Sage People shines a light on diversity data at Channel Four

National broadcaster consolidates nine systems into Sage People, to empower managers and employees

Channel Four operates a publisher/broadcaster model, commissioning production companies to provide a swathe of interesting and creative content. The company also has a film arm – Film4 – which has achieved 135 Oscar nominations and produced 34 Oscarwinning films, including Slumdog Millionaire. Based in London, the company is undergoing relocation to multiple sites, including Leeds, Glasgow, Bristol, and Manchester.

With multiple HR systems spread across sites throughout the UK, a disparate workforce and stringent regulatory requirements to report on diversity targets, Channel Four's HR department was struggling to locate and use its data properly and engage with its 1,000 employees.

Key outcomes

- A single HR system that delivers clean data and quick reporting helping Channel Four deliver on diversity targets
- Employees and line managers are empowered to self-serve HR information from the system leaving HR to perform a more strategic role
- A tailored, location-specific system that helps engage highly-skilled, multi-regional employees

Company
Channel Four

Location
United Kingdom

Industry
Broadcasting/Media

Sage Products
Sage People

About Channel Four
Channel Four is one of the UK's leading broadcasters. Set up by the Government in 1982 and commercially funded, the TV channel's remit is to challenge the status quo through highquality, alternative programming.

Data dilemma

Charlotte Light, Controller of Systems Delivery at Channel Four, says working in a fast-paced environment like the broadcast sector requires the organization to provide its employees and managers with an agile, appealing way of working with HR. "Advertising is a big part of the business, so we're having to move quite fast to deal with the digital changes that are hitting our business externally. From an internal perspective, this means our staff needs the support and capabilities to keep pace with those changes. We needed to digitize our operations and transform our systems to empower our staff to work more efficiently and meet those challenges head-on."

Gaynor Bailey, HR Program and Operations Manager at Channel Four, says the company's legacy HR systems weren't able to cope with these changes. "We had nine different systems within HR, and one of the main struggles for us was getting the data out of those multiple systems to report on diversity and analytics to our senior management team."

According to Gaynor, as part of Channel Four's public remit, the company must report to OFCOM on diversity targets within its organization. However, trying to extract this information is complex and time-consuming.

"Often we need to get analysts involved to knit the information from multiple systems together to produce any kind of report. And because we are so passionate about how we obtain that diversity information we've given guarantees to our employees about who sees this information, making this even more challenging."

Broken engagement

In addition, any urgent requests for people's data from the CEO or senior management could take weeks to compile, by which point either the need was gone, or the information was out of date.

The lack of access to data and information wasn't just challenging around its diversity targets. It was a catalyst for employee disengagement, says Gaynor. "It's not just about HR having access to information, it's also employees being in control of their own data," she adds. "It's hard for them to remember user names and passwords for systems like appraisals that are only used a couple of times a year. This means they avoid using the system and also that we have to spend time reeducating them, instead of thinking strategically about our HR."

Jane Edison, Program Manager for corporate systems, agrees, and says it was also challenging for her technical team. "Integration and support were major issues for us," she says. "Having knowledge of nine different systems and supporting that from a technology perspective led to complexity. It also makes it difficult from a user point of view because each program had a different interface so the user experience was very poor."

"Employees now expect a better user and technology experience, and they definitely couldn't get that with the legacy system we had." Technology that engaged employees and provided a seamless workforce experience was also a priority for the Chief HR Officer, according to Gaynor. "We wanted to be as efficient as possible, removing processes and automating what we could, and ensure that line managers could self-serve the information they need to support the decisions they're making. We wanted to empower them to manage their team, not let HR manage it for them."
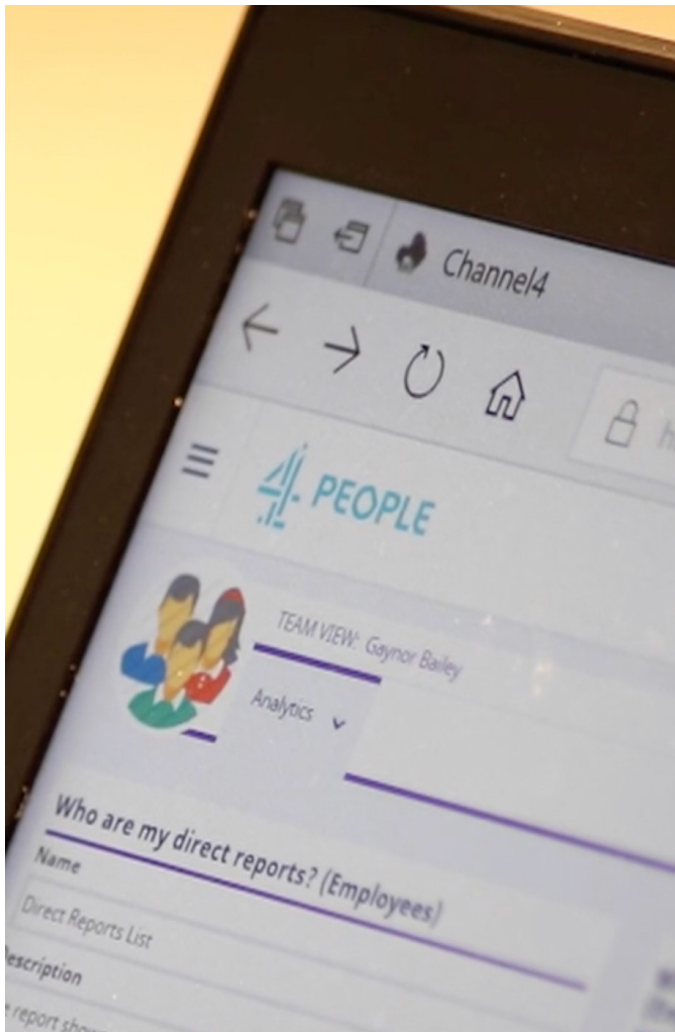
To aid employee adoption, Sage People was rebranded as '4 People'.

A system to deliver the vision

With stringent criteria of what a new HR system should deliver, Channel Four conducted a wide tender process. They were left with two vendors that were both invited in to present. "Sage People did an amazing job," says Gaynor. "They had 15 minutes with our new chief HR officer and they were able to demonstrate that the product was quick, it was nimble and that it was flexible to our needs, especially as we were going through a number of changes as an organization."

The implementation and go-live process took around eight months to deliver. In the first four months, the Sage People team worked with Channel Four to identify the configuration and what areas to focus on. This was to ensure Channel Four could extract the information from the nine different systems into one. Then followed four months of testing and working out how Channel Four would deliver it to employees through a training program and short, tailored instructional videos.

Delivering the data on diversity

Sage People has ensured Channel Four has a single source of truth for all its employee data, including data on its diversity targets. Gathering this information and reporting it to OFCOM is now a much simpler, quicker process with reports taking hours rather than weeks to compile, according to Gaynor.

This speedier reporting helps the broadcaster hit its diversity targets by highlighting areas that require greater attention. It also ensures the organization is mitigating any risk for delayed or inaccurate diversity reports. "It's essential that we can quickly report on our position against our diversity targets so having that information in one system means our heads of department and senior managers can see that information whenever they need to."

Empowering self-service

With all the data in one place, HR can also provide information more quickly to executives through the Sage People. "This means we don't have to extract it to deliver it, they can go in and see the information by self-serving the data," Gaynor says.

This has been a huge time saving for line managers, Light agrees. "From a consolidated data perspective, previously I would have had to put in a request to HR admin and they would provide me with a report and that might take days. Now in Sage People, I can see the same information in less than a minute. It really transforms how you manage your team."

According to Jane, this self-serve aspect of Sage People has made a dramatic difference to her team's ability to be strategic. "We used to have one person dedicated to generating reporting data for HR. With Sage People's self-service functionality, we've been able to re-purpose that person into a value-add role to provide strategic support and enhancements to HR, which is a win/win for everybody."

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Gaynor Bailey
HR Program and Operations Manager, Channel Four

Multi-site advantages

With Sage People, Channel Four employees can now access all their HR information from just one system regardless of where they are working from. This is particularly relevant given the firm's multi-site relocation which is on the horizon. "One of the most important aspects for us was that we re-branded Sage People as 4 People," says Gaynor. "This is especially great for our regional locations because it means that, for example, people in Leeds or Glasgow see their logo and the content that is relevant to them," she adds.

Light says the relocation has encouraged the firm to think about its internal systems. "Historically, we've been based in a single location so we haven't needed agile tools for internal working. As we've expanded we've had to look at our investments and Sage People has really played into our strategy to make our employees more flexible and agile in terms of where, when and how they can work."

Training on a single system

Sage People hasn't just empowered Channel Four employees to work more flexibly, it's helped create benefits from a training and consistency perspective too, Jane says. "Even just from a support and integration perspective, we have just one supplier, one system to support, one user experience. We can train our support team on a single system, rather than nine different ones. When we looked at the business case, the benefits of getting rid of our disparate systems and having one system added up."

Commenting on the impact of Sage People on her team, Light says, "Sage People is one of those systems that's going to help us be operationally efficient. We used to have to access data through analysts, which took several weeks. Now we can access it ourselves in minutes. We don't have to worry about whether the data is clean or not either, which – when we're looking at things like diversity or recruitment – is really important to us."

Gaynor concludes: "Without Sage People as an HR function we wouldn't be able to deliver on our vision, which is to empower our line managers and provide them with the information to make informed decisions, and for Channel Four to become a people first company."

Sage