Emotional Re-Victimization in the Workplace: The Burden of Concern Reporting Systems

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Abstract

Workplace concern reporting channels are essential for addressing workplace issues such as discrimination, harassment, and interpersonal conflicts, but past research has proven that existing reporting mechanisms often fail to support employees effectively. While organizations implement formal reporting channels, employees frequently experience a range of negative emotional distress, leading to silence and disengagement. Through qualitative research with 10 employees and 12 human resource (HR) professionals with experience reporting and handling concerns, respectively, this study examines the emotional barriers shaping workplace concern reporting and the misalignment between employees' expectations and HR's priorities. Our findings establish that fear of retaliation, power imbalances, perceptions of futility, and skepticism of systems all create additional emotional labor for employees, significantly discouraging them from reporting concerns, while HR professionals prioritize legal risk management and procedural efficiency over emotional well-being. This disconnect not only suppresses employee voice but also contributes to what we term *emotional re-victimization*: employees who seek redress encounter unsupported systems that exacerbate their distress rather than mitigate it. To improve current concern reporting channels, we propose a human-centered framework for workplace reporting technologies that better aligns with employee needs and HR realities, fostering psychological safety, procedural transparency, and emotional support. By reimagining reporting mechanisms with emotional resilience and organizational accountability, this study advocates concern reporting mechanisms that empower employees rather than silence them.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing → Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

Keywords

concern reporting channels, emotional labor, workplace, employee voice, emotional barriers, trust in technology

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1 Introduction

Workplace issues such as discrimination, harassment, and interpersonal conflict pose significant challenges that impact both employees and organizations [45]. For employees, workplace issues can erode their well-being, trust, and job satisfaction, while for organizations, unresolved concerns can result in diminished job performance, higher turnover rates, and a weakened workplace culture [59]. A toxic workplace leads to decreased employee engagement and exacerbates organizational challenges [52]. Conversely, a positive work environment enhances employee commitment and performance, translating into improved task outcomes [69]. For employees, having the ability to voice concerns without fear of retaliation is essential to fostering psychological safety and a sense of agency, which has been shown to improve job satisfaction and engagement [22]. For organizations, addressing workplace concerns is not only an ethical obligation but also a strategic priority, which contributes to long-term success by reducing risks associated with litigation, improving workplace equity, and enhancing the organization's reputation [15].

The democratization of the workplace has promoted the emergence of more democratic organizational forms, empowering employees to advocate for themselves and proactively express their concerns [2]. This shift has contributed to the establishment of more diverse channels for employees to report concerns and voice their opinions. During this period, formal mechanisms, including grievance procedures, structured surveys, and trade union representation, became part of broader labor rights movements aimed at addressing inequities and providing employees with channels to challenge managerial decisions [17, 36]. Technological advances have revolutionized employee discourse in the workplace, introducing new avenues for employees to express their opinions [31]. More recently, digital platforms, such as Slack, Google Workspace, and Yammer, now complement the aforementioned conventional channels [31] and facilitate spontaneous and rich interactions that enhance team cohesion, support employee well-being, and foster both efficient work processes and meaningful social relationships [35, 53].

These technological and organizational shifts have expanded the availability of concern reporting channels for employees, but they

often ignore the emotional realities that employees have when deciding whether or how to use these systems. Sociological research highlights how emotions such as anger and grief can transform passivity into agency, driving individuals to seek justice and collective action [28, 61]. However, while organizations offer a variety of reporting options—ranging from formal mechanisms like grievance procedures, anonymous hotlines, and structured surveys, to informal avenues such as open-door policies and employee resource groups—employees often struggle to navigate these systems effectively. Despite the growing availability of these channels, research indicates that these mechanisms are often underutilized and present challenges for both employees and HR professionals [3]. To understand employees' and HR professionals' experiences with concern reporting systems, we conducted a qualitative study in California, USA. This research included semi-structured interviews with 12 HR professionals and 10 employees, with approximately 24 hours of interview data. We also attended multiple offline and online seminars organized by HR organizations to observe professional perspectives on workplace investigations and concern reporting practices. Our findings indicate that beyond procedural and structural barriers, emotional dynamics significantly shape employees' willingness to report concerns and HR professionals' ability to manage employees' concerns effectively. By highlighting these overlooked aspects, our study emphasizes the need to rethink human-centered reporting technologies—one that considers the emotional labor involved and integrates design principles for effective workplace reporting mechanisms.

Concern reporting, as we will foreground, involves complex emotional states that are not adequately addressed by existing systems. Emotions such as fear, futility, skepticism, and vulnerability are central to employees' experiences but remain underexplored in research on reporting mechanisms. Research has demonstrated the importance of emotions in areas such as employee engagement [34], interpersonal relationship management in the workplace [54], and employee performance [10]. However, emotion's role in the context of workplace reporting systems remains insufficiently explored. Through our work, we examined both the structural and affective dimensions of workplace concern reporting, analyzing how employees and HR professionals experience, perceive, and engage with these systems. We argue that both technological and human-mediated concern reporting systems often neglect the emotional labor involved, leading to employee disappointment and frustration rather than resolution. This oversight has profound implications for designing and implementing workplace reporting tools, as emotionally insensitive systems may inadvertently suppress employee voice rather than empower it. We pose the following research questions:

(1) **What experiences do employees and HR professionals have with workplace concern reporting channels?** As we analyzed these experiences, we found that emotional dynamics play a central role in shaping how employees and HR professionals engage with these reporting systems. This led us to the below research question.
(2) **How do emotions influence employees' willingness to report workplace concerns, and in what ways can they serve as either barriers or motivators in concern reporting?**

By centering emotion in our analysis, we bridge the gap between organizational structures and user experience in concern reporting.

Reimagining the relationship between employees and organizations requires centering the employee experience in workplace engagement strategies; this includes restructuring traditional Human Resource Management (HRM) methods to better align with the demands of the modern workplace [50]. The human resources (HR) industry is typically tasked to develop corporate grievance procedures, and effective grievance procedures are claimed to protect employers from liability and serve as a defense for businesses when faced with litigation [14]. Conversely, many employees perceive current mechanisms as bureaucratic, opaque, and ineffective, which often discourages them from reporting workplace concerns. In this study, we identify a critical misalignment between the priorities and desired outcomes of HR departments and employees, and this misalignment further hinders meaningful workplace change. For employees, reporting workplace concerns means seeking emotional empathy, transparency, and meaningful action, while HR departments prioritize risk management, legal compliance, and organizational reputation. From the design perspective, this misalignment not only reveals the limitations of the current concern reporting mechanism but also provides us with the space and opportunity to rethink how and for whom to design new reporting channels. This informs our third research question: **Where is the misalignment between employees and HR professionals in the use of concern reporting channels? How might we design concern reporting mechanisms that are more inclusive, more sensitive to emotional needs, and more responsive to stakeholders?**

By centering emotion in concern reporting system design, this study contributes to broader discussions in HCI, human-centered workplace technologies, and organizational trust-building. In this article, we synthesize the role of emotions in workplace concern reporting by introducing the concept of *emotional re-victimization*, and illustrate how fear, futility, skepticism, and vulnerability shape employees' decision-making and engagement with reporting systems. Second, this research highlights the need for concern reporting tools to better accommodate emotional distress, power imbalances, and psychological safety. Finally, this study identifies a critical misalignment between employees' expectations and HR professionals' priorities, revealing how current reporting mechanisms prioritize case closure rather than making meaningful organizational change. We argue that workplace concern reporting systems should be co-designed with employees, HR professionals, and technology developers to create mechanisms that balance procedural fairness with emotional safety, along with the practical realities of today's corporations.

2 Related Work

This section explores the role of emotional dynamics in shaping interactions with technology and their implications for workplace behavior and reporting systems. By examining how emotions influence technology adoption, emotional labor, and the expression or suppression of employee voice, this section highlights the intricate relationship between emotional experiences and organizational processes.

2.1 Workplace Voice and Employee Silence

Employee voice refers to the individual or collective act of seeking to change objectionable states through the use of voice practices, whether it be through individual or collective petitioning of the responsible management directly, or through various types of actions or protests [29]. In the context of concern reporting, employee voice represents the act of raising concerns about misconduct, discrimination, or inequitable treatment through formal or informal channels. Wilkinson and Fay [68] describe employee voice as the degree to which employees can influence workplace decisions and activities. This definition underscores the importance of a workplace culture where employees feel empowered to raise concerns without fear of negative consequences. Conversely, employee silence—the deliberate withholding of opinions or information arises due to fear of retaliation for criticizing management, lack of support, and the perception that their views will not be taken seriously [18]. Van Dyne et al. [18] categorize silence into three types: Acquiescent (disengagement behavior based on resignation), Quiescent (self-protective behavior based on fear), and Pro-social motives (silence based on altruism). These forms of silence can become more prevalent when employees perceive reporting mechanisms as intimidating, opaque, or ineffective. For example, when employees experience inequitable treatment but feel unsupported by HR or unsure how to report their concerns, they may choose silence as a self-preservation strategy [44]. Chen et al. [9] also examined the lack of feedback and communication, as well as worries about privacy and confidentiality (e.g., fear of being identified and judged by peers or supervisors), that affect employees' willingness to report their concerns to the organization.

In addition, systemic barriers compound emotional struggles and reinforce silence. Employees are often reluctant to speak up about issues that may be perceived as harmful or threatening by management, especially when the issue of inequality is involved, and the inequality is not directly visible or legally defined [44]. Research on workplace silence suggests that employees often withhold concerns due to perceived risks, even when formal protections exist, leading to the reinforcement of unfair power structures [42]. Employee silence can contribute to the perpetuation or even exacerbation of inequality in the workplace [44]. For example, employees are legally protected from sexual harassment in the workplace, but the protection is only effective if they come forward and report it [27]. However, working conditions, social norms, and even the nature of sexual harassment in the workplace can place limitations on employees, making it difficult for them to report and remain silent [11]. Employees' silence and internalization of inequality can have a significant impact on their overall health and stress levels, which can further negatively affect their workplace relationships, engagement, and organizational commitment [51].

2.2 Human Resource's Dual Roles

The professionalization of human resources and the rise of strategic human resource management have been linked to an increase in the complexity of dealing with people in the workplace, which implies that innovative ways of dealing with conflict at work are prioritized in business organizations [13]. Discussions among human resource (HR) practitioners have focused on the development of integrated strategies, including the creation of work environments and cultures, and encouraging the prevention, handling, control, and resolution of conflict at the earliest stages [38]. However, HR's role as a strategic business partner prioritizes rewards, talent management, and performance management over the employment relationship, resulting in the marginalization of the ideal employee "champion" or "advocate" role [16, 25]. There is a considerable lack of literature on the daily routines of HR departments and the processes for managing conflicts between employees [57].

Resolving workplace conflicts and providing appropriate procedures and legal advice to facilitate conflict mitigation are essential human resources practices [66]. Complaint handlers in organizations are often HR professionals who have an inherent conflict of interest in not only adjudicating complaints but also protecting the organization from liability [20]. In organizations, human resources departments are usually responsible for managing the grievance system and for preventing harassment and discrimination, which leads to the fact that they do not want to have complaints reported, with complaints implying that they have failed in prevention [15]. This potential conflict and inconsistency in goals may indirectly contribute to employees' reluctance to use formal channels since they may concerned that the HR department will minimize or ignore their concerns to protect the organization and the HR department's interests. Organizational complaint handlers may be less concerned about protecting the rights of those who report to work in an environment free of harassment than they are about helping businesses avoid lawsuits for defamation and other violations of perpetrators' rights [20]. The grievance system was set up to provide workers with a means of appealing against the decisions of discriminatory managers, but this system for reducing discrimination has not achieved the goals for which it exists [15].

2.3 Emotion's Intersection with the Workplace and Technology

Defined by Hochschild [30], the concept of *emotional labor* involves regulating emotions to produce observable expressions in exchange for compensation. Employees who face negative emotional experiences, struggle to regulate their emotions effectively or lack organizational support are more susceptible to burnout [33]. Prolonged engagement in emotional labor can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout, particularly when the emotional demands of work exceed an individual's coping capacity [7]. Emotional barriers further hinder employees from speaking up in diverse dimensions. Richard Mills discusses how fear-based leadership can hurt organizational culture, leading to feelings of vulnerability and reduced likelihood of reporting among employees [32]. Witnessing the unethical behavior of peers can also trigger emotions such as anger and anxiety, which ultimately lead to employee silence [62]. When employees report mistreatment—especially when the perpetrator holds a position of power—they may face social isolation, professional retaliation, or even demotion [12]. Remaining silent avoids these risks but has negative consequences for the mental and physical well-being of the affected individual.

Positive emotions play a critical role in encouraging employees to voice their concerns. Shahinpoor and Matt [58] emphasize the psychological and ethical significance of employee voice, suggesting

that voice and validation of self-value are vital to preserving a sense of agency and fairness in the workplace. Similarly, Rowe [56] advocate for empowering employees by allowing them to autonomously address conflicts in the workplace rather than solely relying on traditional hierarchies in organizations. For example, psychological safety within teams can foster open communication, enabling employees to report mistakes and concerns without fear of negative consequences [22]. A supportive social and work environment further enhances employees' willingness to speak up, which includes the influence of positive emotions exhibited by colleagues [39] and the role of transformational leadership in fostering trust and openness [67]. However, a work environment where the employees are discouraged from voicing concerns contributes to anxiety, disempowerment, and dissatisfaction, ultimately undermining organizational culture [23].

Technology adoption is a complex and inherently social process influenced by cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors that shape individuals' perceptions of and influence their decisions to adopt technology [60]. Furthermore, human-technology interaction studies have increasingly emphasized the emotional nature of the process. Perlusz [48] argue that affective factors such as excitement, discomfort, and attachment have influential roles in deciding how individuals select and decide to adopt technology into their daily lives. Similarly, Malin [41] underscore that emotional relationships individuals form with communication technologies influence their acceptance and understanding of these tools. For example, frustration while using technology can lead users to abandon a system or seek alternatives, thus demonstrating the need to address emotional dynamics in interactions with technology [41]. Nevertheless, despite this recognition, much of the existing research prioritizes cognitive and behavioral factors over the emotional dimensions around technology adoption [48].

3 Methods & Data

We conducted ethnographic field work in the Silicon Valley (California, USA) to examine the emotional and structural factors influencing workplace concern reporting. California employment laws are different from federal and other state laws in the US—California provides a much higher level of worker protection [24], providing robust protections against workplace discrimination and retaliation. This, coupled with the strong presence of HR professional societies and organizations, made our locale an information rich [46, p.242] site to understand concern reporting and its intersection with employees as well as HR. This study was reviewed and approved by the UC Santa Cruz Institutional Review Board.

3.1 Participant Recruitment

In the early stages of data collection, we participated in several offline and online seminars organized by HR organizations to observe current trends in workplace investigations and concern reporting practices. The seminars covered topics such as legal compliance, workplace investigations, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices. We took field notes during multiple sessions, and these observations and insights guided us in formulating interview questions to ensure that we could approach from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. These seminars also provided an opportunity for us to recruit HR participants for the study. We also recruited participants through flyers in local libraries and posts on social media platforms. Finally, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 HR professionals responsible for handling reports (total = ~13 hours, M = 1 hr 4 min) and 10 employees who had experience reporting workplace concerns through formal channels (total = ~11 hr 30 min, M = 1 hr 3 min).

We used purposive sampling to reach HR professionals from various industries, such as technology, healthcare, and legal services to capture more diverse perspectives. Likewise, employee participants were recruited through online platforms and community boards, emphasizing diversity in gender, ethnicity, and industries. Among the 12 HR participants, 9 identified as White. This is consistent with national data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, which reports that 77.3% of HR managers are White in the United States [65]. Although this racial distribution potentially introduces some bias, it also realistically reflects the current racial composition of the HR industry nationwide. By including multiple stakeholders, we aimed to gather a broad range of viewpoints—understanding how employees navigate emotional and procedural barriers and examining how HR professionals manage, interpret, and respond to employee's concerns. This recruitment strategy allowed us to capture a diverse range of experiences related to workplace concern reporting.

Tables 1 and 2 provide detailed demographic data for the HR professionals and employee participants, respectively. We concluded recruitment after 22 interviews, as we reached data saturation, particularly regarding recurring themes related to the emotional aspects of reporting.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

All interviews were conducted by video calls (Zoom) or in person. The researchers recorded and transcribed the video with the participant's consent. We used a semi-structured interview format, beginning with background questions about participants' years of experience, the industries they worked in, and the size of their organizations (e.g., "How long have you been in this industry?"). This was followed by in-depth discussions about participants' past experiences of how they reported and addressed workplace concerns. For employees, we focused on their motivations for reporting, their emotional experiences during the reporting process, and the outcomes they achieved. We first asked employees to introduce the formal reporting channels they were aware of in the organization, which helped us understand their awareness and usage of these channels. We then asked about specific instances in which they had used formal or informal channels, the events that unfolded, and the challenges they faced. For HR professionals, we explored their approaches to handling reports, the challenges they encountered, and their perspectives on the reporting mechanisms (e.g., "What do you consider to be the biggest challenge in managing formal reporting channels?").

We took several measures during the interview to minimize the risk of re-traumatizing participants. First, we emphasized the voluntary nature of participation at multiple points—both in the

Table 1: HR Demographic Information (*N*= 12)

ID	Age	Gender	Ethnicity/Race	Years of Work Experience	Industry
HR1	50s	Male	White	10-11 years	Consumer Goods and Manufacturing
HR2	60s	Female	White	30+ years	Life Sciences and High-Tech
HR3	70s	Male	White	22 years	High-Tech
HR4	40s	Male	White	17 years	Supply Chain, Life Sciences, and High-Tech
HR5	50s	Female	White	9 years	Legal and Professional Services
HR6	50s	Male	White	10 years	Legal Services and Public Services
HR7	60s	Male	White	35 years	Life Sciences and Healthcare
HR8	50s	Female	Hispanic or Latinx	13 years	High-Tech, Healthcare, and Public Services
HR9	30s	Male	Asian	5 years	Public Services
HR10	30s	Female	Black or African-American	1 year	Legal Services and Public Services
HR11	40s	Male	Middle Eastern or North African	about 10 year	Public Services
HR12	30s	Female	Asian	10+ years	Public Services

Table 2: Employee Demographic Information (*N*= 10)

ID	Age	Gender	Ethnicity/Race	Years of Work Experience	Industry
E1	30s	Male	Asian	10 years	High-Tech
E2	20s	Female	Asian	2 years	Finance
E3	50s	Female	White	29 years	High-Tech
E4	50s	Male	White	29 years	Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals
E5	20s	Non-binary / third gender	Asian	1 year	Energy and Utilities
E6	40s	Female	White	18 years	Public Services
E7	40s	Male	Asian	10 years	High-Tech
E8	60s	Male	Black or African-American	26 years	Chemical Industry
E9	30s	Female	Hispanic or Latinx	9 years	Labor Union
E10	40s	Male	Hispanic or Latinx	13 years	Public Services

recruitment process and again before the interview—ensuring participants understood their right to skip any questions or withdraw at any time without consequence. In addition, we used neutral and non-leading language in our questions in the interview and avoided framing the study as an invitation to share traumatic workplace experiences. For example, a typical interview question might be: "Please tell me about a concern you encountered in a company, and how you sought help through formal channels." Although we observed that employees tended to share more serious past incidents during interviews, this may be due to a self-selection bias, where people with strong emotional investment in the topic are more likely to participate in the research [47]. Finally, when the participant became emotionally distressed during the interview, we acknowledged their feelings and returned the pace of the conversation to the interviewee's control.

For the data analysis, we adopted a qualitative approach centered on narratives from employees and HR professionals. We conducted open coding to identify key themes and patterns in the data. We adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach, which views knowledge as co-constructed between researchers and participants, emphasizing the subjective experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes of employees and HR professionals [6]. This approach allowed us to go beyond the surface-level actions of HR and employees to explore the underlying dynamics shaping reporting practices. During the coding process, we conducted line-by-line coding of the transcripts. Weekly meetings were held with the research team to discuss emerging themes, refine the coding framework, and ensure consensus on the final codes. This iterative process helped ensure reliability and depth in the analysis.

4 Findings

Workplace reporting systems are designed to address misconduct, yet employees often perceive them as potential sources of risk rather than protection. This section examines the fears that prevent employees from speaking up—particularly fear of retaliation, power imbalances, and skepticism about system fairness. Many employees avoid addressing their concerns by reporting because they doubt their concerns will be resolved or fear professional consequences. Those who do choose to report concerns face emotional burdens, navigating opaque processes that often feel more like barriers than support mechanisms. Moreover, we find a fundamental misalignment between employees and HR professionals: employees expect transparency and meaningful action when they report concerns, while HR—sometimes empathetic to the employees' emotional needs—prioritizes risk management and procedural efficiency. This misalignment further undermines trust in reporting systems and also reinforces workplace silence and inaction.

4.1 Fear and Risk Aversion Before Reporting

4.1.1 Fear of Retaliation. In this study, we found that employees' underlying fear of retaliation, professional consequences, and social alienation primarily influence their decision whether to report workplace issues. These fears are not unfounded but stem from the real workplace experiences of employees who have witnessed or suffered the negative repercussions of speaking up. E4, a senior HR executive who participated in our study as an employee, shared an experience of retaliation against a colleague who had filed a complaint. He recalled receiving a text message from management stating, *"I'm gonna be there in a couple of weeks when they get rid of [employee's name]... Onto plan B ... to try to get [employee's name] fired."* Reflecting on the situation, he described his disbelief: *"It was just insane. You look at [employee's name], who filed a complaint, and not only did nothing happen to address their concerns, but they were retaliated against."* As a result, these emotions—particularly fear and risk perception—significantly shape their interactions with workplace reporting systems, often leading them to remain silent rather than risk further harm. Our research found that employees are fully aware of the potential risks involved in reporting their concerns. For example, E1 describes his concerns about losing his job: *"I was afraid to report it at the time because I was afraid of losing my job, being retaliated against, or anything happening if I reported it... I feared being fired."* This statement highlights the underlying reality that employees often weigh the risks associated with speaking up. When employees perceive reporting mechanisms as not protective and as potential sources of harm in the process of reporting, this can further reinforce their hesitation and discourage them from engaging with the reporting system. HR professionals acknowledge these fears, recognizing that retaliation is not just a hypothetical concern but a tangible workplace risk. HR5 acknowledged the reality of these fears: *"At almost every company I've ever worked for. They [employers] tell us we need to know who's reporting this... You don't need to know who it's coming from. They [employers] don't understand that [for] an employee, ... retaliation is very real, and someone doesn't want to lose their job ... That's one form of retaliation. Another form is they're never promoted. They don't receive increases."* This admission underscores how organizational reporting structures can unintentionally facilitate retaliation.

4.1.2 Power Imbalances. Power imbalances in the reporting process are also important factors that influence whether employees report. Employees in lower positions often feel vulnerable and fearful when raising concerns about those in authority, which is usually manifested as fear of negative repercussions beyond direct retaliation. The hierarchical structure of many workplaces reinforces this fear, discouraging employees from confronting those in power. Participants often expressed unease with challenging authority figures. For instance, E5 shared her reluctance to report issues directly to her manager, stating: *"I was very scared of her because of the power dynamic, which is why I still try to find someone in a lower position who can still report it to her, just because I felt that power discrepancy when I was discussing certain things."* Such power imbalances create an environment where employees may feel intimidated or silenced, further inhibiting their ability to voice concerns. Similarly, E7 wished there was an advocate in his company who could voice his concerns: *"If it turns out, [HR] found nothing, then I'll be in trouble. Because [manager] might know that I reported her to HR. I really wish someone else could voice my concerns instead of me ... Because I didn't want to compromise my job. I wish someone could speak out for me."* This statement highlights how power disparities lead employees to seek indirect or safer avenues for reporting rather than directly addressing concerns with their superiors. The intimidation created by hierarchy silences employees, particularly those who feel they lack institutional support.

4.1.3 Avoidance as Coping. Fear and risk aversion further hinder employees' willingness to speak up and lead them to use avoidance as a strategy to deal with workplace concerns. For instance, E6 shared her reluctance to confront workplace issues: *"Because you're hoping it will just stop, I don't like confrontation, I am not a confrontational person, so I did everything I could to avoid that. And I guess when I did reach out at times, I didn't get much help, so it made me more nervous."* Similarly, E7 highlighted his aversion to tension and its impact on his decision-making: *"I don't like confrontation. I don't like tension. I don't like conflict. I'm a lover, not a fighter. I like peace ... I don't know how to deal with conflict. I expressed my concern to the director, but there was only so much I could do. And I didn't want to burn bridges."* These narratives underscore how those who fear conflict will inevitably avoid fully engaging with workplace reporting systems. This hesitancy not only reflects individual emotions but also points to systemic gaps in providing supportive, non-confrontational mechanisms for addressing workplace issues.

4.2 Silence, Skepticism, and Emotional Burden through Reporting

4.2.1 The False Promise of Anonymity. While anonymity is often promoted as a safeguard in workplace reporting, many employees in our study perceived it as an ineffective measure. The fear of being identified and retaliated against persists, even if systems claim to protect an employee's identity. This further discourages employee engagement. Previous research suggests that anonymity can encourage employees to voice concerns and address sensitive issues [1]. However, our findings suggest that perceived anonymity is not enough if employees do not trust the system to protect them. E2 described why she refused to use anonymous channels: *"The company claims to be anonymous, but in reality, the manager of each group looks at the ratings and comments of the entire group... If your manager manages just a few people, or if you write very clearly, I think the manager can guess who wrote it. You might complain that the manager didn't assign you important work, and the manager could easily know who wrote it."* These perceptions by employees demonstrate that insecurity of reporting mechanisms exacerbates the trauma associated with workplace issues, which further intensifies employees' emotional burdens. These emotional burdens force employees to remain in a state of uncertainty and distress, making it challenging for them to speak up.

4.2.2 Reporting Becomes Futility. For some employees, the decision not to report workplace concerns is not driven by fear but by the belief that their efforts will be futile. Employees were doubtful that reporting concerns would lead to more meaningful change

due to their personal experiences or observations of others' unsuccessful attempts to seek resolution. E10, a participant with prior HR work experience, illustrates this perception of futility. Despite recognizing misconduct in his workplace, he chose to leave his job due to frustration with the reporting process rather than make a formal complaint: *"They went just to write a write-up and then a final notice. And so the next step after the final notice was termination. So it was very aggressive…I told them that at the end, I've done this job. I know what it takes. And I can see this coming a mile away. So I just said, you know, no, I'm going to leave."* These examples highlight how the perceived futility of reporting channels can drive employees to abandon not only the reporting process but also their roles within the organization. Research on vicarious learning suggests that individuals shape their behaviors based on observed successes or failures [60]—when they see workplace reporting mechanisms failing others, they become less likely to engage with them themselves.

4.2.3 Skepticism of the System. Employees also expressed deep skepticism toward the ability of internal investigations and the HR department to provide fair and transparent resolutions. They perceive that the HR department prioritizes organizational interests over seeking justice and protecting employees, undermining their belief in the possibility of meaningful change. E4, for example, emphasized his loss of faith in HR's internal investigations and advocated for independent external investigations: *"I said to the CEO … 'This should not be done by HR. It should be done by someone outside the organization.' And he … chose instead to do it himself with the VP of Operations…It broke my faith. It really broke my faith."* This account demonstrates how a lack of impartiality and transparency in internal investigations can severely erode trust with HR and even management in the organization. E1 felt HR's response to his workplace complaint was superficial, and the changes they made did not address the core issue: *"They [HR] only scratch the surface of the problem."* When employees perceive that management or HR lacks the capacity or willingness to conduct unbiased inquiries, their confidence in the system's fairness diminishes. Such doubts reinforce a sense of suspicion and deepen reluctance to engage with internal reporting mechanisms.

4.3 Reporting Systems: Exacerbating Employee Burden

4.3.1 System as Barrier. Before reporting workplace concerns, employees often have to work through some heavy emotional hurdles. And once they decide to speak up, those feelings can intensify; the anxiety and vulnerability that come with the possibility of exposure can hit harder than the process of actually reporting. Ineffective reporting systems can amplify these emotional struggles, turning what should be a pathway to resolve concerns into a source of additional stress. For example, E9 described the emotional burden of reporting sexual harassment and the dismissive responses she received: *"Just because there was a lot that happened, and it just kind of felt like everywhere I turned, it was always, 'Well, nothing physically happened to you. Nothing really happened to you. You're fine. You're okay.' And that, for me, was like, 'Well, are they right? Nothing happened to me. I'm physically okay.' …I have to keep my back to the wall, or someone taps me on the shoulder, and I jump out of my skin, you know, because nothing really happened to me."* E9's experience highlights a common problem in workplace reporting—the way organizations dismiss emotional pain by making employees question their own experiences. This is an example of institutional gaslighting, where employees who report mistreatment are told that what they experienced 'wasn't that bad' or 'didn't really happen' because there is no physical evidence [63]. This experience not only silences employees but also intensifies internal conflict. Survivors begin to self-censor and question whether their emotions and responses are justified. This reinforces the dangerous and false notion that if harm is not visible, it is not real. E9's employer effectively shifted the burden of proof onto the employee, requiring her to justify her suffering rather than acknowledge the systemic deficiencies that caused it. Far from providing closure or a sense of justice, ineffective reporting processes typically hurt employees, leaving them feeling unheard, invalidated, and emotionally exhausted.

Reporting concern is not merely a procedural step but a psychological burden that can exacerbate existing stress. E10's account underscores the profound emotional strain and cognitive load associated with workplace concern reporting: *"I could tell you that it is overwhelmingly emotional. So everything felt heavier than usual emotionally. My vocabulary and my ability to express myself diminished. So I didn't have the ability to remain cool. I didn't lose composure, but internally I was not composed. Internally, I had a lot of anxiety to an extent, or nervousness. I don't know how to put it, which I don't experience that… you get to a point where you just want to find mental peace, which you really can't."* Individuals navigating high-stakes interpersonal exchanges—especially those involving vulnerability, perceived power imbalances, or potential retaliation—often struggle to regulate and articulate their emotions effectively [30]. This also demonstrates that heightened emotional distress can impair decision-making, self-expression, and perceived agency in digital interactions[49].

Furthermore, we observed that current concern reporting channels often create uncertainty for employees, which further suppresses their willingness to voice concerns. Many employees expressed a lack of understanding about how these systems function. For instance, E2 shared: *"If there was something I wanted to report, I probably wouldn't even know which HR to contact. I don't know much about these channels."* Similarly, E8 described the frustration and inefficiency they experienced while using an online reporting system: *"It was a challenge this time, because you gotta get online on their site. I ran into some stuff because I went to fill it out online… you gotta have your dates in order and everything like this. Okay? I did it. Then it got to a point where you can't have over 500 words. How am I gonna put what I just told you in 500 words?…I got to redo it again. So this time I had to back up to get the dates and stuff, I had to back up, find the most important points. And then I had to redo it again."* These experiences highlight a fundamental issue in workplace concern reporting systems—a lack of clarity and accessibility, especially for employees who lack sufficient knowledge of reporting systems. Existing reporting systems become psychological and procedural barriers to employee engagement when employees lack sufficient guidance on how to navigate reporting mechanisms. This uncertainty is particularly problematic in situations where employees are already experiencing stress, fear, and emotional distress. They may feel paralyzed by the complexity of the system and ultimately

choose inaction over engagement if they are unsure of where to go, whom to trust, and what steps to follow.

4.3.2 HR: Aware of the System's Burden. HR professionals certainly recognize the emotional effort employees invest in reporting. HR3 emphasized the importance of addressing employee vulnerability: *"Somebody has given you information that leaves them vulnerable. They're scared. They're often either angry or scared or some combination of those. It is not reasonable to leave them in that circumstance. They've trusted you in a very meaningful way. If you fail to be responsive to that trust, it's gonna go away. It's just not gonna be there."* HR professionals have recognized the fear and stress employees experience during the reporting process and have emphasized a timely and empathetic response to maintain trust and reduce emotional struggles for employees. HR4 highlighted the need for timely and empathetic responses: *"If someone that reports something [expects] to reply back promptly…[we need] to realize that by the time they are reporting something—to their manager, to you an email, or however, it comes—they've probably been thinking about it for a long time…No one takes that step lightly. It's important to give it the credence that is due. So to respond empathetically."* These narratives from HR professionals highlight the emotional effort they make when employees voice concerns, recount distressing experiences, and await responses. Employees often seek resolution not only for the issues they report but also for the adverse emotional effects the process imposes.

Despite HR's understanding of these emotional dynamics, the current design of reporting systems exacerbates employees' emotional burdens. HR9, who works in a large organization with multiple branches, described how lack of structural clarity impacts not only employees but also HR professionals: *"A lot of times, if I'm not clear on that, how would you expect employees to know that? Because I'm doing that as part of my work, but a lot of employees don't have this as part of their work, right? It can be very confusing, and by having a confusing system, you are disempowering people. You're basically like, why is it hard to navigate all of these things to report something?"* This confusion reflects a broader design flaw in workplace concern reporting systems—when reporting systems are ambiguous, employees do not know where their concerns should be directed. Similarly, HR10 refers to employees' lack of understanding of the reporting system within the organization, which can further exacerbate anxiety or hesitation when deciding whether or how to report. She noted: *"We need to figure out other ways to get the information out to people about what their rights are…I still think that there's a lot of positive in hosting trainings, so that people can ask questions and things…When something does happen to them. They know immediately where to go or what their rights are, they at least know where to look, to go find more information."* Ineffectively designed reporting systems not only increase the emotional burden on employees but also limit HR's ability to respond effectively.

4.4 Misalignment Between HR and Employees in Reporting Systems

Despite HR's awareness of the emotional burden that current concern reporting channels impose on employees, these challenges remain inadequately addressed. We found a fundamental misalignment between employee and HR expectations when it comes to handling workplace concerns. Reporting systems often fail to accommodate these differing priorities, resulting in emotional strain for employees and systemic inefficiencies.

4.4.1 Employee's Expectations. Employees and HR often operate with mismatched goals when addressing workplace concerns. From the employee's perspective, they seek tangible actions and meaningful outcomes that validate and reciprocate their emotional investment in reporting. They want HR departments and organizations to take their concerns seriously and lead to tangible action and change. E1 describes the frustration of HR not meeting his expectations. After reporting a workplace injury, he sought reimbursement for his medical expenses, but his request was denied: *"I asked to be reimbursed for my previous treatments. I did spend some money for it. This was refused. And the reason they gave for the denial was that it was too late to report."* This response prioritized procedural rigidity over fairness, reinforcing employee's skepticism about whether the function of HR is to advocate for employees or merely serve as a risk management tool for the organization. The refusal not only dismissed the employee's financial burden but also conveyed a lack of concern and disregard for the employee's well-being. As a result, E1 ultimately left the organization, feeling unsupported and unheard.

Beyond individual resolutions, employees also expect their reports to contribute to broader and meaningful organizational improvements and changes rather than being handled on a case-by-case basis with little systemic impact. E3 emphasized this need for transparency: *"I think one improvement would be to have better reporting out of what happens. So it's difficult, especially in a large company, because there are legal concerns and so on. Like, I don't need to know that [name] got fired for being a horrible bigot, but saying, 'We took this corrective action, and that's what happened,' would be an improvement if they can do that in a legal and ethical way."* E3's statement highlights a crucial fact—employees do not seek to know specific details of disciplinary actions, but they do want to ensure their reports are taken seriously and lead to corrective measures. Without this transparency, employees may assume that their concerns are being ignored or deprioritized, which undermines their willingness to report future concerns. E5 also stressed the importance of ongoing updates: *"I do think having official follow-ups would help. Like giving us a status or an update on certain things, like 'Update: This is still ongoing,' or, 'Here's what's been done.' I think it's also putting expectations on management for certain tasks."* This perspective underscores how process transparency can not only benefit the individual reporter in tracking the progress of their case but also foster a broader sense of trust between employees, the HR department, and the organization. Employees want to see that HR and leadership are actively addressing their concerns rather than allowing them to linger indefinitely.

4.4.2 HR's Expectations. HR professionals, on the other hand, balance addressing employee concerns with protecting the organization from reputational and legal risks. HR7 described how management's disregard for employee and candidate experiences can impact the company's image: *"They [recruiters] consider candidates to be just another commodity and don't appreciate the impact on our reputation as an employer, especially as a large and well-known employer in the region…Their behavior was impacting not only their*

own department but the entire corporation." For HR, it is important to address employees' concerns, but the potential negative impact on reputation and company interests that comes with managing the situation also affects their behavior and approach to the issue. HR2 highlighted the preference for handling issues internally rather than allowing them to escalate externally: *"You want to make sure that the company is protected for liability's sake. It's always just a better thing to handle something internally upfront to an employee's satisfaction than to bring in an outside agency. It just gets messy... They [employees] are angry. They want to hurt the employer, they want to hurt a person. They [employees] want them [employer] to pay."* HR2's response reveals a tension between employees seeking justice and HR managing risks. While employees see external escalation as a necessary step when internal resolutions fail, HR views it as an adversarial move that may harm the company's reputation. This discrepancy often leads to HR focusing on containment rather than meaningful resolution. To minimize legal exposure, HR professionals often seek legal counsel before taking action. HR5 explained this approach: *"Sometimes we seek outside counsel, so some companies will have attorneys on the inside. And then even those attorneys will go outside and speak to another attorney, just to make sure that we're doing what we need to do."* This practice illustrates HR's focus on compliance and risk mitigation, ensuring that any action taken is legally defensible. However, this legalistic approach sometimes creates a barrier between HR departments and employees, giving the perception that HR departments are more intent on protecting the company than addressing employee grievances.

Although employees may turn to external agencies when internal resolution feels inadequate, HR sees this as risk escalation. HR2 specifically cited external complaints as a major concern: *"So rather than have someone report a complaint to the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] or a lawyer where they want to take action without even talking to the company about it first."* This viewpoint highlights HR's preference for internal resolution, but it also suggests that employees may feel forced to escalate when they perceive internal processes as ineffective or biased. HR3 described a cautious approach to handling sensitive issues like workplace harassment: *"We would express our deep concern and explain that it's something we simply can't tolerate as a company. We would offer them options for who they could contact and express our desire to engage and help resolve this and protect them ... In the worst case, after trying that, I might then offer to have them talk to an outside attorney of counsel to the company. Definitely don't want to start there, but that may be the way we have to do it."* Although HR has demonstrated a supportive stance toward the employee, it still desires to maintain control over the resolution process.

4.4.3 Systemic Prioritization. Beyond these philosophical differences, HR systems are often designed to prioritize case closure and data management over fostering transparency or emotional validation. HR6 described his workflow: *"The last step for me was I was referring it to employee and [name]. So then, once I referred it to them, I was not involved anymore."* This statement reveals a common issue: once a case is passed along, HR disengages from the process, leaving employees without further support or follow-up. Similarly, HR12 highlighted the lack of emotional care and focus on case closure in the reporting process: *"Prevention informs caseloads for us, just like how prevention informs advocacy. But investigators are trained to be neutral. Many of them are former lawyers, and if you've ever worked with lawyers, you know they're not always the warmest people. They're professional, but not always empathetic... the focus is always on reporting."* While prevention reduces caseloads and improves advocacy, HR remains fixated on reporting, reinforcing a reactive rather than proactive approach. This systemic deficiency focuses on the efficiency of HR work over meaningful engagement. It also forcibly shifts HR's role from empowering employees to mitigating organizational risk, ultimately limiting their ability to foster trust and address workplace concerns holistically.

5 Discussion

In this study, we reveal that emotional barriers such as fear, futility, skepticism, and vulnerability greatly affect employee engagement with workplace concern reporting systems. Fear of retaliation, skepticism regarding system efficacy, and the emotional burden of navigating complex reporting procedures cause employees to hesitate when reporting concerns. While some HR professionals are aware of these emotional demands and challenges, they nonetheless prioritize organizational interests over employee needs. This misalignment between employee expectations and HR priorities results in reporting mechanisms that are sometimes perceived as ineffective or insufficiently responsive, weakening current systems' effectiveness. Our findings answer the research questions we posed by illustrating how the experience of workplace concern reporting is replete with emotional and procedural barriers that hinder their effectiveness. Furthermore, we identify how emotional labor, power imbalances, and unclear reporting structures influence the usability and perceived fairness of reporting technologies. Below, we synthesize our findings into the concept of *emotional re-victimization* and discuss its implications for concern reporting, suggesting the need for design interventions that bridge these gaps.

5.1 Emotional Re-Victimization of Employees

Emotional re-victimization occurs when individuals who have already experienced harm—such as workplace discrimination, harassment, or other forms of mistreatment—undergo additional emotional distress when attempting to report their concerns. Trauma and victimology studies have examined re-victimization in the context of sexual assault survivors, marginalized communities, and legal reporting systems, where victims often face skepticism, dismissal, or retraumatization when seeking justice [5, 64]. We extend this concept to HCI and workplace research, arguing that concern reporting systems must account for the harm that employees experience before and through the reporting process. The emotional state of employees before they even engage with a reporting system—such as fear, anxiety, distrust, and powerlessness—directly impacts their experience with that system. Emotional re-victimization emphasizes that employees experience emotional re-victimization at multiple stages of the concern reporting process.

Before reporting concerns, employees often experience fear, self-doubt, and the emotional impact of past harm, which makes them hesitant to engage with reporting systems. Much of this hesitation is tied to potential retaliation, career repercussions, power imbalances,

and a lack of confidentiality within existing processes. Previous research has also demonstrated that fear of retaliation, professional repercussions, and lack of confidentiality can further reinforce silence around workplace issues [11]. This disproportionate risk leads employees to often conduct a cost-benefit analysis to weigh the potential risks of reporting against a meaningful resolution. This process can result in emotional re-victimization—a prolonged state of fear and distress that emerges not from the original incident alone but from the process of navigating unsupportive or harmful reporting systems. Such experiences can deeply affect employees' emotional well-being, with lasting impacts on both their mental and physical health.

During the reporting process, employees experience further emotional exhaustion from their experiences of harassment, discrimination, or exclusion, and when reporting mechanisms fail to provide validation, protection, and a clear path to resolution, these systems become an extension—rather than a remedy—of the harm. These systems— designed primarily for risk mitigation and legal compliance—frequently neglect the emotional needs of employees, leading to further alienation and frustration. For example, employees feel forced to navigate complex reporting protocols that prioritize legal risk management over user-centered support [14]. These feelings of alienation and frustration can further contribute to their emotional exhaustion and also weaken their trust in the organization and the system. When employees engage with reporting systems that fail to acknowledge their distress, they perceive the process as an *extension* of initial harm rather than a resolution.

Following the reporting process, when employees' concerns are dismissed or insufficiently addressed, they feel their experiences have been invalidated. Our research has found that a failed reporting experience hurts employees' efforts, leading to frustration, skepticism, silence, and, ultimately, disengagement from workplace concern reporting mechanisms. Failed reporting even leads employees to face retaliation or professional isolation, which in turn leads to further emotional distress and perpetuates the cycle of silence and unresolved workplace misconduct [55, 55]. Emotional re-victimization extends past work by highlighting not only the structural barriers to reporting but also the profound emotional consequences that result from ineffective resolution processes. Future workplace concern reporting systems should account for the profound impact of emotional re-victimization on employees' mental well-being. Current reporting mechanisms primarily focus on procedural efficiency, risk management, and compliance, but often neglect the employees' emotional needs [14]. HCI research has increasingly recognized the necessity of trauma-informed computing and the importance of designing safer, emotionally supportive systems [8]. By prioritizing psychological safety, emotional validation, and procedural fairness [40], an understanding of emotional re-victimization suggests a need to transform reporting from a bureaucratic, punitive process into an empowering mechanism that fosters organizational trust, employee well-being, and workplace justice.

Emotional re-victimization in workplace concern reporting is not only an individual psychological burden but also an *organizational* liability that perpetuates a cycle of disengagement and mistrust. Our research highlights how emotionally inadequate reporting systems themselves contribute to ongoing harm. Specifically, when employees engage with reporting mechanisms that are opaque, bureaucratic, or designed to avoid risk for the organization, they are repeatedly exposed to emotional re-victimization, leading to heightened emotional exhaustion, distrust in organizational processes, and reduced willingness to report future concerns. Beyond individual well-being, these emotional burdens have also weakened employees' psychological safety, increased turnover, deteriorated workplace culture, and negatively impacted the organization [52]. When employees perceive that their concerns are dismissed or inadequately addressed, trust in HR departments and workplace institutions is eroded, discouraging future reporting and contributing to a workplace culture of silence. We argue that addressing emotional re-victimization is not merely a corporate obligation but a strategic investment in fostering trust, transparency, retention, and long-term organizational health.

5.2 Intervening Against Emotional Re-victimization

While HCI research has examined emotional responses in fields such as social media and healthcare applications [37], less attention has been given to the emotional labor involved in workplace reporting systems. Emotional re-victimization highlights opportunities for human-centered design interventions before, during, and after an employee submits a workplace concern. Technology-driven interventions that could be considered include context-aware guidance, emotional reassurance, and risk assessment tools to alleviate employees' fears and uncertainties about whether to report problems. These systems could educate employees on their rights, clarify reporting procedures, and help them weigh their possible options and actions in a low-stakes, confidential manner. During reporting, the process demands significant emotional effort, especially when employees must recount traumatic experiences. HCI research could explore trauma-informed UX design, ensuring that reporting tools incorporate empathetic language, flexible submission formats (e.g., audio, text, or guided prompts), and real-time emotional support features to help mitigate distress. As our findings bear out, one of the greatest frustrations employees face is a lack of feedback or perceived inaction after submitting a report. Future research could focus on designing more transparent, real-time tracking systems that offer updates on case status, estimated resolution timelines, and clear communication channels for follow-ups. This could improve HR's ability to resolve cases, reduce employees' uncertainty, and foster greater trust in the process.

Designing the proposed interventions might draw from current emotionally responsive, human-centered technologies. Informal reporting channels, such as peer support groups and employee networks, are often preferred due to their emotional safety, reduced fear of retaliation, and perceived authenticity [55]. This suggests melding the strengths of informal channels into formal reporting mechanisms by, for example, incorporating AI chatbots for preliminary guidance, enabling peer-moderated discussion spaces for emotional support, and integrating multi-step, low-stakes reporting options that allow employees to gradually escalate concerns. Abdulgalimov et al. [1] propose designing reporting tools that prioritize accessibility, structured escalation, and collective action, which can inspire

informal mechanisms to support employees better before they engage with formal HR-managed systems. Combining the strengths of formal reporting mechanisms with informal, peer-driven support structures may create a hybrid approach that empowers employees and also ensures organizational accountability.

5.3 Designing Workplace Concern Reporting Systems with HR

Despite the promise of the above interventions against emotional re-victimization in concern reporting, we believe it would be unrealistic to discount the managerial impulse of systems in organizations—to, for example, entirely remove the procedural efficiency and legal compliance roles that concern reporting systems serve, even if they have a detrimental effect on workers' emotions. To this end, we also argue that any future technologies need to incorporate HR as a key stakeholder; HR holds critical influence over the resolution process and user perceptions of fairness and is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between employee expectations and organizational priorities. Far from being cultural dopes [26], HR practitioners know the emotional toll of handling sensitive complaints but also the structural limitations of existing systems. HR professionals often face a tension between advocating for employees and their well-being versus mitigating an organization's risk and legal liability [19]. This dual role requires HR to be in a state of balance, where they must ensure that reporting mechanisms are effective, fair, and transparent while also complying with corporate policies and legal requirements. However, much of workplace technology research has prioritized compliance and efficiency over emotional considerations.

To create more effective and responsible concern reporting mechanisms, we believe that HR professionals should not only be seen as administrators but as key co-designers of these systems. Without HR's involvement as a critical user and a stakeholder, design interventions still risk being misaligned with organizational realities, thereby perpetuating underutilized or ineffective reporting systems. Indeed, the current state of HR systems—designed primarily as transactional tools for case management, legal documentation, and policy enforcement [21], rather than as platforms that foster psychological safety and meaningful resolution—is perhaps emblematic of what is lost when HR fails to help shape the design and implementation of such systems. Future work should consider the use of participatory design (PD) methods [4] to include both employees and HR professionals in the design process to co-develop solutions that reflect their collective needs and constraints. Muller and Druin [43] introduces the concept of the third space in PD, which describes a shared environment where stakeholders engage in mutual learning and validation. We can imagine a space that is neither wholly employee-driven nor wholly HR-driven but represents an interactive co-design space where employees, HR professionals, technologists, and organizational leaders collaboratively shape concern reporting tools. By applying participatory design principles and the third space concept, HCI researchers can move beyond individualized design interventions by creating systems that are procedurally fair, emotionally safe, and institutionally constrained.

6 Conclusion

Examining the intersection of emotion, technology, and workplace dynamics, our research argues for reporting systems that are human-centered and emotionally responsive. While most organizations have established formal reporting structures, we found that these systems often exacerbate rather than alleviate employee emotional distress. Current workplace reporting technologies prioritize procedural efficiency and compliance, often neglecting the emotional realities employees face when voicing concerns. This disconnect not only discourages employee reporting but also contributes to emotional re-victimization. To address these challenges, we advocate for rethinking workplace reporting technologies through trauma-informed and emotionally responsive design approaches that center on employee emotional well-being. Reporting mechanisms need to not only provide channels for communication but also actively mitigate emotional burdens by ensuring psychological safety, procedural transparency, and meaningful action. Additionally, designing hybrid models that integrate formal (HR-led) and informal (peer-supported) reporting channels can help employees navigate concerns with reduced fear. Future research should explore how participatory design (PD) can bridge the gap between employee needs and HR constraints by fostering collaborative system development. By involving employees and HR professionals in the co-design of reporting mechanisms, organizations can move beyond compliance-driven models to emotionally and ethically responsive reporting systems. Ultimately, we argue for a shift in workplace concern reporting from punitive, bureaucratic processes to empathetic, safe, and action-oriented systems that foster long-term organizational trust.

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