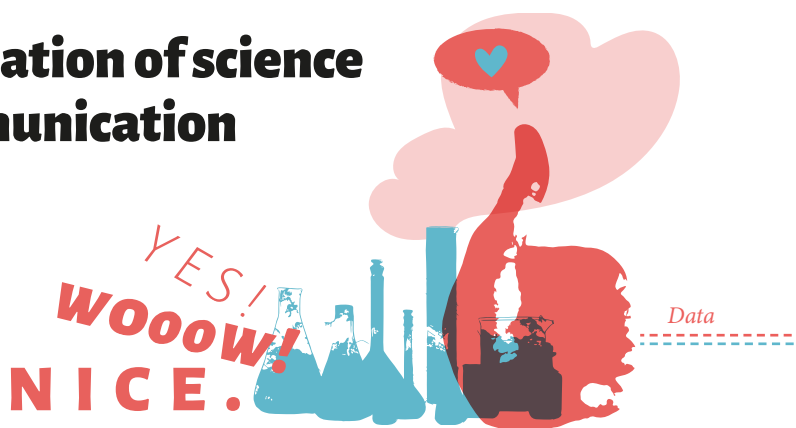


Evaluation of science communication



III. GET STARTED
by RICARDA ZIEGLER

Scientifically substantiated evaluations are pivotal to ensuring the effectiveness and improvement of the growing number of science communication projects. Evaluation results can reveal what a science communication activity has achieved, who it has reached or what impact it has had.

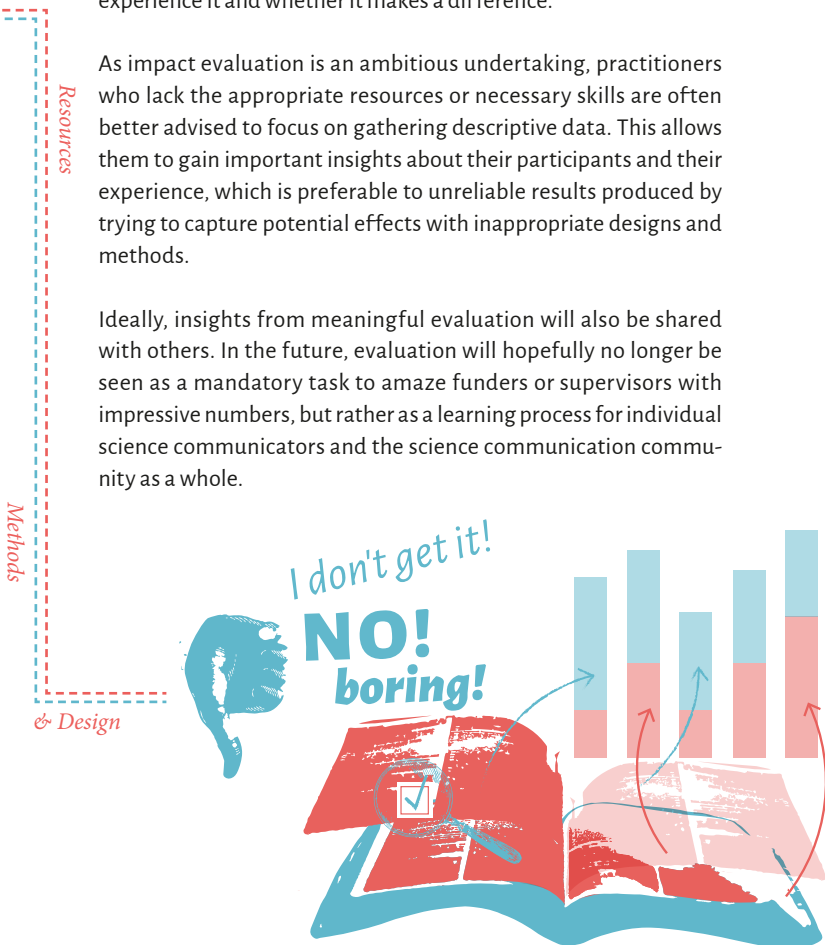
However, evaluation is not yet common in science communication, and current evaluation practices are often flawed. Many projects lack concrete definitions of their objectives and target groups. This is problematic, because clear definitions are the necessary basis for assessing a project's success. In addition, evaluation designs and data collection methods are often not appropriate for answering the evaluation questions. This is especially true when trying to investigate the effects and impact of an activity. Such an investigation requires carefully developed data collection strategies – and, most importantly, data collected at more than one point in time – to enable meaningful comparisons.

Good practice in evaluating science communication does not necessarily consist of handing out a questionnaire to participants after the event. Rather, it starts with a clear articulation of the motives, interests and questions of an evaluation by all stakeholders involved. On this basis, the study design and data collection methods can be derived accordingly.

Conducting meaningful evaluations in science communication therefore requires resources. These include time and money, but also people with the appropriate knowledge and skills. This might seem hard to achieve for smaller project-based activities with limited timelines, or for individual science communicators. Nevertheless, evaluation is the only way to really understand how a science communication activity “works”, how the people involved experience it and whether it makes a difference.

As impact evaluation is an ambitious undertaking, practitioners who lack the appropriate resources or necessary skills are often better advised to focus on gathering descriptive data. This allows them to gain important insights about their participants and their experience, which is preferable to unreliable results produced by trying to capture potential effects with inappropriate designs and methods.

Ideally, insights from meaningful evaluation will also be shared with others. In the future, evaluation will hopefully no longer be seen as a mandatory task to amaze funders or supervisors with impressive numbers, but rather as a learning process for individual science communicators and the science communication community as a whole.



Recommended reads:

- ◆ Pellegrini G. (2021), *Evaluating science communication*, in *Routledge Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology*. ISBN 9781003039242
- ◆ Impact Unit: *Wie evaluieren? Tools für die Praxis*. <https://www.impactunit.de/tools>
- ◆ Ziegler et al. (2021), *Evaluation of Science Communication: Current Practices, Challenges, and Future Implications*. *Front. Commun.* 6:669744. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.669744>