



*South African Payroll Association*

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### **A Career in Payroll: taking on a strategic role in businesses**

Strength of character, an ethical attitude and a professional mind-set. These are the qualities which define a successful payroll practitioner in the modern workplace. The days when payroll was a 'fallen into' career, one which was discovered as someone worked their way up the ranks, are rapidly disappearing. Today, payroll is one of the pillars holding up the business, handling one of its biggest costs and providing strategic insight which transforms corporate communication and impacts on the bottom line.

"Payroll professionals pay the wages and the salaries, one of the biggest business expenses," says James McKerrell, CEO, South African Payroll Association. "They should not be appointed because they have administrative skills, but because they have financial acumen and the ability to handle both management and employee when something goes wrong. Payroll is not just a subset of Human Resources (HR) or finance, it is the oil which keeps the gears of the corporate engine running smoothly."

#### **Building bridges**

Today successful businesses are increasingly recognising the importance of payroll as a department in its own right, staffed by professionals. This shift is allowing for old issues to be addressed and new bridges to be built, especially between payroll and HR.

"There has often been a disconnect between HR and payroll, the former telling the latter to make something happen and payroll being unable to deliver what HR has promised thanks to technicalities and legalities which have to be kept top of mind," explains McKerrell. "Today, bridges are being built slowly but surely. Payroll and HR professionals have skills which complement one another and as these are recognised and understood, the two functions are working together rather than against one another."

This shift in interdepartmental understanding is impacting on how the payroll role is perceived and in its growth as a prospective career. The younger generation is already seeing payroll as a desirable career, recognising the difference it makes and the part that it plays and the professionalism it embodies.

"When a business hires someone who has chosen a career in payroll, they are hiring someone who understands the challenges, knows how to minimise statutory risks and

reputational damage and who can see the links between payroll and HR,” says McKerrell. “They have the skill and knowledge to address any disconnect with management and are strategists who know their value and how to communicate with those in charge.”

Today’s payroll practitioner is a strategic thinker who understands risk, recognises the potential for engagement across departments and knows the business from the inside out.

“Accounting degrees and B.Com graduates are superb candidates for payroll,” concludes McKerrell. “Technology can’t solve all business challenges and a data capturer will just work the system. A trained and qualified payroll practitioner, however, knows how to talk to management and provides strategic advice and insight which can transform the bottom line and the way an organisation does business.”

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