

MANAGING EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCES DURING BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AT OCADO GROUP

Individual Report (Component 2)

Student Name: Pellegrino Venturino

Student ID: 2336525

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Module Leaders: Nishi Ramsurrun and Doreen Nyaa Amundam

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Contents

Introduction

1. Factors Affecting Employee Grievances
2. Evaluation of Contemporary HR Practices
3. Critical Evaluation of Departmental Managers

Conclusion and Recommendations

Reference List

Introduction

This report examines how business transformation, digital technology trends and flexible working arrangements can increase employee grievances if they are not managed carefully. The organisation selected is Ocado Group, a London-based business known for online retail, logistics and technology-led operations. Ocado is a suitable example because its work environment depends on automation, digital systems, warehouse operations, office functions and changing working patterns. These features make human resource management important, especially when employees are expected to adapt quickly to new ways of working.

The scenario for this report is that a new HR professional has joined the organisation and has noticed a concerning number of grievances during the first month. In this context, grievances may relate to workload pressure, poor communication, unclear job roles, perceived unfairness, lack of training, or concerns about the way technology is used. The aim of the report is to explain the main factors behind these issues, evaluate contemporary HR practices that can address them, and critically examine how departmental managers can implement these practices urgently. The report argues that transformation can benefit the business, but it must be supported by communication, employee voice, development and fair management practice.

1. Factors Affecting Employee Grievances

Business transformation is one of the main factors that can create grievances. In an organisation such as Ocado Group, transformation may include restructuring teams, introducing automation, changing performance targets and redesigning daily tasks. These changes can improve efficiency, but employees may feel that change is being imposed on them rather than discussed with them. The CIPD notes that change management is important because badly managed change can damage trust and engagement (CIPD, 2025). In practice, this means employees may become frustrated if they do not understand why change is happening or how it will affect their job.

A specific problem linked to transformation is role ambiguity. When responsibilities change, employees may be unsure about their duties, reporting lines or performance expectations. For example, warehouse employees may be asked to work alongside new automated systems, while managers may expect faster output. If training and explanation are weak, mistakes can increase and employees may feel unfairly judged. This can lead to formal complaints because staff may believe the organisation has changed the job without giving enough support.

Digital technology trends are another important factor. Digital systems can improve planning, communication and performance measurement, but they can also create pressure. The use of dashboards, tracking systems and algorithm-based decision support may make employees feel constantly monitored. CIPD research on workplace technology highlights that technology affects the employee experience and must be managed with attention to people, not only efficiency (CIPD, 2020). If employees believe that digital data is used mainly to punish poor performance, trust can decline. A further issue is the digital skills gap. Some employees may not feel confident using new platforms or devices, especially if training is rushed. This can create anxiety and reduce motivation.

Flexible working arrangements can also contribute to grievances. In principle, flexible working can help employees balance work with personal life. Gov.uk explains that employees can request changes to hours, start and finish times, days worked or work location (Gov.uk, 2026). However, flexibility can become a source of conflict where it is applied inconsistently. Office-based employees may receive more hybrid working opportunities, while operational staff may have limited options because warehouse and fulfilment work requires physical presence. This difference may be understandable from a business perspective, but it can still feel unfair if managers do not explain decisions clearly.

Another issue is scheduling. Flexible shifts, weekend work or last-minute changes can support business demand, but they may disrupt childcare, study, family responsibilities or rest time. ACAS states that flexible working can benefit wellbeing and productivity, but requests must be handled fairly and reasonably (ACAS, 2026). Therefore, the grievance risk is not flexibility itself; the risk comes from poor communication, inconsistent treatment and lack of employee involvement. Overall, the three factors are connected. Transformation changes the business, technology changes how work is controlled, and flexible working changes the employee experience. If these changes are not managed together, grievances can increase.

2. Evaluation of Contemporary HR Practices

Contemporary HR practices can reduce grievances by making change more transparent, fair and supportive. The first important practice is structured change management. Models such as Lewin's change theory show that employees need preparation before change, support during change and reinforcement after change (Lewin, 1951). In Ocado Group, HR should not only announce new technology or new working patterns. It should explain the reason for the change, consult employees, collect feedback and provide a clear timeline. The strength of this practice is

that it reduces uncertainty. Its limitation is that consultation can become symbolic if managers listen but do not act on the feedback.

Training and development is another essential HR practice. Digital transformation requires employees to develop new skills, especially where systems, apps, automation or reporting tools are introduced. Training should be practical and continuous, not only a one-off session. For example, employees could receive short workshops, peer support, simple written guides and follow-up coaching. Armstrong and Taylor argue that learning and development supports organisational capability and employee performance (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). The benefit is that training increases confidence and reduces mistakes. However, training must be scheduled properly because employees may resist it if it is added on top of an already heavy workload.

Employee voice and grievance mediation are also important. Employees need safe ways to raise concerns before they become formal grievances. HR can use listening sessions, anonymous surveys, team representatives and informal mediation. CIPD guidance on employee engagement highlights the importance of involving employees and measuring engagement (CIPD, 2025). This practice is useful because it identifies problems early. For example, if staff complain that a shift rota is unfair, HR can review the rota before the problem becomes a larger dispute. The limitation is that employee voice only works when employees trust the process. If they believe feedback will be ignored, participation will be low.

Wellbeing-focused HR practices are also necessary. Transformation, monitoring and irregular schedules can affect mental health. The World Health Organization explains that poor working environments, excessive workloads, low job control and job insecurity can create risks to mental health (WHO, 2024). Therefore, HR should introduce workload reviews, wellbeing check-ins, access to support services and manager training in mental health awareness. These actions show employees that performance is not the only priority. The limitation is that wellbeing initiatives can appear superficial if the real causes of stress, such as excessive targets or poor scheduling, are not addressed.

Performance management should also be improved. Clear objectives, regular feedback and fair appraisal processes can reduce grievances because employees understand what is expected. Digital performance data should be used to support improvement, not simply to criticise workers. A transparent performance system can help employees see how decisions are made. This is especially important where technology tracks productivity. Overall, the most effective HR response is a combined approach: communication, training, employee voice, wellbeing and fair

performance management. Each practice has value, but none will work alone if managers apply them inconsistently.

For this reason, HR should also consider equality and inclusion when reviewing flexible working and technology-based performance systems. Employees in operational roles may not have the same level of flexibility as office employees, but they still need fair options such as predictable rotas, reasonable notice, shift swapping procedures and equal access to wellbeing support. This matters because grievances often come from the feeling that one group is treated better than another. HR should therefore review decisions by department and check whether rules are being applied consistently. A fair process does not mean every employee receives the same arrangement, but it does mean that decisions are explained, recorded and based on business reasons rather than personal preference.

Another useful practice is to create a simple grievance trend review. HR should not only deal with each complaint separately; it should also look for patterns. For example, if several grievances relate to the same team, manager or shift pattern, this suggests a wider management issue. Monthly reviews of grievance themes could help Ocado identify whether problems are linked to communication, workload, training or fairness. This would make HR more proactive and would support sustainable performance because the organisation would learn from problems rather than repeatedly reacting to them.

3. Critical Evaluation of Departmental Managers

Departmental managers are central because they turn HR policies into daily practice. A policy may look strong on paper, but employees judge the organisation through their direct manager. For this reason, managers must communicate change clearly and quickly. Kotter argues that successful change requires a clear vision and communication that helps people understand the direction of change (Kotter, 1996). In Ocado Group, managers should explain why new systems or working arrangements are being introduced, what support is available and how employee concerns will be handled.

Managers also need to ensure consistency. If one department allows flexible working requests while another rejects similar requests without explanation, employees may perceive unfairness. This can increase grievances even when the policy itself is reasonable. Departmental managers should therefore use the same criteria, document decisions and involve HR when cases are

sensitive. This is especially important because ACAS guidance states that employers must follow proper procedures and handle flexible working requests reasonably (ACAS, 2026).

Another responsibility is early intervention. Managers should not wait until problems become formal complaints. They should observe signs such as low morale, repeated absence, conflict, declining performance or negative feedback. Early conversations can identify whether the issue is workload, training, rota fairness or communication. This proactive approach is more effective than reacting only after grievances have escalated.

However, there are also barriers. Managers may face pressure to meet operational targets, and this can make people-management tasks feel secondary. Some managers may also lack confidence in handling grievances or mental health concerns. Therefore, urgent implementation requires manager training, clear accountability and support from HR. Managers should be measured not only on productivity, but also on employee relations indicators such as grievances, turnover, absence and engagement scores.

A critical point is that urgency should not mean rushed implementation. If managers introduce new practices quickly but without explanation, they may create more resistance. Urgency should mean prioritising communication, solving obvious problems quickly and building routines for continuous review. Departmental managers can ensure implementation by holding weekly team briefings, tracking issues, reporting progress to HR and checking whether employees understand the changes.

Managerial communication should also be two-way. It is not enough for managers to pass messages down from senior leadership. They should also collect employee concerns and send them back to HR and senior management. This is important because frontline employees often understand practical problems before they appear in official reports. For example, if a new digital system slows down a task or creates confusion, employees may notice the issue immediately. A manager who listens carefully can prevent frustration from becoming a grievance.

Overall, managers are the bridge between strategy and employee experience, so their behaviour is essential to reducing grievances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, business transformation, digital technology and flexible working arrangements can improve organisational performance, but they can also increase employee grievances when

employees feel unsupported or treated unfairly. In Ocado Group, the main risks are role ambiguity, digital monitoring pressure, skills gaps, inconsistent flexibility and poor communication. These issues show that transformation is not only a technical or operational process; it is also a people-management challenge.

The report recommends that Ocado Group should: strengthen communication during change; provide continuous digital skills training; create stronger employee voice mechanisms; apply flexible working policies consistently; improve wellbeing support; and train departmental managers to manage grievances early. These recommendations are practical because they address both the causes of grievances and the way HR practices are implemented. Sustainable business performance is more likely when employees understand change, trust management and feel supported in their development.

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