#57 Vision, mission, and strategy: How’s it different for professional regulatory bodies?

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Professional regulatory bodies are creatures of statute. The mission of the organization is defined by the objects of the corporation which are set out in the enabling legislation\(^1\). Statutory professional regulatory bodies do not define their own mission. In fact, professional regulatory bodies cannot add to, subtract from, or modify their objects. So the mission is set from the very start. This becomes the starting point.

In the case of HRPA, section 4 of the Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013, sets out the objects of the HRPA. This is the mission of the HRPA.

There is a difference between the mission and the mission statement. The mission statement is a paraphrase of the true mission. The mission statement should be short and memorable. However,

\(^1\) Indeed, in statutes such as the Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013, the word ‘objects’ is translated in French as ‘mission.’
whenever one goes from more words to less there is always some loss of either detail or nuance or both. With a complex and nuanced set of objects such as HRPA’s, any mission statement will struggle to accurately capture the full detail and nuance of the full mission. Nonetheless, given that there will be a mission statement, this mission statement should be true to the essence or intent of the objects.

HRPA’s mission is more complex than that of many not-for-profit corporations. There are different facets to the objects. It doesn’t necessarily help that HRPA’s objects are written in ‘statute speak.’ It does take some knowledge and skill to interpret the objects (‘statutory interpretation’). It is also the case that HRPA’s objects include elements at very different levels of specificity. For instance, the first object starts with ‘to promote and protect the public interest,’ this is followed by ‘by governing and regulating the practice of members of the Association and firms in accordance with this Act and the by-laws,’ and finally ‘including, establishing, maintaining, developing and enforcing standards of qualification, standards of practice, standards of professional ethics, standards of knowledge, skill and proficiency, and regulating the practice, competence and professional conduct of members of the Association and firms.’ In addition to broad statements of purpose, HRPA’s mission statement also includes very specific activities.

In addition to the specific activities included within the objects, statutes such as the Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013, also include other activities that professional regulatory bodies must do—activities such as reviewing and investigating complaints, conducting discipline hearings as requires, maintaining an appeal process, and so on. Although not part of the objects, these are activities that professional regulatory bodies must carry out. A challenge in working with HRPA’s objects is establishing priorities. Obviously, some of the objects are not as important as others. For instance, HRPA’s fourth object is “to promote inter-professional collaboration with other professional bodies.” It is quite clear, however, that HRPA would miss the mark if it were to allocate most of its resources to this object. The Act gives the HRPA Board of directors a lot of discretion in setting priorities, but the allocation of resources should respect the essence or intent of the objects. Also, the HRPA Board of directors needs to respect where the Acts is specific and prescriptive as in Object (a) and ensure that these activities get done.

What about vision?

Although enabling legislation defines a mission and mandate, it does not set out a vision, at least not in the legislation itself. The Legislature did not spell out why it gave HRPA the mission it did, but here are a few ways of arriving at a vision for the organization. One is to consider what the desired outcomes of carrying out the objects, the other is to refer back to the statements made from the floor of the Legislature when the Act was being debated. Although these statements are not part of the enabling legislation, these statements give an indication of the intent of the Legislature in passing the Act. The point here is that any vision HRPA may craft for itself must be consistent with the intent that the Legislature has in passing the Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013.

All legislation is enacted to provide a social benefit—there is no other reason for legislatures to act. More information can also be gleaned from the debates from the floor of the Legislature in relation to
the passage of the enabling legislation. In reading the transcripts of the debates, we can discern a few themes:

- Fair and equitable employment relations
- Safe workplaces
- Accessible workplaces
- Productive workplaces

One legislative principle is that of coherence. Unless there is evidence to the contrary, one should assume that the Legislature ‘acts of one mind.’ Various pieces of legislation should be assumed to have coherent aims. From this perspective, one could say that HRPA is part of a broader government vision for employment and the workplace. The vision for HRPA should be consistent with other related legislation such as the Employment Standards Act, 2000, the Labour Relations Act, 1995, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1990, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, and so on.

The HRPA was given the mission it has so that it could support a vision of a fair, equitable, accessible and productive employment relations and workplaces in Ontario. For some, a vision in terms of societal outcomes may be too far removed. It is also possible to elaborate an intermediate vision for the organization that is more proximal. Nonetheless, a professional regulatory body cannot have a vision that is divorced from the intent of the Legislature in passing the enabling statute.

**From mission to strategy**

The strategy serves the Objects. A strategic planning process identifies strategies that will best enable the professional regulatory body to advance its objects.

Some organizations put additional steps between forming the mission and vision and setting out strategies. For example, many choose to create an overall list of objectives or goals which follow from the mission first, and then to use those as the basis for developing strategies.

A professional regulatory body’s objects and/or its goals and objectives derived from the objects will drive its strategies. Vertical alignment refers to the configuration of strategies, objectives, action plans, and decisions throughout the various levels of the organization. Strategies must be vertically aligned with the Objects. Vertical alignment of strategies will ensure that strategies are related directly to goals which are related directly to the organization’s mission, which in turn will lead to the fulfillment of the vision. In the other direction, beneath the strategies are the specific tactics that will be implemented to enact the strategies.

Horizontal alignment is also important. Horizontal alignment of strategies ensures that all strategies work together and not against each other. In other words, all parts of the organization need to sing from the same songbook.

**Strategy execution and vertical alignment**

Vertical alignment doesn’t mean much if things don’t get done. But it is also the case that the execution of strategies that are not aligned with the objects is very problematic for professional regulatory bodies.
In fact, not-for-profit corporations like HRPA do not have any powers beyond the scope of carrying out their objects—sticking to the objects of the corporation is a legal imperative. Executing on strategies that are not aligned with the objects introduces exposure for the corporation in that the courts could strike down any action taken outside the ambit of the objects; it also brings about personal exposure for directors of the corporation who knowingly allow the corporation to act outside the scope of its objects. So it is very important that all strategies be aligned with the objects. Of course, the desired state of affairs is strong strategy execution and strong vertical alignment to the objects.