

A question of trust

In a bewildering array of online solutions and instant experts, the value of qualified professionals becomes more important.

BY **DR DEEN SANDERS**,
CEO OF THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AUTHORITY



AT THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AUTHORITY WE are increasingly asked whether professions have a future in our modern, technologically disruptive world, where information is at your fingers, experts are popping up in every field and opinions flow freely from everyone with a keyboard or microphone.

It's true that the world of professions is undergoing radical change but we are confident that they have a vital role and that their importance is only going to grow. Professions are about so much more than information and opinions. For the individual professional these represent a career that delivers longevity, credibility and a sense of purpose and social standing. For the client of professionals though, professions are really about trust and at its core about having confidence in knowing who the trusted and ethical expert is among the bewildering array of product and service choices, online solutions and instant experts that business can now call on. This is especially true in the field of people management.

It's no surprise that there are questions about the future of 'trusted expertise' in a world where 'opinion' is rapidly becoming an economic currency. We know from choice theory research that because of the overwhelming number of choices and channels of opinion, when consumers are faced with too many and complex choices they become anxious about making the 'right choice'.

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Research work in consumer environments tells us this anxiety is corrosive as nearly 70 per cent of average consumers just don't know who to trust any more to give them the expertise they want.

Professions have been proven to play a vital role in providing that confidence, in helping clients to identify the trusted adviser, operating from a framework of approved knowledge and ethical practice and providing an important way of sharing reputation information, which is what makes society possible.

In our view this is a key role that aspiring professional bodies like AHRI can perform. First help to identify and qualify the 'trusted professional' and then make those professionals visible to the internal or external consumer community as the 'trusted professional' they should use. Of course as the national government body responsible for the regulation and improvement of professional standards, the PSA is focused on making sure that consumers are protected, so continuously educating members and improving or removing poor practice is vital. To us, this is the essential element of how a profession proves it's doing its job properly.

This is even more important in a changing world of diverse employment and technically specific environments. In the 21st century, professionals often work in large multi-disciplinary corporate environments with globally connected clients and new technology-enabled business models. This can put professionals in the challenging role of juggling competing obligations to shareholders, the company, their profession and the public, especially where incentives and authority may be at odds with professional obligations.

We think this only strengthens the need for professional associations, and the support they can offer their members. Acting as a beacon to clients and members gives professional associations a very strong future.

We congratulate AHRI on taking action through its certification program and encourage all HR practitioners to get on board and invest in their future. 