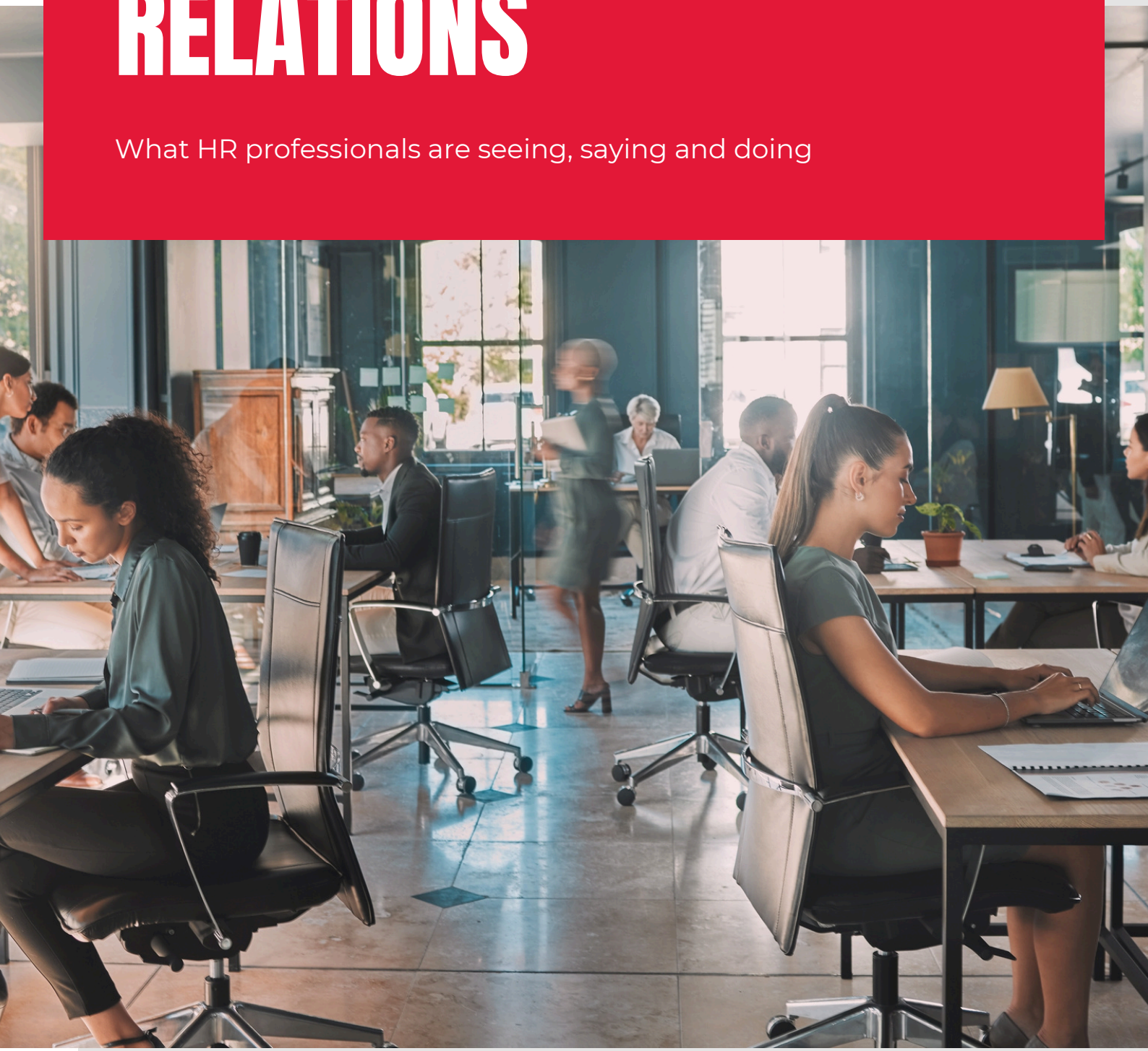
the
The ONE Group

AI IN EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

What HR professionals are seeing, saying and doing



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ABOUT THIS SESSION

This document captures the key themes and discussion from a small-group HR community meetup held on 2 June 2026. The session brought together HR business partners, ER specialists, in-house HR directors and independent consultants from across sectors including manufacturing, education, life sciences, engineering and the arts.

There was no speaker. The format was deliberately conversational: a group of practitioners who have been dealing with the same pressures, talking frankly about what they are seeing in their organisations. The transcript has been edited for clarity and anonymised throughout.





We had somebody who was being taken through a disciplinary process, suddenly went off sick. Then it was: can't possibly appear on camera, can't possibly speak to you at all. The only communication we got was what ChatGPT spat out.

SETTING THE SCENE

The topic had emerged from a real and growing problem: HR teams are receiving grievances, disciplinary responses and ER communications that are clearly not written by the employee themselves. The language is too polished, the structure too formal, the length disproportionate. The culprit, in almost every case, is a generative AI tool.

What started as an occasional curiosity has, in the past year or so, become a routine feature of ER caseloads. One participant described receiving their first AI-generated grievance in early 2026. Others in the room had been dealing with them since mid-2025. A couple had yet to see one directly but were there precisely because they expected it was coming.

HOW DO YOU SPOT ONE?

The group agreed that AI-generated grievances are usually identifiable, though the signals vary. Common indicators included:

- A mismatch between the employee's usual written communication and the suddenly formal, structured grievance
- Sophisticated legal or HR terminology the employee would not ordinarily use
- Excessive length, often structured with headings, numbered sections and legal references

- References to financial figures or outcomes ("you should be able to get £40,000") that seem detached from reality
- Unfilled template placeholders, where the employee has simply copied and pasted without reviewing the output
- Claims that cite multiple forms of discrimination, sometimes in combinations that lack any plausible factual basis

One participant described a case where an employee who had previously self-identified as struggling with written English submitted a meticulously structured grievance document. Another described discovering, when an MD had accessed a work email account (a separate matter entirely), that the employee had literally asked the AI tool to get her as much money as possible.

> She'd said to it: can you get me as much money as you can? It said, based on this, you should be able to get £40,000. She was in the role three weeks, on a salary of £21,000.





THE SCALE PROBLEM

Volume and complexity were recurring themes. The group discussed grievances of 12, 50, 51, 192 pages. One case involved four separate grievances from the same individual following dismissal, each generating its own investigation, outcome, and appeal process. One HR professional estimated that for several months, managing a single complex AI-assisted case was essentially all she did.

The concern is not just the time cost. It is the nature of what AI produces: documents that are simultaneously very long and very thin. They look substantive but often have no coherent evidentiary core. They conflate unrelated issues, introduce spurious legal terminology, and cite outcomes the employee has no realistic prospect of achieving. The result is a document that is expensive to engage with and almost impossible to resolve quickly.

> It's not about the document being bad. It's that it turns what should be a one-page issue into fifteen pages. And then you're spending all your time responding to the fifteen pages instead of solving the actual problem.

WHAT IT DOES TO HR TEAMS

The conversation turned, frankly, to the human cost. Several participants described the emotional and professional toll of managing high volumes of complex, often adversarial ER cases. Words used included burnout, cynicism, overwhelmed, and dread.

The concern about cynicism was particularly candid. When every grievance looks like a strategic document designed to extract money rather than resolve a problem, it becomes harder to approach each new case with genuine openness. Participants acknowledged this as something they actively have to manage in themselves.

THE MOTIVATION QUESTION

A useful distinction emerged during the discussion: the motivation behind the grievance matters more than the format it arrives in.

If an employee is genuinely aggrieved and uses AI to help them articulate something they have struggled to put into words, the document may still be long or imperfect, but the underlying issue is real and probably resolvable. The conversation is still possible.

If the grievance is primarily a mechanism for generating a financial settlement, the AI is being used differently: not to communicate but to overwhelm. The length, the complexity, and the volume of claims are tactical. The employee (or, in some cases, a partner or third party managing the communications) is using AI to create work, not to seek resolution.

> If someone's motivated to try and get money out of a company, they are absolutely going to use AI. They'll throw the kitchen sink at it because they know the game. If someone has a genuine grievance, they may still use AI. But it is potentially solvable, because it comes from a place where they want to solve it.

WHAT WORKS: GETTING TO THE CONVERSATION

The most consistent piece of practical advice from the group was this: the document is not the grievance. The grievance is what the person actually feels. The job of HR is to get past the document and into the conversation.

Several participants described their standard opening question in grievance meetings as something along the lines of: tell me in your own words what this has been about, what matters to you. The AI-generated document is set aside. The person is asked to speak. In many cases, what comes out is significantly different from, and simpler than, what the document contains.

For employees whose primary communication difficulty is literacy or language, this also opens the door to more appropriate adjustments: voice recordings, transcription services, translation support. One organisation offers transcription services routinely where requested, so that the employee knows they are being captured accurately and does not feel the need to rely on an AI tool to make their case legible.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE: WHAT SHOULD CHANGE?

There was broad agreement that grievance policies need updating to reflect the reality of AI use. There was less consensus on exactly how.

DISCLOSURE

Several organisations are now asking employees directly, as a standard question: was this grievance generated with the assistance of AI? The consensus was that you cannot stop employees from using AI, and it would be counterproductive to try. But asking the question is reasonable, particularly where an organisation already encourages AI use in day-to-day work. If you are telling employees to use Copilot for their weekly reports, you cannot easily tell them they cannot use it to document a complaint.

GUIDANCE ON LENGTH AND FRAMING

The group discussed whether policies could set expectations around length and clarity. Some felt that guidance suggesting grievances should be succinct, clearly framed, and focused enough to allow timely investigation was both reasonable and enforceable in spirit, even if you cannot technically refuse to accept a document because it is too long.

Others were more cautious. Employment law tends to favour the employee. A policy that could be read as discouraging a person from setting out their case fully is a risk. The preference was for positive framing: we want to understand your concerns clearly so we can investigate them properly and quickly.

TIMELINESS

One consultant in the group described always including a three-month prompt in grievance policies: issues should be raised within three months of the event, unless there is a substantial reason why this was not possible. This has practical benefit both for investigation (witnesses are still available, events are still fresh) and, in tribunal proceedings, it reflects positively on the employer's process.



DATA PROTECTION

A concern that surfaced more than once was the data protection dimension. When an employee inputs detailed grievance content into a consumer AI tool, they are potentially sharing confidential personal data about colleagues and managers with a third-party platform. The free version of ChatGPT, in particular, does not offer the privacy protections that enterprise tools do.

Organisations with company-wide AI licences (Copilot was the most frequently mentioned) generally have policies stating that personal data should not be entered into the tool, and that company AI tools are for work purposes only. Whether those policies are being followed in practice is a different question. One participant noted that employees probably do not think about data protection at all when they are venting into a chatbot at 11pm.

MANAGING THE VEXATIOUS CASE

The discussion touched several times on what might be called the serial complainant problem. This is not a new phenomenon. Participants acknowledged that vexatious litigants and serial grievance-raisers existed long before AI. What AI changes is the barrier to entry and the volume of material they can generate.

Several practical levers were discussed for managing cases that appear to be primarily tactical:

- Setting a firm scope for the investigation: these are the issues we will investigate, and this is the process we will follow. Any new issues raised after that point will be treated separately.
- Engaging external consultants or legal advisers to manage particularly complex or time-consuming cases, removing the emotional and workload burden from in-house HR.
- Using occupational health to assess fitness to participate in process, rather than allowing indefinite deferral on the basis of stress-related absence.
- Where tribunal claims have been made, applying for cost orders against claimants who are pursuing claims without reasonable grounds, or asking the tribunal to require deposits against individual claims.

On the last point, one participant described a current case involving four tribunal claims, where the claimant has been required to put down a deposit against each one. The group agreed this is not a tool to use routinely, but it is a meaningful backstop when the volume and nature of claims is clearly disproportionate.

AI AS A TOOL FOR HR

The conversation was not one-sided. While the group was dealing with the problems AI creates, they were also using it themselves. Uses mentioned included:

- Summarising long documents to extract the core points before a meeting;
- Drafting initial responses or letters, then applying human review to check accuracy, tone and legal correctness;
- Transcribing recorded meetings using tools like Otter.ai or Rev, then cleaning up the transcript for the case file;
- Checking their own understanding of legislation or policy, while being clear-eyed that the output needs verification.

The general consensus was that AI is a useful assistant for bulk processing and first-draft work, but that it requires an experienced professional to sense-check the output. The risk for less experienced practitioners is that they accept what the tool tells them without questioning it. Several people described examples of AI giving incorrect or outdated information on legislation, including one instance where the tool took several rounds of questioning before it arrived at the correct answer on shared parental leave.

I love AI. I use it a lot. But it won't always give you the correct answer. It's about using your knowledge on top of it. Get it to do the bulk work, get it to summarise, and then you apply your skill and expertise to refine it.

LOOKING AHEAD

- The volume of AI-assisted claims is going to increase. The introduction of the Fair Work Agency, which will be able to bring tribunal claims on behalf of employees, is expected to push that further. The current tribunal system is already saturated. Waiting times for full hearings have stretched to three years or more in many cases. That means organisations are sometimes making commercial decisions to settle claims they would win, simply because the cost and management time of fighting them over three years exceeds the settlement value.
- Regulation of AI in employment contexts is seen as inevitable and necessary, but likely to lag well behind the pace of technology adoption. The legal framework as it currently exists was not designed to handle the volume or nature of what AI is enabling.
- There was also a broader discussion about the skills gap in the next generation entering the workforce. Participants who are parents as well as HR professionals noted that young people are growing up in an environment where AI handles tasks that previously required thinking, research, and synthesis. The concern is not that AI makes young people lazy; it is that they may not develop the capacity to sense-check what a tool tells them, because they have never had to. In HR and ER, that capacity is fundamental.

The critical thinking is the bit that's going to be needed more than ever. And that's the bit they're not getting.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

The group agreed to produce a short guidance sheet on AI in grievances, drawing on the experience in the room. In the meantime, a summary of the key practical points from the session:

FOR HANDLING AI-GENERATED GRIEVANCES

- Treat the document as a starting point, not the substance. The conversation is what matters.
- Ask the employee to explain, in their own words, what has happened and what they want. This one question does more than any amount of document analysis.
- Do not assume AI involvement means bad faith. Many people use it because they lack confidence in their own writing.
- Offer reasonable adjustments: recorded meetings, transcription, translation. Remove the need for AI to be the employee's voice.
- Ask directly whether AI was used to draft the submission. Normalise the question; do not treat it as an accusation.

FOR POLICY AND PROCESS

- Review your grievance policy. Add language about clear framing, disclosure of AI use, and timeliness of raising issues.
- If your organisation encourages or licenses AI use for work, your policy needs to address personal use and data entry. Employees should not be inputting colleagues' personal data into consumer-grade tools.
- Scope your investigations explicitly. Set out what will be investigated and when. Do not leave the door open for continuous additions.
- Keep your knowledge current. The primary protection against AI-generated nonsense is an HR professional who knows enough to spot it.

FOR COMPLEX OR VEXATIOUS CASES

- Consider external support for high-volume or emotionally demanding cases. Protecting your team matters.
- Use occupational health properly, including to assess fitness to attend process, not just fitness for work.
- Know the legal tools available: deposit orders, cost orders. They are not for routine use, but they exist for a reason.

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Next from the HR Community

Several events are in the pipeline, all driven by what practitioners say they need:

- A monthly online meetup for HR professionals to share platform experiences, tool reviews and live challenges;
- A dedicated session for HR advisers and business partners;
- A lunch-and-learn on supporting employees who are experiencing domestic abuse, hosted with a speaker who has direct personal experience of the workplace dimension;
- A further session specifically on AI and ER, following on from this one.

A closed WhatsApp group is also being set up for community members who want a place to ask quick questions and get peer input outside of formal events.

If you would like to be added, or if you have a topic you would like a future session to cover, get in touch.

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