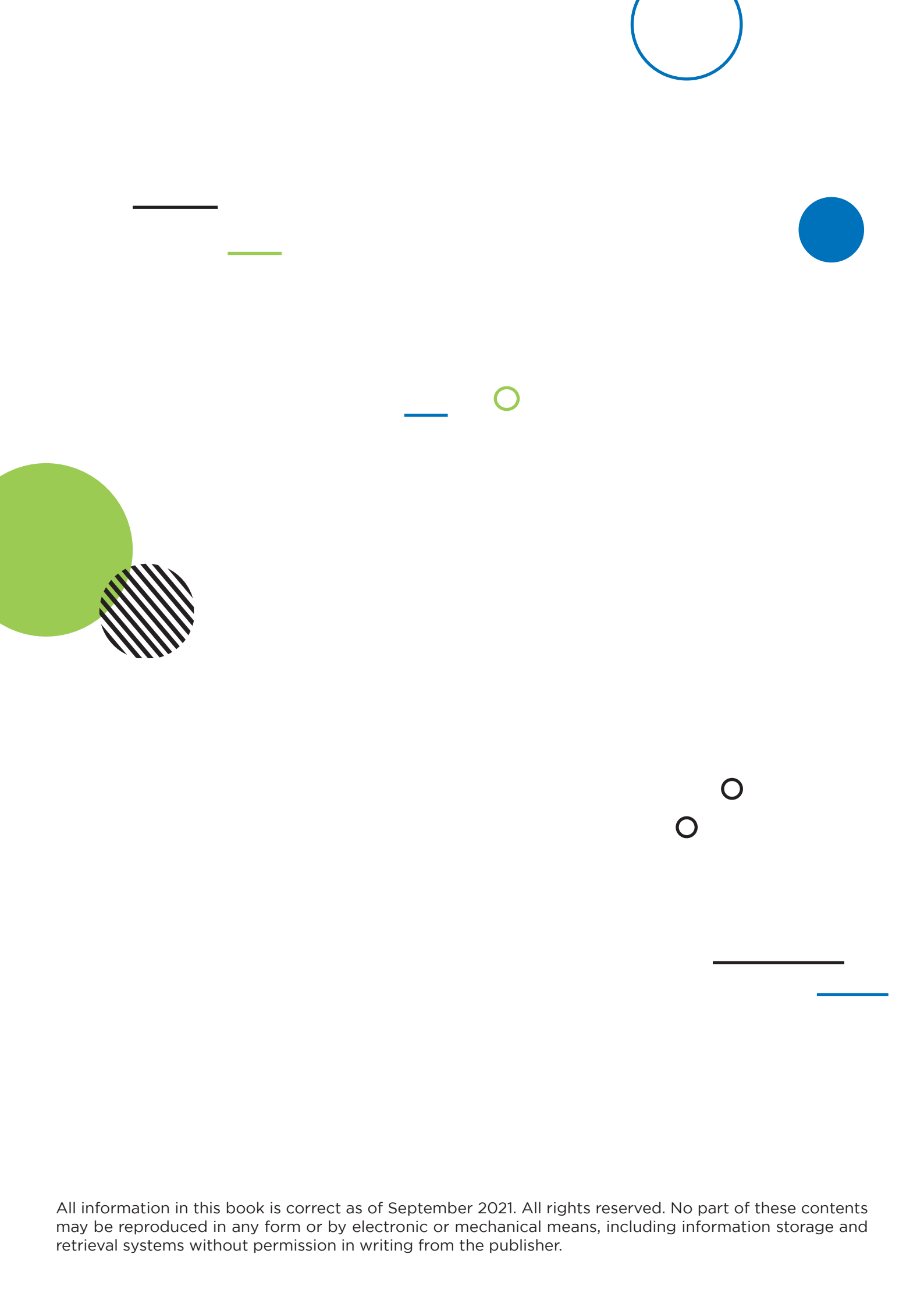


WORK-LIFE HARMONY GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF HR PRACTITIONERS





ABOUT THE ALLIANCE FOR ACTION ON WORK-LIFE HARMONY

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In February 2021, the Tripartite Partners announced the launch of the Alliance for Action on Work-life Harmony (AfA-WLH) to build a community of stakeholders including employers, employees, and HR practitioners who would,

- Improve awareness of the importance of work-life harmony and work-life best practices
- Support workplaces and the wider community to sustain and enhance work-life practices
- Support companies in specific sectors to overcome challenges and implement FWAs and work-life practices

The AfA-WLH comprised over 150 Work-life Ambassadors and other key stakeholders and were advised by Co-leads representing Tripartite Partners: Ms Gan Siow Huang, Minister of State for Manpower, Ms Yeo Wan Ling, Director, Women and Family Unit U SME, NTUC and Dr Bicky Bhangu, Council Member, SNEF.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Ms Goh provides consultancy and corporate training services in Human Resource Management and Work-life Implementation. It is her passion to make a difference in the workplace by helping organisations implement good work-life practices and leverage on their human resources to achieve good business outcomes.

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Mr. Tham is a HR Leader based in Singapore with more than 10 years of combined experience in HR Business Partnering, Learning, Talent and Organisation Development locally and regionally in Asia. He is an advocate of "Better Work, Better Workplace" and has led global initiatives in D&I and Work-Life Harmony.

Mr. Victor Mills

Chief Executive, Singapore International
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With nearly 4 decades of experience in the workforce, Mr. Mills believes work-life harmony is the output of a positive workplace culture. He is an active advocate for better workplace practices to help ensure the success of employers, employees and businesses.

ABOUT THE WORK-LIFE HARMONY GUIDE

The key premise of this guide is that work-life harmony is an integral part of a positive workplace culture (PWC) which enables every business to achieve maximum commercial success.

The Covid-19 pandemic has conclusively proved more jobs than previously thought possible can be done outside the office thanks to technological tools. While this may not apply to every job, it certainly is true for most office-based jobs. This, in turn, has validated the relevance and usefulness of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) like never before.

This guide sets out the key responsibilities of everyone in a business to implement a PWC and policies and procedures which make sense for each business, namely the Board, Senior Management, Human Resources, People Managers and Team Members. These are joint responsibilities and there is no 'one-size solution' which fits all businesses. Instead, each organisation will need to carefully consider the insights, tools and templates shared in this guide, to tailor a work-life plan that best addresses the needs of their workforce.

HOW SHOULD YOU USE THIS GUIDE?

This guide is segmented into 4 modules, each targeting a significant group of internal stakeholders within an organisation. This is done to highlight specific work-life harmony knowledge and practical tips that will be useful to these groups:

- The Board of Directors & Senior Management
- HR Practitioners
- People Managers
- Employees

WHAT IS A 'PWC'?

A PWC is one in which each team member is respected and developed to achieve their full potential to work for the company and its business goals. It is an environment in which no team member is abused, bullied, discriminated against, harassed or undermined. This improves talent retention and enables engaged teams.

When it comes to hiring, a PWC focuses on attitudes and potential rather than paper qualifications alone. This improves hiring outcomes and, together with more engaged teams, gives every company the competitive edge it deserves.

Work-life harmony is integral to a PWC.

WHAT IS WORK-LIFE HARMONY?

Work-life harmony is the desired state in which employees can effectively manage work and personal/home responsibilities successfully - often, this is due to a measure of flexibility offered at work.

Work-life harmony starts with trust. Businesses trust their team members will produce the work outcomes they have been employed for. Organisations that support work-life harmony,

- measure and reward work outcomes, not the number of hours worked.

- provide team members with the autonomy to manage their time and deal with family, personal needs and emergencies while achieving their expected work outcomes.

While work-life harmony is also about flexibility, it also involves consideration for each team member. Employees are not on call 24/7 and not be expected to respond to after-hours e-mails or phone calls except in an emergency.



THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF HR PRACTITIONERS



Employers today face disruptions and challenges, requiring them to respond at an unprecedented pace to evolving uncertainties.

- These have placed a spotlight on **Human Resources (HR)'s role**.
- It is imperative for HR to go beyond its traditional functions **to embrace a crucial and strategic role**.
- HR needs **to work with management and employees to co-create policies and practices** to achieve business objectives and even ensure the survival of the organisation.

As organisations have learnt to pivot quickly to flexible working (e.g., work from home), they are now more prepared to explore and implement FWAs more effectively.

As flexibility and hybrid arrangements become hallmarks of the new way of working – **shaping the workplace of the future**, HR will need to:

- Identify the intrinsic value of Work-life Harmony practices and identify suitable WLH policies to address business objectives.
- Support managers to build a strong culture of trust and communication so that work continues seamlessly.
- Establish a clear and fair performance management system that ensures employees are accurately assessed and rewarded, regardless of their working arrangement

HR CONSIDERATIONS WHEN IMPLEMENTING HYBRID WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Hybrid working arrangements are expected to be the new norm even as organisations cautiously consider having their employees go back to the workplace in the aftermath of the pandemic disruptions and vaccination provisions. In a hybrid working arrangement, employees may work in the traditional office setting for part of their work week, while working at a designated off-site location at other times (these may include home, or shared workspaces and satellite offices). The different combinations vary depending on the industry, nature of work, customer requirements, employee needs and organisation size. There are many implications for HR staff and HR policies in terms of staff engagement, team interactions, collaboration, productivity, recruitment, talent management and development.

WORK-LIFE HARMONY INITIATIVES – THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



WORK-LIFE HARMONY BEST PRACTICES

When implementing work-life harmony initiatives, it is important to find what works best for your company and your employees as there is no 'one-size-that-fits-all' approach. Much depends on the industry, customer needs, nature of work and role of employee.

These are some best practices that HR should consider:

- Develop a work-life strategy that brings all stakeholders on board (i.e., Board of directors, senior management, managers and employees). While HR would likely assist to develop and implement the work-life strategy, endorsement from the BOD and senior management and participation of Work-Life Champion from senior management will be crucial for success.

- Have a structured and documented WLH policy to ensure smooth implementation, facilitate good communication and reap real benefits for all.

- Acknowledge possible constraints of FWAs for certain roles (e.g., onsite, or customer-facing roles). This should be fairly and clearly addressed in the work-life policy and judiciously addressed across the organisation to avoid any potential divide between employees or appearance of unfairness.

- Devise a communications plan to clearly and consistently share the purpose of the overall work-life strategy as well available work-life initiatives and success stories, across the entire organisation

CONSIDERATIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

#1 ADAPTING TO NEW WAYS OF WORKING

The workplace and the way we work have been changing rapidly in recent years.

- ✓ From desktop computers to laptops and smart devices.
- ✓ From partitioned office cubicles to open plan offices, shared spaces (i.e., hot desking), and flexi-place options (e.g., telecommuting).
- ✓ From fixed duration to flexible schedules, including flexi-time and flexi-load.

HR will need to facilitate hybrid working arrangements and other forms of flexibility through:

- ✓ Online Collaborative Tools.
- ✓ Infrastructure to work away from the office (e.g. laptops, VPN access etc.).
- ✓ Clear security protocols and policies to protect sensitive proprietary information.
- ✓ Reconfiguration of physical workspaces.
- ✓ Education and resources to support building soft skills and knowledge on the use of FWAs.

What is clear is that the new normal at the workplace is going to be very different from the past, not just now but into the future. HR will need to be nimble, creative, and flexible about many practices.

Organisations, large and small, will have to adapt to new ways of working.

#2: ESTABLISHING BUSINESS AND EMPLOYEE NEEDS

What should organisations do, given the outlook on new ways of working and the hybrid workplace?

- ✓ While some organisations may have already put in place a work-life harmony or FWA policy, others have adopted FWAs as a temporary stopgap measure to ensure business continuity.
- ✓ These organisations will need to consider how they can continue with FWAs in the longer term to meet employees' preference for flexible working as well as safeguard against future business exigencies.
- ✓ It is timely for organisations to review their business and employee needs to institutionalise the work-life practices and set the right mindset towards work-life harmony.

With the help of HR, management can be clear about their business needs and how work-life practices can help meet their business objectives.

- ✓ For example, an organisation that is lacking in personnel to support certain aspects of their business can expand their talent pool by offering FWAs that attract suitable part-time staff or those who prefer flexible schedules.
- ✓ In the longer term, FWAs can support strategic workforce planning; giving the organisation an added edge in recruiting and retaining employees with the skills and traits to meet mid to long-term organisational growth goals.
- ✓ This becomes feasible and desirable as long as the business objectives can be met.
- ✓ If staff turnover and retention is a major issue due to conflicting work and life goals for employees, having FWAs may be a useful attraction and retention tool.

HR Tip: Use the sample questionnaire for senior management to initiate a discussion on how to implement a beneficial work-life strategy.

It is also important to find out the needs of employees so the most appropriate work-life harmony practices can be implemented to address them.

- ✓ HR can deploy a suitable workforce profiling template or apply workforce analytics to identify specific needs.
- ✓ A focus group discussion carried out among employee representatives can also yield important insights.
- ✓ If the organisation has a sizeable staff strength, the outputs from the focus group discussions can be used to devise an internal employee survey to verify the sentiments of the larger staff force.

HR Tip: Use the workforce profiling template, focus group discussion guide & work-life survey template to identify employee needs.

#3: COMMUNICATING TO EMPLOYEES AND MANAGERS

To ensure entrenchment of work-life practices, it is important to have continual communication with all stakeholders.

- ✓ In particular, it is essential that regular communication with employees be carried out on the principles, policy and processes relating to the organisation's work-life practices.
- ✓ This can be done through email, discussion with supervisors, department meetings, town hall sessions, CEO briefings, new staff on-boarding, the staff handbook or HR, or even the company intranet portal.

People managers who supervise and motivate employees are critical links and gatekeepers in ensuring the effective implementation of work-life practice in an organisation.

- ✓ They should have a clear understanding of the organisation's rationale for work-life practices and help to communicate a consistent message to their subordinates.
- ✓ Organisations should equip their people managers with training and resources to guide and manage the employees.

- ✓ They should be empowered to evaluate FWA requests and manage employees who utilise FWAs while ensuring business outcomes are met.

HR Tip: Provide supervisors with the sample list of considerations to evaluate FWA requests.

#4 DEVELOPING A HR POLICY FOR FWAS

A structured and well documented policy on work-life practices, particularly FWAs, is essential to ensure effective implementation, facilitate good communication and reap real benefits for all stakeholders in the organisation.

- ✓ The policy should facilitate honest dialogue between manager and employee to fully understand organisational as well as employee needs and come to a mutually agreeable FWA.
- ✓ The policy should provide clear guidelines on the eligibility, terms and conditions for utilising each work-life initiative, application process and responsibilities of each stakeholder(e.g. employees and managers)
- ✓ It should take into consideration specific business needs and operating models, customer requirements as well as the needs of employees.

HR should also drive the effort to regularly review and assess the effectiveness of their work-life policy and practices based on regular feedback and communication with employees, people managers and external stakeholders such as customers.

HR Tip: Use the template policy on FWAs as a starting point in tailoring your organisation's work-life policies.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPERATIVES FOR WORK-LIFE HARMONY

A crucial element in helping employees and management see the link between WLH policies and business objectives is to have a fair and effective performance management process that assesses employee performance based on outcomes rather than time spent at work.

Organisations are generally concerned about productivity when employees work away from the worksite.

- ✓ Employers should consistently apply the same metrics when evaluating employees who work in the physical office space and those who work remotely.
- ✓ It is important to establish the appropriate measures of performance and the means to track and monitor it.
- ✓ Performance is best determined by outcomes and measurable benchmarks or goals.

Performance management is an ongoing communication process between the manager and employee that seeks to promote mutual understanding of job responsibilities, priorities, and performance expectations.

- ✓ It is a systematic process to set, monitor, assess and recognise employee performance.
- ✓ It encompasses the setting of goals, review and monitoring of performance, formal appraisals, informal check-ins, regular feedback and the identification of training and development needs.
- ✓ These enable employees to contribute more effectively towards business goals resulting in higher organisational capability.
- ✓ The manager must be actively involved throughout the process and not simply participate in the performance appraisal phase. Otherwise, the manager is merely measuring and not managing performance.

For managers, the key to working well with all employees is to be clear and specific in communicating expectations. These should include practical steps such as:

- ✓ Setting clear measurable and time-bound goals for all employees.
- ✓ Providing structured avenues for accountability and to track progress such as weekly check-ins and milestone project updates.
- ✓ Assessing performance based on the quality and quantity of work produced rather than the time spent working.

Therefore, fair and effective performance management that is well implemented will not just provide a conducive environment for work-life harmony to thrive. It will result in better employee engagement, satisfaction and productivity which will in turn meet business objectives of the organisation. A WIN-WIN for all.

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Tripartite Alliance for
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

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About the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices.

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up in 2006 by the tripartite partners (Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress, and Singapore National Employers Federation), to promote the adoption of fair, responsible and progressive employment practices.

TAFEP is one of three agencies under TAL, along with the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) and the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council.

TAFEP helps employers build workplaces where employees are respected, valued and able to achieve their fullest potential, for the success of the organisation. Employers can approach TAFEP for tools, resource materials and assistance to implement fair and progressive practices at their workplaces. Employees or individuals who encounter workplace discrimination or harassment can seek assistance and advice from TAFEP.