A Review of Current Practice and Future Directions for Evaluation within and across the Government Communication Service

The Money and Hillenbrand Review

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Acknowledgements

A Review of Current Practice and Future Directions for Evaluation within and across the Government Communication Service

Executive summary

Key insights

- The Government Communication Service (GCS) has a rich history of communications and evaluation, often seen (externally and internally) as best practice.

- The need for evaluation is well established in GCS and across government organisations[1] – it is seen to be culturally evangelised.

- Evaluation is, however, still variable across government organisations, with pockets of good and poor practice.

- Poor practice is associated with a 'bolt-on' approach (where evaluations are an afterthought to the process), rather than a 'built-in' approach (where evaluations are embedded from the start and a key part of the communication planning process).

- The culture around evaluation is often seen to be one of 'justification' of current activities, rather than a culture of learning.

- High turnover of staff, budget pressures and the short lifecycles of projects, put a focus on future projects, without learning from the past.

- Looking ahead to the future, both literature and primary research suggest evaluation should take account of four trends: 1.) trust in government; 2.) misinformation; 3.) fragmentation of audiences/citizens; 4.) technological advances – including artificial intelligence (AI).

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[1] Please note: the term 'government organisation' is used in this report as an inclusive term to include all government organisations that use the GCS evaluation framework. 'Government organisation', therefore, refers to government departments, non-ministerial departments, arm's length bodies (ALBs), agencies and other entities that use the evaluation framework.

Key recommendations

- Shift from a 'justification culture' to a culture of informed learning and innovation, where evaluation is a key driver of strategy and improvement.

- Actively connect evaluation to other communications activities, such as strategy development and any professional assurance processes. This will embed evaluation as a 'built-in' rather than a 'bolt-on' process that is integrated with other important activities and priorities.

- Introduce a new Evaluation Cycle to replace the current Evaluation Framework 2.0, which will more overtly drive continuous improvement. This will embed cultural change as well as supporting learning, innovation and the use of more appropriate interventions and multiple tools.

Introduction

A central commitment of the current GCS strategy is to update the GCS Evaluation Framework 2.0 from 2018, to keep pace with the fast moving technological and societal changes. As part of this process, GCS commissioned Professor Kevin Money and his team from Henley Business School (at the University of Reading), to conduct a review. The aim of the review is to assess the state of communications and evaluation across GCS, to identify key strengths and weaknesses and to inform an update of the GCS Evaluation Framework 2.0.

The Evaluation Framework 2.0 (2018)

The Evaluation Framework 2.0 (see below) was introduced in 2018 and is broadly well-regarded by internal and external stakeholders alike. It is seen as being 'fit for its time' and has been a key pillar in establishing the importance of evaluation in GCS. It has been a valuable tool that fostered a joint understanding, language and practice around evaluation across GCS and government organisations. While the primary research found that the framework was widely seen to be sound, it is believed that an update could deliver significant value in addressing specific themes uncovered by the review, both in relation to government communications and society more generally. This review suggests that the Evaluation Framework 2.0 from 2018 could be usefully replaced by a new Evaluation Cycle. The shift from a 'framework' to a 'cycle' arose on the research findings and emphasises evaluation as an activity that drives a cycle of ongoing learning and development that links to other communication activities. There is, however, a degree of synergy between the current Evaluation Framework 2.0 and the updated Evaluation Cycle; this is intentional, as it will allow users to build on their existing understanding, use of language and practice.

The Evaluation Framework 2.0 is included as an important foundation to consider when reading the findings of the review, as well as being an important reference point for the new Evaluation Cycle, which is presented later in this report.

The Evaluation Framework 2.0 (2018), GCS
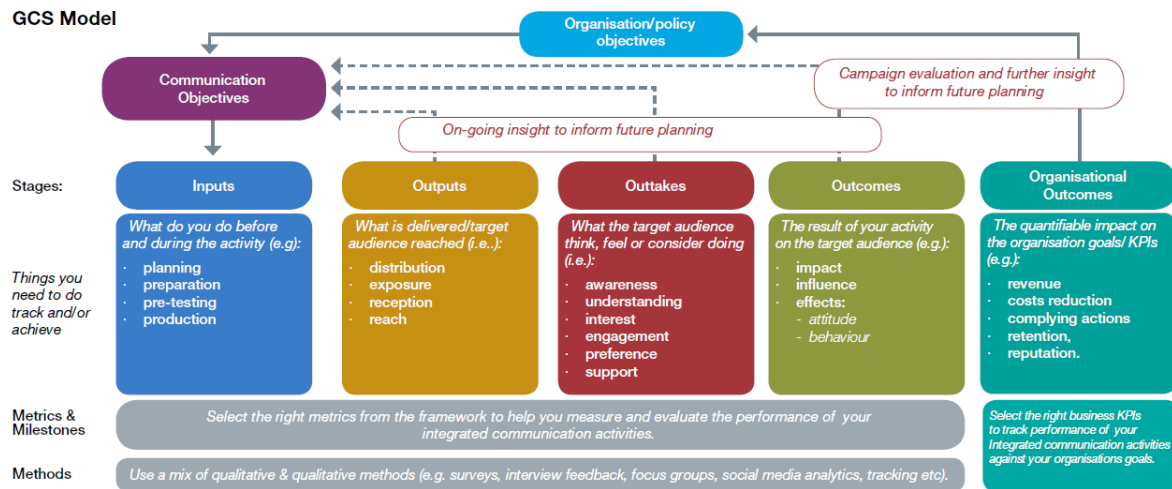
Methodology and scope

The scope of the review focuses primarily on the evaluation of communications within GCS and across government organisations. The work is based upon primary and secondary research. Primary research took the form of 28 interviews with communication and evaluation experts (familiar with GCS and communications across government organisations) and explored perceptions of current practices and future trends. Of the 28 interviews, 13 interviewees were internal to GCS (including insight and evaluation, strategy teams and communication professionals within government organisations) and 15 interviewees were external (including companies that work closely with GCS, as well as Evaluation Council members). Secondary research took the form of a literature review, alongside insights from ongoing and published research from the John Madejski Centre for Reputation at Henley Business School.

Report structure

The report is structured as follows:

A: Findings

    Theme 1: The culture of evaluation

    Theme 2: Evaluation frameworks, models and tools

    Theme 3: Integration of evaluation with strategy, innovation and learning

B: Towards an updated approach to evaluation

    1. Future trends related to evaluation

    2. Introducing the Evaluation Cycle: Evaluation as continuous learning and improvement

C: Recommendations for future practice: Launch and adoption of a new Evaluation Cycle

    1. Encourage collaboration

    2. Enable innovation

    3. Recruit and retain great people

D: Conclusions

References and further reading

Appendix 1: Evaluation Cycle – Detailed Version

Appendix 2: GCS Evaluation Cycle

A: Findings

Three themes emerge from the primary research. The findings for each theme are presented as strengths and areas for improvement in relation to evaluation.

Theme 1: Culture of evaluation

Overall, GCS is seen to have a culture in which the need for evaluation is well established. GCS is seen to have a long history of best practice in evaluation, which is acknowledged both internally and externally. However, the practice of evaluation is seen to be somewhat variable. Furthermore, the culture of evaluation is often seen to be one of 'justification', in which there is a focus on justifying spend rather than genuine learning.

Specific strengths and areas for improvement are outlined below.

Strengths

- The culture of the 'need for evaluation' is well established – it is culturally evangelised.

- Historically, GCS is seen to represent best practice – there is pride in the history of being a leader in evaluation.

- There are strong links to external best practice – for example, the work with the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) and the university sector are seen as positive.

Areas for improvement

- The practice of evaluation is variable across government organisations.

- Learning between and across government organisations can be improved.

- Often, evaluation primarily focuses on campaigns when it should also focus on different communication activities, as well as broader areas. For example, there is a need to better evaluate no-cost/low-cost interventions, as well as evaluating government organisation activity related to communications over a period of time.

- There is a perceived culture of 'justification' in relation to evaluation – this puts pressure on telling a good story around evaluation and the need to justify spending rather than genuine learning.

- Evaluation is often 'done' by the same people responsible for the intervention. There may be a case for peer review or, at the very least, a consultation process with others.

- The fast pace of working and a 12-month budget cycle puts the focus on the future rather than learning from the past.

- Relatively high staff turnover often leads to a loss of skills and knowledge. A key issue here is the loss of organisational memory.

- There is a sense GCS could make more of digital opportunities. There is a perceived 'fear' of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that leads to a highly risk-adverse approach to digital communication and evaluation. On the positive side, this is linked to an awareness of government responsibility in relation to GDPR and not wanting to erode trust in government. However, GCS could learn from best practice elsewhere and use multidisciplinary teams (e.g. legal, behavioural) to better understand how it can operate in a GDPR world. Opportunities to enhance digital capabilities include utilising 'real-time' data in evaluation and developing insights at the aggregate rather than individual level. The latter can help target difficult-to-reach audiences.

Key strategic insight to consider:

How can GCS move from a culture of 'justification' (in relation to evaluation), to one of informed learning and innovation?

This will require psychological safety to allow learning from failure to be seen as a key driver of strategy and innovation.

Theme 2: Evaluation frameworks, models and tools

The current evaluation framework and associated models and tools are seen to be generally sound. A strength is that data collection and planning are often aligned with the current evaluation framework. On the negative side, some users of the evaluation framework can confuse outtakes and outcomes, often leading to a lower focus on outcomes than would be desired. Experiences suggest that some users find it difficult to link together inputs, outputs, outtakes and outcomes in a causal fashion. Therefore, the framework would benefit from clearer distinctions between inputs, outputs, outtakes and outcomes and a theory of change to help link these aspects together. A deeper discussion on what constitutes a theory of change, and how it can be embedded to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of communications, can be found in Section B of this report, where a new Evaluation Cycle is presented.

More specific strengths and areas for improvement are outlined below.

Strengths

- The Evaluation Framework 2.0 and associated models and tools are seen as generally useful and sound.

- Data collection is often aligned with the GCS Evaluation Framework 2.0, which is positive because it allows for benchmarking.

- There are some good case studies of evaluation for others to follow. There is, however, a desire for more case studies, perhaps themed around different outcome types (e.g. start, stop, maintain outcomes).

- There are some good examples of return on investment (ROI) calculations. There is a need for more examples, especially from a wider range of government organisations and settings, and around different outcome types (e.g. start, stop, maintain).

Areas for improvement

- Evaluation could be better linked to organisation/policy objectives.

- While evaluations are generally seen as being good at inputs, outputs and outtakes, they could be better at linking to outcomes (both in terms of not using outtakes as proxies for outcomes and using multiple outcomes to triangulate findings).

- Some users confuse different aspects (e.g. outtakes and outcomes) of the Evaluation Framework 2.0. Causal links between aspects of the current framework are not always clearly defined. One solution is to embed an underlying theory of change within proposed updates.

- There is a need to better understand, categorise, target and find audiences. This is important for equality and inclusion, and links to making better use of digital opportunities (as understanding and targeting audiences was an area of improvement for digital practice).

- There is a need to better understand communications from a citizen perspective. One solution is to take a citizen-centric view, which means that evaluation should closely consider the impact of third-party influencers in delivering outcomes. (Such an approach may also enhance the effectiveness of digital, no cost/low cost and social listening.)

- There could be better understanding of what communication can and cannot achieve in terms of outcomes. There is a sense that, sometimes, expectations can be quite high, given communications are only one aspect influencing outcomes.

Key strategic insight to consider:

How can different parts of the evaluation framework be better linked together, so that it is intuitive to use and is supportive of constructive learning (and supports the achievement of policy objectives)?

This can be achieved by overtly embedding a theory of change into future approaches to evaluation. The theory of change can explain the causal nature of relationships between outputs, outtakes and outcomes, and show how changes in one aspect can be directly linked to changes in other aspects. It will also help to make distinctions between concepts that are used in evaluation clearer.

Theme 3: Integration of evaluation with strategy, innovation and learning

There is a sense that many initiatives are happening simultaneously and there is a need for evaluation to be better linked to the GCS priorities, such as innovation, learning and strategy development in communications.

More specific strengths and areas for improvement are outlined below.

Strengths

- Processional assurance processes require and embed a link between policy objectives and evaluation.

Areas for improvement

- Evaluation is often seen as 'bolt-on', rather than 'built-in'. It could be more integrated into communication planning and done so earlier in the process. There is a perception it could be better (or at least more overtly) linked to strategy planning tools (e.g. OASIS) and behaviour change models (e.g. COM-B – capability, opportunity, motivation, behaviour model). Evaluation could also be conducted several times as part of the process. This will aid learning in real-time (hourly, daily, weekly, monthly) and not be primarily seen as an evaluation at the end of a process. There are also opportunities to leverage digital tools more.

Strategic insight to consider:

Rather than being seen as a competing priority, how can evaluation be leveraged to help professionals achieve other priorities?

By making more overt links with existing and well-established tools (such as OASIS, COM-B and 'test and learn guidelines'), evaluation can be a 'built-in' rather than 'bolt-on' process.

Adopting a continuous improvement approach to evaluation, a cycle rather than a more linear framework, will allow overt links to other key activities such as innovation, formal learning and strategy development.

B: Towards an updated approach to evaluation

1. Future trends for communication

Ongoing research at Henley, a wider literature review and the primary research suggest that evaluation will need to take account of future trends relating to trust in government, misinformation, fragmentation of audiences and technological advances. While there is a partial overlap with the findings presented in the previous section, it is useful to separate out these broader issues as they are important in futureproofing both an updated approach to evaluation as well as other GCS practices and processes. The key trends, with a brief comment on their potential impact on evaluation and communications, are outlined below.

Misinformation

A key global trend is the existence of misinformation. This has been fuelled by the digital revolution which has allowed easier access to both creating and viewing content. There is an increasing number of media sources, which can be leveraged by groups/individuals with different agendas. In an era of misinformation, trust in government becomes a critical factor driving the effectiveness of communications. This is further outlined below.

Trust in government

Another trend is that of lower citizen trust in government, not only in the UK, but around the world. While more research is needed, trust in government and its associated government organisations is important because it sets the baseline for how government messages may be received and acted upon by citizens. With low trust, messages are likely to have negligible impact and, when there is active mistrust in government, may even result in unanticipated consequences. Without trust in government, citizens are more likely to listen to other voices (e.g. misinformation), or simply act in a contrary way to how government may wish. For example, if citizens are asked to engage in a public safety programme, when they distrust government, they may actively engage in the oppositive behaviour than the one being encouraged. Understanding trust in government as an important

moderator of the impact of communications is key to designing and evaluating communications effectively. In addition, it may be useful to consider how communications can set out to enhance trust in government. The issue of trust in government is the subject of much research and (while it may benefit from a fresh review), a significant body of work suggests that trust is likely to be driven by citizen experience of the competence, benevolence and integrity of government action. Communication tactics for operating against a backdrop of low trust include leveraging the voices of third parties who are trusted by a particular audience. However, there is an onus on communicators (be this GCS or government organisations) to maintain and signal the integrity, competence and benevolence of the organisations they represent.

Fragmentation of audiences/citizens

There is a general trend towards audiences being less homogenous and more heterogenous. This is both in terms of person-related factors (which include personality, culture, values or even the level of knowledge and engagement with a topic) and channel-related factors (which includes getting information from more varied sources, non-traditional sources, and in ways that may be unanticipated by the communication source). Associated trends include citizens living in online 'echo chambers', where existing views can become entrenched. For GCS, the implication of fragmentation is twofold. First, there is a targeting issue – how best to identify and reach key audiences. Second, it is likely that person-related factors will moderate the impact of communications on outcomes. These are critical factors to consider in evaluation – they may explain why the same message has different impacts on different audiences. This highlights the importance of segmentation as some audiences may be difficult to reach and/or engage. Practical implications include taking account of such factors when building a theory of change and tailoring communications to different audiences.

Technological advances – including artificial intelligence (AI)

Another trend has been the ever-increasing rate at which technology advances. From a communication perspective, issues related to the relatively low barriers to creating and consuming content have an overlap with the misinformation and fragmentation of audiences (see above). The recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI), pose a step-change in potential benefits and risks to communication. AI will further lower the barriers to entry for creators and offers significant opportunities for the development of highly believable misinformation and misrepresentation in many formats, including multimedia and real-time interaction. However, AI could also be used to target audiences and make decisions in relation to communication strategy. Here, the key benefit is that AI may be able to identify, target, evaluate and develop messages that continually evolve to achieve better outcomes. As such, AI could be a powerful tool to serve communication professionals.

It could also aid with the analysis of large and complex data sets and reduce the time needed for such processes. Plus, outputs from AI could assist with pretesting and the development of theories of change and it could provide insights on how to engage specific or difficult-to-reach audiences. However, the risk is that AI could do this in ways that are potentially discriminatory, rather than inclusive. Responses from GCS to mitigate risks include the application of AI technology that is governed by ethical principles from the outset (rather than primarily outcome related). Indeed, AI could even be used to reduce bias and increase inclusivity in communication. Much will depend upon how AI is utilised in practice, but if AI is used in a way that provides information about different aspects of the evaluation process and informs the decisions of communication professionals, rather than simply being a 'black box', it offers much potential. Another reasonable response is the expansion of verification functions, a partnership-based approach to fake news (where multiple actors, trusted by different citizen groups, comment on the same issues). The emergence of AI as a tool that can be used for misinformation, puts an emphasis on the vital role GCS has in building and/or maintaining trust in government. As mentioned, there is a wealth of research related to increasing trust in government that can be packaged as case studies or as checklists to guide communicators to act in a way that builds trust or mitigates for its absence.

## 2. Introducing the Evaluation Cycle: Evaluation as continuous learning and improvement

Key to this revision is emphasising a more dynamic and process-driven view, in which evaluation is viewed as a cycle of continuous improvement rather than a linear framework. This offers significant benefits in relation to the issues raised in both the primary and secondary research. First, it overtly links evaluation to other communications priorities such as strategy, planning and innovation. Second, it places evaluation as a catalyst for culture change, achieving improved efficiency and effectiveness of communications (rather than being an activity of justification). In this way, evaluation is built-in to activities and can add value as part of the planning, delivery, modification and learning for future projects. Viewing evaluation as part of continuous improvement also highlights the dynamic aspects of the activity, which can be done in real-time. The presentation of evaluation as a dynamic process means that evaluation can easily be applied to a wide range of activities (not just campaigns) and a theory of change can be included within the framework. This will make distinctions within the new Evaluation Cycle clearer and render it as more intuitive and simpler to use.

The new Evaluation Cycle is presented below. Synergies with the Evaluation Framework 2.0 relate to consistent conceptual foundations and use of terms and language. Differences signal the desired shift for evaluation to be more about learning and less about justification. Differences also relate to the

visual presentation as a cycle, which signal the dynamic and ongoing nature of evaluation as a process and the integration of a theory of change. Similarities in foundations and concepts ensure understandings of evaluation are not lost but are rather enhanced and built upon.

The new Evaluation Cycle can be seen as an evolution and enhancement of the previous framework. It is important to signal that learning is emphasised within the new Evaluation Cycle in two ways. First, it is captured at the centre of the model, with arrows signalling that learning can and should take place at every stage of evaluation. This learning is likely to take place in real time (on an hourly, daily or weekly basis) and may often take the form of tactical improvements to activities. Second, more formal 'learning and innovation' is presented as a separate stage of the Evaluation Cycle. The 'learning and innovation' stage is included to embed the importance of GCS becoming more of a learning organisation and to formalise the capturing of strategic learning as part of the evaluation process. This can take the form of the development of case studies and training materials, and would benefit the future planning and deployment of innovative communication activities across all government organisations.

The Evaluation Cycle: Evaluation as continuous learning and improvement
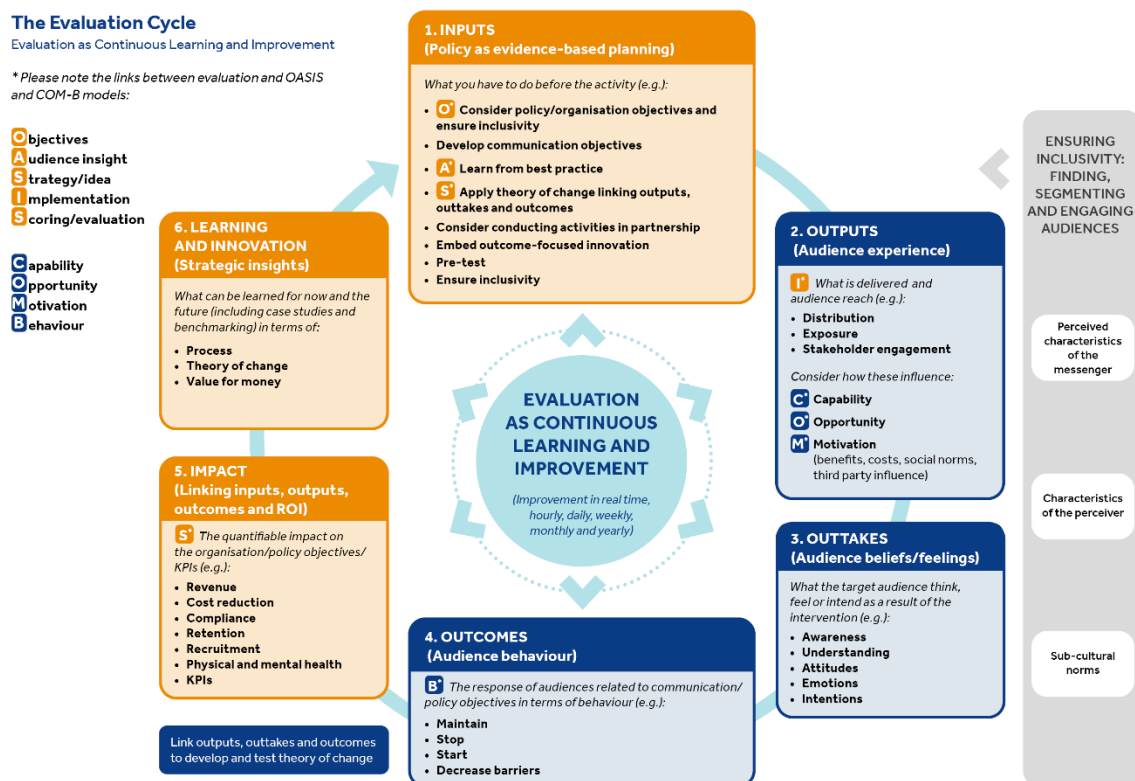
The suggested updates and the presentation of the new Evaluation Cycle have been made after taking into account the primary research (outlined in the previous section), as well as consulting literature and ongoing research at Henley Business School.

Detailed comments related to the reasonings behind the updates and the development of the new Evaluation Cycle are provided in the table that follows. The first column outlines an issue suggested by the review and the second column outlines how these issues are addressed by the update. Where possible, the issues are organised in terms of key stages in evaluation (i.e., relating to inputs, outputs, outtakes, outcomes, impacts and learning), as well as other highlighted aspects (such as ensuring inclusivity, embedding a theory of change and viewing evaluation as continuous improvement).

How the review has fed into the development of the new Evaluation Cycle

Reminder of what the review suggested	How this is addressed in the new Evaluation Cycle
Inputs: The review suggested that evaluation is often seen as a 'bolt-on' as opposed to a 'built-in' activity. Evaluation could be better linked to policy outcomes and KPIs could be better chosen at the outset. Evaluation is often seen as an afterthought – it could achieve better results if it is brought into the process earlier. As such, the importance of understanding inputs as being about policy and evidence-based planning has been highlighted.	The 'inputs' section is expanded and the Evaluation Cycle now overtly references policy objectives, communication objectives, KPIs, audience selection, learning from best practice, application of a theory of change, pretesting, ensuring inclusivity and embedding innovation as key activities at the input stage.
Ensuring inclusivity: The review suggested that identification and targeting of difficult-to-reach audiences was a key trend that needed to be taken account of in ensuring the effectiveness and inclusivity of communications and evaluation.	The Evaluation Cycle now overtly invites considerations of perceived characteristics of the messenger, personal characteristics and cultural norms when seeking to include and engage audiences, tailor messaging and understand responses.
Outputs: The review suggested that evaluation was applied mainly to campaigns and could be more broadly applied to other communication/ engagement activities. The review also suggested that communication activities could be better linked to a theory of change. As such, the importance of viewing outputs as part of audience experience is highlighted.	The 'outputs' section has been expanded and the Evaluation Cycle now overtly references distribution, exposure and stakeholder engagement in relation to a theory of change. As such, the new Evaluation Cycle highlights the importance of building messages/interventions that speak to audience capability, opportunity and motivation (e.g. benefits, costs and social norms/third party influence) in relation to an issue.

Reminder of what the review suggested	How this is addressed in the new Evaluation Cycle
Outtakes: The review suggested that outtakes were sometimes (wrongly) used as a proxy for outcomes and should be clearly distinguished from outcomes. As above, it was suggested that outtakes could be better linked to a theory of change. As such, the importance of viewing outtakes as part of audience perception, beliefs and feelings is highlighted.	The 'outtakes' section is simplified in the updated framework to now focus on awareness, understanding, attitudes, emotions and intentions. References to behavioural aspects (e.g. support, engagement) have been removed to eliminate overlaps with 'outcomes' (see below).
Outcomes: The review suggested that measuring and making the link to outcomes was an area for improvement. As above, it was suggested that outcomes could be better linked to a theory of change. As such, the importance of viewing outcomes as part of audience behaviour is highlighted.	The 'outcomes' section now overtly references key aspects of audience behaviour and the Evaluation Cycle now has a focus on maintain, stop and start behaviours, and decreasing barriers. References to aspects beyond behaviour (e.g. impact) are removed and placed within the impact section.
Embedding a theory of change: The review suggested that evaluation (and communication in general) could benefit from a more consistent application of a theory of change.	The new Evaluation Cycle more precisely defines outputs (as audience experience), outtakes (as audience perceptions, feelings/beliefs) and outcomes (as audience behaviour). These more precise definitions allow a theory of change to be embedded within the cycle where causal links between audience experience, feelings/beliefs and behaviours can be explored. The framework also invites users to consider causal links between these aspects in terms of a well-established evidence-based criteria. This will guide users to consider how specific aspects at the output stage (e.g. benefits, costs, opportunities) may subsequently influence certain outtakes (i.e. awareness, understanding and emotions) and how outputs and outtakes can influence certain outcomes (i.e. the stop, start or maintain related behaviours). As such, a theory of change can be developed by linking outputs, outtakes and outcomes.
Impact: The review suggested that to better demonstrate impact, there was a need for stronger theoretical links within the framework, as well as a broader use of methodologies to calculate impact. There was also a sense that the categories of impact could be expanded to embrace physical and mental wellbeing.	The inclusion of a theory of change in the new Evaluation Cycle (see section above) allows for more robust links to be drawn between outputs, outtakes and outcomes and, therefore, better foundations to calculate impact. As such, the importance of viewing organisational outcomes as 'impact' that links inputs, outputs, outtakes and outcomes is highlighted. The types of impact

Reminder of what the review suggested	How this is addressed in the new Evaluation Cycle
	are also expanded to overtly include aspects of revenue, cost reduction, compliance, retention, recruitment, physical and mental health.
Learning and innovation: The review highlighted the need to embed a formal learning stage into the process, so that learning does not end up as a by-product but is, in itself, a valued stage and output of the evaluation process that can drive future innovation in communications. This includes the importance for more learning between and across government organisations, as well as learning at different levels. Finally, the review highlighted the importance of developing case studies to inform future activities.	Learning and innovation is, therefore, embedded as an equal and additional stage within evaluation. The new Evaluation Cycle also includes learning at different levels, as well as the process level (e.g. how the communication activity was organised and conducted), the theory level (e.g. why the content/type of intervention was successful or unsuccessful) and the financial level (e.g. did the activity provide value for money).
Evaluation as a process of continuous learning and improvement: The review highlighted that evaluation was sometimes an afterthought and suggested that evaluation would benefit from being more overtly linked to other GCS priorities and processes. Key aspects identified here related to learning, innovation, and strategy development. The review evaluation could benefit from the use of real-time data and more frequent and tactical reflections.	The new Evaluation Cycle is presented as a process/dynamic cycle of continuous improvement that overtly integrates with other GCS priorities. It makes links to OASIS and COM-B – meeting the requirement to improve connections to strategy development, planning and evaluation. It is hoped that this approach can build on the existing and positive momentum in the use of OASIS and COM-B. A further option is to reinforce this link by updating OASIS and behaviour change models to directly reference the new Evaluation Cycle. The cycle can also be a template to capture learning and future case studies. Continuous improvement is presented at the centre to signal that learning can happen at all stages and multiple times during an activity, on an hourly, weekly and monthly basis, and not just the end of an activity.

C: Recommendations for future practice: Launch and adoption of a new Evaluation Cycle

The launch of a new Evaluation Cycle to replace the Evaluation Framework of 2018 is important because it can function as a symbol and catalyst for positive change. The introduction of a new Evaluation Cycle can support GCS in the achievement of its priorities of collaboration, innovation, best people. It can be used to set off a series of programmes of activities to encourage collaboration and innovation, and to influence the retention and attraction of high-quality people.

Some ideas on activities that GCS could engage in to support positive change around the launch of a new Evaluation Cycle are outlined below. The insights are partly based on suggestions from participants, the literature/ongoing research, as well as reflections from the authors.

1. Encourage collaboration

Ideas that can support collaboration include:

- Creating networks and forums for sharing best practice across government organisations. This can be in relation to priority areas (e.g. innovation, digital, continuous improvement). This will build and embed the view of GCS as a leader in the field of communication.

- Showcasing the work of multidisciplinary teams (e.g. in relation to digital).

- Culturally rewarding collaboration – this can include embedding this aspect in performance reviews and/or creating internal awards around the area of collaboration. A body, such as the Evaluation Council, can help with creating legitimacy for an award system.

2. Enable innovation

Ideas that can enable innovation include:

- Fostering a high-performance, no-blame culture, where people can learn from failure.

- Culturally embedding collaboration – the 10% spend initiative is a good start but it can also include awards, performance review and extending the remit of the Strategy and Evaluation Council (i.e. to the Strategy, Innovation and Evaluation Council).

- Ensuring that all evaluations (internal and external) include lessons learned for the future. This should include lessons at all levels outlined in the model. This should cover:

1) The process – how things were done and how others can do them better in the future.

2) The theory (i.e. reason for impact) – what impact the intervention had on the desired outcome (usually a stakeholder behaviour) and explore why this was the case. Plus, how others can leverage these insights in the future.

3) The financial aspect – did the intervention offer value for money (e.g. what was the ROI?) and can it offer a benchmark and/or process for others to follow?

3. Recruit and retain great people

Ideas that can reinforce a focus on 'great people' include:

- Making the impacts of work more tangible to help the retention and development of the best people. The new Evaluation Cycle offers opportunities for a structure for professional skills development. For example, this can be through apprenticeship training (e.g. a senior leader programme). The result could be a higher status and professionalism associated with the communication profession.

- Ensuring there is a period of stability to embed change – the launch of the new Evaluation Cycle could, for example, signal a three-year strategic plan.

- Fostering a culture of respect as this is linked to creating psychological safety – needed for a high-performance no-blame culture. There is a wealth of existing literature and training material which can help GCS develop psychological safety and a no-blame culture. Henley Business School, or other business schools, can help provide access to materials that can resonate within GCS or help it to develop case studies which test and show the value of psychological safety in their own specific context.

D: Conclusions

Evaluation has traditionally been seen as a key tool for demonstrating the efficiency and effectiveness of communications. Too often, however, it has been a 'bolt-on' to other communication processes, rather than being integral to them. As such, there has been a missed opportunity for evaluation to be used more proactively to guide strategy, innovation and learning. The adoption of a new Evaluation Cycle, as suggested in this review, delivers the opportunity for evaluation to be less about 'justification' and more about continuous improvement, whereby evaluation is a 'built-in' activity that drives learning and improves efficiency and effectiveness. In this way, evaluation can be a catalyst and driver of positive cultural change.

Finally, it is recommended that the use and support of evaluation is reviewed and updated, informally, in real-time. Looking further into the future, evaluation (and its associated frameworks), would benefit from a more formal review on a three to five-year cycle.

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Appendix 1: Evaluation Cycle – Detailed Version

The figure below presents a detailed version of the Evaluation Cycle.
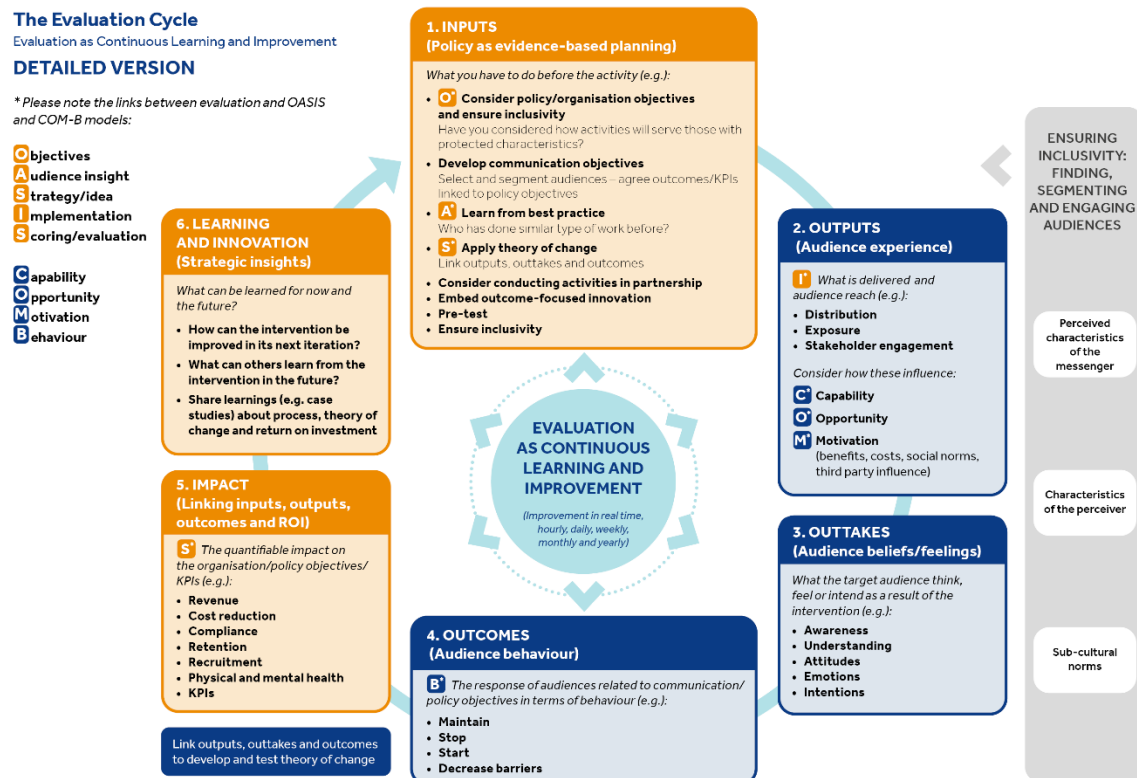
The extra detail on this version provides users with additional checkpoints to consider, particularly at the inputs and formal learning stages. The figure is provided in the appendix so that it does not detract from the parsimony of the framework presented in the main body of text.

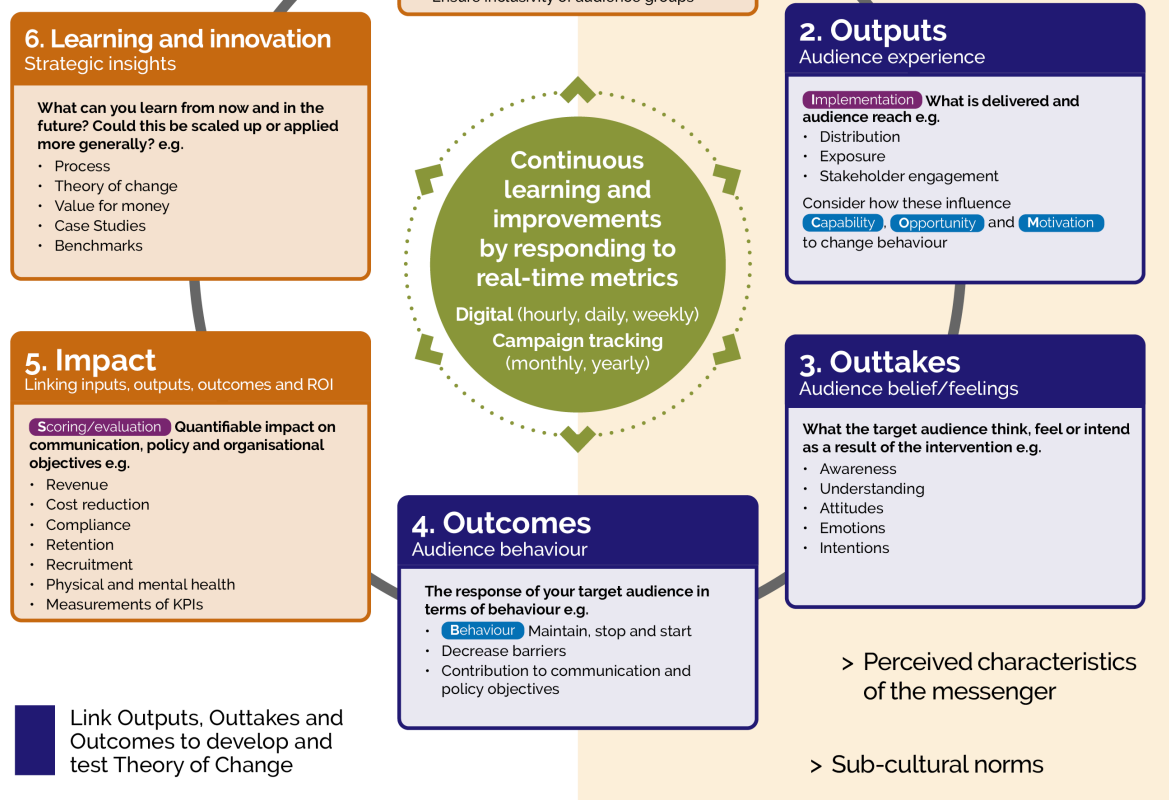# Appendix 2: The Government Communication Service Evaluation Cycle

GCS Evaluation Cycle

Link to OASIS Framework
- **O**bjectives
- **A**udience insights
- **S**trategy/ideas
- **I**mplementation
- **S**coring/evaluation

Link to COM-B Model
- **C**apability
- **O**pportunity
- **M**otivation
- **B**ehaviour

1. Inputs
Evidence-based planning

What you have to do before the activity e.g.
- **O**bjectives Consider policy/organisation objectives and ensure inclusivity
- Develop communications objectives
- **A**udience insights Learn from best practice
- **S**trategy/ideas Apply theory of change linking outputs, outtakes and outcomes
- Consider conducting activites in partnership
- Embed outcome-focused innovation
- Pre-test
- Ensure inclusivity of audience groups

Ensuring inclusivity and engaging audiences:

> Perceived characteristics of target audience(s)

> Audience segmentation

2. Outputs
Audience experience

Implementation **What is delivered and audience reach e.g.**
- Distribution
- Exposure
- Stakeholder engagement

Consider how these influence **C**apability, **O**pportunity and **M**otivation to change behaviour

6. Learning and innovation
Strategic insights

What can you learn from now and in the future? Could this be scaled up or applied more generally? e.g.
- Process
- Theory of change
- Value for money
- Case Studies
- Benchmarks

Continuous learning and improvements by responding to real-time metrics

Digital (hourly, daily, weekly)
Campaign tracking (monthly, yearly)

3. Outtakes
Audience belief/feelings

What the target audience think, feel or intend as a result of the intervention e.g.
- Awareness
- Understanding
- Attitudes
- Emotions
- Intentions

5. Impact
Linking inputs, outputs, outcomes and ROI

Scoring/evaluation **Quantifiable impact on communication, policy and organisational objectives e.g.**
- Revenue
- Cost reduction
- Compliance
- Retention
- Recruitment
- Physical and mental health
- Measurements of KPIs

4. Outcomes
Audience behaviour

The response of your target audience in terms of behaviour e.g.
- **B**ehaviour Maintain, stop and start
- Decrease barriers
- Contribution to communication and policy objectives

Link Outputs, Outtakes and Outcomes to develop and test Theory of Change

> Perceived characteristics of the messenger

> Sub-cultural norms

The Government Communication Service (GCS) Evaluation Cycle has been adopted and adapted from the research presented in this report through a process of engagement and discussion within GCS and externally. This figure is provided so that a deeper understanding of the research that underpins the new GCS Evaluation Cycle can be directly cross-referenced within this report.