



Tripartite Alliance for
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

Grievance Handling Handbook



Produced by:



Tripartite Alliance for
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

tafep.sg

Content updated on November 2025.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems without permission in writing from the publisher.

CONTENT

Introduction to Grievance Handling	04
Importance of Proper Grievance Handling	06
Workplace Fairness Act	08
Definition and Types of Grievances	10
Grievance Handling Process	14
Step 1: Establish a Grievance Handling Policy	16
Step 2: Develop Proper Documentation Process	25
Step 3: Train Supervisors and Appointed Staff	29
Step 4: Communicate the Grievance Handling Policy	33
Importance of Non-Retaliation	34
Supporting Employees Through Workplace Challenges	38
Employee Counselling Session	44
Handling Unexpected Scenarios	48
Going Beyond the Company	54
Conclusion	56
Annex	58

INTRODUCTION TO GRIEVANCE HANDLING



The workforce in Singapore is inherently diverse, comprising employees from different age groups, genders, ethnicities and religious backgrounds. Within each of these groups, individuals also have different values, priorities, work and communication styles, all of which add to the complexity and depth of diversity within every company.

While the benefits of having a diverse workforce are well known, e.g. the ability to tap on a wider talent pool and leverage different strengths for a competitive edge, such diversity of perspectives and views can also lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding.

// If not managed well, employee morale and productivity, as well as the company's operations and image, may be adversely affected. //

Furthermore, job seekers and employees today are better educated and more well-informed. They possess greater awareness of global employment practices and standards, as well as a higher degree of social awareness and civic interest in local employment practices. As such, employee engagement has become much more challenging; organisations need to be more flexible and creative in the way they engage and retain their workforce.

Companies can pre-empt unpleasant situations that arise as a result of miscommunication and misunderstanding by creating a positive working environment through the adoption of fair and progressive employment practices and cultivating an inclusive and harmonious workplace. At the same time, companies can put in place policies and procedures to manage workplace grievances to enable employees a safe recourse should the need arise.

IMPORTANCE OF PROPER GRIEVANCE HANDLING



Effective grievance handling is essential for maintaining a harmonious and productive work environment. A clear and structured process provides employees with a safe and impartial platform to raise concerns without fear of retaliation. This fosters trust and psychological safety, which enhances employee morale and engagement. When employees feel that their voices are heard and their issues are addressed fairly, they are more likely to stay committed and perform at their best.

A well-managed grievance handling process also helps to maintain industrial harmony and minimise disruptions to business operations.

Grievance handling acts as an early warning system for deeper organisational issues. Complaints about management practices, working conditions, or interpersonal conflicts often signal gaps in policies or leadership approaches. By addressing these issues promptly and effectively, employers can prevent escalation into formal complaints, workplace disputes, or legal action, strengthen employee confidence, and improve overall workplace harmony. Effective resolution of grievances also demonstrates the organisation's commitment to fairness and respect, reinforcing a positive work culture and increasing employee retention.

Furthermore, a transparent and consistent grievance handling process enhances the organisation's reputation and employer brand. Companies that prioritise fair treatment and employee welfare are more attractive to talent and better positioned to retain high-performing employees. Handling grievances with professionalism and consistency not only reduces legal risks but also builds a stronger, more cohesive workforce. Ultimately, a well-established grievance handling process creates a positive work environment where employees feel valued and supported, driving long-term business success.

WORKPLACE FAIRNESS ACT



Under the Workplace Fairness Act (WFA), employers must establish a written process for handling grievances. This ensures that all grievances are addressed consistently, fairly and in a manner that promotes trust and transparency in the workplace.

Key requirements under the WFA include:

- 1 Inquiring into Grievances**
Employers must have a clear process to investigate grievances fairly by gathering facts and interviewing all the relevant parties.
- 2 Reviewing Grievances**
Each case must be reviewed thoroughly, objectively and in line with company policies and employment regulations.
- 3 Informing the Employee**
Employees must be notified of the outcome in a timely and transparent manner to uphold trust.
- 4 Keeping Written Records**
Maintain written records of all inquiries and reviews to support consistency and accountability.
- 5 Ensuring Confidentiality**
All grievance-related information and the identities of those involved should be kept confidential, share only when necessary and appropriate.
- 6 Informing Employees of the Process**
Clearly communicate the grievance handling process **in writing** so employees understand their rights and how to seek recourse.

DEFINITION AND TYPES OF GRIEVANCES



What is a Grievance?

A grievance refers to a complaint or allegation based on feelings of dissatisfaction or perceptions of unfair treatment pertaining to an employee's work or workplace. It may involve any complaint or allegation related to discrimination or harassment by an employer or another employee. For example, a grievance may arise when a company policy or code of ethics on anti-discrimination has been violated. This is different from a general complaint, which covers a wider range of topics, such as the cleanliness of the pantry area or a lack of employee support schemes. Grievances are more serious and require a structured and impartial process to resolve fairly and promptly.

The root of a grievance may be real or imaginary. For instance, grievances arising from actual events may include conflicts with co-workers or dissatisfaction over a wage reduction. The root of a grievance may also be imaginary, for example, a supervisor may feel the need to closely monitor an employee with poor work performance. However, if the supervisor fails to communicate their intention, the employee may interpret the supervisor's behaviour as being intrusive and overbearing.

On the other hand, other colleagues may believe that the supervisor is exercising favouritism and being unfair. Such grievances are based on false perceptions and assumptions.

Types of Grievances

In the workplace, there can be General Grievances and Individual Grievances:

- **General Grievance** affect a group of employees. Possible examples include a wage cut or a retrenchment exercise that could involve several employees or the entire workforce.
- **Individual Grievance** affect one employee and requires a one-to-one approach. Possible examples of Individual Grievances include an employee who feels discriminated against in a promotion exercise or a case of sexual harassment.

When handling these grievances, unionised companies must communicate with and involve the Trade Union Representative and members of the Branch Committee as well.

What could cause grievances at the workplace?

Work-related grievances refer to complaints arising from dissatisfaction or unfair treatment at the workplace. These grievances typically stem from issues related to people behaviour and actions, policies and processes, and pay and performance — collectively known as the 3Ps.

People Behaviour and Actions

Grievances can arise from how employees interact with one another or how they are treated by management.

Common types include:

- **Interpersonal conflict**
Tension between employees due to misunderstandings or personal differences.
- **Unconscious bias and discriminatory mindsets**
Perceived or actual unfair treatment based on race, gender, age, or other protected characteristics.

Preventing Behaviour-Related Grievances:

- Establish core values to promote mutual respect and workplace harmony.
- Implement a code of conduct to set expectations for professional behaviour.
- Ensure management and supervisors act as role models for fairness and respect.

Policies and Processes

Grievances can result from unclear or unfair policies and working conditions.

Key areas include:

- **Policies and programmes**
Inconsistencies in company policies related to working hours, benefits, or leave.
- **Poor working conditions**
Issues related to health, safety, and overall work environment.

Best Practices for Managing Policy-Related Grievances:

- Ensure policies support work performance and employee well-being.
- Align policies with business goals and regulatory standards.
- Encourage employee feedback to address unintended discrimination or unfair treatment.
- Communicate policy changes clearly, covering:
 - » *What – The decision or action being made.*
 - » *Why – The reason for the action and why it's the best solution.*
 - » *Who – Who will be affected and the impact on them.*
 - » *When – When the action will take effect.*
 - » *How – How the decision will be implemented.*
- Provide platforms for employees to seek clarification and give feedback.

Pay and Performance

Grievances related to pay and performance often involve perceptions of unfair treatment in salary adjustments, promotions, and performance reviews.

Preventing Pay and Performance-Related Grievances:

- Communicate changes in pay, promotion, or employment terms promptly to allow for adjustment.
- Have clear policies and consistent process in determining pay adjustments, promotions or changes to employment contract.
- Ensure a structured wage system based on ability, performance, skills, and experience.
- Develop a fair performance management system with:
 - » *Training for managers to conduct fair evaluations.*
 - » *Measurable and objective performance standards.*
 - » *An internal appeal process for performance-related concerns.*
 - » *Clear communication of career advancement opportunities.*

By recognising and addressing grievances under these three categories, employers can create a fairer and more harmonious work environment while strengthening employee trust and engagement.



GRIEVANCE HANDLING (GH) PROCESS

Understanding the different types of grievances and their root causes is the first step towards resolving workplace issues. However, recognising grievances alone is not enough — employers must have a structured and consistent process in place to handle them effectively. A clear grievance handling process ensures that grievances are addressed promptly, fairly, and professionally, reducing the risk of escalation and reinforcing employee trust and confidence.

In line with the Workplace Fairness Act (WFA) and the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGFE), organisations are to establish a robust grievance handling process that provides employees with a secure and transparent channel to voice concerns. This helps to build a positive work environment where employees feel valued and supported.

The following section outlines the **key steps** to creating an effective grievance handling process, covering how to establish policies, document cases, train key personnel, and communicate the process clearly to all employees.



STEP 1: ESTABLISH A GRIEVANCE HANDLING POLICY

A well-defined grievance handling policy demonstrates the organisation's commitment to addressing employee concerns fairly and professionally, fostering trust and promoting workplace harmony.

Key Elements of a Grievance Handling Policy

- **Purpose and Commitment**

The policy should communicate the organisation's purpose and commitment to preventing and responding to grievances in a professional and timely manner.

- **Objective and Intention**

The policy should highlight management's intention to handle grievances in a conducive manner that promotes fairness and trust.

- **Involvement of Trade Unions**

Unionised companies should involve trade union representatives in the drafting and implementation of the Grievance Handling Policy to ensure alignment with employee needs.

Components of a Grievance Handling Policy

- **Definition of a Grievance**

Clearly define what constitutes a grievance with examples to reduce misunderstandings and ensure consistency.

- **Objective of the Grievance Handling Process**

State management's commitment to addressing grievances fairly and consistently without fear of retaliation or negative consequences.

- **Grievance Handling Procedure**

Outline clear steps and a reasonable timeframe for addressing grievances to ensure fair and impartial resolution.

» **Reporting Channels** – Provide accessible and confidential channels for employees to report grievances, including anonymous "whistle-blowing" options.

» **Levels of Appeal** – Allow employees to escalate unresolved grievances through a structured and transparent process.

A sample of a Grievance Handling policy is provided below to illustrate how a structured policy can be drafted and implemented.

Sample Grievance Handling Policy

This policy defines the company's policy on the importance of handling grievances of employees in the workplace.

2 The company takes all grievances seriously and assures all employees that all grievances will be handled with strict confidentiality. All employees are encouraged to take up their grievances with the company, through the procedures as laid out.

3 All supervisors and above are expected to handle all grievances which are brought up by their staff. Staff may bring up their grievances to their supervisors or any other supervisors / management staff. Staff are assured that in cases where the grievance is brought up to other supervisors / management staff, or made against their supervisor, there will not be any repercussions on the staff for doing so.

Grievance Handling Policy

1. Definition of a Grievance

Workplace grievances refer to discontent or feelings of unfairness at work or workplace. It may be felt by an individual employee or a group of employees. Grievances may fall under five categories. These are:

- a. Company policies such as leave management and work practices.
- b. Wages such as salary, bonus and overtime pay.
- c. Working conditions such as hygiene, safety and health issues.
- d. Interpersonal relations such as conflict with co-workers or supervisors.
- e. Workplace harassment such as insulting language, cyber bullying or sexual harassment

2. Objective of a Grievance Process

The Company has put in place the following grievance handling procedure (Refer to sample grievance handling procedure) to manage workplace grievances and build an inclusive and harmonious workplace. Unresolved grievances affect the morale and motivation of employees and may have repercussions such as business disruptions. Hence the company takes all grievances seriously and will maintain confidentiality for all cases. Employees are to be assured that no disciplinary action will be taken against employees who appeal to the superior of the immediate supervisor. (For unionised companies) The trade union representative can be involved in the process to represent the aggrieved employee.

You can download the sample template from [here](#).

Why is a Grievance Handling Procedure necessary?

While employers can minimise the likelihood and areas of employee grievances through the adoption of fair and progressive employment practices, when these situations do arise, the company must have a proper Grievance Handling Procedure in place. Having such a procedure to allow prompt response and quick resolution of a complaint or grievance will boost employee morale and productivity, and can avoid potentially protracted and costly legal action.

A Grievance Handling Procedure provides employees with a safe channel to raise their grievances without fear of negative repercussions, and facilitates the resolution of a grievance. It builds trust and maintains industrial harmony.

It is also unrealistic to expect that every grievance should be resolved to the absolute satisfaction of both parties. In most situations, the most reasonable solution is a compromise with both parties adopting a “give and take” position.

Features of a Grievance Handling Procedure

- **Grievance Handler**

Identify who employees should approach when they have grievances and outline the procedures for the grievance handler to follow.

- **Time Frame**

Communicate a realistic and practical time frame for investigating and resolving grievances.

- **Escalation Process**

Include a structured option for escalation if the initial outcome is not satisfactory, ensuring that employees have a clear and fair path to resolution.

Making the Grievance Handling Procedure work

The grievance handling procedure should apply to all employees, regardless of level, including professionals, managers, and executives. A sample grievance handling procedure for a non-unionised company is provided below:

Recognising the value and importance of open discussions in resolving misunderstandings and preserving harmonious working relations, management shall make every reasonable effort to address grievances promptly and effectively. To give effect to this commitment, employers should handle employee grievances through the following procedures, which promote fair and effective resolution.



STEP 1

An employee who has a grievance should raise the matter with their immediate supervisor within (period of time, e.g. 3 working days) of the issue arising. If the grievance involves the immediate supervisor, the employee may escalate the matter directly to the Department Head. The supervisor or Department Head shall provide a response within (period of time, e.g. 3 working days) from the date the grievance was raised.



STEP 2

If the employee is dissatisfied with the decision provided at Step One, they may refer the matter to the Division Head within (period of time, e.g. 3 working days) of receiving the initial response. The Division Head shall investigate the matter and provide a decision within (period of time, e.g. 3 working days) from the date of reference.



STEP 3

If the employee is still dissatisfied, they may escalate the matter to the HR Manager, who will represent management in seeking a resolution. The HR Manager shall provide a decision within (period of time, e.g. 7 working days) from the date the grievance was referred.



STEP 4

If the grievance remains unresolved after Step Three, the employee may refer the matter to the (job title, e.g. Managing Director/CEO), whose decision shall be final. Both parties may also agree to refer the matter to a mutually acceptable third party for advice if necessary.

Regardless of whether a company is unionised or not, all grievance handling procedures should include the following features:

Levels of Appeal

The grievance handling process should provide steps for escalating the grievance if it is not resolved at the initial level. The levels of appeal may vary based on the company's hierarchical structure and HR policy.

Designated Grievance Handler

Clear guidelines should be provided on who employees should approach when raising a grievance.

Timeframe

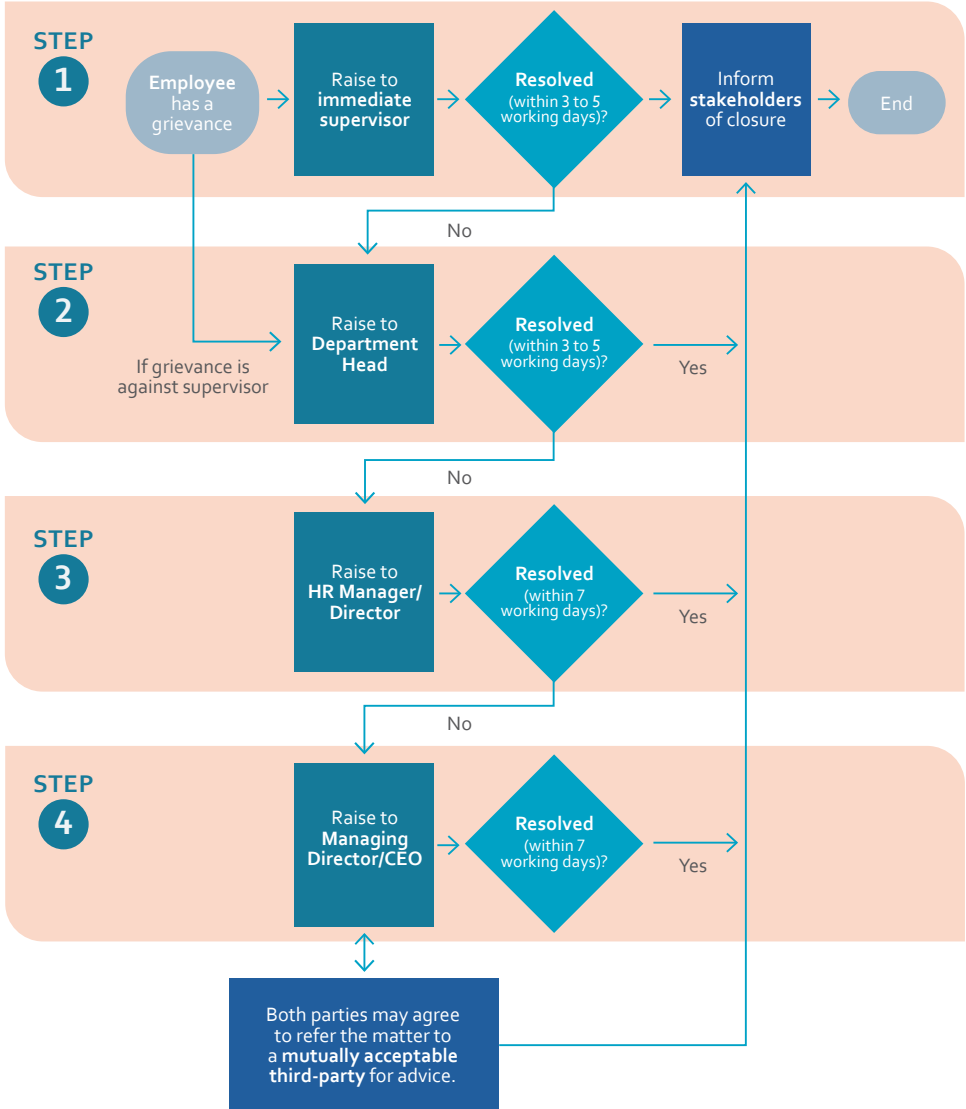
The grievance handling process should specify a reasonable and achievable timeframe for action to prevent delays and miscommunication.

Escalation Mechanism

If a resolution is not achieved at a certain level, the employee should have the option to escalate the grievance to the next level within the organisation.

An illustration of a grievance handling procedure is provided below.

How employees can use the Grievance Handling Procedure



For unionised companies, the grievance handling procedure is a common provision in collective agreements. The Singapore Industrial Arbitration Court website provides sample clauses for grievance handling procedures, which unionised companies can take reference from.

The key difference between a unionised and non-unionised company is the involvement of a Trade Union Representative (TUR). Employees who are union members have the right to seek assistance from the TUR and involve the union in resolving their grievances. The TUR may represent the employee during grievance handling discussions and ensure that the employee's rights are upheld throughout the process.

Conducting the Grievance Handling Meeting

The Grievance Handler must initiate the grievance handling process promptly once a grievance has been lodged. A delay in responding to the aggrieved employee will reflect negatively on the management team. It may be interpreted as insincerity or that the grievance handling process is mere lip service.

The Grievance Handler may start discussions by:

- » Ascertaining if there have been any changes since the lodging of the grievance/complaint.
- » Reminding the employee that the objective of the meeting is to allow the grievance to be examined thoroughly and addressed.
- » Encouraging the employee to speak freely and truthfully, and assuring them that confidentiality will be maintained. Similarly, the employee should ensure that matters discussed are kept confidential as well.
- » If there is a Trade Union Representative present and the employee is a Trade Union member, the Grievance Handler may seek to ascertain whether the Trade Union Representative would be speaking on behalf of the employee.
- » Explain to the parties present that grievances can be resolved if they are open and willing to explore all possible solutions. The Grievance Handler should also encourage feedback and suggestions from all parties.
- » If a workable solution is offered by the Trade Union Representative who represented the employee's grievance, accept and thank the Trade Union Representative for the helpful contribution.

During the meeting, the Grievance Handler should:

- » Speak less and listen more.
- » Seek clarification relating to the grievance to ensure understanding.
- » Keep the discussion focussed on the main issue.
- » If the discussion deviates away, the Grievance Handler should lead the discussion back and remind all participants of the objective(s) of the meeting, if necessary.

Once all the relevant information relating to the grievance has been captured, the Grievance Handler could adopt one of the following measures before closing the meeting:

- » If the grievance can be resolved within the mandate of the Grievance Handler and is to the satisfaction of the employee, the solution can be applied immediately.
- » If the grievance cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the employee, the Grievance Handler should do their best to explain why. The Grievance Handler should then proceed to advise the employee on the available options, such as accepting the situation or to invoke the next step of appeal in the grievance handling process.
- » It is important that the Grievance Handler gives the advice factually without offering a “personal opinion”. This is to prevent misunderstanding between the Grievance Handler and the employee, who may feel pressured into refraining from appealing further.
- » If the Grievance Handler concludes that workable solutions can be found through further discussions, they should present their views and invite the parties involved to explore possible solutions together.

When closing the meeting, the Grievance Handler should:

- » Thank the respective parties for meeting and for their valuable inputs.
- » Inform the participants that they will follow up on the matter and that a response will be provided within the agreed timeframe.

The Grievance Handler should note that the process is not completed at their level until follow-up work has been submitted and a written answer has been given to the employee. Upon receiving an answer from the Grievance Handler, the employee will then decide whether to accept the verdict or pursue their grievance further.

This completes the process for the Grievance Handler and they should close the grievance handling process with a follow-up report. Even if the employee is pursuing their grievance to the next level, the report will provide background information on what has been discussed.

STEP 2: DEVELOP PROPER DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

Proper documentation is a key component of an effective grievance handling process. Thorough and accurate documentation ensures transparency, accountability, and consistency in how grievances are managed. It also protects both the employer and the employee by providing a clear record of the issue raised, the steps taken to address it, and the outcome.

Importance of Documentation

Employers are required to document the grievance handling process meticulously, including the information collected, actions taken, and final resolution. Proper documentation serves several purposes:

- » **Evidence** – Provides a factual basis to support decisions and actions in case of mediation or employment claims.
- » **Official Records** – Creates a reliable record of what happened and how the grievance was managed, which helps prevent misunderstandings or misrepresentation.
- » **Reference for Future Cases** – Acts as a reference point for handling similar cases in the future, ensuring consistency and fairness across the organisation.

Key Documentation Practices

To ensure documentation is managed appropriately, employers should:

- » Establish clear guidelines on collecting and storing documentation securely.
- » Maintain confidentiality by controlling access to grievance records.
- » Ensure all parties involved in the grievance are aware of how their information will be used and protected.

Sample Documentation Templates

Proper documentation ensures that grievances are addressed fairly and consistently, while also providing a clear record of actions taken and outcomes achieved.

To help employers implement a structured grievance handling process, the following templates are available for reference.

These sample templates can be found [here](#).

1. Sample Grievance Handling Procedure and Template

- » *This template outlines the steps involved in handling grievances, from the initial lodging of a grievance to the resolution or escalation process.*
- » *It includes clear guidance on how to document the nature of the grievance, actions taken during the inquiry and review process, and the final resolution.*
- » *The template also specifies timelines for each step and outlines the responsibilities of the Grievance Handler and other parties involved.*

2. Sample Grievance Handling Lodgement Form

- » *This form allows employees to raise grievances formally and ensures that all necessary information - such as the details of the grievance, the parties involved, and any supporting evidence - is recorded.*
- » *The form serves as the first step in the grievance handling process, creating a formal record of the employee's concern and ensuring that it is directed to the appropriate party for follow-up.*
- » *Clear instructions on confidentiality and the protection of employee rights are included in the form.*

Sample Grievance Lodgement Form

Date : _____

To : _____ (Name of Grievance Handler) **Dept :** _____

From : _____ (Name of Employee) **Dept :** _____

Nature of Grievance / Complaint:

What (Subject):

When (Time/Date of Incident):

Where (Location of Incident):

Who (People involved/Witness if any):

How (Describe how it happened):

Immediate Supervisor to respond by (date): _____

Reason(s) for escalating this grievance* (tick where applicable):

**If grievance was not handled within the first level*

- ☐ Received no response within the time lag by _____ (Name)
- ☐ Grievance not addressed to my satisfaction by _____ (Name)
- ☐ Any other reasons (please specify):

3. Sample Grievance Handling Report Template

- » *This template helps Grievance Handlers document the outcome of the grievance handling process, including key findings, decisions made, and any follow-up actions required.*
- » *After completing the template, the Grievance Handler should close the process with a formal written response detailing the resolution and follow-up actions.*
- » *If unresolved, advise the employee on escalation options.*
- » *The report will serve as a reference for any further reviews.*

Sample Grievance Report

Date : _____	
To : _____ (Name of Grievance Handler)	Dept : _____
From : _____ (Name of Employee)	Dept : _____
Date of Grievance Handling Meeting : _____	
Name of Employee : _____	Dept : _____
Present at Meeting	
(1) _____ (Name)	Dept : _____
(2) _____ (Name)	Dept : _____
(3) _____ (Name)	Dept : _____
(4) _____ (Name)	Dept : _____
Nature of Grievance ¹ : _____ _____	
Grievance resolved at meeting? Please circle: Yes / No	
If yes, state nature of settlement: _____ _____ _____	
If no, state employee's prioritised options: (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	
Grievance Handler's recommendation, if any (e.g. escalation ² to the next level): _____ _____ _____	
<small>1. Refer to the Grievance Lodgement Form for full details on Grievance 2. Update the Grievance Lodgement Form if there is an escalation</small>	

Employers are encouraged to customise these templates to align with their company policies and operational structure. By having a structured process, companies can ensure that grievances are managed professionally and that all relevant details are recorded for future reference.

STEP 3: TRAIN SUPERVISORS AND APPOINTED STAFF

Whose role is it?

Handling employee grievances is a job function of any person who has been authorised and empowered by the employer. While it is commonly assumed that it is the role of the designated Human Resource (HR) Practitioner, it is the type of grievance (whether it is general or individual) that will also determine who should handle the grievance handling process.

For instance, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) should play the leading role in handling General Grievances. Such grievances require frequent and regular communication and information-sharing with employees to minimise potential misunderstanding. A failure to do so may lead to a high labour turnover or result in low morale, low productivity and high absenteeism.

As an important organisational practice, managers and supervisors should be equipped to handle employee feedback and grievances effectively, as they are best positioned on the ground to respond to and address such matters. Where the company is unionised, they should also work closely with union representatives.



Equipping Managers And Supervisors For Effective Grievance Handling

Managers and supervisors play a key role in grievance handling and should be equipped with the necessary skills to manage employee feedback effectively. Training should cover:

- **Employees' rights** – Ensure employees understand their right to raise grievances without fear of negative consequences and to escalate the matter if not resolved satisfactorily.
- **Safe environment** – Create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable raising issues without fear of retaliation.
- **Professional response** – Reassure employees that raising a grievance is not a reflection of the manager's competence and will not negatively affect the employee-manager relationship.
- **Follow-up action** – Stress the importance of timely follow-ups within the agreed timeframe. Delayed responses can undermine employee trust and reflect poorly on the sincerity and efficiency of the management team.
- **Escalation protocol** – Train managers and supervisors on how to escalate unresolved grievances in accordance with company policy.

For unionised companies, additional training should include guidance on working constructively with trade union representatives. Managers should:

- » *Treat union representatives with professionalism, courtesy, and respect.*
- » *Understand how to facilitate open and effective discussions with union representatives to resolve grievances collaboratively.*
- » *Ensure that union representatives are involved at the appropriate stage of the grievance handling process, in line with collective agreements.*

By clearly defining roles and responsibilities and ensuring proper training, organisations can manage grievances effectively, strengthen employee trust, and maintain a harmonious and productive work environment.

Essential Skills For Effective Grievance Handling

The following attributes and skills are important when handling employee grievances:

1

Problem solving attitude

- » Being open-minded demonstrates a willingness to explore with the employee ways to resolve the grievance.

2

Responsibility

- » Able to keep all matters relating to the employee and the grievance discussed at the meeting confidential.
- » Conscientious about follow-up and completing the task.

3

Active listening

- » Not just a good listener but practises active listening. Actively seeks to understand, interpret, and evaluate what they hear. They must exercise empathy and try to understand the feelings of dissatisfaction and distress that the aggrieved employee is experiencing.

4

Attention to detail

- » Meticulous about taking notes during the meeting. To ensure accuracy, the Grievance Handler should record and repeat statements made to ensure there are no discrepancies.
- » Note taking is also important for follow-up work.

5

Inclusive language

- » Uses inclusive language such as “we work together” and “our problem” to reassure the aggrieved employee.
- » This makes the grievance appear to be less of the individual’s problem and helps the employee to be less defensive and more willing to speak up.

6

Calm demeanour

- » Able to remain calm and composed throughout the meeting, with or without the presence or active involvement of the trade union representative.
- » Able to remain calm and professional even if the aggrieved employee becomes agitated.

7

Sensitivity and tact

- » Able to read the situation accurately and respond appropriately, using body language and behaviours that demonstrate sensitivity, and, where appropriate, using gentle humour to help ease tension and maintain a calm atmosphere.

STEP 4: COMMUNICATE THE GRIEVANCE HANDLING POLICY

Communication is critical in ensuring the effective implementation of the grievance handling procedure. The company must:

1. Explain the importance of having a formalised grievance handling procedure and convey the need to consider all grievances/complaints seriously.
2. Formalise and document the grievance handling procedure (e.g. in the collective agreement, company circular, employee handbook).
3. Communicate the grievance handling procedure to all employees.

Communication to employees may be done via a number of different platforms. New employees should be informed of the existence and availability of the company's grievance handling process during induction. All employees should be informed through briefings and formal documents such as the employee handbook.

The employee handbook may include the following:

- » *Definition of a grievance with emphasis that it should be employment-related, with examples to facilitate understanding.*
- » *Objective of a grievance handling process and the right of all employees to use it.*
- » *Assurance that the company takes all grievances/complaints seriously.*
- » *Assurance that confidentiality will be maintained.*
- » *Assurance that no disciplinary action will be taken against employees who appeal to the superior of the immediate supervisor. This is to assure employees who are not familiar with a grievance handling process, and may be hesitant to raise grievances for fear of retaliation from the management.*

For unionised companies, the employee handbook should also state when the trade union representative will be involved in the grievance handling process.

To support effective administration, the grievance handling procedure must be user-friendly and accessible to all employees. Employers should disseminate information about the grievance handling process through official communication channels such as company circulars or email announcements.

Additionally, companies can host a Grievance/Complaint Lodge Form on the company intranet to facilitate easy access and encourage employees to raise concerns.

A [sample communication template](#) (circular or email) is available for employers to download and customise. Using this ensures that messaging remains clear, consistent, and reinforces the company's commitment to fair, transparent, and responsive grievance handling.



IMPORTANCE OF NON-RETALIATION

Ensuring a safe and supportive environment where employees feel comfortable raising grievances without fear of retaliation is critical for maintaining a fair and harmonious workplace. The Workplace Fairness Act (WFA) reinforces this by prohibiting employers from retaliating against employees who report incidents of discrimination or harassment. A strong non-retaliation policy helps to build employee trust, strengthen organisational integrity, and encourage open communication.

What Constitutes Retaliation?

Under the WFA, retaliation refers to any adverse action taken against an employee as a result of raising a grievance in good faith.

Retaliatory behaviours include:



Wrongful dismissal – Terminating an employee's contract without just cause or proper process.



Unreasonable denial of re-employment – Refusing to renew or extend an employee's contract without reasonable justification.



Unauthorised salary deduction – Deducting an employee's salary without prior agreement or lawful reason.



Deprivation of contractual benefits – Withholding benefits such as bonuses, leave entitlements, or allowances.



Harassment – Creating a hostile work environment through intimidation, threats, or repeated negative actions.



Other acts of victimisation – Any form of unjust treatment directed at the employee, such as exclusion from meetings or reduced opportunities for career advancement, as a consequence of filing a grievance.

Building a Culture of Psychological Safety

To support a non-retaliatory work environment, organisations should:



Ensure Confidentiality – Grievances and investigations should be handled discreetly, with information shared only on a need-to-know basis.



Provide Protection – Employees should be assured that raising a grievance will not lead to negative consequences such as termination, demotion, or harassment.



Formalise a Non-Retaliation Policy – Include a clear statement of non-retaliation in the company's grievance handling policy to reassure employees that they can raise issues without fear of backlash.



Investigate Retaliation Claims Promptly – If an employee reports retaliation, the organisation should conduct a thorough and impartial investigation and take corrective action where necessary.



Hold Managers and Supervisors Accountable – Managers and supervisors should be trained to handle grievances professionally and fairly, and to prevent any form of retaliation or victimisation.

Reinforcing Non-Retaliation Through Grievance Handling

Your organisation's grievance handling policy should provide a discreet and structured process for addressing employee concerns. Legitimate complainants must be assured of confidentiality and non-retaliation throughout the process. Employees should feel empowered to report grievances without the fear of facing adverse consequences. Clear non-retaliation policies and practices not only ensure compliance with the WFA but also reinforce a culture of trust, fairness, and respect in the workplace.



SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES THROUGH WORKPLACE CHALLENGES



Handling General Grievances

When handling general grievances, communication is a critical part of the process and companies can include the following information in the communication:

- **What** adverse events that have occurred, are occurring or will be occurring that require certain actions to be taken that will affect employees.
- **Why** certain difficult action or actions (e.g. wage cut) have to be taken over other solutions.
- **Who** will be affected and in what manner.
- **How** the decided action or actions would be administered.
- **When** the decided action or actions would be made effective. This will allow employees ample time to prepare themselves and consider their options.

Communication with the employees can be carried out through internal communication channels such as notices or circulars, followed up by staff meetings to obtain feedback, address concerns and provide assurance. When an employer recognises a union, it acknowledges that the union represents all employees within the scope of the collective agreement, in matters relating to all terms and conditions of service. Thus, in the case of grievances involving union members, it is a required contractual obligation for the management team comprising the CEO, relevant Heads of Department (HODs), including the Chief HR Practitioner to first meet with the Trade Union Official and members of the Branch Committee to share information.

The management should also accept the Trade Union's assistance in communication as employees are generally more receptive to communication from the Trade Union.

To facilitate the handling of General Grievances, it would be useful to remember the following tips:



Timeliness

- » Information shared should be up-to-date and communicated in a timely manner to reduce gossip and prevent rumours from growing out of control.
- » The management team should always be in the know of the latest news or events relating to the specific situations, so that they will be able to handle any inquiries or issues that may be raised by the employees.



Frequency

- » Regular communication conveys management's sincerity and builds trust, which is an important factor in maintaining employee morale.



Effectiveness

- » Communication should be well planned (e.g. content is clearly structured, messaging style is suitable for the target audience) and based on accurate information.
- » Communication platforms selected should be suited to the intent and message (e.g. when seeking feedback, a dialogue session is more effective than sending an email).



Consistency

- » Information shared by all members of the management team should be consistent. There should be no contradiction between the CEO and HODs or Section Heads.



Openness

- » During the communication, it is important to remain open-minded and be receptive to comments, queries and feedback. Successful communication requires good listening skills and the willingness to be flexible.

Handling Individual Grievances

Handling individual grievances begins the moment an employee raises a grievance — either through a walk-in meeting with the immediate supervisor or in writing using a Grievance / Complaint Form.

In the case of a walk-in meeting, the Grievance Handler may not have had time to prepare for the discussion and may only be able to address the grievance immediately if it is very simple and straightforward. Otherwise, the Grievance Handler should follow the proper inquiry process by:



Listening carefully to the grievance,



Recording the details accurately, and



Following up on the matter after the meeting to ensure a thorough and fair resolution.

In the case of a written grievance, the Grievance Handler would have the advantage of being able to prepare for the meeting in advance. This includes:

- **Inquiring about the grievance**
Clarify unclear details and gather additional context.
- **Reviewing the Grievance/Complaint Form**
Understand the employee's concerns and background.
- **Identifying specific issues**
Pinpoint core problems to keep the discussion focused.

By following a structured and consistent process, grievances can be handled fairly and effectively, fostering trust and professionalism within the organisation.

Example

If the grievance is about being side stepped in a promotion exercise, the Grievance Handler would need to have the following information from the HR department to assess the issue fairly:

- » What are the selection criteria for promotion, based on the company's policies and procedures?
- » What are the success factors and performance outcomes of a successful candidate?
- » What is the employee's performance track record and where are the shortfalls?
- » Are there any underlying issues or concerns specific to the situation?
- » Are there any workable solutions to be considered within the parameters, based on the company's HR policy?

In sharing information and assisting the Grievance Handler, the HR department should emphasise that this information is strictly confidential. The objective of information sharing is to enable the Grievance Handler to explain matters accurately to the employee.

The Grievance Handler should then set the date, time and venue for a meeting with the employee. For a constructive session, the following measures are recommended:

- **Choose a conducive venue that is private.**
 - » *Select a neutral, comfortable location to ensure that the employee feels at ease.*
 - » *Avoid high-traffic areas to minimise the risk of being overheard or interrupted.*
- **Ensure that there is no interruption or intrusion for at least one to two hours.**
 - » *Switch off or silence phones and electronic devices.*
 - » *Inform relevant staff that the meeting is taking place to avoid disruptions.*

- **Use a “round-table” type or same-side seating arrangement.**
 - » *Sitting at the same level or side-by-side reduces the sense of hierarchy and encourages open communication.*
 - » *Ensure the seating is comfortable to create a relaxed atmosphere.*
- **Begin the meeting with pleasantries and courtesy.**
 - » *Offer refreshments and engage in light conversation to ease any tension.*
 - » *Maintain a professional yet approachable tone to build rapport.*
- **Set clear expectations at the beginning of the meeting.**
 - » *Explain the purpose of the meeting and how the grievance will be addressed.*
 - » *Clarify that the discussion will be handled confidentially and fairly.*
- **Acknowledge the employee’s perspective without judgement.**
 - » *Allow the employee to express their concerns without interruption.*
 - » *Use active listening techniques (e.g., nodding, making eye contact) to show understanding.*
- **Take detailed and accurate notes during the meeting.**
 - » *Document key points and any agreed follow-up actions.*
 - » *Repeat key statements back to the employee to confirm understanding.*
- **Summarise the discussion and next steps at the end of the meeting.**
 - » *Clarify the agreed resolution steps and expected timelines.*
 - » *Thank the employee for sharing their concerns and reassure them that follow-up action will be taken.*

EMPLOYEE COUNSELLING SESSION



Individual grievances can be managed effectively if employees are willing to utilise the Grievance Handling Procedure and talk to the Grievance Handler openly about their grievances. Unfortunately, instead of this positive approach, there are employees who resort to disruptive behaviour to express their grievances such as:

- Uncooperative behaviour or refusing to work as a team.
- Making unkind or rude remarks about the company or the management, especially in the presence of new employees.
- Deliberate acts of misconduct such as late-coming, absenteeism or malingering.
- Deteriorating work performance.

While negative expressions of grievances may sometimes elicit a response from line managers and supervisors, disciplinary action should only be considered if the employee has a track record of misconduct and they refuse to improve despite remedial measures.

However, if the employee has a reasonably good work performance record, the company could consider Employee Counselling rather than a grievance handling meeting.

The objective of an Employee Counselling session is to ensure that:

- The employee is reminded to use the Grievance Handling Process as a more constructive approach to expressing their grievances.
- Proactive steps are taken by the Grievance Handler to demonstrate that management is concerned when employees are not performing at their best.
- The employee is made aware that their negative behaviour has been noted by management and found to be unacceptable.

For unionised companies, the HR may engage the Trade Union Representative to obtain all pertinent information about the member-employee before arranging for a counselling session. This is a progressive approach to establish mutual understanding and trust.

Begin the Employee Counselling session by making reference to what triggered the need for such a meeting:

- If it is due to undesirable behaviour, such as bad-mouthing the company or management, the Grievance Handler should be forthright, without revealing the source of the information or the person who reported the matter to management.
- If it is due to acts of misconduct or deteriorating work performance, the Grievance Handler should share the evidence first and allow the employee to respond.

In the case of reported sources, the employee may deny and challenge the Grievance Handler.

In such an instance, the Grievance Handler should:

- Assure the employee that the session is not a disciplinary inquiry and there is no intention to prove if the source is accurate.
- Express satisfaction that such information is not true.
- Encourage the employee to keep up the good track record for the benefit of their career.

The above meeting may be concluded by adopting the following steps:

- 1 Firstly, remind the employee of the importance of continuing with their record of good work performance.
- 2 Secondly, let the employee know that both they and the company's management team look forward to their future contributions.
- 3 Thirdly, advise the employee that if there is any grievance, the appropriate solution is to apply the Grievance Handling Procedure.
- 4 Fourthly, inform the employee of the value of open discussions to resolve problems and thank the employee for the meeting.

In the case of recorded sources such as late-coming, absenteeism and deteriorating work performance, where evidence is captured through time-cards and performance appraisal forms, the employee would find it difficult to deny such actions.

The employee may either (i) remain silent, (ii) give reasons (i.e. explanations with validity to justify the actions), or (iii) make excuses (i.e. pretexts to overlook a negative behaviour).

The Grievance Handler should:

- Take note and inform the employee what reasons are acceptable and what excuses are not satisfactory.
- Remind the employee of their good track record and proceed to ask the employee for the reasons for the changed behaviour.
- Encourage the employee to remember events that could have caused some dissatisfaction leading to grievances that may not have been addressed.
- Focus on the period of time between the employee's last receipt of commendation and the beginnings of the disruptive behaviour.

Possible outcomes of the above meeting may be one of the following scenarios:

- The employee may remember and start talking about the issue. The Grievance Handler should listen as though they are handling an individual grievance.
- The employee might feel embarrassed and could turn defensive. In such a case, the Grievance Handler should close the meeting.
- The employee declares that they are unable to recall anything. At this juncture, the Grievance Handler should conclude the meeting.

One of the challenges faced by the Grievance Handler is when an employee prefers to keep silent and may sometimes refuse to make any eye contact. No amount of questioning, cajoling or subtle pressure will encourage the employee to speak up. In such an instance, the Grievance Handler will have no choice but to close the meeting in the following manner:

- Remind the employee that their disruptive behaviour was the reason for the meeting.
- Counsel the employee of the unnecessary waste of investment spent in their years of good employment record, talent and resources, if disciplinary action is taken due to disruptive behaviour.
- Caution the employee on how negative behaviour may adversely affect their future employment prospects and possibly even the lives of family members.
- Inform the employee that the proceedings of the meeting will be recorded to show that although every opportunity has been provided for the employee to speak, the latter has refused.
- Remind the employee that the management team expects a change of behaviour from the employee after the meeting.
- Finally, counsel the employee to consider what has been discussed, and if they should later decide to discuss the matter, a follow-up meeting can be arranged.



HANDLING UNEXPECTED SCENARIOS

Grievance Handling can be a delicate task as the issues involved are often personal and emotional. In some instances, it can be complicated or unexpected. These could include the following scenarios:

- » Employee with a walk-in grievance who cannot stop weeping
- » Employee who keeps digressing
- » Argumentative and abusive employee or Trade Union Representative
- » Complaints of sexual harassment

Scenario A

The employee with a walk-in grievance does not allow the Grievance Handler time for preparation. The difficulty is compounded when the employee is incoherent or cannot stop weeping.

There are two possible aspects to such a situation that the Grievance Handler should be mindful of:

- » *The employee is genuinely upset over the grievance and is unable to control their emotions. If necessary, the Grievance Handler can either propose another date for the meeting when the employee is more composed or suggest that the employee puts the grievance in writing. If the company is unionised, and the employee is a member, the Grievance Handler could seek assistance from the Trade Union Representative to work together to help the member-employee.*
- » *The employee could be using tears in the hope of softening the Grievance Handler and achieving a desired outcome. This is based on the assumption that most people are uncomfortable with weeping adults and would therefore be inclined to give in to such pressure. In such an instance, the employee may not be open to any suggestions and may become increasingly agitated. To address such employees, the Grievance Handler should seek assistance from HR.*

Scenario B

An employee who keeps digressing during a grievance handling session and is inclined to harp on about the past failures of the management team in resolving grievances.

In this instance, the Grievance Handler should:

- » *Avoid being defensive about such claims, regardless of whether such claims are fraudulent or accurate.*
- » *Not to feel obligated to indulge the employee.*
- » *Firmly draw the employee back to the present grievance in question. Suggest closing the meeting if the employee continues to digress after a few attempts to draw them back to the discussion.*
- » *Discuss and resolve the matter together with HR. Ask the employee to write out their grievance, investigate the issues related, then decide and take the necessary measures.*

Scenario C

An argumentative and abusive employee or a Trade Union Representative who seeks to dominate the grievance handling session.

The Grievance Handler should:

- » *Remain calm and not enter into an argument with either party or be defensive by trying to argue on behalf of the management team.*
- » *Speak politely but firmly and make it clear that such behaviour is unproductive and does not resolve matters or build an amicable relationship.*
- » *Inform the parties that what has transpired is put on record and that follow-up action will be taken, which would include further discussion with HR.*
- » *If an employee is argumentative or abusive, HR should advise them to submit their grievance in writing if they are unable to express their concerns respectfully.*
- » *If it is the Trade Union Representative who is argumentative and abusive, HR should inform the higher authority of the Trade Union of the matter. The information should include the full record of the meeting and its outcome.*

Scenario D

Sexual harassment occurs when one makes continued unwelcoming sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, to another person, against their wishes. Workplace sexual harassment is not limited to the confines of the office.

Any misconduct of a sexual nature during work-related activities such as company functions, corporate events, teambuilding exercises, or out-of-town business trips can constitute sexual harassment.

Sexual harassers need not necessarily be those from within the same company, such as a supervisor harassing subordinates or vice versa, or among colleagues. They can be clients, suppliers, business associates, vendors or contractors.

Sexual harassment is sensitive and companies that do not have policies and grievance handling processes in place may be thrown into confusion and may not be able to respond appropriately when an alleged incident occurs.

It is therefore important for employers to have in place policies and set out clear grievance handling processes to prevent and address workplace sexual harassment.

The policies set out should apply to all employees and would include:

- » *Explicitly prohibiting workplace sexual misconduct or harassment.*
- » *What constitutes inappropriate behaviour or sexual harassment (include specific examples).*
- » *Possible consequences for harassers and malicious false claims, e.g. disciplinary action.*
- » *Provide a discreet process where legitimate complainants can be assured of confidentiality and non-retaliation.*

Cases of sexual harassment should be handled very carefully to save all parties from embarrassment. Due to the sensitive nature of such grievance, some companies are inclined to set it apart for special attention, and in some cases, the matter goes directly to HR.

The recommended steps for HR to take in managing workplace sexual harassment are to:

- » *Promptly check all complaints.*
- » *Ensure strict confidentiality and impartiality in the treatment of complaints of sexual harassment.*
- » *Conduct a discreet and thorough investigation into the complaint without revealing the source.*
- » *Engage and inform the Trade Union Branch Representative(s) if the accused party or complainant is a trade union member.*
- » *Document a detailed record of incidents that support the grievance which can be obtained from the complainant, such as date, time and venue of the incidents, what was actually uttered by the parties involved, etc.*
- » *Record the names of any witnesses or persons in the company with whom the complainant has shared this information.*
- » *Follow up by questioning the witnesses to ascertain whether the grievance is based on facts.*
- » *Make decisions guided by statements from reliable witnesses, particularly the neutral ones.*

Example of a workplace sexual harassment complaint:

Wendy claims that Philip, a senior colleague, made her feel uncomfortable from the first day she joined the company. As the Head of the Department that worked just next to hers, they were often in the same office space. He began by asking her out to dinner, which she politely declined and told him that he should stop asking as she was not interested. Philip did not seem to understand and continued to ask her out. She has been extremely uncomfortable in his presence and tries to avoid him as much as possible. After speaking to her friend, she decided to report to HR.

To determine a genuine case of sexual harassment, HR would need to:

- » *Examine the employment records of the parties involved.*
- » *Study the labour turnover in that specific department, such as frequency, volume of turnover and specific records, gender, age and marital status.*
- » *Review information from the exit interviews.*
- » *Seek feedback from colleagues in the same department to form a clearer picture of the character of the accused party.*

In cases where the facts are not conclusive that workplace sexual harassment has occurred, HR could take the following actions:

- » *Counsel the employee whose conduct has been found inappropriate on what behaviours are unacceptable at work and how, if not corrected, they could contribute to a hostile work environment. The objective is to clearly communicate that HR has been made aware of the situation and that the employee should exercise caution in their future conduct. Counsel the complainant and update them on the findings of the preliminary investigation. Offer support, such as pairing them with a colleague or mentor, and continue to monitor the situation within a set timeframe, with re-evaluation as needed. Also ask if they would like to speak with a professional counsellor.*



**GOING BEYOND
THE COMPANY**

Technically, grievance handling within the Grievance Handling Procedure ends with the decision of the most senior leader within the company (i.e. CEO or Managing Director). Employees may, however, seek further assistance from external parties (or agencies) such as:



Ministry of Manpower to appeal against unfair dismissal*.



Trade Unions to be represented in collective bargaining, appeals against wrongful dismissals and negotiations for retrenchment benefits, and resolutions on employment terms.



Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) to resolve salary-related claims and employment disputes through mediation.



Employment Claims Tribunal to resolve their statutory or contractual salary-related disputes after going through mediation at TADM.



Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) to provide feedback or report workplace discrimination concerns.

Any appeal to these agencies listed above is a separate exercise and would form part of a comprehensive and inclusive employment dispute resolution process to ensure that the parties resolve the matter amicably and effectively.

When faced with an employment dispute, employees should first discuss it with their employer, as many of these issues can be resolved by communicating and working together to reach an agreement.

**The employee will need to submit a written appeal to the Minister of Manpower within one month from the date of dismissal. More information on the appeal process can be found on the Ministry of Manpower's website.*

CONCLUSION



A Grievance Handling Procedure that employees can use without fear of negative repercussions is a basic requirement in companies that abide by fair employment practices. However, preventing or minimising the potential for grievances is the outcome that all organisations must strive towards.

Grievances, whether general or individual, may be minimised by adopting fair and progressive employment practices and proactively cultivating a work environment that facilitates open communication and an inclusive culture that builds trust between the management and employees. This must be supported by a code of conduct which emphasises the value of treating employees fairly and with respect, and equipping managers and supervisors with people management skills.

The natural outcome of such an inclusive culture and values is a greater sensitivity to the employees' perspective and anticipation of possible impact of any change to terms of employment, policies and practices. Potential pain points and parity issues would also be considered during organisational or employee transitions, as well as a change management strategy that includes timely communications.

Tripartite Standards

Jointly developed by the Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers Federation, the Tripartite Standards is a new initiative which helps organisations with good practices distinguish themselves. Among them, is the Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling, which specifies a progressive standard that organisations should aim to meet.

The Tripartite Standards complement laws, Tripartite Guidelines and Advisories to increase the adoption of fair and progressive workplace practices in Singapore. Each Tripartite Standard comprises a set of verifiable, actionable employment practices across different functional areas (e.g. term contract employment, flexible work arrangements, grievance handling) that progressive organisations should adopt. Each of these Standards has been approved and issued by the tripartite partners.

Organisations who have adopted the Tripartite Standards can use the relevant Tripartite Standards logomarks in their job advertisements and marketing collaterals, and their names will be listed on TAFEP's website (tafep.sg). These organisations would thus be able to differentiate themselves in specific key employment and workplace practices that potential job seekers and employees would look for, thereby enhancing their ability to attract and retain talent.

More information about the Tripartite Standards may be found at tafep.sg.





The logo for TAFEP, featuring the letters 'TAFEP' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letter 'A' is stylized with a small triangle above it. The logo is set against a blue background that forms a large, abstract shape pointing towards the right.

TAFEP

Tripartite Alliance for
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

tafep.sg