How can we help law enforcement agencies learn? A look at CALEA police accreditation

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the benefits of accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), according to those who are engaged in the practice.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors collected data through open-ended, semi-structured telephone interviews. The authors analyzed the data using an inductive methodology.

Findings – The authors found that CALEA police accreditation enhances organizational learning through the development of knowledge brokers, the creation of communities of practice, support for knowledge repositories, support for knowledge managers and greater levels of transparency.

Originality/value – This qualitative study, which focuses on the perceptions and experiences of those involved in the CALEA process, provides a valuable complement to the quantitative literature on accreditation by shedding light on the organizational learning resulting from accreditation.

Keywords Police profession, Organizational learning, Police reform, Police accreditation, Organizational changes, Administrative procedures

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Global protests against police brutality, particularly over the past five years, have increased the calls to adopt police accreditation, namely from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) (Abner, 2022; Federal Register, 2020, 2022). CALEA is the only international law enforcement accrediting body and accredits law enforcement agencies in the United States of America, Canada, Mexico and Barbados, who voluntarily agree to participate. While the adoption of CALEA accreditation is increasing, many law enforcement agencies still refrain from participating in the process due to the cost of becoming accredited and the limited evidence of its effectiveness. Doerner and Doerner (2009) note this stating, "much of the apparent reluctance to pursue CALEA approval stems from the concerns of

Policing: An International Journal
Vol. 47 No. 1, 2024
pp. 1-15
Emerald Publishing Limited
1363-951X
DOI 10.1108/PIJPSM-08-2023-0099

police leaders regarding the actual value of accreditation and the high costs, both direct and indirect, associated with this endeavor" (p. 782).

Hence, this study explores the perceived advantages of CALEA police accreditation, if any, among those who have undergone the process. We find that CALEA police accreditation has a substantive impact on organizational learning, which is "the management of information for positive impact on performance" (Basten and Haamann, 2018, p. 2). Organizational learning is important because it enhances agencies' procedural rationality and problem-solving capacity, concepts we discuss in detail later in the article.

In the following sections, we discuss the background of CALEA police accreditation, provide a literature review on the impacts of police accreditation and detail our methodology, case selection and data. We then present our findings and provide a discussion and a conclusion.

Background on CALEA accreditation

While the call to professionalize American policing dates back to at least the early 1900s, it was the spike in crime in the 1960s, and the civil unrest of the 1960s–1970s that galvanized the move to establish a national accrediting body for law enforcement (Bowman, 2002). The social turmoil of the 1960s–1970s exposed a lack of preparedness among law enforcement to prevent and respond to civil unrest, many lawmakers and law enforcement executives hoped that the development of a national body of policing standards would provide a solution to those problems. Several national commissions at the time recommended the creation of policing standards including the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice in 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (also known as the Kerner Commission) in 1968 and the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals in 1973.

CALEA is a not-for-profit organization that was established in 1979 through the joint efforts of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), with funding from the USA Department of Justice. CALEA accredited its first police agency in 1984, marking a milestone in its mission to professionalize law enforcement agencies. CALEA achieves this goal by offering "state and local law enforcement agencies an opportunity to demonstrate *voluntarily* that they meet an established set of law enforcement standards" (Commission on Accreditation, 1983, p. xi). Specifically, CALEA's original aims were to:

(1) increase law enforcement agency capabilities to prevent and control crime; (2) increase agency effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of law enforcement services; (3) increase cooperation and coordination with other law enforcement agencies and with other agencies of the criminal justice system; and (4) increase citizen and employee confidence in the goals, objectives, policies, and practices of the agency (Commission on Accreditation, 1983, p. xi).

CALEA is governed by a 21-member board, consisting of 11 law enforcement practitioners and 10 members selected from the public and private sectors. An executive director and a professional staff manage the day-to-day operations. CALEA aims to foster an environment of continuous improvement among law enforcement agencies by regularly updating its professional standards in line with best practices and holding law enforcement agencies accountable to those standards through an annual review of proofs of compliance and a site-based assessment every four years.

Participation in CALEA comes with a financial cost. While CALEA offers a sliding fee scale based on the agency's size, agencies must pay an application fee and an initial onsite assessment fee to become accredited. If awarded accreditation, agencies must pay an annual continuation fee and an onsite assessment fee every fourth year. Additionally, given that CALEA requires accredited agencies to carefully document and track their policies,

procedures and proofs of compliance, many agencies dedicate a full-time employee to the work of earning and maintaining accreditation. The tier one CALEA-accredited agencies must adhere to 183 standards and tier two agencies must adhere to 461 standards (CALEA, n.d.). The cost to earn and maintain accreditation helps explain, in part, why in the US only "between 25 and 30% of the nation's law enforcement officers are employed by agencies engaged in the CALEA® Accreditation process" (CALEA, 2020).

Literature review

There is a need for more research on the impact of CALEA accreditation; among the existing research, there is limited evidence of its effectiveness (Abner and Rush, 2022). Hougland and Wolf (2017) note this, stating, "although CALEA has accredited law enforcement agencies since 1984, there has been a surprising lack of research regarding the success of accredited agencies in becoming more professional" (p. 41). Johnson (2015) describes this gap in the literature as "troubling" given that "accreditation carries high costs in public employee time and fiduciary expenses" (p. 140).

Among the research that does exist, scholars have found that accreditation does not have a statistically significant relationship with clearance rates for violent crime and property crime (Doerner and Doerner, 2012; Ferrandino, 2014) or with the total number of complaints received and sustained (Hougland and Wolf, 2017). Research regarding the impact of accreditation on the use of force is mixed. Alpert and Macdonald (2001) did not find a statistically significant relationship between the two, while Parker *et al.*, (2005) found a negative and statistically significant relationship between accreditation and the use of force. One of the brighter spots in the literature on accreditation is a finding by Holliday and Wagstaff (2022), which showed that CALEA accreditation is associated with satisfaction and trust in local police and belief that local police support equality in policing, accountability and community building.

One major limitation of the current literature is that it consists of studies regarding CALEA's impact on a rather narrow set of outputs and outcomes. Given CALEA's broad aims, it may be the case that accreditation impacts dimensions that have not been previously studied but are in line with its original aims. To address this gap, we employ a qualitative, inductive methodology aimed at identifying the benefits of CALEA police accreditation, if any, according to those who are engaged in the practice.

Methodology

This study uses a multicase, multisite case study approach to draw on the insights of the police chiefs, lieutenants, sergeants and accreditation managers of municipal law enforcement agencies in the United States to explore the benefits of CALEA police accreditation, if any, according to those who are engaged in the practice. Those interviewed were identified by their agencies as having extensive knowledge and experience with the processes involved with obtaining and maintaining accreditation. The multicase, multisite case study approach allows for a thick description of the phenomenon under investigation—enriched with quotes from study participants' otherwise unobtainable views (see Charmaz, 2006).

This approach, which seeks analytic generalization rather than statistical generalization (see LeRoux *et al.*, 2019), is increasingly used to explore a range of themes in law enforcement research, including LGBTQ-affirming police tactics (Israel *et al.*, 2016), rape victim advocates' experiences with law enforcement (Long, 2018) and police service models in small communities in the United States (Wilson and Grammich, 2017).

The study team consisted of four researchers spread across two universities. Three researchers participated in the research design and data collection and all four researchers contributed to data analysis and interpretation. We describe the current study's case selection, data collection and data analysis procedures below.

Case selection

We initiated a purposive case selection by accessing a list of accredited municipal law enforcement agencies in CALEA's client database. We then solicited study participants (i.e. police chiefs, lieutenants, sergeants and accreditation managers) from municipal law enforcement agencies across the United States. A total of 30 participants, from 30 accredited departments participated in in-depth interviews over 30 months. A purposive sample, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), "is not a probability sample that will enable the researcher to determine statistical inferences to a population; rather ... it will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the research about the research problem under examination" (p. 148).

Table 1 summarizes the statistics of participants' backgrounds and the accredited agencies they represent. The sample is diverse in terms of the size of the agencies

Agency and respondent-level characteristics	% of sample ($N = 30$)
Agency characteristics	
Size of the department	
50 employees or less	33
51–100 employees	23
101–250 employees	13
251–400 employees	20
More than 400 employees	10
Regions represented	
Northeast	13
South	40
West	17
Midwest	30
Years accredited	
Currently in the process	10
5 years or less	30
6–10 years	13
11–15 years	13
16–20 years	20
21 years or more	13
Respondent characteristics	
Role in department	
Chief only	33
Accreditation manager only	17
Accreditation manager and other role	47
Other related role	3
Years in department	
5 years or less	13
6–10 years	17
11–15 years	13
16–20 years	23
21 years or more	33
Source(s): Table by the authors	

Table 1.
Agency and respondent-level characteristics of sample

sampled, the regions represented, the number of years accredited, the respondents' role in the department and the number of years that respondents have been in the department. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended conducting 20–30 interviews or until saturation, which was achieved in this study around interview 15. Saturation refers to "the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begin to repeat so that further data collection is redundant, signifying that an adequate sample size is reached" (Hennink and Kaiser, 2021, p. 2). Hennink and Kaiser (2021) conducted a systematic review of empirical tests that examined the appropriate sample size for saturation and concluded that "saturation can be achieved in a narrow range of interviews (9–17)" (p. 9).

Data collection
We collected data through 30 open-ended, semi-structured telephone interviews from June 2019 to December 2022. The knowledge and experiences of the study participants exclusively guided the emerging themes concerning the benefits of CALEA police accreditation.

Interviews averaged approximately 45 min. We recorded each interview and had them professionally transcribed verbatim before coding and analysis. The prompt questions used for each sample were asked of all respondents. However, the semi-structured format of interviews resulted in variation in the participant-driven discussions and follow-up interview questions.

Data analysis
Four researchers participated in the process of open coding to identify and categorize patterns emerging from the data (Merritt, 2019). Like Merritt (2019), each coder engaged in an iterative process of closely reading the collected data, comprehensive notation, open coding and frequent comparisons of codes within and across cases. After independently completing these coding steps, we pursued inter-coder agreement by comparing the coding themes that emerged from the data. We also engaged in systematic discussions to resolve the limited discrepancies in coding. This process resulted in agreement on the primary dimensions that informants identified regarding the impact of accreditation on organizational processes in municipal law enforcement agencies.

Findings
This study aimed to identify the benefits of CALEA police accreditation, if any, according to those engaged in the practice. What was consistent across all interviews was that accreditation fostered organizational learning (OL) within the agencies. Basten and Haamann (2018) describe OL as "the management of information for positive impact on performance" (p. 2). There is limited research within policing on OL. Among the literature that does exist, prior studies have examined how Compstat (Walsh and Henry, 2008), randomized control trials (Bedford and Mazerolle, 2014), police-academic partnerships (Martin and Wooff, 2020), red team policing (Coliandris and Rogers, 2014) and communities of practice (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017) impact OL, but not police accreditation which is arguably much more expansive and intensive than the other approaches. Overall, research indicates that organizational learning has positive impacts on performance but that OL is a difficult process to facilitate due to the time, financial costs and cooperation that it requires.

In the following subsections, we provide specific examples of how accreditation has enhanced OL in the agencies through the development of knowledge brokers, creation of communities of practice, support for knowledge repositories, support for knowledge managers and greater levels of transparency.

Knowledge brokers

Knowledge brokers create "connections between knowledge buyers and knowledge sellers" (Basten and Haamann, 2018, p. 8). In the case of accreditation, the knowledge brokers are the accreditation managers. Accreditation managers help police departments and the accrediting body "understand each other's language" and facilitate the transfer of knowledge to and from each other (Pawlowski and Robey, 2004, p. 650). The transfer of knowledge between the accrediting body and the agencies is evidenced through the creation of new standards and policies that adhere to accreditation standards and are relevant to local conditions.

Participant #13, an accreditation manager in a department seeking to earn accreditation, described having to rewrite departmental policies, stating, "You have to make sure all of your policies fit into the accreditation standards. So right now, we're going through all of our policies and re-editing, and writing, and kind of beefing up our policies so that we can meet a lot of the [accreditation] standards." Participant #10, an accreditation manager at an accredited agency, described their role in writing policy in a similar manner, stating that they are responsible for "writing policies and procedures in relation to the [accreditation] standards that [they are] given."

It is important to note, however, that the flow of knowledge between the accrediting body and the police departments are bi-directional, meaning that the accrediting body listens to and learns from the departments as well. When asked whether they would change anything about the goals of accreditation, participant #5, a police chief, stated, "No, you know, they [the accrediting body] do a pretty good job of listening to the constituents in revising policies as necessary." Participant #6, a police chief, responded similarly, stating, "CALEA, I think, has listened to us, and annually they ask . . . for approval and suggestions and I think they've listened."

The relationship between the accrediting body and the police departments, however, is not without tension. Participant #11, an accreditation manager, described the relationship as follows: "So sometimes they listen. But sometimes they just [say] . . . 'Oh, well we know better.' And it's like 'no, you're not the one who's actually down in the weeds doing this'. This doesn't make sense." Participant #16, an accreditation manager and sergeant, summed up the relationship as follows: "[The accreditation director] will listen to you even if he's, at the end of the day, not going to agree. When you're telling people what to do, there's always going to be a little bit of tension, but hopefully, you work through it, and most of the agencies have . . . That's a good thing, to me, that we can talk through things and work to do the best we can." Therefore, knowledge brokers play a crucial role in bridging disconnected and sometimes opposing, pools of ideas and approaches (Basten and Haamann, 2018).

Communities of practice

Communities of practice enhance OL by learning from the experiences of external organizations. Communities of practice are "groups of individuals who meet voluntarily—due to common interests or areas of expertise—to exchange experiences, identify or develop best practices, and establish new interindividual relations. The groups are built on mutual agreement, loosely connected, and self-managed" (Basten and Haamann, 2018, p. 2). CALEA-

accredited agencies have established state support networks or coalitions where accredited agencies and those seeking accreditation can share best practices for developing policing standards and demonstrating compliance with them.

Several of our respondents noted the benefit of being part of such a support network. Participant #16, an accreditation manager and sergeant, stated, "One of the main benefits, in my opinion . . . is our relationships that we have with these other . . . outstanding agencies, I'm glad to be a part of them. Sometimes, when you get 20 people together, you can do something a lot better than if one person's thinking about it." Participant #17, a trainer and accreditation manager, described the benefits of the support networks in terms of increased access, stating that an advantage of accreditation is, "being a part of the accreditation network where we're constantly bouncing ideas off each other and are able to get support from other agencies that may not otherwise be easily accessible."

The support networks are generally organized by state so that accredited agencies in each state can share advice about how to remain in compliance with both accreditation and state law. In describing some of the topics that they discuss at their coalition meetings, participant #3, a sergeant and accreditation manager, detailed this double benefit stating that at their meetings, they "discus[s] new laws that get passed for [their] state, the interpretation of those laws and how to best enact policies to become compliant with enforcing those laws."

Knowledge repositories

Knowledge repositories enhance OL by transferring knowledge throughout the agency. Knowledge repositories refer to the digital storage of "experiences, documents, [and] reusable code" (Basten and Haamann, 2018, p. 13). One strength of knowledge repositories relative to training is that they generally can spread information throughout the organization more quickly (Basten and Haamann, 2018). For accredited agencies, the cloud-based software PowerDMS serves as the knowledge repository.

PowerDMS is a document management system that allows subscribers to view policing standards, upload proofs of compliance and other documentation, manage policies and procedures, conduct online training and testing and run reports. The interviewees provided a myriad of examples of how they use this knowledge repository.

In one example, a respondent described how the knowledge repository helps ensure that officers on the beat have access to rules, regulations and standards. Participant #7, a police chief, noted, "All of our rules and regulations and accreditation standards are uploaded to PowerDMS so that our people have access to all the policy and procedures and standards right on the inboard computer of their car." Thus, knowledge repositories can potentially increase the likelihood that officers are following organizational rules simply by providing them with convenient access to them.

The knowledge repository not only stores documentation but can also document when personnel have accessed information from it. Participant #5, a police chief, explained how they use this feature:

> Now [since accreditation] we've gone more computerized, like with PowerDMS to where we can't put things online, they're given an electronic signature and it has an audit trail to know that, you know, Officer Smith on this date and time acknowledged [something] . . .. It's easier for us to kind of track . . . We run an audit like once a month to find out if Officer Smith hasn't logged in and if he's updated the policy and answered any reviews.

Participant #14, a lieutenant and accreditation manager, described using the knowledge repository in a similar manner:

Now [since they have become accredited], the officers when they first get hired, they have to go in [into PowerDMS] and they have to read every one of our policies and they have to sign off on them electronically. So, let's say an officer chases somebody in a pursuit and they go, "I didn't know the policy", and you say, "Well bullshit, I've got your signature electronically right here. You knew the policy on this date".

Several interviewees detailed how their agencies use the knowledge repository to facilitate training and to store proof of training. Participant #14, a lieutenant and accreditation manager, continued:

I can actually put videos and/or tests along with material inside PowerDMS. The officer actually gets in and they would review it and it's timed, they gotta click on each screen before it'll let you get to the next one . . . you take your test and that's your measurement. And they have to get a certain rating to pass the test and then they'll timestamp it up to the second, showing you that we have proof that they did this.

Participant #18, a police chief, described how his department uses the knowledge repository to facilitate city-level training in addition to agency-level training stating, "Even, at a city level, we have an HR department that requires some training and that sort of thing monthly, and we're able to use PowerDMS to— not only give them the training, but to track that they took it, and you know . . . passed it."

Not only are knowledge repositories helpful for informing people within the organization but also they inform people with oversight responsibilities to the organization. CALEA conducts annual virtual assessments of accredited agencies every year for three years, and in the fourth year, they do an onsite assessment. For both the virtual and onsite assessments, CALEA reviews the departments' knowledge repository to assess their adherence to accreditation standards. Participant #19, a captain and accreditation manager, described the annual review process as follows: "They [CALEA] contact us a few weeks in advance and give us the instructions. They tell us what standards they're going to look at [. . .] So, then we go in and make sure those are all tidied up, good to go, and in the right places [. . .]We share PowerDMS . . . so they can get into PowerDMS and look this stuff over."

Some departments provide their city attorneys with access to PowerDMS. Participant #14, a lieutenant and accreditation manager, described how and why they provide their city attorneys with access:

So, I have a [software] license for every officer in my department, plus I have a couple extra ones for our city attorneys, in the event somebody has a lawsuit or they want to contact us, instead of us getting contacted by attorneys wanting copies of stuff, they have access to our general orders, they can just print them at their law firm and we're not bothered by them.

Knowledge managers

Knowledge repositories require knowledge managers. The work of knowledge managers can be divided into two broad roles: (1) identifying information needs, converting information into stored knowledge and "ensur[ing] that the knowledge is reliable and up-to-date" (Basten and Haamann, 2018, p. 8) and (2) utilizing information and knowledge. Accreditation managers are primarily responsible for the first role and the command staff are primarily responsible for the second role.

When describing the duties of accreditation managers, several interviewees detailed how they are responsible for collecting proofs of compliance and other forms of documentation to demonstrate their adherence to the standards of accreditation. Participant #8, an accreditation manager and crime analyst, stated that the duties of the accreditation manager are in part "to document the performance and the way things are done, both in

policy and on the ground and by collecting documentary evidence and statistics … They basically build the case on a regular basis for CALEA's review of our adherence to CALEA standards." When asked what the duties of an accreditation manager are, participant #9, a sergeant and accreditation manager, responded in a similar manner, stating, "Well ensuring with our accreditation that we are in compliance with the standards and are up-to-date with our documentation."

CALEA requires accredited agencies to run reports, which can be done in PowerDMS. The command-level staff use the reports to gain insights from the knowledge stored in PowerDMS and take appropriate action. Several respondents detailed how their agency increased its level of reporting following accreditation. Participant #3, a sergeant and accreditation and manager, described the changes they made in their reporting:

> CALEA [requires] a lot of annual reports, administrative reports. And at the command level, it's forced them to analyze things that are going on in the agency and do more in that aspect. Which I think is a big improvement. As opposed to something being out of sight, out of mind, or you don't know there's a problem until it is a problem. It's bringing things to their attention, so things are recognized and rectified sooner. For example, we implemented the early warning system— it's called P.E.W.S., Personal Early Warning System, which also included P.I.P.S., which are personnel improvement plans, which we never had before. And once that was in place, now you start paying attention to— well, which officers are calling in sick in conjunction with their weekends, or how many instances of the use of force did this one officer have? I mean, there are eight categories that would activate that. But it forces command to start looking at things they weren't looking at before.

Participant #8, an accreditation manager and crime analyst, made similar remarks regarding the changes they made in reporting by stating, "Probably one of the big benefits that we've realized early on and over time is that occasionally irritating as it might be, the management structures and reporting systems that you have to maintain to retain your accreditation status are really exceptional at giving managers and leaders in the organization the information they need to make good decisions."

Transparency

Transparency has been described as "the willingness to hold oneself (and one's actions) open to inspection in order to receive valid feedback" (Popper and Lipshitz, 2000, p. 187). Transparency enhances OL by "reducing the likelihood of self-deception, by countering pressures to distort or suppress threatening information, and by broadening the scope of one's information base and points of view for its interpretation" (Popper and Lipshitz, 2000, p. 187). In short, transparency promotes learning by providing an honest account of the current state of affairs, which serves as a starting point for improvement.

Accreditation increased the level of transparency in the agencies that we interviewed primarily through three means. First, the aforementioned proofs of compliance were crucial for increasing organizational transparency. For example, when asked what they have done differently as a result of accreditation, participant #18, a police chief, noted, "I think we're more thorough in some of our follow-up, on being sure we had, for lack of a better term, picture proof of accident scenes, review of any pursuits or you know, stuff like that. It was just making sure that we had to document it instead of having to say, well you remember last year, so and so had that pursuit or whatever." With greater levels of documentation and "proof," organizations are better suited to accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses.

A second crucial aspect of accreditation that enhances OL is the emphasis on reporting. For instance, when asked what benefits their organization has experienced from accreditation, participant #4, an accreditation manager, noted, "Being more transparent with the department and the community is a big one. Because a lot of the reports and the things that we have to do create transparency because they provide more information, in-

depth information." A different respondent described how he used the reporting software and routines required by accreditation to foster transparency and combat misinformation. Participant #7, a police chief, stated,

> I was actually able to put down a . . . professor from [University Name] who basically labeled us as White racist police department, but I had a biased-based policing report that I forwarded to him when we were called to question that basically showed you were nine times more likely to be stopped in [Name of City] if you are a White male. It pulled the carpet out from underneath his allegations that we were biased toward African-Americans in traffic stops. That's the value of maintaining and staying in the accreditation process.

Participant #20, a lieutenant and accreditation manager, described the enhanced speed with which they can pull and reveal information due to accreditation, stating, "We could pull a stat immediately if a, let's say someone does an open records request, and they asked for every single person you stopped on a Tuesday for speeding, for the entire calendar year or something like that. We've got it literally right here at our hands, where it might take a department who's not accredited weeks and weeks and weeks to come up with that stat."

Third, not only did respondents describe fostering transparency with CALEA and the public, but also with other law enforcement agencies. When asked what they have done differently as a result of accreditation, participant #10, an accreditation manager, noted,

> Our Intel is shared among the agencies now, where our detectives used to keep everything a secret even from each other. And now we notify other agencies when we have intelligence. And we're more ready to ask the public for identification of people that might be, that were caught on cameras stealing from a store. More transparency.

Data triangulation

To further validate our findings, we engaged in data triangulation. Data triangulation refers to using multiple sources to corroborate findings (Creswell and Poth, 2018). More specifically, we reviewed 271 news articles concerning CALEA police accreditation based on six unique keyword searches of a news search engine. We choose FACTIVA as the search engine for identifying relevant news articles, given its unparalleled access to a large volume of newspapers and its flexible search features. We did not restrict our search to police departments that were included in our interview sample, given that doing so would compromise the anonymity of our participants and also because a broad, open search serves a stricter validity check of the findings.

We assessed whether the articles indicated that CALEA police accreditation had no effect, a negative effect or a positive effect on one or more of the five themes regarding organizational learning (i.e. communities of practice, knowledge repositories, knowledge broker, knowledge manager and transparency). If the article indicated that CALEA police accreditation had no effect or a negative effect on any aspect of OL, the finding would serve as conflicting evidence and would require further exploration and explanation. If the article indicated a positive effect on any aspect of OL, the finding would serve as corroborating evidence.

We excluded 259 articles that did not contain substantive quotes from local law enforcement leaders discussing their experiences with CALEA accreditation. This resulted in a final sample of 12 articles. All 12 of these articles corroborated one or more of the five themes regarding OL. Table 2 details one example of each theme. These examples are merely intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive of the corroborating examples that we found. The findings from the search of new articles help validate the accuracy of the central themes discovered through the semi-structured interviews (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Data triangulation	
Theme	Knowledge brokers
Quotation	"'CALEA assists us with achieving our high level of professional standards,' said Planning and Research Analyst/Accreditation Manager Chrissie Sobanski. 'We are always updating policies, reviewing processes and working not only to maintain, but to raise these standards' (Paplauskas, 2019, para. 1 and 2)"
Theme	Communities of practice
Quotation	"The Winter Haven Police Department is one step closer to receiving national accreditation. A team of four law enforcement officials, including three from Polk County, conducted a mock assessment this week, scrutinizing the department's operations and procedures. 'We went through everything – soup to nuts,' said Lt. Frank Caterino, of the Haines City Police Department. Caterino was the mock assessment team leader. He also is a member of the Florida Police Accreditation Coalition, which assists other agencies [. . .] As part of the mock assessment, the team spent Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday sifting through the department's records, files and procedures manual; visiting sites such as the detective division and a community substation; inspecting vehicles; and checking uniforms and the appearance of about 12 officers. (Circelli, 1996, p. F1)"
Theme	Knowledge repositories
Quotation	"'PowerDMS is great for pushing out legal notices or a case law change that came from the US or State Supreme Court,' said Gomez. 'Sometimes people aren't great at checking emails, so I put it in here and every time they log in they see their dashboard and that they have to read and sign this document.' . . . Tim Gomez, admin assistant to the chief of police, helped bring the system to Maricopa . . . On behalf of Chief Steve Stahl, Gomez said as the administrator he can check to see who hasn't completed a training module, who has or has not signed a document or who has or has not viewed a briefing from the chief yet. He can also see the time spent on a video or document, so no skipping through things quickly without viewing or reading happens. Gomez explained. (Maricopa police, 2017, para. 1, 3, 8, 11, and 12)"
Theme	Knowledge manager
Quotation	"The work done to obtain accreditation and the smooth transition between Lt. Oates and Lt. King has been the direct result of administrative assistant Belinda Parker. She is amazing. She keeps up with all the proofs we must document and keeps the command staff abreast on all the new changes,' said Tilley. 'She will become the actual accreditation manager while working with Lt. Davis on the program (Berendt, 2014, para. 1 and 11)'"
Theme	Transparency
Quotation	"Assessors from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies Inc. (CALEA) . . . visited the city last week to determine whether or not the department will receive accreditation for another four-year term. Michael Webb, a retired chief from Abington Township, Pennsylvania, and David Wolf, chief of the Olivette Police Department in Missouri, arrived Nov. 18 and inspected Frederick's standards and practices through Wednesday. 'We're looking at their written directives to ensure that they're in compliance with the commission's standards, in addition to their proofs of compliance that demonstrate proof that they're in compliance,' Webb said after a public hearing Nov. 18 in the municipal annex building at 140 W. Patrick St. 'We're also talking to many community stakeholders and many internal stakeholders within the organization (Arias, 2019, para. 1–4)'"
Source(s): Table by the authors	

Table 2.
Themes identified
through a search of
relevant news articles

A statement of research rigor

We ensured the rigor of our research process through several means. First, we engaged in peer debriefing throughout the process to "avoid myopic initial interpretations [and] inform midcourse adjustments in [the] protocol to improve data quality" (Nowell and Albrecht, 2019, p. 359). Second, we ensured interrater reliability by engaging multiple researchers in the coding process who reconciled coding discrepancies (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Third, we triangulated the findings from our interviews with online searches of newspapers to

ensure the robustness of our findings (Nowell and Albrecht, 2019). Lastly, we included direct quotations from interviewees which allows "readers to make independent confirmations concerning the credibility of interpretations" (Nowell and Albrecht, 2019, p. 359).

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the benefits of CALEA police accreditation, if any, according to those engaged in the practice. We found that police accreditation enhances OL through the development of knowledge brokers, the creation of communities of practice, support for knowledge repositories and managers and greater transparency. The enhancement of OL benefits the public good in two ways.

First, OL enhances procedural rationality, which refers to the "extent to which decisions are based on technically and administratively sound data, analysis and planning" (Page *et al.*, 2015, p. 722). In the case of police accreditation, this is achieved through the use of a document management system called PowerDMS. This software acts as a knowledge repository for accredited agencies, storing proofs of compliance, officer performance information, policies and procedures. Without a solid and reliable data foundation, generating credible analyses and planning in ways that align with procedural rationality is impossible. Accreditation managers, command staff and to a lesser extent police chiefs, serve as knowledge managers and are responsible for analysis and planning, which they do with the aid of data stored in the knowledge repository. Not only did accreditation appear to enhance the quality of data collection, analysis and planning of the police departments we spoke with but also it enhanced the volume of those efforts.

Second, OL enhances accredited agencies' problem-solving capacity, which refers to "new behaviours or norms that increase the potential to address complex problems" (Page *et al.*, 2015, p. 722). Accreditation enhances organizational transparency by requiring proof of compliance, reporting and information sharing. Transparency is crucial to identifying organizational problems and soliciting the feedback needed to solve them. Accredited agencies also benefit from the standards and guidance needed to meet those standards that CALEA provides. Cultural, political and legal norms that shape policing are constantly changing, and the standards CALEA sets help agencies stay on top of complex problems they face now or in the future. This transfer of knowledge happens through knowledge brokers, which in the case of accreditation, are the accreditation managers who are responsible for educating themselves on new standards provided by CALEA and then translating those standards into policy within their departments. Lastly, accreditation strengthens the problem-solving capacity of police departments through statewide support networks and coalitions. These networks and coalitions serve as communities of practice, where accredited agencies and those seeking accreditation can share their experiences and identify best practices.

This study is not without limitations. First, causality cannot be implied from this study. While we asked agency leaders what benefits they have experienced from CALEA accreditation, it is impossible to know whether they would have taken the same actions without accreditation. Second, given that the participants in this study were law enforcement officials working in the USA, our findings may not generalize to non-USA-based police departments that are participating in CALEA. Third, social desirability is always a concern when individuals are asked about individual and organizational performance. We feel confident that social desirability was not a major issue in this study because respondents felt free to discuss the weak points of accreditation and their concerns with CALEA. There were areas in which many respondents said that accreditation did not make a difference, particularly regarding their agency's ability to prevent crime and solve cases. Additionally,

while the respondents were pleased overall with the benefits that accreditation provides, they expressed concerns related to the cost of accreditation, the benefit of some of the standards and/or the frequency with which they were required to make changes to their standards.

Conclusion

This study makes three substantive contributions to scholarship and practice. Firstly, this research makes an important contribution to the literature on police accreditation, given that there is not much research on the impact of CALEA accreditation, and among the existing research, there is limited evidence of its effectiveness (see Holliday and Wagstaff, 2022; Abner *et al.*, 2022 for exceptions). This qualitative study, which focuses on the perceptions and experiences of those involved in the CALEA process, provides a valuable complement to the quantitative literature by shedding light on the internal processes and organizational learning resulting from accreditation. Secondly, practically speaking, this study also provides leaders in law enforcement with more evidence regarding what benefits they can expect from CALEA accreditation, which is essential given its costs. Based on our findings, it may benefit both CALEA and law enforcement, if the stated advantages of accreditation give greater attention to its impacts on organizational learning. Lastly, this study contributes to the still nascent literature on organizational learning within law enforcement.

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