

Employee Grievance: Concept and Cause

Meaning of Employee Grievance

Employee grievance refers to the dissatisfaction of an employee with what he expects from the company and its management. A company or employer is expected to provide an employee with a safe working environment, realistic job preview, adequate compensation, respect etc. However, employee grievance is caused when there is a gap between what the employee expects and what he receives from the employer.

Employee grievances may or may not be justified. However, they need to be tackled adequately by the leadership team because they not only lower the motivation and performance of the employee but also affects the work environment. Employee grievances if left unchecked can lead to large disputes within the company. It can also drop the motivation levels of other employees. Any company must have a proper channel for employee grievance redressal.

Employee Grievance should be handled in a proper and well defined manner. If an employee voice is raised or a person reports a matter related to a policy or something he or she is not happy with or wants to complaint against, a framework defined in policy should be used.

Features of Grievance

1. A grievance refers to any form of discontent or dissatisfaction with any aspect of the organization.
2. The dissatisfaction must arise out of employment and not due to personal or family problems.
3. The discontent can arise out of real or imaginary reasons. When employees feel that injustice has been done to them, they have a grievance. The reason for such a feeling may be valid or invalid, legitimate or irrational, justifiable or ridiculous.
4. The discontent may be voiced or unvoiced, but it must find expression in some form. However, discontent per se is not a grievance. Initially, the employee may complain orally or in writing. If this is not looked into promptly, the employee feels a sense of lack of justice. Now, the discontent grows and takes the shape of a grievance.

5. Broadly speaking, thus, a grievance is traceable to be perceived as non-fulfillment of one's expectations from the organization.

Causes of Employee Grievance

Employee's grievance not only reduces the productivity of employees and organization, it may put the existence of the organization in a danger situation. Therefore, the grievance has to be solved as quickly as possible. For this, the reason has to be identified. The reason for grievance may vary according to the situation. Some of the important reasons are as under:-

1. Unfair Management

Employees want to be treated equally as other employees. But if management treats differently to the identically performing employees then the grievance arises.

2. Poor Communication

Open and two ways communication makes a healthy relationship and motivates the employees. Policy, directives, information and other notices have to be received by each employee in a similar way according to their job responsibility. One way and controlled communication makes them feel inferior and this will create misunderstanding among the employees and the management. This misunderstanding will slowly turns into the grievance. Thus, poor, controlled and one way communication is also a reason for employee's grievance.

3. Different interpretation

Different in the understanding and the interpretation between the employees and the management also causes for grievance. If employees understand the policy, rules and terms and conditions, directions and guidelines determined by the management differently then they become negative towards the management and whole organization. Organization with ineffective communication has high chance for grievance.

4. Personality traits

Some employees have habit of being grievant even in minor and small cases. They needle or point out other employees even in their minor mistakes. This will create grievance to the

employee himself/herself and other employees as well. Therefore, a personality trait is one of the reasons for the grievance.

5. Culture of Organization

In some cases, the wrong culture of organization creates grievance in the employees. Bad culture adversely affects the organizational environment and it dissatisfies the employees. This dissatisfaction grows on increasing into the grievance.

6. Weak leadership

Leader must be present as a guardian of all employees. If the leader is weak, then employee's enthusiasm may go down and employees do not follow and ignore the leaders. Serious disciplinary activities may be carried out in the organization. This will increase the employee grievance.

7. Personality clash

Sometimes, some employees may have personality clash with the colleagues, management and other people's thought, concept and work style. They may take it as a challenge when their idea is not accepted and a feeling of revenge may take place. Feeling of ego may create anger, miserable or dishearten to an employee that will create grievance among the employees.

Effects of Grievance

Grievances, if not identified and redressed, may adversely affect workers, managers, and the organization.

The effects are the following:

1. on the production:

- a. Low quality of production
- b. Low productivity
- c. Increase in the wastage of material, spoilage/leakage of machinery

d. Increase in the cost of production per unit

2. on the employees:

- a. Increase in the rate of absenteeism and turnover
- b. Reduction in the level of commitment, sincerity and punctuality
- c. Increase in the incidence of accidents
- d. Reduction in the level of employee morale.

3. on the managers:

- a. Strained superior-subordinate relations.
- b. Increase in the degree of supervision and control.
- c. Increase in indiscipline cases
- d. Increase in unrest and thereby machinery to maintain industrial peace

Types of grievances in the workplace

These are the most common examples of employee grievances.

- Pay and benefits.
- Bullying.
- Work conditions.
- Workload.

Let's go through each one in a little more detail.

Pay and benefits grievances

As an employer, you've probably had at least one member of your staff come to you to express that they're unhappy with what you're paying them.

Your employee might mention:

- That they want a higher salary.
- They think they should be earning as much as somebody who does a similar job in the organization.
- They might be trying to receive expenses—such as for their commute.

Make sure that you have a pay and benefits policy that outlines how often you will conduct salary and benefits reviews with your staff, and ensure that any documents your employees receive are in line with this policy.

Bullying grievances

It's inevitable that members of staff in your workplace just won't get on. But that doesn't mean you should allow bullying or harassment. You must have a zero tolerance policy.

Ensure that you give everyone your anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, and always email any updates or revisions. These policies should include the disciplinary procedure you'll follow if somebody lodges a grievance for bullying or harassment.

Working conditions grievances

Nobody wants to lose a valuable employee because of problems with their workplace conditions. It's up to you to prevent this.

Think about:

- Cleanliness on the office floors or in the kitchen.
- Desk etiquette.
- Bathroom conditions.
- Health and safety hazards.
- Temperatures in the workplace.

Conduct workplace risk assessments regularly to identify any possible hazards, such as a leak.

Have a first aid officer, a first aid kit, and signs designating fire exits.

Outfit your office with fire extinguishers. Other obvious essentials include refuse bins around obvious areas, such as a kitchen or canteen and near desks, too. Don't forget about toiletries: toilet paper and hand soap/sanitizer.

As part of your assessment, you could assess whether you should invest in air conditioning for the summer or radiators if the office gets cold in the winter.

Workload grievances

You can often find a link between grievances about their workload, and pay and benefits issues that staff rises.

Typical situations that cause problems with employees are:

- Increasing your employee's workload when another employee leaves, rather than finding a replacement.
- Increasing an employee's workload because you've made other staff redundant to cut costs.

If you're going to increase an employee's workload, you should be ready for them to ask, "What's in it for me?"

And if you're hoping that your employee will just do more work for no extra pay or benefits, and not even a recognized promotion, you're likely to frustrate your employee.

And as we said earlier, their morale will drop. They will begin to resent you and feel like you're taking advantage of them. They'll end up doing less work. And they might begin their search for a new job. In this situation, they could even have a case for constructive dismissal—if they feel like they have no choice but to resign.