

Uncovering the value of designations

CHRP helps raise the profession's profile, say HR practitioners

BY SHANNON KLIE

NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS of HR professionals who responded to a *Canadian HR Reporter* survey either have, or are working toward, the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) designation.

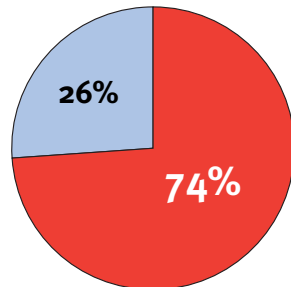
The online survey of 864 readers, conducted last month, found that 74 per cent either have the CHRP or are working toward it. A slightly higher number, 79.6 per cent, said the CHRP is either crucial, very important or relatively important for a successful career in HR.

(More statistics, as well as comments from the survey, can be found on pages 20 and 21.)

As evidenced by the poll, the CHRP is becoming more recognized in the profession, said John Hardistay, the co-ordinator of HR management programs at Sheridan College in Oakville, Ont.

"It reflects an ever-increasing standard expected of HR professionals," he said.

The designation has also helped raise HR's profile in the business world, said Geri Markvoort, a 30-year HR veteran and the director of national HR at Toronto-based professional services firm KPMG.



■ Have CHRP or are working toward it
■ Do not have CHRP and are not pursuing it

"I think it's really established it as a professional discipline," she said. "Not only do you need to gain work experience, but you also need to have specific knowledge in specific areas."

While the CHRP is gaining credibility in the business world, the weight it carries varies from organization to organization, said Hardistay, something his students learn through experience.

"Many find themselves in organizations where the CHRP is definitely valued," he said. "But many will find themselves in organizations where it's not particularly valued at all."

Whether or not the designation will help practitioners move up the ranks in HR is also uncertain. Glancing through a

newspaper's careers section shows how varied the requirements are, said Hardistay.

"For those senior jobs, I don't know that any employer is looking at a CHRP as a requirement," he said.

Malcolm Gabriel, program director for the Organization Development Network in Toronto, said HR designations are useless for professionals who want a seat at the executive table.

"I've found that designations are only recognized by HR people and the real designations that matter to business people are business fundamentals," said Gabriel, who is also a senior HR executive for a large telecommunications firm and has a master's degree in industrial psychology and an MBA.

Instead of focusing on HR training, HR professionals should have more business training, he said.

One area where designations can be useful is when hiring foreign-trained professionals, said Gabriel. By passing the CHRP exams, a foreign professional can gain the appropriate Canadian market knowledge and show a Canadian employer her foreign credentials are valid.

When it comes to the CHRP, HR students are more likely to agree with the majority of *Canadian HR Reporter's* readers than with Gabriel, according to Hardistay. The HR professor surveys his students every year and the majority of them are interested in pursuing the CHRP.

"I tell my students, 'If you have the opportunity to get a CHRP, you would be crazy not to,'" he said. "It may give them a leg up down the road."

More and more employers will use the designation as a screening tool and it will become more difficult to get into HR without any previous training, he said.

"The trend in the knowledge-based economy is to have greater emphasis on professionalism, greater emphasis on ensuring that somebody who positions themselves as having knowledge in an area actually has that knowledge," said KPMG's Markvoort. "The HR designation is in line with that trend."

The requirements for the CHRP focus on technical knowledge of HR, something that is very important for the profession, said Markvoort. However,

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■ HR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

CHRP not enough for senior jobs

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to be a well-rounded HR professional, the practitioner also needs the right soft skills, such as consulting skills, to take that technical knowledge and make it work. Those skills are often learned through experience, not education, she said.

To maintain those technical skills and to stay current with new research, an HR professional must continue with professional development, something the CHRP recertification process encourages, said Markvoort.

"It's really important for HR professionals to keep up with the discipline and to keep up with the body of technical knowledge," she said. "I'm not saying you can't do a job in HR very competently without that knowledge but if you want to keep up and grow, then you really want to understand what's going on in your field."

Just as it's important for HR professionals to stay up-to-date with what's happening in the

profession, it's equally important that the process that regulates the designation be continually reviewed.

"The designation itself and the criteria require ongoing rigour and ongoing review," said Diane Wiesenthal, president of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations, the body that oversees the CHRP designation.

Currently the council is reaching out to the business community to make sure the competencies the CHRP requires are relevant in the workplace. The council is also working on the second major review of the required professional capabilities. It is looking at requiring, instead of merely suggesting, a candidate have work experience before she can be awarded the CHRP.

■ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

How HR professionals view designations

In *Canadian HR Reporter's* survey on designations, respondents were asked to comment on what designations were must-haves for a successful career in HR. Here's a sample of what they had to say:

- HR professionals can demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities in a variety of ways. The possession of a designation does not confer automatic professional competence.
- Human resource practitioners need to have a credible professional standard just as any other professional group. The CHRP is the only designation that meets the generalist requirement.
- At this point, the CHRP is very desirable to have, but employers are not yet demanding it. This should evolve into a must-have over the next five

■ DESIGNATION HOLDERS

How many Canadians hold an HR designation?

Designation	Designation holders in Canada
Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP)	16,000
Group Benefits Associates (GBA)	1,430
Registered Professional Recruiter (RPR)	1,200
Canadian Payroll Manager (CPM)	1,200
Certified Employee Benefits Specialist (CEBS)	896
Payroll Compliance Practitioner (PCP)	850
Certified Compensation Professional (CCP)	734
Retirement Plans Associate (RPA)	652
Canadian Management Professional (CMP)	550
International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) - Certified Practitioner	266
Registered Assessment Specialist (RAS)	250
Certified Training and Development Professional (CTDP)	250
Registered Professional Trainer (RPT)	200
Compensation Management Specialist (CMS)	174
Certified Benefits Professionals (CBP)	
Note: This designation is no longer available in Canada	62
Global Remuneration Professional (GRP)	37
Senior Professional in HR (SPHR)	37
Professional in HR (PHR)	21
Global Professional in HR (GPHR)	10
IPMA - Certified Specialist	2
Certified Training Practitioner (CTP)	Tier 1 – (pilot only) ends Nov'06
Certified Career Strategist (CCS)	New (launch in Oct '06)

to 10 years.

- A university graduate with the ability to read, reason, speak and write clearly, and who is an empathetic, trust-building person, will be successful in an HR career.
- Why waste time and money (to get a designation)? I am an independent consultant with over 20 years of experience.
- Many CHRP designates lack the skill and ability to apply their specific knowledge of HR to broader strategic management issues....I think that the CHRP still has a long way to go to be a recognized designation.
- The true benefits of CHRP are access to training, networking, job postings and reference materials.

■ ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

HRReporter.com

For complete results from the *Canadian HR Reporter* survey on HR designations, including more comments and statistics, go to www.hrreporter.com, click on "Advanced Search" and enter article #4632.