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## Roger Hart, Associate Partner with Deloitte - shares his views on the IT Skills Shortage

The IT Skills Shortage is an area that demands immediate solutions. Today I talk with Roger Hart, I.S.P., P.E. about ways this can be addressed.

Thank you,  
Stephen Ibaraki, FCIPS, I.S.P.

## DISCUSSION

SI: Roger Hart is an Associate Partner with Deloitte and is the Board Director of Professionalism on the CIP National Executive. Roger is a leading international authority in IT with a long history of success. Roger, do you think CIPS has any role to play in addressing the current IT shortage?

RH: Absolutely. CIPS was founded in 1958 and is recognized around the world as Canada's association of professionals. However, before I answer your question, let me tell you a little about my own background so you know where I'm coming from.

As you said, I am an Associate Partner with Deloitte, which is the largest of the "Big Four" professional services firms in Canada. Before joining Deloitte about ten years ago, I was a Principal with a very successful small consulting company in Vancouver. Prior to that I have held roles as a senior college administrator, a Director of MIS, a university professor, and -- if you go far enough -- even a humble programmer. I have been a member of CIPS since 1977 and hold an I.S.P. in addition to my P.Eng. And, prior to joining CIPS, was a member of the British Columbia Society from about 1963. As you can see, I have worked in many diverse IT settings and think I understand the needs that can vary between the public and private sector; between large and small organizations; and between industry and academia.

About ten years ago, I coined the term "Imagination Age" as a juxtaposition to the term "Information Age" and although it never really caught on, I still think it accurately describes where we are now and where we need to go. Our emphases both as a province and as a nation.

A couple of decades ago, I would argue that Canada was in the forefront of IT development and I think that the benefits of that can be seen today. It touches so many aspects of our life that we take it for granted and it is when we go on a trip to the U.S. or E.U. that we are able to appreciate the magnitude of what we have accomplished.

However, the picture today is very different. The number of skilled IT professionals in Canada lags behind other advanced countries and, if we do not address this deficiency as a matter of urgency we will suffer for 20 years or -- given the pace of technological development -- perhaps even sooner.

So with that backdrop, let me finally begin to answer your question: "Does CIPS have a role to play?"

First of all, CIPS has the only legislated professional IT designation in Canada: the I.S.P. As someone who holds a P.Eng. I can say with certainty that an employer or client always looks for that professional designation before embarking on an engineering engagement. The same is true for almost all of the other professions. In Ontario, provincial Colleges of Teachers have to certify teachers before they can be hired by School District and the same is true for M.D.s, accountants, lawyers, etc. I find it astonishing that, in the complex area of IT, a lot of employers still do not look for a professional IT designation. They may look for some certification in particular but that I would argue is akin to a teacher, for example, having specialized in English as a Second Language; a specific skill set complements the professional certification. It does not replace it.

If an employer has a candidate who has an I.S.P. then that does not obviate the need to ensure that she has the specific skill set that is required; or that she is a cultural fit in the organization; or any other qualities that normally would be covered in an IT interview. But it does ensure that she is a certified member of the IT profession regardless of how she obtained her certification.

I add the last point because IT is a young profession and CIPS recognizes that there are many paths that people take to achieve their I.S.P. Not all I.S.P.s, for example, will have a degree in Computer Science for the very reason that such degrees may not have been available when they began their career. Nevertheless, they are judged by their professional peers as worthy of certification and use their I.S.P. with pride.



John Osley Director Community Evangelism  
Microsoft Canada



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So the first, albeit small, contribution to easing the IT shortage would be for employers to specify I.S.P. as acceptable alternative, say to a Computer Science degree, when they are recruiting. At Deloitte we talk about "Recognizing the power of one" in our Code of Conduct <http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/article/0,1002,sid%2532526cid%253D96133,00.html> and increasing the number of applicants for an IT position by just one is a significant step in the right direction.

Secondly, CIPS is in bilateral discussions with our sister organizations in other countries, such as the U.K. Australia, to afford mutual recognition to our respective professional designations. We should be able to do this relatively quickly because of our longstanding relationship and knowledge of these organizations. What this means is that we might be able to certify a potential immigrant as an I.S.P. as part of the immigration process to relieve the immigration officers of trying to make judgments in an area in which few of them will have the necessary expertise. If we can cooperate with Immigration Canada on this matter, then I am sure that we can assist in increasing the numbers of IT professionals immigrating into Canada.

Thirdly, CIPS is in discussions with certain non-IT professional organizations to see if we can provide an accreditation to their members. This would mean that successful candidates would not only have a professional designation in their "home" profession, but -- if they had the education and/or experience to justify it -- they would also hold the I.S.P. Not having concluded these discussions, I am guessing at the number of people involved. My suspicion is that we could be adding a significant number of certified IT professionals to the pool. And my experience is that people who are professionally certified in another area in addition to IT are extremely valuable to the workplace.

SI: Roger, you have talked eloquently about three areas in which CIPS might make a contribution to our IT skills shortage, but -- not surprisingly -- you have focused on people who are or who might shortly become I.S.P.s. What can CIPS do about people who are some ways away from getting their I.S.P.s or who perhaps will never get them? What level of professional certification? Is there any way that CIPS can contribute to addressing the IT skills shortage for this sort of person?

RH: Well, Stephen, as you know, in addition to our certified members -- our I.S.P.s -- CIPS has had a general membership category which dates back to the fifties when IT practitioners were few and far between and CIPS provided a great umbrella for them to get together, socialize, network, and learn what was going on in other parts of the profession. We also have an Accreditation Council that accredits university and college programs so that graduates of those programs can be accepted as candidate members for the I.S.P. CIPS, therefore, has always been broadly based, welcoming students and a broad range of practitioners in addition to our professional members. In that regard, we are a little different from most professional associations, who tend to focus on their professional members and candidate members. However, like most of them we currently only have one category of professional member, the I.S.P.

This is not the case with some of our sister organizations, for example, the British Computer Society. The I.S.P. is a separate category of membership which, I believe, accurately reflects the diversity of our profession today. In addition to moving forward with mutual recognition of our respective professional designations, we are also in discussions with another Canadian organization with the intent of developing a national IT recognition framework. We have drafted an MoU for this which would see CIPS:

- Deliver certification/recognition systems for domestic and foreign-trained ITS workers
- Be the accreditor of choice for educational programs in IT
- Extend the reach, scope, and acceptance of CIPS's professional products
- Continue to develop, extend, and maintain these products, including the Canadian Body of [IT] Knowledge and the IT Code of Ethics
- Increase awareness of CIPS certification and accreditation programs with employers of IT professionals
- Become the principal contributor on the messaging, products, and services that raise the profile of the IT profession
- Represent the entire professional segment of the IT workforce

This represents a bold move for CIPS and I must stress that, although I personally am committed to moving forward on this, we are still in discussions. Nevertheless, if we are able to move forward, even with only a portion of the above, I believe it will make a huge contribution to easing the IT skills shortage in Canada across a broad spectrum of IT practitioners.

SI: Thank you for your insights, Roger. Do you have any closing thoughts?

RH: I'd like to briefly touch on something, that at first sight may look like it would exacerbate our IT skills shortage, although I think it could do exactly the opposite.

Under the terms of the NAFTA agreement, Canadian professionals are entitled to obtain a visa to work in the U.S. Although I must stress that U.S. Immigration inspectors have a great deal of discretion in granting visas, it does appear to accept an I.S.P. as satisfying that professional requirement. So if any of our readers are considering working in the U.S., I would urge them to contact Gina van Dalen at our National Office ([gina@cips.ca](mailto:gina@cips.ca)) who can provide them a letter which will hopefully facilitate the issuance of a visa.

So why am I appearing to encourage people to get a U.S. visa in this discussion on how to address our IT skills shortage in Canada? Firstly because I think it demonstrates yet again the importance of our professional designations -- the I.S.P. -- and secondly because of my own personal experience.

I myself have spent much of the past ten years working in the U.S. for some of Deloitte's most important clients. I found the work stimulating and invigorating and I learned a tremendous amount in the process. It also taught me that, much as I enjoyed the working environment, I did not want to take up residence in the U.S. and it was difficult to get back home to Vancouver Island on the weekend.

Now I'm back in B.C. full-time and am focused on one of our most important Canadian clients, I think that I can leverage what I learned in the U.S., not only for the benefit of our client, but also as a multiplying effect as some of my lessons and experience to more junior practitioners. As we try to alleviate our skills shortage, we should not underestimate the importance of sharing lessons learned in other jurisdictions.

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Roger Hart I.S.P., P.Eng. is the Director of Professionalism for the CIPS National Executive and Pacific Region. He directs the professional portfolio for CIPS and represents the Pacific Region on the CIPS National Board.

Roger is also an Associate Partner with Deloitte, one of Canada's largest professional services firms, with employees in more than 50 offices across the country. Before joining Deloitte, Roger had a distinguished career in both the public and private sector holding such diverse positions as a tenured university professor, direct senior college administrator, and management consultant. His clients have included such international giants as Siemens in Germany, SK Telecom in Korea, and Telstra in Australia, as well as Fortune 100 companies and provincial governments in Canada and the United States.

Roger was an early adopter of the Internet and one of the first people in North America to predict its immense business potential. He was instrumental in bringing the Freenet/Community Networking movement into Canada as a founding Director of Telecommunities Canada. His many accomplishments have led him to be included in Canada's Who's Who.

Roger has been a member of CIPS since 1977 and has held his I.S.P. since 1996.

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Posted: Friday, October 06, 2006 8:06 AM by [cdnitmgr](#)  
Filed under: [Stephen Ibaraki](#), [Interviews](#), [Guest Bloggers](#), [CIPS](#)

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#### Comments

Len Hannam said:

Re: The skill shortage, the problem I have experienced firsthand is that the potential employers are blindly applying a "Skills Matrix" approach to hiring. If you don't have the exact mix of skills with the exactly specified experience, you won't even get to first base (an interview). Unless you are willing to accept that many people never exactly meet the exact pre-requisites so they get passed over.

I have 26 years of experience in IT on a wide variety of platform languages and industries but never seem to quite measure up to the "Skills Matrix" approach. Whatever happened to hiring someone based on their proven track record and allowing them some leeway (and training) to make up for "weaknesses"? I think if employers were willing to do this (like they used to be) they would find the so-called "Skill Shortage" is not nearly so severe. This is a direct consequence of the "Outsourcing" and "Offshoring" practices that hit the IT industry over the last few years. Companies are looking for the lowest cost and not willing to cultivate their own dedicated IT employees and maintain long-term relationships. When will they realize this?

Regards,

Len Hannam, BSc, DEEd, ISEP

[Hannam@Cruzeiro.com](mailto:Hannam@Cruzeiro.com)

October 17, 2006 12:10 AM

Roger Hari said:

In my experience, HR departments and others blindly apply tools like "skills matrices" when they lack the confidence and/or experience to make decisions without them.

I think that the best solution is to continue to push for more professionalism within the IT industry. I don't see skills matrices being applied to professions like engineers, accountants, teachers, etc. Professional certification coupled with specific skills and relevant experience seem to be the norm in these professions and would provide a sensible approval in our field, despite the somewhat complex and rapidly changing nature of the industry.

October 17, 2006 5:45 PM

Graham Jones said:

Like you Roger, I am someone who comes from both the engineering and latterly IT worlds. Since it sounds like you also perhaps originate from the same background we probably have similar experiences regarding professional qualifications.

In general I am in favour of some intermediate step between nothing and full professional recognition such as the Engineer in Training (ET) in BC receiving your P.Eng. I believe that does a number of good things.

It gives the individual some sense of progress towards a goal and it makes it easier to 'capture' them early. It makes the individual more likely to get all the way there. It shows a prospective employer that the individual has an interest in the importance and value of professional standing and are likely to be receptive to training and experience which will give them full professional standing, and work to get there.

For those people who do not have sufficient educational requirements, but some good experience, I am also in favour of a recognized lesser step which time as experience or further education meet the full requirements. Again this gives people some recognition, which is important to the individual and again may be valuable in discussion with a prospective employer. These sorts of things have been common in the engineering community in different places for a long time.

In other words try to make it a more gradual process and then people might be more inclined to 'jump aboard'; smaller hurdles and not one big hurdle can be discouraging.

Finally, until employers start demanding professional IT qualifications, like they often do in other professions, for many people the incentive won't be there. In the end of the day, it all gets reduced to dollars and cents in the pocket both for the employer and the employee.

There will always be a few people where professional pride is the main motivator but I am sad to say they tend to be in the minority. They are typical people who get involved at the organizational level and try and 'raise the bar'.

Cheers

Graham J.

October 19, 2006 6:36 PM

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