

## HR morphs from a 'job' to a profession

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In the past, most HR professionals started their careers by falling into an HR job, then moving erratically across HR functions and organizations. This will not be the path of the future.

Students in high school are choosing, with the full approval of their parents, careers in HR. This change means they are selecting HR courses in colleges and universities, seeking volunteer experiences and summer jobs with an HR component and searching for their first jobs after graduating with organizations that practice "good" HR and offer opportunities to learn more HR.

Why has this change occurred? In many ways, it reflects the change in HR from a job to a profession. HR is evolving and organizations cannot simply throw people into HR positions and expect them to perform well. A profession brings with it status that is attractive to individuals considering a career. It also brings with it requirements and obligations on behalf of its members.

A good indication of this change in Canada is the move towards having people entering the HR profession obtain,

*Questions still linger about HR's status as a profession, but many of the core elements are in place*

at a minimum, a university degree and the acceptance of national standards for the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) designation.

### What constitutes a profession?

There are several core criteria that distinguish professions from other occupations. First, there is the formal requirement for specialized or technical training along with

situation of specialized knowledge. There must also be a professional association that sets standards and has an ethical code and a process for licensing or certification. Professions have a great deal of autonomy in setting their rules and enforcing discipline.

What constitutes success as an HR professional? The changes adopted by the Canadian Council of Human

linkages);

- organizational effectiveness;
- staffing;
- total compensation;
- organizational learning;
- training and development;
- employee and labour relations;
- occupational health and safety; and
- HR information management systems.

This intellectual base is the first requirement and is assessed through the National Knowledge Examination (NKE). The aspiring HR professional is also expected to demonstrate this knowledge through the development of technical skills.

The CCHRA identified a set of 203 required professional capabilities that serve as the basis for skill development. Advanced level HR practitioners must demonstrate mastery of this skill set by obtaining a pass score on the professional practice assessment (PPA). Once awarded the CHRP, after passing both the NKE and PPA, the HR professional must adhere to the CCHRA code of ethics and maintain a commitment to continuous learning through a triennial recertification process. The CCHRA and its affiliated associations

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an intellectual component that is resident in a body of knowledge related to the profession. Second, there is an ongoing need for skill development. And third, there is a need to ensure professional competence is maintained and put to socially responsible uses.

In practical terms this means a profession requires extensive training and acqui-

Resources Associations (CCHRA) over the past several years have strengthened the perception that HR is a profession. National standards for the CHRP are based on the assumption that an HR practitioner must have command of knowledge in a number of functional areas:

- professional practice (which includes business fundamentals and strategic business

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## ■ HR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

# HR's move to a self-regulating profession

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are autonomous in setting and enforcing the standards for the profession.

Professions are not static and must change to meet the demands of new discoveries and new information. Vibrant professions do not hold on to the former way of doing things but continually update their knowledge and skill base. During the past year the CCHRA, through the professional standards committee and independent board of examiners, has initiated a review of the 203 required professional capabilities. That review is not yet complete but it will lead to changes in the required knowledge and skill bases. CHRP's are expected to have.

**Why outsourcing is good news**

Outsourcing is looming large on the HR scene, and it raises a lot of questions for those entering the field. Can HR graduates expect to work in the many interesting functions of HR and rise to senior positions in large organizations? What will future HR positions require in the way of knowledge and skills? Will fewer HR practitioners be expected to provide service in a broader set of HR capabilities and have a deeper knowledge in all of the HR functional areas? Will the HR professional be outsourced or replaced by "HR-in-a-box" or limited to mundane tasks?

HR departments are under pressure to produce

while lowering costs. Cost savings can be achieved through the economies of scale by outsourcing, and almost all organizations have outsourced parts of their HR functions. IBM outsourced its entire HR department. The federal government is considering creating a new organization, called a "shared services organization," which would achieve the same benefits as outsourcing the transactional activities of all its HR departments.

These decisions have implications for the career trajectories of HR professionals and in many ways these are

## **Outsourcing is actually good news. HR professionals don't want these "bad" HR jobs: they want the HR jobs that require professional expertise and strategic thinking.**

positive changes. The outsourced functions tend to be managed through technology and call-centre employees with low skills. The first thought is that HR jobs are being eliminated or deskilled. But this outsourcing is actually good news. HR professionals don't want these "bad" HR jobs: they want the HR jobs that require professional expertise and strategic thinking. By outsourcing "administrivia", HR professionals can focus on the interesting valuable work they love: recruitment, not resumé

tracking; succession management, not training course enrolment.

As James Merchant, vice-president of HR at Montreal-based pulp and paper firm Avenor, said: "Outsourcing allowed us to get out of low value-added administrative work and become more strategic. With our change in focus, our performance in the organization has taken a quantum leap."

The other impact outsourcing will have on HR is the need to develop skills to manage contractual arrangements with suppliers, to understand technology and to

qualities necessary for success in the HR world, they mention factors such as business mastery, HR mastery, change mastery and personal credibility. This mention of credibility seems odd. Other professions do not question the credibility or competency of practitioners — being a member of the profession confers credibility. So why is HR different? Perhaps the answer is that for too long organizations did not see HR as a profession but a collection of jobs that anyone could perform.

The credibility of the profession will increase with the development of HR as a self-regulating profession. The national standards that have been adopted by CCHRA are part of the answer to ensuring knowledgeable, skilled and current practitioners comprise the core of HR professionals. This is the key to success for all those young students looking for a career in HR.

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