Guidebook

The Human Side of AR

5 ways AR automation helps your team feel better, work smarter & stay longer.

What's inside

About this guide

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

This guide explores the psyche of modern AR professionals, how prioritising 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

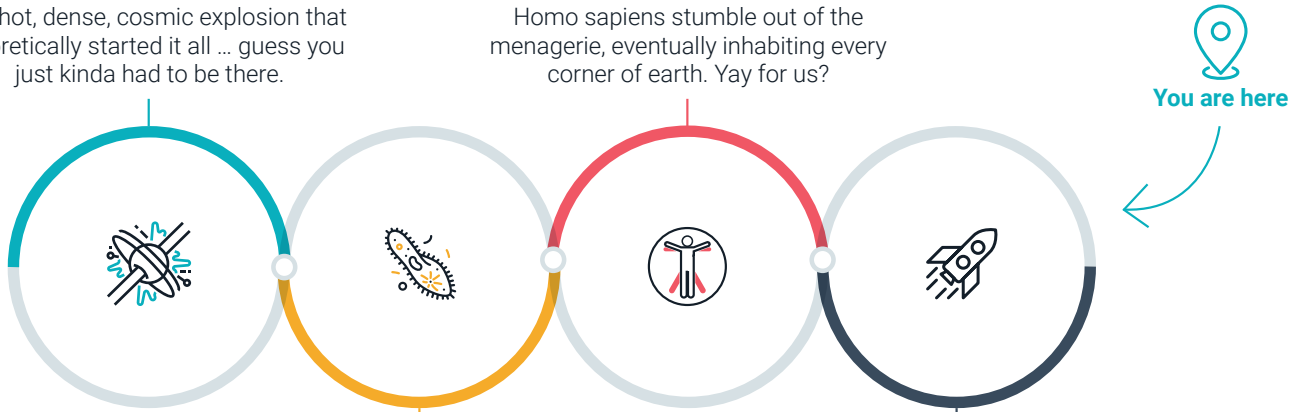
Before we get into the weeds of invoices, payments and all-things AR, it's worth asking ourselves as humans: How did we get here? Time for a quick 4.5-billion-year recap:

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 receivable. What a time to be alive, indeed.

Working 9 to 5

What do people want in an AR career?

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, AR folks generally excel at maths, 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.[1]

Meaningful work

Does poring over sticky notes and spreadsheets sound rewarding? AR 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 prioritise people's professional and psychological needs.

Anatomy of an unhappy AR employee

Think members of your AR team might be part of the 40% of the unhappy workers[1] looking for new opportunities? Typically, the signs and symptoms of a disgruntled AR employee are evident before they decide to look for roles elsewhere:

Head

Constantly spinning from the inability to effectively prioritise calls to late-paying customers (aka Excel hell).

Heart

Not in it any more on account of all the manual compiling and Magellan-ish navigation of data required on day-to-day basis.

Legs

Ready to walk out due to the department's insistence on not pursuing an e-invoicing plan and still mailing paper invoices.

Ears

Filled with customer complaints due to lack of convenient online payment options and a subpar claims and deductions strategy.

Shoulders

Fatigued from carrying the burden of their AR duties without the benefit of tools for KPIs, reporting and forecasting.

Fingers

Constantly pointing at other employees, departments and customers as the cause of their team's poor performance.

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.[2]

People over process

Understanding AI's potential

After years of continuous change, adapting a more human-centric AR 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, AR departments need the help of modern technology that's capable of transforming the ability of AR employees to perform daily tasks, serve customers 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 AR environment, automation:

Doesn't replace humans or eliminate nuance. Functioning more like a highly specialised 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 AR solutions maximise 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 AR process won't be running on autopilot. Sustained success will require a proactive strategy and dedication to continuous process improvement.

5 ways AR automation helps your team feel better, work smarter & stay longer

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.[3] Not great news for AR, which is one of the largest assets on the balance sheet and a department that deals directly with customers.

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

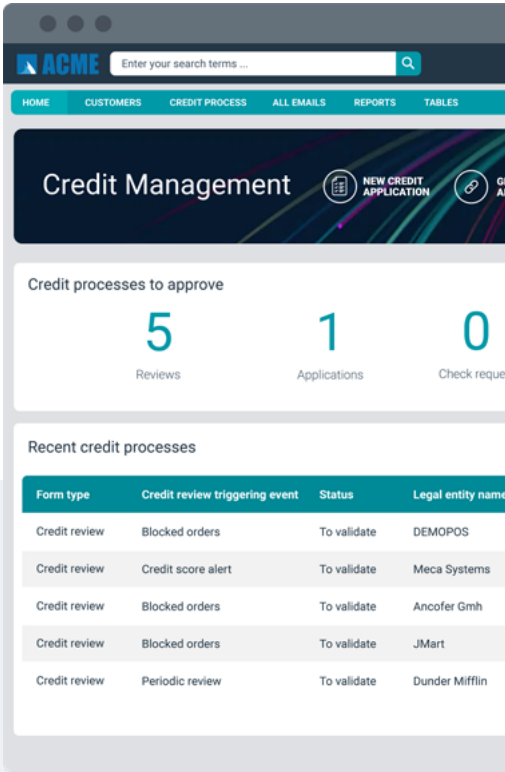
Let the countdown begin …

01

Makes onboarding & training simple

You know what today's workers hate? Obstacles. That's why AR 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.



A single interface with custom KPIs

Not only are AR automation solutions backed by a cloud infrastructure for 24/7 availability, all the information your team needs — from invoices, contracts and credit apps to credit risk data and customer details — flows directly through a single, easy-to-use interface.

02

Replaces the mundane with meaning

It's no secret that traditional AR 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 AR departments.

Thankfully, AR 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.

Digital credit approval

Automating credit applications and approval workflow takes a lot of pressure off your AR staff, making customer onboarding a walk in the park.

Automated invoice delivery

Instead of folding, stuffing and stamping paper invoices, AR staff can mail them directly from your ERP for worldwide postal delivery in < 24 hours.

AI-driven cash application

Free up your team for higher value tasks by automating the manually intensive process of matching payments received from incoming payment information sources.

Strategic collections

Priority call suggestions. Customised to-do lists. Personalised bulk messages and templates. Automated solutions have no shortage of AI tools to help your team optimise its collections strategy.

Kuriyama of America, Inc.

Real-life receivables

Meet Andrea

For Credit Manager Andrea Linke, "busy work" was often the rule rather than the exception for her team at Kuriyama of America, Inc. That is, until they decided to explore digital solutions for centralising their collections process and delivering new levels of speed, efficiency and visibility to the team.

Read full story

"The call prioritisation feature is a favourite within the team. Every morning it generates what calls need to be done which makes it incredibly easy to plan their day."

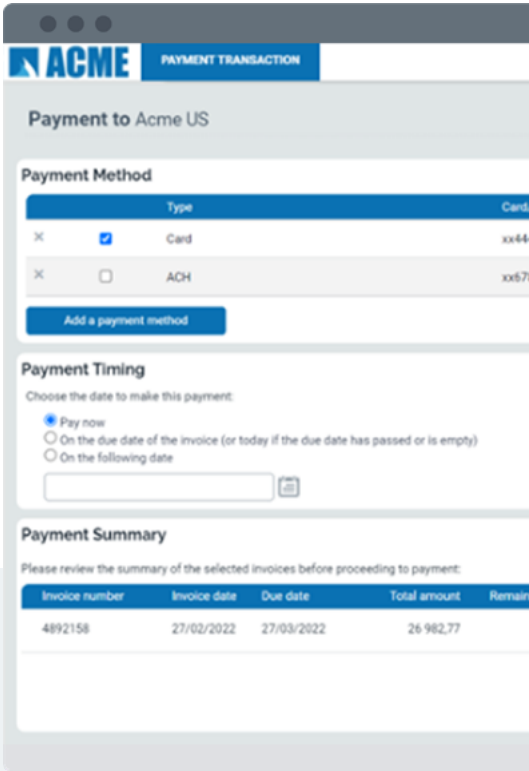
Andrea Linke
Credit Manager, Kuriyama of America, Inc.

03

Nurtures an environment of mutual trust & respect

Much like being a good server at a restaurant with atrocious food, it's hard being an exceptional AR employee at an organisation with second-rate CX strategies. From when a collection call was made, to how a claim was managed, to what payment options were offered — every point of customer contact within AR ultimately reflects on your team, for better or worse. A consistently bad CX sows the seeds for consistently unhappy employees.

Thankfully, customer–employee tension is cut down dramatically when AR automation is employed. Payment allocation is immediate and accurate, dispute resolution is quick and painless, and essential data is just a click away for all parties.



Online payment options

Most automated solutions offer a convenient online portal where your customers can choose their preferred payment option (card or direct debit) and process their payments on a self-serve basis. The result is happier customers and an AR team with more time to spend on collections and other dopamine-producing activities.

04

Opens the door for growth opportunities galore

Currently, only 1 in 3 workers feel as though they receive ongoing recognition for their work.[4] 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 AR solutions enable both by not only helping managers use KPIs to better identify top-performing AR employees, but also creating new career-pathing opportunities by necessarily redefining some positions.

Performance monitoring KPIs

Good work never goes unnoticed in an automated environment! From response time to follow-up calls, customisable dashboards allow AR managers to track metrics tied to individual team members — ensuring high achievers are consistently recognised and rewarded (and never blamed for a laggard's poor performance).

Laminex®

Real-life receivables

Meet Pamela

Receiving up to 700 payments a day, the Banking team at Laminex had heavy manual workloads — particularly at month-end when payment allocation was priority No. 1. What was Operational Team Leader Pamela Rochester's solution for improving her team's workload and well-being? Automating daily remittance advice processing.

Read full story

"The Banking team is under much less pressure to complete payment allocations each day. They have more time to focus on other duties and learn new tasks."

Pamela Rochester
Operational Team Leader, Laminex

05

Relieves 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.[5]

Automated AR solutions play an important role in quelling many of these fears. Not only do they help AR 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 AR 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.

Conclusion

It's time to awaken the humanity in your AR team

Accounts receivable is no longer some back-office afterthought. In a time of significant change and challenge, companies are looking to their AR departments to secure revenue and fortify critical customer relationships.

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 AR 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 centre of your AR function, you can awaken this power for the betterment and longevity of all.

Sources:

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5 Nelson, Bailey. Supportive Managers Relieve Job Insecurity, Boost Engagement. August 27, 2019. Gallup.

Hi, we're Esker

Founded in 1985, Esker is a global cloud platform built to unlock strategic value for Financial, 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 subsidiaries with headquarters in Lyon, France

€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.

www.esker.com

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