

# **RBA/OBA Facebook Selected Entries for Discussion**

**Fiscal Policy Studies Institute**

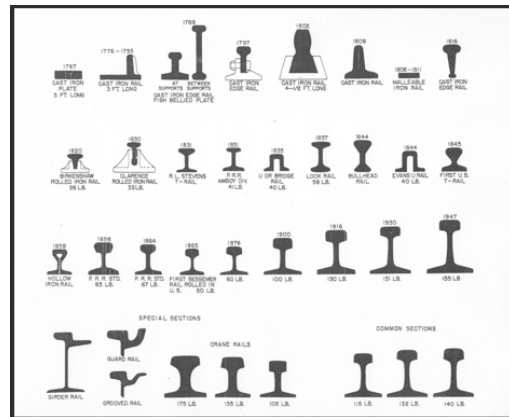
Version 3: March 2014

(© FPSI - OK to copy with attribution)

# RBA/OBA Facebook Selected Entries for Discussion<sup>1</sup>

This is a collection of essays posted on the RBA/OBA Facebook Group. There are many more essays and useful examples to be found in the group's work. Check it out on [www.facebook.com/groups/RBAOBA](http://www.facebook.com/groups/RBAOBA)

**1. COMPACTS AND CONVENTIONS:** The physical world is made up of thousands of interlocking agreements about standard ways of doing things. My favorite example comes from the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, a display (similar to the one pictured) of all the different cross sections of railroad track that existed in the US in the 19th century before agreement on the current modern rail system. Before that, freight had to be loaded and unloaded at each terminus where different railroad systems connected. Virtually every successful modern system, including the conventions underlying computer networks, has a similar set of agreements in place. Notice that agreeing on the size, shape and separation of the railroad rails left lots of room for innovation in the design of the railroad cars, and did nothing to restrict the kinds of goods that could be transported. The same is true for computer systems. We could make a long list.



There are some examples in social science too. National and state tax systems talk to each other. Many states have made progress on standardizing social benefit application forms across programs. But, generally, social systems lag far behind. Agreeing to use a core set of principles as the basis for an accountability compact, like the one recently developed in Vermont, or the National Data Platform, being considered by a national coalition, is much like the railroad or computer agreement. It would not restrict content. It would simply give us a consistent way of working together.

Why should we use RBA as the basis for such an agreement? RBA has certain characteristics that make it uniquely suited for this purpose. RBA is the only planning model that provides a complete architecture for both population and performance accountability, spanning the distance from broad quality of life conditions to the performance of the smallest program. RBA has a simple set of core principles and language conventions that allow people using different systems to communicate with each other. RBA works across ALL government and nonprofit services, not just health education and social services. RBA can be cross-walked to any other framework; and any framework can be cross-walked to RBA. And RBA has an established track record of working across different organizational cultures and across different social cultures. Using RBA core principles is precisely the kind of convention that is needed

<sup>1</sup> Note: "RBA" is used to stand for both Results Based Accountability™ (RBA) and Outcomes Based Accountability™ (OBA) throughout the text.

to get the government and nonprofit sectors out of their 19th Century railroad dilemma.

**2. RBA EXPERT IN EACH UNIT:** The basic idea is to set up a network of in-house experts who can meet together, support each other and provide a kind of informal quality control. In addition to this, it would also be a good idea 1) to do actual quality control by reviewing the work of various units on a rotating basis, 2) have processes for bringing new people into the work (e.g. periodic 101 sessions, Scorecard training, and use of the book and DVD), and 3) give recognition to exemplary work in newsletters and other forums.

1. Ask each program to assign someone to become their in-house RBA expert. (Treat this like a technical support function like an in-house computer expert.)
2. Have these people practice and get good at selecting performance measures and running the Turn the Curve Exercises.
3. Create a network of in-house experts so they can support each other, learn how to do joint RBA training and coaching.
4. Ask the in-house experts to review the RBA Self-Assessment Questionnaire (and create a score) on a regular basis.

### **3. RESULTS BASED BUDGETING: "DO WE NEED IT?" "IS IT WORKING?"**

These two sentences, 7 words in all, address two of the most important questions in budgeting.

When applied to whole programs, the first question (Do we need it?) is a population level question. Do we need this particular program because it is necessary to the well-being of the people of our nation, state, county, council or city? The deliberations around this question necessarily include the subordinate questions: Can we afford it? And is it needed more than other possible uses of the same money?

Question 2 (Is it working?) is a performance question. This question is asked after we have decided to fund a particular program or service. Is the program or service being managed well? (How well did we do it? measures) and more importantly, is it producing the benefits we expect for the people it serves? (Is anyone better off? measures).

Phil Lee has a more clever construction of these two questions. ARE WE DOING THE RIGHT THINGS? ARE WE DOING THINGS RIGHT? If this works better for you, then use it. Either way there is an underlying message here about how the separation of population and performance accountability plays out in the budget process.

**4. CHANGE THE FORMS, CHANGE THE CULTURE:** If you have worked in a government or nonprofit organization for a long time, you may have noticed that the forms you use for budgeting, planning, procurement, etc. don't change very often. Sometimes they don't change for years or even decades. This suggests an interesting hypothesis that may be helpful in organizational change processes: that forms are the skeletal structure of organizational culture. So if you want to change organizational culture, one powerful way to do that is to change the forms. Let's say, for talking purposes, that you want to get people to consider the contribution of their program to population quality of life. What if

you put a section at the beginning of the budget form where people had to discuss how their program contributes to quality of life? What if you wanted them to show measures from the three RBA categories, what if you wanted them to show the three most important measures in baseline form, what if you wanted them to show the story behind the baselines, or how their action plan to do better connects to their budget request? All of this is possible by changing the budget forms to provide sections for these elements. Similar changes could be made to implement Next Generation Contracting provisions by changing procurement forms, and more importantly the boilerplate sections of contracts. What if those contracts called for the negotiation of the 3 to 5 most important performance measures (from How well did we do it? and Is anyone better off?), what if the contract required the contractor to have a continuous improvement process (e.g. monthly consideration of the RBA 7 Performance Accountability questions), what if the contract said that the contract monitor would meet with the contractor at least 3 times a year to discuss performance and would work in partnership with the contractor to help improve their performance? Forms are powerful tools, that can be harnessed in the service of organizational change. And the changes you make, for better or worse could last for decades. What do you think?

## **5. REIMBURSEMENT BASED ON OUTCOMES ALWAYS CREATES**

**PERVERSE INCENTIVES:** Do not, I repeat, DO NOT create reimbursement schemes based on outcomes. It is a trap. But people predictably fall into this trap every year. What is the bait that lures people in? It is the false equivalency of government with the business sector. It is the notion that we can harness the profit motive to get programs to do the right thing for people; when in fact there is only one thing that the profit motive can do and that is motivate people to make a profit. Every time profit is attached to social outcomes, whether population or performance, **PERVERSE INCENTIVES ARE UNAVOIDABLY CREATED.** The best you can then do is mitigate those incentives with checks and balances. And now you are in the business of business regulation, a task for which social agencies are uniquely unqualified. Corollary: Only a balanced set of performance measures (from How well did we do it? and Is anyone better off?) can generate balanced performance.

Several years ago a state government provided financial incentives for social workers to reunite foster children with their natural families. Do you really want social workers figuring their own financial gain in sensitive decisions about child safety. Of course not. Fortunately, the scheme was quickly abandoned before any damage was done. In other schemes, contractors were given a share of savings generated from their ideas about how the state could save money. It is not hard to come up with savings if you don't care about the quality of service. And, in at least one case, the contractor sued the state for millions of dollars over exactly how the savings should be calculated. If you have any remaining doubts about the problems with government privatization, check out Chapter 7 of Rachel Maddow's book "Drift" for a full account of exactly how badly things went (and continue to go) with the Pentagon's privatization program.

And check out the following papers on:

[http://www.fiscalpolicystudies.com/papers\\_you\\_can\\_read\\_on\\_line.htm](http://www.fiscalpolicystudies.com/papers_you_can_read_on_line.htm)

"What you need to know about privatization," and "The pros and mostly cons of contingency fee contracting for revenue maximization."

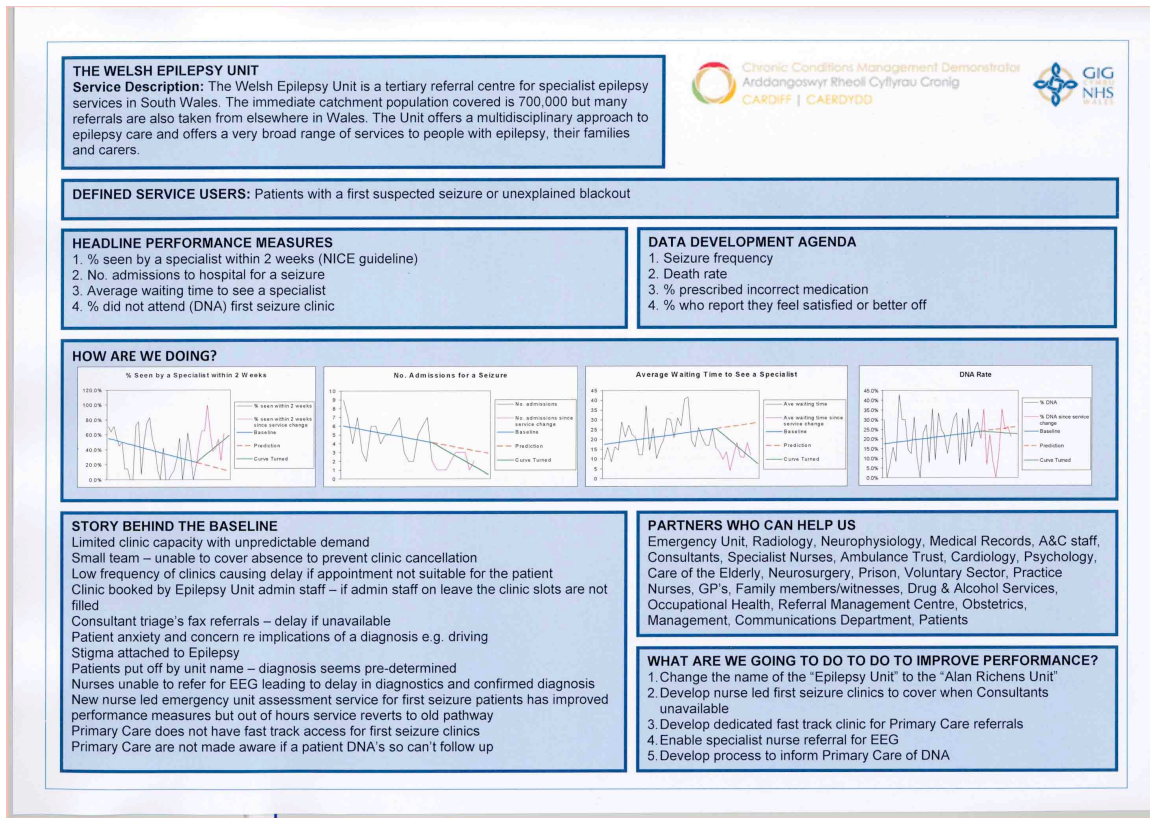
**6. RATIONALE BEHIND THE QUESTION "IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?"** RBA is the only framework (as far as I know) where performance measurement categories are stated in the form of questions, the idea being that plain language questions communicate better than jargon. "How much did we do?" and "How well did we do it?" seem to be pretty straight forward. But where did "Is anyone better off?" come from? It seems like a pretty harsh way to ask about the effects of our work.

The question was chosen over many other possibilities precisely because it is an unceremonious challenge. It is the question that SHOULD be asked by the people who fund programs (whether taxpayers, legislators or foundations), and by the people who invest energy in programs (whether staff, donors or volunteers). The phrasing is the voice of the taxpayer or funder. It is intended to get people's attention and help shake off the old comfortable answers. The question explicitly or implicitly incorporates at least four other questions: "Who is better off?" ; "How are they better off?" ; "Why are they better off?" ; and "Is the investment in your work worth it?" Also included is an implied statement: "We (the funders, the taxpayers etc.) are watching and will not settle for easy answers." This idea of watching and asking tough questions is at the heart of how accountability works, or how it should work. It may be tempting to soften the question, to make it more palatable and perhaps more polite. But something is lost when you do that. Embracing it, with all the sharp edges, signals strength, that we are OK with tough questions, that we are willing to hold ourselves to higher standards, that we are prepared to be accountable. What do you think?

**7. THE IMPORTANCE OF FORECASTS:** Forecasts are important because they shift the conversation into the future. The usual state of affairs with government and non-profit data and social data in general is that the most recent data is not very recent. This often discourages people from using data at all. After all, what is the point of talking about teen pregnancy data from three years ago or even one year ago? But forecasting can be a powerful tool for shifting the data discussion from the past into the future. When creating a forecast, you must first bring the data up to the present using the group's collective knowledge about what has happened in the intervening period. And, going forward, you must judge what will happen if you don't do something more or different than what you are doing now. This discussion of "Where are we headed?" with the sometimes resultant "OMG. Look where we'll be in a few years unless we do something!" can help shape a feeling of common purpose and provide a sense of urgency about the need to take action. Suddenly data is not about ancient history but about the very real present and the very likely future, and about our need to work together if we want that future to be different.

Forecasts, of course, also allow you to define success as "turning the curve" and can later be used to quantify the value of progress when a curve has actually turned. This is particularly important when progress consists of slowing, but not reversing, a bad trend. Forecasts are not always needed. The trend direction might be obvious and a formal forecast might be a distraction. Sometimes just leaving room for an out-year forecast is enough to call the question and get the benefits of forecasting without actually presenting one. Use your judgment. But I see a lot of graphs with nothing but old historical data. And when that happens, the discussion of the future often gives way to just rehashing the past.

**8. USEFUL CONTRACT REPORTING:** It seems to be a near universal sentiment that the forms non-profits use to report to their funders are a problem. They are too complicated. There are too many measures. They focus on counts of activities and not customer outcomes. The long narratives take a lot of time to prepare and are rarely used, and sometimes not even read, by the funder. And, most importantly, the reports are not useful to the people who prepare them. What if we could devise a simple one page report that focused on the right things and was actually useful to managers and staff? Take a look at this report (from a case study from the Epilepsy Unit in Cardiff, Wales).



The Epilepsy Unit, and the person who helped them, Ruth Jordan, deserve a lot of credit for this work! It is a great story about dedicated people using RBA to improve their services, including four turned curves! The form they developed for reporting is simply brilliant and could be used for any program. It has all the right things: a description of the service and its customers, the most important performance measure baselines, the story behind the baselines, partners who can help do better, and an action plan summary. It provides a perfect agenda for staff to meet, once a week/month/quarter to discuss how the service is doing and how to do better. Why not use this form to report on your services? Then fill out all the funder's required forms and put them in an appendix AFTER your version of the Epilepsy Unit report. The message: "We filled out the forms you require, but here's the right way to do it."

Two things could be added to this report that would make it a bit better. The service description could explain how the unit's work contributes to quality of life in Wales, i.e. the link to population accountability. And all programs should regularly submit/publish success stories about individuals they serve. These stories compliment the reporting on performance measures and are useful in promoting the service and winning needed

support. A one paragraph or one page success story could be an addendum to the one page report.

**9. CONTROL VS. ENABLING:** All administrative service jobs (HR, budget and finance, audit, building services, IT, fleet management, etc.) have two different kinds of functions: control and enabling. Often people in these jobs are very good at the control part of the job but not so good at the enabling part. Good managers of administrative services must help their staff develop the right balance. Most performance measures for these units address only the control functions, mostly upper right quadrant measures. But customer satisfaction surveys can tell if the enabling function is being performed well. To test the enabling function, the most important question to ask on an administrative services customer satisfaction survey is "Are we providing the support you need to do a good job?" Customer satisfaction surveys can give you three kinds of information: 1) data from numerical ratings, 2) narrative reasons for the ratings and 3) narrative suggestions on how to do better. (See pp 74-76 of the RBA book, and the administrative services performance measurement examples on pp 168-69)

**10. "EXPANDING THE EVIDENCE UNIVERSE: Doing Better by Knowing More":**

In a 2012 paper, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, authors Lisbeth Schorr and Frank Farrow argue for a much broader conception of evidence considered allowable in funding decisions by government and philanthropic agencies. The legitimate focus on funding evidence-based practice has led to an over-reliance on experimental design (random control trials) as the only legitimate source of knowledge about what works. This has limited our vision of what programs and strategies should be funded and diminished our chances of making a difference at scale on outcomes for children, families, and communities. The paper presents very specific recommendations for changes in policy and practice for funders and for the research and evaluation community. The paper also urges use of results-based planning and decision-making processes, as central components of community change and system change initiatives, to generate "real time" data, learning and accountability. Please consider taking an active role in promoting this paper within your professional network. Download the paper at [http://www.cssp.org/publications/harold-richman-public-policy-symposium/Expanding-Evidence-the-Evidence-Universe\\_Doing-Better-by-Knowing-More\\_December-2011.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/publications/harold-richman-public-policy-symposium/Expanding-Evidence-the-Evidence-Universe_Doing-Better-by-Knowing-More_December-2011.pdf)

Why is this paper so important? It is possibly the only scholarly paper to challenge the prevailing "wisdom" that we should fund ONLY research-proven programs and practice. This kind of policy is driven by the sensible notion that, if money is scarce, we should fund programs with the best chance of success. If a program has been proven by research, it has a better chance of working than a program that hasn't been tested. The problem is that this greatly limits the ideas that can be considered and creates too small a playing field on which to attack our society's most serious problems. Not all good ideas have been tested by research or ever will be. Few if any no-cost and low-cost ideas have been formally studied. And research studies rarely test the kind of complex combinations of efforts necessary to turn population indicator curves. This paper sets out a more practical and realistic way of looking at the question of evidence and the question of what works. If the paper reaches its intended audience it will cause government and nongovernment funders to reconsider their overly cautious policies on evidence and allow us to make

funding decisions based on the best available knowledge, even if it does not always meet narrow control group research standards.

**11. RBA OBA and Non Western Cultures:** The culture of any people is a precious possession that must be preserved and protected. Different cultures have different world views and values that lead their societies to create unique and beautiful ways of living together. The question sometimes arises as to whether RBA, or any other planning framework, is a threat to culture. More specifically, is RBA a product of western culture that is potentially destructive to non-western cultures? My experience suggests not.

First and foremost the RBA framework is a set of tools, no different than other tools of modern life like the phone, car or computer. Tools take on meaning in how they are used. RBA can be used, like any tool, in ways that are meaningful to the culture using it.

RBA first allows the articulation of quality of life ambitions based on the values and the language of people using it. RBA has been used in at least seven different languages, including the languages of indigenous people.

The discipline of using data to judge progress seems like it might be alien to non-western cultures. And yet we have been counting things as humans since the time of hunting, herding and harvesting. Use of numbers in one form or another belongs to all cultures. So too does the idea of numbers getting better or worse, the idea embedded in the RBA concept of a baseline.

Stories are the oldest way we capture, retain and transmit knowledge in our societies. The step in RBA where we tell the story behind numbers draws on this ancient tradition. The idea of partnerships is equally old. And all cultures take action to make life better, the central theme of RBA.

If RBA is a threat to any culture, then it is not being used properly. RBA used properly adapts to and is respectful of all cultures.

There is much more to say on this subject. I encourage others to offer their experience and perspective.

**12. DEVELOPING ACTION PLANS:** There are two separate steps within the RBA/OBA talk to action thinking process that directly support the development of action plans. The paragraphs below address some specific ways of using these two steps in developing performance improvement plans. The process is very similar for population accountability. The starting point is one or more important performance measure baselines where the forecast is "not OK."

The first of the two steps is the Story Behind the Baseline. Here, we usually ask people to tell us what they believe are the causes and forces at work behind the numbers. And this will usually generate a useful discussion. But there is a sharper



way to frame this question that might be helpful, particularly for processes that get stuck. Ask about the customers (clients or service users) for whom the service did NOT work. If the service worked for 80% of its customers on a given measure, then who are the 20% for whom it did not work? Why didn't it work for those particular people? Don't settle for easy answers. Get into the specifics. Use the Information and Research Agenda function between turn-the-curve sessions to review individual case records. If some customers dropped out and failed to complete the program, talk to a few of them to find out why. (REMEMBER that when having any kind of follow-up contact with a customer, the principle purpose must not be data gathering. The first purpose of finding out why someone dropped out, for example, is to see if there is anything we can do to help them, including, where appropriate, getting them to come back to the service. The data is always secondary and a byproduct of these other questions. This means that you should put your very best people on these types of follow-up calls.) Take each cause for why the service hasn't worked and ask what could be done to address that particular cause in the future. This will generate a list of possible action steps, including no-cost and low-cost ideas. Not all of these will be great ideas, but everything goes on the potential shopping list for now.

The second step is the partners discussion. Brainstorm a list of partners who have a role to play in doing better. Push the discussion beyond the usual suspects to consider unconventional partners. Include people or agencies on the list even if they have not been helpful in the past. Ask for "crazy ideas" about partners. THEN, go down the list of partners and ask how each particular partner could help. If they are not currently helping, ask what could be done to recruit or engage them. If the relationship with the potential partner is damaged, ask what could be done to repair the damage. Make sure that you don't allow the discussion to get into negatives. Have the discussion at a time and place (and in small enough groups) where people can relax and have an open exchange.

If you can arrange it, it is a good idea to have this discussion with some of your partners in the room. This can best be done, at least the first time, as part of a turn the curve exercise. The "not-OK" curve you are working to turn serves as a touchstone for each partner to see the importance of what you are doing and the connections to their work. Having participants wear two hats helps identify what absent partners could do. This discussion will generate two types of possible actions: 1) actions that partners who are present are willing to take, or at least bring home for consideration; and 2) actions you can take to engage absent or potential non-engaged partners who have something important to contribute. Note, that it is a good idea to discuss how turning your curve can help your partners achieve the core mission of their agencies. Partnership is not always, or even mostly, about altruism. When agencies have customers in common, actions to improve one agency's service will often have beneficial effects for others.

These two steps will produce a "shopping list" from which actions can be chosen for implementation. The criteria for choosing which possible actions to put in the action plan are discussed on pages 43-44 of "Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough." As the action plan is developed you will also need a process for assigning responsibilities, creating timelines, and monitoring progress.

Finally a word about programs that are performing at a very high level and don't think they need to worry about performance improvement. In any complex system, stable states rarely exist. Your performance is either getting better or worse. If you are not continuously trying to get better, chances are you're getting worse.

**13. SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT (SROI) - BUYER BEWARE:** Any cost/benefit or return-on-investment analysis consists of two parts. Part one is an inventory of where the benefits of the subject program or service shows up in society. This step can be useful in its own right in explaining why a program or service is potentially valuable and worth funding.

The second step is the hard part. This requires attaching a dollar value to each benefit. In traditional business ROI analyses, these benefits usually take the form of tangible income which offsets expenses and produces profit. In social ventures, the matter of attaching a dollar value to a program benefit is much more complicated.

There are now organizations promoting SROI methods for attaching dollar values to social benefits that do not appear to meet traditional tests for rigor and consistency. In one example, an SROI analysis was produced for a food bank operation. The study concluded that having more food on the table helped families do a better job of raising their children (OK so far.). But then they attributed the cost of raising the children as a SROI benefit of the food bank program. Whatever definition of "social return" you use, this is not reasonable. The amount of this benefit was buried in a mass of calculations that would be hard for the funders who purchased this service to see and understand. The resulting number looked very impressive. The food bank returned more than \$17 in SROI for every dollar spent. (One of the food bank's funders paid for this single number to be produced.) But when you look behind the curtain you find that the methodology was not credible. It took a long time searching SROI cases on the web to find even this one example of the precise estimation methodology. Most of the calculations behind the SROI numbers seem to be hidden from view, possibly because these methods are considered proprietary. This makes it hard to judge if this lack of discipline is an exception or the rule.

Another methodological question raised by the SROI work has to do with the time period over which the social "returns" are achieved and how they are distributed across the public, private and nonprofit sectors. These are essential elements of social cost benefit analysis which allow agencies to make the case that a share of savings generated in other agency budgets should be used to expand the program or service generating the savings. (See the related posting on Social Investment Bonds.) There is a history of successfully using this kind of analysis to increase funding for prevention programs by capturing and transferring savings achieved in remediation services. If the timing and distribution of savings is not clearly and credibly part of the cost benefit analysis then this important purpose can not be achieved.

Funders have a legitimate interest in knowing if their investments in services are producing commensurate benefits. This is, of course, part of the impetus behind the movement to clearly define and measure customer results or outcomes. RBA provides a set of tools that can be used to do this by identifying measures of whether

customers are "better off." These effects can be compared to the cost of the service allowing funders to judge the value of their investments. Funders also have the option of sponsoring research into the causal relationship between service provision and customer benefits.

The idea of calculating a single SROI ratio (\$17 returned for each dollar invested) may appeal to some funders as a substitute for these more complicated methods. Imagine having a formula that allows us to choose to fund a program that produces \$17 in "social return" over one that produces only \$15. When something seems too good to be true, it usually is. Funding and investing will never be that simple. We need to bring a skeptical eye to the SROI approach to cost benefit analysis. If you decide to purchase an SROI calculation, look behind the curtain. Make sure you carefully audit the estimation methodologies. Maybe SROI is a useful new approach. Or maybe it's a flawed and wasteful fad. Time will tell. In the mean time, buyer beware.

**14. THE SIMPLEST WAY TO IMPLEMENT RBA/OBA:** If you are having trouble implementing RBA/OBA, think about trying this approach. Page numbers refer to pages in "Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough."

**POPULATION ACCOUNTABILITY:**

Step 1: Pick an important population indicator and run the Population Turn the Curve Exercise. (pages 156-7)

Step 2: Take action.

Repeat.

and/or

**PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY:**

Step 1: Pick an important performance measure and run the Performance Turn the Curve Exercise. (pages 158-9)

Step 2: Take action.

Repeat.

Somewhere along the line, explain the Leaking Roof thinking process. (pages 27-30)  
If necessary, create working baselines from group knowledge until you get the data you need. (page 162)

**15. SOME REFLECTIONS ON HOW TO KEEP RBA/OBA USEFUL WHILE MAINTAINING ITS INTELLECTUAL INTEGRITY:** I have tried to make the RBA/OBA approach one that is adaptable to new situations, not a rigid ideology that must be implemented in a particular way. This is a matter of practicality. Rigid systems are doomed to fail. Only flexible, adaptive systems can succeed.

This then creates a dilemma for which I do not have a perfect answer. How much can you change RBA and still have it be RBA? This is a surprisingly difficult question to answer. The traditional rigid answer falls back on copyright protection. All ideas

must be attributed and any change is prohibited. This is the rigid doomed-to-fail approach and so must be rejected. But where then to draw the line?

First and foremost, it is important to recognize that RBA is a container. All systems or models are containers. They hold the content that people put into them. If we define a "population result" as a "condition of well-being for children, adults, families and communities," then there are no "right" or "wrong" population results. All children are healthy" is a population result, as is "All people eat their vegetables." The content of the idea of a population result is up to the user of the model. So it is with all other components of RBA. So the line drawing has nothing to do with content.

But if you were to tinker with the structure of the model itself, then the tinkered version becomes less RBA and more of something else. With enough of this tinkering over time RBA could become unrecognizable. And this is a problem for two reasons. The first reason is that the tinkering may not be an improvement and may even have significant negative effects. (There is a deep principle in evolutionary biology that the vast majority of mutations are harmful.) RBA is a carefully constructed whole. The parts are all interconnected in important ways, something like a living organism. If you make one part of RBA less functional then the whole might not function so well. It will then be less helpful to the people who use it.

The second problem has to do with the ways in which ideas spread through groups and countries and civilizations. Some ideas are simple and powerful. The wheel is the classic example. The recent evidence is the explosive growth in the use of wheeled luggage, which by some accounts, is the fastest diffusion of innovation on record. But how do more complex ideas diffuse through society while still maintaining their integrity? That is the problem. And the answer has something to do with "branding" and consistency of message. Partly for this reason, we have begun to use the trademark symbol for Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA) & Outcomes-Based Accountability™ (OBA). (By the way, the trademark applies to the full names not the acronyms.) The RBA and OBA brand is becoming well known, and has grown dramatically around the world. But the brand needs to stand for something. It can not be just any version of RBA. The "official" version of RBA is, of course, in the book "Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough." The book and DVD are the primary tools for quality control. But what if people implement and teach RBA in ways that differ from the book? The reputation of the brand could be damaged and this could slow the spread of the ideas. This actually happened in NSW Australia a few years ago and we are still suffering the consequences.

Then there is the matter of control. Once you put an idea out in the world you lose control of how it is used. Copyrights and trademarks give some protection. But for all practical purposes, someone in my situation must simply "get over" the idea that you can control how your ideas are understood and used. So whatever I do to solve the problem of the intellectual integrity of the model must be done through persuasion and not force. (If you want to see how this is done through force, look at social innovation that is franchised, where usage fees must be paid.) There are moral problems with restricting the use of social innovations, which is why RBA is, and always will be, free for use by government and nonprofit organizations.

So that takes us back to the "line drawing" question. I need to persuade people that there are certain parts of RBA that shouldn't be tampered with because it compromises the model and makes it less useful. And because, creating a less useful model that is still CALLED RBA undermines the "brand" and makes it less likely that RBA will grow and prosper.

Whew!

So what are the core elements that people should not tamper with? And here is another dilemma. Any author will tell you that his or her words and ideas are like their children and they can not let go of any of them. This is why most books never get finished and many that do get finished are badly written. Because the authors can't do their own editing or endure the editing of others. I am no different. All the ideas in RBA are important to me and I don't want to let go of any of them. Of course I did just that in writing the book. There is much that was edited out. And every time I do a lecture, I must select which slides I have time to show and which must be set aside. Furthermore, I preach that people should pick 3 to 5 measures and get on with it. So, there is a certain "practice what you preach" thing going on here.

So, drawing the line.....I have come to think that the (10) ideas shown (in white) on the 2-3-7 mnemonic slide for RBA are the very core things that should be inside the line. Those ideas are:

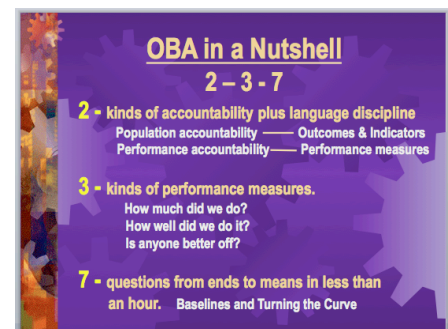
## **2 KINDS OF ACCOUNTABILITY PLUS LANGUAGE DISCIPLINE**

The distinction between (1) Population Accountability and (2) Performance Accountability is the single most important idea in RBA. Keeping these separate yet connected is the only way to do either one well. It is necessary to adopt a language discipline to support this distinction, hence the definitions within Population Accountability of (3) Population Results or Outcomes and (4) Indicators, and within Performance Accountability, the idea of (5) Performance measures, as a class of measures that play a different role than indicators. (And for good measure, the foundational notion that words are just labels for ideas.)

## **3. KINDS OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

- (1) How much did we do?
- (2) How well did we do it?
- (3) Is anyone better off?

This categorization scheme for performance measures is a significant innovation that replaces the mountain of jargon we have struggled with for decades. It makes performance measurement understandable to managers and stakeholders. "Is anyone better off?" is the voice of the taxpayer and everyday citizen. It is the reason we do this work.



## **7 - QUESTIONS FROM ENDS TO MEANS IN LESS THAN AN HOUR**

- (1) Baselines and
- (2) Turning the curve

Baselines, with history and forecast, show where we are and where we're headed. Are things getting better or worse? The story behind the baseline opens up an inclusive conversation about causes. The word "story" is important here because it is the oldest way we communicate and opens the process to non-experts. This is a more sophisticated and fair way to track progress, particularly in complex change processes. The 7 Questions get you from talk to action at both the population and performance levels. They form the basis for the Turn the Curve exercises that can get any group to the beginnings of an action plan in less than an hour. The turn the curve report format can be used to structure processes and documents. And they can produce real change in peoples' lives when used properly.

Now, for some reason, most people are willing to go with the 2 kinds of accountability and 3 kinds of performance measures without change. But everyone seems to want to come up with their own version of the population and performance 7 questions. Why is that? I think it's because people see the intention of the seven questions and think they can do better. "Hell, it's just common sense. If we put it in our own words, then we can adapt it to the audience we are working with and they will understand it better and it will be more useful." I get this. It is not really a bad line of reasoning.

But here's the problem: The 7 questions like everything else in RBA are very carefully thought out. There are literally reasons behind every word. So how much paraphrasing is OK? And that brings us to our last (for now) dilemma: the difference between TEACHING RBA and USING RBA. Tinkering with the wording of the 7 questions might be OK in USING RBA, but might NOT be OK in teaching RBA. Imagine if you were taking a class in constitutional law, and the teacher said, "We're not going to be using the actual constitution in this class, but a version that I like better." You would immediately see the problem. Nothing wrong with the professor explaining why he likes his version of the constitution better. But the original is still there as a starting point. I am not saying that RBA is like the US Constitution, but you get the point. If RBA is taught using only interpretations, without the original, then the original is effectively lost.

I have tried to get people to do this, to teach at least the core concepts of RBA faithfully. Then when using RBA, show the 7 questions exactly as they are in the book and clearly distinguish any interpretations or additions (say in parentheses). Then we can all be clear which are the original ideas and which are the adaptations. Surely this is reasonable, don't you think? But it's damn difficult (and time consuming) to keep dealing with this. I am not, and never will be, the RBA police. I go back and forth between wanting to make this work and giving up. Here I am trying to make it work again. If it doesn't work this time, I may give up..... No, not really.....

Mark Friedman