



QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CORPORATE OMBUDS PRACTITIONERS - JULY, 1984

1. Are you a full-time ombuds practitioner or complaint handler? \_\_\_\_\_  
Or do you have other roles as well? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, please say what proportion of  
your time is spent in what other roles?

2. Is your office in general supposed to be a confidential office, as long as your  
visitor wishes you to keep the visit confidential?

3. Do you keep formal records of visits? \_\_\_\_\_ By the name of the visitor? \_\_\_\_\_  
With some description of the visitor's concern? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you destroy these  
records after a certain period of time? \_\_\_\_\_ If you keep records only part of  
the time, under what conditions would you keep a record?

4. Have you ever worried about whether you should break the confidence of a visitor?  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Because I thought my visitor was or might be dangerous to him/  
herself;

\_\_\_\_\_ Because I thought my visitor was or might be dangerous to another  
(or to me);

\_\_\_\_\_ Because I learned someone else might be dangerous to self or others;

\_\_\_\_\_ Because I learned of unethical or dishonest behavior (theft, etc.)  
which I thought should be addressed;

\_\_\_\_\_ Because I learned one of our managers was incompetent, intolerably  
mean, racist, sexist, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

5. Are you (often or occasionally or never) sought out by people who might otherwise  
become external whistleblowers? \_\_\_\_\_ That is, do people ever come to you want-  
ing help on dealing with ethical and safety problems? \_\_\_\_\_ Comments?

6. Have you ever been leaned on, in-house, to break a confidence of your office? \_\_\_\_\_  
Have you ever been told that you'd be subpoena'd? \_\_\_\_\_ Have you been subpoena'd?  
\_\_\_\_\_ And, if so, did you testify? \_\_\_\_\_ Is this a subject worth more explora-  
tion? \_\_\_\_\_ Would you be interested in:

\_\_\_\_\_ "Shield laws" in your state (to protect you from testifying);

\_\_\_\_\_ More help from professional associations, (for example, a Corporate  
Ombudsman Code of Ethics), and/or the American Bar Association, to resist  
subpoenas;

\_\_\_\_\_ More discussion with other practitioners about this topic;

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe I should testify if subpoena'd, and/or would rather leave  
it up to the discretion of the judge;

\_\_\_ If my employer's interests were at stake or were thought to be at stake, I would feel I should testify.

\_\_\_ Other

7. Do you see yourself as an "advocate?" \_\_\_\_\_ If so, for what or whom?
8. Are you designated as an advocate?
9. Do you see yourself as (attempting to be) a neutral?
10. Are you designated as a neutral by your employer?
11. Are you often taken to be more (or less) of an advocate than you see yourself to be?
12. Is this subject of interest to you? \_\_\_\_\_ To explore with ombuds practitioners?  
\_\_\_\_\_ To change how you are seen internally? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you report to the CEO or equivalent? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, to whom?
14. Are you expected to have oversight over others who also report to the CEO? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Are you expected to be readily available to others who report to the CEO?
- \_\_\_ Yes, I generally treat them as if I reported also to them.
- \_\_\_ Yes, I treat them as colleagues.
- \_\_\_ I have very little to do with them.
- \_\_\_ Depends on the people involved.
- \_\_\_ Other
16. Are you available as a conflict resolution practitioner to managers and professional employees?
- \_\_\_ Yes, the same as for other employees;
- \_\_\_ Yes, and I also do a lot of management consulting with and for them: they come in qua employees and come in also as supervisors seeking help with employees;
- \_\_\_ Yes, but only in their supervisory role;
- \_\_\_ No, not allowed to.
- \_\_\_ No, they could come in but they don't.

\_\_\_\_ Comment?

17. If you are available to managers and professional employees, do such persons seek you out proportionately more often, less often or the same as other employees? Has this changed over time? \_\_\_\_\_ How?

18. Do you see people for any kind of (work-related) problem? \_\_\_\_\_ Is your purview defined? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_

(Do you think the definition, if any, is appropriate, or should it be wider or narrower?)

19. Do people come to see you with scientific and technical disputes? \_\_\_\_\_ Is this kind of problem of interest to you for discussion with ombuds colleagues? \_\_\_\_\_

20. Is your office seen as an "option," so that employees can choose either to go to you or choose another route? \_\_\_\_\_ Or are you (so to speak) singular in your role? \_\_\_\_\_ If the latter, what happens when you are away; is this a problem?

Would it help to have counterparts of different races and sex? \_\_\_\_\_ Comments?

21. Do you see yourself, and are you seen, as part of a "complaint (or grievance) system" for your company? \_\_\_\_\_ Is this explicit?

22. Do you work together with in-house or out-of-house legal counsel? \_\_\_\_\_ Would you say you call them rarely? \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally? \_\_\_\_\_ Often? \_\_\_\_\_

\*23. What proportion of your time do you spend in:

\_\_\_\_ information and/or referral;

\_\_\_\_ counselling on work problems and grievances, (e.g. helping people help themselves);

\_\_\_\_ formal fact-finding with? or without? making formal recommendations to someone else;

\_\_\_\_ conciliation (seeing first one disputant, then another);

\_\_\_\_ mediation (seeing disputants together);

\_\_\_\_ adjudication, or joining an adjudicative committee;

\_\_\_\_ giving upward feedback; working with managers on preventing work problems; working on committees, etc.;

\_\_\_\_ Other

\*(If you have other duties beyond dispute resolution and work problems, please answer Question 23 as if these responsibilities were 100% of your job.)

24. Do you see being an ombudsman as a profession? \_\_\_\_\_ Or as one step in career development? \_\_\_\_\_ If this is a profession, should there be special training for it? \_\_\_\_\_ Comments?
25. Has your office ever done a cost/effectiveness analysis of the office? \_\_\_\_\_ Should a sub-committee of ombuds practitioners work together on how to do this? \_\_\_\_\_
26. Do you keep aggregate records of your most frequent problems? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have a sense of what are your most difficult problems? \_\_\_\_\_ Should ombuds practitioners try to keep formal or informal track of these questions among ourselves? \_\_\_\_\_ Would you want future practitioners' meetings (if any) to offer specific training on any questions? \_\_\_\_\_ Would you be interested to write (or use) case studies?
27. Here is a list of problems for you to consider. Would you mark each problem? Here's the code:  
N=never (My company never has this problem or if they do, I don't see it.)  
O=occasionally (This comes in once in a while.)  
F=frequently (This comes in a lot.)  
T=this would be a good topic for training ombuds practitioners, or for discussion at a group like this.  
CS=this is an area where we need case studies.
- (Whether the problem comes in rarely or often need not of course affect whether a group like ours should address it. If you see it all the time, you may be bored with it.....or want a new perspective.)
- \_\_\_ unjust dismissal/wrongful discharge complaints;
  - \_\_\_ salary equity complaints;
  - \_\_\_ performance evaluation complaints;
  - \_\_\_ promotion/posting system complaints;
  - \_\_\_ supervisor/supervisee tension;
  - \_\_\_ harassment problems (all kinds, or specify);
  - \_\_\_ other EEO/AA problems, (specify if you wish to);
  - \_\_\_ scientific/technical disputes;
  - \_\_\_ other health, safety, ethical problems;
  - \_\_\_ problems with seriously emotionally disturbed people;
  - \_\_\_ dealing with specific difficult managers;
  - \_\_\_ dealing with specific difficult employees;
  - \_\_\_ dealing with difficult employee groups;
  - \_\_\_ dealing with irate relatives of someone at the company;
  - \_\_\_ keeping the Bureaucracy moving (parking spaces, pay advances, red tape);
  - \_\_\_ Ombudsman stress/burn-out;
  - \_\_\_ Other:
28. In general, if you were ever to come back to a conference like this, would you prefer organized discussion among colleagues, or formal training sessions, or lectures, or role playing, or films or skits on the problems that interest you?
29. What other questions should we have asked?

**Research Activities of the**  
**Corporate Ombudsman Association**

COA was founded in 1984 with the intent of supporting development of the ombudsman profession, especially in a work place context. The Research Committee of the COA conducts surveys to study the functions of corporate ombuds practitioners, their reporting relationships, their cost-effectiveness and their contribution to employees, managers, employers and society. These surveys go considerably beyond typical association inquiries and have resulted in a number of academic and professional articles and other materials, as well as a Handbook for ombudspeople. Current work covers such topics as ethical concerns brought to ombudspeople, and successes and failures of ombudsman practice.

COA depends on contributions from many people and institutions. We would like to apply for support to the National Institute for Dispute Resolution, to the National Institute for Justice and to other non-profit and government agencies as well as from philanthropic individuals interested in conflict resolution, alternatives to litigation, work place diversity and the like. It is important to the Association not to become the vehicle for proprietary research by any one employer, since the purpose of COA is to disseminate useful ideas in the public interest.

Questions for Ombuds Practitioners

1. What kind of ombudsman are you? (e.g. corporate, newspaper, health care, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the major purpose of this kind of ombudsman? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. When did the office begin? \_\_\_\_\_ When did you personally begin? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you formally designated as a neutral or impartial person? Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_ (If yes, please circle the correct word.)

5. To whom do you report? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Whom do you serve? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many people (in total) do you see or hear from in a year? \_\_\_\_\_  
Contacts \_\_\_\_\_ Investigated cases \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the total number who could contact you; (how large is your "turf"?):  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Could you list 5 or more of the most common types of problems that come in?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What % of your time do you spend in:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Active Listening
- \_\_\_\_\_ Giving and receiving information, referrals
- \_\_\_\_\_ Counselling, role playing, helping people help themselves
- \_\_\_\_\_ Shuttle Diplomacy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mediation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Investigation and Report-writing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adjudication or Arbitration of Disputes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Working on Systems Change
- \_\_\_\_\_ Training and Education

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What are the major benefits to your organization from your work?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What would be a typical or appropriate background for an ombudsman like you? (academic training and job experience) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. What ombudsman research topics do you think most need attention?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you think a manual or book on problem-solving techniques is needed?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

15. If we get inquiries about this kind of ombudsman work, may we refer the inquirers to you? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Would you be willing to write an article or case study about your work? \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this questionnaire to: Mary Rowe, Chair  
SPIDR Committee on Ombudsmen  
MIT  
77 Massachusetts Avenue  
Room 10-213  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
(617) 253-5921

Please feel free to attach any kind of additional information or case study or office brochure or article you have written about work work.



LIST OF OMBUDS ASSOCIATIONS

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The U.S. Ombudsman Association  
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850 Hungerford Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850  
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University and College Ombudsman Association (North America-wide)  
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Montreal, Quebec HG IM8  
(514) 879-4247

National Society of Patient Representatives  
840 North Lake Shore Drive  
Chicago, IL 60611  
(312) 280-6424

The Organization of News Ombudsmen  
Clair Balfour, Ombudsman  
CP/P.O. Box 4300  
Place d'Armes  
Montreal, Quebec H2Y3S1

National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs  
Jim Varpness  
Minnesota Board on Aging  
204 Metro Square  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
(612) 296-7465

There are also many consumer dispute resolutions programs; see the Report on Consumer Dispute Resolution by Daniel McGillis, from the National Institute for Dispute Resolution, 1901 L Street, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 466-4764

REPORT ON CORPORATE OMBUDSPERSON SURVEY

SUMMARY RESULTS

Busch Center  
Wharton School  
University of Pennsylvania

Fall 1982

## INTRODUCTION

Sixteen corporate ombudspersons were located and surveyed following a literature search. Ombudspersons were defined as "individuals who provide confidential third party assistance in the resolution of employee's work-related complaints outside of the normal hierarchical management structure." Interviews were conducted by telephone by Lee Robbins, a Systems Research Analyst, using a standardized set of questions and lasted 45 to 75 minutes.

### 1) Identification of Corporation and Respondent:

Corporations: large, often non-unionized, progressive

Titles: highly varied (see appendix)

### 2) Developmental History:

Date Initiated: 1946 to 1982; 9 of 16 from 1971 to 1982

Initiating Events:

- threat of unionization (4)
- contact with other ombudspersons (2)
- idea of new CEO (2)
- EEO legislation (1)
- student sit-in (1)
- no specific event (6)

Change over time:

- expanded (10)
- contracted (1)
- no change (5)

### 3) Client Population Served: all non-union employees

### 4) Finding Problems:

- Most ombudspersons simply publicize their existence and then wait for problems to be presented to them.

- They often handle complaints initially routed to top management.
- A minority conduct regular review meetings or surveys.

#### 5) Individual Problems vs. Policy Issues:

- All respondents describe individual problems as their primary function.
- Two-thirds also have policy input to management.
- None have policy-making authority.

#### 6) Typical Problems:

##### The three most important issues:

- salaries
- terminations
- performance appraisals

##### Other issues cited:

- promotions, benefits, civil rights, discipline, workload, location transfer, attendance records, shift changes.

#### 7) Changing Problem Mix:

- Most respondents had little data available.
- Some indicated changes based on changing economic conditions, civil rights legislation, changing employee values.

#### 8) Problem Handling:

##### The first step:

- careful listening, clearly identifying the complaint

##### The second step:

- urging or requiring that resolution be attempted first with the supervisor

##### Additional steps as required:

- interpreting company policy
- coaching in the use of company procedures
- referral to other helping agents
- referral for arbitration by higher management or outsiders
- mediation
- advocacy of the clients case within a grievance procedure
- arbitration by the ombudsperson -- (We were able to locate only one ombudsperson with the power of binding arbitration.)

*Rage?*  
*Speed of handling?*

9) Confidentiality:

- Considered of central and overwhelming importance by each and every respondent.

10) Case Numbers and their Disposal:

Numbers of cases:

- widely varied: 50 - 350 per ombudsperson per annum
- typically: 200 - 300

Case disposal:

- many respondents could not or would not provide data
- typically: supervisors upheld 75-90% of the time

11) Background and Personality:

- Degrees in business, personnel management, psychology/counseling.
- Occasionally: law degrees, other degrees, no degree.

Personality descriptions:

- empathic, warm, friendly, enthusiastic, sense of honor
- helping person, calm, honest, high integrity, "tough but low key"
- analytical, creative, good judgment

Experience:

- at least two years management experience in the corporation, usually considerably longer

12) Reporting Responsibility:

- Typically both verbal and written reports.
- To within two levels of the top executive in the division.
- To an individual within (or above) the personnel chain.

13) Ombudspersons with other Official Roles:

- The majority have no other official role.

Impact when an additional role existed:

- typically considered positive or neutral
- one respondent found a time conflict
- one found a role conflict

14) Use of Resources External to the Company:

- Most utilized no outside resources.
- Two used consultants to explore new ideas.
- One used outside speakers on topics such as stress.
- One used an outside counseling service for referrals.

15) Success:

- All respondents considered the function to be highly successful.
- We located two corporations which had discontinued the position.

Meaning of success:

- resolving difficult cases
- making management aware of problems
- increasing managers' sensitivity
- decreasing complaints
- keeping out unions

16) Helpful Factors:*Fact-finding*The three most important:

- "clout" due to high level reporting relationship, perceived status
- a warm personality
- being a good listener

Other factors:

- understanding how the system works
- an analytical mind
- "guts," independence, tenaciousness
- integrity
- judgment

17) Additional Training Desired:

- Most respondents indicated no need for further training.
- A minority suggested civil rights and labor law, group dynamics, negotiating techniques, stress handling.

18) Written Information Suggested:

- Few respondents could suggest written material.
- A minority suggested books or articles or forwarded materials on their own corporation.

19) Interest in a Conference:

- Enthusiastic interest by a large majority.
- Qualified interest depending on program by the remainder.

Case Studies

20) Other Questions we should have Asked:

- Only one respondent suggested additional questions.

These included:

- how positions were initially developed and publicized
- length of tenure in role
- tenure differences between males and females if any
- type of support provided by management

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CORPORATE OMBUDSPERSONS TELEPHONE SURVEY QUESTIONS  
Busch Center, Fall 1982

1. I.D. Information: Date; Company; Person (name, address, phone)
2. History: When & why was the ombudsperson function established?  
Was there any initiating event(s)?  
Has it expanded, contracted, stayed the same?
3. What client population is served?  
% of total employees (exempt employees?)?  
Geographic dispersion or location?
4. How did you find the problems or how do they reach you?
5. What do you do as an Ombudsperson? Individual problems or policy change?
6. What are the typical kinds of problems
7. Has the problem mix changed over time?
8. Is there a typical way in which you handle a problem?  
What are the other ways you might handle other types of problems?  
How do these methods compare with other methods available in  
the company for dealing with problems?
9. How important is confidentiality?
10. Number of initial calls or other contacts per year?  
Number requiring additional follow-up or lengthy discussion (over 30 min.)?  
Approximate percentage which uphold supervisor, reverse supervisor, are  
a compromise
11. What is your own background; how would you characterize your personality?
12. To whom and how do you report?  
What groups or individual(s) do you feel you have to satisfy?
13. Is this your only role? (If multi-role has this been an asset or a  
liability?) How is the status of ombudsperson viewed within the company?
14. Do you have any resources or contacts outside the company which are of  
assistance in doing your job?
15. Has the ombudsperson function been a success within your company?
16. What has been helpful to you in performing your function?  
What has been detrimental to you in performing your function?  
What makes for a good ombudsperson -- background, status, personality type?
17. Is there any training which you would like to have to help you do your  
job as an ombudsperson?



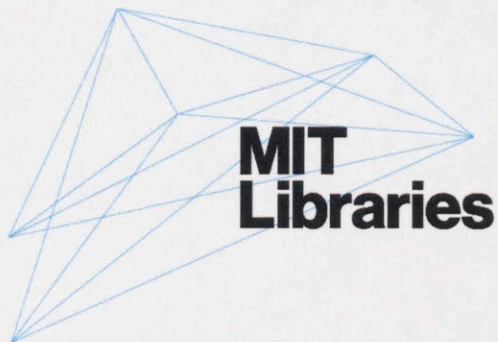
18. Is there any information that you can send or recommend to us about your job or ombudspersons in general such as:
  - brochures about your job
  - reports that can be publicly shared
  - readings and books relating to ombudspersons
  - any helpful training processes you have been through
19. Who else do you know who is called an ombudsperson or performs an ombudsperson function in your own or other companies?
20. Would you be interested in some kind of conference on corporate ombudspersons?
21. Are there any questions that we didn't ask that we should have asked?

*What to suggest to*  
*- Small companies*  
*- diff r work places*

- ROI - risk assessment  
- records -

- Third party complaints

What is the appropriate size of turf  
center :: decent 2u



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Department of Distinctive Collections at

[distinctive-collections@mit.edu](mailto:distinctive-collections@mit.edu)