Learning objectives

- Learn about the basic concepts of professionalism and professionalization and where HR fits according to these models
- Learn about the core questions that HR professionals should be asking themselves in regards to professionalism and professionalization
- Get a sense of the diversity of opinion amongst HR professionals in regards to some aspects of professionalism and professionalization in HR
- Learn about what are the likely next steps in the professionalization of HR and HR professionals

Socratic method

Socratic method (also known as method of elenchus, elenctic method, Socratic seminar or Socratic debate), named after the classical Greek philosopher Socrates, is a form of inquiry and discussion between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas.

Wikipedia
“Do you agree that the professionalization of HR is, or should be, an important issue for the profession?”

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don’t know

Source: HRPA 2013 Member Survey

NOT EVERYONE IS ON BOARD

“Okay, we no longer want to be the people who carry the watermelon to the company picnic; we are going to become a profession.”

Richard E. Boyatzis
Questions for discussion

• What is the trend? Is support for the professionalization of HR increasing? decreasing? staying about the same? or fluctuating up and down without any particular long-term trend?
• What does it mean to support the professionalization of HR?

What do we mean by the professionalization of HR?

• The survey never defined ‘professionalization,’ what do we mean by ‘professionalization’?
• Are we all thinking of the same thing when we think of the professionalization of HR?

Professionalization

“...is the process by which occupations become professions.”

“... refers the process by which the members of an occupation collectively strive to achieve the recognition and status that is accorded to the established professions by emulating or adopting the defining characteristics of these established professions.”
Members of a profession collectively emulate or adopt the defining characteristics of established professions.

In order to achieve the recognition and status that is accorded to the established professions, members of a profession collectively emulate or adopt the defining characteristics of established professions.

Question for discussion

- What are those ‘defining characteristics of established professions’ that we are emulating or adopting, or should emulate or adopt?
- How does emulation work?

FRIEDSON’S (2001) FIVE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONS

1. Specialized work in the officially recognized economy that is believed to be grounded in a body of theoretically based, discretionary knowledge and skill and that is accordingly given special status in the labor force;
2. exclusive jurisdiction in a particular division of labor created and controlled by occupational negotiation;
3. a sheltered position in both external and internal labour markets that is based on qualifying credentials created by the occupation;
4. a formal training program lying outside the labor market that produces the qualifying credentials, which is controlled by the occupation and associated with higher education; and
5. an ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain and to the quality rather than the economic efficiency of work.
Convincing the public

- According to various models of professionalization, convincing the public that HR is indeed a true profession appears to be an important, and perhaps key, aspect of professionalization.
- What does ‘the public’ think of HR? Does ‘the public’ think of HR as a true profession?
- What are the drivers of the public perception of HR as a profession?
- What do we need to do to impact the public’s perception of HR as a true profession?
Professionalism

- Interestingly, ‘professionalism’ comes up fairly frequently in HR but there is actually very little that has been written about what ‘professionalism’ means for HR professionals.
- We can take ‘professionalism’ to mean the set of values, attitudes, and behaviours that are expected of professionals.

Ten elements of professionalism

The Chief Justice of Ontario Advisory Committee on Professionalism listens to ten elements of professionalism for lawyers:
- Scholarship
- Integrity
- Honour
- Leadership
- Independence
- Pride
- Spirit and enthusiasm
- Civility and collegiality
- Service
- Balanced commercialism
Questions for discussion

• When asked, HR professionals will often say that they are ‘professional’ but many will also say that there are many other HR professionals whose lack of professionalism gives the profession a bad name, what does this mean?
• How do we inculcate professional attitudes, values, and behaviours to fledgling HR professionals?

Additional Questions for discussion

• If the professionalization of HR and HR professionals is important to HR professionals, why is it that we don’t talk about it more?
• Are HR professionals truly interested in professionalizing, or are we just interested in some aspects (the status and recognition) but not others (the obligations of being professionals)?
• As a whole, do HR professionals have a clear vision of what it would look like for HR professionals to be true professionals (what it would look like when we get there, if indeed we chose to get there)?
• In regards to professionalism, does HR need a crisis, like the Enron and Tyco debacles for the accounting profession, to push professionalism and ethics to the forefront?
• One of the hallmarks of true professions is that they espouse, in some form or another, a ‘higher ideal,’ what is the HR profession’s ‘higher ideal’?
• What is the role of HR associations in the process of professionalization?

Final question

• Has today’s discussion been valuable to you?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure
THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION