for so many graduates who are truly unprepared when they enter the workforce (Xifra, 2007). This is diminishing the practice of public relations in Spain. The same could happen in the United States if questions are left unanswered and curricula left unchanged. One way of assuring the best education possible for students in general is via assessment (Fink, 2009). It has been found that public relations education is no different in this area. Once specific assessment takes place, the educator may discover how to better teach public relations (Kruckeberg, 1998). Assessment of programs has been executed randomly and infrequently at best. Assessment is imperative to improve curriculums and to keep the United States superior in the field of public relations education (Rybacki & Lattimore, 1999). Assessment is important for credibility of the institution, but moreover for the aspiring practitioner.

Student-run firms and/or applied courses. Coombs (2001) reminded that "while we wear many hats as educators, we can never forget our mission to effectively educate our students" (p. 1). Gustafson (1997) suggested "maybe you've thought out loud, someone in those 'ivory towers' of academe is out of touch and should get out in the 'real world' and take a look around" (p. 26). As these quotes illustrate, educators need to ensure, to the fullest extent, that students are aptly prepared for their respective careers. For public relations education, applied public relations courses or student-run public relations firms are one possible way to do this. Astin (1999) found that when students are more involved (for example, working in a collaborative effort with a teacher and other students), the student's learning is furthered. These real-life, hands-on experiences will help to educate the students far more that any lecture alone could do.

Applied Public Relations (COMM140), at the University of Indianapolis, is an example of such a course (University of Indianapolis, 2011). In this course, students strategize and execute strategic plans by constructing communication tools for clients. Student-led public relations teams throughout the entire semester service not-for-profit organizations. Led by an account manager, each team has a different client. Each client has a unique objective. The teams bring the plan to fruition (with the time constraints of the semester possibly leaving minimal work to be executed by the client). The students are in a business relationship with the client for the duration of the semester. The student managers must learn to manage not only the client relationship, but the teams as well.

With five to six members in each group, the non-managerial students also gain valuable experience in working with a team and performing public relations activities. Any student can enroll in the course, with no pre-requisites. For instance, a first semester freshman may enroll. Being encouraged to take the course as many times as they wish during their tenure at the University, many students take advantage of such an opportunity. Those that are enrolled in the course are by default a member of the on-campus public relations agency. It should be noted that no student can be part of this agency in any given semester without enrolling in the course.

There are several other applied courses at different institutions that are designed to simply give the clients a plan (Mattern, 2003). Students reported that a course with such an attribute (providing a client plan) added value to their college education. Sparks and Conwell (1998) suggested that knowledge “must be balanced with hands-on application if professors intend to graduate students to successfully function” (p. 41). Applied courses or firms provide the hands-on experience, and they also address the aforementioned deficiencies in public relations education. These firms/courses are vastly different than other experiences (such as an internship) that can provide some (but not all) of the desired experiences.

Such a course differs from both an internship and typical coursework. Some of the most positive benefits that add to the unique learning experiences of students engaging in internships include minimum faculty involvement and contacts for the student’s network (Gibson, 1996). These are also benefits of engaging in an applied public relations course or in a student-run firm. In these situations, the professor has limited contact with the client, ensuring that the student manager has the lead role. This allows the student to gain a perspective other than the professor's and to benefit from learning how to manage professional endeavors without the faculty member's micromanagement. Networking occurs naturally because of this open relationship. The client gets a true feel for the student's work ethic and knowledge and may begin to forge a relationship that can help the student later in his or her career. The client may also feel strongly enough about the student to introduce him or her personally to other business contacts, as has previously been seen. Although there are some similarities between an internship and an applied course or a student-run firm, there are obviously differences as well.

Some marked differences between an applied course or a student-run firm and an internship involve management opportunities as well as the experience of working with a team. For example, in COMM140, the account managers are interviewed yearly for paid positions. They lead student teams through the duration of the year, thereby managing two different teams and projects (one each semester). This would rarely happen in an internship as interns are not brought into a company to lead other team members. The learning experience is also unique for non-mangers as they are learning to function as part of a team. Teamwork is common in public relations (Marconi, 2004). The experience of dealing with others on a project can give the students a strong foundation for such work in the future. Again, many times in an internship, working with a team (at least on the same level as other members) is not going to be experienced. Also, things such as budgets, meeting etiquette, and peer evaluations are just a few of the aspects of business that are addressed in an applied course or a student-run firm by way of practical experience. An applied course can also help solve dilemmas of students potentially lacking social science skills. As stated earlier, social science is truly what makes a practitioner understand human behavior, thereby making them aptly decide on and pursue advantageous paths. Working constantly with clients and team members, an applied course teaches about human behavior via experience.

It is thought that there are hundreds of public relations student-run firms nationally. There is no specific count as there is not one governing body or mutual organization for such firms. However, the primary pre-professional organization for future public relations professionals is the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). PRSSA is the foremost organization for students interested in public relations. They hope to advance the public relations profession by acclimating and nurturing students and by setting high standards for public relations education, including promoting positive ethical standards (Public Relations Student Society of America [PRSSA], 2011). PRSSA is the student organization associated with the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), which is the professional organization for public relations practitioners. Of the schools that maintain one of the 326 PRSSA chapters nationally, it is not known exactly how many do offer applied courses or student-run firms. Of course, there are other universities that have such firms or courses that do not even have a PRSSA chapter. PRSSA does attempt to professionalize student run firms at universities that have a PRSSA chapter by way of affiliation, but less than 10 percent of universities with PRSSA chapters have such affiliation (where the firm at the school is affiliated with PRSSA).

There are currently only 33 firms nationally that have such affiliation. These firms must abide by a certain set of rules and regulations as they are the “most accomplished and successful student-run firms” (para. 1). These firms must possess “a solid PRSSA/PRSA connection, a high level of professionalism and an effective structure” (para. 1). This includes, but is not limited to, effective evaluation of client work. These firms must evaluate client efforts every semester with any instrument that they feel will suffice in doing so. COMM140, being the course for a PRSSA affiliated student-run firm, must partake in said evaluation.

Instrumentation

Holden and Zimmerman (2009) stated that evaluation is “an art form that relies heavily on the evaluator’s intuition, perceptions, and ability to access what will best address the concerns of those involved with the evaluation” (p. 7). This evaluation includes standardized measurement. “Standardized measurement that is consistent across all respondents ensures that comparable information is obtained about everyone who is described. Without such measurement, meaningful statistics cannot be produced” (Fowler, 2009, p. 3), and evaluation will not be thorough. One method of evaluation, survey methodology, is designed to see how closely a sample of respondents mirrors the true population, and how well the answers to the collected questions measure what they were actually intended to measure. Kobayashi (2010) stated that survey design and instrumentation can be used for needs assessment, process evaluation, or outcome evaluation. A needs assessment seeks to determine the needs or desires within a system. A process evaluation poses questions as to if a program is working effectively and if changes should be made. Outcome evaluation hopes to find what has changed (if anything) in the given environment and what is different because of those outcomes. Fink (2009) stated that “surveys are information-collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior” (p. 1). The American Evaluation Association (AEA) (2011) stated that evaluation, including instrument construction, is imperative for growth and sustainment of systems. In an effort to aid this endeavor, the AEA (2010) has created a survey that may be used to gauge the effectiveness of originally generated questionnaires by surveying the survey. This tool touches upon the many things that a researcher must be concerned about regarding survey construction. “Two of the main goals in survey methodology are to minimize error in data collected by surveys and to measure the error that necessarily is part of any survey” (Fowler, 2009, p. 11). Researchers working with survey instruments look at not only at what to measure, but also at designing and testing questions that will be good measures.

Sampling

“Sampling is the science of systematically drawing a valid group of objects from a population reliably” (Stacks, 2011, p. 196). There are three ways of collecting respondents. These include census, nonprobability, and probability sampling. If a researcher is using census sampling, a completely comprehensive survey, it will cover the entire target population; therefore, no sampling error can exist (Fowler, 2009). With nonprobability sampling, generalizibility will not be possible as the sample is not randomly selected. Included in nonprobability sampling is quota, convenience and purposive sampling. Quota sampling is "a type of nonprobability sample that draws its sample based on a percentage or quota from the population and stops sampling when that quota is met" (Stacks, 2011, p. 344). Convenience sampling is "a nonprobability sample where the respondents or objects are chosen because of availability" (p. 329). This sampling uses respondents found by accident or by chance. Purposive sampling is constructed for a unique reason and is meant to serve a specific purpose (Fink, 2009). It is "a nonprobability sample in which individuals are deliberately selected for inclusion based on their special knowledge, position, characteristics, or relevant dimensions of the population" (p. 344). This type of sampling certainly excludes some but it also potentially gathers the most relevant information in many cases.

With probability sampling, one can generalize as the sample is random (Stacks, 2011). These types of samples include random and stratified. A random sample "is selected at random from the population, where each member of the population has an equal or known chance of being selected, which enables the research results to be generalized to the whole population" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 448). A stratified sample "divides a population into groups or strata, and samples randomly from each one" (p. 450). Stacks (2011) added that a researcher may break the total population into "homogeneous subsets" (p. 348) in a stratified sample.

Instrument Construction

Instrument construction includes reliability, validity, focus groups, and pilot testing.

Reliability. "While validity is often seen as a subjective call, reliability can be measured" (Stacks, 2011, p. 128). Reliability was defined by Reinard (2001) as "the internal consistency of a measure" (p. 202). It is the "amount of error coders make when placing content into categories" (Stacks, 2011, p. 128). Producing stability, reliability provides consistent measures in comparable situations (Fowler, 2009). For example, something may be seen as reliable when two respondents are in the same situation, and answer a given question in the same way. It is the "extent to which results would be consistent, or replicable, if the research were conducted a number of times" (Stacks, 2011, p. 345). Many suggestions are given to ensure reliability in survey instruments, most stemming from ensuring excellent word usage, word meaning, and term usage (Fowler, 2009). Stacks (2011) reminded us that although we need to pursue reliability, "all measurement has some error attached to it" (p. 50). A suggestion beyond testing word and term usage that was commonly found to help ensure a higher reliability rate was to forgo giving the respondent an option that will let them avoid answering the question (Fowler, 2009). The term "I don't know" is an example of such a term when asking a respondent about his or her feelings about something. Removing such an option forces the respondent to answer more in-line with what his or her true feelings are, thus heightening the chance for higher reliability across the board. Conversely, Stacks (2011) asserted that since not everyone has an attitude about all things, that neutrality must be included on the continuum.

When considering ways to ensure reliability during instrument construction, there are three very common types of reliability frequently noted that must be addressed. Inter-rater reliability, test/retest reliability, and internal reliability are often found in research sources (Fink, 2009).

Internal. Internal reliability, or internal consistency, is the extent to which the instrument is internally consistent as it measures knowledge or retention (Stacks, 2011). Testing internal reliability usually involves dissecting an instrument to see if questions regarding the same construct score in the same manner for respective respondents. This type of reliability is instrument focused.

External. External reliability is reviewed to see at what levels a respective measure varies from use to use and is respondent focused (Fink, 2009). There are two types of external reliability that are commonly sought for. One is inter-rater or inter-coder reliability and the other is test/retest. Inter-coder reliability is "the reliability of content analysis coding when the coding is done by two or more coders" (Stacks, 2011, p. 336). Furthermore, it is the degree to which different raters or observers give consistent estimates to the same phenomenon; sometimes it is used to ascertain which survey questions measure which constructs (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006). Test/retest reliability "involves giving the measure twice and reporting consistency between scores" (Reinard, 2001, p. 203). It is seen as a measure of reliability "over time" (Stacks, 2011, p. 349).

Validity. Validity "is the term that psychologists use to describe the relationship between an answer and some measure of the true score" (Fowler, 2009, p. 15). Valid questions provide answers to correspond with what they were meant to answer, or "the degree to which a measure actually measures what is claimed" (Reinard, 2001, p. 208). Stated differently, validity tests to see if the coding system "is measuring accurately what you want to be measured" (Stacks, 2011, p. 127). For example, the answer to any given question should correspond with what the researcher is trying to measure (Fowler, 2009). This process is seen by many as subjective (Stacks, 2011). When discussing validity, Fowler (2009) suggested that "reducing measurement error thorough better question design is one of the least costly ways to improve survey estimates" (p. 112). Furthermore, "for any survey, it is important to attend to careful question design and pretesting and to make use of the existing research literature about how to measure what is to be measured" (p. 112). Payne (1951) produced guidelines for writing clear questions when original generation must occur.

Researchers must be concerned with both internal and external validity when relevant.

Internal. Internal validity ensures that an instrument's questions are sound. This includes face validity, content validity, construct validity and criterion related validity. Face validity involves researchers reviewing the content of their respective measurement items and advancing an argument that they seem to identify what is claimed (Reinard, 2001). McKnight and Hawthorn (2006) offered that "this type of measurement validity is perhaps the most commonly applied one in program evaluations and performance measurement" (p. 139). Reviewers, usually the evaluator or other stakeholders, make judgments about the questions posed and to what extent they were well written.

Reinard (2001) cited value in content validity as it involves and includes more experts than face validity. Babbie (1995) stated that this validity uses experts and refers "to the degree to which a measure covers the range of meanings included within the concept" (p. 128). McDavid and Hawthorn (2006) offered that "the issue is how well a particular measure of a given construct matches the full range of content of the construct" (p. 140). There is no external criterion for the validity of subjective questions (Fowler, 2009) and usually, one must ask experts in the respective area to review the work and serve as impartial judges of this subjective content (Stacks, 2011). The respondents must understand the question, they most know the answer to enable them to answer the question, they must be able to recall the answer, and they must desire to tell the truth (Fowler, 2009).

Construct validity is based on the "logical relationships among variables" (Babbie, 1995, p. 127). "Developing a measure often involves assessing a pool of items that are collectively intended to be a measure of a construct" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 140). Reviewing how well those respective subparts measured the construct is indeed construct validity (Stacks, 2011).

Criterion related validity is the degree to which something is measured against some external criterion (Babbie, 1995). This, of course, is used in instances where research is attempting to make predictions about behavior or is trying to relate the research to other measures (Stacks, 2011).

External. External validity is about "generalizing the causal results of a program evaluation to other settings, other people, other program variations and other times" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 112). Some types of research aim to make inferences, calling for external validity.

Focus groups. Focus groups, usually occurring before the first set of questions on a survey instrument is drafted, help to ensure that an objective is feasible and that the survey population's input is reflected in original question construction (Fowler, 2009). Fowler explained that sending an interviewer out with a set of question objectives but without specific wording for questions, was problematic. The questions must be thoughtfully produced, as differences in questions can certainly translate to important differences in answers. If thoughtful consideration is not given to specific questions, the research undoubtedly begins in a negative fashion. The design of a survey must optimize the use of resources, including those who can help determine the question and instrument construction. A focus group is the perfect vehicle for this type of research.

One must choose what kind of focus group to conduct, select and train the staff if necessary, create a discussion guide, select participants, set up the focus group room, conduct and record the sessions, and transcribe and analyze the data (Stacks, 2011). Generally speaking, focus groups are best with six-eight people (Fowler, 2009) and can even sometimes be conducted virtually (Stacks, 2011). However, Brown (1999) suggested that for a homogenous group, four to twelve participants is best while for a heterogeneous group, six to twelve is best. The goal that a focus group strives to achieve is assuring that the answers eventual respondents give in evaluation can be used to accurately describe meaningful experiences (Fowler, 2009). Specifically, Fowler stated:

> In surveys, answers are of interest not intrinsically but because of their relationship to something they are supposed to measure. Good questions are reliable (providing consistent measures in comparable situations) and valid (answers correspond to what they are intended to measure). (p. 87)

Stakeholders, like those in focus groups, are the ideal candidates to help begin such a process correctly (Babbie, 1995). Focus groups are then also used for initial review of a proposed evaluative tool.

Two types of review that are specific to focus groups are critical review and cognitive review. Critical systematic review involves looking at pre-existing lists for problems that may exist in survey question construction (Fowler, 2009). Such problems are then discussed in the group.

In the cognitive review process, respondents are often asked to think out loud and to interpret what questions are asking, so that problems with answering certain questions may be determined (Fowler, 2009). “Pretests of surveys have become more systematic, using analysis of tape-recorded interviews to identify problem questions. As a result, the choice of questions working effectively is becoming more objective and less a matter of research judgment” (p. 5). The review is very similar, but the thought process that the cognitive review offers is often more beneficial.

Pilot testing. “A pilot test is a tryout, and its purpose is to help produce a survey form that is usable and that will provide you with information you need. All surveys must be pilot tested before being put into practice” (Fink, 2009, p. 6). This testing reveals if both the directions that the researcher provides and the questions that the researcher asks are clear. Face-to-face interviews are an acceptable form of pilot testing. Fowler (2009) stated that “probably the best way to pretest a self-administered questionnaire is in person, with a group of potential respondents” (p. 124).

Things such as the respondents’ ease in understanding and the time that the questionnaire takes to complete are beneficial to the potential revision process. When pilot testing, the actual circumstance must be replicated, all portions of the instrument should be tested, respondents should be similar to those that will eventually complete the survey in finalized form, an appropriate amount of people should be used and if little revision is necessary, the process should be halted. Finally, special attention should be given to question clarity in the pilot testing process (Babbie, 1995). Errors in surveys can be due to misunderstanding the question, having too little information to answer, and distortion of the answers by the respondent (Fowler, 2009). Pilot testing helps refine all of the aforementioned potential problems. Pilot testing should be repeated as necessary.

Summary

This chapter reviewed relevant literature, both historic and current, about General Systems Theory, public relations, and instrument construction. In the upcoming chapters, a specific method will be proposed for developing an evaluative tool. The tool will then be presented and further discussion will ensue.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOLODOGY

Summary of the Project

This chapter, the detailed methodology, will give the reader a basic understanding of the way that this study was developed. By use of several recorded focus groups and qualitative data collection, this study evolved concepts to questions and questions to a fully packaged evaluative tool to assess output in one student-run public relations firm to establish a solid example for use by other like firms and applied courses.

Design of the Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to produce an instrument that can confidently be used to evaluate output for COMM140 at the University of Indianapolis. Furthermore, it will provide a solid example for others needing to do like evaluation, and a standardized tool to begin consistently evaluating student outputs by external parties. Furthermore, the data from this tool can help drive pedagogy and curriculum discussions about public relations education.

This audience includes, but is not limited to, the 33 PRSSA affiliated firms in the nation that are currently mandated to evaluate outputs of their respective public relations firms, all other student run firms and applied courses, public relations educators, and all practitioners working with clients.

Research Method

Qualitative research was used. Qualitative research "produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, and cultural phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). This study drew on the lived experiences of public relations practitioners as well as former COMM140 clients and clients of public relations programs at other universities, to construct an evaluative tool to assess organizational functioning as it pertains to public relations output in courses/firms. The qualitative paradigm is rooted in sociology rather than in hard science (Carr, 1994). As the practice of public relations attempts to change the behavior or the attitude of the intended audience, a survey about this practice as related to COMM140 and like entities should be rooted in qualitative research as should the questions generated.

"Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e., nonnumerical) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 7). In this specific study, the insight sought after was opinions on what good questions are, and how to best pose such questions as they relate to client satisfaction of public relations output in a student-run firm or applied course. Qualitative researchers typically do not accept a view of a stable, coherent, uniform world (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). This type of research promotes the notion that all perspectives and contexts have different meanings. Therefore, qualitative research was conducted via focus groups and interviews to gauge and assess those respective meanings and to construct and improve questions to reduce meaning variation in potential respondents.

Qualitative research involves discipline. For instance, a researcher must know "when to watch, when to listen, when to go with the action, when to reflect, when to intervene tactically (and tactfully)" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 67). This advice was used in the focus groups and in interviews as participants were observed and, at appropriate times, interacted with or pushed with follow-up questions.

Question crafting is at the core of qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As one may imagine, qualitative data collection involves working with a smaller number of subjects (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The group is chosen purposefully and though a truth is searched for, it may be a truth local to a very small area or community. However, in the pilot testing phase of this study, an effort was made to ensure that the end product was potentially usable by different programs. Interviews, observations, and field notes are often used for data collection in qualitative research (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). All were employed with this study.

Research Approach

The research approach used was the inductive reasoning approach. This approach strives to condense lengthy, raw data into a brief, usable format (Thomas, 2006). Furthermore, it can be used to develop a model by using the raw data. Usually, between three and eight main categories emerge in this approach. In this study, the focus groups elicited much information; the information included suggested themes (or categories), questions, and, finally, overall perception of the instrument. Information was used to construct a model (or a survey) based on the raw data, as done with the inductive reasoning approach. Furthermore, Thomas asserted that this approach is excellent for creating focused evaluative questions in many circumstances. "The inductive researcher derives understanding based on the discussion as opposed to testing a preconceived hypothesis or theory" (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 12). This approach, and this study, allowed those engaging in public relations activities professionally to share opinions and experiences that drove the construction of the survey instrument.

Research Technique

Survey methodology, as well as focus groups, were both employed for this study. Striving for content validity, and remembering that there is no external criterion for the validity of subjective questions (Fowler, 2009), the researcher asked experts in the respective area to review the work and to serve as impartial judges of this subjective content, as suggested by Stacks (2011). Survey methodology was used as many participants took a survey to report their perceptions of the survey created for this study.

Population

The eventual population studied was clients of COMM140 and other student-run firms and applied courses, as well as the respective educators at those institutions who might benefit from use of this instrument.

Sample

The sample of this study for focus groups and pilot tests was a purposive sample of both practitioners and former clients of COMM140 and other like clients at different universities. Purposive sampling is constructed for a unique reason and is meant to serve a specific purpose (Fink, 2009). It is “a nonprobability sample in which individuals are deliberately selected for inclusion based on their special knowledge, position, characteristics, or relevant dimensions of the population” (p. 344). This type of sampling certainly excludes some but it also potentially gathers the most relevant information in some cases. This study resulted in an instrument that gauges client satisfaction of those that complete a semester as a client in COMM140, and potentially other student-run firms or courses engaging in client work. As clients of COMM140 are the true and full population of such survey, no true sample will exist, but the entire population will actually be surveyed. Only said clients will have the experiences to answer such questions.

Setting of the Study

The University of Indianapolis is a private, coeducational liberal arts university affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The University, consisting of approximately 5,000 students, offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University houses several departments, including the Department of Communication. The Department of Communication at the University offers major areas in public relations, journalism, electronic media, human communication, and sports information. COMM140 is a course within the public relations major area courses.

Four to five different non-profit organizations are chosen each semester to work with COMM140. Each team, is dedicated to one client, and led by a student account manager. Each organization is asked to maintain one constant contact for the students.

This person is the team's client. The teams and their respective client work together to formulate one objective for the semester. Objectives are geared toward awareness, acceptance, or action and all have a given deadline. The students are in a business relationship with the client for the duration of the semester.

Data Collection Procedures

Development of the Instrument

Table 1.1 illustrates the data collection procedures of this study, but the details will also be discussed herein. In the initial stages of survey construction, focus groups were conducted with public relations practitioners. These professionals gave input by answering questions about what should be measured to gauge client satisfaction and how those things should be asked. To ensure well-run focus groups, they were kept small, as Brown (2009) suggested. As organization is imperative, pre-determined questions were generated for said groups and professionals gave input about said questions. After three separate focus groups, a first draft of the survey questions were constructed based on common themes that surfaced during the conversations. These themes were found by reviewing the tapes of the focus groups and by reviewing memos and focus group documents. It should be noted that although the groups were recorded, the conversations were not transcribed.

Table 1.1

Data Collection Procedures

Theme	Participants	Objective	Activity
Theme finding	Public relations practitioners	Find the themes/categories that should be included in a survey on outputs of student-run public relations firms and applied courses	Focus groups, memoing, observation, tape review, coding
Question refinement	Public relations practitioners	Refine the questions based on the themes and establish/refine question categories	Focus groups, memoing, observation, tape review, coding
Instrument refinement	Public relations practitioners	Refine the instrument, including instructions, packaging, and question improvement	Focus groups, use of AEA instrument, memoing, observation, tape review, coding
Pilot tests	Former clients of COMM140 and other applied courses/student-run firms	To ensure usability of the instrument in different situations and to continue instrument refinement	Interviews, use of AEA instrument, memoing, observation, tape review, coding

General questions, in support of the themes found, were then constructed. These questions were then presented to five more focus groups. These groups aided in the evolution of the questions by critically reviewing them and giving feedback. Again, these groups were recorded. The researcher observed and interacted with participants in an effort to see how the questions were interpreted and if they were perceived to measure worthwhile aspects of client satisfaction matching the themes that surfaced in the initial focus groups. See tables within Appendices B, C, and D on pages 151, 170, and 188, respectively. When the researcher was confident in the quality of the questions, an entire draft of the instrument, including the directions and the formatted questions was completed.

This preliminary instrument was introduced to two more focus groups of public relations professionals. These participants were asked to utilize an instrument used by the American Evaluation Association (AEA) in an effort to survey the clarity and quality of the constructed instrument (AEA, 2010). Specifically, the AEA's Independent Consulting Topical Interest Group uses the "Peer Review Rubric" to ascertain input about newly created survey instruments and to help them develop into reliable and valid instruments. Participants' input, along with memos from the focus groups, were reviewed, and changes to the survey were made based on participant feedback. This process was repeated as necessary until a point of saturation was reached. An illustration of the results of focus groups' AEA survey data can be found in Table 6.1 in Appendix E, page 199.

To implement pilot tests, the researcher drafted a final survey and a former client of COMM140, as well as clients from other firms/courses at other universities, were observed while utilizing the instrument. This happened in individual instances. As the purpose of pilot testing is to reveal if both the directions that the researcher provides and the questions that the researcher asks are clear (Fowler, 2009), this last phase ensured that those that have been in an actual client/student relationship understood the instrument, the questions, and had little negative feedback about the instrument. If relevant negative feedback existed, the instrument was revised as necessary and pilot tests were repeated, again, until a point of saturation was reached. Again, the interaction with the former clients was audio recorded for more thorough review, and the AEA instrument was utilized again. An illustration of this data can be found in Table 7.1, in Appendix F, page 202.

Writing effective questions. The researcher had to establish a framework for posing the questions to the respondents on the final survey. Said respondents will be clients of COMM140 and potentially clients of other universities. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that “in structured interviewing, the interviewer asks all respondents the same series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories” (p. 702). Although open-ended questions may be used, these are actually infrequent. As Fowler (2009) pointed out, open-ended questions can be less useful in creating data as the answers can be rare and “not analytically useful” (p. 101). For this reason, the researcher primarily used closed questions, specifically scale questions, in this instrument. These questions were posed in such a way that they will collect ordinal data. “If a researcher wants ordinal data, the categories must be provided to the respondent” (p. 101). As the clients' respective opinions are being solicited, this subjective data calls for a subjective continuum scale. A four-category scale consisting of the options strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree was used for this study. This choice also eliminated the option for the respondent to forgo replying. As the answers desired by the researcher are those that articulate the clients' perceptions of the public relations work completed by students, as well as the business interactions with the students, use of this scale will provide appropriate insight into these questions and it is the belief of the researcher that all clients will have an opinion negating the need for a choice that allows no opinion to be given.

Regarding the questions, public relations professionals, or experts of campaign outputs, helped to determine what questions should be asked regarding client satisfaction of output in a public relations campaign. Public relations professionals also aided in question wording and refinement and in instrument construction and refinement.

Seek validation. Researchers must be concerned with both internal and external validity. Internal validity ensures that an instrument's questions are sound. This includes face validity, content validity, construct validity, and criterion related validity. Face validity involves researchers reviewing the content of their respective measurement items and advancing an argument that they seem to identify what is claimed (Reinard, 2001). McKnight and Hawthorn (2006) offered that "this type of measurement validity is perhaps the most commonly applied one in program evaluations and performance measurement" (p. 139). This approach was used in this study as the researcher made judgments about the questions to be posed and to what extent they are well written.

Furthermore, content validity was also sought. Reinard (2001) cited value in content validity as it involves and includes more experts than face validity. Babbie (1995) stated that this validity uses experts and "refers to the degree to which a measure covers the range of meanings included within the concept" (p. 128). As there is no external criterion for the validity of subjective questions (Fowler, 2009), one must ask experts in the respective area to review the work and serve as impartial judges of this subjective content (Stacks, 2011). The researcher asked public relations professionals to suggest criteria to be measured and to help with initial survey construction. The researcher also asked, via focus groups, for suggestions to improve the questions once they were constructed. Experts were used again to assess the entire instrument. This process helped ensure content validity.

Construct validity is based on the "logical relationships among variables" (Babbie, 1995, p. 127). "Developing a measure often involves assessing a pool of items that are collectively intended to be a measure of a construct" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 140). Reviewing how well those respective subparts measured the construct is indeed construct validity (Stacks, 2011). Each question, being an individual piece to compose an entire section, seeks to give feedback about part of a particular construct. The survey created in this study will gauge client satisfaction over several areas when utilized; therefore, construct validity was sought by having experts confirm and refine the questions that combined to create each construct.

Criterion related validity is the degree to which something is measured against some external criterion (Babbie, 1995). This, of course, is used in instances where research is attempting to make predictions about behavior or is trying to relate the research to other measures (Stacks, 2011). It was not the intention of the researcher to make behavioral predictions; therefore, this validity was not pursued.

External validity is about “generalizing the causal results of a program evaluation to other settings, other people, other program variations and other times” (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 112). External validity was sought by engaging pilot test participants from other universities beyond the University of Indianapolis. They were able to assess if this particular instrument could be used, with slight adaptation, in their respective cases. An effort was made to ensure all types of projects were represented in the pilot tests, meaning, the clients all had very different experiences and project directions with the students.

Pilot test for clarity. Fowler, (2009) stated that “probably the best way to pretest a self-administered questionnaire is in person, with a group of potential respondents” (p. 124). To implement the pilot tests, the researcher drafted a final survey instrument and former clients of COMM140 and clients of other universitys’ like firms/courses were observed while utilizing the instrument. As the purpose of pilot testing was to reveal if both the directions that the researcher provided and the questions that the researcher asked were clear (Fowler, 2009), this last phase ensured that those that have been in the actual client/student relationship totally understood the instrument, the questions, and had little negative feedback about the instrument and all parts therein. When negative feedback existed, the instrument was revised as necessary and a different pilot test ensued, until a point of saturation was reached. All pilot tests utilized the AEA instrument mentioned before. The former clients were recorded for more thorough review. An illustration of the data resulting from the AEA instrument can be found in Table 7.1 in Appendix F, page 202.

Test for reliability and trustworthiness. "While validity is often seen as a subjective call, reliability can be measured" (Stacks, 2011, p. 128). Reliability was defined by Reinard (2001) as "the internal consistency of a measure" (p. 202). It is the "amount of error coders make when placing content into categories" (Stacks, 2011, p. 128). Producing stability, reliability provides consistent measures in comparable situations (Fowler, 2009). For example, something may be seen as reliable when two respondents are in the same situation, and answer a given question in the same way. It is the "extent to which results would be consistent, or replicable, if the research were conducted a number of times" (Stacks, 2011, p. 345). Many suggestions are posed to ensure reliability in survey instruments, most stemming from ensuring excellent word usage, word meaning, and term usage (Fowler, 2009).   Such word usage, meaning, and term usage was tested via the aforementioned focus groups by observing both public relations professionals and former clients alike as they assessed the progressive and final drafts of the survey questions generated for this study. Observations allowed the respondents to discuss what they felt a question was asking, how it could be improved upon, and what things may be absent that need addressed.

A suggestion beyond testing word and term usage that is commonly found to help ensure a higher reliability rate is to avoid giving the respondent an option that will let them forgo answering the question (Fowler, 2009). The term "I don't know" is an example of such a term when asking a respondent about his or her feelings about something. Removing such an option forces the respondent to answer more in-line with what his or her true feelings are, thus heightening the chance for higher reliability across the board. As previously stated, this study surveys specific client dealings and student work. It is the belief of the researcher that the client should have an opinion about all questions posed. Therefore, an option that allows a non-answer is not present.

There are three very common types of reliability frequently noted. Inter-rater reliability, test/retest reliability, and internal reliability are often found in research sources (Fink, 2009). The above-mentioned concerns about wording and question-posing address internal validity.

Inter-rater reliability was addressed by way of having focus groups discuss and participate in activities to choose which questions measure which constructs, and to what degree each question was imperative or not imperative in doing so. Inter-rater reliability is "the reliability of content analysis coding when the coding is done by two or more coders" (Stacks, 2011, p. 336). Furthermore, it is the degree to which different raters or observers give consistent estimates to the same phenomenon; sometimes it is used to ascertain which survey questions measure which constructs (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006).

Test/retest reliability "involves giving the measure twice and reporting consistency between scores" (Reinard, 2001, p. 203). It is seen as a measure of reliability "over time" (Stacks, 2011, p. 349). This reliability is not applicable as if one would engage in the same survey after time had passed, the outcome of the campaign may actually become more known to the clients, changing the perception of output. Again, this study sought to assess output only, not impact that the output eventually made. Therefore, test/retest reliability was not sought.

Internal Review Board

The researcher was excused from IRB review, as this study was not deemed one of human subjects testing.

Data Analysis Procedures

For this study, memos and recordings from focus groups were reviewed. Thematic analysis was used while coding concepts that surfaced in the first focus groups. Specifically, this analysis involved "looking for similar word or statement clusters" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p.174) that guided question construction of this evaluative tool. The researcher looked for patterns and repeating themes and then separated the themes into sub-themes, adding or revising content after each focus group. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that "the selection of key ideas is crucial" (p. 448). For this study, the researcher listened for themes in the initial focus groups. After reviewing memos from the focus group and also reviewing tapes, the researcher typed these themes in an Excel document into different columns to differentiate participants' comments from one another. Next, the themes were separated into sub-themes and color-coded accordingly. Special attention was given to the number of times that each theme and sub-theme was commented on by each individual focus group member. This helped the researcher potentially reduce themes that only one focus group member felt important, but mentioned several times. After careful analysis, the researcher determined which themes and sub-themes were the most prevalent and relevant, and based the question construction for this instrument on such themes.

An earnest attempt was made to ensure that respective perceptions were accurately reflected by way of focus groups and memoing to gain corroboration. Validation, or trustworthiness, in this study was sought, by way of the aforementioned focus groups and the AEA instrument use. Findings from all focus groups are illustrated in appendices.

Plan for Data Presentation

Chapter Four will introduce data collected regarding constructs found in the instrument, questions, and survey design. Tables will be used to display all results and can be found in the Appendix section.

Summary

This chapter, the detailed methodology, gave the reader a basic understanding of the way that this study was developed. The study utilized both public relations professionals and former clients (of COMM140 and of programs/firms at other universities) as focus group participants and interviewees for pilot tests. Data were analyzed and used to construct a survey about outputs for COMM140 and like courses/firms. Theme finding, question refinement, and instrument refinement were the foci of the data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Summary of the Project

This project, to create a valid and reliable tool to gauge client satisfaction of public relations student-run firms and applied course work, is an imperative step in public relations education. To understand the importance, one must first understand the deficiency that such a tool remedies.

For years, several have debated the placement of public relations programs within universities. This argument has been fueled by those who feel that placement leads to potential deficiencies in curriculum. For example, if a public relations program is placed in communication, some may contend that students' skills in business could be lacking. Conversely, if a program is placed in business, there is the same possibility that students' skills in communication will be lacking. This debate exists because public relations is an applied social science, melting aspects of business, communication, psychology, and many other subjects, together. Due to this fact, the placement of programs will always be problematic.

One way to ensure that students get adequate programming, no matter where a specific public relations program is located, is to offer applied courses and student run firms. These entities allow students to engage themselves professionally, growing their skills in all relevant areas and learning applications that may otherwise be deficient in coursework.

Applied courses and student-run firms are systems. A system is something that is composed of inter-related parts. One must study the entire system as a part of the environment, and carefully evaluate the impact that the system has on the environment. Systems have parts. Inputs are what is brought into the system from the environment. In an applied course or a student-run firm, this can be knowledge or experience of the professor. Throughputs are work, still remaining in the system, which result from the input. In this example, a throughput is a brochure that is created by students, as taught by the professor. An output is something that leaves the system, going back into, and potentially changing, the external environment. In this example, an output is a brochure that is given to an external client. Outcome is the result that the output had on the external environment. In this example, an outcome could be that the brochure improved business of the external organization.

With every part of the system, feedback loops must exist, soliciting knowledge for potential adjustments. In the aforementioned example, the input (professor knowledge) is evaluated by student assessments. The throughput (the brochure staying internally) is evaluated by the professor's grading standards. The output (the brochure that has gone to the external environment) is evaluated by client feedback. Lastly, outcome (the impact that the brochure had on business) is evaluated by client feedback and statistics.

For public relations student-run firms and applied courses, input and throughput evaluation is usually well done and tools exist to enable this evaluation. However, there is no reliable, valid tool to help measure output. This study remedied that deficiency. A survey to gauge client satisfaction in regard to student projects was created. By helping ensure system survival, via creating a feedback loop that did not exist before, these entities (that are much needed by public relations education) have a decreased chance of system failure. Every part of a system must be methodically evaluated, and feedback used to improve the system, to ensure survival.

To create this survey, a series of focus groups with public relations professionals was pursued to ascertain themes that should be focused on for such assessment. Then, more groups of professionals helped refine questions based on those themes. Finally, professionals helped revise and refine the entire instrument, which was then pilot tested. Pilot tests were conducted with former clients of public relations applied courses or student-run firms.

This chapter, the detailed findings, will give the reader an understanding of how the evaluative instrument came to fruition by way of the focus groups and pilot tests. Tables will illustrate the evolution of the questions and the instrument. Most tables can be found in appendices.

Characteristics of the Study

For purposes of this study, the individual groups or pilots will be referred to by a letter/number combination. The letter represents in which round of focus groups/pilot tests the meeting occurred. Theme finding (T), question refinement (Q), instrument refinement (I), and pilot tests (P) are the respective rounds, in chronological order, that took place in this study. The number represents placement of the groups within each round. For instance, group T2 was the second group that met to establish themes (in the first round). Group I1 was the first group that convened to discuss the entire instrument (in the third round). P3 would represent the third pilot test, and so on. There were three groups that met to theme find (T1-T3), five groups on questions refinement (Q1-Q5), two groups on instrument refinement (I1-I2), and four pilot tests (P1-P4). Rounds were only terminated when the researcher decided that saturation was met for the data being searched for in that particular round.

Table 1.2 depicts the participant details for this study, divided by group. Tables 2.1-2.5 in Appendix A, page 142 illustrate the initial theme construction based on data from the theme focus groups, T1-T3. The categories designated in these tables are carried forward to aid the reader in following the changes. Tables 3.1-3.6 in Appendix B, page 151, illustrate the evolution of the questions using the findings from the theme focus groups (T1-T3) and the questions refinement groups (Q1-Q5) specifically. Tables 4.1-4.6 in Appendix C, page 170 illustrate the evolution of the questions using findings from all groups up to the initial pilot test, P1. Tables 5.1-5.6 in Appendix D, page 188 illustrate the question refinement resulting from the pilot tests. Those resulting questions are found on the final instrument. Table 6.1 in Appendix E, page 199 illustrates data from participant critique of the entire survey instrument in groups I1-I2. Table 7.1 in Appendix F, page 202 illustrates data from participant critique of the survey instrument in the pilot tests, P1-P4.

Table 1.2

Participant Details of all Focus Groups and Pilot Tests

Focus group	Number of participants	Average years industry experience	All areas of profession represented
Theme finding (T groups)			
T1	5	18	Corporate, nonprofit, agency, consultation, sports/entertainment government, other
T2	5	6	Corporate, nonprofit, agency, sports/entertainment, government
T3	3	10	Corporate, nonprofit, government
Question refining (Q groups)			
Q1	5	11	Corporate, nonprofit, agency, consultation, sports/entertainment government, other
Q2	2	8	Nonprofit, other
Q3	5	3	Corporate, nonprofit, agency, sports/entertainment government, other
Q4	6	4	Corporate, nonprofit, agency, sports/entertainment government
Q5	4	13	Corporate, nonprofit, agency

(continues)

Table 1.2 (continued)

Focus group	Number of participants	Average years industry experience	All areas of profession represented
Instrument refining (I groups)			
I1	6	4	Corporate, nonprofit, agency, sports/entertainment government
I2	3	10	Corporate, nonprofit, agency, consultation, government
Pilot test number	**Details--program serving client**	**Length of client service**	**Type of project**
Pilot testing (P groups)			
P1	Small, private, Indiana institution	One semester	Full strategic services; PRSSA affiliated firm
P2	Large, public, Indiana institution	Six semesters	Full strategic services; PRSSA affiliated firm
P3	Large, public, Ohio institution	Five semesters	Task-oriented services; student firm
P4	Medium, public, Kentucky institution	Half of a semester	Program planning (presenting a plan for the client to implement); class project

Characteristics of the Participants

The focus group participants for this study, totaling 44, were public relations practitioners having experience ranging from 1.5 to 40 years, with over 360 total years of experience, with no participants being repeated. Table 1.2 illustrates the breakdown of each focus group's participants.

Participants were found in numerous ways. The researcher used e-mail blasts addressed to personally-known public relations practitioners. Several contacts also passed the original e-mail along to their own network, as asked by the researcher. The researcher also posted information on numerous social media sites that those practicing public relations typically frequent. Also, the researcher used contacts at the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) to announce the study and the need for participants at their annual meeting and at a local luncheon. PRSA also posted information about the need for participants on their own social media sites. Most of those that participated in the study either contacted the researcher by e-mail, or replied back to an e-mail originating from the researcher.

Theme Finding

Conducting the Focus Groups (T1-T3)

The commonalities of the focus groups will be shared in this section to better acquaint the reader with how these groups were conducted. The differentiating aspects and the data specific to any group will be discussed in the respective group's sub-section.

Focus groups were conducted on the University of Indianapolis campus. All groups were audio recorded and all participants signed consents acknowledging this activity. Tables 2.1-2.5 in Appendix A, page 142 illustrate the findings in these focus groups, divided into overall themes.

At the beginning of each focus group in round one (T1-T3), participants were asked what should be on a questionnaire to gauge client satisfaction of a public relations student-run firm or a course engaging in client work. This question was answered by each participant, individually, as he or she wrote his or her unique questions, one per sticky note, before expansive discussion ensued. This allowed participants to decide on their own, without any outside influence whatsoever, what should be asked on such a survey. Furthermore, the participants were asked to write at least five questions that should be posed, and were asked to go one-by-one in sharing their answers as well as their opinions. For instance, one participant would share an answer, it was found if others had the same answer, and then the item (and its validity) was discussed among all participants. After a question was shared, a different participant would share one new question, and so on. This process was conducted until all suggested questions were exhausted, expanded upon, and discussed.

Then, wanting to discover some things that may not be expected of a student-run firm, a follow-up question was posed asking what clients (or those working with the participants) would expect of them— a public relations professional. The answers to this question provided more in-depth potential evaluative measures and also provided insights on things that professionals may have felt that students could not yet do or be held accountable for. This information was helpful, as the firms and courses that perform client work should strive to hold students to professional standards as much as possible.

Therefore, this follow-up question provided such information. This question was asked in an open-ended manner, with participants responding and expanding as they wished. The conversation across all groups was robust, with several professionals agreeing with one another and further expanding on issues and ideas.

In addition to the aforementioned questions, the groups were also asked to discuss the perceived deficiencies in new practitioners. These conversations sometimes led to discussions about new ideas that the respective group had not yet contemplated, yet felt should be on an evaluative tool such as the one being created. It was this portion of the focus groups that brought forth the most candid discussion including many personal stories and opinions about the younger generations of practitioners and what was seen as acceptable and not acceptable in the practice of public relations. These discussions also reinforced that many of the previously discussed aspects were indeed very important and should be measured, as voiced again by the participants.

Five primary themes surfaced during the first round of focus groups (groups T1-T3). They were tactical work, professionalism, communication, strategy, and the overall product. These themes were found after careful review of the memos taken at the focus groups, as well as meticulous review of the audio tapes. These themes were consistent in all three groups.

All groups concurred that the largest improvement needed in the new generation of public relations practitioners was better writing skills. All groups also noted the generational differences found between this generation and any one previous and the challenges that such differences present professionally. It was noted by all groups that there was a perception of entitlement in the generation currently entering the workforce.

Focus group one. When the first focus group was reviewed, and when it was evident that the themes of tactical work, professionalism, communication, strategy, and overall product had emerged, participants' comments/ideas were then slotted under each of these determined themes. This placement was largely decided by the context of the discussion and the proximity of the words in the focus group to the themes that were being discussed. For instance, if the participants were talking about professionalism, and an example of poor attire was used during this conversation, the aspect of attire was slotted under professionalism. This was tracked using an Excel spreadsheet and reviewing the memos and audio tapes for clarity. Only the aspects that were concurred by many, or were mentioned by different participants throughout the conversation, were noted and slotted appropriately. Regardless of participant's differentiating opinions about the aspect (such as what constitutes professional attire), if the aspect emerged as important to the group, it was noted. If an aspect was mentioned, but not concurred, it was noted separately for future consideration based on review of later conversations in the respective focus group or future groups. This allowed for a much more comprehensive review.

The most vastly differentiating opinions seemed to be that of professional attire, as some participants viewed professional attire as being contingent upon the situation at hand while at least one participant articulated that a public relations practitioner should always dress business professional, even if that is not expected for the given situation. Again, even with these differences, the common theme was that such an element did need evaluated on an instrument such as this.

After review of the first group, there were nine prevalent items (or aspects) regarding tactical work, fifteen regarding professionalism, eleven regarding communication, twelve regarding strategy, and three regarding overall product that had each been expanded upon and discussed.

Focus group two. With the second focus group, it was confirmed that the themes of tactical work, professionalism, communication, strategy, and overall product were repeated. However, some elements under the themes differed. There were seven aspects total across all themes not repeated in the second focus group and there were ten new aspects that surfaced total across all themes, although most of them were variations of the aspects that had been noted in the first group. Specifically, the second group expanded on the discussion of professionalism and either added more content, or further articulated things that had been discussed in the first group, enforcing the need to break certain items down further. The second group did not expand quite as much in the area of communication as the first group had; yet, again, many of the ideas were still the same. They were simply not discussed with as much depth.

The data collection process was conducted in the same manner as in the previous group. The same Excel spreadsheet was used, with one page being used as a master document (tracking all additions and revisions overall), and tabs being used to keep track of each focus group separately for future review.

Focus group three. In the third group, which was kept as a triad purposefully for deeper discussions, the themes were again confirmed. The aspects of the themes were also confirmed. This group discussed the need for measurement of all but two aspects that had been discussed in either of the preceding focus groups. Those two aspects (not noted as needing measured in group T3) were knowledge of current events and knowledge of Associated Press (AP) Style. Although these are both very relevant for the industry, they are not aspects that can be measured in a survey such as this. For instance, unless a lot of off-topic discussions took place with the client, the client could most likely not ascertain the group's knowledge of current events in a short period of time. Also, many clients themselves would not have knowledge about AP Style, as many of them are not trained in journalism or public relations. This style is specific to those industries. This fact would prohibit the clients from properly gauging the group's knowledge of such style. These two aspects (current events and AP Style) were both brought up in the discussions when talking about deficiencies of new practitioners and although that particular question generated discussion about many new and valid aspects, in these cases, they were not relevant for the construction of this instrument. Therefore, they were eliminated from the pool to begin question construction. These aspects are both able to be evaluated by the instructor, therefore should be on an instructor's evaluation of the students in some way, but not on a client survey.

One aspect in the third focus group was also added, but it was found in subsequent review that the aspect had also been generated in the first focus group. This was adaptability.

Therefore, the third and final focus group confirmed the themes, confirmed that two aspects should be removed (as it was only noted in one out of three groups that those aspects should be asked on a client satisfaction survey), and confirmed that all remaining aspects should be kept for the time-being as they were mentioned in at least two focus groups with enough frequency to warrant their respective importance when discussing what clients should measure regarding student public relations projects. Most aspects were mentioned in all three groups.

From this information, questions were generated to measure the aspects that had emerged. The questions were formed using sometimes exact verbiage from participants, and other times using participant statements, turning them into questions, using some of the words that the participants had used. See Tables 3.1-3.6 in Appendix B, page 151 for the original questions constructed arising from data found in groups T1-T3.

Question Refinement

Upon review of the appropriate themes and aspects as determined by the first round of focus groups, questions were constructed. Dillman (2000) stated that when constructing questions for survey instruments, a smaller word should always be used (in place of a larger word) when at all possible. For this reason, some words were substituted for others, even if the participants had used the longer word more prevalently. The researcher's best judgment was used in this process.

Also, in constructing the final instrument, one should try, if at all possible, to segment sections of the survey for respondent ease (Dillman, 2000). With this in mind, and thinking that the most ideal beginning segments would be the themes of tactical work, professionalism, communication, strategy, and overall project, the placement of the questions also became important in the question refining process. Therefore, when constructing the questions, they were placed under their respective theme (as they had been coded previously) based on the focus group discussions as formerly explained. For this reason, participants of the second round of focus groups were asked not only to evaluate the questions, but to critique the placement of the questions.

Conducting the Focus Groups (Q1-Q5)

The commonalities of the focus groups will be shared in this section to better acquaint the reader with how these groups were conducted. The differentiating aspects and the data specific to any group will be discussed in the respective group's sub-section.

Focus groups were conducted on the University of Indianapolis campus. All groups were audio recorded and all participants signed consents acknowledging this activity. Tables 3.1-3.6 in Appendix B, page 151 and Tables 4.1-4.6, Appendix C, page 170, help illustrate the evolution of the questions using the findings specifically from this round of focus groups.

A master Excel document was used to track the comments and suggestions emerging throughout this entire round. Data from each individual focus group were also documented on a sheet within the master document, keeping track of all suggestions that may have been persistent throughout the round, yet not persistent in any one group. These data were found through review of memos and audio tapes, and review of annotated documents left by the participants.

The questions for this instrument evolved via the focus group discussions. Adjustments were not made until after group Q3, based on consistent majority feedback found in the data of the preceding groups. The questions evolved in many ways and for many reasons. These groups were conducted in different ways and the details will be illustrated in the following discussion about each respective group.

Focus group one. Group Q1 spent much time placing questions (on cut strips of paper) under the theme in which they felt each respective question belonged. Each participant had their own set of cut questions and larger papers with each theme noted on one piece. The group members placed the five themed papers in front of them (individually), and then placed their respective cut strips of papers on the theme where they felt the question belonged. The questions (on the cut strips of paper) that the participants worked with, resulting from the themes found in groups T1-T3, are included in Tables 3.1-3.6, Appendix B, page 151. This activity quickly affirmed that most questions were perceived to measure what the researcher had intended, and in the context meant by the first round of focus groups. However, there was a group of persistent questions that did not seem to fit easily in any theme, or the group was torn about the theme under which it fit. The two areas in particular that seemed to be in contention were communication and strategy, as several questions were perceived to be in both by different participants. Tactical work and strategy also seemed to have questions that were not easily recognized under one certain theme, with participants disagreeing about where those questions fit. For instance, having a measurable objective was seen by some as part of the tactical work, but by others as a larger part of the strategy. There were five participants in the group, so the majority ruled and subsequent groups were shown the questions under the themes that the first group determined. For the subsequent groups, it was asked if the questions were under the correct themes and the evolution of placement continued throughout.

The above-mentioned question placement activity also became helpful in the general discussion about the questions themselves. This group discussed the collection of questions posed for each individual theme and the ability of said collection to gauge the appropriate theme.

The overall perception was that the questions posed to gauge the first theme of tactical ability were good and comprehensive. Participants felt that the correct questions were posed to determine the overall knowledge and use of public relations tools.

Next, the group felt that the questions regarding professionalism were cumbersome and almost set a negative tone about the expectations of the student work. One participant in particular was very adamant that the questions about being dressed appropriately, being on time, and having a good work ethic should not be asked, as these should be obvious attributes that any firm should encompass (student or not) while attempting to do external work. Another participant agreed with that statement in regard to professionals, but contended that students needed to be evaluated differently due to the possibility that they are not yet aware of certain standards. The group came to a consensus that it may be a good idea to ask peers, rather than external evaluators, questions such as the ones about appropriate attire and timeliness. This way, these items could still be evaluated, but not by external client evaluators who may think negatively of a program for asking these questions.

The group agreed, overall, that the questions regarding communication were comprehensive. Small suggestions, such as word changes, were recommended by participants and noted for future consideration.

The strategy section was seen as problematic. Specifically, one participant asserted that the bottom line of any campaign should be return on investment (ROI) and that ROI should be the true measurement of strategic actions and project implementation. As there was no question measuring ROI, the participant felt that this was a valuable missing element. Furthermore, it was contended that depending on the responsibilities given to students in any project, this section could have questions that were not applicable in certain instances. For example, some participants felt that providing strategic direction would not be an appropriate function to many student groups. Others, however, contended that this is the exact reason that many organizations contract public relations practitioners and that a question such as this should be kept. Again, the conversation ensued about doing different evaluations using different evaluators (professionals, clients, peers) for each project. Furthermore, one participant gave examples of how a course or firm that would utilize such an instrument should conduct business and that professionals, rather than clients, should be used as evaluators to assess students' strategic efforts. After a strong effort to re-direct the group, they finished the task at hand.

The questions on the overall project and the open-ended questions were seen as typical and needed. It was commented that some good and necessary feedback should be solicited from the questions.

All memos and the audio tapes were reviewed and suggestions were noted on an Excel spreadsheet for future consideration after more groups had occurred. This sheet was used and expanded upon throughout the process.

Focus group two. Since there were only two participants in group Q2 (making it more of a discussion than a focus group), open conversation about each section of the instrument was facilitated. A packet with all questions (on paper, under specific themes) was given to the participants. The sections, or themes, were discussed one-by-one, focusing on the validity and the overall impression of each individual question compromising the theme. The sheets with participant notes were kept at the conclusion of the meeting.

Suggestions were noted and proved as good direction for the subsequent groups. The questions that this group worked with, resulting from the themes established in groups Q1-Q3, are included in Tables 3.1-3.6, Appendix B, page 151. The dyad agreed with the placement of all of the questions under the current themes, but contended that many questions could go under a new theme such as research or management to further identify the themes and make the questions fit better. The group felt that some questions were outliers (in location only) and once that group was identified, there would potentially be another theme under which they fit collectively. While discussing the communication tools section, the dyad concluded that the questions were on-target but that some minor grammar changes should occur to ensure that a person not practicing public relations would understand the respective questions' intents. Also, one question asked if all tools would be used for the organization. The point was made that many times, the objective of these projects is to provide many options to clients, so they may choose what they like best. A question asking if all materials were used could possibly generate answers that look negative on such a survey, even if this is a positive attribute in reality.

The professionalism section was seen much more favorably in this dyad than in group Q1, but they suggested that the questions about being dressed appropriately and being punctual should not be the first two questions posed in this respective section. They contended that although they felt this was a needed line of questioning, the question placement could give the evaluator a negative impression of the students, concurring with the objection that arose in group Q1. There were also four questions that group Q2 found redundant in this section. These questions asked if the team knew professional courtesies, if the evaluator had an overall positive impression of the professionalism of the team, if the team was as professional as the rest of the staff/employees at the organization serviced, and if the group had a professional demeanor.

The only point of debate on the third section (communication) was that the aspect of being engaging should not be on a survey such as this, as it was seen as more of a personal trait than a professional skill to be evaluated by clients. It was suggested that this particular question be withdrawn from the survey.

In review of the questions posed to gauge strategic abilities, the dyad felt that two questions were repetitive. Specifically, they felt that asking if the group understood the culture/values of an organization was virtually the same as asking if the students understood the mission. Also within that section, the question was posed if a non-public relations practicing person would understand a question that asked if the students comprehended the organization's message/voice. After further discussion, the dyad was opposed to the use of the verbiage of message/voice, but felt that the question was relevant.

The survey questions posed about the overall project were well received by group Q2, as were the open-ended questions. This dyad did suggest that something might need added, however, about the general research capabilities of the group evaluated.

All memos, audio tapes, and participant notes were reviewed. Findings were added to the master Excel spreadsheet for this round of focus groups, and a sheet was also created for this particular group. No action was taken to change any questions, as the researcher felt that more input was needed, especially since group Q2 had only two participants.

Focus group three. More in-depth questioning continued in group Q3 about the questions themselves. Placement was also discussed, but not in as much length. This group received the same question sheets as group Q2 to foster discussion of each individual section (or theme) and the questions posed in each section, as represented in Tables 3.1-3.6, Appendix B, page 151. Group Q3 was asked to go one-by-one and rate each and every question in the five respective sections as “E” for essential, “O” for optional, or “N” for not needed. They did this for every section, with discussion occurring after each section before going to the next. They were also asked to make any notes on their papers about suggested improvements or perceived problems with the questions. At last, placement of the questions in each section was discussed. These sheets were kept for review by the researcher at the conclusion of the group.

The third group had several suggestions, and, as a result (and in conjunction with the supporting data from previous groups), many changes were made prior to the fourth group. The changes that the third group suggested were actually quite close in content to those suggested by the second group, validating those opinions. Several changes were also in sync with group Q1's suggestions. However, group Q2 and group Q3 agreed that questions regarding things such as attire and timeliness were imperative on this type of survey (as opposed by a few in Q1). They also agreed that return on investment was important, but suggested that it could not be measured as it normally would be due to time constraints. The argument to abandon a client-only survey in lieu of surveys to be given to professionals, peers, and clients was not mentioned by any group except Q1; therefore, it was not acted upon.

Specifically, some changes were suggested by group Q3 to allow more respondents to feel comfortable with their ability to answer the question. For instance, it was suggested that "the writing was equal to that of a professional firm" be changed to "the writing was professional quality." This change was made after review as several focus group participants pointed out that a person taking the survey who had never worked with a professional public relations firm might not feel confident or comfortable in answering this question. However, the change allowed one taking the survey to assess professional quality, regardless of having experienced such quality in directly working with a firm. Another question such as this was originally posed as "there was an appropriate frequency of communication" and was changed to "they met my expectations regarding frequency of communication" based on discussion from this group and previous ones. This change allowed the respondent to answer based on his or her opinion of how much communication should have been occurring. Also, this is the true essence of evaluation, as assessing the client's satisfaction and expectations is the goal. Had this question been left as originally written, the respondent may have answered based on what he or she thought the typical amount of contact should be in such a situation, rather than what he or she preferred or expected.

As a result of this group and previous ones, other questions were changed for purposes of clarity. For example, one original question stated "all work will be used by my organization." Focus group participants saw two different problems with this question. First, as previously stated in group Q2, public relations is a practice where you often purposefully give many options to a client so that client can in turn choose what is best for the given situation. The question, as originally asked, did not take this into account. This question eventually evolved into "the work will be used by my organization." This allows the respondent to answer positively (strongly agree or agree) even if only one path will be used. It also provides a very good open-endedness for the client if he or she feels that not enough work can actually be used, he or she can, and probably would, still take this opportunity to answer this question negatively.

Thirteen items were deleted from the original question selection after focus group Q3. These items were deleted for different reasons. The first was that the participants voiced that the questions were redundant of other questions found under other themes. They felt that they were measuring the same thing. These thoughts and opinions had surfaced in the preceding groups as well. For instance, in the original set of questions, there was one asking if the respondent would recommend the student-firm to another potential client, and a different one asking if the respondent would use the firm again. Participants pointed out that someone would not recommend a firm that he or she would not use again. One other example was that there were two questions both asking about the client's perception of the students' future as public relations practitioners. In all of the cases of redundancy, one question was kept while another was deleted. In all cases, the question that was kept was actually pointed out in at least one focus group (by the respective majority) as the better option.

The next reason that the participants suggested items be deleted was that some items were overarching statements that, when other questions were posed, those answers should have directly indicated to what positive or negative degree the overarching question would be answered. For instance, the question "I had an overall positive impression of the professionalism of the team" would actually have been answered, as is the intent of a survey like this, by looking at the other questions that are specific pieces of professionalism. For instance, the questions "the team handled criticism professionally" as well as "they understood the expectations of business culture" along with all other questions in the section of professionalism should directly point to if the client had an overall positive impression about the team's professionalism. Therefore, a question such as that one should not have been posed and was withdrawn.

The last reason for deletion was that participants felt that the questions had no relevance in the given situation. For instance, there was an original question about the students being engaged with the client. It was pointed out on a few different occasions that although a person who engages well with others will undoubtedly have a better chance at succeeding at public relations, this asset is not pertinent or relevant to assess client satisfaction of a student-run public relations firm or a class project that engages in client work. This item was deleted, as suggested by group Q3 and conferred by group Q2, because it was irrelevant.

This group also suggested that a theme of project management needed added to the question sheet. Adding this theme would potentially create a place for some other questions that were not perfectly fitting under a theme at that time. This suggestion was noted for future reference and eventually utilized.

All aforementioned changes, and more, were made based on memos, review of audio tapes, and review of annotated participant question sheets. Data from group Q3 was compiled into the master Excel spreadsheet, and another sheet was made within the spreadsheet to record the data of group Q3 only. For the changes to occur, the suggestion had to have been alluded to or directly made in at least two of the groups (Q1-Q3).

Focus group four. Participants in group Q4 were given a packet of questions for review. The questions were all organized under a proposed theme and questions had been revised from input of groups Q1-Q3 as previously mentioned. Tables 3.1-3.6, Appendix B, page 151 include the questions that were posed to this group, and the changes that were made as a result of the group, with support from the previous groups (in review of the master Excel spreadsheet).

The participants were asked to evaluate all questions, one theme at a time. They were also asked to rate questions as essential, optional, or not needed. After all participants had finished one section, discussion ensued about that respective section before moving onto the next.

This group solidified the findings of the other groups and provided feedback for a few additional changes that would strengthen the instrument. For instance, when discussing the tactical evaluation section, they felt that it is more of a strategic requirement to measure tactical effectiveness rather than part of the tactic itself (as stated throughout this process sporadically in focus groups). As there was already a question on tactical measurement found in the strategic section, the question that had previously been in the tactical section was deleted moving forward due to perceived redundancy.

Regarding the questions measuring professionalism, some quantifiers were added to a couple of questions that had been problematic throughout, but had been well-received overall. The minor changes, as suggested by this group, remedied the perceived deficiency that these questions previously had (as noted by other groups). Specifically, there was a question about "thinking quickly on their feet" and another about being "adaptable." The group pointed out that without explaining that "thinking quickly on their feet" was to measure the students' adeptness in meetings and other face-to-face encounters, and gauging "being adaptable" alluded to situations that arose in the project, that those two questions could provide the same meaning to a respondent. Therefore, as a result of this group (with support from previous groups), those questions were flushed out more completely striving for clarity.

Also, in this section, it was contended that multi-tasking was more of a complete job function, and not an account/project function. The question in this section that asked about time-management, in this group's opinion, was much better and actually was all that was needed. In review of the data from the other groups, this thought had emerged in different instances, yet had not been presented with enough consistency in any one group for the change to be made. Therefore, the question regarding multi-tasking was deleted due to perceived redundancy and irrelevancy.

The questions on communication were highly regarded in this group, but a change was suggested based on alliteration and the general sound of a question. That change was made due to the minor nature, yet perceived improvement of the instrument.

The conversation in group Q4 regarding the strategy section was quite positive as well. The change that arose from this section was one of clarification. Some participants posed that it would be quite challenging for someone who does not practice public relations to understand what a “built-in way to measure success” was. Yet, this was an imperative question, as it was the one left (with deletion of the duplicate in the tactical section about measurement) that gauged this matter. Therefore, the question was re-worded from “the project had a built-in way to measure success” to “the team built-in a way to measure the success of the project.” This change posed the same question, but it was stated in a more user-friendly way, and, upon review, made the sound of the question more consistent with the others.

Last, in the section to measure the overall project, the most resistance from group Q4 came about the question “hypothetically, you would hire your group members for an entry-level position.” Again, this had been a sporadically problematic question, but with not enough consistency to warrant a change. With the basic understanding provided by group Q4 that this question sets a team up for failure if there is one non-impressive member, this question, to provide more informative responses, was made an open-ended question replacing one prior that read “who stood out in this group and why?” The new question, embodying both of the previous, was worded “hypothetically, would you hire any of your group members for an entry-level position? Which one(s) and why?”

The above-mentioned changes were made after careful review of memos, audio recordings, and annotated questions sheets left by participants. Again, the discussions and suggestions from group Q4 were noted on the master Excel spreadsheet so that overall comparisons could be made and changes could occur based on participant feedback. A sheet was also made within the master Excel sheet recording group Q4 specifically.

Prior to group Q5, a thorough review of the audio of groups Q1-Q4 was completed in combination with a meticulous review of the Excel spreadsheet. Further scholarly research was also conducted to edit and refine the questions to ready them for instrumentation. Due to this extra step, more revisions resulted. Tables 4.1-4.6 in Appendix C, page 170 includes the questions after this process. These are the questions that were then presented to group Q5.

Focus group five. Group Q5 provided many good insights about the questions, but also voluntarily offered opinions about the order in which the questions appear, the order in which the sections occur, and how these two effected participants’ perceptions of the questions. Specifically, it was brought to the researcher’s attention early in the focus group that when asking about communication tools/tactics, one might want to know if they should also evaluate the overall strategy of these things when deciding how to answer these questions. If the questions regarding strategy were asked first, this would set the respondents' minds at ease knowing that those are indeed stand-alone components not to be evaluated within other sections. For a more clear example, if one were asked if the writing was professional (of the tactics) and the grammar and articulation was good, but the messaging (or the intended effect on the audience) was wrong, the respondent may want to weigh that aspect of messaging into his or her answer even though this is not what is being assessed. When strategic questions appear first, the respondent gets the satisfaction of knowing that this aspect has already been answered.

This group also helped firm up the placement of the questions. The initial themes were altered after this group, with concurrence from the previous groups as witnessed in review. The new themes resulting were strategies (remained), project management skills (a new theme with questions from other areas nicely falling in place), communication tools and tactics (remained), professional demeanor (remained and renamed), communication skills (remained), and effectiveness of project (remained and renamed). Also, as the groups evolved, open-ended questions were noted and added as relevant. This group suggested several open-ended questions, as they were very supportive of the pre-existing scale questions that they had reviewed and had very few suggestions for improvement of them. Small changes were made to some, as can be seen in Tables 4.1-4.6, Appendix C, page 170. Also, some questions were withdrawn from the pool, as this group solidified that they indeed should be.

With little new information resulting, and saturation being met, the questions were ready to become part of a fully packaged instrument. The final questions to begin the instrumentation focus groups are included in Tables 4.1-4.6, Appendix C, page 170. The next round of focus groups critiqued the entire instrument.

Instrument Refinement

"Too often, constructing the questionnaire is viewed by survey sponsors as an afterthought—the task that someone else does after they have approved the list of questions" (Dillman, 2000, p. 147). Navigational guides are imperative for instrument creation. For instance, questions should begin in the upper left quadrant, where the eye is naturally drawn. Dillman also suggested that the questions should all be numbered or ordered in some way, from beginning to end. Furthermore, number schemes should be avoided (such as A1, B4) as this violates the simplicity that should exist in the instrument to ensure that it is user-friendly. Questions, ideally, will appear in a vertical format, with answers to the right, and questions should be divided from one another. The main intent is to use "visual navigational guides, the aim of which is to interrupt established navigation behavior and redirect respondents" (p. 129). The use of color could be used if it helps the eyes on the navigational path.

Conducting the Focus Groups (I1-I2)

The commonalities of the focus groups will be shared in this section to better acquaint the reader with how these groups were conducted. The differentiating aspects and the data specific to any group will be discussed in the respective group's sub-section.

Focus groups for this phase, instrument refinement, were conducted on the University of Indianapolis campus. All groups were audio recorded and all participants signed consents acknowledging this activity. Tables 4.1-4.6 in Appendix C, page 170 include the questions as shown to this round of focus groups and the evolution that came from these groups.

Groups I1-I2 were given the instrument as well as an evaluative tool designed by the American Evaluation Association (AEA) used to survey other instruments. The AEA's Independent Consulting Topical Interest Group uses this particular survey whenever trying to solicit feedback about newly developed survey instruments. The groups were asked to review the instrument carefully, note any concerns or suggestions, and then take the AEA instrument and give feedback. Then, the questions posed on the AEA instrument were discussed, one at a time. Specifically, these questions were about the alignment to the purpose, appropriateness for the target population/sample, instructions, appearance, layout and order of questions, close-ended question wording, answer options for close-ended questions, and open-ended questions. Individual participants rated each of the aforementioned categories by designating each as very good, good, fair, poor, or very poor. After discussions concluded, each group was asked if there were other notes they had made, or would like to discuss, that had not yet been addressed by the AEA tool. Last, the constructed survey and the AEA instrument were both kept for further review based on the notes that the participants had made. Table 6.1 in Appendix E, page 199 illustrates data collected by use of the AEA instrument in this round.

Focus group one. Group I1 provided many good insights about the instrument. The specific elements will be discussed below.

Alignment to purpose. This group suggested that the instrument was aligned to the purpose of the intended use. One participant compared the instrument to one used at her professional workplace stating that it did a nice job of alerting the students what will be expected of them if they are allowed to see the survey prior to the project. She did contend, however, that is was missing an element to gauge the rate of investment for the client's time, and potentially money. As the rate of investment element kept reoccurring, one of the pre-existing questions was transformed to ask about the client's perceived investment of time versus what he or she got from the students.

Appropriateness for target population/sample. The group stated that the questions were overall very well done and easily understood by the intended population. They were satisfied that the word "tactics" was identified and examples were given of what tactics are in the directions of that respective section. Also, the word "fact-find" was a point of discussion, as it was discussed if people outside of the public relations industry would understand what fact-find meant and entailed. Most agreed that this term may be problematic, as those surveyed may think that this term simply meant asking the client questions about the project. The question was eventually changed.

Instructions. The only issue that this group debated in regard to instructions of the instrument was the confidentiality/anonymity issue. It was decided upon by the group majority that although the instrument could not be administered anonymously, that confidentiality should be discussed so that respondents knew how the information was being used. Specifically, it was stated and echoed that respondents would want to know if the student group would directly see the comments and the instrument. This knowledge may impact how honestly the respondent may answer. The group suggested that it might be best to leave that decision up to the respondent, to ensure the most candid answers. Nevertheless, the group felt that it needed to be addressed in the instrument.

Appearance. The overall appearance gained positive feedback. The participants suggested that two things in particular could be added. Specifically, they suggested that either a mini-index in the front of the instrument be added, or that a notation be added in each section as to how many sections or questions were left to complete the instrument. The group felt that this would actually motivate respondents to keep going and to complete the instrument. Also, the group suggested that the survey sections should be contained to a page each, making the sections cleaner and more divided. It was also suggested by one participant and then agreed upon by most, that this division of sections would actually help prevent sections from influencing one another, or questions within the different sections from doing the same.

Layout and order of questions. The primary suggestion regarding the order of the sections was that a certain question about research, found within the section on strategy should be moved much earlier in that section, as it is the first element done in any project. It was at the end of the section when reviewed by the group, and many noted that it felt very out of place and unnatural. It seemed to disrupt the participants' cognitive flow.

Several participants noted that they liked how each and every section addressed a different valued concept of public relations, but how it would be better to give each of these sections their own respective page, with the set of instructions at the top of the section.

Close-ended question wording. The participants had favorable things to say, overall, about the close-ended questions. One suggestion was that rather than asking a client if a project was well done, it would be better to change the question and ask if expectations had been met.

Answer options for close-ended questions. It was suggested that the questions that were posed as yes/no questions should actually also be scale questions to allow a continuum of feeling to be conveyed. All agreed with this suggestion, as they felt that the yes/no options really limited what one could find from the data. Many participants also brought up the fact that no middle option or non-applicable option was found in the scale question options. Most of the participants felt that this was actually the best thing, as they suggested that clients should have a feeling about all of these things, either positively or negatively. One also offered that to add such an option might hamper the data collection process.

Open-ended questions. The participants noted that the open-ended questions were done in a way that should foster feedback. It was noted that the technically open-ended questions at the end of each close-ended section were truly yes/no questions and could forgo being answered. This was the intent of those questions, as the respondent should determine if more information needs to be shared. Therefore, they were not altered.

Focus group two. Group I2 provided feedback that was very similar to group I1. The specific elements will be discussed below.

Alignment to purpose. While discussing alignment to the purpose, one participant in particular felt that the survey missed the mark, as the overall evaluative measure should be based on if the campaign succeeded or failed. Others in the group did not agree. The researcher did not change the overall scope as all other feedback had been very positive, and that a client evaluation does indeed evaluate client feelings. Advisors overseeing such projects can determine, without any client interpretation, if the campaign succeeded or failed, as this is measurable itself, without any opinion needed to determine success. The other point of discussion in this group about alignment to purpose was that some questions were subjective, depending on what one's definition of certain words or concepts would be. For instance, one question stated that "they understood the professional expectations of business culture." One participant offered that the concept of professional expectations would be very different to each and every person and should be defined further. The other participants, however, commented that with that fact, the question becomes more relevant, as it displays that the students could accommodate to the position of the client, whatever that may be. They could research and environmentally scan what that particular client would expect and then accommodate for that situation. Since this very much simulates business culture, it was concluded that the way that question was posed was actually good. The person who originally posed the concern felt more at ease.

Appropriateness for target population/sample. When discussing whether or not the survey was appropriate for the target population, it was found, again, that the word "fact-find" as used in one particular question, could be problematic for those that do not work in public relations. Also, it was felt that fact-finding and asking questions needed further differentiated on the instrument.

Instructions. When discussing the instrument's instructions, the group came to a quick consensus that they were well done, but that anonymity was not discussed and should be so that a client understands how the feedback will be used. The group felt that this information might make the client more inclined to answer honestly and with less reservations about how the instrument will be used once completed. From this discussion, the researcher noted that all advisors would most likely have different policies on this, so although this final evaluative tool will be a model, the subject of anonymity should be carefully considered by each.

Appearance. This group had non-critical comments about the appearance. They suggested that every element being discussed should be on one page with no sections being split. Otherwise, they liked the appearance.

Layout and order of questions. Regarding the layout and order of the questions, one participant felt that the last section, effectiveness of the project and the students' work, needed moved before the section on professional demeanor of the students. The reasoning was that the broader strategic elements of the campaign had been measured first, and then the themes about student behavior were afterward. The respondent felt that this particular section should have been within, and at the back of, the broader strategic questions. The other participants did not agree, as they felt that the effectiveness section was actually a nice recap of the rest of the survey.

It was concluded that the use of a four-point scale was an excellent idea. This would make each and every participant decide whether they agreed or disagreed with a statement. The possibility of adding a non-applicable category was a short-lived discussion, as it was quickly agreed upon that many participants take advantage of such an option more than they typically should. This, in essence, hampers the feedback that could otherwise exist. Furthermore, it was discussed that if a participant felt that a question was non-applicable, that he or she could simply forego answering the question, and explain the non-answer in the open-ended section at the end of the respective section. The thought of addressing this in the directions was discussed, but, ultimately, the group felt that if the non-answer was a true issue, the respondent would take advantage of the open-ended question to explain what the issue was.

Close-ended question wording. It was brought up that a question asking about the look and messaging of the materials, was a double-barreled question, meaning that it was asking two questions within one. It was agreed upon by all participants that these questions should actually be considered independently. Also, a participant contended that although a group could frequently communicate with their client, that said communication could be pointless or non-project related. In agreement, the group articulated that the amount of project updates being adequate was probably the most important aspect of that particular question. This group also suggested that since all projects would have a different amount of appropriate communication tools/tactics, the question relating to the number of tactics, worded “they were aware of many different tactics/ideas to meet the objective” could actually be a problematic question as many times, a campaign could not or should not have several tactics. The group concluded that referring to an “ample amount of tactics” would be clearer and would add more depth to the question. Likewise, a question stating "the tactics created showed a high level of creativity of 'out-of-the-box' thinking" needed a disclaimer. It was contended that sometimes projects could not use a creative component for various reasons. Therefore, the group suggested that an allusion to appropriateness should be added to the question for this reason.

Answer options for close-ended questions. The group liked that the survey did not contain a non-applicable or neutral option. Many suggested that this would encourage the respondents to answer more honestly and make the data more valid. However, it was suggested that if a question truly could not be answered (such as if the group did no design elements whatsoever, yet the question was in regard to design), the respondent might be perplexed about how to proceed. Many stated that they suspected that the respondent would choose to leave the answer blank, and explain why they did so in the open-ended section that completes the respective section. One participant stated that she would not take the liberty to do this unless she was instructed to do so in the directions.

Open-ended questions. This group felt that the open-ended questions were very well done and were written in a way to foster client input. It was concluded that these questions should be retained and not revised.

With group I2 concurring with many things that group I1 had stated, and with little new negative feedback emerging, saturation was met and the instrument was finalized for pilot testing. The AEA instrument was also utilized in the pilot tests and the specific findings will be discussed below.

Pilot Testing

Conducting the Pilot Tests (P1-P4)

The commonalities of the pilot tests will be shared in this section to better acquaint the reader with how these interviews were conducted. The differentiating aspects and the data specific to any pilot will be discussed in the respective sub-section.

The pilot tests (P1-P4) were done with former clients of student-run public relations firms, or former clients of student projects as part of a class administered in a public relations program. The clients each worked with a different university, each with varying types of projects. The pilot tests were audio recorded, with the knowledge and consent of the respective participants. The participants were asked to complete the entire survey, as if it were given to them at the completion of their project. They were encouraged to ask questions or to comment as they were taking the survey. After completion of the survey, the participants were asked about their overall impression of the survey. Then, the questions posed by the AEA survey previously mentioned were asked to the participants. The questions specifically touched upon the alignment to the purpose, appropriateness to the target population/sample, instructions, appearance, layout and order of the questions, closed-ended question wording, answer options for close-ended questions, and open-ended questions. Table 7.1, Appendix F, page 202 illustrates these results, as participants were asked to rate each of the aforementioned elements as very good, good, fair, poor, or very poor. After these questions were answered and talked about one-by-one, the participants were asked to comment on any other aspects of the survey as relevant.

Pilot test one. The first pilot test was conducted with a former client of a student-run firm of a small private university in Indiana. The pilot was conducted at the office of the participant. The office was located in the same city as the university. The participant did not seem to read the front or the back page of the instrument. A notable comment by the participant was that there seemed to be too much space spent on directions. As she was willing and motivated to take the survey, it appeared that she was ready to begin the questions, rather than reading about the instrument. She did note, from the beginning, and reiterated at the end, that she would prefer a more direct title that would motivate her and others to answer the questions. She suggested that the words “client satisfaction” be found in the title, as many are accustomed to this verbiage and would possibly give better feedback for improvement, as most people know that this is indeed what a client satisfaction survey does. This former client engaged in a project in which the students provided a strategic plan for one objective and did the work associated with the plan, creating several communication tools.

Alignment to purpose. This participant felt that the survey was nicely aligned with the purpose, yet that there were a few questions that she would have liked to have seen on the instrument. For instance, she noted that a question gauging if there was the availability for constant contact needed to be added. Also, she suggested that the client be asked specifically about the enthusiasm of the team while working on the project. Last, she felt that a question asking about the final presentation, if applicable, be added. As these specific suggestions never arose again, and as they were partially addressed already, they were not added.

Appropriateness for target population/sample. The participant noted that this instrument was extremely appropriate for the target population, and that it was easily understandable and that all questions made sense. She felt confident that many people from many backgrounds could take the survey and understand exactly what was being asked.

Instructions. The participant noted that all instructions were very clear and that they made sense. She did note that they could have been reduced a bit, however. She also noted that the area that explained how the survey would be used, depending on if the client wished for it to be shared with the student group or not, should be placed before the question asking if the client wished the information to be shared with said group.

Appearance. The participant noted that she liked the appearance and the colors, but that for those that preferred to print the survey and then fill it out, hard copy, that a secondary version that was black and white should be constructed. She noted that with color, the survey question answers would be hard to read. This was noted and a black and white version will also be completed, but not included in this study. She also suggested that there should be a running total of questions or something to denote where the respondent stood in the process so that they could gauge how many more questions or sections they had to complete. She reiterated again that the instructions seemed too long and detailed to her.

Layout and order of questions. The participant noted that the layout and the order of the questions seemed very well done and were very logical in the flow. She gave no further suggestions about that particular question.

Close-ended question wording. The participant rated the close-ended question wording as extremely positive. She stated that the questions were direct, understandable, and would foster one to provide the correct information, as further articulated by her understanding of what each was asking. This participant read every question and then restated, in her words, what it was asking of her. She gave no suggestions for these questions.

Answer options for close-ended questions. The participant felt that the answer options for the close-ended questions were excellent. She noted that she loved the scale choice, as it forced the respondent to answer either favorably or negatively. She expanded that thought by articulating that she felt that respondents would actually take advantage of a scale that had a neutral or a non-applicable option by over-using it simply to avoid fully thinking through the answers. She felt that if a respondent was not sure how to answer or really needed a non-applicable choice for an answer, that they could leave that respective answer area blank, and articulate their reason for doing so in the section’s open-ended area. However, she did note that they should be invited to do so, as many would not take that liberty on their own.

Open-ended questions. The participant felt that the open-ended questions at the end of the survey were well done and correctly filled some gaps by allowing the respondent to add things as necessary and to provide overall information about the usefulness of the student project to the organization. One thing in particular that she had been concerned about before finishing the open-ended section was an outlet for discussing which work was usable by her and why the work was usable, along with how it would be used. The participant felt that this section allowed a client to comment on the usefulness of the work given to him or her.

Pilot test two. The second pilot test was conducted with a former client of a student-run firm of a large public university in Indiana. The pilot test was conducted at the participant's home in a mid-size city in Indiana. The participant read all instructions thoroughly. She noted in conversation before beginning the exercise that sometimes it seemed as if students were afraid to admit if they did not know something, and that she often wondered if they could find answers in collaboration with others not directly related to the project. She later stated that both of those concerns had been appropriately addressed in the survey. The project in which the client worked with the students was a strategic plan where the students did the work associated with their constructed plan to meet an objective, including creation of several communication tactics.

Alignment to purpose. The participant felt that the questions were aligned to the purpose, but that specifically, she would add questions about if the team seemed well-managed and if they were able to get support from other areas such as marketing, media, or computer systems at their respective university. As these suggestions were not made by any other participants, nor were they in-line with the objective of the survey, they were not added.

Appropriateness for target population/sample. The participant felt that the instrument was quite simple and specific. She was surprised at how quickly she could take the instrument even though it appeared very long at first glance.

Instructions. The participant felt that the instructions were well done and very to-the-point and self-explanatory. She did read them thoroughly. She completely understood the anonymity language (which had been modified from P1) and liked the placement of the instructions above each section. She had no suggestions to offer to improve the instructions.

Appearance. The participant felt that the appearance was very good and offered no suggestions to improve the appearance.

Layout and order of questions. The participant felt that the layout and the order of the questions was well done and offered no suggestions for improvement. She thought that the questions within each section, in particular, provided a logical sequence for the respondent.

Close-ended question wording. The participant stated that there were a couple of questions that she may change a bit due to verbiage. For instance, she did not like the word "ample" as ample is different depending on each and every project. As this was the actual intent of using that word, it was not changed. She also suggested that it would be good to add a question about the team leader's ability to transfer information to the team. This related back to team communication, which had been addressed in several focus groups and it was decided that a question such as this would be much better on a peer evaluation. When talking about this, the participant also suggested that the survey's open-ended section could add an avenue in which the respondents could address the benefits that the project gave to them, or the value added to the organization, beyond just asking what will be used from the project.

Answer options for the close-ended questions. Overall, the participant liked the scale that was used. She felt that using the non-applicable option, if offered, could be a very typical problem. She continued to state that if a question was truly non-applicable, if allowed to skip, the respondent would probably just skip that particular question. However, she did contend that another way to deal with this could be to simply strongly disagree and then further explain in the open-ended section of that respective area. Regardless, she felt that there were outlets to deal with such an issue.

Open-ended questions. The participant felt that the open-ended questions were well done, with the addition of the follow up about the value added by the project which was already discussed and noted.

Pilot test three. The third pilot test was conducted with a former client of a student-run firm of a large public university in Ohio. The test was conducted in a restaurant in the city in which the university is located. The participant and the researcher met at a time when the restaurant had low traffic and neither person ate. The participant did not spend any time reading the instructions. His project with the student group was more task-oriented, whereas the students produced items of which the client specifically asked.

Alignment to purpose. The participant agreed that the questions were aligned nicely to evaluate clients of student run firms, however, with his situation being more task-orientated, he suggested that there be a specific section denoting this so the person gathering data would better understand why some questions were left blank if they did not apply to a case such as this. He did think that the questions would capture the appropriate data, but stated that some extra questions were present for which he would not be able to supply data due to this unique client relationship.

Appropriateness for target population/sample. The participant felt that the instrument was extremely appropriate for the target audience, being that he had no previous experience in public relations, yet could easily understand and answer all applicable questions. He stated that the questions were simple and straightforward.

Instructions. The participant had to look back over all of the instructions, as he had taken the survey and ignored the section introductions and directions. While looking back, he felt that the instructions were very clear, but not necessary. He stated that the layout was good, and the questions were direct, hence the directions were unnecessary.

Appearance. The participant liked the appearance of the survey and felt that it was nicely spaced out and easy to navigate. No additional suggestions were given.

Layout and order of questions. The participant felt that the questions were well done and ordered nicely with the exception of two that were found in the professional demeanor section of the survey. Specifically, he noted that with a question asking about how the students understood the professional expectations of business culture directly preceding another question about the students dressing appropriately, that he had the connotation of professional attire due to the question placement. He admitted that the question, as worded, was actually subjective as to what appropriate was, but that the order of these questions skewed his thinking.

Close-ended question wording. The participant felt that the wording of the questions was well done. He did bring forth some concern regarding the students' differentiating projects and how some questions would not be relevant depending on what they had done with their project. He, again, asserted that a question should be asked, up front, about what type of relationship the client and the student group had in regard to the project commitment.

Answer options for close-ended questions. The participant would have liked to have had the option for a non-applicable choice on a few of the questions. When asked what he would have done if the instrument had been presented without the not applicable choice, he stated that he would have actually written (or typed) through the line that he was supposed to answer in and explain that he could not answer. He also stated that he would most likely utilize the comments box at the end of the respective closed-ended section to expand. He did concur that it would be quite possible for some respondents to forego thinking through questions and to simply choose “not applicable” as it would be an easy solution in some instances. However, he also stated that he felt that this particular population would be less likely to do that since they had worked directly with the student group. He stated that they might very likely feel compelled to answer to the best of their ability, even with a non-applicable option.

Open-ended questions. The participant stated that the open-ended questions were good and would facilitate reaction, but in conversing, he was a bit perplexed about what each question was specifically looking for. As these questions are meant to open discussion, rather than to direct it, that comment was actually reassuring that the questions were doing what they were meant to do.

Pilot test four. The fourth pilot test was conducted with a former client of a coursework project of a medium-sized public university in Kentucky. The pilot test was held at the offices of the client in the city where the university is located. Two participants answered all questions collectively on one sheet while taking the survey and then they both participated in answering the AEA questions together. They had both attended the meetings and engaged in the client work on their former project. Their project was one in which the students formulated a public relations plan based on research and then presented the plan to be brought to fruition and used by the client. To explain further, the students served as public relations consultants for the clients. For purposes of data collection, the clients were considered one participant and were asked to coordinate answers. They had no disagreements, and this was easily manageable.

Alignment to purpose. The participants felt that the survey was very accurately aligned to the purpose of effectively assessing client satisfaction and student skills. They both complimented the wide range of questions and also insisted that several of these questions were imperative in assessing student work, but that they would not have thought of such a scope. They did note that since some areas were not relevant to them, that a question asking about the client relationship (how the project was directed) would benefit the survey.

Appropriateness for target population/sample. The participants felt that the target population could readily answer all of the questions posed, regardless of lack of experience in public relations, race, age, or gender.

Instructions. Both participants noted that the directions were very well thought-out and self-explanatory. Specifically, they appreciated the clarity of the section introductions. However, they did prefer that the verbiage be taken out of the instrument about the use of the instrument if a client decided not to allow students to see the input. They felt that if a client said that they would prefer the students not see the survey, that no report, not even a summary verbal report, should be given to the students. They agreed with a previous pilot participant that this could cause hesitation to answer the questions truthfully, if not fully addressed. They suggested a change to allow the client to designate whether or not the survey was to be shared and that the advisor should obligate, on the survey, not to share the results if the client preferred.

Appearance. The appearance of the instrument was positive according to the participants. They felt that it was visually appealing and very easy to navigate.

Layout and order of questions. Although the participants felt that the order of the questions within each respective section was very well done and allowed an easy flow, they felt that the sections themselves should be ordered differently. The participants would have preferred the sections on communication skills and communication tactics to be next to one another.

Close-ended question wording. The participants reported extremely positive feelings about the questions themselves and the meticulous wording. They even commented that they felt as if they would enjoy taking the survey because all of the right questions had been posed. They noted that the survey would be worth their time and that it was apparent that the questions had been constructed under careful consideration.

Answer options for close-ended questions. The participants liked the four-point scale and thought that use of the scale would foster the most relevant answers. One of the participants in particular voiced that she would have liked to have seen a neutral option, but also stated that such an option may encourage respondents not to answer to the best of their ability. When pushed, she stated that she would lean more toward having the non-applicable option on the survey instrument, but that it was also fine without.

Open-ended questions. The participants felt that the open-ended questions were extremely well done and would solicit a lot of good, relevant feedback. In particular, they liked the way that the scenarios were set up allowing the respondent to follow a thought process before being prompted to answer a question.

The pilots tests provided good suggestions, many of which were utilized, and allowed the researcher to finalize the instrument. As a point of saturation had been met, the researcher was confident in the instrument. The final instrument can be found in Appendix G, page 205.

Summary

This chapter, the findings, gave the reader a deeper understanding of the way that this instrument unfolded. Through focus groups and pilot tests, the questions were determined, refined, and finalized. The instrument was also constructed and finalized. The tables illustrate the question evolution in detail while using an original category designation throughout so one can follow the progress of an initial theme, all the way to the final question on the survey instrument. The tables also report participant feelings on the survey instrument. This process allowed a final client survey for student run firms and courses that engage in client work to be created. The survey is felt to be reliable and valid due to the process illustrated and the meticulous measures taken.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Project

Public relations educators and practitioners have long debated the placement of public relations programs. The researcher contends that one way to minimize this debate is to ensure that aspects of all types of relevant programming exist in public relations curriculum, no matter where the placement. Applied courses or student-run firms are one way to do this. These teaching strategies allow students to partner with clients while engaged in a public relations project, therefore, building communication skills, business sense, management skills, social science knowledge, and many more skills. This mixture gives students the opportunity to learn multiple aspects through practice, no matter in which academic department or school their respective program is located.

Applied courses and student-run firms are systems as defined by Bertalanffy (2009). Basically, a system is a set of parts that are all interrelated with functions of all parts having an impact and influence on one another. There are several parts included in a system, and unless each part is evaluated properly, and feedback loops are established for each element, the system is at risk for potential failure. Inputs and throughputs are evaluated in most of these systems (public relations student-run firms, or applied courses) through students' evaluations of the instructor, and instructor's evaluations of the students. Outputs are not aptly evaluated. Outputs are the works and activities that have left the system, going into the outside environment (Bertalanffy, 2009). Outputs are seen (and potentially used) by external clients and can be evaluated by them, allowing a feedback loop in this area as well. A standardized, tested instrument had not been created for general use to assess outputs for student-run public relations firms or courses that utilize client work. This study sought to remedy that deficiency.

Using ten focus groups and four pilot tests, the researcher compiled a large amount of qualitative data. The data that emerged helped create and refine a reliable, valid, evaluative tool. The focus groups, comprised of 44 public relations professionals, were segmented into three rounds. Those rounds were focused on theme-finding, question refinement, and instrument refinement.

In the first round, focused on themes, discussion ensued about things that should be found on a survey instrument to gauge client satisfaction of student public relations firms, or courses that utilize client work. The groups were recorded and the data were analyzed carefully to carry forward themes that were repeated by various participants.

The next round, question refinement, focused on how to carefully divide the questions (resulting from the themes in round one) into different constructs (or areas), how to improve upon the questions, and how to minimize the number of questions due to perceived repetitiveness. These groups also focused on the overall constructs, and if the appropriate questions were asked for each and every construct so that the instrument could foster the clients' abilities to provide the best and most exhaustive feedback possible. These groups were also recorded and the data were reviewed meticulously, allowing progression of the questions to a point where they could confidently be inserted into an instrument.

The last round of focus groups, the instrument refinement round, utilized a tool published by the American Evaluation Association's Independent Consulting Topical Interest Group to score various areas of the instrument in its entirety (AEA, 2010). The participants also discussed each aspect of the instrument, and, again, the overall questions were posed regarding if the correct questions were being asked for each and every construct. These groups were also recorded, and the data were analyzed to refine the instrument. Once the instrument was refined as necessary, it was prepared to be presented during pilot tests.

The pilot tests, conducted with former clients of four different universities, were the last step. These former clients all had varying working relationships with their respective student groups. All provided feedback while taking the survey instrument, and being recorded. The pilot test participants were asked about each varying part of the instrument, about the overall impact of the instrument, and about their feelings as to if the correct aspects were being measured. Revisions were made as necessary due to the emergence of data. Once saturation had been met, pilot testing was halted. At the end of the process, a reliable, valid tool to gauge client satisfaction of public relations work completed by students was finalized to provide an example of outputs evaluation for student-run firms and applied courses alike.

This chapter, the discussion, will give the reader an understanding of what the final instrument looks like, how elements of the final instrument evolved, and discussion for future research.

Client Satisfaction Survey for Public Relations Work

Through the use of the data originated from ten focus groups and four pilot tests, an instrument was created that is both reliable and valid by qualitative measure standards. It should be noted that the instrument was designed to be adapted by other student public relations firms and public relations courses that utilize client work by changing some verbiage, the logos, the seal, the contact information, and the pictures. The presented version is the finalized example for the University of Indianapolis. The instrument use is not limited to this university and the pilot tests suggest that it can be adapted and used at other institutions. The instrument is found in Appendix G, page 205.

Discussion

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) put forth clear criteria for evaluating an instrument in their “Instrument—Peer Review Rubric” that is used regularly by their by their Independent Consulting Topical Interest Group to assess the validity and reliability of newly constructed instruments (2010). The criteria listed on this instrument include alignment to the purpose, appropriateness for the target audience or sample, instructions, appearance, layout and order of the questions, closed-ended question wording, answer options for closed-ended questions, and open-ended questions. This survey helps demonstrate an instrument is valid and reliable, which will be included in the discussion below. By reviewing those criteria in detail, explaining how the instrument evolved and improved, and by also discussing validity and reliability of the instrument, the researcher presents a discussion about the design elements of the survey’s final form.

Alignment to Purpose

As found with the focus groups and the pilot tests, this instrument ascertains client satisfaction as it pertains to public relations student-run firms and client work. As testified by the focus group participants in instrumentation review (I1 and I2) and the pilot tests (P1-P4) phase, this survey certainly does a good job at capturing the data needed. As return on investment emerged in various focus groups as the one concept that needed to be added, the researcher found a way to incorporate that concept without making it directed toward only meeting an objective or monetary exchange, as both would be moot in many instances. A question was added that asks if the amount of work and time put into the project was worth the work that the client received. This indeed does measure the client's feelings about return on investment, but does not limit the question as stated above.

As Thomas (2004) stated, a guiding question must assist a researcher the entire time that a questionnaire is being constructed. This is not simply what you want the function of the questionnaire to be, but, rather, what you are trying to get from it. Of course, for this survey, client satisfaction (and input) is at the center of what can be learned. However, something else that drove the project was the fact that clients can help assess aspects of a student's work from a much different perspective than can an instructor or peers. Since clients are indeed external evaluators, outputs evaluation would be in motion once such a survey is used, and improvements based on external feedback (something that in most cases was likely lacking before) could occur, improving the system. This questionnaire is not only aligned with the purpose of ascertaining client satisfaction, but also with helping classroom improvement and systems evaluation.

To claim that a survey is aligned with the intended purpose, one must objectively question validity and reliability.

Validity. "Validity refers to the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to be measured and, consequently, permits appropriate interpretation of scores" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 154). The types of validity that this instrument meets are face validity, content validity, construct validity, and external validity.

Face validity. Face validity involves a researcher reviewing the content of his or her respective measurement items and advancing an argument that they seem to identify what is claimed and what it to be studied or evaluated (Reinard, 2001). The researcher did this by way of scholarly review, review of other instruments, and by working objectively with the questions throughout the entire study.

Content validity. Content validity involves and includes more experts than face validity (Reinard, 2001). To best meet content validity in this project, 44 experts in public relations were used to review the themes, words, questions, and the entire survey, by serving as impartial judges of this subjective content, as Stacks (2011) suggested. Then, four former clients of various institutions further helped to demonstrate content validity via pilot testing. Thomas (2004) contended that this type of validity is the "one that is appropriate for most questionnaires" (p. 80). The reason for this is that it demonstrates that the questions are appropriate for the objective of the survey, or in alignment with the purpose, as discussed above. Furthermore, Thomas suggested that one small group can actually suffice in claiming content validity if that group decides that the questions indeed cover the scope of what needs to be measured to meet the objective of the instrument. In this case, many professionals, through eight focus groups, asserted that the questions had content validity, and others (in two focus groups) asserted that the entire instrument had content validity by answering positively about said instrument's alignment to the purpose.

Content validity also requires that participants understand questions thereby enabling them to answer them (Fowler, 2009). The focus groups helped evolve the questions until little to no negative feedback existed and until positive things were said repeatedly about how easily understandable the questions were. It was evident from discussions and from use of the AEA instrument that the participants understood the questions as they were intended. One example of this was the exclamation of a person who pilot tested the survey and stated that "all of the right questions were being asked, and I knew exactly what each question meant." This will be discussed more in the section about reliability below.

Construct validity. Construct validity is based on the "logical relationships among variables" (Babbie, 1995, p. 127). "Developing a measure often involves assessing a pool of items that are collectively intended to be a measure of a construct" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 140). Reviewing how well those respective subparts measured the construct is indeed construct validity (Stacks, 2011). This type of validity was met by focus group review and pilot testing. Specifically, the focus groups helped evolve the questions into the correct groups to define appropriate constructs and appropriate questions within each construct to exhaust the line of questioning. By the end of the pilot testing phase, every participant agreed that the questions were indeed good comprehensive measures of the construct that they were trying to encompass, with no duplicates existing. The effort to ensure no duplication will be discussed later.

The groups helped establish and refine the constructs. For example, project management was not even a noted construct in this instrument. However, in several focus groups, it was pointed out that some questions in a few of the construct areas did not fit perfectly with the rest. Through comments and suggestions, it was found that by adding a construct of project management, and placing certain questions under that construct (as, again, directed by the focus groups), a much cleaner picture of each construct emerged and project management was an excellent addition to the survey.

External validity. External validity is about "generalizing the causal results of a program evaluation to other settings, other people, other program variations and other times" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 112). It can be inferred through the pilot tests, that other institutions can indeed use this survey to gauge client satisfaction, especially others with students who planned and brought an entire strategic public relations plan to fruition. Furthermore, even programs with different ways of conducting their applied courses or public relations student-run firms can still adapt and use many parts of this survey, again, as seen in the pilot testing phase. The instrument scored extremely high, even with the clients who had engaged in projects that were conducted much differently than Top Dog Communication's projects. One participant in the pilot testing phase even stated that she wished that she had been given the opportunity to take such a survey and that it would have helped her articulate some things that she would have liked to convey to the advisor about her time with the student group. This participant took part in a project that was conducted differently than Top Dog Communication's projects, yet she still saw the benefit and use of the survey.

Reliability. A reliable instrument in this case is one that can pose questions that are interpreted the same way by each respondent. As demonstrated by the instrument review and pilot testing phases, these questions asked the same things to each person. This could be heard and seen with detailed discussions ensuing about the questions and how the participants were understanding each of them. Encoding is the meaning that is attached to symbols when someone is attempting to convey a message (Lucas, 2004). Decoding is the meaning that is actually attached to the symbols by the receiver. It is how the message is perceived.

It was very apparent while participants were reading and discussing these questions that the encoding and decoding matched, and that the overall decoding of the participants matched one another. The one exception to this was in a pilot test where the placement of a question asking about if attire was appropriate was directly posed after a question about students being professional. Due to that placement, the participant said that he almost felt as though the question (about attire) was insinuating that appropriate dress attire was professional only. However, this was not meant to be the meaning, as in many work environments, the concept of appropriate attire varies. Therefore, the placement of that question was changed. The participant was happy with that move and no longer had an issue with perception of that question being different than the researcher intended.

A suggestion beyond testing word and term usage to help ensure a higher reliability rate is to avoid giving the respondent an option that will let them avoid answering the question (Fowler, 2009). This is one of the primary reasons that the final scale used in this instrument does not include a non-applicable option, or even a neutral option, further contributing to the reliability of the instrument. Several people in the focus groups and the pilot tests commented about the lack of these options as a middle-ground. An overwhelming majority, however, maintained that to add such an option would probably be detrimental, as sometimes a person simply does not want to take a stand or a side, even though they are able to do so. One participant stated that she “uses the option too much when she just doesn’t want to have to make a choice” and she would highly recommend that it not be added to the instrument. Most agreed.

Appropriateness for the Target Population/Sample

According to the American Evaluation Association’s instrument, to meet guidelines for audience appropriateness, the survey tool must be easily understood by all who take it, lack jargon, and ask simple and direct questions (AEA, 2010). The focus groups discussing the entire instrument (I1 and I2) and the pilots (P1-P4) all reported positive feedback about the appropriateness to the target population. As Kobayashi (2010) stated, the researcher must take careful measures to ensure that everyone in the target population can answer all questions and feel confident in doing so. This means that respondents must not question words or concepts, but, rather, must understand the questions. Focus groups and pilot tests are the best ways to ensure that the instrument is indeed appropriate for the audience intended.

As this particular population has not been targeted in this capacity before, a special effort was made to ensure that the instrument lacked jargon, especially jargon prevalent in public relations. For instance, words like “tactics” or “return on investment” were avoided, functionalized, or defined. This happened with the help of several of the participants in the early focus groups. These are just two examples, but thorough measures were taken to ensure that words did not confuse the respondents.

The questions on this survey are direct, simple, and have been reduced when at all possible. This survey could be a good model for those doing like evaluation for other student groups working with clients (art, marketing, etc.), as the avoidance of public relations terms makes it potentially adaptable to like circumstances.

Instructions

Instructions should “summarize the purpose of your survey project” and “let respondents know exactly what you want them to do” (Thomas, 2004, p. 68). Dillman (2000) contended that instructions should be placed exactly where they are needed and not all at the beginning of the questionnaire. This advice was used, and the instructions received very good marks from the focus groups that evaluated the entire instrument as well as those who pilot tested the instrument. By placing sets of instructions at the top of each respective section, a very clear and organized picture is presented to respondents.

The only negative comments regarding instructions were about the anonymity section, which evolved tremendously. Anonymity was not even mentioned at first, then it was mentioned with a lengthy explanation (of how the results would not be directly shared with students, but that the instructor would compile the results anonymously from clients, peers, and the advisor to be articulated to the students by the advisor), to a statement saying that the comments will not be directly shared unless the respondent gives permission for them to be shared. The fact that an anonymity statement was first missing was viewed negatively by the groups. The initial statement addressing the issue was viewed as long and cumbersome and very confusing. The final revision somewhat limits what the advisor can do with the survey if the respondent does not wish for it to be shared, but this is almost a necessity, according to the participants, as future respondents will not be likely to answer honestly otherwise.

After careful thought and thorough review, the researcher felt it necessary to address the issue, and to allow the client to opt-out of having the results shared with the students. Taking not only client satisfaction, but systems improvement very seriously, nothing will be gained in constructing and using this instrument if the clients do not feel that they can be honest. Every attempt must be made to ensure that this instrument will be used correctly.

The rest of the directions (those found as a preface, and those there are above each respective section) were received very well. One pilot participant commented that they were perfectly situated and articulated to get her train of thought going correctly; another noted that with the clarity of the survey itself, the instructions were not even really needed.

Appearance

Regarding overall appearance, “questionnaires that are sloppily constructed or contain questions that are difficult to understand . . . suggest that a questionnaire is relatively unimportant" (Dillman, 2000, p. 20). For this reason, among others, the appearance of this survey was taken extremely seriously. This look was complemented by interesting cover pages, both front and back, as Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) contented that they should be designed to appeal to respondents. The use of pictures and a clear and concise title accented said pages. Participants did not seem to spend an abundance of time reviewing these pages, but, according to the participants, the pages made an overall positive impression due to the professional look.

The design of survey instruments should make the task of reading questions, following instructions, and recording answers as easy as possible for interviewers and respondents (Fowler, 1995). Ideally, questionnaires should use brevity, have attractive appeal, and provide an ease for response (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). These criteria, too, were met in this instrument. One pilot test participant commented on how quickly the scale questions could be answered due to the design, directness, and brevity. This, as Dillman (2000) described, is actually a way to minimize a cost, or the respondent's time, associated with answering the survey. The instrument set-up must be scrupulous so that it is easy for participants to navigate. The navigational path, as described by Fowler (2009), helps respondents to correctly react to written information. The participants, when taking this survey, were so confident in the navigational path that many did not even fully read the instructions, as they commented that it seemed quite evident as to what they were expected to do.

Dillman (2000) claimed that a researcher must use social exchange as a theory in guiding the construction of the survey. One thing in particular that he mentioned is that one will expect a reward that will outweigh the cost when completing a survey. As mentioned above, time can be considered a cost. This statement has much to do with the design of the instrument as well. Dillman listed what respondents consider rewards, many of which are intrinsic. In this tool, the researcher illustrated how valuable this evaluation will be for future clients and students. This was placed in a prominent position, with eye-catching text, illustrated by pictures. The survey states "The information you provide will improve our overall process and direct the way that we teach and prepare our students. Your input is valued!" This helps to build the intrinsic value of engaging in response of such an instrument. Furthermore, Dillman (2000) stated that trust must be established for a respondent to truly believe such a statement. One way to meet this criterion is to have the survey originating from a legitimate authority. As this survey originates from, and has several references to, the academic advisor of Top Dog Communication, that need is met. It should also be apparent and obvious from previous contact throughout the duration of the project that the advisor is the decision-maker of the course, and can implement changes as suggestions warrant.

As already mentioned, a respondent's time is one cost associated with partaking in the instrument (Fowler, 2009). Due to focus group feedback, time-markers were added to this survey. Once a respondent sees that he or she only took three minutes to complete the first section, the remaining sections should not feel as daunting. Also, this helps the respondent know where he or she is in the process, encouraging them to continue. The markers do not encroach on the appearance of the survey, but they nicely add to the usability.

Layout and Order of the Questions

"Development of a valid questionnaire requires both skill and time" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 178). Layout and order of the questions, as described by the American Evaluation Association (2010), pertains to the logical sequence of the questions and if said questions are free of influence from earlier questions. The order of the questions themselves must be logical (Thomas, 2004). Furthermore, the order of the sections is also important here, as is the containment of each of those sections on one page. Questions must not appear disconnected from one another, but, rather, must flow logically to the respondent (Dillman, 2000). To help clarify, a questionnaire is sort of like a conversation and must mold to expected norms. "Constantly switching topics makes it appear that the questioner is not listening to the respondent's answers" (p. 87).

"Identifying sub-areas of the research topic can greatly help in developing the questionnaire" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 178). Sections, however, are not meant to disrupt the flow of the information. It is suggested to number questions "consecutively and simply, from beginning to end" (Dillman, 2000, p. 115) to keep consistency. Fowler (2009) stated that the beginning of each section should be identified, in a consistent way, throughout the survey. The aforementioned criteria were met in this survey, and surely contributed to the overall high scores that this section received from the focus group and pilot test participants.

The order of the questions within the sections was almost left untouched by participants as they evolved. The order of the sections within the survey was found to be favorable overall, but there were two participants who would have changed the section placement.

The finalized survey uses the best and most logical order to display sections of questions. The first section, strategy, is the driving force behind any campaign or public relations project. It needs to be presented first so the respondents can reflect, overall, strategically, from the beginning of the survey. The second section poses questions about project management, which, again, is an overall function of how the implementation of the strategy was perceived by the client. This is a very logical sequence. The third section is narrower, yet on the same cognitive path. Third, the questions about communication tools and tactics are posed. As project management is implementation of strategy, communication tools are the actual artifacts, or elements, that help bring the strategy to fruition. Again, this follows a logical sequence. The next two sections, professional demeanor and communication skills, are aspects that accent the students' abilities to aptly manage the project and to create communication tools. These questions are also more specific as they ask about the students' behavior while in the working relationship. The last section of scale questions, effectiveness of the students' work, is a great recap as it asks overall questions about the students and the client's satisfaction. These are questions that could almost be open-ended format (if re-formatted), but they provide good data, still, as comprehensive scale questions.

Close-Ended Question Wording

The close-ended question wording was seen quite positively. This could be attributed to the meticulous measures that were taken in the first eight focus group (T1-T3 and Q1-Q5) to establish the correct questions and to ask them in the most appropriate way possible. By the time that these questions were inserted into the instrument, much had been done to ensure that they were well done. Fowler (1995) shared that the "strength of survey research is asking people about their first-hand experiences" (p. 103). He also stated that designing questions that "mean the same thing to all respondents, to the extent possible, is high on the list of strategies for creating good measurement of subjective states" (p. 77). The questions indeed met these criteria and these issues have already been discussed.

Fowler (2009) added that the first question of the survey sets the tone for the respondent's willingness to complete the questionnaire. Furthermore, that first question should be applicable to anyone who will be taking the survey, as it should try to reflect the purpose of the questionnaire. As seen in this finished survey instrument, the first question asks if students understood the mission of the client's organization. This is at the heart of the project, as students can not aptly work for an organization if they do not understand the cause and the stance of said organization. This question sets a positive tone, from the beginning of the evaluation process, by asking something that is highly important to all clients.

Double-barreled questions are also to be avoided as stated by Fowler (1995) and Dillman (2000). Double-barreled questions ask more than one question at a time. All but one double-barreled question was caught and edited previous to the instrumentation focus groups (I1 and I2). Participants commented on how well this survey did at avoiding such questions, but both instrumentation groups pointed out that one question was still a double-barreled question. The researcher reconstructed the final double-barreled question to satisfaction.

"A survey question should be worded so that every respondent is answering the same question" (Fowler, 1995, p. 103). This must be touched upon again, although already thoroughly covered above in the reliability section. The respondents talked through the questions and all seemed to have the exact same perception about what each question was asking. Words like "ample" aided positively toward this process. For instance, what is an ample amount of communication to one client may not be the same to another due to project issues. However, by asking if an "ample" amount was used, this brings the question to a consistent place for all respondents—what was ample for them and their respective project. Another example of this was the word "appropriate" when used in accordance with dress standards. This word allows all clients to gauge what is indeed appropriate for the given situation and to answer accordingly. These differences are primarily based on meeting places, and the expected dress of the employees at the client's organization. As discussed above, the question placement of this question was originally problematic, as it led one person that pilot tested the instrument to think that appropriate had to mean professional. After the movement of said question, the participant agreed that this question was indeed good and that he would then infer what "appropriate" meant to him and answer accordingly.

In survey construction, askance occurs when questions have a negative or a positive connotation. In these cases, the stimuli (the negative or positive words) are seen as leading in many cases (Fowler, 1995). Questions must ask, as straightforward and simply as possible, about the respondent's feelings, without trying to direct answers. An effort was made, throughout this entire process, to make all questions consistent. For instance, adjectives such as “very” were removed. Also, if a positive word had to be used, it was a consistent “good” rather than “great” or any other word that may seem more positive.

Questions that are perceived as duplicates frustrate respondents as they sense that their investment of time is not being used properly (Dillman, 2000). The process to minimize all perceived duplicates was quite meticulous. Notes were taken in focus groups, audio tapes were reviewed, and several questions, as seen in the evolution tables, were discarded throughout this process. Participants felt that some questions were asking for the same information. The question that was kept was the one that did a better job (as noted by participants) of asking what was being searched for. In some instances, the question was edited a bit to make sure that the full essence was captured. Many notes in the aforementioned tables state that a question was withdrawn for this reason of perceived duplication. Participants in seven different focus groups (Q1-Q5 and I1-I2) had fruitful discussion about this issue of question duplication, helping tremendously in the evolution of these questions toward the final survey construction. By the time that these questions were pilot tested, no duplicates were noted.

Answer Options for Closed-Ended Questions

Fowler (1995) stated that a clear continuum must be used for all surveys, allowing respondents a reasonable place to put themselves. There should be a balance in the agree and disagree items (Thomas, 2004). Furthermore, placing Xs in boxes is a very desirable way to answer questions (Dillman, 2000). The scales must have specified meanings that should be repeated and made clear on each relevant section. Using similarity and color to help the respondent identify like groupings is a solid approach.

Using the above criteria, a four-point scale was chosen, balanced with negative and positive options, (which the respondents answer by putting an "X" in a box) using consistently labeled color-coded answer options. A comment was inserted in to the directions inviting respondents to leave a question unanswered if it was absolutely necessary. The intent of this sentence was to pacify those who may not be comfortable skipping a non-applicable question.

The scale was graded positively by the focus group discussing the instrument (I1 and I2) and by the pilot test participants (P1-P4). Furthermore, the open-ended question at the end of each section also invites respondents to expand if there is an unanswerable question. With these build-in measures, one has a way to forgo answering, but, at the same time, is not viewing an option allowing them (and potentially encouraging them) to do so. The majority of those that discussed this scale felt that it was the correct choice. One participant even commented that she loved the scale and will begin using it herself.

Open-Ended Questions

Many open-ended questions often begin with a hypothetical. Hypothetical situations should be avoided, per Fowler (1995). However, a point of reference is a good thing to include when wording open-ended questions to help the participant's thought process begin (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Fowler (2009) stated that the "way to keep motivation for these questions high is to ask them sparingly and only for important topics about which descriptive information is necessary" (p. 114). The open-ended questions in this survey were carefully thought through and were discussed at length with participants. The questions retained needed to be posed in this format, as the best way to collect data about the particular information was indeed an open-ended question. Scale questions could not provide the rich data needed in these instances. The only issue that kept arising with the open-ended questions was that the ones found at the end of each section could be forgone or not answered by the respondent. However, this was the intent of the researcher, as, if the respondent had no more information to share, the questions should be skipped. Regarding the truly open-ended questions at the end of the instrument, they were seen as good questions that will provide needed data. For instance, it would not be advantageous to use multiple scale questions asking if every imaginable communication tool will be used by the client, yet, students could construct certain tactics better than others on a regular basis. Such a finding could guide classroom discussions to refine knowledge of tactics that are not chosen to be used by clients.

Distribution

Although not a section of the AEA instrument, it is important that distribution be discussed, as the researcher’s hope is that this instrument will be adapted and used nationally.

There are typical ways in which a survey can be administered. These include mail, e-mail, telephone, personal administration, interview, and web-based survey tools such as SurveyMonkey or Zoomerang (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). This particular instrument will be e-mailed as an attachment, by the researcher. A black and white version will also be included for printing purposes if a respondent wishes to complete the instrument on the hard copy form and fax it back. The colors make the instrument, if printed in black and white, unreadable in places. The areas that require written responses will actually be expandable, as this is a Word document that is intended to be workable. It should be noted that each advisor should administer the instrument as best for his or her intended respondents. The tool is easily maneuvered into different formats, even to a web-based tool. If this is done, the visual appeal will be altered, as most web-based instruments simply ask the questions and do not allow picture uploads. However, the questions and the scale could still be imported and used as an advisor wishes. The researcher advises that if a web-based instrument is used, an appeal needs to be made in the e-mail with the link to the instrument as to why participation is important. This relates back to the cost versus investment issue already discussed.

As already stated, this is a fully flushed-out model originating from the University of Indianapolis. Some verbiage, the logos, the seal, the contact information, and the pictures can easily be changed for use by others. The model, however, provides a good visual representation of what the finished document would look like once altered by others. The researcher felt that it was important to illustrate the potential visual appeal (rather than just using space holders for pictures and other information), as, stated above, the appearance is indeed an important aspect of actuating respondents to complete the survey.

Limitations of the Study

For this study, qualitative research was utilized to generate a survey to ascertain satisfaction of clients of student-run firms and other client-based work occurring in public relations courses. Using an inductive approach, data were analyzed in context, rather than viewed from a theoretical basis. This inductive approach strives to condense lengthy, raw data into a brief, usable format (Thomas, 2006). Furthermore, it can be utilized to develop a model via the raw data. Usually, between three and eight main categories emerge in this approach. In this study, the focus groups elicited much information, and the information, formed into themes (or categories) and then into questions, were used to construct a model (or a survey) based on the initial raw data. This approach can present limitations (Wong, Reker, & Peacock, 2006). Specifically, themes found can sometimes “lack in generality” (p. 12). Therefore, the survey tool may not be as generalizable as the themes are coming from a purposive sample. In this case, the professionals supplying input for the evaluative tool were primarily from the Indianapolis area. This could have allowed demographic bias or bias of values, beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors (psychographic bias) to enter the study. Also, as with qualitative research, the input of focus groups to test and improve the questions and the instrument were subject to researcher interpretation, allowing subjectivity or potential error to enter the study (Fowler, 2009). The final limitation was that some of the focus groups were small. Although this allowed for rich discussion, it also limited the number of perspectives that were represented in those groups.

Recommendations for Use and Future Research

As public relations education evolves, so too must the general thinking that where a public relations program is placed within an academic school or department is an important issue of debate. Placement should become a moot conversation piece if applied courses and firms are used to supplement students' educational endeavors in public relations. These courses and firms can aid in giving students the experience in business, management, communication, tactical work, strategy, psychology of working with clients, and many other areas that could otherwise be lacking. These courses and firms are systems and must be evaluated as such to ensure system survival as Bertalanffy (2009) described. The survey constructed in this study is an outcome evaluation that can be (and should be) used in such a system. As this tool is now a solid measurement of client satisfaction of public relations student-run firms or project-based client work, it can be used to ensure a feedback loop that did not sufficiently exist before. If adopted nationally, these surveys can actually benefit public relations education. Educators can begin discussions about what their firms or courses score well on, and educate others about how they teach such elements. Effectively, public relations education could be furthered by use of this instrument, consistently, as standardized data would exist that has never existed before. If public relations educators begin to utilize this instrument, and share pedagogical practices based on the results, advancements can be made.

On a more local level, if this instrument is adopted and used by individual educators, improvements can be made to their own respective programs due to client feedback. This survey, when taken by clients, provides detail that may not have existed before and should improve processes of the individual system.

The researcher's recommendation for future research includes planning for an evaluative tool to be constructed to gauge outcomes. In a system such as an applied course or a firm, inputs, throughputs, outputs, and outcomes, all need evaluated (and feedback loops must exist) to ensure survival and growth of the system (Bertalanffy, 2009). With creation of this instrument, inputs, throughputs, and outputs can all be evaluated properly. Outcomes are the intended results of the system (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006). Although a direct result of outputs, outcomes are the effect that the outputs had on the external environment. Output evaluation must also be pursued with partnership of former clients, but it has to be done when enough time has lapsed to gauge outcomes, or the effect that the student work has had on the organization. Once this evaluative measure is created, ensuring the final feedback loop, total system improvement can be made. Output evaluation may not be able to be assessed for years after a given project, therefore, planning for such a survey will be much different than the process used to construct this instrument. The researcher learned much about preparing and conducting focus groups and this knowledge will undoubtedly help in the creation of the next survey tool to assess outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

Tables Illustrating Themes that Emerged in Round One of Focus Groups (Theme Finding); Organized by Original Theme

Table 2.1

Tactical Work Themes that Emerged in the First Round of Focus Groups (T1-T3)

Q1. What should be asked on an evaluation measuring client satisfaction as it pertains to work by student-run public relations firms or public relations courses performing client work?

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
T1	Knowledge of toolbox	1, 2, 3	20
T2	Professional writing	1, 2, 3	18
T3	Professional design	1, 2, 3	19
T4	Usable work--professional caliber	1, 2, 3	
T5	Generate new tactics	1, 2, 3	
T6	AP style	1, 2	
T7	Work equal to a professional firm	1, 2, 3	
T8	Creativity/out of the box	1, 2, 3	21
T9	Way to evaluate	1, 2, 3	

Table 2.2

Professionalism Themes that Emerged in the First Round of Focus Groups (T1-T3)

Q1. What should be asked on an evaluation measuring client satisfaction as it pertains to work by student-run public relations firms or public relations courses performing client work?

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
P1	Criticism (ability to take)	1, 2, 3	23
P2	Keeping in contact	1, 2, 3	
P3	Disagreement style	1, 2, 3	
P4	Demeanor	1, 2, 3	
P5	Timeliness	1, 2, 3	26
P6	Knowledge of current events	1, 2	
P7	Adaptability	1, 3	12
P8	Flexibility	1, 2, 3	
P9	Comfort-level projected	1, 2, 3	13
P10	Thinking on feet	1, 2, 3	25
P11	Ability to network	1, 2, 3	
P12	Attire	1, 2, 3	27
P13	Work ethic	1, 2, 3	42
P14	Act like a professional	1, 2, 3	24

(continues)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
P15	Ability to meet deadlines	1, 2, 3	11
P16	Ability to work independently for long periods at a time	2, 3	41
P17	Confidence	2, 3	
P18	Professional courtesies	2, 3	
P19	Overall positive professional impression	2, 3	
P20	Organization	2, 3	16

Table 2.3

Communication Themes that Emerged in the First Round of Focus Groups (T1-T3)

Q1. What should be asked on an evaluation measuring client satisfaction as it pertains to work by student-run public relations firms or public relations courses performing client work?

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
C1	E-mail not in text ease/emoticons	1, 2, 3	32
C2	Can talk on the phone	1, 2, 3	33
C3	Able to articulate ideas--written and verbal	1, 2, 3	31
C4	Listening	1, 3	29, 15
C5	Communication-frequency	1, 2, 3	35
C6	Communication-quality	1, 2, 3	34
C7	Interpersonal skills	1, 2, 3	37
C8	Team communication	1, 2, 3	
C9	Illustrate ability to write in different writing styles	1, 3	38

(continues)

Table 2.3 (continued)

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
C10	Able to collaborate with others that are not directly related with the project	1, 3	39
C11	Ability to fact-find and ask appropriate questions	1, 3	14, 36
C12	They are engaging	2, 3	

Table 2.4

Strategy Themes that Emerged in the First Round of Focus Groups (T1-T3)

Q1. What should be asked on an evaluation measuring client satisfaction as it pertains to work by student-run public relations firms or public relations courses performing client work?

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
S1	Understand culture and values	1, 3	6, 7
S2	Strategic direction	1, 2, 3	3
S3	Implementability	1, 2, 3	50
S4	Good advice/council toward "big picture"	1, 2, 3	
S5	Met objectives	1, 2, 3	
S6	Observable results/outcomes	1, 2, 3	10
S7	Research	1, 2, 3	
S8	Understand ultimate business goal	1, 3	5
S9	Understand mission	1, 2, 3	
S10	Measurable objectives	1, 2, 3	
S11	Adding a different perspective	1, 2, 3	

(continues)

Table 2.4 (continued)

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
S12	Critical thinking	1, 2, 3	4
S13	Understanding of budget constraints in planning process	2, 3	9

Table 2.5

Themes About Overall Performance and Experience that Emerged in the First Round of Focus Groups (T1-T3)

Q1. What should be asked on an evaluation measuring client satisfaction as it pertains to work by student-run public relations firms or public relations courses performing client work?

Categories of themes	Aspects of themes mentioned with prevalence in at least two groups	Groups in which this aspect occurred with prevalence	Number on survey category evolved to
Overall			
O1	Would you recommend Top Dog?	1, 2, 3	44
O2	Would you hire these students?	1, 2, 3	
O3	Did we accomplish your goal?	1, 2, 3	43
O4	Confidence in dealing with all in group; not just the manager	2, 3	
O5	Will the students be well-prepared after graduation?	2, 3	
O6	Are you better off for having had the group's help?	2, 3	45

APPENDIX B

Tables Illustrating Question Evolution from the First Three Focus Groups in the Second Round (Question Refinement); Organized by Original Theme

Table 3.1

Question Evolution of Tactical Themes

Evolution of questions from original themes found in the first round of focus groups to and including the first four focus groups on question refinement.

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1- Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
T1	Knowledge of toolbox	The group knew of many different kinds of tactics/ideas to meet the objective	The group knew of many different kinds of tactics/ideas to meet the objective	The group knew of many different kinds of tactics/ideas to meet the objective
T2	Professional writing	The writing was equal to that of a professional firm	The writing was professional quality	The writing was professional quality
T3	Professional design	The design was equal to that of a professional firm	The design was professional quality	The design was professional quality
T4	Usable work--professional caliber	All work done for my organization will be used	The work will be used by my organization	The work will be used by my organization
T5	Generate new tactics	The group came up with new tactics/tools that had not yet been done or discussed	The group came up with new tactics/tools that had not yet been used or discussed by our organization	The group came up with new tactics/tools that had not yet been used or discussed by our organization

(continues)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
T6	AP style	Withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; instructor assessment		
T7	Work equal to a professional firm	The work was equal to that of a professional firm	Withdrawn; measured by T2, T3	
T8	Creativity/out of the box	The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or "out-of-the-box" thinking	The tactics that were created showed a high level of creativity or "out-of-the-box" thinking	The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or "out-of-the-box" thinking
T9	Way to evaluate	I am able to measure results of the communication tools once implemented	The tools/tactics included a way to measure their effectiveness	Withdrawn; measured by S6

Table 3.2

Question Evolution of Professional Themes

Evolution of questions from original themes found in the first round of focus groups to and including the first four focus groups on question refinement.

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
P1	Criticism (ability to take)	The team handled criticism professionally	The team handled criticism professionally	The team handled criticism professionally
P2	Keeping in contact	They were good about staying in contact	Withdrawn; measured by C5, C6	
P3	Disagreement style	The team was able to represent their side of an idea well when in discussions	The team was able to represent their side of an idea well when in discussions	The team was able to represent their side of an idea well when in discussions
P4	Demeanor	The group had a professional demeanor	The group had a professional demeanor	The group had a professional demeanor
P5	Timeliness	The team was punctual/timely	The team was punctual/timely	The team was punctual/timely
P6	Knowledge of current events	Withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; instructor assessment		

(continues)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
P7	Adaptability	They were adaptable in situations that required adaptability	They were adaptable when needed	They were adaptable in situations when needed
P8	Flexibility	They were flexible in situations that required flexibility	Withdrawn; measured by P1, P7, C4	
P9	Comfort-level projected	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand
P10	Thinking on feet	They were able to think quickly and “on their feet”	They were able to think quickly and “on their feet”	They were able to think quickly and “on their feet” in discussions
P11	Ability to network	Overall, I think that the team members would be able to network well professionally	Withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; instructor and peer assessment	

(continues)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
P12	Attire	The team dressed appropriately	The team dressed appropriately	The team dressed appropriately
P13	Work ethic	The team had a good work ethic	The team had a good work ethic	The team had a good work ethic
		The team was proactive	The team was proactive	The team was proactive
P14	Act like a professional	I was/would be comfortable with the team representing my organization to others beyond my organization	Withdrawn; other question to measure the same aspect was better received	
		The team was as professional as the rest of the staff/employees at my organization and other individuals that I have worked with	Withdrawn; other question to measure the same aspect was better received	
		The team understood business culture	The team understood business culture	The team understood business culture

(continues)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
P15	Ability to meet deadlines	The team met all deadlines	The team met deadlines	The team met deadlines
		The team did well with time management	The team did well with time management	The team did well with time management
		They were able to effectively multi-task	They were able to effectively multi-task	Withdrawn; other questions to measure the same aspect were better received
P16	Ability to work independently for long periods at a time	The team was able move the project forward independently for periods at a time without constant guidance	The team was able to move the project forward independently for periods at a time without constant guidance	The team was able to move the project forward independently for periods at a time without constant guidance
P17	Confidence	The team seemed confident	The team seemed confident	The team seemed confident
P18	Professional courtesies	The team knew and used professional courtesies	Withdrawn; overall measure assessed by other questions combined	

(continues)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
P19	Overall positive professional impression	I had an overall positive impression of the professionalism of the team	Withdrawn; overall measure assessed by several other questions combined	
P20	Organization	They kept the project highly organized	They kept the project highly organized	They kept the project highly organized

Table 3.3

Question Evolution of Communication Skill Themes

Evolution of questions from original themes found in the first round of focus groups to and including the first four focus groups on question refinement.

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
C1	E-mail not in text ease/emoticons	The e-mails that I received were well-written	The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written	The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written
C2	Can talk on the phone	The phone conversations that I had with team members were conducted well	The phone conversations that I had with team members were well-conducted	The phone conversations that I had with team members were well-conducted
C3	Able to articulate ideas-written and verbal	They were able to articulate ideas verbally	They were able to articulate ideas verbally	They were able to articulate ideas verbally
		They were able to articulate ideas through their writing	They were able to articulate ideas through their writing	They were able to articulate ideas through their writing
			The final project was nicely packaged and understandable	The final project was nicely packaged and understandable

(continues)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
C4	Listening	The group listened well	The group listened well	The group listened well
		The group acted upon my suggestions	The group acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why well	The group acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why to my satisfaction
C5	Communication-frequency	There was an appropriate frequency of communication	They met my expectations regarding frequency of communication	They met my expectations regarding frequency of communication
		I knew what the group was doing at any given point in time	I knew what the group was doing with the project at any given point in time	I knew what the group was doing with the project at any given point in time
C6	Communication-quality	The quality of the project updates was good	The quality of the project updates was good	The quality of the project updates was good
C7	Interpersonal skills	The overall interpersonal skills of the group were good	The overall interpersonal skills of the group were good	The overall interpersonal skills of the group were good

(continues)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
C8	Team communication	There seemed to be good communication between all of the team members	There seemed to be good communication between all of the team members	There seemed to be good communication between all of the team members
		The group had strong leadership		
C9	Illustrate ability to write in different writing styles	The group can write well in a variety of different writing styles	The group can write well in a variety of different writing styles….contexts …tones	The group can write well in a variety of different writing styles/contexts/ tones
C10	Able to collaborate with others that aren't directly related with the project	They collaborated well with others not directly involved with the project when necessary	They collaborated well with others not directly involved with the project when necessary	They collaborated well with others not directly involved with the project when necessary
C11	Ability to fact-find and ask appropriate questions	The group was able to fact-find well	The group was able to fact-find well	The group was able to fact-find well
		The group asked appropriate questions	The group asked me good questions	The group asked me good questions

(continues)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
C12	They are engaging	The students are engaging	Withdrawn; not relevant for student assessment	

Table 3.4

Question Evolution of Strategic Themes

Evolution of questions from original themes found in the first round of focus groups to and including the first four focus groups on question refinement.

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
S1	Understand culture and values	The group understood the culture/values of my organization	Withdrawn; aspect better measured with other option which also proves application	
		They understood our message/voice	They understood the “sound and look” that we wanted our materials to have	They understood the “sound and look” that we wanted our materials to have
S2	Strategic direction	They provided strategic direction	They provided strategic direction	They provided strategic direction
		Most of the ideas from this campaign originated from the team and were not suggestions from me	Withdrawn; aspect better measured with other option which also proves application	

(continues)

Table 3.4 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
S3	Implement-ability	The project had the ability to be implemented and used	The project had the ability to be implemented and used	The project had the ability to be implemented and used
S4	Good advice/council toward "big picture"	They provided good advice/council toward the “big picture”	Withdrawn; measured by S3, S8, S9	
S5	Met objectives	They met their objective	They met their objective or had things on track so that the objective could be met at a later date	They met their objective or had things on track so that the objective could be met at a later date
S6	Observable Results/ outcomes	They implemented a way to measure their success	The project had a built-in way to measure success	The team built-in a way to measure the success of the project
S7	Research	It was evident in the early meetings that they had researched the organization	It was evident from the onset that they had researched my organization	It was evident from the onset that they had researched my organization

(continues)

Table 3.4 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
S7 cont.	Research	The group seemed to have researched the project well	Withdrawn; question is answered by many elsewhere about client satisfaction with project	
S8	Understand ultimate business goal	They seem to have understood the ultimate business goal	They seem to have understood how this project related to the ultimate business goal	They seem to have understood how this project related to our ultimate business goal
S9	Understand mission	They understood the mission of my organization	They understood the mission of my organization	They understood the mission of my organization
S10	Measurable objectives	The project had a measurable outcome	Withdrawn; measured by S6	
S11	Adding a different perspective	They added a different perspective to our organization	They added a fresh perspective to our organization	They added a fresh perspective to our organization
S12	Critical thinking	They had strong critical thinking skills	They had strong critical thinking skills	They had strong critical thinking skills

(continues)

Table 3.4 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
S12 cont.	Critical thinking	The students left no evident holes in the campaign	The students left no evident holes in the campaign	The students left no evident holes in the campaign
S13	Understanding of budget constraints in planning process	unintentionally fell off	The students understood and took budget constraints into account	The students understood and took budget constraints into account

Table 3.5

Question Evolution of Overall Performance and Experience Themes

Evolution of questions from original themes found in the first round of focus groups to and including the first four focus groups on question refinement.

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
O1	Would you recommend Top Dog?	You would recommend Top Dog to other clients	You would recommend Top Dog to other clients	I would recommend this student group to other clients
		You would work with Top Dog again	Withdrawn; inferred that one would not recommend to others if they would not participate. Recommending was seen as more critical and better to measure.	
O2	Would you hire these people?	Hypothetically, you would hire your group members for an entry-level position	Hypothetically, you would hire your group members for an entry-level position	Withdrawn; measured by OE3 as a better-received open-ended question

(continues)

Table 3.5 (continued)

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
O3	Did we accomplish your goal?	The project was well done	The project was well done	The project was well done
O4	Confidence in dealing with all in group; not just the manager	You would be comfortable dealing with all group members and not just the manager	You would be comfortable dealing with all group members and not just the manager	I would be comfortable dealing with all group members and not just the manager
O5	Will the students be well-prepared after graduation?	The students will be well-prepared after graduation	The students will be well-prepared after graduation	Withdrawn; implies in all areas rather than specific to public relations
		You would predict that the members would have a good future in public relations	You would predict that the members would have a good future in public relations	I would predict that these students would have a good future in public relations
O6	Are you better off for having had our help?	We left your organization better than we found it	We left your organization better than we found it	The group had a positive impact on my organization

Table 3.6

Question Evolution of Open-Ended Questions

Evolution of questions from original themes found in the first round of focus groups to and including the first four focus groups on question refinement.

Category	Prominent aspects from groups T1-T3	Original questions used in groups Q1-Q3, based on themes from T1-T3	Questions used in group Q4, based on revisions from Q1-Q3	Questions resulting from group Q4, before revision based on additional audio review of groups Q1-Q4 and scholarly research
OE1		What three words would you use to describe Top Dog Communication?	What three words would you use to describe Top Dog Communication?	What three words would you use to describe us?
OE2		What words of advice would you have for improvement?	What words of advice would you have for improvement?	What words of advice would you offer for improvement?
OE3			Who stood out in this group? Why?	Hypothetically, would you hire any of your group members for an entry-level position? Which one(s) and why?
OE4			In general, please explain your experience with Top Dog, either negative or positive	In general, please explain your experience with us, either positive or negative

APPENDIX C

Tables Illustrating Question Evolution from the Last Focus Groups in the Second Round (Question Refinement) to the First Pilot Test; Organized by Original Theme

Table 4.1

Question Evolution of Tactical Themes, Continued

Evolution of questions as posed to the final question refinement group, throughout the instrumentation review groups, and up to the first pilot test.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
T1	Knowledge of toolbox	They were aware of many different kinds of tactics/ideas to meet the objective	They were aware of many different tactics/ideas to meet the objective	They suggested an ample amount of different tactics/ideas to meet the objective
T2	Professional writing	The writing was professional quality	The writing was professional quality	The writing was professional quality
T3	Professional design	The design was professional quality	The design was professional quality	The design was professional quality
T4	Usable work--professional caliber	Withdrawn; measured by T2, T3, S3		
T5	Generate new tactics	They developed new tools that had not yet been used by us	Withdrawn; measured by T1, T8, O6	

(continues)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
T6	AP style	Previously withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; instructor assessment		
T7	Work equal to a professional firm	Previously withdrawn; measured by T2, T3		
T8	Creativity/out of the box	The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or “out-of-the-box” thinking	The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or “out-of-the-box” thinking	The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or “out-of-the-box” thinking if appropriate
T9	Way to evaluate	Previously withdrawn; measured by S6		

Table 4.2

Question Evolution of Professional Themes, Continued

Evolution of questions as posed to the final question refinement group, throughout the instrumentation review groups, and up to the first pilot test.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
P1	Criticism (ability to take)	They handled criticism professionally	They handled criticism professionally	They handled criticism professionally
P2	Keeping in contact	Previously withdrawn; measured by C5, C6		
P3	Disagreement style	They were able to represent their side of an idea well when in discussions	They were able to represent their side of an idea well when in discussions	Withdrawn; measured by P1, C3
P4	Demeanor	They had a professional demeanor	Withdrawn; overall measure assessed by several other questions combined	
P5	Timeliness	They were punctual/timely	They were punctual	They were punctual

(continues)

Table 4.2 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
P6	Knowledge of current events	Previously withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; instructor assessment		
P7	Adaptability	They were adaptable in situations when needed	They were adaptable in situations when needed	They were adaptable in situations when needed
P8	Flexibility	Previously withdrawn; measured by P1, P7, C4		
P9	Comfort-level projected	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand
P10	Thinking on feet	They were able to think quickly and “on their feet” in discussions	They were able to think “on their feet” in discussions	They were able to think “on their feet” in discussions

(continues)

Table 4.2 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
P11	Ability to network	Withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; instructor and peer assessment		
P12	Attire	They dressed appropriately	They dressed appropriately	They dressed appropriately
P13	Work ethic	They had a good work ethic	They had a good work ethic	They had a good work ethic
P14	Act like a professional	They understood business culture	They understood the professional expectations of business culture	They understood the professional expectations of business culture
P15	Ability to meet deadlines	They were good at meeting deadlines	Withdrawn; other option to measure this aspect was more encompassing	They met deadlines
		They managed time well	They managed time well	Withdrawn; clients may not be able to gauge time management

(continues)

Table 4.2 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
P16	Ability to work independently for long periods at a time	They worked well independently	They worked well independently	They worked well independently
P17	Confidence	They seemed confident	Withdrawn; assessed as a negative attribute in instances; measured overall by various questions elsewhere from client perspective	
P18	Professional courtesies	Previously withdrawn; measure assessed by several questions combined		
P19	Overall positive professional impression	Previously withdrawn; measure assessed by several questions combined		

(continues)

Table 4.2 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
P20	Organization	The project was highly organized	The project was well organized	The project was well organized

Table 4.3

Question Evolution of Communication Skill Themes, Continued

Evolution of questions as posed to the final question refinement group, throughout the instrumentation review groups, and up to the first pilot test.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
C1	E-mail not in text ease/emoticons	The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written	The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written	The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written
C2	Can talk on the phone	Telephone conversations were well-conducted	Telephone conversations were well-conducted	Telephone conversations were well-conducted
C3	Able to articulate ideas- written and verbal	They were able to articulate ideas verbally	They were able to articulate ideas verbally	They were able to articulate ideas verbally
		They were able to articulate ideas through their writing	They were able to articulate ideas through their writing	They were able to articulate ideas through their writing
		The final package was nicely packaged	Withdrawn; measured by T2, T3	

(continues)

Table 4.3 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
C4	Listening	They listened well They acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why to my satisfaction	They listened well They acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why to my satisfaction	They listened well They acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why to my satisfaction
C5	Communication -frequency	The frequency of communication met my expectations	The frequency of communication met my expectations	The frequency of the project updates met my expectations
C6	Communication -quality	The project updates were good quality	The project updates were good quality	The project updates were good quality
C7	Interpersonal skills	They had good interpersonal communication skills	They had good interpersonal communication skills	They had good interpersonal communication skills
C8	Team communication	They communicated well with one another	Withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; peer assessment	

(continues)

Table 4.3 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
C9	Illustrate ability to write in different writing styles	They write well in a variety of different writing styles/contexts/ tones	They wrote well in a variety of different writing styles/contexts/ tones	They wrote well in a variety of different writing styles/contexts/ Tones
C10	Able to collaborate with others that aren't directly related with the project	They collaborated well with others not directly involved with the project when necessary	When necessary, they collaborated well with others beyond you about the project	When necessary, they collaborated well with others beyond you about the project
C11	Ability to fact-find and ask appropriate questions	They were able to fact-find well They asked good questions	They were able to fact-find well They asked good questions	They were able to find answers needed to keep the project progressing well They asked good questions
C12	They are engaging	Previously withdrawn; not relevant for student assessment		

Table 4.4

Question Evolution of Strategic Themes, Continued

Evolution of questions as posed to the final question refinement group, throughout the instrumentation review groups, and up to the first pilot test.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
S1	Understand culture and values	They understood the “sound and look” that we wanted our materials to have	They understood the messaging and the look that we wanted our materials to have	They understood the messaging that we wanted our materials to have They understood the look that we wanted our materials to have
S2	Strategic direction	They provided strategic direction	They understood the goals and objectives of the project	They understood the goals and objectives of the project
S3	Implement-ability	My organization will use the work created	Our organization will use the work created	What items created by the students will be used?
S4	Good advice/council toward "big picture"	Withdrawn, measured by S3, S8, S9		

(continues)

Table 4.4 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
S5	Met objectives	They met their objective or had things on track so that the objective could be met at a later date	They developed an effective plan to meet the goals and objectives	Withdrawn; instructor assessment if built-in evaluation as mentioned in S6; also measured from client view in O3
S6	Observable Results/ outcomes	An overall evaluation component was included in the plan	An overall evaluation component was included in the plan	An overall evaluation component was included in the plan
S7	Research	They adequately researched my organization	They adequately researched our organization	They adequately researched our organization
S8	Understand ultimate business goal	They understood how this project related to our ultimate business goal	They understood how this project related to our ultimate business goal	They understood how this project related to our ultimate business goal
S9	Understand mission	They understood the mission of my organization	They understood the mission of our organization	They understood the mission of our organization

(continues)

Table 4.4 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
S10	Measurable objectives	Previously withdrawn; measured by S6		
S11	Adding a different perspective	Their plan added a fresh perspective to our organization	Withdrawn; measured by T1, T8, O6	
S12	Critical thinking	The plan was thorough	They developed an effective plan to meet the goals and objectives	They developed an effective plan to meet the goals and objectives
S13	Understanding of budget constraints in planning process	The students understood budget constraints and took them into account	They understood resource constraints and considered them	They understood resource constraints and considered them

Table 4.5

Question Evolution of Overall Performance and Experience Themes, Continued

Evolution of questions as posed to the final question refinement group, throughout the instrumentation review groups, and up to the first pilot test.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
O1	Would you recommend Top Dog?		I would recommend Top Dog Communication to other clients.	I would recommend Top Dog Communication to other clients.
O2	Would you hire these people?	Previously withdrawn; measured by OE3 as a better-received open-ended question		
O3	Did we accomplish your goal?	The project was well done	The project was well done	The project met my expectations
O4	Confidence in dealing with all in group; not just the manager	Withdrawn; unfair to assess as novice students are often used in such groups		

(continues)

Table 4.5 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
O5	Will the students be well-prepared after graduation?	Withdrawn; unable to assess with client survey; instructor assessment		
O6	Are you better off for having had our help?	The group had a positive impact on my organization	The group had a positive impact on my organization	The amount of work and time that I put into this project was worth the work that I received from the students

Table 4.6

Question Evolution of Open-Ended Questions, Continued

Evolution of questions as posed to the final question refinement group, throughout the instrumentation review groups, and up to the first pilot test.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
OE1		What three words would you use to describe Top Dog Communication?	Withdrawn; question not well received	
OE2		What words of advice would do you have for improvement of the project process?	Please reflect upon the process of your project. With those thoughts in mind, how would you improve the project process? Please feel free to discuss any part of the process.	Please reflect upon the process of your project. With those thoughts in mind, how would you improve the project process? Please feel free to discuss any part of the process.

(continues)

Table 4.6 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from revisions due to additional review of focus group Q1-Q4 audios and scholarly research; posed to Q5	Questions resulting from group Q5; used for group I1	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot
OE3		Hypothetically, would you hire any of your group members for an entry-level position? Why or why not?	Hypothetically, would you consider hiring any of the Top Dog Communication students who worked on your project? Why or why not?	Hypothetically, would you consider hiring any of the Top Dog Communication students who worked on your project? Why or why not?
OE4		In general, please describe your experience with Top Dog Communication, either negative or positive	How would you describe your experience with Top Dog Communication?	How would you describe your experience with Top Dog Communication?

APPENDIX D

Tables Illustrating Question Evolution from the First Pilot Test to the Final Instrument Construction; Organized by Original Theme

Table 5.1

Question Evolution of Tactical Themes, Continued 2

Evolution of questions from the ones posed in the first pilot test, to those used on the final instrument.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
T1	Knowledge of toolbox	They suggested an ample amount of different tactics/ideas to meet the objective	They suggested an ample amount of different tactics/ideas to meet the objective	20, communication tools
T2	Professional writing	The writing was professional quality	The writing was professional quality	18, communication tools
T3	Professional design	The design was professional quality	The design was professional quality	19, communication tools
T8	Creativity/out of the box	The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or “out-of-the-box” thinking if appropriate	The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or “out-of-the-box” thinking if appropriate	21, communication tools

Table 5.2

Question Evolution of Professional Themes, Continued 2

Evolution of questions from the ones posed in the first pilot test, to those used on the final instrument.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
P1	Criticism (ability to take)	They handled criticism professionally	They handled criticism professionally	23, professional demeanor
P5	Timeliness	They were punctual	They were punctual	26, professional demeanor
P7	Adaptability	They were adaptable in situations when needed	They were adaptable in situations when needed	12, project management
P9	Comfort-level projected	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand	They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand	13, project management
P10	Thinking on feet	They were able to think “on their feet” in discussions	They were able to think “on their feet” in discussions	25, professional demeanor
P12	Attire	They dressed appropriately	They dressed appropriately	27, professional demeanor
P13	Work ethic	They had a good work ethic	They had a good work ethic	42, effectiveness

(continues)

Table 5.2 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
P14	Act like a professional	They understood the professional expectations of business culture	They understood the professional expectations of business culture	24, professional demeanor
P15	Ability to meet deadlines	They met deadlines Withdrawn; deadlines seen as more public relations related and clients may not be able to gauge time management	They met deadlines	11, project management
P16	Ability to work independently for long periods at a time	They worked well independently	They worked well independently	41, effectiveness
P20	Organization	The project was well organized	The project was well organized	16, project management

Table 5.3

Question Evolution of Communication Skill Themes, Continued 2

Evolution of questions from the ones posed in the first pilot test, to those used on the final instrument.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
C1	E-mail not in text ease/emoticons	The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written	The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written	32, communication skills
C2	Can talk on the phone	Telephone conversations were well-conducted	Telephone conversations were well-conducted	33, communication skills
C3	Able to articulate ideas-written and verbal	They were able to articulate ideas verbally	They were able to articulate ideas verbally	30, communication skills
		They were able to articulate ideas through their writing	They were able to articulate ideas through their writing	31, communication skills
C4	Listening	They listened well	They listened well	29, communication skills
		They acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why to my satisfaction	They acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why to my satisfaction	15, project management

(continues)

Table 5.3 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
C5	Communication -frequency	The frequency of the project updates met my expectations	The frequency of project updates met my expectations	35, communication skills
C6	Communication -quality	The project updates were good quality	The project updates were good quality	34, communication skills
C7	Interpersonal skills	They had good interpersonal communication skills	They had good interpersonal communication skills	37, communication skills
C9	Illustrate ability to write in different writing styles	They wrote well in a variety of different writing styles/contexts/ tones	They wrote well in a variety of different writing styles/contexts/ tones	38, communication skills
C10	Able to collaborate with others that aren't directly related with the project	When necessary, they collaborated well with others beyond you about the project	When necessary, they collaborated well with others beyond you about the project	39, communication skills
C11	Ability to fact-find and ask appropriate questions	They were able to find answers needed to keep the project progressing well They asked good questions	They were able to find answers needed to keep the project progressing well They asked good questions	14, project management 36, communication skills

Table 5.4

Question Evolution of Strategic Themes, Continued 2

Evolution of questions from the ones posed in the first pilot test, to those used on the final instrument.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
S1	Understand culture and values	They understood the messaging that we wanted our materials to have	They understood the messaging that we wanted our materials to have	6, strategies
		They understood the look that we wanted our materials to have	They understood the look that we wanted our materials to have	7, strategies
S2	Strategic direction	They understood the goals and objectives of the project	They understood the goals and objectives of the project	3, strategies
S3	Implement-ability	What items created by the students will be used?	What items created by the students will be used? Please explain the use and the benefit, if any, to your organization	50, additional comments
S6	Observable Results/ outcomes	An overall evaluation component was included in the plan	An overall evaluation component was included in the plan	10, project management

(continues)

Table 5.4 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
S7	Research	They adequately researched our organization	They adequately researched our organization	2, strategies
S8	Understand ultimate business goal	They understood how this project related to our ultimate business goal	They understood how this project related to our ultimate business goal	5, strategies
S9	Understand mission	They understood the mission of our organization	They understood the mission of our organization	1, strategies
S12	Critical thinking	They developed an effective plan to meet the goals and objectives	They developed an effective plan to meet the goals and objectives	4, strategies
S13	Understanding of budget constraints in planning process	They understood resource constraints and considered them	They understood resource constraints and considered them	9, project management

Table 5.5

Question Evolution of Overall Performance and Experience Themes, Continued 2

Evolution of questions from the ones posed in the first pilot test, to those used on the final instrument.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
O1	Would you recommend Top Dog?	I would recommend Top Dog Communication to other clients	I would recommend Top Dog Communication to other clients	44, effectiveness
O3	Did we accomplish your goal?	The project met my expectations	The project met my expectations	43, effectiveness
O6	Are you better off for having had our help?	The amount of work and time that I put into this project was worth the work that I received from the students	The amount of work and time that I (and others in my organization) put into this project was worth the work that we received from the students	45, effectiveness

Table 5.6

Question Evolution of Open-Ended Questions, Continued 2

Evolution of questions from the ones posed in the first pilot test, to those used on the final instrument.

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
OE2		Please reflect upon the process of your project. With those thoughts in mind, how would you improve the project process? Please feel free to discuss any part of the process.	Please reflect upon the process of your project. With those thoughts in mind, how would you improve the project process? Please feel free to discuss any part of the process.	47, additional comments
OE3		Hypothetically, would you consider hiring any of the Top Dog Communication students who worked on your project? Why or why not?	Hypothetically, would you consider hiring any of the Top Dog Communication students who worked on your project? Why or why not?	49, additional comments

(continues)

Table 5.6 (continued)

Category	Original aspects from groups T1-T3	Questions resulting from group I1-I2, used for first pilot	Questions on final instrument after P1-P4	Final placement of question (number and theme)
OE4		How would you describe your experience with Top Dog Communication?	How would you describe your experience with Top Dog Communication?	48, additional comments

APPENDIX E

Table Illustrating Data of the Last Round of Focus Group's (Instrument Refinement) Feedback Using the American Evaluation Association's Survey Tool to Review an Instrument

Table 6.1

Instrument Refinement Data Collected from Focus Groups

Data collected in the instrumentation refinement focus groups (I1-I2) based on results of the "American Evaluation Association's Independent Consulting Group's Instrument Peer Review Rubric." Data illustrates participants' perceptions of the instrument created to assess client satisfaction of student public relations firms, or other client coursework completed for clients.

Question	Results	Description of comments for non-answers, fair, poor, or very poor
Alignment to the purpose	6-very good 2-good 0-fair 1-poor 0-very poor	The participant who noted "poor" felt that there should be more on evaluation of the actual campaign and if the objectives were met than about how the client felt about the project.
Appropriateness for target population	8-very good 1-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Instructions	4-very good 5-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Appearance	5-very good 4-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Layout and order of questions	5-very good 3-good 1-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	The respondent who noted "fair" felt that the outcomes section should be asked before questions such as professional demeanor.
Close-ended question wording	9-very good 0-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	

(continues)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Answer options for close-ended questions	4-very good 4-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor 1-did not answer	The respondent who did not answer did note in the discussion that the answer construction was very good.
Open-ended questions	5-very good 3-good 1-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	The respondent who noted “fair” felt that the yes/no questions should also be scale questions, but felt that the true open-ended questions were well done.
Totals	46-very good 22-good 2-fair 1-poor 0-very poor 1-did not answer	

APPENDIX F

Table Illustrating Results of Pilot Test Feedback Using the American Evaluation Association's Survey Tool to Review an Instrument

Table 7.1

Instrument Refinement Data Collected from Pilot Tests

Data collected in the pilot tests based on results of the "American Evaluation Association's Independent Consulting Group's Instrument Peer Review Rubric." Data illustrates participants' perceptions of the instrument created to assess client satisfaction of student public relations firms, or other client coursework completed for clients.

Question	Results	Description of comments for non-answers, fair, poor, or very poor
Alignment to the purpose	1-very good 3-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Appropriateness for target population	3-very good 1-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Instructions	2-very good 2-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Appearance	2-very good 2-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Layout and order of questions	1-very good 2-good 1-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	The respondent who noted "fair" felt that the questions specific to communication should be kept together. However, it was commented that the order of the questions within the sections was very well done.
Close-ended question wording	2-very good 2-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	

(continues)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Answer options for close-ended questions	3-very good 0-good 1-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	The respondent who noted “fair” felt that a “non applicable” option should be offered in the scale, although also commenting that such an option could invite respondents to avoid answering tough questions.
Open-ended questions	3-very good 1-good 0-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	
Totals	17-very good 13-good 2-fair 0-poor 0-very poor	

APPENDIX G

Final Evaluation Tool Constructed

Client Satisfaction Survey for Public Relations Work Completed by Top Dog Communication

Recently you interacted with a student public relations team from Top Dog Communication to assist in your PR efforts. We need feedback from you about this experience. The information you provide will improve our overall process and direct the way that we teach and prepare our students. Your input is valued!

Rebecca Deemer
Top Dog Communication
University of Indianapolis
1400 East Hanna Avenue
Indianapolis, Indiana 46227
rdeemer@uindy.edu
317-791-5720 (office)
317-788-3490 (fax)

Client Satisfaction Survey for Public Relations Work Completed by Top Dog Communication

Thank you for serving as a client of Top Dog Communication. We continuously look for ways to improve. Our clients are instrumental in this process. By completing this form, you are providing valuable feedback that will be used to improve the quality of our services to both clients and students.

If you have questions, contact Rebecca Deemer at 317-791-5720 or e-mail at rdeemer@uindy.edu

This survey will not be shared directly with the student group, unless you give permission for it to be shared by noting below.

Please provide the following information.

<table>
<tr><td>Name of your organization:</td><td>Your name:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date:</td><td>Student account manager’s name:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Have you worked with student groups in this capacity before? Please mark.

Yes____ No____</td><td>Have you worked with professional public relations firms before? Please mark.

Yes____ No____</td></tr>
<tr><td>Do you wish for this feedback to be shown to the student group? Please mark.

Yes____ No____</td><td>How long has the project relationship between the student group and your organization existed?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Which option best describes your relationship with the student group? Please mark.
____They provided a plan to meet a certain objective and did all or most tactics described in said plan themselves.
____They produced specific communication tools per our request.
____They suggested ways to address an issue or desire that our organization had via a plan, but did not do the tactics suggested in the plan.</td></tr>
</table>

Directions
On this page and the following pages, please answer all questions by inserting an "X" in the box that corresponds with your response. Please try to answer all questions; if no answer is appropriate, please leave it blank. Please remit by (date) to rdeemer@uindy.edu or fax to 317-788-3490.

Strategies Suggested or Used by the Students

This section addresses how you feel about the strategies that the students suggested or used for your project. ***While answering these questions, please reflect upon the students' understanding of the direction and the scope of the project.*** *Please insert an "X" in the box that corresponds with your response.*

Questions/Response Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. They understood the mission of our organization.				
2. They adequately researched our organization.				
3. They understood the goals and objectives of the project.				
4. They developed an effective plan to meet the goals and objectives.				
5. They understood how this project related to our ultimate business goal.				
6. They understood the messaging that we wanted our materials to have.				
7. They understood the look that we wanted our materials to have.				
8. Is there anything else regarding strategies suggested or used by the students that you would like to add? This includes, but is not limited to, expanding upon any of your answers above.				

Project Management Skills Used by the Students

This section addresses how you feel about how the students managed your project. ***While answering these questions, please reflect upon how the students planned, organized, secured, and managed resources to complete your project.*** *Please insert an "X" in the box that corresponds with your response.*

Questions/Response Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. They understood resource constraints and considered them.				
10. An overall evaluation component was included in the plan.				
11. They met deadlines.				
12. They were adaptable in situations when needed.				
13. They seemed comfortable with the project and tasks at hand.				
14. They were able to find answers needed to keep the project progressing well.				
15. They acted upon my suggestions, or if not, explained why to my satisfaction.				
16. The project was well organized.				
17. Is there anything else regarding project management skills used by the students that you would like to add? This includes, but is not limited to, expanding upon any of your answers above.				

Section 2 out of 7

Communication Tools/Tactics Created by the Students

This section addresses how you feel about the communication tools or tactics that the students created for your project. ***While answering these questions, please reflect upon all tactics created and/or executed by the students.*** *Examples of such communication tools/tactics include, but are not limited to, PowerPoint presentations, brochures, fact sheets, press releases, promotional videos, event plans, and other promotional materials. The exact list of tactics varies. Please insert an "X" in the box that corresponds with your response.*

Questions/Response Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18. The writing was professional quality.				
19. The design was professional quality.				
20. They suggested an ample amount of different tactics/ideas to meet the objective.				
21. The tactics created showed a high level of creativity or "out-of-the-box" thinking if appropriate.				
22. Is there anything else regarding the communication tools/tactics created by the students that you would like to add? This includes, but is not limited to, expanding upon any of your answers above.				

Professional Demeanor of the Students

This section addresses how you feel about the students' professional demeanor. ***While answering these questions, please reflect upon the students' conduct and competence while they were engaged with you in this project.*** *Please insert an "X" in the box that corresponds with your response.*

Questions/Response Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
23. They handled criticism professionally.				
24. They understood the professional expectations of business culture.				
25. They were able to think "on their feet" in discussions.				
26. They were punctual.				
27. They dressed appropriately.				
28. Is there anything else regarding the professional demeanor of the students that you would like to add? This includes, but is not limited to, expanding upon any of your answers above.				

Section 4 out of 7

Communication Skills of the Students

This section addresses how you feel about the students' communication skills. ***While answering these questions, please reflect upon how the students articulated their own ideas, and how they interacted with you and others while working on the project.*** *Please insert an "X" in the box that corresponds with your response.*

Questions/Response Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29. They listened well.				
30. They were able to articulate ideas verbally.				
31. They were able to articulate ideas through their writing.				
32. The e-mails/texts that I received were well-written.				
33. Telephone conversations were well-conducted.				
34. The project updates were good quality.				
35. The frequency of project updates met my expectations.				
36. They asked good questions.				
37. They had good interpersonal communication skills.				
38. They wrote well in a variety of different writing styles/contexts/tones.				
39. When necessary, they collaborated well with others beyond me about the project.				
40. Is there anything else regarding communication skills of the students that you would like to add? This includes, but is not limited to, expanding upon any of your answers above.				

Section 5 out of 7

Effectiveness of the Project and the Students' Work

This section addresses how you feel about the effectiveness of the project and the students' work. ***While answering these questions, please reflect upon the expected results that you had for the project and the students.*** *Please insert an "X" in the box that corresponds with your response.*

Questions/Response Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
41. They worked well independently.				
42. They had a good work ethic.				
43. The project met my expectations.				
44. I would recommend Top Dog Communication to other clients.				
45. The amount of work and time that I (and others in my organization) put into this project was worth the work that we received from the students.				
46. Is there anything else regarding effectiveness of the project and the students' work that you would like to add? This includes, but is not limited to, expanding upon any of your answers above.				

Section 6 out of 7

Additional Comments

This section allows you to provide additional comments, in your own words, about your overall experience with, and impression of, Top Dog Communication. ***While answering these questions, please reflect upon your entire experience, from your initial application to project completion.*** *Please provide as much information as you feel necessary.*

47. Please reflect upon the process of your project. With those thoughts in mind, how would you improve the project process? Please feel free to discuss any part of the process.
48. How would you describe your experience with Top Dog Communication?
49. Hypothetically, would you consider hiring any of the Top Dog Communication students who worked on your project? Why or why not?
50. What items created by the students will be used? Please explain the use and the benefit, if any, to your organization.

Section 7 out of 7

Please e-mail the completed survey to
Rebecca Deemer at rdeemer@uindy.edu
or fax to 317-788-3490.

Thank you again for taking the time to complete this survey! Your feedback will help us ensure the most positive client experience for others like you in the future and guide our students' educational process so that they can be more prepared for the professional world. If you have any questions about this survey, please feel free call Rebecca Deemer at 317-791-5720 or e-mail rdeemer@uindy.edu