

Effective Quality

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1 Introduction

In the early 1990s BBC World Service (WS) International Broadcasting and Audience Research (IBAR) embarked on a programme of research with the aim of constructing performance measures that reflected what the audience actually valued about WS. The programme was a collaboration with The Psychology Business, a company formed by Professor Peter Stratton of the Psychology Department of the University of Leeds to make psychological research techniques available to industry¹.

The basic idea of the research was that through structured discussion groups amongst foreign station listeners you could identify the attributes which underpinned their attitude to listening and quantify the strength of the relationship between the attributes and their behaviour. Formative research established that there were certain attributes which led people to approve of a given station, and attributes which led them to listen to the broadcasts²; while the two sets of attributes overlapped they were not identical, and even where they overlapped the strength of the attribution would be different for approval and listening.

It was decided that both approval and listening were essential to WS. It is not enough for people to think that WS is 'a good thing' if they do not actually use it; and it is not enough for people to use it if they do not value it. So the measurement of performance should be based on the intersection of the two sets of attributes, and this was dubbed 'effective quality'. The key attributes were referred to as 'core values'.

The idea that the research could not only identify core values related to foreign station listening but quantify the importance of each value was a key novel feature of the research. It is common for WS to measure, for example, the extent to which people trust it or think it impartial; but how much does this matter? It may be that people lauded WS for its trustworthiness but did not

¹The research, and its theoretical basis, are described in detail in *Psychological Research: Innovative Methods and Strategies*, 1996, , Chapter 10, 'Systemic interviewing and attributional analysis applied to international broadcasting'.

²At that time there were only radio broadcasts; TV and online arrived some time later.

listen because it was boring or broadcast at an inconvenient time. By quantifying the relative importance of different attributes it would be possible to produce a single score for WS performance; and whilst the components and their relative weighting would vary between countries the resulting scores would be comparable. Further, since the core values related to foreign station listening in general and not solely to the BBC it was possible to compare performance of different stations.

The research programme was piloted in Poland and Turkey in 1992 and was rolled out across a further nine countries up to 1996. Ultimately, though, the project was abandoned for a number of reasons.

What can we learn from this research now? There are some aspects of the underlying theory which one might question, in particular the attempt to reduce a complex set of measures to a single score. But the idea that the measurement of performance should depend on what matters to the audience, and that this might vary from place to place, was ground-breaking at the time. Further, the data collected serve as a useful source for examining how one might go about collecting, analysing and presenting metrics relating to the different aspects of the value of WS.

All this was, in technological terms, a long time ago. Much of the material related to Effective Quality (EQ) is either lost or buried where it is hard to find; further, most of the computer files pre-date Microsoft Office and so many are in formats that cannot now be read. So I have had to do a certain amount of 'technological archaeology' and the material presented here is incomplete. There is enough, though, to show how the process worked.

The process

The research within one country involved two stages. In the first, structured group discussions were carried out and relevant attributional statements were recorded and coded. The coded data were analysed to provide a set of core values for foreign station listening, together with a relative weighting. Typically there were six values per country.

From these core values a set of statements were devised, two statements per value to reflect the 'intrinsic' (approval) and 'empowering' (listening) aspects. These statements were put to listeners to each of two or three stations in a given country as part of a questionnaire for a standard general population survey: listeners were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed/disagreed that each statement applied to that station.

A typical question would be:

Now I will read to you some things people say about foreign radio stations. Thinking about [STATION] in particular, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with these statements. Please give your answer according to the scale on this card.

Scale: Agree strongly
Agree somewhat
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree somewhat
Disagree strongly

From the results a score was calculated for each core value, and these combined using the weighting into an overall EQ score, for each of the stations asked about.

Poland

In the pilot study in Poland the six core values that were identified, expressed as adjectives: Distinctive; Functional; Informative; Interesting; Credible; Empathetic.

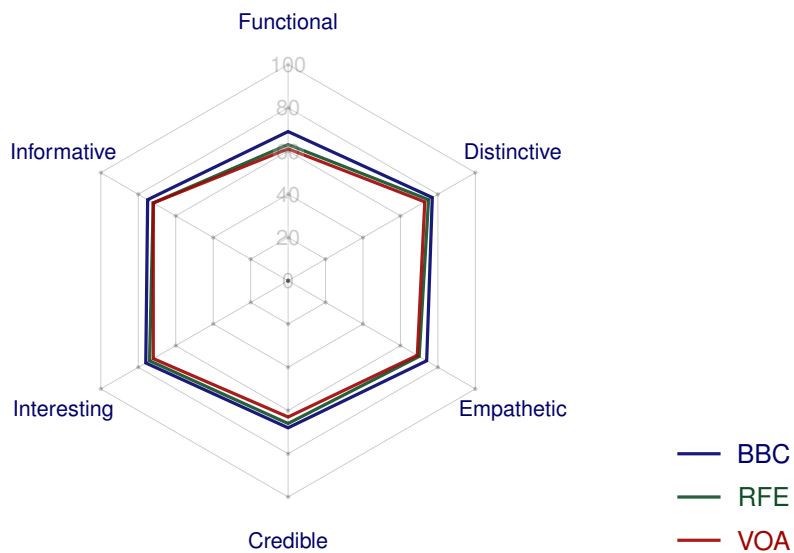
The following 12 statements were devised to test the performance of BBC WS, Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Voice Of America (VOA) against these values:

- Distinctive: This station is easily recognizable when you tune in.
This station doesn't really allow me to choose the kind of programme I want to listen to.
- Functional: It is not safe to form your opinions on the basis of what you hear on this station.
There is quite a lot that is poor quality on this station.
- Informative: This station helps me to develop my understanding and skills in important areas.
The station is a poor source of information.
- Interesting: The station makes its information interesting and enjoyable to listen to.
If you are keen to know what is going on you will want to listen to this station.
- Credible: This station is often biased or inaccurate.
You can be confident that what you hear on this station will not be misleading.
- Empathetic: You cannot rely on finding the programmes that you want to listen to on this station.
Programmes on this station are always well informed about both local and international issues.

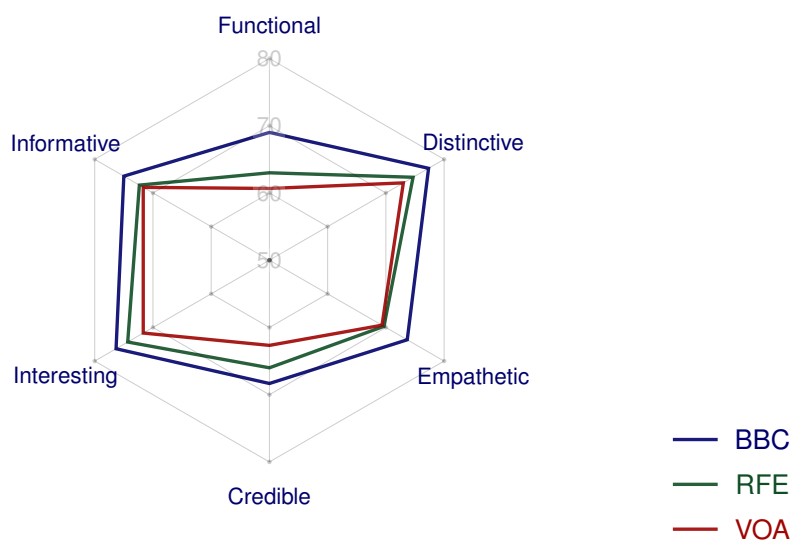
There are two points worth noting about these values and statements. First, that the value de-

scriptions are merely labels and do not adequately describe the complex ideas that they encompass. Secondly, that some statements are negative ones; for these statements disagreement with the statement leads to a positive score.

The chart below shows the results for the three stations (BBC,RFE,VOA), based on people who had listened to each station in the last three months.



In this chart the scores are shown as values ranging from 0 (everyone disagrees with both statements) to 100 (everyone agrees). It is immediately apparent that the range of variation in the mean scores is quite small. For clarity the same results are shown below with the scale limited to the range 50–80.

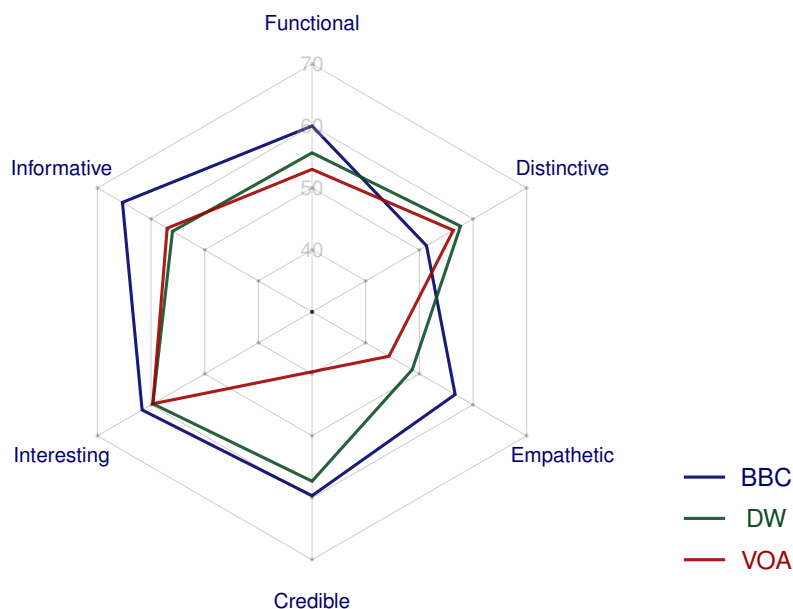


It is now easier to see that the ranking (BBC > RFE > VOA) is consistent across the values, but that there is a greater spread for 'Functional' and 'Credible' than for the others.

Turkey

In Turkey the same six core values were identified. The statements used are not available and were probably not quite the same as for Poland. The three stations asked about were BBC, Deutsche Welle (DW) and VOA.

The results are shown below, again with the scale limited. In this case the scores were generally lower and the range shown is 30–70



In this case there is much more variation in the results. The BBC scores best on all values except 'Distinctive'. VOA performs poorly on 'Credible' and 'Empathetic'.

India

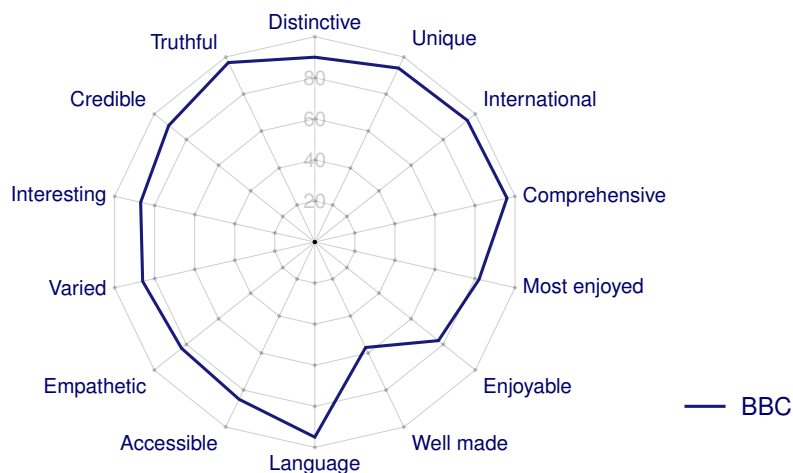
Between 1994 and 1996 EQ questions were fielded in at least four studies in India, covering Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. Raw data from these surveys is available for analysis but the documentation is not. This means that we have only sketchy information about the wording of the questions and no detail of the EQ weighting.

Nevertheless the results may be useful, not only as indications of how the EQ process played out in other countries, but as an opportunity to display the 'raw' scores from individual questions.

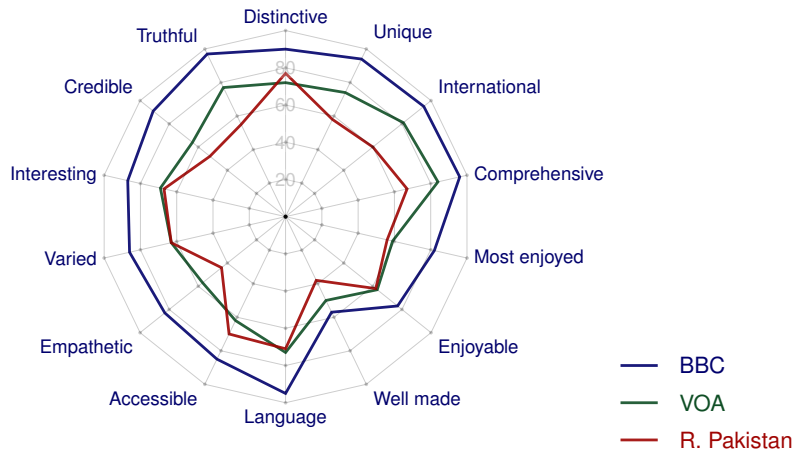
In the 1996 survey in Uttar Pradesh & Delhi there were 14 statements covering 7 core values. The approximate wording of the statements is shown below together with the label that we will use to display the data. They are arranged so that the statements which (probably) made up the same core value are together.

Comprehensive	[STATION] gives you the full information
International	[STATION] gives you current information on international news
Unique	[STATION] gives me news that other sources don't
Distinctive	[STATION] has a characteristic sound that you can recognize
Truthful	[STATION] gives me truthful reports
Credible	[STATION] is more truthful than local media
Interesting	[STATION]'s programmes are interesting
Varied	[STATION] has a variety of programmes
Empathetic	[STATION] cares about people in India
Accessible	It is easier to listen to your favourite programmes on [STATION]
Language	The language that [STATION] uses is always good
Well made	[STATION]'s programmes are not well made (scoring reversed)
Enjoyable	[STATION]'s programmes have a lot to enjoy
Most enjoyed	The programmes that I enjoy most are on [STATION]

These statements were put to listeners to the BBC, VOA and Radio Pakistan. The first chart below shows the results for the BBC, the second for all three stations. In each case the base for the results is people who had listened to the station in the past 12 months.



Well made is an outlier because the statement was a negative one, and although the score is reversed here (so a high score would mean that people disagreed with the statement) it seems likely that there was some confusion as to the meaning of the statement, or perhaps simply a reluctance to disagree. Apart from that, the BBC performs well on all components, with the strongest being *Truthful* and the weakest *Enjoyable*.



VOA has a similar profile to the BBC's but with generally lower scores. Radio Pakistan's profile is quite different, being stronger on *Distinctive*, and *Accessible* but weaker on *Truthful*, *Credible* and *Empathetic*. The scores for *Well made* are all low but otherwise fit the overall pattern.