

Self-Regulating the HR Profession in BC

by Christian Codrington, CHRP

I was fortunate that my first job out of university was in my chosen field of education. After studying organizational behaviour, I showed up eager to apply all my learning and theories on the job. It was eye-opening to see the human resources function actually unfold outside of academia in the 'real world': the many processes, the forms, the discussions and the strategies, some reactive and some planned well in advance, but very different from school. Little did I know then what the future would bring.

The Evolution of a Discipline

Twenty years later the changes within the HR discipline are staggering. The web of legislation that continues to change makes the landscape for any organization very challenging.

When does changing someone's hours of work become grounds for discrimination based on family status? How does a company conduct an audit of the psychological hazards in their workplace? What information is work product versus personal, therefore requiring sensitivity around sharing? How is overtime treated for those on averaging agreements? Or, on which Monday in February would a federally regulated employer with employees in BC and Ontario chose to honour Family Day? These questions were not likely to be asked two decades ago.

The Changing Pace of Change

Technology continues to transform the ways in which people are hired, moved through, and out of an organization. From sophisticated applicant tracking systems, enterprise wide data systems that aggregate employee internet viewing tendencies, and learning management systems that push tailored training and development options to staff. Metrics and analytics are being taken to new heights supporting day-to-day business decisions.

In addition to legislative and technological changes, society is challenging its established norms around work-life balance, imbalance (constant connectivity), generational changes and the globalization of work including the growth of remote teams working together from multiple locations and in different time zones.

The Hallmarks of a Profession

HR professionals render a unique, definite, and essential service to society, relying on a body of knowledge, specialized training and influencing skills in the performance of our duties. In the exercise of our responsibilities we can have challenging and sometimes conflicting demands placed upon ourselves and our decisions. These considerations entrench the need to abide by a professional code of conduct and ongoing professional development.

These are just a few of the hallmarks of a 'profession' and not simply an occupation. The HR role has evolved to that of a profession. The field of human resources has a designation, a code of conduct, exercises significant influence within an organization and impacts the working population. It is safe to say the human resources is now a profession.

Central to that professional status is the privilege and duties of self-regulation. A profession should be allowed to regulate itself when it is specialized in nature and requires expertise and skill to practice its art adeptly. As a result, the people most qualified to regulate the profession should be the members within

the profession itself anchored by proper standards, regulations, a common body of knowledge and a code of conduct.

Why Pursue Self-Regulation?

While it is well accepted that the societal and business landscape has drastically changed the role of the human resources professional, the question of “Why pursue self-regulation?” is still being asked. The overarching reason to regulate a profession is to ensure the public is protected from incompetence or unethical choices of its professionals.

With respect to human resource professionals, members of society, working or otherwise:

- cannot choose, select or shop for human resources support (excepting independent consultants) – they have the one selected by the employer;
- do not have the capacity to evaluate the competence of the HR professional chosen for them until an interaction in the workplace;
- suffer from the imbalance in informational power, organizational insights and knowledge of employment related matters between the HR practitioner and those in receipt of their guidance, and
- can be significantly impacted monetarily, physically or emotionally by the consequences of poor, unethical or even absence of HR decisions.

Precedents Point to BC Futures

Ontario and Quebec have regulated the profession for years, and both Saskatchewan and Alberta currently have submissions in front of their respective governments. For government, self-regulating the HR profession assists them to carry out its responsibilities to the citizens of BC, and does so in a manner that is less costly by reducing administrative costs of redress—such as tribunals, legal costs and penalties. Society benefits from not having to pay costs for protection.

As HR professionals we should share in the growth and continued maturation of our profession. While improvements continue to be made, the profession plays an integral role in the well-being of the general public and the economic success of BC and all provinces and territories.

This is the first of a number of articles that will be shared with membership on self-regulation. For more information continue to visit HRMA.ca/publicinterest.

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