#25 The last hurdle

Claude Balthazard, Ph.D., C.Psych., CHRL
Posted on LinkedIn August 8, 2017

Professionalization can be understood as a sequence of hurdles or challenges that a profession must negotiate in order to achieve its ultimate objective which is to be counted among the true professions. By failing to negotiate one of any of these challenges, the professionalization process is derailed. Although professionalization is a complex process, at any given time, there is one dominant hurdle or challenge that the profession must overcome. Making the transition from an unregulated to a regulated profession is the challenge of the current phase or step in the professionalization process for Human Resources in Ontario.

The various models of professionalization agree that one of the later hurdles in the professionalization process is to obtain recognition from the state. In Canada, this means statutory self-regulation granted by the relevant provincial legislature. There are two perspectives at play—whereas the profession is thinking of enhanced status and legitimacy, the legislature is thinking protection of the public. What results is a quid pro quo—in order to get the status and legitimacy of a true profession, the profession must agree to establish a professional regulatory body that is dedicated to protecting the public interest by governing and regulating its members.

But the passage of an act is not quite enough to guarantee that a profession will fully professionalize. The passage of the Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013, was certainly a milestone but it does not guarantee the ultimate success of the professionalization process. There is a gap between being granted powers of self-regulation and being a successful professional regulatory body.
Successful establishment of a professional regulatory body is the current hurdle for Human Resources in Ontario. If the profession is successful at negotiating this hurdle, it will very likely reach its goal since this is one of the last hurdles to be negotiated. If the profession fails to negotiate this hurdle, the professionalization process will be derailed.

“To put matters into perspective, many experts, such as Hodson and Sullivan, agree that ‘most professionalizing groups achieve autonomy and authority slowly—if at all.’ Successful professionalization is not inevitable. So it is important not to think of successful professionalization as inevitable or automatic.

For instance, consider the real estate agents in BC. For ten years, and up until June 2016, this was a self-regulated profession in BC. On June 29, 2016, BC Premier, Christy Clark, put the province’s real estate industry under government oversight declaring that the industry’s self-regulating body had failed to protect the public from cut-throat and illegal practices and had lost the public’s confidence in its ability to police itself.

“The real estate sector has had 10 years to get it right on self-regulation and they haven’t,” Clark told a news conference. “So we are going to end the right of the real estate sector to self-regulate.”

By losing the privilege of self-regulation real-estate agents in BC were bumped from a self-regulating profession to an occupation regulated by the government.

Although we have full confidence that the Human Resources will negotiate this self-regulation hurdle, it is important not to take success for granted. We need to recognize that negotiating the self-regulating hurdle will require attention and focus. We need to avoid complacency.

---