



## STARBUCKS UK case study:

Strategic HR transformation cuts absence costs and boosts frontline service

Starbucks UK partnered with AdviserPlus in early 2024, investing in its employee relations transformation solution, **empower®**. In just 12 months, Starbucks UK achieved a **10%** reduction in absence rates, equivalent to **15,000** hours of frontline support. By rolling out **empower®** across key UK regions and introducing a proactive approach to absence and probation management, Starbucks UK has raised the bar for employee relations (ER), delivering a measurable ROI and improving manager capability.

Guided digital journeys have strengthened manager confidence leading to a shift in routine casework from HR to the frontline, enabling HR to focus on strategic priorities. Real-time data has allowed for early, targeted interventions, and the culturally embedded advice line, delivered by advisers immersed in Starbucks UK's ways of working, has reduced HR call volumes by providing seamless support directly to managers. The future-ready employee relations model delivers better outcomes for employees, managers and customers, reflecting Starbucks UK's commitment to building community and elevating the employee experience.

### About Starbucks

Starbucks opened in 1971 with a mission to “*inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.*” While coffee is at its core, the Starbucks experience has always been about more than the beverage; it's about connection and community.

A key to its success is the creation of a welcoming “third place” between home and work. From store design and personalised service to local engagement, every element creates warmth, belonging, and meaningful interaction. With each cup, conversation, and community touchpoint, Starbucks celebrates the limitless potential of human connection.



**10% reduction**  
in absence costs in 12 months



**15,000 more hours**  
improving frontline services

### At a Glance

#### Industry:

Starbucks is a multinational retailer of specialty coffee.

#### Key challenges:

Starbucks UK aimed to reduce case escalations to HR, build consistent line manager capability and gain deeper insights to enable proactive, data-driven people strategies.

#### Solution:

**empower®** is a self-service platform, complemented by HR advisory services. Unique guided journeys step line managers through employee relations cases, resulting in enhanced compliance, manager capability and proactive people management. By empowering managers, **empower®** has reduced sickness absence rates and freed up HR and district managers to spend more time on operational excellence and strategic priorities.

#### Results:

In just 12 months, Starbucks UK achieved a **10%** drop in sickness absence rates, driving significant cost savings and operational efficiencies. This translates into **15,000 hours**, which directly impacts frontline service delivery and improves customer experiences.





## The challenge

Delivering exceptional customer experiences starts with empowering the leaders at the heart of every store. Starbucks UK wanted to improve internal operations by enabling line managers to take greater ownership of day-to-day people matters.

With a lean HR and district team focused on strategy, they needed a solution that would let managers confidently self-serve routine employee relations matters, freeing HR to focus on broader priorities and boosting operational agility.

Starbucks UK identified the need for a solution to:

### **Improve manager capability and confidence:**

Starbucks UK wanted to empower managers with the confidence to self-serve routine ER matters, such as absence cases. With an HR team focused on strategic support, managers needed to take greater ownership of everyday people matters, reducing their reliance on HR and providing better support to employees.

### **Gain deeper insight into HR case escalations:**

Starbucks UK needed to improve visibility of the root cause of HR case escalations across its UK stores to enable data-driven strategies to deal with underlying issues. It needed real-time insights to reveal trends that help identify recurring issues and highlight capability gaps, enabling proactive actions.

### **Reduce operational risks and associated costs:**

Starbucks UK wanted to improve consistency in how store managers handled ER matters to ensure best practice, reduce operational risks, and lower associated costs with a solution that enables a consistent, compliant experience across UK locations.

### **Free up HR and district manager capacity:**

Starbucks UK aimed to reduce reliance on HR Business Partners and district managers for day-to-day people matters to free up their capacity to focus on more complex cases and strategic priorities.



## The solution

Starbucks UK partnered with AdviserPlus to transform its approach to employee relations in the UK, investing in a solution that empowered managers to confidently manage people, whilst remaining true to Starbucks' unique culture and values.

AdviserPlus worked hand-in-hand with Starbucks UK to build the case for change, navigating rigorous internal reviews and providing compelling ROI evidence to deliver a comprehensive, culturally attuned solution that included:

**Advice line service:** A dedicated Advice Line staffed by experienced ER specialists provides managers with instant access to compliant, best-practice guidance. This was configured to reflect Starbucks UK's tone of voice and cultural values to ensure seamless integration.

**empower® case management system:** The *empower*® platform simplifies ER case management, enabling managers to act confidently and self-serve issues effectively, doing the right thing at the right time.

### **Manager guided journeys and coaching:**

Unique digital guided journeys and in-built coaching tools empower managers to self-serve ER cases, improving employee experiences, reducing case escalations to HR, and improving capability, closing critical skills gaps.

### **User-friendly reporting and data-driven insights:**

Custom dashboards and actionable insights, trend monitoring and root cause analysis enable Starbucks to take a more data-driven, proactive approach to addressing people matters.

**Brewing success together:** The partnership combines operational efficiency with a people-first approach. Manager empowerment improves employee experiences and reduces absence and related costs.

**The result:** A stronger, agile workforce and more capable manager cohort, supported by a future-ready ER solution.

## Alignment with Starbucks' ethos is the foundation for lasting success

## Key benefits and results



### Managers empowered to self-serve people matters

Tailored advice and step-by-step digital journeys have empowered managers, including new hires, to self-serve people issues with ease, reducing adviser calls and boosting team morale and performance. As an example, **52%** of all ER sickness case actions are now managed digitally by managers.



### A data-driven approach to decision making

HR leverage real-time data and actionable insights to enabling targeted interventions that reduce case escalation rates. This data-driven culture improved training effectiveness and allowed for predictive planning, ensuring resources were focused where they delivered the highest impact.



### Significant reduction in sickness absence costs

Within **12 months**, streamlined processes and proactive support cut absence rates by **10%**, returning around **15,000** frontline hours to stores. This improvement translated into enhanced customer service, operational excellence and an uplift in performance.



### A strong business case and return on investment

The transformation delivered a clear ROI, with quantifiable absence reduction and operational savings exceeding initial investment within the first year. Unlike many HR technology projects, these results were directly linked to real data predictions, providing a compelling case for investment.



### Enhanced performance and probation management

**empower®** introduced a standardised, tech-enabled approach to probation and performance management, ensuring all managers follow best practices. This led to smoother onboarding and earlier intervention for underperformance, supporting fair and future-proof employment practices.



### Freeing up capacity to focus on operational excellence

Automating routine case management tasks and simplifying processes has redirected time to coaching teams, improving store operations and delivering a better customer experience, driving operational excellence at scale across UK stores.

“Empowering our managers with guided journeys has been a huge win for us. It’s really boosted managers leadership, helped us cut absence rates by an incredible **10%** in just one year, and freed up our HRBPs and district managers to focus on strategic priorities. What’s been especially impressive is the seamless integration and cultural alignment of the external advisers. For a company like ours, where our values are everything, that cultural fit is invaluable. The results really do speak for themselves.”

*Irine Katsiashvili, Senior HR Business Partner, Starbucks UK*

## Case study

### A culturally-aligned solution with measurable impact

**empower®** enabled Starbucks UK to revolutionise its approach to people management by empowering managers with a fit-for-purpose technology and expert advice, which helps boost manager confidence, clarity and accountability. The transformation reduces the pressure on HR and district managers by enabling managers to self-serve ER matters efficiently and compliantly, freeing up HRBPs' time to focus on strategic priorities.

Manager adoption of new ways of working has been incredibly positive, resulting in improved employee experiences and a more proactive approach to people management. Achieving a **10%** reduction in sickness absence rates in the first 12 months is testament to the transformational impact of the solution. The success is anchored in a data-driven approach and a robust alignment with Starbucks' values, delivering a solution that feels like a true extension of the Starbucks UK team.

The partnership continues to deliver operational efficiency and improvements and has established a strong foundation for ongoing HR innovation and future-ready people strategies.

“ This is my first time using **empower®**. You've made it so easy for me to understand. It's amazing, thank you. ”

*Manager, Starbucks UK*

Find out more [here](#).



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 An  
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company

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### About Us

AdviserPlus is an Empowering People Group company. The Group brings together experts in HR, employment law, learning, and career transitioning, with a mission to simplify employee experiences and empower excellence. We deliver innovative technology, people-centric policies and processes, and employee development that empower people to drive business success.