



Employers – Lets Embrace Informal Resolution Methods

Addressing staff complaints, interpersonal issues and other HR or employment relations matters effectively is vital for maintaining a harmonious and productive workplace. While formal procedures have their place, there is otherwise an obligation to explore informal options first. This blog post delves into these informal methods, the types of issues they can resolve, and how they contribute to a positive workplace culture.

Common Issues Raised in the Workplace

Examples of the types of workplace issues that might necessitate informal interventions include:

Interpersonal Conflicts: Misunderstandings or clashes between colleagues.

Performance Concerns: Issues such as those related to the quality, quantity, or timeliness of work.

Claims of Workplace Stress: For example, challenges related to workload, responsibilities, or work-life balance.

Communication Problems: Inadequate or ineffective communication within teams.

Informal Resolution Strategies

Before proceeding to formal interventions such as formal investigations or disciplinary actions, it is advisable (and in some scenarios, an obligation) to attempt resolving matters through less formal means. Informal resolution strategies can quite often achieve more positive results than the formal options. Here are several effective informal strategies:

Facilitated Meetings: Organising meetings where all parties involved can openly discuss their concerns in a controlled environment. These sessions aim to foster understanding and mutual respect, facilitated by an HR representative or a trained mediator.

Counselling for Staff: Providing access to counselling services can help employees deal with personal and professional issues that might impact their workplace relationships and performance.

Training: Conducting workshops on communication, conflict resolution, diversity, and workplace culture can enhance employees' skills and reduce the incidence of workplace conflicts.

Reviewing Policies and Procedures: Regularly updating workplace policies and ensuring that they are clearly communicated can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts. It's essential that these policies are accessible and understood by all staff.

Clarifying Role Responsibilities: Many conflicts arise from unclear expectations or overlapping duties. Clarifying role responsibilities can help prevent such issues.

Psychometric Assessments: Utilising assessments to help staff understand their own and others' working styles can lead to improved teamwork and communication. These tools are invaluable for building self-awareness and empathy among team members, and they can be a useful tool during recruitment too.

Regular Feedback and Communication Channels: Encouraging regular feedback and maintaining open lines of communication helps to address issues before they escalate. This could be through regular one-on-ones, team meetings, suggestion boxes, or informal catchups.

Best Practices for Informal Resolution

Voluntary Participation: It's best when the parties agree to the informal processes voluntarily. This increases the likelihood of a positive outcome.

Confidentiality: Maintain confidentiality to protect the interests of all parties involved. This encourages openness and trust.

Impartiality: Facilitators or HR representatives should remain neutral to help mediate discussions effectively.

Documentation: While informal, it is still useful to keep records of what is discussed and agreed upon for future reference and to monitor progress.

Transitioning to Formal Processes


If informal methods do not resolve the issues, it may be necessary to consider progressing to formal options. These might include more structured investigations, involving a more in-depth review of the issues and potentially leading to disciplinary outcomes, where appropriate. The transition should be smooth, with clear communication about the reasons for escalating the matter.

Procedurally, you are then able to show you've attempted to resolve issues informally first, before considering options which ultimately, could impact an employee's employment.

Conclusion

In our workplaces, the initial approach to resolving staff complaints should favour informal resolution methods. These strategies not only promote a positive and collaborative work environment but also empower employees to resolve their differences constructively. By investing in informal resolution methods, employers can enhance their workplace culture, reduce the need for formal proceedings, and support a more engaged and productive workforce.

Don't hesitate to reach out to discuss this topic further and how I might assist you with informal resolution options.

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