

Case Trend Summary

Prepared by: Employee Relations Specialist, People Operations ♦ Northbridge Advisory Partners Date: 2026-04-07 Review Period: Q4 2025 ♦ Q1 2026 Cases Reviewed: 4 Classification: Internal Confidential ♦ Restrict Access Downstream use: This document feeds into HR10 - Policy / Handbook Update Drafts

Executive Overview

Northbridge Advisory Partners recorded four employee relations cases in Q4 2025 ♦ Q1 2026, concentrated in two practices: Risk & Compliance Advisory (2 cases) and Data & AI Advisory (2 cases). The dominant pattern is management procedural non-compliance ♦ two cases involve the same Practice Head in Risk & Compliance Advisory failing to follow established policy on supervision, check-ins, and performance management. A second pattern links post-acquisition integration gaps to both workplace conflict (Data & AI) and pay inequity (Data & AI), with engagement survey risk flags corroborating both. Overall risk posture is High: all four cases are rated High severity, three involve senior leaders as respondents, and two have direct engagement survey correlation requiring policy-level action.

Case Volume & Distribution

Case Type	Count	Open	Closed	Escalated
Grievance	2	1	0	1 (Under Review)
Workplace Conflict	1	1	0	0
Performance / Disciplinary	1	1	0	0
Total	4	3	0	1

Key Patterns

Pattern 1: Management Procedural Non-Compliance (Risk & Compliance Advisory)

- **Description:** The Practice Head, Risk & Compliance Advisory, is named in two separate cases within the same quarter ♦ a grievance about management absence (ER-2026-014) and a performance case with multiple policy breaches (ER-2026-019).
- **Cases Involved:** ER-2026-014, ER-2026-019
- **Risk Level:** High
- **Policy Implications:** Performance Management Policy Section 3.2 (pre-PIP requirements not met), Section 3.4 (PIP communicated without Employee Relations Specialist approval), Grievance Policy Section 2.3 (investigation timeline at risk), Workplace Conflict Resolution Policy Section 5.2 (early intervention obligation)
- **Evidence Summary:**
 - ER-2026-014: Associate Consultant filed grievance after five months with no structured check-ins; calendar review confirmed 68% Practice Head travel days; probation review overdue
 - ER-2026-019: Practice Head attempted to initiate PIP without documented verbal feedback, formal discussion, or improvement period (S3.2); communicated PIP via Teams without Employee Relations Specialist approval (S3.4)
 - Engagement Risk Flag #5 (Management Effectiveness score 58% in Risk & Compliance, -14 pts vs firm avg) corroborates the pattern

Pattern 2: Post-Acquisition Integration Gaps Driving Cases

- **Description:** Two cases in Data & AI Advisory trace directly to unresolved Meridian acquisition integration issues ♦ one workplace conflict between legacy Northbridge and former Meridian employees, and one pay equity grievance created by acquisition salary protections.
- **Cases Involved:** ER-2026-017, ER-2026-021
- **Risk Level:** High
- **Policy Implications:** Workplace Conflict Resolution Policy Section 5.2 and 5.3 (conflict management and mediation), Equal Pay & Compensation Equity Section 6.1 (comparable pay commitment) and Section 6.3 (acquired employee salary protections ♦ no transition procedure documented)
- **Evidence Summary:**
 - ER-2026-017: Workplace conflict between joint project leads (legacy vs former Meridian) with no integration protocol in place; hotline report confirms team morale impact
 - ER-2026-021: 18% pay gap (P32 vs P58) between same-grade employees; gap caused by Meridian salary protection with no documented expiry process
 - Engagement Risk Flag #4 (post-acquisition cultural fragmentation, Culture & Belonging score 65% in Data & AI) and Flag #1 (compensation competitiveness gap rated Critical) corroborate the pattern

Pattern 3: Engagement Survey Signals Predicting Case Activity

- **Description:** Three of four cases have direct correlations with engagement risk flags from the Q1 2026 survey analysis ♦ management effectiveness, post-acquisition fragmentation, and compensation gaps.
- **Cases Involved:** ER-2026-014, ER-2026-017, ER-2026-021
- **Risk Level:** Medium
- **Policy Implications:** Escalation & Severity Criteria ♦ the engagement survey correlation trigger (added January 2026) has not previously been applied; these cases represent the first test of that criterion
- **Evidence Summary:**
 - ER-2026-014 correlates with Flag #5 (management effectiveness) and Flag #6 (onboarding quality)
 - ER-2026-017 correlates with Flag #4 (cultural fragmentation)
 - ER-2026-021 correlates with Flag #1 (compensation gap ♦ Critical)
 - Only ER-2026-019 (performance/PIP) lacks a direct engagement flag correlation

Escalation Summary

1. **Practice Head, Risk & Compliance Advisory ♦ dual-case pattern:** Two formal cases in one quarter naming the same senior leader meets the Escalation & Severity Criteria trigger for automatic escalation ("A second formal complaint naming the same respondent within 12 months"). The HR Director should be briefed on the combined pattern and a determination made on whether management coaching, supervision support, or formal action is warranted.
2. **ER-2026-014 ♦ investigation timeline overdue:** The grievance was filed on 2026-01-22. The 15-working-day investigation window under Grievance Policy S2.3 has been exceeded. Per Escalation & Severity Criteria, cases that remain open beyond twice the response timeline escalate one severity level. This case should be prioritised for hearing scheduling.
3. **ER-2026-019 ♦ unauthorised PIP communication requires immediate remediation:** The Consultant was informed of a PIP that has no procedural validity. This creates a risk of counter-grievance or legal challenge. The Employee Relations Specialist should clarify PIP status with the Consultant as a matter of priority.
4. **ER-2026-021 ♦ pay equity review before July 2026:** The Meridian salary protection clause expires at the July 2026 review cycle. Without a documented transition procedure, the firm risks perpetuating the inequity or creating new grievances when protections lapse. The Compensation Analyst and HR Director should establish the transition process before the review cycle begins.

Next-Step Options

- Commission management effectiveness review for Risk & Compliance Advisory.** The dual-case pattern (ER-2026-014, ER-2026-019) and engagement Flag #5 indicate a systemic management gap in this practice. Options include targeted management coaching for the Practice Head, a structured check-in cadence requirement, or temporary oversight by the HR Director. *Rationale:* Two cases and an engagement flag pointing to the same leader within one quarter meets the threshold for organisational intervention rather than case-by-case remediation.
- Develop a post-acquisition team integration protocol.** Case ER-2026-017 exposed the absence of any documented process for integrating Meridian and Northbridge teams on shared projects. Without this, similar conflicts are likely in other practices with mixed teams. *Rationale:* The Meridian acquisition brought approximately 140 employees across multiple practices; Data & AI is the first to surface a formal case, but engagement Flag #4 suggests fragmentation is broader.
- Conduct a firm-wide pay equity audit focused on acquisition-era salary distortions.** Case ER-2026-021 revealed a structural pay gap traceable to acquisition salary protections. The Compensation Analyst's data shows Data & AI has the widest internal pay spread at the Consultant grade. Additional gaps likely exist. *Rationale:* Engagement Flag #1 rates the compensation gap as Critical; addressing one grievance without auditing the practice risks further informal discoveries and additional grievances.
- Operationalise the salary protection expiry process before July 2026.** Policy Section 6.3 requires protected salary terms to have a defined expiry, but no procedure exists for what happens when the protection lapses. Without this, the firm faces either perpetuating inequity or creating new grievances during the July review cycle. *Rationale:* The protection clause expires in approximately 3 months; the process design, stakeholder alignment, and affected-employee communication require lead time.
- Apply the engagement survey correlation escalation trigger to active cases.** The Escalation & Severity Criteria added this trigger in January 2026 but it has not been applied. Three of four current cases have direct engagement flag correlations. Formally documenting these correlations strengthens the evidence base and sets a precedent for future cases. *Rationale:* Consistent application of the new criterion establishes the operational norm and ensures engagement data is systematically integrated into case management.
- Prioritise overdue policy reviews for Sections 2, 3, 5, and 6.** All four policy sections implicated in current cases are overdue for review (6-17 months overdue). Updating these policies — particularly the Performance Management Policy (S3) and the Equal Pay & Compensation Equity Policy (S6) — would address procedural gaps exposed by the current caseload. *Rationale:* The policy gaps are not abstract; they directly enabled the procedural failures documented in ER-2026-019 and the structural inequity in ER-2026-021. This recommendation feeds directly into HR10 (Policy / Handbook Update Drafts).

Appendix: Engagement Risk Flag Cross-Reference

Engagement Risk Flag	Related Case(s)	Correlation Strength
Flag #1: Compensation competitiveness gap (Data & AI Advisory) ♦ Critical	ER-2026-021	Strong ♦ direct evidence (18% pay gap confirmed, same practice, benchmarking data matches)
Flag #4: Post-acquisition cultural fragmentation ♦ High	ER-2026-017	Strong ♦ direct evidence (workplace conflict between legacy and former Meridian employees)
Flag #5: Management effectiveness deficit (Risk & Compliance) ♦ High	ER-2026-014	Strong ♦ direct evidence (grievance about management absence, calendar confirms 68% travel)
Flag #6: Onboarding quality failure ♦ High	ER-2026-014	Moderate ♦ circumstantial (no onboarding plan in HRIS for the grievant; no probation review completed)
Flag #2: Career progression framework gap ♦ Critical	None	None ♦ no case directly references career progression
Flag #3: HR Systems under-resourcing ♦ Critical	None	None ♦ no case involves HR Systems team
Flag #7: Unreliable Digital & Technology data ♦ Medium	None	None ♦ no case involves Digital & Technology

