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Performance management and the audited self

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Abstract

What counts as evidence of good performance, behaviour or character? While quantitative metrics have long been used to measure performance and productivity in schools, factories and workplaces, what is striking today is the extent to which these calculative methods and rationalities are being extended into new areas of life through the global spread of performance indicators (PIs) and performance management systems. What began as part of the neoliberalising projects of the 1980s with a few strategically chosen performance indicators to give greater state control over the public sector through contract management and mobilising 'users' has now proliferated to include almost every aspect of professional work. The use of metrics has also expanded from managing professionals to controlling entire populations. This chapter focuses on the rise of these new forms of audit and their effects in two areas: First, the alliance being formed between state-collected data and that collected by commercial companies on their customers through, e.g. loyalty cards and credit checks. Second, China's new social credit system, which allocates individual scores to each citizen and uses rewards of better or privileged service to entice people to volunteer information about themselves, publish their 'ratings' and compete with friends for status points. This is a new development in the use of audit to discipline simultaneously whole populations and responsibilise individuals to perform according to new state and commercial norms about the reliable/conforming 'good' citizen.

Keywords Performance management; metrics, auditing

Introduction

What counts as evidence of good performance or character? Two key trends in contemporary societies are particularly relevant to this question. The first is the increasing reliance on numerical indicators and rankings to evaluate phenomena that were previously assessed using qualitative criteria and professional judgments. This is particularly evident in systems of New Public Management (NPM) where numerical indicators are used both to provide evidence of performance and as instruments for stimulating economy, efficiency and effectiveness in organisations. Initially, numerical scores were treated as 'proxies' for quality or excellence (for example, in early UK university research assessment exercises), but these scores have often acquired a life and value of their own. This fetishisation of numbers substitutes the model for the real world so that the proxy becomes the measure, and the measure becomes the target.

The second trend is the increasing dislocation between these rankings and the worlds they purport to measure. Quantitative metrics were typically used to measure performance in schools, factories and workplaces, but what is striking today is the extent to which these calculative techniques have been extended into new areas of life. Recent years have witnessed a dramatic expansion in the use of performance indicators (PIs) to measure previously un-measurable phenomena such as corruption, human rights, sex trafficking, domestic violence, democracy and gross national happiness (Merry, 2011, S83; 20163). More than this, individuals are using new social media and computer technologies in populist projects of self-management. Often these projects are presented as ways for people to take more control over their own health and lives; but strikingly few seem to realise that the personal and intimate data they produce through apps and gadgets (for example, on consumer spending, personal behaviour, credit worthiness, daily exercise, menstrual cycles, health and fitness) belongs to commercial companies and governments. A key feature of this trend is that not only are governments and private companies using these data to discipline and manage individuals, but individuals are actively making themselves into new objects of surveillance and exercising new forms of governance on themselves. This is producing novel kinds of governing techniques that combine corporatism and populism in new assemblages of power/knowledge.

This chapter is set out in four sections. First, we trace how performance indicators were used in the new public management of organisations (schools, universities) and in factories and other kinds of workplaces. Second, we note the post-1970s shift to using individual performance management to drive up productivity in the private and public sectors. That process typically entailed human resource management techniques for objectifying persons and fragmenting them into specific competencies and capacities that can be measured against company objectives. Third, we examine the shift, exemplified in the 'Quantified Self' (QS) movement, in which individuals use hi-tech wearable gadgets to gain 'self-knowledge through numbers', take responsibility for their health and medication, and monitor the performance of their own lifestyle. We note how individuals are producing data about themselves that states and private companies are using to measure and manage populations. Finally, we examine the emergence of a new platform for measuring 'social credit' in China that uses the personal details of citizens to construct a universal ranking system. By presenting this scheme as an online game, the Chinese state has sought to encourage individuals to market themselves as trustworthy citizens and suitable marriage partners. We ask, what kinds of 'auditable selves' are these technologies creating? Can individuals use them to exercise autonomy in ways that transcend the disciplinary logics of surveillance? And

to what extent do these new ways of aligning metrics with the construction and management of the self in China represent a new form of governmentality?

Performance Indicators and the Rise of New Public Management

In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey (1990) highlighted the major trends that were reshaping Western capitalism at the end of the 1980s. In particular, the large corporations were reducing their fixed costs – notably plant and permanent staff salaries – by outsourcing production to peripheral and cheaper sites in an ever more globalised economy. Systems of production were turned into global contract and supply chains, with each contracted party subject to production targets and performance indicators. While standards have always been used to manage performance, this globalised system hinged on rendering visible and explicit measurable indicators of performance. This provided a template for restructuring other sectors. For example, in the 1980s in Britain, Mrs Thatcher's Conservative government introduced a raft of reforms called 'The Next Steps' (Ibbs Report 1988) and commonly referred to as 'New Public Management' (NPM). These began with the breakup of large government departments into executive agencies, each treated as a separate cost centre with its own performance indicators and annual objectives. This reform aimed to replace descriptions of work with numerical measures. The rationale for this approach was summed up the Conservative minister Michael Heseltine:

> When the literacies of the Civil Service and the generalities of their intentions are turned into targets which can be monitored and costed, when information is conveyed in columns instead of screeds, then objectives become clear and progress towards them becomes measurable and far more likely (Heseltine 1987, cited in Pollitt 1993, p. 58).

The next step in this process entailed outsourcing public service functions to private companies, non-governmental organisations, or newly privatised parts of the bureaucracy (National Audit Office 1989). This equivalent of the industrial supply chain was based on what Pollitt, Bathgate, Claufield, Smullen, & Talbot (2001) termed 'agencification' and the idea that the government-as-purchaser of services should be separated from providers in a quasi-market. Contract management was central to the art of governing these outsourced public services. The careful selection of a handful of 'meaningful indicators' became even more important in this process. However, ministers found that it was difficult to derive a coherent view of the outsourced agencies' performance from the target information (Gay 1997: 36) especially when they focused their operations on meeting key performance indicators (KPIs) rather than on overall service (what is elsewhere termed 'Goodhart's Law'[1]). This typically provoked three responses. One was to keep moving the assessment goalposts to prevent those assessed from gaming the system. A second was to increase targets to cover as many aspects of the outsourced service as possible. For example, a recent report found UK health services were so micro-managed through indicators that hospital managers were consumed by a 'terror of targets' and were failing to address frontline problems because they were too 'busy collecting information on how they are doing each week to satisfy regulators, NHS bosses, health commissioners and politicians' (Meikle, 2015).

A third response entailed breaking up professional work into a series of performance objectives, tasks and checklists. This occurred across all sectors but particularly in education.

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[1] Named after the economist, Charles Goodhart, this is best summed up in formulation: 'When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure'.

Pre-school teachers in England, for example, currently have to keep a 'learning journal' for each child to assess and shape their development. In one example that we have seen the learning journal was 30 pages long and divided into seven sections, each of which involved assessing every child against checklists containing specific criteria. For example, Understanding the World involved 42 criteria; Personal Social and Emotional Development 59 criteria, while Communication and Language had 66 and Physical Development had 79. The introduction stated these performance indicators are 'crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning' yet many teachers complain they no longer have time to care for children according to their own professional standards.

Similar trends occurred in other countries. For example, Denmark's Ministry of Finance established an agencification process in the 1990s. Contracts were based on a selection of strategic performance indicators so that service providers could minimise the time spent on reporting and focus their energies on improving services. However, as in England, the number of indicators and measures proliferated. Instead of liberating time and energy, professionals were overwhelmed by the burden of reporting. Many organisations could only cope by hiring additional administrators to deal with the reporting requirements. Even the civil servants who first formulated contract steering publicly protested against the system they helped to create (Gjørup et al. 2007). As one lamented, contract steering was based on in-built mistrust of professionals, and had shifted power to managers and 'brutally side-lined' professional judgement (Nissan 2007).

In the UK, this undermining of professional judgment also occurred though other initiatives designed to empower 'users', now variously constructed as 'taxpayers', 'citizens', 'consumers', 'clients', 'stakeholders' and 'the public'. As Prime Minister Tony Blair proclaimed:

> We are proposing to put an entirely different dynamic in place to drive our public services; one where the service will be driven not by the government or the manager, but by the user – the patient, the parent, the pupil and the law-abiding citizen' (Blair, 2004, cited in Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler & Westmarland, 2007, p.1)

Each of these labels implies a different set of relationships between people and the state, as government increasingly sought to implement strategies for 'governing at a distance' and outsource responsibility for managing the population to individuals, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. Business interests acquired growing influence over the governing boards of public organisations such as university councils, hospital trusts and school governing bodies, and the performance of professionals came to be measured according to a bewildering array of indicators and rankings.

From Managing Professionals to Controlling Populations: Metrics and Biopower

Barbara Cruikshank's 1999 book *The Will to Empower,* highlighted the major shift in the US from 'government' towards neoliberal forms of 'governance'. Instead of government regulating a population from above and through rewards and sanctions, governance entailed mobilising the agency and capacities of individuals so that they themselves actively contributed, not necessarily consciously, to the government's vision of the social order. This 'governing at a distance' is what Foucault (1991) termed the 'conduct of conduct' and what Nikolas Rose (1999) called 'governing through freedom'. As Cruikshank observed, in liberal

democracies individuals and communities are interpolated through the rhetoric of empowerment, which paradoxically, had originally been developed by grassroots-activist movements themselves.

Since the 1990s, there have been numerous new techniques for enhancing individual self-management. Many were pioneered by the military but quickly moved into private companies and, subsequently, into public organisations. This military-inspired business ethos is exemplified by the transnational consultancy firm McKinney Rogers, which, its website proclaims, 'applies military philosophy and real-world experience to equip business teams with the tools and capability to deliver high-performance'. Its founder, Damian McKinney, was a British Royal Marine who served for 18 years as an operations commando before becoming a businessman. He discovered that 'the Royal Marines' Mission Command approach to talent management, business process redesign, and project planning and execution was directly relatable and transferable to the business world' (McKinney Rogers, 2016). The company's oft-quoted 'Mission Leadership Dashboard' technique involves each individual understanding their role in an organisation – what is termed 'empowerment through transparency'.

> This clarity drives alignment, instils a sense of personal accountability, and promotes the independent thought and agility necessary to deliver mission-critical results despite obstacles faced (McKinney Rogers, 2016).

The 'Mission Dashboard' enables people at all levels to keep track of their contribution to a company's strategic objectives. Like in a car, the 'dashboard' installed on their computer screens gives them a one-page overview of the company's business targets, setting out each individual's targets, the indicators used to measure them, and the progress of their performance against the plan (Syrett, 2007). This method builds on initiatives during the 1990s to develop comprehensive, long-term strategies that would align individual behaviour with company missions and targets. In 1993, Kaplan and Norton's influential article in *Harvard Business Review* explained how the engineering and construction company, Rockwater, had developed a 'balanced scorecard' to drive performance (Figure 2.1). Instead of just focusing on financial indicators, they added three other dimensions deemed crucial to the company's long-term success: customer perspective, internal management processes, and employees' innovation and learning. Each required its own 'score-card measures', and work teams throughout the organisation were expected to translate these into their own 'critical success factors' and measures by which performance would be assessed (Kaplan & Norton 2004, pp. 7-10). Ultimately, these measures were turned into individual scorecards, which would fold up and fit into a (presumably male) employee's shirt pocket or wallet (Figure 2.2). This scorecard 'gives managers a way of ensuring that all levels of the organization understand the long-term strategy and that both departmental and individual objectives are aligned with it' (Kaplan & Norton 2004, p. 38).

INSERT FIG 2.1

Figure 2.1. Rockwater's Balanced Scorecard. Source: Kaplan and Norton 1993, p. 7

INSERT FIG 2.2

Figure 2.2. Rockwater's Individual Scorecard. Source: Kaplan and Norton 1993, p. 10

In the early 2000s, BT, the UK-based global telecommunications company developed a further instrument for driving what it called 'end-to-end process management' that would align employee performance with the company's vision and strategic imperatives (Savage n.d.). After the 2001 'dot-com' collapse and faced with a broadband revolution, they wanted to deliver 'transformational change' through 'distributed leadership', 'higher employee engagement' and 'enhanced organisational capability' (Syrett 2007: 71). In their BT People Strategy, first, they defined the company's five 'core values' - Trustworthy, Helpful, Inspiring, Straightforward and Heart - and the ideal 'capabilities' through which each employee would embody and 'live' those values (Savage n.d.). Each team member, four times a year, then had to assess their behaviour under each category. The results were aggregated in an end-of-year Development Performance Review (DPR). Individuals with high scores would be eligible for a bonus payment, but only if their team score was also high. Individual ccores were also 'levelled' against their peers, officially for fairness (BT 2010: 17) but as one employee told us, scores tended to be 'levelled down' below the bonus-earning threshold if management decided that the company's finances could not support all the bonuses for which employees were eligible. BT's top management seems to have been exempt from such links between the company's financial performance and their own pay.[2] As a study by the High Pay Commission (2011, p. 8) found, 'excessive high pay bears little relation to company success and is rewarding failure'.

Many bowdlerised versions of these performance management techniques have been transferred to public sector organisations. Universities have given a particularly novel gloss to these experiments in aligning employee capabilities with strategic goals. The work of Australian 'change management' expert Geoff Scott (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008; Fullan & Scott, 2009) echoes BT's focus on metricised 'capabilities' and 'distributed leadership' and has been taken up by several Australasian universities including the University of Auckland in 2013, under its so-called 'Leadership Framework' programme. Where BT's model began with five key 'values', Auckland University's model sets out five 'leadership dimensions': Personal Leadership, Setting Direction; Enabling People, Innovating and Engaging, and Achieving Results - each of which is also given a Maori name (Figure 2.3). These leadership dimensions each require particular 'capabilities' (thirteen in total). Each 'capability' is then described in detail. For example, "Setting Direction" (*Mana Tohu* - represented by the five stars of the Southern Cross), is defined as 'Establishing and committing to plans and activities that will deliver the University's strategy and the capabilities are:

> Demonstrates an understanding of the competitive global environment and key market drivers and … uses this understanding to create and seize opportunities, expand into new markets and deliver programmes …: The behaviours of a leader who demonstrates global and commercial acumen are:
> • Develops in-depth understanding of the University and tertiary sector • Pursues discipline/market/professional skill set information and maintains global awareness
> • Recognises impact and opportunity of national and global trends
> • Leads and inspires innovation
> • Pursues ambitious ventures

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[2] For example, BT's Chief Executive Office Sir Peter Bonfield received a remuneration package of £3.1m when he left the company in 2003, topping *The Independent's* (2003) 'Fat Cat List'. This remuneration package came despite the company having to carry out a £6bn rescue rights issue in 2001 following a string of bad investments under Bonfield's leadership.

(UoA, 2013, p. 8).

INSERT LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT HERE

The Leadership Framework's philosophy is that everyone in the organisation must take responsibility for leading and aligning their behaviour with the strategic goals set by senior management. While distributed leadership recalls the tradition of university autonomy where academics relied on their own sense of professionalism to set their direction in teaching and research, this model is top down, authoritarian and skewed towards a model of the university as a business corporation. However, unlike BT's 'end-to-end performance management', the values and capabilities expected of academics were not converted into precise performance measures. Instead, a separate policy detailing promotion criteria was developed that quantified required outputs for research, teaching and service in very different language to that of the Leadership Framework. For example, for promotion to Professor in the Social Sciences, candidates must have published over 50 articles in leading peer-reviewed journals; supervised at least 8 MA and 8 PhD students; generated three 'major' external research grants (where 'major' means in excess of $100,000); and demonstrated 'outstanding leadership' consistent with the Leadership Framework' (UoA, 2016).

Denmark's IT University has further adapted these ideas in a model that quantifies performance expectations and individual output targets under a single currency. Academic performance is calculated in a 'Performance Points' (PP) system, which is calculated to raise ITU's performance to that of the average Danish University (ITU, 2014). The performance of a Professor or Associate Professor is calculated at 100 PPs per year. For teaching, 1 PP is equal to 14.5 European Credit and Transfer System (ECTS) points, and a professor must earn 50 points over two years. For research, professors must earn 40 PPs over two years, where 25 PPs are allocated per 2.55 points in the national bibliometric research indicator (BFI). Professors must also earn at least 10 PPs each year on 'spending external funding', where 25 PPs are allocated per 1,114,540 DKK (roughly US $167,000). To raise and spend US $167,000 each year is probably impossible for most humanities or social science professors. Even post-doctoral students are expected to produce 55 PPs per year. Should anyone underperform then other colleagues must ensure that their unit meets its members' combined target. Like the BT model, this relies not just on individual self-management, but compels colleagues to monitor each other's performance. Those who fail to meet their target have been warned that 'yes, firing may take place' (personal communication).

In 2015, the Vice Chancellor of Newcastle University in England announced an equally demanding policy on academic performance targets. Entitled 'Raising the Bar', this catalogued the performance measures expected of all academic staff. Depending on subject area, it required professors to obtain £6 – 12,000 per year in external funding and to 'be in the top quartile' in the national research assessment exercise. For geography, this required professors to generate some £136,000 over three years, produce 'at least four 3* outputs' and at least one 'world-leading (4*) quality output' in a five-year period. They should also supervise to completion '1 post graduate student per annum and provide guidance and mentoring to junior colleagues and show research leadership' (Newcastle University, 2015). Even junior Lecturers were required to generate £3,000 to £6,000 a year, publish four '3* research outputs' in the five-year REF period and successfully supervise one postgraduate student per year. University managers defended these draconian measures as merely "a set of

reference points" for performance that did "not herald some new system of target-driven management". Liz Morrish described the policy as 'manufactured instability', arguing that the measures were neither objective nor objective-setting but rather a process of 'objectification in which people are treated as a tool to meet a goal' (Morrish, 2015). The local University and College Union branch estimated that between 75-85 per cent of staff in some schools would fail to meet all the new criteria (Grove, 2015a) and ultimately their mobilisation of staff and students and an international outcry resulted in the Vice-Chancellor dropping this scheme.

What connects these stories about 'mission dashboards', 'balance scorecards', 'values and capabilities', 'distributed leadership' and 'Raising the Bar' on performance expectations? They all highlight management's attempts to enhance performance through the twin processes of 'disciplining' and 'catalysing' and its adoption of the popular maxim -- usually attributed (inaccurately) to management guru Peter Drucker (see Zak 2013) -- that 'if you can't measure it, you can't improve it'. The drive to measure and audit performance is thus impelled by an ethic of improvement, both of the organisation and the individuals within it. What we see here is the confluence of two different rationalities. First, a neoliberal emphasis on producing autonomous, self-disciplined, individuals whose behaviour is tailored to programmes of continuous self-monitoring and improvement, or what Mitchell Dean (1999, p. 147) termed neoliberal 'reflexive projects of the self'. Second, a calculative and instrumental conception of employees as assets whose capacities must be harnessed and continually expanded by managers so that they become go-getting, risk-taking entrepreneurs. This figure represents modern management's vision of ideal workers: proactive, unbounded, self-driven, forever expanding their capacities, willing to take on any challenge, with a seemingly inexhaustible capacity for work (Bovbjerg, 2011; Shore, 2008, p. 285; Wright and Ørberg 2017: 84). According to Emily Martin (1997), such qualities are similar to those of people with Attention Deficit Disorder. As Bovbjerg observed, constructing ideal workers in terms of the virtues of being positive, enthusiastic and entrepreneurially proactive, renders it unacceptable for a 'good employee' to resist or say 'no' to new challenges. By 2016, one in six universities in England had introduced financial performance targets for academics with little overt resistance (Grove 2015b). However, these technologies of the self are not always so effective. At Newcastle University, Raising the Bar provoked industrial unrest as academics argued they were being set up to fail in what looked like a policy of 'constructive dismissal'. This begs the question: when is self-auditing a form of managerial oppression and when is it a genuine expression of personal autonomy and selfhood?

Quantifying and Rating Oneself: Surveillance or Empowerment?

That question lies at the heart of the 'Quantified Self' (QS) movement, a phenomenon that began in California in 2007 but has gone global. Quantified Self enables individuals to audit their daily activities by wearing sensors and using computing technology to monitor their heart rate, mood, stress levels, calorie intake, activity levels, alcohol consumption and sleep patterns. The movement was started in San Francisco by Gary Wolf, author and editor of *Wired Magazine* and co-founder of the 'Quantified Self' blog. The movement's membership is an eclectic mix of 'early adopters, fitness freaks, technology evangelists, personal-development junkies, hackers and patients suffering from a wide variety of health problems' (Economist, 2012). From the start, regular meeting groups were formed and, within five years, they had spread to over 50 cities. Accounts of QS meetings highlight the way participants share stories about the positive effects of metricising their everyday lives. The technologies allow individuals not only to observe and improve their own performance, but to share data with friends and compare or compete with others. This reflects what Whitson

(2013) calls the 'gamification' of everyday life, a process that turns surveillance into something also highly pleasurable.

There is a growing market for these self-monitoring technologies. For example, in 2015 Fitbit led the field in 'wearable technology' with total sales topping 4.4 million gadgets (beating Apple Watch, which came second with 3.6 million sales (Gil, 2015). The data that individuals collect on their head, chest and wrist-band gadgets is transmitted onto personal computers and then to the manufacturers of these devices. For example, data on personal sleep patterns are transmitted to the Zeo website which now boasts the world's largest database on sleep stages. Wolf (2010) calls this combination of micro and macro data gathering technology a 'macroscope' - bringing together the best of both a microscope and a telescope by combining systems for gathering small observations in nature with computing technologies that store and analyse these data. Wolf argues that in future, measurement devices that people currently carry on their bodies (belts, wristbands) may be put inside their bodies, and he asks, 'So what is the macroscope doing to us?' (Wolf, 2011).

Wolf addressed that question in a TED talk in Amsterdam in 2011. The macroscope is both a window to collect data for 'systematic improvement' and an inward-looking 'mirror' for 'self-improvement, self-discovery, self-awareness and self-knowledge' (Wolf, 2011). For Wolf, the 'self' is 'our operation centre, our consciousness and our moral compass. If we want to act more effectively in the world, we have to get to know ourselves better' (ibid.).

This raises an interesting question: is QS a form of empowerment, or subordination to a new normative order of panoptical control? According to Reyes (2014, p. 372) the quantified self is 'an algorithm of an individual's social networks, interactions, activities, purchases and whereabouts'. Self-quantifiers offer up this data to the life science, health technology and pharmaceutical industries and who owns the data is not always clear. This combination of epidemiological and personal data will also be important for the development of individualised medicine and the future of the pharmaceutical industry. Significantly, many of the QS conferences are organised or sponsored by major corporations such as Intel, Vodafone and Philips – the latter has even produced its own QS promotional video (Philips, 2015).

Others take a more optimistic view of the advance of quantified selves. Based on their ethnographic work, Nafus and Sherman (2014) propose that QS participants exercise a form of 'soft resistance'. They argue that because QSers assume multiple roles – 'as project designers, data collectors and critical sense makers' - and 'are constantly shifting their priorities', the data sets become fragmented and participants escape the categories created by the biopolitics of the health technology industry. However, their ethnography also shows that one thing that QSers do 'not keep track of is what [they] are tracking' (2014, p. 1788). They conclude that the QS 'movement does not escape the wider biopolitics of late capitalism that rely on radical individualism to drive consumption as a dominant mode of expression and to elide structural inequalities by framing all actions in terms of personal "choice"' (ibid p. 1793).

There seems little concern that companies owning data on individual's health and welfare could enter commercial partnerships with insurance companies and affect people's premiums. They could also combine with mega data brokers like the US corporation Acxiom that tracks people's online purchases to build psychological profiles for advertisers and marketers to sell products to individuals - or with political consultancies like Cambridge Analytica who use

data to target bespoke messages to swing voters (Cadwalladr, 2017). People continue to volunteer information about themselves that can be used against them. In October 2015, an app called 'Peeple' was about to be launched through the Apple App store. Described by its creators as a 'positivity app for positive people', it lets users rate their friends, family members, neighbours, baristas, bosses and other social contacts – but without their consent. Use of the app would be free provided a person was 21 and had an established Facebook account and registered their mobile phone number (which would be stored on the company's data base). Scoring would involve assigning people between one to five stars, like the Michelin restaurant guide or a TripAdvisor hotel rating. According to its promoters, the Peeple app 'allows us to better choose who we hire, do business with, date, become our neighbours, roommates, landlords/tenants, and teach our children … there are endless reasons why we would want this reference check for the people around us' (Hunt, 2015). Following criticism that it would invite cyberbullying and stalkers, 7,000 people signed a petition. The company withdrew the app but re-launched it five months later with minor modifications, attracting 15,000 users in the first two weeks. Now individuals have to opt-in and approve comments about themselves before they are posted online. They can hide negative comments on their character, but the company plans to launch a 'truth licence' that will allow fee-paying subscribers to review all the hidden comments that somebody has received or written about others. As its CEO Julia Cordray told a CCTV interviewer, 'whether people like it or not, the world is headed toward a place where people will find it valuable to manage their online reputation'.[3] So what kinds of citizen-subjects or auditable selves are being created through these voluntary processes of performance measurement and self-tracking?

Measuring Performance in China: Citizenship and Social Credit

Our examples of how indicators, rankings and performance metrics are being used to shape subjects have so far only come from Western societies, suggesting that such individualising and totalising techniques of the self are particular to neoliberalised contexts. However, an even more extreme version of these trends can be seen in contemporary China. In 2015, eight Chinese companies began work on state-approved pilot projects to develop a universal system of 'social credit' capable of scoring and ranking the character and 'trustworthiness' of each citizen. One such high profile project is Sesame Credit, an internet-based scoring system built and run by Ant Financial, a subsidiary of Alibaba the Chinese e-commerce giant. With over 400 million users, Alibaba is China's largest online shopping platform, with more transactions than Amazon and eBay combined. When first listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 2014, its market value was a staggering US $231.4 billion. Together with the IT company Tencent, Alibaba runs the Chinese equivalent of all social networks (Falkvinge, 2015). Sesame's social credit system allocates each person a score between 350 and 950 based on factors such as their financial, purchasing and spending history. The higher a person's score, the greater the rewards. For example, 600 points allows an individual the privilege of taking out an instant loan up to $800 when shopping online. Someone with a score of 650 can rent a car from the Chinese companies eHai.com and Car Inc without leaving a deposit, or get a faster hotel check out (Hodson, 2015). 700 points earns a reduction in the time taken to obtain a travel permit for Singapore, while 750 points enables fast-track treatment in processing a Pan-European Schengen visa. Spending through Alibaba's payment app (Alipay) or conducting transactions that recruit friends to Sesame Credit can also raise your score. Personal hobbies, interactions with friends, lifestyle and what you buy also

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[3] CCTV interview, 4 April 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WxuUxHxGLo

influences a person's score. For example, someone who buys work shoes, local produce or nappies (responsible purchases), receives more points than someone who buys videogames or spends large amounts of the day playing online games (irresponsible). China's largest matchmaking service, Baihe, has combined with Sesame to promote clients with good credit scores, giving them prominent spots on the company's website (Hatton, 2015). Users are encouraged to flaunt their good credit scores to friends and potential marriage partners.

Another way promoters have tried to stimulate take-up of this system is by presenting it as a game. A mobile phone app designed by Sesame Credit invites users to guess whether their social credit score is higher or lower than their friends', and encourages everyone to share their ratings. Zheping Huang, a Hong Kong-based journalist, chronicled his own experience with the game in October 2015 saying, 'in the past few weeks I began to notice a mysterious new trend. Numbers were popping up on my social media feeds as my friends and strangers on Weibo and WeChat began to share their 芝麻信用分, or 'Sesame Credit scores'" (Huang, 2015).

According to Huang, Sesame Credit operates independently of government and 'works more like a loyalty program than a credit rating system'. However, others detect a more sinister agenda and worry that government will allow private companies to gather massive data pools, but may extract them whenever it likes. Oxford University's China expert Rogier Creemers says the programme is far more than just a credit-tracking method: 'The government wants to build a platform that leverages things like big data, mobile internet, and cloud computing to measure and evaluate different levels of people's lives in order to create a gamified nudging for people to behave better' (as cited in Bernish, 2015). Acknowledging this, China's State Council explains that social credit will 'forge a public opinion environment that trust-keeping is glorious' but also warns that the 'new system will reward those who report acts of breach of trust' (as cited in Hatton, 2015). Sesame Credit is open about its government links, candidly conceding that it works closely with the Ministry of Public Security, The Supreme People's Court, the Ministry of Education and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce. At present the social credit system is voluntary but the Chinese government has announced that it will become mandatory from 2020 (Osborne, 2015).

Unlike American mega data brokers, Sesame Credit scores are available to everyone. It also links credit scores to one's political opinions so that posting comments on, for example Chinese dissidents or the Shanghai stock market collapse will lower one's scores. An individual's score can also be damaged if their friends post comments on these events. This gamified system of peer pressure adds a new dimension to the Internet as a technology of citizenship and social control. Some authors draw parallels with the KGB and Stasi, whose method for preventing dissent from spreading was to plant *agent provocateurs* in the general population, inciting others to dissent, then arresting them.

> As a result, nobody would dare agree that the government did anything bad, and this was very effective in preventing any large-scale resistance from taking hold. The Chinese way here is much more subtle, but probably more effective still (Falkvinge, 2015).

For Creemers, this massive exercise in individual surveillance goes beyond the ambition of the Stasi; their activities were limited to avoiding revolts against the regime whereas 'the Chinese aim is far more ambitious: it is clearly an attempt to create a new citizen' (as cited in Bernish, 2015).

Unsurprisingly, the Western media has heavily criticised China's Sesame Credit system,

describing it as 'terrifying', 'totalitarian' and an attempt to 'turn obedience to the state into a game' (Osborne, 2015). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) called it an 'Orwellian nightmare' and 'a warning for Americans' (Storm, 2015). Even the usually more sober *Financial Times* headlined it as 'China: When Big Data meets Big Brother' (Clover, 2016). However, China's use of big data as a technology of citizenship reflects trends also occurring in Western countries, as the Edward Snowden and Wikileaks disclosures revealed. Even *New Scientist* concedes that, as in China, 'people who live in the West are being tracked and ranked all the time. For now, though, this is serving commercial interests rather than those of the state' (Hodson, 2015).

What is striking about the Chinese government's attempts to shape and control its citizenry is that it seeks to harness all three of the elements of performance and governance identified earlier: i.e. state control and private companies are combined with big data and popular social media in order to steer individuals towards a constant monitoring and disciplining of their own behaviour, and a performative marketing of their 'good character'. As Clover (2016) says:

> China's Internet is fast becoming a laboratory where the march of technology combined with profit-driven private companies, authoritarian politics and weak civil liberties is creating a toxic cocktail. If unchecked, the "social credit" system … could be used to assign citizenship scores to everyone based on "patriotic" criteria such as whether they buy imported products, or the content of their postings on social media. (Clover, 2016)

That system is not yet in place. At the time of writing, the government was still watching and waiting to see how its approved private companies develop their own 'social credit' systems. In July 2017 it announced it would not be issuing any licences for the time being after regulators expressed increasing concern about conflicts of interest. The main reason for delaying the licences was not concerns about freedom or privacy, but rather the government's concerns that the credit companies should be independent third parties and its desire to reign in risky financial behaviours, particularly the 'systemic risks from the purchase of overseas assets with money raised through high-interest financing products' (Hornby 2017). But this is a delay, not a change of policy; China still aims to have the system operating by 2020.

Conclusions

We began by asking 'what counts as evidence of good performance, behaviour and character?' Perhaps the more interesting question is 'what are the politics behind projects to measure or construct good citizens and subjects?' and how are counting or metrics being used as technologies of the self? The examples outlined above highlight several key trends in the way that performance indicators and personal data are being used - by companies, by the state and by individuals themselves. But what bigger story do these examples tell?

In developing his work on governmentality Foucault (1991) observed how state authorities made absolutely clear why the subject of power was being disciplined, what the norms were behind these disciplinary regimes, and how individuals could use redemptive therapies to align themselves with the normative order. This is particularly evident in the examples of BT, McKinney Rogers and Auckland University, and these organisations even coach staff to improve their performance. But with the QS and Chinese examples, the drivers are less commercially orientated and less overt: instead, individuals are required to measure and rank

themselves and their conduct against that of their friends and colleagues. However, this places them under even greater pressure to monitor and audit themselves, inside as well as outside the workplace and makes the systems even more totalising and individualising. Whether presented as techniques to enhance production and improve quality, a game, or a vehicle of empowerment, these examples all illustrate ways in which performance metrics are being mobilised as disciplinary instruments to create auditable selves. While these are obvious continuities with the type of governmentality that Foucault analysed in the second half of the Twentieth Century, developments like QS and Sesame Credit are opening up a new terrain for the art of government, providing political rulers and private corporations with immense scope - and chilling possibilities - for shaping the way individuals construct and conduct themselves.

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