

REPORT OF ACTIVITIES **2011**
of the **Corporate Ombudsman**



*“One cannot discover new lands without first consenting
to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.”*

—André Gide

Vision

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

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"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

Welcoming Change Confidently

We will all be experiencing major changes in 2012. This is my last Ombudsman's report since I myself am leaving for retirement shortly. Similarly, Hydro-Québec and its employees will undergo numerous changes in the next few months, many of which are already underway.

We all feel uncertain from time to time when thinking about the future and its inevitable changes. Yet to paraphrase André Gide, one cannot discover anything unless one leaves the comforts of one's familiar environment. In a world defined by the rapid pace of technological development, change is part of our daily lives, both personal and professional. We must welcome it with all the enthusiasm, confidence and energy of which we are capable of.

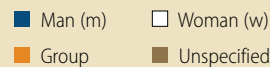
At Hydro-Québec, as elsewhere, the workplace is constantly evolving, leading to many changes in organizational structure, workload, tools and coworkers. This situation is not exclusive to Hydro-Québec: the same thing can be observed in many other companies.

Unfortunately, change may translate into a lack of respect for others and thus adversely affect the work atmosphere. For instance, the irresponsible or malicious use of social media is a new issue in the working world, as it is in the field of education. It is up to us to be vigilant in order to prevent abuses of new technologies.

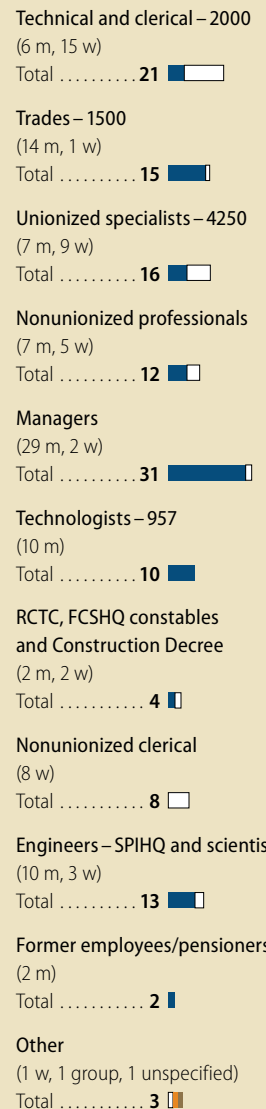
Activities in 2011

CASES SUBMITTED

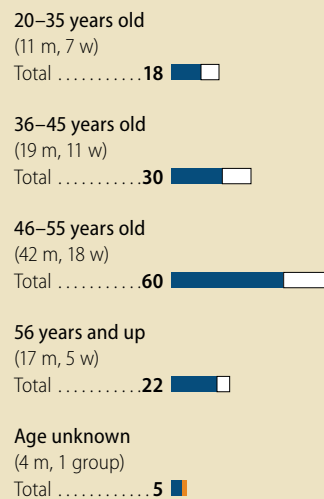
In 2011, 135 cases concerning a number of job categories were brought before the Corporate Ombudsman. Of those 135 cases, 41 were reported by women, 93 by men and 1 by a group of some 20 employees. Records of all my meetings have been kept for statistical purposes.



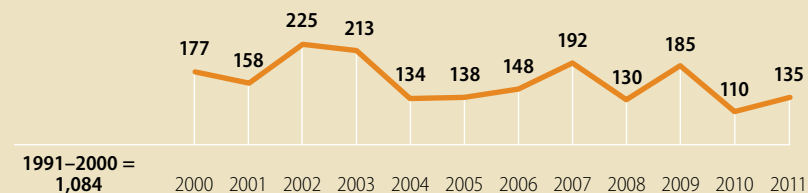
Breakdown of Complainants by Job Category



Breakdown of Complainants by Age



Evolution of Cases Submitted



Note: Certain cases involve groups.

CASES SETTLED

Nature of Cases Submitted

Status (48)

Fringe benefits, leaves and vacation, schedules	23
Layoff, termination of contract, dismissal, suspension, reprimand	12
HQPP buyback program, sports assistance program	1
Salary status and compensation, inequity, moving expenses, incentive pay	10
Retirement conditions, living conditions	2

Positions (41)

Relocation, job classification, obtaining permanent status	19
Awarding, abolition, filling and allocation of positions; reinstatement, seniority, equity	16
Transfer, demotion and abolition of positions	3
Performance appraisals, job level, bonuses and incentive pay	1
Workload	1
Administrative error	1

Harassment (35)

Emotional, psychological or professional harassment, mobbing	17
Workplace climate, violence, threats, bullying, defamation of character, torment	12
Sexual harassment, abuse of authority, lack of respect and invasion of privacy	6

Discrimination (24)

Discrimination related to work, job allocations	10
Discrimination related to equity, sex, language, age	2
Defamation of character, violation of human dignity and integrity, exclusion, denigration	5
Discrimination related to a physical disability or health status	5
Discrimination in hiring	1
Racial discrimination, accommodation	1

Miscellaneous (11)

Working environment and conditions	1
Requests for advice or information, access to information	1
Ethics, Code of Conduct, whistleblowing, zero tolerance program	9

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

Breakdown of Complaints Settled by Job Category

In 2011, 141 complaints were settled.

Trades – 1500 (23 m) Total	23
Technical and clerical – 2000 (8 m, 18 w) Total	26
Unionized specialists – 4250 (7 m, 12 w) Total	19
Technologists – 957 (8 m) Total	8
Managers (14 m, 3 w) Total	17
Nonunionized professionals (6 m, 7 w) Total	13
Engineers – SPIHQ and scientists – SPSI (9 m, 2 w) Total	11
RCTC, FCSHQ (4 m, 1 w) Total	5
Nonunionized clerical (7 w) Total	7
Former employees/pensioners (3 m) Total	3
Contract employees, interns (3 m) Total	3
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 2011.

Counsel, advice, reminder of Code of Conduct, information	26
Intervention by management	6
Mediation by Corporate Ombudsman	12
Cases referred to other authorities	17
Departure, retirement, transfer, relocation or rehiring, reorganization, promotion, demotion	15
Complaints withdrawn	41
Unfounded or inadmissible complaints	29
Payment of compensation or other forms of redress (correction of error, retraction, apology, relocation, agreement, granting permanent status, awarding position, training)	20

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

Nature of Complaints Settled in 2011

The complaints settled in 2011 fall into five categories.

Harassment (45)

Sexual harassment, abuse of authority, attack on someone's reputation, defamation of character	8
Emotional, psychological or professional harassment, reprisals	22
Workplace climate, violence, threats, bullying, mobbing	12
Lack of respect and breach of privacy	3

Discrimination (38)

Discrimination related to work, job allocations, temporary status, reprisals	16
Discrimination related to equity, sex, language, age	4
Discrimination related to a physical disability or health status	6
Defamation, violation of human decency, attack against integrity, exclusion, denigration	7
Discrimination related to hiring and psychometric tests	3
Racial discrimination, accommodation	2

Positions (33)

Elimination, filling and allocation of positions; training; reinstatement, seniority, equity, relocation	25
Performance appraisals, job level, bonuses and incentive pay	3
Transfer, demotion and abolition of positions	3
Failure to respect an agreement	2

Status (32)

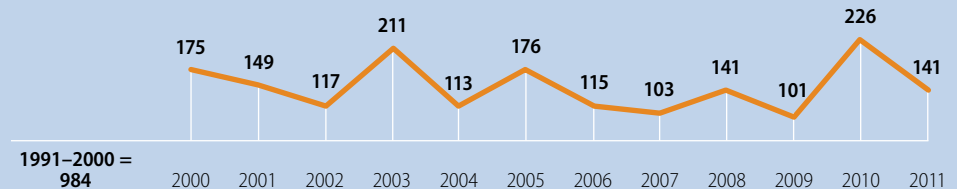
Salary status and compensation, incentive pay, loss of earnings	10
Severance packages, retirement provisions, living conditions, administrative error	4
Layoff, termination of contract, dismissal, suspension, reprimand	14
Fringe benefits, leaves and vacation, schedules and workload	4

Miscellaneous (18)

Requests for advice or information, access to information	10
Ethics and Code of Conduct	6
Working environment and conditions	2

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

Evolution of Cases Settled



Note: Certain cases involve groups.

Follow-up on 2011 Recommendations

Recommendations for 2012

HIDDEN HARASSMENT

By definition, hidden harassment is very hard to detect. As the victims of such harassment often live in a state of anxiety, they are reluctant to report it. For that reason, the best means of uncovering it is through the vigilance of managers and coworkers. One should be alert for signs such as a drop in productivity and a deterioration in the workplace climate.

CONFLICT IDENTIFICATION AND RESOLUTION

In 2011, I noted that greater attention was paid to conflicts than in the past. Hydro-Québec offered training sessions to various employees affected by workplace conflicts.

TRAINING FOR MANAGERS ON CHANGING WORKING CONDITIONS

Against the backdrop of change and restructuring seen at Hydro-Québec in 2011, many employees were exposed to uncertainty and concerns. Personalized meetings held beforehand with managers helped employees gain a better understanding of how the changes would affect their jobs or units.

MORE ADEQUATE TREATMENT OF ISOLATED CASES

In 2011, many people experienced difficult situations when structural changes deprived them of financial benefits and potential promotions. This year, there appeared to be a willingness to settle such cases more quickly and in a more humane fashion.

PRESERVE THE WORKPLACE CLIMATE

In 2011, some employees reported very angry behavior in the workplace. In one case, employees complained about an extremely angry coworker to their manager, who was indifferent and ignored the behavior that many people perceived as latently threatening. Fortunately, the worried employees went to a superior, who assessed the problem and its impact on the workplace climate, then acted quickly.

RECOMMENDATION *At Hydro-Québec, there are a number of resources for resolving difficult situations like the one described above. The most important thing is to take immediate, effective steps to put an end to any threatening behavior and prevent any form of recurrence.*

KEEP COMMUNICATION LINES OPEN

A lack of communication sometimes creates problems, especially when working conditions or strategic changes are likely to have an impact on the jobs of a group of employees. Employees kept in the dark feel undervalued and left out.

RECOMMENDATION *Despite Hydro-Québec's efforts to improve communications about transfers, it has become increasingly obvious that the issue of rationalization should be treated even more carefully. A more personalized approach and follow-up with affected employees would help them understand and accept the company's messages.*

AVOID PERSONALITY CONFLICTS

When there is a conflict between coworkers, sometimes they need to take a step back. In 2011, I dealt with a case of interpersonal conflict that occurred after a trivial incident, when someone forgot to give someone else a telephone message. The situation soon degenerated into an open conflict that divided the entire team into two camps. The polarization of positions, the verbal escalation and the hardening of attitudes kept the misunderstanding from being resolved quickly. Once the two principals were removed temporarily from their coworkers, it was possible to study the nature of the conflict and come up with an acceptable solution. An extra effort to improve the work atmosphere helped the group turn over a new leaf and develop respect for one another.

RECOMMENDATION *Vigilance is always essential to prevent cliques from developing within a team. Every member of the team has to be mindful of the group as a whole team. It would also be useful if managers reminded their employees of the rules of office civility from time to time.*

RESPECT DIVERSITY

Our society is increasingly diverse. Hydro-Québec employees are faced with this reality daily in their interactions with coworkers and customers alike. In 2011, an employee originally from another continent reported some of the things coworkers said about him. I saw how the rude jokes and inappropriate remarks about him or his homeland or compatriots made him suffer. By the time he came to see me, he had already tried in vain to educate his coworkers about his home country and his people, and could no longer tolerate the situation. This employee was just as competent as his coworkers.

He had made an effort to fit in by taking part in the group's sports activities. Despite everything, his dignity was ridiculed and he was ostracized for almost a year before he filed a complaint.

RECOMMENDATION *The face of Hydro-Québec is gradually changing. A growing number of employees are from outside Canada. The culture and methods of these new arrivals are very valuable to the company. Closer to home, the Native people are playing an increasingly active role as partners in Hydro-Québec projects. We must work together, treating each other with respect and dignity. Hydro-Québec employees must set the example of a welcoming, respectful Québec.*

In closing, I would like to suggest that everyone at Hydro-Québec adopt an approach that has proven effective over the past 20 years: listen attentively, keep an open mind and show compassion on a daily basis. That is how Hydro-Québec's excellent reputation will be maintained.

Conclusion and Acknowledgments

The conclusion of my last report is the legacy I would like to leave to this enterprise, a crown-jewel of the province of Québec, which I have had the honor of serving as Corporate Ombudsman.

In 1991, I took up this new profession and new challenge. I have done my best to have an open heart and lend a sympathetic ear to all employees who have turned to me. Many managers have also approached me for advice on how to act in certain situations.

In this period of change which we are now encountering, I know that the company has constraints and must limit its resources. As necessary as they may be, organizational changes can and must be implemented with respect for the people concerned. Unfortunately, I have recently witnessed some cases of layoffs which were executed in haste without regard to the dignity of affected employees. I have also seen some employees leave Hydro-Québec because they could no longer put up with their working conditions or could not foresee a future with the firm. Former employees who are disgruntled do not become goodwill ambassadors for Hydro-Québec.

On a more positive note, I have also appreciated the skills and dedication of some managers who have handled difficult situations, who have resolved conflicts and maintained a good workplace climate for their employees, while at the same time respecting the company's rules. Their ability to listen and their empathy have also enabled them to help employees who were laid off throughout this painful experience. These managers have done an admirable job in difficult circumstances, and I would like to congratulate them. Furthermore, I am convinced that other people would benefit from training and advice in this area. Hydro-Québec's human capital is priceless and should be protected by any means possible.

In closing, I would like to thank the senior management of Hydro-Québec, the managers and the employees who have assisted me during my 20 years in the noble profession of ombudsman. And I would like to end by extending special thanks to my assistant, Pauline Higgins, who has been with me since the beginning and who, over the years, has become an indispensable colleague. She has always done whatever she could to make my job easier. I would like to take this opportunity to wish her a happy retirement.

Justine Sentenne

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