#34 What’s in a name?

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Here is an interesting quirk. In Ontario, for the law profession, the organization that serves the interests of its members carries the name of ‘association’ and the organization that serves the interests of the public by governing and regulating the practice of the profession carries the name of ‘society,’ whereas in the engineering profession, the organization that serves the interests of its members carries the name of ‘society’ and the organization that serves the interests of the public by governing and regulating the practice of the profession is the society carries the name of ‘association.’ So the both the words ‘association’ and ‘society’ can refer to either the member-benefit organization or the professional regulatory body. But the name quirks don’t end there.

One term that is protected in law is ‘college’ which, the context of health care is restricted to bodies that regulate individuals who provide health care under statutory authority. On the other hand, the term ‘college’ has a use in education which is also regulated by law (actually there are a few different usages here too). So we have the Ontario Veterinary College and the College of Veterinarians of Ontario. Both
are ‘Colleges’ but the former is a well-known veterinary school which is part of the University of Guelph, and the latter is the professional regulatory body for veterinarians in Ontario which also happens to be located in Guelph.

It is not required that professional regulatory bodies governed by an act of the Ontario Legislature use the word ‘Ontario’ in their name. Of the 39 professional regulatory bodies in Ontario, 36 have the word ‘Ontario’ in their name. The three that do not are the Law Society of Upper Canada (LSUC), the College of Early Childhood Regulators (CECE), and the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA). In the case of the Law Society of Upper Canada, it is using the pre-confederation name of the province to highlight its long heritage.

Sometimes professional regulatory bodies avoid the issue by having neither ‘association,’ ‘society,’ ‘college,’ or ‘institute’ in their name. The Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario (CPA Ontario). Keeping in mind that CPA Ontario is an amalgamation of an ‘Institute,’ an ‘association,’ and a ‘society,’ the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario Act, 2017 cleverly avoids any of those words and simply refers to CPA Ontario. All professional regulatory bodies in Ontario are corporations without share capital. The other interesting example is Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO). Although PEO’s statutory name is the Association of Professional Engineers of the Province of Ontario, Professional Engineers Ontario was adopted in 1993. The name change was made to avoid the connotations of the word ‘association’ and to give a more modern sounding name to the organization.

Looking beyond the name

The point is that having the words ‘association,’ ‘society,’ ‘college’ or ‘institute’ in one’s name doesn’t say much about the mandate of the organization. Organizations with the same words in their name may have very different mandates, whereas organizations with different words in their name may have similar mandates. The only way to know for sure is to look at the objects of the organization.