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Unveiling the role of identity accountability in shaping charity outcome measurement practices

Cherrie Yang, Deryl Northcott

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#### ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

# **Unveiling the Role of Identity Accountability in Shaping Charity Outcome Measurement Practices**

#### **Abstract**

Internationally, charities are grappling with the challenges of measuring their service outcomes for accountability purposes. This study employs recent developments in institutional theory to examine the role of identity accountability in shaping these outcome measurement practices. Semi-structured interviews with staff and managers in two New Zealand charities are drawn on to understand their perceptions and experiences of outcome measurement. The findings reveal that charity actors engage in institutional work aimed at discharging both identity accountability and upward accountability via their outcome measurement practices. However, they face challenges in achieving and balancing these two forms of accountability. Policy-practice and means-ends decoupling result, creating the potential for mission drift and other unintended consequences of outcome measurement practices.

**Keywords**: outcome measurement; identity accountability; charities; institutional work; decoupling; unintended consequences

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