

# HRD

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# RENEW

“BUSINESSES DON'T TRANSFORM  
BECAUSE OF STRATEGY DECKS, THEY  
TRANSFORM BECAUSE OF CONNECTED,  
VALUED AND PURPOSEFUL PEOPLE”

ALYSON FADIL  
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER  
MATALAN





ARTICLE BY RENA CHRISTOU, EMPLOYMENT LAW EXPERT & GROUP CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER

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## SPINNING WHEELS

EMPLOYMENT LAW IS EVOLVING QUICKER THAN MANY HR FUNCTIONS CAN ABSORB. EXPERIENTIALLY, ER CASE VOLUMES HAVE INCREASED BY CLOSE TO 40 PERCENT AND THE CIPD DESCRIBES HR BURNOUT AS “CRITICAL”, MAKING IT ONE OF THE HIGHEST RISK AREAS OF PEOPLE MANAGEMENT. YET, MANY STILL TREAT IT AS AN OPERATIONAL AFTERTHOUGHT.

Employment law rarely exposes organisations because it is misunderstood, it does so because it is applied inconsistently. Tribunal cases frequently hinge not on the decisions, but how they were reached. Timelines drift, documentation is incomplete, escalation points are missed and lack evidence. The fragility of this is exposed as organisations adapt to managing six-month qualifying periods and increased focus on early decisions, in many organisations, ER processes are still tracked across spreadsheets and disconnected systems that struggle to meet today’s evidential standards. This challenge is magnified in large organisations. High HR turnover, variable management capability and decentralised decision-making leave small specialist teams trying to control legal risk at scale. With the Employment Rights Act introducing major reform, the margin for error in employee relations is narrowing. In response, many employers are re-examining how ER is delivered. The focus is shifting away from reactive, case-by-case firefighting towards deliberate operating models prioritising consistency, visibility and early intervention. Technology plays an important role in this evolution, freeing up capacity rather than replacing human judgement.

At its best, a modern ER approach separates foundation from judgement. Clear workflows, defined escalation points, centralised documentation and

reliable data provide an “always-on” system that supports compliant decision-making. This foundation allows HR professionals and managers to focus on the quality of conversations, applying empathy, experience and discretion, not worrying about procedural missteps. In practice, this means managers are guided through ER processes in a consistent way, aligned to policy and legal requirements, rather than relying on memory or ad hoc advice. Risk thresholds help identify

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LEADERS LACK VISIBILITY  
OF EMERGING RISK”

when situations are becoming complex or sensitive, enabling earlier involvement from specialist teams. Crucially, documentation is captured as part of the process, creating a defensible audit trail and a single source of truth. The benefits of this kind of design are not theoretical. In fast-growing organisations, inconsistent ER practices often stall progress. Managers hesitate, HR teams become bottlenecks and senior leaders lack visibility of emerging risk. Where structured ER models have been introduced, organisations report greater

managerial confidence, reduced escalation and improved oversight of patterns and root causes, allowing more proactive and targeted intervention. In a hybrid and increasingly dispersed working environment, ER data is not only about identifying where legal risks lie, it’s a core component of employer duty of care. Repeat grievances, clusters of absence, trends in disciplinaries or performance management all tell a wider story. Organisations unable to see these patterns are destined to remain reactive. Those that can are better positioned to redesign processes, target capability building and address underlying causes before they escalate. The emerging expectation is that organisations should use the data they already hold to identify early signs of burnout, overwork, conflict and psychological risk, particularly where visibility is reduced by hybrid or remote working and intervene before issues escalate. Mishandled cases erode trust, damage wellbeing and place managers in untenable positions. Employees who feel unfairly treated are more likely to disengage or escalate. A structured approach reduces unnecessary friction and creates the conditions for difficult conversations to be handled confidently and carefully.

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