



SolveXia

# CFO Thought Leader Survey

2019



## Introduction

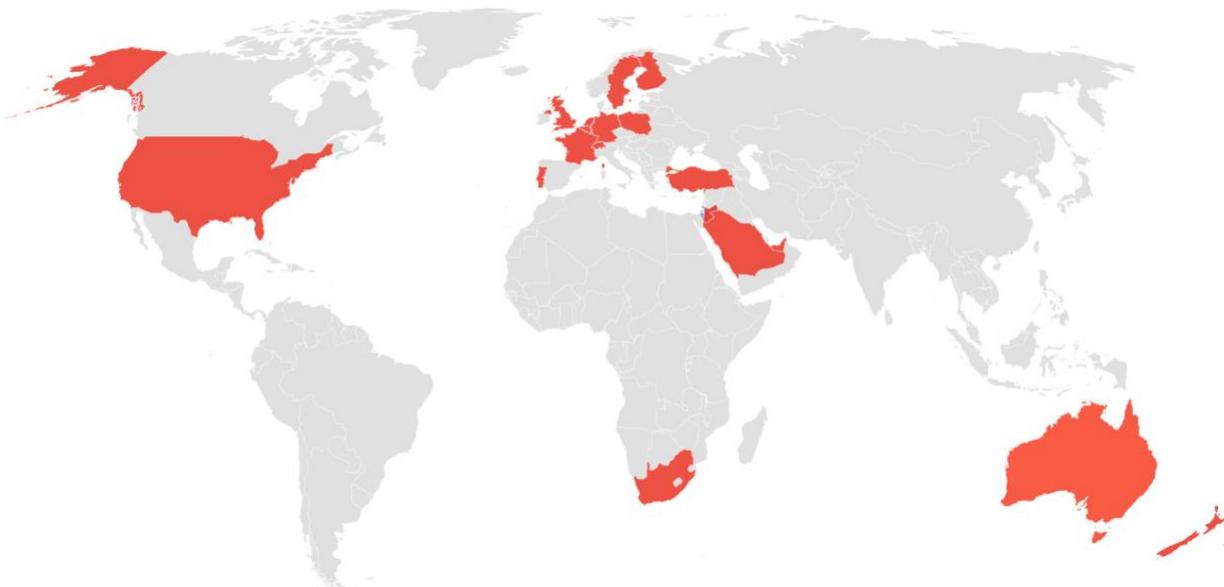
Finance departments, both large and small, must evolve if they are going to remain relevant and thrive in 2019. CFOs must keep pace with an ever-increasing hunger for data collection and analysis. They must not only comply with but also derive competitive advantage from regulatory burdens. Finally, they are expected to facilitate better communication to ensure finance is helping the business achieve its goals.

CFOs like Derek Cashel of media company Australian Metro Publishing is well aware of the shifting landscape and the call for finance to upskill: “CFOs require a new set of data skills to be able to solve the transactional finance problem long term. That, and a strong vision for what your strategic finance will actually do with business partners.”

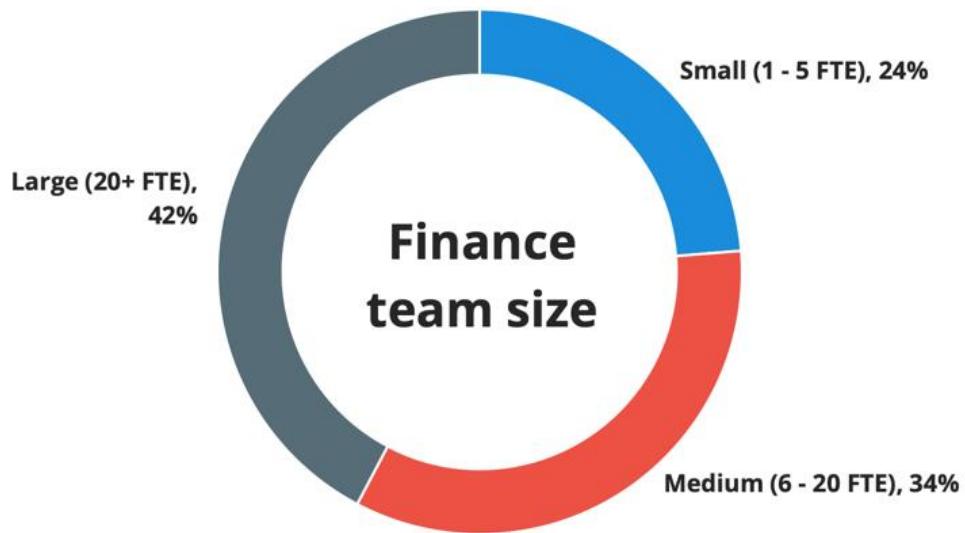
Many CFOs share Derek's sentiment. Data analysis and automation are changing the landscape for finance departments. To learn more, we asked CFOs around the world to share their insight for the CFO Thought Leadership Survey for 2019.

## Who completed the survey?

The survey was completed by 100 finance leaders across APAC, USA, UK, Europe, South Africa and the middle east. We had a great response from companies large and small, including the likes of eBay, Siemens, LexisNexis, Sandoz, Allergan and others. Here is the geographic spread:



Respondents included CFOs from small, medium and large companies – we have based their classification off the size of their finance teams.

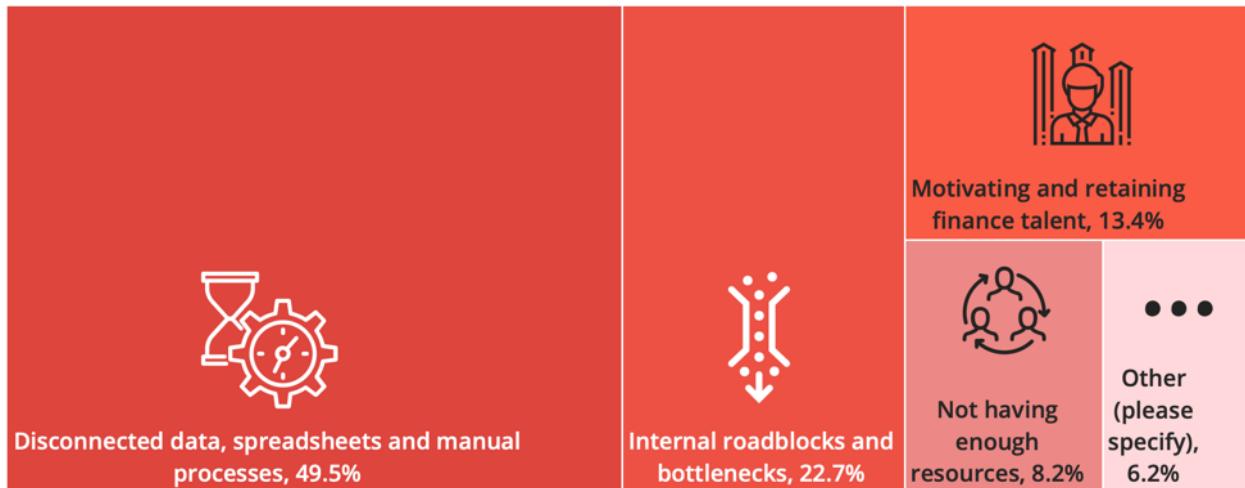


## What data did we collect?

Survey participants indicated their key objectives and challenges for Finance in 2019. They also provided metrics to help determine the size of their finance organisation. To help with analysis, we have defined the size of finance teams, based on headcount as small 1-5, medium 6-20, and large 20+).

## Key findings from the survey

Respondents were asked to select their key challenge for 2019 from one of five choices:



Finance leaders share similar concerns for 2019. These include:

- Disconnected data and manual processes (49%)
- Internal roadblocks and bottlenecks (22%)
- Retaining talent (13%)

The concern for the challenges listed above is understandable. Many finance departments are simply too busy keeping up with BAU tasks to innovate or be more strategic. As the number of systems and data sources continue to grow, CFOs face an increasing burden that needs to be addressed. Failure to do so will mean that their staff are permanently bogged down in spreadsheets.

Respondents were asked to specify their key objectives for 2019:



Following on from challenges, there was commonality and a shared vision for many CFOs when discussing their objectives for 2019. In particular, the most popular objectives were:

- Spend more time on analysis and communication with the business (42%)
- Increase finance agility through digital transformation (31%)

## What do these results mean for CFOs?

CFOs need to invest in emerging technologies and new skills for their staff. Only then can finance leaders free their staff from BAU and turn data into insights for the business. The rate of innovation in analytics and automation means that CFOs and their department risk being left behind.

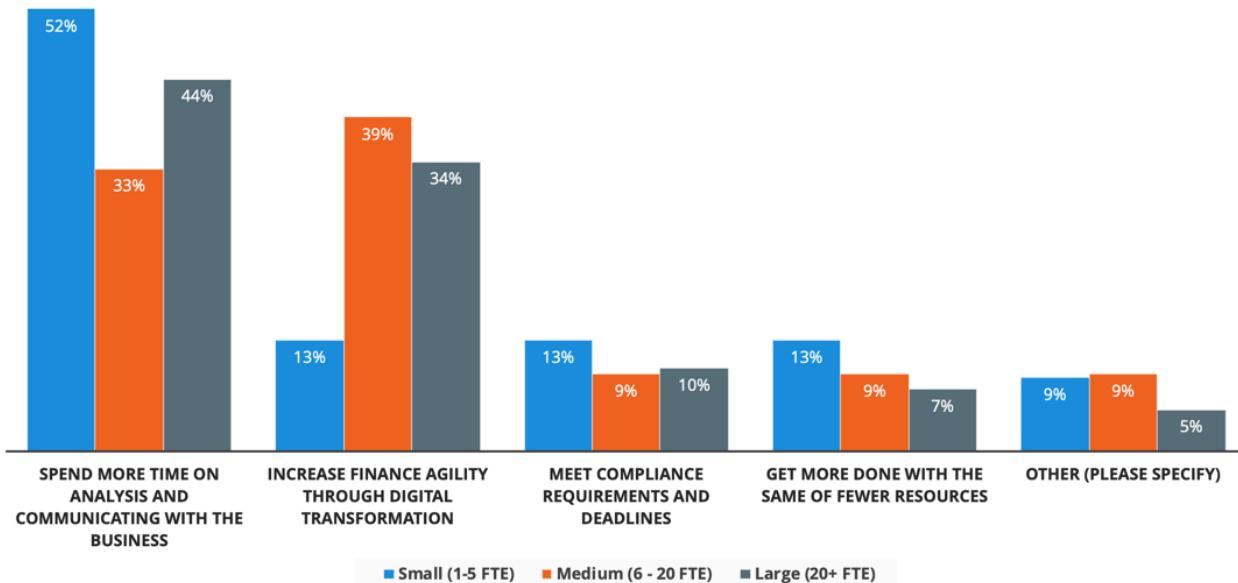
Mark Garratt, CFO of recruiting company Harvey Nash Group shares the sentiment. "I believe that now is the time for Tech (AI, RPA, blockchain, etc) to transform finance departments and transaction processing. All finance leaders need to be comfortable with the language and possibilities these disciplines enable."

Next, we will take a closer look at the insights shared in the survey.

## A Look at the Numbers

### Objectives for CFOs

The key objective for both small and large companies is to be able to spend more time on analysis and communicating with the business. The key focus for medium-sized financial teams, however, is to become more agile through digital transformation:



More analysis and communication was a popular objective for finance teams regardless of their size. This desire can be attributed to the changing role of finance (and the CFO) - [a well documented phenomenon in 2019](#).

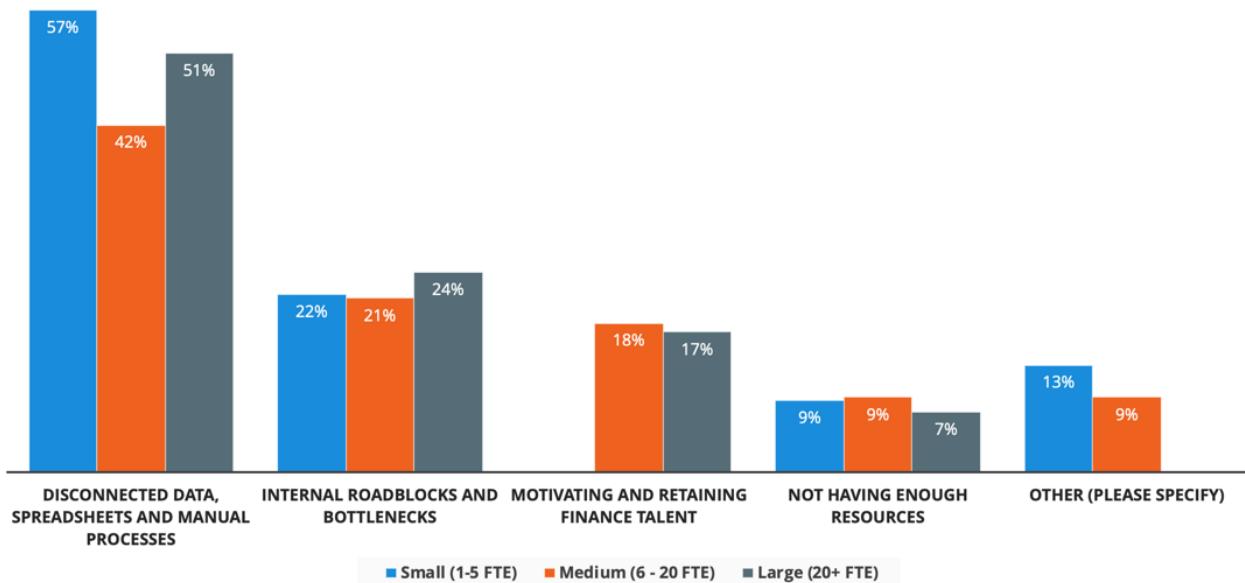
Digital transformation remains a priority, particularly for medium and large finance teams (39% and 34% of respondents respectively) - however, small finance teams were noticeably less interested in this objective. This could be because smaller finance teams do not suffer the burden of legacy systems and outdated processes - more prevalent in large organisations.

## Challenges in 2019

Disconnected data, spreadsheets and manual processes continue to be a thorn in the side of most CFOs - chosen by 49% of CFOs as their key challenge.

Three out of every four companies said their data is [trapped in legacy systems](#) - costing organisations \$140 billion dollars each year in wasted time and opportunities. Coupled with the issue of data silos (the average company uses 500 different systems at any given time), finance feels the burn of disconnected data more than most departments.

To bridge the gap (caused by disconnected data), finance staff resort to spreadsheets and manual processes. Finance leaders must take steps in 2019 to address this issue - discussed later in this report.



Another key challenge for finance teams of all sizes was the prevalence of roadblocks and bottlenecks. When viewing the processes within the finance department as an iceberg, many tasks sit below the surface. They are less well known, often undocumented and rely on a small handful of subject matter experts. Below-the-surface tasks that become bottlenecks can have reverberating effects on the finance department. Deadlines can be missed. Staff work over weekends to submit regulatory filings on time.

While not a key concern for small finance teams, retaining talent remains an issue for CFOs of medium and large finance organisations (18% and 17% of the vote respectively). Finance leaders need to be aware of the warning signs and reasons [why staff leave](#) and need to put strategies in place to motivate and retain key staff.

## Key Takeaways

### You're Not Alone

Based on the responses to the survey, CFOs across the globe are facing similar challenges and share ambitions, particularly for greater analysis, communication and agility. Finance-specific automation and data analysis tools, like SolveXia, can prove invaluable to CFOs.

SolveXia has been helping finance teams overcome these challenges for over a decade. In our experience, the CFOs most likely to succeed and thrive are those able to foster a culture of finance innovation. To do this, finance leaders must:

- Invest in people, processes and technology with equal weighting
- Encourage, support and protect staff as they automate and innovate
- Rethink how projects are identified and funded. They start small and embrace failure.

Paul Lennie, CFO at Asurion a global insurance company shared the following insight; “Most CFOs are thinking how technology can be incorporated into their organization to solve their biggest pain point of disconnected data and manual processes. The key to this is how you successfully execute these transformations in today’s ever-evolving environment where new technology is continuously hitting the market. This problem is solved by fusing your employees’ unique skill-sets with technology that is right for your organization and sometimes this means that you must take the path that is different to what you perceive your competitors to be doing”

### Dealing with disconnected data

CFOs can leverage [automation](#) to fill gaps and connect disparate data sources. Such tools dramatically reduce the time needed to collect, cleanse and prepare data. This will reduce the burden of tedious manual tasks and spreadsheet overload.

When finance staff are given the right tools, their BAU jobs become easier and they save time. In the place of mundane, repetitive work, finance can focus their efforts on analysis and insight generation. By doing so, they can provide further value and strategic insight to the business. The by-product of this transformation is that staff feel more empowered in their work - helping with staff retention.

## Eliminating bottlenecks and roadblocks

Finance leaders can [leverage modern, cloud-based tools](#) to introduce agility and visibility into the data processing performed within their department.

Automation technology, like SolveXia, reduces the dependency on spreadsheets, macros and formulae. These tools eliminate dependency on key staff - particularly during month end - and thus mitigate key bottlenecks. Automation also improves the consistency and accuracy of reporting and data preparation - reducing rework and further bottlenecks.

Furthermore, such modern tools empower finance to create and maintain solutions with little to no dependency on the IT department. This helps finance to become more agile and responsive to demands from the business, customers and the regulatory environment.

## The Future of Finance & Technology

The finance landscape is changing rapidly, in part due to new demands being placed on CFOs and as a result of emerging technologies - in particular for data analysis and automation. This evolution is changing the role of the CFO from financial steward to a leader of innovation and strategy. A view shared by Suzy Watson, CFO of Practera: "Gone are the days of CFOs as process managers and gatekeepers. Automation will have a huge impact on the future of the Finance Function and those steering that ship. CFOs need to understand not only their own business models and processes but also other business models and innovations that are now emerging rapidly, that could either disrupt their industry or market or give their business the edge."

The value of automation is its ability to augment and elevate existing finance staff. Employees and finance leaders can instead focus on the more human elements of their role, including analysis, generation of insights and on communication. According to Stephen Malcolmson, CFO at Crown Equipment Corporation, a global logistics company, "The CFO now and certainly in the future is that of a strategic thinker and leader, with the empathy and soft skills that AI today still cannot master."

By leveraging these new and emerging technologies, upskilling finance staff and re-focusing effort, CFOs can future-proof their department for 2020 and beyond.

## About SolveXia

SolveXia automates reporting, reconciliations, and workflow. We help CFOs innovate, reduce costs and increase the accuracy and timeliness of their reporting. Companies across APAC, UK, EMEA and USA have been using our cloud-based automation platform since 2008.

SolveXia works by providing functionality to automate data processing and reporting across four key categories

- **Data wrangling:** Collect, combine, cleanse and validate data
- **Calculations:** Including support for formulae, aggregations and advanced analytics
- **Reporting:** Data storage, business intelligence and visualisation
- **Governance:** Process orchestration, version control, admin and audit

Our unique, cloud-platform, allows companies to start automating in minutes, with unlimited scale – whether you automate 1 or 1,000 processes.

To learn more, please go to [solvexia.com](http://solvexia.com).