

## **A Qualification is worthless unless linked to Professional Recognition**

It is important to understand that Professional Recognition by the process of Designation, is the most powerful tool in the hands of Employers designed to distinguish between those individuals who may have a qualification but are not yet considered to be professionally competent and others equally, who may not have the qualification but who have been doing the work for a significant period of time, and therefore to the employer are definitely considered to be professionally competent and productive. The Professional Designation is awarded to the individual who is considered to have the whole package.

This means that they would either have the qualification or be competent in the outcomes of the qualification (determined via the process of recognition of prior learning - RPL), and also (and this is the distinguishing feature) have had sufficient time to apply the learning in the workplace to be recognised as professionally competent at a particular level on the designation taxonomy developed for that particular industry, for and by Employers.

Professional recognition will be different between industries within a sector. In those industries where training is more formalised, and more Trades have been registered, it is easier to link Professional Designations to registered Trades. However, a Trade does not a Designation make, unless the qualified Artisan has worked for a suitable period of time in their Trade, in the workplace, to a specified level and standard of application. It is actually the difference between obtaining a learner's license and the real thing. The difference between learning how to put out of fire, and actually being responsible for putting out that fire. Surely it is only the Fire Chief and not the Trainer, who, once the fire has been properly doused, can acknowledge the professional competency of the fireman, in putting out the fire?

Professional Designation is therefore an Employer tool. Importantly therefore, reward and recognition is for Contribution and not for Qualification. Qualification is simply a means to allow the employee to be considered for professional recognition, if and when combined with the requisite amount of experience, applying what has been learned in the qualification.

Having a qualification is not the same thing as being recognised as professional and being designated as such. Whereas obtaining the qualification is within the control of the employee, and once obtained can never be taken away from the employee, it is for either a Professional Body or in its absence, an Employer Association, to confer professional recognition on an individual, making its retention contingent on ongoing criteria of performance and behaviour expectations. Very importantly it should be contingent on the professionally Designated individual, participating in Continuous Professional Development or CPD.

The distinguishing feature here is that the professional Designation conferred on the individual by the Employer Association, sometimes with the Professional Body, can be taken away when the individual does not comply with the conditions for retaining professional recognition, which can either be related to performance (competency) or to behaviour, or both.

Across a sector which contains many industries, there will be a distinction between the industries which are well organised by Professional Bodies, sometimes even Statutory Bodies, with properly placed qualifications and well considered trades, and other industries which do not have Professional Body guidance, nor registered qualifications or identifiable trades. In the latter individuals who should be considered professionally competent require those who are conferring professional recognition to determine who should be recognised and Designated, by other means than necessarily qualification or registered trades, doing so mostly around the years of service and the contribution on the job, day-after-day.

While this requires more effort and a higher level of competency amongst Assessors the rewards, especially for the Employer are immense. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a commonly used process to assess unqualified people against established criteria and outcomes which ordinarily would be contained in NQF-Registered qualifications. In essence, if someone can demonstrate that they are competent, on the job, reflected by how they do the job, then they are competent.

They do not need to sit in a classroom for three years to be adjudged as competent.

This is really the distinguishing feature between what is important to a Training Provider, as opposed to what is critically important to any Employer. To the former the candidate who has enrolled for training can only pass the qualification when formerly assessed against the training material. On the other hand, to the Employer, what is important is only whether the employee is able to do the work to a consistent standard over and over again and remain productive. What immediately becomes more important to the Employer, is a focus not only on the performance of the individual on-the-job, but equally also the behaviour and attitude in the course of carrying out the work. It is this distinguishing feature which can only be assessed on-the-job, after the requisite amount of time has been spent on that job, that can and should be recognised and rewarded by the Employer.

This then becomes the principal difference between what a Trade Union would fight for, and what any Employer would want to prioritise, in an agreement. A Unionist would prioritise the qualification and the learning, and would want recognition and compensation to follow the qualifications obtained. The Employer, on the other hand, would be less interested in the qualification obtained than in the professional recognition earned by the employee as a result of the ongoing and productive contribution in the workplace. The difference is inherent in paying for Qualification as opposed to Contribution.

This obviously goes to the reason for creating a Professional Body in the first place. It is surely only to satisfy, firstly the needs of the employer to have a standardised mechanism for distinguishing who is professionally competent and who is not, and for the employee to have access to professional recognition and ongoing lifelong development.

Ultimately it is the Employer who assumes the complete risk in the employment relationship, in having to find the income, to pay the employee, consistently and reliably. The employees only risk is in contributing consistently and professionally and thus keeping the company productive and profitable. For this reason, the recognition of what constitutes Competency and the determination of how an individual should remain competent and in the process remain productive, falls squarely within the hands and determination of Employers individually, and within an industry collectively through an Employer Association or Professional Body within which the Employer Association plays a leadership role.

For this reason, when an Employee asks a company for support in obtaining a qualification, the Employer is advised to think long and hard about the relevance of that qualification and the added contribution which obtaining it, will make, in the Employee becoming productive and enhancing the required level of productivity, in the workplace.