



2025 Global Finance Leaders Survey

How to Make a Bigger Impact
as a Finance Leader



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 role has changed drastically in recent years.

Now, finance leaders are spending more time than ever before managing tech investments and implementation within their organizations. As a result, they have earned a reputation as the enablers of transformation.

However, managing this increasingly complex role is no easy feat for busy finance leaders who are now expected to prove the ROI of tech adoption while still handling traditional financial management duties.

For our **2025 Global Finance Leaders Survey**, we surveyed 751 finance leaders across the US, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Brazil, and Benelux on their challenges, upcoming priorities, and outlook for the year ahead. This uncovered **three leadership approaches** that finance leaders use to address everything from strategy and tech investments to talent management, helping them **think big** about what they can achieve in their roles and for their organizations.

Read on to see how finance leadership is shaping up for the year ahead.





Inside this document

Chapter 1	Three finance leadership approaches for 2025	4
Chapter 2	Top challenges faced by finance leaders	6
Chapter 3	Finance leaders are optimistic for the year ahead	7
Chapter 4	Short-term focus on driving strategic growth	10
Chapter 5	Digital transformation underway for most finance leaders	12
Chapter 6	The finance team of the future: Digital savviness and tech familiarity	15
Chapter 7	The right technology will help finance leaders meet challenges head on	20
Chapter 8	Conclusion: Make a bigger impact in 2025	24
	About Prophix	26

Three finance leadership approaches for 2025



[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.

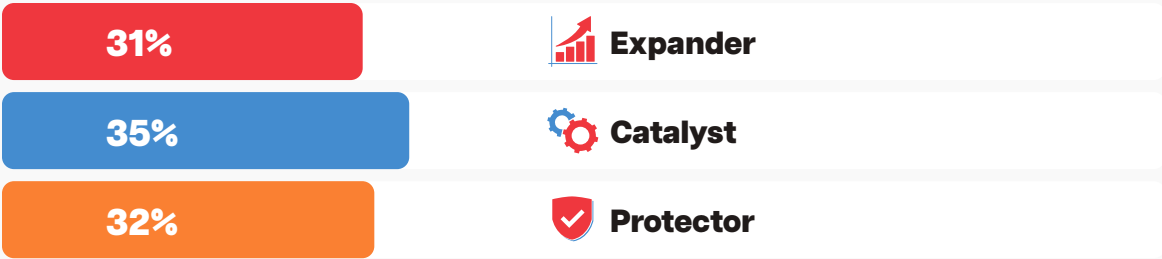


The Protector: Protectors are keen to address risk immediately and build up their team's ability to manage disruption. Less optimistic about their company's financial prospects, they actively monitor external issues and assess the potential impacts on their organization, as well as take measures to protect 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 in the year ahead 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	• Strategic financial insight (42%) • Expertise (specific industry understanding (35%)) • Adaptability (to emerging processes and technologies (34%))
Catalyst	• 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	• Fostering a culture of innovation and investment in automation and improved processes (30%) • Strategic financial insight (30%) • Expertise (specific industry knowledge (23%))

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 untapped potential of finance technology, and the opportunity for finance leaders to use these tools to streamline processes, mitigate risks, and unlock new opportunities, which we'll explore in more detail.

Biggest challenge	% of respondents who say this is the biggest challenge they face
Data reliability, timeliness and accuracy	32%
Talent management (attracting, retaining and developing)	32%
Scaling processes with growing business needs	30%
Effective strategic planning that drives business performance	29%
Navigating economic uncertainty and market changes with agility	29%
Ensuring accurate financial reporting	28%
Managing planning with increasingly complex requirements	28%
Managing sustainability and ESG reporting	27%
Cash flow and liquidity management	25%
Gaining and providing visibility into key planning processes	25%
Effective cross-functional collaboration and communication	24%
Navigating mergers and acquisitions (M&A)	20%
There are no biggest challenges we face	5%

Keep these challenges in mind as we explore how finance leaders are preparing to deliver transformation in 2025 and beyond.

Finance leaders are optimistic for the year ahead



Overall, finance leaders anticipate growth in 2025, 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.

% of Expanders who are optimistic about...



% of Catalysts who are optimistic about...



% of Protectors who are optimistic about...



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

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

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

Finance leaders' growing sense of optimism is also reflected in their business's appetite for risk. In fact, 7 in 10 (70%) of those surveyed³ say their business has become more open⁴ to risk since the start of 2024, with just 5% saying they have become more risk averse.⁵

Our survey found that regardless of leadership approach, finance leaders are going into 2025 with an openness to new opportunities for value creation with finance technology, including an interest in adopting and using artificial intelligence (AI).

Four ways finance leaders will approach their role in 2025



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, the sentiment among finance teams is notably positive, even as some teams remain cautious of economic uncertainty (27%). Yet, there are strong signals of optimism:

- Nearly half (49%) of finance leaders describe themselves as “very optimistic” (versus “somewhat optimistic”) about their industry.
- Similarly, 48% report being “very optimistic” about their business’s financial prospects.
- While optimism about the general economy is more tempered, with 38% feeling “very optimistic,” only a small portion (26%) describe themselves as not optimistic, reflecting a cautious yet resilient mindset.⁶



Industry spotlight

According to our survey, finance leaders in the healthcare industry are more optimistic than their construction counterparts. Specifically, 73% of those surveyed in healthcare⁷ say they feel optimistic about the general economy for the year ahead.

However, this number decreases when finance leaders are asked if they are “very optimistic” about their industry’s prospects for the coming year. Compared to other industries, healthcare (39%) is less likely than those in finance (57%), construction (51%)⁸, retail (51%), and software and technology (60%) to express confidence in their future outlook.

⁶ “Not at all optimistic” and “not very optimistic” responses combined.

⁷ Note that base sizes for healthcare (44 respondents) fall below usual guidelines for robustness.

⁸ Note that base sizes for construction (45 respondents) fall below usual guidelines for robustness.

Short-term focus on driving strategic growth



While the next 6-18 months are generally met with optimism, finance leaders are still approaching economic uncertainty and market fluctuations with caution. To balance this, finance is stepping into the role of strategic advisor to the CEO, who is looking for ways to drive organizational performance in an unpredictable environment.

Findings from our survey reveal that many finance leaders are preparing for this transition—shifting from traditional “number crunchers” to strategic advisors. In fact, 78% agree⁹ that their current position is more challenging and dynamic than when they first entered a leadership role.

However, traditional expectations placed on finance leaders are reflected in their primary business objectives for the coming year. This includes:

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

78%

of finance leaders agree¹⁰ 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%)¹¹ finance leaders surveyed have a defined financial strategy for meeting these objectives in the next 6-18 months.

⁹ “Strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” responses combined.

¹⁰ “Strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” responses combined.

¹¹ Reverse of “no defined strategy.”

And while traditional expectations continue to guide priorities, they are not the full picture of how finance leaders are approaching the future. Balancing these foundational goals, many finance leaders are pairing caution with optimism, signaling a shift toward more ambitious strategies.

This is evident in their short-term financial plans, where an appetite for aggressive growth and expansion (15%) reflects their readiness to seize new opportunities.

However, finance leaders are far from throwing caution to the wind. A focus on cost control and eliminating inefficiencies (14%), and asset preservation and liquidity focus (12%) are also in the top financial strategies for finance leaders over the next 6-18 months.

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.

Digital transformation underway for most finance leaders



The survey shows that enhancing processes with technology has become a significant focus for finance leaders within their departments. While delivering on digital transformation alongside managing day-to-day operations presents significant challenges, it remains clear that investing in the right technology is critical to success in 2025.

The good news is that 75% of finance leaders report that their transformation efforts are well underway.¹² Yet, 15% of teams continue to struggle with finding the right technology to invest in—a recurring obstacle despite its high priority for many organizations.

This disparity highlights that while the right technology solutions exist, organizations must 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 in 2025.

76%

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

74%

are investing in cloud-based solutions.

¹² “Ahead of the curve (adopted many new technologies)” and “in progress (currently adopting new technologies)” responses combined.

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

Technology investment



■ % of respondents who have invested in this technology in the past 12 months, or who are currently investing in it¹³

■ % of respondents who plan to invest in this technology in the next 12 months

¹³ "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.¹⁵ 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 in 2025, using the tools they have at their disposal to enhance automation and improve processes.

84%

of finance leaders find it challenging¹⁴ to balance transformation with solving problems in the finance department.

79%

of finance leaders agree¹⁶ that they play a multifaceted role as a finance leader—keeping the business financially stable and managing risk while enabling transformation.

¹⁴ “Very challenging” and “somewhat challenging” responses combined.

¹⁵ “Strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” responses combined.

¹⁶ “Strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” responses combined.

Digital savviness and tech familiarity



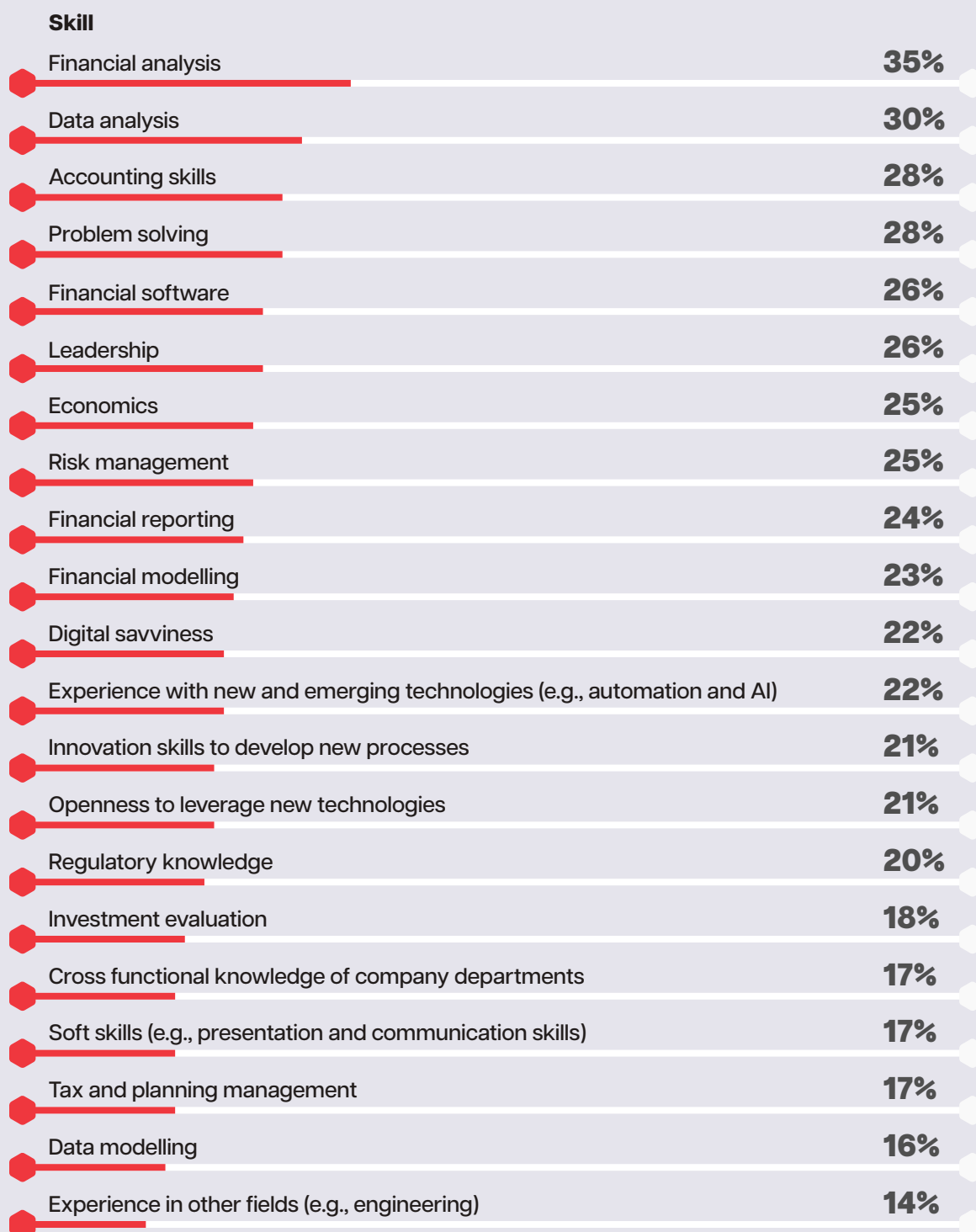
Our survey indicates that finance leaders are feeling the pressure to meet the expectations that come with their evolving role, highlighting the importance of building teams with the acumen and digital savvy required to add value to businesses in 2025.

When on the hunt for new talent, finance leaders are looking for a wide range of skills. Financial analysis (35%) and accounting skills (28%) were among the top priorities. And, when looking for new talent to specifically support digital transformation efforts, many also value digital savviness (22%) and experience with new and emerging technologies (22%).

Digital savviness ensures teams can seamlessly integrate finance technology into existing workflows, while experience with emerging technologies equips finance leaders to assess potential new solutions, ensuring tech investments can address specific business challenges. This expertise is crucial for overcoming any hurdles in technology selection mentioned earlier, streamlining decision-making, and driving successful digital transformation under strong leadership.

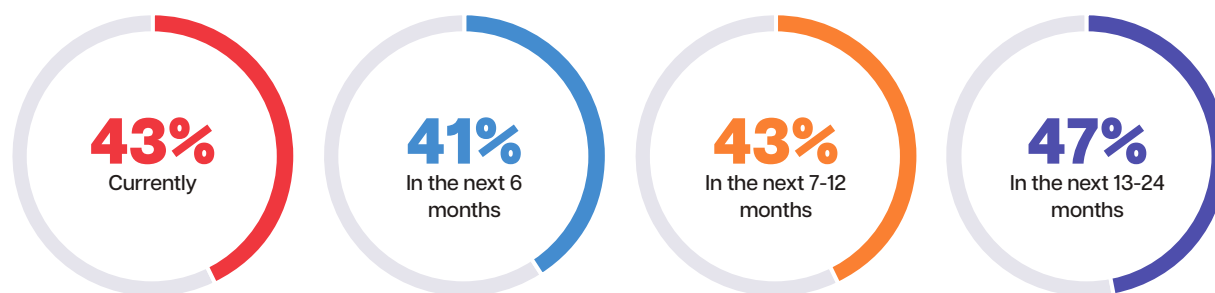
However, finding these candidates is much easier said than done. 32% of finance leaders surveyed cited talent management (attracting, retaining, and developing) as one of the top challenges they currently face in their role—and this was felt equally, regardless of their leadership approach.

% 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 get finance department staffing levels just right. Currently, 72% of finance leaders say their finance team comprises up to 10% of their business's total headcount. However, further findings show that 43% of finance leaders do not believe that their finance teams are adequately¹⁷ staffed, and this number grows to 47% when considering whether their teams will be adequately staffed in 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.

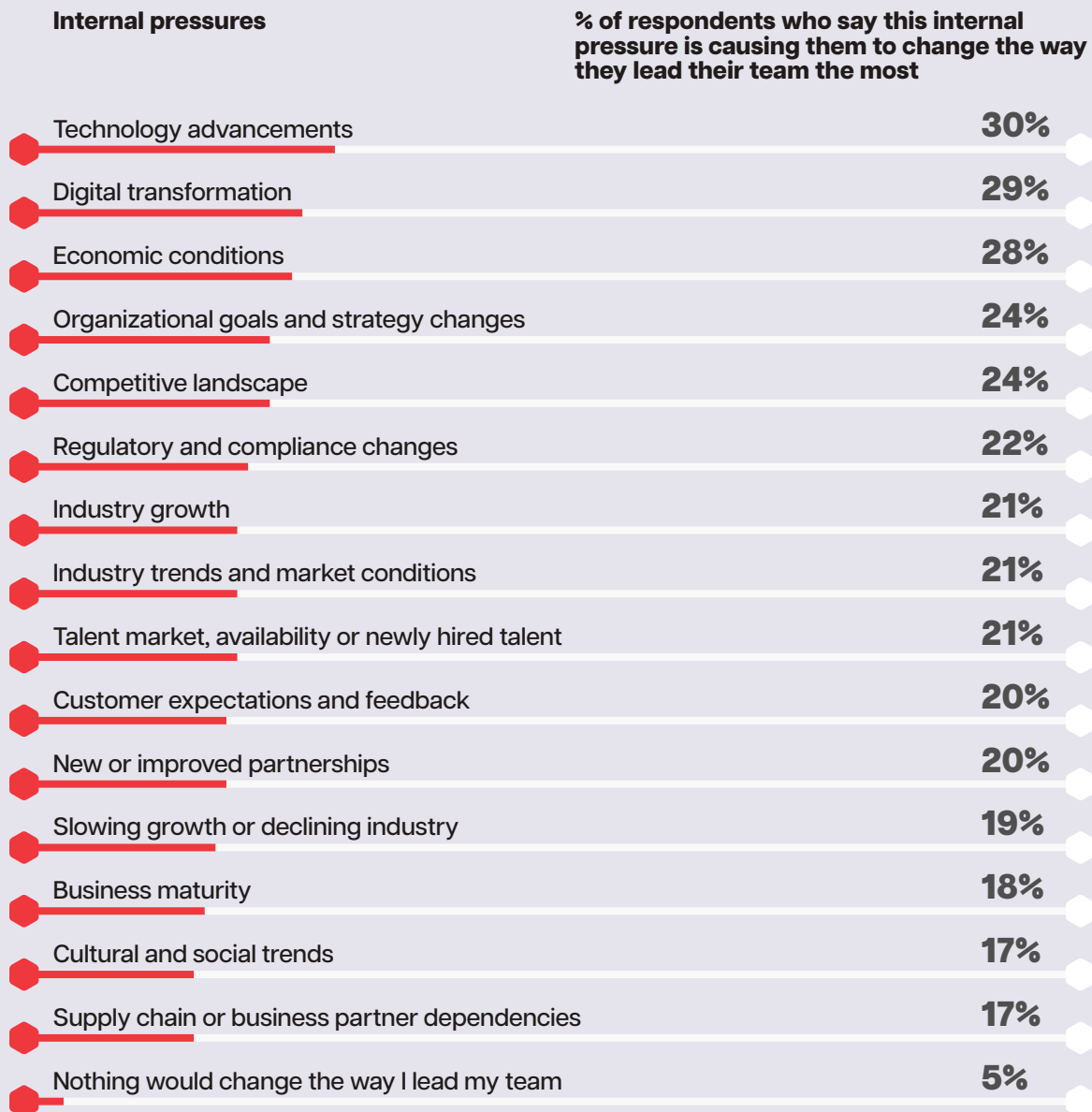
These understaffing and talent management challenges intensify both internal and external pressures on finance teams. Internally, they make it harder to balance daily responsibilities with strategic priorities such as technology advancements, digital transformation, and organizational shifts.

Externally, pressures like competitor growth, regulatory changes, and industry disruption require finance leaders to adapt their leadership approach. Without the necessary in-house expertise, finance teams can struggle to manage day-to-day tasks while effectively driving long-term initiatives.

Similar percentages of Expanders (31%), Catalysts (33%), and Protectors (33%) report that talent management is one of the biggest challenges they currently face in their role.

¹⁷ Reverse of “adequately staffed.”

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?



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.



Industry spotlight

The survey shows that the software and technology industry is most likely to face challenges when it comes to data reliability, timeliness, and accuracy (40%). By comparison, retail (41%) and finance (33%) are most likely to experience difficulties attracting, retaining, and developing talent.

Meanwhile, finance leaders in manufacturing are most likely to face challenges when managing planning with increasingly complex requirements (41%).

The right technology will help finance leaders meet challenges head on



Going into 2025, finance leaders remain optimistic and resilient, allowing them to tackle challenges head-on. As they aim to become 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.

96%

Almost all (96%)¹⁸ finance leaders surveyed recognize that investing in a wide range of solutions will ensure they can maintain and grow their business's competitive advantage.



Industry spotlight

The areas that finance leaders are most likely to be interested in enhancing with 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 tasks so their teams can re-focus on strategy (59%) and those in manufacturing are seeking flexible, agile reporting capabilities (54%).

¹⁸ 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."

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 to help meet the demanding expectations of their role—and help enhance the capabilities of their teams.

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.
- Advanced automation of repetitive tasks accelerates **scaling processes** 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?

% of respondents who are interested¹⁹ in a technology that helps them do this

Futureproofing your business by adopting the latest technologies

87%

Flexible, agile reporting to be able to respond to market changes in real-time

86%

Advanced or complex planning use cases without risk of errors or slow data processing

86%

Advanced automation of repetitive tasks so your teams can re-focus on strategy/strategic decision-making

85%

Granular planning and reporting for a deeper understanding of what drives your business

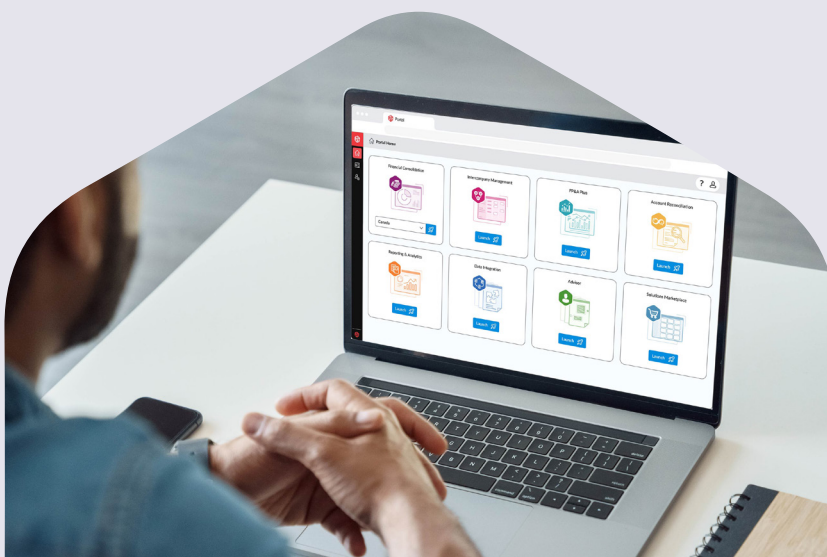
85%

Limitless scenario modeling so your business is prepared for any challenge or opportunity

82%

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.

¹⁹ "Very interested" and "somewhat interested" responses combined.



CONCLUSION:

Make a bigger impact in 2025

Finance leaders are stepping into 2025 balancing their more traditional role as stewards of financial stability with their mandate to lead digital transformation.

Whether they address their challenges as Expanders, Catalysts, or Protectors, each leadership approach reflects a unique response to a shared need for innovation and adaptability. Expanders are driving growth by investing in new opportunities, Catalysts are focused on operational efficiency and agility, and Protectors are fortifying their organizations against risk while maintaining stability. Together, these leadership approaches highlight the diverse ways finance leaders are managing complexity and fostering resilience this year.

Faced with challenges like data reliability, process scaling, and agility, finance leaders are turning to technology to unlock new possibilities. With the right tools, they're not just overcoming obstacles—they're streamlining operations, enabling collaboration, and driving strategic growth.

And equipped with finance technology to meet their business needs, finance leaders are not just managing their challenges but turning them into opportunities to create value for their organizations.

It's clear that the future of finance requires bold leadership and action. It's about visualizing the change you can lead and knowing that the technology exists to make your vision a reality. 2025 is your time to push limits, reimagine success, and innovate with purpose—challenging you to **think big**, and then **think even bigger** about the impact you can make in your role.

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®

Ambitious finance leaders rely on Prophix® to plan smarter, move faster, and lead with greater control. Prophix One™, a Financial Performance Platform, connects planning, budgeting, forecasting, reporting, reconciliation, and consolidation in one unified experience.

With a complete suite of scalable solutions, AI-powered automation, and data you can trust, Prophix helps teams eliminate manual work, improve accuracy, and deliver insights that drive business results. Backed by nearly 40 years of experience, more than 3,000 active customers partner with Prophix to simplify complexity and stay ready for what's next. www.prophix.com

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