#32 Are the interests of the profession and the interests of its members the same thing?

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Among the objects of the Association is the following “(c) to promote and protect the welfare and interests of the Association and of the human resources profession.” What is meant by the interests of the Association and the interests of the Human Resources profession? The argument here is that there is a difference between the interests of the Human Resources profession and the interest of its members, and that understanding this difference is key to a correct interpretation of our mandate.

When the Ontario Legislature included the promotion and protection of the welfare and interests of the Association and of the human resources profession in the objects of the Association, what did it mean?

The debate on the floor of the Ontario Legislature leading up to the passage of the Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013, made it clear that the Ontario Legislature understood that a strong and vibrant Human Resources profession overseen by a strong professional regulatory body was in the public interest.

As discussed elsewhere¹, objects must be interpreted as a whole such that the interpretation of any individual object must be congruent with all other objects. All objects, including Object (c) must be understood within the overall context of the promotion and protection of the public interest. In other words, HRPA can promote and protect the welfare and interests of the Association and of the human

resources profession but not in any way that is detrimental to the promotion and protection of the public interest.

It is possible to work out the ‘sweet spot’ between the interests of the public and the interests of the profession if we distinguish between the ‘noble’ interests of the profession and the parochial self-interest of its members.

Among the ‘noble’ Interests of the profession, we could list:

- Making a contribution to society
- Being recognized as making a contribution to society
- Being seen as trustworthy by the public

Among the more parochial self-interests of the members of the profession, we could list:

- Better remuneration
- Better career opportunities
- Greater power and decision-making autonomy
- Enhanced social status
- Competitive advantage in applying for jobs and consulting engagements

The whole self-regulation approach to professional regulation is predicated on the premise that professionals have the maturity and service orientation that enables them to set aside their parochial self-interests and manage their profession in the public interest.

“A distinction must be made between the ‘noble’ interests of the profession and the parochial self-interest of its members.”

Now pursuing the interests of the profession will likely have a positive impact on the interests of the members, but this does not mean that the two sets of interests are interchangeable. The *Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013*, empowers HRPA to promote and protect the ability of Human Resources professionals to make a contribution to society, but it does not empower HRPA to pursue the parochial self-interests of its members.

The same argument can be made for the promotion and protection of the interests of Association. The Ontario Legislature was clear that it was in the public interest for the Association to have the resources and capability to carry out its mandate. The *Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013*, empowers HRPA to promote and protect the ability of Association to carry out its objects, but it does not empower HRPA to pursue its parochial self-interests.

Although the distinction between the noble interests of the profession and the parochial self-interests of the members of the profession and of the Association seems straightforward, in practice these can get blurred. Members who do not understand the difference between the noble interests of the profession and the parochial self-interests of the members of the profession will often expect the Association to focus on the self-interests of the members of the profession.
In including the promotion and protection of the welfare and interests of the Association and of the human resources profession in the objects of the Association, the Ontario Legislature wanted to support a strong and vibrant Human Resources profession overseen by a strong professional regulatory body but this does not mean that the Association is empowered to pursue the self-interests of the members of the profession.