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### Made to measure: taming practices with results-based accountability

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## Made to measure: taming practices with results-based accountability

### Abstract

This paper focuses on what happens when accountability regimes, represented in calculative planning processes, migrate onto situated, sociomaterial practices. Specifically, the article investigates what happens when the practices of results-based accountability (RBA) are translated into the social justice practices of locally-based community organizations. Based on the tenets of contemporary practice theory and a threeyear participatory action research project with community organizations in Australia, the study illustrates that performance measurement and accountability frameworks such as RBA are not technologies that peer and measure innocently and disinterestedly from a distance. Rather, RBA, as a bundle of materialdiscursive practices, is part of the performance measuring apparatus creating differences that include some things and exclude others. We articulate some of the organizing practices of social justice in a locally-based community organization, follow their translation into RBA planning practices and then return to analyse the introduction of RBA practices into the daily work of an organization. In this way, we demonstrate how situated and ongoing practices begin to unravel through intra-action with RBA boundary-making practices and its redrawn relations of accountability.

### Keywords

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# **Made to measure: Taming practices with results-based accountability**

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on what happens when accountability regimes, represented in calculative planning processes, migrate onto situated, sociomaterial practices. Specifically, the article investigates: What happens when the practices of results-based accountability (RBA) are translated into the social justice practices of locally-based community organizations? Based on the tenets of contemporary practice theory and a three-year participatory action research project with community organizations in Australia, the study illustrates that performance measurement and accountability frameworks such as RBA are not technologies that peer and measure innocently and disinterestedly from a distance. Rather, RBA, as a bundle of material-discursive practices, is part of the performance measuring apparatus intra-acting and iteratively reconfiguring that which is included and excluded from mattering, productive of and part of what materialises. We articulate some of the organizing practices of social justice in a locally-based community organization, follow their translation into RBA planning practices and then return to analyse the introduction of RBA practices into the daily work of an organization. In this way, we demonstrate how situated and ongoing practices begin to unravel through intra-action with RBA boundary-making practices. The paper contributes to current organizational research by contesting overly simplistic, representational approaches to organizing that seek to predetermine outcomes and thereby overlook the situated and emergent character of practice.

**Keywords:** practice-based, performative, intra-action, representationalism, accountability, community organizations

## **Introduction**

In the last two decades, organizational governance has shifted dramatically in domains such as the community, government and education sectors. Driven by a proliferation of new managerial discourses and accompanying sets of material-discursive practices, these changes have been variously referred to as ‘rituals of verification’ (Power 1997), the ‘new accountability’ (Martin & Kettner 1996) and the rise of ‘audit culture’ (Strathern 2000). The key features of this new governance regime include emphasis on calculative measurement practices, quantification of many aspects of organizational practices to render them visible to government funding agencies, development of a plethora of performance indicators and reliance on data-driven evidence to guide policy and decision-making (Osborne & Gaebler 1992; Townley 2002a).

Organizational research illuminates many aspects of this phenomenon. The uncritical migration of corporate rationalities to other types of organizations and sectors through forms of isomorphism has long been contested (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). In the community sector, Hwang and Powell (2009) highlight the importance of a contextualised approach suggesting that “as these formerly expressive settings become more calculable and instrumental, broader expectations about what practices are appropriate and modern are shaped” (2009: 293). Townley’s (2002b) work highlights many of the unintended effects of the migration in the New Public Management. She suggests that a “clash of value spheres” can occur when corporate models of business planning and performance measurement, employed as “rational institutionalized myths”, are disrupted by individual understandings of professional identity and management practices. She highlights the ineffectiveness of performance management systems which rely on an abstracted, disembodied and disembedded approach to management (Townley 2002a). Additionally, drawing attention to

the negative implications of subordinating communicative actions to instrumental or calculative actions, Townley et al, (2003) suggest a “fundamental concern” to be “[that] the control of behaviour passes from the authority of the conscience of associated individuals to the planning authority of societal organizations” (2003: 1067). While this rich body of work provides insight into the rationalities and discursive technologies at work, it does not examine how everyday material-discursive practices are shaped and re-shaped. This paper focuses on what happens when these new managerial regimes aiming for stability, comparability and rationality, represented in calculative planning processes, migrate into situated, sociomaterial practices.

The paper is grounded empirically in a practice-based study of planning processes undertaken in community organizations in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Since the mid-1980s, there has been a shift away from community development practices and local organizations, explicitly linked to the activist social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, towards a service provision model. The increasing devolution of the provision of welfare services to non-government organizations and the introduction of purchaser-provider contractual arrangements have seen increased prominence given to audit and accountability (Power 1994, 1997; Strathern 2000). A feature of government public policy has been an attempt to manage the community sector (other terms are also used to describe this sector such as ‘third’, ‘charitable’, ‘not-for-profit’, ‘voluntary’ and ‘civil society’) through the introduction of these new planning and accountability approaches linked to economic models for managing funding. Aiming to maximise accountability, such governmental approaches (Rose 1999) employ discursive technologies embedded in funding contracts that enable measurement of the community impact of a range of services provided by contracted community organizations (Hwang & Powell 2009). One such process used to measure the performance of

community organizations is Results-Based Accountability (RBA). RBA is derived from protocols of financial accountability as a means to strengthen government's capacity to manage service provision across the purchaser-provider divide, to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of government spending, and to increase accountability and transparency of public and community sector organizations.

RBA in its various forms (Friedman 2005; Hatry et al. 1996; Laverge 2002) is broadly defined by three underpinning ideas: justifying service provision on the basis of outcomes; demonstrating these outcomes by data-based evidence (Houlbrook & Losurdo 2008); and assuming that setting target outcomes ('results') and measuring progress will improve the social service system.

Both NSW Treasury and all human services state government departments have specifically endorsed the North American approach to RBA developed by Mark Friedman (2005). Managers within these government departments are introducing it as a mandatory planning and accountability process for funded locally-based community organizations. A significant feature of Friedman's version of RBA is that it combines a performance measurement system with a means for co-ordinating effort by including all 'partners' in planning for social service provision.

In this paper, we do not concentrate on the institutional pressures that endorsed the introduction of RBA practices into the community sector. Instead, we focus on how RBA practices became implicated in and affect the everyday practices in locally-based community organizations. Locally-based community organizations are a sub-set of organizations within the community sector. They provide support, services and/or advocacy and offer programs

responding to community issues such as poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, environmental degradation, child abuse, sexual assault, unemployment, mental health or substance abuse. They have the following distinctive characteristics: they do not distribute profits to members; have autonomy in local decision-making; have voluntary participation by members; are self-governing organizations; are community-serving and pursue some 'public good' within a particular geographic area (Salamon & Anheier 1996). Locally-based community organizations are neither entities of the state nor the market and although they may receive funding from government, they are legally autonomous from them (Onyx et al. 2008).

In contrast to other non-government organizations, perhaps the critical distinguishing feature is their local governance. Locally-based community organizations are run by management committees or boards elected from members of the local community, 'client' and/or target group, with staff often recruited from these target groups. It is this feature that generates the possibility that decisions can take place in the presence of those who will bear their consequences. Being face-to-face means accountability and response-ability is always inside connections and multidirectional relationships, a much riskier and more demanding situation than accountability that responds to a checklist from a distance (Haraway 2008).

Despite the diversity in the work of locally-based community organizations, many identify *social justice* as a driving force behind their work. The centrality of ideas of social justice to community organizations' self-understanding is widely reported in the literature (see for example, Benjamin 2008; Craig 2009; Tomlinson & Schwabenland 2010). In this literature, social justice is usually conceptualized as a set of values accompanied by an end-state orientation with goals or claims to be achieved.



However, locally-based community organizations facilitate peoples' experiences of and struggles over humiliation, hardship, belonging, representation, respect, personal and social change. Our fieldwork, drawn from a wider study (Keevers et al. 2010), articulates locally-based community organizations as *doing* social justice in the midst of a world of inequality. Accordingly, we focus on the *organizing practices* and the *practising* of social justice. We therefore employ resources from contemporary practice theory and a broader three-year participatory action research project to investigate the question: What happens when the practices of results-based accountability migrate into the social justice practices of locally-based community organizations?

The paper is organized in three parts. First, we briefly review some contemporary practice-based approaches and derive from them several sensitizing concepts to inform our description and analysis of the migration of RBA into the community services field of practices. Second, we situate the RBA study and introduce the research methodology and methods. Third, we adopt a performative, practice-based perspective to analyse some of the organizing practices of social justice in one locally-based community organization, Southern Youth and Family Services (hereafter referred to as Southern Youth). We investigate what happens when these social justice practices are translated into RBA planning processes and how results-based performance measurement becomes implicated in the everyday practices of Southern Youth and its impacts on practising social justice. Finally, we conclude that the privileging of quantifiable measures evident in RBA may mean that critical knowledge about how locally-based community organizations contribute to community well-being and social justice will be rendered invisible.

## **A practice-based approach to performance measurement and accountability frameworks**

Practice-based studies refer to the work of scholars from different disciplines that have developed explanations of social, cultural and material phenomena based on the notion of practices (Barad 2007; Reckwitz 2002; Rouse 2002; Schatzki et al. 2001). Practice-based theorising in organization studies employs a range of research approaches that foreground different aspects of practice. These practice-based approaches draw on rich philosophical and epistemological traditions including pragmatism, phenomenology, Marxist epistemology, Vygotsky's social constructivism, Wittgenstein's later philosophy, Foucault's power/knowledge nexus and Polanyi's personal knowledge and tacit knowing (Reckwitz 2002; Sandberg & Dall'Alba 2009).

Although "a unified field of practices or a social theory of practice does not exist" (Gherardi 2006: 14), contemporary practice scholars identify common themes (Nicolini et al. 2003; Sandberg & Dall'Alba 2009; Schatzki et al. 2001) that enable them to be called practice-based approaches. A core theme is the desire to go beyond *dualisms* and instead emphasize the *relational* character of practice. This emphasis on relationality questions "the primacy of the actor and the individual action as the building blocks of social phenomena" (Gherardi 2006: 39). It is within a situated practice that the knowers and knowns co-emerge and define each other. Thus practice is viewed as *socially and collectively constituted* rather than individually constituted (Sandberg & Dall'Alba 2009).

A second theme is the emphasis on *knowing and doing* rather than knowledge as acquired and possessed. This preference for verbs is indicative of a *process-oriented* stance (Nicolini et al. 2003) that "embraces ambiguity, uncertainty and discontinuity... the foundation of

emerging/becoming/organizing. Practice therefore, exists in practise” (Antonacopoulou 2008: 126). Relatedly, the attention paid to doing and the move away from a cognitive conception of knowledge emphasize emphasizes the *embodiment* of practice by practitioners, sensible knowledge and the knowing body.

Another common theme is that *knowing-in-practice* (Gherardi 2000) is viewed as *situated, mediated, provisional, contested and pragmatic* activity. Practice-based approaches offer methodologies that grapple with the complexity and multidimensionality of knowing-in-practice. Yet another theme is the focus on the *materiality* of the social world. “Knowing and acting are located in ecologies of social-material relations and their intermediaries [both human and non-human] not only mediate activities but also propagate practices” (Gherardi 2006: 39).

Because of the rich philosophical and sociological heritage of the term practice in the literature, there is diversity of use and debate about what constitutes practice. It is therefore important to describe the conception of practices that guides our analysis. In this paper, practices do not simply refer to regularised patterns of human activity but rather to dynamic, situated, embodied, spatially and temporally extended ways of humans and other-than-humans ‘doing’ things together. Practices are materially and discursively constructed networks of intra-active performances that constitute something at issue and at stake “whose definitive resolution is always prospective” (Rouse 2007: 51).

For this empirical analysis of the introduction of RBA into social justice organizations, we draw particularly on the following aspects of practice theorizing and methods. First, critiques of representationalism – the idea that beings exist as individual entities with inherent

attributes, prior to their representation – that offer alternative performative and relational approaches (for example, Butler 1993; Haraway 1997; Mol 2002; Rouse 2002). Second, the ethnomethodological tradition provides resources for the empirical study of specific fields of action and their situated logics. In particular, Suchman's (1987, 2007) work on the relationship between ex-ante planning and the implementation of plans in courses of action. Third, work in feminist studies of science challenges entrenched dualisms and adopts a performative and 'posthumanist' view of material-discursive practices, especially Barad's (2007) work on grasping the intra-action and entanglement of matter and meaning, of agencies of observation and objects of observation.

### **Performativity and relationality: Challenging representationalism**

Performative, practice-based approaches study knowledge not as a possession but as a situated, material-discursive activity that is ongoingly enacted and accomplished (Gherardi 2000). Such performative and relational perspectives call into question the representationalist view that knowledge is best understood in terms of how individuals represent things and their environment (Tanesini 1999). According to this approach, we have the knower (person who does the representing) and things (the known). Knowledge – representations in multiple forms such as theoretical concepts, models, frameworks, graphs, statistics etc – are assumed to “serve a mediating function between [these two] independently existing entities” (Barad 2007: 47).

The move from representationalism to performativity shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality to matters of practices and actions (Barad 2007: 28). A principal concern of a performative, practice-based approach is therefore the practical engagement between actors (both human and other-than-human) involved in the production of knowledge, rather than with the representations that result from this

engagement (Healy 2004). Thus, a performative paradigm doesn't deny cognitive representations of the environment. A performative paradigm, however, suggests "we do not start our thinking about knowledge from representations. They come last rather than first in the account" (Tanesini 1999: 11).

A performative and relational perspective suggests that reality is not independent of our involvements in it. Neither is reality a matter of perspective or opinion but of the consequences of enacting particular discursive-technical-material practices that can and do produce quite different lived worlds (Haraway 1997). Thus a performative, practice-based approach highlights for this paper that practices such as RBA are not only productive of what and how we know but also to what there is to know. Such an approach suggests focusing inquiry on the practices of representing in RBA as well as the productive effects of those practices.

### **Plans as resources for action: Challenging plans as prior and prescriptive**

The relations between plans and situated actions investigated in the pioneering work of Lucy Suchman (1987) is particularly relevant for this paper. In her interactional approach to socio-materiality, Suchman argues that plans are best understood not as a pre-determined series of sequenced steps that prescribe action but as conceptual, rhetorical and discursive resources for action. She uses the example of a canoeist planning to run a series of rapids to illustrate that the purpose of the plan is not to get the canoe down the rapids but to orient the canoeist in such a way as to obtain the best position from which to use embodied skills available in situ and upon which success ultimately depends. These embodied skills are themselves presupposed, rather than specified by the plan (Suchman 1987: 52). She explains:

The foundation of actions by this account is not plans but local interactions with our environment, more or less informed by reference to abstract representations of situations

and of actions and more or less available to representation themselves (Suchman 2007: 185).

In this view, plans are artefacts inseparable from the practices within which they are enacted and planning is itself a form of situated practice. For this study, such an account suggests a focus on how the effects of RBA-as-actant (Latour 1987) are generated and RBA's impact on which social justices practices of locally-based community organizations are included and excluded according to what is measured and counted. As such, material practices can be rendered invisible, excluded or included from 'mattering'. Examining RBA in this way leads to questions of power relations, of what is at issue and at stake in these practice translations.

### **Entanglement and intra-action: challenging the separability of 'agencies of measurement' from 'objects of measurement'**

The emphasis on relationality in Suchman's (2007) work highlights interdependencies and challenges pre-established categories such as subject/object. This work has been extended in feminist studies of techno-scientific practices.

Barad proposes the ontological primacy of intra-active phenomena over independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties. She argues "phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena" (Barad, 2007: 140). The focus moves from interactions between humans/other-than-humans to intra-actions (togetherness/entanglement) in practices/doings/actions. Barad introduces the term intra-action as an auditory and visual reminder of the entanglement of matters of being, knowing, doing and valuing, of ontology, epistemology and ethics. Intra-action signifies the inseparability of "objects" and "agencies of observation" (Barad 2001: 84). She substitutes the notion of 'inter-action' with 'intra-action' in order to stress that the human and other-than-human actors in a performative relationship

should not be seen as distinct entities, acting upon each other from ‘outside’, but as entangled agencies that establish each other as well as being created themselves (Rouse, 2002). The different actors become with and co-emerge through their entangled intra-relating in the ongoing performance of practices. Thus, it is “the intra-actions within practices that produce actors and categories”, rather than practices performed by actors interacting (Nyberg 2009: 1184).

In this way, intra-action is distinct from relations of mutual constitution or reciprocal interaction common in some dynamic social theories, for although they acknowledge entities are changed by interaction with each other, they maintain their ontological separation (Orlikowski 2007). Thus, everyday work practices entail not the interaction of separate entities but material-discursive intra-action. As the boundaries that constitute entities are treated as enacted, Barad’s work draws our attention to the practices of boundary-making and the enactment of difference which are always political (Suchman 2007). Barad’s neologism of intra-action offers for this paper a useful vocabulary for foregrounding entanglements and relationality and encourages a methodological focus on RBA-in-practice rather than on RBA as a ‘thing’ in itself. In what follows, we use this lens for exploring the reconfigurations, inclusions and exclusions when RBA planning processes are introduced into the practising of social justice by locally-based community organizations.

## **The study and methodology**

In this section, we situate our study, describe the research methodology, outline the specific methods used and the data collected. We make our analysis from the data collected at two sites: one of the locally-based community organizations, Southern Youth, and second, the RBA training and planning practices in which Southern Youth participated, along with

diverse non-government organizations and government bureaucracies within the Illawarra community services domain.

Southern Youth is a locally-based community organization providing a comprehensive and integrated range of accommodation, support and advocacy services to homeless and vulnerable young people and their families. It is funded by multiple state and federal government departments and managed by a community-based board that volunteer their board services. Established over 30 years ago, in an industrial centre on the southeast coast of Australia, Southern Youth has grown significantly over the past ten years and earned an international reputation as a provider of excellent youth services.

Within a participatory action research (PAR) framework, we negotiated with the management and staff of Southern Youth to follow and observe mundane practices in a range of their programs and to talk with service participants (also called clients or service users). PAR cycles also included observing and noting organizational events and activities and talking with workers and young people the day after the events, followed by reflective discussions with managers and youth workers.

After focusing on these organizing practises of social justice at Southern Youth, we turned our attention to RBA planning practices within the broader community services field of practices in which Southern Youth was a participating organization. Specifically, we observed organizing practices in two RBA training workshops and two RBA planning workshops. The two RBA planning workshops were each conducted over two days about one month apart. One hundred and sixty people, who are engaged with, work in, participate in or provide monetary and material assistance to local community organizations funded by the



Department of Community Services (DoCS) and/or the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) participated.

### **Methods and data collection**

Within our performative, practice-based approach we employed feminist-informed participatory action research (Treleaven 2006). Analysis of practice is multifaceted and complex and can rarely be captured or re-presented using a single method (Nicolini 2009). We therefore incorporated multiple interpretive methods for accessing a variety of data. Specifically, the interpretive methods used and the data accessed and collected during our study include:

- written ethnographic accounts of observations of residential youth work practices, workshop programs, drop-in programs, employment and training assessment interviews with young people, refuge house-meetings, organization events, staff meetings, Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and informal exchanges amongst young people and youth workers at Southern Youth;
- written ethnographic accounts of observations of RBA training and planning workshops;
- transcripts of reflective discussions with research participants conducted throughout the PAR cycles;
- copies of documentation produced during and after the RBA workshops;
- correspondence and documentation with government funding agencies;
- participation in lunches, morning and afternoon teas and informal debrief sessions with the RBA planning workshop organizers and facilitators.

### **Practices of social justice, RBA planning and their intra-action**

We present our analysis of the effects and impacts of introducing the practices of RBA into the local practising of social justice in community organizations in three parts. First, we describe and discuss some of the organizing practices of social justice evident in our fieldwork with Southern Youth. Second, we describe and illustrate some of the RBA planning practices. Then we follow and analyse what happened when these social justice practices were translated into RBA planning processes. Finally, we return to Southern Youth and analyse how a results-based accountability regime became implicated in the organization's daily activities and its impact on these organizing practices of social justice.

### **Practising social justice at Southern Youth**

Extensive data illustrating organizing practices of social justice was collected at Southern Youth. In this analysis, we identify and focus attention on two practices: practices of belonging and practices of respect and recognition.

#### *Practices of belonging*

Experiencing a sense of belonging is the concern most strongly expressed by young people and other service participants of Southern Youth. Workers' accounts also stress this issue. Workers not only recognise the importance of building strong relationships and connections with service participants but also emphasize the importance of facilitating connections and relationships *between* service participants themselves.

Young service participants use statements like "we are family here" to convey a newfound sense of belonging they experience through their involvement with Southern Youth and its importance in their lives. Although the metaphors of family and home dominate young service participants' accounts of their experiences, workers tend not to use this discourse. The

significance of the sense of belonging facilitated by the organizing practices of Southern Youth and the workers' ambivalence towards the allusions to family are well illustrated by Julia:

Jimmy was a young person here some 15 years ago. He moved to Queensland, got a job, and has a partner and he's just gone on his first big trip overseas. He spent his last night in Australia with us. He said he wanted to come to Wollongong before he caught the flight the next day and he wanted to know about where the other young people were that he'd sort of grown up with here. We went out to dinner with him and it was kind of like – it's very interesting. So we don't present as a family but there was a very strong connection for someone to come back from Queensland to spend their last night before they go overseas with us. So that makes us feel good too and I don't know if that's bad [laughter] (reflective discussion).

Here we see Julia's wonder at the depth of Jimmy's connection and belonging generated by being part of Southern Youth, her acknowledgement of the importance of the relationships for workers *we went out to dinner with him... So that makes us feel good too* as well as her concern *I don't know if that's bad* about how Jimmy's experience of belonging and its significance in his life may be perceived by others.

Similarly, we witnessed ex-residents returning to Southern Youth, in order to introduce their new baby to staff, to announce "they were clean" and to show a friend their photograph on the photoboards. This sense of belonging is facilitated by worker recognition of, and attention to, 'not just delivering the service'. Though Southern Youth is funded to provide specific services like crisis accommodation, family counselling, case management and job-readiness training, the quality of relationships is central, underpinned by the practice conviction that "reciprocity is the foundation of mutual respect" (Sennett 2003: 219). The commitment to reciprocity and 'not only delivering a service' is threaded throughout Southern Youth's

organizing practices. For example, at the AGM, which has been transformed into a ritual of belonging, a celebratory reunion for ex-residents, service participants, workers and bureaucrats alike, we witnessed a young former resident giving a speech to a large audience about his experience of homelessness and advocating for the needs of other homeless young people.

We visited the crisis refuge the morning after they had been on a trip to the Sydney Royal Easter Show. Although this trip does not ostensibly ‘provide a service’, it does provide access to activities, experiences and fun that the young people would not otherwise have had often because of lack of finances. One of the authors noted:

I sat around the dining room table with two workers and some very tired young people.

The previous day they had a 20-hour trip going to the Easter Show and back with a convoy of four mini buses. ... Some of them had never been to the Easter Show before.

They all spoke in detail about the actual amounts of money they were given. One young woman proudly said, “It costs at least \$200 per kid”. Collin (worker) explained, “We fund-raise for the young people to be able to go.” Having this money spent on them, for something like the Easter Show was clearly very important to all these young people...

Dan, a 13-year-old boy, went to his bedroom and brought back things he’d bought to show us (fieldnotes).

Later the same day, two of the experienced managers discussed the value of activities like the Easter Show that do not provide services as such and are not counted in accountability reporting to funding bodies. Interestingly, unlike the young people, they did not frame these activities as economic benefits but as something that enables young people to feel valued and participate in the community like other young people. Collin talked about how activities like the Easter Show and the partnership that Southern Youth has with the Dragons [local football

club], where the young people act as helpers at coaching clinics with younger children, are not considered useful by funding bodies. Kate agreed:

They think we should spend our money on a counselling session for Dan but look at him this morning. He's relaxed and happy. Trips like the Easter Show are really important ... they might not be a casework service but they are really important (fieldnotes).

Collin talked about how these kinds of activities “enable the young people to feel valued, feel part of something” (fieldnotes).

### *Practices of respect and recognition*

How the organizing practices of social justice at Southern Youth contribute to overcoming the kinds of oppressions, humiliations and sufferings that concern people's sense of well-being, esteem and recognition is complex and hard to capture. For the acts which convey respect – the acts of acknowledging others – are demanding and obscure (Sennett 2003: 59).

The crucial importance of relationships in the ongoing performance of mutual respect and recognition we observed in the practices of crisis refuge workers:

During the morning it was clear in the way the young people related to the workers that they really trusted them. The workers in their body language, in their use of humour and in the way they ‘held’ a very non-loaded emotional response themselves, contributed to a calm, relaxed atmosphere where the young people felt free to ‘be themselves’ (fieldnotes).

The young people were willing to take the challenges from the workers, over their use of language or their behaviour:

Tina who had been sitting at the table examining her face with a hand mirror and eating chocolate biscuits, suddenly said angrily: “Where's Tom [youth worker]? He promised to

take me shopping after I'd been to court." Kate explained he was away and reassured her it would happen. Tina got even angrier, shouting "Why would I believe that? People have been saying that they'll do stuff all my life but they never do, why will he be any different?" Kate listened calmly and when she tried talking to Tina about the clothes she was wearing Tina snapped "They are not mine. They're a friends." Kate asked with genuine curiosity "What's it like to have friends that will lend you their clothes?" This lead to a conversation about how Tina was feeling left out because another resident was getting to go shopping that day and also about what had turned around in her life over the last few years. When Tina had settled down and seemed less volatile, Kate asked: "What could you do, that might make you feel like you're not missing out?" Tina said: "I'm going to ring my DOCS worker and get him to get me some money for some clothes" With that she jumped up, borrowed my pen, wrote down the number and starting making a call on the phone. Kate didn't say anything but looked quite pleased that the young woman was making phone calls and acting for herself (fieldnotes).

The youth worker who verbally challenges the behaviour of a homeless young person without turning them off, performs respect. Their practices entail finding the words, the gestures, the time, the tone and the physical space that makes respect felt and persuasive (Sennett 2003).

Creating opportunities for young people to participate and give back are distinguishing features of Southern Youth's practices of mutual respect and recognition. Service participants experience their contributions as being genuinely needed and their expertise on homelessness recognised. A routine organizing practice is to invite young service participants to participate as representatives of the organization not only at the AGM but also in government consultations and the media.

At Southern Youth, creating possibilities for experiencing respect, recognition and belonging is seen as a joint responsibility that includes service participants. In viewing respect as a collective performance, practitioners focus attention on the horizontal relationships between peers, not just on the worker/client relationship. The possibilities and the impossibilities for respect and recognition are constantly becoming ‘for another first time’ (Garfinkel 1967). Respect and belonging are not outcomes or achievements but moment-by-moment practices that are situated, precarious and ongoing.

We observed that the youth workers rely on these horizontal networks and relationships between young people to ensure swift and effective communication with service participants who are often living in unstable housing situations that can make reliable contact difficult. On several occasions, we witnessed youth workers asking service participants to get messages to other young people. These messages resulted in the young person presenting themselves at Southern Youth within a few hours.

Observations of situated practices combined with the accounts of workers and service participants demonstrate that community organizations such as Southern Youth facilitate service participants’ struggles over and experiences of social justice. These local organizing practices of social justice make distinctive contributions to what Sennett (2003) and Lovell (2007) argue is an urgent need in our society, practices that enact respect across the boundaries of inequality, difference and dependency.

### **RBA planning practices**

In this section, we provide describe and illustrate RBA planning practices. RBA planning, as articulated by Friedman is “a disciplined way of thinking and taking action” (2005: 11) to improve quality of life. Participants typically work through a step-by-step process. First, they

identify the ‘results’. Next, they select quantitative measures or indicators for each Result and construct a baseline graph tracking an Indicator with the history, a projected forecast, and the desired ‘turning of the curve’. Then the factors and causes influencing the baseline are discussed. The potential partners who have a stake in attaining the Result are identified. The solutions, with the stipulation that at least two-thirds have to be low-cost, are chosen and finally a strategy and action plan is agreed (Friedman 2005). In short, RBA “starts with ends and works backward step by step to means” (Friedman 2005: 11).

The RBA planning processes we observed involved between eighty and a hundred people working collaboratively to come up with ‘results’ for populations such as children, families, people living with a disability and whole communities. ‘Results’ were phrased, for example, as ‘children are ready for school’ or ‘safe and clean neighbourhoods’. During the planning workshops, participants worked in groups of about ten people to come up with quantitative indicators for each agreed Result. Below is a photograph of a sample Result of a ‘turn the curve’ report, recorded on a single sheet of butcher’s paper and presented to the large group.

**Insert figure 1 here**

This image encapsulates many of the features of a Friedman RBA planning process. Similar to many audit and accountability processes, RBA proposes evaluating the ‘results’ of practices, such as those discussed in the previous section, without having to focus on the organizing practices themselves. RBA planning thus assumes it is possible to go straight to the end-result and by-pass the practices employed in delivering the services and achieving the ‘results’. In looking at outcome as output, RBA attempts to measure the ‘effect’ of practices.

How the social justice practices of local community organizations materialised or were immaterialised in the RBA planning data sets is complex. Practices of social justice varied



enormously during intra-action with different institutions and stakeholders in the community services domain. Similarly, RBA planning practice appeared not as a stable technology of representation with definite boundaries. Instead, there were multiple versions of RBA planning and social justice was performed and emerged quite differently depending on the configurations of organizations, practitioners and technologies intra-acting to produce an RBA plan. For example, when the government funding agency combined RBA planning practices with a Results Logic Framework and applied them to the Community Services Grants Program (CSGP), from which Southern Youth is partially funded, a new ‘result’ was developed for the funding program: “Disadvantaged children, young people, families and disadvantaged communities are resilient and safe” (DoCS Results Logic Flow Chart for the CSGP, 2008). In this ‘result’, recorded by the trainer on her laptop computer on behalf of the group, both the discourse and material-discursive practices of social justice are excluded from mattering. Instead, in the new ‘result’, responsibility is displaced onto individuals and communities themselves to become resilient and safe. However, significantly this ‘result’ ignores the need for change in the context and social structures that both contribute to disadvantage and to the need for resilience. In contrast, when RBA planning practices were enacted with large groups of people using facilitated group-work processes and technologies such as butcher’s paper, social justice was not excluded from mattering in the written plans that were produced. For example, ‘results’ such as ‘economically just’ and ‘fair’ were selected. However, during these RBA planning workshops, the social justice practices of locally-based community organizations were articulated and enacted quite differently from those we observed and discussed with Southern Youth.

### **Translating organizing practices of social justice into RBA planning**

To illustrate these shifts in translation, four contrasts are symptomatically highlighted in the next section of the paper: first, the invisibility of the relational aspects of practice; second, foregrounding of service provision and backgrounding belonging and reciprocity; third, disattention to what goes on between actors and fourth, language simplification and the emergent character of social justice practices. In consequence, practitioners in social justice organizations such as Southern Youth report that their local practice knowledge is not visible or adequately translated by government funding-bodies and, therefore, is not considered credible by Treasury.

#### *End-state 'results' and the relational aspects of practicing social justice*

Perhaps, not surprisingly, in the RBA planning workshops, social justice becomes an end state with 'results' to be achieved on a measurable scale thereby erasing the relational focus of practice from view. For example, one of the community sector workers participating in the RBA planning process commented:

Sometimes it's 5 minutes, 5 minutes of feeling respected, of feeling valued in someone's life, sometimes it's just being really listened to, what sort of result is that? (reflective discussion)

The worker points to the different 'modes of ordering' (Law 1994), different logics and paradoxical understandings of performance, time and scale that co-exist in the lived experienced of social justice organizations and in RBA planning processes. What is "reduced or effaced in one may be crucial" (Mol & Law 2002: 11) to others. While RBA planning tools offer simplification and standardisation for some stakeholders such tools can create confusion and dilemmas for others (Bowker & Star 1999: 293). Practitioners from community organizations struggled to work out how to account for the importance of relationships within RBA planning practices:

Brett, a youth worker, gave the example of taking 18 months to effectively engage an Aboriginal family struggling with severe domestic violence. “How would I measure that?” he asked. “These measures are reportable on a yearly basis. But it took years to see the result” (RBA Training fieldnotes).

Here Brett grapples with the different notions of temporality that co-exist in RBA planning and in the practices of community organizations. He struggles with the speeding up processes that are characteristic of RBA and the dilemmas that arise in relation to accountability reporting to funding bodies. The on-going efforts to create a sense of belonging and contribute to respect in the co-emergence of relations we observed in the practices of the Southern Youth workers, faded into undifferentiated background in the privileging of measurable and temporally determinate ‘results’ in RBA planning.

This fading of social justice practices to the background is perhaps in part due to RBA planning being premised on a representational view of knowledge. Within this ‘representational idiom’, Pickering argues, people appear as shadows of themselves and their practices become abstracted (1995: 6). Certainly, in the RBA planning processes we observed, participants appeared like Pickering’s ‘disembodied intellects,’ making knowledge in a field of data, facts, ‘results’, observations, graphs and language. From a representational perspective, knowledge takes the form of independent cognitive representations of the world. ‘Facts’ are segregated from ‘value’ and ‘context’ and this is achieved by cutting the boundary so as to remove from view the material-discursive practices from which this knowledge is generated (Tanesini 1999). The eschewal of the somewhat messy practices and processes involved in producing, using and circulating knowledge enables cognitive representations to be conceived as a simple mirror onto the world (Healy 2004). Friedman, in both the training we observed and his writing, explains:

Once a set of results and indicators has been developed, it is possible to create an annual report card for a city, county, state or nation. Looking at this kind of report card is like looking in a mirror. People see whether the community's quality of life is getting better or worse (Friedman 2005: 59).

By naturalising the development of RBA as representational, *a mirror*, Friedman obscures the status of RBA “as itself a form of culturally and historically situated activity, manifested in specific practices and associated artefacts” (Suchman 2007: 187). The privilege traditionally afforded to ‘fact’ over ‘value’ by representationalist views of knowledge is threaded through RBA. For example, in both Friedman’s written work (2005) and in our observations of his training practices, he acknowledges stories, experiences and anecdotal evidence as valuable. However, such data is positioned as less important and segregated from the ‘facts of the matter’ and numeric measures. For example, during observations of a senior, government-agency officer training community sector practitioners in RBA, we noted:

The whole group struggled to come up with any already existing data that would be relevant for this result [community relationships/ leadership]. When participants suggested people’s experience and stories might be data that they could easily collect, the trainer commented: “It would only be anecdotal evidence. You can’t just use qualitative data, you need quantitative data, not just stories.” Another participant asked: “Does qualitative data count? The trainer replied: “You can use qualitative data but only as a supplement to quantitative data, and you have to plot it as trends over years (RBA Training fieldnotes).

Here the privileging of quanta, evident in Friedman’s RBA framework, is compounded and institutionalised by the state government representative’s devaluing of qualitative evidence. There is an insistence that rich description of the situated and experiential must be, as Healy notes, “codified in a form analogous to the decontextualised, representationally encrypted form characteristic of expert knowledge in order to be credible” (2009: 1646).

### *Foregrounding service provision, backgrounding belonging and reciprocity*

In this second contrast, the foregrounding of service provision in RBA planning was accompanied by a backgrounding of the importance of reciprocity and belonging in practising social justice. For instance, some practices of belonging, such as the importance of ‘not providing a service’ and ‘giving back’ as the foundations of mutual respect that were strong themes observed in our fieldwork with Southern Youth, did not materialise in any of the recorded RBA planning process data. In both our observations of Friedman’s RBA training and in a published interview, he emphasized that performance accountability and measurement is always about a *particular service*. For example:

Once you have identified the particular service then you can identify your customers, the people you actually serve, and you can identify measures of how the service is working for them, and use those measures to track and improve performance” (Interview between Friedman & Handley 2008: 7).

In this boundary cut that measures service provision, RBA excludes from mattering all the practices that cannot be constituted as ‘a service’. Yet, at Southern Youth these practices are identified as crucial in contributing to peoples’ struggles over recognition, belonging and ‘just’ living .

### *Individualising the relational*

In this third contrast, there is disattention in RBA planning practices to what goes on between actors, as this aspect of practice “exceeds the frame through which recognizable persons, things and processes are made visible” (Suchman 2007: 202). How did it happen that attention to what goes on between people, to the relations between actors (both human and non-human) disappeared in the RBA planning practices of data gathering, establishing

baselines and indicators we observed? The table below shows the indicators identified in an RBA planning workshop for the ‘result’ – safe, caring and connected.

**Insert table 1 here**

In this table, the indicators capture outcomes for individuals and entities expressed in terms of numbers and percentages. This is a typical representational practice in RBA planning processes and a good means for measuring and graphing ‘entities’, such as the *number of individual reports of social cohesion* or *reduced rates of hospital reported unintentional injury*. However, as the table demonstrates in the measures identified, RBA planning intra-actions are less successful in translating what goes on amongst people, the relations and practices *between* actors. Our data suggests that the more agencies of observation and measurement focus on the properties of individual entities, the more information is given up on the nature of what goes on amongst actors. The converse is also the case. For example, in our study with Southern Youth we employed ethnographic methods to articulate their organizing practices of social justice. These agencies of observation provided detailed accounts about what goes on amongst actors participating in Southern Youth but almost no quantifiable, overview information, in terms of numbers and percentages. When using performance measurement frameworks that privilege quanta and measurable outcomes for entities, practices, relations and entanglements between entities fade from view. Thus, even though the ‘result’ in the table is concerned with people’s sense of connection and belonging, none of the indicators address these phenomena directly.

*Language simplification and the emergent character of practice*

Fourth, we observed throughout workshops that RBA trainers and facilitators emphasize plain language ‘results’ which, when combined with the effects of calculative practices excluded the uncertain and emergent character of practising social justice. Small groups were asked to brainstorm ‘results’ for the target population, and then after each group reported

back to the large group, a single list of ‘results’ was recorded. In our field notes, we describe the shifts and slippages in language that occurred between the lists that small groups came up with to the list aggregated in the large group.

“sense of hope for the future” became *secure future*

“sense of control over one’s life” became *choice and control*

“sense of belonging”, ‘belonging to a just community’ became *meaningful relationships*

“happiness, well-being, and healthy as possible” became *best health*.

Observations and artefacts, concerning the intra-actions between the workshop participants and the RBA planning language, point to the material-discursive nature of RBA practices. When participants used words like “equity and access, equality and justice”, the RBA facilitator explained: “The ‘results’ have to be in plain English, short and sharp, so that they speak to the person off the street”. The same example that Friedman had employed in his RBA training, as an illustration of an ideally expressed ‘results’ list was used: “Children are safe, at home, at school, out of trouble and off the streets”.

These ‘ideal’ RBA ‘results’ are very different from the emphasis in Southern Youth on increasing relations and encounters across the boundaries of difference, inequality and dependency that we observed in the fieldwork.

Instead the language of the final ‘results’ list, with the individualised focus and emphasis on ideals such as *choice and control*, is consistent with neoliberal governmentalities. The uncertainty and ineffability of future ‘results’ conveyed in phrases like *sense of hope for the future* is eschewed in the translation to *secure future*. The specific, situated practice knowledge and attention to young people at risk living well, and contributing to community life which expresses the distinctive character of practising social justice at Southern Youth

did not appear on any of the ‘results’ lists we witnessed being constructed. The richness, depth and specific character of local practice knowledge was bleached out (Iedema 2003) during intra-action with RBA representational practices, resulting in final ‘results’ lists that were generalised and indistinguishable from a generic ‘results’ list for any human population.

### *Local practice knowledge and translation*

These four shifts in translation combine to create a situation in which the Southern Youth practitioners participating in our study report a sense that their organizing practices of social justice are not really visible, recognised or understood by funding bureaucracies.

This perception is not surprising as government funding-agencies also recognise the need for a translation device. Their representatives position the RBA framework as such a device:

“RBA is the means for human services to speak the language of the funder”... “You need to speak in the language of Treasury; Treasury resents people not being clear” (RBA Training fieldnotes).

Since the organizing practices of locally-based community organizations funded by Treasury are currently invisible to them, and thus un-accountable and un-governable, an official explained:

“we are trying to get CSGP [the funding program] to fit in credibly with the ‘results’ logic, through the RBA model” (RBA Training fieldnotes).

This statement indicates that the government agency is deploying RBA to translate the contributions of the organizations that are funded through the community services grants program (CSGP) into a form that will be visible to and valued by Treasury, with the intention of securing the sustainability and growth of the funding program. However, within the current configurations of knowledge/power relations in the community sector, the governmental deployment of RBA with its emphasis on performance measurement, co-



ordinated effort and consensus aligns with state-government efforts to re-position social justice organizations such as Southern Youth not as locally-based and autonomous but as detached sub-contractors in purchaser/provider relations.

In the following section, we therefore return to Southern Youth to investigate how the deployment of a results-based accountability regime became implicated in the organization's daily activities and the impacts on organizing practices of social justice.

### **Intra-action: Not just peering, interfering**

Borrowing Hacking's (1983) dictum 'don't just peer, interfere', in this section we reverse the dictum to show how intra-action between social justice practices and RBA practices do indeed not just peer but interfere.

In a published interview transcript, Friedman (Friedman & Handley 2008) stresses not to let accountability and performance measurement methods interfere with the service. Such advice is based on the view that performance measurements reveal pre-existing values of the properties of independently existing services. These services are conceived as being separate from measuring agencies such as the RBA framework. However, from a performative practice-based perspective, RBA cannot be an apparatus that peers and measures innocently, from a distance without interfering. Rather, it is part of the larger performance measuring apparatus intra-acting and shaping the phenomena that becomes (Barad 2007). RBA, a complex of material-discursive practices, constrains and enables what can and cannot be said. RBA is what Barad refers to as "a boundary-drawing practice" (2007: 140) intra-acting in the organizing practices of social justice at Southern Youth, iteratively reconfiguring that which is included and excluded from mattering, productive of and part of what materialises.

For example, during our fieldwork at Southern Youth we observed the introduction of a new results-based accountability and audit regime mandated by the government department that both funds the service and provides a living allowance to homeless young people. The government department plays a governance role in relation to the young people, proscribing and delineating possibilities for behaviour. For example, in order to receive their living allowance payment, the young people have to undertake education or work-related activities. If they miss appointments, they are 'breached', their payment suspended.

This computerised case-management and outcomes-based accountability system, acting as an electronic eye, provides the government funding-body with direct access to the worker's online diary. The government department via the computer database makes appointments directly into the worker's diary and the workers are thereby required to give the funding body information from every appointment and contact they have with each young person. Prior to the introduction of the computer system, Southern Youth acted as an advocate for young people when they had difficulties with the government department providing the living allowance to them. Workers were not directly part of the surveillance, breaching and governance system. One of the authors recorded in her fieldnotes:

The funding body via the database on the computer has a persistent and almost physical presence in the room. The computerised case management system occupies much of the worker's desk, along with the phone and the answering machine. The worker is in almost constant touch with the computer mouse, keyboard and phone. As the workers discuss the funding body and the new system with me, they glance repeatedly at the computer. Instead of being a background part of the infrastructure, at arm's length, the funding body is ever present, inscribing new ways of working on the youth workers... It is almost

as if the workers experience surveillance and governance via the computer database in a manner not dissimilar to the young people they are assisting (fieldnotes).

The impact of the electronic audit regime is well captured in Felicity's [the youth worker] comment:

It used to be the relationship between me and the young person. Now it's the computer, the young person and me (reflective discussion).

The computerised case-management system has an active role in re-shaping relationships between the youth workers, young people and the funding body. The workers treat the computer as an actor with whom they have a difficult and problematic relationship. They ascribe agency to the computer system that causes "dramas", "automatically flicks information to the government agency" and is "unreasonable" (fieldnotes).

The relations between actors emerge from continuous struggle where the human and other-than-human actors resist, subvert and accommodate each other's activities. The meaning of the material actors (both human and non-human) is in the contextual performance (Nyberg 2009). Meaning, matter and power relations are produced and constrained through the iterative intra-actions of the material-discursive practices involving the government department, the bureaucrats, the young person, the youth workers, the managers, the outcomes-based accountability reporting database on the machine and the administrative system of Southern Youth. These structural relations of power are materialised, contested and (re)produced through a range of local practices including the numbers and notes recorded in the computer. The material-discursive assemblages are part of an entangled web of changing practices and possibilities including: economic, political, social, legal, educational and cultural apparatuses for 'producing' and regulating the young people.

Both the managers and the youth workers claim that the accountability and monitoring requirements of the program, designed to assist homeless and at-risk young people to obtain employment or participate in education, is paradoxically making it more difficult to engage with and build relationships with homeless and at risk young people. This outcomes-based accountability and case management system prescribe that Southern Youth meets targets such as the number of young people employed or in training programs. These target 'results' are individualised and the organizations' funding is tied to the number of 'results' achieved. The length and intervals between their official appointments with young people are organized by the funding agency via the computerised case management and outcomes-based accountability system. The integration of this new system has significant impacts on the daily practice of workers, reducing the time necessary to create a sense of belonging and develop young people's skills that will form the basis for sustaining their life changes, changes that may not become evident as 'results' for years into the future. A youth worker, Felicity, describes this impact:

It's constantly looking at numbers. I dream of the data, the numbers at night.

It's all I see and yeah the quality and depth of the client contact has really declined in the last couple of months because of the pressure of the new data and monitoring requirements. We don't get the funding unless we meet the targets. It's really changed the way we work ... If a young person was having problems with transport or anything like that we would go and meet the client. We would either go to where they were staying and do the assessment there, or we'd take them somewhere where they felt more comfortable, so we might meet them at McDonalds or something like that. Now we can't – we can't do any of that because we have to enter information onto the computer as soon as they come in. And they [funding body] have either booked us an appointment

right after or there is not enough space between times to drop them off and pick them up.

In this example, the turning of outcomes ('results') into targets to be measured and managed, far from simply mapping reality, imposes another form of organizing where they have appointments with young people in the office for set periods of time. Such practices are in direct contrast to more open-ended exchanges in informal settings, such as the dining room table. As we previously illustrated, such in-the-moment informal engagement affords opportunities for workers to work with young people on issues as they arise. The experience of Southern Youth supports Tsoukas's (1998) view that pre-determined indicators shape organizations:

towards the bureaucratic form of organization... Holding an organization accountable on the basis of how well it achieves certain targets... tends to push the organization to formalize the behaviour of its members and centralize its functioning, in order to make sure it conforms to outside expectations (Tsoukas 1998: 794-795).

Thus, such performance measures risk shaping locally-based community organizations, such as Southern Youth, in the image of the funding bureaucracy.

The emphasis in RBA reporting on the outcomes of service provision thereby renders immaterial the possibilities created by the way the service is delivered. For example, the governance model of Southern Youth, offers the possibility of participation. Whilst not every young person participates on the board, inclusion as a possibility signals to them that the value of their voice and participation is welcome and recognised. Many such daily organizing practices of social justice at Southern Youth remain *unrepresented* in RBA performance measurement monitoring systems.

These analyses illustrate that apparatuses of performance measurement, such as RBA, are both powerful and contingent and do not necessarily have the intended effect of improving outcomes for service participants (Townley, 2002b). Intra-action with RBA performance measurement practices risks translating quality into only quantity. Statistics enable the taming of the emergent and ineffable character of organizing practices of social justice thus making the world appear more controllable (Ballas & Tsoukas 2004; Porter 1995). Such practices of performance measurement have the capability to turn some aspects of knowing and practising into forms of information that “are stable, mobile, combinable and comparable” (Miller & Rose 1990: 7). This capability renders aspects of Southern Youth known and re-presented to the ‘centre’ (government funding department, senior decision-makers and ministers), thereby enabling the ‘centre’ “to establish control over and convey its preferences to” (Ballas & Tsoukas 2004: 677) Southern Youth.

As required, Southern Youth have introduced a detailed process of gathering data on outcomes that can be calculated and re-presented in statistical form. Simultaneously in a counter-act of resistance, Southern Youth continues to present case studies and evaluations from young people in their accountability reports despite the funding bodies’ lack of interest in such forms of representation.

When RBA, itself an apparatus produced and re-configured in intra-action, intra-acts in the complex material-discursive field of youth services, differential boundaries are drawn. These boundaries are “always accompanied by particular exclusions and always open to contestation” (Barad 2007: 153). Our analysis demonstrates that unrepresented practices are at risk of exclusion under RBA regimes anchored in computer-based monitoring technologies and entangled with funding tied to individualised outcome targets

## **Conclusion**

In summary, we used a performative, practice-based approach to investigate the impacts and effects when RBA planning and performance measurement practices are translated into the organizing practices of social justice exemplified in one locally-based community organization. We articulated some of the mundane practices of social justice at Southern Youth, followed their translation into RBA planning practices and then analysed the introduction of RBA practices into daily work at Southern Youth. As material engagements, RBA practices participate in (re)configuring both relations and work in social justice organizations. Such intra-actions underscore boundary-drawing practices and thus what gets included and excluded from mattering.

This paper provides the first critique and empirical analysis of Friedman's (2005) RBA planning and performance measurement practices and their deployment into the Australian community services domain. The mandating of RBA practices into community organizations encourages their focus to shift from matters of practices, doings and actions to matters of the correspondence between 'results' and 'reality' and the measurement and graphing of this correspondence.

Our critique is fourfold. First, this study illustrates that the representationalist conception of knowledge presupposed and threaded through performance measurement and accountability frameworks such as RBA hampers inclusion of the local practice experience of both workers and service participants. The implicit privilege granted to 'facts' and quantification in RBA renders practices, relationalities, values and context marginal and often invisible (Healy 2009). Second, this privileging of quantifiable measures means that critical knowledge about

how locally-based community organizations contribute to community well-being and social justice is rendered immaterial. Third, our analysis demonstrates that the introduction of results-based accountability, anchored in a computerised case-management monitoring technology and entangled with funding tied to individualised outcome targets, is unravelling some of the daily organizing practices of social justice that create a sense of belonging, assist young people to have a sense of control over their lives and build hope for their futures.

Fourth, contrasting conceptions of performance and temporality intra-act within the community services field of practices. In the practice of RBA, performance is demonstrably linear. RBA planning processes begin with the future-oriented value-laden choice of ‘results’ and conclude with evaluation against performance indicators established from ‘objective facts’. Thus RBA planning focuses attention on the future, the past to be overcome improved and surpassed. In this result-oriented view, “the present is only a vanishing point of transition” toward a better future (Haraway 2007: 2).

Whereas, in the lived experience of Southern Youth, the past, present and future are knotted together. “There is no single, crucial moment when all relevant facts-values are available” (Mol 2008: 54). For young people at Southern Youth, issues arise and, as they are tackled, new challenges in their lives emerge; struggles over social justice continue without cease. Opportunities for change are generated in the organizing practices that unfold in-the-moment and are always open for re-negotiation (Keevers & Treleaven forthcoming). Within such a conception of performance, it makes little sense to fix the result of a process before the process has begun. Working out the destination is part of the process in struggles over social justice (Mol 2008). The intra-actions of these different conceptions of performance and



temporality will almost certainly mean that efforts of alignment by government agencies will be precarious and incomplete.

Rather than concentrating efforts on regulation and standardisation of community organization practices by assessing them against uniform, performance measures and ‘results’, these analyses suggest adopting a more pluralistic approach to both evaluation and accountability. Such approaches would encompass methods sensitive and appropriate to the distinctive contributions and practices of locally-based community organizations. They could begin by addressing the mismatch between the ‘results’ and performance measures developed by government funding-agencies and the experiences and feedback from young people themselves who are the primary beneficiaries of improvements in performance.

The potential for participatory decision-making by government agencies, practitioners and service users, emphasized in RBA planning processes, is currently thwarted and power relations, entrenched in the community services field of practices, reinforced. Disruption of power relations maintained through RBA tools will affect which aspects of practice knowledge in the community sector are visible, heard and understood, and which practices are considered credible (Rouse 2009).

This paper makes a second contribution to studies of organization. While most practice-based studies follow and analyse endogenous changes in practices that emerge from within a community of practice (Gherardi & Perotta forthcoming), this practice-based study focuses on changes in practices mandated exogenously by institutions governing the field of practice. As such, focusing on the migration of result-based accountability practices into locally-based

community organizations that are between market and state contexts, adds empirically to organizational research.

This paper makes a third contribution by studying social justice as organizing practices rather than a set of values accompanied by an end-state orientation with goals or claims to be achieved.

RBA planning practices offer a range of tools for simplifying, standardising and co-ordinating both information and effort across the heterogeneity of institutions, organizations and communities of practitioners in the community services domain. However, as this study attests, what simplifies and standardises for some stakeholders may put at risk the longer term wellbeing of clients by reconfiguring locally-based organizing practises of social justice. The paper, thereby, contests overly simplistic, representational approaches to organizing that seek to make the world more controllable by taming the situated, emergent character of practising social justice.

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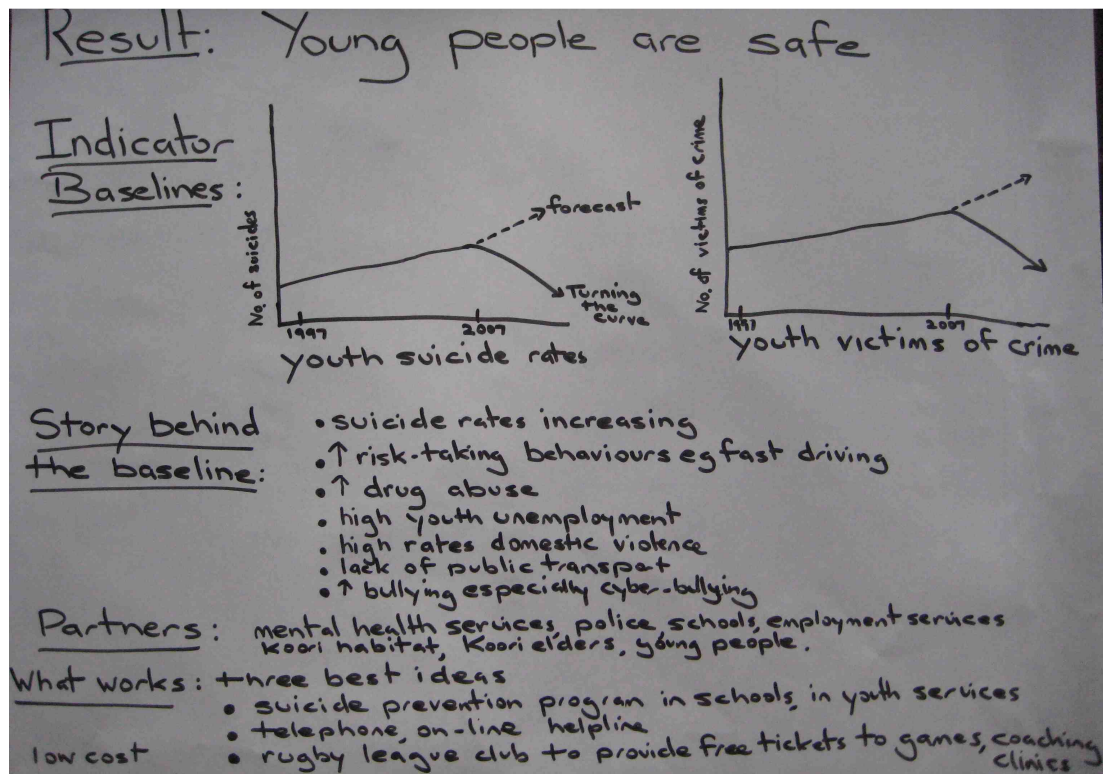
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Figure 1: RBA 'turn the curve' result report



**Table 1: Proposed Indicators for the result ‘Safe, caring and connected’**

<b>Result</b>
The community of people living in the Illawarra is safe, caring and connected
<b>Indicators</b>
# of individual reports of social cohesion
Reduced rates of hospital reported unintentional injury
Confirmed rates of child abuse
Confirmed rates of domestic violence
Reduced rates of road related injury and death
Reduced rates of workplace injury
# and % of people report feeling safe
Increase in uptake of services & participation in community activities
# and % of older people feel safe using public transport at night