

## What Does It Mean To Be A “Professional” In The Public Sector?

Traditionally, the term “professional” has been used to describe individuals who hold doctorate, medical or legal degrees, and are known in their chosen field as having a specialized skill or expertise. These individuals are a part of a community with standards and frameworks to support the continuous development of skills and experience. This may include medical or legal standards and licensing that requires compliance to meet standards within their specific community of practice.

In recent times this term has expanded to include other roles, including finance and accounting. In addition to licensing, such as CPA and CFP, there are certain qualities that describe a “professional” and include the following:

- Operate within an environment that sets expectation of success and continuous improvement
- Display exceptional abilities that lead to consistent quality, high performance, and credibility
- Exhibit dedication and self-discipline to overcome barriers and develop solutions that can be considered best practices for others within their field of expertise, and
- Demonstrate that they are a reliable authority figure within a domain of expertise and service area.

## What are the attributes of a professional public sector support function?

There are a number of key characteristics that a public sector organization, such as Finance, needs to exhibit to truly be considered a professional function. First, there is a shared vision and strategy for the purpose of the function along with clear alignment to the needs and goals of their consumers/ customers. In addition, these organizations have clearly defined role requirements with corresponding career objectives that increase their ability to engage, recruit and retain the best talent in the industry.

In order to be successful, professional organizations must also employ consistent structures and standards while sharing knowledge and best practices amongst peers and colleagues. Successful professional functions also adopt and adapt to methodologies that are proven effective within private sector and industry. In combination these attributes help public sector professionals refine best practices, create internal efficiencies, and hone in on the particular skills and expertise needed for success.

**Pro-fes-sion-al-ize** *verb.*

1. To make a job into something that requires special education, training, or skill
2. To give a professional character to

**‘Professionalizing’** is about changing the way organizations think, feel and do. It’s about transforming existing functions, or building new functions, which are highly capable, efficient, aligned with mission critical processes and become great places to work.

## What are some of the challenges for a Professional Public Sector Finance organization?

There are a number of challenges that confront public sector professionals which are not limited to the public sector, but they are often more common. For instance compensation and career progression tends to be more structured and transparent than in the private sector. This structure creates the need for additional effort to encourage and provide individuals the opportunity to move across roles to gain the additional skills and experience needed to strengthen their overall capability. This approach based on advancing individuals to gain capability, versus moving up a structured pay grade based on tenure, really breaks the mold of the traditional public sector compensation and career frameworks.

Another challenge that is often encountered more frequently in the public sector is creating recruiting strategies to identify new and diverse talent. Recruitment has evolved significantly in the past few years with an increased reliance on social media to find talent. This requires agencies to do more than post a job on a website, it demands more proactive social networking that fundamentally shifts the approach to recruiting.

Finding ways to influence and change a public sector organization's approach to building and managing talent necessary for professional organizations will be challenging. But it also creates an enormous opportunity for functions like Finance to clearly define its purpose and establish its credibility as a professional organization with high caliber people dedicated to delivering quality performance to their customers. The first step is to commit to the goal of being a true professional organization, and then finding ways to build one.

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