

# RadHR Conflict, Grievance and Accountability

## Policy & Process

**AGREED by the RadHR Core Team on 18 March 2025**

### Scope & parameters

*This policy applies to all RadHR workers. For issues raised by or about others in the RadHR Community, partners or funders, please see the **RadHR Complaints procedure** (to be created).*

We're aware that 'conflict' is a massively-broad term that can encompass anything from everyday disagreements, to serious abuses of power and violence. The main distinction we try to make in this policy is between 'abuse' (['behaviours ...intended to gain, exert, and maintain power over another person or in a group.'](#)) and any forms of conflict or difference that don't meet that definition. This is to hone in on the kinds of conflict we imagine are *most likely* to play out within our working context (remote home-based desk working in a small team). We deliberately avoid the detailed framing of 'abuse' in this policy, as we feel that due to our size of team and capacity levels, if a conflict meets the threshold for abuse, it will be necessary to move towards a [Step Four: Formal Grievance](#) (which this policy aims to avoid in most circumstances).

### Policy groundings

We aim to ground this policy in an understanding that the vast majority of conflicts that are likely to arise in our small collective working structure are multi-dimensional. There will always be differences of opinion about who is right and wrong - that is the nature of conflict. We don't say this to diminish harm, or flatten/minimise the power imbalances that exist in the world and that are inevitably involved in conflicts, but to recognise that those power imbalances are rarely simple and that harm can occur in all directions across a conflict. In fact, while appropriate in many wider institutional contexts (e.g. police, borders, etc) reducing conflict to 'harm experienced by one side and caused by another,' often serves to flatten and minimise the range of power dynamics that are actually at play in any particular conflict. We hope this policy can ground a more nuanced understanding of what can go wrong between us.

We believe that conflicts are more likely to reach mutually-beneficial resolutions if the organisational engagement with them doesn't immediately assume that one side is right and one side is wrong (except in exceptional circumstances - see ['Red Lines/ Limitations'](#)). While we will always aim to keep the power dynamics associated with race, gender, class, and other forms of marginalisation at the forefront of these discussions, we will also try to hold the complexities of how those dynamics intersect with one another, with individual and collective traumas and the specific people and circumstances involved.

In line with this approach, we will aim to keep concerns that are raised by any RadHR workers in the 'informal' space, legally-speaking, for as long as is viable. By this, we do not mean treating them any less seriously than a formal grievance, but that the legal requirements of a formal grievance process (as per Acas regulations) embed antagonistic and punitive structures that we will avoid resorting to, due to the destructive impacts they often have on relationships and group cultures. Our experiences of formal grievance processes in other organisations has been that they both ignore existing power dynamics (of any kind) and impose structures which seriously reduce the odds of those involved being able to find common understanding, be accountable or make amends.

## Aims

Based on these experiences and beliefs, we want this policy to help us to:

1. Better understand the structural and interpersonal dimensions of conflicts that play out between RadHR workers;
2. Recognise when harm has occurred and understand how to prevent it in the future;
3. Encourage appropriate accountability from all of those involved;
4. Protect one another from more serious incidents of harm and;
5. Enlist support from facilitators or mediators outside of the team.

## Group culture

We see group culture as the conditions we create together that encourage more or less healthy approaches to conflict. We want to practice being in RadHR spaces together in ways that encourage us to avoid unnecessary conflict and to face inevitable conflict in ways that minimise harm and support personal and collective reflection and change.

Some of the things we aim to do can be found in our [Work policy](#).

## Process

Below are four steps for addressing conflict between RadHR workers. The hope is that each step can avoid the need to escalate to the next, but that there are options to do so, when needed. The steps do not necessarily (except in extreme cases - see: '[Red Lines/ Limitations](#)') relate to the seriousness of the conflict or incident, as we believe that more serious forms of conflict can still be addressed via Steps One, Two and Three ('Informal grievance', in legal terms), but seriousness is also likely to be a factor in deciding the steps that are taken.

Before these steps begin, we suggest taking time to reflect on our own role in a conflict, as well as raising a conversation with the colleague we have a difference with, if it feels possible to do so.

## Step 1: Gentle Intervention

At the point where any RadHR worker feels they have reached a level of difference with a colleague that can't be addressed exclusively between them, they can raise it with a third colleague to enlist their support.

If the additional colleague is comfortable doing so and it is acceptable to the person who raised the concern, the additional colleague can work with those in conflict to work through their differences. ([This Seeds for Change Oxford/Navigate guide](#) - particularly Chapters 5 and 6 - includes useful communication tips and facilitation prompts.) If the third colleague is not comfortable intervening, the process will move to Step Two.

If the issue raised relates to a colleague's work not being done, it should be treated initially as a 'work support' question and the third colleague will kickstart a different process via the **'Work Support Needs Policy'** (to be created). In discussion, it may reveal that a Gentle Intervention is still needed, due to the impacts of the work that hasn't been done on the colleague that has raised it, but this will not be the assumed starting point in these situations.

Additionally, if you are a RadHR worker who is not directly impacted, but have noticed interactions/dynamics between colleagues that don't sit well with you, we encourage team responsibility to check-in with the person affected, to see if additional support is wanted or needed to address those dynamics.

*Example outcomes:*

- Following one colleague telling another that a third colleague had said something that felt patronising about their work, the non-involved colleague raises the issue with the person who made the comment in private. The person who made the comment didn't realise the way it landed and immediately makes a proactive apology to the first colleague.
- When two colleagues strongly disagree about the way an event should be run, they ask for the third colleague's support to help them find a way past the deadlock. The third colleague facilitates their next meeting and helps them to find a way of integrating both of their concerns into the event plan.

## Step 2: Supported Mediation

If the colleague raising the concern or the third colleague (who it has been raised with), don't feel comfortable addressing the issue between them, it is the responsibility of the third colleague to source options for external mediation or support. (The exception to this is if the concern raised relates to physical or sexual violence, in which case, see: ['Red Lines/ Limitations'](#)). External mediation will be resourced by RadHR at the earliest viable opportunity. Mediators that RadHR has existing relationships with are included in the [Organisational Support](#) page.

Given the size of our team, it is unlikely to be possible for a total separation of colleagues' work, but the team may take steps to think about how work together could be minimised while this process is ongoing.

The hope is that through supported mediation, both colleagues will better understand their own and the other's roles in the conflict. This may mean a number of things, but we are deliberately non-prescriptive about trying to determine outcomes in advance, as mediation can often help us to reframe our understandings of a conflict and thus what is needed to move forward in a healthy and equitable way.

*Example outcomes:*

- Through mediated dialogue, the person who raised a concern about how a colleague had spoken to them, is able to understand that there were elements of the conflict that had triggered that colleague's past trauma, leading to a disproportionate response in the moment. The colleague who had been triggered was able to see how their response was disproportionate and had had a negative impact on their colleague and apologises.
- After repeated tense interactions about the wording of a document, mediated conversations help both colleagues to see how they had made incorrect assumptions about one another's intentions, which had led to their own escalated responses. They realise their intentions were similar, but their methods were different and agree to check-in more regularly at the first signs of disagreement, to better understand the other's perspective and aims.

### **Step 3: Accountability**

While the outcomes of a mediation process are difficult to usefully predict in advance, there may be situations where one or more people involved need to be accountable for their actions, in ways which go beyond the scope of the mediation process itself. If this is the case, there needs to be a process of establishing shared understandings of how any of those involved need to be accountable (and it is likely that mediators will still be involved in helping figure these out).

We see accountability as:

- 1) Taking appropriate responsibility for the negative impacts of our actions on others;
- 2) Doing what we can to repair any harm caused; and
- 3) Taking proactive steps to avoid replicating similar harm in the future.

Accountability is only possible when the person being held accountable has a shared understanding with those who have experienced harm (via the previous steps), of what they are being held accountable to and for. Without this, it is more likely that what plays out is a form of punishment. There may be times when this is required (see: '[Red Lines / Limitations](#)'), but this process aims to minimise the need for punitive approaches at each stage.

The details of different approaches to accountability vary, but if a conflict has reached the point of needing an accountability process, it usually involves the person being

accountable having support to do so and the person impacted having support to heal the harm caused.

The specifics of both forms of support should be worked out with mediators. The person who has been harmed should have *full agency* over deciding the kinds of support they receive and should have *input* into the ways their colleague can repair or make amends, but *does not have any decision making authority* over this.

The person needing to be accountable will have *strong input* into the kinds of support they receive and will aim to *take seriously* any suggestions from the person impacted about possible repair and how to avoid similar harm in the future, but will ultimately need to *make those decisions themselves*, in relation to their own understandings of the harm caused. There may need to be further mediated support at this stage, to help both parties agree on the steps that should be taken to make amends, which can hold the tensions and contradictions often involved in one person's healing and another person's understanding of their own capacities and boundaries.

In a non-punitive framework, it is only the person who has caused harm who can ultimately decide on the steps they need to take to avoid causing further harm. This is not to say that either the perspectives of those who have experienced harm, or wider members of a community, are not still central, but they are not what will ultimately shape the actions of someone trying to change their behaviours to reflect more caring and equitable values. This is a deep tension of this approach and will always need to be handled delicately on all sides. This is particularly true in thinking through the kinds of support that are offered to those who have experienced harm, to avoid the accountability process leaving them alone in their healing. This may often be as simple as ongoing buddy check-ins, but could involve more detailed kinds of support, as makes sense for the person.

*Example outcomes:*

- Following an apology for a sexist comment being used by one colleague to another, that first colleague agrees to do some further research around why that way of communicating was not acceptable, why they had felt it was, and to share back their learning with the team.
- Following a member of the team making a series of organisational decisions without proper discussion/input from colleagues, the colleague agrees to make time for extra check-ins around their work, to help establish more regular communication to avoid similar situations coming up again.

## **Step 4: Formal Grievance**

As per the law, we will instigate a formal grievance procedure which will include a grievance meeting, an investigation and the right to appeal, if the previous stages have not resolved the issues raised, or if the issue has crossed any of the '[Red Lines/ Limitations](#)' outlined below. It will include steps aligned with stages two through five from [this Guide](#). In the coming year, we will assess other formal grievance policies, to decide if there is a need to create more specific guidance and update this policy.

If the conclusion of the procedure rules against a RadHR worker on the Core Team, decision making on next steps will revert from 'full consensus' to a two-thirds majority to assess what needs to be done, whether that involves removal of a worker from particular pieces of work, or the termination of the Core Team member's employment with RadHR.

## Red lines / Limitations

If an incident between workers has involved **physical or sexual violence**, it will immediately become a 'formal' (see '[Step Four](#)') grievance and any subsequent decisions will move from full Core Team consensus, to a two-thirds majority decision, not including the colleague who has been accused, as per the [RadHR decision making policy](#).

If a RadHR worker refuses or **fails to engage** with any of the processes outlined, without a proposed path to becoming engaged, decisions related to next steps will move from full Core Team consensus, to a two-thirds majority decision, not including the colleague who has chosen not to engage with the process, as per the [RadHR decision making policy](#). We recognise that this is difficult, both because subsequent choices may relate to ending a colleague's employment contract, but also because it can be emotionally challenging to engage in a collective conflict process, and that this policy essentially makes engagement a requirement of being a part of the team. While we know this is likely to be a difficult requirement in some contexts, we also believe that without dialogue, ongoing work in a small team would become impossible.

If external **mediation has become protracted** and carried on for more than three months AND it has meant that significant RadHR project work has needed to be suspended while the mediation process plays out, the core team will be faced with a difficult collective decision: to continue with mediation (if there is consensus that it feels like progress is being made), or if anyone involved in the conflict needs to leave the team. While we are aware that this doesn't present a clear 'resolution' and could result in a theoretical deadlock about who leaves and stays, we are confident that we would be able to come to this decision as amicably as it possible, if things reached this stage.

## Referenced policies & processes

### Existing:

- [RadHR Decision-making policy](#) To possibly be adapted to include more information about when a decision would need to move to a two-thirds majority and what kinds of decisions could be made in those circumstances.
- **RadHR Work policy** The steps we take to create and maintain the working culture we aspire towards and shapes how we aim to experience conflict together.

### To be completed:

- **RadHR Complaints procedure** To be created to make clear what happens if there are issues between or involving community members, partners and funders.

- **RadHR Work Support Needs policy** To be created to outline what the alternatives to a grievance policy might be when someone is unable to complete their work. Reference: [RadHR x PSC Performance Guide](#).
- **Maintenance Meeting agenda** To be created as a regular culture step towards avoiding unhelpful kinds of conflict. Reference: [Resist + Renew template](#).