

## Initiative #3: Professionalism

In a 2011 survey conducted by the Queen's University Industrial Relations Center on the State of HR in Canada (Juniper & Hill, 2011), the authors noted that those HR professionals who reported that they are "pessimistic" or "not sure" about the future of HR were, in general, concerned about the lack of professionalism in the profession and the credentials that are required in order to obtain the CHRP designation.

### **Regulatory-strength professionalism**

Right of the bat, we need to put out there that there is a difference between how the term professionalism is used in everyday discourse and how it is used in the professions. In everyday discourse the term professionalism refers to behaviours that one would expect of professionals—courteous, reliable, respectful, honest, responsible, and competent. In the context of professional regulation, the concept of professionalism is deeper and more than just a nice to have.

"Neither economic incentives, nor technology, nor administrative control has proved an effective surrogate for the commitment to integrity evoked in the ideal of professionalism"

Sullivan, 1995

"But ultimately, public protection depends on the culture of self-responsibility and accountability that goes with professionalism. And if the regulatory process loses some of its ability to support the professionalism on which public protection depends, that's a problem."

William Lahey, 2011

Two differences come to mind between the popular meaning of professionalism and the regulatory-strength meaning of professionalism (1) the popular meaning of professionalism focuses on behaviour mimic (2) the regulatory-strength meaning of professionalism focused on fundamental values, and intrinsic motivation.

### **Regulatory-strength professionalism is an essential aspect of protection of the public**

Miller's pyramid, possibly the most widely cited model of clinical performance in medicine places professionalism at the very top of the pyramid. A professional may be competent, but this does not mean that he or she will actually put this competence into practice on a consistent basis.

The main point here is that competence is not enough to protect the public. Also, competence is not what distinguishes professionals from other expert occupations.

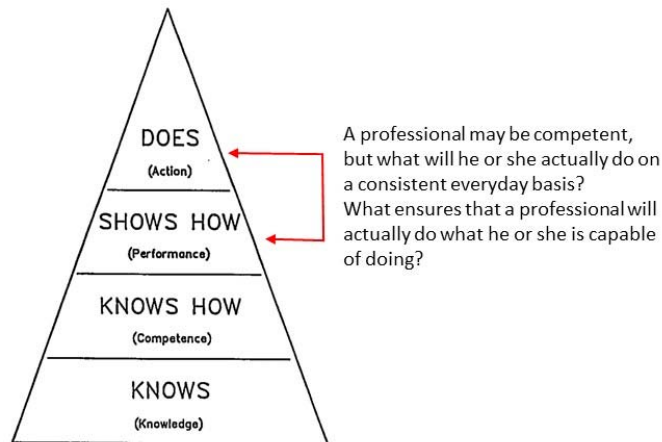


Figure 1. Framework for clinical assessment.

### Miller's (1990) Pyramid

### What is professionalism?

From Sullivan (2000), we have:

*"In Canada and the United States the social basis of the extraordinary grant of occupational authority and independence to professionalized occupations such as medicine and law has been a social contract between the profession and the public. Professionalism is the moral understanding among professionals that gives concrete reality to this social contract. It is based on mutual trust. In exchange for a grant of authority to control key aspects of their market and working conditions through licensing and credentialing, professionals are expected to maintain high standards of competence and moral responsibility. The work of the traditional learned professions has long been understood to require a significant domain of discretion in individual practice. It has therefore been thought to require a stronger sense of moral dedication than most occupations. A professional is not required to ignore material considerations but is expected to subordinate financial gain to the higher values of responsibility to clients and to the public interest."*

From the Chief Justice of Ontario Advisory Committee on Professionalism (2001), we have:

*"Professionalism as a personal characteristic is revealed in an attitude and approach to an occupation that is commonly characterized by intelligence, integrity, maturity, and thoughtfulness."*

Freidson, a widely-cited author on the topic of professionalism, included the following as one of the key characteristics of professionalism: *"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."*

There are two key points:

- Professionalism is a 'deep' construct (attitudes, values, orientation, ideology) that goes beyond the surface (behaviour)
- Professionalism is an ideal

Professionalism is an ideal. This kind of idealism is sometimes difficult to maintain in the face of cynicism. Indeed, many established professions are concerned about the erosion of professionalism as an ideal.

HR has yet to define its 'guiding ideology,' yet it is essential that it do so. Without this kind of guiding ideology, HR becomes just another expert occupation.

### **The process of socialization: How professionalism gets inculcated**

BusinessDictionary.com defines socialization as follows: "process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, language, social skills, and value to conform to the norms and roles required for integration into a group or community. It is a combination of self-imposed (because the individual wants to conform) and externally-imposed rules, and the expectations of the others." The socialization of HR professionals is a topic that has not received much attention in the past but it is an issue that we need to come to grips with if we are to push forward with the professionalization agenda.

Although the process of socialization into a profession is an on-going one, it is especially important in the formative stages of professionals' careers. To the extent that HR is a defined group or community, socialization does occur; but it has never been intentional or focused. It is also not clear that the knowledge, language, social skills, and values that are being socialized are those that are needed to move forward with the professionalization agenda. Other professions have been more focused and deliberate in socializing new professionals into their professions. Indeed, there appears to be very little discussion of what it means to be a professional in the formative stages of HR professionals' careers.

For many professions, inculcating the attitudes and values of professionalism is the most important aspect of any professional education. Professionals have attitudes and values that do set them apart from others. Professionals have an internalized standard as to what is good work and will strive to meet that standard. Professionals take pride in the quality of their work—whether this quality is appreciated by their employers or clients or employees not. Professionals will tend to identify with their profession more than with their employer. Professionals do a good job whether someone is looking or not. Professionals are committed to and diligent in keeping their knowledge and skills up to date.

It is possible that professions simply attract those kinds of individuals, but socialization into professions is also a strong shaping influence. We need to get to individuals at the formative stages of their careers to inculcate these professional attitudes and behaviours as well as the identification with the HR community.

HRPA does not yet have a model or framework for the professionalization of HR professionals.

### **What are other professions doing to promote professionalism amongst their members?**

Getting practical, the following is by no means an exhaustive list. They are just examples of what some other professions are doing in regards to professionalism.

- The University of Waterloo has established a Centre for Accounting Ethics. The Centre for Accounting Ethics was established in 1991 through a grant from the Auditing and Accounting Development Fund. In supporting projects designed to enhance the teaching of ethics to accounting students and the research of ethical issues in accounting, the Centre aims to help prepare future accountants and financial managers to exercise professional judgement within an ethical framework and to promote high ethical standards.
- The Centre for Accounting Ethics at the University of Waterloo sponsored an Ethics Symposium on the topic of Accounting Professionalism. This symposium brought together thought leaders from academia and business to explore and discuss the status of professionalism in accounting. This event provided an opportunity for participants to interact and share ideas throughout the symposium and identify and discuss those questions that are important to the accounting profession and their effect on practice and policy.
- The Centre for Accounting Ethics at the University of Waterloo sponsors an undergraduate essay competition. The Estey Essay Competition is an opportunity for students, who have demonstrated an interest in business or accounting/finance ethics, to submit a research paper for a chance to win \$500 and present their paper at the 2015 Canadian Academic Accounting Association (CAAA) annual meeting.
- The Law Society of Upper Canada has a *Professional Responsibility and Practice Course* which must be completed after the Articles of Clerkship has been filed with the Law Society and the Articling Program fee has been paid. The course is a 30 to 40 hour course and there is an assessment component towards the end of the course.
- The LSUC requires that lawyers and paralegals who are practicing law or providing legal services must complete in each calendar year at least 12 CPD Hours in eligible educational activities consisting of a minimum of 3 Professionalism Hours on topics related to professional responsibility. In other words, a quarter of CPD activity must be on topics related to professional responsibility. Professionalism Hours must be accredited by the Law Society of Upper Canada.
- The Law Society has developed a series of *Professionalism Case Studies* to be used as the basis for discussion by study groups. A Professionalism Case Study is a description of an actual situation in which a lawyer or paralegal is faced with a decision involving one or more ethical, professional responsibility or practice management issues.
- The LSUC has established the Chief Justice of Ontario's Advisory Committee on Professionalism. Composed of representatives of the judiciary, the Law Society, the legal academy and various legal and county law organizations, the Committee acts as a steering committee and a clearinghouse to generate ideas and to make recommendations to other organizations and individuals within the legal community about initiatives to enhance professionalism.
- Chief Justice of Ontario's Advisory Committee on Professionalism established an essay prize in legal ethics. Every year, the Chief Justice's Advisory Committee awards the best student papers on any subject relating to legal ethics and professionalism.
- The Chief Justice of Ontario has established a fellowship in legal ethics and professionalism—The Chief Justice of Ontario Fellowships in Legal Ethics and Professionalism.

- Chief Justice of Ontario's Advisory Committee on Professionalism has created a database for use by the law schools for curriculum, developing a professionalism "tool kit", intended to provide law firms with educational resources for associates, and a series of six continuing legal education sessions led by distinguished members of the Bar to talk to lawyers about ethics and professionalism.
- Chief Justice of Ontario's Advisory Committee on Professionalism sponsors an annual colloquia on topic related to professionalism.
- The Professionalism program at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Medicine, is integrated into the formal curriculum during both the pre-clerkship and clerkship years. The goal of the program is to incorporate the values and attributes of professionalism into medical students by making students aware of their present and future obligations. The professionalism program not only emphasizes how students are expected to behave, but also discusses why certain characteristics and attributes are absolutely necessary for the practice of medicine.
- At University of Waterloo, a course on Professionalism and Ethics in Engineering Practice is offered to Engineering Co-op students. The course provides a framework for understanding professionalism and ethics within society as reflected through practice in the field of professional engineering. Course topics on professionalism include the history of engineering and professions, the licensing of professional engineers and the certification of the practice of offering engineering services to the public, and the regulation of professional engineering in Ontario through Professional Engineers Ontario. Course topics on ethics include the philosophy of ethics and the Code of Ethics, the philosophy of justice, and the definition and disciplining of professional misconduct. Case studies will apply these principles to workplace situations including factors such as environmental ethics, whistle blowing, conflict of interest, and health and safety.
- The Canadian Institute of Actuaries (CIA) offers a Professionalism Workshop. The CIA's Professionalism Workshop is a 3/4-day session that provides an overview of professionalism issues and makes extensive use of the case study method. This workshop is a requirement to become an Associate of the CIA (ACIA) and for Property & Casualty candidates applying for Fellowship in the CIA.
- A number of professions have published documents that spell out what professionalism means to the profession. For instance, the Chief Justice of Ontario struck an Advisory Committee on Professionalism. The document *Elements of Professionalism* was authored by the Committee's Working Group on the Definition of Professionalism. The Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA) published document entitled *The Concepts of Professionalism – An APEGGA Statement*.
- The Law School at the University of Ottawa has put in place what it calls the *Professionalism Initiative*. The purpose of the Professionalism Initiative is to explore, support and challenge the public interest role of lawyers. The framework for the Common Law's Professionalism Initiative is a vision of the law where achieving social justice is a foremost concern for faculty and students. Through the Professionalism Initiative the faculty strives to inspire and support the legal community's efforts to contribute to a civil society.

- The Law School at the University of Ottawa has established a speaker series on the topic of professionalism. Since its inception in 2009, Common Law’s Professionalism Speaker Series – the first such series dedicated to issues of professionalism and ethics in the legal profession in Canada – has hosted over 20 events, attended by over 1,300 law students, lawyers and judges. Speakers have included appellate judges, the Treasurer of the Law Society of Upper Canada, a former Attorney General, and leading academics and lawyers in the field.
- At the McGill Faculty of Medicine, students are evaluated in regards to their professionalism both in individual courses and longitudinally. The Medical Student Performance Record (MSPR) or Dean’s letter will include comments on professionalism.
- The College of Psychologists of Ontario has an annual seminar on the topic of ethics, standards, and conduct. (This is the only event that the College of Psychologists of Ontario puts on.)

To summarize, the kinds of initiatives professions engage in to foster professionalism in their members include:

<b>Initiative to support professionalism among members of the profession</b>	
Establishing centres within academic institutions to focus on professionalism and ethics in the profession	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Establishing fellowships in professional ethics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sponsoring symposia or colloquia on the topic of professionalism either on an <i>ad hoc</i> or continuing basis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Established speaker series on the topic of professionalism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sponsoring essay competitions for students on the topic of professionalism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Requiring professionals-to-be to complete a course or workshop on professionalism and related topics as a requirement for entry into the profession	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Requiring that a certain amount of Continuing Professional Development be on the topic of professionalism on an on-going basis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Developing case study materials on professionalism issues to facilitate discussion among study groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Setting up advisory committees on professionalism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Creating materials to support the teaching of professionalism in professional programs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Developing formal curricula in professionalism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Publishing papers or position statements on the topic of professionalism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Students are formally evaluated with respect to their professionalism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

### **Who is doing what?**

Consider the following institutional stakeholders in professional regulation:



It is interesting to note that it is the professional regulatory bodies and the academic institutions that are taking the lead in promoting professionalism. HRPAs need to take a leadership role in bringing those academics who are responsible for curriculum design and the socialization of HR professionals.

**What is the HR profession doing to foster professionalism among its members?**

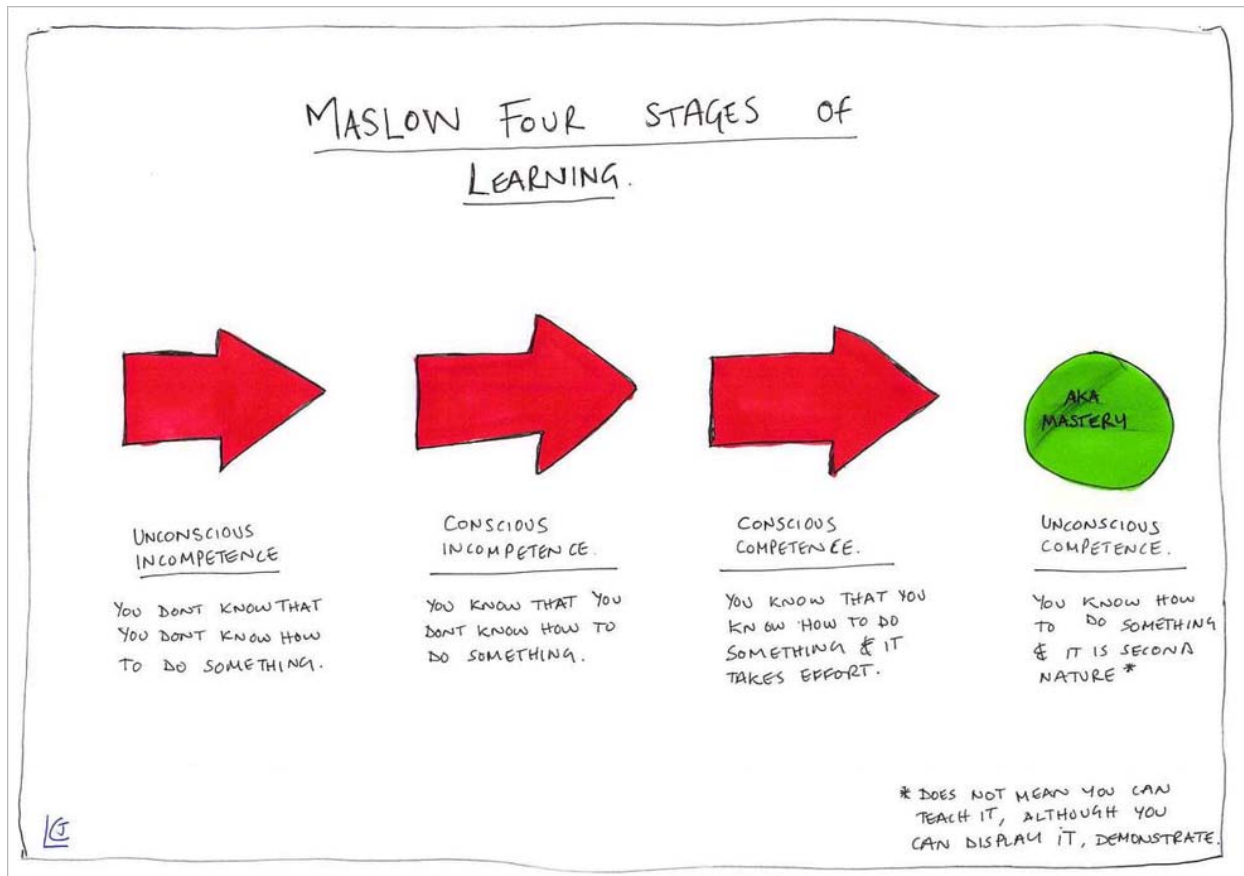
Well, not much. The topic of professionalism is virtually invisible in HR. For instance, as far as I know, the topic of professionalism has never been the subject of a session at the HRPAs Annual Conference. There was one article on professionalization that appeared in *HR Professional*, but ironically the article was about exhorting HR professionals to recognize the professionalization of many occupations in the workplace and not about the professionalization of Human Resources professionals. Obviously, our editorial boards and program committees don't see the importance of including professionalism as a topic.

**The big question: Why isn't the HR profession doing anything about professionalism?**

Why is it that established professions see professionalism as a core topic and issue but that the HR profession does not? Perhaps an even more important question is how we turn the situation around?

One explanation may be that this is normal for the stage of professional development that HR is at. Simply, that HR doesn't know what it doesn't know. What makes the HR profession particularly refractory to the topic of professionalism is that HR professionals believe they are already there.

A model that could be useful here is Maslow's Four Stages of Learning.



Right now, the HR profession seems to be at the ‘unconscious incompetence’ stage. According to this model, the next step would be to move to the ‘conscious incompetence’ stage.

HR professionals aren’t going to go there without a prod. For example, if we were to wait for the *HR Professional’s* editorial board or the Annual Conferences program committee to put the topic of professionalism on the agenda, it would never happen.

There is actually a point of irony here. Only one article was published in *HR Professional* specifically on the topic of professionalization and professionalism—that article was *Professionals and the New Collectivism* authored by Dr. Shelagh Campbell which appeared in the March/April 2012 issue of *HR Professional*. The ironic aspect was that this article was not about the professionalization of Human Resources, its main point was that HR professionals should pay attention to the professionalization of occupational groups such as in the performing arts and video game development industry.

In accounting, there was a resurgence of interest in professionalism and ethics in the wake of the Enron, Worldcom, and Tyco scandals. The accounting profession took a serious hit for failing to protect the public interest. These scandals acted as a wake-up call to accounting profession and pushed it out of the ‘unconscious incompetence’ stage in regards to ethics and professionalism.



**Specific actions:**

Inculcating professionalism is really a culture change initiative. It is a matter of doing many things over time.

- HRPAs need to develop a statement on professionalism and what it means for HR.
- We need to develop a model as to how professionalism is inculcated in professionals. This would involve doing some basic research into how professionalism is inculcated in other professions. For instance, the McGill Faculty of Medicine has a framework for training professionalism that could be adapted.
- HRPAs need to enlist the academic community in making professionalism a focus.
- Make professionalism a required topic for educational programs. To encourage acceptance of this new requirement, HRPAs will likely need to develop a course package.
- Conduct a one-day colloquium on the topic of professionalism in HR
- Introduce 'professionalism hours' as part of the CPD requirement—that a given percentage of CPD activities must fall within a 'professionalism' category.
- Professionalism is a topic that is covered in the jurisprudence exam