

MYOB Advanced People

7 major risk factors to the health of your payroll

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How to manage risks before they affect your business

Does your payroll system measure up? Do you clearly understand the risks associated with payroll and whether your system can effectively manage them?

This guide will help you see and mitigate the risk in your payroll before it becomes a major problem for your whole organisation.

7 major risks to payroll

Payroll has historically been seen as a low risk function, generally automated or outsourced and where issues rarely trouble the higher levels of management. That needs to change.

It's important to know what's happening in your payroll. Doing so will help you avoid major challenges due to fraud, non-compliance, loss of a key resource or worse. As we discuss the seven areas of payroll risk, you'll be presented with key questions that will help you re-evaluate the way in which you approach payroll management.

Major risk 1

Security breaches

Your payroll holds the most confidential data in your organisation. It holds the most risk if there is a breach, whether it comes from inside or outside of your organisation. That's why security is important.

Technology is important in maintaining security, but even more critical are the security measures in place at both a system and staff level. If not treated correctly, data security can be easily breached. Only strong, risk averse processes can alleviate this.

Questions you should be asking

- + What processes are in place for your payroll department about how they share their data?
- + Do your processes on managing employee data match the privacy expectations of your employees?
- + Who has access to the data and how often is your user access audited?
- + Are logins used by more than one person, limiting your ability to see who is accessing the system at any one time?
- + Are your employees trained to spot out-of-process events which could be attempts to gain access to data?
- + Are you doing everything you can to keep employee data completely safe?

Major risk 2

System or data loss

Backup and disaster recovery processes are extremely important when it comes to managing the risk of system or data loss. However, implementing these processes aren't enough. Organisations need to be aware of what processes are in place and have them tested to ensure that no matter what happens they can continue paying staff.

If your data is currently stored in the cloud, you may be thinking it's secure and there is nothing to worry about. You probably also have backups and disaster recovery processes to recover the data if it's ever lost.

Organisations with an on-premise data solution are also at risk. Servers can be damaged or trapped in buildings that are inaccessible, meaning data that is vital to doing business can be lost, either temporarily or permanently.

Questions you should be asking

- + Is your payroll data backed up? If so, where?
- + What are your disaster recovery processes for your payroll?
- + If your current plans fail, how would you recover your data and systems?
- + Can you access your payroll technology remotely?

Major risk 3

Loss of corporate knowledge

In most organisations, payroll staff are critical to ensuring your employees get paid smoothly. This is a key resource risk because only a small number of people know how your specific payroll function works. Without them, your payroll department can't function and you also risk losing the knowledge of how your payroll technology was configured.

So, when it comes to corporate knowledge, what your people know about your business and your processes can't be taken for granted.

Questions you should be asking

- + How many people in your business know how to run payroll?
- + Why is your payroll system configured the way it is?
- + What ongoing maintenance is required for your payroll system?
- + Are your payroll processes documented?
- + If your payroll manager left tomorrow, would their replacement be able to immediately run payroll successfully?

Major risk 4

Fraudulent activity

Fraudulent activity in payroll is a significant concern for organisations. An online search of “payroll fraud” will provide you with millions of examples in which companies from around the world have been victims.

What can be done to prevent instances such as these?

Fit-for-purpose, risk aware processes need to be created, embedded and evolved as your company grows. They need to cover things like segregation of duties, multiple approvers for payments and regular audits.

Without these processes, leaders in a business do not have the tools required to catch potential fraudsters.

Questions you should be asking

- + When did you last audit or review your payroll for indicators of risk, including payments to employees who have now left the business?
- + Is the same person responsible for creating new employees in your payroll system also responsible for paying them?
- + Is the person who pays staff also responsible for approving what they are paid?
- + When bank account details are changed, does your system alert someone other than the person who runs the payroll software?
- + Is your payroll large enough that a significant overpayment would not stand out?
- + Do you have a mechanism to prevent time theft or leave leakage?
- + Who audits the auditors?
- + Would you know if someone has or is committing payroll fraud in your company?

Major risk 5

Non-compliance

Tax compliance is a major focus for organisations when selecting a payroll system. This often leads to the belief that the solution will always keep you compliant with New Zealand legislation. However, if your system requires manual processes and isn't designed to meet your tax compliance needs, how can you rely on it?

If an organisation relies on manual processes it increases the risk of making a mistake or manipulating data. Rekeying, duplicates, accidentally missing records, using the wrong spreadsheet formula – the list goes on.

Perhaps the system implemented isn't fit-for purpose. Did the evaluation process uncover any limitations of the vendors' systems? Did the team running the implementation correctly replicate the organisation's workflows? There is also the possibility workflows weren't reviewed before they were built into the system.

Whatever the reason, it can have a negative impact on an organisation's finances and reputation.

Questions you should be asking

- + Is your payroll system compliant with current tax legislation? How accurately are you paying your employees in line with their associated agreements?
- + Does your existing system provide automated interpretation and apply calculations based on a specified set of rules? Or are your line managers and payroll team manually calculating the payments?
- + If your team makes manual calculations, what checks are in place to ensure accuracy?
- + How does your payroll team keep you compliant if tax legislation suddenly changes?
- + Are you absolutely confident you're paying employees in complete accordance with your obligations?

Major risk 6

Soft costs

Do you know what your payroll cost you last year?

Some organisations will do a quick calculation by working out the total amount they paid their employees last month and multiplying by twelve. Others produce a quick report from their system. A few will even tell you the cost of the payroll, plus the cost of payroll staff and the annual cost to run the payroll technology they use. However, not many businesses can tell you the 'soft costs'. These are costs created by payroll processes not designed to maximise the operational efficiencies of your workforce. These costs can't be seen but your profit line feels their impact.

Examples of soft costs

1 Diversion from core role to admin

Managers are key people. They ensure operational efficiency, recruit, develop and retain staff, and report back to the business. By asking them to follow processes which are manual or not fit-for-purpose, you're diverting them from their core role. The average person spends two weeks a year on manual processes in their organisation, and your organisation could be incurring this cost.

2 Poor data management

Instead of leveraging a fit-for-purpose system to manage data information, many organisations use spreadsheets or email. This produces unreliable data, which is then handled multiple times, stored in different spreadsheets, emails and word documents across the business, and then used to report critical information back to leaders in the business.

Managers and executives in the business are then using potentially incorrect data to make critical business decisions.

3 No true cost of operation

If your organisation is made up of mostly salaried employees, then your payroll will only reflect the standard cost of those employees and not the time they are taking to do their roles. Perhaps they are taking longer to complete tasks than you realise. Lack of insight into your staff's performance means you're missing out on opportunities to drive efficiencies in your organisation.

4 Timely visibility into consequences of decisions

Your labour costs will be one of the highest cost centres in your business but often organisations have no visibility into the financial implications of their staff decisions. Managers do not know how much a shift has cost the business until it's too late. Often these staffing and workforce decisions are made quickly and under pressure. Your staffing requirements can be costlier than they need to be.

Businesses don't realise that they can provide information about staffing costs, whether for full-time or casual employees, enabling the manager to make the most prudent choice rather than going with the most convenient option. The cost of these staffing decisions can often go undocumented because of the weeks it takes for costs to hit your General Ledger. Without strong, fit-for-purpose processes giving you in-depth payroll reporting, you may never get the full picture of what your staffing decisions may be costing your business.

5 Leaking time

Many organisations suffer from time or annual leave theft. Some of this may be attributed to dishonesty, but most is accidental and caused by the processes and systems that are built for time capture. Time and annual leave management processes are often built for those in head office processing the information, and not for those who are using them every day to record their time.

This creates challenges when completing forms and reviewing the information. This may mean an executive or decision maker cannot accurately determine how many annual leave days their staff are taking out in the field or the hours they are on site, and therefore has no way to reduce or prevent this potentially high soft cost.

6 Material costs

Payroll as a function is like any other in the business, to operate it requires the support of shared services. Your payroll staff is a cost centre, utilising office space, furniture, desks and computers, as well their share of any other facilities and equipment.

If you have an on-site deployment, your payroll system and data will need IT infrastructure and support. As these resources are given to the payroll function, you need to invest further to provide them to other areas of the business. It's a necessary and unavoidable cost of doing business.

7 Cost of growth

When a business expands, and hires new employees, it will often have to scale up its payroll department to meet the increased needs of this larger workforce. This is a cost of growth. If a company with manual processes or systems that are not fit-for-purpose grows significantly and doesn't hire more payroll talent, they are putting their payroll at greater risk due to increased human error caused by a faster pace of work to accommodate the necessary volume and burnout of payroll staff.

A business leader who is serious about expanding their business could eliminate this cost of growth by building processes and investing in a system that enables business growth without needing to grow the personnel in the payroll team.

Questions you should be asking

- + Is your time capture process complicated, therefore taking your talented staff away from their core role?
- + Are you relying on your line managers to undertake ad hoc admin tasks for time management or payroll?
- + Do your managers and payroll team receive requests from different areas of the business for the same information?
- + Where do your managers get their information? Are they self-serving from multiple spreadsheets in multiple locations by multiple authors?
- + If line managers must hire staff at short notice, are they presented with a list of costed choices so they can match these against their budget? Or are they left to make the most convenient choice?
- + Are you planning to grow your business over the next few years? Have you accounted for growing the payroll function?
- + How do you currently measure your payroll soft costs?



Major risk 7

Organisational fit

An organisation's payroll processes and systems tend to remain in place and unchanged for years. Companies are still doing things the same way they did years ago, even if their needs have changed. A system or process that is no longer fit for your business means you'll be unable to effectively manage labour costs, increase profits, improve your efficiency and seize opportunities.

Questions you should be asking

- + Think back to your first day in the business. How have your payroll processes changed since then?
- + When were your payroll systems and processes built? Have they been evaluated since?
- + Is the payroll function meeting the expectations of the business?
- + Have other functions in your business evolved their processes to meet commercial requirements?
- + Are the skills in your payroll department fit for purpose?
- + When implementing new software that affects your staff, do you consider the payroll function?
- + What is the business rationale for not reviewing payroll processes and technology?

How MYOB Advanced People can help

MYOB Advanced People is a scalable, flexible payroll management solution for larger businesses that is as simple as it is powerful. An all-in-one management tool, MYOB Advanced People enables your business to calculate finances, track labour costs, analyse trends and created detailed reports in real time.

Powerful payroll

Manage your business and payroll in one integrated system.

Simplified compliance

Keep PayDay filing compliant and eliminate payroll complexity by staying up to date with tax changes.

Employee self-service

Increase employee satisfaction with mobile and online self-service capabilities.

Peace of mind

Reduce errors and risk with streamlined payroll processing.



Contact MYOB Advanced People today

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