The Role of Knowledge Management Enablers in Higher Education Institutes on Institutional Accreditation: An Empirical Study of Business Graduation Association (BGA) Accreditation in China

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Abstract

In the increasingly competitive and internationalized higher education, institutional accreditation has become a supportive role in higher education institutions' (HEIs) ranking and development. Institutional accreditation is a form of knowledge sharing and transfer in organizational management, research, learning and teaching, and networking. But how can such knowledge sharing be enabled within different higher education organizations? The main objective of this research is to explore the relationship between knowledge sharing enablers and institutional accreditation outcomes. Derived from in knowledge sharing enablers, this research builds a model of knowledge management (KM) enabler composed of organizational culture, trust, information technology and employee motivation. A cross-sectional scale questionnaire developed to investigate the relationship between KM enablers with institutional accreditation. Together these KM enablers, including organizational culture, trust, information technology and incentives, were identified to be predictive factors for organizational KM and positively related to institutional accreditation outcomes. This research contributes to the field of knowledge management and HEIs' organizational development, as well as KM enablers in higher education. It also provides practical insights to the higher education administrators and stakeholders involving in supporting educational internalization and regional accreditation.

Keywords: Knowledge Management Enablers, Institutional Accreditation, Knowledge Management, Accreditation Outcomes

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1 Introduction

The increasing needs of globalization activities has led to the globalization of business education. Effective collaboration requires not only the ability of participants to communicate in a common language, but also the assurance of a common level of professional understanding (Moscinska, 2014). Accreditation may be "the most fully developed institutionalization of the idea of accountability in higher education" (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). Institutional accreditation is one step towards demonstrating the high performance of a business school. Well-established international accrediting bodies provides global recognition to business schools. It works as a signal to students, employers, and other stakeholders that the school meets international standards of quality. Chinese universities seek international business accreditation to pursue accreditation from recognized international accrediting bodies (Zhang & Gao, 2012). International accreditation can enhance universities' reputation and the standard of a business school to attract students and faculty from around the world. It serves as a quality assurance mechanism for business schools. BGA accreditation set rigorous standards and criteria that business schools must meet to obtain accreditation (Miles et al., 2016). This process ensures that accredited schools maintain high educational standards, have qualified faculty, offer relevant and up-to-date curricula, and provide a supportive learning environment. Students, employers, and other stakeholders can rely on accreditation as an indicator of quality education.

Although institutional accreditation and knowledge management are distinct concepts, there is a relationship between institutional accreditation and knowledge management (Klein, 2014). In the accreditation process, it opens doors to networking and collaboration opportunities for business schools. Accredited schools become part of a network of peer institutions, allowing for knowledge sharing, research collaborations, and faculty exchanges (Gawor et al., 2021). These collaborations contribute to the overall improvement and advancement of business education. Although effective knowledge management practices can contribute to meeting accreditation standards by providing evidence of institutional quality, supporting data-driven decision-making, and facilitating continuous improvement efforts. Knowledge management can help institutions document and highlight their intellectual capital, demonstrate the impact of their research and teaching, and provide evidence of their commitment to enhancing educational outcomes.

Institutional accreditation and knowledge management are interdependent and interact in various ways. However, our principal concern in this paper is focusing on the role of knowledge management and its implementation through the process of accreditation.

2 Literature review

2.1 Institutional accreditation

Institutional accreditation is a voluntary quality assurance process for schools and colleges (Blanco Ramírez, 2014). It involves the evaluation of an institution's effectiveness based on a set of criteria by an external commission consisting of representatives. The process recognizes the importance of student learning and development as a central focus in the evaluation criteria. Accreditation provides recognition to institutions that meet minimum quality standards and encourages them to maintain and improve their resources, programs, services, and impact on students and stakeholders. Institutions need to response to the criticism or suggestions and work towards resolving identified issues to maintain their

accreditation. Institutional accreditation offers opportunities for institutional improvement and accountability.

2.2 Business Graduates Association accreditation in China

In the United States, accreditation in business education initially developed through the expansion of the American Assembly of Business Schools (Cret, 2010). In Europe, however, its significance is relatively recent. The Business Graduates Association (BGA) is a global accrediting body that focuses on business education (BGA, n.d.). It assesses various aspects of business programs, including curriculum, faculty qualifications, and the learning environment. BGA is highly regarded internationally and evaluates business schools based on global standards and best practices in business education. In China, 65 universities have received accreditation from BGA. BGA accreditation provides these schools with advantages such as enhanced credibility, reputation, and recognition both domestically and internationally (BGA, n.d.). When selecting a business school, prospective students often take into account its accreditation status as an indicator of quality and assurance that the educational institution meets certain standards.

2.3 Knowledge management process

From an organizational point of view, knowledge management (KM) is defined as the systematic process for organizations to create, capturing, organizing, storing, and distributing knowledge to enhance its effectiveness and performance (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). It involves the creation, sharing, and application of knowledge to facilitate decision-making, problem-solving, innovation, and learning (Dalkir, 2017).

Knowledge acquisition refers to the process of getting through various means, such as conducting research, gathering information from external sources, capturing expertise from experienced employees, or conducting internal surveys and interviews (Dalkir, 2017). The goal is to collect relevant and valuable knowledge that can be used to meet the identified needs. In the context of business school accreditation, knowledge acquisition refers to the process of gathering the necessary information and data about the business school to assess its qualifications and meet the accreditation requirements. It involves collecting and documenting evidence to demonstrate that the school meets specific standards set by accrediting bodies.

Knowledge sharing is a critical aspect of the knowledge management process. It involves facilitating the transfer of knowledge among individuals or teams within the organization (Dalkir, 2017). Knowledge sharing and collaboration plays an important role in business school accreditation, as they contribute to the continuous improvement and development of the school's educational programs, faculty expertise, and overall quality. Overall, knowledge sharing and collaboration in business school accreditation facilitate the exchange of ideas, best practices, and research findings within and outside the institution.

Knowledge application involves using the captured and shared knowledge to address challenges, develop innovative solutions, improve processes, and enhance organizational learning (Dalkir, 2017). Knowledge application in business school accreditation refers to the utilization of acquired knowledge, best practices, and insights to improve the quality of education, enhance institutional effectiveness, and meet accreditation standards. By applying acquired knowledge in these various areas, business schools demonstrate their commitment to

continuous improvement, relevance, and the fulfillment of accreditation standards. The effective application of knowledge enhances the quality of education, strengthens institutional effectiveness, and contributes to the overall success of the business school.

Overall, the knowledge management process is an ongoing cycle that requires a systematic approach to capturing, organizing, storing, sharing, and applying knowledge to drive organizational success and competitiveness. It involves a combination of people, processes, technology, and organizational culture to create an environment where knowledge is valued, accessible, and effectively utilized.

2.4 Knowledge management enablers

Knowledge management enablers are the operational or service settings in an organization that is accountable for the success of a KM initiative. These enablers are considered as mechanisms or factors that facilitate the creation, sharing, and application of knowledge within the organization. (Yasir & Majid, 2017). Choo and Neto (2010) identified four distinct categories of facilitators that enable the effective implementation of knowledge processes, they are social dimension, relational dimension, technological dimension, and cognitive dimension.

In the context of BGA accreditation, technological dimension of knowledge enabler develops into information technology usage. In this paper, the term "social dimension" refers to the aspect of organizational culture, specifically referring to the shared understanding and significance that individuals within a network derive from their affiliation with the group. A shared culture within an organization enhances cooperation and creates opportunities for knowledge sharing. It is important to have a mutual understanding between accreditors and accreditees to facilitate knowledge transfer. Therefore, the social dimension encompasses the organizational culture among stakeholders (Hall & Ellis, 2022). The relational dimension of a knowledge enabler is characterized by the development of trust, which is built upon the belief in the integrity and competence of others (Hall & Ellis, 2022). Trust is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the anticipation of cooperation and integrity among individuals, nurturing a sense of mutual confidence. It is based on factors such as benevolence (concern for the well-being of others) and competence. In order to facilitate the transfer of explicit and tacit knowledge between different organizations, the utilization of electronic systems that rely on information technology is crucial (Anvari, 2011). These systems allow for the creation of networks that bridge the gap of time and space, providing effective channels for knowledge transfer. The research mentioned here focused on examining the knowledge exchanges that occur through the utilization of information technology among members involved in the accreditation process. According to Andreeva & Kianto (2011), motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing knowledge sharing, with inter-organizational trust acting as a mediating factor. Moreover, when members of organizations have both external and internal incentives, it strengthens their willingness to engage in knowledge sharing activities. Therefore, the cognitive dimension pertains to the motivations that have been shown in the study to positively influence the quality and quantity of knowledge sharing.

2.5 Hypothesis model and research questions

This study examines the connections between knowledge enablers and organizational performance by emphasizing the importance of knowledge processes as the foundation for organizational advantage. The impact of knowledge management enablers on organizational

performance is mediated through knowledge processes (Hall & Ellis, 2022). This implies that knowledge enablers influence organizational outcomes through the facilitation of knowledge processes. The knowledge-chain model proposed by Tseng (2010) is used to explain this relationship. According to the model, culture, trust, information technology, and motivations create conditions that enable the achievement of organizational outcomes through knowledge management activities such as acquisition, sharing, and application. By incorporating these elements, it can be confirmed that enablers ultimately generate business value. In summary, this paper formulated five hypotheses as presented in the model shown in Figure 1.
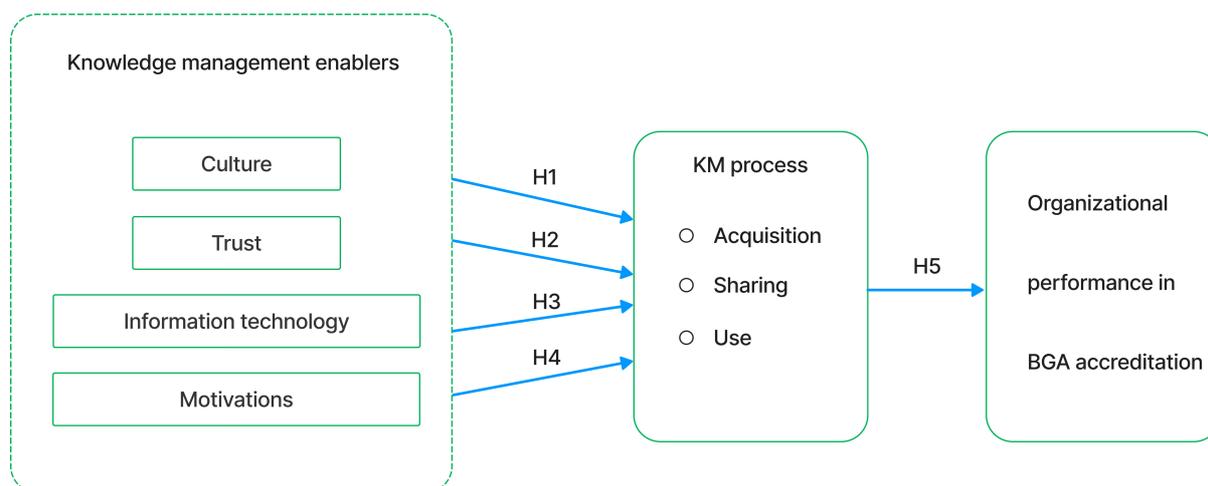

Figure 1: Research model

Based on the above literature and research model, the research therefore investigated the relationship between KM enablers, KM processes and organizational performance in the following hypothesis:

H1:　KM process is positively affected by the culture of institutional accreditation.

H2:　KM process is positively affected by the trust in institutional accreditation.

H3:　KM process is positively affected by the information technology in institutional accreditation.

H4:　KM process is positively affected by the motivations in institutional accreditation.

H5:　The organizational performance in institutional accreditation is positively affected by KM process.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants are randomly selected from 8 BGA accredited universities in China, 1 in Liaoning province, 2 in Guangdong province, 2 in Shandong province and 2 in Jiangsu province. 350 participants received an invitation by email and consented to take part in this research survey. They are BGA stakeholder including administrative leadership, deans, chairs of department, faculty, and staff. 20 invalid questionnaires were deleted for missing answers. The demographic of 330 participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	175	42.9%
	Female	233	57.1%
Age	under 30	20	4.9%
	31-40	151	37.0%
	41-50	196	48.0%
	51-60	41	10.0%
Degree	Master's degree	172	42.2%
	PhD	236	57.8%
Working position	Leadership of university	21	5.1%
	Deans of schools	61	15.0%
	Chairs of departments	89	21.8%
	Faculty of university	184	45.1%
	Staff of university	53	13.0%

3.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire item is designed to collect the data regarding each knowledge enabling factor with a series of 5-point Likert items from 1= totally disagree to 5= totally agree (Table 2).

Table 2: Questionnaire items

Factor	Items	Content
Culture	CUL1	Sharing of successful experience in accreditation is encouraged in my university.
	CUL2	My university advocates for empowerment and encourages active participation in accreditation work.
	CUL3	Collaboration and group work are encouraged in my university to support BGA accreditation stakeholders in exchanging their expertise.
	CUL4	Knowledge sharing among BGA accreditation stakeholders in my university does not pose a threat to their positions.
	CUL5	In this university, we have a culture of openness and trust that facilitates the acquisition and sharing of knowledge in BGA accreditation.
Trust	TRU1	Other members of this network help me when I have a problem concerning BGA accreditation.
	TRU2	I can rely on the other members of our team to support me in BGA accreditation.
	TRU3	I can count on the other members of our team to do what they say.
	TRU4	I have faith in the skills of the other members in my team.
Information technology	IFT1	I am open to new technology utilization in BGA accreditation work.
	IFT2	I like to use information technology in my BGA accreditation work,
	IFT3	I am willing to support technology-based change in BGA accreditation system in my university.

	IFT4	I am highly enthusiastic about information assistance-driven changes in the BGA accreditation system.
Motivation	MOT1	Knowledge sharing in BGA accreditation should be rewarded with higher salary or bonus.
	MOT2	Knowledge sharing in BGA accreditation should be rewarded career development opportunities
	MOT3	Knowledge sharing in BGA accreditation should be rewarded with more exchanges opportunities with external partners.
	MOT4	Faculty and staff should be encouraged to continue with further study.
Knowledge acquisition	KNA1	Knowledge in BGA accreditation can be acquired from shared culture.
	KNA2	Knowledge in BGA accreditation can be acquired from my peers.
	KNA3	Knowledge in BGA accreditation can be acquired from faculty and staff.
	KNA4	My university supports the exchange of knowledge among individuals and groups.
	KNA5	My university employs competent staff to promote the sharing of ideas.
Knowledge sharing	KNS1	Knowledge can be shared with BGA accreditation external stakeholders in my university.
	KNS2	Knowledge can be shared with BGA accreditation working staff.
	KNS3	Knowledge in BGA accreditation can be shared across different departments.
	KNS4	ICT are developed to share BGA accreditation knowledge.
	KNS5	Tasks and efficiency in BGA accreditation are improved by database utilization.
Knowledge application	KNU1	Knowledge can be utilized in BGA accreditation in form of databases and information technology which helps store knowledge for easy access by others.
	KNU2	Different sources of knowledge in BGA accreditation are effective transferred.
	KNU3	There is perfect system in internal knowledge exchange in BGA accreditation.
	KNU4	Experienced know-how can be clear and assessable in BGA accreditation.
	KNU5	Databases and information technology in BGA accreditation are easily accessible.
	KNU6	Knowledge in BGA accreditation is put in practice.
Organizational performance in accreditation	In the last 5 years, my university…	
	OPA1	has more contribution to economic growth and development.
	OPA2	has more contribution to achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
	OPA3	has better institutional sustainability and integrity.
	OPA4	has generating more value by building tangible connections with other academic institutions.
	OPA5	is more impactful and innovative.
	OPA6	is more devoted to the principles of equality and diversity.
	OPA7	has higher graduate employment rate and corporate relations.

4 Results and discussion

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was utilized to examine the five hypotheses using SPSS and AMOS 26.0 software for data analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted as an initial step to establish convergent and discriminant validity. Both the CFI and NFI values exceed 0.9, thus they are considered acceptable. All measurement model fit indices yield satisfactory values, indicating good fit (Hair et al., 2019). Detailed information on the fit indices is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Fit indices values

DF	P-value	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	PNFI	PGFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
-	>0.05	<3	>0.9	>0.9	>0.5	>0.5	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.1
712	0.213	1.042	0.921	0.909	0.842	0.8	0.922	0.997	0.996	0.997	0.01

A threshold of 0.5 or higher demonstrates acceptable convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). As Table 4 shows, all average variance extracted (AVE) values indicate that at least 50% of the variance in the indicators is captured by the constructs. The composite reliability (CR) values in Table 5 all exceed 0.7, which is considered acceptable and indicates good construct reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4: AVE and CR values in measurement model

Factor	CR	AVE
Culture	0.888	0.613
Trust	0.868	0.621
Information technology	0.858	0.601
Motivation	0.842	0.572
Acquisition	0.884	0.603
Distribution	0.889	0.617
Application	0.899	0.597
Organizational performance	0.896	0.553

Regarding the path analysis results in Figure 2 and Table 5, most of the paths demonstrate statistically significant relationships. However, it is important to note that the relationships between culture and KM processes do not reach statistical significance. The analysis results in Table 5 indicate a non-significant effect ($p>0.05$) of organizational culture on KM processes. Consequently, H2 are rejected.
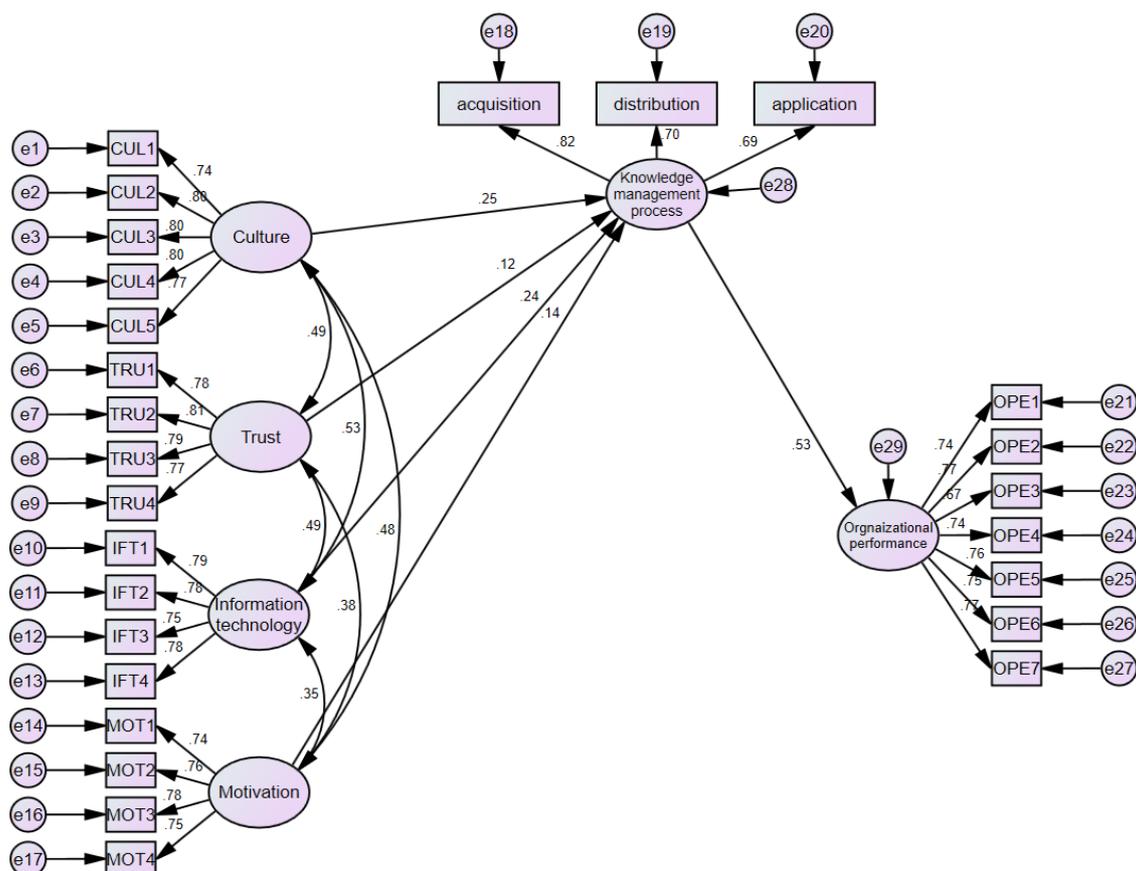
Figure 2: Structural equation model with path analysis

However, there is a significantly positive relationship between knowledge management processes and culture (p<0.05) as well as information technology and motivations (p<0.05). Hence, H1, H3 and H4 are accepted. Moreover, there is a significantly positive relationship between KM processes and organizational performance in the institutional accreditation context. Thus, H5 is supported.

Table 5: Results of testing proposed hypotheses

Relationship			S.D.	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Knowledge management process	<---	Culture	0.246	0.225	0.065	3.476	***
Knowledge management process	<---	Trust	0.123	0.104	0.056	1.868	0.062
Knowledge management process	<---	Information technology	0.244	0.203	0.057	3.575	***
Knowledge management process	<---	Motivation	0.144	0.14	0.061	2.287	0.022
Organizational performance	<---	Knowledge management process	0.533	0.594	0.068	8.718	***

5 Discussion

This research contributed to the field of knowledge management and institutional literature in the context of Chinese higher education institutes. The study establishes a model to investigate how the organizational enablers contribute to the facilitation of knowledge flow in institutional accreditation within Chinese universities. The study recognizes the importance of these enablers in enhancing organizational performance in accreditation.

5.1 Significant enablers in institutional accreditation

The results of this study highlight the significance of organizational culture, information technology, and motivations in fostering KM processes in institutional accreditation. These factors were found to have positive and significant relationships with institutional accreditation performance and KM processes. Notably, organizational culture emerged as the strongest influencer of KM processes, aligning with previous research conducted, such as the study conducted by Schein (2016), which also found organizational culture to be a crucial determinant of KM processes in accreditation settings.

The value of knowledge management created by culture was perceived very differently depending on the organizations. Culture plays a crucial role in the knowledge management process within an organization. The organizational culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors that influence how knowledge is perceived, created, shared, and utilized. The results indicate that communication patterns and information flow within an organization are influenced by its culture. A culture that promotes open communication, knowledge sharing platforms, and transparent information flow enhances the effectiveness of knowledge management initiatives. By integrating knowledge management practices into interactions with external stakeholders, institutions can foster collaboration culture, and enhance their ability to meet accreditation requirements and stakeholder expectations. These practices promote efficient knowledge sharing, evidence-based decision-making, and a culture of learning and improvement.

Also, the findings of this study contribute important empirical insights on the support of information technology. Information technology offer various benefits and capabilities to streamline and enhance accreditation activities. Knowledge management in accreditation process involves capturing and organizing relevant information, documentation, and evidence to support the institution's interactions with external stakeholders. This includes maintaining records, reports, and data that demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards, student outcomes, institutional effectiveness, and other relevant information requested by accrediting agencies or external stakeholders. Accreditation agencies often require institutions to submit comprehensive data related to student outcomes, faculty qualifications, curriculum, financial information, and more. The technology-based management system and its databases allows efficient data collection, validation, reporting, ensuring accuracy and timeliness. Information technology also enables effective collaboration and communication among stakeholders involved in the accreditation process. Online collaboration platforms, video conferencing tools, and project management software support remote collaboration and facilitate real-time communication between institutions, accreditation agencies, peer reviewers, and external stakeholders. These tools streamline coordination, enhance information sharing, and promote efficient feedback exchange.

These empirical findings also echo the valuable insights into the association between stakeholders' motivations and KM processes (Nguyen et al., 2019). Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal desire and satisfaction individuals derive from engaging in knowledge management activities. When individuals find value in sharing their knowledge, contributing to the collective knowledge pool with each other, they are more likely to participate actively in knowledge management process. Intrinsic motivation can be fostered by creating a supportive culture that recognizes and rewards knowledge sharing and promotes a sense of purpose and mastery. When faculty and staff have greater confidence in their knowledge and expertise, they are more motivated to transfer knowledge with their peers and external stakeholders, leading to improved institutional performance in institutional accreditation. Extrinsic motivation involves rewards, recognition, and incentives that encourage individuals to engage in knowledge management. Recognizing and rewarding individuals for their knowledge-sharing efforts can serve as an extrinsic motivator, encouraging them to contribute their expertise and actively participate in knowledge management activities. This can be done through incentives, performance evaluations, promotions, or other forms of recognition that acknowledge and appreciate their contributions.

In summary, the diverse perspectives on the value of knowledge management in institutional accreditation organizations highlight the need for tailored approaches and strategies. Effective communication of benefits, superior rewards and open culture are essential for successful knowledge management initiatives in this HE institutional accreditation.

5.2 Insignificant enablers in institutional accreditation

Interestingly, the results of this study reveal that trust do not have a significant impact on KM processes. This unexpected finding may be attributed to considering source of knowledge power and may be less willing to share their knowledge. When individuals feel uncomfortable sharing their knowledge and ideas with fear of judgment or reprisal, it creates an environment obstructive to knowledge sharing and collaboration. This find is also echoed with Covey and Merrill's research (2008). When trust is low, there may be a lack of recognition and appreciation for knowledge-sharing efforts. Individuals may feel that their contributions are not acknowledged or valued, leading to a decreased motivation to share their knowledge. Without the perception that their efforts will be recognized and appreciated, individuals may be less willing to invest their time and energy in knowledge sharing.

This study emphasizes the positive and significant relationship between KM processes and organizational performance in institutional accreditation. Successful implementation of organizational culture, information technology and motivations lead to continuously improvement in educational offerings, faculty expertise, and programs quality align with industry needs and global standards, which aligns with the findings of previous research conducted by Rios-Ballesteros and Fuerst (2021). These results highlight the importance of prioritizing and optimizing KM processes to enhance organizational performance in the institutional accreditation context.

6 Recommendations and limitations

This study offers practical recommendations for Chinese universities aiming to enhance their knowledge management practices in institutional accreditation. Considering the crucial function of organizational culture, information technology, and motivations in promoting

knowledge sharing, several strategies can be adopted to foster a knowledge-friendly environment within the organization.

The findings underline the significant impact of KM on institutional accreditation. Chinese universities should prioritize and devote more resources to institutional accreditation, which involve promoting knowledge sharing, utilizing effective knowledge repositories, and leveraging diverse knowledge sources. By focusing on these aspects, universities can enhance their organizational performance and excel in quality assurance practices. Overall, this study provides empirical evidence on the relationships among organizational culture, information technology, motivations, and KM processes. It offers practical implications for organizations in effectively managing knowledge resources to drive institutional performance.

This study acknowledges several limitations. This research was conducted solely within the Chinese context, the interpretation of the results may be influenced by national culture. Future studies should consider cross-cultural investigations involving emerging countries to validate and extend the findings across different cultural contexts. By addressing these limitations and incorporating a broader range of KM enablers, expanding the sample size and diversity, and conducting cross-cultural studies, future research can enhance the generalizability, depth, and robustness of our understanding of KM processes in the HE context and institutional domain.

In summary, institutional accreditation ensures educational quality and accountability at an institutional level, while knowledge management focuses on effectively managing and utilizing institutional knowledge assets. Both are important for educational institutions to operate effectively, improve educational outcomes, and demonstrate their commitment to excellence.

Acknowledgments

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