

Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2005). *Evaluating public relations: A best practice guide to public relations planning, research and evaluation*. London, England: Kogan Page.

Reviewed by: [Robina Xavier](#)

If there is one thing that academics and practitioners agree on, it would be that insufficient emphasis is placed on the role of evaluation in public relations. Recent research in Australia suggests the old maxim that practitioners talk about evaluation more than they do it is still highly relevant, despite the best efforts of the academy and industry bodies to raise the bar on evaluation practices. Practitioners frequently cite a lack of expertise as a constraint on strong practice, so resources that help students and practitioners better understand this important area can only benefit the industry.

Watson and Noble have decided to take up the challenge to improve evaluation practice by writing a book focusing solely on evaluation. As highlighted in the book's title, evaluation is not an add-on but an important component in all planning and practice, requiring expertise, experience and resourcing.

The book is structured around the founding principles of evaluation practice and key stages of evaluation planning. It includes chapters on objective setting, gathering and interpreting information, and analytical models to better guide practice, with a special feature on media evaluation systems. Early on, the authors establish what they see as the key principles that guide evaluation practice and these drive the explanations of models and assessment tools contained throughout the book. The book addresses the important topic of practitioners setting realistic program objectives, understanding what can be achieved within certain timeframes, and then designing evaluation practices to demonstrate accountability.

For those new to public relations, the book provides a short overview of the discipline and key theoretical underpinnings, making particular note of how European perspectives differ from the often cited US traditions of public relations practice. Of particular interest to the academy is a comprehensive review of evaluation studies from around the world, mapping contemporary practice and demonstrating the need for improved practitioner focus and skills. The book also provides suggestions on what could be, mapping future initiatives in evaluation and identifying the challenges for evaluation systems to keep pace with changing practice.

The extensive use of case studies and global practitioner vignettes throughout the book from countries such as Slovenia, UK, Canada, Australia, Zimbabwe, and the USA brings the practice of evaluation to life. While confronting at times, these cases demonstrate the real problems, opportunities, and attitudes that students as new practitioners will face in their working lives.

Written by two senior public relations professionals and academics, the book helps readers to design evaluation systems from the simple to the complex, depending on their needs and budgets. The book will be useful for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in evaluation, or as a companion text for public relations campaign courses. Written for both the academy and industry, the book is highly accessible with all terms, models and research fully explained. Because of its dual purpose, it is not written in a classic textbook approach with summary questions at the end of chapters or suggestions for further work, however, these could easily be designed from the material presented.

Purchase Information: Recommended price AU\$54.05. Available from booksellers including Dymocks and Abbey. Online from www.dadirect.com. Soon to be available from PRIA's website, <http://www.pria.com.au/>.

About the reviewer: *Robina Xavier is the public relations major co-ordinator at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, specialising in the areas of public relations management, crisis communication and shareholder communication. Prior to joining QUT, Robina worked as a consultant to both the private and public sectors, specialising in corporate and financial relations. She has received state, national and international awards for her work in public relations practice. Robina is a senior advisor to The Phillips Group and has held a number of positions with the Public Relations Institute of Australia including Queensland President, National Vice President and is a member of the National Education Committee. Her current research focus is in research and evaluation in public relations campaigns and the impact of crisis on organizational legitimacy. She holds a Master of Business (Research), a Graduate Diploma in Applied Finance and Investment and a Bachelor of Business (Communication).*