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RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY PRODUCING MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENTS FOR CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES

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It is not uncommon to find that countries and their regions, local councils and cities have timely reliable data about the quality of life of their citizens. But often this data is not used in ways that lead to the improvement in the quality of life of those geographic areas. RBA provides a set of common sense methods that can be used at all levels and are equally applicable to the work of professional staff and the participation of citizens. RBA has a growing worldwide track record of measurably improving community quality of life and the performance of government and non-government services.

1. Introduction:

Results-Based Accountability (RBA), also known in the UK and Australia as Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA), is a framework that provides step-by-step methods that turn data into action. Starting with quality of life conditions (called “results”), agencies and cross-agency partnerships identify indicators, produce trend lines, consider best practice, and develop strategies, action plans and budgets that are then implemented, monitored and continuously improved. In this paper, Mr. Friedman, author of the book “Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough,” presents the basic concepts of RBA and discusses the implications for the world OECD community.

2. Why is it so hard to get people to use data?

Due in part to the efforts of OECD, many countries now have a wide array of data on the well-being of their populations. Similarly, most government and non-governmental services are literally drowning in data. But good practice in the use of data is surprisingly rare. There are a number of reasons for this.

(1) Organizations do a poor job of setting priorities for what data is most important. If everything is important then nothing is important.

(2) Organizations have a poor understanding of the role of data. Data is not a good unto itself, but rather a tool that can help organizations change lives. It is only possible to set

data priorities if data is seen as serving a higher purpose.

(3) The planning and management frameworks that organizations have adopted are unnecessarily complex and hard to use. In the face of this complexity, managers and executives often treat the development and use of data as a specialized technical matter detached from the day to day management of the organization.

RBA directly addresses these problems. It provides a clear articulation of higher purpose in the form of quality of life statements. It provides common sense methods for setting data priorities. And most importantly, it gives managers, executives and community partners a set of data tools that they can use in their busy schedules to drive improvements in service performance and community quality of life.

3. Language Discipline:

RBA starts with language discipline. If we are not disciplined about language, then we are not disciplined about thought. There is an appalling lack of language discipline in social enterprises around the world. Five definitions are necessary for clear communication about the very complex content of social change. What is important about these definitions is the distinction between the five ideas and not the particular words used to label these ideas.

“Results” (or “Outcomes”) are conditions of well-being for children, adults, families and communities. Results include such things as *Safe Communities, Socially Included Families, Clean Environment, Prosperous Economy*.

“Indicators” are measures that quantify the achievement of results. So, for example, the unemployment rate helps quantify *Prosperous Economy*. The rate of homelessness helps quantify *Socially Included Families*.

“Performance Measures” are measures that tell if a program, agency or service system is working well. RBA uses a simple three part categorization scheme for performance measures: *How much did we do?*(e.g. # served), *How well did we do it?*(e.g. % timely service), *Is anyone better off?*(e.g. % showing improvement)

“Turning the Curve” means turning the baseline or trend line in the right direction.

“Strategies” are coherent sets of actions that have a reasoned chance of turning the curve.

4. Population vs. Performance Accountability:

RBA makes a fundamental distinction between Population Accountability and Performance Accountability. Population Accountability is about quality of life in a geographic area such as a community, city, county, local or regional council area, state or nation. Making progress on population quality of life requires the participation of a wide range of partners. No single agency or level of government can bear sole responsibility for quality of life. Quality of life partnerships require new ways of working together that bridge across different systems and different cultures. In many countries, such partnerships have now successfully used RBA to turn

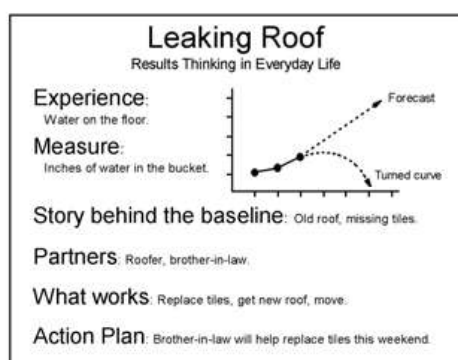
the curve on critical quality of life indicators. For example, the Connexions Council in Newcastle UK has used these methods to make dramatic progress on the percentage of young people “Not in Education, Employment or Training.” (See case example below).

Performance Accountability, by contrast, is about how well government and nongovernmental services are delivered and whether they are making a difference in the lives of their customers. RBA provides a five step method for identifying the most important performance measures for any service. Trend lines are then prepared for these measures. Agency managers and executives use seven RBA questions to monitor and improve performance on a monthly or quarterly basis. For example, in North Lincolnshire, UK, staff from Social and Housing Services used RBA methods to produce a significant increase in the occupancy rate for public sector housing.

RBA has been used successfully in countries around the world, including Australia, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Israel, Moldavia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the UK. It can provide OECD countries with a common way of working across geographic boundaries, across service systems and across cultures to make a difference in the lives of their citizens. Where data has been seen as the domain of specialists, RBA shows that data is something everyone can understand and use.

5. Getting from Talk to Action

Many planning processes are all talk and no action. This is perhaps due to the simple fact that it is easier to plan things than to actually do them. But it is more likely the consequence of two convergent deficiencies in planning processes. They are often far more complicated and time consuming than they need to be. And for many planning processes, creation of the plan document becomes the purpose of the work, instead of the intended benefits and the actions needed to get there. RBA is a planning process where one planning cycle can be completed quickly and where the end “product” is not a static document but rather an evolving action plan where the ends are always in sight and some plan components can be implemented immediately.



The RBA process is built around a common sense progression from ends to means, and can be illustrated by the analogy of fixing a leaking roof. Imagine you have a leaking roof. How could you measure how badly the roof is leaking? You could put out a bucket and measure the centimetres of water in the bucket after each rainstorm. The graph above shows the data plotted for the last three rainstorms. The straight line leading from the last point to the upper right is a

projection of where the measure will go if we don't do anything to fix the roof. We call this combination of history and forecast a "baseline."¹ The future represented by this forecast, of steadily increasing water in the bucket is "not OK." We want to follow a path to zero just as fast as we can. We call this movement away from the baseline "turning the curve" or beating the baseline.

Now that we have the facts about how bad the situation is and where it is headed, we can begin to work on solutions. The first question is, "What are the causes that help explain this baseline?" In this case we need to find the hole or holes in the roof that are causing it to leak. This is a diagnostic process not unlike epidemiologists researching the causes behind an epidemic. We next need to think broadly and creatively about partners who can help us fix the roof. This should include professionals but should also include family members, friends and community members. Next we consider our options about how to fix the roof. Should we repair or replace it? If we repair the roof, what is the best way? Out of our consideration of "partners" and "what works" to fix the roof we will create an action plan to fix the roof. For example, "We decide that we can't afford to replace it. A neighbour will come over next week and we'll get up on a ladder and patch it up as best we can." After we implement this action plan we evaluate whether it is working or not. If it is not working, if there continues to be water in the bucket after the next rainstorm, we need to go back through the thinking process again. We need to reconsider causes, partners, what works and create a next generation action plan. This is an iterative or repetitive process until there is no more water in the bucket and the roof is fixed.

This analogy shows the basic steps in the RBA thinking process. It also illustrates how this common sense thinking process can be communicated to lay people who can use this process in combination with quality of life data to create action plans to improve the quality of life in their communities.

Here is the 7 step "leaking roof" thinking process that can be used at the national, regional, council, city or neighbourhood levels to improve quality of life:

The 7 Population Talk to Action Steps:

Step 1: What are the quality of life conditions we want for the children, adults and families who live in our community?

Step 2: What would these conditions look like if we could see or experience them?

Step 3: How can we measure these conditions?

Step 4: How are we doing on the most important measures? (baselines & causes)

Step 5: Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?

Step 6: What works to do better, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?

Step 7: What do we propose to do?

Here is the 7 step thinking process that can be used by government and non-government managers to improve the performance of their services:

¹ 1 Note, the word "baseline" has many possible definitions. The definition used in RBA comes from the field of budgeting and finance, where both historical data and a policy neutral forecast is shown. The word baseline and trend line are often used interchangeably.

The 7 Performance Talk to Action Steps:

- Step 1: Who are our customers?
- Step 2: How can we measure if our customers are better off?
- Step 3: How can we measure if we're delivering services well?
- Step 4: How are we doing on the most important measures? (baselines & causes)
- Step 5: Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
- Step 6: What works to do better, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?
- Step 7: What do we propose to do?

These questions should be used in monthly meetings or planning sessions. All 7 questions should be asked and answered at every meeting, so that the overall coherence of the process is maintained. As managers and partners repeat this process, their answers will get better. Each set of 7 questions leads to an action plan (what we propose to do.) which should include no-cost and low-cost elements that can be acted on immediately.

6. Report Cards on Quality of Life and Service Performance.

One of the most important tools in the RBA framework is a report card on the quality of life of a defined population. Such report cards on quality of life of children, adults, families and communities have now been produced in a significant number of nations and states. Notable among these are “The Social Report” by the Ministry for Social Development in New Zealand, South Australia’s “Strategic Plan Progress Report,” Vermont’s “Community Profiles,” Maryland’s “Results for Child Well-Being,” the report “Environmental Quality in Connecticut,” the “Community Assessment Project Reports” in Santa Cruz California, the Coventry UK “Children’s and Young People’s Partnership Data Book” (pictured at right), Community level reports for neighbourhoods in Tillburg, Netherlands, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s “Kids Count” reports. Report cards provide the baseline information necessary to drive the RBA quality of life and service performance improvement processes, and to track progress.

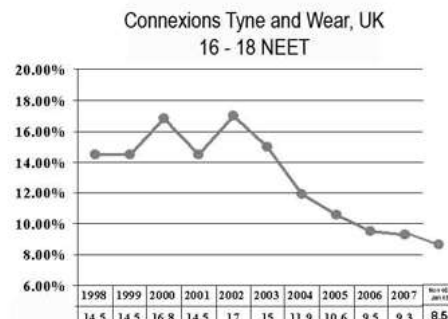


7. Case Examples:

There are a growing number of case examples where the application of RBA (OBA in the UK) has produced a clear measurable improvement in the well being of a defined population. Here is one example from Newcastle, UK, paraphrased from a report by Sara Morgan–Evans, Local Connexions Manager.

Connexions is a service tasked with providing information, advice, guidance, support and referral to all young people in England aged between 13 and 19 and up to 25 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The key measure of success is the number of 16-18 year olds who are not accessing education, employment or training (NEET). Within the Tyne and Wear region of north-east England, the Newcastle Connexions team is tasked with delivering the Connexions service to the 30,000+ young people educated in the City of Newcastle.

In November 2003 the Newcastle NEET figure stood at 15%, roughly the same level as the previous decade. By January 2009, the Newcastle Connexions team had reduced this figure to 8.5%, the largest reduction of any comparable area in the UK. The local Connexions manager attributes much of this success to training in Outcomes-Based Accountability. After the Local Manager attended an OBA training session, she delivered OBA training first to the Connexions management team and then the whole Connexions team. Staff began to look at their work with young people in a different way, placing less significance on



how many times or how long they spent with clients and changing the emphasis to the difference that their interventions made. Staff also began to look more closely at the barriers facing young people who were NEET and the importance of networking with other agencies to support the removal of those barriers. Managers took a fresh look at the team delivery plan and the plans delivered in partnership with other organizations such as schools. Plans were reviewed in terms of the impact that they would have rather than a matter of fixed allocation (e.g. assigning staff time based on school enrollment regardless of the characteristics of the students). Subsequently, the Connexions team drilled down further into the most hard to help NEET young people. New approaches were tried including linking with adult services to target workless households.

At least part of the success of Newcastle's reduction in NEETs was due to the dissemination of OBA as a way of working to all staff in the team. Practitioners working directly with young people saw that they could have an impact on individual lives and that impact on individuals could translate into an impact on the community.

Newcastle's success with RBA/OBA is not unique. Between 1995 and 2004, Vermont showed similar progress in reducing the blood lead content level for young children. Between 1994 and 2002, Santa Cruz County, California produced significant reductions in teen alcohol and drug use. Between 1996 and 2004, Dayton Ohio significantly improved elementary and secondary school attendance. Between 2002 and 2005, North Lincolnshire, UK increased occupancy rates in public housing. And more recently in 2009, Christchurch, New Zealand changed the trend on the rate of graffiti site tagging in the city.

8. Implications for the world OECD Community

RBA provides a way for OECD countries to harness the power of data to produce improvements in quality of life. The process is scalable from the national level, to regions, local councils and neighbourhoods. These uses can be linked across levels of government to produce a powerful alignment of interests and actions. Or they can support autonomous actions at one or more levels not dependent on higher level sanction.

Because RBA is a common sense set of tools easily understood by non-experts, it empowers people at every level to take responsibility for quality of life conditions they find unacceptable and provides a way to work together to directly address and improve those conditions. Although RBA methods and materials are protected by international copyright laws,



all RBA material is free for use by government and nonprofit / voluntary sector organizations.²

RBA is a generic thinking process that has very wide applicability. It has been used for everything from the performance of schools, to the safety of communities, to the health of the natural environment, to matters of national security.

RBA is a process that is strongest when there is broad and diverse participation. It therefore encourages and enables inclusive participatory planning and decision making.

Perhaps most importantly, RBA provides a way to link people working on similar challenges across the world. RBA can build on work developed using other planning frameworks, so that no one has to “start over.” For this reason, RBA offers a way for people in OECD countries to communicate clearly with each other about their on-going efforts to improve quality of life .

9. Resources

There is a large and growing worldwide community of RBA/OBA practitioners (estimated in excess of 30,000). A wide range of resources and organizational support is now available.

Books: The principle resource for understanding and using RBA is the book, “Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough: How to Produce Measurable Improvements for Customers and Communities,” by Mark Friedman, Trafford, 2005.² Lisbeth B. Schorr’s book, “Within our Reach,” Doubleday, 1988, presents groundbreaking work that laid the foundation for later development of RBA.

Websites: There are two websites which directly support implementation of the RBA framework. The first, www.resultsaccountability.com is the website of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute. The second, www.raguide.org, is an implementation guide sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and other charitable and nonprofit organizations in the U.S.

Studies: There are a number of studies and reports which provide examples of RBA/OBA effectiveness, notably “Turning the Curve Stories” Crown Copyright 2008 sponsored by the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families, authors: Dr. David Utting, Alison Painter and Judy Renshaw; and “Turning Curves, Achieving Results,” the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007.

Software: Software has been developed to support implementation of RBA including most notably the Results Leadership Group’s “Results Scorecard,” designed to support RBA applications where large population and performance data bases are required.

Organizations: There is a growing network of organizations and individuals who provide support for RBA/OBA implementation. Not-for-profit organizations are asterisked:

² 2 See notice on page 148 of “Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough.”



The Results Leadership Group (resultsleadership.org), Bethesda Maryland, US

*Applied Survey Research (appliedsurveyresearch.org), Watsonville, California, US

The Charter Oak Group (charteroak.org), Hartford, Connecticut, US

*The Center for the Study of Social Policy (cssp.org), Washington, DC, US

*The Forum for Youth Investment(forumforyouthinvestment.org),Washington, DC, US

The Fiscal Policy Studies Institute (resultsaccountability.com), Santa Fe, NM, US

*The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (c4eo.org.uk), London, UK

Outcomes UK (outcomesuk.com), Worcestershire, UK

*Improvement and Development agency (idea.gov.uk), London, UK

Ordina, (ordina.nl), Nieuwegein, NL

*The Family Action Centre (newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac), Newcastle, AU

* NSW Family Services (nswfamilyservices.asn.au), Sydney, AU

*The Local Community Services Association (lcsa.org.au), Sydney, AU