Journal of the International Ombudsman Association

Reflections on a Team Approach to an Ombuds Office

MELANIE JAGNEAUX, BONNIE BONNIVIER, JOSIE STILES, & MICHAEL MAYER

ABSTRACT
This paper presents reflections on a team approach to an organizational ombuds office for an international corporation headquartered in the US. The authors briefly review the establishment of the office, present descriptions of each role on the team, and reflect on experiences and lessons learned. The authors submit that their team approach to ombuds work has empowered the team to fulfill its purpose in rounding out the company's integrated conflict management system; has enhanced the quality of ombuds services to individuals; has enabled effective reporting and recommendations for systemic improvements; and has enriched each member of the team. The authors hope that this paper encourages additional dialogue about the team approach to an ombuds office.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The authors appreciate Baker Hughes leadership for their foresight in establishing the ombuds office and Pacifica Human Communications for their efforts in providing a strong foundation through the office's initial design and groundwork. We also thank the IOA and ombuds community for the wisdom and generosity extended to us over the years. Special thanks to Mary Rowe for her encouragement for and editing of this paper. The authors also recognize Arianna Gazis, who was instrumental in shaping the coordinator role and contributed immensely to the development of our protocols and communications materials, and who was with us in spirit in writing this paper.

KEYWORDS
Ombuds, ombudsman, team, staffing, coordinator, case intake, ombuds data, information specialist, principal ombuds, case categorization, IOA URC, uniform reporting categories, adjunct services

Baker Hughes is a leading supplier of oilfield services, products, technology, and systems to the worldwide oil and natural gas industry, employing 33,000 employees in more than 80 countries and helping customers find, evaluate, drill, produce, transport, and process hydrocarbon resources.

INTRODUCTION

The authors of this paper are members of the Baker Hughes organizational ombuds office, which was established in 2012 with a team of five professionals of varying backgrounds, experience, and skill sets. Our aim in this paper is to share our team approach to an ombuds office including reflections on our experiences to date. Our hope is that this paper encourages additional dialogue about the team approach to an ombuds office, specifically, or provides support to organizational ombuds offices, generally.

Purpose, Charter and Governance

In 2012, the chief executive officer of Baker Hughes endorsed the establishment of an organizational ombuds office as a new means for employees to raise issues and gain prompt assistance with workplace concerns. Just prior to this time, the company had completed significant organizational restructuring and a sizeable acquisition. Results of the company's employee engagement survey revealed confusion about existing sources of support and a sense of disconnection from leadership. In response, executive leadership ("leadership") aimed to address those concerns in part by establishing an ombuds office as an additional and confidential resource of support and guidance for employees. Leadership intended the ombuds office to complement—but not replace—existing internal sources of support such as representatives in human resources, compliance, safety and security. To help resolve confusion, the ombuds office would provide an easy point of contact for guidance through any work-related concern, including information about other internal sources of support. To help with connections, the ombuds office would add a direct conduit to leadership.

Visionary leadership inspired the establishment of the ombuds office and for nearly five years, employees have benefited from having this meaningful source of individual and confidential guidance. The ombuds office has supported employees in addressing their workplace concerns, improving their communication skills, upholding a positive corporate culture, preserving their relationships, and promoting a positive work environment. Meanwhile, through the ombuds office, the company has benefited from having the ombuds office's support in maintaining an ethical and engaged workforce. While protecting the anonymity of callers, the ombuds office has informed leadership of emerging concerns, enabling them to act timely and proactively. Wherever possible, the ombuds office has recommended improvements to practices and policies to minimize or prevent workplace issues. To encourage an engaged workforce, the ombuds office has assisted employees with communication, negotiation, team-building, and conflict management.

The ombuds office was established by a charter setting forth the overall purpose, structure, responsibilities, and governance of the ombuds office including the expectations of ombuds, covered employees, and management (Baker Hughes, 2017).

Each element of the ombuds office's operations conforms to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (SoP) (International Ombudsman Association, 2007a & 2009).

The ombuds office has access to the highest levels of the company and works with a cross-functional committee for performance and administrative purposes. The Ombuds Governance Committee (OGC) is comprised of seven members including a chair and four members who are appointed by the company's chief executive officer. The other two members come from below the executive level in the company and serve for a two-year term. The OGC oversees the ombuds office's performance of intended objectives and recommends opportunities to improve its integration into the organization. The OGC has no knowledge of specific matters brought by employees to the ombuds office. Neither the OGC nor any of its members may request or compel disclosure of confidential information brought to the ombuds office.

STAFFING A TEAM TO ENABLE QUALITY SERVICE

To enable quality service, the ombuds office was staffed with a team of four key roles: the principal ombuds, ombuds, information specialist, and office coordinator. Each role fulfills specific needs and contributes to the overall efficient functioning of the team. The principal ombuds serves as an ombuds, particularly in situations involving high risk to the organization. In addition, the principal serves as the primary point of contact to the office for executives and leaders of the company and supervises the ombuds office staff. The principal and two other ombuds provide traditional ombuds services including guiding employees who are seeking assistance, suggesting opportunities for systemic improvement, and educating the organization's employees on the unique nature of the ombuds office. The information specialist is the primary gatherer and synthesizer of data resulting from cases that come to the ombuds office. The information specialist serves in a fulltime capacity, which is rare in the ombuds world and supports the goal of deriving maximum systemic benefits for the company while ensuring caller confidentiality. The coordinator serves as the initial and closing contact for employees reaching out to the office, often acts as a quick information source for callers, and handles many administrative matters.

To help accelerate the office's establishment, the company sought external hires with prior experience and expertise in dispute resolution and organizational ombuds work. Three members of the team (principal, ombuds, and coordinator) were external hires having over forty years of combined experience in conflict management, organizational development and human resources from a variety of industries and institutions. To embed institutional knowledge into the team, two members of the team (ombuds and information specialist) were internal hires having over fifty years of combined knowledge and history working for the organization.

Reflection on staffing a team to enable quality service

We have found that staffing the ombuds office with a mix of people from within and outside the company helped the office become established and integrate more quickly and effectively.

The external team members (members of the team who came in from outside the company) brought in relevant skills and experience, which boosted the ombuds function's credibility. Being new to the company, these team members lacked internal history, roles, or relationships that could have caused challenges in establishing the ombuds function's neutrality. Also, the external team members were useful in questioning cultural practices that were new to them, but had become commonplace to the internal team members.

The internal team members were able to educate their external teammates about the organization's structure, culture, policies, and business practices. This helped prevent early missteps that could have occurred due to lack of familiarity with the company. In addition, internal team members had established connections with important stakeholders, such as the human resources, legal, and compliance departments, which were useful in creating inroads for the ombuds office. In short, the team has benefited from having a nice balance of teammates with depth of experience within and outside the company.

Overall, we believe it is worth the expense and effort to staff the ombuds office with a team of people in a variety of roles. Of course, it is important to strike the right balance based on demand for use from employees served. We believe the team and the company have benefited from having dedicated roles to provide ombuds work, case intake, data collection and reporting, and connection to leadership. Specifically, staffing the ombuds with a team of roles has enabled us to meet demands as they arose, draw on unique strengths of individual team members, and harness the power of creative collaboration. As is true with any collaborative effort, enabling strong team performance has taken significant time and energy. The team has come together numerous times every week to keep each other updated concerning cases and informed of company developments. In the following pages, we will review each role on the team, including descriptions, contributions, and our reflections.

COORDINATOR ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

While the office coordinator (coordinator) fulfills a variety of roles, the most critical is to be the initial face (and voice) of the ombuds office for callers. Most callers are first time users of the office. They may have read or heard about ombuds, but before their first experience they are not sure what to expect. In addition, they are often distressed and/or in the midst of conflict. A caller who is distressed or in conflict needs a positive first contact to feel confident about a resource he or she has never used before.

In the initial call, the coordinator has several key goals, including:

- serving as a warm yet professional voice of the office, while potentially calming and providing hope to a troubled person;
- giving a very brief sense of the specialized role of an organizational ombuds office, mentioning the four ethical principles of independence, neutrality, informality, and confidentiality;
- assessing the nature of the call—either as an informational request, readily handled on the spot by the coordinator, or as a case requiring a session scheduled with the ombuds; and
- identifying special considerations, such as technical or cultural implications, involvement of high-ranking personnel, ethical implications, or other circumstances which could impact assignment to a specific ombuds.

When the caller makes a request for information or referral that may be fulfilled without need of an ombuds, the coordinator deems the call a "contact" and assists the caller directly. Empowering the coordinator to provide such service gives callers immediate help, which sends a clear signal of the organization's support of employees. As the coordinator is a member of the ombuds office which promises confidentiality to employees, this initial discussion is likewise explicitly confidential, relieving the caller of any concerns about repercussions.

When the coordinator determines that the caller would benefit from meeting with an ombuds to express concerns and explore options for resolution, they offer to assign the "case" to an ombuds and to schedule the initial session between the caller and an ombuds. The coordinator takes into account the convenience of time for the caller, availability of an ombuds, the need (if any) for specialized knowledge, and the balance of case assignments among the team. If the caller is physically located near the assigned ombuds' office, the coordinator can offer the session either in person or via telephone.

After the initial call, the coordinator assigns a call number (whether a case or contact) and completes an intake form and cover sheet including essential details about the caller and their concerns. In the intake form, the assigned ombuds receives the name, telephone number, and essential concerns of the caller. In the cover sheet, the coordinator has a method to keep track of open cases. While the case is active, the ombuds retains the intake form and notes on developments in the case. After the case is closed, the intake form, cover sheet, and notes taken by the ombuds during casework are destroyed. Whereas certain case-related information is entered into a database, no caller-identifying information is entered. This process allows us to maintain our confidentiality commitment, identify and report broad usage statistics, and remain aligned with the SoP requirement of keeping no case records (Standard of Practice 3.5).

Depending upon circumstances, the coordinator may participate in case categorization sessions, which can add a number of benefits to the process. For instance, the coordinator may offer insight into the caller's initial concerns based on information shared at intake. In addition, the coordinator provides another set of eyes (and ears) for improved consistency in case categorization. Also, if the coordinator's career goals include developing into an ombuds role, conducting intake, participating in case categorization sessions, and hearing about ombuds case management practices provides excellent exposure and opportunities to learn.

Our office desires to survey users regarding services and the coordinator role is well-suited to conduct such surveys. The caller knows the coordinator from the initial intake, so when the coordinator calls to conduct the survey, there is little likelihood that the caller would be alarmed or concerned. Also, having the coordinator conduct the surveys lends some separation from the ombuds with whom the caller worked, which increases the likelihood in receiving unfiltered feedback. Participation in the user survey is voluntary; the coordinator invites but does not require the caller to participate. Any responses remain anonymous even to the ombuds; only the coordinator knows who made the comments.

The coordinator also provides administrative support to the ombuds team. If the individual in the coordinator role has the necessary skill set and so desires, he or she can assist in the development of various marketing and outreach materials.

Reflection on the coordinator role

As previously mentioned, the coordinator serves as a central point of contact for the ombuds office, which has been important as our team members are based in multiple locations. The coordinator has played an integral part of conducting case intake, assigning cases, planning outreach campaigns, handling logistics, and coordinating details between colleagues in other departments and ombuds team members. The coordinator also has conducted some outreach activities on behalf of the office, handing out literature and answering questions at employee events.

Most importantly, the coordinator has been the first and last voice that a caller heard when contacting the ombuds office. From the coordinator, callers received a calm and compassionate person who put them at ease when they were upset. The coordinator helped reduce caller apprehension in using the ombuds office by explaining the purpose of the office, hearing the essence of the concerns, and scheduling cases with ombuds. In those instances when the coordinator was out of the office and an ombuds took a call cold by directly answering an incoming call, we noticed a decrease in the callers' preparedness to work with the ombuds. In contrast, the ombuds noticed a positive impact on our working with callers by having the coordinator separately handle the intake stage of the process. Not only has the coordinator helped reduce fear of using the office, the coordinator helped ready the employee to work well with an ombuds. Even when the meeting with the ombuds has been the very day after intake with the *coordinator, by that time and with the coordinator's contributions, the employee has been better equipped to work effectively through their concerns.*

Occasionally, callers have been frustrated or confused about having to explain their concerns twice—first to the coordinator and then again to the assigned ombuds. In our experience, we have been able to reduce this confusion when the ombuds has recapped briefly the essence of the concerns that the coordinator captured from the case intake call. By doing this, the caller has understood that communication has flowed—in a sense honoring the caller for the time already spent talking with the coordinator. Typically, this has encouraged the caller to invest more time by sharing details of the concerns with the ombuds.

INFORMATION SPECIALIST ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The information specialist (specialist) provides the team with meaningful data analyses and quality reporting to help the office recommend systemic improvements to leadership and demonstrate the value of the ombuds office. As a fulltime member of the ombuds team, the specialist makes the same commitment to confidentiality as other team members and has access to case data. The specialist gathers data gleaned from ombuds casework, enters case-related data into a database specifically designed for ombuds casework, and organizes the data into easily digested formats including graphs, tables, and descriptions. The ombuds team regularly reviews these graphs and tables to consider their use in reports to leadership and management. Such reports present an overview of the nature of concerns brought by callers without compromising caller confidentiality. In addition, the reports provide leadership a summary of the issues impacting morale, performance, efficiency, and productivity.

The specialist is responsible for managing the structure and use of the database. In addition, the specialist makes sure that the database aligns with the IOA SoP. To conform to confidentiality requirements, the specialist excludes all caller-identifying information from the database, ensures that the database and servers are secured by data encryption and physical protection, and oversees a regular schedule of case-related document destruction (Standard of Practice 3.6). In addition, the specialist limits access to the database only to members of the ombuds office.

The specialist customizes the database to reflect the company's operating structure and the nature of callers' issues identified by the ombuds team. As the company changes its operating structure, the specialist alters the database to align with changes to business segments, facilities, and product lines. The specialist enters and maintains the quality of the data in the database to ensure that data being captured is current, consistent, and correct.

The specialist runs reports comparing case data to organizational statistics. Data can be analyzed by geography, business segment, demographics, and nature of concerns. The specialist enters relevant case-related information into the database, such as information about the nature of concerns (e.g., categories, dimensions, and issues) and demographics and physical location of callers. Again, the specialist carefully excludes names and other caller-identifying information (Standard of Practice 3.7). With input from the ombuds who worked the case, the specialist enters additional relevant information, such as the amount of time a caller had been dealing with the issues; other resources involved (e.g., "HR business partner" or "manager"); how the caller has been impacted (e.g., "morale," "finances," or "career"); and ombuds actions in assisting the caller (e.g., "coach," "generate options," "refer," or "intervene"). Including all this information in the database allows the team to identify patterns of concerns, whether pertaining to the company overall or a particular business unit or facility. In addition, the principal can ask the specialist to run reports to assess the team's performance, for instance identifying most common ombuds activities and effective outreach methods.

The specialist also draws on data generated by the organization's other departments, such as human resources. When gathering such data the specialist disguises the specific use of the data to ensure caller confidentiality. For instance, the specialist may request a broader dataset than needed or seek information in the form of a report rather than running specialized queries or making inquiries about individuals. When reaching out to others in the company for information, the specialist requests data in raw form rather than generating a specific query that might identify the caller or concerns.

Reflection on the information specialist role

The information specialist role has provided tremendous value to our ombuds office. Having a dedicated fulltime employee with skills in data analytics and reporting who is covered by the team's confidentiality requirements has enabled the team to prepare meaningful reports that convey relevant information to the company's stakeholders. With support from the specialist, we have been able to manage and appropriately share data, equipping leadership and management with important factual information that contributes to informed decision making. In short, the specialist role enables the ombuds office to provide a positive data-driven systemic impact on the organization.

As mentioned previously, we staffed the specialist with an internal hire, whose experience in data analytics and reporting was based on the company's systems and culture. The specialist's prior knowledge and mastery of many of the company's reporting systems and data gathering platforms expanded the breadth of the team's reporting capabilities. For instance, the specialist had access and ability to draw reports from the company's human resources information system, which allows the ombuds to conduct appropriate information gathering on an informal basis.

The specialist came to the ombuds office with ample experience in data and analytics, but without prior knowledge or experience of the ombuds function. To help the specialist assimilate to the ombuds team and perform in the role, the specialist underwent

Foundations training with the IOA and has attended IOA annual conferences, both as a participant and a presenter. In addition, the specialist has participated as a member of the IOA's communications committee and in other relevant organizations. These have been real investments in the specialist's education and experiences which have brought about improved functioning for the team. Because of these investments, the specialist has fully integrated into the team, participating in all team meetings, contributing to team discussions, and even filling in for the coordinator by conducting case intake and case surveys.

OMBUDS ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Casework practices and conflict management consultation are the core work of ombuds. Despite unique experiences, education, and skill sets, each ombuds offers common core competencies and strategies to ensure consistent and reliable service. Such core competencies include mastery of conflict skills and theories of negotiation, such as interest-based negotiation.

Organizational ombuds practice according to the IOA SoP. Because each caller's situation is unique, an ombuds adapts to the person and situation and employs a variety of approaches to build connection and offer high quality service to the caller. While working with a caller, the ombuds explains the role of the ombuds and how the process works, listens with compassion to the caller, clarifies concerns, identifies possible goals and explores the caller's options and potential outcomes. Depending on circumstances, the ombuds may also provide information on policies or programs, give feedback, help the caller with a strategy, or serve as a sounding board.

Typically, the ombuds works one-on-one with a caller from the outset of the case to its closure. However, an ombuds may confer with team members to seek support or guidance in working with a difficult issue. On rare occasion, an ombuds may explore transferring the case to another ombuds if the original ombuds identifies a potential conflict of interest or has a personal reaction to a caller that may compromise neutrality.

Employees sometimes come to the ombuds office as a last resort, when conflict has escalated and relationships are damaged. It is not uncommon for an ombuds to hear complex and challenging dilemmas. In these more difficult situations, the team—and its wisdom—can provide dual support. First, it can enhance the callers' experiences. Second, it can provide essential support to the ombuds working the case. With a regular practice of coming together to discuss active cases, each ombuds gains essential support and constructive feedback to better manage cases. Specifically, team feedback in case reviews empowers the ombuds by:

- tapping into the wealth of wisdom of diverse knowledge, skills, and abilities;
- sharing learning and hearing about similar circumstances;

- generating or testing ideas, surfacing missing information, and trying new approaches;
- enabling a supportive and gentle way to hold one another accountable to the SoP; and
- expressing personal responses to difficult cases, supporting one another, and developing healthy self-care tools and strategies.

Reflection on the ombuds role

It is important for an ombuds office to be connected to the organization it serves. Gaining and maintaining credibility with key stakeholders while keeping adequate independence can be a delicate business and the saying 'more heads are better than one' has rung true for us. Having three ombuds working from a variety of locations has helped the team keep a broader pulse on the climate, learn about new developments, adapt with change, and manage through the organizational culture. In addition, as mentioned previously, having ombuds with diversity in background and experiences has enriched the team's thinking, empowering it to envision new approaches to challenges and influence change.

The success of an ombuds office is often built on a reputation of trust. As such trust builds over time, the ombuds office becomes more effective. Over the past four-plus years, each ombuds has contributed directly to the office's reputation of trust through connections with callers, leaders, and stakeholders across the company. However, three ombuds can only reach so far. As is true for many organizations, our company operates across a large geography. We have found it challenging to stay connected to thousands of employees working in hundreds of facilities. Even with the ombuds working in several locations, the potential to develop connections and gain information has been constrained, somewhat.

Just as no two artists paint alike, no two ombuds work alike. In our experience, each of the three ombuds has approached ombuds work in a unique way, drawing on their own set of strengths, skills, education, and experiences. The richness inherent in these different approaches comes to life in case reviews, where one ombuds debriefs the case and gains wisdom from the wealth of strengths, skills, education, and experiences of the other ombuds. In this way, each of us has been enriched and our callers benefit from the strengths of the entire team.

PRINCIPAL OMBUDS ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

As an ombuds, the principal ombuds (principal) delivers ombuds services to the company. In addition, the principal provides leadership for the ombuds office. In particular, the principal oversees development, implementation, integration, and outreach efforts for initial launch, expansion, and communication of the office. This includes public relations activities to raise visibility, awareness, and understanding of the ombuds office across the organization. The principal consults with executive leadership—

in particular the chief executive, legal, and human resources officers—to review the contributions from the ombuds office and keep them apprised of the general nature of employee concerns and systemic issues.

The principal ensures the execution of a written charter outlining the mandate, purpose, and structure of the ombuds office and adherence to the IOA SoP. In addition, the principal establishes and monitors effective processes and procedures for the office's operations.

The principal builds and supports a team of individuals to ensure the office delivers value-added results. Specifically, the principal directs all aspects of the ombuds office's team performance including learning and development, training, business goals, performance reviews, and succession planning. In addition, the principal supports each ombuds team member in attaining and maintaining the IOA Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP) designation.

The principal oversees the design and delivery of a variety of aggregated case data reports to leadership and employees relating to the overall nature of concerns and usage of the ombuds office. Leadership reports are tailored to provide aggregated case data about caller concerns from the leader's business segment. Annual reports to employees provide updates on the ombuds office's performance and contributions. These reports may include the nature of concerns received and hypothetical scenarios with examples of ombuds actions. Such reports remind employees of the availability of the office and encourage its use. All reports are carefully prepared to protect callers' confidentiality.

Along with other members of the team, the principal identifies trends that may have negative impacts for the company and positive impacts of decisions or changes that might have gotten little attention. The principal offers recommendations through upward feedback and outward communication to increase understanding and improve outcomes. The principal serves as a resource and advisor on organizational concerns identifying and analyzing gaps between the stated goals and actual practices. The principal consults with leadership and management on possible organizational changes, promoting learning and improved communication at all levels.

Reflection on the principal role

As a practicing ombuds, the principal provides ombuds services to employees of all functions and levels. To be of maximum assistance in casework, the principal works to engender trust and establish genuine rapport. Like the other ombuds, the principal uses ombuds skills to listen, offer feedback, and provide guidance to better equip and prepare callers in addressing their issues effectively. In most instances, any ombuds can be assigned to handle a case that comes into the office. On occasion, either the nature of the concerns or other circumstances cause us to view the case as having heightened sensitivity or risk. In such an instance, we have found it helpful to assign the case to the *principal. Regardless of the risk or severity of the case, the principal's continued involvement in casework is essential to the team's overall performance and cohesion. Without such regular practice in casework, the principal would be less attuned to the climate and hampered in ability to identify systemic concerns.*

Like all members of the ombuds office, the principal presents a face for the ombuds office to the population to inspire trust and promote usage. We understand that the role of the ombuds and even the name itself is odd and relatively unfamiliar. By presenting the faces, names, and contact information of all team members, including the principal's, we have intended to make the office more approachable and accessible. Broadly speaking, the principal's communications with the covered population are intentionally personal, welcoming, and open. Beginning in 2013, following the first full year of our operations, every annual report of the ombuds office has always included a letter addressed to covered employees and signed by the principal. We believe using a personal approach, such as providing all names and photos of the team in reports and on our website, has helped present the ombuds office as an accessible resource for employees when they need help.

The principal brings issues forward to leadership. When conveying messages, the principal considers a wide range of factors and priorities, set within the context of the company's culture and industry. The company operates in the oil and gas industry, which requires keen focus on a market that can rapidly impact our operations. Mindful of this focus, the principal considers changing business conditions and the employee climate when bringing issues forward. Issues may involve perceived concerns, missed opportunities, or potential vulnerabilities. Considering a range of factors, the principal ascertain whether, when, and how to bring concerns to leadership. And once brought, the principal presents the information in a way that engages dialogue and discussion, even when the news may be difficult to hear.

As manager of the ombuds team, the principal oversees the performance and development of team members, manages budgets, and governs all administrative aspects of the office. As an administrator, the principal draws on a distinct set of skills not necessarily required as an ombuds, such as time management, resource allocation, staffing, and budget decisions. While the principal must provide leadership to the team and the company, the principal must also provide competent administrative and people management skills. To balance these dual sets of responsibilities, the principal has needed to focus sufficient attention to both leadership and administrative management.

Lastly and most importantly, the principal must ensure that the ombuds office itself stays true to IOA ethical principles and operates with integrity. This has been especially true these initial years of our operation. A misstep in the first few years could have caused irreparable confusion, distrust, resentment, and possibly even questioning the value of the office. While all team members share in the accountability of operating with *integrity, the principal bears the ultimate responsibility for actions taken by the office or individual team members and ensuring overall adherence to IOA ethical principles.*

MAGIC OF THE TEAM APPROACH

As already described, our ombuds office was established with a team approach in mind. Now in our fifth year in operation, we remain grateful for our team structure and impressed by the wisdom it brings.

From the very beginning, we knew we needed a method to capture the concerns we were hearing. We chose to adapt the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories (IOA URC), a tool developed by a diverse team of respected ombuds (International Ombudsman Association, 2007b). We believed that beginning with the IOA URC and its nine categories of concerns would enable us to gather and report on high-level data from our caseload internally with our leaders and compare our experiences with those of other organizational ombuds offices.

The IOA URC works well for us. Its nine categories give us a common language and a great beginning. Over time, within the nine categories we have added dimensions and issues as they were expressed by employees, resulting in a new tool that developed from the IOA URC yet was customized for our company. We consider our Baker Hughes URC a working document, adding new issues as they emerge in our casework. As an example, our Compensation and Benefits category (one of nine categories) has grown from an initial five dimensions with 16 issues to 31 dimensions with 101 issues.

With our adapted URC in hand, we engage the team's wisdom in a process we call "case categorization," or "case cat" for short. Briefly, case cat involves team meetings in person or via web/phone to debrief current cases and categorize the issues. With three ombuds handling cases, we anticipated a challenge in achieving consistency in issue identification. We realized that each of us might interpret the issues slightly differently; if data were captured inconsistently, reports from the database would be unreliable. Our leadership wanted to learn about employee concerns and the value the office was adding to the company and we planned to rely on reports from our caseload to inform them. To ensure consistency in data gathering and to develop reliable reports, we draw on the team's wisdom by debriefing and categorizing cases together.

As noted, issue identification is a team exercise. We come together in case cat at least once per week to debrief and categorize active cases. The ombuds handling a case debriefs the case and describes the caller's concerns. Other members of the team listen along and generate lists of potential issues raised. Once the ombuds completes a debrief, the others recite issues they identified. The ombuds who handled the case has the final say about the issues that will be recorded in the database, but issues that have been identified by two or more members of the team become persuasively appropriate.

Obviously, with all team members participating in case cat, these meetings require significant investments of time and focus.

Reflection on the magic of the team approach

We have reflected on the balance of our workload and consistently regard the case cat process as well worth the investment. We could have chosen to categorize cases individually and save this time for other work. But, we have seen too much value come from case cat to give it up. For instance, we have seen that we are not always consistent in our review of the issues. Sometimes we categorize cases similarly—all team members identifying almost all of the same issues. In most instances, however, each ombuds categorizes cases at least a little differently. With the benefit of considering a wider range of potential issues, the ombuds handling the case selects the final set of issues that best captures the essential nature of the caller's concerns. With all this team effort, we set ourselves up for quality issue identification and ensure that our data and reports are as accurate and reliable as possible.

Our team approach to case cat gave us more than just improved quality and consistency in issue identification and reporting. Over the years, we began to realize added value brought by the team's experiences in case cat. Below is a list of the unexpected advantages:

- *Typically, we debrief cases while they are still open. New ideas and suggestions regularly arise. The ombuds who is working a case can relay these new options to the caller.*
- *As we review cases together, we begin to identify common patterns and themes allowing us to timely inform leadership of emerging concerns or systemic issues.*
- *Team members operate from multiple locations, doing work that can be quite solitary. Our case cat meetings build in regular connection and bonding that enrich and strengthen us.*
- *We have found this process to be an important way to process and release emotions that we may be carrying from the work we do.*
- *Reviewing cases together has accelerated the team's sharing of knowledge and expertise, which empowers us to better serve our callers and the company.*

At times, each of us has found that ombuds work can be isolating and emotionally draining. Gathering together and sharing experiences has promoted feelings of inclusion and groundedness. Our team approach to casework and conflict management consultation has helped us draw from the diversity in strength among team members, has encouraged healthy connections, and has promoted ongoing learning and creativity. Though we have not found a way to quantify it, we suspect that our self-care efforts have translated into better outcomes for the callers and the company.

ADJUNCT SERVICES

Occasionally, the ombuds office receives requests for services beyond the conventional. When we receive such a request, we consider it carefully to ensure that performance of such work would align with the ombuds office's charter and with the IOA SoP. We refer to these unconventional requests as "adjunct services." Adjunct services may include small or large groups or even a broader spectrum of employees across the company. Adjunct service requests may include facilitation, training, workplace assessments, mediation, and/or employee climate checks, such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups.

An adjunct service request can be more complex than the core work of one-on-one case management. Usually, there are a number of people involved with different goals or perspectives. A consultative approach works well to determine scope, purpose, outcomes, timelines, and resource requirements of each project. The initial information is typically gathered by one ombuds leading the service. However the design and delivery of the service frequently involves at least two ombuds. Delivering adjunct services in this way allows the team to:

- apply and develop a broader spectrum of knowledge, skills, and abilities;
- enable work to be distributed equitably among team members ensuring timely delivery;
- foster diverse perspectives to generate creative solutions and produce better quality services;
- create cohesion among team members; and sometimes even
- help make work more fun!

Each ombuds brings their unique style and perspective to practice and not every ombuds has experience with all types of adjunct services. Having two or more people offering group facilitation, mediation, or skills training allows the team to draw on strengths of individual team members and extend them to other ombuds team members via co-facilitation or training.

Adjunct services may be complex, challenging, and intense. Designing the most appropriate process, paying attention to details and noticing group dynamics while remaining neutral can be difficult for an ombuds working alone. Working as a team provides for greater potential participant impacts as well as fostering healthy team relations.

Reflection on adjunct services

Our experiences using a team approach to adjunct services, such as facilitation or mediation, has been advantageous to participants. Specifically, the differences among the ombuds themselves (styles, age, nationality, backgrounds, work experiences, etc.) have helped participants find connection and gain comfort with what is usually a new and *somewhat foreign process. Also, as ombuds team members worked cooperatively, they offered an excellent model of effective communication and collaborative problem solving.*

Furthermore, we believe that co-facilitation has helped keep participants engaged and motivated. As two or more people shared content delivery, they were better able to attend to participant comfort and security. As a result, we have experienced greater openness in discussions, increased understanding, and improved problem solving. The team approach to adjunct services has allowed us to draw on the strengths in our diversity of thought which enhanced the overall experiences of our participants and produced higher quality outcomes.

Adjunct services also offered advantages to ombuds team members themselves. An ombuds who observed a peer in action enhanced learning and improved skills. As team members shared in group facilitation, for instance, the overall quality of the effort increased. Having extra sets of ears, eyes, and hands enabled the facilitators to pay attention to group dynamics and maintain the momentum of the group. In addition, conducting adjunct services as a team allowed each team member to conserve energy by providing breaks for each co-facilitator. Finally, including check-ins and discussions among co-facilitators as well as post-session debriefs proved to be very useful in promoting individual learning and process improvement.

REPORTING TO THE COMPANY

Reporting is done on a quarterly, semiannual, annual, and as-needed basis depending on the intended audience and reasons for reporting. The reporting process requires the skills and contributions of the entire team. The specialist gathers and assimilates data drawn primarily from the database containing case-related information and provides initial graphics for discussion and review with the principal and ombuds. Based on team discussions concerning the “story” being told by the data, the specialist further refines the analyses for subsequent review and discussion with team members. The coordinator contributes to team discussions and conducts the user satisfaction surveys. The specialist presents the analyses to the principal and ombuds for review, consideration, and potential refinement. Considering all input from the team, the principal ultimately decides on the content and form of information to convey.

As previously mentioned, the coordinator conducts user satisfaction surveys by telephone on an ongoing basis. Survey participation is voluntary and information may be offered anonymously. The coordinator places a phone call to users of ombuds services to gain feedback. Specifically, the survey includes five statements seeking feedback on their experiences with ombuds services. One such statement on our survey is “the ombuds helped me address my need(s) or helped me resolve my issue(s).” The coordinator and specialist compile and analyze survey results for use in reports and on the office’s internal website.

Reports are delivered quarterly to the OGC, due to its oversight function and in serving as an important connection between the ombuds office and the company. The principal delivers these reports in-person and via webinar and includes usage statistics such as the comparative changes in call volume and an overall look at the issues employees are taking to the ombuds office. In addition, the principal relays emerging trends or systemic issues to the OGC, which considers this information and decides appropriate action as necessary. Reports to the OGC also include summaries from the user satisfaction surveys and comments given by employees, so the OGC has information about the quality of ombuds services.

Reports are delivered semi-annually and as needed to other important stakeholders in the company, including leaders of business segments or support functions such as human resources. In these reports, leaders gain insight into the kinds of concerns their employees are having. Leaders receive an overview of the categories, dimensions, and issues brought to the ombuds office over specific timeframes. Reports carefully exclude any information that could reveal the identity of our callers and are not left behind. With the exception of the annual report, which is disseminated by mail and electronically, reports are delivered in person or by webinar only. Recipients never receive a copy of the report in print or electronically.

Reflection on reporting to the company

As the ombuds office has matured, the team has improved its ability to analyze and report on data. In our early years, we provided reports on aggregated data covering the entire covered area. As time passed and our case volume increased, we were able to sort data by segments, such as our North American operations and corporate support functions. As further time passed and with enough cases to ensure validity, we have been able to further sort data by narrowing the scope, such as from all of North America to more specifically North America land or offshore groups or from all corporate support functions to more specifically the human resources function. The upside of the refined reports is that we have been able to reveal concerns or issues that were unique to a particular group. As our leadership teams have remained most interested in hearing about the concerns of their own employees, we have been able to respond with useful insights. The downsides of the refined reports relate to statistical reliability and confidentiality. As the scope of reporting has narrowed, we have sometimes lacked sufficient volume to suggest a common issue. In addition, as the more narrowed reporting includes fewer matters, we have remained on alert to protect caller confidentiality. Our leadership teams have wanted to know whether issues may be emerging within specific facilities or product lines. Without sufficient volume to warrant mention as a common issue or trend, we must keep with our confidentiality commitments to our callers.

As mentioned previously, we have relayed systemic issues in our reporting process to deliver the information to appropriate members of leadership. We have developed methods to identify systemic issues, involving the entire team. The case cat process has served as the primary mechanism to keep the team informed of active caseload. As common issues or trends have developed, the team has been able to identify them readily through these regular case reviews. In addition, in other team meetings, we have identified systemic issues or emerging trends based on team member observations of organizational changes or developments. Whether via case cat or other team meetings, we believe that these team-wide conversations about potential patterns or systemic issues have enabled us to fulfill our role as an agent of change and systemic improvement for the company.

In essence, our reporting has evolved in a way that captures the perspectives of several ombuds who have observed the company from a variety of vantage points. Rich dialogues about systemic issues have brought well-rounded messages to the appropriate members of leadership, in as relevant and timely a format possible.

MARKETING AND EDUCATION

Communications are vital in the initial establishment and continued education and outreach of an ombuds office. Our communications include brochures, articles posted on the office's website, handouts, and excerpts included in written reports (e.g., annual reports).[1] Given the unique nature of the work we do, our communications are developed internally by the ombuds team members themselves. Having the team working together on communications both shares the burden and increases the likelihood of quality output. Writing abilities vary from person to person; however, each member of the team has strengths to contribute—editing talent, visual ideas, sensing what "fits" with the company tone and culture. Once the content is developed, we circulate communications internally to stakeholders in human resources, legal, and internal communications for feedback and help with layout and design.

Meetings with leaders and employees in person are highly effective in informing people about an ombuds office—the services it provides and the principles under which it operates. All members of the ombuds team can be effective in such outreach activities. Most typically, the principal will be the primary presenter to leadership. The ombuds frequently deliver employee briefings describing the nature of the ombuds office, the role of the ombuds, and how the process works. In addition, they provide assurance to potential users of the approachability of the ombuds. Often there are outreach opportunities where a detailed presentation would not be the best approach. These can include open houses, charity activities, health fairs, or town hall meetings. All ombuds team members participate in these events, provide handouts, and answer general

[1] The o3 annual reports for 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 can be found online at http://www.bakerhughes.com/company/organizational-ombuds-office-o3.

questions. Having a team means having more resources to deploy and the potential for broader employee outreach.

Reflection on marketing and education

We have found it necessary to develop and share a variety of tools to reach out to and inform the company about the ombuds office. Although in-person meetings are most effective in informing people about the ombuds office, such meetings have been fairly difficult to organize. Our employees work in hundreds of facilities across a wide geographical expanse in varying shifts and times. Given these challenges and the fact that we are a small team, we have relied on print (brochures, wallet cards, posters, annual reports) and electronic (email, news articles, and web announcements) communications. We have engaged the team's talent in developing these communications. Individual members contributed according to their strengths, whether in drafting content, preparing artwork, or editing final products. Using the individual talents of the team enabled us to develop effective and high-quality communication materials. In our print and video pieces, having a variety of voices and faces added to the overall impact of our communications on our audiences.

*In addition to our internal outreach and education for the company, we have extended our outreach outside the company. Over the years, we have had the opportunity to serve as ambassadors for the ombuds function with customers, suppliers, relevant professional associations, and members of communities where the company has a physical presence. For instance, team members and a fellow Baker Hughes employee in the health, safety, and environment (HSE) department co-authored a paper exploring potential synergies from an organization's ombuds office and social responsibility goals (*Bonnivier, Brooke-Lander, & Lewis, 2015)*. This paper was later presented to a forum of HSE professionals, some of whom had no prior knowledge of or experience with an ombuds, at the Society of Petroleum Engineers E&P Health, Safety, Security & Environmental Conference – Americas held in Denver, Colorado in 2015. We believe our external outreach has created goodwill for the company and bolstered its social responsibility initiatives. Whether the team's participation in external activities involved written communications or actual participation, those activities shone a positive light on the company as an employer of choice.*

BUSINESS PLANNING AND TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Putting time, energy, and resources into business planning and team development brings many advantages. It strengthens the individual members of the team by encouraging their growth and development. In addition, the team benefits from having the ability to shift work among team members as needed or desired to work more effectively and efficiently. Finally, the company benefits from having a fully enabled team to serve employees who call on us for help.

An important ancillary responsibility of practicing ombuds is in providing support to the ombuds community and promoting the organizational ombuds function to other organizations and society at large. Having a team of varied and specialized roles and skills has allowed us to participate in a variety of ways to promote the ombuds profession without overwhelming any single member with excessive additional responsibilities. As such, all team members contribute to the organizational ombuds profession by speaking, teaching, writing and mentoring others—internally and externally. Where possible, each team member contributes to the IOA or affiliated organizations such as the Corporate Organizational Ombudsman Roundtable, or the Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP) program.

Reflection on business planning and team development

Each person on the team has grown, developed, and benefited by participating in business planning and team development opportunities. By sharing knowledge and expertise with other team members, each person has become stronger in their role and grown in understanding and support of one another. We have benefitted individually and as a team by considering our performance and operations over time. For instance, as we have reflected on feedback from our callers, we have made adjustments to our protocols. And as we have evaluated those adjustments, we have been able to mark improvements in the quality and standards of our service to the company.

As is often discussed among our ombuds colleagues, individual members can experience grief or become overwhelmed due to the nature of the work we do. In addition, where team members are contributing to both internal and external efforts, they can experience burnout or exhaustion. When our team lost a player, other team members stepped in to share the added workload. Keeping the team engaged, inspired, and renewed can be challenging. At these times, we have been grateful to be able to call on our mentors in the ombuds field and fellow ombuddies for additional support and good counsel.

CONCLUSION

We believe that our team approach to an ombuds office has empowered us to better fulfill the office's purpose in rounding out the company's integrated conflict management system with an independent, neutral, informal, and confidential process (Rowe & Williams, 2014).

Since it opened in 2012, the ombuds office at Baker Hughes has helped the company surface serious issues and has found ways to provide early warning of them to the company. Consistent with other organizational ombuds, we have guided to internal formal channels any number of whistleblowing issues, such as "harassment, sexual harassment, waste, fraud and/or abuse, potential suicidal and homicidal behavior, retaliation and a wide variety of integrity concerns," as described by the IOA's December 2015 Practice Report (Rowe & Hedeen, 2016, p. 34).

Organizational ombuds work in near-absolute confidentiality; the IOA SoP provides eight safeguards to confidentiality and only one exception—when an ombuds judges a situation as presenting an imminent risk of serious harm (Standard of Practice 3.1). In such instance and like our colleagues, we are "both able and willing to breach confidentiality" (Rowe & Hedeen, 2016, p. 35). Also consistent with other ombuds, such breach of confidentiality is rarely required as we are "adept in finding ways to get information where it needs to go without compromising the confidentiality of individuals" (Rowe & Hedeen, 2016, p. 35). Options include receiving permission from the caller, helping the caller find a way to get the information where it needed to go, or finding an effective way for a compliance office to find the information for itself (Rowe & Hedeen, 2016).

Staffed with a set of specialized roles filled by professionals with varied skill sets and backgrounds, we were able to quickly organize and perform valuable services, accelerate the office's credibility, integrate into the culture, and demonstrate the value the office provides to the company. Since the office's establishment, employees have had the option to call on us for confidential help when they have needed it. When they have done so, we have guided them through the array of options available to them. Our callers have told us that they struggled with issues, unsure of what to do and fearful of potential negative consequences for raising concerns. We consistently hear their appreciation to the company for having a safe place to talk things out, learn of options, and prepare their way forward.

REFERENCES

Baker Hughes. (2017). *Charter for the Organizational Ombuds Office.* Retrieved from https://www.bakerhughes.com/news-and-media/resources/reference-guides/ombuds-charter

Bonnivier, B. M., Brooke-Lander, M. C., & Lewis, M. R. (2015, March). The organizational ombuds office and corporate social responsibility: Driving values in an organization. *Society of Petroleum Engineers, USA*. doi:10.2118/173528-MS

International Ombudsman Association. (2007a). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved from http://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/Code_Ethics_1-07.pdf

International Ombudsman Association. (2007b). *Uniform reporting categories*. Retrieved from http://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/UTFRC-Desk-Reference-v2.pdf

International Ombudsman Association. (2009). *Standards of practice*. Retrieved from http://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_Oct09.pdf

Rowe, M., & Hedeen, T. (2016). *International ombudsman association December 2015 practice report*. Retrieved from IOA website: http://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/docs/IOA-Practice-Report-FINAL5_11_17.pdf

Rowe, M., & Williams, R. (2014). Organizational Ombudsman. In Waks, J. W., Vanderlip, N. L., & Lipsky, D. B. (Eds.), CPR Institute for Dispute Resolution & Scheinman Institute on Conflict Resolution. *Cutting edge advances in resolving workplace disputes*. New York, NY: International Institute for Conflict Prevention & Resolution.

AUTHOR BIOS

Melanie Jagneaux joined Baker Hughes in 2012 as principal ombuds to lead the Baker Hughes organizational ombuds office. As principal, Melanie oversees all aspects of the ombuds office's operations to ensure it is performing effectively and delivering on its mission and goals. Prior to this, Melanie was director of the conflict management system for employment disputes at Coca-Cola Enterprises. Melanie is a member of the IOA and was recently elected to serve on the IOA Board of Directors. Melanie is a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP) and has served on the CO-OP Board since October of 2014. Melanie has a Juris Doctor from South Texas College of Law, a Master's of Business Administration from Kennesaw State University, and a Bachelor's of Arts in political science from Tulane University. (melanie.jagneaux@bakerhughes.com)

Bonnie Bonnivier joined the organizational ombuds office as ombuds when it was established in 2012. Bonnie has presented at IOA conferences, and has contributed to numerous scientific and health safety environment (HSE) related publications. She is a member of the IOA and a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner. Bonnie started her employment with Baker Hughes in 1977 as an analytical chemist for the chemical division. Bonnie has held a variety of roles, including operations, product management, technology and health, safety and environment. Bonnie held several HSE leadership roles and played an instrumental part in the implementation of Baker Hughes process safety programs and the harmonization of the HSE management system. Bonnie graduated from Butler University with a Bachelor's of Science in chemistry, with high honors. (bonnie.bonnivier@bakerhughes.com)

Josie Stiles joined Baker Hughes as ombuds in 2013 and is based in Calgary, Canada. Josie is a member of the IOA and a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner. Josie came to Baker Hughes with over 30 years' experience developing dispute resolutions strategies, implementing change and resolving issues with companies, communities, not-for-profit organizations, government and regulators in Canada. She has helped clients navigate a variety of sensitive issues from community engagement for pipeline projects in the energy sector to work climate matters relating to discrimination and harassment within organizations. She has a Master's Degree in Conflict Analysis and Management from Royal Roads University in British Columbia and a police science degree from Mount Royal College in Albertas. In addition, Josie teaches dispute resolution at the University of Calgary. (josie.stiles@bakerhughes.com)

Michael Mayer joined the organizational ombuds office as information specialist in 2012. Mike is responsible for developing systemic and analytical presentations for various levels of Baker Hughes leadership while protecting the confidentiality of all employees who work with our ombuds. Mike first joined Baker Hughes in 1990 as a temporary employee. After completing his Bachelor's degree at Sam Houston State University in 1995, Mike rejoined Baker Hughes in its then INTEQ division. He later moved into operations to further the company's FIRST Alert initiative. Subsequent to his 12 years managing the FIRST Alert system, Mike moved into project management of many HSE systems which prepared him to transition to the information specialist role. Mike is a contributing presenter at IOA conferences and member of both the IOA and the IOA Communications Committee. (michael.mayer@bakerhughes.com)