



What is my gross margin compared to my plan for 2025?



Which of my operating expense categories were the biggest in 2024?



How much money do I have left for Salaries and Related Expenses in 2025 as of March?



# The State of Strategic Finance 2025

## Finance Teams Grow Up, Glow Up, and Warm Up to AI

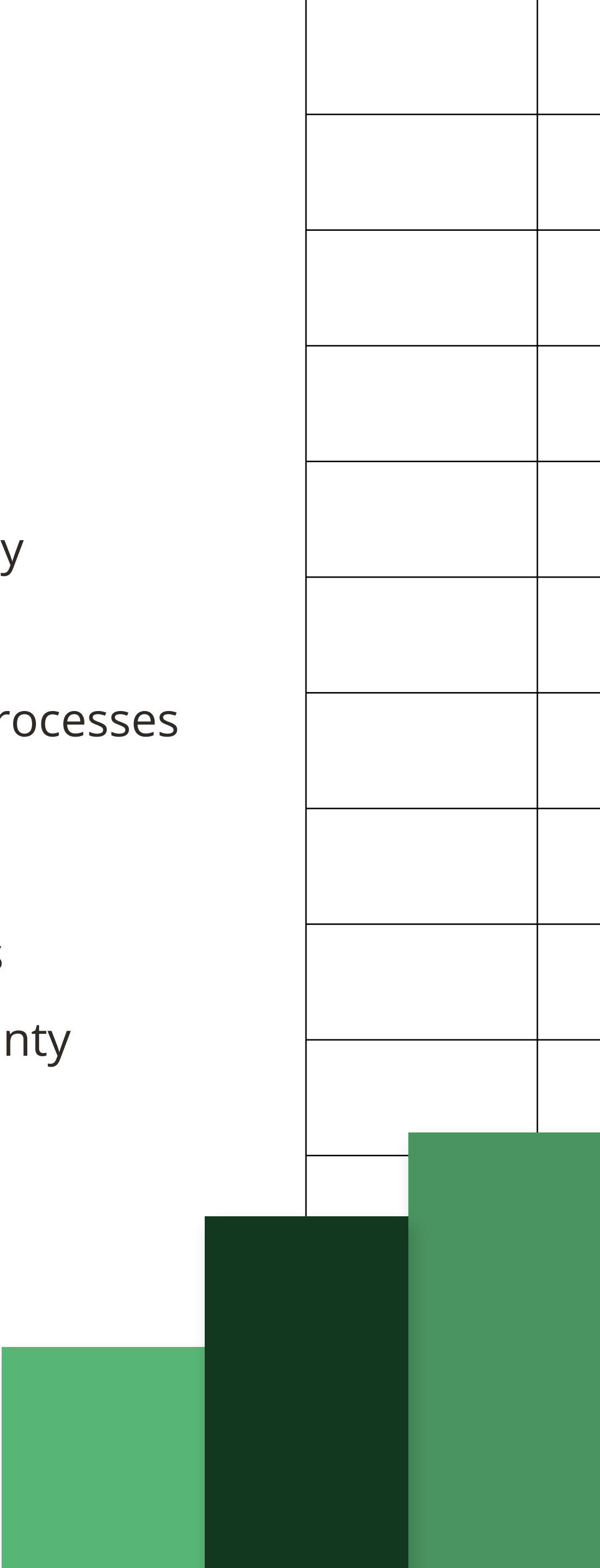
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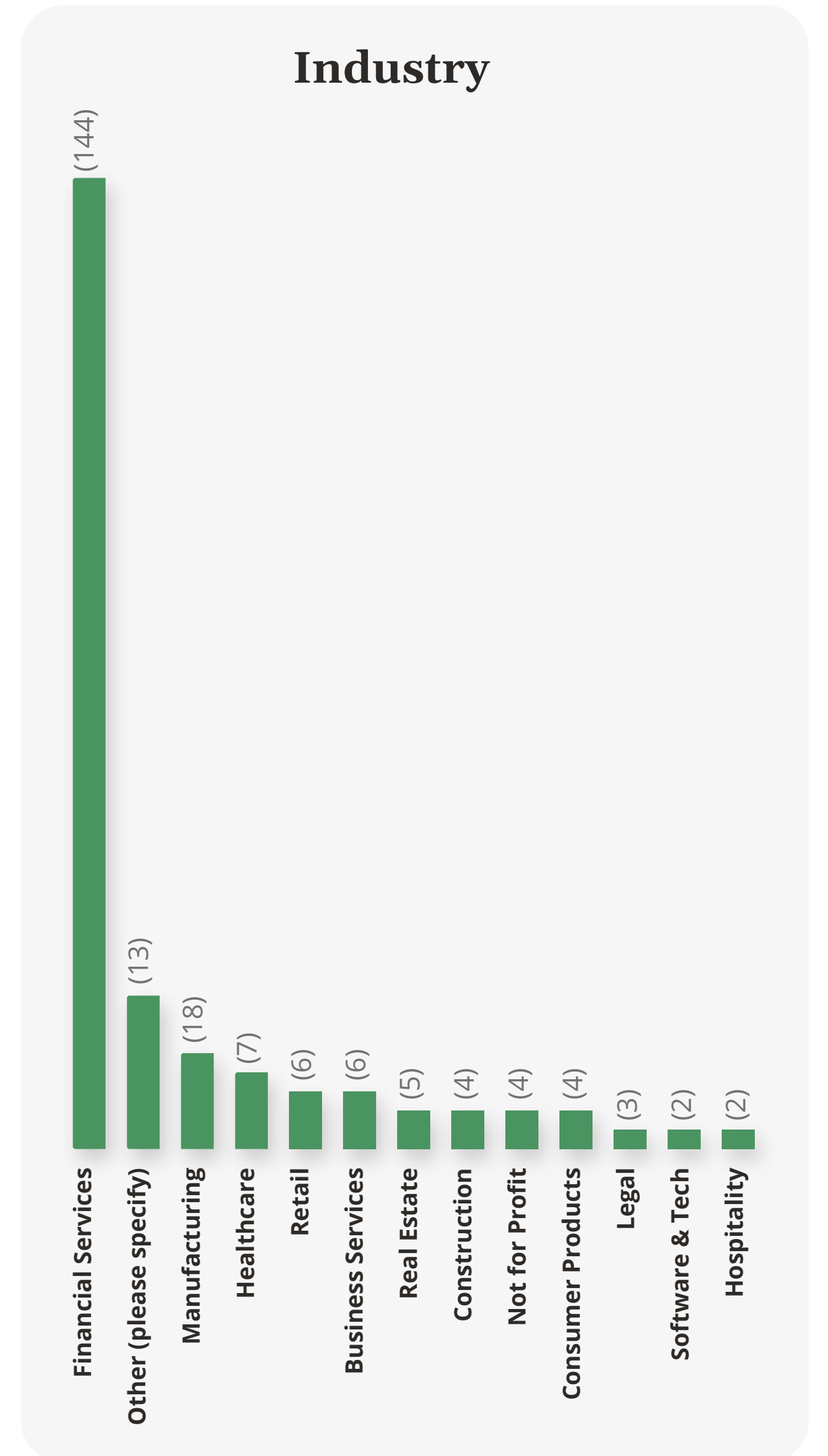
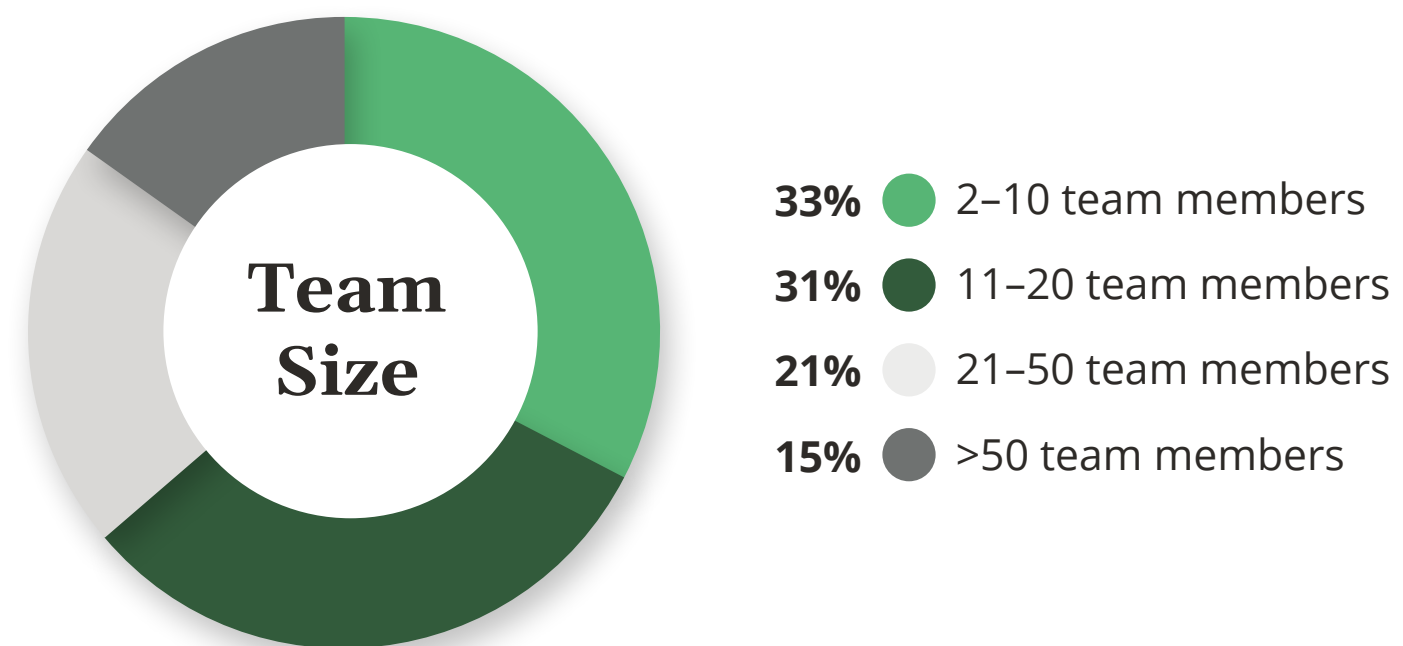
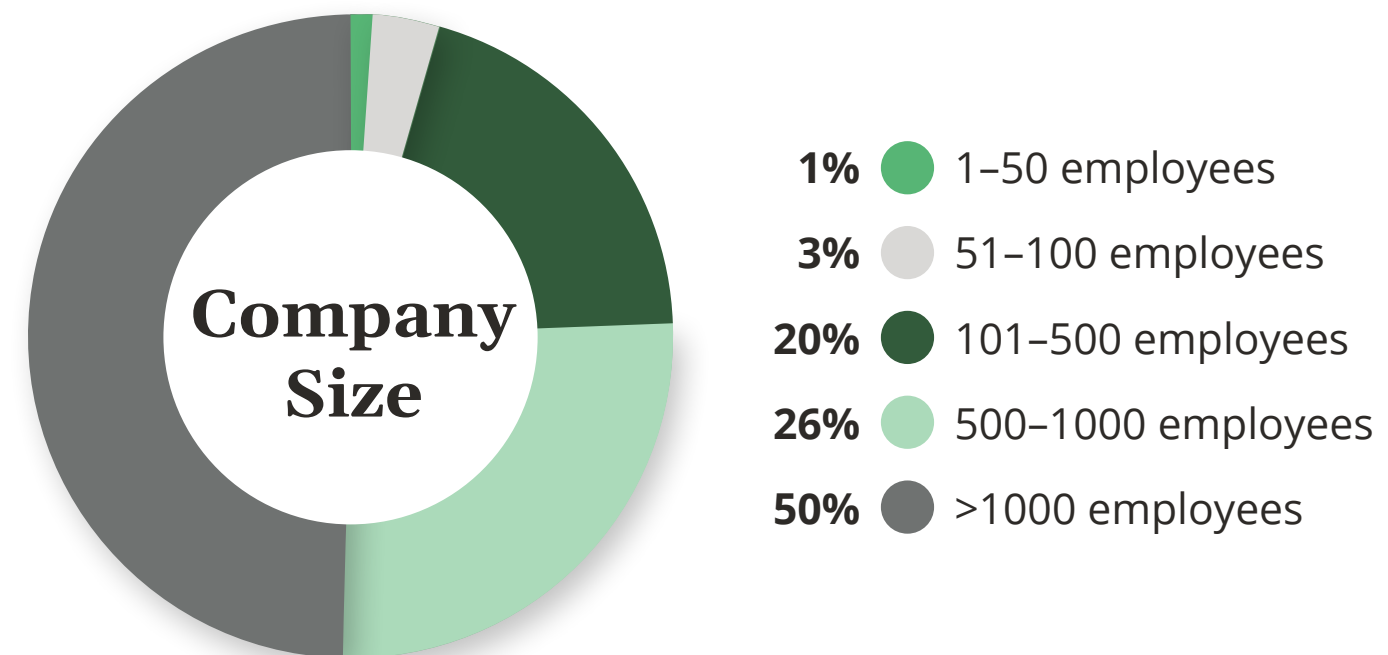
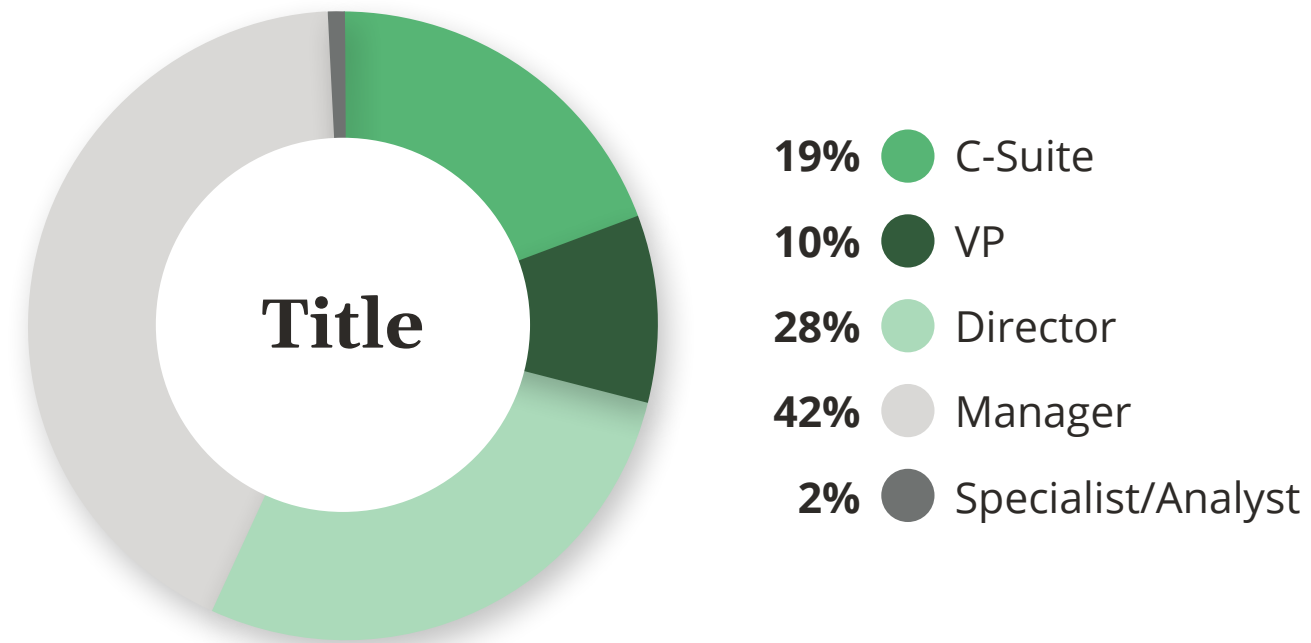
# About This Survey



Vena's State of Strategic Finance 2025 report results from a broad survey of 218 finance leaders. The survey was administered during October and November 2024 in collaboration with BPM Partners. It included respondents from various companies of different sizes, and a diverse set of industries—ranging from healthcare and financial services to higher education and mining. All but six of the respondents are based in North America.

All of the survey's respondents work within or closely with an in-house finance team at their respective firms, and roughly half (50%) work for companies with over 1,000 employees. Around 26% work for companies with 500-1,000 employees, and another 20% work for companies with 101-500 employees. Further, almost two-thirds of the respondents work on teams of less than 20 people, with 33% working on teams of 2-10. Two-thirds of respondents work in the financial services industry and 8% work in manufacturing.

Finally, 42% of respondents hold the title of "manager," while 28% are directors, 19% are in their company's C-Suite, and nearly 10% are VPs.



# Introduction

## It's difficult to think of 2024 as anything but a tumultuous year.

While the world may have collectively moved on from the years ravaged by the pandemic, we're still living with the fallout. Supply chains, once snarled, have unfurled, but subsequent price increases and the impacts of stubborn inflation have affected everyone on Main Street and Wall Street.

There's continuing geopolitical instability as well, with evolving policy changes that will no doubt have sweeping ramifications in the months and years ahead.

With so many variables to consider, and the world growing ever more complex, finance leaders are continuously reminded that change is constant. To put it another way, the only certainty is continuing uncertainty. Being able to pivot accordingly is perhaps the best a leader can strive for. As such, finance teams are more integral than ever, generating accurate forecasts and profitability reports more frequently than in the past, all of which can help stakeholders and leaders take the pulse of the business and carefully consider their next moves.

That's particularly pertinent because if there's one thing to take away from the survey results, it's that in spite of a challenging last few years, finance teams are feeling good. They feel good about the size and scope of their teams. They feel good about what they're capable of, and how new and evolving technologies are going to empower them further. And they feel good about the overall and strategic role their team plays within their larger organization.

Finance teams are becoming more involved in large-scale strategy discussions, and they're collaborating more with other departments. In short: Finance departments are actively being elevated within their organizations, and it's leading to a growing sense of empowerment as well as expanded opportunities for the members of those teams.

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Further, most finance teams we surveyed are actively embracing both established and new technologies, such as corporate performance management (CPM) and artificial intelligence (AI). Those technologies make their teams even more agile and productive, adding some much-needed firepower to their capabilities in a fast-changing business environment.

Despite the introduction and adoption of those tools, Excel remains the workhorse many teams rely on to power or supplement most finance teams' capabilities and automation solutions. Even so, new automation solutions are finding a place in the tool stack—as the research shows, finance teams are eschewing their initial skepticism toward AI and are, to varying degrees, using it to augment their own capabilities.

New tools, growing strategic importance within the overall company, and further productive firepower are all serving as a wind in the sails for finance teams. These are among the major trends and sentiments unearthed in the survey data, highlighting a significant shift in dynamic within the FP&A area from preceding years. The question remains, however: What's next?

We don't know for sure, but the survey data does provide some indication as to what the future might hold for finance teams. Through the 2025 State of Strategic Finance survey, we were able to get a glimpse at the current state and role of finance teams across numerous industries. Some things are clear: Optimism is on the uptick. Other areas are just beginning to come into focus, such as the growing interest and adoption of AI, but just how big a change AI technology will usher in for finance professionals and others is yet to be seen.

But as it stands, finance teams are positioned well to be a strategic catalyst for their business, feeling upbeat and holding an increasingly important position within their organizations. FP&A teams, leveraging the latest technology, are critical to enabling businesses to navigate continuing uncertainty.



**Craig Schiff**

President and CEO, Lead Analyst, BPM Partners

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# Key Findings and Overall Summary

From our research this year, we learned a few key things: Finance teams are optimistic, playing a broader role in their firms, and further leveraging technology to their advantage.

## 1. Optimism abounds among finance leaders

While the world seems increasingly chaotic, finance teams adopted an undeniable sense of optimism heading into 2025. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents (81%), for instance, indicated that their finance team's workload was feasible given their current headcount—but nearly two-thirds also said that they plan to add to their current teams in the next year, a signal that they anticipate the demands on their team to grow. Further, almost all respondents said that they felt very or somewhat positive about their team's ability to take the lead in measuring and enhancing company performance.

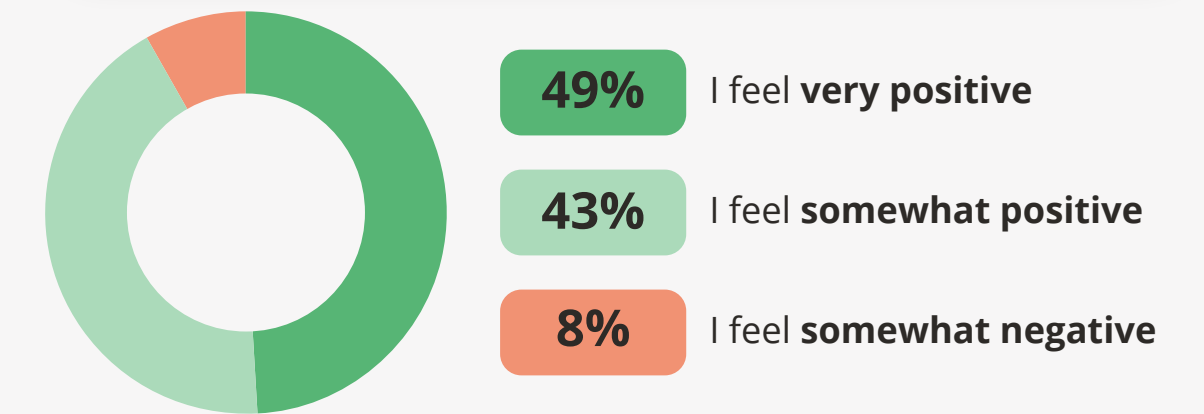
## 2. Finance professionals are feeling good about their individual prospects, too

The good vibes filter down to the individual level, too, per the survey data. Again, a solid majority of respondents (54%), when asked about their outlook on the opportunities for advancement or professional growth in their roles or departments in the next year said they felt "very positive."

That majority expands into a supermajority when those who feel "somewhat positive" are included as well. It's notable, too, that there was a significant correlation between those who felt positive about their growth opportunities, and the extent to which their team is or was collaborating with other departments in their organization. This is a sign that strong, cross-functional collaboration helps finance professionals see the results and impact of their work, leading to more fulfillment.

Conversely, less than one in ten respondents feel very or somewhat negatively about their opportunities for advancement.

Do you feel your finance department is prepared to lead the organization in measuring, managing, and enhancing performance?



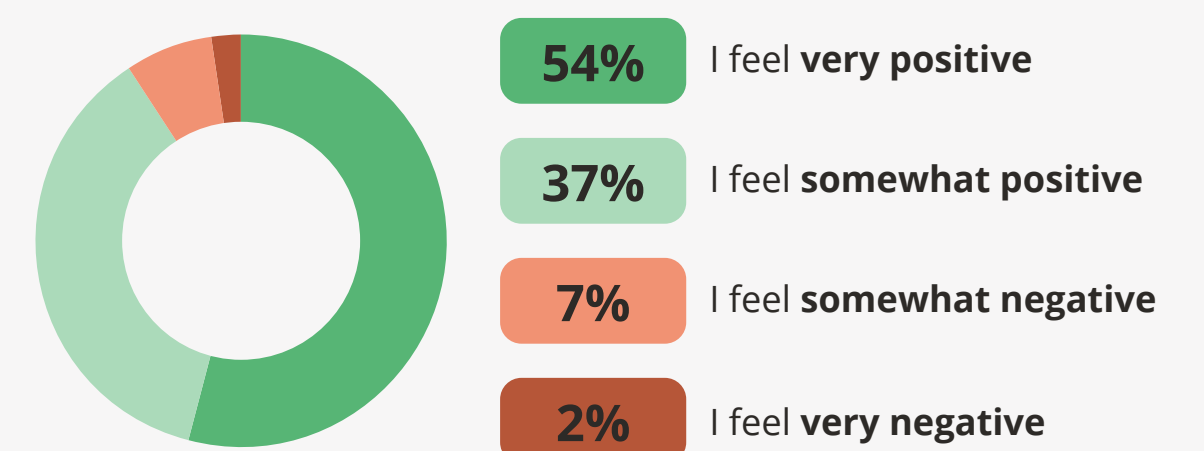
91%

of respondents feel positive about their own opportunities for advancement and professional growth

72%

of finance leaders are planning to add headcount to their teams this year

What is your outlook on the opportunities for advancement and professional growth in your department/role?



### 3. Finance teams are broadening their roles in organizations

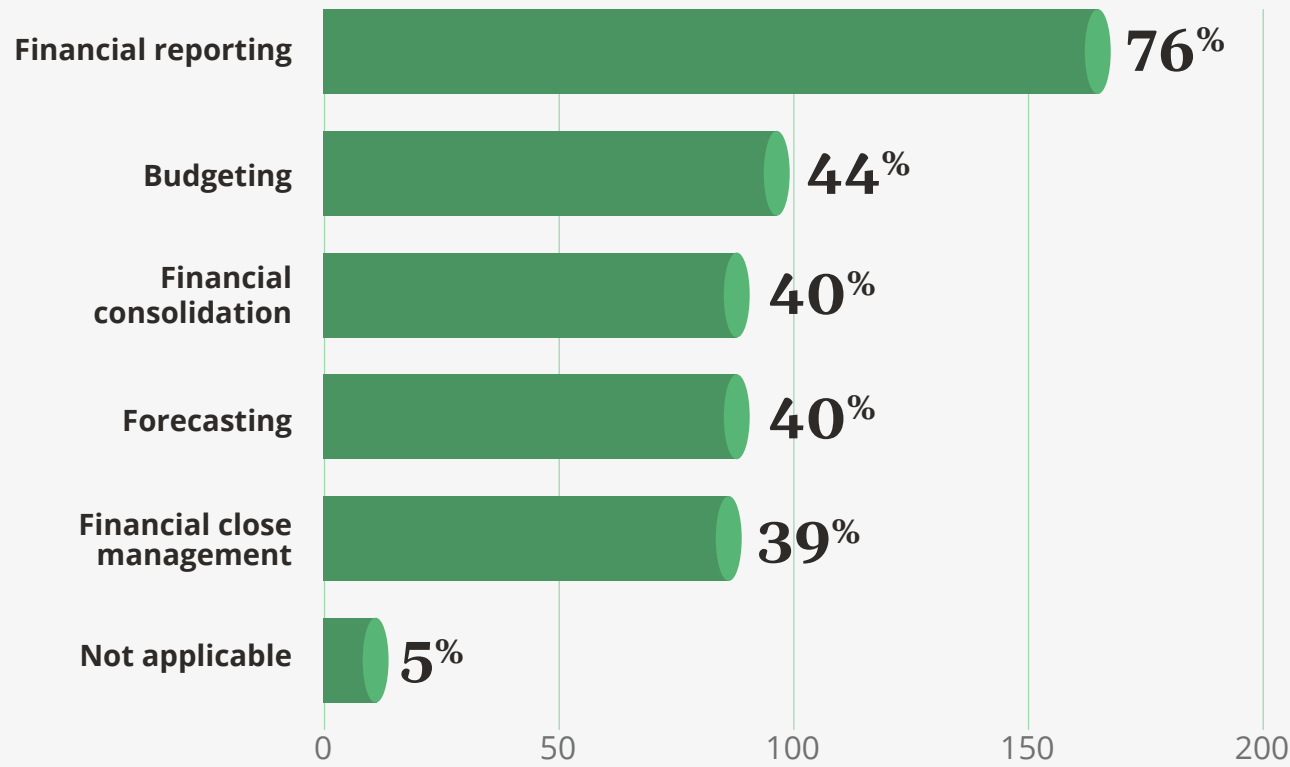
Finance teams are working their way into the gears of other teams within their organizations. A majority of survey respondents (51%) said that they “often” collaborate—having meetings, discussions, strategy sessions, and more—with key stakeholders or other departments outside of the finance function. Another 30% say they have either continuous or ongoing collaborations with outside departments, whereas only a handful responded that they either rarely or never do. Finance teams are primarily working with operations, IT, sales and HR teams, potential high-impact areas where finance teams could impact revenue and costs. In all, finance teams seem to be finding more ways to leave their mark, a change that could significantly impact the bottom line for businesses.

### 4. Companies are leaning into finance automation—but with room for improvement

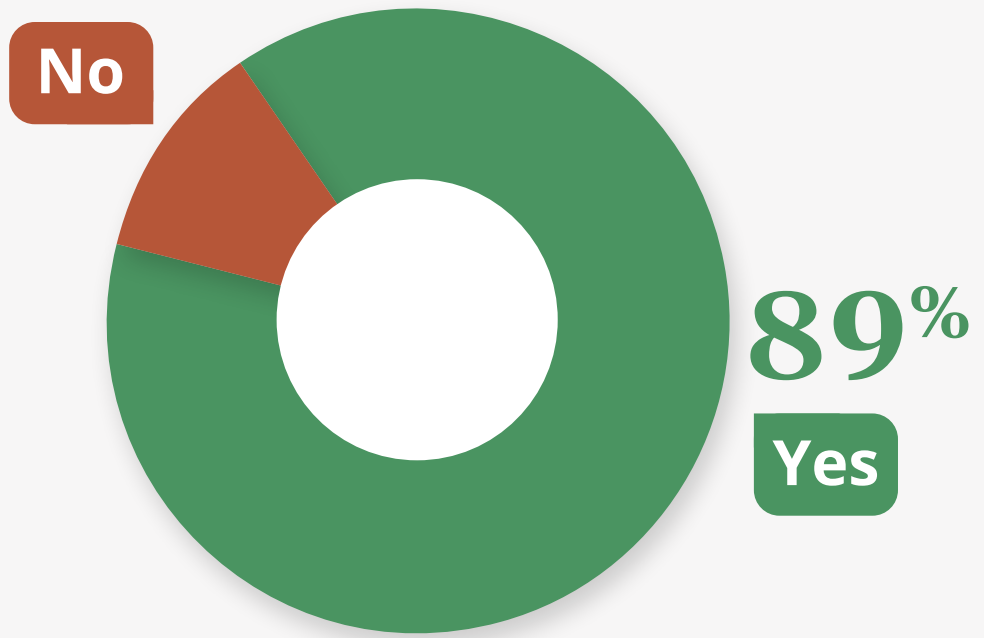
Financial planning, forecasting, and reporting can be labor-intensive, but new and evolving tools are making it easier and more efficient. The survey shows that 76% of respondents have automated their financial reporting processes—but that is the only key financial process for which a majority of respondents automate. Forecasting, budgeting, financial consolidation, and financial close management are all automated in some shape or form by around 40% or so of all respondents, indicating that these are areas where finance teams still need to make progress.

The data shows that 89% of finance teams still rely on Excel even though they have planning software in place. That signals that there are some snags in the workflow, and the data bears that out, too. A handful of respondents say they’re dissatisfied with their current FP&A software, and the primary reason is that it doesn’t integrate well with their source systems.

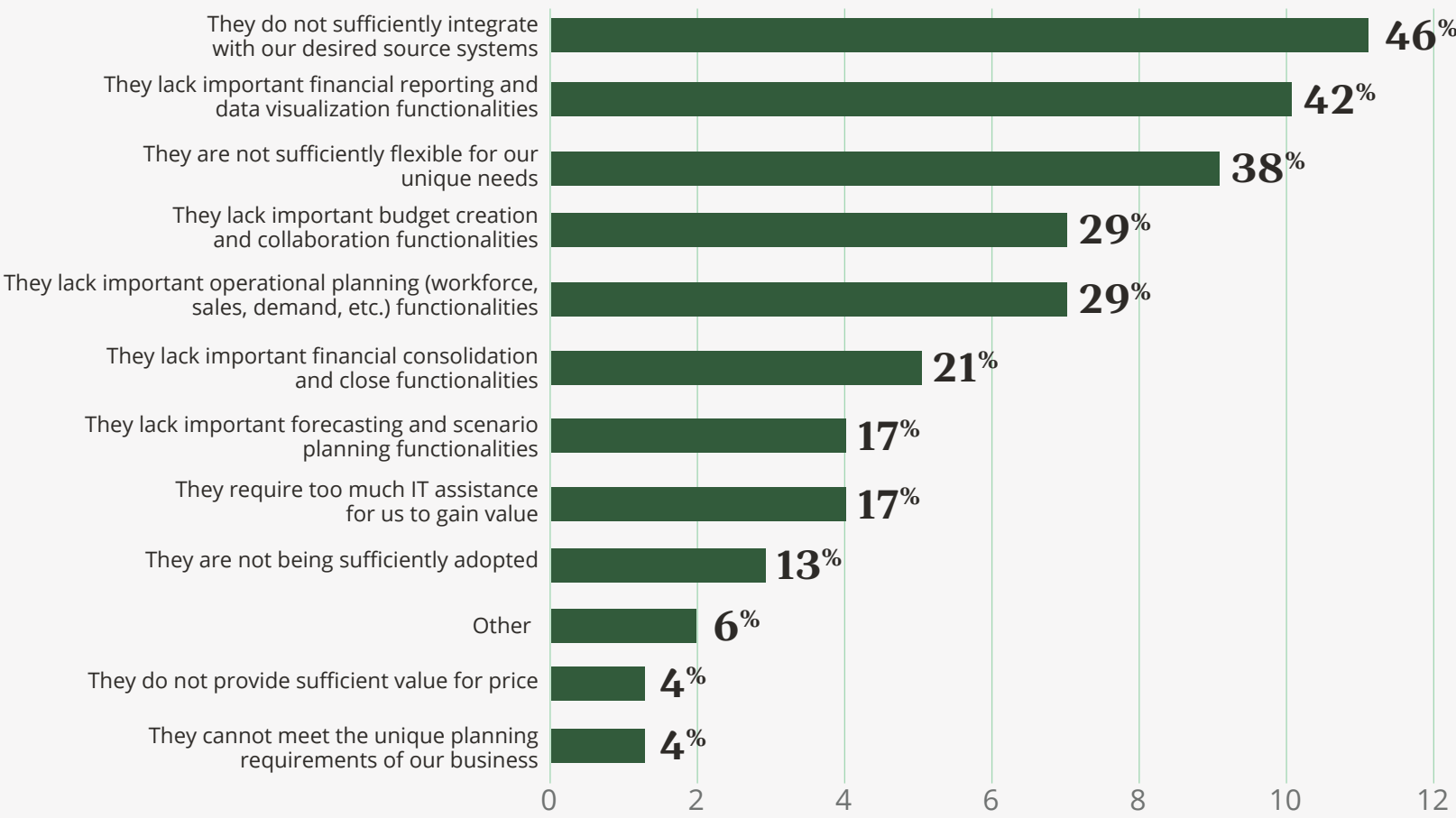
Which of the following processes are automated to some degree within your finance department?



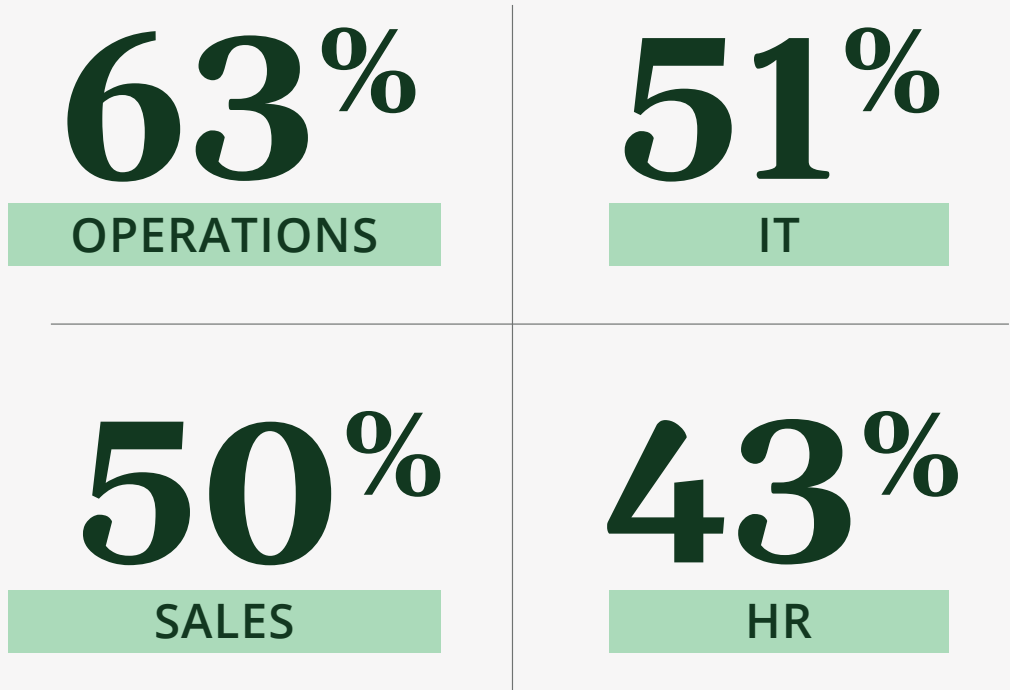
Does your finance team rely on Excel despite having planning software in place?



Why are you dissatisfied with your current financial and business planning systems?



Departments that finance teams collaborate with the most:



## 5. Finance teams are vastly more receptive of AI than before

Perhaps the most surprising finding from the data is the unexpected optimism around AI technology in finance. Given that many finance professionals are naturally risk-averse, and were hesitant to embrace AI at first, the apparent turnaround is notable.

The survey found that almost 57% of respondents actively use AI for at least some of their financial operations, and that another 21% have acquired it but have yet to fully realize its potential. Only around 8% of respondents said they don't have any AI solutions, or plans to implement them at all. As for what finance teams are using AI for, the most common response was data analysis, followed by predictive analysis and modeling, generative AI, and anomaly detection. And, again, respondents overwhelmingly (~82%) feel at least somewhat optimistic about AI's capabilities and potential impacts on their teams or departments. Only 5% feel skeptical, and 3% feel very skeptical about AI.

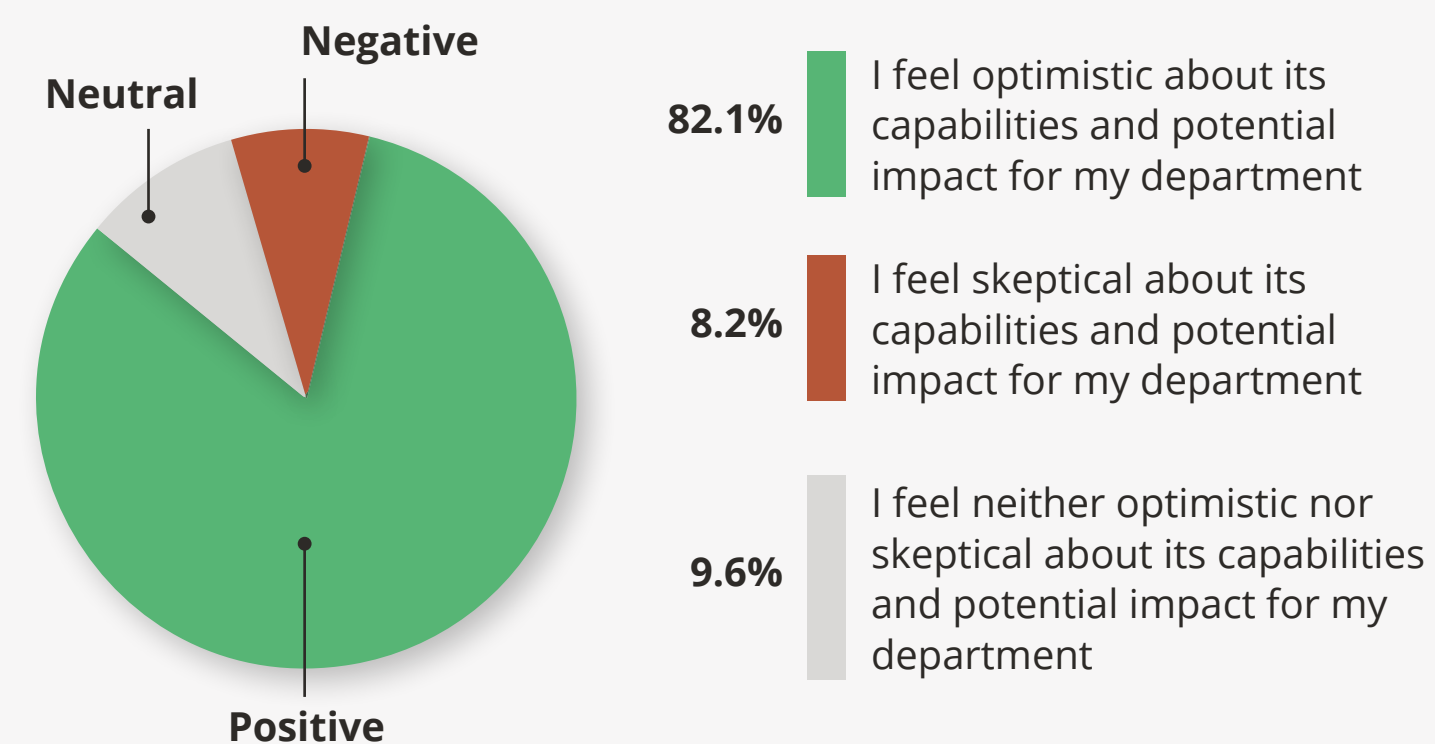
## 6. Leading finance departments are adaptive, efficient, and cross-functional

Taken together, the survey paints a picture of finance teams that are gaining a strategic foothold at the center of their organizations' operations. They're learning to use and leverage AI and other tools to work faster and smarter, and produce more impactful reporting and analyses. They're working more closely with departments and teams across their organizations, finding ways to increase revenues, cut costs, and streamline operations. And they're potentially going to become even more productive soon, as AI tools and technology become further ingrained, ubiquitous and powerful—particularly for FP&A teams.

To what extent is your finance team currently using artificial intelligence?



Which of the following statements best describes your feelings about the use of AI within finance?



57%

of respondents actively use AI for at least some of their financial operations






# The Deep Dive

The survey findings show an economy in flux. When the survey was conducted and the data collected in October and November 2024, tensions were also high, and tempers hot—the U.S. was in the midst of a high-stakes presidential election, and much of the discourse revolved around inflation, the Federal Reserve and interest rates, and potential changes to the tax code, including the potential of introducing tariffs and trade barriers (which have now come to fruition).

All of that is and was important to finance teams, as any large changes at the federal level would have an impact on profitability, and require updated modeling and forecasting—no matter what industry a business is in. With that in mind, one of three primary themes we explored through the survey concerned finance leaders' overall sentiments about the market.





## PART 1

# Market Overview

The survey found a few primary, standout themes about the overall market: Concerns about inflation and interest rates, an increased focus on profitability and cost optimization, and issues with data accessibility.

### Firms remained most concerned about inflation and interest rates

Inflation has been the economic topic *du jour* the past few years, and for good reason. Prices have increased for just about everything in the wake of the pandemic, and as a result, the Federal Reserve instituted a quick series of interest rate hikes. While Consumer Price Index data has shown that the rate of inflation has slowed significantly since its peak in the summer months of 2022, inflation remains a top concern for consumers and businesses alike.

Accordingly, our survey found that 26% of respondents name inflation as their top concern regarding market conditions. Another 22% named high interest rates. The third highest response was general “economic uncertainty,” which 12% of respondents chose.

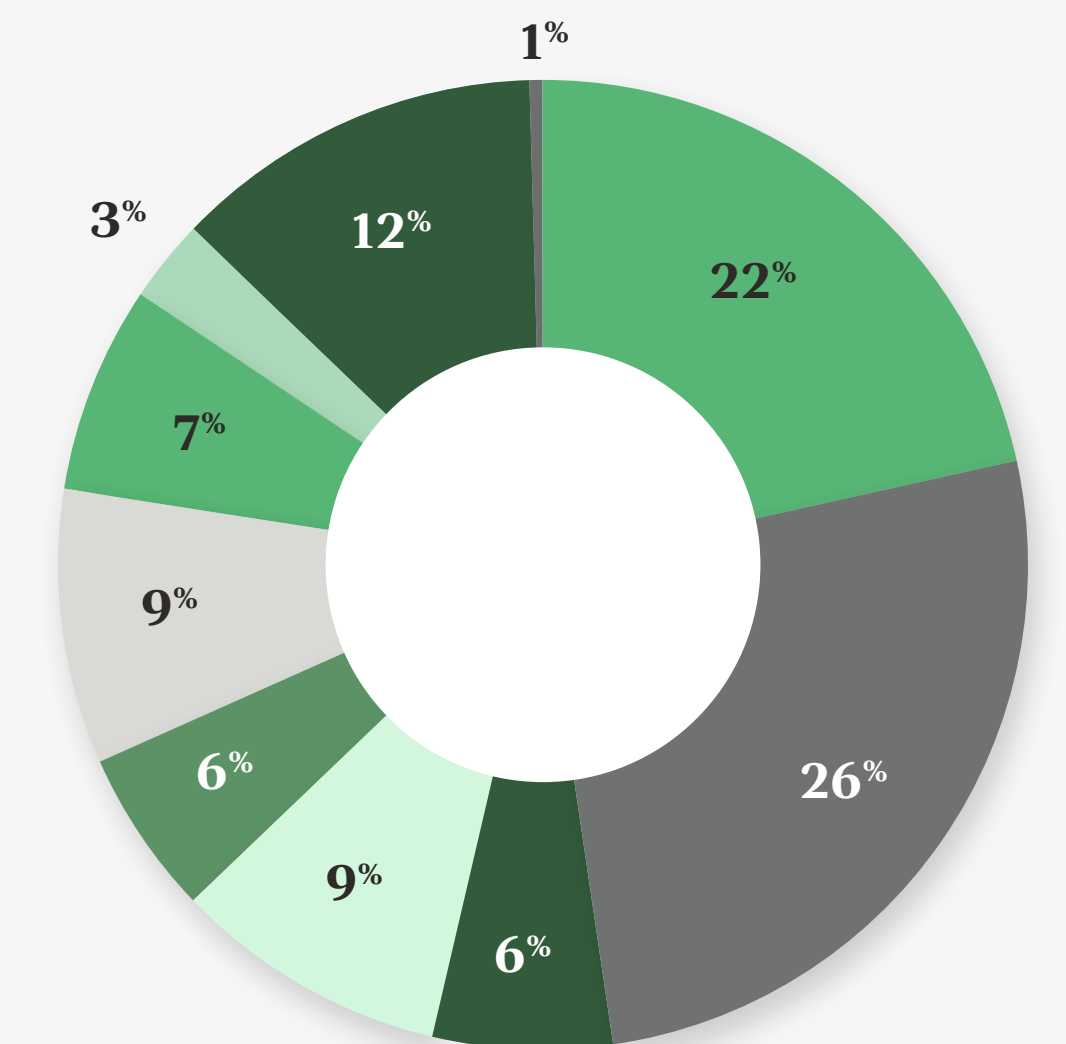
For finance teams, this is particularly pertinent; price increases can affect profitability and costs, which in turn informs planning and forecasting processes. Finance teams are seemingly also aware that they need to plan for ongoing economic uncertainty, particularly with a new presidential administration in the U.S. looking to shake things up.

### Companies are focused on profitability and cost optimization

While businesses are always concerned with overall profitability, the survey data shows that in 2025, this may be more important than ever. More than 38% of respondents said that “profitability optimization” was their top priority as a finance team going into the 2025 planning period, followed by another 27% answering that “cost optimization” was their top priority. Another 21% answered “investing in growth areas,” and 9% said that “raising capital” was the top priority—notable, given that the past few years have been difficult for companies seeking capital.

That data may give us an idea about how firms are thinking about the near-term future. For instance, respondents focused on cost optimization may still be in “survival mode”, anticipating more economic challenges in the year ahead. Conversely, those focused on investing in growth areas may be a bit more optimistic, and willing to stretch their resources to create some distance between themselves and competitors.

Of the following market conditions, which is your business most concerned about?



- 26% ● Inflation
- 22% ● High interest rates
- 12% ● Economic uncertainty
- 9% ● Changing regulatory requirements
- 9% ● Margin pressures
- 7% ● Demand for your products or services
- 6% ● Cost of capital
- 6% ● Competitive landscape
- 3% ● Talent shortages
- 1% ● Other

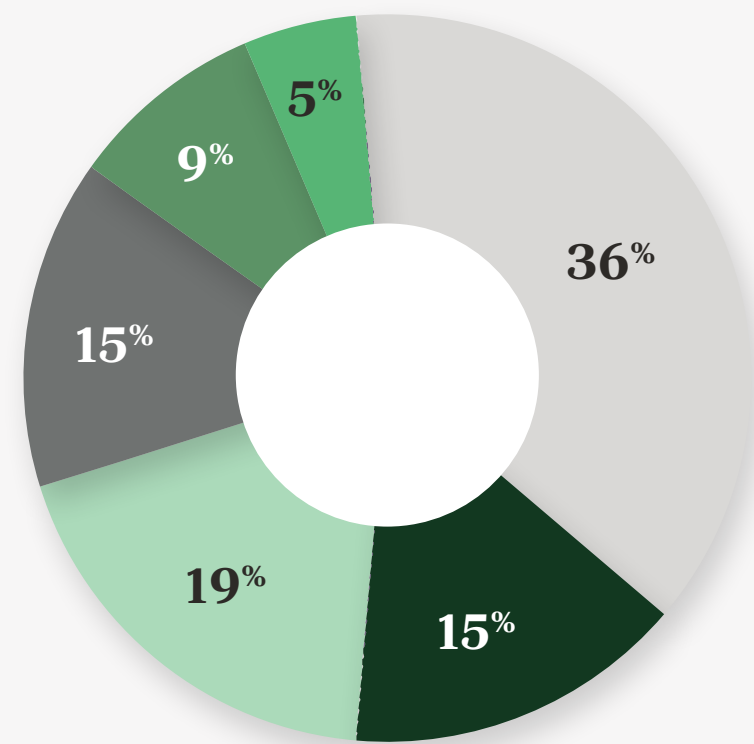


## Finance teams' biggest obstacle to planning is accessing data from multiple sources

To help the business respond to these shifting market conditions, finance teams need to modify their plans accordingly—often easier said than done. What we learned from respondents is that finance teams are struggling with data sourcing, specifically accessing data from multiple systems or data repositories.

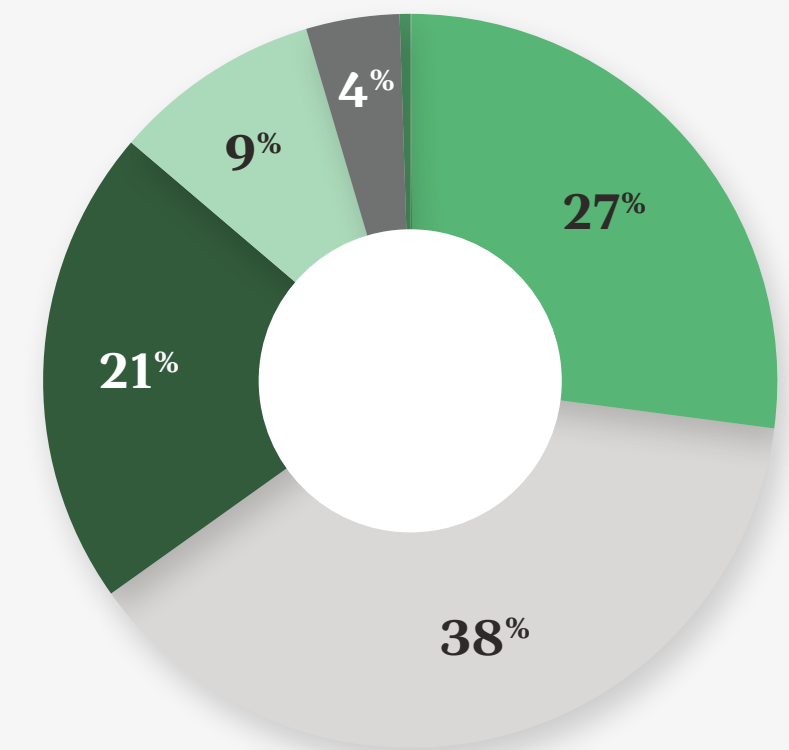
As for what the data shows: A little over 36% of respondents said that accessing the data they need from multiple source systems was the challenge their finance team struggled with the most when completing their planning activities. This has been a perennial pain for finance teams, as we learned in the State of Strategic Finance 2022 report that 31% of finance professionals we surveyed faced issues around siloed data.

Which of the following challenges does your finance team struggle with the most when completing annual and regular planning activities?



- 36% Accessing the data we need from multiple source systems
- 19% Not enough time for planning due to routine processes like monthly close taking up too much time
- 15% Manipulating the data into a usable format
- 15% Difficult or very manual to update plan to reflect changing business requirements
- 9% Lack of strategic alignment across the business
- 5% Lack of self-service financial reporting (e.g. too much reliance on IT required)

Which of the following outcomes is your top priority as a finance organization as you go into your 2025 planning period?



- 38% Profitability optimization
- 27% Cost optimization
- 21% Investing in growth areas
- 9% Raising capital
- 4% Engaging in merger and acquisition activities
- 1% Other

## PART 2

# The People and Processes Behind Finance

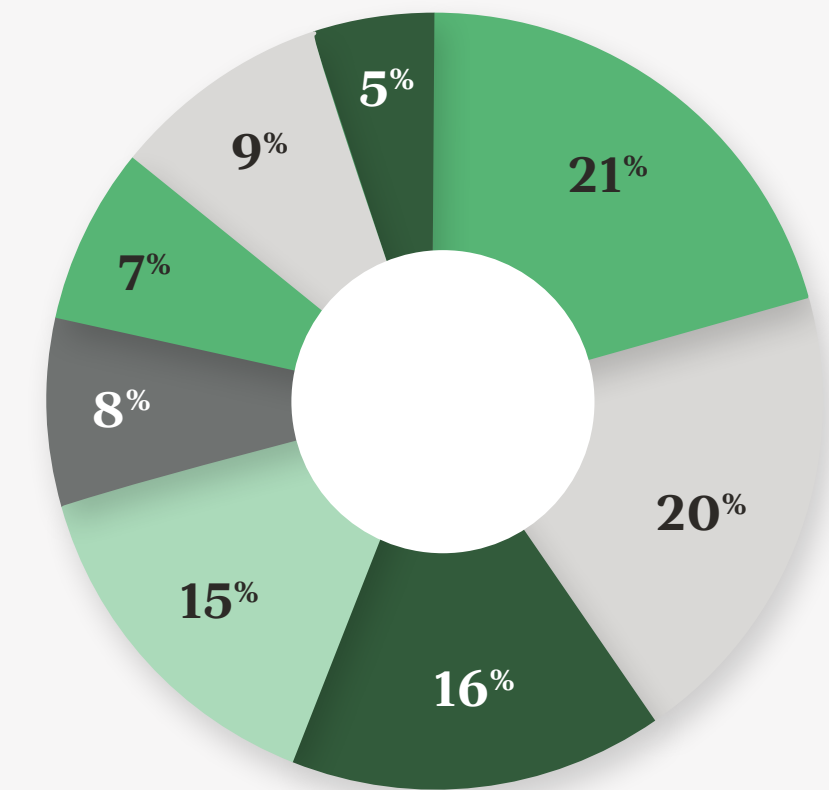
Important things are happening behind the scenes, as well. As the data shows, finance teams have some challenges to contend with not just at the macro level, but at the micro level too. But if there's one important thing to take away from the survey, it's this: Finance teams are seeing the glass half full.

### Finance teams feel good

Optimism abounds among finance teams and leaders—despite some of the larger concerns about the economy. The data shows that nearly half (49%) of respondents “feel very positive about Finance’s ability to take the lead” in measuring, managing, and enhancing performance within their companies. Another 43% feel “somewhat positive” as well. Only 8% responded that they feel “somewhat negative.” It’s notable that finance teams are in a relatively unique position, too, to unify otherwise siloed efforts in specific areas, and can cross boundaries to work with IT, operations, and other business units, perhaps adding to this positive sentiment.

Additionally, even as AI tools and other technologies become ubiquitous and create fears of potential job losses or replacement, finance teams are in a position to grow, and individual members are feeling confident about the future. 54% of respondents answered that they “feel very positive” about their opportunities for advancement and professional growth, with another 37% answering that they feel “somewhat positive.” Only 9% of respondents said that they feel “somewhat” or “very negative,” conversely.

Which of the following operational and process improvements is currently your top priority as a finance organization?



- 21% ● Revising the finance function's organizational design (roles, responsibilities, org structure)
- 20% ● Minimizing manual processes
- 16% ● Introducing new technology systems
- 15% ● Improving performance of existing technology systems
- 8% ● Improving integration of source systems
- 7% ● Improving team adoption of technology systems
- 9% ● Improving strategic alignment across the business
- 5% ● Improving the accessibility of data and insights across the business



## Finance teams are revising their organizational structures and assuming broader roles

Finance teams are getting involved in more and more areas of their organization, and assuming broader, more critical roles within businesses. The survey finds that more than half (51%) of respondents say their finance teams “often” collaborate with stakeholders and other departments outside of finance—which may include holding meetings, discussions, or providing insights, among other things. Another 30% say they have either ongoing or continuous collaboration, and 16% say they “sometimes” collaborate. Only 2% said they either “rarely” or “never” collaborate outside of the finance team. The teams that finance departments most often collaborate with, too, are operations, IT, sales, and HR, which is logical given that those departments often have significant roles in determining overall revenue and costs.

Additionally, the data shows that 48% of respondents said that they “are always” involved in strategic planning as it relates to business-wide decisions. That’s up from 2022, when 40% of finance professionals we surveyed said they have a seat at the table for most strategic planning discussions.

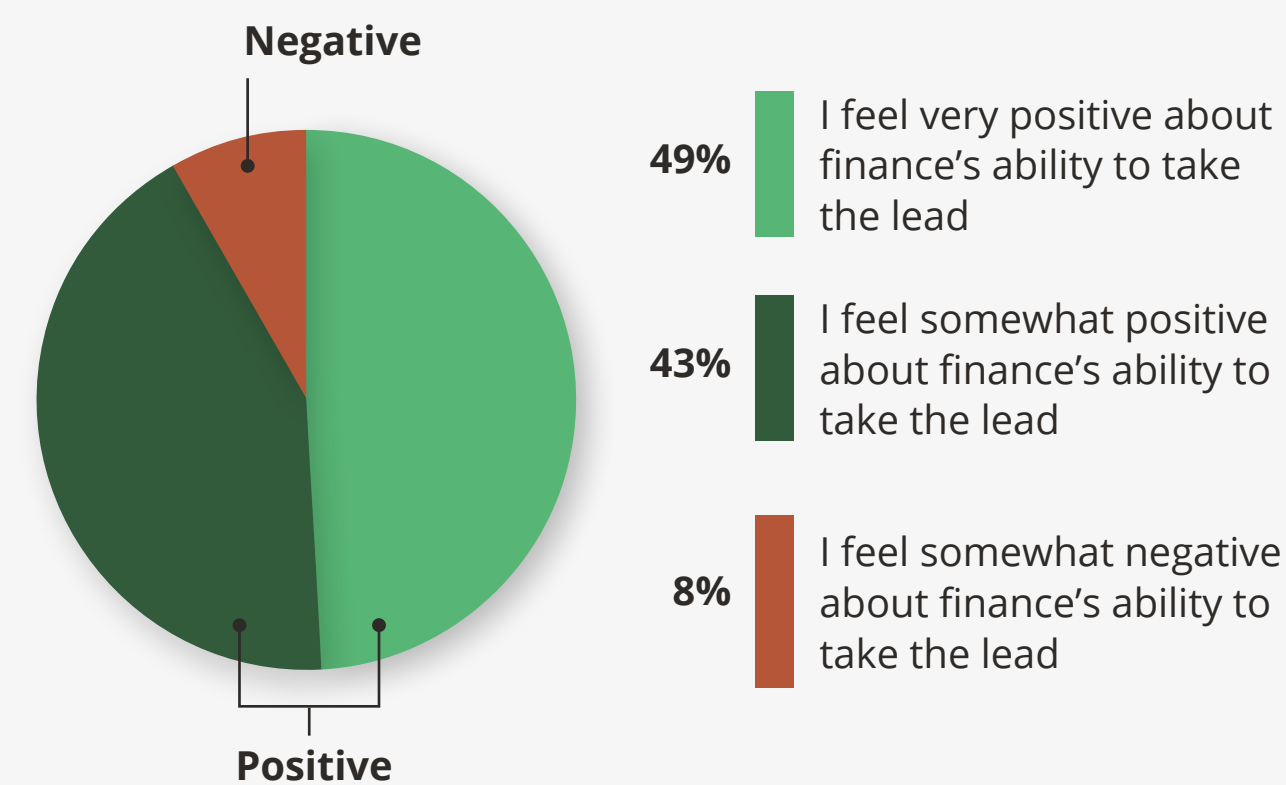
Another 39% said they are “often” involved—again, pointing to how critical and far-reaching finance teams have become to overall business operations.

As for what finance teams are looking to change in 2025? The most popular answer (21%) was “revising the finance function’s organizational design,” which could mean restructuring roles or responsibilities as technology makes it possible to reallocate team members to more strategic work or assignments, allowing for teams to be restructured according to the needs of their business, and more. Twenty percent of respondents cited their top priorities as “minimizing manual processes”, while 15% cited “introducing new technology systems.”

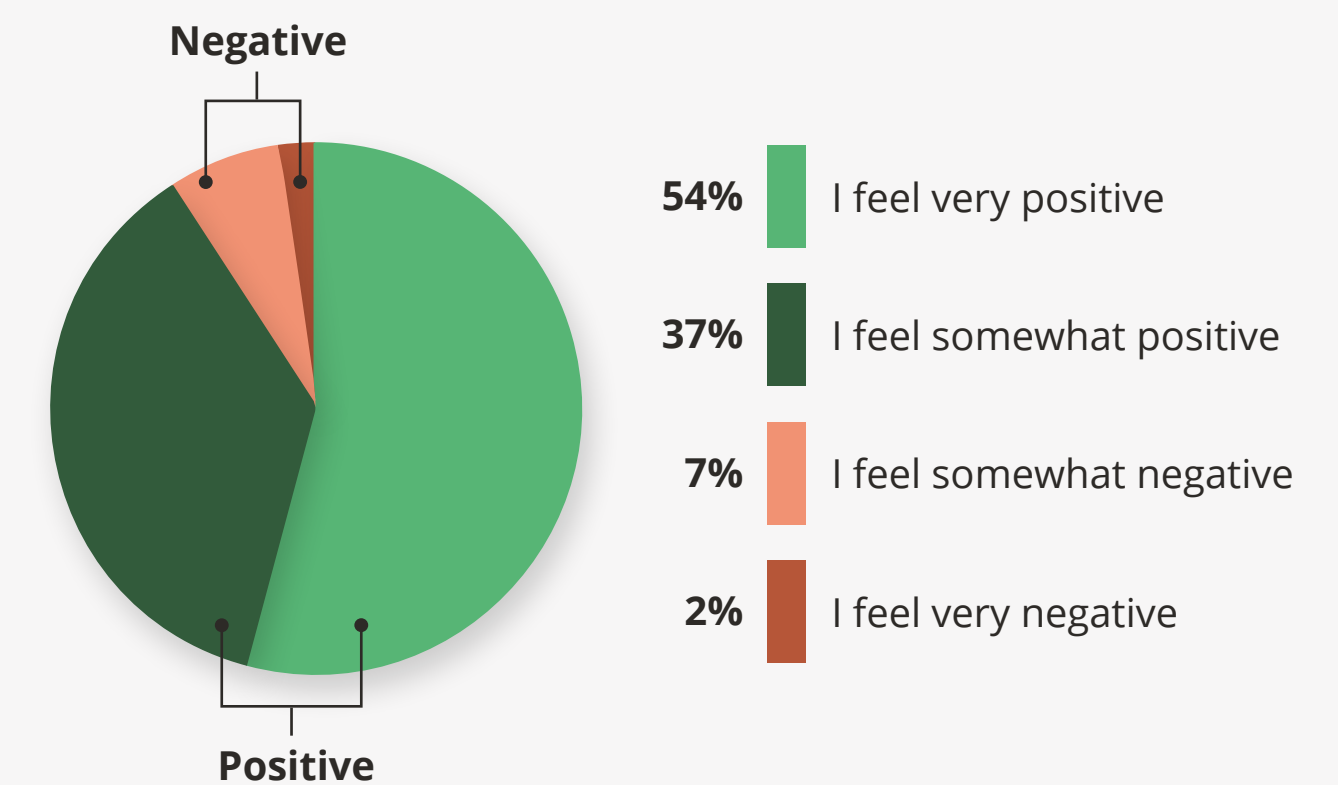
How often does your finance team collaborate (i.e. having meetings and discussions with, providing insights) with stakeholders and departments outside of Finance?



Do you feel your finance department is prepared to lead the organization in measuring, managing, and enhancing performance?



What is your outlook on the opportunities for advancement and professional growth in your department/role?



# Finance teams prize operational understanding and data skills—but there’s a gap

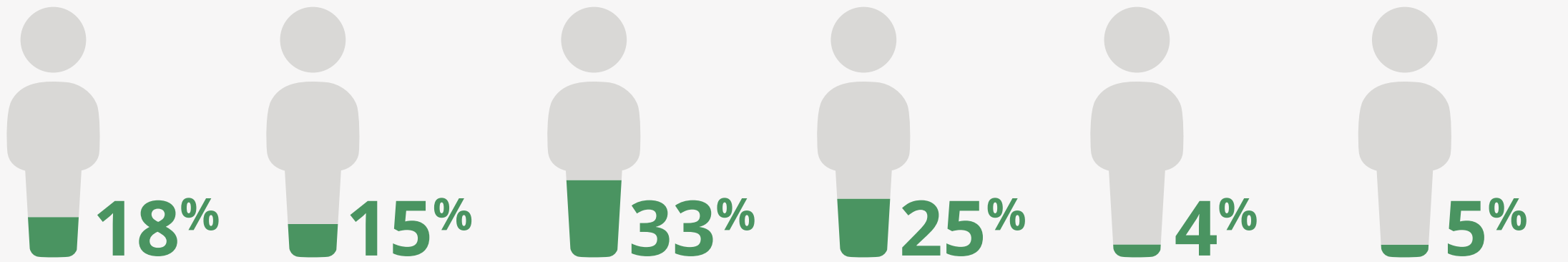
Skills gaps may be an economy-wide problem, but on a micro-scale, finance teams are trying to fill their own gaps. There was a fairly even split in responses when asked which skills were currently the biggest gap for finance teams, but the most common answer was data analysis and data science (28%), followed by AI/machine learning (20%), and operational understanding of the business or industry (20%).

It’s also worth noting that there is an overarching talent shortage in the finance and accounting fields, and many companies may be experiencing difficulties finding employees in the first place. For instance, the number of accounting graduates in the U.S. has been on a downslide for nearly a decade, and for some employers, that means that upskilling and training existing workers is becoming increasingly important.

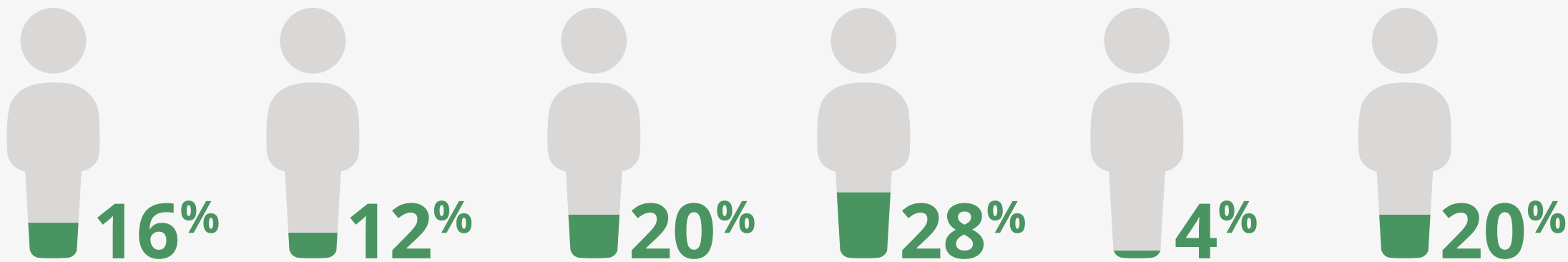
Interestingly, these skills gaps exist in some of the areas that respondents deem to be the most important. In response to another question, 33% of respondents said that they thought operational understanding of their business was the most important skill for their team members to have. That was followed by data analysis and data science, named by 25% of respondents. As for why the need to bridge those gaps? Because, as noted, finance departments are becoming increasingly involved in other parts of the business, which means finance and FP&A professionals need to acquire or bone up on additional skills to meet the growing scope of responsibility.

The good news is that as team members do learn new skills and become more fluent in other areas of business operations, they’re becoming increasingly important to their employers—which may explain why 54% of them are feeling “very positive” about their chances at being promoted or advancing in their roles.

Which of the following skills do you consider most important for your finance team to have?



Which of the following skills is the biggest gap for your finance team at present?



Business partnering    Advanced Excel knowledge    Operational understanding of our industry    Data analysis/data science    Data storytelling    AI/machine learning

How involved is your finance team or leader in business-wide strategic planning?





# PART 3

# Tech and AI

New and evolving technology, including the advent and dissemination of AI in finance, is further fueling finance teams’ positivity. Interestingly, a majority of finance teams are already utilizing AI to some degree, and finding ways to automate processes and become more efficient overall. Most finance departments are automating some processes already—most commonly, financial reporting and budgeting. But there are some caveats.

## Companies are leaning into finance automation—but with room for improvement

The data finds that despite an increased uptick in automation, there’s still room for improvement. While only 5% of respondents said that they had not implemented automation measures into their workflows at all, the remaining 95% are still working through pain points that could, potentially, be solved by automation. For instance, while a majority of respondents have automated their financial reporting process (76%), only 40% have done so for their forecasting processes, and 44% have for their budgeting process.

Another interesting finding: Despite advances in FP&A automation and AI adoption, most finance teams (89%) still rely on Excel for processes such as financial modeling and calculations, data analysis, budget input collection, revenue planning, and more. Why are they sticking to Excel? It may be due to frustrations with the platforms chosen to replace it. Respondents who say they’re somewhat dissatisfied with their current systems identify insufficiencies around integration, flexibility or functionalities in their tools.

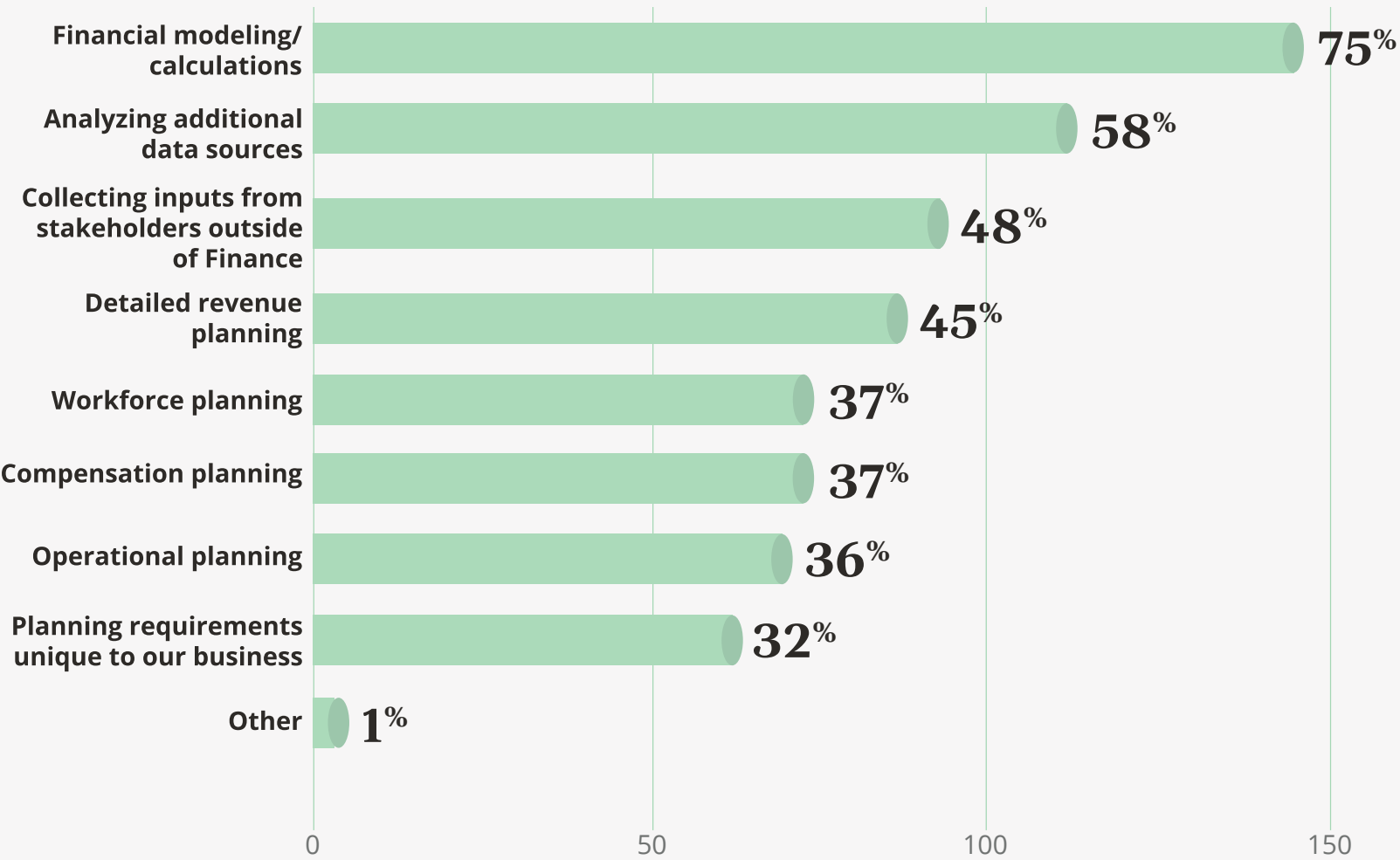
## Most finance teams are already using AI

A majority of respondents say they’re already using AI in some capacity, with 28% answering that they’re using it for “several use cases within finance,” and 29% saying they use it for “some use cases.” Another 21% say that their companies or teams have acquired AI tools, but have yet to implement them. Altogether, less than 8% of respondents say their team or company has no plans at all to implement AI within their finance operations.

57%

of respondents actively use AI for at least some of their financial operations

Which use cases do you rely on Excel for?



“A year ago, AI was not top of the priority list for the companies we spoke to. But more recently (at the end of last year and certainly into this year), they’re asking to see vendors who are either delivering AI or at least have solid plans to put AI capabilities in place. The fact that a vendor has AI capabilities or plans to is an essential component for them to purchase, because they’re intending to keep the solution for many years, alongside the time frame in which they plan to increase their adoption of AI.”

- Craig Schiff, President and Lead Analyst, BPM Partners

## Finance teams overwhelmingly feel positive about using AI

Not only is AI being used by a majority of finance teams, per the survey data, but those teams are feeling pretty good about it, too. In all, more than 82% of respondents say they feel either very or somewhat optimistic about AI's "capabilities and potential impact for my department." Only 8% feel either somewhat or very skeptical about it.

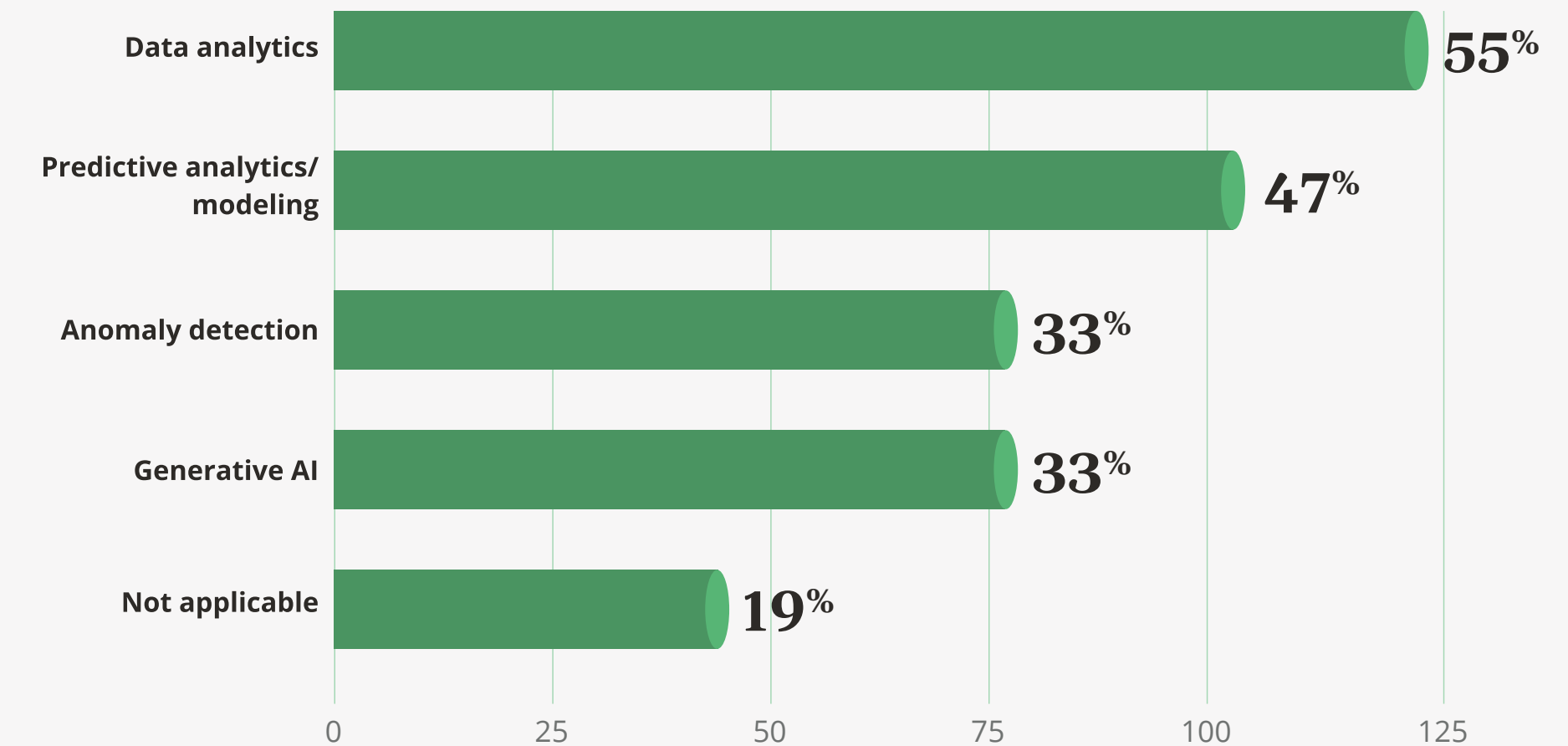
The overwhelmingly positive sentiment is perhaps one of the most surprising insights to come out of the survey data. AI tools have been hyped, or at least discussed for many years now by analysts and vendors, but many potential customers have been skeptical, or at least lukewarm toward adopting them—until now, it seems. Perhaps it's because there are now actual proven products on the market, or because the technology is being implemented into existing platforms and financial software programs, but it's clear that AI acceptance and adoption in finance is on the uptick.

## Finance teams use AI for data analytics, predictive analytics, and anomaly detection

Among firms that have adopted AI tools for their finance teams, there are some common use cases—the most popular being data analytics, which includes insight generation or summarization, which 55% of respondents say is a primary use. Beyond that, roughly 47% say they use AI for predictive analytics and modeling, and around one-third of respondents say they use it for both anomaly detection and generative AI purposes. It perhaps makes sense that these areas are seeing the highest rate of AI adoption, as they're not particularly new. What will be interesting to keep an eye on, in the years ahead, is what additional inroads are made as generative AI tools become more sophisticated and ubiquitous among finance teams.

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question about what changes they'd make to help their teams be more strategic over the next year. There were several notable answers, including "incorporating AI technology more prominently", "trying to implement AI in our process", "integration with financial planning tools and AI-driven scenario planning" and "automate systems and services." So, AI is finding some obvious use cases for finance teams as it stands, and those who use it appear to have an idea of what they'd like to leverage it for in the year ahead as well.

Which of the following AI technologies are you currently using within your finance function?



"A lot of people don't want to be that pioneer and be the first one to adopt a new technology. And we're past that pioneer stage to some extent, where lots of companies have now adopted AI. Companies have started using AI and are expressing how it's helped them, so now positive word of mouth is spreading. This also taps into people's fear of missing out: AI is proven to some extent, and they think 'If I don't move forward, I'm going to be left behind'. Software vendors have also made it easier to use AI with less reliance on data scientists. They've made it more purposeful, focused on very specific things that you know you need help with."

- Craig Schiff, President and Lead Analyst, BPM Partners



# The Evolution of FP&A Operations

Finance leaders are always striving to be better, whether it's improving their teams, processes, or technology. Accordingly, one other thing to keep an eye on over the next year is how finance teams are evolving their FP&A operations to keep pace with changing business needs.

From the survey respondents who are furthest along in that transformation, we analyzed the data to answer the following questions: First, how are finance teams using technology and tools to automate processes, reduce redundancy and manual workflows, and make faster decisions? And second, how effectively are those teams working with or meshing with the rest of their business, providing critical insights into company performance and creating a deeper understanding of their firms' needs?

For the finance departments who do say that they're already in an "advanced" or "defined" state of maturity, there are some commonalities: They have consistent processes, collaborate with other departments frequently, and are typically involved in large-scale strategic planning decisions. That comprised more than half of the overall respondents. Among those still in less-evolved states of maturity, not surprisingly, they still use informal and manual processes.

Obviously, AI and new tools may help kickstart, or at least further that maturation process. **But it's not merely a question of technology, but process improvement and a larger mindset shift, too.**

**"What you'll find in the most successful organizations when it comes to finance operations is a company that's working together—not siloed. Not siloed in terms of data and technology, but even in terms of the way they operate. It's departments working together as a cohesive unit, which starts with strong leadership that creates that environment and encourages and rewards that type of behavior. It's that mutual trust that's important, which is really a function of company culture."**

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FP&A professionals' ultimate goal is to use their financial expertise to help the business allocate capital more efficiently, make better strategic decisions, and properly weigh risks. To do that, they need to be able to make connections across the company, lead change management and use technology to their maximum advantage.

# 41%

of finance leaders who responded they have advanced or leading operations said their team collaborates with stakeholders and departments outside of finance on an ongoing basis (11% higher than the average across all respondents)

# 55%

of finance leaders who responded they have advanced or leading operations said they are always involved in business wide strategic planning (7% higher than the average across all respondents)

How would you rate the current maturity of your financial and business planning processes?

11%

**LEADING:** We have established processes with a high degree of collaboration/adoption across the broader company, we are using advanced planning technologies in a self-sufficient way, we have a large role in advising the strategy of the business

35%

**ADVANCED:** We have established processes with some degree of collaboration/adoption with the broader company, we are using planning technologies in a self-sufficient way, we have some role in advising the strategy of the business

28%

**DEVELOPING:** We have some processes, but they are not very consistent; we have some basic planning technologies in place but still do a considerable amount of manual work

18%

**DEFINED:** We have established processes in place; we are using planning technologies but rely heavily on IT to get value from them

7%

**BASIC:** Our processes are not very formalized; much of our work is manual and ad hoc

# What's Next: Adapting to Uncertainty

With 2024 behind us and 2025 already underway, it's likely we're in for another volatile year—in terms of the economy, the business environment, and what finance teams are finding on their desks and in their inboxes week after week. The world is in flux and FP&A professionals, along with everyone else, are going to need to adapt to the best of their abilities. If there's one sure thing, it's this: Uncertainty reigns.

With that in mind, the question is this: What can, or should, finance leaders do to put their teams in the best position to succeed in 2025? We have four recommendations.

## Recommendation 1: Embrace Optimism

It's easy to get pulled into feeling negative, overwhelmed, or outmatched—and it can be difficult to get yourself, or your team, out of it. Given that most finance teams and FP&A professionals are feeling optimistic, as evidenced by the survey data, a good place to start in 2025 is by embracing those good vibes, and holding onto them. Use them as fuel to continue moving forward, looking ahead to new challenges, and upskilling and expanding your current team.

**Finance teams are entering a brave new world, and it's an exciting time to be working in the field. It may make some people a bit uneasy, but many teams are also working on the cutting edge—embrace it, and look forward to tackling more interesting challenges.**

## Recommendation 2: Reduce Redundancy

The data shows us that many companies and firms are still relying on tools like Excel, and for good reason. Some say that the new platforms they've adopted aren't fully integrating with their systems. Some simply can't get away from old habits, using familiar tools for models and calculations, rather than taking advantage of new, more powerful ones that may provide more return on their investment. As such, some finance teams may not be getting everything they need out of their platforms, and are double-dipping, or remain dissatisfied, with some of their integrations.

For finance leaders who have adopted new tools, platforms, or solutions, which is the vast majority of them, the next year is a chance to get everyone on their team up to speed, eschew older tools, reduce redundancy and prioritize solid system integrations. You likely don't need more than one tool for the same job, and your team may be wasting time doing work that can be automated. Pain points still exist, of course, but **finding ways to streamline processes and become more efficient—such as consolidating systems, removing redundant tools, and revamping aging systems—is going to be as important as ever in the years ahead.**

## Recommendation 3: Embrace AI—Because It's Not Going Away

Cast aside your calculators, and loosen your grip on Excel (maybe just a little!). The data shows that finance leaders are optimistic about AI's growing role in finance. After many years of skepticism—perhaps warranted skepticism—those tools are here, they're ingrained and integrated into existing software, and are becoming ever more commonplace in workplaces.

And as the data shows, finance professionals like them, especially now that they're getting a chance to put them to use in real-world settings. **So, for the next year, focus on continuing to develop skill sets with these new tools, implementing them into workflows, and utilizing them to their full potential. Learn to love AI, because it's not going away.**

## Recommendation 4: Create Connections

**AI and technology are going to make a significant mark in the world of finance, but the field will still largely depend on people.** As the survey showed, most finance teams plan to add to their headcounts and grow their teams in 2025. Paired with other data points, this makes sense—finance teams are working more and more with other departments outside of finance, and are becoming increasingly important to the overall health of businesses. Bringing in more people, and equipping them with cutting-edge tools and platforms that can effectively maximize their productivity, may lead to positive outcomes. But it all starts with leveraging your people, and putting them in a place where they have a chance to succeed.

## About Vena

Vena is the #1 agentic AI-powered FP&A platform purpose-built to harness the full power of the Microsoft technology ecosystem for finance teams everywhere. Vena amplifies Microsoft's world-leading productivity tools, cloud technology and AI innovation to make FP&A, operational planning and adjacent strategic processes more flexible, efficient and intelligent. Thousands of the world's leading companies rely on Vena to power their planning.

For more information, visit [venasolutions.com](https://venasolutions.com).

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