Sage People gives Armstrong a strategic edge in the war for talent

Sage People becomes a catalyst for change, transforming how Armstrong recruit and manage their global workforce

Global manufacturing utilities company Armstrong International was initially looking to transform the way they recruit to compete in the war for talent and attract the best. They soon realized, however, they needed more than this. They needed a paperless system with a single source of truth, globally, that would provide great experiences for employees and free up vital time in the HR team to focus on their people. They needed Sage People.

Armstrong is a private, fifth-generation family-owned utilities company. With clients in sectors ranging from higher education to healthcare, food and beverage to petrochemical, Armstrong offers steam, water and heating products, services and facilities from 15 locations across the world.

Founded more than a century ago, the company, which has succeeded through wars and recessions, was facing a new challenge: the transition of many of its employees to retirement, while recruiting the best people who could continue its impressive growth strategy.

Company
Armstrong International

Location
Michigan, US

Industry
Manufacturing

Sage Products
Sage People

Armstrong®

About Armstrong International
Armstrong is a private, fifth-generation family-owned thermal utilities company with clients in a range of sectors. Armstrong offers steam, water and heating products, services and facilities from 15 locations across the world.

Sage

Making HR a strategic priority

Patricia Provot, President at Armstrong, says the firm has been in business for over 120 years, and HR is more important now than ever: "Our HR department was focused on the transactional side of HR; medical and personal information, pensions and the administration of hiring new people," she explains. "Now we've gravitated towards having HR as a key part of company strategy, and to support our growth."

Patricia explains: "Armstrong is the type of company where employees stay for years - most of our staff have been here for 30 or 40 years in the same role. As we continue to grow, there will be a transition of our staff as some retire and we hire new employees. We needed a structure to support these initiatives."

According to Melissa Bloss, HRIS Manager at Armstrong, the previous processes in the HR department were manual and highly time-consuming to maintain: "Our biggest challenge was getting hold of information. Every manager has their own department and their own way of doing things, so it was siloed with no shared resources." Melissa wanted to find out how the HR team could be more efficient.

Developing and recruiting the right talent

One of the biggest problems the HR team previously faced was the sheer amount of paperwork that was required — for everything. HR Manager Kim Lucas at Armstrong in Michigan, explained that the team was constantly overwhelmed with paper. She explains: "From signing people onto benefits, to changing addresses or payroll inquiries, it was just paper, paper, paper - everything was manual."

"This made even simple processes time consuming. We were trying to standardize everything, but everyone had their own systems, payroll, spreadsheets and paper files. We needed to find one system that would work for all of us, globally."

With the organization undergoing an employee transition period, talent management and growth were high on the agenda. Melissa says HR was lagging behind the rest of the company in terms of the strategic value they could offer the organization, and that kept her awake at night. "I wanted to be able to help make Armstrong grow into the business it had already become in every other aspect, except HR," she explained matter-of-factly. "We needed to streamline and automate, especially when it came to recruitment." Melissa adds: "Some [hiring managers] can hire up to 30 people at a time, so we wanted to help them and give them the tools they need to be more efficient and successful."

Sage

Armstrong rolled out Sage People as an internal self-service HR intranet.

That's why, Melissa explains, they initially started their search for a system that would help them recruit top talent. "When we started looking, we just looked for a talent management solution that could process resumes and track our candidates."

However, Melissa adds, they soon understood that their requirements were much more complex than that. "We realized that what we actually needed was an employment records system, a performance management system, and a way to properly empower our people and make HR a strategic part of the Armstrong vision."

Melissa says that when the HR team made this strong case to upper management, it wasn't just about asking for new software. "It was about informing them that HR can be strategic; it can help with the biggest asset any company has – their people."

A system that powers employee growth

"That's when we found Sage People," smiles Kim. "It ticked all of our boxes. We wanted to make sure it was straightforward – most of us had never used an HR system before, and we wanted to also introduce it to employees, not all of whom are used to operating computers."

Armstrong rolled out Sage People as an internal self-service HR intranet, where employees could change their own personal details, benefits, summary plans and download information they required. However, Melissa is careful to add, it wasn't about taking away face-to-face time between managers or colleagues. It was quite the opposite in fact. "Sage People gives our managers the tools needed to help them work together with their employees and show them exactly what they're doing for them."

Melissa says the other aspect that really mattered in choosing Sage People was the support. "We were going from paper and filing cabinets to a cloud-based system, and you hear a lot of horror stories about that," she laughed. "I wanted to make sure that we would be fully supported through that process and beyond, and that we continued to be successful after deployment."

To ensure high adoption of Sage People across employees, small training and awareness-raising sessions were held at every location, where the HR team walked employees through the system, helped them enroll online for their benefits and ensured they understood exactly how to use the self-service functionality. The HR team wanted to empower employees to own their own data and administration.

Efficient recruiting and effective reporting

With recruitment being such a strategic business priority, one of the biggest challenges that Sage People helped Melissa overcome was tackling all the personnel files in hard copy in the filing cabinet. "We couldn't even check employee references ," she says. "Our hiring rate was increasing so it was great to have an overview of where we were hiring and where we were meeting our goals, giving the best onboarding experience for our new hires. I wanted them to know exactly what they needed to do and where they stand with the company from their first day."

Kim says, that for the HR team, Sage People has already made a huge difference as part of the recruitment process. "Before, we had so many applicants it was very difficult to keep track of them and monitor what stage they were at. Now everything is done in Sage People, from application, to onboarding and hiring – everything is in one place – it's wonderful."

It's not just recruitment that Sage People has helped make more efficient at Armstrong. Reporting, which previously could take days or weeks, has also drastically improved. "Before Sage People, trying to locate employee data was a challenge," Kim says ruefully. "Some information would be in one place, other information at another site. Now everything is in a single online location that I can access." She adds: "Having the data altogether means I can run reports, quickly and easily. Without Sage People I would be totally lost – I don't ever want to go back to paper!"

Melissa agrees and says the reporting benefits have been felt right at the top of the organization. "Previously, our CFO would get reports every quarter from each of our controllers that just measured turnover and employee numbers," she explains. "When I asked for more specific details it took over a month to pull those numbers from each of our locations. That's crazy!"

Now, having visibility of the workforce on a global level means the CFO can access any reports, whenever and however he wants to, with just one click. "With Sage People, we can run a report almost instantly, so we have a much better understanding of our workforce and can make more informed decisions," says Melissa excitedly.

Sage

"Sage People has become a piece of our everyday life to develop strategies to hire, grow and nurture talent for the future."

Patricia Provot
President, Armstrong International US

A strategic People function

Patricia says Sage People has propelled HR to a strategic place within the business. She explains: "We needed to know how to maintain our knowledge and culture in the company as we moved towards a massive transition of new employees. We realized we didn't have any of the key aspects of HR in the organization – onboarding, development of talent, even performance reviews – and these become vital as we bring in new employees." Melissa agrees and says having the platform has helped increase their reputation, internally and externally. "We can now demonstrate to our employees that we're helping them expand their skill set, so they feel in return that we're passionate about taking care of them," she says.

Sage People's flexibility and configurability has also been vital for the success of the HR function at Armstrong. The team has been able to launch performance management in just two months. "It's impressive," says Melissa. "Not every system allows the flexibility and support to hit the ground running." She adds: "Sage People has enabled us to show to upper management what they've invested in, and why it works, and it has the flexibility to accommodate their needs." One thing Patricia feels particularly proud of is the career development plans for new hires. "HR has been working on a performance review model that allows us to set personalized performance reviews with specific SMART goals that are linked to the overall strategy of the company," she says proudly. "The platform has become a piece of our everyday life to develop strategies to hire, grow and nurture talent, for the future of our business." "Now, with Sage People, when the next generation of people come in, they know we're a company who cares about developing them, helping them grow and setting them up for success, " Patricia concludes.