

+ Employee Relations Success Starts (or Stops) with People Leaders.

When it comes to the importance of employee relations (ER), senior leadership and managers, as well as HR and ER professionals, are closely aligned on why getting it right is critical. From the bottom up, well-run employee relations improve individual engagement, strengthen feelings of inclusion, and build employees' confidence that the company they work for is committed to treating its people safely and fairly. From the top down, tightly managed employee relations benefits run the gamut from protecting corporate brand reputation to validating DE&I commitments, mitigating legal risk, boosting retention, and improving productivity, just to name a few.

Yet with all the obvious reasons, top to bottom, to invest in ER, there's a huge vulnerability smack-dab in the middle that too many organizations still fail to address: the individual manager's role in making or breaking employee relations.

It's no secret that our frontline people leaders, our managers, are the most direct connection between our brand and our employees. It's one of many reasons that a manager's personal engagement level is critical. Manager engagement directly sets the tone for those who report to them.

In fact, according to Gallup,

Managers affect a full 70% of the variance in team engagement, and 75% of employees who voluntarily quit their jobs do so because of their boss.

In HR Acuity's recent survey of nearly 700 ER professionals and managers, we sought to identify the "reality on the ground" when it comes to how managers handle employee relations issues. The survey results revealed that managers are not as equipped to handle these day-to-day (yes, they will happen that often) occurrences as they think they are and that they need more help than they think they do. The data also validated our reasons for building manag^{ER}, powered by HR Acuity, a new technology platform that is the path to delivering and scaling help for managers, no matter the size of your ER team.

It's clear that managers who already have a lot on their plates need up-to-date guidance and tools that help them master tough conversations, consistently respond to employees, create appropriate documentation, and, of course, stay compliant and fair. Yet it isn't practical for people leaders to rely on the real-time

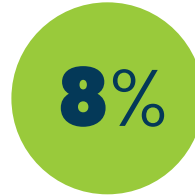
guidance of an ER professional when things go off course. Even this common model isn't perfect. The problems arising from poor documentation (or lack of documentation) that have existed for decades still wreak havoc today.



Herein lies the big opportunity for ER teams to scale their impact moving forward. When we focus time and resources on supporting individual managers, the return on that effort is immediate.

According to the survey, there's a huge disconnect in confidence levels when it comes to a manager's ability to handle employee relations issues well. Just 2% of ER professionals are "very confident" that their managers possess sufficient skills to address employee issues and document them in an effective and compliant manner. Juxtapose that with over 50% of managers who see themselves in a much different light. Just over half of the managers surveyed said they are very confident that they know how to handle an employee-related concern appropriately (55%), have the necessary skills to address the concern (56%), and document employee issues in an effective and compliant manner (52%). Even if those numbers were supported by the ER and HR teams that often have to pick up the messes left behind by managers (which they are not), it would still mean that approximately half of managers surveyed don't have confidence in their employee management skills.

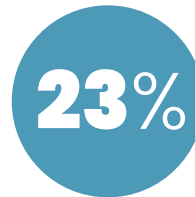
It appears that part of the disconnect centers on access to the right tools and data. Only 8% of ER leaders are very confident that their organization's managers can easily access documents related to an employee's past history. Meanwhile, 39% of managers think they can easily access the past history of an employee, and over half still don't think they have the necessary information needed to move to termination.



Not So Easy Access

Very few ER professionals are very confident that their organization's managers can easily access documents related to an employee's past history.

Yet the problem isn't just about having the right information. There is also a disconnect in judgement when it's time to escalate an employee issue to ER and/or HR. Just 23% of ER professionals are convinced that managers know the right time to escalate and ask for help. That is both troubling and risky.



Timing is Everything

Percent of ER professionals who are convinced that managers know the right time to escalate and ask for help.

Managers need more help than they think they do, and since it's also a matter of convincing them that they in fact do need help, the easiest place to start is by simplifying their lives with impossibly easy access to the right data, tools, training, and guidance.



Overconfidence will drown you in a sea of reality.

– Norain

According to the survey, when it comes to employee relations resources, a combination of manager awareness and consistent adoption is the key to creating value.

Seventy-four percent of managers say yes, they have up to three types of resources available to help handle employee issues. While having awareness of one's resources is a great first step, it's not enough. According to the survey, a lack of confidence is undermining adoption.



The Current Manager Toolbox is Unscalable & Risky:

- 50% use word processing documents
- 43% use spreadsheets
- 61% use email
- 7% use an app or technology based tool

Fairly aligned with managers, 68% of ER leaders say they have made three or more types of resources available to managers, such as on-demand or live training, a manager toolkit, and predefined templates. Yet it's clear that the job doesn't end with resource creation; it very much extends into delivery. "Build it and they will come" works for baseball teams and cornfields, not for managers and employee relations. As great as those videos, templates, and toolkits are, if they're hard to access and keep up to date, they quickly decay on managers' laptops.

It only takes one bad experience with an out-of-date policy or template for a manager to lose faith and potentially make a difficult situation even worse. Manager-specific resources need to be constantly refreshed, remarketed, and delivered to time- and attention-starved managers. What's more, helping your managers know exactly when to use resources helps them build confidence in both themselves and the ER function.

Making a powerful impact requires building in the ability to personalize manager support and deliver it within the flow of work. So, how do you scale personalized support with a small ER team? Technology.

For example, think about the benefits of pushing out real-time historical data. A manager can use to determine if an individual employee issue happening right now is new or recurring. How about the power of automating the most common workflows so managers can quickly and correctly document early warnings and deliver formal notices and, when needed, direct appropriate governance and approvals? How much more efficient would every manager be if they knew exactly when to escalate to HR using a process that was clear, seamless, and instant?

As much as technology has improved how managers participate in other areas of HR (think coaching, performance reviews, and onboarding), the opportunity for technology to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of employee relations at the manager level remains largely untapped. In addition to empowering your managers, this technology can provide a powerful set of predictive data to identify areas of concern, policy or training opportunities, potential inequities, or even bias within your organization.

“ Awareness is always the beginning of positive change.”

– Roxanna Jones

According to the survey, just 12% of ER teams report that their managers use an app or tech-based solution to track employee issues. Ironically, even fewer managers (7%) say they use an app or tech-based solution to track employee issues—perhaps some managers don't even realize they have it!



There's An App For That. (Sometimes)

Percent of ER teams reporting that their managers use an app or tech-based solution to track employee issues.

The reality is that the vast majority of frontline managers are still relying on a manual process to handle employee issues as they arise. Keeping things manual is a missed opportunity to build confidence on both sides. The survey results show that ER professionals' confidence goes up an average of 14 percentage points across the board when managers use an app or tech-based solution to track employee issues.

Imagine how much more your team could be doing if you weren't constantly worried about ER at the manager level.

Rolling out tools that guide managers through the process of documenting employee issues and that provide easy access to employee information will increase manager confidence and effectiveness, as well as your own confidence in your managers.

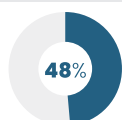
We're quite literally living in a pivotal time for employee relations. Fortunately, the heightened awareness around employee relations ushers in our biggest opportunity to make a lasting and powerful impact. The overwhelmingly good news is that nearly everyone involved with employee issues already agrees that handling them quickly, consistently, and fairly is critical. On this, leadership teams, employee relations professionals, and direct managers are closely aligned. Not only because it's the right thing to do, but because everyone agrees that how an organization handles employee issues directly impacts employee morale and retention, organizational productivity, brand reputation, and, of course, legal risk.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT YOUR MANAGERS...

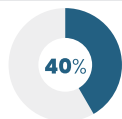
WITHOUT APP/TECH BASED TOOL

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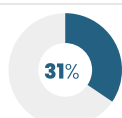
... have the necessary skills to address employee issues?



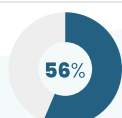
... document employee issues in an effective and compliant manner?



... can easily access documents related to an employee's past issues?



... have the necessary employee documentation when you want to move forward with a termination?



Yet as the survey reveals, the opportunity starts with equipping managers with the skills, process, and tools they need to appropriately address employee issues, escalate to ER when necessary, and ensure that everyone has the information they need to get employee relations right every step of the way.

"SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT OR VERY CONFIDENT."

About the Author



Deborah J. Muller

Deborah J. Muller is the CEO of HR Acuity, the only technology platform specifically built for employee relations and investigations management. Muller brings more than 25 years of human resources and workplace investigation experience to the company. Also the founder of the Employee Relations Roundtable and empowerER community, she is a recognized expert and sought-after speaker in employee relations and workplace investigations and has been featured in Inc. Magazine, Entrepreneur, Fast Company, Business Insider, Forbes, and many other major news outlets.

Learn more about HR Acuity's newest product, managER.

Simplify and improve employee relations by protecting it at its most vulnerable spot: frontline people leaders.

hracuity.com/managER



Where focus goes, energy flows."

— Wayne Dyer



Protect Your Reputation. Build a Better Workplace.

You can't prevent every employee issue from happening, but you can change how you respond. HR Acuity is the only technology platform specifically built for employee relations and investigations management. HR Acuity's newest product, managER, simplifies and improves employee relations by delivering support at its most vulnerable spot: frontline people leaders.

Built for easy access, the managER platform makes it simple for people leaders to access the data they need to successfully document behavioral warnings, communicate company policies, and coach their employees through sensitive workplace interactions. What's more, managER helps clarify when and how people leaders should escalate issues that require more help.

In addition to scaling support and driving accountability for their people leaders, managER helps ER teams gain visibility across the organization. In one centralized view, ER teams can spot trends and identify areas of concern related to misbehavior, policy, culture, and inclusion before they damage culture or escalate into "cancel worthy" headlines.

Learn more about managER, the only employee relations technology purposefully designed to help people leaders have exactly what they need, exactly when they need it.

Survey Methodology

The data included comes from two separate surveys. HR Acuity, in partnership with Global Strategy Group, fielded an online survey via email and social media, targeting employee relations professionals at enterprise organizations based in the United States with at least 1,000 employees. Participants included employee relations leaders whose organizations represent over 4.5 million employees globally. The research was conducted between February 23 and April 5, 2021, and has a confidence level of $\pm 8.7\%$. HR Acuity also fielded an online survey targeting full-time managers at enterprise organizations. Participants included managers, directors, team leaders, frontline supervisors, vice presidents, and executives. This research was conducted between March 10 and 19, 2021, and has a confidence level of $\pm 3.8\%$.