

# What Is A Grievance Procedure And How Does It Work

Author: Carl Tapi . November 2020

## What is a Grievance?

A grievance is a complaint or a dispute regarding the interpretation or application of established policies and/or procedures governing terms of employment, working conditions, hours of work, or compensation (Smith 2020). Employers need to be alert about what occurs in their workplace, as grievances can take many forms and at times, the matters at hand are not too pronounced (ILO 2017). It is essential to be able to recognize grievances and treat them with fairness and offered transparency.

A Grievance procedure is one of the [Human Resource Management](#) tools that set out how certain actions concerning people should be carried out by the management, employees, or other stakeholders. It is a formalized approach to dealing with specific matters of grievance and complaints at work or concerning the workplace. A written and well-publicized grievance procedure ensures that everyone knows exactly what steps need to be taken when faced with situations that adversely affect the well-being of individual employees in terms of work relationships and work environment.

## Understanding Grievance Handling

A grievance procedure action is initiated by the employee because he/she is dissatisfied with something which is within the employer's power to alter, whereas disciplinary action is initiated by a management representative because he/she is concerned with something unsatisfactory in an employee's performance or behavior.

A grievance procedure, however, is not there to replace the role of workers' committees/councils but is used rather to complement it. The workers' committee is a collective means of bargaining whereas the grievance procedure is a means for the individual to bargain and voice a grievance or complaint.

## Roles in Grievance Handling

### Employee's Role

- Raises the grievance which may be concerned with his relationship with the supervisor, conditions of service, salary, etc with his immediate superior, making it clear that this is the first step.
- If the matter is not resolved the employee may take it to the next level of authority, i.e. the Sectional/ Departmental Manager.

- The employee may invite a representative of the workers' committee to accompany them at any stage throughout the grievance procedure.

### **Departmental/Sectional Manager's Role**

- If the grievance remains unresolved he/she arranges a meeting with the supervisor, the employee concerned, and a representative from the Human Resources Department.
- Assures everyone present that what they say will not be held against them or result in them being victimized or ostracised in the workplace. Stresses that everyone should speak honestly and frankly concerning the facts of the issue.
- Sums up the points and facts and resolves any discrepancies in the information supplied by the parties.
- Gets the parties concerned to agree or to reach a solution, or decide on the type of action to be taken to resolve the issue.
- Avoids the discussion of matters not related to the grievance under consideration.
- Records in writing the agreement or solution reached or reason(s) for failing to settle the grievance.

### **Human Resources Officer's /Manager's Role**

- Keeps the records of the resolved or unresolved grievance(s) in the process of being resolved and mentions the proper functioning of the grievance procedure.
- Ensures that the grievance procedure is adhered to; he ensures that the situation/case is analyzed objectively;
- Ensures that all parties are given a fair hearing;
- Ensures that all the facts are looked at fairly.
- A representative from the Human resources Department must be in attendance at all times from the stage when the grievance is dealt with by the Sectional/Departmental Manager and upwards.

### **Main Stages of the Grievance Handling Procedure**

The grievance procedure provides a means whereby employees may express any dissatisfaction regarding the work situation. Every employee should have the right to submit a grievance without fear. In the first instance, the grievance should be dealt with by the line manager. The worker's committee may also be involved. Again the role of the Human resources department is to provide advice and ensure compliance with the laid down procedure.

It is best practice to settle grievances as quickly as possible to its point of origin and encourages staff and their superiors/managers to resolve grievances informally. However, the following three (3) stages are set to address the situations where this is not possible. A Grievance Form should be designed for easy application of the procedure.

### **Stage I: Statement of Grievance**

An employee who has any grievance or complaint should raise it with his/her immediate supervisor in writing by completing a Grievance Form. The Head of the Department should respond to the aggrieved employee, ideally within seven (7) working days.

### **State II: First Appeal Level**

If the matter is unresolved at stage I the aggrieved employee can appeal in writing to the Head of the Department. The Head of Department will at his/her discretion arrange a personal interview with the aggrieved employee and will give a written reply. This should ideally be done no later than fourteen (14) working days.

### **Stage III: Second and Final Appeal Level**

It is expected that most of the cases will be solved at Stage II but in exceptional circumstances where this is not possible and the matter remains unresolved, the aggrieved employee may present it in writing to the head of the organization who will handle the matter and give a written reply within a further fourteen (14) working days.

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 minimizing the potential for grievances is the outcome that all organizations must strive towards.

Grievances, whether general or individual, may be minimized 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 emphasizes 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 the possible impact of any change to terms of employment, policies, and practices. Potential pain points and parity issues would also be considered during organizational or

---

employee transitions, as well as a change management strategy that includes timely communications (TAFEP 2020).

*Carl Tapi is a Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/carl-tapi-45776482/> Phone +263 (242) 481946-48/481950 or cell number +263 772 469 680 or email: [carl@ipcconsultants.com](mailto:carl@ipcconsultants.com) or visit our website at [www.ipcconsultants.com](http://www.ipcconsultants.com)*

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/What-Is-A-Grievance-Procedure-And-How-Does-It-Work>