

# Implementation Guide for SMEs to Adopt Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling






## 1 Introduction

Singapore's workforce is inherently diverse. Companies with a diverse workforce can benefit from having a larger talent pool and a competitive edge over their competitors. However, miscommunication and misunderstanding can potentially occur in a diverse workplace. If not managed well, employee morale and productivity, as well as the company's operations and image, can be adversely affected. Employers can put in place policies and procedures to manage workplace grievances and build an inclusive and harmonious workplace.

This implementation guide is crafted to be aligned with the specification in the Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling. It provides practical references which SMEs could consider adopting in developing an effective grievance handling process.

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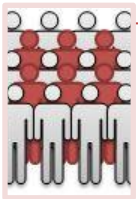
## 2 Checklist for Signing Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling

-  A grievance handling procedure has been put in place for employees to raise grievances and for the employer to conduct proper investigations and respond to the affected persons
-  The grievance handling procedure has been clearly communicated to all employees and documented
-  The grievance handling procedure states the appropriate authority to hear the appeal and a reasonable period of time for action to be taken
-  Discussions are documented and confidentiality of information is observed
-  Supervisors and appointed staff are trained to manage employee feedback and grievances, and work with the union if the company is unionised

### 3 Definition of Workplace Grievances and Types of Grievances

#### 3.1 Understand Workplace Grievances

- 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
- Work-related grievance involves industrial matters
- For grievances involving workplace harassment, refer to Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment



#### General grievance

- Affects a group of employees
- E.g. wage cut, retrenchment



#### Individual grievance

- Affects one employee
- E.g. an employee feels discriminated against in a promotion exercise or a case of harassment

#### Examples of Work-Related Grievances involving industrial matters

Relations between employers & employees

Employment (E.g. job duties)

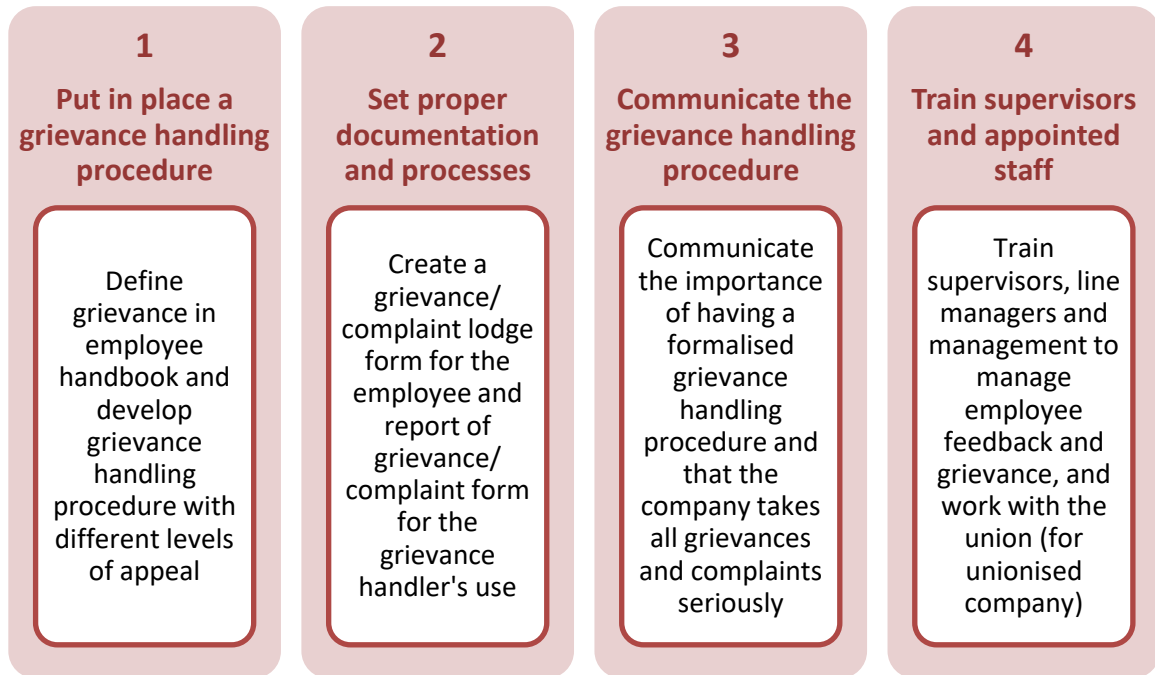
Non-employment (E.g. termination of employment)

Changes to policies

Issues arising from a transfer of employment

Conditions of work

4 Steps to Implement Grievance Handling



## 5 Step 1 - Put in Place a Grievance Handling Procedure

### 5.1 Define Grievance in Employee Handbook

- Include the following into the employee handbook:
  - (a) Definition of a grievance
  - (b) Objective of a grievance process
  - (c) Assurance that company takes all grievances seriously & maintains confidentiality
  - (d) Assurance that no disciplinary action taken against employees who appeal to the superior of the immediate supervisor
  - (e) For unionised companies, trade union representative will be involved

### 5.2 Develop Grievance Handling Procedure

- All grievance handling procedures should include the following features:
  - (a) Identify grievance handler roles and set different levels of appeal
  - (b) First level of appeal is the immediate supervisor
  - (c) Existence of a time lag
  - (d) The option of moving to the next level if no decision is satisfactory to both parties

### 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 Annex A) 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.

**Example of a Grievance Handling Procedure**

**General:** All grievance information shall be considered confidential. Grievance materials will be maintained in a separate file from the employee’s personal file.

**Step One**

Any employee who has a grievance, may within 3 working days of it arising, raise the matter either verbally or in writing to his immediate supervisor who shall respond within 3 working days. If the grievance is against his immediate supervisor, then the employee should bring the matter directly to the attention of the Department Head as in Step Two.

**Step Two**

If the employee is still aggrieved, he may within 5 working days refer the matter to the Department Head who shall resolve the grievance within 5 working days.

**Step Three**

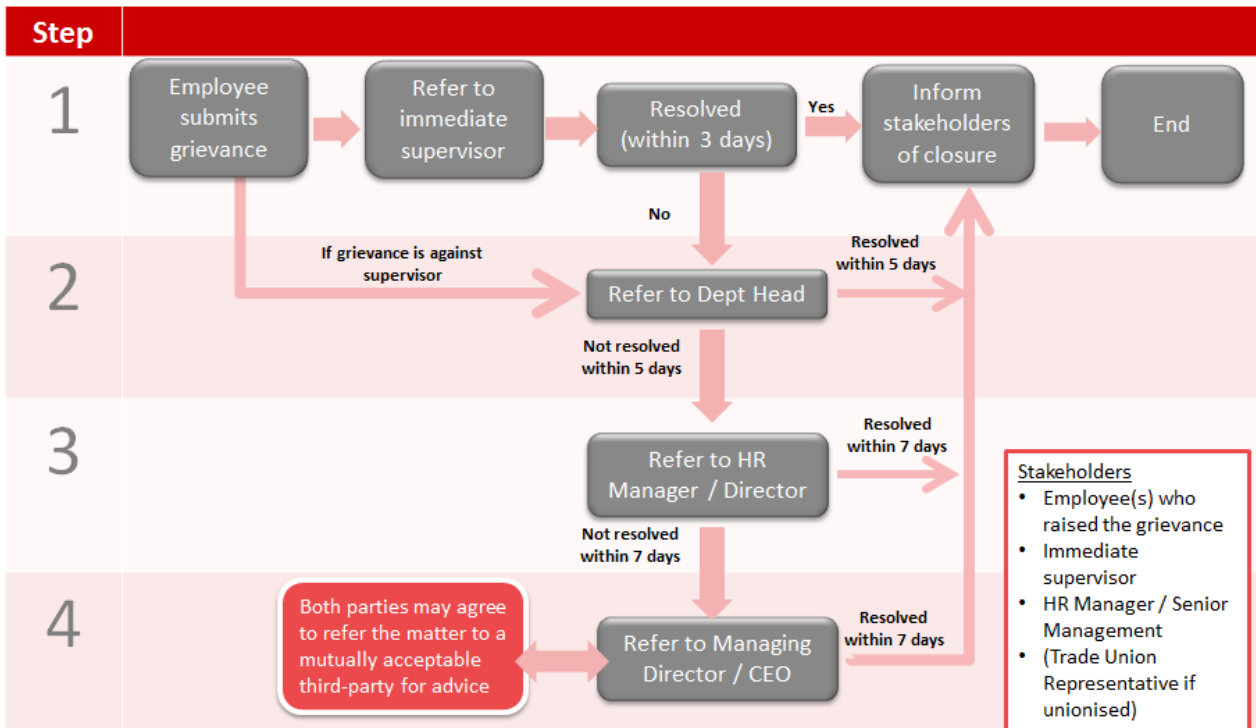
If the employee is still aggrieved, he may refer the matter within 7 working days to the person in charge of HR who will represent the Management to resolve the matter, within 7 working days, unless an extended period of time is agreed to by both parties.

**Step Four**

If the employee is still aggrieved, the matter shall be referred to the CEO who shall resolve the matter within 7 working days. The CEO’s decision shall be final. However, both parties may agree to refer the matter to a mutually acceptable third-party for advice.

Source: SNEF Advisory on Employee Grievance Handling by Singapore National Employers Federation - Example of a basic grievance handling procedure in a non-unionised SME.

**An illustration of a Grievance Handling Procedure**



**6 Step 2 - Set Proper Documentation & Process**

**6.1 Create a Grievance/ Complaint Lodge Form**

- For effective administration, this form is intended for employee’s usage when lodging a grievance
- Form to be uploaded on the company’s intranet

**Sample Grievance / Complaint Lodge Form**

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Date : \_\_\_\_\_  
 To : \_\_\_\_\_ (*Name of Grievance Handler*)      Dept : \_\_\_\_\_  
 From : \_\_\_\_\_ (*Name of Employee*)              Dept : \_\_\_\_\_

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Nature of Grievance / Complaint:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

In accordance with Article \_\_\_\_\_ of the Company Handbook on HR Policy & Procedures\* **OR** In accordance with Clause \_\_\_\_\_ of the Collective Agreement\*, I would like to request a meeting with you on \_\_\_\_\_ (*Date*) at \_\_\_\_\_ (*Time*) in your office.

In accordance with the above-mentioned Article/Clause\*, I shall have the right to appeal to the higher authority should I fail to hear from you within \_\_\_\_\_ (*time lag, e.g. 3 working days*) by \_\_\_\_\_ (*Date*).

*\* Select whichever is applicable.*

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Reason(s) for raising this grievance / complaint (*tick where applicable*):

Received no response within the time lag by \_\_\_\_\_ (*Name*)

Grievance not addressed to my satisfaction by \_\_\_\_\_ (*Name*)

Any other reasons (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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Source: Grievance Handling Handbook by Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Practices (TAFEP) Page 20  
<https://www.tafep.sg/sites/default/files/Grievance%20Lodge%20Form.doc>

**6.2 Create a Report of Grievance/ Complaint Form**

- Grievance handler will use this form to detail the outcome and follow ups required after meeting the employee

**Sample Report of Grievance / Complaint Form**

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 : \_\_\_\_\_

Nature of Grievance / Complaint:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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 to the next level):  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Source:** Grievance Handling Handbook by Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Practices (TAFEP) Page 24  
<https://www.tafep.sg/sites/default/files/Grievance%20Lodge%20Form.doc>

## 7 Step 3 - Communicate the Grievance Handling Procedure

### 7.1 What to Communicate

- Explain the importance of having a formalised grievance handling procedure
- Convey that company takes all grievances and complaints seriously
- Inform that the grievance procedure is documented in e.g. employee handbook in the intranet, collective agreement, company circular or memo
- Communicate the grievance procedure clearly to all employees

### 7.2 How to Communicate

- Communicate the grievance handling procedure and policy through the following channels:
  - (a) During induction for new employees
  - (b) Notices or circulars
  - (c) Staff meetings or
  - (d) Department meetings etc.



## 8 Step 4 - Train Supervisors & Appointed Staff

### 8.1 Train Supervisors, Line Managers and Management

- To manage employee feedback and grievance, and work with the union (for unionised company)
- Training should include:
  - (a) Employee's right to use grievance process
  - (b) Importance of creating a safe environment where the employee does not fear negative repercussions
  - (c) Assurance that the employee's action is not a negative reflection of the supervisor/line manager's competency in problem solving or decision making
  - (d) Follow-up action within the time lag
  - (e) Submit follow-up reports to HR within one working day after the grievance handling session



### 8.2 Training for Unionised Companies

- Work constructively with trade union representative to resolve grievances including
  - (a) The need to extend courtesy & respect; and
  - (b) How to conduct themselves in the presence of the trade union representative to encourage open & effective discussion

### 8.3 Role of the Grievance Handler

- Initiate the grievance process promptly once a grievance has been lodged
- Encourage the employee to speak freely and truthfully, and assuring him that confidentiality will be maintained
- Ascertain whether the Trade Union Representative would be speaking on behalf of the employee
- Give advice factually without offering a "personal opinion"
- Submit follow-up work and an answer to the employee for him to decide whether to accept the verdict or pursue his grievance further
- Close the grievance process with a follow-up report

### Guide to Grievance Handler for Conducting the Grievance Handling Meeting

#### 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 be addressed thereafter.
- Encouraging the employee to speak freely and truthfully, and assuring him that confidentiality will be maintained. Similarly, the employee should ensure that matters discussed are kept confidential.
- 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 his 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 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, he could present his views and invite the respective parties to explore alternative 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 he will follow-up on the matter and that an answer would be given within the time lag.

The Grievance Handler should note that the process is not completed at his level until follow-up work has been submitted and an answer, preferably in writing, 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 his grievance further.

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

**CASE STUDY 1: Alfa Laval Singapore Pte Ltd****Background**

Alfa Laval Singapore is part of Alfa Laval Group whose business focuses on saving energy and protecting the environment. Through their products, Alfa Laval is involved in treating water, reducing carbon emissions and minimizing water and energy consumption, as well as heating, cooling, separating and transporting food. These areas represent the core of Alfa Laval's expertise.

The Company's presence in Singapore started in 1973 as a branch office serving mainly the marine industry, and is established in 1978 as a Private Ltd company to serve all business segments within Singapore. As the Regional head office for South East Asia, Alfa Laval Singapore has total employee strength of over 150 staff in Singapore, of which 95% are PMEs and 5% are rank-and-file workers.

**Challenges in Handling Grievance**

Being a Scandinavian owned company, Alfa Laval believes in treating its employee fairly and equally, and does not allow any discrimination by race, colour, religion, sex, nationality, national origin, tribe, age or disability, social origin, political opinion, gender, pregnancy, marital status and HIV/AIDS status. Open dialogues are always encouraged by the top management, with means for the employees to directly speak to the Regional MD and/or Head of HR on confidential information that requires attention. However, many employees still have the fear of retaliation by their immediate managers and most employees would stay quiet and conservative. There were no proper guidelines on the process for employees to share their voices.

**Implementation of Grievance Handling Procedure**

With their international presence and technological leadership, Alfa Laval Singapore recognises the importance in establishing good HR practices and maintaining a harmonious workplace.

When Alfa Laval Singapore was restructured early 2017 and form as part of the South East Asia businesses, one of the immediate tasks on the mind of Ms Esther Lim, regional HR Manager, is the need to have clear policies and guidelines for the region. During the same period, there were a number of Tripartite Standards that were launched. Having understood the Tripartite Standards and the specifications from SNEF, in particular on the importance of putting in place a proper grievance handling procedure, Alfa Laval Singapore was committed to sign on to be an adopter for Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling and other Tripartite Standards. These Tripartite Standards have been very useful in setting the foundation of the policies such as Flexible Work Arrangements and Grievances Handling.

The company had thus crafted a grievance handling procedure and made great efforts to ensure that there would have constant communications to all employees through regular coffee sessions and forum with individual departments to address concerns in workplace. In July 2018, Alfa Laval Singapore communicated and published the Grievances Handling Policy to all employees. This was communicated to all employees in a separate Town Hall session, and is also made available in the common Intranet and the company's shared drive. A further poster campaign is launched in the same month, reminding employees that they could speak to the Senior Management, for any grievances and/or whistle blowing.

**Outcome**

The company believes that constant communication could reduce misunderstandings and misperceptions which may then affect employees' morale and productivity. The Human Resource department also advocates on open door policy so that employee who has any query or grievances could raise it up immediately. The launch of the policy has afforded much autonomy and confidence to the employees that their voices will be heard. In the same month of the launch, an employee informed HR about a bullying situation in the workplace, and this was dealt with immediately under the purview of the Regional Managing Director.

**CASE STUDY 2: Seal Control Pte Ltd****Background**

Established in 1984, Seal Control is an ISO 9001 certified company providing solutions and products in piping, mechanical and instrumentation. With off-the-shelf and customised solutions, they serve leading global companies in the oil and gas, petrochemical, power, process and marine industries.

Based in Singapore but serving markets up to Oceania, Africa and the Middle East, Seal Control turnkey services that include design and engineering, assembly and testing, fabrication and distribution services.

Although the company is a SME, it continuously prides themselves for their professional integrity and service excellence to grow with success in the Asia region. In order to achieve total customer satisfaction, the company is committed to building a happy workforce and is forward looking in terms of adopting progressive workplace practices.

**Challenges in Handling Grievance**

Being a SME, Seal Control believes in providing a working environment that is open in communications. Employees are encouraged to come forward to provide feedback and suggestion, or if they have any problems, to raise it up to the HR or management immediately. The HR department also welcomes employees to give their feedback so that the workplace relations and environment can be constantly improved without escalation of any unhappiness or misunderstandings. However, employees may be reserved and there were no proper process or written policy that could guide employees on how to raise a grievance. They may also fear potential consequences of bringing a grievance to attention.

**Implementation of Grievance Handling Procedure**

After attending a tea session by SNEF on Grievance Handling, and with SNEF Advisory on Employee Grievance Handling as reference, the company crafted a grievance handling policy and put in place the procedure. The HR department also communicated the procedure to the employees and assured them of the confidentiality of all matters that are raised through this procedure. The company believes that putting in place the procedure could channel individual grievances to the appropriate authority for speedy resolution instead of allowing the grievance to aggravate and affect employees' morale.

Once a month during their weekly sales meeting, the HR will update all employees on new plans for the company and encourage employees to give their inputs and suggestions. At the end of each session, HR will highlight to employees on the importance of working together hand in hand as a small team to create a cohesive workplace. The HR also reminds the employees to come forward should they face any difficulties in performing their tasks, or if they need help or advice.

**Outcome**

Since the implementation of the grievance handling procedure, the HR noticed that employees have been more open in communicating their views and are more willing to open up to the HR, as they have a sense of trust and confidence towards HR. The grievance handling procedure has also given great assurance to the employees as it has been documented that all grievance information collected shall be considered confidential and the grievance materials will be maintained in a separate file from the employee's personal file.

This implementation guide is designed to be aligned with the specification in the Tripartite Standard on Grievance Handling and references are made from the following sources:

- SNEF Advisory on Employee Grievance Handling by Singapore National Employers Federation
- Grievance Handling Handbook by Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Practices (TAFEP)