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## Canada's bean counters get into a brouhaha

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**59 comments**

Allegations of intimidation. An Internet petition with thousands of signatures. Dissidents who insist on anonymity.

It is not exactly the type of intrigue you would expect to surround a merger proposal from the three umbrella bodies that oversee Canada's accounting profession.

But the passions of some of the country's 170,000 bean counters have clearly been stirred.

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Behind the battle is a new push from the profession's leaders that would see Canada's chartered accountants (CAs), certified management accountants (CMAs) and certified general accountants (CGAs) eventually trade in their acronyms for a new one: CPA, or chartered professional accountant.

Those promoting the idea say it is needed to streamline the way the provincially regulated profession is governed. They say it would save the millions of dollars in advertising that the bodies have spent competing with each other. And they point to the need to face competition from foreign accounting bodies such as Britain's Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.

They also say the profession here must speak with one voice in global debates about the new international accounting standards, which were recently adopted by Canada.

Quebec's bodies have already decided to merge. But this will still leave 36 separate provincial governing bodies in charge of the splintered profession. Merging those into one body in each province or territory simply makes sense, says Kevin Dancey, head of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants.

The current system "makes for a pretty inefficient structure, particularly when the world is going global," he said.

Merging is not a new idea. A previous attempt between CAs and CMAs failed in 2004 after members objected. Many in the profession say there has been a blurring between the three disciplines over the years. For example, CAs used to be the only discipline allowed to perform audits. Now, in most cases, the other designations can as well.

Still, resistance has been fierce. Earlier this month, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta said it was bowing out of the merger talks, citing negative feedback from members. CGAs in Manitoba are also sitting on the sidelines.

Before anything becomes a reality, provincial and territorial legislatures will each have to draft and pass new laws.

In the mean time, an acrimonious debate rages. Much of the opposition appears to come from CAs, some of whom see their designation as superior to the others.

In Ontario, the battle has gotten ugly. Some CAs are upset that the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario (ICAO), while holding a vote this June, is not allowing a binding vote. (The question of a member vote varies between designations in each province. Other bodies, including all CGAs, are holding what they say are binding votes.)

Prominent Toronto accountant Al Rosen says a dissident group of Ontario CAs, associated with an Internet petition apparently signed by more than 3,600 people, are remaining anonymous out of fear of reprisals.

"I've been told that the younger CAs, their jobs are being threatened because they are taking up this cause," Mr. Rosen said.

Some CAs opposing the merger declined to speak to The Globe and Mail on the record.

Mr. Rosen says he opposes the merger because he says it would create a more powerful lobby group to pressure governments to lower accounting standards. And it would wipe out the differences between the designations, he adds.

"I still have not found an advantage," Mr. Rosen said. "The disadvantage is going to be that the one-size-fits-all shoe-store mentality will be there."

In a statement e-mailed to supporters, the opposition group says its members were invited to address the Ontario institute's council in December, but declined due to scheduling problems and because the ICAO allegedly took "measures to arguably make those invited feel intimidated."



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