

# FORESEE

Assessing CFO and finance leader perspectives  
and priorities for the coming year



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# Executive summary and key findings

Ongoing economic uncertainty and the ramifications of a volatile geopolitical landscape have put a spotlight on CFOs and finance groups — most notably, on their ability to foresee key developments on the horizon and how they can best support and position the enterprise to respond effectively and agilely.





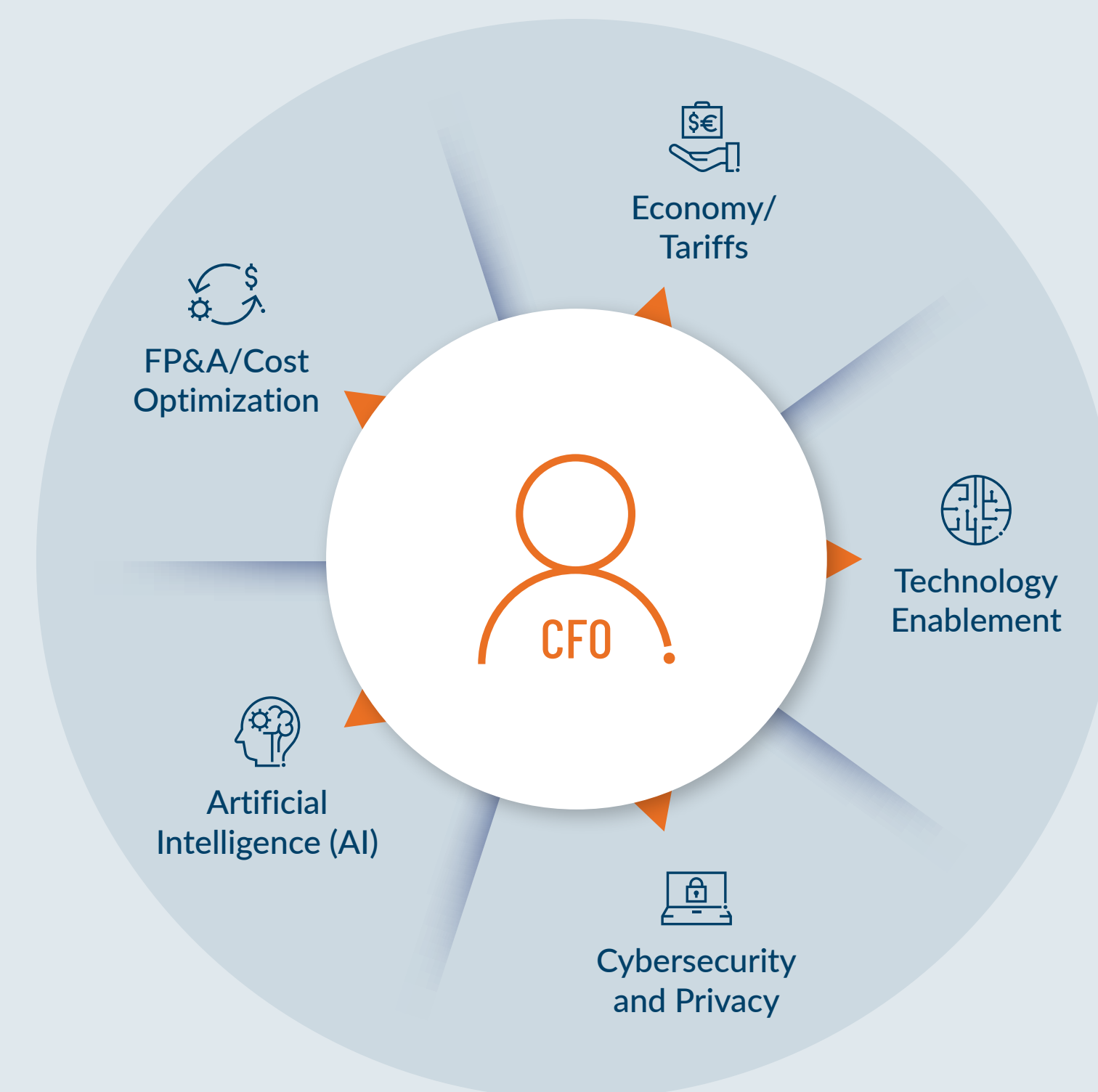
In response to ongoing concerns about where the global economy is going — considering a broad range of factors that include, but certainly are not limited to, tariffs and retaliatory trade measures along with geopolitical strife — leading CFOs are fortifying their finance organization’s capabilities with the right people, technologies and processes to achieve a clear view of the horizon. They have called on finance specialists such as cost accountants, transfer pricing and procurement professionals, and data analysts, among others, to monitor developments and, when necessary, deploy rigorous forecasting, sensitivity analyses and scenario planning to help neutralize tariff-driven cost pressures and calibrate pricing strategies. Further, to address volatile supply chain disruptions and rising cyberattack risks, they are spearheading cross-functional initiatives with C-suite peers to orchestrate strategic responses.

In addition, they continue to refine and enhance their strategic planning and financial planning and analysis (FP&A) capabilities, reinforced by emerging AI and other technologies, to understand day by day, and often hour by hour, how the organization is performing and where operations or investments need to be adjusted. These efforts also serve to enhance the organization’s overall resilience and profitability.

These are among the many notable takeaways from the results of Protiviti’s latest Global Finance Trends Survey of CFOs and finance leaders around the world. Another is this: Given demands for the finance organization to deliver clear foresight into opportunities, risks and other developments on the horizon and how the enterprise needs to respond, the slate of responsibilities on the CFO’s plate continues to grow.

Economic uncertainty is expected to endure globally for months, if not years, to come. Amid a pervasive sense among many organizations to seek more transparency, CFOs are being called on to deploy precision instruments and instill trust in the data, KPIs, analyses and models they produce while cutting through cognitive biases, misinformation, market noise and information volatility. In short, CFOs require clear visibility into multiple areas inside and outside the enterprise to foresee what’s next and how to respond. In many respects, the CFO sits in the center of this maelstrom of forces.

In the face of extreme geopolitical and global trade uncertainty, our findings equip CFOs and finance leaders with a clear compass. We hope you will use these insights to reshape priorities, deploy smarter tools and drive innovation — both in the finance group and throughout the organization.







## Key findings

01

### **Tariffs are having an impact ... but confidence levels to navigate economic challenges are high**

A majority of finance leaders indicate that new and changing tariffs are having at least a moderate impact on profitability as well as financial forecasting and reporting capabilities. Yet most report they are confident in their organization's ability to navigate current economic challenges and uncertainties. These findings speak to the improved FP&A and strategic planning capabilities CFOs and finance teams have developed over the past several years — first honed during the global pandemic — to foresee emerging developments and respond with precision and agility.

02

### **AI use in finance has risen dramatically**

A vast majority of finance organizations (72%) are currently employing AI, including generative and agentic AI. This is a substantial increase compared to 34% of finance groups that reported using generative AI in last year's survey. Finance areas in which AI is being used most frequently include process automation, financial forecasting, and risk assessment and management.

03

### **Security and privacy of data remains the top priority**

Amid ongoing economic uncertainty, multiple and diverse impacts from tariffs, and the rapid emergence of AI and other new technologies, the security and privacy of data remains the top priority for CFOs and finance leaders. This underscores the value these finance executives place on enterprise data and the many functions it serves, as well as how important they view the protection of that data, particularly given the increasing use of AI technologies and the risks they introduce.

04

### **FP&A capabilities continue to deliver increasing value**

A continued focus on evolving FP&A capabilities to develop meaningful strategic, analytical and financial insights to drive critical business decisions in an agile environment has delivered greater value for the broader enterprise. Also of note, a majority of CFOs and finance teams report that automation tools have delivered measurable progress in their cost optimization efforts over the past year, as have technology rationalization and the utilization of cloud-based systems.

05

### **Technology enablement is paying dividends**

Process transformation and ERP enablement are among the top technology areas delivering valuable cost and efficiency benefits for finance teams.



# Top priorities for CFOs and finance leaders

Data security and privacy top the list again, with multiple FP&A-related areas ranking highly as well, likely a result of changing and challenging economic conditions.





Table 1

**Top finance priorities\***

(Shown: All responses)

2025 rank	Area	2025	2024 rank
1	Security and privacy of data	7.2	1
2	Strategic planning	7.1	3
3	Financial planning and profitability analysis and reporting	7.1	2
4	Process improvement	7.0	5
5	Leadership (within your organization)	6.8	6
6	Routine reporting and closing activities	6.7	4
7	Enhanced data analytics	6.7	7
8	ESG metrics and measurement	6.6	9

2025 rank	Area	2025	2024 rank
9	Change management	6.6	N/A
10	Changing demands and expectations of internal customers	6.6	10
11	Cloud-based applications	6.5	8
12	Transaction planning and readiness	6.4	13
13	Artificial intelligence (including generative AI)	6.2	15
14	Tax changes	6.1	11
15	The changing roles of human resources, leadership & development, and recruiting	6.1	12

\* These rankings accurately reflect the full averages for each risk issue, despite the appearance of some virtual ties.

**Question:** Please rate the following areas based on a 10-point scale, where “1” reflects the lowest priority and “10” reflects the highest priority for the finance function to improve its knowledge and capabilities over the next 12 months.





Table 2

Top finance priorities\*

(Shown: CFO/VP Finance responses)

2025 rank	Area	2025	2024 rank
1	Security and privacy of data	7.9	1
2	Strategic planning	7.7	4
3	Financial planning and profitability analysis and reporting	7.7	2
4	Process improvement	7.6	5
5	Leadership (within your organization)	7.5	3
6	Routine reporting and closing activities	7.4	7
7	Enhanced data analytics	7.2	6
8	Changing demands and expectations of internal customers	7.2	10

2025 rank	Area	2025	2024 rank
9	ESG metrics and measurement	7.1	14
10	Change management	6.9	N/A
11	Cloud-based applications	6.8	8
12	Transaction planning and readiness	6.6	13
13	The changing roles of human resources, leadership & development, and recruiting	6.5	12
14	Artificial intelligence (including generative AI)	6.4	11
15	Tax changes	6.2	9

\* These rankings accurately reflect the full averages for each risk issue, despite the appearance of some virtual ties.

**Question:** Please rate the following areas based on a 10-point scale, where “1” reflects the lowest priority and “10” reflects the highest priority for the finance function to improve its knowledge and capabilities over the next 12 months.



# Voice of reason amid economic volatility and tariffs

Tariffs, trade wars and other geoeconomic challenges require CFOs to coordinate cross-functional responses that leverage impact assessment, FP&A, scenario planning, dynamic modeling, supply chain risk management, cost accounting and new pricing strategies.





The CBOE Volatility Index (VIX), which measures how calm or jittery traders feel regarding near-term market volatility, spiked to 50 in April as uncertainty regarding tariff impacts soared. That marked the highest VIX reading since the early days of the global pandemic. While this “fear gauge” has since returned to more tranquil levels, CFOs know very well that it can spike at any moment in response to new tariffs, retaliatory trade actions or barriers, sudden regulatory overhauls, unexpected executive orders, geopolitical conflicts, or other unforeseen external events.

Ongoing economic uncertainty is driving CFOs to focus more frequently on forecasting, scenario planning, supply chain analysis, pricing strategies and impact assessments, and of course, strategic planning — underscoring their importance as key finance priorities for the coming year.

The survey reveals that, amid the shifting tariff landscape, FP&A ranks as the area requiring the most attention from finance organizations.

Our survey results indicate that, as expected, new and changing tariffs are having an impact on multiple finance areas, from financial reporting and forecasting to profitability. FP&A represents the area requiring the most attention, by far, as a result of the tariff climate, underscoring why a number of these capabilities also rank among the top priorities for CFOs and finance teams to address in the coming year (as reported earlier).

In addition, the findings show that a majority of organizations are addressing tariff-fueled supply chain concerns by enhancing communication with suppliers and third-party risk management oversight. On the other hand, most have not made any moves as of yet to adjust their business process outsourcing (BPO) or offshoring models.

CFOs are ideally positioned to serve as the voice of reason amid this geoeconomic turmoil. Finance leaders need to cut through the noise of public pronouncements and media reports by providing data-driven “then” answers to the high-stakes “if” questions shareholders, board members and C-suite colleagues ask about tariff impacts on business performance, revenue, market share and profitability. *How do these changes affect our COGS? What about the costs of transportation and logistics? Can we sustain our profit margins? How do tariffs affect our key suppliers? Do we need to adjust our pricing and, if so, can we do it without triggering a significant drop in demand?*

41%

of CFOs and VPs of finance are very confident in their organization’s ability to navigate current challenges and uncertainties in the economy.

88%

of finance leaders and professionals in publicly held companies are very or somewhat confident in their organization’s ability to navigate current challenges and uncertainties in the economy, versus 68% of those in private organizations.





Answering these questions requires cross-functional collaboration paired with strong FP&A capabilities and core finance expertise. CFOs coordinate impact assessments and scenario planning activities that involve finance, supply chain, legal, tax and marketing teams. Organizations can leverage the insights this work generates to help less-prepared trading partners.

Finance groups also collaborate with operations partners to run sensitivity analyses of potential pricing changes and related market share impacts. For example, if companies can pass 20%-30% of tariff-related cost increases to customers, they can use other levers — for example, strategic sourcing, working capital improvements, cost optimization — to address elements of the remaining exposure.

Bottom line: CFOs understand that high-quality data and predictive analyses underpin an effective response to economic gyrations.

Figure 1

## By the numbers: Impact of new and changing tariffs

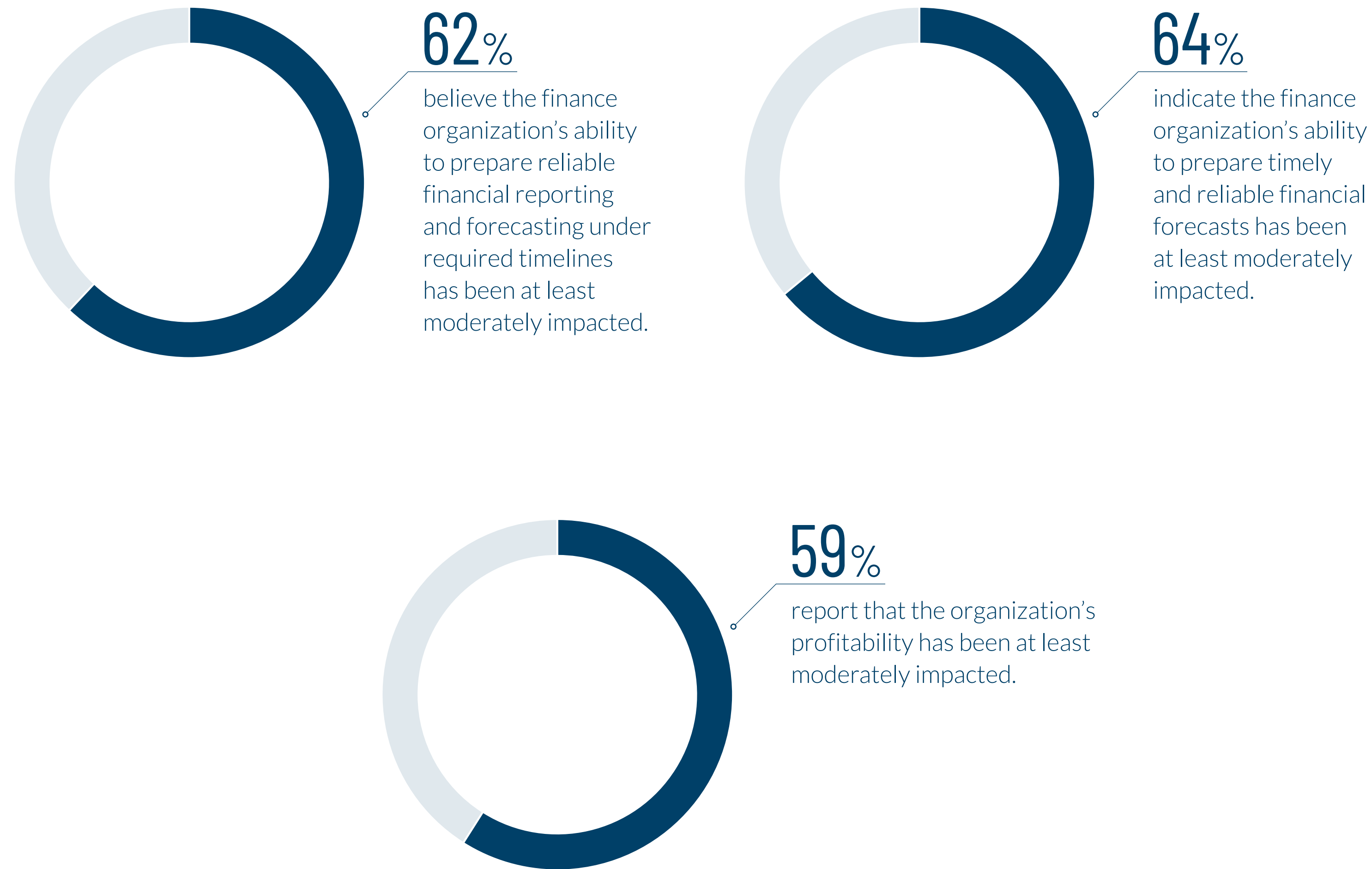


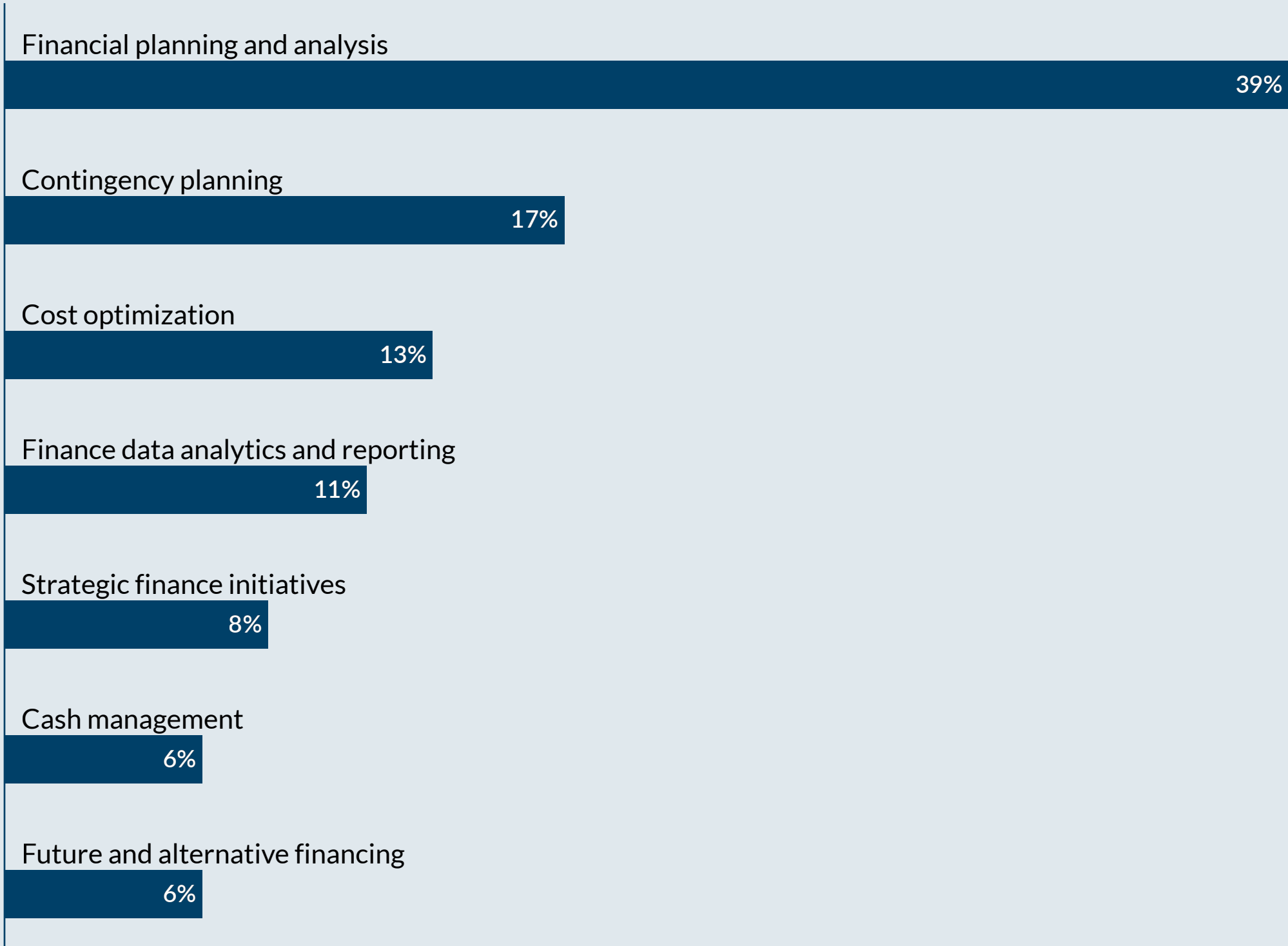




Figure 2

# Areas requiring the most attention due to the impact of tariffs

(Shown: All responses)



**Question:** Within your finance and accounting function, which of the following activities/ areas have required the most attention in the past 3 months due to the impact of new and changing tariffs? (Respondents ranked the areas from 1 to 7. Percentages reflect the number of respondents who ranked each area as “1”; i.e., requiring the most attention.)

## Industry and regional observations

- As expected, the impact of tariffs on the ability to prepare reliable and timely financial forecasts is more significant for U.S.-based organizations (76% reporting at least a moderate impact) compared with organizations in Europe (60%) and the Asia-Pacific region (46%). The same trend holds true with regard to preparing reliable financial reporting and forecasting under required timelines.
- In a similar trend, 70% of U.S.-based organizations report at least a moderate impact on their profitability as a result of new and changing tariffs, versus 60% of European and 43% of Asia-Pacific organizations.
- Compared with organizations in other parts of the world, U.S.-based organizations are devoting significantly more attention to contingency planning due to the impact of new and changing tariffs.
- From an industry perspective, manufacturing and distribution organizations report a greater tariff-driven impact on their ability to prepare financial forecasts relative to organizations in other industries.
- Financial services, consumer packaged goods and retail organizations report the highest levels of impact on profitability as a result of new and changing tariffs, while energy and utilities organizations report notably less of an impact on profitability.





Figure 3

# Impact of tariffs on supply chain strategies

(Multiple responses permitted)\*



\* Not shown: 3% of respondents who report they are not making any changes.

**Question:** In light of ongoing developments concerning changing tariffs and global trade policies, how, if at all, is your organization reviewing its policies toward sourcing goods from its supply chain?

51%  
(a majority of CFOs and finance leaders) report that their organizations have made no changes to their BPO or offshoring strategy in response to recent increases in tariffs.

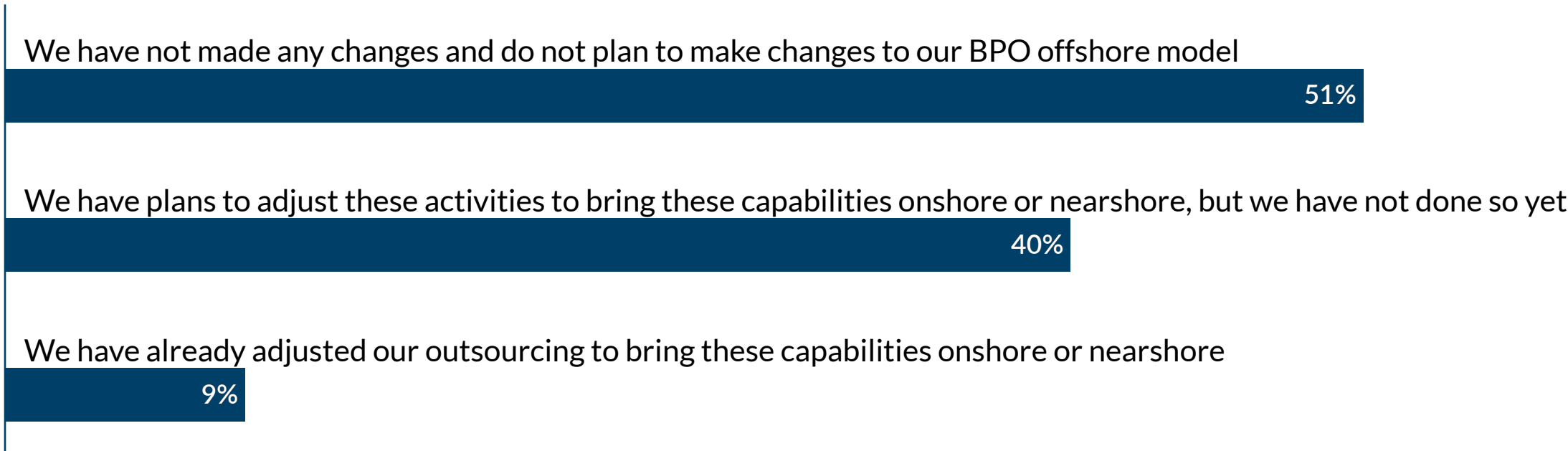




Figure 4

# Impact of tariffs on offshoring strategies

(Shown: CFO/VP Finance responses)



**Question:** Considering recent increases in tariffs, what actions, if any, has your organization taken or planned to take with regard to your offshoring strategy?

14%

of organizations in the financial services industry have already adjusted their outsourcing to bring capabilities onshore or nearshore – more than any other industry group.

## Key action items for CFOs and finance leaders

- Analyze the strategic intent behind different tariffs (e.g., negotiation tactics, trade imbalances, intellectual property protection) to assess their potential timing and magnitude.
- Map potential tariff exposures across the product and service portfolio, including multi-ingredient/input products, and across supply chains to pinpoint areas prone to the largest margin pressures.
- Leverage pandemic-era learnings and improvements to increase the frequency and precision of financial forecasts and scenario planning.
- Design modeling systems that can quickly adjust tariff percentages as regulations change to produce real-time assessments of financial impacts and mitigation options.
- Analyze inventory management, supplier/customer payment terms, and procurement processes to identify opportunities for cash flow improvement and cost optimization.
- Manage expectations by establishing realistic timelines and investment requirements for supply chain overhauls, reshoring and related tariff adjustments while highlighting raw material access, capital requirements, labor availability and other constraints.





# Accelerating AI adoption and transformation

More finance organizations have moved beyond the AI experimentation stage and are building AI capabilities pursuant to a defined strategy.





Leading CFOs have transitioned their finance organizations beyond generative AI experimentation. They are identifying and implementing use cases for generative as well as agentic AI tools, measuring short-term payoffs and longer-term returns, and leveraging task mining, process mapping and heat maps to accelerate AI enablement across finance. This is an effective blueprint for every finance leader to follow.

In fact, the use of AI in the finance organization has essentially doubled over the past 12 months. In last year’s survey, one in three finance groups (34%) reported using generative AI. This year, nearly three out of four finance leaders (72%) indicate they are using AI tools, many pursuant to a defined strategy. Areas and activities for which finance teams are employing AI most frequently include process automation, financial forecasting, risk assessment and management, and compliance and regulatory reporting.

**41%**  
of finance organizations in publicly held companies are currently employing AI pursuant to a defined strategy, versus 8% of privately held companies.

Increasingly, AI strategies in finance organizations cover all forms of AI, versus being limited to generative AI. In fact, we have seen the adoption of agentic AI — systems that employ large language models and other technologies to enable autonomous task planning and reasoning toward human-defined objectives — accelerate dramatically over the past year.

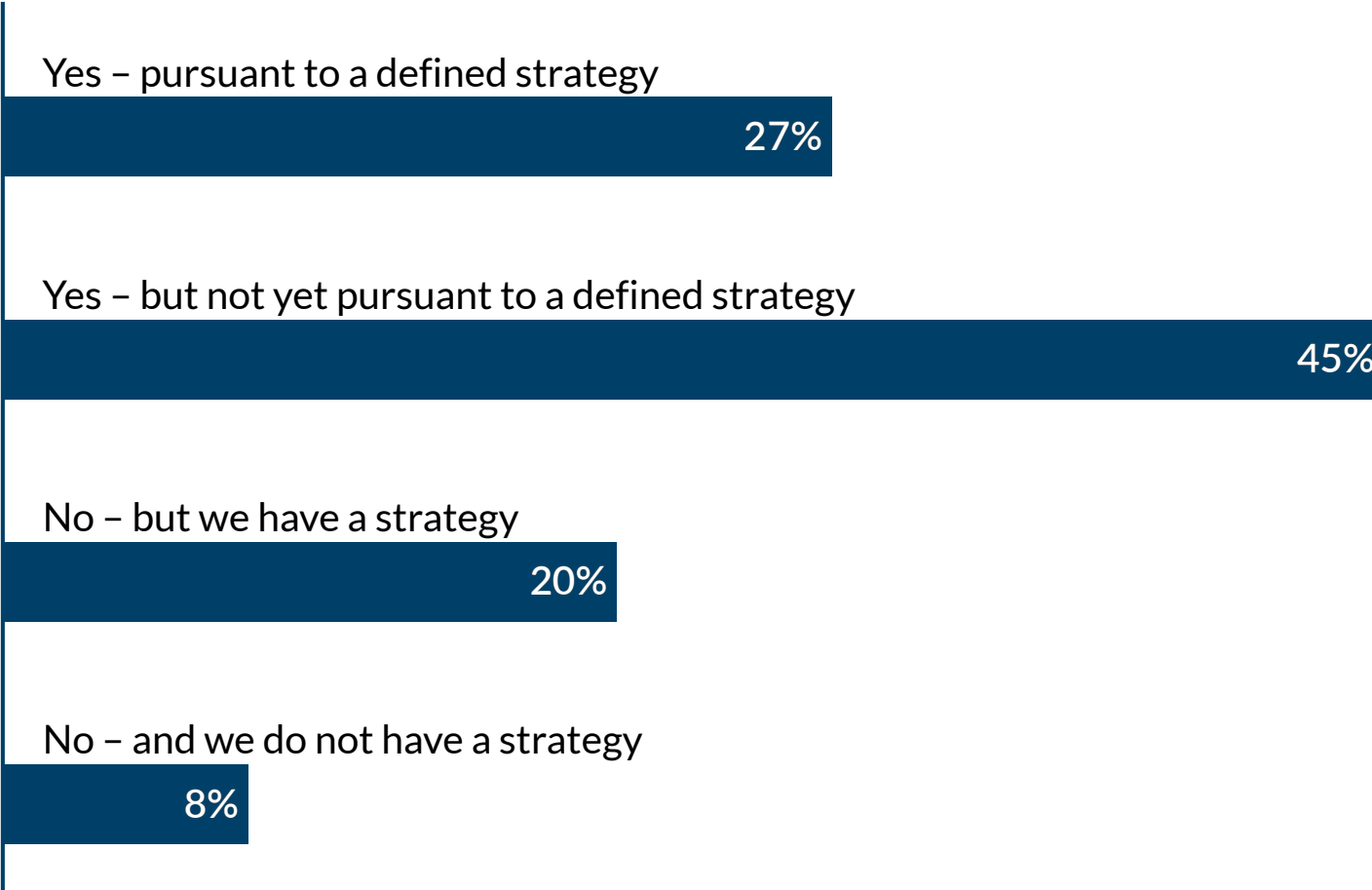
Opportunities to develop and deploy agentic AI systems in finance include:

- **Core finance processes:** Tasks and processes throughout order-to-cash and procure-to-pay cycles represent prime targets for agentic AI deployment, along with financial close and consolidation processes.
- **FP&A:** AI agents help finance teams go beyond traditional forecasting by modeling supply chain, sales and cash flow scenarios in real time. They can flag unexpected variances, explain root causes, and suggest actions such as adjusting inventory levels based on demand shifts or optimizing working capital based on changing payment trends.
- **Cost optimization:** Finance teams discover that cost savings from deploying agentic AI in repetitive back-office processes often exceed savings from outsourcing the same processes offshore.
- **Governance, risk and compliance:** AI agents can work around the clock to review expense management activities, perform continuous auditing tasks, and conduct compliance-focused contract and policy reviews.

As the AI enablement journey progresses in the finance organization, CFOs also have a broader role in AI adoption and transformation across the enterprise. They collaborate with C-suite colleagues to establish AI governance structures that address agent training processes, data protection and misuse controls, bias prevention measures, accountability for AI agent performance, intervention protocols, success metrics, human-in-the-loop considerations, and other ethical guardrails.

Figure 5  
**Finance organizations employing AI (including generative and agentic)**

(Shown: All responses)



**Question:** Is your finance organization currently employing AI, including generative AI and/or agentic AI?





# Where finance organizations are on the AI maturity continuum

(Shown: Among finance organizations employing AI)

12%	32%	39%	14%	3%
Stage 1: Initial	Stage 2: Experimentation	Stage 3: Defined	Stage 4: Optimization	Stage 5: Transformation
Finance organization recognizes AI's potential benefits but has limited understanding and no strategic initiatives. KPIs have not yet been defined.	Finance organization has initiated small-scale AI projects and pilots to assess feasibility and benefits.	Finance organization has integrated AI solutions into existing business processes, enhancing operational efficiency and decision-making.	Finance organization has optimized AI systems for performance and scalability, with continuous improvements based on data feedback.	AI drives significant business transformation in the finance organization.

**Question:** At which of the following stages do you believe your finance organization is on its AI journey?

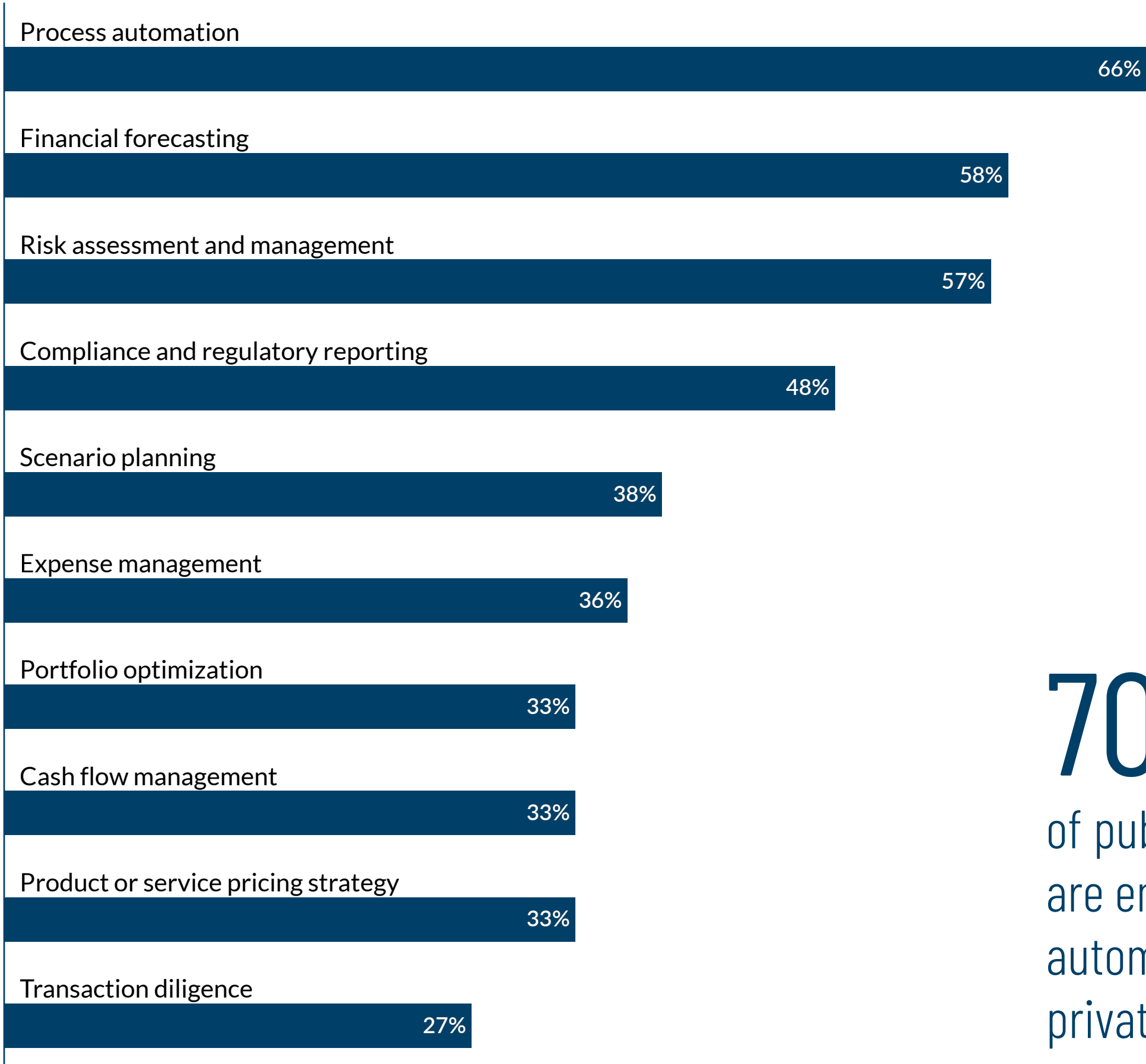
23% of finance organizations in publicly held companies rate their AI maturity at stage 4 or 5, versus 9% of those in privately held companies.





Figure 6

# Activities where the finance organization is currently employing AI\*



70%  
of publicly held companies  
are employing AI for process  
automation, versus 58% of  
privately held companies.

\* Among finance organizations employing AI (72%) — not all responses shown.

**Question:** Please indicate how your finance organization is currently employing AI (including generative AI and/or agentic AI). Select all that apply.

## Key action items for CFOs and finance leaders

- Implement AI solutions within the finance organization and leverage these experiences, returns and learnings to enhance finance’s AI capabilities continuously.
- Assess agentic and generative AI use cases by identifying how AI drives positive, long-term customer relationships, supports cost optimization and profitability initiatives, delivers superior customer experiences through business model innovation, and reimagines core business processes.
- Identify the talent and skills needed to optimize the finance organization’s expanding AI use and design innovative approaches to acquire and develop these competencies.
- Collaborate with the C-suite and the board on AI strategy, business problems and opportunities ripe for AI solutions, AI talent strategies, AI governance, and workforce communications addressing employee concerns and AI investment priorities.





# FP&A optimization is job one

CFOs are advancing FP&A maturity and sophistication as the demand for real-time forecasting, planning and analysis continues rising.





CFOs and finance groups have executed a two-pronged FP&A playbook in recent years. First, they have campaigned for and empowered leaders throughout the business to develop new analytics and performance metrics in their domains. Simultaneously, CFOs are seeking to redefine the FP&A function by integrating AI and other advanced technologies to unlock deeper insights that drive smarter, faster strategic decisions, which can optimize revenue, spend, sourcing and efficiency while identifying risks and opportunities earlier.

These trends are evident in this year's results, with a majority of CFOs and finance leaders citing automation tools (with a significant increase over last year's findings), technology rationalization and utilization of cloud-based systems among the areas in which they have achieved meaningful and measurable cost optimization progress over the past year.

On the other hand, fewer finance organizations (just over one in four) are achieving such progress with AI, indicating these technologies and investments are likely more focused on longer-term returns and benefits (which will require diligence and accountability in measuring ROI in the future). This finding is consistent with the results of our first AI Pulse Survey, *From Exploration to Transformation: What AI Success Looks Like*.<sup>1</sup> Based on this research, initial returns on AI investments in the early stages of AI adoption tend to be

low. However, ROI expectations are met or exceeded with greater frequency as AI maturity rises, indicating that finance organizations can expect more benefits as they progress on their AI journeys.

This year, a dynamic and uncertain geoeconomic climate, fueled by new and changing tariff policies and ongoing conflicts in multiple regions, is providing yet another new test of the efficacy of these FP&A approaches. Organizational responses in today's highly fluid and dynamic business conditions require a multifaceted, enterprisewide approach that, in most cases, centers around the CFO and is anchored by scenario planning, modeling, forecasting and insights produced by the FP&A group.

It is imperative for CFOs to advance the maturity and sophistication of FP&A from an isolated, spreadsheet-laden capability at the basic end of the spectrum to a more defined, collaborative business process supported by robust technology ecosystem tools and resources. The goal is clear: Achieve a fully optimized, holistic FP&A function with integrated and flexible self-service tools. These applications facilitate real-time collaboration and digital on-demand planning, integrated driver-based machine learning models, predictive and prescriptive analytics, and self-service reporting across mobile platforms. High-performing FP&A

functions align tightly with enterprise strategy; harness integrated data, reporting and analytics to deliver actionable insights; and cultivate a data-driven culture that continuously evolves to meet business needs.

Consider the advantages a data-driven FP&A function can deliver. By leveraging integrated data for advanced analytics, FP&A teams can enable more informed business decisions that directly drive cost savings. For example, FP&A can analyze supplier performance, sourcing costs and market trends to identify high-cost vendors and recommend alternative sourcing strategies. These insights empower procurement leaders to adopt a total cost of ownership mindset, optimize supplier selection and negotiate better terms, ultimately reducing spend while maintaining quality and reliability.

A data-driven culture unlocks FP&A's full potential. Leading FP&A functions leverage integrated data, advanced analytics and flexible referential data structures to enable more dynamic forecasting, scenario planning and decision support. By fostering enterprisewide access to consistent, high-quality data, organizations can model outcomes faster, adapt to changing market conditions, and align decisions across functions and geographies.

<sup>1</sup> *From Exploration to Transformation – What AI Success Looks Like*, Protiviti, July 2025: [www.protiviti.com/us-en/survey/ai-pulse](https://www.protiviti.com/us-en/survey/ai-pulse).

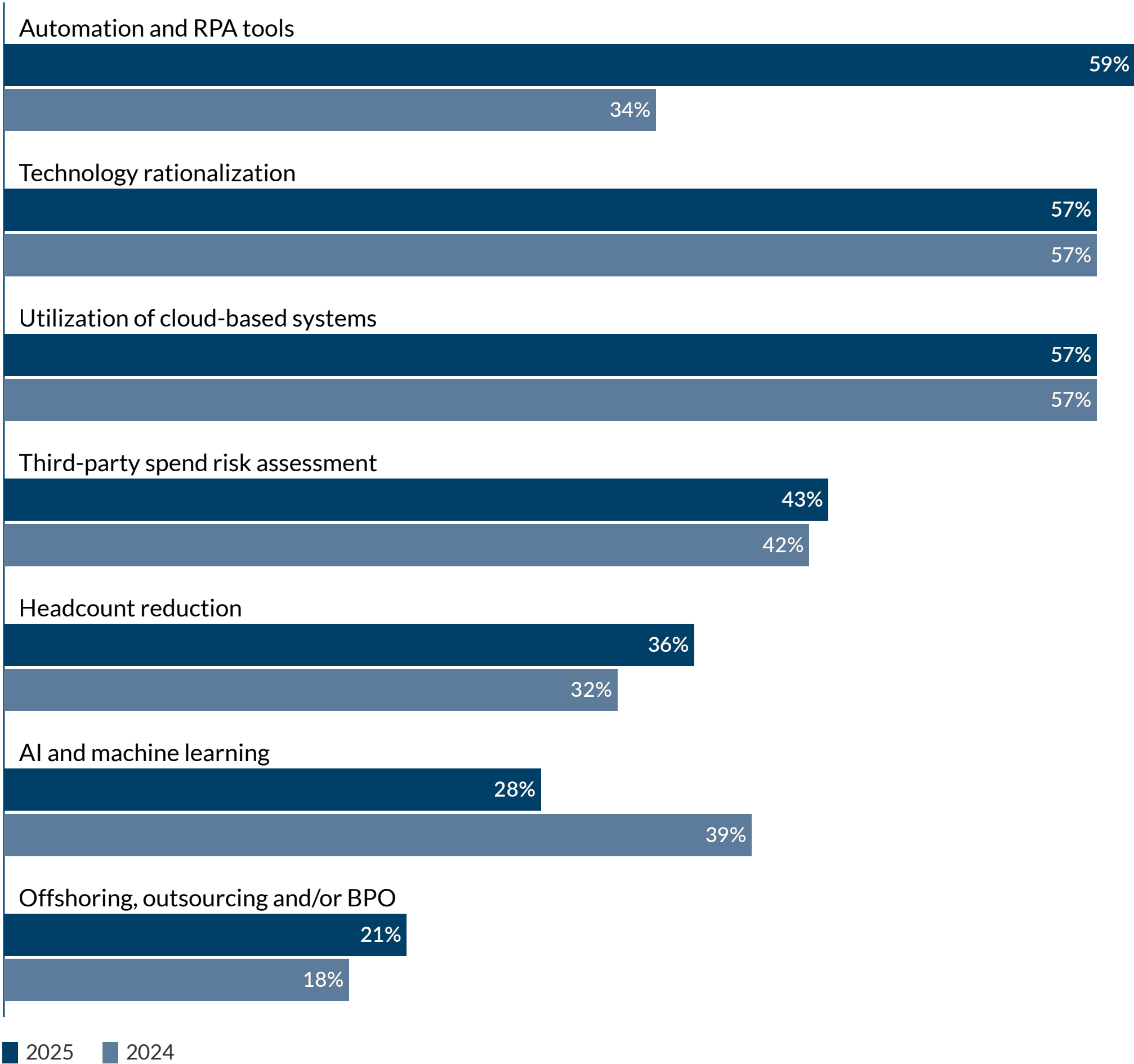




Figure 7

# Areas in which finance organizations have achieved meaningful, measurable cost optimization progress over the past year\*

(Shown: All responses)



\* Not shown: "Other" and "None of the above" responses.

## Key action items for CFOs and finance leaders

- Identify the data needed to provide critical insights into current and future performance to the C-suite and other business partners.
- Determine the degree to which FP&A groups have the skills and processes required to analyze this data.
- Assess the degree to which FP&A teams still rely on spreadsheets and develop a plan to modernize these activities (see next point).
- Develop an FP&A technology roadmap, highlighting opportunities to leverage ecosystems and AI, including AI agents that bolster supply chain operations, sales cycles and cash flow management while providing insightful decision support.
- Identify or, if necessary, establish data governance controls that provide guardrails around data collection, analysis and reporting activities.
- Assess risks — including but not limited to those related to FP&A — associated with unstructured data sourced from multiple systems (both inside and outside the organization).
- Continue supporting other business groups as they produce new, more predictive analytics regarding their performance and contributions to organizational value — and look for opportunities to integrate those analytics into financial forecasts and analyses.





Table 3

# Changes in resourcing and staffing key finance areas

As expected, in light of ongoing economic uncertainty and current marketplace conditions, we see a shift in staffing and resourcing back to full-time employees across key functions within the finance organization.

	Full-time employees			Staff augmentation (contractors, freelancers, etc.)			Managed services provider (blend of full-time staff, contract professionals and third-party experts)			Fully outsourced			Automation		
	2025	2024	2023	2025	2024	2023	2025	2024	2023	2025	2024	2023	2025	2024	2023
Accounting Operations — Accounts Payable	84%	77%	89%	9%	18%	10%	4%	3%	1%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	N/A
Accounting Operations — General Ledger	80%	71%	84%	14%	21%	10%	3%	7%	5%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	N/A
Accounting Operations — Accounts Receivable	74%	63%	78%	17%	31%	14%	6%	5%	7%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	N/A
Financial Reporting	82%	45%	78%	10%	30%	15%	3%	20%	6%	3%	4%	1%	2%	1%	N/A
Financial Planning & Analysis	75%	40%	78%	12%	30%	13%	9%	25%	8%	2%	3%	1%	2%	2%	N/A
Mergers & Acquisitions	29%	22%	49%	21%	27%	18%	18%	31%	24%	31%	19%	9%	1%	1%	N/A

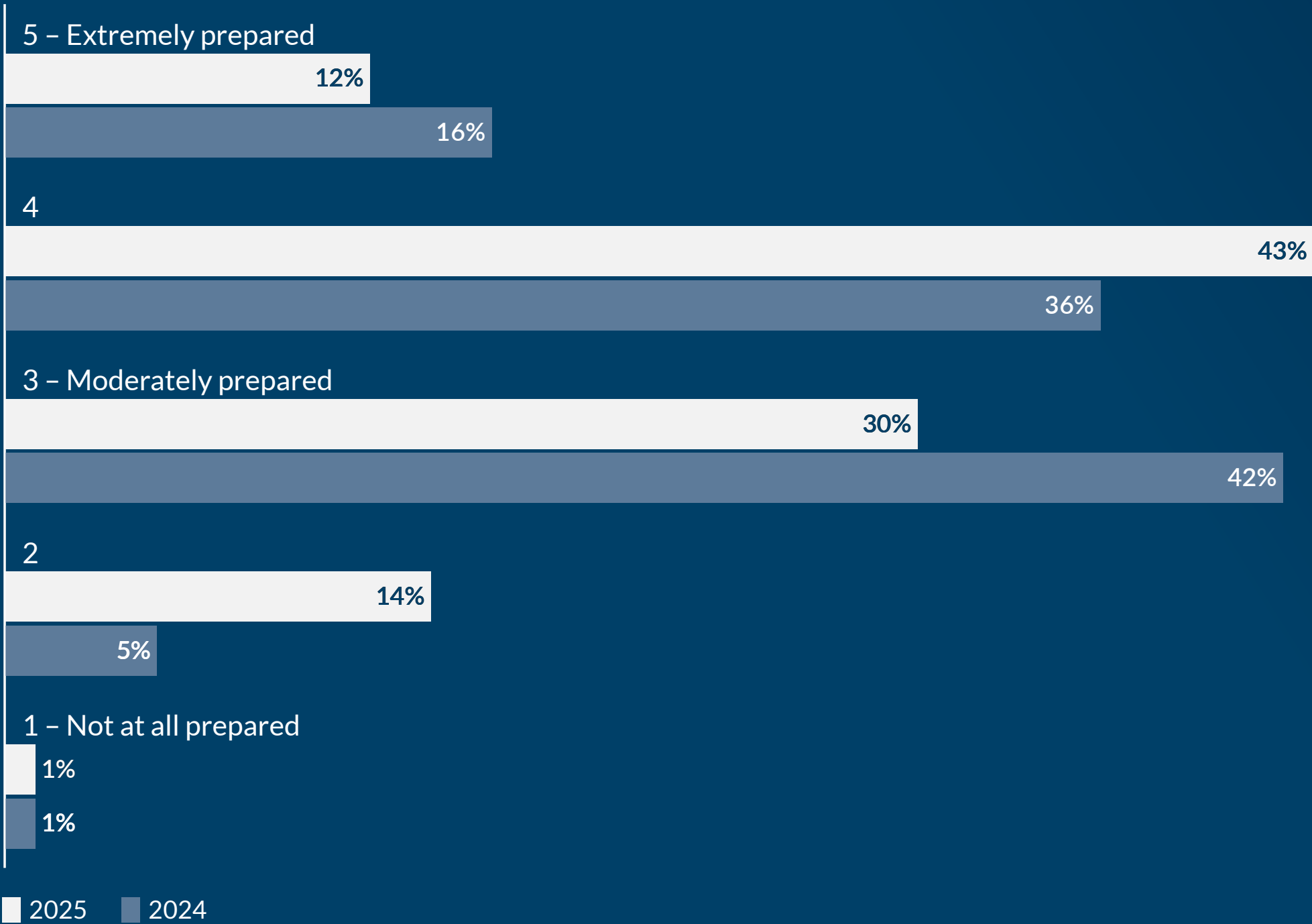




Figure 8

# Organizations are more prepared for ESG reporting requirements

(Shown: All responses)



**Question:** How prepared is your organization, as a whole, for ESG reporting (whether required or voluntary)?

## Notable observations

- As expected, given the different regulatory reporting requirements around the world, publicly held companies indicate higher levels of preparedness for ESG reporting (61%) compared with privately held companies (46%).
- Organizations based in Europe (where there are substantial pending regulatory disclosure requirements) tend to report higher levels of preparedness than those in North America and the Asia-Pacific region.
- Overall, organizations have a high level of confidence in their preparedness to meet ESG reporting requirements, but confidence levels are down from last year’s survey due to changes that have impacted scope and timing.



# Technology enablement is foundational

Building a strong technology foundation that includes but is not limited to AI enablement is key to the finance organization's ability to gain foresight into where the enterprise currently stands and needs to go.





Plumbers and HVAC specialists are rarely glorified, yet their work is crucial. Healthy living requires clean water and comfortable temperatures. A similar dynamic applies to technology infrastructure. Data may be the lifeblood of agile and resilient organizations, but the organizational systems that access, contain, protect and use that data — including but not limited to FP&A — must be in optimal condition if companies are to navigate forbidding business environments effectively.

Although technology enablement areas such as cloud-based applications do not rank as high as other finance priorities for CFOs and finance leaders in the coming year, they do appear at the top of the list of technologies delivering valuable cost and efficiency benefits and improving finance projects. These technologies are enabling cost optimization efforts, cybersecurity improvements, FP&A maturity, and strategic responses to economic and global trade volatility. In addition, their use is likely to fare well in ROI analyses.

Interestingly, AI and machine learning fall further down the list of technologies delivering valuable cost and efficiency benefits. One reason for this could be that, as noted earlier and as reported in our recent AI Pulse Survey, initial returns on AI investments in the early stages of AI adoption tend to be low.<sup>2</sup>

Cost optimization is particularly dependent on technology enablement given that these efforts frequently leverage automation, cloud-based systems and advanced analytics. These initiatives generate higher value when there is minimal technical debt created by outdated legacy systems — the object of technology modernization and enablement strategies.

CFOs that lead effective technology enablement initiatives:

- **Quantify the risks of standing pat.** The costs of failing to modernize systems can be exorbitant: falling short of key business objectives; higher operational costs and process inefficiencies; inability to perform effective forecasting, scenario analysis and strategic planning; subpar customer experiences that erode revenue; talent attraction and retention difficulties; and the loss of competitive advantage and shareholder value.
- **Consider a diverse collection of options and timetables.** Technology enablement and modernization take multiple forms beyond a comprehensive ERP transformation. In addition to updating existing software to the latest versions and/or migrating systems to the cloud, organizations can build or buy new solutions that reflect the latest application development approaches and trends (e.g., microservices architecture, containerization and serverless computing). There also may be

opportunities to capitalize on existing platforms in the enterprise that are underleveraged, which may be optimized or redeployed. Savvy CFOs recognize that a phased approach to technology modernization may be preferred to a massive transformation project placed on a tight, rigid schedule.

- **Elevate the importance of data quality and management.** Leading CFOs advocate for treating data governance and management as mission-critical components of technology enablement and modernization. The data that flows through powerful systems and tools cannot be incomplete, disorganized, distorted or inaccurate.
- **Work with CIOs to leverage core technology principles.** Under the hood, technology modernization is driven by a handful of technology building blocks, including a simplified and decoupled architecture, support for modular and agile deployment, scalability and security (which enable rapid, secure deployments and updates), and a unified and well-governed data repository that helps establish a single and reliable source of truth across the organization. CFOs consult their CIOs regarding the degree to which modernization efforts employ these enablers.

<sup>2</sup> From Exploration to Transformation — What AI Success Looks Like, Protiviti: [www.protiviti.com/us-en/survey/ai-pulse](https://www.protiviti.com/us-en/survey/ai-pulse).

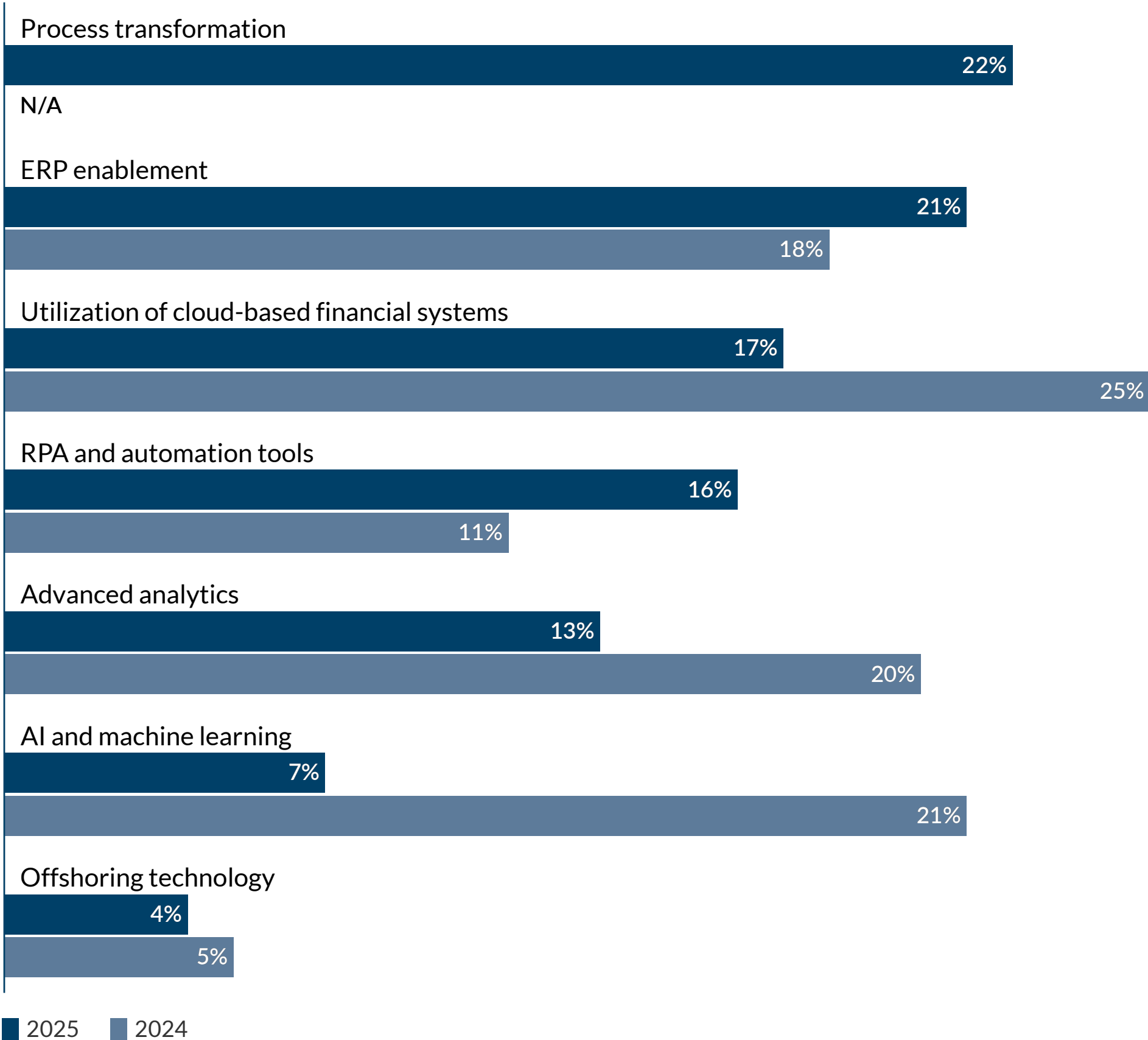




Figure 9

# Technologies delivering the most valuable cost and efficiency benefits\*

(Shown: All responses)



\* Not shown: "Other" and "None of the above" responses.

**Question:** Which of the following technologies have you found to be most valuable in achieving cost and efficiency benefits and improving your finance projects?

## Key action items for CFOs and finance leaders

- Recognize the variety of technology enablement options available to the organization.
- Establish and monitor KPIs for assessing the ROI for technology spend.
- Monitor ERP releases and ERP vendors' end-of-service dates for on-premises solutions.
- Consider the ways that technology enablement relates to other finance priorities, such as FP&A, cost optimization, strategic planning and AI enablement.
- Identify the data the finance group needs to support a leading FP&A capability and the sources of this data, and assess the degree of control the finance group has over these data sources.
- Be prepared to apply transformations and normalizations to data the finance group uses (i.e., cleanse, structure and scale the data into useful formats to make it more suitable for analysis to support decision-making).
- Ensure end users trust data for their reporting activities.





# AI introduces new challenges on the cybersecurity front

Not only does security and privacy of data represent the top priority for CFOs and finance leaders, but AI's impact in this area is potentially transformative in nature, posing a fresh set of challenges for finance organizations.





Amid the current global economic turmoil and ongoing uncertainty in the market, CFOs and finance leaders still view the security and privacy of data to be their top priority to address over the coming year. While this should not come as a surprise given results from prior years of our survey, new factors — namely, the rapidly increasing use of AI — are supplanting prior year rationales and helping keep this issue top-of-mind for finance organizations. Specifically, a majority of CFOs and finance teams have at least some additional concerns about cybersecurity and data privacy as a result of the increasing use of AI technologies in their organizations.

AI tools create three distinct security challenges. First, internal AI solutions introduce risks around accountability, biased decision-making and cybersecurity vulnerabilities that companies must address. Second, cybercriminals now weaponize AI for automated vulnerability discovery, synthetic identities and polymorphic malware that rewrites its own code to bypass defenses. Third, AI strengthens cyber defenses through autonomous threat detection, enhanced log analysis, incident prioritization, and polymorphic defense systems that deploy decoys and shift configurations to confuse attackers.

## A majority of CFOs and finance teams have at least some additional concerns about cybersecurity and data privacy as a result of the increasing use of AI technologies.

The AI enablement of organizations, cyber attackers and cybersecurity programs requires the finance group's risk management, governance and investment prioritization expertise. CFOs are also applying their regulatory compliance and disclosure skill sets to cybersecurity as rules continue to multiply and evolve.

To no surprise, the cybersecurity regulatory climate remains an active one. In the United States, the number of companies reporting material impacts from a cyber incident, in compliance with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) Cybersecurity Risk Management, Strategy, Governance, and Incident Disclosure rule, has increased in the past year. Companies are also providing more detailed cyber incident descriptions in their Form 8-K filings.<sup>3</sup>

U.S. banking groups have petitioned the SEC to rescind Form 8-K Item 1.05 (through which material impacts of cyber incidents are disclosed) and the corresponding Form 6-K requirements from the SEC's cybersecurity disclosure rules.<sup>4</sup> The SEC's response remains uncertain, but publicly listed companies still must comply with an expanding set of data security, privacy and AI rules, regulations and disclosure requirements, as well as with stakeholder demands and expectations.

The European Union and other regions continue to enact, enforce and update cybersecurity, data privacy and AI rules, including the EU's Network and Information Security Directive 2 (NIS2). The lack of harmony among this growing body of rules typically results in greater confusion that increases compliance burdens and costs.

In addition, as CFOs continue to deepen their CISO partnerships, they must address downstream entity (third-party, fourth-party, etc.) cybersecurity risks, which were responsible for 25% of the cybersecurity incidents in 75 SEC disclosures issued by 48 public companies from December 18, 2023, to October 31, 2024.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "SEC Cybersecurity Disclosure Trends: 2025 Update on Corporate Reporting Practices," Jena M. Valdetero and Wouter van Wengen, GreenbergTraurig, February 7, 2025: [www.gtlaw.com/en/insights/2025/2/sec-cybersecurity-disclosure-trends-2025-update-on-corporate-reporting-practices](https://www.gtlaw.com/en/insights/2025/2/sec-cybersecurity-disclosure-trends-2025-update-on-corporate-reporting-practices).

<sup>4</sup> "Petition for Rulemaking on the Cybersecurity Risk Management, Strategy, Governance, and Incident Disclosure Rule (Joint Trades)," John W. Carlson, Heather Hogsett, Melissa MacGregor, Anjelica Dortch and Michelle Meertens, SIFMA, May 22, 2025: [www.sifma.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Joint-Financial-Trades-Final-Petition-for-Rulemaking-on-Cybersecurity-Risk-Management-Strategy-Governance-and-Incident-Disclosure-Rule.pdf](https://www.sifma.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Joint-Financial-Trades-Final-Petition-for-Rulemaking-on-Cybersecurity-Risk-Management-Strategy-Governance-and-Incident-Disclosure-Rule.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> SEC Cybersecurity Incident Disclosure Report, Paul Hastings, December 2024: [https://assets.ctfassets.net/t0ydv1wnf2mi/4Gx9EfWdXUHChNUTWIKWsD/15204bf87c2c3b79ff414cdc5bc57df1/SEC\\_Cybersecurity\\_Incident\\_Disclosure\\_Report\\_121824.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/t0ydv1wnf2mi/4Gx9EfWdXUHChNUTWIKWsD/15204bf87c2c3b79ff414cdc5bc57df1/SEC_Cybersecurity_Incident_Disclosure_Report_121824.pdf).

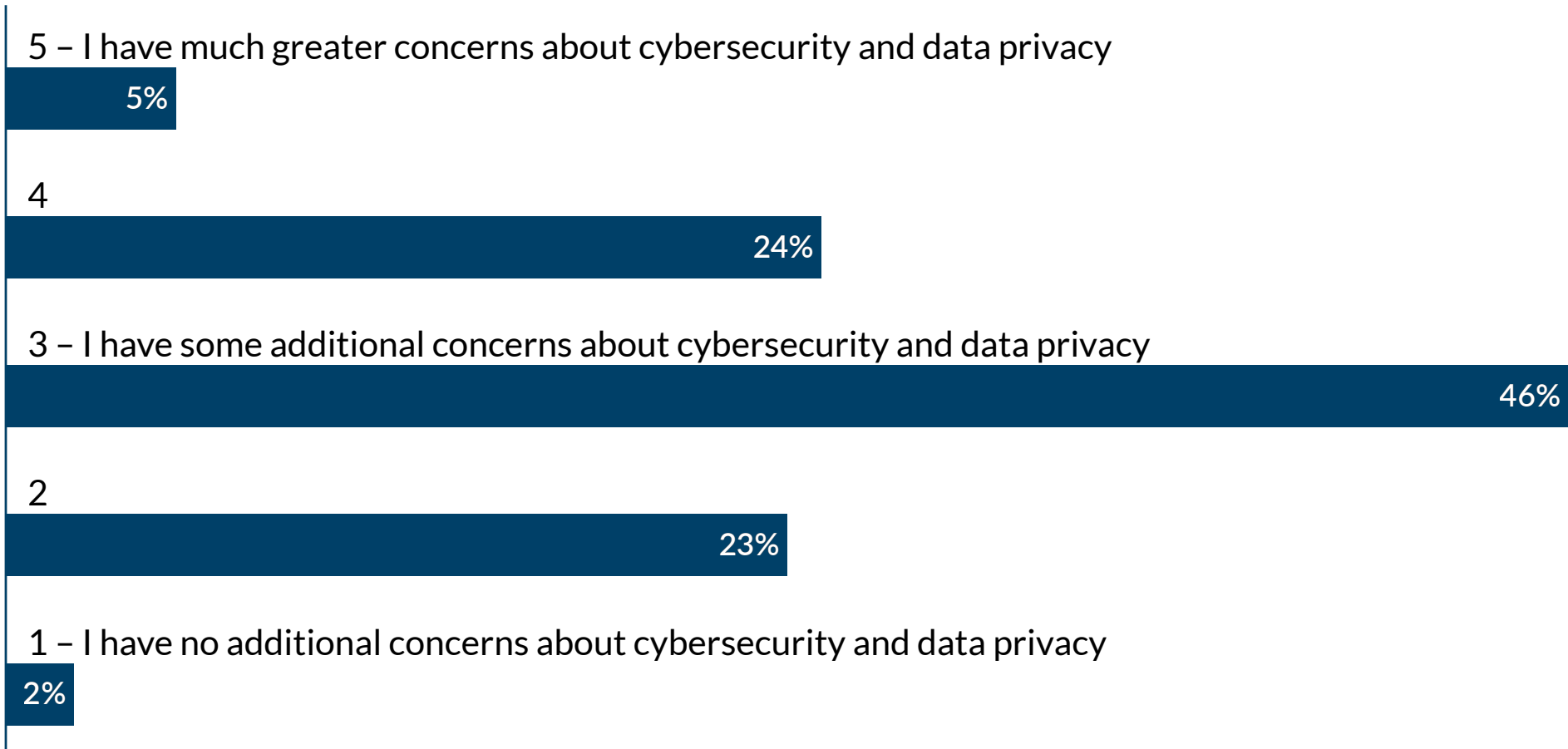




Figure 10

# Views on use of AI and cybersecurity concerns

(Shown: All responses)



**Question:** To what extent does the increasing use of AI technologies and tools in your enterprise affect your concerns about cybersecurity and data privacy in your organization?

<sup>6</sup> “Protiviti-Oxford survey shows ‘us vs. them’ disconnect in how global execs view data privacy,” VISION by Protiviti, November 2024: <https://vision.protiviti.com/insight/protiviti-oxford-survey-shows-us-vs-them-disconnect-how-global-execs-view-data-privacy>.

## Key action items for CFOs and finance leaders

- Monitor regulatory guidance, enforcement actions, and changing cyberattack modes and methods.
- Refine the organization’s existing materiality framework for cybersecurity incidents by reviewing how publicly listed companies in the United States have detailed material impacts on their Form 8-K filings. Private companies can adopt and adapt to this framework, and those that interact with public companies may be drawn into the reporting of events.
- Work with the CISO and other C-suite leaders to ensure that AI governance policies, procedures and performance evolve in ways that sustain the organization’s responsible and secure use of AI.
- Help the CISO and information security leaders evaluate and prioritize data security and privacy investments, including talent, AI-powered tools that support autonomous threat detection and response, augmented security operation centers (SOCs), behavioral biometrics, and polymorphic defense approaches.
- Subject data privacy and security disclosure processes to periodic reviews and audits.
- In conjunction with the CISO, keep abreast of rapidly changing cybersecurity trends and attack types to prioritize investments in cybersecurity solutions as needed.
- Track declining premiums and other trends in the cybersecurity insurance market while ensuring the organization has adequate coverage.
- Address common data privacy compliance challenges, including maintaining effective control environments amid emerging threats, identifying all internal systems that contain personal data and dealing with conflicting data privacy regimes.<sup>6</sup>
- In tandem with the CISO, ensure the board of directors receives timely updates on data security and privacy risks, incidents and disclosures.





# Closing thoughts

CFOs and finance leaders are navigating a landscape defined by complexity and rapid transformation. From a volatile climate of new and changing tariffs to chronic global economic uncertainty to the accelerating adoption of AI and the imperative of data security, finance organizations are being called upon to lead with clarity, agility and — perhaps most importantly — data-driven foresight. The findings underscore the critical importance of strategic planning, FP&A optimization and technology enablement — not as isolated initiatives, but rather as interconnected pillars of a resilient and forward-looking finance function.

Looking ahead, the role of the CFO will only grow more vital as a centralized leader in the enterprise, with organizations seeking to anticipate disruption, manage risk and unlock new sources of value. By embracing innovation, strengthening cross-functional collaboration, investing in the tools and talent needed to thrive, and thoughtfully challenging and monitoring related investments, finance leaders can transform today's challenges into tomorrow's competitive advantages. The insights from this year's survey provide a roadmap for doing just that — empowering finance not only to foresee what's next, but also to shape it.





# Finance areas assessed in our survey



**Changing demands and expectations of internal customers**

— Internal requests might include enhanced dashboards for reporting, access to data when mobile, direct access to interrogate data, dynamic reports.

**ESG metrics and measurement** — Understanding how the organization is measuring, monitoring, and reporting on ESG metrics and risks.

**Transaction planning and readiness** — M&A, divestiture, IPO, debt refinancing, recapitalization.

**The changing roles of HR, leadership & development, and recruiting** — Trend where HR, L&D and recruiting are becoming more integrated into the organization's operational effectiveness.

**Enhanced data analytics** — Data insights; analyzing, cleansing, transforming, mining, and modeling data, including through the use of AI, to make intelligent business decisions that drive performance and growth while managing risks.

**Strategic planning** — Supporting the organization's short- and long-term strategic plans with data and insights.

**Routine reporting and closing activities** — Quarterly and year-end reporting.

**Leadership (within your organization)** — Mentoring and supporting managers and staff; championing the organization's vision and strategy.

**Financial planning and profitability analysis and reporting** — Accessing and leveraging a broad range of data, from internal and external sources, to generate high-quality analyses; providing real-time data and insights on performance and forecasts.

**Cloud-based applications** — Use of cloud-based software, platforms or infrastructure to support the finance function.

**Change management** — Preparing for and managing through organizational change — e.g., IPOs; recapitalizations; mergers, acquisitions and integrations; implementations and transformation; delivery model (lift or shift, or offshoring).

**Process improvement** — Use of cutting-edge technology and digital advances to improve business processes, performance or reach of enterprises.

**Security and privacy of data** — Enhancing controls to safeguard data held in finance systems.

**Artificial intelligence** — Use of AI for different functions throughout the organization as well as within the finance organization.

**Tax changes** — Changes to national tax policies and rates, such as global corporate minimum tax, capital gains tax, corporate taxes and revenue impact.



# Methodology and demographics







More than 940 (n=942) finance leaders worldwide, including CFOs, vice presidents of finance, and a broad range of finance directors and managers, participated in Protiviti’s Global Finance Trends Survey, which was conducted online in the second quarter of 2025. Respondents represent a broad cross-section of public and privately held companies as well as government organizations. Survey participants also were asked to provide demographic information about the nature, size and location of their businesses, and their titles or positions. We are very appreciative of and grateful for the time invested in our study by these individuals.

**POSITION**

Chief Financial Officer	17%
Vice President, Finance	12%
Corporate Controller	6%
Financial Reporting Director/Manager	13%
Finance Transformation Director/Manager	13%
Finance Process Director/Manager	12%
Budgeting/Planning Director/Manager	12%
Finance Technology Director/Manager	8%
SEC Reporting Director/Manager	6%
Other	1%

**INDUSTRY**

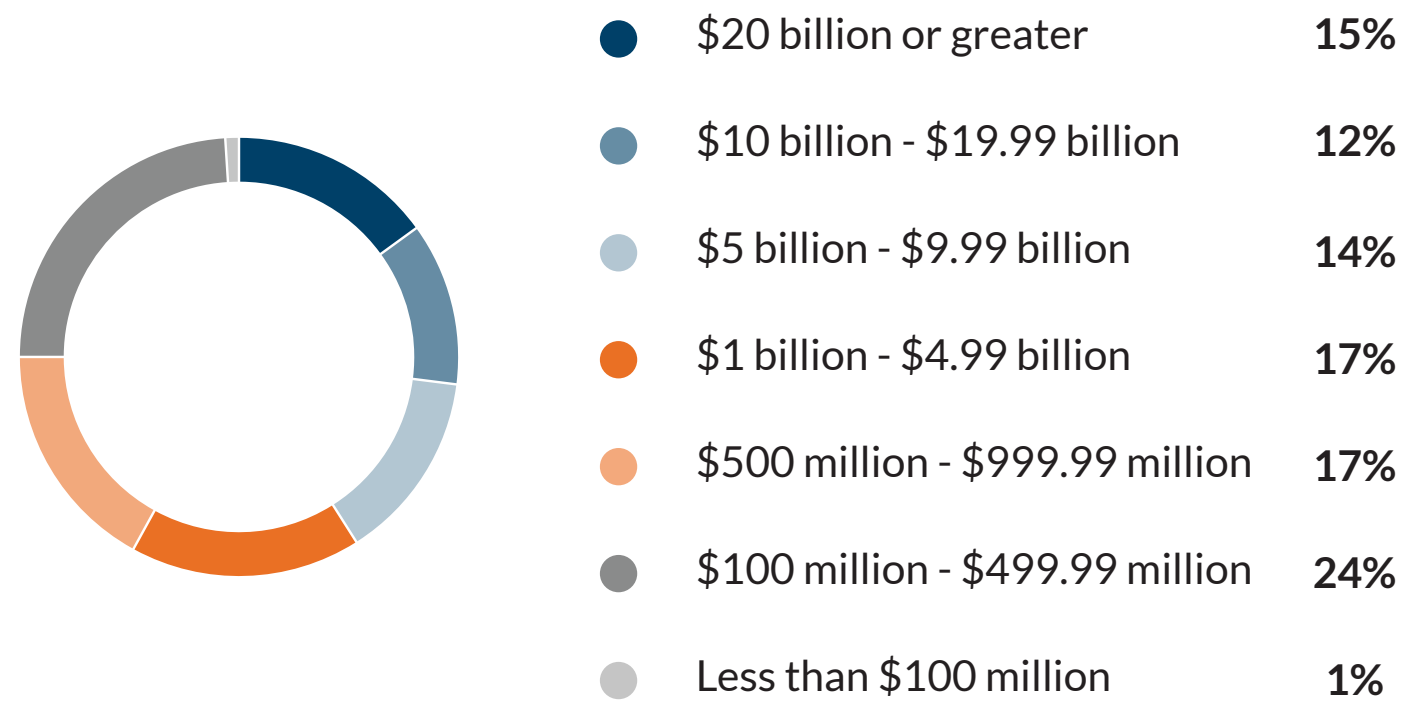
Government	7%
Media and Entertainment	7%
Retail	7%
Aerospace and Defense	6%
Consumer Packaged Goods	5%
Healthcare Provider	5%
Technology (Software, High-Tech, Electronics)	5%
Healthcare Payer	4%
Power and Utilities	4%
Telecommunications and Data Infrastructure	4%
Manufacturing (other than Technology)	4%
Chemicals	4%
Pharmaceuticals and Life Sciences	4%

Transportation and Logistics	4%
Financial Services – Banking	3%
Financial Services – Asset Management	3%
Financial Services – Broker-Dealer	3%
Financial Services – Payments	3%
Automotive	3%
Insurance (other than Healthcare Payer)	3%
Oil and Gas	3%
Mining	2%
Biotechnology	2%
Wholesale and Distribution	2%
Renewables	2%
Professional Services	1%

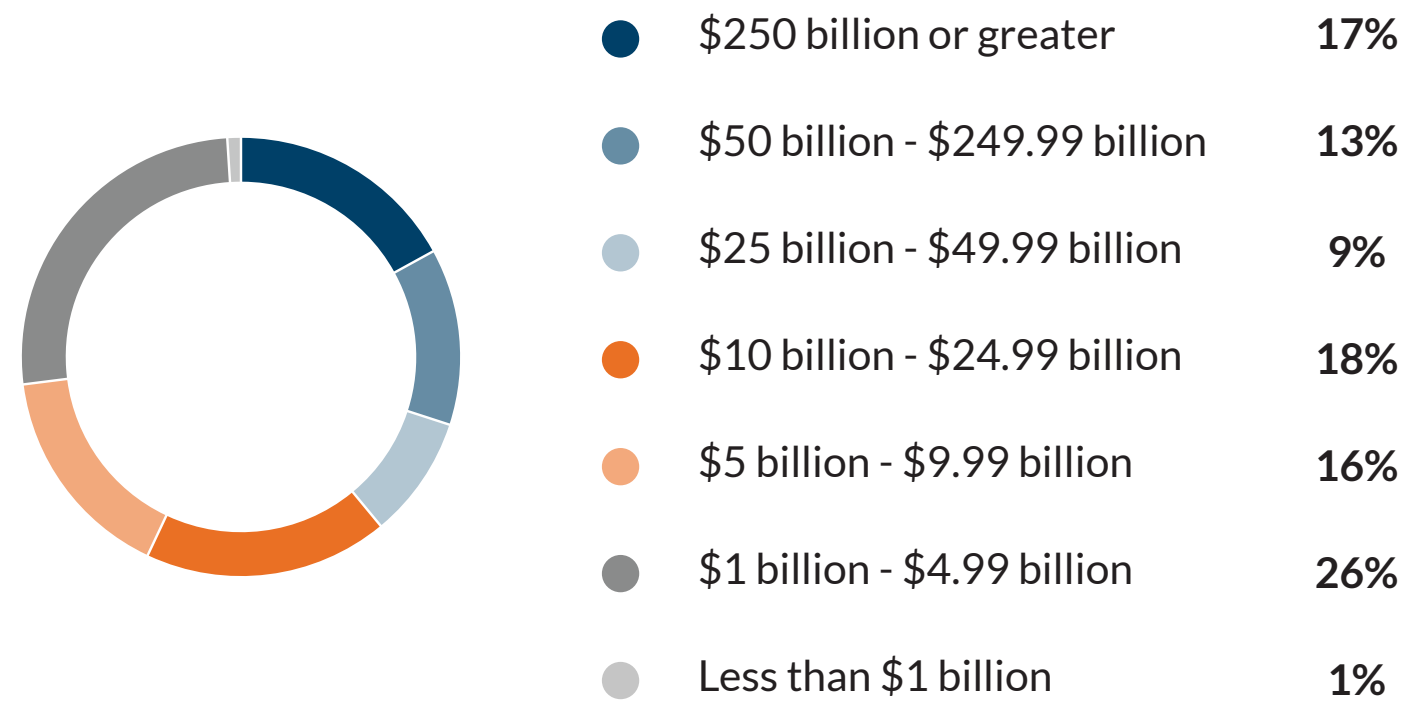




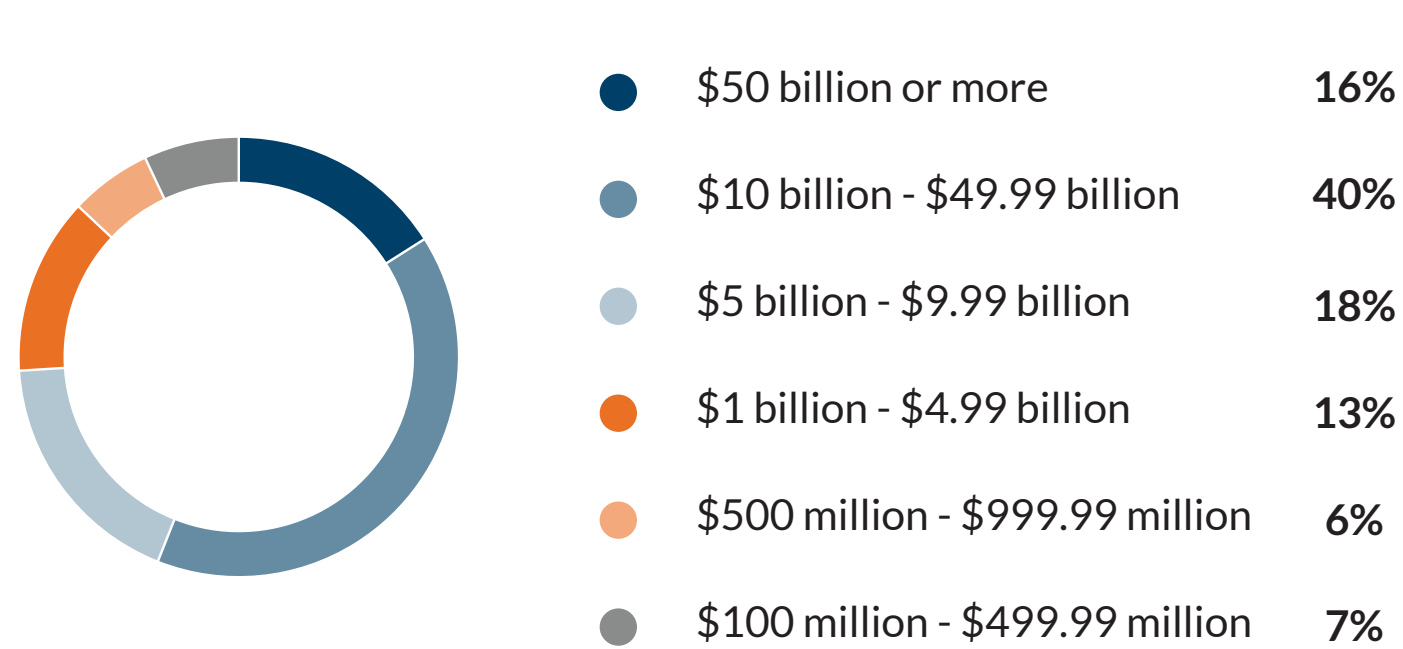
SIZE OF ORGANIZATION (OUTSIDE OF FINANCIAL SERVICES) –  
BY GROSS ANNUAL REVENUE IN U.S. DOLLARS



SIZE OF ORGANIZATION (WITHIN FINANCIAL SERVICES) –  
BY ASSETS UNDER MANAGEMENT IN U.S. DOLLARS



SIZE OF GOVERNMENT AGENCY –  
BY ANNUAL BUDGET IN U.S. DOLLARS



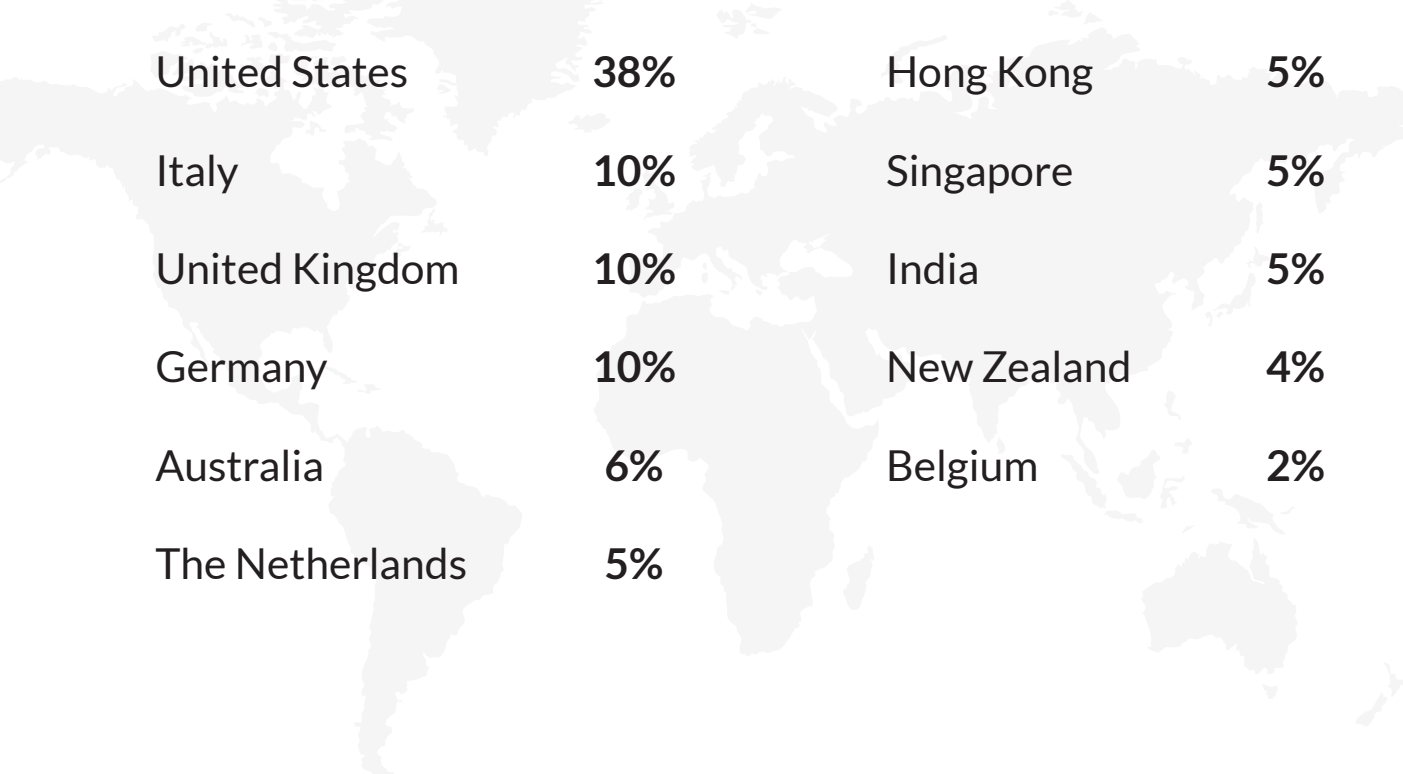
TYPE OF ORGANIZATION



SCOPE OF ORGANIZATION



ORGANIZATION HEADQUARTERS







# About the authors



**Chris Wright**  
*Managing Director*

Chris is the global leader of Protiviti’s CFO Solutions and Business Performance Improvement practices, encompassing Finance Transformation and the firm’s Supply Chain, Operations, and People and Change practices. He also sponsors our global ESG services steering committee. Chris, who has more than 35 years of experience, assists companies working through transactions and restructurings, and those experiencing restatements, regulatory inquiries, stock compensation and financial investigations, and difficulties in implementing new accounting pronouncements. Chris serves on the boards of several charitable, civic, educational and business organizations.



**Kerry Buchar**  
*Managing Director*

Kerry is a Managing Director based in Chicago with over 25 years of experience in accounting and finance, including both industry and consulting roles. She provides hands-on advisory services to clients across industries in areas focused on financial planning and analysis, strategic reporting, profitability optimization, and process enhancement. Her background includes a deep knowledge of operational and financial accounting and process transformation, along with management experience in collaborative and cross-functional settings.



**Nick McKeehan**  
*Managing Director*

Nick serves as Protiviti’s global leader for Financial Reporting Remediation and Compliance services. He has over 20 years of experience leading finance transformations, including public company transitions, financial accounting transitions (ASC 606 and 842), reconciliation and restatement projects, accounting and finance process and technology improvement, shared service centralization, and financial application implementation. Nick’s industry expertise includes private equity, manufacturing, distribution, life sciences and pharmaceutical, and financial services. He is a certified public accountant, certified internal auditor and certified information systems auditor.





## About the authors (continued)



**Shawn Seasongood**

*Managing Director*

Shawn leads Protiviti’s Finance and Performance Management segment and also is a leader in Protiviti’s Operational and Financial Transformation practices. He assists clients globally with business and system transformations to address growth, scalability of systems, challenges and process effectiveness. He is proficient in finance and back-office operations, systems solutions, financial reporting requirements, general ledger systems, and various other finance areas. Shawn has led numerous large reporting transformation initiatives focused on establishing and improving GAAP, MD&A and statutory reporting processes. He also is one of Protiviti’s leaders in the firm’s Property & Casualty, Life Reinsurance, and Broker Insurance practices, with a deep understanding of insurance rules and regulations, processes, and risks.



**Andrea Vardaro Thomas**

*Managing Director*

Andrea is a seasoned finance and business transformation leader with extensive experience in FP&A, forecasting, data analytics, technology-enabled transformation, and public company readiness. She has successfully led finance modernization initiatives and process optimization programs that improved operational efficiency and elevated financial insights. Andrea partners closely with executive leadership teams to prepare organizations for the demands of being a public company, streamline reporting and planning processes, and deliver actionable, data-driven strategies that enable smarter decision-making, business growth and long-term value creation.





## About Protiviti

Protiviti ([www.protiviti.com](http://www.protiviti.com)) is a global consulting firm that delivers deep expertise, objective insights, a tailored approach and unparalleled collaboration to help leaders confidently face the future. Protiviti and its independent and locally owned member firms provide clients with consulting and managed solutions in finance, technology, operations, data, digital, legal, HR, risk and internal audit through a network of more than 90 offices in over 25 countries.

Named to the *Fortune* 100 Best Companies to Work For® list for the 11th consecutive year, Protiviti has served more than 80 percent of *Fortune* 100 and nearly 80 percent of *Fortune* 500 companies. The firm also works with government agencies and smaller, growing companies, including those looking to go public. Protiviti is a wholly owned subsidiary of Robert Half Inc. (NYSE: RHI).

### How we help CFOs and finance organizations

The role of finance executives is dynamic, constantly evolving to keep pace with technology and the changing demands of internal and external customers. Protiviti helps finance leaders address their current challenges, prepare for future challenges and explore opportunities for continuous growth, delivering innovative solutions and supporting finance as a forward-thinking, strategic partner for the business.





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\*MEMBER FIRM



The Protiviti logo, consisting of the word "protiviti" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by a registered trademark symbol (®). The logo is centered horizontally and vertically on a dark blue background with flowing, wavy lines in shades of blue and orange.

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