



Guidebook

# The Human Side of Accounts Payable

6 ways AP automation helps your team feel better, work smarter & stay engaged



## What's inside

# About this guide

What does it mean to be a human-centric organization? Free snacks? Ping pong tables? A flexible schedule with unlimited PTO? While perks are appealing, there are far deeper factors driving the engagement, loyalty and happiness of today's employees – particularly those in accounts payable (AP).

This guide explores the psyche of modern AP professionals, how prioritizing their humanity brings about broader company success, and why AI-driven automation is an ideal solution for nurturing such personal and professional fulfillment within your team.

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## Introduction

# The human story

Before we get into the weeds of invoices, payments and all-things AP, it's worth asking ourselves as humans: How did we get here? Time for a quick 4.5-billion-year recap:

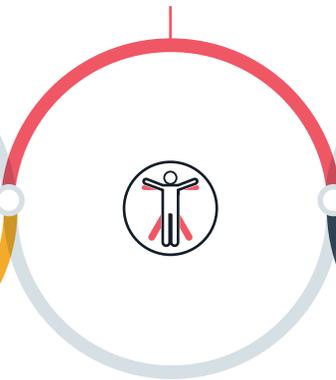
### The Big Bang

The hot, dense, cosmic explosion that theoretically started it all ... guess you just kinda had to be there.



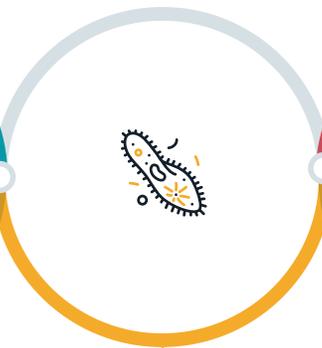
### Humans appear

Homo sapiens stumble out of the menagerie, eventually inhabiting every corner of earth. Yay for us?



### Life emerges

Our planet cools whilst getting infinitely cooler — jellyfish, dinosaurs and insects all enter the chat.



### Modern day

The age of airplanes, air conditioning and accounts payable. What a time to be alive, indeed.



## The 9 to 5

# Why people want a career in payables

A huge part of the modern human experience involves what many consider an inescapable inconvenience — going to work. But despite its compulsory nature, most people still care a great deal about what they do and how they do it.

For example, AP folks generally excel at math, research and record-keeping but doesn't mean they expect to work a boring, one-dimensional job. Yes, a generous salary and benefits go a long way, but there's much more fueling their fulfillment.



### Professional growth

Of the people who quit their jobs from April 2021 to April 2022, 41% did so due to lack of career development and advancement opportunities.<sup>1</sup>



### Meaningful work

Does manually entering invoices into an ERP system sound rewarding? AP folks don't think so, which is why they value work that's meaningful vs. mundane.

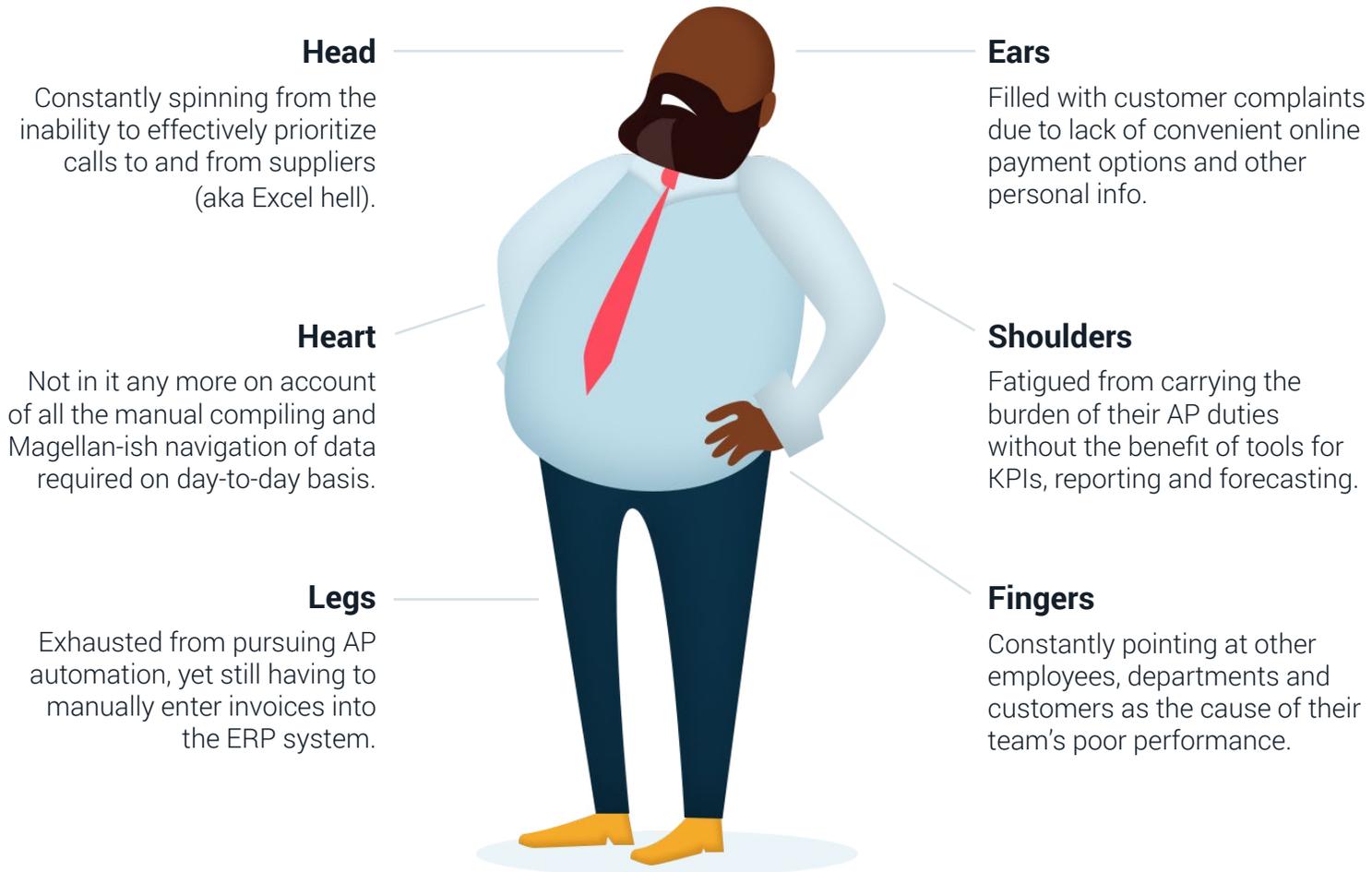


### Personal well-being

Whether it's flex schedules or recognition of good work, attractive companies are those that prioritize people's professional and psychological needs.

# Anatomy of an unhappy AP employee

If you think members of your AP team isn't a part of the 40% of the unhappy workers<sup>1</sup> looking for new opportunities, we've got some based news for you .. Take a quick look around. Typically, the signs and symptoms of a disgruntled AP employee are present long before they come to the boss quoting Johnny Paycheck lyrics. Here's what to look for:



## According to survey results by Gartner:

3.2x

Employees who operate in human-centric work models — where they are seen as people, not just resources — are 3.2 times more likely to enjoy their jobs with a high intent to stay.<sup>2</sup>

## People over process

# The full scope of AI's potential

After years of continuous change, adapting a more human-centric AP approach is now a prerequisite for keeping a business competitive. Yet it goes far beyond a revamped mission statement or meager salary bump.

To truly put people over process, AP departments need the help of modern technology that's capable of transforming the ability of AP employees to perform daily tasks, work easily with suppliers and fulfill their own professional aspirations.

For many Finance teams, that technology is AI-powered automation — a solution arguably best defined by what it doesn't do vs. what it does. For example, in an AP environment, automation:



**Doesn't replace humans or eliminate nuance.** Functioning more like a highly specialized team member, AI-driven automation does the mundane “heavy lifting” so your team is free to perform more strategic tasks.



**Doesn't supplant existing tech stacks.** Automated AP solutions maximize the value of whatever systems are in place by working alongside them and augmenting areas they may fall short in (i.e., manual gaps).



**Doesn't mean you'll solve every issue.** Even with AI assisting, your AP process won't be running on autopilot. Sustained success will require a proactive strategy and dedication to continuous process improvement.

# 6 ways AP automation helps your team feel better, work smarter & stay engaged

According to Gallup research, only 32% of U.S. employees were actively engaged in their jobs in 2022 — down from 36% engagement as recently as 2020.<sup>3</sup> Not great news for AP, which has a direct impact on company cashflow and deals directly with suppliers.

In the following pages, you'll learn about AP automation's role in combating this disturbing trend — detailing the six major ways it dramatically improves the output and outlook of the average AP employee.



**Let's get counting ...**

# 01

## Makes for crazy-simple onboarding & training

You know what today's workers hate? Obstacles. That's why AP employees – particularly those who fall in the category of Millennial or Gen Z – gravitate toward companies that allow them to hit the ground running from day one.

Automated solutions are a great way to bypass drawn-out onboarding processes or painful training sessions thanks to their ability to remove any unnecessary delays, disruptions or duress for your newest team members.



### One interface, all the custom KPIs

Not only are AP automation solutions backed by a cloud infrastructure for 24/7 availability, all of the information your team needs – from purchase orders, invoices, supplier contracts and payment statuses – flows directly through a single, easy-to-use interface.

No mastery of tribal knowledge necessary!

The screenshot displays the TMC Accounts Payable dashboard. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation tabs for HOME, VENDOR INVOICES, EXPORTS, REPORTS, TABLES, and VENDORS. The main section features three large KPI cards: '51 Invoices assigned to approvers', '12 Invoices on hold', and '57 Invoices pending payment'. Below these are two charts: a stacked bar chart for 'Invoices verified by month' and a pie chart for 'Invoices pending by approver' with a callout for 'Kate CCOwner2: 7 (28.00%)'. A secondary screenshot below shows a detailed view of '51 Invoices assigned to approvers', including a filter section for 'Company code' and a table of invoice details.

	Date/time submitted	Invoice status	Vendor name	Invoice number	Invoice date	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open	9/21/2021 1:53:49 PM	To verify	MJ	281509	5/7/2020
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open	9/13/2021 2:26:37 PM	To verify	Belle et Belle	272007	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open	9/7/2021 10:26:14 AM	To verify	American Wood Exports	271988	9/7/2021
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open	8/18/2021 1:16:37 PM	To verify	Adcom	264938	8/18/2021

# 02

## Replaces the mundane with meaning

It's no secret that traditional AP operations can be a hotbed for all sorts of menial and downright mind-numbing work. This isn't just destructive to your team's well-being, it's also antithetical to the kind of strategic value-driving that's now expected out of modern AP departments.

Thankfully, AP automation solutions have powerful technologies working behind the scenes that absolve employees of these time-consuming tasks. What's more, the "free time" they're now afforded can be directed toward work that is more meaningful and valuable – both to the individual and the enterprise.



### Basic & complex workflow handling

New records are submitted to different users based on their profiles. Vendor-initiated changes trigger new approvals, reducing risk and protecting reputation.



### AI-driven data recognition

Optimizes invoice data extraction by using machine learning and deep learning to accurately extract and populate into a validation form (or auto-approved when no exception is detected).



### E-payment

Users can have a 100% digitized process, from sign-off to payout. Every step and user action is recorded in the system ensuring the process is compliant and payments are timely and accurate. No more time wasted shuffling paper!



### Dynamic discounting

Allows your company to optimize cash and secure your supplier base by offering accelerated payments. Suppliers provide a discount in real-time to improve cashflow and reduce the cost of goods.



## Real-life payables

# Meet Michael

Without visibility into approval workflows and general performance metrics, LTP Sports had a hard time understanding its cash position and the status of its supplier invoices. That is, until they decided to explore digital solutions for centralizing their AP process and delivering new levels of speed, efficiency and visibility to the team.

[Read full story](#)



**“It’s much easier to see who we’re waiting on and still has invoices to approve. Now, we can quickly look it up in Esker and know immediately who needs a reminder.”**

Michael Derrick  
Junior Accountant, LTP Sports

# 03

## Fosters mutual trust & respect

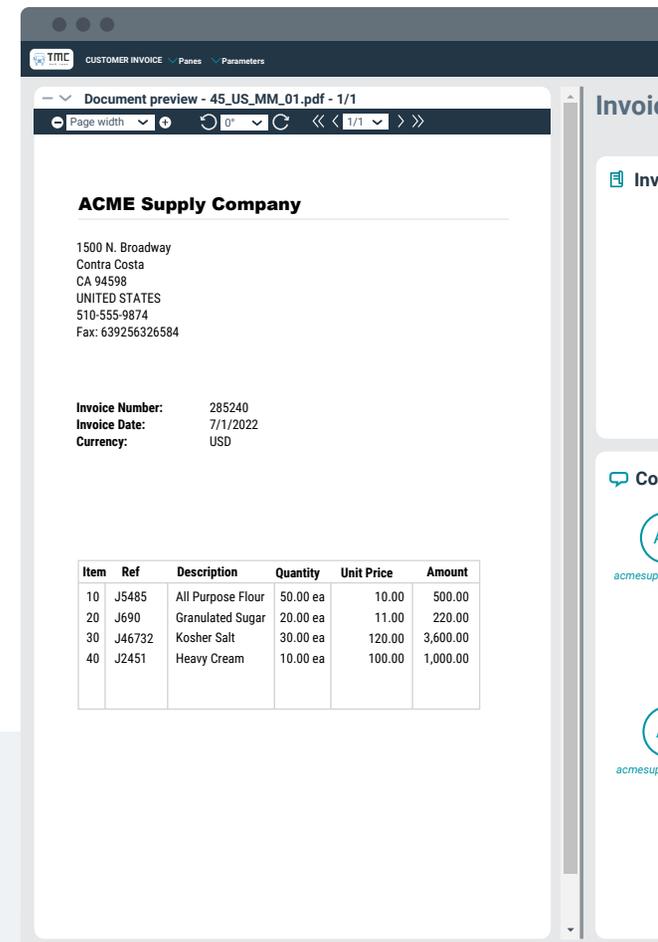
Much like being a good server at a restaurant with atrocious food, it's hard being an exceptional AP employee at an organization with second-rate tools and processes. From receiving an invoice to making a payment, every point of suppliers contact with AP ultimately reflects your team, for better or worse. Every suppliers' interaction matters and can affect the quality of the relationships you build and the payment terms you negotiate. Unhappy suppliers lead to more calls, more discrepancies and, ultimately, overworked employees that would much rather serve happy suppliers.

Thankfully, suppliers–employee tension is cut down dramatically when AP automation is employed. Payment is on time and accurate, dispute resolution is quick and painless, and essential data is just a click away for all parties.



### Supplier self-service options

Most automated solutions offer a convenient online portal that give suppliers self-service access to payment information, helping them get paid quicker, reduce costs and, in turn, save your company time and money previously allocated to responding to invoice status calls. The result is happier suppliers and an AP team with more time to spend on other value-added and dopamine-producing activities.



# 04

## Makes way for growth and opportunities galore

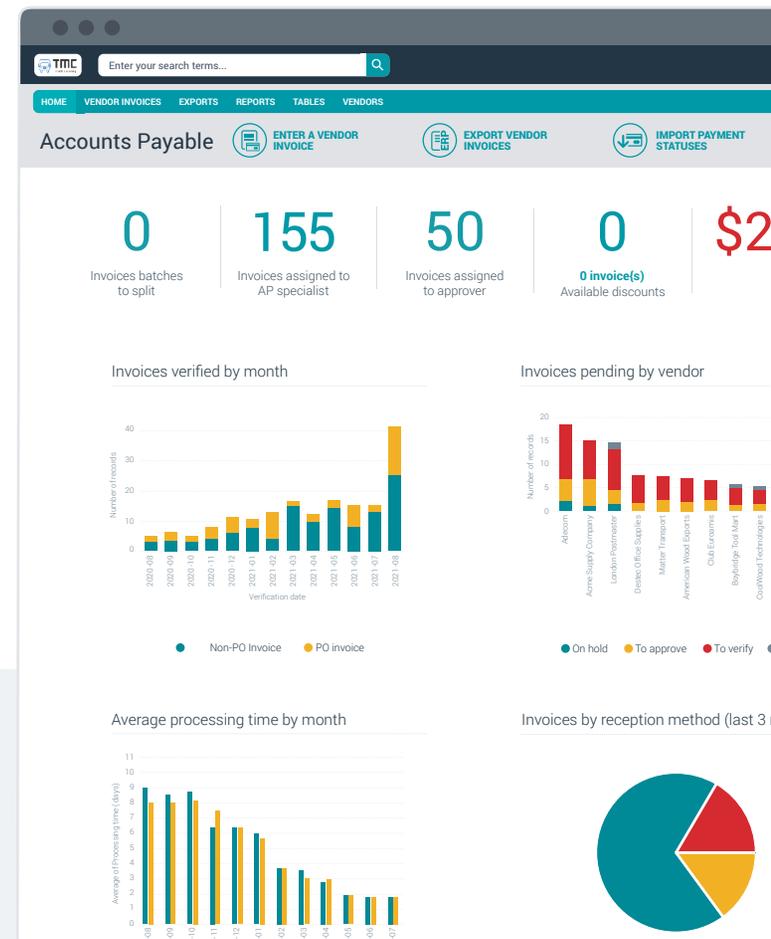
Currently, only 1 in 3 workers feel as though they receive ongoing recognition for their work.<sup>4</sup> Not only is this statistic more than a little depressing, it's also straight up bad for business. Consistent praise is shown to increase employee's sense of belonging, their work performance, and their willingness to stay at their current job.

Naturally, with praise comes opportunity. Automated AP solutions enable both by not only helping managers use KPIs to better identify top-performing AP employees, but also creating new career-pathing opportunities by necessarily redefining some positions.



### KPIs for monitoring AP performance

Good work never goes unnoticed in an automated environment! Finance and AP teams can customize the metrics displayed on their interface in easy-to-read graphs and reports, allowing every action – from performing daily tasks to monitoring budgets – to be more strategic and value-added while ensuring high achievers are consistently recognized and rewarded (and never blamed for a laggard's poor performance).





Real-life payables

## Meet Patricia

As a company that prioritizes investing in its people and embracing technology, DMC Global Sr. Account Manager Patricia Aldape knew it needed an AI-driven AP solution that enabled scalable growth while bringing the two together seamlessly.

[Read full story](#)



**“We’ve been able to get most of our vendors to send invoices directly into our AP solution. Now, I have full visibility of the AP exposure that’s out there.”**

Patricia Aldape  
Sr. Accounting Manager, DynaEnergetics Americas

# 05

## Eases insecurities about their job & future

While the concept of “worker insecurity” is seemingly baked into our economic model, more and more companies are finding out just how harmful it can be to their employees and bottom line. In addition to its effects on people’s mental well-being and physical health, recent research found that engagement decreased by 37% among workers with fears of job stability.<sup>5</sup>

Automated AP solutions play an important role in quelling many of these fears. Not only do they help AP employees create more value for their team (thus becoming less expendable), they provide the company itself with a strong, modern digital foundation that makes it much easier to stay competitive and resilient should more COVID-esque disruptions be in our future.



### Positive-sum growth

One of AP automation’s uniquely non-tangible features is its ability to benefit every stakeholder without ever achieving that success at the expense of another party.

For employees, this concept of “positive-sum growth” means that everyone in their orbit is ensured a better experience — teammates, managers, customers, even the business itself. And when everyone wins, well, everyone wins.

06

## Alleviates the pressure of managing risk & fraud

[According to a PwC survey](#), over 51% of organizations say they have experienced fraud in the past two years. Thanks to economic instability, tightening regulations and the fight against corruption, risk management and fraud prevention has catapulted to the top of priority lists. And without the help of automation, the personal pressure of managing supplier risk and compliance and external fraud can be intense and taxing.

The data provided by AP automation not only helps optimize workflows and create visibility, but the implementation of internal controls that automated processes bring with them ensure accountability and visibility, so that businesses can create a system of safeguards to protect themselves from fraudulent activities – all while taking weigh off of AP staff's shoulders.

## Conclusion

# Awaken the humanity in your AP team

Accounts payable is no longer some back-office afterthought. In a time of significant change and challenge, companies are looking to their AP departments to strengthen cashflow, bolster supply chains and build long-lasting relationships with suppliers.

The ones tasked with carrying out these imperatives are not robots or commodities. They are living, breathing human beings with physical, emotional and intellectual needs that require fulfilling. Automated solutions do all the above, helping AP employees make more of an impact, with fewer obstacles, and with a greater sense of dignity and value.

Humans have come a long way in a just couple hundred thousand years — a testament to the power of humanity. By putting people at the center of your AP function, you can awaken this power for the betterment and longevity of all.

## Sources:

- 1 [The Great Attrition is making hiring harder. Are you searching the right talent pools?](#) July 13, 2022. McKinsey Quarterly.
- 2 [Gartner Research Shows Human-Centric Work Models Boosts Employee Performance and Other Key Talent Outcomes](#), Press Release, December 7, 2022. Gartner, Inc.
- 3 Harter, Jim. [U.S. Employee Engagement Needs a Rebound in 2023](#). January 25, 2023. Gallup.
- 4 Nink, Marco, Robison, Jennifer. [Add Team Praise to Your Employee Recognition Toolkit](#). February 9, 2021. Gallup.
- 5 Nelson, Bailey. [Supportive Managers Relieve Job Insecurity, Boost Engagement](#). August 27, 2019. Gallup.
- 6 [Platform Fraud: The New Frontier of Economic Crime](#). 2022. PwC.



# Hi, we're Esker

Founded in 1985, Esker is a global cloud platform built to unlock strategic value for Finance, Procurement and Customer Service leaders and strengthen collaboration between companies by automating source-to-pay (S2P) and order-to-cash (O2C) processes.

 **38**  
years of experience with 20+ years focused on cloud solutions

 **1,000+**  
employees serving 850k+ users & 1,700+ customers worldwide

 **15**  
global locations with headquarters in Lyon, France, & Madison, WI

 **€159.3**  
million in revenue in 2022, with 90+% of sales via SaaS activities



## Business success is best when shared

At Esker, we believe the only way to create real, meaningful change is through positive-sum growth. This means achieving business success that doesn't come at the expense of any individual, department or company – everyone wins! That's why our AI-driven technology is designed to empower every stakeholder while promoting long-term value creation.



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