Reframing the 'A' Word: Front Line Worker Perceptions of Organizational Change and Personal Transitions Through the Process of Child and Family Services Accreditation.

by

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Combining phenomenological and narrative inquiry methodologies, the author explores the experiences of front-line community agency workers with the child and family services accreditation process. Eight direct service delivery employees in a rural community agency were each interviewed once regarding their perspectives of organizational change and personal transitions throughout their accreditation journey. Participants responded to a semi-structured interview covering areas that included their perceptions of organizational change and their perceptions of their own personal transitions during the accreditation process. After reporting participant responses, the author gives meaning to the data through an integrated framework blending a traditional organizational change model with a model of personal transition. This is followed by an exploration of the different levels of change involved in the accreditation process and two examples from participant data of emotional responses to perceived positive and negative change. Implications of this research are then discussed.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADM – Assistant Deputy Minister

BC – British Columbia

CARF – Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

CCHSA – Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation

COA – Council on Accreditation

CQI – Continuous Quality Improvement

MCF – Ministry for Children and Families

MCFD – Ministry for Children and Family Development

SDRI – Service Delivery Redesign Initiative
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Chapter One
Introduction

Organizational and personal change in the human services sector in British Columbia (BC) is not uncommon. The major funder – the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD), most often initiates agency transformations. Each instance of transformation imposed on the human services sector has affected many human service professionals, be they government workers or community agency employees. Child and family services accreditation has become the latest organizational change initiative to affect human services programs in BC. (See section below: Background Information) Accreditation is a major agency change initiative to all involved in the process. The possibilities of researching the impact of the accreditation process are vast. Major organizational change initiatives affect both the organization and its employees. I chose to focus this research on the organizational and personal transformation experiences of front line service employees from an agency that successfully completed the accreditation process.

I have worked in the human service sector in BC in various settings for the past nine years. My experience includes residential care, community centre youth programming, school based child and youth care, and government delivered child and family services. In all of these settings I have filled the role of front line worker. I have experienced the pressures, challenges, and rewards that front line workers deal with each day. In addition, the frameworks under which I have worked have been diverse and rarely consistent between programs or agencies. I have worked in various capacities in several offices in the past five years for the same employer and I have come to see those
inconsistencies first hand. Paper flow and related procedures, for example, differ depending on the office you work from within the same organization. Along with diverse office operations, I have also noticed how workers in one office often do not understand how other offices in their region operate. The combination of operational diversity and isolation essentially translates into one hand not knowing what the other hand is doing. Accreditation may be a remedy for this problem. Accreditation has a framework that can translate easily from one organization to the next and this framework can give direction to the front line worker who may feel overwhelmed with the absence of congruency and the presence of isolation in his or her work. The isolation and lack of congruence of service between offices and agencies can negatively impact a front line worker interfacing with clients. Clients seeking information are often phoning various people in order to obtain information on services because the worker who took the initial call simply cannot answer a question unless it pertains to his or her immediate environment. As a result of this incongruence and isolation, workers can become entrenched in one aspect of their region's work and the public continues to be frustrated because they have to search for the 'right' person to answer their queries.

The importance of congruence in service has been highlighted in recent research within the context of the extra-familial setting of child and youth care (Anglin, 2002). Anglin found that a core objective for group homes was to "achieve congruence in service of the resident children's best interest" (p. 77). This struggle for congruence was traced through various levels of professional involvement that touched the child's life. These included the MCFD, the group home managerial level, the group home supervisory level, the front line worker perspective, and that of the youth themselves. Drawing from
the logic of Anglin’s argument and applying it to the context of community agency
service, a lack of congruence in service delivery appears. While one agency is held to an
internationally accepted standard of ‘best practice’ (meaning a widely agreed upon set of
standards from which an organization should derive its policies) and another is not, we
can see a gap in the level of service available to communities between agencies.
Therefore, one can find the value of standardization of human service programs.

The focus of any human service program, community based or government
operated, should be the healthy functioning of children and their families. The
accreditation framework espouses a ‘best practice’ philosophy and emphasizes
congruence within their standards. Though policies will differ among agencies,
consistent accreditation standards espousing a ‘best practice’ philosophy would remain
congruent, particularly if all agencies used the same accreditor. Congruence within
service delivery can greatly assist a family unit as they strive for healthy functioning. If
all human service agencies subscribed to a ‘best practice’ philosophy such as
accreditation, than inconsistencies in service goals would be less likely to hinder the
improvement of the family unit.

Naturally, there are some geographical areas where community and familial needs
differ such as the needs of rural versus urban families. Therefore, dissimilar ideas of
‘best practice’ may exist. ‘Best practice’ in one area may not be the ‘best practice’ in
another. One approach could be standardization of programs and agencies at a regional
level. The MCFD in BC has five large regions, among other service branches. The
MCFD has recognized this and understood that each region would handle their own
accreditation efforts with some guidance from the central MCFD management table.
This was a decision that reflected the recognition that diverse areas had differing needs. Even on a regional level, congruence among BC community agencies and government offices in providing consistent and professional service aimed at satisfying the best interests of the client may be best achieved through a process of structured organizational change such as accreditation.

The personal aspect of organizational change can have a profound effect on workers within both government and community agencies (Ackerman Anderson, 2001, Bridges, 1991, Conner 1992, Campbell-Crisp, 1999). Take for example, the creation of the MCFD through the amalgamation of services from five ministries into one. (Explained in further in the Background Information section) Was there much thought given to how this type of change might affect the workers involved? Campbell-Crisp sought to research the lived experience of that very organizational shift from the perspectives of drug and alcohol workers’ in British Columbia, Canada. Their rich narratives offered insight into how organizational change affected them personally in their work, and as Campbell-Crisp points out, “Little is written about the impact such change has on the individuals in the organization, and little seems to be research based” (Campbell-Crisp, 1999, p.20).

Consequently, as familiar as front line workers are with the concepts of change in working with children and families, far less is known about how familiar these workers are with the experience of personal change within the context of organizational change initiatives. The process of accreditation is becoming more common for human service organizations and, again, little is known about the impact of accreditation on both
organizations and workers. This research seeks to understand the front line workers’
experience of the accreditation process and its impact on them.

Background Information

One of the most memorable organizational change initiatives within the
BC human services sector in the last decade would certainly be the creation of the
Ministry for Children and Families (MCF). This re-organizational shift involved the
amalgamation of services from five separate Government Ministries into one entity, the
previous incarnation of what is now referred to as the MCFD. This move occurred in
1996, the effects of which can arguably be felt today. There have also been various
ministry name changes over the years as well as the redefinition of regional boundaries.
Recently, the MCFD has redefined its vision of service delivery for the province of
British Columbia. After a review of core services, the MCFD management team
redefined this vision and created six strategic shifts in order to achieve it. As stated by
the MCFD website,

Achieving these strategic shifts prepares the way for transition
from central governance to a community-based governance model
of service delivery managed by five Regional Authorities, five
Aboriginal Authorities, one Community Living Authority, and one
Provincial Services division. The Ministry is actively working to
reconfigure existing programs and services to align with this new
governance model. (Retrieved from www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/
transformation/governance.htm, August, 19 2004)

The transition referred to is an ambitious move. In order to facilitate this
transition, the MCFD management team implemented a system through which to
redesign service delivery throughout the resource contracting process. They called this
initiative the Service Delivery Redesign Initiative (SDRI) (Ibid). As outlined in the MCFD webpage explaining this initiative, the SDRI sought to consolidate services, both MCFD and community delivered, into a "more accessible, coherent and integrated community-based and culturally responsive service delivery system" (Ibid). Through this redesign, new programs have been developed to reflect a progressive approach to working with BC’s children and families. The MCFD has developed, for example, the Family Development Response and the Youth Agreement programs to align service delivery with the new MCFD vision. Perhaps the most applicable point of interest in this redesign is the focus on what is referred to as performance based contract models. In other words, the MCFD is becoming increasingly interested in outcome measurements, along with outputs, as a requirement in the awarding of contracts to the community sector.

Accreditation greatly contributes to the concept of performance based contract models with its requirement of outcome measurements in its prescribed operating standards. As the SDRI moved to shift the MCFD into position along side its new vision, accreditation became a useful tool with which to achieve this realignment. Before engaging in an overview of what accreditation entails, more context is necessary. What were the converging factors that led the MCFD management team to consider accreditation for itself and the wider community agency sector? Why accreditation and how did this concept satisfy the requirements of those who awarded contracts to contracted agencies? The human service sector had been familiar with accreditation for many years, so why accreditation now?

A telephone conversation with David Young, a former Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) of the MCFD reveals much about the factors which contributed to the matter of
accreditation. With the catalyst of the contract reform initiative that began in 1997, and the continuation of this reform six years later in 2003 now referred to as the SDRI, two major issues fuelled the push for accreditation. As described by Young, these issues were “due diligence and risk management” (D. Young, Personal Communication, July 14, 2004).

An accredited agency makes it easier for the BC government to select them for a contract rather than a non-accredited organization because the MCFD management’s concerns regarding due diligence and risk management are more easily addressed and articulated in the accredited agency. Being accredited represents organizational accountability, as the process demands the production of outcomes within the framework of organizational operations. It is precisely this outcomes-based concept that allows the government to feel confident in its awarding of contract for services to children and families. An agency’s outcome measurement informs the direction of the agency, which, in turn, addresses due diligence and risk management for the MCFD. For more detail see Appendix A.

*What is Accreditation?*

The notion of accreditation and accountability is not a new one in BC. A variety of professionals can individually receive accreditation. Architects, engineers, physicians and psychologists can receive accreditation from their own professional governing bodies as a measure of professional accountability. Organizations can also receive their own type of accreditation. The health sector has long been involved with quality assurance and accountability through accrediting bodies such as the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation (CCHSA) and Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation
Facilities (CARF). As well, the public education sector in BC is also involved in accreditation of its Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools by way of their own internally driven process. It seems appropriate to expect that the social services sector can also achieve a measure of accountability through accreditation that reflects practices in other sectors.

Accreditation refers to the process that an organization has used to meet certain criteria as determined by an external and independent board or commission of an accrediting body. Simply worded, accreditation is standards, plus audit. Either by program or as an organizational whole, businesses and not for profit agencies can apply for and receive accreditation that suggests to the client that the program or organization has met or surpassed a set of independently developed standards. This sends a message to consumers and funders alike that the agency is accountable and monitors its own outcomes to constantly improve its services and to maintain their accredited status. Child and family services have their own accrediting bodies through which they can receive a designation that they too are accountable to stakeholders and that they have been recognized as delivering quality services based upon a philosophy of 'best practices'.

There are several accrediting bodies that offer accreditation to social services organizations. The two main bodies that offer accreditation to children and family services in BC are the Council on Accreditation (COA) and CARF. Currently 21 community agencies in BC have obtained COA accredited status and 54 have obtained CARF accreditation with yet more agencies in the midst of the accreditation process (Retrieved from http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/accreditation/agencies.htm, August 17, 2004). Some government facilities have also opted to participate in the accreditation process.
The Youth Forensics, the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre, and the Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing branches of the Provincial Services branch of the MCFD are currently engaged in the COA accreditation process. The MCFD’s other services such as the Community Living Services and Children and Family Development branches are considering COA accreditation as well.

I have chosen to focus my research on the COA accreditation process. My rationale for doing so includes the fact that I am a government employee who may well be a front line worker engaged in COA accreditation given the propensity for government run services to favour COA over CARF. Moreover, though there are similarities between COA and CARF standards, it is the differences that give cause for me to lean toward COA. As stated on COA’s web site, in order to obtain COA accreditation status the entire organization must be accredited:

Because COA's process is about agency improvement rather than evaluation of specific programs, COA is an organizational accreditor rather than a program accreditor like some of its peers. Achieving the status of accreditation demonstrates that the entire organization has met the highest standards of quality the field has set (Retrieved from http://www.coanet.org/front-end/page.cfm?sect=3, August 13, 2004).

Again, all programs, excluding a program for which no COA service standards exist, must be accredited. CARF on the other hand accredits by program. Conceivably, an agency could have one program operating on a ‘best practices’ framework with other programs in the same organization operating on a separate set of standards. I am drawn to COA’s framework because it helps to create consistency in all of the organization’s programs through the implementation of Generic Standards that fashion the base of their framework regardless of program. I also see the value of Anglin’s research (2002) that
emphasises the importance of consistency in service delivery. Examples include
supplying complaint resolution information for a client or having the client sign consent
to release of information form within the first couple of sessions. Once Generic
Standards are in place for the organization, each program can then create its own policies
in compliance with the Service Standards that apply to that program. I believe this
manner of accreditation not only builds consistency in service delivery, but also assures
the clients that they are receiving the best service they can in any of the programs they
may access.

*What is COA Accreditation?*

The COA accreditation process is a major undertaking and described by COA
themselves as “…a structured means of achieving positive organizational change”
COA’s accreditation standards are separated into two main groups. The first group is
commonly referred to as the G’s or, Generic Standards. Generic standards speak to the
organization as a whole, regardless of the programs offered by the agency. These group
of standards cover ‘generic’ areas such as ethical treatment of employees and clients,
training and supervision, continuous quality improvement (CQI), and health and safety
issues, to name a few. The second set of standards is commonly referred to as the S’s, or
Service Standards. These are the standards that are designed to be specific to each
program. For example, a service for youth independence will have a different set of
standards than a service that provides a crisis telephone line.

COA accreditation can be simplified into four distinct phases: the application, the
self-study, the site visit, and the accreditation decision (Ibid). The application phase
simply deals with applying to the accrediting body by identifying programs that fall under a particular service standard. By defining for the accreditation body which programs are to be accredited and establishing timelines for completing the process, the organization can then obtain copies of the accrediting body’s standards and move onto the next phase. The second phase is the heart of accreditation – the self-study. The self-study phase begins with an analysis of the organization’s own policies and procedures measured against COA’s standards of best practices. Once gaps are identified, policies are created to fill the gaps in standards. All agency policies are to be supported with procedures that describe how the policies are administered from day to day.

Once this is completed, the policies and procedures are compiled and accompany supporting documentation that articulates how the organization employs those policies and procedures. The end result is the self-study document. The self-study document is a preliminary tool with which the team of peer reviewers assesses compliance between agency policies and procedures and the accreditation standards. The self-study is, in essence, an intensive, self-reflective examination of how the agency operates based upon their values and mission statement.

Accreditation can be approached in a variety of ways. When deciding to embark on accreditation, some agencies hire people to assist in the process. These consultants are asked to review existing policies, identify gaps between the agency’s policies and the accrediting body’s standards, and to create policies that bridge the gap between agency and accrediting body standards. Other agencies do the work internally. This means that the workers from all over the agency are called upon to put more work on their respective
plates. Collectively, the agency will review their own policies, identify gaps, and create policies that address the gaps.

Once the self-study is sent off to the accrediting body, the agency busies itself with preparations for the next phase—the site visit. The site visit occurs when those peer reviewers selected to conduct the visit attend the physical location(s) of the agency and its programs to speak to workers, review documents, and visually evaluate agency facilities. Peer reviewers are practitioners who work in the field of human services and volunteer their time to assist in the site visit portion of agencies seeking COA accreditation. These volunteers are required to be working in, or have worked for, a COA accredited agency, preferably at the management level, and must also have a graduate degree. After successful completion of a mandatory training period for new peer reviewers, they then volunteer to travel to those agencies that are preparing for their site visits. At the end of this visit, the peer reviewers fill out their assessment forms and submit them to the accrediting body’s commission for a final decision. The peer reviewers do not decide the final outcome of the agency they have reviewed. The peer reviewer’s only function is to report compliance or non-compliance with the standards.

Following the site visit, a preliminary report is sent to the agency. The preliminary report is an assessment of agency compliance with the accreditation standards as reported by the peer reviewers. The agency is then given the opportunity to respond to the preliminary report. This response can include description of how they have improved in a certain area of identified non-compliance or how they have been compliant on an item as seen not compliant by the peer reviewers. This report is sent directly to COA’s Accreditation Commission. Within 8 to 12 weeks following the site
visit, the Accreditation Commission hands down their decision to accredit or withhold accredited status from the agency. Agencies that are not fully compliant with mandatory standards can be deferred accredited status giving the agency more time to improve identified areas of operation. The handing down of the final decision is the last formal stage of the accreditation process.

Statement of the Problem

As much as I see value in the accreditation process, I also see the possibility of implementing an arduous process on workers with depleted internal and external resources without knowing much about its potential impact. The resistance to change with respect to accreditation initiative in government has the potential to make the process painful for management and front line staff alike. All told, thousands of people may become involved in the accreditation process with varying levels of responsibility. With such massive organizational change taking place in the human service sector, it is critical to understand how the accreditation process affects all levels of staff in the organization.

It is important to note that there has been resistance to the idea of accreditation from the social services sector. I base this assertion upon my experience with assisting the delivery of accreditation to employees in the MCFD. Moreover, these themes are well known to accreditation proponents and detractors alike as I have travelled to and participated in various accreditation events. It is not precisely clear why this resistance exists, though the simple explanation of fear of change seems to surface time and again. Those who voice this resistance allude to recurring themes. The themes resisting the accreditation push include:
Why are we spending money on accreditation rather than simply investing those funds into our needy services? There is some resistance toward going through the accreditation process when there is not enough money to adequately service our child and family programs.

Why are we required to apply U.S. based standards to our Canadian programs?

Why should we spend time on accreditation work when it takes valuable time away from working with children and families? Accreditation takes a significant amount of time to complete, some of which impinges on client time.

Why should we believe that accreditation will improve our work and our organization? Another concern is that in the end, accreditation will not improve services or the work environment and this is simply a management idea that hinders the work of the front line employee.

What if we fail accreditation? There is a concern of what would happen to contracts if an agency engaged in a process that would see time, effort, as well as organization funds go to waste should they not succeed in obtaining accredited status.

These themes of why not to engage in child and family services accreditation point to a definite resistance to change. Perhaps through this study we can find some explanations to either confirm or refute these themes, and more importantly, to develop strategies to address them in a productive fashion. Accreditation and its effect on the front line employees of any type of agency, community or government, has not been well researched. Those agency workers who have successfully assisted their organization to accredited status have much to offer those who have not. The aim of this study is to understand how change occurred in a BC social services agency that underwent the process of COA accreditation. This project sought to investigate the organizational change process known as accreditation from the perspective of the front line worker. In order to carry out this investigation, I believed it necessary to explore several aspects of
this change. These aspects included two levels of the experience as told from the perspective of the front line worker: personal level and organizational level change.

Again, as told through the eyes of the front-line worker, other aspects of the accreditation experience included were the positives and negatives of the organizational and personal levels of change, the typology of change the organization went through, and emotional responses to the change process. Through investigation of these aspects of change I hoped to reveal lessons the wider social services community can learn from before many more people in the human services sector follow the path of accreditation. In order to discover these lessons, I posed the question:

What was the experience of the accreditation process for front line workers in a large multi-service community agency?

Assumptions

In the course of carrying out this research, I had based my investigation on several assumptions. I had assumed that the process of accreditation affected, in some way, the day to day routines of front line employees in the agency going through accreditation. I also assumed that the accreditation had the potential to both hinder and enhance service delivery operations of the agency. I further assumed that front line workers would have varied experiences of their accreditation process and be able to articulate the experiences through frameworks of organizational change and the human aspect of organizational change. My methodological assumptions will be discussed further in Chapter 3.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Organizational change in human services is not an exhausted field of study by any means. There is a scarcity of research on this topic, specific to the human services sector, and it was necessary to broaden the focus of this literature review to the fields of education and nursing. A preliminary search in these two fields, as well as the human service field has yielded some material on organizational change. Literature searches were conducted on Ebsco Host in several databases. Searched databases included PsychInfo, Social Work, Eric, Social Services Review, and Academic Search Elite. Descriptors used included organizational change, organizational transformation, organizational learning, human services change, and accreditation.

The literature identified as of interest to the researcher deals with the identification and implementation of change models and frameworks. On the education front for example, Cryer & Elton (1990) blended organization development and community organizing frameworks and proposed them as an integrative model for organizational change in the education system. Similarly, Bailey (1992) coupled Catastrophe Theory and Herzberg’s theory of motivation to unify Kurt Lewin’s force field model and model of planned change. Bailey then uses this framework to analyze behaviours of academics.

Looking to the nursing profession, Carney (2001) produced an intriguing study on the development of a model to manage the management of change processes. In this study, nursing students were recruited to participate in focus groups to help identify key variables that can be identified as necessary to successfully implement change. An
interesting characteristic of this study was the use of qualitative methodology – focus
groups and reflective discussion on practice.

Lastly, in the human services field, Horwath & Morrison (2000) sought to identify
and implement pathways for organizational change by offering two models of change and
illustrate them through the use of a case example. Further, Moxley & Manela (2000)
discuss a role for evaluation in human service organizations in allowing agencies to cope
with and manage constant change.

Unfortunately, all of these studies were conducted with and for organizational
management structures in mind. For instance, Cryer & Elton (1990) analyzes academics’
behaviour but they are the faculty of educational programs, not students (p. 85). As well,
Bailey speaks to implementing organizational change in the educational realm, something
that is usually carried out by those who wield the power and responsibility to do so.
Correspondingly, Carney (2001) carried out her important qualitative work but with the
use of nursing management students. There is an implicit assumption here that nursing
management students were experienced nurses who were preparing themselves to take
positions of responsibility in their respective workplaces once their studies had been
completed. Arriving at the human service focus, both cited studies were also aimed at the
benefit of the management group. Horwath and Morrison (2000) focused on introducing
their models to be “utilized by senior managers in any social care organization who are
facilitating major changes in the organization” (p. 245). Furthermore, Moxley & Manela
(2000) introduce their study on evaluating human services organizations as a necessary
function to keep pace with the change that affects funding for service delivery. The
paper's aim is to supply management with some tools to use evaluation as a means of justifying their services as well as adapting to constant change (p. 316).

It is not difficult to see that when looking through the literature on organizational change in human services and allied fields, the voice of the front line worker is painfully silent. This proposal seeks to bridge that gap and to show the front line voice as an integral aspect of understanding the organizational change process.

Organizational change can be explored in various manners and continuing in this chapter, I will explore several specific areas of change within this expansive topic. Firstly, I will review the literature on organizational change specific to one influential change model developed by Kurt Lewin (1958). As I did not wish to confuse the processes of organizational change with personal change through using one model to articulate both processes, I chose to use two models to articulate agency and worker change separately. These models, predominant in current literature on these topics, are similar but I will focus them on two separate change processes. Organizational change will be viewed through the model developed by Kurt Lewin in 1958 and personal change will be viewed through the lens of William Bridge's model of Transitions (1980). Moving from there, this chapter will continue with an exploration of the literature specific to typologies of change. Through understanding the various types of change a framework to begin to understand the type of change the participants' agency had gone through will be identifiable. To conclude this chapter, I then shift focus to organizational change literature on personal reactions and responses to the agency change.
An Organizational Change Model

On reviewing the area of organizational change the change management model of Kurt Lewin's (1958) is pervasive. It is a model that illustrates very simply the organizational change journey for any type of organization and is compatible with varying types of change. Several subsequent models have evolved from Lewin's work, primarily with the mind to inform how to approach organizational transformation. Lewin's model has been the basis of many organizational development models that were designed to encapsulate, in theory, the necessary elements to successfully implement and conclude organizational change initiatives. (Galpin, 1996; Kotter, 1996; Schaeffer 1987; Beckard & Harris, 1987; Brager & Holloway, 1978) This may include identifying why a change imperative exists, agency strengths and weaknesses as well as obstacles that may hinder the success of the transformation. What Lewin's model has given to the realm of organizational transformation is a user-friendly framework through which one can gain perspective on a change initiative. Lewin's model contains three stages: the Present State, the Transition State, and the Desired State.

Stage 1, the Present State represents the current status of the organization. According to another change management author, Daryl, R. Conner (1992), this stage is characterised as the 'status quo'. Stage 2 is identified as the Transition State, a time of transformation whereby the organization develops "new attitudes and behaviours" (Conner, 1992, p. 88). The Transition State is a time of uncertainty marked by a loss of comfort with the established, familiar manner of going about business. Once the organization begins to make sense of its new direction it moves on to experience Stage 3,
the Desired State. This is a time when the organization stabilises and begins to entrench itself with the change.

**Transitions**

William Bridges has written extensively on transitions. (1980, 1991, 1993) By transitions, Bridges refers to the psychological shift in people when they go through major life change whether it is at work or in their personal lives. Bridges asserts that every transition has three stages, Endings, The Neutral Zone, and Beginnings.

**Endings.**

Endings are the first stage of a transition. This stage is marked with letting go of something. “Endings must be dealt with if we are to move on to whatever comes next in our lives. Then new growth cannot take root on ground still covered with the old, and endings are the clearing process” (Bridges, 1980, p. 91). Bridges highlights the need to recognize that the change is inevitable and that those involved in the change will have to concede certain losses. These losses could be as simple as losing the format of a service intake form or as complex as a change in organizational leadership. Whether the change is perceived to be positive or negative, losses will be realized. Once the realization and acknowledgement of the Ending occurs, people move on to the next stage in their transition, the Neutral Zone.

**Neutral zone (the wilderness).**

The Neutral Zone stage is characterized as a time of confusion and lack of identity.

This is the no-man’s land between the old reality and the new. It’s the limbo between the old sense of
identity and the new. It is a time when the old way
is gone and the new doesn't feel comfortable yet.
(Bridges, 1991, p.5).

Again, this is a stage that is a precondition of moving to one's new Beginning, the final stage in this transition model. Bridges suggests that this is not only a time of confusion, but can be a time of incredible opportunity:

> The neutral zone is not just meaningless waiting and confusion – it is a time when a necessary reorientation and redefinition is taking place, and people need to understand that. It is the winter during which the spring's new growth is taking shape under the earth. (Bridges, 1991, p. 37).

**Beginnings.**

The final stage of transition is called Beginnings. Beginnings are marked by one making it through the wilderness of the Neutral Zone. When one emerges from this no-man's land, he or she has been alerted to their new direction by a natural, internal process. As Bridges states, "as we long for external signs that point the way to the future, we must settle for inner signals that alerts us to the proximity of new beginnings" (Bridges, 1980, p. 136). This overview of transitions will be useful to interpret the experiences of front line workers who have endured a significant organizational change process in a community agency.

**Typologies of Change**

Change is constantly referred to, talked about, and prepared for (or not) in the human services sector but rarely is anything mentioned about the type of change that has occurred or will occur. It is most important to know what type of change an organization is going through so one may adequately prepare for the change.
One popular framework that explains types of change comes from Nadler and Tushman (1995) who illustrate the differences between what they call incremental and discontinuous change. Incremental change mainly deals with the smaller, focused initiatives that build upon existing operations within an organization. Specific to a human service agency, “…these changes may include revising the screening and assessment process, simplifying eligibility forms, and amending a staff training program” (Proehl, 2001). Incremental change is also most common during periods of equilibrium within an organization (Nadler and Tushman, 1995).

Discontinuous change, on the other hand, is more likely to occur during periods of disequilibrium. Changes of this magnitude are marked by major shifts such as building “…whole new work patterns with new structures and strategies” (Proehl, 2001). This change resembles a significant break from past ways of operating. Discontinuous change is the more traumatic and lasting change of the two.

People, groups and whole organizations not only have to learn new ways of thinking, working, and acting, but they also have to ‘unlearn’ the habits, orientations, assumptions, and routines that have been baked in the enterprise over time. (Nadler & Tushman, 1995, p. 23)

Another manner of understanding typologies of change comes from Linda Ackerman Anderson (1986). Ackerman Anderson illustrates her representation of three levels of change. These levels of change are developmental, transitional, and transformational.

Developmental change within Ackerman Anderson’s view is similar to incremental change and involves “logical adjustments to current operations” (Ackerman Anderson, 2001, p. 34). Moreover, this change is generally viewed as an enhancement of
current operations and can include training, enhancing communications, or improving processes (Proehl, 2001).

The next level of change, Transitional change, primarily appears in organizations when something within an organization needs to be replaced entirely. This level of change impacts workers more than Developmental change as it involves achieving a new way of being where workers must abandon their old way of functioning and move through a transitional period during which they have not yet given up the “old” nor fully developed the “new” (Ackerman Anderson, 2001). The Transitional level of change also requires patience and time from all involved in the change initiative as it moves at a slower pace than developmental change (Proehl, 2001).

Ackerman Anderson’s third level of change is called transformational change and represents the largest, most intrusive type of change within her model. This level of change requires “...a shift of culture, behaviour, and mindset to implement successfully and sustain over time” (Ackerman Anderson, 2001, p.39). Most importantly, Transformational change “demands a shift in human awareness that completely alters the way the organization and its people see the world, their customers, their work, and themselves” (Ibid). A broad overview of this level of change includes major shifts in an organization’s vision, or strategy, that both feed the existence of an unknown direction until it begins to take shape after the change has been initiated (Proehl, 2001).

*Individual Change within the Organization*

The final lens used to examine the experience of change as told from the perspectives of front-line community agency workers is the way in which individuals
responded to the change. Moving from experiences of familiarity to unfamiliarity can be traumatic on people within organizations. As Scott & Jaffe (1989) suggest, the experience of moving from the old into the new and unknown can occur whether the coming change is viewed as positive or negative. A glimpse into the emotional responses to perceived positive and negative change may aid in understanding how each participant framed the accreditation for themselves.

**Emotional responses to perceived positive change.**

As Proehl (2001) states, though peoples’ responses to change vary, when faced with a perceived positive change, a pattern often can be found. The pattern begins with Uninformed Optimism. During this stage, excitement is generated at the coming new change. While in this stage, organization members “often have positive, though unrealistic, expectations about what is to come” (Proehl, 2001, p. 58). The next stage is Informed Pessimism and this is a stage when workers will begin to experience difficulties associated with the new change. These difficulties may include resistance from co-workers, lack of promised resources, or lack of commitment and resolve from colleagues. As worker’s initial enthusiasm begins to subside, they “realize that the change process will be harder than anticipated” (Ibid).

The third stage in the pattern of emotional responses to perceived positive change is Checking Out. In this stage, workers may be enticed to withdraw from the change process on both physical and psychological levels. This is a time when attendance and participation in meetings may drop, failure to follow through on commitments increases and “discussions may be lifeless and unimaginative” (Ibid, p. 59). Moving on to the next stage, workers will find Hopeful Realism. As the work is slowly being completed and
small successes are being achieved, the workers involved in the change process can begin to view their change effort as an achievable goal. This stage is marked by an “increase in self-confidence and a momentum for change begins to develop” (Ibid).

Riding the momentum of change into the next stage, workers find themselves filled with Informed Optimism. Unlike the first stage of this pattern, workers have become optimistic but they are more realistic about their enthusiasm for the change. In this stage there is a refreshingly “high level of positive energy and excitement about the change process” (Ibid). However, grounding their enthusiasm through the lessons of their past experiences with the change process, workers believe that change can indeed be successful. At the conclusion of this pattern, workers see within the organization, a strong support for the change. Workers are willing to assist others in the change process and this stage is underscored with a “shared feeling of accomplishment although often relief that the process has come to closure” (Ibid, p. 60).

Emotional responses to perceived negative change.

Four stages constitute the framework of emotional responses to perceived negative change. The first stage is Shock and Denial. Here, individuals are not ready to acknowledge that change is coming or has come. Typical behaviours that suggest shock and denial responses include acting as if no change has occurred; a lack of energy or enthusiasm; and referring to the change as if it has or will only affect others (Proehl, 2001).

The second stage is Resistance. This is a stage where the individual having a difficult time with the change could experience anger, depression, fear and frustration and self-doubt. Resistance could manifest itself in workers being absent from work more
frequently than usual, through talk about why the change will not work and through workers who will tend to express only negatives about the change. Furthermore, this stage is likely to see workers also spend much of their time talking and letting their performance drop. The resistance stage begins to move past workers when they “suddenly notice a renewed interest in work and creativity begins to re-emerge” (Proehl, 2001, p. 55).

The passing of the resistance stage makes way for the stage of Exploration. This stage can be different things for different people. Individuals who need structure in their work routines may struggle with this stage. For others, this stage can represent an invigorating and stimulating period. Regardless of how individuals see this stage, focus turns away from aimless conversations to accomplishing tasks, away from questions probing the “how” not the “why” of the change imperative and in general, energy rises with the aid of a more positive outlook from people.

Finally, the Commitment stage arrives. Individuals are now ready to commit to the change through more focus on what needs to be accomplished and a willingness to work with others to achieve the change successfully. Though this particular model of emotional responses to perceived negative change is framed in a linear stage format, it is important to note that just as people can go from one stage to the next as they are laid out, individuals can just as easily move back in stages or even get stuck in one, unable to move on.

This concludes the literature review section in this research. The absence of accreditation literature is no doubt noticeable. This thesis has a focus on the front line worker's experience of the accreditation process. Therefore, the accreditation process is
merely representative of the more holistic issue: organizational change. I felt it important to explore several topics related to the subject of organizational change, including personal change and organizational level change. I also thought it prudent to understand typologies of change as well as individual responses to change initiatives within the context of organizational change. However, understanding what accreditation entails is critical to interpreting the participant data. Therefore I provided a review of the concept of accreditation as well as a description of the participants’ agency accreditation process in the introductory chapter of this thesis. I felt my explanation of the accreditation process was best situated in the introductory chapter, as this was where I endeavoured to provide context for my research. Consequently, this is the reason there is no section on accreditation located within the literature review. The topics reviewed are those that I saw as most pertinent to my research and most likely to be able to make sense of participant data.
Chapter Three
Methodology

I strongly identify with a main constructivist assumption that reality does not exist independent of a person’s experience of it (Denizen & Lincoln Eds., 1994). My research is not simply a study of several personal experiences of a single event but of several personal experiences of a series of complex events that make up the accreditation process. In the context of this research I expected to find that people’s experience of accreditation would vary based on the subjective meaning they have given it based on their “...interactions with others...” within their accreditation effort (Creswell, 2001, p. 8). I see the value in diversity in people’s experience of a certain type of event and those diverse narratives can be analyzed to paint a broader picture of how an event affects people in an organization at all levels. Consequently, I found that choosing a qualitative methodology best suited my own values and ideas on how to answer my research question.

As I sought to understand the experiences of the accreditation process as told from the perspectives of the agency front line workers, the approach of phenomenology immediately stood out as a logical option. “A phenomenological study asks, ‘What is this or that kind of experience like?’” (Van Manen, 1992, p. 9). It seeks to “describe the meaning of the lived experience for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). It is a methodology that can be employed to study a wide range of phenomena (Gall et al, 1996). In this instance, I sought to understand a specific phenomenon, the accreditation process.
The major procedural issues in employing the phenomenological design to research as outlined by Creswell (1998) begin with the researcher knowing and understanding the philosophical perspectives that inform this approach. Central to this idea is the researcher's ability to set aside his or her own preconceived notions about the phenomenon in question, and to be attentive to understanding the phenomenon through the voices of the informants (Field and Morse, 1985).

The second procedure focuses on the design of the questions that will assist the researcher to explore the phenomenon. These questions will ask the participants of the research to “…describe their everyday experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p. 54). Then, the researcher seeks to collect data from those individuals who have actually experienced the phenomenon central to the investigation (Ibid).

The final procedure concerns itself with the analysis of the data and according to Moustakas (1994) and Polkinghorne (1989) phenomenologists employ a similar framework as other qualitative researchers to organize their data (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenology also includes the use of interviewing to collect data. It is through the interview that I was able to collect data that focused this study’s participants on the specific phenomenon of accreditation. Lastly, another attractive quality of the phenomenological approach for me was that the procedures of the phenomenological methodology are reported to be “…relatively straightforward” (Gall et al, 1996, p. 603).

I thought that as a novice researcher, I might be more successful using a methodology that utilized skills that I had already rather than learning an entirely new skill set required to use a more complicated methodology.
Another methodology that I was attracted to was narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is based on the same qualitative research assumptions as phenomenology. I am also attracted to how people view their experiences of a particular phenomenon and chose not to place more value on one view than another. As suggested by Holstien and Gubrium (1998) members of an organization in the context of qualitative research are not "...mere extensions of organizational thinking [because they] exercise interpretive discretion, mediated by complex layerings of interpretive influence" (p.150). For this reason, narrative inquiry is equally useful to answer my research question.

Participants’ narratives can be used to bridge gaps between success and hardship as seen from the study participants’ perspectives. As I pointed out in my literature search, a summary of relevant literatures specific to organizational change lack the front line voice (see page 19). As front line workers are charged with not only the responsibility of assisting and facilitating change, but also with the continuous delivery of quality service to their clients during the change process, it might benefit human service organizations contemplating change of the magnitude accreditation dictates, to seek out the wisdom based on the experience and insights of the collective front line voice. It is this voice and experience that I feel needs to be heard to adequately understand how accreditation has affected the backbone of the community agency in question.

Much of the current literature on organizational change is from the perspective of those in authority such as managers and supervisors and their voices currently dominate the popular discourse (Rhodes, 1996). Utilizing the narrative approach would allow for the use of “storytelling as a research technique that aims at giving voice to stories which are heard in the traditional (modern) narrative of organizational theory” (Rhodes, 1996, p.
4). Furthermore, the collecting and analyzing of narratives gleaned from varying perspectives "...can provide an opportunity to see the inherent differences in how organizational members make sense of their organizational experience" (Rhodes, 1996, p.3).

Narrative inquiry and phenomenology appeared to me to have complementary characteristics. Narrative inquiry elicits stories from participants about a particular phenomenon. The phenomenological aim of hearing participants describe their every day experiences (Creswell, 1998) echoes the aim of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry can easily be utilized to hear the voice of any population, including visible but silent groups, such as the front line worker population of a human services organization (at least in organizational change research). Phenomenology complements this by seeking out the participant who is intimately connected with the subject of the inquiry, regardless of their status. Lastly, both narrative inquiry and phenomenology are well suited to the interview process as a means for collecting data.

The other methodology I considered using was the case study method but this was quickly ruled out. The difficulty with this methodology for me was that on one hand, I did not have enough time or opportunity to hold multiple in-depth interviews with more than one participant. Moreover, I would not have achieved the level of understanding regarding this study’s subject matter through only one or two participants. As I endeavoured to gain a representative front line worker sample within the participant organization, I required the opportunity to interview several people with intimate knowledge of the specific phenomenon in question.
I decided to obtain my data by utilizing the interview to elicit narratives of the phenomenon of accreditation. Further, I chose to use the semi-structured interview and I did so for two main reasons.

Primarily, I wanted to focus the participant responses. Elliot Mishler (1986) suggests that it is common for participants in narrative inquiry to digress from the answer sought by interviewers leaving the researcher with the task of choosing what portions of the narrative to record and utilize in analysis (Creswell 1998). The semi-structured interview not only accommodated the element of focus in participants' answers, it also assisted in the phenomenological process of data analysis referred to as horizontalization: a method of sifting and structuring data into categories of meaning (Ibid). Through asking the same specific questions of each participant, I was able to focus their responses and cluster them to then begin to investigate the "...textural description of what was experienced and the structural description of how it was experienced" (Creswell, 1998, p. 55). Secondly, utilizing the semi-structured interview facilitated my ability to develop a study "...especially suited to understanding the particular experiential phenomenon that is the object..." of my study – accreditation (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 44).

Researcher's Role

I largely see my role in this research as the collector and interpreter of data. As such, I concerned myself with the manner in which I collected data as well as its interpretation. I am also aware that as I have previous knowledge of the phenomenon in question, I bring with me preconceived notions about what it is I wish to research. I fully acknowledge my position and endeavoured to use my "...pre-understandings as a beginning point." (Walters, 1995, p. 84) in the design of my semi-structured interviews as
well as the administration of the interview itself. During the interview process and subsequent data analysis, however, I was vigilant to “…allow the data to speak for themselves…” (Osborne, 1994, p.179) in spite of my own prejudgments.

It was not difficult for me to set aside my own preconceived notions about the phenomenon being explored as I was not a part of an agency that was undergoing or had undergone the accreditation process. Moreover, I had no previous understanding of the accreditation effort in the context of the participant agency from which my sample was chosen. Therefore, the propensity to inject my own perceptions of the accreditation phenomenon as a part of the participants’ stories was not realistic, nor plausible.

The issue of co-creating meaning of the accreditation phenomenon was not as substantial as co-creating meaning in the context of a traditional phenomenological study. As I had a semi-structured set of questions to ask participants, responses were more pointed and focused to characteristics of the accreditation process. The semi-structured interview enabled me to simply identify the explicit and implicit themes specific to the phenomenon when comparing participant data to each other. At the same time, the semi-structured interview also allowed me to avoid the rather arduous and time consuming process of using the interview as a space to create meaning and then subsequently sift through the data to identify that co-created meaning. As a result, the themes which have been identified through the data analysis have very little to do with any preconceived notions and stand virtually untouched from the participants’ voices.

Study Sample and Setting

I set out to explore the experiences of accreditation from the perspectives of front line workers in a multi-service community agency. As my research question suggested, I
was only interested in exploring the experiences of agency workers in one agency. There are many approaches to accreditation and I was keen to examine the diverse experiences of one approach and therefore selected one agency from which to draw my sample of participants. As I was interested in COA accreditation in particular, I was able to narrow my search for a sample agency significantly. I began to search for participant agencies that had recently (within the last 3 years) obtained COA accreditation. A quick review of the COA and MCFD websites yielded a list of agencies that fulfilled this criterion. From my list of COA accredited agencies, I further narrowed potential participant agencies to those that were located within the province of British Columbia.

Another criterion was to keep the study’s scope to a workable size. For me, this meant interviewing a sample of workers that could represent the front line tier of the agency well without being a large sample size. I was more interested in the quality of participants’ experience of accreditation, so I kept participant numbers as low as possible. In order to achieve a small but representative sample I looked for an agency that had a relatively small number of employees but that also delivered multiple services to the children and families in that area.

I eventually selected an agency with which I was familiar. I had been involved at an arm’s length with this agency’s accreditation process and was familiar with the agency’s Executive Director. I approached the Executive Director with my research proposal and requested his support for the project. I was greeted with a positive response and so I began to draft a participant recruitment letter. I felt at the time that I would not have a problem receiving participants willing to offer one to two hours of their time to be interviewed. The agency was a larger agency than I was originally trying to recruit. This
meant I would have to interview more people than I originally planned to however, I felt that the benefit of obtaining a sample quickly, and completing my interviews in a timely manner for my schedule, was a fair trade off.

When drafting my recruitment letter, I became concerned with how to uphold my obligation of protecting participant anonymity. I addressed this by suggesting in my letter that potential participants could meet me in a neutral location, away from their agency, to participate in the interview without concern of being identified by co-workers. I further thought that I could ease the inconvenience to potential participants by obtaining permission from their Executive Director for them to attend the interview during agency operating hours. I then approached the agency Executive Director and received a letter addressed to all potential participants encouraging them to participate in my research and to do so during agency operating hours. Once I had this letter, I distributed that, along with my recruitment letter, to all agency program managers. I had included a timeline for receiving responses so I could select a purposeful sample that would best represent the front line tier of that agency. I included the deadline because I was hopeful that I would receive many responses from front line workers to participate. I was indeed sadly mistaken. My imposed deadline arrived and left with no responses to participation offered. I extended the timeline, again without success. I began to feel concern so I then turned my attention to other possible agencies to seek participants from.

As I did, I received two responses from the original agency. I elected to interview those participants while continuing my search for a new agency. I elected to interview them because with the number of participants I would need to accurately represent the front line tier of the original agency would have been around 15 to 20. At the rate of
recruitment progress I was experiencing to that point, it could have taken many more months to obtain the data necessary to begin processing the data. However, I also felt that I may run into the same difficulty with a new agency and felt that having two data sets from two sites is infinitely more desirable than none and may have given me the possibility of a comparative study.

My search for a new agency continued and I narrowed my options to two organizations that recently had completed COA accreditation. I opted to approach them one after the other and began with the first one on my list. Once I selected the agency to approach, I began to recruit participants with an e-mail to the agency’s Executive Director outlining who I was and what I proposed to research. In reply, the Executive Director passed word on to the front line tier of the organization and also provided me with e-mail addresses of those front line workers. Using the list of e-mail addresses, I sent another e-mail to the front line workers with more detail outlining what participation in my research would involve.

Eventually, (and rather quickly) I received commitments from several workers in the agency who agreed to participate in a (approximately) one hour semi-structured interview meant to explore their experiences of accreditation. The interview was semi-structured because I was interested in their views of organizational and personal change. I chose to keep structure to the interview by using broad questions and following up any interesting tangents with clarification questions.

My participants were chosen purposively in order to obtain data from those workers who had experienced accreditation and who had been involved with the agency prior to and throughout the accreditation journey. All participants were working in a
direct service delivery role with client contact during their accreditation efforts. Eight workers comprised the number of participants in this sample. All eight participants interviewed were females between the ages of 33 and 49. The participants’ experience working within the agency varied from 3.5 to 17 years. Interviews took place over a two-day period. When this agency’s accreditation process began, six COA service sections were identified as needing to be implemented within the agency’s selection of programs. Consequently, through interviewing the eight participants that completed my sample, 11 of the 13 programs administered by the agency were represented, as were all of the six identified COA service sections the agency was involved with.

Data Collection

As stated, semi-structured interviews were conducted. I asked 11 broad questions in all, designed to explore the participants’ perceptions of organizational and personal change within their accreditation journey. One interview was conducted with each participant and the length of the interviews lasted between 50 to 80 minutes. As my research methodology is primarily phenomenological in nature, I sought to ask broad questions to elicit narratives of change from participants. When necessary to keep the interview moving forward in the exploration of organizational and personal change, I asked clarification questions. The structured interview questions I posed were as follows:

- Tell me about your experience of accreditation.
- Tell me about some of the personally positive things in your experience that have come about due to accreditation.
- Tell me about some of the personally negative things in your experience that have come about due to accreditation.
• Tell me about some of the positive changes as you see them that have occurred on an organizational level as a result of accreditation.

• Tell me about some of the negative changes as you see them that have occurred on an organizational level as a result of accreditation.

These five questions are broad by design in order to facilitate the participant’s thinking around their own experience of accreditation. These questions would hopefully solicit responses that speak to either attitudinal or behavioral change within the worker or they could speak to the culture or operational changes within the organization.

• How did you feel about accreditation before it started, in the middle of the process, and now?

• How have your assumptions about your work changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?

These two questions speak to the area of attitudinal change in the participant as he/she travels through the accreditation process.

• How has your practice changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?

This question speaks to the participant’s view of his or her own behavioural change as a result of accreditation.

• How has the organization’s culture changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?

This question seeks insight as to how the organization’s collection of employees responded to change brought on by the accreditation process.

• How have the organization’s procedures changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?

• How has the organization’s operations changed in the way services are delivered to its client base as a result of the accreditation process?
The last two questions simply seek to understand the scope of operational changes in the agencies procedural behavior after having gone through accreditation. Questions will only begin to be more specific as the dialogue ensues and as the need arises for clarification purposes.

Data Analysis

As stated by Creswell (2003) the aim of data analysis is to reveal the common themes or plots in the data. The process of data analysis in this study began with each interview being transcribed by myself. I felt that transcribing the interviews myself would allow me to have a deeper grasp of the participants’ experiences and to be able to interpret more accurately the intent that lies beneath their words. Furthermore, I felt that by transcribing the interviews I would have a greater understanding of the data when the time for analysis arrived and, with my knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated, I could minimize the potential for unclear narrative passages due to misunderstanding of context.

Structuring the interview material into text provided me an overview, as suggested by Kvale (1996) which more easily facilitated closer analysis. The transcription was completed verbatim. After the transcription was finished, I read them through thoroughly while listening to the audiotapes to ensure I had not misrepresented or misquoted the participants’ responses. This also allowed me to gain further insight into the participants’ meaning and context embedded within their answers.

Through the exercise of listening and reading of interviews, I began to categorize responses according their corresponding questions. I began then to sort out these narratives into themes. Identified themes were separated into two broad areas,
organizational change and personal change. In the midst of sorting organizational and personal change themes from the data, I began to draw meaning from these responses to make sense of two other areas: the typology of organizational change participants were involved in, and the participants’ emotional responses to the change. Once the data was reported, I began the discussion of the results as they are reported in Chapter 5.

_Confidentiality and Anonymity_

Protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was of utmost importance to me. My efforts to uphold this obligation included securing all data generated through this research at all times. All audiotapes were kept in a locked file cabinet along with the hardcopy transcript to which only I viewed as transcriber and researcher. Only I possessed a key to this cabinet. Further, all data generated on my computer was password protected. Participants were assigned a number and they were referenced with this rather than their names for the duration of data analysis and discussion of findings. The previously mentioned locked file cabinet also secured the list of participant names, with their corresponding numbers.

Anonymity was more difficult to ensure, particularly because the participants of this study were not concerned with it. I had arranged to secure a comfortable space in a hotel where I was staying for the duration of data collection. When I revealed this to participants, they suggested it would be more convenient for them if I conducted the interviews at their agency’s location. When I explained the difficulty with maintaining my obligation to protect anonymity of participants when interviewing in a location where they can be seen, participants stated they were unconcerned with anonymity. Therefore,
in the interests of limiting the inconvenience to participants, I agreed to interview at the agency’s location.

When I attended the agency, I found that administrative staff had already set up an interview area for me to use complete with a list of interview times when participants would show up. Again, this was done so the impact of my imposition on participants’ time was minimal. I conducted the interviews from within the agency and at no time was I told or did I feel that participants were not entirely comfortable with the arrangement.

Validity

The meaning of validity in the context of qualitative research refers to the data analysis within a narrative study being well grounded and supportable (Creswell, 2003). A finding of validity in a qualitative study, such as this thesis is based on a more general awareness of validity as a well-grounded conclusion. (Ibid). I believe the findings of this study are well grounded and supportable. In order to ensure a sufficient level of validity to my findings, I employed the methods of triangulation, member-checking, and clarifying researcher bias as suggested by Creswell (Ibid). I have explained how I approached my bias earlier in this chapter under Researcher’s Role.

In my research proposal I outlined for participants that I would only be interviewing them once and I was not sure of my ability to clarify data due to my own time constraints and other locale considerations. Therefore, it was during the interviews that I triangulated data. In all interviews, I used the responses of one participant who was interviewed already to “check it out” with the next. I found that if one participant neglected to mention a characteristic of their experience that others had, I would present that characteristic in an open question format. For example, if a participant mentioned
the theme of accountability to the clients as well as to other co-workers and the next only mentioned client accountability, I asked the second an open question about accountability to other stakeholders other than clients. (E.g. What are your thoughts on accountability with stakeholders other than your clients?) For the first interview this was not possible as there was no interview data to triangulate so I fell upon my own experience with accreditation and my own understanding of what it might have entailed for these participants. In each instance, participants’ echoed and reinforced the responses of one another through this technique.

This manner of using triangulation may not be viewed as completely sound and I acknowledge that there exists the possibility of leading participant’s responses. However, when I did use triangulation I did not feel this was in fact what occurred. Participants appeared to have a competent view of what accreditation meant to them. When I triangulated with participants I did not once feel I was leading them. I recall many times workers being surprised at themselves that they did not think of that aspect of the question (such as the accountability example). All participants gave what I consider to be confident feedback on their experiences and I have not heard anything from them to indicate otherwise.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I had used the semi-structured interview to provide focus for participants’ narratives. A major benefit of this was to be realized when I began interpreting responses and categorizing them. The structured questions focused the participants’ responses so clearly that identifying the theme and meaning of what was said was unmistakable. For instance, when asked about the positives of the accreditation process at a personal level, all participants identified the broad theme of
accountability. I then took the data away and began to organize it in order to attach meaning to it. Again, using Creswell’s (2003) criteria to guide my decision I chose to delay member checking the data until after I had attached meaning to participant data. I felt this would enable participants’ the ability to understand what they as a group said about their experiences of accreditation within the context of their perceptions of positives and negatives as well as my theoretical lenses of personal transition and organizational change frameworks.

Therefore, I sent the chapters of this thesis specific to these areas to them and asked for their feedback as to the accuracy of what they meant to convey to me. I gave participants a window of three weeks to review the chapters and respond via e-mail or telephone. I also indicated that if I received no feedback that I would assume that each person was satisfied that I gave appropriate meaning to his or her data. I received no feedback within or after the time frame specified.
Chapter Four

Interpretation of Participant Data

As described in Chapter 3, this study's semi-structured interview design was meant to focus the participant on particular aspects of the accreditation effort. The format of the interview questions delineated three large sections of data. The first section addresses the participants' perceptions of personal change, the second section addresses the participants' perception of organizational change, and lastly, the third section addresses the participants' overall experience of the accreditation process.

Interpretation of Participant's Perception of Personal Change

When designing this research, I thought it important to grasp an understanding of what kind of personal change, if any, may have occurred as a result of the accreditation process. In particular, I was interested in changes in assumptions and actual practice as well as any impact the accreditation effort had on each participant. Therefore, I asked participants the following questions:

1. How has your practice changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?
2. How have your assumptions about your work changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?
3. Tell me about some of the personally positive things in your experience that have come about due to accreditation.
4. Tell me about some of the personally negative things in your experience that have come about due to accreditation.

Three themes emerged from participant data as a result of these questions. They were less room to assume, focus of service delivery, and professional file work.
Theme #1: Less room to assume.

Participants reported that accreditation highlighted the lack of space for workers to make assumptions regarding a client’s situation, functioning, or what clients would see as valuable service goals they would be willing to work toward. For instance, some participants revealed that prior to accreditation, they felt as if they were meeting client needs. However, during the participant’s learning process of how certain accreditation standards require the presence of a correlation between the client’s needs assessment and the setting of goals, she learned that her previous method of deriving client goals was perhaps assuming too much and not connecting the needs to goals. Participant #1 states:

I think I have assumed that before accreditation, that the work that I was doing with the clients was meeting their needs. When sometimes I look back on some of those files and I see that I was working on other goals that maybe weren’t even addressing the needs that I had set out in the needs assessment...

In this next response, the participant refers to the structure that accreditation sets up for regular supervision. For this participant, having regular supervision meant having another perspective to inform her service delivery. Consequently, this other perspective proved valuable in minimizing assumptions in her work:

Yeah, I guess it makes you not assume. Maybe not fully—you’re still going to assume things... but having those weekly planned meetings...and that takes a lot of the assumptions away.

Participant #2

The issue of confidentiality also was highlighted as something participants had assumed they did well however after accreditation standards had been implemented, lapses in this practice were identified as evidenced through these two participants’ comments:
I think that prior to accreditation we did have certain standards in terms of confidentiality. But it was pretty nominal.

Participant #7

I kind of thought we had considered all the ramifications around confidentiality yet... I catch myself or other staff... waiting outside of the school for one of the kids and the school staff would wonder who we were waiting for.

Participant #3

Another point of how assumptions have changed with the advent of accreditation in the agency is to what extent the need for documentation removes the ability for assumptions to flourish as reported by another participant:

I guess one of the things that comes to mind is paperwork. I think the assumption that we’ve had a conversation with a client about a certain expectation... is enough, but you know, having a client be made aware of certain rights and responsibilities that they have in writing, that’s changed I guess.

Participant #8

Perhaps the most revealing response to this question speaks to how accreditation standards were designed so that there was no room for the ability to assume much in the context of work with clients. Every standard is designed to become specific enough so that the clarity of what each standard requires ensures a careful examination of how and why one does their work. This participant speaks clearly about how her assumptions had changed with the introduction of accreditation.

So it really made me sort of pay more attention to the smaller details, and then just really thinking of how you are treating the client, and thinking of their cultural background, and their heritage, and their rights, and all of that sort of thing really.

Participant #6
The second question that was meant to investigate participants' personal change was the modification, if any, in their actual practice at their agency. The majority of participants point toward how their practice has altered through the introduction of the accreditation service delivery framework.

**Theme #2: Focus of service delivery.**

Again, according to the majority of participant feedback specific to this section, two things occurred with this shift, the first of which was that their service delivery became more focused as evidenced by the following comments:

...it's now focused...there is a definite progression of what paperwork we are doing next. So you know, you do this one assessment then you go to this report, then you go to this report, this report...

Participant #1

You're not lost, you're given a process now, and once you know the process, after all the confusion and change, you...can plan better... and I think just in your head it gives you that way to plan for your client...and just keep focused...

Participant #2

...well it's not like your guessing what is best practice, you know...[accreditation] gives you a bit more structure...so you're not constantly re-inventing the way you do things - you've got standards to follow.

Participant #6

**Theme #3: Professional file work.**

The second area that changed in participants’ practice due to the introduction of accreditation was that their file documentation became more professionally organized.
The following comments speak to this issue and this, in turn alludes to congruency between intra-agency programs.

I think that there’s a lot more attention paid to the way that files are maintained in a professional standard...so they’re far more professional, and the files contain only what is necessary, rather than heaps and heaps of scraps and scraps, and things that really don’t need to belong in the file.

Participant #4

...compared to at the beginning things seem to be much tidier, there is much more flow, and even in the client files the staff know what goes in, what they have to have. So if you look at a client file from one program, and another program, they are going to look similar because they have the same content...I think the staff probably spend less time [on file work] because they know exactly what they need.

Participant #6

To complete my inquiry into any personal change brought about due to accreditation, I asked participant’s to identify personally positive and negative elements in what accreditation has brought to them as workers and to their agency. Again, there was remarkable consistency between responses in both categories. I will review the personally positive responses first. Broad themes have been gleaned from participant data regarding their positive experiences. Accountability is the primary theme with notable sub-themes such as – accountability for one’s practice, accountability to clients, accountability to the community, and accountability to one’s co-workers.

Personal Positives

Theme #1: Accountability for one’s practice.

Accountability for one’s practice eventually translated into accountability to the client in terms of service they received for one participant:
I have just become more aware of how accountable I am when I have my file reviews. I mean this is the same sort of issue but, just the accountability, you know if I go and I want to see [my supervisor] you know he looks at the files and sees what we are working on. There is just more accountability, if this is your need and this is your goal, then we can talk more specifically about what is going on.

Participant #1

Theme #2: Accountability to the client.

For another participant, a link between accountability to the client as it relates to their file work is more explicit:

A sense that we’re actually helping. That we are actually meeting the need that the client has come in with. And if for some reason we are off, they can let us know that...I think it’s a good test to know what we’re doing...

Participant #2

Theme #3: Accountability to the agency.

One participant framed her thoughts about accountability by pointing out that any worker is likely to be evaluated on their performance based on their work with clients and their file work. This invites a unique benchmark on which workers must be accountable to clients and their agency:

It allows for people to understand their roles...and I guess it goes back to a framework that allows people to, I think, be more accountable, because there is a standard by which their evaluation is happening...it creates sort of a level playing field, across programs, when they set the standardized framework. So it eliminates sort of, ‘them and us,’ and creates more of a ‘we.’

Participant #4
Theme #4: Accountability to co-workers.

And yet another participant furthers this accountability issue to include accountability to other workers explicating the need for uniformity in files so that one’s work with a client can be interpreted in his or her absence:

And definitely it forces people, myself, others to be more accountable because there is a process that you have to go through...the whole agency needs to be on board with that when there is that kind of structure [accreditation]. I think too it gave us consistency, so if I open someone else’s file there is a consistency to mine...

Participant #5

Participants’ accountability responses to the question of what positives they found in their accreditation process are perhaps best summarized through the following comment:

I think it’s a really good thing that we have more accountability...I think there is a sense that our accountability is more to ourselves, and that’s to me a good thing. I think accountability is a very good thing.

Participant #8

Theme #5: Improvement of organizational culture.

Another consistent theme participants’ identified as a positive of the accreditation process was the improvement of their organizational culture. It seems as though there are two parts to this change in culture that brought many parts of the organization into one and then strengthened that togetherness through adversity within their circumstance.

The following responses reflect the ‘coming together’ as an organization:

I think it’s really helped us come together as an organization...I think that bought everybody on to the same level and everybody started working together...
Participant #3

I think that it really did bring some things together that unified as I say, standards, it brought together a lot of staff because you are working on teams and the separation between groups and so forth, became less.

Participant #7

Theme #6: Staff buy-in.

From here, the responses turn to illustrate that the culture of the organization was working through a hardship which aided in the 'togetherness':

Another positive thing actually I think was, it really helped us as a staff group to come together and work as a team, we were all suffering through the same thing so being able to work together and see a positive outcome was really great.

Participant #8

...one thing that happened, is that when all of the staff bought into is the momentum that it created, like people working together. Without a doubt there was resistance in certain places, but I think that in terms of you know, when the staff bought into it there was a cohesiveness. In some ways it was almost like a team-building type of activity.

Participant #7

...once people were able to get their heads around the fact that we were in accreditation, whether we wanted to be or not...it generated a lot of...responsibility on the part of the staff to be involved and to maintain their involvement through the process, and then to take some pride in the outcome.

Participant #4

Personal Negatives

Naturally, a change process as far reaching as accreditation can not be without its negative characteristics. In similar fashion to the question regarding personally positive
elements of the accreditation effort, participants were also asked what they held as negative within the accreditation process. Responses, again, did not vary much and are categorized into three themes: effects of workload increase, constant change and lack of stability, and inflexibility of accreditation standards.

Theme #1: Effects of workload increase.

Primarily, the amount of paperwork increased and it was a time consuming process – a process made more difficult by not being permitted to decrease one’s caseload as they added accreditation responsibilities.

I think with the process the negative personally was the amount of time... accreditation at times it was overwhelming, so it was just really busy trying to juggle the accreditation with the work you were doing.

Participant #5

Theme #2: Constant change and lack of stability.

During the challenging process of accreditation, some participants struggled with the lack of stability in the work they had accomplished through this often turbulent process. For example, developing forms to track information and progress of clients needed to be revised several times before a final format was decided upon.

Throughout the process things kept changing, because we were trying to find out what worked and what didn’t work... you would start using something and then it would change and you do something else, and then they would say this is coming so you would stop using this past form but the new thing wouldn’t be ready yet... and then you realized that for three months I haven’t used anything because I stopped using the old one, and the new one isn’t there. So that was challenging.

Participant #5
...as we developed the paperwork then we were also developing changes in the paperwork, and it just...went on and on...

Participant #4

Theme #3: Inflexibility of accreditation standards.

Other negatives included responses that indicated an inflexibility of the service delivery framework that hindered progress with clients:

I would do the trauma work and so I can go through periods of time when it [setting service plan goals] is being delayed because it is looking at—coping with current functioning and how to support the system, safety planning and all of those kinds of things and you know there is no way we are going to be drawing up a service plan...

Participant #7

The only negative piece...I find with that is a lot of our clients, in three months our goals don’t change...I have a lot of clients that are more long-term clients and their goals are not going to change...so that was part of my frustration...sometimes I just said—I think that’s going to be the same goal unless you want to change it but, because of the standards you couldn’t so that piece was negative.

Participant #2

In summary, we see from participant data that important negatives exist within the accreditation process. Accreditation appears to be a paper heavy process that extends through a period of constant revision of procedures and policy. Accreditation is a process that is to be added to one’s current workload, not substituted into it. As a result, there are more demands placed on the individual that would inevitably take time away from their clients as is implied within the data. Furthermore, for those participants who experienced
Interpretation of Participants’ Perception of Organizational Change

From the exploration of participant data revealing insights into personal experiences of the accreditation process, we will now shift to focus on the participants’ responses to their experiences of organizational change. To begin, I shall report results from the questions regarding the agency’s operations, procedures, and organization culture changes, if any, as a consequence of the accreditation process. The questions employed to elicit data regarding participants’ perceptions of organizational level change were as follows:

1. How has the organization’s operations changed in the way services are delivered to its client base as a result of the accreditation process?
2. How have the organization’s procedures changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?
3. How has the organization’s culture changed, if any, as a result of the accreditation process?
4. Tell me about some of the positive changes as you see them that have occurred on an organizational level as a result of accreditation?
5. Tell me about some of the negative changes as you see them that have occurred on an organizational level as a result of accreditation?

Themes gathered from the data include client centeredness, structured service delivery framework, organizational accountability, organizational culture shift, worker togetherness, and worker alienation.

Theme #1: Client centeredness.

The first question regarding organizational change was aimed at agency operational change. In other words, was there a shift in the way services are delivered to its client base as a result of the accreditation process? The main operational change cited
in participant data was the heightened focus on the client as a result of accreditation. The following selection of participants refers to the agency being more client focused, how there is more client input in service planning, and an emphasis on letting clients and the community know more about who the agency is and what services they provide for children and families.

I think even just when the mission statement was made, you know that we are... client centered, that it's respectful to the client and non-judgmental and I think the more we repeat that, you know when we read that and the clients read that, they see that is actually our process.

Participant #1

Seeing that we're here to help [clients]... but they need to tell us what they want — what they need from us. And that's mainly through that service plan... and just being open. Not having those assumptions and keeping your eyes open to where they're coming from, where they're at, and what they need.

Participant #2

Well, I think that this agency has always been client focused, and accreditation has just illuminated that.

Participant #4

... clients are part of the service plan right, and developing the service plan — so yeah, they are very much a part of their experience.

Participant #5

I think you sort of consider the client more. Like considering their rights, and their... confidentiality, all those procedures considering how you are treating them and what you are keeping in the file, and that kind of thing... but it's become very client focused...

Participant #6
Another change in operations worthy of note is how, as stated in the personal experiences section, the accountability factor again becomes a focus as a result of accreditation.

I think it has because we give them more written material which explains our... accountability – it explains our responsibility to them as a client, that... they can talk to someone if they are not happy with the service they are getting...

Participant #3

Well I think what I see is that the organization wants accountable, ethical service. And I think accreditation supports that, it enhanced that... you know, the accountability is different, and I think the awareness is different.

Participant #7

**Theme #2: Structured service delivery framework.**

The second question within the organizational change section focused on something similar to organizational operations - the organization’s procedures. Participants responded with two prevailing themes. The first theme applies to the measure of organization and structure that was added to the agency through clearer and more concise procedures.

They are clearer. I think we have a lot more procedures now... the procedures are actually drawn out and now we have consistency around that and all the staff have consistency around that. And the procedures are very clearly laid out...

Participant #3

I think it’s clearer. So I think it’s a lot clearer now because we just have a definite way of referral processes, that before... referrals were sort of all over the place, and coming from all kinds of different sources. Now there’s a standard procedure.

Participant #4
Much, much, more organized...we have our policy manual now and it's got all of the categories so if anyone has a question about something you just go to that policy manual... so now we have this nice manual and it's all, very organized, so that has been a big change, it's become much more streamlined, much more efficient...

Participant #6

I mean the beauty is that it tells you what various things are, so it's clear, not sort of going around and saying; ”do we have whatever, and what does that mean?” So it's clear.

Participant #7

Theme #3: Organizational accountability.

The second theme that arose from the participant data regarding the procedural question was the measure of accountability that enhanced procedures introduced as a result of accreditation.

I think we had something to show [funders] you know, we have some stats now. We had stats before but these are the stats they want to see the ones that are significant. What population are we reaching, what are the main concerns of our community, that kind of thing, we can document that now...and I think that's helpful.

Participant #1

As a general answer, maybe its more [accountability]...things aren't left hanging. There’s going to be somebody that’s going to take care of it and somebody who’s assigned to that team to take care of it. I think the accountability—of being responsible for your agency and making sure you’re moving in the right direction...would be a major theme as to why a lot of the things are done. And actually doing what we said we would do...

Participant #2

...clients know how to grieve if they are not getting the service that they expect and that is done in a really formalized, respectful, way because otherwise that’s when I think you have people who
feel really disrespected... Our welcome letter is really respectful of the clients we see and it's changed our process... a big part of doing the work is informed consent. I don't know if that was happening for a lot of clients until it became very formalized.

Participant #5

Yeah, absolutely, accountability to the client, accountability to the funder, accountability to the employer. I also think... the procedures have protected our client's confidentiality in a better way... the way we manage information has a lot to do with confidentiality...

Participant #8

Theme #4: Organizational culture shift.

With any significant organizational change initiative, it is safe to assume that a change in the culture of the organization may also occur. The question in my semi-structured interview regarding the organizational culture was meant to explore whether there was a shift in the collective morale of the organization. Several themes arose from participant responses. The first theme identified was accreditation was very much viewed as a team building exercise. The accreditation effort consolidated parts of an agency into one. As a consequence, one participant suggests that people do not have to be sold on the need for accreditation any longer, as they are all in it together, good or bad. This may be indicative of a strength in numbers attitude.

...before I came I know that some people thought there was more hierarchy, there was a hierarchy between counsellors, and non-counsellors... and I don't hear that as much, people don't feel there is as much of that division...

Participant #5

...there were these really separate entities, but as we started to go through the accreditation... and then we changed it to [Touchwood Community Services], that's who we are and these
family centers are a part of that, they’re not separate...so it went from being separate things to becoming one organization.

Participant #6

There wasn’t as many team meetings before, and there wasn’t any practice in place that brought us together in that way...the programs didn’t overlap as much as they do now...

Participant #8

Yeah, it’s more a team. But I think even if it might be the negative attitude, we all have it as a team. Like, if it’s the groans, like I said before, at least everybody’s doing it, it’s not one person left out to dry. And we’ve already committed, so once you’re committed, yeah, you just have to go with it. And there’s a good discussion process too, with everything. So it just helps—in meetings we know where we’re at, we’re committed, and we don’t have to be sold on it anymore, we just know—that helps us go in the right direction...

Participant #2

There was one participant response that was quite unique and stood out among other responses to this question. In response to this question, Participant #1 relayed a metaphorical example of what has occurred to the culture of the organization.

...when I compared it to religion, I think you know, we use different words—it is a culture, we know what G-something means, or S-something, or, we’re way more aware of something that might infringe upon accreditation policy. Or we consult [the accreditation co-coordinator], or in some cases we consult the manual...to see if this is going to work. So there is a sense that the manual is sort of the bible...

Theme #5: Worker togetherness.

Another theme identified in the data was that through the demand for work on accreditation, the opportunity for getting to know fellow workers was introduced.

...you get to know one another and get a feel for how the other person handles himself or herself...We also do some staff team
building...we have some smaller staff functions, pot lucks, at different times – you know putting on pot lunches when staff are leaving but they are also around celebrating different things that have happened for staff. And I think that is a lot of resulting from accreditation...

Participant #3

I think it can only be good in terms of knowing ones colleagues and appreciating the work that they do, and understanding it more fully. Being able to sit at a table together and talk about all of our respective needs, and how different our needs can be, but how we are all going to come together and meet them respectively.

Participant #7

Theme #6: Worker alienation.

Conversely to getting to know fellow workers, the accreditation process also held the ability to push other workers out of the process, and in some cases, the agency.

...I have also seen it affect people to the point where people are pushed away. At the beginning of the process it did have some effect on the people’s decision to remain employed here.

Participant #7

I think when we were going through accreditation it was stressful on a number of people and some of those people did leave the organization...

Participant #3

The last two questions exploring participants’ perceptions of organizational level change aimed at the positives and negatives for the organization. I shall begin with reviewing participant responses to the organizational positives question. Six themes were identified.
Organizational Positives

Theme #1: Accountability.

The first organizationally positive theme identified was accountability. This accountability was related to all agency stakeholders: clients, co-workers, community and the agency funders.

Okay, well accountability to each other...as staff but also to our funders...To our clients, yeah, sorry, that's the big one. And maybe even in a broader sense like just to our community that we're more accountable.

Participant #1

...overall I think we are more accountable as an agency... to our clients, to our community members, to our—the people who refer to us...

Participant #5

I think about what people do with a client, it is now required...that they account for what is going on with clients. So that their work is accounted for, but also in terms of how they practice. I think also...the service is at a certain level and it needs to be maintained there, or rise above that.

Participant #7

Theme #2: Getting to know each other.

Accreditation also facilitated getting to know other co-workers in performing tasks in accreditation and attending meetings as required by accreditation. This improved inter-personal aspect of the change made the work environment more attractive for some.

I think organizationally we do a lot of interpersonal work within our agency so...we know a lot about each other now so I think when you know a little bit about another person that you work with, you know a little bit about their background...their family,
what their recreational choices are, you find it more appealing to work with them – it seems to be more comfortable.

Participant #3

Well I think because we come together with a common interest in accreditation, partly because once we’re in it there is no turning back, and partly I think because we all find it, at some level or another quite interesting, to see how accreditation works. I think that we have become as an agency more familiar with each other’s programs, and how we work in our programs. I think there is kind of more interfacing going on...

Participant #8

So definitely it brought people closer together doing it, and then some of those people kind of fanned out into other areas... as a new worker, it made me aware of other programs so that was a positive of the whole process.

Participant #5

Theme #3: Professionalism and credibility.

Heightened professionalism and credibility as organization and as workers was also identified as an organizational positive as a result of the accreditation process.

Well I think out in the community... being accredited gave a lot of credibility to the organization... we’re a great organization and we really take pride in our work, but being accredited kind of proves that because a third party with no interest comes in and says; you are doing a great job, so it gives that credibility in the community...

Participant #6

A social worker from the CLS office came out on an intake with me about a year ago and we just sat and talked about where the child was at and what the behaviours were and what was going on for him... I had to break down for the mom what were family issues and what were child-focussed... and the social worker looked at me and said ‘this is amazing – I didn’t know your staff’
did all of this – I didn’t know that they could take kids out and do these things’ and so it was really helpful for her to be along...

Participant #3

**Theme #4: Improved training opportunities.**

Perhaps connected to the heightened credibility and professionalism, the next organizational positive identified was the requirement of access to training for agency workers.

But I think more along the lines that realizing that we need more specialized training...our team is now regarded as a specialized team just as specialized as a clinical person would be – our intervention is highly regarded...so I think accreditation really helped with that because we did not have access to that kind of training prior to accreditation.

Participant #3

I think the training has been positive organizationally...these are the standards and these are what people need to know if you’re doing this job...people are trained to do the work they’re doing, and they are supported in that training too, and I think that is really positive. And then people feel stronger about the roles they are doing because they feel they have the skills to do those roles.

Participant #5

**Theme #5: Agency site aesthetics.**

Another positive that arose from the accreditation process was the improvement of the physical agency site. Making a building accessible to the community is a requirement of accreditation.

...in terms of our physical plant it also had benefits there as well, because I think that it motivated I guess the Board, or management...to look after the physical plant a little bit better
than they had before. I think there is more awareness on the physical plant...its accessibility and so forth...

Participant #7

...because we bought the building we're able to make changes to the building, and that's been a big one actually, like we installed a doorbell. We had to be more aware of any kinds of special needs, like we knew we couldn't put an elevator but we had to make sure that the back entrance doesn't have any steps...

Participant #1

...our center is certainly more attractive than it used to be...we're much more aware and we take much more care in how our physical agency looks...I think that once we started looking at how we connected to the community, and how does the community see us we had to look at that from being a client...when a client comes in and goes into the front reception area, what are they seeing? So I think we are forced to look at that...yeah, I think organizationally we have become more aesthetic.

Participant #8

Theme #6: Hearing the voice of the front line worker.

The final organizational level positive theme identified was an improved process in which agency worker voice is heard. This positive mostly applies to the oft-unheard voice of the front-line worker.

...people feel empowered, especially like, we did a CQI presentation recently to build the CQI team, and you know part of that was saying; “this is your voice” like really empowering people to run with it and they did, and took it off...it was like; have a voice and things happen, and you know you can see the change. So I think that’s been positive to the...whole morale here I guess too, and that’s positive. Yeah, it’s a good place to work.

Participant #5
...we’re on different committees and stuff now, so the full loop seems to come through. There’s not a lot of things that get lost anymore. When things are recommended, or something’s happening, there’s a committee forum to take care of it, and then that loop I find is being filled in now, it’s not just a lot of people saying things, and then nothing being done about it.

Participant #2

Organizational Negatives

Theme #1: Time away from clients.

And with organizational positives, come organizational negatives. Five themes were sifted from participant data responses to the question targeting organizational level negatives, the first of which was how time spent on accreditation work translated into time away from working with clients.

And I do have some question in terms of whether the paper generated...enhances service. Because there are times when it really does feel like it takes away from client delivery.

Participant #7

...yes it definitely...take away from client time – all the staff will be taking a 2 day first aid course – all the staff in our programs, family support, etc., so definitely interferes with client time. We try to pace it so it doesn’t happen that frequently so client time is not interrupted that often. It does make people get behind in their paperwork.

Participant #3

Theme #2: Inflexibility of accreditation standards.

A second negative theme for participants was how the accreditation standards can be inflexible and take away from the spontaneity of the work that sometimes occurs with children and families.
Well, I guess...the standards sometimes really put us in a box. And you know, so that's difficult, because then we have to find creative ways to maintain, you know, to not provide service continually in the box so that we can meet the needs of our clients, but also meet the standards.

Participant #4

...I guess sometimes, it definitely slows the process, slows things up because you need to always check. I mean it's a good thing to check because there are standards for a reason but it does, it can gum up the process a bit, just makes it slower.

Participant #5

...sometimes taking away from the spontaneity of the way people would do practice. Sometimes rather than just going in and doing something they kind of stop, and think okay, well what does accreditation say about this, and that kind of thing. Rather than just going right into beginning work with a client, you kind of think a little bit more, and I would say that in some instances that's a negative thing.

Participant #6

And there is more time spent on accreditation. Like when you think about CQI and you think about meetings on Gs, or whatever, there are always work. So that takes away from direct client service. But I think that again, it's something that now I know in my head, that the paperwork is client service, client delivery, it just looks different. But it doesn't get better for me.

Participant #7

Theme #3: Increased paperwork.

Some participants noted the increased amount of paperwork onto their already existing workload was a concern.

The negatives, organizationally, I guess I would just say paperwork... yeah, I don’t know what other negatives there are, paperwork, that’s about it.

Participant #8
...just kind of adding more work onto people who already had a full case load...it is a lot more record keeping and paperwork than they were doing before, and that is hard for some people.

Participant #6

_Theme #4: Othering of “resistant” workers._

One participant noted that as a critical mass of people became attracted to the accreditation effort, there existed a negative in that not all people accepted the change at the same time and those who resist are at risk of being marginalized within the larger organization.

I think I said before that I think it drew people together, but I also think that there are some people that don’t like the new stuff, and I think for them it—I don’t want to say, ostracize is too strong a word, but it makes them more on the fringe because they really don’t like it.

Participant #1

_Theme #5: Inequity of sharing accreditation responsibilities._

There is also further evidence to suggest that those who resisted the accreditation initiative could have also damaged workplace relationships through lack of involvement.

...there was some tension...some workers were doing the work, others were not pulling their weight...it definitely caused resentment towards – you know different staff that were carrying the load and others that were just doing little bits – things were a little unbalanced.

Participant #3

...there was sort of a resistance and you know, sharing the workload...we got to a point where we recognized that everyone needed to be involved...initially it was only...certain people who were involved in it, and there was certain people who weren’t.

Participant #8
This concludes the section related to participants' views on organizational changes as a result of the accreditation effort. The next section holistically addresses the accreditation change as a process. To sum up participants' overall experiences with accreditation, I focus on these questions that probed that area:

1. How did you feel about accreditation before it started, in the middle of the process, and now?

2. Tell me about your experience of accreditation.

Interpretation of Participants' Overall Experience of the Accreditation Effort

The participant agency had some difficulty with their accreditation beginning with the stage of getting started because it had done some work on accreditation on a previous occasion. The agency actually began their accreditation work at one point in time and then had to stop because they were not on the ‘right track’ as far as completing necessary tasks in order to be successful in obtaining accredited status. At this point, the agency received the guidance of a mentor. This mentor was a person who provided practical advice on what needed to be done and how to do it. At this juncture, the agency essentially embarked on accreditation for the second time. The accreditation journey for the participants involved in this study varied somewhat but seemed to travel through the same phases. I asked a question in my interviews to gain insight into what their journey felt like for them. The question was, “How did you feel about accreditation before it started, in the middle of the process, and now?”

Experiences at the beginning of accreditation.

Feelings about accreditation differed most at the outset, before the accreditation work began. The range of feelings included positive attitudes such as “...healthy
skepticism…” (Participant #1) and being “…cautiously positive…” (Participant #2). These responses reflect recognition that though accreditation would not be easy, it would be done knowing that it will be positive for the agency in the end. This attitude is perhaps most aptly reflected by one participant’s statement feeling the effort would be “…daunting but worthwhile…” and still another participant claiming she had “…mixed excitement of something new and apprehension at the same time.” Other responses moved away from the more positive realm of feelings and into an area of ambivalence claiming outright that they “went into accreditation quite naively” and, “didn’t understand how much work I would have to do.” These responses were undoubtedly a reflection of the fact that some agency members were not informed thoroughly of what accreditation entailed by either agency or MCFD management. This may also shed light on why the agency had to cease their first attempt at accreditation, as most people in the agency were not involved initially. The remainder of the responses left no question that resistance to the change existed with comments that accreditation represented “a fair bit of annoyance” for participant #8. To another, agency accreditation was simply “not where I wanted to go” suggesting she did not wish to see the agency bound up with policies and procedures as a result of accreditation.

Experiences in the middle of accreditation.

After the agency had begun their accreditation, the middle stage was mostly comprised of trying to complete their self-study. This entailed creating policies to comply with accreditation standards, drafting procedures that describe how the policy lives in the agency’s service delivery, and then fine tuning as needed. All policies were
required to be in place and being practiced 6 months prior to the agency’s site visit. As
the participants reflected on their experience of the middle stage of their accreditation
effort, certain points again stand out. Clearly this stage was characterized as burdensome.
All participants reported that this stage of accreditation was in one word or another,
"overwhelming". One participant describes her experience:

...as I became more aware of what it really entailed it became
very onerous, because you’re trying to do your work, you’re
trying to get your head wrapped around what accreditation is
and what the standards are, and what that really means - the
perplexities behind it.

Participant #7

This arduousness is echoed by another participant,

In the middle it was more of a grind. And to really try to
construct on paper...what was reflected in the work, and what
we wanted to establish as policy...we had a lot of struggle with
communication loops and feedback loops...We’d hash this one
over again, ‘How come we’re not at the stage of putting it into
policy?’ So, we had lot of work around that...and to keep us
moving onto the next level.

Participant #4

And another participant adds her supporting view,

...it was still overwhelming in the middle too, because then we
are really starting to...see that we haven’t been connecting
with our community as well, and how can we do better at that
and trying to come up with ideas that were actually
workable...and explore how we really do that. It became a lot
of work to figure that out so, yeah, it was overwhelming...

Participant #8

Though this stage was confusing and onerous for many participants, there seemed
to be a point at which any resistance to the process was dropped when participants began
to see how their accreditation work connected with the practicalities of their service
delivery. This shift is illustrated well with the following response:

But then there was incredible relief once we got beyond just
seeing what it was needing, and just sort of actually doing...and
actually producing a service plan, or using various things, then
it became more real and it made sense.

Participant #7

This next response reflected more about how the accreditation work related to
other agency workers and to the agency itself rather than agency clients.

...the more we got involved in it...it became more practical so
we had made first aid kits for everyone that is a frontline
worker that’s in the community...we went out and assembled
these kits, and so that seemed really practical...I think that is
when I started to see that there was some validity to what we
were doing.

Participant #1

Experiences at the end of accreditation.

As participant responses move into describing how they view their accreditation
journey in retrospectively, tremendous congruence emerges. All participants report that
looking back on their accreditation efforts was positive, and at the very least, “...think
it’s a great thing.” Becoming accredited was viewed as a “...big accomplishment”
garnering respect and credibility for workers and the agency. The following response
summarizes the collective message well:
By the end everyone was just energized I think, just so relieved and so, like a feeling of how proud, like, wow, look what we did, we did all of this work, and how it just came together… it was a real feeling of accomplishment, and then looking back we were glad that we did it even though it was a kind of hard slog along the way, sometimes. The end was the best really, you know, you think wow, that was great.

Participant #6

Within these responses, there were 3 particular elements that stood out. One of the elements has been mentioned – the feeling of accomplishment. The other two were credibility and the importance of maintaining accreditation. Credibility for community agencies is important because it sends a message of professionalism to both clients and those who refer clients alike. For example, one participant describes her view on this credibility issue based on community professional input:

And from the feedback that I have gotten from social workers and other community service providers I think. I don’t think its that they respect our agency any more or that they think of us in a different light but I think they see the enormous amount of work that we put into accreditation and see that the staff here and recognize that the staff here are really committed to make sure that we provide good service back to the community because we did actually go through this.

Participant #3

Another participant mirrors this attitude as well stating,

I think it gives us a lot of credibility, credibility to this agency to say; we’ve gone through this, we have some standards, we need to meet these standards that we worked hard to reach the standards.

Participant #5
The other element to these retrospectives that emerges is the recognition that the work is not complete, the change will continue as indicated through the following participant’s comments:

I think we all recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done, that it is ongoing it’s not like; well we’re done now we don’t have to do anymore…now it’s like re-visiting, knowing that in a few years we are going to have to have all of these things implemented, and perfected pretty much. So now I think we are at a place where it is not over, it’s never over, it’s continuing to work with that attitude, that mindset that we’re always looking to ensure that our practices are the best that they can be.

Participant #8

To further this element of continuous change, an importance has been placed on the need to maintain what has been done thus far, to stay on top of what has been accomplished so that it may be less burdensome when the time for re-accreditation arrives. The following excerpts articulate this never-ending cycle:

...because you are always working on accreditation, I mean that’s the thing, it’s a never-ending process and as the standards change, then again it’s getting your head around “why are they changing the standards”, and how to make all of that work, and make sense of all of that.

Participant #7

It’s always evolving, changing forms...we’re always changing our forms, and that’s really hard because we realize...now that we have changing standards as well a lot of those forms are going to have to be changed again.

Participant #8

Participant’s Responses to Overall Accreditation Experience

The second question asked of participants was to provide a description of their overall accreditation experience. Of the 8 participants of this study, 5 reported that they
had an overall positive experience with their accreditation process, and 2 participants reported a negative overall experience, with the final participant reporting initial negativity but as the participant moved on through the accreditation process, began to see the positives in it.

Even with the positive experiences, there exists a recognition that it took a significant effort to adjust to the change and get into the process of accreditation as noted in the following quotation:

It was positive...it always takes that little bit to get the wheel going, and then I found it positive. And I knew that there would be a lot of work to get through but...I think I was already partially bought in, because I knew what it would bring.

Participant #2

One participant saw that even when the accreditation process highlighted areas for improvement for the agency, learning what that area was and how to address it still held currency as a positive element in her overall experience:

It made us really examine the way that we were doing our practice, and when we were doing something already well, that we were meeting the standard, that was sort of like a positive reinforcement, and...when we found something that we needed to work on, then that was still a good experience, because it—you know—it makes us accountable...as we went through the process and were working on every individual little standard, and the focus became on improving or maintaining a standard, then it gave a certain pride, because I felt anyways, that they had a pride in their work. And I thought that was a really positive thing.

Participant #6
Again, the following participant highlights another element. For this participant, awareness of the various other functions of the agency was key to her overall positive experience as she states;

> Overall I would say it was a positive experience, overall. Simply because I think that we gained a lot more awareness. You know, we're so process-oriented in this business, right? That it actually probably demanded that we become more conscious of other kinds of processes that are involved in the running of the programs in an agency like this, where it's a multi-program agency. So, I think what happened is that we became aware certainly, of the different functions of the agency more than we would have been before, and aware of the different programs—of program development.

Participant #4

Of the negative responses to overall experience, comments were made regarding the preparation of the agency going into the accreditation process. Specifically, comments indicated some misguidance from the agency’s major funder, MCFD - the entity that required the accreditation from the agency to begin with. This participant articulated a struggle with having to direct significant effort into the agency’s self study and changing policies and procedures while maintaining full services to their clients as required by their MCFD contract.

> Initially it was probably more negative because our programs at the time we started accreditation were really busy...the Ministry management people kept saying, don’t worry you can take time to do accreditation...and because they were not giving us any extra money, it wasn’t like we could hire people to do it.

Participant #3

Another participant thought that the accreditation was more of a management task than that of an agency wide effort:
It was a challenging experience because initially the impression I had was that management was going to look after it, and that we as staff, front-line workers, had no ownership of it. And so for the first little while when there was a lot of talk...I myself didn’t buy into it.

Participant #7

Lastly, we have a response to the overall accreditation experience question that reflects a fluctuation between positivity and negativity:

Once we started getting involved in it I appreciated where I could see it would benefit the people that we worked with. And benefit us in the way that we do our work, so it became a little more intriguing and then there was the resistance again. So, I would say you know, it was kind of back-and-forth because the workload was going to increase, getting my head around some of the more stringent aspects of accreditation, it didn’t seem like that was going to be very much fun. So I would say my experience fluctuated between interested, and resistance.

Participant #8

To summarize, the participants in this study report primarily positive experiences, particularly when offering data on what their feeling was at the end of the process of accreditation. Each participant reported a positive retrospective on the completion of the agency’s accreditation. Within this overall positive set of experiences were two negative aspects. These negative experiences were attributed to the strenuous effort to understand how accreditation works to improve agency policies and how accreditation fits into the agency’s service delivery.
Chapter Five

Interpretation and Discussion of Participant Data

With participant data now reported, I shall commence the discussion of data as it relates to the four main areas of focus that constitutes the literature review section in Chapter Two. The two primary aims of this study were to understand front line workers’ perspectives of their personal and organizational experiences of accreditation. Employing those perspectives, I will begin this chapter with an illustration of the organizational and personal journeys of the participants. This will be followed by a discussion of what typology of change matches to the accreditation experience as well as a discussion regarding the participants’ emotional responses to the change.

An Integrated Organizational Change and Personal Transitions Model

I believe the participant interview data reveals a rich description of the agency’s organizational journey, as well as the participants’ personal journey, through the accreditation process. Using the lens of a blended framework of Lewin’s organizational change model and Bridges’ personal transition representation, sense can be made of the data that encapsulates both organizational and personal journeys in a single linear fashion. I have combined their two frameworks into an integrated schematic to describe parallel experiences of change incorporating both approaches into a single model. (Refer to Figure 1)

I will begin with a description of the Present State of the agency prior to the accreditation experience. I will follow with a description of the organization’s Transition State by viewing it through the lens of participants’ personal transitions.
Participants’ narratives of Endings, Neutral Zone and Beginnings will constitute the organization’s Transition State. After each phase of personal transition is discussed we can conclude with a description of the Desired State of the agency.

Figure 1

Present State

What was the present state of the organization prior to the accreditation initiative? Why did the agency decide to embark on accreditation? These questions and more can be answered through a review of participant responses. Kurt Lewin (1958) explains that an agency will travel in a state of equilibrium (Present State) until a force is introduced to
the organization that disrupts that equilibrium. Participant data reveals a clear description of the agency’s state of equilibrium. I believe that what had been introduced to the agency with the advent of accreditation was not present prior to accreditation, or at the very least as one participant worded it, it was “...illuminated”. For example, the agency had standards prior to accreditation but after accreditation the agency’s standards had grown in numbers and they had become more specific, therefore shining a spotlight on areas needed to heighten the standard of service delivery.

The state of equilibrium for the participant agency, based on participant data, can be divided into two broad categories: Accountability and Professional Credibility, and Interagency Issues. I will discuss both categories to outline the Present State of the participant’s agency prior to accreditation.

*Accountability and professional credibility.*

Any community agency must have some standards to work on. It would be most difficult, or impossible, to obtain a contract from the BC government without any framework of accountability. Standards are needed for a framework of accountability to exist. For the participants’ agency, standards did indeed exist. However, as participant #7 worded it, their standards regarding confidentiality and informed consent were “...nominal.” The state of confidentiality and informed consent standards were similar to those in other areas as well. Participants noted that through the accreditation process, additional standards are created that are more specific than those that the agency had before accreditation.

As accreditation moved into the agency’s operations through the adoption of a greater number of more focused standards, participant’s workload framework became
more focused. Prior to accreditation, the workload framework carried out by agency workers was not as structured or focused as it is with accreditation standards guiding their work. Participant #2 states that she has been “…given a process now…” that focuses her work. Participant #1 echoes this adding that though there was somewhat of a framework prior to accreditation, she didn’t see the progression of it as she does with accreditation’s framework (see page 47). Participant #1 goes further, adding the standards outlining the requirement that a client’s needs assessment must relate directly to the client’s goals was something she noted was absent prior to accreditation (see page 45). This participant implied that in the Present State of the organization, the work done with clients was not as focused on the client as they relate to client needs and goals.

Along with more focused work came standards specific to the formalization of client file work. In the agency’s Present State, when the absence of accreditation standards existed, there was less standardization of what information was collected from a client and where it was located within the physical file. Participants #4 and #6 both comment on the change of how client files are formatted making them more user friendly and professional looking (see page 48). This also indicates a less formalized framework that participants worked under during the agency’s Present State.

With the introduction of specific and exhaustive standards, there was a realization among participants that their work became more focused on the client. Participant #6 commented that the manner in which she viewed clients shifted with accreditation. Participant #6 stated that she began to view the clients like customers as a result of accreditation’s requirement of heightened client focus (see page 100). Participants #1, #2, #4 and #5 also commented on how accreditation had focused their work and the agency
in general on clients more so than prior to accreditation (see page 55). This is not to suggest the agency was not client centered prior to accreditation, only less client centered.

Participant data also alludes to the agency's condition of not being as professional or credible to allied professionals whilst in the Present State. Without accreditation standards, referring sources did not receive reports from agency workers, as they are now required to provide. These reports are now more focused and professional. In addition, there is simply more contact between referring allied professionals and the agency workers. Participant #3 explains that, consequently, knowledge of the ability and skill in agency workers is able to spread beyond the walls of the agency creating wider recognition in the social services community (see pages 62 & 63).

In its Present State, the agency was unconsciously unaccountable to clients, co-workers, referring parties, and the community in general. Though there were standards that guided the agency, they were minimal and open to wide interpretation. As a result, there were no requirements, other than professional ethical considerations, to heighten involvement and disclosure to agency stakeholders, that is, to clients, agency workers, the community, referring professionals, and the agency's funders. Heightened awareness of accountability to all these stakeholders was revealed in participant data. Participants #1 and #7 comment on how they have become more accountable for the work they do with their clients (see page 61). Participant #5 explains that having up to date and organized file work that can be understood in her absence translates to accountability to co-workers (see page 50). Participant #5 further speaks to being accountable to the wider community (see page 61) and Participant #1 also comments on how the agency has become more
accountable to their funder(s) (see Page 61). Based on this data, the agency in its Present State was not as accountable to stakeholders.

Participant data suggests that their work with families in the agency’s Present State was more flexible and spontaneous. Participant #4 claims that with the introduction of accreditation standards also came the propensity to restrict workers (see page 66). Participant #5 furthers this sentiment by adding that the standards tended to slow the process of working with families due to the need to always refer to the accreditation standards to ensure compliance with best practices (see page 66). Participant #6 echoes participant #5 by stating that some of the spontaneity is removed from the work with the need to refer to the standards (see page 66). Participants #2 and #7 also commented on how the inflexibility of the accreditation standards sometimes translated into not achieving them (see page 53). Participant #7 was frustrated with having to work on a service plan with a client even when it was more prudent to continue with safety planning. Participant #2 also comments on how she would be required to change client goals after a period of time even when the goal may still be the same.

Within the component of Accountability and Professional Credibility of the Present State, participants suggest that prior to accreditation they had more time to spend with their clients. Participants #3 and #7 commented on the amount of work required to successfully negotiate the accreditation process (see page 65). This in turn translated into time away from client service delivery. Therefore, it can be suggested that in the agency’s Present State, workers perceived that they were able to interface with their clients more often.
Intra-agency issues.

Intra-agency issues include workers' awareness of agency programs other than their own, agency workers' familiarity with one another, the importance of worker training, the frontline worker voice in agency change, change in the physical agency site, and workload issues.

In the agency's Present State, workers were not as connected with other agency programs. Participant #6 states that as the agency moved through the accreditation process, they went from several entities to one organization (see pages 58 & 59). Participants #2 and #8 echo this change (see page 59). In the agency's Present State, there were fewer meetings and therefore, less opportunity to be aware of other agency programs. Connected to this aspect of the Present State was the worker's familiarity with each other. During the Present State of the agency, workers did not know each other well. Through the process of accreditation, more meetings, committee work, and perhaps through water cooler discussions, workers have come to know each other better. Participants #3 and #7 comment on how they experienced the more social side of working with each other (see pages 59 & 60).

The agency's importance placed on training due to accreditation shifted. In the agency's Present State, the opportunities for worker training were less of a consideration for the agency. As accreditation was introduced, this changed significantly as stated by Participants #3 and #5 (see page 63). Hence, in its Present State, the agency had less training for workers and therefore, a less skilled worker population. Also, in the agency's Present State, there was no formal process for the frontline worker voice to inform agency management of what their views are with respect to agency improvement.
Accreditation introduces the concept of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). CQI is a process and the name given to a committee that involves the continuous improvement of identified concerns related to the organization. This committee’s members can include front line worker voices, as well as management. It is in this process that front line workers feel confident that they can influence and affect agency change and feel as if their suggestions are heard. Participant #5 and #2 comment on the empowerment they feel with a process that ensures suggestions are dealt with in a positive manner (see pages 64 & 65). This suggests that during the agency’s Present State, the front line voice of the agency was not heard as well by the agency’s management.

The agency’s physical site improved through the accreditation process. Participants #7, #1, and #8 all state that the physical building where the agency resides has been looked after more thoroughly (see pages 64). This, in turn, suggests that while in the Present State, the agency was less accommodating of clients and not as well maintained. Lastly, in the agency’s Present State, the agency was not as burdened with as heavy a workload. Participants #8, and #6 comment on the increase in paperwork and involvement in continuous committee work involved in the maintenance of accreditation (see pages 66 & 67).

To summarize the agency’s Present State, the agency was largely unaccountable in their practices above and beyond any personally driven frameworks each worker brought to their job. Though the agency had standards from which it operated, the standards were “...nominal.” Workers may have performed exemplary service to children and families, but they did not operate under a rigid framework of ‘best practices’. In its Present State, the agency had a more varied manner in which they kept client files,
and would have communicated less with those who refer clients to them. The community was largely ignorant of what the agency was or how they provided service to children and families. Because workers in the agency were not as bound by rigid standards they were able to be more flexible, spontaneous and spend more time with their clients.

Also in the agency’s Present State, workers were not as familiar with other agency programs or even other agency workers. The importance of worker training opportunities was not recognized and the voice of the frontline worker was not as valued in the context of agency change. The physical site of the agency was not as accessible to clients nor was it aesthetically pleasing and as well maintained in the Present State. Finally, as accreditation demanded a significant amount of time and effort on top of one’s existing caseload, the workload of the agency’s workers was not as demanding.

As stated in the introduction of this paper, accreditation in British Columbia became important in the acquisition of contracts for non-profit agencies. Valuable points were to be gained in the RFP process. Consequently, accredited agencies retained an edge over non-accredited agencies. I have described the agency in Lewin’s (1958) Present State. Lewin suggests that an organization’s Present State is interrupted only when a force is introduced that disrupts the state of equilibrium. For the agency in question, the force that disrupted the Present State was the process of accreditation and as Conner (1992) characterizes this shift, the ‘pain’ of the Present State (non accredited status) exceeded the ‘cost’ of the Transition State (the accreditation process). Therefore, the agency in question had to endure the process of accreditation in order to stay viable as a community agency and be competitive in the RFP process.

Transition State
Workers in any agency can dictate the success or failure of any organizational change initiative, depending upon how well that tier of the organization buys into the change imperative. (Ackerman-Anderson, 2001) To clarify the worker’s responses the agency’s Transition State will be illustrated and discussed through Bridges’ personal transitions framework. I will discuss the stages of transition in the context of how workers approached and dealt with the majority of what accreditation entails: the agency self-study. In the self-study workers involved in accreditation must recognize ‘ending’ entrenched ways of working and established ways of thinking. Workers then move into the ‘neutral zone’ of developing policies and figuring out procedures for the required changes. This is a time of confusion and discomfort because often policies and procedures need to be revised several times before they suit the agency. This is a phase in which a worker has not yet let go of the old way of working yet is unable to practice the new way of working—a place of “…nowhere between two somewheres” (Bridges, 1991, p. 35).

Once policies and procedures are deemed to be appropriate, workers then can embrace their ‘beginnings’ of using them as the operational standard. Using participant data and my understanding of the accreditation self-study process, I will endeavour to view the participant’s journey through their personal transitions employing the categories in Figure 1. It is difficult to produce an accurate representation of a complete transition for all of the participants involved. The interview data was not rich enough to provide a thorough depiction of the wide range of Endings, the confusion and discomfort of the Neutral Zone, and the embracing of Beginnings that make up human transition within
organizational change (refer to Figure 1). However, the data does provide some indication that each stage was represented for some participants.

**Personal Transitions**

*Endings.*

As the Present State of the organization moved into the Transition State, workers were faced with uncertainty. Bridges explains that "...transition begins with letting go of something..." (1991, p 5). Letting go, for the participants in this research involved an acceptance of the change imperative – accreditation – whether it was liked or not. As participant data shows, some were more accepting than others. Participants #1 and #2 were positive about the proposed change (see pages 68 & 69). Others were more negative suggesting that accreditation was a "...annoyance..." and represented a place one participant did not want to go (see page 69). There were also workers who simply did not accept the change and could not 'let go'. Some of these workers chose to leave the agency as it embarked upon accreditation as reported by participants #3 and #7 (see page 60). The process of accreditation was going to move forward in the agency regardless of any resistance. What else did workers let go of in order to begin their transitions?

As we have learned from a review of the Present State of the agency, workers had much to let go of in the pursuit of an organizational Desired State. Firstly, workers needed to let go of a simple framework through which they provided service delivery. More standards were introduced that made their work more focused and removed the ability to assume much within the context of efficient service delivery. Participants #1, #2, and #6 summarize this in their comments about how the adoption of a more structured service delivery framework affected their work (see page 47).
Workers also had to let go of their mindset of accountability. As outlined in the Present State, workers in this agency were largely unaccountable. This may have been difficult for some workers to accept. To suggest that workers operated under minimal accountability structures is to suggest that perhaps they were not working on principles of ‘best practice’. Some workers did accept this and speak to it through their comments about assumptions involved in their work. Participants #2, #3, and #8 all suggest that they continue to work on improving accountability through less reliance on assumptions (see pages 45 & 46).

Workers in this agency had to relinquish their more flexible, spontaneous work with clients as well as the time required for that work. Participants #3 and #7 both comment on how work on accreditation increased and cut into their time with their clients (see page 65). Furthermore, Participants #4, #5, and #6 comment on how the adopted structure of service delivery can inhibit flexibility and spontaneity with clients (see page 66).

Organization culture also changed with accreditation. Workers report that in its Present State, the agency had a culture that was somewhat disconnected both on a intra-agency programmatic level and a co-worker interpersonal level. Some participants admitted that there was separation and unawareness between programs and other workers. Participants #5, #6, and #8 all comment that they became more aware of other programs and people in the organization as a result of accreditation (see pages 58 & 59). This, in turn, suggests that workers had to let go of their existing organizational culture and look at the possibility of its transformation into a new one.
Neutral zone (the wilderness).

Bridges recognizes the "...road through the Neutral Zone is indeed rough going..." and describes it as a period when a "...necessary reorientation and redefinition is taking place..." (1991, p. 37) For the workers of this agency, the Neutral Zone was just as Bridges described. After letting go of their old way of doing and thinking about service to children and families, workers were met with an awkward period. Participant #4 characterizes this time as a "...grind..." and describes the struggle with trying to "...construct on paper...what was reflected in the work..." (see page 70). The Neutral Zone was spent mostly in the endeavour to complete the self-study required by the accreditation process.

In order to let go of their old framework of service delivery, those involved in accreditation set out to give their work a new look, or at least, a look with more depth. This newer, deeper look was a more structured framework that gave way to more complexities as it evolved. Participant #7 describes the process as "...trying to get your head wrapped around what accreditation is and what the standards are, and what that really means – the perplexities behind it." (see page 70). This process applied to all policies and procedures developed by agency workers to comply with the accrediting body’s standards.

Participant #8 continues to describe the process of transition within the Neutral Zone characterizing it as "...overwhelming..." (see page 70). For this participant, the Neutral Zone was a place where exploration into how the agency can better connect with the community occurred. This translated into "...trying to come up with ideas that were actually workable." (see page 70). Her comment sheds light on the Neutral Zone process
where several attempts would have to be made to comply with a standard before one finally was chosen as most appropriate.

The reworking of forms as required by the accreditation process was a further complication. Participants commented on how some forms seemed to change constantly. Participant #5 states “Throughout the process things kept changing...then you realized that for three months I haven’t used anything because I stopped using the old one and the new one isn’t there.” (see pages 52). Participant #5 describes her experience with constantly changing forms with remarkable resemblance to Bridges explanation of the Neutral Zone as a “…process of crossing the gap between the old way and the new.” (1991, p. 36)

And so the work of accreditation continued in the Neutral Zone. Workers identified and bridged gaps between accreditation standards and agency policy. This continued until policies and procedures could be put into place and practiced. This essentially meant that the new Beginnings came when policies and procedures were put into action.

*Beginnings.*

Bridges describes his Beginnings stage as not merely a time of new situations but as a time of “…new understandings, new values, new attitudes, and – most of all – new identities” (1991, p. 50). Through the Neutral Zone, workers were left with the internal task of coming to terms with changing what they did, why they did it, and how they accomplished their work. This was a time of redefinition and reorientation as Bridges notes (1991). In the Beginnings stage of transition, workers begin to buy into the changes they and their agency have made. This final component of transition comes
through the application of the work accomplished thus far. Participant #7 reports that once she started applying the policies, she moved "...beyond just seeing what it was needing, and just sort of actually doing." Participant #1 also reports when she started to apply policies in a practical fashion, she moved into the Beginning phase of transition. She states "...the more we got involved...it became more practical...and I think that is when I started to see that there was some validity to what we were doing."

As the agency workers move into their Beginnings phase of transition, they now have a new framework of service delivery that focuses their work more on the clients they serve, they operate with more standards to guide their work, they have more accountability structures in place. Workers accepted the changes and began, for the most part, to see things work with synergy. Participant #6 explains: "By the end everyone was just energized I think, just so relieved and so, like a feeling of how proud, like, wow, look what we did, we did all of this work, and how it just came together." As described by the participants, the Beginnings likely did not occur until some understanding of practical application was realized. As workers began to see benefits through practical application of the accreditation work, they also were experiencing what Bridges described as the "...timing of mind and heart" (1991, p.50). According to Bridges, the point at which true beginnings occur is the point at which the worker makes the "...emotional commitment to do things the new way and see themselves as new people" (1991, p. 50).

There is a component of this transition that involves the concept and acceptance of continuous change. For workers in an accredited agency, the idea of continually assessing and re-assessing ones work is necessary. The worker in the accredited agency must come to terms with continual change. Participant #8 outlines this understanding
well, reporting that the agency’s workers “...are at a place where it is not over, it’s never
over, it’s continuing to work with that attitude, that mindset that we’re always looking to
ensure that our practices are the best that they can be.”

This concludes the examination of the organization’s Transition State using
Bridges’ Personal Transitions framework. Participant data has illustrated this
organization’s journey and fit within the expectations of the literature focused on this
arena of change. To complete the depiction of the agency’s change, I will now examine
the agency’s Desired State.

*Desired State*

At the time I collected the data for this research, the participant agency had been
accredited for over one year. Therefore, the data collected offered a rich picture of the
Desired State. Simply put, the Desired State of the organization was to become
accredited so that the agency could be competitive in the RFP process. However, to
suggest that the Desired State of this agency was to be accredited, and to leave it at that,
simplifies a complicated journey beyond reason. The Desired State of the agency has a
look more in depth than simply being accredited. It is in many ways the direct opposite
of what can be found in the agency’s Present State.

The agency has more standards now, a more specific and focused framework for
workers to provide their service to children and families. The service that is delivered is
more focused on the client as a result of accreditation. Professional credibility and
accountability to all agency stakeholders has been heightened in the agency’s Desired
State. A further condition of the agency’s Desired State is that workers have a more
inflexible framework to work under that they claim can stifle spontaneity in the work
with children and families. Additionally, workers in the agency spend less time with clients as the Desired State involves continuing committee work and maintenance of accredited status.

The Desired State of the agency is now one that is not made up of several distinct entities but is an organization that is one, with several functions. In the Desired State, agency workers know each other more on a personal level, workers know and understand the functions of other agency programs they do not work in. The workers have more training opportunities, feel as if their voice is heard more, and that they are able to affect change within the organization. The Desired State of the organization also includes the physical site of the agency being better maintained and more accommodating of clients in general. Finally, workers have a heavier workload in the Desired State, a side effect of a paper oriented process demanded by accreditation.

This snapshot of the agency’s Desired State is incomplete without referring to the CQI process as well as the maintenance of accreditation. There is an acceptance amongst participants that accreditation will not be going away any time soon. Participant #8 states that “…there is still a lot of work to be done, that it is ongoing, it’s not like, ‘well we’re done now we don’t have to do it anymore.’” Participant #7 claims that accreditation is a “…never ending process.” Continuous Quality Improvement and its process of constant examination and re-examination of ‘best practices’ in the service of children and families is ultimately the Desired State of any agency going through the accreditation process. This continuous planned change loop is characterized by the modified illustration of the Desired State in the blended model used to map the organization’s journey through accreditation. (Refer to Fig. 2) In essence, the Desired State of the accredited agency is
the never-ending search for improvement inherent in this facsimile of a planned change loop.

Figure 2

This concludes the initial section of the discussion of participant data. Through the integrated model of organizational change and personal transitions, we gain a unique insight on the accreditation journey on agency and individual levels. In the next section of my discussion of the results, I will focus on participant data as it relates to the type of change required by the accreditation process and emotional responses to change for individual workers.
Chapter Six

Further Discussion of Results

Typologies of Change

Two frameworks of the typology of organizational change were reviewed in Chapter #2. The first was developed by Nadler and Tushman (1995) and described change at two levels: incremental and discontinuous. The second framework, developed by Linda Ackerman Anderson (1986), organized change into three levels: developmental, transitional, and transformational. For the purposes of this research, the discussion surrounding the typology of change that accreditation involves will be confined to Ackerman Anderson’s definition. As stated in Chapter 2 accreditation is not simply a study of several experiences of a single event but of several experiences of a series of complex events that make up the accreditation process. Using Nadler and Tushman’s broad definition of types of organizational change, risks oversimplifying the magnitude of what the accreditation asks of its change agents. I found that Ackerman Anderson’s framework not only offers three layers to Nadler and Tushman’s two, but also nicely encompasses Nadler and Tushman’s framework to capture the levels of complexity involved in the accreditation process. The participant data supports the presence of Ackerman Anderson’s three levels of change.

Developmental change within accreditation

Ackerman Anderson describes developmental change as the “...improvement of an existing skill, method, performance standard, or condition...” adding that “the focus of such change is to strengthen or correct what already exists in the organization, thus ensuring improved performance, continuity, and greater satisfaction” (2001, p. 34).
Examples of this level of change include training, some applications of process improvement or quality, and conducting survey feedback tasks.

Accreditation offers ample opportunity for developmental change within an agency. Training was an aspect of accreditation that participants viewed as positive in their experience of this organizational change. Participant’s #3 and #5 both speak to the positives of this training though they do so in the context of training for specialized professions (see page 63). Ackerman Anderson (2001) also refers to training as educating workers on how to implement their identified change. In this agency, workers had to be introduced to new paperwork, new forms and new ways of collecting, recording, and reporting client information. This was an ongoing process of developmental change for Participant #5:

...so you would start using something and then it would change and you do something else, and then they would say this is coming so you would stop using this past form but it would never—the new thing wouldn’t be ready yet...

The developmental changes in paperwork were designed to improve or maintain existing methods of working, according to Participant #7 who states that the implementation of developmental policy and procedural changes is meant to keep “...services at a certain level and it needs to be maintained there, or rise above that.” As outlined in the introductory chapter, the self-study process involves the identification and bridging of gaps in existing agency policies and procedures, and the requirements of accreditation standards. The self-study is the major element to contend with in the accreditation process and involves many concurrent developmental changes to the existing operations in an agency.
Another aspect of accreditation that involves developmental change is the seeking out of agency stakeholder feedback. As a component of the CQI process, part of the service delivery of both workers and programs is to seek feedback on how the service offered is impacting those who use it. For example, after a client completes work with an agency worker, that worker would be required by CQI to ask for the client’s feedback. This feedback form would then go from the client directly to the CQI committee. The CQI committee would then integrate the contents of that survey into the ongoing CQI plan for the agency. The same process would apply to programs and the agency as a whole. Community stakeholders such as businesses, other community agencies, educational institutions, and even funders, could be asked to fill out a survey to inform the agency of how they are perceived in the wider community; of what they are doing well; and what they need to improve. With each completed survey received and recommendations implemented, the face of developmental change emerges.

*Transitional change within accreditation*

Transitional change is a more intrusive and complex level of change, it is a level of change that seeks to replace what currently exists in an organization or agency with something that is completely different (Ackerman Anderson, 2001). As its name suggests, this level of change mirrors that of Kurt Lewin’s (1958) second stage of organizational change as well as William Bridge’s (1980) entire psychological transitions framework. It is a time when “…the organization must dismantle and emotionally let go of the old way of operating and move through a transition while the new state is being put into place” (Ackerman Anderson, 2001, p. 36). An example of this level of change within the context of accreditation for the participant’s agency included the installation
and integration of new computer technologies in order to collect outcome measures data for agency stakeholders, and in the pursuit of agency wide programmatic standardization.

Another example of transitional change was the development of policies and procedures in the effort to comply with accreditation standards. The drafting and implementing of policies and procedures was a significant task within the self-study. Participant #3 points out that the agency has “…a lot more procedures now.” Participant #6 states that having such a comprehensive policy manual where “…they thought of everything…has been a big change.” As discussed in the developmental change section, the implementation of these policies and procedures also involved a continuing improvement loop of forms needed to give life to those policies and procedures. Participant #4 describes the process as she experienced it: “…as we developed the paperwork then we were also developing changes in the paperwork, and it just, you know, went on and on forever.”

Transformational change within accreditation

According to Ackerman Anderson, transformational change is “…the least understood and most complex type of change facing organizations today” (2001, p. 39). This level of change demands that an agency and its employees alter the way they view their work, clients, and themselves. Furthermore, this level of change is “…largely uncertain at the beginning of the change process and emerges as a product of the change effort itself” (Ibid). Ackerman Anderson (2001) offers a quick assessment of whether an organization is going through transformational change or not by answering the following two questions adding that one only need answer affirmatively to one question to be viewed as going through transformational change:
1. Does your organization need to begin its change process before its destination is fully known and defined?

2. Is the scope of this change so significant that it requires the organization's culture and people's behaviour and mindsets to shift fundamentally in order to implement the changes successfully and succeed in the new state? (p.39)

The first question can be answered with both a "yes" and a "no". On one hand, the agency does understand its destination and it does include a basic definition. For any agency embarking on the accreditation process, the destination is to be accredited. The agency is given a timeline within which to complete their process and will be assessed for compliance with the accrediting body's standards. Therefore, on a simplistic level, the answer to this question can be "yes". On the other hand, the agency going through accreditation does not entirely know what the agency will look like at the end of their journey. As the agency travels through the process, they are looking inward at themselves as people, and as an agency, evaluating and re-evaluating what they find. The result of this introspection gives the agency a direction to proceed in, while achieving standards as required by the accrediting body. Moreover, the agency has set into motion a process of continuous quality improvement that translates into a process of continual change and adaptation to the agency's stakeholders' evolving needs.

Echoed by participant #4 (see pages 53), participant #5 describes the context of the Transition State of the agency during the self-study process, reporting how "...things kept changing, because we were trying to find out what worked and what didn't work..." with respect to the development and use of forms. Therefore, if things keep changing throughout a process of discovery of what works and what does not, a concrete and defined destination is difficult to envisage for agency workers. Through my assessment
of the participant data and my understanding of the accreditation process, I consider the accreditation process to demonstrate transformational change qualities.

The second question proposed by Ackerman Anderson (2001) to determine if an agency is going through transformational change speaks to the agency culture, and workers’ mindset and behaviours. The notion that the culture of the organization had changed is evident in participant data. Participant #6 states that through the accreditation process, the culture changed from having separateness, to having unity. Participant #6 claims that “...it went from being separate things to becoming one organization.” Several participants who described in their own words, the same observation, support this view.

Participant #3 states that accreditation has “…really helped us come together as an organization…” and Participant #7 reported that “…the separation between groups and so forth became less.”

Evidence of worker mindset also seems to be present in the data. Participant #6 offers us a profound example of the change in her mindset when she considers viewing clients of her agency as customers of a business, on whom the organization is dependent for their patronage. Participant #6 explains:

I never thought of an organization like this as a business, with customers, but after doing the accreditation thing it almost is like that. Like you know, you have to be efficient, and you do need the clients, they are like your customers and you know the way that they are treated, and you want them to feel good about being here and if they needed to, to come back...I never thought of this as a business, but after the accreditation I did...like it is more focusing on the client and how they feel when they come in, and how they are treated.

Heightened awareness seems to be a by-product of the introspection that the accreditation process requires. Participant #6’s comments reflect other participant data
referring to how the accreditation standards heighten focus on the client. Participant #4 describes how accreditation has illuminated the client focus (see page 56) and participant #6 claims she “…considers the client more.” Through considering the client more, the values of customer satisfaction emerge and therein lie the behavioural shifts that support the mindset shift. For example, the agency installed a doorbell for clients who come to the agency for service in the evening hours, as reported by participant #1 (see page 64). This is indicative of a shift in how the client is viewed by the agency. Participant #1 also adds that she began to be more aware of the agency’s role in the community by reporting what the agency does to connect with the community whereas they didn’t prior to accreditation:

...we make ourselves more present in the community, I think. When we were done being accredited we had a big community cake, we had a big party, and...every two months we would have an article we put in the paper. Just the kind of thing of being really aware that we need to have a voice in the community. So that has changed.

Another example of transformational change with respect to a shift of mindset is how some participants report a newfound appreciation for the importance of accountability.

I think it’s a really good thing that we have more accountability and we know — I think there is a sense that our accountability is more to ourselves, and that’s to me a good thing. I think accountability is a very good thing.

Participant #8
Emotional Responses to Change

Embedded within the data of this study, I found evidence of both positive and negative emotional response patterns in relation to the organizational change. However, as the analysis of the data continued, I determined that participants’ narratives did not contain a sufficient level of significance to report it. This study was not designed specifically to elicit rich narratives about emotional responses to the accreditation process. The emotional content involved with this study was rather, a component of the entire phenomenological inquiry. Consequently, the following discussion is only meant to stimulate thinking about emotional responses in the context of accreditation as organizational change with this particular agency.

I will discuss these changes by utilizing the examples of two participants. One will be a participant with a clearly positive emotional response to the accreditation effort and the other will be the representative for the negative emotional pattern serving the agency. Before doing so, it would be beneficial to quickly review of the phases of emotional responses to perceived positive and negative change to give the subsequent participant data some context.

According to Proehl (2001) there are phases to each of the cycles of emotional reactions to change. On the perceived positive change cycle, the phases move from Uninformed Optimism, to Informed Pessimism, and then on to Checking Out. From the third phase, the worker experiencing the change would then move on to the Hopeful Realism phase and then finally complete the cycle in the Informed Optimism phase.

On the negative side of a person’s emotional response to change, Proehl (2001) outlines this cycle in the following four stages: Shock and Denial, Resistance,
Exploration, and Commitment. This cycle bears striking similarity to the stages of grief and loss. Moreover, as Proehl suggests, though the stages are linear in fashion, it is not necessarily prescriptive of a one way journey where the person experiencing the change can not move back into a stage he or she has already come out of.

*Evidence of positive emotional responses: participant #6.*

Participant #6 demonstrates how a worker can journey through the accreditation process with a positive view of the coming change. Participant #6 initially states that she felt a "...bit of excitement too because just starting something new and you know that feeling when you are starting something new...” This statement corresponds with the first stage of Uninformed Optimism (Proehl, 2001). This is a stage that is marked by excitement that is generated by the newness of the venture.

Participant #6 then comments on how she began to experience difficulty as the scope of the change became more fully understood by her. She claims that when she was getting into the work she got into a slump "...because it was like, well we have done so much but there is still more to do...” Participant #6 refers further to a "...resistance that took a while to overcome...” She is referring to how she began to deal with others who became resistant in the process. She claims that it was a real challenge for her to "...keep people positive and to keep them from just totally shutting down and being resistant.” So we now can see a shift from the initial excitement for this participant, to a more realistic understanding that there will be challenges and “...difficulties that accompany change” (Proehl, 2001, p. 58).

Participant #6 then reveals a time during this process when she began to ponder removing herself from the change process. She states at one point “...yeah that was a
hard time. I know even myself, there were times when I was looking in the want ads thinking, ‘I don’t know if I want to continue this, like I don’t know if I want to keep doing this job’.” This is a clear example of the checking out stage and this particular statement demonstrates the participants contemplation of checking out both psychologically and physically – characteristics of this stage (Proehl, 2001).

How Participant #6’s narrative shifts away from checking out is notable. The next stage is a hopeful realism. Participant #6 claims that after getting over the checking out stage, she “…got kind of rejuvenated…” and the momentum for change increased, she further states she realized that once she got “…over that kind of hump then you’re on the home stretch.” Here, the participant “…begins to see the change process as achievable” (Proehl, 2001, p. 59).

Subsequently, Participant #6 explains that “…by the time we got near the end it just kind of all came together”. Proehl (2001) states that due to past experiences of both positive and negative circumstances within the change process, while in the Informed Optimism stage, workers are confident that they will see the change to a successful conclusion. This is demonstrated by Participant #6’s comment that “…once all of the paperwork was done we weren’t really apprehensive about the site visit, we were actually looking forward to it because you know we thought we had done a pretty good job and we were looking forward to having the reviewers come…” This demonstrates confidence based on experience.

Finally, Participant #6 offers us a view at the last stage in the pattern of emotional responses to perceived positive change: Completion. This stage is characterized as a time where there is generally a shared feeling of accomplishment although often relief that the
process has come to closure" (Proehl, 2001, p. 60). Upon hearing that the accreditation process indeed ended successfully with the agency obtaining accredited status, Participant #6 states that “…we had a celebration and everyone got that real proud feeling again.” She also adds that people were still committed to the changes and “…making sure they maintain (accreditation).” This completes the discussion of one participant’s emotional responses to perceived positive change.

Evidence of negative emotional responses: participant #8.

Emotional responses to perceived negative change are important for both line workers and management to understand within the context of organizational transformation. As Proehl (2001) mentions, the four stages that comprise the pattern of emotional responses to perceived negative change bear a striking similarity to the pattern of grief and loss. After analyzing participant #8’s data, the emotional responses to perceived negative change emerges. The first stage in this pattern is Shock and Denial. Individuals can behave in a variety of manners within this stage. These behaviours can include acting as if nothing has occurred or changed, a refusal to speak about the change, and becoming confused or overwhelmed. Participant #8 reveals her attitude to the proposed change by stating, “I just thought, oh this isn’t where I want to go”, and “oh my god this is so much work, it was overwhelming”. This participant suggested that she thought accreditation was simply a bureaucratic process that would complicate the agency with nonsensical policies and procedures.

Participant #8 then moved onto the stage of Resistance after the change had registered as being a real, tangible process that was going to affect her. The stage of Resistance is marked by organization members letting performance drop, spending
excessive amounts of time talking, seeing and expressing only the negative, and even
displaying anger and being absent more frequently than usual (Proehl, 2001). Participant
#8’s data does not support these Resistance stage characteristics but the data does show in
the participant’s own words that she vacillated between curiosity and opposition.
Participant #8 states, “I would say my experience fluctuated between interested and
resistance.” This suggests that there was a period of time when this participant moved
back and forth between this pattern’s stages of Resistance and Exploration. As Proehl
mentions, this pattern is not necessarily a linear progression as some individuals will
experience movement back to resistance with new challenges and others will not be able
to successfully move on from the Resistance stage.

The stage of Exploration is identified by organization members adopting a more
positive, “can do” attitude, more energy emerges and members focus their efforts to
accomplishing tasks rather than spending their energy participating in aimless discussions
(Ibid). Participant #8 demonstrates her exploration when she recalls how she began to
“focus on (her) future and toward the external environment” (Ibid, p. 55). Participant #8
states, “So I started seeing that we could do a whole lot better than we had been doing,
and well yeah, I wonder what the community really thinks about us, and how many of the
people didn’t know who we were. And so I was quite keen to see how that worked.”

Finally, Participant #8 completes her journey through the pattern of negative
emotional responses by committing to the change process. In the Commitment stage,
individuals become prepared to “commit to new values and actions, and are likely to
strongly identify with the change” (Ibid). Participant #8 explains her response to
Commitment: “now we see that we haven’t been connecting with our community as well,
and how can we do better at that and trying to come up with ideas that were actually workable...and try to come up with ideas, and explore how we really do that.”

To summarize, two participants comments were used to demonstrate the emotional response patterns of perceived positive and negative change in the context of accreditation. As the data would not support a sample wide analysis, only two examples were utilized in order to show that these response patterns did exist within the sample.
Chapter Seven
Implications of Research

The implications of this research touch many areas involved with the delivery of human services. Implications exist for the front line child and youth care worker and for the human service agency management groups. Implications also exist for agency stakeholders, including clients, and child and youth care educators. Each will be discussed and this chapter will conclude with a discussion outlining the limitations of this research project as well as areas for further research.

Implications for Front Line Child and Youth Care Workers

There are many implicit and explicit implications for child and youth care workers that can prepare or brace them for the type of change required by the accreditation process. These implications include enduring personal change within the organizational change initiative, adjusting to more paperwork that will inevitably equate to less time with clients, being prepared for heightened accountability as well as a shift in organizational culture. And finally, child and youth care worker credibility is addressed.

The first implication for front line child and youth care workers that have not experienced the process of accreditation is they are most certainly going to concurrently experience personal change. This personal change will include having emotional responses to the proposed change. Child and youth care workers who recognize their own pattern of emotional responses throughout the organizational change will more easily navigate the accreditation process. Data from this research suggests that even though there were some negative overall experiences of accreditation within the sample, all participants felt accreditation was an overall positive for their organization.
Participant data specific to responses regarding perceived positives on the organizational level often mirrored perceived positives on a personal level. This suggests that there is a clear link between worker satisfaction in the accredited community agency and the improvement of the organization through accreditation.

Child and youth care workers must expect that time with their clients will reduce, as the needs of accreditation work become paramount in their job. This is a reality of the accreditation process and workers must find a way to 'elbow out' some space in their work day in order to complete accreditation work while maintaining appropriate service levels. For workers who have not been held to strict service delivery frameworks, the accreditation process will impose a significant restructuring. Accreditation is a paper heavy process, replete with policies and procedures, forms and timelines. Once the front line child and youth care worker accepts the need for the accreditation service delivery framework and commits to the process, the paperwork may become easier with practice and fine-tuning.

Another major implication for child and youth care workers is that they can expect to be held more accountable for the work they do. A by-product of accreditation as reported by participants in this study is heightened accountability. Workers will be required to support a needs assessment for their clients and goals with documentation directly related to the clients' needs assessment. In other words, it will become compulsory through accreditation for workers to explain their actions with clients more and rationalize why they are doing certain things with their clients. The worker must understand, however, that this manifestation of accountability is not the same as scrutiny. This level of accountability is meant to enhance and focus the service to the client, not
pass judgement upon one's work. The worker who has difficulty with the concept of accountability through accreditation will likely take longer to acclimate to the accreditation process.

A further implication is that child and youth care workers could reasonably expect their organizational culture to change. Of course, the magnitude of change would depend on what culture existed prior to accreditation. As reported through participant data in this study, workers could sensibly expect to have a greater understanding of their organization, other programs within the agency, and their co-workers. For study participants, getting to know one another on a personal level was reported to have been a contributor of a positive organizational culture as well as positive experiences of accreditation.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the child and youth care worker from an accredited agency will garner more credibility in the wider community. Credibility has long been an issue at the heart of the child and youth care professionalization debate for years. On one hand, some do not see professionalization of the field of child and youth care as an imperative to obtain credibility but on the other hand, the child and youth care field tends to complain about the lack of recognition that our profession has within allied human services circles (Stuart, 2003).

I can understand the value of professional credibility from a personal perspective. I have been a front line child and youth care worker and I have unfortunately had many experiences where my experience and knowledge were not taken as seriously as my social work counterparts. I recall one particular situation where a parent suggested that my degree in child and youth care was akin to a popular psychology weekend seminar. This attitude speaks to the regrettable lack of wider understanding about what skills and
knowledge a child and youth care degree offers. As reported in participant data, the accredited agency provides a welcome remedy to this circumstance. Agency stakeholders see the work of accredited agencies as more professional and skilled. Child and youth care workers are more exposed to community stakeholders and in turn, more understood and visible in what they do and how. For those who have an investment in the professionalization of child and youth care, here is an argument that asserts accreditation would do well to promote child and youth care workers' credibility in allied field perspectives.

*Implications for Human Service Agency Management*

Implications for human service agency management focus mostly on the personal and organizational change data in this research. The agency that chooses to become accredited will benefit from some preparation. This preparation should include understanding the typologies of change involved in the accreditation process. When the types of change involved in the accreditation effort are understood along with the characteristics of each type, the agency management adopt a more supportive role to the front line worker tier as the agency goes through the organizational change. This is important because with most agencies, it is the front line worker who will be performing most of the accreditation tasks.

Along with understanding typology of change, agency management should also familiarize themselves with Bridges (1993) work on Transitions as well as any literature pertaining to resistance to change and emotional responses to change. As with typology of change, when the agency management understands how workers react and respond to change initiatives, they are better equipped to support them. In turn, challenges within
the accreditation process will be easier to overcome. One strategy to assist in this task may be to hold intra-agency training in the stages of the Transitions model. If front line workers understand these stages (the importance of letting go of the old, struggling with the unknown, and embracing the new) it will provide them perspective in what they personally experience in the change initiative within their own jobs. Once workers identify and come to terms with what they personally lose in the organizational change effort they clear hurdles of resistance to buy into the organization’s direction.

Management should also expect that some front line workers will resist accreditation, specifically for its amount of paper work and the anticipated reduction of client time at the demands of accreditation tasks. This is an unmistakable reality of accreditation and agency management will need to strategize about how to avoid this reality getting in the way of progress. One manner in combating possible resistance is to have the agency personnel soundly familiar with new standards, policies and procedures. This may be accomplished by setting time aside in morning meetings to review two or three standards at a time – not unlike how actors will read through a script to get a feel for the flow and context for their lines. In addition, providing a safe space (time or physical or both) for workers to speak to the challenges and negatives of accreditation could prove a sound way to hear concerns, and ensure workers are ‘getting it off their chests’. The worker who is sincerely heard will be more productive.

Having a sound plan to implement accreditation is necessary. The administration of human service agencies is a business and any business needs a sound plan to implement change. The world of business literature on organizational change can teach human services personnel much about how to implement and track a change initiative.
such as accreditation. The voice of the front line worker within the continuous quality improvement process is also an important implication to acknowledge. Front line workers are full of wisdom and experience with accreditation, there is a process installed in the agency where this voice is heard. Agency management must be prepared to heed front line workers’ input and act upon it where appropriate. Where it is not appropriate, it must be acknowledged and transparently explained to those who provided the input.

**Implications for Child and Youth Care Educators**

I believe there is a role for child and youth care educators that can fill a very important need in this area of study. It seems that a major obstacle in the acceptance of accreditation is the acceptance of ridding oneself of the old way of service delivery and the acceptance of the new service delivery principles. This could be alleviated through sound education within the child and youth care (and other human services) degree programs. For example, child and youth care educators could offer instruction in needs assessment to prepare the newly educated, soon to be front line worker (if they are not already working in the field). This instruction could include relating service goals to the needs assessment, how to include the client in the development of the service plan, how to prepare the client for his or her discharge from service, and supporting the client in his or her after care plan.

A sound knowledge of accreditation standards would be essential to provide the educator the framework within which to develop lessons on ‘best practice’ in these areas. This would not be unlike how current child and youth care programs, and their social work cousins, produce graduates that have received instruction in child welfare
specialization in order to make their transition into the ranks of MCFD child protection workers as seamless as possible.

Other implications for educators could be the exploration of personal transitions as suggested in the implications to agency management. Child and youth care programs are well versed with introspective activities in order to understand the self in relation to the interaction with clients. Perhaps more focused instruction in the concept of transitions would go a long way to easing the change process for new workers, as organizational change in the human services has been ironically one of the only constants in the human services field.

Potential managers would also benefit from instruction in change management strategies as agency change and adaptation seems to be an invariable in today's shifting human services climate. In particular, training in dealing with resistance to change and team building within the organization would be appropriate particularly for the agency going through the accreditation process. More implications will reveal themselves as research in this area continues but this gives us a place to begin.

Implications for Agency Clients

Implications for clients are plentiful. Clients of the agency going through accreditation can expect to see their workers less, at least initially. These workers may not seem to be happy and could very well appear to be unorganized. As a result of this, clients can also expect to be providing more input into the service plan and taking more responsibility for it themselves. Workers in the accredited agency will be working from a framework that situates the client in the role of expert of his or her situation. Hence, the client will be at the centre of the service delivery, which will also mean more client input.
Clients will also be provided with more information on the agency and its service delivery framework. For example, clients will receive detailed information of the complaints process of the agency should they wish to lodge a complaint. Clients will be provided with information that will make the agency and its operations more transparent as suggested by participant data in this research. Clients could also expect to find the agency be more responsive to client needs. A water dispenser for instance, may appear in the waiting room and a doorbell might be installed, in the agency’s effort to be more accommodating of client needs. Agency clients will also be asked to provide feedback with each level of service they have received. Client feedback will become most important to the direction of existing agency programming as well as the development of new programs.

Limitations of Research

There are three principal limitations that exist in this research. The results of this study cannot be generalized, the perspectives of clients were not included in the study, and researcher bias may have influenced the interpretation of participant data. As this research was qualitatively based, the generalization of findings was not an objective that was important in the research design. Qualitative research seeks to understand the lived experiences of a phenomenon and as such, it does not purport the ability to generalize findings. My research was an exploration in a given context.

Primarily, my findings are limited to the experiences of sample participants in one specific agency, located in a unique geographical area. Not all agencies going through the accreditation process will have an identical experience as the participants in this research have reported, particularly when considering that there are many facets that
influence successful and unsuccessful organizational change initiatives. However, I would submit that there are many agencies that share similar geographical characteristics as the participant agency, along with its size and like-minded workers. I would further suggest that agencies considering accreditation can learn from the findings of this study within the context of their own agencies. Findings related to the experience of accreditation of front line workers in a community agency as a result of this research may resonate with similar agencies but they are not prescriptive.

The second limitation of this research was that the views of clients were not incorporated into this study. Clients, as the users of human services programs, are situated such that they can provide a unique perspective of how the process of accreditation affects the front line worker, which may in turn affect the clients themselves. The aim of this research was to understand the accreditation phenomenon and explore its impact on the front line worker. The focus of my research and the limits that shaped it did not include seeking feedback from clients. Therefore, this limitation exists and may be capably addressed by providing the focus of further research in the area of accreditation and organizational change.

Lastly, the issue of researcher bias may have affected findings. I have been involved in the accreditation movement in British Columbia for two years now in an observer and promoter sense. I have never worked for an accredited agency but I am fond of what I think would be a sensible and reliable framework under which to work with children and families. I was interested and fond enough of accreditation to focus my graduate school research in this area. Therefore, I feel compelled to declare that I began this research with an optimistic view of what accreditation had to offer the community.
agency. Moreover, as my methodology made room for me to create meaning from participant data, my propensity to be favourable to the accreditation process may have crept into my interpretation of findings. To be clear, this was not by design and I did my best to maintain neutrality when interpreting data. Nevertheless, there exists a possibility that I may have unconsciously flavoured the findings with my positive outlook of accreditation.

Areas for Further Research

As suggested in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the subject of child and family services accreditation and its impact on agency workers is not an exhausted field of study by any means. Because accreditation of human service organizations is a relatively new phenomenon, particularly in the province of British Columbia, but also in Canada, there is much to explore. The most obvious area for research is to include the perspectives of agency service users: the client. The inclusion of client perspectives toward an understanding of how such wide scale organizational change impacts service delivery could inform how the implementation of accreditation is approached. Worker job satisfaction, particularly in the turbulent and ever changing landscape of BC social services, is another area for further research. A comparative study between a non-accredited agency and a similar, accredited agency with a focus on worker satisfaction will lay important groundwork in understanding and enhancing workplace culture and perhaps improving staff retention.

Studies can be designed to quantitatively measure the efficacy of accredited agency in serving the population it is meant to serve. This research was a retrospective look at accreditation and the personal and organizational change involved in the process.
It would be interesting to assess the agency participants’ attitudes longitudinally, at points prior to, during, and after the accreditation process has been completed. Would the overall experience be as positive as reported in this study? This section is not exhaustive list by any means given that hundreds of methodologies and areas of focus can be employed to investigate the phenomenon of accreditation.

The experiences of those who participated in this study reveal a consistent message of positive change, with some cautious reservations, within the context of their accreditation process. Accountability to various stakeholders was also a dominant theme in the data. In fact, accountability (at various levels) was seen as a personal positive as well as an organizational. Overall, all participants claimed that in retrospect, accreditation was a positive for the organization and they feel a sense of accomplishment having successfully obtained accredited status. The participants of this study have provided a sound illustration of what accreditation meant for them in their agency. Moreover, participants have also given other agencies much to consider when contemplating the accreditation process.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Due diligence and risk management were two factors in accreditation becoming an important initiative at the MCFD management table. (D. Young, personal communication, July 14, 2004).

Due diligence can be described simply as accountability to the consumer. When engaged in the contract reform process, MCFD management struggled with what the MCFD’s due diligence was with respect to contracting out to the community agencies. MCFD management asked themselves questions such as: How does the funder of community agency contracts ensure the service contracted is the service delivered? How does the government monitor accountable service delivery? How are these contracted programs being resourced and is it adequate for the needs of the consumer? These questions reflected a move toward outcome measurements.

Outcome measurements can be understood in a community agency context as providing documented evidence to agency stakeholders that a program is delivering a contracted service and it is having a positive impact on its target population through achieving the aims and objectives of that program. Outcome measurements seek to link what a worker (or a program) does with a client(s) with the achievement of identified goals. For instance, one goal of many human service workers working with homeless youth is to assist in the development of independent living skills. If I had a youth on an independent living agreement, as a worker I would work with that person to budget for groceries, to open up a bank account, to obtain necessary identification, and to look for a suitable job. Outcome measurement would involve me documenting the means with which I approached helping the youth with those tasks. Further to that, I would
document the end result of my assistance, or the outcome, and then, review whether my assistance was achieving set goals or not. If not, new approaches would be necessary.

A different perspective for this example would be how the MCFD accounts for the $30,000.00 that it gave to a community agency to run the youth independence program to which clients are referred. How many young people accessed that program? Did these people feel as if the program was useful? Did this program reach the people it was intended to reach? Did the program have an impact on the youths' independent living skills? When the agency can provide documentation supporting that they are achieving (or adjusting efforts to achieve) program objectives, this is outcome measurement. For the MCFD management, requiring outcome measures also required a move toward focusing on standards. When the MCFD as a funder can look at a contracting agency and see that outcome measurement is a part of how the agency operates, they are more confident that the dollars they spend on the agency are going toward worthy programs.

Accreditation standards greatly assist an organization to build a framework of accountability through outcomes measures. MCFD management saw that an accredited agency was able to operate on a system of ‘best practices’ which required outcome measurements. In turn, the outcome measurements indicated that the agency was accountable to agency stakeholders including the funder. Consequently, the MCFD’s responsibility for due diligence to the people of British Columbia was achieved with the funding of accredited agencies and this was a significant factor behind the accreditation push in the community sector.
The other major factor in this push was the issue of risk management. During his time as ADM, Young was responsible for monitoring over 100 issues of litigation against the MCFD. Accreditation provided a suitable response to the issue of risk management. As a funder of community agencies, the MCFD assumes responsibility (liability) for the programs delivered on their behalf. The agency that has no accountability structure set up is less likely to aptly handle contentious grievances against them from stakeholders regarding their service delivery. When this occurs, it is the MCFD who must assume liability and as suggested by Young, the rising costs of legal fees and litigation settlements against the MCFD in turn indicated a strong need for ensuring contractor accountability (Ibid).

Young further states, he felt much more confident in dealing with a complaint that had originated from a client of an accredited agency than a complaint that originated from a client of a non-accredited agency. When a complaint arrived on his desk involving a non-accredited agency, Young would have to find out from the agency just what measures they took to address or resolve the complaint. When a complaint involving an accredited agency arrived on Young’s desk, he could be sure that certain steps had already been taken as the accredited agency has a prescribed manner for dealing with complaints as required through their accreditation standards.

Though the matters of due diligence and risk management were the two main factors that fed the push for accreditation, there were some noteworthy tertiary factors involved. For instance, one of the voices at the MCFD management table was former ADM, Vaughn Dowie. Dowie had previous exposure of the benefits of accreditation and was a voice in favour of the issue (Ibid). Moreover, when the alcohol and drug
counsellors services were transferred from the health authority to the newly created MCFD in 1996, they brought with them a knowledge of accreditation. The addiction services had a history with an accrediting body prior to their move and thereby exposed their immediate surroundings to these standards.

Accreditation has some attractive answers for the questions of due diligence and risk management. It was decided that it an agency had been accredited and consequently met either Council on Accreditation (COA), Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation (CCHSA) standards, then they either “…met or exceeded government standards…” for contracting (Ibid). These standards around organizational development and service delivery were sound enough that this afforded the government some assurance that the services they claim they offer to BC’s children and families, are indeed being offered and at an appropriate degree of professionalism. Accreditation began to make sense for the MCFD management team as a smart business decision that addressed the major issues of due diligence and risk management while enjoying the advantage of having people involved with previous experience both at the line worker (drug and alcohol counsellors) and management (a former ADM) level.

The value of having accredited status as an agency continues to be shown through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process where government contracts are awarded. For example, a contract could request that youth services be delivered in a specific geographical area and is to include mental health counselling, safe house operations, and after hours outreach for street youth in that area. Once the bid has been issued, community agencies write proposals to the government informing them of how they seek
to deliver the requested services, what their business plan would be, and what their qualifications are to administer the contract. When all proposals are received, they are assessed and awarded points based upon pre-established criteria. The agency that can claim they are accredited receives valuable points in the competitive RFP process. The agencies that do not obtain accreditation risk losing those points, and consequently, contracts, even if they have held the same contract previously. This translates into lost funding, downsizing, and eventual extinction.