

Public Value, Private Interest: *Can quality management address the challenges to government performance identified by Public Choice Theory?*

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A thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2025

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis comes at the end of many years of part-time study for me. And full-time work, most of which has been in the kinds of social services discussed here. The personal cost of study was high, but so were the benefits. I have learned so much about the complexity inherent in delivering human services, the remarkable depth of the literature around it, and the genuine care and industry committed by so many people to making them better.

I have had a lot of inspiration, help and encouragement on the way. Thank you to my parents, Barry and Anna, for valuing me enough to care about my education, at great personal expense, which at times you could ill afford. Your belief in me is the thing that made all other things possible in my life. My son Cameron, thank you for giving me good reason to try and set an example of the value to be had from getting after something worthwhile, even if it takes a very long time and feels impossible. Maybe because of that. Featon, thank you for enthusiastically jumping right in every time I pummelled you with the endless details of this thesis and for telling me it would be alright when I cried about how hard it was just to keep it all in my head. Thank you to my family from another life. Rob and Kate, your curiosity and hilariously savage critiques of the world made it normal for me to have my own. Mary, your rude, sparkling drive and cleverness has been a spectacle and an inspiration to me. Judy, for crying tears of joy and pride the first time I put the funny uni hat on, I can still feel that moment. To my strange and wonderful friends, thank you for hanging in, despite my absence at your BBQs for eight years. And you, Mike. Thank you for pointing your sharp eyes at my drafts and giving me reliably insightful feedback.

There were also many people who directly contributed to the work of this thesis. Thank you to the 22 participants of this study. Giving up your time to support efforts to improve the social services you provide demonstrates the hope and energy you have for your clients and communities. My supervisors and other academics at the University of Sydney had the most direct supporting role. Thank you, Julien for looking past my

hubris, my running down of so many (now) obviously dead ends, and for sticking by me as much as possible for all the long years it took to put this study together. Your support and insights were invaluable. Thank you also, Xinyue Zhang, Stuart Clegg, Lynn Crawford, Jo-An Occhipinti and Tim Haslett, for battering and inspiring me into thinking better.

Finally, to the staff and clients of social welfare services, of which I have been both. I hope that this research helps remove unnecessary barriers and empowers you to achieve better outcomes.

Statement of originality

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged. During the preparation of this thesis, I used Consensus AI, Litmaps and Elicit AI for the purpose of finding peer reviewed literature and formatting this document. My use of these AI tools for literature search was functionally equivalent to the use of Google Scholar and the University of Sydney Library, both of which were used for the same purpose. No content produced by generative AI tools has been used in the preparation of this thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

The research reported in this thesis was supported by the award of a Research Training Program scholarship to the PhD Candidate.

Lee O'Dowd Austen

Abstract

Governments spend many billions in tax revenue each year in pursuit of public value. However, income is determined via legislation not performance, and the integrity of resource allocation decisions is undermined by lack of accountability. This study investigates whether the principles and practices of quality management can mitigate the challenges to government performance identified by Public Choice Theory.

The study used a mixed-methods, multiple case-study to determine the relationship between quality practice uptake, organisational quality mandates and the personal values expressed by staff around their work, in Australian social welfare services. Quality scores were established for quality mandates and staff practice using a priori coding of their alignment with the International Standard for Quality Management Systems, ISO9000. Scores were based on observation of contract documents and semi-structured interviews with staff across eleven social welfare programs. Staff values were inductively derived from their language choices in interview using Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding. Quality scores were then tested for any statistical relationship with staff values.

Average quality score across social welfare programs was low, with government agencies scoring lower than non-government agencies, and ISO9000 principles relating to leadership, staff engagement, and continuous improvement scoring below average. Staff values predicted higher staff quality scores, but lost statistical significance when quality mandate scores were included in mediation analysis. When aligned with ISO9000 principles, organisational quality mandates were statistically significant predictors of both staff quality scores and staff values, indicating that staff values and narratives are shaped by quality mandates that engage and empower staff, in ways similar to ISO9000 principles. This study provides evidence that quality management can address rational self-interest challenges to government performance identified by Public Choice Theory.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This introduction chapter sets out the context in which this research was conducted, the aims of this research and then the structure in which it is presented in the remaining chapters. This thesis focuses on the social welfare services run to support the most vulnerable people in our community and the government and non-government organisations (NGOs) whose staff and systems work to provide that support. PhD theses conventionally prioritise objectivity and technical rigour. Yet, Plato's allegory of the cave reminds us that claims to objectivity may simply be shadows of a deeper, more complex reality (Plato, 2015, Book VII, 514a-520a). Weatherall (2019) acknowledges this dynamic in her advice on the scope of PhD theses that address the design and delivery of social welfare services, arguing that these documents should and must adhere to academic conventions but should also recognise the lived consequences of institutional choices. To treat questions of quality, accountability, and performance as merely abstract would risk obscuring the profound human implications at stake. This introduction therefore situates the study within the theoretical, technical and social dimensions of government performance, acknowledging that failures in public administration reverberate not only academically, but in the daily realities of citizens' lives. Following this discussion of context, the research aims, structure and purpose of the remaining chapters are explained.

Section 1 Government performance; high stakes, low pressure

Citizens rely upon government revenue collected through taxation to deliver social welfare services; however, it is often unclear whether those funds are being spent as effectively as possible. External pressures on government to perform, such as media scrutiny and the voting system are ineffective in that they do not inform efforts to improve performance (O'Dowd-Austen, 2017, Productivity-Commission, 2017). This leaves bureaucrats and politicians to operate under incentives shaped by self-interest rather than public value, as described by seminal Public Choice Theory literature (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, pp.3-6), resulting in the systematic exclusion of meaningful performance management (Butler, 2012, Gailmard, 2010, Niskanen, 2017). The absence of meaningful accountability is particularly conspicuous in the case of social

welfare services where the most vulnerable populations have the least leverage to hold governments accountable. Clients of welfare services typically lack consumer power as they cannot choose alternative providers, exit the system, or effectively demand redress when quality is poor (Gaster, 2005). So, the stakes involved in the quality of social welfare services are immense. As Shergold's (2015) review of major government programs shows, such failures arise when transparency, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness are treated as optional. These failures waste public funds, weaken trust, leave moral obligations unmet and lead to devastating consequences for both citizens and state. Industries other than government routinely address issues of performance by adopting formal quality management systems, which research consistently links to improved operational and financial performance (Sfreddo, Vieira, Vidor, & Santos, 2021). Yet, the absence of evidence on how governments control the quality and performance of social welfare services remains (Fryer et al., 2009).

1.1 The lack of incentive to perform

Billions of dollars of tax revenue are spent every year in Australia, implementing social welfare services like child protection, community building, disability services, domestic violence support and social housing (NSW-Government, 2025). Yet, current ways of monitoring & controlling the performance of government services lack a means of measuring their impact and therefore can neither claim to be effective nor continually improve (Melão et al., 2017, Head, 2016).

This lack of a reference point for success stands in contrast to the context of most industries outside of government. At the most basic level, success for most private sector industries may be measured by the financial return they make for owners, providing an incentive to control performance through efficiency and effectiveness (Smith, 1776). However, the success of services run with the intention of improving some social condition, like reducing the incidence of child abuse, must rely on non-financial data to judge their relative success or failure, as profit is not their goal. One problem with this is that the performance data gathered from many such social welfare services is unsuitable for or not applied to judge or improve those services

(Head and Alford, 2015). Despite well written policy being implemented by a well-resourced public sector, specific and measurable outcomes are regularly omitted during their design or not collected during their procurement and management (Klassen et al., 2010). The lack of a hard analogue of success, like profit, leaves social services without the means of formally knowing or improving their result.

The scale of this problem becomes clearer when government revenue is compared to the largest industries in the world. In 2025, Australian governments collected around AUD \$760 billion in tax revenue (Australian-Government-Treasury, 2023, OECD, 2024). This places Australian government income on a scale equivalent to global giants such as Google (USD \$307 billion), Apple (USD \$383 billion), Saudi Arabian Oil (USD \$604 billion) and Amazon (USD \$574 billion), (Alphabet-Inc., 2023, Apple-Inc., 2023, Aramco, 2023, Amazon-Inc., 2023). Yet unlike these corporations, which must perform to secure their income, government revenue is guaranteed. This leaves government occupying a unique and troubling position as the only multi-billion-dollar industry in the world whose incentive to perform relies upon the rational self-interest of its staff, who work in a system that actively suppresses performance data (Leaver, 2009). Figure 1 illustrates this contrast.

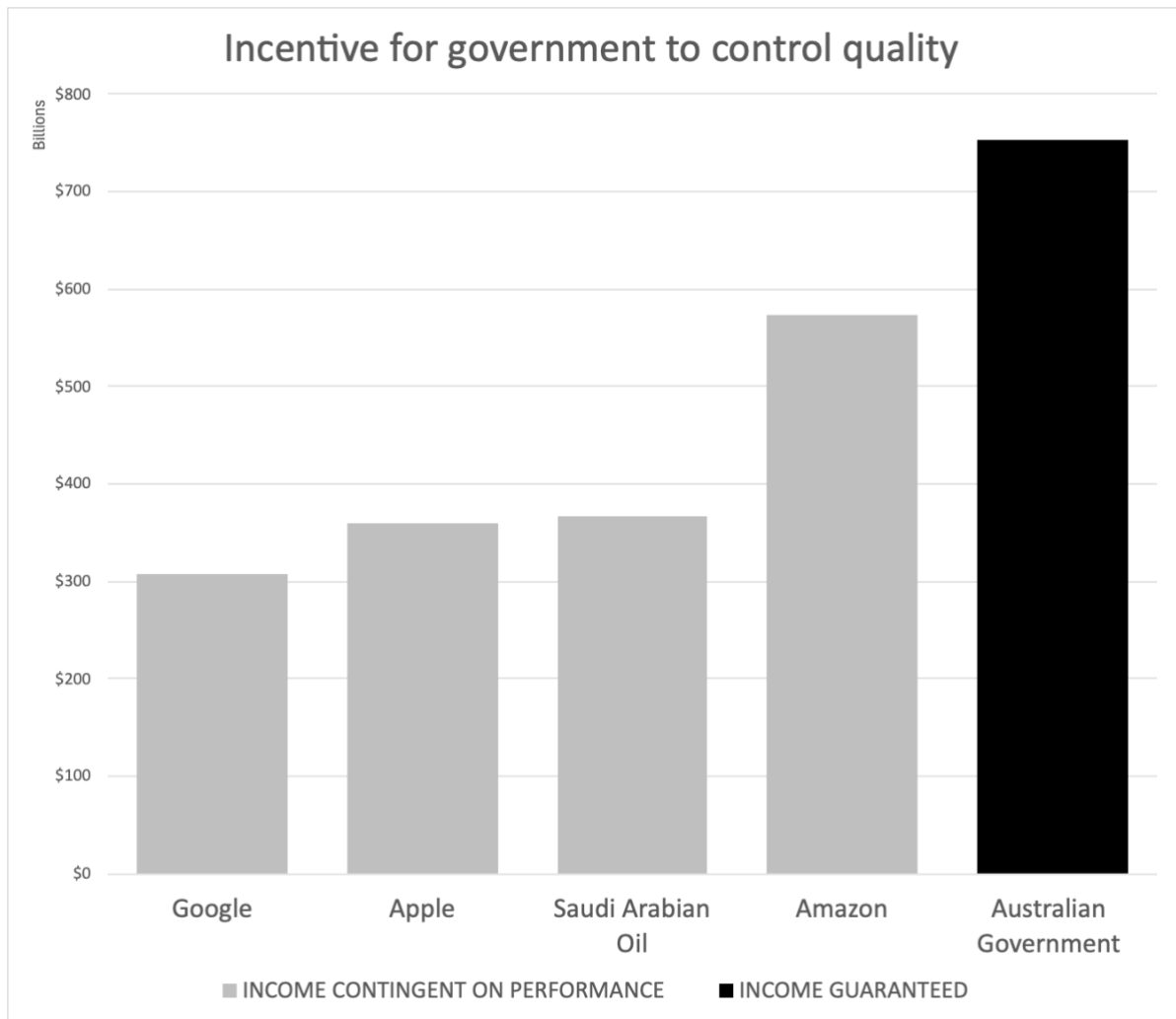


Figure 1. Contingency of income source on performance incentive

In the case of social welfare services, the stakes on those rational self-interests are high. In 2021–22, 45,400 children were living in out-of-home care across Australia, with Indigenous children represented disproportionately at 11 times the rate of their peers (Australian-Institute-of-Health-and-Welfare, 2023). On Census night 2021, more than 122,000 people were experiencing homelessness (Australian-Bureau-of-Statistics, 2023). Meanwhile, family and domestic violence saw one woman killed each week by a partner with over 123,000 people seeking homelessness services in 2020–21 due to these violence issues (Australian-Institute-of-Health-and-Welfare, 2022).

1.2 The role of government

The role of the government including its bureaucratic division expanded over the last century until around the 1970s, when government began to pivot to reduce the public perception of what it could be held accountable for, in line with what it saw as its capacity. Advocates of this retraction of scope saw the lack of systems to understand or control the more complex issues present in their environment as the main factor limiting it (Head and Alford, 2015). To affect this reduction of scope, governments advocated personal responsibility and the role of market forces to address complex societal problems (Rose, 1979). In more recent years, this trend has reversed somewhat, with a portion of political leaders again advocating for government to attempt to address large and complex problems, despite an apparent lack of facility for governments to manage such problems. In this context, the resurgence of government ambition highlights the importance of systems to fully understand and address such problems (Head and Alford, 2015).

This account challenges the popular notion that bureaucracy employs effective systems of governance defined by structured processes, formal rules, and hierarchical relationships. While such structures exist, and do provide the impression of predictability and order, they can also produce rigidity and procedural burdens that negatively impact service delivery (Pascoe et al., 2023). Stenderup (2024) refers to this dysfunction as bureaucratic sludge, a term intended to convey the inefficiencies that arise when focus on process increases to the point where the purpose of work is obscured. This use of the term sludge, is related to Sunstein's (2022) Behavioural Insights notion of sludge, defined as the barrier presented by gratuitous processes, paperwork or other burdens that cost money, take up unnecessary time and cause frustration, without producing the value they intended to. Such inefficient processes may delay or deprive people of access to important services. This produces a conundrum. On one hand it may be argued that the purpose of regulation within bureaucracy is to provide consistent, transparent parameters for decisions that effectively deliver the intent of policy, especially in the case of government social welfare services (Talleraas, 2017), with under-regulated bureaucratic systems lacking

the guidance necessary to ensure equity and responsiveness, leading to poor or unpredictable outcomes (Shergold, 2015). However, especially in the case of social welfare services, client needs are complex enough to confound standard regulation parameters, making the case for unique treatment (Brodkin, 2006). Bureaucratic systems, including their regulation through policy, attempt to provide a decision-making structure through which such public services may be delivered effectively and equitably and to achieve their goals. Regulation in this context, helps to navigate the tension between the need for accountable governments, and the complex array of genuine client need that often defies regulatory boundaries (Brodkin and Marston, 2013, p.vii).

Adding further to the demands of complex client needs, and the necessary rigidity of policy and regulation, other dynamics also impact the clarity of decisions in delivery of social welfare and other government services. Historically, government has used its law making and purchasing power to influence social outcomes like the impact of race, gender and disability discrimination, including at the end of slavery in North America and more recently to reduce human impact on the environment (McCrudden 2004). Passing laws that limit people's actions is one way that government can influence behaviour, and paying for various services is another. By paying businesses and NGOs to pursue social outcomes, governments have linked the desired social outcomes described in policy and social service program documents with payment, through contracts. This is an important point as it shows how the contract abstracts the intention of policy through the award of payment. As such, contracts are tools that make payments to contractors' contingent on them doing the work defined in the contract, whose work is intended to bring about the desired policy outcomes. However, the structures created by this dynamic result in commercial pressures that may result in incentives for contracted service providers to focus on meeting compliance targets at the expense of meaningful engagement with clients (Herd et al., 2023). This dynamic of contractors conforming to contractual obligations, also known as coercive isomorphism, serves for the subordinate (contracted) party to maintain legitimacy without necessarily resorting to the most effective or appropriate means of delivering the intent of the contracted outcomes (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This dynamic is supported when contractors employ a kind of rationality, bounded within the scarce time and resource

constraints available to them to deliver contracted outcomes, resulting in the satisfaction of contracted obligations without optimizing their effectiveness (Greenwood et al., 2017, p.8). However, NGO contractors are not the only parties to the system of social service delivery affected by systemic dynamics. The following sections explore theoretical perspectives on how these dynamics arise, and their consequences.

Theoretical perspectives – public value and public choice

Public Value is a theoretical framework that defines government performance in terms of the value created for citizens through service, outcomes and trust (Kelly et al., 2002, Moore, 1997). The Public Value literature criticises governments for focusing too narrowly on inputs and outputs, such as budget spent and activities undertaken, rather than on whether services actually deliver meaningful outcomes. It highlights that assessments of performance that neglect meaningful outcomes and citizen involvement risk producing a distorted picture of value, and losing legitimacy as government. For Moore (1997), public sector managers must deliberately articulate the value government seeks to create and deploy resources to deliver it, to secure legitimacy. Defining performance criteria for services is an essential first step in this process. In agreement with theories on the hydraulic nature of time use (Joh et al., 2001, Nie and Hillygus, 2002), scheduled activity displaces unscheduled activity, or in this case, without explicit performance goals, governments risk, and realise waste for want of a plan.

Public Choice Theory (PCT) makes extensive comment on this issue. The Public Value and Public Choice critiques of government provide mutual support, with PCT offering an account of the deeper mechanisms; all people are motivated by rational self-interest, including people occupying political and bureaucratic roles (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965). Public Choice scholars explain how this self-interest is enabled, directed and sustained, in a suite of dynamics that erode public value: Voters remain ignorant of the complex details of government work, since the costs of becoming fully informed far outweigh the impact of a single vote, leaving governments with considerable responsibility and diminished accountability (Downs, 1957). The resulting costs of bureaucratic inefficiency are spread widely, while benefits still accrue for non-

contributing special interest groups, who can secure benefits to themselves more easily than large interest groups, like voters (Butler, 2012, p.35, Olson, 1965, in, Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, pp.82-84). Politicians depend on bureaucrats for information, creating the principal–agent problem, which leaves bureaucrats with scope to manipulate perceived costs and maximise budgets under their control for reasons of increasing personal and professional power and prestige (Niskanen, 1994 pp.36-44). This dynamic results in minimal squawk behaviour (Leaver, 2009) whereby bureaucrats actively suppress the collection and reporting of reliable performance data, to preserve their privileged principle-agent position. The absence of strong accountability frameworks allow these behaviours to flourish (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, pp.283-288), leaving officials and interest groups free to redistribute resources for their own benefit, rather than creating value (Krueger, 2008).

PCT argues that these issues spring from a disconnect between rational self-interest, and public value. However, the contention of the present research is that these forces may not be entirely antagonistic. Self-interest may only undermine government performance when the values of politicians and bureaucratic staff are not served by the activities in pursuit of the public interest. When organisational and staff values are the same values, private motivations may serve public value without additional incentives. The Public Service Motivation (PSM) literature comments on this idea, but concludes that motivations to public value are ultimately held for external reasons (Vandenabeele, 2017). Critics of PSM observe that the kind of motivations it describes resemble a form of status seeking, where expressions of altruistic commitment to the community may also function as self-enhancing signals of status. Accordingly, the motivational benefits of the phenomena described by PSM depend heavily on alignment of organisational goals with that individual, rather than on purely intrinsic motives (Giauque et al., 2012, van Loon et al., 2015). This study adds to this conversation by investigating whether and how bureaucratic systems might align the rational pursuit of self-interest with the delivery of public value.

Evaluative perspectives – the cost of misaligned values

Governments face persistent difficulties in demonstrating and achieving public value. In line with the Public Value argument, Lonti and Woods (2008) observe, most public sector organisations are assessed on *inputs* (funds spent) or *outputs* (activities completed), rather than outcomes that reflect meaningful social impact. This focus on compliance with procedure disconnected from meaningful outcomes creates perverse incentives, reinforcing a culture of performative accountability rather than genuine effectiveness (Staszewski, 2008). Shergold (2015) observed these issues in large initiatives of the Australian government, suggesting that transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness are often treated as optional in government practice, with predictable results: wasted funds, diminished trust, and missed opportunities to address citizens' needs. Head and Alford (2015) support this view, describing how bureaucratic and political incentives combine to produce a “*muddling through*” (Lindblom, 1979, p.517) approach to complex issues, where piecemeal fixes replace systemic solutions. The UK Public Administration Select Committee's inquiry into procurement (UK-Parliament, 2013) offers one of many further examples of such procedural shortcomings in practice. In their report, the Select Committee of the UK government found that British public services lacked the skills to define effective performance requirements, gather outcome data, or monitor performance effectively, including in social services. Instead, procurement processes focused heavily on compliance with performative benchmarks and risk assessment, often at the expense of achieving meaningful outcomes. The report concluded bluntly that such failings constituted a failure of government. These findings are echoed in Wilson's (2019) observation (cited in, Gormley, 2015), that hierarchical bureaucracies act as cultural fortresses, with junior staff recruited and exposed only to abstracted institutional demands that are siloed and insulated from feedback. Such structures stifle independent thinking and inhibit governments' ability to respond effectively to dynamic, complex and wicked problems (Head and Alford, 2015). Such failures of government capacity and accountability were noted again in the context of Australian Health services. Research by Marmot (2013, 2017) on the social determinants of health adds

evidence of the tangible results of the failings of government to control the quality of human services, finding that such failures have material consequences for equity, entrenching health disparities and perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. Marmot emphasised that these disparities follow a social gradient, affecting everyone below the very top of society and that government inaction amounts to permitting social injustice on a grand scale (Marmot, 2017). By highlighting what he termed the causes of the causes, the social conditions of housing, work, education and income, Marmot claimed that health inequality was a direct consequence of public policy and governance. On this account, accountability failures in human services are not merely administrative shortcomings, but determinants of life expectancy, wellbeing and fairness across the whole population.

The body of evaluative and theoretical literature converges on the argument that the lack of meaningful performance targets and accountability mechanisms in social services is a structural barrier to government efficiency and effectiveness, that results in significant human and financial cost. Theoretical perspectives (Kelly et al., 2002, Moore, 1997, Joh et al., 2001, Nie and Hillygus, 2002, Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, Downs, 1957, Niskanen, 1994, Krueger, 2008), (Giauque et al., 2012, van Loon et al., 2015, Vandenabeele, 2017) explain that such deficits arise from perverse incentives for bureaucracies to avoid risk, suppress performance data, and distort budget expenditure to satisfy the rational private interests that arise in a system whose accountability remains unchecked. Evaluative evidence (Lonti and Woods, 2008, Staszewski, 2008, Shergold, 2015) (Head and Alford, 2015) (Lindblom, 1979, UK-Parliament, 2013, Wilson, 2019, Marmot, 2013, 2017) provide detailed explanations of how these systemic features manifest and the opportunity cost incurred. The barrier therefore to addressing these critiques is not insufficient diagnosis. Rather it is the absence of effective responses to these known dynamics that perpetuate inefficiency and waste, undermine legitimacy and ultimately leave the most vulnerable in our community exposed to the failures of public administration.

Section 2 Addressing the lack of government accountability

In some cases government has addressed these kinds of problems using quality management systems that focus on meaningful outcomes, align staff efforts with organisational goals, track performance and improve outcomes based on evidence. This section reviews the theoretical and practical models that have addressed the performance and accountability challenges outlined in the previous section and considers what makes them effective.

2.1 Theoretical comment on how to improve government performance and accountability

Theoretical literature provides clear pointers to known government dynamics that can be reshaped. Public Choice Theory highlights the risks of self-interest in bureaucratic systems, offering the potential leverage that, if private motivations can be anticipated, they can be channelled toward public value creation. Incentive systems designed around cooperation and accountability can harness self-interest in constructive ways, reducing free-rider problems that otherwise undermine team efforts (Spicer, 1985).

Organisational theory points to the role of organisational processes in delivering value. The garbage-can model of organisational decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972) observes that solutions to new problems are often approached with the suite of existing, ineffective tools and processes, resulting in performance relying on the chance coincidence of multiple streams of problems, solutions and participants intersecting. This perspective demonstrates the need for decision making processes that integrate learning and feedback into government practice, rather than relying on chance alignments of capacity and will. Psychological engagement theory provides an additional support for solutions, showing that when staff perceive their work as meaningful and supported by coherent systems, engagement and performance rise. Conversely, when organisational policy and mandates obscure the end purpose of work, or reward procedural compliance over meaningful outcomes, disengagement and burnout follow (Giauque et al., 2012, Lehweß-Litzmann, 2020). This provides the insight that government must account for the values, goals and aspirations of staff, including the

drive to meaningful work, when designing organisational systems. In light of these insights, improving government performance becomes less about appeals to grit and altruism, and more about embedding structures and processes that make it rational for staff to be engaged in delivering public value.

2.2 Government attempts to address performance through use of Quality Management Systems

Despite these known challenges to government accountability and performance there is evidence that certain public sectors including education, health and social services have made measurable improvements by adopting formal quality management systems. Their success demonstrates that transformative improvement in government services is both possible and replicable, when systems of accountability are supported by meaningful targets and consistent focus on the needs of the end-user.

Formal Quality Management Systems used by government

Deliverology

A leading example is the use of the *Deliverology* model developed by Sir Michael Barber during his work with the UK Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (Barber et al., 2011a). *Deliverology* is a framework that guides governments to implement priority policies through systematic planning, performance monitoring, and clear and meaningful goals. *Deliverology* distills these principles into four prescribed pillars of action; agree a clear vision of desired outcomes, set ambitious and measurable performance targets, establish working routines to provide regular opportunities to progress work, and foster a culture of urgency around progress (Barber et al., 2011a, Barber et al., 2011b, Birch and Jacob, 2019). Importantly, Barber et al. (2011b) emphasises that success depends on maintaining focus on relationships and communication with all people involved in delivering outcomes. These people include staff, end-users of services, and political leaders. There is credible evidence that *Deliverology* supports improvement in

government services including education USA (Nordstrum et al., 2017) and local government in Ukraine (Buriachenko et al., 2020), reducing childhood obesity (Esdaile et al., 2024) and in reducing homelessness in NSW (David, 2017), which the author of the present study worked on as a member of staff in the NSW Premier's Implementation Unit. *Deliverology's* success has been attributed to its rigorous focus on meaningful performance data, tight accountability structures, and its engagement of people involved in the delivery of value, all of which kept system leaders and front line staff aligned on priority work (Barber et al., 2011a, Barber et al., 2011b, Birch and Jacob, 2019, David, 2017, Nordstrum et al., 2017, Esdaile et al., 2024).

The Toyota Production System

Deliverology's user centred, data driven model aligns closely with the principles of the notable, Toyota Production System (TPS). Morgan and Liker (2020) similarly emphasise the importance of these elements when discussing the design of TPS, which includes activities such as, real-time feedback mechanisms on quality (*Poka-yoke* and *Informative inspection*), and continuous improvement based on evidence (*Kaizen*), all of which engage and align all people involved in delivering value to the end-user. These practices enable rapid identification and correction of errors, and promote process accountability not through blame, but by creating feedback loops that enable mutual learning. TPS has also been successfully applied beyond its manufacturing origins, including in public healthcare. For example, hospitals in the United States such as Virginia Mason Medical Centre in Seattle have used TPS principles to streamline processes like operating room turnovers and supply management, resulting in improved patient safety, shorter waiting times, and reduced costs (Liker and Morgan, 2006). These cases show that the inclusive evidence-based disciplines of TPS can be translated effectively into government-related services to create accountability and measurably improved outcomes (Liker and Morgan, 2006). Kenny's (2005) *Strategic Factors* approach offers more support for the case that engagement, alignment and evidence yield performance improvement. Rather than setting performance

goals based purely on internal processes and perspectives, Kenny argues that organisations must first identify their key stakeholders and then define success in terms of what those stakeholders value. Performance measurement, in the *Strategic Factors* model, is embedded in the design of goals at project start-up phase, to continually compare progress with project aims that all stakeholders find meaningful. The *Deliverology*, TPS and *Strategic Factors* models have supported improved performance in a range of settings, including government services. They share emphasis on setting clear performance targets that are meaningful for end-users, monitoring progress towards goals based on evidence, and engaging all people involved in delivering value in improving processes. Each model recognises that performance is not improved by organisational mandates disconnected from value, but by systems that align purpose and evidence.

The International Standard for Quality Management Systems, ISO9000

The most widely adopted framework for managing organisational performance across sectors is the ISO9000 family of quality management standards. As the internationally agreed standard, ISO9000 provides organisations with a structured system for defining, monitoring, and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of their work. Its core principles emphasise customer focus, leadership commitment, staff engagement, evidence-based decision-making, process approach to work, and continual improvement (Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025). Through these practices, ISO9000 enables organisations to increase their capacity to satisfy customers, align and empower staff, and maintain a culture of performance improvement over time (Psomas et al., 2013). ISO9000's relevance to government services lies in its comprehensive treatment of quality across all operations within an organisation (López-Lemus, 2023), its effectiveness (Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025, Psomas et al., 2013) and its generalisability across organisation types (Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025, López-Lemus, 2023). Unlike *Deliverology* or the TPS, which have been applied in limited contexts, ISO9000 was designed as a universally applicable system to control quality. It is currently used by over one million organisations, spanning manufacturing, healthcare, education, utilities, and government services (López-

Lemus, 2023, SimpleQuE, 2025). However, ISO9000 does share characteristics with *Deliverology*, *TPS*, and other formal quality management systems in requiring that organisations set meaningful targets, monitor progress with performance and feedback evidence and align staff in the pursuit of value creation for clients. While Barber's *Deliverology* (Barber et al., 2011a) stresses political accountability, and *TPS* (Morgan and Liker, 2020) centres on process discipline and error prevention, ISO9000 combines these priorities within one formalised system. The evidence of ISO9000's effectiveness at improving performance in the public sector is mounting. A study of Mexican public service organisations found that ISO9000 adoption significantly improved service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, thereby raising citizen satisfaction (López-Lemus, 2023). Research in Moroccan public administration showed similar results, that ISO9000 adoption enhanced efficiency, transparency and trust in government, positioning it as a strategic tool for modernising government administration (Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025). In other research, Psomas et al. (2013) demonstrated that ISO9000 quality management practices in Greek organisations that provided services, improved operational performance, citizen satisfaction, and employee morale, even under conditions of fiscal stress. These findings reinforce the impact and generalisability of ISO9000 across diverse government contexts and its potential role in transforming bureaucratic processes to reduce waste and align staff in meeting the needs of clients. These examples and many others demonstrate that ISO9000 potentially offers governments a reliable framework to address the long-standing criticisms of public choice theory by adopting accountability, transparency and improvement as standard process. Its widespread adoption and adaptability across contexts make it a particularly strong candidate for rethinking how governments might systematically manage the quality and performance of social welfare services.

Practice examples of government quality management

Their Futures Matter

An example of these principles applied within an Australian public service context is the *Their Futures Matter* (TFM), child welfare service in New South

Wales. This service responds directly to critiques of government ineffectiveness by embedding clear, meaningful outcomes, and tracking their progress with rigorous evidence. Similar to *Deliverology* and *TPS*, this service connects frontline staff, service providers, and government oversight through the common purpose of improving child and family wellbeing, in clearly defined parameters. The transparency afforded by continual evidence collection enables real-time control of quality and promotes a culture of continuous improvement, aligning daily actions with long-term public value objectives (Kissouri & Heriot, 2018). TFM operates extensively in North America and Australia, and has been shown to outperform similar services, improving the mental health, parent emotional distress and parenting behaviours associated with child abuse and neglect (Swenson et al., 2010).

The Welcome Experience

My own professional practice has been directly shaped by these theoretical insights, particularly in setting meaningful performance targets, regularly collecting and applying performance evidence to continually improve processes and outcomes and focus on the needs of the client. For example, *The Welcome Experience* program was explicitly designed to benefit regional communities in Australia by responding to theoretical and evaluative insights in the literature including, lack of accountability, failure to focus on meaningful outcomes, and failure to respond to feedback and evidence. By grounding this social service in the needs of both clients and staff and embedding continuous feedback and improvement, I lead design and implementation of a government service model that linked evidence to action and placed the lived experiences of clients and communities at the centre of government practice (O'Dowd-Austen, 2023, O'Dowd-Austen, 2025). Its performance was demonstrable and meaningful. The pilot phase collected multiple sources of feedback and outcome data to inform improvement for state-wide rollout in 2025 (O'Dowd-Austen, 2025). Its performance was also recognised by external industry awards for best design of a public service in 2024 (Good-Design-Australia, 2024a), and for government

program design involving community (Good-Design-Australia, 2024b). I was also invited to discuss this program as an example of best practice at the Creative Bureaucracy Festival conference, Australia and New Zealand (TACSI, 2025). Although this is a practical application and not an academic example, this work provides direct, practical evidence that the tools and approaches described in the theoretical literature can be applied successfully in practice.

These models and examples of quality management demonstrate that government, like commercial industry, is capable of improving performance by adopting structured systems that define meaningful goals, align staff and stakeholder efforts, and embed feedback loops for continuous improvement. *Deliverology*, *TPS*, *Strategic factors*, *Their Futures Matter*, *ISO9000*, and my own practice in *The Welcome Experience* all provide evidence that with the right frameworks and accountability, performance in public services can be strengthened to counter government shortcomings identified by PCT including, voter ignorance (Downs, 1957), unequal benefits for special interest groups (Butler, 2012, p.35), principle-agent problems (Niskanen, 1994, pp.36-44) and minimal squawk behaviour (Leaver, 2009). Yet, despite the compelling body of evidence, such approaches remain exceptional. Instead, much government work continues to rely on output-based performance reporting, performative accountability and the irrational choice of staff to devote effort to busy-work, rather than embedding meaningful outcome focused performance systems (Vandenabeele, 2017, Head, 2010, Hood, 2007, Le Grand, 1991, Mengiste, 2020, Paarlberg and Perry, 2007). The question remains, if proven solutions exist, why are they not more widely applied?

In NSW, the Department of Communities and Justice implements elements of quality and performance control through contracting arrangements between its social welfare service agency, Family and Community Services (FACS) with the non-government organisations that deliver its social welfare services (NSW Department of Communities & Justice, 2025), but neither the details nor the results of these controls are publicly available. This leaves a marked lack of evidence about the extent to which the control of the quality of social welfare services, like those run by FACS,

align with agreed standards (Melão et al., 2017) Further there is little evidence in the literature about the how application of existing quality controls, formal or otherwise, vary between staff, or the different types of social welfare programs offered within single agencies, like FACS.

Formal quality management systems like ISO9000 mandate the collection of performance data to facilitate continuous improvement. If social welfare services in Australia were routinely collecting the kind of data required under ISO9000, there may be literature that observes their effectiveness. However, the absence of this information in either the literature or the public domain means that any performance or quality measures the NSW government uses with its staff or its services contractors, is unknown. Perhaps the quality controls built into FACS processes are complete and effective and bring about the best possible outcomes for clients of their services. Whether they are or not, there is little to no literature that discusses how FACS manages the quality of social welfare services delivered in NSW, or how this compares with the known effectiveness of agreed quality standards.

Section 3 Research questions

The aim and broad research question of this study was to examine:

Can quality management address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT?

The study was conducted in the context of social welfare services in NSW, Australia. ISO9000 was used as a reference point for the extent of quality practice uptake in these services. To establish a reference point for the causes of uptake, the influence of the value that staff place on work and the presence and type of organisational quality mandates were adopted. This broad research question is broken down further in the following chapters to guide data collection and facilitate accurate analysis of the issues that bear on it.

Internationally agreed quality management systems like ISO9000 confer well established benefits to the clients, staff and owners of many industry types around the world. These benefits include improved outcomes for clients, less wasted effort for staff and improved productivity for the owners of industry (Sfreddo et al., 2021, Schuurman, 1997). In the context of social welfare services, these owners are taxpayers, who are sometimes also the clients of these same services. However, despite these known advantages the literature on the causes of uptake of quality practice uptake is undecided (Bendermacher et al., 2019, López-Lemus, 2023, Melão et al., 2017), leaving a gap in knowledge on how to best direct efforts to control the quality of processes and outcomes in its social welfare services.

Section 4 The structure of this thesis

The overall structure of this thesis aligns with standard conventions, including chapters for literature review, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. Following the structure advice of Evans et al. (2011), information within chapters is organised under sub-sections, with summaries provided at the end of each, and chapter summaries serving to condense the content of whole chapters at the end of each. It is important to note that considerable analysis and explanation was required to inform reliable answers to the two research questions, with the answers to each question and sub-question used in analysis for the next. Figure 2 illustrates the function of the main chapters of this thesis, and an overview of how they built on each other to contribute to the credibility of findings.

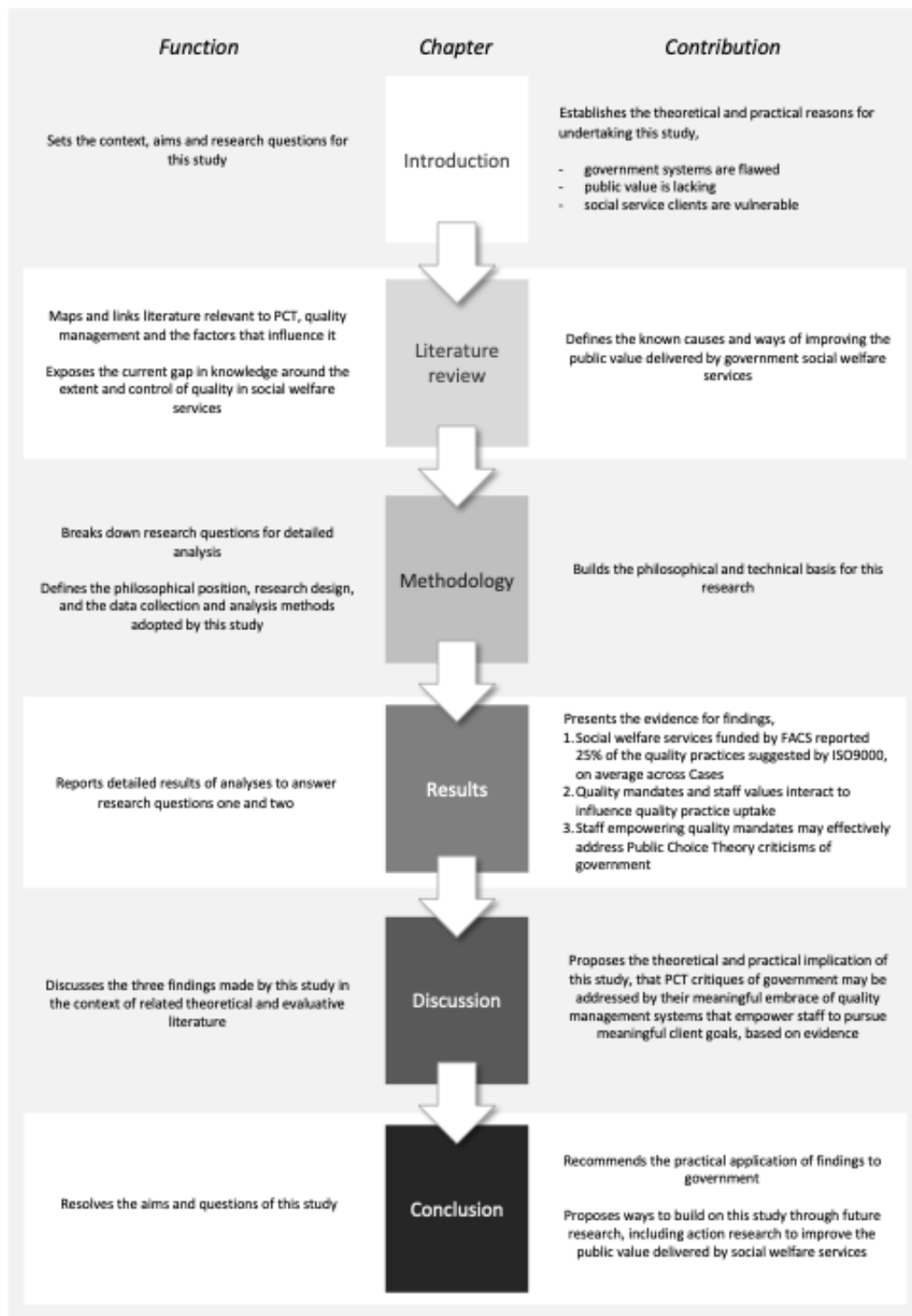


Figure 2. The function, flow and contribution of chapters

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will explore the literature discussing the known flaws in government processes to manage the performance of the services it delivers, and on how other types of organisations have addressed similar challenges using formal quality management systems (QMS). The foundation for this conversation is based in the Public Choice Theory critiques of government, which argue that its dynamics allow self-interest to influence its performance and outcomes. This theoretical foundation is made real with reference to examples that demonstrate the cost of under regulated bureaucratic processes. This literature progresses a tacit argument that the influence of self-interest on government undermines the delivery of public value. Following this, I provide examples of the kinds of remediations to the impact of staff self-interest that have been attempted using Quality Management Systems (QMS) in the public sector, and across numerous examples of a broad range of other industries and organisation types around the world. Finally, I identify how the present study will fill the gap in existing literature on this topic by exploring the extent to which formal QMS' might address any shortcomings in performance of government funded social welfare services by controlling the impact of staff self-interest.

Section 1 Public Choice insights on challenges to government performance

All people weigh decisions from a position of inherent and exclusive self-interest (Becker, 1976, Clegg, 2009), including people who work in government jobs. This section makes the case that deliberate institutional safeguards such as built-in monitoring and control measures are needed if bureaucracies are to avoid these default, private motives of its staff to protect their own interests at the expense of delivering public value (Hood, 1991). Public Choice Theory (PCT) provides an economic perspective on how the self-interest of actors within government manifests, by applying the lens of rational self-interest to explore political and bureaucratic decision making. PCT argues that despite their government setting, individuals tend to be motivated by personal incentives rather than the altruistic motives that we might imagine would deliver maximum public value and fairness. This account of motives and behaviour within government institutions challenges the notion of bureaucrats as impartial actors

dedicated solely to serving the public interest (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965 pp.3-6, Dunleavy, 1985, Moe, 1984). Left unchecked, such personal motives drive behaviours such as seeking esteem and power, that may be perverse to the stated aims of government and systematically undermine its equity, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability (Spicer, 1985). Following is an overview of the main ways that PCT claims that self-interest manifests in bureaucratic settings. PCT makes many criticisms of political and voting systems, however critiques with this focus are considered out of scope for this discussion as they are more relevant to politics, than bureaucracies.

1.1 Principal – agent misalignment

Central to the PCT critique of government is the principal-agent problem where, elected officials (principals) delegate authority to design and deliver government services, to bureaucrats (agents) without a reliable facility to make informed and reliable judgements about the efficiency and effectiveness of their execution (Gailmard, 2010). This happens because agents have an informational advantage over elected officials in that they are closer to the work, and better able to make judgements about its effectiveness, and the resources required to deliver it (Eisenhardt, 1989a). This information imbalance provides an opportunity for agents to pursue self-motivated goals, such as inflating the number of staff required to execute the work, or the benefits of the work itself, in order to bolster their own budgets and career objectives, while de-prioritising the intended outcomes of the work (Gailmard, 2010). The impact of this misalignment of information is realised by the lack of formal and valid methods of principal oversight. Spicer (1985), notes that government staff promotion and performance review processes frequently reward compliance with procedural checklists and risk-averse decision making. As a result, agents tend to minimise personal career risk by avoiding innovative or controversial program changes, even if such innovations could significantly improve service quality. For example, a senior bureaucrat might inflate workload projections or maintain unnecessarily high staff ratios by arguing that performance demands a larger workforce, when in reality these expansions serve their own career interests more than the requirements of the work. Social welfare programs are an ideal environment for this type of unsubstantiated claim as social outcomes (child

well-being, community health etc.) are hard to measure and often require long time periods to produce, giving agents ample scope to shift attention to easily quantifiable but ultimately unrelated processes and outputs. The impact of principal-agent information misalignment is that it facilitates a bias to business-as-usual policy implementation, in the context of self-interested agents. This stifles creative problem-solving at the level of front-line workers and undermines adaptive responses to emerging community needs (Lipsky, 1984).

1.2 Budget maximisation

In bureaucratic settings where the scope to pursue private goals is limited by the scope of business conducted by their agency, individuals' self-interest can manifest as a tendency to inflate the necessity and scale of budget required to carry out their work (Niskanen, 1994 pp.36-44). Known as budget maximisation, this practice involves making arguments in favour of furnishing valuable services for the public, while covertly securing personal benefits such as enhanced job security, increased status and influence and higher salaries as a by-product (Niskanen, 1994 pp.45-52). Despite providing criticisms of the ability to empirically model such budget maximisation behaviour, the Dollery and Hamburger (1996) study of the Australian federal budget sector provides evidence of it, demonstrating how the self-interest of bureaucrats can drive budget expansion at the expense of utility and value. The inefficiency created by this dynamic is further exacerbated by the monopolistic nature of many public sector agencies, which lack the competitive pressures typically experienced by private organisations. When public sector agencies maintain monopoly control over service scope, delivery and performance, they often fail to incorporate incentives for efficiency and effectiveness, leading to higher costs. Without the discipline imposed by competition, public agencies can become complacent, reinforcing tendencies toward oversupply, reduced quality of services, and escalating operational costs (Boyne, 1998). Behaviour that maximises budget, though framed as serving public interests can inflate costs and erode value, especially in the absence of competitive or outcome-driven constraints (Niskanen, 2017 in Butler 2012 p.88). This dynamic underscores the importance of external

accountability mechanisms and performance-based governance to counteract the latent inefficiencies baked into monopolistic bureaucratic structures.

1.3 Minimal squawk behaviour

The drive for bureaucrats to maximise budget under control may result in inefficiency due to expansion beyond necessary levels (Carnis, 2009, Niskanen, 2017 p.38). However, this outcome of unchecked private interests is itself the cause of other inefficiencies.

The internal structures of bureaucracy, shaped by budget, can significantly impact the behaviour of agents working within them. Moe (1984) provides a critique of the internal dynamics of bureaucracies, stating that dynamics such as, how responsibility is assigned and accountability structures and incentives, critically affect organisational effectiveness.

Minimal squawk behaviour (Leaver, 2009) is one of the powerful, broad-acting forces that affect the efficiency of internal bureaucratic processes. Minimal squawk is described as behaviour that sets up working conditions to bring about minimal attention by avoiding activities that surface less than perfect performance data in order to avoid the possibility of criticism, for example, in the media. The result of this is that performance data, critical for assessing efficiency and impact of policy and programs is not routinely collected for scrutiny. Not being able to observe efficiency precludes the possibility of improving it; leaving bureaucrats free to engage in decisions that avoid threats to their reputation and pursue decisions that support the ongoing viability of their budgets, teams and careers. However, bureaucratic environments are complex, often requiring the balance of competing priorities of, for example the advice of technical experts, fiscal responsibility and the basic responsibility to maximise efficiency (Hammond, 1986). Navigating such competing principles is challenging, especially in soft-outcome projects like social welfare services where the path to efficiency and effectiveness may be non-linear. The result is that minimal squawk behaviour becomes entrenched in bureaucratic systems, reducing the likelihood of effective decision making and the processes to support it. This kind of inefficient dynamic gives rise to others, like bureau shaping (Dunleavy, 1985), where senior bureaucrats have personal incentives to

maintain authority and control over strategically significant portfolios with lower budgets, that keep them close to political power while minimising their exposure to the risk associated with larger, high-profile portfolios. This dynamic shows that budget maximisation may be thought of as a broad category of behaviour that also entails budget certainty, both of which result in inefficiency. The central driver of these types of behaviour remains the utility of controlling politically secure portfolios while maintaining autonomy, influence and status.

1.4 Rent-seeking

Rent seeking is the practice of expending resources under management as a way of indirectly securing personal benefits under the guise of achieving public value. It is another mechanism central to the PCT critique of government practice that enables self-interest to distort public policy and programs (Krueger, 2008). Rent-seeking behaviour is not conducted openly, rather arguments are mounted, which are public-value adjacent. Rent seeking does not specifically preclude public value being achieved, rather, thin arguments to public value are employed with the express purpose of achieving personal value, leading to the misallocation of resources and the distortion of policy. Rent seeking perverts government power by basing decisions on personal interest rather than the best possible evidence of what is needed. In social services, powerful service contractors may lobby for inflated per-client funding rates or relaxed service standards, not to enhance service delivery but to capture larger market share of available government contracts by delivering less effective, but cheaper services. An inverse version of rent seeking is also common in this environment, for example where high quality performance information is available, such as client outcome data, but is withheld, delayed or collection suppressed altogether to conceal unfavourable performance, thereby preserving their reputation and revenue stream at the expense of the public good (Lambsdorff, 2007 p.125-127).

This kind of behaviour is common among bureaucrats when lobbying for legislation, regulatory reform or policy that enhances their own power, or the benefit of special interest groups whom the bureaucrat seeks to appease or bargain with (Mueller, 2003

Chapter 15, Introduction). Fiorina and Noll (1978) add that groups of politicians and bureaucrats also collaborate to create policies that serve their mutual interests, expanding the scope of rent seeking to include collusion. Rent seeking results in losses to the public as resources are diverted from productive uses like hiring frontline workers, investing in training, or improving service impact and instead misdirect the opportunity for benefits like these towards bargaining, whose main aim is personal benefit. Efforts should be made to prevent or limit rent seeking, as it is difficult to quantify or redress once it has occurred and has real costs that undermine the effectiveness and efficiency of government (Del Rosal, 2011).

1.5 Regulatory capture

Closely related to rent-seeking is regulatory capture, a phenomenon where over time, the government agencies tasked with monitoring and enforcing performance standards can become influenced by the interests of the organisations they are meant to regulate, to the detriment of those standards (Stigler, 1971, Peltzman, 1976). As a result of regulatory capture, regulatory bodies may provide direct or indirect support for organisations ostensibly competing in a free market. This support may take several forms such as under-investigating provider misconduct or failure to sanction poor performance. For example, Carpenter (2004) demonstrated that pharmaceutical companies have a higher likelihood of achieving new drug approval if they had been dealing with government regulators for a long time. Familiarity with an organisation, even if it is an historical one, with no present bureaucrats having dealt with that company before, predicts faster and more lenient approval processes. From the regulator's perspective, this behaviour is motivated by the will to avoid reputational risk or political backlash when regulated organisations protest too loudly. In an Australian context, a study by Russ et al. (2022) found that high levels of staff turnover, insecure employment, and underinvestment in workforce development across the child protection sector, are conditions that undermine effective oversight as they create structural incentives for regulators to avoid confrontation with underperforming service providers. Regulatory capture thus transforms regulatory bodies into rubber stamps,

allowing substandard performance to persist unchecked, undermining the role of government for want of systems to monitor and control regulatory capture.

1.6 Public Choice Theory as a remedial tool

The present study will use PCT as an analytical lens for understanding the distortions that can arise in bureaucratic institutions when individual interests and incentives are misaligned with public value. PCTs enduring contribution lay in its focus on the behavioural consequences of institutional design; how the rational but self-interested actions of bureaucrats can produce outcomes antithetical to the public interest (Butler, 2012, pp.22-24). Across these core PCT critiques, budget maximisation (Niskanen, 1994 pp.45-52), institutional inefficiency (Carnis, 2009, Niskanen, 2017 p.38, Moe, 1984), minimal squawk behaviour (Leaver, 2009), principal–agent misalignment (Eisenhardt, 1989a, Gailmard, 2010, Spicer, 1985, Lipsky, 1984), rent-seeking (Krueger, 2008, Mueller, 2003) and regulatory capture (Stigler, 1971, Peltzman, 1976), PCT identifies a recurring pattern of systemic privilege of the security, status and continuity of authority over scrutable performance and public value. Rather than acting independently, these dynamics often interact to reinforce and perpetuate each-other and systemic inefficiency. For example, bureaucrats may pursue the expansion of their budget under the guise of public need, use the resulting resources to shape favourable regulations and rely on captured oversight mechanisms to avoid meaningful scrutiny. It may be argued that performance declines in this kind of reinforcing feedback loop, while bureaucratic autonomy and insulation from redress increases. Such dynamics are further facilitated and amplified in social welfare service environments where outcomes are complex, only achieved in the long-term and difficult to measure in concrete terms. These conditions provide ample cover for strategic avoidance of accountability (Lipsky, 1984, Spicer, 1985).

PCTs strength as a remedial tool is deepened by adjacent critiques. Staszewski (2008) observes the implausibility of government accountability by highlighting the performative nature of oversight in public administration, in which legitimacy is assumed but rarely tested through meaningful mechanisms. Others clarify the focus of

critique on bureaucratic systems rather than its actors, arguing that not all public servants are solely motivated by self-interest, indeed many operate with strong ethical and professional commitments (Perry and Wise, 1990). These accounts progress the position that bureaucratic institutions are not inefficient because of intrinsically bad actors, rather, they are structurally fragmented, overburdened and impacted by competing mandates, including the maintenance of sunk cost in existing systems. It is this diffuse responsibility inhibits cohesive performance (Moe, 2012, Cohen et al., 1972). However, the criticisms offered by PCT provide a caution against relying on individual virtue and integrity in the face of institutional structures that reward inertia, avoid controversy and conceal performance. Without deliberate mechanisms that monitor and control the private interests that bring about these systemic tendencies, such as transparent, outcomes-based systems that incentivise quality, bureaucracies are likely to remain environments where it is personally rational to prioritise self-interest over public value creation (Grant and Drew, 2017 p.330).

Together, these perspectives show that bureaucratic inefficiency is not an aberration, but a likely outcome in the absence of deliberate mitigation strategies. While not universal, the issues highlighted by PCT are significant and pervasive enough that left unaddressed, result in not only inefficiency in achieving public value, distortion of policy intent and undermining of government legitimacy, but also present a prohibitively high opportunity cost (Palmer and Raftery, 1999a) to delivering the kind of public value that is possible within existing government resources. The next section will discuss the real-world costs of failure to effectively regulate bureaucratic processes. It will focus upon the tangible costs to public value, service quality and trust in government.

Section 2 The cost of failure to regulate bureaucratic processes

There is a cost associated with the failure to deliver public value, which is borne by the staff of government, the organisations contracted to deliver programs, especially social welfare programs, and the citizens that these programs intend to benefit (Moore, 1997 pp.36-39). Bureaucracies risk delivery of public value when regulation is decoupled from

operational practice; without mandated processes to align purpose, process and performance, governments fail to achieve their intended positive outcomes for citizens, eroding trust (Moore, 1997 pp.36-39).

2.1 The cost to citizen taxpayers

As well as being a waste of time and money, such failures can have significant and often harmful impact on citizens, especially those who are already vulnerable, as with the clients of social welfare services (Gaster, 2005). These impacts can include undue economic hardship and its flow-on implications, including emotional distress. For example, Holler et al. (2024) demonstrate that errors in welfare or related benefit systems can lead to delayed or lost payments, forcing individuals to struggle financially, sometimes resulting in the need to use food banks or face homelessness. In an Australian example of such bureaucratic process error, the federal welfare agency, Centrelink implemented an automatic debt calculation and repayment system for welfare payment recipients who had been overpaid. Unfortunately, the system, branded Robodebt by the public media, suffered critical errors as debt decisions made automatically by algorithms were not based on sufficient information, causing vulnerable welfare recipients to be wrongly charged. Rather than Centrelink investigating the truth of the objections of wrongly charged clients, the system stayed in place for three years until the judicial system intervened to investigate, finding Robodebt to be unlawful (Rinta-Kahila et al., 2024). Quite obviously, such instances of the mismanagement of the quality, relevance and integrity of government services may lead to further disadvantage, stress, anger and a sense of being abandoned by the government authorities whose charge is protecting public welfare. People experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable, reporting that government staff are uninformed about relevant policy and that the system is indifferent to their needs, thus adding feelings of marginalisation to their already remarkable struggles (De Oliveira, 2022).

Such failures in bureaucratic regulation are not merely the result of technical oversight or isolated human error, rather they stem from structural shortcomings that produce

cascading consequences for every layer of the public service. Where properly designed regulation and quality control is missing, disorganisation, inefficiency and ineffectiveness manifest in tangible costs to public value. In addition to the human cost, there are wasted opportunities to improve conditions for citizens and public trust (Shergold, 2015 p.82, Palmer and Raftery, 1999b). This absence of regulatory clarity often leads to fragmented implementation across jurisdictions and agencies. When roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations are not well defined, inefficiencies proliferate. One key example is provided by Kalil et al. (2002) who demonstrate this with their study into the administration of welfare payments. This research showed that women receiving payments as part of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program had their payments delayed or discontinued due to minor administrative errors, like not completing forms correctly, rather than deliberate non-compliance. Predictably enough, recipients of these payments were undergoing periods of hardship, and were more likely to struggle with complex administrative processes for a variety of reasons. Despite this however, administrative sanctions were applied to approximately 12% of these women, triggering loss of their benefit. This resulted in increased material hardship including utility cutoffs and other forms of economic distress for the specific social cohort to whom this social policy intended to provide economic support.

These findings highlight the real, if unintended impact that inconsistent social policy administration has on the lives of its intended clients. Far from being isolated, the literature repeatedly highlights how large-scale programs are launched without sufficient piloting, skill development, or mechanisms for ongoing learning. This leads to repeated failures, growing costs, and organisational fatigue (Shergold, 2015 p. 1, Hanger, 2014). Citizens bear the ultimate cost of the failure of regulatory focus on performance. Where bureaucratic inefficiency remains unchecked, government programs become less responsive, more inconsistent in their application and harder to assess (Talleraas, 2017, Lipsky, 1984, Lehweß-Litzmann, 2020). Moreover, systemic regulatory failure contributes to a deep erosion of public trust. Citizens perceive bureaucracies as inefficient not just when services fail, but when they appear indifferent, unaccountable, or procedurally obsessed (Roosma et al., 2014).

2.2 The cost of administrative burden

The inefficiencies stemming from ineffective performance regulation impact governments, workers and citizens alike. Theoretical models such as Administrative Burden Theory (Herd et al., 2023) and the Bureaucratic Sludge Framework (Stenderup, 2024) help to explain how poor management of quality becomes a barrier not only to performance, but also to access and participation. However, costs are borne disproportionately by vulnerable populations. For example, by adding challenging learning tasks that inadvertently deter access to social welfare programs by imposing complex eligibility requirements that vary across jurisdictions (Herd et al., 2023). Similarly, administrative sanctions based on technical non-compliance rather than pragmatic assessment of eligibility (Kalil et al., 2002), reflect a regulatory system that prioritises technical enforcement over equity and effectiveness. Within government agencies and their contracted service delivery partners, the cost is also borne by staff time, morale and emotional labour, with staff experiencing a decline in organisational loyalty when their work is dominated by accountability type tasks that they deem meaningless to the end of achieving the stated aims of their role (Lehwess-Litzmann, 2020). These staff experience disengagement and burnout when they are required to enforce systems that they do not believe serve the public interest, leading to high staff turnover rates, incurring yet further costs to the taxpayer.

2.3 Mitigating political risk at the expense of public value

Many of the regulatory failures outlined here stem from misdirected risk management, with governments frequently focusing effort on avoiding political risk, rather than effectively managing the risks to program quality and impact (Shergold, 2015 p.37). Governments' sensitivity to criticism tends to direct efforts to establish bureaucratic authority in reputation, rather than performance evidence (Staszewski, 2008); a systemic feature that reduces the drive to manage demonstrable program impact and efficiency (Bertelli and Busuioc, 2021).

When mechanisms that facilitate impact measurement, learning and improvement are avoided for the risk they may pose to reputation, failure is assured by the design of the system itself (Herd et al., 2023).

While the literature provides academic evidence of this issue, there is another source of evidence: the lack of detailed, useful and timely government performance data available for either public, or even its own scrutiny. The NSW Audit Office provides external performance audit reports (Audit-Office-NSW, 2025a) for many areas of government work, including for social welfare services. However, while these reports often show that social welfare services were ineffective (Audit-Office-NSW, 2024, Audit-Office-NSW, 2021). They often make recommendations about processes unrelated to meaningful performance improvement (Audit-Office-NSW, 2025b, Audit-Office-NSW, 2020) or fail to comment on how to improve the effectiveness of services for their clients (Audit-Office-NSW, 2019, Audit-Office-NSW, 2015a, Audit-Office-NSW, 2015b). Such lack of capacity to capture detailed corporate knowledge relevant to real-world performance leads to a kind of self-reinforcing systemic amnesia. When failures inevitably occur, government bureaucracies are forced to defer to strategies intended merely to protect reputation, as they have no recourse to a bank of corporate knowledge and evidence on how to remediate root causes, leading to further failures. Aside from being ineffective, the drive to protect reputation over effectiveness is, of course, completely absurd, as no rational observer is convinced of government performance by appeals to authority in place of proof, especially when those appeals are generated by systems that neither measure impact, nor remember it.

2.4 Theoretical and normative implications

The cumulative effect of these failures entails a structural inability to deliver on the tacit promise of public value. This failure aligns with the critique of New Public Management scholars, who argue in response that performance metrics alone cannot bring about good governance without robust regulatory guidance (Lehwess-Litzmann, 2020, Head and McCoy, 1991 p.1-5). Even progressive government initiatives like Social Benefit Bonds, intended to anchor funding to achieving agreed outcomes, depend on clear

regulatory guidelines as financial incentives alone cannot guarantee delivery of public value (Shergold, 2015 p.76). Ensuring that government programs reach their intended recipients in a fair and effective way, alone implies the need for robust regulation of implementation and control of quality. Without it, fragmented, unfair or inconsistent implementation exacerbates inequality as citizens experience variable access to services based on administrative geography (Herd et al., 2023). The cost of regulatory failure is economic, social and political. It dismantles public value and thereby undermines the legitimacy of government. However, regulation for its own sake will not do the required work. Regulation can be rigorous without being effective, particularly when it fails to engage with the complexity of context.

This type of regulatory failure is particularly evident in the operation of out-of-home-care (OOHC) services in NSW, where rigid procedural oversight may obstruct the kind of responsiveness required to effectively deliver the sensitive work of ensuring the welfare of children whose care has been assumed by the state. The Pathways of Care, a Longitudinal Study (POCLS) conducted by Paxman et al. (2014) of the OOHC system run by Family and Community Services (FACS) within the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, highlights how regulatory failures in the operation and oversight of OOHC result in significant negative human impacts. On the findings of POCLS, Cashmore and Wulczyn (2024) note that despite substantial investment in administrative oversight, this OOHC system often failed to identify or prevent harm to children in its care. Monitoring tools frequently privilege easily countable metrics, such as placement numbers, over qualitative indicators like emotional safety. Such metrics represent necessary but not sufficient indicators of program performance. As a result, children were regarded as abstract entities governed by policy templates, rather than individuals whose wellbeing depended upon relational continuity and professional judgment. The authors also highlight how fragmented governance structures and poor feedback loops across agencies eroded accountability and responsiveness to emerging risks. These findings make clear that regulation is not inherently constructive; rather, the wrong kind of regulation, narrow, mechanistic, tokenistic or misaligned with meaningful performance, can be part of the problem. If regulatory frameworks fail to account for the dynamic and relational nature of human services, they risk compounding the very

harms they are designed to prevent. The lesson here is not simply that regulation be imposed, but that it must be sophisticated, adaptive, and sensitive to human complexity, it must facilitate seeing and responding to the needs of clients and practitioners alike. As the POCLS study illustrates, anything less risks enshrining dysfunction under the guise of control.

2.5 The opportunity cost of inaction

Inefficient public service delivery carries substantial opportunity costs; once an action has been taken, inefficient or otherwise, its cost in terms of logistics, funds, etc., precludes taking alternative actions (Palmer and Raftery, 1999a). Resources consumed by inefficient systems, whether through duplicated effort, unnecessary administrative burden, or ineffective program design, represent lost opportunities to deliver greater value using the same inputs. As with the cost to citizens in cases of poorly implemented programs, opportunity cost extends further still for governments, with the loss of public trust. PCT frames this as a form of market failure, where bureaucratic action is decoupled from the discipline of funding being contingent on performance, resulting in a lack of strong incentives for governments to improve outcomes or efficiency (Moe, 1984). Given this environment of the absence of regulation targeted at performance, government departments and their contracted service delivery partners are free to perpetuate low-performing programs, as has been documented by the literature. In one Australian example of this, the commonwealth government's Home Insulation program failed to assess implementation risks before launch, resulting in the deaths of four home insulation workers and the subsequent, premature closure of the program, leading to the lost opportunity to reduce energy consumption from heating and cooling and the waste of around \$1.5 billion dollars of taxpayer funding (Hanger, 2014).

This section has laid out the consequences of bureaucratic vulnerability to inefficiency resulting from unchecked self-interest, described by the previous section on PCT. Government bureaucracies are tasked with managing complex, large-scale, social welfare programs. Failures of bureaucratic regulation have profound implications for service quality, workforce morale, and public trust, especially in the case of programs

with vulnerable clients. Additionally, wasted investments in ineffective programs come at the dual cost of the funding and effort required to implement them, and the opportunity to improve conditions in the world with more effective programs. Together, the examples provided here build a compelling case for rethinking bureaucratic regulation as they illuminate how misaligned, rigid, or absent regulatory frameworks produce systemic inefficiencies, demoralise staff, fragment service delivery, and ultimately fail the citizens they are meant to serve.

Section 3 Government attempts to improve performance

There are however, examples of home-grown government mechanisms developed to regulate out the shortcomings in quality control across the public sector. Klassen et al. (2010) conducted a systematic review of 111 performance measurement and improvement frameworks developed by governments from around the world, whose aim was enhancing service quality and accountability. They found that performance frameworks were applied in a range of government service types, but centred around health, education, and social services. The performance frameworks commonly included scorecards, benchmarking systems, and outcomes-based planning tools, reflecting a common aim of measuring and improving effectiveness. Yet, despite their promise, these frameworks suffered a number of shortcomings. Few were supported by reliable mechanisms to collect and observe data demonstrating their own outcomes, meaning that their results were unclear. In some cases, this was inevitable as quality and improvement were not defined in measurable terms. Other frameworks were applied inconsistently, leading again to unclear results, as improvements occurred in silos. Two common issues identified across many frameworks were the absence of mechanisms to use the resulting performance data to feed-back and improve core processes, and the lack of consultation with the staff doing the work in focus. Both shortcomings resulted in poor relevance of the framework to the work actually being done, diminished engagement of staff in framework implementation, and lack of broad organisational impact.

Similar home-grown performance frameworks have been designed and implemented by NSW government with the aim of improving service quality, including the Human Services Outcomes Framework (HSOF), developed by FACS, and the SPIRIT framework, developed by NSW Health. These frameworks appear to constitute a genuine intent to enhance public service performance, but as the following sections lay out, they fall short for some of the same reasons discussed by Klassen et al. (2010).

3.1 The Human Services Outcomes Framework

The FACS Analysis and Research (FACSAR) unit defined client relevant outcomes whose achievement can be tracked and evaluated in the HSOF ((NSW-Dept.-of-Communities-and-Justice, 2017) 2017). HSOF provides a common set of population-level wellbeing outcomes and indicators for NSW government and non-government agencies. The seven wellbeing domains were designed by agencies and NGOs and informed by a review of national and international research on what determines a person's wellbeing. As there are potentially many different outcomes that apply in different circumstances, outcomes have been arranged into the seven domains of Safety, Home, Health, Education and Skills, Economics, Social and Community and Empowerment.

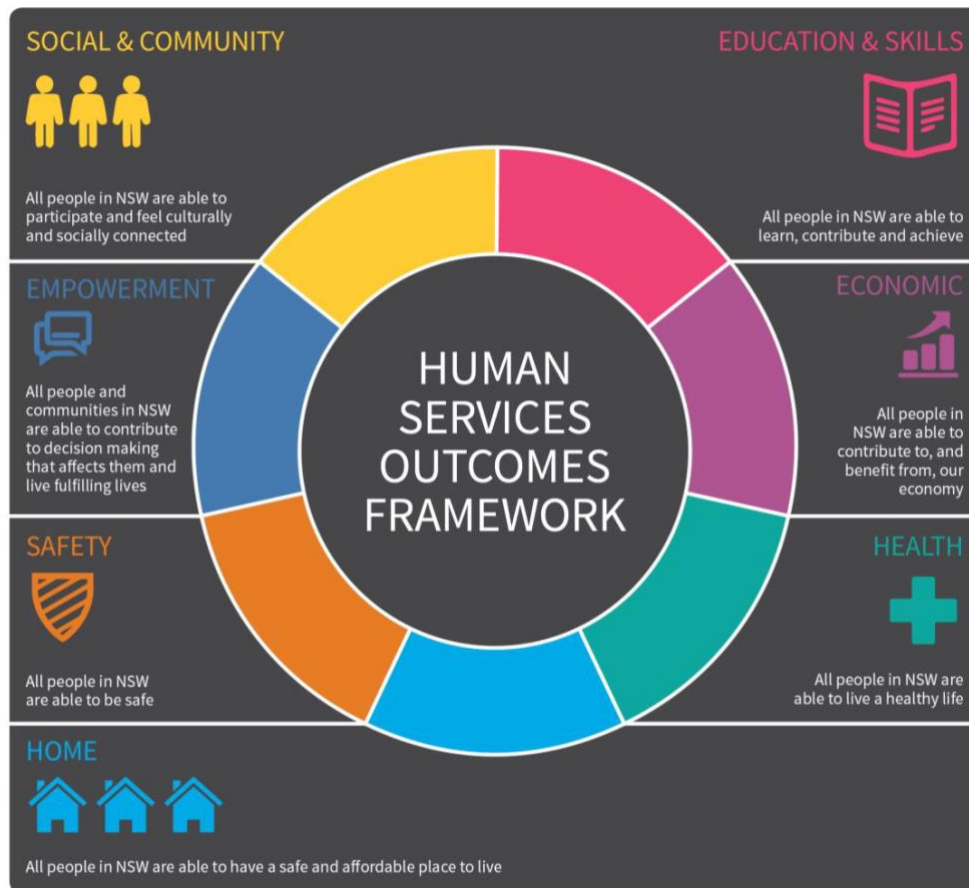


Figure 3. The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework

(NSW-Dept.-of-Communities-and-Justice, 2017)

FACSAR argue that the HSOF provides a way to understand and measure the extent that FACS makes a long-term positive difference to people’s lives and can facilitate the building evidence of which programs contribute to the wellbeing of their clients (NSW-Dept.-of-Communities-and-Justice, 2017). But even if the goals of HSOF are to facilitate government performance, how can government use the kind of outcome information delivered by the HSOF to inform its processes and improve the quality of its services? Government contracts that define social welfare services deliver standardised services that cannot currently adapt to the changing needs of their clients. While the HSOF may measure performance, it prescribes no mechanism for using the resulting data to improve practice, making it ineffective to the end of improving the performance of government in delivering these services.

3.2 The SPIRIT framework

Another NSW example of an attempt to improve service quality through better evidence use, is the SPIRIT (Supporting Policy with Research: An Intervention Trial) framework, developed by the NSW Department of Health. SPIRIT aimed to understand and improve how public health agencies engage with research evidence in the development of policy and programs. It comprised a suite of interrelated studies designed to test an intervention model for increasing the use of evidence by staff. SPIRIT focused on three key capacities: staff engagement, organisational capacity to use research evidence, and actual use of research in practice. The intervention included training for senior leaders, supports for accessing and using evidence, and opportunities for collaborative research exchange between staff and academic partners (Redman et al., 2015). Much like the garbage-can model of organisational choice (Cohen et al., 1972), the SPIRIT Action Framework assumed that policy development is non-linear and influenced by multiple contextual factors, including the agency's internal culture, systems, and leadership support for research engagement. The success of its intervention model was measured in uptake of research and how well agencies embedded research-informed processes into everyday policy and program work. While SPIRIT offered valuable insight into how public agencies might foster more evidence informed practice, it did not formalise continuous improvement of research use through structured performance oversight advice, feedback loops, or standardised accountability processes.

Although ambitious and conceptually sound, HSOF and SPIRIT represent further examples of well-intentioned but partial attempts at improving government performance that lack the completeness required for meaningful and lasting impact. Government agencies responsible for improving complex public outcomes need to become more entrepreneurial in the sense that they must move towards a business model that can not only identify need but can also shift resources to best meet it. This requires focus on goals, but also on results and how their impact on clients can be improved (Osborne 1993).

Section 4 Public Choice Insights to leverage improvement

Braithwaite's (2008) widely cited work on responsive regulation proposes that government actions are already constrained by a kind of informal regulatory network (p.87), comprising media scrutiny and public pressure (p.32), legal constraints and other internal mechanisms (p.157), such as policy controls. However, the constituent mechanisms discussed do not fully account for the distortions of public value caused by private interests, as outlined by PCT. While the existing and tacit regulatory network proposed by Braithwaite aims to enhance accountability, it does not fully address the core concern of PCT, that self-interested behaviour by bureaucrats can distort government outcomes and undermine public value. If such a regulatory network does not specifically target and address this shortcoming of government, then the regulatory network is likely to be compromised by the same shortcomings. PCT is used in the literature (Le Grand, 1991), and in this study, as a diagnostic tool to identify how self-interest distorts government performance. However, its account of the shortcomings of bureaucracies may also be used as leverage to improve them, by offering a framework through which effective controls might be designed to more effectively direct the unchecked private interests that impact the efficiency and effectiveness of bureaucratic systems. Seen this way, PCT is not merely a critique of government failure, but a source of actionable insight for system improvement.

Spicer (1985) makes a pivotal contribution to this perspective by applying PCT principles to motivation and incentive design within bureaucratic organisations. Drawing from rational choice theory, Spicer conceptualises bureaucratic cooperation and effort as collective goods, that fall foul of classic free-rider problems. In this framing, efficient, goal-aligned effort, only occurs when organisational processes incentivise cooperative behaviour over individual opportunism. Conversely, where incentives are misaligned or absent, staff will rationally minimise effort or pursue activities that serve personal goals rather than public outcomes. Crucially, Spicer argues that incentive systems can be implemented to overcome this default self-interest, particularly through tools like conditional cooperation, group-based reward systems, and job design reforms. He shows how controlling structural features of government work, such as reducing group

size, increasing task interdependence, and minimising staff turnover, can strengthen cooperation and redirect effort towards public value creation. This proposition supports the claim that self-interest, far from being an immutable barrier to performance, can be harnessed strategically to promote public value if the right controls are built into system architecture.

4.1 Leveraging PCT using formal quality management systems

Spicer's (1985) insights support the broader argument advanced by the present study; that improving government performance is not necessarily a moral or cultural challenge, but a technical problem of incentive alignment. By treating bureaucratic motivation as an engineering problem rather than a moral one, Spicer's application of PCT offers a kind of systemic leverage for effective reform. It does this by helping identify the conditions and mechanisms that are most likely to foster genuine improvements in program delivery, especially in the context of complex social welfare services, given the human tendency to maximise personal value. This rationalist model of human behaviour is echoed, remarkably but perhaps unintentionally, in the architecture of quality management systems such as the International Standard for Quality Management Systems, ISO9000, which has long sought to improve organisational performance by engineering systems, roles, and feedback mechanisms that engage all stakeholders in a common mission.

What is ISO9000?

ISO9000 establishes a structured framework of policies and procedures designed to ensure that organisations (groups of people with intentions and resources) consistently meet the needs of their internal and external stakeholders, while fostering a culture of continuous improvement (International-Standards-Organization, 2016). Standards for the operation of industries have been in place for many centuries, with early examples including in 11th century China and in the 13th century Magna Carta, which standardised the measures of wine, ale and cloth, among other things, to support fairness in trade (Hoyle, 2017 p.3). Yates and Murphy (2007) describe the modern development of standards and their purpose in their book chapter on the formation of the International

Standards Organisation. In their account, the intention of facilitating fair trade, and later, its efficient operation was the impetus for the International Standards Association (ISA) to develop its first, ‘screws and threads’ standard, which standardised the design of fasteners to be used in war machinery, thus building capacity in the supply chain in the war effort. Post World War II, ISA became the International Standards Organisation (ISO), which went on to publish many standards, including the family of international standards for quality management systems, known as ISO9000, in 1987. The purpose of this family of standards, was to,

- Provide a common framework for quality management systems
- Facilitate trade based on mutual understanding of quality expectations
- Ensure product and service uniformity across borders
- Help organisations demonstrate their ability to manage the quality of their products and services

ISO9000 was intended to provide these general regulatory guidelines across industries, but especially for organisations for whom performance involved meeting customer expectations, such as within procurement & supply relationships. This first iteration of ISO9000 was largely based upon a British Standard (BS5750), which aimed to standardise and regulate contractual arrangements, again, during wartime, for the British armed forces.

The ISO9000 family of fourteen standards comprises several child standards as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. The ISO9000 family of standards

Title	Purpose
ISO9000	Explains the fundamental concepts of quality management systems, including examples of activities that may be used to manage the quality of products or services.

ISO9001	Specifies the technical requirements that must be met to be formally certified as an ISO9000 quality managed organisation
ISO9004	Provides guidance on how to sustain successful quality management systems
ISO1809	Provides guidelines for applying ISO9000 quality management principles in local government contexts

Ten other related standards focus on various components of quality management, such as auditing quality management systems, achieving financial benefits from quality management systems, etc., (Hoyle, 2017).

Why should organisations use ISO9000?

Known benefits to organisations of implementing ISO9000 include decreased waste, costs, defects, production time, and increased productivity, use of existing capacity (staff and infrastructure), staff engagement and customer satisfaction (Schuurman, 1997, Sfredo et al., 2021). The same benefits apply to all organisations types, including government (Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025, López-Lemus, 2023, Starke et al., 2012) and those providing services rather than goods (Psomas et al., 2013). And are increased when management staff pursue implementation willingly (Terziovski et al., 2003). Central to the ISO9000 philosophy is the idea that quality is not just the product of individual effort, but of systemic design that motivates and coordinates the efforts of all involved. It explicitly emphasises the importance of engaging personnel at all levels, promoting staff engagement and cross-functional collaboration, and capturing feedback to improve performance and responsiveness (Oakland, 2014 p.343). In this sense, ISO9000 seeks to engineer the very conditions of cooperation, trust, and incentive alignment that Spicer (1985) identifies as critical to raising effort levels and organisational efficiency. For example, Spicer highlights how job design can influence employee effort, noting that effort is more likely when roles are structured to foster interdependence and accountability. The ISO9000 standards address this through requirements for role clarity, documented responsibilities and defined processes, all designed to reduce ambiguity and foster shared responsibility for quality outcomes

(Hoyle, 2017 p.305-319). Similarly, Spicer's recommendation for smaller work groups and reduced personnel turnover to promote cooperation, is reflected in the ISO9000 emphasis on team-based problem solving and the cultivation of centralising organisational knowledge; strategies that inherently promote individual empowerment and team cohesion (Dean and Bowen, 1994). Additionally, Spicer's notion of conditional cooperation, where rewards and effort are reciprocally reinforced over time, aligns with the ISO9000 principle of improvement and its reliance on evidence-based decision making to guide incremental adjustments. These mechanisms operationalise the kind of interactions and feedback that PCT theorists argue are necessary for sustained cooperation, transparency and trust in public organisations (Spicer, 1985).

ISO9000 is built specifically to comprehensively address the needs of the clients of any organisation, the staff who run the processes to deliver the products or services, and the organisation owners (Mann, 2006, International-Standards-Organization, 2016). In the case of government, the distinction between clients and owners is blurred, as both groups provide the tax revenue that runs government. The staff delivering organisational processes here also stand to benefit. In government settings, where regulation and policy often lack the relevant focus to effectively influence behaviour towards producing public value, ISO9000 offers a way of focusing and aligning individual behaviour with public value production. This kind of leverage is not brute authoritarianism, nor an appeal to idealism, but leverage that helps bring about the conditions under which productive cooperation becomes rational and rewarding.

ISO9000 is a particularly relevant quality management system for government (Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025), as it is written to work with any industry, any organisation. Rather than focus on industry specific factors, it focuses on the way people interact and how information is used. ISO9000 requires management commitment and organisation wide coordination (Chin and Choi, 2003); elements that directly counteract PCT observed phenomena like siloed budget-maximising, minimal-squawk behaviour and regulatory capture. When comprehensive quality management systems are championed at the executive level and implemented through clear processes, staff are engaged in unified and mutual expectations that actively reduce the opportunity for unproductive

or self-serving behaviour (Chin and Choi, 2003). In this way, ISO9000 acts as both a technological and cultural intervention, realigning incentives around shared goals of service quality and public value. The next section will explore how such systems have been implemented in government contexts, and whether their adoption has produced the kinds of improvements that both PCT and quality management principles strive for.

Section 5 The use of ISO9000 in government

The ISO Global Survey identifies trends in the number of certified organisations around the world (International-Standards-Organization, 2023), but does not publicly provide the names of certified organisations. While specific government agencies cannot be identified from this data, the global trends in overall adoption of formal ISO9001 certification can be observed, along with a breakdown of the types of services that governments also run, including public administration, education, health, and social services.

The total number of ISO9001 certifications is growing strongly, for all industry types around the world, with around a fifty-percent increase in the number of work sites certified between 2018 and 2022.

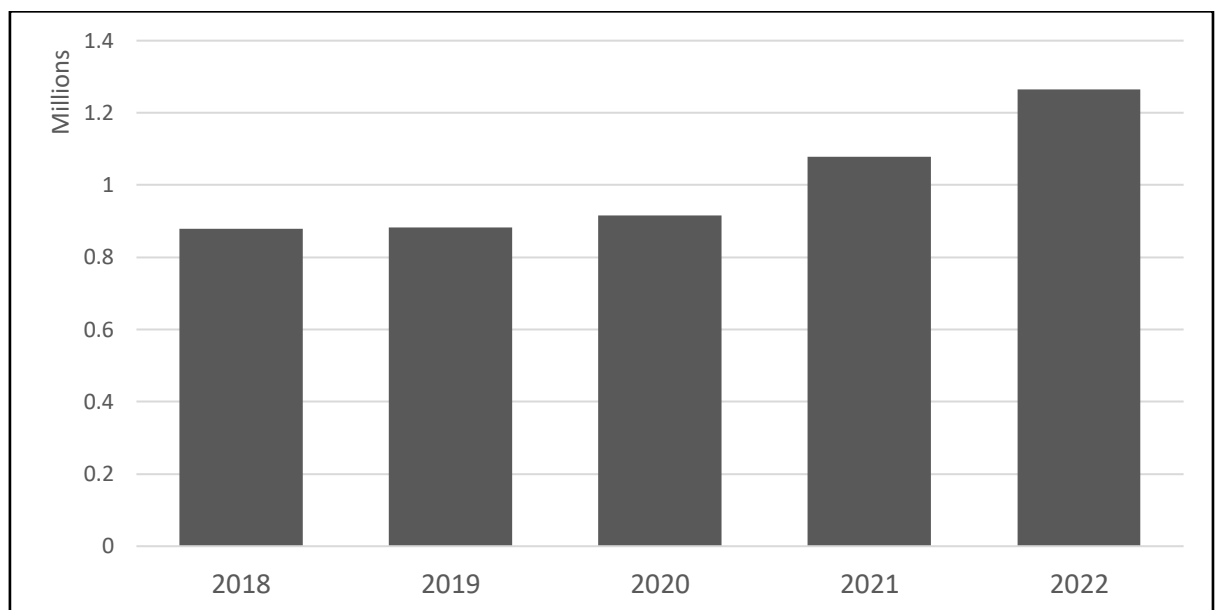


Figure 4. Global ISO9001 certification trends – number of all certified sites – all industries

(SimpleQuE, 2025)

In addition to site registrations, the global survey conducted by the International Standards Organization in 2023, found there were 837,978 individual organisations certified as ISO9001 compliant (International-Standards-Organization, 2023). This cohort is defined by organisation (which can have several certified sites) and includes members of a broad range of industries, 39 in total, including agriculture, publishing, pharmaceuticals, wholesale and retail trade, financial services etc.

Organisations providing public administration, education, health and social services (not exclusively provided by governments), are also represented in global certifications but only at a fraction of the rate of other industry types.

Table 2. Global ISO9001 certification rates - government type services - by organisation

Jurisdiction	Number of certified organisations (2023)	Proportion of certified organisations	Global ranking – of 180 countries / areas
Global - All industries	837,978	100%	N/A
Australia - All industries	13,082	100%	14
Australia - Public administration	118	0.90%	125
Australia - Education	52	0.40%	71
Australia - Health	254	1.94%	115
Australia - Social Services	59	0.45%	82
Australia - All public type services	483	3.69%	107

(International-Standards-Organization, 2023)

China ranked global number one overall in organisations using ISO9001 quality management systems, with 67,534 organisations certified. Additionally, the Chinese government has embraced ISO9001 with a large and growing number of Chinese

government departments achieving certification (Haiyan, 2011, Peng, 2006, Pei-Shen, 2003). However, the proportion of government run Chinese social services with ISO9001 certification is unclear. France ranked global number one in use of formal QMS' in social services with 93.91% (19,127) French organisations certified to deliver ISO9001 quality managed social services. Australia's ranking of 59, for certified ISO9001 quality managed social services and the proportion of certifications for services that may be run by government (public administration, education, health, social services) collectively, fell at around the 60th percentile compared with global peers. For social services, this ranking is notably higher than the United States of America, Denmark, United Kingdom and several other developed nations, but below 106 other nations, the majority of which are developing nations (International-Standards-Organization, 2023).

5.1 ISO9000 use in broad government applications

While there is no registry of the names of organisations that observe ISO9000 principles, or are certified compliant with ISO9001, available to the public, the literature discusses some of the instances where known government organisations have incorporated these standards in their work (e.g. (ALHasani, 2020, Alustiza, 2010, Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025, Cohen and Brand, 1990, DeGuzman, 2017, Fei and Rainey, 2003, Jeyar et al., 2024, López-Lemus, 2023, Psomas et al., 2023)). This literature indicates that many governments have already implemented ISO9000 family or similar formal quality management systems like Total Quality Management (TQM), Lean, etc. These frameworks have been applied to various types of government work including health, education, immigration, environmental protection, and a host of others, with the intention and result of structuring processes to improve the efficient delivery of public value in the same way that other industries have (Sfreddo et al., 2021). In fact the examples listed below often realise success in terms of improving performance and accountability, however these examples are close to exhaustive, underscoring the point that attempts by government to manage their performance through use of standards known to be effective is rare.

The Philippines

The Philippines government has a dedicated team within their Department of Budget and Management whose role it is to promote and facilitate ISO9001 certification across all government work and departments. They have achieved approximately 633, ISO9001 certifications since 2004, in areas including government owned and controlled corporations, government financial institutions, state universities and colleges, and local government units. They regard ISO9001 certification as a reliable means to higher government efficiency and performance (DeGuzman, 2017).

Oman

The Ministry of Education in Oman achieved ISO9001 certification with the intention to incorporate structured processes that improve administrative efficiency, customer satisfaction, and employee effectiveness. ISO9001 has enhanced education service quality by aligning management commitment with organisational learning, boosting internal performance and client service outcomes (ALHasani, 2020).

Morocco

Twenty-two percent of public owned health organisations in Morocco hold ISO9001 certification, with a growth trend driven by patient and staff demand (Jeyar et al., 2024). The trend to adopt ISO9001 certification in Morocco across public administration and other public services is also growing, with a survey of a broad range of public servants indicating a desire to expand adoption of the standard as a tool to improve the impact and efficiency of internal processes and customer satisfaction (Bouferas and Achelmrah, 2025).

Mexico

The Mexican government has appointed a Secretary of Transparency and Accountability in response to a national survey showing that 85% of Mexicans have encountered barriers to accessing basic public services. The Better Attention and Service program, under that Secretary's charge has subsequently developed multiple programs to

improve the quality and effectiveness of government, using ISO9001 certification to improve public education, and other work across government (López-Lemus, 2023, Alustiza, 2010). The implementation of this quality management system resulted in improved Mexican public services, particularly the quality of their response and the assurance and dependability of service quality. Research on quality management in this Mexican Public Services example also observed that individual staff values may have had less influence on uptake of quality management practices than the mandates introduced to require them (López-Lemus, 2023). This finding challenges other models of quality practice uptake (Farr and Cressey, 2015, Fonseca, 2015, Prajogo and McDermott, 2005), that suggest that intrinsic staff motivations are the key driver.

Malaysia

Malaysia implemented a national quality management initiative across its public service departments in the 1990s under its *Guidelines for strategies for quality improvement in the public service* (Fei and Rainey, 2003). The initiative comprised several structured components including,

- An annual Prime Minister's Quality Award
- A formal quality management and improvement manual
- Nationwide training workshops on quality management principles
- Awareness campaigns stressing the importance of quality with slogans such as "*quality is conformance to customer requirements*"
- Seminars to familiarise public servants with quality management principles and practices.

It also funded a special department to oversee the implementation of quality management and administer award programs across government agencies, the Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU). The awards took into account elements of quality management such as how leadership, data, quality standards and customer satisfaction supported quality. As observed in other studies, implementation of quality management in the Malaysian government was

most successful when top level management was both fully committed to implementation and to communicating clear goals and methods of achieving them. However, the quality management system fell short by failing to systematically track customer engagement and satisfaction, and process efficiency, limiting the evidence of its impact (Fei and Rainey, 2003), despite a later study (Agus et al., 2007) confirming that the Malaysian national quality management initiative was strongly, positively correlated with customer satisfaction.

Greece

In Greece, early efforts to apply TQM in local government were limited in scope. While some local authorities adopted elements like citizen and employee satisfaction, other essential practices such as process management and systematic evaluation were largely excluded. As a result, benefits to performance and service outcomes were modest (Psomas et al., 2017). A more recent study found a shift toward Lean management principles in Greek central government ministries has been more successful. The Ministry of Migration and Asylum, implemented process-focused reforms based on ISO9000 and other formal quality frameworks (Psomas et al., 2023) which prioritised application of the ISO9000 principles of customer-focused service, process standardisation and employee engagement. Unlike earlier efforts, this Lean-based approach delivered measurable improvements in efficiency, transparency, and client satisfaction, demonstrating that structured quality frameworks, enhance public sector performance when implemented holistically.

USA

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implemented a comprehensive TQM system in the 1990s to improve the performance and efficiency of its public services (Cohen and Brand, 1990). A key finding of the case study on its implementation was that traditional top-down management approaches, where senior executives set both goals and methods to achieve them, often failed to solve front-line work problems, because senior executives lacked firsthand operational knowledge. The implementation of TQM resolved this issue by allowing senior executives to retain goal

setting authority while quarantining the control of work methods to front-line staff, allowing those who do the work to propose and implement solutions directly, as they arise. The EPA's TQM system facilitated continuous improvement, encouraged cross-functional collaboration and increased worker engagement, again demonstrating the positive impact of ISO9000 principles.

5.2 ISO9000 use in social welfare services

Fewer examples still are evident in the literature for implementation of ISO9000 in social services, with governments in Spain, Mexico and United Arab Emirates (UAE) providing the handful of examples that have integrated formal QMS' including ISO9000 family standards, as a means of improving quality, performance, efficiency and relevance of these services to client need. These services have included many types offered in NSW, such as social housing, child protection and disability support programs. However, even in this small sample, the literature reports that the benefits realised from implementing ISO9000 and similar QMS' include improved client satisfaction, the transparency of government decisions, and increased government legitimacy.

Spain

Melão et al. (2017) report that Spain has adopted a formal quality management system to improve the performance and efficiency of social welfare services, including those funded or managed in partnership with government. These social welfare services provide support for people with disabilities to address social exclusion risks, or provide long-term care needs in residential care homes, day centres, vocational rehabilitation services and community integration programs. The QMS adopted was the European Quality in Social Services Standard (EQUASS), which shares core principles of ISO9000 including client focus, continuous improvement and process approach. While both standards aim to improve the quality and efficiency of social services, EQUASS is tailored specifically for the not-for-profit social welfare service sector, but does not include all aspects of quality management covered by ISO9000. Melão et al. (2017) found that the social services who adopted EQUASS experienced; improved organisational practices such as planning, accurate and complete documentation, better client engagement,

enhanced staff participation with quality management practices including continuous improvement, and better client outcomes, especially in terms of satisfaction and inclusion. The same study also noted that strong buy-in of senior leaders was sometimes lacking, leading to the risk that EQUASS may be thought of as performative by some staff. Melão et al. (2017) made further comment on the role of staff values vs organisational mandates in the uptake of quality practices in this study, arguing that staff values were shaped by institutional structures and systemic expectations. In this context, the uptake of EQUASS quality practices cannot be separated from the broader quality systems in which they are embedded. This point progresses the *mandates-dominant* an argument in favour of the primary influence of organisational quality mandates. However, in a related study, Marimon et al. (2021) found that the personal investment of social welfare service staff, including their personal identification with client outcomes and their commitment to professional standards, may play a more significant role in the uptake of quality management practices than formal policy directives. This study, also of Spanish social welfare services found, that emotionally engaged workers often mediated the success of QMS implementation. This observation contradicts the position of the Melão et al. (2017) study to support the view that staff motivations influence the uptake of quality practices in government services.

Mexico

The local government authority of Los Cabos, Mexico implemented a QMS based on ISO9000 principles to improve public service delivery and build public trust. Their QMS applied to welfare related services using structured processes, staff training and a client feedback mechanism they named the Integral Citizen Observatory (ICO). The ICO enabled both the end users of public welfare services, and the broader community to contribute to their evaluation and improvement. The result was improved service quality, transparency of government decisions and better inter-government coordination (Ostos, 2018).

United Arab Emirates

The Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC), a public social service agency in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), implemented a Quality Management System based on ISO9000 standards to structure its services for victims of abuse, domestic violence, and human trafficking. Their QMS covered key operational areas including case management, intake procedures, follow-up support, and interagency coordination. The system aimed to ensure consistency, client-centred care, and accountability, and was supported by formal policies, staff training, and performance monitoring mechanisms. The implementation improved service reliability and standardised care pathways for vulnerable clients, demonstrating the value of ISO-based quality systems in high-sensitivity government welfare services (Al Gharaibeh and Gibson, 2019).

5.3 Quality management benefits and the influences on its uptake

The common benefit identified in the above examples of ISO9000 implementation in social services was to increase the public value returned by social services to the organisations that ran them, the taxpayers who fund them and the clients who received them. Through ISO9000 aligned frameworks, or government designed analogues like EQUASS, HSOF and SPIRIT, systems have been built to address longstanding deficiencies in public service performance and accountability. The central problem they attempt to resolve is well articulated by PCT, and the various case examples provided an address of the misalignment between internal public sector incentives and the consistent delivery of the best possible performing public services for clients, staff and taxpayers.

This value of implementing these formal quality controls is twofold. Firstly, there is a normative standpoint around the obligation of governments to return value to the citizens from whom they compulsorily acquire the tax income that fund these services. Moore (1997) frames this as creating public value, arguing that the legitimacy of government lay in its capacity to facilitate meaningful outcomes for its constituents. Secondly, there is a financial obligation to support the vulnerable people who access social welfare services, with strong evidence that effective support for disadvantaged people to participate in the economy and live their best life, yields a positive financial

return over the costs of that support (Beck et al., 2007, Marmot, 2017). This is in addition to the argument in appeal to the opportunity cost of inefficiency, with multiple, well established examples including the failures and impacts of the Robodebt initiative (Rinta-Kahila et al., 2024). Effective, preventative investment then is both ethically and financially warranted.

Formal quality management systems like ISO9000 have been implemented by governments to facilitate adaptive, accountable and responsive approaches to delivering social welfare services. These frameworks shift focus away from performative compliance (Manville and Greatbanks, 2020), towards meaningful responses to client need and genuine engagement with staff and evidence to deliver demonstrable results, especially when deployed with strong endorsement and involvement of senior leadership. ISO9000's emphasis on incentivising positive culture aligned to performance within organisations reduces the opportunity for self-serving motivations to arise, derailing government performance in the ways outlined by PCT.

However, the debate on the relative influence of staff values vs organisational mandates on the uptake of quality practice remains unresolved. *Values-dominant* positions propose that the personal values and motivations of staff exert the primary influence on engaging with and sustaining quality practice (Prajogo, 2005; Fonseca, 2015; Farr & Cressey, 2015). Other literature (Melão et al., 2017; López-Lemus, 2023) has shown that organisational quality mandates such as present in policy and contract requirements play a dominant role in influencing uptake of quality practice. Yet others propose an *interactionist* perspective (e.g. Bendermacher et al., 2019; Kull et al., 2019), that mandates and values may work together, with quality frameworks fostering staff values of engagement, empowerment, and commitment (Anitha, 2014; Spreitzer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1991), that promote uptake of quality practices.

Section 6 The gap in the literature

Despite widespread agreement about the challenges to government accountability and performance, and the potential solutions offered by quality management

systems in other sectors, gaps in the literature around why these solutions have not been adopted remain (Fryer et al., 2009, Singh et al., 2020). PCT provides a diagnosis of the performance challenges to bureaucratic efficiency, highlighting the imaginative manifestations of rational self-interest in systems lacking effective oversight (Le Grand, 1991). But it offers little practical guidance for how governments might overcome these structural inefficiencies, particularly in welfare services where market competition is absent (Mengiste, 2020). This study will address these gaps in the literature.

6.1 The use of quality management systems

The first of these is that the existing literature lacks a metric to quantify government attempts at addressing the kinds of accountability and performance issues identified by PCT, using the kinds of effective quality management systems discussed previously. Although government agencies often outsource the work of social welfare services to NGOs through contracting arrangements, neither the details nor the meaningful results of these commercial arrangements are routinely made available to the public (Melão et al., 2017). This gap speaks to the dearth of accountability addressed by both PCT and quality management frameworks like ISO9000. Additionally, there is little evidence mapping quality practices adopted by government social welfare agencies against established and complete quality management systems like ISO9000, which includes comprehensive guidance for organisations to manage the quality of all operations, nor evidence of whether quality controls are adopted consistently across programs (López-Lemus, 2023).

6.2 The influences on uptake of quality practice

A second gap concerns the relative influence of staff values and organisational quality mandates on the uptake of quality practice. Public Service Motivation (PSM) is often positioned as a counterpoint to the rational choice assumptions of PCT, yet research suggests its effects are conditional and context-dependent (Vandenabeele et al., 2018). Without alignment between staff and organisational goals, mandates alone are unlikely to deliver consistent quality. The question of

whether and how staff values or organisational quality mandates explain variation in the uptake of quality management practices remains under-researched, and under-specified in terms of quantifiable alignment with recognised quality management systems (Bendermacher et al., 2019, López-Lemus, 2023, Melão et al., 2017).

6.3 Can quality systems address government performance

Finally, a third gap lies at the intersection of the former two. Can PCT criticisms based on the misalignment of rational self-interest and public value be addressed by formal quality management systems such as ISO9000, to align the private motivations of staff with organisational goals? While quality management research has increasingly recognised the importance of *soft* behavioural and cultural dimensions alongside *hard* and more easily measurable technical dimensions (Prajogo and McDermott, 2005), the evidence of the impact of these *soft* factors in government social welfare services remains unresolved (López-Lemus, 2023, Marimon et al., 2019, Melão et al., 2017). As a result, we have little evidence about whether mandated quality frameworks that engage staff values can realign staff motivations in ways that address longstanding criticisms of bureaucratic inefficiency identified by PCT.

Section 7 Research questions

In response to the lack of literature that accounts for the potential for agreed quality management practices to address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT in social welfare services, the present study posed the following research questions.

The broad research question was:

Can quality management address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT?

To guide data collection and analysis this question is broken down into sub-questions, as follows.

1. To what extent does quality management in social welfare services align with recognised quality management principles and practices?
2. What is the relationship between staff values, organisational quality mandates, and quality practice uptake?

The first research sub-question was posed to establish an empirical quantification of the extent to which quality management practices in social welfare services align with a recognised standard. As no similar metric currently exists, both this sub-question, and the data it produced were exploratory. The numeric answer to this question was used in analysis to support an answer to research sub-question two. The second research sub-question explores the factors that influence the uptake of quality management practices in government-funded, social welfare service environments. This second research question was posed to investigate the complex interaction of organisational environments and human values, which may be as influential as organisational quality mandates like those present in contracted requirements (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, pp.43-46).

Through these questions, this study sought to understand quality practice in social welfare services and to make a theoretical contribution to knowledge of how quality management systems interact with human and organisational dynamics in public services. Both research sub-questions are further broken down to provide a clear scope of data collection and analysis in the Methodology chapter.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a complete explanation of the research design, strategies and methods including analysis, used in this study. In addition, this chapter discusses philosophical underpinnings, including the ontological and epistemological positions adopted. Explaining the ontological and epistemological perspectives is a critical component of this chapter, because of their influence on design, strategy and methods (Dieronitou, 2014). Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion of the ethical considerations and biases of the present study. The explanation of these positions and choices is intended to demonstrate both their coherence with study aims and how they influenced the findings. In doing this, an argument is mounted for in favour of the adoption of these choices for the integrity and validity of this study. The chapter begins by laying out how the research questions were broken down for analysis, then moves on to discuss philosophical position, research design, data collection methods and coding & analysis, in order. This order of topics was chosen to move from the broadest and most globally influential topics to the narrowest, to build an explanation and justification of the methodology of this study from the ground up.

Section 1 Research questions – breakdown for analysis

The broad research question asked by this study was broken down into sub-questions for the purpose of informing data collection and analysis. The broad research question posed by this study was,

Can quality management address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT?

And the breakdown of the two sub-questions for analysis were,

1. To what extent does quality management in social welfare services align with recognised quality management principles and practices?
 - a. To what extent does quality practice in FACS align with ISO9000?
 - i. What is the overall co-incidence of quality practice observed in FACS with ISO9000?

- ii. Does broad FACS practice align more or less with each of the seven quality principles defined by ISO9000?
 - b. Are there any systematic gaps in FACS quality practice compared to ISO9000?
 - i. To what extent do specific FACS social welfare services align with ISO9000 as a whole?
 - ii. To what extent do specific FACS social welfare services align with specific ISO9000 principles?
- 2. What is the relationship between staff values, organisational quality mandates, and quality practice uptake?
 - a. Are certain staff values more commonly associated with higher quality practice uptake?
 - b. What is the nature of the interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice?

The focus of the first sub-question is on alignment of quality management practices in social welfare services with recognised quality management practice. To sharpen the focus of this question for accurate and transparent analysis, quality was defined with reference to ISO9000, and government examined through the instance of FACS, as an exemplar government social welfare service agency. RQ1 is broken down further to enable detailed examination of how FACS quality practices align with or depart from the seven ISO9000 principles, across the various Cases defined by this study. The focus of the second sub-question was on the various factors at play in the uptake of quality practice. To facilitate precision and transparency in data collection and analysis, this research question was broken down into two sub-questions that investigate respectively, whether certain staff values were more commonly associated with higher uptake of quality practices and what the interaction was between staff values and the organisational quality mandates they worked under.

Section 2 Philosophical position

In this section I will outline the philosophical position of the methodological framework for this research, to define what is held to be valid knowledge and thereby explain the decisions made during the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 2006). This section will demonstrate the coherence of the methodology used in this study in the context of the philosophical position that informs it (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.6). Following is an exploration of philosophical issues with reference to the epistemological and ontological positions, a comparison with competing philosophical positions, a justification for the rationale of these choices, and their implications for this research.

2.1 Epistemological position

Overall, this study adopts the epistemological approach of Pragmatism, with elements of Positivism and Interpretivism also adopted for various method and analysis choices. Such a combination of perspectives is appropriate, when applied to understanding various quantitative and qualitative data collected on phenomena in a study (Maarouf, 2019). Instrumentalism also provides a justification for the combination of these perspectives, in a single study.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical paradigm originating around the 1870s with philosophers including Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey. Broadly, the thesis of Pragmatism is that truth is subjective, and is best measured by the utility of its uses or outcomes (Stanford-University, 2008). Behind the idea of the validity of truth with exclusive reference to utility, is the notion that concepts of truth are only relevant and knowable by human subjects, all of whom have basic and inviolable needs and motivations. According to Stanford-University (2008), Pragmatism asserts broadly, that knowledge of the world is intrinsically linked with the perceptions and biases of the agents who know it. Accordingly, Pragmatism holds that the potential for practical applications of knowledge takes precedence over any a priori theoretical positions. To this end, Peirce (1878) proposed the

Pragmatic Maxim, that a true understanding of a concept necessarily entails understanding any consequences that arise from its application. This position champions the observability of the functional usability of ideas in any test of its truth. Pragmatism may be further understood with reference to the Pragmatist assertions on the primacy of experience and that, the truth is what works.

The primacy of experience

Dewey (1930, p.111) claimed that concepts are synonymous with their corresponding operations, suggesting the importance of action in forming truth. Peirce (in Misak, 2004, p.5) also urges that truth be gained by interaction with the world rather than relying on untested, or I add, otherwise untestable antecedents. Under this concept Pragmatists advocate the rejection of pure ideas and the acceptance of doubt as a guide to the revision of ideas based upon new experiences and evidence (James and Sheffield, 2019, p.287).

Truth is what works

Pragmatists hold that truth is determined by its usefulness; something may be held as true if the application of its belief works in guiding action to solve problems. William James (James and Sheffield, 2019, p.112) put this in terms of truth necessarily involving 'expedience'. Understood in this way, something can be said to be true only if it is useful to the extent that it can be applied in human activities intended to leverage their environment to their advantage, either social or otherwise (Almeder, 1986).

As a philosophical tradition that emphasises such practical consequences and real-world applications of ideas, Pragmatism emphasises the importance of the interaction of theory and practice, valuing methods that facilitate actionable insights, relevant to their context. The case study methodology chosen by the present study is consistent with these ideas in that, case studies facilitate contextual understanding of phenomena (Harrison, 2017) and that they provide actionable insights that may be applied with positive effect in similar contexts (Stake, 2013, p.88). Given the prominent role of

judgements made by people in the process of social welfare service funding administration, a Pragmatic approach seems most appropriate.

Complimentary epistemologies

The epistemological positions of Instrumentalism, Positivism and Interpretivism are broadly encompassed by Pragmatism, in that all focus on building theory from evidence, although they vary on the types of evidence viewed as legitimate. These three thematically complimentary epistemological positions were adopted in interpreting the various data sets of this research, as appropriate.

Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism states that philosophical perspectives are useful only to the extent that they facilitate rules that enable useful systems of classification, and not that they lead to an objective understanding of the nature of being or the universe (Dewey, 1999), which is said to be rationally impossible and epistemologically useless (Hildebrand, 2018). In this regard, Instrumentalist epistemology might be said to constitute something like an anti-ontology as it does not require any specific belief in the basic nature of things, valuing truth for its utility rather than its alignment with assertions made by subjectively bound agents, on their view of the objective truth of reality. This study focusses on the utility and potential for practical application of its findings from the data collected here, without wishing to make strong claims about the underlying reality of the phenomena being studied. Accordingly, this research might be said to adopt an Instrumentalist epistemology in its view of the status of the truth of its findings, as it accommodates the Pragmatist view that truth is subjective.

Positivism

Positivism is a broad philosophy which holds generally, that truth derives from positive and observable affirmation of theories, gained via transparent scientific methods (Collins, 2019). Several branches of Positivism regard the interpretability of non-empirical data differently, but all tend to adhere to a basis of operationalising interpretation with sole reference to empiricism (Halfpenny, 1982, p.117). Logical

Positivism for example asserts that the truth of research findings may only be credibly claimed when constructed strictly from empirical, quantitative observations (Gaub, 2009). Despite the challenge of turning social phenomena into numbers, the application of Positivism to social phenomena has long standing in line with the work of philosophers and social theorists including Comte, Durkheim & Webber (Royce, 2015, p.64). But in line with Positivist adherence to use of empirical methods, use is allowed in the context of social phenomena only with empirically based observation (Halfpenny, 1982, p.88). Consequences of this assertion are that subjective values such as ethics are not seen as relevant to truth and that conclusions derived from non-empirical methods may not be counted as knowledge (Collins, 2019). As such, Positivism may be seen as incompatible for use alongside of epistemologies that hold subjective values as suitable sources of truth in research. However, Wicks and Freeman (1998) argue that strict adherence to epistemological distinctions should be avoided as doing so may limit the practical value of research, as the use of various epistemological approaches together may provide functional human benefits. This justification aligns with the general Pragmatic value of utility over philosophical absolutism and forms the basis of an argument in favour of mixed methods research design.

In the present study, a Positivist approach is adopted in limited scope to determine the extent of alignment of practice observed in the delivery of social welfare services (as reported in interviews and observed in documents), with the 'possible actions' described by ISO9000. Accordingly, the legitimacy of this type of knowledge rests on the assumption that the phenomena under study is objective and observable (Crotty, 2020).

Although the Pragmatist epistemological approach of this study allows the use of Positivist methods, it does this from the perspective of utility rather than alignment with the notion that reality conforms to an objective and measurable set of phenomenological parameters outside of the researcher. In fact, neither Instrumentalist nor Pragmatist epistemologies hold the counter view. Rather the

utility of the result of research is held to be relevant, where assertions about the nature of the reality it sits within, is not (Leplin, 2017).

Interpretivism

Ryan (2018) asserts that Interpretivism has an opposite view to Positivism on what is considered truth. Where Positivism resorts to methods that claim to yield highly objective forms of evidence based on empiricism, Interpretivism holds that truth is a product of subjective experiences, and how they are valued by the people that experience them. Wicks and Freeman (1998) add the related comment that Instrumentalism extends this caveat on truth to the researchers who seek to contribute to it, claiming that the necessary non-independence of researchers effects their values and biases in a way that unintentionally influences the scope and outcomes of their research. For this reason, Interpretivism is sometimes called, anti-positivism. Rather than resort to Positivist claims of objectivity (Wicks and Freeman, 1998), Interpretivism posits that the most fundamental basis of truth is that meaning is bound to interpretive, subjective agents (Krauss, 2005).

The Interpretivist approach to scoping, collecting and analysing data in the present research was adopted with the aim of achieving a mixed methods triangulation upon the most holistic account of truth regarding the phenomena under study. This approach is adopted to form an understanding of the perspectives and values of the interview participants involved in social welfare service design, management and delivery. As this aspect of the research seeks to understand the subjective meaning and values held by interview participants, it follows that this research assumes that meaning is constructed within the context of the research process.

Rationale for adopting the chosen epistemological stances in this research

The present research examines the broad topic of organisational engagement with quality management practices from both the perspective that reality is objective, and subjective, depending on the particular data under analysis. As represented in Figure M1, the use of ISO9000 as a system of classification is seen as Instrumentalist, empirical

analysis of participant alignment with ISO9000 is Positivist, qualitative analysis of the perspectives and values of interview participants is Interpretivist, and the combination of these lenses is Pragmatist.

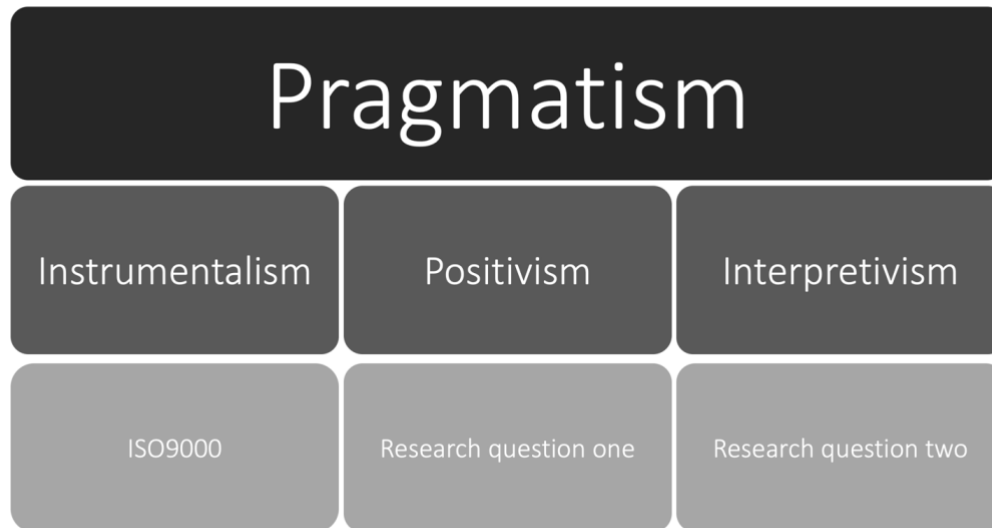


Figure 5. Epistemological position related to the various data sources used in this study

Wicks and Freeman (1998) argue that Pragmatism is a useful approach for research that studies phenomena involving human organisations, as it prioritises examination of subjective elements while avoiding hard epistemological boundaries that may artificially limit any useful application of its findings. They further claim that, as Pragmatism maintains focus on serving subjective human purposes, it is best placed to highlight what they term as the moral dimensions, (i.e., involving value judgements) of human organisations, thereby providing an epistemological foundation for producing research that has the best potential for useful application in organisational contexts. Their argument for this position centres around the proposition that, if the purpose of research is to understand (Haase and Myers, 1988) and benefit (Reichardt and Rallis, 1994) humans, then any epistemological position that precludes consideration of subjective human values surrounding the phenomena under study, misses the point of doing the research in the first place.

Further support for abandoning fidelity in epistemological choice is provided by several authors, including,

- Weick (1969, p.11), who argues that, if human experience of phenomena is equivocal, then the basis of truth, may only be interpreted as social. If this is the case, seeking ways of knowing an objective truth are futile and research is better placed to add to functional human knowledge that comments on how equivocal truth is interpreted through a social lens (Weick, 1969, p.3).
- Clarke and Yaros (1988), who argue that combining research methods is useful in research that tries to understand complex situations, such as health organisations, as it combines data insights from a number of perspectives.
- Reichardt and Rallis (1994), stress that quantitative and qualitative approaches have the common goal of understanding the world, using the same rules of inference to draw their conclusions.
- Thurmond (2001), who expressly encourages the use of multiple theoretical positions in research on grounds that it may provide a broader, deeper analysis of the phenomena under study, decrease alternative explanations and increase confidence in findings.

These arguments, mounted on the basis of appeal to utility, form the foundation of the Pragmatist perspective that alignment with any one epistemology is not only unnecessary, but also potentially prohibitive to forming a complete and useful understanding of phenomena (Wicks and Freeman, 1998). Pragmatist research shuns reverent adherence to epistemological boundaries in favour of adopting various epistemological approaches to any given question, to the extent that they respond to complexity, and facilitate knowledge that contributes value (Sale et al., 2002).

Sale, Lohfeld et al. (2002) however also argue that while mixed research methods may be combined for complimentary purposes, they may not be combined for triangulation purposes, because they study fundamentally different phenomena, citing Guba's (1987, p.31) argument that belief in a round earth precludes belief in a flat one. I submit that this argument is an oversimplification of the issue, as it assumes that belief approximates reality, and that therefore, only one epistemological position may be

correct in its assumptions about it. In fact, the nature of reality appears to be undecided in the literature, which leaves contemplators of reality with the consequence of having engaged in faith-based belief about its nature as a final and unavoidable resort, whatever their orientation. This argument about the necessary subjectiveness of empirically based systems of knowledge, and the consequences of that for the claimed methodological purity required by triangulation may be unpacked further, but as the validity of its assertion is self-evident, we need not. If this is the case, employing a methodological triangulation may be the best possible strategy in attempt to overcome the inherent weaknesses in any single, necessarily limited, epistemological stance.

2.2 Ontological position - Constructivist Realism

The present research adopts the perspective of Constructivist Realism, as it takes into account data arising from the unique realities that exist in the minds of research participants and facilitates an arm's length explanation of their implications for the quality of processes and outcomes in government funded social welfare services using a combination of Constructivist and Positivist methods.

The basis of Constructivism

Schwandt (1994, p.221) draws a broad circle around Constructivism, framing it as a philosophy that proposes the world is best understood through the lens of the perceiver. Further, and importantly, that the world of phenomena available for examination by research is constructed by people during the course of their interaction with the vastly complex array of stimulus in the world and each other, through their attempts to understand and make meaning from it. In support of this Constructivist perspective of reality, Weick (1969, p.174) proposes the property of the Equivocality of phenomena in his research on organisations. This claim asserts that the various phenomena we experience in our lives are equivocal, in that our understanding of them is in no way determined by the phenomena itself. Rather, that meaning is attributed by the perceiver.

Varieties of Constructivism

Riegler (2012, p.237) states that Constructivism is not a homogenous discipline, rather there are several schools of thought, including Radical Constructivism, Social Constructivism, Epistemological Constructivism, and others. Such branches of Constructivism may all be said to be Constructivist approaches despite their variability, as they all hold that reality is made by people as active observers and participants in its construction.

Radical Constructivism holds that our understanding of the true nature of the world is the result only, of active cognitive constructions made by us, and not of a passive interpretation of phenomena that are separate from the observer (Klir and von Glasersfeld, 1991, p.233). The consequence of Radical Constructivism for the present research is that measures outside of the perception of participants may be seen as irrelevant. The problem with adopting this stance is that, empirical measures to evaluate the efficiency of tax revenue expenditure remain useful to the end of providing comment on how to improve it. Social Constructivism offers the perspective that reality is constructed collectively, through social processes and interactions (McMahon, 1997). Once again, the focus of this perspective is on subjective meaning, limiting its usefulness to the end of empirical testing (McMahon, 1997). Cognitive Constructivism, holds that our perception of reality, while necessarily coloured by the filter of our senses, biases, culture etc, more or less moves towards an approximation of an objective reality (Piaget, 1970, p.15). Much like Radical Constructivism, Cognitive Constructivism precludes empirical testing, as it rejects the Positivist view that neutral arbitration is possible (Riegler, 2012, p.242).

Constructivist Realism

Most forms of Constructivism preclude the Positivist view that empirical testing is a valid form of truthmaking, on grounds that it is naïve to think that an objective reality is knowable by subjective agents (Lincoln et al., 2011, p.165). Constructivist Realism however, offers an ontology that attempts to encompass both Positivist and Interpretivist epistemologies (Cupchik, 2001), on what might be called Pragmatist

grounds. Those are that borrowing from various ontological stances offers the greatest potential for producing rich insights in research (Lincoln et al., 2011, p.167). To do this, Constructivist Realism interweaves the Constructivist perspective on the subjectivity inherent in human knowledge with the Realist perspective that an objective reality exists, independent of human perception. It does this with the intent of facilitating an inquirer posture (Lincoln et al., 2011, p.167), unbiased in ontological stance in the production of useful research insights.

The Constructivist Realism argument in favour of adopting this combination of ontological positions rests upon several tenets including, the lack of evidence for the independence of the Positivist researcher from the phenomena they study (Cupchik, 2001), the apparent evidence for the existence of social order, independent of the Constructivist researcher (Beach, 2013), and the common goals of both types of research (Cupchik, 2001). Viewed in this way, Realist and Constructivist research methods traditionally seen as incompatible (Lincoln et al., 2011), may actually be seen as complimentary, as they both attempt to converge on a useful understanding of the world, despite their independent shortcomings.

Rationale for adopting Constructivist Realism as the ontological position for this research

As the nature of reality is undecided in the literature, social scientists may be best placed to put aside questions that seek to quantify how truth relates to subjective experience. Instead, we best get on with the business of generating useful insights to apply to a world comprised of socially determined elements, and others that exist independent of humans (Cupchik, 2001). Constructivist Realism embraces Pragmatism, by allowing engagement with multiple philosophical perspectives on the nature of reality, to produce useful research insights (Lincoln et al., 2011). To this end, there are several reasons why it is legitimate to combine ontological perspectives that facilitate both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (Sale et al., 2002, p.46). The first, is that both types of methods share the goal of understanding the phenomena under study (Haase and Myers, 1988). Second, that both methods attempt to overcome

their shared problem, of research processes being necessarily value-laden, with the consequence of fallibility of knowledge from unaddressed or un-addressable bias (Reichardt and Rallis, 1994). Third, that combining research methods can be useful, especially when studying complex phenomena involving human behaviour, as it can produce insights based on broader perspectives (Clarke and Yaros, 1988). Fourth, that preoccupation with the debate on the nature of reality goes no way to getting potentially useful research done (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Because the philosophical perspective of Constructivist Realism facilitates the interweaving of ontological stances, empirically sourced knowledge generated from Positivist methods may be considered alongside qualitative methods that focus on subjective interpretation (Cupchik, 2001). This argument influenced the present study as it bridges the opposition of Constructivist and Realist ontologies to provide a pragmatic solution that takes advantage of the strengths of both paradigms (Cupchik, 2001). The present research considers this a valuable perspective for generating useful insights on socially bound phenomena. A Constructivist Realism stance facilitates the methods of this study, as it employs both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis, to observe emergent themes and their alignment with ISO9000.

2.3 Ethical implications of philosophical positions

The adoption of the ontological and epistemological stances of the present study provide a means to address key ethical issues in research, including beneficence, bias and data integrity. Shetgovekar (2018) defines beneficence as the ethic which demands that the main goal of research must be to confer a benefit for its participants and audience. To do this, researchers must be aware of and control any bias inherent in the research, including personal and methodological bias, and the integrity of findings including its accuracy and honesty. The philosophical stance of the present research supports delivery of these ethical demands by providing a means to quantify findings with recourse to its quantitative transparency, and to qualify its findings, through deep qualitative investigation of the subjective meaning-in-action of those quantitative findings. The implication of the combination of these methods is that a facility for

reflexivity is included in the research process (Cain et al., 2019), that supports identification of bias or inaccuracy inherent in either method, and controls for it with reference to the other. The result of these methodological controls is systematic support for the beneficence and integrity of findings, as well as a means of controlling bias.

2.4 Counter-points to the chosen philosophical stance

Counter-arguments to the use of mixed methods within the philosophical stance of this research take the form, risks to viability around the challenging nature of applying mixed methods, the apparent philosophical incompatibility of Realist and Constructivist worldviews (Adu et al., 2022), and the complexity of integrating findings (Creswell, 2011). The present research attempts to control for the challenges of mixed methods application and integration by reducing quantitative analysis to the simplest possible terms through use of a-priori codes, based on ISO9000. The issue of apparent philosophical incompatibility is dealt with by the Constructivist Realism, Instrumentalist, and Pragmatist stances, that the utility of findings trumps purist philosophical arguments concerned with what it holds as irrelevant to practical beneficence. While these controls do not completely address criticisms of philosophical and methodological choices, the hope is that they bear out weaknesses in methodological design and execution so they may be observed, accounted for and dealt with.

2.5 Summary

The present research assumes the epistemological stance of Pragmatism, as it facilitates the goal of providing useful insights to improve the impact and efficiency of government practice in delivery of social welfare services. Adoption of the remaining suite of epistemological positions is facilitated by the Pragmatist position that, theoretical stances should be adopted to the extent that they facilitate utility, not on the basis of any necessarily unsupported assertion about the presence of an objective basis of reality. To that end, the perspectives of Instrumentalism, Positivism and Interpretivism are adopted in favour of gathering and analysis of specific subsets of data that contribute to the broad analysis of phenomena under

study. An Instrumentalist stance is adopted to account for the use of ISO9000 as a yardstick. A Positivist stance is adopted as it facilitates an empirical, quantitative comparison of observed practice, with an agreed standard of practice (the yardstick). An Interpretivist stance is adopted as it facilitates analysis of the interplay between the Positivist data and the values, views and experiences of participants. These epistemological stances are thematically aligned with the perspective of a Constructivist Realism ontology, in that this ontological perspective pragmatically adopts both methods and epistemologies that facilitate the utility of producing useful research. The practicality and flexibility of these positions was adopted as the author of the present research was compelled by the facility they provide to inform useful research in organisational contexts, through the gathering and analysis of a variety of data types, as described in the following sections.

Section 3 Research design

This section will discuss the four main topics that need to be addressed to provide context to the choices made in designing research; which methodological strategy was used, employing which methods, and assuming which ontology and epistemology (Crotty, 2020). These topics are discussed in turn, below.

3.1 Methodological strategy

Research nature

The present study aims to explore and describe the phenomenon under study, the nature of decisions made to control the quality of government spending on social welfare services, within the environment it occurs. As such the nature of this study is both exploratory, and descriptive.

Social research serves many purposes, among which the most common are to explore, describe or explain social phenomena (Babbie, 2020, p.90). Exploratory research may have several aims including to become familiar with basic

circumstances and environments, generate accounts of conditions or propose new ideas, questions and techniques for future study (Lawrence Neuman, 2014, p.38). Exploratory research is valuable when knowledge about the phenomena under study is relatively unknown as it can yield new insights (Babbie, 2020, p.116) especially when the most important variables to define and understand are unknown in these circumstances (Creswell and Creswell, 2017, p.35). Descriptive research aims to refine the detail of a social phenomenon by generating a precise account, proposing categories and steps or sequences present, recording causal mechanisms (Lawrence Neuman, 2014, p.38), and reporting details of relevant history or context (Babbie, 2020, p.116). Explanatory research goes further again, by attempting to explain the phenomena under study with reference to an existing theory (Lawrence Neuman, 2014, p.39).

Research Approach

Research approaches can broadly be categorised into three distinct styles: deductive, inductive, and abductive approaches (Creswell, 2014). Each style provides a pathway to exploring the world, that is influenced by different starting points and processes. The deductive or 'top-down' research approach reasons from established theories or logically sound assumptions (Babbie, 2020, p.49). This method involves formulating specific hypotheses based on theories and then testing them against empirical observations (Trochim, 1999). The ability to generate an hypothesis to test in real world contexts via observation is a key feature of deductive of research (Babbie, 2020, p.49). Inductive or 'bottom-up' research works in the opposite direction, beginning with observations of the real world. Researchers using this approach collect and analyse data to identify patterns and insights, from which they develop new theories or hypotheses (Bryman, 2016, p.6). Because of this, no theoretical basis or conclusion is required of, or is necessarily relevant to research that takes an inductive approach. Abductive research involves an iterative process of reasoning, combining both deductive and inductive approaches to develop explanations or theories that are refined based on new data and insights (Kovács and Spens, 2005). The present study takes this abductive

approach, as it offers a framework for exploring complex research questions while accommodating both the formation and testing of hypotheses as well as the generation of new theories from observed data.

Research strategy

This study uses a descriptive, embedded, multiple case study as its strategy to examine its two research questions. Case study research methodology is used to examine real-world phenomena within their context (Harrison, 2017) using a variety of data sources (Baxter and Jack, 2008) and has been used extensively in a broad range of research settings (Flyvbjerg, 2011) including ones similar to the present study.

“A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

As such, case studies allow researchers to study a broad range of phenomena in context, including illuminating decisions made by individuals within organisations (Schramm, 1971, pp.5-6). Case studies are particularly appropriate for, answering ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions, situations where the phenomena under study cannot or is not being manipulated, and where you believe that the context of the phenomena studied is relevant to observations of it (Yin, 2009). This contrasts with experimental strategies which attempt to manipulate phenomena, testing the result and discussing causation (Baxter and Jack, 2008). These applications of case study methodology make it particularly relevant to application in the present study which examines how quality is managed in the context of government funded social welfare services.

Case study types and choices

Various and somewhat competing sub-types of case study are defined by seminal authors on this topic. Yin (2003) defines case study sub-types as explanatory, exploratory or descriptive, with these types further fitting within

single or embedded and holistic or multiple case studies. Stake (2013) adds to these types by defining case studies as intrinsic, instrumental or collective. The present study aligns with Yin's (2003) definition of an embedded, descriptive, multiple case study, as it is primarily concerned with describing a phenomena (use of quality management principles to monitor and control performance) within the varying contexts that it occurs (the multiple cases represented by the various government funded social welfare programs in NSW) (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Defining terms is helpful here, to understand how the choices made by the present research categorise it, within these complex types of case study.

Scholz and Tietje (2002) define embedded case studies with reference to their detailed focus on sub-units of the phenomena under study, and using multiple levels or methods of analysis including both qualitative and quantitative data. For example, an embedded case study may focus on how different branches or groups of people within one organisation relate to each other, using multiple data sources that might include, for example observations and interviews. This contrasts with holistic case studies, whose focus is a broader understanding of the case, and usually limits analysis to use of qualitative data only (Yin, 2009, p.50).

Descriptive case studies are used to fully describe phenomena in their contexts (Baxter and Jack, 2008) whereas Explanatory case studies seek to explain causal links between interventions and their outcomes in complex real-life situations (Yin, 2009, p.19), while Exploratory designs seek to generate preliminary insights into a phenomena only (Ogawa and Malen, 1991).

Multiple case studies contrast with single case studies. Single case studies focus upon one specific case in its unique context, to produce deep findings aligned with the aims of an holistic design. This however limits the application of findings of single case studies to the specific contexts in which they were made (Yin, 2009, p.60). Multiple case study design is preferred where possible (Yin, 2009, p.61), as it allows exploration of differences within and between cases, where the context of each

embedded case varies (Baxter and Jack, 2008), making findings more reliable for application across a range of contexts (Scholz and Tietje, 2002).

3.2 Defining cases

The Quintain as a guide to case selection

The scope of data considered is described as the *quintain* (Stake, 2013, p.4) in case study research. The quintain defines the boundaries of cases and the scope of data collection. For example, if you were studying educational reforms (as in the examples provided in Stake 2013) the execution of that reform in the individual schools it was implemented might be examples of the cases, within the broader quintain of 'the effectiveness of educational reforms'. The quintain serves as a focal point to guide selection of cases and ensure they are relevant to the research question. It helps to maintain contextual homogeneity across multiple cases, and guides understanding of the phenomenon under study, in different contexts (Stake, 2013, p.6). Stake (2013) emphasises the importance of examining situational complexity and the unique features of each case, while balancing common issues across all the selected cases. To ensure that the quintain fulfils its explanatory and limiting role in a multiple case study, it is important to ensure that each case is relevant to the quintain, offers diversity across contexts and provides opportunities for learning about the complex nature of the context the case study happens within. Because of its central role in defining the area of interest in a case study, the quintain significantly influences overall research design, data collection, and analysis methods, and should be clearly articulated.

The quintain of the present study is defined as, 'quality management in social welfare service programs funded by the NSW Department of Communities & Justice, Family & Community Services'. This quintain was used to guide case selection.

Case definition

Understanding the concept of 'case' is central to case study research, as it forms the basis for the in-depth exploration and analysis of complex issues in their real-

world settings. ‘Cases’ are the individual units of interest in case studies (Yin, 2003, p.90). Cases can be tangible or intangible things such as a person, event, process, organisation or any other sufficiently definable phenomenon taking place in an observable context (Stake, 2013, p.2). Cases themselves are defined and selected on the basis of the expectation that they will provide the best possible data and insight into the broader area of interest, which is defined by the quintain (Stake, 2013, p.6) and enquiry, which is defined by the research questions (Stake, 2013, p.9).

The goal in defining cases is to understand the quintain in depth, within the naturally occurring environment of the individual case (Stake, 2013, p.3). In multiple case studies especially, the focus of enquiry must be balanced between the depth of understanding that comes from the individual cases, and how the interplay of the cases within a multiple case study bear on the quintain (Stake, 2013, p.8). Cases in the present study are defined based on the quintain, ‘quality management in social welfare service programs funded by the NSW Department of Communities & Justice, Family & Community Services’. At the time of writing, FACS funds a total of 22 social welfare programs, divided into the following categories (NSW Department of Communities & Justice, 2024);

Table 3. FACS funded programs selected as cases

Social welfare program domains	Total constituent programs	Programs available for selection as cases for study	Total programs selected as cases	Percent coverage of all programs
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs	1	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>	0%
Domestic & Family Violence programs	9	Men’s Behaviour Change, Staying home Leaving Violence	2	22%

Child & Family programs	8	Family Preservation, Intensive Family Preservation, Kids Ealy Years Network, Out-of-home-care, Premier's Youth Initiative Their Futures Matter	6	75%
Community Building programs	1	Targeted Early Intervention	1	100%
Homelessness programs	3	Social and community Housing, Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing,	2	67%
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>22</i>		<i>11</i>	<i>50%</i>

A summary of the scope and purpose of each of these programs is available in Appendix 1.

FACS funded social welfare programs were selected as cases on the basis of their relevance to the research questions of this study, broadly centring around understanding the relationship between quality management practice across FACS funded social welfare programs. Defining cases in this way provided an opportunity to collect data from a range of perspectives on how quality was managed across the design and execution processes from research participants working within government (including contract staff, middle managers and senior executives), and in direct service delivery (including front-line workers, middle and senior managers at the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) who provide these services to end-user clients). Additionally, this case definition afforded study of how quality was managed in FACS through program and contract documents that define quality and performance processes directly related to the case definitions, *i.e.*, quality management relating to the various FACS funded social welfare programs.

As with the limitations on access to interview participants, discussed below in the section 'Sampling Strategies', the FACS funded social welfare programs under study were selected as cases on the basis of their availability. I approached FACS through the formal processes available to researchers to request access to information and staff, but was unable to reach agreement with FACS on accessing either contract documents or the staff involved with the full suite of programs they funded at the time data was being collected. However, the snowball sampling strategy used to recruit interview participants and the legal strategy used to access program documents yielded representative coverage of four out of five broad program domains funded by FACS, and an average of 50% of the constituent program types within these domains, as outlined in Table 3, above.

3.3 Methods

The present study is an example of mixed methods case study research, as it uses both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.217) describe several approaches to mixed methods design in case study research, including Explanatory Sequential Design, Exploratory Sequential Design and Convergent Design. Both the Explanatory and Exploratory Sequential designs require two instances of data collection and while they constitute robust means of gathering evidence, are suited to research projects with large research teams without significant time constraints, unlike the research projects carried out by PhD researchers (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.239). Convergent mixed methods research involves only one instance of data collection that gathers both qualitative and quantitative data, which is then followed by a comparative analysis of the results. The convergent approach is particularly useful in studies that aim to compare qualitative and quantitative data to answer their research questions. Creswell's contribution to convergent mixed methods design is one part of a broader discussion on the evolution and application of mixed methods research in the social sciences (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018, p.53). The convergent method's strength lay in its ability to provide a more complete understanding of research problems by harnessing the strengths of both qualitative

and quantitative research methods (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.237). The present study adopts this convergent approach.

3.4 Data types

Mixed methods research often uses multiple forms of both quantitative and qualitative data to examine an area of interest (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.181). Case study data may come from many sources, including interviews, documents, archival records, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. Although single data sources have strengths and weaknesses, any one type of data is not necessarily better than any other. Rather, various data sources are highly complementary when used together (Yin, 2009, p.99). The specific advantage of using various data sources is that it controls for any biases or weaknesses inherent in any one type of data, making the findings of the study a more reliable and accurate reflection of the topic of study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.14).

Yin (2009, p.102) discusses advantages and disadvantages of the various data sources used by case studies. Advantages of interviews include that they directly access people who have first-hand knowledge of the topics examined by the case study and that because of this, the data gathered from the interview can be insightful. However, the advantage of firsthand knowledge may also lead to the disadvantage that interview participants may be biased, may not understand poorly stated questions, may make errors based on inaccurate memories, or provide responses based on what they believe the interviewer wants to hear. Document analysis has the advantages of stability (documents remain unchanged over time), exactness, in that documents may contain precise references, names, etc., and that it is unobtrusive, in that it does not rely on research questions for its existence, unlike interview data which is only produced once a researcher asks a question. A related advantage of document analysis is described by Silverman (2021, p.202) as comprising 'naturalistic data', along with other forms of data that do not require research for their generation, like observational data. Naturalistic data may be defined as data that is collected via observation without recourse to the opinion of

the observed. Because of this it avoids some of the disadvantages of data sources generated by research, such as interviews, and therefore constitutes data that is more independent of research questions. Yin (2009, p.102) however, describes some disadvantages of document analysis including that it can be difficult to access if it cannot be found or is deliberately withheld and can be biased if either the documents gathered for study are incomplete or if the researcher interprets those documents with unstated, or unknown bias.

Yin (2003) describes interviews and documentation as amongst the most common of the six main case-study data sources, that also includes, archival records, direct observations, participant observation and physical artefacts. The present study uses both quantitative data (commonality of interview responses and document content with ISO9000 possible activities) and qualitative data (interview accounts of individual participant values) in its design to explore the dynamics of quality control among the various social welfare service programs (cases) within the setting of NSW government funded social welfare services. Further detail on data types and the corresponding analysis techniques used to examine them are described in the section entitled Coding Methods, below.

3.5 Validity strategies

Validity and reliability are controlled using means relevant to this type of qualitative research (Noble and Smith, 2015). Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.200) describe validity strategies as procedures that check and control the validity, or 'accuracy' of findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.199). Creswell et.al. recommends that two of eight possible validity strategies are chosen and employed to assess the accuracy of findings. Creswell's eight possible validity strategies are,

1. Triangulation
2. Checking accuracy of findings with research participants
3. Using rich descriptions to convey findings
4. Clarify the bias of the researcher

5. Present any evidence encountered to the contrary of the main findings
6. Spend prolonged periods engaging with the data in context
7. Use peer review
8. Use an external auditor

Of these, triangulation and clarifying researcher bias are employed as the main validity strategies in the present research, with elements of peer review also present via the support provided via PhD candidate supervision.

Triangulation

The use of both interviews and document analysis seemed the most appropriate of Creswell's validity strategies as these data sources were available in the context, and their mutual use satisfies the first and most commonly used of the eight validity strategies defined by Creswell et.al., to triangulate different data sources based on their convergence on a set of questions under study. As these two separate data sources provided the opportunity to triangulate findings, no other data source was strictly called for (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.200).

Researcher bias

The second validity strategy chosen of the eight prescribed by Creswell et.al, is to clarify the bias of the researcher. Creswell et.al recommends that such clarification includes information from the researcher about how topics such as their personal background might have influenced findings. Silverman (2021, p.474) adds, that a brief explanation of the personal circumstances that led to the specific research questions and methods that guided research, can provide readers with important information about the decisions made during it, including epistemological assumptions and methodological choices. For this reason, I include a brief personal context for this research, as follows.

During my early career between the years 2000 – 2012, I studied undergraduate psychology part time while working in the field of mental health casework. My work

generally involved supporting vulnerable people to live safely and independently. A significant support role, for those people who cannot do this unassisted. This work was guided and paid for by funding provided by the NSW government. I estimate that around 25% of my working time across the various roles I occupied involved accounting to the NSW government, according to the performance reporting criteria, as set out in their various contract documents.

It struck me at the time that much of the performance data I collected related to compliance with standard rules of accounting for money spent and logistical matters like the number of staff employed or the number of days per year the service operated. Very little to no information was sought in these time-consuming reports that related to the intended goals of the service, the wellbeing of its clients, nor to the efficiency with which these were achieved. This lack of scrutiny of outcomes relevant to the purpose of these intervention services was at odds with the careful methods employed in the field of psychology which I was studying, whose aim was to observe and alter unhealthy beliefs and behaviours. It also seemed at odds with the basic practicality of devoting as much time as possible to achieving those funded aims.

The performance reporting criteria written in contract documents did not function alone to direct my reporting efforts. Additionally, these were interpreted and prescribed in more or less strict terms by a chain of people involved in their high-level management. Such people included the management boards of the NGOs whom auspiced the services, and the contract managers employed by the NSW government to ensure their effective delivery. However, interpretation of performance reporting requirements varied between these groups, often resulting in a requirement to meet several reporting standards that were similarly uninterested in outcomes for clients. This lack of an agreed set of outcome-relevant rules to guide performance reporting appeared to cost the opportunity to achieve the reason-for-being of these services, at least in part.

I thought at the time that, the necessity of accountability in government's spending of tax dollars means that reporting is non-negotiable, but it seemed, at least morally, that the form it takes and the benefit it confers on end users should be demonstrable. It was these early experiences in my academic and professional career that inspired my curiosity about the performance criteria set for social services, and the way they were interpreted and executed by the various people involved in their delivery. This early experience also inspired my later work in government, including in the ambitious and progressive work I participated in, in the NSW Premier's Implementation Unit, using the principles of *Deliverology* to support meaningful improvement in large-scale government initiatives. It also inspired my work to design and run The Welcome Experience (O'Dowd-Austen, 2023, O'Dowd-Austen, 2025), which enjoyed great success in terms of supporting meaningful client outcomes (Good-Design-Australia, 2024a, Good-Design-Australia, 2024b) through use of the principles of ISO9000.

I am aware that my personal background offers a potential for bias. I have attempted to control for this bias firstly, by stating it and secondly, by approaching this research with the awareness that my personal experience of reporting requirements was limited. I have also adopted an aspiration to learn how the system of performance reporting in social welfare services might contain strengths that could be generalised more broadly across the system for the benefit of its clients and staff, and the taxpayer who funds them.

3.6 Data sources

Interviews

Interview data was sourced by recruiting interview participants from a broad range of roles in the delivery of social welfare services that are funded by FACS (see table 3, FACS Funded programs selected as cases). Interview participants extended from front line workers in NGO contractor organisations to high level decision makers within FACS. The content of interviews with high-level decisionmakers did not relate directly to any one program area but rather, to high-level oversight across all

programs. Interview participants from consulting firms who had consulted on the efficiency and impact of various FACS social welfare programs were also recruited to provide interview data from their perspective. The types of interviewees selected were purposefully chosen to align with the domains of enquiry investigated by the research questions (Silverman, 2021, p.286). This sampling strategy yielded the following sub-types of interview participants, defined here with reference to their relationship to the design, management or delivery of social welfare services.

Table 4. Data types & sources

Source	Data points
Interviews	
FACS front-line contracting staff	2
FACS middle managers and administrators	1
FACS Senior managers	5
FACS senior execs	4
NGO front-line staff	2
NGO middle managers and administrators	3
NGO senior execs	3
Premier's Implementation Unit senior execs	1
Premier's consultants on govt effectiveness	1
subtotal - interviews	22
Contract documents	
Brighter Futures: Family Preservation – Interim Program Specifications	1
Brighter Futures: Provision Guidelines	1

Housing: Community Housing Contract Compliance and Performance Management Framework	1
Housing: Premier's Youth Initiative – Human Services Agreement Schedule	1
Housing: Premier's Youth Initiative – Program Guidelines	1
Housing: Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing – Agreement for funding of services (HSA) – Program Guidelines / Service Specifications	1
Intensive Family Preservation: Family Information Sheet – Data Collection	1
Intensive Family Preservation: User Guide for Intensive Family Preservation / Support data collection tools	1
Men's Behaviour Change Program: Compliance Framework	1
Men's Behaviour Change Program: Minimum Standards	1
Men's Behaviour Change Program: NSW Practice Standards	1
Out-of-Home-Care: Permanency Support Program – Performance and Outcomes Data Reporting	1
Out-of-Home-Care: The Quality Assurance Framework – presentation	1
Staying Home, Leaving Violence: Human Services Agreement	1
Staying Home, Leaving Violence: Program Specifications	1
Targeted Early Intervention: Agreement for funding of services – Schedule	1
Targeted Early Intervention: Data Collection and Reporting Guide	1
Targeted Early Intervention: Program Specifications	1
subtotal – contracts	18
TOTAL – interviews + contracts	40

The present research gathered the perspectives of this network of inter-related people within the domain of enquiry via informal referral from existing participants

to people they frequently work with, like supervisors or staff reporting to them. This type of participant selection is known as ‘snowball sampling’ (Silverman, 2021, p.286). Snowball samples are characterised by a type of participant recruitment that relies on referral by existing participants to their own network of people related to the domain of enquiry examined by the research. The advantage of snowball sampling is that it can be used to explore the various perspectives that exist on the topics covered by the research questions (Goodman, 1961). This sampling method is particularly relevant to studies in which the identity of research participants may not be known, or if they are otherwise difficult to contact (Palinkas et al., 2015). As was the case with the present research.

Records of interviews

The use of audio recordings as a tool to gather interview data is generally taken for granted as the preferred method due to its perceived rigour and accuracy. In fact there are several sound reasons for employing audio recordings in the collection of interview data, including their assurance against the inaccuracy or incompleteness of field notes taken by a human with imperfect memory for the detail of conversations (Silverman, 2021, p.342). There are however some problems with the assumption that audio recordings always provide an ideal record of an interview. The first is the potential for the presence of an audio recording to influence the content provided by the interviewee. Interviewees are sometimes reticent to divulge sensitive or personal content when a device is used to make an audio recording, even if that device is turned off or out of sight (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). This reticence entails an additional and unquantified influence on the data collected in the interview process. The second problem is that audio recordings may not always be possible. In the cohort of interviewees for the present study, only a small minority agreed to have an audio record made.

For these reasons, the majority of interview data was gathered using field notes, taken by the researcher at the time of interview, with any detailed content noted and expanded upon, in line with interviewee response, directly afterwards.

Rutakumwa et al. (2020) suggest that field note records taken within a short time of interview have comparable accuracy to voice recordings of interviews, especially when taken by experienced qualitative interviewers. As the interviewer for this study, I have extensive professional experience and qualifications in interviewing and taking verbatim interview notes for legal matters involving child protection. I gained this skill during my professional work as a child protection caseworker, during which I interviewed many people for the purpose of gathering evidence to put before the NSW Children's Court.

To maximise the accuracy and effectiveness of interview field notes I followed the advice collated by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) on field notes for interviews by,

- Preparing for field note collection in line with my chosen methodology
- Recording basic information about the participant such as their role and its context to the study, and logistics including time and place of interview
- Limiting note taking to key ideas and issues only during the interview so as to maintain normal social cues such as eye contact and continuity of conversation
- Recording additional detail of participant responses immediately that the interview was complete.

Documentary evidence of performance and reporting requirements

Documentation relating to the contracted processes, performance and reporting requirements was also gathered for analysis. A formal application was made under the provisions of the Government Information Public Access (GIPA) Act (NSW-Information-and-Privacy-Commission, 2023) to request any document relevant to the performance and reporting requirements of every social welfare program funded by FACS at the time of the request. I requested access using this process, to all contract or program documents that described program processes, performance and reporting requirements, for all available social welfare programs

that FACS operated at the time of request. A list of the resulting documents is available in the Results chapter.

3.7 Summary

This section has provided a comprehensive account of the research design and approach used to examine how quality is managed within the setting of NSW government funded social welfare programs. The present study employs abductive reasoning in an embedded multiple case-study strategy to examine the diverse contexts within the various settings that social welfare services are delivered in NSW. Both qualitative and quantitative data are incorporated in a mixed methods design to facilitate a nuanced understanding of how quality is managed in real world settings. The triangulation of multiple data sources including interviews, document analysis, and case specific evidence provides a strong quantification of the validity of findings, offering a rounded perspective on the dynamics between the various stakeholders involved in service delivery, when balanced with the unavoidable but disclosed bias of the researcher. This approach to research design facilitates the important capture of insights from both government and non-government organisations, providing a deeper facility for analysing the factors that influence quality management across the range of settings it is applied within to deliver social welfare services.

Section 4 Data collection

This section outlines the methods used to collect data in this research, providing a discussion of formal ethical approval, participant recruitment strategies and the process to acquire documentary evidence for examination. Data arising from interviews and documentary evidence provided valuable quantitative and qualitative insights into the structure of the organisations under study, the perspectives of the various people involved in them, and the interplay of those dynamics with decision-making and performance management processes. Accessing both interview participants and documentary evidence was challenging and time consuming, involving several attempts using various strategies including formal and informal requests for interview

participation and for access to documents. The final attempt to acquire documentary evidence involving the use of the NSW Government Information Public Access Act (GIPA), ensured that a range of documents relevant to quality and performance management were available for study. This offered an opportunity to examine the formal prescription of any operational standards around quality management. The resulting combination of interview and documentary evidence data resulted in a strong foundation for understanding how quality is managed within the complex environment of social welfare service provision across the multiple organisational contexts involved.

4.1 Ethical approval

Ethical approval for human research was granted by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 30 October 2019 under application number 2019/797. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in line with Ethics Committee guidelines. Interviews were recorded either by contemporaneous notes, or electronically recorded and transcribed. All interview records were then de-identified and saved in an encrypted, password protected, electronic file that could only be accessed by research staff directly involved with the project. Additionally, all participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research, an outline of what would be asked of participants, contact details for the researchers and other details. Ethics approval and participant information sheet are provided in Appendix 2 and 3, respectively.

4.2 Sampling strategy – interviews and documentary evidence

Recruiting interview participants

Participant recruitment can be challenging (Liamputtong, 2019, p.72), especially in research involving government institutions or where the subject discussed might be perceived as sensitive (Manohar et al., 2018, p.5). I found this with the present study, having to resort to several methods of participant recruitment over an extended time to gather sufficient data. As the pool of candidates was limited by these recruitment challenges, interview participants were chosen non-randomly, according to availability. I

approached a total of 70 candidate interview participants over a period of 37-months beginning November 2019 and concluding December 2022, resulting in 22 completed interviews. A breakdown of interviewee types by program is outlined in Table 3.

The first method of participant recruitment I used was to go through the central office for research within the NSW Department of Family & Community Services. This office was known at the time as FACS Analysis, Insights and Research (FACSIAR). The publicly stated aim of this office was to coordinate internal program performance monitoring and improvement, and to facilitate access of external persons to FACS staff and data for research purposes. I began the formal process to request access to FACS staff and contract documents through FACSIAR on 22 November 2017 using the prescribed forms and procedures. My specific request was to be allowed to invite members of FACS staff to participate in 30-minute interviews, and to request relevant program documents from them. I was asked to revise my application on three occasions, and after FACSIAR had considered my application to research their department for a little over two years, they finally declined it on 3 March 2020, on grounds that,

- *“The project seeks to build a ... model of how decisions are made, which is likely to be too abstract to be meaningful for DCJ.”*
- *“The project also seeks to analyse DCJ’s current decision-making and governance processes with respect to how they align with ISO9000. The ISO9000 Quality Management System is not a relevant benchmark for us in DCJ. It is not a standard that we aspire to or that guides our principles of resource allocation. Therefore, a finding that DCJ is or is not aligned would not matter to us.”*
- *“Business units are already managing a number of trials as well as large scale program evaluations and do not have the resources to prioritise this project.”*

I subsequently developed a new method to invite FACS staff for interview by directly approaching them through email addresses and phone numbers that were available on public websites (see Appendix 4). Once I had secured an interview with one participant, I asked them for a referral to colleagues who may also like to participate in this study, in line with snowball, or chain sampling (Parker et al., 2019) which was effective at gathering interview participants, but not contract documents.

Gathering contract documents

The sampling approach for contract documents was also non-random, with contract documents accessed on the basis of availability. Given that FACSIAR denied access, and that most interview participants were reluctant to share these documents informally, I developed a second method of access; the NSW Government Information Public Access (GIPA) Act. The purpose of this legislation is to establish,

... a proactive, more open approach to gaining access to government information in New South Wales (NSW). The objects of the GIPA Act are to maintain and advance a system of responsible and representative democratic Government that is open, accountable, fair and effective (NSW-Information-and-Privacy-Commission, 2023).

This method of accessing internal NSW government documents is available to any NSW resident.

My GIPA application to FACS sought access to any contract document that outlined performance reporting requirements for any and all of the social services that it provided through a contract with an NGO. Under the GIPA legislation, access to government documents must be granted unless an argument can be made by FACS that disclosure would not ultimately be in the public interest. In the case of my request, this argument was attempted with relation to contract documents within the 'Their Futures Matter' program area. This argument was deemed indefensible by the independent legal staff assessing my GIPA application (who were also employed by FACS), however, these documents were never released to me. GIPA requires that applications for disclosure of eligible government information are granted access within 21 days. I began the process to request these documents via the formal GIPA process on 25 June 2021, and received the final requested document on 4 May 2022, after a total of nine clarifications and 314 days. It is worth noting that the majority of clarifications centred around me explaining the meaning of 'performance reporting requirements' to the FACS staff who managed these programs. This is not hyperbole, this explanation was required from me by the majority of program areas. Resulting from this process, a total of 18

contract documents describing the performance reporting requirements of 11 FACS funded programs were disclosed to me, as described in Table 3. All contract and related documents were securely stored in line with ethics approval requirements to ensure data security.

The goal of my sampling strategy was to recruit at least one interview participant from government and one from an NGO context for each program area under study, as well as to collect at least one contract document that described performance reporting requirements. The intention of this goal was to both understand the individual perspectives and values of people working in the various government and NGO contexts, and to provide a way of cross validating the data provided by each (Azungah, 2018), with respect to the kinds of information that were collected in each program to make judgements about the impact and value of each program. The collection of contract documents was intended to serve as a further means of triangulating the interview data, and as a means of understanding any differences observed between practice and intention in program delivery. This capacity for triangulation was possible in four of the twelve programs. Of the remaining eight programs, at least two data points (two interviews or an interview and a contract document) were available for triangulation in seven programs, and one data point only, in one program.

Table 5. Data type breakdown by program

<i>Program</i>	<i>FACS interviews</i>	<i>NGO interviews</i>	<i>Contract documents</i>	<i>Total data-points</i>
Family Preservation	1	0	2	3
High-level government decision making	2	1	0	3
Intensive Family Preservation	0	1	2	3
Kids Early Years Network	2	0	0	2
Men's Behaviour Change Program	1	2	3	6
Out of Home Care	2	1	2	5
Premier's Youth Initiative	0	0	2	2
Social and Community Housing	0	2	1	3
Staying Home, Leaving Violence	0	1	2	3

Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing	1	0	1	2
Targeted Early Intervention	1	2	3	6
Their Futures Matter	0	2	0	2
<i>TOTALS</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>40</i>

4.3 Interview procedure

Informed consent was obtained from each participant before interview, in line with ethics approval for this study. Participants were recruited via email invitation and informed of the purpose of the study as well as ethical considerations including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw (see section entitled Ethical Approval for more information).

22 semi-structured interviews were conducted with people involved with the design, management or administration of social service funding or with the delivery of these services on the ground. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via videoconferencing, based on the availability and preference of each participant. Interviews took between 20 and 90 minutes to complete, with an average duration of around 45 minutes. A record of each interview was made either in writing by the interviewer at the time the interview was held, or in some cases via a recording made with participant's consent, then transcribed later for analysis. While recording interviews for later transcription was preferred by me, many participants were unwilling to allow it. While video or audio recordings are generally preferred methods, interviewee rights and consent must be observed, especially in contexts they consider sensitive. In such cases, note taking presents an appropriate and viable option (Kakanda-Sinkala, 2024), as was the case in the present research, where the unease of the majority of interviewees about creating a recording of interviews left contemporaneous note-taking as the best available option. Muswazi and Nhamo (2013) propose that such notetaking is a critical skill when recording research interviews, and is key for novice researchers to master. Rather than recording what is said in a word-for word fashion, the best strategy is to strategically record interviewee responses in a way that that best captures the sentiment of what is said, during the interview, without sacrificing detail. Such notes taken at the time

interviews are being conducted, also known as field notes (Silverman, 2021, p.331), should be taken systematically (Best and Kahn, 1996) and have fidelity to the extent that they construct a verbal portrait of interviewee responses without vagueness or over generalisation (Muswazi and Nhamo, 2013). Such a balance of detail and summary aims to make the best possible representation of interviewee accounts and explanations including on questions of why or how specific events happen and their theories on why this is so (Silverman, 2021, p.332). When taken in this way, contemporaneous notes outperform listening alone on issues of the accuracy in reflecting interviewee responses (MacDonald, 2016). The present research produced contemporaneous notes that met these standards wherever video or audio recording was not possible. All interview records, either notes or recordings, were securely stored in line with ethics approval requirements to ensure data security.

4.4 Interview questions

Semi-structured interviews are a suitable method for studying people's opinions or views involving complex situations, especially where interview participants are not used to discussing their views or opinions in relation to the phenomena under study (Barriball and While, 1994). Semi structured interviews are useful in these circumstances as they allow for participants to be engaged in conversations on aspects of the phenomena under study they find meaningful (Cridland et al., 2015). To effectively direct interview conversation towards answering present research questions, careful consideration was given to the types of questions asked, their order and their capacity to elicit engaged discourse (Krauss et al., 2009). An important factor in achieving these functions was to construct the interview guide from a strong basis of understanding of the topics of enquiry, so that the researcher formed a good grasp of the subject before formulating and asking questions (Kallio et al., 2016). To do this, an interview guide incorporating 20 compound questions (see table 6) was developed to thematically cover the 49 possible activities proposed by the International Standard of Quality Management Systems, ISO9000, in order to understand the relationship of those proposed activities to practices

adopted by FACS and their NGO contractors. This method of deriving alignment of practices with the activities suggested by ISO9000 builds on the work of Lee et al. (2009), who constructed a Likert choice survey to explore patterns of implementation of seven of the eight ISO9000 principles in service organisations, based on the year 2000 version of that standard. The contribution made by the present study is that staff practices aligning with all of the 49 possible activities suggested by the current version of ISO9000, across all seven of the current seven quality domains, may be captured and measured.

Table 6. Interview questions

#	Interview question
1	<i>What is the formal intended purpose of the service, as reflected in formal documents from the funding body?</i>
2	<i>Who are the primary beneficiaries of the service? Does anyone else benefit?</i>
3	<i>In the context of your role, how do you know what the needs of those beneficiaries are, and whether they were met by the service?</i>
4	<i>How does your organisation link its broader objectives to the needs of its clients?</i>
5	<i>What is your role in providing the service?</i>
6	<i>Who are the other people working to provide the service? What are their roles?</i>
7	<i>Do you provide feedback to them on their performance in delivering the service? Why or why not? If so, how?</i>
8	<i>Do they provide similar feedback to you? Why or why not? If so, how?</i>
9	<i>How does the service's purpose transform into a realised benefit for its clients?</i>
10	<i>Do you know whether the service is fulfilling its purpose? If so, what information do you use to make that decision?</i>
11	<i>Do you receive or contribute to feedback to report or improve the performance of the service in achieving its intended purpose? If not, why? If so, how?</i>

12	<i>In your own words tell me, how does the service fit in to the big picture?</i>
13	<i>Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?</i>
14	<i>What do you think your organisation trying to achieve with the service?</i>
15	<i>Does your organisation seek your views on the service, or more broadly, and take them into account? If so, how?</i>
16	<i>Do you seek the views of your colleagues on the service, or more broadly, and take them into account? If so, how?</i>
17	<i>Who are the ultimate decision makers about the service? Can they support the effectiveness of the service? How?</i>
18	<i>Do they help to create a unified direction and purpose of the service in their role? If not, why? If so, how</i>
19	<i>As one of the people working to provide the service, do you help to create a unified direction and purpose of the service in your role? If not, why? If so, how?</i>
20	<i>Does the environment that the service happens in, support or constrain delivery of its intended purpose? How? / How could this environment better support the service to achieve its intended purpose? Is it possible to achieve this?</i>

These 20 questions constituted the main questions asked during interview. They were stated in the same words to each participant. Participants were then given the opportunity to answer in their own time and words (Rubin and Rubin, 2004, p.156). If participants asked for clarification I would further explain or elaborate on the questions without providing examples. Additionally, if participants gave short or unclear answers, additional probe questions would be asked to clarify or expand upon answers (Rubin and Rubin, 2004, p.164). These questions took several general forms including, “*could you expand on that, please tell me more, or what exactly to do mean by ...* “. Nineteen of the 20 questions sought to prompt responses from participants about organisational conditions that aligned with the 49 possible activities described by ISO9000. These responses were sought to elicit responses in

answer to research question one (RQ1). Further explanation of how interview questions were mapped to the possible activities described by ISO9000 are provided under the section heading, A priori codes, below.

Two of the 20 interview questions asked about participant views and values, to elicit responses that could answer research question 2 (RQ2). Those questions were 12 and 13, and were stated as,

12. *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*
13. *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

In line with RQ2, these questions were asked with the goal of understanding whether the personal values of participants varied in relation to the extent to which they reported quality management practices in the other interview questions. These questions were intentionally asked later in the interview to establish rapport beforehand (Rubin and Rubin, 2004, p.158). Question 12 did not relate directly to any ISO9000 possible activity, rather it was asked to elicit a response about the personally held views and values of participants in the context of the case; the topic of their day-to-day work. This question sought to examine whether the participant identified their work as morally valuable to themselves or the world. Question 13 also sought responses about the personal values of participants, around the aims of the program and their work generally. This question invited participants to delve into deeper, more personal territory than the previous question, by directly inviting responses about their own intentions in doing this kind of work. Additionally, this question overlapped with ISO9000 possible activities within the ISO9000, *Engagement of People* principle. As such, responses to this question were a priori coded for the relevant possible activities as well as qualitatively analysed for themes of personal value for later comparison against the extent of quality management practices they reported, as with question 12.

4.5 Summary

Participant recruitment and document collection were challenging, as the nature of this research was seen as sensitive by participants. To resolve this issue, a combination of direct outreach and snowball sampling was used to engage a diverse set of interviewees from both government and non-government organisations. Additionally, legal means available via GIPA were employed to compel FACS to release documentary evidence that described the way that quality and performance are managed. Despite the challenges, the diversity of data types gathered enhanced the credibility and reliability (Langley and Abdallah, 2011) of this research. This diverse data included accounts of quality management from the range of roles played by interview participants in the process of delivering social welfare services, as well as contract documents from a broad range of social welfare services funded by FACS.

Section 5 Research question one – coding and analysis

The following section presents the methods and processes used to code and analyse data collected from interviews and contract documents in this research, in answer to RQ1. Coding was approached with both a priori and inductive methods, as these were most appropriate for achieving depth of understanding of the phenomena under study while maintaining validity and reliability. However, a priori coding was used exclusively to determine an answer to RQ1, as this method produced the most suitable output for that set of questions. A priori codes arose from the 49 possible activities described by the International Standard for Quality Management Systems, ISO9000, in pursuit of quality management. These possible activities provided a proxy of good quality management, as agreed by an international community of quality practitioners. Use of the ISO9000 possible activities as a priori codes facilitated a measure of quantitative alignment in the report of such practices in interviews and their prescription in contract documents. To reduce the length of interviews and thereby facilitate a higher participation and completion rate, the 49 possible activities were thematically consolidated into 20 interview questions that indirectly invited interviewees to comment on practice that aligned with the seven quality management principles prescribed by ISO9000. A priori coding generated numeric scores when interview

participants or contract documents reported work practices intended to support quality management, including any that were not directly linked to ISO9000. This coding technique was employed to establish a quantifiable understanding of the presence and breadth strategies to manage quality in the delivery of social welfare services in practice.

5.1 A priori coding

The 49 possible activities in pursuit of quality management, described by ISO9000 are examples of activities that may bring about conditions and processes that facilitate management of the seven quality principles described by ISO9000 (International-Standards-Organization, 2016). These 49 possible activities, divided between the seven quality management principles discussed by ISO9000 are not intended to be exhaustive, but are collectively indicative of the types of activities that bring about quality management. As such, these possible activities form an independent and internationally agreed proxy of the kinds of activities that bring about effective quality management. This made them an excellent candidate to serve as a priori codes to indicate the presence and degree of quality management practices reported in interviews and contract document discussing social welfare services.

ISO9000 Principles and possible actions

ISO9000 defines seven principles that should be observed in pursuit of a quality management system. The principles are,

1. Customer Focus
2. Engagement of people
3. Evidence based decision making
4. Improvement
5. Leadership
6. Process approach
7. Relationship management

ISO9000 describes each principle in terms of,

- A defining statement
- The rationale for its inclusion
- Its key benefits
- The possible actions that might be undertaken in pursuit of each principle.

Table 7, below provides a list of these seven principles, their 49 possible activities, and how these relate to the 20 interview questions. For a full separate listing of possible activities, see Appendix 5 – ISO9000 Quality principles and possible activities to manage them.

Interview questions were derived from ISO9000 possible actions

The 49, ISO9000 possible activities were aligned with 20 analogously themed interview questions to create an opportunity to observe alignment of interview responses and contract documents with those activities. Some possible activities are aligned with multiple interview questions, giving interviewees multiple opportunities to score against that possible activity in different scenarios. Table 7 maps the 20 interview questions to the seven ISO9000 principles and the 49 possible activities, which interviews and contracts were coded to.

Table 7. Interview questions mapped to ISO9000 principles and possible activities.

Interview question number	Interview question	ISO9000 principles captured	ISO9000 possible activities	This possible activity also covered in
1	<i>What is the formal intended purpose of the service, as reflected in</i>	Customer focus	Communicate customer needs and expectations throughout the organization	
			Plan, design, develop, produce, deliver and support products and services to meet customer needs and expectations	

	<i>formal documents from the funding body?</i>		Measure and monitor customer satisfaction and take appropriate actions	
2	<i>Who are the primary beneficiaries of the service? Does anyone else benefit?</i>	Customer focus	Recognize direct and indirect customers as those who receive value from the organization;	
			Determine and take action on relevant interested parties' needs and appropriate expectations that can affect customer satisfaction	
3	<i>In the context of your role, how do you know what the needs of those beneficiaries are, and whether they were met by the service?</i>	Customer focus	Actively manage relationships with customers to achieve sustained success	
			Understand customers' current and future needs and expectations	
4	<i>How does your organisation link its broader objectives to the needs of its clients?</i>	Customer focus	Link the organization's objectives to customer needs and expectations	
5	<i>What is your role in providing the service?</i>	Improvement	Promote establishment of improvement objectives at all levels of the organization	Q 11
6	<i>Who are the other people working to provide the</i>	Engagement of people Relationship management	Communicate with people to promote understanding of the importance of their individual contribution	
			Establish relationships that balance short-term gains with long-term considerations	

	<i>service? What are their roles?</i>		Determine relevant interested parties (such as providers, partners, customers, investors, employees or society as a whole) and their relationship with the organization	
			Determine and prioritize interested party relationships that need to be managed	
7	<i>Do you provide feedback to them on their performance in delivering the service? Why or why not? If so, how?</i>	Relationship management	Measure performance and provide performance feedback to interested parties, as appropriate, to enhance improvement initiatives	Q 8
			Establish collaborative development and improvement activities with providers, partners and other interested parties	Q 8
			Encourage and recognize improvements and achievements by providers and partners	Q 8
			Gather and share information, expertise and resources with relevant interested parties	
8	<i>Do they provide similar feedback to you? Why or why not? If so, how?</i>	Relationship management	Measure performance and provide performance feedback to interested parties, as appropriate, to enhance improvement initiatives	Q 7
			Establish collaborative development and improvement activities with providers, partners and other interested parties	Q 7
			Encourage and recognize improvements and achievements by providers and partners	Q 7

9	<i>How does the service's purpose transform into a realised benefit for its clients?</i>	Process approach	Define objectives of the system and processes necessary to achieve them	
			Establish authority, responsibility and accountability for managing processes	
			Determine process interdependencies and analyse the effect of modifications to individual processes on the system as a whole	
			Manage processes and their interrelations as a system to achieve the organization's quality objectives effectively and efficiently	
			Manage risks which can affect outputs of the processes and overall outcomes of the QMS	
10	<i>Do you know whether the service is fulfilling its purpose? If so, what information do you use to make that decision?</i>	Evidence based decision making	Make all data needed available to the relevant people	
			Ensure that data and information are sufficiently accurate, reliable and secure	
			Analyse and evaluate data and information using suitable methods	
			Ensure people are competent to analyse and evaluate data as needed	
			Determine, make decisions and take actions based on evidence, balanced with experience and intuition	
			Measure and monitor key indicators to demonstrate the organization's performance	

11	<i>Do you receive or contribute to feedback to report or improve the performance of the service in achieving its intended purpose? If not, why? If so, how?</i>	Improvement	Promote establishment of improvement objectives at all levels of the organization	Q 5
			Develop and deploy processes to implement improvement projects throughout the organization	
			Track, review and audit the planning, implementation, completion and results of improvement projects	
			Integrate improvement consideration into development of new or modified products and services and processes	
			Educate and train people at all levels on how to apply basic tools and methodologies to achieve improvement objectives	
			Ensure people are competent to successfully promote and complete improvement projects	
			Recognize and acknowledge improvement	
12	<i>In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?</i>	Not applicable to ISO9000	This question seeks information on the participant's view of the value of their work to the community, for analysis in RQ2.	

13	<i>Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?</i>	Engagement of people	This question seeks information on the participant's view of the value of their work to themselves, for analysis in RQ2. Additionally, answers to this question were coded for alignment with ISO9000 activities, Recognize and acknowledge people's contribution, learning and improvement & Enable self-evaluation of performance against personal objectives	Q 15
14	<i>What do you think your organisation trying to achieve with the service?</i>	Process approach	Ensure the necessary information is available to operate and improve the processes and to monitor, analyse and evaluate the performance of the overall system	
15	<i>Does your organisation seek your views on the service, or more broadly, and take them into account? If so, how?</i>	Engagement of people	Conduct surveys to assess people's satisfaction, communicate the results and take appropriate actions	
			Recognize and acknowledge people's contribution, learning and improvement	Q 13
			Enable self-evaluation of performance against personal objectives	
16	<i>Do you seek the views of your</i>	Engagement of people	Facilitate open discussion and sharing of knowledge and experience;	

	<i>colleagues on the service, or more broadly, and take them into account? If so, how?</i>		Promote collaboration throughout the organization	
17	<i>Who are the ultimate decision makers about the service? Can they support the effectiveness of the service? How?</i>	Leadership	Ensure that leaders at all levels are positive examples to people in the organization;	
			Communicate the organization's mission, vision, strategy, policies and processes throughout the organization	
			Establish a culture of trust and integrity	
18	<i>Do they help to create a unified direction and purpose of the service in their role? If not, why? If so, how?</i>	Leadership	Encourage an organization-wide commitment to quality	
			Create and sustain shared values, fairness and ethical models for behaviour at all levels of the organization	
19	<i>As one of the people working to provide the service, do you help to create a unified direction and purpose of the service in your role? If not, why? If so, how?</i>	Leadership	Provide people with the required resources, training and authority to act with accountability	
			Inspire, encourage and recognize the contribution of people	
20	<i>Does the environment that the service</i>	Engagement of people	Empower people to determine constraints to performance and to take initiatives without fear	

	<p><i>happens in, support or constrain delivery of its intended purpose? How? / How could this environment better support the service to achieve its intended purpose? Is it possible to achieve this?</i></p>	<p>Process approach</p>	<p>Understand the organization's capabilities and determine resource constraints prior to action</p>	
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This theming of ISO9000 possible activities into 20 interview questions did not limit the ability of any one response or contract section to record alignment with possible activities. Rather the 20 interview questions served only as a way of limiting the number of questions asked during interview. This feature of multiple opportunities to register alignment with ISO9000 manifested in two ways.

Several opportunities to demonstrate alignment with ISO9000 were offered

For example, questions five & 11 both provide an opportunity to report the ISO9000 possible activity of, *promote establishment of improvement objectives at all levels of the organization*. Responses were registered as reporting this activity in question five if the participant said something about how they personally contribute to this. Responses were registered as reporting this possible activity in question 11 if the participant said something about how the organisation contributes to this.

Alignment with ISO9000 possible activities could be registered, regardless of where it occurred

Responses from any interview question or contract section could register alignment with any of the 49 possible activities, wherever they were observed in the interview

conversation or contract document. Additionally, where interview or contract data provided evidence of multiple examples of an attempt to engage in that kind of activity, multiple scores were recorded. This capacity to register multiple reports of any single possible activity was applied across all interview and contract data, in order to maintain consistent treatment of all data.

5.2 Determining scores

Strength of alignment against ISO9000 possible actions was captured

Quantitizing is the practice engaged by qualitative research to enumerate qualities of interview data that happen within the level of a given code, such as its intensity, direction or other content that lends itself to being represented by numbers, rather than words (Banha et al., 2022). The conventions of magnitude coding are particularly relevant in quantitizing cases where intensity is a factor that the researcher wishes to expose, especially when used in the context of semi-structured interviews, as magnitude coding may be used to add a supplemental sub-code in the form of a numeric value to indicate factors such as the strength of alignment with a given master code (Saldaña, 2012, p.72). The use of coding methods such as quantitizing and magnitude coding are particularly appropriate for use in mixed methods research (Banha et al., 2022) as they take advantage of the opportunity to use quantitative data to add texture and richness to qualitative data (Saldaña, 2012, p.73). Examples of use in similar mixed methods studies include, using magnitude coding to enumerate the frequency with which people discuss their experiences with illness (Tanner et al., 2024), or the strength of alignment with preferred teaching methods (Haslip and Terry, 2023).

The present research used magnitude coding to enumerate the strength of alignment of interview responses and contract data with ISO9000 possible activities. Three levels of strength were identified as sufficient to group observed alignment of this data with the ISO9000 possible activities, or other activities intended to manage quality. Resulting from this three-level index, interview and contract data was magnitude coded as follows.

No attempt	If there was no evidence that a possible activity or any other thematically related activity occurred in an interview response or contract document, I coded that response / section of text as 'no attempt' at that ISO9000 possible activity in both NVivo and a supporting Microsoft Excel spread sheet. Responses coded as 'no attempt' for a particular possible activity attracted a score of zero on the spread sheet.
Some attempt	If there was some evidence that a possible activity or any other thematically related activity occurred in an interview response or contract document, I coded that response / section of text as 'some attempt' at that ISO9000 possible activity in both the NVivo and the Microsoft Excel spread sheet. The 'some attempt' category attracted a score of one.
Strong attempt	If there was strong evidence that a possible activity or any other thematically related activity occurred in an interview response or contract document, I coded that response / section of text as 'strong attempt' at that ISO9000 possible activity in both the NVivo and the Microsoft Excel spread sheet. The 'strong attempt' category attracted a score of two.

Calculating scores for each Case

Alignment of cases (FACS funded programs) with the codes (ISO9000 possible activities) was calculated using three mathematical methods, based on their quantitized scores, as follows

1. Absolute alignment with each possible activity
2. Magnitude of alignment with each possible activity
3. Sum of alignment with each of the seven ISO9000 quality principles (*i.e.*, Customer focus, Evidence based decision making ... *etc.*). This figure included

magnitude scores for each alignment with the 49 possible activities, grouped by principle.

This operation resulted in a raw score for each case. However, the different number of interviews and contract documents (data points) gathered for each test variable (Agency type - government / NGO, Participant job level - Executive / Manager / Frontline worker, and Case - 11 Cases) gave rise to a potential problem in comparing raw scores between each test variable, as raw scores would sum as higher for data points with higher incidence (e.g. if I collected three interviews for one case on four for another), which would artificially inflate their mathematical alignment with the codes.

To resolve this, I developed two second order scoring methods, scoring type A, and B.

- A. **An average of scores across test variables**, with scores for the variables of calculated by averaging the scores across all data points.
- B. A **sum of all incidents of alignment** with codes across all interview and contract documents. This score reflected the sum of the number of times that variable registered alignment with a code.

The Type A score was used for mathematical purposes, to maintain equity of comparison between differing numbers of data points for each variable type in calculations involving statistical inter-variable comparison. The Type B score was retained for differential analysis not involving inter-variable comparison. Both score types retained the valence provided by the quantizing measure described above.

Calculating a perfect score for comparison with interview and contract data

I created an idealised score as a benchmark with which to compare observed scores. To do this I simply recorded a perfect score of two (strong attempt) against each of the 49 a priori codes. This ideal case was created to provide a standard metric to compare test cases and organisations. The resulting idealised case score of 98 represents the

maximum possible alignment that any given interview or contract document could achieve overall.

Dealing with the messiness of scoring interview responses against a priori codes

Scores arising from interviews were manipulated in three ways to bring about the fairest possible comparison with codes. In the interest of transparency and repeatability, a description of these manipulations follows.

Responses to codes were registered regardless of where they occurred

In the field, responses to interview questions are more messy than we can plan for (Silverman, 2021, p.152). In the present research, interviewees did not always report activities that aligned with one of the a priori codes, in the manner that I had themed them. When this happened, scores against codes were recorded from interviewee responses irrespective of which question they were answering at a particular time.

A priori code scores were summed and averaged where there was more than one interview per organisation

Where more than one person was interviewed from a given organisation, used their averaged scores to assess the strength of ISO9000 alignment of their organisation and their case (relevant to research question one). However, I retained individual scores to assess them as an individual (relevant to research question two). I did this as I assumed that averaging scores of the various perspectives and experiences among people participating in the running of the same social service within one organisation, provided a more balanced account of alignment with ISO9000 possible activities. This representation of the score of a case (FACS program) might be justified in several ways,

1. Where one interviewee scores lower than another, this decreases average score, reflecting something like the total capacity of that program to comply with ISO9000 possible activities.

2. As programs are implemented by groups rather than individuals, an average score may be more representative the real practice of program alignment with ISO9000 possible activities.

Thus, gaps or strengths in total alignment of any given program with ISO9000 possible activities is averaged out over the knowledge, capacity and practice of several people involved in its implementation.

A handicap system was used to support fair analysis of score at case level

Interviewees appeared to have varying knowledge of the quality requirements of the social welfare service contracts they worked within. This became apparent when more than one interview was conducted within any given case.

Where this happened, I recorded two scores.

2. For the interview
 - a. This score functioned as an implementation score for that particular organisation, rather than an implementation score for the program across all organisations that I had data for (the case).
2. For the case
 - a. This score functioned as a handicap score to reflect the attributes of the entire case regarding its alignment with the relevant code/s. To do this, I filled in gaps of knowledge (or its reporting) in any one interview, by registering the code alignment from the other data point, within the same case.

5.3 Statistical methods

Statistical analyses were chosen to provide a quantifiable answer to research question one, by exploring the extent to which practice reported in interviews, or prescribed in contract documents, aligned with the possible activities suggested by ISO9000. Within the interview data, responses were examined at the variable level of participant, seniority of job role, organisation type and FACS program (Case). Exploratory analysis of

this data simply sought to map patterns of interview and contract data alignment with the ISO9000 standard, without assuming either inference or normal distribution. These analyses were based on the numeric scores arising from a priori codes and their magnitudes. Given the relatively basic requirements of analysis for RQ1, descriptive statistics were the most appropriate and meaningful methods for discovering patterns in the data (Field, 2024, pp.7-27). The descriptive statistics used to assess the extent and distribution of alignment were, standard deviations, ranges, skewness and kurtosis. Data visualisation techniques including histograms and distribution plots were also used to illustrate distributional characteristics. These analysis techniques align with recommendations in mixed methods research using quantizing, to reveal thematic insights by identifying magnitude and directionality within coded categories (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006).

Section 6 Research question two- coding and analysis

Eisenhardt (1989b), Miles and Huberman (1984, p.16) and Langley and Abdallah (2011) converge on the argument that the seminal case study literature fails to define qualitative analysis methods in enough detail to illuminate clear means of producing findings from the often vast data. Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) argue further, that this historical lack of precision in defining qualitative analysis techniques, as opposed to the relatively high levels of certainty and agreement about quantitative ones, makes it all the more important to make qualitative data analysis techniques more transparent. Eisenhardt's (1989) resulting technique, has over seventy-nine thousand citations on Google Scholar at the time of writing. It entails the work of other established case study analysis methods including, line-by-line analysis of data as prescribed by Grounded Theory Model (Glaser and Strauss, 1999, p.57), the design of case study research as described by Yin (2003) and the analytical procedures for case studies described by (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The Eisenhardt (1989b) hybrid case analysis procedure provides a more complete and transparent set of instructions than exists in any one of the other popular analysis protocols. Further, as this hybrid analysis technique focusses more on empirically defining phenomena described by the data (Ravenswood, 2011), than participant explanations of the phenomena (Langley and Abdallah, 2011) (Khan and

VanWynsberghe, 2008), the Eisenhardt (1989b) analysis technique is more closely aligned with the pragmatist approach adopted by the present study, that seeks to achieve external validity of case study findings that incorporate both positivist and interpretive perspectives (Langley and Abdallah, 2011).

In line with the Eisenhardt (1989b) technique, analysis in the present study is facilitated through developing case-descriptions (quantitative and qualitative) for a convergent mixed methods analysis. These multiple analytic methods included Cross-Case Synthesis, Grounded Theory coding and Appraisal Analysis. While Grounded Theory, Appraisal Analysis and Cross-Case Synthesis are distinct analytic methods, the present study integrated all three in line with its Pragmatist perspective. Appraisal Analysis (Martin and White, 2003) was used to generate insights grounded in the deep linguistic meaning of participant interview responses, rather than surface level thematic summaries. The resulting Appraisal Analysis output then underwent further intra and inter-case comparison and coding techniques from Grounded Theory, using Charmaz's (2014) initial and focused coding phases. Finally, Cross-Case Synthesis techniques (Eisenhardt, 1989b) were used to compare patterns between a priori codes (ISO9000 alignment) and inductive codes (participant values), within and between the eleven embedded cases. This integration of methods enabled this study to produce context sensitive insights and credible explanatory power.

6.1 Appraisal Analysis informed initial coding

Appraisal Analysis, a technique within the broad school of Discourse Analysis (Martin and White, 2003, p.33) was adopted in this study as a deep and linguistically grounded way to identify and interpret evaluative meaning in participant speech. Specifically, it provided a structured method of uncovering the values, judgements and emotional orientations embedded in the language choices made by participants, within the themes they discuss (Martin and White, 2003, p.1). This made Appraisal Analysis a powerful and appropriate substitute for the initial coding phase in Charmaz's (2014, pp.1-4) Grounded Theory process.

The Appraisal Analysis categorical lenses of Attitude, Engagement, Graduation (Martin and White, 2003, p.35) and Metarelations (Macken-Horarik, 2003) were applied to participant interview data. Attitude evaluation sought to identify three sub-categories of interview participants feelings around the topics they discussed including their, emotions (Affect), moral judgements about people (Judgement), and their evaluation of objects or phenomena (Appreciation). Engagement evaluation was undertaken to determine how participants aligned with (Heteroglossic) or separated themselves from (Monoglossic) other voices, in order to understand their feelings of isolation from or solidarity with their peers, clients and organisations. Graduation analysis was used to capture where and why participants used language to amplify or diminish the force of their assertions. Coding participant responses according to this structure identified any emotional or value-laden perspectives around their work, as well as how participants positioned themselves in relation to it. Finally, an assessment of Metarelations was undertaken to determine whether participants ordered or connected parts of their response to guide the research interviewer in a tacit value argument. Metarelational analysis was particularly valuable as it shed light on how participants framed their narratives around organisational decisions or engagement with quality management, often suggesting their positions without overtly stating them. Appraisal Analysis allowed this study to look beyond the surface meaning of participant responses, to examine how they said things, why they said them that way, and the values betrayed by their linguistic choices (Martin and White, 2003, pp.40-41). These processes provided the structure necessary to assess complex qualitative data and supported deep insights to inform initial, Grounded Theory codes.

6.2 Charmaz's Grounded Theory developed conceptual depth

This analysis aimed to facilitate a theoretical explanation for how unaccounted-for staff interests affect the uptake of quality practices in government. To do this, Charmaz's (2014) Constructivist revision of Glasser & Strauss's (2017) Grounded Theory (GT) was adopted for its emphasis on flexibility and reflexivity in methods, in line with the Pragmatist position of this study. This approach was particularly suited to the present

study, as it intrinsically recognises that both data and its analysis are socially constructed (Charmaz, 2014, p.14).

The GT coding for this study was informed by an Appraisal Analysis of interview responses, which yielded the initial codes. Charmaz (2014, pp.45-47), expressly advises that initial codes may be based upon anything that can be understood from the data, and encourages deep engagement with meaning from the perspective of the participant, and their environment. This advice clearly incorporates the use of Appraisal Analysis, as it focuses on meaning from the participants' perspective. The resulting initial codes were generated using line-by-line coding of the Appraisal Analysis output, to identify significant meaning by engaging deeply with the data in a detailed way (Charmaz, 2014, pp.50-53). Once initial codes were established, focused codes were developed through a process of grouping and explaining the initial codes across interviews (Charmaz, 2014, pp.57-60). This process involved the constant comparison of meaning embedded in the initial codes in each interview, across all other interviews, to yield higher-level conceptual categories that captured like-sentiments, while maintaining the integrity of the meaning of each constituent initial code. This process followed Charmaz, with each focused code consistently produced iteratively and comparatively (Charmaz, 2014, p.60). Theoretical codes were also developed during the initial phase of analysis, however they were later discarded as they did not contribute meaningfully to the cross-case synthesis. Grounded Theory coding techniques may (Hoda, 2021), and have been used without developing a full Grounded Theory, including in studies similar to the present one (Farr and Cressey, 2015). This is possible because of their flexibility and utility (Al-Eisawi, 2022).

6.3 Cross-case synthesis provided explanatory insights

Cross-case synthesis was used to systematically surface response patterns (Creswell and Poth, 2016) between participant reported quality practices (interview ISO9000 scores) organisational quality mandates (contract ISO9000 scores) and participant values (Appraisal Analysis and GT codes) across the variables of, agency type, staff job level, and eleven embedded Cases. Cross-case synthesis excels at producing insights based on

patterns and themes across multiple cases in studies like the present one (Yin, 2003 pp 158) (Miles and Huberman, 1994 pp 173) and it sits within the analytical paradigm of multi-case analysis methods proposed by Stake (2013 pp 46), (Yin, 2009 pp 156) and Eisenhardt (1989b). This method facilitated deep understanding of the quintain in the present study, producing verifiable assertions based on observations made in its constituent cases (Khan and VanWynsberghe, 2008). It identified similarities and differences between cases, extracted common patterns and themes, and allowed overarching conclusions to be drawn (Yin, 2003 pp 156). It also enhanced the external validity and generalisability of findings by examining how patterns emerged across different cases (Miles and Huberman, 1994 pp 173, Yin, 2009 pp 156).

The specific process followed in this study is described by Eisenhardt (1989b) in her seminal paper, *Building Theories from Case Study Research*. In particular, this study used analysis techniques described by step five of Eisenhardt's eight step process. This consisted broadly of forming careful and comprehensive within-case analyses, and then using that analysis to perform between-case comparisons to surface similarities and differences between cases (Eisenhardt, 1989b, Langley and Abdallah, 2011).

Within-case descriptions, comprised of the quantitative and qualitative analyses described above (ISO9000 alignment reported in interviews and contracts, and the Appraisal and GT analysis of participant values), were used as the foundation for cross-case comparison through paired and grouped comparisons across all case profiles and participant variables. This structure made it possible to examine whether high or low participant reporting of quality management practices was reliably associated with organisational or personal characteristics. To ensure exhaustive comparison across cases and minimise interpretive bias, these comparisons were made systematically and iteratively. Potentially explanatory relationships in the data were noted where repeated alignments were observed, such as strong reporting of ISO9000 alignment and shared personal values. Comparisons that yielded either no or weak alignment across variables were also examined for other contextual factors that might qualify broader claims of this analysis.

This process supported the development of empirically anchored propositions about the relationship between staff values, organisational environment and the uptake of the kinds of quality practices described by ISO9000. By integrating the output of the quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted by this study. Figure 6 illustrates how the Cross-Case synthesis compared within-case and between-case data in this study.

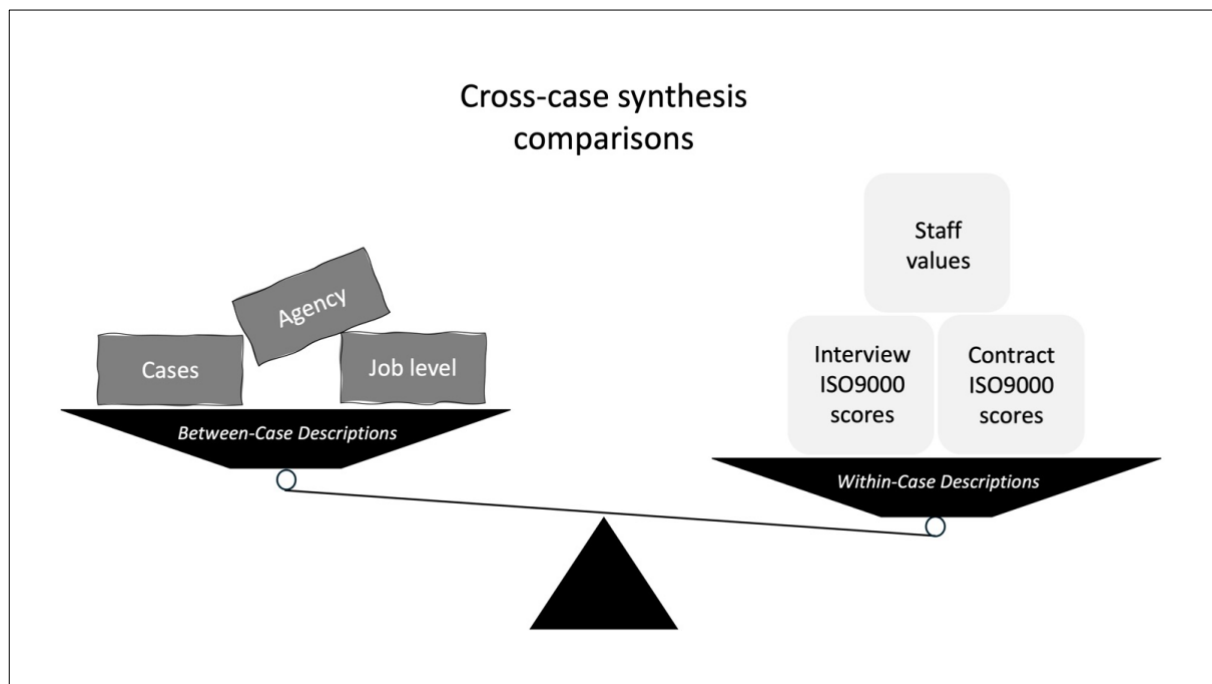


Figure 6. Cross-Case Synthesis comparisons

6.4 Cross-case synthesis analysis methods

Research question two asked, what is the relationship between staff values, organisational quality mandates, and quality practice uptake. To define this question in terms that supported transparent analysis, it was broken down into two sub-questions, whose analyses are described below.

Determining whether staff values were associated with higher quality practice uptake

To explore research question 2a, whether participants' uptake of quality management practices was associated with their personal values, a structured cross-dataset analysis was undertaken to compare its two datasets: the first dataset comprising ordinal data

representing ISO9000 alignment reported in interviews and contracts, and the second, qualitative data representing Appraisal and GT analysis of participant values. To enable a statistical comparison, data from the qualitative dataset was transformed into numeric representations of the initial, focused and theoretical codes developed during the Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory stage. This transformation followed established conventions (Sandelowski et al., 2009) and is reported in full in the Results chapter.

Statistical tests on the resulting, transformed data were conducted to examine distribution normality and homogeneity of variance (Field, 2024, pp.133-148) before more granular statistical testing of cross-dataset relationships were conducted on the relationship between transformed focused codes with participant ISO9000 alignment scores. These tests included cross-tabulations, Pearson's Chi-Squares (Field, 2024, pp.688-689) and Fisher's Exact Test (McDonald, 2014, p.77). Further tests were conducted on transformed Appraisal Analysis data (initial codes) with participant ISO9000 alignment scores. As there were a high number of initial codes (77), a Ward's Method hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted to determine whether participants could be divided into meaningful groups, based on their values, as expressed in interviews. The resulting two-cluster model of participant values was tested (ANOVA) for alignment with ISO9000 scores.

Understanding any interaction between staff values, quality mandates and quality practice uptake

Research question 2b sought to determine the interaction of staff values and organisational quality mandates in the uptake of quality practices. To do this, several analyses were undertaken to understand the macro-organisational dynamics of the social welfare services under study. Determining the effect of organisational quality mandates inscribed in contract documents on quality practice uptake provided a point of triangulation in this question as this result made it possible to quantify the influence of contract mandates in the uptake of quality management practices in social welfare services, and separate this influence from the influence of staff values.

To quantify the influence of contracts, the ISO9000 alignment scores from contract documents were compared with ISO9000 alignment scores achieved in interview data. Several statistical tests (Pearson's r and ANOVA) were conducted between the contract and interview ISO9000 scores to discover any relationship and report it in response to RQ2. Additionally, Mediation analysis was used to formally test whether staff values (focused codes) mediated the relationship between contract ISO9000 scores and interview ISO9000 scores. Analysis followed the causal steps approach of Baron and Kenny (1986), and methodological refinements for categorical mediators proposed by MacKinnon et al. (2007). The Baron & Kenny (1986) approach to mediation analysis was chosen over more modern and sensitive approaches including Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Hays PROCESS mediation (Hayes, 2017) in line with the exploratory nature of this study and to avoid Type 1 statistical errors which may be more likely in small n studies (MacKinnon et al., 2007).

The Baron & Kenny (1986) analysis progressed in three stages.

1. testing the direct effect of contracts on interview scores
2. testing the effect of contracts on staff values
3. testing whether staff values predicted interview scores when controlling for contract effects.

This procedure allowed the study to determine whether contracts directly influenced quality practice uptake, indirectly influenced it through shaping staff values, or both.

6.5 Summary – RQ2 coding & analysis

The coding and analysis processes adopted by this study facilitated a detailed examination of how quality management practice in social welfare services aligns with an ideal standard, and how the values of the people working to design and deliver social welfare services interacts with it. The analysis process followed Eisenhardt's (1989b) broad method, that incorporates the work of several seminal case study analysis authors to systematically compare patterns within and between multiple social welfare

programs, with the aim of revealing how quality is managed in government funded social welfare services.

Using ISO9000 as a basis for a priori codes facilitated a quantification of alignment between ideal quality management practices and those observed in the self-reports of participants and the contract documents that guide their work. The resulting dataset provides an answer to RQ1. The qualitative analysis of participant interviews facilitated a deep examination of the values and feelings of staff around their work, as reflected by the themes emerging from the Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory. The convergent mixed methods analysis of both datasets provided an opportunity to demonstrate how staff values and organisational mandates may meaningfully relate to the uptake of formal quality management practices, providing an answer to RQ2, and broken down for further examination through the variables of the type of organisation each participant worked for, their job level and the specific Case they were grouped within.

This structured and comprehensive approach provided a strong evidence-base to comment on the presence, breadth and extent of the use of strategies to manage quality in the delivery of social welfare services across various organisational contexts and the system of delivery as a whole. Further, the examination of these two datasets provided an opportunity to expose predictive patterns that can inform theory (Eisenhardt, 1989b).

Section 7 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the methodological framework used in this study. It has defined the research questions, philosophical position, design rationale, data collection methods and the strategies for analysis, which all support the high-level goal of this research: to understand how known methods of delivering high performing services to vulnerable people are adopted, neglected or undermined. The methodology defined in this chapter contributes to this question with a rigorous examination of the mechanisms and drivers of quality management in government funded social welfare services in NSW.

The abductive logic adopted by this study made it possible to balance focus between empirical patterns and theoretical insight, drawing on both the qualitative and quantitative datasets available to challenge surface-level explanations for government performance and pursue deeper causal insights. Importantly, the related commitment to Pragmatism and Constructivist Realism allowed this research to transcend descriptive explanations like degree of compliance with pre-defined quality frameworks. Rather this research design has invited theoretical inquiry into why individual ISO9000 principles are embraced or resisted and explored how the people who produce social welfare services make sense of and value quality. Similarly, this research design allowed for exploration of any interplay between personal values and institutional incentives, or the lack of them, to reveal a complex ecology in which quality is challenged, negotiated and at times, strategically obscured. The research questions contribute to this end by facilitating an exploration of how staff navigate the institutional priorities and power dynamics embedded in the social welfare service system. By adopting a mixed methods case study design and engaging deeply with the interpretations and perspectives of those enacting the system, the methodology supported development of practitioner-informed theory about engagement with quality management practices in this context. Rather than an end in itself, the intentional dynamic created by this methodology reframes alignment with ISO9000 as a proxy for staff agency, organisational health and accountability for public value.

For completeness and clarity, the main methodological positions adopted by this study have been summarised in Table 8, below.

Table 8. Summary of methodological positions

<i>Methodological question</i>	<i>Choices made by this study</i>
What is the method?	Convergent, multiple, embedded, mixed methods case-study.
What is the case-study Quintain?	Quality management in social welfare service grant funding.

What are the cases?	Social welfare programs funded by the NSW Department of Family & Community Services
What is the ontological stance?	Constructivist Realism, which integrates the subjective realities of participants with objective analysis of processes.
What is the epistemological stance	Pragmatism.
What is the research design?	Mixed methods, using both quantitative (a priori codes arising from ISO9000) and qualitative (arising from interview) data.
How were participants recruited?	A combination of direct outreach and snowball sampling.
How was documentary evidence obtained?	Relevant contract documents were accessed through facility provided by Government Information Public Access (GIPA) legislation.
Which coding strategies were used?	A priori codes arising from ISO9000 and inductive codes emerging from Appraisal Analysis of interview responses.
Which analytical framework was used?	Cross-case synthesis based on the process described by Eisenhardt (1989) was used to interrogate data within and between cases using both qualitative and statistical methods.
Which ethical issues were identified?	Issues of bias, integrity and beneficence were identified and addressed through reflexivity and triangulation of data.

This methodological approach ensures that this research is capable of both, describing patterns of alignment with established quality management practices, and interrogating their causes and consequences. This positions the study to make meaningful theoretical contributions to the discussions about the impact of quality management on social welfare services, and practical recommendations for improving the performance with regard to the shortcomings of government described by PCT.

Chapter 4 Results

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of analyses conducted to answer the research questions posed by this study. Results are divided into three sections.

The first section provides a summary of the most important results in plain English for each of the research questions.

The next section reports detailed analysis and results for research sub-question one (RQ1), which investigated the extent to which ISO9000 possible activities were reported (interviews) or observed (contract documents) across the different agencies, participant job levels, and Cases. The analyses for this research question relied upon a priori coding of participant accounts and the contract documents that guide their work in each instance, so all the analysis in this section is quantitative.

The third section addresses research sub-question two (RQ2), which examined the influences on staff uptake of mandated quality practices through its two sub-questions, RQ2a and RQ2b. Accordingly, this third section of the results chapter is divided into several sub-sections, as follows.

1. Establishing staff values: this first sub-section reports the results of the Appraisal Analysis of participants' expressions of value around their work, and the subsequent development of initial and focused codes using Grounded Theory methods. This sub-section concludes by reporting the patterns of participant values expressed across the variables of employing agency, participant job level and Case. The staff values established here also provide the qualitative basis for analysis for the two sub-questions to RQ2.
2. RQ2a: This second sub-section reports the results of analysis for RQ2a, providing an answer to the question about the relationship between staff-values (identified in sub-section 1) and quality practice uptake (identified in RQ1)
3. RQ2b: The third sub-section reports the results of analysis for RQ2b, providing an answer to the question about the interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice.

Section 1 Plain English summary of results

This section summarises the key findings of this study in plain terms. It is included to provide a clear and accessible summary of answers to the research questions and the supporting data. This section does not replace the full and transparent disclosure of data and detailed analyses that follow.

1.1 The broad research question posed by this study

This overarching research question asked whether quality management can address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT. The results and interpretation of analysis show that quality management can make a measurable difference to the alignment of staff and organisational goals, providing an address to the rational self-interest causes of impacts to government performance (Butler, 2012, pp.22-24) identified by PCT. Cases whose contracts contained more ISO9000-aligned quality mandates were comprised of staff whose values better aligned with the meaningful and evidence-based goals of their work, and achieved higher incidence of alignment with the 49 possible activities suggested by ISO9000.

Importantly, this relationship was proportional. This study found that aligned staff values and quality practice uptake increased in line with the extent of ISO9000-like quality mandates in the contracts guiding work. As contracts increased their prescription of ISO9000-like practice, staff were more likely to express deep engagement with the goals and systemic issues of their work. The staff values associated with these findings are explored further in the Discussion chapter, where they are shown to align with recognised values in the quality management literature such as staff engagement, empowerment, and commitment.

By requiring practices that orient both staff and organisational goals toward meaningful, evidence-based goals, and fostering a culture of transparency and improvement ISO9000-like mandates create conditions where it is rational and rewarding for staff to act in ways that improve quality. The caveat is that these results were only evident as the prescription of ISO9000 principles increased. Where quality mandates were patchy

or superficial, both staff values and quality practice uptake remained low or inconsistent.

Research question one

RQ1 asked, to what extent does quality management in government social welfare services align with the kinds of universally agreed quality management practices suggested by ISO9000. The short answer to this question is: deliberate quality management is very limited generally, but there are isolated examples of greater alignment with known methods of improving the quality of processes and outcomes.

To establish an answer to RQ1, study participants were asked a series of 18 interview questions that aimed to elicit responses about how they managed quality in their work. Their answers were compared with the 49 activities that ISO9000 suggests organisations undertake to improve quality. These 49 suggested activities were divided between the seven quality management principles prescribed by ISO9000. Similarly to the questions asked of interview participants, the contract documents that define their work was examined to measure how many of the same 49 quality management activities were prescribed. This analysis resulted in ISO9000 alignment scores for each participant and each contract document. The maximum possible score that any participant or contract could achieve was 98. However, the average score achieved across all participants was 29 (around 30%), and for contracts the average score was 18 (around 18%). Alignment of participant and contract alignment scores were also examined to see whether they varied between the seven quality management principles defined by ISO9000.

Combined participant and contract scores achieved an average alignment of 34.1% with the Customer focus principle, and 29.2% with the Relationship management principle. Alignment with the remaining principles was lower still, with identification of activities to improve the quality of Leadership achieving the lowest alignment of 16.9%. This meant that the kinds of activities ISO9000 recommends were being reported by participants and written into contracts at low rates. However, variability of alignment in individual participants and contracts was still high.

To better understand whether something systemic was influencing the variability of alignment scores, several further analyses were conducted. Firstly, both participants and contract documents were divided into groups based on which FACS program (Case) they worked on or guided. Participant scores were also examined in the context of which agency employed them (government or NGO) and what their job level was within that organisation (frontline worker, manager or executive). ISO9000 alignment scores for Cases consisted of all available participant scores and contract documents from that FACS funded program, of which there were eight. Some Cases stood out. The *Their Futures Matter* program ranked first, scoring highly across most ISO9000 principles. *Out of Home Care* also performed well on certain principles. Other Cases including *Men's Behaviour Change*, *Housing*, and *Staying Home Leaving Violence* had lower levels of alignment, especially with the ISO9000 principles of Leadership and Engagement of People. Agency type and participant job level also mattered. NGO staff achieved higher ISO9000 alignment scores than government staff. Again, there was a lot of variation between participants, with managers scoring higher than executives or frontline workers.

Overall, there is evidence that formal quality management practices are used in social welfare services in NSW, but use is substantially limited, unregulated and erratic. While the ISO9000 principle of *Customer focus* was observed across Cases, at least to a limited extent, alignment with the ISO9000 principles of *Leadership*, *Engagement of People*, *Improvement* and *Process Approach* was largely absent in most Cases. Collectively, these findings suggest that alignment of practice with ISO9000 principles is generally low and inconsistent but is partially shaped by Case, job level and the agency type that staff work for.

Research question two

RQ2 asked what is the relationship between staff values, organisational quality mandates, and quality practice uptake by the staff of social welfare services. To investigate the complex underpinnings of this question, it was broken down into two sub-questions that investigate respectively, whether certain staff values were more

commonly associated with higher uptake of quality practices (RQ2a), and what the interaction was between staff values and the organisational quality mandates they worked under (RQ2b). Establishing the data for analysis of these questions required several processes. To collect raw data, participants were asked two additional interview questions about their values around work, for themselves, and for the community. An Appraisal Analysis (Martin and White, 2003, p.1) was then conducted on their responses to reveal the values beneath their words, rather than just the themes they reported. After that, Grounded Theory coding techniques were used to group those values into higher order sentiments, using the initial and focused code procedures described by Charmaz (2014, pp.47-60). The resulting initial and focused codes were then transformed into numeric values and tested to see whether any of the values expressed by staff predicted higher or lower uptake of quality practices, as reflected by their ISO9000 alignment score.

RQ2a

RQ2a asked, are certain staff values more commonly associated with higher quality practice uptake? The result of analysis for this question was that several staff values influenced quality management practice uptake. Staff who advocated ethical action, critiqued bureaucratic systems or displayed tension between their personal values and professional roles, achieved significantly higher ISO9000 alignment scores. So, the short answer to RQ2a was that certain staff values did influence quality practice uptake, however contracts influenced uptake more. The values expressed by study participants were found to impact their ISO9000 alignment score in statistically significant ways but the statistically significant influence of contract documents eclipsed the influence of staff values on quality practice uptake. As quality practice mandates increased in the contracts that guide participant work, their ISO9000 alignment scores also increased, with the effect of contracts on behaviour overriding the effect of personal staff values despite them also being independently significant predictors of this behaviour.

RQ2b

RQ2b asked how this interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates worked to shape practice. This question sought to investigate the causal mechanisms of quality practice uptake, considering both the values of staff around their work, and the environment of organisational quality mandates that they worked within. To answer this question, the influence of contracts on participant behaviour was tested using mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny, 1986). This analysis found that the statistical significance of participant values diminished as the level of quality practice specified in contract documents increased. The results of RQ1 showed us that the degree of contract alignment with ISO9000 varied across Cases. Where contracts were more explicit and prescriptive about the need to adopt formal quality management practices, staff working in those programs had both higher ISO9000 alignment, and expressed values more likely to predict it. For example, staff working under more quality prescriptive contracts were more likely to express the two values most closely connected to higher ISO9000 alignment scores reflected in the focused codes: 2) *critique of bureaucratic systems*; and, 3) *displays tension between their personal values and professional roles*. While this study cannot categorically confirm whether the content in these contracts caused these views, it did observe a statistically significant increase in both ISO9000 scores and the concurrent increase in staff values that predicted higher ISO9000 scores. The finding for RQ2b has powerful implications for the effectiveness and efficiency of social welfare services, including that the right kinds of organisational quality mandates may influence the staff values and practices that improve the quality of social services, and that this alignment of staff and organisational values addresses the critiques made of government efficiency by PCT.

Section 2 Detailed analysis- research question one

This section reports the results of the analyses of quantitative data, comprising numeric values (scores) formed from the a priori coding of 18 of the 20 interview questions, and the contract documents that guide work in each Case defined by this study. These interview questions aimed to elicit accounts of the use of quality management type practices. In this section on the results for RQ1, the analyses and findings for sub-questions are reported first, followed by a concluding claim around the scope of findings to address the overarching aim of research question one; to what extent does government attempt to control the quality of its social welfare services in response to the systemic performance challenges identified by Public Choice Theory?

2.1 A priori coding examples

The section entitled *A priori coding* in the Methodology chapter outlines the full method and rationale for establishing ISO9000 alignment scores for participants and contract documents. However, to demonstrate how ISO9000 alignment scores were generated in practice, the following examples are provided.

Interview coding example

The first example is from an interview with a government executive working in the *Housing* Case. The sample provided demonstrates the coding of their response to interview question seven, which asked:

Interview question seven

“How does your organisation link its broader objectives to the needs of its clients?”

Participant response

“I provide feedback to my team and our colleagues in the Housing NSW team. We also provide feedback to the NGO [contractors] through a fortnightly consortium meeting. Our feedback to them is based on project planning milestones and on contract KPIs.

There is a benchmark for the NGO to perform against regarding reducing [rental] arrears. We put this [benchmark] in [because] arrears are a great risk for losing tenancies. We were below [achieving our] target at the beginning. We are still only at 85% of target, but we are improving ... [The] NGOs wanted us to back off at the start and let them get on with it" (SLK - GV-EX-HST-IV200908).

This response was coded for alignment with four of the possible seven activities in pursuit of the ISO9000 quality principle of *Relationship Management*, as shown in Table 9. Alignment with the remaining three possible activities for this principle were coded in other questions.

Table 9. A priori coding example - interview

ISO9000 possible activities for Relationship Management	Alignment score		
	None	Some	Strong
Measure performance and provide performance feedback to interested parties, as appropriate, to enhance improvement initiatives			2
Establish collaborative development and improvement activities with providers, partners and other interested parties		1	
Encourage and recognize improvements and achievements by providers and partners	0		
Gather and share information, expertise and resources with relevant interested parties	0		

Contract coding example

The second example is from a contract document that describes performance and reporting requirements in the *OOHC* Case. The coding sample provided demonstrates how the quality mandates prescribed by this contract document aligned with the ISO9000 principle, *Evidence Based Decision Making*. As the contract documents studied were obtained under the Government Information, Public Access Act (NSW-Information-and-Privacy-Commission, 2023), they may not be reproduced here without permission. In place of reproducing the example contract document here, it may be described, as follows.

The sample contract document is entitled, *Schedule 2 – Performance and Outcomes Data Reporting*. This document relates to the social welfare service, *OOHC Permanency Support Program*. It contains 22 pages which describe various service parameters and reporting requirements, including data collection and reporting requirements of the *OOHC Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)*, which are applied to this service. The QAF requires that data is collected and reported for 38 individual outcomes for the clients of this service. These individual outcomes are grouped into the three general outcome domains of, Safety, Permanency and Wellbeing, which is broken down further into sub-categories of cognitive functioning, physical health and development, mental health, social functioning, and cultural and spiritual identity. An additional outcome domain is specified for Aboriginal children and young people, which contains a further seven outcomes that data must be collected for, and reported upon. The overall ISO9000 alignment score for this contract was 25.5%. Table 10 demonstrates how the content of this document was matched using a priori codes representing the suggested activities for the ISO9000 principle of *Evidence Based Decision Making*.

Table 10. A priori coding example - contract

ISO9000 possible activities for Evidence Based Decision Making	Alignment score		
	None	Some	Strong

Analyse and evaluate data and information using suitable methods			2
Determine, measure and monitor key indicators to demonstrate the organization's performance			2
Ensure people are competent to analyse and evaluate data as needed	0		
Ensure that data and information are sufficiently accurate, reliable and secure	0		
Make all data needed available to the relevant people		1	
Make decisions and take actions based on evidence, balanced with experience and intuition	0		

2.2 RQ1.a. To what extent does quality practice in FACS align with ISO9000?

In line with RQ1.a, the following section reports the overall extent to which observed FACS practices align with the quality management activities suggested by ISO9000. Alignment was assessed by measuring the presence or absence of ISO9000 aligned activities reported interview responses and observed in contract documents. A weighting was assigned to scores, with evidence of partial alignment scoring one, and evidence of strong alignment scoring two. Sub-questions addressed in this section explore,

- i. What is the overall co-incidence of quality practice observed in FACS with ISO9000?
- ii. Does broad FACS practice align more or less with each of the seven quality principles defined by ISO9000?

These analyses provide a measurement of how embedded ISO9000 type quality management practices are, within FACS funded social welfare services.

RQ1.a.i. What is the overall co-occurrence of quality practice observed in FACS with ISO9000?

Descriptive analysis was conducted on the total incidence of alignment between ISO9000 possible activities and reports of similar activities in 18 of the 20 interview questions, or their prescription in the contract documents that guide that work. The maximum possible ISO9000 alignment score for any contract or interview was 98, comprising up to two points for each of the 49 activities suggested by ISO9000.

This scoring convention resulted in an ISO9000 alignment score for each interview and contract document and a score for each of the 11 cases, which combined both interview and contract scores. Three interviews were excluded from further analysis as these participants either did not have a direct role in providing or managing social welfare services (as senior bureaucrats) or did not answer enough interview questions to register a score that was usable for analysis. The remaining interviews ($n = 19$) achieved a mean score of 28.84 ($SD = 19.53$) with scores ranging widely, from 6 to 72. The distribution was positively skewed (Skewness = 1.00, $SE = 0.52$), suggesting that most interview scores clustered toward the lower end of the scale. Kurtosis was near zero (Kurtosis = 0.08, $SE = 1.01$), indicating a near normal distribution in terms of peak and tail shape.

Among the contract documents, one was excluded as its scope did not include setting performance or reporting requirements, and another contract document was available for this Case that did. The remaining 17 contract documents yielded a mean ISO9000 alignment score of 17.61 ($SD = 8.19$), with scores ranging from 0 to 31. The distribution was slightly negatively skewed (Skewness = -0.31, $SE = 0.54$), suggesting a modest concentration within the higher range of contract scores. The kurtosis value (-0.28, $SE = 1.04$) indicated a fairly flat distribution, suggesting a broader spread of scores with fewer extreme values than a normal distribution.

The combination of all interview and contract alignment scores (n = 36) yielded a mean ISO9000 alignment score of 24.03 (SD = 15.68), with values ranging from 6 to 72. The distribution was positively skewed (Skewness = 1.62, SE = 0.39) and had a high kurtosis value (Kurtosis = 2.53, SE = 0.77), indicating close clustering of lower scores with a small number of high scoring cases pulling the distribution tail upward. This suggests that overall scores across the dataset leaned heavily toward the lower end, with a few exceptional cases influencing the shape of the distribution.

Table 11. Descriptive statistics - ISO9000 alignment in interviews and contracts

ISO9000 Alignment	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis			
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Interviews	19	66	6	72	28.84	4.48	19.529	381.363	1.003	0.524	0.08	1.014
Contracts	17	24	7	31	18.65	1.728	7.123	50.743	0.073	0.55	-0.973	1.063
All	36	66	6	72	24.03	2.614	15.683	245.971	1.617	0.393	2.527	0.768

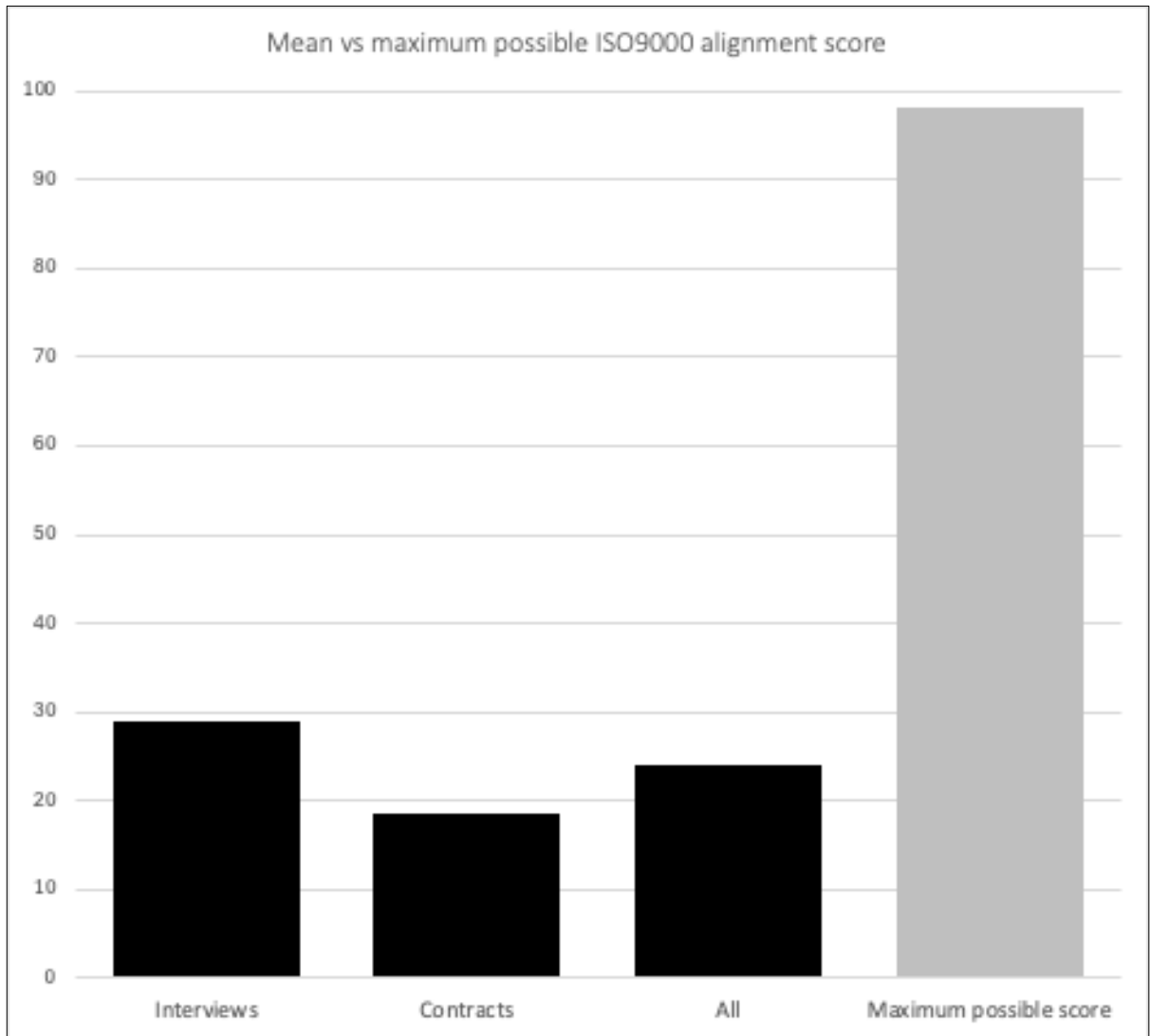


Figure 7. ISO9000 alignment in interviews and contracts

RQ1.a.ii. - Does broad FACS practice align more or less with each of the seven quality principles defined by ISO9000?

To explore whether FACS quality management practice aligned with more closely with some ISO9000 principles than others, combined ISO9000 alignment scores from both interviews and contracts across all participants (n = 36) were analysed across the seven constituent ISO9000 Principles; *Customer Focus, Engagement of People, Evidence-Based Decision Making, Improvement, Leadership, Process Approach and Relationship Management*. Results indicated considerable variation in ISO9000 alignment scores in the aggregated data, among these principles.

The highest mean alignment was observed for Customer Focus at 34.1% ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 3.03$), although scores ranged widely (0–15). This mean score was still relatively low compared with the maximum possible alignment score of 16 (eight possible activities suggested by ISO9000 with strength of alignment of up to two points for each) for this principle. Relationship Management had the next highest average alignment at 29.2% ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 3$), also displaying notable variability (0–12), and again, relatively low mean alignment with the maximum possible score of 14 (seven possible activities). Evidence-Based Decision Making 26.8% ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 3.24$) (maximum possible score = 12), Improvement at 23.2% ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 3.47$) (maximum possible score = 14) and Process Approach 23.2% ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 2.29$) (maximum possible score = 14) achieved a lower average but similarly variable alignment scores.

Lower mean alignment continued through Engagement of People at 21.2% ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 2.75$) (maximum possible score = 14) and Leadership 16.9% ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 2.18$) (maximum possible score = 14), both reflecting very limited alignment with possible ISO9000 activities overall.

All mean ISO9000 alignment scores exhibited substantial positive skewness (ranging from 0.96 to 1.82), suggesting scores were consistently low, with a limited number of instances achieving higher scores. All had elevated kurtosis (ranging from 0.62 to 3.51) with the highest recorded by Improvement, indicating most participants clustered towards lower scores with several instances of notably higher alignment. Figure 8 shows a visual representation of the proportion of ISO9000 alignment achieved across all interviews and contracts in relation to the maximum possible alignment.

Table 12. Descriptive statistics - ISO9000 principle alignment of interviews and contracts

ISO9000 Principle	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis			
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic			
Customer Focus	36	15	0	15	5.47	0.505	3.028	9.171	0.957	0.393	1.793	0.768
Engagement of People	36	11	0	11	2.97	0.459	2.751	7.571	1.12	0.393	1.057	0.768
Evidence Based Decision Making	36	12	0	12	3.22	0.539	3.235	10.463	1.258	0.393	1.288	0.768
Improvement	36	14	0	14	3.25	0.578	3.467	12.021	1.815	0.393	3.512	0.768
Leadership	36	8	0	8	2.36	0.363	2.18	4.752	1.031	0.393	0.688	0.768
Process Approach	36	11	0	11	3.25	0.381	2.285	5.221	1.134	0.393	2.553	0.768
Relationship Management	36	12	0	12	3.5	0.5	3	9	1.018	0.393	0.624	0.768

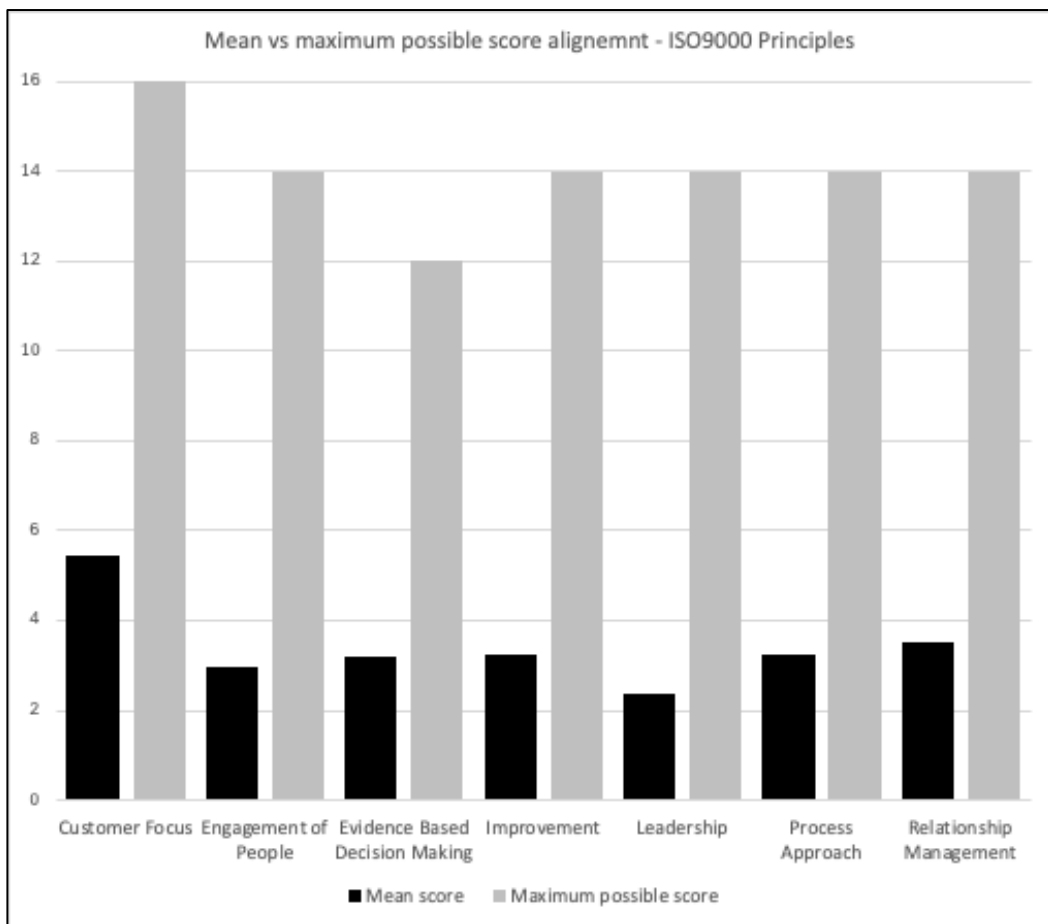


Figure 8. ISO9000 principle alignment of interviews and contracts

Overall, these findings suggest that FACS practices seen in aggregate, align more closely with Customer Focus and to a lesser extent, Relationship Management. Alignment with the principles of Leadership, Process Approach, Evidence Based Decision making, Improvement and Engagement of People was relatively weak across the sample.

2.3 RQ1.b. Are there any systematic gaps in FACS quality practice compared to ISO9000?

Building on analysis in section 1.a, this sub-question investigates whether there are systemic differences in ISO9000 alignment across specific FACS program types, delivery agencies, and participant job levels. Analyses aggregated both scores achieved in contract documents and in interviews as contract documents were seen as an integral part of the messaging around the prescription of practice, including quality practice. All following analyses aim to determine whether agency (government vs NGO), the professional seniority (job level) of participants or Case, are associated with higher or lower alignment with ISO9000 principles. This includes identifying whether particular programs (Cases) or the dynamics of their delivery are consistently stronger or weaker in their alignment, and whether specific ISO9000 principles are more or less present in certain contexts. By highlighting these systemic differences, this section contributes a more nuanced understanding of where quality management gaps may exist within the delivery of FACS funded social welfare services.

- i. To what extent do specific FACS social welfare services align with ISO9000 as a whole?
- ii. To what extent do specific FACS social welfare services align with specific ISO9000 principles?

RQ1.b.i. To what extent do specific FACS social welfare services align with ISO9000 as a whole?

ISO9000 alignment by Case

Descriptive statistics showed notable differences in identification of quality management practices across interviews and contract documents, aggregated as

Cases (FACS programs). *Their Futures Matter* (M = 67.50, SD = 6.36, n = 2) had substantially higher ISO9000 alignment scores compared to all other programs. *Out of Home Care* (M = 34.40, SD = 11.03, n = 5), *Intensive Family Preservation* (M = 33), *Housing* (M = 23.83, SD = 4.51, n = 3), *Family Preservation Service* (M = 23.00) and *Targeted Early Intervention* (M = 23) displayed moderate levels of alignment, though with considerable variability within some groups. Lower levels of alignment were seen in the Cases of *Men's Behaviour Change* (M = 16.83, SD = 8.84, n = 6), *KEYS* (M = 15, SD = 4.24, n = 2), *Staying Home Leaving Violence* (M = 13.50). Data for the *High-level Government* Case was excluded for this analysis as no contract documents or ISO9000 alignment scores were available. *High-level-government* interviews were held with senior executives whose work was not bound by any particular program contract, so they were not coded for ISO9000 alignment, but used only to discover the personal values of those staff. Where contract data was unavailable for other Cases whose staff reported quality management activities in relation to a particular social welfare service, a composite variable was calculated using SPSS's *mean* function which automatically computed the mean of available scores. This ensured that Cases with only interview data were retained in the analyses, without introducing artificial variability. For some of the included Cases, only a single observation was available (e.g., where contract data was not collected, or only one interview was conducted). In these instances, measures of variability (standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis) could not be computed, which is why certain descriptive statistics are not reported for those Cases. Overall, these results demonstrate substantial variability in ISO9000 alignment across Cases, suggesting different levels in quality management practices between FACS program types.

Table 13. Descriptive statistics - ISO9000 alignment by Case

Case	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis
Staying Home Leaving Violence	13.50	.	.	13.50	13.50	0.00	.	.
KEYS	15.00	3.00	4.24	12.00	18.00	6.00	.	.
Men's Behaviour Change	16.83	5.10	8.84	11.00	27.00	16.00	1.68	.
Family Preservation Service	23.00	.	.	23.00	23.00	0.00	.	.
Targeted Early Intervention	23.00	2.52	4.36	18.00	26.00	8.00	-1.63	.
Housing	23.83	2.60	4.51	19.50	28.50	9.00	0.33	.
Intensive Family Preservation Service	33.00	.	.	33.00	33.00	0.00	.	.
Out of Home Care	34.50	6.37	11.03	23.00	45.00	22.00	-0.40	.
Their Futures Matter	67.50	4.50	6.36	63.00	72.00	9.00	.	.

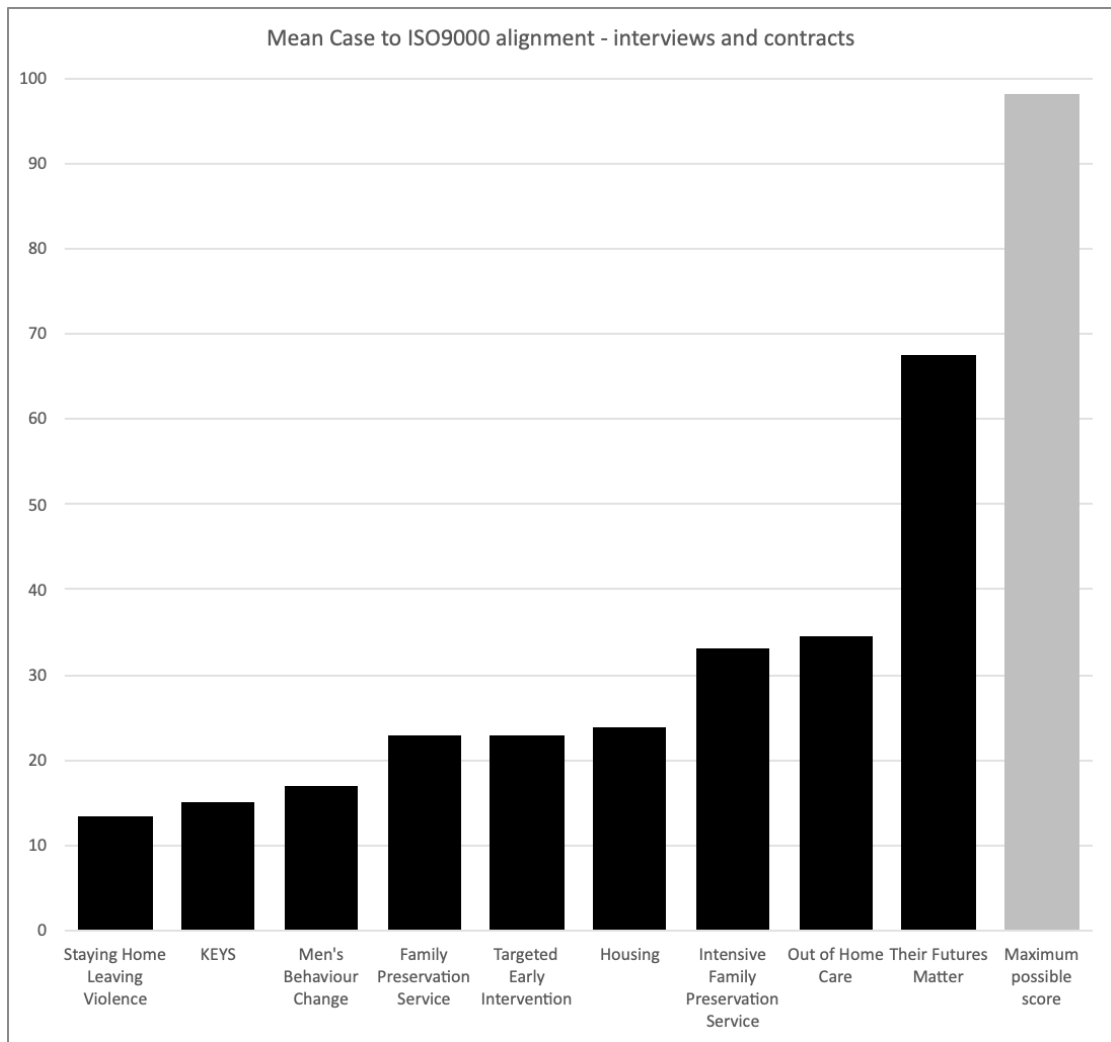


Figure 9. ISO9000 alignment by Case

ISO9000 alignment by agency type

In examining differences in ISO9000 alignment according to agency type (Government, or NGO), notable variability emerged. NGOs demonstrated the highest mean ISO9000 alignment scores ($M = 29.73$, $SD = 21.21$, $n = 11$), although with substantial variability ranging from 9 to 72. Government agencies had lower alignment overall ($M = 22.09$, $SD = 12.59$, $n = 23$), but also displayed considerable variation [range – 6-62]. Again, cases without ISO9000 alignment scores (High-level government) or contract documents (KEYS) were excluded for this analysis. These outcomes suggest that NGO staff generally align their practice more closely with ISO9000 principles compared to government staff, although the broad ranges and

high standard deviations within each category indicate significant internal variability across both agency types.

Table 14. Descriptive statistics - ISO9000 alignment by Agency type

Agency	Mean	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		5% Trimmed Mean	Median	Variance	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Interquartile Range	Skewness		Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound								Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	
Government	22.09	2.625	16.64	27.53	20.89	18	158.447	12.588	6	62	56	15	1.533	0.481	3.547	0.935
NGO	29.73	6.395	15.48	43.98	28.53	23	449.818	21.209	9	72	63	25	1.13	0.661	0.257	1.279

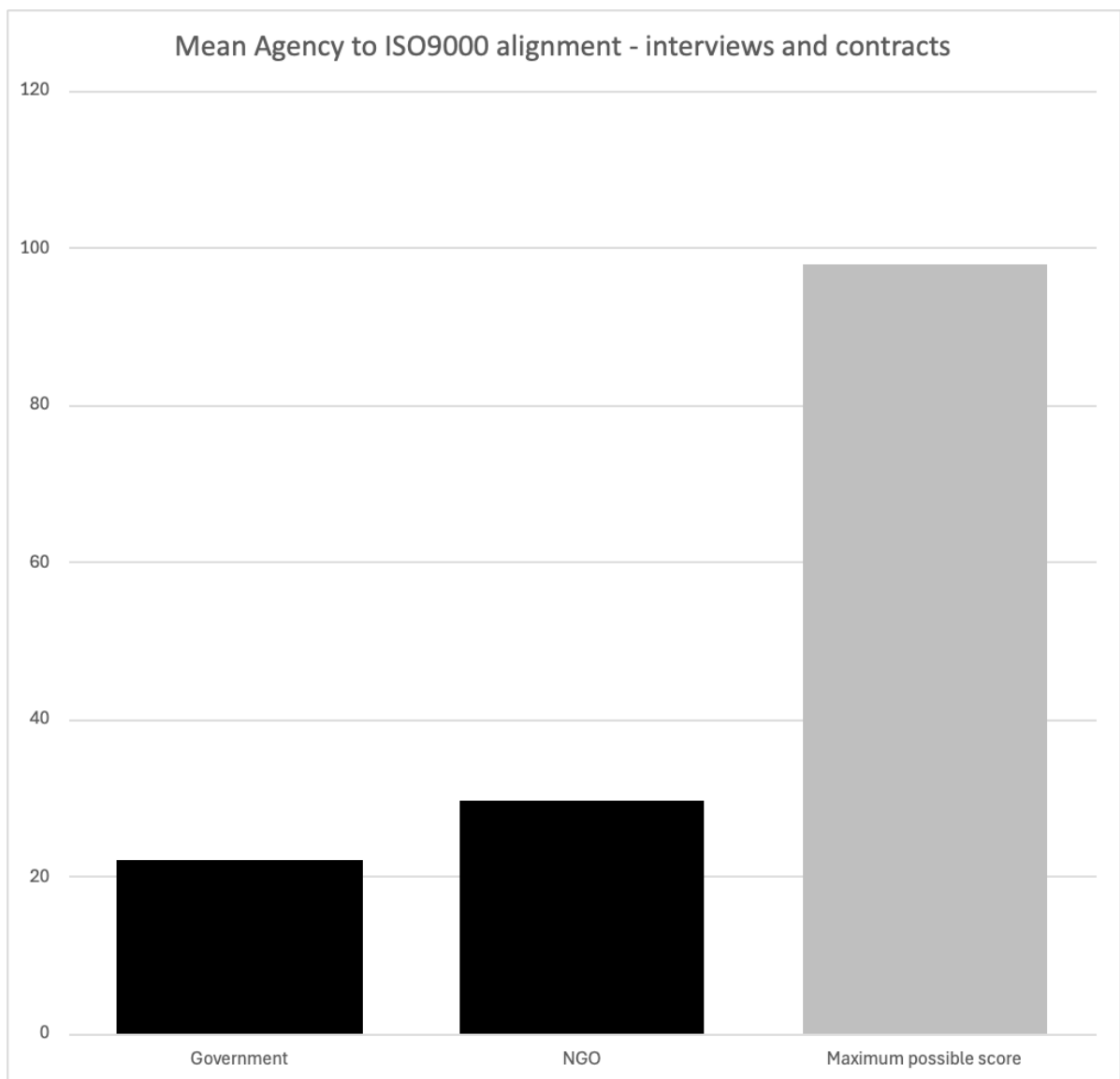


Figure 10. ISO9000 alignment by Agency type

ISO9000 alignment by job level

Descriptive statistics revealed variation in ISO9000 alignment scores between participant job levels. Overall, ISO9000 alignment was moderate across groups, with wide variability within groups. Managers reported the highest ISO9000 alignment score (M = 30.00, SD = 22.51), with scores ranging widely from 6 to 72. Managers also had the greatest variability (Range = 66), suggesting diverse perceptions of quality management within managerial roles. Executives followed, with a mean ISO9000 alignment score of 28.43 (SD = 17.73). Their scores ranged from 12 to 62, also indicating a broad spread (Range = 50). The distribution of Executive scores showed positive skew (Skewness = 1.23) with most scores clustering around the group mean and a few reporting much higher ISO9000 alignment (Kurtosis = 1.32). Lastly, Frontline workers had a mean ISO9000 alignment score of 24.50 (SD = 19.09), with values ranging from 11 to 38 (Range = 27). Due to a very small sample size (n = 2), these results should be interpreted with caution, as reflected in the extremely wide confidence interval (95% CI: -147.03 to 196.03).

Table 15. Descriptive statistics - ISO9000 alignment by participant job level

Job level	Mean	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		5% Trimmed Mean	Median	Variance	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Interquartile Range	Skewness		Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound								Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	
Executive	28.43	6.701	12.03	44.82	27.48	23	314.286	17.728	12	62	50	25	1.232	0.794	1.315	1.587
Frontline worker	24.5	13.5	-147.03	196.03	.	24.5	364.5	19.092	11	38	27
Manager	30	7.12	13.89	46.11	29	22.5	506.889	22.514	6	72	66	35	1.001	0.687	-0.139	1.334

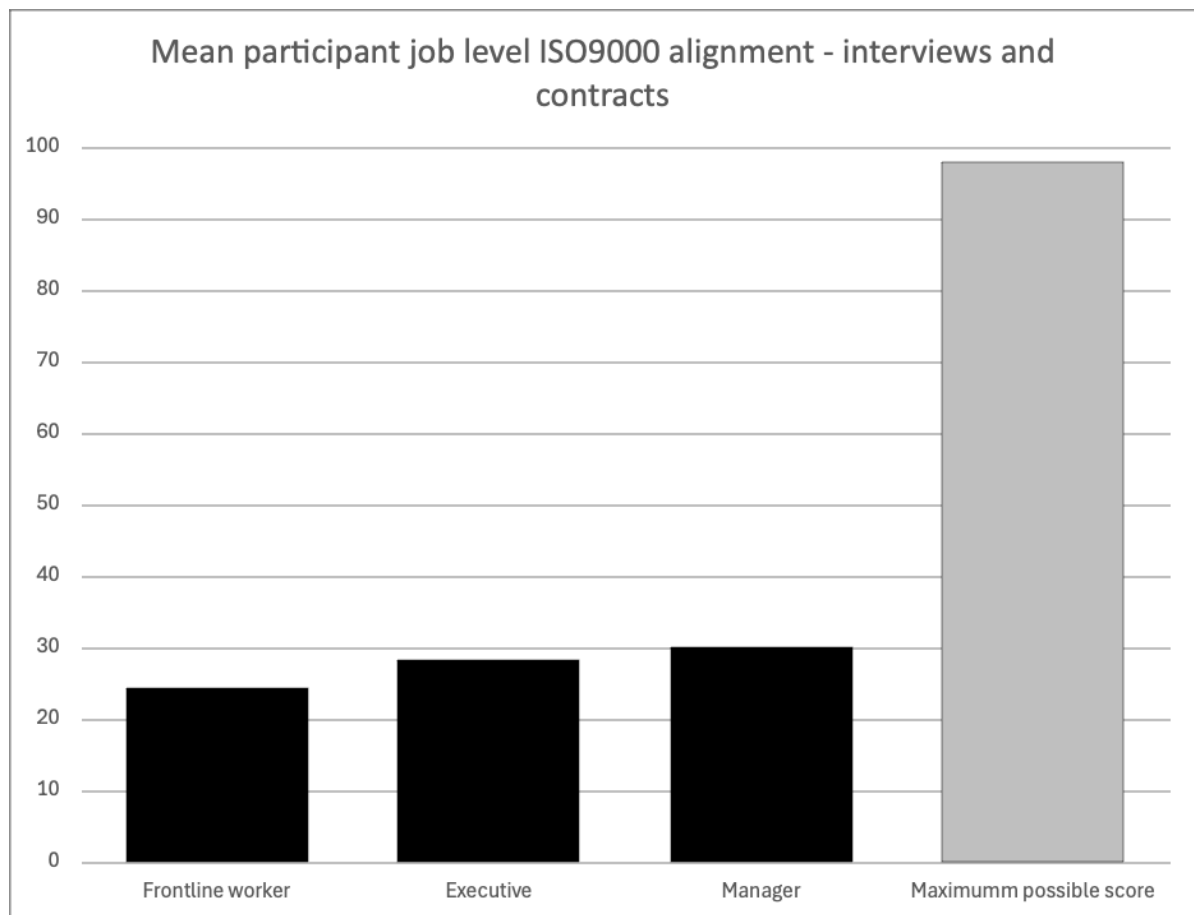


Figure 11. ISO9000 alignment by participant job level

RQ1.b.ii. To what extent do specific FACS social welfare services align with specific ISO9000 principles?

Analysis of how each Case aligned with the seven ISO9000 principles revealed considerable variation. *Their Futures Matter* demonstrated the strongest and most consistent alignment, achieving the highest mean scores across nearly all principles. In particular, it recorded perfect or near-perfect alignment in Improvement (M = 14.00, SD = 0.00) and Evidence-Based Decision Making (M = 12.00, SD = 0.00), as well as high alignment in Customer Focus (M = 10.50, SD = 0.71), Engagement of People (M = 9.00, SD = 1.41), and Process Approach (M = 10.00, SD = 1.41). The *Out of Home Care* program also reported moderate to high alignment, particularly in Customer Focus (M = 8.20, SD = 3.96), Engagement of People (M = 4.00, SD = 3.96), and Evidence-Based Decision Making (M = 4.71, SD = 3.08). *Intensive Family Preservation* displayed moderate alignment in Evidence-Based Decision Making (M = 3.51, SD = 0.44), Engagement of

People (M = 3.33, SD = 0.58), and Leadership (M = 3.67, SD = 1.53). In contrast, Cases such as *Housing*, *Staying Home Leaving Violence*, and *Men’s Behaviour Change* showed lower alignment across several principles. For example, Leadership and Engagement of People frequently scored below two in these programs, with Housing showing particularly low scores in Leadership (M = 1.43, SD = 2.27) and Engagement of People (M = 1.57, SD = 2.55).

Across the board, Customer Focus emerged as the principle with the most consistently high mean scores across all interviews and contract documents (M = 4.93, SD = 3.32), while Leadership (Total M = 2.13, SD = 2.19) and Engagement of People (Total M = 2.68, SD = 2.76) showed lower average alignment, indicating these areas may represent opportunities for improvement in future quality management efforts. As with previous analyses of global interview and contract ISO9000 alignment scores, the High-Level Government and KEYS cases were excluded from this analysis due to the absence of relevant scores. These findings highlight a lack of consistency in alignment between program types and quality management practices.

Table 16. Descriptive statistics - Mean Case alignment to ISO9000 principle

Case	N	Customer Focus		Engagement of People		Evidence Based Decision		Improvement		Leadership		Process Approach		Relationship Management	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Housing	7	3.86	2.8	3.86	2.55	2.43	2.15	2.86	2.27	2.86	2.27	1.57	1.51	1.43	1.72
Men's Behaviour Change	6	4.5	3.56	1.83	2.64	1.17	1.47	2.17	1.17	1.5	1.98	3.33	2.25	1.67	1.37
Staying Home Leaving Violence	3	4.67	2.31	1.33	1.53	1.33	1.53	2.67	1.16	2.33	2.08	1	1	1.67	2.08
Targeted Early Intervention	6	4.67	2.16	3.35	2.35	2.17	1.47	2.83	1.72	2.33	3.01	2	2.28	3	2.28
Family Preservation Service	3	5	1	2.67	2.08	1.67	2.08	5	2.65	2	2	3.33	0.58	2.33	1.53
Intensive Family Preservation	3	5	2	3.33	3.51	4	4	2.67	1.53	3.67	1.53	2	3.46	1	1
Out of Home Care	5	8.2	3.96	4	4.71	2.58	2.59	4	2.59	3.33	3.08	4.2	3.03	3	2.28
Their Futures Matter	2	10.5	0.71	9	1.41	14	0	7.5	4.95	12	0	10	1.41	4.5	0.71
Total	40	4.93	3.32	2.68	2.76	2.9	3.22	2.93	3.43	2.13	2.19	2.92	2.38	3.15	3.03

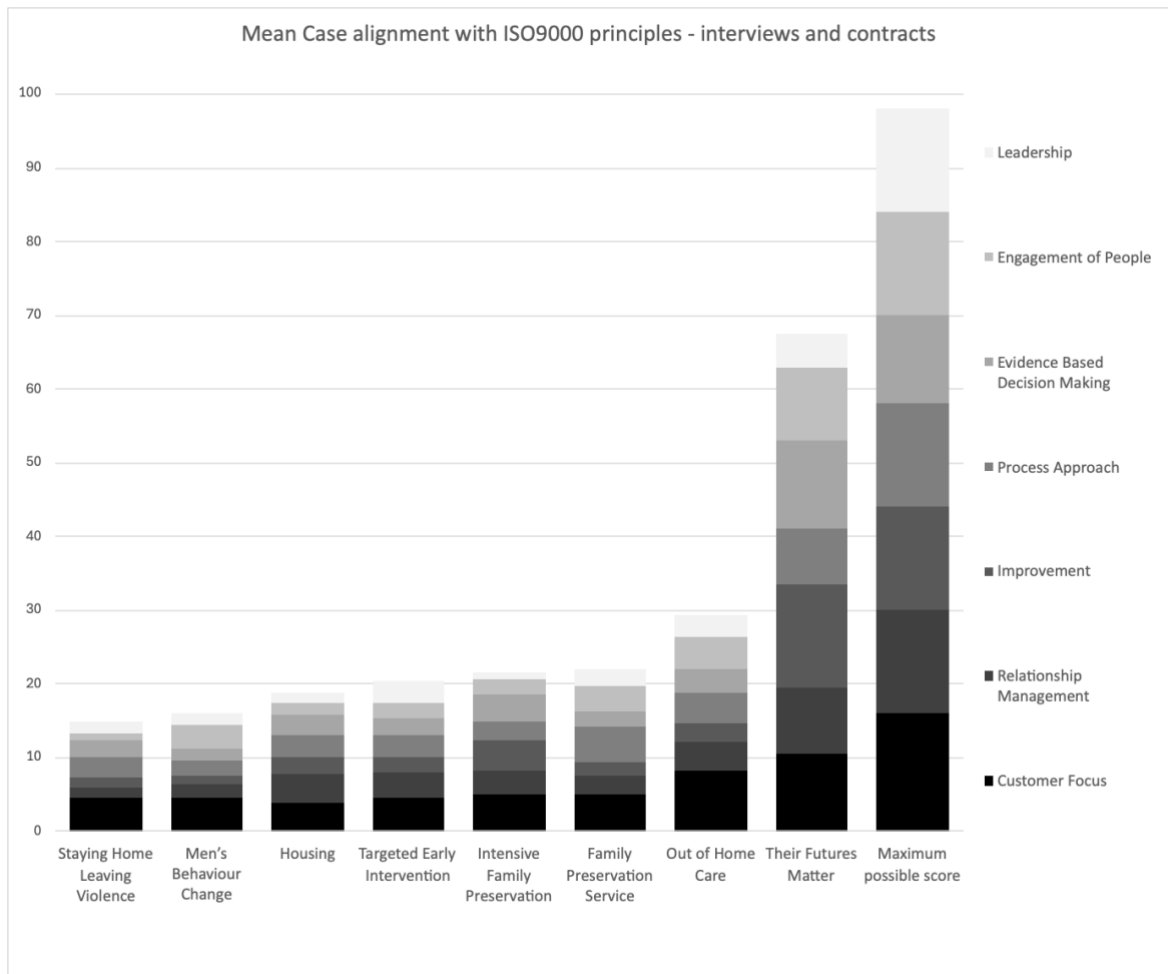


Figure 12. Mean Case alignment to ISO9000 principle

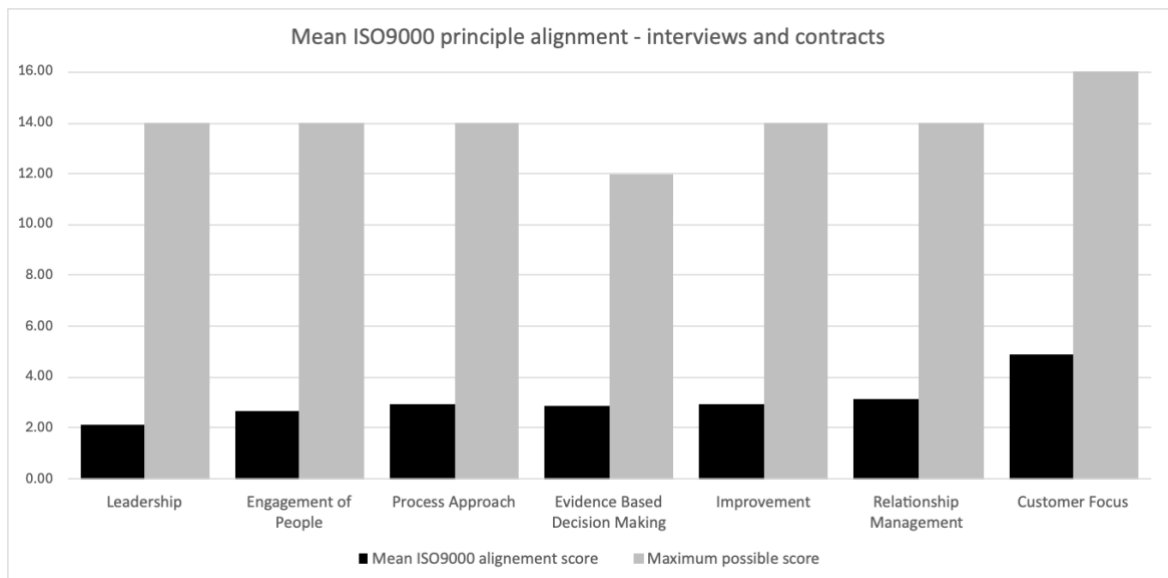


Figure 13. Mean ISO9000 principle alignment scores

2.4 Summary – Research question one

This section has reported data in answer to research question one: to what extent does government attempt to control the quality of its social welfare services in response to the systemic performance challenges identified by Public Choice Theory? The analyses conducted in response to this question reveal that while some ISO9000 aligned quality practices were reported in interviews and observed in contract documents, overall alignment was limited and uneven. Aggregate scores of interviews and contract documents show that most Cases cluster toward lower levels of alignment with ISO9000 as a whole, while a small number of interviews or contract documents achieve higher scores. Among the ISO9000 principles, possible activities reported for the Customer Focus and Relationship Management principles were most consistently aligned with reported practice, while the remaining principles achieved weaker alignment. Further analysis revealed systematic variation in ISO9000 alignment by Case, with Their Futures Matter and Out of Home Care achieving the highest levels of ISO9000 aligned practice, while all others displayed limited evidence of alignment. Regarding the comparative ISO9000 alignment of agency and participant job level, NGO staff tended to exhibit stronger alignment than their government colleagues, and staff occupying managerial roles reported slightly higher alignment scores than executives and frontline workers, although variability was evident within all role types. Collectively, these findings suggest that alignment of practice with ISO9000 possible activities is generally low and inconsistent but appears partially shaped by Case and the agency type that staff work for.

Section 3 Detailed analysis- research question two

This section reports the results and analyses for research question two,

2. What is the relationship between staff values, organisational quality mandates, and quality practice uptake?
 - a. Are certain staff values more commonly associated with higher quality practice uptake?

- b. What is the nature of the interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice?

Results for RQ2 are divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section reports the results of an Appraisal Analysis, including the components of Attitude, Engagement, Graduation and Metarelations. Then, results are reported for the construction of initial and focused codes, and the patterns of participant values across the three participant variables defined in this study, employing agency, participant job level and Case. The results of this sub-section establish a basis for comparison between participant values, and the ISO9000 alignment scores achieved in interviews and contract documents, reported in results for RQ1. The second sub-section reports the results of analysis for RQ2a, providing an answer to the question about the relationship between staff-values (identified in sub-section 1) and quality practice uptake (identified in RQ1). The third and final sub-section reports the results of analysis for RQ2b, providing an answer to the question about the interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice. All results and analyses in this section are based on data gathered from interview question numbers 12 and 13.

3.1 Establishing staff values

Appraisal Analysis of interview questions

In this section the interviews selected for qualitative analysis are transcribed, followed by the Appraisal Analysis for each. Criteria for selection of any given interview for analysis was that at least one of the two interview questions on participant values around their work were answered. Those questions were,

Question 12

Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the services? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?

Question 13

Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?

Under this criterion, 20 of the total 22 interviews were selected for analysis, starting with Interview 2. Each participant was assigned a Statistical Linkage Key (SLK) to de-identify them, while retaining a connection with information about the agency they worked for, their job level and the Case they worked within. Interview four is included here for reference, with the rest included in Appendix 6, Appraisal Analysis of interview responses.

Interview 4

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-MM-TMC-IV210226	NGO	Middle manager	TFM MST-CAN

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *I think there is no other service that is set up to address the very highest risk families that are out there. A lot of other services might see a family once or twice a week but they still can't address the problem behaviours like meth use etc., as well as this service does, with [unique] approach. We aren't perfect but we get pretty great results. I would like to see many families earlier in their case, before brighter futures, Child Protection, Intensive Family Preservation, etc. There is nothing else that adequately supports high risk families.*

Appraisal Analysis:

- Attitude
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a strong positive emotional commitment to the service's unique role in addressing high-risk families,

using evaluative language such as *great results* and *as well as this service does*.

- **Judgment:** The participant evaluates staff of their own service positively suggesting that, *we aren't perfect but we get pretty great results*
- **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the service's multi-professional approach as a significant strength, highlighting its unique ability to support *the very highest risk families* effectively. They also evaluate other services critically, suggesting they are insufficient in addressing *problem behaviours like meth use*, and provide a criticism of government processes, observing that, *I would like to see many families earlier in their case, before brighter futures, Child Protection, Intensive Family Preservation, etc. There is nothing else that adequately supports high risk families*.
- **Engagement:** The participant acknowledges the existence of other services but positions this service as superior due to its *multi-professional approach*.
- **Graduation:** Strong evaluative intensifiers like *very highest risk families* and *nothing else that adequately supports high-risk families* amplify the perceived importance and success of the service.
- **Metarelations:** The participant contrasts this service with others, constructing a hierarchical relationship where their service addresses more complex and critical needs. The phrase *no other service* and reference to *multi-professional approach* position the service as indispensable within the broader ecosystem of care.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Our team jokes about this all the time, the money isn't that good. I have a strong personal value regarding first nations people. I want to actively help address their trauma and help empower them in their own story. The key thing that keeps me going is if I can help keep Aboriginal kids at home and not in Out of Home Care.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses an emotional connection to their work, particularly in relation to Aboriginal people, with words like *strong personal value* and *empower them in their own story*.
 - **Judgment:** There is a clear moral evaluation in the participant's focus on addressing trauma and keeping *Aboriginal kids at home*, reflecting a sense of ethical responsibility. Additionally, the participant expresses a sense that Aboriginal people are deserving of help to right a previous wrong through the use of the ideas, *empower them in their own story* and helping to address *trauma*.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates their role as providing essential and culturally sensitive support, valuing the service's impact on first nations families and children.
- **Engagement:** The participant monoglossically positions themselves, as a meritorious and active agent within the broader system with regard to their work ethic and their view of Aboriginal people as belonging to the noble class of *first nations people*, indicating a sense of personal righteousness supported by the argument in favour of their own merit, stated tacitly as *the money isn't that good*.
- **Graduation:** Strong evaluative phrases like *key thing that keeps me going* and *actively help address their trauma* amplify the significance of the participant's personal mission.
- **Metarelations:** The participant emphasises their personal role as critical within the wider social context. Repeated references to the participant's awareness of the disadvantage of her clients as belonging to the groups, *first nations people* and *Out of Home Care* illustrate a commitment to addressing structural inequities and historical trauma, aligning their efforts with broader societal goals.

Grounded Theory coding

Initial codes

The output of the Appraisal Analysis yielded 77 initial codes, provided below in Table 17. Initial Codes were formed as a function of the summary labelling (Charmaz, 2014, p.242) of the Appraisal Analysis output. Several of the initial codes overlap while also defining separate nuances of the language used by participants. These overlaps were maintained at the initial code stage, to preserve the uniqueness of each participant's response, as much as possible.

Table 17. Initial Codes based on Appraisal Analysis of interview questions 12 and 13

IC #	Initial Code
1	Advocates Program's systemic uniqueness
2	Acknowledges ethical value - program
3	Amplifies challenges to program mission
4	Amplifies importance - addressing Program shortcomings
5	Amplifies importance - community engagement
6	Amplifies program - importance
7	Amplifies program - uniqueness
8	Amplifies own efforts - community outcomes
9	Amplifies own organisation - effectiveness
10	Amplifies self - moral virtue
11	Appreciates organisation - community focus
12	Appreciates organisation - flexibility for community outcomes
13	Appreciates organisation - culture
14	Appreciates own efforts - important for community
15	Appreciates own efforts - ethical merit
16	Appreciates program - community engagement
17	Appreciates program - community outcomes
18	Appreciates program - evidence based decision making
19	Appreciates program - flexibility to meet community need
20	Appreciates program - innovation for community outcomes

- 21 Appreciates program - moral value
- 22 Appreciates program - staff efforts for community
- 23 Asserts expertise
- 24 Collaborative problem-solving
- 25 Critique of government - ineffective
- 26 Critique of government - limitations
- 27 Critique of government - rigidity
- 28 Critique larger NGOs - ineffective
- 29 Critique of own organisation - senior leaders disengaged
- 30 Critique of own organisation - culture
- 31 Critique of program - ineffective
- 32 Critique of program - limitations
- 33 Critique of program - structure
- 34 Disempowered in work context
- 35 Ethical alignment with Program mission
- 36 Ethical responsibility to community
- 37 Employs local people for better community outcomes
- 38 Employs local people for better organisational outcomes
- 39 Engagement - community - neutral
- 40 Engagement - community - negative
- 41 Engagement - community - positive
- 42 Engagement - program - neutral
- 43 Engagement - program - negative
- 44 Engagement - program - positive
- 45 Engagement - work - neutral
- 46 Engagement - work - negative
- 47 Engagement - work - positive
- 48 Emotional alignment - community - neutral
- 49 Emotional alignment - community - negative
- 50 Emotional alignment - community - positive
- 51 Emotional alignment - program - neutral

52	Emotional alignment - program - negative
53	Emotional alignment - program - positive
54	Emotional alignment - organisation - neutral
55	Emotional alignment - organisation - negative
56	Emotional alignment - organisation - positive
57	Gratitude for opportunity to serve community
58	Heteroglossic - neutral
59	Heteroglossic - negative
60	Heteroglossic - positive
61	High regard for collaboration
62	High regard for respect and inclusion of clients
63	Intensifies moral obligation
64	Monoglossic - neutral
65	Monoglossic - negative
66	Monoglossic - positive
67	Moral responsibility to community
68	Personal pride in their work
69	Positive evaluation - colleague's efforts
70	Positive evaluation - program
71	Positive evaluation - organisation - culture
72	Positive evaluation - organisation - effectiveness
73	Prioritises community perspective
74	Program value linked to community outcomes
75	Proud of their commitment to community
76	Rationalises legitimacy of government action
77	Values inclusive decision making

Focused codes

Focused codes were formed by refining and synthesising the most frequently occurring, or conceptually related initial codes into conceptual groups to expedite analysis without losing the detail contained in the initial coding (Charmaz, 2014,

p.283) of the Appraisal Analysis. Constant comparative methods (Charmaz, 2014, p.270, Glaser and Strauss, 1999, p.277) were used to formulate the most accurate and relevant focused codes, by continuously comparing raw data, the Appraisal Analysis and initial codes with themselves and the emerging focused code categories, to maintain a coherent conceptual structure. As with the initial codes, some of the following focused codes contain areas of conceptual overlap with others. However, nuances in each focused code maintain the integrity of the code to its meaning in the raw data, or the participant subset to which it applies. As such, the focused codes that follow accurately represent the various complex sentiments either directly inscribed or implied by participants in response to interview questions 12 and 13.

Summary of Focused Codes

Fourteen Focused Codes were synthesised from the 77 Initial Codes, based on the Appraisal Analysis. These Focused Codes represent themes emerging from the Initial Codes, that progress the analysis of qualitative data (Charmaz, 2014, p.286) towards a response to the research questions posed by this study. Table 18 summarises the 14 Focused Codes.

Table 18. Summary of Focused Codes

FC #	Focused Code
1	Advocates ethical action
2	Critiques bureaucratic systems
3	Portrays personal / professional tension
4	Displays disengagement, disenchantment or disempowerment
5	Displays self-assured professional expertise
6	Advocates client voice in determining program goals
7	Advocates program value
8	Reveals ethical agency in decision making
9	Advocates need for flexibility & innovation
10	Critiques service environment as rigid, limited or ineffective
11	Displays empathy for community

12	Appreciates the complexity of community need
13	Is critical or neutral towards either work or community
14	Shows emotional alignment with both work and community

Focused Codes - composition and meaning

FC1 - Advocates ethical action

This Focused Code captures participants' ethically informed motivation in their work. They discuss taking principled actions within organisational constraints, ensuring fairness, accountability, and positive social impact. For example, one participant commented,

"something I remember growing up in a catholic family ... one of the Kennedy Family sayings [that] was [repeated]; for those to whom much is given, much is required. It sounds sappy but ... I feel responsible and think my job is a fantastic opportunity to share the chances afforded me to the people who don't get them. There are a lot of people materially and spiritually impoverished, and I can maybe give them a chance at social justice" (SLK - GV-EX-ALL-IV201023).

This sentiment was assigned the initial codes, *36 - Ethical responsibility to community* and *63 - Intensifies moral obligation*. Other participants discussed three additional themes that contributed to this focused code, including:

The importance, uniqueness and moral value of their work

"This is a very intense and expensive program ... overall very needed" (SLK – NG-MM-TMC-IV210409).
(IC6 - Amplifies program - importance)

"There is nothing else that adequately supports high risk families" (SLK – NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).
(IC7 – Amplifies program – uniqueness)

"We are there in times of struggle in people's lives ... when they need support to continue to be part of and contribute to the community" (SLK – NG-SM-TEI-IV210430).

(IC21 – Appreciates program – moral value)

“I would be unhappy if [my organisation] drifted away from supporting vulnerable people” (SLK – NG-EX-OAC-IV221205).

(IC63 - Intensifies moral obligation)

“You don’t often get successes, but when we do its fantastic ... we can have wins and get great outcomes” (SLK – GV-OPS-IV221111).

(IC17 - Appreciates program - community outcomes)

The importance of client centred practice

“We need smaller NGOs because they are more flexible and client oriented” (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).

(IC5 - Amplifies importance - community engagement)

“I want to see better outcomes for the women and children that I work with” (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).

(IC18 - Appreciates program - evidence based decision making)

Personal ethical investment

“[I’m] Totally [trying to achieve something personally]. I’ve been with [my organisation] for 30 years. I started on the front line in a child protection role” (SLK - NG-EX-OAC-IV221205).

(IC35 - Ethical alignment with Program mission)

“I have a strong personal value regarding first nations people ... I want to actively help address their trauma and help empower them in their own story” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).

(IC36 - Ethical responsibility to community)

“... I want to see better outcomes for the women and children that I work with” (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).

(IC53 - Emotional alignment - program - positive)

“Our team jokes about this all the time ... the money isn’t that good” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).

(IC67 - Moral responsibility to community)

These sentiments thematically cluster around a kind of meta-proposition about how participants made sense of their position, actions, and their meaning (Charmaz, 2014, p.11) as relatively privileged, compared to their clients. In aggregate, they mount a tacit argument advocating ethical action, justified by participants’ view of their privileged position to provide support, and their clients’ position of needing it.

This combination of initial codes was reported at more than double the rate by government staff, with government executives and managers, and the Their Futures Matter (TFM) Case reporting most frequently. The Initial codes that constitute this Focused Code were:

Table 19. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Advocates Ethical Action

IC #	Initial Code
5	Amplifies importance - community engagement
6	Amplifies program - importance
7	Amplifies program - uniqueness
17	Appreciates program - community outcomes
18	Appreciates program - evidence based decision making
21	Appreciates program - moral value
35	Ethical alignment with Program mission
36	Ethical responsibility to community
53	Emotional alignment - program - positive
63	Intensifies moral obligation
67	Moral responsibility to community

FC2 - Critiques bureaucratic systems

This focused code was formed from participants’ critiques of inefficiencies and constraints in bureaucratic systems. These accounts highlight how rigid policies,

limited resources, and other structural flaws hinder their work, as they see it.

Thematic patterns emerged in two main clusters.

Systemic constraints and inefficiencies

Participants noted that service demand exceeds available resources, creating barriers to effective delivery.

“Challenges are that demand for child protection has continued to increase ... there is a lot of work to look at how we can continually improve the broader system ...” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).

(IC25 - Critique of government - ineffective)

Others emphasised that program and policy frameworks were not fit for purpose or failed to adapt to community needs.

“There’s a lot more to say about working with Aboriginal people and trying to heal the problems that took 200 years to create. It’s going to take a long time to repair this damage” (SLK - GV-SM-OPS-IV221111).

(IC3 - Amplifies challenges to program mission)

“Currently ALL of the consultants for [our program] are from USA. They used to come over from there to here every 12 weeks, until COVID” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210409).

(IC4 - Amplifies importance - addressing Program shortcomings, IC33 - Critique of program - structure)

“... its supposed to help prevent crisis from happening in families. It needs more resources” (SLK - GV-SM-TEI-IV221020).

(IC31 - Critique of program – ineffective, IC32 - Critique of program - limitations)

Navigating bureaucratic rigidity

Other participants described bureaucratic processes as inherently restrictive, even when well-intentioned.

“You have to steer through the bureaucracy” (SLK - GV-SM-OPS-IV221111).

(IC26 - Critique of government - limitations)

“... but you can't be an activist in government ... the system is imperfect but it ensures a degree of accountability to the community through parliament” (SLK - GV-EX-ALL-IV201023).

(IC27 - Critique of government - rigidity)

“... we are starting with our work with children. We have to start there, you can't start at the top” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).

(IC54 - Emotional alignment - organisation - neutral)

These sentiments amalgamate into a coherent critique of bureaucratic systems. Participants describe misalignment between entrenched processes and the requirements of real-life service delivery. They report that insufficient resources, centralised decision-making divorced from local knowledge and rigid frameworks, inhibit appropriate responsive action. While some tacitly characterise existing accountability structures as beneficial or unavoidable, the overall focus is on how systemic characteristics frustrate the achievement of program goals. Government reported these sentiments at 1.5 times the rate of their NGO colleagues, with executives reporting at double the rate of managers.

Table 20. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Critiques Bureaucratic Systems

IC #	Initial Code
3	Amplifies challenges to program mission
4	Amplifies importance - addressing Program shortcomings
25	Critique of government - ineffective
26	Critique of government - limitations
27	Critique of government - rigidity
31	Critique of program - ineffective
32	Critique of program - limitations
33	Critique of program - structure
54	Emotional alignment - organisation - neutral

FC3 - Portrays personal / professional tension

These participants highlight the internal conflicts they felt between their personal values and professional roles. These accounts subtly describe a struggle to balance ethical convictions and systemic limitations, by suggesting that personal effort is required to bring about the intended outcomes of their work.

"We never turn people in need away" (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).

"We are doing the best we can within the minimal resources that we have ..." (SLK - GV-SM-OPS-IV221111).

"I try to do my best to support the NGOs. It would be good if we could reduce DV" (SLK - GV-MM-MBC-IV220907).

(IC14 - Appreciates own efforts - important for community)

Other participants betrayed inner tension by rationalising systemic limitations as necessary.

"... the system is imperfect but it ensures a degree of accountability to the community through parliament" (SLK - GV-EX-ALL-IV201023).

(IC76 - Rationalises legitimacy of government action)

These sentiments portray an uneasy internal negotiation between the practical realities of work environment and a personal desire to provide the full extent of possible support to vulnerable clients. Participants presented stories of adaptation and compromise, about dynamics they would rather not impact themselves or their clients. These ideas were reported almost exclusively by government executives including agency leading executives and those in charge of OOHC and Housing services. Notable exceptions were senior NGO managers in the Their Future's Matter Case.

Table 21. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Portrays Personal / Professional Tension

IC #	Initial Code
14	Appreciates own efforts - important for community
76	Rationalises legitimacy of government action

FC4 - Displays disengagement, disenchantment or disempowerment

This focused code represents participants who expressed feelings of detachment, frustration, or lack of influence within their roles. These accounts reveal a sense of alienation from the program’s purpose, organisational leadership or culture. Participants cited bureaucratic constraints, poor leadership, and systemic inefficiencies as contributing factors. Two thematic clusters emerged.

Negative or disengaged sentiments

Some participants framed their disillusionment around a belief that the broader system or their own organisation was failing to function effectively.

“I want to tackle the system to deliver better outcomes for people” (SLK - GV-SM-FPS-IV220928).
(IC25 - Critique of government - ineffective)

“You have to steer through the bureaucracy” (SLK - GV-SM-OPS-IV221111).
(IC26 - Critique of government - limitations)

“... [my organisation's] concession to government has reduced their capacity to build new social housing” (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).
(IC27 - Critique of government - rigidity)

“... new senior leaders lack interest in the value of research and improvement” (SLK - NG-EX-IFP-IV200522).
(IC29 - Critique of own organisation - senior leaders disengaged)

“... I’m just doing my job ... I don’t have a personal investment” (SLK - GV-SM-TEI-IV221020).

(IC34 - Disempowered in work context, IC42 - Engagement - program – neutral)

Program shortcomings

Others pointed to embedded issues in program design and organisational culture as undermining their capacity to achieve meaningful results.

“... it’s supposed to help prevent crisis from happening in families. It needs more resources” (SLK - GV-SM-TEI-IV221020).

(IC31 - Critique of program - ineffective, IC32 - Critique of program - limitations)

“Currently ALL of the consultants for [our program] are from USA” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210409).

(IC33 - Critique of program – structure)

These sentiments collectively depict a loss of engagement, which appears to stem from perceptions of flawed systems or leadership. For some, disengagement appears as a rational adaptation to an environment they see as unchangeable, for others it signals a deeper erosion of professional identity and purpose. The combination of the initial codes resulting in this focused code was reported almost exclusively by Government Managers with the single exception of one NGO Manager, across all seven Cases, with TEI reporting at highest rates, followed by MBC.

Table 22. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Displays Disengagement, Disenchantment or Disempowerment

IC #	Initial Code
25	Critique of government - ineffective
26	Critique of government - limitations
27	Critique of government - rigidity
29	Critique of own organisation - senior leaders disengaged
30	Critique of own organisation - culture
31	Critique of program - ineffective
32	Critique of program - limitations

33	Critique of program - structure
34	Disempowered in work context
42	Engagement - program - neutral
43	Engagement - program - negative
45	Engagement - work - neutral
46	Engagement - work - negative
51	Emotional alignment - program - neutral
52	Emotional alignment - program - negative
54	Emotional alignment - organisation - neutral
55	Emotional alignment - organisation - negative

FC5 - Displays self-assured professional expertise

This focused code represents the accounts of a set of participants whom reflected monoglossic (Martin and White, 2003, p.99) confidence in their own perspectives and approaches and work. Some offered self-assured views to the exclusion of other perspectives while others highlighted the tangible outcomes of their work, presenting their efforts as both indispensable and successful.

"I have committed my career over 30 years to get a better deal for people who live in western Sydney ... In that time there has been improvement in standard of living for people in western Sydney. I'm happy about this" (SLK - NG-SM-H00-IV200727).

(IC8 - Amplifies own efforts - community outcomes, IC23 - Asserts expertise)

"The reason to undercut [ourselves] was to remain competitive in the market and keep large faith-based orgs from gobbling up everyone else. Smaller organisations add value by having better community consultation and involvement than larger ones. This keeps services more relevant to local people" (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).

(IC9 - Amplifies own organisation - effectiveness, IC28 - Critique larger NGOs - ineffective)

"I like being able to pivot the operations of the organisation to meet the needs we identify in the community" (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).

(IC10 - Amplifies self - moral virtue, IC14 - Appreciates own efforts - important for community)

These sentiments collectively build a portrait of confident professional identity. These participants present themselves as uniquely skilled, highly committed, and justified in their views, drawing on tangible achievements and a strong ethical stance to reinforce their credibility. These sentiments were reported at around double the rate by government managers across five Cases (MBC, FPS, KEY, OOHC, TEI) than the only other group, NGO Executives and Managers (in Cases, Housing and IFP).

Table 23. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Projects Self-assured Professional Expertise

IC #	Initial Code
8	Amplifies own efforts - community outcomes
9	Amplifies own organisation – effectiveness
10	Amplifies self - moral virtue
14	Appreciates own efforts - important for community
15	Appreciates own efforts - ethical merit
23	Asserts expertise
28	Critique larger NGOs - ineffective
64	Monoglossic - neutral
65	Monoglossic - negative
66	Monoglossic - positive

FC6 - Advocates client voice in determining program goals

This focused code represents the emphasis added exclusively by NGO participants to the importance of integrating client and community voices into service design and decision making. Their accounts capture the importance they place on committing to meaningful engagement with those directly affected by service design and delivery decisions. They see this engagement as integral with effective, culturally appropriate, and responsive service outcomes. Two themes emerged within this focused code category.

Prioritising community perspectives

These participants positioned community perspectives as the most important input to shaping service objectives and delivery.

*“... we are here to help people manage relationships in their lives” (SLK - NG-EX-OAC-IV221205).
(IC5 - Amplifies importance - community engagement)*

*“We need smaller NGOs because they are more flexible and client oriented” (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).
(IC12 - Appreciates organisation - flexibility for community outcomes)*

*“... our work with children. We have to start there, you can't start at the top” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).
(IC16 - Appreciates program - community engagement)*

*“... helping these people and improving their lives ... this is the most important thing we can do” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).
(IC17 - Appreciates program - community outcomes)*

*“It is meaningful work to me. I can help reduce DV. That makes it worthwhile” (SLK - NG-FL-MBC-IV210507).
(IC50 - Emotional alignment - community - positive)*

*“The community is the big picture” (SLK - NG-EX-TEI-IV200526).
(IC73 - Prioritises community perspective)*

The value of collaboration & cultural appropriateness

Other accounts stressed that collaboration with clients and their service provider peers fosters trust and delivers better, more relevant outcomes.

*“All of the services provide very valuable support for very vulnerable people” (SLK - NG-SM-TEI-IV210430).
(IC61 - High regard for collaboration)*

“I have a strong personal value regarding first nations people ... I want to actively help address their trauma and help empower them in their own story” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).

(IC67 - Moral responsibility to community)

Sentiments like these, collectively mount the argument that collaborating with clients and peer organisations is key to delivering relevant and effective outcomes. For these participants, the legitimacy of their work rests on incorporating these views into the practice and goals of their work. Executives, managers and frontline staff reported these sentiments in six Cases (TFM, TEI, SLV, OOHC, MBC & IFP), exclusively in NGO environments.

Table 24. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Advocates Client Voice and Community Outcomes

IC #	Initial Code
4	Amplifies importance - addressing Program shortcomings
5	Amplifies importance - community engagement
11	Appreciates organisation - community focus
12	Appreciates organisation - flexibility for community outcomes
16	Appreciates program - community engagement
17	Appreciates program - community outcomes
24	Collaborative problem-solving
50	Emotional alignment - community - positive
61	High regard for collaboration
62	High regard for respect and inclusion of clients
67	Moral responsibility to community
73	Prioritises community perspective
74	Program value linked to community outcomes
75	Proud of their commitment to community

FC7 - Advocates program value

This focused code captured participants' efforts to highlight the effectiveness and importance of their programs. They discuss direct and indirect evidence of success, advocate for the moral value of their programs and seek to ensure recognition of their services' contributions to broader social outcomes.

“This service is for families with very high support needs, that’s where we fit” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210409).

(IC1 - Amplifies program’s systemic uniqueness)

“There is no other service that is set up to address the very highest risk ... families that are out there. A lot of other services might see a family once or twice a week ... but they still can’t address the problem behaviours like meth use, as well as [our service] does ...” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).

(IC6 - Amplifies program - importance)

“This [program] prevents homelessness, without being a [service that offers housing] ... it fits in before that by helping to prevent homelessness in the first place” (SLK - GV-EX-HST-IV200908).

(IC7 - Amplifies program - uniqueness)

“There are so many people worn down by their life circumstances, we are there to help get them through those hard moments. Everyone has times of vulnerability” (SLK - NG-SM-TEI-IV210430).

(IC21 - Appreciates program - moral value)

“[Our program is] a pre-emptive step, offering support before DV gets too entrenched. Like early intervention. This will mean potentially, DV affects less people’s lives ...” (SLK - NG-FL-MBC-IV210507).

(IC53 - Emotional alignment - program - positive)

These powerful statements inscribe or imply moral arguments based on the premise that the services provided by these participants confer better outcomes on their vulnerable clients. These participant accounts present as compelled promotions of the value of their programs, from the perspective of having seen their worth firsthand. As with FC6 - Advocates client voice in determining program goals, the set of initial codes that make up this focused code were reported in exclusively in NGO environments, across executives, managers and frontline workers, in six Cases (TFM, TEI, SLV, OOHC, MBC & IFP).

Table 25. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Advocates Program Value

IC #	Initial Code
1	Advocates Program's systemic uniqueness
6	Amplifies program - importance
7	Amplifies program - uniqueness

18	Appreciates program - evidence based decision making
19	Appreciates program - flexibility to meet community need
21	Appreciates program - moral value
22	Appreciates program - staff efforts for community
53	Emotional alignment - program - positive
70	Positive evaluation – program

FC8 - Reveals ethical agency in decision making

This focused code represents participants expressing strong ethical responsibility and personal agency in their roles. They describe their navigation of institutional challenges while upholding moral and professional commitments to social justice and equitable service delivery, for themselves and their organisations.

“I put a lot of personal value on making a difference for local communities” (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).

(IC14 - Appreciates own efforts - important for community)

“I really value being able to help families by passing on knowledge and improving practice” (SLK - NG-EX-IFP-IV200522).

(IC15 - Appreciates own efforts - ethical merit)

“We see positive results with families” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210409).

(IC23 - Asserts expertise)

“I like the idea that when I leave here, that vulnerable people had respectful support to get through their difficult moment in life. I try to make my service a welcoming place that helps meet people’s needs. I want us to be responsive in a positive way” (SLK - NG-SM-TEI-IV210430).

(IC35 - Ethical alignment with Program mission)

“It is meaningful work to me. I can help reduce DV. That makes it worthwhile” (SLK - NG-FL-MBC-IV210507).

(IC36 -Ethical responsibility to community)

“... we aren’t perfect, but we get pretty great results” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).

(IC69 - Positive evaluation - colleague’s efforts)

These accounts demonstrate how these participants claim ethical agency in their work. They show confidence in shaping program decisions with reference to the utility of providing a moral good to their clients, revealing congruence between their personal ethical judgements and their work practices. Exclusively reported again by NGOs, and most strongly by frontline staff and managers, across six Cases (TFM, TEI, SLV, OOH, MBC & IFP).

Table 26. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Reveals Ethical Agency in Decision Making

IC #	Initial Code
14	Appreciates own efforts - important for community
15	Appreciates own efforts - ethical merit
23	Asserts expertise
35	Ethical alignment with Program mission
36	Ethical responsibility to community
47	Engagement - work – positive
69	Positive evaluation - colleague's efforts
71	Positive evaluation - organisation – culture
72	Positive evaluation - organisation - effectiveness

FC9 - Advocates need for flexibility & innovation

This focused code highlights the trend in a set of participants’ assertions that services must be adaptable to meet evolving community needs. These participants argue for more flexible policies, innovation in service design, and the ability to tailor interventions based on real-world complexities.

“If they had bid for original contract with full cost recovery they may not have won the contract” (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).

(IC12 - Appreciates organisation - flexibility for community outcomes)

“I want for FACS to be able to actually measure how well we’ve done at helping these people improve their lives” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).

(IC18 - Appreciates program - evidence-based decision making)

“Other than the churches, there is nowhere else for people to go. We are also the biggest employer in [our town] so its also a soft entry point for anyone who needs info or support ...” (SLK - NG-EX-TEI-IV200526).

(IC19 - Appreciates program - flexibility to meet community need)

“I’m excited about predictive analytics ... we’d like to offer relevant services earlier” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).

(IC20 - Appreciates program - innovation for community outcomes)

“We get really involved with families at least 3 times a week plus 24/7 on call ...” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210409).

(IC24 - Collaborative problem-solving)

“There was a time when human services were pitted against each other for resources to keep running. This is not helpful” (SLK - NG-SM-TEI-IV210430).

(IC61 - High regard for collaboration)

These accounts reflect a pattern of preference for responsiveness over rigid adherence to predetermined guidelines. These participants emphasised recourse to collaboration and the use of relevant evidence to inform innovation, reflecting their understanding of the dynamic nature of community needs. These sentiments were reported most frequently by NGO managers, followed by government executives, in five Cases (High-level government, TFM, OOH, MBC & Housing).

Table 27. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Advocates Need for Flexibility & Innovation

IC #	Initial Code
12	Appreciates organisation - flexibility for community outcomes
18	Appreciates program - evidence based decision making

19	Appreciates program - flexibility to meet community need
20	Appreciates program - innovation for community outcomes
24	Collaborative problem-solving
61	High regard for collaboration

FC10 - Critiques service environment as rigid, limited or ineffective

This focused code represents the sentiment expressed across broadly across all groups, of dissatisfaction with structural inefficiencies, resource constraints, and systemic rigidity. Participants highlight areas where policy and service frameworks fail to meet community needs, calling for structural improvements.

“I want to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people” (SLK - GV-SM-FPS-IV220928).

(IC25 - Critique of government - ineffective)

“ ... you have to steer through the bureaucracy” (SLK - GV-SM-OPS-IV221111).

(IC26 - Critique of government - limitations)

“This program helps other programs to be more effective” (SLK - GV-EX-KEY-IV220727).

(IC26 - Critique of government - limitations)

“... we would like to see many families earlier in their case ... before brighter futures, child protection or Intensive Family Preservation ...” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).

(IC27 - Critique of government - rigidity)

“We are doing the best we can within the minimal resources that we have ...” (SLK - GV-SM-OPS-IV221111).

(IC32 - Critique of program - limitations)

These participants reflected frustration with systems whose central and self-referent focus failed to respond to the real-world dynamics dealt with by front line staff.

These concerns were expressed across government and NGOs, as well as throughout the various participant job levels, but cited most often by NGO managers, followed by government staff and then NGO executives, in four Cases (High-level government, TFM, TEI & Housing).

Table 28. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Critiques Service Environment as Rigid, Limited or Ineffective

IC #	Initial Code
25	Critique of government - ineffective
26	Critique of government – limitations
27	Critique of government – rigidity
31	Critique of program – ineffective
32	Critique of program – limitations
33	Critique of program – structure

FC11 - Displays empathy for community

This focused code reflects participants’ emotional connection to the people they serve. Participants assigned this focused code expressed deep empathy for clients’ struggles, emphasising the need for compassionate approaches that recognise client emotional realities, needs and dignity.

“It would be good if we could reduce DV” (SLK - GV-MM-MBC-IV220907).

(IC2 - Acknowledges ethical value - program)

“Each [DV] offender affects two to three women ... we try to reduce this number” (SLK - NG-FL-MBC-IV210507).

(IC17 - Appreciates program - community outcomes)

“I want to see better outcomes for the women and children that I work with” (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).

(IC21 - Appreciates program - moral value)

“We never turn people in need away, even if they don’t fit the referral criteria perfectly” (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).

(IC22 - Appreciates program - staff efforts for community)

“Children deserve to grow up in families that nurture them and allow them to flourish ...” (SLK - NG-EX-IFP-IV200522).

(IC36 - Ethical responsibility to community)

“... I really value being able to help families” (SLK - NG-EX-IFP-IV200522).

(IC50 - Emotional alignment - community - positive)

“I like the idea that when I leave here, that vulnerable people had respectful support to get through their difficult moment in life” (SLK - NG-SM-TEI-IV210430).

(IC62 - High regard for respect and inclusion of clients)

These sentiments linked participants’ strong empathic orientation with their professional identity, influencing their narrative of the meaning behind their work. A number of the initial codes that constitute this focused code were reported across all participating Cases, but most frequently by government executives, NGO managers, and frontline staff.

Table 29. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Displays Empathy for Community

IC #	Initial Code
2	Acknowledges ethical value – program
17	Appreciates program - community outcomes
21	Appreciates program - moral value
22	Appreciates program - staff efforts for community
36	Ethical responsibility to community
41	Engagement - community – positive

50	Emotional alignment - community - positive
62	High regard for respect and inclusion of clients
63	Intensifies moral obligation
67	Moral responsibility to community
75	Proud of their commitment to community

FC12 - Appreciates the complexity of community need

This focused code captures participants' recognition that the complexity of clients' needs is best considered from the client perspective. They stress the importance of empowering clients by amplifying their voices to shape the support they receive, ensuring that services align with the actual needs and preferences of those they support.

"We employ local people - this always works better for local client groups" (SLK - NG-MM-MBC-IV210430).

(IC11 - Appreciates organisation - community focus)

"I like being able to pivot the operations of the organisation to meet the needs we identify in the community" (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).

(IC16 - Appreciates program - community engagement)

"... importantly [the program] gives access to Aboriginal people through the Aboriginal NGO ... because that NGO is so small, it operates by making local connections through word of mouth. This is powerful and has resulted in a large number of referrals ..." (SLK - GV-EX-HST-IV200908).

(IC73 - Prioritises community perspective)

"We would like to show how money spent doing this is an investment" (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).

(IC74 - Program value linked to community outcomes)

These sentiments reflect a strong understanding of and responsiveness to the complexities of community need. Participants reporting these initial codes appreciated that the effectiveness of services relies on embedding client voice in service design, delivery and evaluation. These values were frequently reported by

staff of all levels in NGOs across five Cases (TEI, SLV, OOHC, MBC & Housing), but only fractionally among government staff.

Table 30. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Appreciates the Complexity of Community Need

IC #	Initial Code
5	Amplifies importance - community engagement
11	Appreciates organisation - community focus
16	Appreciates program - community engagement
73	Prioritises community perspective
74	Program value linked to community outcomes
77	Values inclusive decision making

FC13 - Is critical or neutral towards either work or community

Participants assigned this focused code expressed emotional alignment with work and community but also expressed criticisms. These included critical appraisals or neutral stances to their work environments, the communities they serve, or scepticism about the impact of their work, while others maintain a detached or pragmatic approach.

“There is a lot of financial pressure on our organisation due to things like lack of indexation. Because of this [we agreed] to absorb some costs in the interest of ending homelessness” (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).

(IC27 - Critique of government - rigidity)

“I’m not as empowered as I’d like to be ... new senior leaders lack interest in the value of research and improvement” (SLK - NG-EX-IFP-IV200522).

(IC29 - Critique of own organisation - senior leaders disengaged, IC30 - Critique of own organisation - culture)

“[This program provides] pretty low-level support ... its supposed to help prevent crisis from happening in families ... It needs more resources” (SLK - GV-SM-TEI-IV221020).

(IC30 - Disempowered in work context)

“No [I don't have a personal mission with my work]. I try to do my best to support the NGOs” (SLK - GV-MM-MBC-IV220907).

(IC44 - Engagement - program - negative)

“... we are starting with our work with children. We have to start there ... you can't start at the top” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).

(IC54 - Emotional alignment - organisation - neutral)

Government staff expressed these critical sentiments, while being emotionally aligned with their work or clients at a rate of more than four times that of their NGO colleagues. Government managers were the most critical of work or emotionally neutral regarding clients.

Table 31. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Is Critical or Neutral towards Work or Community

IC #	Initial Code
25	Critique of government - ineffective
26	Critique of government - limitations
27	Critique of government - rigidity
29	Critique of own organisation - senior leaders disengaged
30	Critique of own organisation - culture
31	Critique of program - ineffective
32	Critique of program - limitations
33	Critique of program - structure
34	Disempowered in work context
39	Engagement - community - neutral
40	Engagement - community - negative
42	Engagement - program - neutral
43	Engagement - program - negative
45	Engagement - work - neutral
46	Engagement - work - negative
48	Emotional alignment - community - neutral
49	Emotional alignment - community - negative

51	Emotional alignment - program - neutral
52	Emotional alignment - program - negative
54	Emotional alignment - organisation - neutral
55	Emotional alignment - organisation - negative

FC14 - Shows emotional alignment with both work and community

This focused code captures the experiences of participants whose accounts conveyed a strong and simultaneous emotional connection to their work and the communities they serve. Unlike other codes where either professional pride or community focus predominated, here both domains were emphasised without harsh criticism of the broader work they participate in. These participants described their work as deeply fulfilling, morally important and central to their identity, while also expressing a commitment to the outcomes that matter most to the communities they serve. Because the initial codes that make up this focused code draw heavily from themes already represented elsewhere, many of the illustrative quotes have been used in previous sections. Rather than repeat them in full, the following examples are indicative of the overall sentiment.

“The key thing that keeps me going is if I can help keep aboriginal kids at home and not in OOHC” (SLK - NG-MM-TMC-IV210226).

(IC75 - Proud of their commitment to community, IC16 - Appreciates program - community engagement)

“My work is important to me. Most people love working here” (SLK - NG-EX-TEI-IV200526).

(IC21 - Appreciates program - moral value)

“I come to get paid, but I also come from a personal family history of social justice ... I want to make a better place” (SLK - GV-SM-OPS-IV221111).

(IC53 - Emotional alignment - program - positive)

“If I can do nothing else, I want to roll this thing out” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).

(IC44 - Engagement - program - positive)

“[We have a] whole of family approach to DV and earlier intervention for better outcomes for children and a space for mentorship for [local] people to get some experience in this work ... this builds stronger work environments” (SLK - NG-MM-MBC-IV210430).

(IC38 - Employs local people for better organisational outcomes)

“My values align with [my employer]. I want to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people” (SLK - GV-SM-FPS-IV220928).

(IC35 - Ethical alignment with program mission)

“[The] Family Preservation service provides early intervention. It helps us have healthier families with their kids at home, better mental health, life and social outcomes” (SLK - GV-SM-FPS-IV220928).

(IC20 - Appreciates program - innovation for community outcomes)

Participants assigned this focused code integrated their professional identity with commitment to community. They framed their work not just as paid responsibility, but as a shared mission with community. This focused code was assigned to participants based on the co-occurrence of these themes, regardless of whether they expressed them concurrently. Only NGO participants qualified for assignment, with the one exception of a very senior government executive. This focused code was assigned across all NGO staff seniority levels and Cases (High-level government, TFM, TEI, SLV, OOHC, MBC, KEY, HST, Housing and FPS).

Table 32. Constituent Initial Codes of the Focused Code, Shows Emotional Alignment with Both Work and Community

IC #	Initial Code
1	Advocates Program's systemic uniqueness
9	Amplifies own organisation - effectiveness
13	Appreciates organisation - culture
16	Appreciates program - community engagement
17	Appreciates program - community outcomes
18	Appreciates program - evidence based decision making
19	Appreciates program - flexibility to meet community need
20	Appreciates program - innovation for community outcomes

21	Appreciates program - moral value
22	Appreciates program - staff efforts for community
35	Ethical alignment with Program mission
36	Ethical responsibility to community
37	Employs local people for better community outcomes
38	Employs local people for better organisational outcomes
41	Engagement - community - positive
44	Engagement - program - positive
47	Engagement - work - positive
50	Emotional alignment - community - positive
53	Emotional alignment - program - positive
56	Emotional alignment - organisation - positive
57	Gratitude for opportunity to serve community
62	High regard for respect and inclusion of clients
63	Intensifies moral obligation
67	Moral responsibility to community
68	Personal pride in their work
69	Positive evaluation - colleague's efforts
70	Positive evaluation - program
71	Positive evaluation - organisation - culture
72	Positive evaluation - organisation - effectiveness
73	Prioritises community perspective
74	Program value linked to community outcomes
75	Proud of their commitment to community

Summary – establishing staff values

The distribution of focused codes across agency type, job level and Case, reveals clear patterns in how participants framed the meaning and purpose of their work. These focused codes provided a means of tracking the kinds of sentiments the various participant types expressed about their clients, their organisation and the broader service system.

Government staff most frequently expressed ethical commitment to their work and empathy for the communities they served, but these values were often accompanied by accounts of navigating, adapting to, or critiquing the constraints of bureaucratic systems. While government executives tended to frame this tension in solution-oriented terms, emphasising the importance of principled action within structural limit, government managers more often articulated dissatisfaction with their environment, portraying it as rigid, limited, or ineffective. This pattern reflects a job-level divide in how systemic constraints were narrated. Executives acknowledged systemic limits but sought to work within them, while managers were more inclined to highlight how systemic limits obstructed their work. In contrast, NGO participants expressed their moral commitment through reflections that emphasised client-centred approaches, flexibility, and responsiveness. Several focused codes, particularly those advocating for the inclusion of client voice in program design or asserting the value and moral worth of their programs, were reported exclusively by NGO staff. This emphasis was strongest among NGO managers, who frequently cited advocacy for client priorities as a call for policy flexibility and innovation in the face of the rigidity of the broader service environment. NGO executives also critiqued system constraints, but generally with less force and frequency than government managers. NGO frontline workers stood out for their avoidance of criticism, instead concentrating on pragmatic, relational strategies to meet client needs. Their accounts reflected high emotional alignment with both work and community, framing service delivery as a moral and practical labour without emphasising systemic shortcomings. Case-level patterns reinforced these agency differences, with NGO staff of the Cases, Their Futures Matter, Out of Home Care, and Targeted Early Intervention more likely to report ethical agency, community empathy, and program value. In contrast, government staff working within the same Cases tended to include bureaucratic critique and professional tension in their responses to interview.

Overall, the patterns revealed by assignment of focused codes suggests that agency type had the strongest influence on how participants conceptualised their work. NGO narratives were client-focused, collaborative, and optimistic about the potential for flexible, locally responsive action. Government narratives, while also reflecting ethical

commitment, were more likely to contain objections to systemic constraints and critiques of policy, structure, or organisational culture. Job level also moderated these tendencies, with executives in both agency types tending to display acceptance of systemic limitations while managers objected. Case context appeared to influence the presence of particular focused codes, but the broader agency and role patterns held across them. Figure 14 visually sets out the alignment of these groups with the focused codes described above.

Agency	Participant Job level	Case	Advocates Ethical action	Critiques Bureaucratic Systems	Portrays Personal / professional tension	Displays Disengagement, Disenchantment or Disempowerment	Projects Self-assured Professional Expertise	Advocates Client Voice in Determining Program Goals	Advocates Program Value	Reveals Ethical Agency in Decision Making	Advocates Need for Flexibility & Innovation	Critiques Service Environment as Rigid, Limited or Ineffective	Displays Empathy for Community	Appreciates the Complexity of Community Need	Is Critical or Neutral towards Work or Community	Shows Emotional Alignment with Both Work and Community
*Consultant	Executive	High-level government														
Government	Executive	High-level government	1	2	3						9	10	11	12	13	
Government	Executive	OOHC	1	2	3						9	10	11	12		
Government	Executive	KEY	1	2	3											13
Government	Executive	HST	1	2	3											13
*Government	Manager	High-level government														
Government	Manager	TEI				4	5									13
Government	Manager	OPS	1	2	3	4	5				9	10	11	12		13
Government	Manager	MBC				4	5									13
Government	Manager	KEY				4	5									13
Government	Manager	FPS	1	2	3	4	5									13
NGO	Executive	TEI						6	7	8						14
NGO	Executive	OOHC						6	7	8						14
NGO	Executive	Housing	1	2	3	4	5				9	10	11	12		14
NGO	Executive	IFP				4	5	6	7	8						13
NGO	Frontline	SLV						6	7	8	9	10	11	12		14
NGO	Frontline	MBC						6	7	8						14
NGO	Manager	TFM MST-CAN	1	2	3			6	7	8	9	10	11	12		14
NGO	Manager	TFM MST-CAN	1	2	3			6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
NGO	Manager	TEI						6	7	8	9	10	11	12		14
NGO	Manager	MBC						6	7	8	9	10	11	12		14
NGO	Manager	Housing				4	5									14

*denotes that this interview did not reach selection criteria for this analysis

Figure 14. Alignment between participant variables and Focused Codes

3.2 RQ2.a. Are certain staff values more commonly associated with higher quality practice uptake?

This section reports results of analysis to answer RQ2a, or in analytical terms; reports whether the variability in the dataset for RQ1 is explained by the dataset for RQ2. The results for RQ1 comprised a numeric score of quality practices reported in interviews or prescribed in contract documents. However, the results for RQ2 were qualitative data, comprised of participants' values around their work, as represented in the Appraisal Analysis, then initial, focused and theoretical codes. To transform these independent datasets into like-terms and analyse their relationship to each other, a range of statistical methods appropriate for mixed methods research were used (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.216).

Converting qualitative codes for quantitative testing

To enable statistical analysis, all qualitative codes arising from the Grounded Theory analysis were transformed into numeric values. This process converted the various initial, focused and theoretical codes into numbers, as follows:

- The 77 initial codes, reflecting participants' evaluative language regarding their interest, values, authority, work meaning, and systemic issues were labelled IC1 to IC77
- The 14 focused codes which captured frequently occurring patterns of initial code expression were labelled FC1 to FC14.
- The five theoretical codes representing major grounded theory concepts were labelled TC1 to TC5.
- The presence of any of these codes in the interview data was flagged in SPSS as a '1', and absence as a '0'.

This type of transformation made it possible to compare participant values with their ISO9000 alignment scores and is supported by established mixed methods approaches,

particularly when using quantizing to test convergence or divergence between datasets (Sandelowski et al., 2009).

Significant relationships between participant values and quality practice

Four initial codes and three focused codes were related with ISO9000 alignment scores in statistically and theoretically significant ways. Those codes were,

Initial codes

- IC1 - Advocates Program's Systemic Uniqueness
- IC4 - Amplifies Importance of Addressing Program Shortcomings
- IC24 - Collaborative problem-solving
- IC33 - Critique of Program – Structure

Focused codes

- FC1 – Advocates Ethical Action
- FC2 – Critiques Bureaucratic Systems
- FC3 - Portrays Personal / Professional Tension

Theoretical codes

As previously noted, five theoretical codes were also developed during the initial phase of analysis. Their composition is shown in Table 33.

Table 33 Composition of discarded theoretical codes

#	Theoretical Codes	Constituent Focused Codes
1	Ethical Negotiation within Bureaucratic Constraints	1, 2, 3
2	Effects of Organistaion and Role on Culture	4, 5
3	Advocacy-Driven Legitimisation of Work	6, 7, 8
4	Policy Rigidity vs. Practice Flexibility	9, 10, 11, 12
5	Emotional Alignment to Work	13, 14

However, while these theoretical codes were qualitatively defensible, they did not contribute meaningfully ($p = [.37 \text{ to } .92]$) to the statistically based, cross-case synthesis, and were discarded. Lack of significant findings here may be due to the relevance of theoretical concepts represented by the codes, or to the sample size, which may have impacted p values.

Initial codes – significant interactions with ISO9000 alignment scores in interviews

Linear regression was used to determine whether the presence of specific initial codes ($n=77$) predicted higher or lower participant ISO9000 alignment scores. This analysis method differed from that used with focused and theoretical codes, due to practical constraints and analytical goals. Practically, there were 77 initial codes spread across only 19 valid interview records, with some codes occurring only once, and others occurring in many interviews. This made it difficult to form clean, mutually exclusive groups that met assumptions for t-test comparisons. The analytic goal was also different, with the aim of assessing the predictive power of each initial code on ISO9000 alignment scores. The use of linear regression in the analysis of initial codes allowed examination of this, but also the direction and magnitude of influence. The additional analytic output possible with this data provided an opportunity to understand and theorise about how the most basic sentiments coded in the data might interact with staffs' engagement with their work, clients, colleagues, and

quality management practices. These insights cannot be obtained from t-tests, which only compare group means, without modelling predictive power or direction. To conduct each linear regression, the initial code was used as a binary predictor in each instance (1 = present, 0 = absent) of participant ISO9000 alignment score.

Regression models were checked for violations of key assumptions. Standardised residuals appeared visually normally distributed, scatterplots revealed that homoscedasticity was also reasonably met. Formal statistical tests (e.g. Shapiro Wilk) were not conducted, due to the small sample size ($n = 19$) and the binary nature of predictor variables. Accordingly, regression models were treated as exploratory, and interpretations made with caution (Field, 2024, pp.385-388, Babyak, 2004, Jenkins and Quintana-Ascencio, 2020). However, no major violation of assumptions was observed, supporting the use of linear regression in this context.

All linear regressions described here also underwent a bias-corrected and bootstrapping procedure (with 1,000 resamples) to assess the stability of the coefficient in low sample tests, as with the present study ($n=19$). The bootstrapped 95% confidence interval was 37.99, 5314, $p = .002$, confirming the reliability and significance of these initial codes as predictors of higher ISO alignment scores.

Importantly, all the initial codes found to be statistically significant predictors of ISO9000 alignment scores (IC1, IC4, IC24, IC33) originated from a single interview transcript. This means the results are likely to reflect the distinct views and values of one participant, rather than representing patterns across multiple cases. While the statistical models (including bootstrapping) confirm that these initial codes were strong predictors of ISO9000 alignment in this study, the concentration of these codes within one interview limits the generalisability of the findings. These results should therefore be interpreted as exploratory and case-specific insights, rather than robust indicators of wider patterns in the dataset.

IC1 - Advocates Program's systemic uniqueness

Presence of this initial code significantly predicted that interview ISO9000 alignment scores would be substantially higher ($B = 45.56, p = .018$). The presence of IC1 accounted for 29% of the variability in ISO9000 alignment scores ($R^2 = 0.286$), suggesting that participants who advocated for the uniqueness of their work in the community were reliably more likely to engage in ISO9000-like formal quality management practices.

IC4 - Amplifies importance - addressing Program shortcomings

Similarly to IC1, presence of this initial code significantly predicted that interview ISO9000 alignment scores would be substantially higher ($B = 45.56, p = .018$). The presence of IC4 also accounted for 29% of the variability in ISO9000 alignment scores ($R^2 = 0.286$), suggesting that participants who emphasised that shortcomings in FACS program design should be addressed were reliably more likely to engage in ISO9000-like formal quality management practices.

IC24 - Collaborative problem-solving

The presence of IC24 significantly predicted higher ISO9000 alignment scores ($B = 45.56, p = .018$). This suggests that participants who emphasised the importance of collaboration in solving problems scored, on average, 45.56 points higher in ISO9000 alignment. The model explained approximately 29% of the variance in scores ($R^2 = 0.286$), indicating a moderate association. These findings imply that participants who value collaborative problem solving tended to achieve stronger alignment with formal ISO9000 principles.

IC33 - Critique of program - structure

Participants who offered a critique of the structure or design of their program of work were again, significantly ($p = .018$) more likely to achieve a higher ISO9000 alignment score ($B = 45.56$) during interview. While a surface level analysis of this code might imply that these interview participants were disengaged with their work, the strong positive impact that IC33 had on score suggests that presence of this

sentiment in participant feedback reflects deep engagement with work to the point of being aware of how it may be improved.

Focused codes – significant interactions with ISO9000 alignment scores in interviews

The following analyses were conducted to explore whether the presence of focused codes in interview responses were associated with a change in ISO9000 alignment score. To quantify the impact of these higher-level, interpretive themes in the dataset, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted. This approach was chosen because focused codes ($n = 14$) were fewer in number than initial codes ($n = 77$), occurred more consistently across interviews, and lent themselves to clear binary groupings to divide total participants into one group that recorded each focused code, and one that didn't (Field, 2024, pp.445-458). Unlike initial codes, where linear regression was used to model predictive influence, the analytic goal with focused codes was to detect more general statistically significant differences in group means. To address issues related to the small sample size ($n = 19$) of this study and reduce the risk of Type I or II error (Field, 2024, p.82) each t-test was accompanied by a bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 resamples. This resampling approach allowed for robust confidence interval estimation and significance testing, particularly under conditions of non-normality or unequal variance (Field, 2024, pp.265-268). Additionally, where Levene's test indicated unequal variances, Welch's t-test results were reported. While results are treated as exploratory, the combination of parametric and non-parametric methods strengthens confidence in the findings. Significant differences in participant interview ISO9000 alignment scores accounted for by the presence of the three focused codes *Advocates Ethical Action* (FC1), *Critiques Bureaucratic Systems* (FC2) and *Portrays Personal / Professional Tension* (FC3).

FC1 Advocates Ethical Action

Participants coded with FC1 ($n = 8$) recorded an average of around 20 points higher ISO9000 scores ($M = 40.75$, $SD = 22.83$) than those without this code ($n = 11$; $M = 20.18$, $SD = 11.21$),

$t(9.47) = 2.35, p = .042$ (equal variances not assumed). Bootstrapping (1,000 samples) confirmed this result, 95% CI [4.00, 36.11], $p = .050$. The effect size was large (Cohen's $d = 1.21$, Glass's $\delta = 1.83$), suggesting that around 24% of variance in ISO9000 alignment scores is explained by participants reporting that ethical action was required in social welfare service work. This moderate statistical finding is in agreement with the grounded theoretical standpoint of this study, that staff alignment to client value motivates focus on work performance.

FC2 Critiques Bureaucratic Systems

Participants coded with FC2 ($n = 8$) had significantly higher ISO9000 alignment scores ($M = 40.75, SD = 22.83$) than those who were not coded ($n = 11; M = 20.18, SD = 11.21$), $t(9.47) = 2.35, p = .042$, with a mean difference of 20.57 points. This finding remained robust under bootstrapping (1,000 samples), with a 95% CI of [5.59, 37.85] and a bootstrapped p -value of .042. The effect was large, with Cohen's $d = 1.21$ and Glass's $\delta = 1.83$, also indicating that around 24% of variance in ISO9000 alignment scores is explained by participants reporting criticisms of bureaucratic systems.

FC3 Portrays Personal / Professional Tension

Participants coded with FC3 ($n = 8$) again had significantly higher scores ($M = 40.75, SD = 22.83$) compared to those not coded ($n = 11; M = 20.18, SD = 11.21$), $t(9.47) = 2.35, p = .042$, with a mean difference of 20.57 points in respective ISO9000 alignment scores. A bootstrapped analysis (1,000 samples) produced a 95% confidence interval of 4.14, 38.67, and a marginally non-significant bootstrapped p -value of .060. While this result did not meet the conventional significance threshold under the resampling test, it remains broadly consistent with the t-test and suggests a meaningful effect. The effect size was again large (Cohen's $d = 1.21$, Glass's $\delta = 1.83$), indicating that participants who reflected upon tension between their work role and personal values were more likely to engage in deliberate quality management practices that lined up with those prescribed by ISO9000.

Although these three focused codes each showed a statistically significant relationship with ISO9000 alignment, they consistently co-occurred in the same participants. As such, their effects are confounded, meaning their effects cannot be cleanly separated from each other in this dataset. Rather than treating them as independent influences, it is more accurate to interpret them as overlapping dimensions of a broader value orientation (Field, 2024).

Alignment of this grouping of significant focused codes with the theoretical concepts of, Engaged, Empowered, Committed

Staff sentiments described by focussed codes 1-3 displayed the common affective elements of engagement, commitment and empowerment as described in the organisational psychology and management literature (Anitha, 2014, Kahn, 1990, Meyer and Allen, 1991, Spreitzer, 1996).

Focused code one, *Advocates ethical action*, was assigned to staff who saw their work as morally significant and aligned with their personal values. This was expressed in a variety of ways, with participants framing their role as an ethical responsibility to community, emphasising the uniqueness and moral value of their work, and often drawing explicit links between their personal ethics and professional obligations. The collection of initial codes representing these value expressions (IC36, IC63, IC67) suggests that participants were not merely performing tasks but actively investing their personal values. For example, one government executive reflected: *“I feel responsible and think my job is a fantastic opportunity to share the chances afforded me to the people who don’t get them [SLK - GV-EX-ALL-IV201023]”* (IC36 – *Ethical responsibility to community*). Such expressions align with Kahn’s (1990) definition of engagement as the *“harnessing of organisational members’ selves to their work roles”* (Hofstede, 1998) and Anitha’s (2014) finding that meaningful work environments cultivate engagement by aligning organisational goals with employees’ personal values. Inclusion of initial codes such as *Amplifies program importance* (IC6) and *Appreciates program moral value* (IC21) in this focused code, indicate that staff assigned FC1 relayed a sense of deep meaning in their contribution to community outcomes. This also aligns with Anitha’s (2014)

emphasis on meaningfulness, leadership support and well-being as critical components of engagement. In line with Anitha's (2014) definition, FC1 demonstrates how the kind of moral engagement required to advocate ethical action may be seen as an expression of engagement. Staff were motivated not merely by compliance with mandates, but by a personal conviction that their work was socially valuable and required their emotional investment.

Focused code two, *Critiques bureaucratic systems*, was assigned to staff expressing agency and belief in their capacity to influence outcomes, aligning with Spreitzer's (1996) notion of *empowerment*, comprising meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The constituent initial codes, *Critique of program – ineffective* (IC31), *Critique of program – limitations* (IC32), *Critique of program – structure* (IC33) and *Emotional alignment - organisation – neutral* (IC54) comprising this focused code emphasised both systemic inefficiencies and bureaucratic rigidity. Staff critiqued policies that they perceived as ineffective or misaligned with own perceptions of community need, highlighted resource shortages, and pointed out issues they felt obstructed service effectiveness. In doing so, they relayed an implicit sense of self-determination and an expectation of that their views mattered, by arguing how systems should change to better meet client needs. This orientation reflects empowerment in the sense that staff actively voiced expectations that their work could and should shape outcomes.

The third significant focused code, *Portrays personal/professional tension* (FC3), was comprised of initial codes including *Appreciates own efforts – important for community* (IC14) and *Rationalises legitimacy of government action* (IC76), pointing to staff negotiating an uneasy balance between their professional obligations and personal values. Such negotiation reflects a form of commitment, consistent with Meyer and Allen's (1991) definition of *affective commitment* as an emotional attachment to, and identification with, one's organisation and role. The very presence of this tension indicates that these staff care deeply about the work, are invested in its outcomes, and are willing to exert voluntary effort even in imperfect systems.

Other theoretical relationships between participant values and ISO9000 scores

Several initial and focused codes warrant discussion because they pointed to something theoretically relevant and interesting, despite some of them not quite reaching statistical significance. Some of these codes confirmed theoretical assertions made by the grounded theory of this study, others were associated with counter-intuitive impacts on ISO9000 alignment scores. These results are included as theoretically aligned exploratory findings. Given the lack of statistical significance present in some of these analyses, an attempt was made to include a metric that gives a clear sense of the scale of influence of these focused codes on participant ISO9000 scores. Proportion of variance was chosen to fulfil this role. To estimate the proportion of variance in ISO9000 scores explained by each focused code, Cohen's d was converted to r^2 , following established methods (Lakens, 2013). The resulting estimate of the percentage of variance explained provides a practical metric that is used here to show how much variability in scores can be explained by the presence of each focused code.

Focused codes of theoretical interest

FC4 Displays Disengagement, Disenchantment or Disempowerment

Although not statistically significant, the direction of the effect of FC4 is noteworthy and theoretically meaningful. Participants coded with FC4 ($n = 8$) scored an average of 8.8 points lower in mean ISO9000 alignment score ($M = 23.75$, $SD = 12.30$) compared to those not coded with this theme ($n = 11$; $M = 32.55$, $SD = 23.34$), $t(15.81) = -1.06$, $p = .304$ (equal variances not assumed). This means that participants expressing disengagement, disenchantment or disempowerment, tended to report less engagement with systems that attempt to improve the impact and efficiency of work environments, like formal quality management systems.

FC9 Advocates Need for Flexibility & Innovation

Participants coded with FC9 ($n = 8$) had a 17.11 point higher mean ISO9000 alignment score ($M = 38.75$, $SD = 24.77$) than those not coded ($n = 11$; $M = 21.64$, $SD = 11.02$). This result approached significance under classical assumptions, $t(17) = 2.05$, $p = .057$,

but was not statistically significant when accounting for unequal variances ($p = .101$) or bootstrapped resampling ($p = .108$, 95% CI [-0.63, 35.27]). However, the effect size was large (Cohen's $d = 0.95$), indicating that around 18% of variability in ISO9000 scores can be explained by participants advocating for flexibility and innovation in their work environment. This is consistent with a theoretical expectation of higher ISO9000 alignment among staff who advocate for progressive, adaptive approaches, as more likely to demonstrate systemic insights.

FC10 – Critiques Service Environment as Rigid, Limited or Ineffective

While the two-tailed probability did not reach significance ($p = .057$), the effect of participants offering this kind of critique of their environment was large (Cohen's $d = 0.951$). The presence of this sentiment accounted for around 18.4% of the 17-point mean score increase in ISO9000 alignment. A one-tailed t-test yielded statistical significance ($p = .028$) suggesting a theoretically meaningful trend, warranting further investigation in future research that explicitly tests such directional hypotheses. As with FC2 and FC9, this finding is consistent with grounded theory expectations that critical reflection on work environment may be associated with higher standards or aspirations for effective delivery.

FC11 – Displays Empathy for Community

A significant one-tailed difference in ISO9000 alignment scores was also found between participants coded with FC11 and those who were not ($t(17) = 2.046$, $p = .028$), with a large effect size, (Cohen's $d = 0.95$) signifying that around 18% of variability in ISO9000 scores explained by the presence of this code. However, the two-tailed probability applicable to this test only approached significance ($p = .057$). Despite this lack of statistical significance, participants who displayed empathy for community, their clients, scored notably higher ($M = 38.75$) than those not expressing this value ($M = 21.64$). This reinforces the theoretical claim of this study that relational value alignment is a potential driver of quality in service delivery.

FC12 – Appreciates the Complexity of Community Need

Participants reporting appreciation of the complexity of their client's needs scored higher on ISO9000 alignment ($M = 38.75$, $SD = 24.77$) than those not ($M = 21.64$, $SD = 11.02$), $t(17) = 2.05$. This approached significance using a two-tailed test ($p = .057$) but only achieved statistical significance under a one-tailed test ($p = .028$), which was not appropriate for this data. The effect size was large (Cohen's $d = 0.95$), accounting for around 17% of variability in scores. Again, the positive influence of this focused code on scores is consistent with the hypothesis that values oriented thinking may be positively related to the adoption of quality management practices.

Non-significant theoretical counterpoints

Two focused codes (FC13 and FC14) yielded non-significant results but exhibited moderate effect sizes in directions inconsistent with theoretical expectations. While these were not retained as key findings, they may reflect underlying complexities in how emotional or critical factors manifest in practice. FC13 (expressing critical or neutral sentiments toward work and community) was associated with higher ISO9000 alignment scores, suggesting that constructive critique or emotional detachment may reflect professional engagement. Similarly anomalous, emotional alignment with work (FC14) was associated with lower ISO9000 alignment scores. This raises questions about whether positive sentiment about work translates into quality practices at all, or whether other factors such as workplace culture that discourages focus on formal work processes, may be at play.

Initial codes of theoretical interest

IC19 - Appreciates program - flexibility to meet community need

Participants expressing appreciation for the program's ability to flexibly meet their client's needs (IC19, $n = 3$) tended to score lower on ISO9000 alignment ($B = -21.19$, $p = .084$). While this result did not reach statistical significance, the moderately sized inverse relationship suggests that favouring adaptive, community focused approaches may correlate with lower alignment to formal quality frameworks such as

ISO9000. This highlights potential tensions between local responsiveness and procedural standardisation in social welfare work.

IC36 - Ethical responsibility to community

The presence of IC36 (n = 6) was associated with higher ISO9000 alignment scores (B = 33.86, $p = .062$). Though the result narrowly missed statistical significance, the direction of this effect implies that participants who reported feeling ethical responsibility to their clients may be more likely to engage with formal quality systems. This aligns with broader themes of value-driven alignment, where ethical convictions reinforce procedural accountability.

IC44 - Engagement - program – positive

The participant coded with IC44 (n = 1), reflected generally positive sentiment about program engagement and achieved a moderate increase in their ISO9000 alignment score (B = 35.00, $p = .080$). Though narrowly non-significant, this effect is in line with the grounded theoretical stance of this study that emotional investment in work may coincide with commitment to quality management behaviours. Findings for this participant supports findings from other initial and focused codes where positive engagement is linked with higher ISO9000 alignment.

IC57 - Gratitude for opportunity to serve community

The single participant's expression of gratitude for working in service of the community (IC57, n = 1) was associated with a notable, though non-significant, increase in their ISO9000 alignment score (B = 32.01, $p = .087$). While probability does not meet significance thresholds, the size ($R^2 = .179$) and direction of this effect imply that an appreciative emotional stance may accompany more systemically aligned thinking or behaviours, consistent with other optimism and client focused codes.

Non-significant theoretical counterpoints

Interestingly, several initial codes with seemingly strong alignment to the initial Grounded Theory of this study produced no discernible impact on ISO9000 alignment whatsoever. These initial codes included, acknowledging the ethical value of the program (IC2), demonstrating high regard for client respect and inclusion (IC62), critiquing disengaged senior leadership (IC29) and organisational culture (IC30). While initially surprising, the lack of impact of these sentiments on ISO9000 scores may reflect deeper complexities, for example, the possibility that ethical beliefs or frustrations do not necessarily translate into systemic action, or that these sentiments are not captured by the formal dimensions of ISO9000 aligned practice. This lack of predictive power highlights the gap that can exist between reported values and procedural focus and underscores the need for further work to explore how these factors interact in context.

Summary – RQ2.a.

Analysis of RQ2.a showed that staff values exerted a measurable influence on the uptake of quality practices. Across participants ($n = 36$), mean ISO9000 scores were low ($M = 24.03$, $SD = 15.68$), and skewed overall toward weaker alignment. Staff of NGOs ($M = 29.73$, $SD = 21.21$) and managers from both government and NGOs reported somewhat higher scores ($M = 30.00$, $SD = 22.51$) than their government and frontline counterparts. Importantly, participants assigned focused codes 1-3 (*Advocates ethical action*, *Critiques bureaucratic systems*, or *Displays personal / professional tension*), achieved significantly higher ISO9000 alignment scores. However, the influence of staff values on ISO9000 scores, while statistically significant, was consistently eclipsed by the influence of contracted quality mandates. The nature of the interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice is reported fully, in the next section.

3.3 RQ2.b. The interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice

Contract documents provide a critical point of contrast to examine the influence of quality mandates on staff, compared with the influence of the values those staff. The contract documents that guide the work of the participants of this study include descriptions of the methods and activities to be used to achieve the goals described. Some mandates describe routine program parameters like client eligibility. The Men's Behaviour Change program, for example, defines eligible clients as men charged with, or at risk of being charged with a domestic violence offence, and who have been referred to the service by the NSW Police. The families of these men are also eligible for support, but not behavioural intervention. However, some contract mandates include prescriptions of how quality is managed, guiding matters like the scope of service performance for reporting. Ostensibly, this makes contract documents a powerful mechanism for promoting or repressing the uptake of quality management activities. To assess the interaction of the influence of staff values and contracted quality mandates on the uptake of quality management practices, analysis first compared the extent of quality management practices prescribed in these documents, with participant uptake of these practices, across Cases and participants.

As an initial assessment, mean ISO9000 alignment scores were calculated for contract documents by Case (Mean ISOT Contracts) and compared to the average interview scores for the same Cases (Mean ISOT Interviews). A Pearson correlation revealed a statistically significant but low to moderate relationship, ($r = .359$, $p = .040$), between mandated quality practices and their uptake by staff. The results of this analysis is illustrated by Table 34 and Figure 16.

Table 34. Pearson Correlation Between ISO9000 Contract and Interview Scores

Correlations		Mean ISOT Interviews by Mean ISOT Contracts	
		Case	by Case
Mean ISOT Interviews by Case	Pearson Correlation	1	.359*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.040
	N	40	33
Mean ISOT Contracts by Case	Pearson Correlation	.359*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	
	N	33	33

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

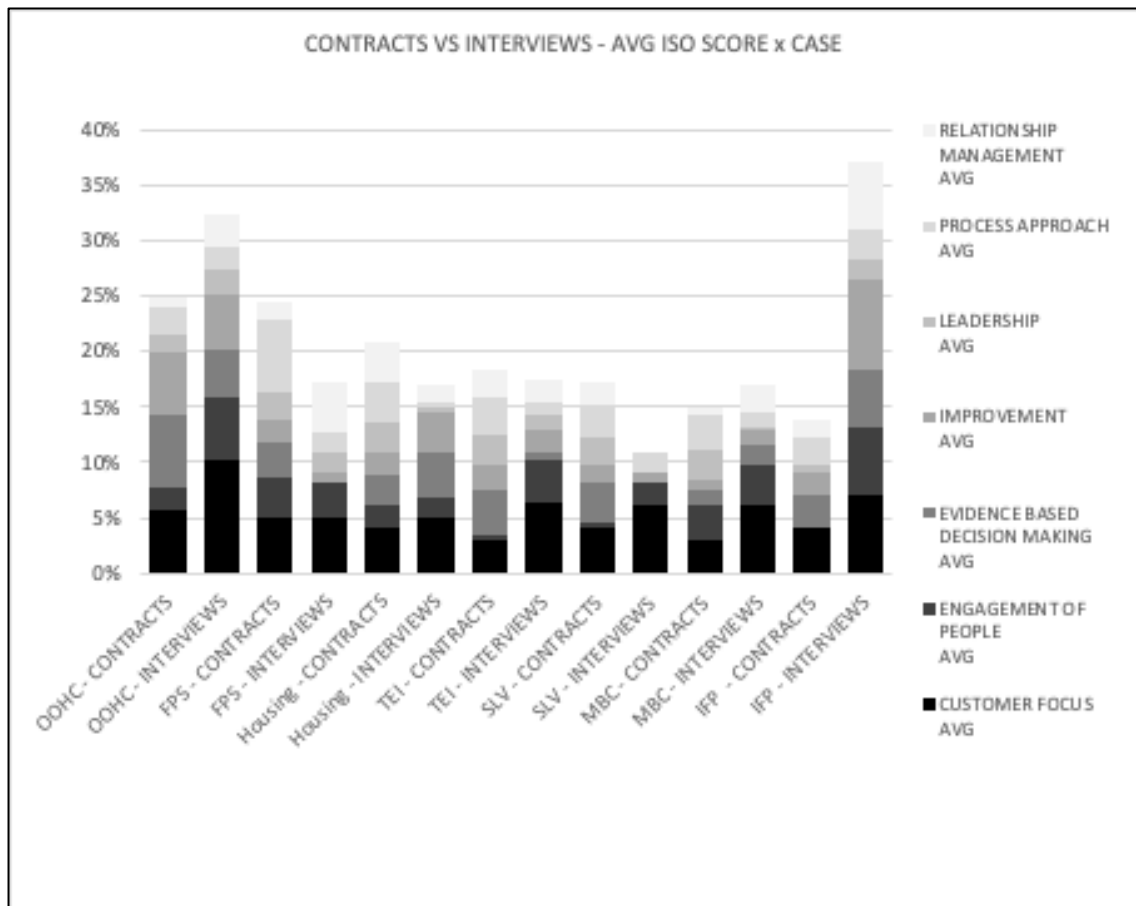


Figure 15. Percent observation of ISO9000 activities - contracts vs interviews by Case

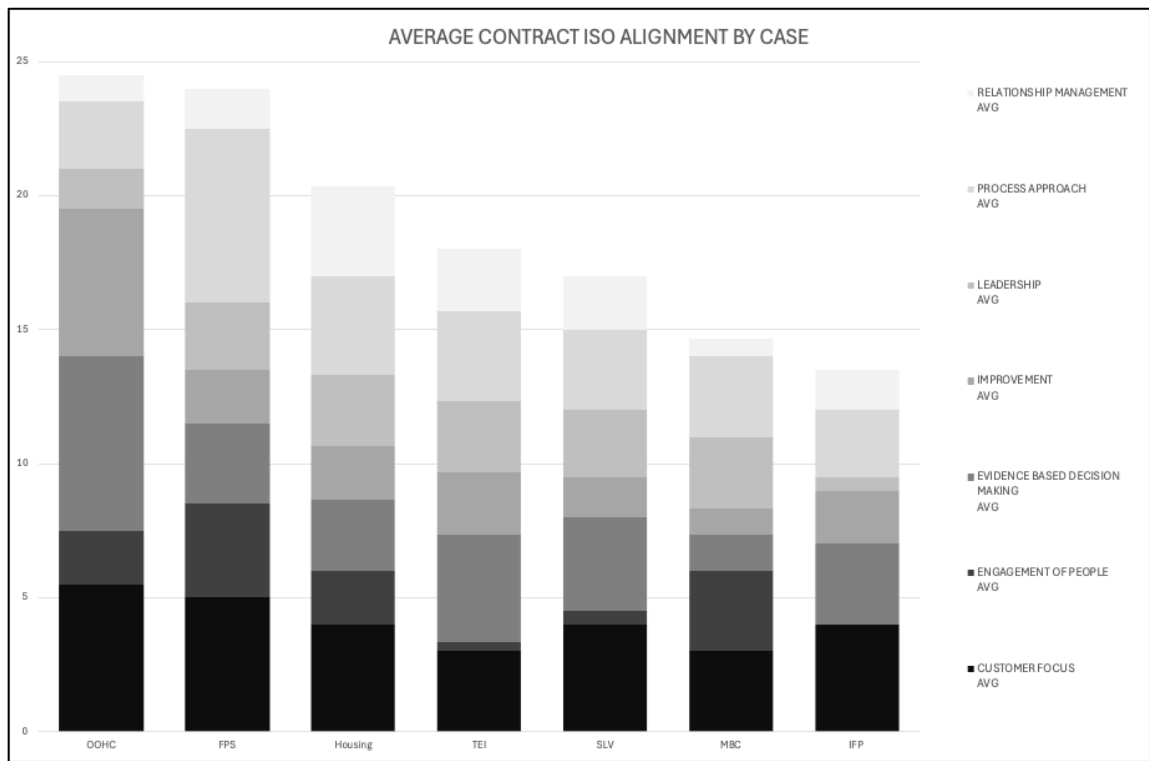


Figure 16. Alignment with ISO9000 activities - contracts by Case

These results established that contracted quality mandates do indeed have a significant, but moderate relationship with staff uptake of quality practices. However, to understand the respective roles of contract mandates and participant values in ISO9000 scores, further analyses were conducted. The three participant values expressed by focused codes 1-3 found to influence participant ISO9000 quality scores in statistically significant ways in RQ2.a were used in this next analysis.

FC1 – Advocates Ethical Action

FC2 – Critiques Bureaucratic Systems

FC3 – Portrays Personal / Professional Tension

These three focused codes were tested as mediators in the relationship between, the extent of quality management practice mandated in contract documents and the extent of quality management practice reported in interviews. This analysis followed the Baron and Kenny (1986) causal steps approach to mediation, supported by the methodological

advice of MacKinnon et al. (2007) for development of categorical mediators. This analysis had three stages.

The first stage consisted of a linear regression which showed that the ISO9000 alignment score of contract documents significantly predicted ISO9000 score in interviews ($B = .359$, $p = .040$, $R^2 = .129$). The result of this first analysis satisfied the first stage of the Baron and Kenny (1986) causal steps approach to mediation. In the second stage, three logistic regressions were conducted to determine whether contract documents had any influence on participant values (as represented by the three focused codes). This analysis revealed a significant influence of the content of contract documents on the presence of participant values that offered critique of bureaucratic systems (FC2) ($p = .028$), and tension between personal and professional values (FC3) ($p = .028$), but narrowly missed significance on the presence of advocacy for ethical action (FC1) ($p = .062$), which may have reached significance with higher 'n' value. This result satisfied the second stage of mediation analysis and suggests that staff values captured by focused codes two and three were shaped by the quality management practices mandated in contract documents. It is notable that the two focused codes with significant influence on ISO9000 score centred around the theme of reflecting on systemic issues, shared by the ISO9000 principle of Improvement.

The third and final stage of this mediation analysis required regression analysis to determine whether staff values (represented again by the three focused codes) mediated the relationship between the uptake of quality management practices (ISO9000 alignment scores in interviews), while controlling for the influence of contract documents (ISO9000 alignment scores in contracts). However, stage three of this mediation analysis was not satisfied, as none of the three focused codes exerted a statistically significant effect on participant ISO9000 alignment, when the effect of contracts was accounted for. These findings suggest that while the presence of focused codes one, two and three emerged in interviews with higher ISO9000 alignment scores, the staff sentiment itself was not the main cause of the score increase. Rather it appears that in this dataset, the content of contract documents increased ISO9000 alignment scores, concurrently with staff values.

It is possible that more sensitive analysis techniques such as PROCESS (Hayes, 2017) may have found a mediating effect between staff values and ISO9000 scores. However, these more sensitive techniques were excluded for two specific reasons. Firstly, the aim of the present study was to explore relationships between staff motivations, organisational environment and quality practice, and not to identify its causes. Accordingly, the present study built binary categorical variables in line with its Constructivist Realism and Pragmatist approach using both qualitative and quantitative data. The Hayes (2017) PROCESS approach however is suited to examining causal mediation using logistic models and dichotomous mediators. Secondly, the more sensitive bootstrapping techniques that might be used to reveal subtle mediation effects, increase the risk of Type 1 errors in small-N studies, potentially producing spurious mediation effects. SEM would also be statistically infeasible due to the mixed regression and sample size requirements (MacKinnon et al., 2007). In contrast, the Baron & Kenny (1986) approach for categorical mediators, remained suitable for exploratory mediation, as the goal was conservative pattern detection rather than claiming causal inference (MacKinnon et al., 2007).

Importantly, the less sensitive Baron & Kenny (1986) tests did in fact detect significant mediation for FC3, suggesting that the method did not suffer from the Type II error risks commonly cited in the literature. Given the conservative nature of the Baron & Kenny technique, it is likely that a more statistically powerful methods such as PROCESS would detect the same or even stronger mediation effect.

Summary RQ2.b. The interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice

Statistical analysis confirmed that staff values were a significant ($r = .359, p = .040$) but not primary driver of quality practice uptake. Rather, staff ISO9000 alignment scores from interviews were significantly and positively predicted by the extent of quality management activities prescribed in contract documents. Mediation analysis showed that when the influence of contract mandates was accounted for, none of the focused codes representing staff values exerted an independent influence on staff ISO9000

scores. A conservative mediation analysis technique was chosen to avoid overstating relationships in a small-N, exploratory mixed methods context. Using Baron & Kenny (1986) ensured that any mediation detected was unlikely to be a false positive, which aligns with the pragmatist and exploratory nature of the study.

These results suggest that staff members' values, internal narratives and emotional orientations may not exert the primary influence supposed by previous research on the role of affect and agency in organisational behaviour (Lipsky, 2010, Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2009, Fineman, 2003, Hill, 2002, pp.41-56). The mediation analysis provided evidence that contract content shaped the presence of certain staff value positions, particularly FC2 and FC3, indicating that contracts may influence how staff value, think and talk about their work ($p = .028$).

A comparison of the ISO9000 scores and Appraisal Analysis data across cases provides illustrative examples of this interaction. In higher scoring Cases, staff made statements that emphasised alignment between the aims of their program and their own sense of morality, revealing their personal motivation to control the positive impact of the program beyond mere compliance with quality mandates. By contrast, as ISO9000 alignment scores got lower for participants and contracts, staff sentiments became less aligned and less engaged with program mission.

Table 35. High to low performing case comparison – interview and contract scores compared with staff values

Case	Contract Score %	Interview Score %	Participant quotes	Appraisal Analysis summary
OOHC	25		<p><i>“If I can do nothing else, I want to roll this [new quality assurance framework] out. We’ve done our best to focus on practice, making continual improvement loops. I care about the children, families and also the caseworkers. I want for FACS to be able to actually measure how well we’ve done at helping these people and improving their lives. This is the most important thing we can do” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).</i></p>	<p>Shows strong positive attitude and commitment, amplifying their work as essential and important. They reflect conviction, urgency, optimism and empowered alignment between personal values and work goals, enabling the participant to frame their role as meaningful and transformative.</p>
		71	<p><i>“The Quality Assurance Framework is an essential part of how we improve outcomes for families and children. Ultimately we want to show how we have improved the lives of people. We would like to show how money spent doing this is an investment. Challenges are that demand for child protection has continued to increase ... there is a lot of work to look at how we can continually improve the broader system ... we are starting with our work with children. We have to start there ... you can’t start at the top. I’m excited about predictive analytics ... we’d like to offer relevant services earlier” (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).</i></p>	<p>Expresses deep care and moral responsibility, amplifying their mission as “essential”. Strong conviction and optimism again show empowered alignment, linking personal values with systemic improvement through evidence-based practice.</p>
		47	<p><i>“I come to get paid, but I also come from a personal family history of social justice ... I want to make a better place. I’m not surprised, given my dad’s views on social justice. You have to steer through the bureaucracy, but we can get better outcomes for young people [gave examples about a young person who is dying and other examples about aboriginal young people] These</i></p>	<p>Links personal history of social justice with strong emotional commitment, finding meaning in small but significant wins. Shows conviction despite bureaucratic constraints, aligning personal values with program goals.</p>

			<i>are the things that excite me. You don't often get successes, but when we do, its fantastic [gave more examples] ... we can have wins here and get great outcomes" (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914).</i>	
Family Preservation	31	45	<i>"Children deserve to grow up in families that nurture them and allow them to flourish. Some families aren't capable of this. We help here by upskilling the family or replacing them if absolutely necessary, due to risk" (SLK -NG-EX-IFP-IV200522).</i>	Expresses strong care and ethical responsibility, amplifying work mission as urgent and morally necessary. Positions the service as both competent and protective of children's right to flourish.
			<i>"I really value being able to help families by passing on knowledge and improving practice. [I'm] not as empowered as I'd like to be; new senior leaders lack interest in the value of research and improvement" (SLK - NG-EX-IFP-IV200522).</i>	Expresses fulfilment in work but critiques disengaged leadership. Values evidence-based practice, highlighting tension between personal commitment and organisational barriers to improvement.
Housing	25	23	<i>"I put a lot of personal value on making a difference for local communities. Maybe because of my time of life, I get a lot out of this role. I like being able to pivot the operations of [this organisation] to meet the needs we identify in the community ... I like doing things here that are meaningful for clients, staff, stakeholders and for me" (SLK - NG-EX-H00-IV200629).</i>	Reveals pride and fulfilment in their work, valuing the empowerment afforded by their job role. Shows strong alignment between personal values and meaningful outcomes for clients, staff and themselves.
Staying home, Leaving violence	17	11	<i>"Yes, I want to see better outcomes for the women and children that I work with" (SLK - NG-FL-SLV-IV210430).</i>	Expresses restrained personal investment, implicitly acknowledging the moral value of achieving "better outcomes" for vulnerable clients. Shows modest alignment of personal values with program goals, signalling commitment but with limited amplification.

Men's Behaviour Change	13	6	<i>"No, [I don't have personal reasons for doing this work]. I try to do my best to support the NGOs. It would be good if we could reduce DV" SLK - GV-SM-TEI-IV221020).</i>	Expresses neutral emotional commitment, framing their role as supportive rather than personally significant. Acknowledges the value of their work, but distances themselves from deeper personal investment.
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These qualitative examples help clarify the results by showing how contracts can facilitate the kind of motivational climate in which aligned staff values may find voice. The results presented in Table 35 illustrate a clear gradient; as interview and contract scores decrease, so too does the affective commitment of staff and the degree to which their personal values align with program goals. This pattern supports the conclusion that alignment of organisational quality mandates with ISO9000 principles can influence staff values, creating conditions for higher engagement with quality practices. A full account of the Appraisal Analysis for each interview is available in Appendix 6.

The results of analysis for RQ2b support theories about the interaction of work routines with change in organisational behaviour (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). While the present dataset cannot unequivocally confirm a causal pathway from quality mandates to participant values, the results of these analyses provide strong evidence of their influence.

3.4 Summary – Research question two

The findings for RQ2 demonstrate that the uptake of quality management practices by staff in government-funded social welfare services is shaped by both their individual values and organisational quality mandates, but not equally. Staff values, including advocacy for ethical action, critique of bureaucratic systems, and personal–professional tension, were significantly associated with higher ISO9000 alignment scores. These associations varied by context, with managers and NGO staff more likely than frontline or government staff to reach higher ISO9000 alignment scores. However, the influence of staff values on ISO9000 scores was eclipsed by the presence of ISO9000 aligned quality mandates in contracts. Statistical analysis confirmed that both staff ISO9000

scores and the values that predicted them (FC1-3) were significantly influenced ($p = .028$) by ISO9000 aligned content of contracts. This suggests that organisational quality mandates actively shape staff value orientations around their work. These findings position quality practice uptake as the outcome of an interaction between personal and organisational forces. ISO9000 aligned quality mandates appear to provide the conditions under which staff are empowered to express critique of systems and tension between their personal views and professional roles. These same staff also express commitment to their work and clients, by advocating for ethical action. However, where ISO9000 aligned quality mandates diminish in contract documents, staff values alone are insufficient to influence uptake of quality practices.

Section 4 Summary- results

This chapter has identified how the uptake of quality management practice manifested in FACS social welfare programs, including the variability of this uptake across Cases, employing agencies and the job roles of participants. It also examined the relative influence of organisational quality mandates and staff values on quality practice uptake. The findings indicate that quality management uptake is dependent in a dynamic way, on work environment, contract content and the values of staff.

Two themes stand out in this dynamic. First, quality practices are not adopted in a vacuum, they are shaped by the organisational setting and professional role of staff. NGO and government participants approached quality management from distinct positions, with differences in the values they reported and in the way they characterised constraints and opportunities in their agency. Second, the contractual framework that Cases operate within exert a measurable influence on uptake of quality management practices. Although staff values were meaningfully associated with higher ISO9000 alignment scores, the independent influence of staff values disappeared once contract content was accounted for.

As contracts prescribed more ISO9000 aligned activities, staff scores increased regardless of individual values, with the effect of contracted mandates overriding the independent role of staff values. The findings for RQ2 therefore suggest that while staff

values influenced uptake of quality practice, the extent of quality practice observed was largely dependent on the strength and extent of ISO9000 aligned organisational quality mandates present in contract documents. This suggests that the ISO9000 aligned quality mandates in contract documents worked on a deeper level than mere compliance tools by influencing both the uptake of quality management practices and the alignment of staff and organisational values.

The following chapter will interpret these results in the context of the Constructivist Realist and Pragmatist perspectives adopted by this study. As such, its aim is practical, to explore the implications of these findings for the design of systems that cultivate uptake of quality management practice in social welfare services.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings made by this study, offering an evidence-based explanation of what they mean both theoretically and in practice. The intention of this chapter is to develop a clear and reasoned explanation of how the phenomena behind the data interact to shape quality management practice in social welfare services. To do this, research aims and questions are re-capped first, followed by analysis and explanation of the meaning and implications of findings for RQ1 and RQ2 in the context of related literature, including a comparison of the methodologies. The findings section frames RQ1 in practical terms, as this research question focused upon building an instrument to measure uptake of recognised quality management practices in social welfare services. Findings for RQ2 are framed theoretically, as findings for this research question contribute to theoretical explanations of the limits and address of government performance, as described by Public Choice Theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings of this study, and why we might trust that they would generalise to other social welfare service contexts. In the interest of economy, further conclusions to this discussion are presented in the Conclusion chapter, following this one.

The overall aim of this study was to examine whether quality management can address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT. To investigate, two research sub-questions were proposed in the Literature Review chapter, then broken down further for analysis in the Methodology Chapter. The first research sub-question sought to establish a reliable and generalisable quantitative measure of quality practice adopted in social welfare services. This metric has its own value, to enumerate quality practice in the high-stakes environment of social welfare services, but it also served as a point of reference for determining an answer to research question two. Figure 17 illustrates the relationship of the aim and research questions of this study.

Research aim	<i>Examine whether quality management can address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT</i>	
Research questions	1	2
	<i>To what extent does quality management in social welfare services align with recognised quality management principles and practices?</i>	<i>What is the relationship between staff values, organisational quality mandates, and quality practice uptake?</i>

Figure 17. Research aims and questions of this study

Section 1 Findings

This section will discuss the meaning and implications of findings in the context of related literature, including a comparison of the methodologies. Findings for RQ1 and RQ2 contribute to the broad aim and research question of this study, in aggregate. The broad finding of this study is presented first, followed by findings for RQ1 and RQ2.

1.1 Finding - the broad research question of this study

The finding for the broad research question posed by this study was that, when implemented fully, formal quality management systems aligning with the principles of ISO9000 can address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT.

This study provides evidence that ISO9000-aligned mandates foster the staff values of engagement, empowerment and commitment. These findings indicate that these values can be shaped and sustained through well designed organisational quality mandates that align with the principles and activities prescribed by ISO9000. This challenges the prevailing *values-dominant* position, which holds that staff engagement and commitment emerge primarily from pre-existing value orientations, and shows instead

that organisations, including government, can and do cultivate them. The mechanism observed in this study is that ISO9000-type quality requirements formalise an invitation for staff, executives and clients to participate in ways that create meaningful engagement with work that influence its efficiency and outcomes. In doing so, these types of quality mandates embed precisely the conditions identified in the literature as predictors of motivation and performance (Anitha, 2014, Kahn, 1990, Meyer and Allen, 1991, Spreitzer, 1996). Rather than operating as mere compliance tools, such inclusive quality mandates operate as organisational culture shaping tools within government social services. This claim is grounded in both qualitative and quantitative evidence. Staff interviews revealed a positive association between ISO9000-aligned practice and the expression of values related to engagement, empowerment, and commitment. The relationship between these values and the uptake of ISO9000-like quality practice increased with the alignment of ISO9000-like quality requirements in the contracts that guided staff work. Mediation analysis demonstrated that this ISO9000 alignment with staff values was influenced through ISO9000 content in contract documents. This evidence indicates that ISO9000-like mandates actively foster working environments that facilitate alignment of staff values and organisational goals, in contexts often assumed to be constrained by types of bureaucratic inefficiency described by PCT.

1.2 Finding - Research question one

Research question one was asked to establish a numeric baseline of quality practice uptake in social welfare services. Given its novelty in the literature, the answer to this question is a finding in itself. However, it also serves a vital role in facilitating an answer to RQ2. Understanding how the personal interests of staff and the organisational dynamics they operate within influences the management of quality in social welfare services is made simpler, by enumerating the extent of quality management practice.

RQ1 finding – Uptake of quality management in social welfare services was low, with substantial variability across Cases, agencies and job levels.

With these aims in mind, the main finding for RQ1 was that alignment was low between the quality management activities suggested by ISO9000 and those reported in

interviews and contract documents, with the average alignment at around 25% of a score that would have indicated complete alignment with ISO9000 principles and activities. Several other findings contributed to this overall finding. Of the seven ISO9000 principles, activities relating to Customer focus achieved the highest average report rate, at 34% of maximum possible score. Activities related to the principle of Leadership was reported least, at a rate of 17%. Substantial variability was partially explained by the Case, with most FACS programs clustered at the lower end of alignment (lowest alignment score was 12%, for the *Men's Behaviour Change Case*), while the *Their Futures Matter* (41%), *Out of Home Care* (38%) and *Intensive Family Preservation* (34%) Cases achieving the highest quality scores. The employing agency and job level of participants also explained some of the variability in interview scores. NGOs (29%) generally outperformed government agencies (21%), and managers reported slightly higher ISO9000 alignment (27%) than executives (24%) or frontline workers (22%). Importantly, contract documents also explained variability in participant scores. Contracts prescribing more ISO9000 aligned quality management activities were statistically significant predictors ($r = .359, p = .040$) of higher interview alignment scores.

Discussion of RQ1 finding one in relation to existing literature

These findings establish a numeric benchmark that allows direct comparison between how quality is managed in government funded social welfare services and ISO9000, the standard used by over one million other organisations, globally (SimpleQuE, 2025). It was established by a priori coding evidence of alignment of quality management practices in social welfare services with ISO9000. The a priori codes were built using the 49 activities that ISO9000 suggests are possible ways to manage quality and included a measure for presence as well as strength of alignment. This method of quantifying the scope and extent of quality management is not exhaustive, as there may be other activities that produce similar quality outcomes. However, this method is comprehensive, as it provides measure of quality practice, based on each of the seven broad principles of the ISO9000 standard. Other methods have been adopted to evaluate the level of quality management in social services (Melão et al., 2018,

Parasuraman, 1988), however these methods are not directly comparable with the quality scoring system used by this study. The present study progresses the argument that direct comparison with ISO9000 is the most complete, universally understood and generalisable method of establishing a quantification of the extent to which quality is managed in social welfare services, in comparison with other methods, like SERVQUAL and EQUASS, adopted in the literature. Given the uniqueness of the quality measurement method developed by this study, comparison of the methods and utility of findings of studies with related goals is warranted.

SERVQUAL

Many studies use adaptations of the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, 1988) framework to build survey and interview instruments to quantify quality practice across a broad spectrum of public and non-public services (Jain and Gupta, 2004, Asubonteng et al., 1996). SERVQUAL works by estimating the effectiveness of quality management by measuring the numeric gap between client expectations and perceptions of the quality of services they receive (Asubonteng et al., 1996). While this method provides a measure of quality, the variable views of the clients of welfare services on their quality offers limited insight into the management of processes and conditions that facilitate it (Gaster, 2005, p.319). This important limitation on SERVQUAL's utility means that insights about the organisational causes of differing client quality experiences remains unexamined (Smith, 1995, Wisniewski, 2001, Buttle, 1996).

Ramseook-Munhurrun et al. (2010) used SERVQUAL as the basis of their study of quality in services delivered by the Mauritian government. Ramseook-Munhurrun et al. (2010) adapted the SERVQUAL framework to construct their survey of the clients (n = 202) and staff (n = 28) of the Mauritian government. Their survey consisted of 20 statements that participants could rate their agreement with on a 5-point Likert scale, under the five SERVQUAL topic domains of; *Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy*. For example, participants were asked to rate their agreement with a statement that the government worker had provided services at the promised time. This survey item found this particular domain of

timeliness yielded the largest gap between client expectations and experiences of service, providing the Mauritian government with empirical data about where it fell short of meeting client expectations. However, the results of this survey were not able to identify any means of systemically addressing the underlying issues that caused that shortfall.

SERVQUAL has been used extensively to measure the quality of services, including at scale in research of government services in Malaysia (Agus et al., 2007), the USA (Kull et al., 2012), Mexico - (López-Lemus, 2023), the UK (Wisniewski, 2001), and many others. However, despite its widespread adoption, the limitations of SERVQUAL persist, because several parameters of this framework critically limit its capacity as a tool for improving the quality of services, including government ones (Asubonteng et al., 1996, Buttle, 1996). Client insights about perceived gaps between service expectations and experiences do not inform address of those gaps, because aspects of organisational management of quality are not quantified by SERVQUAL. Observation of this 'gap', may be a legitimate and useful focus in simple, small scale service environments, but it offers a critically limited perspective in complex environments where the connection between client experience and the myriad inputs to it are unclear.

However, a comparison of the outcomes of quality measurement between SERVQUAL and ISO9000 is not practical, as these evaluative tools self-evidently produce completely different metrics. Accordingly, a comparison of SERVQUAL results and the results of this study will not be made here. The method used by present study avoids the limitations of metric utility and generalisability by examining the causes and processes of quality management directly, through comparison with the global benchmark of quality management (Singh et al., 2020, Medic et al., 2016, Castka and Corbett, 2015).

EQUASS

The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) standard is also widely used to establish a measure of the quality of social services (Melão et al., 2019). EQUASS shares similar aims and features to ISO9000, in that it prescribes practice that leads to examination and address of organisational systems to consider the needs of clients, improve processes and efficiency and engage staff (Dimitriadis et al., 2013, Marimon et al., 2019, Melão et al., 2017). Application of EQUASS to determine and improve the quality of social services is effective (Marimon et al., 2019), but has been reported as difficult to implement for small organisations due to the large number of compliance requirements, leading to suggestions in the literature for its revision (Melão et al., 2019). The present study argues that specificity and extent of compliance requirement of EQUASS, while conferring benefit for the performance of social services, may also present a practical disadvantage to its adoption by government and its NGO contractors. Additionally, because of its specific application to social services, EQUASS is not universally applicable to many other types of government work (Melão et al., 2019). Adopting EQUASS for use in government social services may mean that other government departments need to adopt additional quality management standards for other domains of work, introducing complexity, which is known to hinder organisational performance (De Toni and Pessot, 2021, Fu et al., 2024). This argument in favour of adopting one general standard of quality management is an appeal to parsimony. Negotiating the complex logistical challenges of government to deploy several standards to manage quality when one standard exists to cover them all, unnecessarily introduces waste and redundancy. Perhaps this issue could be overlooked if the alternatives had limited influence on the level of quality achieved. However, ISO9000 has been shown to be effective in improving quality in all organisations, including service organisations, and especially regarding client outcomes (Psomas et al., 2013).

The need for a new quality scoring system

While both ISO9000 and EQUASS offer structured approaches to quality management, neither provides a standardised scoring system by which the level or extent of quality

practice can be objectively compared between services, programs, or organisations. For example, ISO9000 provides a pass/fail certification framework (as part of the ISO9001 certification process) that confirms compliance with required practices, but does not quantify the degree of uptake, nor assign a numeric value to reflect strength of compliance with its 49 suggested activities. The ISO9001 certification focuses on whether quality processes are documented and maintained, not the depth or consistency of their use across different contexts. This has resulted in several scholars calling for more stringent ways to rate compliance with standards like ISO9000 (Castka and Corbett, 2016). EQUASS on the other hand does include a scoring mechanism. EQUASS generates scores for certification against its high-level *Excellence* program, based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) (van der Wiele and Brown, 1999). However, achieving the *Excellence* level certification is a high bar, requiring a high level of organisational familiarity and accomplishment in implementing quality management systems that align with EQUASS requirements. Accordingly, the resources required to implement quality management at this level is not broadly available to smaller NGO contractors of social services, or appropriate to all public service contexts (Marimon et al., 2019, van der Wiele and Brown, 1999).

Methodological contrasts

Resulting from these limitations, a basic, complete and generalisable tool for measuring uptake of quality management practice, across diverse government contexts, remains unavailable. This study addressed that gap by designing a new scoring approach based on the presence and strength of the 49, ISO9000 suggested activities. This new method offers a simple but comprehensive metric of quality practice implementation that can be compared across programs, contracts, and organisational levels.

Table 36. Comparison of quality management evaluation system, methods and outputs

Quality evaluation system	Method	Output
---------------------------	--------	--------

This study	Staff report practice that is directly compared with 49 activities suggested by ISO9000	Empirical - scale data of direct alignment with internationally recognised quality standard
SERVQUAL	Gap analysis of client expectations vs perceptions, using Likert-scale survey of service dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, etc.)	Empirical - data identifies numeric gap value between expected and perceived quality of service experience
EQUASS	Certification via documented compliance with quality principles; scoring used only in Excellence level – derived from EFQM framework	Compliance-based - assesses against sector specific standards, but scoring not generalisable to settings outside social services
ISO9000/1	Certification audit for presence of documented quality procedures (pass/fail) - no scoring of implementation strength or variation	Compliance-based - confirms whether basic processes have been adopted, not how strongly or widely they are applied

Summary – RQ1

These findings matter because, despite the vast literature on quality management systems, no previous study has attempted to quantify the extent to which government-funded social welfare services align with the world’s most adopted quality standard. By establishing a measure of quality alignment across all 49 activities suggested by ISO9000, this study provides the first empirically grounded, standardised measure of quality practice in this field. This foundational contribution enables future research to track progress, compare across social service types and investigate drivers of quality with greater precision. The necessity of inventing the new quality measurement instrument developed by this study also underscores the gap between popular quality evaluation frameworks and the insights needed to effectively monitor and control quality in social welfare services. In the context of this research, this benchmark allows us to answer RQ2: What is the relationship between staff values, organisational quality mandates, and quality practice uptake?

1.3 Finding - Research question two

This study found that the answer to this question cannot be reduced to either staff values or organisational mandates alone. Instead, the findings show that staff values and organisational mandates interact to shape quality practice uptake, but with mandates exerting a direct influence on both quality practice uptake and the staff values that predict it. This positions the study within the *interactionist* perspective on the influence of quality practice uptake in the quality management literature. This study challenged the *values* and *mandates-dominant* perspectives with providing empirical evidence from a government social welfare context where study-specific contract content, staff values, and observed practice were triangulated against the principles and activities suggested by ISO9000.

RQ2 finding - Quality mandates like those in ISO9000 align staff and organisational goals, acting to increase quality practice

This finding provides an answer to RQ2. It proposes that mandates similar to the activities and principles suggested by ISO9000, engage and empower staff, aligning their personal values, goals and narratives with organisational goals. This mechanism drives quality practice uptake more effectively than enforced compliance with mandates that are unrelated to the personal values of staff or meaningful outcomes for clients. While these empowering effects of ISO9000 have recently been observed in other sectors (Milovanović et al., 2023), this study provides empirical evidence that similar effects can occur in government social service settings. The implication, and major theoretical contribution of this study is that implementation of ISO9000 type quality mandates work to address Public Choice Theory criticisms of government like *minimal squawk behaviour* (Leaver, 2009), and other dynamics that suppress government delivery of public value.

The analysis for RQ2 demonstrated that engaged, empowered and committed staff values (*Advocates ethical action (FC1)* ($r = .312, p = .048$), *Critiques bureaucratic systems (FC2)* ($r = .249, p = .041$), *Portrays personal/professional tension (FC3)* ($r = .274, p = .052$)), significantly predicted higher ISO9000 alignment scores in interviews. However,

mediation analysis revealed that these associations were not independent. When the influence of ISO9000 like contract mandates was accounted for in mediation analysis, the predictive effect of staff values disappeared (all $p > .10$), while contract ISO9000 scores remained significant predictors of both quality practice uptake ($r = .359$, $p = .040$) and the three staff values that predicted higher ISO alignment scores in interviews (FC1-3), ($p = .028$).

Concurrently, mediation analysis showed that ISO9000 aligned quality mandates in contracts also influenced how staff value, think and talk about their work. This provides strong evidence that ISO9000 aligned mandates not only correlate with higher quality practice uptake but also appear to influence how staff value, think and talk about their work. Figure 18 illustrates this complex interaction between contract mandates, staff values and quality practice uptake captured in interview scores.

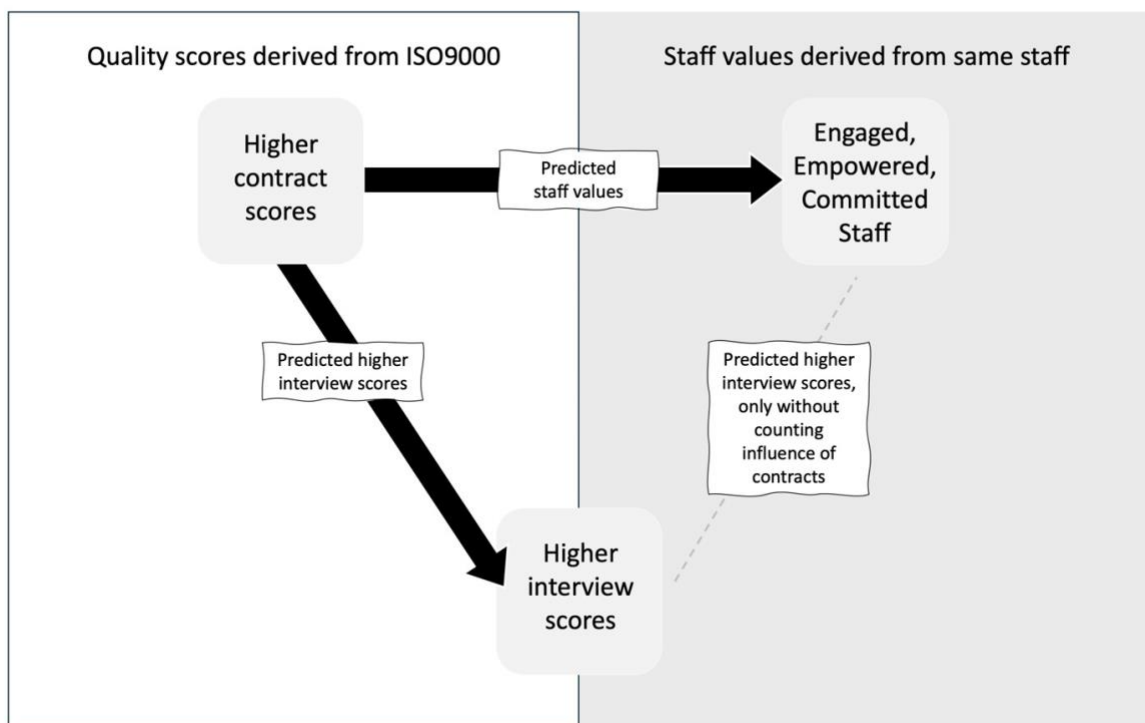


Figure 18. Illustration of mediation analysis insights

Rather than operating as mere compliance tools, the contracted quality mandates studied here appear to have facilitated known predictors of performance identified

across other industries: staff feelings such as engagement, empowerment, commitment and ownership over their work (Anitha, 2014, Bendermacher et al., 2019, Karapetrovic et al., 2010, silaji et al., 2025). These results move beyond the values versus mandates debate in the literature, showing that the right kinds of mandates both inform both organisational goals (Castka and Balzarova, 2008, Demir et al., 2023) and intrinsically align staff with them (Casteleiro and Mendes, 2022, Kurnia and Esthi, 2025, Milovanović et al., 2023). This finding has important implications for the design of government quality frameworks that both inform organisational goals and engage staff more effectively. As the results of analysis for both RQ2a and RQ2b contributed to this finding, both will be discussed in order, following.

RQ2a - Are certain staff values more commonly associated with higher quality practice uptake?

This section presents evidence supporting the claim that organisational quality mandates and staff values interact to influence the uptake of quality practice. The results show that contracted mandates for the uptake of ISO9000-like quality practices were a statistically significant predictor of reported quality practice, to the exclusion of the previously significant effect of staff values. This suggests that mandates exerted a stronger direct influence on staff practice than their values alone, in NSW social welfare services. This finding positions this study in the interactionist school of thought, along with Bendermacher et al. (2019), in the quality management literature. This position argues that staff values and organisational mandates co-influence practice. Other literature has argued that staff values enable or constrain the uptake of quality practices (Kull et al., 2012), or that the effectiveness of mandates depends on their alignment with existing staff values (Farr and Cressey, 2015). However, the present study contributes new methodological depth to this body of literature by providing empirical, case-level evidence from a social welfare service context where mandates are compared with ISO9000, and values are derived directly from the staff doing the work. Following is a comparison between the present findings and three key positions in the literature; values-

dominant models, mandates-dominant models and interactionist models, along with a comparison of the methodologies informing these positions.

Relevant literature to RQ2a

Previous studies have generally taken one of two sides regarding the determinants of successful quality management practice uptake. Most have progressed the argument that organisational culture and staff values exert the primary influence on staff uptake of quality management practices. Seminal studies (Farr and Cressey, 2015, Fonseca, 2015, Hofstede, 1998, Prajogo and McDermott, 2005) portray staff values as the decisive factor in the success of quality management efforts. From this values-dominant position, organisational quality mandates are often viewed as mere instructions that cannot by themselves generate genuine staff engagement with quality practice. These studies often use well established models such as the Competing Values Framework (Prajogo and McDermott, 2005, Fonseca, 2015) to arrive at their conclusions. However, these approaches have relied upon managerial surveys or senior executive interviews to classify culture or value types to infer the relationship between practice and values. Such methods abstract meaning from a third party and rarely link resulting values to directly observed or reported use of specific quality management frameworks. In contrast, only a smaller number of studies have suggested that mandates may dominate influence. López-Lemus (2023) and Melão et al. (2017) provide evidence that mandated quality standards can directly shape practice, even when staff value or organisational culture alignment is weak. However, these studies are limited in scope, with either narrow sector focus or small sample sizes, or in methods used to measure values. Additionally, these studies do not attempt to explain how, why or which mandates can sometimes override the influence of staff values; a gap which the present study has addressed.

A smaller number of studies still, suggest that organisational quality mandates and staff values interact to influence quality practice uptake (Bendermacher et al., 2019, Kull et al., 2012). Bendermacher et al. (2019) provides evidence that mandates and values interact to drive quality practice uptake by statistically linking perceived organisational values to staff empowerment and quality practice uptake. However,

Bendermacher et al.'s approach relied upon self-reported staff surveys using predefined value orientations and reported uptake of quality activities based on the Educational Quality Enhancement framework, in an educational context.

Given the complex interplay of methods and findings in the literature on quality practice uptake, an illustration of its relationship with the present study is warranted. Table 37 maps the relationship between the findings of this study and the findings that might be expected, as a projection of the assertions of related literature. This comparison highlights the contrast between the prevailing values-dominant view and the present evidence which supports a position of interacting influence, while observing that contracted mandates exert stronger direct influence in this context.

Table 37. Present findings situated in previous literature

Predictor variable	Influence predicted by the literature	Relevant literature	This study found	Implications
FC-1 Staff values - Advocates ethical action	Values-first models predict this sentiment would drive quality practice uptake independently of mandates	Prajogo & McDermott (2005) Farr & Cressey (2015) Fonseca (2015) Hofstede (1998)	These values significantly predicted higher ISO9000 alignment scores but effect disappears once contract influence is accounted for	Staff values significantly influence uptake ($p = [.042 - .050]$) but are not independently causal in this context. Contract mandates emerge as strongest direct influence on quality practice uptake ($r = .359, p = .040$)
FC-2 Staff values - Critiques bureaucratic systems				
FC-3 Staff values - Personal / professional tension				
ISO9000 aligned contract mandates	Mandates are assumed insufficient to generate uptake without alignment of values	López-Lemus (2023) Melão & Guia (2017)	ISO9000-like contract mandates significantly predicted quality practice uptake ($r = .359, p = .040$); effect remained robust even when staff values are included in mediation analysis	ISO9000 like contract mandates exerted strong direct influence on quality practice uptake
Interaction of contract quality mandates and staff values	Mandates and values co-influence quality practice uptake, but value alignment required for success over time	Bendermacher et al. (2019) Kull et al. (2012)	This study provides evidence of interaction, but shows that mandates dominate as the stronger predictor in the NSW social welfare context	Interactionist view supported while empirically demonstrating that mandates exert a stronger influence on quality practice uptake than staff values

Values-dominant studies

Seminal works in the study of quality management including, Prajogo and McDermott (2005), Fonseca (2015) and Farr and Cressey (2015) portray organisational culture and staff values as the decisive influence on practice uptake. This group builds on the work of others to establish a measure of staff values. These works commonly categorise staff values according to the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981), and base assumptions about the relationship between staff attitudes and values on the work of Hofstede (1980), Hofstede (1998) and Hofstede

and Minkov (2010). However, the use of these frameworks has implications for the sensitivity and generalisability of findings, discussed below.

In their statistical analyses, (Prajogo and McDermott, 2005) declare their assumption that organisational culture is the independent variable on which organisational quality practice uptake depends. This assumption is based on a further deep assumption of this work, inherent in their methodological choice to use the CVF (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981) to establish a measure of staff values; that CVF sufficiently specifies the full range of staff values relevant to the role of culture in organisational performance. Prajogo and McDermott (2005) built on the work of Chang and Wiebe (1996) who also used the CVF, originally developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1981). The motivation for developing the CVF was to enable consistent observation and measurement of organisational cultures, yielding a common metric that could be used to answer important theoretical questions about the role of culture, defined as shared emphasis on values, in organisational performance (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981).

CFV proposes that three competing tensions are inherent in all organisations; *differing organisational focus* (wellbeing of people within the organisation vs wellbeing of the organisation itself), *differing preferences about structure* (control vs flexibility) and *differing values on means and ends* (emphasis on process vs emphasis on outcomes) (Chang and Wiebe, 1996, Prajogo and McDermott, 2005, Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981). Chang and Wiebe (1996) developed a 24-question survey on six organisational culture typologies, based on the CVF and defined as *domain characteristics, leadership style, organisational glue, criteria of success and management style*. Participants consisting of a board of quality management experts were asked to rate their agreement with statements about the six typologies on a five-point Likert scale. They found that *group* and *development* focused organisational cultures were most predictive of higher quality management performance. Prajogo and McDermott (2005) built on this work by examining the relationship between organisational values, based on CVF derived survey responses from managers (n = 194) of Australian service and manufacturing firms, and

comparing the resulting value orientations with self-reported success at implementing quality management systems. They used the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) model, overlapping substantially with four of the seven ISO9000 principles, as their reference point for quality management practice uptake. Fonseca (2015) also used the CVF model as a basis for comparing culture types and quality management success in a focus group with Chief Executive Officers (n = 6) of Portuguese firms. The goal of their research was to offer conceptual insight to guide implementation of ISO9001, based on multiple organisational theories. Fonseca's (2015) work found that cultural factors were essential for ISO9001 success, noting that mismatches between dominant organisational culture and the culture required for an effective quality management system can undermine outcomes. However, Fonseca offered no empirical testing of the relative influence of values and mandates and explicitly acknowledged their model as a simplification of a complex issue.

In addition to the CVF, Hofstede also contributed to the value frameworks built by Prajogo and McDermott (2005) and Fonseca (2015). Hofstede's work on the relationship between staff values and attitudes provides an absolute qualification that, *"employee attitudes were found to be clearly distinct from employee values,"* and that employee perceptions of organisational practices were *"unrelated to values"* (Hofstede, 1998, p.477). Hofstede also commented that,

"Although nobody has found - or is likely to find - a simple one-to-one relationship of any aspect of organizational culture with organizational performance, there is little doubt that organizational culture affects performance" (Hofstede, 1998, p.491).

Hofstede's comment resonates with the present study's finding that staff values influenced quality, with the caveat that staff values did not independently predict ISO9000 practice uptake.

Farr and Cressey (2015) add evidence for the values-dominant position in the healthcare context, using different methodologies. They used Grounded Theory coding of in-depth interviews with staff (n = 21) and observation of results of the

Primary Care Trust National Staff Survey. They found that staff values, motivations and professional standards interact to co-produce quality. They also found that these elements often operate in tension, a finding also made by the present study in focused code three; *Portrays personal / professional tension*. They noted,

“... the data analysis demonstrates how there are tensions between different aspects of quality and performance in health systems, where patient centred, relational ‘complete total’ care and the pressures of efficiency and rationalisation can sometimes operate as divergent logics within an organisation” (Farr and Cressey, 2015, p.8).

However, while Farr and Cressey found that such tensions were drivers of quality, they did not evaluate the impact of the values expressed by staff on the uptake of any formal quality management system. Findings of the present research show that despite being associated with higher ISO9000 alignment scores, the significant influence of personal / professional tension disappeared in mediation analysis, once contract mandates were considered. This suggests that the presence of this type of staff value is insufficient to explain quality practice uptake.

For the purpose of methodological comparison with the present study, it is worth noting initially, that the original CVF model conceived of staff motivation as a determinant of organisational effectiveness, but not job satisfaction (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981). This methodological decision, deep in past decisions that formed the CVF, may be thought of as indicative of the kinds of thematic generalisations that are necessary when designing qualitative measurement tools based on typological categories. The CVF aligned with its research goals to provide a consistent means of evaluating organisational values, however, this practical feature of replicability may also pose a limitation to the sensitivity of this tool. The Prajogo and McDermott (2005) and Fonseca (2015) studies inferred culture through managerial perceptions and operationalised quality uptake through the MBNQA model, or not at all. The present study built on the findings of this literature by deriving staff values directly from staff interviews using Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding and linked the resulting value orientations to observed alignment with ISO9000 activities. The methodological strength informing findings of the present study challenges the

assumption that staff values always predict practice, showing that organisational mandates may outweigh staff value alignment.

Mandates-dominant studies of quality uptake

A minority of studies found that organisational mandates override the influence of staff values. The Melão et al. (2017) study, investigated the impacts of EQUASS implementation on the quality of processes, outcomes and financial gain in social service organisations in Portugal. Evidence included observational data (interviews and documents) and interview responses from staff (n = 12) of four Portuguese social service organisations delivering social-work services. The study found that alignment of staff values with ISO9000 based quality practices like EQUASS was crucial for implementation but acknowledged that organisational quality mandates were more influential than, or interacted with staff values. The Melão et. al. study however offers limited evidence about the relative scale of influence of mandates and values on quality practice uptake. Their evidence, although appropriate to their study aims, was based on qualitative data only, and did not measure the range or extent to which the prescribed EQUASS quality practices were adopted by staff.

López-Lemus (2023) addressed this gap with their study of quality practice uptake in Mexican public services, by surveying staff of public services (n = 431), to determine the influence of mandated adoption of ISO9001 on the quality of government service organisations. This study found that implementing the ISO9001 quality management standard had a positive impact on the quality of public services, over and above the effect of staff values, noting that,

“a QMS based on the ISO 9001: 2015 standard affects public servants’ ability to achieve proactive behavior in service quality” (López-Lemus, 2023, p.1158).

In contrast to values-dominant studies, this study measured quality practice uptake through a direct comparison with six of the seven principles of ISO9000, rather than through staff perceptions that lacked reference to a formal quality management standard. To establish quality practice uptake, the López-Lemus (2023) study adapted

a 20-item Likert choice survey, previously developed by Lee et al. (2009) to compare staff perceptions of organisational practice with all seven ISO9000 quality management principles, similarly to the present study. Staff perceptions of quality outcomes were measured through survey questions adapted from the SERVQUAL framework. A comparison of the two resulting datasets was then undertaken using a structural equation model to test causal pathways between mandated quality practice and any change in measurements of staff perceptions, based on the SERVQUAL domains of, *tangible aspects, reliability, responsiveness, guarantees and empathy*. As with the present study, the methodological strength of the López-Lemus (2023) study lay in its grounding of quality practice uptake in direct comparison with quality management activities suggested by ISO9000. It also demonstrated through statistical modelling, the independent effect of formal quality mandates on quality practices adopted by the organisation, independent of staff values. In establishing this strong evidence base, the López-Lemus (2023) study provides a powerful counter-argument to values-dominant studies, suggesting that uptake of quality practices is primarily influenced by organisational quality mandates.

The present study was able to build on this robust work in three ways. Firstly, this study measured alignment of practice against all seven quality management principles, using all 49 possible activities suggested by the current version of ISO9000, while the Lee et al. (2009) framework used by López-Lemus (2023) excluded the *process approach* principle, on grounds that it was less relevant to their study aims. The present study's complete comparison with ISO9000 processes affords a full picture of alignment of organisational quality practice with ISO9000. Additionally, The Lee et. al. (2009) framework was based on a document issued by the International Standards Organisation, *ISO9000 principles: benefits and actions* document (not currently available), which specified only 20 possible activities for the six included ISO9000 principles. Regarding the measurement of staff values, the López-Lemus (2023) study abstracted staff values through the lens of the SERVQUAL framework, while the present study built understanding of staff values directly from staff interview responses via Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding. The third contribution of the present study to evidence for this conversation is its triangulation

of three separate datapoints; values derived directly from staff language, ISO9000 alignment scores derived directly from the full suite of activities suggested by the standard and a direct observation of organisational quality mandates, derived from a priori coding of contract documents. The methods of the present study produced results that agree with the findings of López-Lemus to an extent, and provide strong evidence for the further findings (RQ2b) of this study, in the under reported context of social welfare services.

Interactionist studies

Evidence collected by the present study demonstrated that, while contract mandates dominate, both staff values and the contracts guiding their work influence quality practice uptake. This finding positions the present study in the interactionist school of thought in the quality management literature, which argues that both staff values and organisational mandates have a role in the uptake of quality practice (Bendermacher et al., 2019, Kull et al., 2012, Paarlberg and Perry, 2007). This interaction was made visible by the relationship between staff and contract ISO9000 scores and staff values, that were significantly associated with higher ISO9000 alignment scores. Staff expressing values that were collated into focused codes 1-3 relayed feelings of their deep commitment and engagement with organisational systems and client outcomes. Participants expressing these sentiments achieved significantly higher ISO9000 scores than those who did not. Interestingly however, the predictive power of these staff values on ISO9000 score disappeared when contract influence was introduced, with mediation analysis showing that the presence of ISO9000-like content in contracts was the more powerful predictor of staff reporting higher levels of quality practice uptake. This raises the possibility that these staff values too, may have a relationship with organisational environment, particularly when the contracted mandates that these staff work within express similar values. Table 35 in the Results chapter demonstrated the gradient of alignment between contract scores, interview scores and alignment of staff values in qualitative terms. It showed that staff express more engagement, empowerment and commitment as the ISO9000 content of their contracts rise.

The Bendermacher et al. (2019) study contributes to this discussion with their finding that organisational quality mandates in Dutch higher education institutions (HEI) influenced staff engagement with quality practices. They qualify this claim, stating that organisational environment influence was mediated by staff psychological states of empowerment and commitment. Bendermacher et al. (2019) found that staff empowerment and commitment resulted in feelings of ownership of their work, when organisational goals aligned with personal goals, noting that,

“Empowered employees possess a certain amount of responsibility, autonomy and decisiveness. These traits of empowered staff members are considered to have a positive effect on quality enhancement practices ... The findings highlight the paramount importance of a ‘human relation’ value orientation within [Higher Education Institutions], as this orientation contributes to staff empowerment and commitment, indirectly impacts on ownership (through empowerment)” (Bendermacher et al., 2019, p.648).

Both studies point to a model where staff values and organisational environment interact to facilitate or constrain staff engagement with, and commitment to quality practices.

Bendermacher et al. (2019) arrived at their findings by surveying academic teaching staff (n = 89) using Likert scale questionnaires to measure three variables, the value orientation of the organisation as perceived by staff, psychological work attitudes of staff (empowerment, commitment, ownership) and staff self-reported uptake of quality practices. Organisational values were derived from respondents' perceptions of their institution's emphasis on human relations and open systems orientations, typologies originating in the CVF (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981). Psychological work attitudes typologies were derived from Meyer and Allen's (1991) Three Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment framework. The measurement of staff quality practice uptake was derived from the Quality management activities scale (Kleijnen et al., 2013) and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) (ENQA, 2015), including items like *acting on student feedback*, *teaching innovation* and *course evaluation*. The relationship between these variables was then established through structural equation modelling, revealing patterns of

increased staff uptake of quality practices. Notably, all variables were self-reported, no reference to complete, formal quality management systems like ISO9000 was made, and staff work attitudes and organisational values were derived from pre-defined typologies. In contrast again with relevant literature, the present study built context specific staff value typologies directly from Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding of staff interview responses, derived organisational values directly from observation of contract documents guiding staff work, and established quality practice uptake from comparison with the full range of ISO9000 principles and suggested activities.

Methodological contrasts

Diverging findings across the literature may stem from how staff values, organisational quality mandates or quality practice uptake were measured. Table 38 provides a high-level summary of the contrast between the findings and methodological choices between the present study and the literature it sits within.

Table 38. Present methods compared with related literature

Literature finding	Study	Methods of evaluating		Data source	Measurement	Key finding	Limitation	Contrast with present study
		Staff values	Quality practice					
Values dominant	Prajogo & McDermott (2005)	Self-report - Competing Values Framework	Self-report - MBNQA model	Staff surveys (n = 194)	Likert choice scale	Quality management fails without staff value alignment	Relies on indirect perceptions of values & no direct observation of quality practice	contrary view confirmed by empirical data contributed by staff directly involved in the work & directly compared to ISO9000
	Farr & Cressey (2015)	Self-report - GT coding		Interviews (n = 21) and document analysis (PCT survey)	GT codes	Staff values mediate quality practice uptake	No comparison of values with quality practice & limited 'n' within one health org.	
	Fonseca (2015)	Self-report - Competing Values Framework	Self-report - ISO9000 alignment	CEO focus group (n = 6)		Organisational culture mediates uptake of quality practice	Indirect measurement of staff values, limited 'n' & no direct measurement of quality practice uptake	
	Hofstede (1998)	Self-report - 14 typologies developed by the author		Staff surveys (n = 2590)	Factor analysis of Likert choice scale results	Organisational culture, staff values and staff attitudes are unrelated to each other	No comparison of values with quality practice	
Mandates dominant	López-Lemus (2023)		Self-report - SERVQUAL adapted to ISO9001	Staff survey (n = 461) Mexican public sector organisations	SERVQUAL instrument compared to ISO9000 practices	Quality mandates strongly influenced practice uptake; staff values insufficient influence for meaningful uptake	No comparison of influence of staff values on uptake & indirect measurement of quality practice uptake	Strong public sector parallel - aligns with present study emphasis on mandate influence
	Melão & Guia (2017)	Self report and observations - Thematic analysis	Qualitative linkage to EQUASS practices	Interviews (n = 12) Portuguese social services	Thematic analysis of interviews compared staff values and quality practice uptake	Mandates can dominate values but interact depending on organisational mandates	Small sample & no direct measurement of quality practice uptake	Similar findings – mandates override values but interact; aligns with present study
Interacting	Bendermacher et al. (2019)	Self-report - personal values based on multiple value typology models	Self-report - quality practice uptake measured against ESG quality framework and the Quality management activities scale	Staff survey (n = 89) Higher education staff	Structural equation modelling of codes arising from Likert scale choices	Empowering quality mandates lift practice uptake by empowering staff	No direct comparison with complete quality management systems & all measures of values and quality practice derived from typologies	Strong alignment with present study - values and mandates both found influential
	Kull et al. (2012)	Survey and case study - derived staff values from multiple typologies	Survey and case study derived quality practice uptake from multiple quality practice typologies	Survey + case data (n > 20,000) Government organisations	Values & mandates interaction coded from survey responses and analysed with factor analysis and linear modelling	Mandates and values co-determine practice with interaction effects evident but values exerting more influence over time	No direct comparison with complete quality management systems Values and quality practice derived from pre-determined typologies Study outside social services	Strong support for interaction model with large scale, longitudinal study. Present study contributes data from social services and comparison of quality practice with ISO9000
	Present study	Self-report - staff values based on unique value codes derived from Appraisal Analysis and GT coding	Direct empirical alignment of quality practice uptake derived from staff self report and contract document observation	Staff interviews (n = 22) & observation of contract documents (n = 18) NSW social welfare services	Interaction of quantized staff values and contract mandated quality practice	Quality mandates and staff values interact to influence quality practice uptake	Single-context study & untested metric	

Summary - RQ2a

The result of comparing Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding results with ISO9000 interview scores showed that engaged, empowered and committed staff values significantly predicted higher ISO9000 alignment scores in interviews.

However, mediation analysis showed that staff values were not the primary predictor of practice. Once contracted quality mandates were included in analysis, the significant effect of staff values disappeared, suggesting that both staff values and practice may be influenced by the quality mandates present in contracts. This result shifts the debate in the literature beyond whether values or mandates are more influential of practice, and towards recognising their dynamic interaction.

RQ2b - What is the nature of the interaction between staff values and organisational quality mandates in shaping practice?

Research on the link between ISO9000, staff engagement, empowerment and commitment is scarce (Bendermacher et al., 2019). However, a small number of recent studies have found that effective and strategic implementation of ISO9000, particularly the principles outlined in the 2016 revision of this standard, can positively influence these performance inducing staff values (Milovanović et al., 2023, Kurnia and Esthi, 2025), including in education settings (Bendermacher et al., 2019) and privately funded social service organisations (Casteleiro and Mendes, 2022).

The present study provides the first empirical support for the proposition that; quality mandates aligned with ISO9000 positively influence the performance of social welfare services by facilitating alignment of organisational and staff values through engagement, empowerment, commitment and ownership over their work. Accordingly, it proposes that effective implementation of ISO9000 type quality mandates can act to address shortcomings of quality management in bureaucratic work environments identified by Public Choice Theory, including Principal-Agent Misalignment (Gailmard, 2010), Budget Maximisation (Niskanen, 1994 pp.36-44), Minimal Squawk Behaviour (Leaver, 2009), Rent Seeking (Krueger, 2008) and Regulatory Capture (Stigler, 1971, Peltzman, 1976). This section will lay out the evidence and argument in support of this claim and establish

its uniqueness in the literature. The structure of this section aligns with the components of evidence for this argument, illustrated in Figure 19.

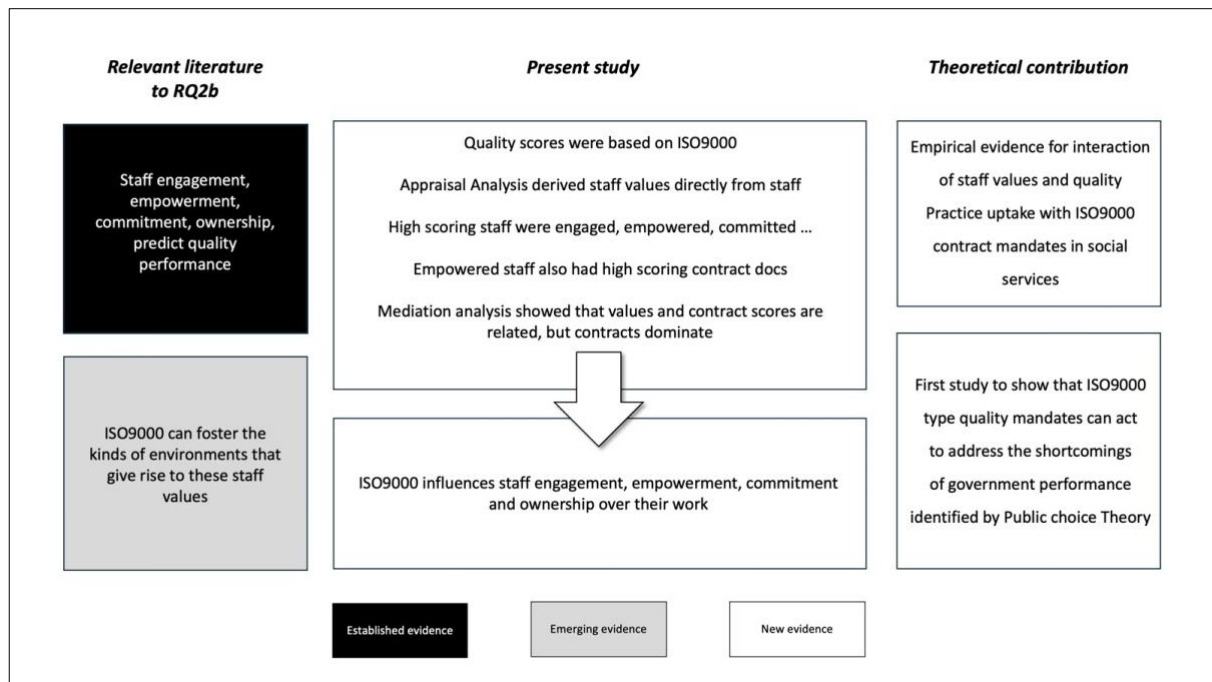


Figure 19. The evidence in support of finding 2b

Relevant literature to RQ2b

Staff engagement, empowerment & commitment predict quality performance

Existing literature has established that staff engagement, empowerment, commitment and feelings of ownership of work are powerful predictors of organisational performance. This link has been consistently demonstrated across empirical studies in organisational psychology and management. Anitha (2014), drew on Kahn's (1990) foundational insight into engagement, expressed as,

“Harnessing of organisational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p.694).

Anitha (2014) built on Saks' (2006) model of job and organisational engagement in a survey of managers (n = 383) in small-scale organisations and found that employee engagement accounted for 57% of the variance in performance outcomes. Her

framework highlighted how workplace well-being, leadership, co-worker relationships, and opportunities for development contribute to engagement, which in turn predicts job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviours, stating,

“Desirable work environment comprises both physical and emotionally safe environment that will motivate the employee to be engaged at work” (Anitha, 2014, p.318).

In agreement, silaji et al. (2025) found that positive perceptions of performance monitoring were strongly associated with higher motivation and productivity. Their findings showed that when performance systems are seen as fair, supportive and participatory, engagement rises and performance improves. Other studies indicate that value alignment and participatory approaches between organisations and staff are essential for genuine internalisation of organisational values. When staff perceive organisational practices as authentic and reinforced by leadership and culture, they are more likely to adopt organisational values, leading to positive outcomes such as increased commitment, satisfaction, and performance (Boxx et al., 1991, Gregory et al., 2009, Leijerholt et al., 2020, Meglino et al., 1989, Ortega-Parra and Sastre-Castillo, 2013).

Similarly, the relationship between staffs’ commitment to their organisation and the presence of personal and professional tension, as captured in FC3, warrants clarification in relation to Person–Organisation (PO) Fit theory. At face value, expressions of frustration with organisational processes might be interpreted as indicative of misfit. However, Siegall and McDonald (2004) provide evidence that value congruence can co-exist with strain and dissatisfaction without undermining staff commitment. As defined in the formation of FC3, participants assigned this code articulated strong alignment with organisational mission and service goals, alongside frustration with inefficient, fragmented, or poorly designed bureaucratic processes. Importantly, FC3 does not reflect value conflict with organisational goals, rather it reflects high value congruence combined with dissatisfaction toward the organisational environment’s ability to support those values in practice.

In PO Fit terms, this distinction is well established, particularly within multidimensional models that recognise separable yet interacting forms of congruence (Westerman and Cyr, 2004, Ostroff et al., 2005). Westerman and Cyr (2004) demonstrate that value congruence is a strong and consistent predictor of organisational commitment, even where other dimensions of fit, such as work environment congruence, are imperfect. This distinction holds in public sector contexts where Wright and Pandey (2008) note that high public service motivation and strong organisational commitment often coexist alongside frustration directed at administrative systems. The findings of the present study align with these findings. Staff coded with FC3 consistently demonstrated higher engagement with quality practices through ISO9000 alignment scores, indicating that personal / professional tension did not reduce commitment to organisational purpose, but rather coincided with un-mandated quality improvement efforts, perhaps in an attempt to reconcile shortcomings in organisational practice with staffs' own values. Accordingly, FC3 may be understood as an expression of value congruence combined with environmental frustration, rather than misfit. This refinement situates FC3 within the concept of value congruence in PO Fit theory, while extending it by illustrating how value alignment may generate constructive critique and active engagement with organisational systems in public service contexts.

These studies contribute to the established body of evidence that people see the chance to participate and contribute to their work as engaging (Holbeche and Springett, 2009), and that engagement, empowerment, commitment and ownership are reliable predictors of staff motivation and organisational performance (Anitha, 2014).

Evaluating focused codes with theoretical constructs of engaged, empowered and committed.

These theoretical values resonate with the kinds of staff perspectives captured in this study's three focused codes (*Advocates ethical action (FC1)*, *Critiques bureaucratic systems (FC2)*, *Portrays personal/professional tension (FC3)*), that were significantly

associated with higher ISO9000 interview scores. This interpretation is strongly supported by the literature (Anitha, 2014, Kahn, 1990, Meyer and Allen, 1991, Spreitzer, 1996), and its exploration here is in line with conventions about the scope and purpose of discussion chapters, to compare and contrast findings with existing theory (Charmaz, 2014, pp.102-108).

Bendermacher et al. (2019) commented specifically on the relationship between these performance inducing values and the implementation of quality management systems when they tested hypothesised relationships between organisational culture, personal values and mandated quality practices. They found that quality management mandates that contribute to staff empowerment and commitment, indirectly impact on staff feelings of ownership over their work (through empowerment) and improve quality practice uptake. They also found that alignment of staff and organisational values was central to sustaining quality management, observing the alignment of their findings with those of Wang et al. (2014), noting,

The presence of a supportive organisational context forms a basic requirement for human resources to achieve sustainable growth and performance (Luthans and Avolio 2003). The organisations' value orientation, leadership and communication can constitute such supportive contextual characteristics and are hypothesised to be positively associated with work-related psychological attitudes: 'empowerment', 'affective commitment' and 'ownership' (Bendermacher et al., 2019, p.647).

ISO9000 can foster staff engagement, empowerment and commitment

Scant but credible literature on quality management suggests that ISO9000 can foster the kinds of work environments that give rise to staff engagement, empowerment and commitment. This literature suggests that the mechanism for this is that ISO9000 embeds participation, communication and responsibility (Casteleiro and Mendes, 2022, Kurnia and Esthi, 2025, Milovanović et al., 2023). This literature provides evidence that, when implemented authentically, ISO9000 enhances staff motivation through the specific focus on meeting the needs of staff, whom the standard characterises as a kind of internal customer, whose needs must be met in order for

value to be realised by external customers (Milovanović et al., 2023). In fact staff engagement, empowerment and commitment is the clear aim of the ISO9000 principles of, *Engagement of people, Evidence-based decision making and Improvement*, with the standard expressly providing the rationale for these principles as,

ISO9000 Principle - Engagement of people

“In order to manage and organization effectively and efficiently, it is important to respect and involve all people at all levels. Recognition, empowerment and enhancement of competence facilitate the engagement of people in achieving the organization’s quality objectives” (International-Standards-Organization, 2016).

ISO9000 Principle - Evidence-based decision making

“Decision-making can be a complex process and it always involves some uncertainty. It often involves multiple types and sources of inputs, as well as their interpretation, which can be subjective. It is important to understand cause and effect relationships and potential unintended consequences. Facts, evidence and data analysis lead to greater objectivity and confidence in decision making” (International-Standards-Organization, 2016).

ISO9000 Principle - Improvement

“Improvement is essential for an organization to maintain current levels of performance, to react to changes in its internal and external conditions and to create new opportunities” (International-Standards-Organization, 2016).

This framing of staff as stakeholders with reasonable needs that must be met in order to ensure organisational performance, positions staff as active contributors rather than compliant executors of quality mandates, suggesting that ISO9000 improves employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity as a lever to better organisational performance (Milovanović et al., 2023).

However, the literature is also clear that realising such benefits depends heavily on how ISO9000 is implemented. When adoption is driven only by external pressures like funding body regulations, the quality system risks being considered an administrative burden by staff. Alternately, when introduced with strong

management support it provides reinforcement for organisational commitment and enables employees to feel part of collective goals (Kurnia and Esthi, 2025). Evidence from social services organisations reinforces this point. For example, in privately funded Portuguese social services, ISO9001-based quality management systems were associated with stronger perceptions of empowerment and engagement among staff, especially among those in leadership positions (Casteleiro and Mendes, 2022). This suggests that quality systems can create enabling environments, but that their effects are mediated by the degree to which staff are invited into the process. Similar dynamics are noted in public sector studies, where quality mandates have been shown to drive quality practice uptake more effectively than staff enthusiasm alone, particularly when those mandates provide opportunities for staff involvement and ownership (López-Lemus, 2023, Melão et al., 2017).

Theoretically, these findings may be understood as ISO9000 concurrently aligning organisational values and the value systems of staff. Paarlberg and Perry (2007) argue that formal management systems become motivating when they resonate with employees' affective and normative values, essentially creating a set of shared values, where staff feel that organisational mandates are authentic and meaningful. They note,

"... strategic values are motivating to employees to the extent that they reflect employees' internal affective, normative, and task-oriented values, a zone of existing values. Although values management is a social process that results from routine interactions, formal management systems provide opportunities to enhance the social interactions that are motivating to employees" (Paarlberg and Perry, 2007, p.387).

Krajcsák (2018) adds that different forms of commitment are supported by different organisational values. Staffs' affective commitment to their work flourishes in organisational cultures that promote collaboration, trust and autonomy, while professional commitment is reinforced by values such as consistency and attention to detail. ISO9000 operationalises precisely these kinds of values through its principle, *Process approach*, which states,

ISO9000 Principle - Process approach

“Consistent and predicable results are achieved more effectively and efficiently when activities are understood and managed as interrelated processes that function as a coherent system” (International-Standards-Organization, 2016).

The literature discussed above suggests that ISO9000 fosters performance-inducing staff values not by prescribing them directly, but by requiring the kinds of practices and mandates that support them. When adopted with strong support from management, ISO9000 quality mandates can cultivate environments in which employees feel engaged, committed and empowered. These are precisely the conditions that the present study found to be discussed by staff and contracts linked with higher uptake of quality practice in government-funded social welfare services.

Methodological contrasts

Theoretical alignments and differences between the findings for RQ2b in this study and similar others discussed above, may be explained and supported methodologically. Table 39 summarises these theoretical and methodological contrasts in a visual format.

Table 39. Studies on impact of ISO9000 - comparison of methods and findings

Study	Methods Summary	Measurement		Key Findings
		Staff values	Quality practice	
Present Study	Semi-structured interviews with staff (n = 22) and contract document observations (n = 18) to investigate alignment of quality practices in social services in NSW with ISO9000 and influence of staff values on uptake	Based on Appraisal Analysis staff responses to interview questions on how they value work	Based on reported alignment with all 49 activities and seven ISO9000 principles	ISO9000 aligns staff values with organisational goals, acting as an antidote to Public Choice Theory criticisms of government

Casteleiro & Mendes (2022)	Likert choice survey (n = 219) to examine the impact of ISO9001 on staff engagement & empowerment in privately funded social organisations in Portugal with / without ISO9001 certification	Based on typologies developed by Spreitzer (1996) (empowerment) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) (engagement)	Not measured directly	ISO9000 certification linked to increased perception of empowerment by staff (statistically significant)
Kurnia & Esthi (2023)	Likert choice survey (n = 75) and observations to examine the effect of ISO9001 certification on employee performance and commitment in one organisation in Indonesia	Staff commitment based on typology developed by Astuti (2022)	Performance based on typology developed by Rohman et al. (2024)	Staff commitment and performance in their work role increases with the fidelity of ISO9001 implementation, with commitment mediating strongly
Milovanović (2023)	Likert choice Survey (n = 145) ISO9001 certified orgs in Serbia to investigate the impact of ISO9001 certification on satisfaction of internal (staff) and external (clients) customers	Satisfaction measurement based on framework developed by Heskett and Schlesinger (1994)	Not measured directly	ISO9001 certification positively impacts customer satisfaction, customer retention, market share, employee productivity and employee satisfaction

Summary – RQ2b

The evidence from this study shows a clear and significant relationship between the language of contracts, staff values, and the uptake of ISO9000-aligned quality practices. Analyses demonstrated that higher ISO9000 alignment in contracts predicted both higher staff interview scores ($r = .359, p = .040$) and the presence of staff values that predicted them (FC1-3), ($p = .028$), (see also Figure R26 in Results chapter for a qualitative account of the effect of contract ISO9000 content on staff value expressions).

These results of analysis for RQ2b support the claim that ISO9000-like contract mandates do more than advise compliance requirements, they can foster the motivational climate in which staff values find expression. In higher scoring cases, staff expressed their roles in terms of moral purpose and ownership, describing their work as *“the most important thing we can do”* (SLK - GV-EX-OQA-IV200914) and

highlighting innovations such as predictive analytics as improvement goals, which they saw as ethically necessary. These expressions of empowerment and engagement were consistently associated with contracts that contained more ISO9000-like quality mandates, emphasising engagement of people, improvement, and evidence-based decision making. The level of ISO9000-like quality mandates in the various contract documents, reflected as scores, appeared to mobilise intrinsic staff motivation by providing a shared framework through which staff could express their values and perceive their work as meaningful. In effect, when contracts spoke the language of ISO9000, staff began speaking in similar terms in their interviews, and framing their values as aligned with those of their work. This interpretation resonates with research emphasising the link between empowerment and ownership in quality improvement (Bendermacher et al., 2019), while extending these implications to the role played by the design of organisational quality mandates. The results of this study showed that contracted quality mandates may have actively facilitated the integration of personal values and organisational practice, fostering a sense of agency and commitment that contrasts with the passive, compliance focused function they are often attributed.

This finding diverges from several established perspectives on the relationship between organisational mandates and staff values. Farr and Cressey (2015) for example, argue that formalised mandates may override tacit relational values held by staff, diminishing intrinsic motivation. In contrast, the Cases in this study demonstrate that ISO9000-like contract content may activate rather than suppress values, enabling staff to frame their work in personally meaningful terms. Paarlberg and Perry (2007) and Krajcsák (2018) soften this assertion by contending that mandates and values can only reinforce each other where they are already aligned, with their research noting respectively,

“ ... most report that the goals communicated by the organization have little meaning for their daily work, and few employees find the communication of these goals engaging and meaningful ... ” (Paarlberg and Perry, 2007, p.398).

“... affective commitment is supported by a high level of self-esteem and self-efficacy through the organizational values such as collaboration, trust, affiliation, achievement, autonomy, competition and growth. In contrast, professional commitment is supported by a high level of locus of control and emotional stability, through the organizational values such as routinization, attention to details, formalization, support, communication and consistency” (Krajcsák, 2018, p.127).

However, the mediation analysis conducted by the present study suggests that ISO9000 may provide a mechanism for alignment of these staff values. Staff values were significantly associated with higher ISO9000 alignment scores, but their independent effect disappeared once the strength of ISO9000 alignment of contracts was considered. This implies that staff values may be influenced by the presence of ISO9000-like quality mandates, rather than alignment requiring that complimentary staff values pre-exist. As with the rational consequences of ISO9000 for staff engagement, empowerment and commitment discussed earlier, this again is unsurprising, given that this standard specifies the conditions needed to address the gap in staff affiliation with organisational goals identified by Paarlberg and Perry (2007) and to influence the need for affective and professional commitment, identified by Krajcsák (2018), through the ISO9000 principles of *Engagement of people, Customer focus, Process approach, Evidence-based decision making and Relationship management*.

The interactionist perspective advanced by Bendermacher et al. (2019) aligns most closely with the evidence presented here, in the emphasis of engagement, empowerment and ownership as mediating factors in quality management. The present study adds support to this argument by empirically substantiating their findings that quality mandate design can create a motivational climate in which staff values find expression. The present findings also contribute to theory by demonstrating that ISO9000-like quality mandates fulfil these needs by operating as cultural instruments that can facilitate alignment between staff values and organisational goals.

1.4 Reasons and choices behind analytic judgements

As a solitary PhD researcher, I have spent many hours pondering and testing the accuracy of the findings of this study. Langley and Abdallah (2011) discuss this issue, commenting that much of the evidence and thinking behind the findings that researchers like myself present, is based on minutiae that are lost in past decisions that I arrived at. The issue, they claim is that the reasons I am convinced of my own study's findings may remain hidden from the reader. In response they propose a solution used by a number of academics in the organisational theory literature (Gilbert, 2005, Maitlis, 2005, Martin and Eisenhardt, 2010, Zott and Huy, 2007), to pro-actively disclose the reasoning and choices behind analytic judgements, so that the credibility of findings is demonstrated, rather than just asserted. With this in mind, I present the reasons that we might trust the findings made by this study in terms of both their insightfulness and their practical utility.

Fidelity and triangulation of data sources

The findings of this study are supported by the triangulation of three separate data sources; staff interviews, contract documents and ISO9000 alignment codes, taken directly from the standard. The combination of these data sources reduces the risk of failure to observe critical nuances in the phenomena under study (Santos et al., 2020).

The grounded nature of the data avoids uncontrolled artefacts or misalignment of pre-determined typologies like CVF or SERVQUAL (Charmaz, 2017). Staff values were based on Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding of staff interviews, then transparently quantitized for analysis. Similarly, to the direct measure of staff values from their source, the measure of quality practice uptake was based on ISO9000, taken directly from all 49 activities suggested by ISO9000, accounting for uptake of all seven of its quality management principles. ISO9000 is a pre-determined typology, however, it is not one that abstracts complex phenomena like values expressed by participants (CVF), or perceptions of quality management (SERVQUAL), into summative categories. Rather, it is a typology that categorises and explains approaches to quality management, developed over many decades (Yates and Murphy, 2007) and adopted by over one

million organisations around the world (SimpleQuE, 2025), with great evidence of success (López-Lemus, 2023, Psomas et al., 2013, Schuurman, 1997, Sfredo et al., 2021). The combination of these methodological choices provides transparent evidence of the influence of ISO9000 type quality management on staff values complementary to government efficiency and performance. The illustration of the phenomena described by finding two of this study in Table 35 in the results chapter provides a case-in-point here, showing the dynamic interaction between ISO9000 aligned quality mandates in contract documents, staff ISO9000 quality scores, and staff values. The nuances captured by Appraisal Analysis in this table paint a compelling picture of diminishing returns on staff engagement as contract ISO9000 alignment decreases, and vice-versa.

Interaction with existing and emerging theory

Finding two interacts with established theories relating to organisations. From the perspective of Institutional Theory, mandates operate in a similar way to that described by this study. In the language of Institutional Theory, organisational mandates act as scripts that regulate and legitimise behaviour, shaping values through embedded norms (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, Zucker, 1987). From a psychological empowerment perspective, the values of engagement, empowerment, and commitment observed in this study reflect the core dimensions of autonomy, meaning, competence, and impact (Spreitzer, 1996). Another relevant body of literature to this finding is that on organisational justice and public administration perspective. Similarly to the present study, this literature holds that when mandates are perceived as fair and aligned with staff goals, they are more likely to be internalised and motivating (Paarlberg and Perry, 2007, Tyler, 2021, pp.3-5) These perspectives support and compliment this study's proposition that ISO9000-like mandates do more than prescribe passive compliance, they create legitimising scripts that empower staff, and foster the fairness and alignment that underpin commitment.

Practical implications

This study offers the first empirical evidence to link organisational quality mandates with staff values and quality practice uptake in government social services, even in the

absence of formal ISO9000 adoption. In doing this, it is the first to demonstrate that ISO9000-like quality mandates can address the systemic shortcomings of government processes identified by PCT. Bureaucratic systems are structurally prone to inefficiency because individual actors, motivated by rational self-interest, prioritise private gains over public value (Butler, 2012, p.36). This manifests in several well established and recurring behaviours.

- Principal–agent misalignment, where information advantages allow bureaucrats to pursue self-serving agendas (Gailmard, 2010, Spicer, 1985).
- Budget maximisation, where bureaucrats inflate the level of resources needed beyond fact, to enhance their job security, authority and status at the expense of efficiency (Dollery and Hamburger, 1996, Niskanen, 1994).
- Minimal squawk behaviour, where staff avoid collecting or reporting performance data that might invite criticism, entrenching inefficiency and bureaucratic inertia (Leaver, 2009).
- Regulatory capture, where resources and oversight are distorted to favour private or organisational interests, undermining efficiency and public value (Del Rosal, 2011, Krueger, 2008, Peltzman, 1976, Stigler, 1971).

Without deliberate safeguards, these dynamics risk government systems being organised around the pursuit of staff security, status and continued authority, rather than the delivery of public value (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, Moe, 1984). ISO9000 offers a structured address to these systemic flaws by aligning staff interests and organisational goals. By mandating participation, communication, and responsibility to act on evidence, not opinion of senior staff whose self-interest is misaligned with public value, ISO9000-like quality management systems establish conditions for engagement, empowerment, and commitment, values shown by this study and others (Anitha, 2014, silaji et al., 2025) to support alignment of organisational and staff interests. As an interpretive synthesis (Charmaz, 2014), this constitutes evidence that ISO9000-like quality mandates either cause or facilitate these values, reducing the incentive for bureaucrats to quietly, rationally, game the system. According to this study and others

(López-Lemus, 2023, Psomas et al., 2013, Starke et al., 2012), ISO9000 appears to achieve this goal alignment by limiting organisational policy and process to activities that support fair and demonstrable value for clients, staff and owners, or executives, in the case of government. It does this through the mechanisms of its principles, which directly intervene to prevent the kinds of inefficiencies and misdirection of resources described by PCT. Figure 20 provides an indicative illustration.

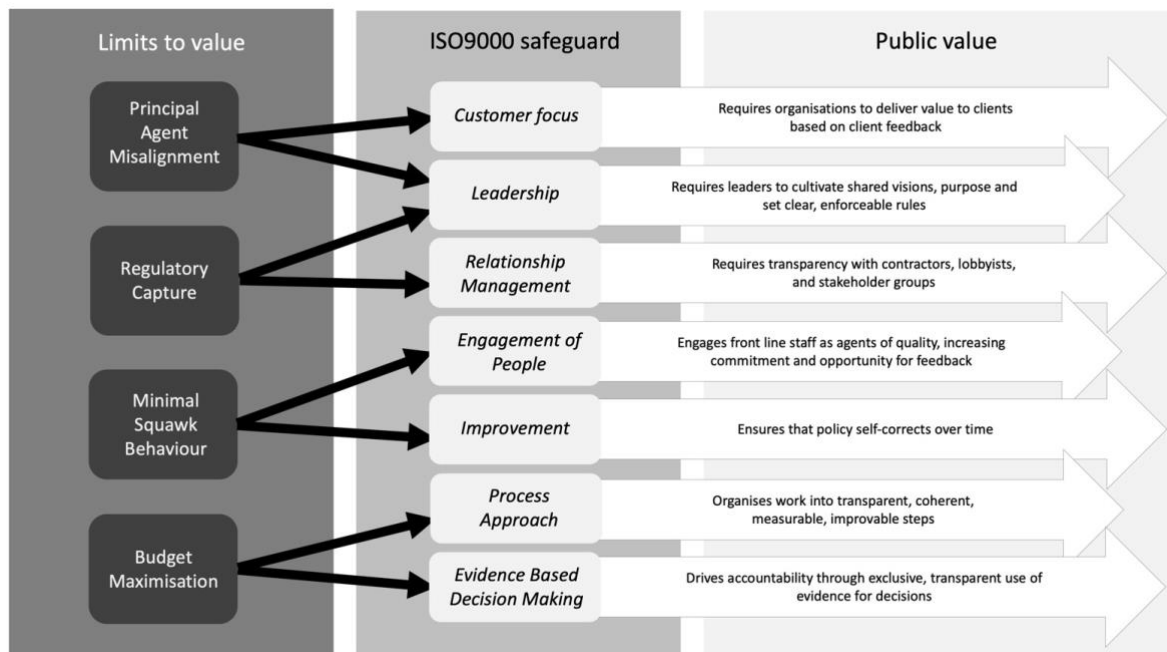


Figure 20. ISO9000 mechanisms to empower staff and address PCT limits to public value

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Social welfare services operate in high-stakes environments where the welfare and safety of its clients is at risk, and government social welfare services are often the last safety net for this vulnerable group of people (Gaster, 2005, pp.313-314). At the same time, the failures of government to deliver effective services is well documented (Head, 2013, Head, 2016, Melão et al., 2017, Shergold, 2015), and well explained (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, Butler, 2012, Downs, 1957, Krueger, 2008, Niskanen, 1994, pp.36-44). This study set out to examine whether quality management can address the rational self-interest challenges to government performance identified by PCT. To do this, research questions were defined for analysis through the Pragmatist and Constructivist Realism lenses adopted. It employed a convergent mixed-methods case study design integrating Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding to derive qualitative staff values, ISO9000 a priori scoring of contracts and interviews to quantify staff uptake of quality practices, and cross-case synthesis including mediation analysis to investigate interactions between the datasets.

This chapter will propose the reasonable conclusion of this study, based on findings from the discussion chapter, which in turn drew together the content and analysis from the remaining chapters (Evans et al., 2011). Additionally, this chapter will discuss this study's limitations and make recommendations for the application of findings in both practical and future research contexts.

Section 1 Can quality management address the challenges to government performance identified by PCT?

Findings for RQ1 showed that uptake of quality management practices in NSW social welfare services was generally low, averaging around one quarter of the total number of practices suggested by ISO9000. However, quality practice varied widely across Cases, staff job levels and the government and NGO agencies that ran these services. NGO environments reliably reported higher incidence of quality management practice than their government colleagues, as did manager level staff, who reported significantly more quality practices than either executives or frontline workers. Adoption of ISO9000 was

not a formal requirement for the social welfare services under study. However, many governments including the NSW government have allocated specific budgets to form agencies that oversee and comment upon the performance and improvement of government agencies, including those who deliver social welfare services (Audit-Office-NSW, 2015a, Audit-Office-NSW, 2015b, Audit-Office-NSW, 2019, Audit-Office-NSW, 2020, Audit-Office-NSW, 2021, Audit-Office-NSW, 2024, Audit-Office-NSW, 2025a, Audit-Office-NSW, 2025b). This study showed that despite the availability of internationally recognised standards, government control of quality management is erratic as well as insubstantial, confirming the concerns raised by the seminal PCT literature, that bureaucracies lack reliable means to ensure performance (Buchanan and Tullock, 1965, pp.3-6). It also demonstrated that improved performance is possible. NGOs, managerial staff and a selection of cases achieved higher levels of evidence of quality practice, indicating that government control of quality and performance may be improved where organisational settings and mandated drivers of quality are supportive. By providing a measure of quality practice uptake across the various Cases, staff and agencies, the findings for RQ1 contribute the first empirical measure of ISO9000 alignment in social welfare services, and establishes a baseline for analysis of RQ2.

Findings for RQ2 showed that organisational quality mandates aligned with the principles and practices suggested by ISO9000 exerted decisive influence over quality practice uptake reported in interviews. While some staff values significantly predicted higher uptake of quality management practices, their influence disappeared when contracted quality mandates were included in the model, indicating that organisational quality mandates exerted more influence on practice than staff values alone. This interaction of influence was found to be a mechanism with important implications. Quality mandates did not merely predict compliance, ISO9000 aligned content in contract documents significantly predicted staff engagement, empowerment and commitment, values that were concurrently aligned with higher quality practice uptake.

The theoretical implication is that ISO9000 quality principles increase uptake by aligning the private interests of staff with organisational goals of delivering public value. By mandating practices that meet the needs of both staff and clients for meaningful

outcomes, contracts with more ISO9000 aligned content transformed bureaucratic process obligations into purposeful work that aligned with the values of staff. This dynamic offers a means of redress to the rational self-interest critique of government offered by PCT (Le Grand, 1991). Staff interests, rather than undermining performance in these cases, supported performance by aligning their self-interest with the provision of public value. The caveat to this finding was that such quality mandates must be implemented completely and authentically, across the organisation for them to succeed (Casteleiro and Mendes, 2022, Kurnia and Esthi, 2025, Milovanović et al., 2023).

Section 2 Theoretical contribution

This study makes four theoretical contributions to the literature on quality management, public administration and PCT.

2.1 Address of the root causes of the failures of government performance identified by PCT

The findings demonstrate that organisational quality mandates aligned with ISO9000 principles provide a practical address of the rational self-interest impacts on government performance identified by PCT. This study provides evidence that such quality mandates work to produce public value by structuring meaningful organisational goals that align with the rational self-interest of staff. For this to occur, genuine and full observation of all ISO9000 principles must be enthusiastically adopted, including by senior organisational staff (López-Lemus, 2023). If this is possible, organisational goals become meaningful to staff, resulting in their authentic, purposeful pursuit, for personal reasons.

2.2 Reframing the values vs mandates debate in in quality management literature

This study provides empirical evidence in support of an interactionist position (Bendermacher et al., 2019, Kull et al., 2012), showing that both staff values and

organisational quality mandates were significantly associated with higher reported uptake of quality practices, with the influence of ISO9000 aligned content in mandates eclipsing that of staff values. At the same time, ISO9000 aligned contracts fostered precisely the values that predicted engagement with quality management practices. This demonstrates that ISO9000 aligned quality mandates actively influence the staff value orientations that drive quality practice by engaging staff in meaningful work goals and empowering their decisions through use of evidence.

2.3 Advancing public administration literature on contracts and culture

A common assumption in the public administration and quality management literature is that values are antecedents of behaviour, while organisational mandates serve primarily as external controls (Farr and Cressey, 2015, Fonseca, 2015, Prajogo and McDermott, 2005). This study challenges the order of causation, by showing that the right kinds of organisational quality mandates can foster staff engagement with and commitment to organisational goals. This insight contributes to debates about the function of organisational quality mandates and positions quality management design in contracts as a central tool for shaping organisational culture.

2.4 Methodological innovation in mixed-methods quality research

Finally, this study contributes methodologically by demonstrating the feasibility of quantizing qualitative data on staff values through Appraisal Analysis and Grounded Theory coding for comparison with ISO9000 alignment scores from both contracts and interviews. This triangulation provided a unique comparison between staff values, contract mandates, and practice uptake, offering a template for future research on organisational quality in complex social service environments.

Section 3 Recommendations for policy and practice in social welfare services

The implication of these findings is that ISO9000-like quality mandates can be used as a mechanism for transformative improvement of government services through cultural alignment of staff and organisation. Recommendations are therefore offered cautiously, but with a view to practical application and further refinement.

The practical recommendation of this research is that policymakers should design quality mandates that engage and empower staff, in line with the best examples found by this study. This requires moving beyond rigid compliance language that seeks simply to demonstrate accountability for its own sake, and towards organisational quality mandates that actively seek to self-improve through impact and value evidence from staff and clients. For example, instead of prescribing outputs disconnected from outcomes, contracts could encourage staff-led problem solving, participatory feedback loops, and transparent evidence collection and reporting. In doing so, governments may more efficiently and effectively harness the interest and industry of its staff in supporting the vulnerable clients of social welfare services, while simultaneously improving its accountability and performance. If this is undertaken, the guidance of ISO9000 would be a good starting point.

Section 4 Limitations and future research

This study is subject to several limitations that frame the scope of its findings.

4.1 Defining quality practice uptake

Measurement of quality practice was undertaken solely against ISO9000. While alternative frameworks such as EQUASS or SERVQUAL offer sector-specific insights, the findings here are not easily translated to other standards. The choice of ISO9000 was intentional, as it provides a universally recognised and generalisable standard. The trade-off is that activities not captured by ISO9000 may also constitute practices that

improve the quality of social welfare services, but were outside the scope of measurement.

4.2 Measuring quality practice uptake

The scoring system developed for this study, although systematic and replicable, has not yet been validated in other settings, and therefore its use here should be understood as exploratory. The alignment scores established provide an empirical reference point, but further testing is required to confirm its external validity (Calder et al., 1982).

Additionally, mathematical measures of central tendency, while useful, necessarily diminish the presence and influence of complexity, limiting their conceptual value to that of general oversight (Field, 2024, p.27).

4.3 Generalisability of findings

This study was geographically limited to NSW government-funded social welfare services. It is not known whether findings hold in other jurisdictions with different contracting arrangements, organisational cultures, or political environments. Also, the analysis relied on staff interviews and contract documents which, while rich sources of evidence, do not capture perspectives from clients, regulators, or other stakeholders whose insights could further illuminate the impact of staff values and organisational quality mandates on practice. Prominent research on ISO9000 implementation discussed in this thesis has made thematic (if not statistically) similar findings, in all sectors, including government and third sector contexts (ALHasani, 2020, Cohen and Brand, 1990, Fei and Rainey, 2003, Jeyar et al., 2024, López-Lemus, 2023, Melão et al., 2017, Psomas et al., 2017, Schuurman, 1997, Sfredo et al., 2021). The goal of the present study in terms of standards of evidence was to generate explanation and insight into how staff values and organisational systems interact. The scope of enquiry and the similarity of findings implies that findings of the present research may be analytically (Firestone, 1993, Yin, 2013) if not statistically generalised to many government-funded service contexts and possibly others.

4.4 Analysis

The cross-case design limits causal inference in comparison with higher standards of evidence, such as randomised-control trials (West et al., 2008). Although mediation analysis demonstrated the influence of contracts on quality practice and staff values, the dynamics between mandates and values may not be completely revealed by this analysis. It is possible that these factors interact in more complex ways than could be observed in a mixed methods cross-case analysis here.

4.5 Future research

While the results of this study are promising, they are also new and untested outside the present scope. Future research should consider adopting action research as an approach to implement and extend these findings. Action research is particularly well-suited to government contexts where complexity, competing priorities, and dynamic environments are common (Eden and Huxham, 1996). Through use of its iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, action research can test whether ISO9000-like quality management genuinely align staff values and organisational objectives. This approach may also reveal how contract language might be refined to maximise participation and motivation. Additionally, such research designs may also provide insight into how resistance to transparency and accountability can be constructively addressed.

Future research might also consider aiming to validate and improve the ISO9000-based metric introduced by this study, examining its accuracy and utility across the social welfare sector and potentially to explore how this method might inform questions of the fidelity of ISO9000 implementation in broader industry.

Section 5 Closing remarks

The findings of this study should not be interpreted cynically. They do not imply that staff values, perceptions, motivations, should or could be artificially manipulated to the ends of a third party, even in pursuit of support for vulnerable clients (Kant, 2020).

Rather, these findings point to the significant advantages available to organisations that genuinely engage with the *voice of the process* (Mann, 2006) to influence both organisational goals and staff affective alignment with them. Seen through the Pragmatist lens of this study, the significance of these findings lay in their practical potential. Social welfare services operate in environments characterised by complexity, vulnerability and the opportunity to leverage or waste substantial public resources. If government can increase the incidence of quality mandates that support staff engagement and empowerment across social welfare services, then the alignment of staff and organisational values may translate into considerably better outcomes for citizens. This study has provided the first empirical proof of concept for this possibility, opening a new path for research and practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Scope and purpose of FACS programs selected as cases

The following summaries of the scope and purpose of the FACS social welfare services selected as Cases in this study were informed by the program documents obtained from FACS via Government Information Public Access request, volunteered by interview participants, or sourced from public facing websites (NSW Department of Communities & Justice, 2025).

Domestic & Family Violence programs

Men's Behaviour Change Program

Purpose

To reduce domestic and family violence by challenging and changing violent, controlling or abusive behaviours in men.

Scope

Delivers structured, group-based behaviour change programs supported by risk assessment, compliance monitoring and partner support services in line with minimum practice standards.

Staying home Leaving Violence

Purpose

To enable women and children experiencing domestic violence to remain safely in their homes and communities.

Scope

Offers case management, safety planning, security upgrades, legal assistance and wraparound support to help victims stay safely housed and avoid homelessness.

Child & Family programs

Family Preservation

Purpose

To improve outcomes for vulnerable families and children by intervening early to prevent entry into the child protection system.

Scope

Targets families with children aged 0–9 (or prenatally) who are experiencing risk factors, offering parenting support, case management, and referrals to health, education and housing services.

Intensive Family Preservation

Purpose

To safeguard children at risk of significant harm and prevent their removal into out-of-home care by providing intensive, short-term home-based interventions and case management in partnership with families.

Scope

Operates as a time-limited, home-based intervention stream within the integrated Family Preservation system, including targeted services for Aboriginal families (IFBS), delivered via referrals from FACS and aligned with the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act and safety risk frameworks.

Kids Early Years Services (KEYS)

Purpose

To strengthen the wellbeing and development of children aged 0–5 by improving coordination of early support services for families.

Scope

Operates as a multi-agency network in Western Sydney that links families with tailored, culturally safe supports, using a single 'family plan' approach.

Out-of-home-care,

Purpose

To provide safe, stable care for children and young people who cannot live with their families due to serious risk of harm.

Scope

Includes foster, kinship and residential placements, underpinned by the Quality Assurance Framework which monitors outcomes in safety, permanency and wellbeing.

Premier's Youth Initiative

Purpose

To prevent homelessness among young people exiting out-of-home care by supporting their transition to independence.

Scope

Provides coordinated access to housing, mentoring, life skills, education and employment support for eligible young people aged 16-25 transitioning from statutory care.

Their Futures Matter

Purpose

To improve life outcomes and reduce long-term social service costs by making larger investment, earlier.

Scope

Uses linked data, statistical modelling and cross-agency collaboration to design and deliver targeted interventions to priority cohorts.

Community Building programs

Targeted Early Intervention

Purpose

To improve long-term outcomes for children, young people and families by supporting wellbeing and preventing escalation into crisis or the child protection system.

Scope

Funds place-based, culturally responsive services across NSW that deliver community connection, child and youth development, family support and safety initiatives.

Homelessness programs

Social and community Housing

Purpose

To prevent and respond to homelessness among individuals and families by funding specialist services that provide housing support, case management and wrap-around support for people who are homeless or at imminent risk.

Scope

Delivers publicly funded outreach, crisis, transitional and early intervention assistance across NSW via commissioned community sector providers under Program Specifications in the Homes NSW/Human Services Agreement framework.

Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing

Purpose

To reduce tenancy breakdown and prevent homelessness by supporting at-risk tenants to sustain long-term housing.

Scope

Delivers tailored outreach and case management to social housing tenants identified as at risk of losing their tenancy due to complex needs or repeated breaches.

Appendix 2 Ethics approval

Wednesday, 30 October 2019

Dr Julien Pollack
Civil Engineering; Faculty of Engineering
Email: julien.pollack@sydney.edu.au

Dear Julien,

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application.

I am pleased to inform you that after consideration of your response, your project has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2019/797
Project Title: How does government manage quality? Exploring the use of quality management systems in government decision making processes
Authorised Personnel: Pollack Julien; ODowd Austen Lee;
Approval Period: 30/10/2019 to 30/10/2023
First Annual Report Due: 30/10/2020

Documents Approved:

Date Uploaded	Version Number	Document Name
12/09/2019	Version 1	Interview questions
12/09/2019	Version 1	Survey questions
12/09/2019	Version 1	Invitation to participants
12/09/2019	Version 1	Survey participant info sheet
24/10/2019	Version 2	PIS - interviews - update with protocol number only
24/10/2019	Version 1	PCF - interviews

Condition/s of Approval

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.
- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
 - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
 - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).
- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.
- Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, as relevant to this project.
- Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the relevant legislation and University guidelines.
- Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, applicable legal requirements, and with University policies, procedures and governance requirements.
- The Ethics Office may conduct audits on approved projects.
- The Chief Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research and is responsible for ensuring all others involved will conduct the research in accordance with the above.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

Please contact the Ethics Office should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely,



Professor Glen Davis
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC 2)

The University of Sydney of Sydney HRECs are constituted and operate in accordance with the

National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2007\)](#) and the NHMRC's [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2007\)](#)

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Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet



**Discipline of Project Management
Faculty of Engineering**

ABN 15 211 513 464

Dr Julien Pollack
Associate Professor Project Management Program
School of Civil Engineering

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How does government manage quality? Exploring the use of quality management systems in government decision making processes.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about the effectiveness of government funded social services. The study aims to understand and improve how social services are designed and delivered. We hope to find out what kinds of programs and decision-making processes work best for people and to provide advice to government on how to use that information to help more people improve their lives.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are one of the people that contribute to the design or delivery of a government funded social service. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:
✓ Understand what you have read.

- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- **Dr Julien Pollack**, Associate Professor, Project Management Program, Faculty of Engineering, The University of Sydney
- **Lee O'Dowd Austen**, PhD Candidate, Project Management Program, Faculty of Engineering, The University of Sydney

Lee O'Dowd Austen is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of Dr Julien Pollack, Associate Professor, Project Management Program, Faculty of Engineering, The University of Sydney.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

We have invited you to participate in this study because we are interested in your knowledge and views about how decisions are made to start or continue grant funding in the NSW Department of Family and Community Services and Justice.

If you choose to participate, we will make a time to come and speak to you where you usually work. We expect that our conversation will take around 30 minutes, during which we will:

- Ask you a series of questions about specific services that you are involved in administering, including;
 - your understanding of the nature and purpose of that service
 - your understanding of how decisions are made about that service
 - the kind of information you receive and pass on ○ how you receive and pass on that information
 - how you contribute to that information
 - whether and how you make decisions, or otherwise act upon that information
- Make a record of our conversation that includes;
 - notes and drawings that we will make together on a whiteboard that explains how different information about program performance is collected and used
 - photographs of our drawing

De-identified information about the function of your role will be recorded during our conversation, but personal information about you will **NOT** be collected at any time.

We will arrange for an interpreter to be present if you ask us to, when we contact you to make a time for our conversation.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

The total time needed to participate in this study will be under one hour, including any time to arrange the time and place for our conversation, and the conversation itself, which will take around 30 minutes.

(5) Who can take part in the study?

People invited to participate in this study include people that contribute to the design or delivery of a government funded social service. We would like to interview people from a range of roles including front line workers, up to senior executives. We need to talk to these people because they will have deep insight into how quality management works in the delivery of social programs in government.

(6) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to end the withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing us at lodo6258@sydney.student.edu.au and simply stating that you no longer wish to participate in the study. No reason is required. If you decide to withdraw, we will remove any information that you contributed, provided that findings from the study are not already published.

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any records will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results, provided they have not already been published. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

If you take part in a focus group, you are free to stop participating at any stage or to refuse to answer any of the questions. However, it will not be possible to withdraw your individual comments from our records once the group has started, as it is a group discussion.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Possible risks may include but are not limited to;

Inconvenience: Giving up time to participate in the research project.

Risk of reputational harm: There is a small risk of reputational harm to any individual or whole non/government agency of reputational harm as a result of disclosing any information about processes that could be viewed as inefficient by readers of any final research publications. To minimise the impact of reputational risk, I will not collect or publish information that makes you easily identifiable.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

Benefits of participation in this research may include but are not limited to;

Satisfaction This research is designed to highlight and promote improved practice in program delivery and decision making, rather than deficits. As a result it is possible that you and the non/government organisation you work for may be able to improve outcomes for clients as a result of participating in this research. This may lead to feelings of satisfaction.

Empowerment Participating in this study may result in increased awareness about the outcome of your work in government funded social programs.

Benefits to others

The published results of this study may improve the effectiveness of the decision-making process in government and thereby provide a benefit to:

Social program clients Your input will help improve the effectiveness of the service you are currently a client of, and other government funded services. This would have the effect of helping to improve the outcomes of clients of those services.

Non/government employees Your input will help improve the effectiveness of the service you currently work for, and other government funded services. This would have the effect of helping to improve the satisfaction of employees of those services.

Taxpayers

Your input will help improve the effectiveness of the service you currently work for or are a client of, for other government funded services and outcomes for clients of those services. This will have the effect of increasing the value for money that tax payers get from the services their tax pays for.

(9) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

- ✓ *What types of information about participants will be collected and used in the study.*

We will ask you questions about your work, including what sorts of information you send and receive, and how you might use that to make any decisions. We will collect your responses to these questions in the form of:

- Notes
- Diagrams
- Photographs of any diagrams that we draw together

- ✓ *Details of any third parties who will have access to participants' information during or after the study (e.g. transcription services).*

Electronic data will be stored in a secure, encrypted server (Research Data store). Hardcopy data will be digitised and destroyed securely. The resulting electronic data will also be stored in this way.

- ✓ *Whether personal information will be kept confidential, and any limits to confidentiality (e.g. mandatory reporting, court orders or subpoenas, for research that may uncover illegal activity).*

All care will be taken to ensure that interviewees are not identifiable from interview input. Your position and name will be kept in a coded list that is stored separately from the data you provide.

- ✓ *Whether (and how) participants may access their personal information from the study.*

No personal information about you will be collected.

- ✓ *How and where study results will be published (e.g. student theses, journal publications, conference presentations, other reports).*

Study results will be published in a student thesis and other places which may include journal publications, conference presentations and other reports.

- ✓ *Where electronic and hardcopy data will be stored during and after the study and who will have access to it. If cloud or network storage will be used, describe any associated privacy/data security/data ownership limitations.*

During the study, electronic data will be stored in a secure, encrypted, password protected server (Research Data Store). All hardcopy data including interview notes will be digitised and destroyed securely. The coded list of interview participant details will be kept in hard copy in a secure filing cabinet. After the study all electronic data will be kept for the 5 year minimum period required for research of this kind, then destroyed.

- ✓ *Whether the data collected in this project is intended to be used for any other purpose (e.g. future research projects, establishment of a research register/database, submission to a data sharing resource). This should also be declared in your ethics application.]*

We will use the data and our resulting analysis of it to provide feedback to the NSW government on the effectiveness of its processes.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

Your information will be stored securely, and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published. Although every effort will be made to protect your identity, there is a risk that you might be identifiable in publications due to the nature of the study and/or the results.

We will keep the information we collect for this study, and we may use it in future projects including using the resulting analysis of it to provide feedback to the NSW government on the effectiveness of its processes. By providing your consent you are allowing us to use your information in future projects. We don't know at this stage what these other projects will involve. We will seek ethical approval before using the information in these future projects.

(10) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

(11) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Lee O’Dowd Austen will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Lee via email at lodo6258@student.sydney.edu.au, or phone on 0416



(12) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by visiting Lee O’Dowd Austen’s research blog, where updates and study results will be published once they are available.

Lee’s research blog is available online at:

<http://www.qualitymanagementforgovernment.com/>

This feedback will be in the form of a one page summary of the findings of the research. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished. Until that time regular updates will be posted on the above website.

(13) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney (2019/797). As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

Telephone: +61 2 8627 8176

Email: human.ethics@sydney.edu.au

Fax: +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

This information sheet is for you to keep

Appendix 4 Standard invitation email to participants

Hi [NAME],

It was nice to speak to you over the phone today. As discussed, I am writing to provide some more information about the research I am conducting with the University of Sydney.

WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

- This research aims to map the sorts of information government uses, and how it uses it, to understand the effectiveness of social services.
- We hope to find out what kinds of decision-making processes work best to incrementally improve services over time, and to provide that information back to government and non-government agencies for their use.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THIS STUDY?

- The study aims to improve how social services are designed and delivered by providing information to government and NGOs that can improve the effectiveness of decision-making processes.

WHAT WE ARE ASKING OF YOU

- We are inviting you to participate in this study because you are one of the people that contribute to the delivery of a government funded social service. We are interested in your knowledge and views about how decisions are made to start or continue grant funding in the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.
- We will collect information about your views and de-identified information about your role during our conversation, but personal information about you will **NOT** be collected at any time.
- If you would like to participate, we will make a time to come and speak to you where you usually work, or we can speak over the phone or Zoom. The interview takes around 30 minutes.

The attached Participant Information Sheet has more details on the aims and methods of the study. If you have any questions, please just call Lee on 0416 221 818.

Please call or email to let me know if you would like to participate or if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Lee.

Lee O'Dowd Austen

The University of Sydney

Engineering, School of Project Management

Phone 0416 [REDACTED]

Email lodo6258@uni.sydney.edu.au

Appendix 5 ISO9000 Quality principles and possible activities to manage them

Following are the seven quality principles identified by ISO9000 and the possible activities that may be undertaken to implement them in any organisation (International-Standards-Organization, 2016).

Customer focus

1. actively manage relationships with customers to achieve sustained success
2. communicate customer needs and expectations throughout the organization
3. determine and take action on relevant interested parties' needs and appropriate expectations that can affect customer satisfaction
4. link the organization's objectives to customer needs and expectations
5. measure and monitor customer satisfaction and take appropriate actions
6. plan, design, develop, produce, deliver and support products and services to meet customer needs and expectations
7. recognize direct and indirect customers as those who receive value from the organization
8. understand customers' current and future needs and expectations

Engagement of people

1. communicate with people to promote understanding of the importance of their individual contribution
2. conduct surveys to assess people's satisfaction, communicate the results and take appropriate actions
3. empower people to determine constraints to performance and to take initiatives without fear
4. facilitate open discussion and sharing of knowledge and experience
5. promote collaboration throughout the organization
6. recognize and acknowledge people's contribution, learning and improvement
7. enable self-evaluation of performance against personal objectives

Evidence based decision making

1. analyse and evaluate data and information using suitable methods
2. determine, measure and monitor key indicators to demonstrate the organization's performance
3. ensure people are competent to analyse and evaluate data as needed

4. ensure that data and information are sufficiently accurate, reliable and secure
5. make all data needed available to the relevant people
6. make decisions and take actions based on evidence, balanced with experience and intuition

Improvement

1. develop and deploy processes to implement improvement projects throughout the organization
2. educate and train people at all levels on how to apply basic tools and methodologies to achieve improvement objectives
3. ensure people are competent to successfully promote and complete improvement projects
4. integrate improvement consideration into development of new or modified products and services and processes
5. promote establishment of improvement objectives at all levels of the organization
6. recognize and acknowledge improvement
7. track, review and audit the planning, implementation, completion and results of improvement projects

Leadership

1. communicate the organization's mission, vision, strategy, policies and processes throughout the organization
2. create and sustain shared values, fairness and ethical models for behaviour at all levels of the organization
3. encourage an organization-wide commitment to quality
4. ensure that leaders at all levels are positive examples to people in the organization
5. establish a culture of trust and integrity
6. provide people with the required resources, training and authority to act with accountability
7. inspire, encourage and recognize the contribution of people

Process approach

1. define objectives of the system and processes necessary to achieve them
2. establish authority, responsibility and accountability for managing processes
3. determine process interdependencies and analyse the effect of modifications to individual processes on the system as a whole

4. ensure the necessary information is available to operate and improve the processes and to monitor, analyse and evaluate the performance of the overall system
5. manage processes and their interrelations as a system to achieve the organization's quality objectives effectively and efficiently
6. manage risks which can affect outputs of the processes and overall outcomes of the QMS
7. understand the organization's capabilities and determine resource constraints prior to action

Relationship management

1. determine and prioritize interested party relationships that need to be managed
2. determine relevant interested parties (such as providers, partners, customers, investors, employees or society as a whole) and their relationship with the organization
3. encourage and recognize improvements and achievements by providers and partners
4. establish collaborative development and improvement activities with providers, partners and other interested parties
5. establish relationships that balance short-term gains with long-term considerations
6. gather and share information, expertise and resources with relevant interested parties
7. measure performance and provide performance feedback to interested parties, as appropriate, to enhance improvement initiatives

Appendix 6 Appraisal Analysis of interview responses

Interviews selected for qualitative analysis are transcribed, followed by the Appraisal Analysis for each. Criteria for selection of any given interview for analysis was that at least one of the two interview questions on participant values around their work were answered. Those questions were;

Question 12

Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the services? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?

Question 13

Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?

Under this criterion, 20 of the total 22 interviews were selected for analysis, starting with Interview 2. Each were assigned a Statistical Linkage Key (SLK) to de-identify the participant while retaining a connection with related information about the participant.

Interview 2

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-EX-ALL-IV201023	Government	Executive	All

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: No response – ran out of time during interview

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Yes. I personally ... taken from something I remember growing up in a catholic family ... one of the Kennedy Family sayings was ... for those to whom much is given, much is required ... It sounds sappy but I enjoy and ... I feel responsible and think my job is a fantastic opportunity to share the chances afforded me to the people who don't get them ... there are a lot of people materially and spiritually impoverished and I can maybe give them a chance at social justice. But you can't be an activist in*

government – the system is imperfect, but it ensures a degree of accountability to the community through parliament.

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses personal motivation: "I personally – taken from something I remember growing up in a catholic family", reflecting positive emotion and adds a sense of duty with, "*I enjoy and ... I feel responsible*" and "*a fantastic opportunity to share the chances afforded me to the people who don't get them*".
 - **Judgment:** They critically evaluate the limitations of populations of people who are, "*mentally and spiritually impoverished*", judging them as deserving of support from, "*those to whom much is given*", such as themselves.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant offers a critique of government constraints by acknowledging the system's imperfections, while valuing the degree of accountability it affords.
- 1. **Engagement:** The participant hedges personal aspirations with reference to the limitations of their imperfect government environment, thereby opening dialogic capacity for considering alternative viewpoints.
- **Graduation:** The participant makes use of intensifiers, "*fantastic opportunity*", "*a lot of people materially and spiritually impoverished*" and "*much is required*" emphasising the significance and responsibility of their role in the context of great need.
- **Metarelations:** The participant aligns their personal values within a broader systemic and philosophical framework, using the Kennedy Family saying to establish ethical motivation for their work. They highlight the tension between individual aspirations for social justice and the constraints of working within government, framing their role as both impactful and limited by institutional structures.

Interview 4

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-MM-TMC-IV210226	NGO	Middle manager	TFM MST-CAN

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *I think there is no other service that is set up to address the very highest risk families that are out there. A lot of other services might see a family once or twice a week but they still can't address the problem behaviours like meth use etc., as well as this service does, with its multi professional approach. We aren't perfect but we get*

pretty great results. I would like to see many families earlier in their case, before brighter futures, Child Protection, Intensive Family Preservation, etc. There is nothing else that adequately supports high risk families.

Appraisal Analysis:

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a strong positive emotional commitment to the service's unique role in addressing high-risk families, using evaluative language such as "*great results*" and "*as well as this service does*".
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates staff of their own service positively suggesting that, "*we aren't perfect but we get pretty great results*"
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the service's multi-professional approach as a significant strength, highlighting its unique ability to support "*the very highest risk families*" effectively. They also evaluate other services critically, suggesting they are insufficient in addressing "*problem behaviours like meth use*", and provide a criticism of government processes, observing that, "*I would like to see many families earlier in their case, before brighter futures, Child Protection, Intensive Family Preservation, etc. There is nothing else that adequately supports high risk families.*"
- **Engagement:** The participant acknowledges the existence of other services but positions this service as superior due to its "*multi-professional approach*".
- **Graduation:** Strong evaluative intensifiers like "*very highest risk families*" and "*nothing else that adequately supports high-risk families*" amplify the perceived importance and success of the service.
- **Metarelations:** The participant contrasts this service with others, constructing a hierarchical relationship where their service addresses more complex and critical needs. The phrase "*no other service*" and reference to "*multi-professional approach*" position the service as indispensable within the broader ecosystem of care.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: Our team jokes about this all the time, the money isn't that good. I have a strong personal value regarding first nations people. I want to actively help address their trauma and help empower them in their own story. The key thing that keeps me going is if I can help keep Aboriginal kids at home and not in Out of Home Care.

Appraisal Analysis:

- **Attitude**

- **Affect:** The participant expresses an emotional connection to their work, particularly in relation to Aboriginal people, with words like "*strong personal value*" and "*empower them in their own story*".
- **Judgment:** There is a clear moral evaluation in the participant's focus on addressing trauma and keeping "*Aboriginal kids at home*," reflecting a sense of ethical responsibility. Additionally, the participant expresses a sense that Aboriginal people are deserving of help to right a previous wrong through the use of the ideas "*empower them in their own story*" and helping to address "trauma."
- **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates their role as providing essential and culturally sensitive support, valuing the service's impact on first nations families and children.
- **Engagement:** The participant monoglossically positions themselves, as a meritorious and active agent within the broader system with regard to their work ethic and their view of Aboriginal people as belonging to the noble class of "*first nations people*", indicating a sense of personal righteousness supported by the argument in favour of their own merit, stated tacitly as "*the money isn't that good*".
- **Graduation:** Strong evaluative phrases like "*key thing that keeps me going*" and "*actively help address their trauma*" amplify the significance of the participant's personal mission.
- **Metarelations:** The participant emphasises their personal role as critical within the wider social context. Repeated references to the participant's awareness of the disadvantage of her clients as belonging the groups "*first nations people*" and "*Out of Home Care*" illustrate a commitment to addressing structural inequities and historical trauma, aligning their efforts with broader societal goals.

Interview 5

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-MM-TMC-IV210409	NGO	Middle manager	TFM MST-CAN

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: This is a very intense and expensive program – overall very needed. We see positive results with families. We get really involved with families at least 3 times a week plus 24/7 on call, so the family get the really intensive help they need to shift and keep kids safe. This is the kind of care and therapy they need. This service is for families with very high support needs – that's where we fit.

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**

- **Affect:** The participant expresses a positive emotional stance regarding the program's necessity and outcomes, using phrases like "*overall very needed*" and "*positive results with families*".
- **Judgement:** The participant implicitly evaluates the actions of other services as effective, positioning this program as uniquely impactful for "*families with very high support needs*".
- **Appreciation:** The participant values the program's intensity and "24/7" availability as critical to achieving safety and therapeutic goals for high-need families, emphasising its important role.
- **Engagement:** By stating "*we get really involved with families*" the participant adopts an heteroglossic stance towards the consideration of service user's needs and perspectives.
- **Graduation:** Strong intensifiers such as "*very intense and expensive*", "*really involved*", "*really intensive help*" and "*24/7 on call*" amplify the service's importance and uniqueness.
- **Metarelations:** The participant frames the service as both highly specialised and integral to the broader landscape of family support systems. The emphasis on its intensity and availability underscores its critical role for families with "*very high support needs*".

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *I want to be a consultant back in my home country (Australia) so we don't have to rely on consultants from USA. This would be ideal for me. Currently ALL of the consultants for MST CAN are from USA. They used to come over from there to here every 12 weeks – until COVID.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a personal ambition with a sense of pride, describing their goal to become a consultant in Australia as "*ideal for me*".
 - **Judgment:** There is a critical evaluation of the reliance on consultants from the USA, implying a gap in local expertise that they seek to address.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant demonstrates their appreciation of the service promoting the opportunity to further improve it by reducing dependence on international consultants to enhance the program's relevance in Australia.
- **Engagement:** By emphasising "*ALL of the consultants ... are from USA*", the participant posits a heteroglossic perspective, engaging dialogically with the broader context of international service provision.
- **Graduation (Force):** Emphasised "*ALL*" and the mention of "*every 12 weeks*" intensifies the dependency on international consultants.

- **Metarelations:** The participant's goal of becoming a local consultant reflects a desire to localise expertise and reduce reliance on external resources. This aspiration ties their individual role to a commitment to supporting broader systemic change by addressing structural gaps in the program's operations.

Interview 6

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-SM-TEI-IV210430	NGO	Senior manager	TEI

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *We are there in times of struggle in people's lives, when they need support to continue to be part of and contribute to the community. There are so many people worn down by their life circumstances, we are there to help get them through those hard moments. Everyone has times of vulnerability. There was a time when human services were pitted against each other for resources to keep running. This is not helpful. All of the services provide very valuable support for very vulnerable people.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses empathy and a strong emotional connection to the service's mission, with phrases like "*we are there in times of struggle*" and "*we are there to help get them through those hard moments*".
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the past competition between human services as "*not helpful*", suggesting a critical stance towards systemic inefficiencies and implicitly, their positive moral evaluation of collaboration.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the role of the service in helping people "*continue to be part of and contribute to the community*", positioning it as an essential element in fostering societal well-being.
- **Engagement:** The participant adopts a dialogic stance by acknowledging the broader contributions of "*all of the services*", opening space for multiple perspectives while emphasising shared value.
- **Graduation:** The use of phrases like "*very valuable support*" and "*very vulnerable people*" amplifies the importance of the services and the fragility of the populations they serve.
- **Metarelations:** The participant situates the service within a larger framework of communal care and mutual support, contrasting a collaborative ideal with the competitive past to underline the necessity of systemic cohesion.

Q13

Interviewer: Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?

Participant: I like the idea that when I leave here, that vulnerable people had respectful support to get through their difficult moment in life. I try to make my service a welcoming place that helps meet people’s needs. I want us to be responsive in a positive way.

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a personal commitment to fostering a supportive environment, with phrases like, “I like the idea”, “respectful support” and “welcoming place”, indicating a positive emotional and ethical alignment with their own goals.
 - **Judgment:** Emphasis on “respectful support” reflects a moral evaluation of how services should treat vulnerable people, advocating for dignity and responsiveness.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the service as “a welcoming place” that meets needs and fosters positivity, highlighting its role as a vital community resource.
- **Engagement:** The participant’s statement reflects a monoglossic stance in affirming their personal and professional goals, suggesting confidence in their approach, while expressing an heteroglossic view of the collaborative nature of the service, through the inclusive language of “we”.
- **Graduation:** Amplifiers such as “very positive way” and “helps meet people’s needs”, heighten the perceived efficacy and significance of their contributions.
- **Metarelations:** The participant aligns their personal role with the service’s broader mission, positioning themselves as a key agent in realising the shared objective of providing dignified and effective support.

Interview 7

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-EX-TEI-IV200526	NGO	Executive	TEI

Q12

Interviewer: In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?

Participant: The community is the big picture. Other than the churches, there is nowhere else for people to go. We are also the biggest employer in Blackheath, its also a soft entry point for anyone who needs info or support in Blackheath. (Examples offered of services they provide to the Blackheath community included, The welcome table, which provides free food and a social group in the pub for newcomers to Blackheath, and The Heathens Choir which welcomes all members of the community to join)

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses admiration of the service's community role by introducing the idea that "*the community is the big picture*" and referencing the service's welcoming and supportive nature.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the actions of the service positively as essential, suggesting its value extends beyond traditional institutional support by being an accessible, primary source of help for the local community.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the service's multifunctional role, highlighting its impact as a social, economic, and information hub for Blackheath.
- **Engagement:** By emphasising the primary role of the community and the role of churches, the participant opens space for dialogic engagement, positioning the service as complementary rather than competitive.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*nowhere else for people to go*" and "*biggest employer in Blackheath*" amplify the significance of the service's impact.
- **Metarelations:** The primacy of mention of the community in this response frames it as morally superordinate to the service and possibly offers a tacit objection to the premise of this interview question, which the participant may have interpreted in context as an invitation to frame the worth of the service only in context of other services. The participant then builds an argument that the service is integral to the community's social fabric, by laying out evidence for its unique combination of economic and social contributions within the local context.

Q13.

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *My work is important to me. Most people love working here.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys personal fulfillment and pride in their role in the statements "*my work is important to me*" and "*most people love working here*".
 - **Judgment:** The participant deems their role and the work environment as important, implying the organisation's ability to create meaningful and fulfilling outcomes.

- **Appreciation:** The participant evaluates the workplace positively, implying that it fosters a supportive and enjoyable environment for employees.
- **Engagement:** The participant’s monoglossic statement reflects confidence and conviction about their personal goals that those of the organisation.
- **Graduation:** The use of intensifiers like "important" and "love" heighten the emotional and evaluative weight of their appraisal of the service.
- **Metarelations:** The participant connects their personal satisfaction with broader organisational dynamics, highlighting the relationship between individual fulfilment and workplace culture.

Interview 8

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-SM-TEI-IV221020	Government	Senior manager	TEI

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *It’s pretty low-level support, with some capacity for higher level support to complex clients. It’s supposed to help prevent crisis from happening in families. It needs more resources.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a neutral emotional stance, with no explicit affective markers in their description of the service.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the service as falling short of its potential through use of the terms “pretty low-level” and “supposed to help” implicitly judging its resource allocation as insufficient to meet family needs.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the service’s role in preventing crises and supporting complex clients, but this appreciation is tempered by a critique of resource limitations.
- **Engagement:** By stating "it needs more resources", the participant implies competing perspectives on appropriate resource allocation.
- **Graduation:** The use of phrases like "pretty low-level support", "supposed to help prevent crisis" and "needs more resources" intensifies the limitations in the service’s scope and effectiveness.
- **Metarelations:** The participant positions the service as being ineffective within a broader service delivery framework that fails due to inadequate resources.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *No, I'm just doing my job. I take it seriously, but aside from basic job satisfaction I don't have a personal investment.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a neutral affect, indicating a lack of emotional investment beyond "*basic job satisfaction*".
 - **Judgment:** There is an implicit judgment of their role as routine, without scope for broader personal engagement or systemic influence.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the satisfaction derived from work generally but does not attribute significant personal or societal value to this particular job, implying that they see the work itself as meaningless.
- **Engagement:** The participant's statement reflects a monoglossic stance, conveying a limited regard for alternative interpretations.
- **Graduation:** The use of "*just doing my job*" and "*basic job satisfaction*" downplays the significance of their role and its personal impact.
- **Metarelations:** The participant's response highlights the tension between the requirement to fulfill professional responsibilities and the absence of a deeper personal connection, implying a lack of empowerment or engagement within their role.

Interview 9

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-FL-SLV-IV210430	NGO	Front-line worker	Staying Home Leaving Violence

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *We need smaller NGOs because they are more flexible and client oriented. We never turn people in need away, even if they don't fit the referral criteria perfectly.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**

- **Affect:** The participant implies a positive emotional connection to the value of smaller NGOs, reflecting pride in their flexibility and client-focused approach.
- **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the actions of the service positively, suggesting it fulfils an ethical obligation by "*never turning people in need away*", even when formal criteria are not met.
- **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the service's adaptability and responsiveness, positioning these qualities as essential strengths within the broader service landscape.
- **Engagement:** The participant's statement engages with alternative voices by acknowledging the referral criteria, the needs of people and the dynamics of the broader service system.
- **Graduation:** Language choices like "*need smaller NGOs*" and "*never turn people in need away*" amplify the service's systemic value and its commitment to being inclusive and responsive.
- **Metarelations:** The participant situates smaller NGOs as indispensable within the broader ecosystem, emphasising their unique capacity to address gaps left by larger, less flexible organisations.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Yes, I want to see better outcomes for the women and children that I work with.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys restrained emotional investment in their role by highlighting a personal desire to improve outcomes for women and children.
 - **Judgment:** The participant values the potential impact of their efforts by stressing their desire to achieve "*better outcomes*".
 - **Appreciation:** The participant minimally but implicitly evaluates the service as fulfilling a moral obligation to support vulnerable populations.
- **Engagement:** The statement is monoglossic, reflecting a clear and confident will to achieve personal goals without engaging alternative perspectives on the value of work.
- **Graduation:** The use of "*better outcomes*" conveys a neutral to slightly positive focus on meaningful and measurable improvements.
- **Metarelations:** The participant marginally aligns their personal goals with the service's broad remit, positioning their efforts as aligned with achieving positive change for women and children.

Interview 10

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-EX-OQA-IV200914	Government	Executive	OOHC

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *As an agency, the Quality Assurance Framework is an essential part of how we improve outcomes for families and children. Ultimately, we want to show how we have improved the lives of people. We would like to show how money spent doing this is an investment. The challenges are that demand for child protection has continued to increase. There is a lot of work to look at how we can continually improve the broader system ... we are starting with our work with children. We have to start there, you can't start at the top. I'm excited about predictive analytics. We'd like to offer relevant services earlier.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses enthusiasm for the mission of the service and future focus, demonstrated by their excitement about predictive analytics as a means to improve outcomes.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the work done to generate the framework as essential to improving outcomes within a child protection system challenged by increasing demand.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the framework itself as "essential" to improving lives, valuing its potential to enhance systemic practices and outcomes.
- **Engagement:** By stating "*we have to start there, you can't start at the top*", the participant acknowledges alternative perspectives while positing their strategic focus.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*essential part*", "*continually improve*", and "*excited about predictive analytics*" amplify the importance and optimism surrounding the work.
- **Metarelations:** The participant positions their work within a broader context, linking it to innovative practice resulting in systemic improvements and accountability through predictive analytics and early intervention.

Q13

Interviewer: Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?

Participant: Yes. If I can do nothing else, I want to roll this thing out. We've done our best to focus on practice and make continual improvement loops. I care about the children, families and also the caseworkers. I want for FACS to be able to actually measure how well we've done at helping these people and improving their lives. This is the most important thing we can do.

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a strong emotional commitment to their role, expressing care for children, families, and caseworkers, and personally prioritising delivery of the work with the phrase *"if I can do nothing else, I want to roll this thing out"*.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their work positively, suggesting its focus on improvement and measurement is fulfilling a moral responsibility.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the ability to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of services, appreciating it as the *"most important thing we can do"*.
- **Engagement:** The participant's stance emphasises conviction and focus on their heteroglossic goals to incorporate other voices in service improvement.
- **Graduation:** Strong language such as *"most important thing"*, *"if I can do nothing else"* and *"actually measure"* amplifies the significance and urgency of their mission.
- **Metarelations:** The participants connection of their personal objectives with the needs of clients and caseworkers in contrast with the tacit suggestion (*"actually measure"*) that FACS currently lacks the capacity to (*"most important thing we can do"*), proposes the integration of evidence-based decisions as key to achieving systemic improvement.

Interview 11

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-EX-OAC-IV221205	NGO	Executive	OOHC

Q12

Interviewer: In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?

Participant: *Relationships Australia has a broad remit. We are here to help people manage relationships in their lives. The service contributes to relationships, health, wellbeing, DV, and managing trauma. In the community, we are supporting people to function healthily and to contribute to a better society.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a positive connection to the service's mission, claiming its support of broad societal impact.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the actions of the service positively, implying it fulfils the moral obligation to address complex issues such as trauma and domestic violence (DV).
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the service's contribution to community health and wellbeing, positioning it as a contributor to a better society.
- **Engagement:** While affirming its importance the participant displays a dialogic stance by describing the service's goal to "*help people manage their relationships*", opening space for the possibility of dialogue with clients.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*broad remit*" and "*supporting people to function healthily*" amplify the service's potential for impact.
- **Metarelations:** The participant situates the service as relevant within a broader social service system and community need, emphasising its interconnection with healthy relationships, and social well-being.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Totally. I've been with Relationships Australia for 30 years. I started on the front line in a child protection role. I would be unhappy if Relationships Australia drifted away from supporting vulnerable people.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a deep personal commitment to the service's mission, choosing "*totally*" to underscore their dedication. They also imply happiness with their work with the phrase "*I would be unhappy if Relationships Australia drifted away from supporting vulnerable people*"
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the organisation's historical focus positively and implicitly critiques any potential drift from supporting vulnerable populations.

- **Appreciation:** The participant values the service’s focus on supporting vulnerable people, seeing it as a critical and defining aspect of the organisation’s identity.
- **Engagement:** By highlighting their concern about potential changes, the participant introduces a dialogic element, inviting reflection on the potential for alternate perspectives on the organisation’s direction.
- **Graduation:** The participant intensifies their authority and alignment with the work with "totally" and the disclosure of their 30-year career commitment.
- **Metarelations:** The participant aligns their personal history and professional goal with the organisation’s mission, positioning themselves as both a steward and advocate for its continued focus on vulnerable populations.

Interview 12

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-SM-OPS-IV221111	Government	Senior manager	OOHC

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *In the big picture of NSW being a safe place for young people? Our district? FACS? It fits into all of those. We do get data on this, like higher completion of HSC etc. We have just made a policy decision to extend care for children from 18 to 21 years old. There’s a lot more to say about working with Aboriginal people and trying to heal the problems that took 200 years to create. It’s going to take a long time to repair this damage. We are doing the best we can within the minimal resources that we have.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a sense of determination and care in the context of the safety of young people, particularly in relation to addressing systemic issues with Aboriginal communities.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their actions positively as contributing to moral good, such as making NSW a safe place for young people and supporting Aboriginal communities, while making an implicitly negative judgement about the availability of resources.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the service’s ability to contribute to meaningful outcomes, like HSC completion and extended care policies, while acknowledging constraints.
- **Engagement:** By referencing data and systemic challenges, the participant displays heteroglossia by opening the space for multiple voices.

- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*heal the problems that took 200 years to create*" and "*doing the best we can*" broaden the scope of challenges and the effort required to address them.
- **Metarelations:** The participant offers a tacit critique of the service system by comparing the importance and complexity of its mission with the relative lack of resources afforded it.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *I come to get paid, but I also come from a personal family history of social justice. I want to make a better place. I'm not surprised, given my dad's views on social justice. You have to steer through the bureaucracy, but we can get better outcomes for young people. (Participant gave examples including about a young person who is dying and other examples about young disadvantaged Aboriginal people who the participant was able to help through their work). These are the things that excite me. You don't often get successes, but when we do, it's fantastic. (Gave further examples around homelessness). We can have wins here and get great outcomes.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a strong emotional connection to their work, describing the link between their personal history and their feelings of fulfilment about achieving meaningful outcomes.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their efforts positively as morally significant, particularly in addressing the needs of young disadvantaged Aboriginal people and tackling homelessness in a challenging environment.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the potential for achieving "*great outcomes*", emphasising the value of even small wins in a challenging context.
- **Engagement:** The participant acknowledges the need to negotiate bureaucratic challenges and shares personal examples, introducing dialogic elements that highlight constraints and opportunities posed by various voices present in their work.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*you don't often get successes, but when we do, it's fantastic*" intensify the emotional and practical significance of their work.
- **Metarelations:** The participant aligns their personal values and family history with their professional role, suggesting interplay between individual dedication and systemic change.

Interview 13

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-FL-MBC-IV210507	NGO	Front-line worker	MBCP

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *It's a pre-emptive step to offering support before DV gets too entrenched. Like early intervention. This (service) will mean potentially, that DV affects less people's lives. Each offender affects 2-3 women. We try to reduce this number.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a slight positive affect with their aspiration to participate in reducing the number of people affected by DV, as a moral good, by including themselves in the collective action of the service through use of the phrase, "*we try to reduce this number*".
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their actions positively as an important step in reducing harm, suggesting their belief that the service fulfils an ethical responsibility.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the service's role through use of "*pre-emptive*" and "*potentially, that DV affects less people's lives*", highlighting its importance in addressing a concerning social issue.
- **Engagement:** The participant displays an heteroglossic outlook by mentioning statistics like "*2-3 women affected per offender*", thus introducing the voice of evidence to substantiate the service's relevance and necessity.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*DV affects less people's lives*" and "*try to reduce this number*" amplify the significance of the service's mission.
- **Metarelations:** The participant positions the service within a broader service framework of prevention, signalling the value of its presence to long-term systemic change in addressing DV.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Yes. It is meaningful work to me. I can help reduce DV. That makes it worthwhile.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a sense of personal fulfilment and meaning in their work by equating it with the implied moral obligation to “*help reduce DV*”.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their actions positively, emphasising the ethical importance of their work to address DV.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the service’s ability to make a meaningful impact on reducing harm.
- **Engagement:** The participant’s response is heteroglossic. While confidently affirming the worth and purpose of their work, they tacitly engage with the alternative perspectives of people harmed by DV, and society generally.
- **Graduation:** The use of “*meaningful*” and “*worthwhile*” amplifies the personal and social significance of their role.
- **Metarelations:** The participant mounts a clear argument that their personal motivations align with the broader goals of the service and the community. This positions their work as a shared mission to mitigate the pervasive effects of DV.

Interview 14

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-MM-MBC-IV210430	NGO	Middle manager	MBCP

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *We employ local people. This always works better for local client groups. Larger NGOs have a large share of this market, and this can be good for their budget bottom line but not so good for end users.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a positive emotional connection to employing local people, by referring to its benefits for client groups.
 - **Judgment:** The participant critiques the actions of larger NGOs as prioritising financial goals over the needs of end users, implicitly evaluating their own actions as more community-oriented and effective.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the service’s approach to hiring, highlighting its importance for better client outcomes compared to larger organisations.
- **Engagement:** By contrasting their approach with larger NGOs, the participant introduces a dialogic element, acknowledging different perspectives while advocating for their model.

- **Graduation:** The language choices of "*always works better*", and "*not so good*" amplify the perceived effectiveness of employing local people and the relative shortcomings of larger NGOs.
- **Metarelations:** The participant positions their service as preferable to larger NGOs, by outlining an argument in favour of its unique contribution to end-user outcomes with reference to community-focused care and resource allocation.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Few things; a whole-of-family approach to DV and earlier intervention for better outcomes for children and a space for mentorship for people to get some experience in this work, this builds stronger work environments.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses enthusiasm for positive work practices such as mentorship and early intervention.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their work practices positively, framing them as morally significant and beneficial for both families and staff.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the outcomes of a whole-of-family approach and mentorship, adding emphasis that their organisation contributes to systemic improvement and professional development.
- **Engagement:** The participant reflects a monoglossic stance, confidently asserting the legitimacy of the service's goals and practices without entertaining the legitimacy of alternative approaches.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*better outcomes for children*" and "*stronger work environments*" amplify the significance of the service's impact.
- **Metarelations:** The participant intends to persuade the listener to conclude that their work is meaningful and effective by providing multiple points of evidence in favour of that position.

Interview 15

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-MM-MBC-IV220907	Government	Middle manager	MBCP

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *Men's Behaviour Change Program services help DV offenders to change their behaviour. This improves outcomes for the offender and their families and children.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys an emotionally neutral but morally positive stance, by implying the importance of behavioural change in improving outcomes.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the program positively, tacitly highlighting its ethical and practical significance in addressing DV and its effects on families and children.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the program's capacity to effect change, appreciating its role in reducing harm and fostering better family outcomes.
- **Engagement:** The participant's statement is monoglossic, affirming the program's importance without engaging with alternative perspectives.
- **Graduation:** "*improves outcomes*" provides a mild amplification of the program's positive impact to emphasise its significance.
- **Metarelations:** The participant positions the program as a critical component of the broader framework of DV prevention and family support by linking the aims of the service with positive moral outcomes.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *No. I try to do my best to support the NGOs. It would be good if we could reduce DV.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses neutral emotional commitment to their role, with a concession to doing their best to contribute to reducing DV.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their efforts positively in terms of fulfilling a supportive role, without claiming broader personal significance.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the potential of reducing DV as a worthwhile outcome, although they do not assert direct personal motivation.
- **Engagement:** The participant reflects an heteroglossic stance, acknowledging the perspectives of NGOs and their own organisation.

- **Graduation:** The phrases "do my best" and "it would be good if we could reduce DV" tacitly downgrade their commitment and interest in systemic outcomes.
- **Metarelations:** The participant acknowledges the moral value of program objectives and their basic professional commitment to them while clearly rejecting the proposal that they have a personal interest in their work.

Interview 16

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-SM-KEY-IV220727	Government	Senior manager	KEYS

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *This program helps other programs to be more effective.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a neutral emotional stance.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates actions facilitated by the program positively by mentioning its contribution to the success of other programs.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the program as an enabler for the effectiveness of others.
- **Engagement:** The participant's statement is monoglossic, presenting the program's value as self-evident, without engaging alternative views.
- **Graduation:** The phrase "*helps other programs to be more effective*" upgrades the moral or systemic function of the program.
- **Metarelations:** The participant interprets the context of the question as relating to the service system and positions the program only with reference to its function within that system, further strengthening monoglossic alignment with only their own perspective.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *My career has been about making a difference in the lives of vulnerable people.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses emotional connection and dedication to their work, emphasising its moral value.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their career actions positively, tacitly suggesting they fulfil a moral and social responsibility to support vulnerable people.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values their role as meaningful and impactful, highlighting the broader significance of their contributions.
- **Engagement:** The participant's statement is monoglossic, confidently affirming their dedication without entertaining alternative perspectives.
- **Graduation:** Language like "career" and "making a difference" amplify the significance and personal investment in their work.
- **Metarelations:** The participant aligns their personal mission with systemic goals, emphasising how their career contributes to positive moral outcomes for vulnerable populations, without emotional embellishment.

Interview 17

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-EX-KEY-IV220727	Government	Executive	KEYS

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *All the services out there that are trying to help struggling families are operating in isolation. The express aim of this new KEYS service is to pull info & data from the family and all the services they touch into one central location. By doing this we can decrease wasted or duplicated effort.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a positive emotional stance to the service, emphasising the legitimacy of the program's goals to streamline support for struggling families.
 - **Judgment:** The participant values the innovative approach of consolidating data to enhance efficiency and improve social outcomes.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant provides a critique of the current state of the service system by highlighting inefficiencies like isolation and duplication of efforts, while positioning the KEYS service as a solution.

- **Engagement:** By contrasting the fragmented nature of existing services with the unified model proposed by KEYS, the participant opens space for dialogic engagement with evidence, acknowledging other perspectives.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*decrease wasted or duplicated effort*" intensify the significance and necessity of the service's goals.
- **Metarelations:** The participant situates KEYS as fulfilling an essential role in improving the impact and value of the broader service system through use of evidence-based practice.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: No response – ran out of time in the interview

Interview 18

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-EX-HST-IV200908	Government	Executive	Housing - Sustaining Tenancies Pilot

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *This pilot prevents homelessness, without being a Specialist Homelessness Service that provides housing. It fits in before that by helping to prevent homelessness in the first place. Its an early intervention piece for vulnerable people under financial stress, mental health issues, disadvantage, etc. It also, importantly, gives access to Aboriginal people through the Aboriginal NGO. Because that NGO is so small, it operates by making local connections through word of mouth. This is powerful and has resulted in a large number of referrals that we can't currently provide a service for. That NGO is now starting on the advocacy journey and feeding back strongly on gaps in the service system.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses satisfaction with the service's role through use of language choices like, "*in the first place*" and "*importantly*".

- **Judgment:** The participant values the actions of the service positively, emphasising their ethical importance in preventing homelessness and addressing systemic gaps.
- **Appreciation:** The participant values the service as innovative and impactful, highlighting its effectiveness in supporting vulnerable populations and addressing systemic shortcomings.
- **Engagement:** By describing the NGO’s advocacy and referral efforts, the participant opens dialogic space for alternative perspectives while affirming the importance of local, community-driven solutions.
- **Graduation:** Language like “*in the first place*”, “*importantly*”, “*powerful*” and “*large number of referrals*” amplifies the service’s positive impact and the urgency of addressing unmet service demands.
- **Metarelations:** The participant situates the pilot as an innovative improvement of the homelessness service system, citing multiple points of evidence of its capacity to affect positive systemic change.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: No response – ran out of time in the interview

Interview 19

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-SM-H00-IV200727	NGO	Senior manager	Housing

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: No response – ran out of time in the interview

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Absolutely. I have committed my career over 30 years to get a better deal for people who live in Western Sydney. Sometimes this is through disability, homelessness, many services, but always within the social services arena in Western*

Sydney. In that time there has been improvement in the standard of living for people in Western Sydney. I'm happy about this.

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant provides inscriptions and tokens of strong emotional commitment and pride in their work, discussing their happiness with the improvements achieved.
 - **Judgment:** The participant judges their long-term efforts positively and provides a token of a mild causal relationship between the standard of living for vulnerable populations in Western Sydney, and their career.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values their career contributions and the broader social services system's role in fostering meaningful change over time.
- **Engagement:** The participant adopts a monoglossic stance, confidently affirming their commitment and satisfaction without engaging alternative viewpoints.
- **Graduation:** Language choices like "absolutely", "committed my career" and "30 years" amplify the participant's dedication and the significance of their achievements.
- **Metarelations:** The participant aligns their personal mission with broader systemic goals, positing a cumulative impact of their career on Western Sydney's living standards.

Interview 20

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-EX-H00-IV200629	NGO	Senior manager	Housing

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *There is a lot of financial pressure on our organisation due to things like lack of indexation etc. Because of this, our organisation accepted to absorb some costs in the interest of ending homelessness. Our organisation regularly reviews the impact of this on strategic goals. Our organisation, in this practice is providing more than they are paid for. If they had bid for the original contract with full cost recovery they may not have won the contract. They have the contracts for both types of services, but their concession to government has reduced their capacity to build new social housing. The reason to undercut themselves was to remain competitive in the market and keep large faith-based organisations from gobbling up everyone else. Smaller organisations add value by having better community consultation and involvement than larger orgs. This keeps services more relevant to local people.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys a mixture of pride and frustration, reflecting on the organisation's struggles and dedication to ending homelessness despite financial constraints.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the organisation's ethical and practical choices positively, discussing its role in maintaining competitiveness and prioritising community needs over financial success. Additionally, they evaluate large faith-based organisations negatively through use of language like "*gobbling up*", and their comparison with superior, small organisations.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the organisation's contributions to local people through competitive pricing and community consultation, highlighting this as a key strength compared to larger organisations.
- **Engagement:** By repeated use of the language choice "our", and by contrasting their organisation's approach with that of larger faith-based entities, the participant introduces alternative perspectives while affirming the value of smaller organisations.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*providing more than they are paid for*" and "*reduced their capacity to build new social housing*" amplify the organisation's challenges and virtues.
- **Metarelations:** The participant interprets the context of the question as related to the broader housing service system, and community welfare and uses their response to mount a multi-pronged argument in favour of the proposition that they are a smart and morally upstanding player in the big picture.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *I put a lot of personal value on making a difference for local communities. Maybe because of my time of life, I get a lot out of this role. I like being able to pivot the operations of the organisation to meet the needs we identify in the community. This is mainly true for me because of the small size of our organisation. I like doing things here that are meaningful for clients, staff, stakeholders and for me.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses personal fulfilment and pride in their role, emphasising the meaningfulness of their work for all stakeholders.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their flexibility as positive, reflecting on their capacity to adapt and address community needs effectively.

- **Appreciation:** The participant values their organisation’s small size as an enabler for agility and meaningful impact, highlighting its capacity to achieving meaningful outcomes.
- **Engagement:** The participant’s statement reflects a monoglossic stance, confidently affirming their personal commitment, values and abilities and the organisation’s strategic value without engaging alternative voices.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "a lot of personal value" and "meaningful for clients, staff, stakeholders, and for me" amplify the personal and collective significance of their work.
- **Metarelations:** The participant builds evidence of satisfaction with their personal achievements and power through use of language like “pride”, “I like being able to pivot the operations of this organisation” and “I like doing things” along with qualifying justifications like “I put a lot of personal value on making a difference”, “mainly true for me because of the small size of our organisation” and “my stage of life”.

Interview 21

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
GV-SM-FPS-IV220928	Government	Senior manager	Family Preservation

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *The Family Preservation service provides early intervention. It helps us have healthier families with their kids at home, better mental health, life and social outcomes. Less kids in Out of Home Care and the justice system. It helps people lead better lives.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant conveys optimism and satisfaction with the service’s role in improving social welfare.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates the service’s actions positively, referring to the ethical and social importance of keeping families together and reducing reliance on Out of Home Care.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the service’s impact on mental health, social outcomes, and justice system involvement, framing it as a critical intervention for better lives.
- **Engagement:** By highlighting specific outcomes, “mental health, life and social”, the participant acknowledges the broader systemic challenges while maintaining the service’s contribution to addressing them as beyond question.

- **Graduation:** Language like "*healthier families*", "*better lives*" and the repeated use of "*help*" amplify the significance and reach of the service's value.
- **Metarelations:** The participant positions the service as integral to social welfare with reference to its preventative role within the broader service system.

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *My values align with FACS (my organisation). I want to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people. I want to tackle the system to deliver better outcomes for people. I want to shift the balance of power ... don't leave behind the forgotten.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a strong personal commitment to their role, emphasising their values and dedication to making a difference for vulnerable populations, in line with the aims of their organisation.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their goals positively, highlighting their moral responsibility to challenge systemic inequities and advocate for better outcomes.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the alignment of their personal values with the goals of the service, framing the work as meaningful and impactful for those who are overlooked.
- **Engagement:** The participant's statement reflects a monoglossic stance, confidently defining systemic barriers to its intended outcomes without reference to alternative perspectives.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*make a difference*" and "*shift the balance of power*" amplify the urgency and significance of their work in relation to better outcomes for "*vulnerable people*".
- **Metarelations:** The participant intensifies the strength of their convictions and personal alignment with their work via the repeated use of "*I want ...*" in framing their case.

Interview 22

SLK	Agency type	Interviewee type	Case
NG-EX-IFP-IV200522	NGO	Executive	Intensive Family Preservation

Q12

Interviewer: *In your own words tell me, how does the service fit into the big picture?*

Participant: *Children deserve to grow up in families that nurture them and allow them to flourish. Some families aren't capable of this. We help here by upskilling the family or replacing them if absolutely necessary, due to risk.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses a sense of care and commitment to ensuring children's well-being by emphasising the importance of nurturing environments.
 - **Judgment:** The participant evaluates their own actions positively, highlighting the ethical merit of addressing family capability shortcomings to ensure children live in nurturing environments.
 - **Appreciation:** The participant values the service as supporting nurturing environments for children, either through upskilling or alternative care.
- **Engagement:** The participant acknowledges the challenges faced by some families, justifying the necessity of the service's interventions while leaving space for alternative voices.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*absolutely necessary*" and "*children deserve to grow up*" amplify the significance and urgency of the service's mission.
- **Metarelations:** The participant positions the service as potent, competent and morally responsible

Q13

Interviewer: *Are you personally trying to achieve something through your role in delivering the service? If so, what and how? Do you have any power to do this? Why or why not?*

Participant: *Yes, personally. I really value being able to help families by passing on knowledge and improving practice. Not as empowered as I'd like to be; new senior leaders lack interest in the value of research and improvement.*

Appraisal Analysis

- **Attitude**
 - **Affect:** The participant expresses fulfilment in helping families but also frustration at the lack of support for research and improvement from senior leadership.
 - **Judgment:** The participant values their own contribution of, "... being able to help families ..." and critiques new senior leaders lack of interest in research, providing a token of their implicit valuing evidence-based practices as essential to meaningful service delivery.

- **Appreciation:** The participant appreciates the opportunity provided by their work to contribute through knowledge sharing and practice improvement, emphasising its importance for family outcomes.
- **Engagement:** By contrasting their personal values with those of leaders, the participant introduces dialogic elements that highlight tensions within the organisation.
- **Graduation:** Phrases like "*not as empowered as I'd like*" and "*really value*" amplify their personal engagement and the significance of their contributions.
- **Metarelations:** The participant emphasises the discord between the practical requirement for performance evidence to inform meaningful improvement and prioritisation by senior leadership, implying that cultural factors within the organisation erode impact and efficiency.