

## Investigating the flow of Organisational Obstinacy in Collaborative Balanced Scorecard: An Ethnographic Action Research in Public Service

Nicholas Clifford  
Manchester Business School

Mostafa Mohamad  
Salford Business School

Peter Kawalek  
Manchester Business School

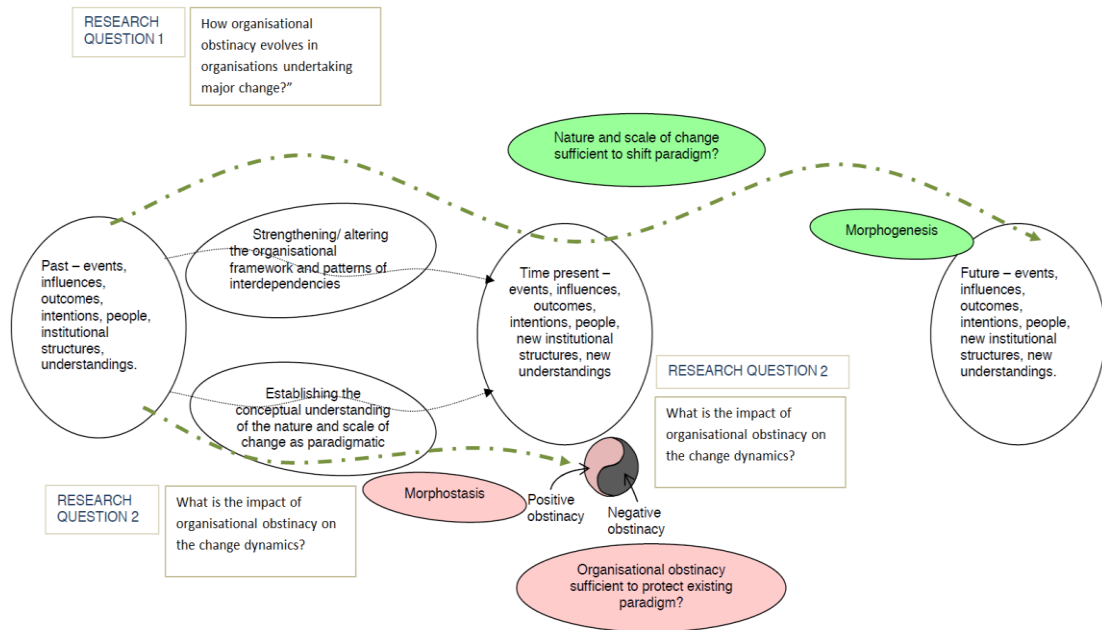
### Abstract:

**Area of concern:** Developing a Balanced Scorecard (BSC) for a network of public-private institutions requires interdependent connectivity and information sharing to set commonly agreed performance standards. Such a Collaborative BSC (CBSC) reflects a high degree of socially constructed organizational values, rules, and procedures. In doing so, organizational changes take place to reach to equilibriums among varying (sometimes conflicting) organizational powers. Our research tends to draw a deep understanding of the systemic nature of organizational obstinacy that shapes the success of organizational a change and raises contested values in the provision of public services. The evidence of our findings has been drawn from the local councils in the Metville region that recorded low performance in their public service delivery. The change actors in this project are a team of public-private executives who were responsible for developing an inclusive CBSC where different stakeholder groups contribute to the perceived performance. The above mentioned area of concern raises two research questions that led our research:

The first question is; “*How organisational obstinacy evolves in organisations undertaking major change for CBSC?*” This quest helps map the events of inter-dependencies in Metville’s change programme and identify the extent to which a conceptual understanding of the need to change is or is not shared.

The second question is; “*What is the impact of organisational obstinacy on the change dynamics associated with building the CBSC?*” Answering such a question helps in identifying the dual (positive & negative) impact of organisational obstinacy on the organisational change and its dynamics. It sheds the light on *organisational obstinacy as values*-laden as well as a restraining factor. Answering these two questions led to three levels of contribution; Theoretical, Methodological, and Partical.

**Theoretical Contribution:** While previous studies such as Van Der Zee et.al (1999), Martinsons et.al (1999), Chiasson & Davidson (2007), and Hoque (2014) addressed the technical view of software engineers on the processes of developing CBSC, this study reflects the views of team of non-technical corporate executives (consultants) and officers of local councils who offer a thorough insight on the social context that surrounds the development of CBSC in public services. To interpret the key events that took place and illustrate how ideas flow around the organization and where connected interdependencies might become established, we developed a ‘*Winding 8*’ framework. This framework identifies ‘nodes of crank’ and a ‘critical mass’ comprising elements that contribute to the change events associated with the development process (see Figure 1 below). The key findings suggest that organisational obstinacy can be observed when organisational equilibrium is disturbed by the strength of the driving forces that are introduced. Under the influence of this obstinacy the organisation re-establishes the ‘old normal’ with swiftness that is surprising to participants in the process.- A duality of attitudes, often held by the same people, which both support driving forward as well as restraint, suggests that obstinacy can be both positive and negative in its operation.

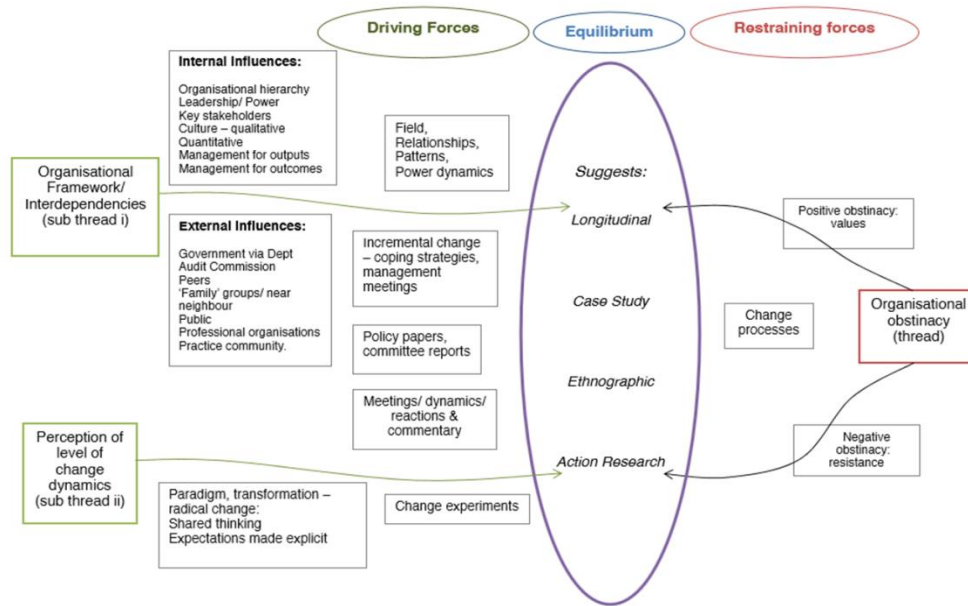


**Figure 1: A Framework for Organisational Interdependencies & Obstnacy**

**Methodological Contribution:** To capture the essence of socially constructed (and contested) values embedded in the processes of organisational change, a distinct mix of longitudinal action research and ethnography has been developed to build up a Kantian approach to different stakeholder groups. Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 2000) has been adopted to define the problem situation and draw exist points for every disequilibrium point. Two main elements have led our choice of the research methodology (See Figure 2 below). Firstly, there is the question of observation - how might organizational obstnacy be observed? Capturing the strengthening of specific interdependencies (Lewin, 1947) within organisations and seeing how these emerge as networks within a larger framework is needed; judging at what point they become ‘thick’ enough connections (Goleman, 2007) to form a critical mass that is sufficient to achieve change is also needed. Secondly, at what level do the perceptions of the nature and scale of change required to tip the organisation toward a paradigm shift in the organisation (Kuhn, 1962), translate into the ‘felt need’ (Dawson, 1996) that triggers action. To fully understand the organisational framework and the perceptions of change held within and around the organisation requires rich data sources from individuals and groups. This data set is significant in that it was collected at the time the events were taking place and because of this the study was able to gather attitudes, behaviours and thoughts from people as they were experiencing the issues.

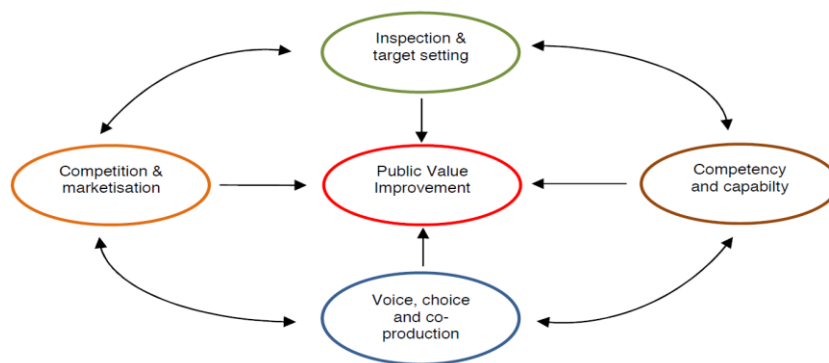
**The role of our research team:** In order to offer a subjective involvement in creating the disequilibrium points and argue the organisational changes to map different sorts of obstnacy, we developed a systematic definition of organisational obstnacy associated with developing CBSC. The first author was the main actpr in a long association with key individuals involved in Metville programme, over several years. Through this extended process we were able to capture the duality of attitudes and feelings. This enabled us to recognise the ambivalent and uncertain nature of driving and restraining forces as they impact on individuals. In turn this allowed us to understand more fully the positive and negative effects on obstnacy that makes it such a fluid element in organisational change. The engagement ultimately constitutes an extended Action Research programme with four fully worked-through episodes during which the examination of the scale and nature of the Framework of Ideas; the methodology and the focus on the Area of Concern (the ‘FMA’) has been deep and

extensive and added to the knowledge and experience of using this mechanism in Action Research (Checkland and Holwell, 1998).



**Figure 2: A framework for Methodological Threads**

**Empirical Contribution:** Our research helped the executive in Metville council and their private partners to systemically map the process of organisational obstinacy and changes associated with the development of CBSC. In doing so, a more inclusive matrix has been developed (See Figure 3 below) to consider the public-private concerns of public service delivery. It also offers a starting point for system analyst to engage with the technical web-development team to build the web-interface the data management system on the ground.



**Figure 3: CBSC Approach to Public Sector Reform**

**Key Words:** Organisational Obstnacy, Organisational Change, Organisational Learning, SSM, Ethnographic longitudinal Action Research, Collaborative Balanced Scorecard