



National Technology News

Overcoming Operational Hurdles: The Role of Technology in Finance Management

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Today's finance function stands at a critical inflection point, shaped by competing pressures of operational complexity and strategic opportunity.

While technological capabilities have advanced dramatically, many companies remain constrained by operational architectures that inhibit both efficiency and strategic agility. This contrast presents a fundamental challenge: how can finance teams evolve beyond their traditional administrative role to become strategic enablers of business growth?

This report reveals persistent operational barriers that extend far beyond simple technology gaps. Manual processes, disconnected systems, and limited real-time insight continue to hold Finance teams back. These inefficiencies risk undermining decision-making, exposing organisations to risk and slow growth. The prevalence of spreadsheet-dependent workflows for critical functions such as cash forecasting and risk analysis exemplifies this challenge, representing not merely a technology preference but often a reflection of deeper integration limitations within existing financial infrastructures.

Legacy system architectures compound these difficulties by creating information silos that impede accurate payment tracking and timing. The resulting operational delays generate both direct costs through processing inefficiencies and indirect risks through compliance exposure and fraud vulnerability. These challenges are particularly acute in an environment where reporting delays can compromise organisational responsiveness to market changes.

As companies expand internationally, treasury functions must navigate increasingly sophisticated regulatory frameworks that vary significantly across jurisdictions and evolve continuously. Rather than viewing compliance as purely constraining, forward-thinking businesses are beginning to recognise regulatory adherence as a competitive differentiator that can enhance market access and stakeholder confidence.

Against this backdrop, National Technology News and Bottomline have undertaken a comprehensive industry survey of senior finance professionals to examine how companies respond to these multifaceted challenges. The research explores the spectrum of approaches being employed to modernise financial operations, from payment process optimisation to enhanced cash visibility and fraud prevention capabilities.

The insights gathered from finance and treasury leaders reveal not only the immediate operational challenges confronting the industry but also the emerging strategic priorities that are reshaping the finance function's role within organisational leadership. This analysis examines how automation adoption varies across different organisational contexts, the factors driving technology investment decisions, and the relationship between operational efficiency and strategic contribution.

Most significantly, it reveals that companies typically fall into one of three distinct organisational archetypes based on their current operational maturity and strategic outlook:

'Traditional Operators'

These companies are largely manual

'Transformation in Progress'

These companies have mixed automation

'Digital Leaders'

These companies are highly automated

The current landscape reveals persistent operational barriers that extend far beyond simple technology gaps.

Understanding these archetypes provides valuable insight into the transformation pathways available to finance leaders and the critical success factors that distinguish high-performing functions from their peers.

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Methodology

National Technology News and Bottomline surveyed 200 finance professionals from companies across the UK to uncover their biggest pain points in payment processing, how their finance teams handle cash visibility, and how far they have come in automating their payment and cash management systems.

Please note: Percentages may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding, non-response exclusions, and questions allowing multiple responses. All figures are rounded to the nearest whole number unless otherwise indicated.

Key findings



The Automation Paradox

Only 11 per cent of respondents have automated more than 90 per cent of their finance processes, yet 25 per cent of finance professionals spend over three-quarters of their time on tasks that could be automated



Legacy Dependency Persists

Cross-border transaction delays affect 18 per cent of respondents as their biggest payment processing challenge, whilst 47 per cent still rely on manual bank portal consolidation for cash visibility



Strategic Potential Unrealised

Just 34 per cent of finance professionals play a proactive role in business strategy and forecasting, with an equal proportion having limited strategic input – leaving two-thirds of organisations underutilising their finance function's potential



Process Governance Gaps

38 per cent of respondents review their payment processes infrequently or have no formal review process, despite operating in an environment of increasing fraud risks and regulatory change



Integration Disconnect

43 per cent of respondents struggle with managing global or multi-entity financial operations, yet only



1. What is your organisation's biggest challenge in payment processing?

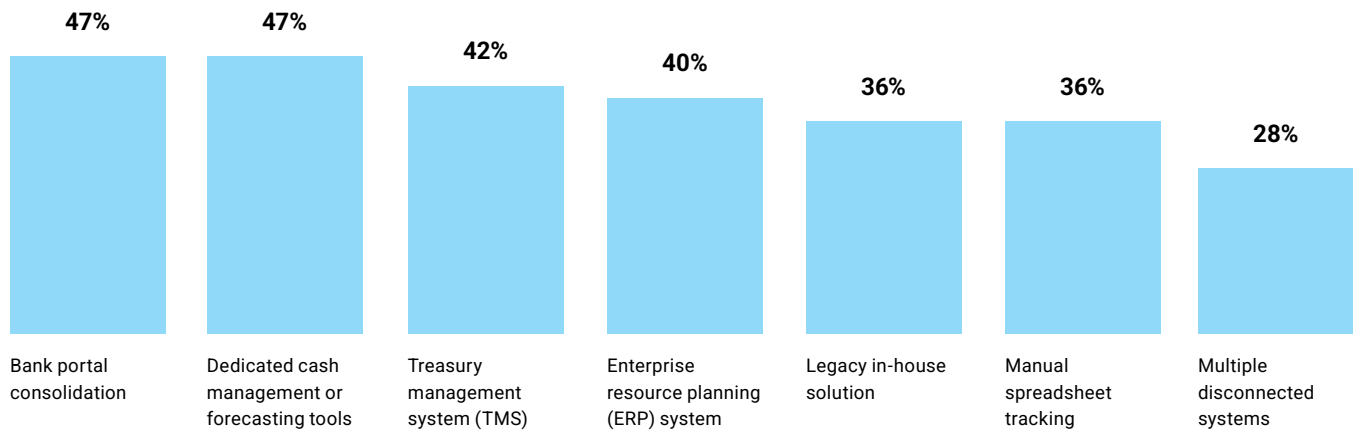
(Select one option)



These payment processing challenges directly impact how companies approach cash visibility, with the severity of the impact varying significantly across the archetypes. The following section examines current cash management practices to assess whether existing approaches can address the identified operational constraints.

2. How does your finance team currently manage cash visibility?

(Select all that apply)



Most finance teams deploy 2-3 different systems for cash visibility – a fragmented approach that introduces operational risk and reduces efficiency.

Such companies report higher error rates and operational inefficiencies due to factors including system design, process governance, and staff training, rather than technology architecture alone. This reliance on fragmented approaches is particularly characteristic of 'Traditional Operators' and 'Transformation in Progress' companies, reflecting their varied stages of automation maturity, whereas 'Digital Leaders' typically benefit from more integrated and unified systems.

These risks are especially pronounced when outdated methods such as manual spreadsheet tracking (selected by 36 per cent of respondents), legacy in-house solutions (36 per cent), and multiple disconnected tools (28 per cent) are still in use. These methods are the hallmarks of 'Traditional Operators', whose cash visibility is significantly hampered by labour-intensive and error-prone processes.

Manual bank portal consolidation remains the primary method for 47 per cent of companies – a resource-intensive process that limits real-time decision-making capability. This suggests that many organisations, including those in the 'Transformation in Progress' archetype, continue to depend on direct access to their banking platforms to monitor cash positions.

Although bank consolidation can provide timely information, it has limitations and can quickly become a double-edged sword. If not effectively integrated with cash management platforms, it may reduce rather than enhance flexibility in managing regional banking relationships and responding to market-specific requirements. 'Transformation in Progress' companies frequently face this challenge as they seek to bridge existing operational gaps.

In addition, 47 per cent of respondents reported using dedicated tools for cash management and forecasting, reflecting a growing investment in targeted solutions to improve visibility and control. Similarly, 40 per cent said they had integrated an ERP system,

indicating that more than one-third of respondents, typically those in 'Transformation in Progress' or 'Digital Leaders' categories, already have a centralised platform for managing core financial data, which is essential for ensuring data consistency and enabling scalability.

However, the survey findings also show that these tools are often used in combination with legacy systems and siloed platforms, reinforcing rather than resolving fragmentation across the technology landscape, particularly for 'Transformation in Progress' companies. Unsurprisingly, only a small proportion of respondents (1 per cent) rely solely on ERP systems for cash visibility. Most businesses continue to use ERP systems alongside manual spreadsheets, forecasting tools, or bank portals, which limits the effectiveness of automation and increases the risk of delays, errors, and inefficiencies.

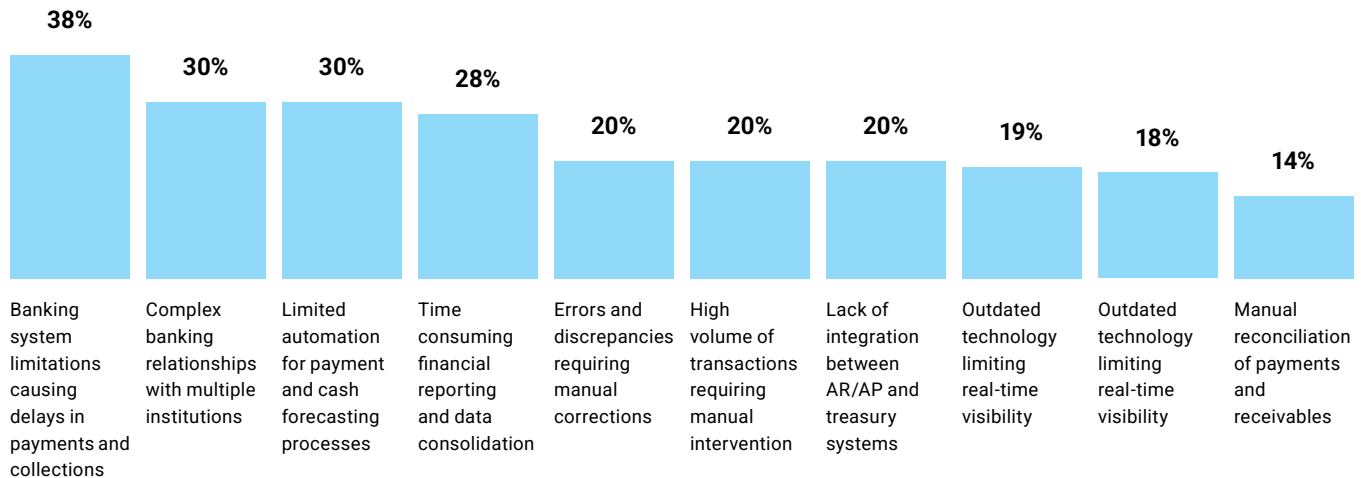
It is important to note that manual spreadsheet monitoring remains surprisingly widespread. This approach is both labour-intensive and error-prone; a single manual mistake can have serious financial consequences. It also increases operational costs, as it requires ongoing human supervision for reconciliation and reporting. This continued prevalence underscores the significant hurdle faced by 'Traditional Operators' in achieving efficient and accurate cash management.

Similarly, the continued reliance on internal legacy systems and multiple disconnected platforms suggests that many 'Traditional Operators' and some 'Transformation in Progress' companies remain locked into outdated or siloed infrastructures that impede scalability and agility.

While finance teams employ diverse tools for cash visibility, the effectiveness of these approaches varies significantly. Understanding the specific operational barriers that prevent real-time visibility provides insight into why multi-tool strategies persist, particularly for those that are still on their journey towards becoming 'Digital Leaders'.

3. Which operational inefficiencies most impact your finance function's ability to achieve real-time cash visibility?

(Select up to three options)



Finance teams face systemic inefficiencies across multiple operational domains, creating compound barriers to real-time liquidity visibility. This suggests that such inefficiencies are not isolated but instead reflect challenges at multiple levels within financial systems and workflows, often directly correlating with the company's archetype.

Banking system limitations lead operational constraints, affect 38 per cent of companies and create downstream visibility challenges. This is followed closely by the complexity of managing relationships with multiple banking institutions (30 per cent) and limited automation of payment and forecasting processes (30 per cent). These leading challenges point to a recurring theme of fragmentation, particularly affecting 'Transformation in Progress' organisations striving for greater coherence. Managing numerous banking relationships, particularly across regions, becomes increasingly burdensome without unified platforms or automated processes.

When combined with outdated or disconnected tools, these factors severely slow decision-making and restrict access to accurate, real-time cash data. In addition, delays in payments and collections further hamper visibility and effective cash flow management.

Another prominent challenge is time-consuming data consolidation and financial reporting, selected by 28 per cent of respondents. This reflects the ongoing reliance on traditional, human-dependent workflows, with many organisations, especially 'Traditional Operators', still compiling reports and financial data by hand, as indicated previously. This raises concerns about whether such activities represent an efficient use of finance teams' time and capabilities.

The remaining responses were fairly evenly distributed, highlighting several persistent operational challenges: errors and discrepancies that require manual intervention, manual processing of payments and receivables, lack of integration between accounts receivable

/ accounts payable (AR/AP) and treasury systems, and outdated technology limiting real-time visibility. These fundamental operational hurdles are most pronounced for 'Traditional Operators' and represent significant barriers to their digital advancement.

The evidence reveals interconnected inefficiencies rather than isolated problems. Outdated systems, integration gaps, and manual processes create compound barriers that systematically undermine real-time cash visibility. This combination of factors is predominantly seen in 'Traditional Operators' and 'Transformation in Progress' companies, defining their distinct paths toward achieving full financial agility.

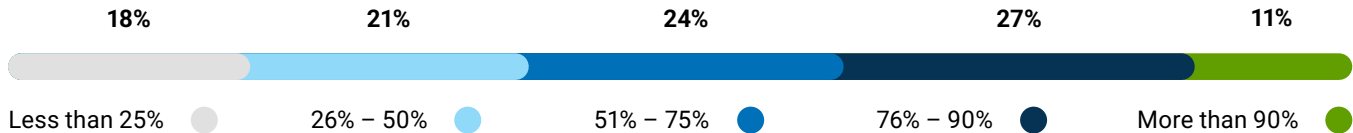
To address this, finance teams should consider adopting consolidated cash management solutions that provide an integrated experience. Such solutions bring together banking relationships, automate payment and forecasting activities, and bridge existing gaps between AR, AP, and treasury systems. These solutions are key enablers for 'Transformation in Progress' companies moving towards the 'Digital Leader' archetype.

For example, addressing inefficiencies arising from the lack of integration between AR/AP and treasury systems, an automated platform can unify the entire payment and cash lifecycle. This includes securing AR/AP workflows from invoice to settlement, eliminating manual steps and insecure paper-based processes, and consolidating banking relationships into a single, real-time view. The result is a more cohesive, data-driven cash intelligence environment that supports faster and more informed financial decision-making, characteristic of advanced 'Digital Leaders'.

The operational inefficiencies identified above create compelling business cases for automation. However, automation adoption varies widely across companies, as revealed in the following analysis of current implementation levels, which further distinguishes between the operational archetypes.

4. What percentage of your finance processes are currently automated?

(Select one option)



Automation levels cluster in the 51-75 per cent range, indicating partial digitisation with substantial efficiency gains remaining unrealised. While this is a positive sign, it also highlights considerable room for further advancement. These findings expose a critical gap: comprehensive automation remains an unrealised opportunity across the majority of finance functions.

These varying levels of automation reflect the emergence of three distinct organisational archetypes within the industry. Just 11 per cent of respondents have automated more than 90 per cent of their finance processes, representing the 'Digital Leaders', who operate with highly integrated ecosystems where finance functions as a strategic partner, leveraging predictive analytics and cross-functional collaboration.

The largest segment, comprising 51 per cent of respondents, falls into the 'Transformation in Progress' archetype, with automation levels between 26 and 75 per cent. These companies exhibit mixed maturity, with pockets of efficiency alongside legacy constraints, and their primary challenge often lies in integration rather than technology acquisition, as they may possess multiple capable systems that operate in isolation.

Finally, nearly 40 per cent of respondents indicated they had automated fewer than half of their financial processes, classifying those companies as 'Traditional Operators', who face the steepest transformation challenge due to their heavily manual operations, which limit their strategic contribution potential. Even modest automation investments can yield substantial returns for this archetype.

Organisations with limited automation exposure face escalating operational and strategic risks. For instance, continued reliance on local storage of payee details and manual verification increases exposure to fraud. More broadly, this lack of automation inhibits scalability, making it difficult to handle rising transaction volumes and increasingly complex compliance demands.

By automating the entire payment lifecycle, companies can enhance payment timeliness, achieve real-time cash visibility, reduce fraud risk through digital verification and monitoring,

and ensure compliance with evolving regulatory standards. This includes embedding technologies such as Confirmation of Payee (CoP), which ensures beneficiary account verification prior to payment execution, thereby reducing fraud and misdirected transactions. CoP supports automation by streamlining verification processes that would otherwise require manual oversight.

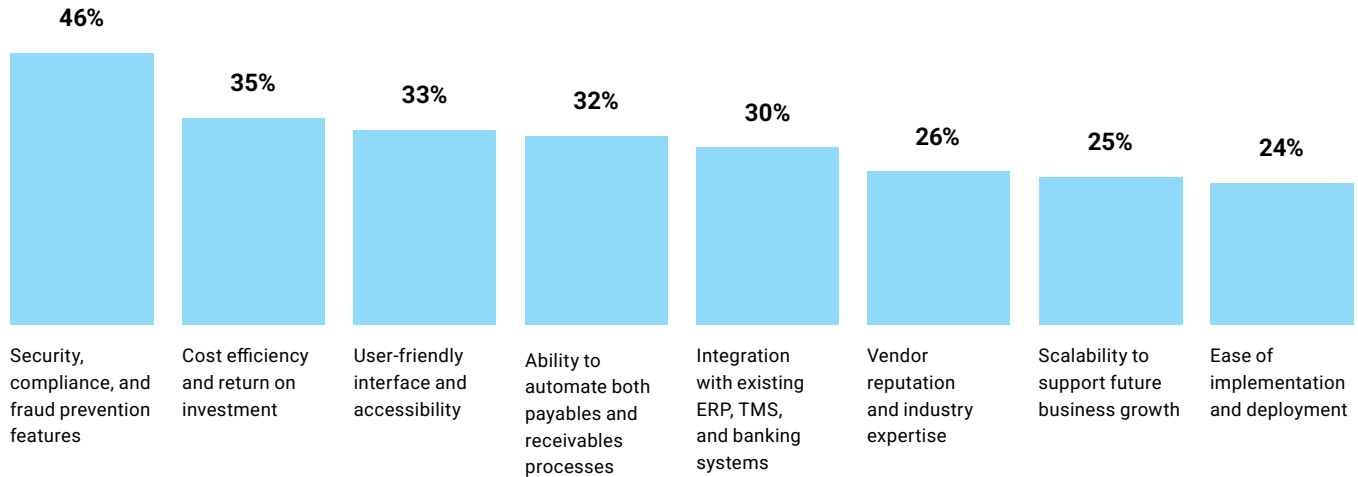
Tokenisation, similarly, plays a growing role in secure automation by replacing sensitive payment and account data with encrypted, non-sensitive equivalents. This enables automated workflows to operate securely at scale, while reducing the risk of data breaches and supporting regulatory compliance. For finance functions aiming to move beyond process efficiency toward resilience and security-by-design, technologies like CoP and tokenisation should be considered integral components of the automation architecture.

Comprehensive payment lifecycle automation enables the integration of all accounts and systems, allowing finance teams to forecast and manage cash with greater precision. Security is also improved, as automation is supported by tools such as digital account verification, and anomaly detection to safeguard transactions.

Leading centralised payment processing platforms typically feature integration capabilities with domestic banking networks and global messaging services. Finance teams should evaluate platforms based on their support for relevant payment rails (Bacs, Faster Payments, SEPA Instant) and assess integration quality through metrics such as:

- **API reliability**
- **System uptime guarantees (99.9%+ availability)**
- **Awareness of regulations that insulate the organisation from change**
- **Availability of pre-integrated bank and payment messaging formats**

5. What are your main criteria when selecting finance automation technology providers? (Select up to three options)



Security, compliance, and fraud prevention dominate technology selection decisions, driving 46 per cent of provider evaluations and reflecting heightened risk awareness.

This finding aligns with regulatory imperatives and increasing concerns around fraud and cyber threats in financial operations. It also reinforces the notion that automation is no longer merely a technical upgrade, but a strategic business necessity.

System integration capabilities influence 30 per cent of technology decisions, highlighting integration as a strategic imperative rather than a technical preference. This improves workflow automation, reduces risk, and saves time.

Modern platforms offering APIs and cloud-native architectures have made integration more achievable than ever. Without such integration, finance teams remain burdened by manual data entry, reconciliation delays, and error-prone processes.

Automation of payables and receivables was also selected by 30 per cent of respondents, suggesting that many teams are pursuing end-to-end automation to break down silos, shorten lead times, and improve visibility into working capital.

Scalability (25 per cent) and ease of implementation (24 per cent) were also identified as key considerations. As businesses grow, integrated systems must be able to adapt without requiring a complete overhaul of the financial infrastructure. Similarly, ease of implementation reduces operational disruption, encourages adoption, and lowers training costs.

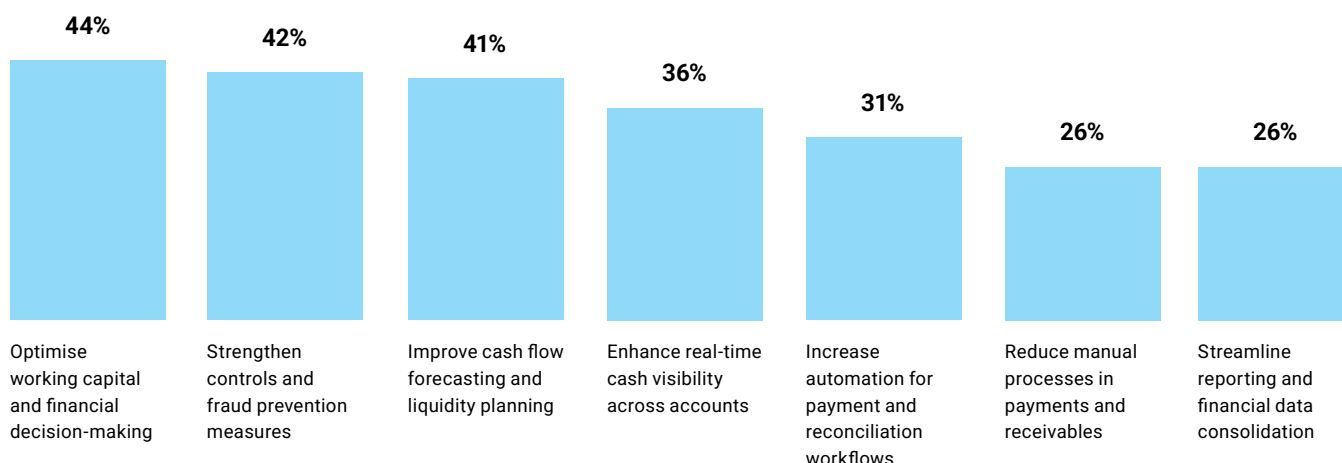
The selection criteria for finance automation technology providers also reflect the distinct needs of the organisational archetypes. For 'Digital Leaders', who have already achieved high levels of automation, the emphasis on security, compliance, and fraud prevention becomes paramount, as they are focused on optimising and protecting their advanced, integrated systems. Their interest in seamless integration is about further enhancing an already cohesive ecosystem.

In contrast, 'Transformation in Progress' companies, while also valuing security, may place a stronger emphasis on the ability to automate both payables and receivables processes and the ease of implementation, as they seek to bridge existing operational gaps and bring disparate systems together.

For 'Traditional Operators', the focus might lean heavily on cost efficiency and return on investment, as well as user-friendly interfaces, as they seek foundational automation that provides clear, immediate benefits and eases the transition from manual processes.

Vendor reputation and industry expertise are crucial across all archetypes, indicating that trust and credibility have become critical factors in finance technology procurement, but perhaps more so for 'Traditional Operators' seeking trusted partners to guide their initial steps in digital transformation.

6. What are your primary goals for improving payments and cash management efficiency? (Select up to three options)



Working capital optimisation and enhanced financial decision-making emerged as primary objectives for 44 per cent of companies, reflecting the strategic evolution of finance functions. This was closely followed by 42 per cent who cited strengthening controls and fraud prevention measures.

These objectives are strategically aligned: working capital optimisation directly enables improved liquidity management, reduced borrowing dependency, and more effective resource allocation – along with greater protections against fraud.

Improved decision-making and enhanced fraud prevention contribute to the overarching objective: a more efficient and resilient finance function. In this context, automation and real-time data have become essential. They provide finance leaders with greater visibility and control, while also reducing delays and errors associated with manual processes.

The primary goals for improving payments and cash management efficiency also diverge among the organisational archetypes, reflecting their current state and strategic ambition. ‘Digital Leaders’ primarily focus on optimising working capital and financial decision-making, and strengthening controls and fraud prevention measures, as their foundational processes are already highly efficient, allowing them to pursue higher-level strategic objectives.

For ‘Transformation in Progress’ companies, enhancing real-time cash visibility across accounts (36 per cent) and increasing automation for payment and reconciliation workflows (31 per cent)

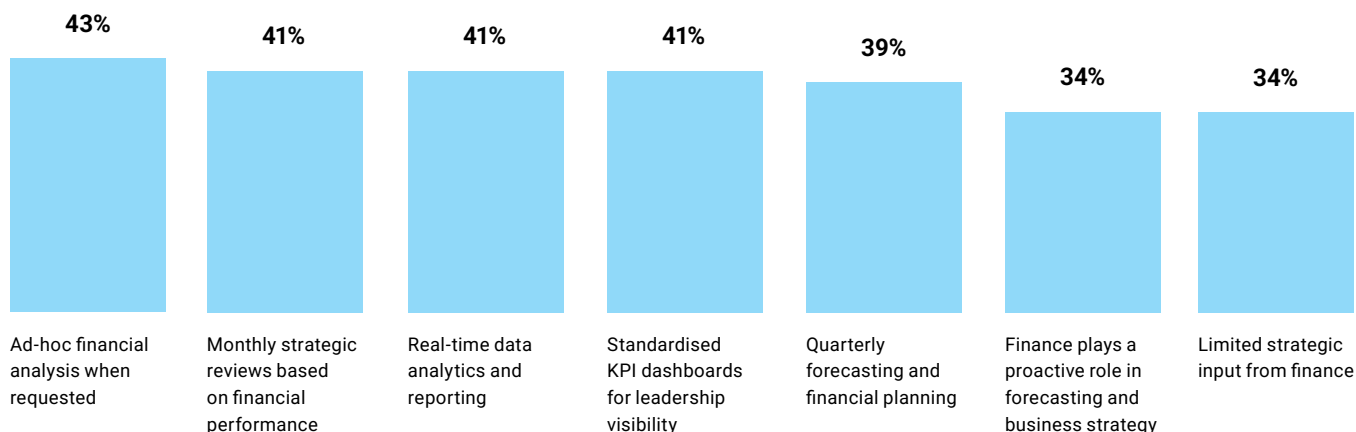
are often key goals as they work to integrate existing systems and gain a unified view of their liquidity. ‘Traditional Operators’, conversely, are likely to prioritise reducing manual processes in payments and receivables (26 per cent) and streamlining reporting and financial data consolidation (26 per cent), as these represent the most immediate and impactful improvements for their heavily manual operations.

Meanwhile, 36 per cent of those surveyed cited enhancing real-time cash visibility across accounts, underscoring the increasing importance of up-to-the-minute insight. In today’s volatile markets, having a clear view of cash positions has become essential for maintaining operational agility.

Although 31 per cent of respondents identified automation and 26 per cent cited the reduction of manual processes as key goals, only 26 per cent selected streamlining reporting and financial data consolidation as a top priority. This is significant, as consolidated, real-time financial data underpins many of the other goals mentioned – from forecasting and fraud detection to working capital optimisation.

Without accurate and unified reporting, finance teams operate with fragmented data and outdated assumptions. Improving the streamlining of reporting and financial data consolidation delivers wide-ranging benefits, both operationally and strategically. It enables faster responses to market changes and better-informed strategic planning, allowing finance teams to shift focus from data gathering to value creation and analysis.

7. How does your finance function currently support strategic decision-making? (Select all that apply)



Finance functions demonstrate inconsistent strategic engagement, revealing significant unrealised potential across organisational decision-making processes.

Only 34% of finance functions actively drive forecasting and business strategy, representing a fundamental underutilisation of financial intelligence capabilities as a contributor towards business growth. Equally concerning, another 34 per cent of respondents said their finance function has limited strategic input. Together, these findings paint a stark picture: in a third of organisations, finance is either not actively contributing to strategic direction or doing so only minimally.

Reactive financial analysis dominates current practice (43%), indicating finance functions respond to strategic needs rather than anticipating them.

In addition, 41 per cent of respondents said they conduct monthly strategic reviews based on financial performance, and the same proportion reported using real-time data analytics and reporting. Another 41 per cent indicated that their finance function provides leadership with visibility through standardised KPI dashboards. Quarterly forecasting and financial planning were selected by 39 per cent of respondents.

While this is a positive sign, it is not yet a universal practice. Regular and accurate forecasting remains essential to effective decision-making, particularly in a rapidly evolving economic environment.

Overall, the data suggests that many finance teams are contributing strategic insights, but not in a consistent, structured, or embedded manner. Rather than serving as an integrated strategic partner, finance often operates through a series of disconnected efforts, remaining primarily a reporting function rather than a strategic one.

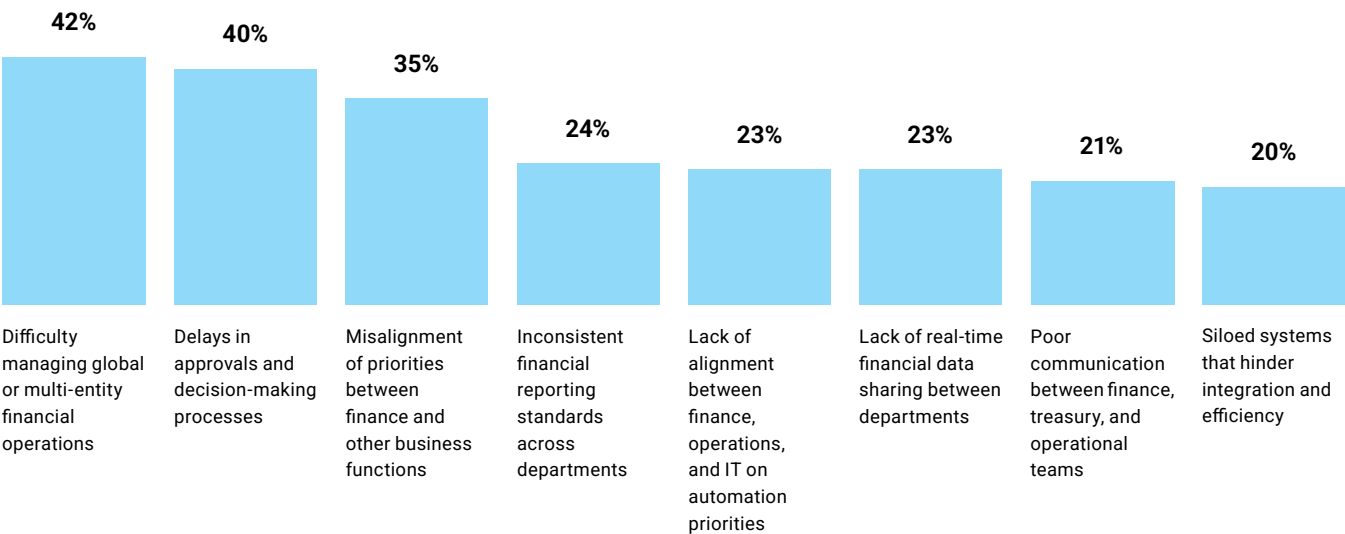
Finance is uniquely positioned to deliver forward-looking insights, scenario planning, and strategic risk assessments. To realise this potential, finance functions must move beyond spreadsheets and periodic reporting, requiring investment in automation, integration, and data analytics to provide timely, reliable, and actionable intelligence. Unlocking the full strategic value of finance demands both cultural and technological change; the insights exist, but without structure, integration, and support, they remain underused.

The extent to which finance functions support strategic decision-making also starkly differentiates the organisational archetypes. 'Digital Leaders' exemplify the 'proactive role in forecasting and business strategy', leveraging real-time data analytics and reporting and standardised KPI dashboards to drive business scenario planning.

For 'Transformation in Progress' companies, their engagement is often a blend of monthly strategic reviews based on financial performance and quarterly forecasting and financial planning, suggesting a move towards more structured strategic input, though often still operating through a series of disconnected efforts.

In contrast, 'Traditional Operators' are more likely to provide 'ad-hoc financial analysis when requested' or have 'limited strategic input', remaining primarily a reporting function due to the burden of manual operations.

8. What are the biggest challenges your organisation faces in cross-departmental collaboration for cash management? (Select up to three options)



Cross-departmental collaboration reveals systematic barriers that compound cash management complexity across organisational boundaries.

Global and multi-entity financial operations present the primary collaboration challenge for 43 per cent of organisations, reflecting increasing operational complexity. This is a particular hurdle for 'Transformation in Progress' companies expanding their reach without fully integrated systems. Businesses often struggle to maintain visibility and control over diverse operations, which increases risk and reduces agility.

In addition, 40 per cent of respondents highlighted delays in approvals and decision-making processes as a major obstacle. These delays hinder cash flow and prevent timely responses to financial needs, often resulting from unclear workflows or insufficient automation, issues particularly prevalent among 'Traditional Operators'.

Thirty-five per cent of respondents identified a misalignment of priorities between finance and other business functions. When departments do not share common objectives, inefficiencies and duplication of effort arise, further complicating cash management. This lack of cohesive strategy is a common challenge for 'Transformation in Progress' businesses navigating internal changes.

Other challenges include inconsistent financial reporting standards across departments (24 per cent) and a lack of alignment between finance, operations and IT regarding automation priorities (23 per cent). These gaps contribute to a fragmented view of financial data and delay adopting more efficient automated processes, issues that 'Traditional Operators' frequently encounter and 'Transformation in Progress' companies are actively working to resolve.

Finally, 20 per cent of respondents mentioned isolated systems that impede integration and efficiency. Fragmented technologies frequently lead to manual workarounds, increasing the risk of errors and slowing down cash management. These siloed systems are a significant barrier for 'Traditional Operators' and a key focus for integration efforts by 'Transformation in Progress' companies.

These findings reveal clear opportunities for automation to enhance efficiency across all archetypes. By simplifying workflows, standardising reporting and enabling seamless integration and real-time data sharing, companies can break down silos and improve collaboration. This will support faster, more informed decisions and increase the overall effectiveness of cash management, helping the business to progress towards the highly collaborative and integrated state seen in 'Digital Leaders'.

9. How often does your organisation review its payment processes?

(Select one option)



Payment process governance reveals systematic deficiencies, with 38 per cent of companies conducting infrequent or informal reviews. This widely varying approach is a direct reflection of an organisation's archetype.

In particular, 38 per cent of respondents – primarily 'Traditional Operators' and those earlier in their 'Transformation in Progress' journey – stated that they review payment processes infrequently, such as every six months or only when specific problems arise, or that they do not have a formal review process at all. Specifically, 13 per cent conduct biannual reviews based on specific needs, 11 per cent review infrequently and only in response to serious problems, and 14 per cent reported having no formal review process.

Inconsistent review cycles create vulnerability in an environment of escalating fraud risks and evolving regulatory requirements. Organisations with siloed payment infrastructures, common among 'Traditional Operators' and some 'Transformation in Progress' organisations, frequently report impaired data visibility and slower reconciliation processes. While system architecture contributes to these challenges, our analysis suggests that governance structures and process design may be equally influential factors.

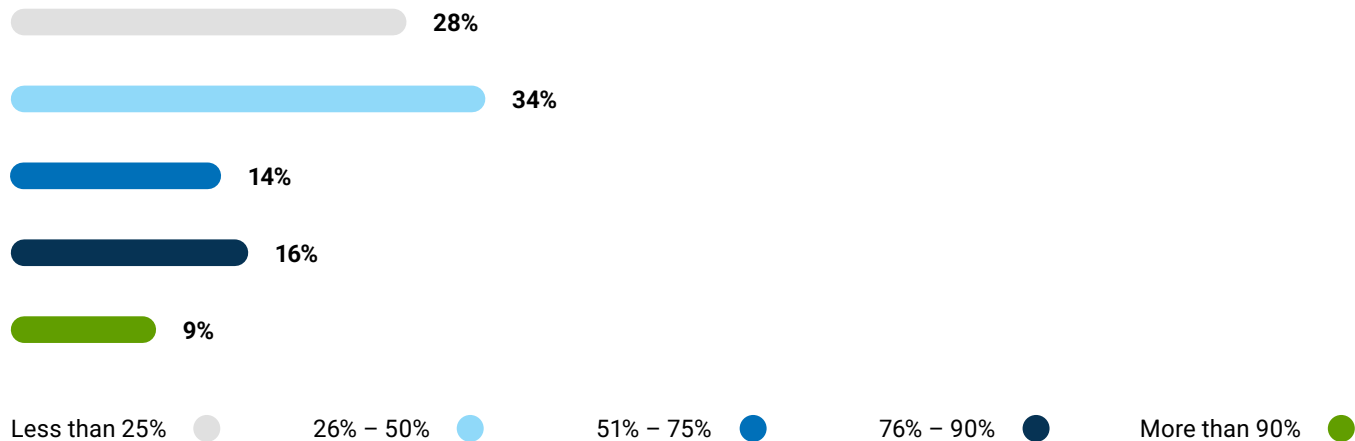


The consequences of infrequent reviews extend beyond operational inefficiencies: the business becomes slower to respond to market shifts, regulatory changes and evolving customer expectations, which can undermine their competitive position.

Conversely, companies that adopt a proactive and continuous review cycle are better positioned to ensure their payment processes remain efficient, secure and aligned with business objectives. Regular updates and optimisations, reported by 25 per cent of respondents, are characteristic of 'Digital Leaders' and enable their finance teams to identify risks early, implement improvements and effectively leverage emerging technologies.

Payment processes are not static but dynamic systems requiring ongoing attention. Establishing a best-practice review framework including real-time monitoring, frequent updates and integration with broader financial strategies is essential to safeguarding efficiency, compliance and innovation, and is a key differentiator for 'Digital Leaders' in a rapidly evolving market.

10. What percentage of your role is spent on manual, administrative tasks related to payments, cash management, and financial reporting that could be automated? (Select one option)



The time allocation data reveals a productivity paradox: 25 per cent of finance professionals spend more than 76 per cent of their time on automatable tasks, yet only 11 per cent of respondents have achieved more than 90 per cent automation. This suggests that awareness of automation potential hasn't translated to implementation, possibly due to investment prioritisation or change management challenges rather than technology limitations.

This disparity reflects fundamental operational differences between organisational archetypes. It reveals substantial efficiency opportunities, with 'Traditional Operators' and 'Transformation in Progress' contributing significantly to the high percentage of time spent on manual tasks, while 'Digital Leaders' represent the vanguard of highly automated organisations.

This 'productivity paradox' is particularly acute for 'Traditional Operators' and many 'Transformation in Progress' organisations, where a significant portion of valuable finance team time is consumed by repetitive manual work.

In contrast, 'Digital Leaders' have largely overcome this, enabling their finance professionals to focus on higher-value strategic activities by leveraging comprehensive payment lifecycle automation. This technology integrates accounts and systems for greater precision in cash forecasting and management.

This figure highlights a major inefficiency within many finance functions, where valuable time is consumed by repetitive work that drains resources and limits strategic focus. It is concerning that such a high proportion of finance professionals remain tied to manual processes, particularly given the increasing availability and maturity of automation technologies.

Manual activities not only slow down operations but also increase the risk of errors and fraud while restricting the agility needed to respond to rapidly changing markets and regulatory environments. These consequences are most severely felt by 'Traditional Operators', impeding their ability to adapt and grow.

Corporates should consider adopting integrated technological solutions that automate manual administrative tasks, streamline payment processes, and enhance cash management and financial reporting. For 'Traditional Operators', this means focusing on foundational automation directly targeting the most time-consuming manual processes. 'Transformation in Progress' companies should prioritise solutions that integrate existing systems and automate end-to-end workflows to achieve greater efficiency.

'Digital Leaders', meanwhile, will seek to leverage advanced analytics and AI-driven platforms to further optimise their already efficient operations. Effective platforms typically offer features such as end-to-end payment automation, real-time data visibility, secure transaction processing, and seamless integration with existing ERP and cash and treasury management systems.

By leveraging these technologies, businesses of every size can reduce operational risks, improve accuracy, and free up finance teams to focus on higher-value strategic activities.

Conclusion

This research reveals three distinct organisational archetypes emerging in finance operations, each requiring different strategic approaches. Digital Leaders, representing 11 per cent of companies with more than 90 per cent automation, demonstrate integrated ecosystems where finance functions as a strategic partner. These organisations have moved beyond tool implementation to focus on predictive analytics and cross-functional collaboration, establishing themselves as early adopters who can provide valuable lessons for the broader industry.

The largest segment, 'Transformation in Progress' companies comprising 51 per cent of respondents with automation levels between 26 and 75 per cent, shows mixed maturity with pockets of efficiency alongside legacy constraints. Their primary challenge lies in integration rather than technology acquisition, as they often possess multiple capable systems that operate in isolation. These organisations represent the critical middle ground where strategic investment decisions will determine whether they advance towards digital leadership or remain constrained by operational limitations.

Traditional Operators, encompassing 38 per cent of organisations with less than 50 per cent automation, face the steepest transformation challenge. Their heavily manual operations limit strategic contribution potential, requiring foundational automation before pursuing advanced capabilities. However, this archetype also presents the greatest opportunity for dramatic improvement, as even modest automation investments can yield substantial returns.

Looking ahead, emerging developments will likely separate high-performing finance functions from their peers. Embedded intelligence through artificial intelligence-driven cash flow prediction and anomaly detection will enable finance teams to shift from reactive reporting to proactive risk management.

Forward-looking corporate treasurers are exploring emerging innovations such as stablecoins - not only as digital assets but as potential instruments for streamlining cross-border payments. While adoption remains nascent, this development is worth monitoring closely as regulatory clarity and infrastructure maturity evolve.

Regulatory automation will evolve from bolt-on compliance solutions to built-in regulatory adherence, reducing the administrative burden that currently consumes substantial finance resources. Initiatives such as Confirmation of Payee (CoP) exemplify this shift toward embedded control. Perhaps most significantly, the strategic partnership model will see finance teams driving business scenario planning rather than merely reporting historical performance, fundamentally altering their role within organisational leadership structures.

The implications extend beyond operational efficiency to competitive advantage. Organisations that successfully navigate this transformation will possess superior market responsiveness, enhanced risk management capabilities, and more agile capital allocation processes. Conversely, those that maintain traditional approaches risk falling further behind as automation technologies mature and market expectations for financial agility continue to rise.

The path forward requires deliberate choices about investment priorities, change management approaches, and organisational culture. Finance teams that embrace integrated automation, embedded controls, and cross-functional alignment will not only improve operational resilience – they will shape the strategic agenda. Those that delay risk being structurally unfit for the next wave of financial leadership.



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