

Gartner®

Gartner CFO & Finance Executive Conference Key Take-Aways

May 25 – 26, 2021 | Americas | Virtual

The most important gathering for CFOs
and their finance executive teams

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Letter From the Conference Chair

I'm truly honored to have had the opportunity to host two days filled with insightful and forward-thinking conversations with such an amazing cohort of CFOs and finance executives at our first-ever virtual (and bigger than ever) conference.

As 2021 unfolds, it's proving to be a career-defining year for finance leaders. We face the challenge of accelerating growth and digital models while restoring our organization's financial health. We're also actively defining the "new normal" for our teams, creating a digital finance footprint that enables a nimbler structure, set of processes and workforce.

This year's conference was specifically designed to address these challenges and answer pressing questions such as:

- How can we accelerate growth while strengthening the company's financial position through a delicate cost and growth balancing act?
- How can we supercharge data, analytics and technology projects to drive a digital finance footprint?
- How can we reorient the finance organization's focus and workflow to capture comparative advantage?
- How can we accelerate performance across the finance function?

We hope that all attendees left the conference feeling inspired and armed with the data-backed insights needed to answer these questions and impact their organization's success.

I look forward to welcoming you back to Gartner CFO & Finance Executive Conference in 2022.



Johanna Robinson

Conference Chair and
Finance Practice VP, Gartner

Conference Features

Explore the 2021 virtual program, which was filled with live, interactive and engaging sessions where attendees learned from Gartner experts, progressive practitioners and their peers, in the easy-to-navigate Conference Portal.



Interactive sessions

Besides breakout sessions, attendees joined roundtables, workshops, research discussions, and Ask-the-Expert and Solution Provider sessions to learn from the experiences of their peers.



One-on-one meetings

Attendees met with a Gartner expert for a 30-minute, private consultation to address their most pressing challenge.



Networking

In addition to interactive sessions, the new Braindate platform allowed attendees to connect virtually in small-group, peer-to-peer meetings on specific topics of their choice.



The CFO Circle

This exclusive experience for CFOs enabled a high level of information exchange and peer interaction on high-priority topics, and CFO-only roundtable and research discussion sessions.



Exhibitor Engagement Zone

Attendees explored potential finance solutions, services and technology providers through one-on-one meetings, peer reviews, theater sessions and live chats.

See what attendees had to say:

“The conference shared content I and my team can actually use — starting tomorrow. Insightful and data-driven.”

Dennis Newby, CFO, Idaho National Laboratory

Attendee Demographics

The virtual Gartner CFO & Finance Executive Conference 2021 brought together 2,000+ finance leaders globally to discuss the trends shaping the future of finance.



Job title level

- CFO **24%**
- Corporate controller/
accounting **15%**
- Financial planning
and analysis **10%**
- Finance transformation **3%**
- Shared services **2%**
- Procurement **1%**
- Tax **1%**



Top 5 industries

- Manufacturing **24%**
- Banking, finance
and insurance **19%**
- Technology and telecom **12%**
- Government **12%**
- Business services **11%**
- Healthcare **9%**



Top 5 countries

- U.S. **71%**
- Canada **8%**
- U.K. **7%**
- Switzerland **2%**
- Germany **1%**



Number of teams

368

Top one-on-one inquiry topics

- Finance process excellence
- Finance function strategy
and organization design
- Financial data and analytics
- Shared services
- Finance technology
optimization

Exhibitors

Premier



Platinum



Gartner Keynote

The CFO at a Crossroads: Catalyst or Inhibitor of Transformative Change



Dennis Gannon

VP, Advisory

As CFOs chart their role in supporting the organization's next wave of growth, their peers chart an entirely new course of changes to the organization's workplace and digital business portfolio. The CFO will be asked to make potentially game-changing investments in people and technology with significant cost and risk implications.

CFOs must make strategic changes to their operating style to shape the success of these initiatives early on, or they risk becoming an obstacle to progress on these mission-critical priorities. In this keynote, Dennis Gannon discussed the extent of these transformative changes and the critical actions the CFO needs to take to be a catalyst, not an inhibitor, for positive change.

Key take-aways

Three transformative changes currently being driven outside of finance include: the new hybrid workplace, arrival of digital business and the new employment deal. Here's what CFOs and finance executives must ask themselves.

- The new hybrid workplace: Employees want radical flexibility and sustainability. What is the purpose of the office space, and what are the employee needs the office is uniquely positioned to meet? But more important, how prepared are you to make investments in the workplace that may not have a positive financial business case attached to them? And where can you actually differentiate yourself with smart investments in the new workplace?
- The arrival of digital business: Digital spending is rapidly disappearing from finance's line of sight and taking on entirely new risk and return profiles. How comfortable are you in really knowing what digital investment is absolutely required to maintain competitiveness? How much visibility do you actually have into the entirety of digital initiatives like the one business might be pursuing at any given time? And how confident are you that our digital investments are lined up in the right places and are performing as they should?
- The new employment deal: Business leaders must redraw the boundaries of what employees expect from their employers and what we as organizations need to provide our workforce, not just as units of labor, but as people. This new employment deal will require some very real investment decisions: How will you know where investments in the workforce are critical must-dos? Which ones will present a unique opportunity to differentiate you? And the ones that might sound good but don't actually create any return at the end of the day?

Guest Keynote



Dr. Steve Robbins

Inclusion Expert

What Is Culture?

Without understanding culture, we will have a difficult time understanding open- and closed-mindedness. In this keynote, Dr. Steve Robbins quoted a famous sociologist to explain how culture plays a key role in the way humans behave in a world full of differences. Culture also ties into the pursuit of inclusion and innovation, and it has everything to do with teamwork and leadership.

Want to dig deeper? Explore these related articles:

[The CFO at a Crossroads: How to Be a Catalyst for Transformation](#)

[What Is the New Employment Deal?](#)

See what attendees had to say:

“I had high expectations for this event and Gartner surpassed all of them. The speakers were next-level, the topics were excellent and the value of the presented information was high-impact.... They were able to connect the best companies and the best networking in America.”

Sandra Trevino, CFO, TCA Software Solutions (MDX)

Agenda Tracks

At the conference, attendees explored an array of content and Gartner research specifically designed for CFOs and their direct reports, across four agenda tracks.

Track A: The CFO Mandate — Rethinking Costs That Drive Growth in a Digital World

The board demands accelerated growth while expecting CFOs to restore their organization's financial health. With the tumultuous start to 2021, achieving this dual mandate is a daunting task, but the best CFOs catalyze rapid growth by determining the right costs to bring back in and how to protect the organization's most critical investments. This track taught CFOs why now is the time for them to update the governance, data and analytics that drive these decisions.

Track B: Supercharging Data, Analytics and Technology Projects to Build a Digital Finance Footprint

Eighty percent of finance leaders believe the finance organization must significantly accelerate its application of advanced digital technologies

to effectively serve the business in 2025. This track helped finance leaders understand how to effectively unlock the promise of the data, analytic and technology landscape — without breaking the bank.

Track C: Building the Finance Organization to Capture Comparative Advantage

Three pervasive trends are changing the course of finance forever: the democratization of data, increasing organizational complexity and the rising sophistication of digital technology. This track helped finance leaders understand the impact of these trends on the finance organization's comparative advantage and shift their transformation efforts to successfully achieve their 2025 vision.

Track D: Accelerating Performance of Finance Processes and People

To meet the digital needs of the organization, finance leaders will need to build a different in-kind set of talent and processes. This track taught finance leaders which competencies are needed to succeed, how to accelerate skill development, and how to take advantage of digital technology advances to automate more processes and enhance judgment across the finance organization.

Featured Sessions

In addition to interactive sessions and keynotes, attendees gained access to 50+ breakout sessions led by Gartner experts. Explore a few of the most popular sessions from 2021 conference.

How to Modernize Your KPIs for the Digital Age

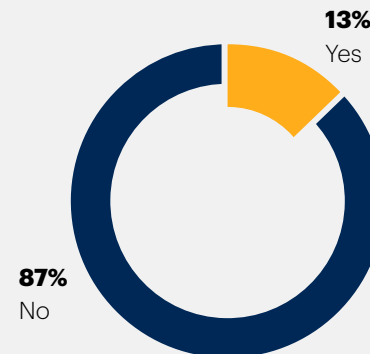
Clement Christensen, Director, Advisory

New business models, new channels, new customers, new tools — same old metrics. Most finance teams haven't updated their metrics in years, but a new era of business demands a new set of KPIs and metrics. This session discussed how to use key driver maps to modernize your KPIs set for the digital age.

Weak Link Between Data and Business Performance

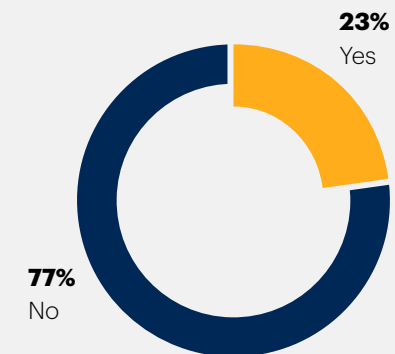
Percentage of business leaders agreeing that performance data ...

... truly reflects business performance (n = 299)



n = 151 Finance Leaders
Source: 2019 Gartner Talent Gap Survey

... explains key financial outcomes (n = 299)



n = 151 Finance Leaders
Source: 2017 Digital Talent Gap; 2019 Gartner Talent Survey

Featured Sessions (continued)

Key take-aways

- To map KPIs to the new digital business model, start by identifying a value outcome.
Question to ask: What is our guiding north star metric(s)?
- Identify strategic drivers of your digital business.
Questions to ask: Which elements of our strategy or business model are the main drivers of the value outcome? What strategic outcomes are prioritized in our strategy?
- Identify tactical drivers of your digital business.
Questions to ask: Which process, project or tactics help us achieve our strategic goals? Which tactical plays are business leaders prioritizing this year?
- Identify operational drivers and relevant metrics.
Questions to ask: What operational or technical drivers will drive the success of our tactical drivers? What does the business need to do well on a daily basis?

Implementation Tips



Source: Gartner

Want to dig deeper? Explore these related articles:

[Tune Your Finance Dashboard Using Metrics to Drive Performance](#)

[Make Financial Data Decision-Ready](#)

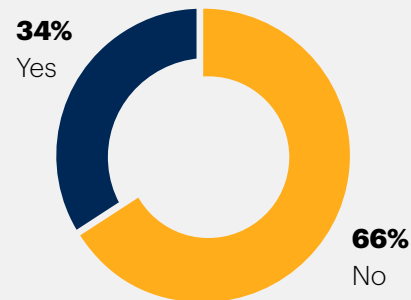
Featured Sessions (continued)

Digital Upskilling Lessons From Leading Finance Teams

Jake Dunne, Director, Advisory

Sixty-nine percent of finance leaders say that improving training is not effective for closing the increasing digital skill gap. Training either is developing outdated competencies or forces changes that are too aggressive. Leading finance teams achieve digital upskilling by developing a foundational level of digital skills and applying lessons from gamification to engage employees in building skills for the future.

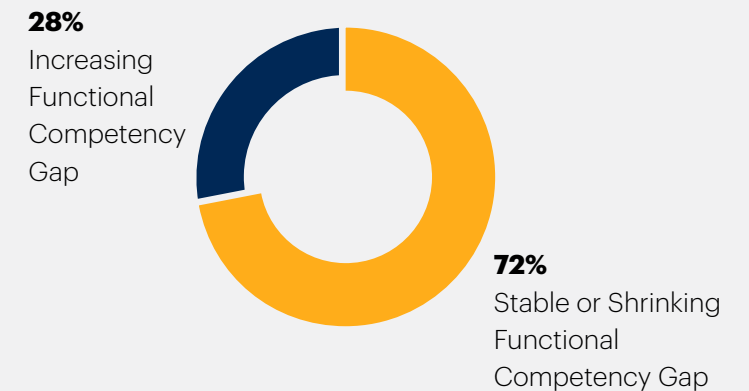
Talent Is Not Keeping Up With the Digital Need ...



2 out of 3 finance leaders don't have talent with the overall mixture of data, technology-based and social-creative competencies.

n = 151 Finance Leaders
Source: 2019 Gartner Talent Gap Survey

... and We Expect It to Get Worse



n = 151 Finance Leaders
Source: 2017 Digital Talent Gap; 2019 Gartner Talent Survey

Featured Sessions (continued)

Key take-aways

- Digital technology is only as impactful as a human's ability to leverage it.
- Improving digital competencies through talent acquisition is expensive, rare and competitive. We cannot hire our way to digital; we must fundamentally change how we train for digital.
- Make digital training impartial to rank or tenure.
- Increase digital skills retention by pulling forward key learning moments.

Examples of Digital Skills

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • A/B Testing | • Data Wrangling |
| • Algorithm Bias Detection | • Database Management |
| • Algorithm Interpretation | • Digital Fluency |
| • Algorithm Validation | • Insight Generation |
| • Automation Risk Mitigation | • NLP Interpretation |
| • Basic Programming | • Pattern Recognition |
| • Change management | • Process Mapping |
| • Collaboration | • Process Mining |
| • Critical Thinking | • Process Reengineering |
| • Data Bias Detection | • Project Management |
| • Data Interpretation | • Regression Analysis |
| • Data Literacy | • Stakeholder Management |
| • Data Manipulation | • Systems Thinking |
| • Data Quality Management | |
| • Data Stewardship | |
| • Data storytelling | |
| • Data Visualization | |

Source: Gartner

Want to dig deeper? Explore these related articles:

[Fill Finance's Skill Gaps](#)

[How CFOs Build a More Digital Finance Function](#)

Featured Sessions (continued)

New Foundations for Digital: Top 4 Data and Analytics Trends in Finance

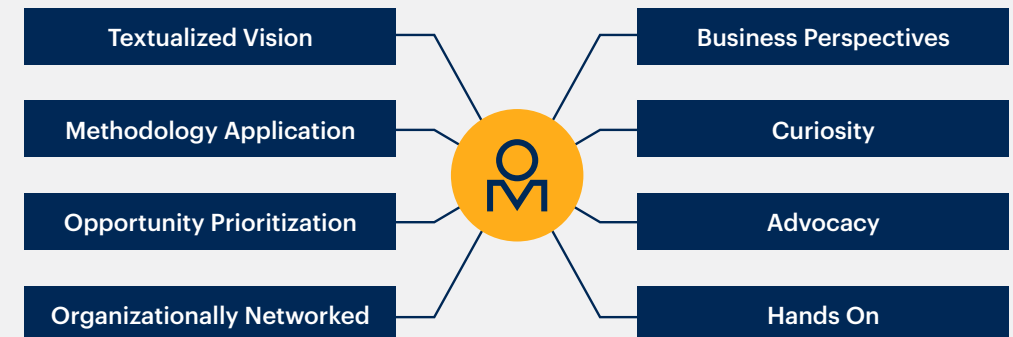
Richard Ries, VP, Advisory

The recent global pandemic has left most organizations in a fragile and uncertain state. However, new data and analytics technologies are stepping up to help organizations rapidly reconfigure to thrive after the reset. In this session, attendees learned about the four top data and analytics trends that will help finance strengthen its digital footprint in the coming year.

Key take-aways

- Cloud is a key enabler: It connects the enterprise, rapidly delivers new functionality and lowers barriers for innovation and prototyping.
- Augmentation drives data democratization. While 84% believe too much time is committed to reorganizing data, metadata automation creates scale and efficiencies.
- Convergence of data and analytics platforms enables knowledge sharing across the enterprise. Network data, technology and talent drive analytics.
- Dynamic data storytelling, which drives insight adoption through visualization, will replace predefined dashboards.

Enable Your Citizen Data Scientist



Source: Gartner

Want to dig deeper? Explore these related webinar and article:

[Overcoming Data and Analytics Challenges for Operations to Drive Faster Business Decisions](#)

[Add Data Science Skills to Corporate Finance Decisions](#)

Featured Sessions (continued)

Determining What and How to Centralize in Finance

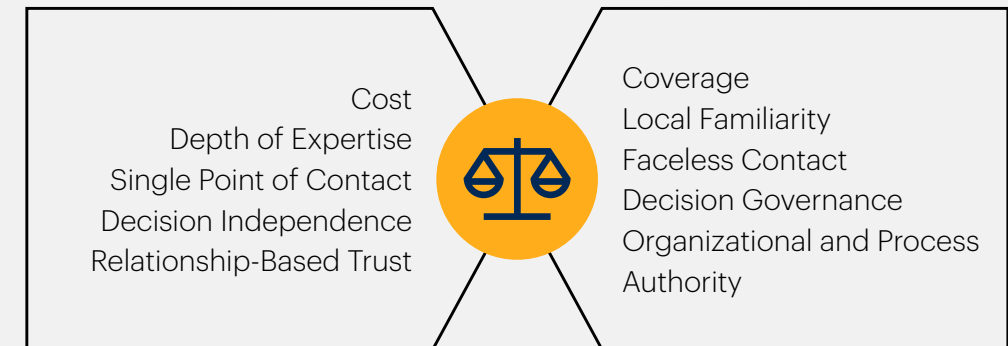
Craig Risberg, VP, Advisory

The dual forces of finance digitalization and budget pressure require finance leaders to rethink the location of work. For many companies, this represents a fundamental question about how much, what, where and how to centralize finance activity sets. During this session, we discussed what drives successful finance centralization efforts.

Key take-aways

- Centralizing finance services means trade-offs: Centralized analytics are half as expensive but cover roughly half as many decisions. These trade-offs should be explicitly discussed with stakeholders.
- Determine the feasibility of centralizing activities by assessing the homogeneity of the operating landscape and the complexity of finance activities.
- Use an understanding of the impact and complexity of activities to establish a target operating paradigm for finance centralization.
- Set clear rules for relocating activities across the range of potential finance delivery locations.

Centralization Trade-Offs



Source: Gartner

Want to dig deeper? Explore these related articles:

[3 Advantages of Shared Services Over Centralized Services](#)

[How to Organize Your Finance Function](#)

Back at the Office

After reviewing the research and recommendations presented at Gartner CFO & Finance Executive Conference 2021, attendees can develop clear action items to implement in the future.

To get the most from the conference experience and to share insights with colleagues, we suggest these next steps:



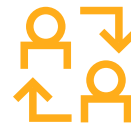
Revisit

Did you miss a session? You can still access documentation and recordings from many of the presentations, up to 90 days postconference, in the [Gartner Conference Portal](#).



Recap

Recap the notes from your Gartner one-on-one meeting and create a 30-, 60- and 90-day action plan with your team.



Connect

Now is a great time to circle back with peers and keep the conversation going, even reach out to new contacts or share insights at [#GartnerFinance](#).



Follow up

If you need help turning your ideas into actions or would like to provide feedback or a testimonial, contact us at GlobalConferences@gartner.com.

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Gartner works with CFOs and senior finance leaders from leading organizations to equip them with actionable insights, expert guidance and tools across the following key initiatives:

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- Finance Process Excellence
- Finance Talent
- Finance Technology Optimization
- Financial Data and Analytics
- Growth Investments and Cost Structure
- Internal Control, Tax and Investor Relations
- Planning, Budgeting and Forecasting
- Procurement Management
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Contact Us

Discover how we can help to achieve your critical finance priorities

Speak to one of our team to learn more

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Save the date for Gartner CFO & Finance Executive Conference

June 6 – 7, 2022
National Harbor, MD

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