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REDRESSAL AND SETTLEMENT OF EMPLOYEES GRIEVANCES - A STUDY OF SELECTED INDUSTRIAL UNITS

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ABSTRACT

Organization does not exist in vacuum, but made of people and function through people. An organization is what its people are. The true significance of the grievance emerges only when we recognize the expression of dissatisfaction as a symptom of friction, of malfunctioning somewhere in this living structure of shop relationships. In their working lives, employees occasionally have causes to be uncomfortable, disappointed or aggrieved either about certain managerial decisions, practices or service conditions. When human beings work together there is likelihood of friction and misunderstanding. Some of these areas of friction could lead to unhappiness or dissatisfaction among workers. The grievance procedure is one of the most important means available for employees to express their dissatisfaction. It is also a means available to management to keep a check on relevant diagnostic data on the state of the organization's health. The present study is an attempt to identify and suggest such an effective, flexible and simple procedure of settlement of grievance that can ensure the speedy redressal of the grievances and must be capable of ensuring a sense of satisfaction to the employee concerned. In this context, an empirical study has been made of three organizations to identify their grievance handling machinery.

KEYWORDS

people, dissatisfaction, friction, organization's health, grievance procedure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Late J.R.D Tata said in one of the seminar that the difference between Tata's organizations and any other organization is not of technology, capital, market but its employees who are competent, loyal and committed. Organizations are made or broken not by competition, technology, market and finance but by its people. *Happy, satisfied, contented employees are the greatest and most invaluable assets in any organization.* Such employees will be more productive, more committed, loyal and with high morale. The performance of an employee depends on skill and will. An unhappy, dissatisfied and discontented employee lacks will to work. Such employee practice all the dysfunctional behaviour like low productivity, wastage, low morale, stressful and tense behaviour, conflicting interpersonal behaviour, low quality, increase in the cost, high absenteeism and turnover, increase in accidents and reduced level of commitment, sincerity and punctuality. Such a scenario is not only damaging to the employees but also to the organization because such *dissatisfied and unhappy employee is the greatest liability to the organization.* Such an employee looks around and finds everybody unkind to him. He is aggrieved and wants to *ventilate his feelings and reactions.* **Prompt and effective disposal of workers grievances is the key to industrial peace and harmonious inter-personal relations.** An unsettled grievance is the embryo of more serious trouble to come because accumulation of minor grievances may lead to *major explosions.* In such cases, **the concerned manager will have to play the role of a counselor or 'a friend, philosopher and guide' for the employee carrying some psychological problem or grievance.** As Voltaire is reputed to have observed,

'Man will differ as autumn leaves will rustle.'

In employment relationships both employer and employee have mutual expectations. In course of working together in the organization, an employee may feel or believe that he/she is being neglected by the supervisor, colleagues or his/her terms and condition of employment has been deliberately violated. As a result, an employee remains unhappy and dissatisfied in the place of work although it is truism that when human beings work together there is every likelihood of friction and misunderstanding, which cause dissatisfaction. If the dissatisfaction of the employees goes unattended, the increased irritation of the employees may lead to unfavourable attitudes towards supervisor, colleagues and the organization and ultimately gives rise to poor industrial relations. **This state of affairs of an employee is called grievance and the person who has dissatisfaction is called grievant.**

In India, the government has been making a plea for grievance machinery at the plant level ever since 1956 - 1958 when the standing committee of the **Indian Labour Conference (ILC)** submitted a draft on the various aspects of a grievance procedure. The National Commission on Labour set up by the Government as a tripartite body in 1969 also spelt out the nature of grievance and a model grievance procedure. However, this remains a recommendation and is not a statute yet. In effect, government machinery can only recommend but it is up to the respective managements of each enterprise to formally adopt or reject the grievance procedure. It must be noted that there are many instances in India today, where the corporate management and union, through the collective bargaining process, have adopted a grievance procedure.

2. REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Several reviews of grievance procedure research were published in the mid to late 1980s (Gordon & Miller, 1984; Labig & Greer, 1988; and Lewin & Peterson, 1988). First, the authors noted the relative scarcity of grievance procedure research. Given the importance of grievance procedures for facilitating justice in the workplace, Gordon and Miller (1984, p. 118) note that this neglect is "disturbing."

Allen and Keaveny (1985) noted the inconsistent results and low explanatory power of studies focusing on demographic and job related variables to differentiate between grievants and nongrievants. They focused on several attitudinal variables in their study of grievants and nongrievants from the **1977 Quality of Employment Survey.** They found several statistically significant differences in attitudinal measures between grievants and nongrievants. Grievants were less satisfied with their jobs, had poorer attitudes toward their line supervisors, had greater feelings of pay inequity, had stronger beliefs that workers should participate in decision-making, were less satisfied with their unions, and more active in their unions. The lower satisfaction with the union among grievants may be due to dissatisfaction with the processing of their grievances. As Allen and Keaveny note, a limitation of this study is that the attitudinal measures were obtained after the grievants had initiated their grievances.

Knight (1986) found that there is substantial variation among union and management officials' self assessments of their use of feedback about prior grievance settlements and arbitration decisions in grievance processing. More frequent use of feedback from prior grievance settlements was related to higher rates of grievance resolution.

Lewin and Peterson (1988) discuss the results of a survey about grievance activity conducted by one of the organisations included in their study. Based on data reported by Lewin and Peterson, 16 percent of employees said they had no issues that warranted filing a grievance over the past year and another 12 percent said they only had questions of clarification about policies but apparently no grievable issue. Thus, 28 percent of employees would effectively be eliminated as potential grievants because they had experienced no grievable events.

Dastmalchian (1989) and Dastmalchian and Ng (1990) found that the perception of a more favorable industrial relations climate by managers was related to higher grievance settlement rates and settlement at lower levels of the grievance procedure.

Bemmels, Reshef and Stratton-Devine (1991). They included a measure of the shop steward's assessment of the supervisor's knowledge of the collective agreement, and this had a negative relationship with grievance rates. This result is consistent with a common complaint from shop stewards in interviews conducted as part of these studies that supervisors often violate the collective agreement because they do not know what the agreement says on certain issues.

Eaton, Gordon and Keefe (1992). They examined the relationship between subjective evaluations of grievance procedures and measures of commitment which is important since commitment has been found to be related to numerous measures of grievance procedure behaviors and outcomes. Employer commitment has been found to be negatively related to absenteeism and turnover.

Gordon and Fryxell (1993) note that several studies of grievance processing suggest that grievance settlement decisions may be based on criteria other than the merits of the grievance. Many of these could be interpreted as inappropriate criteria for deciding the outcome of a grievance. Although the results are mixed, studies have found that the gender of the grievant and/or the gender of the decision maker are related to grievance outcomes.

Lewin and Boroff's (1994). In their study they analyzed the employees who perceived that they experienced unfair treatment and filed a grievance and employees who perceived unfair treatment but did not file a grievance. They found that employees with higher loyalty to the employer were less likely to have filed a grievance.

Some empirical studies were also already being conducted by some Indian researchers to for exploring the grievance – handling practices in some organizations. The main objective of the survey was to know the grievance – handling practices followed by the organizations and the overall framework of industrial relations to which these practices are resorted to.

South India Textile Research Association (1963). The Association conducted a study of 12 textile mills situated in Coimbatore, jointly sponsored by the south India Textile Research Association and the National Productivity Council has revealed that no systematic and formal grievance procedure existed in any of the sample mills. No systematic procedure is followed and there was no clarity about the types of grievances which each level would settle.

S. Chandra (1968). S. Chandra conducted a survey in various industries identifying various causes of employees grievances like promotion amenities, leave, nature of job, transfer and condition of work etc. It was a limited study relating to causes of grievances.

Prof. Lallan Prasad (1973). He studied the grievance procedure in three plants namely, Rourkela, Bhilai and Durgapur. Industrial relations in these plants have been in a poor state from the very beginning. When the plant was under construction, non-payment of wages and maltreatment of labourers were common features, which led to a large number of strikes, lockouts and go-slows.

Dr. Debi S. Saini (1994). For exploring the grievance practices, a survey was conducted in respect of some large-scale industries in and around Ahmedabad. The main objective of the survey was to know the grievance-handling practices followed by these organizations and the overall framework of industrial relations in which these practices are resorted to.

Dr. M.S. Choudhary (1996). The grievance procedures and machinery of some organizations have been studied as a part of his research on Collective Bargaining. The study was mainly concerned with the procedure of Grievance Settlement. He also recommended that to have better and harmonious industrial relations, there must be effective machinery for the settlement of employees grievances.

National Commission on Labour, 1969. The National Commission on Labour, 1969 also recommended the Model Grievance Procedure suggested by the Code of Discipline, 1958. The Commission suggested that the grievance procedure should be made applicable to those establishments, which employ more than 100 workers.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the present study is to assess a wide spectrum of working of the machinery for handling grievances in selected industries in India. More specifically but, the present study aims at:

1. To study and analyze the various issues of employees grievances in selected industries.
2. To study and analyze the various sources used to discover employees grievances in selected industries
3. To study the different approaches to employees grievances.
4. To analyze and assess the effectiveness of the grievance handling machinery in the sample organizations.
5. To evaluate the impact of employee grievances on (i) Productivity (ii) Absenteeism (iii) Discipline (iv) Industrial peace/harmony.
6. To determine the effectiveness of the objectives of the Grievance Settlement Machinery.

4. SCOPE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study covers five organizations / industries selected from three centers of Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh State. A list of these sample units is given in alphabetical order in table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1: LIST OF SAMPLE COMPANIES*

S. No.	Name of the Company (In alphabetical order)	State of Location (Head office/ Plant)	Place of Location (Head office/ Plant)	Category of Products
1.	Godrej Eatables Pvt. Ltd.	Haryana	Bahadurgarh	Biscuits
2.	State Petroleum Corporation Ltd.	Delhi	New Delhi	Oil
3.	Indian State Power Corporation	Uttar Pradesh	Noida	Power
4.	Max Bharat Cooperative Ltd.	Uttar Pradesh	Noida	Fertilizer
5.	Sona Trading Corporation	Delhi	New Delhi	Minerals & Metals

* These are pseudonyms and the real names of the companies are not being used.

While 05 listed organizations / industries at the first glance may seem to be inadequate sample, in reality as a piece of qualitative research where the emphasis is on obtaining insights rather than elaboration which makes it very exhaustive. Secondly, the criterion of selecting sample units to make the study wide in scope and representative of Indian industries history, units have been selected on the basis of their different locations, products, ownership, human relations scene, enlightened personnel policies, well laid down grievance procedures etc. as is evident from the important features of these units.

The number of respondents from each company is shown in table 1.2. The questionnaires got filled up mostly individually, but sometimes in groups and also by post. The manager respondents are further classified according to the position held in the organization as shown in table 1.3. 15 percent of the managers' respondents belong to high level category which includes Managing Director, General Managers, Chief Human Relations Managers. 35 percent belong to the middle level, which includes managers, and 50 percent are Dy. Managers and Asstt. Managers.

In case of employees / workers, efforts have been made to select respondents from different departments, age group, length of science on basis of convenience sample.

TABLE 1.2: CATEGORY WISE RESPONDENTS OF SAMPLE COMPANIES

S.No.	Name of the Company (In alphabetical order)	Manager	Employees/Workers
1.	Godrej Eatables Pvt. Ltd	20	40
2.	State Petroleum Corporation Ltd.	20	40
3.	Indian State Power Corporation	20	40
4.	Max Bharat Cooperative Ltd	20	40
5.	Sona Trading Corporation	20	40
Total		100	200

TABLE 1.3: MANAGER RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THE LEVEL OF POSITION HELD BY THEM

High Level		Middle Level		Front Line Level		Total	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
15	15	35	35	50	50	100	100

5. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

The grievance procedure and settlement machinery of the 05 sample companies have been studied in detail through structured questionnaires, discussions, personal interviews, office documents and files. It was found that there are wide differences in the grievance procedure, which varies from company to company. Some companies have written grievance procedures patroned after the Indian Labour Conference 'Model Grievance Procedure' and tailored to specific plant conditions.

SUBJECT MATTER/ISSUES COVERED UNDER EMPLOYEES GRIEVANCES

There is wide gap from organization to organization regarding issues and causes of grievances. Organizations are different regarding their working conditions, management style, interpersonal relations, human resource policies and grievance redressal machinery. Some of the issues like wage payments, leave, transfer, promotion, working conditions, work assignment have been mentioned by managers and employees of majority of companies. Table 1.4 shows subject matter/issues covered under Employees Grievances in different organizations.

TABLE 1.4: ISSUES COVERED UNDER EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCES IN DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS

S.No.	Subject Matter
1.	Payment of Wages
2.	Employment Condition
3.	Recovery of Dues
4.	Working Conditions
5.	Grant of Leave
6.	Promotion
7.	Medical Facility
8.	Transfer
9.	Seniority
10.	Work Assignments
11.	Welfare Amenities
12.	Irregularities
13.	Increments
14.	Allotment of Quarter
15.	Medical Facilities
16.	Overtime
17.	Entitlements such as reimbursement of travelling expenses, meal allowances etc.
18.	Officiating Appointments
19.	Safety Appliances
20.	Loss of Tools
21.	Issuance of Monsoon Equipment
22.	Pay Fixation
23.	Interpretation of Rules

SOURCES USED TO DISCOVER GRIEVANCES

Different Companies use various methods to discover grievances of their employees/workers as shown in Table 1.5.

TABLE 1.5: SOURCES USED TO DISCOVER GRIEVANCES

S. No.	Sources	No. of Companies
(a)	Direct Observation	-
(b)	Grievance Procedure	05
(c)	Gripe Box	-
(d)	Exit Interview	-
(e)	Open Door Policy	03
(f)	Any other	-

Source: Questionnaire/Interview

The above table shows that all the 05 companies use grievance procedure but 03 companies (Godrej Eatables Pvt. Ltd., State Petroleum Corporation Ltd., Max Bharat Cooperative Ltd.) use a combination of grievance procedure and open-door policy and 02 companies (Indian State Power Corporation and Sona Trading Corporation) uses only the grievance procedure to discover grievances of their employees/workers. Other methods like direct observation, gripe box and exit interview which are also very effective sources of identifying grievances, are not used in case of these companies. However, these methods are used to discover grievances of managerial personnel.

EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIOUS APPROACHES OF GRIEVANCE SETTLEMENT MACHINERY

The perceptions of various respondents (100 managers and 200 employees/workers) regarding the effectiveness of different approaches (legalistic view approach, human relations approach, open-door policy and step-ladder approach) is shown in Table 1.6.

TABLE 1.6: PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIOUS APPROACHES OF GRIEVANCE SETTLEMENT MACHINERY

S. No.	Approaches/Respondents	Managers		Employees/Workers	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Legalistic View	60	60	11	5.50
2.	Human Relations	-	-	58	29
3.	Open Door Policy	-	-	108	54
4.	Step ladder	40	40	23	11.5
	Total	100	100	200	100

Source: Questionnaire/Interview

The perceptions of managers and employees are totally different regarding approaches to Grievance Settlement Machinery. 60% of managers prefer legalistic view approach as they are of the opinion that grievances are those which are defined by the contract and process of dealing with those grievances is clear to all concerned. 40% of the managers prefer step-ladder approach for resolving employees grievances because they don't like that employees supercede and side-step them. The reason being that, in case of step-ladder approach, the designation of authorities to whom grievances should be presented, the time limit for the

disposal of grievances at each step, the manner in which grievances have to be presented-verbally or in writing, or on ordinary paper or on prescribed form etc. are clearly laid down. Majority of employees prefer open-door policy and human relations approach (54% and 29%) for resolving their grievances because they consider themselves to be partners in the organizations and want to be a part of decision making process. 11.5% the employees are in favour of step-ladder approach and only 5.5% employees prefer legalistic view approach.

EFFECTIVENESS OF GRIEVANCE MACHINERY

The perception of various respondents regarding the effectiveness of Grievance Machinery in their organization is shown Table 1.7.

TABLE 1.7: PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GRIEVANCE MACHINERY IN THEIR ORGANISATION

S.No.	Respondents/ Grievance Machinery	Managers		Employees/Workers	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Very Effective	10	10	-	-
2.	Effective	40	40	25	12.5
3.	Moderately Effective	30	30	50	25
4.	Ineffective	12	12	100	50
5.	Can't say	8	8	25	12.5
	Total	100	100	200	100

Source: Questionnaire/Interview

The above table reveals that only 10% of managers consider their grievance settlement machinery very effective, where as 40% of them consider it effective, 30% opine that it is moderately effective, 12% of the managers opine the grievance settlement machinery as totally ineffective in redressing the grievances and 8% of the managers did not answer the question regarding the effectiveness of grievance machinery in their organization. In case of employees/workers, 12.5% feel that the procedure of redressing grievance is effective, 25% opine that it is moderately effective, 50% feel that the machinery is ineffective in resolving grievances and 12.5% did not answer the question.

The table reveals that the majority of managers respondents feel that the grievance machinery is effective or moderately effective, whereas majority of employees/ workers feel that grievance machinery is moderately effective or ineffective in redressing their grievances in an organization.

EFFECT OF GRIEVANCES IN AN ORGANISATION

Table 1.8 shows the opinions of respondents regarding effects of Grievances in their organizations. In rare unanimity, 100% managers and employees opine that grievances adversely effects the superior-subordinate relations. The table shows that 100% managers are of the same opinion that unattended and unresolved grievances adversely effect and increases the cases of turnover, indiscipline, unrest, accidents, degree of supervision and control and reduces employee morale. The table also reveals the differences of employees regarding the effects of grievances. 75% of employees opine that grievances increases the rate of absenteeism and turnover, 12.5% of employees opine that it increases indiscipline cases 27.5% of employees are of opinion that it increases the incidence of accidents and the rest opine that unresolved grievances leads to reduced level of employee morale.

TABLE 1.8: ATTITUDINAL DISPOSITION OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING THE EFFECT OF GRIEVANCES IN AN ORGANISATION

S.No.	Effects / Respondents	Managers		Employees/Workers	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Strains Superior-Subordinate Relations	100	100	200	100
2.	Increased rate of Absenteeism and Turnover	100	100	150	75
3.	Increase in Indiscipline Cases	100	100	25	12.5
4.	Increase in the degree of Supervision and Control	100	100	-	-
5.	Increase in Incidence of Accidents	100	100	55	27.5
6.	Reduced Level of Commitment and Sincerity	100	100	-	-
7.	Reduced Level of Employee Morale	100	100	25	12.5
8.	Increase in Unrest	100	100	-	-
9.	Can't Say	-	-	-	-
	Total	100	100	200	100

Source: Questionnaire/Interview

The table also shows that all the respondents are of the opinion that there should be a voluntary forum and mechanism to resolve their grievances through mutual discussions by adjusting their compromises. Effective grievance redressal machinery has the remarkable ability in creating new and varied procedures for resolving problems as they arise to vex industrial relations.

OBJECTIVES OF GRIEVANCE HANDLING MACHINERY

To know the main objectives of grievance settlement machinery, four alternatives were enlisted to solicit opinions, which are shown in the Table 1.9

TABLE 1.9: PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT THE OBJECTIVES OF GRIEVANCE SETTLEMENT MACHINERY

S.No.	Objectives/Respondents	Managers		Employees/ Workers	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	To strengthen line Authority	100	100	125	62.5
2.	Improve Mutual Understanding between the Complainant and the Supervisor	100	100	25	12.5
3.	To Establish Natural Justice	100	100	-	-
4.	To Prevent Dissatisfaction	100	100	30	15
5.	Can't say	-	-	20	10
	Total	100	100	200	100

Source: Questionnaire/Interview

The managers are of the opinion that grievance procedure cannot have only one objective. The grievance procedure should restore the employees confidence and satisfaction in the machinery which should also assist the line managers to be effective in resolving and preventing the grievances. So, all the 100 managers opine that all the four objectives are important and relevant to an effective grievance machinery. But, 62.5% of the employees/workers are of the opinion that the grievance procedure has been used to strengthen the authority of line managers, 12.5% are of the opinion that the management tries to improve the relations between the concerned parties, 15% opine that the employees/workers satisfaction should also be kept in mind while redressing a grievance, and 10% did not answer the question.

6. CONCLUSION

'Key to success is its positive relationship with its employees.'

Workplace harmony is a desire of managers and employees alike. Most people look forward to coming to work and value work relationships that are built on common interests, trust and individual recognition. Grievances can't be completely eliminated because human personality is very complex and if one grievance is resolved, other will arise. Grievance is an universal phenomenon. Grievances are inevitable, unavoidable and endemic in social, political, economic, religious

and industrial society because of man's unique capability to perceive differences in any given situation. Dissatisfaction leading to grievance can come from almost anywhere. Complaints about discrimination and favoritism in work assignments, work standards or physical working conditions are frequent sources of grievances. It is important to remember, though, that anything about which an employee is dissatisfied can lead to a serious grievance.

While grievances can't be eliminated but can be minimized and resolved through a well laid down 'grievance settlement machinery'. A grievance procedure is essential because it brings uniformity in the handling of grievances. Another important aspect of the grievance machinery is the reassurance given to an individual employee by the mere fact that there is a mechanism available to him which will consider his grievance in dispassionate and detached manner and that his point of view will be heard and given due consideration. He gets it 'off his chest' does lot of good to his morale.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The level at which settlement takes place is an index of the climate or the spirit that prevails in the organization. The lower the level of settlement, the quicker the redressal of a grievance. Once parties other than those directly concerned get interested in any event, the situation becomes worse and its solution is hard to find because of vested interest.
2. The legal framework is very weak, as it does not provide any specific and well laid down grievance procedure. The various labour laws should be amended and a specific and well laid down grievance procedure must be provided. Such procedure must be legally enforced on all organizations.
3. Grievance Procedure should be widely publicized through house magazines, notice board, workshops and personal contacts. The Grievance Procedure should be in a language understood by employees.
4. Human mind is such that it cannot be 'switch on and off'. Not only on-the-job grievances but also off-the-job grievances affects the morale of employees in the organization. Organizations should have 24 hrs relations with the employee instead of only on the job relations. HRM Manager should be good face reader and should closely monitor/observe the behavior of employees.
5. Managers responsible for settlement of grievances at different stages should adhere to the time schedule provided in grievance settlement machinery in the organizations. Arguments like the 'busy schedule' and 'hands have been tied by management' should not be the answer to maintain the time schedule.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations relates to the inadequacy of statistical data on the impact of employees grievances on discipline, absenteeism, productivity, employer-employee relations, quality of products. Hardly any company maintains such data to study the impact in statistical terms when an employee has a grievance and when it is resolved. The Private sector as usual is very shy in providing relevant documents and information. Some of the selected organizations are very huge, multi planned with thousands of employees. Individual researcher has her own limitations in terms of time and finance to contact adequate number of respondents. In some organizations, data is collected from the Head Office without visiting far-off plants. But to supplement the available data, intensive use of the interview, questionnaire, discussion and observation has been made.

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