

REPORT OF ACTIVITIES
of the **Corporate Ombudsman**

2010



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.

Mission

"The Corporate Ombudsman must be an independent, nonpartisan 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

One person's passion can motivate an entire team

At Hydro-Québec, as elsewhere, the quality of working life is a very important factor in performance. In fact, we all want the same thing: to do a job that we like, in a stimulating and appreciative environment.

In 2010, I met employees in several units who love their jobs. Their enthusiasm boosts morale, productivity and the performance of everyone around them. An employee who expresses a desire to take on a new project, improve a process or quite simply do his or her job well can energize an entire team.

New arrivals are also a source of inspiration, because they have diverse points of view that help broaden our thinking and improve our practices. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Hydro-Québec is tending to become increasingly representative of today's Québec society, largely thanks to the renewal of 25% of its workforce in the past five years.

Every day, I am privileged to meet extraordinary people whose professional skills and personal qualities greatly benefit the company. To achieve this quality of working life, it is sometimes necessary to sit down with a coworker to solve a problem, find a way out of an impasse or come up with ways of working together in harmony.

Many employees have spoken to me about the importance of a serene climate in the workplace. We all have a responsibility in this regard. A simple smile, an encouraging word or an act of kindness may have the effect of an unexpected gift.

Activities in 2010

CASES SUBMITTED

In 2010, 110 cases concerning a number of job categories were brought before the Corporate Ombudsman. Of those 110 cases, 45 were reported by women, 63 by men and 2 by groups, including a group of 125 employees. Records of my meetings have been kept for statistical purposes.

■ Man (m) ■ Woman (w) ■ Group

Breakdown of Complainants by Job Category

Technical and clerical – 2000
(6 m, 21 w)
Total 27

Trades – 1500
(18 m, 1 w)
Total 19

Unionized specialists – 4250
(6 m, 9 w)
Total 15

Nonunionized professionals
(4 m, 7 w)
Total 11

Technologists – 957
(10 m)
Total 10

Engineers – SPIHQ and scientists – SPSI
(7 m, 1 w)
Total 8

Managers
(5 m)
Total 5

RCTC, FCSHQ constables and Construction Decree
(3 m, 1 w)
Total 4

Former employees/pensioners
(3 m, 1 w)
Total 4

Nonunionized clerical
(2 w)
Total 2

Other
(1 m, 2 w, 2 groups)
Total 5

Breakdown of Complainants by Age

20–35 years old
(6 m, 3 w)
Total 9

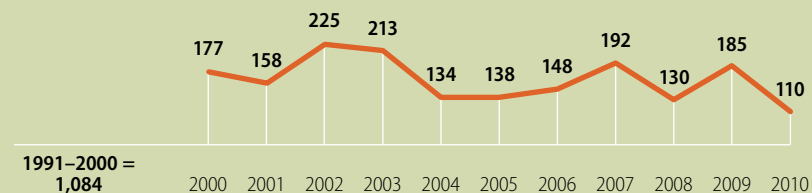
36–45 years old
(8 m, 12 w)
Total 20

46–55 years old
(31 m, 20 w)
Total 51

56 years and up
(17 m, 7 w)
Total 24

Age unknown
(2 m, 2 w, 2 groups)
Total 6

Evolution of Cases Submitted



Note: Certain cases involve groups.

CASES SETTLED

Nature of Cases Submitted

Discrimination (156)

Discrimination related to work, job allocations, temporary status, reprisals	140
Discrimination related to equity, sex, language, age	6
Defamation, violation of human decency, attack against integrity, exclusion, denigration	5
Discrimination related to a physical disability or health status	2
Discrimination related to hiring and psychometric tests	1
Racial discrimination, accommodation	1
Disclosure of personal information	1

Miscellaneous (144)

Working environment and conditions	128
Requests for advice or information, access to information	8
Ethics and <i>Code of Conduct</i>	8

Positions (33)

Relocation, job classification, obtaining permanent status	10
Awarding, abolition, filling and allocation of positions; assignments and training; reinstatement, seniority, equity	8
Surplus staff, employee deemed redundant	5
Transfer, demotion and abolition of positions	4
Performance appraisals, job level, bonuses and incentive pay	3
Union allegiance	2
Administrative error	1

Harassment (31)

Emotional, psychological or professional harassment	15
Workplace climate, violence, threats, bullying, defamation of character	9
Sexual harassment, abuse of authority, lack of respect and invasion of privacy	7

Status (17)

Fringe benefits, leave and vacation, schedules	8
Layoff, termination of contract, dismissal, suspension, reprimand	4
HQPP buyback program, sports assistance program	2
Salary status and compensation, inequity, moving expenses, incentive pay	2
Living conditions	1

Note: Data may overlap, as some cases may be reported in more than one category.

Breakdown of Cases Settled by Job Category

In 2010, 226 complaints were settled.

Trades – 1500 (82 m, 4 w) Total	86
Technical and clerical – 2000 (10 m, 25 w) Total	35
Unionized specialists – 4250 (14 m, 14 w) Total	28
Technologists – 957 (18 m) Total	18
Executives (11 m, 3 w) Total	14
Nonunionized professionals (6 m, 6 w) Total	12
Engineers – SPIHQ and scientists – SPSI (8 m, 3 w) Total	11
BNR, RCTC, FCSHQ constables and Construction Decree (5 m, 3 w) Total	8
Former employees/pensioners (4 m, 4 w) Total	8
Other (2 m, 3 w, 1 group) Total	6

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 2010.

Counsel, advice, reminder of <i>Code of Conduct</i> , information	99
Intervention of superior, management rights	68
Mediation by Corporate Ombudsman	45
Cases referred to other authorities	40
Departure, retirement, transfer, relocation or rehiring, reorganization, promotion, demotion	37
Complaints withdrawn	31
Unfounded or inadmissible complaints	25
Payment of compensation or other forms of redress (correction of error, retraction, apology, relocation, agreement, granting permanent status, awarding position, training)	10

Note: Data may overlap, as some cases may be reported in more than one category.

Nature of Complaints Settled in 2010

The complaints settled in 2010 fall into five categories.

Harassment (125)

Sexual harassment, abuse of authority, injury to reputation, defamation of character	72
Emotional, psychological or professional harassment, reprisals	33
Workplace climate, violence, threats and bullying, mobbing	20

Discrimination (48)

Discrimination related to work, job allocations, temporary status, reprisals	19
Discrimination related to equity, sex, language, age	12
Discrimination related to a physical disability or health status	8
Defamation, violation of human decency, attack against integrity, exclusion, denigration	6
Discrimination related to hiring and psychometric tests	2
Racial discrimination, accommodation	1

Status (39)

Salary status and compensation, incentive pay, inequity	25
Severance packages, retirement terms, living conditions, administrative error	5
Layoff, termination of contract, dismissal, suspension, reprimand	5
Fringe benefits, leave of absence and vacation, schedules	4

Positions (27)

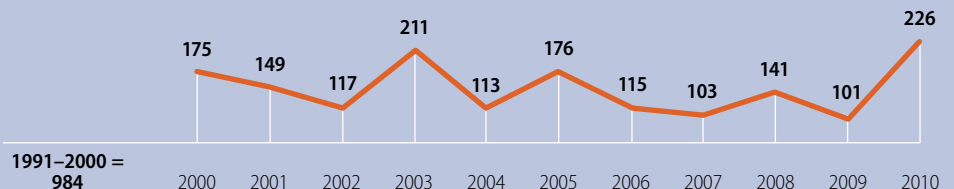
Abolition, filling and allocation of positions; assignments and training; reinstatement, seniority, equity, relocation	17
Performance appraisals, job level, performance premiums and incentive pay	3
Employee deemed redundant	3
Reclassification, obtaining permanent status	2
Transfer, demotion and abolition of position	2

Miscellaneous (20)

Requests for advice or information, access to information	9
Ethics and <i>Code of Conduct</i>	7
Working environment and conditions	3
Complaint against an employee	1

Note: Data may overlap, as some cases may be reported in more than one category.

Evolution of Cases Settled



Note: Certain cases involve groups.

Follow-up on 2009 recommendations

ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE

In 2010, managers continued their efforts to make employees aware of Hydro-Québec's rules of ethics. Those frequent reminders have made employees realize the importance of ethics in the workplace. They have become more vigilant with regard to the role they play in a fair distribution of the workload.

COURTESY IN THE WORKPLACE

A number of employees have given me feedback on the theme of my 2009 report: self-respect and respect for others. Some told me that they feel that interpersonal relations have become more civil and that there has been a significant improvement in the work climate.

EXCESSIVE USE OF TELEPHONE ANSWERING SYSTEMS

New information technologies too often prevent people from establishing direct relationships with others, but the excessive use of telephone answering systems seems to have declined in the past year. A number of units appear to have changed their practices to make sure there is always someone available to answer the phone.

NATURAL CAREGIVERS

In 2010, the supervisors and coworkers of employees obliged to act as natural caregivers continued to show compassion, while respecting company guidelines. Special attention and a flexible attitude on the part of others enable these employees to cope with the exceptionally difficult circumstances in which they find themselves.



Recommendations for 2010

HIDDEN HARASSMENT

Since implementation of the *zero tolerance* policy on harassment, I have noted that it has unfortunately not disappeared; rather, it has changed. Some employees told me that insidious comments and suggestions are made when the harasser and victim are alone together in a meeting room, hallway or other place away from their coworkers. It is very hard to convince these victims to report a case for which they do not have any proof. However, it must be admitted that absenteeism and sick leave can be evidence of the intolerable situations experienced by some Hydro-Québec employees. The victims' loss of self-esteem leads to unconscious submissiveness, which can be demobilizing.

RECOMMENDATION *Managers and coworkers of employees with such problems should advise them and steer them towards the appropriate resources: the employee assistance program (PAE), health centres, human resources advisors, their union or the Corporate Ombudsman. A healthier workplace atmosphere benefits everyone.*

CONFLICT IDENTIFICATION AND RESOLUTION

In 2010, I noticed that there are managers who have trouble acknowledging the existence of a conflict between two employees who must regularly work together. In the cases I reviewed, the parties involved in the conflicts received no support from their managers or anyone else who could have acted as mediator. The managers I spoke to emphasized that they count on the goodwill of employees to resolve conflicts.

RECOMMENDATION *An occasional reminder from the supervisor could prevent conflicts or, at the very least, help the parties come up with a solution. To this end, it would be advisable to provide these managers with the more advanced training on conflict identification and resolution. That kind of approach would greatly improve interpersonal relations.*

TRAINING FOR MANAGERS ON CHANGING WORKING CONDITIONS

Last year, major changes were made in the areas of compensation, working conditions and schedules. Hydro-Québec took these administrative measures in response to government guidelines. Some employees who filed complaints, in this regard, felt that cuts were imposed on them, thus constituting a denial of the company's prior contractual commitments to its employees. The measures were applied to all employees at all pay levels. The complainants I met told me they had received evasive, inconsistent or incomplete explanations from those responsible for implementing the measures.

RECOMMENDATION *Any decision entailing a change in working conditions and compensation should be clearly explained to employees who bear the consequences. In this regard, better preparation of those in charge of implementing such measures would be useful.*

MORE ADEQUATE TREATMENT OF ISOLATED CASES

When a team is overhauled or restructured, some employees may be marginalized and the situation may drag on for too long. Several employees told me about difficult situations they experienced, mainly when working conditions were changed and they were the only ones not promoted or who did not receive a higher job level. Despite their goodwill and patience, these employees feel excluded from any form of solution.

RECOMMENDATION *Without amending the rules that apply to team reorganizations, it would be a good idea to pay careful attention to the real problems experienced by employees who are marginalized to help them find a way out of the impasse in which they find themselves. That would help avoid situations that make colleagues uncomfortable and poison the workplace.*

Conclusion and Acknowledgments

"I love my job! If only I could work in a peaceful atmosphere without any harassment or verbal abuse!" That is how the people who come to see me often express their chief complaint about their workplace. For both them and us, it is essential to personally help improve the work atmosphere by injecting passion and enthusiasm. In the end, we will all benefit!

The Office of the Corporate Ombudsman can work effectively in large part thanks to my administrative assistant, Pauline Higgins. Thanks to her invaluable assistance, I can deal expeditiously with the cases submitted to me. I would also like to thank everyone in the various departments—Affaires corporatives, Contentieux, Informatique, Ressources humaines and Sécurité industrielle—who has made my job easier. And finally, I would like to thank the President and Chief Executive Officer, Thierry Vandal, and senior management for their support throughout the year.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me to find out about the services offered by the Office the Corporate Ombudsman.

Justine Sentenne

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“Passion is the energy that drives a project and attracts the resources needed to achieve it.”

– Davender Gupta, entrepreneurial leadership coach



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