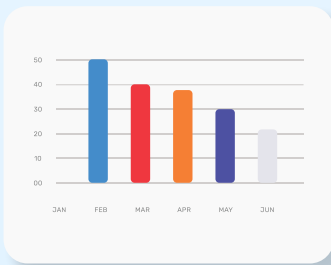
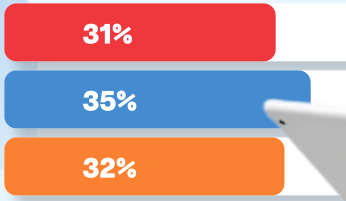


How to lead in the age of AI

Insights from the 2025 Global Finance Leaders Survey





In businesses today, the modern finance leader wears many hats—steward, strategist, operator, enabler.

Traditionally viewed as the guardians of financial stability, CFOs, VPs, Directors of Finance, and Financial Controllers have long been responsible for carefully managing their organization's financial risk and opportunity.

But their roles have changed drastically in recent years. Finance is at an inflection point. Once defined by backward-looking reporting and transactional workflows, CFOs now have to lead with speed, precision, and foresight in an increasingly complex global market.

Between the impact of unpredictable market conditions and geopolitical shifts, digital transformation, attracting and retaining global talent, and most importantly, the rise of AI – the finance function is changing. The expectations of finance leaders are changing. And traditional finance processes just can't keep up.

In fact, AI in finance is projected to grow by 300% over the next five years. This highlights the urgency for intelligent, automated solutions that can help finance teams stay ahead.

Our 2025 Global Finance Leaders Survey heard from 751 finance leaders across the US, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Brazil, and Benelux about the challenges they face, where they're focusing next, and how they see the year ahead unfolding.

The survey data makes clear: **For finance leaders, AI is a strategic priority.** The survey results uncover how finance leaders are adopting AI, what additional tech investments they're making, and how these decisions are shaping their approach to everything from decision-making to talent development.

The survey results also revealed three distinct leadership approaches, each a reflection of how finance leaders focus on the impact they can have within their roles and across their organizations.



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Three finance leadership approaches for 2025 and beyond



Over the [past several years](#), we've observed that finance leaders flex and adopt their leadership approach to meet the needs of their business in the face of market volatility. As optimism for economic stability continues to grow for the year ahead, finance leaders are displaying different attitudes toward taking strategic risks to drive business growth.

Our survey revealed **three distinct leadership approaches** for finance leaders in 2025, shaped by their approach to ongoing challenges and opportunities.



The Expander: Expanders seek growth and actively look to invest in big new opportunities. They reassess their business and weave the right narrative for investors with an optimistic view of their company's financial prospects and the economy.



The Catalyst: Catalysts look to drive operational efficiencies and optimize their operations. Scalability, agility, and resilience are key to their approach as they prepare their organizations to quickly tackle opportunities and threats as they arise. Catalysts wish to invest in measures that will support productivity and connect silos.

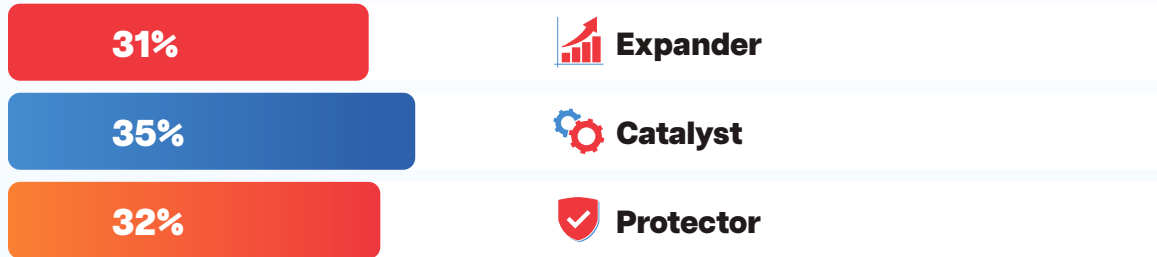


The Protector: Protectors are keen to address risk immediately and build up their team's ability to manage disruption. Less optimistic about their company's financial prospects, they actively monitor external issues and assess the potential impacts on their organization, as well as take measures to protect and preserve assets. Their focus is on specific, anticipated opportunities or threats that need to be managed to maintain stability.

It's important to note that one leadership approach is not preferable to another; it's a matter of how finance leaders approach their business needs. Analyzing our survey results through this lens provides a nuanced look at how finance leaders can make a bigger impact in their roles in 2025.

Defining the modern finance leader

Finance leaders identified the leadership approach that most resonates with how they plan to lead their team and tackle new opportunities and challenges—and the results showed an even split.



2% selected "Do not identify"

Each leadership approach also reflects different traits and priorities that finance leaders identify with based on their approach to challenges in the year ahead.

Leadership approach	Top leadership traits
Expander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic financial insight (42%) Expertise (specific industry understanding (35%)) Adaptability (to emerging processes and technologies (34%))
Catalyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic financial insight (38%) Adaptability (to emerging processes and technologies (38%)) Listens and understands the needs of their finance team to influence decisions (33%)
Protector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fostering a culture of innovation and investment in automation and improved processes (30%) Strategic financial insight (30%) Expertise (specific industry knowledge (23%))



AI spotlight

Adaptability to emerging technologies, like AI, stands out as a defining trait for Expanders and Catalysts. While Protectors may place more emphasis on process consistency and risk mitigation, that doesn't mean they aren't adopting AI-driven solutions. Their approach may be more measured, prioritizing long-term stability and proven results. As AI becomes more embedded in finance operations, each leadership style plays a distinct role in how teams test, implement, and scale these tools.

Top challenges faced by finance leaders



Regardless of their leadership approach, our survey revealed that all finance leaders face challenges with data reliability, scaling processes, effective strategic planning, and navigating uncertainty with agility. This underscores a common thread: navigating the complexity of finance demands a resilient and innovative approach to leadership.

These hurdles also highlight the growing gap between what finance teams are tasked with and what their current tools can support. As responsibilities multiply and the margin for error narrows, legacy systems and manual processes simply can't keep up.

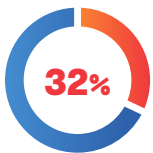
That's where finance technology, like AI and machine learning, can augment processes. For finance leaders looking to scale with agility, deliver real-time insights, and confidently plan for the unknown, smarter tools offer a competitive advantage.





As we explore how finance leaders are preparing for transformation in 2025, one thing is clear: technology is ready. The question now is how teams will use it to close the gap.

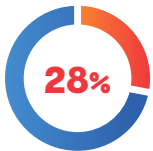
The challenges tell a story:



say data reliability, timeliness, and accuracy is their biggest barrier. AI can help clean, classify, and surface relevant data faster.



struggle to scale processes as their business grows. AI-driven automation can reduce manual workload and make workflows more efficient.



are bogged down by increasingly complex planning requirements; predictive modeling and scenario planning can make planning faster, clearer, and more responsive.



Finance leaders are optimistic for the year ahead



Overall, finance leaders anticipate growth in 2025 and beyond, with many reporting that they feel more optimistic about the year ahead than they did the previous year.

When thinking about their business's financial prospects:

- 9 in 10 (91%) finance leaders say their outlook is optimistic.¹
- Three quarters (75%) say they feel more optimistic² than they did a year ago.

This positive outlook is shared across all three leadership approaches—although, Expanders are the most optimistic.



¹ "Very optimistic" and "somewhat optimistic" responses combined.

² "Much more optimistic" and "somewhat more optimistic" responses combined.

This growing sense of optimism is also reflected in their business’s appetite for risk. In fact, 7 in 10 (70%) of those surveyed say their business has become more open to risk since the start of 2024, with just 5% saying they have become more risk averse.

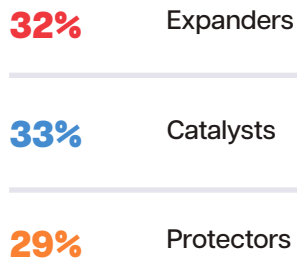
Finance leaders across the board are moving through 2025 and beyond with a clear focus: using technology to drive greater value. Interest in AI is no longer theoretical, and adoption is gaining ground.

Four ways finance leaders will approach their role in 2025

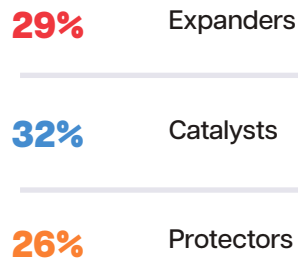
Open to adopting and utilizing AI



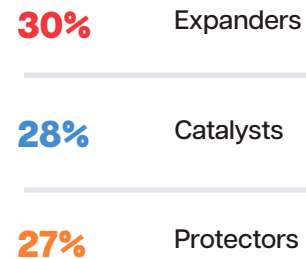
Open to new opportunities



Looking to expand and invest



Looking to invest in measures that will support productivity



³ Respondents who have primary business objectives for the coming year.

⁴ “We are significantly more open to risk” and “We are somewhat more open to risk” responses combined.

⁵ “We are significantly more closed to risk” and “We are somewhat more closed to risk” responses combined.



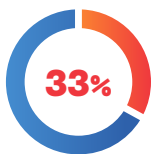
Overall, finance leaders approach their roles with curiosity and a growth mindset – most notably being open to adopting and utilizing AI.



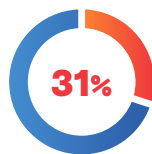
AI spotlight

According to our survey, a notable share of finance leaders in construction (33%) and manufacturing (31%) describe themselves as open to adopting and using AI. These results signal a shift: industries known for operational complexity are now looking to AI to help finance teams work smarter and respond faster.

Industries open to adopting and using AI:



Construction



Manufacturing

Using AI to meet strategic growth goals



While survey data shows that the next 6–18 months are generally met with optimism, finance leaders continue to navigate economic uncertainty with caution. To move forward, many are stepping more fully into their role as strategic advisors to the business, offering new ways to strengthen performance in a changing environment.

Traditional expectations placed on finance leaders are reflected in their primary business objectives for the coming year. Their focus for the year ahead includes:

- Revenue growth (28%)
- Operational efficiency (23%)
- Profitability improvement (22%)
- Cost reduction and efficiency gain (21%)

But what's changing is how they plan to get there. Ambitious targets like growth and expansion (15%) reflect their readiness to seize new opportunities, while strategies to protect cost control (14%) and liquidity preservation (12%) remain high on the list.

78%

of finance leaders agree⁶ that the position they're in is more challenging and dynamic than when they first entered a leadership role.

99%

Our survey shows that almost all (99%)⁷ finance leaders surveyed have a defined financial strategy for meeting these objectives in the next 6-18 months.

⁶ "Strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" responses combined.




⁷ Reverse of "no defined strategy."

AI is helping to make this possible.

From automating workflows to accelerating reporting cycles and surfacing decision-ready insights, AI is creating more space for strategic thinking. It's giving finance leaders back the time and headspace to pursue growth opportunities while keeping a sharp eye on risk.

But short-term financial strategies differ depending on a finance leader's leadership approach. Expanders and Catalysts favor a more aggressive approach while Protectors are shifting their attention to minimizing risk.

Three short-term financial strategies by leadership type

Leadership approach	Short-term financial strategies		
 Expander	Aggressive growth and expansion (for example, new customer segments, product offerings, or geographic regions) (17%)	Opportunistic, ready to seize new opportunities as they arise (17%)	Focusing on cost control and eliminating inefficiencies (14%)
 Catalyst	Aggressive growth and expansion (for example, new customer segments, product offerings, or geographic regions) (16%)	Preparing for investments, mergers & acquisitions, or accelerating product development (14%)	Asset preservation and liquidity focus (maintaining or increasing cash reserves to prepare for potential market fluctuations) (13%)
 Protector	Focusing on cost control and eliminating inefficiencies (16%)	Asset preservation and liquidity focus (maintaining or increasing cash reserves to prepare for potential market fluctuations) (14%)	Risk management and mitigation (13%)



Industry spotlight

Our survey revealed that finance leaders in manufacturing may be less focused on digital transformation than other industries.

Retail (33%), finance (29%), and software and technology (28%) were most likely to cite digital transformation as their primary business objective for the coming year. However, finance leaders in manufacturing are most likely to cite cost reduction and efficiency gains (34%).

But how finance leaders achieve these objectives differs. Respondents from software and technology are most likely to favor aggressive growth and expansion (22%) while those in manufacturing are most likely to focus on cost control and eliminating inefficiencies.

AI as an enabler of digital transformation



The survey shows that technology adoption is central to how finance leaders deliver value. While balancing transformation with day-to-day demands remains a challenge, one thing is clear: success in 2025 hinges on choosing the right tools.

The good news? 75% of finance leaders say their digital transformation efforts are already in progress. But 15% still struggle to identify the right technologies. A barrier that continues to slow momentum, despite growing urgency.

This disparity highlights that while the right technology solutions exist, organizations have to prioritize thorough research and due diligence to identify the best fit for their unique needs.

The importance of finding the right technology is reflected in the solutions finance leaders are choosing to invest in.

76%

have already invested in or are currently investing in cybersecurity and risk management solutions.

74%

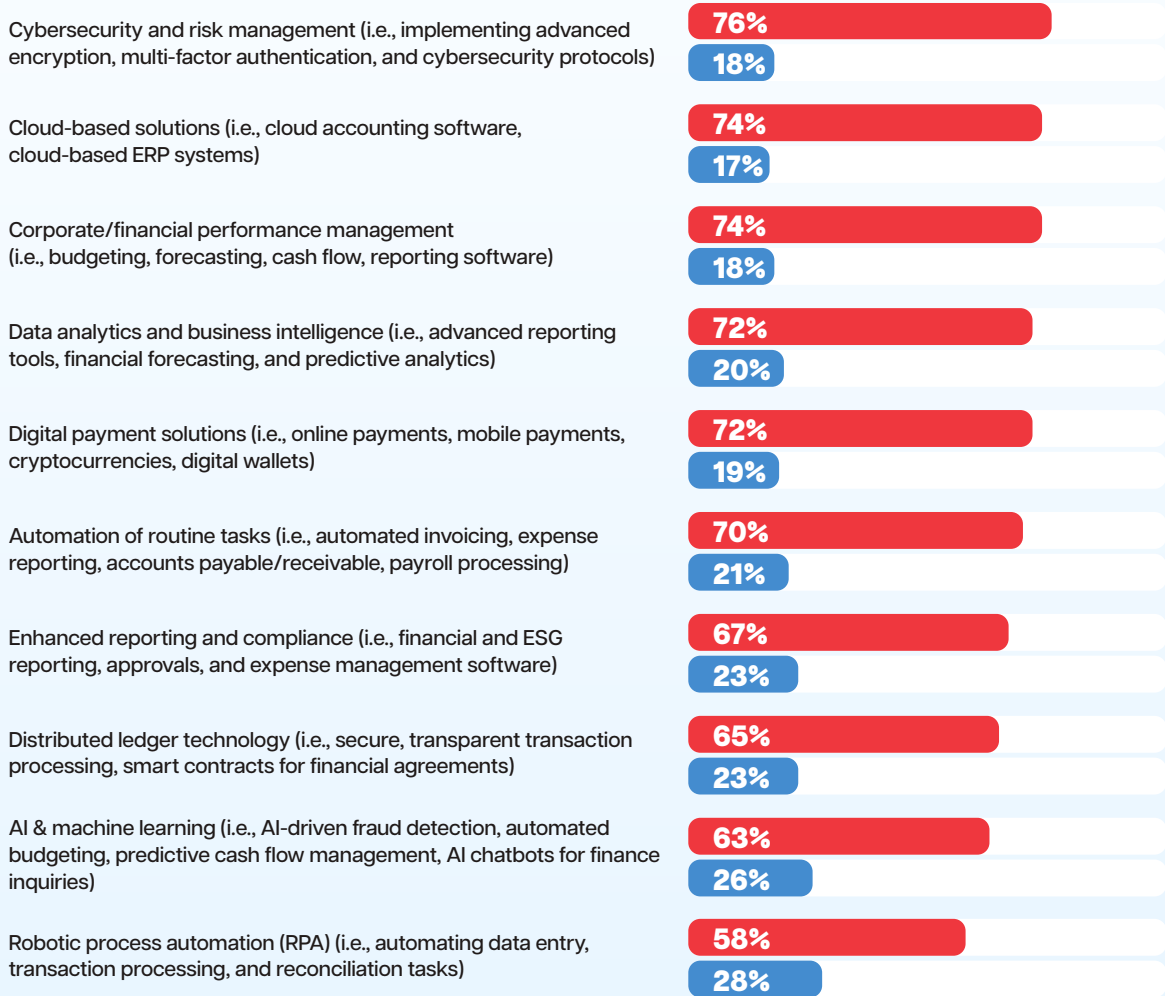
are investing in cloud-based solutions.

63%

have already invested in or are currently investing in AI and machine learning.

Top technologies finance leaders have already invested in or are currently investing in

Technology investment



Red bar: % of respondents who have invested in this technology in the past 12 months, or who are currently investing in it⁸

Blue bar: % of respondents who plan to invest in this technology in the next 12 months

⁸ "Invested in the past 12 months" and "currently investing" responses combined.



The balancing act of managing day-to-day tasks while driving digital transformation has inevitably increased pressure on finance teams to deliver results. Nearly half (46%) of finance leaders admit that identifying tools to meet their team’s needs is a significant hurdle.⁹ For many, it often feels like there aren’t enough hours in the day. Yet, 74% are already dedicating more time than ever to technology investments and implementations.

This underscores a crucial divide between teams struggling to choose the right technology and those successfully implementing it, emphasizing the importance of effective finance leadership.

Teams that have the right tools in place can streamline operations and stay ahead of growing demands, positioning themselves to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy.

Meanwhile, for those still hesitant or uncertain, the risk isn’t just falling behind—but missing out on critical opportunities to drive progress and stay competitive.

The payoff of getting digital transformation right is clear. Teams equipped with the right technology are better positioned to thrive, using the tools they have at their disposal to enhance automation and improve processes.

63%

of finance leaders are already investing in AI and machine learning, with another 26% planning within 12 months. These tools are being used to speed up fraud detection, automate budgeting, predict cash flow, and power finance chatbots.

⁹ “Very challenging” and “somewhat challenging” responses combined.

Digital savviness and tech familiarity are no longer nice to have – it's a must



Our survey indicates that finance leaders are feeling the pressure to meet rising expectations in their role, highlighting the importance of building teams with the financial, technical, and analytical skills needed to drive impact in 2025.

When hiring new talent, finance leaders prioritize a wide range of skills. Financial analysis (35%) and accounting (28%) top the list.

But as digital transformation accelerates, there's growing emphasis on digital savviness (22%) and experience with new and emerging technologies (22%), including tools like automation and AI.

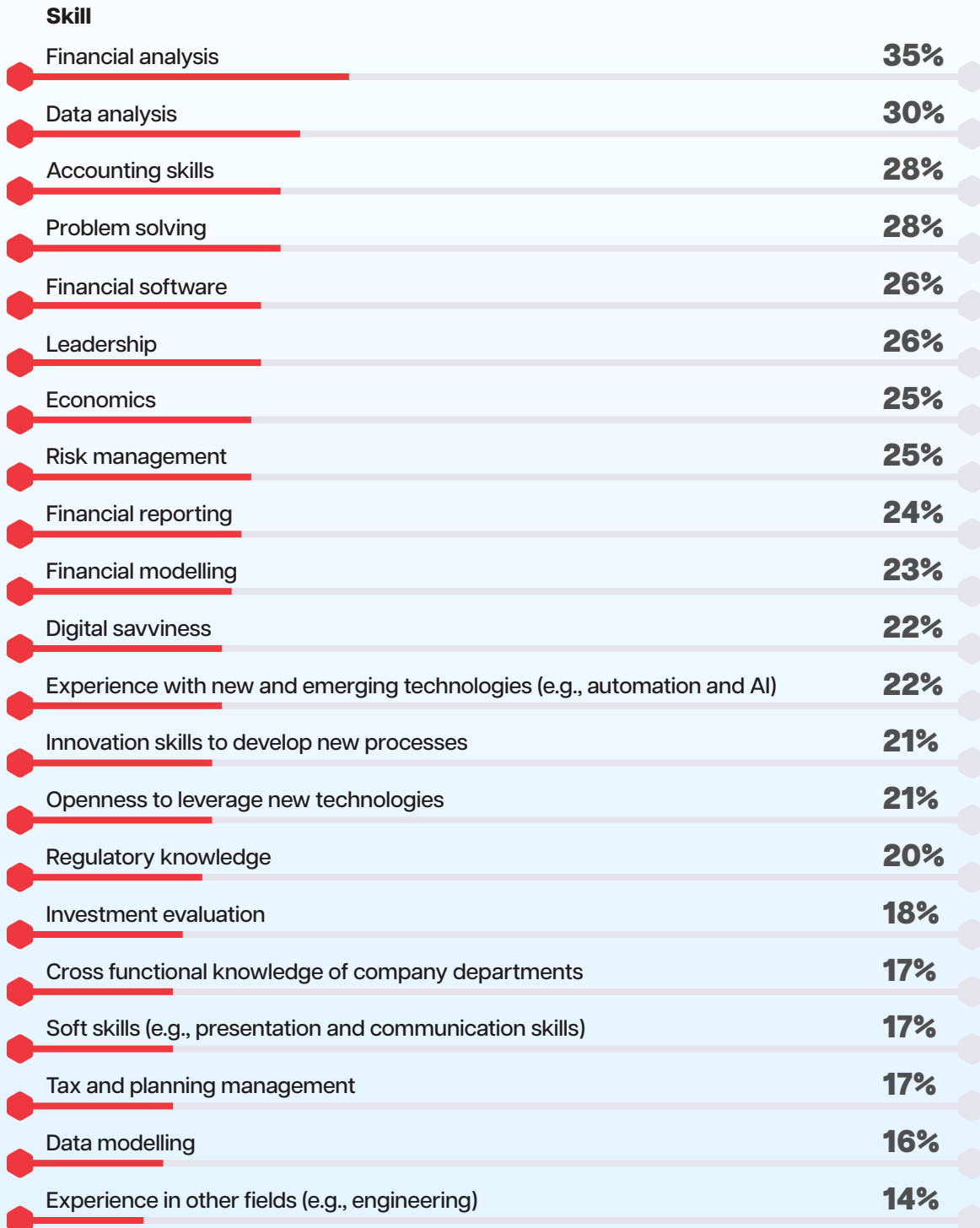
Teams that understand how to apply AI today will be better equipped to adapt as new capabilities emerge. Future-proofing the finance function will help organizations stay competitive as expectations continue to shift.



AI spotlight

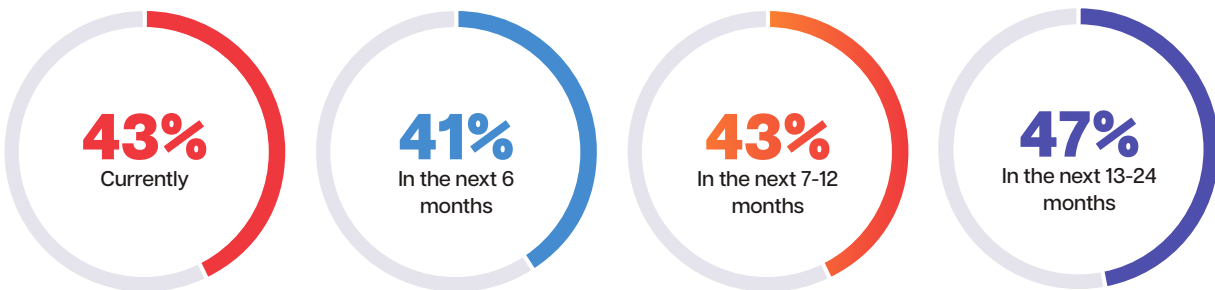
22% of finance leaders say they prioritize experience with new and emerging technologies, like AI, as a top skill when hiring. As finance teams take on more technology-driven responsibilities, this number is expected to rise.

% of respondents who ranked this skill as one of the top five skills they prioritize when hiring new talent



Our survey also shows that many businesses may be struggling to strike the right balance in finance department staffing. Currently, 72% of finance leaders say their finance team makes up no more than 10% of their company's total headcount. But 43% do not believe their teams are adequately staffed today. And that number grows to 47% when looking ahead to the next 13–24 months.

How adequately staffed, if at all, do you feel your finance department is during the following timeframes?



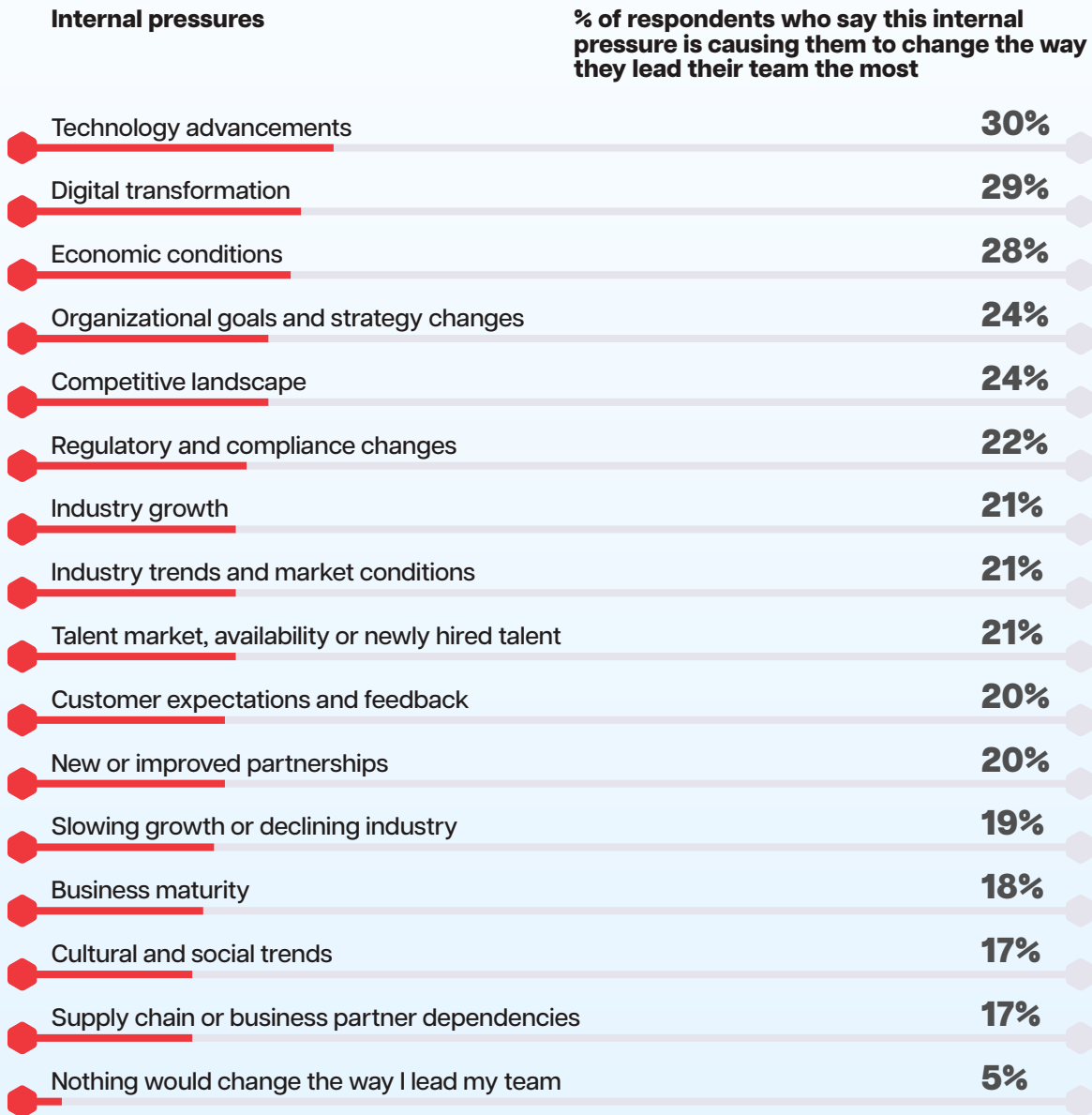
% of respondents who do not think their finance department is/will be adequately staffed.

These staffing and talent challenges intensify the internal and external pressure on finance teams. Internally, limited capacity makes it harder to balance day-to-day responsibilities with broader priorities like digital transformation, systems upgrades, and organizational change. This is where AI can help not by replacing roles, but by absorbing routine, time-consuming tasks and giving teams the bandwidth to focus on strategic work.

Externally, pressures like competitor growth, regulatory change, and industry disruption are forcing finance leaders to think differently about how they build and scale their teams. Without the right in-house expertise and the tools to support them, teams can struggle to keep up, especially when expected to lead long-term initiatives on top of daily operations.

By turning to AI-powered tools that reduce manual workloads, finance leaders can help their teams shift from task execution to informed decision-making. A necessary mindset shift for modern finance.

What internal pressures, if any, would change the way you lead your team?



What external pressures, if any, are causing you to change the way you lead your team the most?



AI spotlight

47% of finance leaders don't believe their teams will be adequately staffed in the next 13–24 months. Adopting tools, like AI, that reduce low-value work, is one way to help existing teams operate at a higher level.

Struggles with talent management, along with internal and external pressures, underscore the challenges finance leaders face in expanding their role as enablers of transformation. Balancing day-to-day tasks with driving digital transformation requires not only achieving a strong ROI on tech investments but also maintaining financial stability.

Yet, as we look ahead to 2025, finance leaders remain optimistic and resilient, ready to rise above these constraints. Finance leaders can harness the power of finance technology to drive digital transformation, automate processes, tackle complexity, and enhance their competitive edge.

AI-powered technology will help finance leaders meet challenges head on



In 2025, finance leaders remain optimistic and resilient, allowing them to tackle challenges head-on. As finance leaders evolve into strategic advisors, they are being asked to stretch their responsibilities beyond traditional financial management.

Digital transformation is now a major part of the modern finance leader's role. No longer a nice-to-have, new technologies that automate and facilitate increasingly complex processes provide today's finance leaders with even more opportunity to drive value. AI is a central part of that shift. In North America, 38% of finance leaders surveyed say they are open to adopting and utilizing AI in their role. That number is slightly lower in Europe (25%) and the UK (19%), suggesting that while interest is still emerging, AI is beginning to play a meaningful role in how finance leaders approach strategy and decision-making.

Almost all (96%)¹⁰ finance leaders surveyed recognize that investing in a wide range of solutions will ensure they can maintain and grow their business's competitive advantage.

Finance teams need the speed and clarity to be strategic drivers of transformation, fuel sustainable growth, and create tangible enterprise value. And Prophix One Intelligence is the driving force.

The pace of AI adoption is only increasing. Investing now doesn't just solve today's challenges; it positions finance teams to lead with insight, agility, and confidence in the years ahead.

¹⁰ Reverse of "N/A – I already carry out my role effectively enough" and "N/A – nothing would help me carry out my role more effectively."



We know that AI is shifting the expectations of finance teams. Finance leaders are evolving as beacons for strategy, providing real-time insights and guiding critical business decisions.


The demand for real-time insights, predictive capabilities, and a future-ready finance function that can address challenges head on is no longer a recommendation – it's a must.

Prophix One Intelligence is the sophisticated AI engine that powers Prophix One, a Financial Performance Platform. Natively integrated into the platform, which powers a complete suite of financial performance management solutions, finance teams can experience immediate productivity benefits today, while laying the foundation for a future-proofed tomorrow.



What, if anything, do you think would help you to carry out your role more effectively?





Overall, our survey shows that finance leaders would benefit from technology that not only meets the demands of their role but also expands the capabilities of their teams. Purpose-built finance platforms, powered by end-to-end AI integration, will elevate the talent of your team. Now you can spend less time on the data and more time on faster planning, sharper forecasting, and more confident decision-making across the office of the CFO.

It makes sense then that 87% of survey respondents said they would be interested in futureproofing their business by adopting the latest technologies. This is great news – as the technology that finance leaders are interested in can help them tackle their ongoing challenges:

- Futureproofing your business by adopting the latest technologies **strengthens data reliability** by integrating advanced tools that reduce errors and enhance accuracy across systems.
- Flexible, agile reporting supports **navigating uncertainty** with agility by enabling real-time responses to market changes.
- Technology that supports advanced planning minimizes errors and delays, ensuring **strategic planning** remains precise and effective.
- AI-powered automation of repetitive tasks accelerates scaling by freeing up teams to focus on strategic **decision-making** and **growth initiatives**.

The tools that finance leaders are most likely to think would be helpful vary according to their unique challenges.



To carry out their roles more effectively, **Expanders** are more likely to prioritize advanced finance technology (31%) and tools that can scale with changing client and team needs (29%).

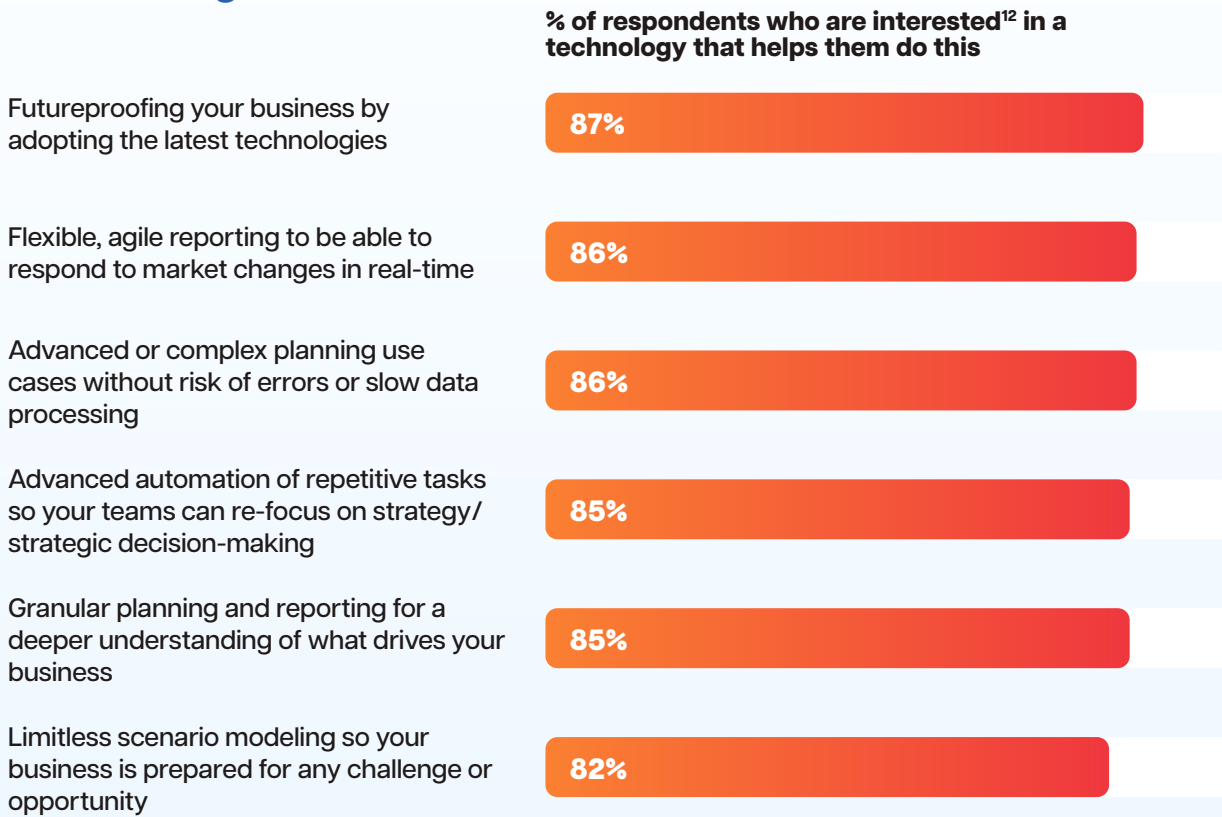


On the other hand, **Catalysts** are most likely to seek tools to help with collaboration with other departments (31%).



Protectors are most likely to look for tools that aid faster decision-making (27%), to help carry out their role more effectively.

How interested, if at all, are you in a technology that helps to do the following?



Industry spotlight

The areas that finance leaders are most likely to be interested in enhancing technology differ according to the needs of their industry.

The findings show that those in finance (43%) and software and technology (58%) are most likely to be interested in technology that futureproofs their business by adopting the latest technologies.

On the other hand, finance leaders in retail are looking for a tool to deliver advanced automation of repetitive takes so their teams can re-focus on strategy (59%) and those in manufacturing are seeking flexible, agile reporting capabilities (54%).

Overall, the right finance technology empowers finance leaders to perform with unmatched scale and efficiency, futureproof their business, and outperform competitors. All while driving digital transformation that positions them as strategic advisors to the business.

¹² "Very interested" and "somewhat interested" responses combined.



CONCLUSION:

AI will set tomorrow's finance leaders apart

Finance leaders continue to balance their traditional role as stewards of financial stability with the growing responsibility to lead digital transformation.

As the survey results show, AI is emerging as the path to meet the changing expectations and evolving demands of today's business landscape.

AI is fundamentally changing the way finance teams work. With the time and space to refocus on strategic growth and innovation, finance leaders are stepping into new roles as beacons of transformation.

Finance teams who choose AI-powered platforms, like Prophix One, work faster, smarter, and more strategically. Now, finance teams have the tools at their fingertips to reimagine – and redefine – modern finance operations.

2025 is your time to think big, plan smart, and lead with intelligence.

Ready to make a bigger impact as a finance leader in 2025?

Explore how Prophix One, a Financial Performance Platform, can empower you to drive business growth.

[See what you can do](#)

Methodology

Prophix partnered with Censuswide to conduct a survey of 751 middle management financial decision makers (18+) within businesses with 100+ employees and \$100m+ revenue (or equivalent in market per currency conversion from \$ scale) across the UK, US, Canada, France, Germany, Brazil, and Benelux.

The data was collected between November 28, 2024 – December 6, 2024.

Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.





About Prophix®

Prophix® is a global leader in financial performance management, empowering finance teams to lead with clarity, capacity, and confidence. From planning and budgeting to forecasting, reporting, reconciliation, and consolidation, Prophix brings it all together in one intelligent platform.

Prophix One™, the flagship Autonomous Finance Platform, combines AI, automation, and intuitive technology to simplify complex work and elevate finance to a more strategic role. With nearly four decades of innovation and a global footprint serving more than 3,000 customers in 100+ countries, Prophix is the trusted partner for organizations ready to transform finance into the driving force behind business growth.



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