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An Initial Enquiry Towards a Model of Supervision and Support for Organisational Ombudsmen.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the proposition that a formal model of supervision and support for Organisational Ombudsmen (OOs) should be implemented. It examines data from a small research project that asked experienced Ombudsman (and those recently retired) about how Ombudsman practitioners met their needs for support and guidance in the early days of the profession. It reviews supervision models in established professions, such as psychology and social work, to identify the key characteristics of a model for Organisational Ombudsmen, and proposes that a mandated supervision requirement is an important and defining characteristic of mature professions, providing not only psychological support but guidance towards ethical practice. It is argued that supervision benefits not only OO practitioners and the organisations in which they work but that it also contributes to the standing of the profession by promoting consistency and supporting reflective practice.

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KEYWORDS

Ombudsman, Supervision, Mentoring, Practice Standards

INTRODUCTION

Being an Organisational Ombudsman (OO) can be lonely and OO practice can be exacting. It is a determinedly informal role, without the heft of formal authority, unlinked to conventional mechanisms of oversight and support, yet bears the weight of expectation engendered by the press of individual visitors' needs and the substance of issues addressed. As Organisational Ombudsmen, we are witnesses to allegation, to fact, to opportunities lost and gained, to the best and worst of our organizations. If we are solitary practitioners[1] we may find ourselves burdened by our unstated role as 'the keeper of the tears'[2]. Our operational independence may have us hesitating to acknowledge the significance of that burden, and/or the importance of having our work subjected to professionally appropriate degrees of scrutiny or monitoring. And, even if we are not solo practitioners, our current Standards of Practice may engender a sense that sharing of case content (beyond those instances where formal, legal requirements may require information disclosure or permission has been granted, and the OO has agreed, to share some information) in some sense challenges our legitimacy as truly independent, confidential, neutral or informal. In this respect issues of evaluation and professional development may have been held hostage to standards of practice for which no formal accountability mechanisms exist.
In other settings where independent, confidential practice is the norm, particularly but not only education, social work, and health professions, "supervision" has been long held as a process that can strengthen practice standards and clinical competence, improve accountability, and promote restorative responses to the emotional weight of clinical practice (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2018). The authors believe that Organisational Ombudsmen would benefit in similar ways by receiving this type of support and guidance.

It is the intent of this paper to recommend regular practice supervision as an essential element of on-going Organisational Ombudsman practice, and in support of the development of the profession[3]. Our hope is that this paper is a catalyst for a wider conversation about the development of regular practice supervision within the Organisational Ombudsman profession.

We begin with a brief overview of the history and development of supervision models, moving to the more recent requirement of supervision as an assurance of continuing professional development and competence. It is submitted that Organisational Ombudsmen would also benefit from supervision as support and as a bulwark against the operational isolation our role can at times engender. Having located OO work in the context of contemporary societal and organisational challenges, we then present the findings of a survey of senior Ombudsmen with respect to how practitioners met their needs for guidance, development and support during the earliest days of the profession, including identifying the characteristics they valued as essential to a supervision/support model for OO's. After then examining key aspects of supervision guidance coming from Social Work and Clinical Psychological associations (and comparing them with the IOA and COFO mentoring programmes), the authors propose some next steps for developing the role of formal supervision for the Organisational Ombudsman profession.

A VERY BRIEF BACKGROUND ON PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

The purpose of providing some background information about supervision is to highlight how, within professional practice, it has evolved from a process of basic oversight of practitioners, to

[1] The International Ombudsman Association 2017 Practice Survey identified 44.6% of Organisational Ombudsmen respondents as working in solo practitioner circumstances.
[2] 'Emba Tebaki' ('*Keeper of the People's Tears*'), Zulu term. Also attributed to IOA Distinguished Emeritus Member, James Lee
[3] The terms 'supervision', 'support' and 'mentoring' are all referenced in this paper. A discussion of how they stand in relation to each other is given below

include competence monitoring and assessment, as well as self-reflection and professional development, including a growing emphasis upon the support that it provides for work-related challenges.

Supervision models evolved from the context of education, social work and psychotherapy. A main function of social work supervision in its early days was that of 'control and coordination', a reassurance that the profession was being administered in accord with oversight standards (Kadushin and Harkness, 1976). The development of social worker skills through supervision would come later (Bernard and Goodyear, 2004), and supervision really bloomed as a field within social work in the latter half of the 20th century[4].

In contrast to supervision arising from a required adherence to administrative imperatives, the development of *clinical* supervision appears to have been based more directly on the intended improvement of clinical competence and clinician skills. Of course, mental health developments in the 20th century reflect the rise of new treatment ideologies and practice, so it is unsurprising that initial models of clinical supervision reflected models and frameworks of the psychotherapy practices being supervised. This was certainly the case with psychodynamic models of supervision, as well as the Person-Centered, Cognitive-Behavioural, developmental and feminist models of mental health practice (Smith, 2009).

Some professional associations are explicit about the nature and purpose of supervision:

> "Supervision is defined as a scheduled time to meet with a respected professional colleague for the purpose of conducting a self-reflective review of practice, to discuss professional issues and to receive feedback on all elements of practice, with the objectives of ensuring quality of service, improving practice and managing impacts of professional work upon the supervisee. The reflective discussion deepens awareness of the link between the personal and professional identities of the supervisee and how these interact in her or his practice. Supervision helps to promote competence, confidence and creativity."[5]

The emergence of new challenges in health has also seen the development of supervision models in which one profession provides the supervision for another (e.g., psychologists and social workers providing supervision for Health Advisers in the context of HIV and STI's: Leach, French and Miller, 1997). Supervision has also been identified as a crucial element in clarifying roles, expectations and boundaries where health professionals work alongside – and depend upon – volunteers, and to help ensure volunteer retention, quality of care and volunteers' psychological health (Miller, 2000).

In summary, supervision has evolved to encompass a number of purposes in the helping professions including the monitoring of the administrative requirements of the work, the oversight of practice competence, the provision of support in managing work-related stresses and challenges, and professional development through reflecting upon the challenges of individual cases. In organizational settings supervision also enables the consideration of the challenges that organizational dynamics has upon meeting the goals of professional practice.

WHY IS SUPERVISION RELEVANT FOR ORGANISATIONAL OMBUDSMEN?

[4] www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/47676_ch_1.pdf (accessed 03 September 2018)
[5] New Zealand Psychologists Board Guidelines on Supervision (Revised Draft February 2018) http://www.psychologistsboard.org.nz/cms_show_download.php?id=477 accessed 30 September 2018.

In his presentation of the first Mary Rowe Lecture at the IOA Annual Conference in 2015, Miller (2016) noted a phrase from IOA Distinguished Emeritus Member, Howard Gadlin: 'we don't know what Ombudsmen do, we only know what they say they do'[6]. Miller (2016) went on to note:

"I feel certain that most Organizational Ombudsmen do have their own ways of getting practice input, testing theories, and discussing difficult cases anyway; it is just not mandatorily proscribed. I also know first-hand that solo, remote Ombudsman practice can be a very lonely business, especially when witnessing the idiosyncracies of bad-faith organizational management or governance. Stress can distort perspectives – we all need to have our views supportively challenged to ensure good operational health. That's what mentoring does. It helps to uphold standards of practice. Of course, mandatory mentoring also necessitates that we agree on best practices for supervisors – those doing the mentoring." (p.43)

While Miller's observation conflates mentoring and supervision, the authors submit that mentoring and supervision are substantially different programs. It is however, understandable that these two programs are conflated. Currently the IOA Mentoring Program responds to a critical need providing support and guidance for inexperienced practitioners; however there remains a substantial void for more experienced Ombudsmen, or those who do not meet the criteria for having a mentor. This void is filled by practitioners creating a range of informal responses to meet the needs that come from taking up such a demanding role in a challenging environment. While there is overlap in relation to the some of the goals of mentoring and supervision a major operational distinction, which Miller alludes to above through the use of the term 'mandatory mentoring', is that supervision is a more formal and structured process, that contains elements of both mentoring and the informal responses that have been created to fill this void. (We examine further below this and other important distinctions between these two programs).

The question of the relevance of Ombudsman supervision may be seen in the context of Ombudsman training and licensing requirements. As things stand currently, we have none. The role and title of Organisational Ombudsman are each conferred on those holding the role not by the IOA, but by the organizations for whom Ombudsmen work. There are no formal minimum standards for Ombudsman training (other than for those who have voluntarily entered CO-OP certification), no mechanisms for accountability (other than voluntary individual adherence to the IOA Ethical Principles and Standards of Practice), and no on-going assessment of Ombudsman competence (other than as CO-OP maintenance). Attendance at IOA training courses, and the IOA Regional and Annual Conferences and workshops, is entirely voluntary. There are no formal IOA reporting or skills updating requirements. We do not know what Ombudsmen do, only what they *say* they do.

More recently these issues were articulated by Nick Diehl, Past President of the IOA in his guest post on the Ombuds Blog (April 14, 2019) following his observations at the IOA's 2019 Annual Conference in New Orleans. In his post he reflects upon the state of the Ombudsman field, in particular highlighting a major concern for the profession, and one that was also raised by Jon Lee in his key note presentation to the Conference, namely, how do we ensure the quality of service that Ombudsmen are providing to their respective organisations? Diehl notes that, particularly for solo practitioners (and here the authors would include Ombudsmen new to the field), professionals are in a position of self-monitoring when determining the quality of professional practice, including how IOA standards are used to support practice.

As well as professional practice considerations, another important consideration is the operational and psychological health impact on Organisational Ombudsmen of doing the work they do. As

[6] Mary Rowe (personal communication 07.06.19) noted further, "As a profession we do not yet know the functions of OOs around the world, leave aside how those functions are performed – or not performed." Data we do have come from IOA Annual Practice Surveys, and from occasional papers such as those summarised in Rowe, M., Hedeen, T., Schneider, J (2019): 'What do Organizational Ombuds Do? And Not Do? (Working draft, in preparation).

early as 1994, the PRESTO (Professional Review – Essential Services to Ombudsmen) initiative had seen the development of the 'Ombuds Stress Self-Assessment' (Mary Rowe, personal communication), though no outcome data has been kept of its use.[7] While there is a great deal of research on the topic of compassion fatigue and burnout in a range of helping professions, the authors could find only anecdotal reports of the potential for psychological morbidity in Organisational Ombudsmen. However, many have acknowledged the often very significant operational challenges OO's face, including multiple visitors in highly emotional states of mind, exposure to the reportedly negative consequences of human behavior, organisational labyrinths that seem to impede doing the right thing and, for many, the absence of close colleagues with whom to share such burdens. As Montemurro (2012) noted,

"As a solo practitioner you can get spread thin. You have to manage a sometimes unmanageable caseload; you have to take time to build relationships with constituents but remain separate and at arm's length from them; you need to understand your organization's strategic direction; you need to step back from time to time to assess your own strategic direction; you have to set limits on the things you are asked to do and you need to explain why; you need to attend to mountains of administrative tasks that cannot be turfed out to someone else; you need to stomach the pressure of knowing nearly everything you do affects the reputation of the ombuds function. And you have to do it all yourself." (p.9)

Montemurro, continues,
"Besides not having someone to consult on cases or to delegate tasks, being a solo practitioner can also mean not having an outlet for frustrations, worries, and venting. It can mean feeling unappreciated and unheard. There's no one else to pick up a case if you need to go out of town, or to offer encouragement when you need it. You don't have someone to keep you on your toes, or point out when you've gone flat and gotten into a rut. The promise of confidentiality can intensify the sense of isolation."(p.13).
In a companion paper, Rowe and Bloch (2012) concurred:

"Being able — regularly — to share thoughts and experiences with colleagues is invaluable. OOs have a challenging job. We can be affected by self-doubt. We are exposed to unfairness. We struggle to remain neutral when a party is acting inappropriately. Our patience and compassion are put to the test, especially when we deal with complaining visitors who are "self-made orphans". We are often exposed to the worst parts of the organization we work with. We may struggle with emotional fatigue and depersonalization. The wisdom, reassurance, guidance, and friendship of fellow OOs is a necessity for OOs who want to remain effective in their work and balanced in their life." (p.22)

The importance of peer-support for maintaining functional operational balance was suggested in an earlier paper by Griffin (2010). Exploring "The importance of relationships for Ombudpersons", he noted,

"The development of relationships with professional mentors has been of invaluable assistance to many of us in the profession. It is extremely helpful to have a relationship with a small group of seasoned professionals with whom one can consult in difficult times to talk through a problem which is impossible to discuss with anyone in our own organization. Essentially, an ombudsperson's ombudsperson. … I firmly believe that experienced practitioners have an ethical responsibility to offer themselves as mentors to new colleagues in the field." (p.69).
Griffin continued,

[7] Questions in the 11-question self-assessment include: "Do you find yourself losing sleep because you are worrying about a case?", "Do you need more support from colleagues about effective ways to handle cases?", "Are you frequently in poor health or having accidents?"

"We should never allow ourselves to become so isolated in our professional role that we compromise the necessary relationships of friends, family, counselors and therapists, and others who nourish us personally and provide us with the emotional stability we all need. *Colleagues who provide professional mentorship can provide empathy which contributes to our emotional and psychological health* (emphasis added)…[W]e all need to make a conscious effort to develop relationships outside our professional circle that help to sustain us personally since this foundation is essential to our professional performance."(p.70)

MENTORING

One response by the IOA to Ombudsman practice challenges, which enables experienced Ombudsmen to informally support the quality of professional practice of those new to the field, has been the establishment of the IOA's Mentoring Program. Mentors have been available since 2008, "…to assist new ombudsman (defined as IOA members with no more than 2 years experience) make the transition to ombudsing a positive and rewarding experience. The Mentoring Program may be especially helpful to solo practitioners who do not have the benefit of an experienced colleague to guide them through the murky waters of ombuds work."[8]

While Rudolph and Connell (2012) describe the mentoring relationship as 'somewhat formalised', the Chair of the Mentoring committee (Ronnie Thomson, personal communication 24/5/2019) acknowledges the substantially informal and 'buddie' focus of the program. The Mentor- Mentee commitment is described in the IOA's 'Tips for Mentors' guide, as normally involving a monthly contact over a period of a year, in which discussion can be 'free flowing or topic driven', depending upon the goals and needs of the mentee.

The Confederation of Federal Ombudsman (COFO) also has a mentoring program that "…is designed to assist federal ombuds in practicing in accordance with the ombudsman professional standards of independence, impartiality, and confidentiality, as well as the three common ombudsman characteristics of informality, a commitment to fairness, and providing credible processes. COFO promotes mentoring as a way to further these goals by sharing ombuds expertise, best practices, and by supporting the cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches within the federal ombuds community."[9] (Of note is that US federal agency ombudsmen served by COFO include external as well as internal (including organizational) ombudsmen and as such does not directly reference the IOA standards of practice).

Under the COFO mentoring Program, mentors and mentees meet for two hours monthly for 6-12 months. Mentors must have been full-time federal ombudsmen practitioners for at least three years, as well as being active in Ombudsman professional development in COFO and elsewhere. In addition to performing an ombuds function (as defined by COFO) at their federal agency, Mentees are asked to identify their goals for the mentoring relationship, learning style, and desired expectations of a mentor.

COFO's January 2019 mentoring cohort matched 11 mentors with 11 mentees, a second cohort in mid-2019 matched 3 mentors with 3 mentees, and a third cohort is underway to begin in January 2020.

While the value of support and guidance provided through both the IOA and COFO mentoring programmes is beyond question, the authors believe that there is also a need for a *formalised* model of supervision/support which is underpinned by a contract, staffed by experienced

[8] Retrieved from http://www. ombudsassociation.org/about-us/standing-committees/membership/mentoring-program and from the IOA Mentoring Solicitation Letter 2018.)
9 COFO Mentoring Program Concept Document, kindly shared by David Michael 13 April 2019.

practitioners trained in supervision, which has as part of its focus the building of an ethical, professional practice underpinned by Standards of Practice (SOP's) and which extends well beyond the initial years of an Ombudsman's career. It is the aspects of formality that detail process and standards, define expectations (including supervisory training and career long involvement) and prioritise the development of ethical, professional competence that distinguish supervision from mentoring.

The authors acknowledge that making supervision an inherent (mandatory) requirement of OO practice introduces some significant considerations for the profession including, the need for a more sophisticated ethics process, the development of standards of supervision and qualifications for supervisors, consideration of introducing a continuing professional practice training requirement for all practitioners, as well as some challenging discussions about aspects of the supervision process that involve oversight and evaluation of practice. However it is a central thesis of this paper that a formal model of supervision be implemented by the IOA that incorporates the provision of support and the promotion of the professional development of practitioners, as well as a measure of accountability in relation to the quality of the Ombudsman service provided. In this way, formal supervision will contribute to the credibility and standing of the profession more broadly.

THE CONTEXT OF OMBUDSMAN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE – WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

We are experiencing a period of substantial change impacting all facets of society. These changes arise from a complex set of interrelated circumstances some of which include technological advances, the impact of climate change, increasing levels of inequality, the movement of people around the world fleeing conditions of war and poverty, as well as reactive, short-sighted and at times nationalistic responses by governments of all persuasions to complex societal challenges.

The nature, extent and pace of these changes has impacted landscapes in political systems around the world. Politics has become more volatile, partisan and adversarial, at times resembling a primitive battle as each side prosecutes its views with righteous indignation, while demonizing anything that may represent difference or disagreement to these views. Bipartisanship in the service of civil society and the common good appear to be concepts from the past, as communities are increasingly presented with political discourse and executive behavior characterized by incivility, individualism and aggression.

While we are seeing people feeling more empowered to speak up about issues they might disagree with or comments that that they might find offensive, this empowerment is regularly exercised via social media. The processes that are followed are often not constructive, views expressed are often judgmental and divisive, and parties are reportedly left feeling either not heard or victimized or, at worst, targeted and fearful in the face of sometimes extremist hate speech and violent imagery[10].

One of the challenges that we face in contemporary life is that the skills and mindsets required to support constructive responses to difference and disagreement are in short supply. It is submitted that a contributing factor to this is that a culture of immediacy exists in which there are expectations that complex issues will be instantly resolved. Yet emotional literacy is required to engage with these challenges, including a reflective capacity as well as empathy and

[10] https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/112757465/the-christchurch-call-pledge-document-in-full, accessed 28 May 2019.

understanding that each issue may engage a multitude of different perspectives. In other words there is often no quick fix for many of the complex issues challenging society today.
The organisations in which Ombudsmen operate are in dynamic interaction with this environment. Regardless of the sector or the geography, organisations are experiencing relentless and disruptive change that includes increased competition, decreased resources and challenged leadership. The task of navigating organisations and supporting staff through this turbulent operating environment is a difficult and demanding one.

It is therefore not surprising that organisations are reporting increasing levels of stress, decreasing levels of engagement and rising levels of bullying, harassment and incivility[11]. While this context presents incredible opportunities for the Organisational Ombudsman profession, it also presents enormous challenges. Never has the need for a trusted, independent and neutral program that provides a safe place for leaders, managers and staff to be heard and supported, been greater. Indeed never has the role of an ethical, neutral and confidential resource been more important; at the same time, however, never has managing and maintaining the political, ethical and moral fundamentals of such a program been more challenging.

A constant risk for the Organisational Ombudsman is that their role becomes instrumentalised, being seen as simply another tool of management in the service of outputs and outcomes. The authors believe that within the context of the environmental challenges described above, this risk is heightened. The authors further believe that these contextual pressures are particularly amplified for inexperienced Ombudsmen, for new programs being established or where the organization may be looking to cut costs or avoid time-consuming, resource- intensive 'inconvenient truths' about leadership or management practices.

What we know is that it is difficult to stand up to people in positions of power, in both politics and also in organisational life. In this chapter the authors have argued that speaking up is even more difficult in contemporary society, where dissent and disagreement are discouraged (and even closed down) and in which a culture of collusion and exclusion is promoted. In this environment, organizations face existential threats; to creativity, to innovation, staff engagement and critical and strategic decision making. The case of the NASA space shuttles Challenger and Columbia (McDonald and Hansen, 2009) and the ENRON scandal (McLean and Elkind, 2008) are powerful historical examples of the risk to organisations (and society) of this culture of collusion. More contemporary examples include sexual harassment allegations at Oxfam International and Doctors without Borders, Boeings apparent failures with its 737 airplane, as well as McKinsey and Company's reported actions in South Africa.

OO programs exist to provide a critical voice in this environment. However it is the authors' submission that without a formalized and structured program of supervision supporting ethical and thoughtful practice, this critical voice is at risk of being drowned out at best, or corrupted at worst.

DEVELOPING A CASE FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF AN OMBUDSMAN SUPERVISION MODEL

[11] The impact of workplace stress and morbidity is frequently presented as a financial cost. Recent studies have shown extraordinary costs for sickness absence and treatments in Europe and North America, e.g., Unternehmerschaft Düsseldorf (2012): **Best Practice Conflict Management**, Dusseldorf, 2012; Kuoppala, J., Lamminpaa, A., Liira, J., & Vanio, H. (2008). Leadership, job well-being, and health effects – a systematic review and a meta-analysis. ***J Occup Environ Med,*** **50**, 904-915.

From the early days of the profession Organisational Ombudsmen have been challenged to ensure competency of practice (i.e., appropriate, effective and ethical practice in keeping with the SoPs and Code of Ethics of the IOA) in the face of the evident structural and environmental challenges encountered[12]. To understand how early Ombudsman practitioners responded to these challenges the authors asked a small purposive sample (n=8) of IOA Distinguished Emeritus colleagues about their career-long experiences in obtaining supervision, support and guidance in their practice. Respondents were surveyed by email and their answers were collated and tabulated for quantitative thematic analysis. Specifically, they were each asked the following questions:

- When the need arose in your work as an OO, who gave you support or guidance?
- Was this support/guidance formal (i.e., built in to your contract) or informal (i.e., not built in to your contract)?
- How did you find the support you were looking for – what was the process you undertook for support/guidance?
- In what ways did your support/guidance help your practice as an OO?
- What characteristics in the support-giver led you to seek their support?
- In view of your experience, what do you think would be important characteristics of a model for Ombudsman supervision and/or support?

The respondents in the sample were chosen because of their experience and recognition by the profession as Distinguished Emeritus members of the IOA, with their status guaranteeing that their service in the profession had been acknowledged for its high standard over many years. Their service covered the higher educational, research, corporate and international agency sectors in Europe and the United States. All had retired within the previous five years, the most recent being 6 months prior to this inquiry.

FORMALITY/INFORMALITY

Only one of the seven respondents had supervision built into their formal contract – all the others identified their supervision support as being informal, i.e., there was no formal requirement or expectation that regular supervision occurred. That said, some had costs of consultation and/or conference attendance paid by their employer.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

An interesting aspect of the feedback from these colleagues was the development of support relying on *informal* contacts with peers. Of course, access to such colleagues is enabled through the development and outreach provided by the International Ombudsman Association, Cal Caucus, and other professional opportunities (In Geneva, the UNARIO network of OOs meets monthly, for example).

The overwhelming source of Ombudsman support described reportedly came from fellow Ombudsmen. Additionally, specialist key colleagues (e.g., legal counsel, HR, mental health personnel) were cited as important sources by most (n=5), and conferences, the IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics were also frequently cited as sources of support and guidance.

The contexts of support most frequently cited were regular meetings with OO peers. Mentoring from OO elders was also frequently cited, as was input from specialist experts in companion

[12] For a review of Ombudsman functions, see Rowe, M., Hedeen, T., Schneider, J (2019): 'What do Organizational Ombuds Do? And Not Do? (Working draft, in preparation).

departments and services. In all cases, respondents identified that they needed to be proactive in engaging such support.

HOW SUPPORT/GUIDANCE AFFECTED PRACTICE

All respondents described their experience of support and guidance growing their professional confidence, affirming their professionalism, and strengthening their capacity to analyze, conceptualize and communicate. Some identified the importance of support enabling strength on a personal level. One respondent stated, “[Support] kept me going! Without all the support and guidance I received, I'd likely have left my practice….” Another respondent noted, “It kept me grounded, and by validating my own perceptions and experience, gave me the confidence to assert 'the right thing to do'”.

Another respondent noted, “Consulting with other OOs gave me perspective, helped to develop additional questions or points to make, and provided a safe space for me to express doubts, insecurities and worries. In essence they were an ombuds to the ombuds, allowing me a place to reflect free of the pressure from the issues at hand.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUPPORT-GIVERS THEY SOUGHT

Given the informal nature of support sought and found, it is not surprising to see the positive characteristics of support-givers listed by those surveyed. One respondent summarized the qualities sought and offered as follows: “Technical knowledge, their gift of a sounding board, their humor, my trust in their complete discretion, their patience with me—and, endlessly, their kindness at times of bewilderment and grief.”

Another respondent clarified the importance of principle in a support-giver: “Experience, a relaxed manner, and a sense of humour. Also and perhaps most importantly, a principled approach to people and issues. I didn't want someone who I would necessarily agree with, and I did want someone who respected my work and understood my role.”

Another responded as follows: “They were intellectually curious - it was both contagious and validating; They deeply understood the organizational culture of higher education within the US; They seemed aware of and were open to learning to manage their own biases; They were accessible, welcoming, patient, respectful.”

One respondent located the added value of Ombudsman support not in individual characteristics, but in the organisational culture that fostered peer-support and critique: “It had nothing to do with the personal characteristics of those of us who participated in the process. We established an atmosphere that enabled us to give and receive critically supportive feedback.”

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUPPORT MODEL FOR OOS

Responses to this question yielded a consistency that indicates both the value placed on the role of supervision, and the consonance with IOA values. One respondent echoed the replies of many in this way: “Confidentiality - a safe space for questioning and answering; accessibility (by any means – physical, telephonic, virtual); regularity; supervisors need to have real experience (not only in OO work), and experience of the organizational environments being discussed; *The model itself needs to be embedded as an essential for good practice, provided in the interests of a duty of care for visitors, OOs and the organization*” (emphasis added). In describing the ‘atmosphere of trust’ established through regular, critical self-reflection in their Ombudsman office, a respondent noted: “In addition we made clear that every aspect of our work could be and should

be examined and that we should see this as ultimately supportive and we should work to keep it that way."

One respondent went into detail about the supervision process she felt should be required of all OO's: "All new OOs should be expected to participate in weekly supervision, (in person or via telephone) until such time as the supervisor feels less scrutiny would be appropriate. If a new OO does not report to another more experienced OO supervisor, a volunteer supervisor may be assigned from the ranks of certified IOA OOs. It would be ideal if new OOs could be observed in their practice, obviously with permission of visitors. If live supervision with one way mirrors is not possible then recorded sessions could be obtained and shared with supervisors. I would like to see candidates for certification be observed while working with visitors, during the certification process. If newly established offices or existing offices decide to require regular supervision of their OOs, the supervisor could decide on the degree of supervision necessary in each particular circumstance."

Overall, responses to this initial brief survey revealed some crucial elements that must be considered as the authors' recommendation for formalized OO supervision is discussed. And it is noteworthy that survey responses – with one exception - conflated supervision with mentoring support. As we will articulate in the next section, there are critical distinctions between mentoring & supervision including the formality of the supervision process, the mandatory aspect of the engagement and the links to monitoring and evaluation against professional practice standards.

RATIONALE AND RECOMMENDATION FOR A MODEL OF FORMAL SUPERVISION FOR ORGANISATIONAL OMBUDSMEN

While elements of the supervision model being proposed have been part of Organisational Ombudsman practice from the earliest days, as detailed in the insights and suggestions generously offered in the preparation of this paper by Distinguished Emeritus colleagues, Organisational Ombudsman supervision as a professional requirement would be a new development in our currently unregulated profession. What are the key characteristics of the model?

As well as taking into account information provided by distinguished colleagues, and OO mentoring schemes (within the IOA and externally, though under the IOA 'umbrella'), the authors believe that the experience of companion professions provides important insights when considering the establishment of a supervision requirement and role. The authors have chosen the fields of Social work and Psychology as companion professions, in part because they represent the primary professional training of the authors, but more importantly they were informed by the belief that the fundamental nature of Ombuds work is emotional labour. Whilst Ombuds come from a range of occupational backgrounds and benefit from a range of conflict resolution, legal, organisational and people related skills, at its heart the authors believe that Ombuds work is about working with people under significant emotional stress, many of whom are in crisis. Ombuds work is about creating an environment that supports people to attend to their emotions, while at the same time reflect upon the complex dynamics of their experience and plan an informed and constructive course of action.

The authors consulted the professional supervision guidelines of the New Zealand Psychologists Board (NZPB), the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), and the (US) National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to identify key elements of formal professional supervision in those contexts (see comparison table appendix 1).

We noted that some professional boards have the parameters of supervision determined, at least to some degree, by legislation designed to enable public assurance of practitioner competence[13]. In the realm of Organisational Ombudsmen, their operations are mandated not by law but by organisational policy. OO practitioners are reliant upon whether the issue of supervision and/or support has been considered as an organisational prerequisite during the program's development, or upon whether and to what extent it is a priority of the individual Ombuds or senior management.

Despite the legislative basis of the NZPB supervision guidelines, as with the COFO mentoring program, the NZPB guidelines "…are recommendations rather than mandatory standards…" (p.3) which are considered to supplement the NZPB Code of Ethics. That said, it remains a practice requirement that all psychologists undertake regular, formal supervision. For social workers in Australia, the AASW determines that active participation in supervision is a core practice standard, with the practice of supervision guided by core values articulated in the Code of Ethics. For both professions supervision has an important role in relation to developing professional practice and upholding the professional Code of Ethics. Indeed supervision is considered a key process in supporting the profession. (In this vein, the NZPB guidelines draw a distinction between supervision as monitoring and reporting on performance, which they emphasize less than *supervision as peer support for professional development)*.

Within each of these guidelines, the implementation of professional supervision is expected to be career long, and for the NZPB it touches on all aspects of a psychologist's work (i.e., client contact, research, professional [continuing] education, and managing a psychologist practice). Additionally, *modes* of supervision in these professions – whether supportive, questioning, reflective, corrective, educational or challenging – may multiply and intersect at the same time, changing as the needs of the supervisee changes and as the supervisory relationship evolves. Significantly, the NZPB guidelines emphasize that self-reflection is a cornerstone of supervision, and functions as a means "…whereby the employer can fulfil their obligations as a good employer to address occupational stress." (NZPB p.5)

In an era in which OO's communicate and share experience across cultures, countries and time-zones, all guidelines consulted emphasize supervision as a means of supporting and nurturing cultural competence in professional development. The authors have reviewed the professional guidelines, as well as the COFO and IOA mentoring models, and identified some essential elements for an effective supervisory relationship. These include:

- A climate of trust, safety, and mutual respect
- An expectation of honest, open questioning
- Demonstrated interest
- Tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity
- Elicitation of regular and constructive feedback
- Experiential learning approaches
- Recording, monitoring and evaluation of the process.

A brief comparison of such characteristics across three relevant professional associations is provided in Table 1. Also, *supervisory* competencies are described in the reviewed guidelines as including the following:

- Creating a safe environment for supervisees/mentees
- Responding respectfully to supervisees' individual styles and capacities

[13] In New Zealand, psychologist supervision guidelines are designed to fulfil assurance of practitioner competence under the Health Practitioner Competence Assurance Act, 2003. For the AASW active participation in supervision is a core practice standard.

- Feeding back constructively while showing empathy and respect
- Non-judgmental validation of supervisees' experiences
- Modelling ethical, principled professional conduct and boundaries
- Attending to supervisee personal wellness issues, as they impact professional conduct
- Attending appropriately to cultural and diversity issues
- Encouraging supervisee awareness and reflection on the consequences of their impact on others
- Reviewing the supervision process and impact regularly
- Exploring values and difference, believing supervisees are willing to learn.

Formal programs of supervision/support are an integral part of professional practice across many other professions. They fulfill critical functions including;

- Supporting new and inexperienced practitioners
- Supporting practitioners in isolated roles
- Supporting the welfare and wellbeing of practitioners in challenging roles
- Contributing to raising professional practice standards
- Contributing to credibility of the profession
- Supporting the consistency / reliability of practice
- Promoting a model of continuous learning and reflective practice
- Improving the effectiveness of interventions
- Assisting new programs to consolidate and establish themselves

Feedback in relation to the early drafts of this paper highlighted an area of great passion for many of the experienced practitioners who provided feedback, i.e., the current state of the Ombudsman profession in relation to adherence to the practice standards. Given this, supervision was seen as important for addressing issues of accountability, assessment and evaluation, particularly for ensuring consistency of OO ethical practice and thereby protecting the standing of the profession in the community.

While the authors acknowledge that implementation of a formal supervision program creates the opportunity to monitor and asses practice standards, Wright (2003) has previously identified that under conditions of stress and organisational pressure, supervision can become overly focused upon accountability issues at the expense of support and development. In other words, if a balance of objectives is not achieved the supervisor is at risk of being perceived as the 'practice police'.

The authors firmly believe that the main focus for supervision should be the creation of a safe place for potentially contentious issues to be thought about. Growth and development can only occur where the professional feels safe to be vulnerable in exposing challenging aspects about their work. While there needs to be enough robustness in the supervisory relationship to enable challenge, the purpose of that challenge is to facilitate growth and development. For the authors this means guiding rather than directing, nurturing the process of adherence to standards, although, in the most serious cases, referral to an Ethics Committee or Ethics process for further consideration should be an option available to the profession (Miller 2016).

Additionally, there will likely be different priorities dependent upon the nature of the supervisory relationship, e.g., is the contract with the organisation or the individual, is the supervisor part of the organisation or external, is the supervision contract one-off and case -specific, or short- or longer term?

A Supervision Contract for Organisational Ombudsmen, based on the model provided by the NZPB, is illustrated in Appendix 1.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The content and functions of formal supervision are important for the still relatively new profession of Organisational Ombudsmen and, as such, the authors recommend the following as key next steps to develop the role of formal supervision in this milieu:

AN ORGANISATIONAL CONVERSATION AND ENQUIRY

We recommend that the International Ombudsman Association commences an IOA Board-mandated conversation and enquiry with the membership about the development of a formalized program of supervision/support for the Ombudsman profession. As has been described, such an enquiry will likely find that much – and even possibly most - OO practice involves informal support and supervision processes. We contend, however, that *formalizing* existing processes is an important next step in asserting the professional standards, credibility and advancement of the Organisational Ombudsman profession. Using inputs from the IOA and COFO mentoring programmes, and with encouraged input from practitioners with experience, a conversation with the membership will help to explicate the 'ways and means' by which such formalizing can realistically happen and, by its existence, hopefully add weight to the importance of it being done. Additionally, such a conversation could help to clarify where administrative responsibility for formal supervision could reside – e.g., as a Board function, or under the CO-OP programme, or elsewhere.

ESTABLISHING BEST PRACTICES FOR OO SUPERVISION

We further recommended that work commences to establish principles of practice for Organisational Ombudsman supervision, grounded in the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, as well as taking the best from companion professions' supervisory standards and documented experiences. Some practical considerations to be addressed include:

- How supervision is appropriately contracted and who has responsibility for it being so (e.g., the IOA, the employer, or the individual practitioner)
- How supervision models can ensure cultural appropriateness while also ensuring rigorous and consistent professional standards
- Expectations of the frequency and duration of supervision meetings
- Appropriate potential goals of OO supervision and options in relation to the processes that can be undertaken to achieve them
- How can supervisors be best prepared to supervise
- How issues of inappropriate or unethical practice (by supervisees or supervisors) are to be addressed
- Protocols about confidentiality and managing confidential information in supervision.

RESEARCHING IMPLEMENTATION OF OMBUDSMAN SUPERVISION

It is further recommended that the IOA formulates parameters for researching implementation of supervision protocols and models within the membership, especially examining outcomes associated with supervision and mentoring support. In particular, research could guide evolution of future approaches that may help to maximize Ombudsman self-care, that support culture-specific supervision design, and that assist with development of sustainable programmes in different occupational contexts.

In summary, the authors submit that supervision should be part of each individual practitioner's commitment to continuing professional development, to appropriate self-care, and implemented by the IOA as an integral aspect of ensuring the maintenance of professional Organisational Ombudsman standards.

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AUTHOR BIOS

Fred Wright has almost 40 years' experience in public sector administration in a range of operational and senior management positions across Victorian Government Departments including Justice, Human Services, Environment and Primary Industries. In 2011 he managed a successful pilot project that led to the establishment of the first Organisational Ombudsman program in a government department in Australia. Since this program was established, Fred has consulted to the establishment of Ombudsman programs in four other branches of government in Victoria, Australia

Fred is Co-Chair of the Asia Pacific Regional Advisory Committee and member of the International Outreach Committee of the IOA, as well as a board member of the National Institute of Organisational Dynamics, a not for profit educational institute undertaking research and providing programs in leadership and organisation dynamics. He also holds the position of Director of Group Relations Australia, a professional association where members seek to develop the field of group relations and systems psychodynamics. (fred.wright@delwp.vic.gov.au)

David Miller was Organisational Ombudsman for the World Health Organization, UNAIDS, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, The World Food Programme, and Gavi: The Vaccine Alliance. Originally trained as a Clinical Psychologist, David was a pioneer in the development of psychosocial and public health policy for the management of HIV/AIDS. He was editor of the JIOA for 5 years to 2014, has been a faculty trainer on IOA training courses in Europe and North Africa, and a member of IOA Task Forces creating Uniform Reporting Categories and reviewing the IOA Standards of Practice. David became an IOA Distinguished Emeritus member in 2018, and is currently providing supervision for Ombudsmen in Europe and Australasia. (decanterbay@gmail.com)

TABLE 1: Comparison Table – Characteristics of Supervision Programs

	AASW	NZ Psych Board	National Association of SW – US
Status	Active participation in professional supervision is a core practice standard for social workers.	Supervision is a mandatory competence mechanism.	Specific requirements of regulatory bodies guide status.
Principles	Code of ethics pays an important role.	Code of ethics pays an important role.	Code of ethics pays an important role.
Purpose of Supervision	Enhance skills and competence. Professional learning and development. Positively Impact client outcomes	Enhance skills and competence. Manage stress. Positively Impact client outcomes	Development of competence, demeanour and ethical practice
Functions of Supervision	Education, Support, Administration.	Promotions and maintenance of high professional and ethical standards. Time and space for review, reflection, conceptualisation and planning of interventions. Address occupational stress.	Education, Support, Administration.
Arrangements	Line manager or, External professional (either engaged by individual or agency). In some cases may not be a Social Worker	Trusting collaborative relationship. Respected professional colleague	Different models dependent upon context and nature of work. Supervisor has experience in practice area.
Process	A range of different models, frameworks and creative or innovative approaches may be employed. (In person, online (video/web), phone)	A range of different models, frameworks and creative or innovative approaches may be employed. (Face to face, direct observation of work through audio or video, file review or report).	A range of different models, frameworks and creative or innovative approaches may be employed.
Frequency	Related to experience; - less than 2 years' experience; fortnightly supervision, - new field of practice or facing challenges, fortnightly supervision, - more than 2 years' experience; monthly	All practicing psychologists to engage in supervision. (nature may change as career evolves). Minimum 2 hours per month for full time workers and one hour per month for p/t. Frequency to increase for trainees, inexperienced or new area of work.	Various options considered dependent upon context, professional/legal requirement of association and nature of work.
Standards	Supervisors to be trained and experienced,	Supervisors to be trained and experienced,	Contract – includes goals, timeframes, confidentiality and responsibilities Supervisor has

	supervisor to uphold professional ethical responsibilities. Supervisor guided by code of ethics in relation to misconduct or unethical behavior. Establish Supervision contract, Maintain supervision records. Confidentiality important.	supervisor to uphold professional ethical responsibilities. Supervisor guided by code of ethics in relation to misconduct or unethical behavior. Establish Supervision contract, Maintain supervision records. Supervisor has experience and expertise in practice area. Importance of cultural awareness. Confidentiality important.	experience and expertise in practice area. Importance of cultural awareness. Confidentiality important.

APPENDIX 1: DRAFT ORGANIZATIONAL OMBUDSMAN SUPERVISION CONTRACT
Agreement between: _____ (Supervisee)

and: _____ (Supervisor)

1.a) Supervision will be in accordance with the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Code of Conduct and Standards of Practice.

b) The purpose of supervision is to create a reflective space promoting peer support for the supervisee's professional development and to enable them to effectively and professionally respond to visitors and professional issues.

c) Supervision sessions will use discussion of case presentations, hypothetical situations and open dialogue to promote the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding to encourage the development of a reflective and effective practice that is consistent with the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

d) The supervisor is expected to address professional, cultural, ethical, and educational issues, and personal issues which relate to and affect the supervisee's work performance.
e) The supervisee is expected to have reviewed their current work and clarified their priorities and needs before the supervision session.

f) The content and purpose of the supervision sessions will be kept confidential between the parties. The limitations to this confidentiality are where concern arises for the imminent risk to and safety of the supervisee and/or their visitor/s and/or others.

g) Both supervisor and supervisee remain responsible for their own professional conduct and competence.

h) In the event of concern arising for the supervisor that involves issues of safety or propriety either the supervisor or the supervisee should make their concerns clear and discuss contacting the employer and/or the appropriate professional authority:

i) In the event that the supervisee has a complaint or concern, then in the first instance it should be addressed directly with the supervisor. If this proves to be not possible, then an agreed course of action to be followed should be made explicit and included in the supervision contract.

j) Both supervisor and supervisee have a responsibility to keep a log of the supervision process pertaining to their respective roles, as required by appropriate professional authorities.

2. a) The frequency of the supervision will be: fortnightly ..... monthly ..... other.....
b) The protocol for cancellation and rescheduling is:

c) The duration of the supervision sessions will be:

d) The supervision will be reviewed:

e) Specific goals/focus areas for attention for the next ..... months are:

-
-
-
-

3. Any specific additional duties or expectations attaching to the supervisor or supervisee should be noted below.

-
-
-
-

Signed: ..... (Supervisee) Date: .....

Signed: .....(Supervisor) Date: .....
Copy sent to supervisee's professional leader, or professional body (If appropriate)
.....