

THE CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CFO

Insights Report

Finance leaders today have to contend with their role transforming from bookkeeper to one of the chief drivers of business operations, innovation, and performance.

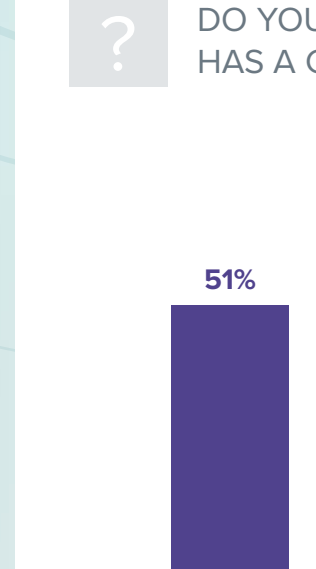
In the 2020s, 80% of organisations will be competing based on customer experience (CX) alone. As the key C-suite partner, the Chief Financial Officer's (CFO) role is fundamental to driving a customer-centric approach across their organisation.

CFOs will now need to guide strategic decision-making. Adopting a positive CX strategy focused on increasing both internal and external customer satisfaction to deliver results and achieve higher performance across the organisation will require.

The CFO role reimagined places greater emphasis on CX, which is why we surveyed CFOs across industries from leading organisations gathering insight on how, if at all, they are achieving a customer-centric approach across their organisation.

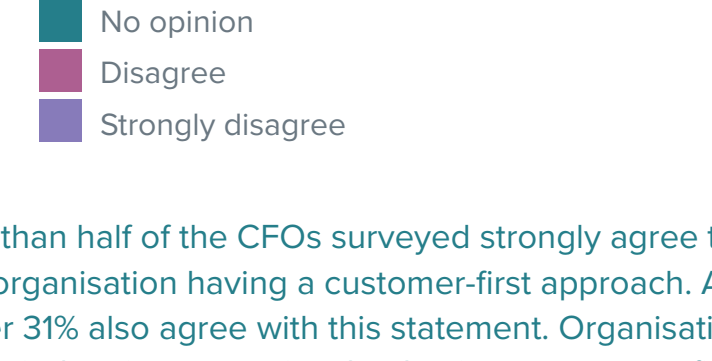
KEY FINDINGS

- Customer satisfaction and experiences are an increasing priority for CFOs.
- As the role of the CFO evolves, data analytics will play a big part in driving customer success.
- CFOs must move away from incumbent legacy software, leveraging technology to meet the challenges of today's digital era.



A NEW APPROACH

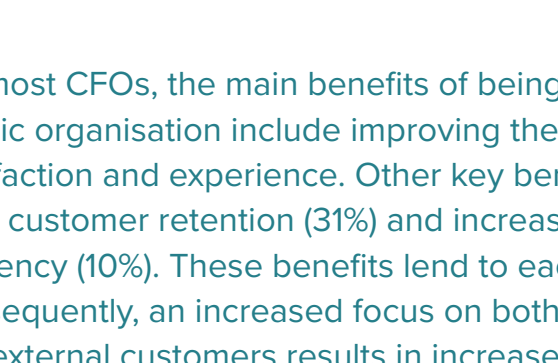
DO YOU AGREE THAT YOUR ORGANISATION HAS A CUSTOMER-FIRST APPROACH?



Strongly agree
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Strongly disagree

More than half of the CFOs surveyed strongly agree to their organisation having a customer-first approach. A further 31% also agree with this statement. Organisations across industries recognise that having a customer first mindset is essential in order to remain competitive. As consumer needs and focuses shift, they are leaning to prioritising experience over product.

WHAT IS THE MAIN BENEFIT OF BEING A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANISATION?



Improving customer satisfaction and experience
Retention of customer
Increasing workforce efficiency
Increase revenue/profits

For most CFOs, the main benefits of being a customer-centric organisation include improving their customer satisfaction and experience. Other key benefits cited were customer retention (31%) and increased workforce efficiency (10%). These benefits lend to each other. Consequently, an increased focus on both internal and external customers results in increased workforce efficiency and higher customer retention. In an age where customer dissatisfaction can affect an organisation with as little as a mobile tap, it comes as no surprise CFOs are paying particular attention to improving customer experiences.

A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

WHAT PART DOES THE FINANCE FUNCTION PLAY IN YOUR ORGANISATION'S CUSTOMER-CENTRIC STRATEGY?



Although "collating finance data" is believed to be the finance function's main role, with 53% of respondents opting for this function, reducing silos soon followed with 48%. Breaking this down further, it is clear how the CFO and those in the finance function are responsible for building relationships with the rest of the business. This unpacks further into several sub-roles for the CFO: steward, strategist, catalyst and operator.

Budget distribution (39%) and customer experience strategy (39%) ranked in equally. Effectively, those in the finance function are now not only monitoring their organisation's financial activity but are taking on new tasks. These include mapping out the customer experience strategy and gaining stakeholder buy-in to adapt the business to unprecedented change whilst maximising opportunities presented and navigating a rapidly evolving environment.

BARRIERS TO CHANGE

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO THE FINANCE FUNCTION BECOMING CUSTOMER-CENTRIC?



The largest barriers to driving customer-centricity within organisations include incumbent legacy software and silos among C-suite delegates. This prevents those within the finance function from exploiting the potential of the information at their fingertips. Information that can be utilised more efficiently by deploying new technology.

Achieving a customer-centric approach requires collaboration between the CFO, their C-suite counterparts and the wider organisation. This involves leveraging data to gain a single view of the organisation's metrics. This can only happen if the finance function embraces technological innovations to transform their organisation.

INCREASING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION METRICS

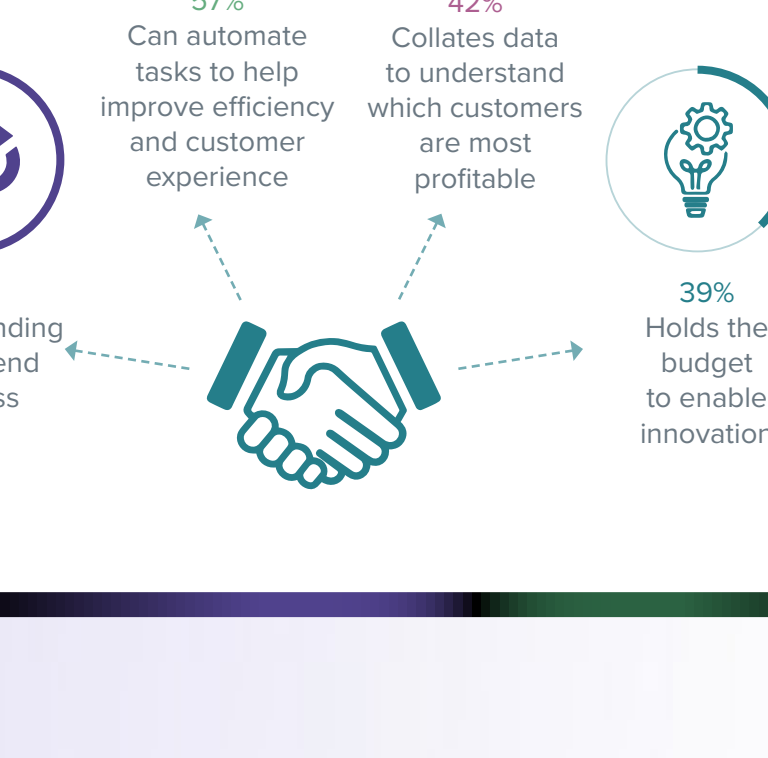
How do you see customer satisfaction metrics increasing as a priority for the finance function over the next 12 months?



Many CFOs believe that customer satisfaction metrics will become an increasing priority in the coming months, although a further 32% think these will stay the same. Businesses need to monitor customer satisfaction metrics efficiently, working on continually improving performance to create customer loyalty and better business benefits in the long term.

THE FINANCE FUNCTION AND THE WIDER ORGANISATION

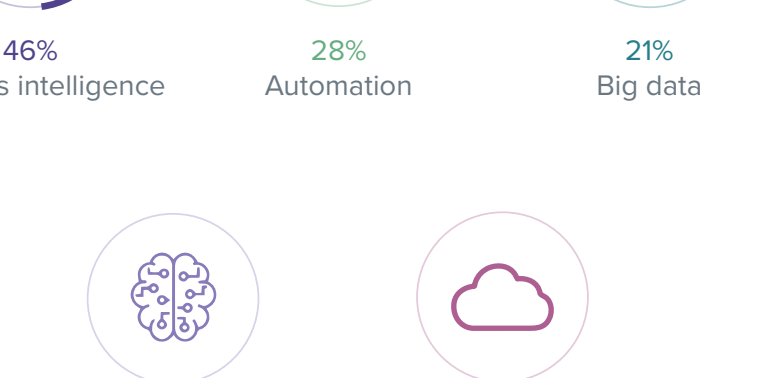
Which of the following makes the finance function an integral part of your organisation?



Many CFOs consider understanding the end-to-end process as an integral part of their organisation's finance function (75%). This comes as no surprise since the finance function contend with varying business departments, requiring an understanding of not just the finance function but the wider organisation. Whereas only 39% of CFOs consider holds the budget to enable innovation as an integral part, this signifies the changing role of the CFO and those within the finance function.

EMBRACING INNOVATION

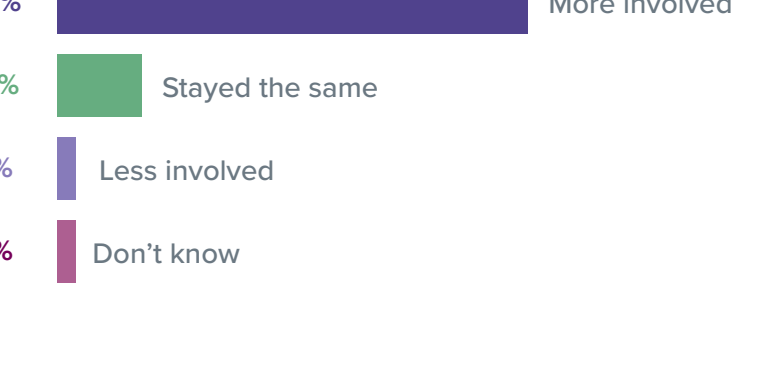
What do you think your finance function's technology investment priority should be in the next two years to enable customer-centricity?



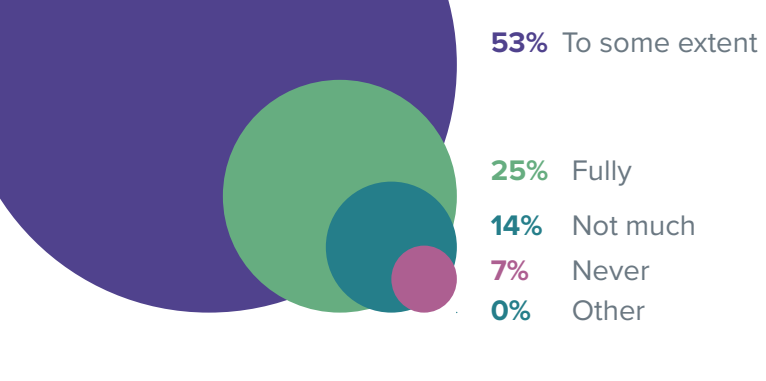
Digital transformation and technological disruption are going nowhere. Our survey found that half of finance leaders predict business intelligence to be their largest investment priority to enable customer-centricity. Whilst 28% expect it to be automation and a further 21% cite big data.

As organisations demand greater returns on investment, CFOs are playing an increasing role in implementing innovation across their organisation to deliver real results. Their rising involvement in technology initiatives will require the CFO to adapt. That will include experimenting with which initiatives work best whilst frequently evaluating resources to identify lagging areas that no longer require investment.

In the past 12 months, how has the finance function's involvement in data and analytics changed?



Do you leverage analytics and insight to improve customer-centricity across your organisation?

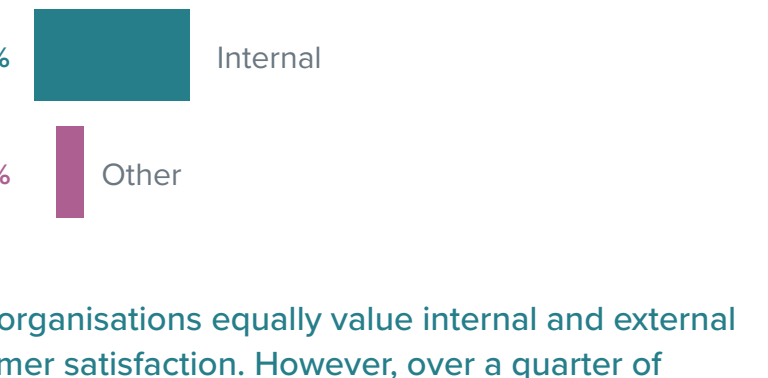


To accelerate their status as the key strategic business partner, CFOs and the finance function will need to become adept at handling data and analytics. The vast amount of readily available data requires collaboration beyond the C-suite for CFOs to extract value. To gain a deeper understanding of their organisation will require CFOs to actively partner with business leaders, managers and peers in marketing and sales to drive automation that will result in cost and time efficiencies.

In the coming years, to enable customer-centricity CFOs will spend an increasing amount of time on non-finance related activities. This comes as no surprise, as business intelligence comes in as a high technology investment priority. One of the key areas of changing responsibilities for CFOs is serving as the steward of data, not just for their function but throughout the enterprise. Gathering, sifting, and modelling the data necessary to support customer-centricity is difficult without automated tools.

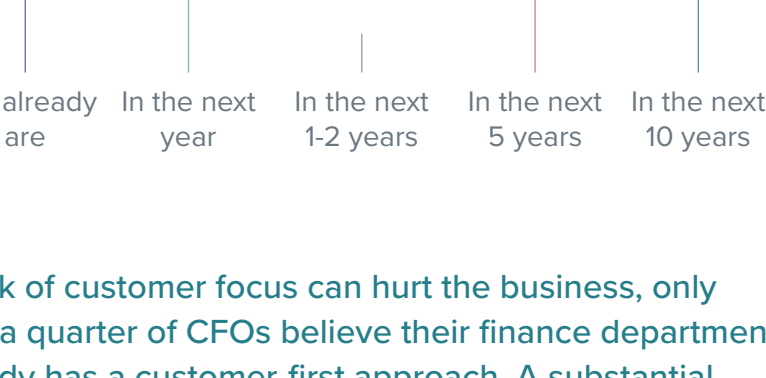
PRIORITISING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Do you prioritise internal or external customer satisfaction?



Most organisations equally value internal and external customer satisfaction. However, over a quarter of CFOs prioritise external customer satisfaction over their internal customer. Delivering positive CX requires a holistic approach. CFOs need to understand the importance of extending great customer experience to their internal customers to increase retention and productivity. Ultimately empowering their employees to deliver great CX internally and externally.

When do you believe your finance department will become customer-first?



A lack of customer focus can hurt the business, only over a quarter of CFOs believe their finance department already has a customer-first approach. A substantial 42% of CFOs surveyed believe their finance function will become customer-first in the next 1-2 years.

It's vital that CFOs learn the importance of understanding the evolving needs of customers. Failure to do so will cause lower customer retention over time. A customer-first approach requires CFOs to alter their mindset, embracing change and adapting to implement customer-centred strategies that translate to success for the whole organisation. CFOs will be willing to experiment, at times incurring failures, or -risk falling behind. Failing to act now means losing the opportunity to promote a progressive outlook and increase revenue.

BECOMING CUSTOMER-CENTRIC

CFOs must now approach customer-centricity through a value lens, increasing intangible factors such as customer satisfaction. This requires a broader understanding of their business - fitting, as the CFO role continues to evolve beyond the finance function. As CFOs develop into the strategic C-suite partner, the largest challenges they face in implementing a customer-centric approach across their organisation will include legacy software and breaking down silos.

Creating a customer-centric organisation requires a holistic understanding, from both an operational and a strategic standpoint, with the finance function touching information flows throughout the business. This allows CFOs a wider perspective of their organisation. They are the best positioned to tackle ever-increasing business challenges and rising customer expectations.

With the right strategy, customer experience can be a valuable force for your organisation's growth and revenue. This will lead to increased customer satisfaction and retention, resulting in long-term loyalty.

However, providing consistent great CX takes a lot of time and effort. In an era where customer expectations are high, positive customer experiences can make or break businesses. Today's CFOs need to take the lead in driving customer-centricity across their organisations or risk irrelevancy.

To learn more about taking a customer-centric approach within your organisation, subscribe to [CEO.digital's newsletter](#) today.