

Cogitare et volvere

Thoughts & Reflections

The Emperor's New Letters: Unveiling the "Chartered" Illusion

It was George Orwell who said, "if thought can corrupt language, then language can corrupt thought." This was brought to mind as I reviewed a range of governance organisations websites that proclaimed, that if you complete their programme of study, or course, you will be awarded a "Chartered [whatever]" designation. Signifying your newly acquired status as a "Chartered Professional. But are these providers truly able to award this highly sought after status of Chartered Professional or are they selling you the illusion of a "Chartered" designation and do you care?

What drives organisations to mislead those joining their institution or participating (buying) in their courses that they are authorised to award this designation? Here is a brief outline of why a Chartered designation is sought after:

Chartered status^[1] is considered a mark of professional competency and is awarded by Chartered professional bodies. A professional awarded Chartered status is deemed to have achieved a higher specific, and *tested level of skills and competency* than other practitioners in their chosen profession. This designation is most often seen in the accompanying post nominal, e.g. *Chartered Professional Engineer "CPEng"* (under the Chartered Professional Engineers of New Zealand Act 2002). How are institutions granted the authority to award this accreditation? There is only one way:

Chartered status is issued to professional bodies from the British Monarch via the Privy Council or via legislation in their jurisdiction. The standards required for awarding the Chartered distinction are set between the professional bodies and relevant government departments and cannot be altered without government permission. Because the Chartered designation denotes prestige and credibility, institutions often include the word "Chartered" in their name, signifying the institutions status and its "authority" to award the Chartered designation.

But there are institutes who award and use the designation without Royal or Parliamentary approval. Why does this matter if an institution uses the term "Chartered" without the required approval? Because, if the "language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what ought to be [have been] done remains undone" (Confucius). If the institution has misled you on its authority to award Chartered designation, it may be misleading you in other areas as well.

In the UK, the unauthorised use of protected titles is regulated under the Company Limited Liability Partnership and Business Names (Sensitive Words and Expressions) Regulations 2014. Other jurisdictional authorities will have enacted similar protective legislation on the misuse of professional designations.

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Institutions that use the designation of "Chartered" without proper authorisation may result in their facing legal action, and or being forced to change their name and rescind and or rename the awarded designations.

The digital revolution has introduced new complexities in maintaining and verifying professional designations especially with the plethora of organisations offering professional designations they cannot legally award. This creates challenges in distinguishing the real from the fake professional qualifications in the digital space¹.

For those institutions legally allowed to award Chartered status, it may be time to invest in technology such as digital badges. These badges, when clicked, show real-time verification of the individual's membership status and chartered designation. Another is Blockchain technology, which allows for storage of an individual's educational certificates and professional credentials on a blockchain to combat fraud and allow ease of verification.

As governance professionals, I imagine you agree when I say, for an institution to promote themselves or award a designation for which they have no authority, may speak to the institutions values and professional standards. As the Latin phrase says "falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus," meaning, if they are "*false in one thing,*" they may be "*false in everything.*"

My simple advice is "*trust but verify,*"

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/19/business/the-undoing-of-scott-thompson-at-yahoo-common-sense.html>

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