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**Understanding the Context, Impacts and Consequences of Accreditation on Canadian University
Business Schools**

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**Understanding the Context, Impacts and Consequences of Accreditation on
Canadian University Business Schools**

Catherine J. Elliott

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis, first and foremost, to my husband Andrew. Throughout this multi-year project, he has provided unwavering support and encouragement; and during this time he has fulfilled many roles – motivator, cheerleader, chef, housekeeper, taxi driver, banker, and best friend. I would like to also extend this dedication to our children, Emily and Hannah. While they were only eight and eleven years old when I embarked upon this journey, they are now young adults. Sharing in their growth and development has been an inspiration for me throughout my graduate studies; and weaving this thesis around and between their lives has been a pleasure. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my parents. They have been a constant source of support, advice, and inspiration throughout my life and for this I am forever grateful.

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ABSTRACT

Accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International) and its impact on Canadian university business schools (UBSs) is a question that has been studied empirically in only a limited manner in recent years. The purpose of this study was to explore the potential consequences as perceived by administrators and faculty members. Does accreditation constrain organizational actions, or conversely, does it facilitate organizational learning? What are the contextual factors which influence these potential consequences?

A qualitative, multiple case study approach was employed to study these questions. A sample of four business schools was selected; and data were collected from multiple sources. In Phase I, data was analyzed using NVivo7 and individual case profiles were prepared. These were validated and provided input into Phase II in which a multiple case analysis was performed. Emergent themes were identified and informed by three main bodies of knowledge: accreditation, institutional theory, and evaluation for organizational learning.

The study concluded that the primary drivers for seeking accreditation by Canadian UBSs were marketing-related - accreditation was seen as a powerful marketing tool which could be used in a highly uncertain and competitive market to enhance reputation and gain competitive advantage. Primarily motivated by the Dean/Director, accreditation was seen as a lever for change, both within the school and with central administration. Perceived impacts were related to these drivers – enhanced reputation, leverage for change, management efficiencies, an increased focus on research and quality, and program changes. Five contextual factors were found to be potent in

influencing the drivers, impacts and consequences of accreditation, with leadership being the most pervasive.

In terms of the enabling or constraining consequences, AACSB accreditation was perceived to be slightly enabling or neutral in its effect. While accreditation did promote some elements of organizational learning in three of the four schools, (continuous improvement), the learning effects were limited in scope, duration, and magnitude. There was insufficient evidence to suggest that double loop learning had occurred. Although accreditation was viewed to be constraining in several ways, overall it was not perceived to be overly restrictive.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Over the last 20 years, Canadian universities have faced an increasingly turbulent and competitive environment. Fueled by an unprecedented decline in public funding throughout the 1990's, universities have been forced to rethink their traditional ways of operating and adopt a more commercial, "corporate" paradigm¹ (McKee, Mills, & Weatherbee, 2005; Tudiver, 1999; Turk, 2000). Responding to this fiscal uncertainty, universities have sought out alternative sources of revenue from the private sector in order to survive. Tuition fees have escalated; universities have generated funds from individual and corporate donations and grants; and new business-research partnerships have been forged. By necessity, universities have become less reliant on the public purse and more adept at marketing their products (CAUT, 2005a, 2005b).

This increased commodification of higher education has led to increased expectations on the part of consumers. Students, for example, demanded improved employability upon graduation; and employers requested specific competencies and job-readiness (McKee et al., 2005). In response, many universities adapted their curricula and research programs to suit these consumer demands, in an attempt to increase enrollments and better meet the needs of students, private donors, and corporations. Critics argue that this corporatization of Canadian universities rendered them "less accountable to the public interest and more so to various private interests" (CAUT, 1999, p.15).

¹ Between 1992/3 and 2004/5, federal and provincial per capita cash transfers to universities declined an estimated 40%. As a share of the economy, the federal cash contribution reached its lowest level in twenty-five years in fiscal year 2004 (CAUT, 2005a).

During this same period, widespread acceptance and use of new technologies such as the internet opened up alternative delivery methods to replace traditional classroom courses. Universities utilized distance-learning technologies to extend their reach into new markets, resulting in increased competition for students – nationally and internationally. New on-line universities emerged, posting impressive enrollments (Murphy, 2000; Zammuto, 2008); and educational institutions formed consortia, to increase their on-line capability and marketability (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006).

These competitive pressures created a turbulent, destabilizing environment for universities as a whole, and Canadian university business schools (UBSs) were particularly vulnerable. Unlike other professional schools – law, medicine, education, architecture – no restrictions were applied to the supply and demand of students, and therefore, business schools and MBA's were allowed unbridled growth². With business education seen to be a "cash cow", the race for a greater slice of the ever-expanding market served to intensify the competition. As well, business schools were fairly late entrants into the field of higher education in Canada (Austin, 1998) and have long suffered from a lack of respectability and legitimacy, with critics claiming that their educational product lacks scientific foundation and relevance to the world of business (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). They have therefore responded by attempting to differentiate themselves from the competition and to legitimize their product. Many undertook corporate-style branding exercises, to market their programs and gain competitive advantage in the marketplace. Another increasingly popular strategy was to become

² In the UK, for example, the number of business schools rose from 20 in the early 1980's to 120 in 1996; in the United States, the number of MBA degrees increased from 3,200 in 1955-6 to 102,000 in 1997-98 (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002).

accredited. Accreditation offered a recognized stamp of approval, proof of authenticity and quality from an external, objective third-party. As no external professional accrediting body existed in Canada, the majority of universities looked to the American-based Academy to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Accreditation became so popular that the AACSB experienced a overwhelming 91% increase in the number of accreditations throughout the 1990's; in Canada, the growth curve was exponential, with two institutions accredited in 1989, increasing to 17 in 2008 (AACSB, 2006a, 2008; McKee et al., 2005). Paralleling this increase in accreditation-seeking by business schools was a corresponding proliferation of bodies which performed accreditations. Whereas prior to 1988, the AACSB was unrivaled in its role, four other accrediting bodies joined its ranks over the ensuing years (refer to Appendix A for a profile of accrediting bodies and Appendix B for a list of Canadian university business schools' accreditations).

This remarkable growth - in both the number of business schools seeking accreditations as well as granting accreditations - illuminates the predominance of this trend, in Canada and abroad. But how much do we really know about this phenomenon? Why has accreditation become so highly valued, and by whom? What are the consequences of accreditation for Canadian business schools? Does it result in improved educational outcomes and organizational learning or does it have a constraining effect? To date, there has been limited empirical research which has investigated these questions. Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) claim that only one publication on business school accreditation was found in their search of ABI-Inform (21 top-tiered management journals from Gomez-Mejia and Balkin, 1992); and they call upon management scholars

to “conduct rigorous theoretically and empirically based inquiries into various aspects of the accreditation process” (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006, p. 232). Romero (2008), a strong advocate of AACSB accreditation, also admits that “there is a lack of published, hard, and systematic data on AACSB’s positive strategic impact” (p. 246). The purpose of this research is to respond to this challenge and explore in more depth the perceptions of different stakeholders on accreditation and its impact on Canadian business schools.

To address this lack of empirically-derived knowledge, a qualitative, multiple case study was undertaken. An overview of the study is provided below, including the research questions and a summary of the methodology employed.

Overview of the Study

Research Questions

First, the literature was critically reviewed in three domains of inquiry: accreditation, institutional theory, and evaluation for organizational learning. Based upon this critical review, the following research questions were formulated:

What are the consequences of accreditation on Canadian university business schools?

- a. Does accreditation have an enabling influence on the organization? If so, how?
 - b. Does accreditation promote organizational learning? If so, how?
 - c. Does accreditation have a constraining influence on the organization? If so, how?
2. What are the contextual factors and conditions which influence these potential consequences and how?

Summary of Methodology

To investigate these research questions, a qualitative multiple case study design was used. The sample was comprised of four Canadian university business schools, each representing a separate “case”; and all had received AACSB accreditation within the last 10 years. Overall, the data collection approach was articulated in two main phases. The first sought to gain an in depth understanding of the impact of accreditation on each individual school and its unique historical, social and cultural context. The primary sources of data were published documents, observations, and interviews conducted with administrative staff and faculty. These qualitative data were then entered into NVivo7 and analyzed for each separate business school, (a “*within* case analysis”). Initially, the data was coded according to broad categories corresponding to a preliminary conceptual framework which was derived from a literature review. Emergent themes and sub-themes were then identified, coded and described. The results of Phase I were then summarized and presented in a draft Case Profile Report for each site. Each of the four draft Case Profiles was validated by the interview participants and any errors or omissions were identified and corrected. The results of this phase constituted the full set of validated case data for each of the four individual cases.

A *multiple case* analysis was then performed in Phase II. Using NVivo7 the data was further massaged, reduced, displayed, and analyzed across the four cases – to identify overarching patterns, areas of similarity and distinctive variability (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2006). Based on these results, the conceptual framework was modified and elaborated. A summary of findings was prepared for each of the individual cases as well as for the multiple case analysis. The results are presented in this thesis.

Organization of the Thesis

There are eight chapters in this thesis. This first chapter outlines the research problem and questions. It also highlights the context for the research and summarizes the methods employed. The second and third chapters introduce the study by providing more details on the background by way of a literature review (Chapter 2) and a detailed description of the methodology used (Chapter 3). The literature review provides a theoretical foundation for the study, by examining the academic literature on business school accreditation, institutional theory, and evaluative inquiry for organizational learning; and the intersection points of these bodies of literature are identified. Chapter 3, “Methods”, outlines the research approach and epistemological assumptions which guide this study and the research methods which were employed. This includes a description of the case study method and multiple case analysis which was employed. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the thesis present the results – first, the data is analyzed *within* each of the individual cases, (Chapter 4), then the data is analyzed *across* the four sites (Chapters 5 & 6); however, the focus of this thesis will be on the latter – the results of the multiple case analysis. Chapter 7 discusses the findings in light of the research questions. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis: contributions of the research are presented, implications of the study are discussed, and recommendations for future research are proposed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical review of the research knowledge in three domains of inquiry: accreditation, institutional theory, and evaluation for organizational learning. The focus is on Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs), specifically the administration of Canadian university business schools (UBSs); and the accreditation process of primary interest is that of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International). Review of this literature identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the current empirical and conceptual work in the field; it also highlights key points of intersection and departure, thereby illuminating opportunities for further research.

Accreditation and AACSB

Accreditation is an evaluative process whereby a recognized agency compares an institution against agreed-upon standards. It is different than licensure, which involves an authority granting permission for an organization to operate in a particular area of practice; and it is more than an audit, which is an independent examination to assess whether actual activities and results comply with plans (Pichoir Drew, 2005; Shaw, 2004). Accreditation is typically voluntary in nature and can be administered by peers or by an external standard-setting body. In the field of management education, AACSB accreditation is voluntary and self-administered, (i.e., organized by AACSB members); it denotes that a program meets or exceeds a minimum standard of excellence. According to the AACSB, accreditation assures stakeholders – students, alumni, and employers – that a uniform, high level of quality in education is being provided. Similar to other service-

provider accreditation programs of quality management such as ISO9000, the AACSB emphasizes the formative aspect of accreditation (Miles, Hazeldine, & Munilla, 2004):

Accreditation focuses on the quality of education. Standards set demanding but realistic thresholds, challenge educators to pursue continuous improvement, and guide improvement in educational programs (AACSB, 2006b, p. 1).

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has been in the business of granting accreditations for over 90 years. Still recognized as the “premier” accrediting body in the United States, it was founded in 1916 by 16 of the leading American universities, (e.g., Harvard, Columbia, Chicago), who were interested in improving collegiate education for business (Pringle, Michel, & Madison, 2007; Trapnell, 2007; Zammuto, 2008). In 1919, the AACSB introduced accreditation standards; and it has been virtually unchallenged in this accreditation role until the last 20 years, with the entry of two other American agencies - the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) in 1988, and the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) ten years later. Whereas the former was primarily created by smaller, more teaching-oriented institutions that were frustrated by the “one-size-fits-all research orientation” of AACSB, (and ACBSP also allows accreditations for 2 year associate degree programs), the latter was created by schools that were typically less resource-rich, and offered more non-traditional delivery methods (Zammuto, 2008). IACBE members were reacting to the overly structured, traditional, input-based assessment approach of AACSB, preferring an accreditation approach which was flexible and outcome-focused (Roller, Andrews, & Bovee, 2003; Zammuto, 2008). Later in the 1990’s, two other players also entered the accreditation market from overseas – the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) launched its

European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) in 1997; and the same year the UK's Association of MBA's established its own accreditation system specifically for MBA programs (AMBA). For more details on these different accrediting organizations, refer to Appendix A.

During this time period, and largely in response to this increased competition, the AACSB introduced two main changes to their accreditation process. First, having been criticized for their somewhat rigid standards and bias towards large, research-based institutions, in 1991 they moved to more flexible mission-based standards and a peer review process. Second, in preparation for international expansion and to reflect the greater heterogeneity of programs and delivery methods, (e.g., distance learning), they introduced more globally-oriented standards in 2003, that “support and encourage excellence in management education worldwide, and are relevant and applicable to all business programs” (Thompson, 2004, p. 429). One of the most substantive changes was the introduction of Assurance of Learning (AOL) standards, which “did not appear controversial at first”, but have subsequently required significant effort on behalf of accredited schools (Martell, 2007, p. 189). AOL necessitates that accredited institutions provide direct evidence of student learning across all business programs. This was a marked shift from standards which were based entirely on inputs, (e.g., faculty qualifications), to those also based on outcomes; and many professional and regional accrediting agencies have since followed suit (Martell, 2007; Pringle et al., 2007).

AACSB also made a critical name change during this timeframe, symbolic of their shift into the global playing field and also to extend their appeal to international members: in 1997 they became “AACSB – The International Association for

Management Education”; and then they changed it again in 2001 to “AACSB International”. The most important part of the latter change, however, was the modification of the first two words of the acronym, from the *American Assembly* of Collegiate Schools of Business to the *Association to Advance* Collegiate Schools of Business, International (Durand & McGuire, 2005; Zammuto, 2008)³.

The AACSB Accreditation Process

The AACSB accreditation process involves three main steps which can take up to five years to complete. To initiate step one, “Pre-accreditation”, applicants must be members of AACSB. Upon submission of an eligibility application to the Pre-Accreditation Committee (PAC), member applicants are then assigned a mentor who works with them to prepare an Accreditation Plan (AP). The AP is submitted to the Initial Accreditation Committee, which signals the start of step two, “Initial Accreditation”. Throughout this phase, the applicant implements the AP, works to improve elements in the AP, and submits Annual Reports until the Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) determines that it is time to prepare a Self Evaluation Report (SER). The IAC selects a Peer Review Team (PRT) who reviews the SER and schedules a visit to the applicant’s institution. Upon completion of a successful visit and receipt of a positive recommendation, accreditation is granted at this point by the Initial Accreditation Committee, for a period of six years. A maintenance visit occurs in year five, with annual “Maintenance of Accreditation” activities every year. Refer to Appendix C for a detailed diagram of the accreditation process.

³ According to Flesher (2007) it wasn’t until the ACBSP started recruiting the AACSB’s non-accredited international members that they were spurred on to take action towards attracting international members.

Despite this rather cumbersome and lengthy process, there are many schools interested in seeking accreditation; and AACSB has experienced unprecedented growth throughout the last 20 years. For example, in 1987, the AACSB had accredited 246 US business schools; however, by 1996, this had grown to 320 and by the end of 2006 this had reached 438 accredited institutions, representing an increase of 78% over 20 years (Zammuto, 2008). More noteworthy is the entry of new international participants. While there were only three accredited schools from outside the U.S. in 1996, (all three being Canadian schools), by 2006 there were 93 from across the globe; and "...currently, schools seeking AACSB accreditation are dominated by international institutions" (Trapnell, 2007). In Canada, the number of accreditations has escalated steeply throughout the late 1990's and first decade of 2000, with two institutions accredited in 1989, increasing to three in 1996, seven in 2000, eight in 2002, 11 in 2003, 15 in 2005, and 17 in 2008 (AACSB, 2008; McKee et al., 2005). This now represents 33% of the total number of UBSs in Canada (AACSB, 2008; CFBSD, 2008)⁴. Two of these universities also possess a second accreditation; and two possess a third (refer to Appendix B for more details). This rather sudden increase is somewhat surprising, given that a survey of the Canadian Deans of business schools in the early 1990's indicated that a substantial majority of respondents saw little use for AACSB accreditation (Coleman, Wright, & Tolliver, 1994).

Advantages of Accreditation

There are many documented benefits to seeking accreditation. Research has shown that accreditation can positively affect employment prospects for accounting

⁴ As of July, 2006, there are 51 members of the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans (CFBSD). Refer to Appendix B for a list of Canadian university business schools and their accreditations. Source: CFBSD website, July, 2006; and accreditation websites, August 4, 2008.

students (Hardin & Stocks, 1995); it has been linked to higher professors' salaries and to increased cross-disciplinary salary differentials (Levernier & Miles, 1992; Roller et al., 2003); and accreditation has been positively related to higher retention rates at accredited institutions (i.e., even after controlling for other relevant institutional factors and student characteristics, colleges/ universities with accredited business schools enjoy "23% higher graduation rates and 15% higher full-time retention rates than non-accredited institutions") (Espiritu, 2007, p. 269). In a survey of 122 Deans of American business schools, Roller et al. (2003) found that the benefits most frequently mentioned by Deans of accredited schools, (either AACSB, ACBSP or IACBE), were "accountability for program improvements", "opportunities to share techniques/successes/challenges", "marketing advantages" and "faculty recruitment advantages". Research productivity has also been found to be higher at AACSB accredited schools. For example, Udell, Parker and Pettijohn (1995) discovered that marketing faculty at AACSB accredited schools published more journal articles than those at institutions that were denied accreditation; and Ehie and Karanthanos (1994) found that Deans of accredited institutions (n=82) perceived intellectual contributions to be more important than at non-accredited schools (n=116). However, neither study found that these perceptions were to the detriment of teaching /instructional responsibilities. Finally, many authors have credited the AACSB process with improving the quality of business education in the United States overall (Mayes, Heide, & Smith, 1993; Roettner, 1989). Advocates argue that it helps to protect the consumer, by ensuring a minimum level of quality in an increasingly diverse and confusing marketplace, particularly on the international stage (Anderson, 2002; Romero, 2008; Trapnell, 2007).

More recently, researchers have become interested in studying the impact of AACSB on member institutions. Roberts, Johnson and Groesbeck (2006) examined the impact of recent AACSB accreditation, (between 1997-2001), on 24 American university business schools, by comparing the views of faculty hired since accreditation (n=62) to those who were hired prior (n=221). The authors' rationale for this approach was that accreditation may result in a cultural change and resetting of priorities; therefore, the new faculty may see accreditation as an "indication of whether schools meet their career expectations" whereas "faculty hired prior to accreditation, on the other hand, may well have had different expectations when they joined a program and have seen the established culture changed" (p. 61). When compared to faculty hired prior to accreditation some significant differences between the groups were identified. Most notably, the new faculty viewed the benefits of accreditation *more strongly* – they tended to agree more that accreditation helped themselves, new, and established faculty. Furthermore, they agreed *more* that AACSB is "good for the business school", that it benefits students and employers. However, both groups perceived that AACSB accreditation changes the values of the organization: that is, newly hired faculty value research more. In conclusion, the authors believe that, "everything else being equal, respondents decidedly prefer working at AACSB accredited schools" (Roberts, Johnson, & Groesbeck, 2004, p. 59).

With the Assurance of Learning (AOL) standards being introduced in 2003, several researchers have been interested in finding out how these requirements have been implemented and/or how they have benefitted the accredited institutions. (Since the emphasis on AOL standards has represented a significant change to most schools – the

focus shifted from indirect to direct measures of achievement - the AACSB offered schools a graduated implementation schedule of 5 years⁵.) Pringle, Michel and Madison (2007) conducted a web-based survey in 2006 to determine how business schools have responded to the 2003 assessment mandate - in terms of Assurance of Learning (AOL) practices and issues at 138 AACSB accredited schools. The respondents, (assessment coordinators or those responsible for accreditation), indicated that “some” or “significant” faculty resistance has been experienced (43%); and this resistance was significantly related to two main groups of variables: “inconvenience”, (amount of time, complications to teaching; lack of knowledge about how to conduct assessments), and “fear” (interference with academic freedom; fear of results used for performance evaluation). By far the most daunting challenge appeared to be “the amount of time that assessment takes”. Overall, the author concluded that most schools are still in transition – they have not yet developed strong assessment programs to meet AACSB’s new standards; furthermore, there is a persistent confusion between grading and assessment, (and indirect vs. direct measures), and still room for more improvement (although an encouraging 89% indicated that their assessment program has produced results.)

These research findings were replicated in a study by Martell (2007), entitled *Assessing Student Learning: Are Business Schools Making the Grade?* She surveyed Deans of accredited business schools (n=154) about the status of AOL practices and found that most had made significant progress towards AOL implementation: 88% had articulated learning goals and 64% had translated those into observable behaviours. The

⁵ AACSB guidelines (2003) suggest that 2 years will be required for defining learning goals and translating those into specific objectives; measurements can be developed in the 3rd year; and the entire process should be operational by year five (Martell, 2007; Pringle et al., 2007).

schools were using a variety of assessment techniques and fairly sophisticated databases for storing data. The Deans' greatest concerns about assessment were the "time required" (68%); and another 46% were also challenged by "closing the loop" (i.e., actually using the data to inform teaching practices and improve student learning). As Martell summarizes, while "many schools have made great strides in developing systems to collect assessment data", the whole purpose is to "use this data to improve the curriculum" and enhance decision-making (2007, p. 192). Only then will the full benefits of accreditation be realized.

While these studies provide insight into the effect of accreditation on university business schools, they are limited in several respects. First, the degree to which the results are representative of all UBSs (including Canada) is questionable. The response rates are relatively low, (e.g., 27.2% for Pringle et al. and 32.8% for Martell et al.), include very few international schools, and the surveys are often completed by one person on behalf of the school (Deans or a school "representative"). In some cases, the findings may also be skewed towards those schools which have positive results and are pleased to report their progress – on Assurance of Learning or on other accreditation outcomes which are studied. Secondly, these studies are methodologically alike – they rely almost entirely on data from structured, closed-response, quantitative surveys. The answers are therefore pre-defined and do not uncover alternative views, deeper issues or concerns associated with accreditation; furthermore, they do not access the views of different audience groups or geographies, (e.g., Canada vs. US; Deans versus faculty), nor do they illuminate the contextual factors which influence how accreditation is "constructed" in different UBS environments.

Disadvantages of Accreditation

While there are many documented benefits to accreditation, there appear to be equally as many disadvantages. The process itself is very costly and time-consuming (McKee et al., 2005; Pringle et al., 2007; Roberts, Johnson, & Groesbeck, 2006; Wood, 1999). For example, direct cost - application fees, conference fees, air fares, meals, and consultant costs – have been estimated by Roberts et al. (2004; 2006) at “well over \$50,000” and “if the school is aggressive, these costs typically approach \$100,000” (2006, p. 60). Pringle et al. (2007) in their recent survey of 138 accredited schools found that 54% of accreditation coordinators estimated that the costs of AOL *alone* had already exceeded \$10,000 U.S.

Accreditation can also be constraining, requiring that institutions conform to strict procedures in order to qualify. Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) claim that the influence of external accrediting bodies is negative and “profound”, referring to this phenomenon as an “accreditocracy”. They cite many negative effects: accreditation has influenced business school staffing, research, and curriculum policies (Gore, Steven, & Bailey, 1998; Henninger, 1994) and caused schools to alter the processes by which they conduct strategic planning and environmental scanning activities (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006; Kerby & Weber, 2000; Yunker, 2000). However, only one provided empirical data to support these claims; and three of the four do not suggest that the effects are *negative* per se. Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) also argue that current university environments are discontinuous and require adaptive strategies whereas accreditation increases rigidity - the *opposite* of what is needed; Yunker (2000) contends that AACSB criteria have “dubious sensibleness”, that accreditation wastes time, breeds inefficiency, and

proliferates paperwork. However, both authors rely more on personal opinions than scientific data.

Recently, two authors have refuted these claims. First, they have addressed Julian and Ofori-Dankwa's (2006) argument that accreditation is hampering universities' strategic responsiveness to a turbulent environment - by imposing restrictive procedures, decreasing operational flexibility, inhibiting risk-taking, and reducing sensitivity to environmental changes. Romero (2008) describes how, to the contrary, AACSB actually *promotes* strategic alignment and "encourages business school administrators to become strategic leaders" by facilitating long term planning and the development of competitive advantage (p. 246). He argues that strategic management is a critical element in the accreditation process and reflects the importance of strategy in successful business schools. The process *starts* with strategy, as it is mission-driven:

A school's mission statement, the foundation of its strategy, is the basis for determining the appropriate mix of degree programs, student services, and other key functions; therefore schools make these decisions independently, given broad accreditation guidelines... (p. 246).

Universities that are accredited, then, have greater alignment of their mission with their program offerings as the process itself forces them to clarify the markets that they serve and the services they offer (Romero, 2008). They are also able to better differentiate themselves from competitors and demonstrate their focus on quality to potential consumers, much as ISO certification communicates quality in the private sector.

However, Romero's claims must be interpreted with some caution. His research methods are not highly systematic or scientific; and he admits to drawing from anecdotal data, "examples from deans, AACSB studies and accreditation standards" to "support my position" (p. 246). As the former Assistant Vice President (Knowledge Services) of the

AACSB, Romero comes from a viewpoint that is clearly biased towards accreditation and its benefits.

Zammuto (2008) further attacks Julian and Ofori-Dankwa's (2006) argument from another angle. Drawing upon the work of other authors, (Burgelman & Grove, 1996; Porter, 2001; Zammuto & Cameron, 1985), he concludes that the new developments identified by Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) - on-line technologies and corporate universities – have not been disruptive and are not likely to become disruptive or cause discontinuities in the future. He also relies on secondary data, (historical accreditation data and international enrollment statistics), to demonstrate that corporate universities have been part of the competitive landscape for at least a decade without having a significant, negative impact on enrollments. To the contrary, many traditional business schools have actually worked hand-in-hand with the corporate sector, developing partnerships and consortia to deliver educational services. With respect to on-line technologies, Zammuto (2008) agrees with Porter (2001), that the Internet “is often not disruptive to existing industries or established companies” (p. 78); and in the case of higher education, while on-line enrollments have grown over the last decade, “they have not cannibalized face-to-face enrollments” (Zammuto, 2008, p. 258). Zammuto (2008) goes on to show how the globalization of business programs, the increase in for-profit universities, and the rise of accreditation as a quality differentiator will potentially have a greater impact on business school enrollments in the future than either of the trends mentioned by Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006). While Zammuto's article is quite convincing and well supported by secondary data, its prime purpose is to refute Ofori-Dankwa's claims. As such, it is more a position paper than a scientific inquiry.

In summary, overall, the current research on accreditation is inconclusive. Methodologically, it is largely anecdotal, descriptive and a-theoretical. Although some quantitative survey research has been conducted (e.g., Roberts et al., 2004), it has been limited almost entirely to University Deans and Directors, primarily in the United States; and data on other stakeholders' perceptions are limited.

Institutional Theory - Perspectives on Accreditation

One area of research on accreditation which has recently shown promise has been institutional theory. McKee et al. (2005) and Durand and McGuire (2005) offer examples of current research which has examined how institutional theory can help to explain the recent upsurge in accreditation in Canadian university business schools; as such, this research provides a foundation for future exploration. Before delving into the literature in more detail, however, a brief introduction to institutional theory is warranted.

Background

With diverse roots in political science, economics and sociology, it was not until the 1970's that the study of institutional forces gained prominence in organizational studies. Meyer and Rowan (1977), in their seminal article, *Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony*, are frequently credited with shattering the dominant paradigm of organizations as open systems, interacting in a fairly independent, unrestrained way with the environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991a; Hanson, 2001; Scott, 2003)⁶ and replacing it with a new approach, called "institutional theory". Institutional theory focused more on *constraining* elements in the environment which *limit* the ability of organizations to change. However, concerned with the overly

⁶ See Scott, 2001, for an in-depth historical overview of institutional theory.

rational and asocial perspective that many traditional institutional theorists used, DiMaggio and Powell later redefined institutional theory in their 1991 book, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Building upon Meyer and Rowan's earlier views, *new* institutionalism (or *neo-institutionalism*) emphasized more of the cultural-cognitive processes of social life, rejecting the overly deterministic theories of human action in earlier works (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991a); in essence, neo-institutionalism attempted to draw "attention to informal as well as formal aspects...adopting pluralistic theoretical frameworks and methodology" (Van Gestel & Teelken, 2006, p. 100).

Van Gestel and Teelken (2006) describe how new institutionalism is still not a unified body of thought, with three main theoretical approaches in evidence over the last twenty years. These are typically referred to as: historical institutionalism, economic (rational choice) institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. Scott, (2001), in his broad definition of institutions, bridges these three perspectives as he describes the three types of forces or "systems" which shape institutions; and it is this all-encompassing perspective which will be followed in this thesis:⁷

Institutions are composed of *cultural-cognitive*, *normative*, and *regulative* elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life (Scott, 2001, p. 48) (*italics added*).

Scott called these three institutional systems –cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative – the "three pillars of institutionalism". The *regulative* pillar plays a stabilizing role by defining the written and unwritten rules of conduct. For example, university rules, provincial educational statutes, union regulations, and professional standards govern the

⁷ These forces correspond to the theoretical approaches identified by Van Gestel and Teelken: economic institutionalism emphasizes regulatory aspects, historical the normative elements, and sociological the cultural and cognitive aspects (Scott, 2001; Van Gestel & Teelken, 2006).

actions of university professors and administrators. In contrast, *normative* systems are primarily enacted through moral suasion. Norms are internalized by participants; and actions are guided by a widely held sense of “what’s right” and appropriate. In a work setting, some of these values would be embodied in the corporate culture. Finally, the *cognitive-cultural* pillar refers to processes through which people collectively view reality and construct shared meaning structures; and *institutionalization* is the term used to describe this process, whereby “social reality is constructed” (Scott, 2001).

Educational institutions, like all organizations, operate within a larger domain, or *institutional field*. The institutional field refers to “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b, p. 64-65). Over time, a complex pattern of relationships is formed among the various participants in the field so that the multitude of formal and informal expectations, norms, rules, and myths develop like a network of connectedness or constraints. This institutional *structuration* process creates a powerful set of restraining forces - not unlike Max Weber’s iron cage – which leads organizations to become more and more similar to one another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991b; Hanson, 2001). *Isomorphism* is the term used to describe the means by which this homogenization occurs. DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991b) identify three mechanisms through which isomorphic change comes about, each corresponding to Scott’s “pillars” of institutionalism mentioned above:

1. *Coercive*, resulting when an organization adopts structures or procedures because it is compelled to do so;
2. *Normative*, occurring when an organization adopts procedures or forms because they are purported to be superior;

3. *Mimetic or imitative*, resulting when one organization simply elects to copy or mimic another, often because of uncertainty (Scott, 2003, p. 215) (*italics added*).

Through these isomorphic mechanisms, institutions strive to achieve and maintain their legitimacy. Legitimacy “is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). That is, a legitimate organization is one whose values and actions are congruent with those of its larger environment (Durand & McGuire, 2005). For schools, the pursuit of legitimacy is a constant struggle, since they fit into a classification of organizations which have been labeled by some authors as *organized anarchies* (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972, 1976). That is, compared to many organizations, universities operate in conditions of contextual ambiguity: they suffer from ill-defined goals, unclear technologies and fluid participation (i.e., shifting involvement in decision-making). The result is a continual and concerted effort to establish legitimacy in the eyes of society and their myriad of stakeholders – students, parents, unions, employers, political parties. Universities therefore reduce contextual uncertainty by mimicking other “successful” schools; through isomorphism, organizational action is constrained and schools start to look more and more alike.

Accreditation is one of the powerful means by which this is achieved:

School organizations go to the greatest lengths, not to accomplish instructional ends, but to maintain their legitimate status as schools. They seek *accreditation*, which depends on structural conformity with a set of rules that are professionally specified and legally mandated, and react in panic when it is threatened (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1992, p. 54).

Institutional Theory and AACSB Accreditation

Several researchers have looked specifically at the case of AACSB accreditation, applying institutional theory to explain the proliferation of accreditation-seeking and accreditation-granting behaviour by university business schools throughout the last 15-20 years. McKee et al. (2005) argue that, in Canada, a number of factors have contributed to a climate of uncertainty and created significant institutional pressure for Canadian university business schools to seek legitimacy through AACSB accreditation. These include: decreased government funding, new corporate partnerships for research, increased competition and demands for relevancy, reputational pressures such as program rankings, and the common practice of hiring American professors at Canadian institutions. The former, decreased government funding to postsecondary education, is not unique to Canada alone – it has been identified as “one of the major economic and social trends in Western democracies in the latter part of the 20th century” (Helms Mills, Weatherbee, & Colwell, 2006, p. 500). In Canada, Helms Mills et al. (2006) explain how financial uncertainty was caused by decreased funding allocations from both federal and provincial governments throughout the early 1990’s; and in 1996, a change in federal funding formulae was introduced, (from cost-sharing with provincial governments to a block allocation), causing a further reduction in postsecondary funding and increased fiscal uncertainty (Helms Mills et al., 2006; Tudiver, 1999). This caused a shift from “benign coexistence” of universities and governments, (whereby funding was sufficient for all), to competitive environment of “ambiguity and uncertainty” in which universities and business schools were forced into a commercial model - competing for external dollars by increasing enrollment levels and tuition fees, searching for new research

partners, (the government also shifted towards a private sector cost-sharing research funding model), and seeking enhanced reputation and status (ACST, 1999; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Helms Mills et al., 2006; Tudiver, 1999; Turk, 2000).

AACSB Accreditation was seen as a means by which business schools could differentiate themselves in the increasingly global and competitive environment of postsecondary education in Canada (Helms Mills et al., 2006; McKee et al., 2005). As Helms Mills et al. (2006) explain, accreditation became part of the complex social construction, meaning and rhetoric used by business schools and universities to produce an identity that positioned and validated themselves in the shifting institutional field:

Because the identity created around business schools who have received AACSB accreditation is believed to set them apart from nonaccredited institutions, accreditation is viewed as a plausible way to attract new students and a means of increasing fee revenues. In addition, the increased prestige that accreditation gives a university and the tighter control mechanisms in place attract more research-oriented faculty, which in turn improves the ability of the university to source research funds. In sensemaking terms, we can see how growing competitive demands have forced universities, in particular business schools, to carve out new identities that set them apart from others and give credence to their actions (p. 501).

Boyle (2004) explains how business schools, in general, have always been particularly vulnerable to questions of legitimacy. However, this competitive environment served to exacerbate the situation. While universities were contending with a commercialized, resource-constrained environment, at the same time they were also contending with the spread of business-management models, (also known as “new public management” or the “new managerialism”), at the administrative level (Meyer, 2002). Consequently, accusations of corporatization, privatization, commodification and cooptation were rampant (Boyle, 2004; McKee et al., 2005; Tudiver, 1999; Turk, 2000); and these tensions, (between the university and the corporate sector), served to aggravate

many longstanding issues about the types of commercial ventures exemplified by a business or management degree:

...business schools appear to personify both the threat and the complexity because they are closer to the corporate sector than are other areas of the university....from the perspective of those deeply rooted in the liberal arts, academic study of business management is equated with the pursuit of profit rather than the pursuit of knowledge and creation of public goods (Boyle, 2004, p. 43).

Historically, business schools have always struggled for credibility, walking a delicate line between the corporate and public sectors. Perceived by detractors as more of a vocational training school than an academic discipline, business management is a relatively new entrant to higher education in North America, it has low entry barriers, and has no clearly agreed-upon body of knowledge (Austin, 1998; Boyle, 2004; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). As such, it is unlike other elite professional schools – law, medicine, or architecture; and it is also unlike other academic disciplines with university-based training, (e.g., education), as it has difficulty stressing its “social responsibilities” or its close association with “public knowledge or the public good”⁸. Therefore, it faces continual legitimacy challenges from competing constituencies and from negative judgments about its position in higher education (i.e., what Suchman would refer to as ‘moral legitimacy’ – does it contribute to the good of society?) (Boyle, 2004; Suchman, 1995).

In the intensely competitive environment of the 1990’s, AACSB accreditation was seen to help solve this dilemma in Canada. As the most publicly recognized measure

⁸ Khurana, in his history of the American business school, actually blames the AACSB for failing in the “professionalization” quest. He identifies many ways in which AACSB lies at the root of the “unfilled promise” (Khurana, 2007; Spender, 2008)

of quality world wide, it offered an answer to questions of credibility as well as providing an international symbol of quality that was recognized in the increasingly global and competitive marketplace. As well, business education was seen to be a ‘cash cow’(with no limits on the supply of and demand for students); and with a burgeoning export market for global business education, the universities saw an opportunity to grab a piece of this ever-expanding marketplace. Business schools were therefore allowed (and *urged*) to seek unbridled growth (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Several authors (e.g., Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, Trapnell, 2007, Zammuto, 2008) have documented the expansion of international markets: for example, while 600,000 students studied outside their countries in 1975, enrollments reached 2.5 million in 2006 (IIE, 2006; Zammuto, 2008); in the U.S., this consisted of 582,984 students and 75,200 in Canada in 2006/7 (IIE, 2007). While the U.S. is the top destination, Canada is fourth among English-speaking countries, representing 3% of the export market in 2006/7(after the U.K. and Australia) (IIE, 2008). Moreover, business education represents the largest proportion of this export market: almost one-third of international students in 2003-4 were in business; and graduate business education in particular has become a “major export in many parts of the world” with an estimated 8,000 business schools worldwide (Trapnell, 2007, 68). Overall, the OECD estimates that 1.2 million business degrees were awarded in OCED countries in 2004 - a 70% increase from 1998 (OECD, 2006).

The AACSB recognized the prospect for significant growth in this promising global marketplace and seized the opportunity⁹. Whereas only three international schools

⁹ According to Zammuto, it was just in time – the Academy only took notice when the ACBSP started to solicit its unaccredited members.

were accredited in 1996 (out of 323), this raised to 93 in 2006 (out of 531) and 96 in 2008 (out of 555) (AACSB, 2008; Zammuto, 2008). Applying institutional theory, Durand and McGuire (2005) explain this phenomenon. They demonstrate how the AACSB, as a powerful legitimating force, strategically - and successfully – reinforced and expanded its role over the last 20-25 years. (Like university business schools, accrediting bodies must also maintain their legitimacy and relevance to their constituents.) In their study of the recent globalization of the AACSB, the authors illustrate how AACSB performed a careful balancing act in the late 1990's to ward off selection pressures in the institutional field by expanding their domain into global markets and establishing legitimacy in this new domain, while simultaneously maintaining legitimacy among existing members. Using methods such as co-optation and re-branding, the AACSB extended its legitimacy into the international organizational field (Durand & McGuire, 2005; McKee et al., 2005).

While this body of research provides many new insights into how institutional forces shape our educational institutions – why schools seek legitimacy through accreditation, why they are isomorphic - it is limited in several respects. First, the analysis tends to rely on one interpretive “lens”, (e.g., institutional theory), ignoring other approaches which could deepen the analysis. For example, in McKee et al.'s 2005 study, the authors' prime focus is the application of neo-institutionalism to historical events surrounding the proliferation of accreditation seeking by business schools. Although the authors do collect qualitative data, “from interviews and correspondence with 10 Canadian business school deans and senior administrators”, they report this data almost as an afterthought, without describing their approach, methods, or findings in a

systematic manner (p. 296). As a result, they miss an opportunity to strengthen their results through rich qualitative data. Similarly, in Helms Mills et al.'s (2006) insightful research on "sensemaking" of business school accreditation and rankings, they focus only on quantitative data to "investigate the sensemaking processes involved in the organizational production and use of quantitative representations of success" (p. 498) (i.e., data was collected from formal AACSB documents, published rankings, web site content and related publications). However, qualitative data may have enhanced their analysis. Durand and McGuire's (2005) article could also have been strengthened by a deeper examination of the qualitative interview data.

Secondly, institutional theory tends to be deterministic. It often overestimates the constraining role of institutional structures and underestimates the role of human agency in decision-making (Geppert, 2000). In university business schools, despite myriad institutional pressures that they are facing to seek accreditation, there is still room for university administrators to exercise choice in decision-making - they "enact" their future (Weick, 1995). Hanson (2001) for example, applied institutional theory to the study of organizational change in schools and found that they can learn to adapt, *despite the fact* that they are constrained by a multitude of institutional forces – including accreditation - which render them inflexible and reinforce stability at the expense of change. As Geppert (2000) points out, organizations are comprised of individuals who enact their future in a social context:

Institutional theory represents a body of thought that identifies, emphasizes, and explores the forces that constrain organizations from change...What is fundamentally missing in this discussion is that educational systems *do* change, perhaps not as often or dramatically as reform advocates would like, but they do change"(p. 653-4).

Accreditation, Evaluative Inquiry and Organizational Learning

This leads us to a competing body of knowledge which suggests that accreditation can be *enabling* rather than constraining. Accreditation, as a process of evaluative inquiry, has the potential to promote organizational learning and thereby improve an organization's ability to change. As evidenced by the Deans' comments received by McKee et al., (2005), many viewed the evaluative process as a positive force: some spoke generally about the opportunity for learning and renewal – “to strategically affect change in the business school” – while others mentioned specific actions such as bringing faculty together around curriculum changes, or increasing the school's visibility and/or funding (p. 296). Roller et al. (2003) reported similar results in their survey of 122 American deans of university business schools. The two most highly rated benefits of accreditation were learning-related: first was “accountability for program improvements” and the second was opportunities for knowledge sharing (p.199). While these studies hint at some interesting possibilities, the authors do not link their findings to *organizational learning* per se. A brief review of the literature is therefore useful.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning, first popularized in 1990 by Peter Senge in *The Learning Organization*¹⁰, refers to the process whereby an organization gains competitive advantage in the marketplace because of its ability to acquire, create, and transfer knowledge and “modify its behavior to reflect new insights” (Garvin, 1993, p. 80). Over the last 20 years, the field of organizational learning has generated much interest amongst

¹⁰ In Europe, Pedler et al. (*The Learning Company*), are largely credited as authors who popularized the learning organization concept, as opposed to Senge (Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell, 1991).

practitioners and academics alike, amassing an extensive body of literature; and the proliferation of research shows no signs of abating (Bapuji and Crossan, 2004). Various authors have referred to this growth as “exponential” (Crossan & Guatto, 1996), “phenomenal” (Bapuji & Crossan, 2004) and “volcanic” (Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000). To draw some boundaries around this burgeoning body of research, this section will focus on a more specialized area – how accreditation, as an evaluative process, is related to, and can contribute to organizational learning. Also in this section is an overview of several ongoing debates in the field of organizational learning as well as a proposed definition and paradigmatic stance. By situating this research among a number of different perspectives, it is hoped that this will help to clarify the perspective to be taken and will address some of the common critiques that have been waged by researchers in the field (Bapuji & Crossan, 2004; Friedman, Lipshitz, & Popper, 2005; Templeton, Morris, Snyder, & Lewis, 2004).

Current Issues and Debates

The literature on organizational learning is vast, representing a variety of different definitions and paradigmatic assumptions¹¹. Two questions which persist throughout the ongoing debate include: 1) how *does* an organization learn; and 2) how *should* an organizational learn? (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000; Easterby-Smith, Snell, & Gherardi, 1998; Yeo, 2005). Whereas the former refers to the underlying means or *processes* by which organizations learn, the latter refers to the characteristics or attributes of the ideal “learning organization”. Authors in the first camp tend to use the term

¹¹ Refer to Easterby-Smith, Antonacopoulou, Simm, and Lyles (2004) for an excellent summary of the major contributions/debates to organizational learning in the last 30 years (2004).

‘organizational learning’, and their purpose is primarily descriptive, directed more at theory building and academic research rather than performance improvement. The second group is typically associated with *normative* definitions of the “Learning Organization” (LO) (Gorelick, 2005; Tsang, 1997). Authors in this camp adopt a *prescriptive* approach, advising others on the steps to take to become a LO, describing its various attributes and often extolling its virtues in superlative terms (DeGues, 1988; Senge, 1990; Stata, 1989). They tend to be consultants, practitioners or human resource managers with a hands-on, pragmatic orientation.

Another ongoing debate that has surrounded organizational learning is the nature of learning as a multi-level concept – individual, group, organizational. Does learning occur *in* organizations, or *by* organizations? (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998; Popper & Lipshitz, 2000) Many researchers apply a cognitivist model, asserting that all learning takes place by individuals *in* organizations. Senge, for one, believes that “organizations learn only through individuals who learn” (1990, p. 140); and Simon asserts that “all learning takes place inside individual human heads” (Simon, 1991, p. 125). In this viewpoint, organizational learning occurs through individuals who are cognitive “agents” (Wang & Ahmed, 2003). Their collective efforts translate into organizational actions which provide evidence that learning has occurred. Others argue that organizations themselves can learn, attributing human-like cognitive abilities to organizations, in their capacity to process and store information: as Hedberg (1981) contends, “organizations do not have brains, but they have cognitive systems and memories. As individuals develop their personalities, personal habits, and beliefs over time, organizations develop world views and ideologies” (p. 6).

However, the cognitive approach creates a number of dilemmas. Conceiving of organizational learning as merely learning *in* organizations does not explain the link between the two. How does individual learning become organizational? On the other hand, applying a cognitive model to describe learning *by* organizations is problematic as it raises difficult questions about the ontological status of organizations, requiring a conceptual leap to view organizations as if they were individuals, with human characteristics, capable of learning and thinking. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that individuals and organizations would learn *in the same way* (Cook & Yanow, 1993). A social constructivist perspective helps to resolve these dilemmas. Learning is viewed as primarily a social process whereby individuals are active producers of meaning in a social, historical and cultural context. Because learning is situated, organizational learning can be empirically studied through observations of group practice or “communities” of learners (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cook & Yanow, 1993; Cullen, 1999).

In an attempt to “map out” these different approaches, Shipton (2006) has constructed a typology for organizational research. Her comparative framework categorizes the literature according to the two main “dilemmas” described above: (a) prescriptive/ explanatory bias; and (b) level of analysis – individual or organization (refer to Appendix D for a depiction of the typology). The approach which will be taken in this study aligns with quadrant four, in which the level of analysis is the individual situated within the organizational context. It is primarily descriptive/explanatory; takes a social constructivist stance, which emphasizes the importance of “embeddedness” in the construction of meaning (Brown et al., 1989).

Definition

Preskill and Torres (1999) present a definition of organizational learning which will be used in this research. It is social constructivist in orientation and it is comprehensive, encompassing many of the main concepts about organizational learning. The authors also focus on the role of evaluative inquiry to promote organizational learning; they include both incremental and radical change, (single and double loop learning), and they stress collective action. The authors attempt to bridge the theoretical with the practical, and the literature on evaluation with that on organizational learning. It is primarily descriptive, but can be prescriptive in the sense that it promotes action. For these reasons, their definition will be adopted for this study:

Evaluative inquiry for organizational learning and change is grounded in a social constructivist theory of learning which suggests that learning takes place through (a) the collective creation of meaning, (b) action, (c) the development of new knowledge, (d) an improvement in systemic processes, and (e) the overcoming of tacit assumptions. Team learning from evaluative inquiry occurs when individuals share their experiences, values, beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge through dialogue, and engage in collaborative learning efforts. When individuals and teams disseminate their learning from inquiry throughout an organization, and action results from this learning, it can be said that the organization learns. Evaluative inquiry can facilitate learning at all levels by stimulating and supporting the ongoing process of asking questions, the collection and analysis of data, and using what is learned from an inquiry to act on important organizational issues..." (p. 50).

Organizational Learning and Evaluative Inquiry

As suggested by Preskill and Torres' (1999) definition, recently, researchers have shown growing interest in the linkage between organizational learning and evaluative inquiry. While it is commonly understood that organizations vary in their ability to learn, (Fiol & Lyles, 1985), there is still a lack of practical advice, (the "gritty details of practice") on how to foster an enduring organizational learning capacity (Garvin, 1993, p.

79). In addition to many other interventions which have been suggested for building organizational learning capacity, (e.g, training, mentoring, strategic planning), evaluation holds much promise in this regard (Cousins, 2005; Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004a). Evaluation can be defined as “systematic inquiry leading to judgments about program (or organization) merit, worth, and significance and support for program (or organizational) decision making” (Cousins et al., 2004a, p. 105). Accreditation falls under this definition, as do other types of formative, improvement-oriented evaluation, (e.g., process evaluation, implementation evaluation), or summative, more judgment-oriented evaluation (e.g., impact evaluation).

As an intervention, evaluation offers a chance to go beyond the collection and monitoring of performance information to the creation of knowledge for strategic decision making and continuous improvement (Cousins et al., 2004a; Goh, Cousins, & Elliott, 2006; Preskill, 1994; Preskill, Torres, & Martinez-Papponi, 1999; Preskill & Torres, 1999). Evaluation can present many opportunities for learning: through the substantive *results* of the evaluation, or by virtue of participating in the actual evaluation *process*. The latter notion of “process use” refers to the knowledge and skills that organizational members can gain by being involved in the evaluation; and in so doing, they learn to view organizational phenomena differently and question basic assumptions (Patton, 1998). This capability is vital to achieving “double loop learning”- one of the basic tenets of Senge’s “learning organization”¹² (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Senge, 1990). Whereas single loop learning is incremental in nature and refers to the ongoing detection

¹² Senge (1990) used the terms “adaptive” or “lower level learning” to refer to incremental change and “generative” or “upper level” to refer to more transformational change. These notions are akin to Argyris and Schon’s concepts of single and double loop learning.

and correction of errors, double-loop learning is more radical, and involves questioning the underlying assumptions or values which are the basis for decision making. This can be achieved through collective reflection and dialogue, whereby the implicit is made explicit and defensive routines are exposed (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990).

Although both modes of learning are valuable – i.e., “both learning forms can lead to a higher degree of effectiveness and competitiveness of business organizations” - the latter is often seen to be the true means by which organizational learning occurs (Geppert, 2000, p. 29).

Organizational Learning, Accreditation, and Schools

The current body of knowledge linking organizational learning to evaluative inquiry in schools is relatively lean. While the concept of organizational learning has received growing support in educational circles as a way of dealing with accountability and ongoing school reform (Marks & Printy, 2003), the development of professional cultures in schools (Louis & Kruse, 1999; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999), effective school leadership (Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 1999; Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002), and school decision making (Stevenson, 2001), it has not been linked to *evaluation* (or accreditation) per se. Cousins, Goh, Clark, and Lee (2004a) conducted an extensive review of literature linking organizational learning with evaluative inquiry, (both evaluation capacity building and evaluation use), and concluded that research in this area is “underdeveloped”. They found five studies which examined organizational learning in relation to systematic inquiry; only three of these were in the context of schools. In summary, they stated that these studies only refer in “incidental ways to the role of systematic inquiry” in fostering organizational learning

in schools (p. 131). Building on the results of this review, the research team then developed a framework which they tested empirically at 41 public schools in Winnipeg (Cousins, Goh, & Lee, 2004b). Employing multi-level path analysis, they found that evaluative inquiry produced significant indirect effects on organizational learning capacity, mediated by school support structures and organizational readiness for evaluation. An analysis of descriptive statistics revealed that school support structures were strongest in the area of training and professional development, but lowest in terms of experimentation and knowledge sharing (Goh et al., 2006)¹³.

While there is an expanding body of knowledge exploring organizational learning, evaluative inquiry, and public schools, there is little research on organizational learning at institutes of higher education (IHEs) in general and in university business schools in particular. Two graduate theses were located which examined quantitatively the relationship between organizational learning and university-level accreditation at a small sample of American colleges and Universities (Beard, 2005; Neeffe, 2001). Both authors were interested in comparing the organizational learning capacity of IHEs which used a “traditional” accreditation process versus those which used a new “quality-based” approach (modeled on the Malcolm Baldrige quality process). Since the latter promotes many of the aspects of organizational learning, (teamwork and dialogue, innovation, less hierarchy, flexible organizational goals, continuous improvement), and is less rigid than the traditional method, it was hypothesized that the IHEs accredited with the quality method would rank more highly in organizational learning capacity than those without.

¹³ Statements were rank-ordered according to the degree of agreement. Rankings were highest for statements related to training and professional development (rankings of 1 through 5/17) and lowest for knowledge sharing and experimentation (rankings of 12-17 out of 17)

Neeffe's (2001) hypothesis was supported - six schools using the quality-based criteria scored more highly on all of the organizational learning survey scores than the six schools using the traditional method. Beard's (2005) results, however, were contradictory. Following up with two of the schools from Neeffe's (2001) study five years later, she discovered that the school using quality-based criteria did *not* improve over time and had a *lower* overall score than the traditionally-accredited school. These results illuminate the importance of *contextual* factors, within the university which impact the degree to which an IHE develops organizational learning capacity. They also suggest that organizational learning may be difficult to sustain over time; and the *type* of accreditation, (i.e, quality-based or traditional), matters less than *how* the accreditation is implemented within the University setting. Neither study, however, collected qualitative data to investigate the deeper meaning of these factors. As Beard recommended in her conclusion,

Qualitative data, obtained through interviews with faculty and administration, would provide a richer understanding of the impact of issues such as unionization, barriers to organizational learning, tenure (long-term employees), fragmented departments, and the type of institution. This research design would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of organizational learning in IHEs (Beard, 2005, p. 84).

Summary of Literature Review

In reviewing the literature on accreditation, institutional theory, and evaluative inquiry for organizational learning, there are numerous points of intersection and critical issues which emerge. Firstly, the current body of empirical research on university business school accreditation is sparse (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006; Romero, 2008). It is largely descriptive and primarily focused on American institutions. Although some quantitative empirical research has been conducted, (Martell, 2007; Pringle et al., 2007;

Roberts et al., 2006; Roller et al., 2003), it has been fairly broad in scope and limited in depth – focused primarily on survey data from one internal stakeholder group. Moreover, by using large-scale survey methodology, these studies have not uncovered some of the deeper contextual factors which may influence the accreditation process and its outcomes.

Institutional theory enriches this body of literature by adding a much needed theoretical dimension. It suggests that Canadian university business schools are vulnerable to restrictive isomorphic pressures in the organizational field, thereby seeking accreditation to legitimize their educational product and gain competitive advantage. Although this argument has strong explanatory power, it tends to overstate how accreditation acts as a normative force *constraining* organizational action; and it underplays the importance of human agency (Geppert, 2000). The literature on evaluation for organizational learning provides an intersection point here. By linking accreditation to organizational learning, the *enabling* potential of accreditation is emphasized and the human element further explored. Accreditation is seen as a possible means of generating knowledge and stimulating learning for individuals, groups, and organizations. Research on evaluation use, process use, and evaluation influence adds further support for this alternative perspective – that accreditation can be an *enabler*, promoting knowledge-creation for strategic decision making and continuous improvement, and by fostering double loop learning (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Cousins, 2005; Cousins et al., 2004a; Goh et al., 2006; Kirkhart, 2000; Patton, 1998; Preskill, 1994; Preskill & Torres, 1999).

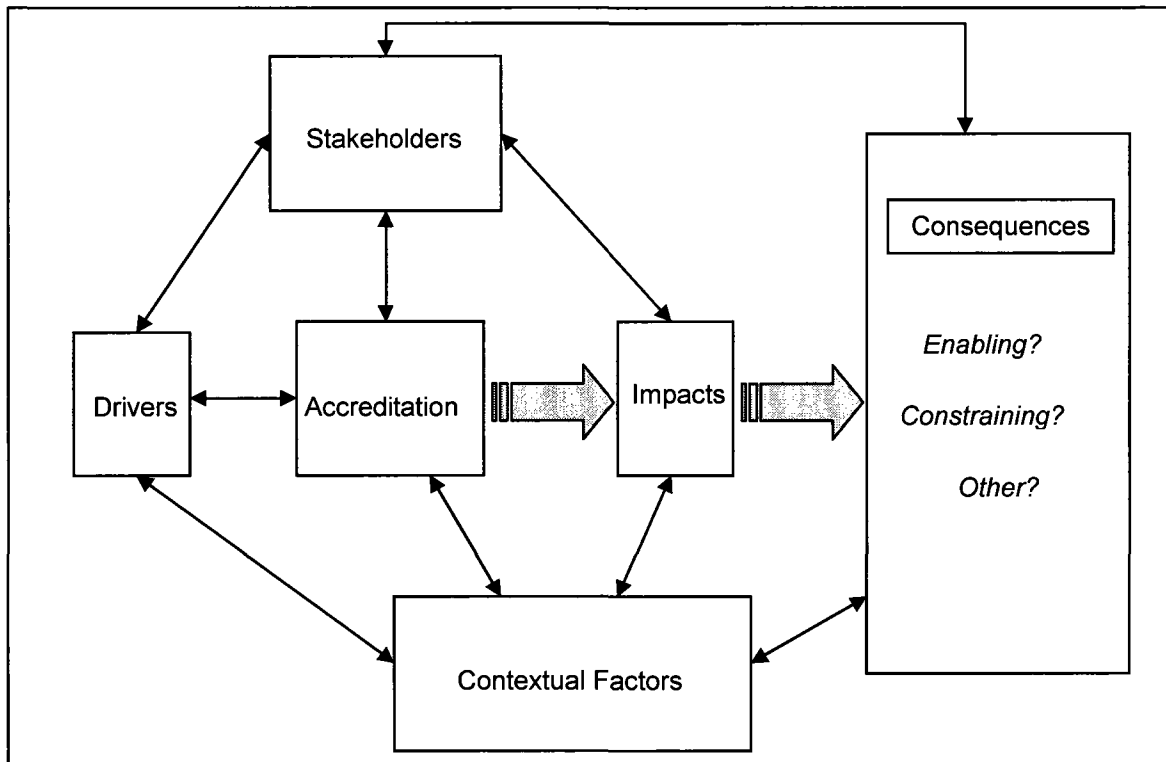
A compelling conceptual paper by Adler and Borys (1996) provides further insight into this debate. How can accreditation be both constraining, (as suggested by

institutional theory), and enabling, (as suggested by research on evaluation for organizational learning)? The authors describe two contrasting types of organizations – enabling or coercive bureaucracies – and propose that workflow formalization, (e.g., rules, procedures), can have either an “enabling” or “coercive” effect on employees. This depends upon employees’ perceptions – do the formalized processes help them to better “master their tasks”; or alternatively, do they provide a means by which management is seen to coerce their effort and compliance? A process such as accreditation, which has the potential to increase workflow formalization, therefore has the potential to be perceived either way - as either enabling or coercive (Adler & Borys, 1996).

Conceptual Framework

To summarize the main concepts and issues presented above, a conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.1. In addition to illustrating the main concepts and arguments presented in the literature review, the conceptual framework also provides general guidance to the research study. Per Miles and Huberman, (1994) this research is primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature; therefore, the conceptual framework is not considered to be strictly pre-ordinate – it will evolve further as the research progresses and more details will be added to the framework as each of these concepts is examined in this study. As Miles and Huberman explain, “a case can be made for tight, prestructured qualitative designs and for loose, emergent ones. Much qualitative research lies between these two extremes” (p. 17). Such is the case with this research.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework



Definition of Constructs

Each of the constructs presented in Figure 2.1 is defined below. For additional (supplementary) definitions, refer to Appendix E.

Drivers: Drivers refer to the perceived reasons for having sought accreditation and for continuing to seek re-accreditation. These may be: 1) larger environmental forces such as increased competition in the marketplace; 2) organizational level (university or business school) drivers such as pressure from decision-making or governing bodies; or 3) individual level reasons.

Accreditation: Accreditation refers to the AACSB accreditation process and all of its many components.

Stakeholders: Stakeholders refer to groups who have a “stake” in accreditation – they may be involved in or impacted by accreditation. They may be internal or external to the UBS. They include groups such as faculty members, administrators, students, employers, alumni, employers, and the business community. However, due to the scope of this study, only two stakeholder groups are involved, *in interviews*, as participants:

1. senior administrators in university schools of business; and
2. faculty members in UBSs.

Contextual factors: Contextual factors refer to factors in the external or internal environment which constitute the particular context in which the university business school operates. They may be historical, cultural, economic, or social. They may influence any or all aspects of the accreditation process and its consequences.

Impacts: Impacts refer to participants’ perceptions of the general impacts of accreditation. This includes concrete *actions* taken due to AACSB accreditation (for pre-accreditation, initial accreditation or accreditation maintenance activities) as well as more *intangible* effects (e.g., perceived benefits realized).

Consequences: Consequences refer to participants’ perceptions of the consequences of accreditation *specifically vis a vis enabling, constraining, or other* consequences. Each is described in more detail below.

Enabling consequences: Enabling consequences refer to stakeholders’ perceptions that they have an increased range of options available in the workplace due to positive changes which have occurred *because of accreditation*. These include consequences such

as organizational learning (and continuous improvement) or other related improvements such as more streamlined, simplified or improved work processes; increased empowerment and/or flexibility in decision-making; or other perceived improvements in the quality of work life. It refers to changes which are generally perceived to be positive.

Constraining consequences: Constraining consequences refer to stakeholders' perceptions that, *due to AACSB accreditation*, their actions are more constrained or limited. This may be due to new rules or sanctions that are imposed by accreditation or due to informal restrictions and/or sanctions on their behaviour because of accreditation (e.g., cultural norms, values, expectations). It refers to changes which are generally perceived to be negative.

Other consequences: Other consequences refer to consequences which may be perceived to be *either* potentially enabling or constraining. In this study, the participants were asked specifically about *formalization* and *legitimacy*.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the issues raised in the literature review by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the consequences of accreditation on Canadian university business schools?
 - a. Does accreditation have an enabling influence on the organization? If so, how?
 - b. Does accreditation promote organizational learning? If so, how?
 - c. Does accreditation have a constraining influence on the organization? If so, how?
2. What are the contextual factors and conditions which influence these potential consequences and how?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Overview

The data collection approach used in this study consisted of two phases. The first sought to gain an in depth understanding of the impact of accreditation on each individual school and its unique historical, social and cultural context. The primary sources of data were published documents, observations, and interviews conducted with administrative staff and faculty. A *within* case analysis was then performed. The results were summarized and presented in a draft Case Profile report for each site; and each Case Profile was validated by the interview participants. A *multiple case* analysis was then performed in Phase II. The focus of this phase was to identify the overarching patterns, areas of similarity and difference across the four cases. The results are summarized in this thesis. Based on these results, the conceptual framework was modified and elaborated.

This section briefly describes the research approach selected for this study, the rationale for its selection, as well as the epistemological assumptions underpinning this research. An explanation of the research strategy, design, and methods used during the two phases of the study is then provided, including a description of the methods for case and participant selection. Finally, the process used for data analysis is detailed.

Research Approach

Theoretical and Epistemological Assumptions

This research is grounded in a social constructivist approach. To describe social constructivism, it is useful to begin with constructivism, as it is a broader term which encompasses a number of related theoretical perspectives. Constructivism is based on two epistemological principles: knowledge is actively constructed by the individual and not

passively received from the environment; and knowledge is a process of adaptation based on and constantly modified by a learner's experience of the world. As Denzin and Lincoln describe, the constructivist paradigm (or worldview) assumes "a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings) and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). At one end of the spectrum, "psychological" or personal constructivists view the construction of meaning as primarily an individual cognitive activity, dependent upon an individual's interaction with the environment, their previous and current knowledge structure. The influence of Piaget is evident at this end of the continuum - learning is seen as the progressive adaptation of an individual's cognitive schemes to the physical environment (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Schwandt, 2000, 2001). At the other end, the strongest perspective maintains that "all knowledge is constructed in social contexts and is inseparable from shared understandings" (Cullen, 1999, p. 46)¹⁴.

One strand of constructivism, heavily influenced by the work of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes the embeddedness of learning in social, cultural and historical contexts. This form of social constructivism, (typically referred to as sociocultural constructivism), has had a significant influence on contemporary theorists who have developed many concepts which have relevance in organizational settings, including shared cognition, situated learning, communities of learning and communities of practice, cognitive apprenticeships, and everyday cognition (Cullen, 1999). Some of

¹⁴ There is a branch of *constructivism* which is called *constructionism* and the strand called "*strong social constructionism*" is the most radical insofar as it denies any ontology of the real whatsoever – everything is a sociolinguistic product of historically situated interactions (Schwandt, 2001).

the main tenants of this blend of social constructivism include: a foundational belief that cognitive learning occurs first at a social level, before the individual level; that learning is therefore mediated by others in the social context; and that dialogue is critical to learning. (Cullen, 1999). This is the form of social constructivism which will inform this study.

In keeping with the social constructivist approach, the nature of this research necessitates a qualitative research strategy, due to the focus on rich description and gaining a better understanding of complex phenomena and contextual conditions. The research methods, (to be described later in this chapter), therefore pay attention to situatedness, the importance of context, human agency, and the mutual construction of reality; and they allow for fairly inductive theory building (starting with participants' views and building up to patterns, theories, or generalizations) (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Consistent with this philosophy, this research begins with a fairly "loose" or exploratory conceptual framework (refer to figure 2.1), which is based upon the existing set of knowledge and theory in the field. It will then be modified, elaborated, and further developed through interaction with the multiple types of data which are collected and analyzed throughout the course of this research.

Research Strategy

To investigate the research questions, a qualitative research strategy was used. Qualitative research seeks to "understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena" (Merriam, 1998); and this approach provided an opportunity to examine the deeper issues and meanings surrounding accreditation – particularly its consequences - that have largely been overlooked in the existing literature. A qualitative strategy also recognizes the importance of *context*; a critical consideration in research on organizational behaviour

which has often been ignored (Johns, 2006). As Mason (2002) contends, qualitative research methods celebrate “richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity”. Furthermore, she adds:

...it has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in *particular contexts*. More than that though...the qualitative habit of intimately connecting context with explanation means that qualitative research is capable of producing very well-founded *cross-contextual generalities*... (Mason, 2002, p. 1)

Research Design

A multiple case study was selected as the research design. Creswell (1998) describes a case study as an “exploration of a ‘bounded system’ which occurs “through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). The “case” may be bounded by time and place; it may be a program, community, or phenomenon. A multiple case (or “multicase”) study is simply a particular collection of cases which share a common characteristic or condition (Stake, 2006). In this instance, the common phenomenon is *accreditation* and the different sites are *Canadian university business schools*.

Case Selection

According to Stake (2006), “the benefits of multicase study will be limited” if fewer than “4 cases are chosen, or more than 10” (p. 22). He believes that too few cases do not show enough of the interactivity between sites and their situations, whereas too many will provide “more uniqueness of interactivity than the research team and readers can come to understand” (p. 22). It was therefore determined that this multicase study would include four university business schools. The sampling of business schools was purposeful; in multicase research this is necessary, as the selection of sites is critical to

the purpose. They should be relevant to the overall concept and research questions; and they should provide diversity across contexts (Stake, 2006). For this study, the criteria for business schools to be included were: 1) AACSB accredited; 2) accreditation completed within the last 10 years; 3) Canadian; and 4) similarity in size and type of university business programs. In order to minimize the potential effects of multiple program-wide accreditations, schools with EQUIS were excluded (as there are no Canadian schools with AACSB or IACBE accreditation, so these are not factors). However, since the AMBA is targeted at a single program and the accreditation process is similar to that of the AACSB, schools with this designation were considered (J. Leck, personal communication, May 8, 2007).

Using these criteria, four university business schools were selected and contacted via letter in September and October of 2007. The purpose of the letter was to invite the Dean and/or Director of the business school to participate in the study, explain its purpose and level of involvement, and to obtain his/her organizational consent (refer to Appendix F for a copy of the letter). Approximately two weeks after the letter was sent, the researcher conducted a follow-up phone call, to ensure that the letter had been received and to inquire about the response. Four schools, (A, B, C and D), gave their consent to participate under the condition of anonymity¹⁵; and in all four cases the researcher was referred to another member of the faculty/administration for further contact, typically the person who had been most closely involved in the initial accreditation effort (hereafter referred to as the “Accreditation Coordinator or AC”). A

¹⁵ They will therefore be referred to as University Business Schools (UBSs) A, B, C, and D.

meeting was then held with each Accreditation Coordinator, (by telephone or in person), to discuss the research protocol, answer any questions, and determine the next steps.

Data Collection

Data were collected from four sources: 1) published documentation, 2) interviews, 3) observations, and 4) a researcher's journal. Each of these sources will be described in more detail below.

Published Documentation

The first step was to review documentation, (both on-line and hard copy), from each of the university business schools (UBSs). Prior to contacting the schools, each university web-site was reviewed thoroughly to garner as much data as possible about the business school programs, size/composition of student populations, accreditations granted and dates, school's mission, etc., to confirm the selection of the initial sample. This data was recorded for later use and analysis on a "Document Checklist". This checklist helped to ensure consistency and completeness. The web-sites were also reviewed again prior to site visitations to identify any additional questions or elements to consider. (Refer to Appendix G for a copy of the Document Checklist.)

During the actual visitation, published documentation was identified and provided by the Accreditation Coordinator (AC) at each site. This included the following: AACSB accreditation documentation, (e.g., AACSB Self Evaluation Report), other Accreditation Plans, Strategic Plans, Annual Reports and Maintenance Reports), and additional business school reports and plans which were deemed to be relevant. Each of these documents was reviewed in order to gain deeper insight into the organizational context, (key players, important events, and governance and decision-making structures),

and to determine (or verify) the chronology of the key historical events. A timeline was prepared for each school to document the important events and corresponding dates (Note: the critical events on the timeline were further enhanced by interview data).

Interviews

At each business school, the Accreditation Coordinator assisted in identifying a potential sample group to participate in interviews. This included members of both the faculty and administration who had: 1) been involved in accreditation activities; and/or 2) been a member of the faculty or administration throughout the majority of the accreditation period. The administrative staff included individuals who were serving in administrative roles at the time of accreditation and included the following: Deans, Directors, Associate, Assistant or Vice Deans, Program Directors (MBA, and/or undergraduate programs), and Accreditation Coordinators. With respect to faculty members, there was an attempt to have representation across different disciplines within the faculty, as they may have different perspectives on accreditation (i.e., marketing, accounting, finance, management). The researcher then contacted these individuals by email, inviting them to participate in the study by participating in a one hour interview. An individual consent form was also included in the invitation. At each university, interviews were conducted with seven to ten individuals. Each interview followed a set of guiding questions in a semi-structured format (see Appendix H). (Note that these questions were used as a “guide” only – they were adapted to the individual being interviewed and the unique environment at each site.) Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-taped with the permission of the participant. (Refer to Appendix I for a copy of the individual consent form that each participant

reviewed and signed. This consent form also served as an invitation to participate and was sent by email to each participant).

Observations

Throughout the study, observations were also made by the researcher and recorded as field notes. These served as an important purpose - to triangulate the data, help validate other findings and to gain further information about the context and organizational culture. For example, while the researcher was on-site at the UBS, observations could be made about the physical layout and signage in the school, any social interactions between faculty, formal practices and policies, or other cultural artifacts. An observation checklist was used to guide these observations (refer to Appendix J).

Researcher's Journal

A researcher's journal was kept throughout the study. This journal was used to promote self-reflection on the researcher's behalf - it prompted her to think critically about her perceptions, observations, feelings, and insights during the research process. By exposing underlying assumptions and biases, the researcher was more open to thinking creatively about alternative explanations or interpretations of the case. Stake (2000), following Schon (1983), encourages reflective practice as a "general frame of mind" for doing casework (p. 450). It also assists in making decisions concerning the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Data Analysis

The overall approach to data analysis for this multicase study followed the procedure outlined by Stake (2006) and Miles and Huberman (1994); and it was further

informed by Yin (2003a, 2003b). As Stake points out, there is a “healthy tension” in a multicase study between generalization and particularization, between the overall case (which he calls a “quintain”) and the individual case. The researcher therefore needs to start with the individual case for analysis. Although the overall research questions *guide* the research, each case is studied in terms of its own situational issues and then it is analyzed cross-case to determine commonalities and divergences.

Phase 1: Individual Case Analysis

For each individual case, the data were subjected to a basic interpretative analysis (Merriam, 2002; Schwandt, 2000). All data, (interviews, observations, documentation, reflective journal, field notes) were entered into NVivo7, a qualitative software analysis tool, to assist with the process. To get started, all data were read and re-read to allow the researcher to familiarize herself with the data and to start identifying emergent patterns and themes. Once the data were re-read a sufficient number of times, they were assigned to fairly broad categories, (known as “free nodes” in NVivo7). The majority were associated with a component of the conceptual framework. (As an initial starting point, for the first round of coding the conceptual framework provided a general organizing structure.) However, some additional categories were also identified; and these free nodes were created as required. The data in each node were then re-read and assigned to more detailed subcategories, (also known as “free nodes”). As relationships started to emerge from continual analysis of the free nodes, data were assigned to a “tree node”. Each tree node has hierarchical relationships - much like a family tree - and this enables a graphical depiction of the “parent-child” relationships to be viewed. Throughout this iterative analysis process, the data were also reviewed for discrepancies and disconfirming

instances; and these formed separate free nodes. Once the free nodes were all assigned to tree nodes, any remaining free nodes were analyzed to determine if they should be 1) combined with other nodes; 2) deleted because they were redundant; or 3) left to stand alone because they warrant special attention.

Upon completion of this coding process, the data were then further analyzed and summarized in preparation for a draft Case Profile report (one was prepared separately for each UBS). First, each of the major tree nodes (and “children”) were re-read to tease out the main points. Then, the researcher used NVivo7’s memoing function to record these summary observations and identify relevant quotes. Finally, from these data, a draft Case Profile Report was prepared. Each Case Profile was quite lengthy (averaging 24 pages, single spaced); and it summarized the main findings from the individual case study according to the predominant themes. This first draft was reviewed by the researcher’s supervisor, discussed and revised before it was sent to the interview participants for validation purposes. Participants were asked, (via email), to review the report to identify “any errors, omissions, or clarifications that might be needed”. In all cases, the feedback indicated that the Case Profiles were seen to be an accurate representation of the events which had occurred throughout the accreditation period. One participant identified minor changes and these editorial changes were made. The following feedback from these two participants was typical:

The case seemed to present a fair profile of what happened here. The interesting part of your report for me is the views of the various people you interviewed.

I think that you captured the way we thought about the issues back then. I have no suggestions or clarifications.

Phase II: Multiple Case Analysis

When all of the individual case profiles were complete and validated, the multiple case analysis was performed. As Stake (2006) instructs, the purpose of the multiple case analysis is to apply the “findings of situated experience to the research questions of the Quintain” (Stake, 2006, p. 47). Essentially, this iterative process generates multiple case findings (which he calls “multicase assertions”). The multiple case findings are then summarized in an overall multiple case (or “multicase”) report. In this instance, the multicase report will constitute the results of this thesis.

To perform the multiple case analysis, the researcher once again used NVivo7 to assist. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), this process consists of three “concurrent flows of activity” – data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (p. 10). The first two steps were facilitated by NVivo7’s querying function which was utilized to generate matrices. Using this initial data display format, data in each of the major tree nodes (thematic categories) were validated for each individual case first. This was performed in the following manner: the frequency of responses was calculated for each thematic category (and subcategories), the content was reviewed, the totals adjusted accordingly, the modal response indicated, (where applicable), and described in a summary statement(s). Illustrative comments were selected for additional explanation or clarification. These data were then compared to the individual Case Profile Report and any adjustments made. Repeating this process for each of the four UBS’s, the data were slowly reduced, massaged, and displayed using a series of display formats – primarily matrices. Once the matrices were fully “loaded” with data from each school, they were combined and a multiple case analysis took place. Patterns were noted, differences,

contradictions, and unique findings. At this point, preliminary conclusions were made. In many cases, the data needed further massaging and the matrices required further reduction and reformatting. At the bottom of each matrix, observations and summary comments were recorded for later investigation and follow-up.

The results of the multiple case analysis were then summarized and documented for the thesis. Drawing from, and informed by the literature on accreditation, evaluative inquiry, organizational learning, and institutional theory, this was also a process of discovery. As described brilliantly by Richardson (2000), in her article, *Writing: a method of inquiry*, writing is more than a method of representation: it is “also a way of ‘knowing’ – a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 923). As the writing process unfolded, various hunches and queries arose, were investigated, and confirmed or disconfirmed. Those which proved to be insightful and relevant to the research question were documented and explicated. Others were noted for further investigation.

Quality

Throughout this research project, the researcher attended to issues of quality. However, the question of how to properly define “quality” has been the subject of a longstanding debate among qualitative researchers. Many contend that the traditional “scientific” parameters of reliability, validity and generalizability are modeled on the positivist paradigm and therefore inappropriate. Trustworthiness and authenticity are often discussed instead and extended to “terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). However, many researchers from the postmodern, critical theory and poststructural perspectives challenge these definitions as well (Merriam, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994) steer clear of

these “thorny” issues by providing a set of five practical guidelines to apply to the question of research quality; Merriam (2002) also avoids wading into these epistemological debates by describing specific strategies which can be used to ensure the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Following Merriam (2002) each of these tactics is described briefly below with relevance to this study.

Validity

Internal Validity

Triangulation is the most commonly mentioned strategy for ensuring the internal validity of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). Yin (2003b), following Patton (1987) describes how data triangulation involves using multiple sources of evidence within a single study to support the events or facts of the case. In this study, for example, data was collected from a variety of sources – faculty and administrators at four different university business schools – and using different data collection methods (interviews, documents, observations, and web-sites). Another type of triangulation is “analyst” or “investigator triangulation” (Patton, 1987; Yin, 2003b). While the present study was conducted by only one investigator, the research design underwent significant peer review by seasoned academics as well as member checks with research participants. This consisted of several components: 1) the research proposal was reviewed, presented, and discussed in detail before a committee of experienced academics before the research commenced; 2) the research approach was refined as a result of this feedback (e.g., several data collection instruments were added, the interview protocol was revised); 3) the data, (summarized and presented in the four Case Profile Reports), were reviewed by the researcher’s advisor, discussed and revised before being distributed to the research

participants for validation; 4) the draft Case Profile reports were distributed to 31 participants at four schools to validate the researcher's interpretations; and 5) all feedback was reviewed, comments were considered, and changes were made (a few minor modifications due to historical interpretations). Merriam (2002) suggests that both of these methods – “peer review” and “member checks” are tactics for enhancing the validity of qualitative research. Maxwell (2005) claims that “systematically soliciting feedback on your data and conclusions from the people you are studying” is the most important way of ruling out misinterpretations (p. 111).

Maxwell (2005) suggests several other methods of ensuring validity. First, he recommends the use of “rich” transcripts and verbatim data to provide a full and revealing picture of the specific context. In the present study, the interviewer performed in depth interviews at each school, audio-taped the interviews and provided verbatim transcriptions. This data was also supplemented by on-site observations, recorded as field notes. Secondly, Maxwell (2005) and Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that comparisons can be used to assess validity threats. In this research, by selecting a multiple case study design, the researcher had the opportunity to make numerous comparisons across four sites – across individuals, across context and location. This assisted with the interpretability of results; and it helped to identify and confirm which factors were most salient in explaining similarities and differences across cases.

Finally, Merriam (2002) and many other authors discuss the importance of practicing reflexivity in conducting qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The researcher must be aware of the “human as instrument”, her position with respect to the participants, and the assumptions that she brings to the research. For this reason, a

researcher's journal was used - to ensure that the researcher was continuously reminded of her own perceptions and suppositions throughout the research process.

External Validity

Many authors address the contentious issue of external validity in qualitative research, also known as generalizability (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003b). Merriam (2002) suggests that generalizability needs to be reconceptualized in qualitative research, as it is based on positivist-oriented methods, (i.e., statistical sampling), and on different assumptions of reality. Patton (1990) prefers to think of this of this process as making “context bound extrapolations” as opposed to generalizations (p. 491); and Cronbach (1975) refers to “working hypotheses” which reflect conditions within a specific context. These working hypotheses offer practitioners guidance, based on their own experience, in making decisions and monitoring outcomes. Similarly, Stake (2006) feels that “generalizability” should be left up to the reader, as he/she is the best qualified to determine, based on his/her own experience and understanding of the cases, how the findings may best apply.

Following Stake, (2006), by selecting a multicase study approach, many of the concerns of external validity are mitigated. By studying four different university contexts in which accreditation was implemented, there was an opportunity to explore both the particularity as well as the commonality of experience – it enabled the researcher to look for patterns which emerge, convergences as well as instances of discontinuity (Stake, 2006). As Stake (2006) describes, the “common and the unusual are both portrayed, and both are situated in a complex of experience against a local and diverse background” (p. 90). This design enables the reader to better extrapolate by providing rich descriptions of

four different contexts, their commonalities and differences. He/she has therefore has more information upon which to base his/her interpretations.

Yin (2003b) provides another perspective on generalizability. He contends that analytical generalizability rather than statistical generalizability can be applied in qualitative case study research. That is, replication logic, not statistical sampling logic, can be used. For example, in this multiple case study, four sites were selected, which underwent the same AACSB accreditation processes, in different time periods, and in different contexts. Relevant theory can then be studied in light of this data. For example, Adler and Borys (1996) suggest that there could be different “enabling” and “constraining” effects due to the specific contexts in which they were situated. In contrast, the research on institutional theory suggests that, at a macro level, certain commonalities might be observed across all four cases, due to institutional pressures at the level of the organizational field. This multicase research thereby provided an opportunity, by employing a type of replication logic, to study the application of these theories in “real life” situations (refer to Yin, (2003), for further discussion of replication logic in case study research). The results can therefore be used to extend this theory in new domains.

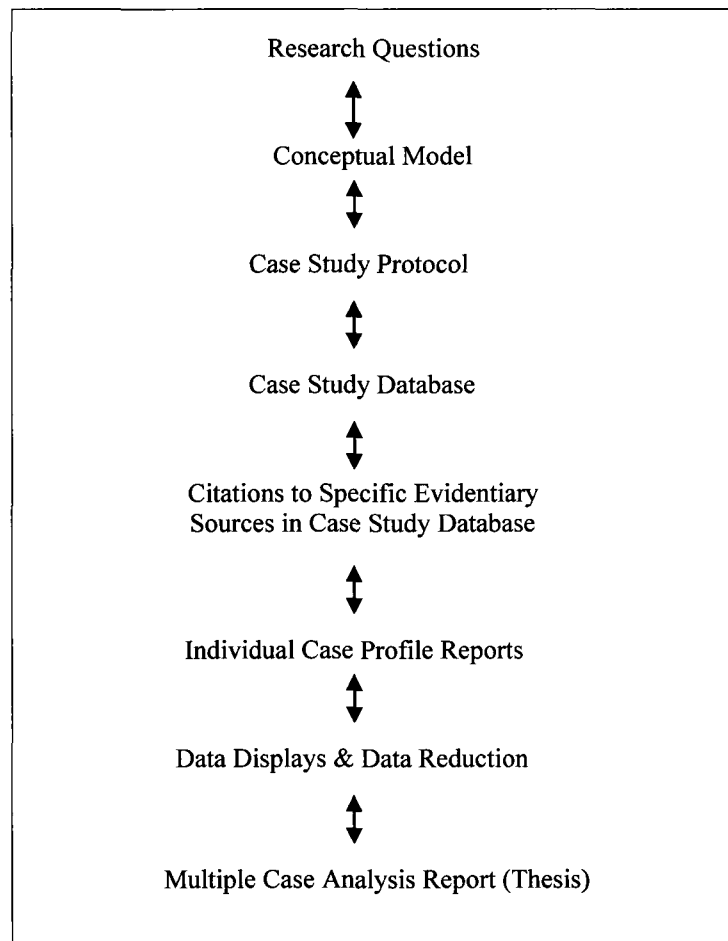
Reliability

Merriam (2002) suggests that reliability in qualitative research is best conceptualized as the degree to which the results are consistent with the data collected. Therefore, some of the tactics discussed under internal validity apply to reliability as well – triangulation, peer review, member validation, and researcher reflexivity – as they help to ensure that the data is dependable, consistent, and congruent with reality, as

understood by the participants. Other methods include maintaining an audit trail and case study database (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2003). In this study, a detailed audit trail was kept, which documents the methods, procedures and key decision points. Yin refers to the audit trail as a “chain of evidence” and explains how it should link the multiple sources of evidence to the case study database. This process was aided by the researcher’s journal, the use of NVivo7, the preparation of Case Profile reports, and the data displays.

Figure 3.1 illustrates how the components comprise a comprehensive chain of evidence.

Figure 3.1 – Chain of Evidence



** Adapted from Yin, (2003b), p. 106.*

Ethics

To ensure that ethical issues have been addressed, this research has been vetted by the University of Ottawa's Ethics Committee and followed the standards outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. A certificate of ethics approval was awarded in August 09, 2007 for the conduct of this research.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research approach used to investigate the AACSB accreditation process in Canadian university business schools. The researcher located the present research within the social constructivist perspective, which views the nature of reality as relativist and the nature of learning as situated - in a social, historical and cultural contexts. The research was conducted in two phases at four sites: Phase I consisted of individual case analyses at four university business schools, culminating in a draft Case Profile report which was validated by the participants; and Phase II consisted of a multiple case analysis which culminated in a series of data displays (matrices, tables, diagrams). Multiple sources of data were used, including interviews, observations, review of documentation, and a researcher's journal. Data analysis was aided by the use of NVivo7, for both the individual and multiple case analyses. Finally, this chapter discussed issues of research quality and how this research addressed each of these considerations. In the next chapter, (Chapter 4), the results from Phase I will be presented.

CHAPTER 4: PHASE I RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for the multiple case analysis. As such, it highlights important findings from Phase I of the research (the individual case analyses). Recall that Phase I sought to gain an understanding of each *individual* case - the particular social, historical, and cultural context in which AACSB accreditation was performed at each of the four university business schools (UBS). It also sought to identify the drivers, contextual factors and consequences of accreditation at each UBS. These detailed results were documented in an individual Case Profile report for each school and validated by participants. Since the main focus of this thesis is at the multicase level – the overlying patterns, commonalities as well as discontinuities across *all cases* – this chapter will highlight only a brief summary of the individual case findings¹⁶. The emphasis will be on the accreditation process itself and the context in which it was situated.

To begin the chapter, the sample group is described. The four university business schools (UBSs) are presented according to a number of key characteristics – size, student enrollment, location, and accreditation date. The interview participants are also presented (e.g., number of participants, role, gender). A brief, textual account of each case follows, with a focus on the context at each UBS. First, a general introduction to the UBS is provided, followed by an overview of the AACSB accreditation process, including the steps taken and the historical milieu in which it occurred. The degree and type of stakeholder involvement is then presented. Thirdly, the accreditation process is situated within the unique context and culture of the UBS, as perceived by the interviewees. Since many respondents drew attention to the critical role of leadership in influencing UBS

¹⁶ Individual Case Profile Reports are available upon request.

culture, this topic will be highlighted. Please note that, whenever possible, the dates of key events have been validated by written or electronic documentation (e.g., accreditation reports, strategic plans, press releases, web-sites).

Sample Group Characteristics

At each case study location, interviews were conducted with 7-10 individuals, (faculty and administration), who had been present during the accreditation process. Table 4.1 outlines the roles of these individuals *at the time of initial accreditation* as well as selected salient characteristics of the University business schools (UBS's)¹⁷ Please note that the size and enrollment numbers reflect current (2008) data (or estimates), collected from University web-sites, CAUT (2008) and/or Canadianbusinessschools.com.

Table 4.1 – Individual Case Sample - Summary Description

Characteristics	School A	School B	School C	School D
Year of Accreditation	2003	1999	1997	2004
UBS Size and FT Enrollment	Medium-Large 3300	Large 6000+	Large 7000+	Small-Medium 1300
Overall University Size	Medium-Large	Large	Medium-Large	Medium
Faculty size (FT)	Medium-Large (110+)	Large (170+)	Large (135+)	Small-Medium (45+)
Proportional Size of UBS/University enrollment	11%	9%	29%	10%
Province/Region	Ontario	Ontario	Quebec	Maritimes
Location	Medium -Large metro area	Large metro area	Large metro area	Small-Medium Metro area
Participants:				
Administration*	5 – 1 female/4 male	4 – 2 female/2 male	4 – 4 male	3 – 3 male
Faculty*	5 – 1 female/4 male	3 – 1 female/2 male	3 – 3 male	4 – 1 female/3 male
Total	10	7	7	7

¹⁷ These are current enrollment and faculty size estimates, as of most recently available web-site data (11/08)

*Role at time of study. Since faculty members frequently have assignments in administrative roles, many of the interviewees had changed roles several times since accreditation. Administrative roles included the following: Deans, Associate or Vice Deans, MBA/Undergraduate Program Directors and Senior Administrators, Accreditation Coordinators.

Individual Case Descriptions – Accreditation Process & Context

School A

University business school A (UBS A) is a relatively large business school located in a medium-large metro area in Ontario. It offers an undergraduate commerce program, undergraduate certificates, and a range of MBA programs, (full-time/part-time, specialty MBA's and EMBA). The UBS's current overall enrollment is approximately 3,300 with a faculty complement of over 200 full and part-time professors (Canadianbusinessschools.com, 2008). This comprises an estimated 11% of the university enrollment overall. The university itself is medium-large in size and has a solid reputation within Canada, ranked within the top 25 for the last three years by Macleans magazine's four "reputational" scores (Dwyer, 2006, 2007, 2008)¹⁸.

The Accreditation Process

The AACSB accreditation process at UBS A was officially launched in the fall of 2000. The Dean assembled a team of administrators and experienced faculty to discuss the AACSB requirements and determine how to best approach the accreditation challenge. From this larger group, a smaller, internal task force was formed – to prepare the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and collect the significant amount of data required. An Accreditation Coordinator (AC), was appointed by the Dean and he assumed responsibility for this team and the accreditation effort overall; but the workload was shared with other team members – one professor and two Associate Deans - who were

¹⁸ Macleans magazine has been ranking universities since 1990, and one section includes 4 "reputational rankings" – "best overall", "highest quality", "most innovative", and "leaders of tomorrow". This data is collected from high-school principals, guidance counselors, university officials, heads of organizations, CEO's and recruiters.

responsible for specific sections of the report and/or inputs to the report. Administrative support was provided by a student research assistant; and other inputs were provided by Program Directors and by the faculty themselves (e.g., updated C.V.'s and research productivity data).

Simultaneously, a strategic planning exercise was initiated, facilitated by an external consulting firm, which ran parallel to the AACSB accreditation process. The results of this planning process, (a new mission, vision, and strategic priorities), aligned with and guided the AACSB accreditation process, as it is “mission-driven”¹⁹. As the Dean indicated, *“It was clear that one of the things that we would have to do for AACSB accreditation would be to have a credible strategic plan in place – these were all parts of the same thing.”*

Overall, the process was completed in less than three years. The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was submitted in August, 2001, an AACSB Peer Review Committee (PRC) performed a visitation in January 2002, and the School of Management was awarded a one-year deferral. The Deferral Report was submitted in January 2003 and a second visitation occurred shortly thereafter. Official approval of AACSB accreditation was received on April 15, 2003.

Stakeholder Involvement and Communication

Most of the “real work” of accreditation was accomplished by members of the accreditation task force. Stakeholders were briefed at the beginning of the process. (Recall that stakeholders refer to individuals who are both internal and external to the

¹⁹ Having been criticized in the past for their somewhat rigid standards and bias towards large, research-based institutions, in 1991 AACSB moved to more flexible mission-based standards and a peer review process.

UBS – faculty, administration, students, alumni, employers, and the business community.) These groups were also briefed prior to the two visitations, particularly those who would be interviewed by the AACSB Peer Review Team. There was also awareness of the AACSB process and requirements by Program Deans/Directors – Undergraduate Programs and Graduate Programs (EMBA, MBA, MHA, etc.) – as some provided input to the data collection process and many of the AACSB requirements had implications for program revisions and staffing (faculty/ student coverage ratios, professional qualifications).

In general, the interviewees felt that communication was good throughout the accreditation process – they felt that faculty members were well informed and the Dean was quite successful at building a consensus around the process. However, interviewees who were members of the faculty were less inclined to agree. Those who were not directly involved in the process, (either accreditation and/or strategic planning), felt that it could have been more inclusive and that communication – throughout the entire process - could have been improved. As one interviewee noted, the overall change management aspect could have received more attention:

It's a change process and I'm not sure that the change management, (the steps in terms of the change management), was all that well thought out maybe...

Context

Leading up to accreditation, (i.e., before 2000), UBS A underwent a fairly challenging “transitional” period. In fact, the previous 10 years had not been easy. After having launched the Executive MBA and International MBA’s in the early 1990’s, the mid-late 1990’s were characterized as a time of cut-backs and curtailment, a time when the school was somewhat internally focused. One participant suggested that several

factors may have contributed: a leadership gap inside the UBS (1998-99), the Chrétien government's Program Review, the decline of the technology marketplace, and broader environmental forces. For example, it is well documented that public funding for education declined throughout the 1990's, tuition fees increased, and many business schools were forced to seek out alternative sources of funding in order to sustain current programs (CAUT, 2005a). In response, many business schools significantly increased enrollments and student fees (StatisticsCanada, 2008). In the case of UBS A, one respondent recalled that central administration exerted pressure:

Well, we were held kind of ransom because the province said 'Unless you increase your overall enrollment – they weren't specific about what faculty – but unless the University [A] increases overall undergraduate then we aren't funding you' – at least in some kind of part. So the university had to get that increase - and much of it was on the backs of our faculty, to get those numbers up. So that kind of pushed the enrollment up. And, you know, I think that we will always be, as an undergraduate school, in the position to attract students. It's just at what level do we want to accept those students?

The MBA program was revised in 1997 from its two year format to a shortened, modular structure. While enrollments were still strong, they started to decline by early 2000 for the international MBA and competition was increasing (particularly for specialty MBA degrees). Further changes were suggested for the MBA. However, the biggest threat (or opportunity) on the horizon was the "Double Cohort", set to arrive in 2003 in the province of Ontario. With an expected increase of up to 100% in first year undergraduate enrollments, the school was struggling with how to best manage resources to meet this sudden amplification of demand²⁰.

²⁰ As it turned out, the increase was much less. As one respondent reported, it turned out to be approximately a 30-40% increase, spread out over several years. According to Statistics Canada, it was an annual increase of only 6.4% overall (nonetheless, still the largest increase in the previous 28 years).

Culture and Leadership

It was in this context that Dean A commenced his leadership role in 2000.

According to most faculty members, his arrival was long anticipated and much appreciated. Throughout his tenure, (from 2000 to present time), faculty and administration described how they witnessed a change in the culture of the school – moving from one which was more internally focused to one which is more external in orientation - more responsive to stakeholders (alumni, business leaders, students), more goal oriented, market-driven, and business-like in its approach:

I would say that before Dean [A] came...there was a real lack of esprit de corps, a sense that the School didn't really know the direction it was going. And when [he] came in, he set about really making a very purposeful... – he didn't just do what the previous Deans had done, in the sense of having meetings and talking about mission statements and goals... [he]l was the first person to really follow it through...

He always spoke with confidence and pride in the School and the University and said that things were going to get better and he had a different orientation [i.e., external rather than internal]...

The school has become much more focused in terms of business. And the culture has become far more for-profit oriented... It is a very definite shift in culture...

While the vast majority of interviewees were pleased with recent changes, a couple of respondents expressed serious concerns about the change in culture and the school's more market-driven, "corporate" approach. Essentially, these interviewee's comments reflected a different philosophy about the role of business education - within the university and within broader society – and these divergent views surfaced through some of the participants' comments. Nonetheless, in general, the Dean was able to navigate the difficult waters and unite the majority behind accreditation:

So, the Dean set ambitious goals for us, I think, but that gave us a sense of purpose, which collectively, as a school, we didn't have before. The problem with

any academic institution is that you have sections, and each section has particular demands and it is always difficult for a Dean to satisfy the demands of all those sections... But Dean A has taken a much more objective approach...

School B

University business school B (UBS B) is a large Canadian business school located in a major metropolitan area in Ontario. It has a doctoral program and offers a range of full and part-time MBA and EMBA programs. It boasts an overall enrollment of approximately 6,000²¹ and a faculty complement of over 173 full-time professors (UBS B website). This comprises an estimated 9% of the overall student enrollment at the university. The university has a strong reputation within Canada, ranked within the top 10 by Macleans magazine in the last three years (Dwyer, 2006, 2007, 2008).

The Accreditation Process

In 1997, the Dean and Associate Dean at UBS B were approached by a Canadian representative of the AACSB who was strongly promoting the benefits of accreditation. As part of its international expansion plans, AACSB was sending advocates to targeted schools in other countries in the hopes of signing on new members. As one respondent described,

... they wanted to be international, so they came to us...they came to us and a couple of other Canadian schools, because they wanted to get a toehold in our market.

At the time, Dean B felt that AACSB might fit into the school's plans for growth in an expanding global marketplace. Accreditation was perceived to be something that might be worthwhile to pursue, (a relatively low risk, low cost item), that could possibly help them "*at the margins*". Therefore, it was officially launched that year. The Associate

²¹ Estimated from web-site, SER, and interview data.

Dean led the accreditation effort which culminated in a “Self-Evaluation Report” (SER), produced in February 1998. To assist in this endeavor, the Associate Dean contacted other administrators and Program Directors to provide him with the necessary data and metrics which were required to address AACSB’s questions and meet their quality standards.

Overall, the entire accreditation process was completed in less than two years. The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was submitted in February 1998, the AACSB Peer Review Team (PRT) came to visit that same year, and made a recommendation for unconditional, immediate approval. Official approval of accreditation by AACSB’s Business Accreditation Committee (BAC) was received on March 5, 1999. Since that time, a 5-year interim assessment has been conducted (consisting of a 10 page report in 2003/04); and a 10 year-reaccreditation is scheduled for the fall of 2008.

Stakeholder Involvement and Communication

The accreditation effort was primarily accomplished by the Associate Dean, with input from other business school staff. He coordinated the collection of data from different program administrators, (e.g., undergraduate program, MBA program, Ph.D. program), pulled the information together, and wrote the Self Evaluation Report (SER). As he described,

...it was a data collection exercise more than anything else. And in most cases, the data are there, but not in the format that they [i.e., AACSB] prescribed, so that made it a little bit more involved.

The participants were asked about their recollection of the accreditation process, in terms of their own involvement and that of other stakeholders. As they described, communication about accreditation and their participation in the effort was primarily

limited to providing data for the report; and they felt that many faculty members were likely unaware that AACSB accreditation was in progress:

...I mean, he [the Associate Dean] asks me if he needs information and I give it to him. But I don't really always see the document that he is creating. But if I did, like I said, it wasn't high on my personal priority list, so I didn't pay much attention. Whatever they needed, they got it.

... I doubt if the bulk of the faculty were even aware of it [i.e., accreditation].

[The Associate Dean] coordinates it all. When he asks me to do something I do something.

Although the accreditation effort did not seem to garner significant stakeholder involvement or attention at UBS B, the level of effort on the Associate Dean's part was considerable. He described the process as “lengthy” and “time consuming” He also observed that it was somewhat “complicated”, given the nature of their undergraduate programs and different campus relations. (Since AACSB accredits universities, not faculties or schools, they were actually accrediting across separate programs and management groups). As well, their undergraduate program is not strictly a management program per se, but a commerce program (a mix of management, economics, other humanities and arts and science courses). This caused the Peer Review Team some consternation and required that they exercise flexibility around the AACSB standards. As the Associate Dean described:

...So they had trouble getting their heads around “who does what to whom” and the fact that there were essentially 3 different undergraduate programs all called management... And so again, if I recall correctly, there is a bit of inflexibility around the AACSB process and the standards...

Context

At the same time that the AACSB self-evaluation process was underway in 1997-1999, the UBS was experiencing other significant changes. Having received a generous

endowment in 1993 for construction of a new facility, the faculty had just moved into the building in 1996 and was getting settled by 1997. Then, this same year, an additional gift was made and the School was renamed. Shortly afterwards, in 1998, a new Dean was appointed. He spearheaded a 5 year planning process for the School. However, because the accreditation visitation had already occurred, the results of this planning process, (a new set of ambitious goals and strategies), did not factor into the AACSB Self-Evaluation Report or ensuing decision for accreditation. Overall, the new Dean was fairly uninvolved; and the two projects did not come together.

Culture and Leadership

The new Dean at UBS B was connected in the corporate world, a superior fundraiser and master of public relations, but also a recognized researcher with an innovative research agenda. In 1997/98, School B was at a crossroads, and the new Dean was seen to be the right leader to chart a new direction, “*to decide what kind of school it was going to be*”:

A decision had to be made, if we are going to become one of the top schools – not only in Canada, but worldwide – some changes had to be made. And one of them was certainly from a funding point of view. We needed someone who could raise money to allow us to, I guess strategize about a mission – what was our mission going to be? And that was what [Dean B] was brought in for.

Under Dean B’s direction, “*things started to change immediately.*” A set of challenging goals and a competitive strategy were established and articulated in the strategic plan, designed to move UBS B forward to a position of “*international distinction*” – being within the 10 business schools worldwide by 2009. The participants described how Dean B created a highly motivating environment, fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth. In their own words, they described the culture as:

Aggressive in an ambitious way.

...it's a very dynamic environment. Things change constantly. You just have to be ready to be on your feet. It's not necessarily a change in strategy, but it is constantly innovating, doing things better...

Under his direction, School B experienced unprecedented growth, meeting and surpassing many of the goals outlined in the School's strategic plan. Enrollment tripled, the faculty expanded, programs were added and redesigned, and fundraising exceeded expectations. The participants described their experiences:

I have witnessed a ton of change, from curriculum change to introducing new programs. I think that under [Dean B's] guidance, there has been a huge upsurge in the profile of the school related to research that he's done.

First of all, it has gotten much bigger. We've grown threefold over the last 10 years (in terms of enrollment, faculty size and pretty much any metric that you can look at). And we've improved dramatically in terms of our international reputation...

All of these changes occurred against a backdrop of broader economic growth and expansion in post-secondary enrollment. Whereas the post-secondary education landscape in Ontario was one of retrenchment in much of the 1990's, it became increasingly competitive in the late 1990s; and many Canadian universities expanded into international markets. Moving into the next decade, a number of factors served to reinforce enrollment growth: the double cohort in Ontario entering university in 2003, changes to the provincial funding formula (from "enrollment corridors" to per head funding), and a large increase in university participation levels in Ontario. As one participant described these contributing factors:

We had, within our university system, a tremendous amount of growth because we've had record levels of post-secondary participation. So it's a combination of the double cohort, and post-secondary participation and immigration. If you add the three things together, there has just been an explosion of growth and the excess demand for business education is highest of the others.

School C

The third case was conducted at a university business school (UBS C) in the province of Quebec. This school has a large undergraduate business program, both full and part-time, as well as a healthy slate of graduate programs (MBA, EMBA, MSc., and Ph.D.). Overall enrollment is 7,810 with approximately 134 full time staff (and an additional 173 part-timers). This represents a disproportional 29% of the student enrollment overall (UBS C website). The university is located in a large metropolitan area; and it is viewed to be a reputable Canadian institution, scoring within the top 30 universities in Macleans for “reputation” across four categories (Dwyer, 2006, 2007, 2008).

The Accreditation Process

The AACSB accreditation process was launched at School C (UBS C) in 1995. The new Dean, (appointed in February of that year), was keen to inject some much-needed energy into the faculty, after a difficult 5 years of cost restraints and cut-backs. He felt that accreditation might provide the impetus needed; and the timing seemed right. After conducting a cursory feasibility assessment with the Associate Dean, they decided that it looked eminently do-able. The Dean assembled a team of experienced faculty and administrators, consisting of himself, the Associate Dean, an Accreditation Lead and Assistant to tackle the task at hand. The first step involved the collection of significant amounts of data to prepare the Self Evaluation Report (SER).

Simultaneously, a strategic planning exercise was initiated, parallel to the AACSB accreditation process. This process, led by Dean C’s vision for the faculty, culminated in a new mission statement for the faculty (adopted and approved in March 1996). The

results of this planning process aligned with and guided the AACSB accreditation process.

Overall, the entire accreditation process was completed in less than two years. The first draft of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was reviewed with an AACSB Peer Advisor in March of 1996, he provided feedback and a second draft was prepared. This was reviewed by AACSB and a response was prepared and submitted in October 1996. Shortly thereafter the PRT visit took place; a positive result was delivered on-site, and later ratified by the AACSB's Business Accreditation Committee (BAC) in April 1997.

Since that time, a 10-year maintenance assessment was conducted in 2006/7 and School C was assigned a 2-year period of "continuous review", during which they were asked to demonstrate their progress in three areas – Assurance of Learning (AOL), strategic planning, and faculty coverage ratios. An interim report was submitted in 2007 and another will be forthcoming later in 2008.

Stakeholder Involvement and Communication

The Accreditation Coordinator and Assistant performed most of the daily work associated with accreditation. They coordinated the collection of data from faculty and program administrators, pulled the information together, and wrote the Self Evaluation Report (SER). While they worked primarily with internal stakeholders to collect data (e.g., C.V.'s), the Dean played a key role in communicating key messages to the Department Chairs, Associate Deans, and external stakeholders. As the Accreditation Coordinator described the process and their respective roles,

We just did it. We just went ahead and documented it...I was mainly about the internal stuff and [Dean C] was all about the external stuff. He was a great guy for going around and shaking hands and everything... He was a very charismatic sort of guy... He was very good at persuading people to get on side.

In general, the interviewees felt that stakeholders – faculty, students, alumni, and the business community - were fairly involved in the accreditation process. They participated primarily in the PRT visitation, meeting with members of the Peer Review Team during their 2.5 day visit. The faculty's support was also critical; and Dean C was diligent in ensuring that faculty members understood the process and its purpose:

He [Dean C] went around educating people and saying 'you've all got to be honest and forthcoming, but remember that we're trying to win this...' So, I think he did a very good job of that – singing from the same sheet.

Context

Leading up to 1995, UBS C underwent a very challenging time. The previous 5+ years had been a period of stagnation – cutbacks in federal transfer payments had caused severe fiscal constraints, (a 20% reduction in university budgets across the province); acrimonious politics among senior university administration had resulted in an entire changeover in university leadership; and a lack of salary increases (and fiscal restraint) had prompted many faculty to leave, others to take early retirement, and others to seek academic positions in international posts overseas. As one participant aptly described,

They were dire times. And we had the oldest average age of the professoriate in all of Quebec (so the salary structure was heavy)...So we just cut everything; and people were leaving like crazy. Then we put in an early retirement scheme, which retired 25% of the professoriate. Not so much in the business school, but in arts and science, where whole departments were decimated...1994 maybe was probably the worst year...We were so far down (in 1994) that we could only go up...

Culture and Leadership – Initial Accreditation

It was in this context that Dean C commenced his leadership role in 1995. According to most faculty members, it was his leadership, (and the strong team working with him), that motivated and enabled the successful attainment of AACSB accreditation.

The Dean believed that accreditation was the right thing to do, to revitalize the faculty and to provide a catalyst for positive change. He wanted to raise the visibility of the faculty to where he felt it belonged – a top tier business school in Canada. Fortuitously, the economy was starting to show signs of turning around as well in 1995 and this helped to reinforce his plans. One of the participants described very well the shift in climate,

... the mid 1990's, after the stagnation of the early 90's, there was an uplift in technology, the dot com thing started to happen, so the whole economy started coming back, and there was a little bit of a loosening of the purse strings in Quebec City...so there seemed to be a little bit more money about and the resource environment improved. And [Dean C] took over as Dean and I think that he wanted to do something...

However, the culture of the faculty at the time was highly politicized and there were daunting challenges in front of Dean C and his accreditation team. One respondent described how many faculty members were unconvinced of the benefits of accreditation; another mentioned how a culture of non-disclosure made it more difficult to collect data, (e.g., CV's, research data), and to get assistance. Moreover, many respondents recognized and commented upon the extreme difficulty of managing within the University environment *in general* - with conflicting goals, diverse faculty interests, and competing priorities. Despite these challenges, Dean C and his accreditation team were successful in assembling an impressive bid for AACSB accreditation, in bringing the faculty on board, and in convincing the AACSB peer review team that the school was ready for and deserving of accreditation.

Culture and Leadership – Maintenance of Accreditation

To retain their status, UBS C was obliged to undergo accreditation maintenance in 2007. However, in the 10 year period since initial accreditation, much had changed in the internal and external environment - the school of business had grown significantly, (from

3,000 students to 7,000+), new programs had been introduced, but at the same time the provincial government had changed their funding formula for international students. Within the university, “quirks” of their internal financing had also disproportionately penalized the business school. The net result was drastic, peaking around 2004/2005, when School C had no choice but to significantly reduce costs by freezing hiring and suspending many other normal administrative activities (e.g., strategic planning). After sustained, intensive lobbying by the Dean at the time, he was able to finally influence the central administration – to get a better “financial deal”, gain approval for their recruiting plan, and sway them towards a centralized fund for hiring. (This allowed the school to hire a significant number of new faculty members in the next 2 years.)

Concurrently, during this 10 year period, the AACSB had changed. Perhaps the biggest addition was the introduction of Assurance of Learning (AOL) standards; and this posed a challenge for UBS C, particularly given their recent pre-occupation with budget deficits and cost cutting. As a result, the school had not taken the necessary steps to identify learning objectives and outcomes for their curricula (AOL), nor had they updated their strategic plan (or completed annual AACSB accreditation reports). And due to the suspension of hiring, their full-time faculty coverage ratios had been impacted in a very negative way. The AACSB decided to maintain School C’s accreditation, but put them on “continuous review” for two years, requiring that they demonstrate the school’s progress on three fronts: AOL, strategic planning, and full-time faculty coverage ratios. Here is how one participant summed it up:

There were 3 things that they asked us to do... One, we hadn't done enough on AOL – other schools were accredited and passed – but we hadn't really gotten that in place...and we're doing it now....Our strategic plan hadn't been updated...we did a new mission statement this summer – our mission statement

hadn't been even looked at in 10 years...we have a new one...that's good- that's what accreditation does for you. The other thing is, we hadn't hired in a couple of years...so this is where the maintenance is really important. So, we hired 13 tenure track people this year – that is lots.

School D

University business school D (UBS D) is a small to moderately sized business school located in the Maritimes region of eastern Canada. It offers two undergraduate degrees – Bachelor of Management and Bachelor of Commerce - and general and specialized MBA programs. The overall enrollment is approximately 1,300 with a faculty complement of 47 full-time professors. This comprises an estimated 10% of the university enrollment overall (UBS-D web-site). The university has a solid reputation within Canada, ranked within the top 20 in Canada in the last 3 years (Dwyer, 2006, 2007, 2008).

The Accreditation Process

The AACSB accreditation process was launched at university business school D (UBS D) in 2000/2001. Dean D was very keen on becoming accredited and asked the Assistant Dean to lead the effort. The first step was to invite a consultant - an experienced AACSB accreditation consultant and “insider” - to visit the School. He performed a high level review, explained how AACSB worked, and recommended a number of changes that needed to be taken in order to ensure that UBS D would meet the minimum standards (particularly in the area of research productivity, where the School needed to improve in some areas to a “reasonable” level). He also assisted in the preparation of the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and helped to select the members of the AACSB Peer Review Team (PRT).

During this same period, two other key events were occurring at School D. A Capital fundraising campaign had been launched in January 2000 to fund a new building and a strategic planning exercise had been initiated. The latter was approved in February 2000 and served to guide the AACSB accreditation process.

Overall, the entire accreditation process was completed in approximately three years. After several iterations, the final Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was submitted in early 2003 and reviewed by the AACSB Peer Review Team (PRT). The PRT then submitted a set of questions for a written response by UBS D prior to their visit. In November 2003, the official PRT on-site visit occurred and the PRT made an informal recommendation for unconditional approval. Official approval of AACSB accreditation by AACSB's Business Accreditation Committee (BAC) was received in January 2004.

Stakeholder Involvement and Communication

Most of the work associated with accreditation was performed by the Assistant Dean (AD) with some assistance from the then Director of the School of Business. The AD coordinated the collection of data from different program administrators, faculty and staff; and he then prepared the Self Evaluation Report (SER).

The interviewees were asked about their recollection of the accreditation process, in terms of their own involvement and that of other stakeholders. Some remembered attending meetings, providing information and filling out forms. The former included meetings with the accreditation consultant, who advised the faculty members on ways in which they could increase their research output. As one respondent described,

...he was talking about that – how you could improve your [research] profile over a period of years without changing too much about what you like about your job....

In general, the level of faculty engagement in the accreditation process was somewhat limited. This could be due to a number of factors: it was led by the Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Management, it was not perceived to be beneficial or relevant, or it was simply seen to be too much work. Also, one common perception was that AACSB accreditation was “American”; and this caused some reluctance among faculty to get too involved:

...the basic perception among the Canadian faculty was that this is an American thing and ‘why would we do it?’

However, as the faculty gradually learned more about the AACSB, (and at the same time the AACSB was adapting to the external environment), the Dean was able to convince them of some of the benefits:

...and I think that they slowly turned toward being in favour of this once AACSB began to change their rules and regulations...and once they got confidence that our school would be recognized and appreciated.

In terms of other stakeholder groups – students, alumni, and the business community – the interviewees felt that they were relatively well informed during the process. Their primary role appeared to be during the PRT visitation, when they met with members of the Peer Review Team.

Context

Leading up to 1999, (prior to Dean D’s appointment), School D underwent a fairly difficult time, with fiscal constraints and federal pressure for rationalizing programs across the Maritime Provinces over the previous 5+ years. As one participant aptly described,

At the time... there was a process put in place with a view to rationalizing the universities here...there was some view that there would be gains made by amalgamating either programs or schools or whatever...One of the big areas, of

course, since every university has a business school, was that. So, for probably 2 or 3 years, there was a fairly strong threat that there would be some amalgamation...Anyway, that didn't happen, but that whole period was a very difficult one. We had taken some very big budget hits and every single expenditure that wasn't absolutely necessary had to be looked at very carefully.

A positive outcome, however, of this fiscal restraint was the birth of some very interesting programs, (e.g., specialty MBA's), with innovative approaches to instructional delivery, pricing models, and partnerships. In the words of one respondent,

... because of the financial difficulties that we were in, and because we realized that the University wasn't going to cough up any more money from the central budget, we started to develop some rather interesting and different degree programs here - which have been very successful.

Culture and Leadership

It was in this milieu that Dean D commenced his leadership role in 1999/2000.

According to most faculty members, he was the main instigator behind the push for accreditation; it was he who motivated the process and the Assistant Dean, (and others working with him), that enabled its successful attainment. The Dean strongly believed that accreditation was the right thing to do; and having already successfully launched the Capital fundraising campaign, accreditation could help attract further interest in the campaign by raising the visibility of the faculty to where he felt it belonged – among the top business schools in Canada and the world.

Many of the respondents noted, however, that the importance of accreditation actually paled in comparison to the fundraising campaign for a new building, which was critical. For many years, the UBS had been “*strewn all over campus*”; and as some of the participants described, these physical challenges had long defined and circumscribed the school of business, its culture, and its achievements. Therefore, with the Capital Campaign being approved and a strategic planning process running in parallel, the faculty

felt great relief and optimism for the future. For most, accreditation was merely the icing on the cake. As two participants reflect,

...our biggest cultural shift has been the move to the new building. So if you go back to the early like 2000, 2001, we were in the old building which was quite ramshackle...and very small for us - really, really small. And that is very discouraging, trying to encourage people to believe that you put on an excellent program....

...anything that contributed to our fundraising success [i.e. accreditation] was definitely on my high list. The building was critical for us and if it was all part of the package...

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has set the foundation upon which the multiple case analysis can be built and understood. It highlighted key findings from Phase I of the research - the individual case analyses conducted at four UBSs. For each case, a general introduction to the UBS was provided first, followed by an overview of the AACSB accreditation process. The degree and type of stakeholder involvement was then presented as well as the nature of communication which took place around accreditation. Culture and leadership were also highlighted. Finally, the accreditation process was situated within the unique context in which it was constructed - the social and historical circumstances in which accreditation took place. By understanding more about these events and circumstances, it is possible to better understand and interpret the findings of the multiple case analysis. What were some of the common patterns and responses which emerged across all four cases and why? Were there any exceptions and why did they occur? These questions will be examined in the next chapter, when the analysis turns to a higher level, that of the multiple case analysis.

CHAPTER 5: PHASE II RESULTS – PART A

The results of the multiple case analysis, (Phase II of the research study), are presented in this section. These multicase results have been organized in two parts: Part A will be presented in Chapter 5 and Part B will be presented in Chapter 6. Part A addresses the context, accreditation process, drivers and impacts of AACSB accreditation. Part B addresses the consequences of accreditation and stakeholders. Each of these topics is represented in the original conceptual framework (Figure 2.1); and based on the results of this multiple case analysis, the conceptual framework will then be revised, elaborated, and discussed in Chapter 8. As such, it will represent the major findings which have emerged from this research.

This chapter – Chapter 5 - begins where the last one left off, with the context. However, it takes a higher level of analysis –that of the multicase. What are the common elements across all four business schools in terms of both the external environment and internal milieu? First, a general, overarching summary is provided – the internal and external context is described across all four schools. Then, based on the results of the multicase analysis, five of the most salient contextual factors are identified and described. The accreditation process is presented next. During the multicase analysis, three “accreditation factors” emerged as critical in mediating the impact of evaluative inquiry; and each of these is explicated. As noted by Alkin and Taut (2003), the characteristics of the evaluation process have an important effect upon the utilization of evaluation results.

In the latter part of the chapter, the drivers and impacts of accreditation are reported. For each, a table format is used to display the data; and this is followed by a textual description, highlighting the main commonalities, differences and nuances of each

school. The chapter ends with a summary, briefly highlighting the results of Part A of the multiple case analysis.

Context

In the previous section, individual case descriptions were provided. These consisted of textual descriptions of the unique historical, social, and cultural milieu within which the accreditation process was implemented in each of the four UBSs, as perceived by the participants and documented in their accreditation reports and/or strategic plans. (Refer to Appendix K for a summary of the key events described above on a chronological timeline.) The purpose of this section is to provide an overarching, multicase perspective. First, the internal contextual factors across all four schools are highlighted (refer to Table 5.1); then, the external context is described and illustrated in Figure 5.1. Finally, the external and internal contextual factors are woven together: in light of the accumulated results from the remainder of the study, the most salient contextual factors are identified and explicated.

Internal Context

As described in the previous section and noted in Table 5.1, the four UBSs ranged in size from small/medium to large. All have a variety of business programs – graduate, undergraduate, full and part-time - and two offer doctoral programs (B and C). All experienced challenges throughout the 1990's in terms of increased competitive pressures (primarily due to decreased provincial government funding); however, the greatest financial hardship seemed to be faced by UBS C (and the least by UBS B). All have increased their enrollments significantly throughout the last 10-15 years as well (partially in response to financial pressures but also due to increased participation levels,

Table 5.1 – Internal Context – University Business Schools

School Contextual Factors	A	B	C	D
UBS Size and FT Enrollment*	Medium-Large 3300	Large 6000+	Large 7000+	Small-Medium 1300
University Size	Medium-Large	Large	Medium-Large	Small-Medium
Faculty size (FT)	Medium-Large (110+)	Large (170+)	Large (135+)	Small –Med (45+)
Proportional Size of UBS/University	11%	9%	29%	10%
Province	Ontario	Ontario	Quebec	Maritimes
Location	Large metro area	Large metro area	Large metro area	Metro area
Year of Accreditation	2003	1999	1997	2004
Physical space	New Building	New Building	New Building in development	New Building
Reputation per Macleans	Top 25	Top 10	Top 30	Top 20
Financial Situation and Endowments	\$\$ Well financed Named Building and Named School	\$\$\$\$ Extremely well financed Named Building and Named School	\$ Some struggles, but currently OK Named School (Building next)	\$ Sufficiently well financed Named Building
Culture & Leadership (during accreditation)	- Dean who spearheaded accreditation -Upbeat; focused; positive changes - Dean with strong vision and leadership -Moving towards more performance orientation and research culture -Group of new researchers being hired -Generally very positive environment (possibly some disgruntled senior professors) - Dean with long tenure	-Dynamic, charismatic Dean -Highly energized; high expectations of staff and school -New Dean not involved in accreditation process (started with previous Dean and Assoc. Dean) -Exciting, positive environment - Driven by rankings - Goal to achieve top 10 internationally for MBA's	-Dean who spearheaded accreditation - Morale was very low leading into accreditation - Required much selling and footwork to get information from staff (culture of non-disclosure) - Multicultural student population and international focus in classes	-Dean who spearheaded accreditation. -Dean very research focused -Informal, family-oriented culture - Small faculty -Focus on fundraising for new building – much optimism around this project. -Many students from Ontario, Western Canada; also some international
Stakeholder Involvement & Communication about AACSB process	Overall – Medium Task Force - High Faculty and Staff - Med Good communication from Dean to stakeholders Good briefing prior to PRT visit.	Overall - Low Primarily Associate Dean who performed work. Some briefing prior to PRT visit.	Overall – Medium Accreditation Team - High Faculty and Staff - Low-Med Good “selling” from Dean to stakeholders Good briefing prior to PRT visit.	Overall –Low-Medium (some involvement with consultant) Primarily AD who performed work - Briefing prior to PRT visit

* As per Table 4.1., these are current enrollment and faculty size estimates, as of most recently available web-site data (Nov. 2008). These data were not equally available for all schools for the accreditation period; therefore it was felt that the 2008 data provided a more accurate comparison.

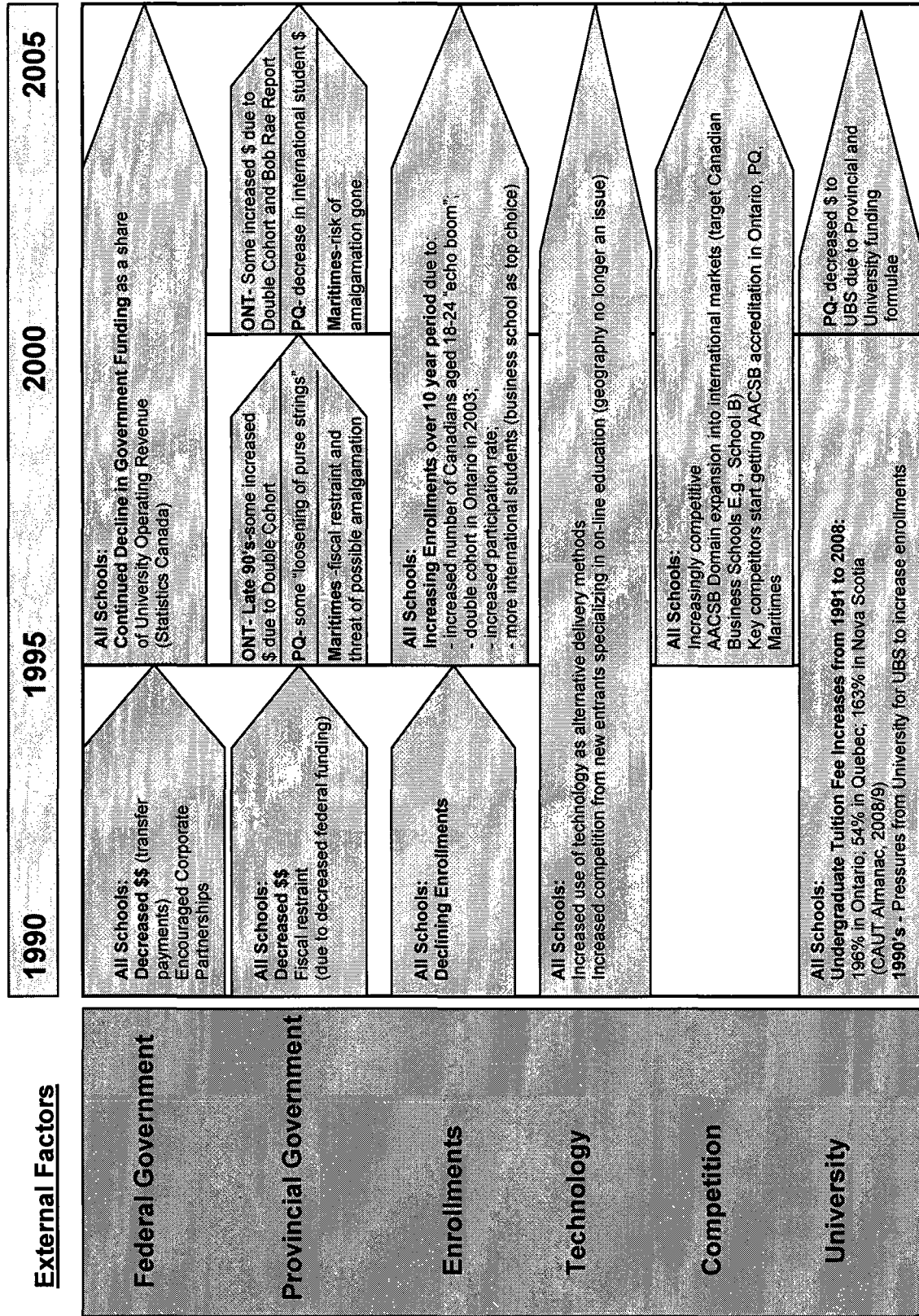
international enrollments, and the double cohort in Ontario). In terms of leadership, three of the four schools (A, C & D) had new Deans who championed the accreditation effort as they commenced their Deanship. In contrast, the Dean at UBS B was “wooded” by the AACSB to pursue accreditation; but his successor was more interested in rankings and did not take up the cause. In terms of the accreditation process itself, there was variability across the schools in terms of degree and type of stakeholder involvement. A summary of these internal factors is provided in Table 5.1.

External Context

The external environmental forces which were influencing university business schools during the period of 1990-2005 are depicted in Figure 5.1; and many of these were common across all four schools. The most powerful forces were those related to federal and provincial government financing, whereby federal transfer payments for higher education were severely reduced throughout the 1990’s, and these reductions were passed along to the Universities via provincial funding formulae. The Universities were forced to raise additional funds: through increased tuition costs, by turning to the corporate sector for support, by forging new partnerships, streamlining programs, and/or increasing student enrollments. According to Statistics Canada, from 1991 to 2008, undergraduate tuition fees increased significantly: for example, in Ontario, they escalated by 196% over this period, in Quebec by 54%, and in Nova Scotia by 163% (CAUT, 2008). In a corresponding fashion, government funding decreased as a share of University Operating Revenue, from 81% in 1986 to 56.8% in 2006 (CAUT, 2008)

In their own words, the interviewees described how the early 1990’s were an extremely difficult period in this cost-constrained environment. In general, however, they

Figure 5.1 - External Forces



felt that the financial picture began to improve by the late 1990's, as the economy gained steam, demand started to increase, (foreign and domestic), and corporate fundraising started to gain traction. But the environment remained competitive; and each school tried to gain their share of an education market that was increasingly global and relied on private sector dollars. In Ontario, universities were looking ahead to the double cohort. In Quebec, the purse strings started to loosen slightly, but the universities (and provincial government) clawed back fees from international students, a financial hit for many UBSs.

Salient Contextual Factors

Despite the myriad environmental forces impinging upon these four universities over the last 15 years, and despite the unique blend of historical and socio-cultural factors which influenced these schools throughout the accreditation period, there were a number of common contextual factors which emerged. Certain contextual variables, across all schools, were the most salient in terms of their influence on the accreditation process.

These are:

- Leadership
- Resource Dependence
- Strategy and Synergies
- Reputation
- Environmental Uncertainty

Each will be described below.

Leadership

Leadership is a pervasive contextual factor – the most important factor which emerged in this study. It had an influence on the drivers of accreditation, the accreditation

process itself, the impacts, and the consequences. The Deans' influence cannot be understated - the degree to which the Dean truly championed the effort, encouraged participation, and was willing to dedicate resources had a huge impact on the results. For instance, at UBS A, the Dean was integrally involved in the accreditation effort. He spearheaded accreditation, served as a sponsor and champion throughout the entire process, pulled together a task force and provided dedicated resources to ensure that accreditation was properly performed. As noted by the interviewees at School A, the Dean was the main motivator for the process and he believed that the "*timing was right*" to pursue accreditation and raise the visibility of the school. Accreditation was integral to his strategic plan. As will be described in the section on "drivers", the Dean was also identified as the main instigator of accreditation at UBSs C and D as well. Fifty-seven percent (57%) and 43% respectively of respondents specifically mentioned his critical role in driving accreditation, in helping to guide the effort and advocate its benefits. In sharp contrast, the new Dean at UBS B was uninvolved in accreditation. It was the Associate Dean who orchestrated the effort; and according to his description, it was primarily a "*data collection exercise more than anything else.*" As a result, that is exactly what accreditation became.

Resource Dependence

Another important contextual factor which emerged was the relationship of the university business school (UBS) with central administration and the degree to which the UBS was dependent upon the university for resources (dollars, staff, facilities, etc.). This factor affected the drivers of accreditation and the type and degree of impact that accreditation had on the school. The less dependent the business school was upon the

university for financing, the less uncertainty there was around resources and the less potential strain on intra-university relations. As a result, there was less likelihood that the Dean would be motivated to seek and use accreditation as leverage to negotiate for resources. As well, the philosophy of the university senior administration (President, Provost, Rector, etc.) and specifically his/her perspective on the business school, (and its role), also served to “colour” and influence intra-university relations. For example, School C had experienced significant financial constraint in the years leading up to accreditation and once again in the years leading up to *reaccreditation*. Participants felt that the faculty had shouldered much of the financial burden on behalf of the university, (i.e., pressure to increase enrollments), without the requisite benefits and recognition. There was also some very difficult political activity at the university at the time²². It was the threat of not acquiring accreditation (and later losing accreditation) that enabled the school to successfully lobby central administration to secure the resources that they desperately needed to survive (and thrive). As a result, the impact of accreditation was significant.

Similar, but much lesser effects were also realized at schools A and D, where intra-university relations influenced the degree to which accreditation served as a point of leverage for additional resources. At UBS A, it helped secure additional funding to reach research-productivity goals; at UBS D, accreditation also helped the school gain respect from other departments. As one participant indicated:

...accreditation reviews are typical in health sciences and the whole crowd, so us going through accreditation and being accredited, it does you good in your status in the university as a whole...

²² Prior to initial accreditation, one of the interviewees described the situation (politics, university leadership, financial hardship) as “dire times.”

In contrast, however, School B appears to have had much more financial independence from central administration and was therefore not relying on accreditation for leverage purposes (mentioned by 0% participants). They were also the furthest ahead in terms of fundraising, branding, securing a new (endowed) building and named school. In interviews with administrators, they indicated that the school was extremely well financed.

Strategy and Synergies

Another contextual factor that influenced the impact of accreditation was “strategy and synergies”²³. This refers to the degree to which the Dean (and dominant coalition) fully integrated accreditation into the strategic plan, built upon other activities in the department and leveraged the benefits of accreditation to advance the school’s strategic agenda. For example, interviewees mentioned the importance of timing for AACSB accreditation - many environmental forces were converging in the mid-late 1990’s, creating the optimum conditions for accreditation. But *timing* refers to more than just serendipity. The greatest impact was achieved when an insightful leader decided deliberately and *strategically* to seize opportunities in the environment, (both internal and external), and to capitalize upon the available *synergies*. For example, at UBS A, the highest impact school, the Dean had a very ambitious agenda for change which included accreditation as one of the major thrusts. Synergies were realized with other ambitious goals and strategic imperatives – building a “leading capacity in research and innovation”, being housed in new building, and attracting significant corporate support

²³ Synergies can be defined as the interaction of two or more forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

(securing a naming endowment and major financial gift). He also realized that significant program revisions were necessary, and planning was in high gear for the arrival of the double cohort. Accreditation thereby served as both a catalyst to drive these other initiatives as well as a synergist, to build upon them. The benefits were mutual.

In sharp contrast, at UBS B, the changeover in Deans came at a somewhat inopportune time for AACSB accreditation. The new Dean had his own agenda for change, and he was not focused on accreditation. Rather, he had his sites set on business school rankings as a rallying point for the school. As such, accreditation was not seen to be a key part of his strategy. Any synergies that were realized would have been merely fortuitous, but not deliberately planned.

Reputation

Reputation was another key contextual variable. At three of the four schools, (A, C, & D), “reputation” was a prime driver of accreditation; and it was also perceived to be the top benefit realized. Moreover, the results indicated that there is a relationship between the interviewees’ perceptions of reputation, legitimacy, and accreditation. In other words, participants were more likely to agree that accreditation *added* to their school’s legitimacy and to their reputation, as their current reputational ranking got *lower* (per the Macleans ranking). At UBS B - the most highly ranked school in Macleans and the exception to this pattern - the participants felt that while their *own* reputation was already sufficiently high they felt “*other schools*”, those of lower reputation, might benefit:

I would say that it is more important for the lesser schools where there are serious questions about ‘does this university have the capability to deliver an undergraduate business program?’

It follows that those schools with a “lesser” reputation would be more vulnerable to isomorphic pressures and thereby be more likely to engage in legitimacy-seeking behaviour – such as accreditation. (More discussion on reputation, legitimacy, and accreditation will follow in Chapters 6 and 7.)

Environmental Uncertainty

Environmental uncertainty also emerged as a critical contextual factor. While the university environment has long been considered to be stable and complex (Daft & Armstrong, 2009; Duncan, 1972), throughout the 1990’s, environmental munificence declined and the degree of environmental change increased significantly due to the myriad of external factors described above and depicted in Figure 5.1. These included decreased government funding, increased pressures to seek private sector financing and corporate partnerships, globalization of business education, the introduction of new instructional technologies, etc. These forces have been well documented by other authors (CAUT, 1999, 2005a, 2008; Helms Mills et al., 2006; McKee et al., 2005; Romero, 2008; Tudiver, 1999; Turk, 2000); in fact, Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006) contend that the university environment can be considered “discontinuous” and that universities require adaptive strategies in order to remain competitive.

The results of this study support these perceptions of increased environmental uncertainty: many interviewees cited competitive forces, (particularly international), and the need to differentiate their product or gain competitive advantage as prime reasons for seeking accreditation. As one participant described:

The reason that we did the accreditation was very simple – it had become a necessity in the competitive environment – that’s the number one reason... we had to do it. We didn’t see a choice...Either accredit or else...

Schools A and C seemed to have slightly stronger perceptions of the degree of competition in the marketplace, particularly vis a vis their key rivals in local markets (i.e., those schools who recruited from the same student population). School B was primarily interested in the international marketplace in terms of AACSB accreditation; otherwise, they felt fairly secure at home. Participants at school D also mentioned uncertainty in the marketplace in the 1990's; and while this seemed to subside somewhat in the 2000's, they remained somewhat concerned about international recognition and heightened competitiveness.

Summary

To sum up, it was a complex and multi-faceted environment in which the university business schools found themselves in the 1990's. Increased uncertainty was reported by the participants in terms of environmental instability (decreased government funding, financial constraints, pressure to increase enrollments, increased growth through participation rates, new corporate relationships), complexity (the emergence of new programs, new delivery technologies, a new focus on "student experience", and new global competitors and opportunities), and heightened competition (expanding global markets and pressure to adopt corporate marketing strategies such as branding, partnerships, "naming", etc.). Across the four UBSs in this study, (despite their unique circumstances), five contextual variables emerged which were most salient in influencing the drivers, impacts, and consequences of accreditation. They were: leadership, resource dependence, strategy and synergies, reputation, and environmental uncertainty.

Accreditation Process

Within this contextual environment, what was the nature of the accreditation process? The participants were asked to describe the AACSB process and their respective role(s). Official AACSB documents were also reviewed, (e.g., Self Evaluation Report (SER), Strategic Plan, Annual Reports, Deferral Reports), in order to provide additional data on the process and/or to validate the interviewees' recollections of the events which transpired, the timing, and outcomes. While the AACSB accreditation process is fairly prescribed, (e.g., see Appendix C for a process diagram), nonetheless, there were interesting variations and commonalities across schools which emerged - in terms of the way in which the process was managed by the AACSB as well as by the UBS (refer to Appendix K for the Accreditation Timeline, which illustrates when each school reached various milestones in the process).

Overall, three main themes emerged. These included: stakeholder participation, organizational support, and cycle time. Each of these factors served to influence the impact and consequences of accreditation.

Stakeholder Participation

Accreditation, by its nature, is a fairly prescriptive evaluation process, (standards-based; evaluators from an external agency who provide objective, consistent measures and judgments); and therefore the degree to which its design can be tailored to the institution is limited. This is true of AACSB accreditation as well (although the Academy has made significant efforts over the last 5 years to make it more flexible and appealing to international schools). With respect to the AACSB process, while the degree of stakeholder involvement could be modified in the design, (i.e., how the Self-Evaluation

Report was prepared and by whom), and how the evaluation was used (i.e., use of results and process use), the actual conduct of the evaluation was prescribed (and performed by an externally appointed AACSB team). Therefore, the use of participatory, collaborative and empowerment approaches, (which have been proposed to encourage evaluation utilization), could not be fully employed (Brandon, 1998; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Fetterman, 1996; Greene, 1987). As a result, it was the way in which the school tailored the few discretionary aspects to their needs that influenced the outcomes. For example, the degree to which stakeholders were consulted, involved, and/or informed throughout the process positively affected the degree to which interviewees perceived the accreditation to be beneficial and to which they understood its role. This was evident in terms of the differences between the schools. At UBSs A and C, the Deans appointed a lead (Accreditation Coordinator) and assembled teams of three to four people who were dedicated to the accreditation effort. The Deans were strong sponsors and advocates; and communication was ongoing and widely distributed to a broad audience. As will be described later in this chapter, the participants at both of these schools reported a greater impact from accreditation. In contrast, UBSs B and D appeared to approach accreditation as more of an administrative exercise which was primarily the responsibility of the Associate/Vice Deans (on top of their regular workloads). While the Associate/Vice Deans sought data from other administrators in the preparation of accreditation reports, there was less engagement by faculty and administration overall. One marked difference was with respect to research productivity. As the Dean at UBS D was keenly interested in promoting an agenda of heightened research intensity, to this end he did promote faculty involvement. He invited an American AACSB accreditation “expert” to the school and

held a series of meetings to generate interest and prepare concrete strategies towards increased research output. As a result, interest was generated in this area - research productivity - and the participants from School D reported a greater number of benefits realized in this domain.

Overall, UBS B appeared to have the lowest level of engagement for several reasons. Firstly, UBS B was “courted” by the AACSB and persuaded of the merits of the accreditation process – their interest was not intrinsically generated. Secondly, there was a changeover in Deans just after the accreditation process was launched. The new Dean had a different – but ambitious – agenda, and accreditation was not part of his vision. Without a Dean to champion the process, the Vice Dean led the effort but had little incentive/support to involve many others. It became another administrative task on top of his already full workload. Additionally, the process at UBS B appeared to be slightly “fast-tracked” (perhaps because they were “invited” to participate?); and there was less time to encourage widespread participation.

Organizational Support

In UBSs that experienced a greater positive impact, more resources were dedicated to the accreditation effort. Organizational support was provided (e.g., budget, personnel, training, emotional support); and the involvement of a respected, experienced, core team was key (i.e., it was not just part of the Associate/Assistant Dean’s role). Such a team was assembled at two of the highest impact schools, (UBS A and C); as well, administrative assistance was provided to support the Accreditation Coordinators at these two schools. Both were provided with a research assistant who was able to help with the

large number of administrative duties associated with accreditation (collecting CV's, tabulating research productivity, assembling the SER, calculating ratios, etc.).

At UBS C and D, consultants were also hired to assist in the accreditation effort. At UBS C, it was primarily to provide administrators with advice, (e.g., on the composition of the AACSB committee), and thereby enhance their chances of success by having AACSB members involved who were familiar with the provincial education system; and at UBS D it was to strategize around how to increase research productivity and prepare for accreditation. Both schools found that this investment was very worthwhile. As one of the Associate Deans commented, "*After that, it was kind of smooth sailing.*" (In contrast, UBS A did *not* engage the services of a consultant, and perhaps as a result, their accreditation process was the most lengthy of all four schools. However, it also had the highest impact and highest degree of learning reported by participants.)

School B was an exception. The Vice Dean was in charge of the effort and chose to go about it primarily on his own (with input from others and only basic administrative assistance associated with his role). The Dean did not lend his support, as it was not seen a huge priority. Not surprisingly, the Vice Dean found accreditation to be very time consuming; and overall there were few perceived benefits realized at this school.

Cycle Time

According to participants, another factor which influenced the degree of impact was the "cycle time" of the accreditation process – the length of time between initial accreditation and re-accreditation. The first two schools to be accredited, UBSs B and C, were awarded a 10 year period of review. Not surprisingly, they became "*lackadaisical*"

between reviews; and did not have a huge incentive to “institutionalize” the changes. This was clearly evident at UBS C, which was going through maintenance of accreditation at the time of this study (and therefore could reflect on their behaviour over the 10 year period). In contrast, at School A, participants mentioned that the new, shortened review period keeps you focused: “*you know that you are going to be constantly looked at, every 5 or 6 years... that keeps you sharp...*”. While they had not reached the time yet for re-accreditation, they were already preparing for that fact – they had created an official position for the Accreditation Lead and started implementing the new AOL standards.

Related to “*cycle time*” was the “*lack of sustainability*” of the accreditation process; and this was mentioned by many participants as a major challenge associated with continuous improvement or organizational learning (most notably at UBS C, but also at UBS A). This characteristic of AACSB accreditation is described in more detail later in this thesis, under “*sustainability*” (refer to section on “*Enabling Consequences*”).

Summary

In this study, the characteristics of the AACSB accreditation process were found to influence the outcomes of evaluative inquiry. Overall, three main themes emerged. These included: degree of participation, organizational support, and cycle time.

Drivers

Given the contextual environment and accreditation processes described above, what were the main drivers for accreditation? Each of the case study participants was asked the following question, “*Think back to when you were first accredited. What were the main drivers then for seeking accreditation?*” The results of the multicase analysis are presented in Table 5.2.

The most common response overall at three schools (A, C and D) was “the Dean”.

At each of these UBSs, the Dean was seen to be the prime motivator of accreditation; and in each school, the Dean had been newly appointed in this role and spearheaded the effort at the beginning of his Deanship. Participants felt that attaining accreditation was one of the ways in which the Dean aimed to raise the profile of the school, set their leadership

Table 5.2 – Perceived Drivers of AACSB Accreditation

Schools/ Themes	A*	B	C	D	Total	Researcher's Observations or Comments
DRIVERS - External						
Build Reputation, Image, or Brand	✓✓✓ ✓✓✓		✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	13	Reputation <i>within</i> the University as well as outside (primarily mentioned <i>outside</i>)
Differentiate from competition /Competitive Advantage	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓	6	To differentiate primarily from <i>immediate</i> competitors
Marketing Tool	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	12	School B – Defensive marketing since AACSB had done effective marketing themselves
Rankings	✓✓	✓✓✓			5	To be included in certain rankings, need to be accredited. School B – rankings are more important than accreditation for students, branding
Recruitment – in general	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	8	School B – international only mentioned School A – also mentioned faculty School D – international only mentioned
External recognition for internal pride	✓✓		✓		3	
External recognition of quality	✓✓			✓✓✓	5	Primarily for international audiences
International marketing/ recruitment		✓✓		✓✓✓✓	6	
Approached by AACSB (international expansion)		✓✓✓			3	School B - AACSB came to visit and “sold” the idea
DRIVERS - Internal						
The Dean	✓✓✓ ✓✓✓		✓✓✓✓ ✓✓	✓✓✓✓ ✓	17	School A - Administrators identified more internal drivers than did faculty.
Lever for Change	✓✓✓ ✓		✓✓	✓	7	School C - Used for leverage with Central Administration (for resources) (seen as the #1 <i>benefit</i> , but not as strongly identified as the prime driver)
Timing was Right	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	13	
Clean up Program	✓✓✓			✓	4	School D – Prompted review & analysis
TOTAL N	N=10	N=7	N=7	N=7	n=31	

* Each ✓ represents one mention of this theme by one participant. Participants are only counted once.

team apart, differentiate the school from its competitors, and improve the school's image in the marketplace. For example, as participants at one school recalled,

At that time, we had a new Dean of the school of business who was ambitious, he had a vision, he wanted to make things happen, and he started that process as soon as he was appointed as Dean - because of his vision for this school by outside agencies.

So that was the main driver – A new dean who was determined to raise the overall profile of the school. And undertaking the AACSB as sort of an external symbol of that...

Timing was viewed to be critical; and the importance of timing was emphasized by interviewees in association with the Dean's decisions to pursue accreditation and realize their respective visions for their schools. As one interview describes,

...he certainly led the initiative. And I think that he communicated to the school, that given the nature of the business school as a whole, that, while accreditation in the late 1990's was something that few universities had sought, that it was time for us to get accreditation because it would place us in a different league.

In fact, this was not the first time that AACSB accreditation had been discussed at any of these three schools. Previous Deans had considered accreditation but decided against it. It had been dismissed as "American", too "prescriptive", a "cookie cutter" scheme, and largely "redundant" in the Canadian marketplace, where universities have a consistently high level of quality. However, the environment had changed in the last 10 years; and the Deans felt that the timing was right:

In the past, we had considered it several times and always decided not to do it. This time we had a Dean who wanted to do it.

It was this Dean...In Canada, for a long time, there was the outlook that this is a bunch of American stuff...

Furthermore, during this period the AACSB had changed. By modifying their approach to accreditation, (from fixed standards to a mission-based assessment), and by

de-Americanizing their image and name (adding “international” and dropping “American”), the AACSB had become more attractive to Canadian schools. As one of the participants explained:

... AACSB over that same period realized that it had to be more international in its orientation, so I think that there was...more effort made to stretch beyond the borders of the US too; they did sort of transform themselves somewhat – they even renamed themselves of course – you don’t see ‘American’ in the title anymore...

However, School B was a different case. As part of its international expansion plans, AACSB was sending advocates to selected schools in other countries in the hopes of attracting new members; and UBS B was a target. In 1997, the Dean and Associate Dean were approached by a Canadian representative of the AACSB who was strongly promoting the benefits of accreditation. As one respondent from UBS B described,

... they wanted to be international, so they came to us...they came to us and a couple of other Canadian schools, because they wanted to get a toehold in our market.

Nonetheless, School B saw an opportunity, just like the other three schools, to use accreditation as a strategic marketing tool²⁴. Global competition was heating up and UBS B had ambitious goals for international expansion; but school B had not yet built the brand and the reputation that it has today. In 1997, the school was “*fairly small*” and “*insignificant*”, particularly in the global marketplace. As one participant described the marketplace for post secondary education at the time:

... it wasn’t really until the late 1990’s... schools had to get much more aggressive in actively recruiting students. It wasn’t a case of ‘if you build it they will come’. People wouldn’t just apply here just because we were [X school or Y school or Z school]. People got much more aggressive about recruiting...

²⁴ Since the Dean was near the end of his term, the Associate Dean carried the effort forward, but it was overshadowed by the new Dean’s arrival – his clear vision for the School, his charisma and subsequent focus on rankings.

AACSB accreditation fed into this environment and UBS B's goals for expansion quite fortuitously. Accreditation was seen as a globally recognized symbol which signified quality to international students. It was perceived to be something that might be worthwhile for UBS B to pursue, (a relatively low risk, low cost item), that could possibly help them "*at the margins*":

...in 1997, we weren't Harvard, we weren't recognized, so the question was 'well, at the margins, does make a difference?' Maybe. So, on that possibility - you don't want to have to answer questions like that - so you do it, right?

... it was fairly well understood that in order for us to grow, we needed to tap into an international market. And in that international market, AACSB was kind of the dominant accreditor.

This rationale is similar to that of the other three schools insofar as there was a strong sense that the external marketplace was ripe. Competitive pressures had been mounting; and UBSs A and C also mentioned the need to need to differentiate from key competitors *in Canada* who were vying directly for potential students. Many of these rival schools had already been accredited, (in the case of School A), or were perceived to be not far behind (School C wanted to gain first mover advantage). As participants from UBS A describe:

The reason that we did the accreditation was very simple – it had become a necessity in the competitive environment...we had to do it. We didn't see a choice...Either accredit or else...

...as soon as other schools started to get it and use it as a branding tool, you did not want to be the one who was left out...

Accreditation at UBSs A and C was seen as something that would build the school's reputation and brand, taking the school to a new level, both internally and externally. In so doing, it would increase the faculty's own pride in the school – something tangible and publicly identifiable, a hallmark of excellence. Participants from

these schools described how the Deans felt that the schools were under-recognized and needed to gain the profile that they deserved. They also felt that this would instill pride in the faculty and give everyone a much-needed boost in morale (specifically UBS C). In their own words,

I think people were interested to demonstrate that we were a good school – like internally – OK, there's accreditation, that's something public that we can say we have accomplished. And it's part of branding and to build your reputation.

...we had quality students, we had quality faculty, we had quality education, but it [i.e., the School of Management] just didn't have any visibility outside the campus...

Dean-C took over as Dean and I think that he wanted to do something. And his thing was that UBS C... was better than its reputation and that the business school was better than [the University]. We were kind of weighed down by the [University] brand. We had to somehow cut loose the image of the faculty from the University. And let the faculty find its own level. So he had set this target of becoming recognized as a top tier business school in Canada where he thought we were according to research indicators and citations and these sorts of things.

Summary

In summary, the primary drivers for accreditation were perceived to be: 1) the Dean(s); and 2) competitive forces in the external marketplace. The timing was seen to be ripe for accreditation; it was perceived to be a strategic marketing tool which could be used to build the schools' unique brands and reputation, differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market, (both in Canada and internationally), and keep up to their key competitors. AACSB Accreditation would also help to gain recognition for the schools of business within the university environment itself and be a source of pride for faculty members (as a publicly recognized hallmark of quality). School B was slightly different. Shortly after having been "sold" on the idea of accreditation by the AACSB, the Deanship changed hands. The new Dean had a vision of his own, (primarily focused on

rankings), accreditation was almost complete; and as a result, he did not champion the accreditation cause; therefore, it was primarily a data-gathering project by the Associate Dean. Nonetheless, it was perceived, at the time, that accreditation might, “*at the margins*” help them gain traction in the increasingly competitive international marketplace, where their brand was still not yet fully established.

Impact of Accreditation

Participants at each of the four UBS’s were asked to describe the general impact of accreditation. This included concrete, observable actions which were taken as a result of accreditation as well as less tangible benefits. As part of the multiple case analysis, these accreditation effects were categorized according to two main dimensions: 1) their observability, (tangible “actions” vs intangible “benefits”); and 2) the timeframe in which they were reported (immediate term, short term, or medium term). Based on the results of the analysis, each school was assigned an overall rating as either as a “high”, “medium”, “low”, or “minimal impact school”. These ratings and the summarized results are presented in Table 5.3, detailed results are available in Appendix L, and the findings are described below.

Overall Impact

Table 5.3 reports the top seven impact areas for the four University Business Schools (UBSs). These represent the most frequently mentioned effects, both tangible and intangible, across all four schools, from immediate term to medium term. Due to variability across schools, the “average timeframe” is an estimate only, across all four schools, based on the respondents’ comments and accreditation reports. The results for

each UBS are briefly highlighted below – in terms of the overall rating – and then the combined results are presented, by area of impact.

Table 5.3 Impact of Accreditation

		School Overall Impact	A High	B Min	C Med	D Low
	Tangible/Intangible (Action or Benefit)	Average Timeframe				
Areas of Impact – in Rank Order						
1. Enhanced Reputation	I- Benefit	S	●● (1)	⊗ (1)	●● (2)	●● (1)
2. Leverage/Catalyst for Change	I- Benefit	IM	●●	⊗ (2)	●● (1)	●●
3. Increased Management Efficiencies	T- Action	IM	●● (2)	○	●●	⊗
4. Program Revisions	T- Action	IM	●●		●●	●
5. Increased Focus on Research	I- Benefit	M	●●		⊗	●● (2)
6. Improved Quality	I- Benefit	M	●●		⊗	⊗
7. New Programs/Initiatives	T- Action	S	●●		⊗	

Legend and Decision Rules

Symbol	Meaning	Evidence
(1) (2)	Top Ranked Responses: (1) First; (2) Second	Highest frequency of responses at that UBS (mode)
●●	Very Strongly Present	The strong majority of respondents (>70%)
●	Strongly Present	✓✓✓ - 3 or more (>40%)
⊗	Moderately Present	✓✓ - ✓✓✓
○	Slightly Present	✓✓ or ✓ (and validated with documentation)
T	Tangible	Able to observe a behavioural change
I	Intangible	Unable to observe this effect directly
IM	Immediate	Before (leading up to) Accreditation or during Accreditation
S	Short Term	Shortly after Accreditation (e.g., 0-2 years)
M	Medium Term	After accreditation (e.g., 2+ years)

High Impact School

University business school (UBS) A was considered to be a “high impact” school. Both the number of impacts which were mentioned and the frequency with which they were mentioned was very high. As illustrated in Table 5.3, the top seven impacts were “very strongly present”, reported by over 70% of respondents (both faculty and administration). Participants identified many actions which were taken directly because of accreditation and they indicated that these changes had a very strong influence on the school. For example, in the immediate term, accreditation prompted a re-alignment and redesign of the undergraduate program:

...looking at the self-evaluation of the school and its programs, we quickly realized that there was a need for us to realign our programs with our mission, vision, and goals of the school as a whole...

...The whole undergraduate program had to be redesigned because AACSB requires 50% of its courses (I think it's 50%) to be non-management courses, so that really changed the nature of first and second year for the undergraduate program...

Accreditation also reinforced the need to undertake action on five main fronts²⁵:

- Strengthen the graduate program portfolio and improve resource utilization;
- Increase the School's research productivity and output;
- Increase the School's base of internal and external financial support;
- Strengthen performance/outcomes measurement; and
- Strengthen student placement services.

All of these areas were addressed over the several years leading up to and following accreditation (primarily immediate to short term). Although AACSB was not the only impetus, (the impending double cohort, strategic planning exercise, and recommendations of external consultants also added to the positive momentum), the participants felt that

²⁵ These five priorities were detailed as 17 specific actions. All were “*in progress*” or “*planned*” to respond to the concerns or questions of the AACSB Business Accreditation Committee (Deferral Report, 2003).

accreditation was the prime catalyst for change. It offered a chance to rally the faculty towards a common goal, one which was constructive. Several interviewees described how it served as an initial “stepping stone” - “a necessary one” - that got the process moving towards other achievements. As two interviewees described, by having one success, it led to another:

...it gave the school a common project and drove the energy of everybody towards the attainment of that goal. In itself, I think that it was positive...and a lot of compromises - which would not have been possible otherwise – were made in order to reach this higher goal which was common to everybody.

...it was probably the kick-off for everything. I had never really thought about that, but it was probably the catalyst for a lot of stuff.

Medium Impact School

The results indicate that UBS C was a “medium impact” school. Four areas of impact were “very strongly present” (mentioned by greater than 70% of respondents); and the other three areas were “moderately present” (mentioned by two or three respondents). Since initial accreditation had been attained 10 years prior (1997), UBS C was in the unique position of being able to reflect on their *first* experience with AACSB as well as the impact of *re*-accreditation, in which they were currently involved (they were in the process of “continuous review” until 2008). In terms of initial accreditation, while the participants identified that a number of actions were taken due to accreditation, they perceived that those immediate actions were relatively minor in terms of the strength of their impact. These included: changes to the undergraduate curriculum to meet the 50% general arts component, re-allocation of faculty to meet minimum full-time coverage ratios, and modifications to the type of performance data collected, how it was

collected, analyzed and used. The latter referred primarily to research productivity data and coverage ratios.

In terms of accreditation maintenance, the majority of respondents felt that the impact has been, and will continue to be significantly greater than initial accreditation. Eighty-six percent (6/7) expressed a great degree of optimism about how the process had instigated positive changes; and how they believe it will promote increased accountability, improved quality of curricula, performance monitoring and possibly even a change in culture. They felt that this was due to the introduction of the AACSB Assurance of Learning (AOL) standards which are forcing the development of learning objectives and outcome measurements. Participants expressed excitement about the process and its potential for improvement. In their words,

Yes, the true assurance of quality aspects are coming now, from my perspective. The AOL stuff is doing it...

Assessment of learning is very important. We want to standardize that. And this is a lever that we can use with the faculty to tell them that 'you, know, there is not total academic freedom to do whatever you want.' We want to make sure that there are clear learning objectives that are consistent with course being delivered. And we are measuring them and there is a standardized form of measuring them. So...these are both good things.

Low Impact School

UBS D was considered to be “low impact”. Although there were three impact areas which were classified as “very strongly present”, (mentioned by 70% of respondents), these were primarily “intangibles” – reputation, catalyst for change, and increased focus on research; and the participants did not speak very strongly about these changes or about any specific, concrete steps which were taken due to accreditation. When asked to describe *explicit* actions, they described minor modifications that had

been made - to the program itself and to performance management practices. For example, the way in which research productivity data was collected necessitated the introduction of a performance tracking system – at least for the short term, to comply with AACSB requirements. Minor program revisions were also made: the graduate admissions process, (for the specialized MBA program), was adapted to increase transparency and standardization of applicant assessment; and the Bachelor of Commerce program was reviewed and “tweaked” to ensure that the course complement met the AACSB’s standard for general arts.

Minimal Impact School

The results indicate that AACSB accreditation had a negligible impact on UBS B. For this reason, it has been classified as a “minimal impact” school. This rating was exemplified by the participants’ responses to questions about actions taken due to accreditation and the perceived benefits accrued. In terms of actions, none of the respondents was able to identify any concrete, specific steps which had been taken as a result of the accreditation process – from the initial self-assessment through to the visitation or final approval. Three participants mentioned that faculty coverage ratios were something that, over time, they have had to monitor when considering curriculum changes and/or allocation of faculty, and the Associate Dean recalled a very minor adjustment that had been made in their business ethics course due to accreditation (AACSB required additional hours); but otherwise there were no significant, substantive changes in programs, policies, services, or administration, that came about because of accreditation. As exemplified by this participant’s comments, any positive changes were

attributed to the influence of the (new) Dean – and accreditation was not part of his agenda:

There has been incredible growth in faculty and students; and we've ramped up a lot of things in a lot of different ways, and none of this has anything to do with accreditation...we have a fantastic Dean who has done a wonderful job and really made the school visible. I credit most of the good things that have happened here to his leadership and not to accreditation.

Surprisingly, two impact areas did show up as “moderately present” – “enhanced reputation” and “change lever” (refer to Table 5.3). In the case of UBS B these results require explanation. While the participants felt that accreditation may have been somewhat useful for UBS B to attract international students in the late 1990's, (to increase reputation and branding), it was no longer considered to be necessary. The participants felt that accreditation was primarily useful for *other* schools - those who are considered to be second or third tier - or whose rankings and/or reputations are *not* noteworthy on a national or international scale. For these schools, accreditation can enhance their reputation internationally, providing assurance to prospective students that the school is acceptable, part of the “pack”. As one respondent explained,

So if somebody looks on the website from India or from Argentina what they usually say, is 'so what kind of school is this'? So what they look at is international rankings. So for schools that are highly ranked, this probably doesn't mean a thing. So, if you can't get into Harvard and you can't get into Columbia, you can't get into other places, you look at 'can I get into the University of [---]'? Then you start to wonder, 'So, I know that they aren't the top 100, but are they at least accredited?' I think that's probably the biggest benefit.

They also noted that accreditation can serve as leverage for smaller schools which need to lobby for resources from central administration. (Once again, UBS B participants did not feel that this applied to them.) As two participants suggested,

If I was [X University] ... if I was the Dean – it would allow me to use the accreditation procedures to push for more Ph.D. faculty, more resources for the library, and all these sorts of things. So that it gets you up to that minimum.

Overall Impact Areas

Having discussed the impacts at each individual UBS, in this section, the top seven impacts are discussed, *by theme*, across *all four schools*.

Enhanced Reputation

For three out of the four schools (A, B, and D), “enhanced reputation” was identified as the top benefit realized by accreditation. For UBS C, it was a very close second. For schools A, C and D, accreditation was seen as a means by which they could increase the visibility of the school, strengthen its reputation and brand – both internally, (within the faculty and within the University itself), and externally (domestically and internationally). In their own words,

...we are on the map internationally now, because of this type of accreditation.

... Pride in the school, particularly faculty and students. And enhanced reputation.

...it does you good in your status in the university as a whole.

At these three schools – A, C and D - accreditation was part of a “package”, an effort to raise visibility and funds for the school and to build a distinctive brand. This included “naming” the school and/or acquiring a new building. As one of the interviewees noted,

...it all kind of went into a 4 or 5 year public relations campaign that helped us become more of a visible presence...

School B was pursuing a similar growth strategy, but accreditation was not an important ingredient; rather, (as described earlier), UBS B was focused on international rankings instead.

Leverage/Catalyst for Change

The most commonly mentioned benefit which accrued to UBS C due to AACSB accreditation was the ability to use AACSB as external leverage to negotiate for increased resources or funding from central university administration (mentioned by 86% of respondents). Respondents felt that it had been invaluable to the Dean, particularly with respect to garnering more funds for hiring faculty in times of severe fiscal restraint. In their words,

...teaching ratios – we've always been able to use that to get the numbers of hirings up. And I think that's the basic functional reason why it [accreditation] exists – to make sure that you can lock in your resources and if you fall behind a certain level in terms of academically qualified people relative to the number of students you have, you can use that as your lever.

... we also have been able to secure from the university positions that we may not have been able to secure otherwise. I am confident that that is the case. So that certainly is a benefit - because we are competing in that respect with other faculties. Say the university can only give out 50 positions. And if we go there with our need for AACSB and our ratios, then that's going to be a stronger case for what we need than if we didn't have it.

Participants from UBSs A and D also strongly identified this benefit. At school A, AACSB provided the Dean with ammunition to seek approval for additional faculty positions and financial support from central administration. It also served as a negotiating tool for other areas such as research, where additional funds were needed to reach immediate and long term productivity goals. The AACSB visitation team further advanced the school's needs by lobbying on behalf of the school during their meetings

with senior university administration (the President, Vice-President, etc.). As one participant described,

... when they come, AACSB, they are very good, they go to see the President and they say, 'your school is underfunded' or 'you need a new building' – they lobby for the business school.

At UBS D, they mentioned that accreditation helped to advance the business school's agenda by increasing its relative importance on the university priority list. As this participant explained,

It [i.e., accreditation] can also be used for the university as a whole to force changes that might otherwise be slower to happen. So, for example, moving up the university's priority list - on the building, or for research centres, or for new staff, or for program changes or the whole thing – it is easier to get senior administration on your side when you have a recommendation from an accreditation review committee than any other single way. It is an external lever....

Accreditation also served as a catalyst for change *within* the faculty of business itself. This was mentioned by many of the participants at UBSs A, C, and D. By having an externally-imposed body come in to perform a rigorous assessment, it offered a unique opportunity – for review and analysis, benchmarking, improvement, re-positioning, - and for focusing the faculty's energies towards a positive, common goal. As participants pointed out the benefits:

We would not have been incented otherwise, you know. So there are a lot of benefits in terms of process, rationalization, quality, that schools impose on themselves on the basis of the expected (AACSB) requirements. That is a definite benefit.

... AACSB highlighted areas that we had challenges in. It was not new news. It was just that it was making it very clear that they were areas of concern. So it almost forced us, in a way, to correct those problems...

You know, it's forced us to look at things and it has been good, it's been good. Although it's bureaucratic, it has made us change.

At UBS C, there was a need to find something that would raise the faculties' spirits, after many years of cutbacks and fiscal constraints; and accreditation provided a rallying point for the Dean and his team:

...we were kind of in the doldrums, as a University and as a school, and everything else – [UBS C] had been through some really bad times in the early 90's – and we just needed some things to lift us up. And [he thought] this was a great thing to do.

Several respondents also acknowledged the difficulty of managing in the university environment in general and how accreditation can provide a much-needed lever for change:

But in an environment where it is so difficult to manage, this is a tool which can certainly help – it can certainly help...

One of the challenges of a Dean is to get everybody – get all the horses running in the same direction...Being a Dean is absolutely the worst job in the world – the toughest job in the world, in many respects...because you can't come in here and say 'we're going to change everything' because you'd be out of there pretty quickly.

Increased Management Efficiencies

Another major impact at UBS A was improved efficiencies in educational administration – a rationalization of processes and programs. As one respondent described, AACSB provided an opportunity to focus on what really needed to be done:

“It has forced us to realize that we can't be everything to everyone.” The AACSB assessment process forced the school to determine whether they were delivering courses in an efficient manner; and because the process necessitated a re-articulation of the mission, it also ensured alignment of programs with the strategic priorities of the school. The result was an increased *focus*, a clearer understanding of the direction of the school and an associated alignment of program offerings:

I think that we have become more efficient and more effective. We are using our resources better; and I think that we are getting, the product that we are graduating, is much – I think that we are achieving what we wanted to achieve but now we know more what we want to achieve, if that makes sense.

AACSB also created more of a focus on performance at UBS A. Metrics were identified, resulting in increased data gathering, tracking, and reporting. Collecting student satisfaction data became systematic and served as a basis for further changes.

Similarly, at UBS C, there was an increased use of data for decision-making and accountability and greater attention to the “customer”. The respondents indicated that accreditation caused them to look at things differently, to collect data and document things in different ways that fostered more performance-driven decision-making and accountability – or had the *potential* to do so. For example, with respect to research productivity, it was felt that while some data collection was happening already, it became more regular, more standardized, and systematic with accreditation. As described by the participants,

Certainly, the accreditation did help improve on the collection of information or the documentation of information. Now the processes, most of the processes we had in place, because they are required within the collective agreement and the faculty groups...Nothing in there was created because of accreditation. The only thing was the way to collect and document available information.

It was at a time when we still had a lot of people who weren't at all performance oriented. And we were changing towards that – performance research orientation – that was thought of as the continuing thrust. I guess that you needed a little bit of a lever...We became more systematic about collecting CV's and recording this stuff.

Other respondents spoke enthusiastically about the maintenance of accreditation process in which they are now engaged and how it will help to change the culture towards more accountability and a heightened focus on performance management:

But the AACSB Assessment of Learning initiative in particular will be something that people might not realize will change things and make people more accountable... And I think that it will result in a nice, gentle, back-door way, one of the results will be much greater accountability for everybody.

Plus it is a cultural change too... The threat of our accreditation...has made people move... on maintenance, now, right? But we have used that... it's been useful because we should be measuring. If I send my child to do a BComm/ BAdmin and you say that they are going to have better team skills and better...how exactly do you measure that? ...You know, it's forcing us to look at things and it has been good, it's been good.

Program Revisions

The greatest number of programs revisions occurred at UBS A. As mentioned earlier, accreditation prompted many changes. The undergraduate program was redesigned and the graduate program was revised and rationalized - to align with the new mission, to meet the AACSB requirements for general arts and coverage ratios, to accommodate the double cohort, to introduce more flexibility around resource allocation, and to improve efficiencies.

School C also initiated program revisions due to accreditation. Long overdue, UBS C launched a major undergraduate curriculum revision in anticipation of AACSB; and these curriculum changes were then further refined to meet AACSB-specific standards (e.g., for the 50% general arts component and for coverage ratios). Due to the unique CEGEP education system, this required a bit more work than usual. As the participants explained,

So when they came and saw that we had a system different from anywhere else (2 years pre-university...) and we explained that to them...and we had to identify what kind of courses were offered in pre-university to qualify to come here. So, we had to include what they do before coming here as part of the general education

... no more than 50% of an undergraduate degree can be in business. And we were a bit over it, even taking CEGEP into account. So we revised the undergrad

curriculum, to cut the core back by a course or two. But, you know, that probably made sense.

...so it forced us to re-direct our resources to the undergraduate program. And, in anticipation, we also knew that our undergraduate core – our curriculum hadn't been revised for years and years, so before we went into this accreditation exercise, we completely revamped our undergraduate curriculum. If we hadn't have done that, we wouldn't have gotten it, because we were just ignoring it.

In contrast, the program revisions at UBS D and B were negligible. A couple of participants mentioned minor modifications which were made to meet AACSB standards. At UBS D, there were some concerns about one of their specialty MBA programs, but it was only impacted in a minor way (the admissions process had to be adjusted).

Increased Focus on Research

The second highest response at UBS D was “increased research focus”.

Participants felt that the Dean had used accreditation as a driver to transform the school into one which was more research-intensive. In preparation for AACSB accreditation, an external AACSB consultant was engaged to advise the faculty on ways in which they could increase productivity; and faculty members tried to put these actions into effect to improve the school's metrics on research output. In the words of two participants,

We'll see...umm...certainly research has had a more high profile. But let me just qualify that a little bit. I certainly don't want to imply that research wasn't being done, but it was very spotty. We had some terrific researchers, we had some people who did ok, but then we had too many who really weren't doing anything very much at all. And so, that's the problem - the calculations are kind of weighted, and so the problem is with the ...I guess there were too many in that middle and lower category. So, it certainly put some pressure on them to do better.

...definitely the contribution of AACSB has to been to shift more towards research.

UBS A also identified “increased research focus” as a strong impact of accreditation. Participants reported a number of positive initiatives that have been

launched primarily due to AACSB: a new research support and rewards policy was established; additional funding from central administration was secured; a Director of Research was hired; and a Research Office was set up. UBS A also started tracking research productivity more rigorously and routinely. Furthermore, accreditation influenced hiring practices for new faculty; and now there is a core group of young, inspired researchers. Overall, it has contributed to the establishment of a research culture. As two respondents explained,

Part of what the accreditation did was to highlight the need to be more research-focused. That was I think our weakest area. And that created this research culture that is building. It's not there yet, I don't think, but it is building, partly due to the new hires... now that we have a good core of people that good researchers are actually contacting me rather than me contacting them. So the synergy or whatever is really moving upwards. And then we introduced programs to help support the research culture as well, such as the incentive program ...

We have a database for publications, research and everything... That is a definite benefit. Here, it created a focus on research, a focus on quality of publications, the kind of things that you know about but would rather delay, or not think about....it forces you to do it... Well, the change in culture.... I think what has had an impact, though, is the research side - as I mentioned, the reward program - because there is money behind it.

In contrast, at UBS C, AACSB had little impact on research productivity. The only change was around how the data was documented. As these participants explained, an incentive system was already in place:

...it didn't change research productivity. We documented it... But it didn't really change motivation... In our case, we assign courses on the basis of research productivity, so the less research you do, the more courses you teach. So, it's kind of built in.

Quality

Improvements in quality were seen to be a positive impact of AACSB. At UBS A, this theme was “very strongly present” and at schools C and D it was “moderately

present”. The most pervasive comments across all three schools related to an increased attention to general “standards of performance” and quality practices introduced by a respected, external entity:

The main benefit is to be conscious of certain standards of performance that we needed to meet.

...We are more conscious of what we're doing and just judging what we're doing. By an external entity, external standards, etc.

Another aspect of quality improvement that emerged strongly from the data at UBS A was related to faculty recruitment. At this school, participants mentioned that accreditation enabled them to better identify their human capital requirements and attract higher quality candidates: “*it forced us to look a little bit more closely at where we should direct our hiring*”. The consequence has been the development of a core group of young, keen, researchers. As two respondents described,

I can certainly say that the quality of the candidates that knock on the door are better because we are an accredited school.

We're known across North America and the world now as an international management school...so we attract a better quality faculty because of that...

New Programs/Initiatives

At UBS A, the participants also credited AACSB with being the impetus behind many new programs. For example, the AACSB Beta Gamma Sigma program was implemented, a dedicated career centre was established, a new mentorship program was conceived, and student satisfaction surveys were administered on a regular basis. As these participants described, AACSB was a major force in making these things happen. Furthermore, by engaging the students in some of these changes, it gained momentum:

And the success led to us believing in success and believing enough to be able to get more success in different venues – getting a Career Centre ...

...it is as a result of the AACSB that we had the referendum and the students wanted the Career Centre, and we started the Career Centre, and each year it is just growing like this...

So the students decided that they were going to take this on themselves. So they went out, held a referendum to raise their fees and create a dedicated career centre. This is something that the university would never have let us do if we'd try to do it on our own... It would be very difficult for the university to turn down students who want to raise their own fees to build a career centre! So, that was number one.

Summary

In summary, there were seven major impacts which were identified across all four case study sites. While many of these effects were reported to *some* degree at all schools, there was large variability across schools in terms of the strength and nature of the impact. UBS A was considered to be a “high impact” school, as all seven impact areas were reported as “very strongly present”. In comparison, UBSs C, D and B were classified as “Medium”, “Low” and “Minimal” respectively, to reflect the degree to which accreditation had influenced the schools in these seven areas. It was interesting to note that the top two impacts were “intangible”; that is, they were not related to specific observable actions, but rather, to effects which were more difficult to observe – enhanced reputation and leverage for change. However, these same effects are well aligned with the motivations for seeking accreditation. In reviewing the perceived drivers of accreditation – to build reputation, use accreditation as a marketing tool, to enhance recruitment, and drive an agenda for change – it appears that the participants felt that many of these intended outcomes had been realized. In addition, a number of other impacts were also perceived at certain schools: an increased focus on research, improved management

efficiencies, and program modifications (revisions, new programs, and rationalization of existing programs).

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter provided a first look at the results of the multiple case analysis. To begin, the context (across all four schools) was described, as reported by participants, documented in UBS reports and supported by statistical data and the academic literature. Five salient contextual factors were identified and described. These include: leadership, resource dependence, strategy and synergies, reputation, and environmental uncertainty. The characteristics of the AACSB accreditation process itself were also seen to influence the impacts and consequences of accreditation. In particular, there were three accreditation factors which emerged in the multicase analysis. These were: stakeholder participation, organizational support, and cycle time.

Later in the chapter, the drivers and the impacts of accreditation were reported. The top seven drivers across three schools were the following: the Dean, building reputation, timing, marketing tool, recruitment, change lever, and competitive advantage. Each was described in terms of how it was enacted at each school as well as its salience across all four. The impacts were also described. They included: enhanced reputation, catalyst for change, increased management efficiencies, increased focus on research, program revisions, improved quality, and the introduction of new programs or initiatives. In the next chapter, Part B, the consequences of accreditation will be addressed as well as the stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6: PHASE II RESULTS – PART B

This chapter constitutes Part B of the multiple case analysis. Whereas Part A addressed the context, accreditation process, drivers and impacts of AACSB accreditation, Part B addresses the consequences, (enabling, constraining, and other), and the stakeholders.

Consequences

While the participants identified many impacts of accreditation – reported in the previous chapter - this study also sought to identify the *consequences*. “Consequences” in this research was conceptualized as a *particular type* of longer term impact; and it was defined in the following manner: “the participants’ perceptions of the consequences of accreditation specifically vis a vis *enabling, constraining, or other* consequences”. The first term, “enabling”, refers to the participants’ perceptions that, due to AACSB accreditation, they have an increased range of options available in the workplace due to positive changes which have occurred. In this study, the researcher was particularly interested in determining whether, for example, accreditation promoted enabling effects such as continuous improvement and organizational learning. The second, “constraining consequences”, refers to the participants’ perceptions that, due to AACSB accreditation, their actions are limited or restricted in any way. This could be due to formal constraints such as new rules, policies and/or procedures which are perceived to be increasingly cumbersome or restrictive, or informal constraints and/or sanctions on their behaviour (e.g., cultural norms, values, expectations). Finally, “other consequences” refers to effects which can be potentially either constraining *or* enabling. In this study, the participants were asked specifically about formalization and legitimacy.

Enabling Consequences

Participants were asked two questions about the enabling consequences of accreditation. The first was related to continuous improvement: “*Do you think that the AACSB accreditation process promotes continuous improvement?*” Then they were asked to explain their responses and provide examples, if possible. Next, they were asked about organizational learning: “*Taking continuous improvement one step further, does accreditation promote organizational learning?*” Once again, they were asked to elaborate upon their responses. The responses to these questions are summarized below.

Continuous Improvement

Table 6.1 provides a summary of the participants’ responses, overall, by school. First, it indicates the participants’ responses to the close-ended question, either “yes” or “no”. Then, the comments are grouped according to predominant themes. The top six themes are presented below and described in the text which follows. (Refer to Appendix M for more detail).

Overall Response

Seventy percent (70%) of participants from UBS A felt that AACSB accreditation promotes continuous improvement. This was a significantly higher number of affirmative responses than at the other schools, which had agreement of 0% (School B), 43% (School C) or 17% (School D). There was also a difference between faculty members’ and administrators’ responses. At UBSs A, C and D, the administrators were more likely to agree to this statement than were faculty. The members of faculty had a higher number of negative or ambiguous responses (i.e., they were more likely to say “no” or equivocate on the response). The results will be discussed by theme below.

Table 6.1 – Continuous Improvement – Summary of Themes

<i>Does accreditation contribute to continuous improvement?</i>	School A	School B	School C	School D
YES...*	70%	0%	43%	17%
Regular Review Processes and Performance Metrics	● ● (1)	No – already enough rigour	○	
Change in Focus - Quality	⊗ (2)			
Focus on Research			○	⊗ (1)
Difficult to Sustain			● ● (1)	
Not in certain areas (e.g., curriculum change)			● (2)	
<i>but...</i> Internally driven – Dean		● (1)		○

* This includes only those responses that were clearly YES (i.e., it does not include non-committal responses).

Legend and Decision Rules

Symbol	Meaning	Evidence
(1) (2)	Top Ranked Responses: (1) First; (2) Second	Highest frequency of responses
● ●	Very Strongly Present	The strong majority of respondents (>70%)
●	Strongly Present	✓✓✓ - 3 or more (>40%)
⊗	Moderately Present	✓✓ - ✓✓✓
○	Slightly Present	✓✓ or ✓ (and validated with documentation)

Regular Review Processes and Performance Metrics

At UBS A, participants felt that the accreditation process had contributed to continuous improvement in several ways. First, the AACSB process forced them to reflect on the program, the mission, etc., and critically assess whether their processes and programs were in alignment. Second, it provided external benchmarks against which the school could measure its performance - AACSB reviewers provide an objective, external viewpoint and a set of metrics which were taken seriously. Third, since the accreditation

process is cyclical, (every 5-6 years), respondents felt that this helped to ensure that the school “*stay on its toes*”, and maintains its focus on improvement. In their own words,

Yes, absolutely...All of the processes and systems that result from the AACSB are continuous improvement oriented. You measure something, and if it's not at the desired level, you take action. That's what quality improvement is all about.

Yes, I think that it does because you know that you are going to be constantly looked at, every 5 or 6 years and I think that keeps you sharp...and I think that the expectation is that when they come back, whoever those evaluators are, that they expect to see a significant difference, an improvement or whatever. And I think that that does create a certain environment here, a certain expectation – and I think that is a very good thing.

Participants at UBS C also felt that the accreditation process had prompted them to reflect and reassess. Both in preparation for initial accreditation and throughout the process it had caused them to re-examine many of their processes, their mission and strategic plan, and determine how well they were aligned. These activities would not have happened if they had not been motivated by accreditation. As described by two participants,

It made us question a lot of things, you know – what do we want to do, what's our mission? How do we fit into the mission?

The preparation for accreditation caused the administration of the faculty to look at the processes that we have in place. Some of them were there because it's part of what we do and we didn't need to do anything differently because they were in place. But other things we had to improve on, or sometimes initiate...

Change in Focus - Quality

Participants at UBS A also mentioned that their “focus” changed due to accreditation (30%). In other words, the conversations are now different – in committee meetings there is more discussion about quality, performance measures, student satisfaction, and metrics. While this has not been *entirely* due to AACSB, the respondents

felt that accreditation contributed. In their words,

...yes, more of a discussion of how do we measure performance [at undergrad and grad program committees]; more of a discussion of student survey results, in particular student satisfaction...

...it forces us to do continuous improvement and to revise our programs on a regular basis in order for us to maintain accreditation. So, in a sense it has changed the focus... There have been other sources as well – student satisfaction at the undergrad level for example that are not related to AACSB but which also force us to periodically review our course offerings, the quality of the curriculum, the quality of the delivery and so on and so forth...I think generally, that there is a level of awareness that has been raised at universities as a whole over and above what AACSB does. And so our challenge is to basically manage that.

Focus on Research

Participants from two schools (C and D) identified an increased focus on research that had come about due to continuous improvement, prompted by accreditation. At UBS D, for example, three participants felt that accreditation had helped to improve the school's research productivity and also provided some leverage for the Dean at the time to realize his objective of creating a research culture. As several of the participants described:

...while we still have a long way to go, there is very, very, much the beginnings of a much stronger research culture than there was in the past...

Well, there was a lot of emphasis on research output, under our prior Dean, Dean D, because that was a major issue in our accreditation review, was to get us up to a level that was considered to be “respectable”. In this building, and in this structure, (and this is probably a legacy from Dean D), there are research centres now and we have some targeted research centres of activity – you know, particular people who are very productive and have research agendas that are ongoing...

...it brought research – those people trying to promote the research agenda – it gave them some more leverage.

To a lesser degree, UBS C also identified research intensity as an area of improvement (1 participant). As this interviewee expressed it succinctly:

I think that there is continuous improvement in our attention to faculty and their doing research. And that has been a prominent shift. That sort of fed into recruitment decisions more systematically. And the more of those kind of people that you bring in, the more that you want to bring in people who are like them. I think that's what has kind of been lifting us up – we have people publishing in really much better quality journals than we did in the past...

Difficult to Sustain

Both of the top responses at UBS C were related to the sustainability of change. This is perhaps not surprising, given that UBS C was in the unique position of being involved in maintenance of accreditation (“continuous review”) at the time of this study - it had been 10 years since initial accreditation. Seventy-one (71%) percent felt that, while accreditation may have fostered continuous improvement at the time of initial accreditation, it had not been sustained. Furthermore, it may not have been leveraged to the full extent possible at the time: “*we were just a little lackadaisical in terms of making the benefits that are supposed to happen, happen*”. And in the ensuing 10 years, the biggest challenge for continuous improvement was to keep the momentum going without an external accrediting body to apply pressure and demand results. It seems that the focus and urgency that was created around initial accreditation has been simply too difficult to maintain. As several participants noted, in the interim, AACSB has decided to shorten the maintenance period (from 10 years to 5); and they are hopeful that this would facilitate improvement that is truly *continuous*. As the interviewees described,

Yes it did, at the time [contribute to continuous improvement]. But I would say that the system at the time, though, was such that, we fell into...the tenure period was just too long. So, the new system is much better. With the new system, you are obliged to make annual reports. You're obliged to set annual goals and everything and report on them at the end of the year.

...because the forces of inertia are really, really strong...

As another interviewee pointed out, continuous quality improvement requires sustained, deliberate attention, including the dedication of resources to monitor its impact:

...we need to allocate someone to do this ...It's not something that can be done on an ad hoc basis. Like assessment of learning – it's not something that the task force comes up with this recommendation and then it is the end. It's something that we have to monitor on a constant basis. And make sure that all new courses meet that, and we are continuing to meet our assessment of learning objectives. So, it becomes an ongoing process. But that's what quality control is – it's an ongoing process.

In the area of course curricula, however, four respondents (57%) at UBS C pointed out that accreditation has *not* stimulated ongoing quality improvement or major revisions (except for adjustments made prior and during initial accreditation). For example, there has been a proliferation of graduate courses over the 10 years which will need to be reviewed during the maintenance process. In the respondents' own words,

...our school certainly became quite lethargic over the years in terms of curriculum planning... the last time that we had a major undergraduate curriculum revision was 10 years ago.

...The planning process that you are supposed to implement, including strategic planning, curriculum planning...etc. I mean certainly, curriculum planning didn't happen....

As mentioned earlier, the participants expressed a great deal of optimism about the current AACSB reaccreditation process and hope that it will be easier to sustain continuous improvement over time. Partly, this optimism is due to the shortened AACSB review period, partly it is due to new AOL standards and focus on outcomes, and partly this is due to the concerted, participative approach which is being taken to manage the change (i.e., AACSB accreditation maintenance) this time around. In their own words,

...now with the maintenance, with the AOL, that is a direct quality measure because those are actually the outcomes...so if we start to get to outcomes, that will stimulate changes and that is a whole new thing...I can see that already.

So I think that the changes by the AACSB (in terms of more frequent reporting of information) would contribute to faculty administration thinking more about continuous quality improvement.

Internally Driven

None of the respondents (0%) at UBS B felt that the AACSB accreditation process promotes continuous improvement. However, the school *has improved*, continuously, but it is internally driven; and the Dean was identified as the prime motivator (67%). Through ambitious goal-setting, high expectations of faculty, successful fundraising, and a focus on rankings, he has spurred the business school on to remarkable achievements over the last 8 years – striving to reach their goal of becoming a world-class business school. In the participants' own words,

From what I've seen, it truly is Dean B and his vision - and his wanting to provide an outstanding business education. That's what I see as the driver for the need to continuously improve the curriculum, the need to continuously strive for better and better applicants and quality students. I have never been in a meeting where the accreditation came up as 'that's one of the things that we have to do...'

Well, we've done a lot of improvement at the school over the years, but not because of anything that's coming from the outside...I think that the rate of improvement that is going on here is just way off the charts. So, I don't think that it is the outside bodies (like accreditation) that is doing...

The rankings have served as a lynchpin for Dean B's ambitious mission and strategies. As stated in their 5 year plan, the UBS B's goal was to “*place among the top 20 business schools worldwide by the end of the planning period (2004)*”. With many diverse elements to the school's competitive strategy, the rankings have been a tangible measure of progress; and they have been a rallying point for staff and faculty alike. As one participant explained,

I think what's driven it is the fact that we want to be one of the top business schools in the world. That's what's driving it, and that's our mission.

Negative Responses

Similar to UBS B, many participants at School D responded negatively or ambiguously to the question about continuous improvement (83%). Among the skeptics, one felt that it was too soon to say whether continuous improvement had taken place. This participant felt that once *re-accreditation* had occurred, then they would be able to ascertain the degree to which improvements had actually been implemented. Two others referred to the business school's current practices of review and decision-making; and they did not feel that the AACSB process had prompted any change in “*institutionalized practice*”. As they described:

... I don't think that we did anything different about solving problems before versus after. I think that we always had review and follow-up mechanisms on problems and we do now, so I don't see anything that is different.

... in order for you to have continuous improvement, you want to have that as an institutionalized practice. Right? We don't just say 'continuous improvement' and pretend that everybody is going to do it, without any kind of support or without any kind of feedback to help them with continuous improvement. Continuous improvement necessarily suggests that the individuals and the enterprise itself is constantly involved in reflective behaviours, in fact demonstrating their proclivity to being a learning organization. And I just don't see that here.

Another pointed out that AACSB accreditation is not “*something that impacts them on a daily basis.*” This participant speculated that perhaps “*the level of internalization*” was not there because of the way in which the process had been managed: faculty members' ownership over the process and degree of engagement in the process had been fairly low. As he described,

...if you went around and surveyed most of the faculty in this building, they would have the same response. It's not something that impacts them on a daily basis.

Organizational Learning

Respondents were also asked about organizational learning (OL) as a potential enabling consequence of accreditation. They were asked to discuss the degree to which AACSB accreditation promoted OL, (if at all), and if so, how. The summarized results are presented in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 below. Table 6.2 identifies the four most common responses for those who said “yes”; and Table 6.3 summarizes the five most frequent responses for those who said “no”. Please note that noncommittal responses are included in both; therefore, the results add to more than 100%. (Refer to Appendix N for details.)

Positive Responses

The greatest number of positive responses was evident at UBS A (70%). However, the strength of the responses was not high – the top four themes were only “moderately” or “slightly” present. Also worth noting is the lack of decisiveness – whereas participants were quite definite in responding to the question about continuous improvement, many were not willing to commit strongly to either side of the fence when asked about OL (i.e., they equivocated on their responses). Even those who said “yes” often qualified their responses. (Also worth noting is that administrators were more positive in their responses (100% said “yes” or “did not answer”).) As exemplified by these comments,

Yes, I think so. I mean, we're really, I mean, it's interesting...It probably has. If I sat down and thought about it, I would probably draw a connection.

I think that the process has contributed to – I mean, we now take it into account every time that we think about new programs, new courses – so there is a process...

Likewise, at UBS C, those who said “yes” did not do so convincingly. They responded with “*I don’t know*”, “*it is a conditional yes*” and “*I think that it is spotty*”. School D was similar; and UBS B respondents simply said “no”.

Table 6.2 Organizational Learning -Affirmative Responses

<i>Does accreditation contribute to organizational learning?</i>	A	B	C	D
YES (or noncommittal)	70%	0%	57%	50%
Alignment with Mission	⊗			
Approach to Change/ Decision-making	○			
Change in Mindset	○			○
Catalyst for Change	○		●	

Table 6.3 Organizational Learning – Negative Responses

<i>Does accreditation contribute to organizational learning?</i>	A	B	C	D
NO (or noncommittal)	60%	100%	86%	100%
Application of OL to Academic Institution	●		⊗	⊗
OL is internally driven		●		⊗
Lack of Sustainability	○		●	
Individual vs. Organizational Learning	○		○	○
Lack of Engagement	○			⊗

Legend and Decision Rules

Symbol	Meaning	Evidence
●●	Very Strongly Present	The strong majority of respondents (>70%)
●	Strongly Present	✓✓✓ - 3 or more (>40%)
⊗	Moderately Present	✓✓ - ✓✓✓ (30%+)
○	Slightly Present	✓✓ or ✓ (and validated with documentation)

At all three UBSs (A, C, and D) the themes which emerged were similar to those of continuous improvement; however, the participants felt that any contribution which accreditation may have made to organizational learning has been relatively limited – in breadth, scope, or duration. At UBS A, however, the responses were generally more positive. The most common response at UBS A related to the fact that accreditation prompted a strategic planning process that clarified the mission, set ambitious “stretch” targets for the school, and ensured alignment with the school’s programs. Accreditation was also seen to contribute to the introduction of systematic processes of critical review and analysis for decision making - data gathering, analysis, and discussion – both at the program level as well as the strategic level. (“Data” included data from many sources - competitor, alumni, employer and customer data.) According to one participant,

...generally speaking, that is a question that is top of mind when we are looking at any change internally. ‘How does it relate to AACSB accreditation?’ ‘How does it relate to our mission?’ ‘How will it relate to the best possible use of resources to achieve this overall objective?’

Accreditation was also identified as a stimulus for change, one which motivated discussion and analysis of other areas of the school as well as the introduction of new programs (e.g., adoption of the AACSB Beta Gamma Sigma program and a dedicated career centre). UBS C also mentioned this aspect – that accreditation was a catalyst of change, particularly with maintenance of accreditation and the “*true assurance of quality aspects*” that it was perceived to be ushering in.

Several participants mentioned a “change in mindset” brought about by accreditation (at both UBS A and D). At the former, participants referred to two aspects: 1) an increased focus on performance management and “the customer”, and 2) the

beginnings of a research-intensive culture. School D referred only to the latter, as exemplified by this participant's remarks:

In terms of research culture and things, I think that once you get it going and there is some momentum, I think that the momentum continues, but there are a lot of external and internal rewards in the university system for the people who are research intensive – the conferences, the recognition from peers and the whole excitement routine. So, we probably have a few more of those change agents now than we did before and they are a little better funded and recognized than they were before and they create momentum...

Negative Responses

In general, across all UBS's, there were more negative or skeptical responses than positive. The theme most frequently mentioned related to the overall relevance of organizational learning (OL) in an academic institution - does it apply in this context? Respondents from UBSs A, C and D posed this question. As they described, unlike in the private sector, (where the concept of OL was first conceived), university and faculty leadership do not have the same powers to effect change:

It doesn't work in a school. Because you're managing...if there are 100 professors, you are managing 100 individual stars who want to be treated as such...so it's negotiation...the levels of decisions are far removed from the Dean.

Furthermore, there is an academic socialization process which encourages independent “academic entrepreneurship” - not team-work, experimentation, knowledge transfer, or risk-taking, the types of practices in which learning organizations engage. As this participant observed, seldom do academics even think about the actual “management” of the faculty per se, nor are they trained in these management practices:

...faculty are brought up through a system, right from when they first start as undergrad students, until they're finished their PhD., that really is a black box. They don't understand, they don't concern themselves with, they don't think about the management processes. Basically, they focus their attention on the research and teaching that they have prepared themselves over many years to do. And except that, part of the job, is administrative work...

In contrast, as mentioned above, some participants *did* feel that accreditation served as a lever to bring about learning and change (or at least had the *potential* to be). The challenge was whether this change became institutionalized, whether it was disseminated throughout the faculty, and whether it could be sustained over time. In general, the respondents felt that it had not reached its potential. For example, in UBS A, despite any changes that came about in terms of data use/knowledge management for informed decision-making, the school did not necessarily seem to capture this information - for sharing, learning, and future use. As this faculty member observed:

But learning means that you retain it, so I don't know if ...I don't get a sense that we continually update our files on what our competitors are doing or our other undergrad programs are doing... that's the whole idea of the dissemination – people should know what is going on.

Another at UBS A agreed that dissemination and sustainability is an issue: “...*the faculty was mobilized when it happened, and now, nobody even talks about it anymore, we have forgotten about it...*” The Dean was specifically asked for his thoughts on this topic, and how far he felt that the change had “penetrated” the faculty. His perception was that, although they have communicated regularly, (providing progress reports on the strategic plan – of which accreditation was a part), he was not confident that the faculty members were necessarily fully engaged, interested, or attentive. But he did feel that, over time, their communication had raised the level of trust:

But basically, what is has done, [i.e., progress reports] I think if you talk to faculty, they are confident that the school is heading in the right direction, that they trust us to make the kinds of decisions that are right for them.

Similarly, at UBS C, the participants felt that any signs of organizational learning which may have come about due to initial accreditation did not become embedded in the

mindset or culture. The changes which came about were primarily short term, responding to the immediate requirements of accreditation (e.g., coverage ratios, intellectual contributions, minor curriculum modifications, faculty qualifications). While accreditation had the potential to stimulate large scale OL, it did not. Why? This was attributed primarily to change resistance and the length of time between accreditation visits. In the participants' words,

But then when they realize that they won't be reevaluated or checked on for 5 or 10 years, there is a tendency to relax, like our students, when we test them, after the testing they relax. But that isn't the intent of the AACSB – they want schools to continue in that process and the accreditation is the start of the process.

It could, over a period of time, influence the culture. But I'm not too sure, you know... in the short term, it has an impact. But if you know academic faculty, they are really hard to change what they do. So, you know, you have to drag them, kicking and screaming to any changes that you want.

As mentioned above, the participants were overwhelmingly positive that maintenance of accreditation (particularly AOL) promises to drive more ongoing change, and possibly facilitate OL. As their comments indicate, they believe that accreditation maintenance holds much possibility in this regard:

I think that it will [i.e., with maintenance of accreditation] and I think that it should... as I've discovered more about it, I realize what it can do. That, to me, that is the reason for actually doing it. I truly believe that...

I think that it could do more...yeh, I think that it will...

Once again, UBS B was different. When asked about organizational learning, the respondents were unanimous: all participants strongly felt that the school was a learning organization; however, they did not feel that AACSB accreditation had contributed to this mindset of inquiry. Consistent with their comments about continuous improvement, most

of the participants attributed the school's progress to the Dean, his leadership, a set of ambitious goals and a deliberate strategy on how to get there:

It trickles from Dean B down...He is coach and quarterback...he is doing it at 30,000 feet...

I would say that anything that has gone on has been driven by the senior management team and by Dean B's thinking, foresight, strategy and how that trickles down...

I think that there is a tremendous desire to make significant changes in all sorts of things and it is an internally generated thing...I mean, this isn't some outside accreditation body that is telling us that we should be on our toes and thinking about improvement...

They described UBS B as a learning environment, one in which there is a culture of experimentation and team work. Administrators described how there is a high degree of mutual respect between members of the faculty and administration; it is non-hierarchical and they are treated as equal partners in developing, growing, and managing the school. New ideas are exchanged freely and innovation is encouraged. Furthermore, it is data-driven – data is constantly being collected to assist in decision-making. As the participants described the culture,

... having smart people... with lots of ideas, very creative. We get surveys from students that help drive the specifics about what we do to provide a better experience. And so there is feedback information coming from a lot of different angles that support the decision-making that we have...

...professional staff here are highly valued...there is a really strong level of respect there which I wouldn't say that I have experienced in other places...

A few participants at UBS D also attributed changes in the culture to the personality and focus of the Dean – not necessarily to accreditation. While Dean D may have used accreditation as “lever”, it was his style, priorities and strategic direction that brought about the change in culture. While he had a strong focus on research, in contrast,

the current Dean has a more balanced, participative approach; and at least one participant felt that he is helping to foster a culture of OL. In two participants' words,

I would put it more on the personality of the Deans than I would on accreditation. Dean D probably used it as a lever to make us move in the direction that he was comfortable with. He was a very, very research-intensive person himself... So, this [new] Dean is probably more balanced and has an approach that is more balanced.

I would say that the Faculty of Management as a whole, particularly with our current Dean has that mindset, [i.e., organizational learning], but it has nothing to do with accreditation though...it's personal to the Dean. He is very is stakeholder-inclusive...

Summary

Overall, what did the results say in terms of AACSB accreditation and its enabling consequences? In short, the results were mixed. There was a fair degree of variability across schools, with UBS A being the most positive (70% felt that accreditation had prompted continuous improvement) and UBS B being the least (0% felt that it contributed to CI or OL). Participants, across all schools, were more likely to feel that accreditation promoted continuous improvement (CI) than organizational learning (OL) (CI elicited stronger affirmative responses and fewer noncommittal/ambiguous responses and issues or qualifications). Many of the themes which emerged were similar for both questions – at some schools, accreditation promoted an increased focus on performance management, research, and quality. Some participants felt that it acted as a catalyst to change, prompted a review of the school's mission/vision, (and alignment of strategic priorities), as well as a change in mindset. However, any resultant changes in practice were difficult to sustain over time and required a concerted effort to engage a greater number of stakeholders. Several participants also wondered if the concept of OL was fully relevant and attainable in a university setting.

Constraining Consequences

The participants were then asked two questions about the potentially constraining consequences of accreditation. First, they were asked, in general, whether they found, “*in any way*”, that the accreditation process was constraining. Later in the interview they were asked whether, overall, they felt that accreditation was more “enabling” or more “constraining”. That is, in which direction does the balance tip? For both of these questions, the participants were asked to explain their responses.

Introduction

There was a wide range of responses to both questions. For question #1, the responses were summarized into six response “types” (refer to Table 6.4); these are discussed first below. For question #2, an overall rating was assigned (see Table 6.5); and these findings are discussed next. For detailed responses, refer to Appendix O.

Table 6.4 – Constraining Consequences of Accreditation

Question #1: “Have you found that, in any way, the accreditation process is constraining?”			
RESPONSE	GENERAL PERSPECTIVE		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
YES	1. NECESSARY EVIL Yes, but... Constraints are <i>good</i> - they “force us to do the right thing”...	2. IRRELEVANT Yes, but... Not to us...Possibly to others?	3. CONSTRAINING Yes...Restricts organizational actions in a <i>negative</i> way.
NO	4. ENABLING Not constraining... “helps us recognize and define what we need to get it right”	5. IRRELEVANT No impact on us... Possibly to others?	6. IRRELEVANT No impact - an irrelevant process.

Constraining Consequences - Positive

In response to question #1, “*Have you found that, in any way, the accreditation process is constraining?*” respondents answered in one of six ways. These response types are depicted in Table 6.4. “Yes” responses could be positive, negative or neutral in their perspective; and “no” responses could also be positive, negative or neutral. For responses that were generally positive in nature, there were two cells in which these could fall - cell #1 (“Necessary Evil”) or cell #4 (“Enabling”). In cell #1, for example, participants felt that accreditation was, in fact, constraining insofar as it places limits on organizational actions, however, it is primarily positive because it can force the school to “*do the right thing*”. At UBS A, for example, the majority of responses fell here (70%). Participants felt that accreditation was restrictive, but primarily in a positive way: “*Absolutely, absolutely*”; “*...and it is meant to be constraining, in fact.*” As they explained further, AACSB accreditation has changed the nature of some committee discussions at the UBS – it comes up fairly commonly now in discussions about program changes or new ideas. It creates a new mode of management, one which is more reliant on data - performance metrics are identified, monitored, and tracked. While this focus on performance management can be constraining, at the same time, it also provides an opportunity to benchmark against others and to discuss feedback. As the respondents commented,

...it forces us to keep information and to manage information and prepare reports and so on and so forth...

Well, apart from all the things - of making sure that you are measuring, you're reporting, you're benchmarking – all of those things are constraints in terms of, to start off they require time, they require resources...

It comes up now, in discussions that we hear...so in that sense, it colours a lot of what we do in terms of decision-making on program revisions, or changes, additions, you know – ‘would AACSB – would this be good or not’?

Respondents at UBS C were also primarily positive in their perspective as well, with an equal representation in both cells #1 and 4. That is, respondents were generally positive about accreditation, whether they answered “yes” or “no”. The most commonly mentioned constraint was around staffing (coverage ratios) and curriculum changes; and it was noted that the former can have a fairly strong impact on the school’s “bottom line”. On the other hand, this same (negative) effect can be an extremely useful tool when negotiating for additional resources. It provides the Dean with strong leverage when dealing with central administration – to acquire additional resources or to “lock in” existing resources in times of fiscal restraint. As the participants described this double-edged sword:

I don't know if you are aware, but we have depended heavily on part-time faculty over the years. We have to manage that much more carefully. You have to watch your night ratios, your day ratios, your core ratios....so it makes it difficult. On the other hand, I believe... it has been a good tool to approach the highest administration in the university, saying 'we need more budget for full-time faculty.'

The one constraint that has been positive for us has been the teaching ratios – we've always been able to use that to get the numbers of hirings up. ...to make sure that you can lock in your resources and if you fall behind a certain level in terms of academically qualified people relative to the number of students you have, you can use that as your lever.

While the responses at UBS D were mixed, almost half (50%) of the respondents fell into cell # 4, “Enabling”. This group of participants viewed accreditation primarily in a positive light. As one participant noted,

I don't really see it as a constraint. I see it more as something that helps us recognize and define what we need to do to get it right ...and I wouldn't use the term 'constraint' for that.

Another felt that constructive changes had resulted in terms of the graduate admissions process:

...it has been useful in a couple of ways. Because of the external pressure in terms of the admissions process for some of our programs...we have had to have a more transparent evaluation of prior learning, and its something that we want anyways...

Constraining Consequences –Neutral

Cells #2 and #5 in Table 6.4 represent the neutral responses. Responses in these categories corresponded to those participants who felt that the process was irrelevant to them, but they did not inherently feel negatively about the consequences of accreditation overall (i.e., it wasn't a "bad" process). They felt that, whether accreditation was constraining or not, basically, it was "irrelevant" to their school of business. For example, at school B, almost 100% of respondents fell into this category – accreditation was seen to be a non-issue, immaterial to their UBS. It did not affect decision-making in any way, it did not come up in meetings, and they were unaware of any constraints that it placed on organizational policies, procedures, or practices. However, consistent with their responses to other questions, they did think that it might be relevant (and possibly constraining) to *other* schools.

Constraining Consequences – Negative

One respondent, however, at UBS B did point out some negative constraining effects - he noted that accreditation was restrictive insofar as it places limits on staffing and/or curriculum development (e.g., the degree to which non-Ph.D.'s can be used as faculty). As this participant indicated, the repercussions are that it reduces the potential for business-academic interaction and cross-fertilization.

... what I find constraining is the percentage of Ph.D.'s teaching in the program...I mean, it depends. They are more useful in certain parts of the curriculum. I mean if you are teaching business economics, generally you can't go and use a lot of adjuncts, or whatever, but if you're teaching accounting you can, if you're teaching finance you can. Even marketing, you can bring in

occasional people from downtown advertising agencies and things. And that, I think, is very valuable in terms of creating a dialogue with the business community, making sure that what we are teaching is fresh and up to date. And also, making sure that the faculty is up to date!

This same participant likened accreditation to a “*straightjacket*”, one which dictates strict limits on everything – from the type of library collection that should be housed in the business school to the percentage of Ph.D.’s and the amount of contact time. However, he argued that these limits don’t “*indicate the quality of the education*” - AACSB isn’t measuring the intangibles, nor is it measuring true outcomes. Rather, it is there “*just to make sure that everyone gets the minimum in terms of the tangible things.*”

Fifty percent of respondents at UBS D also felt that the consequences were constraining, (cell #3, Table 6.4), insofar as it places limits on organizational actions in some way *that is perceived to be negative*. The most commonly mentioned constraints were restrictions placed on programs - program content or admissions procedures, staffing and/or hiring academically qualified staff to meet AACSB standards. In fact, this was the most consistent constraint identified across all schools. Notwithstanding the respondents’ overall perspective, (positive, negative or neutral), 49% of all respondents mentioned some type of constraint in the areas of program/curriculum management.

Participants at UBS’s A, C and D (19% overall) also described how the overall approach of the AACSB – ‘one size fits all’, ‘the American way is best’ – is unduly restrictive and conformist. (Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, the participants, in general, felt that the AACSB had “loosened up” in recent years and become more flexible in their approach.) The most vocal critics were those who were involved in teaching or managing the accounting program, as AACSB standards can necessitate that students take extra

courses in order to meet the requirements of their accounting designations. As explained by one participant,

...they require that a certain number of the credits be taken outside of the business school - they have a very distinct model that they think is "best" and you must conform to that model or you will not be accredited. And, particularly for the accounting majors, that is a problem because when the accounting majors come out they have as a goal, to do the professional accounting designation. And all of the professional bodies require students to take a certain number of credit hours in various topics...

And as this participant describes more generally,

...it does almost force a cookie cutter approach I would say to education. They aren't really all that prepared to look at, for example, curricula that are very different... and these are all American Deans, and I think that they are very trapped inside the traditional way of thinking about business education...

Overall – Constraining or Enabling?

In the second interview question about the constraining consequences of accreditation, participants were asked, “*On the whole, overall, do you find that accreditation is ‘enabling’ or ‘constraining’?*” (i.e., *Where does the balance tip?*). The findings are summarized in Table 6.5 and explained below. (Refer to Appendix P for detail.)

Overall, at two of the four UBS’s (A, and C), the respondents were positive about the consequences of accreditation. That is, overall, they felt that it was enabling. While they acknowledged constraints that the AACSB has placed on the management of the school, they insisted that, for the most part, accreditation was useful and beneficial. In the words of two participants at UBS C:

I don't find the constraints particularly harsh. I think it gives us a little structure and stops us from doing things that maybe we shouldn't do. No, on the balance it is positive.

It has been constraining in a positive way.

Table 6.5- Overall Responses – Enabling or Constraining

Question #2: “On the whole, <i>overall</i> , do you find that accreditation is ‘enabling’ or ‘constraining’?”		
School	Combined Response	Comments/Rationale
A	Positive - Enabling	Positive, particularly as viewed by administrators. <i>... We haven’t really drastically changed what we were doing before, we just made sure that we were doing what we were supposed to do...</i>
B	Neutral	Neutral - No impact on them, but would likely be enabling for lower-tier universities or for those that need external standards: <i>... all those low rung schools are essentially local schools so they buy into accreditation and are living up to these requirements. So to them AACSB is enabling...I honestly don’t think the same is true here...</i>
C	Positive - Enabling	Positive – all who responded felt that it was positive overall (equally by faculty and admin.) (note: many faculty had also previously worked in admin roles): <i>...I think that the balance has been a positive contribution to what we do...</i>
D	Neutral to Slightly Positive	Neutral to Slightly Positive <i>...I don’t really see it as a constraint. I see it more as something that helps us recognize and define what we need to do to get it right...</i> <i>...Again, I have not been affected by the AACSB, really. None of the constraints has been binding...</i>

Similarly, at UBS A, respondents felt that “*in a sense, it forces us to do the right thing*”.

One participant also provided an example of how accreditation served as a powerful enabler, prompting the school of management, (particularly the administration), to make some very tough decisions; it served as a rallying point around a collective goal for which the faculty and administration could put aside their differences:

*It was a great victory and source of satisfaction when accreditation was obtained...In a sense, it was just the **process** of getting accreditation itself had a positive impact on the school.*

At UBS D, the net effect was less potent – on average, the consequences were neutral to slightly enabling. There was only one participant who felt strongly about accreditation being overly rigid. Others were slightly positive or neutral. However, even those participants who viewed accreditation as primarily “*enabling*” were lukewarm in their responses. One felt that the term “*enabling*” was too strong, preferring the word

“facilitating”. This respondent felt that accreditation was: *“Facilitating getting it right, as opposed to facilitating getting it done”*. In other words, the school has always been successful in getting things done, but were they the right things? And were they done in the right way? This is where accreditation helped – it prompted reflection and review. Another participant felt that accreditation was “helpful”, but primarily for faculty and external stakeholders,

So, I think that people here feel that it is important, and certainly our advisory board thought that it was an important quality stamp for the school...So I think externally, it is good. Whether it makes much of a difference internally, I'm less sure about.

Finally, there was UBS B. In keeping with their other responses, the net effect was perceived to neutral or slightly negative for them (irrelevant/no impact), but enabling for *other* schools. As this sentiment was expressed by two participants,

I think it is enabling for schools that need to have external standards (e.g., Mississippi State, it would be helpful to read about what other schools are doing) – so for them it is enabling...I mean, all these low rung schools are essentially local schools so they buy into accreditation and are living up to these requirements. So to them AACSB is enabling, no question about it. I honestly don't think the same is true here...

I would say it depends entirely upon the University... It's probably more constraining for us; and it's more enabling for somebody like [a lower tier university]...

Summary

In summary, where does the balance tip? UBS A and C had more positive responses than UBS B or D. Nevertheless, across all of the UBS's, the overall response fell on the positive side. While many participants acknowledged the ways in which accreditation constrained organizational action, (e.g., teaching ratios, curricula), they also felt that it was a “necessary evil”, to force them to “do it right” (review/assess their

programs, identify standards of performance, ensure alignment with the mission/vision, and make certain that decisions are data-driven). The exception was UBS B. The participants at this UBS felt that while accreditation was irrelevant to them, it might be useful for smaller schools.

One participant noted, however, that the difficult part of accreditation comes now, after the initial process is complete. What happens in the aftermath? As this individual notes, accreditation continues to direct organizational action, by ensuring that ongoing business school management is deliberate, rigorous, reflective, and improvement-oriented:

The consequences of once it is achieved, maybe it doesn't look as exciting anymore. This is where it still has its role because, again, it requires us to be careful about doing the right thing – consulting the right stakeholders, keeping abreast of changes in the field, being able to continuously improve our program offerings, our research, and so on and so forth...

Other Consequences

Participants were also asked about *other* potential consequences of accreditation. The queries focused on two main areas: 1) formalization (the degree to which formalized work processes, procedures, and/or practices are documented and used); and 2) perceptions of legitimacy. While formalization has the potential to be either enabling or constraining, it was anticipated that legitimacy would have constraining effects. Both topics were explored with the participants.

Formalization

In terms of formalization, participants were asked to rate the UBS with respect to its current levels of formalization (high, medium, low). Then they were asked to explain

their responses and describe whether they felt that this had changed due to accreditation.

The results are summarized in Table 6.6 and details are available in Appendix Q.

Table 6.6 – Formalization – Summary of Responses

School & Current Level of Formal.	Areas of Impact						
	<i>Did Formalization Increase?</i>	Increased focus on performance metrics	Improved data collection, management & access (systems)	Learning Objectives	Increased documentation /improved communication & reporting	More attention to existing processes and application	Already have formalized systems in place
A MED-HIGH	YES* 60% (Higher) NO 40%	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	
B MED	NO 100%						✓✓✓
C MED-HIGH	YES 17% (Higher) NO 83%			✓	✓		✓✓✓✓✓
D MED-LOW	NO 100%		✓				✓
TOTAL		2	6	2	3	2	9

* Each ✓ represents one mention of this theme by one participant. Participants are only counted once.

Current Level of Formalization

Participants from all four schools, on average, felt that the current level of formalization was “medium”. In responding to this question, however, they focused on many different aspects of university administration. At UBS A, for example, some participants focused on personnel administration and the collective agreement (how it is highly formalized and leaves “*very little room to maneuver*”); others discussed the governance structure (how it is committee-based, multi-leveled and highly bureaucratic); and others spoke more about research (how it used to be “*non-existent*” in terms of

formal documented expectations or results). These first two themes – personnel administration and the governance structure - were also mentioned at UBSs B, C, and D, to varying degrees. At UBS B, participants also mentioned that the rankings, (e.g., Financial Times, Business Week), have served as a driver for implementing formalized systems for tracking performance metrics; and at UBS C, they noted that the provincial government's institutional self-appraisal process has contributed to the school's fairly high level of formalization. As the participants described,

No, there has been no change [i.e., in the level of formalization]. It is driven completely by the collective agreement. All of our procedures - written down procedures - stem from the processes in the collective agreement – that is the number one governance instrument. That is the same for job descriptions.

...but we were fairly formal to start – most larger schools are formal – because we have a self-evaluation for programs every 7 years – the Quebec Government – so we evaluate our programs every 7 years with an external examiner.

I would say, if you think about all of the committees and the meetings and the reporting that Universities typically do, it would be hard to think about it [i.e., formalization] being increased. I don't know, to be honest...I would say that I have big doubts that it changed things, really...and we have the collective agreement, it is 400 or 500 pages long – it is ridiculously comprehensive...

Change in Formalization

The participants were then asked whether they felt that the level of formalization had changed after accreditation. UBS A had the strongest positive response, with 60% stating that they felt it was higher due to accreditation. The most frequently mentioned response was performance management, particularly in terms of instituting information systems and formal processes to help with data collection, tracking and management. As one interviewee explained,

...we keep much more documentation and much more data because we know that we have to go through this. And so you have to build a data collection mechanism

and team and stream – we do much more student satisfaction data and course coverage data. So, we are more focused on performance metrics.

As a result of more formalized processes, and improved data/knowledge management, several participants felt that communication and decision-making had improved. In their words,

...we are able to make much more informed decisions now - because the data is in databases now, instead of just being in somebody's office. I think that there is far less risk in our faculty now...

Yes - which is a good thing. Because it improves communication and you have things in writing... So the history now is really good. And now that all these processes are all in place, it allows us to access information that perhaps that we didn't have before, didn't get at before...

Interestingly enough, there was no difference between administrators and faculty in their responses to this question. In fact, two of the administrators who were quite involved in the accreditation process felt that it had not changed. As they expressed,

We haven't really drastically changed what we were doing before, we just made sure that we were doing what we were supposed to do.

I don't think that it has changed a great deal. I think that it has strengthened the structure that we had, allowed us to maybe take the structures that we had put in place more seriously...It has forced us to really give more priority to these processes and actually implementing them rather than going through the steps.

These two quotations were similar to the sentiments expressed at other schools.

That is, the majority of respondents at UBS's B and C felt that many formalized processes already existed, *prior* to accreditation; hence, formalization levels had not really changed (accreditation had no impact in this regard.) In the case of the former, (UBS B), the rankings process was considered to be the main driver. At UBS C, participants mentioned the union and other accrediting bodies as motivators. As the participants described,

One of the advantages that we have is that those systems are already in place, to provide information for the ranking services as well...what we do here is we look at the strictest one to make sure that we adhere to that one, and that takes care of the others.

We have processes for appointments of faculty, tenure, promotion, all of that is in place. Standards for admission and evaluation of students, they were there. Nothing in there was created because of accreditation. The only thing was the way to collect and document available information.

Participants from UBS D did not feel that formalization had changed either (100% said ‘no’). Similar to the sentiment expressed in the quotation above, any changes that did occur were related to changes in the way that information was collected, to satisfy AACSB requirements. Furthermore, they felt that the sphere of impact was small – faculty were the least likely to observe changes of this nature. As they explained,

Not that has affected me. We have an annual performance reporting system. We have to do some extra forms when they get close to accreditation...but other than that, I haven’t seen anything extra. Now there may well be extra things, but just not in the activities that I have.

I don’t think so, no...To the average faculty member, that wouldn’t be evident, no. If anyone notices a difference, it would be the two or three people who are leading the charge in this...

Summary

Across all four schools, there was general agreement that the current level of formalization in their UBS’s was “medium”. With the exception of UBS A, the majority did not feel that formalization had changed due to accreditation. However, at UBS A, 60% felt that formalization had increased - through an increased emphasis on performance metrics, an improved ability to collect, manage, and report on data, (information systems), and more attention to existing processes and documentation.

Legitimacy

Participants were asked about their perceptions of legitimacy: “*Do you think that accreditation adds to your school’s legitimacy in any way? Please explain.*” The results of the interviews are presented in Table 6.7 and each of the predominant themes is further explained below. Refer to Appendix R for details.

Table 6.7 – Legitimacy: Summary of Responses

Does Accreditation add to your School’s Legitimacy?						
School & Response	Major Themes					
	Increased Pride in School	Not Differentiating or Deterministic	Redundant	AACSB as American	Homogenizing	Reputation/ Marketing / Branding
A 70% YES 20% DK1 10% NO	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
B 43% YES* 43% NO 14% Maybe			✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓✓ - for “smaller schools”
C 100% YES	✓✓		✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
D 67% YES 33% DK1	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	
TOTAL responses	9	5	12	13	6	8

*With reference to smaller schools.

Decision Rules:

✓	One response from one respondent. Respondents only counted once.
DK1	Did Not Answer – the respondent provided a non-committal or ambiguous response.
Note:	N=10 for School A; 7 for School B, 7 for School C, and 7 for School D.

Overall, the majority of participants felt that accreditation adds to their business school’s legitimacy, in some way. The number of affirmative responses was highest at

UBS C (100%), followed by schools A and D (70% and 67% respectively). School B was less positive with responses split equally between ‘yes’ and ‘no’. At all UBSs, when interviewees were asked to elaborate, they offered differing opinions about how *particular stakeholder groups* might view accreditation and legitimacy - faculty members, the university community, the corporate sector, prospective students, or new recruits²⁶. Since these comments correspond to particular themes, they have been integrated into the discussion below. (Refer to Appendix S for more details on stakeholders).

Increased Pride in the School

A number of respondents at UBSs A, C and D felt that accreditation added to perceptions of legitimacy for faculty members in particular. They felt that accreditation had helped to instill a greater level of pride in their UBS. While faculty members at all of these schools knew that their schools were already worthy and eminently “accreditable”, the AACSB provided an external recognition that was nonetheless appreciated. In their own words:

Certainly internally... It is in all of our literature, we are proud of it, it is all on our web...Inside, we know and we are all happy about it.

...you know, we got the morale boost that we absolutely needed – it was real important...so, for us at the time, (it’s not as useful this way anymore), legitimacy, branding, it fed into when we changed our name and everything else...

Participants at two UBSs (C & D) also mentioned that AACSB accreditation served as an important legitimizing force *within* the university environment itself, particularly with senior administration and with other faculties. This was another source of pride for faculty and administrators; and it served to boost the faculty’s bargaining

²⁶ Refer to Appendix S – “Legitimacy – To Whom?” for detailed results by stakeholder group.

power within the university environment. Participants from UBS D reported this result more strongly, but it was also mentioned at UBS C. As they described:

...and the senior management in the University - certainly I would say that it was a feather in our cap when we got the accreditation.

...accreditation reviews are typical in health sciences and the whole crowd, so us going through accreditation and being accredited, it does you good in your status in the university as a whole.

...also for business schools, you can add it's internal too – to the institution – and the reason for it, is that business school faculty or business schools in general, are viewed as being in a professional school, not academic. So, the accreditation process and the emphasis on intellectual contributions and the qualifications of faculty, does help...we have a unit here that is producing, putting more emphasis on publishing...

Within the local community, accreditation served as external recognition that the UBS's were "legitimate" and high quality. Participants at UBS D mentioned that their Board of Advisors was impressed; UBS C mentioned that accreditation established them as a stronger (more legitimate) player/competitor in their local market (first mover advantage). As a participant from UBS D describes,

... a number of our Board of Advisors regard it as very positive - Canadian businessmen - that it is sort of higher education's stamp of approval. No matter what it is, it is a process to have to go through every few years. They like that. Did they give more money because of it? I don't think so!

Not Differentiating or Deterministic

In general, respondents did not feel that accreditation was a differentiating factor in terms of *students'* perceptions of legitimacy, particularly with respect to their decision-making about university education. In most cases, the participants felt that students were unaware of AACSB accreditation and what it meant. As one participant conjectured,

My guess...it would be very unlikely that this [accreditation] would be a deterministic attribute for a student to come here for business because the other attributes are so much more critical. Like can I afford to go away or not? ...do I

want to leave home or not? These are all very significant life things... I think that it would be very low for undergrads here, on deciding to come here. I doubt that they really know what it means or the meaning of it. I would think even the average MBA applicant is probably not thinking about it too much, but a little bit more than undergrads...and the part time MBA is more of a captive market. ...

However, the respondents did make some important distinctions between different student groups. They felt that while accreditation may have no significance to undergraduate students, particularly in a domestic market, they felt that it may have some currency with MBA's (however, the rankings may have overtaken accreditation in importance). Even more so, they felt that, on the international scene, AACSB has increasingly become a recognized symbol of quality (and a potential criterion when students are selecting from a myriad of schools). Therefore, they felt that accreditation did add to perceptions of legitimacy on behalf of *international students*. In the respondents' words,

I don't think that they have a clue what that is about [i.e., undergrad students] ...But for most international students, though, for most, that is one of the criteria that will come up...about the same for all programs...

I would expect that the accreditation has no impact on them at all, unless they are international students...

I think if you were to walk into my 4th year commerce class and ask them if they knew we were accredited, most of them would say, 'no idea, what does that mean?' the MBA's would at least understand the brand recognition thing. But whether many of them choose us because of that....?

I think that the rankings have supplanted any kind of accreditation "body" - the rankings provide information that students are looking for and the internet has so much information....

Interestingly enough, however, the respondents indicated that they were unaware of any “hard” data to support their opinions – only one school had surveyed students specifically on their perceptions of AACSB accreditation²⁷.

Redundant

Among the participants who were non-committal or disagreed, (i.e., felt that accreditation had *not* increased legitimacy), they argued that Canadian business schools are *already* legitimate, that the quality is already high, and it is regulated by provincial government bodies - AACSB is therefore unnecessary and redundant. They explained how the American system, (where AACSB has its roots), is significantly different than ours, and requires a separate, professional accreditation body to set consistent standards of excellence:

Now, the American system, the way that they handle and accredit their programs, state-wide, nation-wide, is not the same as what we do in the education system in Canada. We have a very strongly legitimized system province-wide. Our Ontario Council is a very strong accreditation body...

...but I think that we all know that the US probably has some of the best Universities in the world and some of the worst. So quality control is probably more critical in the US than in other countries where you have a smaller number of Universities and perhaps there is a longer history...

However, in terms of international schools, the participants felt that AACSB accreditation does add legitimacy – particularly in “uncharted waters”. For example, when determining whether to forge partnerships with certain schools or whether to accept applicants from relatively unknown places, accreditation provides assurance that certain

²⁷ Their survey data showed that accreditation was among the lowest 5-10 factors out of 24 in terms of undergraduates’ decisions to attend University X. The top were: 1) “Academic Reputation”, 2) “University Reputation”, or 3) “Campus Life” (out of town students) and 3) employability or particular programs (local students).

quality standards have been attained. As two participants explained this viewpoint:

... Where you might get close to that is that there are about 10,000 business schools in the world – the European model is private – so if we decide to do our MBAs at a business school in Barcelona or China for example - legitimacy there is – ‘what are you really buying?’ Here we are starting to see a little bit of that....or the legitimacy with the US schools. So I don’t think that we really face that.

But this is quality control at the international level...internationally recognized. How do we know if a school in Europe or Cairo or the far east... ‘oh, you’re not accredited, ok sorry’so in that sense it is good.

Homogenizing

Another issue which was raised by six participants at three schools (A, C and D), was that accreditation has the potential to “homogenize” business schools, discouraging creativity and innovation if they are forced to comply with the same set of standards. As expressed by one of the participants,

...it’s isomorphic pressures - that stems from the quality movement...because if you look at the macro environment, at what is really driving AACSB it’s this... the emphasis on data driven stuff – the popular press is doing it like Macleans, US News and World Report, and the other kinds of rankings like the Financial Times...

AACSB as American

Related to this concern was the fact that Canadian business schools might become “Americanized”. For most of these participants, however, such fears seem to have been largely allayed by recent changes by the AACSB (mission driven; more flexible process and standards):

... And most of their rules and regulations were very American-oriented...so they quickly changed their tune, or changed their approach, at which point it became more palatable to Canadian institutions.

Reputation/Marketing/Branding

Participants from UBS B felt strongly that accreditation is primarily useful for smaller schools that need to market their programs to build their reputation and help establish their legitimacy. They did not feel that it was necessary for those with a strong reputation (i.e., themselves):

It is something that lends legitimacy to smaller schools and that is why they want it. And it is something that the bigger schools can pretty much ignore...

In fact, they observed that the larger schools which are unaccredited do not appear to be suffering from a lack of legitimacy. As one respondent commented:

But if you look at the reasons why people get into it, I don't think that those reasons apply to them [i.e., larger schools] as much either... I don't think that any of them are having recruiting issues, or fundraising issues, or legitimacy within their university issues.

Participants from UBSs A and C also linked accreditation to marketing and reputation. They described, how, at the time of accreditation, it was a question of differentiating themselves from the competition or ensuring that they were not left behind (“defensive marketing”). As one participant explained, it only adds to your legitimacy, “*up until the point that everyone has it, then no!*”; and as another respondent explained, it is only one piece in the overall legitimacy puzzle:

...in a sense, yes, it does legitimize what the school does...But just to some extent. And I say that because we have other schools, equally good...that don't have accreditation from AACSB, but that doesn't mean that their programs are not legitimate...

Stakeholders

As noted throughout this legitimacy discussion, the participants had different responses depending upon which stakeholder groups were being referenced. Recall that legitimacy refers to “a *generalized* perception or assumption that the actions of an entity

are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). The results indicate that this “generalized perception” is an amalgam of many viewpoints - from very different stakeholders with very different perspectives. For instance, the most important groups in terms of legitimacy, (referenced most frequently by respondents), were “current faculty” and prospective “international students” (particularly graduate students). Twenty-six percent (26%) of respondents across all four schools mentioned that both of these groups could have been influenced by accreditation. That is, the respondents felt that attaining AACSB accreditation would likely have added to the UBS’s legitimacy in the eyes of these stakeholders. There were also participants (10%) who felt that new faculty recruits were influenced by AACSB accreditation as well as the university community and business leaders (e.g., Board of Governors). They did not, however, feel that other stakeholder groups’ perceptions of legitimacy were highly affected by accreditation. This was specifically true of undergraduate students, (prospective and current), who were seen to be largely unaware of AACSB accreditation. The only exception was at UBS A, where they seemed to have focused on educating their current student body about accreditation: at this school, participants felt that both undergraduate and graduate students were aware of, and proud of the AACSB hallmark. (For more detailed comments on each group, refer to Appendix S).

Summary

In summary, the majority of respondents felt that AACSB accreditation added to their legitimacy, (A, C & D) or to that of smaller, “lesser known” universities (UBS B). Primarily, it added to the faculty’s pride in their own UBS, as a symbol of quality

recognized by their peers and colleagues at other UBS's and within their own University community. They also felt that AACSB accreditation added to the business school's legitimacy in the eyes of prospective international students. However, many respondents also pointed out the inherent contradictions of, and issues associated with accreditation. First, they were concerned that it was an American-centric approach to quality, redundant in the Canadian environment where the standard of education is consistent across the country and is monitored and maintained by provincial funding/accreditation bodies. It has the potential to homogenize business school education according to the AACSB's "model". While it may have been pursued for marketing purposes, the differentiating power of AACSB may be limited and/or short-lived as students are unaware of its value or it loses its cache when everyone jumps on board.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented Part B of the multiple case analysis. Whereas Part A addressed the context, accreditation process, drivers and impacts of AACSB accreditation, Part B addressed the consequences, (enabling, constraining, and other), as well as participants' perceptions of different stakeholder groups. In Chapter 7, each of the research questions will be addressed and discussed in light of these findings and the literature on accreditation, institutional theory and evaluation for organizational learning.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter provides a discussion of the key findings of the study. To set the stage, the motivation for the study is reviewed and the research questions guiding the study are revisited. Then, each of the research questions is addressed and the major findings are presented.

Motivation for the Study

The question of AACSB accreditation and its impact on Canadian university business schools has been studied empirically in only a limited fashion. It is largely descriptive and primarily focused on American institutions. Although some quantitative empirical research has been conducted, (e.g., Roller et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2006), it has been fairly broad in scope and limited in depth – focused primarily on survey data from one internal stakeholder group. Moreover, by using large-scale survey methodology, these studies have not uncovered some of the deeper contextual factors which may influence the accreditation process and its outcomes.

Several Canadian authors (Durand & McGuire, 2005; Helms Mills et al., 2006; McKee et al., 2005) have enriched this body of literature, by applying institutional theory to examine the effect of accreditation on Canadian university business schools. Their contribution has been significant – providing a much-needed theoretical perspective as well as an historical analysis of the environment in which this phenomenon has occurred. Their results suggest that Canadian university business schools have been vulnerable to restrictive isomorphic pressures in the organizational field, seeking accreditation to legitimize their educational product and gain competitive advantage. However, a contradictory viewpoint is presented by the literature on evaluation for organizational

learning. By linking accreditation to organizational learning, the *enabling* potential of accreditation is emphasized and the human element further explored. Evaluative inquiry is seen as a means of stimulating learning for individuals, groups, and organizations. Research on evaluation use, process use, and evaluation influence adds further support for this alternative perspective – that accreditation can be an enabler, promoting knowledge-creation for strategic decision making and continuous improvement, and by fostering double loop learning (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Cousins, 2005; Cousins et al., 2004a; Goh et al., 2006; Kirkhart, 2000; Patton, 1998; Preskill, 1994; Preskill & Torres, 1999). This study therefore sought to reconcile these two bodies of literature – both enabling and constraining - by examining, in more depth, the impacts and consequences of AACSB accreditation on four Canadian university business schools.

Overview of the Study

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the consequences of accreditation on Canadian university business schools?
 - a. Does accreditation have an enabling influence on the organization? If so, how?
 - b. Does accreditation promote organizational learning? If so, how?
 - c. Does accreditation have a constraining influence on the organization? If so, how?
2. What are the contextual factors and conditions which influence these potential consequences and how?

A two-phased approach was used to produce answers to these questions. In Phase I, individual case studies were conducted at four Canadian university business schools. This provided an opportunity to gain insight into the impact of accreditation on *individual* business schools and their unique historical, social and cultural contexts. The sources of data were published documents, observations, and interviews conducted with

administrative staff and faculty. A *within* case analysis was then performed. The results were analyzed, summarized, and presented in a draft Case Profile report for each site; and each Case Profile was reviewed and validated by the interview participants.

The validated Case Profile reports comprised the qualitative data set for Phase II. In this phase, a *multiple case* analysis was performed. With the assistance of NVivo7, data was combined, reduced, analyzed and presented in a series of data displays. This analysis resulted in an identification of overarching patterns, areas of similarity and difference. These findings were presented in Chapters 5 & 6.

Discussion of Findings by Research Question

Based on these research findings, in this section each research question is addressed. Once the questions have been discussed, other findings which emerged from the study will also be presented. Throughout, the key findings are summarized in **bold type**.

Research Question 1 – Consequences of Accreditation

The first research question guiding this study was: *What are the consequences of accreditation on Canadian university business schools?* Recall that, in this study, consequences were defined as “participants’ perceptions of the consequences of accreditation *specifically vis a vis enabling or constraining or other* consequences”. The first term, “enabling”, refers to the participants’ perceptions that, due to AACSB accreditation, they have an increased range of options available in the workplace due to positive changes which have occurred. In this study, the researcher was particularly interested in determining whether accreditation promoted enabling effects such as continuous improvement and organizational learning. The second, “constraining

consequences”, refers to the participants’ perceptions that, due to AACSB accreditation, their actions are limited or restricted in any way. This could be due to formal constraints such as new rules, policies and/or procedures which are perceived to be increasingly cumbersome or restrictive, or informal constraints and/or sanctions on their behaviour (e.g., cultural norms, values, expectations). Finally, “other consequences” refers to effects which can be potentially either constraining *or* enabling. In this study, the participants were asked specifically about formalization and legitimacy. Each of these types of consequences will be discussed below.

Enabling Consequences

The results of this study show that **overall, across all four schools, AACSB accreditation was perceived to be enabling or neutral in its effect.** While many participants acknowledged that it could also be constraining in some ways, in general, the participants felt that accreditation forced them to “*do the right thing*”, that it had been constraining “*in a positive way*”. The strong dialectical tension between constraining and enabling components of bureaucracy, (as suggested by Adler and Borys, 1996), was also recognized by the participants and evidenced by their comments. For example, the very same constraints that limited options for staffing and recruiting were also identified as powerful leverage to negotiate with central administration for change. Many also acknowledged that, without accreditation, they would not have been incented to change – it served as a powerful motivator in two of the four schools. (Further discussion of these findings will be provided under “other consequences – formalization”).

Organizational Learning

This research also explored *specific* enabling consequences such as organizational learning, as expressed in Research Question 1b). The participants were therefore asked to respond to two separate queries: 1) *“Do you think that the AACSB accreditation process promotes continuous improvement?”*; and 2) *“Does accreditation promote organizational learning? If so, how?”* The purpose of this double-barreled approach was to tease out the two essential elements of organizational learning (OL), both single loop and double loop learning. Recall that the former refers to learning that is incremental in nature. It consists of the ongoing detection and correction of errors; and it is commonly called “continuous improvement” (CI), generative, or adaptive learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990). The second element, double loop learning, refers to more radical learning processes, whereby individuals question the underlying assumptions or values which form the basis for decision making. This can be achieved through collective reflection and dialogue, whereby the implicit is made explicit and defensive routines are exposed (Argyris & Schon, 1978, 1996; Senge, 1990).

Although the interviewees were asked two separate questions about continuous improvement and organizational learning, the responses were fairly similar, (i.e., the actual themes were analogous, but the strength of responses was significantly less for OL than for CI); for this reason, the results will be combined for discussion purposes. In terms of the affirmative responses, the main themes which emerged can be summarized as: 1) an increased focus on performance management (regular review processes, identification and measurement of performance metrics, alignment with the mission, data-driven decision-making); 2) an increased attention to quality; 3) an increased focus

on research; and 4) a catalyst for change. The first theme was present at UBSs A and C, the second at UBS A, the third at schools C and D, and the last at schools A and C. School B felt that accreditation had not contributed to organizational learning; rather, they felt that the school was *already* operating as a learning organization, which they attributed to the leadership of the new Dean (100% of respondents).

There was a great variation in the strength of the responses between schools for both questions. For continuous improvement and OL, UBS A had by far the largest number of affirmative responses (70% for both questions) and UBS B had the least (0%). However, at UBS A the participants were more likely to equivocate in their responses to OL than to CI (i.e., they said ‘*yes and no*’ or they provided ambiguous responses such as ‘*yes, but...*’). Except for participants at UBS B, there was some discomfort exhibited by respondents at all three schools in making the claim that they were a “learning organization” or that accreditation had contributed to “organizational learning” in their faculty. Furthermore, they pointed out a number of issues associated with organizational learning in their organization and within the university in general. To understand these responses more thoroughly and to provide a comprehensive answer to research question 1b), it is useful to revisit the definition of evaluation for organizational learning.

As stated in Preskill and Torres’ definition, “*evaluative inquiry can facilitate learning at all levels by stimulating the ongoing process of asking questions, the collection and analysis of data, and using what is learned from an inquiry to act on important organizational issues*” (1999, p. 50). The authors also emphasize that OL is a collective learning process, through four primary processes: 1) dialogue, 2) reflection, 3) asking questions, and 4) identifying and clarifying values, beliefs, assumptions and

knowledge. Note the emphasis on *process*. Also note that it is a *collective* process; and to get to double loop learning, step #4 above must be included. Based on the results of this study, it appears that at least some of these criteria were met. For example, at UBSs A, C and D, some participants described how accreditation caused them to question the mission, reflect on their practices, engage in dialogue about performance, and make decisions in a different way (change in mindset). It also promoted strategic alignment (i.e., a reassessment of their goals and strategy and a calibration of decision-making in line with the school's strategic direction).

As a result of these discussions, it caused them to take organizational actions. In the area of research productivity, for example, UBS A implemented many changes to incent, support, monitor, and encourage researchers. At UBS D, they had an external (AACSB) consultant provide them with ideas on how to increase research output and this interaction stimulated some changes. At schools A and C, accreditation data and discussions highlighted the need to hire more research-oriented faculty: *That [research] sort of fed into recruitment decisions more systematically*. It also caused the participants to pay more attention to issues of quality; and at UBS C, they felt that the Assurance of Learning (AOL) requirement was ushering in the “*true assurance of quality aspects*”. Overall, it was seen to be a stimulus for change – accreditation served as a “shock” to “unfreeze” the system to get them mobilized to engage in some of these discussions.

While accreditation stimulated dialogue and organizational actions, what was the *quality* of the dialogue? While it appeared to be more data-driven, more performance and quality-focused, was it “*ongoing*”? Was it “*collective*”? Was it actioned or applied very broadly across the organization? Per Preskill and Torres (1999), did the dialogue prompt

step #4, an examination of underlying assumptions and values? The data would suggest that *no*, it did not appear to prompt these types of discussions *on a systematic basis*. For this reason, the following summary statement and caveats have been formulated to respond to question 1b), which is a ***qualified “yes”***: **AACSB accreditation did have a slightly enabling influence on three of the four university business schools. The accreditation process did promote *some* elements of organizational learning (i.e., single loop learning) in three of the four schools; however, the enabling effect was limited in *scope, magnitude, and duration*. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that double loop learning was fostered in an ongoing, systematic way.**

These limitations – scope, duration, and magnitude – are described below.

Limitations in Scope

As noted above, these continuous improvement effects were limited in scope. That is, the collective learning process, (dialogue, reflection, questioning), was limited in terms of the *number of participants/stakeholders* personally involved or affected. In most cases, only the small accreditation team or administrative group was involved in or even aware of these changes; and this was reflected in the scores (which were often higher for administrative respondents). At schools where there were larger program changes, a slightly broader audience was involved, (e.g., at UBS A, where faculty, administrators, and program committees were also involved), and these participants reported more learning effects. This phenomenon has been studied by many authors interested in enhancing the utilization of evaluation; and it is believed that increased stakeholder participation, (in evaluation design and implementation), leads to a broader understandings of a the program’s theory and design, and to organizational learning about

the program and its wider context (Patton, 1999; Preskill, 1994; Torres & Preskill, 2001; Turnbull, 1999). Preskill, Zuckerman and Matthews (2003) also suggest that, by increasing process use, (i.e., learning that occurs by virtue of being involved in the process), organizational learning can potentially be enhanced. The authors propose five categories of variables which can influence process use, several of which are remarkably similar to the contextual and accreditation factors identified in this study²⁸.

Limitations in Magnitude

Single loop learning was also limited in terms of the *magnitude* or *areas* of impact. In general, it did not permeate the organization - it was focused on particular areas of priority for the Dean. For example, at UBS D, the Dean was very research intensive and wanted to foster the school's research capability and productivity, so he guided the accreditation effort in this direction. At UBS C, one of the Dean's primary interests, (besides "increased reputation"), was to use accreditation as internal leverage for resources; as a result, this may not have had as many obvious, observable improvement effects (also, an undergraduate review had just been conducted *prior* to accreditation; therefore, there was little focus on program changes). In contrast, at UBS A, the Dean was prepared to make large-scale, massive program changes across the board, (in graduate and undergraduate curriculum, research, and management); hence, the accreditation effort was leveraged to drive change. As a result, there was increased engagement of both faculty and administration, much greater evidence of concrete actions taken and single loop learning across many areas.

²⁸ They include: 1) Facilitation of Evaluation Processes, 2) Management Support, 3) Advisor Group Characteristics, 4) Frequency, Methods, and Quality of Communications, and 5) Organizational Characteristics (p. 430).

Limitations in Duration

Finally, the influence of accreditation was limited in *duration*. One of the strongest themes which emerged was lack of “sustainability”. Many participants felt that improvements they had implemented when accreditation was underway were subsequently forgotten or no longer in use; once the pressure of accreditation was gone, many faculty would revert to their previous habits (e.g., research productivity). In other words, the learning and behaviour changes had not become part of the fabric or the systems of the organization – they did not become “institutionalized”. This is one of the defining characteristics of organizational learning that differentiates it from individual or team learning – learning becomes part of the organizational memory, (Hanson, 2001; Hedberg, 1981) or culture (Cook & Yanow, 1993) or organizational routines (Argyris & Schon, 1978), to be shared collectively and used. The notion of institutionalization is also something that is emphasized in the literature on evaluative inquiry for organizational learning. For example, Dahler-Larsen (Forthcoming) recommends that “for evaluation to be sustainable, its organizational conditions should be attended to”. That is, he suggests that learning-oriented evaluators need to look at constructing organizational regimes to support evaluation capacity, evaluation culture, and systems. Preskill and Torres (1999; Torres & Preskill, 2001) also talk about the importance of building an organizational infrastructure, (i.e., culture, systems and structures, leadership and communication mechanisms), that supports evaluative inquiry for learning within the organization.

Constraining Consequences

Having explored the enabling effects of accreditation, it is time to turn to the other side of the coin, the “coercive” or “constraining” effects (i.e., question 1c). Research sub-

question 1c) asks, “Does accreditation have a constraining influence on the organization. If so, how?”

To explore this phenomenon, the participants were asked two questions. First, they were asked a general question, “Do you find that accreditation, in any way, is constraining?” At a later point in the interview, they were asked specifically whether accreditation was more enabling or constraining – “Where does the balance tip?” While this latter question was addressed above, further discussion is warranted here.

In response to the first query, six possible response “groups” emerged (refer to the 3x2 matrix in Table 6.4). Two groups are neutral (“irrelevant”); two are negative (“constraining”/“irrelevant”); and two are positive (“enabling/necessary evil”). The vast majority of responses, across all four schools, fell on the **positive or neutral** side of the matrix. **That is, overall, AACSB accreditation was not perceived to be overly constraining, in a negative way.**

However, that is not to say that the participants did not feel that accreditation was restrictive in some manner. To answer the second part of the research question, “If so, how?”, it is instructive to look more closely at the qualitative data. At UBS A, for example, while the majority of respondents described accreditation as constraining insofar as it puts limits on organizational actions, they felt that it was positive, a “necessary evil”: “in a sense, it forces us to do the right thing...”. These respondents felt that, without accreditation, they might not have been incited to change. Accreditation created a new mode of management, once which is more results-based, with decision-making which is more reliant on data – performance metrics are monitored and tracked.

For those who voiced negative concerns about the constraining elements of accreditation, across all schools, it was due to the following: constraints on program management, (staffing, curricula), the perceived rigidity of the standards and the fact that they are externally imposed, (by an American body), the cost of acquiring and maintaining accreditation, (primarily human resources), and the way in which it changes decision-making and might serve to inhibit creativity/innovation. With respect to limits on staffing and/or curriculum development (e.g., the degree to which non-Ph.D.'s can be used as faculty; and the general arts component of the program), this was particularly true in program areas such as finance or accounting, where part-timers are more heavily used and where accounting designations dictate strict course requirements. For example, several participants mentioned how, (due to the emphasis on AACSB ratios), recruiting for accounting professors has become biased towards academically qualified personnel; and this makes sourcing and selection of candidates more constrained – in an already scarce marketplace. Furthermore, by only hiring Ph.D.'s (versus practicing accountants/business leaders), there is less opportunity for an ongoing conversation/knowledge exchange and a cross-fertilization of ideas with the business community. (On the other hand, this same constraint was also recognized as a useful tool when negotiating for additional resources. It provided the Dean with strong leverage when dealing with central administration – to acquire additional resources and/or to “lock in” existing resources in times of fiscal restraint.)

Other Consequences

This research also sought to understand how accreditation might have “other consequences” which could be potentially either constraining or enabling. For this

purpose, participants were asked specifically asked about formalization and legitimacy. Each will be discussed below.

Formalization

In general, the participants, across all four schools, felt that their workplaces were already quite formalized, prior to accreditation. When asked to rate the current degree of formalization, (low, medium, or high), the average response was “medium”. Only one UBS, School A, felt that formalization had increased with accreditation (60% of respondents); and the majority of these respondents felt that it was a positive influence (i.e., enabling). How was it enabling? The participants attributed it to several factors: an increased focus on performance management, particularly in terms of establishing information systems and formal processes to help with data collection, tracking, and management. As a result of these formalized processes and improved data/knowledge management, a number of respondents felt that communication and decision-making had improved – it was more informed, systematic, data-driven, and aligned with program objectives. Furthermore, several participants felt that knowledge transfer/corporate memory was enhanced and risk management had thereby improved - due to formalized procedures which had been implemented because of AACSB. In contrast, at the other three schools, the respondents indicated that the degree of formalization had remained unchanged (100%, 83%, and 100% at UBSs B, C, And D respectively). **Therefore, in terms of formalization and its potentially enabling or constraining effects, AACSB accreditation did not increase formalization at three out of the four schools; at one school, the majority of respondents perceived that it had increased. At this same school, it had a limited enabling effect through improved decision-making and**

communication. This was due to an increased focus on performance management (improved systems and formal processes to collect, track, and manage data).

There is a tension between these two opposing forces – enabling and constraining – and this was evident in the study. Participants seemed to implicitly understand Adler and Borys’ (1996) notion of these two different types or “sides” of bureaucracy. They pointed out *both* the enabling and constraining possibilities of accreditation; and when asked about these effects, there was much equivocating (e.g., “yes, but...”; “maybe”...) (The exception was UBS B where most of the participants felt that it had little to no impact.) The participants’ comments also displayed recognition of the importance of peoples’ different *perceptions* of bureaucracy and of human agency – how formalization is enacted through peoples’ actions. For example, participants indicated that this bureaucracy was “*taken for granted*” in the academic workplace; and several of the participants indicated that they have learned to navigate the rules and regulations, (i.e., to “work” the system), so that it does not constrain their actions. Despite a fairly high level of bureaucracy (“*full of rules and red tape*”) they felt that much depends on the people and how the process is conducted. Essentially, they have learned to operate in such a way that it doesn’t “*bog them down*”.

Legitimacy

While the majority of participants did not perceive accreditation to be unduly constraining at the individual/organizational level, what were their perceptions of the broader environment? Did they perceive that accreditation was a constraining force which was operating at the macro level? Institutional theory would suggest that it is. Accreditation has long been viewed as a legitimizing force which exerts isomorphic

pressure at the level of the institutional field. But how did this manifest itself at the personal level? What did participants at the four UBSs have to say on this topic?

The results of this study indicate that institutional pressures were strong; and many participants were aware of these pressures – at some level. Based on their qualitative responses to the interview questions about legitimacy, it appears that both normative and mimetic pressures were at play. For example, in terms of normative forces, even though the majority of participants overall (70%) felt that accreditation added to their schools' legitimacy, they had difficulty explaining "to whom". When probed further, the most common response was "to us", "to the current faculty". They then went on to explain that accreditation had increased the faculty's pride (3 out of 4 schools): "*It has increased our own personal pride in the school. It is an achievement.*" Several participants also mentioned how accreditation would also increase their standing within the university community, that it is a well established practice in other fields (particularly the health sciences).

However, participants were hard pressed to identify any other stakeholder groups who even knew about AACSB accreditation, understood it, or valued it in any way (the exception was international students, who 26% felt might be influenced by accreditation). Nor were they able to identify any data that supported the importance of accreditation in terms of increasing student enrollment, marketing, fundraising, etc. These comments indicate that accreditation was primarily for themselves - the faculty, administration, and academic community – it had become a valued and accepted "norm" of their profession. Since norms are internalized by participants and enacted by moral suasion, the participants would not necessarily be consciously aware of these expectations and value

systems. As one interviewee tried to explain, it “*sort of sounds like we are a better school*”, but it is difficult to explain why.

Many participants also demonstrated their understanding of mimetic isomorphism and voiced their concerns about its homogenizing effects. Of particular concern was the AASB’s “Americanizing” influence, lack of cultural sensitivity, “cookie cutter”, “one size fits all” rigidity of the AACSB standards, and the risk of stifling innovation. Several participants felt that, although the AACSB had introduced more flexible, mission-based standards, they were not convinced that these metrics allowed for many degrees of freedom, that there was still significant pressure for conformity and a risk of stifling innovation.

Despite the participants’ awareness of these isomorphic pressures, however, most participants were supportive of pursuing accreditation. These mimetic forces are extremely powerful; and this was demonstrated by the participants’ comments - while these individuals *knew that their schools were already legitimate*; the majority still persisted in seeking (or supporting) accreditation - because of their perceptions of the uncertainty and “competitiveness” of the environment. Couched in business language, participants described how they were responding to competitive pressures, how they had to differentiate themselves, and/or keep up with their nearest competitors. For example, UBS C talked about maximizing their “first mover advantage”, and UBS A described how they had “no choice”, as their closest competitor(s) had become accredited. At these two schools in particular – UBS C and A - there was a feeling of urgency expressed by many of those who were intimately involved.

In summary, it appears that AACSB accreditation exerted significant isomorphic pressure on Canadian university business schools over the last 10-15 years and participants were able to recognize and vocalize some of their concerns - and the inherent contradictions. A number of events and environmental shifts served to increase this isomorphic pressure until accreditation was seen to be crucial – particularly as perceived by senior decision-makers (most notably at two of the four schools). These forces were expressed by many of the participants and have been clearly documented elsewhere, (e.g., CAUT, 1999, 2005a; e.g., Helms Mills et al., 2006; McKee et al., 2005; Zammuto, 2008). They include: increased competition in the business education marketplace (due to globalization and key competitors gaining accreditation); instability (due to a rapid decline in consistent public sector funding and increased reliance on corporate dollars); increased complexity (due to a greater number of stakeholder groups and different educational “products”); and concerted efforts by the AACSB to expand their domain, (through co-optation, re-branding, and active promotion) (Durand & McGuire, 2005). **These isomorphic pressures were both normative and mimetic.** Therefore, with respect to question 1c) the following summary statement can be made: **While accreditation did constrain organizational action at the time, (i.e, there was little choice perceived by decision-makers in terms of the competitive marketplace), there was considerable discretion in terms of *how* accreditation was implemented, *leveraged*, and *enacted* at the individual/ organizational level. At the individual level, (despite the concerns of some participants), accreditation was primarily viewed as enabling – at worst, it was seen to be ineffectual, neutral/benign.**

Research Question 2 – Contextual Factors and Conditions

This section will address the second research question: *What are the contextual factors and conditions which influence these potential consequences and how?*

The results of this multicase study illuminated a number of commonalities which were present across the four UBSs in terms of the drivers, impacts, and consequences of accreditation. However, key differences also emerged. For example, there were significant differences between the UBSs in terms of the drivers of accreditation. Whereas accreditation-seeking at UBSs A, C and D was primarily driven by the Dean, in search of marketing and reputational advantages, accreditation at UBS B was led by the Associate Dean, in response to a successful international crusade by AACSB representatives. Whereas the Deans at UBSs A and C were also interested in boosting the internal pride of the faculty with accreditation, the Dean at School D was primarily interested in promoting his research agenda. With respect to the impacts of accreditation, there were also significant variations in the nature, degree and type of effects. Whereas UBS A was considered a “high impact” school, UBS B was considered “minimal” to no impact, UBS C was “medium” and UBS D was “low”. Whereas participants at UBS A, for example, identified strong impacts across all seven impact areas (more than 70% of respondents), those at School B identified only three areas, of which two – enhance reputation and catalyst for change – actually referred to benefits for “*other*” schools. To what can these differences be attributed?

The disparity between schools can be largely explained by contextual factors. Accreditation does not take place in a vacuum, and each of these schools’ accreditation experiences is best understood when “contextualized” – situated in the unique social,

historical and cultural milieu in which it was constructed. Beard (2005) for example, in her longitudinal study of accreditation at American universities, found that context was paramount for explaining her results; she recommended that more qualitative research was needed to “gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics” of accreditation and organizational learning (p. 84). Similarly, Johns (2006) stresses the essential role of context on organizational behaviour in general. It has therefore been the intent of this study to observe the accreditation process *in particular contexts*; and **five contextual variables emerged as being critical both *within* and *across* the four cases.**

The response to Research Question #2 can therefore be stated in the following way: **Overall, 5 contextual factors were identified which influence the drivers, impacts, and/or consequences of accreditation. They are: leadership, reputation, resource dependence, strategy and synergies, and environmental uncertainty. These factors influenced the type of effect and the strength of the effect.** Each of these factors will be discussed further below.

Leadership

The results show that leadership was a pervasive contextual factor – the most important factor which emerged in this study. The Deans’ influence cannot be understated. At three schools, (A, C, and D) the Dean was the main motivator and champion of accreditation; and his influence was felt in terms of the type and strength of the impacts and consequences. For instance, there was evidence of enabling consequences - single loop learning - in three of the four schools, (particularly UBS A), and the Dean’s leadership strongly contributed to these outcomes. At UBS A, for example, the Dean was perceived to be the main driver of accreditation; and due to his

leadership, accreditation was a powerful lever for positive improvements of many types (e.g., increased focus on performance management and quality, program modifications). Participants at UBSs C and D also identified their Deans/Directors as the prime motivators of accreditation and change. However, there was less support for continuous improvement/OL in these schools. In the case of UBS C, this was partially explained by the length of time since accreditation (10 years) – the lack of sustainability was particularly evident since they were going through a new and “improved” AACSB reaccreditation. (Note that they had also changed Deans twice in that time period.) At UBS D, the participants felt that the previous Dean had primarily been interested in promoting his agenda of research productivity; therefore, the improvements were primarily in this area (i.e., not broad in focus or application). Furthermore, he did not distribute the leadership effectively to his team or communicate a convincing vision of change (due, in part, to a somewhat challenging governance structure). School B was perhaps the most interesting. Even though accreditation was *not* the main lever for change, all of the participants felt that they were a “learning organization” and credited Dean B with being the impetus behind this approach. They were unanimous in this viewpoint (100%).

These findings lend support to the literature on leadership and organizational learning (OL) in educational settings and extend it into the domain of higher education. For example, in secondary schools, transformational leadership has been shown to be an influential variable in fostering OL (Leithwood et al., 1998; Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genge, 1996; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Silins & Mulford, 2002a, 2002b; Silins et al.,

2002)²⁹. The results of this study are also consistent with Preskill and Torres' (1999) model of evaluative inquiry for learning in organizations. In their framework they emphasize the key role of leadership as one of the four “infrastructure” variables which provides a strong “foundation or framework for supporting learning in the organization” (p. 153). They emphasize that leadership support for evaluative inquiry must come from the very top of the organization but also from within. This notion of leadership - throughout the entire organization – also fits with Silin and Mulford's (2002a) findings that transformational as well as *distributed* leadership are central to promoting OL. In the four universities studied, the most engaged, distributed leadership teams were present at schools A and C. Not surprisingly, these were the two highest impact schools; and those with the most enabling consequences.

Reputation

Reputation was another key contextual variable. At three of the four schools, (A, C & D), one of the primary drivers of accreditation was to “build reputation”; and “enhanced reputation” was perceived to be the top benefit realized. Therefore, perceptions of reputation had a significant influence on the UBSs' motivations to seek accreditation, the perception of benefits realized and of the consequences. Of particular interest in this research was the relationship of reputation to one of the potential “other consequences” – legitimacy – and the results indicated that there was a close, but complex relationship. While many felt that AACSB accreditation added to their school's reputation as well as to its legitimacy, they also felt that Canadian Universities were

²⁹ Silins and Mulford (Silins & Mulford, 2002b) define transformational leadership according to six dimensions: vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, and performance expectation - refer to Appendix T for a description of each.

already legitimate; and several participants expressed concern about the “redundancy” of accreditation. As one participant aptly explained, “*it is an add-on, it is something more*”.

The results of this study would suggest that this “add-on” is *reputation*; and the respondents’ comments illuminate the strong tension between the two terms. As noted by Barnett, (2006) these constructs are “frequently confounded” ; while they are similar in their definitions, they differ in their application (Suchman, 1995). Whereas legitimacy is an indicator of social *acceptability*, reputation is a comparative measure of *favorability* (Barnett, 2006; Deephouse, 1999). Whereas legitimacy is possible for *all* to attain, reputation is a source of competitive advantage (Barnett, 2006; Dollinger & Golden, 1992; Fombrun, 1996; Galaskiewicz, 1985). However, the legitimacy/reputation balance is constantly shifting in the institutional field as standards for garnering reputation (differentiation) at one point in time become the standards for legitimacy at a later point in time (conformity) (King & Whetten, 2008). This phenomenon was evidenced numerous times in this study. For example, when UBS C first sought accreditation in 1997, they considered themselves a “first mover” in their local marketplace and felt that accreditation may be a differentiator. However, they realized that this competitive advantage would be short-lived, as it would be erased when other Canadian business schools gained accreditation. Over time, accreditation would become the new norm; and the question would become “*why don’t you have it?*”

As one respondent explained, accreditation only adds to your reputation, “*up until the point that everyone has it, then no!*” At that point, a new equilibrium has been established and all activities are geared towards maintaining legitimacy. Several respondents likened it to other accreditations or certifications like ISO 9000. When

organizations were first accredited it was impressive. Then, slowly ISO became more popular and more institutions were accredited. Over time, it becomes a risk to *lose* accreditation, or in the words of one interviewee, accreditation-seeking is solely for the purposes of “*defensive marketing*”. In the vocabulary of institutional theory, “defensive marketing” would more aptly be referred to as “legitimacy maintenance” or normative isomorphism – that is, accreditation has become the newly accepted standard of practice. Several participants felt that AACSB accreditation had already reached that point – it has become institutionalized, taken-for-granted, “*a given*”. It is *no longer* a differentiator.

Organizations with lower reputations are more susceptible to isomorphic pressures – to achieve increased reputation and legitimacy – than those of higher status (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). In contrast, for higher status firms, isomorphism has a negative relationship with reputation; therefore, these organizations are less likely to conform and yet their status will be unaffected (Deephouse, 1996; Deephouse & Carter, 2005). The findings from this study were consistent with this literature. For instance, participants from the highest status school, UBS B, were the least likely to view enhanced reputation as a driver or benefit of accreditation. They were also the least likely to see their legitimacy as affected by accreditation. Research on this topic has suggested that firms with higher reputation are allowed “idiosyncrasy credits” which enables them to exhibit non-conforming behaviour; in fact, constituents might even judge non-isomorphic actions positively (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001) Furthermore, the same participants from UBS B felt that, while *their* school was legitimate and their *own* reputation was sufficiently high, (i.e., they didn’t

really need accreditation), they felt that other, smaller or “*less known*” schools, might benefit.

These sentiments are in line with Deephouse and Carter’s (2005) findings that organizations of lower status are more incented to seek isomorphism (conformity) as it increases their reputation and legitimacy. Moreover, participants from the university with the lowest reputational ranking in this study (UBS C) were the most likely to feel that legitimacy had increased due to accreditation (100% of respondents). They also felt that their reputation had improved; and this is consistent with Deephouse and Carter’s findings. Schools A and D also felt that reputation and legitimacy was increased with accreditation; and this is consistent with the author’s findings as well. According to Phillips and Zuckerman (2001), middle status schools are the most likely to seek isomorphic behaviours, as they are strongly incented to *maintain* their reputations. Deviations are viewed negatively by constituents and therefore more likely to lower their status than raise it. There are strong pressures to conform; and this was evidenced by many of the participants’ comments.

Resource Dependence

A third contextual factor was resource dependence – the relationship of the university business school (UBS) with central administration and the degree to which it relies on the university for resources (funding, staff, facilities, etc.). This factor affected the drivers of accreditation and the type and degree of impact that accreditation had on the school. The greater the dependence of the business school on the university for financing, the greater their uncertainty around resources and the greater their incentive to seek and use accreditation as a potential negotiating tool. Related to this was the

perspective of the senior administration, (President, Provost, Rector, etc.), on the role of the business school within the university. As mentioned earlier, business schools have long struggled to achieve legitimacy within the university environment (Austin, 1998; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) where they have not always been viewed to be truly “professional” schools like their brethren in medicine, law, architecture, etc. Even their moral legitimacy has been questioned as they are often viewed as being too closely aligned with, (and therefore “tainted”), by the corporate world (Boyle, 2004; Suchman, 1995). These perceptions can strain intra-university relations, particularly during times of financial duress; as such, accreditation can be a strong mechanism for the UBS to justify their expenditures and to counteract pressures from central administration for increased enrollments, use of part time professors, and potentially untenable class sizes. For example, participants at UBS C felt that the faculty had shouldered much of the financial burden on behalf of the university during the early 1990’s as well as a decade later (prior to reaccreditation). However, they did not feel that the school had received the requisite benefits and recognition. Therefore, the threat of not acquiring accreditation, (and of later losing accreditation), enabled the school to successfully lobby central administration to secure the resources that they desperately needed to survive (and thrive). As a result, the impact of accreditation was significant.

Similar, but lesser effects were also observed at schools A and D. At UBS A, one participant mentioned how financial pressures in the 1990’s had forced the business school to increase enrollments – the UBS was “*kind of held ransom*” to get their numbers up. A number of years later, accreditation thereby served as a point of leverage for limiting class size, and for securing additional funds for achieving research productivity

goals (i.e., approval for research programs and Research Chair positions). At UBS D, accreditation also helped the school gain respect from other departments. As one respondent explained, accreditation is something that is typical in other faculties and well understood; as a result it raises the status of the UBS to an equivalent level.

In contrast, School B appears to have been much less dependent on central administration for funding and was therefore not relying on accreditation for leverage purposes (mentioned by 0% participants). They were also the furthest ahead in terms of fundraising, branding, securing a new (endowed) building and named school. In interviews with administrators, they indicated that the school was extremely well financed.

Strategy and Synergies

A fourth contextual factor that influenced the impact and consequences of accreditation was “strategy and synergies”. This factor refers to the degree to which the Dean and his leadership team fully integrated accreditation into the strategic plan, built upon other activities in the department, and leveraged the benefits of accreditation to advance the school’s strategic agenda. While “timing” was recognized as being a very important driver of accreditation, the greatest impact was achieved when an insightful leader recognized the importance of timing and deliberately seized opportunities in the environment, (both internal and external), to capitalize upon the available synergies in pursuing the school’s strategy. For example, at UBS A, the highest impact school, the Dean had a very ambitious agenda for change which included accreditation as one of the major thrusts. Synergies were realized with other ambitious goals and strategic imperatives – building a “leading capacity in research and innovation”, being housed in a

new building, and attracting significant corporate support (securing a naming endowment and major financial gift). He also realized that significant program revisions were necessary, and planning was in high gear for the arrival of the double cohort. Accreditation thereby served as both a catalyst to drive these other initiatives as well as a synergist, to build upon them. The benefits were mutual.

In sharp contrast, at UBS B, the changeover in Deans came at an inopportune time for AACSB accreditation. The new Dean had his own agenda for change, and he was not focused on accreditation. Rather, he had his sights set on business school rankings as a rallying point for the school. As such, accreditation was not seen to be a key part of his strategy. Any synergies that were realized would have been merely fortuitous, but not deliberately planned.

University business schools C and D fell somewhere in between. Accreditation was initiated in both instances by the respective Deans and it was strategic in the sense that it focused energies around areas of priority for them. At UBS D, the Dean was primarily interested in advancing the research agenda; but some synergies were also achieved with the capital fundraising campaign. At UBS C, accreditation was primarily around reputation, internal pride, and leverage. However, it also motivated a review of the mission and undergraduate program, (in preparation for accreditation); and for reaccreditation, it stimulated a curriculum review, re-evaluation of the mission, and development of AOL objectives. The current Dean appeared to be taking the process very seriously and leveraging its synergies for strategic advantage.

Environmental Uncertainty

Environmental uncertainty emerged as the fifth contextual factor. While the university environment has long been considered to be stable and relatively complex (Daft & Armstrong, 2009; Duncan, 1972), throughout the 1990's, environmental munificence declined and environmental uncertainty increased significantly due to a multitude of external factors. These included decreased government funding, increased pressures to seek private sector financing and corporate partnerships, globalization and growth of the business education market, and the introduction of new instructional technologies. These forces have been well documented by other authors (CAUT, 1999, 2005a, 2008; Helms Mills et al., 2006; McKee et al., 2005; Romero, 2008; Tudiver, 1999; Turk, 2000); in fact, Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) contend that the university environment can be considered “discontinuous” and that universities require adaptive strategies in order to remain competitive.

The results of this study support these perceptions of increased environmental uncertainty: many interviewees cited competitive forces, (particularly international), and the need to differentiate their product or gain competitive advantage as prime reasons for seeking accreditation. Several expressed a sense of urgency, a need to take action immediately in order to keep up with their closest competitors (or, in the case of UBS C, to pull ahead in the marketplace). This was particularly true of UBSs A & C, who seemed to have stronger concerns about the degree of competition in the marketplace, particularly vis a vis their key rivals in local markets (i.e., those schools who recruited from the same student population). UBS C also seemed to suffer the greatest financial hardship, (both in the 1990's and more recently around 2004), due primarily to provincial

funding constraints and changes to the financing of international students. (Notably, in Quebec, tuition fees have increased the least – only 54% over the last 17 years, causing the provincial government to continue to shoulder the costs of post-secondary education.) In contrast, UBS B felt less competitive pressures during this period, being primarily interested in the international marketplace in terms of AACSB accreditation; and otherwise, they felt fairly secure at home. At the fourth school, UBS D, participants also mentioned uncertainty in the marketplace in the 1990's; and while this seemed to subside somewhat in the 2000's, they remained somewhat concerned about international recognition and heightened competitiveness.

Other Findings

In the previous section, each of the research questions was answered based on the findings. However, additional findings also emerged during the data analysis; and in this section, two of these will be discussed.

The Canadian University Institutional Field

This research also provided a unique insight into the institutional field in which Canadian university business schools operate and the means by which legitimacy and reputation are understood by institutional actors – UBS administrators and faculty. The results showed that **institutional actors use a process of constant comparison to position themselves in the institutional field**; and subfields are very important in this process.

As described by many participants in this study, both legitimacy and reputation are relative concepts; and as institutional fields shift over time, organizations engage in constant comparison between themselves and others within the field. King and Whetton

(2008) refer to this process as between-category and within-category comparisons.

Stakeholders first determine their identity “category” by comparing themselves to the minimum standards in a particular group or subfield; then, once that membership is satisfied, they compare themselves to an ideal standard for that group for reputational purposes. In this study, it was evident that each of the schools had different within-category referent groups for comparison. These included: competitive peers, affiliating peers, inspirational peers, and other players. The former refers to UBSs with whom they directly compete for students. Usually these are local and they are perceived to have the same reputation; UBSs are therefore strongly motivated to conform to these organizations’ standards of performance to maintain legitimacy. However, reputation is only enhanced through additional differentiation from these peers. In contrast, affiliating peers are those with whom they affiliate in terms of a number of factors; however, they are not perceived to be in direct competition for students. UBSs keep a close eye on these UBSs for competitive/ legitimacy comparison purposes, but are not as seriously concerned about their actions. Inspirational peers are those schools to which they aspire; and they are the UBSs with the highest reputations. Finally, “other players” refer to those schools that are not quite in the same subfield for competitive or legitimacy purposes.

The results showed that, in the case of AACSB, competitive peers were the most important for making decisions about assimilation or differentiation via accreditation. For example, participants from both UBS A and UBS C were very concerned about their position vis a vis certain competitive peers; and they knew intimately when/if they had attained accreditation and what type (i.e., AACSB, EQUIS, AMBA). UBS B talked about

“other schools” needing accreditation for legitimacy, but not themselves. It would appear that they perceived these “other players” to be in a different subfield to them.

The participants were also aware of the constant comparison process and how the institutional field continually shifts over time. Several described how they were no longer “ahead” of their competitors because they had subsequently become accredited. Others mentioned how they didn’t want to be “left behind” as their competitive advantage disappeared when “everybody has it”. (However, it is interesting to note that “everybody” refers only to those UBSs who they consider to be competitive peers).

Currently, the Canadian UBS field appears to be in a state of instability and some interesting sub-groups are emerging. For example, one subgroup of UBSs has decided to opt out of AACSB and retain their legitimacy through a different international accreditation – EQUIS. Others, of high reputations, seem to believe that they are immune to legitimacy “games” and do not need accreditation. Yet another subgroup of UBSs is escalating the accreditation battle, by acquiring multiple accreditations - AACSB, AMBA, and EQUIS for the purposes of differentiation (reputation) and/or conformance (legitimacy). One participant speculated that this latest trend might lead towards less and less “degrees of freedom” in terms of innovation and change, as each accreditation provides somewhat overlapping but different sets of criteria. Managing these accreditations becomes a very complicated and time-intensive exercise.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Accreditation

While institutions make strategic positioning decisions according to constant comparison, they base this assessment on their perceptions of a multiplicity of constituencies. With little prompting, interviewees in this study identified six groups who

may have differing views on accreditation and to what degree it contributes to legitimacy. They were: current faculty/administration, prospective international students, the university community, the business community/ employers, faculty recruits and other students – current/prospective/ undergraduate/graduate. **The results of this research therefore lend support to the importance of a composite, multiple-stakeholder perspective on accreditation and its relationship to legitimacy and reputation.**

These findings are consistent with current research on reputation which emphasizes the importance of multiple stakeholders' perspectives. For example, Vidaver-Cohen's (2007) "RepTrack" framework for assessing business school reputation includes a mediating variable, "stakeholder expectations" to capture the multiple views that are critical to reputation assessment³⁰. This has been emphasized by numerous authors, who assert that assessments of reputation may vary considerably across different stakeholder groups (Alessandri, Yang, & Kinsey, 2006; Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). Similarly, in the literature on legitimacy, researchers have long emphasized that many social actors, with diverse viewpoints, come together to constitute the collective whole (Baum & Oliver, 1991; Deephouse, 1996; Galaskiewicz, 1985; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion of the key findings. First, the motivation for the study was reviewed and the research questions guiding the study were revisited. Then, each of the research questions was addressed and other findings were presented.

³⁰ Her stakeholders include: students, alumni, employers, faculty, business community, parent university, external evaluators, and scholarly peers (p. 287). Interestingly, she does not include "the general public", which is a frequently mentioned group in empirical studies of legitimacy and reputation (e.g., see Deephouse, (1996), Deephouse and Carter, (2005), Fombrun, 1990).

In the next chapter, contributions to the literature will be discussed. The limitations of this study will be outlined as well as possibilities for future research in the field. Finally, the implications for practice and policy will be presented.

CHAPTER 8: CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE & CONCLUSIONS

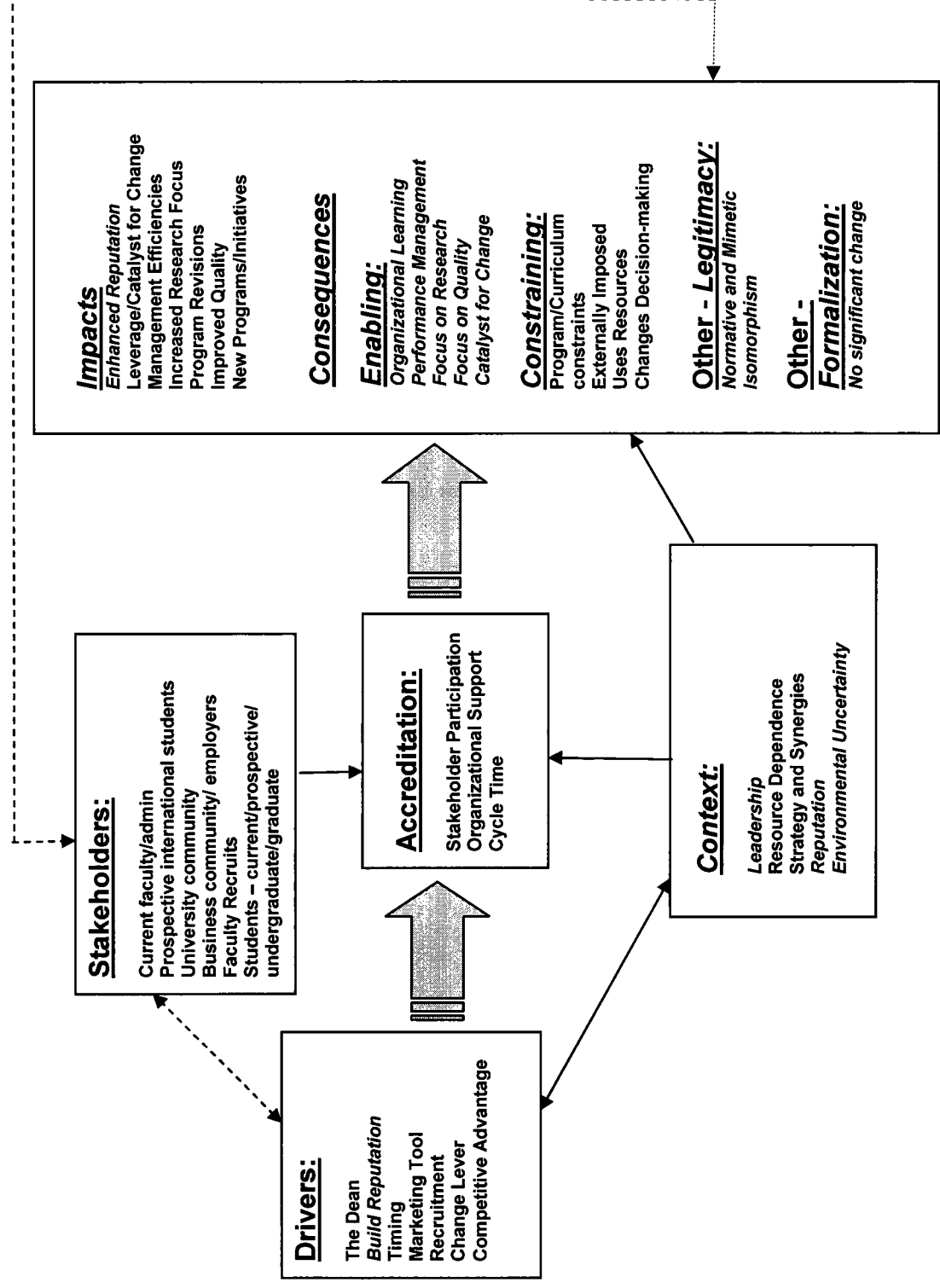
This final chapter concludes with a discussion of the contributions of this research to the body of literature in accreditation, evaluation for organizational learning and institutional theory. The conceptual framework provides an organizing structure for this discussion. The limitations of the study are then presented as well as the possibilities for future research in the field. The chapter finishes with implications for practice and policy.

Contribution to the Literature

Overall, this study makes an important contribution to the body of knowledge on accreditation, specifically in the Canadian higher education sector. Although much has been published recently on accreditation, it has primarily been survey research, directed at American Deans/Directors. Research at Canadian universities has focused mainly at the level of the institutional field; however, it has not examined the unique organizational milieu in which accreditation has been conducted and experienced. Nor has it examined the consequences of AACSB accreditation at a UBS level. This in depth, multiple case study therefore provided an opportunity to gain an “up close”, contextualized look at the impacts and consequences of accreditation on business schools in a Canadian setting.

The results of this study have been summarized in a conceptual framework. This framework, (Figure 8.1), offers a unique contribution to the field. It provides insight into the impact and consequences of AACSB accreditation at Canadian UBSs; and most importantly, the role that context plays in influencing these outcomes. As a visual representation, grounded in data, it helps to map out the complex interrelationship between the drivers of accreditation, the process itself, the context in which accreditation

Figure 8.1 – Enhanced Conceptual Framework



occurs, and the impacts and consequences. As depicted in the diagram, the influence of context is pervasive; it is shown as exerting an effect on all dimensions of the process. The impacts and consequences are shown as concurrent, as these effects were found to be indistinguishable in terms of their estimated timeframe (unlike the initial depiction where the impacts were shown as an antecedent to consequences). The dotted line between legitimacy and stakeholders represents the multitude of stakeholders which constitute the participants' understanding of the UBS's legitimacy - and how it was impacted by AACSB accreditation. (While legitimacy is a "general" conception, it is composed of the perceptions of many stakeholder groups.) There is another dotted line between stakeholders and drivers; and this represents the findings that participants' decisions to pursue accreditation (drivers) are based on their perception of these various stakeholders' opinions of accreditation, particularly as it relates to reputation³¹. (Note that the drivers are also influenced by the larger institutional/ competitive environment, but this was not depicted in the framework because it is a macro level view which is not consistent with this organization level model). Finally, there is an arrow from stakeholders to accreditation, and this depicts the various stakeholders' potential engagement in and/or influence on the accreditation process itself.

The remainder of this section will highlight specific elements in this framework which comprise important contributions to the field. For ease of reference, each dimension is shown in *italics* in the conceptual framework (figure 8.1).

³¹ A dotted line indicates that this relationship is weaker than a solid line; while a relationship has been identified in the study, more research is warranted to confirm the strength and direction.

Context and Drivers

The results of this study illuminated the pervasive effect of context in influencing all aspects of the accreditation process – the drivers, characteristics of the accreditation process itself, and the degree and type of impacts and consequences. This is the first study in which a qualitative multicase analysis of Canadian UBSs has been conducted and has yielded this result. Five contextual variables were identified; and leadership emerged as the most powerful internal variable. This finding extends the existing research on leadership, evaluative inquiry, and organizational learning in an educational context. While several authors have found that leadership is a critical variable in fostering OL in secondary schools (Leithwood et al., 1998; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Silins & Mulford, 2002a, 2002b; Silins et al., 2002) they have not studied OL in the higher education context nor its relationship with accreditation. While other authors have examined the relationship of evaluative inquiry in fostering OL, they have only incidentally observed the role of leadership as well (e.g., Cousins et al., 2004b). Additionally, the results of this study add empirical evidence to support Preskill and Torres' model of evaluative inquiry for learning in organizations, which emphasizes the vital role of leadership as one of the four infrastructure variables which support organizational learning (Preskill & Torres, 1999); it also reinforces Silins and Mulford's finding that both distributed and transformational leadership are critical for fostering learning (2002a).

Environmental uncertainty was another contextual variable (external) which emerged from this study. This finding strengthens the existing scholarly research which suggests that the Canadian environment was “ripe” for accreditation in the mid-1990's,

with universities suffering from heightened financial uncertainty, increased competitiveness, commercialization, and complexity (CAUT, 1999, 2001; Helms Mills et al., 2006; McKee et al., 2005; Tudiver, 1999; Turk, 2000). However, the data do not provide support for Julian and Ofori-Dankwa's contention that on-line technologies and corporate universities have been the major disruptive forces. While they may have *contributed* to the overall level of uncertainty, these factors were not specifically mentioned by any of the participants at the four schools.

Another key finding in this study was the importance of reputation. "Building reputation" was a powerful driver of accreditation, "enhanced reputation" was a perceived benefit, and reputation also emerged as strong contextual variable (it influenced these factors as well as the consequences). While previous research has identified "marketing advantages" as one of the perceived benefits of accreditation, (Roller et al., 2003); and while other authors have talked about "reputational pressures" as one of the reasons for seeking accreditation, (McKee et al., 2005) the pervasiveness of reputation, (as driver, contextual variable, and benefit), was unique in this study. This result could possibly be explained by the structure of higher education in Canada, which is already "strongly legitimized", has consistent quality across geography and institutions, and is regulated by provincial government bodies; therefore, AACSB accreditation is not sought primarily for accountability reasons (as some American-based surveys have suggested), but for perceived competitive advantage instead. However, it could also be explained by the sample group and methods used - unlike other accreditation studies using historical data or quantitative surveys with Deans/ Directors, (and with close-ended

responses), this study relied on rich, qualitative data from a broader range of participants (administrators and faculty from different disciplines).

Impacts

This research extends the debate on the advantages and disadvantages of accreditation, in the Canadian context. In terms of the benefits of accreditation, the results were fairly consistent with the literature. For example, Roller et al (2003), in their study of AACSB accredited U.S. business schools, found three main factors that best describe the benefits perceived by Deans: External Reputation/ Competitiveness Benefits; Resource Benefits and Program Development Benefits. While these three overall factors are consistent with the findings of this study, there are variations in the detailed responses: Canadian participants rating marketing/ reputational advantages much more highly; and Roller et al's data does not mention several other highly ranked benefits for Canadian participants: "management efficiencies", an "increased focus on research" or "quality standards".

However, Roberts, Johnson and Groesbeck's (2006) did find that AACSB accredited institutions placed a higher value on research (among new faculty); and this result is supported by the findings of this research. For example, interviewees at UBSs A, C and D identified an "increased focus on research" as one of the impacts of AACSB accreditation. As well, interviewees at UBSs A and C felt that a "research culture" was beginning to develop due to AACSB – because of an emphasis on hiring research-oriented faculty.

Romero (2008) proposed that accreditation promotes strategic alignment. This was evident, to varying degrees, at three of the four schools (A, C, and D); however, it

was not one of the top benefits identified in this study. At the fourth school, for instance, (UBS B), accreditation was largely considered to be “*irrelevant*” as the new Dean was focused on rankings and drove his own strategic agenda for change. Therefore, these findings suggest that accreditation certainly *can* promote greater strategic alignment, but *not necessarily*. At the very least, it ensures that the right components are in place; at best, when pursued with integrity and purpose, it can build upon synergies and effectively create a powerful platform for change.

Consequences - Constraining

On the other side of the debate, a number of authors have identified negative/constraining consequences of AACSB accreditation (e.g. Gore et al., 1998; Henninger, 1994; Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006; Yunker, 2000). For example, Julian & Ofori-Dankwa (2006) argued that the influence of external accrediting bodies has been profound, contending that accreditation has negatively altered many business schools’ policies and procedures. However, the findings of this study largely refute these claims. While the participants in this study did identify some modifications in their business schools’ policies and procedures, (for staffing, research and curriculum), and some did express concerns about the (American), homogenizing effect of accreditation, overall they felt that the impact had been minor and relatively beneficial and enabling. In no way, per Julian and Ofori-Dankwa, (2006) did they feel that AACSB accreditation was an “accreditocracy” in terms of its constraining influence. In fact, in many cases, participants felt that AACSB standards forced them to “*do the right thing*” or to do it “*in the right way*”.

Other Consequences - Legitimacy

This research also contributes to the analysis of accreditation, in Canada, from an institutional theory perspective. To date, this body of literature has been primarily dominated by “macro” institutional perspectives (relying most heavily on historical and/or quantitative data); therefore, this research introduced “human agency” into the picture, an aspect that has largely been absent. As such, it yielded important clues as to how organizational actors view the institutional field, (and subfields), how they view and understand the normative and mimetic pressures; and how the interaction of constituents cause the field (and subfields) to constantly shift and re-shape itself over time. The results are supportive of McKee et al.’s (2005) contention that AACSB accreditation, over the last 15 years, has been a powerful legitimizing force. Moreover, the data suggest that UBSs were also seeking, (sometimes simultaneously), *both* reputational and/or legitimacy benefits; and these advantages were continually shifting in the Canadian institutional field. Following Deephouse and Carter (2005), those schools with the lowest reputations were most vulnerable to isomorphic pressures; and those with the highest reputations were most immune. Moreover, there were normative pressures also at play – UBSs were reacting not only to environmental uncertainty (mimetic isomorphism) but also to normative and cultural-cognitive pressures among their peers and the academic community.

The results of this study also support Durand and McGuire’s (2005) thesis that the AACSB pursued an international expansion strategy in the late 1990’s which was extremely successful. Through various mechanisms – co-optation, rebranding – AACSB managed to ward off selection pressures in the institutional field by expanding their

domain into global markets and establishing legitimacy in this new domain (Durand & McGuire, 2005; Zammuto, 2008). Numerous study participants described how they had revised their opinions of AACSB over the last 10-15 years, due to the Academy's actions - their name change (rebranding) and the introduction of more flexible standards. As well, they described the deliberate and effective use of co-optation, (a Canadian Dean), who was influential in marketing accreditation to targeted business schools. As a result, whereas in the late 1980's and early 1990's, accreditation had been dismissed as too "prescriptive" and largely redundant for Canadian institutions, by 1997, it was far more appealing.

Enabling Consequences – Organizational Learning (OL)

Another research contribution relates to the body of knowledge on accreditation and organizational learning in institutes of higher education. The findings of this study suggest that the concept of organizational learning is relevant to business schools and that accreditation *can* foster learning, when contextual conditions are attended to. Three of the four schools identified *some* learning (continuous improvement) effects due to accreditation; and UBS B felt that *other* schools might benefit (as they were already a learning organization). Consistent with the literature on evaluation use, (Patton, 1999; Preskill, 1994; Torres & Preskill, 2001; Turnbull, 1999) this study showed that utilization and OL increased when stakeholder participation was encouraged throughout all aspects of the evaluation. Similarly, there was evidence to suggest that increased process use facilitated learning effects (Preskill, Zuckerman, & Matthews, 2003). In terms of OL's relevance to institutes of higher education, Meyer (2002) suggests that organizational learning is an appropriate model to deal with the inherent tensions and challenges of

managing in a university structure – loose/tight coupling, ill-defined goals, unclear technologies and fluid participation (Cohen et al., 1972, 1976; Meyer, 2002). OL is also compatible with notions of the new entrepreneurial university and new public management (NPM) (Hannagan, Lawton, & Mallory, 2004; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Meyer, 2002; Poole & Robertson, 2003; Van Gestel & Teelken, 2006). The findings of this study are fairly consistent with these arguments, in that many of the accreditation benefits realized by UBSs A, C and D reflect these NPM principles (e.g., increased management efficiencies, focus on quality and research productivity). Also, accreditation did have some learning effects; and it did offer an opportunity for UBSs to forge new “structural links” and forms of communication and dialogue among/between faculty and staff. However, while there is some evidence that this occurred at schools A and C, the opportunities for OL were not fully realized.

Other Consequences – Formalization

This study also lends empirical evidence to further explore Adler and Borys’ (1996) conceptualization of bureaucracy and its potentially enabling or coercive effects. While accreditation was viewed as a possible mechanism for increasing workplace formalization, (bureaucracy), this was not borne out by the evidence. The participants at three business schools (B, C, and D) felt that formalization was already quite high and they did not believe that the degree of formalization had changed with accreditation. However, at the highest impact school, (UBS A), accreditation was seen to increase formalization; and its effects were primarily enabling. The most frequently mentioned response was an increased focus on performance management, particularly in terms of instituting information systems and formal processes to help with data collection,

tracking and management. As a result of more formalized processes and improved data/knowledge management, several participants felt that communication and decision-making had improved.

Summary

In summary, the results of this research add further insight into the complex relationship between accreditation, (as a process of evaluative inquiry), its impacts and consequences in a Canadian university context. As illustrated by the conceptual framework, the influence of context is pervasive – five factors were identified which affect all aspects of the accreditation process as well as the degree and type of impacts and consequences. This study also furthers the lively debate on the advantages and disadvantages of accreditation, adding a uniquely Canadian perspective; moreover, it provides empirical evidence which refutes the critiques of many. By examining accreditation through the lens of institutional theory, the results of this research reinforce and extend the work of other authors, (e.g., McKee et al., 2005), showing that accreditation is an potent legitimizing force – both normative and mimetic – but one that also has a strong (and dialectical) relationship with reputation. Similarly, this research provides a rare glimpse into the difficult tension between the enabling and constraining effects of accreditation - as experienced by organizational actors. As such, it adds new insights into the literature on organizational learning, formalization, and accreditation.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, this study poses some limitations which should be considered in the interpretation of its findings. These include limitations with respect to

the study's scope, methodology selected for the study, and the interpretation of the findings.

The study's unique focus on four Canadian university business schools has generated findings that are applicable to these organizations in particular, but may not be appropriate for other types of organizations and accreditations (e.g., American business schools, other types of business school accreditations or multiple accreditations, other types of organizations with similar types of accreditations). The results are also specific to a particular point in history, (1997 to 2004), during which time a number of environmental forces had come together to create the conditions described in this thesis – conditions which were ripe for accreditation. The institutional field is constantly shifting; and therefore, the results of this thesis are a reflection of the complex interactions between four organizations, their participants, and the cultural, normative and regulative pressures at that time.

However, by selecting a multiple case study approach, some of these limitations of “generalizability” have been mitigated. By studying four different university contexts in which accreditation was implemented, there was an opportunity to explore both the particularity as well as the commonality of experience – it enabled the researcher to look for patterns which emerge, convergences as well as instances of discontinuity (Stake, 2006). As Stake (2006) describes, the “common and the unusual are both portrayed, and both are situated in a complex of experience against a local and diverse background” (p. 90). He recommends that “generalizability” should be left up to the reader, as he/she is the best qualified to determine, based on his/her own experience and understanding of the cases, how the findings may best apply. Patton (1990) prefers to think of this process and

conclusions as “context bound extrapolations” as opposed to generalizations (p. 491).

Once again, a multiple case study design was selected to enhance this ability to extrapolate by providing rich description of four different contexts, their commonalities and differences. The reader therefore has more information upon which to base an interpretation of the results.

The role of the researcher must be considered as well. As a university student, MBA graduate and research assistant, the researcher brought her own ideas and biases to the study of accreditation in a university business school. These same biases and pre-conceived notions would also influence the interpretation of the data. An attempt was made to reduce this limitation in several ways. First, a researcher’s journal was kept throughout the study. This journal was used to promote self-reflection on the researcher’s behalf - it prompted her to think critically about her perceptions, observations, feelings, and insights during the research process. By exposing underlying assumptions and biases, the researcher was more open to thinking creatively about alternative explanations or interpretations of the case. Stake (2000), following Schon (1983), encourages reflective practice as a “general frame of mind” for doing casework (p. 450) - to help expose these biases. It also assists in making decisions concerning the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Secondly, the data was reviewed and “checked” by the researcher’s advisor and the research participants. Upon completion of the individual case analyses, draft Case Profile reports were prepared to summarize the data. These were reviewed by the researcher’s advisor, any questions were answered and revisions made, and the revised versions were sent to all participants for validation. Finally, triangulation was performed, to ensure construct validity (Yin, 2003b). Data was

collected from different sources, using different methods and analysis (e.g., observations, interviews, and document review). In this way, the researcher could step away from the data and view it differently (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991). Patton refers to this process as a ‘cross-data validity check’ – an indication that efforts have been taken to minimize bias (Patton, 1990).

Further Research

The findings from this study provide several opportunities for future research. While this work represents a first step in gaining a better understanding of the impacts and consequences of accreditation on Canadian university business schools, it also highlights the possibilities for continued research to further investigate some of these findings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presents abundant opportunities for future research. As a starting point, for example, it would be interesting to investigate its applicability for other types of organizations, (e.g, hospitals, public schools, non governmental organizations, businesses), or for different types of accreditation (e.g., EQUIS, AMBA in business schools), or in other geographies. A similar methodology could be used and the research could be conducted in other business schools and/or in other countries. The results could be compared, to answer questions such as: what are the differentiating factors across different geographies which influence the accreditation process and outcomes? What elements are the same? The potential differences between different accreditation models could also be investigated using the framework with Canadian UBSs with EQUIS accreditation only, or with multiple accreditations (AACSB, EQUIS,

AMBA) to identify the effects of different types of evaluation processes and philosophies. For example, the EQUIS model is European-based, more flexible, and less driven by standards. One would expect this to have differentiated effects on some of the other elements in the conceptual framework as well as on the potential outcomes. By investigating some of these research questions, the scope and relevance of the framework could be enhanced.

Leadership

Certain key dimensions in the framework are worthy of further investigation. For example, the prevalent role of leadership, (the Dean or Director), was evident in the study and deserves further attention. As mentioned earlier, little has been done to explore this relationship in educational institutions, particularly in the higher education sector. A potential approach would be to build upon Silins and Mulford's transformational leadership model and their research in organizational learning and leadership in Australian public schools (Silins & Mulford, 2002a, 2002b; Silins et al., 2002). By expanding upon their measurement instruments, (e.g., in combination with evaluation/accreditation and other elements in the framework), it would extend the literature in several new directions. It would also potentially enhance the conceptual model in terms of its definition of leadership dimensions and how these interact with other factors.

Organizational Learning

One of the research questions that this study sought to answer was the means by which, if at all, AACSB accreditation promoted organizational learning. Because the researcher was interested in "*how*" – the contextual details about the process and factors

which may have contributed – a qualitative, multicase study approach was used. However, as a follow up to this study, it would be interesting to supplement this qualitative data with quantitative data, to measure the degree to which organizational learning is present. For instance, Goh and Richards (1997) developed a 21-item scale which measures five dimensions of organizational learning capacity (OLC): leadership, experimentation, mission and vision, team learning, and knowledge transfer. The overall score reflects the degree to which an organization has these associated practices in place to promote learning (Goh & Richards, 1997). By administering this instrument to the schools studied, it would provide another perspective on the degree to which these schools have incorporated learning practices into their culture and operations; and it would serve as a comparison to the qualitative results.

Testing

Taking this approach one step further, it would be useful to “test” the overall model by developing a comprehensive survey questionnaire. To develop this quantitative instrument, each of the constructs could be defined according to their various dimensions, (based on the qualitative data from this study). Its psychometric properties could be evaluated, using various methods such as expert validation, pilot testing, reliability and factor analysis. It could then be administered to each of the participating organizations – faculty and administration - as an initial sample group, to assess the results in light of the qualitative findings from this study. By analyzing the results using a statistical technique such as Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) or Path Analysis, the relationship between variables could be measured. This would provide an entirely new way of examining these relationships and would broaden our understanding of this complex interaction.

Stakeholders

Another key finding from this study was the identification of the multiplicity of stakeholders who interact with the university business school and who constitute a collective understanding of UBS reputation and legitimacy. Since the data in this study were collected from only two stakeholder groups, (albeit important ones), it would therefore be instructive to gain a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of these other groups – alumni, the business community, prospective and current students (undergraduate, graduate, international), new faculty recruits, and employers. A survey methodology would be appropriate to gather data from these groups. The questionnaire could be informed by the results of this thesis research and pilot tested to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity (e.g., Vidaver-Cohen's (2007) model for assessing business school reputation could possibly be modified).

Organizational Change

One final area for continuing research that is worth considering is the literature on organizational change. In the management domain, for example, multiple authors have written on the nature of organizational change; and accreditation could be studied using this lens (e.g., Conner, 1992; Kotter, 1996; Miles, 1997; Nadler, 1998). Similarly, in the field of educational administration, much has been written on the adoption of educational reforms and the adoption of new innovations; and the study of accreditation could be informed by such a perspective (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1987; Loucks-Horsley & Hergert, 1985). For example, most frameworks such as Rogers (1995) outline a number of steps through which organizations will pass as they adopt innovations; and these might be worth considering in light of accreditation. As well, the

management literature typically recommends ways in which organizational change can be “managed”; and the implementation of accreditation could be assessed according to these models.

Implications for Practice and Policy

In addition to opening up new possibilities for future research, this research has implications for policy and practice, particularly in Canadian university business schools. However, there are also broader implications for accrediting agencies and educational policy; and these will also be discussed below.

Canadian University Business Schools

First of all, for UBS Deans and Directors, this research can provide some key elements to consider when deciding whether to embark upon an accreditation journey. For example, as a starting point, Dean/Directors of UBSs should examine their rationale for seeking accreditation, as accreditation is a lengthy process and requires a significant commitment of resources. Furthermore, it is a long-term effort for multiple years to come (reaccreditation is every 5-6 years); and the introduction of Assurance of Learning (AOL) has added a considerable amount of effort to identify and measure outcomes.

Additionally, accreditation subscribes to a certain model of management, which may require a culture shift at certain schools (particularly for veteran faculty). It promotes more of an “entrepreneurial”, “performance-oriented” model, whereby the UBS adopts the principles and practices of “New Public Management” (NPM) (Poole & Robertson, 2003; Van Gestel & Teelken, 2006). While there is no consensus in the literature on the definition of NPM, it refers in general to “a closer focus on results in terms of efficiency and quality of service, decentralization and devolution of management, a stress on

private-sector styles of management practice and explicit standards and measures of performance” (Van Gestel & Teelken, 2006, p. 99)

If accreditation is going to be undertaken in a cursory way, (seen as just an administrative exercise, “checking off boxes”), then few of the “learning” benefits will be realized. In fact, its presence may not even be noticed (e.g., UBS B and to a lesser extent UBS D). However, if it is to be undertaken in an authentic, rigorous manner, then a number of benefits can accrue. This means that leaders need to take a deliberate, planned approach. And they should be dedicated to championing the *entire process*, from start to finish. Those schools that derived the most benefits had a leader whose tenure was continuous, throughout the change. Furthermore, they had a dedicated team, with a lead Accreditation Coordinator, (reporting to the Dean), who was assigned to the project. Administrative assistance was also provided to the Coordinator; and the other team members handled sections of the accreditation report. Overall, it was a team effort.

Ideally, the leadership should start with the Dean and be distributed among other members of the faculty and staff (the team, other Program Directors, Program Area leads, etc.). Increased participation and involvement assists in promoting ownership over the change, building capacity for accreditation, and promoting use – process use and use of findings (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Kirkhart, 2000; Patton, 1998; Preskill, 1994; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Turnbull, 1999). That is, to maximize the learning benefits from accreditation, the Dean should model and promote behaviours that support a culture of learning. This includes a change in the nature of communication – an encouragement of dialogue and reflection, openness to risk-taking, (and making mistakes), and surfacing of

underlying assumptions. Moving from continuous improvement to true organizational learning means making some of these difficult changes in everyday behaviours.

In universities where business school Deans/Directors have limited leverage, are highly dependent upon the university for resources, and/or the external environment is extremely resource-constrained, accreditation was shown to be very useful in negotiating with central administration. For this reason alone, Deans may decide that accreditation is worth pursuing. In addition to providing leverage, it can also enhance the legitimacy and/or reputation of the business school in the eyes of other academics (particularly those in other professional schools – medicine, nursing, law, and engineering).

Accreditation is a powerful change lever. In the university environment, where the Dean has relatively limited power to mobilize change, it can provide a unique opportunity. The results of this study showed that the UBSs which derived the maximum benefits were those in which accreditation was “packaged” with other key strategic initiatives to drive change. Therefore, in pursuing accreditation, leaders should consider how and where accreditation fits with the overall strategy at the school. If the strategy needs to be renewed, accreditation provides a prime occasion to do so. By ensuring that it is aligned with other strategic imperatives, synergies can be realized in order to maximize their collective impact.

Deans/Directors should be wary of seeking accreditation in an attempt to realize reputational enhancements. In Canada, with a strongly regulated, legitimized system, any external reputational benefits may be non-existent or short-lived (as there are strong pressures for conformity). Furthermore, possible reputational benefits have not been measured. Currently, (based on the perceptions of participants in this study), reputational

benefits appear to exist primarily within the academic community (and to a lesser degree among new faculty recruits and international students). As well, schools at the lower end of the reputational scale serve to gain the most by accreditation; and those at the higher end seem to be somewhat immune. Therefore, recommendations for practice leaders include: continued monitoring of the external environment and conversations with colleagues at other schools to determine if collective efforts should be taken to avoid further unnecessary “escalation” of accreditation; monitoring the costs of accreditation; educating stakeholders about accreditation and what it means; and participating in student or university-sponsored surveys to gather data about reputation and accreditation. (For example, based on a survey conducted at school D, accreditation was ranked in the bottom 5 of undergraduates’ selection criteria for university, but “reputation” was ranked first!).

This study did not assess the impact of Assurance of Learning (AOL) standards, as they were only being implemented in one school. However, at UBS C, the participants were extremely optimistic about this development and were embracing these standards in a very positive, collaborative way. Given that these standards have a more direct impact on educational outcomes, they have the potential to have a greater impact on the UBS – one that permeates the organization at a broader level.

Another recommendation relates to the sustainability of change. To ensure that the benefits of accreditation are realized, and to encourage an ongoing culture of change, accreditation leaders should think about ways and means in which change can become institutionalized. What systems, practices, and policies can be introduced? How can information technology support these changes? What rewards systems are needed to

encourage and sustain new behaviours? How can knowledge that is learned from accreditation processes be managed and shared? In a university environment, with personnel who are continually shifting roles, (in and out of administration), it is even more important to ensure that these management systems are in place.

Accrediting Agencies

This study also has implications for accrediting agencies, particularly the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International). First of all, if the AACSB truly wishes to promote continuous improvement, then the Association needs to consider the introduction of strategies to facilitate sustainability and institutionalization of continuous improvement (CI) practices mentioned above. For example, when a mentor is assigned to an AACSB applicant who is seeking accreditation, the mentor should work with the applicant to provide suggestions and best practices on how to maximize the enabling effects of accreditation. Several recommendations were mentioned above; and they include practices such as establishing an appropriate structure with distributed and ongoing leadership, maximizing participation and involvement of multiple stakeholders, providing open communication throughout the accreditation effort, and ensuring that sufficient resources are dedicated to this accreditation initiative.

The AACSB has already demonstrated their commitment to continuous improvement by moving to a shorter accreditation cycle (from ten years to five). This is a step in the right direction for sustainability: as exemplified by UBSs B and C, the longer, 10 year cycle of accreditation contributed to complacency and neglect. However, the relatively recent introduction of Assurance of Learning (AOL) requires significant effort

on behalf of the UBSs and will therefore require additional support from AACSB as universities struggle with resource constraints and competing interests for their time. To sustain this AOL process, the AACSB will need to think creatively about mechanisms for guiding, facilitating, encouraging, and supporting their membership.

This study also showed that there remains a concern among Canadian business schools that the AACSB is still too rigid, too American, and too homogenizing. These sentiments are slowly fading as Canadians gain first-hand experience with the AACSB accreditation process, as the membership starts to be increasingly diversified, and as the name-change is reflected in the AACSB's practice. Nonetheless, the AACSB needs to continue to live up to its name as an *international* body and continue to think about ways in which they can show flexibility and cultural understanding about the education systems and traditions in other geographies. They could, for example, establish policies to guide their actions in this regard. One area would be the composition of the Peer Review Team and/or the selection of the mentor. By ensuring that a mentor and/or Peer Review Team member comes from the same region as the applicant, (speaks the same language, is knowledgeable about the applicant's specific circumstances and education system), a positive relationship can better develop. If there is a short supply of international mentors, then AACSB could develop a proactive recruitment drive and "coaching program" for nurturing these new mentors. In the area of governance, it appears that the AACSB may have already established policy guidelines for international representation, as nine out of 30 members of the current AACSB Board of Directors come from non-American organizations. (Canada is represented (1), Europe (5), South America (1), Asia (1) and Australia (1).)

As several participants in this study observed, there has been a proliferation of business school accreditations over the last 15 years; and while the results of this study would suggest that they are not currently too “constraining”, that situation could change with the addition of many others. And business is only one school/faculty within the university. A review of the *Associations of Universities and Colleges* website indicates that there are an overwhelming 90 different professional bodies that provide “professional program accreditations” in higher educational institutions across Canada, from pharmacy to nursing, to law, to education (AUCC, 2009). In addition, there are six provincial bodies that grant mandatory accreditations (e.g., in Ontario, business schools that offer graduate degrees are subject to accreditation by the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies). This has implications for policies – at the university and provincial government level. For example, the university may find it useful to establish policies regarding accreditations – which ones they will support, why or why not, and what the associated financial guidelines would be. For example, some accreditations are mandatory while others are voluntary; some are expensive while others are not. Many have strong implications for curriculum design and/or course content.

The provincial accrediting bodies for higher education may also wish to take note. In Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes, there are accrediting bodies for graduate programs (the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies, La Commission de vérification de l'évaluation des programmes, and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission respectively). To avoid unnecessary duplication, these quality assurance bodies may wish to review the many accreditations offered by external agencies to determine where there are overlaps, redundancies, points of intersection and uncharted territory. Policies

could then be established to guide universities and business schools in their accreditation-seeking behaviour. For instance, these provincial/territorial bodies may decide that AACSB accreditation provides the school with an exemption from the council's accreditation (or part of it). Similarly, EQUIS or AMBA could be acceptable and/or interchangeable. Such policies could prove to be very beneficial in terms of the time and energy required for university or departmental management.

Chapter Conclusion

It is hoped that the results of this thesis will be used to pose new questions about the nature of accreditation in Canadian university business schools and its longer term consequences and contributions. For example, many participants were curious about the future impact of multiple accreditations – will the overlapping requirements of these accreditations serve to stifle innovation and increase organizational rigidities? For those who decide against maintenance of accreditation, will there be negative externalities? How will learning effects continue to be realized and facilitated? As Meyer (2002) suggests, organizational learning is an imperative for universities of the future, universities which are able to understand and balance the inherent tensions between enabling and constraining structures and practices: furthermore, many of the elements of accreditation can positively contribute towards this vision. As he describes,

For schools and universities to play a leading role in the shift to a knowledge-based society, they need to expand and accelerate their capacity for organizational learning. This requires, first and foremost, the ability to balance the conflicting imperatives of stability and change, central strategic leadership and bottom-up entrepreneurship, individual autonomy and collective cooperation....it [i.e., the university] is “loosely” as well as “tightly” coupled, steered as well as facilitated (p. 549).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Accrediting Bodies - University Business Schools

Name of Accrediting Organization	Year of Introduction	Description of Accreditation – Purpose & Focus	# of Accreditations (as of 17/09/08)³²
The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International)	1919 (Association founded in 1916)	- “assures quality and promotes excellence and continuous improvement in undergraduate and graduate education for business administration and accounting” (AACSB web-site) - voluntary, non-governmental - tends to be larger, more research-based institutions	555 Accredited institutions (528 in 2006) 96 outside the USA (85 in 2006) 17 Canadian
Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP)	1988	- “the leading specialized accreditation association for business education supporting, celebrating, and rewarding teaching excellence...” (ACBSP web-site) - main purpose is to promote teaching excellence. - over 50% of accredited programs are 2 year business programs (Roller et al., 2003). -Offers alternative quality-based process (based on Baldrige quality standards)	574 members (384 in 2006) 403 accredited (306 in 2006) 0 Canadian (8 from Colleges/ smaller institutes)
International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE)	1998	- “IACBE was formed in response to presidents, chief academic officers, and heads of academic business units who wanted an accreditation process that was mission-driven and outcomes-assessment based” (IACBE web-site) - “Currently the most outcomes-assessment oriented of the three business accrediting associations” in the US (Roller et al., 2003) - tends to be mainly U.S.colleges	195 members (187 in 2006) 0 (1 Canadian member from a management institute)
European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) through its EQUIS program (European Quality Improvement System)	1998	- “EQUIS is the leading international system of quality assessment, improvement, and accreditation of higher education institutions in management and business administration” (EQUIS web-site) - focus not only on high general quality in all dimensions of their activities, but also a high degree of internationalisation. Also stress relevance – degree of interaction with corporate world.	113 institutions in 33 countries (97 in 28 countries in 2006) 6 Canadian (5 in 2006)
Association of MBAs (AMBA)	“1997” Association founded in 1967	- assess the quality of post-graduate business programs against a set of criteria established by our International Accreditation Advisory Board (IAAB). Review entire curricula.	152 accredited in 69 countries (115 in 2006) 3 Canadian

³² Only Canadian business schools recognized by the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans (CFBSD) are included. This number represents the number of schools accredited as of Sep. 17, 2008.

Appendix B - Universities with Accredited Business Schools

	ACBSP	AMBA	EQUIS	AACSB	University Business School
1					Acadia University, Fred C. Manning School of Business
2					Athabasca University, Centre for Innovative Mgmt.
3					Athabasca University, School of Business
4					Bishop's University, Williams School of Business
5				AACSB	Brock University, Faculty of Business
6					Carleton University, Eric Sprott School of Business <i>Note: web-site states that they are seeking AACSB accreditation</i>
7				AACSB	Concordia University, John Molson School of Business
8				AACSB	Dalhousie University, Faculty of Management
9					First Nation's University of Canada, School of Business & Public Administration
10		AMBA	EQUIS	AACSB	HEC (Université de Montréal), École des Hautes Études Commerciales
11					Lakehead University, Faculty of Business Administration
12					Laurentian University, School of Commerce and Administration
13					McGill University, Faculty of Management
14				AACSB	McMaster University, Michael G. DeGroote School of Business
15				AACSB	Memorial University of Newfoundland, Faculty of Business Administration
16					Mount Allison University, Department of Commerce
17					Nipissing University, School of Business and Economics
18		AMBA	EQUIS	AACSB	Queens University, School of Business
19					Royal Roads University, Faculty of Management
20					Ryerson Polytechnic University, School of Business Management
21					Saint Francis Xavier University, Gerald Schwartz School of Business & Information Systems
22				AACSB	Saint Mary's University, Frank H. Sobey Faculty of Commerce
23				AACSB	Simon Fraser University, Faculty of Business Administration
24					Thompson Rivers University, School of Business and Economics
25					Trent University, Business Administration Program
26					UBC Okanagan, Faculty of Management
27					Université de Moncton, Faculté d'administration
28					Université de Sherbrooke, Faculté d'administration
29				AACSB	Université Laval, Faculté des sciences de l'administration
30					University College of Cape Breton, School of Business
31					University College of the Fraser Valley, Business Administration

32				AACSB	University of Alberta, School of Business
33			EQUIS	AACSB	University of British Columbia, Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration <i>Note: identified as the Sauder School of Business on ACBSP web-site)</i>
34				AACSB	University of Calgary, Haskayne School of Business
35					University of Guelph, Faculty of Management
36					University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Management
37				AACSB	University of Manitoba, I. H. Asper School of Business
38					University of New Brunswick. – Fredericton, Faculty of Administration
39					University of New Brunswick – Saint John, Faculty of Business (Note: <i>St. John</i> is identified under ACBSP, but not Fredericton)
40					University of Northern British Columbia, College of Management and Science
41		AMBA		AACSB	University of Ottawa, School of Management
42					University of Prince Edward Island, School of Business
43					University of Regina, Faculty of Administration
44					University of Saskatchewan, College of Commerce
45				AACSB	University of Toronto, Joseph L. Rotman School of Management
46			EQUIS³³		University of Victoria, Faculty of Business
47			EQUIS		University of Western Ontario, Richard Ivey School of Business
48					University of Windsor, Edmond and Louis Odette School of Business Administration
49			EQUIS		UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal) École des sciences de la gestion
50				AACSB	Wilfrid Laurier University, School of Business and Economics
51					York University, Schulich School of Business
	0	3	5	17	TOTAL

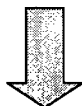
³³ This accreditation has been awarded in the last 2 years.

Appendix C - AACSB Accreditation Process Diagram

***Adapted from AACSB Website, October 27/08
<http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/process/process-toc.asp>*

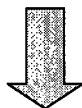
Step 1 - PreAccreditation

1. Submit Eligibility Application to PreAccreditation Committee (PAC)
2. PAC reviews application for accreditation standards issues.
3. PAC assigns a mentor to work with the applicant; mentor visits.
4. PAC forwards a recommendation on eligibility criteria and scope of review to Accreditation Coordinating Committee (ACC) for concurrence.
5. Applicant and mentor work together to address PAC issues and design an Accreditation Plan (AP) within the applicant's Strategic Plan- applicant submits AP to PAC.
6. PAC reviews AP.
7. PAC forwards AP to Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) with PAC recommendations.



Step 2 - Initial Accreditation

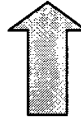
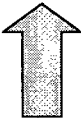
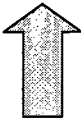
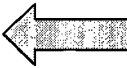
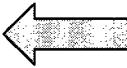
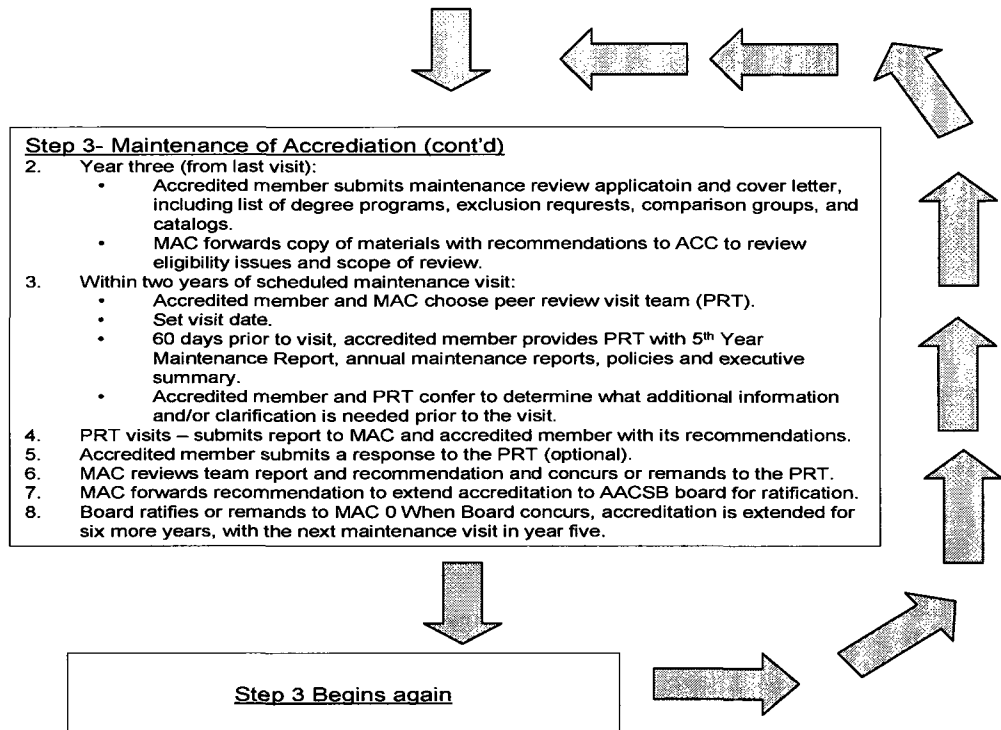
1. The Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) reviews the AP.
2. Accreditation Plan is implemented.
3. Applicant submits Annual Reports to IAC for review; mentor submits annual recommendations (can take up to 3 years).
4. IAC reviews materials and recommends whether to continue with AP implementation or apply for Initial Accreditation.
5. When applying for Initial Accreditation, the school submits application to AACSB.
6. At this time, 2 years remain in the PreAccreditation process and the IAC appoints a team Chair.
7. Applicant works with Chair to prepare a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). PRT and IAC review SER and Annual Reports.
8. Applicant, Chair and IAC select the Peer Review Team (PRT). PRT and IAC review the SER and annual reports.
9. PRT submits pre-visit letter to applicant at least 45 days prior.
10. Visit occurs. PRT submits report to IAC and applicant with its recommendations.
11. Applicant submits a response to the PRT report (optional).
12. IAC reviews team report and recommendation and concurs or remands to the PRT.
13. IAC forwards recommendation to accredit to AACSB Board for ratification.
14. Board ratifies or remands to IAC- when Board concurs, member is accredited and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council. Accreditation is valid for six years, with a maintenance visit in year five.



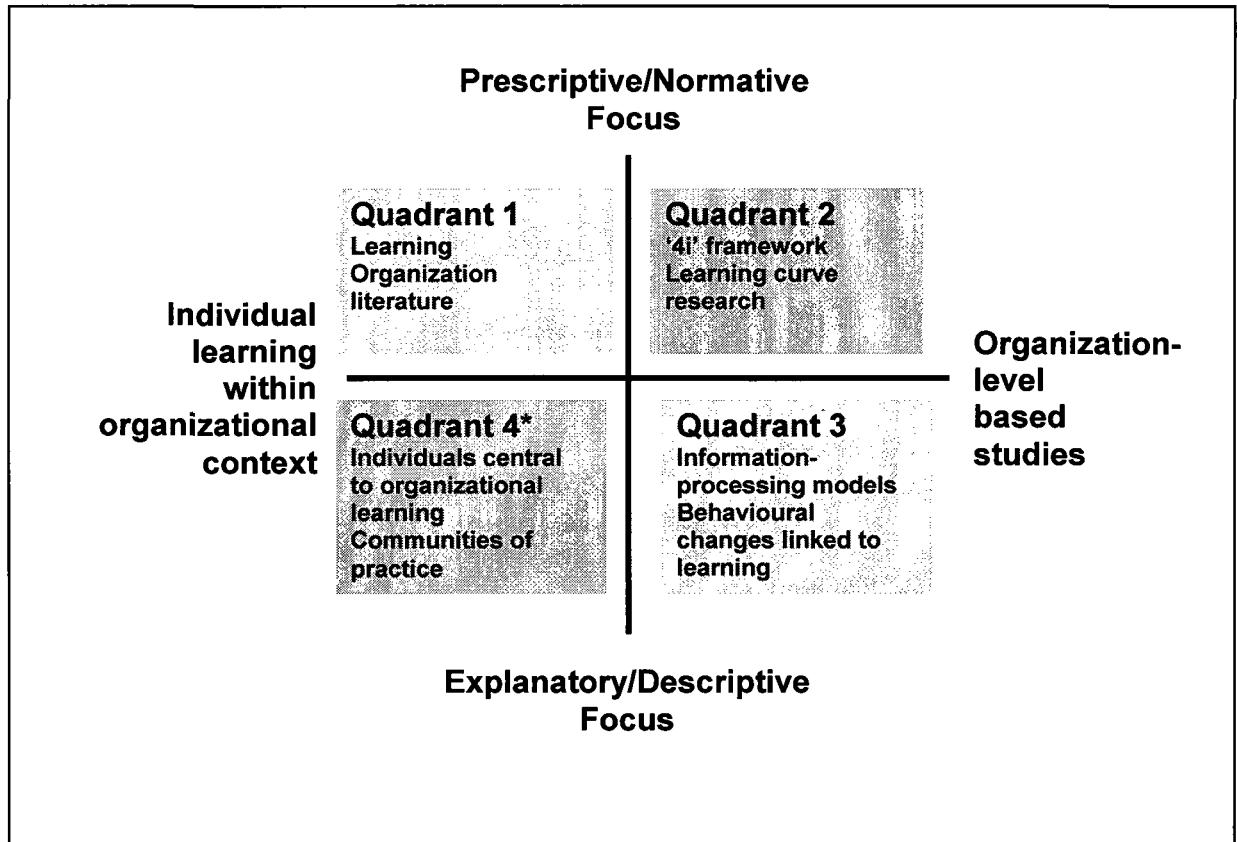
Step 3 – Maintenance of Accreditation

1. Annually:
 - Refine Strategic Plan
 - Prepare Annual Maintenance Report
 - Participate in AACSB accreditation data collection

Continued on next page....



Appendix D – Typology of Organizational Learning



* Adapted from Shipton (2006), Figure 1, page 235.

Key Features of Quadrants in Typology*

Quadrant 1	Quadrant 2	Quadrant 3	Quadrant 4
Practitioner/consultancy orientation Focus on individual learning within an institutional environment Knowledge 'objectified' Lack of empirical work	Academic orientation 'Normative' rather than critical Focus on outcomes and 'stages' 'Explicit' or 'objectified' knowledge Increasing amount of empirical work	'Change' rather than 'outcomes' Behavioural vs cognitive approaches Dysfunctional learning and 'cognitive limitations' Tacit knowledge is acknowledged	Individual characteristics shape learning quality The role of context and 'social arrangement' Case study based Ethnographic or action learning methodologies 'Knowing' rather than 'knowledge' Tacit knowledge central

* Adapted from Shipton (2006), Table 1, page 236.

Appendix E – Definitions of Key Constructs

Term	Definition
Drivers	Drivers refer to perceived reasons for having sought accreditation and for continuing to seek re-accreditation. These may be: 1. larger environmental forces such as increased competition in the marketplace; 2. organizational level (university or business school) drivers such as pressure from decision-making or governing bodies; or 3. individual reasons.
Stakeholders	<i>Stakeholders</i> refer to groups who have a “stake” in accreditation – they may be involved in or impacted by accreditation. They may be internal or external to the UBS. They include groups such as faculty members, administrators, students, employers, alumni, and the business community. However, due to the scope of this study, only two stakeholder groups are involved, <i>in interviews</i> , as participants: 1. senior administrators in university schools of business; and 2. faculty members in UBSs.
Accreditation	Accreditation refers to the AACSB accreditation process and all of its many components.
Contextual Factors	Contextual factors refer to factors in the external or internal environment which constitute the particular context in which the university business school operates. They may be historical, cultural, economic, or social. They can influence any or all aspects of the accreditation process and its consequences.
Impacts	Refer to participants’ perceptions of the general impacts of accreditation. This includes concrete <i>actions</i> taken due to AACSB accreditation (for pre-accreditation, initial accreditation or accreditation maintenance activities) as well as more <i>intangible</i> effects (e.g., perceived benefits realized).
Consequences	Refer to participants’ perceptions of the consequences of accreditation <i>specifically vis a vis enabling or constraining or other</i> consequences. More details are provided below.
Constraining Consequences	Refer to stakeholders’ perceptions that, <i>due to AACSB accreditation</i> , their actions are more constrained or limited. This may be due to new rules or sanctions that are imposed by accreditation or due to informal restrictions and/or sanctions on their behaviour because of accreditation (e.g., cultural norms, values, expectations). It refers to changes which are generally perceived to be negative.
Coercive Bureaucracy	Refers to a particular type of constraining impact. Following Adler and Borys (1996), coercive bureaucracy refers to the notion that formalization of work processes can be viewed by employees as negative. That is, formalization is seen by employees as a means by which their work efforts are constrained and by which management attempts to force compliance.
Enabling Consequences	Refer to stakeholders’ perceptions that they have an increased range of options available in the workplace due to positive changes which have occurred <i>because of accreditation</i> . These include consequences such as organizational learning (and continuous improvement) or other related improvements such as more streamlined, simplified or improved work processes; increased empowerment and/or flexibility in decision-making; or other perceived improvements in the quality of work life. It

	refers to changes which are generally perceived to be positive.
Enabling Bureaucracy	Refers to a particular type of enabling impact. Following Adler and Borys (1996), enabling bureaucracy refers to the notion that formalization of work processes can be viewed by employees as positive. That is, formalization is viewed as a means by which they can better accomplish their work tasks – their efforts are facilitated.
Other Consequences	Other consequences refer to consequences which may be perceived to be <i>either</i> potentially enabling or constraining. In this study, the participants were asked specifically about formalization and legitimacy.
Organizational Learning	In this study, (as explained on page 44), the definition to be followed is from Preskill and Torres (1999): organizational learning “takes place through (a) the collective creation of meaning, (b) action, (c) the development of new knowledge, (d) an improvement in systemic processes, and (e) the overcoming of tacit assumptions. Team learning from evaluative inquiry occurs when individuals share their experiences, values, beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge through dialogue, and engage in collaborative learning efforts. When individuals and teams disseminate their learning from inquiry throughout an organization, and action results from this learning, it can be said that the organization learns” (p. 50). Therefore, OL can be operationalized as: the extent to which single loop or double loop learning occurred, as evidenced by the following: Incremental changes (single loop) – e.g., key decisions taken, process changes introduced, policy or procedures changes, increase in knowledge (as reported by interviewee or observed by others’ behaviour), increased reflection, increased dialogue and/or quality of dialogue, increase in collaborative learning efforts. Mind-set changes (double loop) – e.g., changes in individual attitudes (as reported by interviewee or observed by others’ behaviour), changes in group attitudes, identifying underlying tacit assumptions and discussing those assumptions through dialogue (making them explicit).
Isomorphism	Refers to the process whereby organizations, within a particular institutional field, become more homogeneous over time, by incorporating institutional rules within their own structures. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest that this occurs through three general mechanisms: 1. coercive – adopting structures or procedures because it is compelled to do so; 2. normative – adopting procedures or organizational forms because they are purported to be superior; or 3. mimetic – simply copying another organization(s) to reduce environmental uncertainty. In this study, it is expected that evidence of isomorphism may be observed through participants’ comments during interviews, or through published documentation.

Appendix F – Letter of Organizational Consent

[Date]
[Name]
[Position]
[Department]
[address]

Dear [name]

Greetings! I am a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa, conducting research into the accreditation of Canadian university business schools. In this current climate of heightened competition for students, decreased public sector funding, and higher stakeholder expectations, many schools are turning to accreditation as a differentiating factor. I am interested in understanding more about this phenomenon, particularly its impact on Canadian business schools.

I would like to invite your organization to participate as one of several organizations in a multiple case study on this topic. The objective of my research, which I hope will be of mutual interest, is to develop a deeper understanding of the consequences of accreditation on Canadian university business schools as well as the contextual factors and conditions which influence this process.

Who is the research team? This is my doctoral research project and I will be conducting the research myself, under the supervision of my thesis advisor, Professor Swee Goh, of the University of Ottawa Telfer School of Management.

What does participation imply? If you agree to participate in our research, I would ask you and some of the members of your organization to participate in individual interviews and to help me to locate relevant documents. Specifically, I would be interested in speaking to members of your faculty and administration (e.g., associate/assistant deans, program directors, accreditation coordinator) who have been involved in accreditation and/or been impacted by it. Ideally, they should have been present at your school throughout the duration of the accreditation exercise. (The interview would be one hour in duration and it would be audio-taped with the permission of the participants.) Once these are complete, I would prepare a draft Case Profile Report which will document my findings. Participants will have an opportunity to review this report for validation purposes. The final revised report will be returned to your organization and I would use it as input to my cross-case analysis, generating a Multicase Report. This document will constitute the main results of my thesis and will lead to the production of research reports.

How would the data be treated? All discussions would be considered to be private and all of the information collected would be treated as

confidential. My advisor and I are the only individuals who will have access to the data. Direct verbatim quotations would be included in reports arising from the research, however, individual's identity would be withheld (i.e., personally identifying information would be removed and the contents of the quote would not reveal individual identities).

What about organizational anonymity? The organizations which participate in this study will remain anonymous in the Multicase Report and in my thesis. Data will be presented in such a way that the university is not identifiable. It is my intent to publish the results of this research in academic journals and other outlets as well; and the identity of your organization will remain anonymous in these publications also.

What would be the potential benefits of participation for you? I am hopeful that the findings arising from this research and indeed participation in the process would be useful to you and your staff in reflecting on the accreditation process and its consequences in your organization and potentially making this process more beneficial to your school or faculty. I will share the individual Case Profile Report with you and summaries of the cross-case research, including my conclusions about the impact of accreditation, the factors and conditions which influence the process, and any differences which exist between different "stakeholder groups" (i.e, faculty versus administration).

Thank you for considering this request. I truly hope that your organization would be willing and able to participate in the study. Please indicate your agreement by returning a signed copy of this letter to me at the address provided. If you have any questions, you may contact me directly (see coordinates below). I would be happy to provide further information if necessary.

The University of Ottawa, Research Ethics Review Board, has approved this research. Inquiries or any questions dealing with ethical conduct of this research can be addressed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research 2-5841 (email: [ethics @ uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)). The University of Ottawa requires that its researchers obtain administrative consent from organizations participating in its research. Your signature at the bottom of this letter would serve such a purpose.

I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Catherine Elliott
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
145 Jean Jacques Lussier
Ottawa, ON, CANADA, K2M 2N3

My organization agrees to participate in the study.

Name

Signature

Date

_____ / _____ / _____

Appendix G – Document Checklist

	Data	Source(s)	Summary
<i>General University Data:</i>			
Overall Student Population			
Reputation (e.g.Macleans)			
<i>Business School Data:</i>			
Business School Size			
Undergraduate Degree			
Graduate Degrees			
MBA Degrees			
Executive Education Size			
<i>Accreditation Data:</i>			
Year of application			
Year of accreditation			
Other accreditations			
Visibility of accreditation and AACSB on web-site			
Major Drivers			
Main Messages re: Accreditation			
Rankings info (web-site)			
<i>Strategic or Operational Plans:</i>			
Major Issues			
Minor Issues			
Other			
<i>Accreditation Plans:</i>			
Major Issues			
Minor Issues			
Other			

Legend - List of Sources

1. Business School Front Page (web)
2. University Front Page (web)
3. Accreditation Page (web)
4. Pre-accreditation Report
5. Accreditation Report
6. Maintenance Report
7. Strategic Plan

Appendix H - Interview Guide

Introduction:

- Explain the purpose of the research – thank participant for agreeing to be involved
- Review informed consent, ask about audio-taping and sign letter

Q A Context & Drivers

Q A1 To get started, I would like to learn more about your organization – the context in which accreditation has taken place (over the last X number of years). How would you describe your business school in terms of its organizational culture? (communication, decision-making, etc.).

Q A2 How long has your school of business been accredited by the AACSB? Confirm key dates of accreditation – date started, each phase, completion.

Q A3 Think back to when you were first accredited, what were the main drivers (reasons) then for seeking AACSB accreditation, and what are they now, for seeking re-accreditation? (i.e., have they changed)?

Q A4 During this accreditation period, has the context changed?

YES NO SOMEWHAT

Q A5 Please elaborate - Have there been any major events? How has the external environment changed?

Q B Accreditation

Q B1 I'm interested in the AACSB accreditation process here at your university. Can you please walk through it for me (follow diagram, if that helps)? For each step, could you please identify:

- Main activities and how implemented
- Who was involved
- Main actions
- Main outcomes/results

Q B2 What has been your involvement in the accreditation process during this period? (Type of involvement – role throughout; and Degree/Level of involvement – idea of time and intensity)

Q B3 What other Stakeholder Groups were involved and how?

Q C Consequences of Accreditation - Enabling

Q C1 One of the primary aims of AACSB accreditation, as stated by the agency in all of their documentation is “quality” and “continuous improvement” Do you think that this process promotes continuous improvement?

YES

NO

Q C2 If yes, can you provide some examples of positive incremental changes that you have made due to this process? If no, please explain.

Q C3 Taking this improvement theme one step further, does it promote organizational learning? (DEFINITION: OL refers to both incremental change and to “double loop” learning, which involves a more dramatic change in mindset – questioning the underlying paradigm or values on which programs or decisions might be based)

YES

NO

Q C4 If yes, can you provide some examples? If no, please explain.

Q C5 *Optional*: How could the AACSB accreditation process be improved for your school of business to promote more learning? (I.e., what factors would help to facilitate the process? What are the main barriers?)

Q D Consequences - Constraining

Q D1 Have you found that, in any way, the accreditation process is constraining? (E.g., for decision-making, managing your operations; E.g., are there certain things that you would like to do differently but can’t?)

Q D2 How would you describe the degree of formalization that you have in your business practices/procedures? (i.e., the extent to which practices are formalized in explicit, written, policies, procedures, etc.)

HIGH MED LOW

Q D3 Has this changed before and after accreditation?

YES NO

Q D4 Overall, on the whole, do you find that accreditation is ‘enabling’ or ‘constraining’? (i.e., Where does the balance tip?)

Q E Cost/Benefit

Q E1 What do you see as the main benefits that you have derived from accreditation?

Q E2 *Optional*: What do you think is the cost in dollars and time devoted to the AACSB (and others?)

Q E3 Do you think that accreditation adds to your school’s legitimacy in any way?

YES NO

Q E4 Please explain (if yes, to whom? And how do you know?)

Q F Other Comments:

Q F1 Is there anything else that you would like to add? (What other comments or questions do you have regarding AACSB Accreditation at your school and its impact?)

THANK YOU for contributing to this research!!

Appendix I – Letter of Individual Consent

[Date]

[name]

[Position]

[Department]

[address]

Dear [name]

Greetings! I am a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa, conducting research into the accreditation of Canadian university business schools. I am very pleased that Dean [] has agreed to participate as one of the sites in a multiple case study that I am conducting, entitled: *Understanding the Impact of Accreditation on Canadian Business Schools*. The last 10-15 years has witnessed a significant upsurge in the number of universities seeking accreditation; however, there is little research into the consequences of this phenomenon. Through this research, I hope to deepen our understanding of the impacts of accreditation as well as the influencing factors and conditions.

I would like to invite you to participate. [Dean X] has identified you as someone who has either been impacted by accreditation or involved in the accreditation process. If you agree, your participation would be voluntary and would involve no risks or significant inconvenience to you. You may withdraw at any time. Please note that there would be no consequences to you for choosing *not* to participate or to withdraw from the study. As you no doubt have many questions, I have tried to anticipate some of them and have provided a response below:

What are the objectives of this research? Overall, the purpose of my research is to learn more about the impact of AACSB accreditation on Canadian university business schools. I am interested in gaining both the perspectives of faculty and administration.

Who is the research team? This is my doctoral research project and I will be conducting the research myself, under the supervision of my thesis advisor, Professor Swee Goh, of the University of Ottawa Telfer School of Management.

What does participation imply? If you agree to participate in our research, I would ask you to be involved in an individual interview. It would be conducted by me, on site, and it would be an estimated 60 minutes in length. With your permission it would be audio-taped to ensure accuracy. Upon completion of the data analysis, you will also have an opportunity to review the results of the case study – summarized

in the draft Case Profile report. (Note: in certain instances, a second interview may be requested for clarification or elaboration.)

How would the data be treated? All discussions would be considered to be private and all of the information collected would be treated as confidential. My advisor and I will be the only individuals who have access to the data. Direct verbatim quotations would be included in reports arising from the research, however, individual's identity would be withheld (i.e., personally identifying information would be removed and the contents of the quote would not reveal individual identities).

What would be the potential benefits of participation for you? I am hopeful that the findings arising from this research and indeed participation in the process would be useful to you in reflecting on the accreditation process and its consequences in your organization and potentially making this process more beneficial to your school or faculty. I will share the individual Case Profile Report with you and summaries of the cross-case research, including my conclusions about the impact of accreditation, the factors and conditions which influence the process, and any differences which exist between different "stakeholder groups" (i.e., faculty versus administration).

Thank you for considering this request. I truly hope that you would be willing and able to participate in this study. Please confirm your interest at your earliest convenience to me (see coordinates below). I would be happy to provide further information if necessary.

The University of Ottawa, Research Ethics Review Board, has approved this research. Inquiries or any questions dealing with ethical conduct of this research can be addressed to the Prot.

The University of Ottawa requires that its researchers obtain formal consent from those participating in research. Your signature at the bottom of this letter would serve such a purpose. If you could please bring a signed copy of this form to your first interview, it will be co-signed by the researcher and a copy will be provided for your records. Any questions that you have can also be addressed at that time.

I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Catherine Elliott
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
145 Jean Jacques Lussier

I agree to participate in the study:

_____/_____/_____
Participant's Name Signature Date

I also consent to this interview being audio-taped.

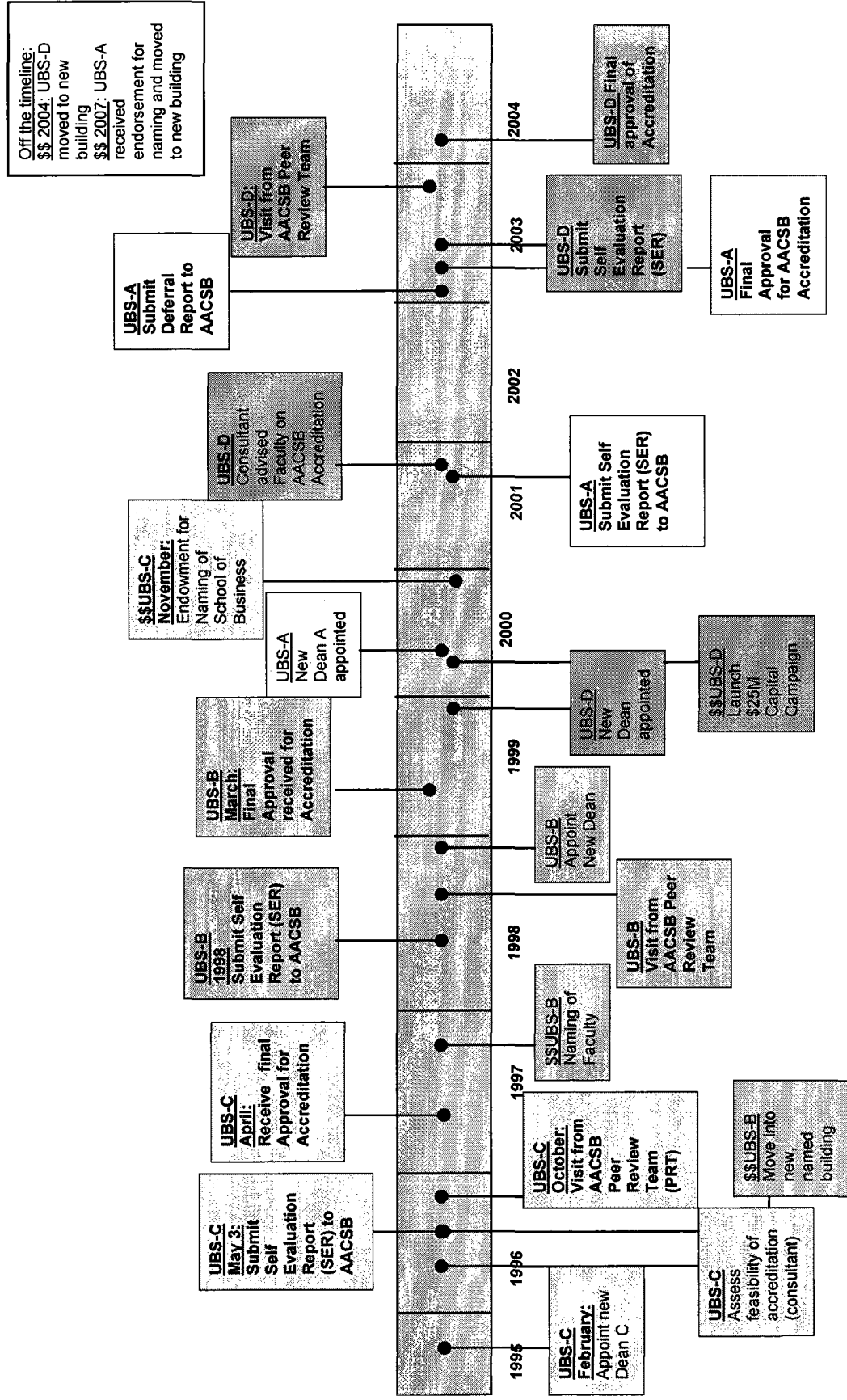
☐ Yes ☐ No

_____/_____/_____
Researcher's Name Signature Date

Appendix J - Observation Checklist

	Observation/Comments	Data Source Description & Date	Summary
<i>Physical Layout & Artifacts:</i>			
Location on Campus			
General Impression			
Signage			
Accreditation Info			
Student meeting areas			
Classrooms			
Career Centre			
Awards & Other Recognition			
Other			
<i>Formal Practices & Policies:</i>			
Structure of Department			
Overall Governance Structure			
Decision-making			
<i>Social Interactions:</i>			
Informal student-faculty			
Informal faculty-faculty			
Informal faculty-admin			
Formal admin (e.g. meetings)			
Organizational Stories			
<i>Other:</i>			

Appendix K – Accreditation Timeline



Appendix L— Impacts of Accreditation

TYPE OF ACTION /IMPACT	IMPACT & DESCRIPTION	School		Illustrative Comments for this School
IMMED TERM	Increased Management Efficiencies - Focus on Performance Management – Rationalization of programs, definition of metrics, documentation, measurement, tracking, and overall management	A	●● (2)	<i>I think that we have become more efficient and more effective. We are using our resources better... we have improved our processes drastically...</i>
		B	○	Faculty coverage ratios are loosely monitored and can serve as a useful benchmark
		C	●●	<i>... we had to change our ways of collecting our information. We used to do it every 2 years, to help with a bit of planning and then assignment of courses. So, with accreditation, we had to keep track of it on a regular basis... Certainly, the accreditation did help improve on the collection of information or the documentation of information...</i>
		D	⊗	<i>We implemented a system just to get us thorough the accreditation process. And subsequent to that, we have implemented faculty-wide... ...Forcing us to go through the process of seeing whether what we're doing makes sense in the context of what we have set as a strategic direction...</i>
	Program revisions - due to AACSB accreditation process (or metrics such as coverage ratios, general arts component)	A	●●	<i>Well, there had to be a rationalization of the portfolio of our products... we were offering were too many based on the resource base that we had... Note: revisions were also due to the Double Cohort in Ontario</i>
		B		Many program revisions but not due to accreditation
		C	●●	Revised Undergraduate curriculum largely in preparation/ anticipation of accreditation. ...we completely revamped our undergraduate curriculum.
	Catalyst for Change – AACSB can stimulate change within the faculty and/or serves as a lever for negotiation with Central Administration (e.g., to lobby for more resources)	D	●	Minor restructuring of the Commerce Program to meet AACSB structural requirements. Also, the introduction of a more transparent admissions process for a specialized MBA program. The impact was greatest felt in the accounting area: <i>it has to do with the Accounting area, where to get your CA designation you have to have X, Y and Z - you have to have all these credits...</i>
		A	●●	<i>It was kind of a first step to a number of other initiatives that built on it and allowed us to grow... ...when they come, AACSB, they are very good, they go to see the President and they say 'your school is underfunded' or 'you need a new building' - lobby for the business school</i>
		B	⊗ (2)	Refers to the benefit that accreditation can have in lobbying for resources at OTHER schools, those schools that are struggling for resources (lower tier schools; underfunded provinces). <i>Accreditation is only of interest while it is going on!</i>
		C	●● (1)	For: 1) lobbying central administration; and 2) using as a lever for change internally. With accreditation maintenance, there is much optimism for AOL to serve as a strong lever for curriculum change.

				...it has been a good tool to approach the highest administration in the university, saying 'we need more budget for full-time faculty.'
	D	●●		For: 1) promoting the Dean's research agenda; and 2) lobbying the central administration for resources or more attention: ...it brought research – those people trying to promote the research agenda – it gave them some more leverage. ... a useful tool when dealing with the senior administration, when it comes to things like what a faculty complement needs to look like.
SHORT TERM	A	●●		Introduced Beta, Gamma, Sigma; Mentorship Program; Dedicated Career Centre...
	B			Introduced many new programs but not due to AACSB. E.g., launched a PT MBA program, reformatted and re-launched 13 month EMBA, established endowments for top academic priorities.
	C	⊗		Started surveying graduates. It forced us to look at our graduates, who we hadn't paid any attention to for years.
	D			Some programs were threatened; none were introduced due to AACSB: The other thing that we had to do was we had a program; very successful program with the Institute [X]'s – graduate program - and such a program had never been accredited before... they had gone into places like [X] that had certain programs and brought the hammer down, and made them close them. But we were convinced that what we were doing was quality.
	A	●● (1)		Pride in the school, particularly faculty and students. And enhanced reputation. ... we are on the map internationally now, because of this particular kind of accreditation.
	B	⊗ (1)		Includes recognition outside of Canada, at this particular time, (late 1990's) when recruiting international students (more aggressive marketplace). This was before School A had established itself strongly as a recognized brand, (as a recognized symbol of quality).
	C	●● (2)		...it all kind of went into a 4 or 5 year public relations campaign that helped us, become much more of a visible presence... ... we got the morale boost that we absolutely needed – it was real important...so, for us at the time, (it's not as useful this way anymore), legitimacy, branding, it fed into when we changed our name and everything else...
	D	●● (1)		Includes international recognition and recognition within the University itself: ...The international aspect. When you are dealing with anyone from the United States or Europe... ...it does you good in your status in the university as a whole.
	A	●●		I think that it has had a very positive impact on the overall quality of the program in terms of the curriculum...
MEDIUM TERM				Improved Quality – Improvements in quality of

programs and new faculty (improved faculty recruitment).			... the quality of the candidates that knock on the door are better because we are an accredited school...
	B		No impact mentioned by any respondents.
	C	⊗	The main benefit is to be conscious of certain standards of performance that we needed to meet... Much optimism that AOL will contribute greatly to increased quality
	D	⊗	...I think that it's quality assurance that would be the main one. ... We are more conscious of what we're doing and just judging what we're doing. By an external entity, external standards, etc.
Increased Focus on Research* Increased tracking and productivity (i.e., incentives)	A	●●	Part of what the accreditation did was to highlight the need to be more research-focused. That was I think our weakest area. And that created this research culture that is building
	B		No impacts mentioned by any respondents.
	C	⊗	You know, it didn't change research productivity. We documented it. We collected the data and we weren't collecting the data. And that is useful...
	D	●● (2)	BUT it didn't really change motivation... In our case, we assign courses on the basis of research productivity, so the less research you do, the more courses you teach. So, it's kind of built in. ... there was a lot more emphasis put on research. That was the area where we fell down the most in terms of the kind of calculations... while we still have a long way to go, there is very, very much the beginnings of a much stronger research culture... ... definitely the contribution of AACSB has to been to shift more towards research.

* NOTE: many of the comments in "Increased focus on research" were also related to "catalyst for change"

Legend and Decision Rules:

Symbol	Meaning	Evidence
(1)	Top Ranked Responses:	
(2)	(1) First; (2) Second	Highest frequency of responses
●●	Very Strongly Present	The strong majority of respondents (>70%)
●	Strongly Present	✓✓✓ - 3 or more (>40%)
⊗	Moderately Present	✓✓ - ✓✓✓
○	Slightly Present	✓✓ or 1 validated with documentation
IM	Immediate	Before (leading up to) Accreditation or During Accreditation
S	Short Term	Shortly after Accreditation (e.g., 0-2 years)
M	Medium Term	After accreditation (e.g., 2+ years)

Appendix M – Continuous Improvement

SCHOOLS	A N=10	B N=7	C N=7	D N=6	
<i>Does accreditation contribute to continuous improvement?</i>	70% YES	0% YES	43% YES	17% YES	ILLUSTRATIVE COMMENTS
PREDOMINANT THEMES					
Regular Review Processes & Performance Metrics	✓✓✓ ✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		...we now monitor very carefully our coverage issues in terms of full-time faculty coverage of courses... ...All of the processes and systems that result from the AACSB are continuous improvement oriented. You measure something, and if it's not at the desired level, you take action... ... you know that you are going to be constantly looked at, every 5 or 6 years... that keeps you sharp... School B – No, there is already enough rigour in their evaluation processes. ...It made us question a lot of things, you know – what do we want to do, what's our mission? How do we fit into the mission? ... caused the administration of the faculty to look at the processes that we have in place. ... more of a discussion of how do we measure performance ... more of a discussion of student survey results, in particular student satisfaction... ...I think that is internally driven here. I don't think that anyone could raise the bar any higher than our Dean does and the Associate Dean...and there is enough rigour in the evaluation process here.... ...From what I've seen, it truly is (the Dean) and his vision... ...I would put it more on the personality of the Deans than I would on accreditation. Dean [X] probably used it as a lever to make us move in the direction that he was comfortable with.... That's why the business rankings are becoming more important. Because they look at the crucial test which is what do the recruiters think of your students? And how happy are your students 2-3 years after the MBA? ...It made us question a lot of things, you know – what do we want to do, what's our mission? How do we fit into the mission? ... caused the administration of the faculty to look at the processes that
Change in Focus - Quality as Key	✓✓ ✓				
CI is internally-driven - by the Dean, mission, vision, ambitious goals, NOT by accreditation		✓✓ ✓✓		✓	
Rankings are more important driver and measure of quality/CI (one also mentioned ability to attract \$)		✓✓			
Forced business school to re-assess			✓✓		

							we have in place.
Not CI in certain areas like curriculum change				✓✓✓✓			...our school certainly became quite lethargic over the years in terms of curriculum planning... the last time that we had a major undergraduate curriculum revision was 10 years ago.
Too difficult to sustain – 10 years between accreditation & maintenance – new system is better – but requires sustained effort.				✓✓✓✓			...it did, at the time. But I would say that the system at the time, though, was such that, we fell into... the tenure period was just too long. So, the new system is much better It's not something that can be done on an ad hoc basis... it becomes an ongoing process. But that's what quality control is.
Focus on Research (and hiring new recruits with strong interest in research)				✓		✓✓	...I think that there is continuous improvement in our attention to faculty and their doing research. And that has been a prominent shift... School D... while we still have a long way to go, there is very, very, much the beginnings of a much stronger research culture than there was in the past.
Already have processes for review, problem-solving, decision-making; another said NO, do not have institutionalized practices for reflection and feedback						✓✓	No change - I don't think that we did anything different about solving problems before versus after. I think that we always had review and follow-up mechanisms on problems and we do now, so I don't see anything that is different... (NOTE: opposite below) Opposite - Continuous improvement necessarily suggests that the individuals and the enterprise itself is constantly involved in reflective behaviours, in fact demonstrating their proclivity to being a learning organization. And I just don't see that here.
Useful as leverage for senior administration						✓✓	I think that it can be quite a nice form of leverage with senior university officials to get more resources...

Legend and Decision Rules

Symbol	Meaning	Evidence
●●	Very Strongly Present	The strong majority of respondents (>70%)
●	Strongly Present	✓✓✓ - 3 or more (>40%)
⊗	Moderately Present	✓✓ - ✓✓✓ (30%+)
○	Slightly Present	✓✓ or 1 validated with documentation
	Not Present	
	Predominant Themes	Highest number of responses across UBS's.

Appendix N – Organizational Learning

	SCHOOLS				ILLUSTRATIVE COMMENTS
	A 70% YES or DK1	B 0% YES	C 57% DK1 /Maybe	D 50% DK1	
Does Accreditation contribute to Organizational Learning? YES*					
PREDOMINANT THEMES					
Alignment with Mission/ Mission-driven - Best use of resources -consider impact of change vis a vis accreditation	✓✓				...generally speaking, that is a question that is top of mind when we are looking at any change internally. 'How does it relate to AACSB accreditation? How does it relate to our mission?'
Approach to Change & Decision-making - Critical analysis – research, use of data (e.g., student satisfaction) in evaluation/analysis of programs, strategic decision-making	✓✓				...I think that it has changed the way that we approach change...
Change in Mindset More performance-oriented, more research-focused and more customer focused.	✓✓			✓✓	School A - Well, the change in culture.... I think what has had an impact, though, is on the research side. School D – slight increase in research focus to which accreditation contributed; But definitely the contribution of AACSB has to been to shift more towards research...
Catalyst for Change Mobilized the faculty around change; OR School C -maintenance of accreditation will serve to stimulate change (due to more frequent reporting, AOL)	✓		✓✓✓✓		...if you just ask me the question – 'has AACSB made you think more...?' I'd say, 'naaa', but I guess that it really has, because it has caused all of these other things to take place. School C – while they have been "lackadaisical" about sustaining changes from initial accreditation, they are optimistic that accreditation maintenance will stimulate change, CI and possibly OL: ... Yes, the true assurance of quality aspects are coming now...the AOL stuff is doing it...
Does Accreditation contribute to Organizational Learning? NO**	A 60% NO or DK1	B 100% NO	C 86% NO or DK1	D 100% NO or DK1	
Lack of Sustainability - of Process or of actual Learning	✓✓		✓✓✓✓		... In our case, we have been accredited a long period.... So the faculty was mobilized when it happened, and now, nobody even talks about it anymore, we have forgotten about it... but I don't think that the faculty is altogether very interested in these things. ... learning means that you retain it, so ...I don't get a sense that we continually update our files on what our competitors are doing or our other

						undergrad programs are doing. ...But then when they realize that they won't be reevaluated or checked on for 5 or 10 years, there is a tendency to relax... ...But if organizational learning means that everybody gets the information and everybody learns where the organization is going, then that's too much for your average prof. Your average prof doesn't care. ... one of the paradoxes of Universities is that they are places of learning, but it is student learning that is paramount... ...The big question for us is how do we diffuse those benefits in the general faculty? I don't think that we have been extremely active or focused on that at the time.... ...Continuous improvement necessarily suggests that the individuals and the enterprise itself is constantly involved in reflective behaviours, in fact demonstrating their proclivity to being a learning organization. And I just don't see that here. ... this sort of knowledge isn't codified anywhere – it is all in peoples' heads, really... ...but I think that the level of engagement at the faculty level for the accreditation process was relatively limited... ...we're in an academic institution so we are supposed to be loosely coupled and decoupled which means that I really shouldn't be bothered with information that I don't need. Because I'm an academic and I'm supposed to publish and not worry about anything that's going on with the rest of the building.... ...It doesn't work in a school. Because you're managing...if there are 100 professors, you are managing 100 individual stars... ...They don't understand, they don't concern themselves with, they don't think about the management processes. ...How you bring them with you is a very difficult process... Because of the collegial structure of faculty.... ...In terms of encouraging dialogue, no, I don't think so. In some ways, it closes it off because the focus is so much on, 'these are the accreditation requirements, so we don't want to hear those other viewpoints, because we have got to keep accreditation'. I think that some of the effects are more dysfunctional from a learning or an innovating perspective.
Individual vs. Organizational Learning While the University encourages individual learning it does NOT promote OL	✓✓		✓	✓		
Lack of Communication/ Engagement/ Diffusion of Change (OL); Lack of institutionalized practices and KM	✓✓					
Application of OL to Academic Institution Does/how does the concept apply to a SOM? What are the rewards and incentives to change?	✓✓✓✓		✓✓	✓✓		
Discourages Creativity Accreditation process increases rigidity and lack of flexibility, thereby limiting innovation	✓✓✓					
OL is internally-driven - by the Dean, mission, vision, ambitious goals, NOT by		✓✓✓✓			✓✓	

accreditation					the Dean's vision, ambitious goals, a culture of innovation and change:... ...I think that there is a tremendous desire to make significant changes in all sorts of things and it is an internally generated thing. School D - ...I would say that the Faculty of Management as a whole, particularly with our current Dean has that mindset, but it has nothing to do with accreditation though...
Dynamic Environment/Culture			✓✓✓✓		School B- I think that the rate of improvement that is going on here is just way off the charts. So, I don't think that it is the outside bodies (like accreditation) that is doing it. However, 2 participants felt that rankings also drove change.

Legend and Decision Rules

Symbol	Meaning	Evidence
●●	Very Strongly Present	The strong majority of respondents (>70%)
●	Strongly Present	✓✓✓ - 3 or more (>40%)
⊗	Moderately Present	✓✓ - ✓✓✓ (30%+)
○	Slightly Present	✓✓ or 1 validated with documentation
	Not Present	
	Predominant Themes	Highest number of responses across UBS's.

Appendix O –Constraining Consequences

Have you found that Accreditation is Constraining in any way?	A	Comments	B	Comments	C	Comments	D	Comments
NO	1	No Impact - 1	5	No Impact	3	Positive	3	Positive or no impact
DID NOT ANSWER/ DON'T KNOW/NON-COMMITTAL	3	Didn't answer - 3	2	No Impact	1		2	
YES	6	Constraining -2 Necessary Evil - 4			3	But not negative	2	Rigid Standards
In what way?		Comments		Comments		Comments		Comments
Constraint on Curriculum, Program Changes and Staffing (e.g. maintain standards – coverage ratios, general arts components, etc.)**	5	...we are regularly hearing, 'no we can't do that because we have to watch our ratios', or we have got to watch the qualifications... Note –can also be positive –used as leverage for staffing. And even those who view it as constraining, still often see it as positive in terms of its impact on the SOM.	2	...Wearing my staffing hat, or my curriculum development hat, what I find constraining is the percentage of Ph.D. 's teaching in the program, simply because I would like to use more adjunct faculty in certain areas...	5	...You have to watch your night ratios, your day ratios, your core ratios....so it makes it difficult... Note –can also be positive leverage for staffing: ... The one constraint that has been positive for us has been the teaching ratios – we've always been able to use that to get the numbers of hirings up...	3	...They aren't really all that prepared to look at, for example, curricula that are very different.... Accounting Program: ...in order to make it work for [X], we did have to make some changes, in some courses – and some changes in programmatic things to bend to their needs.
Forces IM and Reporting	3	...it forces us to keep information and to manage information and prepare reports and so on and so forth...						

Changes Decision-making	3	Comes up in discussions and decision-making – need to consider ‘what is impact on AACSB?’ More performance and data-driven as well.		1	...yes, definitely, because you are conscious of how that decision will affect certain information that you report to the AACSB...	
Externally Imposed - Quality defined by external body; constraint on innovation (1)	3	...you’ve got these externally imposed limits which mean that you can’t necessarily craft what you would have liked...		1		...they have a very distinct model that they think is “best” and you must conform to that model or you will not be certified.
Lack of cultural sensitivity	3	...And even though they say that they are ‘AACSB International’, there wasn’t much of an international component...				
Uses Resources	2	...all of those things are constraints in terms of, to start off they require time, they require resource, ok?		2	...it does mean that we need to allocate someone to do this. It does take a lot of time and effort.	
Change in Power and Politics	1	Driven more by professors before – power now shifted to admin.				

Decision Rules:

✓	One response from one respondent. Respondents only counted once.
Note:	N=10 for School A; 7 for School B, 7 for School C, and 7 for School D.

Appendix P – Overall Responses – Enabling or Constraining

“On the whole, overall, do you find that accreditation is ‘enabling’ or ‘constraining’?”		
School	Combined Response	Comments/Rationale
A	Positive - Enabling	Positive, particularly as viewed by administrators. <i>...in a sense, it forces us to do the right thing...</i> <i>...We haven't really drastically changed what we were doing before, we just made sure that we were doing what we were supposed to do...</i> Not sure about longer term implications: <i>...The consequences of once it is achieved, maybe it doesn't look as exciting anymore. This is where it still has its role...it requires us to be careful about doing the right thing...</i>
B	Neutral	No impact on them, but would likely be enabling for lower-tier universities; or those that need external standards: <i>...It is enabling for schools that need to have external standards...I mean, all those low rung schools are essentially local schools so they buy into accreditation and are living up to these requirements. So to them AACSB is enabling...I honestly don't think the same is true here...</i> <i>...I would say it depends entirely upon the University...It's probably more constraining for us; and it's more enabling for...</i>
C	Positive - Enabling	Positive – all who responded felt that it was positive overall (equally by faculty and admin.) (note: many faculty had also worked in admin roles): <i>...I don't find the constraints particularly harsh. I think it gives us a little structure and stops us from doing things that maybe we shouldn't do...</i> <i>...I think that the balance has been a positive contribution to what we do...</i> <i>...It has been constraining in a positive way.</i> <i>...I can't say that it forced us out of anything...that we should have been in.</i>
D	Neutral to Slightly Positive	Neutral to Slightly Positive <i>...I don't really see it as a constraint. I see it more as something that helps us recognize and define what we need to do to get it right...</i> <i>...I would say that it is more constraining. That relates to the area that I teach in, and the challenges that my area group has....(Accounting)</i> <i>....Again, I have not been affected by the AACSB, really. None of the constraints has been binding...</i>

Appendix Q - Formalization

CURRENT level	Did Formalization Increase?	AREAS OF IMPACT					
		Increased focus on performance metrics	Improved data collection, management and access (systems)	Learning Objectives	Increased documentation/improved communication & reporting	More attention to existing processes & application	Already have formalized systems in place
A Med - High	YES 60% (Higher) NO 40%	✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	
School A - COMMENTS		... we keep much more documentation and much more data because we know that we have to go through this. And so you have build a data collection mechanism and team and stream – we do much more student satisfaction data and course coverage data. So, we are more focused on performance metrics. We haven't really drastically changed what we were doing before, we just made sure that we were doing what we were supposed to do. Faculty member:....I think that there is a lot more data being collected and so on, but I don't necessarily see it... or we hear the student satisfaction results for example, where we might not have heard them before, so we have some discussions around what can we do. No...I don't get a sense that we have become more formalized...I mean, it's normal university bureaucracy...					
B Med	NO 100%						✓✓✓
School B - Comments		Already in place for other accreditations...It is a fairly formalized place and recall we go through Ontario reviews all the time and the University reviews (an external review) every 5 years...					
C Med-High	NO 83% YES 17% (Higher)			✓	✓		✓✓✓✓✓

		AREAS OF IMPACT					
CURRENT level	Did Formalization Increase?	Increased focus on performance metrics	Improved data collection, management and access (systems)	Learning Objectives	Increased documentation/ improved communication & reporting	More attention to existing processes & application	Already have formalized systems in place
School C - Comments		...No, there has been no change. It is driven completely by the collective agreement. All of our procedures, written down procedures, stem from the processes in the collective agreement – that is the number one governance instrument. ... You know, it didn't change drastically. In terms of some things like the research monitoring and research productivity, we were doing that already... We are pretty systematized anyway. First of all, we have a union. ... We have processes for appointments of faculty, tenure, promotion, all of that is in place. Standards for admission and evaluation of students, they were there. Nothing in there was created because of accreditation. The only thing was the way to collect and document available information.					
D Med -Low	NO 100%		✓				✓
School D - Comments		Introduced a system to satisfy AACSB requirements – different way of collecting info on research productivity.: we implemented a system just to get us thorough the accreditation process. And subsequent to that, we have implemented faculty-wide stuff... (to avoid duplication). ... if you think about all of the committees and the meetings and the reporting that Universities typically do, it would be hard to think about it being increased...and the collective agreement, it is 4 or 500 pages long – it is ridiculously comprehensive...					
TOTAL - Med	NO	2	6	2	3	2	9

Decision Rules:

✓	One response from one respondent. Respondents only counted once.
Note:	N=10 for School A; 7 for School B, 7 for School C, and 7 for School D.

Appendix R – Legitimacy

MAJOR THEMES							
Does Accreditation add to the School's Legitimacy?	Increased Pride in School – Faculty and/or Students	Not Differentiating or Deterministic	Redundant	AACSB as American	Homogenizing	Reputation/ Marketing / Branding	
School A 70% YES 20% DK1 10% NO	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	
Comments	... It has increased our own personal pride in the school. ... in terms of legitimacy, we don't need AACSB for legitimacy, not within in the Canadian system – it is an add-on, it is something more... ... Yes, up to the point where everybody has it, then it will be 'no.' ... it would be very unlikely that this would be a deterministic attribute for a student to come here for business because the other attributes are so much more critical...						
School B 43% YES 43% NO 14% MAYBE			✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓✓	
Comments	Helped 10 years ago. Rankings were all that mattered. ...No, I think that [School B] is legitimate as it is. And having somebody checking a whole bunch of boxes doesn't make us illegitimate or legitimate. ...It is something that lends legitimacy to smaller schools and that is why they want it. And it is something that the bigger schools can pretty much ignore...						
School C 100% YES	✓✓		✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	
Comments	... but they did seem to be a very American-focused sort of place... they were very parochial... ... this is an extremely isomorphic sort of place, where the institutional pressures were extremely strong... ...you know, we got the morale boost that we absolutely needed – it was real important, for us at the time... legitimacy, branding, it fed into when we changed our name and everything else...						

MAJOR THEMES						
Does Accreditation add to the School's Legitimacy?	Increased Pride in School – Faculty and/or Students	Not Differentiating or Deterministic	Redundant	AACSB as American	Homogenizing	Reputation/ Marketing / Branding
	...I remember, years before that, when this issue came up...and we decided 'don't do it, we'll become an American school... in a sense, yes, it does legitimize what the school does...But just to some extent. And I say that because we have other schools, equally good...that don't have accreditation from AACSB, but that doesn't mean that their programs are not legitimate...					
School D 67% YES 33% DK1	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	
	In Canada, we had relatively few higher educational institutions, they were all basically established by the government, and everyone assumed that they were accredited, so running around telling everyone that you were accredited didn't get you anything because it didn't mean anything...BUT a few things changed. ... It was largely an American one and in fact AACSB stood for the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business...The interesting thing is that in the United States, you have the full spectrum of Universities... ...and these are all American Deans, and I think that they are very trapped inside the traditional way of thinking about business education. So I think that is a serious... drawback of the AACSB.. And my concern was - from what I knew of accreditation in general and what I had seen of AACSB accreditation - that would be a process of benchmarking us against everybody else and being the same as everybody else.. ...except for a very small amount of the decision factors, it is not meaningful, my suspicion is. So people look and they say, 'good, it's accredited, check mark'. They might have concerns if it weren't accredited...					
Total Responses	9	5	12	13	6	8

Decision Rules:

✓	One response from one respondent. Respondents only counted once.
DK1	Did Not Answer – the respondent provided a non-committal or ambiguous response.
Note:	N=10 for School A; 7 for School B, 7 for School C, and 7 for School D.

Appendix S - Legitimacy – “To Whom?”

Legitimacy – TO WHOM?	Respondents	Representative Comments
Current Faculty	A - ✓✓✓✓ B - No C- ✓✓ D - ✓✓ Total = 8	<u>A:</u>...I think both internally – faculty take a lot of pride in being an AACSB school; students, I think, take a lot of pride in it... ...For our employees it is. I think there's a degree of if you say it enough times, publicly, it sort of sounds like we are a better school. There is sort of this incremental reputation improvement, except that no one would really know why. It has increased our own personal pride in the school. It is an achievement. ...and with the AACSB accreditation, I think that it gave people a sense of pride. I'm not sure at first whether some really understood what it was, but I think as they started to learn that it was setting them apart from other schools, from the competition, that they started feeling good about themselves. And moving into the new building now, it's almost like the icing on the cake. I mean, it's...these are tangible things that you can see. <u>B:</u>...Faculty don't know about accreditation. <u>C:</u> Certainly internally... –you know, we got the morale boost that we absolutely needed – it was real important.. <u>D:</u> I think that everyone was pleased – NOTE: 2 say that Faculty took pride in the accreditation, but others say that the faculty were not impressed.” People who have been here forever, know how good we are at some things and how bad we are at others!”
Current Students - Undergrad	A - ✓✓✓ B, C, D - ??? Total = 3	<u>A</u>...students, I think, take a lot of pride in it... ... Well, in terms of the students, I remind them that we are from an AACSB. They don't quite appreciate that – that in itself is an achievement. ... Umm...I think for the students, it's beneficial in the sense that they feel like they are graduating from a recognized university in some sense. I think that there is more pride perhaps for the students, knowing that they went to an accredited school. Do you talk to any of them about this? It's just a feeling that I get. ...And from the students' perspective as well, it's something that they see and that they feel. So it's a much more positive environment. ...NOT SURE I'm not quite sure if there is a big benefit on the student side. There is a marginal benefit there, that's probably my least highly ranked because I don't think that a lot of students know what it is. ...So, seeing AACSB doesn't mean anything, but when you explain it to them, it means a lot. <u>C:</u> Sometimes, we even get questions from potential applicants...we get that more and more.
Current Students - Grad	A - ✓✓✓✓ Total = 4	<u>A:</u> See above. Note: the respondents don't always differentiate between undergrad and grad. I think it depends on who they teach/are in contact with the most. MBA students care more about rankings, according to the Current Director: ...If you want to be ranked as a business school and be able to say that you are in the top 25%, – that is a big seller for students. They can't all afford, (or get into), Harvard, Yale, Chicago, whatever else, so we need to be able to differentiate

Legitimacy – TO WHOM?	Respondents	Representative Comments
Prospective Students	Overall: Uncertain: A- ?? B – No C - ?? D - ???? ? Not undergrad. International: A - ✓✓ B – ✓✓ C - ✓✓ D - ✓✓ Total = 8	ourselves... if you talk to anyone, internationally, they know the Financial Times and they know the Economist – so those are 2 major rankings that are important. A:...I don't know about students coming in...to me, it would be very unlikely that this would be a deterministic attribute for a student to come here for business because the other attributes are so much more critical. Like can I afford to go away or not? Um...do I want to leave home or not? These are all very significant life things...I think that perhaps the international students – that is quite plausible. ...Now, when they have recruitment sessions for the MBA, I'm sure that it is flouted, so it would be more important at the MBA than the undergraduate probably. ...I don't know, honestly, for sure, how successful accreditation was in allowing us to attract more or better quality students. I have kind of mixed signals on that front. Some students indicate that it is part of their decision process to seek accredited schools; some students couldn't care less. And so I don't know for sure...there are other factors that come into play and accreditation is not necessarily very high on the list of most students. That's the perception that I have - but this is mainly anecdotal... think something like moving into a new building and getting a named endowment probably has a lot more impact on attracting quality students than accreditation. ... I don't know in North America, but I have interviewed some French students in Europe, and asked them why they had gone to X, and they said because "the school is accredited" ... Even more so for international. When you shop on the web, there is definitely this...of selection. Unless you have a brand that doesn't require this, which is not our case. B: ...I don't think any student (undergrad) even knows about it. So, AACSB is an MBA problem. I'm really not sure. The international students might care... So that's why I think that the only important aspect of this is a signal, in an easy way, to an international student that you are somehow part of the pack C: ...Sometimes, we even get questions from potential applicants... we get that more and more. ...Students and parents do pay attention to rankings of business schools and accreditation. ...certainly, from a recruiting perspective, especially on an international basis, it is almost a....you have to have it in a sense. Because if you think of international students choosing from amongst a very wide series ofand if we are going to continue to recruit in the Middle East and China, then you need to have that accreditation. D:...I would expect that the accreditation has no impact on them at all, unless they are international students... the MBA's would at least understand the brand recognition thing. RE: accreditation and undergrad students: You'd like to think so, but you know it never ceases to amaze me that students come to university for the strangest reasons ... RE: accreditation and undergrad students: I don't think that they have a clue what that is about... But for most international students, though, for most, that is one of the criteria that will come up...about the same for all programs

Legitimacy – TO WHOM?	Respondents	Representative Comments
Faculty Recruits	A - ✓ D - ✓ Total = 3	<u>A:</u> ... Clearly, in terms of faculty, that we are looking to hire, it has increased the perception of us, as a school. So I think that it has had a lot of value from that perspective. ...Now, we have probably been successful in recruiting some junior faculty that we might not have gotten to come otherwise. <u>D:</u> ...And, to some degree to potential new hires of faculty..
Canadian Marketplace – e.g., employers, external stakeholders	A - ?? not yet; no B - C - ✓ D - ✓ Total = 3	<u>A:</u> ... The Canadian marketplace still doesn't quite understand what it is. And we have been talking to other AACSB accredited schools that we need to do a better job of promoting what AACSB is so that employers and other understand what that is. ... <u>Well, to be honest, I don't think that most external stakeholders have a clue what accreditation means! In terms of the criteria, how many of them would know what those criteria are? So you get the nice little logo, everybody sees it, and I don't know if anybody knows what it means...</u> <u>C:</u> - To the community, to ourselves. You know, we are like "the other" school in town. So, to have something that McGill didn't have was a big plus. And to be the 4th school, (forgetting UBC and it's history), we were the 4th Canadian school to get accreditation. And not long after that, there was a certain damn that broke and everybody went for it. <u>D:</u> - RS...I would say, though, to be fair, that a number of our Board of Advisors regard it as very positive(Canadian Businessmen). That it is sort of higher education's stamp of approval. No matter what it is, it is a process to have to go through every few years. They like that. Did they give more money because of it? I don't think so! ... The Board of Advisors... they wanted to be associated with the AACSB.
Within the University Community – between Faculties	A - B - C - ✓ D - ✓ Total = 3	<u>C:</u> - WITHIN the UNIVERSITY itself - And also for business schools, you can add it's internal too – to the institution – and the reason for it, is that business school faculty or business schools in general, are viewed as being in a professional school, not academic. So, the accreditation process and the emphasis on intellectual contributions and the qualifications of faculty, does help. I could say, look, we have a unit here that is producing, putting more emphasis on publishing... <u>D:</u> ... To the senior administration... And the senior management in the University - certainly I would say that it was a feather in our cap when we got the accreditation.
Inter-University Market (International)	A - ✓ B - C - ✓ D - ✓ Total = 3	<u>A:</u> ...it also means that, in all of our exchange programs, with schools around the world, we now look for accreditation (it doesn't have to be AACSB – it could be EQUIS or AMBA). <u>C:</u> ...Because we don't have a legitimacy problem. In all of these questions, we're talking competitive. So we don't even question our legitimacy. Where you might get close to that is that there are about 10,000 business schools in the world – the European model is private – so if we decide to do our MBAs at a business school in Barcelona or China for example - legitimacy there is what are you really buying? Here we are starting to see a little bit of that... <u>D:</u> ; and to those international audiences (he is referring to prospective recruits but also to other schools for exchanges/ partnerships, etc.

✓ - One response by one participant

? - Respondent indicated that they were uncertain, but "Didn't think so" (one response per participant)

Appendix T – Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

Dimension	Description of Practices
Vision and Goals	The extent to which the leader* works toward whole staff consensus in establishing school priorities and communicates these priorities and goals to students and staff giving a sense of overall purpose.
Culture	The extent to which the leader promotes an atmosphere of caring and trust among staff, sets a respectful tone for interaction with students and demonstrates a willingness to change his or her practices in the light of new understandings.
Structure	The extent to which the leader establishes a school structure that promotes participative decision making, supports delegation and distributive leadership and encourages teacher autonomy for making decisions.
Intellectual Stimulation	The extent to which the leader encourages staff to reflect on what they are trying to achieve with students and how they are doing it; facilitates opportunities for staff to learn from each other and models continual learning in his or her own practice.
Individual Support	The extent to which the leader provides moral support, shows appreciation for the work of individual staff and takes their opinion into account when making decisions.
Performance Expectation	The extent to which the principal has high expectations for teachers and for students and expects staff to be effective and innovative.

*Adapted from Silins and Mulford, (Silins & Mulford, 2002b) "Leader" has been substituted here for "Principal".