

Trend spotter report

The finance professional of tomorrow

How finance leaders are transforming their roles, teams, and technologies for the future

Produced by:

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rillion

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Executive summary

Something exciting is happening in finance departments across the country. The professionals who once spent their days buried in spreadsheets are now sitting at strategy tables, shaping business decisions with predictive insights. This transformation isn't just changing job descriptions. It's opening up entirely new career paths for finance professionals ready to embrace the opportunity.

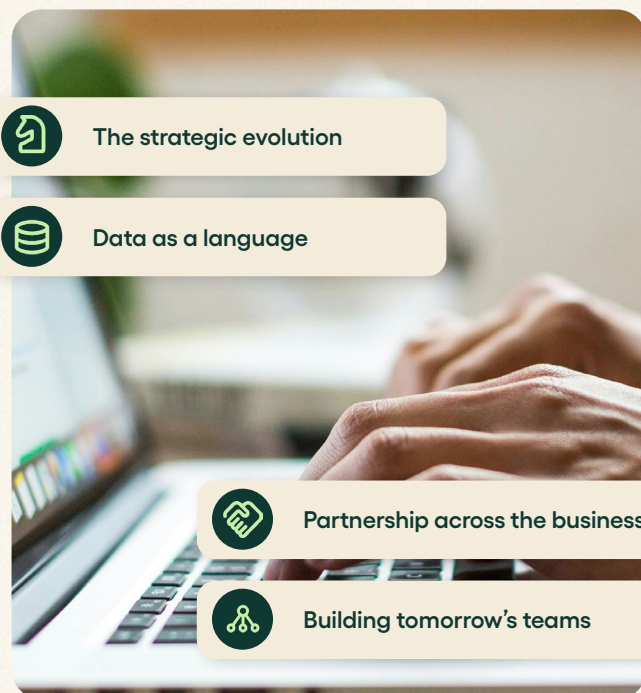
Based on in-depth interviews with CFOs and finance directors across diverse industries, we discovered a profession in the midst of an exciting evolution. **Finance teams are discovering they can deliver far more value when freed from manual tasks, and the tools to make this happen are finally within reach.**

Four key trends

Are reshaping the finance profession:

The strategic evolution

Finance teams are moving beyond historical reporting to become trusted advisors. As one CFO told us: "Finance is moving from operational to strategic, playing an increasingly important role in helping executives navigate complex and changing business environments."



Data as a new language

Finance professionals are discovering that fluency in data analytics and new technologies opens doors to influence and impact they never had before. It's not about becoming programmers. It's about understanding how to turn data into insights that drive decisions.

Partnership across the business

The most successful finance leaders are those who speak the language of their colleagues in operations, sales, and technology. By breaking down traditional silos, they're finding new ways to add value.

Building tomorrow's teams

Organizations are investing in their people, creating learning cultures that help existing staff develop new capabilities while attracting talent excited about finance's expanding role.

The opportunity is clear: finance teams that embrace modern automation tools and develop new capabilities position themselves at the heart of organizational strategy.

Those who start this journey now, even with small steps, will find themselves leading rather than following as the profession continues to evolve.

Market backdrop:

A world of new possibilities

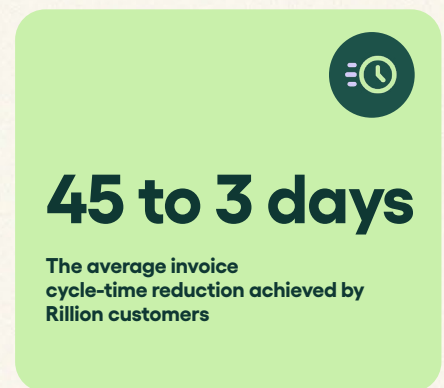
The finance profession is experiencing its most exciting era yet.

New technologies, evolving business needs, and fresh perspectives on talent are creating

opportunities that didn't exist even five years ago. For finance professionals ready to embrace change, the future looks remarkably bright.

Automation opens new doors

The numbers tell an encouraging story:



What does this gap mean? **Opportunity.**

Finance teams that adopt automation aren't just saving time. They're freeing their people to tackle more interesting, strategic work. A Deloitte study found that organizations

implementing automation typically reduce operating expenses by 25-40% (Linnovate Partners), but the real win is what teams do with that recovered time: deeper analysis, better partnerships, more strategic thinking.

The talent evolution

The changing nature of finance work is attracting a new generation of professionals:

52% of finance professionals plan to start their own ventures within two years
(ACCA, 2025)

76% demand hybrid work arrangements as non/negotiable
(ACCA, Global Talent Trends Survey, 2025)

50-75% gap exists between current and optional digital talent levels
(Gartner, 2025)



Rather than a crisis, this represents healthy evolution.

As **Gerard Joseph, CFO of Project Renewal**, observes:

“The technical skills that got us to where we are no longer sufficient. We now need to deploy human skills: managing people, managing conflict, and driving change management.”



Gerard Joseph
Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal

Smart organizations see this as a chance to build teams that combine deep financial expertise with broader business acumen and technical fluency.

Expanding finance's impact

Finance's growing influence across organizations creates new career paths and opportunities:

- Leading digital initiatives that span the entire business
- Providing predictive insights that shape strategy
- Partnering with teams as embedded advisors
- Using scenario planning to help navigate uncertainty

This expansion isn't about adding work. **It's about doing more meaningful work.** As businesses face increasing complexity, they need finance leaders who can translate numbers into narratives and data into decisions.



TREND #1:

From number crunchers to strategic advisors

The most exciting shift in finance is watching professionals move from the back office to the boardroom. This evolution is opening up entirely new career paths and giving finance teams the influence they've always deserved.

Building on strong foundations

Traditional finance skills remain valuable: accuracy, attention to detail, analytical thinking. But now they're the foundation for something bigger. As **Ilana Esterrich, CFO of Planned Parenthood Federation of America**, shares:

"Most folks think about finance people as, 'Okay, we close the books. We do journal entries. Maybe we pay the bills.' And of course, we do. But if that's all you're doing, then I don't think you're really partnering with the business the way that we need to."



Ilana Esterrich
Chief Financial Officer
at Planned Parenthood Federation
of America

The best part? Finance teams already have the core skills needed for strategic work. They just need the opportunity to apply them differently.

The new finance playbook

Today's finance leaders are expanding their influence in practical ways. **Joakim Langkaas, Finance Director at Equipment Depot**, captures this shift perfectly:

"Ten years ago, if you were to ask a finance person what their job was, they would say to track, record and report. Today, we believe it's to inform, influence and inspire action."



Joakim Langkaas
Director of Finance Operations and Shared
Services at Equipment Depot

Here's what this looks like in practice:

- Joining strategy discussions from the start, not just to validate the numbers
- Creating "what-if" scenarios that help teams see around corners
- Translating complex financial data into stories that drive decisions
- Leading initiatives that span multiple departments

Success stories in action

Gerard Joseph shares how this plays out at Project Renewal:

"Finance is evolving from being predominantly focused on processing journal entries, bank recs, and traditional backward-looking activities. Instead, we're becoming strategic advisors who help the business navigate complex decisions."



Gerard Joseph
Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal

One example: when his team automated invoice processing, they didn't just celebrate the time saved. They redirected those hours to analyzing vendor relationships and finding opportunities to negotiate better terms, delivering real value beyond just faster processing.

The beauty of this shift is that it builds on existing strengths. Finance professionals who embrace this evolution find their work more engaging, their contributions more visible, and their career prospects significantly expanded.

TREND #2:

Data literacy as the new finance superpower

Data fluency has become a defining skill for modern finance professionals. Those who combine traditional finance expertise with data capabilities are finding new ways to add value and expand their influence within organizations.

The stakes are clear

Vlad Toca, CFO of Bobcat of Southeast Alaska, doesn't mince words about the importance of data skills:

“Data literacy is important. You either get on board or you're not gonna survive. Every day there's innovation. You might be ready for the role now, but I guarantee you within three months, you need to revisit your skills.”



Vlad Toca
Chief Financial Officer
at Bobcat Company

This direct assessment reflects what many finance leaders are experiencing. The pace of technological change means that skills have a shorter shelf life than ever before. While this

creates pressure, it also opens doors for those willing to adapt.

Practical skills that matter

Becoming data-literate doesn't require a computer science degree. **Gerard Joseph** outlines what organizations actually need:

“We now require finance professionals to understand data analytics, visualization tools, and even basic AI concepts. It's not about becoming programmers, but about understanding how to leverage these tools for better insights.”



Gerard Joseph
Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal

Finance teams are focusing on skills that deliver immediate value:

- Building dashboards in Tableau or Power BI that communicate insights clearly
- Using predictive analytics to identify trends before they impact the bottom line
- Automating routine reports with tools like Alteryx or advanced Excel features
- Understanding AI capabilities well enough to apply them appropriately
- One finance manager shared: “I invested two weeks learning Power BI fundamentals. Now I can produce analysis in hours that previously took days, and leadership actually uses my dashboards for decision-making.”

The learning reality

Continuous learning has become part of the job. **Joakim Langkaas** acknowledges this reality:

“Working in finance, you always have to keep learning and keep abreast of what’s happening in the industry.”



Joakim Langkaas
Director of Finance Operations and Shared Services at Equipment Depot

Forward-thinking organizations are supporting this need by:

- Allocating dedicated time for skill development
- Creating peer learning programs where colleagues share expertise
- Recognizing and rewarding process improvements
- Building cultures where experimentation is encouraged

The finance professionals who thrive in this environment are those who view learning as an investment in their future rather than an added burden.

TREND #3:

Breaking down silos through business partnership

The boundaries between finance and other departments are dissolving. Today’s most effective finance leaders operate as business partners who understand operations, sales, marketing, and technology well enough to add value across the organization.



Beyond the numbers

The shift from functional expert to business partner requires new ways of working. As **Ilana Esterrich** explains:

“The technical skills that got us to where we are no longer sufficient. We now need to deploy human skills—managing people, managing conflict and driving change management”



Ilana Esterrich
Chief Financial Officer
at Planned Parenthood Federation
of America

This evolution demands:

- Understanding how different parts of the business actually operate
- Communicating financial insights in language that resonates with non-finance colleagues
- Building relationships based on trust and mutual respect
- Working comfortably with ambiguity and competing priorities

Expanding knowledge horizons

Modern finance professionals need breadth as well as depth. **Ilana Esterrich** highlights an important mindset shift:

“We need to be comfortable with gray areas and the ability to pivot as needed. Sometimes people in numerical jobs get bogged down in black and white thinking.”



Ilana Esterrich
Chief Financial Officer
at Planned Parenthood Federation
of America

This flexibility becomes essential when collaborating across departments. **Finance leaders report needing working knowledge of:**

- Marketing metrics and customer acquisition costs
- Sales pipeline dynamics and revenue recognition nuances
- Operations workflows and efficiency measures
- Legal and compliance considerations
- Technology capabilities and limitations

One finance director told us: “I spent time shadowing our operations team for a week. Now when we discuss cost reduction, I understand what’s actually feasible versus what just looks good on a spreadsheet.”

Building trusted partnerships

Success in this partnership model goes beyond technical knowledge. **Finance leaders who make the greatest impact focus on:**

- Asking questions that help teams think through challenges
- Providing data-driven insights without dictating decisions

- Understanding each department’s goals and constraints
- Finding solutions that balance financial discipline with operational reality

The most successful finance professionals recognize that partnership isn’t about having all the answers. It’s about bringing financial expertise to collaborative problem-solving. When done well, finance becomes an enabler rather than a gatekeeper.

TREND #4:

Navigating the talent transformation challenge

Organizations face a complex reality: they need to develop new capabilities in existing teams while competing for talent in a changed employment landscape. This dual challenge requires thoughtful approaches and sustained commitment.

The upskilling reality

Many finance teams include experienced professionals who built their careers before digital tools became central to the profession. For these team members, adapting to new technologies and ways of working represents a significant shift.

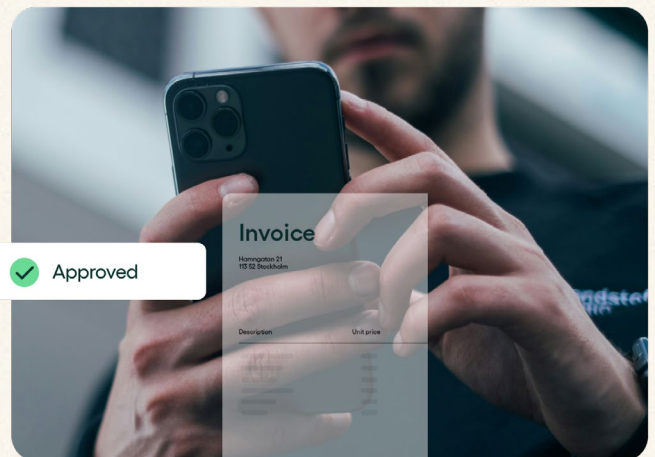
The challenge is practical as well as technical. Finance teams already operating at capacity must find time to learn new skills while maintaining daily operations. As one CFO noted: “We’re essentially rebuilding the plane while flying it.”

Retention in a mobile world

The employment landscape has shifted significantly:

- Professionals have more options than ever, with remote work expanding opportunities globally
- Younger team members expect clear growth paths and meaningful work
- The entrepreneurial option attracts ambitious finance professionals
- Competition for talent with digital skills remains intense

Organizations are learning that retention requires more than competitive compensation. Finance professionals stay where they can develop new skills, work on strategic projects, and see clear paths for advancement.



Practical approaches that work

Leading organizations are addressing these challenges through multiple strategies:

For current teams:

- Creating structured learning programs with protected time for development
- Pairing digitally-savvy staff with experienced professionals for mutual learning
- Rotating staff through strategic projects to build new skills
- Providing clear pathways showing how new skills lead to advancement

For recruitment:

- Emphasizing growth opportunities and learning culture
- Offering flexibility in work arrangements
- Connecting roles to organizational impact
- Investing in modern tools that attract tech-savvy professionals

One finance leader shared their approach: “We dedicated Friday afternoons to learning labs where team members teach each other new skills. The person who automated our expense reports last month is now teaching others how to do the same.”

The organizations succeeding in this transformation recognize that building tomorrow’s finance team is a marathon, not a sprint. It requires patience, investment, and a willingness to experiment with new approaches to development and retention.

Poll results:

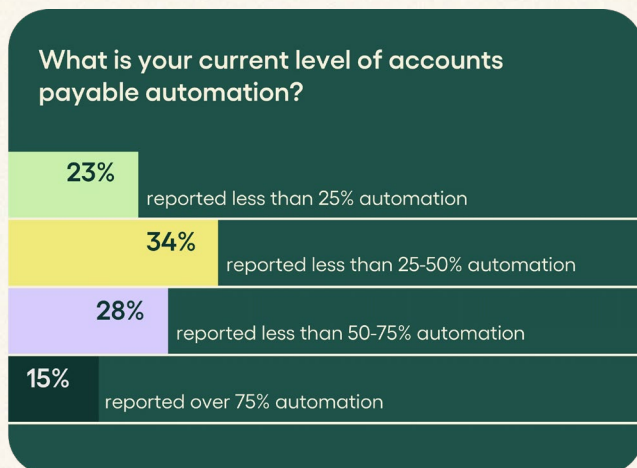
Insights from finance leaders

Following our interviews, we asked participants to complete a brief poll. While our sample size is limited to five finance leaders, their responses provide valuable insights into the current state of automation in finance.

Key finding #1:

Wide variation in automation adoption

When asked about their current level of accounts payable automation, responses revealed a striking disparity:



This variation highlights the opportunity gap across the market. Interestingly, organizations define and measure automation differently—what one company considers 50% automated, another might view as much lower. Despite these definitional differences, a clear consensus emerged: all participants recognized the need to increase their automation levels, regardless of their starting point.

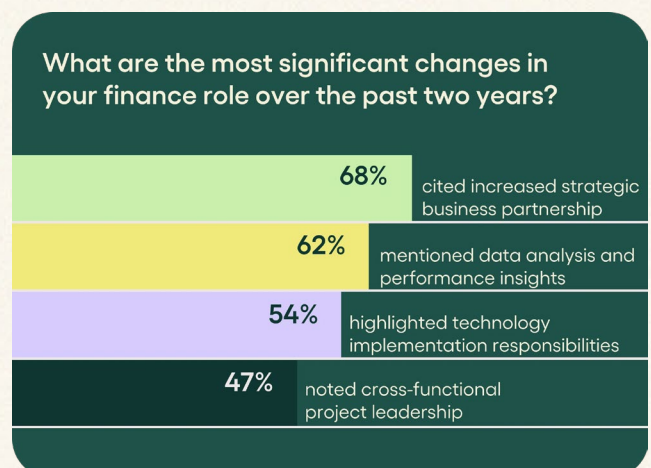
Even organizations with higher automation levels indicated they continue seeking improvements, with the focus shifting from “whether to automate” to “what to automate next.”

One respondent noted: “We’ve automated invoice capture but still manually handle exception processing. That’s our next target.”

Key finding #2:

Strategic work expanding across all roles

We asked participants to identify the most significant change in their finance role over the past two years. The results aligned closely with our interview findings:

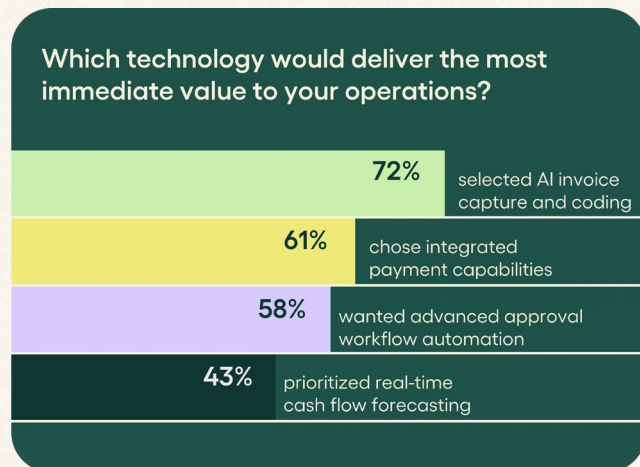


Multiple selections were allowed, and most respondents chose at least three areas, indicating the multi-faceted nature of role expansion.

Key finding #3:

AI applications top technology wishlist

When asked which technology would deliver the most immediate value to their operations, participants prioritized practical applications:



The focus on AI for specific, practical applications rather than general “digital transformation” suggests finance leaders are looking for targeted solutions to specific pain points.

What this means for finance teams

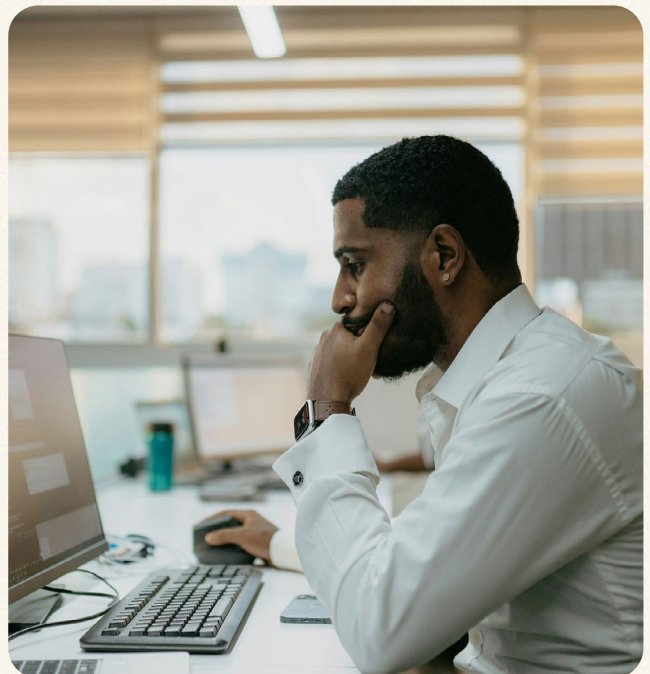
The trends we've identified point to a clear direction: finance is becoming more strategic, more technical, and more integrated with the broader business. For organizations ready to embrace this evolution, the path forward involves thoughtful planning and consistent execution.

Building your foundation

Start by understanding your current state. With only 9% of AP departments fully automated (Institute of Financial Operations & Leadership), most organizations have room for improvement. The key is identifying where you'll see the quickest wins.

Accounts payable often provides the best starting point. A Deloitte study found that organizations implementing touchless transactions can reduce operating expenses by 25-40% (Linnovate Partners), making the business case clear. Teams can see tangible results within weeks, building momentum for broader transformation.

But automation is just the beginning. The real value comes from what you do with the time saved.



Organizations seeing the best results immediately redirect freed capacity to:



Deeper analysis of
spending patterns



Proactive vendor
relationship management



Strategic
planning support



Cross-functional
collaboration

Developing capabilities over time

With 92% of companies increasing AI investments (McKinsey) and FP&A teams using generative AI jumping from 6% to 47% in just one year (EY), the pace of change is accelerating.

Organizations need structured approaches to capability building:



First quarter focus:

- Launch pilot automation projects in high-volume areas
- Begin regular data literacy training sessions
- Create forums for sharing learnings across the team
- Start measuring and communicating early wins



Mid-year milestones:

- Expand automation to additional processes
- Embed finance team members with business units
- Replace static reports with dynamic dashboards
- Develop clear career paths incorporating new skills



Year-end goals:

- Integrate predictive analytics into regular planning cycles
- Establish finance as a true business partner
- Build talent pipelines through university partnerships
- Create cultures where continuous learning is standard practice

The leadership imperative

Transformation requires committed leadership. **Finance leaders must balance multiple priorities:**

- Maintaining operational excellence while driving change
- Supporting team members through skill transitions
- Building credibility with executive peers
- Making the case for continued investment

The most successful transformations happen when leaders model the behaviors they want to see: learning new skills themselves, taking calculated risks with new approaches, and celebrating both successes and learning opportunities.

As one CFO told us: “The finance function that emerges from this transformation will handle fewer transactions but have far greater strategic impact. We’re becoming the place where technology, talent, and business insight converge to drive better decisions.”



Solution spotlight:

How Rillion transforms finance teams

Rillion brings three decades of accounts payable expertise together with practical, AI-powered solutions to help finance teams achieve touchless invoice processing. The cloud platform processes over 40 million invoices annually for more than 3,000 organizations, regularly reducing processing times from weeks to days while achieving accuracy levels above 90%.

Real organizations, real results

Tacala Companies: Managing 60,000 invoices annually across 300 Taco Bell locations, Tacala's 70-person AP team relies on Rillion's contract-matching AI to maintain smooth operations across their complex multi-entity structure.

Cypress Creek Renewables: This renewable energy leader processes 25,000 invoices annually with 98% data capture accuracy. Rillion maintains complete audit trails across their multi-entity operations, essential for their compliance requirements.

Technopolis: During their D365 implementation, Technopolis eliminated manual coding using Rillion's AI capabilities, significantly accelerating their month-end close process.



The Rillion difference

Organizations choose Rillion for its flexibility and ability to handle complexity. The platform adapts to each customer's unique workflows rather than forcing rigid processes.

Key capabilities include:

- AI capture achieving over 90% accuracy through intelligent OCR and machine learning
- Predictive approval routing based on historical patterns and business rules

- Over 20 pre-built ERP connectors for easy integration
- Role-based security that enhances both efficiency and control
- No per-user pricing, encouraging broad adoption across teams

Typical implementations take 12-14 weeks, allowing organizations to see value quickly while ensuring proper configuration and training. This measured approach balances the need for rapid results with long-term success.

Complete functionality

Rillion provides true end-to-end automation: capture, match, approve, pay, and reconcile on a single platform. The solution includes one-click vendor payments, keeping the entire process simplified.

What sets Rillion apart is its human-first approach to AI. The system provides explainable results that keep accountants in control while automating routine work. Built-in compliance with SOC 1/2, GDPR, and HIPAA standards ensures enterprise-grade security.

Taking the next step

Ready to explore how touchless AP can transform your finance operations?

Join the 3,000+ organizations already achieving 93% faster processing and 98% data capture accuracy.

Visit **rillion.com** or book a meeting to see how Rillion can work within your unique environment and requirements.

Buyer insights



Gerard Joseph

Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal



Ilana Esterrich

Chief Financial Officer at Planned
Parenthood Federation of America



Joakim Langkaas

Director of Finance Operations and
Shared Services at Equipment Depot



Kadir Karaman

Senior Finance Executive
Founder of Karum Financial Advisory



Vlad Toca

Chief Financial Officer, Bobcat of
Southeast Alaska



Gerard Joseph

Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal

About Gerard Joseph

Gerard Joseph serves as Chief Financial Officer at Project Renewal, a comprehensive nonprofit healthcare and human services organization in New York City, which he joined in July 2024. With extensive experience spanning finance management and controller roles across multiple organizations, Gerard has evolved from traditional number-focused positions to

strategic leadership roles. He oversees financial operations for an organization dedicated to addressing homelessness through services including shelter, healthcare, substance abuse treatment, mental health support and job training. Gerard is passionate about elevating the finance profession and believes strongly in the strategic value finance professionals bring to organizational success.

“You might be ready for the role now, but I guarantee you within three months, you need to revisit your skills.”



Gerard Joseph
Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal

The finance profession appears to be undergoing significant transformation. How would you characterize the changes you’re observing in finance roles today?

The evolution is quite dramatic when you consider where we’ve come from. Finance used to be about ledgers, then we moved to Excel, but nowadays it’s Power BI and Tableau. We’re seeing the digitization of finance at the forefront of the industry, and we need to keep pace with AI and automation driving these changes.

What’s particularly striking is how the role itself has fundamentally shifted. When I first started as a finance manager and controller, it was less about strategy and more about the numbers. But now, as a CFO, it’s not just finance anymore. We’re strategic partners to both the CEO and COO.

The term being used in the financial industry right now is “reskilling of people.” You might be ready for the role today, but I guarantee within three months, you need to revisit your skills because it’s changing at such a fast pace.

What are your primary concerns as a finance leader in this rapidly evolving landscape?

The speed of disruption genuinely keeps me up at night. Even looking at AI, with all the different versions and tools available, determining which one is best whilst keeping up with the pace is challenging. I need my team to be up to par, but the speed of disruption means I’m constantly reassessing what skills we need in this ever-changing environment.

Data fragmentation is another concern that’s linked to talent gaps. By the time I think about something today, it might be irrelevant tomorrow. I’m always listening to podcasts to understand what’s emerging in the finance world because it’s only a matter of time before it becomes relevant to our sector.

My biggest aspiration is for finance to be valued at the forefront of organizations. For too long, we’ve been referred to as just “the money people” or “numbers conscious,” but I believe we’ve been undervalued. Finance used to be about presentation and telling the story that numbers reveal, but nowadays, the role finance

“The scope we need to address as financial individuals is much broader than before.”



Gerard Joseph
Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal

plays is more crucial. It's not just numbers; it's forecasting, anticipating what may or may not happen, positioning the organization to be financially stable. We handle everything from risk management to creating “what if” scenarios.

How are you preparing your finance function for tomorrow's challenges?

Preparing for tomorrow's finance landscape requires accountability on two fronts. I need to be ready personally and hold myself accountable for what I know and don't know. Simultaneously, I need to empower my team so we're supporting each other rather than holding each other back.

Change management is crucial. If we need to transition overnight, do we have the resources? How do we use what we have to build an effective team? The digital impact question is constant: how prepared are we to adapt? These are questions we should have been answering yesterday, not today, for tomorrow.

Technology integration is about identifying the best tools for what we do, eliminating repetitive tasks and working smart. When we moved to our new ERP system Coupa, we addressed major pain points like manual invoice processing and inconsistencies in our vendor database. Manual processes were creating vulnerabilities, especially with fraudulent activities becoming more sophisticated.

In what ways do you see technology reshaping finance operations?

Technology, through automation and AI features emerging in the financial world, plays both a predictive and real-time function. It brings data at the speed of light, enabling us to make decisions in a timely manner based on accurate financial data. What would take

us three days or a week to analyze, technology can accomplish in five to ten minutes.

This puts us in a significantly better position for real-time decision making, which is the model people are gravitating towards. Technology improves workflow and facilitates collaboration for all the analysis needed. The crucial role technology plays is enabling immediate, informed decisions based on current data rather than historical snapshots.

How do you envision the finance workforce evolving, and what advice would you offer to emerging professionals?

The impact will be significant. If we automate most workflows, a department of thirty could easily become fewer than twenty over time. AI will handle many current tasks—that's the reality we must accept. Either AI will eliminate some jobs, or people won't have the skill set to manage that automation.

However, I do see new roles emerging. There's a need for what I'd call a “change agent” position within finance departments. Similar to how compliance departments have specialists who interpret new regulations, finance will need someone to be the quarterback behind technology infrastructure. This role would ensure all automation and platforms communicate effectively. It's not an IT role—it's a finance role requiring domain expertise.

For entry-level professionals joining today, you need to be that change agent. You need digital background and your financial technology IQ needs to be sharp. Data literacy is critical—you either get on board or you won't survive. Whether you become a financial prompt engineer, a connector, or a strategic technology advisor, you must be technology savvy. Being a change agent means adapting to whatever direction the finance industry takes.

“Data literacy is important. You either get on board or you're not gonna survive.”



Gerard Joseph
Chief Financial Officer
at Project Renewal



Ilana Esterrich

Chief Financial Officer
at Planned Parenthood Federation of America

About Ilana Esterrich

Ilana Esterrich is the Chief Financial Officer at Planned Parenthood Federation of America, a role she has held since February 2023. With over 30 years of experience, she specializes in financial excellence and operational efficiency in complex environments. Starting her career in management consulting, Ilana has worked with major organizations including General

Mills and Thomson Reuters during significant acquisitions. She develops financial strategies that align with advocacy initiatives while leveraging advanced analytics for long-term planning that balances mission-critical objectives with fiscal sustainability.

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How has the role of finance professionals evolved in recent years, and what are the key changes you're observing?

We're evolving from numbers-based, retroactive analytics to becoming truly strategic players in the corporate environment. Finance is moving beyond producing point-in-time financial statements towards leveraging that information to think forward about what will happen and what might happen.

We're shifting from being the negative department that says 'we don't have the budget' to partners who say 'we will work with you to figure out how to do this'. Finance professionals have a unique advantage—we see everything happening across an organization because of our proximity to financial information. We're now partnering with marketing, sales, operations and HR in unprecedented ways.

The technical skills that got us to where we are no longer sufficient. We now need human skills—managing people, managing conflict and driving change management. These aren't easily taught in technical schools or MBA programs but are capabilities the most successful finance professionals are developing throughout their careers.

What specific approaches or tools have helped you transition finance from a reporting function to a strategic partner?

In corporate environments, you'd often see CFOs at all-staff meetings simply recite

“The technical skills that got us to where we are no longer sufficient. We now need to deploy human skills — managing people, managing conflict and driving change management.”



Ilana Esterrich
Chief Financial Officer
Planned Parenthood Federation of America

numbers: 'We did better. We did worse. This grew by X percent'. Anyone could read a slide and get that information—it was clearly an accountant reading numbers without connection to the business.

Then you'd see marketing or sales leaders talk about new products and customers—and that's where people got excited. The key is merging these approaches to create a more compelling financial narrative.

When looking at improving operational effectiveness, there's often gut feeling like, 'If we invest in this department, we'd be winning'. Finance adds value by saying, 'That feels like a good solution. However, you're increasing sales in an area with a very low margin. Why not apply that investment to something with a higher margin? You might move fewer units, but you'll add more to the bottom line'.

It's not about being the 'no' department. Instead, it's saying, 'That sounds great, but here are tweaks to make it more efficient and profitable'. That's the storytelling aspect I bring to my teams.

The critical tools enabling this transition are the convergence between accounting systems and analytical tools like Power BI or Tableau. Being able to connect actuals with forecasts, multi-scenario analytics and what-if comparisons—these are the capabilities supporting finance going forward.

How are you helping your finance team develop the human skills needed for this more strategic role?

People don't want to just come in, do math and go home anymore. With easy access to knowledge, there's increasing intellectual curiosity among finance professionals who want their work to have greater impact.

I've created an Office of the CFO Professional Development Plan that provides depth within each functional area while helping team members understand: 'If I wanted to learn about FP&A or treasury, these are the resources I could use'. We've structured it by function so if you want to understand what skills would get you to the next promotion, you can see what training is recommended.

We include podcasts, books, certifications, conferences and seminars. While I provide tools and access, team members must take ownership of their development. I'll open doors, but they must take initiative to incorporate learning into their everyday work.

I have people shadow me and attend meetings. The people closest to the problem should be at the table for the solution. I delegate and leave things delegated, acting as coach when they encounter difficulties.

Sometimes people in numerical jobs get bogged down in black and white thinking. Being comfortable with gray areas and the ability to pivot is another skill I'm building into the team. The most successful finance professionals can navigate ambiguity and help others do the same.

Where do you see the biggest opportunity for technology innovation within finance?

It's all the low-hanging fruit—the day-to-day pain points. Automating accounts receivable, accounts payable, closing the books faster and creating dashboards that form the basis for decision-making.

Automation shifts skills towards decision-making: 'I see what the dashboard shows. Now I can decide where to take my car'. I don't have to figure out how much fuel is in the tank; the gauge tells me. I know my speed and direction, making me a much more efficient driver able to steer the organization effectively.

Getting comfortable with technology beyond Excel and looking for ways to tighten processes is essential. Just because you've implemented the best AP solution doesn't mean you're done. You need to continuously ensure everything is still working together and that what you thought was value-added a year ago still is.

We must stay on top of technology and ensure it serves us, rather than us serving it. The goal is to use automation to free up time for forward-thinking activities, balancing technological capabilities with human judgment to provide insights that drive organizational success.



Joakim Langkaas

Director of Finance Operations and Shared Services
at Equipment Depot

About Joakim Langkaas

Joakim Langkaas serves as Director of Finance Operations and Shared Services at Equipment Depot, where he focuses on strengthening operational fundamentals and fostering a service-driven culture across the organization. With over 20 years of experience, including a career as a management consultant at Accenture followed by strategic finance roles within the oil and gas sector at Hydro and TechnipFMC, Joakim brings a wealth of expertise in process transformation and digital

innovation. At Equipment Depot, he leads efforts to enhance customer-focused accounts receivable and credit risk management, streamline internal functions like accounts payable and treasury, and optimize supplier engagement through digital solutions in supply chain processes. His leadership is centered on integrating automation, telematics, and emerging technologies like Generative AI to drive efficiency and improve decision-making within the Shared Services functions.

How has the finance professional's role evolved beyond traditional responsibilities?

In the 20 years I've been working in both oil and gas and material handling, I've witnessed rapid changes in finance organizations. One of the major shifts are that transactions that impact revenue and cost are now happening earlier in the process—at the point of service, supply chain interaction, or customer engagement—placing financial accountability further from the finance team. We're increasingly dependent on processes and systems that run efficient

operations, which means transactions are entered very early in the process.

This creates complexity because reporting becomes more challenging when you need accurate data from the beginning. One of the biggest challenges was that transactions happen early in the process, but without proper rules around master data entry, it becomes extremely difficult to create meaningful reports afterward.

The competency required has shifted dramatically. Previously, you could succeed by being a good accountant, but now finance professionals need much more operational understanding and business acumen. You must understand how data flows and how operations work.

With AI and increased computing power, analytical reporting has become more accessible. You can work with less perfect data upfront, but you absolutely must understand how to interpret results correctly.

What operational challenges have emerged with finance automation?

The shift toward automation has brought valuable efficiencies, but it has also introduced

“The biggest thing is business acumen. Spend time with the business and don't get too bogged down in analytics alone.”



Joakim Langkaas
Director of Finance Operations and Shared
Services at Equipment Depot

new challenges around trust and process control. As transactional responsibilities have expanded from finance departments to roles like warehouse clerks and sales coordinators, we've observed some delays stemming from hesitancy to fully rely on automated systems.

For example, on the accounts payable side, automation has allowed invoices to flow directly into our system. However, this has also led to an increase in exceptions requiring manual review—often because suppliers send invoices immediately after shipping, even when the warehouse hasn't yet confirmed receipt.

Similarly, sales coordinators tend to wait until they are confident that equipment has been properly received before posting receipts. This cautious approach, while understandable, can result in delays of several weeks between delivery and system receipt, postponing customer billing and impacting cash flow.

Addressing these challenges involves a combination of focused training, efforts to reduce turnover, and strengthening process controls—such as implementing barcode scanning systems—to guide accuracy and build confidence in the process. These steps will help ensure smoother workflows and more timely financial recognition.

How are you bridging the gap between data and actionable insights?

We're not lacking data—we're lacking structured information and decision-making frameworks needed to turn that data into actionable insights. The biggest first step was consolidating our regions to one ERP system so processes and data flows consistently. Previously, we had multiple ERP systems including several that weren't supported anymore.

We implemented AWS as our reporting platform to centralize data, transitioning away from spreadsheets. The AWS platform with Power BI represents our core technology stack.

The breakthrough comes when you start building dashboards, because that's how you identify where data is problematic. We discovered we had the same equipment showing as multiple inventory items because some entries used dashes, others used spaces, and others had various formatting.

We had situations where equipment aged out in one operating company while there was demand in another, simply because people couldn't recognize that "Item ABC" was the same as "Item ABC-dash." As a company that

tracks every piece of equipment we've sold, we weren't converting this information into actionable decisions.

Simple applications like lease renewals demonstrate the opportunity: we should contact customers 12 to 18 months before lease expiration, but we weren't systematically doing this despite having the data.

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Joakim Langkaas

Director of Finance Operations and Shared Services at Equipment Depot

What are your key priorities as a finance leader today?

Getting and retaining the right people is my primary concern. Moving from Norway to the US, I've observed that people change jobs much more frequently here. The pace of change means keeping people satisfied enough to stay becomes critical, especially when you're trying to do more work with fewer people through automation.

Building career paths that give people growth opportunities is challenging but essential. The people you retain need to be exceptional because automation makes each individual more critical to operations.

Macroeconomic turbulence—tariffs, trade wars, and economic volatility—requires proactive management through intentional planning and data-driven decision-making. Having navigated 20 years in the oil and gas industry, where market cycles and oil prices have fluctuated widely, I've learned that effective planning is critical to resilience.

Positioned as a distributor between suppliers and customers, we've also refined contract structures to ensure cost increases can be passed through, helping maintain stability in uncertain times. During COVID-19, we developed a comprehensive playbook that continues to structure responses to today's challenges.

What advice would you give to entry-level finance professionals?

Business acumen is absolutely critical. Spend time with business operations rather than getting bogged down in analytics alone. If you can take internships or work directly in operations - even simple tasks like working in a warehouse - do it. Understanding these operations is essential.

The earlier you gain operational experience, the better positioned you'll be. Take classes focused on business systems and how they interact. Learn basic programming languages like SQL, Python, BI & Dashboard Tools, etc. - it's incredibly helpful for finance professionals.

Understanding how to work with generative AI models is becoming essential. I'm still learning this myself, but it's clear that AI literacy will be fundamental for future finance professionals.

Spend time on cost accounting and understanding cost flows. Many companies lack control over cost accounting. Understanding which customers generate profit versus losses is crucial but challenging.

The traditional finance functions still need to operate efficiently, but automation is becoming essential. Understanding financing operations remains important, but these skills must integrate with operational understanding.

Finally, don't get siloed. The complexity of modern business means you need to understand how everything flows together.



Equipment Depot is America's largest independently operated material handling and rental source, serving local communities since 1939 across 50+ locations spanning 25 states. The Houston-based company provides comprehensive material handling solutions including new and used forklifts, aerial lifts, pallet racking, automation systems, parts, service, and rentals. Acquired by Mitsubishi Logisnext Americas Inc. in 2019, Equipment Depot operates as part of one of the world's largest material handling groups, employing over 850 certified technicians and delivering full-service solutions to maximize productivity and minimize downtime for businesses nationwide.



Kadir Karaman

Financial Executive
Founder of Karum Financial Advisory

About Kadir Karaman

Kadir Karaman is a seasoned finance executive with over 20 years of experience across consumer goods and technology sectors. With a strong background in strategic finance leadership, he has held multiple senior finance roles such as Regional CFO, Vice President of Finance and Finance Transformation Lead in

global organizations. Currently the Founder of Karum Financial Advisory, Kadir provides strategic financial guidance to venture capitals, private equity firms and scale-ups, specializing in M&A, revenue growth strategy and fractional CFO services.

How is the finance professional's role changing in today's business environment?

The finance function is transitioning from operational to increasingly strategic. We're seeing finance professionals becoming more vital in helping executives navigate volatile business environments.

In today's uncertainty, CFOs play a crucial role

in guiding capital decisions and investment options, addressing everything from shareholder changes to financing structures. These concerns are now consistently on board agendas—no longer just about executing plans but adapting to changing conditions.

Technological disruption is another major factor. Whether it's AI or new market competition, the barriers to entry across industries are lowering significantly. This trend has been evident in consumer sectors with indie brands gaining market share, but the pace is accelerating. CFOs must now guide investments, determine strategic directions, and develop technology roadmaps.

The finance role isn't just about managing the current portfolio—it's about anticipating where to go next in an uncertain landscape.

How are you seeing traditional finance tools and practices evolve with technological advancement?

Just a few years ago, the default approach was implementing comprehensive ERP systems like SAP with shared service centers—projects that typically took years to complete.

Today, that paradigm is shifting dramatically. For many businesses, especially tech companies without inventory or manufacturing

“Finance is moving from operational to strategic, playing an increasingly important role in helping executives navigating volatile and disruptive business environments.”



Kadir Karaman
Financial Executive
Founder of Karum Financial Advisory

needs, those heavyweight systems may not be the right fit. Instead, we can create ecosystems with different specialized tools implemented in months rather than years.

This approach offers tremendous advantages—greater flexibility, easier changes, and stronger negotiation power by avoiding dependence on a single vendor. The integration between modern platforms is becoming easier, particularly with AI capabilities increasingly embedded.

This creates tension between standardization and flexibility. The benefits of a unified system must now be balanced against the agility that modular solutions provide. For high-growth companies where products are evolving quarterly and business models are shifting, rigid systems often struggle to keep pace.

I've seen cases where companies create workarounds with inflexible systems, resulting in manual adjustments at month-end just to close the books. Finding the right balance remains a key challenge.

What are the biggest pain points in financial operations that technology could address?

Manual processes remain prevalent throughout finance operations. While some countries are moving to e-invoicing, many internal company processes still involve significant manual intervention. In invoice processing, scanning is just the first step—classification, booking, payment and spend analysis often remain manual.

During finance transformations, I've encountered persistent issues: invoices not paid or booked correctly because teams attempt perfect processing—individually classifying each invoice to specific purchase orders. This perfectionism creates bottlenecks.

AI presents an extraordinary opportunity. Instead of rigid algorithms handling only repetitive tasks, generative AI can intelligently allocate costs based on descriptions and underlying logic, with human review for validation. From my experience, such systems could accurately process at least half of transactions immediately, improving speed and efficiency.

Beyond transactions, I see technology transforming financial forecasting. Many current systems require excessive manual inputs—I've seen models requiring data entry across 40 different tabs just to generate one revenue number. By contrast, I've worked with machine

learning models for advertising forecasting with remarkable accuracy, providing more reliable projections with less effort.

How should finance professionals prepare for tomorrow's financial landscape?

Finance professionals need a blend of strategic thinking and technical expertise. While accounting skills remain essential, we must recognize that many traditional roles are evolving—some becoming automated, others more strategic.

I've observed a concerning gap: some ambitious professionals focus exclusively on becoming strategic partners without

“Today you don't need one name for an ERP, you can create an ecosystem with different tools that you can implement in six month rather than two years time.”



Kadir Karaman
Financial Executive
Founder of Karum Financial Advisory

developing the necessary technical foundation. They aspire to CFO roles without experiencing accounting, treasury or M&A. Conversely, technical specialists often struggle to translate their knowledge into strategic insights.

My advice is to seek diverse experiences early in your career. Don't limit yourself to one specialization—rotate through different finance functions. Expose yourself to accounting, audit, treasury and M&A. Change companies and industries to accelerate your learning curve.

For those already in specialized roles, find cross-functional projects that force collaboration. When implementing financial planning systems, ensure your FP&A team understands the data flow from source systems.

I've implemented programmes like structured shadowing where team members spend time with colleagues in different locations, and mentorship initiatives where specialists help each other develop complementary skills. These create a ripple effect as participants share their experiences throughout the organization which also fosters upskilling talent and scaling-up best practices easily.

What role will data literacy and analytical skills play for finance professionals moving forward?

The importance of data literacy varies by position. At CFO level, understanding data concepts is crucial, but technical execution can be delegated. What's essential is developing the ability to identify data inaccuracies, ask the right questions, and translate information into actionable insights.

I experienced this challenge when a CFO colleague introduced a new forecasting tool. During the first meeting with their Chief Sales Officer, the sales leader didn't recognize the numbers. Rather than clarifying in simple terms, the finance team sent over a 30-tab Excel file expecting the sales director to navigate it independently. This communication failure shows where many finance teams still struggle.

Finance professionals must develop skills to clean data, recognize patterns, and transform technical information into clear narratives that business leaders can act upon. The technical aspects are increasingly automated, but the ability to derive meaningful insights and communicate them effectively remains distinctly human—and increasingly valuable.



Vlad Toca

Chief Financial Officer
at Bobcat Company

About Vlad Toca

Vlad Toca serves as Chief Financial Officer at Bobcat of Southeast Alaska, overseeing operations in both Juneau and Ketchikan. Since stepping into the role in March 2023, he has led the transformation of finance operations into a modern, strategic, and technology-driven function. With over a decade of leadership experience spanning healthcare and heavy machinery sectors, Vlad brings a unique blend of financial strategy, operational innovation, and hands-on technical expertise to the table.

His background includes an Executive MBA and specialization in data science, machine learning, and process automation.

Before joining Bobcat of Juneau and Ketchikan, Vlad served in healthcare senior roles, where he developed 27 corporate-level dashboards and spoke at national conferences about AI integration in finance and operational innovation, working on special projects like state wide telehealth network and technology implementations.

How has the role of finance professionals evolved, and what's driving this transformation?

The modern finance professional is evolving from a passive historian of numbers into a proactive architect of strategy. We are now expected to forecast, advise, and help shape the future of the business. This transformation is driven by real-time data access, digital automation, and the increasing need for cross-functional alignment.

When I joined Bobcat of Juneau and Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska, there were no forecasting tools or consolidated reporting systems. I unified our banking environment, linked it with real-time sales tracking, and worked directly with our regional sales teams. This visibility allowed us to anticipate floor plan due dates and strategically position inventory. By proactively managing product allocation, particularly for government contracts and mining operations, we significantly improved profitability and avoided interest accruals.

What technological innovations are you implementing to modernize operations?

Technology is no longer a support tool; it is the strategic engine of modern finance. I designed forecasting dashboards in our ERP system, IntelliDealer by VitalEdge, integrating floor plan

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Vlad Toca
Chief Financial Officer
at Bobcat Company

liabilities and vendor payables to streamline weekly planning cycles. Using data science software, we created custom visualizations and month-to-date sales comparisons that allow instant data-driven decisions.

This approach enabled us to reallocate cash more efficiently and avoid high-cost interest. In 2024, we reduced invoice processing time by 48%, freeing up capacity to focus on margin enhancement and client engagement.

“AI isn’t replacing finance professionals. It’s augmenting us.”



Vlad Toca
Chief Financial Officer
at Bobcat Company

I also automated month-end close processes, standardized late charges, and implemented cross-departmental protocols.

How are you balancing AI integration with human expertise?

AI and machine learning are revolutionizing how we manage risk, detect fraud, and improve accuracy. Our predictive analytics systems maintain invoice error rates below 2%. We also proactively flag suspicious vendor activity to mitigate risks associated with phishing and payment redirection.

But AI doesn’t replace people—it empowers them. By automating repetitive tasks, we’ve rechanneled our team’s energy into strategic initiatives. We introduced daily morning huddles, where our teams meet for 15 to 20 minutes to align on priorities and brainstorm new ideas. These sessions improved engagement and delivered measurable gains within the first quarter.

What challenges keep you focused on continuous improvement?

What truly keeps me up at night is not volatility—it’s inaction. The inability to pivot quickly in a high-stakes environment is a strategic liability. Tariffs, interest rate fluctuations, and logistical constraints in Southeast Alaska amplify these pressures.

Operating in an archipelago the size of Florida, we rely heavily on ferry and barge systems for shipping. In some cases, we’ve delivered equipment to remote areas using helicopters. This demands seamless financial forecasting and operational readiness.

Internally, our greatest challenge is integrating legacy data across disparate systems. Manual approvals and varying vendor terms continue to cause delays. We are currently standardizing vendor onboarding and preparing for a scalable AP automation solution that includes digital invoice capture and approval routing.

What skills will define successful finance professionals in the future?

Future finance professionals need to be multi-dimensional. Beyond accounting skills, they must master business intelligence platforms, speak the language of operations, and offer insights rooted in real-time analytics. Data literacy, forecasting, and automation will define high-performance teams.

“Finance is no longer just about looking back. It’s about lighting the way forward.”



Vlad Toca
Chief Financial Officer
at Bobcat Company

Tools like Power BI, Tableau, SQL, and Python are no longer optional—they’re fundamental. Strategic scenario modeling and process optimization across functions such as AP, AR, payroll, and procurement will separate tactical accountants from strategic leaders.

For those entering the field, my advice is simple: don’t wait to be told what to learn. Get ahead of the curve. Learn automation tools, find mentors, and study how strong leaders make decisions. Your mindset is your most valuable asset. In today’s world, finance isn’t just about reporting the past—it’s about lighting the way forward.



Bobcat Company is a premier North American manufacturer of compact construction equipment, serving agriculture, construction, landscaping, and industrial markets globally. With its roots in North Dakota, the company is renowned for innovation and reliability across its lineup of skid-steer loaders, compact excavators, tractors, and utility vehicles. The Southeast Alaska dealership is ranked among the top ten Bobcat dealers in North America and works extensively with public and private sectors including the Coast Guard, Army, Air Force, Navy, mining operations, and local municipalities.

About the research partners

rillion

With 30 years of expertise in accounts payable automation, Rillion helps over 3,000 customers transform their finance operations. Processing 40 million invoices annually, Rillion's AI platform enables finance teams to focus on strategic value creation rather than manual processing.

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