#67 WIIFM thinking is corrosive to professional regulatory bodies

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WIIFM, of course, stands for what’s in it for me. What members pay for and what members get is different for professional associations and professional regulatory bodies. Although members financially support their professional regulatory bodies by way of membership dues, this does not mean that professional regulatory bodies exist to provide services to their members.

The logic of professional self-regulation is that professionals support their professional regulatory body but that the main beneficiaries of professional regulation are the public. This can be contrasted to professional associations which exist to serve the needs and interests of their members. Here the logic is that members get a direct service or benefit in return for their membership dues. One can quickly see that the logic of professional regulatory bodies and the logic of associations are quite different¹.

Furthermore, it is corrosive to a professional regulatory body to think of it in terms of association logic. Here’s why.

The purpose of professional regulatory bodies is not to create value for members but to promote and protect the public interest. The primary beneficiaries of the work of professional regulatory bodies are the public not the professionals under regulation. The professionals under regulation support the work of their professional regulatory body financially and otherwise, but the direct beneficiaries of the work of professional regulatory bodies are the public. The logic of this lies in the deal professions make with

¹ In the language of corporate purposes, professional associations are mutual-benefit not-for-profit corporations and professional regulatory bodies are public-benefit not-for-profit corporations.
society. In exchange for the extraordinary privilege of self-regulation (with all its collateral benefits for the profession and its members), the professions agree to create and maintain a professional regulatory body which mission and mandate are to manage the profession in the public interest.

**Self-regulation is not entirely altruistic**

There is value for professionals in establishing and maintaining a professional regulatory body which serves the public interest. As described in an earlier article, there are collateral benefits to members of conducting activities intended to promote and protect the public interest, and the increased legitimacy. In fact, the increased legitimacy that the grant of self-regulation gives to a profession and its members is something that an ‘association’ which acts in the interests of its members can never match.

The challenge, however, is that the benefits of supporting a professional regulatory body to the members are indirect and require a greater *delay of gratification*. Those who want an immediate return on investment (‘WIIFM’) as in the *service for fee* arrangement will have difficulties with the more indirect and longer-term return of professional self-regulation even if the rewards are greater.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Professional regulatory body</th>
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<td>The primary beneficiaries of the work of a professional association are the members of the association.</td>
<td>The primary beneficiaries of the work of a professional regulatory body are the public.</td>
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<td>For their dues, members can expect to be provided products and services.</td>
<td>For their dues, members can expect their professional regulatory body to fulfil its mandate and to keep the public safe and in doing so maintain and enhance the confidence the public has in the profession.</td>
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<td>Short-term return on investment. More immediate.</td>
<td>Greater rewards but longer-term</td>
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What happens when the logic of professional self-regulation is lost is that members start thinking ‘why should I pay for others (the public) to get the benefit?’ or ‘I want to see an immediate benefit for my dues.’ This kind of thinking puts pressure on the professional regulatory body has a number of detrimental effects:

- Expectations that the professional regulatory body will serve the interests of the members actually pulls the professional regulatory body outside of its statutory mandate to pull away from its core mandate.
- Resources that are spent providing products and services to members beyond those that are relevant to carrying out the primary mandate, simply draw resources away from carrying out the primary mandate.
- Trying to serve two masters leads to confusion about the mission and mandate of the organization.

This is not to say that professionals should not expect their professional regulatory bodies to deliver value. Professionals can and should expect their professional regulatory bodies to fulfil their statutory mandate to the fullest and to maintain or enhance the confidence that the public has in the profession.

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2 #63 A model which explains how members benefit from professional regulation. [https://www.hrpa.ca/Documents/Regulation/LinkedIn-Articles/63-A-model-which-explains-how-members-benefit-from-professional-regulation.pdf](https://www.hrpa.ca/Documents/Regulation/LinkedIn-Articles/63-A-model-which-explains-how-members-benefit-from-professional-regulation.pdf)
However, expecting one’s professional regulatory body to provide benefits and services over and above the promotion and protection of the public interest is, in fact, corrosive to the work of professional regulatory bodies.