

Organizational Ombuds Programs

Synopsis

The Organizational Ombuds provides a zero-barrier structure that: Uncovers serious problems; Resolves conflicts as quickly, fairly and informally as possible; Identifies organizational issues and trends; and Proposes organization enhancing adjustments.

This low-cost, high-impact mechanism offers demonstrable advantages unavailable in other issue management processes, due to its distinct (and protected in law) principles of confidentiality, neutrality, impartiality and informality.

Rapidly deployable and scalable, Ombuds Programs can be designed to focus on specific needs and challenges, or provide benefit via a more open goal set. Organizational Ombuds have demonstrated exceptional value creation, risk mitigation, and relationship preservation in a wide range of environments.

Definition

An internal, neutral, resource designated to provide confidential and informal support that quickly and fairly resolves work-related issues, disputes, and conflicts. Ombuds also provide organizational self-correction through systems improvement and assure Users a safe mechanism to raise any concern, with protection against retaliation or obstacles of bureaucratic indifference or inefficiency.

Actions

- Encourages raising of issues by Users, and addressing problems at the most appropriate level, to maximize creative problem solving and beneficial resolution.
- Helps Users identify, evaluate and pursue all viable options, including informal processes (e.g. coaching, discussion, mediation) or existing formal channels.
- Serves as an early warning system for leadership.
- Suggests systemic changes to prevent identified problems from recurring or escalating.
- Supports change management by identifying otherwise unknowable needs, reducing resistance points, and receiving/providing real-time feedback.
- Provides leadership with a unique firm-wide perspective/listening post.
- Assists users to generate actual, practicable, targeted solutions instead of “coping,” taking ineffective/destructive action, or resigning.
- Enhances ethical compliance, and augments the functional performance of leadership, management, and formal mechanisms.

Existent Programs *(partial list)*

- Corporate: Alliance Bernstein, American Express, Coca-Cola, Chevron, Eaton, Eisai, Mars
- Federal: CIA, DOE, FBI, NIH, TSA, USAID, DOD
- Education: Harvard, MIT, U.Cal Berkley, Stanford
- NGOs: ICANN, UN, American Red Cross, WBG, WHO

Organizational Ombuds Program

Operating Principles

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence
- Does not testify or contribute to any formal process
- Keeps no records containing identifying information or original documents
- Not an office of notice or record

NEUTRALITY

- Advocates only for fair process, not for any individual or the organization
- Considers the interests and impacts on all parties
- Fills no other role that might compromise neutrality

INDEPENDENCE

- Operates distinct of line and staff structures
- Functions independently from control, limitation or interference by any party in the firm
- Does not act as an agent, accept notice, or speak for the organization
- Has unfettered access to all internal information and all individuals in the organization

INFORMALITY

- Serves as an off-the-record resource
- Supplements, does not replace formal channels
- When possible, helps people develop new ways to solve problems themselves
- Does not make policy, issue findings, or participate in any formal investigations/processes

Roles

Listener, Generator of options/choices, Coach, Informal fact-finder, Mediator, Go-between, Upward-feedback conduit, System navigator

Value Returns

ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS

- Heightened transparency
- Enhanced accountability
- Protected and maximized personal responsibility
- Increased ethical and compliant behavior
- Improved preventative conflict-posture

ECONOMIC GAINS

- Expanded productivity
- Preserved management time
- Improved retention/separations
- Reduced legal process and outcome costs
- Decreased disputing time and costs
- Enhanced risk mitigation
- Protected reputation/brand
- Demonstrated (corp.) ROI of more than \$20/\$1

HUMAN CAPITAL

- Improved morale
- Enhanced risk mitigation
- Increased trust
- Advanced creativity and problem solving
- Heightened affinity
- Preserved working relationships