

PRACTITIONER-CENTRED RESEARCH PROJECT LAUNCHED... PARTICIPANTS WANTED!

By Jordan Max

IN AN EVER-CHANGING world, how can PEO anticipate, respond and adapt to changes in professional engineering practice?

The first step is getting answers to questions like: When do you contact PEO for practice advice? Why (or why not)? How useful are professional practice bulletins, guidelines or standards in helping you improve your practice or integrate new expectations? What other issues, questions, products, services or formats could also be helpful?

To find answers to some of these questions, PEO is embarking on its first practitioner-centred research study—a “deep dive” research project to examine and better understand professional engineering practice in Ontario from the practitioner’s (not PEO’s) vantage point.

To do this, we’ll need professional engineers as volunteer participants. Volunteers will help us get a more accurate picture of what goes on in professional practice and allow us to determine better what public safety risks might exist, where and when those risks might emerge, which professional practice elements still need to be regulated, which ones don’t, and which ones could be regulated in a different way, for example, through voluntary compliance. If you aren’t currently practising professional engineering, we’d also like to know why.

SPECIFICS OF THE PROJECT

Our study of licence holders will help us discover more about:

- if and how you practise professional engineering on a daily, regular or occasional basis;
- how you advance and improve your professional practice;
- what factors, besides reporting to PEO, influence your practice behaviour (e.g. competition, personal ethics, suppliers, client relationships, business alliances, insurance, professional development, etc.);
- how, when and why you interact with PEO (or why not) on professional practice issues; and
- the impact of PEO’s services and communications (e.g. discipline hearing decisions and reasons in *Engineering Dimensions*, practice bulletins/guidelines, town hall meetings, etc.) on how you improve your professional practice.

This research is markedly different than any online survey or consultation PEO has done in the recent past. While it may use focus groups, interviews, shadowing, discussion and observation methodologies, this research is not being driven by a current regulatory policy initiative. We want to listen to *your* practice story.

The outputs of this research will be “persona” segments of the licence holders, essentially telling us who they are, and their needs, goals and motivations, as well as “journey maps” of their interactions with PEO on professional practice issues, which will reveal our members’ experiences with us at various times. Companies and organizations use these experiences and insights to identify their users’ “pain points,” frustrations and opportunities for service improvements, and to develop ideas for, prototype and test new approaches, products, processes and services. For PEO, deeper understanding of our practitioners’ perspectives and the factors having an impact on them will help us in future policy development work, to innovate or upgrade policies or services for professional practice, and to suggest more effective regulatory policy or operational improvements.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

We are looking for two kinds of study participants: licence holders and companies holding a Certificate of Authorization. The study may involve a variety of the methodologies mentioned above. Your participation in this research is voluntary. PEO will engage a consultant with extensive experience in both the private and public sectors to conduct the research.

Wherever possible, the research will be conducted in a participant’s workplace, but it is *not* a practice review or audit of the workplace. Our consultants will not enter any workplace without a participant’s agreement. All input will be treated confidentially and, if used later, will be made anonymous.

While PEO cannot compensate participants for their time, it will share the findings with them prior to publication. So, when you are contacted by PEO to participate in our practitioner-centred research project, please say “yes”! Σ

WHAT IS PRACTITIONER-CENTRED RESEARCH?

Practitioner-centred research (PCR) is the empathetic foundation of design thinking—an increasingly employed user-focused method of driving innovation in top businesses, education and even government. This approach is generally used to develop a deep understanding of users’ experiences with service providers to suggest possible improvements. Its two major outputs are “personas” of different user segments and “journey maps” that illustrate why, when and how users interact with a service provider (including both successes and frustrations).

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