#79 What does the public think of Human Resource professionals?
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The Gallup Organization has been surveying Americans annually on the honesty and ethical standards of various occupations/professions since 1976. More recently, Insights West, out of Vancouver, has begun surveying Canadians on the level of respect they have for various occupations/professions. Insights West conducted their first Most Respected Professions survey in 2016, and have repeated the survey annually with the latest survey conducted in March 2018. So how does Human Resources compare to other occupation/professions? Unfortunately, neither the Gallup survey nor the Insights West survey included Human Resources among the surveyed occupations/professions, so we decided to find out by commissioning our own public opinion surveys.

The Gallup question and the Insights West question are somewhat different, so we decided to try both.

<table>
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<th>Gallup</th>
<th>Insights West</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields?</td>
<td>“All things considered, do you have a positive or negative opinion of each of the following professions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ very high,</td>
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HRPA commissioned Ipsos to ask these two questions of the Ontario public. The sample was drawn via the Ipsos I-Say panel and non-panel sources. Quotas and weighting were employed to ensure that the sample reflects that of the Ontario population by region, age and gender according to Canadian census information. The questions appeared on different weeks. The idea here was to avoid spurious agreement by having both questions appear on the same survey. First, we asked the Gallup question. This question was inserted in an Ipsos poll conducted from January 22 to 24, 2018. There were 1,010 respondents for this question. The Insights West question was inserted in an Ipsos poll conducted from February 5 to 7, 2018. There were 1,005 respondents for this question.

The samples focused on the Ontario public for a number of reasons. For one, HRPA’s jurisdiction is provincial. Then, there is the fact that the Human Resources profession is regulated in Ontario whereas it is not in other provinces except Quebec. This could have an impact on attitudes towards the Human Resources profession.

The Gallup question

The Gallup Organization reports the percent positive score as the percent of respondents choosing ‘high’ or ‘very high’ on the question. In our survey, 29% of respondent gave a ‘high’ or ‘very high’ response for registered Human Resources professionals.

“How would you rate the honesty and ethical standards of registered human resources professionals?”

![Graph showing the distribution of responses to the Gallup question.]

How does 29% compare to the scores of other occupations/professions? It depends on the reference group one chooses. For 2017, Gallup ratings\(^1\) ranged from a high of 82% for nurses to a low of 8% for lobbyists. Medical Doctors and Engineers achieved ratings of 65%, Accountants a rating of 39%. The occupations/professions closest to Human Resources professionals would be nursing home operators at 26% and auto mechanics at 32%.

However, we find that regulated occupations/professions tend to occupy the upper half of the list whereas unregulated occupations/professions tend to occupy the lower half of the list. When compared to regulated professions, Human Resources professionals are quite low with only lawyers obtaining a lower score at 18%.

\(^1\) [https://news.gallup.com/poll/224639/nurses-keep-healthy-lead-honest-ethical-profession.aspx](https://news.gallup.com/poll/224639/nurses-keep-healthy-lead-honest-ethical-profession.aspx)
Although there is evidence to suggest that the opinions of Canadians and American are quite congruent in their opinions of the ethical standards and honesty of occupations/professions\(^2\), there is an awkwardness in comparing an Ontario-based rating with American data. Of possible significance is the fact that professions are regulated differently in the US and Canada. It is also the case that the Gallup results are based on a telephone survey whereas our results were based on an online panel. A more convincing argument would be made if the comparison were to Canadian data, or even better to Ontario data.

**The Insights West question**

Insights West reports the percent positive score as the percent of respondents choosing ‘*somewhat positive*’ or ‘*very positive*.’ The most recent survey of occupations/professions was conducted in early March 2018. Although the survey was conducted with proportional representation from all the provinces, we focused on the data from the approximately 400 respondents from Ontario\(^3\). In the 2018 Insights West survey, firefighters came in first at 89%. The most highly rated regulated professions were nurses at 88%. The occupation with the lowest rating was politician at 25%.

The percentage ratings for the Insights West question were higher than for the Gallup question for all occupations/professions. However, the relative positions of the various occupations/professions were very similar indeed.

In our survey, 64% of respondent gave a ‘*somewhat positive*’ or ‘*very positive*’ response for registered Human Resources professionals. Inserting that result in the Insights West table, this comes out as an average score. Registered Human Resources professionals were ranked 17\(^{th}\) out of 28 occupations/professions.

\[
\text{“All things considered, do you have a positive or negative opinion of each of the following professions?”} \\
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c|c}
 & 0\% & 10\% & 20\% & 30\% & 40\% & 50\% \\
\hline
\text{Very positive} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{64\% Positive} \\
\text{Somewhat positive} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} \\
\text{Somewhat negative} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{16\%} \\
\text{Very negative} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{3\%} \\
\text{Not sure} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} & \text{} \\
\end{array}
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Again, as with the Gallup results, regulated professions figure prominently among the more highly rated occupations/professions. Regulated professions occupy 9 out of the top 13 occupations/professions. Of the eleven regulated professions surveyed, registered Human Resources professionals fell at number ten. Only lawyers, with a rating of 51%, fell below registered Human Resources professionals. Accountants achieved a rating of 81%. The occupations/professions closest to Human Resources


\(^3\) [https://insightswest.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Professions2018_Tables.pdf](https://insightswest.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Professions2018_Tables.pdf)
professionals were building contractors at 58% and athletes, judges, and journalists at 66%, 67%, and 67% respectively.

Discussion

With both the Gallup question and the Insights West question, the results were very similar.

- 29% of the Ontario public is of the opinion that registered Human Resources professionals have ‘high’ or ‘very high’ levels of ethical standards and honesty
- 64% of the Ontario public have a positive attitude towards registered Human Resources professionals

In both cases, the results are average in comparison to all occupations but quite low in comparison to other regulated professions.

An often-used model for regulated professions is that of a deal between the profession and society. In exchange for a commitment to high standards of competence and ethics and the willingness to establish and support a professional regulatory body which will hold regulated professionals accountable for this commitment to high standards of competence and ethics, society grants the occupation the status of being a profession. Although the formal deal is instantiated in legislation, it takes time to this deal to permeate public opinion. It is also the case that (1) the occupation must act like a profession before the public-at-large will grant the status of being a profession, and (2) it takes time for this to happen.

The Human Resources profession is at that point. By way of the Registered Human Resources Professionals Act, 2013, the profession has inked the deal with the Ontario Legislature, but this has not yet percolated down to public awareness.
Insights West’s 2018 *Most Respected Professions* Survey

https://insightswest.com/news/firefighters-and-nurses-top-list-of-canadas-respected-professionals/