

Ontario: Please come back to the CCHRA

HRPA's decision to withdraw from national body opposite of protecting public interest



Dionne Pohler

GUEST COMMENTARY

A colleague and I recently published an article at the University of Saskatchewan on Canada's approach to the professionalization of HR. We claimed Canada was further ahead in this process than the United States, notwithstanding our smaller size and newer professional associations.

Canada, it appeared, was seeking to uphold higher standards and aspiring to enlightened professional values such as balancing interests between employers, employees and broader society. As a result, we argued, the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) designation was faring somewhat better with regard to credibility than the professional HR designations in the U.S.

One of the reasons for this was the federal structure of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA). Although there were tensions, the CCHRA fostered interprovincial dialogue, sought to harmonize standards across provinces and allowed the potential for an occupational identity to form for HR professionals across the country. Conflict and tension across provinces can foster creativity and innovative solu-

tions if they are embraced.

Until very recently, CCHRA appeared to mostly transcend entrenched provincial politics in favour of enlightened self-interest. The decision by Ontario's Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) to leave the CCHRA is the exact opposite of what I would have recommended to continue on this path. It is also the exact opposite of protecting the public interest.

We have to acknowledge Ontario's sheer size compared to the other provinces. The money it puts into the CCHRA is substantial. (Although less per capita than any other province, the total amount is still more than other provinces). It essentially serves the same purpose as provincial transfer payments, and the HRPA board has the right to hold the CCHRA accountable for how these resources are used.

Having said that, Ontario seems to have forgotten that, by virtue of the federated model, it was a major player in the CCHRA. The voting model used by the CCHRA for some time has provided Ontario with more power over many of the decisions, direction and actions of the CCHRA than any other province.

A failure of the whole is a failure of each of the parts. HRPA can be more effective working within the structure than outside of it, and I believe Ontario will come to realize it needs the CCHRA as much as the CCHRA needs it.

Its members will want and demand a consistent standard of practice across the country. Its

members will want and demand reciprocity with other jurisdictions. Its members will want and demand a unified voice and efficient infrastructure to support the ever-increasing demands on the profession.

The CCHRA is not without its problems. It has cumbersome decision-making processes that need to be re-assessed, a volunteer structure that can be problematic for ensuring commitment and continuity, and a governance model that requires greater accountability. The CCHRA also needs to find a way to engage more with Quebec.

However, if you try to think for even one moment of creative solutions to the problems in a way

that can leverage economies of scale, prioritize quality assurance for the CHRP designation, reduce disparities between provinces and elevate the entire Canadian HR profession, pulling out of the CCHRA is not the first option that comes to mind (it's not even close to the top of the list).

Without a strong national association, every province and HR professional across the country ultimately loses. In a time of ever-increasing interprovincial labour mobility, there cannot be a tier-one HR profession in Ontario if the profession isn't elevated in other provinces at the same time.



Provincial associations working at cross-purposes to each other can only result in a profession that is seen by stakeholders as lacking professionalism, consistent standards and demonstrating an inability to work together for the common good. That's ironic considering HR professionals are often required to balance competing interests between employers and employees within organizations.

Democracy is inefficient but it is the most valuable system we have to ensure the best outcomes possible where there are competing interests, and protection of the public is truly a primary concern.

Acts that give provincial HR associations the power to self-

regulate do not stop these associations from working together to protect the public interest. Setting aside legal regulation, I'm fairly certain protection of the public interest doesn't look any different in Ontario than it does in Manitoba, Nova Scotia or Alberta. It is about ensuring both the competent practice and ethical conduct of HR professionals through standards, education and monitoring. And it is about ensuring HR professionals receive the support they need to uphold critical HR values and principles by creating for members some autonomy to make the right decisions in their day-to-day work.

If we do these pieces well, we won't need to market our profession as much — HR professionals

will do it themselves.

HRPA has had tremendous influence in the CCHRA since its inception, and has been a critical partner in elevating the HR profession across the country. HRPA has assisted other provinces in understanding and navigating self-regulation, and its staff have been integral in providing services (both through ongoing contracts and advice offered free of charge) to provinces that do not have the capacity internally.

I sincerely hope that one day Ontario decides to come back.

And to the remaining provincial members of the CCHRA, I have great faith in the HR professionals across the country who have committed to working tirelessly to foster interprovincial collaboration, enhance standards for the profession and build an improved, yet united, CCHRA. Transcending provincial politics to work together toward the common good is critical to succeed in both elevating the HR profession and protecting the public interest.

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