HUNTER ADAMS WHITE PAPER

The Accountable Manager:

Raising Standards and Mitigating Risk – The Impact of the Employment Rights Act 2025.

HunterAdams HR

The Accountable Manager:
Reducing Risk and Raising Standards Under the Employment Rights Act 2025

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Executive Summary

The Employment Rights Act 2025 marks a decisive shift in the UK employment landscape. While the Act introduces new and strengthened employee protections, its most significant impact is not found in policy wording or procedural change, it lies in how organisations manage people day to day and, critically, who is accountable for those decisions.

That accountability now sits firmly with line managers.

Line managers are the point at which organisational values, legal obligations and employee experience converge. They shape culture through daily behaviour, but they also carry legal responsibility for fairness, consistency and process integrity. Under the Employment Rights Act 2025, the quality of management decisions, not just organisational intent, will be subject to greater scrutiny.

Many organisations are not fully prepared for this reality. Line managers are often promoted for technical expertise rather than people leadership capability, and many lack confidence or practical training. This creates a growing gap between the responsibilities managers are expected to carry and the support they are given to fulfil them.

The consequence is increased organisational risk. Inconsistent decision-making, delayed intervention, escalating employee relation issues, disengagement, attrition and avoidable legal exposure. Conversely, organisations that invest in line manager capability can significantly reduce risk while strengthening culture, engagement and leadership effectiveness.

In light of the changes introduced through the Employment Rights Act 2025, organisations should consider five key actions:

- **Recognise line managers as a primary key point** in the employment relationship and treat management capability as a strategic priority.
- **Assess current management capability and confidence**, identifying where gaps in knowledge or decision-making may expose the organisation to risk.
- **Invest in practical, scenario-based training** that equips managers to handle real workplace situations, rather than relying solely on policy updates or e-learning modules.
- **Create clearer support structures between HR and managers**, ensuring managers understand when to seek guidance while retaining accountability for day-to-day people management.
- **Embed consistent management standards across the organisation**, reinforcing fair process, good documentation and early intervention in people issues.

This white paper sets out that line manager capability is now a core form of risk control. Under the Employment Rights Act 2025, strengthening management capability is no longer optional development activity, it is a legal, cultural and commercial necessity.

The Changing Legal Landscape

The Employment Rights Act 2025 represents one of the most significant developments in UK employment law in recent years. While legislative reform is not unusual, the practical implications of this Act are different in one important respect: it raises expectations around how decisions are made, evidenced and explained.

Three themes are particularly significant:

- **Earlier and broader employee protections.** Increasing risk in early employment decisions. This strengthens the importance of consistent decision-making from the outset of the employment relationship. Processes such as onboarding, performance management and early-stage conduct issues now carry greater potential risk if they are handled inconsistently or without appropriate consideration.
- **Higher standards of fairness, transparency and procedural consistency.** Employers are increasingly expected to demonstrate that decisions affecting employees have been made transparently, proportionately and with appropriate consultation. This places greater emphasis on managers being able to explain the rationale behind decisions, follow established processes and document key steps clearly.
- **Greater scrutiny of behaviour and process, not just outcomes.** Employees are more aware of their rights, and regulators and tribunals are increasingly prepared to examine not only the outcome of workplace decisions but also the process that led to them.

Many organisations naturally respond to legislative change by updating policies, issuing guidance or revising employee handbooks. While these steps remain important, they are no longer sufficient on their own. The effectiveness of employment protections increasingly depends on how organisations apply them in practice, and that responsibility sits largely with line managers.

As a result, the Employment Rights Act 2025 should be viewed less as a compliance exercise and more as a shift in how accountability operates within organisations. The legal framework is changing, but so too is the level of scrutiny applied to routine managerial judgement calls.

The Shift from HR-Led to Manager-Led Risk

Alongside the legal changes themselves, there has been a gradual shift in where employment risk sits within organisations.

Historically, employment risk was often contained within HR led processes. Today the operating model has shifted. HR functions increasingly advise and enable, while managers remain accountable for execution.

Line managers remain responsible for leading teams, addressing performance issues, handling welfare concerns and responding to employee feedback. In practice, they are the individuals conducting the conversations that shape the employment relationship.

This matters because most employment disputes do not originate in formal procedures. They begin earlier, in avoided conversations, inconsistent responses, unclear expectations or delayed action. Under the Employment Rights Act 2025, tribunals and regulators are more likely to examine whether:

- **Similar situations were handled consistently**
- **Managers acted proportionately and transparently**
- **Concerns were addressed in a timely and fair manner**
- **Decisions were properly explained and evidenced**

In this context, the Employment Rights Act 2025 reinforces a structural reality that many organisations are already experiencing: the frontline of employment risk is the line manager. Policies, systems and HR guidance remain essential, but they do not answer these questions, manager behaviour does. As a result, line managers are now the primary control point for employment risk.

For organisations navigating this changing landscape, the key question is therefore not simply whether policies are compliant, but whether managers are equipped to apply them effectively in real situations.

The Accountability Gap

If the Employment Rights Act 2025 increases the importance of day-to-day management behaviour, the next question for many organisations is a difficult one: are line managers genuinely equipped to carry that level of accountability?

In many businesses, the answer is mixed. Managers are expected to lead teams, make decisions that affect people's careers, and navigate increasingly complex employment protections. Yet the support, training and time available to them often does not reflect the level of responsibility they carry.

This creates what can be described as an accountability gap. Managers are held responsible for people decisions, without being adequately equipped to make them.

Understanding the roots of this gap is essential for organisations looking to reduce risk and improve management effectiveness.

Why Line Managers Are Underprepared

One of the most common reasons managers struggle with people issues is simply how they arrive in the role. Many are promoted because they are strong technical performers or operational specialists. Their expertise may lie in finance, engineering, technology, sales or operations rather than in leading and developing people.

As a result, individuals often move into management roles with limited formal preparation for the realities of managing performance, addressing behaviour issues or handling difficult conversations.

Alongside this, many managers face a genuine capacity challenge. In growing organisations in particular, managers are expected to balance operational delivery with team leadership. Commercial targets, project deadlines and client demands can take priority, leaving limited time for regular one-to-ones, early performance conversations or proactive team management. People issues are therefore sometimes addressed only when they have already escalated.

This pressure can also drive avoidance behaviours. Managers may delay difficult conversations because they feel uncertain about how to approach them, or because they worry about saying the wrong thing. In other cases, they may take a reactive approach, allowing problems to build before seeking support.

Another common pattern is a heavy reliance on HR to resolve issues. While HR teams play a critical advisory role, they are not typically present for the day-to-day conversations that shape employee experience. When managers defer responsibility to HR entirely, issues are often escalated too late, once relationships have deteriorated or formal processes are already required.

Finally, there is often inconsistent understanding of employment law and organisational policy. Managers may have heard of key concepts such as fair process or documentation requirements but may not fully understand how these apply in practical situations. This can lead to well-intentioned but poorly executed decisions, particularly in areas such as performance management, conduct issues or flexible working requests.

Individually, each of these factors presents manageable challenges. Together, however, they create a situation where managers carry significant responsibility but may lack the confidence or clarity needed to exercise it consistently.

The Hidden Cost of Poor Manager Capability

When organisations consider the risk associated with people management decisions, the focus often turns quickly to employment tribunals. While legal exposure is certainly important, it is rarely the most immediate or frequent cost of ineffective management capability.

In practice, the consequences tend to appear first in day-to-day organisational performance and culture.

One of the most significant impacts is the loss of high-performing employees. Talented individuals often leave organisations not because of the work itself, but because of poor management experiences. Inconsistent feedback, unclear expectations or unresolved team tensions can quickly undermine engagement and retention.

Over time, these patterns can also contribute to cultural erosion. When employees see similar issues handled differently across teams, or when difficult behaviours are not addressed early, trust in management can begin to weaken. This creates frustration among employees who expect fairness and consistency in how decisions are made.

Ineffective manager capability can also create a significant drain on management and HR time. Issues that could have been addressed through early conversation and clear expectations can escalate into lengthy performance management processes, formal grievances or complex investigations. Senior leaders and HR teams are then drawn into situations that may have been avoidable with earlier intervention.

In addition, unresolved workplace issues can contribute to increased absence and employee relations cases. Workplace conflict, unclear expectations and poor communication are common factors behind grievances and stress-related absence, both of which place additional pressure on teams and operational performance.

Finally, there remains the legal and reputational risk associated with poorly handled processes. When concerns escalate into formal disputes or tribunal claims, organisations may face financial costs, leadership distraction and reputational impact.

To illustrate how these issues often develop in practice, consider two common scenarios drawn from anonymised client experience.

Case example: Delayed performance management

A high-growth organisation identified concerns about an employee's performance but the line manager delayed addressing the issue directly, hoping that performance would improve over time. Without clear expectations or structured feedback, the situation continued for several months before HR became involved. By that stage, the employee felt the concerns were unexpected and unfair, leading to a formal grievance and a prolonged performance management process. Early, confident intervention could have significantly reduced the time and disruption involved.

Case example: Inconsistent handling of team conflict

In another organisation, two teams experienced similar interpersonal conflicts. One manager addressed the issue quickly through facilitated conversations and clear expectations around behaviour. The other manager avoided intervening, hoping the situation would resolve itself. The latter case eventually escalated into a formal complaint and employee absence, requiring substantial HR involvement. The difference in outcome was not policy or process, but the manager's confidence in addressing the issue early.

These examples highlight a consistent theme: people management capability directly affects organisational risk, culture and performance.

For many organisations, the challenge is not a lack of intent but a lack of structured support for managers navigating increasingly complex workplace expectations. Bridging the accountability gap therefore requires a shift in how organisations view line manager development - not simply as leadership training, but as a critical component of operational risk management.

What ERA 2025 Changes for Line Manager Behaviour

While the Employment Rights Act 2025 introduces a number of legal reforms, it also raises expectations around how decisions are made, how conversations are handled and how fairly employees are treated.

For many organisations, the practical shift is this: people management decisions need to be more deliberate, consistent and well evidenced than in the past. Managers will need to approach areas such as recruitment, performance management, absence and workplace culture with greater confidence and clarity.

Below are several areas where the Act is likely to influence everyday management behaviour.

Recruitment and Early Employment Decisions

Changes to the qualifying period for unfair dismissal increase the importance of fair, evidence-based decision-making during recruitment and the early stages of employment.

For line managers, this places greater emphasis on getting recruitment decisions right in the first place. This includes structured interview processes, clear role expectations and more thoughtful assessment of both technical capability and behavioural fit.

Day-One Rights and Structured Onboarding

As more employment rights apply from the start of employment, onboarding becomes a critical management activity rather than simply an administrative process.

Managers play a key role in setting expectations, explaining how the team operates and establishing the foundations for effective working relationships. Structured onboarding conversations help employees understand what good performance looks like, how feedback will be given and where they can seek support.

It also increases the importance of a robust probation period with early and regular performance feedback during the first months of employment being key. If concerns arise, they should be raised clearly and constructively rather than left unaddressed until later.

Fair and Consistent Absence Management

With stronger employee protections in place, organisations will increasingly need to demonstrate that absence management processes are applied consistently and sensitively.

Line managers are often the first point of contact when employees report absence, making their response particularly important. Managers must balance empathy with consistency, holding open and supportive conversations about health and wellbeing, while also applying processes fairly and documenting interactions appropriately.

Flexible Working Conversations

The strengthening of flexible working rights places greater emphasis on constructive dialogue between managers and employees. This shift towards dialogue over procedure organisations to demonstrate that requests have been considered thoughtfully and reasonably.

For line managers, this means developing stronger conversation skills. Managers should be able to explore how a request might work in practice, discuss potential operational challenges and consider possible compromises where appropriate.

A well-managed conversation can often lead to a workable solution. Poorly handled discussions, on the other hand, can quickly create perceptions of unfairness or inflexibility.

Process Discipline in Managing Performance and Conduct

Changes to dismissal protections provides greater emphasis on transparency and evidence which reinforces the importance of early intervention, clear feedback and documented rationale. Managers should be able to explain the reasons behind decisions and demonstrate that employees have been treated consistently and given opportunities to improve where appropriate.

This does not mean every issue needs to escalate into a formal HR process. In many cases, early, informal conversations remain the most effective approach providing clarity to the employee. However, when concerns do continue, managers need to ensure that expectations are documented, feedback is clear and steps taken are aligned with organisational policy.

Proactive Culture Management and Harassment Prevention

Strengthened expectations around harassment prevention place greater responsibility on organisations to create safe and respectful working environments.

Line managers play a central role in this. They shape the tone of their teams, set behavioural expectations and are often the first to become aware of inappropriate behaviour or emerging tensions.

Effective managers do not simply respond when complaints are raised. They actively reinforce respectful behaviour, address concerns early and create an environment where employees feel comfortable speaking up.

This type of proactive culture management can significantly reduce the likelihood of more serious issues developing.

Taken together, these behavioural expectations highlight a consistent theme: good intent is no longer sufficient. Modern employment law increasingly relies on confident, capable management.

Why Policy Updates Alone Won't Work

When employment law changes, organisations often respond to legal change by updating policies, employee handbooks and guidance documents are circulated to managers. These steps are important and necessary but insufficient in isolation.

Policy Does Not Automatically Translate into Practice

Policies describe what should happen, while managers determine what actually happens in real time. Performance concerns emerge during busy project cycles. Absence conversations happen in the middle of operational pressures. Requests for flexibility arise when teams are already stretched. In these moments, managers rely far more on judgement and confidence than on the wording of a document.

Without the confidence to apply policies effectively, managers may avoid addressing issues, handle them inconsistently or escalate them unnecessarily to HR. In these cases, the policy itself may be compliant, but the outcome is still problematic because it was not applied well in practice.

In short, policy does not equal practice.

E-learning Does Not Build Management Capability

Many organisations also rely heavily on e-learning to communicate changes in employment law or internal processes. While digital learning can be a useful tool for raising awareness, it rarely builds the practical capability required to manage complex people issues.

Managing performance concerns, responding to workplace conflict or discussing flexible working arrangements requires more than knowledge of the rules. It requires judgement, communication skills and confidence in navigating difficult conversations.

These skills are rarely developed through passive learning alone. Managers need opportunities to discuss real scenarios, understand the reasoning behind policies and practise applying them in realistic situations.

The Handbook Is Not Protection

It is also common for organisations to assume that once policies are distributed and acknowledged, they have sufficiently protected themselves from risk. In reality, documentation alone carries limited weight if it is not reflected in day-to-day practice.

Employment tribunals and regulators increasingly look at how organisations behave in practice. A well-written policy offers little protection if managers are unable to demonstrate that it was followed consistently or that decisions were made fairly.

This reinforces the importance of equipping managers to interpret and apply policies appropriately rather than simply expecting them to read and remember written guidance.

The Limits of HR Firefighting

Another common response to complex people issues is to rely heavily on HR teams to step in when problems arise. While HR professionals play a critical role in advising on risk and supporting managers through formal processes, this approach can quickly become unsustainable.

When managers fail to address issues early, problems often escalate before HR becomes involved. What might have been resolved through an early conversation can turn into formal investigations, grievances or lengthy performance management processes.

Reframing Line Manager Training as Risk Mitigation

If organisations accept that line managers are increasingly central to employment risk, then the next step is to consider how those managers are supported. In many businesses, training is still viewed primarily as a development activity - something designed to improve leadership skills over time or support career progression.

However, in the context of changing employment legislation and growing expectations around fairness and accountability, line manager training should also be viewed as a form of operational risk mitigation.

Managers make daily decisions that shape the employee experience. They decide how feedback is delivered, how absence is handled, how team conflict is addressed and how requests for flexibility are considered. These moments rarely feel like “legal decisions”, yet they are precisely the interactions that are most often scrutinised when disputes arise. When managers are confident and capable, these interactions tend to be constructive, transparent and well managed. When they are uncertain or unsupported, the same situations can escalate quickly into grievances, employee relations cases or formal disputes.

Effective training therefore focuses on building practical management capability, equipping managers to navigate real workplace situations with confidence and consistency.

What Effective Line Manager Training Should Cover

To support managers effectively, training should focus on the practical skills and behaviours that underpin strong people management.

This begins with helping managers understand their role in modelling inclusive, fair and respectful behaviours. Through everyday actions – listening to employees, responding openly to feedback and applying standards consistently, managers set the tone for their team. Strong communication and active listening skills are essential, enabling managers to facilitate open conversations, understand different perspectives and address performance, wellbeing or workplace challenges constructively.

Training should also build managers’ confidence in coaching-style leadership to develop solutions, improve performance and grow in confidence rather than relying solely on direction or correction.

Alongside this, managers may benefit from a basic understanding of employment law and organisational policies as they apply to everyday situations. This includes knowing how to make fair, consistent decisions, document key discussions appropriately and follow clear processes that support accountability and transparency.

Training should also address managing conflict and handling difficult conversations confidently. Many workplace issues escalate simply because conversations are delayed or avoided. Managers who feel comfortable addressing concerns early are far more likely to resolve issues informally and maintain positive working relationships.

Finally, managers must feel equipped to manage conflict and handle difficult conversations early, preventing issues from escalating. Effective performance management, early feedback and timely intervention all play a critical role in maintaining positive working relationships. Managers also need to understand their legal and organisational responsibilities when handling sensitive matters, such as discrimination, harassment or bullying; understanding the importance of confidentiality; and knowing when to seek HR support.

Together, these capabilities form the foundation of effective, confident and accountable line management.

What It Should Not Be

While the importance of manager development is widely recognised, many traditional training approaches fall short of building meaningful capability.

One common challenge is training that focuses heavily on theory rather than practical application. While it is important for managers to understand key principles, lengthy explanations of best practice and legislation rarely translate into confident, effective decision-making. better management decisions. Managers tend to gain more value from practical examples, discussion of real workplace scenarios and clear guidance on how to apply policies in everyday situations.

Another limitation is the reliance on one-off workshops. Single sessions can be useful for raising awareness, but lasting capability is built through ongoing learning. Management skills develop over time when training is reinforced, revisited and supported by opportunities to practise and reflect on new approaches.

Training programmes can be less effective when they rely on generic leadership models that are disconnected from the organisation's environment. Managers benefit most from development that reflects the specific challenges they face within their own teams and industry context.

Finally, when programmes are viewed as a tick-box compliance exercise, the opportunity to build meaningful capability and confidence can be missed.

By approaching manager development as long-term investment rather than a one-off activity, organisations can significantly strengthen their operational resilience. Well-supported managers are better equipped to manage people effectively, resolve issues early and create positive, high-performing working environments.

A Practical Capability Framework for 2026 and Beyond

As the expectations placed online managers continue to evolve, many organisations face a practical challenge: what does good line management actually look like in this environment?

At Hunter Adams, we see effective line management capability resting on four core areas. Together, these form The Four Pillars of Accountable Line Management - a framework designed to help organisations strengthen management practice while reducing operational and legal risk.

Pillar 1: Conversational Competence

At the heart of most workplace issues is a conversation that either happened well, fell short or did not happen at all. Conversational competence refers to a manager's ability to engage in clear, respectful and constructive dialogue with employees.

This includes giving feedback, addressing concerns early, discussing performance openly and creating an environment where employees feel comfortable raising issues.

What good looks like

Managers hold regular, constructive conversations with their teams. Feedback is delivered clearly and respectfully, expectations are discussed openly and difficult conversations are approached with confidence rather than avoided.

Employees feel heard and understand where they stand, even when feedback is challenging.

Risks if absent

When managers delay or avoid conversations, performance concerns may go unaddressed, misunderstandings may escalate and team tensions can build over time. By the time formal processes begin, relationships may already have deteriorated.

How to build capability

Conversational skills develop through practice, reflection and scenario-based learning. Managers benefit from training that allows them to rehearse difficult conversations, learn structured approaches to feedback and develop active listening skills.

Pillar 2: Decision-Making Discipline

Line managers are frequently required to make decisions that affect employees' roles, responsibilities and development. Decision-making discipline refers to the ability to approach those decisions consistently, objectively and with appropriate evidence.

What good looks like

Managers gather relevant facts before making decisions, apply policies consistently and document important steps where necessary. They can clearly explain the reasoning behind their decisions and demonstrate that employees have been treated fairly.

Risks if absent

Inconsistent decision-making can quickly undermine trust within teams and expose organisations to disputes. Employees may perceive favouritism or unfair treatment if similar situations are handled differently across teams or if decisions appear poorly justified.

How to build capability

Organisations can strengthen this capability by providing managers with simple decision-making frameworks and practical guidance on documentation. Case studies, peer discussion and HR coaching can also help managers build confidence in applying consistent processes.

Pillar 3: Cultural Responsibility

Line managers play a critical role in shaping team culture. Cultural responsibility refers to a manager's ability to create and maintain a respectful, inclusive and psychologically safe working environment.

Managers influence culture through everyday behaviour - how they respond to inappropriate conduct, how they model respectful communication and how they ensure all team members feel valued and supported.

What good looks like

Managers set clear behavioural expectations and address inappropriate conduct early. They encourage open discussion, support diversity of perspective and create environments where employees feel safe raising concerns.

Inclusive behaviours are demonstrated consistently through everyday management practice.

Risks if absent

When managers do not actively shape team culture, problematic behaviours may go unchallenged. This can lead to conflict, disengagement and increased risk of harassment or discrimination complaints. Over time, it can also damage trust in leadership, lead to higher attrition and weaken organisational culture.

How to build capability

Developing cultural responsibility requires both awareness and practical skill. Training should help managers recognise behaviours that may create risk, understand their responsibilities in maintaining respectful workplaces and practise responding to sensitive situations appropriately.

Pillar 4: Legal Literacy

Legal literacy does not mean turning managers into employment law specialists. Instead, it refers to a practical understanding of the principles that underpin fair and lawful people management.

Managers should understand the intent behind key areas of employment protection and how those principles influence everyday decisions around recruitment, performance management, absence and workplace conduct.

What good looks like

Managers understand the importance of fairness, consistency and transparency in decision-making. They recognise when an issue may have legal implications and know when to involve HR for guidance. Policies are used as practical tools rather than seen as administrative requirements.

Risks if absent

Without this basic understanding, managers may unintentionally create risk through inconsistent treatment of employees, poorly handled conversations or failure to follow appropriate processes. Even well-intentioned decisions can lead to disputes if they appear unfair or poorly evidenced.

How to build capability

Capability in this area is developed through practical learning that focuses on real workplace scenarios. Training should explain how legal principles apply in day-to-day management situations and give managers the confidence to recognise potential risks early.

Bringing the Four Pillars Together

Each of these pillars reinforces the others. Legal literacy supports better decision-making. Conversational competence enables issues to be addressed early. Cultural responsibility shapes the environment in which those conversations take place.

Together, they form the foundation of accountable and confident line management.

For organisations adapting to the expectations created by the Employment Rights Act 2025, strengthening these four areas provides a practical and structured way to reduce risk while improving the overall quality of people management.

Implementation: Moving from Reactive to Proactive

Recognising the importance of line manager capability is only the first step. The real challenge for many organisations is translating that understanding into practical action.

In many businesses, particularly SMEs and scaling organisations, people management support tends to develop reactively. Training is introduced after issues arise, HR and/or senior leadership become involved once problems escalate, and management capability grows unevenly across teams. While this approach can resolve individual situations, it rarely reduces the underlying risk.

A more effective approach is to build management capability deliberately and proactively, treating it as part of operational infrastructure rather than an occasional development initiative. The following four-step approach provides a practical way for organisations to begin strengthening line manager capability.

Step 1: Conduct a Management Risk Audit

The starting point is understanding where potential risks already exist within the organisation. Rather than assuming all managers face the same challenges, organisations benefit from identifying areas where management capability or people management practices may already be under pressure. This allows development efforts to be focused where they will have the greatest impact.

A useful starting point is a hotspot analysis, reviewing existing data and patterns across the organisation. Indicators might include:

- **High levels of disciplinary or grievance cases within particular teams**
- **Elevated employee turnover in specific departments**
- **Patterns of absence that suggest underlying team issues**
- **Ongoing performance concerns that are not being addressed early**

For SMEs and growing businesses, this analysis does not need to be complex. Even a simple review of HR case data, exit feedback and management feedback can reveal patterns that highlight where additional support may be required.

The goal is to identify where managers may be facing the greatest challenges, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach to development.

Step 2: Establish a Capability Baseline

Once potential risk areas are identified, the next step is to understand the current capability of managers across the organisation.

An effective way to do this is through a simple confidence versus competence assessment. Managers are asked to reflect on how confident they feel handling different people management situations, while organisations also assess how effectively those situations are currently being managed in practice.

This comparison can reveal important gaps. In some cases, managers may feel confident but lack understanding of good process or documentation. In others, managers may understand what they should do but lack the confidence to have difficult conversations or address issues early.

Gathering this insight allows organisations to tailor development programmes to the areas where managers need the most support.

For smaller organisations, this baseline assessment can often be achieved through structured conversations, short surveys or workshops with managers and HR.

Step 3: Deliver Targeted Development

With a clearer understanding of both risk and capability gaps, organisations can begin to design development that is practical and relevant to the challenges managers actually face.

At a minimum, this typically includes core training covering key areas of people management such as performance conversations, absence management, and handling difficult discussions.

However, the most effective programmes go beyond theory. Scenario-based workshops allow managers to work through realistic situations, discuss different approaches and build confidence in applying policies to real-world challenges.

For managers who may already be dealing with complex employee relations situations, targeted coaching or one-to-one support can also be valuable. This allows managers to talk through specific challenges, develop structured approaches and build confidence in handling sensitive issues.

This tiered approach helps ensure development is both practical and proportionate, particularly in organisations where managers may have varying levels of experience.

Step 4: Reinforce Good Management Practice

Training alone is unlikely to create lasting change unless it is supported by ongoing reinforcement.

Organisations can strengthen management capability by making sure managers continue to receive practical support after initial training. This may involve rethinking how HR (or external HR support, where applicable) works alongside managers, shifting away from a purely reactive approach towards providing guidance earlier in the decision-making process.

Simple tools can also make a significant difference. Manager toolkits, conversation guides and documentation templates help translate policy into practical action and give managers confidence in handling common situations.

Another effective approach is creating opportunities for managers to learn from one another. Manager forums or peer discussion groups allow leaders to share experiences, discuss challenges and build confidence through shared learning.

For SMEs and scaling businesses, these forums can be particularly valuable as management capability develops alongside organisational growth.

Moving from a reactive to a proactive approach does not require large-scale programmes or complex infrastructure. What matters most is a deliberate and structured approach to building line manager capability over time.

By understanding where risks sit, supporting managers with practical development and reinforcing good practice across the organisation, businesses can create a stronger foundation for confident and accountable people management.

The Strategic Opportunity

The Employment Rights Act 2025 presents organisations with a choice.

Those who focus on compliance will update policies and increase procedural oversight.

Those who take a broader view will recognise that manager capability is now a strategic lever one that will deliver benefits far beyond legal compliance.

Strengthen Management Capability

Improving the consistency of management practice across teams is a significant opportunity for organisations. When managers are supported with clear guidance, practical tools and relevant training, they are better equipped to handle people management situations in a structured and thoughtful way.

This reduces risk and creates a more predictable, supportive working environment where expectations are clear, feedback is constructive and issues are addressed earlier.

Enhancing Employee Engagement and Accountability

Employees' experiences at work are shaped primarily by their direct manager. Confident and capable managers who communicate clearly and address concerns constructively foster higher levels of trust, engagement and alignment with organisational goals. At the same time, stronger management capability creates clearer accountability. Managers understand their responsibilities, decision-making becomes more consistent, and HR is able to operate more effectively as a strategic partner rather than an escalation point.

Supporting a Positive Workplace Culture

Line managers play a central role in shaping workplace culture through their everyday behaviours.

When managers feel confident addressing inappropriate behaviour, supporting employee wellbeing and encouraging open dialogue, teams are more likely to develop respectful, inclusive and psychologically safe environments.

This helps to prevent issues from escalating and contributes to a culture where employees feel valued and supported.

The Value of a Proactive Approach

Investing early in management capability delivers clear organisational benefits. Early intervention and consistent decision-making reduce the likelihood of disputes escalating into formal grievances or legal claims.

Stronger management practice also supports employee retention, protects senior leadership and HR capacity, and enhances employer reputation in a competitive labour market.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 will raise expectations around how organisations manage people. While some businesses may respond with minimal compliance, others can use this as an opportunity to strengthen the foundations of effective people management. By investing in line manager capability now, organisations can reduce risk, improve employee experience and build more resilient organisations and well-managed workforce for the future.

Conclusion: Accountability is a Capability Issue

The Employment Rights Act 2025 makes one reality unavoidable – organisations are only as compliant, fair and resilient as their line managers.

Line managers are the individuals having the conversations that shape employee experience. They set expectations, manage performance, respond to concerns and make daily decisions that influence fairness, engagement and culture within teams.

The standard of their judgement, behaviour and communication defines both employee experience and organisational risk.

This is why the changes introduced through the Employment Rights Act 2025 should not be viewed solely as a legal or compliance challenge. They highlight a broader organisational question: are managers equipped to lead people effectively in a more accountable environment?

Policies, processes and HR support remain essential foundations. But they cannot replace the judgement, communication and consistency required from managers in real workplace situations. When managers lack the capability or confidence to address issues early or are uncertain about how to apply policies, organisations are more likely to see avoidable disputes, inconsistent decision-making and unnecessary pressure placed on HR teams.

Conversely, when organisations invest in building management capability, the benefits extend far beyond risk reduction. Confident managers address challenges earlier, communicate more openly with their teams and apply processes more consistently. Employees experience clearer expectations and fairer treatment, while leadership teams spend less time responding to escalated issues.

The core message is straightforward:

- **Line managers do not become more accountable simply because legislation changes.**
- **They become accountable because organisations invest in building the capability and confidence required to manage people well.**

With the Employment Rights Act 2025 now in force, strengthening line manager capability is therefore not just a development initiative. It is a practical step towards creating more resilient organisations, healthier workplace cultures and more effective leadership at every level.

Businesses that take this opportunity seriously will not only navigate legislative change more confidently - they will also build stronger foundations for sustainable growth in the years ahead.

About Hunter Adams

Hunter Adams supports organisations to navigate complex people challenges, with a strong focus on building confident, capable and accountable leadership at every level.

As there is greater responsibility on how decisions are made day to day, the capability of line managers and senior leaders becomes a critical factor in managing risk and maintaining trust.

A key part of our approach is developing practical leadership capability. Our learning and development offering is designed to equip both people managers and senior leaders with the skills and confidence to handle their responsibilities effectively.

For people managers, we deliver hands-on, practical training focused on the realities of managing teams. This includes areas such as performance management, absence, employee relations and workplace investigations, helping managers apply policy and employment law confidently in real situations.

For senior leadership teams, we provide bespoke development, executive coaching and leadership programmes that strengthen decision-making, accountability and organisational alignment.

Alongside this, Hunter Adams provides flexible HR support tailored to organisational needs, including:

- Interim HR professionals who can quickly strengthen capability and support leaders through complex people challenges
- Outsourced HR services that provide consistency, structure and oversight
- HR recruitment to build long-term leadership and specialist expertise

Our approach is commercial, people-focused and grounded in real-world experience. We work as trusted partners, helping organisations build confident leadership, reduce risk and create a more consistent employee experience.

If you'd like to discuss how your organisation can strengthen leadership capability and accountability, feel free to get in touch.

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