

## **Grievance Handling:**

A grievance is any dissatisfaction or feeling of injustice having connection with one's employment situation which is brought to the attention of management. Speaking broadly, a grievance is any dissatisfaction that adversely affects organizational relations and productivity. To understand what a grievance is, it is necessary to distinguish between dissatisfaction, complaint, and grievance.

1. **Dissatisfaction** is anything that disturbs an employee, whether or not the unrest is expressed in words.
2. **Complaint** is a spoken or written dissatisfaction brought to the attention of the supervisor or the shop steward.
3. **Grievance** is a complaint that has been formally presented to a management representative or to a union official.

According to Michael Jucious, 'grievance is any discontent or dissatisfaction whether expressed or not, whether valid or not, arising out of anything connected with the company which an employee thinks, believes or even feels to be unfair, unjust or inequitable'.

### **Causes of Grievances:**

Grievances may occur due to a number of reasons:

#### **1. Economic:**

Employees may demand for individual wage adjustments. They may feel that they are paid less when compared to others. For example, late bonus, payments, adjustments to overtime pay, perceived inequalities in treatment, claims for equal pay, and appeals against performance-related pay awards.

#### **2. Work environment:**

It may be undesirable or unsatisfactory conditions of work. For example, light, space, heat, or poor physical conditions of workplace, defective tools and equipment, poor quality of material, unfair rules, and lack of recognition.

#### **3. Supervision:**

It may be objections to the general methods of supervision related to the attitudes of the supervisor towards the employee such as perceived notions of bias, favouritism, nepotism, caste affiliations and regional feelings.

#### **4. Organizational change:**

Any change in the organizational policies can result in grievances. For example, the implementation of revised company policies or new working practices.

#### **5. Employee relations:**

Employees are unable to adjust with their colleagues, suffer from feelings of neglect and victimization and become an object of ridicule and humiliation, or other inter-employee disputes.

#### **6. Miscellaneous:**

These may be issues relating to certain violations in respect of promotions, safety methods, transfer, disciplinary rules, fines, granting leaves, medical facilities, etc.

### **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

### **Need for a Formal Procedure to Handle Grievances:**

A grievance handling system serves as an outlet for employee frustrations, discontents, and gripes like a pressure release valve on a steam boiler. Employees do not have to keep their frustrations bottled up until eventually discontent causes explosion.

The existence of an effective grievance procedure reduces the need of arbitrary action by supervisors because supervisors know that the employees are able to protect such behavior and make protests to be heard by higher management. The very fact that employees have a right to be heard and are actually heard helps to improve morale. In view of all these, every organization should have a clear-cut procedure for grievance handling.

The grievance procedure is the method by which a grievance is filed and carried through different steps to an ultimate decision.

### **Objectives of Grievance Handling Procedure:**

Objectives of the grievance handling procedure are as follows:

1. To enable the employee to air their grievance
2. To clarify the nature of the grievance
3. To investigate the reasons for dissatisfaction
4. To obtain, where possible, a speedy resolution to the problem
5. To take appropriate actions and ensure that promises are kept
6. To inform the employee of their right to take the grievance to the next stage of the procedure, in the event of an unsuccessful resolution

### **Benefits of Grievance Handling Procedure:**

Benefits that accrue to both the employer and employees are as follows:

1. It encourages employees to raise concerns without fear of reprisal.
2. It provides a fair and speedy means of dealing with complaints.
3. It prevents minor disagreements developing into more serious disputes.
4. It serves as an outlet for employee frustrations and discontents.

5. It saves employer's time and money as solutions are found for workplace problems. It helps to build an organizational climate based on openness and trust.

### **The four stages of the machinery are briefly discussed here:**

#### **1. Initial level at which grievance occurs:**

The greatest opportunity to redress a grievance is to resolve it at the initial level at which it occurs. A worker's grievance should be resolved by their immediate boss, the first-line supervisor. The first stage of the procedure usually involves three persons—the aggrieved employee, his immediate boss and the union representative.

It is possible to involve the union in laying down the framework of the grievance procedure and thereafter restrain union involvement in the actual process, at least in the first two stages. Supervisory role needs to be strengthened, with appropriate training in problem-solving skills, grievance handling, and counselling.

#### **2. Intermediate stage:**

If the dispute is not redressed at the initial state at supervisor's level, it is usually referred to the head of the concerned department. It is important that the management assumes prime responsibility for the settlement of a grievance. At the intermediate level, grievance can be settled with or without union involvement.

#### **3. Organization level:**

If a grievance is not settled at the intermediate level also, it can be referred to the top management. Usually, a person of a level not less than the general manager designated for the purpose directly handles the issue. At this level, it is very difficult to reconcile the conflicting interests.

#### **4. Third-party mediation:**

If the grievance has not been settled bilaterally within the organization, it goes to a third party for mediation. Arbitration or adjudication or the matter may even be referred to a labour court. At this stage, the parties concerned lose control over the way the grievance is settled.

In case of mediation (conciliation or arbitration), the mediator has no authority to decide, but in case of the labour court or an adjudicator, the decision will be binding on the parties, subject to statutory provisions for appeal to higher courts.

At any stage of the grievance machinery, the dispute must be handled by some members of the management. In grievance redressal, responsibility lies largely with the management. And, as already discussed, grievances should be settled promptly at the first stage itself.

The following steps provide a measure of guidance to the manager dealing with grievances:

**1. Acknowledge dissatisfaction:**

Managerial/supervisory attitude to grievances is important. They should focus attention on grievances, and not turn away from them. Ignorance is not bliss; it is the bane of industrial conflict. Arrogant attitude on the part of supervisors and managers aggravates the problem.

**2. Define the problem:**

Instead of trying to deal with a vague feeling of discontent, the problem should be defined properly. Sometime the wrong complaint is given. By effective listening, one can make sure that a true complaint is voiced.

**3. Get the facts:**

Facts should be separated from fiction. Although grievances result in hurt feelings, the effort should be to get the facts behind the feelings. There is need for a proper record of each grievance.

**4. Analyse and decide:**

Decisions on each grievance will have a precedent effect. While no time should be lost in dealing with them, it is no excuse to be slipshod about it. Grievance settlements provide opportunities for managements to correct themselves, and thereby come closer to the employees. Horse-trading in grievance redressal due to union pressures may temporarily bring union leadership closer to the management, but it will surely alienate the workforce away from the management.

**5. Follow up:**

Decisions taken must be followed up earnestly. They should be promptly communicated to the concerned employee. If a decision is favourable to the employee, their immediate boss should have the privilege of communicating the same.