Jefferson Wells®
ManpowerGroup

CFO Priorities Annual Survey

2025

Executive Summary

Jefferson Wells' 2025 CFO Priorities survey provides a comprehensive overview of the current landscape and challenges faced by CFOs in the U.S.

The primary concern for CFOs remains profitability, with cybersecurity, economic uncertainty and technological transformation following suit. CFOs are planning to increase their finance headcount, driven by the growing role of finance within their organizations.

Investment in technology, particularly AI and automation, is a key strategy for addressing these challenges. CFOs are seeking external support for AI and cybersecurity, emphasizing the importance of subject matter and industry expertise over cost.

Overall, the survey results underscore the resilience and adaptability of CFOs in navigating a complex and evolving business environment. Leveraging technology and focusing on core priorities positions CFOs to move their organizations forward.

Top Strategic Priorities

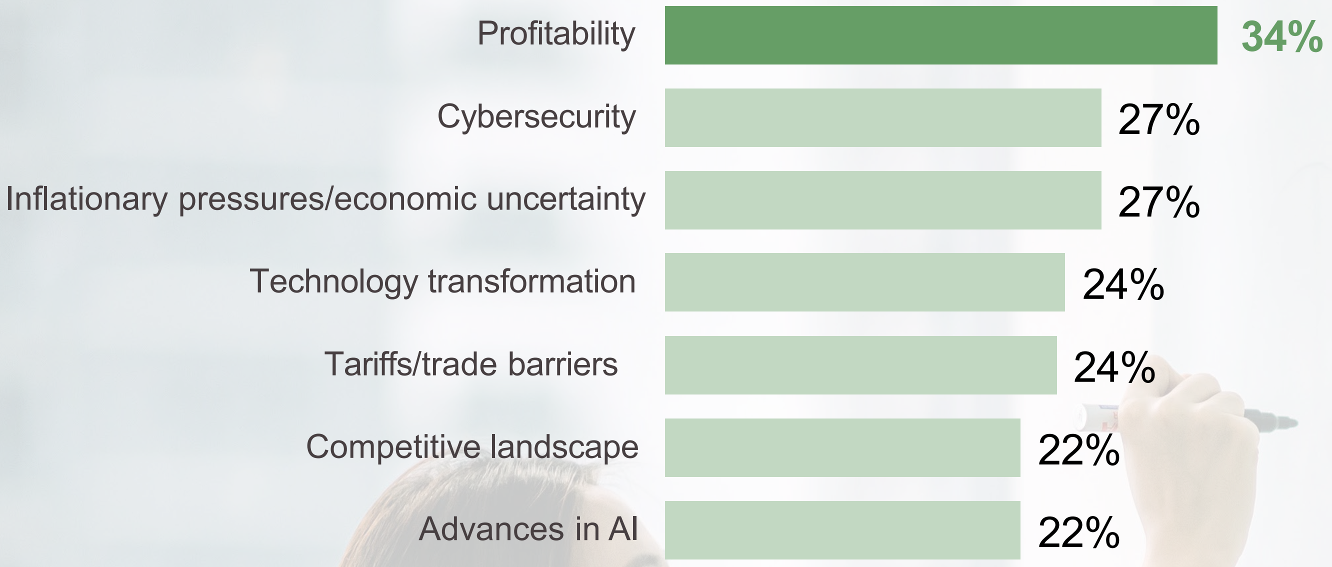
Top Strategic Priorities

Amid continued economic uncertainty, profitability has never been so critical. It is still the primary issue for both CFOs and the board with technology transformation, AI adoption, process automation and new software investments gaining strategic importance.

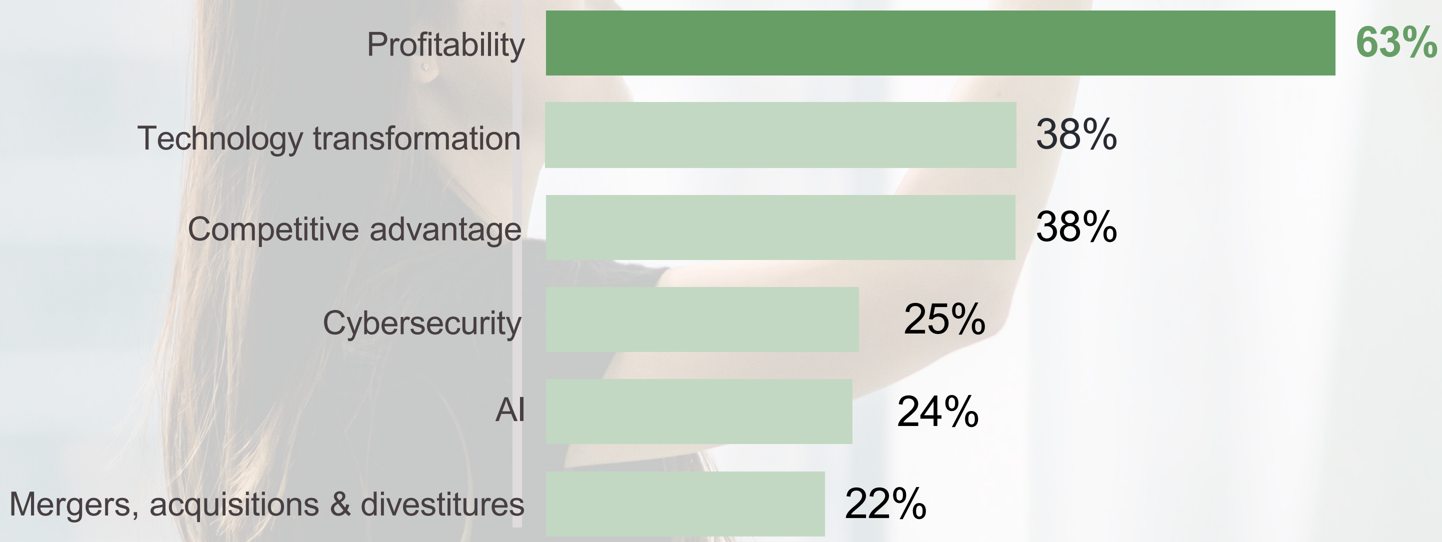
Cybersecurity continues to be a top risk, with CFOs actively engaged in managing cyber risk strategies and expressing confidence in their organizations' capabilities.

Additionally, the challenges posed by tariffs, tax structures and global economic instability call for increased agility and resilience from CFOs and their teams moving forward.

What are the top 3 biggest challenges keeping you awake at night?



What are the top 3 priorities of your board and major investors?



Profitability

remains the dominant concern for CFOs (34%) and boards (63%). It's the top challenge keeping CFOs awake at night.

Cybersecurity

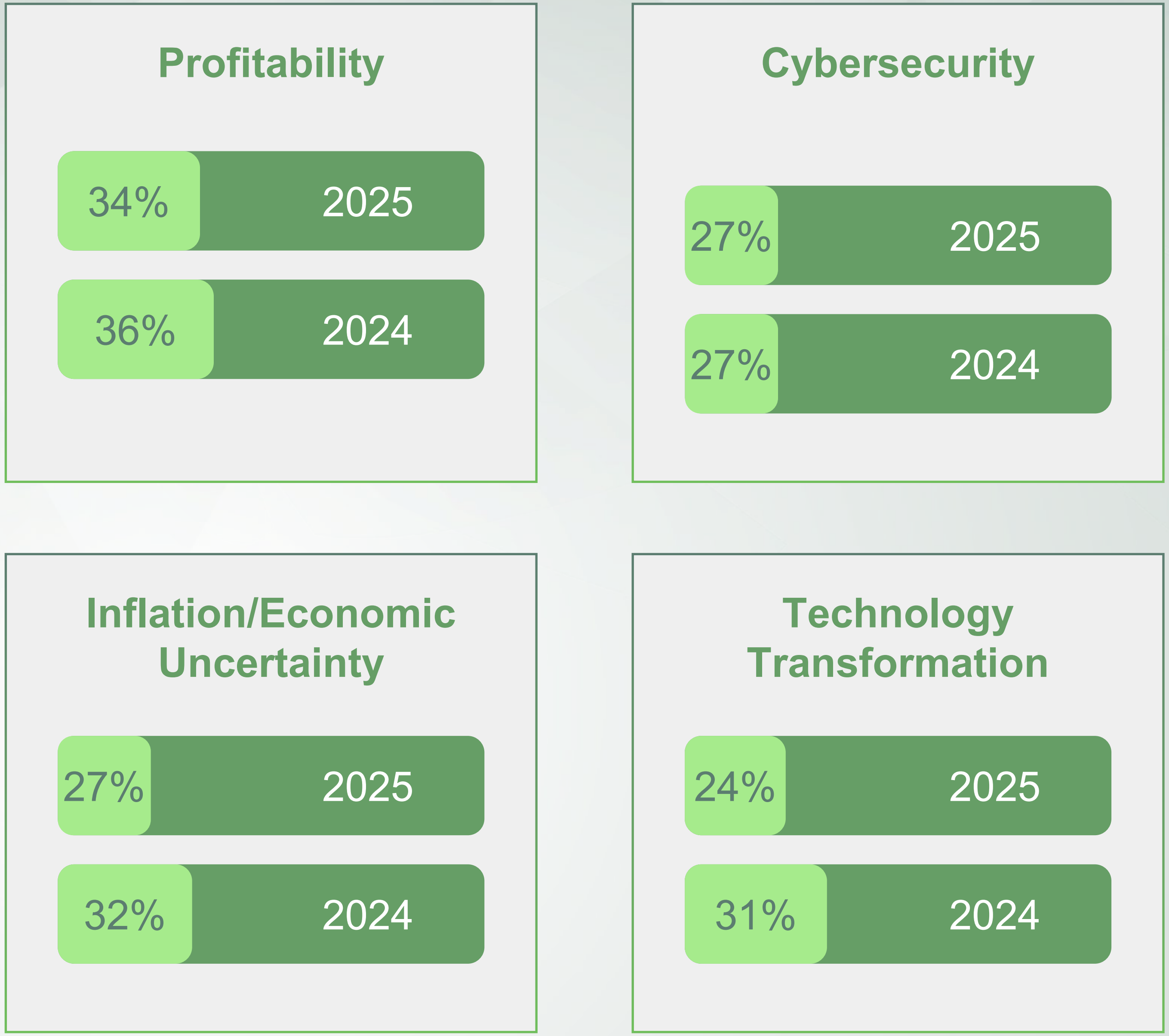
Cybersecurity remains a top risk with CFOs highly involved in cyber risk strategy and response.

Economic Uncertainty

Ongoing turmoil means resilience will need to be the name of the game for the foreseeable future.

Technology Transformation

All things technology continue to remain a high priority. Technology transformation was an even higher priority for boards and investors.



Talent & Headcount Trends

Talent & Headcount Trends

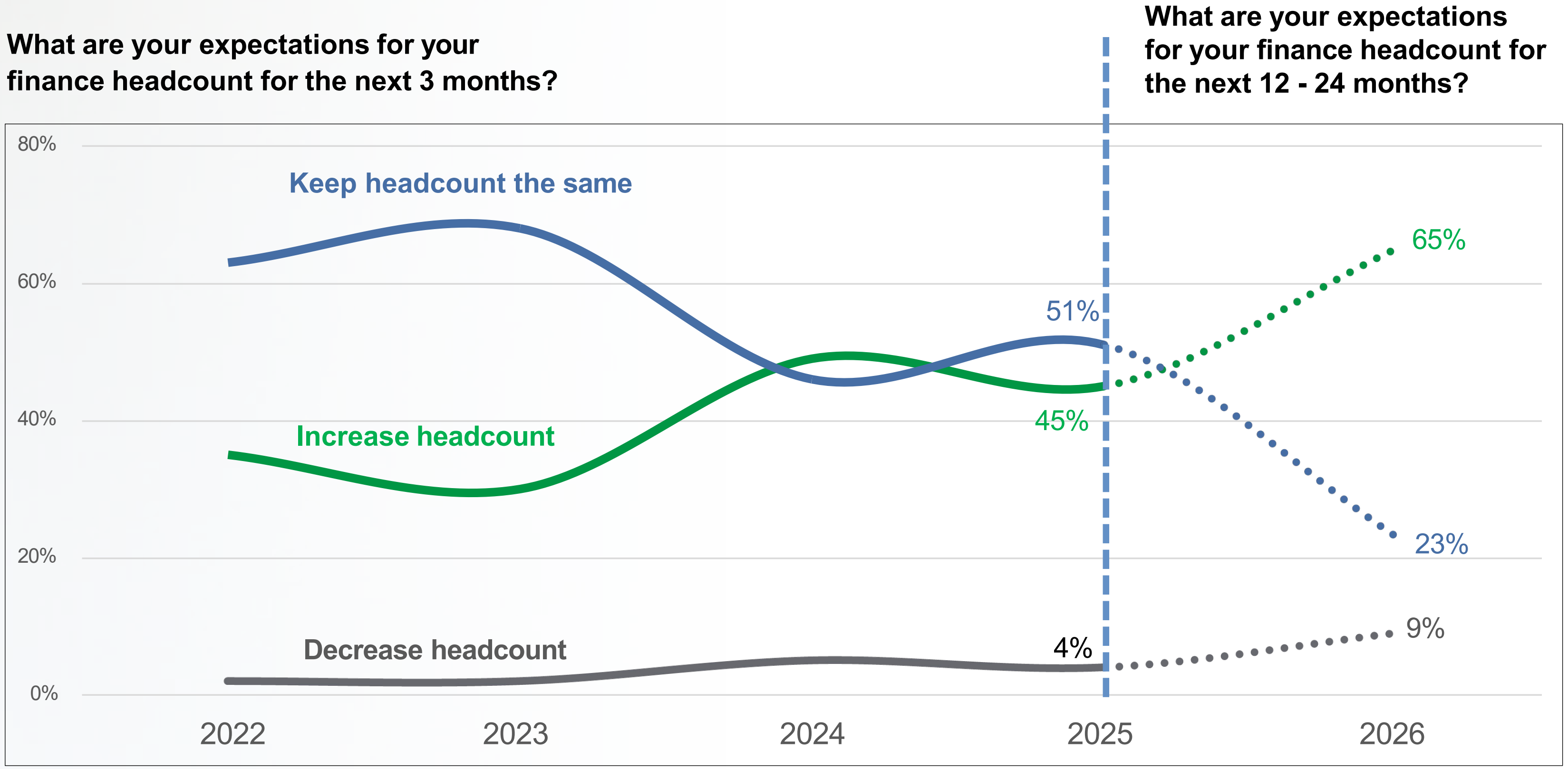
Balancing strategic priorities and the challenges faced by finance teams remains difficult for CFOs to navigate.

The primary drivers for team growth include the expanding role of finance, increased focus on risk management, support for transformation projects and managing economic uncertainty such as tariffs.

CFOs identify their top leadership strengths as finance management, people skills and driving transformation. About half of CFOs say they are agile in responding to changing skill requirements, with those planning to increase headcount being more adaptable than others.

CFOs prioritize investing in technology, AI and expanding team skills to address talent attraction and retention challenges.

45% of CFOs plan to increase finance headcount in the next quarter, with 65% expecting to grow their teams over the next 1 to 2 years.

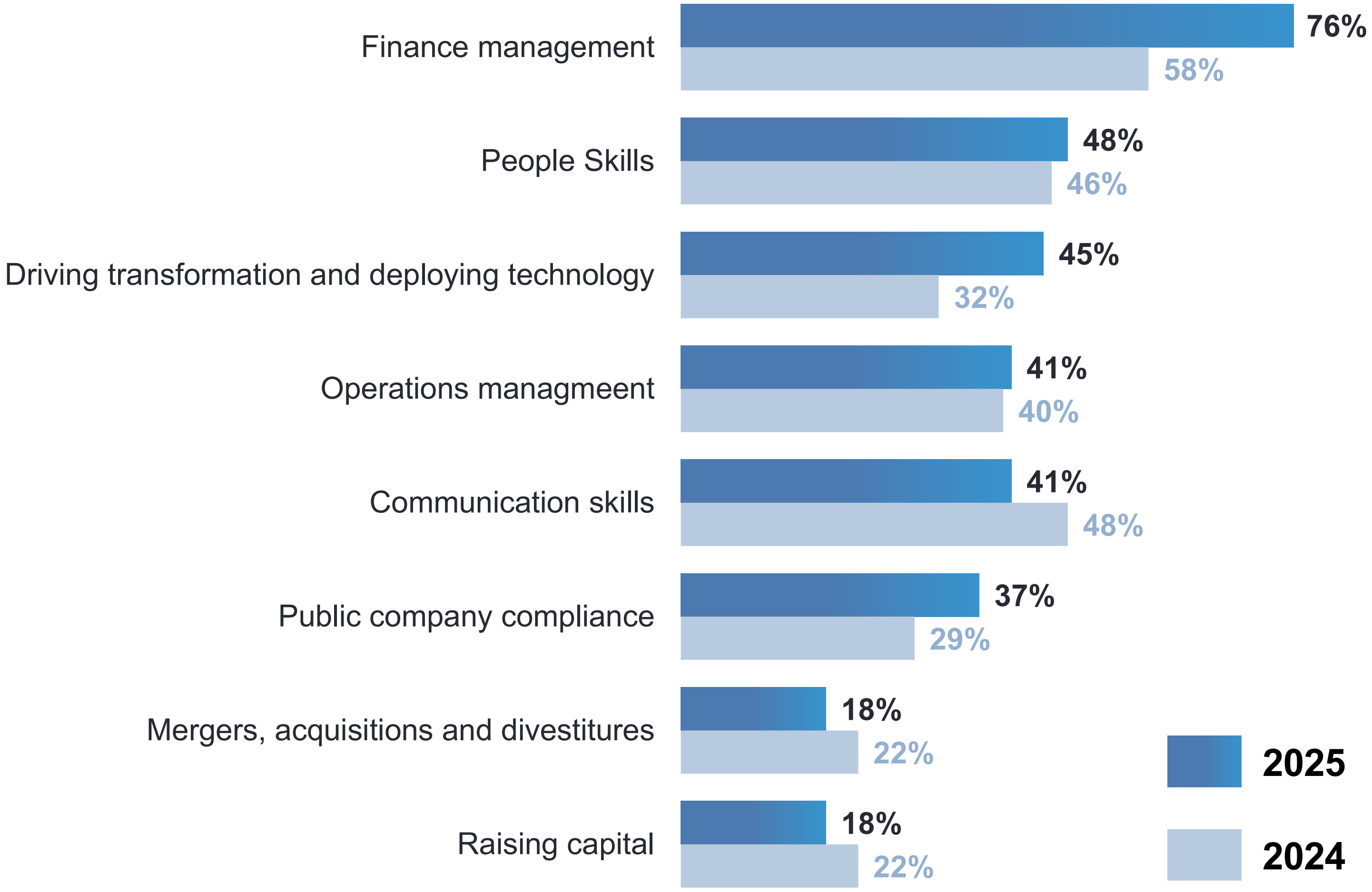


Drivers for team growth align with strategic priorities – indicating a need for more resources to manage complexity.

Why is your department planning to increase headcount?

CFOs are most confident in their financial management skills.

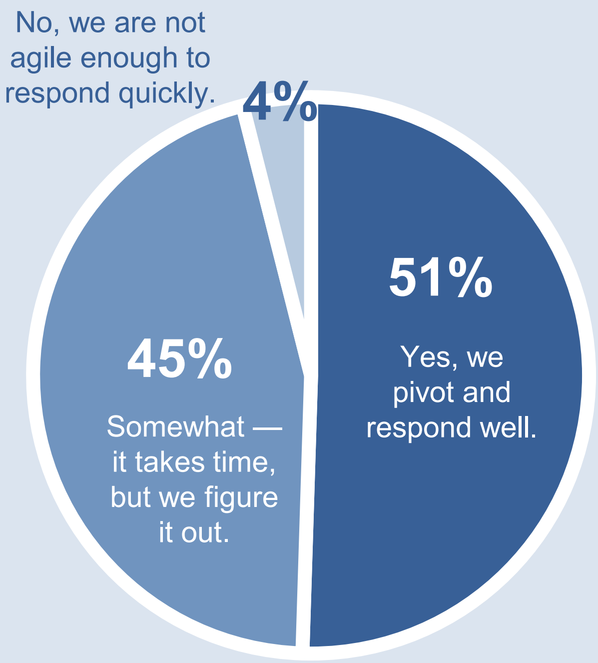
What do you consider your top 3 strengths as a leader?



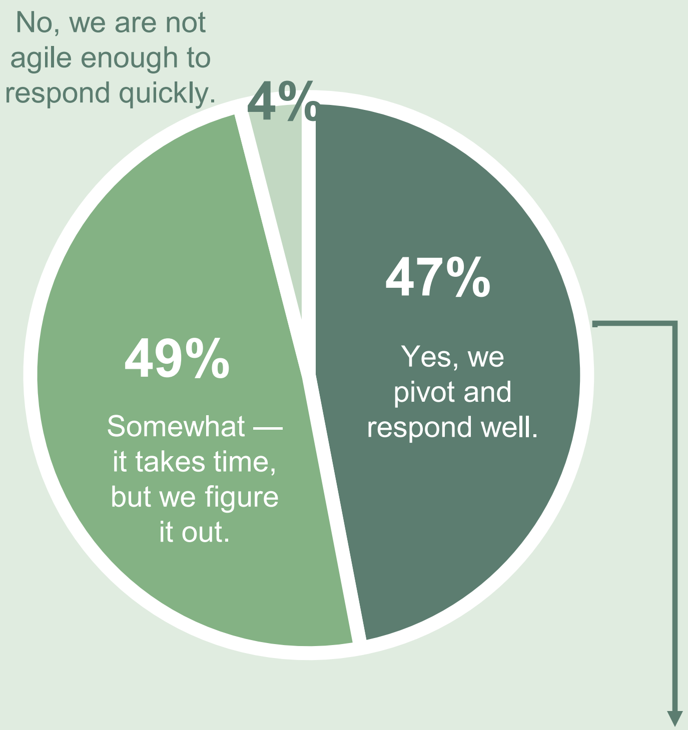
When asked about a changing job market and shortages, CFOs answered modestly: half pivot well, and half take some time to figure it out.

Do you feel your company can innovate quickly in response to…

Talent shortage/wage pressures



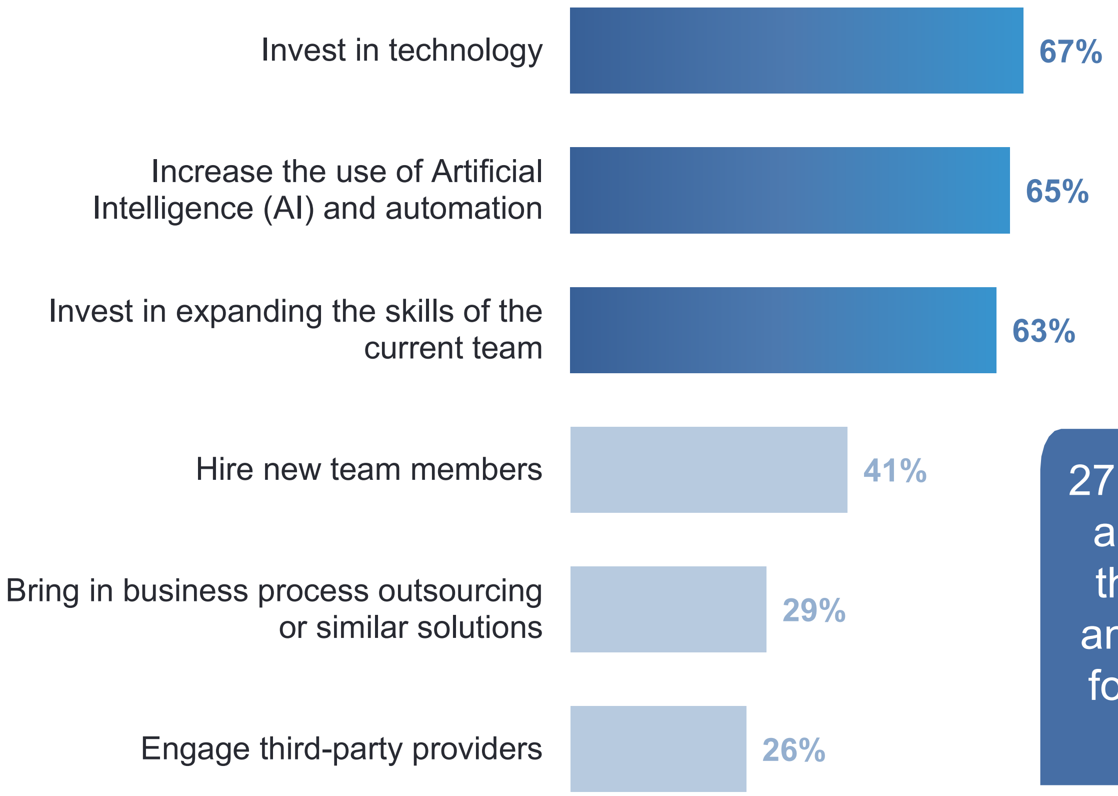
Changing skill requirements/need to upskill



Those who plan to increase finance headcount next quarter (45%) are more likely to pivot well to changing skill requirements than those who are keeping headcount the same/decreasing it (59%).

CFOs say tech, AI and investing in the team are the best ways to manage the challenges of attracting and retaining talent.

How do you plan to manage the costs/challenges of attracting and retaining talent while accessing the skills/expertise needed to achieve your objectives?



27% more CFOs are increasing their use of AI and automation for hiring since 2024.

Tariffs & Economic Uncertainty

Tariffs & Economic Uncertainty

Tariffs have become a critical challenge. CFOs report rising supply chain costs and complexity in re-sourcing and logistics. With business transformation as a top strategic objective, economic conditions and tariffs/trade barriers stand in the way of effective transformation execution.

While half of CFOs say they can pivot and respond well to tariff-related changes, the majority are still developing internal solutions or looking to experts for help. Only about 1/3 of organizations have the skills and processes in place to comply with tariff-related regulations.

The ongoing volatility continues to drive the need for agility among finance leaders and their teams.

CFOs expressed a wide diversity in concerns and expected impacts from tariffs.

"The cost is going high and making things more difficult, and we have no option than to pass it to our customer."

Privately owned company with revenue between $1B-6B, Financial Services & Insurance

"Our clients that are in industries that are impacted by this, they reduce their budgets or delay projects."

Privately owned company with revenue between $10-50M, Advertising & Media

"[We can] get even more local vendors, which will lower our fees and increase demand."

Publicly listed company with revenue between $200-500M, Consumer Goods & Retail

"It might help our economy and financially make us strong."

Privately owned company with revenue between $500M-1B, Technology & Communications

"People [are] buying more American goods."

Privately owned company with revenue between $200-500M, Manufacturing & Distribution

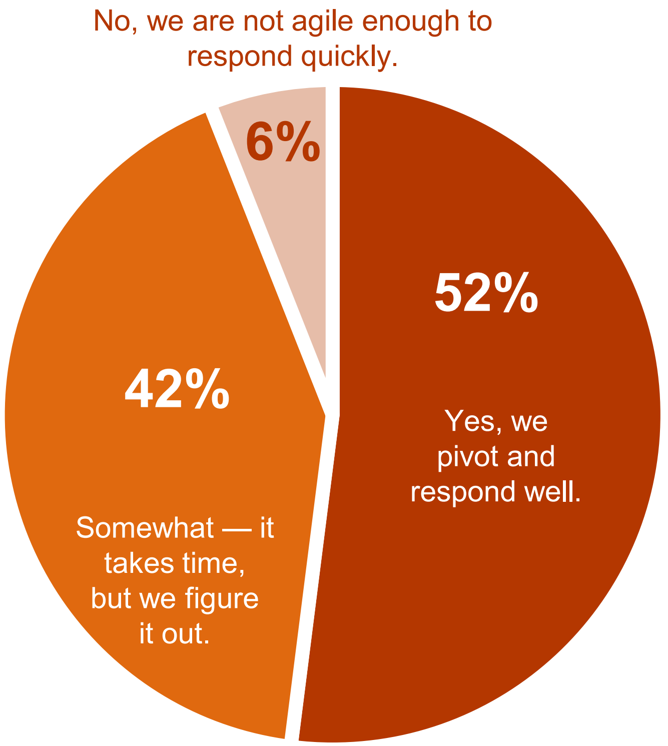
What impact are you expecting on your organization from tariffs and economic uncertainty in the US?

66% foresee a negative impact from tariffs on their organization

13% are unsure or see no impact

21% foresee a positive impact

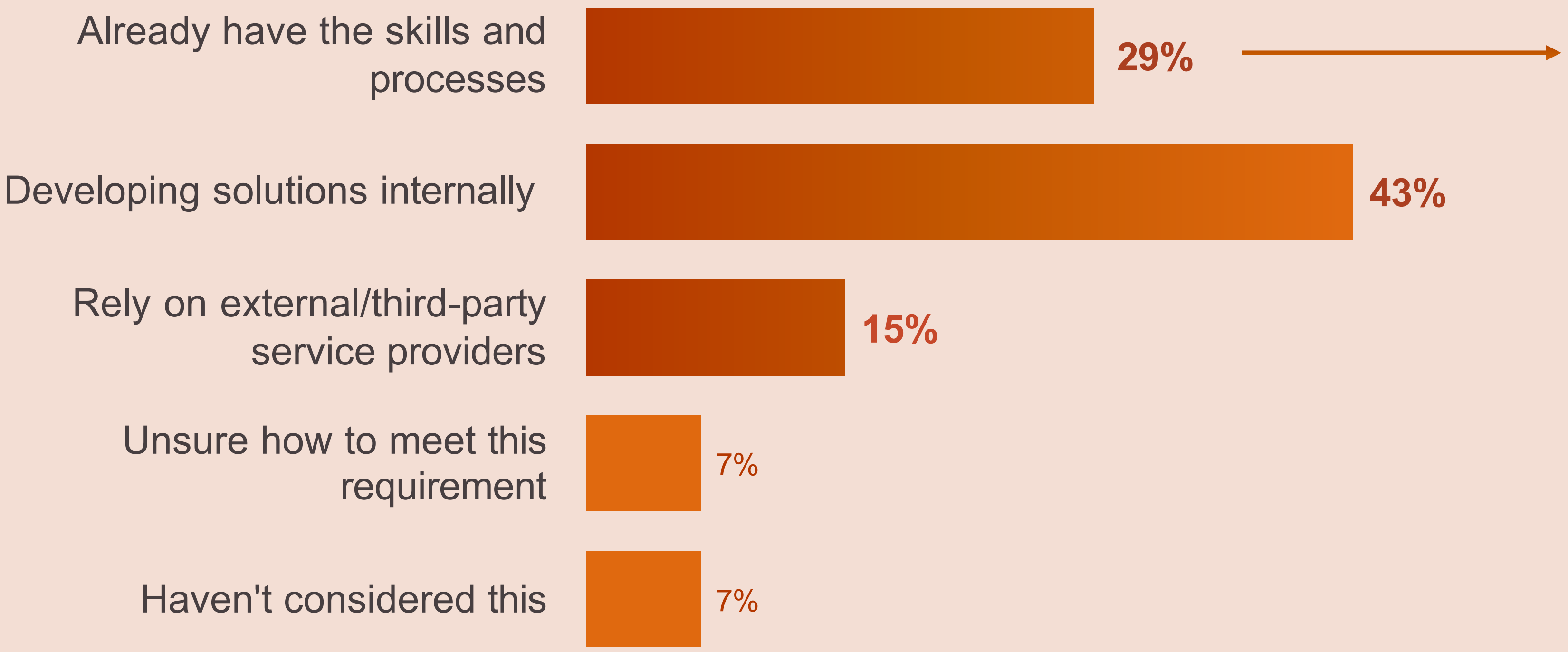
Half of CFOs report that they pivot and respond well to tariffs, with only 6% admitting to lagging behind.



CFOs in organizations that can quickly respond to tariff impacts are more likely to expect tariffs to have a positive impact than those that can't pivot quickly (33% vs.9%).

About one-third of organizations already have the skills and processes in place to deal with tariffs; the rest are still trying to figure it out.

How well is your organization positioned to comply with requirements on tariffs and international trade?



Organizations are less likely to already have tariff-related skills compared to those needed for sustainability, cyber risk, SEC regulations, taxation and banking and finance regulations.

Technology & AI Adoption

Technology & AI Adoption

With technology transformation as a top strategic priority for both CFOs and boards, pressure to adopt solutions quickly and effectively will continue to increase.

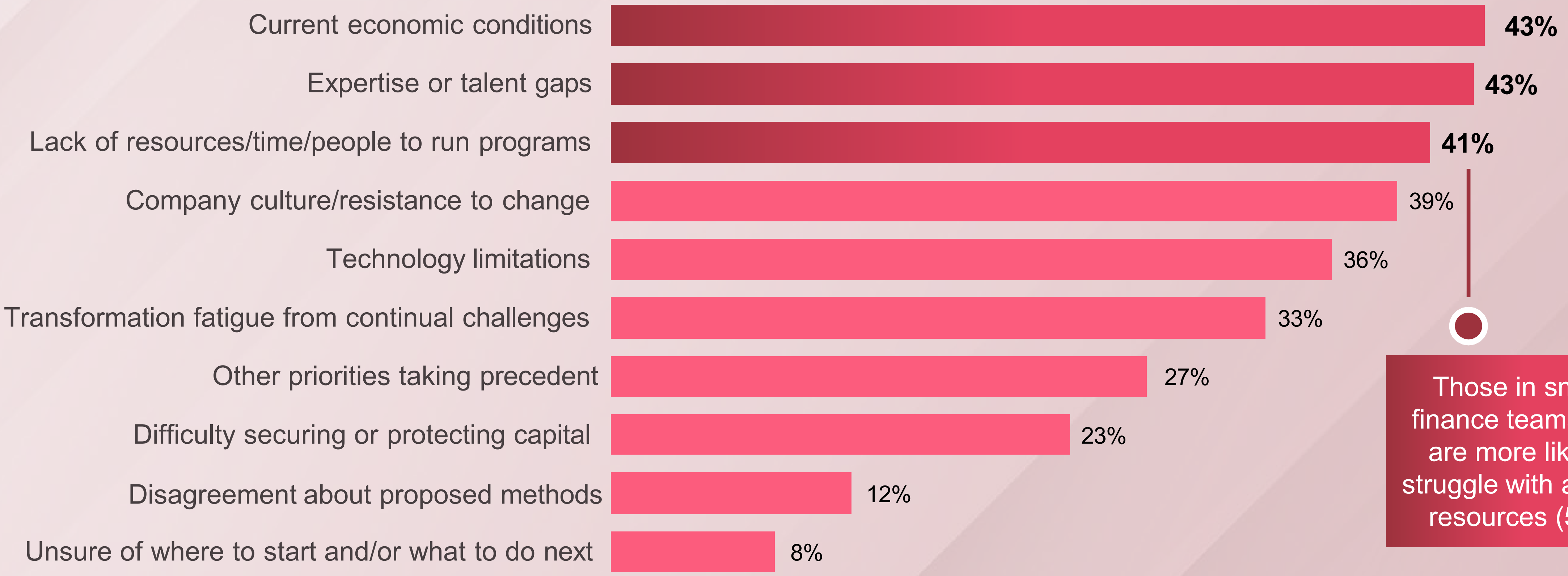
To address these challenges, companies are focusing on increasing wages and benefits, hiring specialized skillsets and investing in new technologies.

Use of AI in some fashion is widespread, but challenges remain in quantifying measurable benefits. The majority of CFOs see AI as part of their talent strategy for hiring, upskilling and reducing reliance on outsourcing.

In this challenging environment, almost 60% of CFOs will seek external support for their AI initiatives in the next two years, recognizing that expertise is critical to rapid and effective adoption.

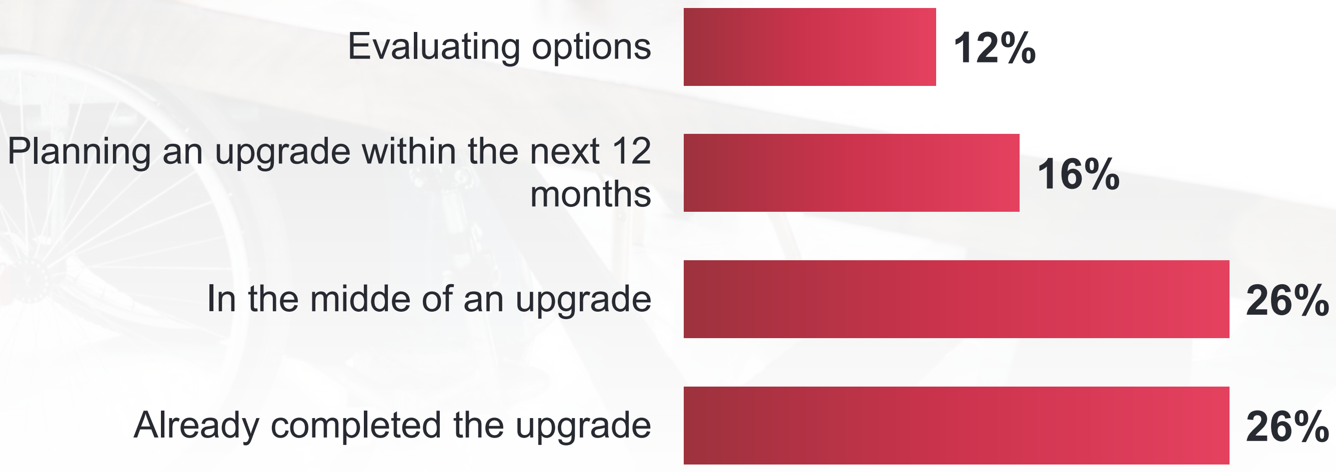
The three biggest challenges to business transformation are current economic conditions, talent gaps and a lack of resources or time. Business transformation is seen as important, but difficult.

What are your challenges in achieving business transformation?

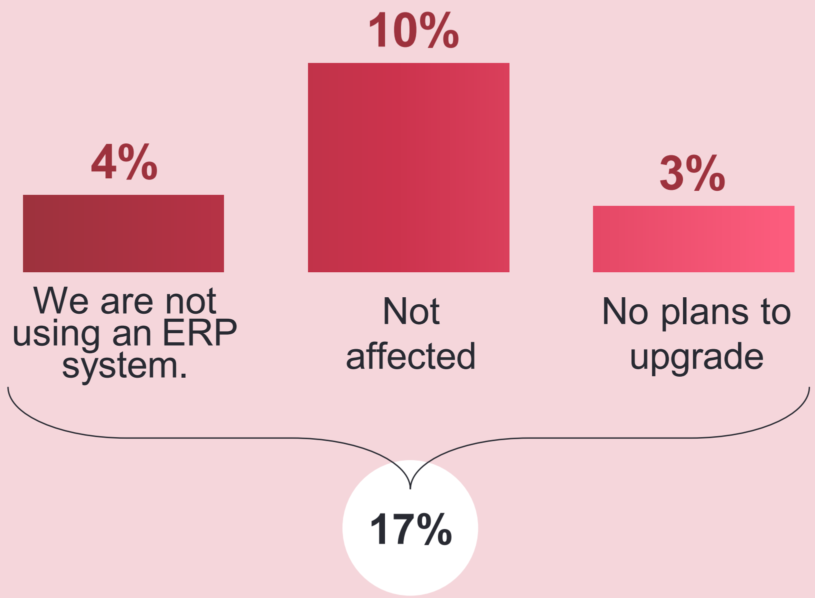


Those in smaller finance teams (<25) are more likely to struggle with a lack of resources (57%).

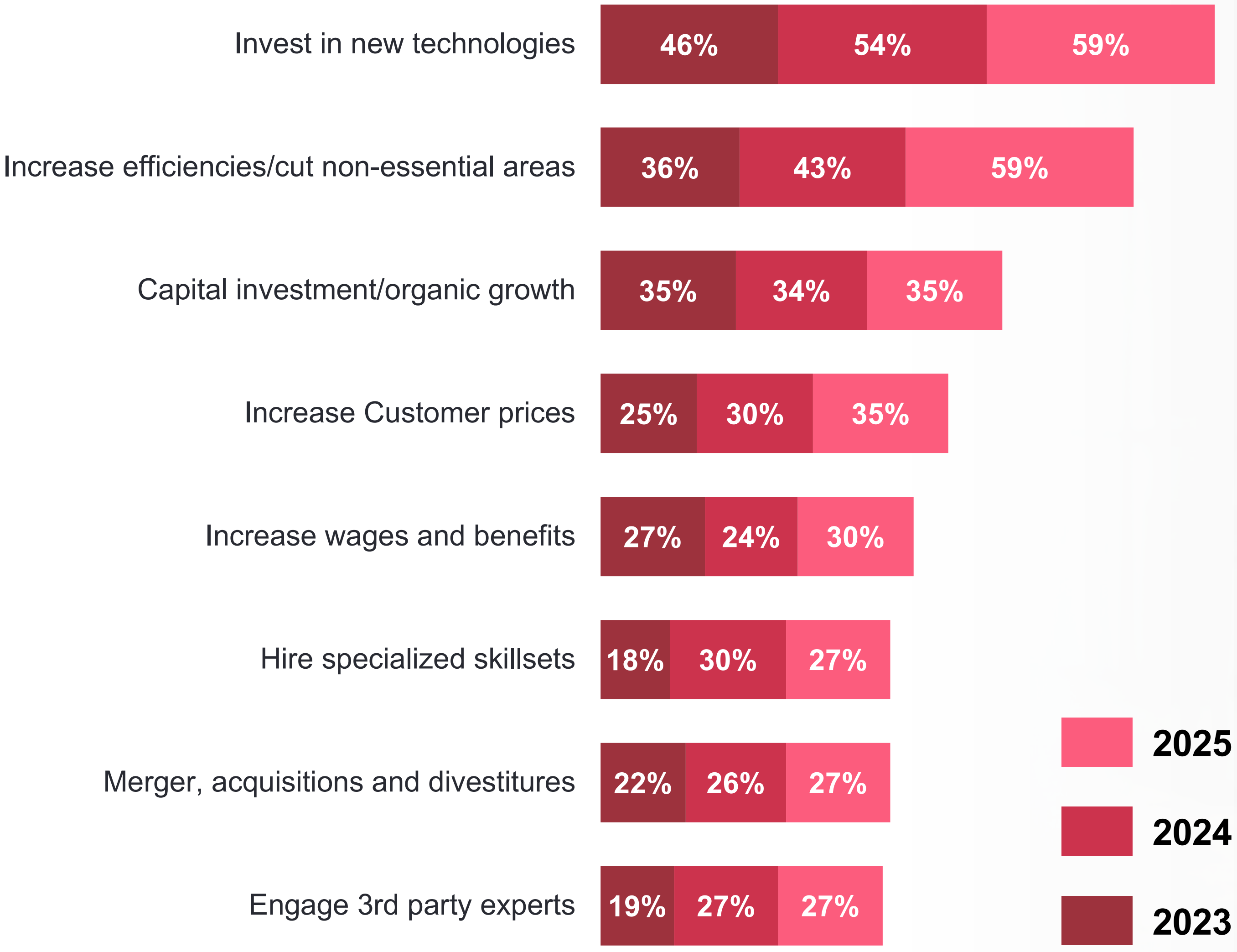
Most organizations are in the process of shifting ERP to the cloud or have already made the change.



17% have no plans to do so.

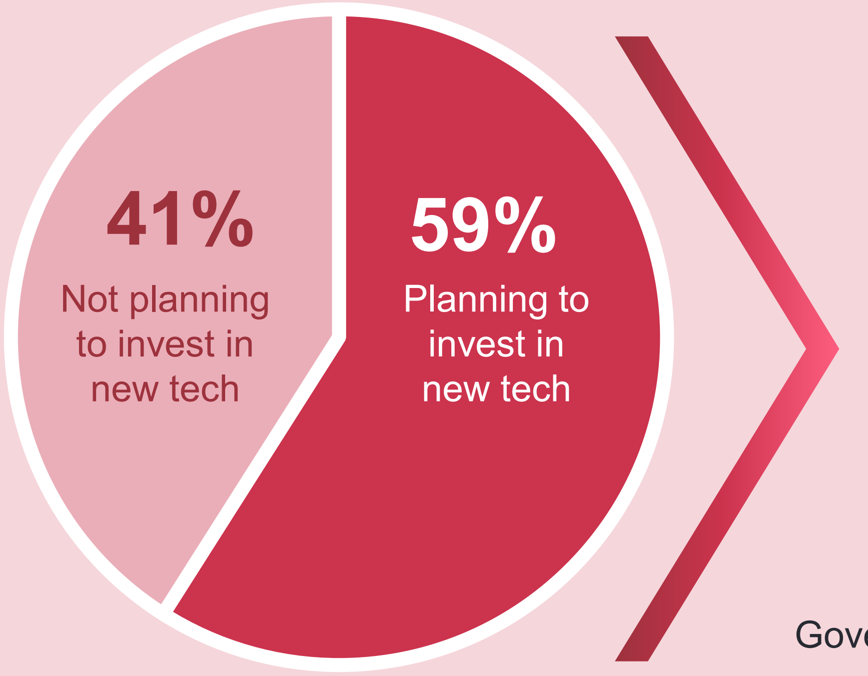


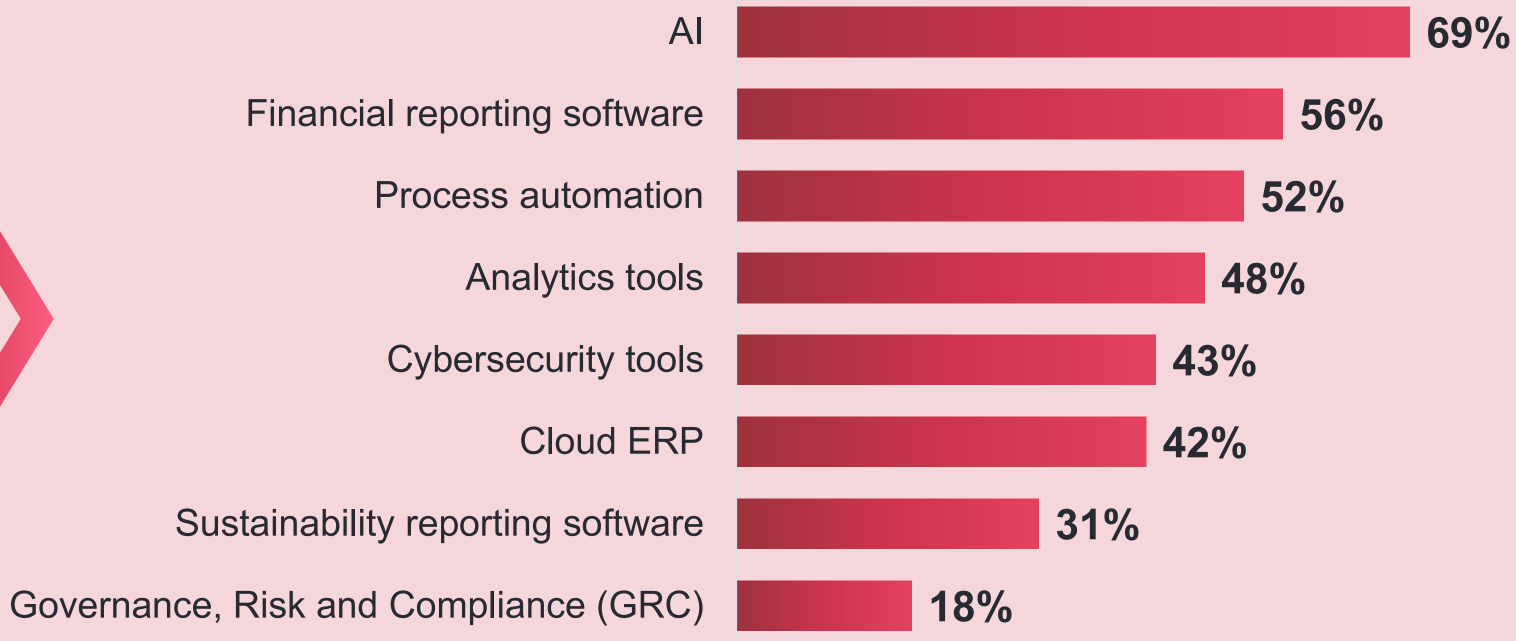
What are your strategies to meet the challenges you mentioned and mitigate accompanying risks?



To meet challenges such as profitability, cybersecurity and economic uncertainty, CFOs are implementing various strategies. Improving efficiencies has seen the largest jump (16 percentage points).

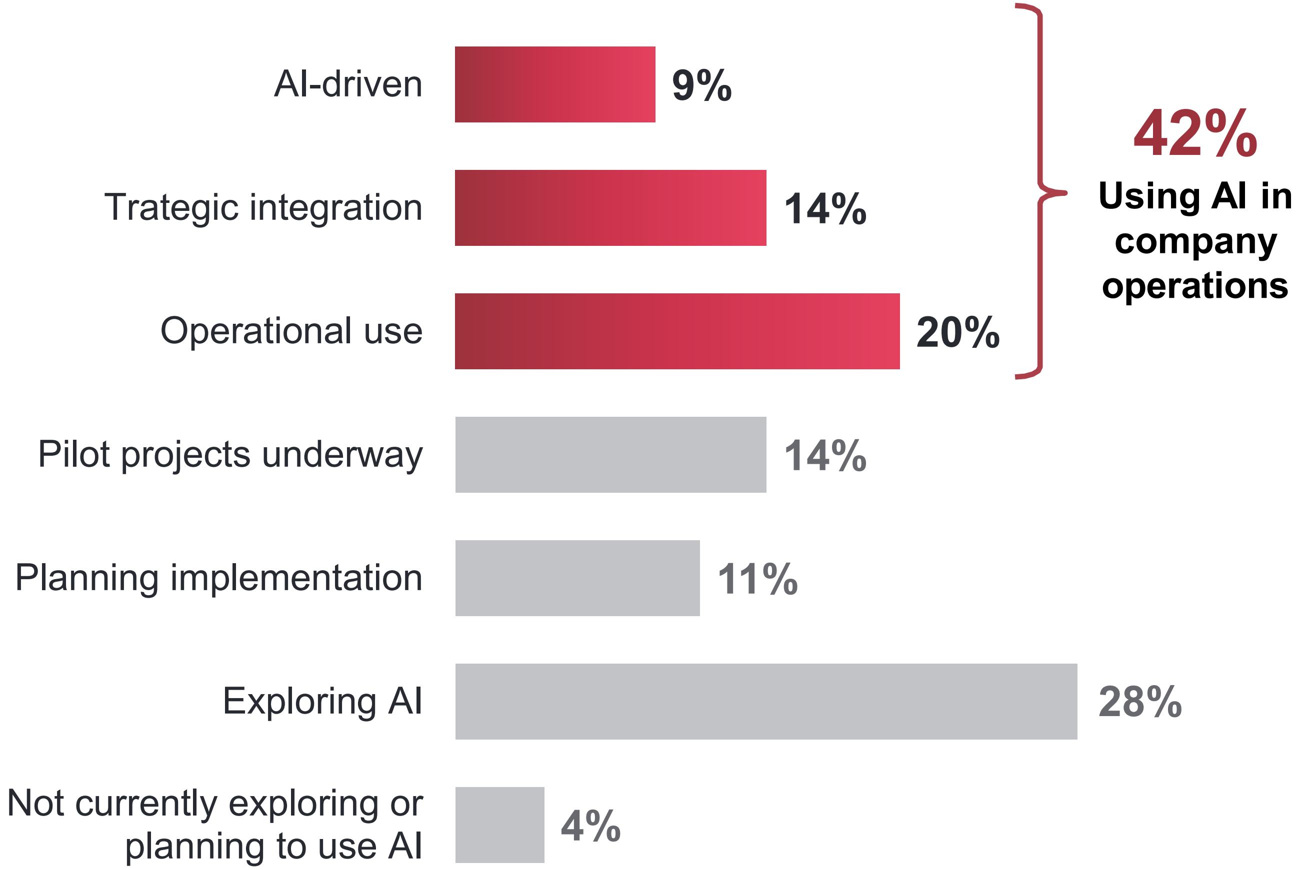
Those who plan to invest in new tech are mainly interested in AI, financial reporting software and process automation.





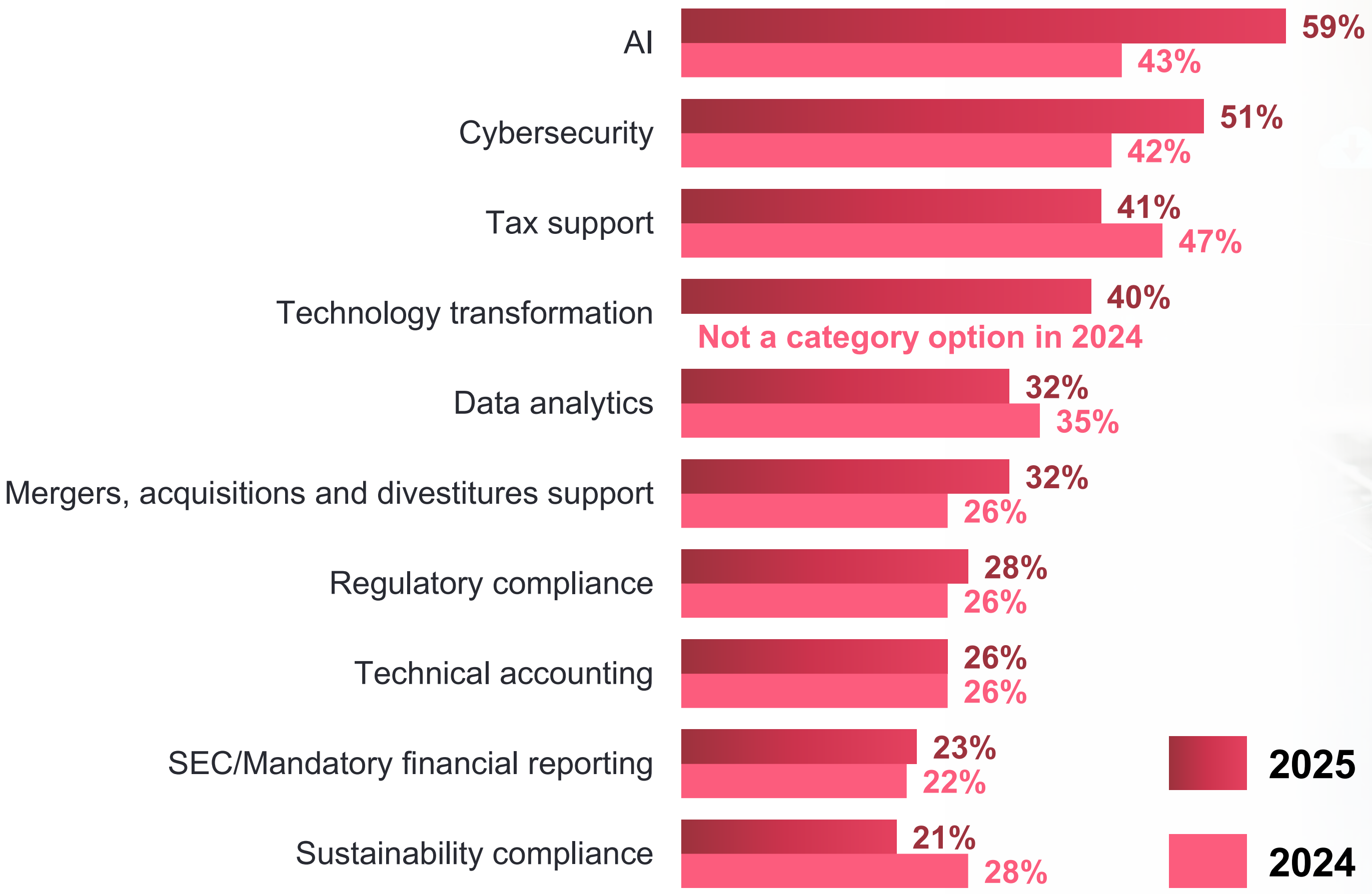
Investments in AI are paying off: 42% of AI efforts are producing at least some business value. 96% are engaging with AI.

Where is your company in terms of its current use of artificial intelligence (AI)?



Organizations that are seeing business value from their AI efforts are more likely to innovate quickly in relation to cybersecurity, tech end-of-life, competitive strategy, upskilling and talent shortages than those that have yet to use AI for business.

When asked where they plan to use third-party service providers, AI and Cybersecurity lead the way.



Back to getting the very best: In times of uncertainty and tech transformation, people are selecting those with expertise.

What is the top consideration when selecting professional service providers?

Cybersecurity Confidence

Cybersecurity Confidence

Cybersecurity is a top strategic concern for CFOs, second only to profitability.

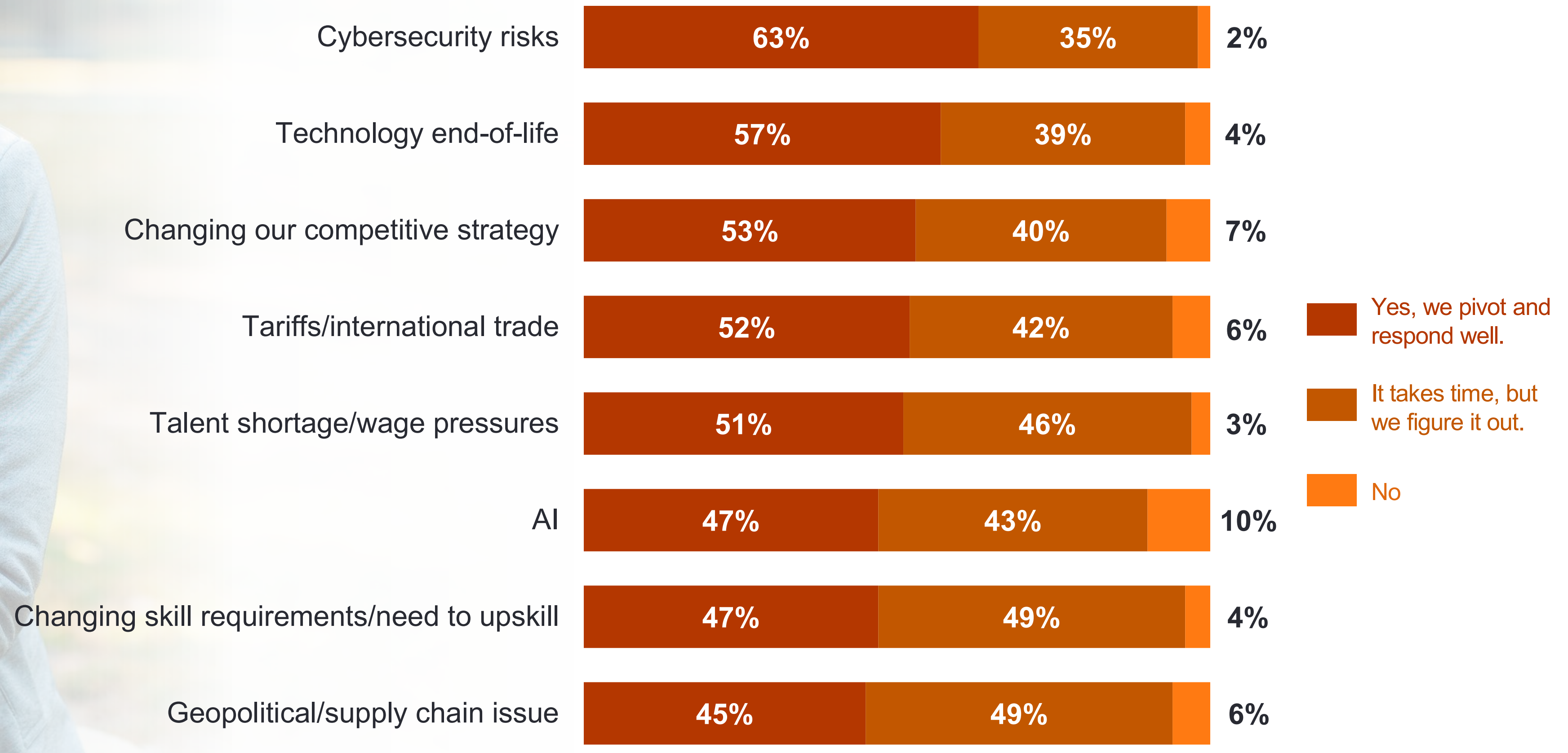
The findings reveal that almost one-third of CFOs cite that cybersecurity risk is keeping them up at night, yet they exhibit a high level of confidence in their organizations' ability to manage and report on these risks.

Many CFOs are actively involved in cyber risk strategy, with nearly half participating in both strategy and response efforts.

While CFOs are generally confident in their organizations' cybersecurity capabilities, the ever-changing landscape of cyber threats requires ongoing attention and adaptation to ensure robust protection and response mechanisms.

CFOs are confident in their ability to innovate and respond to risks.

Do you feel your company can innovate quickly in response to the following conditions?



CFOs are likely to understand cyber risks: 73% are involved in cyber strategy, and half report being deeply involved in both strategy and response.

How involved are you individually with your company's cyber risk strategy and response?

CFOs in larger companies (>$1B revenue) are more likely to be deeply involved (68%), whereas those in smaller companies (<$200M revenue) are more likely to say that they're not involved in cyber risk strategy at all (15%).

Regulatory Compliance

Regulatory Compliance

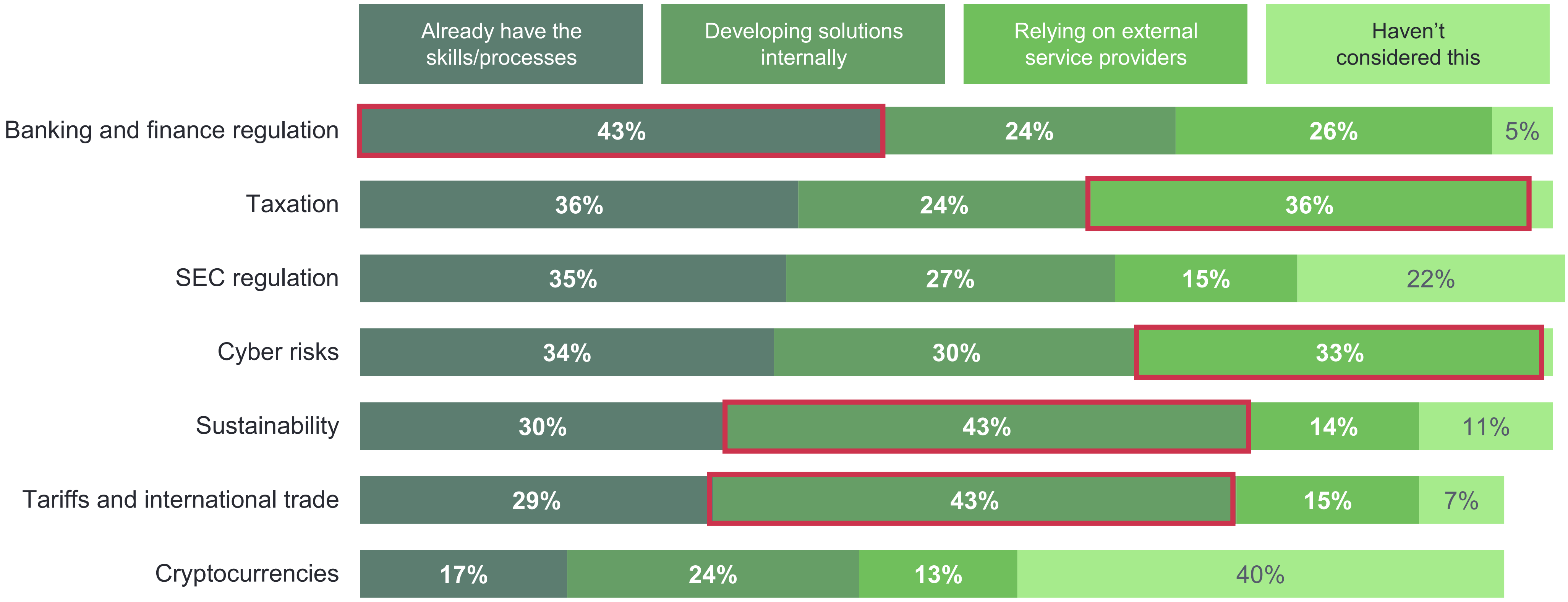
CFOs are generally well-positioned to comply with finance regulations. However, they are more likely to be developing internal solutions for non-finance specific risks such as sustainability and tariffs while relying on external providers for tax and cyber compliance.

Companies providing services to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) are challenged with implementing the Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC).

The most significant challenges associated with implementing new accounting standards, exposure drafts and ongoing projects are the time and resources needed, accessing the required data and engaging third-party assistance.

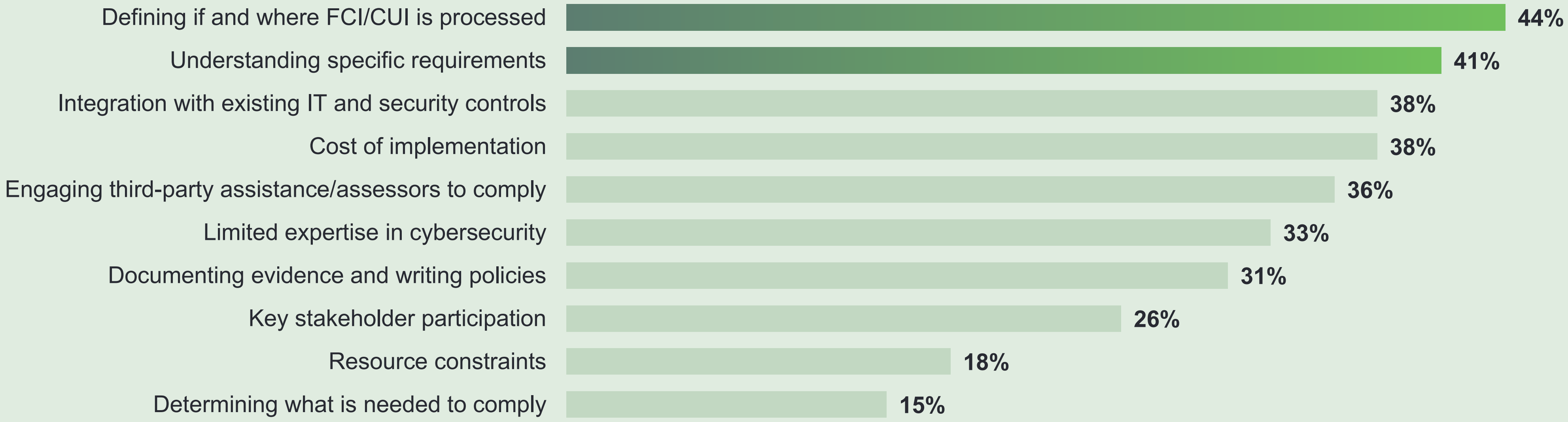
CFOs are more likely to develop internal solutions for regulations around non-finance specific risks while relying on external providers for tax and cyber.

How well is your organization positioned to comply with regulatory requirements now and in the future?



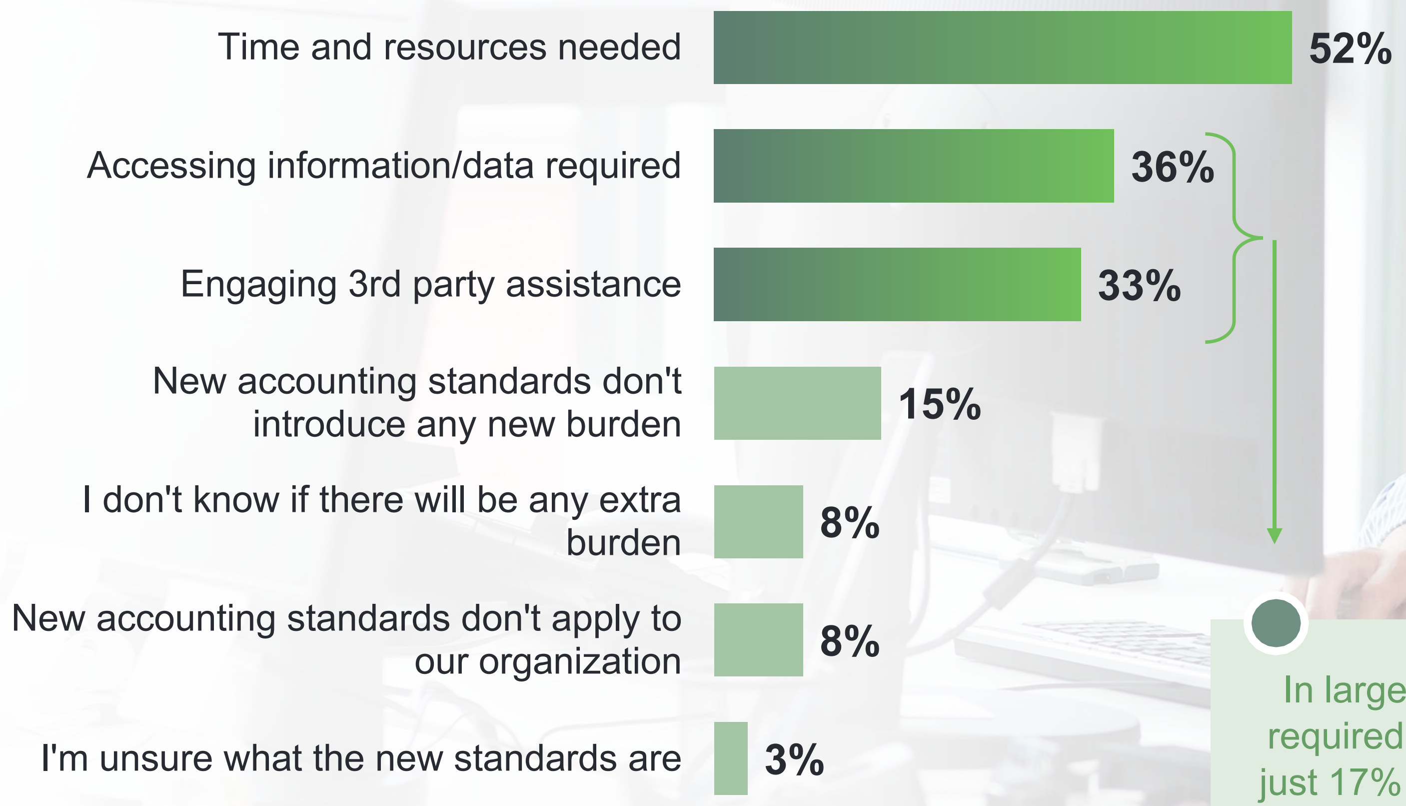
Defining and understanding the CMMC are top of mind for DoD providers. Integration and cost are secondary.

Have you encountered any issues when implementing CMMC?



Looking at the new accounting standards, CFOs predict time and resources to be the largest challenge.

Which parts of implementing will be the most challenging?



In large finance functions (>100 people), 56% say accessing the required information or data will be most challenging, compared to just 17% of smaller functions (<25 people). The same trend is seen when engaging third-party assistance (48% vs. 16%).

Summary

The 2025 Jefferson Wells CFO Priorities Survey provides valuable insights into the evolving priorities and emerging risks that CFOs are addressing.

Profitability, cybersecurity and technology transformation remain at the forefront, with economic uncertainty gaining prominence. CFOs continue to adapt to the changing landscape, with a focus on expanding departments and addressing the challenges posed by new technologies and evolving business environments.

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For more on Jefferson Wells solutions, contact:

Rebecca Albarelli, VP-Solutions

About the Research

This year's CFO Priorities Survey report outlines the key findings and strategic concerns of CFOs across the U.S. for the year 2025. The study was conducted by Jefferson Wells in collaboration with Reputation Leaders, surveying CFOs from organizations of varying sizes and industries.

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