From monologic to dialogic: Accountability of nonprofit organisations on beneficiaries’ terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal:</th>
<th>Accounting, Auditing &amp; Accountability Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript ID</td>
<td>AAAJ-01-2019-3847.R2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript Type:</td>
<td>Research Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keywords:</td>
<td>Accountability, Beneficiary, Nonprofit organisations, Critical accounting, Dialogic Accounting Theory, Participative Evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts
Introduction
The purpose of this research is to investigate how accountability practices towards beneficiaries within nonprofit organisations (NPOs) might be enhanced. Within this context, beneficiaries are stakeholders that receive a service from NPOs (Wellens and Jegers, 2017). The research has a primary motivation to address social inequality through the empowerment of beneficiaries, often marginalised as a stakeholder group and typically ignored within contemporary accounting’s practice of defining, constructing, and then privileging more powerful stakeholders (Brown and Dillard, 2015a). Through this motivation, the research has the potential to action the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically goals 10 - to reduce inequality, and 16 - the promotion of inclusive societies, and accountable, inclusive institutions, at a subnational level (United Nations, 2015). According to Bebbington and Unerman (2018), the SDGs have only recently begun receiving attention within academic accounting literature. They argue accounting academics have a role to play in embedding policy and action at an organisational level, in order to contribute to meeting the SDGs (Bebbington and Unerman, 2018). This research aims to sustain this call and contribute to the development of an evidence base which might inform policies and practices that can lead to a reduction in social inequality and promote more inclusive societies.

Ebrahim (2016) lists evaluation (a tool) and participation (a process) as accountability mechanisms used by NPOs. However, he suggests that evaluation is underutilised as a tool for increasing or enhancing accountability downwards (to beneficiaries and communities) yet acknowledges its tremendous potential to do so (Ebrahim, 2016). Drawing upon dialogic accounting theory (Bebbington, Brown, Frame and Thomson, 2007), this research uses interpretive qualitative case studies to explore how evaluation can enhance accountability to beneficiaries. In order to do this, current and potential practices of beneficiary participation, leading to downwards accountability within the NPOs studied, were explored. By focusing on beneficiaries of NPOs and positioning them as a societal actor that traditional accounting tends to ignore, this research attempts to embrace difference and open up dialogue, by creating new opportunities for participation and nonprofit accountability. As Dillard and Ruchala (2005) contend, “instrumentally rational hierarchical accounting and control systems are no less prevalent and controlling in the public and the not-for-profit sectors”, than in the private sector (p. 611).

Mercelis, Wellens and Jegers (2016) describe there being a “dearth of research on accountability towards beneficiaries in general, let alone on beneficiary participation” (p. 1447). They highlight that the perceptions of beneficiaries on beneficiary participation are rarely studied (Mercelis et al., 2016). This research seeks to fill this gap through directly studying the perspectives of beneficiaries on their participation within their organisation in general, and within evaluation processes.

In order to progress, this paper is organised as follows: the next section reports the theoretical underpinning of the research. The subsequent section reviews extant literature on the research topic within areas of accounting, management, and evaluation. This review leads to the development of the research question. The paper progresses to report the methodology of the research and the two case narratives. The subsequent section presents a cross case comparison and discussion. The penultimate section of the paper outlines research implications and limitations, and provides suggestions for further research. The paper concludes with the presentation of summary comments.

Theoretical underpinning of the research
From a critical perspective, this research proposes that traditional ways of conceptualising accounting and accountability, that focus on the perspectives of the capital market and shareholders, thereby promoting neoliberal logics and policies (Brown and Dillard, 2015b), are at odds with the democratic sentiments of participation. Neoliberal policies are those underpinned by an intent to draw on market mechanisms and private actors to regulate the economy and distribute goods and services (Chiapello, 2017).
In order to challenge accounting’s emphasis on neoliberal policies and promote increased democratic participation, we draw upon a dialogic theory of accounting (Bebbington et al., 2007). Within dialogic accounting theory there is a call to move away from the traditional monologic approach to accounting. The monologic approach focuses on a single (mono) narrative, dominated by positivism, capitalist perspectives, and neoclassical economics (Brown and Dillard, 2015b). The call is to move towards a dialogic approach that embraces heterogeneity and rejects the notion of a universal narrative (Brown, 2009).

In this light, the research positions the traditional monologic conceptualisation of accounting and accountability as being hegemonic and a cause of existing social inequalities. Here, hegemony is referenced to Gramsci’s (1971) theory of hegemony, and refers to “how society comes to be structured around particular power formations” (Spence, 2009, p. 209). This research purports a need to develop frameworks for participation that are motivated by counter-perspectives, or counter-hegemonies (Tambakaki, 2014). A counter-hegemonic intervention aims not to unveil a ‘true reality’, but to re-articulate a given situation in a new configuration (Mouffe, 2013), such that existing power formations can be repositioned.

Graham (2013) describes the finance and accounting industries as a “…hegemonic system for the production of truth…” (p. 125). It is this production of truth that allows accounting and accountability to appear apolitical, ahistorical and acontextual. Once a truth is established and concretised, it is like it was always there. It appears as objective, as a reality. Vinnari and Dillard (2016) concur that “accounting does not only reflect a reality; it participates in the construction of that reality” (p. 25).

Lehman (2013) suggests there are vast implications of accounting’s actual subjectivity when it is presented as objective. She highlights the importance of questioning what is chosen to be represented and what is chosen to be silenced (Lehman, 2013). The act of being able to ask these questions demonstrates the subjectivity of the phenomena. However, within this produced truth, a pattern of power relations is established, and the meaning of social relations set (Vinnari and Dillard, 2016). This process creates more and less powerful constituents and stakeholders. Who we are accountable to, for what, and how, is positioned and defined.

Burlaud and Colasse (2011) state that “anyone who knows anything about it at all knows that accounting is political through and through. It is not a pure technique, far from it” (p. 44). However, traditional accounting attempts to depoliticise accounting through denying the political (Brown, 2009). In re-politicising accounting, researchers have drawn upon an agonistic approach to democracy (Brown, 2009, 2017; Dillard and Yuthas, 2013; Dillard, Yuthas and Baudot, 2016; Dillard and Vinnari, 2018; Vinnari and Dillard, 2016). An agonistic approach to democracy “recognizes the complexity of prevailing power dynamics and that competing perspectives and interests cannot be resolved through logic or reason” (Dillard and Yuthas, 2013, p. 114). As a political theory, an agonistic approach to participative democracy contrasts a deliberative approach, by placing a central role upon difference and conflict (Brown, 2009).

Central to the notion of agonistic political theory is pluralism. Here pluralists focus on “the injustices that arise from dominant hegemonies and the importance of recognising marginalised viewpoints” (Brown, 2017, p. 37). Pluralist politics recognises the existence of conflict but enfolds it within democratic activity (Vinnari and Dillard, 2016). Brown (2009) draws on agonistic political theory and pluralism to develop a conceptual framework for critical dialogic accounting in an attempt to democratise accounting by moving from monologic accounting principles to dialogic accounting principles. This approach interrogates “what is accounted for, how it is accounted and on whose terms it is accounted” (Brown and Dillard, 2015b, p. 250).
Embedded within a lens of dialogic accounting theory (Bebbington et al., 2007) and Brown’s (2009) conceptual framework for dialogic accounting, this research is motivated to reposition and redefine accounting and accountability away from traditional neoliberal conceptions, and towards systems that empower and give voice to groups marginalised through the monologic accounting hegemony.

**Literature review**

**Accountability in NPOs**

Within nonprofit accountability literature questions are posed to enable NPOs to broaden their understanding of accountability and to facilitate more meaningful discussions of the topic (Ebrahim, 2016; Jordan, 2007; Murtaza, 2012; Najam, 1996; O’Dwyer and Boomsma, 2015; Schmitz, Raggo and Vijfeijiken, 2012; Williamson, Luke and Furneaux, 2018). These questions form a conceptual accountability framework for NPOs (Ebrahim, 2016) and include:

- To whom are NPOs accountable?
- For what are NPOs accountable?
- How are NPOs accountable?

In order to position this accountability framework critically, the lens of dialogic accounting theory is applied. Doing so offers a system which allows for contested narratives to coexist, where multiple viewpoints are engaged, power dynamics addressed, and actor engagement taken seriously (Brown, 2009). As such, a dialogically informed conceptual framework for accountability can extend the traditional framework by interrogating *on whose terms* are we viewing to whom, for what, and how NPOs are accountable? (Brown and Dillard, 2015b).

**Accountability to Whom?**

Considering the importance of multiple stakeholders within the accountability processes of NPOs features strongly within academic literature (Cordery and Sim, 2017; O’Dwyer and Unerman 2007, 2010; O’Dwyer and Boomsma, 2015). Ebrahim (2007), Najam (1996) and Kilby (2006) stress an NPO’s multiple accountabilities: to themselves, to clients, and to donors. Najam (1996) claims that these multiple accountabilities make accountability within the nonprofit sector more complex than the private or public sector. These multiple accountabilities are frequently also competing accountabilities due to the power asymmetries between these constituents (Ebrahim, 2003; 2005).

In order to consider *to whom an NPO is accountable*, the multiple accountabilities within NPOs have been positioned directionally (Murtaza, 2012). This is illustrated within Figure 1. Here, accountability can be:

1. Upward = to donors, funders, governments.
2. Inward = to boards, mission.
3. Downward = to communities, beneficiaries, clients.
4. Sideways = to other NPOs.

Extant literature emphasises the priority NPOs place on upwards accountability over that of other, less powerful stakeholders positioned in other directions (Ebrahim, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009; Jordan, 2007; Murtaza, 2012; Najam, 1996; O’Dwyer and Unerman, 2007, 2010; Schmitz et al., 2012). Wellens and Jegers (2014) claim that nonprofit literature itself is primarily concerned with other stakeholders. Yet, Jordan (2007) warns that organisations focus on upwards accountability at their own risk, as accountability mechanisms that emphasise the needs of upwards accountabilities could jeopardise the relationship with other stakeholders. Similarly, Jacobs and Wilford (2010) stress that mechanisms of upwards accountability tend to weaken downwards accountability. However, Christensen and Ebrahim’s (2006) case study research found that conflicting upwards accountability...
demands can be managed when upwards reporting is seen by the NPO as relevant to mission achievement. Whilst Wellens and Jegers (2014, p. 948) allude to the “potential problem of upward accountability harming downward accountability”, they suggest a close contact between NPOs’ management/board and government officials can increase the alignment of government and beneficiary needs, thereby reducing this problem. Emergent research highlights the potential for upwards accountability to enable downwards accountability (Uddin & Belal, 2019), for example responding to funders on how the needs of beneficiaries have been addressed.

Najam (1996) observes that NPOs’ most obvious line of responsibility is for them to be accountable to the community and clients they are working with. However, Najam (1996) and Kilby (2006) highlight that because these communities are frequently marginalised, they lack the mechanisms for holding the NPO to account. Whilst powerful actors can demand accountability from less powerful actors, the opposite is not typically true (Jacobs and Wilford, 2010). Wellens and Jegers (2017) suggest NPOs to be ultimately accountable to their beneficiaries because they are the stakeholder group that receives the service of the organisation. As such, beneficiaries should have the right to participate in decisions that affect service delivery, and affect their daily life. However, Schmitz et al. (2012) claim NPOs’ aspirations to engage in downwards accountability are not as yet matched by their practices.

**Accountability for What?**

When considering what an NPO is accountable for, Ebrahim (2003), Murtaza (2012), and Najam (1996) detail two levels of accountability: functional accountability – for resources, resource use and immediate impacts; and strategic accountability – for organisational mission and goals, and impacts upon other organisations and the wider environment. Included within these levels is a consideration of accountability for effectiveness, equity, sustainability, and coordination with others, as well as accountability for technical standards, financial integrity, transparency, disclosure, and the fulfillment of legal obligations (Ebrahim, 2009; Murtaza, 2012; O’Dwyer and Unerman, 2007; Schmitz et al., 2012).

When framing accountability within neoliberal logics, the traditional positioning of accountability to whom and for what is fairly clear. For example, accountability to shareholders for financial performance is well legitimised and legislated. However, under a different framing, what an organisation is accountable for could vary depending upon which stakeholder group is being considered. What beneficiaries see as accountable acts, may be different to what funders or governments seek to be accountable for. In applying a critical lens, and considering the power asymmetries between stakeholder groups, a picture emerges of on whose terms (Brown and Dillard, 2015b) accountability to whom and for what is positioned. The questions arise, on whose terms are the traditional directions of accountability positioned; and on whose terms are accountabilities defined?

**Accountability on whose terms?**

As discussed, when positioned critically, what an NPO is accountable for changes depending on who is evaluating and who they see as the primary accountable agent. When considering accountability to beneficiaries, NPOs may consider their reach, or the number of beneficiaries they serve to be a valid measure. However, for the beneficiary, accountability for reach may not match their desire for accountability to their individual or collective needs. However, Rey-Garcia, Liket, Alvarez-Gonzalez, and Maas (2017) confirm that a considerable number of NPOs “do not in any way measure beneficiaries’ needs” (p. 507). Their research indicates that although the majority of NPOs surveyed say they implement beneficiary-related consultation and participation mechanisms, its use is often symbolic (Rey-Garcia et al., 2017). As such, beneficiaries are considered to have a restricted impact upon NPO decision-making and outputs (Rey-Garcia et al., 2017). In contrast, Awio, Northcott, and Lawrence’s (2011) case study research drawing on social capital theory, found trust,
cooperation, reciprocity, and voluntarism to be important drivers of accountability within a ‘bottom-up’ accountability framework. These drivers may lead to the development of informal downwards accountability mechanisms that better respond to the needs of beneficiaries.

**Accountability How?**

Traditionally, how accountability is discharged is powerfully framed through the accounting standards and standard setters, where definitions are established that construct ways of looking, and define who is visible and who is not. These constructions determine on whose terms we are accounting. Here accountability typically appears in the form of financial statements and reporting. These provide financial information to assist *users* in making decisions about resource allocation or provision (AASB, 2016).

In this way, the framing of accounting and accountability establishes to *whom* an account is owed, *what* to be accountable for, and *how* accountability is to be discharged. However, in taking a dialogic perspective and considering *on whose terms* (Brown and Dillard, 2015b), this version of accountability can be questioned. From the perspective of the beneficiary, how accountability appears, on their terms, may be different from traditional, neoliberal constructions. How accountability to beneficiaries can be actioned, on their terms, may necessitate asking them. This could be done dialogically through accountability practices that ‘give voice’ to this group.

Scholarly literature on giving voice is frequently situated alongside discussions of rights’ actualisation (McNamara, 2013; Schmitz and Mitchell, 2016). Schmitz *et al.* (2012) extend the parameters of the giving voice discourse to highlight the importance of beneficiaries’ voices reaching those parts of the NPO that are usually oriented to upwards accountability stakeholders. However, Cornwall (2008) cautions that simply being involved in processes of voice-giving, is not equivalent to having a voice. She highlights that a voice “needs to be nurtured” in order to have influence, and involves effort from within the organisation (Cornwall, 2008, p. 278). In her seminal paper, White (1996) warns of the potential for conflict to arise when the voiceless are given a voice, due to changing power relations. Suggesting the absence of conflict within participatory processes should “raise our suspicions” (White, 1996, p. 15).

Conflict is viewed constructively within an agonistic democratic approach, which questions the dominant hegemony and seeks to transform power relations (Mouffe, 2013). Here others are not enemies, but rather are viewed as *adversaries* whose ideas might be argued but “whose right to defend those ideas is not questioned” (Mouffe, 2013, p. 7). In this context, adversaries are opponents in a democratic struggle who share common allegiance to principles of liberty and equality for all (Mouffe, 2013). This confrontation between adversaries is what Mouffe (2013) labels the ‘agonistic struggle’, and suggests that conflict need not be considered negative, but part of a functional democratic environment.

White’s (1996) caution of conflict whilst giving voice suggests a moment of hegemonic acknowledgement and highlights a need for commitment from an NPO to genuine participation and organisational learning. Engaging in tokenistic downwards accountability processes, or what Najam (1996, p. 346) refers to as the accountability “sham-ritual”, could result in more harm than good to both the organisation and beneficiary, through shutting down voice, due to the view of conflict as negative. Embracing an agonistic approach would see the NPO not be threatened by any potential conflict due to differing perspectives being heard but see it as a sign that participation is genuine, dialogic, and capable of transformation. An NPO can dialogically reframe how they are accountable, through considering accountability on the terms of beneficiaries, as a political player whose voice is commonly unheard.
Mercelis et al. (2016) describe participation as the giving of voice to stakeholders “through forms of deliberation, consultation and/or mobilisation, designed to influence planning and decision making” (p. 1448). Participation of beneficiaries is one component of downwards accountability (Wellens and Jegers, 2016). However, O’Leary (2016) cautions that participative accountability mechanisms that aid in meeting downwards accountability objectives have been found to fail in granting beneficiaries the ability to articulate their true interests in a meaningful and coherent manner. This might be due to a lack of examination of the causes of societal inequalities, and an attempt to embed new participatory mechanisms within pre-existing structures. However, through considering accountability dialogically (Brown, 2009) more authentic change might occur.

**Accountability How - Through Evaluation**

Beneficiary participative evaluation is proposed as a means of enhancing downwards accountability (Ebrahim, 2003). Green (2013) defines evaluation as “the systematic process of gathering and interpreting empirical information in order to make a judgement of quality and worth about the program, policy, or practice being evaluated” (p. 750).


However, Mathison (2018) states that evaluation “has labored under neoliberalism for decades” (p. 115). She warns of evaluations reflecting neoliberal values of commodification, competition, and privatisation at the expense of the “public good” (Mathison, 2018, p. 115). Within this context, evaluations are tools to rationalise and normalise actions and neoliberal values, for example - new public management, performance management, and impact measurement (Mathison, 2018). Evaluations adopt the language of markets, measure programs in relation to profit, and outcomes in economic terms (Mathison, 2018).

In order to move beyond accountability as a tool to meet the neoliberal agenda, an evaluation orientation that focuses on democratic participation is suggested (Hanberger, 2004). This sentiment is also shared by Benjamin (2008) when describing how evaluation can elevate the developmental and dialogical function of accountability over more instrumental functions. The value of multiple stakeholder inclusion through democratic evaluation processes is well documented in academic literature (Bryson, Patton and Bowman, 2011; Mertens, 1999). Ebrahim (2005) suggests that framing an evaluation from the perspective of the beneficiary allows “different conclusions about an organization’s effectiveness” to emerge (p. 63).

Evaluations are essentially about making a judgement (Greene, 2013). Unlike traditional accounting, which exists in a positivist paradigm claiming to be objective, rational, and neutral (Vinnari and Dillard, 2016), or complete, neutral and free from error (AASB, 2016), evaluations invite the questioning of on whose terms are we accounting. Evaluations have the potential to invite subjectivity and bias and summon a reframing of the qualitative characteristics of accounting information such as relevance, faithful representation, usefulness, comparability, understandability, timeliness and verifiability (AASB, 2016).

Through beneficiary participation in evaluation, beneficiary voice could be instrumental in shaping new directions of accountability, away from linear models. This gives rise to an opportunity for accountability that is dialogic, reciprocal, and open, as it makes visible the dominant hegemony,
whilst presenting counter hegemonies as possible.

From a critical dialogic perspective, accountability to beneficiaries could be enabled through the giving of voice and participation that arise within participatory evaluation practices. It is from within this context that the central research question arises - How can evaluation enhance accountability to beneficiaries within NPOs?

Method
In order to answer the research question, a critical dialogic analysis of multiple case study data was employed (Stake, 1995; Walsham, 1995). The aim of the multiple case study was to gain perspectives of beneficiary participation in evaluation, in order to better understand how evaluation opportunities for beneficiary participation could be developed. Here, two NPOs, referred to as Case A and Case B, were studied as empirical units of analysis. Extant literature, particularly that from within a positivist standpoint, frequently advocates for a higher number of cases to increase the robustness of the research (Yin, 2014). However, for the purpose of this research, the focus was on understanding the experiences of those individuals involved, within authentic situations (Stake, 2006). As such, whilst limiting the statistical generalisability of the research, it was decided that two cases allowed for cross case comparison and was restrictive enough to enable an in-depth study of the phenomena within each case.

The case study organisations were accessed through an Industry Research Partner to ensure independence from the research team. Although independent from the research team, the study organisations were approached to participate due to their service provision to a beneficiary group, and their willingness as an organisation to consider the involvement of beneficiaries within their evaluation process.

In order to better understand the dynamics within each case (Eisenhardt, 1989) the research used two data sources: primary data from semi-structured interviews with three stakeholder groups: board, staff, and beneficiaries, and secondary data from publicly available organisational and legislative documents. Using multiple sources of evidence within each case enabled triangulation of the data (Ponelis, 2015). The three informant stakeholder groups strengthened triangulation via data sources (Shenton, 2004). Snowball sampling was used to identify participants. The number of participants interviewed totalled 14 across the two cases. The research focuses on hearing the voices of the beneficiary group; therefore, this group takes preference in number within the interviewee sample. As a result, the number of staff and board members interviewed is less than the number of beneficiaries interviewed. However, across all stakeholder groups the sample size was dictated by the willingness of voluntary participants. The interview questions can be viewed within Appendix 1.

Table 1 below lists the interview details for each participant.

Table 1. Details of each interview conducted across the two cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Case A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondary data, in the form of publicly available legislative and organisational documents allowed for a more in-depth understanding of each case and more significant insights to emerge (Keutel and Werner, 2011; Ponelis, 2015). The secondary data used in each case analysis is summarised in Table 2. Document discrepancy across the two cases signals a lack of availability of comparable documents, or a difference in production of organisational documentation.

Table 2. Secondary data used in each case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Case A</th>
<th>Case B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Insert table 1 here

Insert table 2 here
Both the primary and secondary data was analysed using thematic analysis and the data analysis software QSR Nvivo which is helpful in justifying findings by providing evidence to link findings back to the original data source (Keutel and Werner, 2011). The thematic analysis involved coding the data to a predeveloped set of theory-generated codes. During the coding process, new inductive codes were developed as they arose from the data. Four phases of thematic analysis occurred in order to develop a rich understanding of the data. Through these rounds, patterns and commonalities within the initial codes emerged. These were identified as leading themes within the analysis. At the conclusion of the thematic analysis, 36 codes and 11 themes had emerged. This analysis was used to develop case study narratives which tell a story about each NPO (Patton, 2015). The analysis concluded with a cross case comparison.

The Case Narratives
Both cases present as “Service Providers” (Cordery and Sim, 2017). Service Providers predominately receive government funding, have a nonprofit motive, where members only weakly direct operations, and the organisations mainly gain income from the delivery of goods and services in health, legal, and other sectors (Cordery and Sim, 2017). Case B also presents characteristics aligned with an “Advocacy” civil society organisation (Cordery and Sim, 2017). Here organisations advocate for improved corporate and/or government policies for underprivileged groups, by speaking powerfully with or for the disadvantaged (Cordery and Sim, 2017).

Case A
Established in 2000, Case A is an Australian nonprofit public benevolent institution, incorporated as an association with charity status. Classified in financial terms as a medium sized NPO by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC, 2018), it has annual income between $250,000-$999,999. Case A operates five days per week, from one location within a capital city, and has a beneficiary group consisting of approximately 2,100 beneficiaries.

The mission of Case A is to provide voluntary rehabilitation for adults experiencing a mental illness. The rehabilitation program involves beneficiaries and staff working together to run all aspects of the management and governance of the NPO. Beneficiaries participate in management, are members of the board, and are involved in financial decision-making and fundraising. Other beneficiary participation includes recreational events, a transport program, an employment program, and a housing program that provides housing for homeless beneficiaries. Beneficiaries participate in Case A through regular, weekly engagements with the service, typically over many years. In this way, the participation of beneficiaries within Case A is usually ongoing and over a long-term period.

The importance of Case A in the lives of beneficiaries is reflected in the comments below:

“It’s my whole life. I really don’t think I’d be here if it wasn’t for [Case A]. I really don’t because I don’t have much family...I call this my family.” (Case A, 2017, beneficiary 2)

“I slept on concrete floor. Then next day I took an overdose of tablets...I’d probably be here [at Case A] for the long haul, because I’ve got nowhere to go, I’ve got no money.” (Case A, 2017, beneficiary 5)

The beneficiaries of Case A are highly participative and have extensive involvement in the governance and management practices of the organisation, however avenues for participation in formal evaluation of the service are limited. Although one of the five beneficiaries interviewed did refer to completing an evaluation form, none of the other four beneficiaries had been exposed to this process. The beneficiaries primarily seek accountability to be discharged through verbal communication structures, yet in order to provide for equality across the beneficiary group, beneficiaries discussed how effective evaluation instruments would need to take various formats including written and verbal, group and individual. These findings indicate that a dialogic approach
to downwards accountability necessitates instruments that encourage and support an exchange of accounts through participation.

Within Case A, an accountability structure that goes beyond a mere downwards giving of accounts to beneficiaries is presented. The beneficiaries are in receipt of accounts, and are also givers of accounts. Beneficiaries are listened to, and their voices impact upon the service. This was illustrated by staff who noted: “we have their [beneficiary] input in everything, in any sorts of decisions” (Case A, 2017, staff 1). This results in beneficiaries having an increased sense of ownership within the organisation.

The beneficiaries seek to have an impact upon the organisation, and they seek the organisation to be accountable for the impact it has upon their lives. In this regard, impact is multi-directional. The impact the organisation has on the beneficiary’s life is reflected in the impact the beneficiary is having on the organisation.

The structure of Case A has given rise to beneficiaries feeling needed, having higher self-esteem, and more self-confidence, as reflected in the following comments:

“If [beneficiaries] don’t have a say it will fall apart” (Case A, 2017, beneficiary 3),
“We’re needed here” (Case A, 2017, beneficiary 1),
“The fact that you need to feel wanted and needed, it makes you want to come back and it makes you want to participate” (Case A, 2017, beneficiary 4)

Case B
Established in 1986, Case B is an Australian nonprofit, public benevolent institution, incorporated as an association, with charity status. Classified in financial terms as a large sized NPO by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC, 2018), it has an annual revenue greater than $1,000,000. Operating five days per week, Case B is State-based with a central CBD location within a capital city and regional offices, some of which are run by sub-contracted partner NPOs. Notably Case B has a documented client base of over 15,000 beneficiaries that used the service within the 2016-2017 financial year.

Case B has a mission to represent the concerns of adult recipients of a housing service through the provision of specialist advice services and advocacy leading to potential law reformation. In keeping with the mission of the organisation, the beneficiaries of Case B participate within the organisation through accessing advice and advocacy services. Typically, this begins when beneficiaries access the telephone advice service to help them respond to an issue. Participation typically ends when the issue reaches a conclusion and advice is no longer sought. It is possible for beneficiaries to have repeated engagements with the NPO if new issues arise, however the participation of beneficiaries within Case B is usually episodic and over a short-term time period.

Within Case B, the importance of non-financial accountability to beneficiaries is evident within the interviews. Here non-financial information rather than financial information enables accountability on beneficiaries’ terms. Beneficiaries of Case B seek the NPO to be accountable for outcomes of the service, impacting their lives. This is of greater importance than the relationship between the NPO and beneficiary. Evidence of this is provided through the following beneficiary comments:

“A lot of people who are dealing with [housing] issues will probably be less concerned with how the service is provided. It’s having a home and having [housing] issues sorted is a big issue for a lot of people” (Case B, 2017, beneficiary 1).
“They [staff] don’t have to be friendly, but as long as they’re relatable and can provide all the information…to maximise the successful outcome of the case” (Case B, 2018, beneficiary 3).
Within Case B the board member reports the NPO to be accountable for acting in beneficiaries’ best interests and having an organisational structure that has “very good exposure to the breadth of beneficiaries’ issues and concerns” (Case B, 2018, board) through constant, direct contact. To the board member, listening to beneficiary’s voice is “potentially really helpful to us. It’ll improve the quality of what we do, to continuously improve” (Case B, 2018, board). Here the giving of voice to beneficiaries is reported as being important to all interviewed, however no systematic processes to facilitate this are currently in place. Through the giving of voice to beneficiaries, a staff member reported beneficiaries would feel less helpless, and more empowered. Giving voice to beneficiaries was considered an opportunity to increase positive outcomes for beneficiaries, their sense of social justice and empowerment, and also improve service quality, although evidence of this in practice was not found.

The beneficiaries lack awareness of any evaluation or feedback opportunities. However, beneficiaries were clear that they would value an opportunity to evaluate Case B and to provide feedback upon the service they received, as evidenced through the following quote: “I think some people would feel that it is important to be able to pass on that advice or things, ideas that could better the organisation” (Case B, 2018, beneficiary 2). The beneficiaries interviewed suggested an evaluation survey or feedback form to be suitable.

Case Comparison and Discussion
Comparison of organisational characteristics of each case shows legislative and operational similarities. Notably the two NPOs differ in financial and organisational size, and beneficiary number, with Case B being significantly larger. This difference in size affects each NPO’s staffing level and beneficiary reach.

Timeframe of beneficiary participation
Comparing the two research cases, a difference in the beneficiaries’ timeframe of participation within each case was noted. These different timeframes appear to give rise to different accountability needs within each beneficiary group, which impacts upon when accountability occurs from a beneficiary perspective, and the ability of evaluation to enhance accountability to beneficiaries.

In Case A, beneficiary empowerment has increased participation and transformed lives. Through participation downwards accountability is transformed from being one-directional, to be a reciprocal giving and receiving of accounts. In doing so, accountability is enacted relationally. This is depicted in Figure 2.

![Insert figure 2 here](image_url)

Figure 2. Transforming downwards accountability into relational accountability

The beneficiaries of Case A want the organisation to be accountable for information that enables a dialogue and helps to build a relationship between the beneficiary and Case A. In establishing this accountability need, the beneficiaries of Case A appear to be calling for a relational approach to accountability. Rather than being discharged as finite, accountability is ongoing as it cycles from beneficiary to organisation, consistently strengthening relationships. This approach to accountability is enabled by the beneficiaries’ long-term and ongoing timeframe of beneficiary participation with the NPO, as well as the NPO’s willingness to engage in this form of accountability. This timeframe appears to impact upon the timing of accountability to beneficiaries, such that accountability remains an open dialogue rather than a periodic task.

A relational approach to accountability exhibited within Case A demonstrates dialogic accountability. It does this by requiring an accountability structure that involves genuine stakeholder participation. The dialogic approach to downwards accountability within Case A calls for evaluation processes that encourage and support an exchange of accounts through participation. Here, an
evaluation instrument could contribute to building the relationship between the NPO and beneficiary, and assist in discharging accountability to beneficiaries, if it is used at regular intervals throughout the beneficiaries’ engagement. In this context, an evaluation instrument could allow for conflict or disagreement between the NPO and the beneficiary by being a platform for beneficiaries to have a voice. However, it is the organisation’s willingness to address conflict that facilitates engagement in dialogue and enables accountability to be discharged on the beneficiaries’ terms. Without the organisation’s willingness to address any conflict, it is unlikely the evaluation instrument would enable downwards accountability to be discharged. In seeking accountability throughout their engagement beneficiaries are detailing when accountability needs to be discharged to them. In Case A, under relational accountability, when the accountability needs of beneficiaries are met, the relationship would be strengthened.

In contrast, Case B beneficiaries typically have a short-term and episodic timeframe of participation within the organisation which results in beneficiaries seeking accountability to be discharged to them at the conclusion of their engagement with the NPO. Here, the purpose of accountability, on beneficiaries’ terms, is to enable a transaction of accountability between the beneficiary and organisation to occur. Beneficiaries appear to seek accountability in order to complete their engagement with the organisation, as a point of closure. In this regard, an evaluation instrument could act as an enabler of the fulfilment of the accountability transaction between Case B and the beneficiary group. In similarity to Case A, an evaluation instrument here could allow for conflict or disagreement between the NPO and the beneficiary by facilitating a platform for beneficiaries to have a voice. Through seeking accountability at the conclusion of their engagement, beneficiaries are detailing when accountability needs to be discharged to them.

Within Case B, beneficiaries are seeking accountability for outcomes, and staff are seeking to be accountable for the impact the service has had upon the beneficiary. This is evidenced through the quote: “So if we say we’re going to help you [the beneficiary] do A, B and C, did we do those things or was there a reason that we changed our minds? But we also want to see if it had an impact on the [beneficiary]” (Case B, 2017, staff 1). Although neither the staff nor beneficiaries’ needs are currently being met in this regard, the potential meeting of these accountability needs resembles an exchange and could enable a transaction of accountability. An evaluation instrument could facilitate this transactional giving and receiving of information. This transaction is represented within Figure 3.

Based upon the different timeframes of beneficiary participation within each case, different approaches to, or modes of downwards accountability, on beneficiaries’ terms, have been identified: relational accountability and transactional accountability. Reflecting on this, downwards accountability can be considered to take multi-modal forms. A summary of the implications of the different timeframes of participation upon the beneficiaries’ accountability needs is illustrated within Table 3.

Although the engagement of beneficiaries within Case A and Case B are typically either long-term and ongoing or short-term and episodic respectively, either NPO may have beneficiaries outside of these timeframes. This would apply to a new beneficiary in Case A or a returning beneficiary within Case B. In these examples the study organisations may need to adapt the mode of downwards accountability to suit the nature of beneficiary engagement and timeframe. This situation arose within Case B where through repeated engagements, one beneficiary now seeks to develop a relationship...
with the NPO. The beneficiary believes an evaluation form used “along the way could actually help building relationships” (Case B, 2018, beneficiary 2). This reinforces the need for the NPOs to match their beneficiary evaluation processes to the timeframe of individual beneficiary engagement in order to discharge downwards accountability on beneficiaries’ terms, rather than consider beneficiaries as a single collective group with common needs.

For what are NPOs accountable within Relational and Transactional modes of accountability:
The beneficiaries of Case A seek accountability for ongoing operational sustainability based upon sound management of the NPO. This is due to a dependence beneficiaries have developed upon the NPO. Therefore, accountability for organisational sustainability presents as a characteristic of relational accountability. Case A’s highly participative structure currently allows beneficiaries to be part of the operational sustainability. In this way, their accountability need is being met. This is in contrast to the findings from Case B’s narrative. As previously discussed, within Case B, beneficiaries are seeking accountability for quality of service provided rather than organisational sustainability, which is in keeping with their short-term and episodic engagement. Therefore, accountability for effective service delivery presents as a characteristic of transactional accountability. Currently, this accountability need is not being met within Case B. However, as shown by these findings, an evaluation instrument that enables the beneficiaries to evaluate the service delivery could allow the NPO to discharge this form of accountability. Therefore, what an organisation is accountable for to beneficiaries differs depending upon the type of participation beneficiaries have. This difference necessitates questioning accountability when?

Within Case A beneficiaries seek accountability from the NPO for the impact the service has had on their lives, and for the impact they are having on the NPO. In this way, impact is multi-directional. This is illustrated in Figure 4. Here, staff and board seek to meet beneficiaries’ accountability needs through providing increased participative means.

**Insert figure 4 here**

Figure 4. Impact within the Relational Accountability model of Case A

In contrast, the beneficiary group of Case B seek accountability from the NPO for quality of service, and how this impacts upon their outcomes. Beneficiaries are not seeking accountability for the impact they have had on the NPO. In this way, impact is one directional. This is illustrated in Figure 5.

**Insert Figure 5 here**

Figure 5. Impact within the Transactional Accountability model of Case B

Accountability on beneficiaries’ terms – impact on the directions of accountability

During the analysis, it became clear that both NPOs are engaged in upwards accountability reporting requirements that have benefitted or have potential to benefit downwards accountability. For example, during an interview a staff member from Case B discussed the organisation’s need to carry out a beneficiary satisfaction survey in the future in order to comply with funding requirements. To quote, “…we're required to do them for funders but it's also good practice …” (Case B, 2017, staff 1). This suggests that when upwards accountability requires reporting the meeting of downwards accountabilities, NPOs are more likely to engage in activities that support and increase accountability to beneficiaries. This correlates with Uddin and Belal’s (2019) identification of the potential for upwards accountability to enable downwards accountability. As such, upwards reporting documents can play a role in increasing accountability on beneficiaries’ terms, by being platforms within which voice can be given to beneficiaries. Currently, upwards accountability financial reporting documents of both NPOs provide little avenue for contributing to accountability on beneficiaries’ terms. This confirms the importance of avoiding monetary reductionism, when moving away from the monologic accounting paradigm (Brown, 2009).
Other examples arose within the research which illustrated upwards and downwards accountability processes co-opting each other in order to support the other’s agenda. The board member of Case B identified the potential for downwards accountability mechanisms to improve upwards accountability reporting, suggesting reporting positive beneficiary feedback to funding bodies gives funding bodies “…confidence that what we’re doing with them, we’re on the right track and that we’re doing the right things” (Case B, 2018, board). If funding bodies could call for the reporting of both positive and negative beneficiary feedback, this upwards reporting could be shifted away from the NPO’s terms and towards those of the beneficiaries. Similarly, a staff member of Case A described their involvement in mandated upwards accountability processes which benefited beneficiaries through ensuring Case A was “legally and properly giving those opportunities to our [beneficiaries]” (Case A, 2017, staff 2). Here the frequently competing upwards and downwards accountabilities (Ebrahim, 2005) can be repositioned when considered on beneficiaries’ terms.

When considering accountability on beneficiaries’ terms, the traditional directions of accountability appear to change. Within this research, a dialogic perspective of accounting and accountability on beneficiaries’ terms, has reframed separate accountability directions into a more mutually supportive accountability network. The meeting the accountability needs of one stakeholder group can also meet the accountability needs of others.

The very language of the traditional accountability directions (upwards and downwards) perpetuates power differentials embedded within the monologic accounting discourse, as it positions beneficiaries as the lowest (and by implication, least important) stakeholder group. Murtaza (2012) similarly draws attention to the implied assumptions embedded within the use of this directional language in acknowledging where in the hierarchy the downwards direction falls. However, accountability can have a symbiotic nature, where what benefits one group can also benefit others when given the opportunity. Thus, directional accountability (i.e. upwards, downwards, inwards or sideways) is replaced by recursive accountability, such that accountability is dialogic. Accountability reflects not only accountability to a particular group but is also a reflection on the NPO’s accountability as a source of learning or feedback to refine existing accountability processes. Here accountability is dialogic. To fit accountability into monologic accounting principles would mean accountability is capable of being neutral and value-free, apolitical, quantifiable, dependent upon experts and objective (Brown, 2009). Yet, it is clear that accountability is none of these. This recursive relationship between upwards and downwards accountability when considered on beneficiaries’ terms is illustrated in Figure 6.

Insert Figure 6 here

Figure 6. The symbiotic relationship between upwards and downwards accountability when viewed on beneficiaries’ terms.

Within this reframing, the boundaries of accountability to stakeholder groups begin to blur, what is accountable upwards is no longer easily separable from what is accountable downwards, nor is where accountability in each direction begins or ends discretely delineated. From an organisational perspective, the symbiotic relationship between the traditional directions of accountability can be used to the NPO’s advantage, by embracing the principles of dialogic accounting theory and casting a critical perspective upon the traditional accountability framework by considering accountability on beneficiaries’ terms. Doing so ensures accountability becomes accessible to non-experts, embraces subjectivity and is attentive to power relations (Brown, 2009). Without this underpinning, as research has shown, downwards accountability would again be undermined by the power differentials in upwards accountability (Jacobs and Wilford, 2010).

Accountability how? – through evaluation

Participants of the research believe beneficiary involvement in evaluating NPOs is valuable, for both the beneficiary and organisation. Yet both cases detailed limited examples of beneficiary
participation in formal evaluation processes. This supports Schmitz et al.’s (2012) claim that organisational aspirations to engage in downwards accountability are frequently not matched by practices.

When downwards accountability is viewed through the lens of dialogic accounting theory, the question of accountability when arises. Both modes of downwards accountability identified support a dialogic approach to accountability. Here, participation and dialogue enabled through evaluation could encourage an exchange of accounts between beneficiaries and the NPO.

Despite White (1996) suggesting conflict to be an important consideration when giving voice to those less powerful, this was not evident within the case study. However, White’s caution of conflict is still valid in regard to its potential if beneficiaries begin evaluating the organisation, and therefore needs to be considered within both relational and transactional accountability. To be dialogic, NPOs using evaluation instruments developed under either approach need to be cognisant of embracing an agonistic position where beneficiary voice, presented in conflict with staff or board voice, is valued as a democratic right. Evaluation instruments considered agonistically, enable the ability for less powerful stakeholder groups to be heard through being a platform to have a voice. An evaluation instrument designed with consideration of the timeframe of beneficiary participation could enable the giving of voice to beneficiaries more effectively than instruments developed without this temporal awareness.

Based upon the findings, within Case A an evaluation instrument would be used periodically throughout the beneficiaries’ engagement, enabling accountability to be discharged in an ongoing manner. In this instance, the evaluation instrument becomes a dialogic enabler. Conversely, within Case B, findings reveal the beneficiaries predominately seek accountability to be discharged to them at the conclusion of their engagement. To be dialogic, the NPO needs to ensure the evaluation process includes a response back to the beneficiary.

Within both Case A and Case B, the staff and board members interviewed aspire to increase beneficiary involvement in the NPOs’ evaluation processes. Therefore, these NPOs could be considered biased towards the success of such an evaluation process. If NPOs do not value beneficiary participation in evaluation, dialogue generated via an evaluation instrument is unlikely to discharge accountability due to it neither enabling or supporting a relationship (relational), nor completing an accountability transaction (transactional), to the satisfaction of the beneficiary.

Qualities of relational and transactional accountability
Both modes of downwards accountability – relational and transactional – are similar in that they focus on accounting for non-financial information and giving voice to beneficiaries, and both support a giving and receiving of accounts through a dialogic approach to accountability. However, the two modes differed greatly in their means to genuinely give an account to each beneficiary group. Differences include the type and means of beneficiary participation, what each beneficiary seeks accountability for, when evaluation should occur, and the purpose of evaluation. Table 4 presents a summary of these and other similarities and differences between relational and transactional accountability.

Table 4. Similarities and Differences between Relational Accountability and Transactional Accountability

In summary, this research has been able to demonstrate that the time frame of beneficiary participation impacts upon discharging downwards accountability. Although these findings are not statistically generalisable outside of the research cases, theoretically, accountability may be better fulfilled if NPOs are able to match their accountability practices towards the needs of beneficiaries.
A presentation of the findings across the two cases indicates that the practice of accountability on beneficiaries’ terms, differs depending upon the type of participation beneficiaries have within the NPO. This difference necessitates the questioning of accountability when? When accountability is practised on beneficiaries’ terms, outcomes to beneficiaries are different.

At the outset, this research examined the question – How can evaluation enhance accountability to beneficiaries within NPOs? Cross case analysis of the two case study organisations revealed participants believe beneficiaries should be part of the organisation’s evaluation processes. Yet for evaluation to enhance accountability, the timing of evaluation needs to be considered. The timing of evaluation enables accountability to be consideration on beneficiaries’ terms and enacts principles of dialogic accounting across both cases. As such, an evaluation instrument developed with an awareness of when accountability is occurring within the beneficiary group, could assist with the practice of accountability on the beneficiaries’ terms. Therefore, in answering the research question:

- Evaluation can enhance accountability to beneficiaries if NPOs pay attention to the particular timeframe of beneficiary participation within the NPO; and
- The timeframe of beneficiary participation within the NPO reflects different beneficiary accountability needs within an NPO’s accountability structures.

Therefore, initial insights generated by this research suggest viewing accountability on beneficiaries’ terms necessitates questioning the timing of accountability. Through positioning the beneficiary at the heart of the accountability process, what beneficiaries within each case need, and are calling for within their organisation’s accountability structure, is dependent upon the type of engagement they have. The different timeframe of participation impacts upon how accountability can be practised on beneficiaries’ terms. Thus, it is possible to include beneficiaries within the democratic space, but importantly, it must be done on their terms, and this necessitates asking them.

Implications

Implications for Theory

This research has engaged with critical accounting theory by proposing a means of enacting accountings acknowledging agonism (Brown and Tregidga, 2017), through participative evaluation. Beneficiary engagement within participative evaluation, framed by agonistic pluralism and dialogic accounting theory, as presented within this research, contributes to the theorisation and realisation of a dialogic accounting system and practice (Brown and Dillard, 2015b).

Implication for Practice

The research presents an ability to impact upon NPO’s accountability practices. In acknowledging beneficiaries’ accountability needs are dependent upon their timeframe of participation, organisations can better target downwards accountability structures. An NPO with beneficiaries who have long-term, ongoing engagement can use the understandings drawn from this research on relational accountability to inform their accountability practices. This could be generalised to include NPOs such as aged care facilities or preschools, where beneficiary engagement is typically long-term and ongoing. Similarly, the reverse can be applied to transactional accountability NPOs, for example advice centres. Here, downwards accountability structures can be influenced through an understanding of the nature and qualities of transactional accountability.

Implications for Policy

The research has potential implications for policy. Traditional service delivery and accountability technologies have typically been framed in terms of the principal/agent relationship which privileges the powerful stakeholders. However, when the traditional directions of accountability (Murtaza, 2012) are viewed critically, on beneficiaries’ terms, the discrete accountability directions blur, and a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship emerges. Upwards accountability can become an
instrument of downwards accountability. Similarly, downwards accountability can also be beneficial to meeting upwards accountability demands and enhancing an organisation’s internal accountability.

Currently accountability is predominately tied to those with power over the NPO (for example government, donors, and other funders), linked to funding, and supported by heavily regulated accounting processes. If those current power holders were able to reposition the focus to include accountability to beneficiaries as an inherent dimension of accountability to other stakeholders, an act of empowerment of beneficiaries could occur. This could be done by organisational or government policy acknowledging the importance of hearing beneficiary voice and explicitly calling for processes to achieve this outcome, specifically the involvement of beneficiaries within accountability processes, such as evaluation. In this way, evaluation is able to force accountability downwards. This illustrates an accountability extension where upwards accountability processes supported by accounting, sit alongside downwards accountability processes supported by evaluation.

Limitations
The sample size of two organisations within the case study presents as a limitation to the statistical generalisability of this research outside of the research arena. However, this research is aimed at exploring relationships and providing insights that can be used to build theory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). As such, the research focused upon achieving theoretical generalisation (Parker and Northcott, 2016). In this regard the small sample size has been beneficial in allowing for a more in-depth study of the phenomena present within each case. This is frequently the goal of qualitative research, as researchers strive to provide a “rich, contextualized understanding of human experience” through the study (Polit and Beck, 2010, p. 1452). However, the desire to be able to generalise the approaches of relational and transactional accountability across the wider nonprofit sector provides an avenue for future research.

As previously suggested, a possible limitation is presented by the organisations willing to partake in the research. These two cases could be considered biased towards the benefits of evaluation at the outset. This raises concerns of participation bias (Saunders et al., 2016). That being said, the perspectives of beneficiaries from each case are free from this bias.

Future Research
As mentioned above, researching the applicability of relational and transactional accountability across a wider sample of NPOs could enable the testing of this theory, and/or the identification of other approaches to downwards accountability. The addition of accountability when to the traditional accountability framework presents an opportunity for further study. This study positioned beneficiaries at the centre, and identified a need to question when accountability should be discharged to them. Consideration of accountability when adds a temporal dimension to accountability research and may be an important consideration in reviewing the needs of other stakeholder groups.

Concluding remarks
This research has shown that the timeframe of beneficiary participation gives rise to modes of relational and transactional accountability such that:

- Relational accountability arises when beneficiaries’ engagement with the NPO is long-term and ongoing. Here, the beneficiaries seek accountability that helps to form or strengthen their relationship with the NPO. The timing of accountability is throughout the beneficiaries’ engagement with the NPO.
- Transactional accountability arises when beneficiaries’ engagement with the NPO is short-term and episodic. Here, the beneficiaries seek accountability that helps to complete their engagement with the NPO, thereby enacting an exchange or transaction between beneficiary and NPO. The timing of accountability is at the conclusion of the beneficiaries’ engagement with the NPO.
This research has attempted to contribute towards social change and the actioning of the SDGs at a subnational and organisational level. In listening to and valuing the words of beneficiaries, and other participants interviewed within this research, new understandings of what it means for NPOs to be accountable downwards have been formed. The research has identified different modes of downwards accountability in an attempt to reconfigure the traditional, power-based, accountability directions by positioning beneficiaries as central to an NPO’s operations and accountability. Through this research a method of enacting dialogic accounting theory via beneficiary participative evaluation has been established, and an understanding of how dialogic accounting theory can be applied to downwards accountability has been developed.
References:


Appendix One

Semi-structured interview questions used within the research:

**Beneficiaries:**
- Can you describe your involvement within (NPO)?
- How long have you been involved with (NPO) and how did that involvement start?
- What type of service do they provide to you?
- In what ways do you receive information about the NPO? E.g. what they have achieved this year, how they have helped people, what they have spent their funding on?
- If you could receive more information from the NPO what information would be useful, interesting or important to you?
- What are some of the ways that you inform the NPO about your needs or ideas within the organisation? E.g. giving feedback or evaluating, writing, talking to someone, using a computer or a tablet, what else?
- Generally, do you think for beneficiaries like yourself, having a greater voice and increased involvement within NPOs is positive or negative, why?

**Staff:**
- What grouping of beneficiaries do you work most closely with?
- What information is important to gain from beneficiaries that might improve the service they are receiving?

**Board:**
- Do you think in principle that beneficiaries having a stronger voice in NPOs is positive for the sector? If YES, what type of information would be most useful to receive from beneficiaries? If NO, why not?
- Do any of the processes in place currently within your NPO allow beneficiary’s ideas to influence procedures or policies? If so, can you describe how that happens?

**Staff and Board:**
- Are there any negative implications you can think of in regard to beneficiary involvement in evaluation processes?
- What about positive implications of increased beneficiary involvement?
- What does your NPO currently do to receive information from beneficiaries about their needs or ideas on the service? E.g. feedback forms, interviews, surveys.
- Can you think of any other ways to involve beneficiaries that your organisation hasn’t tried yet but that might be useful?
- What ways are beneficiaries currently able to receive information about your NPO’s services, performance, activities, how funding is spent etc.? E.g. newsletters, emails, financial reports, annual reports, informal or informal meetings etc.?
- Do you think there are barriers to beneficiaries being more involved in evaluation processes?
## Table 1. Details of each interview conducted across the two cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Interviewee #</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case B</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>19 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>39 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>68 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>35 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>21 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>403 mins</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Secondary data used in each case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Organisational Documents</th>
<th>Legislative Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>7 documents analysed including annual report, promotional material, handbook and organisational standards.</td>
<td>5 documents analysed including charity reporting requirements and audit reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3 documents analysed including annual reports and strategic plan.</td>
<td>5 documents analysed including charity reporting requirements and audit reports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of documents: 20
Total number of pages: 169
Table 3. Timeframes of beneficiary participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Accountability</th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Transactional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe of Beneficiary Participation</td>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing of Accountability</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Episodic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome of Accountability</td>
<td>Relationship building</td>
<td>Transaction completing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Similarities and Differences between Relational Accountability and Transactional Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Relational Accountability</th>
<th>Transactional Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on non-financial information</td>
<td>Focus on non-financial information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between the accountability</td>
<td>A mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between the accountability directions is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directions is evident</td>
<td>evident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a blurring of organisational accountability directions</td>
<td>There is a blurring of organisational accountability directions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving voice to beneficiaries is important</td>
<td>Giving voice to beneficiaries is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the giving and receiving of accounts through a dialogic approach to</td>
<td>Support the giving and receiving of accounts through a dialogic approach to accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences</th>
<th>Relational Accountability</th>
<th>Transactional Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly participative environment</td>
<td>Less participative environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact multi-direction</td>
<td>Impact one directional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability for information which enables a dialogue, and builds a</td>
<td>Accountability for the quality of the service provided, and how this impacts upon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship between the NPO and the beneficiary</td>
<td>outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When accountability needs of the beneficiaries are met by the NPO, a</td>
<td>When accountability needs of the beneficiaries are met by the NPO, a transaction occurs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship occurs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability for operational sustainability</td>
<td>Accountability for service quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term engagement</td>
<td>Short-term engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing engagement</td>
<td>Episodic engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service delivery has a collaborative focus</td>
<td>Service delivery has an individual focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving and receiving of accounts through a relationship</td>
<td>Giving and receiving of accounts through a transaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation throughout engagement</td>
<td>Evaluation at conclusion of engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation builds relationship</td>
<td>Evaluation completes transaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. The directions of accountability
Figure 2. Transforming downwards accountability into relational accountability.
Figure 3. Transforming downwards accountability into transactional accountability
Figure 4. Impact within the Relational Accountability model of Case A
Figure 5. Impact within the Transactional Accountability model of Case B
Figure 6. The symbiotic relationship between upwards and downwards accountability when viewed on beneficiaries’ terms.
The authors wish to again thank both Reviewers for their time and valuable reviews. Additional suggested edits to improve this paper have been made and are detailed in the table below. All suggested edits have been addressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewer comment</th>
<th>Author response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The first paragraph under ‘Accountability for what’ (p.4) reads like a pot pourri of terms. It would be useful if the ‘impact oriented criteria’ was linked to the dichotomy presented or, if other terms need to be brought in and cannot be lined to acknowledge them in a footnote or similar.</td>
<td>In agreement with the reviewer we have edited the wording of this paragraph to simplify terms used. The paragraph (page 4 lines 26-35) is more readable as a result.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Page 6 line 54 ‘Evaluations invite subjectivity…’ Do they not ‘have the potential to invite subjectivity’? Especially in light of the statements in the paragraph starting on line 31 of the same page where ‘evaluations are tools to rationalise and normalise actions….’</td>
<td>This line now reads: “Evaluations have the potential to invite subjectivity and bias…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Editing comments:**

1. Some of the in-text references include page numbers when there is no direct quote.  
   Citations with page numbers but without direct quotes have been corrected. Page numbers have been removed.

   The citation to Uddin and Belal (in press) has also now been updated to (2019) to reflect publication changes during the review process.

2. Page 4 line 51/52 – whose viewpoint here? perhaps the sentence could read ‘depending on who is evaluating and who they see as the primary…’  
   This sentence has been changed to now read - “…what an NPO is accountable for changes depending on who is evaluating and who they see as the primary accountable agent.”