

PRESERVING HARMONY: ADDRESSING WORKPLACE CONFLICT AND THE RISE OF COMPLAINTS IN DEPED OFFICES

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In an ideal educational setting, the workplace should be a space of collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility. Schools and division offices under the Department of Education (DepEd) are built not only on policies and programs but on the strength of relationships among the people who work within them. However, a concerning trend is emerging: a growing number of internal disputes and complaints that appear to undermine the spirit of professionalism and mutual respect.

Reports from the field reveal an increase in formal complaints being filed against personnel – sometimes on an unclear or minor basis. In certain instances, patterns emerge that suggest a collective or orchestrated effort to discredit specific individuals. These situations have raised red flags, as the frequency and nature of the complaints suggest not a commitment to accountability, but the emergence of tension, division, and possible harassment in the workplace.

Whether these reports are legitimate or not, the perception alone that someone is being “targeted” or isolated by co-workers can erode trust and mental well-being. Left unaddressed, such dynamics poison workplace morale and degrade the culture of cooperation vital to educational success.

Conflict often intensifies when underlying issues remain unaddressed or are poorly managed. Several key factors contribute to the escalation of disputes, including miscommunication, unmet expectations, power imbalances, and lack of timely intervention. Understanding these contributing elements is essential for developing

strategies to prevent conflicts from worsening and to promote more constructive resolutions.

Conflicts at work often get worse when small problems aren't dealt with early or clearly. One reason is that many workplaces don't have simple and easy ways for people to talk through issues before they turn into bigger problems. Another cause is the presence of cliques or "in-groups" that can make others feel left out or unfairly treated. Miscommunication also plays a big role, especially when people are busy or stressed, it's easy to misunderstand messages or intentions. When people aren't sure about their roles or who's in charge of what, it can lead to confusion, frustration, and blame. Lastly, when kindness, respect, and self-control are missing, people tend to react emotionally, which makes it harder to solve disagreements calmly. All these things together can make everyday problems grow into major conflicts.

Persistent conflict and a culture of constant complaints can have a wide-reaching ripple effect throughout the workplace. Over time, these issues can lead to reduced morale and lower employee engagement, as staff feel unsupported or undervalued. Heightened stress and anxiety often follow, affecting the overall well-being of personnel. This emotional strain can result in decreased productivity and weaker collaboration, as team members become less motivated to work together. Professional trust may also erode, making it difficult to foster a respectful and cooperative environment. In the long run, these challenges can contribute to increased absenteeism, higher resignation rates, and overall staff turnover, disrupting continuity and weakening organizational stability.

Fostering a healthier work culture begins with creating systems that support open, fair, and respectful interactions among staff. One key step is to institutionalize grievance mediation and counseling, giving employees access to impartial services where concerns can be addressed early, confidentially, and constructively. Leaders, particularly school heads and supervisors, should receive training in conflict management and professional ethics so they can respond to issues with transparency, neutrality, and calm authority.

Regular team-building activities and communication sessions can also play a vital role by helping staff better understand one another, address lingering issues, and strengthen working relationships.

It's equally important to implement fair and transparent processes for investigating complaints—ensuring that each case is reviewed thoroughly and objectively, while filtering out repetitive or baseless claims to prevent misuse of the system. Ultimately, promoting a culture of respect and inclusion is essential; this means adopting clear policies that uphold every employee's dignity and discourage harmful behaviors such as gossip, retaliation, or personal attacks.

Workplace harmony is not merely about the absence of conflicts about building a culture where issues are addressed constructively, individuals feel respected, and professionalism is paramount.

As the Department of Education pursues its mission of quality, inclusive education, it must also ensure that its internal communities reflect those same values. A safe, fair, and collaborative work environment is essential for teaching, administrative, or support staff—to thrive and serve with integrity.

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