

Merger – SO not the Question!

Please start by reading the following table:

Association of Professional Engineers & Geoscientists	Engineering Institute of Canada
College of Dental Surgeons	Dental Association
College of Pharmacists	Pharmacy Association
College of Physical Therapists	Physiotherapy Association
College of Veterinarians	Veterinary Medical Association
Law Society	Bar Association
College of Social Workers	Association of Social Workers
College of Psychologists	Psychological Association
College of Dieticians	Dieticians of Canada
College of Occupational Therapists	Society of Occupational Therapists
College of Opticians	Opticians (Province)
Royal Architectural Institute	Architecture Canada
Financial Planners Standards Council	Canadian Institute of Financial Planners
College of Optometrists	Association of Optometrists
Real Estate Council of BC	Real Estate Association
College of Physicians and Surgeons	Canadian Medical Association
College of Teachers	Teachers Federation
College of Dental Hygienists	Dental Hygienists Association

(This list has been compiled based upon membership in the “Executive Directors and Registrars of Professional Organizations”. Given the structure of society here in Canada, some of the proper names listed above might have either “Canadian” or a “province name” before or after it to correctly describe the organization. Also, given our provincial orientation here in Canada, some of the provincial organizations may have slightly different naming in that particular jurisdiction. Lastly, I apologize to any organization that I over-looked in my research on this topic.)

Note that in every profession listed above, the **left-hand column** represents the **regulatory body** for that group. This body owns, controls and grants the mark, and monitors its members through some combination of code of ethics, mandatory professional development reporting, etc. Membership in good standing in this body is **required** to practice in that profession.

Note that in every profession listed above, the **right-hand column** represents the separate and independent **membership body**. This body delivers membership services of professional development, practitioner assistance and, where needed, advocacy, etc. Membership in these organizations is voluntary, not mandatory, and thus it behooves those membership organizations to deliver value in order to promote membership and sustainability.

The twinning of regulatory and member services organizations in each of these professions brings both and commonality and duality of goals. There are occasions where the two organizations see things differently, creating conflict within the profession. However, ultimately, this is good, as isometric tension and tensile strength are often a positive force in finding equilibriums in controversial aspects of practice.

Now, please read the following table:

Certified General Accountants Association	N/A
Institute of Chartered Accountants	N/A
Society of Management Accountants	N/A

You will notice “N/A” in the right hand membership column. This is because each of the accounting organizations has been constructed since their inception to house regulatory and membership in one organization. As you can see, this structure is contrary to every one of our fellow professions.

You may have seen a TV ad a few years ago, in which the tag line is spoken by a teenage girl who exclaims “That is SO not the question”. Bi-partite or tri-partite merger, of course, has been formally on the agenda or at least on the radar screen forever in this country. While it indeed is very relevant, in my opinion, it is SO not the key question. It is fundamentally important in decision-making and problem-solving to get the question RIGHT.

And that RIGHT question is to address what the two tables above highlight. WHY are WE different to every other professional organization structure? Do we even realize it? If we DO, and believe that we are right and all of them are wrong, what is the basis for this authority of position? And if instead the answer is that their structures are right for their professions and ours is right for ours, again, what is the authority of that position.

The Thought Leaders in this profession need to come forward now and contemplate this point. If we “get it” now, then we first must turn our minds to the restructuring... into the classic separation of “church and state”... of “regulatory and membership” before we address merger. This is indeed a big task. However, it is NOT threatening, except to the extent that it represents change, which we humanly resist. All of the functions that are currently served likely still need to be done. All of the salaried people on the various provincial and national associations, institutes and societies likely still will have a job.

All three of our organizations have wallowed a bit in the diffuse pursuits of our members – public practitioners, industry members, educators, government and not-for-profit employees, etc. At the practitioner level, there is the omnipresent issue of Big Four (Six, Eight... whatever it was historically) dominance in public practice. Perhaps, in morphing to a dual structure, we will finally find out that each of these constituencies of our membership needs its own strong and viable advocacy organ. In other words, maybe we have a National Industry org... and a National Practitioners org, etc, all answerable to a regulatory body that owns and controls the mark(s).

I firmly believe that this is right. And I hope that you, my fellow professionals, can have the insight and courage to see that we will be stronger, and most importantly serve our public better, in this re-write of our structure.

In March of this year, and before the merger spectre resurfaced, I created a new, national, digital multi-designational members' org called the Canadian Federation of Progressive Accountants (www.canfpa.com) in an attempt to address this issue. It was not at the time, and is not now, my intent that this org would become the members' org I am referring to above. It was intended as a stopgap in the vacuum, and a home and forum for the progressively-minded in the profession. CanFPA would welcome the profession to undertake the large task of re-organizing itself.

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