



Strategic Payroll Evolution

Elevating Payroll Experience through Transformation and Consolidation

TMF
GROUP

Introduction

Payroll processes have traditionally been viewed as administrative tasks managed by the payroll team at the backend, focused solely on ensuring accurate and timely employee payments. However, evolving workforce needs have transformed payroll from a back-office function into a vital component of the overall employee experience. Today payroll integrates with organizational strategies, contributing to financial forecasting, budgeting, and talent management. This alignment enables payroll to support overall business goals, such as cost management, employee satisfaction, and retention.

Changing workforce expectations have driven this shift in payroll's role. Factors such as the emergence of new working models, the blurring of geographic boundaries, and the increasing presence of a digitally savvy workforce have elevated employee expectations. Employees now seek more than accurate and on-time payments; they expect payroll systems built on trust, flexibility, control, transparency, and continuous improvement. Advances in payroll technology have further fueled these expectations, enabling more immersive, personalized, and accessible interactions for employees.

This viewpoint from Everest Group, supported by TMF Group, examines the evolving payroll landscape in response to changing employee needs and outlines a modern approach that organizations can adopt to enhance the employee experience. It will explore how technology plays an enabling role by offering innovative solutions that enhance flexibility, control, and transparency in payroll systems. Key topics explored include:

- Emerging workforce needs and payroll's role in addressing them
- The increasing role of technology in modern payroll
- The importance of managed services in payroll management
- Approach to strategic payroll transformation

HR and business leaders can use this report to identify gaps in traditional payroll practices, gain insights into the payroll systems of the future, address these gaps, embark on a payroll maturity journey, and understand their roles in driving this transformation.

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Contents

- 03 Introduction
- 04 Enhancing employee experience through payroll
- 07 The increasing role of technology in modern payroll
- 11 The role of managed services in payroll management
- 13 Strategic payroll transformation: a unified approach to cost reduction, consistency, and continuous improvement
- 16 Case study
- 17 Conclusion

Introduction

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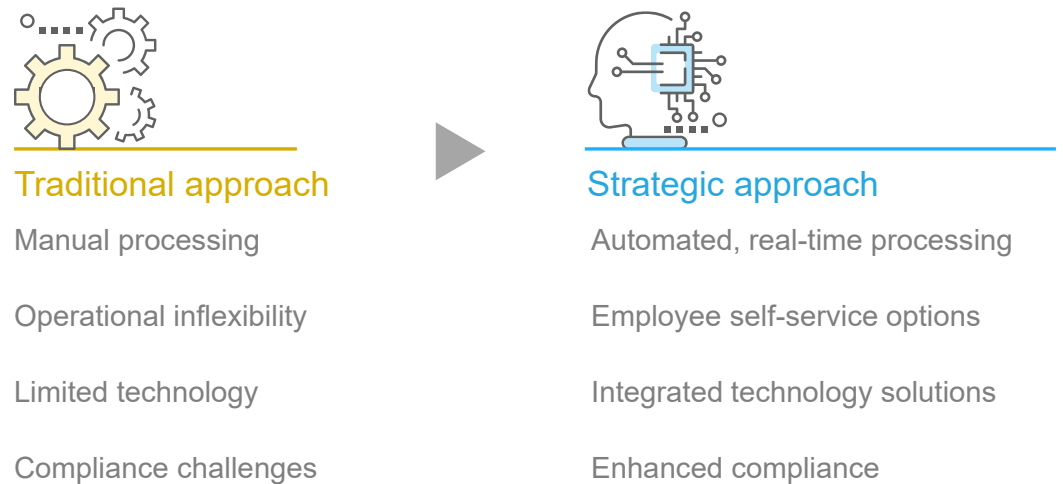
Enhancing employee experience through payroll

Over the past decade, payroll has seen a paradigm shift, evolving from a purely administrative function into a pivotal component of the employee experience. As payroll now impacts everything from onboarding to employee retention, organizations increasingly recognize it as a strategic tool to drive employee satisfaction and foster loyalty.

Exhibit 1 highlights the transformation of payroll management, shifting from a traditional, administrative task to a strategic, employee-centric initiative.

Exhibit 1: Shift in the payroll management approach

Source: Everest Group (2025)



As shown, the traditional approach relied on manual processing, resulting in inefficiencies, inflexibility, and limited technology that limited organizations' ability to meet evolving workforce needs. Additionally, compliance challenges introduced further complexity, consuming significant time and resources.

In contrast, the modern payroll approach leverages automation for real-time processing, significantly reducing errors and improving efficiency. Employee self-service capabilities provide seamless access to payroll information, while integrated technology streamlines operations and delivers actionable insights. Enhanced compliance measures ensure regulatory adherence, mitigating risks and building employee trust.

The shift from traditional to modern payroll management mirrors the broader trend of digitization and automation in HR functions. This evolution enhances efficiency, ensures compliance, and improves employee satisfaction, enabling businesses to remain competitive and relevant in today's rapidly changing environment.

Evolving employee expectations around payroll

Employee expectations around payroll have evolved significantly, driven by societal shifts and technology advances. In the past, employees accepted a standardized, one-size-fits-all payroll model with fixed schedules, limited compensation methods, and minimal visibility into deductions and benefits. Today, the modern workforce demands transparency, flexibility, and control over their compensation. Employees expect real-time access to payroll information, clear explanations of deductions, and flexible payment options tailored to their needs, such as early access to earned wages or customized tax withholding.

Financial wellness has emerged as a key priority. Employees increasingly rely on their employers for financial support tools, including budgeting, savings, and debt management resources. Payroll, as a vital touchpoint for financial engagement, is expected to go beyond delivering paychecks – it must provide an empowering experience that fosters financial security and peace of mind. With a multigenerational workforce and diverse preferences, organizations must address needs such as mobile access to payroll data, integration with financial planning application, and multicurrency options for remote workers and global teams. Exhibit 2 outlines the key factors driving modern payroll expectations.

Exhibit 2: Key factors shaping modern payroll expectations

Source: Everest Group (2025)

	Rise of the digital-first generation	Millennials and Gen Z make up a significant portion of today's workforce, and they prioritize convenience, transparency, and digital accessibility.
	Influence of the gig and freelance economy	The rise of gig work and freelancing has driven expectations for flexible, on-demand payment options in payroll.
	Advances in payroll technology	Cloud-based platforms, AI/ML, and enhanced UX are transforming payroll with real-time access, automation, and intuitive interfaces.
	Global and remote workforce trends	Remote work and global hiring have created a need for payroll systems that accommodate diverse payment preferences, time zones, and currencies.
	Varied preferences across a multigenerational workforce	With multiple generations in the workplace, payroll solutions now need to serve diverse preferences, requiring payroll systems that offer both digital and traditional access options.

As expectations evolve, payroll systems have the potential to significantly impact employee satisfaction. Errors or delays in payroll processing can lead to frustration, decreased trust, and increased attrition. In contrast, a transparent and seamless payroll system enhances an organization's credibility, builds trust, and contributes to a positive work environment.

The need for payroll transformation

Given the evolving expectations and payroll's vital role in shaping the employee experience, organizations must transform their payroll processes to stay aligned with the dynamic demands of today's workforce. Traditional methods are no longer adequate; a shift toward more modern, employee-centric approaches is essential.

This transformation involves reimagining payroll management by leveraging advanced technologies to improve efficiency and enhance employee engagement. This evolution is not merely about upgrading software; it encompasses a holistic approach that aligns payroll practices with broader organizational goals, including employee satisfaction and retention.

To implement this approach effectively, organizations must begin by understanding and addressing the diverse needs of their workforce. The complexity of managing payroll across multiple geographies, entities, and regulatory environments significantly increases, demanding careful navigation of varying compliance requirements, taxation laws, and local payroll practices. At the same time, organizations must ensure a consistent, seamless, and values-driven payroll experience for employees worldwide.

The cornerstone of this transformation is investing in modern payroll technologies. These solutions enable organizations to centralize payroll operations while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to region-specific requirements. By doing so, companies can achieve global consistency without compromising local compliance or employee needs. Advanced payroll systems also provide the transparency, flexibility, and adaptability that today's workforce expects, fostering trust and improving the overall employee experience.

This comprehensive transformation is not just an operational upgrade; it is a strategic initiative to meet the evolving expectations of modern employees and support long-term organizational success.

Technology is revolutionizing payroll, offering significant benefits to both employers and employees.

The increasing role of technology in modern payroll

Traditional payroll systems have consistently faced challenges with efficiency, accuracy, and adaptability to evolving workforce needs. These systems often relied on manual intervention, increasing the risk of errors in payroll calculations, tax deductions, and compliance reporting. Additionally, they lacked the flexibility to handle diverse payment structures or seamlessly support a global workforce.

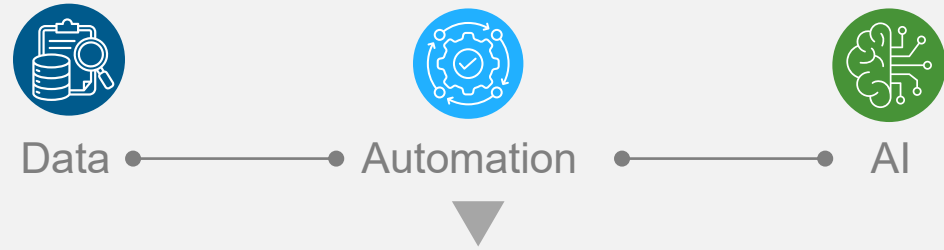
Technology has emerged as a game changer in transforming payroll processes, propelling organizations into a new era of innovation, efficiency, and accuracy. By automating tasks and seamlessly integrating with other systems, businesses are now able to streamline payroll management like never before. Self-service portals have empowered employees to take control of their personal information, while mobile accessibility ensures that payroll data is always at their fingertips.

Advanced compliance management tools navigate complex regulations with ease, fostering a transparent workplace where everyone in the organization feels informed and valued. This tech-driven approach has not only simplified payroll operations for enterprises, but also enriched the overall user experience, creating a sustainable work environment that thrives on efficiency, trust, and satisfaction. Exhibit 3 highlights the key components of payroll technology, demonstrating their positive impact at every level.

Automating core payroll processes and integrating AI-driven insights transform payroll into a strategic powerhouse that builds trust, enhances efficiency, and drives sustainable growth at every level of the organization.

Exhibit 3: Technology driving superior outcomes at every level

Source: Everest Group (2025)



Leadership

Enhanced employee retention and satisfaction

Dynamic reporting and interactive visualizations

Simplified global payroll management

Data-driven strategic decision-making



Employees

Access to self-service portals

Improved financial well-being

Timeliness and accuracy of payments

Increased flexibility

Rapid resolution of payroll-related inquiries



Payroll administrators

Reduced administrative burdens

Improved payroll data management

Simplified compliance management and reporting

Error-free payroll calculations

Strengthened oversight with improved payroll monitoring capabilities



Organization

Enhanced organizational agility through payroll scalability

Streamlined workflows with integrated payroll systems

Increased data security and privacy compliance

Significant cost efficiencies by automating manual payroll tasks

Modern payroll tools such as automation, data management, and AI have transformed employee payroll management by automating key processes such as payroll calculations, tax deductions, and compliance reporting. Automation reduces manual workloads, minimizes errors, and accelerates payment timelines. AI further enhances efficiency by ensuring compliance, improving accuracy, and enhancing stakeholder satisfaction. Integration with HR systems, such as HRIS and time and attendance management platforms, enables seamless data flow between internal and third-party systems. This ensures payroll systems stay updated with real-time data and evolving regulations, eliminating the need for manual monitoring and oversight. Such advances improve the accuracy of payroll calculations, alleviate administrative burdens, and support a more efficient and reliable payroll process.

Advanced payroll technology, powered by AI, automation, and seamless data integration, benefits all organizational levels:

Leadership:

- Provides real-time, data-driven insights into compensation trends, overtime, and benefits costs through interactive dashboards and reports
- Empowers leaders to make informed and strategic decisions on budgeting, resource allocation, and compensation planning
- Enhances global payroll management and supports employee retention and satisfaction by offering clear visibility into payroll management

Employees:

- Ensures timely and accurate salary payments, fostering trust and satisfaction
- Ensures employees receive their salaries without delays and when discrepancies arise, resolves them quickly
- Empowers employees with self-service portals to access pay slips, tax information, and benefits data independently, giving them greater control over their compensation

Payroll administrators:

- Reduces manual workloads by automating calculations for wages, taxes, and deductions, enabling administrators to focus on strategic tasks
- Improves accuracy in payroll processing and ensures adherence to changing tax rates and compliance requirements
- Eases administrative burdens and reduces the risk of noncompliance

Organization:

- Streamlines payroll operations, enabling more effective allocation of resources
- Enhances data accuracy and security, safeguarding sensitive payroll information is stored safely and is accessible only to authorized personnel
- Mitigates the risk of errors or breaches
- Scales easily to accommodate growth, new employees, or evolving compliance requirements
- Boosts employee satisfaction and engagement through reliable payroll processes, contributing to improved retention and overall productivity

Thus, by leveraging payroll technology advances, organizations can transform payroll processes into more efficient, reliable, and strategic components of their overall business operations, contributing to both stakeholder satisfaction and overall organizational success.

The role of next-generation technology in revolutionizing payroll systems

The evolving workplace landscape and rising employee expectations have compelled organizations to adopt cutting-edge technology, not only to streamline payroll operations but also to future-proof their business against emerging challenges while seizing opportunities in a dynamic environment. Next-generation technologies enhance accuracy, provide actionable insights to employees and business leaders, and solidify their role as the cornerstone of modern payroll systems.

Exhibit 4 outlines the transformative role of next-generation technology in revolutionizing global payroll processes across organizations, demonstrating its impact on efficiency, compliance, and employee empowerment.

Exhibit 4: Next-generation technology's role in transforming payroll processes

Source: Everest Group (2025)

■ Use cases

Data analytics	AI/ML	Generative AI	Blockchain technology	Digital wallets and cryptocurrency
Tracks labor costs, overtime trends, and employee turnover rates	AI-powered payroll chatbots for instant query resolution	Automates tax filing assistance	Secure and transparent payroll transactions	Instant and flexible payroll payments
Provides insights for forecasting and budgeting	Automates repetitive tasks to reduce human error and speed payroll cycles	Plans predictive compensation	Cross-border payroll solutions	Employee benefits in digital assets
Identifies patterns for informed workforce planning and retention strategies	Detects anomalies and protects	Personalizes employee communication	Enhances audit trails for payroll transactions	Secure and private transactions
Tracks real-time expense and reimbursement	Analyzes historical payroll data and predicts future trends and patterns	Tailors compensation insights to enhance employee trust and satisfaction	Decentralizes identity verification	Real-time salary adjustments

Organizations embracing next-generation technology are driving a transformative evolution in the payroll landscape. By adopting these advanced technologies, they have empowered themselves to revolutionize not only payroll processing but also the crucial pre-payroll and post-payroll stages.

Advanced technology streamlines data collection and analytics before payroll runs, ensuring accuracy and compliance from the outset. In the post-payroll phase, automated reporting and self-service portals enhance employee engagement and transparency, giving employees easy access to their information. As a result, companies are no longer just processing payroll; they are redefining the payroll experience. This approach delivers strategic insights, fosters agility, and equips a more informed workforce to meet future challenges with confidence.

The role of managed services in payroll management

While technology plays an important role in transforming payroll services and experiences for employees and employers, delivering a seamless experience requires a robust team. Critical factors such as compliance, timely salary disbursement, adhering to tax regulations, and effective query resolution form the foundation of a reliable payroll system. Organizations can manage these elements internally or partner with a payroll managed service provider to streamline operations.

Outsourcing payroll to a managed services provider offers businesses a transformative opportunity to optimize operations and reduce in-house resource requirements. By entrusting payroll responsibilities to external experts, organizations can eliminate the need for expensive infrastructure and dedicated personnel. This approach not only delivers cost savings but also enhances accuracy, timeliness, compliance, and overall process efficiency, leveraging the expertise of professionals who understand the complexities of payroll and regional nuances. Their on-ground presence helps businesses navigate regional nuances, labor laws, and cultural factors that influence payroll operations. As a result, businesses are better equipped to navigate complex regulatory landscapes without the burden of managing these intricacies on their own.

Moreover, this model empowers businesses to focus on strategic priorities rather than tactical, time-intensive payroll operations. For instance, organizations can redirect resources to leveraging payroll analytics for workforce cost insights, optimizing resource allocation, or refining compensation strategies to improve Cost-to-Company (CTC) structures and retention. Payroll-adjacent initiatives such as integrating payroll data with financial planning systems for better labor cost forecasting, aligning payroll with performance management systems, or streamlining compliance processes can also be prioritized.

By offloading operational payroll tasks, internal teams can concentrate on initiatives that drive long-term growth, such as workforce development, innovation, and customer engagement. This strategic shift fosters agility and better equips organizations to adapt to evolving market demands. Ultimately, managed payroll services transform payroll from a routine operational task into a streamlined, strategic function that supports broader organizational objectives.

Exhibit 5 highlights the key contributions of managed services in evolving payroll systems, including streamlining processes, enhancing compliance, and leveraging advanced technologies to optimize operations.

Exhibit 5: The role of managed services in enhancing payroll management

Source: Everest Group (2025)



Access to specialized knowledge

Navigating the complex landscape of payroll regulations presents significant challenges, as rules vary widely by jurisdiction. Managed service providers leverage their specialized knowledge to guide organizations through compliance requirements and best practices. By managing these complexities, they empower HR teams to move away from administrative tasks and focus on strategic initiatives that drive business success.



Global reach

For internationally operating companies, managed services ensure compliance with diverse local laws and regulations while efficiently managing multiple currencies and tax systems. This comprehensive support streamlines payroll processes across borders, allowing organizations to confidently focus on expanding their global footprint.



Scalability and flexibility

Managed services provide the scalability and flexibility organizations need to efficiently accommodate a growing workforce, diverse pay structures, and evolving compliance requirements – all without requiring a complete overhaul of the existing system.

Enhancing data management

Managed service providers substantially improves how payroll data is handled, transmitted, and analyzed within an organization. By employing best practices, managed services ensure that payroll data is accurate, up-to-date, and easily accessible.



Thus, by integrating advanced payroll technologies with the specialized expertise of managed service providers, organizations can achieve a seamless synergy between automation and human insight. Technology automates repetitive and data-intensive tasks, such as calculations, data validation, and reporting. Meanwhile, managed services apply these processes with a nuanced understanding of compliance, regional labor laws, and organizational needs. This combination not only boosts the efficiency and accuracy of payroll systems but also addresses the complex, human-centric aspects of payroll management with precision.

Building on this synergy, managed service providers play an essential role in not only maintaining the organization's current payroll systems but also driving the evolution of payroll technology. They help organizations stay competitive, reduce risks associated with future uncertainties, and optimize payroll operations to align with both current and future business needs. By working closely with organizations, these providers offer a forward-looking perspective that enables businesses to focus on growth and core operations while ensuring their payroll infrastructure is equipped to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Leveraging managed services allows organizations to transform their payroll processes into streamlined, efficient, and compliant operations, ultimately enhancing employee engagement and boosting overall business performance.

Strategic payroll transformation: a unified approach to cost reduction, consistency, and continuous improvement

As we have seen, the evolving expectations around payroll and the need for modernization call for a structured approach to transformation. This approach should support every step of the journey, from aligning payroll with broader business goals to integrating advanced technologies.

When embarking on this transformation journey, organizations must evaluate certain factors to ensure a smooth and successful transition. The process begins with identifying existing payroll challenges, such as process inefficiencies, compliance risks, or inconsistent technology across regions.

Additionally, assessing current payroll KPIs, such as processing time, accuracy, and costs, is essential. Clear objectives should be established by addressing key questions:

- What specific challenges are we solving?
- Who is the ideal payroll partner to support our goals?
- What are the transformation costs, and how will they be managed?

Once the strategy and goals are defined, organizations can focus on the following essential aspects to achieve their desired outcomes.

- **Reevaluating the operating model**

Transforming payroll begins with organizations reevaluating their operating models. Organizations can explore various approaches such as in-house management, outsourcing, hybrid models, or service consolidation. Some organizations may choose to centralize their payroll operations by consolidating from a decentralized setup into a single-provider model or shared services, enhancing consistency and standardization. Others might opt for outsourcing to specialized external providers, leveraging expert knowledge and scaling operations worldwide. Each organization must choose the model that aligns best with its unique needs and strategic objectives

- **Optimizing processes**

Efficiency plays a vital role in successful payroll transformation. By optimizing payroll processes, organizations can reduce costs, improve accuracy, and ensure consistency across locations and departments. Streamlining workflows, automating repetitive tasks, and standardizing calculations and reporting can mitigate compliance risks while fostering a seamless payroll experience that enhances employee trust and satisfaction

- **Prioritizing people and change management**

Payroll transformation succeeds only with strong support from people within the organization. Effective change management ensures employees and managers understand and adopt new processes, systems, and roles. This requires clear communication, hands-on training, and ongoing support to build confidence and commitment to the changes. By prioritizing people and change management, organizations can foster a positive culture, reduce resistance, and ensure a smooth transition

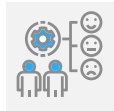
- **Embracing technology integration**

Modern payroll transformation is driven by technology. Integrating advanced systems such as cloud-based platforms, automation, and analytics provides real-time data access, automated compliance updates, and personalized features such as on-demand pay and multicurrency support. This digital-first approach enables payroll to adapt seamlessly to evolving workforce needs and regulatory requirements, transforming it into a data-driven, strategic function

By addressing these key aspects, organizations can ensure payroll transformation goes beyond adopting new tools or policies. The focus should be on creating a sustainable, scalable payroll function that aligns with organizational goals while enhancing employee satisfaction. This structured approach reduces costs, improves consistency, and positions payroll as a strategic enabler of workforce engagement and resilience.

Measuring the value realized

To evaluate the success of payroll transformation, organizations should define clear metrics and benchmarks. Key indicators of a successful transformation include:



Improved employee experience

Advanced payroll systems offer employees easy and convenient access to their payroll information, promoting transparency and boosting satisfaction and engagement



Automated and reliable processing

Increased automation reduces manual interventions, minimizes errors, and ensures timely payroll processing, enhancing overall reliability



Centralized view of global data

Consolidating payroll data into a centralized system improves visibility and facilitates informed decision-making, enabling organizations to track and analyze payroll performance effectively



Seamless provider integrations

Integrating payroll systems seamlessly with Human Capital Management (HCM) systems and other payroll providers streamlines operations, boosts data accuracy, and eliminates inefficiencies



Enhanced compliance

Strengthened compliance mechanisms ensure adherence to local regulations, reducing the risk of legal issues and fostering trust in payroll processes



Continuous improvement

To maintain the strategic value of payroll transformation, organizations should regularly monitor payroll KPIs and refine processes as needed. Staying updated on technology advances ensures payroll operations remain efficient, compliant, and aligned with business objectives

By focusing on these metrics and adopting a proactive approach to continuous monitoring and refinement, organizations can ensure long-term success and adaptability in their payroll operations.

Case study: Company background and business objectives

NTT Ltd., a global leader in IT services, acquired Dell Services to enhance its capabilities and expand its reach. With the acquisition, NTT Data inherited a geographically dispersed workforce across EMEA, APAC, and LATAM, necessitating a comprehensive payroll management system to address multi-country complexities.

Challenges faced

- **Multi-region payroll complexity:** The acquisition introduced workforce integration challenges, with payroll operations varying significantly across EMEA, APAC, and LATAM
- **Compliance management:** Operating in diverse regions meant adhering to complex, evolving regulations in each country
- **Operational inefficiency:** The lack of centralized visibility into payroll data made it challenging to align payroll operations with organizational goals

Solution

To overcome these challenges, TMF Group deployed Horizon, a unified payroll platform designed to consolidate multi-country payroll operations. The platform provided centralized payroll management with end-to-end visibility into payroll data across regions, ensuring accuracy and consistency. Leveraging local expertise, the platform automated compliance with complex country-specific tax, labor, and statutory requirements, minimizing risks and ensuring regulatory adherence.

Additionally, the platform offered robust self-service options, empowering employees and HR teams to access and manage payroll information efficiently. Complementing this technology component, TMF Group's on-the-ground presence in all the client's required countries ensured seamless operational execution and localized compliance, further strengthening the effectiveness of the solution.

Outcomes

- **Consolidated payroll operations:** Integrated payroll management across EMEA, APAC, and LATAM into a single platform, ensuring consistency and scalability
- **Enhanced compliance:** Achieved 100% compliance with local regulations, reducing risks of penalties and fostering confidence in payroll processes
- **Increased operational efficiency:** Streamlined workflows significantly reduced time and costs, freeing up resources for strategic initiatives
- **Improved employee satisfaction:** Accurate and timely payroll processing enhanced employee trust and morale, enhancing engagement across regions
- **Seamless transition management:** TMF Group's structured approach to knowledge transfer reduced disruptions during service representative transitions, ensuring business continuity

Conclusion

The future of payroll is poised for a transformation as organizations adapt to an evolving workforce landscape and embrace technology advances. This shift requires businesses to align with emerging trends and seize opportunities that redefine payroll, enhancing employee experiences and streamlining operations.

Technology plays a central role in this evolution, driving automation, improving accuracy, and enabling more personalized and transparent payroll processes. These advancements empower businesses to foster greater accessibility and autonomy for employees, while laying the groundwork for a dynamic payroll system that aligns with modern workforce expectations.

Organizations must approach payroll transformation as a strategic priority. By combining managed services with advanced technology, businesses can strike the right balance between personalized support and innovation. This holistic approach ensures payroll not only meets operational needs but also strengthens employee satisfaction and organizational success in a rapidly changing marketplace.



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We are a key part of our clients' governance, providing the accounting, tax, payroll, fund administration and legal entity management services essential to their success
We make sure rules are followed, reputations protected and operational compliance maintained

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