



SESSION 2: How can ombuds institutions prevent crisis and threats?

Introduction

In a world that is constantly evolving, ombuds institutions need to constantly adapt to new challenges. In other words, in order to maintain their momentum in the long run, ombuds institutions need to be resilient in the short run.

It becomes fundamental to prevent the occurrence of threat or crisis in order to respond to them efficiently.

For the sake of our purpose, we will define a crisis as “a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions.”¹

In order to prevent such event from jeopardizing stability and permanently harm the work of an ombuds institution, it is essential to identify and define the significance of the threat before she occurs. To do so, office holders need to conduct risk-assessment.

How to anticipate a threat or a crisis ?

How can an ombuds institution effectively anticipate a threat or a crisis? Institutions often conduct risks-assessment.

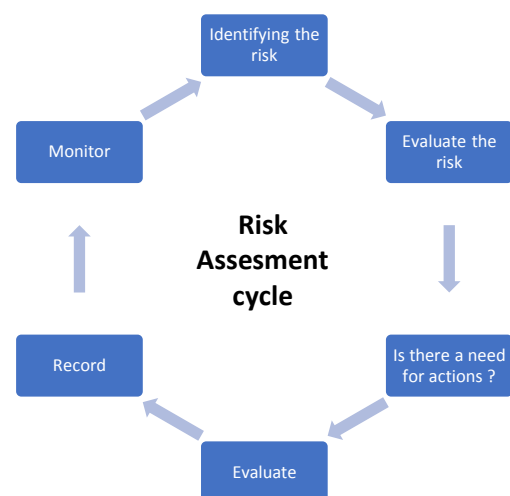
A risk assessment is, put simply, a careful examination of what could cause harm to the work of an institution, in order to make assess if enough precautions have been take in order to prevent the negative impact of the occurrence of such an event.

Conducting a risk-assessment in six steps

STEP 1 – IDENTIFY THE RISKS

The first step to assess a risk is to identify situations that may turn out “badly” and have a negative impact on the work of the institution. In this respect, it may be appropriate to turn to past experiences.

Another option would be to identify potential threats by performing a so-called SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis as presented in the appendix is designed to allow a realistic look at the strengths (S),



¹ Rosenthal, Uriel; 't Hart, Paul; and Charles, Michael T. 1989 "The World of Crises and Crisis Management." In Rosenthal, Charles, and 't Hart, eds. 1989 Coping with Crises : the Management of Disasters, Riots, and Terrorism. Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, IL. 485 pages.



weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T) facing an institution².

STEP 2 – EVALUATE THE RISK

To evaluate a risk is to define the severity of that given risk. Once a threat has been identified, it is necessary to assess its degree of danger.

- Who and/or what might be harmed and how?
- How bad will it affect the work of your institution (consequence)?
- How often? In other words; is it a recurring threat or a periodic threat?

The more accurate is the identification the more efficient will be the response.

STEP 3 - IS THERE ROOM FOR ACTION?

Once you have identified the risk and its severity, determine whether the measures already in place to prevent the risk from causing harm are sufficient or if your organization needs to do more to reduce the risk. If necessary, propose an action, identify who will lead the action and follow the implementation.

STEP 4 – EVALUATE

Assess whether the hazard has been eliminated or if it is kept under control appropriately.

Review your assessment regularly and update it if necessary.

STEP 5 - RECORD YOUR FINDINGS

Keep all documents or records related to the critical event. While archiving may seem tedious, keeping a written record of the crises and how they have been managed can facilitate future risk assessment process and help to adopt the best-adapted response more quickly. Similarly, keeping a written record avoids or prevents the occurrence of crisis when the staff of an institution is renewed in its entirety.

STEP 6 – MONITOR

Few contexts are immutable. Sooner or later, a new event can lead to a new threat. It is therefore logical to constantly monitor the changes in the context in which your institution works so that you can identify new threats if necessary. It's too easy to forget to review your risk assessment - until something goes wrong and it's too late.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are/were the strengths of your office ?
2. What are/were the weaknesses of your office ?
3. What are the opportunities your office is encountering or has encountered?
4. What are the threats your office is encountering or has encountered?

² You will find the following table and more information on how to perform SWOT Analysis on the website of the MindTools : *SWOT Analysis ; Discover New Opportunities, Manage and Eliminates Threats*. (Online). MindTools ; Essential skills for an excellent career. September 2019. <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/articles/newTMC_05.htm>