**What are the differences between the Ombuds Team and Human Resources?**

In many organizations, including [CLIENT NAME], employees have several options for discussing concerns or questions about their workplace experience, including the ombuds and Human Resources (HR). It’s natural to wonder about the factors one should consider in selecting whom to talk with about workplace concerns. In this article you’ll find information that will help you make that determination. There are a few factors that help with understanding the way the ombuds and HR work with issues brought to their attention.

**The Formality of the Role and Process**

* The ombuds role is informal. The ombuds doesn’t keep any formal records for the organization, does not get involved in any formal proceedings such as investigations, and is not the place to go to submit a formal complaint. It is a place to go to have a helpful, informal conversation about the different options you have.
* HR plays a more formal role. They implement HR policies, maintain personnel records, and get directly involved in performance issues, disciplinary processes and hire/fire decisions. You can have a conversation with your HR rep, and if the issue necessitates formal action, they will lead that process.

**Confidentiality**

* Confidentiality is very important for ombuds office visitors. The ombuds commits that nothing identifying to you will be said to anyone else in the organization unless you and the ombuds agree that the ombuds will do so to help resolve the issues. The only exception is if the issues indicate an imminent risk of serious harm. The ombuds takes this commitment to confidentiality seriously.  It’s something you can count on.
* Your HR representative also understands the importance of confidentiality but may need to take action (such as speaking with management or conducting an investigation) if a serious matter is brought to their attention. It is a good idea to discuss the question of confidentiality when meeting with your HR person so that you have a good understanding of how it will be handled in your circumstances.

**Independence**

* The ombuds has a very independent role in the organization, is not “supervised” on day-to-day activities, and has wide discretion to handle the role as they see fit. That independence allows the ombuds to speak strongly and candidly with leaders in the organization when it is warranted.
* HR is more integrated into the organizational hierarchy. Often, managers and employees in the organizations are seen as “clients” to HR. Management looks to HR to advise them on all sorts of situations, including performance management. Of course, HR representatives are also available to speak with non-managers.

**Impartiality**

* A core principle for the Ombuds is being impartial. Ombuds play a neutral role, which allows them to discuss issues and coach employees without being tied to any specific outcome, and without taking sides.
* As mentioned above, HR is also available to have discussions with employees about issues they are facing, but HR has a different role in the organization. They are more integrally involved in decisions about policies and practices. Ultimately, they have a key role in implementing management decisions and in protecting the interests of the organization as well as the employees.

**Bottom Line**

**Consider speaking with an ombuds when:**You wish to keep the contact informal, completely confidential, and when you wish to speak with someone who has an independent and impartial role in the organization. The ombuds will act as a sounding board and partner in thinking through your options, but the decision on what to do next is yours to make. You may be considering speaking with HR, but would appreciate a confidential and neutral perspective on it before you do - the ombuds will be happy to speak about this with you.

**Consider speaking with HR when:**You wish to have a more formal contact within the organization, especially when you want to share a concern that will then be acted on by HR. If you do speak with HR, ask them how they’ll handle confidentiality regarding your specific issue. Lastly – especially in cases where you wish to make a formal complaint or allegation, e.g., about something like harassment or discrimination, HR is the right place to do this.

To connect with CLIENT’s HR Team visit XXXX. To learn more about CLIENT Ombuds Team, visit [www.mwi.org/INITALS-ombuds](http://www.mwi.org/INITALS-ombuds).