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Innovation Reluctance in Mechanistic Professional Certification Bodies: A Critical Incident Perspective

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Abstract

Background: Professional Certification Bodies (PCBs) operate through formal authorization, standardized procedures, and hierarchical controls. Although these mechanisms safeguard certification quality, they may also restrict the expression and adoption of new ideas.
Objective: This study identifies the factors underlying reluctance to innovate, the responses displayed by organizational members, and the consequences of such reluctance in Indonesian Human Resource Management PCBs.
Methods: An exploratory qualitative design using the Critical Incident Technique was applied. Fifteen informants—three PCB leaders, nine assessors, and three operational managers—were purposively selected and interviewed in depth. Incidents were coded through content analysis and organized into first-order concepts and second-order themes using NVivo 12 Pro. The findings were checked through expert review, triangulation, and member checking.
Results: Four contributing themes emerged: fear of failure, organizational inertia, the nature of change, and limited support and collaboration. Reluctance manifested as adverse affective reactions, cognitive reactions, and behavioral inclinations. Its consequences comprised individually adaptive but organizationally adverse responses and explicitly negative attributions.
Conclusion: Mechanistic controls do not merely delay innovation; they shape a sequence in which restricted voice produces emotional and cognitive withdrawal, reduced innovative behavior, and the diversion or suppression of ideas. PCBs should retain regulatory compliance while establishing transparent idea-review processes, cross-role collaboration, and controlled experimentation mechanisms.

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INTRODUCTION

Innovation depends not only on individual creativity but also on whether organizational arrangements permit ideas to be voiced, evaluated, and tested. In mechanistic organizations, authority is centralized, roles are specialized, and work is governed by formal procedures; these features can support consistency but can also narrow discretion and slow responses to new problems. Reluctance to innovate is therefore treated here as a situated response to perceived organizational barriers rather than as a fixed personal deficiency.

Research on mechanistic settings shows that complexity, formal hierarchy, and fragmented information flows can become barriers before innovative potential is expressed. Leadership within hierarchies may coordinate responsibility, yet multiple levels of authorization

can also increase the distance between problem recognition and decision-making (Alston et al., 2020). These tensions are especially important in regulated organizations, where conformity protects institutional legitimacy while experimentation introduces procedural risk.

Professional Certification Bodies (PCBs) provide a relevant context for examining this tension because certification activities depend on authorization, standardized assessment instruments, documented procedures, and accountability to a licensing body. The present study does not assume that all Indonesian PCBs are mechanistic. Instead, it examines Human Resource Management PCBs in which informants described high formalization, centralized approval, and predominantly vertical communication—characteristics analytically consistent with a mechanistic organizational design.

The specific problems motivating the inquiry came from the study context and preliminary accounts rather than from a national prevalence claim. They included concerns about confidence in assessment results, inactive certification schemes, possible unauthorized disclosure of assessment instruments, weaknesses in evidence elicitation during assessment, and slow responses to recurring operational problems. These issues are presented as contextual problems reported within the participating HRM-certification PCBs; they should not be generalized to all Indonesian PCBs without broader evidence.

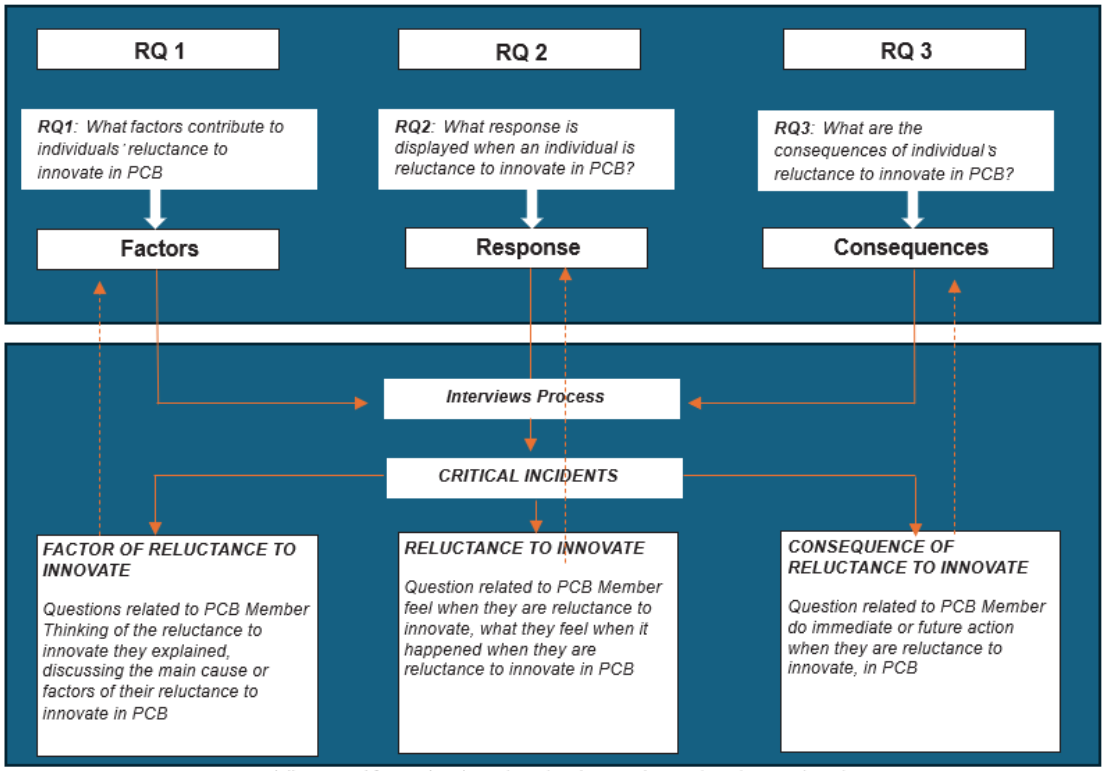
The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was selected because the research questions concern identifiable episodes that hindered innovation, the responses occurring during or after those episodes, and their perceived consequences. CIT directs informants toward concrete events and consequential behaviors rather than general opinions (Bott & Tourish, 2016). This event-centered focus is more suitable than phenomenology, which prioritizes the essence of lived experience, and more bounded than grounded theory because the study aims to map incident categories rather than construct a comprehensive process theory. Prior CIT-based organizational research also shows that contextualized accounts can reveal recurring response patterns (Nadia et al., 2020).

Accordingly, this study aims to (1) identify the factors contributing to individuals' reluctance to innovate in mechanistic PCBs, (2) examine the affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses displayed, and (3) explain the consequences for individuals and the organization. The findings are intended to help PCB leaders distinguish necessary regulatory control from avoidable organizational rigidity and to design safer channels for proposing and testing improvements.

The study extends three related streams of prior work. Research on barriers to public-sector innovation maps structural and process obstacles Cinar et al. (2019), studies of mechanistic knowledge transfer emphasize system complexity Crichton-Sumners et al. (2013), and research on reactions to organizational change explains affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses (Oreg et al., 2011). The present study connects these streams in the underexamined setting of regulated professional certification by using CIT to trace factors, responses, and consequences within one analytical sequence. Its novelty is contextual and integrative rather than a claim that reluctance to innovate itself is new.

METHOD

This study employed an exploratory qualitative design using the Critical Incident Technique. The institutional setting comprised Human Resource Management Professional Certification Bodies in Indonesia. The participating organizations and geographic locations are not named in the source manuscript; this boundary is stated explicitly to protect institutional confidentiality and to prevent unsupported claims about national representativeness.



NOTE: Partially sourced from Edvardsson (1992); Keltner and Gross (1999); Grace (2008)

The figure above illustrates the research framework used in this study. It maps the three research questions (RQ1–RQ3) onto the constructs of Factors, Response, and Consequences, which are explored through the interview process and analyzed as critical incidents. Each construct corresponds to a specific question posed to PCB assessors: the factors underlying their reluctance to innovate, the reactions displayed when experiencing such reluctance, and the actions or consequences that follow. This approach is consistent with the critical incident methodology adapted from Edvardsson (1992), Keltner and Gross (1999).

The unit of analysis was a critical incident concerning reluctance to innovate in Human Resource Management PCBs. An incident was treated as critical when an informant described a specific event or recurring operational episode that materially enabled or hindered the proposal, evaluation, or implementation of an improvement and could explain its context, response, and consequence. The inquiry covered problems reported in the participating PCBs, including assessment-instrument security, inactive certification schemes, pre-assessment and assessment processes, technology adaptation, and confidence in certification services. These observations reflect the context of the study rather than national-level statistics.

Fifteen informants participated: three PCB leaders, nine assessors, and three operational managers (Table 1). Initial participants were selected purposively because they were directly responsible for, or frequently involved in, competency-certification operations. Subsequent referrals were used only to identify additional information-rich participants who met the same criteria; thus, snowball sampling supplemented rather than replaced purposive selection. Eligibility required direct involvement in HRM certification and sufficient experience to recount specific innovation-related incidents. Recruitment ended at 15 participants when additional accounts repeated the established second-order themes and no new themes relevant to the three research questions emerged.

Table 1

Position	Informant	Experience in PCB	Assessment tested
PCB Leader 1	1	16 years	>100
PCB Leader 2	2	12 years	>100
PCB Leader 3	3	11 years	>100
Assessor 1	4	5 years	>50
Assessor 2	5	3 years	>50

Assessor 3	6	1 years	>50
Assessor 4	7	5 years	>50
Assessor 5	8	3 years	>50
Assessor 6	9	1 years	>50
Assessor 7	10	5 years	>50
Assessor 8	11	3 years	>50
Assessor 9	12	1 years	>50
Operations Manager 1	13	>3 years	-
Operations Manager 2	14	>3 years	-
Operations Manager 3	15	>3 years	-

The assessor group included five-, three-, and one-year experience levels, while PCB leaders had 11–16 years of experience. This variation supported source comparison across organizational roles and experience levels. Saturation was assessed at the level of second-order themes: interviewing ceased when later accounts could be assigned to existing themes without requiring the addition of a new theme.

Data were collected through in-depth CIT (Critical Incident Technique) interviews guided by the three research questions. Informants were asked to recall concrete episodes in which an idea or improvement was proposed, constrained, withdrawn, or redirected; probes addressed the situation, actors, actions, responses, and consequences. Content analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 Pro. The researchers first coded informants' own expressions as first-order concepts, compared codes across incidents, grouped conceptually similar codes into second-order themes, and then organized the themes under the aggregate dimensions of factors, responses, and consequences. A category was retained when it was supported by identifiable incidents and could be conceptually distinguished from adjacent categories. Three expert jurors reviewed the fit between incidents, concepts, and themes; disagreements were discussed until a shared classification was reached (Grace, 2007).

The source materials available for this revision do not record interview duration, the exact number of incidents elicited per informant, a formal ethics-clearance number, or a data-retention schedule. These details have therefore not been reconstructed. Their absence is acknowledged as a reporting limitation, and future replications should document informed consent, confidentiality, recording, transcription, storage, and deletion procedures explicitly.

Trustworthiness was addressed through systematic coding, expert review, source comparison, secondary-data comparison, and member checking (Grace, 2007). Source triangulation compared accounts from PCB leaders, assessors, and operational managers. Data triangulation compared interview incidents with the secondary materials available to the research team. Theoretical triangulation examined whether categories were coherent with research on mechanistic structure, organizational change, and innovation barriers. Three expert jurors familiar with professional certification independently examined the fit of incidents to themes, and interpretive differences were resolved through discussion. Three PCB managers reviewed the contextual plausibility of the resulting categories. Saturation and the adequacy of multiple sources were considered in line with (Fusch Ph D & Ness, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Factors contribute to individuals' reluctance to innovate

The findings are organized around the three research questions: contributing factors, displayed responses, and consequences. Four factor themes emerged consistently across the data structure: Fear of Failure, Organizational Inertia, Nature of Change, and Limited Support and Collaboration (Figure 1 and Table 1). Percentages in the informant columns indicate the proportion of the 15 informants who reported an incident in each subcategory; because an informant could report more than one incident, subcategory percentages are not additive.

According to Informant 4, organizational inertia, manifested in overly bureaucratic work processes and excessively rigid SOPs, is the biggest obstacle to the emergence of innovation, both among individuals and within the Professional Certification Institute (PCB) as an institution characterized by a mechanistic organizational design.

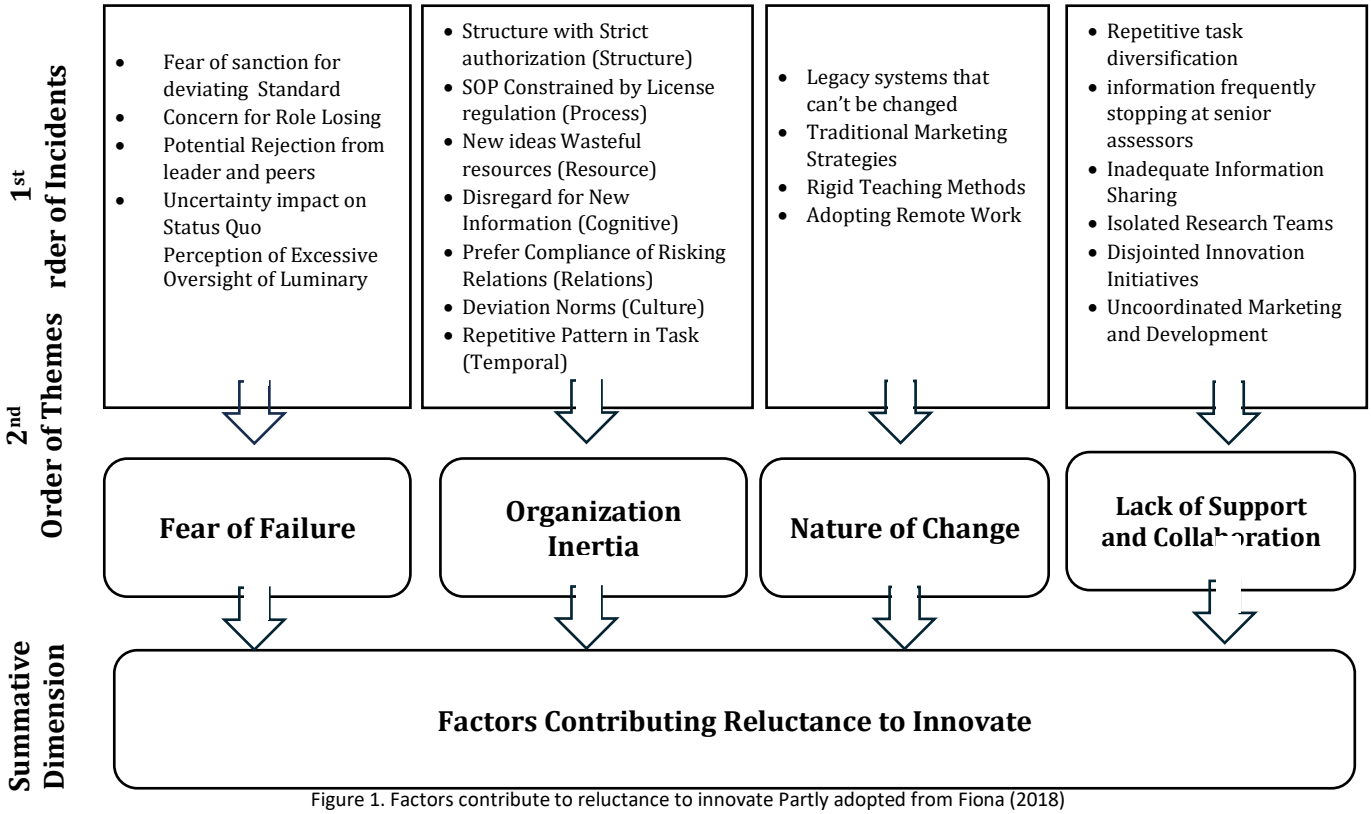


Figure 1. Factors contribute to reluctance to innovate Partly adopted from Fiona (2018)

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SOPs for these PCBs are generally developed and implemented very strictly because the existence and operation of a PCB must comply with the provisions governing its license issued by the BNSP, the entity that grants the PCB authority to operate. Consequently, every aspect of organizational development requires complex and lengthy approval processes. (Informant 6)

Other informants added that organizational inertia was evident in limited opportunities for comparative research (73.33%), slow adoption of new technologies because implementation required multiple approvals (80.00%), delays in skills-upgrading programs because financing required lengthy approval processes (73.33%), and the absence of a collaboration platform for management, assessors, and administrative personnel (66.67%).

Table 2.
Factors of Reluctance to Innovate

Critical incidents Reluctance to Innovate in Mechanistic organization			Informants[a]		References	
			Count	%	Count	%
Fear of Failure	(1)	Fear Of Sanction For Deviating Work Standard	9	60.00	22	7.40
	(2)	Concern for Role Losing	11	73.33	21	7.07
	(3)	Potential Rejection from leader and peers	6	40.00	16	5.38
	(4)	Uncertainty impact on Status Quo	5	35.00	9	3.03
	(5)	Perception of Excessive Oversight of Luminary	10	65.00	11	3.70
Organization Inertia	(1)	Structure with Strict authorization	11	73.33	14	93.33
	(2)	SOP Constrained by License regulation	5	35.00	14	4.71
	(3)	New ideas as Wasteful resources	12	80.00	10	66.67

	(4)	Disregard for New Information	11	73.33	8	2.69
	(5)	Restricted Innovation in Education	8	50.00	9	3.03
	(6)	New methods is as a deviation from norms	10	65.00	19	6.39
	(7)	Repetitive Pattern in Task	11	70.00	10	3.36
Nature of Change	(1)	Legacy systems that cannot be changed	11	73.33	14	93.33
	(2)	Traditional Marketing Strategies	10	65.00	11	3.70
	(3)	Rigid Teaching Methods	12	80.00	15	5.05
	(4)	Adopting Remote Work	11	73.33	9	60.00
Limited Support and Collaboration	(1)	Repetitive task diversification	5	33.33	6	40.00
	(2)	Information frequently stopping at senior assessors	11	70.00	19	6.39
	(3)	Inadequate Information Sharing	13	85.00	20	6.73
	(4)	Isolated Research Teams	9	60.00	14	4.71
	(5)	Disjointed Innovation Initiatives	9	60.00	11	3.70
	(6)	Uncoordinated Marketing and Development	6	40.00	15	5.05
Total			15	100	297	100

Note(s):

a. Informant percentage = number of informants reporting the subcategory ÷ 15 × 100. Informants could report multiple subcategories; therefore, percentages are not additive.

b. Percent frequency for the references corresponds to the count of references over the total of 297 references. References include both the CIs informed by Informants and the findings from the secondary sources

This PCB is like an old ship running in the open sea with the ambitious goal of managing participants' certificates of competence, but its implementation is quite rigid and provides little support for the self-development of assessors and staff. Their skill-enhancement programs required approval for a long time, let alone comparative research programs or comparative studies, which were almost nonexistent. (Informant 9)

Another factor that inhibits innovation in a mechanistic organization is fear of failure. In this context, the influence of seniority is particularly evident, especially in the way the input of senior assessors is considered more valuable than that of newer assessors who have a better understanding of technological developments.

I have only been with the PCB for one more year, and on the other hand, I am very happy to be able to learn from senior assessors. However, it seems that our younger assessors' input regarding the development of the PCB rarely receives a response from the PCB leadership, even though our input is often oriented toward technological adaptation and whether it could help the PCB improve its services to the community. (Informant 11).

Other informants identified slow decision-making (60.00%), seniority (73.33%), SOPs that constrained interparty collaboration (40.00%), limited opportunities for market or partner analysis (33.33%), and a lack of joint programs (66.67%) as conditions associated with fear of failure.

Limited communication and collaboration are another aspect contributing to innovation barriers in the PCB. This situation becomes a matter of concern because an assessor's presence at the PCB is not always routine; in fact, assessors may be the only personnel who visit the PCB on a regular basis, apart from PCB managers. When PCB members are present, they tend to concentrate on their regular tasks because, typically, only senior assessors convene at their level, and they frequently feel compelled to maintain a safe distance from PCB managers who are not assessors. Individuals rarely collaborate with one another, except during infrequently scheduled meetings.

The PCB is not always operational for everyone. Nonmanagerial assessors only visit when they are assigned to conduct assessments, whereas assessors who also serve as PCB managers or are part of the PCB management team do so regularly. Because of this distinction, collaboration is rarely

possible. Assessors who manage the PCB typically interact primarily within their own managerial circle; they also rarely communicate with nonassessor PCB managers, and, occasionally, nonassessor managers face obstacles in carrying out their responsibilities. (Informant 13)

Incidents related to limited support and collaboration included repetitive task allocation (33.33%), important information stopping at senior assessors (73.33%), comparative research involving only individuals perceived as close to the leadership (60.00%), rejection of operational suggestions for problem-solving or service improvement (60.00%), and certification-product marketing considered insufficiently aligned with digital developments (40.00%).

The nature of change component is the final barrier to innovation in mechanistic organizations. Informant 6 stated that although the PCB was established using a system that complied with BNSP regulations, modifications were being considered. Such modifications could potentially create issues for the PCB and jeopardize its ability to obtain an extension of its operational license from BNSP. Fear of deviating from the status quo prevents innovation from flourishing and limits the organization's ability to address problems as they arise.

After nearly seven years here, the previous system has finally been replaced. The PCB system is reviewed for a considerable amount of time before any modification is made, such as changes to the assessment mechanism or promotion process, because senior personnel tend to be conservative in their thinking. (Informant 14)

Within the Nature of Change theme, informants reported traditional marketing strategies without a specific approach to industry (66.67%), predominantly one-way assessor training that offered newer assessors little opportunity to critique documents perceived as mandated (80.00%), and work methods that were not aligned with technological developments and were associated with complaints about lengthy certificate-issuance processes (73.33%).

Responses to Individual Reluctance to Innovate in the PCB

For the second research question, responses were classified according to their primary manifestation. Adverse affective reactions refer to feelings arising from constrained innovation; cognitive reactions refer to interpretations and judgments about one's abilities, leadership, or the feasibility of change; and behavioral inclinations refer to intended or observable withdrawal from innovative action. Coding followed the dominant meaning of each incident, while juror review addressed overlaps—for example, self-doubt was coded as cognitive when the account emphasized an appraisal of personal capability rather than an emotion. Reported affective reactions included disappointment with procedures (86.67%), stress and anxiety (73.33%), resentment toward attempts to make breakthroughs (60.00%), discouragement over the rejection of valuable ideas (66.67%), and disillusionment regarding recurring problems (53.33%).

Yes, when asked about how it feels to work in the PCB, there is more disappointment when the ideas we communicate are not accepted because of the strict BNSP SOPs. Then, when the same problems recur, the situation should have been addressed using the ideas we previously presented. (Informant 15)

Reluctance also triggered cognitive reactions, understood as appraisals of capability, causation, risk, and leadership (Nadia et al., 2020). These included self-doubt after repeated nonaccommodation of input (46.67%), attributing difficulties to unchangeable conditions (53.33%), catastrophizing the pursuit of ideas (66.67%), reduced willingness to take risks or solve PCB problems (80.00%), and distrust in leadership when the same problems recurred (66.67%).

As PCB assessors and managers, we have come to the conclusion that the stringent BNSP regulations make it extremely difficult to get solid ideas approved for the advancement of the organization. Then, when we consider what we can contribute, our ideas are often not accepted. Therefore, it becomes easier to simply focus on our own work and believe that problem-solving is unnecessary because the issue may have originated from well-intentioned suggestions that were rejected. (Informant 8)

The implications of assessors' reluctance to innovate, which affect how these processes are organized, manifest not only in emotional and cognitive responses but also in behavioral inclinations. Based on this research, we may state that behavioral inclination is a regulated tendency to behave in accordance with prevailing incentives, making it a strong barrier to innovation. According to the informants, these reactions manifested as behavioral inclinations:

Yes, the PCB system is stringent, and we understand that this is the case because the PCB's ability to operate depends on the license issued by BNSP, the PCB's parent institution. Our ideas become less valuable when there are several barriers to innovation, particularly those related to the promotion process. It seems that we have developed a tendency to become apathetic toward constructive change. (Informant 9)

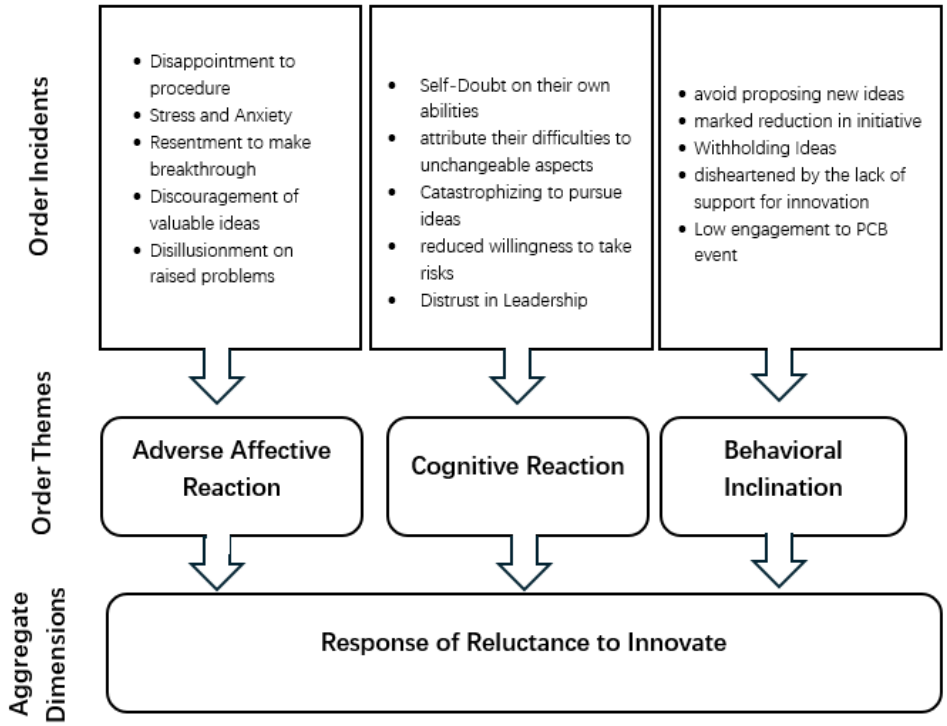


Figure 2. Response displayed to reluctance to innovate Partly adopted from Nadia (2020)

Behavioral inclinations included avoiding proposals for new ideas (86.67%), reduced initiative (66.67%), withholding ideas (80.00%), diminished support for others' ideas (73.33%), and low engagement in PCB activities (53.33%).

Table 2.
Response of Reluctance to Innovate

Critical incidents in the course of Innovation Barriers Mechanistic organization			Informants[a]		References	
			Count	%	Count	%
Adverse Affective Reaction	(1)	Disappointment to procedure	13	86.67	28	11.11
	(2)	Stress and Anxiety	11	70.00	19	7.53
	(3)	Resentment to make breakthrough	9	60.00	24	9.52
	(4)	Discouragement of valuable ideas	10	66.67	17	6.74
	(5)	Disillusionment on raised problems	8	53.33	16	6.34
Cognitive Reaction	(1)	Self-Doubt on their own abilities	7	46.67	10	66.67
	(2)	attribute their difficulties to unchangeable aspects	8	50.00	10	3.96
	(3)	Catastrophizing to pursue ideas	10	66.67	16	6.34
	(4)	reduced willingness to take risks	12	80.00	21	8.33
	(5)	Distrust in Leadership	10	66.67	20	7.93
Behavioral Inclination	(1)	avoid proposing new ideas	13	86.67	14	93.33
	(2)	marked reduction in initiative	10	66.67	11	73.33
	(3)	Withholding Ideas	12	80.00	17	6.74
	(4)	Disheartened by the lack of support for innovation	11	70.00	19	7.53
	(5)	Low engagement to PCB event	8	50.00	10	3.96

Total	15	100	252	100

Note(s):
a. Informant percentage = number of informants reporting the subcategory ÷ 15 × 100. Informants could report multiple subcategories; therefore, percentages are not additive.
b. Percent frequency for the references corresponds to the count of references over the total of 252 references. References include both the CIs informed by Informants and the findings from the secondary sources

The Consequences of individual's reluctance to innovate in PCB

For the third research question, two consequence themes emerged (Figure 3 and Table 3). The first is more precisely interpreted as individually adaptive but organizationally adverse attribution: informants preserved or applied ideas outside the PCB (80.00%), confined their work to strict SOPs (66.67%), transferred responsibility for problem mitigation to others (80.00%), or retained the intention to change the system if later appointed as a leader (73.33%). These responses may protect individual agency, but they deprive the PCB of ideas and should not be interpreted as unambiguously positive organizational outcomes. The second theme comprises explicitly negative attributions, including disengagement, passive resistance, delayed work, and nonconstructive criticism.

Yeah, if it's a good idea, we're always raw. Yeah, I'm just going to keep it. It's okay. (Informant 8)

I don't work full time at the PCB, but my idea is good and not used. Yeah, I can still use that idea somewhere else. (Informant 9)

When I become the leader of the PCB, I will make adjustments to ideas and innovations without having to violate the rules of the BNSP*. (Informant 10)*

In the explicitly negative attribution theme, informants reported unwillingness to mitigate problems (66.67%), low engagement with meeting invitations (60.00%), passive resistance to changes suggested by leaders (73.33%), delaying work through obsolete methods (73.33%), and nonconstructive criticism of others' ideas (66.67%).

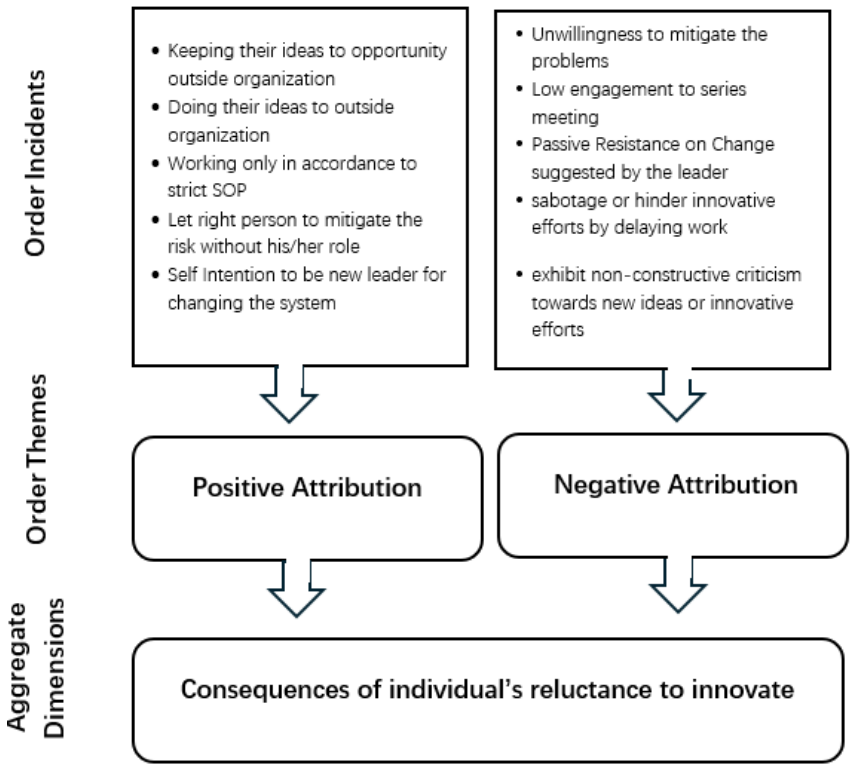


Figure 3. Consequences of reluctance to innovate (2018)

Often, there are problems related to complaints from assessment participants who feel that the pre-assessment process is quite complicated. I've given you advice, but it's not accepted. (Informant 13)

Usually, if there's a meeting, it's more of a decision delivered by the PCB leadership, so we're rarely enthusiastic about a meeting invitation. (Informant 15)

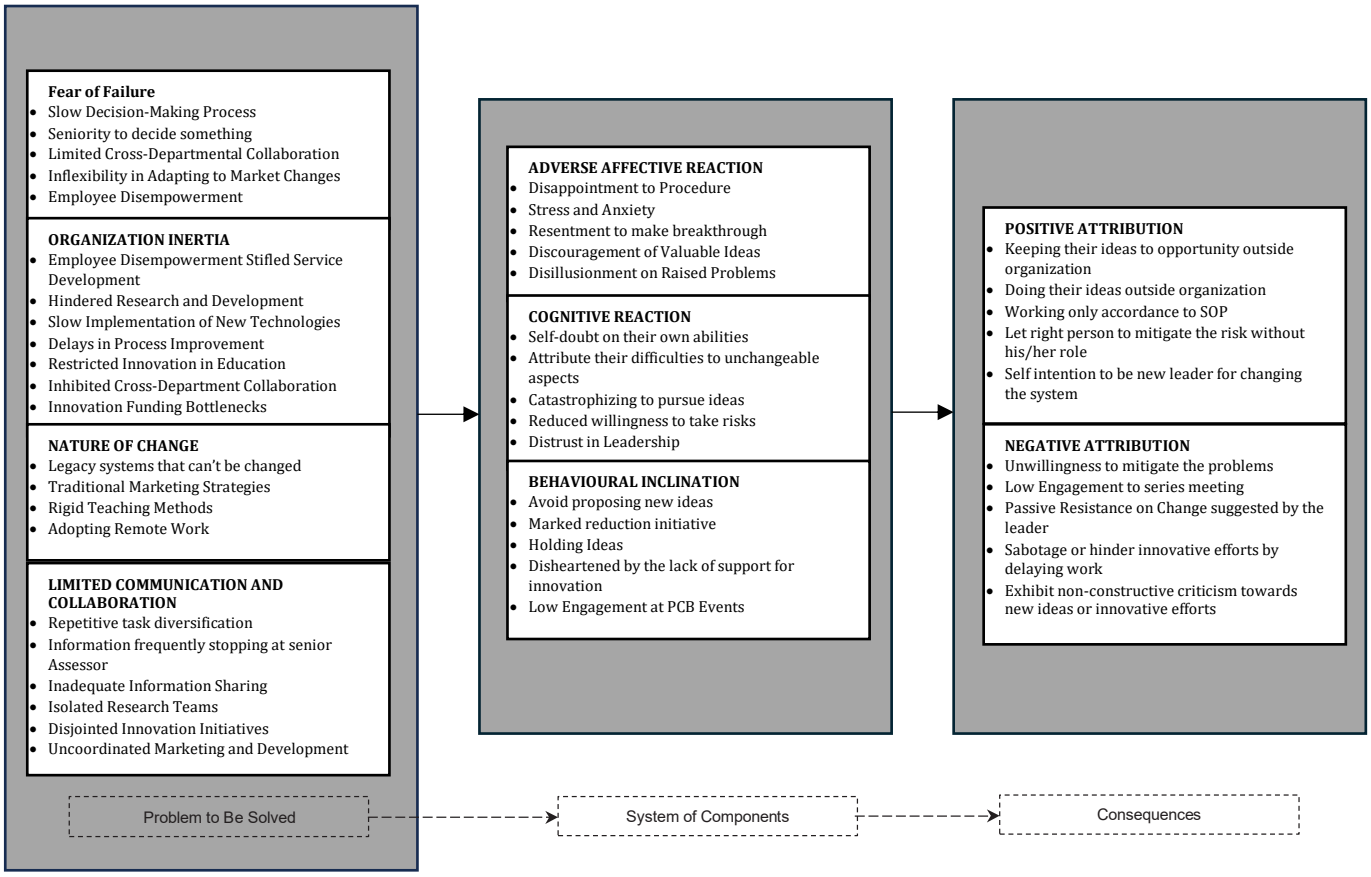
Table 3.
Course of Innovation Barriers

Critical incidents in the course of Innovation Barriers			Informants[a]		References	
Mechanistic organization			Count	%	Count	%
Positive Attribution	(1)	Keeping their ideas to opportunity outside organization	12	80.00	24	13.80
	(2)	Doing their ideas to outside organization	12	80.00	18	10.40
	(3)	Working only in accordance to strict SOP	10	66.67	16	9.24
	(4)	Let right person to mitigate the risk without his/her role	12	80.00	12	6.93
	(5)	Self Intention to be new leader for changing the system	11	70.00	15	8.67
Negative Attribution	(1)	Unwillingness to mitigate the problems	10	66.67	17	9.82
	(2)	Low engagement to series meeting	9	60.00	21	12.13
	(3)	Passive Resistance on Change suggested by the leader	11	73.33	19	10.98
	(4)	sabotage or hinder innovative efforts by delaying work	11	70.00	20	11.56
	(5)	exhibit non-constructive criticism towards new ideas or innovative efforts	10	66.67	11	73.33
Total			15	100	173	100

Note(s):
a. Informant percentage = number of informants reporting the subcategory ÷ 15 × 100. Informants could report multiple subcategories; therefore, percentages are not additive.
b. Percent frequency for the references corresponds to the count of references over the total of 173 references. References include both the CIs informed by Informants and the findings from the secondary sources

Discussion

Based on the findings, a functional representation can be provided of the reluctance-to-innovate factor, the responses exhibited by individuals experiencing reluctance to innovate, and the consequences associated with such reluctance, as follows:



Factors Contributing to Individuals' Reluctance to Innovate in PCBs

The four factors operate as a connected system rather than as isolated barriers. In the PCB context, licensing dependence makes procedural deviation appear institutionally risky; centralized authorization then slows decision-making, while seniority and limited cross-role interaction restrict the circulation of alternatives. Fear of failure is consequently not only psychological. It is produced by an organizational setting in which the perceived cost of departing from an approved procedure is immediate, whereas the benefit of experimentation is uncertain.

According to Smith & Tushman (2005), the first category, Fear of Failure, pertains to a condition in which organizational structure can impede innovation because of inadequate flexibility, thereby limiting problem-solving capacity. Hamel (2008) provided evidence supporting the idea that people at lower organizational levels are less inclined to take innovative actions because they believe that those in higher positions will not accept them. In PCBs, this frequently occurs when managers who are not assessors consider voicing proposals for promotion to higher positions within the PCB on multiple occasions.

Organizational inertia is reinforced when compliance requirements are interpreted as prohibiting local improvement rather than defining the boundaries within which improvement can occur. Informants' accounts suggest that approval chains, delayed skills programs, and restricted collaboration converted necessary quality assurance into perceived immobility. The distinction matters practically: regulatory control cannot simply be removed, but PCBs can clarify which process elements are mandatory and which may be tested through documented, reversible pilots.

Within the third category lies the nature of change. Oreg et al. (2011) state that the presence of this kind of barrier hinders people's ability to apply new ideas because their process of adapting to external change is slowed. In the case of PCBs, this barrier primarily concerns the guidelines established by organizational leadership, which issues stringent regulations and frequently disregards the opinions of younger, more technologically savvy professionals.

Limited support and collaboration amplified the other barriers because assessors were present mainly when assigned, whereas operational personnel and leaders interacted more

routinely. This temporal separation reduced opportunities for informal problem framing and made information more likely to stop with senior actors. The finding extends prior teamwork research by showing that, in a certification body, communication barriers are partly produced by role schedules and authorization patterns, not merely by an unwillingness to cooperate (Sundstrom et al., 2000).

Responses Displayed When an Individual Is Reluctant to Innovate in PCBs

According to the study's findings, individuals' responses to PCBs as a result of innovation-stifling barriers can be divided into three groups: adverse affective reactions, cognitive reactions, and behavioral inclinations. The results corroborate earlier research by Ashkanasy & Dorris (2017), who described adverse affective reactions as a collective category of responses among people who lack motivation to innovate within organizations. This pertains to the first type of adverse affective reaction. Fink (2013) discuss feelings of helplessness and frustration, reduced creativity, and the withholding of certain elements of teamwork.

Specifically, in the second category of cognitive reactions, Anderson et al. (2014) state that barriers to innovation can affect individuals' perceptions, thinking, and decision-making within an organization. In other words, some of the critical incidents identified in this study involve procedural systems that are so strict that they may cause PCB members to develop negative perceptions of innovation. This is reinforced by Jansen et al. (2006), who concluded that cognitive reactions often involve the belief that individuals' efforts or innovative behaviors will not be appreciated. Consequently, they may feel that they do not need to engage in innovative activities that could otherwise be encouraged by organizational leadership.

The third category pertains to behavioral inclination, which is a prerequisite for individual initiative and engagement in the organization's innovation process. Prior studies by Piderit (2000) found that bureaucracy and rigid hierarchical structures inhibit innovation by making people defensive and passive. What occurs in such a PCB may be related to Bason (2010) findings, which show that people in organizations with rigid procedures are afraid of failure and are therefore reluctant to innovate. According to Palmer et al. (2017), when there is a barrier to creativity, people are more inclined to remain within their comfort zones rather than offer suggestions for improving the group.

The Consequences of Individuals' Reluctance to Innovate in PCBs

The consequences require a multilevel interpretation. Keeping or using an idea outside the PCB may preserve creativity and self-efficacy for the individual, yet it represents lost learning capacity for the organization. Accordingly, the first consequence theme is not "positive" in an absolute sense; it is individually adaptive but organizationally adverse. The negative theme is more directly damaging because passive resistance, delayed work, and disengagement can reproduce the operational problems that originally triggered the idea. The findings therefore reveal a feedback loop: mechanistic constraints suppress voice, suppressed voice encourages withdrawal, and withdrawal further reduces the organization's capacity to solve recurring problems.

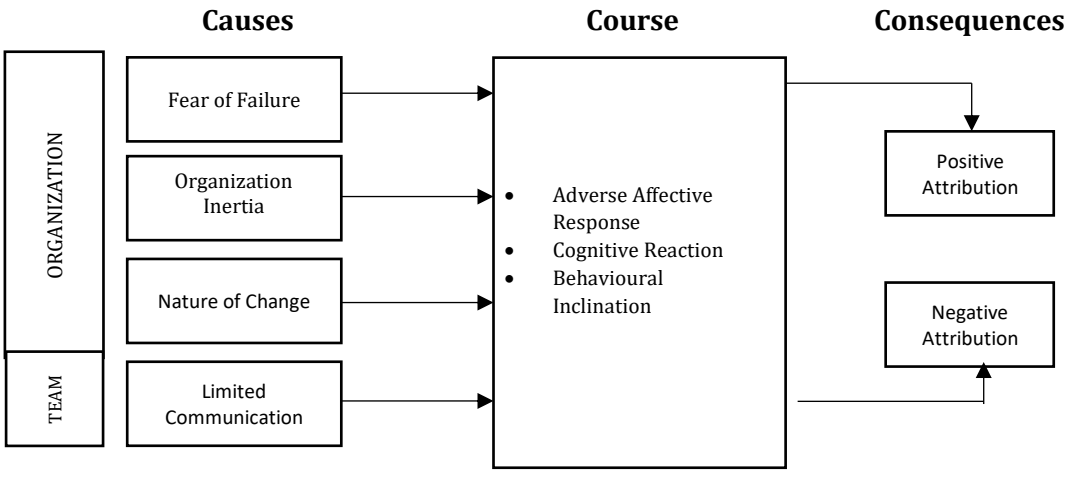


Figure 4. Consequences of Innovation Barriers in Mechanistic Organization

The theoretical contribution is a context-sensitive sequence linking structure to innovation reluctance: formalized control and constrained communication shape affective and cognitive reactions, which then become behavioral withdrawal and organizational consequences. This extends barrier-based accounts by explaining how barriers are translated into responses, and it qualifies change-reaction theory by showing that apparent resistance may reflect rational protection against licensing and relational risks. Reluctance in this setting is therefore neither purely individual nor inherently irrational; it is co-produced by regulatory interpretation, hierarchy, and limited channels for safe experimentation.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies four sources of innovation reluctance in mechanistic PCBs—fear of failure, organizational inertia, the nature of change, and limited support and collaboration. These conditions generate adverse affective reactions, cognitive judgments that innovation is unsafe or futile, and behavioral withdrawal. Their consequences include individually adaptive but organizationally adverse diversion of ideas, as well as disengagement, passive resistance, delayed work, and nonconstructive criticism. The study contributes an integrated, incident-based sequence explaining how structural constraints are converted into individual responses and then into organizational outcomes.

Practically, PCB leaders should separate non-negotiable licensing requirements from locally improvable procedures, establish a documented cross-role forum for ideas, provide time-bound and transparent feedback on proposals, and use small, reversible pilots before wider adoption. Senior assessors should mentor rather than filter newer assessors' technology-oriented input, while leaders should monitor whether repeated rejection is producing withdrawal. At the supervisory level, BNSP guidance could clarify permissible spaces for innovation without weakening assessment integrity. These measures preserve compliance while reducing avoidable rigidity.

The implementation of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) methodology within the specific context of human resource management (HRM) certification bodies is a limitation of this research. Although CIT offers detailed insights into individual situations, the findings' objectivity may be limited by recall bias resulting from its dependence on retroactive accounts. Moreover, narrowly concentrating on HRM certification bodies might miss the entire range of difficulties encountered by other kinds of professional certification organizations, which would limit the study's findings' relevance and generalizability to various industries and organizational configurations. This restriction highlights the necessity for additional certifying bodies and procedures to be included in future studies in order to improve the validity and relevance of the results.

Future research should convert the four factor themes, three response dimensions, and two consequence orientations into measurable constructs, develop and validate a quantitative model, and test the proposed factor–response–consequence sequence across certification sectors. Comparative studies could examine whether regulatory intensity, leadership openness, assessor seniority, and technological change alter these relationships. Longitudinal designs are also needed to determine whether transparent idea-review and controlled experimentation reduce reluctance without compromising certification integrity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the original manuscript. All

authors participated in revising the manuscript in response to the anonymous reviewers' comments and approved the final version for publication.

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