



STARK UK case study:

Transforming the HR operating model for rapid growth

Following the 2023 acquisition of more than 600 dedicated builders' merchants, specialist, distribution branches and a major timber importer and distributor, STARK Building Materials UK Ltd recognised the critical importance of evolving and standardising processes across the group. A key priority was to evolve its People Shared Service function and transform its employee relations (ER) framework with a fit-for-purpose solution that could scale with its ambition to be the UK's number one builders' merchant of choice for customers.

empower® delivers a future-proof employee relations operating model that empowers managers and gives STARK UK the data insight needed to help inform its people strategy, whilst transforming operations and employee experiences.

About STARK Group

STARK Group is a leading business-to-business distributor of heavy building materials for the construction industry in Europe, with a strategic focus on serving professional builders.

The company's philosophy is based on "Local ownership. Global leadership" with a decentralised operating model where the decision-making powers are locally anchored close to the customers. It empowers builders and the entire construction industry so that professional builders can build value in their local communities. The **empower®** solution supports the STARK UK business unit.

**60%**

reduction in tribunal claims

**70%**

of tasks completed by managers

At a Glance

Industry:

Major retailer and distributor of building and construction materials.

Key challenges:

STARK UK needed a robust, scalable employee relations solution that enabled it to see the ER landscape for the first time, standardise processes, and provide expert, outsourced advice.

Solution:

empower® digitalises employee relations case management, streamlining and standardising processes and allowing line managers to self-serve people matters, while providing HR with actionable data insights that enable proactive people strategies.

Results:

70% of employee relations tasks are now manager-led, there has been a 60% reduction in tribunal claims and legal costs, while manager capability, confidence and consistency has accelerated, transforming employee experiences. The outsourced ER advice has elevated support and freed up HR to focus on strategic priorities.





The Challenge

In 2023, STARK Group established its UK operation, STARK Building Materials UK Ltd, through a significant acquisition of a collection of well-known brands, including Jewson, Minster, JP Corry, Normans and International Timber.

This made STARK UK a significant player in the UK building materials distribution market, and the company recognised the critical importance of a robust and efficient People Shared Services function and a future-proof employee relations (ER) framework to support its success.

While dedicated to supporting its managers and employees, STARK UK identified several areas where it could further strengthen operations and empower its leadership teams:

Optimising policy accessibility and driving consistency:

STARK UK aimed to enable all managers to have seamless, 24/7 access to the most up-to-date and consistently applied policies and processes, reducing risk and reliance on HR.

Enhancing data insights for proactive improvement:

STARK UK sought to gain holistic visibility into ER case management trends to enable more proactive identification of potential issues and a deeper understanding of the employee relations landscape.

Empowering managers with efficient support:

STARK UK committed to digitalising processes to enable managers to access expert guidance and tools, empowering them to handle ER issues with confidence and efficiency.

Improving manager capability:

STARK UK recognised the need to equip managers to safely and compliantly make decisions about ER matters, leading to more confident, skilled managers and less business risk.

Streamlining administrative processes:

STARK UK identified opportunities to optimise ER administrative tasks, freeing up valuable time for the HR team to focus on more strategic initiatives.



The Solution

STARK UK partnered with AdviserPlus to implement a comprehensive employee relations transformation, centred around its ER expertise and innovative **empower®** platform. The solution included:

Advice line service: Implementation of an expert advice line providing managers with readily accessible, expert, professional guidance on ER matters, providing best-practice, consistent and compliant advice.

empower® case management system: **empower®** centralised ER processes, enabling efficient tracking, management, and reporting of cases, addressing issues of version control and policy access.

Manager guided journeys: Implementation of guided workflows within **empower®** support managers through common ER processes, such as disciplinarys

and grievances, ensuring compliance and consistency.

Auto case creation: Trigger-based auto case creation for short-term absence cases enables managers to proactively manage significantly more issues that otherwise might have gone unchecked and escalated.

Management Information (MI) and reporting:

Robust MI dashboards and reporting capabilities give HR and business leaders valuable insights into ER trends and performance metrics.

Collaborative partnership: A strong, transparent partnership between STARK UK and AdviserPlus, with a focus on agile implementation and responsiveness to STARK UK's specific needs, has helped embed the solution as a seamless extension of the STARK UK team.

The speed of implementation and the collaborative partnership have been key to success.

Key benefits and results



Managers empowered to self-serve people matters

Line managers now have easy access to self-serve people matters, supported by guided journeys and expert advice, increasing their confidence in handling employee relations cases. **70% of ER tasks are self-served by managers**, and feedback from managers about **empower®** has been very positive.



A data-driven approach to decision making

MI provides actionable insights, enabling STARK UK to make informed decisions based on data. Trend analysis facilitates a proactive approach to identifying and addressing the root causes of issues that could impact employee experiences.



Increased efficiency and faster case resolutions

Streamlined processes, template documents and centralised, accessible information have significantly improved administrative efficiency, saving time and resources. Auto case creation has resulted in **65% more sickness absence cases being proactively managed by managers**. Case durations are reducing, reflecting STARK's need for a fast-paced approach.



Reduced risk and improved compliance

Consistent application of policies and procedures, expert guidance and robust audit trails, with DSARs downloaded at the touch of a button, have helped reduce the risk of legal challenges and improved compliance, resulting in a **60% reduction in tribunal claims and 65% drop in legal costs**. **empower®** enables managers to proactively take the right action at the right time, reducing the volume of ER matters that escalate.



Enhanced productivity gives HR more time for strategy

The ER function was streamlined and now manages a higher volume of cases. The HR department is now able to operate more strategically, using MI to identify trends, proactively address issues and provide more value-added services.



Agile implementation and effective change management

The ability to implement the solution in an agile manner, adapting to STARK's evolving needs at speed, was essential. Effective change management, including involving managers in testing and communication, facilitated successful adoption.

“Their hard work and dedication to moving at pace and getting under the skin of our business has been incredible. They have enabled us to transform ways of working, empower managers and gain the insight we need to make employee-centric business decisions. Going forward, the partnership will be central to achieving even greater efficiency and enabling HR to provide the best support to the strategic direction of the business.”

Jill Ennever, Transformation Lead, STARK UK

Rapid implementation and a future-proof operating model

This employee relations transformation, grounded in the principle of empowering managers rather than burdening them, has ushered in a new era of efficiency and empowerment. By providing managers with greater choice in accessing information, 24/7 guided support, streamlined processes, and readily available expert advice, this is building a greater sense of ownership and confidence.

The collaborative approach to implementation, which saw the AdviserPlus team immersed in the STARK UK business and actively engaging managers to ensure the solution was truly fit-for-purpose, has culminated in a robust and future-proof ER operating model. The remarkable outcome of **70% of ER tasks now being manager-led, a 60% reduction in tribunal claims and 65% fall in legal costs**, coupled with enhanced management information, demonstrates the profound impact of this strategic shift.

This partnership not only transforms ways of working and reduces business risk and costs, but also cultivates more skilled and confident managers, driving a more agile and empowered workforce.



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

Find out more [here](#).



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About Us

AdviserPlus, an Empowering People Group company, is a leading UK provider of Employee Relations transformation services. Working with large UK corporates and FTSE 100 companies, we combine Employee Relations experts and industry leading technology to deliver next level case management, increase the capability of line managers and improve commercial performance.