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**Structure and action in a municipal reform
– some reactions to scorecards –**

This study looks into the implementation of Balanced Scorecards in a small Swedish municipality. In 1998 it was decided that all units in the organization should set up Balanced Scorecards before the end of 2000.

Previous research on management accounting change tells us that most attempts to implement new management accounting tools will be path dependent. The established social structures shape the processes of change. Furthermore we know that changes which do not challenge the existing social structures are easier to introduce, while changes that conflict with existing structures will be more difficult to implement. Hence, the existing social structures such as language, norms, values, ideals and power are important when trying to understand the dynamics of change. Following the theoretical idea of rule-based action and the way structure and action can be seen as reciprocally dependent on each other, Giddens' structuration theory was used as a theoretical starting point.

I have conducted an in-depth case study so that I could spend a great deal of time with the actors at local levels when trying to understand the way they react and act when responding to political decisions. Through participative observation, interviews and archival material I have studied the process of change or non-change in three different units within the municipality.

In all three units the initial reactions towards the project were negative among the employees. Even so, they all participated in creating scorecards. They attended meetings and took part in many discussions. However, even though scorecard documents were created at two of the three units the actors did not change their daily operations.

Unlike previous research in this field, the study shows that the resistance towards the balanced scorecard-project is not primarily based on resistance towards the management accounting model as such. Hence, the resistance can not be found in the clash between the existing structures and the inherent logic of the model. Rather, the resistance was primarily based on actors insisting on their perceived right to determine what is right or wrong, good or bad, important or not, among themselves at the local level. This professional accountability is expressed in terms of their initial negative reactions, mainly verbally among each other and in interviews. Still, their dependence on their superiors obliges them to participate in the meetings and to set up scorecards. However, once the formal meetings are over the actors reproduce the existing ways of doing things. In the study this is understood in terms of instrumental opportunism where the use of formal authority to impose change only led to a temporary adjustment of the individual acts. The instrumental opportunism is facilitated through the limited authority that the superiors have. Their authority only covered the formal procedures surrounding the scorecard-project, i.e. calls for meetings, being chairmen at the meetings, taking minutes etc. Once the meetings were over, the employees felt no commitment to change the way they act, and hence reproduce the rules that were in place before the scorecard-project was initiated.

Key words: Balanced scorecard, management accounting change, structuration theory, rules, resources, action and reaction.

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