A Taxonomy of Organizational Ombuds:
Descriptors of the Employment of Organizational Ombuds who Practice to IOA Standards of Practice
(for researchers, policy makers, employers, and constituents)
©2024 Mary Rowe, Timothy Hedeen, Jennifer Schneider, Hector Escalante
Working Paper

Organizational Ombuds work in many different configurations. Ombuds work in a hundred countries, in many sectors of the world economy and in many cultures. Understanding the employment context of OO work helps in understanding the value and effectiveness of OO work. OOs may be self-employed, paid by a focal organization or organizations, or paid by contractors who provide ombuds services to organizations (or individuals). Here are some of aspects of OO employment for ombuds who practice—in any configuration here—as closely as possible to the IOA Standards of Practice (SoP):

1) **Employed by the focal organization and serves solely as Ombuds**: OOs may be part time or full-time. They may be located within the organization ("embedded") or serve from outside, online—or may do both.
2) **Employed by the focal organization and serves as collateral-duty ombuds:** The ombuds is an employee of the organization served; **has a primary or permanent role other than ombuds**; and serves as ombuds only part of the time. When practicing to IOA SoP, their primary role(s) can not conflict with their service as an ombuds. (NB: in the Federal Government and some organizations this is the *only* correct use of the term *collateral duty*.)
3) **Employed by the focal organization as an ombuds and has another role or roles:** The ombuds is an employee of the organization served and has at least one role in addition to ombuds. When practicing to IOA SoP any other role(s) can not conflict with their service as an ombuds. These OOs could be collateral duty ombuds if another role is primary—or they could be primarily ombuds, with additional role(s) that are secondary, or the OO could serve as ombuds and in another role, without either being a primary designation. (NB the term *"dual role"* is discouraged, as it is ambiguous, since there should be no overlap in roles.)
4) **Self-employed as an ombuds:** The ombuds serves one or more organizations, working on-line, or inside the organization.
5) **Contracted ombuds, employed by a contractor,** for service *to* one or more organizations (working from outside the organization). (NB the term "*outsourced*' is ambiguous and not used by some OOs.)
6) **Contracted ombuds, employed by a contractor,** for service *in* one or more organizations (working within the organization).
7) **Hours of employment:** OOs may work full-time at a given job, or part-time for set periods of time, or on-call.
8) **Place of employment**: The workplaces of the focal organization may be one or few, or locally distributed, or widely distributed, or world-wide, and within the office or on-line or hybrid. (NB using the terms '*Internal*" and "*External*" for the *OO practitioner* is discouraged, because those terms designate the *constituents* of Federal ombuds.)

9) **Constituents**: May be one set or several sets of organizational members—or all the organization's members. May range in numbers, literally, from a handful to millions. May be local, or dispersed within a country, or worldwide. May be relatively homogenous, or diverse, or extremely diverse with broad cultural differences. Consultant ombuds (see below) also consult to other ombuds and serve as active mentors.
10) **Reporting Relationships:** OOs may report only to a top leader of their organization, or to a contractor, (or even, day to day, to no one). Or, they have full access and therefore deal with many organizational managers and leaders who, in turn, also may be visitors to the office who ask for service from the OO.
11) **Characteristics of the Ombuds**: Ombuds may be generalists, have specific skills with certain visitors or groups, or maybe highly specialized—or may be more than one of these.
12) **Relationship with the organization's conflict management system (CMS)**: the ombuds may be a recognized, (independent) support to their CMS, or in an adjunct office within the organization or outside it.
13) **Consultant ombuds, working for a contractor,** consulting to organizations about ombuds work, and/or to other ombuds.
14) **Consultant ombuds, self-employed**, consulting to organizations about ombuds work, and/or to other ombuds.
15) **Owner or partner of a consultancy** that is a provider of ombuds services —and may also provide services personally.
16) **Owner or partner of a consultancy** providing on-line (AI) "ombuds bots," on retainer to organizations of various kinds, and may also provide services personally.