

THE QUEST FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN ONTARIO'S POST-
SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR: AN ASSESSMENT OF
THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE MULTI-YEAR
ACCOUNTABILITY AGREEMENTS (MYA/MYAAs)

Victoria Eugenia Díaz Paniagua

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School of Political Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa

*To my parents:
For teaching me to ask many questions,
for motivating me to learn new things, and
for showing me the power of grit and determination.*

ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis analyzes the introduction, development, evolution and impacts of the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements, which were introduced to the Ontario post-secondary sector in 2006. The analysis uses an eclectic theoretical framework that builds on the accountability literature, public policy implementation theory, organizational theory, principal-agent theory and the study of instruments in the French tradition. This allows for analyzing the original object of study using multiple lenses. The field work was extensive and consisted of a documentary analysis including the agreements for Ontario's twenty universities between 2006-07 and 2009-10, as well as thirty-seven semi-structured interviews undertaken in 2012 with representatives from Ontario universities, the Ontario government and other sector organizations.

The thesis moves away from a speculative definition of accountability as it clarifies how this concept is interpreted and constructed by the actors involved in its implementation and how its dimensions evolve over time. Accountability is thus conceptualized as a "moving target" – a challenge that is not unique to the post-secondary sector, as these kinds of processes are observed in other areas of the public sector. Therefore, although accountability is often presented as a tool of "good governance" intended to reduce waste and increase trust, is actually operationalized in a highly symbolic fashion and the gaps between the public discourse, the perceptions of actors and the final implementation are demonstrated.

This thesis also shows how the choice of instrument facilitates acceptance of a new requirement in the sector and helps balance the government's need for control with the universities' need for independence. On one hand, the type of instrument is coherent with government discourse for increased accountability. On the other hand, the instrument, presented as *an agreement* embodies the negotiated character of the relationship, and conveys the idea to different actors that their needs are being met. However, when the objectives are ambiguous, uncertainty is pervasive, and negotiation is limited, the increase in control reduced and the changes in autonomy are negligible. Despite the promises of the instrument, symbolic and rhetorical compliance may be the sustainable equilibrium between governments and governed.

SUMMARY

In 2005, the Ontario government introduced *Reaching Higher*, a \$6.2 billion plan to improve the accessibility, quality and accountability of the province's post-secondary system. This was the government's response to the recommendations made by The Honourable Bob Rae in his evaluation of the sector published earlier that year. One element of the *Reaching Higher* strategy was the introduction of Multi-Year Accountability Agreements between the province and universities and colleges. These were planned as multi-year, bilateral agreements with annual report-backs and were launched in 2005-06 with an interim agreement and three-year plans in 2006-07. The objective of this study is to analyze what the introduction of this new accountability instrument has meant for the sector, both at the organizational level and regarding the evolving relationship between government and universities.

Although accountability agreements were introduced for both colleges and universities, this research focuses on the latter. After providing an overview of the theoretical background for accountability studies and the evolution of accountability requirements worldwide and in Ontario, the study proposes to study universities as organizations that react strategically to the imposition of external accountability requirements. For that purpose, the study builds on contributions made from organizational theory and summarized in the model of strategic responses developed by Oliver (1991) as well as on the strategic responses predicted under a principal-agent model for post-secondary sector accountability developed by Massy (2011). Although both models come from different theoretical backgrounds, the behavioral hypotheses are deemed equivalent or complementary and the analysis uses insights from both models. Furthermore, inspired by the ideas behind the theory of policy instruments, the analysis inquires what unintended, non-neutral effects had the agreements in the sector. The interest was in developing a framework that would help analyze how universities will make implementation choices when facing a new accountability requirement, and to understand its introduction from a public policy perspective. Furthermore, there was an objective of understanding how accountability is interpreted in Ontario and how this affects relationships between universities and government and with other stakeholders. The three main questions guiding the study are thus summarized as: How have accountability policies introduced with *Reaching Higher* (2005-2010) been implemented in Ontario universities and why have organizations made those implementation choices? What do these implementation choices reveal about how accountability is interpreted and internalized by Ontario universities? What does this reveal regarding university/state relationships and faculty/administration relationships?

Given that there is little information regarding the introduction of the agreements and accountability relationships in the Ontario PSE sector, the methodological approach is of a qualitative nature. The field work initiated with a documentary analysis of the plans and agreements published by twenty Ontario universities from 2006-07 to 2008-09. The field work proceeded in two stages. First, stakeholders from central organizations and representative from universities involved in the development and implementation process of the MYA/MYAs were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. This provided access as well to other documentary sources that were utilized during the analysis. A second stage consisted of the identification of three specific university

study sites where representatives from internal stakeholder groups were interviewed to help understand whether the agreements had any impacts within universities and to categorize those impacts. Due to material limitations faced during the second stage of research, the results obtained from the analysis of specific universities are incorporated throughout the analysis.

The results are organized along five major topics. First, with the objective to understand the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs, the origin and objectives of the agreements are analyzed in detail. It is found that accountability is a “moving target”, where the objectives of the policy instrument to attain accountability evolved over time and were often ill-defined publicly. This resulted in an instrument that did not always contribute to meet the objectives originally planned. Second, the analysis proceeds with a discussion of the development of the agreements and the implementation strategies privileged by both the government and universities. It is determined that universities played a role in the implementation process both via consultation processes and the introduction of major data production initiatives regarding quality in the Ontario PSE sector. It is also concluded that despite an initial objective from the government to apply sanctions for non-compliance, these were not pervasively used and the implementation follow-ups shifted from high-level objectives and targets to specific and technical matters. Third, the content of the plans and report-backs are analyzed for the initial three-year implementation period (2006-07 to 2008-09). In the vast majority of cases, universities chose to base their commitments on either ongoing activities, new activities already planned via internal strategic and academic plans or on small flagship initiatives for which specific funding was obtained. This was possible given the general character of the government’s objectives and the flexibility allowed to universities to answer to the commitments. The discussion highlights the importance of priority alignment, legitimacy of objectives and the use of rewards/sanctions to understand the implementation that ensued. Fourth, the transformation of the MYA/MYAAAs into data collection tools and the introduction of a new instrument to structure the strategic relationship between government and universities are discussed. Fifth, the analysis identifies the areas in which the MYA/MYAAAs have driven change in Ontario’s PSE, consisting of: (i) the availability of information on the sector; (ii) the increased willingness on the part of university to share success stories with the government to pursue funding allocation and reputational objectives; (iii) the alignment of priorities in certain areas of activity; (iv) the impact of university autonomy and what this signal regarding university and government relationship in terms of control and (v) highlighting the current voids in accountability governance structures.

The analysis concludes with a presentation of the main overarching themes that emerge from the study that put into perspective the results from this thesis and highlight their contribution to public policy and public administration in general. First, the introduction of accountability measures in Ontario’s PSE is framed within a normative perspective of principal-agent, where control is technically possible and policy questions are reduced to finding the right way to enforce them. The choice of a principal-agent model to study the implementation of accountability policies in the PSE field (Massy, 2011) embodies that top-down perspective and helps explain the extent to which universities embrace the new requirements, using priority alignment, the power of the measure and the saliency of the rewards as explanatory factors. Although Massy (2011) acknowledges that power

relationships and the choice of instrument will affect implementation decisions, the author ignores the political aspects of policy implementation in the operationalization of his model, thus failing to consider the extent to which goal ambiguity will play an instrumental role in conflict situations. In the conclusions, the value that ambiguity has in a policy world conceived in top-down terms is highlighted.

Second, autonomy is a fundamental value in the post-secondary education sector that is often placed at odds with the reification of accountability measures observed over the past few decades. A focus on organizations highlights the role that the struggle between autonomy and control has on the implementation of the new requirement. Moreover, portraying the instrument as one that is not neutral but that encompasses a structuring of relationships across actors (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010) highlights the importance of the autonomy/control dichotomy. The choice of instrument is thus analyzed in light of its role facilitating the negotiation of an adequate balance between autonomy and control in Ontario's PSE. This analysis also allows for a deeper understanding of the non-technical limitations of performance contracts as instruments of public policy.

Third, the results from this research also open the door towards understanding governance relationships within universities and the role played by university administrators in the internalization of the new initiative. Our attention thus turns to an analysis of what the introduction of the MYA/MYAs reveals vis-à-vis faculty and administration relationships within the university, developing the theme that "management matters". The use of buffering strategies is highlighted as an important element of the way universities embrace and internalize the new accountability requirement that shelters faculty from its potential impacts. It is concluded that despite forces pushing towards stronger and more cohesive organizational structures within universities, accountability measures can produce incentives towards maintaining their loosely-coupled character.

To finalize, the discussion considers how accountability is a moving target, an elusive concept that is constantly on the move. However, accountability models often fail to take into consideration its dynamic character and it is possible to overlook how the accountability dimensions of a single instrument may evolve, and even be contradictory over time. The discussion also highlights the multiple agents that are targeted at once with one single instrument even when it lacks transitivity and how this reflects on the governance practices in the sector. In light of the findings of this study, the thesis concludes with some thoughts regarding future research areas of interest for this policy field.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------|--|
| AHQEF | Access to Higher Quality Education Fund |
| AUCC | Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada |
| BPS | Broader Public Sector |
| CAUT | Canadian Association of University Teachers |
| CFS | Canadian Federation of Students |
| CGPSS | Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey |
| COFO | Council of Ontario Financial Officers |
| COU | Council of Ontario Universities |
| CSRDE | Consortium of Student Retention Data Exchange |
| CUDO | Common University Data Ontario |
| CUPA | Council on University Planning Analysis |
| CUSC | Canadian University Survey Consortium |
| CSA | College Student Alliance |
| FIPPA | Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act |
| HEQCO | Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario |
| IQAP | Institutional Quality Assurance Process |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicators |
| MOF | Ontario Ministry of Finance |
| MTCU | Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities |
| MYA/MYAA | Multi-Year Action Plan (2006-07 to 2008-09) / Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (report-backs) |
| NPM | New Public Management |
| NSSE | National Survey of Student Engagement |
| OAG | Office of the Auditor General of Canada |
| OCUA | Ontario Council on University Affairs |
| OCUFA | Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Administrators |
| OPS | Ontario Public Sector |
| OSAP | Ontario Student Assistance Program |
| OUAC | Ontario University Application Centre |
| OUSA | Ontario Undergraduate Student Association |
| PSE | Post-secondary Education Sector |
| QAF | Quality Assurance Fund (2003-04 to 2008-09) |
| QIF | Quality Improvement Fund |
| SAG | Student Access Guarantee |
| SMA | Strategic Mandated Agreements |

Chapter 1. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Over the past few decades, Ontario's post-secondary sector has been facing numerous challenges: enrolment growth has continued at a steady pace; funding from the government has not been indexed for inflation; and the composition of the enrolment body has changed to now include greater numbers of international and minority students. In this context, ensuring that the quality of the post-secondary educational experience is maintained and that publicly-funded post-secondary institutions are accountable have become primary concerns. This call for increased accountability, however, is not specific to post-secondary education, as it echoes the pervasive interest in this area across the broader public sector.

Despite the heightened interest in accountability, there are still important knowledge gaps regarding its meaning, its operationalization and its implications: definitional issues have been widely recognized and documented, strong theoretical backgrounds to guide its operationalization are lacking, and studies regarding the impact of accountability measures on performance, actors and organizations are few. This study contributes to closing this knowledge gap by advancing our understanding of accountability in the Ontario post-secondary sector via the analysis of one specific instrument, the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYA/MYAAs), introduced by the Ontario government in 2005. Moving from the general to the specific, this study links public policy with public management (Winter, 2003b), by starting with an analysis of the context in which a public policy is approved, followed by its implementation and finalizing with an assessment of its transformative power at the organizational and sector-wide level. It is an ambitious exercise that remains within scope given its focus on the MYA/MYAAs and their implementation by Ontario universities.

Given the interest in understanding implementation decisions made by universities as the result of the introduction of a new instrument, the research process initiated with a literature review aimed at developing a theoretical framework that would explain the behaviour observed at the organizational level as a reaction to changes in their environment. However, the research questions posed at the outset went beyond implementation decisions, as there was an interest on identifying both intended and unintended consequences of the new instrument and on understanding the impact of the initiative on the relationships between actors in the policy network. Therefore, the operationalization of the study privileged a qualitative data collection that would be analyzed inductively. Consequently, the theoretical framework originally developed was deemed insufficient and thus revised iteratively and expanded to encompass ideas from other relevant areas that will be outlined in detail throughout this study.

The first chapter of this thesis presents the object of study and the research objectives. In section 1.1, the context and genesis of the research problem are outlined. This is followed in section 1.2 by the main research question that drives the inquiry as well as the more specific research objectives framing the analysis. In section 1.3, the discussion turns to the academic and social contributions that justify this study, including (i) an analysis of the post-secondary education sector from a public policy perspective; (ii) a contribution to implementation studies; (iii) understanding

accountability relationships and the appropriation of accountability instruments; and (iv) furthering our knowledge about the Ontario post-secondary sector. The chapter finalizes in section 1.4 with a presentation of the plan for the thesis, where the content of each chapter is briefly summarized. The discussion starts with the presentation of the research problem.

1.1. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the past few decades, the economic role of post-secondary institutions has become increasingly prevalent in policy-making considerations. Governments worldwide are concerned about augmenting human capital and fostering a highly educated workforce, both outcomes from investments in educational systems (Burke, 2005; Ontario Ministry of Finance [MOF], 2005c; Rubenson & Fisher, 1998). As a result, universities have been re-conceptualized as crucial engines of economic growth, critical to the future economic success of their countries (Alexander, 2000; Harvey & Stensaker, 2011; Kirby, 2007; Rubenson & Fisher, 1998; Shanahan, 2009b). Since the 1970s, this re-conceptualization of the role of universities has been a major driving force behind significant changes observed worldwide, including massification,¹ greater internationalization, marketization and a growing role of the government in monitoring post-secondary education (PSE) quality (Alexander, 2000; Enders, 2004; Gürüz, 2008; Jones, 2004; Kirby, 2007; Shanahan, 2009b).

These changes have taken place within the larger globalization phenomenon, as many governments opted to reduce the welfare state and to embrace changes in public administration practices, often labeled together as New Public Management (NPM), with a view to increase their economic competitiveness in a global economy (Charih & Daniels, 1997; Crespo, 2001; Ferlie, Musselin, & Andresani, 2008; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Under the NPM banner, an emphasis on rules was replaced by an emphasis on results (Charih & Rouillard, 1997; Gow & Hodgetts, 2003; Hood, 1991), and promoted, among other things, funding allocations based on competitive and outcome-based approaches (Alexander, 2000; Haque, 2000). Thus, “outcome indicators (...) emerged as an instrumental economic rationality device to improve institutional efficiency and effectiveness” (Alexander, 2000, p. 422). In addition, as post-secondary institutions were given a larger share of the burden to ensure the competitiveness of a given economy, public funds became a more important source of revenue than in the past in some countries, and governments felt compelled to ensure the sector was efficient and performing; thus, accountability requirements became more prominent (Amaral, Karseth, & Jones, 2002; Gürüz, 2008). Market choice, herein defined as students choosing the university and program that are suitable to them (Lemelin, 1999), and peer reviews were deemed insufficient indicators of institutional performance, and the interest in performance funding and budgeting for higher education in OECD countries increased (Alexander, 2000; El-Khawas, 2007; Lang, 2013).

An interest in accountability, however, was not new. Reporting requirements, law compliance and institutional monitoring had existed for some time (Gauthier, 2004). The difference was

¹ In 1973, Trow developed a categorization of higher education systems based on participation rates: elite, mass or universal. A participation rate greater than 50 per cent is the benchmark established for universal participation (as reviewed in Kirby, 2009).

regarding the extent and shape of new accountability requirements (Shanahan, 2009b). This movement was accompanied by a call for clearer assignment of responsibilities for action and clearer statements of goals and objectives (Hood, 1991), more transparency and demonstrated quality improvements. There was a loss of trust by the government and stakeholders in the system (Callahan, 2006; Shanahan, 2009b; Stensaker, 2009; Suskie, 2006) that was not confined to PSE as a sector or to a specific jurisdiction, as it was observed in many contexts (Aucoin & Jarvis, 2005; Ferlie et al., 2008). In Canada, for instance, the declining trust in public institutions has been described as resulting from the perception that public administration is “bloated (...), wasteful of public resources, out of control and insensitive to the needs of citizens” (Charih & Daniels, 1997, p. 15). The expectation was that performance reporting and other accountability initiatives would help restore the image of public organizations and public confidence (Thomas, 1998).

Despite this generalized wave of change, Ontario’s PSE system enjoyed relative stability until the mid-1990s. With participation rates higher than comparable jurisdictions,² Ontario’s PSE was not involved in the rapid massification process observed elsewhere and that required the investment of additional public funds. In addition, Ontario universities are comparatively autonomous and self-managed institutions, which further sheltered them from government imposed measures when compared to PSE institutions in other jurisdictions (Jones 2004; Fisher & Rubenson 1998).³ Consequently, little policy change was observed in the Ontario PSE sector until 1995, when Mike Harris and the Progressive Conservative party assumed power (Jones, 2004). Ontario would no longer be an exception as the new government moved forward with their *Common Sense Revolution* and their campaign promises of privatization, greater accountability and bureaucratic reform (Callahan, 2006). This *Revolution*, an example of neo-liberal reform, aimed for the reduction of the state via tax cuts, and an increase in the role of the market via privatization (R. V. Barrett & Doughty, 2005; D. Clark, 2002; Jones, 2004).⁴ Moreover, driven among other things by the economic downturn of the early 1990s, the provincial government re-conceptualised Ontario as a learning region that had to rethink its role as the industrial core of Canada and foster the collaboration among different actors to “upgrade the core competencies [required] for knowledge-based production” (Bradford, 2003, p. 1008) and the province joined the international trend of

² The period after the Second World War was one of major expansion of the PSE sector across Canada (Usher & Potter, 2006). In Ontario, for instance, eight universities were founded between 1948 and 1965.

³ Despite the stability described here, there were important discussions taking place regarding system coordination, accountability and university autonomy (Snowdon, 2005b). The historical development of accountability in the Ontario post-secondary sector is further described in section 3.2.

⁴ The introduction of NPM practices by the Harris government was broad in scope: “upon assuming power, the Harris government reduced social assistance by approximately twenty-two per cent in 1995 and announced plans to eliminate the deficit within five years” (Charih & Daniels, 1997, p. 18). Consequently, it touched different sectors including, among others, social and community services (Wesson & Barrows, 2005), the alternative delivery of consumer safety standards (Winfield, Kaufman, & Whorely, 2000), the amalgamation of municipalities and off-loading (D. Clark, 2002) and the amalgamation of hospitals and delegation of responsibilities to regional health boards (D. Clark, 2002; Reeleder, Goel, Singer, & Martin, 2008).

homogenization of the university governance⁵ model across different nations (Amaral et al., 2002; Gürüz, 2008).

As a result, marketization, managerialism and greater accountability initiatives were introduced in the Ontario broader public sector in the late 1990s (Jones, 2004; Shanahan, 2009b). Key performance indicators for PSE were introduced in 1999 and subsequently linked to government funding in 2000 (Alexander, 2000; Callahan, 2006; Shanahan, 2009b). The Liberal government that assumed power in 2003 continued using performance indicators linked to funding and, in 2005, introduced *Reaching Higher*, that further married accessibility and quality goals with funding and accountability agreements (MOF 2005c; Shanahan, 2009b). The *Reaching Higher* plan aimed at transforming Ontario PSE into an “accountable system that is relevant and responsive to the needs of students” (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities [MTCU], 2009b, p. 19) using three preferred means:

- (i) The creation of annual multi-year accountability agreements (MYAAs) between the government and institutions which outline how each university plans to use their operating budget to develop their missions and objectives while contributing to the achievement of the *Reaching Higher* goals and results for access, quality and accountability (MTCU, 2006a);
- (ii) The establishment of a new arm’s-length Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) with the objective to assist the Minister in improving all aspects of the post-secondary education sector, including the quality of education, access and accountability; and
- (iii) The proposal to make Ontario universities subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA).

These new measures for university accountability to the government were legitimized in the government discourse by attributing their need to the loss of trust mentioned above. For instance, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, the Honorable John Milloy, indicated in a public speech: “I have also heard it from students and their parents—that they want more accountability in the system” (Milloy, 2010, p. 8). Similarly, William Banks and his colleagues, in a paper given at the 2004 Administrative Sciences Association Conference, write: “The public needs to know what universities are doing, why they are doing it and whether they are doing it well” (as cited in Usher & Potter, 2006, p. 14). The media also contributed to this perception when writing:

Universities are money pits. There is little relationship between the funding they receive and the number of students they actually educate. Insulated from both the market and the government, there is little incentive for universities to be accountable for anyone but themselves (Jerema, 2010).

⁵ In this context, governance refers both to the *alignment* of authority—that is, who is in control—as well as the *structure* of authority—that is, the arrangement for the authority to be exercised (Leclerc, Moynagh, Boisclair, & Hanson, 1996). This is a different definition than the one associated with observed changes in governing practices where “governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed” (Rhodes, 1996, pp. 652–3) and that emphasizes the process of coordination of actors, social groups and institutions to meet collectively defined objectives (Le Galès, 2010).

This rhetoric assumes that the citizen audience knows and agrees with the inadequacies highlighted, despite lack of evidence in the regard (Pollitt, 1998). In particular for the Ontario PSE example, whether this discourse is shared by the public in general is unclear and the evidence is small: A 2011 survey by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Administrators (OCUFA) and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) suggests that the public's perception does not appear to be as negative as the media portrays it.⁶ Nonetheless, this rationale for introducing new accountability measures is regularly used in a discourse that argues "the government is not getting enough bang for its investment in higher education" (K. Howlett, 2010).

The issue, from an institutional perspective, is that if universities fail to explain what they are doing and why, they remain open to criticism by the media; it is thus in their best interest to earn the public trust (Kennedy, 1997). Therefore, universities appear to recognize the challenge "to respond to legitimate expectations to account for the use of public funds while avoiding loss of institutional autonomy, excessive costs and undue risk to institutions" (Gauthier, 2004, p. 105). Along that line of thought, the position expressed by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) on behalf of individual organizations, during consultation processes predating the *Reaching Higher* announcement, was not to oppose the idea that accountability is necessary, in particular given the importance of public funding. However, it purported that the government should not introduce new unnecessary reporting nor interfere with academic matters, as the preferred means to ensure adequate use of funds is via professional accountability mechanisms (COU, 2004; Stevenson, 2004).

Despite some agreement on the benefits of accountability initiatives, these have not been introduced without misgivings.⁷ There is a sentiment in academia that current accountability measures erode institutional autonomy—that is, the "ability to be self-governing" (Leclerc, Moynagh, Boisclair, & Hanson, 1996, p. 40),⁸ threaten academic freedom, increase workload unnecessarily and are reductionist and simplistic (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Mighty, 2009; Shanahan, 2009b). It is argued that institutional autonomy is eroded when an emphasis on economic-type performance indicators pushes universities to redefine themselves and the quality of education in terms of the labour market, efficiency and productivity in such a way that choices, missions, research and pedagogy are narrowed (Grosjean, Atkinson-Grosjean, Rubenson, & Fisher, 2000; Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Shanahan, 2009b). Moreover, universities are considered more susceptible to consumer demand and market choice due to the publication of performance reports (Callahan,

⁶ According to the survey, 71 per cent of Ontarians trust that "Ontario universities conduct their affairs in an ethical manner" whereas 51 per cent are "confident that Ontario universities manage their finances in a competent manner". Regarding accountability, about half of respondents trust that academic freedom (e.g., curriculum development) should be left to professors, but that the burden to ensure high quality and develop standards is partially shifted to either the government or to the university administration. This echoes the idea that the best group to ensure accountability is the government (31 per cent of respondents), followed by university administrators (26 per cent) and professors (11 per cent). On the other hand, the views are mixed regarding whether universities should have more freedom (33 per cent of respondents agree with this statement) or whether the government should be more involved (21 per cent of respondents agree) (OCUFA & CFS, 2011)

⁷ The literature is quite critical of accountability measures, but some benefits are mentioned as well, including: improved instructional and research effectiveness, more student confidence, improved public trust, better faculty/administration relations and improved institutional profiles that bolster fundraising efforts (Grosjean et al., 2000). This will be further explored in section 2.3.

⁸ The definition of university autonomy is key for this study and will be further developed in section 4.2.

2006). Specifically in Ontario, it was argued that “the Liberal approach of collapsing system level accessibility, accountability and funding goals into one mechanism in the form of the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements, may have strengthened the influence of government priorities on institutional behavior”(Shanahan, 2009a, p. 7). The extent of such influence, however, is unclear as the multiple quality and accountability systems in Ontario provide “institutions with conflicting incentives, rewards and penalties” (I. D. Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009).⁹

The concerns regarding the impact of accountability measures on autonomy do not remain at the organization-wide level, but are also expressed with regards to academic freedom. For instance, threats to the latter have been observed when organizational changes that conform to the norms and needs of businesses take place (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) and due to the standardization of curriculum, teaching methods and assessment and evaluation across universities (Shanahan, 2009b, p. 6). Faculty lives and attitudes are affected (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Focus is driven away from teaching and research (Shanahan, Fisher, Jones, & Rubenson, 2005), due to the “extensive amounts of time, money, and energy are expended to implement the range of accountability exercises for which we are increasingly responsible. (...) Inevitably fatigue, cynicism and resentment sets in” (Shanahan, 2009b, p. 13). Finally, accountability measures are considered simplistic, when they exclude important, but immeasurable, areas, for which institutions should be accountable, such as quality assurance processes (Grosjean et al., 2000; Mighty, 2009) or when they fail to answer key questions (Salmi, 2009).

The examples provided above illustrate the debate and tension observed in the sector regarding the basic principles of autonomy of post-secondary institutions, of trust between the public sector and its agencies and of the government’s push for more accountability and proven responsibility. Despite the introduction of important initiatives intended to increase accountability and to obtain better results, as promised by NPM principles, it is unclear to what extent the public perceives that these objectives have been attained whereas academics speak out about numerous (and perverse) unintended consequences. The debate also exemplifies the complexity of accountability as a concept. The basic dictionary definition speaks of explaining behaviour, justifying conduct, demonstrating responsibility in the exercise of duties, and being transparent (Shanahan, 2009b) or of being responsible, answerable, explicable, understandable, comprehensible, and interpretable (Stensaker, 2009). In practice, however, the content and implications of accountability measures depend on its context, origin and implementation, and these elements are important when trying to understand its consequences.

The period for implementing *Reaching Higher* ended in 2010 and conversations between the government, universities and higher education stakeholders about the definition and design of a revised accountability framework started in 2008-09. As it will be explained in section 3.3, the objectives of the MYA/MYAAs evolved and a new instrument for accountability was introduced, the

⁹ Given Clark et al. (2009)’s emphasis on accessibility throughout their analysis, the examples of conflicting incentives are provided in that context. Specifically, the authors indicate that “of the four systems that influence the behaviour of universities, two—the funding system and the MYAA process—promote accessibility; one—the required performance indicator reporting system—is neutral with respect to accessibility (...); and the other—the quality assurance system—discourages accessibility” (p.133).

Strategic Mandated Agreements (SMAs). Although there is some academic literature that analyzes accountability measures in Ontario's post-secondary sector (Bruneau & Savage, 2002; Callahan, 2006; I. D. Clark et al., 2009; Grosjean et al., 2000; Mighty, 2009; Shanahan, 2009b), these studies do not provide a systematic analysis of the impacts that new or existing accountability measures have produced nor why such impacts are observed. In particular, there is very little information about what consequences the introduction and use of MYA/MYAs has had for the Ontario post-secondary sector.

There is thus an opportunity to contribute to the debate outlined above by analyzing and explaining the impact on universities of a small component of the large accountability spectrum, such as the MYA/MYAs, and examining how universities, as organizations, dealt with the new requirement. Under what circumstances do institutions embrace and appropriate the accountability policies imposed on them? To what extent did they participate in the conceptualization and development of the new requirements? What implementation choices are made and why? What have been the consequences, both intended and unintended, for both faculty and administrators? Are there any changes resulting from the MYA/MYAs observed in the academic activities of universities? Do organizational choices help explain the changes observed? Such an analysis will provide important information contributing to the ongoing debate on accountability and also contribute to the understanding of the policy process, as it will shed light into how a policy evolves during its implementation (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978). The specific objectives for this study are outlined in the section that follows.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

As mentioned above, accountability demands for post-secondary education are not new, however the extent and context of such demands have changed over time. Public universities around the world have been asked to participate in increasingly complex accountability measures ranging from key performance indicators to comprehensive quality assurance schemes (OCUFA, 2009b). In Ontario, a redefinition and justification of accountability in economic terms is being observed as requirements are shifting from law and financial reporting to quality and performance measurement. Moreover, the context has become more complex as the number of stakeholders¹⁰ to whom an organization is required to be accountable increases (Shanahan, 2009b). Consequently, Ontario's PSE has joined the worldwide trend for an increased emphasis on accountability (OCUFA, 2009b).

As a result, there are nowadays multiple accountability instruments with different objectives. This study chooses one accountability instrument introduced by the Ontario government—the requirement to develop three-year MYA plans with subsequent annual report-backs (MYAs)—as the entry point to analyze how universities appropriate and embrace new accountability measures

¹⁰ Stakeholders of post-secondary institutions include parents, prospective and enrolled students, internal community of the institution, accreditation agencies, federal and provincial governments, the business community, education associations, the mass media and tax payers (Dugan, 2006), as well as corporate donors, alumni, and any funder who may have "a financial stake" on their financial success (Mighty, 2009, p. 16).

and thus, whether and how they are transformed as a result. Such an analysis will shed light on the role that organizations play in the implementation of a policy, on the organizational changes driven by policy, and on the consequences that the observed changes may have on the relationship between post-secondary institutions and the government regarding autonomy, trust and governance.

The general questions that guide the study are: How have accountability policies introduced with *Reaching Higher* (2005-2010) been implemented in Ontario universities and why have organizations made those implementation choices? What do these implementation choices reveal about how accountability is interpreted and internalized by Ontario universities? What does this reveal regarding university/state relationships and faculty/administration relationships? Specifically, the study will:

- Describe and characterize the MYA/MYAAs, including an analysis of their origin, development and evolution.
- Identify, analyze and explain the strategies used by universities for implementing MYA/MYAAs between 2006-07 and 2008-09.
- Identify, analyze, characterize, and explain the intended and unintended consequences that MYA/MYAAs have had on Ontario universities and other sector stakeholders, as a result of the choices made.
- Analyze what those policies and instruments reveal regarding the relationship between government and institutions, in terms of governance and autonomy. Assess whether their introduction has affected the relationships under analysis and if so, characterize and explain the changes.

Although the impetus in the use of accountability measures is observed in both Ontario's colleges and universities, it is generally recognized that their missions are quite different; thus "policy discussions in higher education in Ontario have typically revolved around the particular sector rather than around the totality of the system" (Shanahan et al., 2005, p. 12). Consequently, this study focuses solely on the Ontario university sector. In addition, this study is not an exercise of program evaluation in the sense of assessing whether the objectives set out by the government in *Reaching Higher* regarding accessibility and quality were achieved or not, nor an assessment of the validity of the wider policy goals set by government (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009). Moreover, this study does not intend to provide an evaluation of the MYA/MYAAs, aiming at establishing direct cause and effect linkages (Jacob, 2010; Layne, 1999; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989; Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1998). Rather, within a public policy analysis perspective, this study investigates the impacts or effects of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs, broadly defined in terms of their transformative power vis-à-vis university behavior and relationships between stakeholders. The academic and social relevance of this study are discussed next.

1.3. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This research makes a direct contribution to the study of public administration with an inquiry interested in implementation decisions—where policy analysis and public management converge.

Although at the outset, the study examines how Ontario universities react to and appropriate a new policy requirement, it transcends implementation decisions and probes how the context and the policy development choices affect the operationalization of the new requirement and the consequences it has on different actors. In that regard, the analysis contributes to the literature that unveils implementation as policy in action, in constant evolution (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978), giving consideration to the role played by the definition of objectives (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Sabatier, 2008) as well as the broad effects induced by the introduction of instruments of public action (Lascombes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010).

Furthermore, the object of study is an accountability instrument in the Ontario post-secondary sector. Not only has the post-secondary sector been generally understudied from a public administration perspective (Ferlie et al., 2008), accountability studies are only recently developing as a research field in its own right (Dubnick & Frederickson, 2011). Therefore, this research contributes to these specific fields with an empirical analysis that highlights how policy decisions, and the push for greater accountability, affect universities and why. These contributions are described in detail in the sections that follow, organized in four major areas: (i) Analyzing post-secondary education from a public policy perspective; (ii) Within public policy analysis, contributing to knowledge about the implementation “black box”; (iii) Understating accountability relationships and the appropriation of accountability instruments; and (iv) Furthering our knowledge about post-secondary education in Ontario.

1.3.1. ANALYZING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FROM A PUBLIC POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Not only is post-secondary education considered a relatively under-researched field that has lagged in the development of scientific enquiry (Kohoutek, 2013), in addition, few studies bring a public policy or public management perspective into it (Ferlie et al., 2008). Its research roots are not in government policy considerations but rather in educational concerns, and thus policy questions are not asked as often (Hearn & Lacy, 2009), and research in this field is often theme-based and application-oriented, particularly in the North American literature (Kohoutek, 2013). Also, many researchers, think tanks and academics interested in higher education produce policy research “with the express purpose of informing educational policy, [but] they rarely engage in policy analysis to assess systematically the alternative policy choices that could be made to address any particular problem” (Weimer, 2009, p. 93). Thus, the literature focuses more on the cost of policies and their effects on student educational outcomes rather than focusing on how such policies affect the decision-making of administrators or on explaining the genesis or emergence of particular policies (Hearn & Lacy, 2009).

However, government plays an instrumental role in guiding post-secondary education: it dictates policies and provides funding that influences and drives the sector. Policy analysis in this area is thus an important concern, particularly in a time when many external forces, such as internationalization, globalization, and marketization, are impacting post-secondary institutions. The interest in the post-secondary sector from a public policy perspective has been more prevalent

in the European literature, concerned with the study of implementation of large-scale higher education reforms (Cerych & Sabatier, 1986; Kohoutek, 2013) and has increased in recent years, particularly given the European Bologna process—which has been studied as an example of public policy transfer and convergence (Dobbins & Knill, 2009)—and the changes in the governance structure of European universities (Enders, Boer, & Weyer, 2012).

This research will contribute to that renewed interest in the public administration perspective in the post-secondary sector within the Canadian context, with an analysis of the implementation of a policy, framed within a public policy perspective. It inquires about the consequences of a policy on the “academic heartland” or core areas of post-secondary education: research, teaching and learning (Kehm & Teichler, 2007). In that regard, it contributes to the objective of helping reconnect the micro world of higher education with the macro world of the state (Ferlie et al., 2008). Moreover, drawing upon the public administration literature, this study will help identify challenges, complexities and areas for further research in the post-secondary education field.

1.3.2. CONTRIBUTING TO KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION “BLACK BOX”

Public policy implementation studies enjoyed a moment of glory in the 1970s and 1980s, when important theoretical developments were made regarding two competing approaches: top-down versus bottom-up (M. Hill & Hupe, 2002; Kohoutek, 2013). However, given the difficulties in reconciling these two perspectives, no comprehensive theory of public policy implementation emerged, and traditional style studies in this research area diminished since the mid-1980s (M. Hill & Hupe, 2002; Kohoutek, 2013; Winter, 2003b). Implementation studies, continued, nonetheless, under alternative lines of enquiry, using different labels and in more applied areas of research (Gornitzka, Kyvik, & Stensaker, 2005; M. Hill & Hupe, 2002; Kohoutek, 2013; O’Toole Jr., 2000), including, as Winter (2003b) indicates, the following areas: institutional theories, governance studies (Bogason, 2000), the study of networks and network management (O’Toole Jr., 2000), formal and deductive approaches, public administration (Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009), management studies (Bardach, 2001), regulatory enforcement and compliance (Kagan, 1994), principal-agent theory (Brehm & Gates, 1999; Winter, 2003c) and policy design and instruments (Hood, 2007; M. Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004).

Furthermore, public policy implementation continues to be an issue of concern, particularly in an era of governance herein defined as having a wider range of actors participate in the delivery of public policies, with an interest to assess their delivery capacity (Le Galès, 2010). Despite the value of implementation studies, few of this kind have taken place regarding post-secondary education policies (Gornitzka et al., 2005). This has been explained by the complex and multifaceted character of higher education policies that render traditional implementation theories unfit for the sector and the introduction of an “evaluative” state that has directed our attention to a more pragmatically-driven analysis of the evaluation of policy outcomes (Kohoutek, 2013). Nonetheless, “the power and politics around decisions occurs after adoption and during implementation, [thus...] a significant question would be how state policies come to be interpreted and further operationalized at the campus level” (Hearn & Lacy, 2009, p. 953).

This study contributes to bridging this literature gap by looking at one specific public policy, the introduction of a new accountability instrument to the Ontario post-secondary education, with an implementation studies lens, focusing on the choices that are made at the organizational level to respond to the new requirement. Complementarily, the analysis of the instrument contributes to our understanding of how policy implementation and formulation are intertwined, since means and ends are inseparable (Miljan, 2008). Moreover, the recognition of policy implementation and formulation as intertwined processes highlights that focusing on the actions of implementers helps reveal what happens with a policy in action and how it evolves (M. Hill & Hupe, 2002; Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009), in a sense of policy in evolution (J.-E. Lane, 1987; Majone & Wildavsky, 1978). Finally, the specific questions in this study regarding the intended and unintended consequences of a particular policy instrument, as well as how its use may empower or weaken actors (Ferlie et al., 2008) will contribute to the implementation studies literature that focuses on instrument choice and design as it goes beyond technical considerations, and inquires about the breadth and depth of its effects (Lascombes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010).

1.3.3. UNDERSTANDING ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE APPROPRIATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS

The pervasive use of accountability measures in post-secondary education is concurrent with a similar trend across public administration bodies. As a result, “accountability studies” have become a topic of interest in public administration research over the past two decades, that has made progress in regards to the “nature, dimensions, methods, techniques, consequences and dilemmas of accountability in public organizations” (Yang, 2011, p. 256). Nonetheless, it is still considered an “embryonic field” (Dubnick & Frederickson, 2011). Recently, the need to empirically research the mechanisms that “connect accountability institutions with actor behaviors and organizational/societal outcomes” as well as investigating “how are accountability institutions produced and reproduced by actors” has also been highlighted (Yang, 2011, p. 266).

This study contributes to this line of research by discussing how Ontario universities reacted to the introduction of the MYA/MYAs and the strategic approaches used to respond to the new requirement, as it is expected that accountability measures may change the structure and content of post-secondary education (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011). That is, the appropriation of the instrument during its implementation phase and the dynamic and interactive process this involves are empirically researched. In addition, as universities internalize the new accountability instruments, it is expected that this will have some transformative power in terms of their behavior and their relationships with other stakeholders. This is an innovative contribution as the post-secondary education literature regarding accountability measures often takes a more descriptive approach, focusing on how the policy was developed (El-Khawas, 2007) and since the empirical literature on implementation and the impacts of accountability on institutional behavior, although growing (Sá, Kretz, & Sigurdson, 2013), is limited (I. D. Clark et al., 2009). Furthermore, when available, this literature it is criticized for lacking an analytical understanding of the impact of accountability instruments as it is rarely grounded on solid theoretical frameworks (El-Khawas, 2007).

The concept of accountability and quality in post-secondary education are difficult to distinguish and each “have spawned distinct bodies of literature” (I. D. Clark et al., 2009, p. 113). Although accountability could be considered a broader term, a working definition indicates that accountability refers to demonstrating quality—presenting outcomes; whereas quality refers to measures intending to improve quality—the introduction of processes (Suskie, 2006; Usher & Potter, 2006).¹¹ This definition, albeit simplistic, allows separating the analysis of the introduction of quality assurance schemes—intended to improve quality—from the introduction of new reporting mechanisms or performance indicators—intended to report on it. Furthermore, in the post-secondary education sector, the literature that focuses on impacts deals primarily with quality improvement measures (Botha, Favish, & Stephenson, 2008; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Csiszmadia, Enders, & Westerheijden, 2008; Dill & Beerkens, 2010a; Meade & Woodhouse, 2000; Wahlén, 2004; Westerheijden, Hulpiau, & Waeytens, 2007). In addition, the few studies that inquire about reporting requirements, tend to discuss impact and adoption of accountability measures in general (Currie, DeAngelis, de Boer, Huisman, & Lacotte, 2003; Harvey & Stensaker, 2011; Huisman & Currie, 2004), without focusing on the specific consequences that one single instrument may have. As a result, the conclusions are relevant at a high-level but do not delve into how one instrument may be introduced, negotiated, implemented and, consequently, evolve.

Finally, this study analyzes the evolutionary process of the instrument and the impact on sector stakeholders, a relatively unexplored field of research in the PSE literature. In that regard, the analysis contributes to the literature on the introduction and impact of performance agreements or program contracts, which is very sparse (Chevaillier, 1998; García de Fanelli, 2006; Gornitzka, Stensaker, Smeby, & De Boer, 2004; Hölttä, 1998; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010).

1.3.4. FURTHERING OUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

The generalized call for more empirical studies about the relationship between post-secondary education institutions and government policies (Hearn & Lacy, 2009) or for providing more analyses of accountability policies worldwide grounded on empirical analyses (I. D. Clark et al., 2009), apply to Ontario as well. There have been some studies of accountability in Canada and in Ontario, including among others: (i) An analysis of the impact of using performance indicators on the social sciences, arts and humanities in Canada, using a case study approach (Grosjean et al. 2000); (ii) An analysis of the alignment between accountability instruments and government/institutional goals in Ontario for both colleges and universities using a survey of administrators and government representatives (Callahan, 2006); (iii) An analysis of the alignment

¹¹ The discussion regarding measures to demonstrate quality versus initiatives to improve it is also normative as there is significant debate regarding the value added and adequacy of using performance indicators. On one hand, institutional quality assurance policies and public departmental reviews are offered as preferred alternatives to the use of reports on quality since they respect institutional autonomy and collegial governance models (Julien, 2006). On the other hand, some authors consider that these processes preclude innovation and the government must play a greater role as a regulator (I. D. Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009). This normative discussion is set aside in this analysis since the focus is not on determining what the best method to demonstrate quality is but rather on understanding the impact that methods chosen so far have had.

between accountability and quality measures in Ontario with societal goals (I. D. Clark et al., 2009, Chapter 5); (iv) A historical analysis of performance indicators in Ontario's PSE system with a strong normative recommendation that the choice of accountability measures should be primarily driven by universities themselves and not by the government (Bruneau & Savage, 2002); (v) An analysis of the consequences of introducing performance indicators in different jurisdictions including a laundry list of potential consequences, stressing that the context will affect what is observed (Grosjean & Atkinson-Grosjean 2000); and (vi) An analysis of the voluntary disclosure of performance indicators by Canadian universities (Maingot & Zeghal, 2008).

However, there has been no systematic analysis of the impacts of particular policies or of the role that organizational choices play in explaining such impacts. Although "the intertwining complexities of multiple, contributing factors make it difficult to isolate definitive causal links between the imposition of performance models and changes" (Grosjean et al. 2000), this thesis purports that focusing on the role played by different stakeholders in the definition and implementation of an accountability tool, including the strategic choices made by universities during implementation, will contribute to an understanding of how these accountability are produced and reproduced in the province and identify whether and how they have contributed to any transformation in accountability relationships. Finally, "Canadian higher education is in transition, but it is a transition in which there is little clarity in terms of the overall direction or objectives, little analysis of what may be lost as a function of reform, and little sense of how the various components of this increasingly complex puzzle fit or do not fit together" (Jones, 2006, p. 644). By focusing on an in-depth study of a policy in Ontario, this study will contribute with a small piece to help solving this puzzle.

1.4. PLAN FOR THIS THESIS

As it was indicated in the introduction, the research process for this thesis was initiated with the development of an analytical framework sought to explain the strategic choices made at the university-level. Given that the context in which the policy was introduced, as well as elements of its introduction and development, were identified as key factors contributing to answer the general questions guiding this study, the framework was expanded to provide insights to analyze those topics. Consequently, the analytical framework was constructed drawing from elements from different disciplines, an approach justifiable in PSE given the organizational complexity of colleges and universities (Amaral, Gornitzka, & Kogan, 2005; Bees & Dee, 2008). Moreover, as the data collection stage was completed, and the observations revealed areas of analysis that went beyond the approach originally developed, the framework was enriched iteratively with tools to pursue the analysis.

The literature review and the theoretical framework are presented in four interrelated chapters. This organization allows for drawing elements from different disciplines in such a way that they are not randomly superposed and clarifies the process of building the analytical framework on the basis of different approaches. The presentation starts in chapter 2, *The Impetus for Accountability in the PSE Sector* that elaborates on the presentation of the research problem under study to further explore accountability as a concept and as a practice in PSE. Looking at the

literature from different jurisdictions, this section provides an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of accountability, its evolution in post-secondary education, and documents the expected impacts of introducing accountability measures in the sector. In Chapter 3, *Accountability in Ontario's Post-secondary Sector*, the system that is analyzed in this study is described in detail and the evolution of accountability measures in the province is summarized. This chapter provides a short history of the MYA/MYAs from their introduction to their current state in 2013, providing a clear context for the analysis that follows.

As this thesis focuses on the introduction of accountability measures for universities, Chapter 4 discusses the importance of undertaking *Policy Analysis with a Focus on Organizations*, and justifies the choice of universities, defined as organizations, as an appropriate object of study within the discipline of public policy analysis. Moreover, drawing from the literature on university governance, the discussion contributes to our understanding of universities as distinct organizations which opens up questions regarding sources of control and university autonomy that are briefly explored to help scope this thesis, and that will be useful in the analysis of the transformative power of the MYA/MYAs. The discussion continues with an analysis of the contribution that organizational theory can make to understanding change at the university level. Numerous organizational theories have been used to study adaptation in the context of post-secondary education institutions (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999; Sporn, 1999); however, in this study, the model developed by Christine Oliver (1991), that operationalizes the complementary character of neo-institutional and resource-dependency theories, is chosen as the basis for the discussion.

The analysis of the Oliver model highlights its weaknesses in terms of its explanatory power. That is, the model identifies the different strategies that universities can undertake as a reaction to the introduction of a new requirement, but falls short in helping determine what strategy will prevail. Understanding that the narrative of accountability measures stresses the impact it will have on the sector, it is deemed important to analyze under what circumstances certain behaviours at the organizational level can be expected, since these behaviors will be major determinants of the type and scope of the impacts observed. For that purpose, the search for a complementary approach is presented next. Specifically, since questions of control and autonomy are closely linked to the topic of accountability, the contributions that principal-agent theory can make to its analysis and their complementarity to the Oliver model are explored in Chapter 5, *Organizations, Accountability and Policy Instruments*. William Massy (2011)'s model for analyzing the introduction of accountability measures in the PSE sector and the reaction of universities is presented in detail. Since the rational behavior assumptions imposed by the principal-agent theory framework are somewhat restrictive, its premises are compared against the Oliver model. The Massy and Oliver models, nonetheless, focus on the implementation decisions made by universities. To move the discussion beyond that process, the presentation continues with an exploration of insights from the literature on policy instruments, where their non-neutral character is highlighted, as well as their role revealing the structure of the relationships "between the governing and the governed" (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 3). This literature completes the theoretical framework to help identify and explain impacts on stakeholder relationships.

Those four chapters delineate the object of study and complete the analytical framework and literature review. Chapter 6 outlines the methodological approach chosen, and the stages of research developed for this study. The analysis was scoped by focusing on Ontario universities and their implementation strategies during the first round of the MYA/MYAA from 2006-07 to 2008-09. First, a detailed documentary analysis of first-generation MYA/MYAA across Ontario's twenty universities was undertaken. This analysis was complemented with additional information regarding their content, evolution and general impacts obtained via twenty-one semi-structured interviews of relevant players from central organizations and stakeholder groups. The interview guide did not restrict itself to the strategies undertaken by universities, as the broader research questions called for a more open guide that would help reveal the impacts felt in the sector. In addition, to better understand the impacts of the MYA/MYAA at the organizational level, three universities were chosen to pursue an in-depth documentary review and an additional sixteen semi-structured interviews with university staff and key stakeholders (including faculty, student and board of governor representatives). Due to material limitations in this last stage of fieldwork, the insights obtained via this process are integrated throughout the analysis and not presented separately.

There are six additional chapters that present the field work results. In Chapter 7, *A Moving Target: Origin and Objectives of Ontario's MYA/MYAA*s, the reasons behind the introduction of this new instrument are presented, including the influential Rae Review, the possibility for policy transfer from other Canadian provinces, the perception of reduced trust in the PSE sector and the evolution in accountability requirements. This is followed by a discussion of the objectives the MYA/MYAA aimed to accomplish, the key characteristics of the instrument and the reasons why this specific type of instrument was chosen. This presentation focuses on the reasons for the government to introduce a new policy and aims at assessing what the objectives were and whether these were clearly defined or ambiguous (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Sabatier, 2008). Using the four dimensions of accountability instruments, the analysis demonstrates how the instrument evolved and was redefined throughout the different stages of its introduction and the discussion explores what the instrument and its objectives reveal regarding university and government relations (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010)

In *Chapter 8, Development and Implementation of Ontario's MYA/MYAA*s, the emphasis is shifted towards universities and other stakeholders in the sector to understand their participation in the formulation process. In that regard, the chapter provides a brief discussion of the reception the agreements had in the sector, the consultation process that ensued, and the universities' efforts to influence the policy process. This is followed by an analysis of the implementation choices made at the time including the universities' approach for setting strategies and targets and the ministry's approach to review the plans and the grant associated funding. It is noted that universities, in general, privileged initiatives that were easily attainable or already planned for, and that most minimized the use of stretch targets to manage risk. Regarding the government's follow-up strategy, it is noted that they focused on monitoring and explanation, and that an emphasis was placed on compliance at a superficial, and often symbolic, level.

*Chapter 9, Analysis of Ontario's MYA/MYAA*s Content, summarizes the content of the plans and report-backs between 2006-07 and 2008-09 for Ontario's twenty universities. The presentation

follows the types of content provided in the agreements, including a brief discussion of *Reaching Higher* commitments excluded from the agreements, areas on which reporting was required without establishing institutional objectives, and strategies and targets requiring the three main objectives of accountability, accessibility and quality. Each of these elements is analyzed using the Massy (2011) model to explain the strategies observed at the university level. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the drivers in the Massy model and their role as forces of change in the implementation of the MYA/MYAA thus highlighting the importance of the saliency of the rewards, the power of the metrics chosen and the degree of priority alignment.

Chapter 10, A Policy in Evolution: Transformation of Ontario's MYAAs and Introduction of a New Instrument analyzes the changes in the MYAAs since 2008-09 in terms of their transformation into a data gathering tool and discusses the shift of the strategic discussion towards a new accountability instrument, the Strategic Mandated Agreements. Based on that analysis, the documentary review and the comments from stakeholders, the chapter concludes with an analysis of expectations vis-à-vis an instrument of accountability instrument in the Ontario PSE sector and asks what has been attained in that regard with the introduction of the MYA/MYAA requirement. The discussion is guided by the elements that have been identified in the literature as characterizing accountability instruments (Bovens, 2005a; Harvey & Stensaker, 2011; Thomas, 2007).

Chapter 11, The Transformative Power of Ontario's MYA/MYAAAs, identifies the different effects that the analysis of this accountability instrument reveals, regarding both the degree of internalization of new expectations on the part of universities; and regarding state/university relationships and university internal relationships. The discussion is organized along the following themes: (i) the role played by the MYA/MYAAAs as sources of information; (ii) the changes observed in the university sector regarding their interest in sharing their stories with the government; (iii) the effects that the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs had on the degree of priority alignment between the government and the universities; (iv) the changes observed in university autonomy vis-à-vis the government as a result of the MYA/MYAAAs and what this reveals regarding their role as an instrument of control; and (v) what the analysis reveals regarding the alignment and structure of authority (governance) in Ontario universities.

The thesis concludes with *Chapter 12, Final Conclusions and Further Research*, where four overarching themes that emerged throughout the analysis are presented, including the value of ambiguity in a world where policies continue to be developed and introduced with a top-down preference, the role that performance agreements play as instruments that promise an acceptable balance of the expectations regarding autonomy and control, the role that university management plays in the introduction of buffering strategies to shelter university autonomy and the elusiveness and dynamism of accountability as a concept and the implications for its operationalization. Finally, a series of appendices documenting the methodological approach are presented for reference purposes at the end of this study.

Chapter 2. THE IMPETUS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PSE SECTOR

As it was discussed in the previous chapter, the interest in accountability measures is a world-wide phenomenon, which touches all fields within the public sector. Not being unique to Ontario nor to the post-secondary education sector, this discussion builds on the underpinnings of the accountability movement in general, followed by an analysis of its evolution in the PSE sector in particular. For that purpose, the presentation starts with an overview of the concept of accountability and its theoretical background, as well as a presentation of the different typologies available for its analysis. This is followed by a summary of the reasons behind the introduction of accountability measures to the post-secondary sector and the explanations offered for its pervasiveness. The chapter concludes with a summary of the impacts of accountability in PSE as documented in the literature.

2.1. A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Accountability is a fundamental value in Canadian public administration, due to its importance in the context of a parliamentary system (Leclerc et al., 1996).¹² In that regard, in the Final Report of the 1979 Lambert Royal Commission on Financial Management and Accountability, accountability is defined as “the essence of our democratic form of government. It is the liability assumed by all those who exercise authority to account for the manner in which they have fulfilled responsibilities entrusted to them, a liability ultimately to the Canadian people owed by Parliament, the government, and thus, every government department and agency” (as cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 590). As such, agencies or government organizations “are subject to some form of external control, causing them to give a general accounting of and for their actions” (Leclerc et al., 1996, p. 45). It is thus a process of control that allows for the scrutiny of what the government is doing—that is, goals and objectives—and how they are working towards those objectives—that is, programs and actions (Johnson, 2006).

This is a conceptualization of accountability as “political responsibility”: It is externally imposed and since it emphasizes to whom and for what one is responsible, it is characterized as objective since it calls for a rational account to be given (Jackson, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Kernaghan & Siegel, 1999). Accountability as objective and externally imposed was the position defended by Herman Finer in his debate about this topic with Carl Friedrich in the 1930s-40s. According to Finer, accountability is akin to a sense of responsibility, as obedience for explicit direction and thus the relationship between politics and administration is unidirectional (Jackson, 2009). Alternatively, Friedrich purported that accountability may also be defined as “moral responsibility” and result from self-regulation and a sense of duty (Jackson, 2009; Kernaghan & Siegel, 1999). In the latter approach, the flow between politics and administration is expected to be two-way in both

¹² In fact, the concept of ministerial responsibility is considered a major legacy of the “era of the United Province of Canada (1840-1867) [as with] the granting of responsible government by the Colonial Office in 1848, whereby the government (i.e., the Executive Council) had to hold the confidence of a majority of the legislative assembly” (Gow, 2012, p. 1).

“technical and political matters” (Jackson, 2009, p. 70). This debate continues to be relevant regarding the approach and instruments for accountability that are privileged in the public sector.

In a government setting, accountability can be established via both formal and informal lines of control, which have been synthesized into a three-pronged model (Johnson, 2006):

- Political responsiveness: Government actors should respond to superior authorities, resulting in the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. Ministers are responsible to Parliament and Cabinet must maintain the confidence from Parliament to remain in power. In turn, public servants are required to support the Minister;
- Legal responsiveness: Ministers and public servants must observe the rule of law and the procedural and substantive requirements of administrative law, their actions can be then evaluated by the courts which have the right to overrule any decisions deemed unjust; and
- Social responsiveness: An element that is controversial and touches on the subjective elements of accountability. Actions from the government should happen for the public interest, which in turn is dependent on the ideological position of the evaluator.

Traditionally, in a context of ministerial responsibility, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are collectively responsible for the performance of the government, and individually responsible for the official actions of their departments; in turn, public servants are anonymous to the public and only directly accountable to ministers (Thomas, 1997). The anonymity of public servants has been debated since the 1979 Lambert commission proposed that civil servants may be held accountability independently from the minister (Sutherland, 1991). Moreover, since 2006, with the introduction of the *Federal Accountability Act*, deputy ministers are now designated as the individuals having to give account in their own name “of their management before the appropriate parliamentary committees” (Gow, 2012, p. 2). Thus, despite being considered a fundamental value, there are limits that have been observed in practice regarding the strength of parliamentary accountability. For instance, the introduction of NPM practices with regards to ministerial responsibility may allow for blame avoidance (Gow, 2004; Weaver, 1986). That is, providing public servants with more autonomy coupled with new expectations vis-à-vis their personal and direct answerability for performance can leave a void in ministerial responsibility since ministers “cannot be held accountable in the sense of being required to resign if mistakes are made” (Thomas, 1997, p. 154). One example of the challenges faced with these new practices is observed in New Zealand, where upon the development of contracts between politicians and civil servants, and the development of adverse events, “ministers attempted to unload blame onto public servants [... who] fought back by accusing ministers of back door interference and/or inadequate resources” (Thomas, 2003, p. 553). On the other hand, the concept of minister responsibility has not been put in practice often, as it has led to very few resignations for bad administration of their portfolios (Sutherland, 1991).

In addition, the social responsiveness dimension suggests that accountability is not a politically neutral term and, therefore, should be studied within its political and sector-specific context.¹³ For instance, in the education sector accountability rests on:

Assumptions regarding the proper role of education in a democracy; assumptions regarding the role of various community members in the education of their children; assumptions about the role of the state in the educational process; and even assumptions about the nature of human beings and human interactions” (Gross, Shaw, & Shapiro, 2003).¹⁴

At a more general level, the basic dictionary definition of accountability speaks of explaining behaviour, justifying conduct, demonstrating responsibility in the exercise of duties, and being transparent (Shanahan, 2009b), as well as of being responsible, answerable, explicable, understandable, comprehensible, and interpretable (Stensaker, 2009). However, those dictionary-like definitions of accountability fail to highlight its complexity. “Accountability is an essentially contested and contestable concept, because there is no general consensus about the standards for accountable behaviour; in addition, they differ from role to role, time to time, place to place, and from speaker to speaker” (Bovens, Schillemans, & Hart, 2008, p. 227). This polysemy is exacerbated by the numerous mechanisms available by which someone can be asked to be accountable, therefore making it difficult to “conceptualize the term consistently” (Erkkilä, 2007, p. 6), as well as by the lack of a clear theoretical framework under which to study accountability initiatives (Dubnick & Frederickson, 2011). Accountability is therefore recognized as a “problematic area conceptually, empirically and theoretically” (Dubnick & Yang, 2011, p. 171), and as such, “remains a conceptually amorphous idea that eludes our empirical grasp” (Dubnick & Frederickson, 2011, p. xiv).

Following Mulgan & Bovens, in this study accountability is defined as the report or answer that an accountant—an actor—gives to an account holder—or a forum—, where the latter has the right and authority to require such reports, and can impose sanctions as a result (Bovens et al., 2008; Bovens & Schillemans, 2010). In this definition, accountability is seen as a social mechanism or institutional relation, and the literature that uses it explores the way in which these institutional arrangements operate and whether agents can be held accountable *ex post facto* by accountability forums (Bovens et al., 2008; Bovens & Schillemans, 2010). This definition of accountability as an institutional arrangement, in turn, focuses our attention on issues of power and control, which is at the core of the analysis of accountability in the post-secondary education sector, given that its potential impact on university autonomy is an issue of concern. The emphasis is placed on answerability for performance in the context of an authoritative relationship and on ensuing sanctions or rewards (Thomas, 1997), where sanctions can be either tangible, such as reduced funding or symbolic, such as blame, guilt, humiliation and loss of reputation (Thomas, 2003).

¹³ For example, the choice of accountability instrument may be affected by the degree of institutional autonomy observed in a jurisdiction (Shanahan, 2009b).

¹⁴ In an analysis of educational accountability in the United States, three philosophical underpinnings for accountability measures are identified: progressive, i.e., all individuals should have access to education; essentialist, i.e., education is required to promote economic growth and competitiveness in the international scene; and free market, i.e., educational organizations compete for clients (Gross, Shaw, & Shapiro, 2003).

It is important to distinguish this approach to accountability from one where accountability is perceived as a personal or organizational virtue (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010), and where the emphasis is placed on values. That is, it reflects a subjective sense of responsibility, not only to formal authority, but also “to internalized norms and values” (Thomas, 1997, p. 142). The distinction is, to a certain extent, an artificial one, since respect for accountability requirements are not only a function of external control mechanisms but “also a product of internalized perceptions” held by individuals (Thomas, 1998, p. 349). In that sense, Thomas appears to be moving away from the Finer-Friederich dispute regarding the dichotomy between political responsibility and moral responsibility. Moreover, in an implementation framework that recognizes that policies continue to be developed during their execution, it is argued that moral responsibility and political responsibility cannot be completely separate as internalized norms and values will play a role in execution decisions (Gregory, 2003). The distinction, nonetheless, helps identify research traditions as the later tradition will tend to focus on the assessment of the behaviour of public agents (Bovens et al., 2008).¹⁵ In this study, the emphasis will not be on assessing the behavior of universities or government, or whether their actions and the instrument under analysis make them more accountable or not. Rather, the analysis will focus on what the choices made during implementation reveal regarding the accountability relationship between Ontario universities and the provincial government.

The four dimensions of accountability developed by Mulgan (2003) are a useful tool to disentangle the complexity of accountability and improve the understanding of the object of study. According to this approach, accountability instruments can be categorized according to the four dimensions outlined below (Bovens et al., 2008; Mulgan, 2003):

- The object of accountability – or who is accountable, e.g., a government, an institution, a program, a complete system;
- The standards of accountability – or accountability for what, e.g., for fulfilling the institution’s mission, for financial administration, for performance, for demonstrating quality;
- The agents of accountability—or to whom they are accountable, e.g., to the government, to the public, to students and their parents; and
- The means of accountability—or what form accountability takes.

These contextualizing parameters allow for categorizing accountability at a given point in time, as well as for differentiating its objectives and stakeholders. In addition, these dimensions are not fully independent from each other but rather interact with each other. For instance, different standards—“accountability for”—will often come from different objects—“accountability to” (Yang, 2011). These four dimensions have also been used to highlight the evolution of accountability as a concept and of its instruments, particularly under the banner of the NPM movement (Bovens et al., 2008; Haque, 2000; Romzek, 2000; Thomas, 2003), where new accountability modalities have been

¹⁵ This concept is considered akin to that of social responsibility developed by Carl Friedrich and briefly described in footnote 13 above.

introduced and where the number of accountability requirements in the public sector have increased (Bovens et al., 2008; Le Galès, 2004). These changes are justified in a context where “the state is far too complex and modes of delivery are sometimes difficult to understand that accountability must be developed through means other than political accountability” (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011, p. 9).

The evidence of changes across jurisdictions and sectors is important. In Australia, the NPM movement resulted in the introduction of greater public accountability, particularly in the form of performance indicators in diverse sectors, including public transport, public hospitals, government audit offices, social housing and universities (Watts, McNair, & Baard, 2010). In the United Kingdom, structural changes were initiated in central and local government in health services and public utilities (Le Galès, 2004; Tuohy, 2003). In particular, “business methods were introduced into government, changing both external (privatization, contracting out) and internal relationships (performance measures)” (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 86) and new accountability measures accompanied cost-cutting goals across different sectors (Hood, 1991). Similarly, in the Canadian federal government, the *Public Service 2000* exercise in 1990 aimed at “introducing a more people-, results- and service-oriented management” at a time when cost-cutting initiatives, alternative service delivery options and downloading of responsibilities to the provinces was promoted (D. Clark, 2002, p. 782). In Alberta, governmental deficits were used as the justification to introduce monitoring systems, business plans and performance indicators (D. Clark, 2002). These changes are summarized by Haque (2002) as follows:

- The standards of accountability have shifted from being substantive (i.e., focus on equality and representation) to becoming instrumental (i.e., focus on efficiency and productivity). This is illustrated by the movement from law and financial reporting requirements to quality and performance measurement (Shanahan, 2009b), as governments are not only interested in results but also on achieving better results (Kettl, 1993).
- The agents of accountability have changed. Rather than being accountable to the public in general, government agencies are now accountable to customers—a reductionist view of those who can pay. Moreover, in some cases sectors, accountability involves an increasing number of stakeholders to whom to be accountable to (Shanahan 2009).¹⁶
- The means of accountability have shifted their emphasis to outcomes, thus placing attention on what is being achieved without looking at the process by which it is being achieved.

Furthermore, some authors argue that within New Public Management approaches, accountability has become not only an instrument but a goal in itself. As it has gained symbolic value, it is often used as a rhetorical tool to convey an image of good governance (Bovens, 2005a). The government thus transformed from being protective of its own bureaucracy to become

¹⁶ The agents of accountability can be external or internal (Haque, 2000); moreover, accountability initiatives can emanate internally from institutions or be imposed externally (Leclerc et al., 1996; Trow, 1996). In that regard, Ontario’s Management Board of Cabinet indicates that “internal accountability holds public servants answerable to their line superiors for their own actions and the actions of their subordinates... External accountability holds public servants answerable to the public as well” (as quoted in Kernaghan & Siegel, 1999, p. 370).

evaluative (Neave, 1998) in what has been called the “audit society” (Power, 2000). In addition, to deal with the conflicting, and often normative, expectations of various stakeholders requires a great deal of skill in mastering the symbolic aspects of accountability (Stensaker, 2009), which further reinforces such character. Recognizing that accountability can be both a means and an end is helpful in advancing further research in the area, and highlights the importance of power relations in understanding this concept (Dubnick & Yang, 2011). For instance, when accountability becomes a rhetorical tool to convey the image of good governance, it can be risky for organizations to protest against it (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011).

Nonetheless, there may be circumstances under which accountability requirements may be ethically problematic (Messner, 2009). For instance, “behaviours that are legal and accountable can be unethical and immoral” (Thomas, 2003, p. 553) as in the case of police officers working for an oppressive regime that may act in an accountable fashion vis-à-vis their superiors but that in the course of their work become involved in irresponsible or unethical activities against citizens (Gregory, 2003). In addition, there may be ethical reasons why the possibility to be fully accountable may be difficult. For example, (i) it is expected that accountability will be opaque when decisions are made intuitively, as the individual is not fully conscious of its own decision-making; (ii) the burden for accountability may be such that it can affect the conduct of the person being held accountable; and (iii) expecting one individual to fulfill contradictory requirements from diverse stakeholders may be ethically questionable (Messner, 2009). Although the ethical character of accountability requirements will not be a focus of this research, it is noted that the numerous stakeholders universities are accountable to, and the possibility of carrying important accountability burdens, may condition university behaviour.

Each of the dimensions of accountability outlined above—object, standards, agents and means—can be further analyzed with typologies that help categorize a given instrument. In that regard, the means of accountability can be categorized according to its level, ranging from descriptive or low-level initiatives (i.e., describe a factual event in a qualitative or quantitative way) to explanatory or high-level initiatives (i.e., either the event is to be explained or those involved must justify it). This distinction is relevant when analyzing the increase or decrease of accountability, since in some instances there has been a shift from low-level to high-level accountability (Currie et al., 2003). There has also been important work done aimed at categorizing the standards of accountability (or accountability for what) into different accountability relationships according to the degree of autonomy of the accountor and the source of expectations and control, as illustrated in the table below. Currie et al (2003), building on work by Romzek (2000) identify four distinct accountability relationships as follows: (i) Hierarchical, which implies obedience to organizational directives; (ii) Legal, which consists of compliance with external mandates; (iii) Professional, which highlights deference to professional judgment and individual expertise; and (iv) Political, which results from responsiveness to key external stakeholders. Although distinct relationships are identified, the authors recognize that these are not unique and may even overlap. For instance, in the post-secondary education sector, hierarchical, professional and legal accountability are observed simultaneously.

TABLE 2-1: TYPES OF ACCOUNTABILITY, VALUE EMPHASES AND BEHAVIOURAL EXPECTATIONS

| Sources of Expectations and Control | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| | Internal | External |
| Degrees of Autonomy | Low | Hierarchical |
| | | Value: Efficiency Expectation: Obedience to Directives |
| | High | Legal |
| | | Value: Rule of Law Expectation: Compliance with Mandates |
| Degrees of Autonomy | Professional | Political |
| | | Value: Expertise Expectation: Deference to Judgment and Expertise |
| | High | Value: Responsiveness Expectation: Responsiveness to Stakeholders |
| | | Stakeholders |

Source: Currie et al. (2003), p.114.

Further research, presented in table 2.2 below, has aimed at expanding the four quadrants above to consider other accountability relationships such as personal accountability, performance in a market setting and deliberation in the public sphere (Erkkilä, 2007). Once again, these categories are not unique or mutually exclusive resulting in possible overlaps in a given sector or context. For instance, performance accountability is not solely concerned with the market as it is often used in contexts of bureaucratic accountability. A clear example of that, related to the shift in the definition of ministerial responsibility mentioned above is observed in New Zealand, where departmental heads were replaced by Chief Executives, hired on term contracts that specified the key results and outputs expected from the department. Accountability to the minister was promoted through the use of reports and performance indicators: “Ministers remained in theory *accountable* to Parliament for the performance of their departments, but the CEs were *answerable* before parliamentary committees for the administrative actions of their departments” (Thomas, 1997, p. 155). This is similar from the process observed in Canada with the introduction of the *Federal Accountability Act* in 2006, where deputy ministers have to give account in their own name (Gow, 2012).

TABLE 2-2: TYPES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

| Type | Features | Mechanisms of Accountability | Context (Structure) |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| Political accountability | Democratic, external | Democratic elections, chain of accountability | Democratic state |
| Bureaucratic Accountability | Hierarchic, legal | Rules, regulations, supervision | Bureaucracy |
| Personal accountability | Internal, normative, moral | Culture, values, ethics | Collective |
| Professional accountability | Complex, ‘deferent to expertise’, peer-oriented | Expert scrutiny, peer review, professional role | Expert organization |
| Performance | Output or client-oriented | Competition, self-regulation | Market |
| Deliberation | Interactive, deliberative, open, public | Public debate, deliberation, transparency, access to information | Public sphere |

Source: Erkkilä (2007).

Thomas (2003) describes the different approaches to accountability with a different angle, in terms of “accountability dichotomies. Different kinds of accountability are presented along in opposition to each other. Although these dichotomies are popular, their use is simplistic as they

provide an “unrealistic description of the world of practice where multiple meanings exist” (Thomas, 2003, p. 552). The dichotomies are summarized in the table below.

TABLE 2-3: ACCOUNTABILITY DICHOTOMIES

| | | |
|--|----|---|
| Political accountability | vs | Administrative accountability |
| Formal, objective accountability | vs | Informal, subjective accountability |
| Procedural/compliance accountability | vs | Performance/results |
| Hierarchical accountability | vs | Non-hierarchical (e.g., contracting out/partnerships) |
| Retrospective accountability | vs | Prospective accountability |
| Blaming/punitive accountability | vs | Learning/remedial accountability |
| Internal accountability | vs | External accountability |
| Centralized accountability | vs | Devolved accountability |
| Accountability for actions | vs | Accountability for inaction |
| Bureaucratic accountability (answerable to politicians and citizens) | vs | Customer accountability (answerable to clients/customers) |
| Legal accountability | vs | Moral accountability |
| Symbolic accountability | vs | Real accountability |

Source: Thomas (2003).

This short discussion about accountability has illustrated the polysemic nature of the concept, which translates not only in difficulties for defining it, but also the difficulties in its implementation, as the meaning and purpose of accountability instruments may be multiple and even irreconcilable. It also outlined diverse typologies available, regarding the dimensions of accountability and the character of accountability relationships, that contribute to a better understanding of a given accountability instrument. Although these typologies are imperfect, especially when more than one accountability relationship is observed in a given sector or organization, any analysis of accountability will benefit from clarifying its dimensions and the main agents involved. In addition, a good understanding of these dimensions and relationships may provide insights regarding the expected impacts of the introduction of a particular accountability measure, as their different characteristics are important. The discussion now turns to an overview of the accountability movement in the post-secondary education sector.

2.2. THE ACCOUNTABILITY MOVEMENT IN THE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR

Since the late 1970s, there has been increased interest in accountability measures in the post-secondary education sector, and public universities around the world have been asked to implement increasingly complex accountability measures ranging from key performance indicators to comprehensive quality assurance schemes (Shanahan, 2009b). These sector-specific changes echo those of the accountability movement in general, where a shift towards more complex stakeholder reporting relationships, greater use of instrumental accountability mechanisms and a greater emphasis on outcomes is observed. The reasons for the change in accountability in PSE that have been identified in the literature can be summarized as follows:

- The re-conceptualization of the role of higher education institutions as crucial engines of economic growth, critical to future economic success of countries (Shanahan, 2009b), has been exacerbated by “an emerging view of higher education as an industry rather than as a social institution” (Schmidtlein, 2004, p. 164). Thus, the massification of higher education, accompanied by increased funding needs and rising post-secondary education costs (Alexander, 2000; Shanahan, 2009b), has raised “doubts about the efficient allocation of resources, and effective cost containment” (Schmidtlein, 2004, p. 164). As post-secondary institutions were given a larger share of the burden to ensure the competitiveness of a given economy and, in many jurisdictions, public funds became a more important source of revenue,¹⁷ governments felt compelled to ensure the sector was efficient and performing, and thus accountability became more prominent (Alexander, 2000; El-Khawas, 2007; Shanahan, 2009b).
- Lack of confidence on the appropriate management of universities due to the traditionally decentralized, loosely coupled, institutional governance processes that are common at organizations primarily comprised of professional employees, accompanied by a lack of trust and suspicions regarding the accuracy and relevance of data provided by institutions (Schmidtlein, 2004, p. 164). Concurrent with a process of demystification of the sector and lack of trust from society at large¹⁸ these ideas are used to justify a call for further control and demand more transparency (Shanahan, 2009b; Trow, 1996).
- Discussions about student mobility and credential recognition led to initiatives promoting harmonization, standardization and quality improvements, such as the Bologna process in Europe (Shanahan, 2009b). These ideas have put additional pressure on institutions to measure and demonstrate the quality of their services (El-Khawas, 2007; Shanahan, 2009b).
- The “belief that the bureaucratic imposition of quality assessments will provide a means to overcome perceived management shortcomings” (Schmidtlein, 2004, p. 164) and that the “growing complexity must be met with greater quality in individual roles and responsibilities in service delivery” (Stensaker, 2009, p. 25).
- The reduction of the welfare state and new public administration practices under the banner of New Public Management (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), including, among others, adaptations towards funding based on competitive and outcomes-based approaches. Thus, “outcome indicators have emerged as an instrumental economic rationality devised

¹⁷ This is a description of the general trend observed worldwide. In Ontario, contrarily to the trend observed elsewhere, the relative share of public funding towards post-secondary institutions has decreased over time. Specifically, government funding to universities decreased from about 0.85% of Ontario’s GDP in 1976-77 to about 0.4% in 2000-01 (Mackenzie, 2004). Although provincial government grants accounted for 47 per cent of universities operating revenue in 2011-12, this share decreased from 52% in 2000-2001, with an increase in the contribution of tuition fees compensating for this trend (COFO, n.d., Financial Report).

¹⁸ The concerns regarding the quality of the education provided as to ensure its contribution to economic outputs are identified at the core of the loss in trust. The challenge herein for universities, is that whereas “satisfaction is the result from service experience [... trust and] confidence, or lack of it, does not require contact with the organization at all” (Flanagan, Johnston, & Talbot, 2005, p. 374). Therefore, this lack of trust that builds from the perception of lacking quality is often times not linked to first-hand experiences (Sarrico, 2010).

to improve institutional efficiency and effectiveness” (Alexander, 2000, p. 422). Within this context, student (market) choices and peer review were deemed insufficient indicators of institutional performance (Alexander, 2000), providing additional reasons for an interest in performance funding and budgeting for higher education in OECD countries (Alexander, 2000; El-Khawas, 2007).

Different theoretical explanations have been provided for the changes observed on both sides of the Atlantic, including new public management, entrepreneurialism and academic capitalism (Sporn, 2007). New Public Management practices, primarily introduced since the 1980s, aimed at making the public sector more efficient and effective (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). The higher education sector is thus, under the NPM banner, re-conceptualized as an industry and expected to model itself after the corporate model (Escotet, 2005; Kogan & Marton, 2006; Schmidlein, 2004; Sporn, 2007). In turn, this translated in some jurisdictions, into granting more autonomy to universities, and into a more prevalent use of market-like mechanisms of control (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011). As a response to these new external demands, universities developed mechanisms to deal with them, dubbed entrepreneurialism by Burton R. Clark (1998), which is characterized by a strengthened steering core, a diversified funding base, and the development of peripheral commercial activities. In turn, Clark posits, such developments can only be supported by a change in organizational culture that introduces more professional management while maintaining the traditional core academic “heartland” (B. R. Clark, 1998). Finally, the reconceptualization of higher education as an industry is a driving characteristic of Slaughter and Leslie (1997)’s academic capitalism, which outlines the implications of this force in practical terms as (i) management, i.e., more professional administration of universities; (ii) consumerism, i.e., the portrayal of the student as a consumer that must be satisfied; and (iii) stratification, i.e., the differentiation of missions across universities (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Sporn, 1999).

Although the role of the state is changing, and the models used to explain change in regulatory mechanisms in the United States and Europe tend to emphasize the role of the market and of managerialism practices, this does not mean that the role played by governments is reduced. Rather, the movement observed is from an interventionist state towards a regulatory state, where new rules are established to deal with market approaches and decentralized government practices (Majone, 2008). In post-secondary education, most universities continue to function in a system where the public sector plays an important role and the market and the institution are nested within the state. State authority is key in three areas: Funding, regulation and promoting accessibility (Pusser, 2008). Furthermore, the state plays a regulatory role in establishing a legal framework and in being evaluative; it also plays a strategic role in developing specific sector policy strategies (Neave & van Vught, 1991). Consequently, the continued importance of the government in the sector should be recognized.

Regarding accountability practices, amidst this wave of change, post-secondary education is considered to be:

Heavily influenced by national, cultural or institutional particularities and histories [which can result] in an interesting development with creative mixes as to how accountability schemes appear as a

combination of the 'old' and the 'new', incorporating various national and international elements (Stensaker, 2009, p. 24).

As a result, the degree to which accountability practices are institutionalized in different jurisdictions is varied: in some places, it is commonly accepted, in others, it is a recent phenomenon, and elsewhere, it is contested (Currie et al., 2003). In that regard, although the introduction of an instrument such as the MYA/MYAA that was first conceptualized as an agreement between universities and government is fairly recent in Ontario, the use of similar tools has been in place in other jurisdictions, even for several decades in some cases. A brief description of these follows, where the differences in content, breadth and linkages to funding are briefly summarized.

Performance agreements or contracts generally consist of “a written statement setting the institution’s objectives and the metrics that will be used to gauge their achievement” (Massy, 2011, p. 232), also defined as a contract of an economic character where the relationship between two parties is specified in terms of “tasks, processes and outcomes” (Gornitzka et al., 2004, p. 88). Although a distinction has been made between performance agreements—where funding is provided only when certain outcomes, such as the number of graduates are met—and performance contracts, where there is no additional funding associated with it (Lang, 2013), in this study, the distinction is not made and both concepts are used interchangeably. In general, performance contracts are expected to be beneficial, since it assumes that organizations “will have a better understanding of the production process of their programs and more incentive to demonstrate improved outputs, since they must report in a public fashion” (Thomas, 1997, p. 156). In the Canadian post-secondary sector, the use of such agreements is documented in Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia. In the following paragraphs these experiences are briefly presented.

In British Columbia, an accountability framework including three-year Institutional Accountability Plans and Reports, updated annually, has been in use since 2002-2003. These plans and reports “include goals, objectives and performance measure results for each institution along with contextual information to describe the institution's role in providing services to their students and communities” (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Technology and Innovation, n.d.). As of 2012, institutional and system-level performance indicators and targets in the following areas are produced: student enrolment, credentials awarded, aboriginal students, student satisfaction, unemployment rate, sponsored research funding, transition rates from high-school to PSE, loan repayment, retention rates, and participation rates (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology, 2012). In Quebec, three-year performance contracts were signed by 18 universities between 2000 and 2001 (Bernatchez, 2003). These included a description of institutional objectives and targets and the processes to attain them. Furthermore, upon negotiation with government, incremental funding was to be assigned to support the plans (Bernatchez, 2003; Crespo, 2001; Fecteau, 2002; Ratel, 2005). The breadth of indicators and targets included in these agreements is vast, as there is mention of promoting the development of graduate studies and research initiatives, of being open to partnerships to further research, of accelerating the internationalization of the university, and developing the offer of services (Bernatchez, 2003; Fecteau, 2002). Universities crafted their specific performance indicators in eight categories: graduation rates, participation rates, international students, student support, faculty recruitment,

academic programs, research and a balanced budget (Gauthier, 2004). However, these agreements were short-lived and were not renewed, although the reasons for their dismissal are not found in the literature (Ratel, 2005; Snowdon, 2005a). In Alberta, universities prepare institutional mandates indicating their mission and institutional strengths that include neither metrics nor targets but that are approved by the government (Fougère, 2011). In addition, “universities have to submit to the provincial government, four-year business plans outlining goals, objectives, performance indicators and targets” (Ramlal, 2009, p. 39); these include metrics and enrolment projections that reflect provincial priorities (Fougère, 2011).

Outside of Canada, examples of these kinds of agreements are found in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Catalonia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic, Sweden, and the United States, (Fougère, 2011; García de Fanelli, 2006; Goedegebuure, Santiago, Firznor, Stensaker, & van der Steen, 2008; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Strehl, Reisinger, & Kalatschan, 2007). These vary regarding their legal form as well as the obligations and rights included; that is, both design and content vary across jurisdictions (Strehl et al., 2007). To illustrate the variability in implementation practices, a number of examples are briefly discussed. In France, institutional contracts were initiated in 1989-1990 with the goal to decentralize the university sector and to meet certain objectives at the national-level (Fecteau, 2002). Universities developed institutional-level, four-year strategic plans, where:

Each institution tried to formulate its strategy in terms of teaching programs and related needs in terms of recurrent funding, equipment and new staff or staff retraining. The negotiation with the Ministry resulted in the definition of the courses the university could offer and for which it would obtain recurrent financial support from the State (Chevaillier, 1998, p. 72).

These were teaching contracts, but research activities related to the contract were introduced later on (Chevaillier, 1998; Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001). The main driver of funding allocations for teaching activities in France is student enrolment by discipline (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001).

In Catalonia, Spain, program contracts were introduced in 1997 with the objective to link funding to the achievement of objectives. Initially, there were two types of contracts: Type B contracts, of three years in length, for new universities and geared towards resolution of human and material deficiencies; and type A contracts, four years in duration for established universities that had quality improvement as their primary aim (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). The indicators are numerous as the contracts touch on diverse areas of university functioning including student enrolment, alumni labour market integration, consolidation of research and development activities, technology transfer activities, and resource planning (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Argentina introduced program-contracts in 2005, following the example of the French and Catalanian experience. These contracts link the results of program evaluation and accreditation with the development of funding instruments aimed at improving quality (García de Fanelli, 2006). There do not appear to be predetermined areas for performance indicators (e.g., enrolment, graduation and retention rates, etc.); rather, these are identified by universities according to the strategies included in each of their plans (Ministerio de Educación, Argentina, n.d.).

In Flanders, a new funding model was introduced in 2008 that combines formula funding and contracts. The contracts consist of multi-annual agreements between the Ministry of Education and Training and the individual university, where they will “set out agreed objectives and targets, formalize the commitment of the institution to achieving these, and stipulate the amount of funding to be allocated” (Frølich, 2008, p. 24). Indicators include information on student enrolment, on degrees awarded and on the number of publications and citations. In Finland, since 1998, university presidents and ministry representatives sign three-year university plans where the goals of the institution are agreed upon, such as the number of graduate degrees to be awarded during the contract period, and funding is included in the agreement (Frølich, 2008; Hölttä, 1998). These are reviewed annually and negotiation takes place throughout the year (Gornitzka et al., 2004). In Sweden, universities enter three-year agreements with the government regarding teaching and research. These are primarily based on student enrolment and their achievement (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001), and funding is linked to performance (Gornitzka et al., 2004).

In New Zealand, the Tertiary Education Commission, a policy implementation agency, negotiates charters and profiles with institutions to meet the system-wide direction set in the Tertiary Education Strategy developed by the government. The charters contain information on the university’s mission, strategic direction, policies and performance targets within the context of integrated funding (Goedegebuure et al., 2008). In Denmark, government and universities can enter into voluntary four-year contracts that specify performance goals for teaching and research, and that identify the university contribution to national priorities; these are unlinked to funding (Gornitzka et al., 2004). Finally, in Germany, contracts between a few universities and the government setting out performance expectations and financial appropriations to meet those expectations have been developed (Gobbels-Dreyling, 2003).

The short overview of performance agreements above demonstrates that there are a number of similar characteristics across these agreements: they are multi-year, universities are required to set targets and report back on their performance, and, in many cases, funding is attached to these. However, there are also variations in their implementation, regarding the outcomes that are included—ranging from enrolment and graduation rates to research activities, labour market integration and commercialization—, the length of the planning period, and the degree of negotiation and consultation between universities and government that takes place to establish the agreements. Despite the differences, the pervasive use of performance agreements in post-secondary institutions constitutes a clear example of how the accountability movement has had an influence on post-secondary education across the world.

Furthermore, many of the articles regarding the introduction of accountability measures in the form of performance contracts acknowledge their introduction as an example of government initiatives promoting management by objectives (Chevaillier, 1998), “steering, not rowing” (García de Fanelli, 2006), and financial models based on objectives and results (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010), as recommended by NPM proponents and neoliberal ideologies (Bernatchez, 2003). In her report, Noline Frølich explicitly acknowledges that the objective of her 2008 report is not to critique the philosophical underpinnings of NPM practices, but that the analysis “gives ample evidence of the challenges associated with these changes” (p.7). Nonetheless, the objective of most articles is to

provide an assessment of the technical success of the instruments that are in use. In that sense, the approach is more traditional or pragmatic, as it assumes that the choice of instruments is a “political-technical endeavor of solving problems via instruments” (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2010, p. 329) and disregards Gaudin (1999)’s view that “this type of instrument’s chief legitimacy derives more from the modernist and, above all, liberal image of public policy, of which it is the bearer, than from its real effectiveness, which is in fact rarely evaluated” (as reviewed by Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 13).

Finally, some of impacts observed across different jurisdictions –and described in the following section– tend to converge, even despite important differences in their technical implementation, as reforms going by the same titles often present considerable diversity of practices (D. Clark, 2002; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004) and a tool abstracted from its context is not the same tool (MacDonald, 2005). Despite the differences in implementation, the observed convergence is explained as a result of the powerful symbolic dimension of these instruments, that convey and formalize the rhetoric of the NPM movement (Frølich, 2008), as contracts are generally perceived as instruments that allow for adequate regulation in sectors where there is a permanent search of autonomy (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). The next section focuses on teasing out what impacts have been observed from the introduction of accountability measures in general, and more specifically, on the basis of the existing empirical literature on performance agreements and contracts.

2.3. IMPACT OF ACCOUNTABILITY CHANGES ON POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Given the numerous forms and shapes that the impetus for accountability has taken across the world, coupled with the varied degree of institutionalization of accountability practices, many authors have called for a test of the powers and promises of accountability (Dubnick & Justice, 2004). Moreover, it is unclear whether the objectives behind the introduction of new accountability practices have been met and what other consequences have they had. Unfortunately, the debate is generally “remarkably light on assessment tools and methods” and few of those who debate the benign or pathological effects of public accountability discuss the standards they employ for their analysis” (Bovens et al., 2008, p. 230). In addition, accountability as an external influence on institutional behavior can range “from a broad steer, leaving to the institution a measure of autonomy over the implementation of policy, to the direct commands of an external regulatory agency which uses accountability to ensure compliance with specific policies and directives, and designs its system of reports to ensure that conformity” (Trow, 1996, p. 4) and this will dictate the degree of impacts observed. Moreover, the discussion of impacts and transformation is often framed within the author’s normative perspective vis-à-vis the need for increased accountability. Despite these challenges, this section aims at documenting what is known about the impact of introducing accountability measures on post-secondary education institutions. At a very general level, Trow’s 1996 seminal paper on higher education accountability identifies the functions of accountability as follows:

- It will provide “constraint on arbitrary power and on the corruptions of power, including fraud, manipulation, malfeasance and the like”, due to the obligation to report to

appropriate groups or authorities. As a result, organizational legitimacy is expected to increase (Trow, 1996, p. 3);

- It will increase standards by forcing organizations to “examine their own operations critically, and by subjecting them to critical review from outside” (Trow, 1996, p. 3); and
- It will regulate future action, since the anticipation of having to be accountable shapes decision-making.

These functions are akin to the promises of accountability regarding inputs—improve control and integrity; processes—ensure ethical behavior and legitimacy; and outcomes—promote performance and justice (Dubnick & Yang, 2011). Bringing these two together, the positive impacts of accountability can be summarized in the following four groups: Increased control and regulation, increased legitimacy and integrity and increased performance. Conversely, the introduction of accountability measures can entail negative consequences, including (Trow, 1996, p. 4):

- Weakening the autonomy of institutions when accountability is due to outsiders as “obligations to report are usually disguised obligations to conform to external expectations. And there is, or at least has been, a special case to be made for a high measure of autonomy for institutions of higher education”;
- Due to confidentiality, may be a force against truth-telling and good governance. That is, when accountability reports affect reputation and resource flow, there is an incentive for it to become less an exercise of discovery and more public relations documents, “so a central problem is how to create a system of accountability that does not punish truth-telling and reward the appearance of achievement” (Trow, 1996, p. 6);
- Can work against diversity of institutions as it uses same standards for all; and
- Work against the freedom of professionals to manage their own work and time.

These four negative impacts identified by Trow provide an overarching typology to discuss the impacts that accountability may have and are summarized and rewritten as: Reduced substantive autonomy – or diversity; reduced procedural autonomy; reduced academic freedom; and increased symbolic uses of accountability.¹⁹ Both negative and positive impacts at the organizational level are summarized in the table below.

TABLE 2-4: EXPECTED IMPACTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

| Positive Impacts | Negative Impacts | At the Organizational Level |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Increased control and regulation | Reduced substantive autonomy Reduced procedural autonomy Reduced academic freedom | Reduced substantive autonomy Reduced procedural autonomy Reduced academic freedom |
| Increased legitimacy and integrity | | Increased legitimacy |
| Increased performance | | Increased performance |
| | Symbolic use of accountability | Symbolic use of accountability |

¹⁹ As indicated above, a discussion of autonomy is presented in section 4.2. In general, substantive autonomy refers to decision-making regarding the institution’s mission and strategic areas, whereas procedural autonomy refers to more managerial aspects such as defining organizational processes (Berdahl, 1990; Enders et al., 2012).

The expected impacts on substantive and procedural autonomy should be evaluated taking into consideration the normative bias vis-à-vis the appropriate balance between accountability and autonomy. On one hand, some authors place accountability and university autonomy at opposite ends of a continuum, implying that one cannot be increased without sacrificing some of the other. In this perspective, accountability is viewed as a proxy for institutional control. For instance, an increase in external governance—to the government, to corporations, to the public—reduces institutional autonomy due to external agency and control (Mighty, 2009). Nonetheless, accountability can be associated with high autonomy in a professional environment where control takes place internally (Romzek, 2000). On the other hand, some authors argue that accountability and autonomy are complementary concepts. For instance, Dressel (1980) indicates that “autonomy does not include the freedom to be irresponsible or unaccountable” (p.96). Furthermore, Margaret Simey (1988) in her experience with the police sector argued that “accountability is not about control but about responsibility for the way in which control is exercised” (as quoted in Mackie, Martin, & Thomson, 1995, p. 62).

Although these two positions could be reconciled if translated into a policy question regarding the adequate balance between accountability and autonomy (Raza, 2009; Salmi, 2007), this is a question that remains unresolved and an important area of debate (Alexander, 2000). Furthermore, tension is observed not only between external and internal control, but also due to tension between state priorities, market forces and academic concerns (Burke, 2005). Both private and public institutions are vulnerable to state demands for cost containment and accountability and suggests that state action should seek balance between market demands, state regulation and professional expertise (Zumeta, 2001). Otherwise, universities may shift away from their original ‘raison d’être’, and jeopardize the optimal context for research and innovation that requires a significant degree of autonomy (Raza, 2009).

The literature also questions what issues are of legitimate government concern and which should be left to the institutions (Schmidlein, 2004). For instance, some authors observe that the government appears to be more concerned with substantive autonomy while providing more procedural autonomy to the institutions (Usher & Potter, 2006). Conversely, other authors argue that the movement away from ex-ante regulation towards ex-post evaluation is conducive to institutions that have maintained their substantive autonomy, since these are more often evaluated against their own self-defined mission and less often against an institutional model defined by a regulatory agency (Bergan et al., 2009). Thus, the direction and extent of the impact on substantive or procedural autonomy is conditioned by the specific context, the governance model in place and the accountability measures introduced. The latter point is important, as the balance between autonomy and accountability also appears to hinge on the kinds of indicators that are privileged. Alexander (2000) notes:

Government authorities prefer to use indicators that measure institutional efficiency, consumer satisfaction, job placement, and value for resources. They also advocate using performance measurements as a means of comparing institutional productivity and performance. On the other hand, university administrators and faculty favour performance measures that reflect the quality of the educational experience in a manner that elucidates their own specific institutional mission(s). University leaders also advocate the adoption of performance measures only when they are premised

on the assumption that the results will be used in a non-competitive manner to improve one's own performance (p.426).

There is no consensus on which output measures are appropriate or on which ones provide a reliable accounting of the outputs they are intended to measure. For these reasons, efforts to introduce performance indicators are often met with some combination of scepticism, critique and opposition (Finnie & Usher, 2005).

An additional element of complexity regarding autonomy versus accountability questions is the challenge of its multidimensional character. Post-secondary education is not only subject to accountability expectations externally—vis-à-vis the government or other external stakeholders—, but these also exist internally—vis-à-vis the academic community. As the number of stakeholders increases (Mighty, 2009; Shanahan, 2009b; Stensaker, 2009), the challenges in dealing with multiple accountabilities such as having to deal with conflicting expectations (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010; Bovens, 2005a), become more prevalent. In that regard, “one of the genuine challenges for any head of institution is to ensure there is a balance between managerial accountability and giving a say to the academic community” (Kogan & Hanney, 2000, p. 195).

The third impact in table 2-4 above is observed when individual autonomy, that is, academic freedom, is compromised. Many authors have argued that power is moving away from the academics—those who teach—towards the corporation—those who administer, as a result of a loss of trust in academics for their own management coupled with a reduction of state control, the latter being a condition more prevalent in European countries (B. R. Clark, 1998; Kogan & Marton, 2006; Sporn, 1999, 2007). There is concern with the time taken away from academic activities, as

The never-ending wave of assessment exercises, since each entails different, partly overlapping, reporting requirements and generates its own ‘circus’ of preparatory meetings, dialogues with the accountors, responses to their draft reports, publicity ‘fallouts’ and ‘follow-up’ rituals (...) eats away at the time available to scholars for their primary duties in teaching and research (Bovens et al., 2008, p. 228).

There is an assumption that the increase in externally-imposed accountability demands will trickle down with impacts on faculty members and department chairs, due to the introduction of internally-imposed accountability measures, such as management by objectives, or more paperwork in search of transparency (Boyko, 2009; Frølich, 2008). The impact may as well be unintended, as organizations try to align different accountability expectations, which “may encourage a culture of compliance that might substitute for more effective processes designed to improve teaching and learning” (Currie et al., 2003, p. 118). Too many controls diminish entrepreneurship and make agencies obsess with rules, to a point where suboptimal decisions are made in order to fulfill transparency and accountability requirements (Bovens, 2005a). Such pressures can result in ‘accountability overload’, which is characterized as an:

Accountability regime that: (1) imposes extraordinarily high demands on their limited time and energy; (2) contains a comparatively large number of mutually contradictory evaluation criteria; (3) contains performance standards that extend way beyond both their own and comparable authorities’ good practices; and (4) contains performance standards that seem particularly conducive to goal displacement or subversive behaviour. The more of these four characteristics a given accountability

regime can be said to possess, the higher the likelihood that it defeats its purposes (Bovens et al., 2008, p. 229).

The fourth element in table 2-4 above, legitimacy, is equated in the accountability literature with the provision of reports or information (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011; Trow, 1996). Although the general literature on accountability appears to be silent regarding the evaluation of this impact and no empirical evidence is presented regarding how institutional legitimacy may have changed as a result of the introduction of accountability instruments, the underlying idea is that organizational legitimacy arises from the acceptance of an organization by its external environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Watts et al., 2010). Thus, when governments exercise public accountability, in the sense of responsiveness, transparency and answerability, this “assures the public confidence in government and helps bridge the gap between citizens and representatives and between governed and government” which helps enhance the legitimacy of public governance (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000; Bovens, 2005a, p. 193), as the value and actions of the organizations are congruent with those of the legitimacy-conferring actor (Watts et al., 2010). Furthermore, using institutionalized practices protects an organization from questioning; thus “publicly funded organizations often implement elaborate management systems to conform to external requirements” in order to protect their legitimacy (Watts et al., 2010, p. 13).

The expectation of increased performance outlined as the fifth impact in table 2-4 has led to evaluating whether new quantitative accountability measures result in increased performance in a given institution. This is particularly relevant in the United States, where since the 1990s, accountability has been presented as a way to increase institutional autonomy that in turn is expected to translate into increased performance (Shin, 2010). Such analyses present mixed evidence, with some concluding that increases in accountability measures have increased institutional performance and other analyses concluding that no impact has been observed (Shin, 2010). It is also indicated that the measures introduced may have changed processes rather than outcomes themselves (Banta, 2010) while the emphasis on quantitative outcomes acts as a force taking attention away from qualitative issues and processes (Mighty 2009; Grosjean et al. 2000).

The sixth impact identified regarding the symbolic aspect of accountability measures also deserves attention. Experience reveals that institutions, when they believe that the information supplied might be used for adverse summative decisions by external agencies, can very creatively provide data that is “accurate” but which does not reveal circumstances that could provoke unwanted actions (Schmidtlein, 2004). Along that line of thought, a four university case-study concluded that the changes observed following the introduction of accountability measures were merely rhetoric (Huisman & Currie, 2004), a possible outcome that is compounded in cases of multiple accountabilities (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010). That is, following neo-institutional theory, the adoption of new accountability or performance related activities may be the result of organizations protecting their survival by conforming to social norms of acceptable behaviour, often translating into the “the introduction of performance indicators as a measure of accountability only serves as a ritualistic/ceremonial means for symbolically demonstrating an organizations commitment to rational decision making” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Watts et al., 2010, p. 13).

On the other hand, changes that may appear symbolic or rhetoric at the external governance level, may induce actual changes in internal governance as processes change; that is, if accountability is a goal, probably different management than the ones traditionally used, are required (Sporn, 1999, p. 33). To evaluate whether a change is more than symbolic, one can evaluate whether there have been reconfigurations in the internal environment (Shin, 2010) since “successful institutional change is [not only] indicated by changes in institutional actions and performance outcomes [but also] as shifts in values, assumptions, and approaches to inquiry, as well as culture (Boyce, 2003, pp. 124–5). When governmental officials attempt to impose decisions on institutions that do not recognize the complex trade-offs and constraints involved, institutions, while frequently giving the appearance of minimum compliance, actually engage in a variety of unacknowledged behaviours to cope with the complex realities of their circumstances (Schmidlein, 2004). Furthermore, as a result of risk-avoiding behavior, if the accountability instrument is geared at measuring performance, it may bias the institutions emphasis into outputs that are easily attainable (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). The table below summarizes the different categories of theoretical impacts identified so far at the organizational level, as well as a few examples that will guide their identification.

TABLE 2-5: SUMMARY OF EXPECTED IMPACTS AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL DUE TO THE INTRODUCTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

| Expected Impact | Direction of Impact | Example |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Substantive Autonomy | • Reduced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering of missions (Dubnick & Yang, 2011; Trow, 1996; Usher & Potter, 2006) Limits on strategic decision-making (Mighty, 2009) |
| | • Neutral | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutions evaluated against self-defined mission (Bergan et al., 2009) |
| Procedural Autonomy | • Reduced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in internal processes (Banta, 2010; Boyko, 2009) Changes in organizational structure (Sporn, 1999); modifications in systems of inquiry (Grosjean et al., 2000; Mighty, 2009) |
| | • Neutral | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leeway to implement externally dictated mission (Usher & Potter, 2006) |
| Academic Freedom | • Reduced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time taken away from teaching and research (Bovens et al., 2008; Currie et al., 2003; Raza, 2009; Trow, 1996) Research focused on commercial activities (Frølich, 2008) Balance between managerial autonomy and the views of the academic community (Kogan & Hanney, 2000) |
| University legitimacy | • Increased | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision/availability of information that meets norms/standards in the sector (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011; Maingot & Zeghal, 2008; Ryan, Williams, Charles, & Waterhouse, 2008; Trow, 1996) Increased standards (Dubnick & Yang, 2011; Trow, 1996) |
| Performance | • Mixed evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes (Shin, 2010) Process improvement (Banta, 2010) |
| Symbolic Accountability | • Increased Use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in rhetoric (Huisman & Currie, 2004; Trow, 1996) Value shifts (Boyce, 2003) Choice of easily attainable targets/outcomes (Frølich, 2008; Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010) |

The extent to which the impacts presented above may be observed will depend on the type of instrument introduced, on its dimensions and on the governance context of the jurisdiction under study. Therefore, the existence or absence of these impacts must be tested empirically. In the sparse literature regarding the introduction of performance agreements, contracts or program contracts, the analysis of the instrument is done with a view at identifying, among other things, the impact that their introduction has had (Chevaillier, 1998; García de Fanelli, 2006; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Based on the documented evidence found to date, it is noted that the introduction of these kinds of agreements has resulted, in some cases, on:

- (i) Increased steering capacity, priority alignment and convergence of objectives between universities and government (Bernatchez, 2003; Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Reich Albertz et al., 2011). In the European context, the steering role implies a change in the relationship between government and universities, as the government “shifts from regulator to supervisor of autonomous universities” (Reale & Seeber, 2012, p. 148);
- (ii) Improved negotiation and collaboration, in the sense of more cooperation and dialogue between government and universities (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010);
- (iii) Clarification institutional autonomy in the sense of academic freedom, diversity and their ability to define their strategic priorities. That is, the core concept of academic freedom as the autonomy to be protected is clarified and universities have the opportunity to choose their own strategic direction, and thus differentiate, under the umbrella of sector-wide priorities (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010);
- (iv) Improved availability of information, internal to institutions, illustrated by the modernization of IT/database systems in France, the anticipated strengthening of institutional research offices in Chile and the general availability of more information (Chevaillier, 1998; García de Fanelli, 2006; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010);
- (v) Modernization of the funding system (Chevaillier, 1998; Reich Albertz et al., 2011);
- (vi) Internalization/appropriation at the institutional level of transparency/accountability duties (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010); and
- (vii) Strengthening of central administrations (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Reich Albertz et al., 2011).

The table below summarizes the impacts and the jurisdictions where these have been documented as a consequence to the introduction of performance agreements/contracts.

TABLE 2-6: DOCUMENTED IMPACTS DUE TO THE INTRODUCTION OF PERFORMANCE CONTRACTS, BY COUNTRY

| Impact | France | Catalonia | Chile | Nordic Countries |
|--|--------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| Priority alignment, steering, convergence of objectives | X | | X | X |
| Improved negotiation and collaboration | | X | X | X |
| Clearer definition of university autonomy & institutional identity | X | X | | X |
| Improved availability of information (internal to institutions) | X | X | expected | |
| Modernization of the funding system | X | | X | |
| Institutional internalization of transparency/accountability duty | | X | | |
| Strengthening of central administrators | X | | X | X |

Sources: Chevallier (1998), García de Fanelli (2006), Gornitzka et al. (2004), Jongbloed & Vossensteyn (2001), Reich Albertz et al., (2011) and Vilalta & Brugué (2010).

Priority alignment, steering and convergence of objectives, or what in the discussion above regarding general accountability studies was presented in terms of control and reduced substantive autonomy, is often mentioned as a benefit arising from the use of performance agreements (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001). However, the literature is relatively silent on the empirical evidence regarding how this objective is attained. For instance, in the case of Catalonia, even though the analysis recognizes priority alignment as an objective, it does not present evidence that it has been achieved; rather success is argued on the basis of observed improvement in quantitative indicators (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Furthermore, two important challenges for priority alignment are identified: First, the definition of system-wide objectives is difficult, and often turn into instrumental objectives such as the economy and system efficiency. Second, the identification of adequate indicators to meet those objectives is demanding, thus, there is a risk that simplistic and readily available indicators are chosen (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010).

In terms of improved negotiation and dialogue, it is argued that the implementation of performance contracts allows for increased trust and cooperation, furthering mutual support, and translating into greater knowledge and understanding of each other (Gornitzka et al., 2004; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010).²⁰ Nonetheless, despite a trust relationship and increased collaboration between government and universities, a contract does not reduce the asymmetry of information between the two, and as a result, universities may have incentives to “slack” during the process of negotiation (Gornitzka et al., 2004). Furthermore, it is important to determine to what extent the increased support happens only at the level of central administration. For instance, Musselin (1997) and Frémont (2004) observe that contracts are unknown to academic and internal administrative

²⁰ Roberts (2002) and Whitaker et al. (2004) even consider that dialogue is in itself an alternative accountability mechanism as the expectations regarding the objectives of accountability are negotiated among the participants (as reviewed by Yang, 2011).

staff which challenges their implementation (as reviewed by García de Fanelli, 2006), as well as challenging the internal staff commitment levels to the objectives (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010).

The impact on autonomy depends on the institutional context in which universities are immersed. For instance, the introduction of contracts in France and Spain is described as a mechanism to provide more autonomy to universities residing in a centralizing state system whereas in Argentina, their objective is to develop a joint strategic vision for universities in a context where they already enjoy significant autonomy (García de Fanelli, 2006). Furthermore, regarding the clearer definition of university autonomy and institutional identity, it is argued that this is improved when the negotiation starts with the university's own strategic plan, that is then compared with the government's priorities for the specific university, as observed in Catalonia (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). This is also argued in Chile, where universities have freedom to choose the field and topics in which they wish to participate for funding, although it is recognized that discretionary power in the use of public resources is reduced (Reich Albertz et al., 2011). Flexibility in choosing the universities initiatives within a flexible governmental goal framework is also interpreted as creating more institutional autonomy (García de Fanelli, 2006). Moreover, the respect to internal decision-making is expected in the use of financial incentives that promote changes in university functioning without "directly intervening in the decision-making processes of autonomous universities" (Moreno, 2012, p. 25). Although this leeway for universities to decide how to respond to the agreements is expected to protect their specific identify, the content of the contracts in reality is not very different and some standardisation has been observed throughout the process (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Furthermore, increased direction in terms of priorities is interpreted, in other jurisdictions where there is already a significant level of autonomy, as an intrusion and a reduction of trust (Gornitzka et al., 2004). It is argued that with the contracts, the "independent status [of institutions] is confirmed in a more formal way than in the past", in a way that central administration may be winning power vis-à-vis faculty members (Gornitzka et al., 2004, p. 96).

The modernization of the funding system is observed when allocation processes shift from input measures towards output measures, and with the introduction of multi-year commitments (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). The challenge with this approach is the risk to steer away from quality issues and focus on outputs—or questions of efficiency, which was observed in most Nordic countries analyzed (Gornitzka et al., 2004). It has also been noted that sometimes all the performance agreement does is to make an "implicit contract" explicit, which in the short term does not translate into any drastic changes in operational terms, as it is simply a formalization of a historically established relationship (Gornitzka et al., 2004). In addition, not in all jurisdictions the experience has been one where incremental funding is allocated. In Germany, for example, the agreements have been used to cut budget allocations (Gobbels-Dreyling, 2003). Finally, although monitoring and evaluation of the progress made regarding the targets set in the contract is a key element of this instrument, it has been observed that these activities do not take place as often as it is intended. For instance, in France, concerns are raised regarding the limited number of actors involved and the potential lack of organization in the negotiation process (García de Fanelli, 2006).

Throughout this chapter, the analysis of the literature regarding the impact of accountability highlights the many challenges faced in teasing out the consequences of its introduction, being one

the political character of accountability and therefore the normative views regarding the need (or not) for its introduction. For instance, some authors believe that governments have no right to impose accountability measures on universities and justify their position using arguments of professional and academic autonomy (Shore & Wright, 2000); other authors believe that it is the natural consequence of governments retreating and providing more institutional autonomy (Currie et al., 2003). Another challenge with the existing literature is that comments about accountability are often made generally, without taking into consideration its diversity (Shin, 2010). For instance, an observation of weakened institutional autonomy may depend on the accountability instrument and the kind of autonomy under study. This suggests that an analysis of accountability must take into consideration the characteristics of the instrument, the decisions made regarding its operationalization, and the context in which it is being implemented. By focusing on one single accountability instrument, this study contributes to this literature by assessing, among other impacts, whether the introduction of the MYA/MYAA translated into a reduction of autonomy, as was feared at the beginning (I. D. Clark et al., 2009; Shanahan, 2009b). To continue with the analysis, the discussion now turns to an overview of accountability practices in Ontario's PSE.

Chapter 3. ACCOUNTABILITY IN ONTARIO'S POST-SECONDARY SECTOR

As mentioned in the introduction, Ontario has often been referred to as the odd-case out among the many changes happening in post-secondary education worldwide. However, in recent decades, important changes in internationalization and accountability, among other trends, have been observed in the province (Jones, 2004; Metcalfe, 2010). The objective of this chapter is to characterize the Ontario post-secondary sector from a governance perspective, and to provide a historical overview of the introduction, use and impact of accountability measures in the province, with the final section focusing on the introduction, development and evolution of the MYA/MYAAAs. This chapter sets the stage for this thesis, providing clear contextualization and framing for the research problem under study.

3.1. UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN CANADA AND ONTARIO

In Canada, post-secondary education is a provincial responsibility, which has been conducive to the development of separate and independent systems of institutions, structures and policies in each jurisdiction (Usher & Potter, 2006). Despite the lack of a federal education ministry, the federal government is involved in the sector via the provision of research funding and student financial aid, and via the development of policies about labour force training and aboriginal issues, among others (Jones, Shanahan, & Goyan, 2001; Schuete & Bruneau, 2004; Sheffield, 1982). These diverse areas of activity for the federal government raise interesting accountability and policy coherence questions (Snowdon, 2005b), as institutions face a “bewildering array of policy incentives which collectively are inducing policy paralysis at Canadian universities” (Usher & Potter, 2006, p. 11). This study, however, does not aim at analyzing the policies initiated by the federal government nor at comparing accountability practices across Canadian provinces; rather, it focuses on the relationship between the Ontario government and universities via the study of one single policy instrument. Therefore, the discussion henceforth focuses in the PSE sector in that single province.

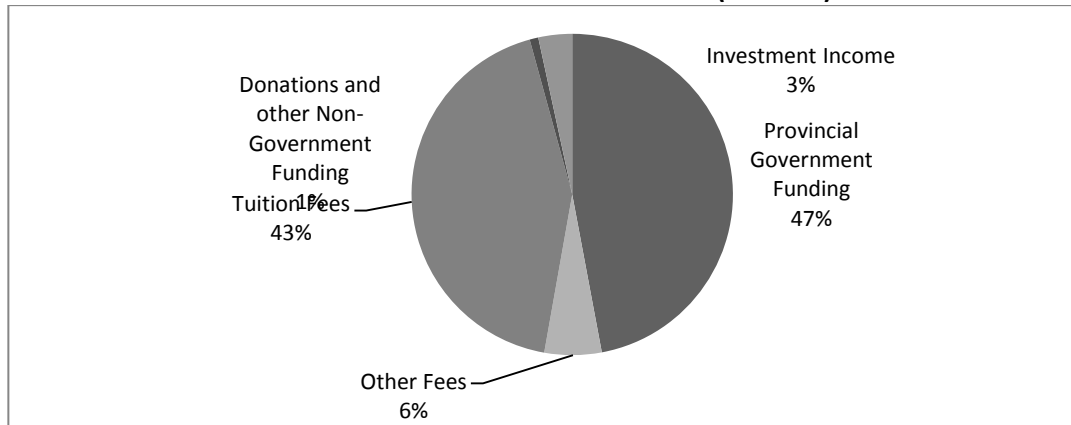
The Ontario post-secondary education system has traditionally been categorized as binary, having both degree-granting institutions, universities, and non-degree granting institutions, colleges, offering alternative paths to post-secondary students (Shanahan et al., 2005; Usher & Potter, 2006). Although this distinction has blurred since the monopoly for granting degrees was removed in the 1990s, it still captures the essence of a system with primarily two separate groups of institutions, with distinct roles and different regulatory mechanisms (Shanahan et al., 2005). Although there is “no standard definition of what constitutes a university [at the federal level], membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada is sometimes considered as a defining criteria” at the federal level (Usher & Potter, 2006, p. 9). In Ontario, membership in the Council of Ontario Universities is considered the defining criteria for identifying universities.

Degree-granting authority is given by the Ontario government, “originally under the Degree Granting Act 1983 and currently under the Post-secondary Education and Excellence Act 2000”

(Shanahan et al., 2005, p. 6). Ontario universities are created by provincial legislation²¹ as autonomous not-for-profit corporations of a public character, and most have a bicameral system consisting of a board of governors, which is responsible for administration and finance, and a senate, which oversees academic matters (Shanahan et al., 2005; Usher & Potter, 2006). Being created on the basis of specific legislation outlining each university’s mandate coupled with a bicameral governance system has provided Ontario universities with a significant degree of autonomy from the government in all matters regarding both academic and administrative policies. In particular, the board of governors ensures that the powers of each university’s executive are limited, thus providing reassurance to government authorities (Stevenson, 2004).

Despite their autonomous character, a major source of funding are provincial grants, primarily driven by formula financing that takes into account student enrolment and differential costs per program, but that makes no other distinction across universities (Jones, 2004; Kymlicka, 1982). Special funding envelopes for other government priorities, such as education in the North or bilingual education, are also provided (Kymlicka, 1982; MTCU, 2009d). When formula financing was first introduced, it was expected to help preserve university autonomy since universities are not told what to do with funding; however, this type of funding also provides the government with control over the size of grants and can use them as an incentive to efficient management (Kymlicka, 1982). On the other hand, it has also been argued that this funding system has resulted in the unintended homogenization of universities’ missions (I. D. Clark et al., 2009). The relative importance of provincial grants as a source of funding for Ontario universities has changed over time, as student fees and research funding have become important alternative funding sources.²² The chart below shows sources of operating funds for all Ontario universities in the fiscal year 2011-2012. At about \$3.6 billion annually, provincial funding is the most important source of funding and tuition fees account for 43 per cent of the total \$7.6 billion in annual funding.

FIGURE 3-1: SOURCE OF FUNDING ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES (2011-12)



Source: COFO (n.d.), Financial Report.

²¹ The only exception is Queen’s University that was created with a Royal Charter (COU, 2004).

²² Tuition fees were deregulated under the Harris Conservative government in the mid-1990s (Jones, 2004), but regulated again under the Liberal government. Nonetheless, their share of operating income has more than doubled from 20 per cent in 1987 to their current share above 40 per cent (Snowdon, 2005a).

Another important element of Ontario's PSE sector is a system of voluntary cooperation created in 1962 and formally renamed the Council of Ontario Universities in 1971. As a common voice, COU plays an important role in policy development and implementation in the province and, despite facing the typical challenges of a federated organization (e.g., it cannot move before all members agree), it has proven to be quite a successful organization (Kymlicka, 1982; Monahan, 2004). One COU committee in particular plays an important role in the implementation of accountability measures due to its technical expertise: the Council on University Planning Analysis (CUPA) comprising university representatives from institutional research, planning or analysis offices. At the national level, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) also plays an important role in lobbying and negotiating with the government on behalf of individual universities and colleges. Moreover, both organizations act as facilitators in the joint development of policies between the government and Ontario universities, and as such, contribute to ensuring the autonomy of Canadian universities (I. D. Clark, 2008; Stevenson, 2004). Finally, over the past few decades, there have been different iterations of policy advisory bodies to the Ontario government in the sector. First, the Committee on University Affairs, renamed the Ontario Council on University Affairs (OCUA) in 1974, was dismantled under the Progressive Conservative government in 1996 (Shanahan et al., 2005). The 2005 *Reaching Higher* plan saw the reintroduction of an advisory body in the form of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). The discussion now turns to the evolution and state of post-secondary education accountability practices in Ontario.

3.2. THE INTRODUCTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS TO ONTARIO'S PSE

The introduction of accountability initiatives in Ontario's post-secondary system dates from the 1990s, since only minor changes occurred in this province during the 1980s (Jones, 2004). Nonetheless, in the 1980s, the Liberal government in office was already focusing on the economic contribution of post-secondary education, and promoted investments in research and linkages to industry, all strategies that were continued by the New Democratic Party government that followed (Shanahan et al., 2005). With the recession at the end of the 1980s, the government also turned its attention to issues of accountability (Callahan, 2006; Shanahan et al., 2005). Specifically, accountability was put on the policy agenda following a provincial auditor report concluding that "accountability for funding in Ontario universities was inadequate" after evaluating three different institutions and that raised concerns regarding system-level (Callahan, 2006; Jones, 2004; Snowdon, 2005a). Although the auditor recommended a comprehensive provincial audit (Callahan, 2006; Jones, 2004), there was some debate in the sector regarding the legal rights of the auditor to pursue a major audit of universities, and the recommendation was not acted upon (Callahan, 2006).

Nonetheless, following the recommendation to improve accountability, a *Task Force on University Accountability*, led by William Broadhurst, was set up by the provincial government in 1991 with a final report submitted in 1993 (Shanahan et al., 2005). The Task Force, which had representation from numerous organizations relevant in the Ontario PSE sector, recommended "a strengthened institutional framework supervised by the governing body [of each institution and that] an independent, external monitoring agency" located within OCUA be set up to monitor accountability" (Task Force on University Accountability, 1993, p. 3). At the same time, upon request

from the government, OCUA evaluated options for ensuring program quality, and recommended the introduction of a province-wide undergraduate level evaluation, akin to the graduate level evaluation led by the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS) since the 1960s (Shanahan et al., 2005).

Both recommendations “advocated further government intervention in universities in a political environment where the government was retrenching. The recommendations were deemed unworkable and the government did not respond” (Shanahan et al., 2005, p. 21).²³ Although OCUA established its own undergraduate program quality review, it did not commence since the Council was dismantled in 1996 (Shanahan et al., 2005). In addition, “the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was created in 1995 with responsibility for addressing issues of educational quality and accountability in both the elementary/secondary and post-secondary sector”, but the post-secondary responsibility of EQAO did not materialize.

With the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 1995, the Ontario post-secondary sector entered a path of neo-liberal policy reform, categorized by (i) privatization, or the shift from funding from the government to the public and the utilization of market mechanisms for fund allocation; (ii) the blurring of the university-college binary structure, as the monopoly for granting degrees was removed from colleges and collaborative programs between both types of institution were encouraged; (iii) the introduction of institutional differentiation, that was possible with the deregulation of tuition fees; and (iv) system expansion, due to the double cohort²⁴ and the baby-boom echo increase in population (Jones, 2004). This was coherent with the broader *Common Sense Revolution* that guided the reforms introduced by the PC government aimed at reducing the state via tax cuts, and at increasing the role of the market via privatization (R. V. Barrett & Doughty, 2005; D. Clark, 2002; Jones, 2004).

These changes were facilitated by a reduction in federal funding due to the national deficit, by the acceptance and support of institutions (e.g., in the case of tuition deregulation), by having sufficient time to induce change as the conservative government was in office for several years coupled with many changes in the policy network (e.g., dismantling of OCUA, changes in COU’s role) that allowed for the new initiatives to be introduced. Moreover, not all changes were top-down reforms since some, such as tuition fee deregulation, had been advocated by institutional leaders in previous years (Jones, 2004). There was also some degree of policy transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996): The introduction of performance indicators was influenced by U.S. and European trends arising from their fiscal dilemmas associated with rapidly expanding post-secondary education systems (Alexander, 2000).

In terms of accountability measures, the spirit of the 1993 *Task Force on University Accountability* recommendation was continued as a new review of the Ontario PSE sector, the Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Post-secondary Education, restated in its 1996 report

²³ Specifically, universities expressed opposition to the creation of another bureaucratic agency (Crespo, 1999).

²⁴ Ontario’s double cohort resulted from the removal of the 13th year of high school. In 2003, two cohorts of high-school graduates entered the PSE system at the same time: Those finishing their 13th year and those finishing their 12th year.

Excellence, Accessibility and Responsibility that greater responsibility be given to governing boards of universities to demonstrate accountability and placed quality assurance on their hands as well (Shanahan et al., 2005, p. 21). The general interest in increasing accountability measures was pervasive throughout the Broader Public Sector, as illustrated by the introduction of accountability directives by Management Board and the government's intention of introducing a Public Sector Accountability Act, announced in the 1997 Budget Speech (Callahan, 2006); however, this new legislation was not passed (Callahan, 2006; Snowdon, 2004). In the PSE sector, three key performance indicators were introduced in 1999 and subsequently linked to funding in March 2000 (Jones, 2004; Lang, 2013). These consist of graduate employment rates, graduation rates per program group and Ontario student loan default rates (OCUFA, 2006). The new funding scheme would allocate approximately \$16.5 million to universities in 2000-01 (Alexander, 2000). It has been argued that the introduction of these performance indicators was done in response to the 1997 Provincial Auditor Review of the Ontario Student Assistant Program (Callahan, 2006); nonetheless, the development of performance indicators was consistent with the trend in Canada in the mid-1990s, as systems of performance indicators and value for money were starting to become common in other provinces, such as Alberta and British Columbia (Crespo, 1999; Grosjean et al., 2000). Furthermore, the use of specific funding envelopes became the privileged approach to direct the use of new and incremental funding (Shanahan et al., 2005).

In 1999, the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) stated accountability expectations for PSE institutions according to their performance in six areas: quality, accessibility, mobility and portability, relevance and responsiveness, research and scholarship, and accountability (Julien, 2006). As well, another report from the Provincial Auditor focused on university accountability that was followed by a review of its recommendations in 2001. Among other things, the 1999 Provincial Auditor report recommended that the government: (i) Establish expectations for university governance and accountability; (ii) Encourage universities to report publicly on their key governance and accountability processes including those aimed at ensuring program quality; (iii) Encourage and monitor improvements in universities' efforts to report publicly on their performances; (iv) Work with universities to establish clear expectations for program quality, including an agreed-upon definition of quality that facilitates comparisons; and (v) Ensure that universities summarize and report publicly on their internal quality assurance processes, activities and results, and on the results of external reviews (Office of the Provincial Auditor, 1999). However, the 2011 review noted that steps to solve all of the issues identified had not been taken (Callahan, 2006). Consequently, between 2000 and 2001, COU and MTCU established a joint taskforce on the Provincial Auditor's report. In 2001, the Ontario Financial Review Commission published a report outlining some building blocks to accountability and highlighted the need for a culture of actively sharing financial and performance information with all communities with an interest in the organization.

The change in government from the Conservatives to the Liberals in 2003 did not affect the observed trends in accountability measures and post-secondary education policies. Although no major structural changes (such as system redesign) have been attempted by the Liberal government, a clear and explicit effort was made to link higher education policy to the province's economic agenda. The Liberal government also continued the trend towards using key performance

indicators, further marrying accessibility goals with funding and accountability agreements, all rolled into one. As mentioned in section 1.1, it was the Liberal government that, in 2005, introduced *Reaching Higher*, a \$6.2 billion cumulative investment by 2009-2010 for post-secondary education, with the objective to increase access and quality in the sector, provide better facilities and hold institutions accountable for accomplishing these objectives (MOF, 2005c). This plan was put forward based on advice from the Ontario Post-secondary System Review led by The Honourable Bob Rae in 2005.

The \$6.2 billion investment was not directed only to post-secondary institutions. As outlined in table 3-1 below, \$1.5 billion were allocated for Student Financial Assistance, \$4.3 billion were allocated as operating grants to colleges and universities and \$0.4 billion were allocated to training and similar activities. Within the operating grants to universities and colleges, there was funding for increasing enrolment, expand graduate and medical education, enhance the student experience and improve access to under-represented communities, among other activities (MOF, 2005a).

TABLE 3-1: REACHING HIGHER INVESTMENTS

| (in \$ millions) | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | Total |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Student Financial Assistance | 150 | 192 | 241 | 282 | 314 | 358 | 1,537 |
| Operating Grants | 50 | 447 | 732 | 932 | 958 | 1,156 | 4,275 |
| Training and other activities | | 44 | 62 | 86 | 87 | 87 | 366 |
| Total | 200 | 683 | 1,035 | 1,300 | 1,359 | 1,601 | 6,178 |

Source: Ontario Government (2005)

It was under the *Reaching Higher* plan that multi-year accountability agreements “between the government and institutions that would set out enrolment and quality improvement targets” (MOF, 2005c, p. 3), were introduced, with the first Interim Accountability Agreements being developed for 2005-06, followed by a three-year plan developed in 2006 (MYA) and subsequent report-backs (MYAAs). There was a certain degree of stability until 2008-09, as the original plans were extended for 2009-10, a transition year. In the 2011 Provincial Budget, the government indicated that changes would be implemented to the plans, but changes were delayed and the introduction of a new accountability instrument, the Strategic Mandated Agreements (SMAs), did not take place until 2012. In the meantime, the objectives of the MYAAs continued to evolve, as will be presented in section 3.4. On parallel, in 2010 an arms-length body was created by the Council of Ontario Universities to provide overarching quality assurance in the form of the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance with the mandate to ensure that “(a) the quality of all programs leading to degrees and graduate diplomas granted by Ontario’s publicly assisted universities, and (b) the integrity of university quality assurance processes” (Nicholson, 2011, p. 1).

The presentation above highlights how the policy environment in Ontario has been characterized by constant evolution and change since the early 1990s, and how accountability has

become an important concept that has spearheaded the search for instruments to ensure it. To complete the portrait of the accountability environment in Ontario's PSE, a brief overview of the different accountability mechanisms in use is presented in the following section.

3.3. ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS IN ONTARIO

There have been several attempts to list and classify accountability mechanisms in Ontario or to outline the key areas of accountability for the sector. For instance, accountability instruments could be grouped into information disclosure/provision, performance-based funding, and quality process management (Usher & Potter, 2006). These are however, very large groups for categorizing the instruments which obscure their key differences. Also, it focuses on the objectives of the instrument rather than on the different forms it takes. The list below draws from the existing literature and provides an overview of the kinds of accountability instruments in use in Ontario. The list is quite comprehensive as some of the instruments listed below can be considered more of a quality improvement nature (e.g., accreditation) than solely having accountability or reporting emphasis.

Peer review: This is the traditional approach in academia, where faculty subjects its research work to peer review to ensure its quality (Shanahan, 2009b). Peer review is also an important element of degree accreditation discussed below.

University Accreditation: Accreditation is defined as the "official recognition that an institution is meeting minimum standards of curriculum, staff qualifications, and resources" (Donald, 2006, p. 25). Although there is no national institutional accreditation system in Canada (Shanahan, 2009b), institutional accreditation is obtained with membership in the AUCC and with the university's government charter (Donald, 2006). Moreover, some professional disciplines, including Nursing, Architecture, Medicine, and Engineering, are accredited by the governing body of the profession (Shanahan, 2009b).

Degree accreditation: A provincial responsibility, degree accreditation at the undergraduate and graduate level is undertaken internally following guidelines established by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (Nicholson, 2011).²⁵ Each university develops its own Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) and submits them to the council for review and approval. Once an IQAP is approved, the institution is responsible for reviewing existing programs and the Council is responsible for reviewing and approving new programs (COU, 2010b). The main distinction between accreditation and quality assessment is that the former is concerned only with whether an institution or program meets minimum standards, whereas the latter involves making "graded judgments about academic quality levels" (Dill, Massy, Cook, & Williams, 1996, p. 21).

Legislation or Operating Rules: Several pieces of legislation regulate Ontario universities, including their individual charters and the Post-secondary Education Choice & Excellence Act 2000

²⁵ Before 2010, degree accreditation in Ontario was managed via external reviews led, at the undergraduate level, by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV) through COU and, at the graduate level, by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (Shanahan, 2009b, p. 7).

that regulates degree-granting adjudication (Shanahan et al., 2005). System-wide frameworks of accountability expressed in legislation have been on the rise in Ontario and Canada, including human rights codes, freedom of information and the protection of privacy laws, employment equity requirements and disability acts; which apply to the public sector as well as to universities (Shanahan, 2009b, p. 8). At the organizational level, there are regulations regarding the treatment of research subjects and health and safety considerations that affect university functioning (Massy, 2011).

Board oversight: Ontario universities have a bicameral system consisting of a board of governors and a senate (Shanahan et al., 2005; Usher & Potter, 2006). The role of the board of governors is to oversee finance and administration issues (Gauthier, 2004).

Performance Contracting: These are performance agreements or contracts that the institution enters in with the government consisting of “a written statement setting the institution’s objectives and the metrics that will be used to gauge their achievement” (Massy, 2011, p. 232). The first generation of MYA/MYAAS is considered as an example of this type of instrument (Shanahan, 2009b).

Intermediary or buffer bodies: These are organizations at arm’s-length from government that monitor universities or develop accountability and quality indicators. In Ontario, HEQCO is an example.

Student and alumni feedback: In recent years, the use of surveys to gauge student satisfaction, engagement and employment outcomes has become prevalent. These are considered accountability measures as they provide input to guide university strategies and information to report back to the government, the public and other stakeholders (Shanahan, 2009b; Stevenson, 2004). In Canada, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) are examples of such initiatives. In recent years, other student and alumni-based instruments have been introduced, including assessments that gauge the value added of education (i.e., comparison of what students know at the beginning of their program versus the end in terms of writing and problem solving skills) and assessments of alumni preparation for the workforce (i.e., employment surveys after graduation) (Kallison & Cohen, 2009).

Credit transfer and articulation agreements: These are agreements between two or more institutions where the conditions to recognize credits or offer joint degrees are outlined. Although such agreements are not conceived as a report to any particular stakeholder, some authors include them in the inventory of accountability instruments, since they call for the institution to describe what it does (Shanahan, 2009b).

Information disclosure: This consists of the direct publication of information by universities, to inform the public and potential students (Dill, 2001). For instance, Ontario universities voluntarily participate in the Common University Data Ontario (CUDO), an initiative led by COU for universities to publish data online. Furthermore, universities are increasingly publishing information on their websites (Usher & Potter, 2006). In the United States, a similar initiative is the Voluntary System of

Accountability, where using a common template, participating universities publish information on costs, graduation rates and student satisfaction (Salmi, 2009).

Financial Auditing and Reporting: Universities produce audited financial statements, as well as “detailed annual revenue and expenditure information in comparable format across all institutions through the *Financial Report of Ontario Universities* prepared by the Council of Finance Officers of Ontario Universities” (COU, 2004, p. 2). These audited statements help assure that funds are spent according to the purposes allowed for by provincial statute (Usher & Potter, 2006).

Strategic and Academic Plans, Mission Statements: Another source of information about universities consist of strategic and academic plans, that include commitments over a long-term period regarding academic, research and other strategic objectives. These usually involve the development and publication of annual follow-ups with reports on progress (Stevenson, 2004; Usher & Potter, 2006).

Performance Indicators: These consist of budget allocation mechanisms that reward performance (Salmi, 2009). In Ontario, key performance indicators are used to assign a portion of government funding (Donald, 2006) and include graduation rates, employment rates, and student loan default rates. These are published by the government and in each university’s website (COU, 2004). A distinction is made between performance funding, i.e., “if an institution meets a specified performance target, it receives a designated amount or percentage of state funding”; performance budgeting, i.e., “to consider campus achievement on performance indicators as one factor in determining allocations for public campuses” and performance reporting, that provides information on indicators to the state and the public, “but has no formal link to allocations” (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006, p. 2). Performance funding is usually associated to a small percentage of total government funding, but may be important in terms of the universities’ operating budget as these are applied to incremental budget amounts (Dill, 2001).

Rankings: Some authors identify rankings and benchmarks as instruments of accountability since press and media publish national or international rankings that disclose information on universities (Salmi, 2009). In Canada, the most important national ranking is produced by Maclean’s since 1991; however, this process has been heavily criticized as it disregards each university’s mission and does not provide an adequate measure of quality (OCUFA, 2006).

As can be seen from the short overview above, the objectives of these different instruments are numerous and diverse. For instance, academic integrity is supported by accreditation processes; fiscal integrity is supported by financial auditing; the effective use of resources is supported by performance indicators, financial auditing, public reporting, and performance contracts; quality and relevance is supported by strategic plans, performance indicators, public reporting, accreditation, performance contracts and benchmarking; and, equity is supported by strategic plans, public reporting and performance contracts (Salmi, 2009). Much of the criticism raised in the academic community regarding the use of accountability measures as simplistic, focused on immeasurable aspects or overemphasizing quantitative aspects (Grosjean et al., 2000; Mighty, 2009; Salmi, 2009) appears to overlook the existence of a variety of options for accountability that are illustrated in the table above. Nonetheless, in recent years, the government has tended to emphasize the use of

performance indicators and other measurable mechanisms to link to funding, obviating the potential contribution of alternative approaches more appropriate for the university sector, as well as the need for broader accountability frameworks rather than narrow and specific solutions (Shanahan, 2009b). In addition, in Canada, empirical analyses that test whether the objectives of the different accountability instruments—particularly in terms of effective use of resources and of quality improvement are met— are few. Consequently, the evidence regarding the impact resulting from the introduction of those measures is rare, particularly when defined in terms of change at the institutional level, in the policy environment, or regarding their intended or unintended consequences. The discussion now turns to the specific instrument under study, its introduction and evolution.

3.4. A SHORT HISTORY OF ONTARIO’S MYA/MYAAs

Ontario’s MYA/MYAAs were first announced in the 2005 Ontario Budget as a key element of the *Reaching Higher* plan. In 2005-06, interim accountability agreements (IAA) were developed and one year later, universities were asked to develop three-year plans (MYAs) for 2006-07 to 2008-09, followed by annual report-backs. During the following three-years, universities were asked to produce annual report-backs. As the end of the *Reaching Higher* plan neared, MTCU decided to revise the accountability approach and extended the original plan for another year. This was followed by a period of uncertainty, during which the fate of the MYAAs was unknown, until 2012-2013, when the introduction of a new instrument, the Strategic Mandated Agreements (SMAs) was formalized, and the annual report-backs became institutionalized as a data reporting tool. The presentation below describes at a high level the different iterations of Ontario’s MYA/MYAAs and their content, which are summarized in table 3-2 below.

TABLE 3-2: ONTARIO ACCOUNTABILITY AGREEMENTS: EVOLUTION OVER TIME

| Month/Year | Document/Announcement | Description |
|------------|--|---|
| May 2005 | 2005 Ontario Budget | Announcement of the <i>Reaching Higher</i> plan, with cumulative funding of \$6.2 billion by 2009-10 in the form of student financial assistance, increased operating grants to universities and colleges, and funding for training activities. |
| Fall 2005 | Quality Improvement Fund (QIF) | Government announces a fund to increase quality (\$224 million provided in 2005-06), with distribution contingent on institutions signing bilateral accountability agreements |
| Fall 2005 | 2005-06 Interim Accountability Agreement | One-year agreement regarding <i>Reaching Higher</i> goals |
| Fall 2006 | Multi-Year Action Plan (MYA) for the 2006-07 to 2008-09 period | Institution-specific three-year agreement regarding the <i>Reaching Higher</i> goals, signed by the Minister and each university’s president. |
| Fall 2007 | Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) Report Back for 2006-07 | First report-back for the year 2006-07 |
| Fall 2008 | MYAA Report Back for 2007-08 | Second report-back for the year 2007-08 |
| March 2009 | Transition year is announced | Government announces that the existing MYA plan is extended for one more year to allow for realignment to future goals |

| Month/Year | Document/Announcement | Description |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Fall 2009 | MYAA Report Back for 2008-09 | Third report-back for the year 2008-09 |
| Fall 2010 | MYAA Report Back for 2009-10 | Report for the interim year 2009-10 is due. A new template, focusing more on system-wide goals, is introduced. |
| March 2011 | 2011 Ontario Budget | New generation of accountability agreements announced, details are not provided to the public |
| Fall 2011 | MYAA Report Back for 2010-2011 | Similar template as the 2009-10 is used |
| Summer 2012 | Request for SMAs | Request for SMAs is sent to universities. A panel review to be led by HEQCO |
| Fall 2012 | MYAA Report Back for 2011-2012 | Similar template as the 2009-10 is used |
| Fall 2012 | SMAs submission | SMAs are submitted by each university |
| April 2013 | HEQCO Recommendations | HEQCO publishes recommendations regarding the first SMA implementation |

3.4.1. 2005-06: THE INTERIM ACCOUNTABILITY AGREEMENTS

In fall 2005, the government announced the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF), which provided about \$124 million in new funding to universities for the 2005-06 fiscal year. This left little time for universities and government to jointly develop full-blown action plans to support the new funding distribution, as had originally been announced in the budget. Nonetheless, as the government announced publicly that institutions receiving money from the fund were expected to “sign accountability agreements that set out how the money is to be spent and the expected results from these investments” (MTCU, 2005c), one-year interim accountability agreements were requested and produced in the fall 2005 and allowed for some time to continue working on the specification of the MYA/MYAAAs.

The QIF had specific objectives and encouraged hiring of new faculty and staff, more resources and equipment and introducing better student services, while supporting each institution’s differentiated mission (MTCU, 2005c). To support those objectives, the interim agreements explicitly requested information from each institution on:

- Outcome indicators, including student-faculty ratios, average class sizes and undergraduate retention;
- Hiring activities for both faculty and staff;
- Institutional-level specific investments for enhancing teaching quality, improving educational resources and enhancing student services (e.g., new program offerings or library acquisition initiatives);
- Access initiatives for under-represented groups; and
- Additional outcome indicators of quality, such as results from student surveys.

All institutions submitted their IAA in the late fall 2005 or early winter 2006. Although one important objective of the *Reaching Higher* accountability movement was that of greater transparency, the 2005-06 interim agreements were not made public by all institutions. It is unclear

why this was the case, but one may speculate this happened since publication of the interim agreements was not explicitly requested by the government. However, this raises the question regarding for whom was the accountability instrument being introduced, that is, what was the intended agent of the accountability initiative, a point that will be further elaborated in the sections that follow.²⁶

3.4.2. 2006-07: THE MULTI-YEAR ACTION PLAN

In the summer 2006, universities were asked to complete and sign a Multi-Year Action plan (MYA) for the three-year period 2006-07 to 2008-09. In a memo from Minister Bentley to university Executive Heads it is indicated that “the Presidents or Board Chairs of each university will be required to sign a Multi-Year Accountability Agreement and release of the full amount of your 2006-07 funding will be conditional on the Ministry approving your completed MYA plan” (C. Bentley, memorandum, August 6, 2006). The MYAs were:

Intended to outline the government’s commitment to stable funding, articulate each institution’s commitment to accessibility, quality improvements and measurements of results, and tie the commitments to results. The agreements define[d] goals and system-wide measurements alongside institution-specific action plans of indicators and quantifiable targets (Iacobucci, 2009, p. 1).

The MYA consisted of three separate documents: First, a document outlining the government’s objectives, which was the same for all Ontario universities. This document had to be signed by each university’s president or board chair and the Minister. Second, the schematic *Reaching Higher’s Measurement and Results Schematic for 2006-07 to 2008-09*, presented in Appendix H, summarizes the principles underlying the report-back templates developed later on. Third, *Appendix B: Multi-Year Action Plan for Universities*, published by all universities online,²⁷ which consists of the actual plan describing each university’s commitment in terms of strategies and objectives for the three-year period.

The content of the Appendix A on measurement and results was elaborated collaboratively between universities and government, as there were consultation rounds that took place, including direct consultations with CUPA. Such consultation process was important in ensuring the effective and successful implementation of the MYAAs, as it provided an opportunity for discussion, negotiation and buy-in. The document outlining the government priorities and commitments and their expectation for the institutional contribution for access and quality is summarized in table 3-3. It is noted that the commitments ranged from simply reporting on existing figures (e.g., enrolment growth) to participating in major data collection exercises (e.g., NSSE, CGPSS), to assisting HEQCO in their research efforts to develop multi-year strategies for access and quality. More importantly, the range of original commitments made in this document was broader than what universities were asked to report-back annually in their MYAAs, as indicated in the table’s third column. For example, the university-specific three-year MYA plans included no information on the tuition-fee framework

²⁶ Their restricted availability is well documented. OCUFA reports that they only obtained copies of all interim agreements after launching a Freedom of Information request in March 2006 (OCUFA, 2008, p. 2). At the time of drafting this thesis, not all the IAAs are publicly available for all universities.

²⁷ See Appendix A for a list of websites where accountability agreements are posted.

or on collaboration across institutions, both items that had been mentioned in the general MYA commitment document. As well, some elements found in the measurement and results schematic previously presented are not listed as a commitment (e.g., increasing participation rates).

Some of these exclusions were explained by the government as a result of the existence of other reporting requirements: “[the MYAAs will not] replace existing performance and accountability arrangements, and will be supplemented by existing and, where applicable, modified or new transfer payment and reporting requirements, such as those associated with individual grant lines reporting practices would continue” (MTCU, 2006a, p. 1).²⁸ Furthermore, the large number of reports already existing was a concern raised at the time by COU as universities were responsible for at least 25 different reports to the government (COU, 2004). Moreover, although enrolment is included in the plan, the institutional commitment was limited to continue to report in keeping with established protocols. The exclusion of these elements has been criticized by different stakeholders, as in an environment of increasing demand for university and a government interest in accessibility, enrolment targets other than under-represented groups were excluded from the agreements (I. D. Clark et al., 2009; COU, 2010b) and these omissions raise questions once again about the intended audience of the agreements.

TABLE 3-3: GOVERNMENT VS INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS

| | Government Commitment | Institutional Commitment | In MYAA |
|---------------|--|---|----------------|
| ACCESS | Establish enrolment targets and policies to meet commitment to increase enrolment | Continue to report on enrolment growth in keeping with established protocols | No |
| | Develop policies and provide funding to promote access and opportunities for Aboriginal peoples, francophones, persons with disabilities and first-generation students ²⁹ | Provide ministry with institution-specific multi-year access strategies, indicators and results in the Multi-Year Action Plan template | Yes |
| | Develop the Student Access Guarantee ³⁰ | Participate in the Student Access Guarantee | Yes |
| | Continue enhancement to the Student Access Program ³¹ | Provide government with assistance to design and implement a website clarifying to students the costs and sources of financial aid | No |
| | | Comply with new Tuition Fee Framework ³² | No |

²⁸ For example, enrolment reporting takes place via the Transfer Payment Reporting Requirements. Reporting Requirements for French Language Education are established in the 2005-09 Canada-Ontario Agreement on Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction and the Canada-Ontario Agreement Relative to the Complementary Funds for Minority-Language Education at the) Postsecondary Level (2006-06 to 2006-07) under the Official Languages in Education program (OLE).

²⁹ First-generation students are those who are the first in their family to attend post-secondary education.

³⁰ The Student Access Guarantee is a program that provides that no qualified Ontario student is prevented from attending a post-secondary institution due to lack of financial support.

³¹ The Ontario Student Assistance Program includes extended access grant eligibility, updating allowance amounts, limiting annual repayable debt and matching funds raised by institutions to establish endowments.

³² The new tuition framework, introduced in 2006, differentiates between groups of programs. It allows universities and colleges to “increase first-year students’ tuition by a maximum of 4.5% for undergraduate/first-entry and diploma/first-entry programs and by a maximum of 8% for professional/graduate/high-demand and post-diploma/high-demand programs over the previous year’s tuition fees. All program tuition-fee increases for upper-year students were

| | Government Commitment | Institutional Commitment | In MYAA |
|----------------|---|--|----------------|
| | Develop jointly a research agenda on participation and access to be carried out by HEQCO Outline roles and responsibilities of HEQCO | Provide HEQCO with assistance to complete access related research | No |
| | Develop system measures to track participation of under-represented students | Provide HEQCO and ministry with assistance to develop system to track participation of under-represented groups | No |
| | Develop a comprehensive international marketing strategy to assist on the internationalization of Ontario PSE | Not applicable | NA |
| | Provide funding to institutions to increase quality | Provide ministry with institution-specific multi-year quality strategies, indicators and results in the Multi-Year Action Plan template | Yes |
| | Continue with Key Performance Indicator initiative | Participate in KPI ³³ as is the current process | No |
| | Comply with protocol to use NSSE, CSRDE and CGPSS data to establish benchmarks for quality measurement | Participate in NSSE ³⁴ , CSRDE ³⁵ and CGPSS ³⁶ and provide MTCU with results | Yes |
| QUALITY | Work jointly with HEQCO chair to establish a research agenda Outline roles and responsibilities of HEQCO | Provide HEQCO with assistance to complete access related research | No |
| | Collaborate with the Ministry of Research and Innovation to support the role of institutions | | No |
| | Develop strategies and policies to promote collaboration between institutions Receive advice on how to best measure collaboration | Collaborate with this effort to develop policies and strategies to increase collaboration and recommend ways for measuring this | No |
| | | | |

The commitments regarding accountability requirements are summarized in table 3-4 below. As per those elements, and following the requirements outlined in table 3.3, each Ontario university submitted their three-year action plans to the government, and committed to report back annually.

limited to 2% per year, and no institution was permitted to increase its overall tuition fees by more than a weighted average of 5% in any given year without facing financial penalties” (Boggs, 2009, p. 78).

³³ KPI refers to the three Key Performance Indicators that are associated with one funding envelope from the Ontario government.

³⁴ The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is managed by Indiana University in the United States and aims at measuring the engagement of undergraduate students. It was first administered in the United States in 2000.

³⁵ The Consortium of Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) is a US initiative that developed a framework to calculate and share information on retention and graduation for undergraduate students entering directly after high school completion. It is based at the University of Oklahoma and was founded in 1994.

³⁶ The Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) was developed on the basis of a MIT survey. It asks graduate students about their academic experience, research and supervision opportunities and their satisfaction with services. CGPSS was first administered in Canada in 2005.

TABLE 3-4: GOVERNMENT VS INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS, ACCOUNTABILITY

| | Government Commitment | Institutional Commitment |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| ACCOUNTABILITY | Track and report on achievement of <i>Reaching Higher Goals</i> | Complete the Multi-Year Action Plan Continue with all other existing reporting requirements related to the Francophone students and the Access and Opportunity Fund Post MYA on university's website |
| | Receive advice from HEQCO on best way to measure performance and ensure accountability of PSE institutions | Provide HEQCO with assistance in identifying these measures |
| | Sign and implement MYA with institutions | Sign and implement the MYA |
| | Participate in the review of annual MYA report-backs | Participate in the annual report of MYAs |
| | Continue review of accountability requirements to streamline, consolidate and improve reports | Not applicable |

3.4.3. 2006-07 TO 2008-09: ANNUAL REPORT-BACKS

As of fall 2007, universities were required to produce annual report-backs on their commitments and outcomes, including: (i) Institution-specific multi-year access strategies, indicators and results regarding outreach and access for Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and first-generation students; (ii) Information on the Student Access Guarantee; (iii) Institution-specific multi-year quality strategies, indicators and results (specifically, MTCU requested information on staff and faculty hiring initiatives); (iv) NSSE and CGPSS results; and (v) results on retention (CSRDE). Although the general guidelines for the agreement and report-backs were the same for all universities, other than the specific requirements on NSSE, CSRDE and CGPSS, the templates offered significant leeway for universities to decide what strategies to identify as part of their commitments as well as the metrics to report on progress. Although the period 2006-07 to 2008-09 is the main focus of the study, a brief description of the evolution of the MYA/MYAs is described next.

3.4.4. 2009-10: THE TRANSITION YEAR

The three-year period planned under the MYAs ended in 2008-09. In March 2009, in preparation for the new cycle, the government announced that 2009-10 would be a transition year. As a result, the 2008-09 report-backs contain a section on the strategies to be continued the following year. As well, the government launched a series of initiatives to obtain feedback on the agreements and the experience thus far. Among other activities, MTCU consulted with universities, COU and HEQCO regarding the existing template. HEQCO in turn undertook a consultation process that included expert workshops, commissioned external research, formal and informal discussions with stakeholders and feedback on presentations to college, university and ministry staff (Iacobucci, 2009, p. 2). Although little information is publicly available regarding this consultation process, an open letter from HEQCO's Chair, Frank Iacobucci, to MTCU's Minister, The Honourable John Milloy, highlights some of the elements identified as opportunities for improvement by the Ontario post-secondary sector community, including: (i) the agreements do not explicitly outline sector-wide

targets and do not offer mechanisms for ensuring that the sum of institutional results equals aggregate targets; (ii) reporting sections based on quantitative outcome indicators do not offer enough context, while the reporting sections based on qualitative results are too detailed; (iii) there are inconsistent reporting methods across institutions, particularly for under-represented students; (iv) the link between reporting and funding is unclear; (v) the trade-offs between goals are not recognized; and, (vi) the MYAAs duplicate other accountability tools (Iacobucci, 2009).

Heeding some of the advice obtained in the consultation process, a few small changes were made to the reporting back template for 2009-10. The table below summarizes the elements included in the revised template and highlights the differences with the one used in previous years. For instance, the new template incorporates information reported elsewhere (e.g., CUDO, KPI) and includes the identification of the institutional contribution to so-called system-wide indicators.³⁷ Moreover, the list of indicators was broadened to include information on credit transfers, online learning and international students, among others. MTCU also requested examples of one or more strategies undertaken by the university to improve, meet, or advance the goals established. In addition, an effort was made to provide definitions that are clearer and that facilitate measurement and comparability. Ontario universities completed the 2009-10 report-backs in fall 2010. In addition, some, but not all, of the criticism offered in the 2009 consultations was reflected in changes to the template and the process.

TABLE 3-5: INDICATORS INCLUDED IN THE REVISED REPORT-BACK TEMPLATE

| | Indicator | Details | In Report Backs before 2009-10 |
|---------|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| ACCESS | Enrolment headcount | Total headcount, ages 18-24 and 25+ | No |
| | Under-Represented Students: Students with Disabilities, First Generation and Aboriginal | Full-time / part-time As a % of total enrolment | Yes – indicators more clearly defined |
| | 2009-10 Compliance with Student Access Guarantee | Expenditures Number of accounts | Yes |
| | Plans for 2010-11 Student Access Guarantee | Qualitative description of strategies | Yes |
| | Participation in Credit Transfer System | Statistics from the Ontario Undergraduate Application Centre (OUAC) | No |
| QUALITY | Class Size | Undergraduate class size distribution (CUDO) | No |
| | Online Learning | Placeholder for future measures ³⁸ | No |
| | International Enrolment | Number of international students Number of international exchanges Revenue from international tuition Revenue from off-shore activities | No |

³⁷ Although a potential list of system-wide indicators is included in the template, only institutional ones are reported.

³⁸ MTCU ran a detailed survey on this topic to understand possible measures that could be developed in the future.

| Indicator | Details | In Report Backs before 2009-10 |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Supply Chain Compliance | Report on implementation of <i>Code of Ethics and Procurement, Policies and Procedures</i> ³⁹ | No |
| Space Utilization | Report on planning of space utilization | No |
| University Student Satisfaction | NSSE results posted in CUDO Examples of strategies implemented | Modified |
| Graduation Rate | Undergraduate graduation gate (as per KPI) Strategies implemented | No – in KPI report |
| Graduate Employment Rate | Undergraduate employment rate (as per KPI) Strategies implemented | No – In KPI report |
| Student Retention Rates | Undergraduate retention rates Strategies implemented | Yes – rates Strategies are new |
| Quality of the Learning Environment | Examples of strategies implemented | Yes |

3.4.5. 2010-11 AND BEYOND

In March 2011, with the announcement of a new round of funding supporting enrolment growth, the government indicated that a new generation of agreements would be developed (MOF, 2011). However, as no details were provided before that, in fall 2011, the 2009-10 template was used again for the 2010-11 report-backs. This emphasized the role of the agreements as a reporting rather than a planning tool, as there was no opportunity nor a requirement to revise the strategies and targets proposed in the original three-year MYA plan. As there were important changes in the political leadership of MTCU after that time, for many months, there was silence regarding the new generation of agreements originally announced. Eventually, in summer 2012, the introduction of a separate instrument, the Strategic Mandated Agreements (SMAs), was confirmed. The evaluation model for the SMAs was different, as MTCU requested the support from HEQCO which in turn formed an evaluation committee to “identify those colleges and universities ‘whose submissions demonstrate the greatest ability to serve as lead institutions...those that provide the most compelling and promising visions, mandate statements and plans that advance government policies, objectives and goals...The lead institutions selected through this exercise would be the first to receive funding to pursue their mandates starting as early as 2013-14’” (HEQCO, 2013a).

This study does not elaborate on the introduction of the SMAs; however, in the sections that follow, their characteristics may be discussed when needed to clarify their role in relation to the MYA/MYAAs. Primarily, the introduction of a different planning tool relegated permanently the MYAAs to play the role of a secondary reporting tool. This has resulted in a clear limitation to the potential impacts the MYA/MYAAs could have had long term and directs the attention of this study to the reasons behind its transformation. Regarding the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs, there are,

³⁹ Introduced in March 2010 by the Broader Public Sector Supply Chain Secretariat at the Ministry of Finance.

however, a number of questions that remain unanswered in the short description above. First, what were the reasons the government had to introduce a new accountability requirement? Were there any conflicts due to their introduction? What were the objectives they wanted to meet that justified their introduction? Did their form as agreements had any particular impact on the relationship between universities and government? To what extent were these transformative at the organizational level? In addition, the summary above briefly portrayed their evolution towards becoming a reporting rather than a planning tool. How is this change explained? These questions will be addressed throughout this thesis. The discussion now turns to an analysis of the contribution that organizational studies can make to our understanding of policy issues and justifies the characterization of universities as organizations.

Chapter 4. POLICY ANALYSIS WITH A FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONS

Being a study interested in implementation, the analysis that will be undertaken focuses, in great part, on the choices made by Ontario universities when implementing a new accountability requirement. To facilitate this analysis, this chapter discusses how policy analysis with a focus on organizations is justified and pursued. This first section presents how the organizational perspective can contribute to policy analysis, particularly in the implementation stage. This is followed by a discussion of whether universities can be categorized as organizations, and, if so, of what kind, which highlights the importance of understanding the concept of university autonomy in a study of university accountability. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the contribution that organizational theory can make to an analysis of implementation choices at the organizational level.

4.1. AN ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

This study contributes to the public policy analysis literature by focusing on the implementation of a specific policy introduced by the Ontario government in the PSE sector. Although it is recognized that the description of the public policy process in terms of sequential stages is an artificial one since policy implementation and formulation are intertwined processes; focusing on the actions of implementers helps reveal what happens with a policy in action and how it evolves (M. Hill & Hupe, 2002, 2009; Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009). Being thus interested in implementation and actions, this study builds on a perspective that argues that an organizational focus enlightens our understanding of policy implementation. Contrarily to traditional public policy approaches that concentrate on explaining change and decision-making, an organizational focus, which focuses on actions (Musselin, 2005), allows to:

- Shed light on the reasons behind a given institutional response to a given policy (Amaral et al., 2005; Friedman, 2008). It analyzes how “policies come to be interpreted” and put into action (Hearn & Lacy, 2009, p. 953), due to its emphasis on understanding how do things work (Musselin, 2005).
- Broaden the question of “what works” to “what works to whom, when and where” (Honig, 2009; McLaughin, 2006). That is, knowledge built from the organization “does not tell practitioners how things universally are, but how they locally become” (Knudsen & Tsoukas, 2003, p. 16).
- Explain the variations or lack of uniformity in outcomes and changes observed by analyzing the implementing site’s response to policy goals and instruments (McLaughin, 2006), by highlighting the multidimensionality and complexity of organizations (Enders, 2004).
- Identify and measure the influences that governments may have on the organizational features of the implementing sites, including both intended or unintended consequences
- Recognize that actors do not exist in a vacuum, rather “they work in organizations and these organizations influence their practice for better or worse” (Spillane, Gomez, & Mesler, 2009, p. 409) and provide insights regarding the final impact of a policy on actors—whether these may be weakened or empowered by the policy under analysis (Ferlie et al., 2008, p. 342).

- Inform policy design with relevant empirical evidence. Recognizing the interplay and feedback between action and design, as well as understanding what triggers an organizational response, translates into a better grasp of the conditions required for policy effectiveness, and can inform any adjustments that may be required (Enders, 2004; Friedman, 2008; Gornitzka et al., 2005).

The contributions just outlined assume that it is possible to reconcile bottom-up and top-down analytical approaches. That is, public policies are expected to have an impact on organizations which is observable and that can be linked back to policy measures. Some authors are skeptical of the impact that macro policies can have at the ground level, arguing that bottom-up and top-down perspectives can rarely be reconciled and that it is difficult to establish the links hypothesized here. For instance, the inability to identify the impact of national agriculture policies on peasants or of higher education policies on university staff is presented as evidence that the link does not exist (Musselin, 2005). On the other hand, it has also been noted that the link between both levels is often missing because public policy theories tend to overlook the role of management structures and processes in policy implementation. For instance, in a review of empirical public policy studies, it was noted that an analysis of the mediating role that management structures and processes play to produce outputs and outcomes is often skipped, which can result in biased conclusions (Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009). This study, by concentrating on the organization, explicitly highlights the role that management plays in implementation and aims at assessing the role that such management structure plays in linking top and bottom levels of analysis. Moreover, it opens the door to look at “public policy initiatives as possible inputs into organizational change processes at the institutional level” (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999, p. 295).

Although the literature using this an organizational focus is limited and more often found in the European context (Gornitzka et al., 2005, p. 36), there are some important works exemplifying this approach in the post-secondary education literature. A main contribution is made in *From the Eye of the Storm*, a book sponsored by the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), in which the emphasis is placed on studying the adaptation of universities given different forces of change (Jongbloed, Maassen, & Neave, 1999). The book analyzes the impact of changing employment and conditions of service of academic staff, of internationalization forces, of the development of new study programs, and of government policies on universities. One chapter provides an overview of institutional adaptation studies in higher education regarding the introduction of new programs and highlights the value of organizational theory in explaining the changes observed (Huisman & Meek, 1999). Another chapter argues for the integration of neo-institutional and resource dependency theories in the analysis of institutional adaptation (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999). The book *Adaptive University Structures: An Analysis of Adaptation of Socioeconomic Environments of US and European Universities* by Barbara Sporn (1999) also looks into the contribution that organizational theory can make to the development of a theory of adaptation for higher education institutions.

Additional research examples within this tradition include an analysis of how academic units in Australian universities adapt and/or resist changes in their environment (de Zilwa, 2010) and an analysis of the introduction of higher education quality policies in Hungary suggesting that

organizational characteristics help explain the implementation of such a policy by individual organizations (Csiszmadia et al., 2008). In the Hungarian study, using neo-institutional and resource-dependency theories, the authors find that the leader's commitment to the implementation process, the involvement of external consultants, institutional reputation and bureaucratic and political decision-making processes have strong impacts on the implementation of quality management initiatives. Finally, an analysis of the impact on six Norwegian universities of the introduction of governmental policies regarding the quality of teaching and research (Stensaker, 2006) finds that institutional adaptation often resulted in complex organizational identities. The model uses three organizational ideals of university to guide the analysis, including the bureaucratic, the professional and the entrepreneurial ideal, and concludes that universities internalized the new requirements to fit their own traditions and characteristics, thus combining new activities and existing ones. These studies show that the organizational perspective proposed for this study can help shed light on the analysis of higher education policy implementation and further motivates to undertake a study within that tradition in the Canadian context. The discussion now turns as to whether and how universities can be characterized as organizations.

4.2. UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY: CHARACTERIZING UNIVERSITIES AS ORGANIZATIONS

The unit of analysis for this study consists of Ontario universities. The challenge therein is whether universities can be conceptualized as organizations, and if so, of what kind, an area of heated debate in the post-secondary education literature. Much of the debate arises from the manner in which (i) control is exercised at the different authority levels: the understructure—academic or disciplinary units—, the enterprise structure—the institution or individual organization—, and the superstructure—the government or another system-level regulatory mechanisms (Amaral et al., 2002); (ii) on how those levels interact and (iii) on the formal structure that the university has developed to deal with those authority levels. As a result of this multiplicity of governance institutions, “often decision-making mechanisms can consist of numerous layers of participation” (Kaplan, 2006, p. 218). Also, in recent years, there have been important changes worldwide regarding how the government exerts control or not on universities and in the more predominant role that central administration at universities has earned as a result. In continental Europe, for instance, there has been a movement away from state control towards state supervision resulting in stronger internal management structures (Amaral et al., 2002; Sporn, 1999, 2007). On the other hand, in Anglo-Saxon countries, where the role of the government was relatively less important, the movement observed is towards more predominant government oversight (El-Khawas, 2005; Sporn, 1999). This study will not dwell on that evolution since its characteristics are closely determined by the jurisdiction and traditional control arrangements, but some important conclusions are highlighted.

University autonomy, as an institutional pillar, is often justified on the nature of a university's core activity, that of knowledge creation, which requires freedom from direction to ensure a disinterested and critical search of knowledge (Kogan & Marton, 2006; Thorens, 1998). Conversely, knowledge production, particularly when linked to economic growth, provides arguments for a stronger degree of public policy influence. There is thus no generally accepted principle of university

autonomy, and the relationships of control and authority are quite diverse across jurisdictions (Kogan & Marton, 2006). Moreover, the societal acceptance of university exceptionalism and commitment to protect it is not universal and is dependent on the characteristics of the political environment. For example, such commitment has been qualified as weaker in the United Kingdom when compared to the willingness to protect higher education institutions in the United States (Kogan & Marton, 2006); this acceptance is thus. In addition, universities cannot be completely autonomous as they require financial support from the government to operate (Thorens, 1998).

Nonetheless, from a regulatory perspective, and following Burton R. Clark's (1983) classic triangle of coordination and control, the level of university autonomy present in a jurisdiction is very much dependent on the relationship of control with the market, with the state and with academic oligarchies.⁴⁰ As a result, regulatory models are diverse and vary according to the different degrees of control exercised by each regulatory actor. Another model helpful in understanding university governance systems at the superstructure level is Neave and Van Vught's (1994) continuum, where a controlling state is placed at one end of the spectrum, while a more liberal and supervising state is presented at the other end (as reviewed by Kogan & Marton, 2006). The model, however, is simpler than Clark's as it does not discuss the role of the market. It confirms, however, the basic premise that there is significant variation observed across jurisdictions vis-à-vis government regulation.

The degree of autonomy also depends on what is being regulated or not, including the legal status of the institution, its degree of academic authority, whether it can define its own mission, who appoints its governing body, and how financial decisions are made, among other questions (Kogan & Marton, 2006). A useful typology of university autonomy breaks it down into (Berdahl, 1990):

- (i) Academic freedom which belongs to the individual academic and it protects the pursuit of knowledge as academics see fit. Academic freedom is thus different than freedom of expression which is a human right. It belongs to the academic sphere as it is justified in an environment seeking the pursuit of knowledge for benefiting society in general and not in conditions where knowledge is pursued with the objective of generating profit, as in a private research firm (Thorens, 1998);
- (ii) Substantive autonomy, which is the power of the institution to determine its own goals and programs, both at the academic and research level, including, curriculum design, research policy, entrance standards and academic staff appointments. Substantive autonomy can be placed over a continuum for the purpose or role that higher education plays, with an utilitarian role at one end and a general culture or knowledge pursuit at the other end (Kogan & Marton, 2006); and
- (iii) Procedural autonomy which is the power of the institution to determine the means by which its goals and programs will be pursued, that is, how decision making efforts proceed and their control over budgets, personnel, and internal management (Hearn

⁴⁰ Academic oligarchies consist of "powerful coordinating boards such as the British Universities Grants Committee, or powerful faculty members with influence over national postsecondary governing bodies" (Pusser, 2008, p. 107).

& Lacy, 2009; Kogan & Marton, 2006; Raza, 2009; Usher & Potter, 2006). Procedural autonomy is described abstracting from the management tradition within a university. However, some authors combine the discussion of autonomy with management by indicating that autonomy can be interpreted either as a collegial decision-making model or as the university management independence from government's influence. In such a model, a discussion of autonomy weighs in the conflict between the collegial autonomy of academics as decision makers versus the management autonomy of universities embedded in the administration (Vinokur, 2008).

This categorization is useful and was used in Chapter 2 to explain the expected impacts at the level of universities of introducing new accountability requirements. It is helpful, nonetheless, to further specify the different types of autonomy observed in a university. Following a recent study of autonomy in Dutch universities, a more detailed typology that aims at distinguishing what are the decision-making competencies of universities and what are the existing constraints for making use of such competencies, is developed (Enders et al., 2012). These are summarized in the table below.

TABLE 4-1: A TYPOLOGY OF UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

| Area | Type of autonomy | Definition |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Decision-making competencies | Managerial | Discretion over finances, human resources & other production factors |
| | Policy | Decisions about goods and services delivered and target groups |
| | Governance | Decisions regarding internal structures, processes & policy instruments |
| Ability to use competencies | Financial | Dependency of government funding or other sources of income |
| | Legal | Legal status and implications for autonomy (e.g., private, public) |
| | Interventional | Freedom of reporting requirements/evaluations/audits from the government |

Source: Adapted from Enders et al. (2012).

From the perspective of defining universities as organizations, substantive and procedural autonomy help measure the degree of control versus organizational self-determination observed in a jurisdiction. With strong discretion comes an important central administration, whose importance is in turn heightened in an environment where universities as organizations are becoming stronger and more widely prevalent across the world, in part due to the introduction of NMP approaches, for which different kinds of institutions (e.g., hospitals, public administration firms, etc.) are conceptualized “first and foremost as organizations, with typical organizational problems and being in need for efficient organizational solutions” (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 242). Thus, “strong institutional management [is] now considered a key component of university governance” (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 244). The transformation discussed, however, does not imply that strong administrative structures lacked in the past. Management, leadership, and governance procedures had already been identified as the main levers to promote and adjust to innovations in the PSE sector (Balridge, 1983; Sporn, 1999). Rather, the evolution observed is towards a more predominant role of central administrative structures as a source of control in higher education institutions. In that perspective, universities are portrayed as decision-making entities in their own right; modern organizational actors that are accountable, goal-oriented, differentiated and professionalized

(Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 253). The observed change in university management is characterized by: (i) a central administration plays a stronger role in the definition of objectives and work conditions; (ii) councils and board of trustees have been created, and these parallel or replace the predominantly academic in nature senates; (iii) institutional leaders (i.e., presidents, rectors) have become akin to CEOs running a corporate institution; (iv) a shift from control via laws and regulations or budgetary decisions towards greater focus on management by objectives and results and (v) collegial structures (e.g., deans, department heads, professors) are being replaced by new managerial structures – again, what is referred to as “managerialism” (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007, p. 480).

There is a heated normative debate, as to whether the promotion of a stronger central administration in universities should be embraced or rejected. Doubts have also been cast as to whether stronger management structures can provide cogent and strong strategic direction in the university environment or not (Whitley 2008) and as to whether the changes are effectively changing the management of universities or are primarily symbolic. Regarding strategic direction, Whitley (2008) argues that although universities, particularly in Europe, have obtained in recent years greater autonomy from the government, they are restricted to the extent they can exert strategic autonomy, since doing so would mean moving away from financial dependency from the state, and in turn reduce their access to charitable status and public support. That is, universities have been granted procedural autonomy but not substantive autonomy. Moreover, the pursuit of common goals in higher education institutions is challenging due to the character of the profession, particularly if common goals are defined as the “sharing of intellectual goals, resources and knowledge in the joint pursuit of organizational purposes [on the part of researchers], as distinct from those of individual research groups and scientific fields” (Whitley, 2008, p. 24). The idea of having cohesive management, understood as “a unified central authority over the design of work processes, the co-ordination of their outputs and the development of collective capabilities for dealing with problems, adapting to change and seizing entrepreneurial opportunities through mobilizing the commitment of skilled staff” is difficult to achieve in most research universities (Whitley, 2008, p. 26). Rather, coordination in universities is deemed “akin to investment banking organizations, [thus] universities do not develop organization-specific problem-solving skills and knowledge to carry out their core activities more effectively than their competitors” (Whitley, 2008, p. 25).

Consequently, universities have some characteristic traits for which they are traditionally depicted as specific, distinct or unique organizations (Krücken & Meier, 2006; Sporn, 1999). Contrarily to the definition of organization provided above that stresses coordination and integration, universities are “loosely coupled systems with diffused decision making, as well as goal ambiguity” (Boyce, 2003, p. 120; Weick, 1976). Similar representations further reinforce the idea of disjointed components with universities being portrayed as complex and multifunctional (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Sporn, 1999). Such depictions arise from the professional character of the higher education sector, where professors act as teachers and researchers, pursue their own individual enterprises, and are organized in separate silos in the form of departments and faculties. Furthermore, the conceptualization of universities as loosely coupled systems has influenced the

ideas regarding change processes in higher education settings (Boyce, 2003, p. 120). For instance, loose coupling translates into an ability to make small adjustments easily, but difficulty in “diffusing a major change through an institution (Boyce, 2003; Weick, 1976). As well, loose coupling translates into change being primarily characterized by grassroots innovation, innovation by persuasion, incremental change, boundary-leaking change, and invisible change (B. R. Clark, 1984). Moreover, as a result of the autonomy and independence between units and the diffused decision making processes, leadership plays an important role to induce change in these kinds of institutions (Boyce, 2003, p. 121). Given that, this study researches change resulting from a change in the external environment, such models of internally-driven change just mentioned are not further explored.

Universities are thus depicted as entities that are pulled in different directions, by the state, the market, the faculty. Moreover, the degree to which each of these actors exercise control depends on the context and the jurisdiction. However, regarding the role of university administration—other than presidents and governing boards—played in the definition of the external relationship of authority, very little is known (Pusser, 2008).⁴¹ This may be explained by the fact that this group was relatively unimportant in the past. The traditional model developed by Clark portrays universities as lacking a centralized, senior, internal source of control. These representations leave a void regarding the organization itself since such centralized power was considered of relatively minor importance at the time they were developed, thus leading to a representation “far away from a model where organization is understood as an autonomous decision maker” (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 246).⁴² This is, nonetheless, an important void to fill, since an analysis of university regulation cannot be dissociated from the internal governance or decision-making mechanisms at universities, since they are closely linked. That is, “the degree of dependence to the government affects the decision making processes and structures of higher education institutions” (Barton, 2005). Moreover, understanding internal decision-making processes in universities can be vital in understanding how and why they change or not (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999). Furthermore, the extent to which the transformation towards a central administration has taken place is unclear. That is, a key question is to what extent the redefinition of institutions as autonomous organizations that are accountable and professionalized, with clearer mission statements and strategic plans, has translated into such institutions becoming less loosely coupled and difficult to manage (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). These are important questions for which more empirical evidence is required (R. W. Scott, 2008, p. 172) as it is noted that there are still important differences observed, particularly regarding internal decision-making processes. Therefore, different institutions may be adapting to different degrees and this is an area that deserves analysis (Stensaker, 2006).

⁴¹ The role of governing boards has been explored in more depth. In that regard, Harman (1992) includes them in his portrayal of three main types of national authority: (i) The Continental mode, where authority is shared by faculty guilds and state bureaucracy; (ii) The United Kingdom mode: authority is shared between faculty guilds and institutional trustees and administrators; and (iii) The United States mode, which is similar to the United Kingdom’s, but has weaker faculty guilds and stronger institutional trustees and administrators (as reviewed by Amaral et al., 2002).

⁴² From a normative perspective, Clark privileged, as many other higher education scholars, the collegial model, where power is shared between academics, as the appropriate way to organize universities. Given that the main activities of higher education (e.g., teaching and research) are primarily individualistic, the changes in knowledge creation happen with “scant regard to national government or institutional management” (Kogan & Marton, 2006, p. 74).

Beyond autonomy considerations, there are other distinguishing characteristics of universities summarized below using a market-based language (Sporn, 1999):

- (i) Goal ambiguity: As universities do not have a single mission, they often have numerous and heterogeneous goals that result in conflict; thus, to avoid contestation, goals are often stated broadly and ambiguously to reach agreement among members of the university community (Sporn, 1999). Consequently, “this link between clarify and conflict may help explain the prevalence of meaningless rhetoric in academic speeches and policy statements” (Balridge, 1983, p. 3). This is not an observation constrained to universities, but that has been made regarding the definition of clear goals and objectives throughout the public sector as goal ambiguity may be an ingredient facilitating resolution of conflicting objectives across actors (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Matland, 1995).
- (ii) Client service/Stakeholders: Being people-processing institutions, different stakeholders provide input in decision making processes, such as student representatives in committees. Management abilities are required as well as sensitivity and ability to manage and accommodate a variety of stakeholders (e.g., students, government, international visitors, companies, research agencies). Moreover, the marketization of the environment has provided greater focus on satisfying a culture of service to clients (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Sporn, 1999).
- (iii) Task complexity: Teaching and research functions co-exist. These complexity and variety of tasks causes confusion regarding what to do and how to do it (Sporn, 1999)
- (iv) Professionalism and administrative values: Being professional organizations, professors demand autonomy in their functions and privilege peer evaluation of their work. This often enters in conflict with the bureaucratic values of the organization. Consequently, the influence of the central administration was traditionally limited so not to endanger the conditions in which knowledge was produced.

The loosely coupled character is in turn managed differently across universities, as summarized by the different typologies developed to characterize them, including: (i) The bureaucratic model, where hierarchical authority relationships are rationally arranged, and the management creates rules, regulations and hierarchies to regulate procedures and ensure accountability (Kogan & Marton, 2006); (ii) The collegial model, where a community of scholars where decisions are made by consensus, that is, there is disciplinary self-governance (Birnbaum, 1988) ; (iii) The political model, where the university is a pluralistic entity where there is competition between individual and group interests (Balridge, 1971); (iv) The organized anarchy model (Cohen & March, 1974), which indicates that “organizational action at a university is virtually unintentional” (Kogan & Marton, 2006, p. 74); (v) The professional bureaucracy model, where decision-making is primarily led by a group of professionals (Mintzberg, 1991); and (vii) The policy network model, where different players influence the decision-making process (Amaral et al., 2002; Jones, 2002). Interestingly, mixed models of the different approaches listed are often observed.

Many authors continue to elaborate on the different models observed in the management of universities. For instance, Bleiklie & Kogan (2007) offer a simplified model with four possible groups,⁴³ which are (i) professional self-regulation under which academics independently run their research and teaching operations; (ii) representative democracy that grants participatory rights to staff and students in institutional decision-making processes; (iii) bureaucratic steering by which the state regulates publicly funded educational institutions; and (iv) corporate management as a means to render higher education institutions efficient and accountable. The authors stress that these models:

Are not mutually exclusive, but the degree to which they are emphasized and dominate varies over time and across institutions and educational systems. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s it shifted from professorial self-regulation towards some form of representative model although still dominated by academics, the emphasis since the late 1980s has (at least ostensibly) shifted towards a business model, while the representative model has been under attack as a prime example of 'weak' leadership. In addition, bureaucratic steering has always been an aspect of the way in which public and private universities have been managed (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007, p. 481).

To conclude, it is noted that the depiction of universities as organizations, as opposed to institutions, is often a normative one. Characterizing universities as organizations is perceived as a redefinition of their purpose as utilitarian, with the aim to justify corporatist or managerialist approaches. It is expected that this perception acts in detriment of the character of universities as social institutions, having as a purpose to educate an important share of the population (Kogan & Marton, 2006; Sporn, 2007), and their permanence as institutions that transcend human lives and intentions (R. W. Scott, 2008). These normative concerns need to be understood but do not play a role in the choice of theoretical approach for this study, as it builds on the premise that the role of universities as social institutions coexists with their organizational behavior. Consequently, in this thesis, universities are defined as organizations; this provides a framework of analysis to study their decision-making processes when faced with an external policy change. The approach is particularly justifiable in the case of Ontario, where universities have traditionally enjoyed significant autonomy (Jones, 2004; Usher & Potter, 2006). Furthermore, mediating managing structures play an important role in the implementation of government policies (Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009); thus, this analysis focuses on the implementation decisions made by central administrators and highlights their interaction with other stakeholders as appropriate. To understand implementation decisions by central administrations as the result of introducing accountability measures, insights are sought from organizational theories, which are presented in the following section.

⁴³ Similar models have been used within an organizational culture framework. For instance, Berquist (1992) proposed the idea of four competing cultures in the academy: collegial, managerial, developmental and negotiating culture (as reviewed by Boyce, 2003). Moreover the role played by the institutional culture should not be downplayed since it has been found to even trump explicit structural arrangements (Kaplan, 2004), an observation that has been confirmed in the Canadian context (Hardy, 1996). The organizational culture approach offers an alternative theoretical framework to analyze questions of governance and implementation; however, these are not further explored in the context of this study.

4.3. UNIVERSITIES AND CHANGE: INSIGHTS FROM ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

To understand how and why the introduction of accountability measures has an impact on universities, the discussion now asks how and why universities, as organizations, act, react, approach or change as a result of environmental changes, as well as how organizations, in turn, affect their environment. Given that these are questions typical of organizational theory (Bees & Dee, 2008; Gornitzka, 1999; Jongbloed et al., 1999; Sporn, 1999), this section provides an overview of the contribution that this approach can make to our analysis of the strategies universities undertake to manage impact. In particular, it evaluates the contribution that a model proposed by Christine Oliver in 1991, that has been used in the past in post-secondary education (Huisman & Meek, 1999; Reale & Seeber, 2010), can make as the starting point for the analysis.

Modern organizational theory is based on the assumption that an organization is an adaptive system that has to adjust to changes in their environment, “as it constraints, shapes, penetrates and renews the organization” (R. W. Scott, 2008, p. x). Open systems theory is concerned with the technical environments, e.g., resources and task-related information, and also with the institutional environment, e.g., legal regulations, social and cultural organizing forces (R. W. Scott, 2008; Sporn, 1999). Therefore, to “understand organizations one must understand how organizations relate to other social actors in their environment” (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999, p. 297). The recognition of such linkages stresses “the importance of being able to scan and sense changes in task and contextual environments, of being able to bridge and manage critical boundaries and areas of independence and being able to develop appropriate strategic responses” (Morgan, 1986, p. 45). In that sense, universities are considered open systems (R. W. Scott, 2008; Sporn, 1999), as their operations are closely related to the characteristics and dynamics of the environments in which they operate and “they must achieve an appropriate relation with that environment if they are to survive” (Morgan, 1986, p. 45).

Analyses of the higher education sector have built upon numerous, diverse and often competing views of the organization, such as population ecology theory, life cycle theory, contingency theory, resource-dependence theory, strategic theory and neo-institutionalism theory. In addition, studies of university/external environment relationships can be categorized into five groups: (i) Studies that investigate causation, such as “why universities adapt to changes in their environment”; (ii) Studies that investigate process, that is “how do universities adapt to changes in their environment”; (iii) Studies that ask both why and how universities adapt; (iv) A number of studies with a normative in character, which argue that “universities should resist environmental pressures such as marketization, entrepreneurialism and managerialism”; and (v) Studies that list strategies to facilitate adaptation (de Zilwa, 2007, p. 559). On one hand, these competing ways of looking at organizations allow for innovation and for a better understanding of the phenomena observed (Jongbloed et al., 1999). On the other hand, the challenge faced by scholars in the area is that the incommensurability of the different approaches “means that there is no potential for cumulative knowledge” (Knudsen & Tsoukas, 2003, p. 24). Moreover, efforts to combine alternate views of the organization may lead to incomplete results, to data with limited coherence and

comparability, and to fragmented explanations that cannot be articulated one against the other (Musselin, 2005).

In the case of universities and their response to government-imposed directives, neo-institutionalism and resource-dependency theories are often used to explain organizational behaviour. Neo-institutionalism emphasizes the constraints imposed by institutional environment's, and is well suited to look at public organizations since they are embedded in distinct social, legal and economic environment, the pressure of stakeholders via NPM, the need to prove legitimacy and requirements to maximize efficiency (Fernández-Alles & Llamas-Sánchez, 2008). These approaches emphasize the value of organizational conformity to institutional environments to ensure their survival (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999). Furthermore, conformity is often ritualistic in nature and organizations construct symbols of compliance to environmental change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The theory predicts that organizations will tend to resist change, unless there is congruency between "the values and beliefs underlying a proposed program or policy and the identity and traditions of an organization" (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999, p. 300).

The challenge with using solely this approach is that early institutional theory formulations emphasized an organization's tendency toward conformity, but empirical results show that organizational responses are more varied than that. For instance, several studies have shown that universities make strategic choices when adjusting to institutional pressures and adaptations (Huisman & Meek, 1999). As a result, there has been a "calling for more attention to power and agency" to understand the way in which organizations respond to institutional pressures, moving away from the depiction of the environment as deterministic and of leaders as powerless (Goodstein, 1994; Hearn & Lacy, 2009; R. W. Scott, 2008; Spillane et al., 2009). For instance, in the higher education scholarship, despite the aforementioned misgivings about the combination of theories, there has been an effort to complement neo-institutionalism in the sociological tradition with insights from resource dependency theories in an effort to explain seemingly contradictory empirical results (Csiszmadia et al., 2008; Gornitzka, 1999; Huisman & Meek, 1999) and recognizing that organizations exercise strategic choices within the constraints of their institutional environment (Csiszmadia et al., 2008; Oliver, 1991).

In this study, Oliver (1991), which analyzes the possible strategies that organizations will choose to respond to a new institutional demand or policy requirement, was chosen as a starting point in the analysis. The author starts with the choices of strategies expected within a neo-institutional perspective, which emphasizes the cognitive and cultural dimension of institutions, and expands drawing on resource-dependence arguments (R. W. Scott, 2008), which allows for understanding varied impacts on organizations, ranging from strategic adaptation to reactive institutional adjustment (Huisman & Meek, 1999). Oliver's model starts with a top-down perspective where a new demand is introduced and the reaction of organizations impacted by it is analyzed in turn (Sabatier, 2008). To explain the approach proposed by Oliver, both neo-institutional theory and resource dependency theory are briefly summarized below.

Neo-institutional theory in the sociological tradition presents as a fundamental premise that institutions matter (Hall & Taylor, 1996), as they shape the outcomes of policy. The approach highlights conformity to societal structures, and “emphasizes the stability of organizations and the barriers to change that exist within organizations” (Gornitzka, 1999, p. 8). Organizations thus seek to conform to external pressures while maintaining their culture; policies are interpreted in ways that organizational threats and disruptions are minimized. In that regard, institutionalism in the tradition of isomorphism or conformity, explains that organizations mimic the norms, values, and ideologies of their environment in search for legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As such, “the institutional environment inhibits the organization to change” if change at the organizational level implies a deviation from the expectations of the institutional environment (Huisman & Meek, 1999, p. 123).

Resource dependency theory, on the other hand, emphasizes “how organizations act strategically and make active choices to manage their dependency on those parts of their task environment that controls vital resources” (Gornitzka, 1999, p. 7), where resources are defined as “physical, financial, human and social assets, that people, both individually and collectively, use to accomplish organizational work” (Spillane et al., 2009, p. 414). They also point out that organizations may be able of undertaking effective action vis-à-vis their environment and that their strategic choices to deal with resource scarcity may lead to diversity. In particular, “the strategies of actors at central positions in the organization—coping with and reducing uncertainty, managing resource flows, handling interdependencies—is stressed” (Huisman & Meek, 1999, p. 123). For instance, “marketing, lobbying and coalition formation are (...) strategies that leaders can use to change the way the environment views the organization” (Bees & Dee, 2008, p. 151). However, it also recognizes that organizations exercise strategic choice within the constraints imposed by their institutional environments (Hrebaniak & Joyce, 1985; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and that any potential for self-determination and strategic freedom is also shaped by historical and material circumstances (Marginson, 2007). These theories:

...share these two basic assumptions: organizational choice and action are limited by various external pressures and demands, and the organizations must be responsive in order to survive. However, these theoretical perspectives do not converge on two central issues: first, to what extent are organizations capable of reacting to changes in their environment, and second, how do they do it, i.e., the mechanisms that couple environments to organizational change (Zha, 2009, p. 460).

For instance, regarding the search for legitimacy, the neo-institutional perspective will emphasize conformity to external criteria whereas resource dependency will focus on the control of external criteria; while the neo-institutional perspective focuses on organizations conforming to collective norms and believes, the resource dependency approach emphasizes coping with interdependencies.

Oliver’s approach intends to provide a model that allows for hypothesis for both types of behaviours: “Institutional theorists are capable of addressing a broad range of strategic responses to the institutional environment if they assume a potential for variation in the resistance, awareness, proactiveness, influence and self-interest of organizations” (Oliver, 1991, p. 151), in “which conformity or resistance to institutional pressures is likely to reflect both institutional and

technical concerns” (Goodstein, 1994, p. 352). That is, organizations are considered “active entities that make strategic choices. They accept or reject institutional rules as they relate to their own interests and do not view acceptance from a negative or passive perspective” (Fernández-Alles & Llamas-Sánchez, 2008, p. 6).⁴⁴ Consequently, Oliver (1991) identifies a range of possible responses from an organization to institutional processes which are summarized in table 4-2 below. The range of possible strategies is much broader than what a traditional neo-institutional perspective would offer, a variability that appears to be supported by the empirical evidence in the higher education sector (Huisman & Meek, 1999).⁴⁵ The strategies proposed by Oliver (1991) are summarized as follows:

First, organizations may acquiesce and fully conform to institutional pressures and expectations. Second, organizations may compromise by partially complying with institutional demands. Third, they may avoid institutional pressures through such means as concealing nonconformity, responding symbolically, and buffering themselves. Fourth, they may actively reject institutional norms or expectations in defiance of institutional pressures. Fifth, organizations may adopt an aggressive posture toward institutional agents and, through manipulation, attempt to actively change or exert power over institutional pressures (Goodstein, 1994, p. 352).

Oliver’s model goes beyond the identification of strategies to break them down into tactics, which are quite specific and illustrate that there is some degree of variance within each strategy. For instance, when organizations ‘acquiesce’, this may range from mimicking institutional models, especially those known and trusted, to compliance, which is a conscious and strategic choice to comply with institutional pressures to obtain a social benefit – an idea akin to utility maximization. However, given the difficulty in empirically differentiating tactics it is recommended to use them as examples to guide the classification of actions observed sector (Huisman & Meek, 1999). Moreover, the strategies appear mostly concerned with the organization itself, but upon taking a closer look, one notes examples of negotiation with stakeholders and accommodating and balancing their expectations and requirements under ‘compromise’, which rather suggests negotiated change. Finally, it is useful to recognize that the institutional environment in which organizations operate can influence and delimit the strategies that organizations can employ, since “strategies that may be appropriate in one kind of industry or field may be prohibited in another” (R. W. Scott, 2008, p. 169). It is argued, however, that the strategies that Oliver concentrates on can be pursued irrespective of field-level constraints (R. W. Scott, 2008, p. 170).

⁴⁴ Another solution is to analyze the collective level, where associations could act on behalf of individual organizations in search of “collective responses to environmental pressures, often to redefine or reshape institutional demands” (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999, p. 300). This study pursues first the avenue of analyzing the individual organizational level, but it will soon be noticed that coordination and collective responses become important to provide a complete picture of changes underway, and this phenomenon is analyzed in section 8.3.

⁴⁵ An overview of empirical evidence regarding institutional versus strategic behaviour in higher education institutions is provided by Huisman & Meek (1999). The authors indicate how although some isomorphism in program creation is observed at the university level, there are also some strategic choices that are made. Moreover, in their paper, they set out to test under which circumstances they observe the different kinds of behaviour listed by Oliver.

TABLE 4-2: STRATEGIC RESPONSES TO INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES (OLIVER, 1991)

| Strategies | Tactics | Examples |
|-------------------|----------------|---|
| Acquiesce | Habit | Following invisible, taken-for-granted norms |
| | Imitate | Mimicking institutional models |
| Compromise | Comply | Obedying rules and accepting norms |
| | Balance | Balancing the expectations of multiple constituents |
| | Pacify | Placating and accommodating institutional elements |
| Avoid | Bargain | Negotiating with institutional stakeholders |
| | Conceal | Disguising nonconformity |
| | Buffer | Loosening institutional attachments |
| Defy | Escape | Changing goals, activities or domains |
| | Dismiss | Ignoring explicit norms and values |
| | Challenge | Contesting rules and requirements |
| Manipulate | Attack | Assaulting the sources of institutional pressure |
| | Co-opt | Importing influential constituents |
| | Influence | Shaping values and criteria |
| | Control | Dominating institutional constituents and processes |

Source: Oliver (1991, p. 152)

Oliver’s model is further developed by adding a series of hypothesis predicting organizational responses with the objective “to increase our understanding of the processes and factors that lead to a specific behaviour, either strategic or institutional” (Huisman & Meek, 1999, p. 128). There appears to be a bit of a contradiction between the neo-institutional grounding of the Oliver approach that places emphasis on explaining and her presentation of predictive factors that are rooted in a more rational approach. Moreover, a focus on predictive factors has been criticized as explanatory factors change over time, interact with each other, and changes may be based on contingencies that are difficult to predict (Steinmo, 2010). However, Oliver’s exercise allows, along the lines indicated by Huisman & Meek above, to identify possible different strategies that are possible and to illustrate potential variability in action.

These predictors of strategic responses are summarized as the five “Cs”: cause, constituents, content, control and context. Cause refers to why the organization is being pressured to conform to certain institutional rules or expectations and it can be differentiated into legitimacy (or social fitness) or efficiency (or economic fitness). The constituents identify who is exerting the pressure on the organization, whether there are multiple constituent demands or not and the degree of dependence on them. The third predictor is content, that is, what is being required from the organization, which can be consistent or not with organizational goals and can result in discretionary constraints. The fourth predictor is control, and how is it exerted, which can range from legal coercion or enforcement to voluntary diffusion. The fifth and final factor is context, which can be one of environmental uncertainty or of environmental interconnectedness (Oliver, 1991). The hypotheses put forward by Oliver linking predictors to strategies are summarized in the table below. For each type of antecedent, the likelihood that each of the strategic responses is observed is qualified as high, moderate or low.

TABLE 4-3: INSTITUTIONAL ANTECEDENTS AND PREDICTED STRATEGIC RESPONSES (OLIVER, 1991)

| Predictive Factor | Strategic Responses | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------------|----------|------|------------|
| | Acquiesce | Compromise | Avoid | Defy | Manipulate |
| Cause | | | | | |
| Legitimacy | High | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Efficiency | High | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Constituents | | | | | |
| Multiplicity | Low | High | High | High | High |
| Dependence | High | High | Moderate | Low | Low |
| Content | | | | | |
| Consistency | High | Moderate | Moderate | Low | Low |
| Constraint | Low | Moderate | High | High | High |
| Control | | | | | |
| Coercion | High | Moderate | Moderate | Low | Low |
| Diffusion | High | High | Moderate | Low | Low |
| Context | | | | | |
| Uncertainty | High | High | High | Low | Low |
| Interconnectedness | High | High | Moderate | Low | Low |

Source: Oliver (1991, p. 160)

When the relationship between antecedents and strategic responses above is analyzed with a view to operationalize it for data collection, some drawbacks are observed. First, there appears to be bias – likely justified in the rooting of Oliver’s approach on the neo-institutional tradition— towards strategies that are moderate in character (i.e., acquiesce, compromise and avoid).⁴⁶ Second, the antecedents for one instrument can potentially be conducive to different responses and the model does not provide any insights as to which strategy will prevail. For instance, accountability measures are often introduced in the name of social legitimacy and when linked to funding, can have a certain element of coercion. These two forces suggest a tendency to ‘acquiesce’. On the other hand, the multiplicity of stakeholders and the constraints imposed could suggest a tendency to ‘avoid’ or even ‘manipulate’. Despite this limitation, in an effort to summarize the model’s predictions, it has been argued that:

Conformity can be expected in light of perceptions of high legitimacy, consistency, and interconnectedness, while resistance can be anticipated in light of perceptions of low efficiency, high multiplicity, moderate dependence, high constraints, low coercion, and moderate diffusion (Jamali, 2010, p. 632).

Despite these shortfalls, Oliver’s precursors of strategic responses can be mapped to the dimensions of accountability presented in section 2.1. The cause, or reason for an institutional arrangement to be in place, reflects the standards of accountability, or accountability for what, which in the example provided by Oliver could refer to increased legitimacy or organizational efficiency. The constituents reflect the agent of accountability, or accountability to whom, since it identifies who is exerting pressure on the organization. Oliver’s model opens up the possibility of considering the impact of having multiple constituents with conflicting expectations, as situation

⁴⁶ In the table of antecedents, there are fifty possible results, of which ‘acquiesce’, ‘compromise’, and ‘avoid’ are considered highly or moderately probable outcomes in almost half of the cases, whereas ‘defy’ and ‘manipulate’ appear as highly only four times out of fifty.

that is observed in accountability arrangements (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010). The content and the control reflect the form that the accountability instrument takes—the means—in terms of what is being required, the degree of discretionary power left to the organization and the mechanisms of enforcement. The content and control mechanisms embedded within an instrument can clearly be differentiated, however, in establishing the links with the accountability dimensions it is noted that the “means” are a broader term that encompasses different aspects of the instrument, such as the form it takes, the information it contains, and the mechanisms for coercion and enforcement.

There is one accountability dimension, the object, which is implicit in the Oliver model as it simply refers to the organization being imposed a new requirement. Then, there is one predictive factor, context, that is absent from accountability dimensions, as it does not define an accountability arrangement but rather the environment in which it is placed. These relationships are summarized in the table below.

TABLE 4-4: ACCOUNTABILITY DIMENSIONS VS OLIVER’S PRECURSORS OF STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR

| Accountability Dimension | Oliver’s Precursor | Comments |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Object | | Implicit in the Oliver model |
| Standards | Cause | |
| Agents | Constituents | |
| Means | Content | |
| | Control | |
| | Context | Contextual factor that does not define the accountability instrument |

Summing up, the discussion on policy analysis with a focus on organizations suggests that it is acceptable –and even recommended—to study organizations to help understand the implementation and consequences of a given policy or of a particular policy instrument, as it will complement any findings drawn from the application of more traditional public policy approaches. Nonetheless, given the variability in the governance systems worldwide for universities, the degree of cohesiveness of central administrations in a given post-secondary system is a key element to consider before applying an organizational focus to the analysis. Given that Ontario universities, in general, have strong central administrations and, being state-chartered, have enjoyed significant procedural and academic autonomy for a long time, the use of this approach is justified.

Ontario universities are immersed in a context characterized by a strong institutional environment in which they make strategic choices. Therefore, a model that takes into account those characteristics is a useful starting point for an analysis of impact on universities. In that regard, Oliver’s extension of neo-institutionalism recognizes that organizations have a certain degree of agency, and that despite path-dependency forces, organizational change can be observed (R. W. Scott, 2008).

The model also recognizes that universities themselves may behave as active participants contributing to define and modify their environment, either independently or collectively via the Council of Ontario Universities, an active player in public policy debates. Although Oliver’s approach is useful for understanding the role that organizations play when facing new government-imposed

demands, given that it does not provide with clear insights as to what strategy will prevail, and that there appears to be a bias towards compliance-type strategies, the approach is considered incomplete. Consequently, the literature on accountability and policy instruments is further explored to better define what behavior will be expected on the part of universities, as is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. ORGANIZATIONS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND POLICY INSTRUMENTS

Given the limitations outlined for Oliver (1991) in the previous chapter, an alternative and complementary approach, closer to the object of study of this thesis, was sought. Massy (2011), a model that aims at describing the specific strategies that universities undertake to deal with accountability measures imposed on them, appears to offer some solutions to the drawbacks highlighted. In this chapter, the contributions that the Massy model can make to this study's analytical framework are discussed. However, the Massy model ignores the possibility that the instrument may produce unintended or non-neutral impacts; therefore, insights from the theory of policy instruments (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007) are presented as well. The chapter concludes by piecing back together in a coherent fashion the different elements discussed thus far to complete the analytical framework that will guide the data collection process.

5.1. ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

Oliver (1991) offers a general model outlining the organizational strategies that could be undertaken in response to the introduction of an institutional norm.⁴⁷ This approach is quite attractive given its simplicity, the intuitive character of the strategies outlined and the identification of possible predictive factors. However, it has some important limitations. First, the model does not appear to have been developed on the basis of empirical evidence nor has it been widely tested empirically, except for a few examples (Goodstein, 1994; Huisman & Meek, 1999; Jamali, 2010; Reale & Seeber, 2010). Although it is argued that it can be applied to varied contexts, fields or industries, its lack of specificity makes it difficult to directly apply it to a given sector, such as post-secondary education and accountability. Second, as mentioned before, the model does not explain which strategy will prevail when different antecedents are in play. How do organizations balance the different determining factors to choose how to act?

Given those limitations, a search was undertaken for an alternative approach to study post-secondary education accountability and Massy (2011), which is based on a rational economic approach that assumes a principal-agent relationship between universities and government, was identified. The use of alternative models is often justified in the study of implementation of an initiative since "it may be valuable to triangulate accounts, to use different theoretical models to try to achieve a satisfactory explanation of what happened" (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 59). Furthermore, insights and assumptions from principal-agent theory are at the cornerstone of the NPM trend towards accountability for performance, the pursuit of priority alignment, and the introduction of incentives for behaviour (Brouard, 2010; Gruening, 2001). Therefore, it is of interest to seek insights from a model that shares assumptions with a movement that is at the origin of the initiative, to search for internal consistency and to inquire about the applicability of its underlying principles. This

⁴⁷ Institution, in this sense, is defined as "a more or less coordinated set of rules and procedures that governs the interactions and behaviors of actors and organizations" (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 8).

study proposes Massy (2011) as a complementary analytical tool for the study of the MYA/MYAAAs implementation process.

Principal-agent theory originates in the new economics of organization to study contractual relationships (Moe, 1984), and became the basis for numerous studies relating bureaucracy to elected officials since the 1970s (Waterman & Meier, 1998). In those analyses, modern representative democracy is depicted as a series of principal-agent relations:

Citizens, the primary principals in a democracy, transfer their sovereignty to political representatives who, in turn (at least in parliamentary systems) confide their trust in a cabinet. Cabinet ministers delegate or mandate most of their powers to the thousands of civil servants at the ministry, which in its turn, transfers many powers to more or less independent agencies and public bodies (Bovens, 2005a, p. 192)

Some examples of its use in political science include analyses of the relationship between legislators and political groups (Mitnick, 1975), of the costs associated with monitoring (Mitnick, 1980), of comparative politics (Huber & Shipan, 2000), of presidential decisions (Downs & Rocke, 1994) and of the relationship between the Supreme court and lower courts (Songer, Segal, & Cameron, 1994). The approach assumes a utility-maximizing behavior on the part of the agent that is “driven by his own interests, makes decisions on the basis of information only imperfectly available to the principal, and engages in behavior that the principal can only imperfectly observe” (Moe, 1987, p. 480). The approach also assumes that there is goal conflict between principals and agents, and that given information asymmetries, this motivates the principal to establish monitoring and rewarding systems to control the agent (Moe, 1987; Waterman & Meier, 1998). The approach, however, is heavily criticized by sociologists who study organizations, given that its basic assumptions are considered false from an empirical perspective, including among others, the minimization of uncertainty, ignoring the incomplete character of information, abolishing the non-consensual character of objectives for the principal and the agent, and neglecting the role played by third parties to explain consequences of decisions (Muller, Leca, Majone, Thoenig, & Duran, 1996).

Similarly to Oliver (1991), the development of Massy (2011) does not appear to be based on its empirical testing. Rather, its applicability is argued by observing dissimilar situations across higher education systems and fitting them into the model. Despite the limited empirical grounding of the model, compared to Oliver, two differences of the Massy model that are important for the object of study are noted. First, given the assumption of utility-maximizing behavior, predicting what strategies will prevail is an objective of the model and these predictions are clearly outlined based on a number of assumptions. Second, the power relationship between universities and government is explicit in the principal-agent relationship, although it is simplified when described as a contractual one, where the responsibilities of both parties are established (Waterman & Meier, 1998).

One challenge with the application of this model is that it does not evaluate the legitimacy of the principal’s goals (Kivisto, 2008), which is a natural consequence of the model’s theoretical basis. In the principal-agent approach, it is assumed that the principal delegates authority to the agent, but has difficulty in controlling them, since agents may have differing goals, specialized abilities and a knowledge advantage that allows them to use the principal resources to pursue ends that benefit

the agent (Kivisto, 2008; Moe, 1987; Waterman & Meier, 1998). The principal thus tries to minimize this problem by developing mechanisms to monitor and direct the agent using “an array of oversight, compensatory, and punitive initiatives” (J. E. Lane, 2007). Moreover, the principal has the legal or moral authority and the agents are expected to follow. Consequently, the model leaves the introduction of accountability measures and their legitimacy unquestioned. That is, the need for accountability is given and any observation of their general impact, for instance, on autonomy, is overlooked.

Rather than discussing the legitimacy of intervention, or the adequate balance between autonomy and accountability, Massy’s approach is to define the degree of trust in the principal-agent relationship, where trust is operationalized as having congruent or positively aligned goals. Although principal-agent theory assumes conflicting goals between agent and principal (Waterman & Meier, 1998), Massy’s application develops possible scenarios by assuming that goal alignment is possible. Furthermore, contrary to an alternative definition of trust as the antithesis of accountability (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011), Massy defines trust as the absence of conflict, since “policy conflict will exist when more than one organization sees a policy as directly relevant to its interests and when organizations have incongruous views” (Matland, 1995, p. 156).

According to Massy, when there is mutual trust, both principal and agent have the same view about “what needs to be done, why and to some extent how to do it”, which facilitates the interchange between principal and agent. On the other hand, distrust makes any exchanges more difficult, prevents from achieving consensus and consequently, the principal does not achieve what it hoped (Massy, 2011, p. 222). Massy’s perspective is congruent with a top-down and normative policy implementation approach, where conflict/trust “is treated as an endogenous variable that policy designers can influence and should minimize” (Matland, 1995, p. 157). Thus, to Massy, accountability is required to ensure a trust relationship between agent and principal, otherwise, the consequence of rejecting accountability demands may be reduced trust which “fuels demands for yet more accountability” (Massy, 2011, p. 225). The author recognizes that several challenges are faced when trying to achieve trust in higher education, including that quality is ill-defined, that the costs associated with PSE are poorly specified and that performance is hidden from the public or difficult to measure and interpret (Massy, 2011). However, given that “universities are generally not interested in being held accountable, for historical and cultural reasons, and their loose-coupled environment” (Massy, 2011, p. 284), this justifies the search for mechanisms to monitor agents’ activities, and to promote the use of sanctions and rewards to bring agents back in line with principal’s objectives (Waterman & Meier, 1998). Furthermore, the approach supposes that repeating an accountability cycle, if properly done, will contribute to priority alignment (Massy, 2011).

This highlights two important assumptions in the Massy model that overlook important observations from the implementation literature. First, Massy (2011) assumes that goals can be clear and unambiguous. However, experience demonstrates that this is part of the political within the policy process, that administration is not separate from political concerns, and thus policy development, formulation and implementation are not as straightforward as they appear (Matland, 1995). Second, as a top-down model, it emphasizes command, control and uniformity; however, it

fails “to take into account the diversity inherent in much implementation that occurs” (Matland, 1995, p. 167). In addition, the discussion of trust in the context of establishing performance agreements has been qualified as ironic since “contract arrangements [...] have often been developed as a response to a growing lack of trust, while contracts at the same time depend on trust in order to be able to function adequately”, that is, to “minimize the temptations of actors to cheat or to deviate” (Gornitzka et al., 2004, p. 99).

Massy proceeds to identify the factors determining the strategies that a university would undertake when facing the introduction of a new accountability requirement. Priority alignment is a key analytical variable in the model that is kept constant in the analysis to understand the agent’s strategic reaction to the principal’s request. In fact, the degree of support from target groups and field staff to the intent of a policy is key in determining their reaction. That is, if support is not there, “they may exercise principled disagreement with the policy and work to subvert it” (May, 2003, p. 228). Therefore, whether the objectives of introducing a given measure are positively or negatively aligned between the university and the government (Massy, 2011, pp. 232-3), are used to separate two possible sets of strategies. These two sets of strategies, in turn, are determined by two factors. First, the saliency of the rewards that the university – or agent – obtains from meeting the requirement. Second, the power of the measure, or how definite is the measure in terms of its robustness, credibility and reliance on good data. Echoing the top-down implementation literature, Massy recognizes that these are features to be built into a policy that will facilitate commitment to policy goals (May, 2003). Before presenting the mechanics explaining the choice of strategy, Massy’s three elements (alignment, saliency and power) are compared to Oliver’s predictive factors (cause, content, control, constituents and context).

There are two predictive factors in the Oliver model that are clearly identified in the Massy approach. First, Oliver’s *cause* is equivalent to Massy’s *saliency*. Although the rewards that will be obtained from compliance, are much more specific than what Oliver’s considered *cause*, the rewards could be construed as the concrete return regarding social or economic fitness. Second, two elements of the analysis in Massy are considered specifications of Oliver’s *content*. First, there is the specification of whether there is alignment of priorities between the principal and the agent in terms of whether what is required is consistent with the organization’s goals. Second, there is the specification of what is required, which Massy models in terms of measures and their power. Priority alignment can be interpreted at two levels: first, whether there is agreement with the ultimate objectives of the new institutional arrangement, that could be to increase legitimacy, or to increase efficiency—or what Oliver refers to as *cause*; second, whether there is agreement to the coherence between the form of the institutional arrangement and the organization’s internal goals—once again, what Oliver refers to a content. Both levels of priority alignment are condensed into one in the Massy model.

Oliver’s approach provides a broader or macro-level view of the elements and factors having influence on the organization’s response to the new requirement, whereas in the Massy model, the perspective is primarily funneled towards the instrument itself and other contextual factors are ignored. Therefore, there are three of Oliver’s predictive factors that are not identified by Massy: *constituents*, *control* and *context*. *Control* is not explicitly presented since accountability is already

defined as a requirement for the agent to win the principal’s trust. That is, the element of control, by whatever means, is at the core of Massy’s model and is therefore treated as given. The *constituents* are also ignored by Massy’s model as by definition there are two players in the decision-making, the principal and the agent, and the role played by other universities, students or faculty members is ignored. That is, Massy (2011) disregards the existence of forces other than the university and the government in the decision-making process, as it ignores the existence of multiple principals and agents (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010; Burke, 2005) and only briefly acknowledges that disagreement from faculty members may be observed. Finally, Massy does not dwell on questions of *context*, although one could argue that certain characteristics of the environment could be reflected on the alignment (or not) of goals between principal and agent. These three additional predictive factors outlined by Oliver but not considered by Massy may play a role in explaining strategic behaviour. For instance, *context* and *constituents* may prove important in facilitating or objecting to a negotiated process, depending on the role that multiple constituents play during implementation and the degree of uncertainty surrounding the process. Consequently, this analysis suggests that all factors should be kept in mind in the analysis of implementation. This comparison is summarized in the table below.

TABLE 5-1: COMPARING OLIVER (1991) ANTECEDENTS TO MASSY (2011) FACTORS

| Oliver’s Factors | Oliver’s Antecedents | Massy’s Factors |
|------------------|---|--|
| Cause | Social Fitness Economic Fitness | Saliency (operationalization) |
| Constituents | Multiple Dependence | Ignored |
| Content | Consistency with Goals Constraints (loss of discretion) | Positive/Negative Alignment Power of the measure |
| Control | Legal Voluntary | Accountability is a requirement for gaining trust |
| Context | Environmental Uncertainty Environmental Interconnectedness | Ignored |

Source: Constructed based on Oliver (1991) and Massy (2011)

As mentioned above, Massy identifies two sets of strategies, one where there is positive alignment of objectives and another where there is negative alignment, along the two dimensions of saliency of the rewards and power of the metrics. In the positive alignment model, summarized in table 5-2 below, the expected university strategy is that the new accountability measures be adopted, albeit to different degrees, as there may be incentives to enter a negotiation process for either better metrics or better rewards. New accountability measures will be embraced when the objectives of both principal and agent are aligned, the expected rewards from compliance are clear and fair and the metrics are strong, practical and meaningful. Conversely, if there is alignment of objectives but both the rewards and metrics are flawed, adoption will be weak; that is, the goals or processes will be established, but not necessarily enforced. As well, if the rewards are attractive but the metrics are poor, the institution will be likely to initiate an effort to develop better metrics. In a case of powerful metrics but poor rewards, the institution will tend to negotiate better rewards. This can be compared to a legitimization process, where the acceptance of the requirement

contributes to secure stability and survival of the agent. However, if it is deemed unacceptable or controversial, organizations will adopt symbolic measures to deal with new impositions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

TABLE 5-2: MASSY (2011) MODEL WITH POSITIVE ALIGNMENT OF OBJECTIVES

| | | Power | |
|----------|------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | Low | High |
| Saliency | High | Adopt & develop better metrics | Adopt deeply (embrace) |
| | Low | Adopt weakly | Adopt & negotiate for better rewards |

Source: Adapted from Massy (2011), p.233

In the negative alignment model, summarized in table 5-3 below, more drastic strategies are observed. When the power of the metrics and the saliency of the rewards are high, the university will conform to the new requirements, but its adoption will be less stable than in the positive alignment scenario. This is the case when the objectives may result in internal problems for the university such as disagreement from faculty members. Conversely, if the rewards and the metrics are poor, the university will have a tendency to ignore the requirement. When the rewards are strong but the metrics are poor, and the requirement is unacceptable or controversial, the institution will tend to comply in a rhetorical or symbolic fashion (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), such as changing processes that do not affect the actual situation, which also echoes the concept of “creative compliance” (Power, 2000). This symbolic nature of change is an important concern in the accountability literature (Bovens et al., 2008).

This compliance strategy is also described as buffering or “an organization’s attempt to reduce the extent to which it is externally inspected, scrutinized, or evaluated by partially detaching or decoupling its technical activities from external contact” (Oliver, 1991, p. 155) and as responses that are structured in a “ceremonial manner, making changes in their formal structures to signal conformity, but then buffering internal units, allowing them to operate independent of these pressures” (R. W. Scott, 2008, p. 171). Universities are considered “prime examples of organizations which routinely adapt to external expectations without necessarily transforming them directly into organizational change” (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 254) and Meyer & Rowan (1983) suggest that they are motivated to perpetuate their loose coupling since it protects instructional activities and shelters autonomy (as reviewed by Oliver, 1991). Finally, if the metrics are strong but the rewards are weak, the institution will tend to simply explain the lack of compliance, i.e., “spin” the results. A fifth possible strategy that is not represented in the table below is possible when the potential negative consequences for the university are very important, and will result in overt resistance.

TABLE 5-3: MASSY (2011) MODEL WITH NEGATIVE ALIGNMENT OF OBJECTIVES

| | | Power | |
|----------|------|--------|---------|
| | | Low | High |
| Saliency | High | Comply | Conform |
| | Low | Ignore | Spin |

Source: Adapted from Massy (2011), p.237

Although Massy (2011) and Oliver (1991) have different theoretical backgrounds, the identification of common strategies, as was done earlier with the case of predictors, shows a certain degree of resemblance between the approaches. For instance, Massy’s approach provides some details on Oliver’s strategies that are very large (especially, ‘Acquiesce’) and offers clear examples of compromise in the context of accountability, which can take the form of developing better metrics or of negotiating for better rewards. In addition, Massy (2011) recognizes the value of negotiation and recommends that negotiations among stakeholders are undertaken to produce positive alignment of objectives, to identify rewards that are highly salient to the universities, and that the measure system be of reasonable power but acceptable to academics. In synthesis, the two models can be brought together as proposed in the table below.

TABLE 5-4: COMPARISON OF STRATEGIES

| Oliver (1991) | Massy (2011) | Explanation (Massy 2011) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Acquiesce | Adopt deeply | Positive alignment, rewards and metrics |
| | Adopt weakly | Positive alignment and rewards, weak metrics |
| | Conform | Negative alignment, strong rewards and metrics |
| Compromise | Adopt & develop better metrics | Positive alignment and rewards, poor metrics |
| | Adopt & negotiate for better rewards | Positive alignment and metrics, poor rewards |
| Avoid | Comply | Negative alignment and metrics, strong rewards |
| | Spin | Negative alignment and rewards, strong metrics |
| Defy | Ignore | Negative alignment, rewards and metrics |
| | Overt resistance | Costs of implementation are significant |
| Manipulation | Unidentified | |

Summarizing, these two models, despite being based on very different theoretical backgrounds, arrive to the similar conclusion that the extent to which a university will embrace a new accountability measure will depend on the value of the rewards—both financial and regarding their legitimacy—and the congruency in objectives with those of the government. When the objectives are not congruent, the universities will try to minimize the negative internal impacts by taking into consideration the impact on internal constituents (e.g., faculty, students). On the other hand, neither of the models questions the legitimacy of imposing additional accountability measures on universities, including the legitimacy of the instrument itself or the content that is considered. Given that Massy (2011) indicates that the power of the metrics will dictate how much leeway the university has to use symbolical or rhetorical demonstrations of compliance, the discussion briefly turns to an overview of policy instruments theory to contribute to our understanding of the role played by the metrics chosen.

5.2. THE THEORY OF POLICY INSTRUMENTS

The theoretical framework presented so far provides an approach to address the first main question of this study regarding how the new accountability policies introduced with *Reaching Higher* in 2005 were implemented by Ontario universities, and why organizations made those implementation choices. These strategic choices are important to analyze since they help

understand the degree of change that is observed after a new requirement is introduced. The two additional questions in this study transcend implementation choices and inquire what these reveal regarding how accountability is interpreted and internalized by Ontario universities, and regarding university/state relationships and faculty/administration relationships. In that sense, the analysis goes beyond a technical or functionalist perspective of the instrumentation of public policy and is complemented by the contributions made by the policy instruments framework (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010; Lascoumes & Simard, 2011). The contributions made by this approach to this study's analytical framework are discussed in this section.

Policy instruments are generally defined as “the actual means or devices governments have at their disposal for implementing policies, and among which they must select in formulating policy” (M. Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, p. xx). The theoretical contributions of the analysis of policy instruments have been made by two main schools of thought. On one hand, there is a functionalist tradition, where the emphasis is placed on the choice of instrument as an important element of policy design and is mostly based on technical considerations (Bressers & O’Toole, 1998; M. Howlett, 1991; Linder & Peters, 1989; May, 2003). Much of the literature under this stream of research has focused on the development of typologies of instruments (Hood, 1991, 2007; John, 2010; Salamon, 2002) or on the linkages between policy design and instrument choice (M. Howlett, 1991; Linder & Peters, 1989). In the post-secondary education literature, the instrument and policy design tradition has been applied to an analysis of instruments to ensure academic quality (Dill & Beerens, 2010a) and to the analysis of incentive-based quality assurance instruments in the Czech higher education sector (Kohoutek, 2010). However, this literature is criticized as it “has taken a technocratic turn that emphasizes the mechanics of different policy instruments and attention to their fit with different problems, political settings and goals” (May, 2003, p. 225). Furthermore, the development of taxonomies “provides little insight about trade-offs in choosing different mixes of instruments or about the impacts of different tools” (May, 2003, p. 225).

On the other hand, the political sociology tradition emphasizes the effects or impacts that the instruments have, as these are not considered neutral but are understood to convey a specific problematization of the issue at stake (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010; Lascoumes & Simard, 2011). In that regard, the French tradition recognizes the contribution of the choice of instruments approach, but is critical of the observation that policy instruments are often introduced as if they were natural, readily available and at the disposal of government (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010) without considering their effects, intended or unintended, regarding the way in which they structure relations across different agents, and the way in which they define, represent, conceptualize and problematize the issue at stake. That is, instruments are not neutral: The way in which we choose to measure something defines it and instruments become institutions in their own right with their own effects:

A public policy instrument constitutes a device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries. It is a particular type of institution, a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 4)

For instance, performance evaluations and accountability practices that aim at controlling organizations are not considered “neutral acts of verification (since these) actively shape the design and interpretation of ‘auditable performance’” (Power, 2000, p. 114); or the devolution of greater autonomy to universities in the Netherlands has been interpreted as a restructuring of government and university relationships where there is still significant control, but that is undertaken via different mechanisms (Enders et al., 2012).

In this study, the perspective from the political sociology tradition is privileged, as the main question inquires about the consequences of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs. Therefore, looking into the analysis of the implementation choices in this study is complemented by what the instrument itself reveals regarding the “relationship between the governing and the governed” as well as determining what “specific effects, independent of the objective pursued” are observed in the sector (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 3). Furthermore, the analysis contributes to an understanding of the legitimization or delegitimation of the instrument (Le Galès, 2004).

As it was mentioned in the previous section, a consequence of the principal-agent theory approach proposed by Massy is that it assumes that accountability is a given, legitimate request from the government. However, as mentioned in the discussion of accountability in the post-secondary education sector, there is an important debate regarding the counterbalancing forces of accountability and autonomy. That is, the requirement for additional accountability may not be readily accepted in the sector and thus, the introduction of a measure, and the form that it takes, may contribute to the impacts observed, including how it is implemented and internalized by universities. In the specific case of the MYAAAs, their introduction was unlikely to have been perceived as neutral as these were openly intended to increase accountability and to align the priorities of government and universities.

These considerations highlight the need to push the analysis beyond the implementation strategies proposed by Massy (2011) and Oliver (1991) to ask how the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs impacted the relationship between universities and the government. Lascoumes & Le Galès (2007) identify the following effects from the introduction of an instrument that help guide the analysis to go beyond the organizational-level strategies:

- (i) *The instrument will partly determine the way in which actors behave.* This point is recognized in the Massy and Oliver models as it is closely linked to the question of the power of measure and its saliency. Nonetheless, to explicitly consider it opens the door to inquiring whether due to the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs, government/university priorities are further aligned.
- (ii) *The instrument will create uncertainties about the balance of power.* As was discussed in the presentation of the research problem, with the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs, concerns were raised regarding their impact on university autonomy, but the Massy and Oliver models were mostly silent in this regard. This perspective highlights the need to inquire whether the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs has affected university autonomy.

- (iii) *The instrument eventually privileges certain actors and excludes others.* That is, not only are there uncertainties about the balance of power, but power may be redistributed as a result of introducing a new instrument (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010). In that regard, two key questions relevant to this study are identified: (i) What does the development and implementation of the MYA/MYAAs reveals regarding the relationship between the government and universities? (ii) What about internal university governance structures and the role played by faculty and student representatives?
- (iv) *It constraints actors while offering them new possibilities.* The question ranges from the choices made internally to institutions regarding strategies and targets to how the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs structure accountability-autonomy relationships between the government and the universities.
- (v) *Drives forward a certain representation of problems.* That is, instruments shape the political discourse (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010). Are there definitions of the problems facing universities institutionalized as a result of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs?

It is also useful to assess how the MYA/MYAAs can be classified according to the typology of policy instruments presented in table 5-5 below. Since the MYA/MYAAs evolved from a first generation where three-year plans were developed with targeted outcomes and report-backs to what has been characterized as primarily a data collection tool, their effects would be expected to vary accordingly. First generation MYA/MYAAs can be characterized as performance agreements or contracts, where universities were expected to change their behaviour in certain areas, and funding was to be provided based on the demonstration of performance as per output indicators (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001). This approach includes a process of give and take, where both universities and government have the opportunity to build trust, align objectives and result in interactive dialogue (Massy, 2011). Later on, the emphasis on plans and targets was abandoned, and the new MYAAs can be characterized more as reporting tools or as a data gathering instrument, as per the government's authority to request such information (Hood, 2007). It is noted that given their different iterations and apparent objectives, the MYA/MYAAs overlap several categories in the following hierarchical order. First, these were conceived as an agreement-based instrument that seeks direct involvement from constituents. Second, it was operationalized and evolved into an information/communication based instrument that aims at increasing accountability. Finally, an underlying objective was to be an economic instrument that seeks to increase economic efficiency. This multiplicity of objectives, their implications in terms of political relations and of the type of legitimacy privileged will be further developed and taken into consideration in the analyses that follow.

TABLE 5-5: TYPOLOGY OF POLICY INSTRUMENTS

| Type of Instrument | Type of Political Relations | Type of Legitimacy |
|--|---|---|
| Legislative and Regulatory | Social Guardian State | Imposition of a General Interest by Mandated Elected Representatives |
| Economic and Fiscal | Wealth Producer State, and Redistributive State | Seeks Benefit to the Community Social and Economic Efficiency |
| Agreement-Based and Incentive-Based | Mobilizing State | Seeks Direct Involvement |
| Information-Based and Communication-Based | Audience Democracy | Explanation of Decisions and Accountability of Actors |
| De Facto and De Jure Standards Best Practices | Adjustments within Civil Society Competitive Mechanisms | Mixed: Scientific/ Technical, Democratically Negotiated and/or Competition, Pressure of Market Mechanisms |

Source: Lascombes & Le Galès (2007), p.12

Furthermore, the analysis of the introduction of the MYAAs would be incomplete if it focused solely on the macro level. That is, each university had significant leeway in defining the specific strategies and measures that they were committing to, and it is important to analyze whether and to what extent these specifics may have had an impact on structuring the relationships with internal agents within the university, as well as any unintended effects they may have had. For instance, how are university-specific strategies identified? To what extent are symbolic measures undertaken? Is there a direct impact on the academic function of universities or is there some kind of buffering observed? To what extent the universities manipulate or negotiate to obtain better metrics? What is the impact of measuring things a certain way? Are there any impacts on the academic functions of the university?

Therefore, this discussion suggests that the analysis of the transformative effect of the MYA/MYAAs—a question that cuts across the formulation, development and implementation of the instrument—can be analyzed from the general to the specific in order to tease out the different elements that play an influential role. At the highest level, the first question of analysis is regarding the consequences of introducing a new requirement for accountability. For that purpose, understanding the motivations and objectives behind the introduction of the new instrument is important. Since these inform our interpretation of the saliency of the rewards associated with it, as well as the potential for priority alignment. The second level of analysis relates to the choice of a performance contract as the instrument, a question closely linked to the objectives that are sought after with its introduction, taking into consideration that the instrument is not neutral. The third level of analysis deals with the impact from introducing specific strategies at the university level as part of a performance contract. In order to analyze this factor, the operationalization of the implementation process must be studied. The fourth layer looks into how the measures/indicators introduced to follow up performance regarding the strategies in level three may have consequences of their own. Finally, a key contribution of the political sociology approach to studying instruments is that the changes introduced in accountability in the Ontario PSE sector were characterized above as the result of the NPM movement, which has been traditionally characterized by its proponents as

an apolitical process (Hood, 1991), that searches for natural or better approaches to manage the public sector. Looking into the instruments perspective allows for introducing the political nature of the exercise in the analysis, which enriches any conclusions drawn from applying a framework based on principal-agent theory.

5.3. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The approach developed for this research is ambitious and eclectic, where the introduction of an instrument of accountability will be analyzed, starting with its formulation, followed by implementation decisions by the government and universities, including a look into how it is internalized by the latter, and finalizing with an assessment of what this reveals regarding the relationship between different actors in the policy network. In that sense, the analysis is undertaken from three different angles:

- First, the analysis aims at understanding the substance or content of the new requirement, which falls within a more classical policy analysis approach (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2010). Within this angle, the focus is placed on understanding the context and rationale for the government to introduce a new accountability instrument in Ontario's post-secondary sector, and the government's intended objectives.
- Second, the analysis looks in to the implementation process at the organizational level. For this purpose, it builds upon the strategies identified by Massy (2011), as well as insights from organizational and institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Oliver, 1991) to explain the behavior observed at universities. Given the ex-post character of the analysis, the models help explain the observations made without testing their predictive power. The analysis also highlights what the organizational angle reveals about the policy process (Musselin, 2010).
- Third, this study is interested in understanding the consequences of introducing a new requirement. This is done from the perspective of analyzing an instrument of public action—*un instrument de l'action publique*—and what this reveals vis-à-vis how the issue at stake was problematized and its intended or unintended impacts (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2010).

Thus, the analysis starts with the more classical approach, aiming at understanding the context—the “call for accountability”—and the rationale for the government to introduce a new requirement. This is followed by an interest in understanding the actions of universities based on a number of hypotheses regarding university behavior following Massy (2011) and Oliver (1991). As the research process advanced, however, the theoretical models chosen felt lacking and insufficient to understand the observations made during the field work, and the analysis was open to understand more from an organizational and instrument perspective what is observed in the sector. In particular, “the objective is not only to understand the reasons for choosing an instrument, but also to consider the effects resulting from those choices” (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2010, p. 326).

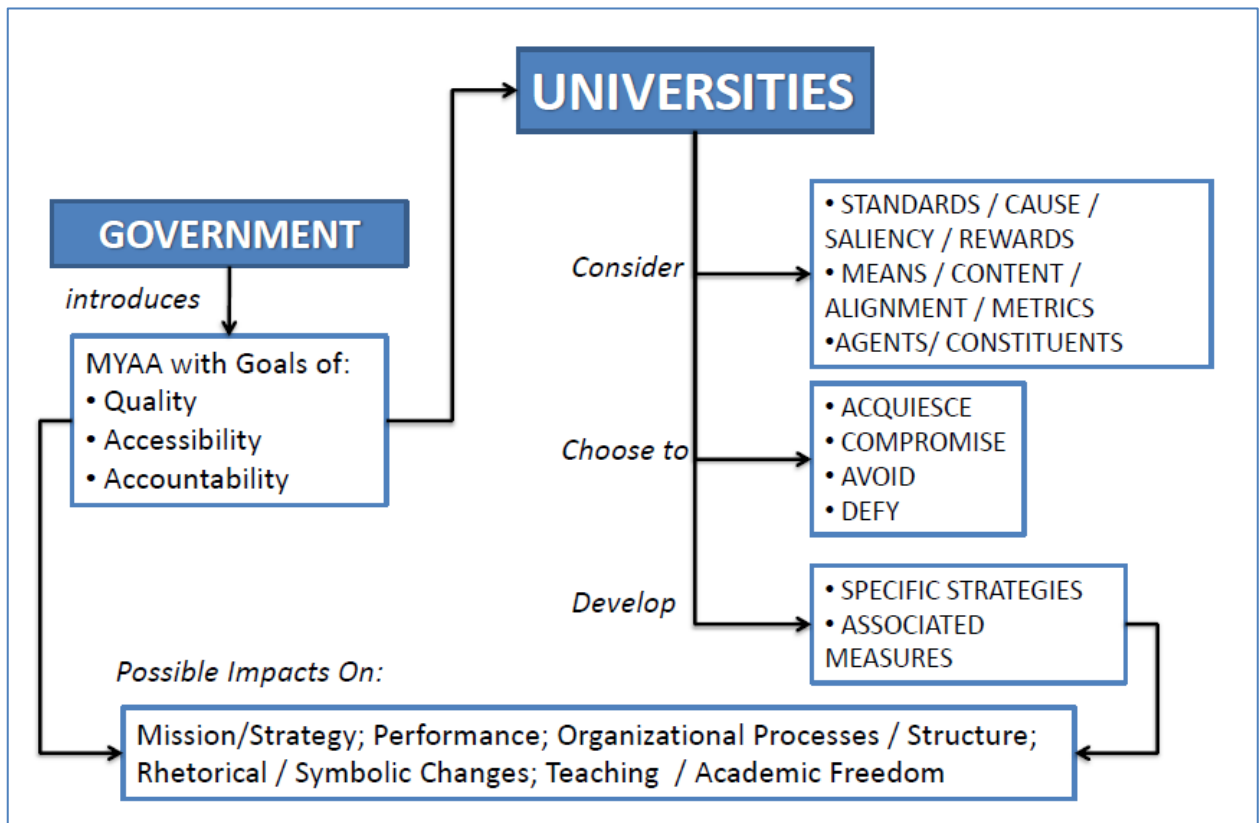
The development of this framework is akin to the integrated implementation model developed by Winter in the early 90s that “aims at presenting the key factors and mechanisms that affect implementation outputs and outcomes” (Winter, 2003a, p.210). For instance, in Winter’s model, an understanding of the different policy stages is important to analyze the overall consequences of implementation. In that regard, a study of the implementation of a given initiative takes into consideration the policy formulation and policy design processes where policies may be characterized by ambiguous goals or the adoption of symbolic policies and that takes into consideration the instruments chosen for its operationalization. The model then focuses on the behaviours observed at the organizational and inter-organizational level that considers both resource-dependencies across actors and early implementation agreements that can influence later decisions. Consideration is also given to the socio-economic context, feedback mechanisms and the behaviour of target groups. Several of these considerations are explicitly described in the representation of the proposed framework that follows.

The diagram below summarizes the three angles of analysis as follows. The first angle is represented on the left hand side of the diagram, where the government is placed and their introduction of the new instrument is indicated with the goals of quality, accessibility and accountability. The diagram simplifies the process as the introduction of this instrument was not solely the result of government actions, but it represents that the new requirement is that starting point for the inquiry (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Sabatier, 2008). Indeed, the analysis of the origin and objectives of the new instrument is presented in Chapter 7, where the different forces propitiating its introduction are discussed. The analysis of the context contributes to our understanding of the implementation decisions made in terms of the choice of instrument, including its multi-year and binding character. Although the diagram below represents the introduction of the new requirement with a unidirectional arrow towards universities, it is recognized that some interaction and feedback may have taken place in a non-linear process (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009), but it is simplified this way for presentation purposes.

On the top center of the diagram, Ontario universities are represented, as these are placed at the core of the analysis. In this sense, the approach inserts itself within the literature that chooses an organizational angle as a way to understand public action and to define the object of study (Musselin, 2005). Within the first angle of analysis, the discussion focused on policy development; in this second angle, the focus shifts towards implementation decisions, where “public decisions take shape (...) inviting to inquiry about the existing linkages between the “daily” actions and the reform” (Musselin, 2010, p. 77). Ontario universities are represented as a block, given that the Ontario government introduces its policies for the sector without differentiation in the requirements per university. Therefore, the analysis hypothesizes that Ontario universities can be analyzed as a group. Furthermore, neither Oliver (1991) nor Massy (2011), although both focus on the organization, take into consideration the organization’s characteristics as determinants or drivers of which strategy prevails. Whether an organization is big, old, and well established or small and of recent creation, and the influence these characteristics will have on their decision-making appears to be immaterial or at least it is ignored. Even when Oliver explicitly indicates that variation across organizations is expected given they will have different institutional contexts and environments (Goodstein, 1994;

Oliver, 1991), these impacts are not teased out in the model. Rather, both models focus on the traits of the externally imposed policy/instrument/requirement. Consequently, this analysis also focuses primarily on the traits of the instrument, but teases out the role of organizational characteristics and highlights them when appropriate. For instance, other studies have hypothesized that younger institutions will be more inclined to apply defying and manipulative strategies as they will be “less permeated with the norms and values of the organizational field” than older ones (Huisman & Meek, 1999). In addition, varying institutional contexts evoke different strategies, thus a nuanced sense of the plurality of institutional contexts and cultures is required in the analysis of Canadian universities (Hardy, 1996).

FIGURE 5-1 SUMMARY OF THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK



The right hand section of the diagram represents how universities react to the introduction of the new requirement. The expected reaction by universities is developed based on Oliver (1991) and Massy (2011). In that regard, universities *consider* the content of the instrument, including the potential rewards, the alignment of objectives, the power of the metrics requested and the impact on constituents. This will dictate their choice of response, which can be described in terms of *acquiescing/adopting, compromising/conforming, avoiding/complying* or *defying*. Within these choices, the interaction with the government in terms of negotiating better measures or better rewards is implicit. There is also growing recognition that accountability mechanisms work best when universities are engaged in their definition in a collaborative process with governments and other stakeholders (Salmi, 2009). Furthermore, organizations may not be acting individually, but

that there may have been some degree of coalition in their decision-making. Finally, keeping in consideration all those explanatory or determining factors, universities are called to define the specific institutional-level strategies to meet system-wide goals and their associated metrics.

At the bottom of the diagram, the expected impacts of the introduction of the instrument are indicated, with one arrow coming directly from the policy and another arrow coming from implementation choices. That is, the analysis recognizes that some consequences will be the result of the decisions made at the implementation level; however, the introduction of the instrument itself also has its own effects as it reflects on how the issues are problematized at the government level. Examining the impacts of the policy itself complements the hypothesis regarding organizational behaviour based on Oliver (1991) and Massy (2011) as it looks into the policy process throughout its different phases, with the objective to clarify the change process without pre-conceived hypotheses of behaviour (Musselin, 2010, p. 81).

Given that the three angles of analysis interact with each other, a choice is not made between a top-down and a bottom-up approach to implementation. Although the study is initially framed from a top-down perspective, which is justifiable given that a policy structure the situation of analysis (Cerych & Sabatier, 1986), the analysis recognizes the importance of the contribution of different actors and the modifications that a policy is subject to over its implementation. Furthermore, the analysis emphasizes the identification of outcomes or impacts, not of goal achievement (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009; Winter, 2003a), which justifies the search for information about unintended consequences. This is akin to the instruments approach, where the concern is not only on finding the right instrument, but rather on understanding what this instrument reveals about the policy sector. Consequently, this study allows for an analysis of the policy process and its repercussions beyond the implementation decisions made, offering a transversal portrait of the Ontario post-secondary sector accountability landscape and contributing to a better understanding of the environment in which Ontario universities operate.

Chapter 6. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As it was indicated in the introduction to this study, the main question guiding this research is how have accountability policies introduced with *Reaching Higher* been implemented in Ontario universities and why have organizations made those implementation choices? This question was originally conceived by looking at a dominant piece of policy “structuring the situation” under study (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Sabatier, 2008) and focused on the behaviour observed at the university level. Consequently, the theoretical framework was initially developed following a literature review with an emphasis on explaining the strategies developed at the organizational level. In that regard, the documentary review allowed for an assessment of the reaction and response provided by universities. Furthermore, to understand the choices made by universities, the data collection could have been developed to test the models (Huisman & Meek, 1999; Jamali, 2010; Reale & Seeber, 2010) or to test a series of predefined hypothesis (Csiszmadia et al., 2008). However, the other research questions driving this study emphasized an interest on understanding the impact of the initiative on relationships across actors and on identifying both intended and unintended consequences, both questions that went beyond implementation decisions. In addition, this study aims to increase our knowledge of a current practice for which little information exists (Chevrier, 2009). Therefore, the emphasis during the operationalization of the research was placed on an approach that would allow for unintended consequences and unexpected impacts to be revealed.

As a result, the theoretical framework was revised iteratively and the operationalization of the data collection was done in such a way that the observations collected could be analyzed inductively. Had the focus been placed on the attainment of formal policy objectives, as in the top-down tradition, the opportunity to identify other effects would have been missed (Sabatier, 2008). In addition, the field work was undertaken in stages while allowing flexibility with a view to identify gaps as the material available was analyzed, and thus to adapt the data collection process as appropriate. Consequently, a limitation of this study is that it does not provide a full-test of the Oliver (1991) and Massy (2011) models. However, the observations made are explained by the models, a process akin to that of Huisman & Meek (1999).

The first source of information available consists of the MYA/MYAAs themselves, published by Ontario universities⁴⁸ online. These documents were analyzed to identify the content provided in the plans and report-backs and to identify any implementation choices unveiled by universities in their responses. Based on that analysis, a series of semi-structured interviews were planned with sector representatives involved in the MYA/MYAAs development and implementation process to better understand the government’s objectives as well as the universities’ decision-making process during implementation. These interviews also provided information regarding the origin, development and implications of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs, as well as information regarding their evolution and transformation.

⁴⁸ See Appendix A for a list of websites where accountability agreements are posted.

Furthermore, the information obtained in these interviews allowed for an exploration of the two other main questions guiding the analysis: “What do these implementation choices reveal about how accountability is interpreted and internalized by Ontario universities and their stakeholders? What does this reveal regarding university/state relationships and faculty/administration relationships?” However, to contribute to a deeper understanding of the processes in which the instrument was developed or the implications that the choices may have had in terms of strategies and metrics inside a university, three case study sites were chosen. The objective was to collect more specific information allowing to better document the decision-making processes and the use and implementation of the new requirement at the organizational level. However, due to a number of material limitations described below, the information originally sought after for this last stage of research was not obtained. Nonetheless, valuable data collected via the additional interviews undertaken and via the documents obtained in these sites was integrated throughout the analysis.

This chapter describes in detail the methodology just outlined, providing details on a characterization of Ontario universities that was used in the analysis, a description of the documents available, information on the process for selecting individuals for participating in the interviews, as well as describing the limitations encountered in the three case study sites. The chapter continues with a brief presentation of the approach undertaken for data analysis and finalizes with a short discussion of limitations.

6.1. DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

The field work initiated with an exploratory documentary review of the rich descriptive data provided in the 2006-07 to 2008-09 MYA plan and each of the subsequent annual report-back during that three-year period. This analysis provided an initial assessment of the organizational strategies undertaken by universities to deal with the new requirement. The population under study consists of the twenty publicly-funded Ontario universities which are full members of the Council of Ontario Universities.⁴⁹ This is quite a diverse group: some universities have been operating for more than 150 years while others were just only recently created; student enrolments range from a little over 1,000 students to close to 80,000; finally, some universities run a major research enterprise while others are primarily focused on teaching of undergraduate students (see Table 6-1 below).

⁴⁹ This study originally intended to analyze Ontario’s universities with unrestricted degree granting authority that MTCU numbers at sixteen. However, a list of those universities is publicly unavailable. Moreover, such a criterion would exclude the University of Toronto and Laurentian that cannot grant degrees in Theology. In the process of identifying the population under study, it was noted that the number of universities in Ontario differs according to the source (e.g., MTCU, AUCC or COU), which is explained by the different governance and funding arrangements in place. For instance, the Ontario government provides funding to 23 institutions listed as universities. Of these, two focus on religious training (Dominican University College and Redeemer University College). On the other hand, most denominational institutions are not listed separately since they obtain their public funding via a federated institution. These include Saint-Paul University (parent institution is Ottawa); St. Jerome College (parent institution is Waterloo); Brescia University College, Huron University College and King’s University College (parent institution is Western Ontario); and University of St. Michael’s College, University of Trinity College and Victoria University (parent institution is the University of Toronto). Another university excluded from the population is the Royal Military College, which is an associate member of COU (COU, 2010a). Given that the Ontario government often interacts with Ontario universities via COU, it was decided to use full membership in that Council as the criterion for inclusion.

Another difference arises from degree granting authority: for example, OCAD can only grant degrees in the Arts and Fine Arts and Algoma University can only grant degrees at the undergraduate level.

Despite those differences across universities, there is no widely accepted method in Ontario—or in Canada—to group them into categories (Metcalf et al., 2011). Being able to categorize universities into groups is of interest to this study to understand the composition of the sector and the degree of diversity briefly illustrated above, as well as to determine whether the implementation choices made due to the introduction of the MYA/MYAs were dictated by the differences across universities. Generally, university classification systems take into account their size, their program mix and their research intensity.⁵⁰ Therefore, with the objective of finding an appropriate way to categorize Ontario universities and help in the analysis, the following criteria were tested to develop a classification: (i) The year in which the university was founded, or in which the University's Act or Charter was incorporated;⁵¹ (ii) total university enrolment; (iii) share of graduate students in total enrolment; and, (iv) research intensity.⁵² After testing different options for classifying universities, a categorization often used in Canada (Metcalf et al., 2011), developed by Maclean's magazine for its university rankings and profiles, was retained.

Maclean's categorization consists of the following three groups: (i) Medical-doctoral, which consists of universities that offer a broad range of PhD programs and research, all of which have medical schools; (ii) Comprehensive, that is, universities that have a significant degree of research activity and a wide range of programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including professional degrees; and (iii) Primarily undergraduate, which includes universities that are largely focused on undergraduate education, with relatively few graduate programs. As observed in the table below, Maclean's medical-doctoral and comprehensive categories capture all the universities having greater research intensity in Ontario. In addition, the primarily undergraduate category groups universities with different dates of establishment that have not focused as much on research activities. Although there could be some debate regarding the appropriate classification for the University of Waterloo (i.e., it doesn't have a medical school, but has a broad range of graduate programs and belongs to the U15 Group of Canadian Research-Intensive Institutions), the categories developed by Maclean's will be used in this study to help organize the presentation of results.

⁵⁰ These are the criteria used for example by the Carnegie classification of post-secondary institutions in the United States or by the Canadian magazine Maclean's in their ranking of universities.

⁵¹ Since in some cases a charter or act are created for amalgamating existing colleges or religious institutions, the date of establishment does not always exactly reflect the institution's age. Nonetheless, it is considered a good approximation.

⁵² The criteria chosen were based on readily available and credible information. Although it would have been interesting to characterize the relationship of individual universities with the Ontario government, this information does not exist. Also, an alternative would be to classify universities based on their reputation, but such measures are based on survey data that is not generally accepted in the sector.

TABLE 6-1: ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES, CHARACTERISTICS AND CLASSIFICATION

| University | Maclean's Classification | Year Founded | Enrolment (fall 2010) | % graduate students | Rank research intensity ⁵³ |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| University of Toronto | Medical-Doctoral | 1827 | 78,900 | 19% | 1 |
| McMaster University | Medical-Doctoral | 1887 | 28,650 | 14% | 2 |
| Western University | Medical-Doctoral | 1878 | 29,910 | 17% | 3 |
| University of Ottawa | Medical-Doctoral | 1848 | 39,802 | 14% | 4 |
| Queen's University | Medical-Doctoral | 1841 | 23,820 | 19% | 5 |
| University of Waterloo | Comprehensive | 1957 | 28,010 | 16% | 6 |
| University of Guelph | Comprehensive | 1964 | 25,430 | 10% | 7 |
| Carleton University | Comprehensive | 1942 | 26,040 | 14% | 8 |
| York University | Comprehensive | 1959 | 54,600 | 11% | 9 |
| University of Windsor | Comprehensive | 1857 | 15,730 | 12% | 10 |
| Ryerson University | Primarily Undergrad | 1948 | 34,550 | 6% | |
| Brock University | Primarily Undergrad | 1964 | 17,870 | 8% | |
| Wilfrid Laurier University | Primarily Undergrad | 1911 | 17,160 | 7% | |
| Lakehead University | Primarily Undergrad | 1965 | 8,710 | 7% | |
| Trent University | Primarily Undergrad | 1963 | 7,930 | 5% | |
| Laurentian University | Primarily Undergrad | 1960 | 7,920 | 9% | |
| UOIT | Primarily Undergrad | 2002 | 7,400 | 6% | |
| Nipissing University | Primarily Undergrad | 1909 | 5,190 | 4% | |
| OCAD University | Primarily Undergrad | 1876 | 4,080 | 2% | |
| Algoma University | Primarily Undergrad | 2008 | 1,230 | 0% | |

Since Ontario's twenty universities have been publishing their individual action plans (MYAs) and annual MYAA report-backs on their websites since 2006, for the period 2006-07 to 2008-09, there are a total of eighty public documents available to identify the choices that the universities have made regarding the implementation of MYA/MYAA's. The templates for these plans and report-backs also offer information regarding their objectives and their evolution over time. Public documents regarding the MYAA's were downloaded from university websites between July 2010 and March 2011 and individual universities were contacted when that information was not posted online.⁵⁴ Since the documents available online are the same shared with the ministry, the instrument itself can be analyzed without having to adjust for modifications for publication purposes. A summary of the information available and downloaded is presented in the table below.

⁵³ The rank for research intensity in this table is provided for Ontario universities only, without considering the relative position of universities in other Canadian provinces.

⁵⁴ Although the documents are generally easily accessible via the university websites, Carleton, Western, Nipissing, Algoma and Toronto were contacted since the reports were sometimes missing, often as a result of broken links. The only documents not obtained as of August, 2011 are Western University's 2006-07 report-back and Algoma University's 2007-08 report-back. See Appendix A for a list of websites where accountability agreements are posted.

TABLE 6-2: MYA/MYAAS ANALYZED FOR CONTENT

| University | Interim Agreement | MYA - Action Plan | MYAAs - Report Backs | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------|---------|
| | | | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
| University of Ottawa | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| University of Toronto | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| University of Waterloo | X | X | X | X | X |
| Western University | unpublished | X | Unavailable | X | X |
| University of Windsor | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| Carleton University | X | X | X | X | X |
| McMaster University | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| Queen's University | X | X | X | X | X |
| University of Guelph | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| York University | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| Brock University | unpublished | X | X | X | |
| Lakehead University | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| Laurentian University | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| Nipissing University | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| Ryerson University | X | X | X | X | X |
| Trent University | X | X | X | X | X |
| Wilfrid Laurier Univ. | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| Algoma University | unpublished | X | X | Unavailable | X |
| UOIT | unpublished | X | X | X | X |
| OCAD | unpublished | X | X | X | X |

The analysis of these documents took place in 2011-2012. To facilitate this process, the ten largest universities were analyzed at first, followed by the analysis of the other ten once a coding plan was developed. The objective of the analysis is to document how universities first reacted to this new requirement, by looking at how it was answered or fulfilled. It was not expected that an analysis of these documents provides a complete understanding of what universities chose to report or why, but it documents at a high level the strategies identified and associated indicators. Moreover, these documents contain not only the information provided by the universities, but also the MTCU-drafted templates provide details about the provincial government's objectives and expectations. Therefore, the analysis of these documents allows for an analysis of the strategies—both at the government and university level—as well as a preliminary assessment of the implications arising from their introduction. In addition, templates for the 2005-06 Interim Accountability Agreement and MYAAs for years after 2008-09 were analyzed for understanding the evolution of the report-backs, and changes in government requirements. Another set of documents that was available for analysis include the memorandums sent by MTCU to university

representatives regarding the MYA/MYAAAs, identified by signatory and date throughout this thesis, as well as the minutes from CUPA meetings, identified by date. These allowed to complete the documentation regarding the implementation of the agreements, and clarified the role played by CUPA, even when the information is mostly procedural, as CUPA deliberations are intentionally kept private to promote open discussion between its members and MTCU representatives. Finally, the documentary analysis contributed to crafting the interview questions, discussed in the following section.

6.2. INTERVIEWS

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the limitations arising from an analysis focused solely on existing documentation were tackled on two fronts. First, twenty-one semi-structured interviews with different players involved in the development of the MYA/MYAAAs and from representatives from relevant stakeholder organizations were undertaken, both to obtain factual information regarding the origin, development and implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs as well as subjective information to understand their different perspectives on the issues under study. It was originally intended to pursue the analysis even further at three universities as case study sites, with the objective to better understand their decision-making, and thus facilitate the identification and analysis of the transformative power of the agreements. For that purpose, a documentary analysis and a second set of interviews was initiated at three specific universities. A total of sixteen interviews were undertaken under the second stage. The two stages of data collection and decisions made for their analysis are described below.

6.2.1. STAGE ONE: GENERAL INTERVIEWS

To complement the analysis of content from the documentary review and to understand the origin, evolution and implementation decisions regarding the MYA/MYAAAs, a first series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives from central and stakeholder organizations in the Ontario post-secondary education sector involved in the development and introduction of this instrument. The criteria for invitation included that these individuals should have been directly involved with the development or implementation of the agreements and that they should be at middle to senior level in the organization. In those occasions when an individual currently occupying a position was not there at the time of the development of the agreements, the organization was asked to provide the names of those who were involved. In practice, often times, the interview was delegated to middle-level representatives who were closer to the execution of the agreements, and in occasions, individuals involved in the process before 2007-08 declined to participate. In addition, representatives from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and from the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)⁵⁵ did not respond or declined to participate. The recruitment plan including the organizations and the positions is summarized in the table below.

⁵⁵ This is the provincial chapter of the federal organization which encompasses both graduate and undergraduate students. The Ontario chapter has published about *Reaching Higher*.

TABLE 6-3: RECRUITMENT PLAN, GENERAL INTERVIEWS

| Organization | Positions |
|---|--|
| Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MTCU) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistant Deputy Minister, Post-secondary Education Division • Director, Post-secondary Accountability Branch, Post-secondary Education Division • Director, Post-secondary Finance and Information Management Branch, Post-secondary Education Division |
| Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)⁵⁶ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Director responsible for the accountability portfolio |
| Council of University Planning and Analysis (CUPA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair of CUPA • Chair of CUPA's Accountability Committee |
| Council of Ontario Universities (COU) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Director, Policy and Analysis |
| Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director • Research Director |
| Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate Executive Director, Research and Advocacy |
| Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Research • Executive Director |
| Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario (CFS-Ontario) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Committee representative for the province |

Potential participants identified according to the inclusion criteria were contacted via email using an invitation letter drafted and signed by the principal researcher, presented in Appendix C, and were asked to participate in a 90 minute interview. However, when an individual held more than one pertinent position, they may have been interviewed twice.⁵⁷ Most interviews took place in person, at a location coordinated with participants according to their availability and convenience. However, a number of interviews were undertaken on the phone, with the previous consent of the individual when being recorded. Finally, following ethical guidelines, each participant read and signed a consent form, presented in Appendix E. These interviews were undertaken during the first semester of 2012, and the interview guide is presented in Appendix F. Once representatives from the other organizations, including delegates and individuals who occupied relevant positions in earlier years, are counted, a total of twenty-one interviews were undertaken for this stage. These interviews are quoted throughout the study. The numbering system allows differentiating whether the interviewee is a representative from a central organization (i.e., 'CEN' for MTCU, HEQCO or COU), a faculty representative (i.e., 'FAC' for OCUFA, or for a faculty representative at a given university), or a student organization (i.e., 'STU' for OUSA or for a student representative at a given

⁵⁶ Although HEQCO was not in place when the discussion about MYA/MYAs initiated, they have been working in the field and their input is valuable.

⁵⁷ For example, an individual may have been recruited due to their position in the CUPA Accountability Agreement, but also have been recruited again if held a relevant position in one of the universities chosen for the case studies. In that situation, it is possible that the person was contacted for two separate interviews, but the interview guide was adapted to avoid repetition.

university). Although CUPA is an organization associated with COU, these interviews are identified as university-level (“UNI”) given that its representatives are university employees.

6.2.2. STAGE TWO: UNIVERSITY-SPECIFIC INTERVIEWS

As indicated before, this research intended to produce three case studies with the objective of studying implementation choices and organizational strategies in more depth, as well as to better understand the apparent lack of variability in responses observed in the documentary review. That is, after studying the multi-year agreements and subsequent report-backs, it appears that the organizational strategies undertaken to deal with the new requirements are very similar across universities, although some variation is observed around the specifics of what they chose to do or report on. In addition, the choice of specific study sites allows for reviewing documentation internal to the universities to assess the breadth of discussion regarding the agreements in internal forums, such as the senate and the board of governors. Finally, these specific sites allow for understanding the extent to which the agreements are known and used by internal stakeholders, including faculty associations and student organizations, as well as their understanding of university accountability. Given the qualitative nature of the analysis, the approach to select the specific sites was purposeful following Coyne (1997)’s suggestion that “the cases are specifically selected because they can teach us a lot about the issues that are of importance to the research” (as reviewed by Boeije, 2010, p. 35) and they contribute to the validation of emerging knowledge (Boeije, 2010). The objective was to represent a wide range of perspectives and experiences, thus the examples retained include one medical-doctoral university, one comprehensive university and one primarily undergraduate university.

Data for the case studies was collected via an expanded documentary review, moving beyond the MYA/MYAAAs themselves and looking at mission statements, websites for programs, minutes from senate and board of governor meetings, and budget papers, among others. In addition, to better understand the decision-making process around the agreements and related strategies, the additional documentary review is complemented with a small number of semi-structured interviews as these allow for a more open approach and ask explanatory questions: “With the help of the interviews the story behind the written texts should become clearer and the findings from the documents can be triangulated” (Luijten-Lub 2007, p.73). Participants include individuals involved in the development of the agreements, in the implementation of specific strategies identified in the contract, involved in government relations or who are important stakeholder representatives. The recruitment plan is summarized in the table below.

TABLE 6-4: RECRUITMENT PLAN, CASE-STUDY INTERVIEWS

| |
|---|
| Director of the Institutional Research or Planning unit responsible for completing the agreements and report-backs |
| Director of government relations or its equivalent, head of Board of Governors and head of Academic Senate |
| Faculty representative (e.g., head of union) |
| Student representative at undergraduate and graduate level (e.g., presidents of student associations) |
| A senior member aware of impacts at the academic level (e.g., Provost) and another aware of impacts at the service level (e.g., VP Planning and/or Dean Student Services) |

Similarly to the general interviews, participants identified according to the inclusion criteria were contacted via email using an invitation letter drafted and signed by the principal researcher, presented in Appendix D,⁵⁸ where they were asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview. Interviews took place either in person, at a location coordinated with participants according to their availability and convenience, or on the phone with previous consent from the individuals when the conversation was being recorded. Following ethical guidelines, all participants read and signed the same consent form as in the general interviews (Appendix E).

These interviews were undertaken in 2012; however, the material conditions were difficult. From a practical perspective, the process to access the case study sites involved additional ethics approval by each university—a lengthy process. Moreover, access to internal documentation was limited. In addition, several potential interviewees declined to participate or those representatives who were in relevant positions at the time of introducing the agreement had left the organizations and were unreachable. As a result, a total of sixteen interviews were undertaken with unequal representation across university sites. Secondly, it was revealed in the first few interviews that many stakeholders on campus were not aware or knew very little about the MYA/MYAA⁵⁹ and a separate interview guide was developed to obtain relevant information regarding their perspective on accountability relationships in their university to complement the information obtained elsewhere in this study (see interview guides in appendix G). Nonetheless, the information obtained in the interviews was converging and saturation of the interviews was observed (M. Mason, 2010). Consequently, the information that was originally sought after was not obtained and satisfactory case studies were not achieved. This limits the potential contribution of this thesis to an in-depth understanding of variations in organizational adaptation across different types of universities and of the consequences that the choice of certain strategies and associated metrics may have entailed at the local level.

Nonetheless, both the interviews undertaken in the specific sites as well as the additional documentation obtained provided key factual information regarding university governance and the relationship with government, as well as the subjective interpretation of interviewees on how those relationships have evolved. Thus, although the information obtained did not allow to produce individual case studies and their contribution to our understanding of the problem was smaller than anticipated, it was decided to integrate the data obtained during this research stage throughout the study with the stage one interviews and other data obtained. Therefore, the analysis is based on a total of thirty-seven interviews, including those from stage one and stage two. The same coding method for the interviews is used in the second stage and the contributions made by university ('UNI'), faculty ('FAC'), student representatives ('STU') and board members ('BOG') can be identified.

⁵⁸ This is a generic letter that was adapted according to each institution.

⁵⁹ This is explained by their transformation into a data reporting tool that will be described in the following chapters.

6.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was undertaken in sequence: first the documentary review, then the general interviews, followed by the analysis and interviews of the information from the specific sites. In addition, the analysis of thematic units was undertaken using a mixed analytical grid, which was developed as the analysis advanced and that was improved as more information was obtained. At the highest level, the analytical grid identifies four large areas of interest to this study, as illustrated in the left column of the table below, which are origin, content and impact of the multi-year agreements as well as the organizational strategies developed to deal with them.

TABLE 6-5: HIGH-LEVEL ANALYTICAL GRID BY THEMATIC UNITS

| High-Level Thematic Unit | Details |
|---------------------------|---|
| Origin of MYYAs | No specific analytical grid. Information from templates and interviews summarized |
| Content of MYYAs | The content was initially organized following the three main objectives of <i>Reaching Higher</i> – accessibility, quality and accountability – and the summary strategies identified by MTCU for each element. Both strategies and indicators are summarized |
| Organizational Strategies | Grid developed on the basis of Oliver (1991) and Massy (2011) |
| Impact of MYYAs | Grids provided in Tables 2-5 and 2-6 based on the literature review and the analysis of documents |

Although the theoretical framework and literature review provided insights and themes to help structure the findings, the identification and coding of themes and categories leading to findings was undertaken in an iterative manner, a common trait in qualitative research (Boeije, 2010), that allows to identify “relationships and links that may not have been originally hypothesized” (Desimone, 2009, p. 169). The review allowed for a good understanding of the content of the instruments and provided initial information identifying the approaches the organizational strategies that Ontario universities put in place to face the introduction of an instrument. However, key information regarding the internal decision-making of universities and the limitations faced when making those decisions that allow for a deeper understanding of the impacts (and more ambitiously, their extent or measure), remained undisclosed in these documents. Moreover, given the generality of the documents analyzed, making inferences regarding the choices made by universities, although intriguing, could be fragile and may lack sufficient justification.

Furthermore, despite this wealth of information available, the ability to extract relevant data from the aforementioned documents is somewhat limited, since they were not written with the intent to highlight consequences. Therefore, careful reading of the documents – and associated coding techniques – must guide the identification of such impacts. The coding plan included the classification of impacts in three levels: (a) at the level of requesting an accountability report in the form of a performance contract; (b) at the level of the universities response by introducing specific strategies as part of the performance contract, and (c) at the level of the measures/indicators introduced to follow up performance regarding the strategies in point (b). Point (c) is directly observable from the published agreements and report-backs. Points (a) and (b) are documented

from the analysis of the documents and the observations and conclusions are triangulated and complemented with data obtained via the semi-structured interviews. Also, the extent to which universities made linkages between outcomes and their initiatives is documented as part of the data analysis.

Therefore, in the documentary review of the MYA/MYAAs, the main emphasis was on the identification of content and organizational strategies. For this purpose, these were first organized using the three main priorities for the government: accessibility, quality and accountability. Then, as the requirement to establish strategies or not became an evident distinction in the actions undertaken by universities, the content was then organized along that criterion, as will be presented in Chapter 8. Nonetheless, in particular for the areas of accessibility and quality, each university identified strategies and indicators; these are organized following the groupings developed by the government and reproduced below.⁶⁰ The grouping of these strategies along the different categorization was done entering and codifying the different initiatives from the twenty universities in excel files, and creating summaries with the aid of pivot tables.

TABLE 6-6: MTCU’S CATEGORIZATION OF STRATEGIES

| Category of Strategies | Accessibility | Quality |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Outreach | X | |
| Bridging & Pathways | X | |
| Student Services & Supports | X | X |
| Academic Programming | X | X |
| Building Capacity | X | |
| Graduate Education Enhancements | | X |
| Student Engagement & Satisfaction | | X |
| Teaching / Classroom Enhancements | | X |
| Operations | | X |

Source: MTCU (2009a)

This analysis was followed by content analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The first step was to proceed with the full transcription of each interview. Once all the interviews were transcribed, the analysis of thematic units was done once again using a mixed analytical grid. On the basis of the documentary review undertaken so far and of the strategic behavior models mentioned above (Massy, 2011; Oliver, 1991), a preliminary closed analytical grid was developed for the following four areas: (i) origin of the MYAAs, (ii) content of the MYAAs, (iii) impact of the MYAAs, and (iv) strategies used by universities. However, particularly in the cases of points (i) to (iii) above, there was flexibility in the analytical grid to add any elements that may not have been identified before the interviews. The coding of the interviews was done by placing extracts of the main themes organized in excel files.

With the help of the information obtained in case study sites, point (iii) above on the impact of the MYAAs above was extended, to aim at understanding the following three levels of impact (a) at the level of requesting an accountability report in the form of a performance contract (b) at the level of introducing specific strategies as part of the performance contract and (c) at the level of the

⁶⁰ Definitions for these groupings are provided in Tables 9-10 and 9-16.

measures/indicators introduced to follow up performance regarding the strategies in point (b). Once this information is codified, it was summarized and analyzed to infer general tendencies. That is, the data analysis helps identify the horizontal themes regarding accountability and their transformative effects, which help answer the three main questions presented in this study.

6.4. LIMITATIONS

Given the limited information available on the MYA/MYAAs in terms of their origin, development and implementation, this study, as described above, relied heavily on the information obtained via semi-structured interviews. The findings from the interviews were triangulated to the extent possible with information obtained via other sources, however, in some occasions; there were arguments that were made by few individuals in the sector. When this is the case, it is clearly indicated in the presentation of results. Another limitation is that several individuals who participated in the process were no longer available to participate in the study and some interviews reflect the views of individuals who see the MYA/MYAAs from today's context. This permeates their comments in terms of their relevance, but is important in terms of highlighting the evolution of the agreements over time and their implications. In addition, it was decided to limit the participation to non-political players, as the main interest of the study was on the impacts at the organizational level, but this limits the understanding of the political forces behind the introduction of these new instruments.

Finally, it is important to recall that this study does not aim at evaluating the performance of the MYA/MYAAS, but rather focuses on understanding how universities reacted to this new requirement and to identify the strategies for answering to the ministry request. The documentary analysis as well as the analysis of the data obtained via the semi-structured interviews, allows for a scientific reflection of the topic, aiming at understanding what universities did using their report of what they did as the observable medium of analysis. The presentation of results that follows is organized in five chapters. In the next chapter, the origin and objectives of the MYA/MYAAs are described first, as this sets the context for their implementation and evolution.

Chapter 7. A MOVING TARGET: ORIGIN AND OBJECTIVES OF ONTARIO'S MYA/MYAAs

An overview of the introduction, development and evolution of the MYA/MYAAs was briefly presented in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the analysis focuses on the provincial context in which the new requirement was introduced, as well as the objectives that were outlined for the new instrument during its introduction. Although the main research question for this study is regarding how and why Ontario universities adopted and implemented the new requirement, the formulation stage is analyzed to help understand the implementation process that ensued, a step that is important for several reasons. First, it helps contextualize the implementation decisions made by universities within a longer sequence of events that recognizes that policy formulation and implementation are intertwined (Eaton Baier, March, & Saetren, 1986; J.-E. Lane, 1987; Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Miljan, 2008). That is, focusing only on implementation decisions would ignore how the different 'stages' of the policy process are interconnected, "that some implementation decisions are closely linked with the design of the policy" (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009, p. 91) and that organizations attempt to manage their environment for their benefit (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999; Morgan, 1986; R. W. Scott, 2008). Second, an understanding of why the instrument is introduced provides an opportunity for the analysis to go beyond normative statements of accountability towards a rich comprehension of relationships within the sector (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011). Third, in order to analyze both implementation decisions and their effects, it is important to take into account the content of the policy itself (Csiszmadia et al., 2008), as "the type of change that the government attempts aim at will affect institutional response" (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999, p. 309).

To meet those objectives, the chapter is organized as follows. The discussion starts with an analysis of the agreements' *raison d'être* and their origin. For that purpose, the forces that originated the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs are presented in section 7.1. This is followed in section 7.2 by the main objectives the new instrument aimed at achieving as well as how such objectives contributed to the choice of instrument and the rationale behind it. It is noted that the objectives were sometimes conflicting or ambiguous, and that the fulfillment of government commitments was uncertain, which will prove important in explaining the implementation decisions made as a consequence. In section 7.3, the discussion continues with an analysis of how the instrument and its objectives evolved during the formulation stage. Such analysis is facilitated using the dimensions of accountability discussed in the theoretical framework; that is, the standards (accountability for what), object (who is accountable), means (accountability on what) and agents (accountability for whom). The presentation shows how the scope of the policy changed significantly in the months prior to its introduction, and how a challenge in the development of public policies is the lack of clarity in the goals pursued.

7.1. ORIGIN OF ONTARIO'S MYA/MYAAS

In the literature review for this study, the forces explaining the impetus for new accountability measures for post-secondary institutions worldwide were described as primarily resulting from (i) the redefinition of the role of universities as engines of economic growth and competitiveness (Alexander, 2000; Schmidlein, 2004); (ii) lack of confidence in their appropriate management (Shanahan, 2009a; Trow, 1996); and (iii) managerialistic practices introduced under the banner of NPM (Alexander, 2000; El-Khawas, 2007). As part of the field work for this study, interview participants were asked to indicate what originated, in their opinion, the introduction of the new instrument. Four main sources were identified during these conversations. Top of mind were the recommendations of the Rae Review, which specifically called for more explicit and stronger accountability relationships between the post-secondary sector and the Ontario government (Rae, 2005). Another explanation offered was the possibility of policy transfer from British Columbia. Although those two reasons were the most often mentioned, some interviewees suggested ideological underpinnings behind choosing this new tool that echo the NPM movement and worldwide trends already described. Specifically, these ideas are noted in the description of the agreements as an evolution of accountability requirements in the sector and as a result of diminished trust on the part of government on post-secondary institutional governance and management.

Each of these elements will be discussed in this section. However, it is recognized that the distinction is, to a certain extent, an artifice for presentation purposes, since the four forces are intertwined. That is, the Rae Review and the policy transfer explanations cannot be dissociated from a generalized perception that more accountability is needed to increase trust, or from an ideological position that outcome-based approaches are a more effective way to govern (Lawton & Six, 2011). That is, the changes observed in the micro-sphere of Ontario PSE and that can be interpreted as the diffusion of best practices is also symptomatic of changes at the macro level of the state (Le Galès, 2004). Therefore, the four forces combined together to produce a 'governance paradigm', that is, an institutionalized approach to public policy making regarding both its content and process, that structured the government's introduction of the MYA/MYAA (Bradford, 2003). The discussion starts with the Rae Review recommendation.

7.1.1. THE RAE REVIEW AND A "COMMON DIAGNOSIS"

Most post-secondary sector representatives interviewed for this study identify the Ontario Post-secondary Sector Review (i.e., the Rae Review), that published its recommendations in February 2005 in the report *Ontario: A Leader in Learning*, as the origin for the MYAAs. This close association is unsurprising, as the Review was commissioned by the McGuinty Liberal government and *Reaching Higher* was the government plan that ensued with the objective to implement the Review's final report recommendations (Beach, 2005; MOF, 2005b). In that regard, two stakeholders comment:

"I suspect [the MYAAs] came out of the Rae Review [... where] there were some recommendations in terms of aligning institutional priorities with government priorities, and [regarding] strengthened accountability between [both]" (CEN-2)

“[The MYAAs originated in] the Rae Review [that] recommended new agreements between the government and the institutions to create some sort of accountability for achieving public and government goals” (STU-1)

Echoing the redefinition of universities as institutions responsible for the competitiveness of a given economy (Schmidtlein, 2004) as well as concerns with raising post-secondary education costs (Alexander, 2000), the Rae report’s recommendations were based on the principle that greater accountability requirements in the Ontario PSE sector were justified due to the economic value of higher education and the greater costs incurred in sustaining it:

The growing awareness of the fundamental role that post-secondary institutions play in the economic, social, and cultural development of Ontario, combined with the increased costs of higher education has resulted in an increased profile of accountability and governance in the post-secondary sector (Rae, 2004, p. 7).

Despite the clear principle behind the proposal, the source of inspiration for its specific implementation in the form of an *agreement* is not identified in the Rae report and, given the time elapsed since the Review took place, participants interviewed for this study were unable to recall its origin. Nonetheless, it was speculated that the idea evolved from recommendations made during the consultation process for the Review or that it emanated from different sources that gained currency over time. For instance, in the quotes below, a student representative highlights the role played by his organization in pushing this idea, while a central agency representative indicated that the concept was being floated by different sources at the time:

“[in our submission to the Rae Review] we had said to the government that there needed to be a little bit more rigor between universities and government and universities and students about what quality and academic planning looked like on campus (...) They liked the idea, and sort of pushed the government to consider the MYAAs as a mechanism” (STU-2)

“Whenever there is an idea that people have been talking about for a while, and starts to generate some interest, everybody thinks it was their idea (...) because they’ve been reading the American literature (...) because they were in a meeting, and they started brainstorming [... they] are going to come to the same thing because it’s common currency “ (CEN-1)

The idea of “common currency” presented in the quote above is important. As mentioned before, Rae’s accountability proposal is coherent with the worldwide trends regarding PSE accountability and with the NPM emphasis on outcome measures and clear objectives (Alexander, 2000; Haque, 2000). On the other hand, his vision is also coherent with the political discourse in Ontario at the time. First, it was intended to answer some of the criticisms that had been made of university accountability earlier in that decade, including the Provincial Auditor’s concerns with unclear linkages between government objectives and PSE funding (Rae, 2004). Secondly, Rae’s thinking has been deemed akin to that of the Liberal government (R. V. Barrett & Doughty, 2005), characteristic of a social investment government that “offers new funds for services but with high levels of state regulation and accountability” (Ready, 2012, p. 29). That is, the social investment government is an evolution of crude managerialism that refocuses the role of the state but maintains the expectations regarding regulation and control (Dufour, Dobrowolski, Jenson, Saint-Martin, & White, 2007). How this thinking fits with the evolution of accountability requirements and the observation of diminished trust will be further developed in the sections that follow. In terms of its specifics, Rae’s accountability proposal, summarized in the text-box below, recommended multi-

year funding commitments on the part of government accompanied by institutional multi-year plans.

TEXT-BOX 7-1: RAE (2005) REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS ON ACCOUNTABILITY

Strategy 7: *Require tangible commitments from governments and the institutions in support of higher education, and continually evaluate and review progress.*

Recommended Action 28: Multi-Year Plans

Set out the provincial funding commitments to the institutions on a multi-year basis. The institutions need to prepare multi-year plans that set out:

- the mission and program focus of the institution;
- enrolment targets, commitments to access, and tuition guarantees;
- planned improvements in quality of programming and the student experience;
- transferability of credits and areas of collaboration with other institutions;
- revenue requirements and how they will be met through provincial transfers, tuition and other sources;
- the results and measures that will be used to demonstrate progress against the multi-year commitments.

These plans should be informed by the work of the Council on Higher Education.

A Standing Committee of the Legislature should conduct periodic reviews of individual institutions' multi-year plans and performance.

Source: Rae (2005), p.104

The ambitious objectives of the Rae proposal were never truly met. The proposed objectives were broader than what was retained in the Ontario budget as the Rae report considered having enrolment targets, tuition-fee policies and revenue requirements from all sources specified in the institutional plans. Moreover, although some key elements such as planned improvements in quality programming and the student experience, the development of measures to demonstrate progress and the promise of multi-year funding commitments are found in the 2006-07 to 2008-09 MYA plan, the extent of negotiation and bilateral commitment sought after did not materialize over the long term and funding commitments over more than one year were not made. A university representative comments in this regard:

"[Rae's intent was] to look at that coordination [between universities and government], and having a document [on] how that's working back and forth [...] That's where the MYA intended to go. I don't think it made it there" (UNI-13)

Even though the ambitious recommendations were never fully implemented, given the consultation process from which the Rae report emerged, that had participation from different stakeholders in the policy field, the Rae Review can be described as a "common diagnosis", a key element in the facilitation of policy change (Palier, 2007). That is, often times, the terms of a common diagnosis are negotiated and gradually shared in the course of work by some kind of planning commission that draws up various reports, which sometimes seek "less to organize collective thinking in order to find new solutions than to create shared approaches to diagnosing problems"(Palier, 2007, p. 95). In this case, the widely publicized Review summarized a perspective that the Ontario post-secondary sector was in dire need for new instruments to improve its accountability and its performance. This shared diagnosis was further promoted in the Ontario

government due to other contributing forces, including the speculation that the MYA/MYAAAs are an example of policy transfer, discussed in the following section.

7.1.2. POLICY TRANSFER AND THE IDEA OF A GOVERNANCE PARADIGM

As it was mentioned in the section above, the proposal made by Rae echoed the accountability discourse in PSE worldwide as well as the Ontario Liberal government expectations regarding greater accountability in return for new funding. Moreover, Ontario's accountability agreements were not the first in Canada's post-secondary sector; other instruments that have also been described as agreements between government and universities were already in use in British Columbia, Quebec and Alberta at the time (Crespo, 2001; Ramlal, 2009; Ratel, 2005; Sudmant, 2008). In addition, just before the MYA/MYAAAs were announced, accountability agreements were introduced in Ontario's hospital sector, as the government asked that "individual hospitals submit signed accountability agreements with plans for balancing their budgets" (Reeleder et al., 2008, p. 166). The objective of these agreements was to place responsibility on hospitals for ensuring that public funding is used and distributed according to agreed purposes; that is, "accountability agreements point to government's desire for increased emphasis on tying hospital funding to specific deliverables while committing hospitals to balancing their budgets" (Reeleder et al., 2008, p. 165).

The initiatives in other Canadian provinces were known to the government, and, according to a former MTCU employee, were analyzed when designing the details of *Reaching Higher*. In particular, the quote below emphasizes the British Columbia accountability agreements as a source of inspiration:

"Everybody is moving towards the sort of written accountability agreements, different jurisdictions are playing with that. The Ontario government was certainly very aware of those different initiatives, especially the BC accountability agreements" (CEN-1)

Furthermore, it is speculated that the interest in the British Columbia model could have been spearheaded by MTCU's Deputy Minister at the time, Philip Steenkamp, who joined the ministry from that province and whose experience may have facilitated the transfer, as described in the following statement by a faculty representative:

"It's probably no coincidence that the Deputy Minister at the time was from British Columbia, [...where] there are actual public documents stipulating the deliverables that the universities are responsible for, and in return [they receive ...] funding letters from the provincial government [... which] is consistent with what they were doing [in Ontario]" (FAC-1)

Despite this speculation, senior and middle management MTCU officials portray the MYA/MYAAAs as the first of their kind in Canada. That is, although other experiences were known and the British Columbia 's agreements were studied by the them, government representatives consider that the Ontario MYAAAs were more advanced and robust, a fact that was, according to the quote below, recognized by British Columbia officials as well, who were later on interested on learning more about the Ontario experience:

"[The MYAAAs] were literally the first accountability agreements in Canada between the government and the sector" (CEN-2)

“BC had an accountability agreement that they had signed with their institutions and (...) we learned from them. [...] however] we went far deeper and we had more robustness in what we were asking for. [...] BC’s] was at a higher level [...] in fact BC then came to visit us year later [...] and said ‘you went much deeper and it’s much more robust and could you share with us?’ That was interesting too” (CEN-11)

Even though government officials appear to minimize the role played by policy transfer in the introduction of this initiative, and that the extent to which such a transfer occurred cannot be demonstrated with the evidence collected for this study, the information above is consistent with the observation that policy initiatives in one region, province or country may inspire the activities in another jurisdiction, particularly given the actors involved and the timing of the initiative (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). Moreover, this type of transfer is not uncommon in the post-secondary sector, and has been documented in the literature. In regards to the conceptualization of higher education quality in Australia (Vidovich, 2004), to the development of an accreditation system for vocational education in Austria inspired in the British model (Pratt, 2004), to the Americanization of the United Kingdom’s higher education policy (Smith, Baston, Boccock, & Scott, 2002) and in the context of the Bologna process in terms of policy convergence (Dobbins & Knill, 2009). Closer to the topic of this thesis, policy transfer activities were documented in the development of program contracts in Argentina and Chile, inspired by the experience in other jurisdictions (García de Fanelli, 2006; Reich Albertz et al., 2011) and in the depiction of the short-lived Quebec performance contracts as a copy of funding practices in European countries (Fecteau, 2002). Furthermore, it has been argued that in the Canadian post-secondary sector, since demographic and funding environments are shared by many provinces, the introduction of a policy in one province, such as Ontario will have influence in Canada as a whole (Beach, 2005).

This possibility of policy transfer was compounded with the institutional effects of the NPM movement, where mimetic forces across jurisdictions were at play (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). That is, the practices observed under the NPM banner in other Anglo-Saxon jurisdictions were copied as best practices by Ontario practitioners. Furthermore, although the NPM movement is generally described as a collection of ‘private sector’ management techniques that were introduced to the public sector (Ryan et al., 2008), some authors go beyond that concept to speak of a governance paradigm:

A governance paradigm describes the intellectual framework and institutional relations that structure public policy making in a particular field. As Peter A. Hall (1993) has elaborated, such paradigms define the broad goals behind policy, the problems to be tackled, and the instruments to deploy, as well as mapping the respective responsibilities of the state, market and citizens in meeting societal challenges. Once institutionalized, a governance paradigm channels the thoughts and actions of a range of state and societal actors, reflecting shared policy knowledge and habitual decision-making routines. The result is broad continuity in both the content and process of public policy (Bradford, 2003, p. 1006).

That is, the pervasive use of agreements or contracts, both in the PSE sector across jurisdictions and in Ontario across sectors, in conjunction with the accountability discourse worldwide and in the province, suggests the existence of a governance paradigm. Furthermore, this paradigm touched areas other than post-secondary education, as similar accountability practices such as business plans and key performance indicators at the ministerial level were introduced in other Canadian jurisdictions, with the Alberta public service being a clear example in the late 1990s

(D. Clark, 2002). Therefore, as similar ideas from multiple origins started to collude, this facilitated the genesis of the MYA/MYAAAs. However, not all the ideas were initiated externally. Indeed, another explanation for the introduction of the agreements, more prevalent in the interviews than that of policy transfer, is to portray their introduction as an evolution of existing accountability requirements in the province, and more specifically, in the PSE sector, which can be described as a strengthening of the accountability governance paradigm in the province as a result of the increased prevalence of the NPM principles, which is where our attention turns next.

7.1.3. EVOLVING ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS AND THE NPM WAVE

Both the accountability recommendations made in the Rae Review, as well as the introduction of accountability agreements in different provinces and sectors, are immersed in the wave of evolving accountability requirements over the past few decades, more broadly characterized as a result of the introduction of NPM practices in the Ontario public sector (R. V. Barrett & Doughty, 2005; Jones, 2004; Ramlal, 2009) and a shift from the use of political and bureaucratic accountability towards performance accountability (Erkkilä, 2007). However, the emphasis on productivity, outcomes and measurement vis-à-vis predefined objectives, usually associated to the NPM banner, was not unique to Ontario, nor had its origins only in the NPM movement that started in the 1980s. Indeed, the use of managerial approaches “developed in corporate business were applied in the public sector well before the advent of NPM” (Gregory, 2003, p. 563). Specifically, it has been argued that the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) led the charge towards public management practices for accountability given his call for efficient and effective use of government funds in the 1960s, the introduction of performance auditing and performance indicators in the 1970s and as proponent of an entrepreneurial government in the 1980s (Jacob, 2006b; Saint-Martin, 2004), where the driving concern behind those new initiatives was an unmanageable deficit at the federal level (Charih & Daniels, 1997).

The trend continued in the 1990s with *Public Service 2000*, a series of task forces charged with introducing “a more people-, results- and service-oriented management culture into the federal public service” (D. Clark, 2002) with a NPM language that was more explicit. For example, the OAG further promoted these ideas in 1997, with a report arguing for the need for government to move towards managing results (Saint-Martin, 2004), and in 2000, when defining accountability as “an obligation by government to demonstrate and take responsibility for system performance when measured against targets or goals” (Reeleder et al., 2008, p. 165). One year later, the position is reiterated when “in his definition of management focused on results, the Auditor General of Canada insists in the need to agree on the results’ impact and effect, as well as to agree on strategies, indicators, and intermediate outcomes results” (V. Martin & Jobin, 2004, p. 318).

In Ontario, these ideas had been discussed for a number of years as well. As early as in 1988, Ontario’s Management Board of Cabinet issued a *Directive on Transfer Payment Accountability* that required ministries to develop a framework outlining (i) expectations regarding objectives and results; (ii) an agreement demonstrating an understanding of the objective and ensuing responsibilities; and (iii) reports on results achieved (Callahan, 2006). Similarly, references are found to an accountability directive dating from 1997, involving multi-year commitments and the

systematic review and renewal of minimum public reporting standards. This directive required signed agreements with measurable results, and periodic reports on financial status & program results, routine monitoring and reporting of performance, and corrective action in cases of non-compliance (Worley, 2004, p. 7), which echoes the key characteristics of the MYA/MYAA mentioned above (including, their multi-year character, the emphasis on results and outcomes measurement, and the concept of an agreement).

It is unclear why these ideas did not see fruition at the time. Nonetheless, they easily found their place both within the Harris Conservative government and the McGuinty Liberal government, as value-for-money concepts and the focus on results became pervasive in the political discourse. This emphasis was portrayed as a shift from traditional compliance towards results reporting: “In the past, the OPS accountability obligations have often been met by transfer payment recipients reporting on dollars spent. Since 2000, the OPS is shifting away from ‘compliance’ to ‘results’ for taxpayer dollars” (J. Mason, 2005). In 2006, the government’s approach regarding improving public sector quality and productivity was summarized by the Deputy Minister and Associate Secretary of the Cabinet, Policy as: “identifying desired outcomes, setting targets and developing a vision; seeking continuous improvement; and ensuring transparency which means making the government’s actions and plans public” (COU, 2006a, p. 3).

Thus, although many sector stakeholders identify the introduction of the MYA/MYAs with the Rae recommendations and the activities happening in other provinces, the general call for more accountability, for introducing management by objectives and for focusing on results was also understood in the Ontario PSE sector as a direction that emanated from central government, and that predated the *Reaching Higher* movement, as the following university representative describes:

“The mood within the Ministry, even preceding Reaching Higher, was on accountability for public expenditures (...) For several years, there has been a lot of value for money and controllership and accountability talk that emanates from various government departments, particularly Finance and right up to the Premier’s level. [...] the new requirements] reflected the need for political gains and conformity to our compliance with accountability requirements within the broader public sector itself” (UNI-6)

Regarding the Ontario post-secondary sector in particular, despite the promotion of managerialistic accountability concepts by both the provincial and federal government since the late 90s, the Ontario Provincial Auditor, in his 1999 and 2001 reports, was critical of MTCU for falling short in establishing linkages between university funding and specific government objectives for the post-secondary sector (Rae 2004, p.27). This criticism, coupled with the emphasis on outcomes promoted by NPM practices, may have contributed to a shift in the way the Ontario government funds universities and colleges towards a more pervasive use of funding envelopes.

Traditionally, the largest portion of government funding to universities is provided in the form of a base grant, which is allocated on the basis of a sophisticated funding formula that accounts for enrollment and program costs (Kymlicka, 1982; MTCU, 2009d). In recent years, however, the government has privileged the idea of allocating new and incremental funding via dedicated

envelopes with clearly predefined objectives,⁶¹ with a view to guide the efforts of post-secondary institutions towards focusing on government priorities, and which has been described as a new way of introducing state control on universities (Crespo, 1999). In general, framing the need for accountability in a context of increased economic prevalence of post-secondary education and rising costs also justifies the need to align objectives between universities and government to promote an effective use of limited resources. Moreover, this focus on specific or separate envelopes was supported by the Rae Review (Rae, 2005). Regarding the use of a multiple envelopes, a sector stakeholder comments:

“Over the last twenty years, they have gone considerably further [...with] a plethora of targeted envelopes for a whole variety of initiatives that government would like to see, while at the same time core funding to support basic operations isn’t being funded properly” (CEN-12)

Given the pervasive use of targeted envelopes, new accountability instruments are portrayed as necessary to explain and justify the use of dedicated envelopes and to follow-up on the individual investments made by the government, as indicated in the two quotes below. Furthermore, the increase in the number of reporting requirements is a documented consequence of a more pervasive use of targeted funding, as reported for the Canadian non-for-profit sector (K. Scott, 2003).

“There’s always been a need for an accountability mechanism for any kind of grant support provided by the government to universities, above and beyond the base grant... to measure more specifically the usage of that money” (UNI-1)

“But in fact, whenever there have been new monies directed to the institutions, there have been new reporting requirements associated with that...” (CEN-9)

Looking back at the operationalization of funds targeted specifically for quality improvement—a major objective of the *Reaching Higher* initiative—the requirement to report-back on the use of the funding is not new. For instance, in 1998-99, the Fair Funding for Universities Grant, which was introduced to reduce variations in per student funding across institutions, required grant recipients “to provide a five-year plan to hire new faculty and to provide professional development to existing faculty, with a view of enhancing the quality of undergraduate education” (MTCU, 2009d, p. 35).⁶² Later on, in 2003-04, the Quality Assurance Fund (QAF) was created

... with the purpose to provide funding to support quality (...) Institutions submitted Quality Plans specifying areas of expenditures targeted by the institution for quality improvement, based on their

⁶¹ For example, some of the funds introduced in recent years include the Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities (since 1989-90), the Performance Fund (since 2000-01), the Quality Assurance Fund (since 2003-04), the Undergraduate Accessibility Fund (for enrolment growth, since 2000-01), the Graduate Accessibility Fund (2001-02 to 2003-04), Medical Enrolment Expansion (since 2000-01), Postgraduate Medical Enrolment (since 2003-04), Nursing Enrolment Expansion (since 2001-02), Graduate Nursing Expansion (2001-02 to 2007-08), Nursing Faculty Fund, Teacher Education Expansion (1999-2000), Mission-Related Institution-Specific Envelopes, Northern Ontario Grants (since 1997-98), Bilingualism Grants (since 1967-68), Differentiation Grants (since 1981-82), Research Overheads/Infrastructure Grant (since 1986-87), Special Purposes Grants (including grants for aboriginal and francophone students, since 1995-96), Access to Opportunities Program (ATOP, 1998-99 to 2004-05), Graduate Scholarships in Science and Technology (OGSST, 1998-99), among others (MTCU, 2009d).

⁶² This funding was rolled into the Basic Grant in 2001-02.

assessment of most critical quality needs. The Ministry allocated the available QAF funding to the institutions based on approval of the quality plans submitted (MTCU, 2009d, p. 16).⁶³

It is particularly interesting, in the case of the QAF, to note its similarities to the MYA/MYAAAs in terms of the topics of interest in the reports backs. The QAF lists eligible activities for the plan including: (i) Hiring new academic staff, (ii) investment in education resources (e.g., specialized staff such a librarians or laboratory technicians, supplies and equipment to support classroom instruction, library and laboratory use); (iii) investment in student services and student retention; (iv) new program development (MTCU, 2009d), which echoes the content of the report-backs that was briefly described in section 3.4 above. A different instrument but with similar content, was being introduced.

On the other hand, the emphasis on quality is not surprising as this an objective that has increasingly gained prevalence in recent years both at the government and at the university level (Csizmadia et al., 2008; El-Khawas, 2007; Nicholson, 2011; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002; Shanahan, 2009b; Vidovich, 2004; Westerheijden et al., 2007). The differentiating aspect of the MYA/MYAAAs, as the following university representative indicates, is that the reporting requirements for specific envelopes for quality have been getting increasingly more complex. In the case of the MYA/MYAAAs, their novelty was found in being more comprehensive and multi-year, although, as mentioned above, their comprehensiveness did not meet the original proposal in the Rae Review:

“Going back into the 90s, there had been sort of agreements around (...) issues related to institutional quality... there were quality assurance plans, quality improvement plans (...) we would be given a pot of money and every year we had to file a plan that would actually look at how we are spending that money. [The MYAAAs] were sort of the next thing in that phase (...) it was an attempt to try and look at quality and institutional planning from a more broad multi-year framework” (UNI-13)

Another differentiating factor of the MYA/MYAAAs vis-à-vis reporting requirements used in the past is that these are considered more specific and explicit of the accountability requirements, as the areas of interest to government were expressed in more detail and, according to the two stakeholders below, were narrower in focus:

“[In terms of accountability requirements, the MYAAs are] orders of magnitude higher than what we dealt with a decade ago. When the QAF under Harris came out in the late 90s, there was virtually no significant meaningful accountability around that. That was just a big chunk of money to the sector [but the MYAAs] had built into it the assumption that the Ministry has a right to expect specific signature initiative accountability from the universities” (UNI-6)

That is, the specific topics on which universities had to report back were relatively new as being on top of the priority list for the government, but the clear emphasis on those particular objectives was also a different approach. These increasing levels of requirements and accountability are echoed by other sector representatives; however, the extent to which these are resulting in greater accountability or are simply providing the ‘appearance’ of accountability is raised as a possibility, a topic that will be further developed throughout this study:

⁶³ This fund provided \$74.9 million for universities in 2003-04, and a constant level of funding at \$78.8 million per year thereafter until 2008-09, when it was rolled into the basic operating grant.

"I think there has been a steady evolution, even if you go back before the reports that were required on those quality funds and go back to the original performance indicators ... it's a long stream of additional requirements and additional attempts to respond to the need for more accountability or... more appearance of accountability" (CEN-9)

One quote above mentions the Ministry's assumption that they had "they right to expect" certain activities, which suggests a change in the relationship between the government and universities. The way in which the government sought direct involvement in the setting of priorities, in which these priorities were expected to be justified in terms of benefits to the community, and the fact that decisions had to be explained, suggest changes in the sources of legitimacy for government action that are being facilitated by the introduction of a new instrument (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). This idea of the changing character in the legitimization process will be further developed in section 7.3. Indeed, from the government's perspective, the large sums of money that were being invested in the post-secondary sector justified the use of more demanding accountability requirements, as one senior ministry official and one university representative indicate below. However, justifying the need for more accountability on the size of the total investments made is surprising since the MYA/MYAA's focused on a very small portion of the \$6.2 billion *Reaching Higher* investment (details on the funding associated with the initiatives are presented in section 7.2.4). This suggests some level of incoherence between the rationalization of the initiative offered in the government discourse and the actual scope and relative importance of the implementation that ensued. It also suggests a symbolic use of the new accountability requirement as its demands are placed on a small fraction of the overall investment, whereas its virtues are attributed in the discourse to the total amount, as illustrated in the quotes below:

"[with the provincial funding provided of] almost 5 billion dollars and taking responsibility for tuition framework, that adds another 3 to 4 billion, with that much of public money involved, it's almost self-evident why you would be motivated to have some form of performance measurement, accountability system" (CEN-6)

"It's important for the government, given the amount money that has been flown to the institutions to have a good awareness of what is going on each campus" (UNI-4)

In practical terms, as it was mentioned above, the evolution in accountability requirements resulted in looking for and adding new reporting tools to those that already existed, many of which are considered legacy (Snowdon, 2005b), and complaints about cumbersome reporting and unreasonable demands are common (Salmi, 2009). Consequently, this motivated resistance, an observation not unique to Ontario's post-secondary sector, the complaints regarding the burden arising from numerous reporting requirements has been noted, even when complex reporting may be explained by the multidimensionality of accountability that translates into multiple measures and new mandates (Considine, 2002):⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Not only the number of reports is of concern, but also that the content and timing of these may be inappropriate. One example of this is found in the reports regarding funding for aboriginal students, mentioned in the following quote, and the lack of effort to streamline the flow of information: *"No, it's piling on. When you start looking at the last five years, the reports, the requirements for complex... contracts which have quarterly reports or by annual reports or whatever, it just keeps adding and adding. And there is very little value added (...) the classic case is that underrepresented groups, where you had to report quarterly. Well, quarters don't work in the university. There is nothing sillier than that for not a lot all of the money, and I don't know what they do with it other than to keep their jobs" (UNI-2).*

“When these were being developed, there was definitely a lot of pushback in the institutions because there are an enormous number of reporting requirements” (CEN-1)

“Now, that’s the beef of universities. The total number of reports that universities have to do just keeps increasing (...) because the reporting is always associated with dedicated envelopes” (UNI-1)

Furthermore, the report backs provided in the MYA/MYAAAs were at some point deemed insufficient by the government and additional specific requirements, over and above those of the MYAAAs, were added for pilot project funding for aboriginal and first generation students. For instance, regarding first-generation, a government memo indicates that “a written report on your institution’s First Generation Access Pilot, that could also be made public (...) will also be due” (S. Madhany & M. Hicks, memorandum, Feb 21, 2006). In addition, as of 2007, universities were asked to write a letter, separate from the MYA/MYAAAs and not made public, indicating how the new funds allocated for the year would be used. The tendency to increase the number of accountability requirements over time is considered characteristic of the Ontario public sector and consistent with the introduction of NPM practices (R. V. Barrett & Doughty, 2005; Jones, 2004; Le Galès, 2004; Ramlal, 2009). Moreover, there is a tendency to pile up reports when the government perceives that there is a lack of accountability as it expected that establishing more accountability systems “will magically lead to good outcomes” (Yang, 2011, p. 256) or “as a symbolic gesture to restore public confidence” (Thomas, 2003, p. 550). Performance indicators as “bothersome data collection and reporting activities with no end” are possible in policy frameworks where strategic goals are absent (Layzell, 1999, p. 238) or that increases in audit requirements are accompanied by audited organizations “transforming into machines that produce year-end statements, performance indicators and standardized procedures” (Le Galès, 2004, p. 255). Even though the suggestion to reduce the number of reports has been made by different observers (Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services, 2012; COU, 2004), as they do not produce useful information or are costly, the number of reports has remained unchanged.⁶⁵ Continuing with the origin of the MYA/MYAAAs, the fourth factor that was identified as motivation for the government to introduce the new instrument was a loss of trust in university management given the organizational complexity of universities that is discussed in the section that follows.

7.1.4. DIMINISHED TRUST AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF GOVERNMENT STEERING

Accountability discussions in the post-secondary sector often go hand-in-hand with concerns regarding university governance and management. There is tension between the impression that government lacks a strong grip on universities, as expressed in the Ontario Provincial Auditor reports of 1999 and 2000, and the sector’s defense of their autonomy. In that context, the discussion often turns its attention to accountability structures, including where accountability responsibilities should reside and the shape the accountability relationships should take. This topic has been of interest in the Ontario PSE policy environment for a number of years. For instance, with the objective to provide an answer to such questions, the government struck in 1993 a *Task Force*

⁶⁵ In 2014, MTCU introduced a new online Reporting Framework that is expected to streamline reporting requirements thus reducing the reporting burden on universities and colleges, and it is anticipated that all grant-based activity reports will be available in the online tool by fall 2015 (N. Naylor, memorandum, December 19, 2013).

on *University Accountability*.⁶⁶ In its final report, the task force identified university's governing boards as the locus of accountability (Task Force on University Accountability, 1993).

In addition, aware of a context where trust is lacking, universities, on their own initiative or collaboratively via COU, have continued to support and develop instruments of voluntary accountability, such as CUDO and program evaluation processes (Ramlal, 2009). However, despite these efforts to clarify accountability relationships, to fulfill reporting requirements and to provide information to different stakeholders, there is a sentiment that university management cannot be trusted, given their autonomy and the opinion that the choices that institutions would make in the exercise of such autonomy would not be the right ones. In the opinion of the stakeholders quoted below, this lack of trust is reflected in the way the new reports and accountability requirements are conceptualized:

"I think the government wanted—the students certainly wanted this as well—to engender more of a culture of accountability [since] the institutions—and they still to this point—feel very autonomous" (STU-2)

"The requirements of the report almost suggest that the universities would not do the right thing if left on their own devices (...) 'We can't trust you guys to do the right thing so we need to have very explicit measures to make sure you are doing the right thing'" (CEN-9)

The pervasive lack of trust was not a new phenomenon and it permeated the Liberal government's perception of the Ontario PSE sector even before they were in power. In that regard, a sector stakeholder, reporting on a meeting he had in 1999-2000 with Premier McGuinty, at the time Leader of the Opposition, describes the future Premier's perspective:

"while [McGuinty] was prepared to invest in higher education, there was no way it was just going to be through increases in operating grants with no ties (...) My sense is that he had a bias about how universities would spend the money. That if you put more money in what universities would do is simply increase salaries, do more research and ignore students. So, he was intentionally committed to making sure that the universities held up their side of whatever bargain it might be. He didn't trust the management or the governance of the universities to do the right thing with any reinvestment that was made" (CEN-12)

The lack of trust is exacerbated when the use of funds does not seem transparent and when cost inflation in the Ontario post-secondary sector is more than twice the general average increases in the cost of living (COU, 2006b; C. Martin, Pin, & Andrey, 2011). Therefore, the government's perception is that even when using specific funding envelopes, universities generally dedicate new funds to salary increases, as a former MTCU employee recalls in the context of another funding program:

"The premise at the time was that universities would try to cheat on us, so that's why we had (...) a very, very complex reporting system (...) All because of this lack of trust (...), this attitude in government that if we

⁶⁶ Although it was created by the government, the task force had representation from the Council of Ontario Universities, the Council of Chairmen of Universities, the Ontario Council on University Affairs, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, the Confederation of Ontario University Staff Associations, the Ontario Federation of Students, the Ontario Graduate Association and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. The Task Force was heavily informed by CUPA's Committee on Accountability, Performance Indicators and Outcomes Assessment led by Dr. Dan Lang (who was at that time Assistant Vice-President for Planning and Registrar at the University of Toronto).

just give them the money they are just going to spend it all on salary increases and not improve quality” (CEN-9)⁶⁷

The concern that all new funding is directed to salary increases is also echoed in the Rae report:

Universities and colleges have not always done a good job at explaining exactly what additional funds will provide (...) Universities and colleges need to ensure that their own internal accountability structures and business practices are well understood and well monitored. (...) There needs to be a candid discussion – and consequent decisions – to ensure that new money does not simply translate into much higher, across-the-board salary increases (Rae, 2005, p.16).

This apparent lack of transparency is also confirmed by other stakeholders in their interviews, although it is explained as resulting from university complexity and decentralization. Universities, as loosely coupled, disjointed organizations (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Boyce, 2003; Weick, 1976), do not disclose their internal mechanisms to distribute funding across departments and activities internally:

“One of the frustrations that governments have had on looking at universities and investing in universities is trying to understand where that money goes, and how it’s spent (...) universities are not transparent organizations in terms of how money spent from (...) They are complex organizations. They have a high degree of decentralization so the ability to understand how the funds are being spent, and what the outcomes are, is very difficult from the outside” (UNI-2)

“[The ministry] had this perspective of universities as a place where [they] put money in a wheelbarrow, wheeled it in over the drawbridge, and the drawbridge closed, and they didn’t really have any say after that point” (STU-2)

The perspective of lacking trust and that the government fears that universities will use the new funds in ways other than those intended, are typical observations in principal-agent models, where information asymmetry opens up the possibility of moral hazard, i.e., cheating on the part of universities towards the government (Kivisto, 2008; J. E. Lane, 2007; Moe, 1984; Waterman & Meier, 1998). The portrayal of universities as agents that will have motivations to cheat are framed within a shift in the perception of how trust is built. Traditionally, trust was framed within a normative-cognitive (or tacit) perspective that “sees trust as established by the existence of strong norms and expectations as to what is appropriate behaviour by various parties involved in a relationship” (Stensaker, 2009, p. 26). This changed over time to a rationalist-instrumental (or explicit) perspective, was underscored in New Public Management approaches, and thus materialized in government practices, which assumes that

If otherwise not induced to it, the individual will pursue self-interest and maximize his or her own utility. Trust is established through the existence of independent actors and auditors that can be

⁶⁷ One stakeholder elaborated on the need to clarify how salaries and tenure are allocated: *“I think the universities have done themselves a real injustice by not dealing with the compensation issue in a much more transparent fashion and allowing themselves to get into basically automatic progression through the ranks without the kind of merit checks that should be there. It’s very easy to be subject to criticism that, once you are hired, and once you have tenure, then everything is automatic and you don’t have to perform [resulting in] this old unproductive tenured faculty members around, I don’t believe that for a minute that that is the case but that is certainly a perception and we collectively as the post-secondary or the university sector don’t do a very good job to dispel those notions” (CEN-12).*

trusted by all parties involved in a relationship (...) Procedures, standards, rules and regulations established by the independent auditors are then the proxies of trust (Stensaker, 2009, p. 26).

Furthermore, the increased government interest in the economic value of post-secondary education and the massification of higher education institutions that was conducive to a large heterogeneity of quality, are also identified as causes of the reduction in trust (Amaral & Joao Rosa, 2011; Sarrico, 2010). All of these forces act together as legitimization factors of greater government direction, and provide a rationale for the introduction of new accountability instruments to deal with these issues. Therefore, the MYA/MYAAS were introduced with the objective to contribute to an alignment of priorities between universities and government and to obtain more information regarding the use institutions make of their funding allocations. These objectives are discussed in detail in the next section.

7.2. OBJECTIVES OF ONTARIO'S MYA/MYAAS AND THE CHOICE OF INSTRUMENT

The official introduction of the MYA/MYAAs dates from May 2005, when they were tabled in the Ontario budget and announced as part of the *Reaching Higher* plan. In the Budget Speech, the accountability plan was described as consisting of agreements and follow-ups to “ensure that greater investment equals greater results” (MOF, 2005b, p. 6). In addition, the budget papers refer to setting “targets and measures [...] to monitor the quality and performance of the post-secondary education sector” (MOF, 2005a). These were to be established not only at the institutional level, but also at the system level, by “improv[ing] system performance and result measures” and their public reporting (MOF, 2005a, pp. 16–17). Thus, the budget narrative emphasizes the objectives of demonstrating greater results due to additional funding, of establishing targets and measures, and of publicly demonstrating system-level performance.

The emphasis on results, which was a key government's objective both at the university and at system-level, clearly echoes the NPM movement described throughout this study (Charih & Rouillard, 1997; Gow & Hodgetts, 2003; Hood, 1991). However, there were also objectives from the universities' perspective, in particular, the promise of funding stability. These general objectives, as well as that of funding transparency, both for universities individually and for the system as a whole, are analyzed in this section. The discussion shows that the objectives presented were not always consistent or clear.

The analysis will also illustrate how the choice of instrument was intended to contribute to the general objectives outlined above. In particular, in their first iteration, from 2006-07 to 2008-09, the MYA/MYAAs were presented as an *agreement*, where both universities and government were committing to certain results. The use of an agreement, which conveyed the idea of being official and binding, but respectful of university autonomy, is discussed along the objective of demonstrating results in section 7.2.1. These kinds of performance agreements have also been called contracts in other jurisdictions. Although the use of the word was interpreted by some stakeholders as symbolic of its binding power, it was not necessarily implemented as a contract itself. In that regard, the term ‘contract’ is sometimes used loosely to the point of being misused, as instruments denominated contracts can, in some instances, be lacking in their procedural characteristics and be vague in their implementation (Gaudin, 2010). These agreements were also

institution-specific and thus recognized the different characteristics, history and mission of individual universities. The potential conflict from this specificity with the general objective of demonstrating performance at the system-level is discussed in section 7.2.2. The original agreements were also *multi-year*, a characteristic that is closely linked with the objective of funding stability and that will be discussed in section 7.2.3. The chapter concludes with the objective of funding transparency in section 7.2.4.

7.2.1. DEMONSTRATING RESULTS

The three main *Reaching Higher* goals outlined a policy agenda of quality, accessibility and accountability. The introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs was intended as one mechanism to demonstrate that universities and colleges understood the new priorities and to ensure that these were met, by ensuring “that government funding is focused on achieving the government’s goals” (MTCU, 2009d, p. 12), and as such were seen as a mechanism for priority alignment and a driver of university behaviour as described below:

“We needed a consistent way, one, to ensure that post-secondary institutions, both colleges and universities, understood what the government expectations were” (CEN-11)

“There was a clear policy agenda and a need to demonstrate that the objectives were being met” (CEN-1)

This objective of priority alignment has been observed in the contracts in place in other jurisdictions for the post-secondary sector (García de Fanelli, 2006; Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010), and will be further developed throughout this thesis. The analysis that follows will focus on the interest in demonstrating results and the consistency and clarity of that goal (Sabatier, 2008). Although the goal of demonstrating results was clearly voiced by the government, the identification of the intended audience—the *agent* of accountability (Mulgan, 2003)—for this new instrument, was not as clear. Echoing the 2005 budget papers, where references were made to improving public reporting, a ministry representative indicates that they were expected to demonstrate their results to the tax payer:

“It was a reporting mechanism that we could turn around and say to the stakeholders, to the broader tax-payer public ‘well we’ve invested this kind of money, and this is what you are getting for it. You are getting a higher quality education; you have seen student satisfaction rates are as higher as they have ever been’ (...) it was also intended to provide the public with some assurances that the money was being well spent” (CEN-2)

The intended public reporting aspect of the agreements was communicated to universities, as these were told that in their choices of strategies they should find things “the ministry can talk about” (CUPA minutes, October 13, 2006). This search for stories is also mentioned by a student representative in his recollection of conversations with MTCU’s Minister at the time:

“They wanted to be able to show the public that the dollars they had invested were yielding results, and they wanted to have good news stories (...) the minister at the time, Minister Bentley, whenever we met with him as a group, he always said ‘I need to be able to tell the people on my street why I’m putting 6.2 billion dollars into the system, and I need to be able to give them really tangible outcomes of that investment.’ (...) It was a political thing” (STU-2)

One reason identified behind the need to tell stories, is that the government perceived that the ‘public’ was not aware of the investments that were being made and the results obtained by those, as mentioned in the quotes below:

“I think one of the government's objectives was to change public perception. They wanted to encourage the public perception that they were managing the sector (...) The government's wanting to be seen to be getting value for money” (CEN-4)

“[The government] wanted to show things were moving on to the money [...Politicians] weren't getting the impact they thought they did with the public (...) They recognized it wasn't getting attention and this was another mechanism to show (...) very visibly that we are getting results” (FAC-2)

Moreover, the justification to collect information at the time when the MYA/MYAs were first introduced was closely linked to the large injection of funding, \$6.2 billion, associated with *Reaching Higher* that had to be justified within the government as the following quotes illustrate:

“This began for the Ministry and for the Premier as very much a good news story and to be able to relay back to the public and to the opposition parties and so on, the great things that had happened as a result of Reaching Higher investments” (UNI-6)

“The MYA was something politically that the government can hold down and say, money is not simply going into a black hole, we have these agreements, and this is where the institutions are going; moreover, we are in track, the results are in, and they can claim success based on the results of the agreement” (FAC-1)

“They were making a really politically risky investment, and they wanted to make sure that they got a return, and [they provided] a little bit more direction to try to ensure the investment yielded the quality returns they were looking for” (STU-2)

Moreover, the reports would provide the information to the ministry to justify funding the same envelopes in years to come or to justify their allocation to the post-secondary sector instead or other sectors in the government.

“The government as a whole has decided to put some money into post-secondary education and there's a fixed pie in the tax base. That money could have been put in the healthcare system. It could have been put into some kind of device to change the industrial base of the province, etc., etc. So that's where the transparency comes into place [to justify that] we've made decisions to channel a certain amount of money in a certain direction [...Then] every time they come up with a new budget, they have to remake decisions as to which portion of the overall provincial money goes to primary education, post-secondary education and so on (...) Is it still important? Have we obtained some results from the previous investment and should we continue to do that?” (UNI-1)

This perception of public awareness was confirmed by an OCUFA poll where 1,800 Ontario residents were asked about the government's impact on post-secondary education sector. In one of the questions, they were asked to compare what the McGuinty government had done regarding higher education compared to the Harris government, whether the situation had improved or stayed the same, and a faculty representative recalls that in the responses:

“[A] significant number [of respondents] actually said ‘stayed the same’” (FAC-2)

Consequently, given the relative importance of the *Reaching Higher* commitment, the government was interested in changing this perception shortly after the budget announcements. As a result of a main publicity objective, the government appeared to be more concerned with the symbolic demonstration of activity than with the substance and the content of the initiatives. For

instance, given that the emphasis was on getting the stories fast, stakeholders expressed concern regarding the content and relevance of the stories to tell, as illustrated in the quote below regarding the interim agreements:

“The 2005-2006 interim agreement was very much designed to provide the ministry with very quick turnaround progress reports on the first year (...) to get quick stories without worrying as much about how meaningful it was” (UNI-6)

However, despite the clearly stated objective of using the agreements to report back to tax payers and to obtain good stories to share, there is little evidence that the agreements were sought after by the general public or that the information obtained in them was actually used. This was compounded by the lack of debate regarding the information posted. That is, although it is encouraging that information be posted online, this action is insufficient to engage stakeholders in a discussion without other related measures, such as publicity of the initiative (Jacob, 2006a). In particular, stakeholders interviewed for this study identify a number of reasons regarding their limited use, mainly related to access and format. First, it is argued that the format provided did not facilitate their use by the public:

“[they wanted more accountability to the public and thus required] institutions to post their accountability agreements on their websites and the government making them available to their site (...) but I don't think anybody ever really believed that very many people in the public would be interested in looking at the kind of information that was put in that agreement” (CEN-9)

“If it was really public accountability there would be far more context, so that the public could actually understand what they were looking at...” (CEN-1)

Second, although the posting of the agreements and report-backs on university websites allowed at a minimum readily access to this information, many stakeholders indicated in their interviews that they didn't believe these websites got many hits:

“I bet that if we saw the number of hits on our MYAA site... would be, first of all be very small. Secondly, the audience would be pretty limited in terms of who they were, so I don't think this is for the public, even though they we put it on our websites (...) I don't think we ever had a question about it” (UNI-2)

“I will be curious to know whether anyone is tracking the number of hits that actually occurs. My impression is that these things are completed, filed, posted on the website and forgotten about” (CEN-12)

Third, even if members of the public did not directly access the information, the government could have shared the information obtained to demonstrate results. However, the evidence showing how the government presented it to the public is limited as well. On one hand, the original intent of creating a central government website to summarize results was not pursued.⁶⁸ On the other hand, there are few recollections as to whether the stories were used, or if they were, it was considered that their relevance was limited as these were very specific examples, as illustrated in the quotes below.

“I recall the universities providing the stories in those sections. I don't recall the ministry or the government using them in any way. Like retelling the stories. Don't know, maybe I just missed it” (CEN-9)

⁶⁸ Results from initiatives were going to be posted on the website www.resultsontario.gov.on.ca; however, this idea was abandoned (J. Mason, 2005).

“I remember looking at things to [identify those] we would like to see the minister to pick up and talk about publicly [for instance] we had a diversification café which was (...) a great success and this is actually one of the things that the minister picked up in one of the speeches” (CEN-8)

Moreover, there appear to have been limited diffusion of any collected stories to the public, as only six new releases from the government speaking explicitly of the MYAAs were found and all six refer to initiatives drawn from the *interim* agreements dating from 2005-06 (see Appendix B). Fourth, although the government intended to be accountable to the public, the MYA/MYAAAs were developed as an instrument to facilitate accountability between universities and government. That is, there was a conflict between the intended audience for the instrument, which would likely require system-level reports, and the operationalization of the instrument in terms of a report from each university individually to the government. Specifically, as a system of institutional accountability, the MYA/MYAA had institution-specific indicators, which may not necessarily be the same as those produced when the objective is to report system-level accountability (I. D. Clark et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the government still tried to summarize them in some kind of way, as highlighted by the stakeholder below:

“They have reports from individual institutions and try to come up with some overall big picture” (UNI-1)

Since the information was difficult to read and the evidence of a widespread use by the public is limited, it appears that the agent of accountability of the MYA/MYAAAs was not the general public as the government originally portrayed. In that case, who was the ‘real’ and intended audience? As indicated above, several stakeholders believe that the MYA/MYAAAs were a political tool that was required to demonstrate and justify the use of the *Reaching Higher* money within the government. That is, there is an interest on the part of government to demonstrate results to protect the timing and scope of post-secondary education investments in the provincial budget. This suggests that the government is not one single, cohesive entity, as there is competition between different government organizations and actors (Niosi & Bellon, 1995). Therefore, the ministry itself faces accountability responsibilities and expectations within the larger government structure that must be met; as a consequence, the structural relationship behind the accountability instrument is more “a web of interconnected iterations” (Rungfamai, 2008, p. 12). This presented a challenge to implementation as it is unlikely that one instrument can answer appropriately to the requirements of multiple audiences or appropriately deal with the multidimensionality of the task at hand (Considine, 2002). The use of the information obtained in the MYA/MYAAAs will be further developed in section 11.1.

Another important point to analyze was the extent to which the choice of instrument contributed to the objective of demonstrating results for specific priorities. An agreement, or contract, conveys the idea of being more binding (Enders et al., 2012) as opposed to other accountability instruments that do not communicate that level of constraint. In addition, performance contracts are a conceptually attractive model since “they respect institutional autonomy, recognize the diversity of institutions, and link funding allocations to actual outcomes rather than inputs and processes” (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b, p. 325). That is, these take into consideration institutional autonomy while providing government with the opportunity to exercise

more control (Enders et al., 2012), primarily allowing for control without direct intervention (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). In an environment where rationalistic-instrumental approaches to accountability prevail, performance contracts that include an important element of negotiation and persuasion, are considered representative of a more normative-cognitive tradition (Massy, 2011). Therefore, this type of instrument is expected to ensure that the objectives are met, given its binding character while respecting institutional autonomy and given that the objectives are negotiated by two parties. Representatives from different stakeholder organizations comment in that regard:

“The contract sounded certainly much more binding than simply having perhaps Key Performance Indicators which actually are imposed on the institutions [... the MYA was the government’s way to draw institutions in as] they would themselves say what they can do within a sort of element of local autonomy in developing the individual response to meet the government goals” (FAC-1)

“[not knowing why a contract was used], I can speculate that it is the form that would be most consistent with the idea that government legitimately has an overall guiding role, but to respect institutional autonomy [... the government] says ‘we have rights, we have the duty, the obligation, the overall general guidance for the spending, but we are going to leave the details of how you spend it to you’” (CEN-8)

Indeed, this characteristic of protecting autonomy while providing general steering is one of the positive aspects highlighted for performance agreements in PSE in other jurisdictions (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Furthermore, one key element of the implementation to ensure the contracts are well established is the negotiation process regarding goals (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). However, in the opinion of university representatives, the negotiation process was limited. Therefore, although the MYA/MYAAAs were portrayed as bilateral, these were perceived primarily as unilateral since it offered little room for real discussion between the universities and the government, especially regarding funding requirements.

“I have often found that the multi-year agreement approach as very one sided, if you want the money that we are prepared to offer you have to do it, [although the money] may or may not be sufficient to actually do the job, universities have gotten into a situation where they have really little choice but to sign the agreements (...Universities are) are supposed to sign off on these accountability agreements without actually being able to say but this is got to be tied to legitimate funding mechanisms” (CEN-12)

Moreover, as mentioned above, one characteristic of interest regarding performance agreements of contracts is the expectation of their binding character (Enders et al., 2012). However, the word “contract” may sometimes be used loosely (Gaudin, 2010), as it is not the binding character of the contract itself that matters, but rather, as a university representative expresses, that it conveys the idea of being official:

“It has the appearance of being official and it's only the appearance because it would have been very difficult to pretend that what we reported in a report-back would in and of itself through the structure of the agreement, would have been a basis for them to either punish us or reward us or withdraw funding or whatever. (...) this looks official, this looks like it's the government getting the result reporting that would be reasonably expected through this kind of investment and that sounds a bit cynical, I suppose I am” (UNI-6)

Therefore, the use of the contractual language can indeed be seen as a symbolic tool, bearing in practice very little different to the tools used in the past. In that regard, a university

representative indicates that transfer payment agreements are formal contracts with the government, and as such the contractual character was not any different:

“Everything that we enter into the government is kind of binding in a contract (...) so that from my perspective didn’t seem to be different (... It’s not) any different than any of the other grants that we have with government” (UNI-13)

Summing up, there were issues with the design of the instrument as a number of conflicting goals were evident. On one hand, there were multiple audiences for demonstrating results, including the external taxpayers, as well as the central government, a challenge observed in accountability relationships in general (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010) and in the context of performance agreements in particular (Gornitzka et al., 2004). Furthermore, it is unclear the extent to which the government actually intended to modify the behavior of universities or change their relationship, as the implementation of a contractual arrangement suggest, or whether the underlying objective was more of a communication tool that could be used to demonstrate results in a more general manner. Another issue identified is that the agreements were developed but the opportunity for negotiation was limited, whereas in other jurisdictions this is considered one of the success factors in the implementation of such an instrument. Another conflicting goal, briefly mentioned above, was that institution-specific agreements were developed with a view to demonstrate system-level performance, which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

7.2.2. SYSTEM-LEVEL PERFORMANCE

Since their introduction, the government portrayed the MYA/MYAs as a tool that would allow them to demonstrate system-level performance. The 2005 budget papers explicit their intent to produce system-level indicators, which was restated in the government commitments in the MYA template: “This agreement confirms the commitments expected from each institution and the sector-wide indicators that will be used to report on results achieved” (MTCU, 2006a, p. 1). This objective was once again indicated in the first report-back correspondence: “The completed report-back templates will be used by the government to inform the development of best practices and system-wide measures and results. These measures may be incorporated in revised requirements in future years to demonstrate system-wide improvements” (P. Steenkamp, memorandum, October 7, 2007). The underlying goal of such objective was to demonstrate system performance as a proxy for the government’s own performance, as indicated in the two quotes below:

“What they thought they were going to be able to do with those is demonstrate their own performance by taking the reported results from all the institutions and adding them up or compiling them in some way (...) They believed that this would be the pieces of an overall presentation they would make on how much their investment had achieved for the province of Ontario” (CEN-9)

“The staff of the ministry was trying to summarize system-wide what was going on, so that the minister would know what’s going on. And I understood that part of what they thought they would do with the summary was to sort of make some public statements about the system as a whole” (UNI-1)

Despite such an official objective, the MYA/MYAs were developed in the form of institution-specific agreements. Consequently, each institution had an important degree of freedom to choose what to report and the quantitative information requested was often provided using institution-specific definitions. For example, although the reporting on certain sections such as under-

represented student counts or quality strategies were mandatory, there was leeway in the methodologies used and in the kinds of strategies to be reported. In addition, the templates placed significant emphasis on lists of strategies and a qualitative narrative that was difficult to summarize. That is, the content requested in the MYA/MYAA template was not conducive to producing system-level data, which created a conflict of objectives:

“The original intent of the agreement was never to provide system-level data. It was always to provide institution-specific data which will be public, but only public in a way where you had actually go to that institution’s report, and then somewhere along the way people in the ministry started thinking what about if we just rolled it out, so part of we were talking to the staff was process of rolling out” (CEN-1)

“[Some] institutions say, we’ve developed a new program of aboriginal studies in which both aboriginal students and people interested in aboriginal questions can register, that’s the narrative side of things. So if you just say that, you’ve said something important about the content of the type of changes you’re making. But if not all of the universities have done that, and not all universities will do that, if another one has done something else that has to do with promoting aboriginal studies, it’s very difficult to have a summary. All you can add is a list” (UNI-1)

Not all aspects of having institution-specific agreements were negative, as it recognized that the needs and objectives of each university were different at the time when the agreements were introduced and was expected to facilitate more differentiation in the system:

“Not all universities can contribute similarly or identically to the objectives of Reaching Higher. Some universities were already very advanced in the delivery of graduate programs, others were just beginning. Two institutions cannot possibly contribute in the same manner. [Universities] wanted to have an agreement with the government that would state to what extent they can contribute, given their own situation at the beginning point of effort” (UNI-1)

“The government wanted to allow for a differentiation between the institutions [while] still providing the general undergraduate experience so I would assume that there it was their attempt to balance the differentiation piece, but also ensuring that each university offered that just basic level undergraduate experience” (STU-2)

This recognition of differences across institutions goes back to respecting institutional autonomy as an underlying theme used as a rationale in some decisions made, and, once again, one of the benefits observed in other jurisdictions using performance agreements (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). The challenge, however, lies in reconciling an overall objective of producing system-level results with the development of institution specific-indicators (Lewis, Hendel, & Kallsen, 2007). The conflict arises on the part of universities as expressed below:

Given the need for these indicators to provide some level of comparability or equity in assessment among institutions, they are often crude measurements of the objectives identified. Furthermore, given the challenge of defining provincially or nationally relevant indicators, they often fail to account for the institutional diversity that is both characteristic of, and demanded of, universities in Canada (Gauthier, 2004, p. 105).

In addition, the objectives for performance indicators pursued by different actors in the sector may diverge; that is,

The purposes of performance measures also vary depending on the unit that develops them. While ministry or legislatively mandated performance measures are usually intended to require higher education institutions to demonstrate accountability and achievement of their missions and goals, institutionally developed measures are often designed to influence the institution’s priorities, monitor

the process, communicate its achievements and success, and improve its quality (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 210)

Furthermore, the logic of system differentiation poses its own particular challenges, although it appears respectful of institutional autonomy. In very practical terms, a concern raised by one interview participant is that there is a search for differentiation whereas the template used is quite standard:

“[On] one side they talk about greater differentiation, and from the other side, they talk about a standard template that everybody has to use. To me, that reflects [...] the lack of policy vision inside the ministry” (CEN-12)

Nonetheless, the challenges for differentiation go beyond the simple development of a standard template. Neo-institutional theory discusses in detail the forces that push organizations to become isomorphic in search for organizational legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; R. W. Scott, 2008). Although these forces are at play in Ontario, including international ranking systems that push universities to be more research-oriented and graduate student funding that places an emphasis on this student group, at the same time, there is a push in the government discourse for differentiation that has not been established as a source of organizational legitimacy and thus precludes its implementation. Although the logic of differentiation was not further elaborated in the MYA/MYAA development, this concept has been a cornerstone in the development and implementation of the SMAs and is a key theme in today's policy environment.

Moreover, although institutions had some leeway as to how to respond to the agreements, there were no clear expectations regarding how much each institution could contribute to system-level objectives. Indeed, there were no province-wide objectives that had been identified with universities being accountable for their contribution for their attainment. The lack of well-established government-determined province-wide objectives is not uncommon, as it has been noted in Ontario when analyzing other accountability instruments (Callahan, 2006). This has also been documented as a difficulty with performance agreements, where due to a missing readily available answer regarding what is expected from universities, simplistic objectives are chosen (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). In the Ontario case, the goals were left at a very high-level of quality, accessibility and accountability. The definition of system-wide goals for these areas would probably result in conflict vis-à-vis each institution's specific contribution and the government's funding commitment long-term to make them a reality. Therefore, the observed ambiguity may result from a strategy to reach a compromise, where deciding parties may concur on an ambiguous agreement (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009). Furthermore, their generality allows for universities to find a good fit with the general goals and therefore is interpreted by some as conducive to the protection of autonomy (García de Fanelli, 2006; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Sudmant, 2008), as highlighted in the quote below:

“The original agreements were very broad in terms of the reporting back (...) I think the ministry has tried to be very, very respectful of the decision-making of the institutions (...) it allows universities to choose the strategies that] are the best for them, and for the circumstances that they are in. It acknowledges the uniqueness of each particular organization because it's hard to put a cookie cutter on top of the institutions. That's very respectful of the autonomy of the institution” (CEN-2)

Despite giving a sense of agreement, the direct consequence is that “objectives are broadly or vaguely defined, or if multiple goals are in conflict, it will be more challenging to specify accurate and informative measures” (Thoenig, 2003, p. 29) and performance is difficult to measure as there are no clearly defined goals and objectives for it (Banta & Borden, 1994). In that regard, a sector stakeholder comments:

“One of the overall weaknesses of the current MYAA process is that there hasn't been a completely explicit or clear linkage drawn between government's overall objectives and the things that's addressing the MYAAs. You can infer some of those objectives by the directions of the questions. But it's often not explicitly articulate” (CEN-4)

The task of creating system-level results from the information provided would prove to be almost impossible. However, the Ministry did not relent in its effort, even when facing the challenges of unavailable or incomparable data. An approach to deal with this challenge was to leave to universities the choice of measures to include, but this overlooked the fact that sometimes the data simply did not exist:

“They are asking for a considerable amount of detail and for much more than was asked for the interim agreements last year. While in many instances they leave it up to each university to determine what measures to propose, I am not sure that the data even exists” (COU email, June 26, 2006)

This was a recurring concern for university representatives, who were aware of the inconsistencies in the definitions used, of the difficulties of providing certain information and the impact that this had in their comparability across institutions:

“There was much more ministry interest in building a sector profile than there was in building it with consistent data” (UNI-6)

“When you start collecting data that you've never collected before you can make presumptions around whether or not the information, first of all, is comparable, whether it's useful, and that's the problem. The ministry has trouble understanding whether they look at data that's comparable, much of the time it's not, since we don't collect information in the same way” (UNI-2)

“As we talked to the officials about the report-backs, it became really clear the desire from government actually be able to aggregate all of the data (...) and in the earlier versions of the report what happened was we were all allowed to use our own definitions (...) They weren't apples-to-apples comparison across all of them” (UNI-13)

Despite the definitional and comparability challenges, the ministry produced system-level summaries, that were not all that well received by sector representatives:

“The first time they came to CUPA to show the data output from the MYAA everybody from CUPA was just blown away that they really thought that the data that they had out of this was comparable, and was going to tell the story that they said it was. It wasn't” (UNI-2)

“They never were able to successfully [produce system-level results] in any kind of a comprehensive way that anybody could understand” (CEN-9)

The difficulties in producing system-level data, that would facilitate a province-wide evaluation of improvements and new activities and “system accountability from the ministry to the public” (Iacobucci, 2009, p. 4) was, according to a review of the agreements by HEQCO in 2009, one important shortfall of the whole process. This would be one contributor to the instruments evolving towards a data reporting tool after 2009-10. On parallel, there have been efforts to support the

movement towards system indicators with a greater participation on the part of HEQCO, as their intent was to work on the development of “a procedure for reporting to the public in a clear and succinct fashion” (Iacobucci, 2009, p. 4).⁶⁹ At this point, our attention turns to the objective of funding stability.

7.2.3. FUNDING STABILITY AND PREDICTABILITY

The MYA plan template identifies funding stability and predictability as one of its objectives in recognition of the universities’ need for a longer time period to “have a greater ability to develop plans that meet government goals for the sector and achieve results” (MTCU, 2006a, p. 1). This goal was communicated in a context where funding arrangements in the sector had been in a significant state of flux over the past few decades, where their predictability had been lacking (Snowdon, 2005a), and where the government traditionally makes one-year decisions (Rae, 2005).⁷⁰ Therefore, the multi-year character of the agreements was portrayed as an innovative feature that recognized that objectives take time to achieve and that it was helpful for universities to plan for more than one single operating year. In that regard, OUSA reported in 2006:

As the government builds the accountability framework of its multi-year agreements, it must also ensure that it provides sufficient, ongoing, and predictable levels of funding to allow institutions to aim for continuous improvement, beyond just enrolment growth. The measurement of university performance will not be a productive exercise if universities are not provided with sufficient resources with which to improve their operations (Chan, 2006, p. 1)

The stability objective was to be accomplished by committing to funding allocations for a three-year period (MTCU, 2006a). The resulting increase in flexibility and the greater control over their resources was the benefit universities would obtain in exchange for being more accountable. Moreover, a longer-term funding allocation also protected institutional autonomy in the context of funding allocations on the basis of performance results, as it allowed for longer-term planning (Gobbels-Dreyling, 2003). These promises of financial benefits, flexibility and control echo those made in Australia to entice universities to join the Unified National System that blurred the distinction between universities and colleges in that country (Watts et al., 2010). In the context of the MYA/MYAs, a university and a faculty representative comment:

“[The MYA/MYAs are called multi-year] because many of the objectives are not of the type that can be accomplished in a single year... Universities need to plan their operations, they have a yearly cycle, but they have to plan multi-year as well. So there was an interest on both parts, the government and the universities, to look at the longer period of time than just a single operating year” (UNI-1)

“In exchange for greater accountability, the institutions would have a greater sense of what the money was forthcoming so that they could actually develop, both in terms of their internal needs but also in terms of what the government’s goals and objectives were” (FAC-1)

⁶⁹ A specific reference is made to collaborating with HEQCO in establishing a system-wide measurement of under-represented students (M. Hicks, personal communication, October 31, 2007).

⁷⁰ In the Canadian non-for profit sector, targeted funding envelopes have been conducive to unpredictable funding (K. Scott, 2003). It is possible that their pervasive utilization was a source of instability in the PSE sector as well.

A former Chair of the board of governors at one Ontario university indicated that this new commitment for clear funding partially originated in the failed implementation of the *Broader Public Sector Accountability Act* in 2000:

"[When this ambitious statute] was introduced, there was a lot of push back from the public institutions, from the hospitals and universities [that said] there is no way that you can impose on us unilateral accountability unless the province lives up to certain expectation [regarding funding]" (BOA-2)

The proposed Accountability Act was perceived as unilateral accountability, since funding being flowed into the system was often unclear or was indicated only later in the fiscal year. Given that this was a major criticism of the proposed approach, the movement that opposed it, according to the quote below, was a precursor to the multi-year accountability agreements, where funding stability was promised:

"How can you plan when you don't have certainty around your funding? And if you can't plan ahead of time, then how can you be held accountable to certain objectives? That statute never ended up anywhere and I think the province at that time was convinced that the only way in which they could then expect the institutions to agree to some accountability would be to enter into the form of agreement (...) so the province would provide the funding and in return the institutions would agree to certain standards and requirements to function" (BOA-2)

The push for negotiated, bilateral agreements was also observed in the Ontario hospital sector, as the use of agreements was also met with stakeholder resistance until a conversation speaking of "mutually negotiated agreements" took place in a second round of negotiation (Reeleder et al., 2008, p. 166). Indeed, the multi-year character of performance agreements is another key characteristic observed in those that have been developed in the post-secondary sector elsewhere (Chevaillier, 1998; García de Fanelli, 2006; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010).

Multi-year commitments for funding also contributed to the MYA/MYAA's bilateral flavor, as universities were expected to make plans while the government's financial support facilitated their implementation. However, despite the promise for funding stability and predictability during the implementation of the agreements, the government did not communicate funding allocations to universities in a timely manner and the process continued with a great degree of uncertainty. A University of Guelph report to their board of governors in early 2005 indicates: "as in previous years, there is still much uncertainty about prospective government revenues" (University of Guelph, 2005). Later in the year, with a view to clarifying funding allocations, each university received a memo from MTCU's deputy minister indicating notional three-year funding commitments (P. Steenkamp, memorandum, August 2006). Despite the information provided, universities perceived the information insufficient and requested clarification from ministry staff that was still deemed unsatisfactory. The excerpt below summarizes the perception in the sector vis-à-vis the funding uncertainty for the MYAAs at the time:

Something that will have to carefully consider as there is a great deal about the three-year funding picture that we still don't know. I can't imagine anyone will be in a position to make significant commitments beyond trying to maintain existing levels of service (COU staff, personal communication, August 11, 2006).

Not only was the promise of funding stability unmet by the government in the original plan, but the multi-year character was one key characteristic of the agreements that was abandoned in later years when the agreements were reinvented as data collection tools. In the quote below, a sector stakeholder comments on the situation and argues that the actual implementation contradicted the spirit of what the Rae Review had originally proposed:

“Institutions didn’t know at the end of the year whether they are going to be funded or not, a totally ridiculous situation given the amount of dollars that were at stake [... the MYAAs have] not fulfilled the expectations regarding multi-year on anything as far as I can tell, every year they either change the rules or leave enough question marks about the planning framework that you really don’t know what your funding is going to be. (...) the whole notion of funding predictability to encourage better planning has been lost, even though it was a center piece of what Bob Rae was talking about” (CEN-12)

Furthermore, according to the university stakeholder quoted below, that the multi-year plan was never renewed after 2008-09 is one of the most important drawbacks in the process:

“We only set the contract once (...) We never did go back and renew the agreements in any way which I think is a particular flaw with the process. (...) It would be better if it was more of a rolling type of agreements, where we negotiated the agreement, we reported back on the agreements, and then there was a chance to update the agreements if there are any changes, and that wasn’t provided to us” (UNI-13)

Throughout the implementation of the MYA/MYAAs, different policy actors stressed their bilateral character which was two-fold. First, there was an expectation for a negotiation between universities and government. Second, there was also an expectation for a mutual commitment to set goals and obtain the funding to attain them. However, both elements ensuring the bilateral aspect of the agreements would remain unmet, despite their role in facilitating the acceptance of the agreements in the province. The promise of funding stability had an impact that was internal to universities, in terms of their ability to plan, commit and implement strategies to contribute to the government-wide goals. The provision of resources, which is considered an important element of accountability relationships (Thomas, 2007) was an unfulfilled promise. Since the size and continuity of the funding associated with the agreements is deemed a key element of success in the implementation of performance agreements (García de Fanelli, 2006), this shortfall in the Ontario approach hints towards some of the problems that will be noted later on in this study. In addition to the expectations of funding stability, there was also an external expectation, concurrent with the demonstration of results, that the linkage between funding and results would be clearer, thus providing funding transparency, which is where the discussion turns next.

7.2.4. FUNDING TRANSPARENCY

Another objective of the new instrument, only made explicit in the interim agreements, was to clarify the link between funding and results (MTCU,2005b); however, this relationship was not elucidated, and the 2009 HEQCO review concluded that the “link between funding and activities is unclear” (Iacobucci, 2009). Details regarding funds associated with quality and accessibility system-wide as well as the mechanisms to determine institutional allocations and the amounts provided are not published. Furthermore, explicit linkages between institutional allocations and initiatives were

only requested in the interim agreements⁷¹ and the details on the funding provided for the 2006-07 to 2008-09 agreements and their report-backs are not publicly available.⁷² The difficulties in establishing clear linkages between objectives and costs are not new, and have been documented in the evaluation of public sector reforms in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Finland (Pollitt, 1998).

The only information publicly accessible regarding funds and allocations for all Ontario universities is obtained via the Council of Ontario Financial Officers (COFO), which reports annual government grants by fund (see table below). The interpretation of this financial information is further complicated as the definition and objectives of each of the funds mentioned in the table are not provided in the COFO documents.⁷³ In the table below, it is observed that there are three major sources of funding coming from the government: (i) The basic formula grant, calculated on the basis of student enrolment and program costs, that increased by 27 per cent between 2004-05 and 2008-09—from \$1.8 billion to 2.3 billion; (ii) Other grants and contracts provided by MTCU, which increased from \$522 million to \$834 million during the period. About 75 percent of this increase is explained by the introduction of the Higher Quality Education Fund and the Graduate Expansion Fund (\$127.9 million and \$108.8 million by 2008-09 respectively), which are directly associated with *Reaching Higher*; and (iii) Other grants and contracts provided by other ministries, such as the Ministry of Health that supports medical training. Despite the large size of the *Reaching Higher* investments, this additional funding accounts for a very small portion of total government-based university funding.

TABLE 7-1: OPERATING PROVINCIAL GRANTS AND CONTRACTS TO ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES, \$ MILLIONS, 2004-05 TO 2008-09

| Fund | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Basic Formula Grant | 1,839,371 | 2,013,399 | 2,022,858 | 2,083,951 | 2,258,448 |
| Access to Opportunities Program | 52,752 | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Higher Quality Education Fund | | 132,844 | 197,913 | 167,415 | 127,881 |
| Accessibility Fund | 125,058 | 85,217 | 103,521 | 129,363 | 136,489 |
| Performance Fund | 23,194 | 23,150 | 22,810 | 23,280 | 22,430 |
| Graduate Accessibility Fund | NA | NA | 43,217 | 107,747 | 108,838 |
| Medical School Expansion | 19,617 | 39,493 | 56,257 | 25,936 | 40,412 |
| Quality Assurance Fund | 74,355 | 74,390 | 73,809 | 84,712 | 69,233 |
| Tuition Fee Freeze Compensation | 41,896 | 98,982 | 97,880 | 102,923 | 62,874 |
| Other | 185,547 | 198,751 | 425,589 | 288,012 | 266,809 |

⁷¹ Examples of institutional funding allocations during the interim year were disclosed by MTCU in the series of news releases published in early 2006, summarized in Appendix B.

⁷² All universities received a government memorandum after each report back was approved where the funding allocation is released, but these are not posted publicly. Furthermore, specific linkages were not requested in the agreements.

⁷³ Definitions of each envelope are available in the Ontario Distribution Manual, a document that outlines the government funding of Ontario universities and the rules and guidelines for its distribution. Although the last update dates from 2009-10, it does not provide a description of the Access to Higher Quality Education Fund (MTCU, 2009d).

| Fund | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| MTCU Grants & Contracts (excluding Basic Grant) | 522,419 | 652,827 | 1,020,996 | 929,388 | 834,966 |
| Other Ontario Govt. Grants & Contracts | 113,015 | 132,532 | 72,084 | 85,619 | 102,397 |
| Total Ontario Grants and Contracts | 2,474,805 | 2,798,758 | 3,115,938 | 3,098,958 | 3,195,811 |

Source: COFO Financial Report of Ontario Universities

The funding associated with the MYA/MYAAs is found in the third line of Table 7-1, where the Access to Higher Quality Education fund (AHQEF) is indicated. This fund includes the \$122 million Quality Improvement Fund granted in 2004-05, mentioned in the first public releases regarding the MYA/MYAAs, that grew to approximately \$124.2 million for universities in 2005-06 (M. Hicks, memorandum, February 22, 2006) and was renamed AHQEF in 2006-07. However, full funding under the AHQE was not available for quality initiatives. In 2005-06, the ministry redirected funding to other priorities and thus only \$60.5 million was available to universities under the label *Advancing Quality Fund*. The next year, MTCU communicated that the fund was not all going to be dedicated to new quality initiatives, as other priorities became apparent. A memo by Minister Bentley clarifies that some of the funding originally directed to support quality initiatives was made available for supporting enrolment growth: “Institutions who had chosen to grow their enrolment beyond what was to be accommodated in the expanded undergraduate accountability grant can apply funding from their multi-year allocation to ensure each student is fully funded” (C. Bentley, memorandum, August 4, 2006). Thus, as explained in the table below, the additional funding available for quality was, in the end, reduced by half (C. Martin et al., 2011). At the time, this information was not made public.

TABLE 7-2: FUNDING ASSOCIATED WITH THE MYA/MYAAS (\$ MILLIONS)

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| AHQEF – original allocation | \$199.9 | \$216.2 | \$212.9 |
| Portion reallocated to accessibility fund | \$11.5 | \$7.6 | \$0.7 |
| Per-student funding ⁷⁴ | \$56.6 | \$92.6 | \$92.6 |
| Targeted Quality Initiatives ⁷⁵ | \$18.0 | \$25.0 | \$25.0 |
| Remaining funds for quality– general allocation⁷⁶ | \$85.5 | \$89.5 | \$93.8 |
| Remaining funds for quality– targeted allocation⁷⁷ | \$28.3 | \$1.5 | \$0.8 |

Source: MTCU, 2006-07 Funding Technical Notes, Sep. 14, 2006; S. Madhany & M. Hicks, memorandum, Dec. 12, 2006

⁷⁴ Funding provided to support unfunded student enrolment was withdrawn from the AHQEF and built into the permanent base of the operating grants formula (BOI) as of 2008-09 (MTCU, 2006-07 Funding Technical Notes, September 14, 2006). Measures to provide full-funding for enrolment started in 2005-06 and different funding sources were used, including ministry year-end savings and operating funds that were redirected (M. Hicks, memorandum, May 5, 2006). The objective is to “phase out historical anomalies created when many institutions responded to demand by increasing enrolments beyond available funding levels” (MTCU, 2005-06 Funding Explanatory Notes, November 2, 2005).

⁷⁵ The Ministry reserved this funding to support specific initiatives, pending identification as of August 2006. For instance, the French Language Targeted Fund was added to support “the development of innovative university programs and services and consolidating French-language university programs” (MTCU, 2006-07 Funding Technical Notes, September 14, 2006).

⁷⁶ These funds are distributed by university based on their enrolment shares.

⁷⁷ Additional flexibility was built-in by the government to provide one-time funding for quality/access “to be distributed at the Minister’s discretion to manage access and quality issues on a one-time basis” (MTCU, 2006-07 Funding Technical Notes, September 14, 2006).

The redirection of funding affected, in the opinion of university representatives, their ability to undertake new activities, as illustrated in the quotes below:

“A couple of things happened in Reaching Higher [...The government] underestimated their enrollment growth. Their money was diverted from the quality to enrollment which I think probably blunted the MYAA to be frank for not getting much more money for quality improvements (...) if they had accountability attached to the quality improvement line, that made a lot of sense to me if you are giving me more than, just growth and inflationary cost, and then we should be really accountable for it, but that got lost in the growth money” (UNI-2)

“For all intents and purposes the money dried up in year one because that was the last time we got a consistent based BOI-based allocation across the sector. In year two it went to special projects and in year three there was hardly any money left” (UNI-6)

As part of the targeted initiatives, the government provided pilot funding for specific projects, particularly those related to under-represented students. For instance, in 2005-06, a one-time project of up to \$150,000 per pilot was available and is described in the quote below; as well, similar funding envelopes were provided to support aboriginal students (MTCU, 2005d):

To support improved access and success for first generation students (... which) can be used to enhance and/or undertake new activities for outreach, transition and/or retention specifically targeted to first generation students and their parents. Initiatives considered through your recent interim accountability agreement, quality improvement initiatives, strategic plan, or other may be relevant (M. Hicks, memorandum, Feb 21, 2006).⁷⁸

The changes in the total funding available for quality initiatives helps explain the uncertainty in funding allocations that was described in the previous section. Furthermore, the determination of what portion of total government funding would be linked to the agreements was observed. The decision of how much funding to attach to the agreements is instrumental as it would dictate the level of commitment required by each university; in addition, in terms of two elements of the theoretical framework (Massy, 2011; Oliver, 1991), it will be a direct determinant of the saliency of the reward and of the economic fitness for the new instrument. The greater the funding associated with the reporting, the greater relevance it was expected to have. Nonetheless, there was no a priori agreement in the sector as to what the amount to attach to the MYA/MYAAAs would be best:

“There certainly were conversations around what's the appropriate amount of funding to tie to these agreements (...) if you tied too much then you are actually getting into basic operating grant, and peoples inability to function, if you tie too little then nobody is going to take in seriously (...) I don't think that anybody has really worked out exactly what the appropriate amount is” (CEN-1)

There are some statements in the IAA and MYA templates⁷⁹ that could suggest the linkages are to be made with total operating funds. This is also coherent with the Rae recommendation as it

⁷⁸ Some examples of initiatives funded by the pilot projects are mentioned in the MYA/MYAAAs, including the University of Toronto, the University of Western Ontario, the University of Waterloo, the University of Windsor, Algoma University and Trent University.

⁷⁹ For instance, in the 2005-06 interim agreements templates, the government associates these instruments with “targets and results expected of the sector from the cumulative fiscal investment” and as a companion for “operating grant allocations” (MTCU, 2005b), which suggests that the linkages, and consequently the reporting, were going to be done on total operating grants. Along the same logic, in the MYA template, a reference is made to the full amount of the 2006 allocations: “The release of the full amount of your 2006-07 allocations is conditional on the Ministry approving your completed Multi-Year Action Plan” (MTCU, 2006a, p. 1). Furthermore, this is consistent with a memo from Minister

referred to all funding sources, including tuition (Rae, 2005). Nonetheless, the communications from government clarify, later in the process, that the funds linked are those of the AHQEF, which represents only between 4.0 per cent and 6.4 per cent of total grants in the years from 2005-06 to 2008-09. Furthermore, a memo from the Deputy Minister, received by Executive Heads one year later, clarifies that full amount referred solely to the specific funds for the Access to Higher Quality Education Fund: “As was outlined on page one of Appendix B: Multi-Year Action Plan for Universities of the Multi-Year Accountability Agreement for Universities for 2006-07 to 2008-09, the release of the full amount of your 2007-08 and 2008-09 Access to Higher Quality Education Fund allocation” (P. Steenkamp, memorandum, July 10, 2007). Consequently, having only a portion of the university funding associated to the agreements reduced their potential impact:

“It was designed as a limited kind of thing. It was not designed as something that was going to affect everything what goes on inside universities (...) Imagine that the entire basic operating grant was completely conditional on some kind of reporting like that, the amount of influence will be humongous (...) the amount of power that this kind of procedure has, its leverage, is proportional to the dollars that are embedded to it” (UNI-5)

Another topic of debate regarding the funding associated with the MYA/MYAAAs, is the extent to which this was truly incremental or whether it was simply compensating for previous years of underfunding, as summarized in the quote below:

“This is the interminable argument whether the level of funding is sufficient or not [... whether] the rate of change of funding [was] adequate or not and compared to previous years (...) there are two ways to look at [at the investment in Reaching Higher]. One, it's a substantial increase in funding and the other is, it went part of the way to make up for underfunding from the Harris years and before” (CEN-8)

This perception would become an important factor when deciding how to respond to the MYA plan and subsequent report-backs, as universities considered that they were asked, on one hand, to report on new activities; while on the other hand, the new funding available was limited. This was furthermore compounded by inflationary pressures and by greater than expected student enrolment that resulted in falling funding per student (OCUFA, 2007). Funding shortfalls during the *Reaching Higher* period were estimated in early 2006 as \$176 million by 2007-08, \$240 million by 2008-09 and \$300 million by 2009-10 (COU, 2006b). In that regard, the two quotes below state:

“For most of us Reaching Higher meant that we barely kept pace with inflation for a year or two. So the whole notion of new incremental investments without even talking about what you are not going to do any more was the huge structural flaw in the whole process. (...) The notion that we would be accountable for millions of new things just didn't cut it. (...) those of us who were at best treading water with this new money, would not have had the luxury of setting aside a \$1 million and saying ‘Gee I wonder what we can do with this money?’ Because it was spent before we got it (...) We have less money now than we did five years ago or seven years ago” (UNI-6)

“By the end of Reaching Higher, funding per student wasn't that much higher than at the beginning (...) which was the whole [purpose] in the first place” (CEN-9)

Bentley to Executive Heads, which referred to full amounts of funding: “release of the full amount of your 2006-07 funding will be conditional on the ministry approving your plan” (C. Bentley, memorandum, August 4, 2006).

Thus, despite the original intent to provide clear, multi-year commitments, the funding associated to the agreements was reduced due to other priorities that arose during the time period, and the remaining funding envelopes were further broken down to link them to pilot projects that had their own reporting requirements. The linkage between funding and the agreements was diluted even more when additional quality funding provided after 2006-07 was not directly associated with MYAA report-backs, but rather, universities were asked to report on the use of these funds in separate letters, that were not available to the public: “Executive Heads of universities are requested to provide a written report to the Director of the Post-secondary Education Finance and Information Branch (...) identifying the quality enhancements supported as a result of this additional quality funding” (P. Steenkamp, memorandum, March 31, 2008, p.2). This practice of requesting separate memos for the incremental funding continued in years thereafter. For instance, in 2009, universities were once again “asked to provide a report on the areas targeted for additional investment using these funds” (B. McCartan, memorandum, April 17, 2009). Consequently, despite their clearly stated objective, the multi-year accountability agreements failed to demonstrate publicly how the investments made by the government were directly linked to strategies and new outcomes.

It is unclear why the government asked for separate memos to support the use of incremental funding. Nonetheless, the release of the original funding envelope for quality continued to be contingent on the submission of the MYAAs. Although focusing only on the AHEQF could give the impression of low saliency of the associated rewards, particularly when compared in relative terms to the size of total government funding, it represents nonetheless an important share of marginal funding increases during the period under analysis. Moreover, although no new envelopes of funding have been added to the MYAAs since their introduction, and for additional allocations universities are asked to report back using other mechanisms, the funds associated with the MYAAs continue to be of importance to universities and thus motivate their participation in the reporting.

On the other hand, as it was documented above, university representatives debate the extent to which the additional funds resulted in new funding or not. This limited the impact that they had on the development of new activities on campus. Finally, as it has discussed throughout this section, there has been lack of clarity in the linkages between funding and activities, which calls into question once again who was the intended audience of the agreements and what was the objective being aimed at with their introduction. An evolution in the objectives and scope of the instrument throughout its implementation is observed, a point that is discussed in light of the dimensions of accountability in the next section.

7.3. SHIFTING OBJECTIVES AND THE DIMENSIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The presentation of the origin, objectives and choice of instrument has revealed that some of the issues that challenged the success of the MYAAs since their introduction include (i) their aim at achieving multiple objectives for different audiences with one single approach; (ii) the conflicting objective of developing institution-specific instruments for measuring system-level performance; and (iii) the pervasive uncertainty in funding commitments and the failure to fulfill the promise of multi-year allocations. Although traditional top-down approaches to analyze policy implementation

identify clear and consistent objectives as a criterion of success, empirical research and testing of this premise have demonstrated that this is a policy formulation characteristic rarely observed in practice (Sabatier, 2008), and the MYA/MYAA process provides a clear example of this challenge.

Goal ambiguity is often explained as a mechanism used to reach a compromise, when deciding parties are in conflict and may only be able to concur on an ill-defined goal (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009). Of the conflicting objectives outlined above, the mismatch between system-level performance and institution-specific indicators is likely explained by the use of goal ambiguity as a tool to reduce conflict; that is, the challenges with regards to the definition of system-wide goals and the contribution each institution can make to these were impossible to resolve in the short timeframe provided to put the agreements in practice. However, the lack of clarity regarding the identification of the intended audience and the commitment to funding do not appear to arise from the need to reach an agreement on ambiguous terms, as universities would have preferred more clarity in this regard. Indeed, the ambiguity regarding funding translated into reduced incentives—which are a palliative for conflict—and muddled the negotiation process. It could be hypothesized that the lack of clarity arises from conflicting objectives *within* the government, but this study did not collect information that could pursue such a line of questioning. On the other hand, Matland (1995) argues that goal ambiguity should not be evaluated in normative terms—as neither good nor bad—since it is the nature of policy making in pluralistic societies (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999), but that understanding it can help explain our observations of the policy implementation process. Specifically, ambiguity is expected to influence:

The ability of superiors to monitor activities, the likelihood that the policy is uniformly understood across the many implementation sites, the probability that local contextual factors play a significant role, and the degree to which relevant actors vary sharply across implementation sites (Matland, 1995, p. 159).

As well, ambiguity will provide leeway for the institutional transformation of policies (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999). These factors will be explored in the discussion of implementation that follows in Chapter 8, where the difficulties in monitoring and in the interpretation of requirements will be discussed. Furthermore, blurry goals preclude from judging the implementation process as a success or as a failure, since this is not possible without a goal against which to judge it (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984), which in the case of the MYA/MYAAAs was a moving target. On the other hand, it is the same ambiguity that facilitated the introduction of the instrument without major conflict in the sector. As Palier (2007) observed in the case of pension reform, ambiguity may be a contributor to political functionality:

Vagueness surrounding the meaning of these measures and divergent interpretations of the solutions adopted do not appear to be parasitic on clear, rational action, but lie right at the very heart of their political functionality. In a sphere as legitimate as social protection and involving such a variety of actors, a measure that was too unambiguous could not be adopted. The measures that pass are those that handle the different interests in play carefully through their peculiar polysemy, by being subject to several possible interpretations (p.100).

The analysis of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs also illustrates how the objectives, scope and funding associated with the accountability instrument evolved over time from the first proposal in the Rae report to the implementation that was chosen in the form of the MYA/MYAAAs. To

characterize this evolution, this section applies the dimensions of accountability discussed in section 2.1 to the portrayal of the new accountability agreements in different public documents, including the Rae recommendations, the budget narrative, the IAA template, and the MYA template. These observations are summarized in table 7-3 below and outline the object, standards, agents and means of accountability in each of these documents. Furthermore, this analysis highlights what the choices made in terms of the dimensions of accountability reveal vis-à-vis how accountability is represented and problematized in the policy sector (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004).

The first dimension analyzed is the object of accountability or who is accountable, and it is noted that the object identified changed in the different documents analyzed. In the proposal made by the Rae Review, the intent was for both universities and government to be accountable and indicate “tangible commitments” (Rae, 2005, p. 104) whereas the budget narrative and the interim agreements text focused mostly on universities. Furthermore, the intent in Rae was even broader, as it looked into the possibility of introducing legislation on the vision for post-secondary, as described by a stakeholder below:

“When the Rae report came out, [his] original recommendations were that legislation be passed to have the mission and the vision of higher education enshrined in legislation. So it was the government’s contract with the Ontario population that we want to have one of the best higher education systems in the world. Of course they never did pass that kind of legislation” (CEN-12)

With the publication of the MYA template, the object of accountability appeared to broaden in scope again, although not to the extent originally planned by Rae, as the document that was signed by the Minister and university presidents listed both institutional and government commitments. However, in practice, the content of the MYA plans and the information that was made public focused primarily on the universities’ plans, actions and measures, and the government did not establish any system-wide goals to report back on. That is, the requirements for performance accountability were imposed on universities but not on the government. Nonetheless, MTCU used the information provided in the MYA/MYAAAs to report back to other government agencies, a point that will be further discussed in Chapter 11.

Regarding the second dimension, the standards of accountability, as these are closely linked to the object of accountability, there were also important changes observed across the different documents. Once again, Rae envisioned much more ambitious exchanges, with universities having to discuss their missions and enrolment targets, and both the government and universities having to commit on funding options from all sources (including transfer grants, tuition and others). Concerns were raised in this regard since government control on private sources of funding was deemed a potentially hurtful intrusion on institutional autonomy and committing on funding sources was also criticized as an important infringement on university autonomy, as private giving and investment income are considered differentiating factors across Ontario universities (Snowdon, 2005a). Furthermore, this proposal would have implied a major overhauling of funding mechanisms in Ontario, as the vast majority of support is still distributed on the basis of formula financing.

TABLE 7-3: ACCOUNTABILITY DIMENSIONS: FROM RAE'S REPORT TO MYA/MYAA IMPLEMENTATION

| Dimensions | Rae Recommendation | Budget Narrative | Interim Agreement Template | MYA Template | MYA/MYAA in Practice |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Object (who?) | Government and Institutions | Post-secondary sector | Institutions | Government and Institutions | Institutions/MTCU |
| Standards (on what?) | Universities: mission, enrollment, quality | Quality and performance of the system Meeting government goals | <i>Reaching Higher</i> goals: Quality and Accessibility | Quality, Accessibility and other | Focused on Quality and Accessibility/Funds in PSE |
| • Funding | Multi-year All sources (transfers, tuition, other) | <i>Reaching Higher</i> Investment | Quality Improvement Fund | Quality portion of AHEQF | Quality portion of AHEQF |
| Agents (to whom?) | Standing Committee Legislature | Public | Public | Government/Public | Government |
| Means (how?) | Multi-Year Plans | Bilateral performance agreements System-wide performance measures | Interim agreements | Multi-Year Plan | Report backs |

These ambitious targets were reduced in the budget narrative, which constrained the focus to primarily *Reaching Higher* goals and the funding associated with it. This was even further reduced during implementation as the commitments focused on funding from the quality envelope. The government's interest in linking accountability to funding items where they have some discretionary power provides flexibility for the government to justify budget cuts if needed, which can hardly be done regarding funds allocated via funding formulas (Schmidlein, 2004). Furthermore, despite the interest on performance funding in the accountability literature and the government discourse, it has been shown that the performance focus across different jurisdictions, defined as the share of funding allocated with those methods, is not as predominant as the discourse would suggest, particularly in relationship to teaching activities (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001).

Considerations of system-level performance are important in the analysis of the standards of accountability, since in the budget narrative, being able to assess province-wide results was an underlying objective. Even though this was an objective, given that the instrument was built for institutional-specific accountabilities, when the government tried to use the information available to demonstrate system-level performance, there were issues as to how the information was defined, rolled up and communicated. Moreover, this highlighted the pervasive gaps in the identification and formalization of system-wide goals, an issue that to date remains unresolved. The overarching

objective to produce system-level information seemed to have predominated in years thereafter, as this was one of the reasons behind the transformation of the MYAAs into primarily a data gathering tool, an evolution that will be further discussed in chapter 10. Furthermore, accountability is asked for performance of each institution, but there are no concerns regarding whether the distribution of funds across institutions is equitable or how this distribution of funds may affect accessibility and under-represented groups. This approach concurs with the performance rather than on equality and representation prevalent in the accountability discourse under the NPM wave (Shanahan, 2009b).

The third dimension is concerned with the agents of accountability. In this regard, the budget and the MYA template vaguely speak of the public, with references to “public reporting” (MOF, 2005a, p. 17). The Rae report also aimed at the public but had identified a specific figure for this, the Standing Committee of the Legislature (Rae, 2005). In practice, however, there appears to have been much greater emphasis on reporting results from institutions to the government and from MTCU towards other government sectors, than to the public, as the only specific information released publicly—other than posting the agreements and report-backs on institutional websites—are the news releases dating from the IAA in 2005.⁸⁰ Therefore, the recurrent references to the public appear to be more reflective of the government’s rhetoric than of their concrete actions, and although the original intent was one of external accountability—towards the public—in practice it translated into an exercise of internal accountability—towards superiors (Kernaghan & Siegel, 1999).

Finally, regarding the means of accountability, clearly one single instrument was intended as the vehicle to gather the information to demonstrate all these different levels of accountability on different aspects, to different players, by different agents, a design problem that has been noted in the implementation of other performance-based accountability measures in Ontario (Lang, 2013). Such a situation can result in ‘multiple accountabilities disorder’ (MAD), that is, “when faced with multiple and sometimes inconsistent accountability requirements, the lines became blurred as to who was really accountable” (Thomas, 2007, p. 254). Moreover, the issue of multiple objectives and multiple audiences in one single tool is conspicuous to the MYA/MYAAs and could have foretold the challenges in their implementation. For example, regarding performance reports, dealing with multiple aims and audiences results in increasing the difficulty in selecting appropriate measures (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010; Thomas, 2007).

These changes in the dimensions of accountability for the MYA/MYAAs illustrate how the understanding of the instrument and the expectations that were built around it changed during its formulation and implementation. Following the type of political relation and legitimacy observed in the sector as proposed by Lascoumes & Le Galès (2004, 2007, 2010), as was briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, the MYA/MYAAs presented characteristics of an agreement-based, of an economic tool and of an information-based instrument, and the relative importance of each of these elements fluctuated over time. Specifically, the initiative was originally imagined as an agreement-based instrument, and its description suggests a mobilizing relationship between the government and

⁸⁰ A summary of those is presented in Appendix B.

universities as the government seeks direct involvement in the definition of objectives. This suggests an underlying ideal of “negotiated governance”, where actors can reach mutually satisfying decisions keeping their autonomy vis-à-vis the state (Le Galès, 2004). In addition, having explicit linkages to funding, the instrument is also seen as an incentive-based economic tool, thus suggesting a command and control emphasis relationship between universities and government. That is, congruent with the conception of universities as engines of economic growth, the government provides incentives to promote quality improvements, and as a result, the economic benefits of education. In this regard, the instrument’s legitimacy is drawn from the community’s agreement that the government is investing in activities that produce social and economic benefits.

However, the degree of involvement from the state originally pursued in the Rae proposal was quite ambitious and would have meant important changes in the autonomy of universities. Rae’s proposal also had an important component of an information-based instrument, where the relationship with the government and the public is more of an audience democracy and legitimacy is obtained via the explanation of decisions and the accountability of actors. However, Rae was preoccupied with the accountability of both the government and universities, whereas when the initiative was implemented, the locus of accountability was placed mainly on universities. The relative role of economic incentives in the instrument also changed, shifting from an ambitious objective of dealing with the economic efficiency of the complete sector revenues to being limited to the marginal increment obtained in the form of the QIF.

Another interesting aspect noted in the evolution demonstrated above, is that despite important changes on the objectives and scope of the initiative, the same type of policy instrument, a multi-year bilateral agreement with report-backs at the institutional level, was being considered at each stage. The extent to which the choice was made based on preference and not on the appropriateness of the instrument is a valid question as often times there is an evolution in the objectives but not in the means to attain them (Lang, 2013) and that

Policy instruments are rarely selected on the basis of their implementability and effectiveness. Different policy fields tend to show preference for their “favorite” types of policy instruments and use these repeatedly regardless of their actual contribution to problem solving” (Bressers & O’Toole, 1998, p. 214)

Indeed, it is noted that the use of contracts, agreements or similar kind of instruments is becoming more common in the post-secondary sector across different jurisdictions; albeit their content, objectives and consequences are different (Reich Albertz et al., 2011). In the Ontario case, the emphasis on the bilateral multi-year character during the early stages of formulation and implementation may have facilitated its acceptance, as it was presented as an instrument that would provide adequate capacity to carry out the function (e.g., funding), that would foster commitment and that clearly signaled the desired courses of action in terms of high-level goals (M. Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; May, 2003). Therefore, it is noted that despite the important differences in their characteristics and implementation practices, the increasingly common use of the word agreement or contract for post-secondary education across jurisdictions is an example of the legitimization of this type of instrument at the international level (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011). That is, the Ontario experience is an example of how an instrument that is perceived as legitimate, was

imported, implemented, and modified, thus becoming a different tool. However, its introduction has contributed to some real consequences that will further discussed in Chapter 11. At this point, the discussion turns to the development and implementation of the MYA/MYAAS, including the reception they had in the sector, the influence universities played in their development, and the implementation decisions both at the university and at the government level.

Chapter 8. DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ONTARIO'S MYA/MYAAs

In the previous chapter, an analysis of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs and of the objectives the new requirement aimed to attain was presented. In this chapter, the analysis of its introduction, development and implementation, as a policy in evolution, is further elaborated. For that purpose, the analysis transcends the government's perspective and inquires about its reception in the sector and the participation of different actors in the design process, recognizing that implementers will also develop strategic initiatives influencing both the policy environment and the formulation of the policy in question (S. Barrett & Fudge, 1981; Hjern, Hanf, & Porter, 1978; Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Lipsky, 1980; Sabatier, 2008). In addition, understanding what actors were involved in the process and how, complements the analysis previously presented to clarify relationships in the sector and move beyond the presentation of accountability measures as normative requirements (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011).

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 8.1 discusses the initial concerns raised by universities and other stakeholders, including student and faculty representatives. Although the requirements for accountability measures were not openly opposed, concerns were expressed regarding the mechanism to implement it. This is followed in section 8.2 by a description of the consultation process the government set in place to implement the agreements and to facilitate buy-in by different stakeholders. It will be shown that broad consultations took place over a short period of time and that ongoing consultation processes had a tendency to focus on technicalities. The analysis continues in section 8.3 with a discussion of the active role universities took to influence the process, including the identification of measures for quality of education and the student experience they endorsed. These three sections conclude the analysis of the development of the agreements, as at the end of this process, there were templates available for the universities to complete.

The discussion then turns to an analysis of the implementation process at a general, macro level. The first question that is discussed in section 8.4 is how university-level strategies and targets were chosen. Since institutional-level choices will be developed in more detail in Chapter 9, the discussion at this point focuses on the interpretation made of the requirement, and the high-level strategies that universities undertook to meet the government's objectives. This is followed by a discussion of how the government reviewed the plans and approved funding in section 8.5. Since the theoretical framework includes linkages with funding as an explanatory factor for university behavior, the extent to which punitive measures were applied when targets were unmet is also discussed.

8.1. RECEPTION IN THE PSE SECTOR

From the perspective of universities, accepting and adopting a new accountability requirement, such as the one introduced by the government, was the expected behaviour. There were legitimacy pressures to adopt it arising from the importance of the accountability discourse in

the province and from the NPM movement, where accountability had become an end in itself. It would have been risky for universities to protest against it (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011), as audit procedures, presented as rational, objective and neutral, are as “unopposable as virtue itself” (Pollitt, 1993, p. 49). Furthermore, the emphasis on greater accountability had been highly publicized and was quite visible given its introduction in the 2005 Ontario Budget. Consequently, Ontario universities accepted the new requirement as being “accountable” is an element contributing to their legitimacy. This is illustrated in the quote below:

“I don’t think it was a big upheaval and a big battle (...) because you cannot make the argument that you should not be accountable, you can’t even try” (UNI-5)

In addition to legitimacy pressures, there were financial rewards associated with the initiative, albeit smaller than originally expected, that nonetheless provided the initiative with saliency as it was new funding that compensated for gaps resulting from unfunded enrolment and inflationary pressures. Therefore, according to some participants in this study, the new investment was the main driver in accepting the MYA/MYAAAs, and accountability is described as the “quid pro quo” for additional funds that was readily accepted by university administrators:

“[The MYA/MYAA] was tied very directly to the new money, a sort of quid pro quo. We were willing to put more money in, but we are expecting [universities] to be accountable for what we are getting back in return for those extra money (...) accountability was [recognized as] quite legitimate (...) that it was only fair if you’re going to put several billion dollars into the system that we be accountable for what we were doing with it and how we are spending it” (CEN-8)

“We understood that the ministry needed results reporting because of the results-based performance ethic that had permeated government already and I think we were quite happy to do it because that was a necessity for getting the money” (UNI-6)

In the following quote, the perspective is confirmed by a faculty representative, who indicates that the association between the MYA/MYAAAs and what was originally considered an important influx of funds contributed to the acceptance of the agreements not only by university administrators, but by faculty representatives as well:

“The concern about the MYAAAs reduced [...partially] because the government did show a commitment to what we saw as the key issue in post-secondary education, which was under funding. So, the context shifted in a way in that we didn’t see any negatives” (FAC-4)

In addition to the accountability objective, the other general high-level objectives introduced by *Reaching Higher*, accessibility and quality, were closely aligned with university-level objectives, which facilitated their acceptance. Quality improvement is a priority both for the government and individual institutions, as it is at the core of university missions. Improving access is also a general objective with which universities would concur in general, although focusing on specific under-represented groups may be contingent on the specific mission of individual universities (e.g., Laurentian and Ottawa for the francophone community, Lakehead for the aboriginal community). The two quotes below illustrate the perspective of universities regarding their alignment with those proposed in *Reaching Higher*:

“[The goals did not include] something that appeared particularly threatening or unusual or outside the mandate [of universities]” (UNI-14)

“Some of the things [the government] included were things all the universities would probably be working on anyway” (UNI-3)

Thus, two forces behind adoption in the Massy model, priority alignment and saliency of the rewards, were present in the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs. Furthermore, the public character of the initiative contributed to its adoption. Although following Massy (2011) these three elements suggest that universities would embrace the new requirements, the introduction of this instrument did not happen without concerns. Specifically, as indicated in the quotes below, there was unease about the way it was implemented and the constraints that it could potentially entail:

“There was a lot of disagreement about how it was done” (CEN-8)

“Every time something else that’s is going to be a constraint happens, people try to minimize it” (UNI-5)

Universities, acting as organizations, evaluated the imposition of the new rules as they relate to their own interests (Fernández-Alles & Llamas-Sánchez, 2008; Oliver, 1991; R. W. Scott, 2008) and made strategic choices in the implementation of the new requirements to deal with any possible issues. For instance, there were concerns regarding the emphasis on quantitative measures and the reduction of universities to a set of numbers, provided that it is difficult to implement measurements for complex activities in PSE, such as teaching quality and research excellence (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Shanahan, 2009b; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010), that were shared both by university and faculty representatives as the two following quotes illustrate.

“When [universities] had the opportunity of talking about these in a cautionary sense [the concern raised was that] we can’t measure the things that universities are with these indicators” (UNI-14)

“Any type of accountability initiative or attempt to measure quality had to make sense. It couldn't simply be a quantitative exercise, and we used as a reference other accountability measures, like the KPIs that did not make much sense at all” (FAC-1)

In addition, the possibility of a punitive side to the agreements, and whether the government was intending to provide closer oversight worried stakeholders involved. The potential reduction of institutional autonomy was at the core of the rationale for suspecting the new initiative, and negatively affected the positive alignment originally predicted, as highlighted by two faculty representatives in the quotes below:

“We were concerned that they were not be a punitive dimension to them, if there were more areas that were seen as deficient according to the measures of the accountability agreements, that the government understands that might be more resources needed to be added to those areas as opposed to actually bringing in punitive measures” (FAC-1)

“Going into the MYAAAs there was a certain skepticism about what was going to happen, this was not welcomed by OCUFA because the last time we went through this there were things done that were perceived to be unfair and there was no real perception that anything positive had really come out of the KPIs (...) There was a concern that what the government was trying to achieve was firmer oversight and (...) a stronger hand on the direction of universities, as though there was something universities were doing wrong” (FAC-4)

Summing up, the introduction of a new accountability requirement was not directly opposed, as this would have affected the perception of universities by other stakeholders, and universities accept their responsibility to be held accountable. Furthermore, the promise of new funding also contributed to this acceptance. Nonetheless, concerns were raised regarding the use of quantitative

measures, the issue of potentially affecting institutional autonomy and the implementation process in general. At the same time that opposition was expressed, impacted organizations searched for ways to try to use the new requirement in a way that was favorable to them (Le Galès, 2004), as will be discussed in section 8.3 and 8.4 regarding their influence in the process and their strategies to meet the new requirement. From the government's perspective, their strategy was to address these concerns during the consultation process that is discussed next.

8.2. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

A recurring theme in the policy narrative around the development of the MYA/MYAAAs and the Rae Review, was the importance given to consultation processes involving different stakeholders, an example of how adequate representation in decision-making has “emerged as an important dimension of administrative legitimacy” (Gow & Hodgetts, 2003, p. 193). However, NPM initiatives have been criticized due to their lack of consultation and the lack of inadequate and meaningful representation of the different groups affected (Gow & Hodgetts, 2003; Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007; Le Galès, 2004). Although one of the highly regarded characteristics of performance agreements or contracts is that they are conceived in such a way that negotiation and consultation are promoted, in the case of the MYA/MYAAAs, the consultation process was restricted and limited in scope, focusing mostly on technical aspects. The details of this process are described in this section.

The consultation process undertaken to facilitate the implementation of *Reaching Higher* has its roots in the development of the Rae report. In the fall 2004, Rae published a discussion paper inviting feedback from post-secondary sector stakeholders. The resulting documents outline the vision each group had regarding accountability, among other topics of interest to the Rae Review. In that regard, as it was mentioned in Chapter 7, the Rae Report documents the “common diagnosis” regarding accountability challenges in Ontario's PSE; however, similarly to what happened in the case of the pensions sector in France, an agreement was struck regarding the issues and not necessarily the solutions (Palier, 2007). When the government launched *Reaching Higher* with a view to implement the Rae Review's recommendations, it consulted again with different stakeholder groups to tease out the operationalization details. The objective, according to the government representative quoted below, was to obtain buy-in, to build on existing processes, and to create opportunities for collaboration:

“We wanted to make sure that we didn't go in with the templates and say, ‘thou shall do the following because of the following’. We wanted to stay within the framework of our relationships with both the colleges and universities and we wanted to make sure that we worked with their existing processes (...) so that we were getting buy-in as we were developing these agreements” (CEN-11)

In the case of universities, the main collaborators were COU and CUPA, where the latter has important representation from institutional research and analysis offices. The emphasis on ensuring consultation with this group is consistent with common consultation practices that often focus mostly on concerned specialists and organizations (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). Government representatives describe this collaborative relationship with university representatives as follows:

“We didn't just do it on our own. We had a sub-committee from the institutional research people and I met some of them, one on one and basically used to go to these meetings to say here is what we are thinking, what do you think. And we got a lot of good advice” (CEN-11)

“COU/CUPA was the forum where the government first brought the drafts for discussion by university staff. We had numerous teleconferences with them” (CEN-9)

The conversations with CUPA started earlier in the process, while the IAA were introduced. Although these first conversations were limited due to time constraints, CUPA members had an opportunity to provide feedback on content and measures. An invitation to comment on the template was circulated in November 2005 (M. Hicks, memorandum, November 23, 2005) and a teleconference to discuss content between MTCU and CUPA representatives took place soon after (CUPA minutes, December 8, 2005). However, no documentation is available regarding what content was discussed or the feedback provided.

In the spring of 2006, the government turned its attention to the development of the MYA/MYAAAs. Broader consultations took place in May and June 2006 at five different locations across the province. These provided a forum for the major stakeholder groups to voice their concerns and were open to the public.⁸¹ In that regard, a ministry official and a faculty representative recall conversations between the ministry and representatives from other stakeholder groups:

“There was involvement with the sector in terms of soliciting feedback and consulting, I think that was almost a year, and the two sectors, colleges and universities, were put together along with student groups and, faculty associations [... we consulted about the] agreements and what should they look like” (CEN-2)

“We were all consulted by the ministry when the agreements were being conceived, and then developed [for instance,] student organizations, whether it was OUSA or CFS, met with the government to discuss some of their concerns” (FAC-1)

Although documents outlining the participants, questions discussed or the evaluation criteria used by MTCU during this consultation process are not publicly available, it was on the basis of these conversations that the ministry finalized the schematic for measurement, referred to as ‘the framework’ (see Appendix H), which provided general guidelines about measurement and identified measures to be used. Despite the participation from other groups in broader consultations, conversations with CUPA and MTCU representatives happened on a regular basis and continued over time. For instance, a small delegation from CUPA met with ministry representatives to discuss plans for the MYA/MYAAAs on February 13, 2005 (CUPA minutes, February 9, 2006). In addition, at a CUPA meeting on May 11, 2006, MTCU staff presented the draft schematic for measurement later on finalized during the consultations (CUPA minutes, May 11, 2006).

Later on, in an email from the MTCU to COU dated June 2006, the former requests feedback on the template of the MYA, before it is formally released: “In the interest of consulting with our university partners as often and as early as possible on the Multi-Year Agreements, please find attached a draft Multi-Year Agreement for 2006-07 to 2008-09” (M. Hicks, personal communication,

⁸¹Five open consultations took place in London, Kingston, Hamilton Sudbury and Toronto (CUPA minutes, May 11, 2006) and included representatives from student groups (e.g., College Student Alliance, OUSA, CFS, Ontario Public Services Employees Union) and faculty groups (e.g., OCUFA, CAUT).

June 23, 2006). Furthermore, this collaboration continued over time as illustrated by a September 2008 memo, where the ministry acknowledges CUPA “for their initiative, their demonstrated commitment to ensuring that MYAAs are effective, efficient and useful accountability tools” (S. Madhany, memorandum, September 12, 2008).

Therefore, the involvement of representatives from other stakeholder groups was limited when compared to that of CUPA. This resulted in the perception that university senior administrators were working directly with government. In that regard, a former OCUFA executive recalls:

“The concept of the agreement is an interesting one because it suggests a common cause, a meeting of mind. It suggests that there is comfort between the two parties in addressing something together. [the MYAAs] were imposed however (...) and there was the sense of the mistrust of faculty associations that administrations were agreeing to things without really talking to Senate (...) It was seen as administrations agreeing with government on behalf of the organizations without adequate internal discussion” (FAC-4)

In Chapter 7, the discussion argued that the choice of an agreement as the tool to establish a new accountability relationship between government and universities had been promoted given its bilateral character; however, sector stakeholders perceived its implementation more as a unilateral initiative as the government commitments and the opportunities for negotiation were limited. Furthermore, the quote above introduces another perspective in which the ‘agreement’ character appears to fall short, and is regarding the level of consultation that took place. Although other stakeholders interviewed for this study recognized that technical conversations were to take place with CUPA representatives as these would play an important role in implementation, they also perceived this practice as alignment between university administrators and government without adequate involvement, in their opinion, of academic representatives. Alternatively, the limited participation of faculty members can be explained by senior administration purposefully playing a buffering role to protect the academic core (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Jamali, 2010; R. W. Scott, 2008), a point that will further developed in section 11.4.

Moreover, despite these opportunities to comment on the templates and to participate in their implementation, in retrospective, CUPA representatives are critical of the limited opportunities to make a major contribution on the real content, of the fact that not all of their suggestions were accepted, and that their recommendations were mostly sought after regarding technical issues:

“We got [MTCU] to make lots of little changes because what they were asking couldn't be done, but we never got the real substantive aspects of them changed. This is what they wanted and we weren't able to get them to significantly reduce the amount of data that they were requesting or anything like that” (CEN-9)

“[The discussion] wasn't focused on: ‘You shouldn't be spending so much time measuring this or that.’ It was just more: ‘Well, we can't collect the data that way because... or here is the different way we should do this table that would be simpler.’ It wasn't about the real content itself” (UNI-2)

“Eventually, the ministry after they've completed their own internal planning, they let us know what they're planning to do. And sometimes if there are things that are really, really difficult to implement, then we'll give them some feedback and they will try to do whatever adjustment they can. But the core policy aspect behind the changes, I mean those don't change, it's their decision” (UNI-1)

CUPA played a role regarding primarily two technical aspects of the MYA/MYAAAs. First, CUPA was interested in data definitions to be used to ensure their feasibility, the comparability across institutions and the availability of the required data. This was one of their primary contributions with an objective to address the concern expressed in the literature that inadequate measures of university activity be chosen (Grosjean et al., 2000; Mighty, 2009):

“The concern of universities is always let’s do it in a manner that it’s, first of all, feasible, because sometimes, we’d like to have some data, but it’s not necessarily available (...) The technicalities of which statistics to report and when to report or not to report them, became again a conversation with CUPA” (UNI-1)

“[CUPA made sure] that when we are providing things to government that we are doing apples-to-apples comparisons [... to ensure] that [the government is] actually doing a fair comparison, or when they are not doing a fair comparison, we can actually explain why” (UNI-13)

“If we were negotiating with them on anything then it was on the accuracy of what was the formula for that particular indicator, whether or not we could all be using exactly the same thing and [whether] we all are measuring exactly the same thing”(UNI-14)

For that purpose, CUPA played a role proposing measurement instruments that would be helpful in responding to this requirement, a point that will be further elaborated in the next section. Second, details of the implementation regarding how the funding would be allocated were discussed in this forum:

“A lot of the conversations are not about the general principle of funding (...) but about the implementation of it: What happens if you don’t reach your target in the first year or second year or third year, what happens if you go over your targets; those kinds of implementation aspects” (UNI-1)

Therefore, although some faculty and student representative perceived the process as a joint implementation between government and senior administration, CUPA representatives argue that their proactive role played at different levels and forums should not be interpreted as such, but rather as a limited opportunity to provide feedback:

“It’s not that the thing was developed together jointly, I mean, it is the ministry that was developing it. But they were giving the universities an opportunity to provide them with some feedback” (UNI-1)

Although one of the expected impacts of the implementation of performance agreements is that these would eventually translate into greater collaboration with the government (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010), the implementation in Ontario limited the negotiation regarding content and the priorities and rather focused on technicalities. That is, an instrument that had the potential to be conducive to a more agreement-based relationship between universities and government was implemented in a way that further privileged its information-based character (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007). Consequently, the limited opportunity to discuss content in the CUPA forum cast some doubt on how meaningful the exercise was for some universities and set the tone for the strategies they would use to fulfill this commitment:

“Faced with a draft template from the ministry on which we are asked to comment, questions were raised almost immediately about how meaningful is this exercise (...) I recall thinking it was just a given that there would be some reporting out on just additional money and that the government’s political needs in doing it and our financial needs to agree to do it just carried the day (...) I don’t have a strong memory of the details

of those discussions other than just, we are going to do it, we will just accept that we will report it this way” (UNI-6)

Summing up, the process described so far illustrates the interaction between the different groups involved in the development of the agreement. This is clearly not the case of a policy single-handedly introduced by the government (the principal) with the agents having to adjust it, as there was significant interaction between the two groups. In that sense, it is noted, that as both actors (agent and principal) acted together and implemented jointly, the implementation of accountability measures is a dynamic and interactive process (Yang, 2011). However, as it was illustrated, the discussion and collaboration dwelt mostly on technical aspects, and the opportunities to discuss the content or the objectives of introducing a new accountability instrument were limited, remained unclear, and the negotiation that is expected from implementing performance agreements did not materialize. Furthermore, given the loosely coupled structure of universities, there were different perceptions regarding how the process unfolded. For instance, faculty representatives perceived that they had limited opportunities to contribute to it. In order to deal with some of the uncertainty surrounding the process, universities sought an opportunity to influence it, particularly in the area of quality measurement, an effort that is described in the section that follows.

8.3. THE UNIVERSITIES INFLUENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Given the evolution of accountability requirements and the consultation process around the Rae Review and *Reaching Higher*, the government’s interest on PSE accountability was not unknown to the sector. Consequently, during the years while the MYA/MYAA were being developed, universities played an active role trying to drive the content of the new instrument over and above their participation in consultation processes led by MTCU. These efforts focused on influencing the government’s perspective on accountability and on quality measurement. This is a clear example of how policy is a dynamic and iterative process, resulting from the interaction of multiple actors with different interests (Kohoutek, 2013; Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Sabatier, 2008; Yang, 2011), where “many partners intervene in handling public affairs” (Thoenig, 2003, p. 134) and where collective responses are able to influence implementation early in the process and to shape institutional adaptations (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999). Analyzing this collective effort helps reveal both power relations and the exercise of power, by identifying the dependencies, cooperation or alliances that are formed and explaining the collective behaviour observed (Musselin, 2010).

Specifically, the *COU Quality and Productivity Task Force*, a group of senior representatives from Ontario universities, led a coordinated effort “to identify the numerous and varied ways in which universities can demonstrate their commitment to quality and using public funds for the best possible outcome for students, taxpayers and the province” (COU, 2006a, p. 1).⁸² This task force met with senior government officials to understand their objectives and played a proactive role in the identification of possible quality initiatives and measures, a position paper that purports that (i)

⁸² COU’s interest in quality measurement predates the MYA/MYAA movement, as illustrated in the 2000 report on quality indicators and quality enhancements in universities: *How will I know if there is quality?* (Smith, 2000).

careful evaluation of indicators is needed to avoid perverse incentives; (ii) a one size fits all approach is counterproductive as each institutions must find its own path; (iii) it is important to focus on activities designed to improve student success (COU, 2006a). The final report also provides examples of quality assurance, process improvement and teaching support, among others. Government and universities also collaborated via the MTCU-COU Working Group on Sector Performance that informed the work of the taskforce. Co-chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister for Postsecondary Education and the COU Vice-Chair, the working group was established in 2005 “to help define valid measures and results of sector performance in three key areas: quality, accessibility and research” (COU staff, memorandum, October 24, 2005).

Regarding quality measurement, Ontario universities contributed with the identification of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) and the Consortium on Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) as measures that could be used in this context. These were proposed in the context of numerous discussions among CUPA members, senior university administrations and MTCU, regarding the search for the appropriate measurement tools. A CUPA member and a student representative recall:

“There were lots of conversations with the government about how do you actually measure things like quality and through those discussions, particular measures started to emerge like NSSE, CPGSS and CSRDE (...) COU did endorse those, and actually helped pave the way to [their use]” (UNI-13)

“I remember lots of discussion about getting the right instrument” (STU-2)

Universities had a vested interest in proposing these measures as it was an effort to improve their accountability to government in a proactive manner. Specifically, implementing these instruments helped universities convey the idea that they were serious about the objective to improve operations and to influence the choice of instruments to be used given that government authorities prefer “indicators that measure institutional efficiency, customer satisfaction, job placement and value for resources” whereas university administrators “favor performance measures that reflect the quality of the educational experience in a manner that elucidates their own specific institutional missions” (Alexander, 2000, p. 426). This was a movement primarily led by CUPA, with no consultation with other sector representatives such as students or faculty:

“[It was a political objective] to get out ahead of the government (...) There was a feeling that these would be useful tools for internal use and they would be useful to demonstrate to the government that we were serious about improving our operations” (CEN-9)

“[Some of the measures] were put forward by the institution as a way to try to appease the government’s voracious appetite for this kind of information [... institutions] were trying to be proactive rather than have people in the ministry come up with ideas about how to be measuring certain things” (CEN-12)

The University of Western Ontario played a leadership role in the proposal of NSSE, CGPSS and CSRDE. For instance, regarding CSRDE, this university reports in their MYA:

In the 2005 reporting cycle, there was limited participation in the CSRDE by Canadian institutions, with only Western, UBC, McMaster, and Toronto among the G10⁸³ universities as comparators. Western has taken a leadership role in encouraging participation in future years by all of the G10 universities and all of Ontario's universities and in 2006 there was full participation in this survey (University of Western Ontario, 2006, p. 20).

With regards to NSSE, the role played by Western Ontario⁸⁴ is confirmed by a former Vice-President for Policy Analysis, Council of Ontario Universities, who recalls how he and a colleague from that institution heard about NSSE for the first time in a conference in Chicago in 2002. NSSE appeared to be an attractive tool as it was not opinion-based, but identified areas in which the student experience could be improved:⁸⁵

"(NSSE) isn't just opinion-based but asks what students are actually doing instead of just whether they like what they are doing (... it was) a tool which could actually be used to improve the student experience" (CEN-9)

In general, these surveys and data collection tools were considered the best measures available at the time, and although imperfect, were gaining legitimacy as more and more universities were adopting them:

"There wasn't a perfect instrument at there that was going to get us exactly what we needed. NSSE was the best tool at the time" (STU-2)

"There were enough institutions that had some comfort level with NSSE and CPGSS (...) there was some real acceptance [... Also] the right number of institutions [was] participating in CSRDE, and therefore that became a convenient measure because there was a critical mass of institutions that had some experience with that" (UNI-13)

"I think the presidents were all quite keen and our president thought too this is a really good idea (...) He definitely wanted us to do it because of what he was hearing from his colleagues around the table" (UNI-14)

Over the next couple of years, NSSE, CGPSS and CSRDE would be promoted in university circles. These were proposed to Executive Heads in early 2005 (COU, memorandum, February 3, 2005), many months before the ministry started to mention these instruments as a requirement for the MYAs. Thus, in March 2006, Ontario universities publicly reported their commitment to these surveys as

⁸³ The G10 was the former name of the U15 Group of Canadian research-intensive institutions. In 2006, this group included the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, Queen's University, the University of Western Ontario, University of Waterloo, McMaster University, the University of Toronto, Université Laval, Université de Montréal and McGill University. In 2007, three additional institutions were invited to create the G13: the University of Ottawa, the University of Calgary and Dalhousie University. In 2011, the group became the U15 with the integration of the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Manitoba.

⁸⁴ Western's leadership appears to have been extensive, as in its MYA, it argues that it also spearheaded the Student Access Guarantee in conversations with MTCU staff (University of Western Ontario, 2006, p. 9). Although reporting on the SAG is a requirement in MYA/MYAAs, the role played by Western or any other universities in their introduction was not further explored in this study.

⁸⁵ Another reason NSSE was an attractive measurement tool is that it allowed abstracting from disciplinary differences and providing information on the experience of the students: *"We thought (NSSE) was the best tool at the time to try to capture the nature of the student experience, across a system where you have many different universities with variations in their mission and within each university (...) you cannot measure the content of each program (...) with a single tool. But what you can measure with a single tool is the experience of the students, in the case of NSSE, in terms of engagement" (UNI-1)*

...participation in NSSE, CGPSS and CSRDE by all Ontario universities will help each institution to analyze their results in the context of institutional objectives (...) universities should take advantage of the opportunities to learn from other jurisdictions' experience with these surveys and compare strategies" (COU, 2006a, p. 19).

However, in order to protect the extent of their impact and the scope of utilization by the government, universities established a data sharing protocol with the government for NSSE, CGPSS, and CSRDE in the summer of 2006. The protocol supported the use of the information but limited the linkages to funding as: "it is agreed that while government may make participation in these instruments a prerequisite for funding, it will not distribute funding on the basis of performance relative to other institutions in any of these instruments" (P. Steenkamp, memorandum, August 24, 2006). Furthermore, although the government was interested in the survey results, these were perceived as a long term measure while the ministry's focus was on the short term: "The Minister is interested in NSSE et al for the long-term, but is currently more focused on demonstrable, tangible and meaningful results in the short term. [He] wants institutions to show how they will *reach higher*" (CUPA minutes, September 23, 2005). However, some non-participating universities may have experienced coercive forces as they would not want to be left behind. The following university representative indicates that had the government not formalized its requirement, most universities would have joined in eventually due to peer pressure:

"It was really a pressure point (...) yes, the universities offered, if you like, but the pressure was really there. It was either do or be told to do because... this sort of thing was coming down to us, so it would be better for us if we agreed to do it (...) I don't think people or anyone would want to be in the university that didn't do it (...) There's something about the mice following each other, the Pied Piper..." (UNI-14)

The introduction of these measures is a clear example of the leadership role played by some institutions followed by mimetic behaviour at other universities that was facilitated by the professionalization of the institutional research field and the role played by CUPA as a professional organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Furthermore, the discussion thus far illustrates that there were coercive forces—from the government and other institutions—that compounded the mimetic forces conducive to the introduction of these new instruments to Ontario universities. In fact, the introduction of these new instruments was probably more demanding of some smaller universities that did not have the systems in place to do this. Two specific examples include Trent University, which was not using the CSRDE methodology before the 2006-07 report back; and UOIT, which mentions this data collection mechanism in their 2008-09 report-backs.

To what extent can it be argued that the widespread use of these measures was spearheaded by the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs? The literature offers two differing interpretations of the government's role in the introduction of quality measurements such as those discussed here. On one hand, it is argued that government requirements for reporting on quality possibly accelerated their introduction. That is, in Australia and Germany, it has been noted that "unless government defines and/or subsidizes the development of more valid information on academic quality and encourages its use, it is unlikely to be produced by the commercial sector or to be actively applied by universities in internal improvement" (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b, p. 231). On the other hand, some literature based on the American experience casts doubt on the level of influence of state-level accountability requirements, as it is found that main driver are institutional internal dynamics and

their interest in these kinds of measures (Peterson & Augustine, 2000). In Ontario, both forces are at play, as the observation is made that the MYA/MYAAAs acted as a catalyst for the province-wide participation in the new instruments:

“So are you asking did the existence of MYAs support kind of a universal sector wide approach to these things, so was it a stimulus for them? (...) Probably to some extent, yes. I think it probably accelerated it. 2006 was the first full Ontario Consortium participation as I recall (...) I suspect the MYAs did act as a catalyst for that. My hunch is that it would have happened kind of next year anyway” (UNI-6)

Finally, the widespread use of NSSE and its integration into reports to MTCU did not come without misgivings. Some of the concerns raised were that NSSE was not intended to compare universities to one another, as it is not a good institution-wide measure, that should not be used for rankings, and that proves unhelpful to discriminate at the institutional level (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b). Furthermore, in general, university leaders support “the adoption of performance measures only when they are premised on the assumption that the results will be used in a non-competitive manner to improve” performance (Alexander, 2000, p. 426). In this regard, universities themselves set the tone publicly as their *Task Force on Quality and Productivity* recommended that ranking efforts be resisted:

Universities should resist efforts to use NSSE, CGPSS and CSRDE results to compare or rank universities. This is consistent with international experience, which has shown that if a jurisdiction adopts a “one size fits all” model and relies on a set of “commonly accepted” indicators to benchmark performance, such measures lead to an institutional “arms race” that detracts from efforts to improve student learning. The surveys are designed to support quality-improvement efforts at the institutional level by fostering identification of problems and solutions and should be used that way (COU, 2006a, p. 19)

In addition, some stakeholders recall some initial reticence by participating universities in making the information public:

“There was pushback in the universities. They wanted to keep the NSSE data somewhat most to the chest because I think that they were worried if that information got too public that they were competing amongst each other and that the data wouldn't be interpreted in the way that that should be” (STU-2)

Summing up, this discussion suggests that the choice of NSSE, CGPSS and CSRDE was motivated by universities to deal with the government pressures to measure quality in a way that they would find acceptable. That is, the party “directly affected by a new policy may be able to increase their own-long term influence in the order to avoid some of the effects intended by policy proponents” (Winter, 2003a, p. 213), which in this particular case, would have been to implement unacceptable measures of quality proposed by other actors. Indeed, similar initiatives that search for adequate performance measures after the introduction of new reporting requirements have also been documented for the Canadian Federal Research Granting Councils (Sá et al., 2013).

Nonetheless, quality measurement is a field where uncertainty dominates, as there are ambiguous goals, the linkages between outcomes and processes are unclear, and where the definition of quality is value-laden and changes over time (Shanahan, 2009b). It is possible that part of the motivation to adopt a solution (i.e., how to measure quality) was as powerful as the motivation to solve the problem (i.e., how to improve quality). That is, “changes often seem to be driven less by problems than by solutions” (March, 1981, p. 568). Despite the misgivings expressed

in the sector and the inherent limitations in the use of these new instruments, NSSE, CSRDE and CGPSS were integrated into the MYA/MYAAAs. Furthermore, although it is true that all universities started using these measures sooner or later, they acted strategically when deciding what elements to report in the MYA/MYAAAs and whether to act upon the information obtained via these new instruments, a discussion that will be presented in Chapter 9. The discussion now turns to a macro-level discussion of how universities completed the MYA/MYAA templates and defined strategies and targets.

8.4. IMPLEMENTATION AT UNIVERSITIES: STRATEGIES AND TARGETS

Once facing a template, universities had to choose how to complete them, including the information to provide and the commitments to make. In this section, these decisions are analyzed at a macro level, since the specific analysis of content is presented in Chapter 9. The emphasis is placed on the interpretation made of the requirement and the high-level strategies developed. The discussion starts with a description of the uncertainty and ambiguity at the time when the requirement was first introduced. This is followed by the strategies universities used to identify initiatives and targets. It is noted that universities, in general, privileged initiatives that were easily attainable or already planned for, and that most minimized the use of stretch targets to manage risk.

The first element that determined the behaviour of universities when responding to the requirement was that they had significant leeway regarding how to complete it even though there was one single template for all universities. Two university representatives comment on that flexibility in the quotes below:

“We had complete flexibility on how we wanted to interpret those, complete flexibility on the strategies and activities that we would pursue, complete flexibility on the data that we would use to demonstrate our success in doing so” (UNI-6)

“(The strategies) come from within each university. Each university spent some time thinking as to how they could modify their operations or create new ways of operating”(UNI-1)

This approach was confirmed by a government representative who highlights the decision-making left to universities:

“We left it to each university or college to determine the process to get there and what the target was going to be. So it really depended internally with what they decided to do” (CEN-11)

In principle, this opportunity to answer in a differentiated fashion would be welcome by universities, as their officials have expressed the need for the government to recognize the diversity in university policies and institutional missions (Gauthier, 2004), which is an attractive characteristic of performance agreements as they allow for this differentiation to be put into practice (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b) . However, flexibility was conducive as well to a feeling of uncertainty, as the single template to complete was vague in its requirements. This sentiment is illustrated in the quotes that follow:

“When we first saw [the template] it was very vague as to how to respond to it. There were very little instructions as to exactly what you needed to put in. There were some quite specific information that they asked, number of students, a number of faculty and number of staff and so on and that's of course information

you can provide. But then there were parts of it where we had to list what we saw were expenditure or actions or processes that were consistent within the enhancement of quality and it was absolutely wide open” (CEN-8)

“I think that was the message that was sent, kind of ‘we know we want you to do something, but we really don’t know what it is’ (...) and the only response to that is ‘okay we will give you something’” (CEN-1)

Therefore, the goal ambiguity regarding the government’s intent with the new agreement, which was discussed in chapter 7, translated into uncertainty during the implementation process. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the policy was not “uniformly understood across the many implementation sites” (Matland, 1995, p.159). The pervasive uncertainty on what was required from universities dictated the wide variety in approaches to respond to the agreements, and local contextual factors played a role in the approach that each university chose (Matland, 1995). Thus, as long as the proposed strategies were framed within the two larger objectives of quality and accessibility pursued by the government, individual strategies and the targets to be attained were, for the most part, chosen by the universities internally.

In fact, letting universities chose their own strategic direction with the overall direction of the government is considered one of the advantages of performance agreements, as it provides steering while respecting institutional autonomy (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010); however, given the government’s objective of demonstrating results at the system-level, this freedom is, in principle, to be accompanied by greater negotiation and clarity regarding high-level objectives goals (Chevaillier, 1998; Gornitzka et al., 2004; Reich Albertz et al., 2011; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Thus, despite the consultation that took place and was described earlier, the level negotiation that is expected to accompany the implementation of performance agreements to clarify objectives and goals (García de Fanelli, 2006), is found lacking in the Ontario experience. Therefore, being uncertain as to what were the specifics that had to be demonstrated, most stakeholders recall that universities were strategic regarding their answers to the new requirement. First, as two student representatives comment below, universities proposed strategies that, while being realistic, possible and honest, made them look good:

“There was and there continues to be strategic behavior to make sure that the metrics that are used, and the things that are included (...) wouldn’t embarrass anyone (...) I think in the initial round there was quite a bit discussion at the university administration level, about what was possible, what was realistic, what was, to be honest, the most advantageous to them” (STU-1)

“I know some campuses had more sophisticated institutional planning folks than others in terms of being able to... report out in a way that made them look good” (STU-2)

Second, universities discussed with each other how they were going to respond to the new government requirement, as COU and CUPA provided a forum for them to share their approaches. One interview participant recalled that conversations at the level of Academic Vice-Presidents and Executive Heads regarding the best way to respond also took place. In that regard, the two quotes below suggest that although universities were going to comply with the new requirement, they were going to exercise their strategic judgement in the choice of specifics:

“I remember some informal phone conversations where we discussed wording. Maintain, improve... are you going to set the benchmark at the lowest level possible or the average? (...) We were all interested in how the other people were going to be presenting their agreements” (UNI-6)

“There were conversations at COU at the time as we all negotiated those targets, and it did provide us an opportunity (to share) ‘this is how I approached and this is how it worked out’. (...) Not surprisingly, we all took slightly different views in terms of how we set our targets” (UNI-13)

Third, to comply with the newly imposed requirements, universities appeared to favor strategies that they had already planned for, that were part of their ongoing activities or that had been recently introduced as part of an academic or strategic plan. This was largely confirmed by several university representatives and other stakeholders interviewed, as illustrated in some examples of below:

“(we included in the MYA the strategies) that we were already interested in or developing or trying to (...these were) newly reported things or articulated a little differently” (UNI-14)

“Most of the institutions took what they were already doing (...) and then parceled them out in the accountability agreements” (FAC-2)

“One of the tricks that we all do to set targets and goals (is to include) things that you are already doing as much as possible (...) I am sure that all the 20 universities and all 24 colleges did that as much as possible” (CEN-8)

The approach of fitting activities to the *Reaching Higher* objectives was done using reframing and retooling of the existing initiatives:

“They were a rebranding, a retooling, a reorientation of existing programs to the extent that that they could be made to conform to the signature initiatives in Reaching Higher (...) So we developed maybe some new accounting methods or some new strategies or we rebranded some existing activity that made it appear as if we were undertaking new specific procedures or activities (...) There was nothing in the reporting that caused us to have to demonstrate that this was truly new activity contingent on new investment (...) This became more of a bean counting exercise (... it) really didn't affect our core business at all” (UNI-6)

“We identified where we had to go, but our approach was, okay what do we want to do, and how do we make it fit within what they had. It wasn't that it directed us to do things that we didn't want to do... I'm not sure we put anything in place we would not have done anyways (...) There might have been a bit of heightening of what we were doing” (UNI-2)

One documented example of the use of existing initiatives is that of the University of Guelph, that in a news release regarding the MYA/MYAAAs indicated that they were well positioned to meet the new requirements thanks to

...the extensive work that we had already done as a university on initiatives such as integrated planning, the White Paper and the President's Task Force on Accessibility (...) the U of G incorporated existing programs into the new plan (University of Guelph, 2006b).

As well, Lakehead University indicates in their MYA: “An internal document that identifies institution-specific strategies, indicators and results in the form of an Improvement Plan is being developed; the present submission is intended to present key components of this document in the format requested by MTCU” (Lakehead University, 2006, p. 11). This tendency to make commitments that the universities expect will be easily satisfied is not uncommon (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010), and suggests a risk-avoiding behaviour where by choosing ongoing initiatives, the universities gave emphasis to priorities that were easily attainable (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001). Furthermore, this was facilitated by the template as it did not require demonstrating that the funding was being used for new initiatives. The idea of using existing initiatives did not surprise the

ministry; indeed, some staff already expected this would be the case, as indicated in the quotes below:

“I assume it would have to do with their strategic plans. Because that’s the interesting piece, is to map out the MYAAs against annual reports and strategic plans that are posted on websites because will probably see a complementary type of situation” (CEN-2)

“They would align that whatever was in their strategic plans [for the MYAAs]” (CEN-3)

This suggests that, in a sense, there was already a certain degree of trust between the government and universities in that the latter were undertaking initiatives and activities that were considered appropriate and aligned with the government’s priorities. Therefore, in Ontario, the need to be directive appears to be rather rhetorical and that the accountability instrument was a symbolic tool of good governance rather than a mechanism to induce behaviour. One possible interpretation is that it was a neutralized way of management that aimed more at highlighting the spirit of the reform rather than at actually transforming management practices (Alber, 2013). That is, given that policies are sometimes proclaimed when they symbolize certain values and beliefs, policy makers may be more concerned with their proclamation than with their ultimate implementation (Eaton Baier et al., 1986).

As part of this exercise, universities also had to propose targets for their performance and outcome indicators. As it will be illustrated in Chapter 9, by only choosing indicators for a subset of the activities originally listed in the MYA plan, universities kept this chore under control. For those indicators retained, they chose targets which ranged from being vague and non-committal to being ambitious and demanding. In the setting of targets, one concern that administrators had, was that universities did not have much certainty regarding how the government would use or interpret the targets, as the following comment confirms:

What is most worrisome is that universities must establish individual targets without knowing what the others are doing, what is acceptable and without clearly understanding what would be the consequences if the targets are unmet (Ontario university, internal email, June 26, 2006)

As a result, a privileged approach was to indicate the targets vaguely, so that success was relatively easier to achieve, or to indicate targets that would certainly be met, once again, echoing the strategies observed in other jurisdictions (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). That is, the lack of information regarding the future use of the measures and the mistrust regarding the possibility of sanctions, resulted in the choice of safe or vague targets in a vast majority of cases, as such vagueness is helpful in avoiding potential conflict (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Matland, 1995), in this case internally to universities and externally upon the possibility of being sanctioned. This approach is documented by an OCUSA representative, a board member and confirmed in a communication among CUPA members, quoted below:

“It was in the interest of university administrators (...) to make promises that were sufficiently vague, or at least sufficiently non-committal, that when results came around, they could report that they’ve achieved the results [since if they identified them very specifically] when those results aren’t met, then it becomes problematic” (FAC-1)

“If you are going to sign one of these agreements, you will immediately ensure that you are able to meet these agreements” (BOA-2)

“Regarding targets for some indicators, the strategy will consist of avoiding precise figures and rather describe in a general fashion our improvement efforts” (Ontario university, internal email, June 27, 2006)

Vagueness in the targets was not only observed regarding the level to be attained but also regarding the specificity of the indicators to which targets were attached. In particular, it is noted that the more specific is an indicator, the greater challenge will be faced in attaining the target established. Therefore, sometimes high-level indicators were chosen to avoid a specific level of commitment, as the quote below illustrates:

“I know one institution put in one of its very early MYAs, a reference to one of the NSSE benchmarks that said ‘maintain’. And I know of another institution that took a half a dozen individual items out of that benchmark analyzed them or discussed them and said I think on two or three of these we can make some real progress. So there is a level of data specificity there that’s very different. You can maintain a benchmark without trying very hard but to move individual items selectively, takes a lot more work and effort and is more likely to fail” (UNI-6)

Despite this general perception that the use of vague targets would be privileged, in practice, two distinct approaches are observed in the way Ontario universities set their targets: (i) to set stretch targets or (ii) to propose easy goals that administrators knew were possible to achieve. Moreover, it is possible to find both strategies in a single MYA, depending on the indicator that was being targeted, as indicated in the quotes below:

“There were a couple of different schools of thought there. Some institutions really did put in stretch targets and took them seriously and tried to achieve them and usually didn’t and realized what a mistake it was, others saw the whole thing as a bit of a paper exercise that they were having to go through and they didn’t take the exercise too seriously and didn’t put stretch goals in because they just put goals they were pretty sure they had already achieved or knew they would achieve in” (CEN-9)

“[the two perspectives were] one, we can set stretch goals that genuinely we would like to get and that would make it seem to the government and everybody that what we were striving for improvement and for excellence (...) if we don’t meet it we will say ... these things take some time and be prepared to explain why we were along the way as opposed to meeting. The other view was to set goals which you know you are going to make and so when the reporting time comes you say guess what we have achieved it” (CEN-8)

In those cases where stretch targets were chosen, the reasons behind this approach include the following. First, these universities perceived that such targets demonstrated support towards the government, and that it would be in their benefit, as it would make them not only look better, but also would oblige them to challenge themselves, as a university representative recalls in the quote below. However, this quote also highlights that stretch targets were promised when institutions thought they were not going to be penalized. This understanding on the part of universities, that they would face sanctions for failing to meet targets is documented in a CUPA meeting in September 2006, where a ministry official intervention is summarized as confirming that there is no direct tie between meeting a target and receiving a grant (CUPA minutes, September 14, 2006). However, such as statement contradicts the public documentation regarding the agreements:

“Our initial strategy was to be supportive of the initiative because we thought that it was tied to demonstrating responsibility for getting additional resources, and the President wanted to have stretch in our targets so that we would be seen as... kind of play the game appropriately, that we would be making our best efforts (...) at that point this was a formative exercise [we understood from the government that we weren’t] going to be penalized” (UNI-2)

Second, choosing stretch targets was also driven by the personalities of individuals involved and the situation and context of each university, regarding what their internal priorities were at the time, as the following quotes illustrate:

“(The choice of targets) had more to do with personalities of the individuals on the CUPA and on the personality of the executive head or just the culture of institution” (CEN-9)

“It is not like we all had more or less the same goals and some more ambitious than others. If a university was in the process of expanding graduate registration for example and others weren’t, they are probably less ambitious with respect to that goal” (CEN-8)

“It was pretty much each institution’s decision depending on the personality and where they were and what they could do” (CEN-8)

Third, the choice of stretch targets was sometimes encouraged (or coerced) by the government, as a sector representative recalls. This dynamic did not happen at all universities, and it is unclear what elements motivated the ministry to interact differently depending of the university. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in the quotes below, assurance that there would be no punitive measures from falling short of the predetermined targets is provided in the quotes below:

“We were certainly encouraged mightily by Ministry staff to propose stretch targets. And we were given the implicit assurance that failure to meet stretch targets would not be held against us” (UNI-6)

“There were in fact a lot of one-on-one telephone conversations around the construction of these and around discussions—after we submitted them and there was sort of an informal revisions process before the ministry said okay, that’s good we will sign up on that. There appeared to have been different kinds of communications from ministry staff around what constituted good target setting” (UNI-6)

However, as the government started reviewing the agreements, officials were picky over unmet targets. At that point, some institutions felt that the rules of the game had changed, and had they known this was going to be the approach, they would have been less ambitious:

“[If we] had known from the beginning that you are going to do that I would have spent months negotiating and arguing for the lowest target I could have for my institution [our targets] would have been targets that we easily could have achieved in our sleep (...) At that point we had conversations with the government and said ‘Are you nuts? What you are doing to drive behavior is that we will negotiate the lowest target we can ever get going forward if you want to play this sort of game’ (...) We will never put a stretch target back in for any of these agreements” (UNI-2)

These changes in approach throughout the implementation process is one of the challenges documented in the use of performance agreements, where the level of cooperation may evolve; that is, “it enables the actors to choose a “tit-for-tat” strategy—that is, I shall co-operate as long as you play the game properly; you have to realize that as soon as you cheat, i.e., observe the contract, I shall quit” (Gornitzka et al., 2004). In fact, one concern that has been raised about the definition of strategies and targets is that these may be conducive to engendering “distrust between agencies and legislators about gaming of measures” (Heinrich, 2003, p. 31). One example of gaming with the measures is that managers may wish to manipulate performance measures in ways that these “improve their *measured* but not *actual* performance” (Heinrich, 2003). These concerns about gaming and the intent to manage risk within organizations were certainly present in the decision-making process. However, the inability of the part of universities to establish ambitious but

attainable targets may have been legitimate, as it has been documented that often times it is difficult for agency managers or leaders to translate long-term goals “into annual performance goals and to predict the level of results that might be achieved over a shorter term” (Thoenig, 2003, p. 30).

The fact that universities had the possibility of changing their strategies without consequence can be attributed to their ability to protect their autonomy on one hand, or a consequence of the lack of clarity regarding the government intended objectives, thus translating into freedom regarding the specifics of the implementation as long as high-level compliance was perceived. Furthermore, one of the challenges in the establishment of targets was the extent to which the government’s expectations were reasonable. For instance, one university reports that the government asked them to increase retention rates even when theirs were already high and to set targets for the NSSE benchmarks even though information as to how to make progress on those targets was lacking.

“[because our retention rate was] already the highest around, our multi-year agreements said our goal is to maintain it at 95%. I mean, how much better could we do? We were pressured to set a target of 97% because we had achieved it in one or two of the previous five years and so because we had done it once that was considered a good stretch target (...) Despite being pressured to, I submitted it as 95% as I had originally done. (... the government also made the) suggestion that we should propose improvement in a NSSE score even though we had no idea what it took to move a NSSE benchmark” (UNI-6)

“If you have 100% graduation rate, wouldn’t that seem so strange? So what’s the real number that we should all be striving for?” (UNI-14)

This quest for improvement, realistic or not, appeared to be getting institutionalized in the ministry, as the following university representative recalls:

“At that point you’re getting into some sort of mindset that isn’t realistic (...) some people in government started to think that ‘universities have to improve (...) so we have to see some movement on these things.’ Many of which don’t improve in a year, you just get bouncing around, so there is an unreality that started to get into this (...) I think it became its own industry inside the ministry so you had particular people who now their job was this” (UNI-2)

Consequently, in later report-backs, institutions revised their strategies when possible and concentrated on making them more realistic. This is indeed the experience documented in other jurisdictions, as in the case of the program-contracts in Catalonia where “most of the commitments were designed to be satisfied – i.e. universities tend to sign contracts only when they are pretty sure about their capacity to satisfy or fulfil them” (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010, p. 285). This approach is confirmed by the two quotes below:

“Institutions in the first couple of rounds set ambitious goals, and then for various reasons, sometimes for their own doing, sometimes just circumstances intervene, you don’t reach them [... this translated into] a tendency to reduce the goals and get them back, except from something that you are pretty sure you can achieve” (CEN-8)

“I think as the second year and then the third year came along, stretch targets, where they existed were being (...) redefined (...) I think that general consensus (emerged) ... that stretch targets were a bad thing to have been done and it would have been made a lot more sense to be more modest in those targets” (UNI-6)

To summarize, given the flexibility and leeway offered in the templates, universities decided what strategies to include in the MYA depending on the personality of the actors involved, their academic and strategic plans (their internal priorities), as well as the stage of development in which they were in. Regarding the targets, there was an element of negotiation with the ministry that happened in the first round, but the tendency over time was to adjust targets to levels that would be considered realistic. Moreover, some inherent contradictions in the process are observed in the way that the universities set their strategies and targets and the way the government reacted to them. On one hand, the introduction of new accountability measures is initially made in an environment where the discourse is one of increased control, decreasing trust on the management of universities and a search for results-based accountability. On the other hand, during the implementation process, universities are left with significant leeway to choose the strategies they wish to attain within the greater themes of quality and accessibility; and, in a vast majority of cases, chose to report on strategies that were underway. This approach to implementation could suggest, contrarily to the pervasive discourse surrounding accountability, that there is actually a high level of trust on the part of government. That is, it considers that universities are doing their best in the development of strategic and academic plans, and that the implementation of these activities would be conducive to performance improvement. Under this interpretation, the requirement appeared to have focused mostly on improving the collection of information regarding those activities underway.

An alternative interpretation is that we are not observing an expression of trust. Rather, the lack of government-level, system-wide commitments and limited enforcement power oblige the government to rely on each institution's identification of their contribution. That is, "for contracts to be successful, governments must be willing and able of stating their policy and program goals with sufficient precision to set direction and monitor performance" (Thomas, 1997, p. 157). Therefore, given that those high-level objectives were never established, the government had no choice but to settle for accepting what universities were able to propose. We see an initial effort on the part of government to be more controlling and directive, albeit done in a negotiated manner, as during the first two years of implementation, they put significant pressure on universities to develop stretch targets that demonstrated improvements, even in cases when their performance was already of high caliber. These efforts are not pursued as the government settles for an exercise of more information collection from universities. At the end, the relationship between universities and government is changed but not dramatically, and the reporting remains at a symbolic level.

A second inherent contradiction is observed between the NPM management trends where universities and bureaucrats are asked to be economic, efficient and effective in achieving goals, while policy is changing or outcomes cannot be anticipated (Zapico-Goñi & Mayne, 1996). That is, there is a contradiction between the overall objective of efficacy—to attain the objectives that were identified—and the lack of definition in the objectives themselves. The government then downloads the definition of objectives to universities, that amidst the uncertain environment, privilege strategies that remain vague or limit their ambitions. That is, "the greater the uncertainty of the policy context, the more distorted will be the performance monitoring system in use (... since these assume) the availability of precisely predefined, unquestionable and stable objectives, as well as

well-known and widely accepted cause–effect relationships between policy management and outcomes” (Zapico-Goñi & Mayne, 1996, p. 263). Therefore, as has been documented throughout this study, ambiguity or simplification was pervasive in the implementation, as both government and universities search for an accountability relationship where risk is reduced, conflict is minimized and commitments are managed. This non-committal approach is reminiscent of the idea of blame avoidance (Weaver, 1986), where some choices are not the result of technical considerations but a deliberate political choice. If choices are unclear, there cannot be mobilizations against their decisions and there cannot be responsibility for what is decided during implementation (Lascombes & Le Galès, 2004). Consequently, the way in which the accountability process was introduced creates incentives to reduce accountable behaviour. Our attention turns now to the evaluation that the government undertook of the agreements and how funding was provided.

8.5. IMPLEMENTATION AT MTCU: REVIEW AND FUNDING

This section focuses on how the ministry reviewed the agreements, how this review affected the funding that was provided to universities, and how universities perceived that process. The implementation of accountability measures requires control, as their introduction is based on a perception that managers will not be self-regulating (Gow & Hodgetts, 2003). However, the analysis that follows shows that MTCU’s approach to the review can be characterized as akin to ‘soft’ accountability measures, that focus on monitoring and explanation, as opposed to ‘strong’ accountability measures that focus on justification (Currie et al., 2003). It is hypothesized that MTCU’s ‘soft’ control approach may be a direct consequence of goal ambiguity, as it casts a challenge on the supervisors’ ability to monitor activities with ill-defined objectives (Matland, 1995). In addition, to be able to judge on performance, government representatives require simple and concise indicators that allow for comparison among actors (Le Galès, 2004), which were not only lacking in Ontario but are generally uncommon in the PSE sector. In fact, often times the government expects that performance information will be readily available which is rarely the case (Romzek & Johnston, 2005). Furthermore, the use of contracts in post-secondary education emphasizes the government’s role as facilitator rather than prescribes of goals, which contradicts their intent to specify and measure expected performance (Bernatchez, 2003).

The starting point in the discussion is the pervasive level of uncertainty regarding the new requirement, not only in terms of government goals, as discussed in Chapter 7, and the expectations vis-à-vis universities, as discussed in section 8.4, but also regarding what kind of review process would ensue. University stakeholders report that in the early stages of implementation, it was unclear to what extent the government would be more controlling—that is, micromanaging universities—, or to what extent the government would be satisfied with simple reports. As the quote below illustrates, both approaches were possibilities considered in the sector, that in practice landed somewhere in the middle:

“There were two expectations: it is going to be a huge bureaucratic mess, or we’ll just fill it out and won’t hear any more about it [... either] a really bureaucratic mirage of reporting on everything, people from the ministry looking over our shoulder and feeling everything up, second guessing everything we do and so on, and the other view was, we wanted it to match with this list of paper and file it. And not much will happen (...) the truth as it turned out, lay somewhere in between” (CEN-8)

Upon receiving the agreements, ministry staff revised the submissions and focused mostly on procedural implementation aspects. Government representatives were often concerned with details, such as whether the reports were submitted in a timely fashion, their level of completeness and a high-level comparison of changes in results from year to year. In some cases, ministry staff required explanations of why differences were observed, and sometimes the feedback offered emphasized trivial differences between targets and results. The ministry's approach is described in the quotes below:

"Each one comes in [... and we] take a look at them against the original action plans, and then against the last year (...) If I have questions, I will call (...) I will get clarifications on this" (CEN-2)

"Initially we filed a lot of stuff and didn't hear back at all and then institutions started hearing back on very, very specific details of things, which seemed to be contrary to the spirit of the things [... for example] 'You set the target of 80% of that and you got 79.8%, how come you failed?' And you know, statistically 79.8 in a university system is equal to 80, but there was a lot of picky kind of feedback" (CEN-8)

"We hear back on small things such as the numbers in these two cells didn't add up, can you please correct or something like that (...) nothing about the substance of the report itself, no questions" (UNI-3)

In addition, although the quotes above suggest some degree of interaction between university and ministry staff, the number of exchanges varied across institutions, and in some cases, it was very limited. The university representative below recalls how over the number of years of implementation, they were only contacted once:

"I think they have a hell of a lot of people sitting there just reading, making up tables, and doing all those checking, checking. Bringing it all together [... but] they only called us on one occasion" (UNI-14)

As the limited follow-ups with universities focused mostly on details, university representatives confirmed their initial doubts regarding the level of depth with which the agreements were to be analyzed at the ministry level. The analysis of the report-backs, between 2006-07 and 2008-09, is primarily described as a simple check-up of boxes, and lacking a high-level of understanding of Ontario universities and their activities:

"They looked at them, but I'm not sure they looked at them with the kind of depth and understanding that you would expect. I think that there was almost a sense that the actual process of doing them was the goal, and there was a sort of a checkup, did you fill up the boxes, did you meet your targets, did we do what you said you were going to do (...) I don't think they are used as a real 'what's going on in the universities' type tool" (CEN-1)

Therefore, filing the reports was perceived as the most important task, as opposed to evaluating the content within the context of Ontario's post-secondary sector environment or even to ensure that the government had a good understanding of the initiatives beyond the details. This reinforced the initial perception of the process as an administrative formality. Although under a NPM philosophy, the intent was for the government to place emphasis on results and provide input about the concrete tasks needed to transform public organizations (Gow & Hodgetts, 2003), during the MYA/MYAA implementation it is noted that the government lacks the knowledge to direct universities in any specific way and that universities themselves are unsure of the activities to undertake. Due to the difficulties observed, any enforcement is relegated to the trivial spheres of submitting the reports. On the other hand, this superficial treatment of the issues allowed universities to respond in a superficial manner.

“We were never sure who read it, how it was read, how it was evaluated, how it could come back to us in terms of yes this is satisfactory adequate or whether we just produce it and file it, or whether we produce it and somebody pull it over and come back to us (...) they never came back and query their question or wanted to discuss further... it seems like they just sort of filed it” (CEN-8)

A pervasive sentiment among university representatives was that the process was not very useful. In their opinion, there was never a true opportunity to enter into a serious conversation and to have truly bilateral agreements. One explanation that was offered during the semi-structured interviews regarding the lack of depth in the ministry’s evaluation of the reports was insufficient resources, and the fact that a strategic conversation would have to take place at the senior level:

“I think it's almost impossible for the way the government is structured to be able to do anything more than that. If you think about it, if you want to have a bilateral agreement in discussions with the government on an issue like this, the Presidents are going to want to deal with the deputy minister, and the deputies and the ADMs they don't have the face time to do this sort of thing” (UNI-2)

Indeed, the level of seniority of individuals involved in the negotiations evolved over time in a direction that limited their relevance and pertinence, as the following representative recalls:

“It was originally the case Deputy Minister, and the Minister were having conversations with my President about the Multi-Year Agreements (...) slowly overtime as it became part of the regular business (...) at the end of the day I'm the one who is sort of closest to it, and the majority of the work is happening at my level [with the] policy adviser or a research analyst at TCU, as we go back and forth with our respective bosses (...) That discussion between the Deputy Minister and the Minister and my President don't happen anymore” (UNI-13)

The initiative was then relegated to junior-level staff members that were responsible for numerous universities at the same time. Furthermore, analyses of bureaucratic behaviour suggest that government staff may change or adapt goals in contexts of limited resources (Lipsky, 1980) and that their decision-making may be a result of their personal preferences for less workload (Winter, 2003c). Although no evidence was collected in this study to evaluate the extent to which the limited impact was due to bureaucrat preferences, it is noted that universities interpreted the process as one that did not entail major consequences:

“The people who have the job of dealing with the universities were people who had no decision making power, and that sends a message. If you have a person who was actually calling you up and negotiating your MYAA is an analyst as opposed to manager, a director or an ADM. It sends a really strong message as to how seriously they are being taken by the ministry” (CEN-1)

“If you are a fairly junior staff and you are in the ministry the only things that you can kind of really do is tick the boxes” (CEN-8)

“I think to have one analyst in the universities branch at the time responsible for Multi-year Agreements with 20 universities is probably not a good thing. I think they would need to have appropriate level of staff who would then actually be able to facilitate these strategic conversations” (UNI-13)

Could senior management have been more involved in the process? Participants in this study understood the limited involvement as a result of workload, the lack of political capital to impose more control on universities and the fact that the government is not structured in such a way as to facilitate greater involvement. Moreover, there is no clear indication of the willingness nor the ability for the government to undertake such conversations, as described in the quotes below:

“To deal with 44 institutions would have been a pretty much full time job for some senior people, if it was going to work they would have needed to have an ADM or somebody whose job was pretty much full-time doing this ... to meet individually... have the first conversation, do the follow up ... and then have the evaluation, and then the follow up from the evaluation (...) the concept is great, but the commitment in terms of ministry resources to see it through for whatever reason it wasn't done” (CEN-8)

“Government can't do strategic with 45 institutions. They don't have the structure to do that ... you need to have those strategic conversations not at an officer level within the bureaucracy” (UNI-2)

The limited ability of the government to commit sufficient resources to a review of bilateral agreements is confirmed with the introduction of different models for follow-up and review in the context of bilateral agreements developed after the MYA/MYAA, including the creation of a special committee to review the SMAs in early 2013 (HEQCO, 2013a) and the appointment of Paul Genest, a former COU president, to lead strategic discussions for the SMAs with the university sector starting in late 2013 (D. Newman, memorandum, November 29, 2013). On the other hand, the lack of senior official involvement may not only result from lack of resources, but also be influenced by the government's interests. The types of indicators privileged by the government and by institutions will likely differ as their objectives are different, since the government privileges measurement for comparative purposes whereas university administrators wish to limit competitive comparisons of performance (Alexander, 2000). These disparate objectives get further compounded by the lack of knowledge and definition of appropriate goals for the system that has been thoroughly documented in this study. That is, the quotes above also assume that the government knows what it wants, which is not always clear (Callahan, 2006; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). System-wide goals are often undefined and, even when identified, the government has not always been good at communicating its intent. Consequently, it is the opinion of university stakeholders that the government was in a very difficult position to do strategic with universities; a belief that is pervasive in the university environment and that connoted the perceived usefulness of the MYA/MYAAAS.

Another important element of the government review were decisions regarding funding. The initial position presented was that funding would be retained if and when universities were unable to meet the commitments made in their plans and reports. As the MYA template clearly indicated, funding was contingent on plans and report-backs submission: “pursuant to the MYAA, the release of the full amount of your 2007-08 and 2008-09 Access to Higher Quality Education Fund will be conditional on your institution confirming that it is on track for meeting its commitments” (MTCU, 2007). A university representative recalls the process:

“The provincial envelope was subdivided into a portion for each university that was related to the existing basic operating income, but in order to have access to that money, that's where the Multi-Year Accountability Agreement was binding. We had to report and the content of the report had to be judged appropriate level of performance (...) then the minister in person would make a global decision as to whether the funding is to be released” (UNI-1)

There is a normative disagreement in the sector regarding the extent to which funding and sanctions should be used. Some central stakeholders, like the one quoted below, privilege an approach that encompasses strong linkages between resources and outcomes and promotes the use of sanctions:

“You might hope that there would be a more direct and understandable connection between the resources provided and the outcomes that came as result of those resources” (CEN-4)

This position is supported by one literature stream that closely links accountability and sanctions (Thomas, 2007) and by empirical evidence such as in the case of Finland, where it is argued that performance agreements implemented in that country were unsuccessful in improving performance as clear sanctions were not associated with them (Hölttä, 1998). Other stakeholders believe that such an approach would result in a useless vicious circle, and that performance indicators should not be used “to penalize institutions for falling short” (OCUFA, 2008). Supporting the latter position, empirical evidence suggests that closely linking outcomes in performance indicators to funding may produce unintended consequences, for instance, lowering academic standards to increase graduation rates when funding is attached to such an indicator (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001). In the MYA/MYAA experience, funding was only withheld temporarily⁸⁶ for some universities, and the government accepted different levels of performance. That is, even in cases when the proposed targets were unmet, government follow-ups privileged requests for explanations and for additional information, as indicated by two university stakeholders and one interviewee from a central organization quoted below:

“I don’t think the minister has had to use his discretionary power. [Government officials] have asked specific, additional information from universities from time to time. But, as far as I know, I don’t think they’ve locked out the university saying ‘you’ve so underperformed that we can’t possibly give you the money’” (UNI-1)

“I have not heard of any consequences (...) we felt short on a couple of the targets. There were conversations around (...) remediation plans [... around] why we achieved or didn’t achieve it (...) and this is what we are doing to look after this, and to get back on target. Those were just conversations with government (...) I’m not aware of any money penalties from these” (UNI-13)

“People were falling short of their targets, and there was no real consequence to that. And there was no political will to have a consequence to that. There was [only] a couple of stern letters...” (CEN-1)

The non-punitive approach was justified from the government’s perspective as an opportunity to start a conversation to see that progress was made. Moreover, universities preferred this approach, as illustrated in the quotes below, as it was considered more in line with a concept of formative accountability that will be further developed in section 10.3. Therefore, funding was only withheld temporarily and the government applied more of a methodical than analytical approach to releasing the funds.

“We did we looked at whether or not they were making progress towards that particular agenda (...) particularly in the first three years. If (...) they have rational reasons for not being able to meet particular objectives, and (...) as long as that was reasonable to us, then we asked them to develop strategies and inform us of what they were going to do to make sure they actually met their objectives in the following year (...) we had to talk to a couple of institutions about withholding their funds until those restitutions were actually made” (CEN-2)

“There’s never been any money withheld permanently, but there has been here a few instances where a university hasn’t been in compliance with something that we think is important and it’s (...) just a trigger for a conversation before the cheque gets released (...) it gets resolved fairly quickly” (CEN-6)

⁸⁶ No funding was withheld permanently, but sometimes release was delayed while universities answered questions the ministry had (CUPA minutes, December 6, 2007).

An alternative interpretation, however, is that the bureaucrats involved in the review of the agreements did not have the political power to play a heavier hand. That is, the consequences of underperformance were limited to a conversation rather than to withholding funding, since retaining funding would be politically difficult and for fear that such an action would create a vicious circle of underperformance, as illustrated in the quotes below:

"[The government] has not been particularly good, once they say what they want, at actually requiring that to happen (...) they don't use a particularly heavy hand when it comes to the universities... they are a little scared of them (...) bureaucrats know that at the end of the day if an exec head picks up the phone, and calls a minister, bureaucrats then have to back off" (CEN-1)

"They never withheld funding because politically that would be very difficult (...) the government has good intentions to influence institutional behavior, but in practice it often is not as bold as intended" (STU-1)

"If you say you haven't done your job, I'm cutting the money. You can create a kind of vicious circle there, because if you're pulling money out, the ability of the institution to do the job or recover from a bad year would become even worse" (UNI-1)

Many of the concerns expressed during the first months following the introduction of the MYAAs had to do with fear that the relationship between government and universities was changing. Eventually, the new tools were accepted, as the government changed its emphasis from being controlling to making it more of a foundational piece to identify challenges in the sector and on which universities and government could keep working together. Universities were no longer fearful that these would be used in a negative way:

"Initially the relationship was changing and institutions were not sure what the intent was (...) it was a lot of struggle between why we are doing this and where we are going to land and some institutions felt that there wasn't enough money in the pot for them to deliver on quality and accountability. Over time, people realized that this was just helping us understand that there is a gap and to move forward (...) the selling points were, this isn't going to hold you accountable for everything that you are going to do given that it's still a very new process (...) At least let's put a foundational piece in and have conversations on how we could make the process better" (CEN-11)

"There is a comfort level on the trust now that [at least] these aren't used in a negative way" (CEN-6)

However, in the opinion of some sector stakeholders, it was the limited follow-through in the withholding of funds that explains that no major changes were observed in the sector as a result of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs. This opinion is expressed in the following quotes:

"To get tied funding you actually have to follow through because you can't threaten and then not follow through" (CEN-1)

"I think they are useful tools for government to collect data or achieve certain ends, but I think if they wanted to get serious about it, they would have to withhold the funding or change funding levels (...) so the universities know that, and so the universities stopped taking that seriously" (STU-1)

Summing up, there was a significant degree of flexibility used on the part of government to apply the control they had instituted with the agreements. The focus was redirected from the actual funding allocation to the opportunity for ministry staff to initiate a conversation to improve targets, which hints to ministerial control that is applied with flexibility and that is very limited in the extent of what it actually controls. Moreover, as the contingency was not as strong, universities moved away from using stretch targets over time. There is also a reinforcement process and vicious circle

that is observed between the establishment of vague targets and soft enforcement. On one hand, having vague objectives, as was discussed in the previous section, prevents adequate monitoring (Thomas, 1997). This is observed both at the level of universities setting goals and of the government setting system-wide goals. On the other hand, soft monitoring reinforces the tendency to define vague targets. This is an example of “how agents’ strategic behavior is embedded in and constrained by current accountability structures, whereas accountability structures respond to agents’ strategic behavior” in a process of recursive interaction (Yang, 2011, p. 267).

To what extent did the government’s review approach contributed to the establishment of an accountability relationship with universities? According to Bovens, a relationship of accountability is characterized by a relationship between an actor and a forum, where the actor is obliged to explain and justify his conduct, where the forum can ask questions, pass judgments and where the actor may face consequences (Bovens, 2005a). In the case of the MYAAs, it is clear that the government could pose questions; however, their role passing judgment was limited and, as indicated throughout this section, the actor did not face the consequences. Using Bovens’ criteria, this would not be considered an accountability relationship. However, this strict perspective has been criticized, as the imposition of sanctions may be problematic and performance may be reduced as a result (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011). Moreover, it has been documented that universities may use information available for quality improvement in the local planning and quality enhancement efforts even in the absence of sanctions associated with performance (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b). Consequently, it has been argued that this criterion should be excluded and “address the overall outcome of dialogue in forms of improvement, change and performance gains” (p.15). This is a perspective where accountability is seen as a proactive and productive relationship, where evaluation plays a role to improve the outcomes at the actor level. This perspective will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 10. For now, our attention turns to the actual content that was included in the MYA/MYAAs and what this reveals regarding the way in which universities embraced the new requirement.

Chapter 9. ANALYSIS OF ONTARIO'S MYA/MYAAs CONTENT

In this chapter, the content of the Multi-Year Action plans (MYA) signed in fall 2006 and subsequent annual report-backs (MYAAs) until 2008-09 are presented in more detail. The analysis is undertaken for Ontario's twenty universities, with the objective to offer a complete portrait of how universities chose to implement the new requirement. This provides examples of the strategies and indicators and identifies any similarities or differences in the choices made by institutions to report on these items. In addition, this analysis points out the technical dimension of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs by identifying the measures and procedures that were established. It also provides evidence of the symbolic or social representations of the issues at stake given the instrumental choices made (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004).

With a view to identifying the impact on universities of the new requirement and the operationalization of the choices made, the analysis is guided by a few general questions, including whether new initiatives were introduced, and whether there are any indications of changes that ensued from the introduction of new accountability requirements. The objective is to identify the level of organizational adaptation that took place as a result of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs, where organizational adaptation in the university context is defined as deliberate changes in (i) organizational structure, including teaching programs; (ii) in the composition of the population of the university, either academics, administrators, or students; and (iii) adaptations in the culture of the institution (Jongbloed et al., 1999). Finally, the analysis aims at identifying the extent to which the measures may have resulted in any unintended consequences.

The presentation follows each of the thematic lines of the accountability agreements, providing examples of actions, goals and indicators. Since the reporting requirements vary for different topics, this chapter is organized following the degree of reporting requirement or commitment that MTCU asked for different topics within the MYA/MYAAs: In section 9.1, content that was mentioned in the initial information provided by MTCU but that was excluded from the agreements is analyzed. Section 9.2 analyzes topics where report-backs without establishing targets or strategies were required. In 9.3, information on the consultation process to undertake the agreements is discussed. To finalize, the content regarding areas where targets and strategies were developed is analyzed in section 9.4.

The discussion will also analyze the extent to which universities, following the Oliver (1991) and Massy (2011) models, acted in passive compliance to the new requirements or behaved as actively defiant (Goodstein, 1994). The models focus on the characteristics of the instrument and the relationship between universities and government to predict the behavior observed without inquiring about organizational differences across universities. Consequently, the discussion refers to Ontario universities in general, indicating different approaches across institutions if and when these were evident in the available documentation. However, goal ambiguity, that was pervasive in the implementation of the agreements, is expected to influence the probability that contextual factors will play an important role in implementation and suggests that there may be sharp variations across sites (Matland, 1995). Furthermore, organizational theory and institutional theory provide

insights that some variability would be expected. In general, the analysis concludes that when variation is observed, it is often regarding the scope of the initiatives and the ambitiousness of targets. The content included in the agreements, which reveals the representation of issues at hand, was, in general, quite uniform.

It is also important to note that this analysis considers whether there is alignment of objectives between universities and government without inquiring into whether the goals are appropriate or reasonable. In particular, Massy's principal-agent approach does not question the priorities that the government has chosen, as it assumes that "the principal provides instructions and information that are grounded in legal or moral authority" (Massy, 2011, p. 222). On the other hand, given that in many of the areas in which the government promoted activities were of little conflict for universities as priorities, but that the means to attain them were ambiguous, as in the case of quality initiatives, it is noted that the type of implementation observed throughout Ontario may be qualified as experimental (Matland, 1995). However, priority alignment may be observed regarding the content of the agreements (i.e., quality and accessibility) but be lacking regarding the means to promote accountability (e.g., commitment to targets). This distinction is important to understand the decisions made by universities and will be highlighted throughout the analysis. In addition, the introduction of performance indicators and of the requirement to establish goals and targets assumes that these can be objectively defined and be measured, is an example of a hyper-rationalization assumption that does not hold in reality (Le Galès, 2004). These forces coupled with the underlying challenge of dealing with multiple objectives and audiences translate into additional difficulties regarding the selection of appropriate measures (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010; Thomas, 2007).

9.1. *REACHING HIGHER* CONTENT EXCLUDED FROM THE AGREEMENTS

As indicated in table 3.3, there were some commitments outlined in the MYA document signed by the Minister and each university president that were not included in the MYA plan or in the report-backs. These exclusions include reports on enrolment growth, on credit transfer and on the tuition framework. This study inquired why enrolment growth was excluded given its importance in *Reaching Higher* and that it is characterized in the MYA template as a key commitment. Specifically, the government expressed the interest and the need for tracking undergraduate, graduate and medical enrolments, and outlined the goals of increasing graduate enrolment by 12,000 in 2007-08 and up to 14,000 by 2009-10, as well as increasing medical enrolment by 23 per cent by 2009-10 (MTCU, 2006a). Enrolment growth continued to be a key priority for the government, as illustrated by its prevalence when reporting on the success of *Reaching Higher* in budget speeches and similar documents, as shown in the extract below.

TEXT-BOX 9-1: EXAMPLE OF GOVERNMENT'S REPORT OF REACHING HIGHER

Introduced in 2005, the McGuinty government's five-year, \$6.2 billion *Reaching Higher* plan is the most significant investment in postsecondary education in 40 years. Reaching Higher achievements include:

- 100,000 more students in colleges and universities by 2007-08, an increase of 25 per cent over 2002-03
- Creating almost 10,000 more graduate spaces by 2007-08 over 2002-03 levels to ensure that students can go on to pursue meaningful higher education and be leaders in the workforce. In February 2009, the government announced funding for an additional 3,300 graduate spaces over the next three years
- 160 more spots in Ontario medical schools between 2005 and 2008
- The Northern Ontario School of Medicine is expected to graduate its first class in the spring of 2009.

Source: 2009 Ontario Budget (MOF, 2009).

Although the MYA/MYAA templates do not require universities to report on enrolment targets, two exceptions are noted: York University provides figures on enrolment growth as context for their MYA submission; in addition, some universities identify greater graduate enrolments as a strategy conducive to improved quality of the learning environment. Given the lack of a specific enrolment reporting requirement in the report-backs, there is no information to help discern whether the government's enrolment growth goals expressed in the MYA plan template were met. Furthermore, the documentation available does not provide any insights as to whether this information is available to the public elsewhere. In that regard, a sector stakeholder comments:

"We were just actually talking about that in a meeting about how we [can] actually measure the effect of the graduate enrolment money because right now we can't, I don't know why it was taken out" (CEN-1)

In the semi-structured interviews, other sector stakeholders indicated that enrolment growth was excluded from the report-backs for two reasons. First, support for this initiative was allocated via a separate funding envelope, characterized by a competitive bid for deciding the allocation of funds among universities:

"[Graduate enrolment] was a separate pot [... provided] in collaboration with the Ministry of Research and Innovation. It was far broader than academic driven, [it considered] the labor market and there were also implications for what was happening federally. It was very deliberate that we left that out" (CEN-11)

"The graduate experience was a competitive process, people put their proposals what they would like to do and then they were measured on whether they were actually achieving it. It was seen as a different initiative with its own distribution and reporting aspects" (CEN-9)

As the funding model was a separate competitive bid process, according to the quotes below, the agreements did not appear to be the right place to report on this:

"The MYAAs were never specific enough and never institutionally differentiated enough for them to have been able to incorporate what was a really subjective graduate bid allocation process" (UNI-6)

"Graduate growth got dealt with directly and funded directly in a different way, and therefore you could argue it didn't need to be in the MYAAs" (STU-1)

Given that the decision of what funding to link to the MYAAs resided with the government, arguing that a separate funding model explains the exclusion of reports on enrolment targets is unconvincing, particularly when enrolment figures were added to the report-backs in later iterations. An alternative explanation is that the government already had access this information via other university-level reports. This observation concurs with the argument presented in Chapter 7,

that the intended audience for the accountability agreements was the government itself rather than the general public or other post-secondary sector representatives:

“There was already a system in place as to how you account students (...) it’s the standard official report of registrations that universities do four times a year. So you didn’t need to add another tool (...) they have the audited data already” (UNI-2)

To what extent can these two arguments, that is, having a separate funding and reporting mechanism, be generalized to the other exclusions? The tuition framework, for example, had a different reporting mechanism and was thus excluded. Credit transfer, although initially excluded from the first generation of report-backs, was added to the 2009-10 templates. Moreover, enrolment figures were also added to the next generation of MYAAs, as their focus turned towards data collection. It is not the intention of this section to provide a definite conclusion as to why these elements were excluded. The arguments above, however, confirm how as the agreements evolved from the first recommendations made by the Rae Report, their focus narrowed. These were not perceived as a place to negotiate and indicate enrolment targets that required major commitments and agreement between government and institutions, but focused on areas where the government’s role was less important in the delivery. One reason why the government may have decided to exclude these aspects was that having negotiated enrolment targets in a public document, would have limited the government’s freedom of action, as instruments structure the ability to act by different actors (Le Galès, 2004). The focus on simple reporting is further illustrated in the next section that provides another example where the information provided in the MYA/MYAAs is quite limited, and no requirements of targets or strategies were made.

9.2. REPORTING WITHOUT STRATEGIES

Two topics were included as reporting requirements in the MYA/MYAAs without the need to establish targets: Universities were asked to report back on the Student Access Guarantee (SAG) in the MYA/MYAAs and on their missions in the MYA plan. Both requirements are discussed in this section.

9.2.1. THE STUDENT ACCESS GUARANTEE

The Student Access Guarantee, introduced by the Ontario government in 2006-07, imposes a series of financial aid principles to all Ontario universities: “No qualified Ontario student should be prevented from attending Ontario’s public colleges and universities due to lack of financial support programs, and students in need should have access to the full resources they need for their tuition, books and mandatory fees” (MTCU, 2006b, p. 2). Consequently, if a qualified student does not obtain sufficient funding from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), the guarantee commits post-secondary institutions to provide the shortfall in the case of first-entry programs and to offer access to loans in the case of second-entry programs. In the MYA/MYAAs, universities were asked to report on whether they have met those principles and on the strategies regarding financial aid that they had in place. Given that the contextual information included in the templates vis-à-vis the SAG is limited and that there is virtually no information explaining the program provided at the outset, the reporting is very difficult to understand. Moreover, the template refers to an annual set

of guidelines for the SAG which is not published online. A summary of the reports on SAG is presented in table 9-1 below.

In all report-backs, Ontario's twenty universities confirm that the Ministry's tuition/book shortfall calculation was taken into consideration in the allocation of financial aid. However, as the Ministry guidelines are not disclosed, it is unclear how the university met the requirements or exactly what the commitment entails. Second, universities offer a qualitative description of the financial aid strategies in place to demonstrate that they already provide sufficient support. For the most part, these strategies refer to the process by which students can apply to the program, the information provided to them, whether other bursaries are available and what dispute resolution processes are available. Despite the examples provided, table 9.1 shows that universities complied with the guidelines imposed and although in some cases a university may mention changes in the process (e.g., the requirement for accessing the financial aid), the documents publicly available are not conducive to evaluating any evolution or changes induced by the new program or by the requirement to report on it.

Furthermore, universities made different choices in the kind of information provided and thus the report is not reflective of the full spectrum, scope and impact of their financial aid practices. For instance, the kinds of bursaries available that are mentioned in the report-backs suggests that some universities do not offer any kind of merit or needs-based bursaries, or that only one of these kinds of bursaries are offered, which is untrue. Thus, the reports must be interpreted as an illustration of what the universities chose to report and not as a reflection of the breadth and depth of their financial support activities.

TABLE 9-1: CONTENT OF REPORT ON SAG

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen's | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Consideration for tuition/book shortfalls | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Student has to apply | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | | | | X | X |
| Automatic consideration with OSAP or other aid | | | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | X | | |
| Automatic for OSAP eligible, others apply | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Loan assistance for second-entry programs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| NA (programs not offered) | X | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | X | X | | | |
| Not offered | | | X | X | | X | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | | X | | |
| Offered | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Bursaries offered | | X | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Loan aid amount for second-entry programs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Program not offered | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|---|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen's | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier | |
| Other bursary programs available | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fee payment arrangements (delayed payment) | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Work-study/on-campus jobs | X | X | | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | |
| Emergency bursaries and/or loans | X | | X | | X | X | | X | | X | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | |
| Other bursaries | | | | | X | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Needs-based bursaries | X | X | X | X | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | X | X |
| Merit-based bursaries | X | X | X | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | | |

In the 2007-08 template, institutions are also requested to report on the amounts provided to support the tuition/book shortfall aid, including total funds disbursed and the number of accounts created. However, no details are provided as to how these amounts were determined or how can they ensure that no qualified student is left behind. Also, there is no explanation in changes in funding, or number of accounts, or how does it compare to a benchmark. Moreover, there is significant variability in the rates of growth of funds per university, which with the little information provided in the reports, is impossible to explain. Furthermore, an exchange between CUPA and MTCU in the summer 2008 clarifies that the information on the tuition and book shortfall aid is not produced by universities themselves, but rather provided by MTCU's Post-secondary Finance and Information Management Branch, with the objective "to avoid confusion and ensure accuracy" (S. Madhany, memorandum, September 12, 2008). That is, universities are asked to report on numbers that are unclear with information provided by the ministry. The monitoring of compliance is limited to noting that something was done, in a manner akin to providing a checkmark on a box, and is made public in a manner that hinders the ability to evaluate the extent and impact of the initiative. This is an example of accountability as a symbolic goal, similarly to examples noted in other jurisdictions (Huisman & Currie, 2004; Watts et al., 2010).

Given that the SAG was introduced throughout the province, it may have had an impact on the activities and the organizational structure of those universities where equivalent programs were absent. As such, its introduction could be perceived as an intrusion on the part of government on the procedural autonomy of universities (Enders et al., 2012), as it is a mandatory commitment to provide financial aid funding. Such an impact would vary across institutions given the diversity observed in related activities already underway in different campuses. For instance, several universities report offering equivalent programs—or even exceeding government requirements—since before the introduction of SAG, including the University of Toronto since 1998 and the

University of Western Ontario that even played a role in developing this idea with ministry representatives.⁸⁷ The University of Ottawa and York University also report introducing such programs since 2005-06. On the other hand, some universities report limitations in providing financial aid of the form requested by the government. Nipissing University, for instance, highlights their large number of OSAP students with unmet need as a result of their demographic characteristics, therefore, “the Student Access Guarantee as currently proposed, disproportionately disadvantages Nipissing because of the nature of our student body, our short history, our program mix and our location” (Nipissing University, 2006, p. 10). Another university expresses its normative opinion that the responsibility for funding primarily rests with students and their families, in which case, an imposition of financial aid policy impacts substantive autonomy (Enders et al., 2012).

Although the extent to which procedural or even substantive autonomy were affected with the introduction of SAG is an interesting question, the focus of this study is the role the MYA/MYAAAs reporting requirement plays in perpetuating, expanding or controlling the impact of this new requirement. The little evidence available suggests that the role played by the reporting is limited. First, the SAG requirements had to be met even without the need to report. Second, some of the information reported is not even provided by universities, but rather by the ministry. In that regard, a university representative was asked why they had to report on things that were already in place like reporting student financial aid, and he indicated:

“It’s because it’s not so much to strengthen the accountability of the university vis-à-vis how it spends the government money. It is to enable the government to make public statements to the general public” (UNI-1)

There is a contradiction between a public disclosure objective and the provision of information in a decontextualized fashion. The purpose of reporting on the SAG, other than having some kind of document where universities confirm their commitment, is unclear. This highlights once again the apparent contradiction regarding the intended audience for the agreements. Despite these limitations, the government considers that the commitment by all institutions to participate in SAG is a “substantive result” of *Reaching Higher* (S. Madhany, memorandum, July 25, 2008), albeit one difficult to comprehend given the information provided in the MYA/MYAAAs.

To analyze the behaviors described in light of the role played by priority alignment, saliency of the rewards and power of the metrics in the Massy (2011) model, these are broken down into actions regarding financial aid activities vs actions regarding financial aid activity *reporting*. Regarding financial aid activities, although the information available in the reports is limited regarding the extent of priority alignment, it is noted from the analysis above that the degree of alignment is not constant across institutions. That is, not all universities have explicitly stated in their mission the goal of being financial accessible,⁸⁸ whereas others were active participants in the development and introduction of the SAG. Therefore, the alignment of priorities ranges from strong

⁸⁷ Western reports in their MYA that it “has been an active participant in discussions with Ministry staff in the development of a Student Access Guarantee” (University of Western Ontario, 2006, p. 9).

⁸⁸ Whether financial accessibility should be a university responsibility or not is not discussed here, the focus is only on whether the priorities are aligned or not. The opinion of different stakeholders may differ in this regard, and the appropriateness of the objective is a normative discussion.

to poor. Regarding financial aid activities, the power of the metrics and the saliency of the rewards are coded as high. Even though the metrics used are unclear for a lay reader, these are very concrete and allow the ministry to understand whether universities met the commitment or not. In addition, given the public nature of the report and the value granted to accessibility and financial aid to important stakeholder groups, such as students, the saliency for this initiative in terms of legitimacy is coded as high for all the universities. Given that priority alignment was coded along a range of strong to poor, the expected strategy as per the Massy model is also placed along a range, from either deep adoption when the priorities are aligned to simple conformity when they are not. This is consistent with the range of responses observed from universities, with deep adoption being interpreted as the introduction of new activities to meet the requirement as well the continuation of activities in line with the commitment that were already in place; and conformity being interpreted as the introduction of some activities, albeit in a less stable fashion.

However, the value added of having to report on compliance with the SAG guidelines is unclear and is thus analyzed separately. First, regarding the reporting of activities, priority alignment between universities and government is poor, as the former have an overall objective of keeping reporting requirements on check. Regarding the saliency of the reward, it would have been expected that the activities would take place with or without reporting requirements as the SAG guidelines were a process carried on parallel to the MYA/MYAAAs; nonetheless, the legitimacy associated with providing financial aid support is still strong and thus the saliency of the reward is coded as high for all universities. Finally, the power of the metric, in this case represented by the MYA/MYAA instrument, is considered poor, given that although the information reported is relevant to the government, it is vague for the reader. Moreover, the instrument does not entail a direct causal relationship as the objectives are already in place for universities and when specific figures were requested from universities, these turned back to the government to obtain them. Therefore, the observed strategy in the case of reporting on the SAG is interpreted as one of compliance, where the examples provided are more a partial representation of the activities underway.

TABLE 9-2: SAG ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE MASSY MODEL

| Area | Alignment of Objectives | Power of the Metric | Saliency of the Reward | Observed Strategy |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Financial Aid Activities | Strong to poor | High | High | Deep adoption to conformity |
| Reporting on Financial Aid Activities | Poor | Low | High | Comply |

9.2.2. UNIVERSITIES MISSION

The government requested universities to state their mission in the MYA/MYAAAs, a minor requirement that is interesting in two regards. First, mission statements have been interpreted in the PSE sector as “part of the overall trend toward transforming universities into accountable decision-makers” (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 250), that despite their loose coupling, are able to act in a coordinated manner and are asked to be accountable as a whole, a questionable ability as it

would require tight coupling (Patterson, 2001). This suggests a government's assumption that they are dealing with one organization with a clear, unified and coordinated direction. This is coupled with a requirement for internal consultation, to be elaborated in the following section, which recognizes that universities consist of several different groups that are loosely coupled. Asking for a joint mission for a disjointed organization illustrates the challenge in dealing with universities.

The second element of interest in the reporting of missions is that it sets the tone for the analysis regarding the extent to which the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs affected the establishment of priorities at each university. This study is interested in inquiring about the MYA/MYAAs and their potential for reducing university substantive autonomy, that is, the institution's ability to decide its own mission. This impression sparked from the government description of the MYA as an agreement that "articulates the government's goals for the system and its roles and responsibilities in meeting those goals [as well as] the commitments expected from each institution" (MTCU, 2006a, p. 1). Moreover, the government suggested a level of involvement in planning with the universities, which would be conducive to greater direction provided centrally:

In partnership with institutions, the Ministry is committed to reviewing and revising this agreement as needed on an annual basis to ensure that colleges and universities remain focused on meeting the government goals for post-secondary education (MTCU, 2006a, p. 2).

However, in the MYA template, the government did not provide guidelines on the specific mission of each university. It focused their attention on system-wide priorities (i.e., accessibility, quality), that given their general nature, were not unlikely to be embraced by universities. Moreover, given university participation in the consultation process of the Rae Review, the implementation of *Reaching Higher* that followed, and the high-level definition of goals in terms of broad themes, the likelihood to be at odds was small. Given that the template expresses recognition of the distinctive mission of each university (MTCU, 2006a), when asked to report on their missions, universities did not feel a need to reinvent themselves. As shown in the table below, the source for the mission reported in the MYA often pre-dates the drafting of the plans and consists of budgets, strategic and academic plans, in development or already completed at the time of producing the MYA.⁸⁹ Given that this consisted of simply reporting on their institutional mission, there was no consideration of priority alignment, saliency of the rewards or power of the metrics. Universities simply reported their missions, which sets the tone for the analysis regarding the extent to which the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs affected the establishment of priorities at each university. Furthermore, universities were able to build on the existing initiatives to deal with the new planning/reporting requirement and that this dictated partially the strategies used in the establishment of targets for areas where these were required.

⁸⁹ Only Queen's University states that their strategic plan was developed concurrent with, and in recognition of, the Province's *Reaching Higher* plan (Queen's University, 2006, p. 23).

TABLE 9-3: SOURCE OF UNIVERSITY MISSION REPORTED IN MYA

| University Group | University | Mission/Strategies Source |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Comprehensive | Carleton | Strategic Plan: Task Force on Planning and Priorities (preliminary report 2006) |
| | Guelph | Integrated Planning (2004) |
| | Waterloo | Strategic Plan: Sixth Decade Plan (2006) |
| | Windsor | Strategic Plan (2004-2009) |
| | York | Academic and Budget Plan (2005) |
| Medical-Doctoral | McMaster | Strategic Plan: Refining Directions (2003) |
| | Queen's | Strategic Plan (2006) |
| | Toronto | Vision Statement and Planning Documents: Stepping up (2004) |
| | Ottawa | Academic Strategic Plan: Vision 2010 (2005) |
| | Western | Strategic Plan (2005 & 2006) |
| Primarily Undergrad | Algoma | Source not reported, approved by Board of Governors and Senate ⁹⁰ |
| | Brock | Mission statement (2004), Planning Documents (2002-2003) |
| | Lakehead | Source of mission not reported, Improvement plan cited |
| | Laurentian | Strategic Plan: Building on Excellence (2003) |
| | Nipissing | Strategic Plan |
| | OCAD | Source not reported |
| | Ryerson | Mission and 2006 Quality Agenda (2006-07) |
| | Trent | Strategic Plan: Strategic Directions (2003-2010) |
| | UOIT | Source not reported |
| | Wilfred Laurier | Strategic Plan: Century Plan (2005-2011) |

9.3. STRATEGIES FOR ACCOUNTABILITY: THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Although the MYA/MYAs were themselves instruments of accountability, the government built into the templates two accountability-related activities to ensure this objective was accomplished. First, it required, as a key institutional commitment, that the plans and report-backs be publicly available, which is, according to some authors, a requirement of accountability (Bovens, 2005a). Second, it requested universities to indicate to what extent they had undertaken an internal consultation process to complete the reports. In addition, a third possible dimension for accountability is the extent to which universities developed strategies to improve internal accountability to their stakeholders. This point is briefly described at the end of this section.

Focusing first on the public availability of the information, it has been noted that this did not always take place in a timely fashion. OCUFA reported that “some 2006-07 reports were not publicly available until June 2008” (OCUFA, 2008, p. 3) and the same challenge was experienced during this study: although as of April 2011, most information for the 2006-07 to 2008-09 period was available on-line, not all of the 2005-06 Interim Agreements were published nor had the 2009-10 report-

⁹⁰ In 2008-09, Algoma was the only university to publish a new Interim Agreement, where the source of proposed strategies is identified as their Institutional Plan (2008), developed after a comprehensive strategic planning exercise.

backs, due in fall 2010, been made public (see Table 6-2). The delays in publication may be linked to approval processes; however, it suggests that there is not great demand for having these agreements available to the public on a timely fashion. In this regard, an OCUFA representative recalls:

“One of our main complaints was that the results of the reporting weren’t publicly available for all the institutions (...) there was a great delay in getting the information” (FAC-1)

Regarding the publication of information related to the agreements, such as funding allocation memos, a government official indicated that the original intent was to provide these to the public, but this has yet to happen. Although the original intent was to have the broader MYA/MYYA process being public and open, publication was limited to only the agreements and report-backs, as indicated by a government representative quoted below:

“The objective is to actually put the allocation letters, and the memos that go out to institutions on the TCU public website. It just hasn’t transitioned there yet” (CEN-2)

These delays in publication once again call into question the intended audience of the reports, as despite the purported objective of providing more information to the public, in practice access to and the provision of information is limited to the government. It also raises the question of what level of detail regarding ministry funding allocations to universities should be made public and what would be the purpose of doing so. On one hand, remaining silent on the specific internal allocation of funds by universities, translates into respect for their internal decision-making procedures, and thus, respect of procedural or managerial autonomy (Enders et al., 2012). On the other hand, this contributes to obscuring the internal functioning of universities to external stakeholders.

Student groups tend to homologate consultation with accountability, as the latter is understood as a participatory decision-making process. Therefore, the internal consultation process was not only a requirement from the government but also an expectation on the part of the student community. Student organizations argue that the level of participation allowed for student groups varies across institutions and perceived the MYA/MYAAS as an opportunity to ensure similar opportunities were offered throughout the system, as described in the quotes below. Furthermore, in a position paper, OUSA identifies their ideal role for students as “meaningfully involved at all stages, including setting the metrics to measure, free access to examine the multi-year agreements, and participation in reporting results” (Chan, 2006, p. 3).

“[Accountability means that] the people who are part of the decision-making bodies are making decisions that are in the best interests of the public that they serve and that they are making those decisions in a way that involves consultation with the central stakeholders in the community, that is at least participatory and understandable by (...) the users of the public service” (STU-3)

“We wanted to see [consultation] really beefed up: formalized consultation locally on campus between university administrations and their student’s councils, talking about what quality meant to student from that campus, and getting really good feedback from students in general and then responding to that feedback when the university was doing the planning (...) We wanted to standardize it, and making it a requirement across the board so if you are a student council, you can expect the same level of accountability” (STU-2)

The government's main objective from involving different stakeholders on campus was to ensure that the agreements were not seen as a commitment exclusively between senior administration and the government, as the following university representative indicates:

"[There were] requirements that you consult with your community about these things [... so that it is just not perceived as] an agreement between the senior administration of the university and the government" (UNI-13)

Therefore, the government asked each university to indicate the activities they undertook with faculty, staff and students regarding public consultations for completing the MYA, which are summarized in table 9-4 below. The two most common instances of consultation were:

- High-level, that is, at dedicated town hall meeting or at existing committees that meet regularly (including senate, board of governors or the academic council). Two of the universities who do not mention any of these activities, McMaster and Queen's, indicate that senior management was invited to comment directly – another example of high-level consultation; or
- Indirect, that is, the strategies proposed are based on strategic documents for which extensive consultation already took place.

Only a few universities reported having posted the document publicly for feedback (Toronto, Ottawa and Carleton) or having requested that feedback in email form. Only a few isolated cases report on direct consultations with students (Nipissing, Ryerson and UOIT), one indicates future plan to use NSSE as a source of student feedback (Lakehead), one reports on a direct consultation with faculty (Nipissing) and another one reports on a working group created specifically for the MYA/MYAAAs (OCAD). All universities which report on more ground level consultations belong to the primarily undergraduate group. Most of the universities in this group are relatively smaller in size, which can provide a two-fold explanation of the extent of ground-level consultation. First, it can be argued that in smaller institutions this kind of consultation is more manageable as the number of participants can be representative but not overly large, and that coordination within the organization is feasible. Second, it could also be argued that larger and more reputable institutions can rely more on their existing legitimacy and do not require building in as much buy-in regarding their chosen approach to answer to the new requirement.

Indeed, this is an implementation issue that has been observed in other jurisdictions where performance agreements have been utilized, which is potentially conducive to limiting the influence of the agreement if internal stakeholders do not perceive it as "their contract and therefore, they are not committed to its terms" (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010, p. 283). Despite the government's requirements, faculty representatives in Ontario describe the agreement as something where their involvement was limited:

"This was really an agreement between the institutions and the government" (FAC-1)

On the other hand, consultations are of interest not only if they happened, but also to the extent to which they resulted in modifications to what universities originally proposed. In that regard, three universities report that the plan was modified as a result of consultations (Carleton,

Windsor and Waterloo) but only the University of Waterloo specifically identifies how the content of the plan and the reports were modified as a result of these consultations.⁹¹

TABLE 9-4: CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE MYA (ACTION PLAN)

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen's | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Document discussed at committees (e.g., Senate, Board of Governors, Academic Council) or dedicated Town Hall meetings | | X | X | X | X | | X | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Senior management invited to comment | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Indirect consultation: Based on Strategic Plan or other planning documents | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | X | X | | | |
| Plans to use future Strategic Planning to contribute to MYAA | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Post draft publicly for comments | X | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Stakeholders and community invited to provide comments (e.g., via e-mail) | X | | | X | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Consultations with students | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X | | | X |
| Plans to use future NSSE reports to improve upon the plan | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Consultation with faculty | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Working group for discussing draft | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Short timelines limited ability to consult | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Despite student groups' interest to have more standardized methods of consultation, the table above illustrates how, in practice, the approach chosen by different universities to consult was quite varied. A student and a faculty representative confirm that assessment:

"I think [the consultation] varied a lot by institution. I know there are some of those institutions [that] just did their own thing, while others were very consultative" (STU-1)

"[At some universities] there was some consultation internally [...at others] there wasn't any consultation at all" (FAC-1)

Three different reasons have been offered by university representatives to explain the limited extent of the consultation process. First, it is argued that the consultations could not take place due

⁹¹ In the consultation process, Waterloo identified outcomes other than NSSE and CGPSS as important regarding student satisfaction and engagement. The new indicators were integrated into the quality of the environment section as of the 1st report-back.

to lack of time, driven in particular by the odd timing of the MYAA request. The request for producing the MYAs came in a memo from the Minister in the middle of the summer, when much of the university activity slows down (C. Bentley, memorandum, August 4, 2006). Moreover, it did not provide much time to complete, as the deadline for submitting the plans back to the ministry was September 29, 2006. In that regard, as noted in the table above, Carleton and McMaster explicitly indicate this limitation in their MYA plans. This constraint is also confirmed by two university representatives in the quotes below:

“We knew the Multi-Year Agreements are coming. We are waiting for them, waiting for them, waiting for them. They came out in a particular form which meant that we actually had to have the consultations in a relatively compressed cycle. I would have liked to use our normal meeting schedules to deal with the report-backs” (UNI-13)

“The timing was a bit odd. It was during the summer when that kind of thing is hard to happen. We documented in lieu. We documented the broad consultations that had occurred as part of our academic and strategic planning process that had preceded this. We made the link that consultation had occurred at the academic planning stage and that the multi-year agreement very much captured their results” (UNI-6)

The second quote also suggests that the consultation was not required as much as it had already taken place in the context of the strategic and academic plans on which the MYA plan was based. This strategy is confirmed in the quote that follows as well as by the large number of universities who indicated this strategy as summarized in table 9-4:

“The documents themselves were not tabled with the board (...) They might be tabled through information but not through discussions, I don’t think that it was because these issues weren’t important to the board it’s just that it seems so in tune with the direction that we were taking that it didn’t seem to be needed to be dealt with distinctly” (UNI-4)

The lack of time is recognized by faculty representatives as a limitation that central administration often faces, as indicated in the quote below. However, this limits the number of individuals that can be involved in the decision-making process as well as the number of alternatives to be considered:

“One of the problems with some of the universities interactions with government, where there is a demand that more data be collected [... is that] we really have to think about what is more important to do [...but] it does take time for people to become informed and to consider alternatives, the more people you have involved the longer it can take, (...) it may be that there are times when university administrations really don’t have a choice when they have tight timelines” (FAC-4)

A second explanation for the limited consultation is that using the channels of communication and structures that already exist on campus is the right approach, as they are already in function and have the appropriate representatives, as the following university representative indicates:

“We used our Faculty Councils and Senate process as our official communication way because that allowed us to use our normal governance process to consult (...) we didn’t have to do any extraordinarily measures [to contact stakeholders who] sit on faculty councils, you have faculty, you have students [and] you have administration, all of the right people (...) We didn’t have specific discussions with the faculty or students groups because they were so built into our process” (UNI-13)

Nonetheless, the extent to which existing organizational structures, such as the board, the senate and other committees, lend themselves to consultation is debated by student and faculty

representatives. Some student representatives argue that their participation is discouraged and that consultation is not really that representative and may even be hand-picked:

“Participation is not really encouraged in those structures. The board of governors does not want the student governors to be representative of their constituency. They want everyone to come there like clean slate, no bias, objective decision makers, but that does not allow for accountability because the students that are there, they are supposed to be there representing the needs of students” (STU-3)

“[For the strategic plan] there was an invitation to participate in these consultations but the administration picked and choose those who are able to participate... so very significantly I would say no actual consultation [took place]” (FAC-3)

The degree of representation of students and other stakeholder groups in the board of governors is considered a way of connecting the university with its external environment and to ensure the representation of diverse interests in university-making. Consequently, the real or perceived under-representation of certain groups may translate into tensions in post-secondary organizations regarding what interests are emphasized and prioritized (Larsen, Maassen, & Stensaker, 2009). Furthermore, the fact that governance structures appears to be de-emphasizing representative democracy structures for accountability has been linked to the rise of the evaluative state, as representativeness, according to some authors, is perceived by management as hampering institutional performance, although the relationship between democratic governance structures and organizational performance is not well researched (Larsen et al., 2009).

A third explanation regarding the limited consultation that was offered is that faculty members are not interested in this kind of exercise, as their focus is often their own research:

“In 2006, I recall the president of the university, providing some commentary in an internally circulated document and some of that is still on the website talking about the multi-year accountability agreements, but it wasn’t something that people really, the regular faculty paid really very much attention to” (FAC-4)

The requirements for consultation that were explicit in the MYA were removed from future report-backs, especially since the three-year plan only was never revised. There were new consultation processes in 2009 and 2010 to evaluate the process and template for the agreements and did not provide an opportunity for internal stakeholders to comment on the commitments made by universities towards the government.⁹² Moreover, the emphasis on consultation echoes the shift from what Romzek (2000) denominates professional accountability to political accountability, or responsiveness to stakeholders. The MYA/MYAs embedded both hierarchical—accountability from efficiency—and political accountability values. The government was looking for more efficiency and also expected universities to be more responsive to their internal stakeholders, in a way that would reflect well on the government’s own accountability towards these groups. That is, there was an expectation of transitivity in accountability relationships, where the government in turn would appear more responsive to their stakeholders. However, the responsiveness to internal stakeholders was, in the opinion of the latter, lacking. In fact, governance of accountability—who has the ultimate responsibility and to whom—is a topic of debate within university environments, and will be further explored in Chapter 11.

⁹² New rounds of consultation regarding content took place with the introduction of the SMAs, but are not analyzed in this study.

This discussion has analyzed the two dimensions accountability requested by the government, that is, the public posting of agreements and the undertaking of a consultation process. There is a third dimension of accountability observed in one of the agreements that was not requested by government. This consisted of taking the plans and strategies undertaken by universities under the framework of the MYA/MYAAAs and to use them with a view to improve accountability to their internal stakeholders. The only university that explicitly mentions this in their MYA is Waterloo, that plans and commits to (i) ensure accountability instruments are easily accessible by stakeholders; (ii) monitor the effectiveness of risk management activities; (iii) complete university performance reports with quantitative indicators (iv) and ensure regular reporting on corporate matters are made to the board of governors (University of Waterloo, 2006). This approach is interesting as one complaint often heard is that it is difficult to find information about universities, a comment that applies to content over and above the MYA/MYAAAs and is made regarding both availability and clarity. For example, one student representative indicates that they would not always be directly provided with key university information, such as the year-end report and a faculty representative indicates that often the information is not available or that if available, it is the minimum required or it is difficult to understand, particularly regarding financial information:

“On our campus, we wouldn’t be receiving that [documentation] from Student Affairs. They wouldn’t give us their year-end report (...) It really depends on whether people see it is a relationship builder” (STU-3)

“There is a deficit in terms of accountability transparency in universities (...) It is very, very difficult to get a sound understanding of the[ir] financial situation. The information as it is on the web, it needs to be read and interpreted and then presented by people who hold an expertise. It need not to be that way, that’s a choice” (FAC-3)

These comments are made after many years of making effort to improve accountability, not only in the form of the MYA/MYAA but also with the creation of accountability umbrella sites at Ontario universities, the publication of CUDO and the implementation of FIPPA requirements on university campuses. This suggests that a definition of accountability that focuses simply on reporting is narrow and that transparency involves facilitating the understanding of the information that is disclosed, particularly in the case of financial information that is the least likely to be voluntarily disclosed by universities (Gallego, García, & Rodríguez, 2009). Furthermore, the expectations around accountability in the sector go beyond an institutional relationship between two actors (Bovens, 2005a). There is an expectation of disclosure on the part of universities towards other stakeholders to deal with multiple accountabilities (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010).

To finalize this section, behaviours observed regarding consultation practices are analyzed in light of the Massy (2011) model. From the government’s perspective, the consultation process was intended to provide legitimacy to the MYA plan and would be conducive to a greater degree of acceptance within universities. As it was documented above, in the vast majority of cases, universities chose to develop a plan that reflected their internal priorities and objectives as dictated by recent strategic or academic plans. As a result, universities had little incentive to undertake additional consultation to justify their proposals. In terms of the Massy model, it is considered that the objectives between universities and government regarding the need for additional consultation

were poorly aligned. Moreover, it is considered that the metric used for determining the extent of consultation was poor, as universities were not asked to demonstrate that new or extensive internal consultation had taken place: As the request was to report on it, there was room to document activities in that regard that happened previous to the introduction of the MYA. Finally, the reward, as it was associated with the complete MYA package, was high. As a result, and as predicted by the Massy model, universities complied. That is, the report is produced and some consultation takes place but it is mostly based on existing information or it is produced with limited additional effort. The limited impact that this requirement had on changing consultation practices was highlighted by student and faculty representatives interviewed. On the other hand, had the government been more directive in the approach to consultation required for the MYA plan, universities would have perceived this as an intrusion on their autonomy, particularly in a procedural sense. The discussion around university autonomy will be pursued in Chapter 11; below the discussion continues regarding areas where strategies and targets were identified.

TABLE 9-5: CONSULTATION ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE MASSY MODEL

| Area | Alignment of Objectives | Power of the Metric | Saliency of the Reward | Observed Strategy |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Internal Consultation | Poor | Low | High | Comply |

9.4. STRATEGIES AND TARGETS: ACCESSIBILITY

In the MYA template, MTCU defines accessibility as enrolment growth, the participation of under-represented students and the provision of the Student Access Guarantee. Since two of these elements have already been discussed, this presentation focuses on under-represented students, first in terms of measuring their number on campus with a view to developing system-wide measures; second, in terms of the strategies directed towards attracting more under-represented students to post-secondary institutions and the services offered once they are on campus. Similar uses of performance agreements to increase the representation of ethnic minorities and under-represented students are reported for Flemish post-secondary system but an assessment of their success is unavailable (Frølich, 2008). There are three main observations made when analyzing the implementation of this objective. First, this is an example of the government expecting performance data to be more readily available than it is in reality, which hinders their ability to evaluate performance (Romzek & Johnston, 2005) but also hinders the ability of universities to identify targets. Second, having accessibility framed in terms of performance as per the NPM priorities, takes attention away from the values of equity and ease of access, which if privileged as objectives would have resulted in a different kind of indicator. That is, putting students into one diversity group, an “us vs them approach” that requires differential treatment, can be considered a non-inclusive approach to education (Zepke & Leach, 2007). Third, regarding the choice of strategies, the vast majority of universities met the new reporting requirements by building on existing or ongoing initiatives.

9.4.1. MEASURING THE NUMBER OF UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS

The MYA template asked universities to document their ability to quantify the number of under-represented students on campus. Despite the government's interest in these measures, the vast majority of universities do not have campus-wide, comprehensive identification processes nor is there a province-wide system for capturing the information.⁹³ Moreover, according to privacy laws, universities are only allowed to collect private information that is required in the fulfillment of their operations, thus the government is imposing a reporting requirement that appears to contradict their own laws. Self-declaration to respect employment equity standards is undertaken throughout the public sector, however, these standards do not apply to the student population and the United Nations Recommendations insists that to respect free consent, individuals should be free to declare or not, their ethnicity (Simon, 2012).

Since the information is not readily available, most universities provided enrolment estimates based on survey responses or on self-identification by students upon request of support services. A resulting caveat, highlighted in the report-backs, is the potential for underestimation of actual enrolment, as indicated by a university representative quoted below:

"A big challenge, if you think about aboriginals students is that, at the time certainly, it was not recorded in the student information system, and still isn't. Also it may not be entirely accurate because there might be reluctance on the part of people to self-declare" (UNI-1)

Reluctance to self-declare, a commonly observed phenomenon, is explained by the level of trust "in the preservation of privacy and the positive use of the information" created (Simon, 2012, p. 1382). In addition, it is affected by the sense of belonging to the category and "may change over time and space for the same individual, which hinders comparisons" (Simon, 2012, p. 1381). Despite these documented difficulties in self-identification, the different sources of information used by universities to report on under-represented student enrolment are summarized in the table below. Not all sources cited by one university were necessarily used the same year, although sometimes different sources were cited to validate the numbers offered or to provide a range. For aboriginal students and those with disabilities, the most common reporting method is that of registration with the specific offices providing support. Regarding first-generation students, the most common information source is the NSSE survey. It also noticed that some universities undertake internal surveys to gather this information, and that some of these surveys were not in place at the beginning of the period of analysis.

Thus, the government's interest in counting these types of students has had some minor implications for universities to try and improve the quality of the measures. Examples of these changes include: a project to formally register participating students in Aboriginal services to better identify and track these students (University of Waterloo); a new web-based survey to identify first-generation students (University of Windsor); the introduction of a First-Generation Student Supplementary Application Form to help in their identification at the time of admission (University

⁹³ Since 2006, university applicants are asked to voluntarily declare whether they are aboriginal in their OUAC application forms. Self-declaration figures appear to be underestimate the aboriginal student representation on campus when compared with university data (University of Guelph, 2006a).

of Western Ontario); new questions or surveys regarding ethnicity and origin of students in the prospective and registration stages (Algoma University, Lakehead University, Ryerson University); incentives for under-represented students to register with their respective offices offering support or services (Brock University); and requirements to indicate first-generation status when requesting financial aid (Wilfred Laurier University, University of Ottawa).

TABLE 9-6: SOURCE OF UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENT QUANTIFICATION

| Source of Measurement | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen's | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Aboriginal | CUSC | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| | Incoming student information form | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | X | | | | X | |
| | Internal Survey | | | | | | | X | | | | | X | | X | X | | | | |
| | NSSE | | | X | | X | X | | | | | | | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| | OUAC field | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X | | |
| | Registration with relevant office | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | | X | | X | X | | | |
| | Band sponsorship and targeted aid | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| | University Student Information System | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| First Generation | CUSC | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| | Financial information form/surveys | X | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Incoming student information form | | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| | Internal Survey | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | X | X | | | X | | |
| | NSSE | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | | | | | X | X | | X | X | X | X |
| | Portal Survey | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| | Registration with relevant office | | | | | | | | X | | | X | | X | | X | X | | | X |
| Students with Disabilities | Admission process | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| | CUSC | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | |
| | Financial information form/surveys | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Incoming student information form | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| | Internal Survey | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| | None reported | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| | Registration with relevant office | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

Although efforts were made to improve measurement, the large number and diversity of sources resulted in limited data comparability, as the following university representatives recall:

“Counts were done in almost any way imaginable. Some people based them on pro rating up from NSSE; some people had First Nations Center counts. They were utterly inconsistent and however important the need to develop a sector profile was, I don’t think that inconsistent data helped at all” (UNI-6)

“Some questions being asked did not adequately take in to account the uncertainty of the information, of having careful definitions (...) so there were some frustration with (...) how some of the information was aggregated to represent the system” (UNI-4)

To further illustrate the variability in data, two examples are drawn from the case studies. In the first table, it is illustrated how the measurements varied over time for one single university. Not only were the sources different, but these do not allow for any clear assessment of whether there were actual increases or decreases in the representation of these student groups, and it is thus impossible to assess their performance in this area, where performance would be defined as increasing the number of under-represented students on campus.

TABLE 9-7: UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENT POPULATION COUNTS – EXAMPLE I

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2009-10 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aboriginal students (Source) | 2% 1 st year, 2% final year (NSSE) | 180 (Registration at Centre) | 161 (Registration at Centre) |
| First-generation students (Source) | 40.9% 1 st year, 45.3% final year (NSSE) | 44% 1 st year, 42% final year (NSSE) | 44% 1 st year, 42% final year (NSSE) |
| Students with disabilities | Over 2,900 | 2,153 | 2,196 |

The second example shows the uncertainty in the figures in one single year for one single university, as standard errors are provided for information that is based on student survey samples.

TABLE 9-8: UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENT POPULATION COUNTS – EXAMPLE II

| Measurement Methodology (including description) | Student Groups in Your Student Population | | | Total Number Self-Identifying as Member of Under-represented Group | Total Number of Students Surveyed, if applicable |
|---|---|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | Aboriginal % ± Error | First Generation % ± Error | Students with Disabilities % ± Error | | |
| NSSE – 1 st Year | 2.83 ± 0.62 | 42.17% ± 1.87 | | 49/722 | 1730/1712 |
| NSSE – Final Year | 2.49 ± 0.72 | 41.59% ± 2.29 | | 29/480 | 1165/1154 |
| NSSE - Combined | 2.69 ± 0.47 | 41.94% ± 1.45 | | 78/1202 | 2895/2866 |
| CUSC – 1 st Year | 2.50 ± 0.95 | 40.46% ± 3.23 | 6.73 ± 1.56 | 21/301/55 | 840/744/817 |
| CGPSS – Masters | 1.61 ± 0.96 | | | 8 | 497 |
| CGPSS – Doctoral | 3.43 ± 1.60 | | | 11 | 321 |
| CGPSS - Total | 2.32 ± 0.88 | | | 19 | 818 |

Despite the difficulties in measurement and the wide variety of counting methods utilized in different institutions, the government was keen in producing a count that would serve as a baseline to measure progress, even though it recognized, early in 2005, the challenges they were facing:

There are limitations to the quality and comparability of some of the data for which the ministry is asking in this document. We recognize this, and you will note the preamble to the agreement acknowledges these limitations, the inability to compare data across institutions, and our commitment to work with you to develop more robust data sets for the future (M. Hicks, memorandum, November 20, 2005).

The emphasis on measurement, in the opinion of the stakeholder quoted below, calls into question the extent to which this was an accounting exercise rather than an accountability exercise. There is not a clear policy regarding the level of representation that the government wishes to aim for, as the base population is not identified nor the target at the system level is provided:

“If they set targets for first generation or aboriginal students [such as] increasing their participation rates in post-secondary, unless you have benchmark data you don’t really know how well the funding and the actual programs that are implemented at each of these institutions are working, because they don’t really know what may have gone on beforehand [...] And in that sense it really amounts to an accounting exercise” (FAC-2)

In the United States, it has been argued that one reason behind the introduction of complex accountability systems is the government’s lack of trust and suspicions regarding the accuracy and relevance of data provided by institutions (Schmidlein, 2004, p. 164). In the Ontario case, the government is cognizant of the lack of accuracy of the data available, but their objective to “count” supersedes any concerns raised by universities, resulting in circumstances where they are adding up things that have nothing in common (Le Galès, 2004). That is, the objective to appear accountable overrides any concerns regarding data accuracy. In an effort to improve the quality of the data, in 2008, CUPA proposed to the ministry that similar measures be used:

In the Access section, each institution will use the 2008 NSSE estimate to report the number of First Generation students. Each institution will also use Table 1 from the Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities report we submit to MTCU to report the number of Students with Disabilities” (CUPA Chair, memorandum, August 13, 2008).

Before this suggestion was made in 2008, the annual Student with Disabilities Accountability report submitted to MTCU that explicitly requests for enrolment numbers is only mentioned by the University of Western Ontario and UOIT as a potential source. This suggests that there are reports produced by different offices throughout campuses that are not widely known or distributed. Moreover, there were conflicting sets of data shared with the ministry during that time. Finally, the proposal for these two groups was accepted by the ministry; however, the challenges with the use of survey data remained unsolved, although figures were consistent throughout the province. Once the number of students had been identified, the MYA/MYAA template moved on to request information on the strategies to increase their participation rates, which are described in the following section, after an analysis of the strategies regarding measurement using the Massy model.

Regarding under-represented student populations, the degree of priority alignment between government and universities in regards to providing support and specific activities to these groups falls within a range from strong to poor depending on the university. That is, for some universities this is a low priority while for others, this is clearly part of their mission (e.g., servicing the aboriginal population at Lakehead or the francophone community at the University of Ottawa). Moreover, although priority alignment regarding activities geared to these groups may range from strong to poor in some cases, priority alignment to quantify their numbers is generally poor. That is, even in those campuses where this is part of their mission, support activities and improved access can be achieved without having exact student counts. Regarding the power of the metrics, the objective to measure the number of under-represented students is clear; it is the source of data that is lacking. Therefore, the power of the measure, for the purposes of this analysis, is indicated as high given

that such a count would in general be deemed credible and robust. Finally, the saliency for the reward associated with this reporting measure is coded as ranging from low to high. On one hand, failing to report on the exact number of students was unlikely to result in reduced funding, and some universities interpreted the risk that way. On the other hand, the saliency of the overall reward could not be separated for each item, and some universities interpreted it as high.

These factors result in two separate sets of strategies outlined in the table below. Those universities where the saliency of the reward was interpreted as high introduced new measurement activities (e.g., internal surveys, changes to application forms) which are examples of conformity to the new requirement. In those universities where the saliency was interpreted as low, the issue was not ignored, but rather they explained “away the demonstrated failure to conform” (Massy 2011, p.238), in a strategy labelled “spin” as they found alternative estimates of representation from student surveys or other sources that were reported. Had the priorities been positively aligned, it would have been expected that universities engage more actively in the development of better data sources for the proposed metric. Along that line of thought, the proposal to use survey data given that it is considered more accurate than any attempt to produce record-level identification can be interpreted as an example of deep adoption. However, obtaining data on the under-represented student population is not a main objective of the introduction of the surveys, and their use is more of a helpful coincidence than a purposeful strategy in their implementation.

TABLE 9-9: UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENT COUNTS - ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE MASSY MODEL

| Area | Alignment of Objectives | Power of the Metric | Saliency of the Reward | Observed Strategy |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Quantification of Under-Represented Students | Poor | High | Low to High | Spin to Conformity |

9.4.2. STRATEGIES TO ATTRACT UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS

The MYA/MYAAAs requested to report on the strategies planned for attracting and providing better services to under-represented students as well as at least one indicator per strategy to follow up on progress and results achieved. In the vast majority of universities, the original list of strategies presented in the MYA plan is much longer than the reduced list of strategies for which an indicator is defined and for which tracking is provided in subsequent years. The documentary evidence provides no information on whether all the strategies originally proposed were undertaken or not, or the reasons why follow-ups are included only for a sample of the proposed strategies.⁹⁴ Despite the lack of information, it is clear that the follow up via the report-backs was not comprehensive of all the activities developed at universities.

The type of strategies proposed was quite varied. To facilitate their description, a typology provided by MTCU in the 2008-09 report-backs is used and reproduced in the table below. The

⁹⁴ The case of Algoma University’s report is striking: There are three pages of access initiatives in the MYA that are reduced to a few indicators of enrolment and retention for the report-backs.

government published these groupings to offer examples of initiatives to be developed in the transition year (2009-10), but it also provides a good categorization of the strategies described in the report-backs and proves helpful in organizing them.

TABLE 9-10: MTCU’S CATEGORIZATION OF STRATEGIES FOR UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS

| Type of Strategy | Examples |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Outreach | Targeted outreach activities with local community organizations and high schools, or advertising / marketing activities to improve participation of under-represented groups. |
| Bridging & Pathways | Activities to bridge students into PSE (including dual credit programs, academic upgrading and other services) and assist students’ pathways between college and university (i.e., credential assessment, advising for transferred students) or into work placements and co-operative programs. |
| Student Services & Supports | Activities including personal and career counseling, academic advising and supports, and cultural programming (i.e., Aboriginal Elders on-site). |
| Academic Programming | Activities to assess or develop programs to ensure accessibility in terms of delivery and / or content, enhance opportunities for under-represented groups, or deliver the program in partnership with other institutions. |
| Building Capacity | Activities focusing on the capacity of the college or university to ensure greater accessibility, including staff training, research and needs assessment of the student population and the identification of barriers. |

Source: MTCU (2009a)

Using those groupings, table 9.12 below summarizes the initiatives identified by each university in the MYA/MYAAAs. The table shows that the strategies more often found across all institutions relate to aboriginal students, including academic programs and support services. Another widely cited initiative consists of support services for students with disabilities. The fact that not all universities present the same strategies is difficult to interpret, since it results from the significant leeway each was allowed to highlight the strategies they deemed important. For instance, although Queen’s, Toronto and Western do not mention any strategies for students with disabilities, this does not mean that such services are not already in place in their campuses. Therefore, from a system perspective, the way in which the information was collected in the three-year plans does not allow for providing a complete picture of the activities undertaken at the university level.

TABLE 9-11: ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES' STRATEGIES FOR UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|--|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Queen's | Ottawa | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier | |
| Academic Programming | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Distance education/on-line programs | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Program delivered in another campus | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Program on Disability Studies (unique in Canada) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Programs targeted/relevant to aboriginal students | X | X | | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | |
| Programs targeted to the francophone community | | | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Review curriculum to ensure meets needs of under-represented groups | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Bridging & Pathways | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Transition support for first-generation students | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | | | | | | X | |
| Help with missing prerequisite courses | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Transition support for aboriginal students | X | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| Transition support for mature students | | | | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | X | | | | | |
| Transition support for students with disabilities | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | X | | | X | | |
| Building Capacity | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Continued improvement to campus accessibility | X | | | | | X | | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Diversity training for staff/increase staff diversity | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | X | X | | | | | |
| Enhance technology for students with disabilities | X | | | | | | X | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | | | |
| Increase enrolment of aboriginal students | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Increase enrolment and services for students with disabilities | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Review admission policies to increase pathways | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Outreach | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Community has access to university facilities | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High school students spend time at university (may earn credits) | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Information to high school students | | | | | | | X | X | | | X | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Information/mentoring/orientation for students with disabilities | X | | | X | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | X | |
| Information/mentoring/orientation/outreach - first-generation students | X | | | X | | | | | | | X | X | | | | X | | | | | |

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|--|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Queen's | Ottawa | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier | |
| Information/orientation for under-represented groups (parents/students) | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | | X | |
| Information/outreach for aboriginal students | X | | | | X | | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | |
| Orientation programs | X | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | X | X | |
| University staff visits communities | | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Student Services & Supports | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Aboriginal students – counselling/orientation/mentoring | X | | | X | | X | | | | | X | X | | X | X | | X | | | | |
| Aboriginal students – cultural/awareness centre/house/office | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | | | X | X | | X | | X | | | | | |
| Aboriginal students – general services | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Aboriginal students – participation on campus | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| First-generation students – career services | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| First-generation students – ESL teaching | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| First-generation students – identification project | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| First-generation students – improved financial aid/information | | X | | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| First-generation students – mentoring/orientation | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| First-generation students – quality of services | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| First-year students – office/centre/coordinator | | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| General – Improved financial support services | | | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| General – Increase financial aid awareness | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| General – Mentoring/tutoring/peer support programs | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | | X | X | X | | | | X | |
| General – Promote development of student organizations/groups | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| General – Provide career services to under-represented students | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Students with disabilities – general services | | | | X | X | | | | | | | X | | | | | | X | X | X | |
| Students with disabilities – mentoring program | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | X | | | |
| Students with disabilities – new committee services | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Students with disabilities – office/centre | X | X | X | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |

The MYA/MYAAAs were reviewed to aim at determining whether the strategies indicated already existed, are presented as an improvement of existing strategies or are relatively new or recently introduced. A summary of those interpretations is presented in the table below. There is a certain margin of error on the assessment since universities do not consistently report as to whether a particular strategy is new or already established, although some times the year of introduction of a new initiative is indicated. Moreover, the categories are somewhat overlapping, as the assessment of improvement is based on an interpretation of the reports indicating a continuation, an improvement or a development of initiatives already underway. Most universities present existing initiatives as part of the agreements. The improvement of existing initiatives is an important category as it can consist of greater provision of existing services that are closely associated with the academic mission of the university (e.g., student supports). This is illustrative of the implementation strategy described in section 8.4 above, where the rebranding of ongoing activities, practices, and instruments was highlighted as one widely used by universities. That is, universities found a way to present activities they were already undertaking in a different fashion to fulfill the requirements of the MYA/MYAAAs.

TABLE 9-12: STRATEGIES REGARDING UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS – NEW OR EXISTING

| Novelty of initiative | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|--------|----------|---------|--------------------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York ⁹⁵ | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen's | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Already existing | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Improvement of existing | | | X | | X | | X | | | X | | | | X | X | | | | | X |
| New/recently introduced | X | X | | | X | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | |

As mentioned before, not all strategies identified in the MYA had an outcome indicator associated with it. Indicators are developed for measurable strategies, and thus many focus on the number of students participating or their level of satisfaction with the program offered. Two examples of indicators used are provided below. In the first example in table 9-13, very specific programs are chosen, such as outreach and orientation programs, for which the indicator is simply the number of students participating and the goals are indicated in terms of maintaining or increasing participation. The representativeness of the number of participants in the overall entering cohort is unclear, as well as how this compares to similar activities at other universities. Other than accepting the university report regarding results, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the strategy was beneficial to under-represented groups in general.

⁹⁵ Some new initiatives are indicated in the 2007-08 report back.

TABLE 9-13: UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENT POPULATION INDICATORS AND TARGETS – EX. I

| Program | Indicator | Target | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Outreach programs | Number of students participating | To maintain or increase participation | Increase of 32 students ⁹⁶ | Increase of 59 students (previously reported) New outreach programs, total participation = 1690 students | Total of 2400 participants |
| Orientation programming | Number of students participating | To maintain or increase participation | 8200 students participated ⁹⁷ | Increase of 300 participants | Increase of 400 participants ⁹⁸ |
| Recruitments students under-represented groups | Participation of these students | Maintain or increase | Not provided | Reports counts provided above | Reports counts provided above |

In the second example in table 9-14, the university chose to follow much larger strategies with less specific indicators. In this case, an aboriginal access plan is analyzed and the report-backs indicate whether their plan is proceeding or not. There is also a strategy regarding orientation, in this case, however, instead of specific participation counts, participation rates based on surveys are offered. Finally, a measure of under-represented student retention is approximated with survey data and does not provide a clear picture of the effectiveness of the strategies implemented.

TABLE 9-14: UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENT POPULATION TARGETS AND STRATEGIES – EX. II

| Program | Indicator | Target | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|---|---------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Aboriginal access plan | Plan implementation | | Plan reported underway. Long list of initiatives linked to aboriginal students are included. | Plan proceeding but approach revised | Proceeding. Descriptive update on initiatives |
| Summer orientation | Participation rates | Participation rates consistent with representation in first-year student population | Unable to measure | Use survey data to estimate | Improving participation under-represented students (survey data) |
| Final-year % (of total student population) | Retention measure | NSSE final-year respondents: approx. 2.5% Aboriginal and 15% first generation, or higher (CUSC survey) | Indirectly measured using representation in NSSE survey | Improved by indirect measure using NSSE data | Based on CUSC survey |

⁹⁶ This figure was calculated following information provided in the report-back as the total was not reported.

⁹⁷ No information regarding number of participants the previous year is provided. It is not possible to assess whether there was an improvement or not.

⁹⁸ Indicates increase in activities is due to continued funding from MTCU's First Generation Grant.

Therefore, the information provided by universities is not conducive to clearly assess their performance in these areas. Furthermore, this focus on specific groups and indicators were supported by special funding envelopes that were introduced during the implementation period. Nonetheless, reducing the attention to the enrolment, retention and support strategies of specific groups has been criticized as it marginalizes other problems that are larger, or have greater impact within the overall strategy of the university, as illustrated by the quote below:

“People will focus on a particular indicator, [for] example the proportion of first generation students in university, and are compelled to fund special initiatives to increase that particular group without really recognizing how that fits into the institution as a whole. It’s like focusing on the tree and ignoring the forest (...) It completely misses the boat about the overall increase in enrollment over this last decade” (CEN-12)

This section has illustrated the variety in the strategies reported by universities and the specificity of the indicators chosen to follow-up on the proposed strategies. It exemplifies the difficulties that the government faced in trying to get a picture of system changes based on disconnected examples of institutional activities. In addition, it has shown that the measurement methods were ill-defined and that the targets and monitoring that ensued were not stringent. Even when there is limited knowledge regarding an adequate method to achieve the change that is intended, the government passes on the responsibility to universities, who then must face several challenges, some insurmountable, to meet an ill-defined target.

To finalize, the observed behaviours are analyzed using the Massy (2011) model. As it was indicated in the section about the quantification of under-represented students, the degree of priority alignment between universities and government ranged from strong to poor depending on the institution’s location, mission and existing priorities. Furthermore, some university representatives consider that the requirement to improve accessibility asks from universities to develop strategies in an area that is not fully within their realm of control. The decision to attend university is a personal one that is affected by the individual’s background and their financial context, among other aspects, and the university can offer the opportunity to attend a post-secondary program but does not control the demand for it. In addition, enrollment can increase as a result of changing participation rates, which is not a phenomenon controlled by universities. In that sense, accountability for something that is not under the control of the organizations held accountable is a goal difficult to pursue, as illustrated in the two comments below:

“I suspect that for most institutions, the levels of participation from under-represented groups are more stochastic than it is intentional policy. You can have small programs that deal with trying, bridging programs and things like that, that are aimed at that, but the actual number is—this is student’s choice. I think there became a disconnect between the reality of doing the business, and the expectations of the government bureaucrats” (UNI-2)

“You are attracting students from these under-represented groups because overall participation rates are going up and the value of higher education has been recognized by those under-represented groups. There is a bit of a disconnect between a government policy pronouncement on the one hand and what actually happens inside a particular campus” (CEN-12)

On the other hand, it is noted that priority alignment is not static. As it will be further documented in Chapter 11, one general impact observed from the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs is that they signaled clearly government priorities and provided a focus for universities. Therefore,

for the purposes of analyzing the behaviours observed, priority alignment is coded as ranging from poor to strong regarding the introduction of new activities and initiatives for under-represented students. Furthermore, similarly to the analysis on the SAG, there are different incentives regarding the reporting on the activities. In this regard, priority alignment is poor, as universities do not have an interest in increasing the number of report requirements or on committing to targets that are not fully within their control.

TABLE 9-15: UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS STRATEGIES - ACCORDING TO THE MASSY MODEL

| Area | Alignment of Objectives | Power of the Metric | Saliency of the Reward | Observed Strategy |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| Strategies | Strong to poor | Low | High | Adoption-improve metrics to compliance |
| Reporting on Strategies | Poor | Low | High | Comply |

In both cases, the saliency of the rewards is coded as high, given that improving accessibility was one of the three main objectives of the *Reaching Higher* plan, and universities expected it would receive some visibility coupled with the funding associated with the reporting and the additional pilot project funding envelopes that were distributed. In the case of strategies, the metrics are poor since many of the initiatives undertaken do not have robust measures that can be associated to assess progress. In the case of reporting, the power of the metric is also coded as weak, given the significant leeway offered for the report-backs, where universities could offer examples of activities under way. The expected strategies therefore range from adoption with development of better metrics to compliance. In that regard, the strategy that all universities pursued, where they identified a short list of strategies to report-back with quantitative targets can be either interpreted as ‘adoption with development of better metrics’—that is, only strategies where quantification of results is possible are presented. Alternatively, it can be interpreted as ‘compliance’: Universities chose a subset of strategies that represent their efforts, but mostly in a symbolic fashion as their impact on ongoing activities is minimized. The discussion now turns to strategies and targets regarding the quality of the learning environment.

9.5. STRATEGIES AND TARGETS: QUALITY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In addition to the objectives of accountability and accessibility, the third axis of *Reaching Higher* was quality, which presented particular difficulties as it is a concept that has been characterized as a “wicked problem” (Krause, 2012) given the heated debates around its meaning and the challenges faced for its operationalization. There are disagreements in its definition, which is often value-laden and context specific (Shanahan, 2009b). Quality in higher education can be understood to include uniqueness and excellence of universities, the standards that need to be fulfilled, relevance, efficiency and the ability to change and develop (Harvey & Green, 1993). It can also be defined, following Stensaker (1998) as quality of curricula, quality of teaching, quality of management, quality of learning or student outcomes, and quality of organizational structures (as

reviewed by Frølich, 2008). Nonetheless, quality is one of those recurring themes at the core of policy decisions and new policy initiatives, as the following university representative indicates:

“There’s been many times in the past where (...) the issue of quality has come up, and been identified as an important aspect of university functioning that should be monitored as closely as possible. With all the difficulties associated with it, because just defining quality is a very tricky thing” (UNI-1)

Therefore, efforts to measure quality are pervasive across jurisdictions and “universities now set goals, undertake some level of strategic planning, measure performance and evaluate outputs or outcomes, although to date there is no real consensus within the profession about the appropriateness of performance indicators presently used to measure quality/outputs/outcomes in teaching” (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005, p. 162). There is still a limited understanding of the processes of education and research that are internal to universities. Specialized knowledge on the topic is lacking and the “costs of gaining such knowledge is usually considered to be too great” (Huisman & Currie, 2004). Furthermore, even when definitional and measurement efforts are made, the interpretation of outcomes is difficult (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011).⁹⁹

Since performance contracts are expected to create incentives for organizations to better understand their production processes and to demonstrate improved outputs (Thomas, 1997), it is expected that their introduction to the post-secondary sector will result in a better understanding of the quality process. However, in other jurisdictions such as Catalonia, experience has shown that the indicators used to motivate quality enhancement in the context of performance contracts tend to be generic. As a result, “performance-based funding or contracts, which are usually based upon available input, process, and output measures, have consistently proven to be an inadequate instrument for assuring academic standards” (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001). In a sector where the outcomes of the processes are not well known, this creates a major gap to fill, especially when “easily quantifiable information regarding quality is not the most informative and useful for decision-making and quality improvement” (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 210) and consequently, there are concerns that the indicators chosen result in a dangerous oversimplification of higher education issues (Shanahan, 2009b).

In the MYA template, with the objective to operationalize this concept, MTCU indicates that quality of post-secondary education was defined in the consultation process as *quality of the learning environment*. This includes, but is not limited to, strategies and “programs designed to improve student-faculty engagement and learning quality [such as] academic and student advising, student centered-learning models, first-year seminars, enhanced computers and technology access, learning commons and library expansions and enhancements” (MTCU, 2006a, p. 9). This definition is consistent with “context variables”—one commonly used shorthand in the assessment of quality (Kuh, 1981) and considers elements from two alternate definitions of quality offered by Pascarella (2001), where quality consists of: (i) Excellence in resources including endowment, volumes in the library and class sizes, among others; and (ii) Excellence in effective educational practices, which considers the extent to which a university makes use of the pedagogical and institutional practices

⁹⁹ For instance, the difficulties in the interpretation of outcomes is illustrated by examining high failure rates at examinations: Are these “the result of high academic standards or poor teaching?” (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011, p. 10).

that are known to be correlated with positive cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, such as interactions with faculty and peers and exposure to innovative pedagogical techniques.

Consequently, the MYA template requires that Ontario universities report specifically on faculty hiring, student success (e.g., retention rates) as well as on the strategies and initiatives aimed at improving quality. However, some of the things the government intended to measure are not easy to quantify, which forcefully translates into trade-offs between what it is intended to know and what it actually measured as shortcuts are used. In addition, there are considerations about what universities and government wish to make public. In that sense, a stakeholder comments that keeping the focus under those circumstances is challenging:

“[In the development] of performance indicators there’s always a dance between what it is that you want to know and what it is it’s easy to know, it’s really very, very difficult (...) to keep a really disciplined focus on what is it that we’re trying to achieve? (...) Because that takes time, it takes effort and it takes resources” (CEN-4)

The government’s interest on easy to obtain measures was not always welcome by universities, as indicated in the quote below. Therefore, as mentioned in Chapter 8, universities aimed at influencing the system looking for measures that would be appropriate, such as NSSE, CGPSS and CSRDE, or by promoting approaches that would be more appropriate to measure quality. For instance, in the second quote below, a university representative recalls how his institutions focused internally on processes:

“The government likes straight measures: What’s the student-faculty ratio? What’s your success rate? What’s your graduation rate? What’s your retention from year one to two? The universities pushed back as a whole” (UNI-14)

“Instead of just having a number, we wanted to have a process that examined things (... quality assurance) came out of the whole debate that was there [...] It helped us focus on measurements that we do for quality (...) it actually led to where we are today, with quality assurance priorities. So we have tried to work with the constraint [...] of] how do we measure quality? What is quality?” (UNI-14)

The discussion continues with the different approaches used to measure quality in the MYA/MYAAAs. First, the strategies and targets proposed by individual institutions are discussed. This is followed by their reports of faculty hiring, student engagement and satisfaction and of retention and graduation rates.

9.5.1. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING QUALITY

Universities presented in their MYA plans numerous strategies to promote quality. Once again, the categorization of strategies provided by MTCU in the 2008-09 report-back templates, reproduced in the table below, offers a good starting point to organize the strategies reported by universities.

TABLE 9-16: MTCU'S CATEGORIZATION OF STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

| Type of Strategy | Examples |
|--|---|
| Graduate Education Enhancements | Activities that support graduate students in career development (teaching assistant workshops, conferences, research best practices, funding seminars); strengthen academic resources (program development, research & lab spaces) and promote student engagement |
| Academic Programming | Program development and quality review processes, and improved program policies and quality audits |
| Student Engagement & Satisfaction | Activities to increase student engagement through effective educational practices (interaction, cooperation amongst students, active learning, prompt feedback and time on task). Also includes overall assessments of student satisfaction and engagement through designated tools (KPI, NSSE, and CUSC) |
| Student Services & Supports | Academic supports such as tutoring, academic advising and foundational skills (English and Math). |
| Teaching / Classroom Enhancements | Overall enhancements to students' experience inside the classroom through targets for student-faculty ratio, student assessment of teaching and physical classroom upgrades (technology, seating) |
| Operations | Activities to support effective operations, including faculty / staff development, infrastructure / capital and library and technology enhancements |

Source: MTCU (2009a)

Two of the categories indicated in the table above deserve closer attention. First, graduate education enhancements are presented as a quality initiative. As mentioned earlier, although the government did not request enrolment reporting in the MYA/MYAA templates, several institutions homologate quality with becoming more attractive to graduate students. The research-intensive university model is promoted by the funding structure in Ontario and, as a result, the pervasive impression in the PSE sector is that "there is now widespread contempt for undergraduate teaching among professors, largely because the academic rewards—promotion, status, and increments in salaries—are allocated for exceptional research, and not for exceptional teaching" (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010, p. 78). The preference for the research-intensive university has been criticized as limiting the development of the Ontario post-secondary sector (I. D. Clark et al., 2009) and this trend is at the core of the differentiation discussion that has been briefly documented throughout this study. Moreover, as it was discussed in Chapter 7, there is tension in the Ontario post-secondary system between a funding approach that promotes convergence towards a unique model and the search for original and site-specific activities.

A second point to highlight is the section of student engagement and satisfaction. The engagement language comes from the new instruments introduced during this period, such as NSSE and CGPSS, an indication of the institutionalization of engagement practices due to a measurement

instrument being introduced in the province (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004). Using those MTCU broad categories, the strategies implemented by each organization are summarized in table 9-17 below. The list provides a summary of the initiatives reported by universities, as many were grouped to provide a sense of the topics covered without entering into specific details. The strategies indicated were quite diverse and sometimes long lists of activities lacking clear linkages to indicators were provided. In that regard, a former university representative recalls:

“These were just a hodgepodge of stuff. I remember when we first prepared ours, it was just throwing in stuff into the quality, it was all legitimately good things to do, but it was really a list of thing as opposed to any serious impact of how it related to strategic priorities (... nor how there were) derived from the priorities” (CEN-8)

Regarding the strategies chosen to improve quality there are a few elements in which the majority of the universities concur (e.g., increasing the use of new technologies in the classroom, offering faculty development opportunities, enhancing the library collection) and some are a reflection of the time (e.g., expand wireless service on campus). Also, the list of activities is far from comprehensive, as it reflects the initiatives each university chose to report on, without necessarily being representative of all quality-related activities underway in their campus. For instance, only some universities report on quality assurance processes; however, this is a mandatory requirement in the Ontario post-secondary sector (Nicholson, 2011) that is generally quite demanding on universities and their resources (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Csiszmadia et al., 2008). In addition, some initiatives reported result from innovation happening in the academic heartland, independently from any reporting requirements or central administration’s objectives, as indicated below:

“There are people who would have innovated anyway, these firebrands who go out and figure out whole new ways to teach courses (...) eventually it catches on. But these people are out there doing their stuff regardless of MYAs and so we are able to capitalize on those good stories to make it look as if the MYAs were capturing our innovation” (UNI-6)

Although the information may be incomplete or may result from decentralized innovation processes, it offers examples of activities that are expected to contribute to the academic mission of the universities and of the approaches used to improve quality. The challenge, however, is that the way in which those activities interact among each other and the degree to which they actually contribute to improving the quality of the learning experience are not clearly known. There is no proven strategy to solve the problem (Lemelin, 1999). For instance, many of the factors that refer to resources, although of easy quantitative measurement, such as average class sizes and library resources, have been empirically shown to have little impact on learning outcomes ((Maingot & Zeghal, 2008; Pascarella, 2006). Despite the lacking empirical evidence to support their linkages to quality (Pascarella, 2006), these activities have become institutionalized as elements conducive to quality and are thus legitimate measures to report in the existing context. In addition, the linkages between the activities reported and the university’s internal priorities or the government’s emphasis on quality are not explicitly stated and the structure and context required to understand the content of the reports is often lacking.

As indicated before, universities based the content of the MYA/MYAA on their strategic and academic plans and, sometimes, this linkage was explicitly stated. However, the MYA/MYAA do not

clearly outline when the initiatives started or how they were funded. Similarly to the analysis of accessibility initiatives, the table below summarizes an attempt to interpret the degree of novelty of the initiatives reported. Although some initiatives are presented as new, there is no evidence that these were created directly as a result of the new instrument or of the *Reaching Higher* initiative, and in the vast majority of cases, these consist of existing or an improvement of existing initiatives.

TABLE 9-17: STRATEGIES REGARDING THE QUALITY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – NEW OR EXISTING

| Novelty of initiative | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|--------|------------------------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen's ¹⁰⁰ | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Existing initiative | X | X | | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X | | | X | |
| Improve existing initiative | X | X | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X |
| From Strategic Plan | | | | | X | X | | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| New or recently introduced | X | | | | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X |

¹⁰⁰ Queen's reports in their MYA that the strategies in their plan reflected both their recently approved strategic plan as well as the priorities set by *Reaching Higher* (Queen's University, 2006).

TABLE 9-18: SUMMARY OF QUALITY INITIATIVES REPORTED IN MYA/MYAAAS

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|----------|-----------|-------|------|---------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Queen's | Ottawa | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurent. | Nipissing | Trent | OCAD | Ryerson | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Academic Programming | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Design and develop new/innovative programs | X | X | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| Develop new programs - Graduate level | | | | X | | | X | | | | | X | | X | | | | X | | |
| Ensure quality - Graduate programs | X | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ensure quality - Undergraduate programs | X | | | X | | X | | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Improve or expand coop programs | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Promote development of interdisciplinary programs | | | | | | | | | X | | | X | | | | | X | | | |
| Graduate Education Enhancements | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Financial aid - Improve support to graduate students | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Follow up on time to completion | | | | X | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Improve graduate student experience | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Increase graduate enrolment | | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Offer new space/facilities for graduate students | | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | |
| Create new faculty, new graduate school | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | |
| Provide career development opportunities to grad students | | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide opportunities to share research | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Provide additional support/training to TAs | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Surveys - Measure performance & satisfaction (CGPSS) | X | | | X | | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Operations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Continue to increase research funding/support | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Create net new faculty positions | X | | | | X | X | X | | | | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | | |
| Create net support staff positions | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Develop inter-institutional partnerships | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Improve facilities | | | | | | X | | | X | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Improve funding to student support activities | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Improve support to first-year students | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Increase number of first-year courses taught by tenured faculty | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Increase support from alumni | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| IT - improve overall technology on campus/network | X | | | | | X | | | | | X | X | | X | | | | | | X |
| IT - introduce/expand wireless | X | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | | | |
| Library improvement - Expand collection (regular/electronic) | X | | | X | X | | X | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X |
| Library improvement - Expand services | | | | X | X | | X | | | | | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Library improvement – General | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|----------|-----------|-------|------|---------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Queen's | Ottawa | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurent. | Nipissing | Trent | OCAD | Ryerson | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Library improvement - Learning Commons / Building | X | X | | X | | X | X | | | | | | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Measure - student retention | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Offer courses in alternative delivery formats | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Ontario's first laptop university | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Organizational change - new senior position research | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Organizational change - new senior position students | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Provide training and faculty development opportunities | X | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | | X | | X | X |
| Student Engagement & Satisfaction | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Improve support/new opportunities first-year students | X | X | | X | | | | X | X | X | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Continue to increase research funding/support | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Create more on-campus jobs/improve career services | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Expand consultation on "Excellence in Learning" | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Improve/maintain faculty-student interactions | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Increase number of students with admission average > 80% | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Internationalization - Changes to curriculum | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Internationalization - Promote study abroad | | X | X | | X | | X | | | X | | | | | X | | X | | | |
| Introduce capstone courses at undergraduate level | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Introduce learning communities | X | X | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide experiential education opportunities | X | | | | X | | X | X | X | | | | | | X | | | | | X |
| Provide opportunities for undergraduate research | | | X | | | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Support diversity on campus | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Survey - Teaching evaluations | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Surveys - measure performance & satisfaction (NSSE, CUSC) | X | | | X | | X | X | X | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Student Services & Supports | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Academic advising and support | X | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Develop mentoring/peer tutoring program | X | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | X |
| One window/integrate services to students | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Provide financial aid | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide leadership opportunities | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Teaching / Classroom Enhancements | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Class size - maintain/reduce | | | | X | X | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Increase use of new technologies in the classroom | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Upgrade classrooms/laboratories | | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | | X | | | | | |
| Sustain or improve student-faculty ratio | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | X | | X | | | X |

Although the objective of the MYA is to report on outcomes, most strategies outlined do not have a direct indicator for measurement, therefore, progress is not reported on all of them. For very concrete measures, there is the possibility of indicating whether a specific goal was achieved (e.g., number of multi-media classrooms, number of capstone projects) but these results are often expressed in absolute terms which reduces the ability to discern their campus-wide impact—for instance, what is the share of students exposed to the changes introduced?—or are hard to interpret, as highlighted in the two quotes below:

“Just because the Center for Support Teaching served 100 students in 2005 [and] this year 500, is not really a measure of the kind of interaction that goes on. Just because my student got 64, and another student might got 85 on NSSE that doesn’t mean they spend any less quality time with that student [... the long lists of initiatives was a way] of saying in the agreements ‘you can’t really count this. It’s a qualitative thing’” (FAC-2)

“Just saying “seven” means nothing (...) because they don’t have any context for it. You don’t know what that policy goal was. You don’t know what the target was. You don’t know what other institutions are doing. You don’t know what’s being done within the institution to achieve “seven”. You don’t know if seven is good, or seven is bad, you just don’t know” (CEN-1)

A university administrator who participated in the process reports how the identification of indicators took time away from understanding how students learn and under what circumstances towards “playing games with numbers in order to give our auditors what we perceive them to want – a total or a count” (Mighty, 2009, p. 18). Moreover, some of the indicators that are used as global proxies for quality come from the surveys that institutions committed to participate in (i.e., NSSE, CGPSS and CUSC), for which details are provided below, but there are no clear linkages made between survey results and the strategies in place. Two examples are provided below to illustrate the kinds of indicators used. In the first example, presented in table 9-19, only three indicators are used, two of which are related to faculty hiring proposals. The third indicator refers to class sizes. There are no indicators provided regarding any other strategies in terms of expanding library collections and services, academic support programs, promoting internationalization, improving technology use in classrooms, offering training opportunities to faculty, or counseling activities, that were all strategies presented by the university with the objective to improve the quality of the learning environment.

TABLE 9-19: QUALITY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, STRATEGIES, INDICATORS & TARGETS – EXAMPLE I

| Strategy | Indicator | Target | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| Hire more tenure-stream faculty | Tenure-stream complement | To increase | Increase of 40 | Total 1445 (> target) | Total 1470 (= target) |
| Improve student-faculty ratios | Student-faculty ratios | To maintain or improve | Undergrad ratio improved Grad ratio increased | Several ratios reported. Maintain or slightly increased | Several ratios reported. Maintain or slightly increased |
| Manage class sizes | Average class size % time in classes <30 students | -Maintain or reduce sizes -Maintain or increase % time in classes < 30. | - reduced 1 st , 2 nd , & 3 rd year -increased % time for 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd year classes | Increase in class size -increased | Increase in class size -increased |

In the second example, presented in table 9-10, although the student-faculty ratio is also chosen as an indicator, most other indicators are less specific and include benchmarks and results from surveys.

TABLE 9-20: QUALITY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, STRATEGIES, INDICATORS & TARGETS – EX. II

| Strategy | Indicator | Target | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| High Quality Instruction | NSSE Benchmarks and satisfaction questions | Benchmarks above or at provincial average (other specific targets for satisfaction question) | No NSSE report | Not all benchmarks at target level | No new NSSE data |
| | CGPSS satisfaction questions | Targets for CGPSS to be determined after 1 st participation | Provides baseline for GPSS survey | No new CGPSS data | No new CGPSS data |
| | Student-faculty ratios | Reach 23.5 by 2007-08 and maintain | 23.4 | 23.5 | 23.4 |
| | % first-year students taught by contract instructors | Reduce to 25% by 2008-09 | 29.2% | 26% | 29.6% |
| | OCGS reviews | All graduate programs reviewed are “good quality” | Reports on recent evaluations | Achieved | NA |
| | Classrooms electronically equipped | All classrooms (20+ seats) are equipped by 2007-08 | Moving towards goal. Achieved target for the specific year | Completed 2006-07 | Not reported |
| | Campus network | Upgrade buildings | Achieved number of upgrades planned | Not reported | Not reported |

The examples provided so far illustrate how the lack of a standard as to how to report resulted in great inconsistencies across universities regarding the level of detail provided. Therefore, some universities report with a minimalist approach (e.g., Toronto) and others include many details. This translated into an enormous challenge for the government to analyze the reports obtained and to construct a system-level evaluation of progress and initiatives. These observations echo the criticisms already exposed by HEQCO and summarized early in this study (Iacobucci, 2009), and explain to a certain degree the transformation of the report-backs into data collection tools in future iterations. It is also illustrative of how ambiguous objectives will result in experimental implementation and variation across different organizations (Matland, 1995).

Regarding the impact of the reporting requirement on the academic activities of universities, many of the quality activities identified are removed from classroom instruction practices. These focused more on services, which are the purview of central administration, and thus can be interpreted as a buffering initiative intended to protect activities internal to the organization (Krücken & Meier, 2006; Oliver, 1991; R. W. Scott, 2008). Furthermore, the analysis suggests that university administrators buffered it by reporting on existing strategies and by providing high-level measures of success, as observed elsewhere (Krücken & Meier, 2006). In that sense, organizations will simply use objectives which they can measure instead of their priorities (V. Martin & Jobin, 2004). This idea of buffering strategies will be further developed in Chapter 11. Before delving into the analysis using the Massy (2011) model, three other sections of content are presented, including reports on faculty hiring, the measurement of student satisfaction and engagement via student surveys, and the results obtained in retention measures.

9.5.2. REPORTING ON FACULTY HIRING

Faculty hiring is one element of quality explicitly identified by the Ministry and an important component of implementing *Reaching Higher*. Universities were asked to report on planned and actual hiring of full-time tenured, full-time limited term and part-time faculty, as well as hiring of student services and administrative staff. These figures were provided by all universities, however, clear or explicit definitions were lacking, which limited the possibility to compare the proposed targets and results obtained across universities, as mentioned by a faculty representative in the quote below:

“There is no common sets of definitions (...) even the hard data like the number of new faculty are not really comparable (...) for full-time faculty, they may have different populations, presumably they are using the Statistics Canada method, but we don’t know for sure. The full time equivalent for part time faculty varies from institution to institution, so there is no comparability between institutions” (FAC-2)

From the perspective of universities and their own accountability, the ability to compare their efforts and performance to other universities in regards to faculty and staff hiring is of no concern. The agent of accountability, universities in this case, drives the choices of measure by taking into consideration its context and objectives (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010). Although it is possible to analyze whether universities met their own targets as proposed for net new faculty in their MYA plans without having comparable definitions, these figures cannot be added to a system-wide total.

Throughout the three-year period of implementation of the MYA, only six out of the 20 universities met their targets. The numerous explanations offered for falling short of planned net new hiring are summarized in table 9-21 below. Budget restraint is justified in a time of crisis in financial markets and economic recessions coupled with uncertainties regarding government funding. Government funding uncertainty provides evidence that the stability and predictability expected from the multi-year character of the agreements was not realized. Some universities also explain the variance between “actual” and “planned” staff new hires as within a range expected for a large and decentralized organization, where forecasting is difficult. The abolition of mandatory retirement is another factor offered as an explanation for the shortfalls. The difficulties for planning are more often mentioned by larger universities whereas five out of six universities that met the

proposed targets are in the primarily undergraduate group and generally smaller in size. This suggests that smaller universities may have greater abilities to modify their budgets and priorities to fulfill externally-imposed requirements.

TABLE 9-21: RATIONALE PROVIDED WHEN NOT MEETING FACULTY OR STAFF HIRING TARGETS

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen's | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT |
| Budget restraint/constraints | X | X | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | X | |
| Hiring faculty requires significant lead time | X | | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Abolition of mandatory retirement makes changes more volatile/Higher than expected attrition | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | | | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| Uncertainty regarding government funding | | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Difficulty to plan/forecast in a decentralized organization | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| No explanation provided | | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| No rationale as targets are met | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | X | X | X | | X | X |

Despite the government's original intent to make universities commit to their targets, there is no public information about any financial penalties to universities who failed to recruit the planned number of faculty (OCUFA, 2008). OCUFA's criticism goes even further to affirm that "university commitments under the MYAAs notwithstanding, increased funding and accountability mechanisms have not yielded faculty hiring at levels that would fulfill the hopes raised by *Reaching Higher*" (OCUFA, 2009a, p. 5). Moreover, as a result of the difficulties in meeting the original targets, many universities decided to scale them back:

Initially, a significant proportion of full-time faculty hiring was of faculty with limited term contracts. Overall, 23 per cent of planned faculty hiring was for contractually limited term appointments, well above the ten-year average of 13 per cent before the double cohort. In addition, actual hiring for 2006-07 proved to be significantly less than planned. Planned hiring for 2007-08 was scaled back from previous plans and, even though actual hiring exceeded plans, combined hiring over 2006-07 and 2007-08 was three per cent less than planned (...) hiring plans for 2008-09 are 27 per cent below the previous year (OCUFA 2009a, pp. 3-4).¹⁰¹

In section 8.5, it was noted that the lack of enforcement on the government's part to retain funding when targets were unmet is not exclusive to faculty hiring. This raises the question regarding the extent to which sanctions are an integral part of an accountability relationship, a point

¹⁰¹ OCUFA continues to express concerns about limited funding to improve student-faculty ratios in years thereafter, particularly when new funding was allocated to the sector in the 2011 Provincial Budget (OCUFA, 2011).

that will be further discussed in Chapter 10. The analysis now turns to the use of student engagement measures in the MYA/MYAAS.

9.5.3. MEASUREMENT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION

In early 2006, all Ontario universities committed to participate in surveys to measure student engagement and satisfaction and entered into a data protocol agreement with MTCU to submit survey results (MTCU, 2006a). Although there was a commitment to participate and to share the information with the ministry, there was no compulsory requirement to report on these results publicly or to establish targets and strategies in the MYA plan. Following the government’s template that indicated that “institutions may wish to use their NSSE or CGPSS results as their indicators of quality in the section above” (MTCU, 2006a, p. 11), some universities chose selected results to report in the plan, but others remained silent regarding the surveys, as summarized in the following table.

TABLE 9-22: REPORTING ON SURVEY RESULTS (NSSE, CGPSS) IN THE MYA/MYAAS

| | Comprehensive | | | | | Medical-Doctoral | | | | | Primarily Undergraduate | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|----------|---------|------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|----------|------------|-----------|------|---------|-------|------|------------|
| | Carleton | Guelph | Waterloo | Windsor | York | McMaster | Ottawa | Queen’s | Toronto | Western | Algoma | Brock | Lakehead | Laurentian | Nipissing | OCAD | Ryerson | Trent | UOIT | W. Laurier |
| Mentions surveys in MYA ¹⁰² | | X | | | X | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Uses indicators in quality of learning section | X | X | | X | | X | X | X | | | | | X | | X | X | X | | | |
| No mention of survey results | | | | X | | | | | X | | X | X | | | | | | X | X | X |

Those universities that included survey results as indicators in their quality learning section often report on other initiatives on campus to increase engagement including the creation of working groups to discuss survey results; the creation of specific initiatives to support first-year students; the introduction of learning communities; and the creation of new positions or offices to attend to these areas. Therefore, in some universities, the introduction of these new instruments was conducive to organizational changes, to the introduction of new activities, to the stimulation of conversations about quality on campus and even to modifications to teaching approaches, which is consistent with similar effects that have been observed in the United States as a result of the introduction of NSSE (Ewell, 2010) and are a clear example of university adaptation (Jongbloed et al., 1999). The table below summarizes the changes that universities reported in their MYAAs during the period under study.

¹⁰² These universities drafted some text in the NSSE section of the MYA/MYAAs.

TABLE 9-23: ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES RESULTING FROM NSSE, AS REPORTED BY UNIVERSITIES

| | University ¹⁰³ | Organizational Changes or Activity Reported |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Comprehensive | Carleton | The 2007-08 report-back indicates the creation of a NSSE Advisory Committee to assist the university in identifying key determinants of student engagement and in promoting increased engagement within each faculty |
| | Guelph | In their MYA, Guelph reports being the first university to create an Office of First Year Studies, as one of the “key messages in NSSE is that students who become engaged early are more likely to stay and succeed” (University of Guelph, 2006a, p. 12). In addition, reports participating in several workshops on NSSE, as well as forming a university-wide committee to review “the 2006 NSSE data to identify quality indicators that align with the University’s unique focus” (University of Guelph, 2006a, p. 19). In years thereafter, this information is integrated into the Quality of the Learning Environment section. |
| | Windsor | No changes reported |
| | York | In the 2006-07 report-back, this university reports the creation of a NSSE steering group chaired by the new Associate Vice President, Academic Learning Initiatives. No specific report on NSSE/CGPSS results or activities in MYYAs report-backs thereafter. |
| Medical | Western | No changes reported |
| | Queen’s | In the 2007-08 report-back, indicates that “numerous initiatives directly or indirectly related to NSSE were under development or in implementation during the 2007-08 year. These include learning communities projects in residence, course enhancements (...), new course advising model...” (Queen’s University, 2008, pp. 10–11). In addition, the 2008-09 report-back indicates that in response to NSSE 2006 results, these have been incorporated into budgeting and performance processes, into the university-wide planning metrics framework and that numerous pilot projects in engagement improvement have been started |
| | McMaster | A First-Year Experience Office is mentioned in the MYA. However, no link is made with NSSE |
| Primarily Undergraduate | Lakehead | Reports in their MYA that they will study NSSE results to determine a baseline expectation for future monitoring of the level of success in student engagement |
| | Ryerson | No changes reported. Unclear if a 2005-06 President’s Commission on Student Engagement and Experience mentioned in their MYA was related to NSSE. |
| | Nipissing | Using the results from analyzing first-year experience, this university reports that a series of recommendations are being implemented, but few details are offered |
| | Laurentian | Indicates in MYA that NSSE results will be used “to provide rational shifts in programs and services for students” (Laurentian University, 2006, p. 9) |

The large diversity in the content of reporting and actions illustrated in the table above is the reflection of the commitment made in the MYA, which referred to reporting and not to actions. Consequently, each university was free to use the survey results in the way they saw appropriate for

¹⁰³ Only universities that report on NSSE and CGPSS in their MYA/MYAA are included in this table (i.e., Toronto, UOIT, Algoma, Trent, Brock, Wilfred Laurier, OCAD are not included).

their circumstances, but in the context of the MYA/MYAAAs, the requirement was limited to reporting, as illustrated by the two quotes below:

“Our commitment was a procedural commitment as opposed to a results commitment. Within the early stages of the MYA [we committed] that we would conduct and report on those two surveys” (UNI-6)

“There is no requirement to the Multi-Year Agreement to actually do additional things with [the surveys...] if an institution wasn’t interested in taking on board the lessons of NSSE, they didn’t have to do that. All they need to do was run NSSE and report out on those field, that’s all is required through the agreement” (UNI-13)

Moreover, although the data from the surveys was being shared internally to universities, the actions undertaken were context and university-specific, as illustrated by the two following quotes:

“Our administration has been so careful in the way they present this data, that they have tried to present them in ways that are supportive and non-threatening and so I don’t think they have driven a budget decision or that sort of thing” (FAC-4)

“It sounds very unclear to me how this stuff gets used at the institutional level anywhere. On occasion it might get distributed to deans, but if there is any follow ups, it will be up to you” (CEN-12)

In that regard, NSSE is characterized more as an input than as a driver, as just one of the many other elements that inform university decision-making, since it is the mission of universities that focuses their attention on the student experience:

“I wouldn’t go quite that far [as to suggest that NSSE inspired the changes] because we are working on a variety of fronts and NSSE is an input to what we are doing but [... our] mission is to help the students succeed [... thus] the campus community has been mobilized by the notion of providing a better student experience (...). I wouldn’t want to imply that somehow because we came up with some NSSE results, somehow, somebody saw the light, and therefore they changed their behavior. It’s a long process of trying to understand what is going on and what sort of interventions might help and then trying them out” (UNI-4)

Although the introduction of reporting requirements in the MYA/MYAAAs regarding student surveys does not explain the extent to which new activities in student engagement were undertaken in Ontario university campuses, the MYA/MYAAAs did play a role in motivating the participation of all Ontario universities in the NSSE survey on a three-year cycle, which echoes the observation that quality assessment information in the post-secondary sector can be spearheaded by government influence (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b). Given that the MYA template indicated that it “may be revised in future years to incorporate institutional or sector variables to improve student engagement and satisfaction scores” (MTCU, 2006a, p. 11), specific requirements to report on NSSE results were added in the 2009-10 report-backs. However, there was disagreement in the sector regarding the questions that would be published, which resulted in choosing the most general satisfaction questions in the survey for public reporting:

- (i) How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?
- (ii) If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?

Sector stakeholders indicate that these questions are of little use and that they preclude from comparing benchmarks or engagement activities, as highlighted in the two quotes below:

“There was disagreement within CUPA about how much we would expose ourselves to some risk if we were to do more explicit or more detailed engagement reporting (...) The only thing that people would agree to was those two (...)bland satisfaction questions (...) there would be no requirement for consistent benchmark reporting, no interpretation of issues around rates of change” (UNI-6)

“The NSSE stuff that is published, the benchmarks and the two questions, the overall that you satisfied, they correlate almost perfectly with the Globe and Mail satisfaction survey so there is no much use” (CEN-8)

The choice of these general questions is, nonetheless, consistent with the reluctance in making NSSE data public in the United States, where although the original intention was to make the results from all universities public with the objective to redirect attention away from public rankings that place all their weight on resources and reputation, university representatives resisted to publicly disclose this information and their participation was made confidential (Ewell, 2010). These concerns are rooted in the observation that results from these kinds of instruments can be taken out of context and misused (Lewis et al., 2007). The choice of questions is also consistent with the increased use of “client satisfaction” measures as these are rationalized as a relatively straightforward measure of performance that privileges a bottom-up approach and holds the government accountable to citizens (Heinrich, 2003). Client satisfaction measures, however, have been criticized given the volatility and ambivalence of the evaluations observed which cast doubts of the extent to which public managers “will get a clear picture of whether or not government performance is improving simply by tracking client satisfaction rankings” (Heinrich, 2003, p. 32). In fact, the use of NSSE that focused on actionable measures of participation and engagement rather than dwelling on satisfaction, was considered an improvement on satisfaction measures. The irony, however, is that the choice of questions to follow-up on, given conflicting objectives and the fear of risky information disclosure, were the basic satisfaction questions, that did not solve the issues mentioned above and that have limited value as a performance measure. The discussion continues with CSRDE, another major measuring initiative that was introduced during the early years of *Reaching Higher* and that was included in the MYA/MYAAAs.

9.5.4. MEASURING RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

The last quality element on which the agreements explicitly request a report is student success, measured as graduation and retention rates. Since universities already report on graduation rates via the Key Performance Indicators (KPI), no details on that indicator are provided in the original three-year plan and its report-backs. Regarding retention, MTCU requested the following measures: (i) from 1st to 2nd year (ii) from 2nd to 3rd and (iii) for 3rd to 4th year. Although retention rates are widely used as a proxy for quality, it is recognized in the sector that retention is primarily a measure of performance:

“The retention one, CSRDE is (...) a precursor of the graduation performance indicator. That’s not so much a quality [measure...] it’s mostly a performance measure” (UNI-1)

Since all universities agreed to participate in CSRDE, this provided a coherent methodology to calculate and report on retention, and it is thus possible to compare their reporting strategies, particularly with regards to establishing a target. Some universities identified a target set over a constant range, other identified a moving target (e.g., such as a three-year moving average) and others identified a fixed number. The table below summarizes which universities from the

comprehensive and medical-doctoral groups established a fixed target and those who established a moving target. A fifty-fifty breakdown is observed, but those who chose the fixed target were members of the G10 when the MYA plan was developed, which suggests some kind of collusion in their decision-making.

TABLE 9-24: STRATEGIES FOR FIXING THE RETENTION TARGET

| | Carleton | McMaster | Queen's | Guelph | Ottawa | Toronto | Waterloo | Western | Windsor | York |
|---------------|----------|----------|---------|--------|--------|---------|----------|---------|---------|------|
| Fixed Target | | X | X | | | X | X | X | | |
| Moving Target | X | | | X | X | | | | X | X |

Regardless of the strategy chosen for establishing the target, not all universities were able to meet it, and a summary of the explanations provided is presented in the table below. The reasons enumerated range from methodological challenges (e.g., due to program composition) to university-level drivers (e.g., staff strikes), to system-level causes (e.g., higher performance of the double cohort).

TABLE 9-25: RATIONALE OFFERED FOR FALLING SHORT OF THE RETENTION TARGET¹⁰⁴

| | University | Organizational Changes or Activity Reported |
|------------------|------------|--|
| Comprehensive | Carleton | In 2006-07, indicates staff strike started at beginning of the term. In 2008-09, indicates that Ontario retention rates have declined, which coupled with a decline in Carleton's admission averages, explains the decrease observed |
| | Waterloo | Explains that the target was not met due to methodological problems with the 2006 CSRDE submission and the challenges of a coop environment for measuring retention. Thus, results are lower than expected. The proposed strategy is to review the methodology |
| | Windsor | Explains that target was unmet due to a labor disruption |
| | York | Explains that double cohort was over performers and that decrease in retention rates is due to cohort effects and not to York's strategies. Provides additional information on students not entering directly from high school |
| Medical Doctoral | McMaster | Identified source of problem (international and male) to develop target strategies. No details on target strategies provided |
| | Ottawa | Identified source of problem (male students), and indicates that results have been distributed to faculties to increase awareness. No details on additional strategies |
| | Queen's | Argues that falling short of target is still acceptable since it is within the observed retention historical range |

¹⁰⁴ Includes only universities where target was not met (Toronto, Guelph, Western and Ryerson met their targets).

| | University | Organizational Changes or Activity Reported |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Primarily Undergraduate | Algoma | No detailed explanation, but recognizes that original targets were set too high |
| | Brock | Influence of the double cohort, which had higher retention rates, is dissipating |
| | Lakehead | Variances are expected. In 2008-09, indicate that increasing population of under-represented students may have led to reduced retention rates |
| | Laurentian | Increasing difficulties retaining adult students |
| | Nipissing | Majority of students are non-local requiring financial aid and therefore retention rates tend to be low. Also, indicates that many factors determining retention are not under the control of the university. |
| | OCAD | When target for 3 rd to 4 th year is unmet in 2006-07, argue that students must leave university for a year due to lack of funding or may reduce load to part-time. For other targets, indicates that it is close to proposed range. |
| | Trent | Reports several strategies in the 2007-08 report-backs, including improved advising online, improve resources for programming, and implementation of a case management approach for students severely at risk |
| | UOIT | In 2007-08, indicate that some faculties enforced stricter policies on academic standing. In 2008-09, targets are revised as CSRDE methodology is used for the first time. |
| | Wilfred Laurier | Reduction in target rates as students after the double cohort face difficulties in key subject areas such as mathematics and science. Also, retention rates are adversely affected by collaborative programs with colleges if students leave the university to attend college for a year. Targets are revised down in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 report-backs. |

This reporting element provides little information regarding any changes that may have been specifically introduced to improve retention results or the extent to which the initiative to report on CSRDE retention rates improved the awareness, interest, or actions related to retention at different universities. That is, in the section where the government requests a report on retention rates, this request focuses on updates of the retention figures without inquiring about any follow ups, strategies or proposals as to how the problem is addressed. As per the 2007-08 report-backs, the government had added the requirement to outline any remedial action when falling short of the targets. These remedial actions are noted in the report-backs either in the retention section or in the quality section. A summary of the initiatives indicated throughout the reports is presented in the table below. When universities choose not to report on an item, it cannot be implied that they do not undertake any activities in this regard. A challenge in reading these reports is that the link between the different strategies undertaken and changes in retention measures is not clearly established, and the two are reported separately.

The universities interest on maintaining or improving retention does not arise solely from the requirement to report on it to the Ontario government, as it is consistent with university mandates and policies. However, an unintended consequence that has been documented elsewhere from focusing on retention reports is when academic standards are reduced so that an outcome indicator

improves (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b; Zepke & Leach, 2007). According to the list of activities indicated below, this unintended consequence does not appear to be observed in Ontario. Nonetheless, the possibility that this may happen is forewarned in a recent paper for the sector, where it is stated that the correlation between retention and access may encourage schools to build barriers to entry so that retention rates could be improved, which would negatively impact the Ontario government's objective of expanding student access (Albert, 2010).

TABLE 9-26: STRATEGIES AIMED AT IMPROVING RETENTION REPORTED IN THE MYA/MYAA¹⁰⁵

| | University | Strategies |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Comprehensive | Carleton | Developed an early detection system for students in difficulty, peer mentoring, interventions and support are indicated in 2007-08 report-back. Research regarding NSSE, BUSSE is mentioned. Retention information is also widely distributed on campus. |
| | Guelph | MYA indicates that advising, counseling and other activities directed to aboriginal students will help improve their retention rates. Creation of an Office of First-Year Students to promote their engagement and consequently, retention. |
| | Waterloo | A tutoring program aims at increasing retention of all students (access strategies). However, only participation and satisfaction and tracked. |
| | Windsor | No specific mentions are made |
| | York | In the 2007-08 report-back, indicate orientation activities aimed at increasing retention, but no specific linkage is shown in the indicators. In 2008-09 report-back, identifies new quantitative research and development of methodologies to identify students at risk |
| Primarily Undergraduate | M McMaster | Indicates intent in improving rates and working with faculties, no additional details. |
| | Algonia | In MYA, identifies that strategies that improve access are also aimed at increasing retention of under-represented students. In report-backs, indicates they expect to increase retention rates as a result of an increased focus on student success strategies. |
| | Brock | Mentions a subcommittee dedicated to improve recruitment and retention of aboriginal students in the MYA, but offers no follow-up information in report-backs. |
| | Laurentian | Retention efforts to be focused on new degree-seeking adult students (MYA, p.16). In the 2006-07 report-back, indicated a new online academic support service network and orientation program; tracking use of key services (First-Year Experience Office, Writing Assistance Program, and Native Student Affairs Office); new surveys undertaken; and expansion of mentoring program. |
| | Lakehead | In 2008-09, mentions further analysis of survey results to understand causes. Creates an Enrolment Management Sub-committee to develop proposals to improve retention, satisfaction and engagement, and to collaborate with faculties. |
| | Nipissing | Proposed a number of initiatives in the MYA, including expansion of preparation courses (e.g., University Success course, UNIV1011), evaluation of student first-year experience, new survey to identify attrition reasons. By 2007-08 report, variance in retention is considered small and university indicates that retention is based on many factors, some of which not under its control. In 2008-09, indicates will continue to work towards better retention, but no details are provided. |
| | Trent | As of 2007-08, introducing an advising website, case management approach for students severely at risk (including mentoring, specific courses, and close follow-ups). Provides no indication of how student at risks are identified. |
| | UOIT | Indicates that select faculties must enforce stricter policies on academic standing. |
| | Wilfred Laurier | Introduction of supplemental instruction programs, peer tutoring services, creation of an Enrolment Management subcommittee dedicated to the study of retention. |

¹⁰⁵ The University of Ottawa, Queen's University, the University of Toronto, Western University, Ryerson University and OCAD do not specify any strategies under the retention section of the report-backs.

In fact, one of the greater challenges with the use of retention as a quality measure for universities is that a student's decision to withdraw early may not be due to institutional practices, as personal attributes and dispositions predate institutional influences (Zepke & Leach, 2007). The lack of control over performance measures used in accountability systems is a recurring criticism. For instance, it has been argued that the use of output measures is too crude, since equating outputs with "quality" or "success" without considering the nature of inputs (such as funding levels or the nature of the student body) is like ranking hospitals on the basis of the mortality rates of their patients without knowing how healthy their inpatients were to begin with (Finnie & Usher, 2005). It is recommended that if sanctions or rewards are going to be applied according to results, that the linkages between student personal interest, student maturation, family support and financial status and retention/graduation rates need to be better understood (Liu, 2011). Therefore, meaningful performance indicators should link university structures and process to outcomes, independently of input factors (Maingot & Zeghal, 2008).

9.5.5. ANALYSIS OF QUALITY STRATEGIES FOLLOWING MASSY (2011)

To conclude the section on quality, these strategies are analyzed in light of the Massy (2011) model and its explanatory factors of priority alignment, saliency of the reward and power of the metric. As mentioned before, priority alignment between universities and government regarding quality initiatives in general is, in principle, very strong. Moreover, in the case of the MYA/MYAAs, this was a key element of the funding initiative, as it was the Quality Improvement Fund and later the Access Higher Quality Education Fund that were associated with the MYA/MYAAs, and therefore saliency of the reward was high too. The challenge lies with the measurement of quality, as the metrics are, in general, weak. Furthermore, as mentioned in the case of accessibility strategies, universities face different incentives regarding the undertaking of initiatives to improve quality versus the incentives to report on their activities.

Regarding strategies to improve quality, universities had, similarly to the case of initiatives for accessibility, significant leeway to choose their strategies and associated indicators. Moreover, since specific metrics for the general strategies were not provided, it is observed that there were many examples of rebranding and retooling ongoing activities to present them in new light to the government. Given that there is strong priority alignment, that the saliency of the rewards is high and that the power of the metrics is considered low, it is expected that universities will adopt and establish better metrics. That is, as it was observed in the case of accessibility, universities chose to report on strategies where they could find appropriate metrics. Furthermore, the establishment of better metrics is observed in the proposal of student engagement and comparable retention measures as identified and proposed by universities. However, the saliency of the reward is not associated with the strategies at a granular level, but rather with the reporting and proposal of targets. Furthermore, priority alignment regarding *reporting* of the strategies is considered poor. Therefore, the choice of strategies to present in the report-backs can be even depicted as an example of compliance, where the response is more in terms of examples of initiatives which provide an image of accountability, as an example of symbolic compliance, particularly, given that over time, there was a tendency to adjust targets to a level that would be considered realistic.

TABLE 9-27: QUALITY STRATEGIES - ACCORDING TO THE MASSY MODEL

| Area | Alignment of Objectives | Power of the Metric | Saliency of the Reward | Observed Strategy |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Strategies for Quality | Strong | Low | High | Adoption-improve metrics |
| Reporting on Strategies | Poor | Low | High | Compliance |
| Faculty Hiring | Strong | High | High | Deep adoption |
| Reporting on Hiring | Poor | High | High | Spin |
| Retention | Strong | High | High | Deep adoption |
| Reporting on Retention | Poor | High | High | Spin |
| Student Engagement | Strong to Poor | High | High | Deep adoption to compliance |
| Reporting on Student Engagement | Poor | High | High | Deep adoption to compliance |

Regarding the requirements for the two specific measures or proxies for quality—faculty hiring and retention—, the three predictive factors are strong and deep adoption is predicted. The challenge herein is to define what deep adoption means in the context of the MYA/MYAAAs. As it was documented above, universities were not always able to hire as many faculty as planned, an issue that was clearly explained and documented in their report-backs. Similarly, not all universities report on their strategies to improve retention, nor all choose stretch targets for this indicator. Moreover, not all were able to meet the stretch targets they indicated. Thus, even though these are areas in which universities wish to perform well, they cannot commit to certain results as there are determinant factors that are outside of their control. Therefore, deep adoption is the expected strategy, but not the one observed.

To explain this unexpected result, it is important to distinguish two levels of metric. First, there is the granular metric that simply measures the number of hires and the retention rates. These are hard numbers, not very difficult to obtain and therefore of presumably high power. However, these quantitative measures are embedded in a larger three-year plan, where many topics are covered and where there is an opportunity to explain any divergences from the targets planned for. Therefore, the extent to which a given metric is embedded within a larger and more complex process appears to have a direct impact on its power, as it becomes weaker. Moreover, it also appears to affect the saliency of the reward, weakening it as well. Thus, although the expected strategy is deep adoption, in reality, examples of compliance and of spinning are observed in the reports, as if the priorities were also becoming misaligned. In fact, what we observed is that although priorities are aligned for the final outcome (e.g., increased number of faculty, improved performance in retention measures), the priorities for reporting and committing to certain figures are misaligned, and universities would primarily explain away their shortfalls, a strategy labelled “spin” (Massy, 2011).

The final element in the quality section of the report is student engagement, where as indicated above, priority alignment varies according to the university, ranging from strong to poor. That is, although quality initiatives are a key priority for all universities, the interest in developing new approaches following insights from student engagement and satisfaction measures varies across universities. Given that the power of the metric is high, the strategies observed range from deep adoption (e.g., incorporating survey results into internal evaluation and/or management structures) to compliance (e.g., limiting the involvement to survey participation). In regards to reporting, the choices made reflect the universities' perspective on student engagement practices. One interesting conclusion from the analysis is that the degree of power of a measure or of saliency for a reward appears to be inversely correlated with the complexity of the instrument used. That is, the more complex is the measure, its power gets diluted. Therefore, it is challenging to find metrics that are truly powerful particularly when these are embedded within one single instrument where numerous metrics are reported on. In addition, it is interesting to observe that even though the Massy model is of a static nature, there are changes observed in the alignment of priorities over time.

9.6. FORCES OF CHANGE

Throughout the presentation of results, each of the elements reported has been analyzed in light of Massy (2011), indicating how the insights from the model help explain the strategies each university chose to respond. In this section, the discussion elaborates on the observations made to further analyze the forces of stability or change behind the strategies implemented by universities. Different influential elements are analyzed including: the role that goal ambiguity plays regarding priority alignment, the extent to which rewards are valued differently from a legitimacy and financial perspective, and how the power of the metric is affected by the university's ability to influence the issue at hand. Insights from Oliver (1991) are considered when appropriate.

9.6.1. PRIORITY ALIGNMENT

One of the key objectives of introducing performance agreements is to ensure priority alignment between organizational and policy objectives, thus contributing to the objectives outlined by the government in the agreement (García de Fanelli, 2006; Gornitzka et al., 2004). These objectives are not unique to performance contracts as these are a common "feature of normative performance management models" (Hildebrand & McDavid, 2011, p. 46) that include competition and a system of rewards/penalties conducive to mobilizing actors in the sense that those who control the system originally intended (Le Galès, 2004). Although this recognizes that priority alignment changes and evolves over time, the extent of alignment at the time of introducing the new accountability requirement is an important determinant of the strategies universities will chose to implement and their willingness to accept and embrace the new requirement and its consequences. In the analysis presented so far, for half of the content elements in the MYA/MYAAs, priority alignment between government and universities is considered strong at the time when the requirement was introduced, including quality initiatives, faculty hiring and retention targets. The exceptions include the implementation of SAG, the quantification and initiatives for under-

represented students and the initiatives regarding student engagement and satisfaction, where variation in alignment is observed across universities.

In the case of the consultation process, the alignment was poor given that universities did not see the need for further consultation given that most of their proposed initiatives came from campus-wide approved strategic or academic plans, which was compounded by short timelines for implementation. Priority alignment for the quantification of under-represented students is considered poor since strategies for these students can be put in place without accurate counts of their representation on campus. Priority alignment for SAG and for strategies regarding under-represented students are within a range, as the degree of alignment depends on what universities regard as their priorities and their responsibilities following their mission statements. Finally, although quality initiatives are a key priority for all universities, the interest in developing new approaches following insights from student engagement and satisfaction measures varies across universities, and this is represented by a range in the table above. These variations in priority alignment across implementation sites would dictate differences in the scope of the initiatives reported in the MYA/MYAAAs. For instance, some universities would place more value on emphasizing their contribution to servicing under-represented students as a result of their mission statements.

Despite those differences in specific content, at a macro level, strong alignment for the two core objectives of the MYA/MYAAAs other than accountability—that is, quality and accessibility initiatives—was facilitated by two factors. First, the MYA objectives generally focused on large, high-level themes that were congruent with the mission of universities (e.g., ensuring the quality of education). This initial congruency in missions contributed to the acceptance and implementation of the new instrument, as neo-institutional theory predicts that organizations will tend to resist change unless there is congruency between values and beliefs (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999) and policy changes are more likely to be contentious when “they threaten what actors perceive as their organizational core policy mission” (Durant, 2008, p. 291). The two quotes below illustrate how this congruency was perceived in the sector:

“The government was interested in accessibility and quality, so were the institutions. It is not like they picked priorities that were totally foreign or alien to the institutions” (CEN-8)

“I don't see our fundamental missions or our approaches or definitions of quality or outcomes or any kinds of those things really affected by this” (UNI-6)

The universities' recognition of their role to contribute to social policy predates the MYA/MYAAAs, as indicated in the 1993 *Task Force on University Accountability* report where “public acknowledgement by the university community that part of its accountability was for the achievement of public goals, making government goals for higher education a relevant consideration in university decisions on programs and processes” was expressed (Callahan, 2006, p. 25). Therefore, there is a certain predisposition to congruency with government objectives, as universities recognize that they do not exist isolated from their environment.

The second element that facilitated priority alignment was the level of generality in the goals proposed. *Reaching Higher's* objectives focused their attention on system-wide priorities (i.e.,

accessibility, quality), that given their general nature, were not unlikely to be embraced by universities, and as highlighted in the quote below, were not interpreted as constraining. Moreover, given the university participation in the consultation process of the Rae Review, the implementation of *Reaching Higher* that followed, and the high-level definition of goals in terms of broad themes, the likelihood to be at odds was small as illustrated in the quote below. General goals are valuable as they reduce conflict and are more readily accepted by sector stakeholders (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Matland, 1995; Sabatier, 2008). More specificity would have likely faced greater resistance.

“How can you be against these objectives? (...) If you do not think that there is accessibility, then we know we are in favor it, so that’s what I mean by they are not really constraining in true fashion”(FAC-3)

This lack of specificity that facilitated acceptance of the requirement, however, also had its consequences since ambiguity plays a role in nuancing the degree to which the new requirements are met. Specifically, the level of generality and vagueness in the government goals allowed room for interpretation. Thus, as the goals of quality, accessibility and accountability were downloaded to universities for the establishment of strategies and targets, these had significant leeway in choosing what ideas to put forward. Moreover, there was lack of clarity on expectations vis-à-vis MYA/MYAA content and on what consisted of an acceptable university commitment. Furthermore, universities were required to produce a public accountability document that lacked contextual information to facilitate its interpretation. Therefore, variation in reporting strategies and commitments made are observed across implementation sites, particularly regarding the scope of the initiatives and the ambitiousness of targets, albeit the general representation of issues at hand was quite similar across universities. This echoes the observations made for the Catalonia experience, where the content of the agreements in that jurisdiction was deemed uniform across university sites (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). In Ontario, much variation is observed in terms of the quantity of information offered, where some universities privileged a minimalist approach to reporting—that is, a reduced number of activities were listed—whereas others offered numerous details in their MYA plans.

In either case, the number of strategies for which indicators were developed was often a shortlist that did not fairly represent all of the activities underway on university campuses that would allow for understanding how the different strategies contributed to the overall goals, both internal and those of *Reaching Higher*. The concern in this case is that the measures and strategies selected are “those most readily available or those that are the easiest to collect, rather than those that are most important to the mission or goals of the institution” (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 210). In fact, this may not result only from the presentation requirements, but be rather symptomatic to the limited knowledge we have about how to define, measure and improve quality. Therefore, although a key objective of the initiative was to improve on priority alignment, given the level of generality in the goals, and the ambiguity in the specifics, the level of alignment was limited. Furthermore, universities reported for the most part on activities that they had already initiated or underway.

9.6.2. SALIENCY OF THE REWARDS

An important element of saliency is the degree to which engaging in the reporting activity is considered a legitimization activity, which is affected by several forces. First, the number of constituents or stakeholders regarding an area of activity is important: facing a multiplicity of

constituents allows universities more leeway in choosing their strategy since their requirement to answer is diluted (Oliver, 1991). In the context of the MYA/MYAAs, it would be fair to indicate that universities perceived the government as their sole constituent, which contributes to strong saliency. Unfortunately, Oliver's model does not help clarify the relationship between university senior management and internal stakeholders, and how this explains their limited participation in the decision-making process, a point that will be further elaborated in Chapter 11.

Second, the impact of having the government as the sole constituent is compounded by the degree of university dependence towards it over and above the MYA/MYAAs, which translates in the government becoming a source of legitimacy itself (Huisman & Meek, 1999). This effect on legitimacy arising from existing dependencies and government control are somewhat diminished by the lack of funding consequences to falling short of targets, when these were set. This suggests another line of questioning regarding university autonomy versus government control, which will be further developed in Chapter 11. Third, legitimacy will also vary according to the individual characteristics of each university. In that regard, some degree of variation in implementation was identified across universities, as has been observed in other similar studies (Csiszmadia et al., 2008; Huisman & Meek, 1999; Jamali, 2010).

One main factor of adjustment is organizational size, as it is argued that the larger the organization, the more willing it will be to adapt to new requirements, as they are more visible, and therefore any act of non-compliance is expected to have a greater impact on their legitimacy (Goodstein, 1994). This general relationship with organizational size is not as clearly established for universities, as other characteristics, such as reputation, trump the impact of size. In that regard, it is expected that universities with greater reputation may have a tendency to be more defiant as they do not draw their legitimacy from the government as much as other universities do. A clear example of this was observed in how for most items the reporting strategy by the University of Toronto was simpler and less engaging than that observed in smaller Ontario universities, which illustrate differences in the scope of implementation. A stakeholder comments in that regard:

"A place like [university x] might not have taken the whole thing too seriously. It's already doing its own thing" (CEN-9)

A second element that is key in the level of saliency, beyond its legitimization character, consists of the funding associated with it as it is expected that funding uncertainty, an important context factor (Oliver, 1991), will reduce the saliency of the initiative. Furthermore, there is disagreement in the sector regarding the extent to which the funding associated with the MYA/MYAAs was incremental or not. This was conducive to universities limiting their commitments to new activities, since the ability to initiate new activities is directly linked to funding. The central role played by funding in steering university behaviour is shared by central organization and university stakeholders as illustrated in the two quotes below:

"I think the impact comes almost entirely from where government used to put its money, that's what drives everybody. That's what drives agendas. If you give them money for growth, you grow. If you are giving money for creating access for a certain cohort, you create access for that cohort" (CEN-1)

"The behavior's influenced by the funding primarily. The reporting is there to verify that the funding has had an effect (...) As long as there is a strong contingency (... that is) you'll only get your funding if you

perform on those indicators, (...) The piece of the mechanism that's important is that you can only continue to get your money if you demonstrate that you've done something" (UNI-1)

That is, the extent to which new initiatives were proposed or undertaken appears to be, to a greater extent, driven by the availability of funding associated with the MYA/MYAAs, which highlights the importance of economic saliency for the reports to spearhead change. In that regard, two university representatives affirm below that universities did new initiatives to the extent they had additional funding to support them. On the other hand, the second quote below shows that rebranding of existing initiatives that were underway was acceptable as long as it was consistent with the government's priorities, as the additional funds were thus available to enhance activities that were aligned with the goals:

"Spearheading new initiatives? Absolutely: the Multi-year Agreements came with new funding, and that new funding allowed us to do things that we hadn't been able to do before" (UNI-13)

"It's more important to look at it in terms of how much money was available to do the new things above and beyond what was done there before [... the new money was used to do new things] as best as we could (...) It was not so much new things as more of the same thing, but it was more" (UNI-1)

Although the saliency of the reward arising from legitimacy or from resource provision are presented on an equal footing, there is no indication of which one would explain to a greater extent whether changes or stability are observed. However, the generalized opinion in the sector is that it is the funding that pushed them in new directions and not the act of reporting itself, as indicated in the quotes below:

"If they have just given us money without the Multi-year Agreement would we have done anything differently? Probably not so the accountability layer of that, and I don't mean that to say if the contract didn't do anything, but it wasn't directive in terms of how we would have spent additional funding" (UNI-13)

"I have to imagine that [... the Ministry] understood that the effect is going to be because of the money that you put into the system and the levers you put around funding envelopes, and that the accountability agreement really is almost—I don't want to say a public relations exercise. (...) It's almost about saying to the public 'look, we are spending your money, but we are also making universities tell us what they are doing with your money' (...) I don't really think that having people report out had that effect. I think it was sort of an added irritant, but the money really was what made the difference" (CEN-1)

This is certainly an area of debate. On one hand, it is argued that for funding to modify behaviour, it has to be sizable enough to be correlated to the costs of changing the behaviour (Lang, 2013). On the other hand, it has been argued that the simple negotiation within a performance agreement unlinked to funding results in priority alignment (Hölttä, 1998) and that there is no need to link funding to be steering (Gornitzka et al., 2004). In fact, if the steering is broadly defined as the change in attitude towards the provision of information and the need for accountability instruments, it could be argued that the government and university priorities were aligned in Ontario as a result of the MYA/MYAAs, without the provision of funding explicitly for this objective, a point that will be further elaborated in section 11.2. Therefore, in such a situation, it is expected that the importance and survival value of legitimacy prevails, such that universities will tend to conform, but this is done in a symbolic form that blends with "latent facets of resistance (avoidance, defiance, manipulation) (... since) organizations are aware of their latitude for maneuver within this voluntary space, and are engaged in calculative responses reflecting both choice and self-interest"

(Jamali, 2010, p. 633). In other words, symbolic implementation “may help institutions to maintain their legitimacy by masking the underlying resistance to change” (Csiszmadia et al., 2008, p. 449). This must not be equated with arguing that the impact of *Reaching Higher* was limited. *Reaching Higher* was conducive to greater graduate student enrolment, the creation of HEQCO and the introduction of the Student Access Guarantee, among other initiatives, that have had important implications for the sector.¹⁰⁶ However, the focus of this study is on the MYA/MYAAAs, that were linked to just a portion of the funding pot associated with the larger initiative and with the impacts that the requirement to report back entailed.

9.6.3. POWER OF THE METRICS

The third element in the Massy model is the power of the metrics, which in the assessment in the table above ranges from strong to poor. As it was mentioned above, one of the challenges in the post-secondary sector is that there are difficulties with the operationalization of performance in quality improvements (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010) since existing gaps to measure higher education outcomes are widely recognized and endemic to post-secondary education worldwide. Therefore, there is a risk of reducing universities or the quality of education only to those things that can be measured or to use inappropriate or irrelevant proxies, which could end up being institutionalized thus perpetuating a reductionist or inappropriate perspective (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Mighty, 2009; Shanahan, 2009b). This position is illustrated in the quotes below from university and faculty representatives. It is noted that measurement difficulties were not mentioned by government representatives interviewed for this study:

“How can we assess quality? We need measurement (... but there is) very limited understanding of what quality is all about when it comes to the relationship between teaching and research so all that matters is what you can measure. If you cannot measure it then know to a large extent it did not even exist really, any idiot can see if a given goal or target has been met or not, but whether or not that goal or target is relevant, that is something else” (FAC-3)

“Universities are a very difficult, it is very difficult to measure what we do (...) I think the problem is that the things that are easy to measure are not necessarily the things that count” (FAC-4)

“But universities cannot be reduced to this (...) we can’t measure the things that universities are, with these indicators” (UNI-14)

Although an effort has been made with the introduction of new student surveys and of better and comparable methodologies to measure retention, there is still significant work to be done, not only in Ontario, but in higher education in general, to improve quantitative measures of higher education outcomes and thus, according to the Massy model, the introduction of new

¹⁰⁶ For instance, the competitive bid for graduate space allocations is reported to have had important repercussions in the internal business of universities, with clear implications regarding organizational adaptation, a point that the following quote illustrates: *“The piece about graduate growth, this has had a humongous impact on the functioning of the departments within the universities and the profs themselves. The departments had to pay a lot more attention to how many grad students enter the system every year, and how many succeed from that (...) we wanted to improve the ratio of the career professors to graduate students, that was a major effort. The entire budgeting process inside the university was driven, the priorities were set according to that” (UNI-1).*

accountability requirements will create incentives for universities to explore and develop better and improved metrics.

However, this affirmation disregards that even in cases where strong metrics are available (e.g., retention rates, faculty hiring), limited control and uncertainty are two factors that come into play to affect its power. That is, there are concerns regarding the level of control that universities may have over external factors that influence the indicators (Gauthier, 2004). Consequently, buffering strategies may result from the knowledge that control is limited. Moreover, the lack of control results in uncertainty regarding how these metrics will evolve (Oliver, 1991). As such, the uncertainty and lack of control associated with these measures explains the universities' response where mostly measured promises are made vis-à-vis faculty hiring and in the efforts undertaken to influence the choice of indicator to measure retention coupled with the numerous explanations, often exogenous to universities, regarding targets that were unmet.

To conclude, what does the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs reveal in terms of changes happening within Ontario universities? The consequences of introducing a new accountability measures can be quite evident at the organizational structure, ranging from a change in power relationships between the academy and the administration, with the strengthening of the president's role (García de Fanelli, 2006) to the creation of new offices and managerial positions (Moreno, 2012). In opposition to this finding, given the manner in which the MYA/MYAAAs were negotiated between universities and government and the strategic implementation decisions made by the former in the rebranding and the reutilization of the information and activities available, there is no evidence of major organizational changes or power balances within universities as a result of their introduction. The changes in organizational structure that were noted in the documentation resulted from some of the measures introduced, such as NSSE, but the changes observed aimed at improving the results in the metric rather than dealing with the government requirement. It is thus found that the Ontario model was less stringent in their requirements and application. This also echoes the implementation process in British Columbia, where it is reported that the agreements are mostly completed by Institutional Research offices and that their campus-wide impact is limited (Sudmant, 2008).

Ontario universities were only required to produce three-year plans in 2006-07 and these were never renewed, although the production of report-backs continued. Given that this aspect of the implementation of the agreements is important for understanding their transformative power, the following chapter describes the evolution and transformation of the MYA/MYAAAs into a more benign data collection tool and the introduction of a new instrument to structure the relationship between government and universities.

Chapter 10. A POLICY IN EVOLUTION: TRANSFORMATION OF ONTARIO'S MYA/MYAAS AND INTRODUCTION OF A NEW INSTRUMENT

When this study was first planned, it was the general expectation in Ontario's PSE sector that the three-year plans for the multi-year accountability agreements would be renewed. However, over the next several years, attention was taken away from the MYAAs, their role was transformed, their original shape collapsed, and a new instrument, the Strategic Mandated Agreements (SMAs), was introduced. Rather than reducing the interest on the object of study, this new context brought to the foreground new questions with regards to the evolution and transformation of the MYA/MYAAs. This analysis suggests two reasons why the eventual dismissal of the MYA/MYAAs in their original form is unsurprising. First, they were introduced as an initiative that, if fully implemented as originally planned, would involve dramatic change between university and government relationships. By taking a stance that challenged the traditional and path-dependency forces of university autonomy and institutionalized funding mechanisms, it would be expected that the initiative would face important resistance and fail (Palier, 2007; Pierson, 2000). Second, as was documented in Chapters 8 and 9, reporting under the MYA/MYAAS was adopted symbolically under coercive pressure, therefore expected to collapse over time (Watts et al., 2010).

The MYA/MYAAs were modified into data collection tools and a new instrument bearing the original strategic objectives was introduced. The transformation of the new tool and introduction of a new one can be interpreted as the search for a mechanism that is acceptable to impacted actors (Le Galès, 2004). Furthermore, it is consistent with the institutional character of instruments that tend to go through incremental changes rather than radical redesigns (Reale & Seeber, 2010) and the political use of renewing instruments, as the introduction of a novel tool is used as a signal of the government's intent and objectives for a given sector or jurisdiction (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004) that may eventually result, thanks to cumulative changes, in a deep change in the logic of the relationship between organizations/actors and the government (Palier, 2007). Finally, this transformation is illustrative of policy implementation as an evolutionary process (M. Hill & Hupe, 2002; Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009). Understanding the evolution of the MYA/MYAAs is important in the interpretation of how these are perceived by sector stakeholders. Moreover, the changes in the policy environment framed many of the observations made during the semi-structured interviews and clarify the context for this analysis

In this chapter, this process of evolution is analyzed in detail. The discussion begins with the transformation of the MYA/MYAAs and the reasons behind it, including internal changes in the ministry and the consultation and review process that took place in 2009-10. The discussion follows with a brief overview of the introduction of the SMAs and the challenges that have been faced in that regard. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the extent to which the instruments introduced have contributed to changing the accountability relationship between government and universities. Although it is probably too early in the process to state that the logic of the relationship has changed dramatically (Palier, 2007), given the efforts to date to modify the relationship between government and universities by introducing novel and cumulative tools into the sector, the

analysis helps explain the implications and extent of the transformative power that the MYA/MYAAs have had since their introduction, that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

10.1. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MYA/MYAAs SINCE 2009-10

The evolution of the MYA/MYAAs since 2009-10 is presented in this section, including their transformation into a data collection tool. The presentation starts with a description of the different forces identified in the sector regarding the reasons for not renewing the three-year plans including the completion of the *Reaching Higher* three-year funding commitments, the organizational changes within MTCU and the formal establishment of HEQCO. These forces motivated a new consultation process to evaluate the implementation of the MYA/MYAAs to that point in time. It will be shown that as the MYA/MYAAs were transformed into a data collection tool, the strategic discussions shifted towards the SMAs.

The first signal that some transformations would be coming for the MYA/MYAAs was given in March 2009, when the government announced that 2009-10 would be a transition year and that universities would not be called to develop new three-year plans for the time being. Universities were asked to include in their 2008-09 report-backs transition initiatives to extend the original three-year plan for one more year. This change was presented by the government as an opportunity for universities to reaffirm the commitments already made while providing the former with time to propose a revised accountability framework for future years “that reflects the priorities for post-secondary education in 2010 and beyond” (M. Hicks, memorandum, July 21, 2009). The ministry’s interest in reevaluating the existing frameworks was justified by the need to review funding allocations as the three-year funding commitment for *Reaching Higher* ended in 2008-09, and supported by the promise that “something new” would be introduced in 2010-2011, as a university representative recalls below:

“The 2009-2010 was introduced a year earlier saying ‘You’re done with your three-year window but we are going to be asking you in the following year to talk about the extension or continuation of these initiatives. And this will be a one-year holding pattern because the three-year funding window for Reaching Higher is over. You only have to do it once because there is going to be this brand new thing happening in 2010-11’” (UNI-6)

In addition, given that a number of internal changes took place in MTCU at the time, including a shuffling of responsibilities, and the transition year gave time to ministry staff to figure out their new roles. Specifically, the responsibility for the MYAA portfolio moved from the Post-secondary Accountability Branch to the Strategic Policy Area Branch temporarily. It is unclear why this change was not made permanent, as eventually the MYAAs were brought back to the Post-secondary Accountability Branch, but the development of the SMAs was nonetheless permanently assigned to the Strategic Policy Branch. Assigning the MYAA and SMA portfolios to different branches foretold how these would be seen as distinct tools with specific objectives that could be used complementary, as will be discussed in the analysis that follows. However, the ministry representative quoted below did not recall the reasons behind that separation:

“We decided to extend for a year because [the] ministry went through a transformation exercise and things got moved around (...) The MYAA’s went to the strategic policy area (...) we felt that rather than putting something new up, the ministry needed time to think about what was going to happen” (CEN-11)

While those changes were taking place internally at MTCU, another series of consultations was launched in 2009 and 2010, with the objective to help define the future of the MYAAs. Leading up to this consultation, the ministry worked with the CUPA accountability committee in the fall 2008. More formal consultations started in the summer of 2009 and culminated with a *Learned Lessons Forum*, a one-day conference in October 2009 with participants from universities, colleges and speakers from other provinces, where there was an opportunity to provide direct feedback on a number of themes. The objective of the conference was to “articulate the feedback received from the sector into a comprehensive feedback document” (M. Hicks, memorandum, July 21, 2009). The perspective coming into the forum was already that the government was developing a new accountability framework, distinct from the MYA/MYAAS, which was interpreted as an opportunity for renewal as is often the case when new instruments are introduced in the same field with related purposes (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004). The findings from the forum regarding what this new framework should look like, as summarized by MTCU, are presented in the text-box below.

The comments below highlight the need for a more strategic, long-term process that privileges collaboration between government and institutions. In addition, both colleges and universities wish to have more meaningful quantitative indicators while protecting the flexibility allowing them to tell their specific story and to tie the MYAA process to their internal planning cycles. Finally, there is recognition that the accountability relationships in the sector are complex and that the intended audience must be targeted appropriately, which includes the need to better articulate the goals of the MYAAs at the institutional level.

TEXT-BOX 10-1: LESSONS LEARNED FORUM: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The new post-secondary accountability framework should be more strategic than the current one: It would benefit from being longer-term in nature; to focus outcomes, not on outputs; it should be a useful tool to inform institutions and government on where/how to invest future post-secondary funding.
- The new post-secondary accountability framework should provide room (...) to include narrative and context as they move forward: Consistency of system-wide context should be balanced against the flexibility of the story at the local level affected by regional and demographic differences throughout Ontario; allowing for more qualitative reporting would allow institutions to use existing tools (annual report, strategic plan, etc.) to highlight activities and accomplishments.
- The new post-secondary accountability framework will have many audiences: Need to balance the story of accountability with the need for engagement, depending on the audience; there should be a consistent level of transparency to all stakeholders (institutions, students, public et al) in the development and implementation of the framework; the messaging to each audience should be tailored and within the appropriate context; the purpose of the MYAAs must be articulated more clearly at the institutional level.
- The development and ongoing processes of the new post-secondary accountability framework should coordinate and reduce potential negative impacts on the annual college and university planning processes. The current processes are out of synch with the planning cycles of colleges and universities.
- There should be “value-added” to the indicators used to measure progress: For use as inputs into ongoing policy development; data collected for the indicators must be meaningful, accurate and consistent; Indicators should be tied to targets established by/with the Ministry and clearly defined.
- There should be a stronger collaborative approach to the development and implementation of the new framework, one that emphasizes an ongoing dialogue between the sectors and the Ministry: Focus on bilateral partnerships; ministry and institutions moving forward together.
- The story of whether the MYAAs are helping the sector move forward has not yet been told.

Source: Lessons Learned Report (MTCU, 2009c)

The formal establishment of HEQCO offered the government with an opportunity to take a critical look at the implementation of the agreements to date and played an important role throughout this process given that a review of the MYA/MYAs and of accountability in general was included in their annual research plans. Their analysis was based on a review of the report-backs and on a series of formal and informal consultations. This process started before the 2009 *Lessons Learned Forum* just mentioned; for instance, in a CUPA meeting in February 2008, it is reported that HEQCO is interested in the universities' opinion of the MYA/MYAA process and that they are planning to advise the government on the development of solid measures for under-represented students (CUPA Minutes, February 14, 2008). As HEQCO's proposed approach for accountability crystalized, they started sharing their ideas with other sector representatives:

"[HEQCO presented their] ideas on what the MYAs should look like for feedback at every possible [opportunity... HEQCO] did kind of dog and pony show, what do you think of this, what do you think of that (...) The VP research at the time had a group, who he regularly talked to about this stuff and flew ideas by (...) There was an ongoing conversation that happened over the course of about a year and a half" (CEN-1)

HEQCO's recommendations were based on "an extensive consultation and research process, including expert workshops, commissioned external research, formal and informal discussions with stakeholders and feedback on presentations of preliminary ideas to gatherings of college, university and Ministry personnel" (A. Matthews, personal communication, June 2, 2010). According to one central stakeholder interviewed for this study, HEQCO's recommendations were intended to:

"Pick up the best features of the original idea: that there will be some sort of contractual arrangement between the government and each institution, [that] the university would say here is who we want to be, here is our mission, here is a vision for us and here is our main strategic priorities over the next number of years [...and indicate] here is how we are going to measure and evaluate success" (CEN-8)

The resulting accountability framework was presented to the government in 2009 and was made public in June 2010. In its introductory letter, HEQCO's president at the time proposes that an Ontario multi-year accountability framework should take full advantage of institutional autonomy but also provide "clear direction on how change, where required, is to be achieved" (Iacobucci, 2009, p. 3). Specifically, the proposed approach by HEQCO is that system-wide goals and targets be developed collaboratively between government and institutions, as well, that

Annual consultations with government and institutions should take place to determine how each institution will contribute to system-wide goals by setting institutional specific core targets that recognize differentiated missions of institutions. Institutional consultations will also take place on institution-specific goals relative to objectives (Iacobucci, 2009, p. 5).

The system proposed by HEQCO thus intended to reconcile the contribution that each institution can make to system-wide planning, and for that purpose, requires that system targets first be developed at the government level. This proposal thus differentiates itself from the MYA/MYAs implementation where no system-level objectives were developed. Also, it is conceived as a much more negotiated process where the contribution of each institution to predefined system goals is identified. Therefore, this proposal had potentially greater impact on reducing university autonomy as it would be more directive of the goals and responsibilities of each institution. Another report published by HEQCO in October 2010 influenced the discussion as it proposed greater differentiation across Ontario universities and colleges:

The cornerstone of this transition [be] a comprehensive agreement between each university and MTCU identifying the expectations and accountabilities of each institution, including its expected enrolment and student mix, its priority teaching and research programs and areas for future growth and development (Weingarten & Deller, 2010, p. 4).

This idea concurred with an earlier recommendation made by HEQCO in 2009 regarding the development of mission-specific indicators that “reflect institutional diversity and autonomy (...). In collaboration with each institution, the government would develop the type and number of indicators and targets that reflect and support diverse institutional missions” (Iacobucci, 2009, p. 3). This proposal is much more ambitious than the MYA/MYAs intent of aligning *Reaching Higher* priorities between universities and government. Nonetheless, the interest in differentiation and system structure was not new. The request to analyze the structure of the postsecondary sector in Ontario was originally included in the Rae report. However, Rae did not provide clear recommendations but indicated that the topic of structure and differentiation was to be included in the mandate of his proposed Council on Higher Education. The conversation on this topic was delayed as it was not included in the government’s creation of HEQCO, as the first responsibilities were mostly outlined in terms of quality and accountability (Beach, 2005). The 2010 HEQCO report continues its recommendations proposing that

Incremental funding to the institution would be aligned with its mission agreement, annual progress would be evaluated using an agreed-upon set of performance indicators, and institutional funding would be continued or removed based on progress towards agreed-upon goals and targets (Weingarten & Deller, 2010, p. 4),

The recommendation above echoes the original intent of the MYA/MYAs, but also appears potentially much more comprehensive in terms of the funding associated with it as well as much more directive in terms of missions, in a consistent fashion with what the Rae Review originally recommended (Rae, 2005). In addition, some elements of this proposal were also stated in COU’s 2011 pre-budget submission to the provincial government. The key point underlying COU’s support to this idea was the call for greater incremental funding that would support differentiation across universities and outcomes negotiated via a multi-year strategic accountability plan (COU, 2011).

Amidst all these ideas being developed in the sector, MTCU drafted their new accountability framework to guide the next generation of MYAs. This framework built on the advice provided by HEQCO and thus reflected the recommendations regarding institutional planning and system-wide indicators, as it was expected to “serve as a tool to better align government’s public policy priorities with institutional strategic planning and incorporating the use of system-wide indicators into the agreements” (N. Naylor & M-L. Fougère, memorandum, March 10, 2010), which suggests once again alignment of priorities in areas larger than those highlighted by *Reaching Higher*. Having developed a preliminary version of the next accountability agreements framework, the ministry organized another round of consultations in 2010 and a joint MTCU, Cabinet Office, COU and HEQCO working group was to be established to develop indicators and that could be included in the next generation of agreements. (H. Bender, memorandum, April 13, 2010). However, this consultation started to experience delays again while waiting for budget commitments (COU staff, personal communication, March 1st, 2010), and the MYAs transition period was extended for another year to the 2009-2010 report-backs (CUPA minutes, March 11, 2010).

At this point, two developments were taking place. On one hand, the ministry continued to speak of the new generation of accountability agreements while on the other hand the MYAAs continued to evolve in their own direction. Since many of the objectives that the ministry had were still in place (e.g., demonstrating results, having a sense of system-wide performance), collecting information on universities continued to be a priority. The development of a new, different accountability agreement instrument of a strategic character was an opportunity to transform the MYAAs into a data gathering tool in an effort to meet the objectives of demonstrating results and system-level performance. In that sense, the institutionalization of the transformed instrument reveals what appeared to be the main objectives of government officials (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004). In a way, the means of accountability, by being thus transformed, became an end in themselves (Gregory, 2003), that would continue to be supported in the sector, but where evolution is still expected depending on government priorities:

“[The MYAAs are] a fairly stable and accepted piece of the landscape, and that's part of a mature relationship between a sector ministry and an important part of the broader public sector. I think they are here to stay (... but) they will never be final for all time. You'll always be improving them (...) As priorities emerge in the sector, for example, credit transfer, we are asking more and more questions, more specific ones (...) They evolve in response to the emerging priorities of the government, and I think as we get better at measuring certain outcomes that are priorities for the government” (CEN-6)

“The actual concept of accountability with each individual institution is here to stay [... The MYAAs] are not stagnant (...) we've been through two different ministers. We are on a third in the span of the Multi-year Accountability Agreements, so we must be doing something right that they've all agreed that this is the process that it want to continue (...) We tried to evolve based on where the government is going and how it's looking at certain areas, and to refine some of the things that we were originally doing, so that they are more meaningful to us” (CEN-2)

The transformation, however, could also be interpreted as an implementation strategy that focused on the least conflicting objectives that were nonetheless of value-add to the government, as highlighted in the quote below:

“The MYAA has evolved (... to) the things that are easier and less contentious” (CEN-4)

As the emphasis of the MYAAs was placed on data collection, this perpetuated many of the challenges documented in that regard throughout this study, and institutionalized information gathering lacking strategic relevance (White, 2011), as they took the shape of a compendium:

“[the MYAAs have] become part of our regular business, and is now less transformative than it was before, and more just regular reporting (...) It's more like a statistical compendium of data”(UNI-13)

Furthermore, their renewed role as a reporting, rather than as a strategic tool, is confirmed in the portrayal of the instrument in more recent templates for the report backs, where it is described as “a tool for publicly reporting on the performance of Ontario post-secondary institutions on the principles of access, quality and accountability” (MTCU, 2011, p. 1). The decision of limiting their role to a data gathering tool was further facilitated by the following implementation decisions. First, the objective of producing system-level results became more prevalent in the implementation decisions made by the government during this period and the ministry moved towards an electronic submission with the objective to create databases that would support an easier and more efficient roll-up of the agreements and for greater comparability, as indicated by two stakeholders below:

“[the 2008-09 report-back] was submitted in hard copy, and it was very narrative, we were going through these giant binders, and if we wanted to know, for example, how many aboriginal students the institutions were reporting, you literally had to go through 44 submissions and add them up [... to tackle this, we moved] to an electronic submission that creates a database” (CEN-6)

“[the government wanted to] quantify them in a manner that would allow you to do something like calculate an average for Ontario (...) Gradually, the reporting was tweaked to try to get to a stage where at the end of the year, the ministry can take the data from the all the universities in Ontario, and calculate a global score” (UNI-1)

Second, the ministry realized that the information provided by universities was already available elsewhere and decided to prepopulate some of the fields in the submission:

“When we moved to an electronic basis ... [we] harvest information from a bunch of sources (...) put it together, automatically populated [with what] institutions already submitted it” (CEN-6)

Thirdly, the government continued to add new requirements, not only of a quantitative nature, but also for signaling compliance with other requirements, sometimes of a procedural nature, that do not appear to have any relationship to a long-term strategic direction at the institution level or system-wide. These are often just check marks to indicate compliance with the areas in which the ministry appears to be interested at different times, including procurement rules and executive office expenditure limits:

“They keep trying to use it for additional purposes [... when] they've got a new interest, a new policy interest, they add new section of it” (UNI-2)

“Every year we seem to see more questions put on the list (...) because government priority is now interested in international or accountability frameworks—looking at freezes for senior staff at the universities or the 10% reduction in executive office staff” (UNI-13)

“The broader public sector and the finance rules and all those things around procurement and executive expenditures and money counting they had crept in by now and so some of the MYAs had become a vehicle for promising to reduce your executive office expenditures by 10% (...) still trying to [transform these into] kind of a systematic policy document but never succeeding” (UNI-6)

These implementation changes have not been always welcome by universities. They perceive the loss of flexibility in telling their stories as detrimental, as it is not possible to highlight differences across universities. This criticism is illustrated in the quotes below, but must be nuanced, as universities do have other mechanisms to communicate this kind of information, such as annual reports and strategic plans that were in fact used to answer to the original MYA request:

“There is a lot more flexibility to report out on things that weren't exactly in the agreement in the earlier stages than there is today (...) as the reports backs progressed, we have seemed to narrow down on the things that are being as more directive from government (...) and I think that the loss of flexibility has been a negative for the agreements, at least in my context” (UNI-13)

“I think the government needs to provide the flexibility in the formatting of that, that you can really do have the opportunity to tell your story rather than it's varied in some cases the ability to provide information relevant to that topic has been quite constrained by the format itself” (UNI-4)

In addition, the electronic submission is perceived as creating additional work and the data collection process is considered inadequate, given the difficulties to use consistent definitions across universities or even to identify adequate data sources for some topics of government interest, as highlighted in the two quotes below:

“They have turned it into this data collection which is actually quite inadequate from a data collection point of view” (UNI-2)

“They have made the universities’ life harder (...) the automation is actually very clunky from the universities point of view because you’re a decentralized organization. You send a word file somewhere. Somebody can fill it in, but then we have to then put it back into [the electronic form]” (UNI-3)

Finally, despite the emphasis on consultation throughout the development and implementation of these accountability instruments, university representatives still express concern that there continues to be to this date a lack of understanding on the part of government of the difficulties associated with obtaining certain data or the limitations in their usability. For instance, although it is difficult to measure what universities do, MTCU continues to move towards more measurement, while university representatives continue to argue that there is need to look at more topics that are descriptive rather than measurable (CUPA minutes, March 12, 2009). Along that line of thought, a university representative indicates:

“In the MYAAs, there are things that are data. And if the government wants data, fine. But we’ll continue to talk to them about responsible and credible data collection” (CEN-4)

Despite those criticisms, sector stakeholders recognize some advantages resulting from the changes that took place. For instance, requesting only for data is less contentious, as the ability to tell new stories was becoming artificial, especially since the funding envelope was fixed and the new operations became recurring, and the government finally focused more on one of their main objective of being able to produce system-level indicators:

“In a sense it’s a good thing that the data orientation and the tables and the system summary picked up at this point because the story’s part which we were telling over the prior three years was becoming a bit contrived. The ability to say the same things or the ability to construct new initiatives and report on them as if they were grand things year by year by year got a little hard after a while” (UNI-6)

Summing up, the MYA/MYAAs have transformed significantly since they were originally introduced in 2005 to their current shape and form in 2013. Since the multi-year plans were never renewed and the strategic discussion shifted to the SMAs, the MYAAs became data collection tools, albeit not all that performing, given the difficulties in performance measurement in post-secondary education, the emphasis on quasi-auditing procedures of ticks and checkmarks, and on the inability to provide a complete and fair portrayal of the sector with a reduced number of figures. Nonetheless, the government still considers the redefined tools as useful and argues that these will continue to be used and evolve over time. There are thus two opposing interpretations of the process in the field. From the perspective of universities, these instruments have become diverted from their original intent, and narrowed their scope and impact. From the perspective of the government, these have evolved to fill an existing need. Therefore, although the instrument does not appear to be meeting the objectives originally outlined for it, is not discarded, but rather transformed significantly. From the perspective of the government, the instruments are transformed so they fit their context and are in line with the existing mix of other instruments (Reale & Seeber, 2012). In that sense, it is interpreted as a process of implementation that is in constant evolution, that is, implementation processes mingle objectives and outcomes, so that “implementation is endless” (J.-E. Lane, 1987, p. 533) and “will inevitably reformulate” (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978, p. 116). This is only possible, however, as their strategic objectives are placed

elsewhere and the decision to not terminate their implementation appears to be also motivated by political ideology (de Leon, 1983) where an accountability initiative cannot be removed.

Furthermore, given that policy instrumentation reveals a theorization of the relationship between the governing and the governed, “every instrument constitutes a condensed form of knowledge about social control and ways of exercising it” (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010, p. 6). In this particular case, the evolution in the instrument highlights the decision-making process of a government that perceived to have more power to steer universities than what it was actually able to implement, but that has not abandoned this idea and is still working on developing the way to put the power at work, as illustrated by the introduction of the SMAs that will be discussed next. In addition, at the beginning of the MYA/MYAA process, despite the consultation process, the identification of measures and the development of templates, there was an “essential unpredictability about the form that any instrument eventually assumes” (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010, p. 11) since it had to evolve to fit the environment in which it was introduced. As such, being institutions, instruments are “autonomous with respect to the goals for which they were originally established. They therefore tend to follow a peculiar path of development interacting with how actors use them” (Reale & Seeber, 2012, p. 137) and the policy transfer efforts of introducing these kinds of instruments to a new political environment result in context-specific implementation.

Following with the discussion about the instrument and what it reveals regarding legitimacy and the relationship between the government and universities, it is noted that the agreement-based model was completely abandoned in the implementation of the MYA/MYAA since 2009-10. The government introduced the agreement-based instrument, by presenting itself as mobilizing and drawing legitimacy from the direct involvement of different stakeholders in the policy network. This process of legitimization of the new requirements via consultation processes and the development of a “common diagnosis” were important in the introduction and acceptance of the MYA/MYAA. This was possible given that agreement-based instruments are privileged vis-à-vis sectors that are in search of permanent autonomy and in those cases, contract-type approaches are the ones able to provide adequate regulation (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). However, as the instrument was operationalized and significant emphasis was given to the information and communication-based aspect of the government, what we observe is a political relationship that aims at being more audience-based. However, the audience is not universities. The audience is vaguely defined as the “public”, the students and their parents, at least in the government discourse. In practice, the audience includes the central agencies of government for an answerability role, as will be discussed in chapter 11. This echoes the description offered for the health sector where the accountability relationship between the government and health agencies has shifted from one where agreement on targets is set towards one where the negotiation of consensus and the collection of information are privileged as representative of a governance approach (Tuohy, 2003). The discussion now turns to the introduction of the SMAs into the sector.

10.2. INTRODUCTION OF THE SMAS

While the MYAAs were being transformed into data collection tools, the development of the next generation framework continued and eventually resulted in the introduction of the Strategic

Mandated Agreements in 2012 that renewed the government's objective of greater coordination with universities and long-term planning. These new instruments are briefly discussed in this section. Although this study does not provide a full description of the genesis of the SMAs, understanding their objectives, stakeholders' expectations vis-à-vis their contribution and the reaction in the sector contribute to illustrate the voids left by the MYA/MYAAs. It is in this perspective that the SMAs are discussed.

Despite the consultation process in 2009 and 2010 described above, and the many conversations regarding a new accountability framework, it would take about two years for the ministry to finalize the new approach. In 2011, the Minister announced publicly a new funding model and the pursuit of greater differentiation in a process where

The province will negotiate each school's strategy individually, measuring success on priorities such as student satisfaction, employment rates, and student mobility more closely. The goal is to have universities and colleges specialize more in their own strengths and core programs, spending more on excellence in teaching and the student experience on campus, while also providing as much choice and flexibility as possible in the style of learning available (Bradshaw, 2011).

The announcement emphasizes bilateral negotiations on an institution by institution basis, and formally introduces a new objective of differentiation, that had not been discussed previously with the introduction of *Reaching Higher*. However, despite the public announcement, there was a dearth of information for several months, and the uncertain environment was top of mind for many of the interviewees for this study.¹⁰⁷ Specifically, there was no information regarding when the new instrument would be introduced, how would it look like, whether it would complement or replace the MYAAs and how would it be used. For instance, a faculty stakeholder indicated that there were no clear responses being provided regarding the new instrument, and a university representative explains that the information was not yet available:

"It's still very vague, and we are not getting answers" (FAC-1)

"Here we are about to be asked to submit in 2011-2012 and I have no idea what is going to look like. The only thing I know was that strategic mandate agreements are not yet off the ground and there is going to be nothing new on those for a while" (UNI-6)

At this point, the MYAAs had already been reinvented mostly as reports on data for two consecutive years, 2009-10 and 2010-11, but there was uncertainty regarding how the two instruments would work together. There was also evidence of tensions within MTCU regarding the future of the MYA/MYAAs:

There may be some tension between the desire to make the agreements more strategic and narrative-based and the interest in consolidation of existing reporting. There is a possibility that core operational reporting would be provided separately from strategic MYAAs (CUPA, January 19, 2010)

¹⁰⁷ One reason behind this uncertainty was changes in the leadership of MTCU. Minister John Milloy, who was in this position since 2007, was replaced by Glenn Murray in October 2011. Minister Murray resigned in November 2012 to run for the Liberal party's leadership. As a result, Minister Milloy joined MTCU again for a few months until 2013 when Minister Brad Duguid was appointed. When the vast majority of interviews for this study were undertaken, Minister Murray had recently been appointed and his position regarding performance agreements had not been publicly disclosed.

Amidst the uncertainty, in early 2012, some sector representatives perceived the MYAAS as placeholders that would be eventually replaced by something more meaningful, in a way consistent with a process of policy-oriented learning over a longer time period, where the instrument and its implementation could be modified with the objective to make it more successful at meeting the government objectives (Sabatier, 2008)

“Most people, if they are being honest, would admit that the current agreements are placeholders”
(CEN-1)

Another expectation was that the two instruments would be used complementarily. In fact, Minister Malloy is mentioned in one of the quotes below as having indicating how the two instruments would work together, which was the approach that was privileged at the end:

“With Minister Malloy there was a plan around the strategic mandate when it was announced in May: the MYAAs would become actual reporting mechanisms (...) they would become data reporting mechanisms, and that there would be strategic mandates and they will parallel” (STU-1)

Finally, after many delays, in the summer of 2012, the government sent its formal request to both colleges and universities to prepare their SMAs, and submit them in the fall. SMAs were to take on the strategic aspects of the accountability relationship between universities and government and in some way, mimicked some of the initial objectives of the MYA/MYAAS. In that regard, their introduction is an example of “hope over experience”, that is the repeated introduction of similar reforms in spite of disappointment (Hood & Peters, 2004). That is, the SMAs are interpreted as an improved version of the original MYAs that would provide the appropriate framework to establish a strategic accountable relationship between government and universities. Although a detailed analysis of the SMAs implementation and consequences is out of scope for this study, it is recognized as an element of interest for further comprehending Ontario’s PSE accountability relationships, and a few elements of their implementation are illustrated below.

First, the SMAs include broader themes that were not previously addressed by the MYA/MYAAs, such as productivity and affordability. Furthermore, there appears to be an effort on the part of government to be much more directive, including the determination of fields of specialization per university and the approval of subject areas in which programs can be created. The references to accountability are abandoned and the language speaks of mandates, which suggests more clear direction from the government. Such increases in direction and control echo an observed trend towards neo-conservatism of the government role, particularly in light of the national security concerns that arose since 9/11. It would be of interest to study whether this tendency to be more directive is permeating other sectors, therefore creating a government context where such an initiative is welcome, as the government is perceived as taking a more active role to governing (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009). Nonetheless, “any propositions about the effectiveness of mandates are likely to depend upon the extent to which the layer of government doing the mandating is seen as a legitimate policy-maker for those being mandated” (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 141), and questions of autonomy, resistance and control are expected to resurface in any detailed analysis of the SMAs.

Second, to facilitate their review, MTCU asked HEQCO to set up an expert panel “to evaluate the SMAs in terms of their “ability to achieve significant improvements in productivity, quality and

affordability through both innovation and differentiation” (HEQCO, 2013b, p. 5). The panel reported back on their review in April 2013, indicating their inability to fulfill one of the governments’ stated intentions to identify “lead institutions.” Specifically, the report indicates:

There was not sufficient diversity among mandate statements, particularly when examined within each of the college and university sectors, to allow for identification of some institutions as leads. Where an individual SMA was seen as potentially differentiating that institution, the exercise did not permit the level of detailed scrutiny required for the Panel to be confident and/or comfortable with making a funding recommendation. In addition, the SMAs provide few examples of ideas that might transform the system (HEQCO, 2013b, p. 6).

Consequently, the report indicates that it would only “provide commentary and advice to government based on these themes to advance the government’s thinking, directions and actions” (HEQCO, 2013b, p. 6). In particular, the report goes on to recommend modifying existing funding formulas, to move away from bottom-up initiatives such as the SMAs, to base funding on outcomes commitments and to create an arm’s-length decision body for funding decisions to depoliticize the decisions. Some of these key recommendations are summarized in the text-box below.

TEXT-BOX 10-2: HEQCO’S RECOMMENDATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE SMAS

- System-level planning will require the government to be more active and assertive. Bottom-up processes like that used with this SMA exercise will not produce the system changes we believe are necessary. The government will need to demonstrate discipline, consistency and commitment to direct changes over the several years it will take to implement them.
- Funding is the major lever available to government to motivate and steer change. Government should adopt the following approaches to modify the current funding formulas: (a) The evidence suggests that strategic funding targeted to specific desired outcomes is a forceful and dramatic incentive that steers the system and influences the behaviour of institutions. Some proportion of institutional funding should be tied to specific outcomes that are aligned with government objectives. (b) Institutional competitions for targeted funding are an effective mechanism for optimizing the use of funds. In any such funding competition, the Panel advises that: (i) External validation is required of any institutional claims of primacy, quality, distinctiveness or excellence. Self-proclamations of these attributes are entirely inadequate to drive decision-making. (ii) For an institution to be eligible for any targeted funding, it must already have demonstrated an a priori tangible commitment to that outcome or project. This ensures that institutional submissions are motivated by strategic strengths and commitment rather than opportunity. To be eligible for targeted funding, an institution should be asked to demonstrate, where appropriate, and aside from other relevant criteria, evidence that the funding would increase collaboration among institutions and integration of the system.
- Although the government drives change and is instrumental in setting desired outcomes, it should consider devolving and depoliticizing outcomes-based funding decisions to an external group of experts that represents societal interests and is charged to implement government direction.

Source: HEQCO (2013b)

As of the summer of 2013,¹⁰⁸ the government has not responded publicly to the lack of clear direction arising from the SMA review exercise. Furthermore, there have been important cuts to university funding that compound the uncertain environment in which universities must react to the new requirement, as a plan to reduce post-secondary education funding is framed under a policy lever savings initiative (N. Naylor, memorandum, April 11, 2013). Finally, the introduction of the

¹⁰⁸ Further developments regarding the SMAs took place after in the fall 2013 and thereafter. However, these are not analyzed in this study as they are beyond its scope.

SMA is reminiscent of the tendency to continually renew the instrument to try to give it symbolic power, to increase buy-in, to adapt new managerial approaches or reflect an evolution of requirements (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004; Le Galès, 2004). Moreover, although rationalized as a more effective tool to strategize with universities—which remains to be demonstrated—the SMA introduction has also been used as a political tool that aimed at signaling the government’s authority and competency for governing (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004). Nonetheless, the brief description above highlights that resistance remains and the challenges continue to be unsolved, probably since this was not a fundamentally different instrument from the MYA/MYAs regarding the need to establish clear goals and base decisions on bilateral negotiations.

10.3. ‘TO BE OR NOT TO BE’ AN ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENT

The description of the introduction of the SMAs and the transformation of the MYAs into a data gathering tool show the struggle in the implementation of accountability measures in the Ontario university sector. At the outset, accountability is defined as an institutional relationship between an accountant and an accountee (Bovens et al., 2008); however, the analysis demonstrates that there is conflict and disagreement regarding the shape that this institutional relationship should take. In the post-secondary education sector, a clear source of conflict is diverging opinions across policy sector actors regarding the adequate balance between autonomy and control, which is at the core of the accountability relationship. The difficulties are compounded by the uncertainty regarding “[what] works, why or why not” to increase the performance of universities (Lang, 2013, p. 1) and by the implicit objective of dealing with multiple audiences with one single instrument (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010; Lang, 2013).

In this section, this study looks into the reasons for disagreement regarding the adequate shape of the accountability relationship by analyzing the expectations in the sector vis-à-vis its operationalization. This analysis can be justified from a perspective of policy design to help in the choice of the appropriate instrument (Hood, 1983, 2007; M. Howlett, 1991). It can also be justified from a normative NPM perspective since “the scope of the discipline is not to study public organizations in a disinterested way but to study them to help the practitioners to find a solution to their problems or to improve the working of the organizations they manage” (Gow & Dufour, 2000, p. 560). Alternatively, given the normative and positivism emphasis of the implementation literature, there is an expectation that a contribution is made to “what is feasible” and “what will work” (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 133).

However, in this study, the objective of this analysis is to identify the voids left by the implementation of the MYA/MYAs to tease out the sources of conflict and disagreement among actors, to enrich the discussion of the explanatory value of the Massy (2011) and Oliver (1991) models, to understand the perspective of Ontario’s post-secondary stakeholders regarding the implementation of the MYA/MYAs and to help contextualize the transformative role their introduction has played in Ontario’s PSE sector. Although the MYA/MYAs were not implemented in a way that they would ensure the accountability of all university funding on the part of government, a detailed analysis of the choices made serves as a case in point of the expectations and understanding of accountability relationships in the sector.

The challenge herein is that an analysis of the characteristics of the instrument quickly falls into a normative discussion, where the appropriateness of the accountability relationship is questioned depending on the author's preferred governance framework for universities. On one hand of the spectrum, one finds the position that any accountability relationships other than professional—such as performance, political or bureaucratic (Erkkilä, 2007) —are coercive (Shore & Wright, 2000) due to the imposition of official objectives (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), the simplification of a complex university environment to a series of figures and the reduction the autonomy of the professoriate (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Mighty, 2009; Shanahan, 2009b). Along that line of thought, the increased use of audits—as promoted by the NPM movement where trust is substituted by measurement and academic autonomy is replaced by management control—, “assumes and even breeds mistrust” (Gregory, 2003, p. 564) since it:

Encourages the displacement of a system based on autonomy and trust by one based on visibility and coercive accountability (...) audit is introduced largely when trust has broken down, and yet the spread of audit actually creates the very distrust it is meant to address (Shore & Wright, 2000, p. 77).

On the other hand of the spectrum, when a principal-agent relationship between government and universities is the normative background, the control offered by adequate accountability instruments that will result in priority alignment is conducive to an increase in trust (Massy, 2011). The struggle between control and autonomy, between accountability and trust, parallels the top-down and bottom-up debate of implementation studies, where there is “controversy between those who believe in control, planning and hierarchy on the one hand and on the other, those who believe in spontaneity, learning and adaptation and problem-solving techniques” (J.-E. Lane, 1987, p. 543). This struggle is compounded in a sector where professional accountability and the protection of autonomy are institutionalized values that affect all of the sector's operations.

Putting aside the normative discussion, it was the pervasive sentiment in the sector that despite several proposals regarding how accountability relationships could be improved in the Ontario post-secondary sector (COU, 2004; HEQCO, 2009; Rae, 2005), there are still important gaps to be fulfilled. To facilitate the analysis of such a statement, the identification of drawbacks, voids and misalignment in the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs is guided by a comparison with an “adequate” accountability relationship, as defined by Thomas (2007). Starting with a top-down approach, favoring control, Thomas identifies the following key elements defining such a relationship:

- (i) The delegation or negation of responsibilities, usually based on agreed expectations and standards (Thomas, 2007). Furthermore, to be accepted, involved actors must agree that the delegation of responsibilities is legitimate (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009), that the areas of action are relevant to stakeholders (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011), and when established as a performance measurement system, that it contributes to the goals of the organization (Sterk & Bouckaert, 2008);
- (ii) “The provision of authority, resources and a reasonably supportive environment to allow for the fulfillment of responsibilities” (Thomas, 2007, p.13);
- (iii) “The obligation of the accountable party to answer for the performance of responsibilities based upon the provision of comprehensive, valid and balanced

information on performance” (Thomas, 2007, p.13). In that regard, Bovens (2005) adds that the account giving must be publicly accessible, and move beyond internal informing; that the information provided must explain and justify conduct, not take the form of propaganda to the public; and that the actor “must feel obliged to come forward” (p.185). In addition, accountability schemes should contain fair judgment of performance (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011) and be based on reliable information (Sterk & Bouckaert, 2008);

- (iv) The obligation of the authorizing party to monitor performance and to take (or require to take) corrective action when performance problems or shortcomings are identified (Thomas, 2007);
- (v) “The bestowal of rewards and penalties based on performance, which can include non-monetary rewards such as publicity and other forms of recognition for superior performance” (Thomas, 2007, p.13). The role of rewards is elaborated by Bovens (2005) by including the “possibility for debate and judgment (...) and not a monologue without engagement” (p.185) and is echoed in a position stating that “accountability schemes should be open for feedback and dialogue; and (...) stimulate trust” (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011, p. 15).

One difficulty with the criteria just offered is in the vagueness of the concepts put forward. For instance, central stakeholders remain unidentified, the definition of what is considered fair performance is lacking and the meaning of “trust” is left to interpretation. Nonetheless, the identification of elements is useful in the analysis of the MYA/MYAAAs. The first element in the list consists of clear and shared expectations across participants that translate into a clear delegation of responsibilities. There are important elements in that statement: It assumes that clear expectations can be identified, that priorities can be aligned and that the government and/or university administrators have the legitimate right to establish priorities. This echoes the requirements of clear and consistent objectives and support of interest groups as instrumental to avoid policy implementation failure within a top-down analytical framework (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). However, as it has been documented throughout this study, the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs suffered from goal ambiguity, which was explained as a mechanism to avoid conflict among stakeholders (Kübler & De Maillard, 2009; Matland, 1995; Sabatier, 2008). Moreover, Thomas speaks of delegation and agreement but is silent on negotiation. However, the emphasis on dialogue and negotiation (Bovens, 2005a; Harvey & Stensaker, 2011) is pervasive in sector proposals (COU, 2004; HEQCO, 2009; Rae, 2005) and played an important role in the acceptance of a new instrument reflecting an expected new accountability relationship in Ontario’s PSE sector. In that regard, the expectations vis-à-vis the MYA/MYAAAs in the sector are summarized in the quote below:

Initially seen as intrusive and a recipe for government micro-management with a single goal of containing expenditures, the value of good accountability frameworks is now generally recognized as an important ingredient in the overall management and operation of post-secondary institutions. Moreover, over time, the emphasis has shifted from a more narrow view of adherence to policies and procedures and financial accountability, to a more comprehensive view of accountability with an onus on multi-year plans and performance measures—often developed jointly (or at least with some consultation) by government and the institutions (Snowdon, 2005b, p. 40)

The quote above highlights that one of the elements that facilitated the acceptance of the MYA/MYAAAs in the sector was the expectation that negotiations and joint definition of goals would take place. In fact, this characteristic of performance agreements, which are seen as an effective mechanism to mutually agree or voluntarily embrace goals, is one of their highlighted advantages:

[Negotiation] ensures a greater sense of responsibility with respect to the feedback process and fuller ownership of the agreed instruments. The performance contracts mentioned (...) are a good example of this kind of shared commitment as they represent the culmination of a negotiation process between university leaders and government officials to ensure convergence between the strategic goals of the institution and national policy objectives (Salmi, 2009, p. 25)

Along that line of thought, sector stakeholders quoted below insist on the interest and the need to jointly establish goals in a bilateral discussion, echoing the original idea of establishing an agreement/contract:

"[I]f governments have the courage and the clarity to be clear about what those objectives were and got in to a more meaningful dialog with universities about what both sides of that looked like, what the universities were responsible to do, what government was responsible to do. That would be a meaningful conversation on both the autonomy and the control side (...) If they really are agreements, then it's a two-sided thing. The ministry needs to make commitments and the universities need to make commitments" (CEN-4)

"What we at the universities always hoped is that (...) some groups senior in the ministry would sit with each institution and have a conversation about what their mission is, how do you see yourself in the system, where would you like to go in terms of mission and then in terms of strategic priorities. And reach a contractual agreement on that" (CEN-8)

If there is an interest in developing goals jointly, and this was one of the selling points of the MYA/MYAAAs, why has this objective not come into fruition? First, it is the perception in the sector that the government is not ready to state its goals, as this would increase their risk of not meeting them and therefore fail to meet its own accountability objectives (Callahan, 2006; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010):

"In order to be accountable and in order to have real accountability, you have to have goals and objectives. The ministry doesn't have goals and objectives. There are no system goals and I think the reason that they don't want system goals per se is because they might in fact be held accountable" (CEN-12)

The statement above highlights that under the NPM movement, where an emphasis on results is placed, falling short of pre-established targets is considered an accountability failure. Government culture struggles with the balance between reporting actual results and then explaining the variance between planned and actual reports, given that concerns regarding the image provided prevail over honesty, thus making performance reports at the departmental level look more like public relations documents (Leighton, 2008). Furthermore, the use of authority once legitimized by a normative framework, will also constraint the exercise of such power (R. W. Scott, 2008), as the government loses flexibility of action. Therefore, goals are not clearly established to minimize risks and facilitate flexibility, thus perpetuating uncertainty.

Second, despite the sector's insistence on the joint identification of goals, there is disagreement regarding the areas in which objectives could be determined jointly and regarding the appropriate scope of such objectives. Although a clear policy framework is needed to identify institutional-level objectives (Layzell, 1999), universities exert their power in defending their

autonomy regarding their mission and areas of activity. Since unclear goals give the appearance of control while remaining respectful of autonomy, ambiguity is perpetuated:

“To have very limited number of constraints and in my opinion true constraints because they are also general, that again is to give appearance that you do exert some control and at the same time you remain truly respectful of the autonomy of the institution” (FAC-3)

That is, there are areas of university activity considered to be out of the government’s purview, as exemplified by the quote below referring to institutional missions:

“To the extent that these are about mandates or missions, we really believe that that’s not something that the ministry should be approving. Universities have their own missions, their own mandates and they have their own evolution path they’re going to follow. If the government wants the university to articulate (their mission), to answer some questions about it or to talk about it in a public way, that’s fine. But it’s not something that the ministry would have to approve” (CEN-4)

Moreover, there is the possibility of conflict in determining the contribution that each university would make to system-wide goals, if and when the latter would retain the leeway to establish their own contribution to those, as illustrated by the quotes below:

“I think the universities were certainly expressing the desire for things to be like... give us an overall objective and give us some freedom as to how to achieve it” (UNI-1)

“There is an overall government framework in terms of their policies in post-secondary education, so they want to do things such as improving transfer credit or whatever, that’s within their right to have those policies. It’s within our right as to have how we respond to that. And I think its finding that middle ground (...) is what you’re trying to do with these types of arrangements” (UNI-2)

This analysis highlights, as in Chapter 9, the fundamental role played by priority alignment, and the challenges faced aiming at that objective. It is recalled that in Massy (2011) trust is defined as a situation when “principal and agent have roughly the same view about what needs to be done, why and to some extent how to do it” (Massy, 2011, p. 223). The model assumes that the principal’s goals are correct, because it has the authority to establish them; as such, accountability is defined as a mechanism to benefit the principal. This is consistent with Thomas (2007) where the principal can delegate responsibilities and agree on shared goals with the agent. However, sometimes priorities will not be aligned. Under those circumstances, allowing for flexibility and autonomy of implementers, may lead to unmet official goals (Matland, 1995). Using an example from research funding, Massy (2011) notes that:

Most universities have been able to manage these conflicts using the compliance and spin strategies, but it is possible that stronger rewards and punishments or, perhaps more importantly, more powerful ways of measuring the resources universities devote to research, could trigger overt political conflict. With no place to hide, institutions would have to win the political case for research or accept a mission that downplays it (p.239)

The two options provided in the Massy model are clear: either universities’ priorities prevail if they win the political case, or the government wins the power game and universities have to adjust. Therefore, there are circumstances where even if performance contracts or agreements allow to engage partners in discussion of the objectives, and are purported as a worthwhile vehicle “if there is a need to build understanding and trust between funding authorities and higher education providers” (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001, p. 142), this negotiation will face limitations if priorities

are misaligned, thus conflict will ensue. Closing the circle, when priority misalignment can result in important political conflict, vague priorities, which reduce conflict, are chosen. As symbolic compliance ensues, the promises of the performance agreements remain unfulfilled.

The second element in Thomas (2007) model is the adequate provision of resources and a supportive environment. This is echoed in the comments from the sector that called for the identification and commitment of multi-year funding to allow for planning and implementation. Furthermore, Massy (2011) identified the provision of resources—saliency of the rewards—as a fundamental element in the implementation of an accountability instrument. In that sense, there is a sentiment, pervasive in sector proposals (COU, 2004; HEQCO, 2009; Rae, 2005), that universities are ready to commit to certain objectives as long as there are resources associated with those goals, particularly regarding the establishment of enrolment targets:

“Universities are more than ready to have a conversation with the government about specific results for resources (...) We're totally ready to talk to government about a more managed approach to enrollment targets (...) we're asking for an explicit accountability relationship where the ministry sets targets and the universities were held accountable for reaching them because we want that certainty (...) And where government wants to move the big sector, it needs to bring resources to bear” (CEN-4)

Funding certainty is the overarching goal for universities, as the proposals and comments in the sector converge on the need for a greater government commitment on establishing clear goals, regarding enrolment or other priorities, and to bring the funding required to meet those goals, as indicated by the following stakeholder:

“The challenge for the government is they have to make really hard decisions if they're going to get in to agreements with universities about both undergraduate and graduate growth. They're going to set targets and they're got to be accountable for bringing funding for those targets that are there. And they got to be accountable for saying no to universities if they exceed those targets. On some levels, it's easier for the government to just sort of muddle through” (CEN-4)

The reiterated challenge is that certainty requires the government to make important commitments and be held accountable for them, given that size and continuity of funding are key elements to ensure the success of a new instrument (García de Fanelli, 2006). However, this is risky in an uncertain fiscal climate:

“As a government, if they set goals and targets for themselves, people will hold them accountable for those goals and targets and part of their accountability will be ‘Are you funding the system properly?’ and of course one could argue that they are not (...) when push comes to shove, the government doesn't want to be held accountable in the same way (...) they really don't want to be specifying the kind of things that they may well specify in other ministries because it is an enormous cost” (CEN-12)

“There is a general sense though that if the government wants more than what it's getting now, whether it's quality or access, given the state of resources in the universities, [they need to] bring more and we don't really expect them to bring more. You know, fiscal climate” (CEN-4)

Furthermore, even if the agreement were to commit to additional funding, some authors would indicate that universities would nonetheless find the additional funding insufficient, since constantly criticizing the government allows universities “avoid accounting for what they do with the resources that they are given” (I. D. Clark et al., 2009, p. 119). That is, the onus of accountability is constantly shifted in the discourse from one actor to another.

The third element in Thomas' model is the provision of comprehensive, valid and balanced information on performance. However, underpinning such a framework we find a number of assumptions about evidence, including "that auditable statistics provide transparent, fair and objective information about outcomes [...] that such evidence will provide the information from which improvements can be made, [...] and that this evidence is] practical, informing both policy-making and practice" (Zepke & Leach, 2007, p. 239). However, as documented throughout this study, these assumptions rarely hold, given our incomplete understanding of post-secondary education quality and the contributions made by quality improvement measures (Geuna & Martin, 2003), the lack of clarity regarding cause and effect relationships between performance and funding (Lewis et al., 2007) and the pervasive limitations due to restricted data availability (Layzell, 1999). That is, akin to top-down implementation frameworks, the requirement to have a valid causal theory that explains how objectives are to be attained is key in the approach (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980), but difficult to observe in practice. As it was documented throughout this study, many of these challenges were pervasive during the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs. Nonetheless, the search for new and improved means is likely to continue (Heinrich, 2003) and sector proposals for accountability arrangements often speak of joint goals expressed in terms of enrolment targets which would minimize measurement difficulties at least on that topic.

The fourth element in Thomas' criteria emphasizes monitoring and follow-ups with corrective action. This is akin to two elements of the top-down implementation framework where there is an expectation that the government can provide the required legal structure to enhance compliance and that committed and skilful implementing officials ensure this process (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). Moreover, monitoring is another key characteristic of performance contracts or agreements that has been particularly highlighted in recent years in countries such as Argentina and Chile (García de Fanelli, 2006; Reich Albertz et al., 2011). In Catalonia, a monitoring committee with government and university representatives is set-up for each institution, meet once per semester and have the responsibility to determine whether the targets set were met on an annual basis (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). However, problems in monitoring and in the timing of revisions are noted in other jurisdictions (Chevaillier, 1998; Sudmant, 2008), as these are considered ceremonial, fail to happen with the recurrence originally planned, or focus on minor details as reported in this study for Ontario.

Moreover, monitoring and data availability are closely linked. Since one important function of accountability measures is to demonstrate outcomes, this conveys the idea that their measurement and follow-up will also contribute to increased performance (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). However, the linkages between accountability and performance have not been proven theoretically or empirically (Dubnick & Yang, 2011). Evaluating the contribution of accountability instruments to increased performance requires that the latter be clearly defined and that the information be comparable across institutions. More importantly, there should be a consensus on how to measure performance, which has been recognized as a challenging task since, in general, performance is an elusive topic that is interpreted through the lens of those who define it (Thomas 2007), and, in particular, university performance is an area where consensus is lacking (Larouche & Savard, 2012). To measure performance, a machine metaphor is often used, as it assumes that complex systems

are understood, the linkages are observable and thus can be monitored in valid and reliable ways (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006). However, the complexity of post-secondary education limits the usability of such a metaphor due to “the inherent technological uncertainty of their core activities and their deeply embedded fragmentation. As organizations, universities thus possess limited discretion over expected results” (Enders et al., 2012, p. 15). Regarding monitoring, the lack of knowledge of linkages and cause and effect relationships implies that “knowing that they have achieved or failed to achieve target objectives or standards is not likely to aid public managers in understanding *why* performance is at the level it is or *how* managers can effect change” (Thoenig, 2003, p. 26). Furthermore, even when a definition is available, the indicators chosen for accountability tend to privilege uniformity and consequently only provide a partial view of university performance (Gauthier, 2004). This is what happens when the objectives of accountability are externally imposed, with a view to make “summative judgments of higher education quality supporting the allocation of scarce resources (*summative* function of accountability), through external accountability mechanisms such as quality reviews, rankings, reporting systems, and new funding and governance initiatives” (Speziale, 2012, p. 1155).

An alternative perspective to summative accountability is one that privileges a process of constant improvement (Larouche & Savard, 2012), that shifts attention away from a traditional view of accountability that emphasizes the appointment of blame to one that focuses on “learning for improved results” (Barrados, Mayne, & Wileman, 2000, p. 498). This approach, attributed by some to professional authority, looks for monitoring and continued improvement of processes, in a *formative* function of accountability, “by means of internal accountability mechanisms such as systems of performance measurement and management and other management information systems” (Speziale, 2012, p. 1155).¹⁰⁹ In this sense, accountability is put in place in order “to encourage and promote learning in pursuit of continuous improvement in governance and public management” (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000, p. 45). That is, summative accountability is geared towards external authority such that universities are held accountable, while formative accountability is geared towards internal use asking the question of how to ensure educational improvement (Shavelson, 2010).

These differences in objectives result in an inherent conflict between government and universities, where the former will privilege a summative focus of accountability, whereas the latter will support more formative approaches. In that regard, it is argued that:

Accountability works better when it is experienced in a constructive way than when it is imposed in an inquisition-like mode. Tertiary education institutions are more likely to appreciate the value of their reporting obligations if the relationship with their stakeholders, especially government authorities, responds to positive incentives rather than punitive measures. Therefore, accountability should be less about justifying a poor performance and more about making strategic choices to improve results (Salmi, 2009, p. 24)

¹⁰⁹ The concepts of formative and summative accountability are transferred from the program evaluation literature. These were introduced in 1967 by Michael Severn and further developed by Weiss in 1998. Following Weiss, formative evaluation is “intended to provide feedback and advice with the intention of improving a program [... summative focuses on] the bottom line with issues of value for money” (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 21).

Given that they are externally imposed, the MYA/MYAs were implemented with more of a summative accountability perspective, although their original form with an institution by institution agreement, suggested the possibility of a formative approach. However, summative goals were the most important for the government, as highlighted in the quote below:

“The tendency of governments is to gravitate to summative accountability (...) You can tot it up and see who ranks where and who has moved (...) It's much easier to have summative accountability [since in formative accountability] you set targets and you track against it, and you are looking at improving (...) the problem you always have to explain why. (...) you have to have, from the government side, a lot of discipline to let it be formative, because it's messy (...) It's not straightforward. You can't put it into a simple table, and it isn't easy to brief a minister on” (UNI-2)

There is no consensus found in the literature regarding the type of information required to satisfy the needs of summative versus formative accountability, although some authors indicate that performance indicators “are most usefully developed as a means to define institutional mission and goals operationally and to monitor progress towards their achievement” (Banta & Borden, 1994, p. 98). On one hand, there is an optimistic perspective that explores how to produce measures that can be useful for both types of accountability. That is, there is an objective to construct suitable measures to track progress towards achieving intended outcomes, while the same information could be provided to managers, who can use it formatively in a creative and innovative way to improve processes (Considine, 2002) and to the executive and other stakeholders, who can use it in a summative manner (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 292).

An alternative perspective recognizes the difficulties in doing so and indicates that there are measures that can be used for external consumption, while others are more useful for internal use, as the latter would concentrate “directly on the parameters under the control of individual managers” (Mawhood, 1997, p. 142). Moreover, “the information that is useful for summary judgments is often not detailed enough to inform decisions for improving teaching and learning” (Shavelson, 2010, p. 117). The challenge, however, is that organizations are concerned that summative accountability may be used for adverse decisions by external agencies, and thus engage into risk-avoiding behavior, for example, emphasizing outputs that are easily attainable (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010) or providing data that is “accurate” but which does not reveal circumstances that could provoke unwanted actions (Schmidtlein, 2004). That is, the use of summative accountability contributes to symbolic compliance as the introduction of performance indicators as a measure of accountability only serves as a ritualistic/ceremonial means for symbolically demonstrating an organisations commitment to rational decision making (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Watts et al., 2010).

The extent to which the objectives of universities and government can be reconciled is also of interest. That is, if accountability is expected to contribute to a relationship of trust, and trust is defined as converging priorities (Massy, 2011), but in the case of deciding what information to produce, the priorities are irreconcilable since one aims for summative accountability while the other aims for formative accountability, is trust a truly attainable goal? In that regard, some authors believe that there is already much accountability in demonstrating improvement in the sector (Harvey & Newton, 2007), without the attainment of specific goals. Furthermore, the attainment of

certain goals is an ongoing process, as questions of quality and accessibility are truly open ended and that given their complexity, progress is made in small steps, as illustrated in the quotes below. This discussion highlights the inherent conflict of accountability in the sector. There is lack of clarity regarding whether accountability should be done on a summative or a formative way, as well as regarding who is responsible to whom on those aspects, a discussion that will continue in section 11.5 regarding the governance of accountability relations.

“Goals are process. The additional investment that was being made in Reaching Higher was going to contribute to those three goals, I guess I should refer to them as goals because these are pretty much open ended is not like you can say that you have access accomplished or quality accomplished is an ongoing process” (UNI-4)

“The effort that’s put into that is certainly vastly increased. The actual amount of movement, all things considered, is relatively small, if we look at our own results of NSSE for instance, there is an upward trend over the years. But we’re not talking about going up by leaps and bounds, but that is understandable and should be accepted and understood from the get-go because we’re talking about a phenomenon, that the complexity of which is really staggering” (UNI-1)

The fifth and final element in Thomas (2007) is the bestowal of rewards, which is a contentious point in the sector as rewards are often associated with resources to meet the commitments. In the model, these could be interpreted as rewards over and above committed resources, which is an unlikely scenario in a context of fiscal constraint. Furthermore, the use of non-monetary rewards, such as publicity and similar initiatives, would deserve further exploration, but the discussion throughout this study has illustrated how universities place more value on financial rewards. To finalize the analysis of Thomas’ criteria and the suggestions made in the sector, it is important to note that Thomas remains silent on the intended audience, as it is implicit that it is the principal to whom the universities are responding. However, in the post-secondary sector, there is no single principal, which results in potential confusion regarding the intended audience of the instrument (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010; Lang, 2013). However, having an instrument that intends to answer to different groups will work against it and muddle the choices made. Although the information required to respond to one group can be collected via one instrument that can then be transformed into something different for communication purposes, this must be clearly explained. Clarifying the audience and the objectives would also contribute to having a more thoughtful way of collecting the information.

To conclude this chapter, it is noted that despite the implementation and evolution of the MYA/MYAAAs, the pervasive sentiment in the sector is that an adequate instrument of accountability has not yet been developed. On the contrary, the efforts undertaken were eventually institutionalized as data or process reporting tools that do not translate into a truly accountable relationship, as highlighted in the quotes below:

“But along with that has come a significant increase in expectations around reporting under the guise of accountability. And actually my own sense I don’t think that reporting is in fact accountability, it’s just reporting and really when all is said and done that’s what the MYAAAs are, it’s reporting” (CEN-12)

“Did that the advent of the multi-year agreements make us more accountable in the institution? I really don’t think so. It may [have] made us more accountable to government, in that we were reporting things to government in a consistent way, but I don’t think it made us more accountable” (UNI-13)

Although a new accountability instrument was introduced, it was given approval by different actors for different reasons (Pallier, 2007), thus, change is observed, but of an ambiguous kind. Following a normative approach where the government is considered the principal and universities the agents—and ignoring for now the issue of multiple audiences and accountabilities—in order to fulfill the criteria for a meaningful accountability relationship between these two groups, the experience with the MYA/MYAAAs suggests that the onus is with the government regarding the need to establish clear goals, to provide sufficient resources to meet those goals, and for the continuous monitoring of the commitments to prevent their becoming routinized, as these are key elements of success that have been lacking. On the other hand, universities must also have the responsibility to enter the conversation willing to make clear commitments. However, even if this was the case, this does not solve the potential issue that sometimes results will not be attained, a greater risk in a field where cause and effect relationships are unclear. Thus, the challenge of an emphasis on results is that it forgets that accountability can be attained in other ways that include clear objectives, professionalism and expertise, transparency in procedures, the willingness to publish decisions at the organizational level and increased participation from the public and that it is the combination of instruments that facilitates the complementarity of independence/autonomy and accountability/responsibility (Muller et al., 1996) since one single instrument cannot meet all of those objectives.

The depiction of the MYA/MYAAAs as a substandard instrument does not imply that its introduction was without consequence. In that regard, the following chapter focuses on an analysis of the transformative power of the MYA/MYAAAs beyond the decisions made surrounding its implementation.

Chapter 11. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF ONTARIO'S MYA/MYAAs

Based on the analysis of the origin and evolution of the MYA/MYAAs (Chapter 7) and their implementation at the university level between 2006-07 and 2008-09 (Chapters 8 & 9), this study has addressed one of its main questions: "How have accountability policies introduced with *Reaching Higher* (2005-2010) been implemented in Ontario universities and why have organizations made those implementation choices?" Being a study focused on the implementation of a new initiative, the analysis now turns to the changes that are observed as a result of its introduction (Mégie, 2010). As indicated in Chapter 1, this does not intend to be an exercise of impact evaluation; rather, by analyzing how accountability has been operationalized in this particular example, we can learn how the introduction of a new instrument influences accountability practices in the Ontario PSE sector and the relationship between universities and government. In that regard, the other two main questions guiding the analysis are addressed in this chapter: (i) What does the implementation of the MYA/MYAAs reveal about how accountability is interpreted and internalized by Ontario universities and their stakeholders? and (ii) What does this reveal regarding university/state relationships and faculty/administration relationships? Going beyond the technical considerations of the instrument, it is possible to ask how broad are its effects and how it structures relationships between actors (Ferlie et al., 2008; Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007).

Accountability initiatives in the post-secondary sector have sometimes been characterized as symbolic, given that under the prevalent governance paradigm, accountability is considered a goal in itself and an indication of good governance (Bovens, 2005b; Stensaker, 2009; Yang, 2011). Particularly in an environment where it is perceived as crucial that the broader public sector sends messages to the public regarding the requirement for organizations to be well-performing (Thomas, 2007), public performance reporting becomes an end in itself, used primarily for informational and symbolic accountability purposes (Gregory, 2003; McDavid & Huse, 2008). The symbolic character of the exercise is compounded when "shallow and mechanistic approaches to the promotion of responsible behaviour and the enforcement of accountability" are privileged in an environment of deep public mistrust (Thomas, 1997, p. 142). Furthermore, the superficial character of the indicators and accountability measures is exacerbated in a sector such as post-secondary education, where the lack of understanding of the "production process" contributes to the appeal of superficial indicators that give the impression of being good measures despite their inability to capture the complexity of the higher education process (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Lemelin, 1999). The MYA/MYAA experience could be qualified as symbolic to the extent that, in the opinion of some stakeholders, the mere existence of the report appears to have been enough to satisfy the government requirements, without giving much concern to their content, as illustrated by the two quotes below:

"There may have been a sense at a certain point both at the ministry and the institutional side, that the actual act of reporting out was enough and that it didn't really matter what was in [the agreements]" (CEN-1)

"Almost on day one the structure of the agreements was more in the mode of compliance than it was in creativity and vision (...) I did not believe that anything I would say was either caused by or would flow back into the broader Reaching Higher vision piece" (UNI-6)

In fact, examples of such symbolic behaviour have been given throughout this study in terms of the simple reporting of certain activities based on information provided by the ministry (e.g., SAG), the emphasis on getting success stories out the door fast without much concern about their content, and the provision of indicators to supposedly measure performance improvement without the contextual information to assess their success or not.

In the post-secondary education sector, new accountability instruments are considered ‘soft’ when the changes they entail are primarily rhetoric and are not intended to sanction individuals or their activities (Huisman & Currie, 2004). Given the lack of sanctions in the implementation of the MYA/MYAAs, in the opinion of sector stakeholders, the process appeared to be mostly rhetorical thus contributing to its symbolic character. Although universities were required to identify initiatives and define targets for their outcomes, some stakeholders are critical of the lack of evaluation of the value of the activities, which, in their opinion, reduced the relevance of this exercise. This echoes the presentation in section 10.3 of an ‘adequate’ accountability relationship following Thomas (2007), where one school of thought purports that reporting without evaluation, follow-ups and sanctions is not what characterizes a truly accountable relationship. This perception is illustrated in the two quotes below:

“There are all those sections where all the university [does is] filling out a box, and there is nothing... it's all positive... this university is great (...) it's not really an evaluation as much as time for a news story” (STU-1)

“It's not as if [the government] are intervening to [universities] saying ‘well, you better do this or that’ and ‘how you are delivering it?’” (UNI-2)

Despite such characterization, it is the purpose of this study to assess the transformative power that the MYA/MYAAs had on the Ontario post-secondary sector, given that even if observed changes are deemed symbolic and ceremonial, that does not imply that they are inconsequential (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In addition, sometimes the act of introducing a policy is “of equal or greater importance than its intended instrumental effects” (Rosen, 2009, p. 270). In that regard, the transformative power of the MYA/MYAAs is analyzed in the context of the two main questions mentioned at the beginning of this section. The discussion focuses on elements that illustrate how universities and their stakeholders interpret and internalize the new accountability requirement and complements the discussion in section 10.3 where it was documented that there are conflicting interpretations at the government and university level of what is the adequate shape of such a relationship.

In section 11.1, it is observed that as result of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs, the sector appears to have more access to factual information about universities. This availability of information and the extent to which it is used by different stakeholders is discussed, including an analysis of the degree to which its use results in either university legitimacy or in the legitimization of government actions. In section 11.2, it is noted that even when accountability is operationalized as a rhetorical tool, the benefits of sharing stories—that is, the power that is brought forward by a clear narrative—is internalized by university administrators, providing an example of organizational value shifts. Given that our attention has now turned to internal universities practices, in section 11.3 the discussion focuses on the extent to which the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs resulted in

priority alignment within universities, which complements the discussion regarding priority alignment between government and universities that was presented in Chapter 9.

The second question mentioned at the beginning of this chapter dealt with accountability relationships between universities and government and between faculty and administration. To understand such relationships, in section 11.4, the MYA/MYAAAs are analyzed as an instrument of control. Although it is noted that some elements of university autonomy have been impacted in recent years, Ontario universities continue to be powerful and autonomous institutions. Moreover, the role played by management in buffering the impact of government initiatives on the academic community is highlighted, which sheds light on administration/faculty relationships in the Ontario post-secondary sector. The chapter finalizes with an analysis of accountability governance within the universities in section 11.5. Not only are the relationships between government/university and faculty/administration complex, but it is also noted that the role of the board of governors and its relationship with senior executives is pivotal in understanding the challenges of accountability in Ontario's PSE sector. The discussion starts with the availability of information in section 11.1.

11.1. DIVULGING INFORMATION

One of the original government objectives regarding the MYA/MYAAAs was to produce a sector-wide pulse of Ontario's PSE, and thus, the report-backs were intended as a source of information. In general, the quantity and type of information voluntarily shared by universities depends on their organizational characteristics, such as size, age and program mix. Established universities tend to disclose more service and financial performance information than newer or recently created universities (Banks, Fisher, & Nelson, 1997). In the Canadian PSE sector, large universities—in terms of enrolment—and those in the medical-doctoral category, tend to publish more information (Maingot & Zeghal, 2008). Due to the observed variations in information disclosure and the lack of a sector-wide data infrastructure for Ontario's PSE, an initiative such as the MYA/MYAAAs could play a role as an “equalization” factor in the availability of information. Nonetheless, challenges may be faced, particularly when the system is not designed for information gathering and systematization, as observed in Denmark (Gornitzka et al., 2004), or when sophisticated information technology systems to meet data reporting requirements are lacking, as reported in France (Chevaillier, 1998).

The information obtained with the MYA/MYAAAs in terms of accessibility and quality of the learning environment was described in detail in Chapter 9. Although a significant amount of information was available, much of it was of a qualitative nature or lacked common definitions to ensure their comparability. In light of those challenges, in this section, the ministry's use of the information obtained, as well as sector stakeholders' opinion of its usefulness are analyzed. In addition, being a public document, the MYAAAs offered a new information source for sector stakeholders outside universities that could be used, among other things, to influence market choice among students (Callahan, 2006). Thus, the extent of their use by other groups, such as student and faculty organizations, is also analyzed. Finally, since the contribution of accountability instruments to institutional legitimacy is often equated with the provision of information (Harvey &

Stensaker, 2011; Maingot & Zeghal, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008; Trow, 1996), the section concludes with some thoughts in that regard.

Ministry staff report using the information compiled via the MYAAs to write provincial summaries, to share sector-specific information with other government agencies/ministries, to respond to media enquiries, and to provide background information to senior government officials, as illustrated in the two quotes below. In that sense, the information obtained and the documents based on it contribute to answerability from a perspective of ministerial responsibility, that is “the obligation of ministers to provide information and explanations to Parliament concerning activities within their portfolios” (Thomas, 1997, p. 144). With such an objective in mind, the effort to produce provincial summaries was continued despite the difficulties, documented throughout this study, in compiling comparative information that can be summarized sector-wide. Moreover, although compilation was facilitated with the evolution towards a more standardized electronic template in recent years, some definitional and comparability challenges still remained.

“We use the individual reports as a backup for our meeting notes when we are meeting with institutions (...) what's more common throughout the year is we will call on specific indicators [... for instance] we'll go back into the class size section of this to look at what the data tells us (...) We draw on these for answers to media enquiries, questions on the House, and to present the estimates” (CEN-6)

“As far as I can tell, it is used to write internal briefing notes to each other in the ministry and to supposedly prepare the minister for sound bites that can be used in the legislature (...) it makes it easier to write briefing notes for the Minister and it may help them in response to individuals who are commenting about government policy” (CEN-12)

As the data collection emphasized obtaining information that otherwise government representatives would be lacking due to the absence of a sector-wide data infrastructure and the variations in information disclosure noted at the beginning of this section, the MYA/MYAAs are regarded by the government, particularly in their second generation form, as valuable tools to gather information in a consistent fashion across universities, and to keep a pulse of the sector, as indicated in the following quotes:

“[The MYAAs] reflect some real holes in our post-secondary education information systems at the provincial and federal level. Trying to get information on certain groups of prospective students and tracking them is just not an easy thing to do” (CEN-1)

“If we didn't have MYAAs, there would be a vacuum, and we would be compelled to fill it (...) We would be expected to be able to answer questions about the sector's performance” (CEN-6)

Ministry representatives also indicate that their utilization is not limited to the factual information that is reported out and later on communicated within the government to meet internal accountability objectives. In their opinion, the information collected also contributes to inform government activities, by identifying system-wide issues and thus shaping government thinking that will eventually translate into policy. In that regard, two examples are provided below by government representatives:

“The agreements were able to surface some recurring systemic and system-wide issues that we could deal with in more of a coherent way [...For instance, when we were] looking at first generation students and the fact that even to get into universities would have been difficult (...) We had a series of workshops and

[developed] some guidelines for all universities and colleges on some really good work some institutions had done that only surfaced on the accountability agreements” (CEN-11)

“Sometimes there are concerns in the media [for instance, that] class sizes are huge in universities. That's not what the data tells us (...) So do we need to rush out and design a designated funding program or be prescriptive with institutions about it? No (...) so, it shapes policy and it shapes our policy response to sometimes the anecdotal issues that arise in the media” (CEN-6)

The public availability of the information provided in the MYA/MYAAAs, according to government representatives, also contributes to a better understanding of the Ontario university system and of the differences across universities on the part of the public. That is, the provision of information contributes to an improvement of the decision-making process of external users, particularly when users are defined as consumers (Callahan, 2006; Sporn, 2007). This position is described in the quotes below, where also the degree of utilization by non-governmental stakeholders is stressed:

“I felt that for the first time we had one consistent way that was transparent and posted for all stakeholders to see what institutions were accountable for and what they actually did... before you just knew a name brand. Everybody knew what Queen's was, but what Brock did? Nobody really could tell” (CEN-11)

“There is an enormous value to the sunshine aspect of the reporting, and they have to be signed off by executive heads. They have to be publicly available. We know the student groups look at it, individual students and parents look at it” (CEN-6)

The perception that the MYA/MYAAAs are read by individuals external to the government and to universities is pervasive in government representatives' discourse. However, as will be further illustrated below, no clear evidence of such use was obtained in this study. Nonetheless, as a consequence of their perceived utility at the government level, a senior government official asserts that in the absence of an instrument such as the MYAAAs, they would have to create something equivalent. This assertion denotes a lack of understanding of the limited usefulness of the information collected when definitions are unclear or data is unreliable. It also disregards the observation that the collection of data “has often become busy work of little significance to those who collect it and often of even less significance to those who, having demanded it, find that it provides no simple answers to the complex problems originally raised” (Dressel, 1981, p. 237).

Not only are these difficulties ignored, but the MYAAAs are described by government representatives as a good way to capture performance, to inform policy, and for the government to produce a narrative on PSE policy, that has become quite mature, and that will continue evolving:

“[The MYAAAs give universities] a structured way to arrange performance-related data into one kind of consistent format (...) we feel that today this is the best capture of performance of the system” (CEN-6)

“It helps us tell a story. In terms of how successful the investments have been, and I think that's the primary purpose. It helps us rationalize (...) if we have to do the report back to the Cabinet, or to Treasury Board, and then it allows us to tell a much better story. And it allows us to access more funding [... as we can demonstrate] we've done X, Y and Z so therefore our allocation for the year should be better” (CEN-2)

The positive assessment on the usefulness of the information obtained on the part of government is unsurprising, as government representatives will tend to comment positively and offer strong support for these kinds of initiatives, both in legislative debates and when responding to use surveys, as they have a vested interest in their continuation (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006;

Thomas, 2007). Moreover, non-governmental stakeholders concur with the idea that ministry representatives have obtained tangible benefits from the initiative. However, these benefits are not defined in terms of factual information or hard data, but rather are found in the narrative, the stories and the press material, that is available in a consistent format across universities, particularly as a narrative that links *Reaching Higher* investments to success stories at university sites resonates with the government and is presented in a standardized form that reduces the effort for compilation:

"I think to the extent that they can point to data and point to stories, narrative that's in one place and in one way that's consistent across universities... I think [the Ministry] made some gains on that" (CEN-4)

"From the government's perspective, having everyone report out in exactly the same way helped them look across all the institutions, and look for similarities and differences" (UNI-13)

"As far as I am concerned, this is a ministry reporting mechanism that makes their life easier" (CEN-12)

Beyond the availability of stories, university stakeholders cast doubts on the usefulness of this exercise, as they are not aware of evidence of how the information provided in the agreements works its way back to policy or even how the government releases it to the media, which is consistent with the observations made by a university representative in the context of the British Columbia agreements (Sudmant, 2008), who characterized them as neither used nor useful. In that regard, Ontario PSE stakeholders comment:

"I haven't seen the outcome of multi-year agreements work its way into a particular policy. I have seen them refer to those as sort of data points about how we are doing with X, Y and Z, but I haven't heard of a policy that says: from the report-back we know this is happening, so therefore we changed our plan to this. My overall impression is they are using it for monitoring purposes. I haven't directly seen any impact of this on new policies moving forward" (UNI-13)

"I have never been in a conversation or I've never seen evidence of how the ministry uses the information from MYAAs in any decision-making" (CEN-4)

Even its usefulness as a monitoring exercise appears to be limited to the bureaucracy itself, as participants in this study have not seen the information included in government annual reports or any kind of similar public document, as indicated below:

"That information is being used in a variety of ways but not necessarily for policy-making, I think it is being used more for reporting within the bureaucracy itself" (CEN-12)

"We don't even see very many [uses of the information in the legislature...] There is no annual report for the ministry that says how they are doing on this various things, it's not linked to any goals set by the government (...) there is no specificity to it. I see it as a huge busy work exercise frankly" (CEN-12)

Therefore, there is disagreement in the sector regarding the extent to which the expected uses of the information, both factual and narrative, were actually realized. Government representatives stress the usefulness of the information collected whereas other stakeholders question the extent to which it was used in practice. These observations concur with those of other studies, where it is observed that performance information is generally underutilized (Ho, 2005) or that their usefulness is limited to communications and awareness purposes, and are rather underutilized for decision-making (J. Taylor, 2009; Willoughby, 2004). Consequently, the information collected via performance or accountability processes may not necessarily be used to

“improve policy communication and decision making” (Yang, 2009, p. 81) and its integration “into such major processes of government as planning, budgeting, and performance appraisal, etc. has proven to be difficult and disappointing” (Thomas, 2007, p. 2). Reasons cited for the underutilization of the information obtained include that final users may have not been involved in the design of the measures (Ho, 2005), although it is important to pay attention to their needs (Leighton, 2008) and that the distribution of reports is limited, particularly in the context of evaluations (Jacob, 2006a).¹¹⁰ These explanations identify rational factors conducive to the underutilization of the information provided. Alternatively, institutional theory suggests that the provision of such information may result from systems established to meet external demands of accountability giving an impression of rationality and efficiency without an actual objective of influencing internal decision-making (R. W. Scott, 2008; J. Taylor, 2009) and thus its limited utilization is expected as the main objective of fulfilling an external requirement is met, which concurs with the comments regarding symbolic accountability at the beginning of this chapter.

As mentioned above, the government vastly communicated their expectation that the information obtained would be useful to external stakeholders and other agents in the policy network. However, it is rarely the case that the information produced is useful outside of the provincial government, as documented regarding performance reports in Ontario municipalities (Schatteman, 2010) and the use of Key Performance Indicators for Ontario universities (Callahan, 2006). With a view to obtaining evidence to validate the government position, this study looked for documentary evidence as to how the information provided in the MYA/MYAAAs was used by other stakeholders. No evidence regarding the use by individual students or parents or whether they have requested access to this information is readily available. On the other hand, there is published evidence that it has been used by organized student and faculty groups, particularly during the first years since its introduction. For instance, OCUFA produced an analysis of faculty hiring using the information from the MYAAAs (OCUFA, 2009a) and used it to advocate for their policy priorities, as highlighted in the quotes below:

“OCUFA followed and seized on, like the students, the parts that were consistent within their own agenda [... for instance] to track the numbers of faculty and student faculty ratios and so on [...OCUFA] seized on a couple of the indicators (...) and used [them] in the research and the publications and in their public pronouncements [...and] in their public relations strategy and lobbying strategies” (CEN-8)

“There are a number of things that we want to get out of the agreements, and one of them was more data to be collected especially as it pertains to contract of faculty. We were also interested in tracking student-faculty ratios, and links to class-size. Our members were concerned because they could see class size growing and then falling or deteriorating student-faculty ratio they wanted addressed” (FAC-1)

Another example is by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) that produced an analysis of funding with the Student Access Guarantee and of the percentage of first generation students who have access to bursaries (CFS, 2009). These two examples provide evidence that stakeholders other than the government used the new information provided via these official reports, however, given

¹¹⁰ In analysis of the utilization of evaluation reports in Quebec, Jacob (2006a) indicates that only 30 per cent of survey respondents systematically share their reports with the Minister and only 15 per cent share it with Quebec's National Assembly. Usually, 50 per cent of reports are posted online.

that only two examples were found over the seven years the MYA/MYAAAs have been publicly available, which suggests that their use is in fact quite limited. The interest of the part of OCUFA faded in later years with the changes made to the report-backs. On the other hand, student organizations perceive these instruments as a continued opportunity to obtain institutional information, as illustrated by their request to add information on credit transfers to the agreements (CFS, 2010) and the quote below that describes how their feedback is considered by the government. In that sense, it can be argued that organized stakeholders, other than the government, have seized the opportunity by establishing ownership of the instrument and influencing its content. As the relationship between the government and student organizations is more collegial than with faculty associations, the process of consultation described below happens solely with the former, which is a continuation of existing relationships:

“As [the MYAAAs] exist as a data reporting tool, we’ll use them as a data reporting tool (...) As the new MYAAAs are being developed, we provide specific feedback [... we are interested in] adding tracking of rural students like they are tracking the aboriginal and first generation students (...) there continues the issues with the class size data being inaccurate (...) We talked about creating a section about support services (...) it continues to be an ongoing discussion with the ministry” (STU-1)

A final point to assess regarding the utilization of the information provided by the agreements is the extent to which these are known or utilized by internal university communities, as it has been observed in other jurisdictions that the introduction of program-contracts has facilitated the internal dissemination of institutional objectives (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). In this regard, the evidence in Ontario suggests that the level of utilization is very limited. University-level faculty and student association representatives contacted at the individual study sites were, for the most part, unaware and unfamiliar with the agreements. University representatives do not appear to be surprised by this finding, as they consider the agreements to be of little interest to internal stakeholders, particularly when their role has transformed into a data collection tool. When they were first introduced, there was some interest as there were consultations and discussions regarding the content of the commitments in the three-year MYA plans, but as these became part of the regular business, they were no longer utilized:

“I would say that the interest in the MYAAAs had in my community has decreased overtime. There was intense interest for the first couple of years around how that worked and there were people who knew about the agreements (...) It very quickly became part of our ordinary business, so now these are things that move forward, they get filed (...) actually, I can't remember the last time anyone asked me for a copy of our multi-year agreement or asked me where to find it” (UNI-13)

The diminished interest in the agreement results not only from their lack of renewal, as there are no goals and commitments incorporated into them, but also, according to the university representative below, these are not widely known on campus since their publication has no effect on the activities at the student or the faculty level, a point that will be further developed in section 11.4:

“I think it's utterly below the radar. I don't think it is part of the broad public or even student equation. The fact that we have these agreements, that we negotiate their structure, we crunch a bunch of numbers, we report-back, they give us feedback, that we do it again, I don't think that has made any change whatsoever in the life of a student or of a faculty member” (UNI-6)

Furthermore, although these documents include data and narrative regarding individual universities, given that their structure does not necessarily reflect the priorities of universities, university administrators direct their audiences to other documents. This observation contradicts the experience in Catalonia, where program contracts were found to have been beneficial in the dissemination of information and objectives within universities (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). In the case of the Ontario MYA/MYAAAs the direction of the information flow is the opposite, from internal practices towards external knowledge, since universities wish to tell their story in a way that is relevant to their own priorities and context, as illustrated by the two quotes below:

“I don’t think there is wide spread use in campus of any of those documents (...) If someone wants to find out about [University x, the MYAAAs are] not structured in the way that we might structure to tell our story [... so] we could refer them to other material that would be where we have more opportunity to write it the way we want it to write it, for that particular audience” (UNI-4)

“[To communicate with the university community] I use other document that come out as part of our planning exercise, our university academic plan... because those planning documents are actually within [our university’s] context, within our strategic plan, those become more relevant to our community” (UNI-13)

Consequently, despite the value perceived by the government and by Ontario-level student organizations in terms of information availability, from the perspective of universities, the MYAAAs, particularly in their current data-driven form, are much more geared towards serving the interests of the ministry than theirs. In that regard, the following quotes reflect how the MYAAAs are not considered useful, but are rather seen as a reporting requirement that needs to be fulfilled:

“The universities generally see the MYAAAs as something that they’re required to do and that they do not find internally useful” (CEN-4)

Particularly since 2009-10, when the MYAAAs were reinvented as a data collection tool, and there have been no additional funding provided or bilateral negotiations, the MYAAAs are considered an involved and demanding exercise that creates too much work for little benefit, as illustrated in the two quotes below:

“I just don’t know whether it’s worth the effort to be able to put out a public relations piece” (UNI-14)

“When I think of the time and effort that went in to both the negotiating of these things and then completing them at the institutions...it really was a lot of work for very little benefit” (CEN-9)

Indeed, the amount of work associated with these agreements has a cost element associated with them that is rarely mentioned. The estimate provided in the semi-structured interviews is that the completion of the agreements and report-backs takes about one month per year, which is translated into 0.1 annual FTE of a staff member at a university, as per the quote below:

“A good chunk of my August is usually spent on that and then if I imagine pieces of people elsewhere it probably add up to about a month” (UNI-3)

Although there are possible variations across institutions and over time regarding the amount of resources dedicated at universities to deal with the MYA/MYAAAs, a rough estimate could assume that these have required 0.1 FTEs annually at each Ontario university, which translates into a

conservative dollar value of approximately \$1.3 million since 2004-05.¹¹¹ This does not take into account the cost of managing this initiative from the government perspective. If the cost is assumed to be shared equally between governments and universities, the initiative could have cost thus far close to \$3 million, an important amount for a rhetorical initiative that was also replicated in colleges, albeit a very small share of Ontario university budgets.

To finalize the discussion on the provision of information, it is important to link it back to the role that this activity plays in the legitimization of the actors involved. In general, it is considered that the provision of information as a result of accountability requirements contributes to the legitimacy of post-secondary institutions (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011; Maingot & Zeghal, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008; Trow, 1996). This is particularly the case when this information clarifies or illustrates how accountability measures help post-secondary institutions deliver with regards to their economic contribution and their expected value in a knowledge society (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011). However, the provision of information described in this section is at a much more primitive level, being more concerned with counting things, rather than understanding and explaining the societal value of PSE. Therefore, the extent to which the provision of this kind of information contributes to the legitimization of universities is likely to be limited and explains the little benefit observed by university representatives. From a legitimacy perspective, the initiative plays a more important role facilitating the legitimization of government initiatives; furthermore, since the government judges that the benefits of obtaining this information outweigh the costs, the continuation of the initiative is justified (Peters, 2010). Universities, on the other hand, do not perceive the MYAA related activities as catalysts in improving their standing vis-à-vis the government, and therefore are increasingly aware of the need of sharing their stories, which is discussed in the following section.

11.2. SHARING STORIES

The implementation process of the MYA/MYAAs may be interpreted as one that privileged rhetorical approaches and contributed more to the legitimization of government than that of universities. However, even rhetorical changes are not inconsequential since institutional change can also be reflected in shifts in values, assumptions and culture at the organizational level (Boyce, 2003). That is, even in cases where symbolical or rhetorical implementation is privileged, the introduction of particular policies reinforce certain beliefs, illustrate changing influences on organizations (Watts et al., 2010) and thus change the interpretations of actors of their reality and therefore their actions (Rosen, 2009). This can happen even when policies fail, as their accumulation may bring about changes in attitudes (Gow, 2012) due to the topics highlighted in their content (May, 2003). For instance, new management reforms adopted to increase organizational legitimacy may result in the provision of new information to “stakeholders, such as government and the public, as a mechanism for raising the profile of the organization or reducing conflict” (Watts et al., 2010, p.

¹¹¹ As of 2013, the estimate accounts for one month of work for one full-time equivalent staff for nine years (2004-05 with the IAA to 2011-12 for the latest report) in 20 Ontario universities, at a conservative annual salary of \$80,000 before benefits. This salary is conservative as in some offices, and particularly in the first few years of the MYA/MYAAs there were a significant number of senior administrators that were involved. Applying a factor of 23 per cent in benefits, the cost is estimated at \$1.3 million.

11). The analysis in this section identifies such value shifts observed in Ontario universities as a result of the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs. Specifically, the analysis finds that, in recent years, universities appear to be more aware of the value of reporting, both regarding the need to provide stories to government to justify their investments, as well as of the value of reporting to a broader audience beyond the government. The observed change is a greater predisposition to sharing stories and, more importantly, by a recognition that there may be benefits from collaborating with the government.

The recognition that there are benefits from collaborating with the government in the identification and publication of success stories takes place even when, as indicated in the previous section, university representatives perceive that the benefits to the government are greater. According to the government representative and the university stakeholder quoted below, the benefits from collaboration arise from universities and MTCU representatives having a shared agenda of justifying the benefits and outcomes of increased funding to the sector, to jointly produce a positive impression within the government, and have continued access to financial resources:

“I think that has resonated very well with [universities] that we [ministry staff] use this information with the Minister, and he is happy when he finds out that these institutions have improved in whatever ways, because it makes us all look good; makes [universities] look good, makes [the government] look good” (CEN-2)

“[Demonstrating outcomes] puts [universities] in a good light which means the ministry can point to us and say ‘we funded them and look at the great job they are doing for our economy’ and ‘maybe we can justify giving them more money’. These are shared interests among the universities and the government, we aren’t always at odds” (UNI-6)

The recognition of shared agendas is compounded in a context of limited financial resources, where ministry representatives must make a strong case before the Ministry of Finance and the Premier to justify further investments in the PSE sector relative to other competing priorities. This need for collaboration was recognized in the past for Ontario’s PSE when it was purported that “there is a need to demonstrate whether the public investment in higher education is seen to provide sufficiently value added to claim priority on public and/or private resources” (Shapiro & Shapiro, 1994, p. 14). The observation made here, however, is that the need to communicate and the benefits of collaboration appear to have permeated the administrative structure of universities to the offices who have a direct hand on the information shared. In such an environment, universities recognize that they would eventually benefit if they help communicate their needs and their stories more clearly, particularly since the return would be of a financial nature, as illustrated by the two quotes below. There is a realization that if universities tell their story, they will exert control in the way it is presented and thus contribute to the legitimization of their funding needs.

“Twenty years ago we would ask for money and expect to do nothing in return (...) I think we are wiser and fully appreciate that the government needs to show why this was worthwhile (...) I am a little more mellow about providing this information back to the ministry so that it can make its case, than I would have been years ago when I might have said ‘oh, this is silly. This doesn’t actually prove anything’ (...) We are more conscious of the fact (...) that the ministry needs our help” (UNI-6)

“[The government and universities] depended on each other in terms of the expectations to the public and how we were going to articulate what we were putting out there (...) both parties had a stake in this (...) the premier had put money into post-secondary education rather than health, everybody knew that. So we needed to deliver [... to confirm that] he made a good choice” (CEN-11)

A second motivation that contributes to the greater willingness on the part of universities towards sharing success stories within the government is that the relationship between universities and government is uneven throughout the sector. That is, some universities, due to their size, geographical location or other factors, have closer contact with and greater influence on government activities. This point is discussed in the context of university autonomy and the influence on government activities in the quotes below:

“There are some [institutions that] are more vulnerable and there are some that have more political power within the province (...) there are differences in how institutions can exercise their autonomy. If you are sitting in an institution that is very dependent on the northern grant or highly dependent on education BIUs then you are going to be far more vulnerable than if you don’t have either of those things” (UNI-2)

“There are some institutions that do have more regular interaction with government at all levels than others, some universities have fairly aggressive government relations teams (...) all universities did have some discussions around the development of the templates as they consulted, but it’s likely that [...some] other institutions had probably more of an impact than others in terms of how that plays out just because of that the normal nature of how they set themselves up in relation to the government” (UNI-13)

The two quotes above confirm an earlier observation that the legitimization value of the MYA/MYAAAs was greater for smaller and less influential universities. Even if there were doubts regarding the use of information contained in the agreements by the ministry, university representatives perceived the original MYA plan as an opportunity to share their story with government officials. The MYA/MYAAAs provided a framework for discussion, particularly for those institutions that were not close to government, regarding the things that universities were doing and how these fit the government priorities, in a way that they could convey their stories, their needs, their priorities and their plans. This is confirmed by a university representative in the quote below:

“It’s important that you do tell your story, sometimes you can be too busy, you are trying to do good things but you are not necessarily getting the word out (...) this process certainly helped, it provided another vehicle (...) Did this encourage more information flow to the province? Yes, and is that a good thing? It’s important that policy makers be informed on what we are doing and that the politicians understand where we are and where we are headed and the progress we are making” (UNI-4)

In that sense, the introduction of the new instrument is embraced by universities with a view to advance their own policy goals (Durant, 2008) and to build and to communicate a coherent and shared vision of what universities are and do. Creating such stories also allows universities to report on their performance as a marketing tool (Watts et al., 2010), thus pushing the agenda for additional funding to improve the quality of the educational experience. The construction of the story is done in such a way that the solution, in this case, greater funding to improve quality, is part of the narrative, taking the shape of a casual story (Radaelli, 2010; Stone, 1989):

“We should be clear about what it is we are trying to do, and whether or not we achieve those things (...) We had some good conversations with the government around number of faculty, around quality improvement plans, around types of initiatives that we have on campus, and that’s been the framework to help moving forward” (UNI-13)

“Quality assurance was certainly something that is always on every university’s agenda and that was always one of the major items that was pushed: We need more funding so that we can have more quality, we

need more funding per student, because that will improve the quality of the student experience and will improve the outcome indicators” (UNI-14)

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the interest in sharing stories went beyond the perceived benefits of collaborating with the government, as some stakeholders indicate that the introduction of the MYA/MYAAS contributed to promote greater openness on the part of universities with regards to voluntarily disclosing information more broadly and ensuring that they are being more transparent:

“It led to universities being more open with their data and reporting (...) I don’t know if that’s resulted in any kind of improvement, but I do think it was kind of a wakeup call for (...) universities that they need to be more open with sharing information” (STU-2)

“I think it raised everybody awareness of there has to be more transparency, and more open dialogue and sharing of the information” (BOA-2)

“One thing that has had an important impact on universities is the public transparency aspect (...) because it’s been picked up by (...) any other type of public information system, whether public or private. Universities (...) are concerned about the image that they project through the results” (UNI-1)

There is a value shift in the acceptance of the transparency notion that goes beyond the initial requirements. The introduction and institutionalization of the MYA/MYAAs facilitated a movement towards greater acceptance of reporting requirements, both regarding the need for system-level data and the development of new indicators. It also motivated universities to publish and publicize activities that were not being published before and that contributed to a change in approach institution-wide. This shift in perceptions at the university-level, however, may not be solely due to the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs since other contemporary events contributed to the universities’ desire to provide more information publicly. At the macro level, the development of e-government with the advent of the World Wide Web, promoted during its first stages a digital presence concerned primarily with providing information (Ahn, 2012; Norris, 2010). At the micro level, Ontario universities concerted in the creation of CUDO and its annual updates with the objective of managing Maclean’s magazine requests for information. Furthermore, other research has identified fundraising efforts and the need to respond to the needs of stakeholders (Grosjean et al., 2000; Nelson, Banks, & Fisher, 2003), the pressure exerted by international competition and international rankings (Maingot & Zeghal, 2008), and an interest to prevent being left exposed to the media (Kennedy, 1997) as forces behind increased levels of information disclosure. Voluntary disclosure can also result from a “defensive” strategy, as in the case of the Canadian Research Granting Councils that “deal with the challenge of appeasing demands for greater accountability (...) by stepping efforts to communicate those outcomes that can be reported” (Sá et al., 2013, p. 112).

Given that transparency as the provision of information also contributes to the effort on the part of universities to maintain institutional legitimacy (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011; Maingot & Zeghal, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008; Trow, 1996; Usher & Potter, 2006), we observe in Ontario the realization of the value of institutional communication, which enhances the visibility and influence of organizations, with a view to create or strengthen their image or reputation (Pasquier, 2012). Nonetheless, the acceptance of such values is not without challenges. Such acceptance can range from an assimilation of “the concept of each university being accountable to society”, as observed in Catalonia (Dill & Beerkens, 2010b, p. 289) to a less demanding requirement of promoting “a

culture of transparency about outcomes” (Salmi, 2009, p. vii). Since transparency consists of the “voluntary disclosure of information that shapes, structures or contributes to attitudes, behaviours, actions or discourse, for the purpose of ensuring that they are totally intelligible” (Bernier, 2012), it is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for accountability. In that sense, “being made more accountable (... is) not the same as being made more transparent or publicly available” (Power, 2000, p. 117). Furthermore, the emphasis is placed on outcomes and reports when it has been argued that transparency of processes is the element that contributes to the preservation of autonomy in balance with accountability since organizations assume responsibility and transparency of their actions (Mackie et al., 1995). Finally, although the concept of transparency is presented as a well-defined goal, it suffers from the same definitional challenges as accountability. Similar questions in terms of the standards, means, agents and object can be raised with regards to transparency and responsiveness, and the elusiveness of the term and implications of its implementation are similarly vague (Thomas, 1998).

The acceptance to share stories goes beyond the MYAAs not only in terms of potential audiences but also in terms of potential instruments. As the majority of the interviews for this study predated the formalization of the SMAs, at the time, the MYAAs were perceived as the foundation for more meaningful accountability and more refined indicators and instruments. Central stakeholders and government representatives, as per the quotes below, perceive that there has been an internalization of transparency requirement at universities that facilitated the transition towards other instruments that could eventually be even more demanding.

“I think when the agreements were first introduced six years ago, the push back really was ‘we don’t want aggregate system-level, comparable data’. There were all sorts of things that universities didn’t want, that now (...) they are more comfortable with (...) I don’t think it was intended, but the MYAAs have almost sort of smoothed the transition towards something a little bit more meaningful [... There is more] of an acceptance that accountability is a necessary part of what we do. I guess it’s just a question of how” (CEN-1)

“We moved the conversation [on] university accountability from where it was before the Rae report to where it is now (...) We’ve made the sector more aware of the accountability (...) we have experimented with tools, we have supported (...) the development of new tools to try to get a better handle on it and I think the government [has] made some progress” (CEN-8)

Given that this study does not provide an analysis of the implementation of the SMAs, the extent to which these expectations have been fulfilled is not analyzed. Nonetheless, it is noted that the MYA/MYAAs are perceived both as a cause behind the greater acceptance of accountability and as consequence of it. That is, in Chapter 7, the MYA/MYAAs were portrayed as a result of an evolution in the scope and reach of accountability requirements and as a consequence of the accountability movement in Ontario and worldwide. However, their internalization on the part of universities and their participation in their implementation also suggest that they can play a role as facilitators in the greater acceptance of accountability. This is illustrated in the following quote:

“[With the] increased emphasis on accountability in the public sectors more generally, this was all kind of wrapped up together, with an increased demand that we measure, be accountable, with the appearance of tools to try to do it [... The MYAAs] are partly a cause of the change of behavior and partly a consequence of the whole reformulation of thinking about higher education” (CEN-8)

That is, the accountability movement and the introduction of new instruments became a force in themselves that pushed further for their increased utilization, in a reinforcement cycle, as they drive the way in which actors behave and formalize a certain representation of the problems (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010). In this case, the common representation is that more accountability is required. The introduction of the instrument has contributed to align the accountability priority—pivotal in *Reaching Higher*—between government and universities, as universities appear to have become more accepting of the imposition of external accountability instruments. This was done by introducing the idea of a contractual relationship—a powerful instrument in theory—and promoting its internalization in the PSE sector. Even when the characterization of the MYA/MYAAAs, especially in later years, as performance contracts is highly questionable, the objective of accepting more accountability impositions was attained. The symbolic dimension of the policy contributed to the legitimization of its material aspects (Rosen, 2009). Nonetheless, there is still misalignment regarding the form and shape that accountability will take, as universities are interested in demonstrating their individual accountability as they interact with stakeholders in an institution-specific fashion, but are unconcerned with system-level accountability (or at least not in same degree as government) and the challenges in developing system-wide performance measures have not been overcome, as was discussed in section 10.3. The phenomenon of greater acceptance that has been documented in this section is primarily observed at the level of central administrators. In that regard, it is of interest to determine how these changes have permeated within the complex university structures and what is observed in terms of autonomy and governance of accountability systems in Ontario’s PSE. These topics will be addressed in sections 11.4 and 11.5. Before that, the discussion turns to the linkages between the MYA/MYAAAs and priority alignment.

11.3. ALIGNING PRIORITIES

In Chapter 9, where the content included in the first-generation MYA/MYAAAs was analyzed, it was shown that about half of the topics to report on already had strong priority alignment between government and universities, and that this played a role in facilitating compliance with the new requirement. It was also shown that the level of generality in the *Reaching Higher* objectives contributed to a perception of alignment that promoted compliance with the agreements. In this section, the objective is to analyze the extent to which there was a change in the degree of priority alignment between universities and government due to the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs, and consequently, the impact on university substantive/policy autonomy. Indeed, when first introduced in 2006-07, the MYA/MYAAAs were perceived by stakeholders as an instrument that could potentially strengthen the influence of government priorities on institutional behavior (Shanahan, 2009a), given that performance agreements have been noted to allow the government to direct universities “under the pretext of strategic choice” (Enders et al., 2012, p. 14). In particular, the discussion is interested in analyzing the extent to which priority alignment permeated within the university internal structures and will show that the role played by the MYA/MYAAAs in facilitating such an internal alignment has been limited, and where observed, it is at such a specific level that their broad effects are limited.

Given that the high-level priorities outlined by the government were already aligned with those of universities, albeit at a general level, according to sector stakeholders the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs was not conducive to major changes in direction at the organizational level. This was more clearly the case in those instances where the university mission was close to the government's objectives, as indicated in the quotes below:

"[Universities were] reasonably well prepared because the focus on these policy issues was a natural piece of what they were doing in many cases. [For instance, our university] has a tradition of trying to recruit and retain a wide variety of students (...) I don't think [that] knowing that we were going to have to do these reports or having this identified in the plan really changed our own direction" (UNI-4)

"Universities, or at least the ones I associated with were interested in quality anyway, so it was more of a discussion about particular ways to get there or try to get there as opposed to the goal" (CEN-8)

Although universities were already working for the most part on the outlined priorities, some degree of change was observed given that the requirement included new topics that had not been dealt with within an accountability arrangement in the past. The focus on particular initiatives was, in the opinion of some stakeholders, an important change in the way the government had done things to date:

"Right from day one this was about access, about under-represented group's access, about quality, about enrolment growth. With the exception of enrolment growth, those had never been topics that were subject to explicit accountability (...) So it was a huge sea change in the way that the relationship between the ministry and the universities evolved" (UNI-6)

Priority alignment does not limit itself to the macro level—that is, between university administrators and the government. It can also be observed within universities, thus the question is to what extent the government's interests translated into changes in direction internally. Analyzing the extent to which this internal alignment was observed is important given that one common criticism made vis-à-vis the implementation of performance agreements in other jurisdictions is that internal faculty and staff members have limited knowledge of the initiatives and goals identified in the contracts, therefore limiting their commitment (García de Fanelli, 2006; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Indeed, performance agreements are expected to induce pressure to align priorities between central administration and faculties/services within the university (García de Fanelli, 2006). This pressure for alignment, however, can be challenging, as coordination within universities is difficult given that the "distribution of decision-making responsibilities and the degree of institutional fragmentation are important factors conditioning the extent to which co-ordinated change (...) is possible or likely" (Maassen & Gornitzka, 1999, p. 302). In addition, when compatibility of priorities across internal policy levels is lacking, gridlock may ensue (Richardson, Reeves-Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999), and "systems implemented to satisfy external requirements are less likely to influence internal behavior than are those implemented to satisfy the organization's own needs" (Cavalluzzo & Ittner, 2004, p. 244).

In the case of the Ontario MYA/MYAAAs, since many of the initiatives proposed by universities were based on existing strategic, planning and academic plans, most initiatives proposed were already well known within universities. Furthermore, by aligning the responses to the government with their internal plans, university administrators ensured consistency between what they were

presenting to internal and external stakeholders, both regarding their commitments and their plans. This process is described by the following university representative in the quote below:

“I don’t have different answers for different stakeholders. One of the tricks from all of this is that we do have continuing conversations through our governance process with students and with faculty associations, and with mainline faculty members (...) so making sure that the multi-year agreement talks to exactly what these things are [... to represent] the same types of conversations we are having internally is important to make sure they are aligned” (UNI-13)

Furthermore, since administrators looked towards their internal activities to find initiatives that would fit the government’s objectives, sector stakeholders indicated that the new reporting requirements made universities take some time to reflect on the activities that they were undertaking in the context of the government’s general priorities. This confirms the observation that performance contracts are generally believed to contribute to disseminate awareness of some challenges that are being faced (Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). For instance, in the quote below, it is argued that the MYAAs made university representatives more aware of the work being done internally, which is an example of an intangible effect in the form of awareness creation:

“It gave us an occasion, to think more explicitly and look at what we are doing in the context of those priorities. It may not have shifted direction very much, but it certainly reinforced the direction in which universities were going [... the MYAAs] made us much more conscious and aware of (...) different participation rates of different groups in society, and their different rates of success [... it also] made us more conscious about (...) what we were doing in terms of the quality of the undergraduate experience” (CEN-8)

In addition, given that some of the government’s areas of interest were quite specific, for example, aiming to increase the participation rates of under-represented groups, this emphasis, coupled with the provision of targeted funding envelopes, is believed to have contributed to an institutional focus on these concrete areas. For instance, universities identified detailed strategies and initiatives, either ongoing or new that contributed to progress to those specific objectives:

“The agreements made it necessary for the universities to demonstrate accountability on some very specific activities and strategies, such as what are you doing to increase first generation enrolment or demonstrate to us three things that you have done that increase the quality of the classroom environment for students... very, very specific things” (UNI-6)

As a result, universities indicate being involved in explicitly articulating more strategies to support first-generation and aboriginal students, which may not have been a priority before for some institutions. As a consequence, there is a certain degree of isomorphism across institutions observed in this area directly resulting from the government pressure exerted on universities, which is of a coercive nature given the dependency on government funding (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The perception of the MYA/MYAAAs as a tool that would promote greater access of under-represented students is confirmed in a 2011 analysis of access to higher education in Ontario developed by student organizations, where robust MYAAs are identified as an instrument for the government to encourage institutions to invest in non-traditional students along targeted funding (OUSA, OSTA & CSA, 2011). Furthermore, in cases where the activities were ongoing, the emphasis from the government and the additional funding resulted, according to university representatives, in the expansion of some of these programs and in highlighting the importance of certain minority groups within the university environment in activities other than reporting:

“We are doing more on the first generation than we would have. We had programs in place, this helped support those programs and continue them, and they have more volume than they would have (...) they didn’t go in new directions though. It was really expanding [what] they were doing for the most part” (UNI-2)

“It has probably been somewhat helpful in underlining the importance of that particular population in the life of this university. I think that plays out when the current administration is very supportive in working to attract aboriginal faculty [... the focus] is somehow helpful outside the MYAA” (FAC-4)

The discussion so far has focused on the first generation of the MYA/MYAAs, as these were the ones with a performance agreement form where priority alignment was an objective. In the most recent iterations of the MYAAs, where the emphasis is on a data reporting tool, the emphasis on priority alignment has lost its stature of importance since recent report-backs are no longer responding to university-level multi-year plans with specific objectives and their linkages with *Reaching Higher* have faded. Nonetheless, the government continues to add reporting requirements according to their ever evolving interests and priorities, which is perceived in the sector as priority signaling. In that regard, the MYAAs are interpreted by the sector as a signal of requirements to come, and sometimes of priorities for which funding may become available in the future, a function quite different from those observed in the literature:

“[The MYAAs] provide an avenue for the government to send signal to what’s important (...) many universities are responding appropriately because they know that if these are priorities, money will come” (STU-1)

“We are getting a better sense of what government wants to talk about, and that has been helpful” (UNI-13)

Despite the role played in signaling, the contribution to university knowledge is limited since the signal does not help reduce uncertainties regarding future funding initiatives. An additional challenge with some of the new requirements added to the report backs in recent years, is that contrary to the first generation of the agreements, where priorities were almost naturally aligned, additions in recent years are often far removed from the educational mission of the university, such as requiring to demonstrate that procurement procedures are respected as in the case of supply chain rule compliance. As a result, the power of the MYAAs to align priorities has been reduced, as these procedural technicalities are perceived as unimportant by university administrators in the context of a bilateral accountability relationship.

It is concluded that the contribution of the Ontario MYA/MYAAs to priority alignment has been limited. In their first-generation form, this was explained by their level of generality that allowed for universities to fit in. Although this has been interpreted as a positive aspect of this type of instrument in other jurisdictions, since it is respectful of autonomy and institutional decision-making (García de Fanelli, 2006), it shows that the value of the instrument as a directive and control tool is determined in part by the specificity of the objectives included. This is illustrated by the fact that the specific interests of the government, particularly those in terms of under-represented students that were explicitly identified, did create a focus. This balance between accountability and autonomy is also illustrated by the position that an integrated contract, including broad themes, could reduce the evaluation overload and thus be positive, albeit the risk would be a loss in institutional autonomy (Gornitzka et al., 2004). Furthermore, the role played in priority alignment was further reduced when the tool was transformed into a data-collection instrument, and now is

used more as a signaling mechanism of the government's interests. It is also noted that the Ontario agreements were narrower in focus in terms of the priorities they wished to align than those observed in other jurisdictions where their reach was broader, maybe even including research activities, enrolment targets and greater funding shares (Gornitzka et al., 2004). The discussion now turns to what the introduction of the MYA/MYAs reveals regarding government control and institutional autonomy in the province.

11.4. REVEALING GOVERNMENT CONTROL

The introduction of new accountability instruments is often framed within a normative perspective of principal-agent relationships, where the government's objective to exercise control in the sector is considered legitimate (Enders et al., 2012). Furthermore, the introduction of "better management techniques" is considered politically neutral and is not expected to distort normal or political relationships (Pollitt, 1993). In the post-secondary sector, however, the authority from the government to request universities to give account of their actions is not generally accepted by all actors for all dimensions of university activity. Moreover, the degree of autonomy in the relationship between government and institutions is "culture-specific and the rights and controls that are taken for granted in one country can be unthinkable in another" (Fielden, 2008, p. 18). Consequently, the relationships of control and authority are quite diverse across jurisdictions (Kogan & Marton, 2006); these distinctive features will influence the content of policies and reforms (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007) and "beliefs regarding autonomy (the values embedded in the instrument and the discussion) limit what the instrument can accomplish" (Reale & Seeber, 2012). To facilitate the analysis of the MYA/MYAs implementation, this study used a model based on the principal-agent perspective; however, this does not preclude from noting its normative implications. In that sense, the relationship between autonomy, accountability and control is made explicit to understand how the introduction of a new instrument affects the relationship between Ontario universities and government and what it reveals regarding the balance of power (Ferlie et al., 2008; Lascombes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010) between these two actors. Therefore, this section explores the new requirement in light of its linkages with university autonomy.

In the accountability literature, it is generally indicated that increases in the external imposition of mandates are associated with lower levels of university autonomy (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Mighty, 2009; Romzek, 2000; Shanahan, 2009b; Shore & Wright, 2000). Given that relationship between external mandates and autonomy, when the MYA/MYAs were introduced in their original form of goal setting and review process, it was expected that the government would be "able to exercise a degree of control over post-secondary institutions that did not exist before the MYAs process" (I. D. Clark et al., 2009, p. 128), an expectation that concurs with the implementation of similar contracts in Quebec (Ratel, 2005). Conversely, other authors expected that this new instrument would provide greater autonomy, or at least maintain existing levels, since the Rae proposal gave universities the opportunity to present their objectives as individual institutions (Snowdon, 2005a). Being cognizant of autonomy concerns, the Rae Review recommended that the government demands for accountability be confined to "the collection of data on a limited number of performance indicators, [to ensure that] institutional autonomy would

not be threatened” (Skolnik, 2005, p. 9). This interpretation is consistent with the literature on performance agreements in other jurisdictions, where the ability of universities to choose their own objectives has resulted in increased autonomy with better defined institutional identity (Chevaillier, 1998; García de Fanelli, 2006) or in the continuation of the status quo (Gornitzka et al., 2004).

In order to discuss how the introduction of the MYA/MYAs has affected the relationship between universities and government in terms of their autonomy, the type of autonomy observable in Ontario universities is first described. The Ontario post-secondary sector is generally portrayed as one that enjoys significant autonomy, as universities are created as autonomous non-for profit corporations of a public character (Shanahan et al., 2005; Usher & Potter, 2006). Indeed, sector stakeholders often describe the system in those terms, as illustrated by the quotes below:

“We have a particularly autonomous system in Ontario for a whole range of reasons, historical reasons, political reasons, just system size and complexity reasons” (CEN-1)

“We had probably the most autonomous system in North America” (UNI-2)

This approach to generalizing the concept of autonomy is simplistic, as it has been shown that the types of university autonomy are multiple (Berdahl, 1990; Enders et al., 2012). Using the taxonomy summarized in Chapter 4, the general determination of Ontario universities as autonomous is explained due to their levels of:

- (i) Legal autonomy, given that they are non-for-profit corporations created by a charter (Metcalf et al., 2011; Usher & Potter, 2006). On the other hand, being set in law, this means that it cannot be easily changed, which has been interpreted as low autonomy in other jurisdictions (Enders et al., 2012);
- (ii) Managerial autonomy, given that university administrators enjoy significant decision-making powers regarding the use of financial, human and other resources (Metcalf et al., 2011). However, the role of unions and employment legislation have an offsetting impact on this kind of autonomy (Enders et al., 2012), a phenomenon observed in Ontario where many aspects of human resource administration, such as faculty salaries, tenure appointments and job security are subject to collective bargaining (Jones et al., 2001); and
- (iii) Governance autonomy, since universities can make decisions regarding their internal organization and processes. In Canada, due to the individual charter for each university, there are substantive differences in governance arrangements and structures across universities, for instance, regarding the size and composition of governing boards (Jones et al., 2001).¹¹²

These three elements of autonomy coexist with a funding model where an important share of support comes from government, thus Ontario universities have been characterized as state-chartered (Whitley, 2008). Despite the importance of government as a source of funding, financial

¹¹² Regarding managerial and governance autonomy, when this study looked into specific university sites, the topic of governance and the role of the board of governors versus that of central administration, were revealed as issues that deserved further exploration. Specifically, in the context of accountability, questions were raised regarding the perceptions of who is responsible to report to whom, a point that will be further developed in section 11.5.

autonomy has been traditionally high, as universities enjoyed significant leeway regarding how to spend their block grants (Kymlicka, 1982): “The non-targeted, block grant nature of the basic operating grant recognizes the institutional autonomy of grant recipients within an overarching framework of accountability” (MTCU, 2009d). Moreover, block grants that are assigned on the basis of formula funding through the use of simple inputs, such as enrolment, facilitates its accountability as the allocations are easy to understand (Snowdon, 2005a). In addition, when a large share of funding is provided on the basis of student enrolment, this leaves reduced ability for steering the system towards objectives determined ex-ante (Agasisti & Catalano, 2006). The relationship between block grants and financial autonomy is confirmed by university representatives in the two quotes below:

“The base grant is really a big lump sum of money that’s given to universities (...) but the details of how to achieve that are really left to the university (...) Who are the profs? How are the profs trained? What do they put by way of content in their courses? There is absolutely no such thing for post-secondary education that even remotely approaches the curriculum design for primary school and high school. (...) There is a lot of autonomy in universities” (UNI-1)

“[The government] doesn’t get involved in the minutia of the universities, for example, they provide money, but they don’t set hiring targets, and in law each institution is a setup as an autonomous institution” (FAC-1)

In recent years, there are three forces at play that counteract this model of autonomy, and that are observed during the implementation the MYA/MYAA initiative. First, as it was indicated before, the number of reporting requirements continues to increase, which according to the taxonomy of autonomy, is conducive to a decrease in interventional autonomy. The MYA/MYAA’s in both their form as performance agreements and as data collection tools, are additional reporting requirements that contribute to the observed trend. Nonetheless, the change appears to be generally accepted as Ontario university representatives internalize government-imposed accountability requirements as reasonable quid pro quo for government funding that coexists with the provision of grants. Furthermore, universities produce externally-audited financial and enrolment reports to meet the obligation of accountability to government in response to funding (Callahan, 2006). This opinion is expressed in the two quotes below from central organization stakeholders, and concurs with the perspective presented by one university representative that was quoted in section 8.1 that discussed the reception of the instrument in the PSE sector:

“As a tax payer you can’t say you object to the autonomous universities being required to at least report on how they are spending student and taxpayer money” (CEN-9)

“I think it’s a misnomer to talk about government control [The government is] putting in thousands of millions of dollars every year to universities, money of the citizens of Ontario. And it’s totally reasonable that there be some accounting and some responsibility for that (...) Why talk about this as control? I think it’s really about responsibility” (CEN-4)

This internalization of the reporting requirements is in turn appreciated by government representatives, as indicated in the quote below:

“I think universities and colleges are very sophisticated. They realize that they are responsible for a lot of taxpayer money. They fully appreciate that this is a part of the gig, this is not an onerous responsibility (...)

autonomy has to coexist with accountability and within that responsibility to maintain public confidence about how they use the money and the results they are getting” (CEN-6)

A second force that is affecting university autonomy in recent years is the extent to which sources of funding have diversified over time, with tuition fees becoming increasingly important. Although this is a process independent of the MYA/MYAAs, this is an important phenomenon that arises from existing government regulation regarding the determination of fees in the vast majority of programs (Snowdon, 2005a), resulting in limited freedom regarding how this type of funding is obtained. The impact that fee regulation has on the context in which the MYA/MYAAs were introduced is discussed in the quote below:

“I would say that sort of the autonomy that people might have thought existed before the MYAs didn't. When tuition fees get frozen again and controlled, very little exercise of real autonomy by the institutions because it's not their money” (CEN-9)

Although some authors purport that to increase their autonomy, universities should diversify income sources (Moreno, 2012), this position ignores the complexity introduced by greater diversity on multiple accountabilities and multiple stakeholders. That is, introducing new funding sources not only affects the degree of autonomy towards the government, but introduces further challenges in terms of the multiple constituents that universities have to deal with (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010). In fact, in Ontario, as indicated in the quote below, and illustrated in figure 3-1, the contribution of government funding has dropped to less than 50 per cent of operational resources in recent years:

“The proportion of the universities’ funding or government funding is increasingly getting smaller and others private sources (...) are getting larger. To what degree is there a rational way or basis for the government to intervene? We have in one hand the portion of government funding declining, and yet at the same time we have an expansion of the desire to direct, to come to and push greater accountability. It's interesting that in some institutions less than 50% funding comes from government sources” (FAC-2)

Finally, as it has been documented throughout this study, the increased use of funding envelopes also reduces the traditional financial autonomy that was provided by the block grants, as formula funding provides the government with a tool to shift the direction of universities strategically in areas deemed a priority (Snowdon, 2005a). The funding associated with the MYA/MYAAs in the quality envelopes and under-represented students pilot funding are examples of targeted envelopes. In fact, faculty associations disagree with the envelope funding approach as the use of funds is specifically earmarked to certain activities, which is considered management that is too involved:

“It's a bit of gamesmanship to my mind to try and pin dollars to a specific activities in that way [...the government] can't make those kinds of the statements, it's not helpful. Let [universities] know what you want to do, and give them enough money to do that, don't try and earmark it too closely for something like that, because then it becomes limiting in terms of what you can do” (FAC-2)

The final kind of autonomy described in Enders et al. (2012) taxonomy is policy autonomy, which refers to the ability of universities to independently set their own goals with regards to their mission, what is also referred to as substantial autonomy. In general, there is a perception that the Ontario government has been “much less willing to concede full substantial autonomy, because substantial autonomy has a great likelihood of conflicting with the government’s goals for the university system” (Downey 2008, p. 9). Following the semi-structured interviews for this study, it

appears to be generally accepted by university administrators that if the government provides funding, then it is in its own right to promote their policy interests within universities, as indicated in the quotes below. Examples of government intervention include the regulation of program approvals and of enrolment for specific groups, such as graduate students.

“Governments are not merely places where all the tax money comes in and then you get it out and you have no control over it. They are there to have policies. They are there to orient things” (UNI-1)

“If I go back to post-secondary financing 101, there is no constitutional obligation for the province to provide funding for post-secondary institutions (...) what government does is it uses powers of funding to elicit behavior in a particular way or form” (UNI-13)

The reduction in policy autonomy that is associated with additional government funding, particularly in the form of government grants, is not perceived as a loss of control by university administrators, but rather as the government fulfilling its role in setting out policies by influencing university behavior. Moreover, this recognizes that universities, although autonomous due to their legal constitution, are not fully autonomous in all of their areas of activity, given the share of funding obtained from public sources (Whitley, 2008) and the “processes in place to approve programs for government funding, set first-year enrolment targets for each institution and targets for some specific program areas” by the government (Snowdon, 2005a, p. 64):

“The government is providing the funding, and I think the government can as a consequence of providing the funding, identify clear expectations for how the funding is going to be used” (UNI-4)

“I don't think we have full autonomy to define our own academic content, quality or processes entirely. As long as we are taking money from the public, we are accountable for what we achieve with it” (UNI-6)

In addition, a government representative quoted below reiterates that the direction that was provided with the three high-level goals of *Reaching Higher* was intended to leave some autonomous decision-making at the university level. In the specific case of the MYA/MYAs, it cannot be argued that policy autonomy was further reduced due to their introduction since universities continued for the most part with business as usual or as planned. In fact, the government's objective of being more directive using specific indicators is perceived as unrealistic given the complexity of universities, and since it was not intended as one of the objectives from the government:

“I don't really think it did change our behavior (laughs...) I don't think that's how the universities really functioned internally. The academic experience, the academic management of the universities is so complex and so related to the institution you are in. Trying drive it with these particular indicators just seems to try to fit a square peg in a round hole” (UNI-14)

“Some institutions did feel that we were now impacting the autonomy to make decisions [but] we were really clear, we weren't suggesting where funding goes or the process for doing up the accountability agreements. We kept out of that. All we said is, here are the three priorities and here are the buckets we want you to report in. Some institutions potentially felt that that was impacting their autonomy; we felt that what we were doing is setting up a framework and providing clarity about what the expectations were” (CEN-11)

The evaluation of the status of university autonomy during the period under study is summarized in the table below that is based in the model developed by Enders et al. (2012) for Dutch universities and discussed in Chapter 4. The model distinguishes between types of autonomy that allow for decision-making competencies (i.e., managerial, policy and governance) and the

existing constraints (i.e., financial, legal and interventional) to make use of those competencies. The third column, labeled “in Ontario”, indicates what trends were observed and documented in this section. Even with the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs, the level of legal, managerial, and governance autonomy in Ontario universities continues to be high. The first-generation of agreements had the potential to impact negatively policy autonomy, but that impact was limited by the priority alignment already in place coupled with goal ambiguity. Nonetheless, the status of policy autonomy is affected by other government measures beyond the MYA/MYAAAs. Finally, in the case of the first generation of agreements and in their current form as data reporting tools, their impact has been to reduce both financial and interventional autonomy.

TABLE 11-1: EVALUATION OF AUTONOMY OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

| Area | Type of autonomy | In Ontario (period under study) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Decision-making competencies | Managerial | High |
| | Policy | Decreasing |
| | Governance | High |
| Ability to use competencies | Financial | Decreasing |
| | Legal | High (non-for profit corporations) |
| | Interventional | Decreasing |

The position that the impact on policy autonomy is either limited or that it should be accepted as it is within the government’s purview is very contentious. On one hand, sector stakeholders interpret the internalization of government directions as evidence of how university administrators align with the external imposition of objectives, at the prejudice of collegially-defined and faculty-driven institutional policy and governance. That is, there is a shift in “power relationships within universities by strengthening management authority and devaluing (or ignoring) collegial processes” (Metcalf et al., 2011, p. 155). This comment clarifies that the concept of professional autonomy in the Romzek (2000) model is twofold and consist of academic autonomy to pursue teaching and research, as well as the expectations in terms of collegially-based self-governance (Enders et al., 2012). Furthermore, the concept of self-governance is often framed according to two alternative dominant ideals about university governance: either conceptualized as a ‘republic of scholars’ versus treating universities as a ‘stakeholder organization’ where faculty is one stakeholder among many (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

In the opinion of faculty representatives, priority alignment is perceived as central administration lacking in their actions to protect institutions from government intrusion, as indicated in the quote below, which highlights the conflict between the collegial autonomy of academics as decision makers versus the management autonomy of universities embedded in the administration (Vinokur, 2008). In that regard, “one of the genuine challenges for any head of institution is to ensure there is a balance between managerial accountability and giving a say to the academic community” (Kogan & Hanney, 2000, p. 195).

“There is also tension in terms of both university administrators, in some senses not standing up to government, and government going in the direction it wants (...) I think it varies from institution to institution, but there is a very tense relationship, and to various degrees and relationship is distrust. The faculty both

embrace the notion of autonomy also embraced the notion of academic freedom and they see that some of the direction that the university administrators are taking are undermining that” (FAC-1)

From the perspective of university administrators, despite the reported acceptance of the degree of direction that the government can provide and the legitimacy of such direction, there is nonetheless disagreement regarding what shape this direction can take and its level of specificity. In particular, there is concern regarding the government’s influence on micromanaging activities. That is, there is agreement in principle with the higher level objectives, but it is the opinion of sector stakeholders that the day-to-day operations are best left to universities to protect managerial or procedural autonomy, as indicated in the two quotes below:

“I am a huge opponent of government micromanagement because they think they're smarter than they are and I think we can do a better job of quality control than they can” (UNI-6)

“I think that the government has to be mindful for getting into the kitchen, institutions are willing to accept the direction that comes with the funding but if they try to tell us, how to do things rather than what to do, this is what the money should be contributing towards rather than how to do it, I think (...) the administration and the employees of the institution are best able to determine that” (UNI-4)

The extent to which the degree of government intervention is acknowledged by university administrators is debated, as according to the representative quoted below, university presidents do not acknowledge this trend as a result of internal politics with faculty associations:

“Most presidents (...) feel compelled to buckle under the wishes of government for fear of being hurt, either via transfer payments or capital or tuition or whatever. The government has all of the policy levers (...) and it has been like that for a long time (...) over time, autonomy has been negatively affected. I don't really think university presidents want to talk about that very much, because it just reinforces the view that faculty associations have which is of a big brother government that wants to run everything” (CEN-12)

This tendency is unwelcome by faculty representatives, as governments, in their opinion, do not understand how universities operate and are demanding more and more control while the share of funding they provide is decreasing:

“The government doesn't really effectively understand the university autonomy (...) Universities are very unlike colleges (...) autonomy sets them apart, which is really important to preserve (...) the government is saying ‘we've done our reforms in doing secondary, doing our reform in healthcare, and now we need to do a report for a post-secondary’ without (...) fully appreciating how universities operate” (FAC-1)

In stark contradiction, student representatives have the impression that governments are unable to exert sufficient control and that universities push back and ignore the direction provided:

“I wouldn't characterize that necessarily as changing the autonomy because anyone can still ignore the signal and lots of the institutions do (...) It didn't really feel all that accountable when the government is not controlling the measures.”(STU-1)

“Universities still will try to defend their ability to (do) their own academic plans and (...) they pushback a little behind closed doors, and the government seems to respect that pushback when it happens” (STU-2)

The discussion thus far illustrates the different perspectives in the sector regarding the need for and legitimacy of government intervention, the extent to which it takes place and the ability by senior administrators to deviate from it. An alternative interpretation that aims at reconciling the different perspectives offered thus far is that central administration may be acting as a buffer, actively choosing in what areas to allow more government intrusion while continuing to protect

internal teaching and research practices to the extent possible, in line with a theme in public management research that “management matters” (O’Toole & Meier, 1999; Yang, 2009). For instance, when the MYA/MYAAAs were originally introduced, the concern expressed was that these would have an impact on autonomy and academic freedom, being another example of government intervention and control (Shanahan, 2009b). However, as discussed in detail in Chapter 9, universities participated in their development by reporting primarily on ongoing activities and on activities far removed from the teaching core. In that sense, university central administration plays a buffering role for the academic core regarding the influence that the government may have intended originally, allowing faculty to operate independently of the new pressures, a process akin to the one documented in the research sector (Jamali, 2010). That is, for performance and accountability tools, such as indicators and reports, to affect individual academics, these have to be adopted in the way that they affect the internal policies of the university at the faculty and departmental level (R. Taylor & Taylor, 2003). Buffering is thus interpreted not “as the blind dismissal of external demands but to strategically decide to engage and respond to such demands in limited ways” (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 23), as the mediating role played by management structures (Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009) helps clarify the context and allows to reinterpret their impact.

One example of this is found in the analysis of how quality is defined in terms of the learning environment, as opposed to a broader definition of quality that would encompass more specific teaching activities. That is, an emphasis on the learning environment is interpreted as an early stage of the buffering process where the focus is placed on service-like elements of the student experience leaving aside a keen analysis of academic processes. Another example of the buffering process is observed in the literature where university leaders choose to purposively “side-step stronger accountability measures for softer ones which they believe are more effective in leading in a collegial and collaborative manner. Thus they gain greater professional integrity from their staff” (Huisman & Currie, 2004, p. 550). That is, the choice of indicators is made in such a way that it protects academic freedom within universities. This is also observed in the MYA/MYAAAs case as many of the quantitative indicators chosen related to very specific activities that are almost fringe to the university core (e.g., number of counselling activities, number of orientation opportunities).

There is another buffering strategy that privileges providing an image of change without making any substantial changes in functioning, which is achieved by decoupling reporting activities from day-to-day operations (Jamali, 2010). That is, “designing and implementing a performance measurement system primarily for public accountability will usually create a disconnect between the activities associated with measuring and reporting performance and the ‘real’ work that goes on in the organization” (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 314). Such decoupling is noted in British Columbia, where the performance indicators included in their agreements have not made their way into the universities’ strategic planning or used as a management tool, because they are not really integrated into the resource allocation mechanism nor are compelling (Sudmant, 2008). In the MYA/MYAAAs, the buffering exercise is not considered to be that extreme; rather, the report is based on on-going day-to-day activities that allow protecting from further influence, more in line with a decoupling strategy where “organizations become early adopters of external demands when they

can demonstrate that their ongoing operations already meet or exceed” demands imposed externally (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 24).

The analysis offered for the Ontario experience differs from the observations made regarding the introduction of performance agreements or contracts in other jurisdictions. In some cases, it was argued that there was limited contribution from internal staff to the achievement of goals and targets, as these were removed from the decision-making process and this was seen as a central-administration activity only (García de Fanelli, 2006; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Along that line of thought, the lack of impact on core academic activities is due to limited legitimacy of the targets chosen in the eyes of the academic staff (Dill & Beerken, 2010b). However, in the case of Ontario’s MYA/MYAAAs, although the consultation was limited, the choice of presenting ongoing activities for the most part assumed the buy in from administrative staff as they were already actively engaged in them.

The observations made in this section highlight how in conversations on accountability, autonomy should be clearly specified to evaluate the relevance and importance of the changes noted. In addition, these observations illustrate how “university autonomy is a dynamic concept. According to Hutchens (2007), achieving the appropriate balance between State oversight and the independence of public colleges and universities represents an issue marked by persistent tension and change” (Moreno, 2012, p. 19). In fact, given regulatory changes, particularly in Europe, where the State is shifting “from regulator to supervisor of autonomous universities” (Reale & Seeber, 2012, p. 148), accountability may be perceived as “the logical consequence of governments retreating from closely monitoring higher education and allowing an increase in institutional autonomy” (Huisman & Currie, 2004, p. 529). On the other hand, the devolution of autonomy in the European PSE has been recently interpreted as another mechanism of control, albeit of a different nature to those previously used (Enders et al., 2012). The argument is that new accountability instruments, such as performance contracts and output funding, framed within a principal-agent approach, “allow the government to force universities under the pretext of voluntary strategic choice into certain directions desired by the government [...] organizational autonomy becomes part and parcel of a new regime of control of universities” (Enders et al., 2012, p. 14).

Although the Ontario case is different given that the starting point was one of greater university autonomy, the analysis of the MYA/MYAAAs implementation exemplifies clearly the observation made that control in “real-life” principal/agent relationships is a give-and-take phenomenon: “If the principal-agent model tells us anything, it is that control is a two-way street: a relationship between two actors, both of whom must be well characterized and understood if their jointly determined behavioural outcomes are to be explained” (Moe, 1987, p. 482). Both universities and government will not implement performance agreements or contracts as a politically neutral tool, given that their relationship has not been fully depoliticized (Kassim & Le Galès, 2010). The struggle to define the right balance between autonomy and control continues and may be difficult to achieve given the diverse interpretations of the term and the varied expectations of stakeholders across the sector. At the end, a willingness to give up some autonomy in exchange for more funding is observed, but reticence is exercised when the funding is not provided or when universities act strategically to protect their core activities. In that regard, Ontario universities

continue to exercise a significant amount of power in their policy sector. Given the complexity of universities, the discussion now turns to an analysis of the internal governance of accountability.

11.5. UNVEILING ACCOUNTABILITY GOVERNANCE

Throughout this study, the analysis of the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs has focused on the relationship between government (primarily defined as MTCU) and universities (primarily defined as central administration). However, in section 11.1, the complexity of the government was deconstructed when accountability requirements within the government were unveiled. In addition, an interest in power relationships was already alluded to in the discussion above regarding university autonomy, where it was noted that internal stakeholders have the perception that the government is becoming increasingly intrusive while aligning their interests with those of the central administration. However, there is another shift in power structures that has been referred to in the literature, towards a strengthening of management structures and a devaluation of collegial processes (Metcalfe et al., 2011). These changes have been attributed to a result of a loss of trust in academics for their own management and, in the some European countries, including Sweden and the Netherlands, to the reduction of state control that has been accompanied by stronger administrative structures (B. R. Clark, 1998; Kogan & Marton, 2006; Sporn, 1999, 2007). In the specific case of performance or contract agreements, these have been deemed contributors to such a trend when they strengthen the power and influence of university presidents, specifically when resources are provided and central administration wishes to influence how resources are distributed internally and what projects obtain funding (García de Fanelli, 2006; Vilalta & Brugué, 2010). Given those observations, it is relevant to ask whether the introduction of the MYA/MYAAAs in Ontario contributed to strengthening the role of the central administration vis-à-vis faculty members.

Specifically, the discussion is interested in understanding the alignment of authority—who is in control—and the structure of authority—how authority is exercised (Leclerc et al., 1996) to elaborate on the state of university/government relationships presented in the previous section and to shed light on faculty/administration relationships in the Ontario PSE sector. This is also important in light of the dimensions of an accountability instrument and the interest in clarifying who is accountable and to whom (Bovens et al., 2008). Therefore, the objective to understand how the introduction of these new accountability instruments affect the way in which the sector is governed contributes to an analysis that goes beyond the “often-normative statements” surrounding accountability that unveils the power dimension of the relationship (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011, p. 2). Therefore, in this section, the complexity of accountability governance at universities is clarified when internal accountability challenges vis-à-vis the board of governors are discussed. For that purpose, the accountability governance arrangement of Ontario universities, in the context of the MYA/MYAAAs is discussed. This also contributes to our understanding of whether universities, when conceptualized as autonomous and professionalized organizations, with clear mission statements and strategic plans, have become less loosely coupled and difficult to manage (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

As it was mentioned before, most Ontario universities have a bicameral system consisting of a board of governors and a senate (Shanahan et al., 2005; Usher & Potter, 2006), which was established with the rationale to balance public interest (the board) and academic interests (the senate) within the formal internal governance structure of universities (Jones et al., 2001). Governing boards are expected to play an important role in bolstering public confidence in the operation of universities by overseeing finance and administration issues (Jones et al., 2001; Jones & Skolnik, 1997). Furthermore, one opinion that has been publicly reiterated by university stakeholders (COU, 2004; Task Force on University Accountability, 1993) is that the locus of university accountability lies with boards of governors. This is in line with a perspective purporting that since university administrators are accountable to their board of governors (Gauthier, 2004), it is their role to ensure that the powers of each university's executive are limited, thus providing reassurance to government authorities (Stevenson, 2004), which is echoed in the quote below. That is, according to the stakeholders quoted, the university management is accountable to the board and the board in turn is accountable to the tax payers:

"[Universities are] publicly funded institutions [and] have our own acts of incorporation; very clearly (this) makes our boards the ones who are responsible, we are accountable to our boards (...) and the boards are accountable to the tax payer" (CEN-9)

However, there is some confusion regarding which is the primary point of contact with the government. Such confusion was evident when the MYA/MYAA's were first introduced as there was some debate regarding who should sign the agreement as the university representative, being the options either the university president or the chair of the board of governors. At the end, it was university presidents who signed the agreements, but the discussion highlights that, in practice, the governance of accountability relationships in the sector remains unclear for several reasons. First of all, despite the statement above that boards are accountable to tax payers, there is lack of clarity regarding who the board is accountable to. According to their legal role, some participants in the study state that the board is accountable to its stakeholders, via the mechanism of representation:

"Who is the board of governors accountable to? To the public, and the question is how? (...) you are accountable to your local populace [via] your local appointees, you are accountable to the province through provincial appointees and you are accountable to your own communities through your alumni appointees and students, faculty and staff appointees (...) These various constituent groups that are represented there become this broader notion of the community or the society" (CEN-12)

"The board takes its direction from the legislation and its subjects and that's the sort of focus that we have, theoretically we work independently but if we don't deliver or we manage irresponsibly then the people who pay the bills can obviously impact on it substantially by reducing funding or ensuring that if there is funding there is a reporting structure in place that forces us to be accountable or forces the university because I think we are not separate" (BOA-1)

The issue of representation in the board is nonetheless contentious as well. Before the 1960s, there was practically no faculty or student representation in university governing boards, a tendency that started to change after the Duff-Berdhal Commission recommendations in 1966 that led to "governance arrangements that were more participatory, complex and decentralised" (Jones et al., 2001, p. 138). Despite such changes, during the semi-structured interviews undertaken for this study, internal university stakeholders expressed their concerns regarding the balance between internal and external members to ensure appropriate representation of all stakeholder groups

coupled with the concern that external members have limited knowledge about university functioning. On one hand, the principle of accountability to the public in governance boards is ensured via adequate stakeholder representation of its members; while on the other hand, participation by external members with limited knowledge of the university's internal functioning contributes to the perception that the boards are becoming too corporate. There is therefore a need to strike an adequate balance between representation and knowledge.

Another point that was made in the interviews is that there is not enough faculty representation on the board, nor enough discussion, and that the decisions are made at the level of board committees, which echoes concerns documented in the literature (Metcalf et al., 2011). The limited or reduced participation by student and faculty groups in university boards is reducing is not unique to Ontario, as it has been documented that in Europe there is a perception that increased representation hampers effectiveness (Larsen et al., 2009). The evidence is muddled as other studies have found that the correlation between board structure and institutional decisions is negligible (Kaplan, 2004). Despite a legal structure that operationalizes board accountability via representation, given the outlined concerns with this aspect of governance, some participants in this study shared their belief that the board is not accountable to anyone and that there are tensions between the university president and the chairman of the board, regarding who is managing who:

"Well the board is not accountable, if it is then I couldn't tell you to whom it is really, nor is the administration" (FAC-3)

"Presidents want to manage the boards and there is this constant tension between who is managing whom in the board governance" (CEN-12)

"Board of governors tell them does what the senior administration tells them to do (...) Board of governors is not accountable in any way" (STU-4)

The point just made regarding the relationship between the board and university central administration highlights the second reason why internal accountability relationships and responsibilities are unclear. Specifically, the extent to which the board and the administration have a cooperative relationship is also unclear according to sector representatives. On one hand, the relationship is described as one of "healthy tension" which is presented in a positive light in the two quotes below, as conducive to establishing the direction for the university:

"The board sets direction hopefully in a cooperative way with the president and senior administration and in doing so can have a clearly significant impact on the discussion that occurs between the university and the government (...) establishes direction through a strategic plan, establishes mile stones that they expect the president will deliver on" (BOA-1)

"If boards are doing their jobs properly, there is a healthy tension between the president and the board, with respect to some very fundamental questions, what are you trying to do? And what resources do you need to do that? (...) Where is the evidence? Where is the monitoring that the board can see that the institutions are actually moving in a specific direction towards the attainment of those goals?" (CEN-12)

On the other hand, this cooperative relationship is presented in a negative light in the following quote, as a close relationship may not be consistent with an accountable relationship, as the collaboration, as the interviewee quoted below suggests, is not based on priority alignment,

discussion and collaboration, but rather on a partnership based on a more personal definition of trust:

"I think central administration [is], to some extent, accountable to some people on the board. But it tends to be the sort of... friends within a 'société d'admiration mutuelle'... you realize it's almost too close, too close for comfort in many ways" (FAC-3)

In practice, the relationship between administration and the board varies across institutions and university presidents are the main point of contact for government officials. This was the actual implementation decision that was made with the MYA/MYAAAs, where the ministry continued its ties with the central administration, a general practice according to the quotes below:

"[The board doesn't] have a lot to do with the government on a day to day basis (...) there is president deal with ministers and deputy ministers and the system as whole deals with assistant deputy minister all the way down into the bureaucracy, well that's not with the board because the board is only meeting infrequently" (BOA-1)

"The government has chosen, or maybe it has just become their practice, to not be dealing directly with the boards, now I think part of that [is that] university presidents don't want the government messing around with the boards. There is nothing that probably scares a university president more than to hear that his board chairman has been talking to someone from government, unless the university president has specifically sent them to do that" (CEN-12)

University executives thus have to juggle an external accountability relationship with the government while managing an internal accountability relationship with the board. Moreover, there are apparent contradictions in the later relationship, between what is observed in practice and the theoretical description of the board's role. This contradiction, nonetheless, can be reconciled thinking of a symbolic use of the board on the part of university administration. That is, university administrators wish to maintain their autonomy as much as possible and use the board to "defend" themselves from government intervention, and to defend themselves from criticism, as illustrated below:

"I think the emphasis on the board of governors by the universities (...) is an attempt to maintain their autonomy and not get in to all this reporting stuff. I don't think anybody ever really thought that other than holding the president accountable and occasionally getting rid of a president that the board could do very much in terms of the day to day operations, the day to day reporting" (UNI-9)

"Well I think that university presidents do a very good job of playing off depending who the audience is, playing off the role of the board. So it's great as the university president to be able to point the finger at somebody else: 'I didn't make that decision, the board made me do it.' Well, maybe sometimes, but in other times it's not" (CEN-12)

Under this interpretation, the board is therefore used by the central administration as a buffer from government intervention when needed, another example of the importance of management (Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009; Yang, 2009). Despite this interpretation, a question remains regarding the impact that board intervention, when present, has on academic freedom. Furthermore, the onus of dealing with an accountability relationship towards the government and towards the board is a situation that facilitates any of the following challenges: (i) there may be conflicting expectations and the criteria for accountability may even be contested; (ii) there are substantial costs with providing information and negotiating outcomes with different stakeholders; (iii) there may be a compounded search for flaws in the organization, which drives attention away

from the question of improvement; (iv) agents may enter into blame-shifting to avoid taking responsibility; (v) too much accountability may preclude from making decisions; (vi) there may be a loss of control due to conflicting demands cancelling each other; (vii) all accountability measures are really symbolic and ritualistic having no effects (Bovens & Schillemans, 2010). In the case of the MYA/MYAAs, possible conflict between what was presented to the government and what was presented to the board was minimized with the use of board-approved strategic and academic plans to answer the government requirements. However, these possible effects deserve further exploration.

In terms of authority and its alignment within university internal structures, the implementation of the MYA/MYAAs echoes the comment made earlier that “management matters”. Nonetheless, what can be said about whether the introduction of the MYA/MYAAs contributed to a strengthening of central administrations in Ontario universities? On one hand, it could be argued that the limited consultation demonstrated that all the power that was given with the additional funding was left to the central administration to make their choices. On the other hand, the proposals were made within the context of strategic planning exercises that pre-date the MYA/MYAAs. That is, the agreements focused very much on examples of what was being done within the university, documenting what was already underway instead of providing additional direction. Therefore, it does not appear to be the case that central administrators used this initiative to strengthen their internal control. Rather, as documented earlier, this is perceived more as an effort to buffer the academic heartland from government control. Contrary to what was observed in other jurisdictions, given that the additional funding was limited, but moreover, given that the universities had their planned activities already underway, there is no expression of further central administration control as a result of the agreements, nor further board of governor’s control. However, inquiring about the agreements opened the door at looking at the role of the board of governors, an area that deserves further exploration. For that purpose, the final chapter of this study elaborates on the main themes that emerge from the analysis of the MYA/MYAAs implementation and the knowledge gaps that deserve future exploration.

Chapter 12. FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Given the pervasive interest on accountability initiatives in the broader public sector in general, and in the post-secondary education field in particular, this study was designed to contribute to our understanding of the genesis, implementation and impacts of accountability measures in Ontario. Focusing on the accountability policies introduced with *Reaching Higher* (2005-2010), and more specifically on the introduction of the MYA/MYYAs, this study analyzed how this new instrument was implemented by Ontario universities and why these organizations made their implementation choices. Furthermore, this research clarified how Ontario universities internalized the new requirement and what this reveals regarding university/state relationships and faculty/administration relationships. In that regard, this thesis makes a contribution of significant relevance to the PSE literature—a field where public policy research is not predominant—by analyzing the emergence, introduction and development of a public policy and by identifying how target groups respond to public policies and how these policies inform their decision-making.

Asking how Ontario universities chose to implement a new accountability requirement and why drove our attention to implementation theory in this particular field. It was noted that not only is post-secondary education a relatively under-researched field, it is also one where the policy analysis perspective is scarcely used, particularly in the North American literature (Ferlie et al., 2008; Kohoutek, 2013). Following the trend away from the traditional top-down/bottom-up debate in implementation research, this study looked into alternative approaches to study policy implementation, being principal-agent theory (Yang, 2009), organizational theory (Gornitzka et al., 2005), and a focus on instruments (Dill & Beerkens, 2010a; Kohoutek, 2010) examples of this renewed interest in the PSE field. As this thesis has drawn elements from those three approaches, it contributes not only to opening and analyzing the implementation “black-box”; it also clarifies the insights drawn from those three approaches and their complementary value.

In this final chapter, four overarching themes that have emerged from the analysis are examined. These four themes put into perspective the results from this thesis, as they frame the discussion of results without limiting the presentation to the specific research topic of this study—accountability in Ontario’s PSE—and highlight their contribution to public policy and public administration in general. First, the introduction of accountability measures in Ontario’s PSE is framed within a normative perspective of principal-agent, where control is technically possible and policy questions are reduced to finding the right way to enforce them. The choice of a principal-agent model for the implementation of accountability policies in the PSE field (Massy, 2011) embodies that top-down perspective and helps explain the extent to which universities embrace the new requirements, using priority alignment, the power of the measure and the saliency of the rewards as explanatory factors. Although Massy (2011) acknowledges that power relationships and the choice of instrument will affect implementation decisions, the author ignores the political aspects of policy implementation in the operationalization of his model, thus failing to consider the extent to which goal ambiguity will play an instrumental role in conflict situations. The first section of this chapter highlights the value that ambiguity has in a policy world conceived in top-down terms.

Second, autonomy is a fundamental value in the post-secondary education sector that is often placed at odds with the reification of accountability measures observed over the past few decades. A focus on organizations highlights the role that the struggle between autonomy and control has on the implementation of the new requirement. Moreover, portraying the instrument as one that is not neutral but that encompasses a structuring of relationships across actors (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2004, 2007, 2010) highlights the importance of the autonomy/control dichotomy. In the second section of this chapter, the choice of instrument is analyzed in light of its role facilitating the negotiation of an adequate balance between autonomy and control in Ontario's PSE. This analysis also allows for a deeper understanding of the non-technical limitations of performance contracts as instruments of public policy.

Third, the results from this research also open the door towards understanding governance relationships within universities and the role played by university administrators in the internalization of the new initiative. Our attention thus turns to an analysis of what the introduction of the MYA/MYAA reveals vis-à-vis faculty and administration relationships within the university, developing the theme that "management matters". The use of buffering strategies is highlighted as an important element of the way universities embrace and internalize the new accountability requirement that shelters faculty from its potential impacts. It is concluded that despite forces pushing towards stronger and more cohesive organizational structures within universities, accountability measures can produce incentives towards maintaining their loosely-coupled character.

To finalize, the discussion considers how accountability is a moving target, an elusive concept that is constantly on the move. However, accountability models often fail to take into consideration its dynamic character and it is possible to overlook how the accountability dimensions of a single instrument may evolve, and even be contradictory over time. The discussion also highlights the multiple agents that are targeted at once with one single instrument even when it lacks transitivity and how this reflects on the governance practices in the sector. In light of the findings of this study, the chapter concludes with some thoughts regarding future research areas of interest for this policy field.

12.1. THE VALUE OF AMBIGUITY IN A TOP-DOWN WORLD

This study was designed at its core as an analysis of implementation. Being interested in understanding how universities chose to implement a new accountability requirement and why they made those implementation choices, at first it focused its attention on universities as organizations and on how principal-agent theory could explain the implementation choices made. Following that emphasis, the research problem was presented in this study within a top-down perspective. However, some authors consider that the application of top-down approaches to policy analysis in the post-secondary sector is obsolete due to the decentralized nature of the sector, the autonomy of the academic staff, and given that policies introduced under the NPM movement have multifaceted objectives (Kohoutek, 2013). Nonetheless, such an assessment disregards that the government continues to develop policies assuming that top-down approaches are feasible (M. Hill & Hupe, 2009) and that university administration provides a joint structure that they can deal with.

Therefore, regarding the object of study for this thesis, the issue was presented as follows: The government introduced the MYA/MYAAAs given a number of objectives that they wished to attain. There was an underlying assumption that universities, as organizations, would either accept the new requirement, or that the government would have access to tools, such as contracts, performance measures and funding that would guide universities in the desired direction. Specifically, Massy (2011) notes that in cases where priorities are aligned, where the metrics are powerful and where the rewards are prominent, universities would adopt and internalize the externally imposed requirements. This notion concurs with the expectation that accountability measures may change the structure and content of PSE (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011).

However, this thesis demonstrates that such an assessment overlooks the role that ambiguity plays in nuancing the degree to which the new requirement is embraced by implementers. The results presented throughout this study show that the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs was characterized with ambiguity, resulting in high uncertainty in the political environment. As was documented throughout Chapters 7, 8 and 9, the level of generality and vagueness in the government goals allowed room for interpretation. Thus, as the objectives of quality, accessibility and accountability were downloaded to universities for the establishment of strategies and targets, these had significant leeway in choosing what ideas to put forward. Such vague specifications that were conducive to the acceptance of the new requirement were also accompanied by other ambiguities of a technical nature. For instance, the promise of funding stability and predictability in the form of multi-year commitments was unspecified for many months and never materialized. There was lack of clarity on expectations vis-à-vis MYA/MYAAAs content and on what was considered an acceptable university commitment. Universities were required to produce a public accountability document that lacked contextual information to facilitate its interpretation. Despite an overarching objective of producing system-level reports on results, the agreements were developed on an institutional basis and the templates offered the flexibility for each university to report on institutional-level strategies and indicators that could not be added to system totals. Clear system-level goals and funding commitments were not achieved, as these are areas where agreement is lacking.

This thesis thus contributes to our understanding of the implications of the NPM movement and the tools associated with it. Specifically, the thesis shows how the potential for political conflict arising from establishing system-level goals and associated institutional commitments, as well as the financial risks arising from committing to multi-year funding plans, superseded the rationality implicit in the NPM movement and the instrumentality of performance agreements. Despite the pervasive top-down approach for policy development that accompanies the accountability movement, this thesis demonstrates how such an approach is limited to fully understand the impacts of a new policy as it ignores the politics of policy formulation and design, and overemphasizes the ability of policy proponents to structure implementation (Winter, 2003a). The MYA/MYAAAs thus provide a clear example of how public policy implementation choices can be explained by strategies to deal with, manage and reduce conflict and uncertainty, which are all elements ignored by principal-agent models that minimize uncertainty and the non-consensual character of objectives (Muller et al., 1996).

There could be a temptation to therefore judge the implementation of the MYA/MYAs as failed, since the overall objectives remained unmet. A top-down analysis may suggest that the government could make improvements to the effectiveness of any accountability measure by being clearer in its objectives and intended audience, therefore by being more specific in the dimensions of accountability. This assumes, however, that it is possible to establish a causal theory of accountability and that the underlying processes to improve the quality of the learning environment are not only well understood but also quantifiable. Moreover, it assumes that it is possible to separate politics from administration, which is rarely the case, and that it is possible to reduce or manipulate ambiguity during policy design (Matland, 1995). However, as Matland (1995) suggests, this would ignore the positive effects of ambiguity that “can ease agreement both at the legitimation and the formulation stage” (Matland, 1995, p. 171). The value of ambiguity is thus to allow for the introduction of a measure without, or at least with reduced, conflict (Eaton Baier et al., 1986; Matland, 1995; Palier, 2007), a strategy that is not unique to government but that is also used internally by universities (Balridge, 1983; Sporn, 1999). Moreover, this strategy is also observed across policy-making, for instance when the approval of legislation “requires ambiguous language and contradictory goals to hold together a passing coalition” (Matland, 1995, pp. 147–8).

At the outset, this study expected that the principal-agent model would explain the implementation of the new requirement. However, this thesis demonstrates that focusing only on the mechanics of the model to study accountability relationships translates into findings that are limiting. Although the principal-agent model simplifies the object of study for analytical purposes, some elements, such as power relationships, uncertainty and ambiguity that are not operationalized in the model, are fundamental for a complete understanding of the policy-making process. The role played by the vagueness of objectives so that priority alignment was possible, and the importance of the interpretations of power of the metrics and the saliency of the rewards was not an expected result, but proved to be the most fundamental one. Ambiguity is pervasively observed as it helps deal with implementation challenges in a policy world conceived in top-down terms. An ambiguous solution allowed the government to introduce a new requirement that otherwise would have been rejected by sector representatives. Ambiguity allowed for moving the discussion forward and for the acceptance of measures that provide an image of more accountability. The evidence presented makes clear that the direct application of principal-agent principles without consideration for the role that power balances, conflict and uncertainty play in policy implementation in general, overlooks that the technical promises of a tool can be overturned by the politics surrounding its implementation.

12.2. AN INSTRUMENT TO BALANCE AUTONOMY AND CONTROL

Given the objective to understand the way a given accountability requirement was implemented by Ontario universities, accountability is defined in this study as an institutional arrangement. From a governance perspective, given the multiplicity of actors and institutions involved in the public policy process, these kinds of arrangements are at the core of the study and practice of public administration. In that regard, one key objective of this study was to analyze how one accountability instrument was internalized by Ontario universities upon implementation. One

aspect of such internalization was the prevalence of ambiguity that was described in the previous section. Another fundamental determinant of how and why the accountability instrument was internalized is the extent to which it appealed to the dominant normative discourse regarding the relationships of autonomy, control and trust between government and universities, and the role that the instrument played in satisfying the expectations vis-à-vis such relationships.

The conversation regarding autonomy and control is not new and is far from being exclusive to the post-secondary education sector. As it was discussed in the theoretical framework, the debate between Friedrich and Finer regarding the relationship between elected officials and bureaucrats in the 1930s already presented two opposite perspectives: One in which accountability arises from obedience—and trust—, versus one in which accountability arises from close supervision—and control (Jackson, 2009). In Friedrich’s model, the relationship between two actors is characterized as one of partners “pooling their knowledge to develop policy through interaction based on the experience unique to each perspective, taking into account feedback from the field” (Jackson, 2009, p. 74) and accountability focuses on explaining and informing. According to Finer, accountability goes beyond responsibility and calls both for explanation of actions as well as acceptance of sanctions when issues ensue (Hurley, 2006), it involves demonstrating performance vis-à-vis agreed expectations (Barrados et al., 2000) and considers control as a condition for accountability (Gow, 2012). Therefore, Friedrich’s *eliciting* of responsible conduct versus Finer’s *enforcing* of responsible conduct (Jackson, 2009) represent respectively an environment of high autonomy versus one where autonomy is reduced. Moreover, Finer’s approach is consistent with the NPM preference for a smaller government and for the use of sanctions as a condition for accountability (Thomas, 2007), the prevalent normative model in the context where the MYA/MYAs were introduced.

Despite the current prevalence of Finer’s approach in policy design, this thesis provides evidence that the debate continues and that it is relevant in the study of accountability. Not only those two positions are akin to different perspectives regarding the institutional level of autonomy, the debate is also reflected on the definition of trust and the impact it has on the choice of accountability instruments. Specifically, the introduction of new accountability instruments exemplifies a change in perspective from a system of trust that is based on norms and standards—normative-cognitive—to one where agents are assumed to pursue self-interest and thus trust has to be based on a system of audits—rationalist-instrumental (Stensaker, 2009). The latter is consistent with the principles embraced by the NPM movement and Finer’s enforcement of responsible conduct while the former is consistent with Friedrich’s eliciting of responsible behaviour. Finer’s prevalent model presupposes that universities will not be held accountable to internalized norms and values and that these have to be imposed externally – there is no virtue in the accountability of university administrators. The debate between eliciting and enforcing behaviour also echoes the discussion regarding formative and summative accountability presented in Chapter 10, where it was concluded that one single instrument is unlikely to satisfy the different perspectives as the their objectives are irreconcilable.

In that context, the force of the “agreement” or “contract” is that it is presented as a tool that balances these diverging perspectives. The contract, as an instrument of public action, promises to

facilitate control in a sector where autonomy is a fundamental value (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007) as it encourages priority alignment while providing the opportunity for negotiation and for input from the implementers, along the lines of the normative-cognitive model. That is, it promotes a shared understanding of the issues and solutions and the use of dialogue in a two-way street (Massy, 2011). In addition, performance contracts cannot be deemed “shallow and mechanistic” (Thomas, 1997, p. 142), as they consider the different players in the sector. The agreements thus structure the relationship between government and universities in an acceptable fashion within the governance paradigm dominating the sector. Other characteristics of the agreements that facilitate compliance include that these have the potential to reduce evaluation overload by compiling different elements of the accountability relationship together in one single instrument and that these concur with the NPM principle of promoting clearer statements of goals and objectives (Hood, 1991; Stensaker, 2009). The appeal of such an ideal is also evident in the choice of an agreement or contract as the preferred tool in all of the proposals that were put on the table in Ontario at the time when the MYA/MYAs were first being considered (COU, 2004; HEQCO, 2009; Rae, 2005).

Despite the promises associated with the instrument, this thesis established that when consultations and negotiations are limited, the promises of negotiated governance remain unfulfilled. As documented in Chapters 8 and 9, Ontario universities perceive that their involvement in bilateral negotiations helps keep government control in check. However, the government’s lack of commitment dictates the context for identifying, developing and implementing reporting strategies that satisfy the government’s need to control and the universities’ need for independence. An unintended consequence of such implementation choices is reduced trust on existing account-giving processes. This in turn reinforces the rationalization of introducing additional rational-instrumental measures that are rejected by universities and thus answered to symbolically, entering into a vicious circle of accumulation of instruments that are reduced in their implementation to limited compliance. Massy (2011) asserts that the power of the metrics and the saliency of the rewards can be improved upon to produce the results sought; however, an opposing position is that the use of incentives, both tangible and intangible, to motivate accountability results in linkages that work against truth-telling and reward the appearance of accountability (Trow, 1996). Furthermore, in the Ontario example analyzed, we observe that the efforts regarding improvement of metrics and rewards are either limited or absent, thus demonstrating that it is Trow (1996)’s perspective that prevails over Massy (2011)’s. Consequently, Massy (2011) fails to consider that symbolic compliance may be the sustainable equilibrium in the relationship between principal and agent. As was illustrated in Chapter 10, the MYA/MYAs collapsed over time and were redefined as a more “benign” and unchallenging data collection tool; that is, implementation in practice is reduced to the provision of information.

The Ontario case is a clear example of how in the study of instruments, a key determinant of their effects is the context in which these are introduced, which may be conducive to a reformulation of its principles or to resistance to its introduction (Lascoumes & Simard, 2011). That is, instruments are autonomous of their original goals, and policy transfer results in context-specific implementation (Reale & Seeber, 2012). Although the introduction of accountability requirements worldwide has been framed under the rhetoric and objectives of the NPM movement and the use of

performance agreements in the sector is becoming increasingly common, this thesis highlights that these are not necessarily appropriate tools to meet the practical or technical objectives intended since they are adapted to their particular circumstances. The idea of a contract in accountability promises to clarify relationships, to negotiate objectives, and to increase trust (Gornitzka et al., 2004; Massy, 2011), but it overlooks the autonomy and the interests of the universities and the impact of an uncertain fiscal environment. The continued introduction of performance agreements and similar tools both in Ontario and in other jurisdictions, not only in PSE but also in other sectors, such as health, provides evidence that the discussion is put to rest, or at least managed, by implementing a tool that conveys the message that an acceptable balance between accountability and control has been established, albeit symbolically, in a process of legitimization that ignores the limitations of borrowing an instrument from another jurisdiction or from another sector.

12.3. BUFFERING STRATEGIES TO SHELTER AUTONOMY

In the first chapter of this thesis, the sentiment in academia that current accountability measures erode institutional autonomy was noted; among other things these are said to reduce the “ability to be self-governing” (Leclerc et al., 1996, p. 40), to threaten academic freedom, to increase workload unnecessarily, and to be reductionist and simplistic (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Mighty, 2009; Shanahan, 2009b). There is fear that market language will permeate university structures and the evaluation of university core activities (Hearn & Lacy, 2009; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Organizational structure changes and shifts in internal power relationships are also expected, given the documented experience with the introduction of accountability instruments in other jurisdictions (Moreno, 2012; Chevallier, 1998). Despite such expectations and noted impacts in other jurisdictions, this thesis shows that the impact resulting from the MYA/MYAs in particular—where impact is narrowly defined as the introduction of new activities or organizational changes at the university level in order to report-back to the government—was limited in Ontario. In addition to the role of ambiguity described above, this study provides evidence that university administrators played a fundamental role in managing the repercussions of externally imposed demands on the internal operations of their organizations.

Buffering consists of “an organization’s attempt to reduce the extent to which it is externally inspected, scrutinized, or evaluated by partially detaching or decoupling its technical activities from external contact” (Oliver, 1991, p. 155). There can be buffering by adopting external demands symbolically, as in changes in formal structures that shelter from influence on internal structures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; R. W. Scott, 2008), by limiting organizational change (Krücken & Meier, 2006) or by deciding to engage and respond to a new requirement in limited ways (Honig & Hatch, 2004). There can also be buffering in the form of adapting early to external demands when it can be demonstrated that ongoing operations already meet or exceed the demands imposed, thus not affecting internal operations (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Buffering and decoupling thus help relieve the external pressures for change while maintaining legitimacy and enhancing flexibility (Jamali, 2010; R. W. Scott, 2008; Westphal & Zajac, 1994).

This thesis offers the use of buffering mechanisms on the part of universities’ central administration in an effort to protect the autonomy of institutions, as an explanation to the

implementation decisions observed regarding the MYA/MYAAAs. As it was shown in Chapter 9, with the exception of UOIT, offices of institutional research were already well structured and positioned to manage the new requirements. A vast majority of activities were ongoing and had been defined in previous planning exercises; those activities that were new or expanded, happened as a result of additional funding; and the majority of metrics chosen were either too specific or too general to convey a clear idea of the overall progress that was happening at the university level vis-à-vis the government's goals. Furthermore, many of the strategies identified for quality and accessibility were within the purview of central administration and removed from teaching and research activities. These are clear examples of buffering strategies used by university administrators.

Consequently, and contrarily to what is observed in other jurisdictions, limited impacts on the academic core in the Ontario MYA/MYAAAs example do not result from reduced participation by the academic staff in the implementation process but rather by the central administration playing a buffering role in the operational choices made in the implementation of the agreements. Such buffering or decoupling is unsurprising, as it often arises in circumstances when there is uncertainty and goal ambiguity, when the processes to attain the goals are not well specified or when timely feedback from the external environment is absent (Goodrick & Salancik, 1996; Jamali, 2010; Ogawa & Scribner, 2002), which are the circumstances observed in Ontario's PSE at the time of implementing the MYA/MYAAAs. Another explanatory factor behind the use of buffering or decoupling strategies is when a demand is placed on a topic where there is limited knowledge of best practices (Goodrick & Salancik, 1996; Jamali, 2010), which is the case with quality initiatives in the PSE sector or when government expectations are presented in areas where universities have little control. Finally, the buffering role played by managers is partly justified by their understanding and respect of the academic community. That is, academic and administrative staff are often portrayed at odds, but as this study suggests, it is not always the case.

The idea of purposeful buffering could be criticized on the basis that it assigns rationality to university administrators, which may not be the case. Many of the strategies put in place may not have resulted from a conscious effort to decouple academic activities, but rather be strategies to meet new demanding requirements within short timelines. The consequence, nonetheless, is equivalent, in the sense that the impact on internal operations of the act of reporting is limited, and the response is shaped in limited ways. Being a loosely coupled organization to start with, facilitates this process at the university level. That is, universities do not have to loosen their institutional attachments so they can buffer; rather, it is their loosely coupled character that allows them to buffer. Although central administrations are cohesive and powerful according to some authors, these will also use the loosely coupled character of their organization in their advantage to implement the new requirements, thus perpetuating this distinctive character of universities as organizations. The extent to which the new priorities permeate the internal structure of universities will therefore depend on the extent to which central administrations allow that process to happen.

This thesis thus provides evidence of the importance of management. Although the expression that "management matters" is often used in the context of the role that managers play in ensuring performance (O'Toole & Meier, 1999), in this case, their role as a mediating structure is highlighted (Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009). Although these linkages are evident from a public

management perspective that shows how the decisions and strategies of public managers affect policy outcomes (Meier & O'Toole, 2001), this is not often highlighted in public policy models that tend to overlook the role played by managers (Hicklin & Godwin, 2009; Robichau & Lynn Jr., 2009). This thesis thus makes an important contribution by highlighting the role played by mediating structures in explaining public policy implementation and in linking the macro world of policies with the micro world of implementation. Contrary to a position that purports that a link between macro-policies and the micro world does not exist, this thesis supports the premise that such a linkage does exist, but that it is not directly observed because managers, as a mediating structure, play a role in managing that impact.

12.4. THE NARRATIVE OF ACCOUNTABILITY: A CONCEPT ON THE MOVE

As it has been widely documented, accountability is an elusive term, and its polysemic nature is compounded under the new requirements of the NPM movement (Hurley, 2006). Accountability is also dynamic (Thomas, 2003; Yang, 2011) as it evolves according to its implementation and the interpretation given during its operationalization. In the implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs, there are indeed various interpretations of this term that are used by the different actors and frame their decisions. For instance, the analysis of the dimensions of accountability during the formulation and implementation of the MYA/MYAAAs from their origin in the Rae Review to their final form in 2006-07 presented in Chapter 7, showed that accountability is a moving target and that the government's objectives changed significantly over time in terms of their scope of action, the actors involved and their accountability objectives.

Although it is recognized that accountability relationships are established dynamically (Yang, 2011), static models fail to incorporate such dynamism into their explanatory power (Brouard, 2010). This study contributes to this literature by shedding light on those dynamics that are usually set aside by existing models. The negotiations that happen and the role played by different stakeholders in the policy environment or network are key to understanding how organizations manage the impact that a new policy or instrument of accountability has. In that regard, the analysis of the MYA/MYAAAs, demonstrates that their impact on organizations cannot be fully understood without specifying the role played by the COU, HEQCO or other leaders in the field, such as Western University. In addition, the impact of the MYA/MYAAAs is better understood when the evolution of the accountability instrument during the period under study is analyzed taking into consideration its multiple dimensions—that is accountability for what, by whom, for how and of what form. Despite the use of the Massy model as an alternative to help identify predominant strategies, the same limitations regarding the lack of dynamism in the model are observed.

Another aspect of accountability as a moving target is given by the justifications for introducing the agreement based on the needs to improve accountability to the external public. However, throughout this study, there is an overwhelming sense that a key objective of the initiative is for the government to obtain more information about universities, albeit within a broader communication objective towards the public that remains unfulfilled. The analysis in this study clearly shows that the intended audience was not the external public but rather internal

actors within the Ontario government; in that regard, ministry representatives overlooked the lack of transitivity of accountability instruments. That is, an effort is made by the ministry to use an institutional-based instrument to demonstrate system-wide accountability. At the same time, an effort is made by central administrations to use internal plans to demonstrate accountability. As March (1981) highlighted, the emphasis on the solution—the agreement—distracts attention from the problem—accountability. Furthermore, it was ambitious to download the responsibility of accountability to universities as organizations when the accountability of the government itself is called into question. Although the download can be interpreted as a strategy by the government to appear accountable as it keeps the organizations it funds under control, this manoeuvre falls short of filling the void in the improvement of governmental account giving. Downloading the accountability burden to the university does not solve the problem. Rather, it highlights the polysemic nature of accountability that is interpreted in numerous ways, and thus remains ambiguous and incommensurable (Dubnick & Justice, 2004).

Such ambiguity of the accountability concept is perpetuated when it is defined through the lens of different actors. There is disagreement in the sector regarding the extent to which universities are already accountable. An important number of university administrators and faculty representatives believe that universities are already accountable enough via qualitative review processes that exist; other representatives from those same groups think universities should be more efficient in their administrative processes and provide proof of that; faculty and student representatives in general believe more transparency is needed; and student representatives equate accountability to consultation. The reality is that “no particular mechanism or set of mechanisms defines accountability” (Dubnick, 2008, p. 5). Different measures of accountability are developed “but in the process we lose sight of the more fundamental and unanswered question about the nature and role of accountability in governance” (Dubnick, 2008, p. 6). In that regard, what can the experience of the Ontario MYA/MYAAs teach us about accountability and governance?

Accountability was used as an image of good governance. It is good governance to require public organizations to report publicly. This disregards the extent to which public reporting is either useful or used. Good governance requires public organizations to demonstrate performance. This ignores that the processes to produce certain outcomes are poorly understood and that there are already generally accepted mechanisms that are more appropriate to assess performance in the sector (e.g., quality reviews). Good governance conceptualizes accountability in a one-dimensional way. This overlooks the contributions made by existing hierarchical, political, legal and professional relationships that play a role in ensuring the well-functioning of public organizations. As a result, “good governance” practices are adopted, but in such ways that their impact is minimized. Nonetheless, one lasting impact is the realization that existing processes and mechanisms need to be better communicated.

12.5. LOOKING FORWARD

As this study finalizes, there are a few areas that are identified as deserving attention in further research. From the general to the specific, it is argued that it would be of interest to contribute to the development of a theory of accountability. Second, an inter-jurisdictional analysis

of performance agreements and contracts in post-secondary education may prove useful in assessing their impacts and transformative power depending on their context and implementation decisions. Third, a better understanding of the governance of accountability within Ontario universities is recommended. Finally, measuring the quality of the learning environment is the holy grail of post-secondary education performance measurement, and further research in that regard would be welcome by the sector. These four areas are described below.

Regarding the future of accountability studies, Dubnick (2008) offers three different avenues to pursue. The first is to dismiss this concept as a meaningless construct, as a cultural artifact with “little more than symbolic and rhetorical value” (Dubnick, 2008, p. 25). Concurring with Dubnick, this is not an approach to be further explored given that even when used rhetorically, accountability results in the introduction of real instruments that carry their own effects. The second option is to treat accountability as a “meta-problem” that straddles governance discussions. In this approach, accountability thus becomes the study of governance and removes our attention from its specific characteristics. Although interesting to frame in that regard, accountability as a topic of study would fade within the study of governance. The third approach is to treat accountability as a topic that varies by context, as a result, general statements regarding the forms and drivers of accountability can only be done contingently since “credible theories of accountability must be of necessity contingency theories” (Dubnick, 2008, p. 8). The findings of this study shed light on the basis to continue studying accountability through the third angle, contingent to a sector, but elaborating on its governance implications. Specifically, there is an opportunity to continue the development of a theory of accountability for post-secondary institutions by mapping existing accountability relationships, the mechanics satisfying accountability expectations and by identifying the voids to be fulfilled.

The second area deserving further exploration consists of the study of performance agreements as an instrument that is emerging internationally. The pervasive use of performance agreements/contracts is likely contributing to their legitimization (Harvey & Stensaker, 2011, p. 2), despite the fact that the several implementation experiences analyzed to date have as many similarities as differences. The introduction of this type of tool in multiple jurisdictions is contributing to change at a global level (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002) even when their impacts are partially understood, when such repercussions are considered marginal in character with regards to everyday academic practices in departments and faculties, or when the implementation of the instrument is qualified as primarily rhetorical. Therefore, a clear extension of this research is to produce an in-depth comparative analysis of the performance contracts used both at the Canadian and at the international level, aimed at discerning under what circumstances different objectives and effects are observed. The perception from reading the limited literature in this regard is that there is a risk that the characteristics of one such instrument in a given jurisdiction may be attributed to its implementation in another, without giving proper consideration to the context, the degree of institutional autonomy, the structure of accountability governance internal to the institutions and the objectives aimed at by the government.

Another important area deserving further exploration is that of accountability governance in the context of autonomous institutions. New accountability measures are often justified due to a

loss of trust in the traditional governance processes within universities (Schmidlein, 2004, Trow, 1996); however, their introduction raises new challenges in terms of internal governance, as lack of trust from professional groups towards central administration and the role of the board is also observed. Furthermore, internal stakeholders in specific university sites are not necessarily aware of the role central administration plays in relation with government, which in this study was interpreted as a buffer, and using autonomy as a shorthand obscures the complexity of relationships not only in terms of the areas of autonomy (e.g., managerial, legal, governance, interventional, financial, policy) but also in terms of accountability relationships across both internal and external stakeholders. In that regard, it is of interest to pursue our knowledge of how management matters, by more specifically studying the management structures of universities and their diversity across institutions (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007), as well as the relationships across actors. In addition, it is important not to overlook the importance of external university governance, since it is directly linked to sources of control and values. In an environment of high autonomy, the values underlying accountability are either expertise on the part of professionals or responsiveness to stakeholders (Romzek 2000). However, a struggle between those two types of accountability values is observed in universities. Moreover, in circumstances where the structure of accountability relationships is changing, and government, central administration and boards are playing increasingly predominant roles, how are the underlying accountability values changing and interacting?

The vast majority of the observations made throughout this study dealt with the degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the government, but the strategies observed internally within institutions were made even more complex by various groups pulling in different directions. For instance, universities can make managerial decisions independently from the government, but internally, there are struggles between central administration, boards of directors, student representatives and faculty members. Although the two latter groups argue for decision-making processes that are responsive to their needs, the values of efficiency and ensuring that the university as an organization continues to operate prevail in the decision making of the administration and the board. Nonetheless, since the stakeholders involved come from different value contexts, the internal perception is that the university (i.e., the central administration) is losing its autonomy to the board, while faculty members perceive they are losing their autonomy to central administration (Metcalf et al., 2011; Shore & Wright, 2000). Thus, the conversation about governance is clearly linked to managerial autonomy, which is compounded by the board's struggles with adequate representation—a key element of bringing accountability of universities to the wider community (Salmi, 2009). This highlights the need to further explore accountability relationships within the organization to better understand how they are evolving. Furthermore, the evaluation of the relationship with boards is often done by asking the opinion of stakeholders (Metcalf et al., 2011) but further research is required by looking at communications and documenting the treatment of the issues.

The fourth area where further research is recommended is regarding our understanding of quality in the post-secondary education sector. As it was noted in this study, the lack of clarity around this concept limits the ability of universities to demonstrate their accountability in the quantitative terms requested by the government. Consequently, the metrics used in many content

areas are weak or ill-defined, and there is a need to rely on qualitative descriptions of narrow initiatives that contribute to quality but that do not provide a comprehensive portrait of institutional efforts in this regard. Even though institutions share the objective of quality improvement with the government, building consensus on an appropriate way to assess quality would be beneficial, since in many reporting or accountability mechanisms to the government, universities “may have privileged what can be counted, rather than what truly counts” (Mighty, 2009, p. 21). There is thus an opportunity to further linkage the quality and accountability literatures in the field of post-secondary education and to move away from the undue emphasis of the NPM movement on results and the shape of the instrument without a thorough understanding of substance and of processes. Such an effort may offer solutions to the challenges regarding diverging objectives between governing and governed and the promises of summative versus formative accountability. Moreover, it may contribute to elaborate on the theoretical possibility that performance contracts may indeed constitute a tool that would promote the improvement of quality as well as demonstrating the results obtained.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY WEBSITES FOR MYA/MYAAs¹¹³

| University | Website Address |
|----------------------------|---|
| University of Toronto | http://www.utoronto.ca/about-uoft/measuring-our-performance.htm |
| University of Ottawa | http://www.uottawa.ca/services/irp/eng/research/ententesang.html |
| Western University | http://www.uwo.ca/pvp/accountability.html# |
| McMaster University | http://www.mcmaster.ca/avpira/accountability.html |
| Queen's University | http://www.queensu.ca/irp/accountability/regcompliance.html |
| University of Windsor | http://www1.uwindsor.ca/president/accountability-agreements |
| Wilfrid Laurier University | http://www.wlu.ca/page.php?grp_id=169&p=8186 |
| Nipissing University | http://www.nipissingu.ca/departments/institutional-planning/Pages/Multi-Year-Action-Plans.aspx |
| York University | http://president.yorku.ca/accountability/mya/ |
| University of Waterloo | https://uwaterloo.ca/institutional-analysis-planning/reports/multi-year-accountability-agreements-myaa-0 |
| Carleton University | http://carleton.ca/about/university-reports/ |
| University of Guelph | https://www.uoguelph.ca/analysis_planning/accountability/ |
| Ryerson University | http://www.ryerson.ca/about/accountability/# |
| Lakehead University | http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~analysis/MultiYearAgreements.html |
| Trent University | http://www.trentu.ca/oirsp/accountability.php |
| Laurentian University | http://laurentian.ca/multi-year-accountability-agreement |
| Brock University | http://www.brocku.ca/vp-academic/public-accountability |
| UOIT | http://uoit.ca/sites/oira/accountability/multi-year-agreement--.php |
| OCAD University | http://www.ocadu.ca/about_ocad/accountability.htm |
| Algoma University | http://www.algomau.ca/about/administration/accountability/multi-yearaccountabilityagreement/#.UyN3UYWjHAY |

¹¹³ Website addresses were valid as of March 2014.

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF NEWS RELEASES

| Date | Title | Institutions | Example |
|------------------|--|---|--|
| January 11, 2006 | McGuinty Government Improving Quality At Mohawk College and McMaster University | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McMaster • Mohawk | <p>McMaster University is receiving almost \$7.6 million from the Quality Improvement Fund to hire 38 new academic faculty and four part-time staff to improve student services. Funding is being used to purchase new library resources and to transform classrooms into smart, collaborative learning environments with flexible technology to provide access to different types of learning. The university is also creating additional graduate scholarships to increase the number of graduate students available to be teaching assistants, and thereby raise the number of small-group activities for undergraduate students.</p> <p>http://news.ontario.ca/archive/en/2006/01/11/McGuinty-Government-Improving-Quality-At-Mohawk-College-And-McMaster-University.html</p> |
| January 25, 2006 | McGuinty Government Improving Quality At St. Lawrence College and Queen's University | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Queen's University • St. Lawrence College | <p>Queen's University will receive almost \$5.1 million which has already resulted in four new full-time faculty, additional support staff and will fund an additional 21 faculty for which recruitment is underway. This will allow students to experience smaller classes, improved academic support and student services. Queen's will also introduce new courses and programs, expand interdisciplinary programs and improve professional development programs for faculty. The funding will be used to support students with increased career and student counselling, an expanded program to train teaching assistants and improved access to information on student awards and financial assistance. The university will also invest in improved classroom equipment and lab facilities, including multimedia technology to create 'smart' classrooms.</p> <p>http://news.ontario.ca/archive/en/2006/01/25/McGuinty-Government-Improving-Quality-At-St-Lawrence-College-And-Queen39s-Univer.html</p> |
| January 26, 2006 | McGuinty Government Improving Quality At Ottawa's Colleges And Universities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carleton • Ottawa • La Cité Collégiale • Algonquin College | <p>Carleton University will receive \$6.6 million to help hire 20 new faculty and 14 new support staff. One of the requirements of the new faculty is that they contribute to teaching first-year students. The funding will be used for more educational resources, to upgrade teaching equipment and to fully equip 27 additional electronic classrooms. The university will also create a 'one-stop study shop' to provide learning support services, technology support and library services at one location which will encourage students to be more engaged in learning and research. It has also created a First Year Experience Office to help students make the transition to university.</p> |
| February 3, 2006 | McGuinty Government Improving Quality At Fanshawe Colleges And UWO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UWO • Fanshawe College | <p>The University of Western Ontario will receive almost \$11.4 million to help hire 45 new faculty members and 24 new support staff. This increase in faculty will result in improved student-faculty interaction through smaller class sizes and more course availability. The university will invest in educational resources including technological upgrades aimed at increasing student access to campus-wide wireless networks and improving computing facilities in the classroom. Western will also invest in the library system, providing improved student study space, and make more materials available electronically for students.</p> |

| Date | Title | Institutions | Example |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| February 8, 2006 | McGuinty Government Improving Quality At Toronto Colleges And Universities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ryerson University • University of Toronto • OCAD • Humber College • Centennial College • George Brown College • Sheridan College | <p>http://news.ontario.ca/archive/en/2006/02/03/McGuinty-Government-Improving-Quality-at-Fanshawe-College-and-UWO.html</p> <p>Ryerson University will receive over \$8.3 million to help hire 41 new faculty members and 42 new support staff, with a particular focus on increasing the number of front-line staff. Ryerson will also be expanding its complement of teaching assistants to have an immediate impact on students' interaction with academic staff. Increased training for teaching assistants will ensure that they may make the most effective contribution possible to students' learning. This training will strive to further develop the ability of teaching assistants to discuss course materials with students, and to provide them with useful feedback. The new funding will also be used to improve study space in the library and in common areas across campus in order to respond to the needs of Ryerson's large commuter student body. Enhancements to library facilities will be accompanied by upgrading the university's computer labs to provide students with access to state-of-the-art computing technology round the clock on campus.</p> <p>http://news.ontario.ca/archive/en/2006/02/08/McGuinty-Government-Improving-Quality-At-Toronto-Colleges-And-Universities.html</p> |
| February 2nd, 2007 | London Students Win With Unprecedented, Multi-Year Investments At Fanshawe College And The University Of Western Ontario | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Ontario • Fanshawe College | <p>This year, The University of Western Ontario will benefit from over \$243 million to support improved access and quality. Students will benefit from a broad spectrum of on-line instruction, field projects and service learning experiences in addition to traditional face-to-face instruction. In 2006/07, increased funding will support 37 net new full-time tenured faculty/academic hires and eight net new full-time limited term faculty/academic hires. Under the agreement, Western will significantly increase the number of PhD and Masters level students, as well as develop programs that integrate classroom study with community engagement and service.</p> <p>http://news.ontario.ca/archive/en/2007/02/02/London-Students-Win-With-Unprecedented-MultiYear-Investments-At-Fanshawe-College.html</p> |

APPENDIX C: INVITATION LETTER – STAGE I

Re: Request to participate in the study: “The impact of provincial accountability measures on Ontario Universities”

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa researching the impact that the introduction in 2006 of multi-year accountability agreements (MYAA) for Ontario universities may have had at the organizational level. This research project is planned over two stages. First, a number of key players involved in the design of these agreements or who participated in the consultation process will be interviewed with the objective to better understand the objectives and intended effects of the MYAAs. Second, four Ontario universities have been chosen as case studies to provide a more thorough analysis of the implementation choices that were made and of the impacts they may have had at the individual university level. You will find attached a one-page summary of this project outlining its objectives and approach.

As you are a representative of a key stakeholder organization in the field, I wanted to talk to you in the context of the first stage of this project to discuss the origin of the MYAAs and the choices made regarding their content both at the government level and at the level of individual universities. I would also like to talk to you about the objectives these agreements had and their intended impacts as well as what has actually happened since their introduction at the university level.

I am hoping to visit (*location*) on (*dates*) and I would like to meet with you at that time for an interview of about 90 minutes. This invitation letter will be followed up by either a phone call or an email to set up a convenient time for us to meet.

In the meantime, for any question regarding this research or for setting up an appointment at your convenience, you may contact me by email at email@uottawa.ca or by phone at 613-xxx-xxxx. If you have any other questions or concerns, you may also contact my supervisor, Anne Mévellec, Assistant Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, by email at email@uottawa.ca or by phone at 613-xxx-xxxx, extension xxxx.

I would like to thank you in advance for your collaboration with this project and I look forward to meeting with you in the near future. Cordially,

Victoria E. Diaz
School of Political Studies
University of Ottawa
email@uottawa.ca
613-xxx-xxxx

RESEARCH PROJECT
THE IMPACT OF PROVINCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES ON ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
SUMMARY

In 2005, the Ontario government launched *Reaching Higher*, a \$6.2 billion cumulative investment by 2009-2010 for post-secondary education, which outlined as one of its goals the intent to transform Ontario's post-secondary education sector into an accountable system that is relevant and responsive to the needs of students. One central element of this strategy was the creation of multi-year accountability agreements (MYAAs) between the government and universities. These agreements outline how each university plans to use its operating budget to accomplish its mission and objectives while contributing to the achievement of the government's *Reaching Higher* goals of improved access, quality and accountability. The first multi-year agreement was signed in fall 2006 for the three-year period 2006-07 to 2008-09 and each Ontario university has produced and published online annual report-backs since then. There is, however, little empirical evidence about what impact the introduction and use of the MYAAs has had on Ontario universities since 2006.

This project's goal is to improve our understanding of how the new accountability measures required from Ontario universities since 2006-07 have been implemented and what has been the impact, at the organizational level, of those implementation choices. It is a study of policy in action and as such focuses on the organizational strategies that explain and support implementation decisions. The study also posits that policy instruments are not neutral and may have their own intended and unintended consequences.

Although the impetus in the use of accountability measures is observed in both Ontario's colleges and universities, this study focuses on the latter. Specifically, the study will:

- (i) Describe and analyze the choices made for implementing Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAAs) and subsequent report-backs in Ontario universities during the period 2006-07 to 2008-09.
- (ii) Identify, characterize and analyze the impact and intended and unintended consequences that the MYAAs have had on Ontario universities, focusing particularly on their effect on the academic functions of the institution.
- (iii) Analyze what those policies and instruments reveal regarding the relationship between the government and institutions, and the relationship between faculty and administration, in terms of governance, autonomy and trust.

The field work will take place in two stages. In the first stage, an analysis of the accountability performance contracts and related report-backs for the 2006-07 to 2007-08 period published by Ontario's twenty universities has been undertaken. This will be complemented by semi-structured interviews with key players who participated in the design of these performance contracts. In the second stage, four Ontario universities have been chosen as case studies to provide a more thorough analysis of the implementation choices that were made and of the impacts they may have had. These case studies will be based on an analysis of documentary evidence (on-line documents, meeting minutes, etc.) and complemented by a selected number of semi-structured interviews at each of the case study sites.

APPENDIX D: INVITATION LETTER – STAGE II

Re: Request to participate in the study: “The impact of provincial accountability measures on Ontario Universities”

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa researching the impact that the introduction in 2006 of multi-year accountability agreements (MYAA) for Ontario universities may have had at the organizational level. This research project is planned over two stages. First, a number of key players involved in the design of these agreements or who participated in the consultation process will be interviewed with the objective to better understand the objectives and intended effects of the MYAAs. Second, five Ontario universities have been chosen as case studies to provide a more thorough analysis of the implementation choices that were made and of the impacts they may have had at the individual university level. You will find attached a one-page summary of this project outlining its objectives and approach. .

The University of _____ has been chosen as a case study under stage two of this project. Given the role that you play at this organization, I wanted to talk to you about the introduction of the multi-year agreement requirement, to discuss the choices that your organization has made regarding the content of the MYAAs as well as the impacts those choices and that a new accountability requirement may have had.

I am hoping to visit (*location*) on (*dates*) and I would like to meet with you at that time for an interview of about 90 minutes. This invitation letter will be followed up by either a phone call or an email to set up a convenient time for us to meet.

In the meantime, for any question regarding this research or for setting up an appointment at your convenience, you may contact me by email at email@uottawa.ca or by phone at 613-xxx-xxxx. If you have any other questions or concerns, you may also contact my supervisor, Anne Mévellec, Assistant Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, by email at email@uottawa.ca or by phone at 613-xxx-xxxx, extension xxxx.

I would like to thank you in advance for your collaboration with this project and I look forward to meeting with you in the near future. Cordially,

Victoria E. Diaz
School of Political Studies
University of Ottawa
email@uottawa.ca
613-xxx-xxxx

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Title of the study: The impact of provincial accountability measures on Ontario Universities

Researcher: Victoria E. Diaz Paniagua
PhD Candidate, Public Administration
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
Tel 613-xxx-xxxx
email@uottawa.ca

Supervisor: Anne Mévellec
Assistant Professor
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
Tel 613-xxx-xxxx x xxxx
email@uottawa.ca

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Victoria E. Diaz Paniagua, PhD Candidate at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Anne Mévellec, Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to better understand how multi-year accountability agreements required by the Ontario government since 2006-07 have been implemented by Ontario universities and what has been the impact of those implementation choices at the organizational level.

Participation: My participation will consist solely of granting a 90 minute interview to the researcher during which I will answer some questions regarding the multi-year accountability agreements in Ontario. This interview will be audio-recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer work related information and this may cause me to feel uncomfortable (for instance, if revealing sources of disagreement with my organization's management). I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. Specifically, I can refuse to answer any question during the interview and I may terminate the interview at any time if I feel so inclined.

Benefits: My participation in this study will help me contribute to a better understanding of the impact of accountability measures in the Ontario post-secondary sector, a field in which I work directly or have a vested interest. Moreover, my participation will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this relatively unexplored area of research. In addition, if my contribution is for one case study, the researcher has committed to provide me with a copy of the analysis for my organization.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will be used only for helping understand accountability issues in Ontario's

post-secondary education sector. The researcher has also provided me assurances that my name will not be disclosed in any form. However, given the nature of the study:

- I consent to be quoted at times and that my employer and position be disclosed in the data analysis. I understand that disclosing my employer and position may provide sufficient information resulting in my identification. Participant's Signature: _____
or
- I consent to participate in the study anonymously. All information that can identify me will be removed or modified in the presentation of results and any quotes will remove any identifiable information to ensure that my anonymity is respected. Participant's Signature: _____

Conservation of data: The data collected in the form of tape recordings of the interviews, transcripts and interview notes will be kept in a secure manner, with electronic copies being encrypted in the researcher's computer and physical copies kept under lock in the researcher's office. The data will only be accessible to the researcher and her supervisor. It will be conserved for five years and destroyed upon completion of that period.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be removed from the analysis and destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Victoria E. Diaz Paniagua School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Anne Mévellec.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor, their contact information is provided at the top of this form.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, via phone (613) 562-5387 or email ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE – STAGE I

Summary: *The objective of this interview is to discuss the origin, development, content and impact of the multi-year accountability agreements, specifically during the period 2006-07 to 2008-09. The interview guide has been organized in three sections accordingly, origin, content, and impact.*

SECTION I: ORIGIN

1. According to you, why did the Ontario government chose to introduce multi-year accountability agreements for universities?
2. How was the introduction of these agreements expected to influence the accountability relationship between universities and government?
3. What was the role played by organizations, other than the government, in the development of these agreements?
4. The *Reaching Higher* was closely aligned to the 2005 Rae Review recommendations. In your view, why were the areas of accessibility, quality and accountability given priority?

SECTION II: CONTENT

5. The multi-year action plan template outlines the main sections of the agreements as well as some specific indicators to report on. According to you, how were these specific indicators chosen by the government?
6. Other important areas of activity during the Reaching Higher years are excluded from the agreements (e.g., report-backs on graduate enrolment growth). According to you, why was it decided to keep them elsewhere?
7. According to you, how did universities decide what strategies and measures to include in the agreements?
8. Did the multi-year agreements replace any other accountability instruments in place?
9. After the initial three-year MYA, some revisions were made to the report-back templates. What originated those revisions and what were the objectives of making those revisions?

SECTION III: IMPACT

10. What funding was associated with the agreements?
11. How are the accountability agreements and report-backs analyzed by the government?
12. Has any university fallen short of meeting the goals outlined in the agreement? If that has been the case, what have been the consequences?
13. According to you, have the objectives of the government for the introduction of the MYYAs been met? Specifically, has the objective of increased accountability been met, if so, how?
14. According to you, what have been the impacts of the introduction of the multi-year agreements for (i) universities, (ii) stakeholders (iii) government?
15. Are there any other impacts or characteristics of the agreements that you would like to discuss?

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW GUIDE – STAGE II

VISION I – UNIVERSITY STAFF

(Intro) I am interested in understanding what has been the impact on your institution resulting from the introduction of the multi-year accountability agreements since 2005-06, and to characterize such impact. To facilitate the discussion, I'd like to differentiate between the first generation of agreements (interim, multi-year and report-backs up to 2008-09) and the second generation of agreements (2009-10 to date).

1. Thinking primarily of the first generation of agreements and report-backs, according to you, what were the objectives the government was trying to achieve when introducing the MYAAs?
 - 1.1. (Follow up): origin has been characterized as Rae by some respondents, whereas by others it has been characterized as an evolution of early reports on quality funding... what are your thoughts on that?
 - 1.2. In your opinion, why was the format of a contract or performance agreement chosen? Do you know from where did it come? (validate the idea of policy transfer from BC)
2. Thinking again of the first generation, what was the role played by different organizations during their introduction?
 - 2.1. (follow up list to check): universities, COU/CUPA, students, faculty associations
 - 2.2. Did your university (or any other particular university) play a leadership role in the introduction/development of the agreements? How? In the choice of measures?
 - 2.3. Did the introduction of these agreements created any conflict between the organizations involved or with stakeholders?
 - 2.4. Were there any conversations among universities regarding the introduction and completion of these reports?
3. The introduction of the agreements was directly associated with Reaching Higher. Did the introduction of Reaching Higher alter the internal priorities of your institution?
 - 3.1. (If yes) how is this reflected? Any lasting influences?
 - 3.2. (If not) why not?
4. Can you estimate what amount of time / resources were required for the production of these agreements in the first generation?
5. Now turning our attention to the 2nd generation of report-backs, in your opinion, why did the changes in the report-backs took place?
 - 5.1. The three-year plans have not yet been revised. In your opinion, what is the reason behind this?
 - 5.2. In your opinion, what will be the role played by the new mandated agreements that were announced by the government?
6. Can you estimate what amount of time/resources is required for completing the 2nd generation report-backs?

I would like to now discuss more specifically the content of the agreements and report-backs for xx University.

7. Thinking about the specific instruments that were included in the agreements (CSRDE, NSSE, CGPSS, Faculty hiring), can you please indicate why these were chosen?

- 7.1. (objective: trying to dissociate whether they were introduced with the agreements or were already ongoing)
8. Now, thinking specifically of the strategies reported by your university, as presented in this summary, can you indicate which were especially elaborated for the MYAAs?
9. Now, thinking specifically of the measures used in the reports backs prepared by your university, as presented in this summary, can you indicate which were especially elaborated for the MYAA?
10. What has been the impact of introducing those strategies and measures?
 - 10.1. Benefits/costs for students
 - 10.2. Benefits/costs for administrators (Mission/Strategy; Performance; Organizational Processes/Structure)
 - 10.3. Benefits/costs for faculty (teaching/academic freedom)
 - 10.4. Benefits/costs for government (how were the reports analyzed by the government?)
 - 10.5. Benefits/costs for the public
 - 10.6. Have there been any organizational changes associated with these measures/strategies?
 - 10.7. Have there been any challenges for your university resulting from the introduction of those measures/strategies?

(Summing-up)

11. Thinking about the whole process of introduction, implementation, and development of the MYAA, in your opinion, what does this process reveal regarding the relationship between government and universities?
 - 11.1. (follow up): in terms of autonomy, trust, control
 - 11.2. (Follow up): in your opinion, have these agreements altered the relationship between universities and government?
12. Thinking about the agreements as a whole, have there been any impacts for your university?
 - 12.1. Did the obligation to report-back induce any behaviors?
 - 12.2. In terms of administrators, faculty and students?
13. Are there any other impacts of characteristics of the agreements that you would like to discuss?
14. Are there any other members of your university community that you would recommend I speak to for this project?

VERSION 2 – INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH BOARD, FACULTY, STUDENTS

I am interested in understanding whether the introduction of the multi-year accountability agreements since 2005-06 has had an impact on your institution, and if so, to characterize such impact. Are you familiar with these agreements?

- A. IF NOT
 - a. What does accountability mean in the university sector?
 - A. Who's accountable (object)
 - B. Accountability to whom (agent)
 - C. Accountability for what (standards) - objective
 - D. Instruments of accountability (means)
 - b. How does the government hold your institution accountable?

- c. Is accountability in the university sector important?
- d. What is the impact of existing accountability measures on:
 - A. The organization itself (organization, procedures, etc.)
 - B. The mission of the organization
 - C. The organization's performance
 - D. The organization's legitimacy
 - E. The organization's autonomy

B. IF YES:

To facilitate the discussion, I'd like to differentiate between the first generation of agreements (interim, multi-year and report-backs up to 2008-09) and the second generation of agreements (2009-10 to date).

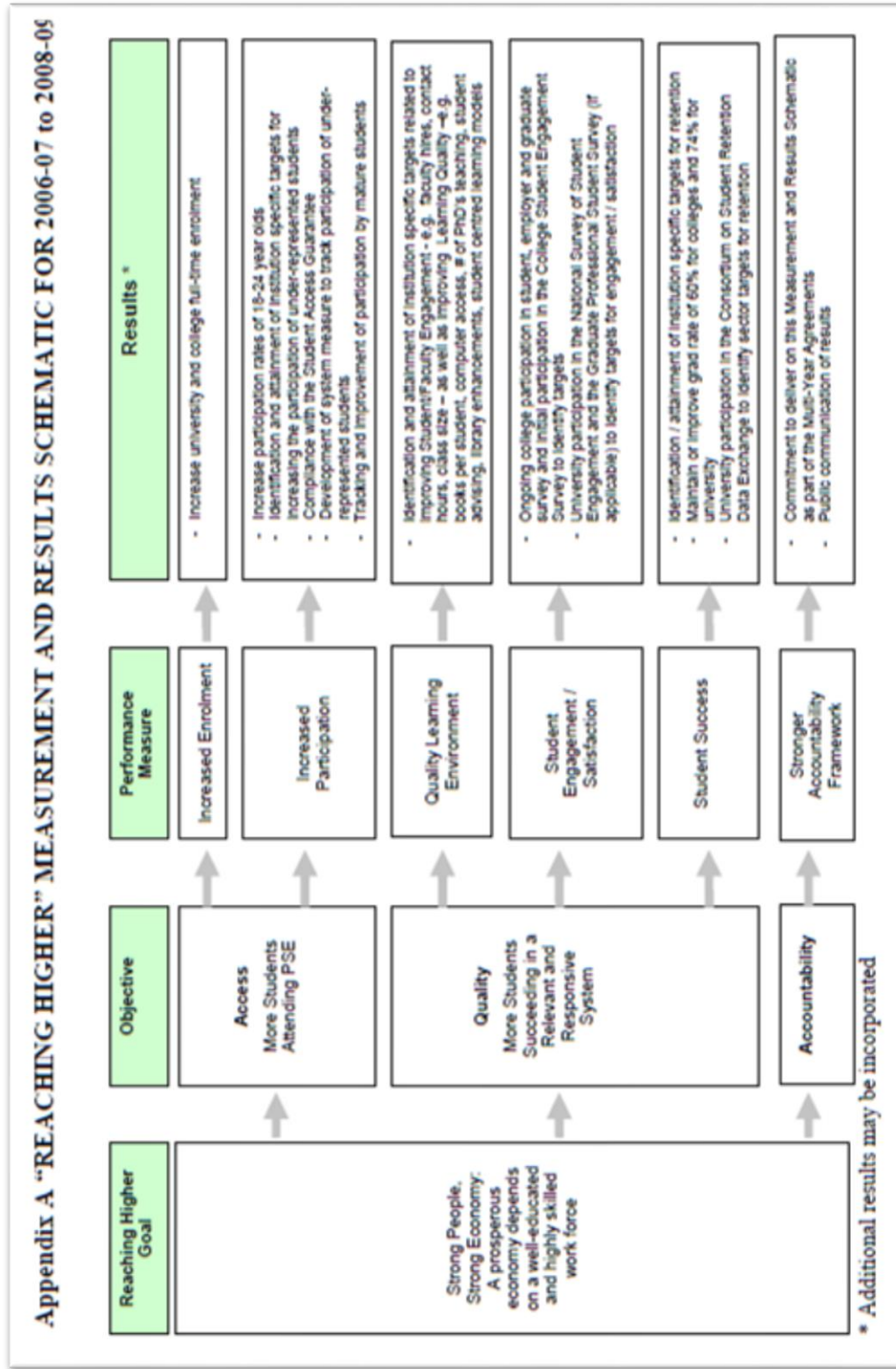
1. Thinking primarily of the first generation of agreements and report-backs, according to you, what were the objectives the government was trying to achieve when introducing the MYAAs?
 - 1.1. (Follow up): origin has been characterized as Rae by some respondents, whereas by others it has been characterized as an evolution of early reports on quality funding... what are your thoughts on that?
 - 1.2. In your opinion, why was the format of a contract or performance agreement chosen? Do you know from where did it come? (validate the idea of policy transfer from BC)
2. Thinking again of the first generation, what was the role played by different organizations during their introduction?
 - 2.1. (follow up list to check): universities, COU/CUPA, students, faculty associations
 - 2.2. Did your university (or any other particular university) play a leadership role in the introduction/development of the agreements? How? In the choice of measures?
 - 2.3. Did the introduction of these agreements created any conflict between the organizations involved or with stakeholders?
 - 2.4. Were there any conversations among universities regarding the introduction and completion of these reports?
3. The introduction of the agreements was directly associated with *Reaching Higher*. In your opinion, did the introduction of Reaching Higher alter the internal priorities of your institution?
 - 3.1. (If yes) how is this reflected? Any lasting influences?
 - 3.2. (If not) why not?
4. Can you estimate what amount of time / resources were required for the production of these agreements in the first generation?
5. Now turning our attention to the 2nd generation of report-backs, in your opinion, why did the changes in the report-backs took place?
 - 5.1. The three-year plans have not yet been revised. In your opinion, what is the reason behind this?
 - 5.2. In your opinion, what will be the role played by the new mandated agreements that were announced by the government?
6. Can you estimate what amount of time/resources is required for completing the 2nd generation report-backs?
7. Thinking about the specific instruments that were included in the agreements (CSRDE, NSSE, CGPSS, Faculty hiring), can you please indicate why these were chosen?
 - 7.1. (objective: trying to dissociate whether they were introduced with the agreements or were already ongoing)

8. Now, thinking specifically of the strategies reported by your university, can you indicate which were especially elaborated for the MYAAs?
9. Now, thinking specifically of the measures used in the reports backs prepared by your university, as presented in this summary, can you indicate which were especially elaborated for the MYAA?
10. What has been the impact of introducing those strategies and measures?
 - 10.1. Benefits/costs for students
 - 10.2. Benefits/costs for administrators (Mission/Strategy; Performance; Organizational Processes/Structure)
 - 10.3. Benefits/costs for faculty (teaching/academic freedom)
 - 10.4. Benefits/costs for government (how were the reports analyzed by the government?)
 - 10.5. Benefits/costs for the public
 - 10.6. Have there been any organizational changes associated with these measures/strategies?
 - 10.7. Have there been any challenges for your university resulting from the introduction of those measures/strategies?

(Summing-up)

11. Thinking about the whole process of introduction, implementation, and development of the MYAA, in your opinion, what does this process reveal regarding the relationship between government and universities?
 - 11.1. (follow up): in terms of autonomy, trust, control
 - 11.2. (Follow up): in your opinion, have these agreements altered the relationship between universities and government?
12. Thinking about the agreements as a whole, have there been any impacts for your university?
 - 12.1. Did the obligation to report-back induce any behaviors?
 - 12.2. In terms of administrators, faculty and students?
13. Are there any other impacts of characteristics of the agreements that you would like to discuss?
14. Are there any other members of your university community that you would recommend I speak to for this project?

APPENDIX H: MYA PLAN, MEASUREMENT AND RESULTS SCHEMATIC



Source: MTCU (2005a)

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