

Outsourcing gets its own designation

New professional certification shows Canadian execs have the know-how for outsourcing success

BY CHRISTINA POWERS

Jean-Francois Poisson and Manoj Lakhtakia have never met. Yet, they speak the same language when it comes to outsourcing. Although the two sit on different sides of the table — Poisson with outsourcing firm SNC-Lavalin ProFac and Lakhtakia with outsourcing customer Bank of Montreal — they use common terminology when drafting contracts, follow the same steps in the outsourcing process and adhere to the same standards.

These Canadian business executives are among the first in the country to earn the new Certified Outsourcing Professional (COP) certification from the Poughkeepsie, N.Y.-based International Association of Outsourcing Professionals (IAOP).

Common standards

To Poisson and Lakhtakia, the COP designation signifies their professionalism, leadership, integrity and commitment to the global outsourcing industry and gives them a special professional bond.

"The COP designation is a testament and validation of an individual's professionalism in outsourcing ventures," says Poisson, principal director of outsourcing and business development for Toronto-based SNC-Lavalin ProFac.

Poisson, who worked in various outsourcing roles during a 25-year career with Bell Canada before joining SNC-Lavalin in March, helped develop the COP program with the IAOP when he saw training of this nature was lacking in Canada and elsewhere.

"I was involved in doing a lot of internal re-engineering projects at Bell Canada since the mid 1990s,

but it was not called outsourcing then," he says. "Early on, there were not a lot of organizations that could provide support and bring knowledge of the outsourcing processes and governance. Programs offered through the IAOP like the COP certification are changing this."

Poisson was part of the inaugural class of COP graduates in July 2006, which included 13 executives working across the outsourcing field as clients, providers and advisors.

Lakhtakia, a relationship manager and senior business consultant at the Bank of Montreal, enrolled in a COP master class training program in February because he recognized outsourcing was growing globally and in Canada, and that certification will become increasingly important. He earned the designation in April.

"The COP designation really has helped me define and enhance my skill sets," says Lakhtakia, who has more than 20 years of experience in operations, strategy and sourcing. "It shows a consistent level of quality and also that an individual possesses the tools and resources to manage outsourcing strategies that are becoming more and more complex."

As a global, professional membership-based organization to establish standards for outsourced services, the IAOP developed the COP certification to be equally valuable to users, providers and advisors of outsourcing services.

"COP promotes an environment where all of the parties in an outsourcing business relationship have a common and shared professional knowledge, approach and commitment to mutual success," says IAOP chairman Michael Corbett.

Since launching the certification program in 2006, more than 50 individuals have received the designation, he says.

10 building blocks for COP

To become a COP, candidates must demonstrate professional capabilities through a combination of comprehensive work experience and knowledge and education, earning a total of 150 points through different methods.

The rigorous process includes an application documenting outsourcing projects the person has led and the results achieved, which is reviewed and scored by a certification committee of peers.

The COP certification covers the following categories:

- defining and communicating outsourcing management practice;
- integrating outsourcing into an organization's business strategy;
- creating and leading outsourcing project teams;
- developing and communicating outsourcing business requirements;
- selecting outsourcing service providers;
- developing the financial analysis and pricing an outsourcing opportunity;
- developing and negotiating the contract for an outsourcing agreement;
- managing the transition to an outsourced environment; and
- outsourcing governance.

"It's important to have a good overview of all the different steps in outsourcing, from exploring opportunities, building a business case for it and selling the project to senior executives to developing and completing contracts and managing relationships," says Poisson. "The COP training provides this common foundation."

One-half of the points needed for certification can be earned through the COP master class, a four-day training program offered by IAOP.

Lakhtakia, who took a master class in North Carolina, says the training was challenging, with participants working on problem-solving scenarios late into the evenings. But it prepared him for global competition in outsourcing, he says.

"The master class program brings a tremendous value. It is really structured to rub shoulders with the who's who of the industry who share their lifetime experiences."

Expanded training options

The IAOP has expanded its training options and now offers an online version of the COP master class with Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y.

A new exam, which tests candidates on the strategic, implementation and operational implications of outsourcing, is an alternate way to earn points toward the certification.

Lakhtakia expects over time the COP designation will be increasingly sought after in Canada and will take on the importance of other professional certifications.

"When organizations see the COP designation, they will immediately have the confidence that this individual has all the capabilities and skill sets to deliver a successful outsourcing project," he says. "As outsourcing evolves to become global re-engineering, COP will designate that these are the right people to approach who have the ability and desire to deliver what an organization is looking for."

Christina Powers is the executive director of the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals (IAOP) in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. For more information visit outsourcingprofessionals.org.