

## **Annual Report Summary – EPFL Person of Trust Activity**

### **January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024**

#### Annual Report

The annual activity report (the "Report") aims to report on the activity of the Person of Trust/Mediator with EPFL collaborators and students (together, the "EPFL Community") from January 1 to December 31, 2024 (the "Year"). It specifically aims to identify trends that should be taken into account in order to continue improving the work and study environment for the members of the EPFL Community.

#### General

Overall, numerous synergies with other bodies of the Trust & Support Network (TSN) materialized, thereby strengthening the trust of Consultants in the Person of Trust service.

#### Stabilization of the number of new cases in 2024

In total 160 cases were managed, of which 139 new ones opened in 2024. 93 cases were resolved this year.

Number of new cases have stabilized in 2024 versus previous years. This appears to be a positive consequence of the establishment of the TSN and the related extensive communication.

#### Positive synergies within the TSN

The concerted action of the various bodies of the TSN, enabled by a better understanding of each one's roles and scopes, have once more contributed to the resolution of a number of situations.

The EPFL Community appears to have a better knowledge of the resources available and is less hesitant to seek help in case of difficulty. The Trust Point application has also allowed the TSN bodies to gain visibility.

Speaking up is thus encouraged, which helps to prevent deterioration of situations as much as possible.

#### Impact of the change in Presidency

The change in Presidency has obviously generated uncertainty within the EPFL Community this year. The goal was therefore to provide them with tools to better navigate this period of uncertainty and change in order to protect their health and well-being at work.

### Need to clarify the internal complaint management process

Several consultants expressed a lack of understanding and, therefore, confidence in the internal complaint management process implemented within the Respect Compliance Office (RCO).

These consultants therefore refrained from using this resource even though these situations could appear very serious.

### Managing Problematic Situations Known to the Organization

Some problematic situations that appear to be known to the organization remain unresolved.

These primarily involve managerial dysfunctions involving professors and/or senior managers, sometimes some of them being very close to retirement.

This poses a significant risk to EPFL at various levels. It is essential that these situations be addressed proactively as soon as the organization becomes aware of them, regardless of the profile of the person whose behavior is being questioned.

### Human Resources: Some Points of Attention

Human Resources is very hands-on, professional, and effective in managing and resolving complex issues that require regular monitoring. This year, a pragmatic and collaborative resolution of many dysfunctional situations was thus implemented.

Nevertheless, certain points of attention require consideration.

#### - Performance management

This year has highlighted some long-standing performance issues that impact the entire team, including managers/ professors, who often find themselves very uncomfortable managing these situations.

However, when these situations persist, they affect the well-being of the individual involved, the team, and the manager/ professor in charge.

Many people still mistakenly interpret a managerial decision or refocusing as bullying.

As a result, some managers are now weakened by these types of allegations, feel paralyzed, and no longer dare to take the necessary managerial actions or decisions. This is detrimental to both the organization and its employees.

It is therefore important to restore balance and provide managers/professors with the support they need to fulfill their managerial role.

#### - Fixed-term contracts (CDD)

The process for managing fixed-term contracts renewal is not always clear to consultants and does not appear to be applied consistently within EPFL.

This can generate stress, fear, and tension for those involved. There is concern that this could lead to abusive behavior from some managers/professors.

#### - Long-term sick leave

The process to manage long-term sick leave is not always clear to Consultants. Some complain that they did not have any contact with Human Resources or the occupational health department during this period.

Yet, this is an essential element that promotes a rapid return to work and appropriate detection and management of potentially dysfunctional situations.

#### Slight Decrease in Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance Cases

The number of new cases in this category of Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance Cases is down sharply, with 7 new cases this year compared to 16 last year.

This year, this category includes allegations of moral and sexual harassment and discrimination.

While the decrease in the number of new cases in this category is a priori positive, it is important to remain particularly vigilant with the PhD student population, which is more at risk than others. The decrease in cases in this category could indeed result from a fear of reprisals or a lack of confidence in the internal complaint management process, as mentioned above.

#### A majority of managerial issues

This year, we again observed a majority of issues relating to hierarchical interpersonal conflicts.

It is important to keep in mind that these issues must be taken seriously, as they can affect the health of the individuals involved, just as much as inappropriate behaviors falling under the category of legal, regulatory, financial, and compliance cases.

#### Satisfaction Survey

As always, an anonymous satisfaction survey was sent to Consultants. 64 of them responded this year.

This survey was very positive, with 62 respondents reporting being very satisfied or satisfied with the service provided. 2 respondents were dissatisfied with the service provided. The reasons for this dissatisfaction were not explained.

There may be misunderstandings or dissatisfaction when the Consultant's initial expectations are not met. For example, when it is not possible to resolve the issue on behalf of Consultant.

Similarly, while this is clearly stated in the rules addressed to Consultants upon initial contact, some may expect to receive in-depth legal advice, which is not the role of the Person of Trust. The Person of Trust Service helps resolve conflicts and issues early, before the situation becomes risky from both the organization's perspective and that of the EPFL community.