



Report of Activities of the Corporate Ombudsman 2008



Vision

Respect for individuals is by far the most important consideration. Certain conflicts are obstacles that the Corporate Ombudsman seeks to resolve, in order to improve employees' quality of life and the organization's good governance.

Vision

"Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him."

– Booker T. Washington

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Mission

"The Corporate Ombudsman must be an independent, non-partisan observer. She receives specific complaints from employees in relation to the dispute settlement policy approved by Hydro-Québec's Board of Directors in addition to complaints relating to the employment equity policy and the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms."

– Hydro-Québec dispute settlement policy, 1991.

Pride and Confidence

Hydro-Québec employees are very proud to be part of a team that provides essential services and whose work is appreciated by Quebecers. I see this even among people who turn to me to resolve a problem. These employees often come to me and say "I'm coming to see you about this issue because the name Hydro-Québec is written in my heart." In a sense, they are protecting Hydro-Québec's tradition of fairness, integrity and vitality.

In periods of uncertainty such as the one caused by the recent economic crisis, people must be able to rely on genuine, lasting values. This holds true for both people and businesses.

An employee's career path will always include some obstacles. Various factors can result in a sudden change in direction. However, as long as decisions affecting employees are based on respect for the individual, employees will maintain their trust that allows them to perform at their best.

People's pride in working for Hydro-Québec is based largely on trust—trust in the direction being taken by the organization, trust in other people's judgment, trust that one's immediate superior will act fairly, trust in the skills and commitment of colleagues, and trust that the processes put into place will ensure that the organization's values are respected.

Managers and colleagues set the example in obtaining this trust. Their positive and respectful attitude during meetings sets the tone that allows others to better carry out their duties. This is certainly not an answer to all problems, but it does make it possible to maintain the level of trust that inspires the pride and energy of all Hydro-Québec employees. Courtesy and respect, each and every day, help to make Hydro-Québec a winning combination.

I would not neglect to mention the distress and suffering expressed by some of the people who came to me. I hope that in taking the time to listen to them, I have helped to relieve them of some useless and unproductive stress. In initiating a dialogue with the Corporate Ombudsman, an employee takes an important first step and can more optimistic about the future.

Mission

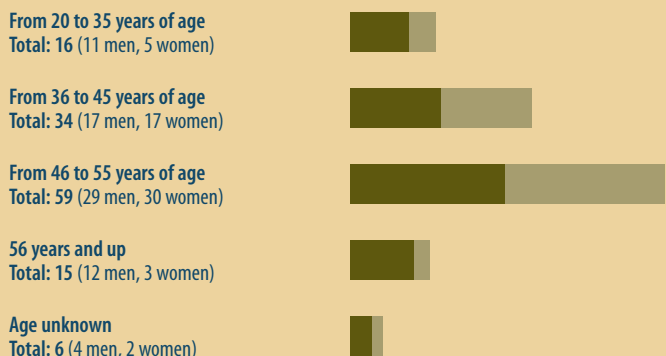
Introduction



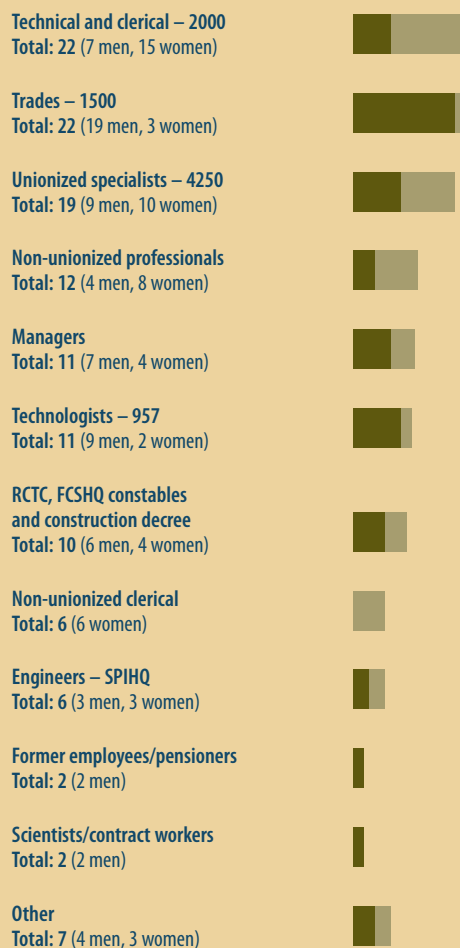
Cases brought before the Corporate Ombudsman

In 2008, 130 cases concerning various job categories were brought before the Corporate Ombudsman, a substantial decrease compared to 2007 (192). However, it is quite common to have such variations from one year to the next. Of the 130 complainants, 57 were women and 73 were men.

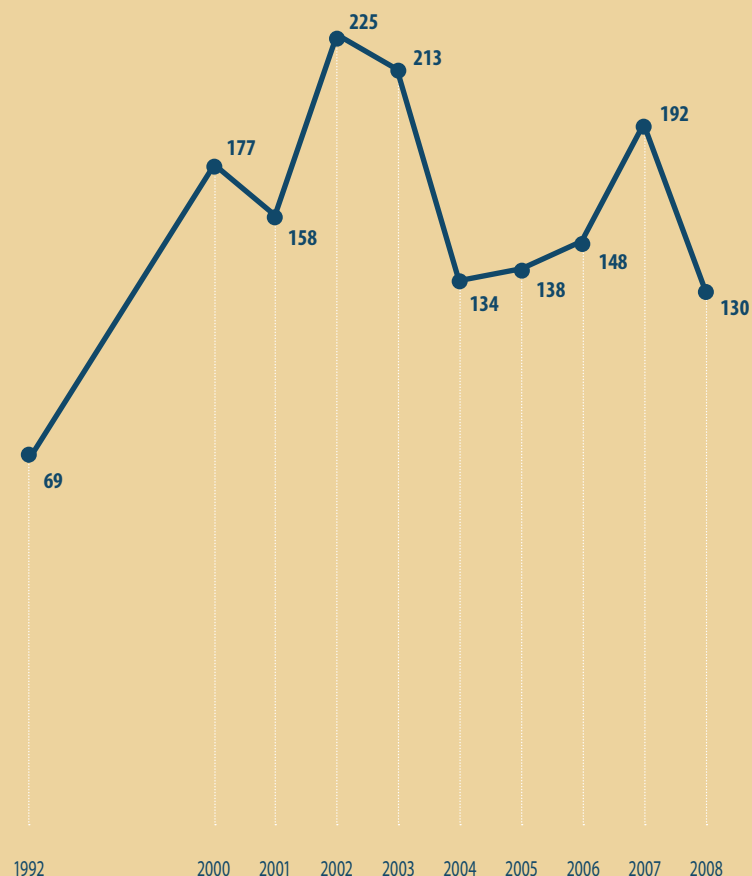
Breakdown of Complainants by Age



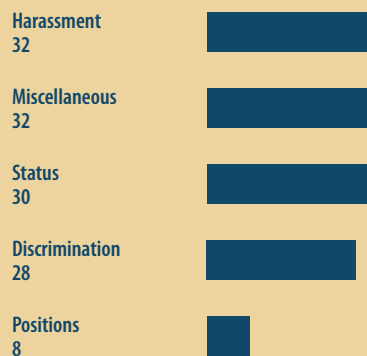
Breakdown of Complainants by Job Category



Evolution of Cases Submitted



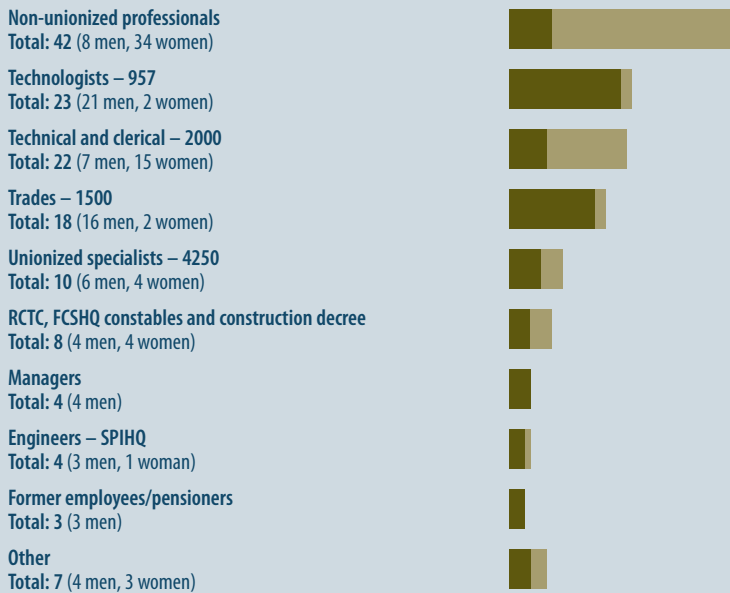
Types of Cases Submitted



Cases Settled

Breakdown of Complaints Settled by Job Category

In 2008, 141 complaints were settled.



Note: The statistical variances stem from the fact that some cases were settled in a year other than the year in which they were received.

Type of Settlement

Cases were settled as follows in 2008.



Note: Some of the data may overlap, as a case may be reported in more than one category.

Nature of Complaints Settled in 2008

The complaints settled in 2008 fall into five categories.

Discrimination (67)

| | |
|---|----|
| Discrimination related to equity, sex, language or age | 39 |
| Defamation, violation of dignity and exclusion | 8 |
| Discrimination related to a workplace, job allocations, temporary status, reprisals | 8 |
| Discrimination related to a physical handicap or health status | 6 |
| Discrimination related to hiring and psychometric tests | 4 |
| Racial discrimination | 2 |

Harassment (38)

| | |
|--|----|
| Sexual harassment, abuse of authority, lack of respect and invasion of privacy | 17 |
| Emotional, psychological or professional harassment | 11 |
| Work atmosphere, violence, threats and intimidation | 10 |

Status (30)

| | |
|---|----|
| Severance pay, retirement terms, working conditions | 15 |
| Salary status, compensation and bonuses | 6 |
| Layoffs, dismissals, suspensions and reprimands | 5 |
| Fringe benefits, leaves and vacations | 4 |

Positions (18)

| | |
|---|---|
| Awarding, allocation and filling of positions; assignments and training; reintegration, seniority | 6 |
| Performance appraisals, job level, performance premiums and bonuses | 4 |
| Administrative error | 4 |
| Transfers, demotions and abolition of position | 2 |
| Classification, granting of permanent status | 2 |

Miscellaneous (13)

| | |
|---|---|
| Requests for advice or information, access to information | 6 |
| Ethics and Code of Conduct | 3 |
| Working conditions and environment | 2 |
| Whistle blowing | 2 |

Note: Some of the data may overlap, as a case may be reported in more than one category.

FINDINGS

For various reasons, far fewer cases were submitted in 2008. Nonetheless, since each case shows that a Hydro-Québec employee is dissatisfied in some way, I believe that it must be addressed with a maximum of empathy and respect. Every call made to the office of the Corporate Ombudsman is indicative, in my view, of distress being felt in the workplace. I understand the people who come to me and do my utmost to help them to rectify difficult situations, while trying to ensure that such situations do not happen again.

Some people wait a long time before coming to see me. It is not always easy or pleasant to have to get something off one's chest. In some cases, people manage to solve their problems without me. They often wait a few months before coming to meet me to share a solution that may possibly be useful for other colleagues.

FOLLOW-UP OF 2007 RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequences of inadmissible complaints of harassment

This situation hardly changed in 2008.

In spite of the decrease in this type of case, the problem continues to exist. Even today, employees who have filed a complaint regarding harassment on the part of a colleague or manager are not always properly reintegrated in their unit. This results in discomfort that is palpable in the workplace, where the situation has not been remedied.

It therefore seems important to have a more official return-to-work protocol and more comprehensive intervention among all employees in a work unit.

Conflict and accountability

Given the number of employees who have retired, Hydro-Québec now has a younger work force. There is also more diversity in the workplace and employees have a more conciliatory attitude with regard to one another because of these demographic changes.

Actions that are perceived as hurtful

The efforts made by many managers and employees throughout 2008 have fostered more inclusion and have broken down the stigma concerning new or unappreciated employees. However, we will have to remain vigilant to avoid the perpetuation of negative stereotyping and rejection.

Dangers of the rumor mill

This year, some units organized special sessions to discuss the *Code of Conduct* and the *Code of Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct for Directors, Executives and Controllers of Hydro-Québec*. These meetings allow managers and employees to re-assimilate the values in these two Hydro-Québec documents. They also make it possible to eliminate cases of misconduct by restating the organization's values.

Filing a complaint and hampering the settlement process

Anyone who sets out to achieve something wants good results. This also applies to individuals who turn to Hydro-Québec's Corporate Ombudsman. I know that employees who come to me are sometimes disappointed with the action taken or the results obtained. I understand their disappointment and bitterness all too well. However, some complaints cannot be accepted because all the management rules have been followed in these instances.

What is even more troubling is the reprisals that some people face after consulting with the Corporate Ombudsman. Each time a complaint is made, I remind the person that I cannot guarantee that he or she will obtain what they seek, but that I will ensure that the matter will be studied and analyzed in a non-discriminatory and fair manner. I also tell the person that Hydro-Québec does not tolerate reprisals in any form.

RECOMMENDATION *Listening to employees and informal mediation are effective tools that generally provide good results. However, a number of people have told me that they have the impression that others are retaliating against them once the matter has been addressed. When I receive such information, I contact the people who may be putting pressure on the employee to find out what happened and make sure that the dispute settlement process is being followed. In such cases, I always try to ensure that the matter remains confidential and that my office remains independent. Sometimes, I check the situation in the workplace. As part of my mandate, I recommend that people who are examining issues be very careful to ensure that the informal investigation does not result in reprisals.*

Disparity between unions causes frustration

I received a few cases involving compensation in 2008. It would appear that some unionized employees are paid less than other employees in a similar position who are affiliated with a different union. Labor legislation is being respected since the conditions are determined after an agreement has been reached between the employer and the union, but such situations are frustrating for employees.

RECOMMENDATION *Although my duties as the Corporate Ombudsman do not allow me to seek a remedy in such cases, I met with and listened to these employees, who were troubled and frustrated by this lack of equity. In order to better mobilize employees affected by a wage gap in the same workplace, I recommend providing clearer information regarding salary scales and how they are established. In addition, centralizing labor relations within the Direction principale – Ressources humaines will make it possible to correct or mitigate wage gaps.*

Avoiding work accidents among new employees: a long-standing practice at Hydro-Québec

An article by Michel De Smet published in *Les Affaires* on October 6, 2008 showed that every year, 24,000 Québec workers under the age of 24 are involved in a work accident. According to the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, young workers are involved in one and a half times more work accidents than older workers. The experts agree that it is important to train new employees regarding safety rules and to act quickly to ensure their participation in a culture of preventing accidents and occupational illness.

Hydro-Québec stands out as a leader and a pioneer in this area, thanks to its programs whereby young workers are paired with more experienced employees who are approaching retirement. This intergenerational dialogue has existed since 2003 in the form of a buddy system and teamwork.

RECOMMENDATION *Employee health and safety are everybody's business. I recommend that every employee and every manager be made aware of the importance of safety rules as part of our buddy system, while putting a higher value on the role played by experienced employees.*

The right to work: a commitment made by the employer to the employee

In 2008, one manager abused his authority over an employee. After deciding that he no longer wanted the employee and having no way to get rid of him, the manager gradually withdrew his tasks until the employee filed a complaint and suffered a burnout that forced him to take several months off.

RECOMMENDATION *In order to maintain a healthy and respectful work climate, I recommend that every manager acknowledge that each Hydro-Québec employee has a right to work as long as the company's rules and codes of conduct are being respected. It is unacceptable to refuse to assign tasks that must be carried out and that an employee is able to handle. This violates the commitment to provide a sufficient work load and the employee's right to have fair and reasonable working conditions, thereby ensuring the person's health, self-esteem and human dignity.*

Diversity in the workplace

At Hydro-Québec, work teams are composed of people with different nationalities and cultures. Nonetheless, I have met with people who have received comments such as "You're not a Quebecer, are you?" This points out the fact that these employees are landed immigrants. Some people still consider that skin color, accent or ethnic origin are a cause for exclusion.

RECOMMENDATION *Hydro-Québec's Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct for Directors, Executives and Controllers of Hydro-Québec are clear on this subject. No such comments are permitted. The Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms also states that every citizen has the right to work freely and without prejudice. I recommend that people in authority quickly take action when they see signs of racism or intolerance, thereby creating the harmony that is sought in the workplace and in society.*

Conclusion

Employees rarely call upon my services to discuss good management practices on the part of their immediate superior. And yet, this happened a few times in 2008. Here is an eloquent example, which I am making public with the person's consent.

"I would like to thank you for your report. It is a good thing that Hydro-Québec has a Corporate Ombudsman. At the same time, I would like to mention my manager's excellent ability to listen. His listening skills and his solutions enabled me to avoid obstacles that I would have created myself. In my opinion, my manager has played a key role in improving employee relationships since I joined the team. I would just like to say that the values you are conveying exist at Hydro-Québec and that people should promote them."

Managing is a difficult task, which is why it is important to share good news, especially in these challenging times. It is good to hear about achievements!

Justine Sentenne

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