

Speaker 1:

Welcome to PayTalk, the podcast for payroll professionals, with your host, Nina Talley. In the podcast, we explore the human side of payroll by speaking with global industry leaders who provide their unique insights to help listeners better understand the issues important to them and their careers.

Nina Talley:

Hey, everyone, thanks for joining us for PayTalk, the podcast that brings you payroll's human side. This is a special episode recorded at the 44th Payroll Congress in Nashville, Tennessee, by our guest hosts, Nick Day and Natalie Lloyd of The Payroll Podcast. They sit down with PayrollOrg members, Wendy Muirhead, Kira Rubiano, and Dale Weathered, CPP, for an honest, forward-thinking conversation about where payroll is headed in the age of automation. I hope you all enjoy this special Live At Congress episode, and I'll be back to chat with you all next month.

Nick Day:

Welcome to the Payroll Podcast and PayTalk. I'm Nick Day and depending on where you're listening, you may be hearing this on either show, because three special episodes are going to be aired and both shows are running the same series in full. And this is the first of those episodes recorded live from the floor of Payroll Congress 2026 in Nashville, Tennessee. Yee-haw.

So look, if you've never been to Congress, the simplest way to describe it is this. Every smart person in our wonderful payroll profession all come together in one building for four days, that's the event. And this year PayrollOrg pulled it off again, the biggest gathering of payroll professionals on the planet in a city that knows how to put on a show. A genuine thank you to PayrollOrg for hosting Congress, and of course for the access that made these conversations possible. I think it's fair to say, the work they do for our profession deserves unbelievable recognition for how much they do to really elevate this wonderful profession. They really do help move it from invisibility to influence. And whether you're listening on the Payroll Podcast or PayTalk, welcome. Let's get into it.

First up, the wonderful ever and the effervescent, Wendy Muirhead. Hello, and welcome back to the Payroll Podcast and the PayTalk Podcast. And I'm joined by the wonderful Wendy Muirhead, founding partner of WH Partners and Fair Works Solutions, who has just been on stage. The first person I managed to grab into this booth to talk about someone who's just talked in front of a fully packed crowd.

Wendy Muirhead:

It was.

Nick Day:

Tell us.

Wendy Muirhead:

Standing room only, and people were all crowded around the back as well, because there was not a seat, a single empty seat lies. So the session today was around processor to strategist and how to lead global payroll transformation in the age of automation.

Nick Day:

Not the age of AI. AI is a buzzword, automation.

Wendy Muirhead:

Age of automation, because that was the thing, actually. I asked the audience at the beginning just to get a sense of who was in the room, and, "Has your business got an AI strategy? Show of hands." Everyone pretty much put their hand up. And then, "Do you have an AI strategy for your payroll department?" One or two hands, a lot less than with the first question. The third question was, "Who here is sick of hearing about AI?" And then the whole room cheered. And apparently in the session next door, one of our very good friends was at the session next door. Apparently, we disrupted their session because we were so loud. So, there was definite full engagement. There was lots of dialogue. It was really, really good fun.

Nick Day:

Well, I was very lucky. I didn't make your talk this year, I was in this booth setting things up, but I did make your talk last year, which was how to get investment from the CFO or CEO or the C-suite. And that was a fun crowd. I have no surprises at all that you had a full, packed room today. Apparently, people couldn't even get in.

Wendy Muirhead:

Yeah, that's right.

Nick Day:

My colleague, Tom, tried to book onto your slot and it was like full room.

Wendy Muirhead:

And I heard from the payer team that actually was one of the first to fill on, and so I was just like... Yeah, I was completely shocked.

Nick Day:

[inaudible 00:04:10].

Wendy Muirhead:

But I had a great time. I had lots of people come up and say that they really resonated with, "How do I get started?" Because that's the challenge. People maybe want to do something, they want to be seen as strategic, and they just don't know actually, how do I make that work for me? What tools are out there? And we believe at WH People that it's about actually, when you own your plan and you actually master the tools, and AI is just a toolkit that you can leverage. When you do that, you can really start to drive strategic forecasting, workforce planning. You can start to give some level of risk prevention when scenarios happen. And that's what every CEO wants to know, right? It's all based on data.

Nick Day:

I think that's the challenge, though. So you come to these places, and this is a fantastic Congress. There's more talks than I can possibly say in one go. But when there's so much AI noise, it's hard to know how to start. There's too much. Everyone's saying, "It's this, it's that. Which language learning model? Which payroll product do we use? Do we want, I don't know, anomaly detection?" There's so much out there, taking that first step is the hardest. Right?

So I'll ask you, it's a tough one. What's the first step people should take? They're listening to this now, that they're in that position, they don't know where to start, first step.

Wendy Muirhead:

And I actually talked about this in the session as well, because everyone has challenges within their team. So if there's something that your payroll team is struggling with, it could be how they're building their growth, it could be just even onboarding new people into the team. Is there an opportunity that's repeatable and a process that takes a lot of time and is causing a lot of disengagement, there's your first candidate.

So if you take a whiteboard, a piece of paper and you start mapping out every aspect of it, every single detail, if you find that it's actually a repeatable process, that's a great candidate for the likes of AI, because then you can start to actually build the workflow in AI. And what we say at WH People is, "Do not make the decision points, keep that with a human." But if you can accelerate from great datasets, which we have the most scrutinized data in payroll.

Nick Day:

For sure.

Wendy Muirhead:

So, but when you actually can build that and you own that process and then you get the tools, because learning natural language is being able to do this in English. You don't have to do code in 01011 anymore, which is where the explosion of ChatGPT, Copilot Studio, all of these things in the last three years has really accelerated. But all these platforms is still learning from things that are right there in the public domain. So, making sure that you're actually using platforms and tools that are ring-fenced for your own organization is super important, because if you are actually starting to work with sensitive data, you want to make sure you're using a private, wholly owned by your company with the right governance controls in place to be able to help accelerate some of that.

And it can be a really small thing. It could be literally a Q&A agent that really helps somebody who's wanting to understand about, where's all my policies and what's going on with HMRC or going on with this government body? And actually, you can set Q&A bots up that will actually help get that information in seconds rather than that chasing the team off and asking people, "How did we do this, or what have you done with that before?" So, it's great opportunity just to even take tiny wins and accelerate that. Get to know the tools, get to master the tools, and start small before you start thinking about, "Actually, I can get quite sophisticated with this tech."

Nick Day:

Well, look, if you're enjoying this, they always say the best times to [inaudible 00:07:31] is 30 years ago, the next best time is now. If you're not at 2026 Congress, you've enjoyed what Wendy's just said, come to 2027, come into Wendy's session, fill it out again, book up early because that sounds like you need to or you're not getting in the room. And you can hear this firsthand and actually ask Wendy yourself like I am. We're both facilitating this year's executive summit. We've got two panels. Tell us a little bit about your involvement in that tomorrow.

Wendy Muirhead:

Oh, I'm very excited. I'm going to be following Nick. So your session is on first thing.

Nick Day:

It is.

Wendy Muirhead:

A fantastic session, The \$50 Billion Question. So, I think we should talk a little bit more about that.

Nick Day:

Well, we can.

Wendy Muirhead:

But yeah, let's do that.

Nick Day:

Payroll's on the spotlight, right?

Wendy Muirhead:

Let's do it.

Nick Day:

There's more investment coming into this industry than we've ever seen before. We're seeing huge growth with some of the new entry players in the market, if we can still call them new, and they've been taken over. There's consolidation, there's investment, there's AI in the middle of all that. Where does payroll sit now? Is AI elevating payroll? Is it taking over from payroll? Do we need to have a conversation about how we position ourselves for the future? I'm excited to get into it. We've got a really good panel of Nathan Male, Joe Ranzau, and Greg Harmer. So we've got some-

Wendy Muirhead:

Love Greg, love Greg.

Nick Day:

... advisory partners. Greg, whose of course is ex-Amazon, now at CVS Health. So yeah, it's going to be a really good panel.

Wendy Muirhead:

It's going to be great.

Nick Day:

Tell me about yours.

Wendy Muirhead:

So mine is after lunch, so you're up first, then mine is after lunch. I have the fabulous Kyra Jones who is the Global Payroll Director at Ralliant. The fabulous Kristi Smith, who's Senior Vice President of People Operations at Dynatrace. And then who can forget, Reuben Thompson-Amarteifio, and he's at DoorDash and he was a speaker last year at conference. So, I'm super excited to have such great speakers.

We're going to be talking about the machines that manage us. So what's the governance controls that we have in place? So to your point around, if you're working with lots of technologies and they're all flowing like agentic AI and this is the new thing everyone's talking about, but that flow and something goes wrong, who's at fault?

Nick Day:

You're going to like my talk on Thursday. I'm going to bring it in, I've got a little plug now. I'm talking on Thursday.

Wendy Muirhead:

Go for it. Yeah, sure.

Nick Day:

I've coined a term, which I believe the future of payroll. Payroll people need to be what I call the algorithmic conscience of work. So you've got all these algorithms, all these bots, all these technologies coming in, but we still need a conscience. We need someone to contextualize it and go, "Okay, we know the algorithms are making it, they're accurate, it's correct. But is it right?" And that's something I think stays with the human and with the payroll team.

Wendy Muirhead:

Decision point from my perspective, that human-centric approach when you're thinking about automation or AI, and let's face it, whether it's machine learner and robotic process automation or AI tools, it's about actually that decision point and doing it so that you accelerate the speed of all that transactional stuff that takes up our time, so that you can focus on those moments that matter with the employee experience.

Nick Day:

Absolutely right.

Wendy Muirhead:

When you focus on that, you keep retention, you get the opportunity to educate, you get the opportunity to get everyone in the cultural dynamic of the workforce, give them purpose, give them stretch. We don't always have the opportunity to be able to give them a pay rise or a promotion, and they might be doing fantastic work. So we need to think about, how do we get some of these other initiatives to give that soft skill leadership capability to our teams so that they can start to actually learn some of those softer skills?

Nick Day:

I think even on a broader scale, if you're looking at data we talked about earlier, you mentioned earlier the amount of data the payroll has at their disposal. You can also look at that data to identify where someone may be underpaid, maybe not being paid... I can't say the word because my voice has gone, equitably.

Wendy Muirhead:

Equitable.

Nick Day:

Almost there. Almost there. But there might be gender pay gap, there might be discriminatory pay gaps in other areas, ethnicity, regional pay gaps, whatever. Data can bring that story up. Now the algorithms are going to calculate it based on the rules they're told, not necessarily going to calculate it to know that's the fair way of paying somebody. And I think this is where we can really raise the profile of payroll.

Wendy Muirhead:

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Absolutely. And I think that aspect of it, of where you can actually go in there and do the modeling and do the verification, check the governance, and then actually give the right guidance. When I talk to people all the time, and it came up in our room today.

Nick Day:

All right. So, we're both leaning back now.

Wendy Muirhead:

There's a leaning back moment.

Nick Day:

It's supposed to be a 10-minute chat, we're going to go on here. [inaudible 00:11:19].

Wendy Muirhead:

We might overrun a little bit. But when you hear about the conversation about where the future of payroll is at that chief payroll officer, actually when I speak to payroll leaders, they don't want to be at the boardroom. We had a bit of a grown in the room when people were actually talking about it, but they do want to have that conversation and give that opportunity, because I actually don't think that there will be a payroll or a CFO in the future. I think that there could be people experienced officers or compliance officers-

Nick Day:

For sure.

Wendy Muirhead:

... that actually have finance, payroll, legal, and a number of different facets.

Nick Day:

Chief equity officer, maybe?

Wendy Muirhead:

Potentially.

Nick Day:

Involving fair pay?

Wendy Muirhead:

Potentially. All of these things around, especially with changing government dynamics, even the way they're embracing technology and how that they interact, all of this is all coming up. It's going to hit us faster and faster because tech is moving faster.

Nick Day:

It is.

Wendy Muirhead:

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I'm excited by coming to your session. I think you're on at 11:00?

Nick Day:

10:00.

Wendy Muirhead:

10:00.

Nick Day:

Yes.

Wendy Muirhead:

That's okay. I'll be up early.

Nick Day:

Not after the party, before. It might be a dead room. We'll see, we'll see.

Wendy Muirhead:

No, no, no, no. I'm going to be going championing as we walk around the expert.

Nick Day:

Oh my God. I was hoping we would finish early, and now I'm rabbiting on about fear and transparency and visibility influence.

Wendy Muirhead:

It will be excellent. It'll be excellent. And people are starting to say, "What's going on in there? I see I'm being recorded."

Nick Day:

There might be people that are listening to this or watching and you've just seen someone walk past it, I think it was Rosie. She had about 16 of these little things that caught off the brochures.

Wendy Muirhead:

Oh, yeah. It's like an apron.

Nick Day:

So, this is something-

Wendy Muirhead:

Some of them have gotten really, really long and I actually need to go again.

Nick Day:

What'd you call this? This is called a-

Wendy Muirhead:

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Is the ribbons.

Nick Day:

A ribbon. So if you're listening and not watching, you get a ribbon every time you come, you get to come your first time here with ribbon. I've got a all access, a PayTalk podcast, and a speaker ribbon this year.

Wendy Muirhead:

I actually need to go to the ribbon stand.

Nina Talley:

Whether you attended Payroll Congress in person a few weeks ago or registered exclusively for PayrollOrg's 2026 Virtual Congress happening on July 9th, you'll get another full day of premier professional development and networking. Virtual Congress is an online experience that comes complete with educational workshops, inspiring general session speakers, and plenty of engaging networking with professionals around the world.

This year's event includes expert-led workshops offered live and on-demand, the opportunity to earn up to nine recertification credit hours, fun games and giveaways, a resource center to gather important event materials and news, and much, much more. This is an online experience you won't want to miss. But act today, because this additional educational event is only available through October 10th. Bolster your career with this industry conference by going to payroll.org, choosing the education tab along the navigation bar, and then clicking on Virtual Congress to register. Continue your payroll education today.

Nick Day:

So now, I'm joined by the one and only Kira Rubiano, who I have caught for a moment before she goes to present her first talk. Is it your first talk?

Kira Rubiano:

Of the week, yes.

Nick Day:

First talk of the week. So without further ado, tell us what your talk is about. What are we going to expect?

Kira Rubiano:

Yeah, a topic that I'm extremely passionate about, which is culture and how it affects how we work in payroll. Not just payroll, in business overall.

Nick Day:

Sure.

Kira Rubiano:

And it's like, culture is an unwritten rule book that affects the way that we communicate, the way that we make decisions, the way that we delegate work, the way that we trust people to do work. And so, I think it's really important that payroll leaders understand that, especially when they're leading teams in different parts of the world, that when they're working with different colleagues as well, is just to really be

conscious of culture and be culture champions within their organizations. Because no culture is better than the other, there's differences.

Nick Day:

Sure.

Kira Rubiano:

Right? And it's just important to be mindful of those differences, be humble, and also find that middle ground. What can we do to really partner and understand how culture affects us and not get frustrated with each other? Because those frustrations happen a lot and I hear it all the time.

Nick Day:

Well, here's an interesting question for you that I'm interested to know, because of course you're a Global Vision Award winner at Payroll Congress a few years ago.

Kira Rubiano:

2019.

Nick Day:

2019 is when we first met. That was my first Congress if I remember it well.

Kira Rubiano:

It was like in... gosh.

Nick Day:

Do we need to be more mindful of the culture question if we have a global payroll, or is it equally as applicable if we're just multi-state?

Kira Rubiano:

It's equally relevant when you are doing local or US payroll, because you are interacting with people who are probably from different parts of the world, whether it's your vendor, whether it's your HR colleagues, your IT colleagues. Right? Oftentimes, you'll see companies have shared service centers in different parts of the world, and so it doesn't matter if you're global or not, it's still relevant. And even with your friends, with people you meet at Congress, more and more people are coming from different parts of the world, and there's people that maybe live in the US but they were born somewhere else, so they've been influenced by cultures at home, that all affects-

Nick Day:

Cultural awareness is so, so important.

Kira Rubiano:

It affects how we perceive things. It affects how we communicate. It affects how we internalize certain kind of behaviors. And so, it's just important to be mindful of it.

Nick Day:

So I'm going to bring this into a recruitment conversation slightly, because often when we take a vacancy or acquisition, people will say, "Our culture fit's really important. We've lost somebody and we need to make sure that they're right culture fit." And I have an issue with the term, "Culture fit." I always think when somebody leaves your organization, it's an opportunity to evolve your culture. What are the things that maybe you're lacking in your business that this individual can bring in? Maybe it's a perspective, maybe it's a view, whatever it is, is there opportunity to rewrite the rule book and say, "Where are the gaps in our organization"? So don't try and replace necessarily like for like, this is your opportunity to have a blank canvas and say, "What do we really need that's going to take us from A to B?"

And there are a lot of people at Congress here that are keen to take the next step in their leadership journey. So, what would be your Monday morning move? What would be the first thing you would recommend they started to consider as they start that leadership journey for themselves if they want to really take culture seriously?

Kira Rubiano:

Oh, wow, that's a really good question. I think it's just to be open-minded, and maybe listen to other individuals who have experience with it, reach out to your friends and colleagues, like, what are the things that they would recommend that you do? I'm a huge fan of Erin Meyer's, The Culture Map. I think she's brilliant, I read it multiple times. I've also made it mandatory reading for a lot of my teams.

Nick Day:

We were talking about this book earlier today as well, to be fair. And that Netflix show that you recommend as well, I'm going to check that out.

Kira Rubiano:

Yes. The No Culture Culture.

Nick Day:

No Culture Culture.

Kira Rubiano:

... at Netflix by Erin Meyer and Reed Hastings. And I think those are great starting points. TED Talks, I love TED Talks because they give a short snippet and makes you just think a little bit differently. But I think it's just important to realize that the world's going to continue to globalize. That's not going to change.

Nick Day:

For sure.

Kira Rubiano:

You're going to come across people from all aspects of life who have different perspectives. And so, maybe even if it isn't culture but it's just knowing people have different perspectives. Right?

And on the recruitment side, I feel like sometimes it's not company culture anymore, it's more like the hiring manager culture. It's who that individual wants to interact with rather than [inaudible 00:19:18].

Nick Day:

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We sometimes, I think, come into the process in leadership or recruitment with beliefs and those beliefs, can be changed. We're sometimes so steadfast in believing whatever we've come up to this belief, whatever, but we forget that we can change and we can evolve. I like the idea of the word beliefs has the word lie written in the middle of it and it's surrounded by BS. Right?

Kira Rubiano:

Wow, [inaudible 00:19:39].

Nick Day:

When you see that, you can't unsee it, isn't it? And it's a great reminder for me to go, "You know what? The things I think are true are often untrue, but you need to have another perspective to realize that you can see the world from a different view."

I know from us meeting in 2019, this is what Congress can do for you. You can meet new people, it can set you on a new path. We've liaised, we've worked together, we've partied together, we've met new people together.

Kira Rubiano:

Trauma bonded.

Nick Day:

Trauma bonded. It's absolutely true, it's absolutely true. It is true, it's one of those things that connects us and we're from totally different cultures, different parts of the world.

Kira Rubiano:

And I want to share something, in fact, because I don't know if you've seen this, but I'm such a believer in-

Nick Day:

Oh, is this a podcast first?

Kira Rubiano:

Well, no.

Nick Day:

[inaudible 00:20:19].

Kira Rubiano:

So I'm such a believer in international and-

Nick Day:

I love that.

Kira Rubiano:

... cross-cultural, I'm so passionate. I have a map, I tattooed a map onto my arm.

Nick Day:

Have you put the plane over the UK?

Kira Rubiano:

No, it's heading from where I came from to the United States.

Nick Day:

Very nice.

Kira Rubiano:

But that's how passionate I am about-

Nick Day:

It's beautiful.

Kira Rubiano:

... getting to learn different cultures, getting to travel, getting to work with people from all over the world. To me, I always say, "I'm not payroll." I'm passionate about payroll in the sense of that I think it's an absolutely wonderful profession and it's critical, but it's the people component that really gives me passion.

Nick Day:

People you meet along the way, for sure. I think also, I don't know if you noticed there's some research that's been undertaken by Harvard actually, and there's probably other studies out there as well, that talk about what makes an effective leader. And what they discovered is there's no real makeup, you can't give you the makeup for an effective leader. It comes from all different cultures, different styles, different... You can be an empathetic leader, you could be a direct leader. It depends on the environment, depends on the industry. And it's impossible to come up with a makeup of what makes the perfect leader, which I think is important if you're in payroll. Sometimes we think we're not appreciated enough. How could I be a leader in this space? You look up and you compare ourselves, as I say, "Comparison's a thief of joy." We say, "Well, that's a great leader. I'll never be that person." And we forget that people follow all types of leaders.

Kira Rubiano:

It's like there's no right way to parent.

Nick Day:

There you go.

Kira Rubiano:

For parents, there's no necessarily right way to be a leader, and I think you have to find your own style. So here at this Congress, I have two former employees from abroad, one's from India, one's from Spain, that reported into me for three years and I mentored them, and now they've taken flight and they've taken these great roles. And they've made it here, which for them is like-

Nick Day:

Amazing.

Kira Rubiano:

Wow, I made it to the big top. You know? This is the pinnacle for them. And it gives me as a leader, the joy I get is seeing them soar above me, not below me. And that for me is what I love.

Nick Day:

I love that. Well, above me, not below me. That's nice.

Kira Rubiano:

[inaudible 00:22:37].

Nick Day:

I'll let you go. This good, this is good, right? This is lovely.

Kira Rubiano:

Yeah. All these things, I just decided to ink myself.

Nick Day:

Well, we were talking about Chinese problems today, the art of true happiness is giving back. And when you've given that mentorship and you see them here, what a wonderful thing.

Kira Rubiano:

And I will forever help. Anyone that ever has worked for me, I will always help take them to that next level because one, they deserve it, two, somebody needs to care, especially in today's day and age.

Nick Day:

The world could be more kind, generally, right?

Kira Rubiano:

Yeah. With what's happening with organizations and layoffs and everybody's a number kind of approach. If we had more leaders that really invested, we would have more successful leaders as well. And I'm grateful that I had people who invested in me and in my development that I owe my leadership also to them.

Nick Day:

Well, I think also there's a message in there that within the world of AI, we've talked a lot about AI. With every guest I've had, we're talking about AI. Let's not lose the heart. AI is a tool that sits underneath, fine, but let's not lose the heart of this profession, which is the people. It's the heart of every profession, actually, it's not unique to payroll. It's the heart of organizations is the people first, and it's very easy to lose sight.

Kira Rubiano:

Very easy.

Nick Day:

And I think you've got to pull that back in. Well, look, before I let you go, I know you've got your talk to prepare for, but I may as well ask you, tell us a little bit about who you're here for, who you're representing. I obviously know your organization, but tell us a little what you do.

Kira Rubiano:

So I am a partner with Payrollminds, which is a global payroll consulting firm, and we specialize in everything from transformation, to helping with vendor selection, strategic advisory, staff support. So staff augmentation, project management. And basically, if it has a payroll problem, most likely we can help you solve it. And it's definitely a change that I took in my career going into the consulting world, but I couldn't be happier. And I'm so pumped to be able to use my 20 years of client services and operations experience to now work with organizations who are looking at transformation, who are really looking at driving their payroll organizations forward, and it's an exciting time.

Nick Day:

Global Vision Award-winning experience, I will add.

Kira Rubiano:

Yes.

Nick Day:

Well, if you're watching this and you've enjoyed what Kira's had to say, you're passionate about culture, passionate about people, and you want to find out more, seek out Kira Rubiano on LinkedIn. I'll put a link to your platform and show notes as well.

Kira Rubiano:

Thank you.

Nick Day:

I'm pretty sure what you've said today will resonate with people that watch and listen to this. I hope it does. So, reach out.

Kira Rubiano:

Yes. And always take care of yourself.

Nick Day:

It's like if the plane's going down, put the air mask on yourself before you can help others. Right?

Kira Rubiano:

Exactly.

Nick Day:

And that's an important message as well, I think. Super. Kira, thank you so much.

Today I am joined by the one and only Dale Weathered. Dale is someone I've known since my very first year at Congress. Someone who's always very welcoming. Someone who's often on stage, always helping the community with pale advice and guidance, and he's got a few insights he'd like to share on the show. So Dale, I'm going to give you the floor. Fill me in.

Dale Weathered:

All right. So one of the things that I've seen, we're starting to see more AI classes in the session. And I think that's crucial and important, because we are moving beyond just the idea of large language models and publicly used my models, and using them for simple mundane, routine task.

In five years, I think AI, especially agentic ring-fenced AI is going to be as critical in the payroll space as Excel used to be. And whereas Excel will no longer be a thing because AI will be making all of our AI spreadsheets because it's that powerful. I really think that we need to learn and discuss how that transition, and we need to start thinking about how we're going to implement and manage that transition so that we don't get caught behind the eight-ball, and so that we as professionals can use it safely, securely, and responsibly.

Nick Day:

I think you raised one really interesting good point, several points. And one in particular that stands out for me is you used the word ring-fenced. And of course, we have to understand if you're putting PI data into a language learning model, you need to make sure you're doing so securely or on a ring-fenced LLM so that information isn't being used by language learning models to train the model, right? Which is really, really important.

Dale Weathered:

Yes.

Nick Day:

The second point you mentioned was Excel. And of course, Excel will work brilliantly on a Microsoft enabled AI platform like Copilot.

Dale Weathered:

Yes.

Nick Day:

There's lots that we can do. Tell us a little bit more about your experience with both.

Dale Weathered:

All right. So with that, when I'm looking at that, so originally when I started using AI, I was using publicly available non-ring-fenced, because there was no such thing. So, models, originally ChatGPT, and then explored a few other models as well, just to see what their flavors were, their nuances were, and then what mirages they were susceptible to, and was using them for things like crafting communications that followed a client's theme. Like if they had a particular communication style, AI was really good at writing employee-facing communications and updates that met their model.

Then started looking at how we could use it within chatbots so that then it could be tie-in. And so when somebody was asking common things, it would just provide a link to where people could access their W-2 form, where they could access a tutorial on how to update their data such as their banking data, their tax elections, their address, what have you, within the employee self-service model. That would alleviate for clients the need for those routine customer service tickets that were just repetitive and the same. And it was easier than having just a template that somebody would get the ticket, send it out, and then have to manually close the ticket. Instead, the AI model could actually then take that incoming communication, no tickets involved, and just provide the assistance, the link, the direction, and then for additional information, then contact the payroll team.

Nick Day:

We know that AI has been a hot topic at Congress this year. The 44th Congress, and it's called Unlocked, and I think a lot of it talks a bit about unlocking the power of AI. I know already, a little birdie tells me you've been enjoying some of the talks, and I think you need to get up on stage. You had an opportunity to talk about change management in AI in one of the talks. Tell me a little bit about some of the talks you've enjoyed and where you've had some involvement.

Dale Weathered:

All right. So first off, so one of the most dynamic speakers on this topic I think right now is Wendy Muirhead. I believe you know her.

Nick Day:

I know her very well. I've just facilitated the executive summit with her. I've known her 15 years from the UK, and a good friend of mine, for sure.

Dale Weathered:

Nice. And so wonderful woman, love her, respect her intelligence on this issue. And she has been a very... So, really like the way she communicates. She communicates in a way that is very non-threatening. And for a lot of workers, you mentioned change management. When we're looking at change management, we have to get beyond the fear factor of the change, because we've heard these horror stories. AI is coming for our jobs. AI is going to make it so you're obsolete. No, AI, just like any automation tool is just one more tool. And yes, jobs will be lost, work styles will change. That is not something that's up for debate, but it's been happening.

To put this in reference, when I started in payroll, because I'm terminally old, as that I started off with paper timecards and a 10-key calculator doing manual calculation, write a total on a timecard, and then run a tape, and then manually enter the information into a payroll system. Okay? And it wasn't even batches at that point. And so at that point, you had lots more people. When you're talking about a larger organization, you would have entire teams, that's all they're doing, is timecard tabulation. Then you would have verification checkers doing that for quality control. Then you would have a gross pay calculate team. Then you would have a tax calculation team. Then you would have a net deduction and a net pay calculation team.

Nick Day:

You might like this. I always say to people when comes to AI, "AI won't replace the people that embrace AI, but it might replace the people who don't." And I think that's how I position it. We know it's going to take some jobs, but that's what we've got to get on board. As you said at the start of this conversation, "You don't want to be behind the eight-ball," I think with your words. And that's the point, if we get on board, which of course Congress can help you do because there's some great talks, great speakers like Wendy that can educate and support people on their first steps into the unknown, which it is. It's kind of an abyss of unknown, lots of tools, lots of-

Dale Weathered:

Sure.

Nick Day:

... I guess lots of confusion, lots of people need to find some answers and this is a great place to get it. Now you're someone who's been to many, many Congresses.

Dale Weathered:

Yes.

Nick Day:

And so, I want to lean on that a little bit, because I know it's a hot topic, but at the same time, we are going to support the PayTalk Podcast today, we're going to support a fantastic event. Tell people watching or listening to this, depending where you get your podcasts, why should you come to Congress? What's it given you over the years?

Dale Weathered:

So the first thing it's given to me is an increased sense of community connectivity. I've always known that I was passionate about payroll. I always knew that there was a small community in my local chapter that was passionate about payroll. And I could learn from them, but I was limited to that small pool of people that I'm networking with. Here, there are literally thousands of people. I have just as impactful of discussions on the sidelines as I do information that I gather from the sessions themselves. And I form friendships and networks with people that then I can continue to bounce ideas off of.

Nick Day:

Including football rivalries.

Dale Weathered:

Including that. Even though we discussed we weren't going to go there.

Nick Day:

[inaudible 00:33:11] football rivalries, ladies and gentlemen. For those soccer fans, although I'm a Tottenham fan, and Dale is an avid Arsenal fan, which you can see by both his shirt if you're watching on video, he has an Arsenal sweatshirt on and a new tattoo that says Arsenal. It's a constant debate since I first met Dale. We have always talked and enjoyed a debate around soccer. Dale is very, very experienced and knowledgeable about his home team, or home team, his team, I should say. But hey, look, this is what you're talking about. It's about meeting people, it's about having conversations, not always about payroll. Right?

Dale Weathered:

No, of course.

Nick Day:

It talks about anything, it's friendships, it's community.

Dale Weathered:

Yes, all of that. And yes, but I think it is important though because now your network and your friendship group, we all talk about our work with our friends. So even if we begin just as friends, I have a problem. I might remember, oh wait, you've worked with this or you mentioned something about your job doing something [inaudible 00:34:08]. You might just be my friend, but I now have a resource as well. So we build that, and that's something you cannot build anywhere else than this.

And I actually just met a first timer earlier, and she was talking about her boss wants to have it switch off different people. I'm like, advocate for not either or, but plus, because everybody on that team's going to

learn and they're going to grow and they're going to add value. And if I could leave anyone on that topic, there are great resources every year with Congress on letters and ideas on how to approach that conversation with your employer, to get your employer to pay for the fee, to pay for your transportation, hotel, and your expenses while you're here. Because you're going to bring back so much of value to your employer, and you're going to come away enriched and invigorated as a person, but also as a professional.

Nick Day:

Well, there you go, you heard it here first. I'm going to give you another point, which I think is for me anyway. Right? You said that when you talk about payroll, we talk to our friends. But a lot of us, I mean for me, I talk to my friends outside of payroll about payroll and they don't get it. Right?

Dale Weathered:

Yeah.

Nick Day:

I can talk about the pressures and the tribulations of payroll. They're like, "Nick, I don't know what payroll is," and they try and understand but they don't really get it. Here you get to talk about something and everyone in the room gets it. That's the difference.

See confidence in payroll, like confidence anywhere, follows clarity. And that's what this series is for. Sharper reads, better calls, and really moving from invisibility to influence. That is the payroll pivot. So, thank you again to PayrollOrg and to every guest who gave their time on the floor in Nashville.

Now, if these conversations are useful to you, please do send them to one payroll colleague, tag someone in your team. That's the algorithm that really matters. It's about elevating this profession through community and through social sharing. This has been the Payroll Podcast and PayTalk. I'm Nick Day, and I look forward to seeing you for the next one.

Nina Talley:

Thank you so much to Nick Day and Natalie Lloyd of the Payroll Podcast, and to Wendy Muirhead, Kira Rubiano, and Dale Weathered, CPP, for such an amazing and honest conversation about the future of the industry. Make sure you register for PayrollOrg's Virtual Congress and Expo to immerse yourself in even more powerful workshops and conversations. Thank you to all of our listeners out there, and make sure to send us your thoughts to podcasts@payroll.org.

Want to support PayTalk? You can rate, review, and subscribe to this podcast on whichever your preferred streaming service is. Until next time, folks, this has been your host, Nina Talley with PayTalk.

Speaker 1:

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