

WHILE ALL know you worked really hard for the degrees you have earned, it took a great deal of learning and acquisition of knowledge and that MBA, or B.Tech, LL.B or MBBS did give you a headstart in your career as a working professional. However, given the state of the growth of knowledge and content in any professional field, your knowledge is fast becoming obsolete. In some professions like information technology, knowledge seems to have a half life of as low as two years.

New research that points out on different ways of doing things and the old ways become redundant. Patients do not want their heart surgery done by a cardiologist who had qualified 10 years ago and did not bother to update himself on the latest technology and research. Engineers and IT professionals are developing so fast that engineers have to work overtime to keep the current applications of technology in their sphere of work.

Management consultants cannot advise their clients based on old and outdated models, skills and competencies of working professionals that were successful in the past do not guarantee future success. Customers and stakeholders demand that working professionals are updated and current in their knowledge and skills. Even the medical profession is now gearing up towards certification every five years that will require doctors and practicing professionals to appear for an examination to verify the currency of their knowledge.

What do working professionals do to keep themselves updated? Reading journals and magazines is not enough, neither is networking or attending training programmes. So what is the way forward?

Certification is the answer to gaining credentials that testify the currency of your knowledge and the fact that you are undertaking continued professional development. Global Professional organisations like Project Management Institute, International Council of Management Consulting Institutes, Society for Human Resources Management, Global Association of IT Professionals and many others in different fields are working towards creating and implementing certification standards for their professions that provide working professionals the credentials that testify their continued professional development. These are usually globally recognised and meet tough accreditation standards.

Many countries have governments that recognise these certifications and provide special opportunities to those who are certified. In some professions like accounting, actuarial sciences and loan financing, it is not possible to start practice till you have achieved certification. The number of countries that require mandatory certification for different professions is on the increase, particularly as qualifications achieved in one country may not meet the standards of another country. A typical example of this are paramedical professions like physiotherapy and nursing and so on.

Organisations that employ professionals are also increasingly looking for certification standards on the resume. All things being equal, if you have high quality certification in the profession that you belong to, your chances of getting a promotion or a new assignment become higher. In fact, some IT companies in India have developed incentive schemes that urge their employees to obtain certification and even grant special leave for preparation for examination. Many also pay the certification fees as it adds to their human capital and brings value and brand equity to the company.

Most of these professional associations

To be or not to be CERTIFIED?

Working professionals need to assess whether they meet the pressures of globalisation



ILLUSTRATION: SEBASTIAN

have developed knowledge, content and training, have professions and require evidence of training and skills before they provide certification. Training programmes in the content and body of knowledge of the profession is the starting point. Examinations are usually in order and sometimes also a viva voce which makes an assessment of skills by a panel of experts. Often you need to sign up to a code of conduct for the profession that specifies ethical behaviour for professionals. Certifications are usually valid for two to three years after which evidence is required to testify continued professional development. These certifications normally cost a large amount, especially if they are given by international organisations, but are well worth it. The professional is entitled to put the abbreviations of the certification at the end of his name and qualifications and in resumes and brochures and other marketing material that requires him to present his credentials.

The value proposition of any certification is the reputation of the awarding organization. Mere giving of a certificate at the end of a training session is not the equivalent of certification. Certifying agencies need to well to have their certification practices accredited by association of accreditation agencies and meet tough international standards to assure

the working professional that he is not being duped of his money but is getting certification that is representative of the best of professional standards.

Other things to watch out for are commercial organisations that make money in the name of professional certification. There are many operators who grant certifications without proper examination procedures and verification of results in return for payment of fees.

Certifications are also trademarks that are normally protected by law in the countries

in which they are marketed so there is a need to also beware of pirates who make their certification logos look remarkably similar to those of professional agencies.

India is poised on the edge of an exponential growth in all spheres. The competitive advantage of a vast pool of knowledge workers is going to propel the growth of the economy and the resurgence of India as a global entity. It is time for governments, professional associations and working professionals to take a good look at how they are using leversages their knowledge potential in these competitive times. Establishing professional standards through certification is a significant part of the way forward. Governments need to set up regulatory mechanisms for auditing the practices of certifying agencies and for recognising those certifications that meet the mark. In the global world, international associations of certifying agencies can establish best practices and enable benchmarking of global certification processes.

Protection of current bodies of knowledge of various professions through appropriate intellectual property rights legislation will also be enacted in the future to bring some ethical practices in the process of granting certification by the agencies.

So if you feel that you are well qualified, have enough credentials, or are too old or too senior to take examinations, or perhaps have achieved too much success in the past and don't need certification, think again. Before you know it, there is not much knowledge left in you that is relevant today. Getting certified is the step forward in assuring yourself and your stakeholders that you possess the knowledge and skills that are demanded by the pressures of globalisation.

(The author is Dean, Center for Human Resources, S.P. Jain Center of Management, Dubai)

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