



2021 ER Survey Whitepaper

Employee Relations Success Starts (or Stops) with People Leaders

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When it comes to employee relations (ER), senior leadership, managers, 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 their employer is committed to building a fair and safe environment.

From the top down, the benefits of tightly managed employee relations run the gamut from protecting corporate brand reputation to validating DE&I commitments, mitigating legal risk, boosting retention, and improving productivity.

Yet with these reasons to invest in ER, there's a huge vulnerability smack-dab in the middle that too many organizations 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.

Managers' personal engagement level is critical because it sets the tone with their direct reports.

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.***

HR Acuity surveyed nearly 700 ER professionals and managers 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 occurrences (yes, they will happen that often) as they think they are. And they need more help than they think they do.

These realities were our very reason for building managER, a new technology platform that is the path to delivering and scaling help for managers, no matter the size of your ER team.

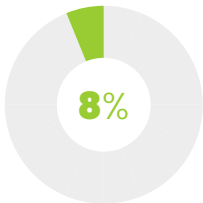
We know that managers, who already have a lot on their plates, need prescriptive guidance to help them master tough conversations, consistently respond to employees, create appropriate documentation, and, of course, stay compliant and fair. Yet it isn't practical for people leaders to rely on the real-time guidance of an ER professional to keep things from going off-course.

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. **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.**

Managers 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 (and they're not), it would still mean that approximately **half the managers surveyed don't have confidence in their employee management skills.**

So where is the disconnect, and how can we solve it? We know access to the right information is part of it.

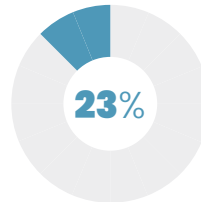


Not So Easy Access

Only 8% of ER professionals are very confident their organization's managers can easily access documents related to an employee's history.

Meanwhile, over half of managers agree they don't have the necessary information to move to a desired termination.

But the problem is bigger than just having the right information. There is also a disconnect in judgment when it's time to escalate an employee issue to ER and/or HR.



Timing is Everything

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.

Rather than convincing managers that they need more help than they think they do, ER professionals need to reach managers with easily accessible data, tools, training and guidance nudging them forward with evidence-backed next steps.

There's a 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.



We're using Excel, email ... we are all over the place manually tracking history.

- VP, Employee Relations - Financial Services

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

The majority of both managers (75%) and ER professionals (68%) reported they have up to three types of resources intended to help with handling employee issues. But without consistent adoption, the quantity of resources is irrelevant. The job doesn't end with resource creation; it very much extends into delivery. "Build it and they will come" might work for baseball teams and cornfields, but not for managers and employee relations. As great as videos, templates and toolkits are, if they're hard to access and keep up to date, they'll just collect dust on managers' laptops.



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

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. Helping your managers know exactly when to use resources helps them build confidence in themselves and the ER function.

Making a powerful impact requires building in customizable manager support delivered within the flow of work. So, how can you scale personalized support with a small ER team? Technology.

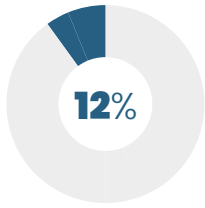
For example, think about the benefits of pushing out real-time historical data. A manager can use it to determine if an individual employee issue happening right now is new or recurring. How about the power to automate the most common workflows so managers can quickly and accurately document early warnings and deliver formal notices? 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 (like 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.**



People aren't being treated consistently across the organization- that can be problematic."

- CHRO - Global Pharma Company



There's An App For That (Sometimes)

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!

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.

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

We're living in a pivotal time for employee relations. Fortunately, the heightened awareness ushers in our biggest opportunity to make a lasting and powerful impact. Nearly everyone involved with employee issues (including leadership teams, ER pros and direct managers) already agrees that handling them quickly, consistently and fairly is critical—not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because **data supports that how an organization handles employee issues directly impacts employee morale and retention, organizational productivity, brand reputation and legal risk.**

Taking advantage of these benefits 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.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT YOUR MANAGERS...	WITHOUT APP/ TECH-BASED TOOL	WITH APP/ TECH-BASED TOOL
... have the necessary skills to address employee issues?	48%	69%
... document employee issues in an effective and compliant manner?	40%	50%
... can easily access documents related to an employee's past issues?	31%	54%
... have the necessary employee documentation when you want to move forward with a termination?	56%	69%

"SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT OR VERY CONFIDENT."

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

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 +/- 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 +/- 3.8%.

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 empowER 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.



Elevate your employee relations from
“that just got awkward” to *“that went
better than expected”* with managER —
your people leaders will thank you for it.

About HR Acuity

While you can't prevent every employee relations issue, you can change how you respond. HRAcuity is the only technology platform specifically built for employee relations and investigations management. HR Acuity's SaaS technology empowers you with built-in intelligence, templates and reporting so you can conduct best practice, fair investigations; uncover trends and patterns through forward-looking data and analytics; and provide trusted, consistent experiences for your people.

Protect Your Reputation and Build a Better Workplace with HR Acuity.