Five Essential FP&A Team Roles that Power Strategy and Transformation

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Business Partnering: The Key to FP&A's Strategic Evolution

Modern Financial Planning and Analysis (FP&A) has shifted from its role in finance to that of a strategic enabler, integrating analytics with decision-making to enhance agility and ensure alignment across the organization.

With 64% of organizations now making data-driven decisions, representing a 12% rise compared to last year's FP&A Trends Survey, FP&A's influence is growing. This change is being driven by market volatility, evolving expectations, and technology. AI-driven forecasting and cloud platforms are enhancing FP&A's capabilities, but the true transformation is in its role as a Business Partner.

Mario Jiménez, Group CFO at Alamar Foods, states, *"Today, the industry needs more than just data compilers: businesses seek strategic partners who can drive success through well-informed decisions."*[1]

FP&A Business Partnering is essential for this transformation because it bridges financial insights with execution. Currently 50% of organizations prioritize Business Partnering when hiring into the FP&A team, a 9% increase from last year which reflects its rising importance.

Achieving this transformation requires more than simply data and technology. It demands multifunctional teams, with clearly defined roles, that encourage agility, collaboration, and strategic influence. These roles extend beyond finance, integrating expertise from finance, IT, and data science to bridge gaps and drive transformation.

This paper revisits five key FP&A roles: the Architect, the Analyst, the Data Scientist, the Data Storyteller, and the Influencer which were first introduced in our 2021 research paper. We explore how these roles have evolved, their impact on Business Partnering, and how they will adapt to new challenges and technologies.

These roles are in demand in the market and require specialized training and development. Some organizations address this through collaboration with universities. Others choose to recruit specialists, from the world of data science and IT, and equip them with finance skills through tailored development programs.

② Key Attributes of Best-in-Class Business Partnering

To be effective Business Partners, FP&A professionals must go beyond number crunching and embrace a holistic approach that integrates strategic alignment, data-informed insights, collaboration, effective storytelling, and change leadership. These **Five Key Business Partnering Attributes** empower FP&A teams to influence decision-making, ensure financial plans align with business goals, and help foster cross-functional collaboration (Figure 1).

Strategic Alignment

The primary role of FP&A is to align strategic goals, financial plans, and operational execution to maximize organizational performance.

Figure 1: Five Key Business Partnering Attributes

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[1] https://fpa-trends.com/article/transformation-fpa-experts-strategic-collaborators

Vertical integration aligns strategy with execution, while horizontal integration drives cross-department collaboration. For example, FP&A teams can bridge long-term sustainability goals, such as reducing carbon emissions, with daily actions like monitoring energy consumption, adjusting procurement strategies, and optimizing supply chain logistics.

Integrating systems becomes crucially important at this stage, for example connecting FP&A planning with ERP ensures that operational data seamlessly aligns with strategic and financial planning, creating a unified system of record that enhances decision-making and execution across the organization.

In the words of **Prodromos Siapkas, CFO at SunRoof**: *"Integrated FP&A offers FP&A teams the opportunity to leverage their central position within the business and wide access to information, to bring together strategic, financial, and operational plans."* [2]

Data-Informed Insights

Data is the lifeblood of modern decision-making, but not all data supports effective decision-making—only accurate, reliable data with strong integrity, unified in a single source of truth, enables confident and strategic business choices.

Data alone is not enough, as **Andrew Wee, CFO at Good Bards**, puts it: *"Our role is to serve as a bridge between raw financial data and the strategic decisions that propel business success. It means not just analyzing numbers but interpreting them to guide leadership in making sound decisions."* [3]

Therefore, FP&A should be data-informed, not just data-driven. Data serves as a foundation, but human judgment ensures insights are actionable and relevant.

Collaboration and Relationship Building

Collaboration is a defining characteristic of best-in-class FP&A teams, rooted in their ability to influence without authority. By cultivating trust with stakeholders and tailoring insights to the specific needs of each department, FP&A drives actionable decision-making across the organization.

"Effective FP&A requires close collaboration with colleagues across departments and functions. Financial data needs to be translated into actionable insights that resonate with diverse company stakeholders," [3] explains **Andrew Wee**.

For example, partnering with marketing to optimize campaign budgets can deliver a higher return on investment (ROI), while collaborating with supply chain teams to identify inefficiencies can reduce costs.

Effective Storytelling

Effective storytelling not only bridges data and strategy but also ensures alignment across functions by translating insights into a language that resonates with each team. It integrates data visualization, context, and narrative to engage and inform decision-makers. *"Great FP&A storytelling isn't just about charts and reports; it's about turning complexity into clarity. When data is woven into a meaningful story, it not only informs but empowers leaders to act with conviction,"* says **Michael Lengenfelder, Global Solution Architect Unit4 FP&A at Unit4**.

For instance, an FP&A team might use an interactive dashboard to showcase quarterly revenue trends, breaking them down by product line, customer segment, and geographic region. It might also display key business drivers such as supply chain disruptions and new product launches. However, instead of just presenting raw figures, a Storyteller would highlight key insights. For example, a 15% sales decline in a key market as a result of supply chain disruptions or a 20% boost in revenue from a newly launched product.

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[2] https://fpa-trends.com/article/integrated-fpa-scale-world
[3] https://fpa-trends.com/article/transforming-fpa-purpose-driven-success

Change Leadership

FP&A professionals are not just supporters of change. They are change agents of transformation. FP&A teams challenge the status quo and drive impactful organizational change. **Kristina Bow, Senior Director of FP&A at Optum**, highlights: *"Leading with authenticity, adaptability, and empathy has been the key factor for the FP&A team to successfully merge into the greater organization, integrate into new processes and systems, and manage change."* [4]

③ Five Essential FP&A Team Roles

FP&A has evolved into a multidisciplinary field, requiring a diverse set of skills and capabilities that combine traditional finance, data science, and strategic Business Partnering.

The Five FP&A Roles Framework presented here is the result of extensive global research. It is based on insights from over 260 meetings of the International FP&A Board, contributions from thought leaders, and numerous case studies. Building on previous in-depth research, *Skills of the Future: Best-in-Class FP&A Teams and How to Build Them*, this framework highlights the best practices that exist, and the innovations emerging in the evolving FP&A field. Companies worldwide are already successfully applying this framework and in many cases one individual is able to tackle two or even three roles, demonstrating framework's flexibility and adaptability.

The 'classical' FP&A role
- Analysis and Reporting
- Develops models, comments, and observations
- Oversees the planning and forecasting process
- Evaluates projects and Investments

Influence without authority
- Uses expertise with info and analytics to achieve goals
- Leadership Characteristics / Mastery of Emotional intelligence

The 'bridge' between Finance and IT functions
- Connects IT / Finance / Strategy
- Develops Systems Architecture
- Harmonizes planning processes
- Creates driver-based, real time, analytic models
- Data warehouse development

The 'bridge' between Finance and Data Science functions
- Skilled in Predictive technologies (AI/ML)
- Uncovers key analytical drivers and trends
- Integrates AI/ML/optimization/statistical modeling
- Masters data management

Delivers compelling insights & visualization to support the story
- Makes story engaging, easy to understand
- Explains what actions are required
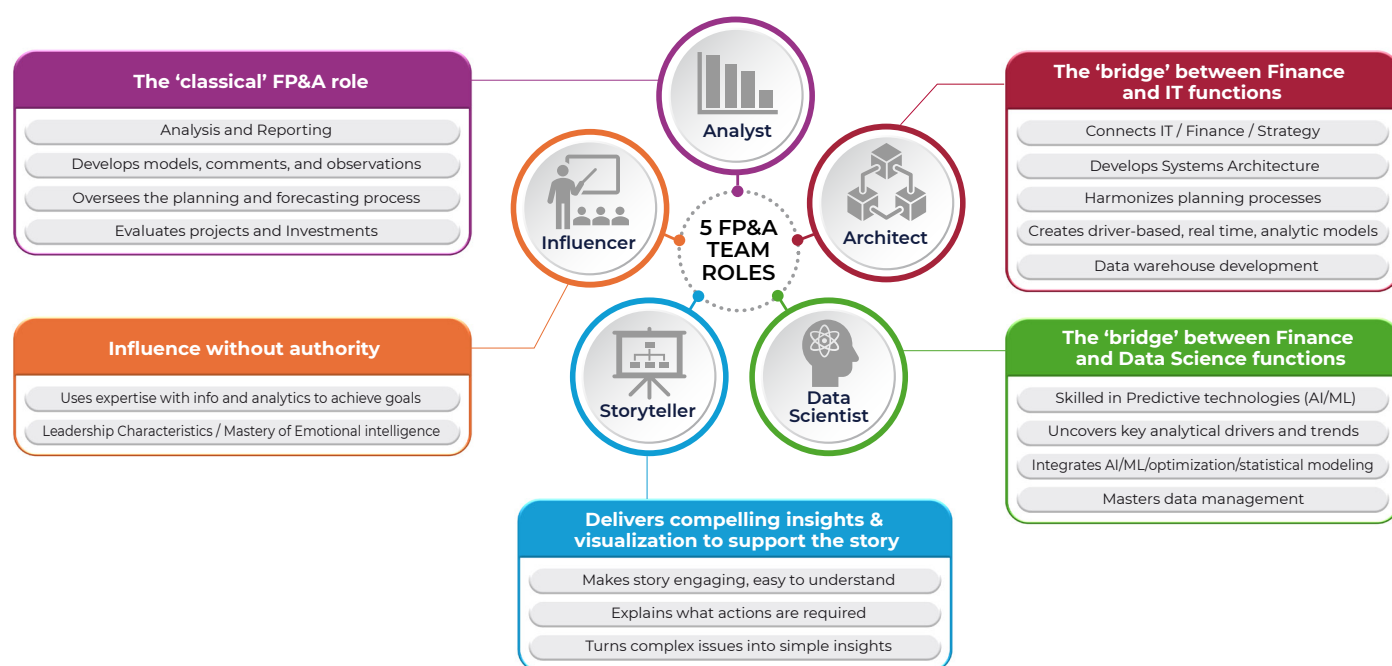- Turns complex issues into simple insights

Figure 2: The Five FP&A Roles Framework

This framework distinguishes between analytical roles, such as the Architect, Data Scientist, and Analyst, and soft-skill roles, such as the Data Storyteller and Influencer. Together, these roles form a cohesive model that enables FP&A teams to integrate technical and strategic capabilities. The Five FP&A Roles Framework serves as a practical tool to identify any skill gaps and create targeted development plans that ensure teams are equipped to meet modern demands.

The Analyst

Definition: The Analyst is a foundational role responsible for analyzing financial data to support budgeting, forecasting, and performance analysis. With analytical skills, proficiency in Excel, and attention to detail,

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[4] https://fpa-trends.com/article/leadership-through-change-management

the Analyst plays a critical role in providing operational insights. This is typically an entry-level position for finance professionals post-university. The role is widely available and serves as a stepping stone to more strategic FP&A functions.

Key Responsibilities:

- Develop and maintain budgets and forecast models.
- Conduct variance analysis and identify the root causes of performance issues.
- Provide actionable recommendations for management to optimize financial outcomes.

Example in Practice: An Analyst reviews variances in raw material costs that uncover unexpected price increases from suppliers. This analysis helps the procurement team renegotiate contracts or identify alternative vendors which optimizes costs without disrupting production.

> *"FP&A professionals must turn data into actionable insights that can identify issues, highlight trends, and uncover opportunities, ensuring the organization consumes, uses, and acts on the information effectively."* [5]
>
> **Garrett Dennie, CFO at Knix**

Strategic Value: The Analyst ensures financial accuracy and lays the groundwork for deeper insights but relies on collaboration with more strategic FP&A roles to fully integrate data with technology.

The Architect

Definition: The FP&A Architect designs and manages the FP&A ecosystem, ensuring platforms and tools support financial and strategic decision-making across the organization. This role bridges finance and IT but the FP&A Architect is not an IT Architect. Their deep understanding of both domains is crucial for the success of IT and data projects.

Key Responsibilities:

- Design the FP&A technology infrastructure.
- Implement driver-based planning and scenario modeling tools.
- Ensure robust data governance and automate routine processes.

Example in Practice: An Architect integrates FP&A and ERP systems, enabling real-time data flow for driver-based planning. This allows the finance team to update forecasts instantly when operational metrics shift.

> *"Being data-driven is a spectrum; it's not about producing reports or owning expensive tools but about aligning data with decision-making to drive meaningful outcomes."* [5]
>
> **Garrett Dennie, CFO at Knix**

Strategic Value: By aligning technology with financial goals, the Architect empowers FP&A teams to deliver faster, more accurate insights and align data with decision-making.

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[5] https://fpa-trends.com/article/are-you-data-driven

The Data Scientist

Definition: The FP&A Data Scientist is not a classic Data Scientist but a translator and bridge between finance and data science. They apply machine learning and predictive techniques, such as artificial intelligence and statistical modelling, to uncover patterns and provide forward-looking insights tailored to financial decision-making.

Key Responsibilities:

- Build predictive models to forecast outcomes and inform scenario planning.
- Analyze large datasets using ML to identify trends.
- Translate complex analytics into actionable insights for financial decision-making.

Example in Practice: A Data Scientist develops a predictive model to forecast customer demand, helping the supply chain team optimize inventory levels and reduce costs during peak seasons.

> *"The great thing about being the financial analyst in this process is that we can incorporate the results in the overall narrative and business plan. When things work, we can try to scale them. We can tweak or abandon them altogether when they do not work. This is the Data Scientist's role."* [6]
>
> **Matt Poleski, Regional CFO/Finance Director at Arthur J. Gallagher**

Strategic Value: By equipping FP&A teams with predictive insights, the Data Scientist enhances organizational agility and enables proactive decision-making.

The Data Storyteller

Definition: The FP&A Data Storyteller transforms complex financial data into clear, compelling narratives that drive alignment, engagement and action across the organization.

Key Responsibilities:

- Create engaging visualizations and dashboards to communicate financial insights.
- Simplify complex data into narratives tailored to stakeholder needs.

Example in Practice: A Data Storyteller compiles and visualizes logistics data to uncover inefficiencies in warehouse operations, illustrating with narrative how delayed shipments are impacting customer satisfaction. By framing the issue with real-world examples and clear visuals, they guide leadership toward optimizing inventory management and distribution strategies.

> *"Data storytelling is one of the most critical skills for FP&A. It brings data to life, transforming it into accessible, effective visualizations and building narratives that explain it so that decisions can be influenced and strategic action can be inspired."* [7]
>
> **Mohamed El-Rouby, Associate Vice President Global Commercial Finance at Pharmanovia**

Strategic Value: The Data Storyteller accelerates decision-making and fosters cross-departmental collaboration, ensuring that insights resonate and inspire strategic actions.

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[6] https://fpa-trends.com/article/why-life-strategic-advisor-tough
[7] https://fpa-trends.com/article/data-storytelling-most-important-things-keep-mind

The Influencer

Definition: The Influencer leads organizational transformation by using insights to challenge the status quo, align stakeholders, and drive strategic decisions. The Influencer bridges gaps across teams and ensures alignment between strategy and execution.

Key Responsibilities:

- Guide strategic decision-making using financial insights and foster collaboration.
- Act as a catalyst for change, driving organizational agility.
- Influence without formal authority to build trust and support.

Example in Practice: An Influencer leverages financial insights to advocate for rolling forecasts over static annual budgets, enhancing adaptability to market shifts.

> *"FP&A Influencer plays a key role in bringing people across the company in contact with each other and keeping the team up to date on the latest developments within the business. The Influencer tactically changes course in an uncertain environment and tries to link strategic planning to maturing operational planning if necessary."* [8]
>
> **Rudie van Dijk, Group FP&A Director at TIP Group**

Strategic Value: By shaping strategy and fostering alignment, the Influencer ensures that financial insights drive organizational agility and long-term success.

Two Emerging Roles

Building on our previous research, we identified two emerging FP&A roles that complement the foundational five: The Interpreter and The Connector. While some may observe that these responsibilities are already embedded within existing roles, their distinct focus on gap bridging makes them noteworthy as standalone functions.

The Interpreter plays a vital role in translating complex technical analysis into actionable insights for non-technical stakeholders, by tailoring financial narratives to specific audiences. The Connector acts as the central link between business units, facilitating collaboration and aligning financial strategy with operational execution.

> *"Emerging roles like the FP&A Connector and Interpreter are vital for bridging silos and enabling collaboration. The Connector ensures that planning links strategy, operations, and financial outcomes, while the Interpreter translates complex analytics into actionable insights for stakeholders."* [9]
>
> **Garrett Dennie, CFO at Knix**

These roles derive their true strength from their synergy with others, enhancing the collective impact of FP&A teams.

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[8] https://fpa-trends.com/article/case-study-how-move-towards-advanced-fpa
[9] https://fpa-trends.com/article/number-crunchers-navigators-how-business-adversity-can-develop-multiple-fpa-personalities

4 From Individual Roles to Team Synergy

In modern FP&A, individual roles are powerful, but true value emerges when they collaborate seamlessly as a team. This synergy, where the collective output exceeds the sum of the individual efforts, enables integrated decision-making and drives organizational success.

The Shift from Silos to Collaboration and Synergy

Traditionally, FP&A functions were composed of narrowly focused specialists, such as analysts working in relative isolation on forecasting or budgeting. However, this fragmented approach often led to inefficiencies, misaligned objectives, and missed opportunities for deeper insights. The increasing complexity of today's business environment necessitates breaking down silos, not only within FP&A but across other functions like HR, sales, and operations.

Synergy is about the interaction between team members, their ability to complement each other, and leverage diverse experiences, skills, and capabilities. It's not just about team roles. It's about fostering compatibility, motivation, and managing conflict, as well as promoting team-building, change management, and education. Synergy involves creating a team spirit, encouraging healthy debate, and cultivating a culture of continuous learning and development.

For instance, the Data Scientist's predictive insights can complement the Analyst's financial models which leads to delivering actionable plans while fostering a unified, motivated team environment.

Practical Example: Synergy in Transforming Headcount Planning and Forecasting[10]

Andrew Wee, CFO at Good Bards, shared with us an example from one of the organizations he worked with, where headcount planning traditionally relied on siloed processes across HR, accounting, and FP&A teams. This fragmented approach resulted in inefficiencies, delays, and a lack of clarity for actionable insights. FP&A, often viewed as a task executor, struggled to act as a strategic partner, leading to misaligned objectives. As **Andrew Wee** highlights: *"True FP&A value lies in bridging functions, fostering collaboration, and becoming the driving force behind integrated decision-making."*

To address these challenges, the organization introduced a purpose-driven approach that redefined FP&A's role. While **Andrew Wee** does not explicitly use the FP&A role names - Architect, Analyst, Storyteller, and Influencer - their contributions are recognizable throughout the example. The Architect created a unified data system that centralized workforce information, ensuring standardization and consistency. The Analyst leveraged this system to extract and analyze discrepancies in workforce data, aligning them with a consistent taxonomy (e.g., Full-Time Equivalent counts). With the groundwork laid, the Storyteller transformed the data into a compelling narrative, providing actionable recommendations tailored to senior management. Finally, the Influencer ensured alignment and buy-in across HR, accounting, and management teams to drive the implementation of optimized resource allocation strategies.

This approach demonstrates the power of synergy. The Architect's infrastructure, the Analyst's precision, the Storyteller's communication, and the Influencer's alignment efforts all combined to deliver outcomes far beyond what any single role could achieve alone. Together, they reduced inefficiencies, improved data accuracy, and enhanced decision-making agility, showcasing the critical role of FP&A as a unifying force across the organization.

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[10] https://fpa-trends.com/tv-series/purpose-driven-fpa

Role Interaction Map: Supporting Integrated Decision-Making

To illustrate the interplay of FP&A roles, consider the following interaction map displayed on Figure 3:
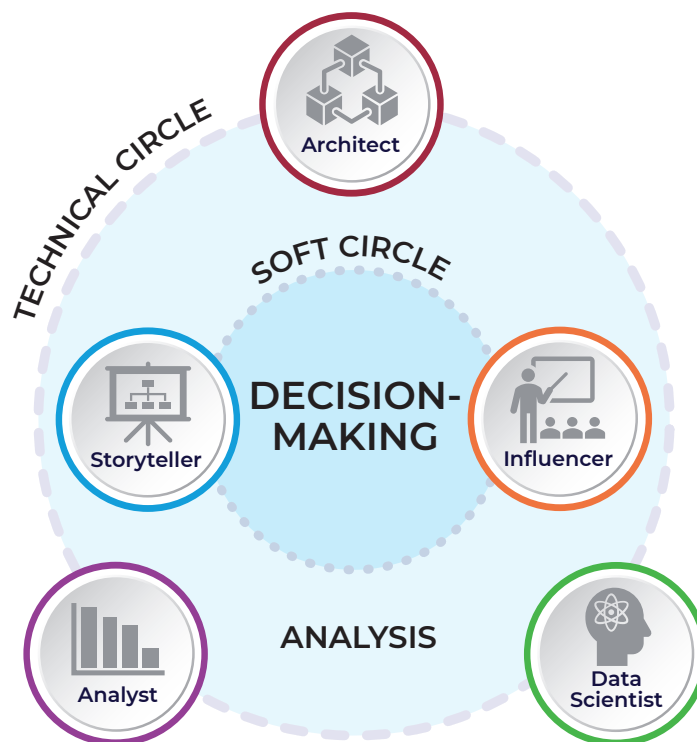

Figure 3: Role Interaction Map

In a high-performing FP&A team, collaboration unfolds across distinct yet interconnected layers, ensuring that financial insights seamlessly evolve from data to strategic action. At the core of this ecosystem is Decision-Making, the ultimate goal of FP&A's collective effort. Surrounding this core are two critical circles - the Technical Circle and the Soft Circle - each playing a vital role in transforming raw data into actionable business intelligence.

The Technical Circle: Laying the Analytical Foundation

The Architect serves as the backbone of FP&A infrastructure, designing and integrating systems that centralize data, automate workflows, and create a seamless analytical environment. This ensures that financial and operational data are accessible, structured, and ready for analysis.

Building on this foundation, the Data Scientist harnesses advanced analytics, machine learning, and statistical modeling to identify key business drivers, hidden trends, and predictive insights. These models form the basis for forward-looking planning, equipping organizations with the foresight needed to navigate uncertainty.

The Analyst translates these insights into financial models, variance analyses, and reports, ensuring that the organization's planning, budgeting, and forecasting processes align with strategic objectives. By distilling complex datasets into structured outputs, the Analyst provides a bridge between technical insights and business realities.

The Soft Circle: Shaping Insights into Actionable Narratives

While the technical team builds the foundation, the Storyteller takes center stage in translating analytical outputs into compelling, digestible narratives. By leveraging visualization tools and communication techniques, the Storyteller ensures that financial insights are not just understood but resonate with stakeholders, enabling more informed decision-making.

Finally, the Influencer plays a pivotal role in turning insights into impact. This role focuses on securing buy-in from leadership, aligning cross-functional teams, and driving strategic execution. By fostering collaboration and ensuring that data-driven insights lead to tangible business actions, the Influencer bridges the gap between analysis and decision-making.

This layered approach ensures that FP&A is not just an isolated financial function but an integral driver of business success. The Technical Circle provides the analytical rigor, while the Soft Circle ensures insights are communicated, understood, and acted upon. Together, these roles create a synergistic FP&A team, one that not only delivers data-driven recommendations but also ensures they influence real-world business decisions.

Case Study: How Modern Technology Enhances FP&A Roles, Fostering Collaboration and Synergy[11]

Background: The City of Port Moody, a municipality in Canada serving over 34,000 residents, faced significant challenges in its financial planning due to manual, fragmented spreadsheets. This hindered collaboration, delayed decisions, and limited strategic insights.

Challenges:

- **Manual Processes:** Budget alignment calculations took up to two weeks.
- **Fragmented Data:** Siloed systems required time-consuming manual consolidation.
- **Limited Insights:** Spreadsheets could not provide real-time or accurate data.
- **Rigidity:** Annual budget reviews lacked adaptability to changing needs.

Solution: By adopting modern technology for financial planning and analysis (Unit4 FP&A), the City automated workflows, centralized data, and introduced interactive dashboards. This system enabled FP&A teams to collaborate effectively and act as a strategic force using the roles of:

- **The Architect** centralized data systems to ensure consistent and seamless information flow.
- **The Analyst** used real-time data to deliver actionable forecasts and planning.
- **The Storyteller** leveraged dashboards to present insights visually, improving decision-making.
- **The Influencer** aligned departments with strategic goals through collaborative insights.

Outcomes: By implementing modern financial planning technology (Unit4 FP&A), integrated with its ERP system, the City transformed its processes, achieving:

- **100% Budget Alignment:** Instantaneously, compared to a two-week period previously.
- **18% Time Savings:** Online processes were streamlined and workloads reduced.
- **Improved Collaboration:** Effective cross-departmental decisions were enabled by data.
- **Increased Agility:** Monthly budgeting replaced inflexible annual reviews.
- **Granular Insights:** Real-time tracking enhanced cost control and resource allocation.

Takeaway: The City of Port Moody demonstrates how modern technology (Unit4 FP&A) can enhance FP&A roles by advancing collaboration and synergy. Integrated systems and automated workflows empowered their FP&A team to transition from an operational silo to a strategic enabler for success.

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[11] https://www.unit4.com/sites/default/files/2021-12/unit4-cs-public-erp-fpa-na-city-of-port-moody-cs211013int.pdf

⑤ FP&A Roles in Business Partnering: Driving Strategic Collaboration

As FP&A moves beyond forecasting into strategy and operations, its role as a Business Partner is critical. This shift demands multifunctional skills and adaptability.

FP&A teams act as critical Business Partners by promoting collaboration across departments, enabling informed decisions and providing measurable outcomes. Their effectiveness is built on the synergy between roles, where each contributes unique value to the preparation of cross-functional business scenarios. FP&A professionals often take on multiple roles, blending analytical, strategic, and storytelling capabilities to maximize impact.

Examples of Business Partnering

Revenue Forecasting:

Driving accurate revenue forecasts requires seamless collaboration between FP&A roles. The Architect needs to ensure ERP and CRM systems are fully integrated in order to allow real-time financial and operational data to flow across functions. The Data Scientist builds predictive models to identify demand trends, which Analysts refine by incorporating historical insights and scheduled business activities. Storytellers translate these insights into compelling visualizations and reports that equip leadership with actionable intelligence. Meanwhile, Influencers engage cross-functional teams, to ensure alignment between sales, finance, and operations, that allows for execution of data-informed decisions.

Cost Optimization:

Driving cost efficiency is a collective effort within FP&A teams. It begins with the Architect, who ensures that financial systems capture real-time cost data which provides a clear foundation for decision-making. Using this structured data, the Data Scientist builds predictive models to assess cost trends and highlight inefficiencies. Analysts then work closely with operations and procurement to interpret these insights and translate them into actionable cost-saving opportunities. Storytellers refine these findings into compelling business cases while Influencers engage leadership and department heads to ensure cost-saving measures are implemented effectively across the organization.

Garrett Dennie, CFO at Knix, highlights that modern FP&A teams must transcend traditional analysis, stating, "The best FP&A teams are navigators of the enterprise, bridging analysis with strategic planning and storytelling to influence impactful decisions."[12] This underscores the need for FP&A professionals to develop a diverse, business-focused skill set.

Transforming FP&A Business Partnering through Digital Capabilities

The latest FP&A Trends Survey shows that only one-third of FP&A time is spent on high-value activities like Business Partnering, while 45% of their time is still consumed by data-related tasks. This highlights the urgent need to enhance digital capabilities which will enable FP&A teams to focus on strategic impact rather than manual processes.

Technology and analytics are key enablers of Business Partnering. Capabilities such as modern cloud FP&A platforms and advanced analytical tools, including AI and automation, transform FP&A from data processors to strategic enablers. This is what drives proactive decision-making and seamless business collaboration (Figure 4).
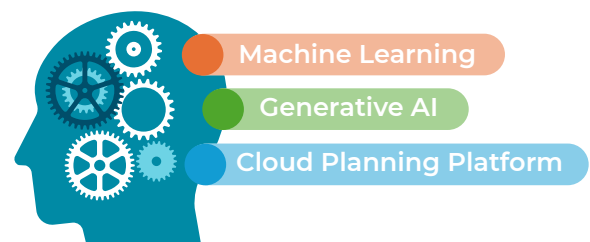

Figure 4: Transformative Technologies that Support Business Partnering

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[12] https://fpa-trends.com/article/number-crunchers-navigators-how-business-adversity-can-develop-multiple-fpa-personalities

Machine Learning in FP&A

AI in the form of ML is revolutionizing FP&A. It improves forecasting and scenario modeling by detecting trends missed by traditional methods. FP&A teams leverage ML to optimize resource allocation, refine scenario planning, and automate variance analysis which frees up Analysts time to focus on strategic insights rather than manual data processing.

According to the FP&A Trends Survey 2024, organizations using AI/ML tools report a 25% higher forecast quality, with 65% rating their forecasts as "great" or "good", compared to 40% among non-users. Additionally, high-performing FP&A teams are 18% more likely to leverage AI/ML for advanced forecasting and scenario analysis (Figure 5).

FP&A teams that are optimized or perform well with a few areas for improvement

AI/ML Users: 35%

Non-AI/ML Users: 17% → +18%

Percentage of organizations that rate their forecasts as great or good

AI/ML Users: 65%

Non-AI/ML Users: 40% → +25%
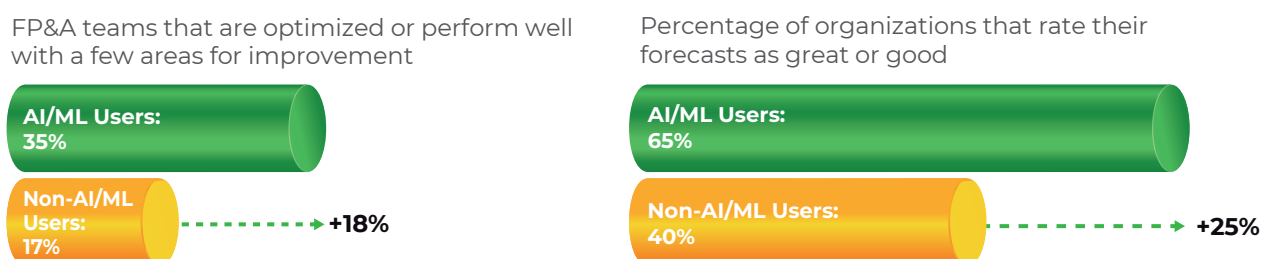
Figure 5: The Impact of AI/ML on FP&A Performance and Forecast Accuracy

Generative AI (GenAI) in FP&A

The integration of AI in FP&A is not limited to predictive analytics and automation. GenAI automates reporting, enhances storytelling, and generates real-time strategic insights. It fosters creativity and efficiency, ensuring stakeholders receive tailored, impactful messages. Storytellers use GenAI to generate professional-grade visuals, tailored narratives, and scenario-based reports which save time and ensure consistent messaging.

> *"The GenAI service automatically generates a summary of the performance of all units and can give a summary of all action points. This saves finance users significant amounts of time in aggregating comments, with time freed up for providing recommendations instead of crunching data."*
>
> **Michael Lengenfelder, Global Solution Architect Unit4 FP&A at Unit4**

Case Study: How AI Transformed Business Partnering at Amazon Operations[13]

This case study was presented by **Wim De Rouck, Finance Director CEU CF at Amazon**, during one of the FP&A Trends webinars.

Background: Amazon's finance team of 70-75 supports over 2,000 leaders and manages vast data volumes while maintaining cost discipline.

Challenges:

- **Data Overload:** The team manages financial insights across 300 warehouses and global teams.
- **Resource Constraints:** The lean finance team supports thousands of stakeholders.
- **Operational Complexity:** Insights are required to be generated for diverse and dynamic business operations.
- **Manual Processes:** Forecasts and document analysis require excessive time and effort.

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[13] https://fpa-trends.com/article/how-ai-enhances-fpa-business-partnering

Solution: To address these challenges, Amazon Operations integrated AI and ML solutions, including:

- **AI-Powered Chat Ops:** A chatbot system enabled instant data retrieval across internal documentation.

- **ML Forecasting Models:** These produced more accurate sales forecasts, outperforming traditional methods.

- **Generative AI Summarization:** AI tools were implemented to summarize key documents that allowed faster decision-making.

- **AI Training & Adoption:** AI was embedded into workflows with structured training that ensured finance teams could confidently interpret AI-generated insights and make data-driven decisions.

Outcomes: The adoption of AI and ML enhanced the Business Partnering function at Amazon Operations, allowing FP&A team members to focus on strategic contributions over manual tasks. Analysts leveraged predictive models and summarized documents to uncover insights while Influencers supported informed decision-making with impactful narratives.
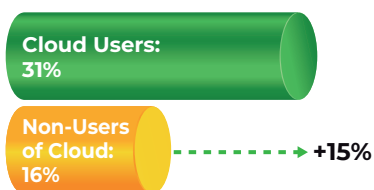
Takeaway: This case study shows how AI and ML can empower FP&A teams to become proactive Business Partners, using automation and predictive insights for strategic decision-making. By automating tasks, improving forecasting, and enhancing decision-making, AI enables finance teams to drive greater business impact.

Cloud Platforms

The new generation of cloud-based FP&A platforms unifies data, ensuring real-time alignment of financial and operational insights. This seamless access enhances collaboration and enables FP&A teams to work efficiently across the organization. Additionally, these platforms also embed AI capabilities, enhancing analytics and automation within FP&A processes.

According to the FP&A Trends Survey 2024, organizations using cloud-based platforms report 61% higher forecast quality, compared to 37% among non-users. Additionally, high-performing FP&A teams are twice as likely to be using cloud-based planning applications (31%) rather than relying on legacy systems (16%) (Figure 6).

FP&A teams that are optimized or perform well with a few areas for improvement

Cloud Users: 31%

Non-Users of Cloud: 16% — → +15%

Percentage of organizations that rate their forecasts as great or good

Cloud Users: 61%

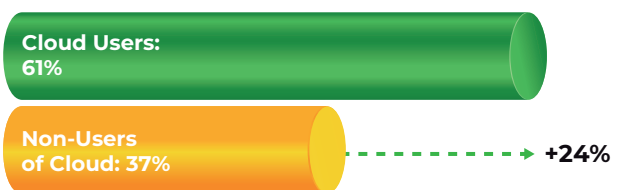Non-Users of Cloud: 37% — → +24%

Figure 6: The Impact of Cloud Platforms on FP&A Performance and Forecast Accuracy

"In today's fast-paced business environment, organizations that embrace cloud-based FP&A platforms are better equipped to align their teams, streamline operations, and maintain a competitive edge."

Oliver Sullivin, Director of Growth - Global FP&A at Unit4

Cloud technology plays a key role in modern FP&A to ensure data consistency, accessibility, and seamless collaboration which lays the foundation for strategic decision-making.

Case Study: How Cloud FP&A Transformed Decision-Making at the East of England Ambulance Service[14]

Background: The East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust provides 24/7 emergency services to over 6.2 million people. However, fragmented spreadsheets and manual processes limit their FP&A's ability to deliver timely insights and collaborate effectively, slowing decision-making.

Challenges: The reliance on spreadsheets created several obstacles:

- **Fragmentation:** Inconsistent budgeting processes across teams led to misaligned financial planning and delays in decision-making.
- **Limited Insights:** A lack of real-time data prevented FP&A from proactively adjusting budgets to operational changes.
- **Inefficiency:** Manual consolidation consumed a significant amount of FP&A time, reducing the team's ability to focus on high-value strategic activities.

Solution: To overcome these challenges, the Trust adopted a cloud-based FP&A solution (Unit4), to streamline financial planning and enhance collaboration. This platform enabled the FP&A team to transition from manual, fragmented processes to a unified, automated, and real-time planning environment. It brought it:

- **Centralized Data:** A single source of truth was established for cash flow, cost forecasting, and operational budgets which improved data accuracy.
- **Automated Processes:** Manual tasks were reduced and budgeting/forecasting time was cut by one-third.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Interactive dashboards enabled dynamic data sharing and stronger partnerships across departments.

Outcomes for FP&A Teams: The cloud solution redefined how the FP&A team operated, enhancing their ability to act as strategic Business Partners:

- **The Architect:** Enabled seamless collaboration through a unified data platform, ensuring accurate, real-time financial insights.
- **The Analyst:** Shifted focus from manual aggregation to high-value activities like trend identification and strategic forecasting.
- **The Storyteller:** Used real-time dashboards to translate financial insights into clear, data-driven recommendations.
- **The Influencer:** Strengthened financial and operational alignment, optimizing resource allocation and strategic execution.

> *"Our planning insights are now all wrapped in one shared, accurate system. We can view previous budgets, track year-to-date spend, see forecasts for the coming year, and reallocate budget where necessary."*
>
> **Robert Abery, Management Accountant at East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust**

Takeaway: Cloud technology transformed FP&A from a reactive function into a strategic partner, enabling data-driven decision-making and measurable impact.

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[14] https://www.unit4.com/sites/default/files/2022-11/Unit4-CS-Public-ERPFPA-UK-East-of-England-Ambulance-CS210813INT-221103a.pdf

⑥ Developing Future-Ready FP&A Teams

As the FP&A function evolves into a strategic enabler, building future-ready teams requires deliberate strategies to ensure the right mix of skills and expertise. Organizations must navigate the complexities of acquiring talent through a mixture of borrowing, hiring, and nurturing. Each method offers distinct advantages and challenges.

Borrow: Leveraging External Expertise

One way to address capability gaps in FP&A is to temporarily borrow talent from other departments or external experts. This approach brings immediate expertise and a fresh perspective to the team.

However, this strategy has trade-offs. While borrowing can be cost-effective in the short term, it may create dependencies and skill shortages in the lending team. Moreover, borrowed talent may not be fully integrated into the FP&A team's culture and their longer-term goals.

Hire: Attracting Market Experts

Hiring experts from the market or headhunting talent from competitors can infuse FP&A teams with cutting-edge skills and industry knowledge. This is particularly valuable when building expertise in emerging areas such as AI, ML, or GenAI.

The challenge lies in the competitive landscape. High-demand roles, such as Data Scientists and Data Storytellers with advanced visualization skills, are difficult to recruit and often come with significant hiring and onboarding costs.

Nurture: Building T-Shaped Professionals

Developing T-shaped professionals, individuals with a broad understanding of FP&A functions and deep expertise in specific areas, is essential for a high-performing team.

FP&A professionals should have foundational skills in data analysis, financial modeling, scenario planning, and storytelling to ensure cross-role collaboration. Each team member should also have a spike of deep expertise, such as predictive modeling, advanced visualization, or influencing stakeholder decisions.

In an FP&A team, the presence of five distinct roles does not necessarily require five separate individuals. These roles can often be combined within team members, depending on their existing skill set and their potential for growth. By identifying both the skill gaps and strengths in your FP&A team, you can strategically build expertise by enhancing complementary capabilities within the same person (Figure 7).
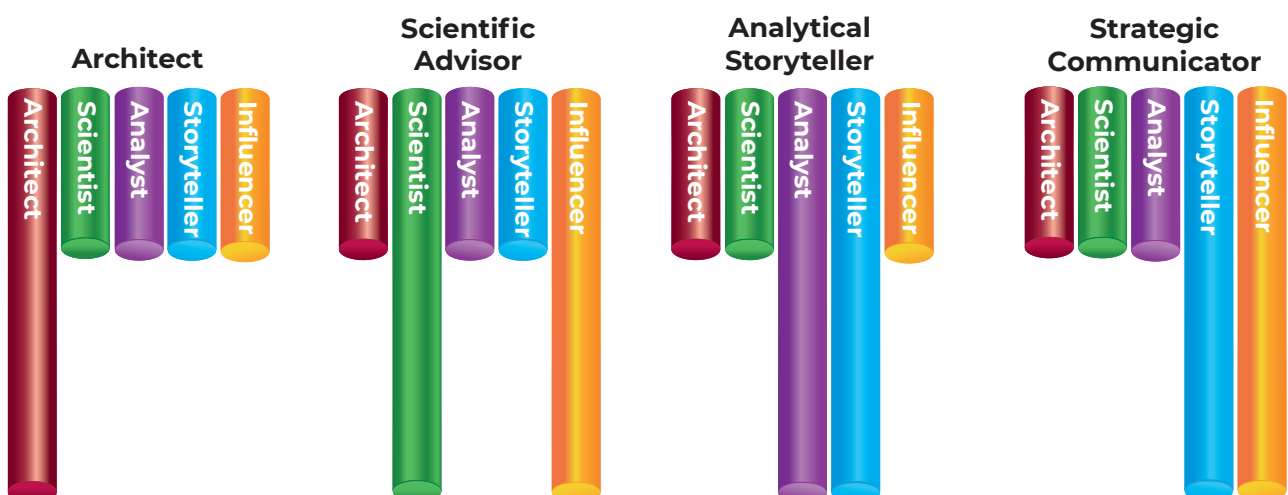

Figure 7: Covering 5 FP&A Roles with 4 T-Shaped Professionals

Employees in FP&A are increasingly expected to develop T-shaped profiles, where they have deep expertise in one area while also possessing a range of complementary skills that can be applied when needed. Professionals with this blend of specialized knowledge and broader capabilities are likely to become the most sought-after in the FP&A industry.

Developing T-shaped professionals requires investment in training, mentorship, and hands-on practice. One of our FP&A Board members supports creating multiskilled T-shaped FP&A professionals by ensuring a balance between practical experience, mentoring, and education. This approach follows a 3E model for people development: 70% Experience (learning by doing), 20% Exposure (teaching, mentoring, and coaching), and 10% Education (training, eLearning, and reading).

Case Study: Upskilling FP&A Teams for Advanced Capabilities[15]

Background: TIP Group, a €1 billion+ transport equipment leasing and maintenance business, operating in 17 European countries, recognized the need to transition its FP&A function to a more advanced, data-driven model. The company has tripled in size over the past decade, necessitating a more sophisticated FP&A approach to support its growth and complex operations.

Challenges: The company faced several challenges in its FP&A skillset:

- Skill Gaps hindered advanced data analysis and technological proficiency.

- Role Ambiguity or a lack of clearly defined roles within the FP&A team led to inefficiencies and overlapping responsibilities.

- Fragmented Excel workflows and inconsistent data governance made standardization and efficient planning difficult.

Solution: The company introduced a comprehensive strategy focusing on:

- **Implementing a cloud-based planning solution** that integrated with a central data lake and reporting software.

- **Identifying Strengths and Skill Gaps** within the team. Assessments to understand the current capabilities of the FP&A team were conducted to identify areas for development as well as existing strengths that could be leveraged.

- **Defining Dedicated Roles:** Specific roles were established within the FP&A team, such as FP&A Architect, Analyst, Data Scientist, Influencer, and Data Storyteller, to ensure clarity in responsibilities and to build a well-rounded team capable of advanced analytics and strategic support.

- **Combining Nurturing and Hiring Approaches:** Internal talent were developed through upskilling while people with a more advanced data and analytics level were brought in from outside, ensuring a balance between organizational knowledge and fresh expertise.

Outcome: By identifying the strengths and skill gaps within the FP&A team, and implementing a balanced approach of nurturing internal talent and hiring new expertise, the company successfully transitioned to a more advanced FP&A function.

Balancing the Three Approaches

The most effective FP&A teams combine borrowing, hiring, and nurturing to build a balanced and future-ready workforce. Borrowing provides agility for short-term needs, hiring addresses gaps with external expertise, and nurturing develops a resilient talent pipeline that is aligned with organizational goals.

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[15] https://fpa-trends.com/article/case-study-how-move-towards-advanced-fpa

⑦ Connecting FP&A Roles to the Maturity Model

Bridging the Maturity Gap Effectively

The FP&A Trends Maturity Model Assessment is a comprehensive benchmarking and transformation tool that helps organizations evaluate their FP&A capabilities by addressing six critical dimensions that drive FP&A excellence and outlining the 5 stages of development. The output of this assessment also allows them to create their own roadmap toward achieving a best-in-class performance (Figure 8).
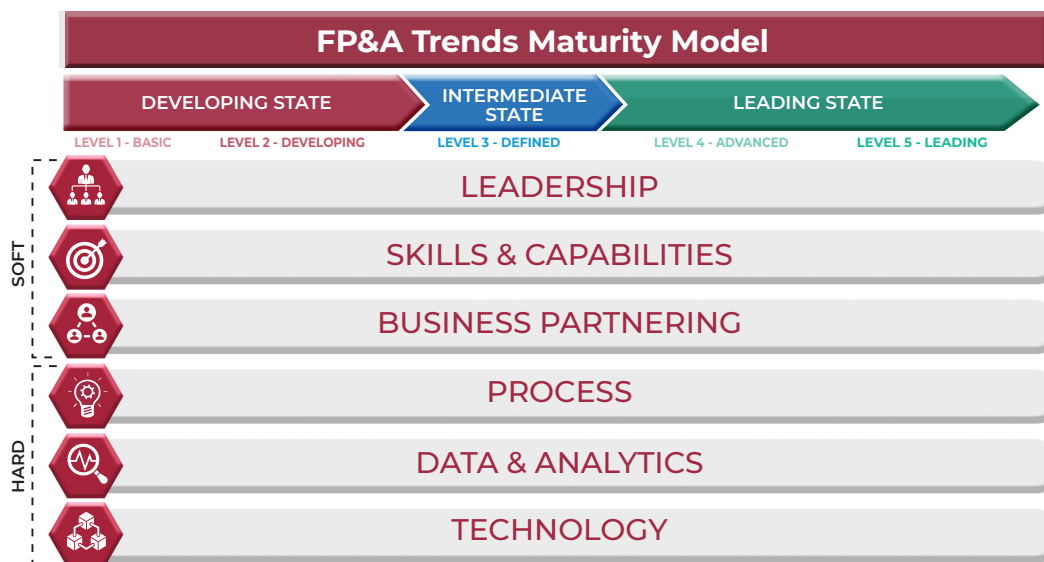

FP&A Trends Maturity Model

DEVELOPING STATE		INTERMEDIATE STATE	LEADING STATE	
LEVEL 1 - BASIC	LEVEL 2 - DEVELOPING	LEVEL 3 - DEFINED	LEVEL 4 - ADVANCED	LEVEL 5 - LEADING

SOFT
- LEADERSHIP
- SKILLS & CAPABILITIES
- BUSINESS PARTNERING

HARD
- PROCESS
- DATA & ANALYTICS
- TECHNOLOGY

Figure 8: The FP&A Trends Maturity Model

Successful FP&A transformation requires more than just technical expertise. It demands a shift in leadership, skills, capabilities, and Business Partnering. FP&A must embrace multidisciplinary teams that go beyond accounting to integrate data analysis and storytelling. As FP&A evolves into a trusted advisor, these soft dimensions of the FP&A Trends Maturity Model become not less, but even more important than the technical ones.

Evolving FP&A Roles Alongside Organizational Maturity

Developing a high-performing FP&A team requires alignment not only with individual roles but also with the organization's overall maturity. As an organization progresses through the model's five stages — from basic to leading — it becomes evident that the development of advanced FP&A roles, such as Data Storyteller, Influencer, and Data Scientist, depend heavily on the organization's maturity in technical dimensions, such as technology, process, and data analytics.

Attempting to develop advanced roles like Influencer or Data Scientist at the early stages of maturity is challenging as a result of insufficient technological infrastructure and low process maturity.

However, while it may be tempting to recruit advanced professionals from organizations at higher maturity levels, this strategy can backfire. A Data Scientist or Strategic Influencer accustomed to a seamless, AI-enabled environment and cloud platforms may feel constrained and demotivated in a team lacking robust systems or data-driven collaboration. Without adequate support and resources, these professionals might disengage or leave the organization.

To avoid such pitfalls, organizations should focus on gradual development. At the same time, investments in technology, process improvements, and data infrastructure must progress alongside role development to create a supportive ecosystem for FP&A transformation. By synchronizing the evolution of roles with the organization's maturity journey, FP&A teams can build a collaborative, future-ready workforce capable of driving strategic excellence.

⑧ Conclusion: Unlocking the Full Potential of FP&A Teams

As FP&A evolves, its future depends on integrating roles, technology, and strategic Business Partnering. This paper outlines key elements of collaborative FP&A teams, emphasizing how roles like Architect, Analyst, Data Scientist, Data Storyteller, and Influencer drive strategic excellence.

> *"The FP&A role has shifted from a number-crunching function to becoming a critical enabler of business strategy and decision-making."*
>
> **Karina Williams, Business Unit CFO at Veolia**

To stay ahead, FP&A teams must move beyond functional expertise and develop T-shaped professionals who combine analytical depth with cross-functional influence. Success hinges on aligning talent development with organizational maturity and leveraging emerging technologies.

To fully realize FP&A's strategic potential, organizations must bridge the gap between financial planning and operational execution through seamless integration with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. By embedding FP&A within the ERP ecosystem, businesses ensure a single source of truth, where real-time operational data informs financial forecasts, and strategic decisions translate directly into execution.

The next frontier is clear: FP&A teams that combine technological innovation with strong business acumen will lead organizations toward smarter, faster, and more dynamic decision-making.

As technology, data, and collaboration redefine FP&A, the most successful teams will not just support decision-making, they will drive it. The future of FP&A belongs to those who embrace agility, digital transformation, and a proactive role in shaping not just the financial strategy, but the entire business landscape.

Acknowledgments

About the authors

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Olga is an FP&A professional and a trainer in Data Storytelling and Dashboard Design. With over a decade of corporate experience, Olga now trains and consults clients across various sectors, including banking, pharmaceuticals, automotive, energy, utilities, retail, FMCG, technology, manufacturing, telecommunications, and many others.

Larysa Melnychuk, CEO and Founder at FP&A Trends Group

Larysa is an accomplished FP&A professional and thought leader with over 20 years of experience in senior finance roles at top-tier companies. In 2016, she founded the FP&A Trends Group, a global organization that offers valuable insights, advisory services, and training to finance professionals seeking to stay ahead of the curve. She also founded the International FP&A Board, which has held over 260 meetings for finance leaders from 33 chapters across 19 countries on four continents.

Larysa chairs the Global AI FP&A Committee and runs a number of high-profile initiatives in the area of modern financial analytics.

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International FP&A Board

FP&A Trends Webinars

FP&A Trends Maturity Model Assessment

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FP&A Trends Group is a high-profile think tank focused on modern corporate Financial Planning and Analysis (FP&A). The organization's mission is to identify, shape, and share the latest FP&A trends and best practices via global research, events, educational content, and advisory services.

FP&A Trends Group enables continuous discussion, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among finance practitioners from leading organizations. The organization is UK-based but highly international in nature, serving as a one-stop shop for all things FP&A.

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