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Management Education News from AACSB International

The Missing Link



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Last April, the AACSB International Board of Directors chartered a new “think tank” called the Special Committee on Global Accreditation Strategy. The special committee’s objective is to evaluate AACSB’s accreditation strategy in light of AACSB’s global mission and determine appropriate actions, if any, to better align the accreditation strategy with the mission statement. AACSB’s mission is direct and unrestrictive. It is to, “*advance quality management education worldwide through accreditation and thought leadership.*” However, AACSB’s accreditation strategy is more restrictive in tone and text. It states, “*AACSB assures quality management education by providing the world’s most prestigious business school accreditation.*”

While some may argue which business school accreditation is the “most prestigious,” what is more demonstrable is that AACSB accreditation is for relatively few of the nearly 12,000 schools awarding business degrees worldwide. The fundamental challenge for most schools is how to achieve AACSB’s faculty requirements, particularly with respect to “academically-qualified” faculty. “AQ” faculty, for the most part, are those who hold a PhD with a research orientation and have active intellectual contributions. Finding these individuals in the US and other high income countries is often a difficult task, but with perseverance, many schools can successfully recruit them. The pool of active PhDs in other parts of the world and developing nations in particular is limited. And, so therefore, is the school’s ability to achieve AACSB accreditation. So long as the situation remains as stated above, AACSB will not be able to accredit more than six or seven percent of the world’s business schools. This small percentage does not appear to be in the spirit of AACSB’s mission.

AACSB's remedies are few. It could either broaden faculty standards and potentially risk the accreditation's prestige, or it could develop a second, high-quality accreditation with more flexible faculty requirements. If AACSB stays with its "one size fits all" model, it could find itself in a position most notably described by Harvard Business School's Clay Christiansen. Dr. Christiansen warns simply that industry leaders who do not keep an eye on the perceived lower quality providers and manage these markets face long-term business risk. Perhaps, the best example is the Japanese ascent in the automobile market from the 1960's to the present. General Motors and other US automakers, once the auto industry's unquestioned leaders, lost their way. This, too, could be the prognosis for AACSB International if it maintains an accreditation for only the "most prestigious" business schools.

Now, the Special Committee on Global Accreditation Strategy is examining several alternatives that could either change the accreditation strategy to better align it with the mission, or simply leave things as they are. The committee has met three times this year, and will convene again in January for a discussion with the AACSB Board of Directors. It is expected that the committee will complete its work and issue a draft report in time for the International Conference and Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California, USA in April 2010. Depending on your perspective on AACSB's global mission, this could be a tough call. What do you think? The year 2010 holds the answer.