



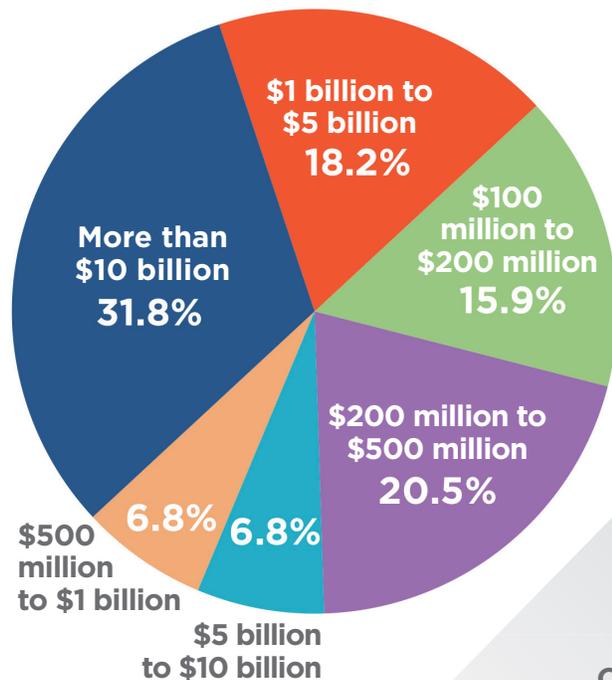
SURVEY:

FINANCE EXECUTIVES SEE AUTOMATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND ANALYTICS AS KEY DRIVERS OF GROWTH

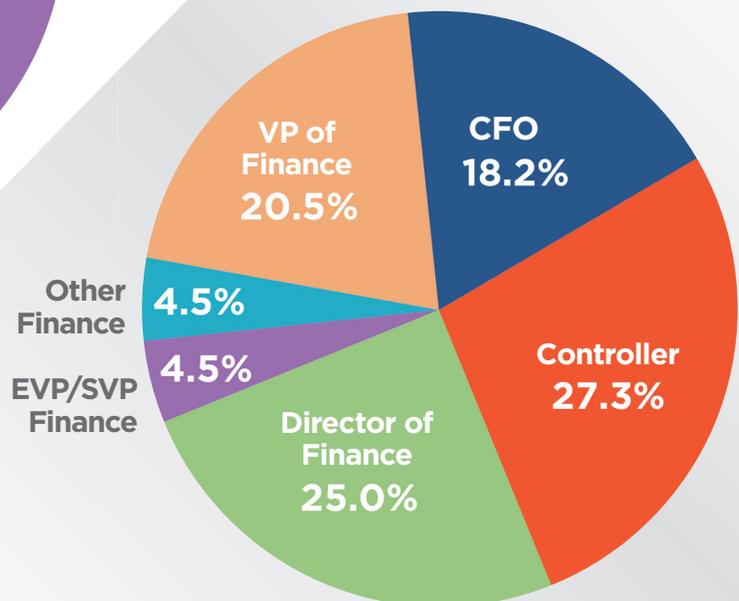
IN THESE DAYS OF BIG DATA, predictive analytics, and digital transformation, the influence of finance executives is expanding as their responsibilities transcend traditional accounting and reporting activities. Finance leaders today are expected to be change agents who champion new technologies, refine processes, embrace data, and enlist the best talent—all in addition to their daily responsibilities.

The downside is that many feel overextended and understaffed, according to a poll of 44 senior finance executives conducted by Innovation Enterprise in collaboration with CohnReznick. Almost one-third (32%) of respondents were from companies with revenues of more than \$10 billion. By title, 18% of respondents were CFOs, 27% were controllers, 25% were directors of finance, and 20% were vice presidents of finance.

RESPONDENTS BY REVENUE



RESPONDENTS BY TITLE



TOP PRIORITIES: AUTOMATION AND ANALYTICS

If there is one consistent theme throughout survey responses, it's the conviction that technology and data can propel the finance function to new levels of efficiency and productivity.

Technology can fully automate a significant number of manual, rules-based tasks, and partially automate many more. Accordingly, automation of functions to strengthen budgeting and planning is the No. 1 priority of survey respondents. CFOs are particularly attuned to the importance of automated processes, with 43% saying that it's their top objective.

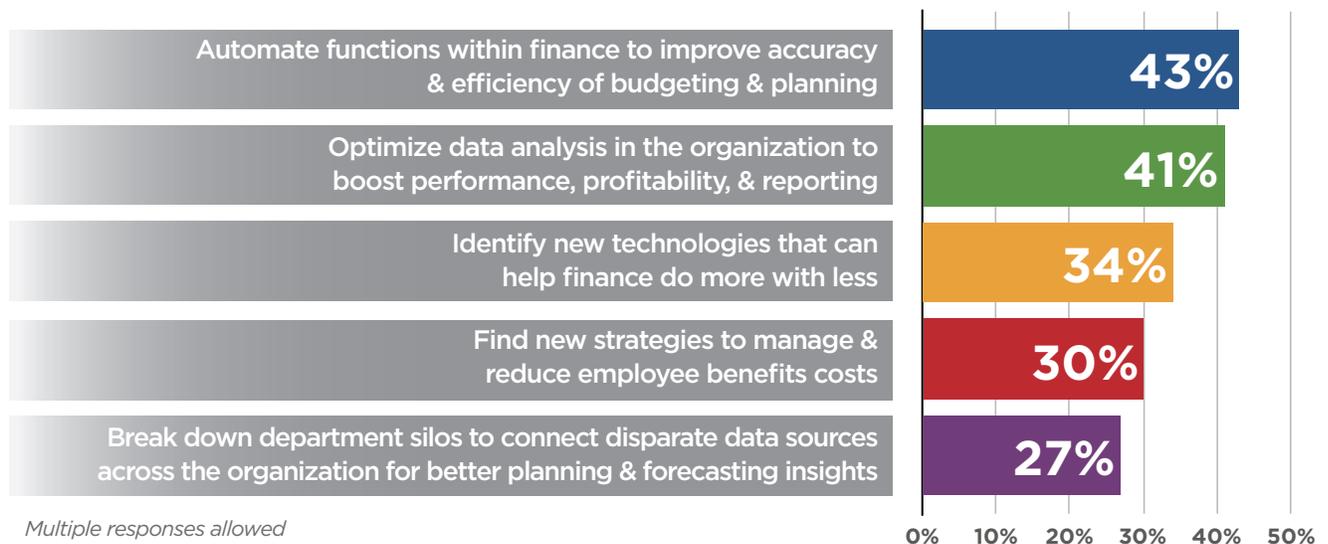
Beyond automation, finance executives plan to identify new technologies that can increase the productivity and impact of finance. Again, CFOs see this need more clearly.

Data is also top of mind. Increasingly, finance leaders understand that analytics can strengthen productivity and efficiencies, inform decision-making, and help keep pace with customer preferences. Many respondents said that analytics can enhance performance and profitability, as well as improve the accuracy of reporting. To gain the full measure of analytics, however, businesses will need to make sure that financial data is accessible to relevant employees and is not sidelined in departmental silos.

43%

Of CFOs said automation of finance functions is a top priority

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE TOP PRIORITIES FOR YOU IN 2019?



UNDER PRESSURE AND OVERWORKED

Today's overbusy finance leaders said one of their biggest challenges is fulfilling multiple roles and addressing constantly shifting priorities. CFOs are among the most industrious: Almost two-thirds said they pivot between multiple roles and responsibilities. Another key pressure is helping the finance team navigate rapidly shifting priorities.

Perhaps the most striking finding is an apparent lack of concern about cybersecurity and privacy threats. Today, cybertheft is the fastest-growing crime in the U.S. and new privacy regulations like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have expanded privacy and compliance obligations. Yet only 19% of executives said they feel pressure to address data privacy, compliance, and cybersecurity.

And while big organizations tend to have more mature cybersecurity programs, fewer executives from the largest firms cited security and privacy pressures. It could be that finance executives don't see themselves as ultimately responsible for security and privacy, but forward-thinking leaders should take an active role in the battle to safeguard data.

14%

Of respondents from big firms cited security and privacy pressures

WHAT PRESSURES DO YOU ACTIVELY FACE IN YOUR ROLE?



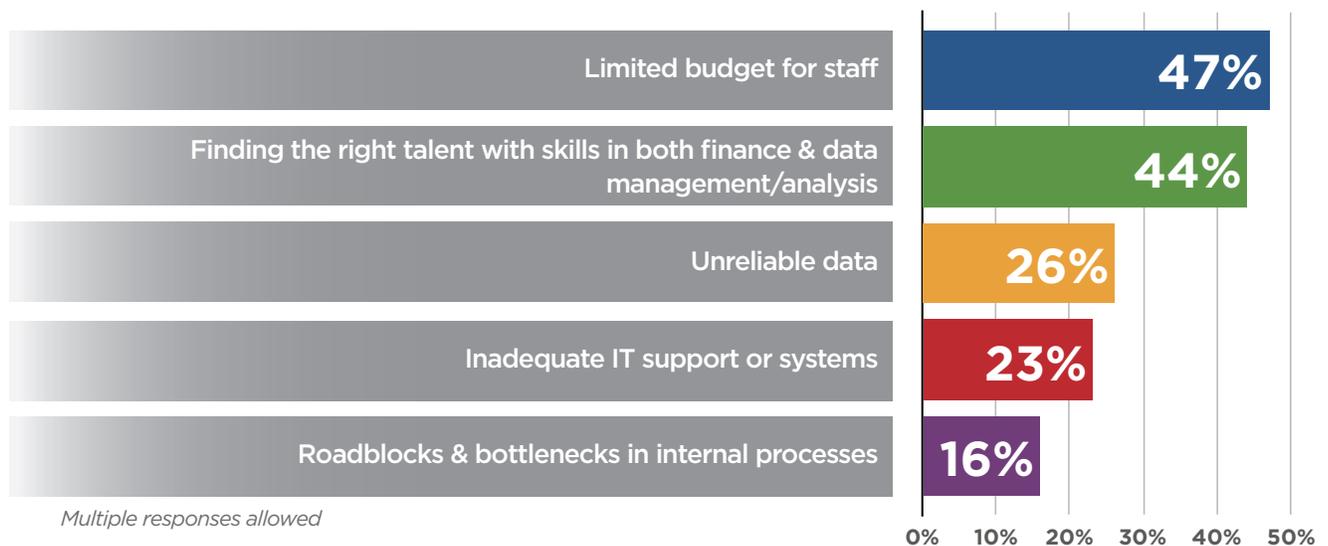
OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

Budget constraints, as well as an inability to find talent with the right blend of finance and data skills, are top obstacles. Demand for tech talent is high—IBM predicts that the number of jobs for US data professionals will increase by 364,000 openings to 2.72 million by 2020—but finance executives say staff budgets remain low.

In fact, almost half of respondents said tight personnel funds impede performance. And while slightly fewer (43%) of executives from the largest organizations cited low budgets, half also reported difficulty finding staff with the right digital skills.

What's more, given the primacy of data in operational and finance functions, most executives understand that accurate information has become the lifeblood of business. Yet only one-quarter (26%) of respondents said unreliable data is an impediment to achieving goals, a number that, if anything, seems low.

WHICH OBSTACLES DO YOU FACE IN ACHIEVING YOUR BUSINESS GOALS?



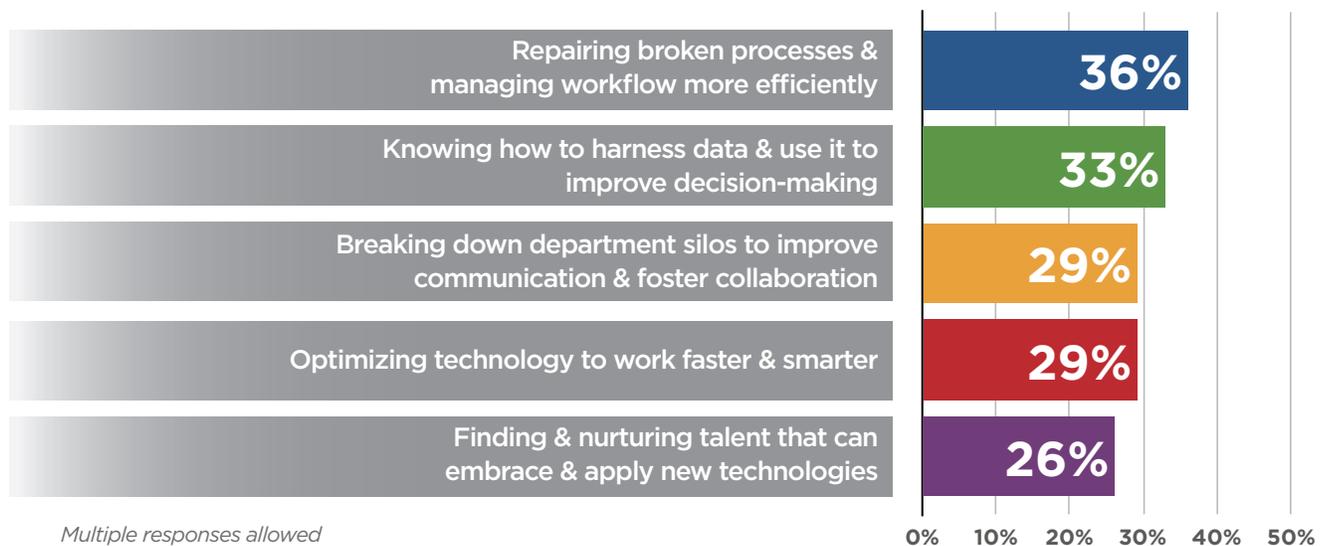
SUCCESS FACTORS

Finance leaders have an ambitious agenda for the coming year. Many said they are looking to improve business processes, more effectively harness the power of data, and boost collaboration to enhance efficiencies. They believe progress will also require that they optimize technology and onboard employees with digital skills.

Redesigned processes and more efficient workflow management are at the top of the finance agenda. Mid-size businesses (\$200 million to \$500 million) are most likely to focus on processes. CFOs tend to emphasize optimizing technology, as do executives from the largest companies.

Finance leaders know that championing data-driven decision-making and a data-centric culture can help achieve forward-looking insights to help shape business strategy and improve performance. In this area, smaller companies are at a disadvantage.

WHAT COULD MOST HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR BUSINESS GOALS?



*Source: THE QUANT CRUNCH HOW THE DEMAND FOR DATA SCIENCE SKILLS IS DISRUPTING THE JOB MARKET <https://www.ibm.com/downloads/cas/3RL3VXGA>

USING DATA TO DRIVE VALUE

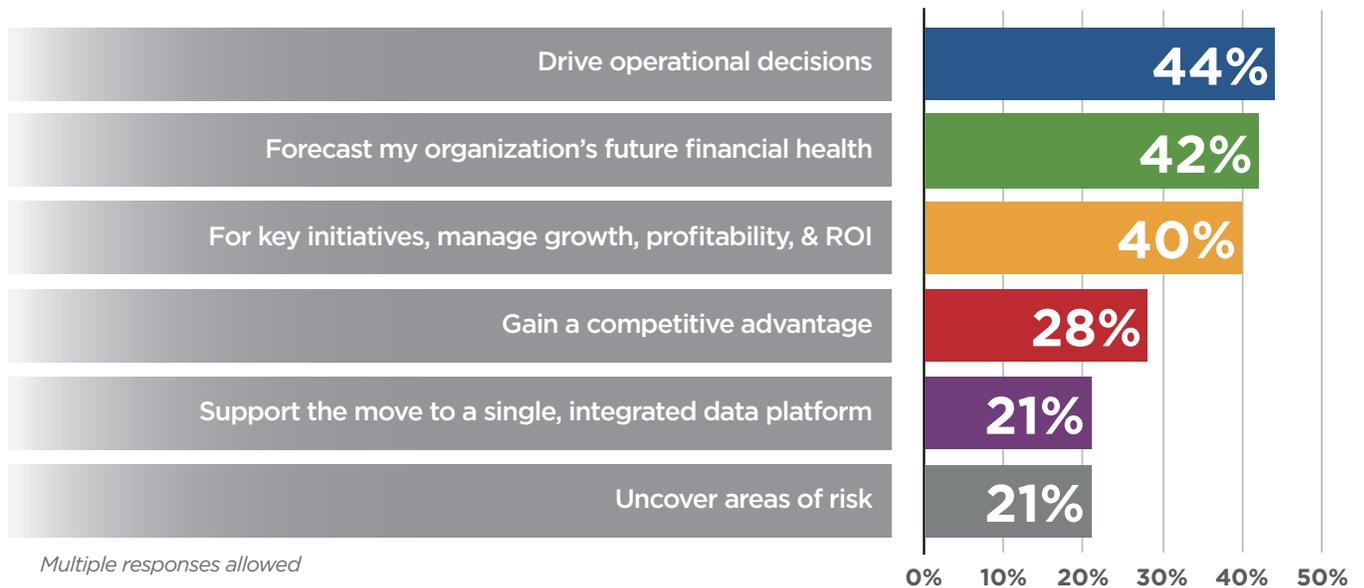
Business intelligence, particularly when combined with an integrated business planning (IBP) strategy, can help the finance function make more informed operational decisions. Executives from larger companies are considerably more likely to seek insights from data, as are CFOs.

Many executives said they also use analytics to improve the accuracy of financial forecasts. The smallest companies are less likely to use data for forecasting, while more CFOs do so. CFOs are also more apt to use data to manage the growth and profitability of key initiatives.

75%

Of CFOs use analytics to drive operational decision-making

HOW CAN ADVANCED DATA ANALYTICS PROVIDE THE MOST LEVERAGE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?





HOW EXECUTIVES CAN EXPAND THEIR ROLE IN TRANSFORMATION

As these survey results show, data and digital transformation are redefining the role and reach of today's finance leaders. They are expected to embrace complex technologies like data analytics and artificial intelligence, as well as re-engineer processes to achieve operational efficiencies and inspire collaboration and productivity. Given the tight labor market, particularly for data specialists, finance executives are also under pressure to proactively recruit and retain digitally skilled employees.

Crafting a strategy to address these demands will be an arduous undertaking for many. The key is to first identify a single initiative that is most likely to have an immediate impact on your organization. Next, redouble traditional planning to understand your organization's current state, define the ideal target state, and chart a roadmap that unites existing capabilities with tomorrow's business needs. Only then will you be prepared to begin the real work of aligning technologies, processes, and people skills with organizational objectives and shifting market forces.

NOTES

ABOUT COHNREZNICK

As one of the top advisory, assurance, and tax firms in the United States, CohnReznick, LLP combines the focused expertise of a global firm with a responsive, entrepreneurial approach to build tailored offerings that drive real results. Together, our handpicked teams of industry practitioners, business intelligence specialists, and data scientists work collaboratively with you to unlock the breakthrough ideas that define your vision and solve dynamic business issues to achieve the best possible outcomes. Clients range from growth-oriented middle-market companies to some of the world's largest enterprises. Headquartered in New York, NY with offices nationwide, the firm serves organizations around the world through its global subsidiaries and membership in Nexia International. www.cohnreznick.com

ABOUT INNOVATION ENTERPRISE

Innovation Enterprise is a business media company specializing in enterprise innovation. We bring exceptional cross-industry knowledge to the business community through a combination of digital media and live summits, providing organizations with cutting-edge insights to drive growth in the constantly changing business environment.

Through our key channels—big data, analytics, strategy, innovation, digital, finance, and operations—we connect industry leaders across the business spectrum, from leading Fortune 500 companies to disruptive and exciting new startups, facilitating the sharing of ideas through webinars, articles, white papers, and on-demand video content.

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