

## Resource:

### Assessing—and Possibly Keeping Data or Private Notes about— the Most Serious Cases (MSC) Encountered by an Organizational Ombuds (OO) Office

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#### How to assess the “Most Serious Cases” Encountered by an OO

There is no generally accepted definition of a “MSC.” However, MSCs are very important in illuminating the value of the ombuds office to your organization. You may wish to define the term for yourself in the context of your own organization and its mission. *Consider asking leadership, risk managers, HR, EAP, religious counselors and affinity groups—to learn how they assess seriousness, and for you to learn their interests.* Consider tracking points like the level and types of risks to visitors, and the organization, the number of people who might be affected by the case, financial and emotional costs (or benefits), etc.

There is a list of issues at the end of this article that was compiled by AI and may be useful.

**This page offers questions for taking further notes or adding categories to your database or Checklists.** In organizations with many MSCs, you might wish to keep a separate, paper and pencil, undated MSC page about each one. MSCs are very important in demonstrating the value of having an ombuds.

#### Questions to consider in assessing (and tracking) MSCs

1. Was it an emergency as well as a Most Serious Case? Yes
2. From whom did you first learn of this case?
  - Recipient/target of behaviors
  - Perpetrator
  - Supervisor



\*NB: Some MSCs take only an hour, some take a great deal of time; *each point is important to show OO value.*

## **Some Issues that Might Be Considered “Most Serious”**

**Compiled by AI**

Categories adapted from U.S. federal “table of penalties” guidance and agency examples, including the U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual (3 FAM 4540), the U.S. Office of Personnel Management guidance on progressive discipline and tables of penalties, and representative agency tables from HUD, the U.S. Marshals Service, and other departments.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Example of behaviors (serious level)</b>	<b>Typical concerns/risks</b>
Violence & threats	Physical assault, credible threats, bringing weapons, serious intimidation	Safety, legal liability, urgent duty of care
Harassment & discrimination	Severe or repeated harassment (including sexual), discriminatory conduct, hostile environment	Civil rights violations, litigation, reputational damage
Retaliation	Punishing or threatening those who report, cooperate, or oppose misconduct	Chilling reporting, regulatory and legal exposure
Serious insubordination	Willful refusal of lawful orders, open defiance that undermines operations	Breakdown of authority, operational risk
Fraud, theft, & corruption	Theft of funds or property, expense fraud, kickbacks, bribery, falsifying financial records	Financial loss, criminal exposure, public trust erosion
Misuse of official position	Abuse of authority, conflicts of interest, using position for personal gain	Integrity concerns, regulatory/binding policy violations
Security & confidentiality	Serious security violations, mishandling classified or sensitive data, unauthorized disclosure	National security, privacy breaches, regulatory penalties

Category	Example of behaviors (serious level)	Typical concerns/risks
IT & data misuse	Intentional system damage, unauthorized access, serious misuse of electronic resources	Cybersecurity incidents, data loss, service disruption
Safety & health violations	Willful disregard of safety rules, creating serious risk of injury or major incident	Occupational injury, regulatory sanctions, liability
Dishonesty & falsification	Material falsification of records, applications, time/attendance, investigations, or reports	Reliability of records, legal risk, erosion of trust
Substance abuse on duty	Being under the influence, illegal drug use or alcohol impairment while working or on premises	Safety, performance, policy and sometimes statutory violations
Attendance/gross neglect	Extended AWOL, gross negligence leading to significant harm or loss	Operational disruption, financial and service impact
Sabotage & interference with others' work	Deliberate sabotage of systems or processes, interfering with or corrupting others' work or data, blocking key tasks or access	Undermines mission, data and research integrity, safety and quality risks, potential fraud

**Note: AI may offer responses that are inadequate, incorrect or offensive.**

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