

2023 Survey Report

Finance Professionals Speak: Concerns, Challenges, and Opportunities for 2023



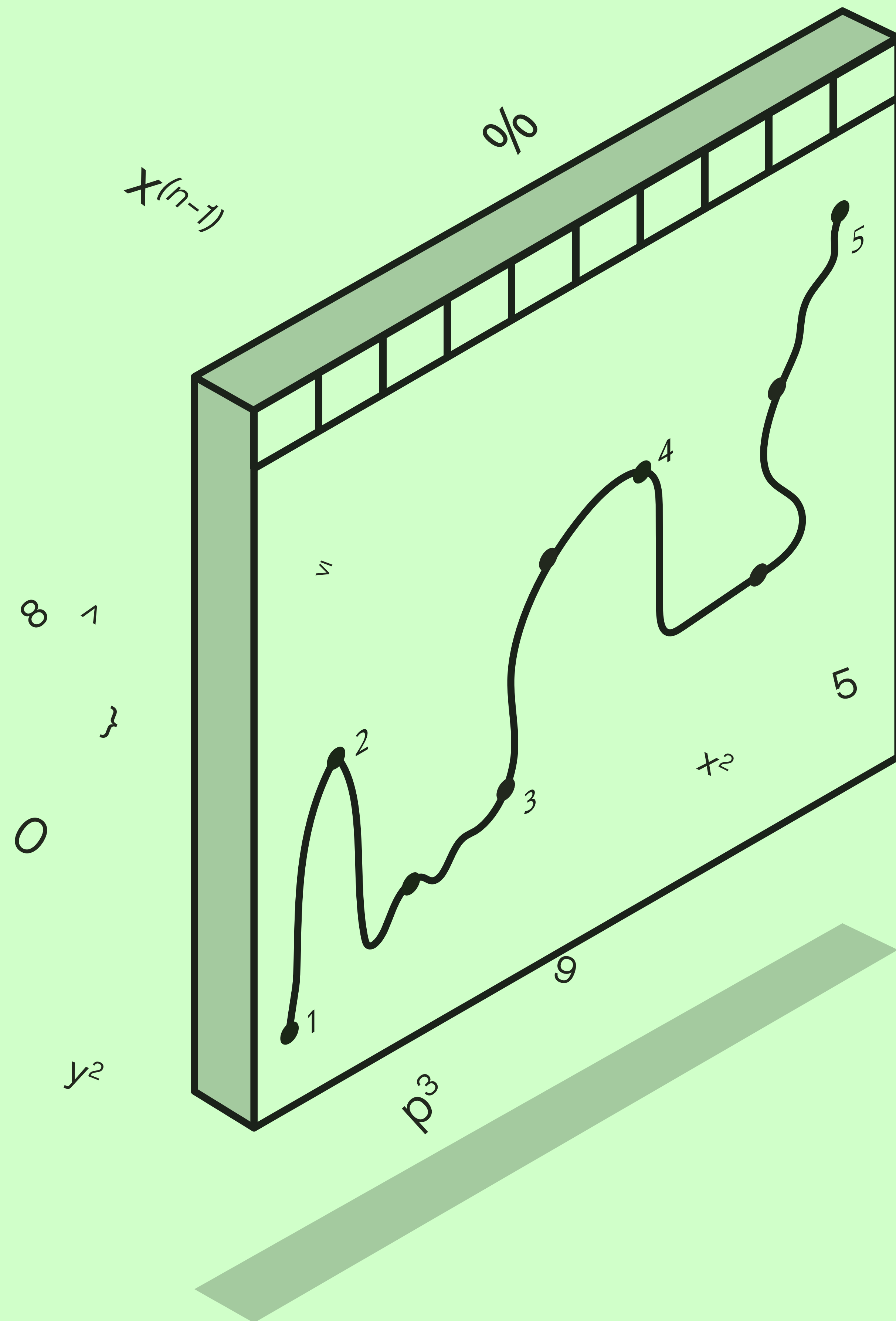
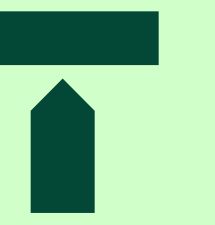


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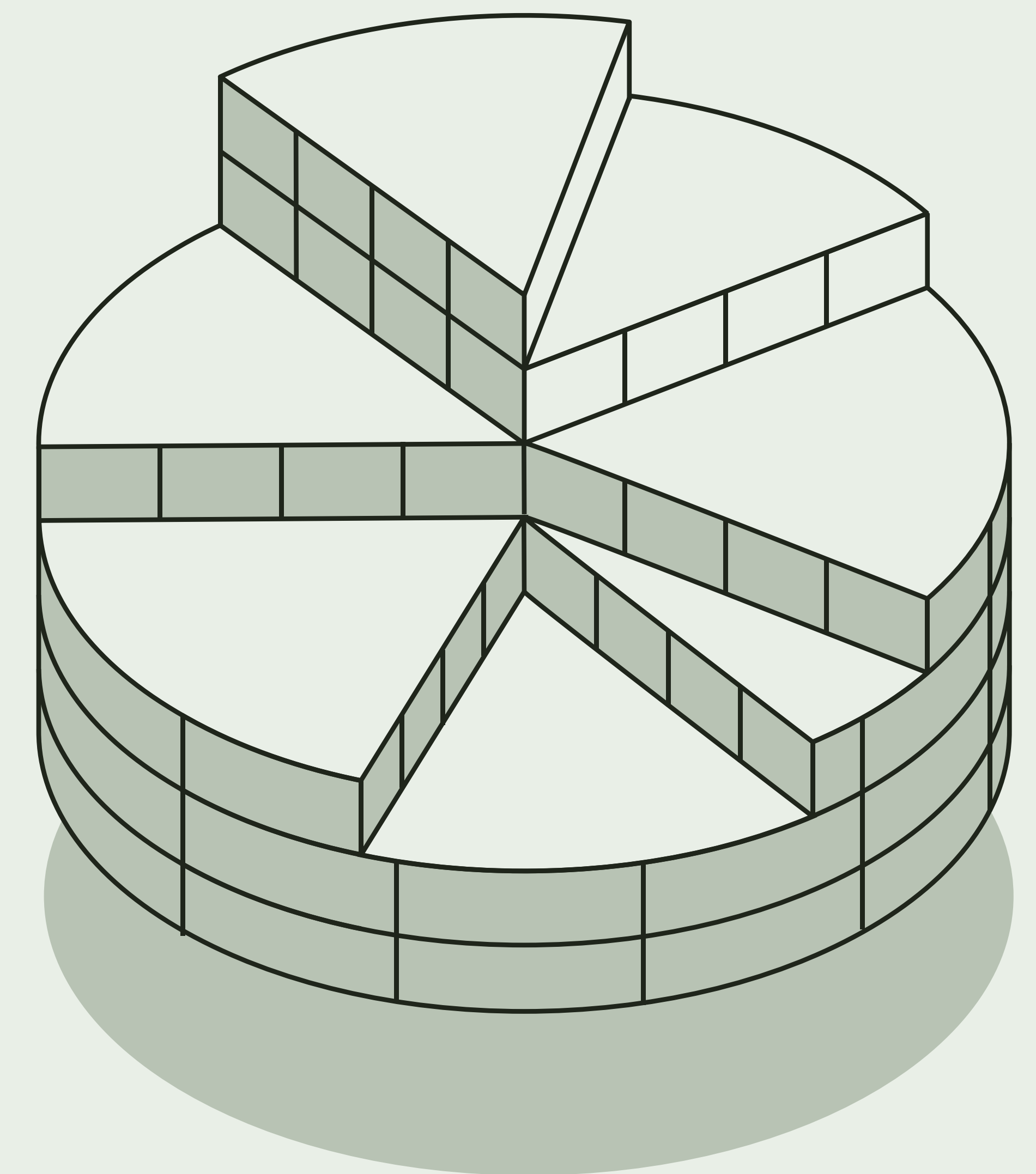


Introduction

Amidst a constantly evolving economic landscape, finance professionals possess a wealth of expertise and insights that are often overlooked. This report aims to provide a platform for these professionals, including accountants, auditors, and consultants, to share their valuable perspectives on the pressing financial challenges of our time.

With a focus on the intersection of finance and technology, our survey reached out to a wide range of finance professionals - from assistant controllers to CFOs - across public and private companies, audit firms, and consulting entities. Drawing upon their extensive practical and theoretical knowledge, our report offers unique insights into the current economic downturn, market trends, challenges facing the industry, and more.

Join us as we listen to the voices of finance professionals.





Key findings

01.

Despite a strong desire for technological upgrades, finance professionals still rely heavily on legacy systems

AI and automation are expected to have a greater impact in the next decade than cybersecurity, analytics, big data, biotech, and renewable energy combined. Despite this, finance professionals still spend more than 4 hours a day working in Excel, with 93% of respondents using it on a daily basis.

02.

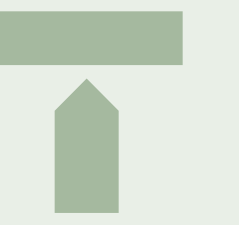
Freeing up time for strategic initiatives and retaining talent are the key to propelling the profession forward

Over 50% of respondents would prioritize strategic planning and high-level insights if automation freed up more of their time, according to survey results. Attracting and retaining talent for teams is the top concern for 2023, followed closely by the desire to free up time for high-impact projects, as talent mobility becomes increasingly important for the profession.

03.

Recovering from the recession is top of mind among a myriad of other industry concerns

Findings reveal that 79% are worried about post-recession recovery, a concern that outweighs the challenges of mass layoffs, industry ethics issues, and COVID/healthcare problems. Professionals across a range of industries are most optimistic about the recovery of SaaS and Fintech sectors.



Methodology

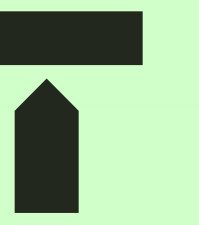
Trullion conducted this research using an online survey prepared in-house and distributed via email to full-time finance professionals across industries and verticals; across public and private companies, entities that were preparing for IPOs, Audit firms, and consultants. Titles surveyed include Controllers and Assistant Controllers, CFOs, Staff Accountants and Accounting Managers, Auditors, CEOs, VPs and Directors of Finance, Technology Innovation Leaders, CAOs, Senior Revenue Analysts, Independent Consultants, Advisors and Consulting Partners, Senior Analysts, and others.

The sample consisted of n=100 respondents from the United States. Data was collected from December 1, 2022 to January 20, 2023.

Disclaimer

This report contains statistical data, estimates, and expectations that are based on survey responses and are solely presented as context for broader market trends. The findings are for informational purposes only and should not be used as the basis for commercial decision-making of any nature.





Despite a strong desire for technological upgrades, finance professionals still rely heavily on legacy systems

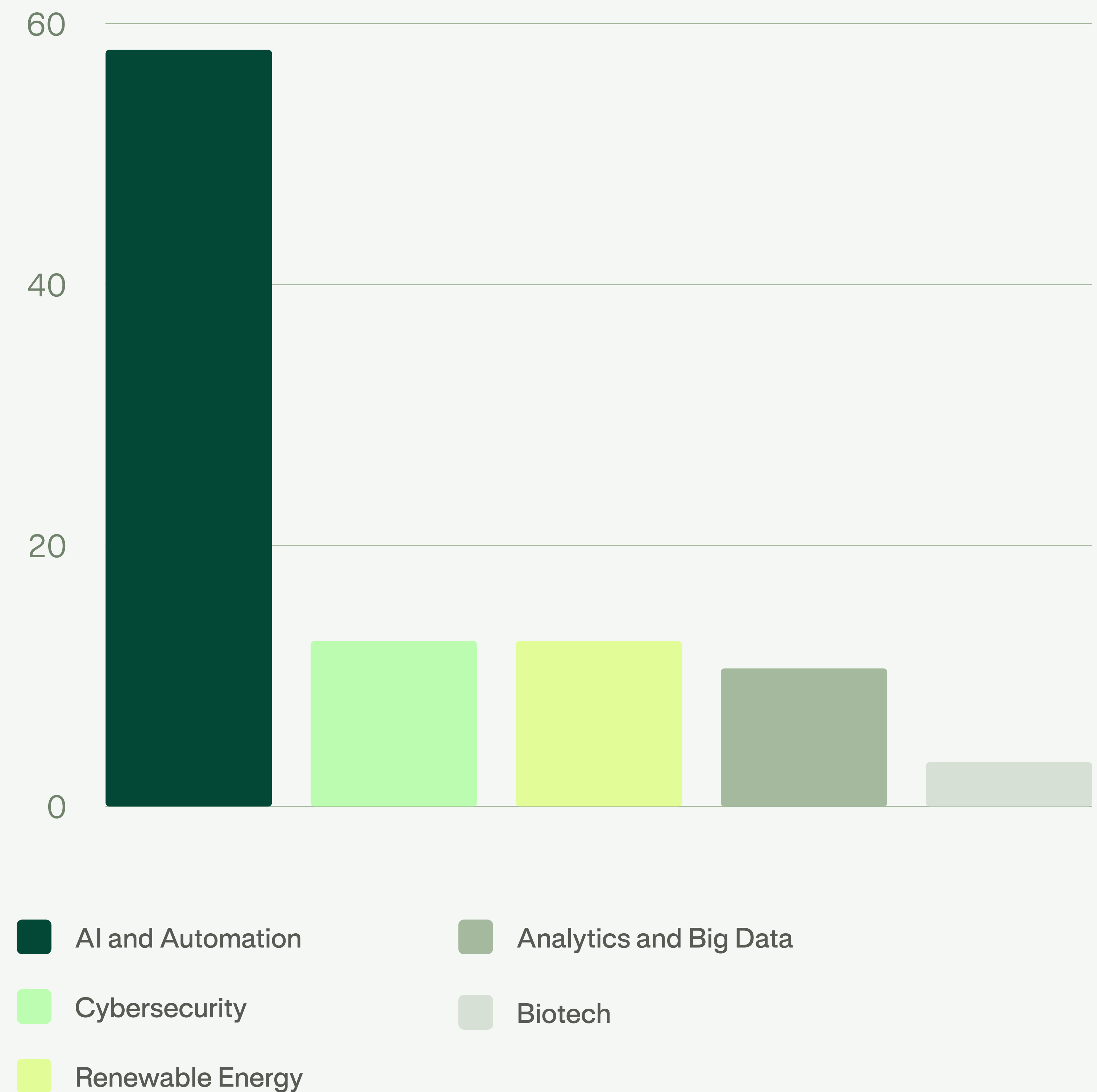


01.

AI and Automation are projected to have a bigger 10-year impact than Cybersecurity, Analytics and Big Data, Biotech, and Renewable Energy combined

If anything has galvanized opinions throughout the survey, it's the emergence of generative AI (ChatGPT, etc.) and similar technologies. Many remember a world without the internet – similarly, time can now be divided between pre-mass AI and post-mass AI availability. Finance professionals are essentially saying that the world will change completely in the coming decades. We are in a new AI era, which will change the way we do just about everything.

Which technological trend will likely have the biggest impact in the next 10 years?



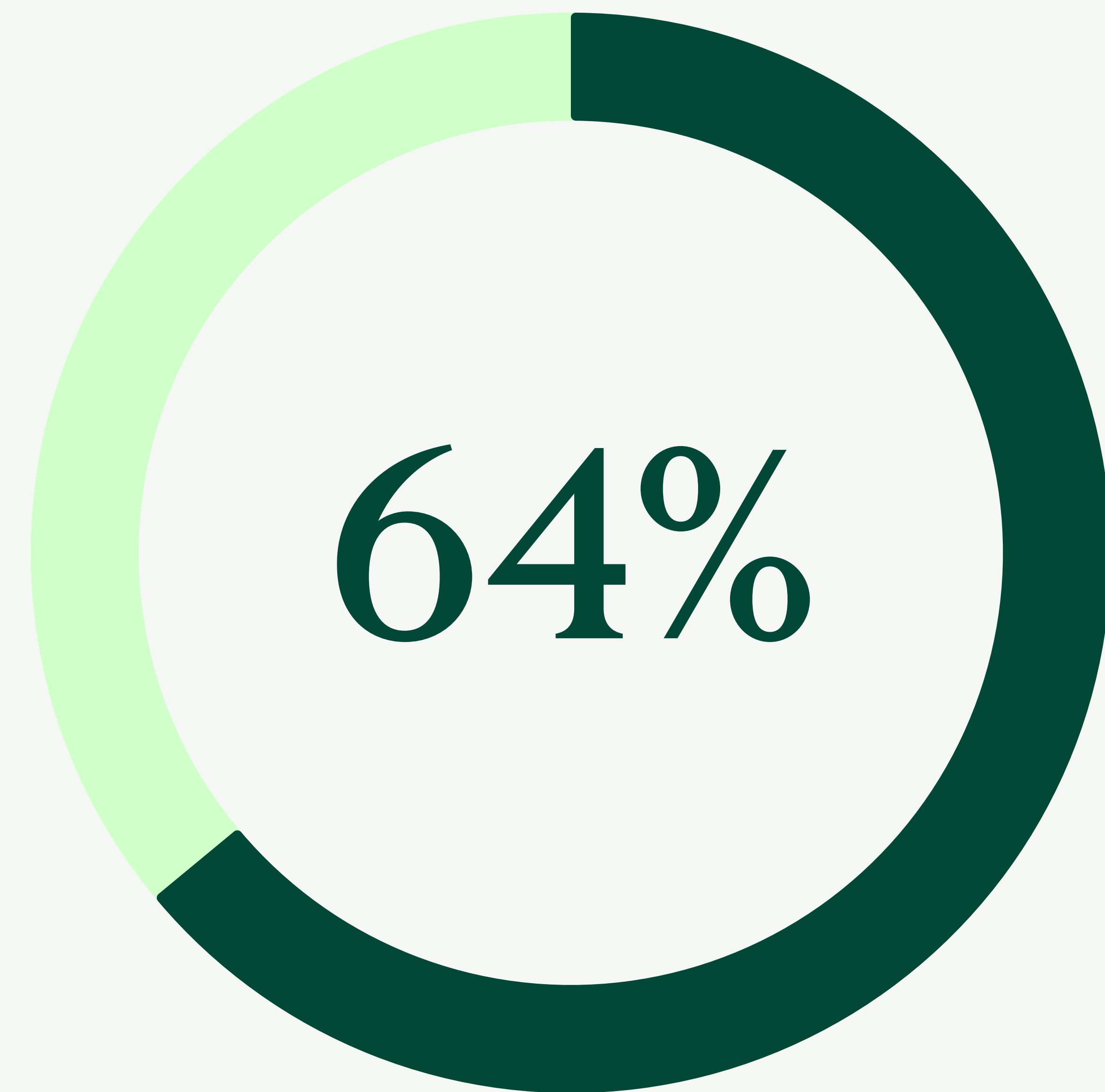


01.

AI and Automation are projected to have a bigger 10-year impact than Cybersecurity, Analytics and Big Data, Biotech, and Renewable Energy combined

When looking only at the responses of CFOs and VPs of Finance, this figure holds true: 64% of senior finance executives believe AI and Automation will have a bigger impact than other technological developments over the next decade. Interestingly, two topical areas – biotech post-COVID-19, and cybersecurity in an increasingly digital world – garnered only 4% each of senior finance execs' impact analysis.

64% of senior executives believe in AI and Automation's extreme impact



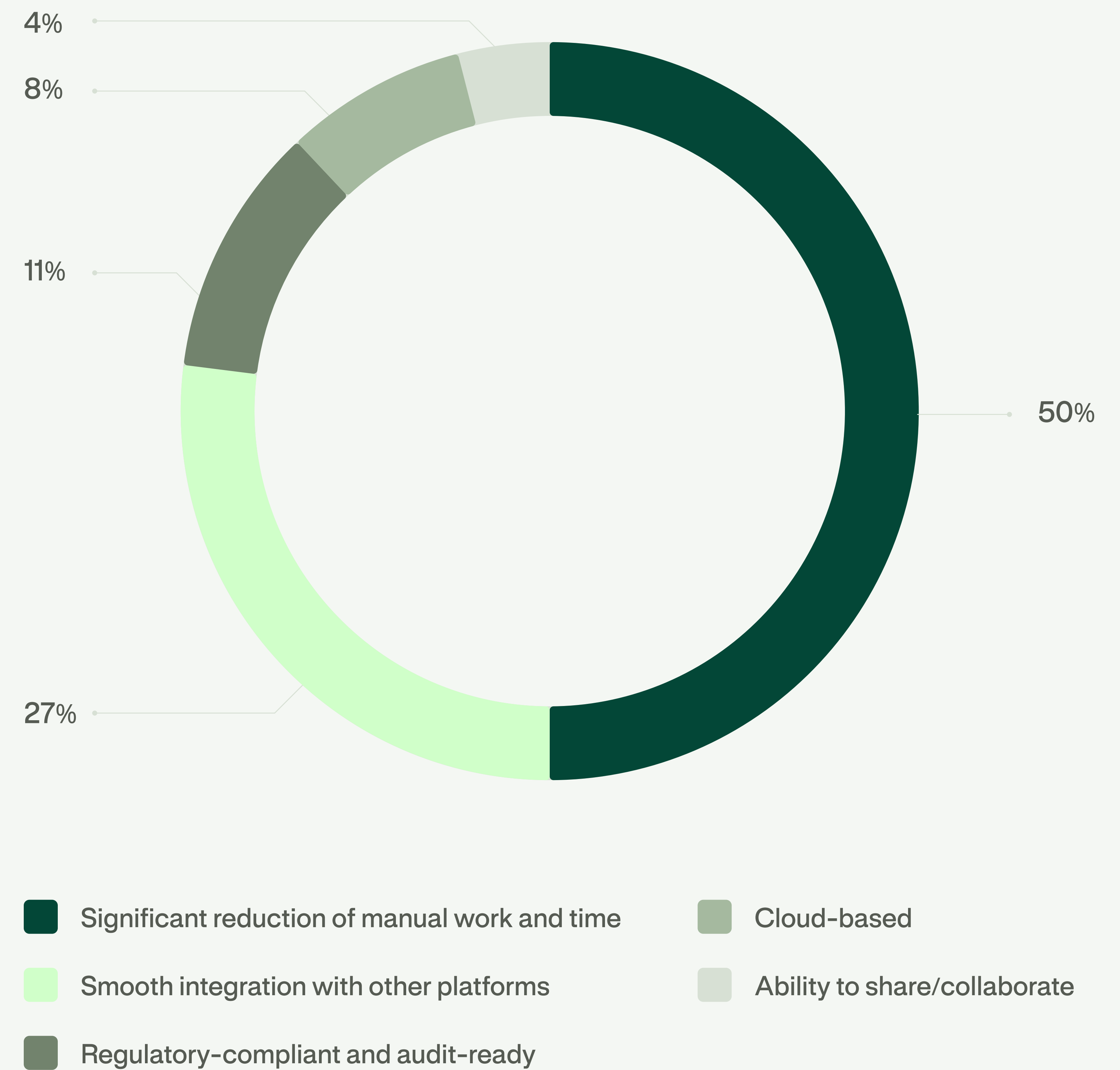


02.

50% of respondents say saving time by reducing manual work is the most important role of financial technology tools

Financial technology tools offer a number of key benefits. From accuracy to insights, they can make a massive impact on an organization. Yet, it's time that finance professionals crave most. Once again, finance professionals noted that they desperately need technology to take care of manual work, so that they can be freed up to make a real difference within the organization and beyond.

What elements of financial technology tools are most important to you?



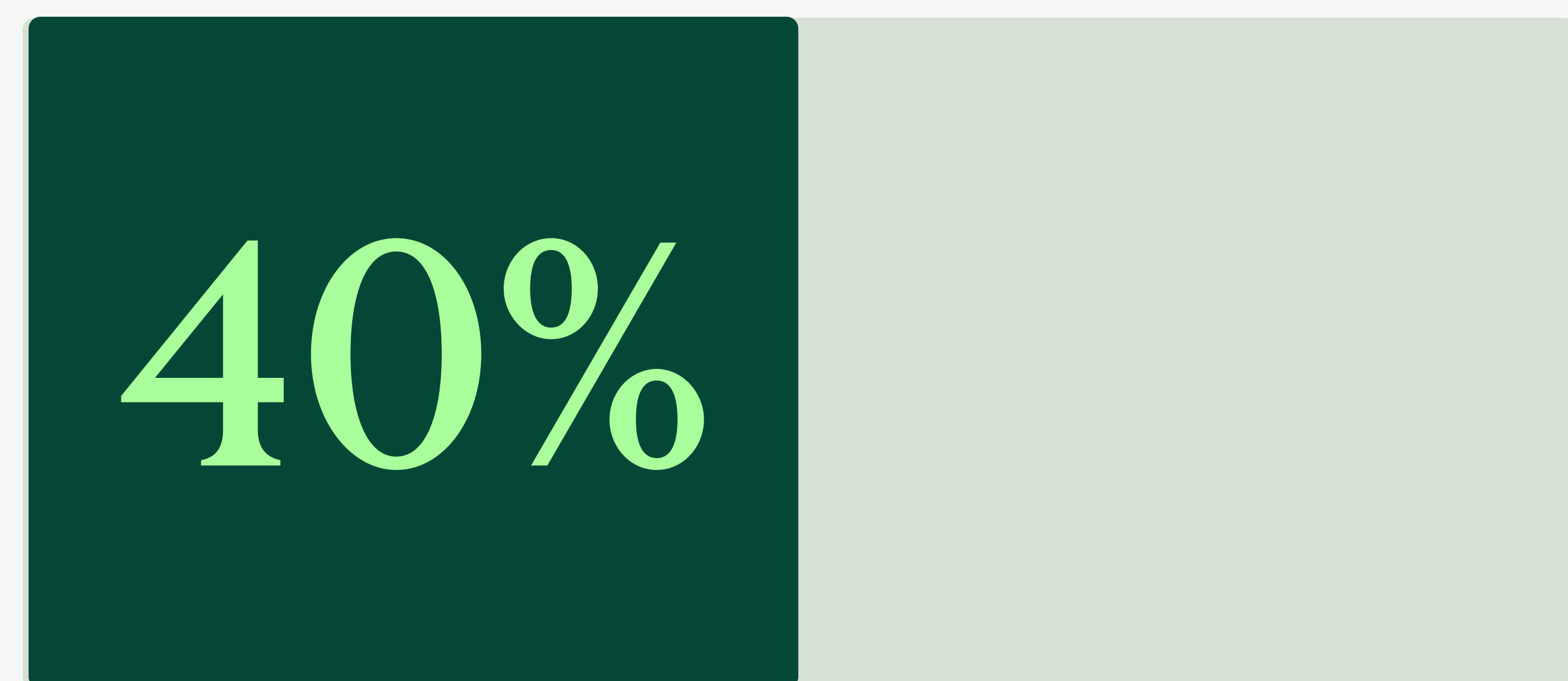


02.

50% of respondents say saving time by reducing manual work is the most important role of financial technology tools

When senior finance executives answered this question, the results also showed that around half believed that saving time is the most important role of tech tools. Interestingly, almost 40% of these respondents believed that smooth integrations with other platforms was most critical, highlighting how a multi-platform ecosystem is emerging, with numerous SaaS tools being incorporated into the finance tech stack.

The finance stack is growing and should be embraced - 40% of senior executives believe that smooth integrations with other platforms is critical



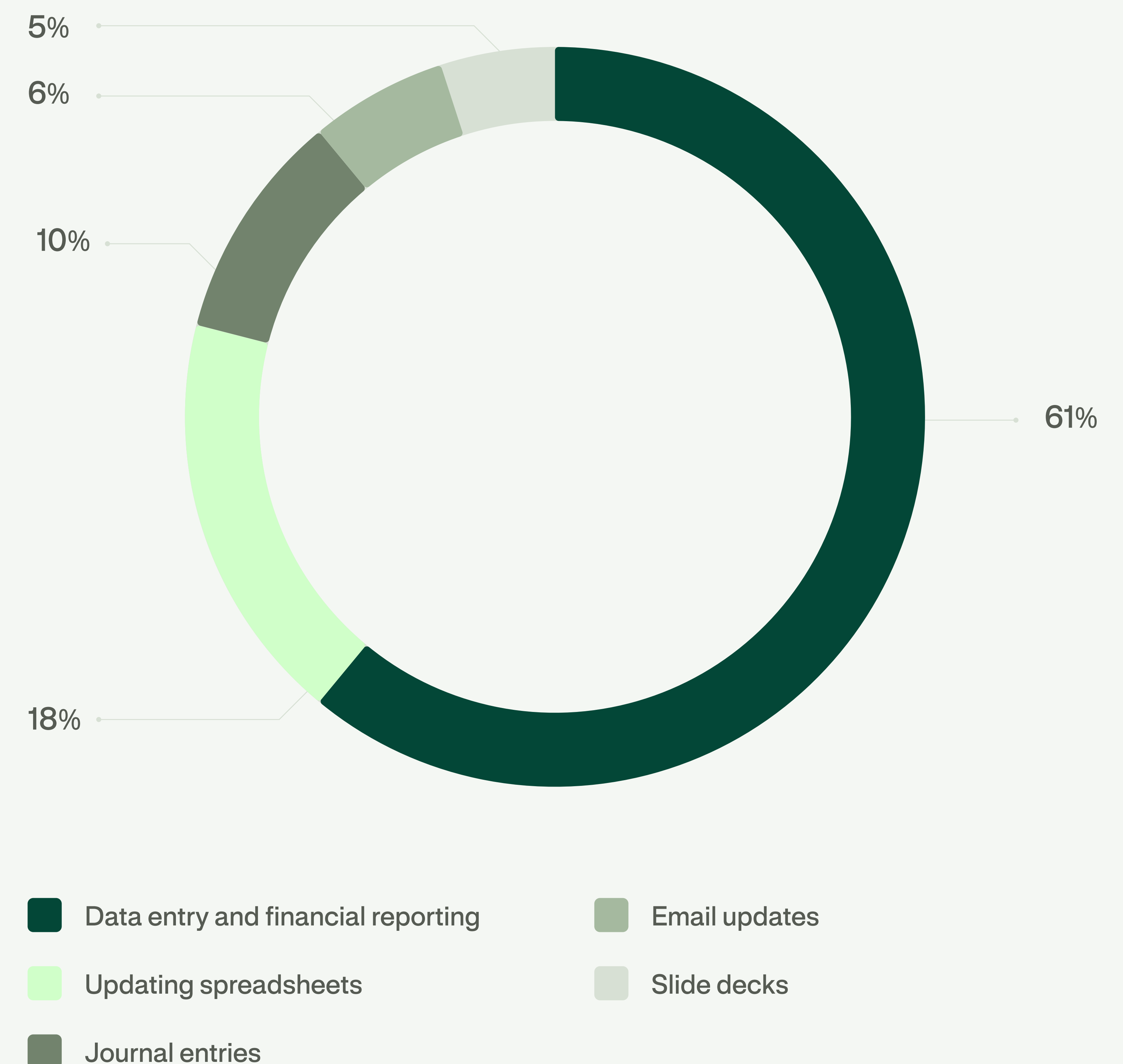


03.

If you could automate anything: data entry and financial reporting #1 on automation wish list

When presented with day-to-day operations that could potentially be automated – options such as “email updates” or “slide decks,” the majority of those surveyed chose data entry and financial reporting as the most urgent areas to essentially take off their hands. Finance professionals want to do more and want to have more of an impact, but are being held back. Happily, much of what is holding them back is legacy processes that can be easily automated – ushering in a new era of creativity, innovation, and value from the finance team. This finding dovetails nicely with the amount of time finance professionals spend in Excel. While this tool will continue to have its place, the finance professionals can contribute more when they move beyond spreadsheets.

If you could choose only one part of your job to completely automate (with accurate results), which would it be?



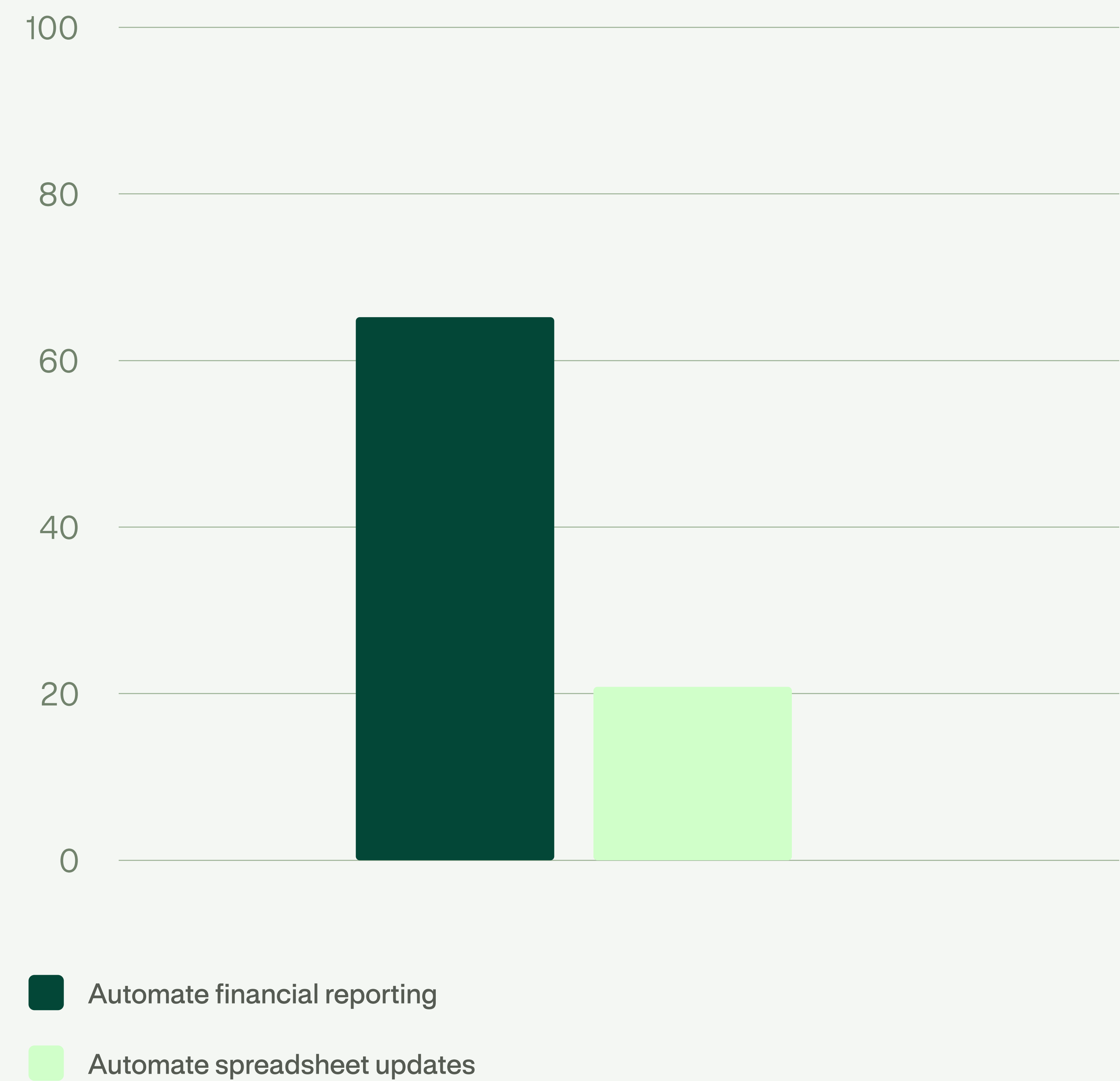


03.

If you could automate anything: data entry and financial reporting #1 on automation wish list

The responses of senior finance executives follow a similar pattern, with 64% dreaming of automating financial reporting, and 21%, as the second choice, wishing to automate spreadsheet updates. This sentiment is concerning considering the recent studies on disillusionment in the talent pool, and the reduction in the labor force entering the accounting field. It's not just a matter of a few years of manual work - even the seniors can remain deep in the weeds on spreadsheets.

The possibilities of automation bring senior finance executives' priorities into focus





04.

The majority of finance professionals spend a staggering 4+ hours per day locked up in Excel

95% of finance professionals spend at least an hour a day on Excel, with 61% spending the majority of their working day (over 4 hours) using this tool.



61%

61% of finance professionals spend 4+ hours a day in Excel.

Accountants report feeling overburdened, or that their work schedule is slipping behind. They may commit more mistakes when using Excel spreadsheets, especially during the busy season, because they are dealing with a large amount of data that can be difficult to organize and analyze. This can be especially true when working with complex financial information or when dealing with multiple spreadsheets or data sources.

If the spreadsheets are not well-organized or the formulas used are not accurate, errors may be further magnified. If the accounting firm or company is growing and expanding, and the accountant is not able to keep up with the pace of growth, there may be little time left in the work week for strategic, creative, or growth-focused tasks. With a plurality of respondents citing the wish to focus on more strategic meaningful work (and recruiting and retaining the talent to help them accomplish it), it's no wonder that there is a desperate need for technology to take care of the burdensome tasks, freeing up finance professionals for high-impact activities.

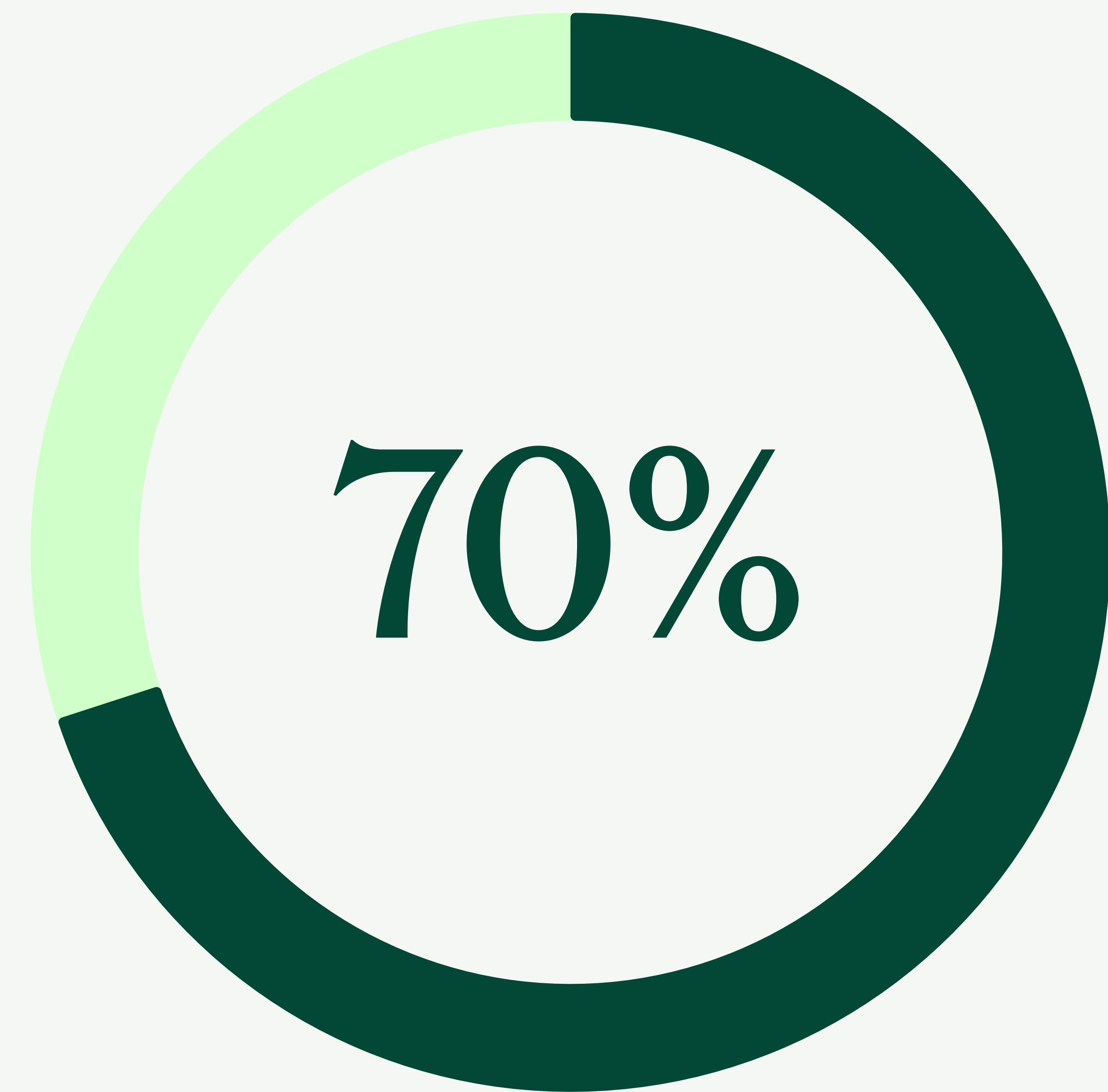


04.

The majority of finance professionals spend a staggering 4+ hours per day locked up in Excel

70% of controllers reported spending over half their day in Excel. Considering there are 260 work days in a year, that's at least 130 full work days of a highly-skilled employee carrying out their job on software from 1985.

Excel is great but is overused while new technology is not being embraced quickly enough



70% of controllers spend over half their day in Excel.



05.

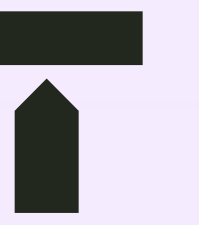
93% of respondents still use Excel every day

Excel is an excellent and dependable tool and has been instrumental in assisting finance professionals in carrying out their roles effectively, ever since it was first seen in 1985. Still, as the world of finance evolves to meet the pace of business today, relying on Excel alone can fall short. For example, the non-cloud-native architecture limits Excel's ability to integrate with some of the latest cloud-based technologies.

Consider the percentage of finance professionals using other modules such as payables, or payroll software – between 40% and 70%. Generally, only specific roles spend significant amounts of time in these modules; a controller might spend much time in payables software, whereas a CFO would spend more time on high-level figures, and not in a specific accounting module. This paints the “93%” figure in even starker light: across titles, across seniority, and across industries, Excel is still what underpins accounting today.



93%



**Freeing up time for strategic initiatives
and retaining talent are the key to
propelling the profession forward**

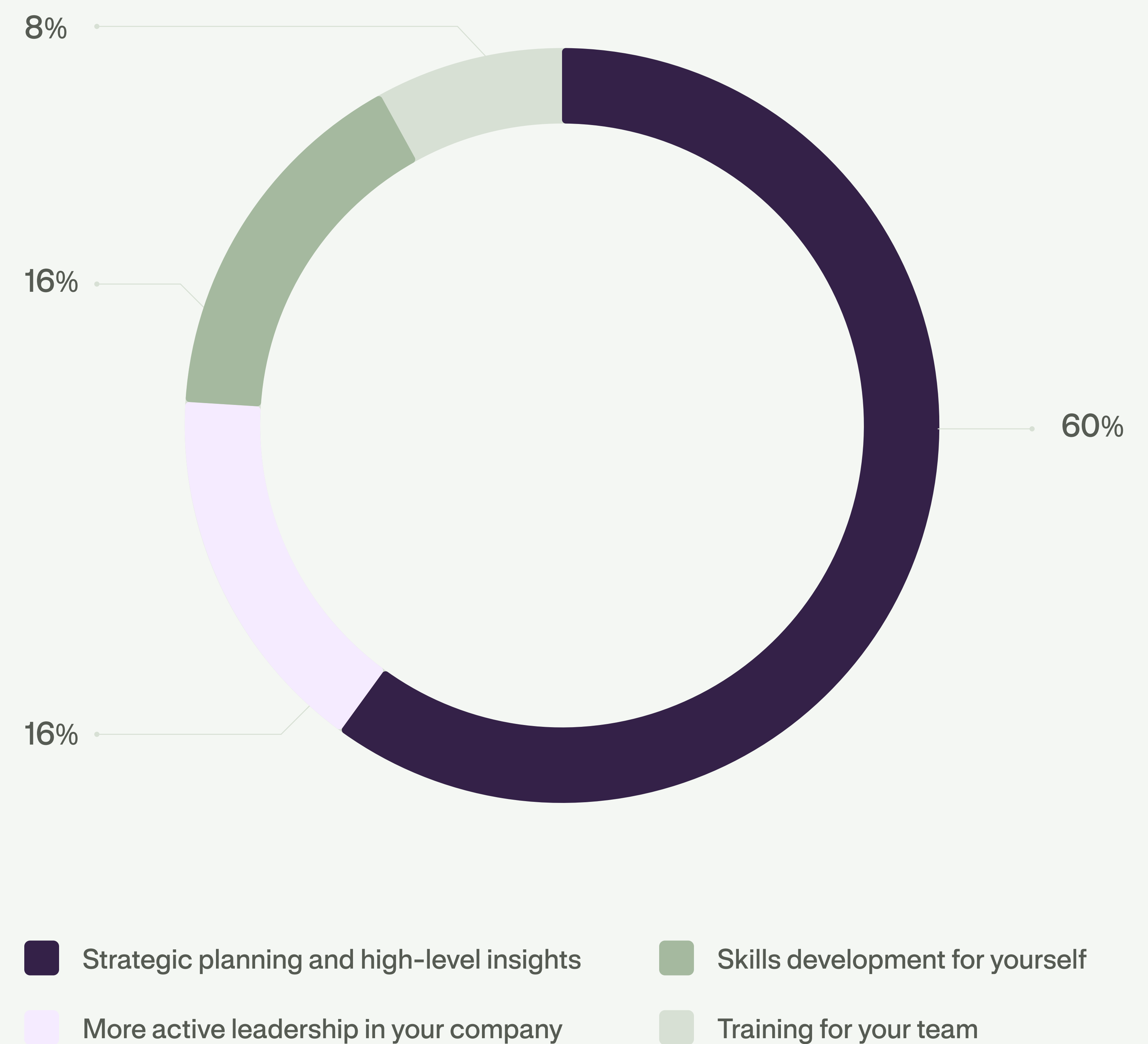


06.

Over half of survey respondents would prioritize strategic planning and providing high-level insights if automation could free up more of their time

Far from fearing AI and automation, finance professionals are embracing these technologies with a view to what can be achieved by freeing up some of their time. With more time, these professionals would prioritize more progress on strategic planning and high-level insights, over other options including more active leadership in their company, skills development, and training their team. Having intensely studied for years, finance professionals want to develop their careers beyond manual, repetitive tasks. Rather, automation should take care of these jobs, allowing finance professionals to plan strategically, give high-level insights, and guide their companies to achieve their goals.

If more of your manual work was automated, what would you focus your efforts on with the time and energy saved?





07.

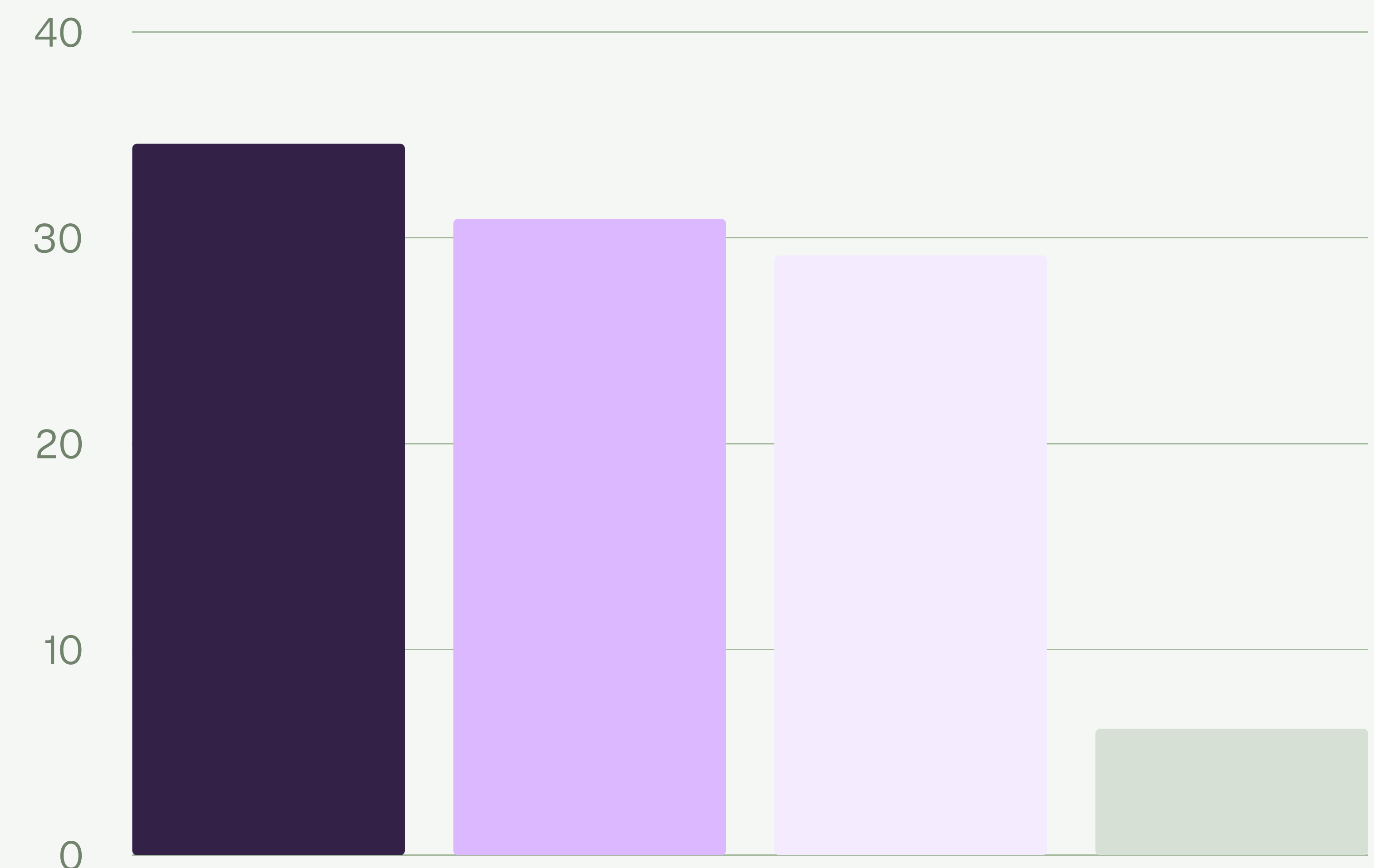
Biggest challenge in 2023? Attracting and retaining talent for my team (closely followed by freeing up time for high-impact projects)

The “War for Talent” is present in the finance industry just as much as any other. Attracting and retaining talent is a key challenge for those surveyed, which means that:

- There is a shortage of highly skilled finance professionals
- The human factor is still critical, despite technological gains
- By hiring top talent, finance leaders are freeing themselves up for high-impact activities

One might assume that in light of the current economic situation, the biggest challenges for 2023 would be “cash flow or company-specific challenges” or “regulatory compliance;” but talent and high-impact projects are clearly the goals of ambitious finance leaders. This is positive news for the industry, as finance moves out of its shadow of “reporting and compliance” towards “impact, reporting, and compliance.”

What do you anticipate being your biggest challenge in 2023?



- Attracting and retaining talent for my team
- Freeing up time for high-impact projects
- Cash flow/company-specific challenges
- Regulatory compliance



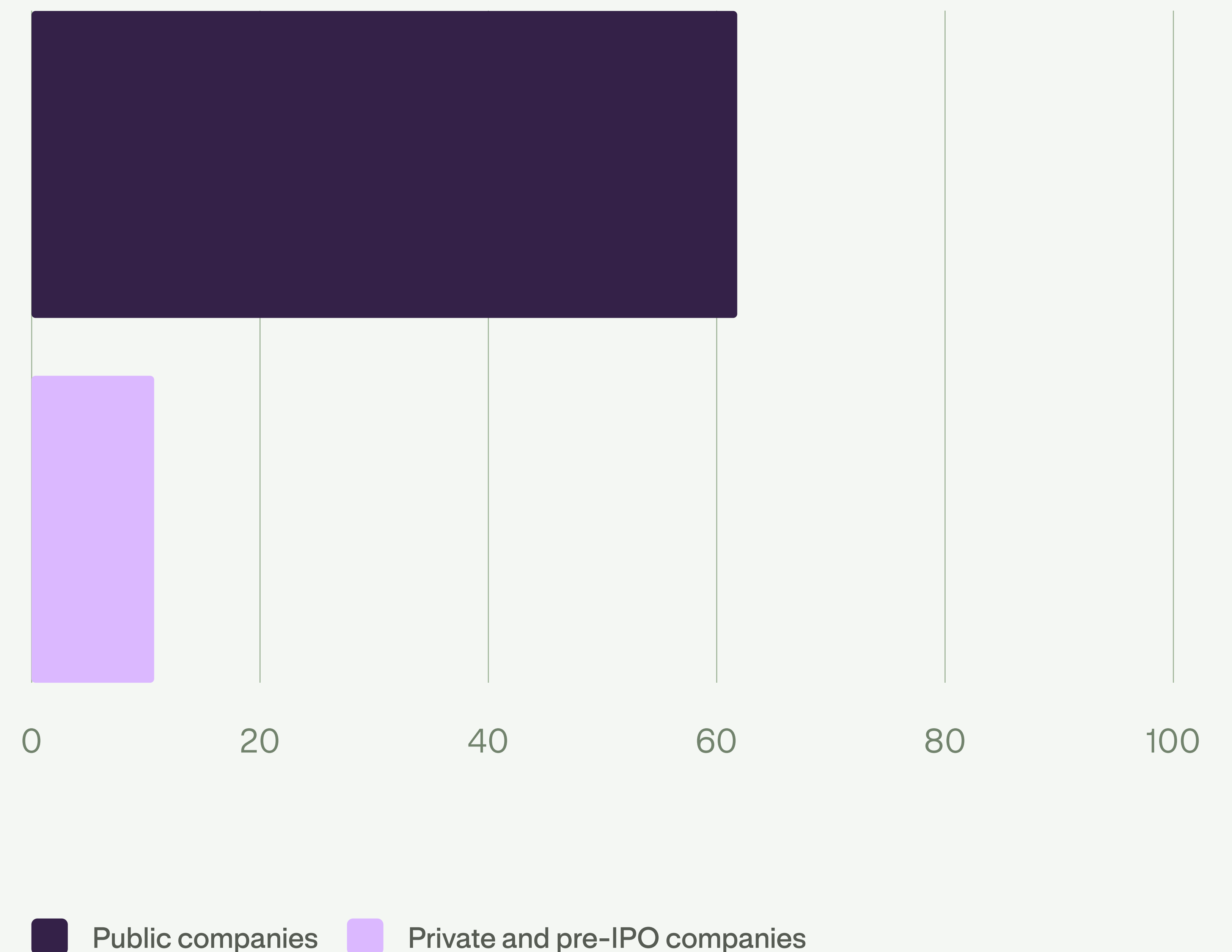
07.

Biggest challenge in 2023? Attracting and retaining talent for my team (closely followed by freeing up time for high-impact projects)

Private and pre-IPO companies were much more focused on the challenges of cash flow (41%) and freeing up time for high-impact projects (37%). This demonstrates that finance teams' goals and methodologies can be very different depending on company stage and industry.

Very different challenges for public and private companies in 2023

Attracting and retaining talent was, at 61%, by far the most pressing challenge for public companies; while only 11% of private and pre-IPO companies prioritized this challenge.





08.

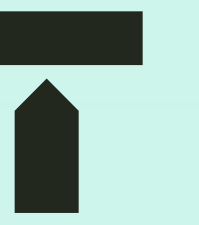
40% of Auditors believe talent mobility is instrumental in shaping the future of the profession

Among respondents from an audit background, 40% noted the mobility of talent as the trend shaping the future of work. For an industry fighting for talent (there has been a marked decrease in new entrants to the field) mobility presents an intriguing solution to attract a new generation.

With 34% of finance professionals answering that attracting and retaining talent is their biggest challenge in 2023, the picture that emerges is that in order to attract and retain the best finance talent, organizations must provide the technological tools and the flexibility to appeal to this talent. That means tech tools that leverage AI and automation, for example; and providing the ability to work from anywhere, or at least a less structured work environment.

40% of auditors note that the mobility of talent is shaping the future of work





Recovering from the recession is top of mind among a myriad of other industry concerns

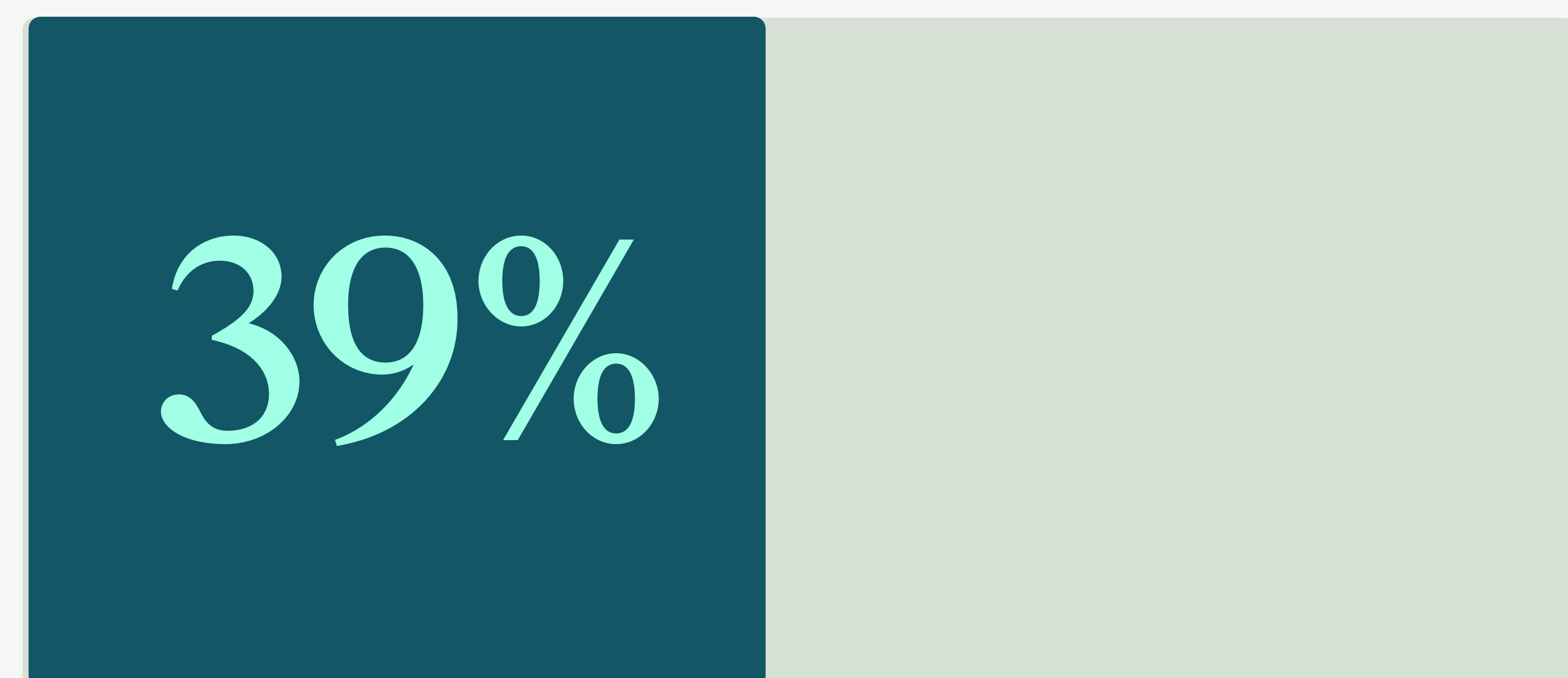


09.

Finance professionals from a range of industries are most positive about SaaS and Fintech sector recoveries

Despite recent shocks – where SaaS and Fintech companies have been among the hardest hit when it comes to valuations, growth, and fundraising – 39% of respondents, being finance professionals across multiple industries, picked these sectors to rebound strongest from the current recession, representing the most popular sectors among those surveyed (Healthcare and Pharmaceutical, Real Estate, Retail, and Traditional Finance.)

When looking at finance professionals across various industries, 39% vote SaaS and Fintech as most likely to recover fastest from the current economic situation.





09.

Finance professionals from a range of industries are most positive about SaaS and Fintech sector recoveries

Looking exclusively at advisory firms, this figure is 44%. These industry professionals' exposure to multiple companies and industries gives even more credence to the speculation of these industries getting back to pre-recession levels -- and beyond -- before others.

When looking at just advisory firms who have additional insight into a range of industries, the number reflects the same trend at 44%.



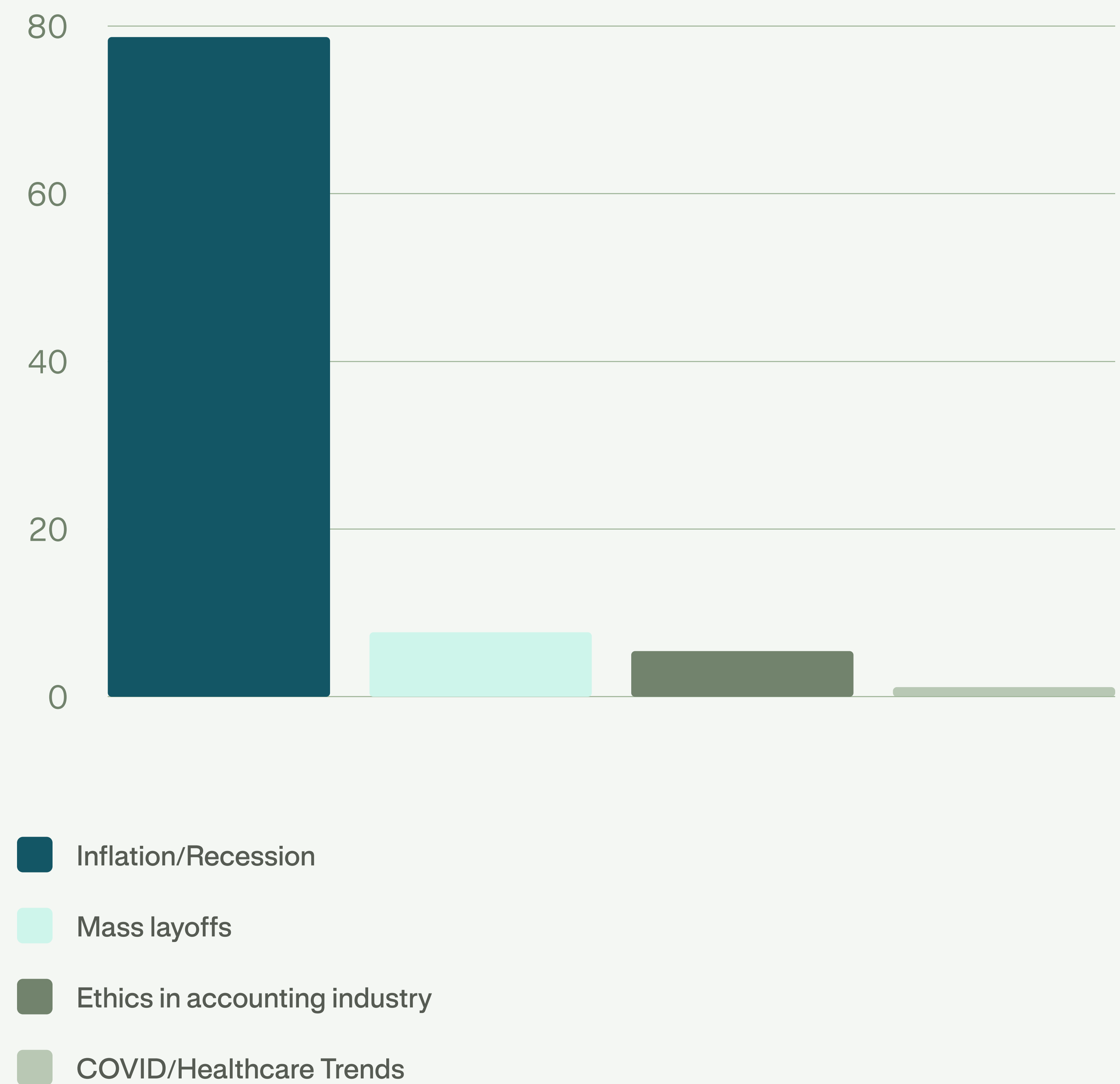


10.

79% of finance professionals are concerned about post-recession recovery; more so than dealing with mass layoffs, industry ethics issues, and COVID/healthcare issues

Finance professionals have been grappling with major issues of late – from the uncertainty of COVID, to ensuring the company is prepared for the next health crisis, to restructuring and mass layoffs, and industry ethics issues which have been hitting the headlines, from Wirecard to FTX. And yet despite these burning issues, it's post-recession recovery that's the priority of the vast majority of industry professionals. The take-away? It might be tough now, but the turnaround is coming, and individuals and businesses that prioritize leveraging this recovery are going to be among tomorrow's leaders.

Which of the following market trends is most concerning to your business?






10.

79% of finance professionals are concerned about post-recession recovery; more so than dealing with mass layoffs, industry ethics issues, and COVID/healthcare issues

For private and pre-IPO companies, mass layoffs have been in the news, as investors have shifted to valuing profits and sustainability over growth metrics. However for these respondents, mass layoffs only accounts for 7% of their headaches; the upcoming recession and current inflationary conditions worry 90% of those surveyed.



7%

Only 7% of private and pre-IPO companies chose mass layoffs as their primary concern.



90%

The upcoming recession and current inflationary conditions are a top concern for 90% of private and pre-IPO companies.



Conclusion

Throughout this report, several themes emerge. Foremost, finance professionals seek to leverage technology to streamline time-consuming tasks that could be automated, providing them with more opportunities to add value through actionable insights, high-impact projects, and strategic planning. With the world of finance undergoing transformational changes from technological advancements, these professionals are keen to embrace technology to drive impactful change and avoid being left behind.

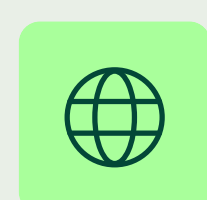
The finance professionals that participated in this survey revealed fascinating insights such as their view on the future of work, the industries they are most optimistic about post-recession, and even nuanced sector responses to survey questions. The voices of these finance professionals are finally being heard, and those outside the industry are taking note.

We express our gratitude to those who took part in this insightful report and are eager to continue tracking-and reflecting on-the evolving opinions of finance professionals in the future.



Interested in supporting our future research?

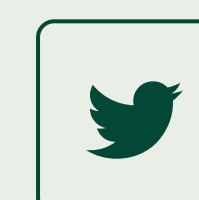
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