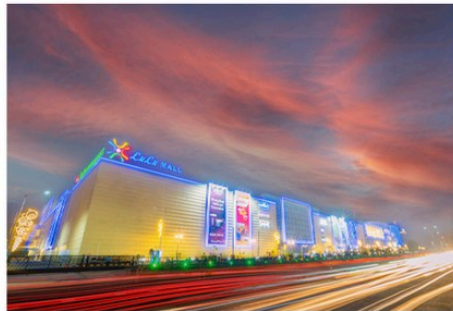


CASE STUDY • PEOPLE MATTERS INFINI-T AWARDS INDIA 2026

From Eight Days to Four: Payroll Unified Across 49 Entities

Lulu India

Infini-T Awards Category: Core HR & Payroll Unification Excellence



Executive Summary

Lulu Group India runs **11,547 employees across 49 entities** in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Delhi. Those entities are not variations on a theme. They span shopping malls and hypermarkets, Lulu Daily convenience stores, e-commerce fulfilment units, convention centres, a flight kitchen, warehousing and logistics, hospitality, and a head office, with a workforce split between desk staff and frontline floor employees. One payroll cycle must be right for all of it, every month.

11,547 Employees across 49 entities in eight states	8 → 4 days Payroll processing cycle, halved	360 → 72 hrs Effort per location per cycle, an 80% reduction	100% Payroll adoption within three months
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Before we implemented Darwinbox, almost none of that was automated. Attendance was calculated by hand in Excel and Loss of Pay uploaded manually into our previous payroll system. One-time inputs such as salary advances were entered by hand. Tax was computed manually. Statutory validations were not system-driven, and compliance reports did not exist inside the system. The platform gave no clear error messages during processing, so finding a problem was guesswork, and **correcting a single employee meant re-running the entire payroll simulation** to resynchronize. Our central team could not see location-level data when it needed to verify anything, and audits meant finance manually consolidating from multiple sources.

The cycle took **8 days**. It now takes **4**. Payroll, attendance, leave, tax and statutory compliance were consolidated onto a single automated platform, and the effort behind each cycle fell from **360 hours per location to 72, an 80% reduction**, with the team needed per major location dropping from four or five people to one or two.

The part that makes this unusual is what happened to ownership. Payroll transformations commonly leave an organization more dependent on outside support than it started. Ours did the opposite: our operating model moved **from a managed service to a product our payroll team runs itself**, and it did so without disrupting a single cycle. Adoption reached 100% within three months, not because anyone mandated it, but because our team saw what the old way had been costing them.

49 Entities, from malls and hypermarkets to a flight kitchen and logistics	4-5 → 1-2 HR team members per major location, per cycle	288 hrs Saved per location, every single cycle
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CONTEXT

Everything by Hand, Every Month

Our payroll ran on spreadsheets and paper, later uploaded manually into a payroll system. That sentence sounds like a small inefficiency. Across 49 entities and 11,547 people it was a monthly act of endurance, and every step of it was a place where a number could go wrong.

The system underneath made it worse rather than better. Simulation runs were slow because of the employee volume. Error messages were vague, so problems were hunted rather than read. Payslips came in one basic format with no room to change anything. Statutory and tax forms went out to employees by hand. Bulk uploads were limited, which meant large-scale changes had to be broken down and done piecemeal. And vendor support was thin during exactly the periods when payroll cannot wait.

Where the manual cycle was costing our business

Our starting point	The consequence it caused
Attendance calculated 100% manually in Excel, with Loss of Pay uploaded by hand	Every cycle began with a manual reconstruction of who had worked and who had not, before a single rupee could be calculated
One-time inputs such as salary advances entered manually	Payroll adjustments depended on someone remembering to key them, at the exact moment the team was busiest
A single employee correction required re-running the entire payroll simulation	One error cost the whole cycle its time, which meant errors were expensive to find and expensive to fix
Tax computed 100% manually, with statutory validations not system-driven	Compliance risk sat on individual effort, and compliance reports were unavailable inside the system at all

Where the manual cycle was costing our business, continued

Our starting point	The consequence it caused
No location-level visibility for our central payroll team	Verification and analysis meant asking a location and waiting, so the centre could not see what it was accountable for
Audits required finance to consolidate and validate data from multiple sources by hand	Audit cycles ran long because the evidence had to be assembled before it could be examined
Statutory and tax forms distributed to employees manually	Administrative load on our HR team, and a slower, less certain experience for 11,547 people
Limited bulk upload capability and no integrated attendance or leave reports	Large-scale processing stayed inefficient, and standard reporting had to be built by hand each time it was needed

One Platform, and a Team That Owns It

The consolidation itself is the straightforward half: payroll, attendance, leave, tax and statutory compliance brought onto a single automated platform, which removed the manual interventions and standardized payroll operations across every entity. We positioned Darwinbox as strategic infrastructure carrying **Core HR, Time Management, Payroll, Travel and Expense, Performance Management, Recruitment and Onboarding**, integrated to biometric attendance, MakeMyTrip and Comport. It is the central HR system that connects our people, processes, and data.

The less obvious half is the one that matters. We deliberately built the solution to make our payroll team **self-sufficient from the outset**, with standardized workflows and automation, rather than reproducing legacy managed-service processes in a new tool. That was a design choice with a cost: it is harder to hand someone the controls than to keep operating the machine for them. It is also the only version that scales, because it puts process ownership inside our organization rather than beside it.

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THE IMPACT

Half the Cycle, a Fifth of the Effort

Measure	Before	After
Payroll processing cycle	8 days	4 days
Effort per location, per cycle	360 hours	72 hours
HR team members per major location	4 to 5	1 to 2
Attendance and Loss of Pay	100% manual, calculated in Excel	Automated, integrated with biometric attendance
Payroll inputs such as salary advances	100% manual entry and upload	System-driven
Correcting one employee	Re-run the entire payroll simulation	Handled without resetting the cycle

The Impact, continued

Measure	Before	After
Tax computation	100% manual	Automated
Statutory compliance	Validations not system-driven, no compliance reports in-system	System-driven with reporting available
Statutory and tax forms	Distributed to employees manually	Centralized distribution
Central visibility	No location-level payroll data for central administrators	Location-level data available to the centre
Audit readiness	Finance manually consolidated from multiple sources	Evidence available where the work happened

The effort number is the one worth sitting with. **288 hours come back per location, every cycle**, measured from the cutoff date to the last day of the month. That is not an annual saving quoted once. It is a saving that repeats twelve times a year, at every major location, and it is what allowed the team behind each cycle to shrink from four or five people to one or two without payroll getting later or less accurate. It got faster and more accurate at the same time.

Adoption Nobody Had to Enforce

Adoption ran on champions, training and a leadership push, but the moment it turned was smaller than any of those. **During training, our payroll team realized how much of the process had actually been optimized**, saw the time it was going to give them back, and started using the system on their own initiative before anyone told them to.

That is our whole change-management story in one sentence, and it is worth more than a mandate would have been. **100% payroll adoption followed within three months of implementation.** People who have spent years rebuilding attendance in Excel do not need to be persuaded that there is a better way. They need to be shown one that works.

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Agreeing What Salary Even Means

The delay in phase one was not technical. **Aligning on a common salary structure and HR policies took time**, because it required multiple rounds of discussion and genuine consensus across entities operating pan-India.

That is the hidden cost of unification, and it is the part easiest to leave out. A mall in Kochi, a flight kitchen, an e-commerce unit in Palakkad and a convention centre in Bolgatty had each built their own answers to the same questions over years. Putting them on one payroll meant those answers had to converge first, and no software can shorten a conversation about what a salary structure should be. The work had to happen before the platform could do anything useful, and it is the reason the result holds now that it is done.

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The Moment That Mattered: The First Four-Day Close

*During our first payroll cycle after implementation, the impact of the transformation became immediately clear. The payroll was **completed successfully within the new four-day timeline**, with accurate results and no disruption to business operations.*

*Throughout the process, the payroll team learned each step of the new workflow through hands-on experience and gained a clear understanding of the system. When a last-minute correction for a single employee was required, it was **completed in minutes without re-running the entire payroll simulation**. The payroll process continued seamlessly, and all deadlines were met.*

Seeing the system perform successfully in a live payroll cycle gave the team confidence in both the technology and the redesigned process. The team's knowledge and confidence grew with every step they completed. They quickly adapted to the new way of working and began using the system independently.

*This first successful payroll cycle **transformed the team's mindset** and established trust in the solution as the new standard for payroll operations.*

Why We Believe This Stands Apart



We took the controls, rather than handing them over

Payroll transformations commonly end with the organization more dependent on outside support. We moved from a managed-service model to an internally owned product setup, and did it while driving rapid adoption, without disrupting payroll operations. That direction of travel is rare, and it was deliberate.



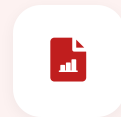
Ownership inside three months

100% payroll adoption within three months of implementation, across 49 entities and 11,547 people. Organization-wide process ownership in that window takes leadership alignment, standardized processes across entities, and continuous change management. Those are the parts that do not copy across.



Designed for self-sufficiency from day one

The build gave our payroll team standardized workflows and automation from the outset rather than replicating legacy managed-service processes in a new system. The design goal was independence, which is why the model scales rather than needing to be propped up.



One cycle for 49 very different businesses

Malls, hypermarkets, convenience stores, e-commerce units, convention centres, a flight kitchen, warehousing, logistics and hospitality, across eight states, with desk and frontline floor employees. Unifying payroll across that spread is harder than unifying it across scale alone.

From Our Leadership

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Choosing to bring payroll operations fully in-house was a strategic decision to strengthen our internal payroll capability and build a more knowledgeable, self-reliant team. The implementation introduced a systematic and standardized payroll approach, giving us complete visibility and ownership of the entire process. Beyond operational efficiency, it significantly improved the employee experience: staff now receive their salary slips on time through Darwinbox, complete their Income Tax declarations digitally, and access Form 16 directly through the system. Our payroll team has gained the confidence and expertise to manage the entire process independently, while the time saved is invested in continuous process improvement and enhancing employee services.

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Head, Human Resources

CONCLUSION

The Benchmark We Set

For years, our payday started with a spreadsheet. Attendance rebuilt by hand for 11,547 people across 49 entities. Loss of pay uploaded manually. Salary advances keyed one at a time. Tax computed by a person. And if one employee's number was wrong, the entire payroll simulation had to be run again, because the system had no other way to make the correction stick. Eight days, every month, for a company that runs malls, hypermarkets, a flight kitchen, warehouses, convention centres and an e-commerce operation, each of which had spent years developing its own idea of how any of this should work.

Unifying that took a conversation before it took a platform. Agreeing a common salary structure and common HR policies across entities operating pan-India required consensus that no software could have accelerated. Once it existed, the rest followed: payroll, attendance, leave, tax and statutory compliance on one automated platform, the cycle down from **eight days to four**, and the effort behind it down from **360 hours a location to 72**.

But the number that describes this best is not a duration. It is **288 hours**: what comes back to a single location every single cycle, twelve times a year, forever. That is what let the team behind each payroll shrink from four or five people to one or two while the output got faster and more accurate at the same time.

And the ending is the part worth copying. Payroll transformations commonly finish with the organization leaning harder on someone else. Ours finished with our payroll team running the thing themselves, **100% adopted within three months**, having chosen it during training before anyone asked them to. Not because a mandate arrived, but because they had spent enough years doing it the hard way to recognise the alternative on sight.

This is the standard we set: payroll unified across 49 entities and eight states, halved in time and cut by four fifths in effort, and handed to the people who run it rather than kept as a service they depend on.