Accountants for Business

Is finance function technology delivering on its promise?

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This report discusses the current use of technology in finance shared services and outsourcing. It considers the extent to which technology is changing the face of finance delivery and providing value for the organisation.

1. Introduction

In a world where technology is continually turning business on its head, is the finance function keeping up? Are finance leaders effectively exploiting the power of technology in service delivery operations? Are we seeing significant improvement in finance performance such that better business outcomes can be realised? In short, is technology fulfilling its promise for finance service delivery? And is finance service delivery ready to harness its benefits?

This report looks at the implications that technology now has for finance operations, typically those provided through shared services and outsourcing models, and considers whether the finance organisation is tapping into the full range of available technology solutions to improve performance and create and sustain value for the business.

Technological development has significant implications for finance performance. It has historically been a catalyst driving efficiency in finance operations, lowering finance unit costs, fostering standardisation and improving controls. In addition, it is critical in creating the value finance should provide to the business by deriving insights through analysis of data from across the business.

Finance leaders are familiar with technology. They have not only relied on the implementation of enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions for years, but have also deployed select applications to improve the efficiency of their current finance processes and delivery constructs as they are configured today. Now, the bigger prize for finance will be won by using technology to further eliminate the current need for shared services and outsourcing in the move to 'lights out finance'.

More automation will require radically different finance capabilities. It will probably place the burden of investigating, selecting and configuring software to support changes in business rules directly on the finance team. No longer will the finance team be able to throw the responsibility for technology over to the chief information officer (CIO).

Technology could also impact the remit of finance —moving even further up the value chain. Social and mobile technologies, abundant in front-office functions such as sales and marketing, could irreversibly change how finance 'works' – how it communicates with the business and its employees, and its ability to provide real-time data. In short, finance could become technology-led rather than people-led – but will it?

'I think an important question is whether or not finance will have the thinking space and capacity to actually its head above the parapet and start thinking about truly leveraging technology rather than just focus on as-is operational delivery.'

LUC MAUVARIN, GENPACT

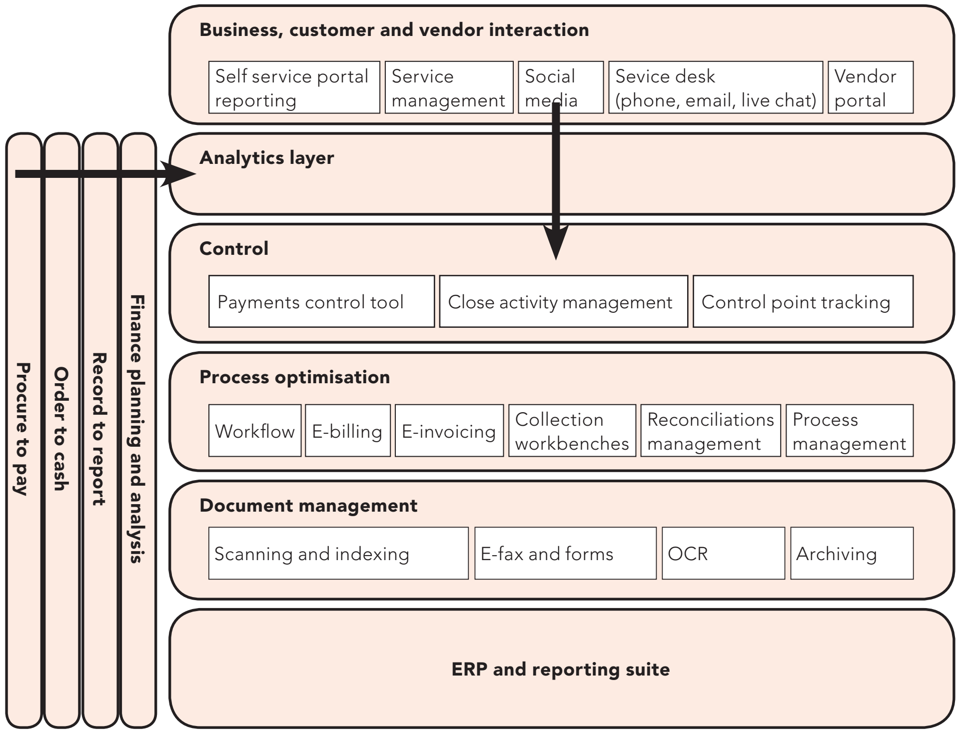
2. Is finance technology positioned to deliver the finance value agenda?

With the plethora of business and finance applications and digital technologies flooding the market, is finance staring at something truly new, or just a bit more of 'better, faster, cheaper'? More importantly, are finance operations ready to embrace technology, switching their traditional technology focus from transactions processing to support for growth and innovation?

Or does pushing a bigger technology agenda really matter to the finance leader; As Genpact's Luc Mauvarin observes: 'I don't see organisations losing much sleep over what technology should or ought to be doing for finance'. Or is the question more basic: do finance leaders 'get' technology?

It would not be fair to say that finance service operations have been standing still for the past 10 years. Leading companies in all industries and of all sizes have deployed technology to change the fundamentals of finance delivery, using ERP platforms and other applications (Figure 2.1) to provide cost control and quality in finance transactions, reducing manual transaction processing by as much as 85%. In the words of John Lewis Partnership's Simon Newton: 'There's more standardisation, there's better quality data everywhere'.

Figure 2.1: The finance services technology landscape



ACCA would like to express its thanks to North Highland for sharing their thinking on the finance services technology Landscape.

Business leaders concur that there are opportunities for further technology application in finance services. Shell's George Connell confirms this belief: 'Absolutely, and I think in my experience working for a big corporation [is that] there's still far too much manual work, there's far too much reliance on spreadsheets. We're not properly leveraging technology and I don't think we've got full agility as well.'

What do finance leaders expect from technology? For them, efficiency is essential – reducing cost, improving both the control environment and the quality of information. Deloitte's Peter Moller says that expectations should be sequenced: 'you first promote efficiency, then value, through the deployment of technology. You must do both.'

Accenture's Julie Spillane believes that the historical technology focus has been on 'better, faster and cheaper', rather than on creating value for the business; she says, 'up till now, technology has been applied within the "four walls" of finance – using technology to increase finance efficiency'. As leaders strive to position finance service delivery and operations as creators of value rather than just controllership and process delivery functions, technology has a role in generating that value. Realising more efficient processing no longer justifies investment, given that for many finance departments the financial returns are marginal. Today, the goal of finance technology is to develop the business more profitably.

Yet investment in technology that transforms finance, rather than making transactional processes more efficient, may still be very much an afterthought or not even understood in the majority of finance operations. Finance transformation leaders believe that the deployment of technology in finance lags behind that in other business functions. According to Specsavers' Dilesh Magdani, 'our focus is [that] the customer comes first, so we give priority to implementing technologies that are customer-facing and enable our supply chain'.

That is not to say that leaders do not believe that technology hasn't moved the dial on finance efficiency. Dilesh Magdani goes on to say that, 'if you look at things like OCR compared to what was being provided 10 years ago, enhanced versions of what is offered today are far superior'.

So has technology been a 'game changer' for finance? In the words of George Connell, 'I think it depends on your definition of "game changing". Technology has not changed finance delivery overnight.' Finance leaders appear to focus mainly on efficiency rather than value creation; until their focus changes, finance service delivery will not be 'turned upside down'. This begs the question: should we be asking whether business rules define technology, or whether technology can put a new light on the relevance of the rules?'

3. Is finance showing sufficient leadership in the technology agenda?

Does pushing a bigger technology agenda really matter to the finance leader? Or is the question more basic: do finance leaders understand the benefits that technology could bring?

If the responsibility of a transformed finance organisation is to drive performance and value for the organisation through insight as well as controllership and process mastery, is finance service leadership taking responsibility for identifying and implementing applications and tools that promote business intelligence and more insightful performance management in finance operations? If not, why not?

'On one hand, finance has come an awfully long way in the last 10 years. On the other hand, I look at the apps on my iPad and iPhone, and I see incredible agility. And then I look back at finance and ask "why can't it have the same 'plug and play' capability?"'

PETER MOLLER, DELOITTE

Perhaps the key is the historic caution and risk-averse positions that finance professionals take. Finance relies heavily on proof sources; if leaders believe that tighter business rules have primacy over the implementation of new technology whose payback and functionality is not clear, then transformation through technology will probably be marginal. Technology at this level is an enabler rather than a transformer. The focus on rules and risk may, quite possibly, obstruct new thinking not only about finance processes themselves, but also about how value is created. Specsavers' Dilesh Magdani may sum up the finance profession's approach to technology when he says: 'I think finance is way behind the curve. We lack imagination and we are too conservative.'

Are finance leaders overstating the risks ? After all, technologies such as salesforce.com are now seen as standard in corporate sales and marketing functions. If sales leaders can see beyond the risks, why not finance leaders? Genpacts' Luc Mauvarin asks: 'How can you explain that companies are ready to put all their sales on the system, on the cloud, while in finance we are really unprepared to do that?'

What is stopping finance delivery from benefiting more from technology? Is finance content with dealing with multiple ERP systems? Or focused on processes to the detriment of better harnessing of the power of technology? John Lewis Partnership's Simon Newton asks: 'Is finance showing sufficient leadership in the area of finance technology? To me the answer to this question is no – we're still locked into our process world and are behind what's truly relevant.'

4. Will technology ever move the business to self-service, or 'lights-out' finance?

Is technology sufficiently evolved to move us to self-service finance, eliminating the need for people in transactional finance processes? What is the future of a finance organisation if its customers can process their own transactions, tapping into, accessing and manipulating data in real time? Does it have implications for the remit of the finance organisation, its size or construction?

As Peter Moller says, 'we're not lights-out yet, but we are certainly a lot darker than we used to be'. Do finance leaders attribute this increasing 'darkness' to the availability of technology, or process elimination?

Leaders posit the question: since technologies to enable 'lights-out' finance have been around for many years, why is it still elusive? Is it a lack of trust or fear of loss of control if technology 'takes over?' Or is it down to an inability to optimise use of technology? Perhaps there is an unadmitted reluctance to embrace self-service finance, which is theoretically a huge enable of better quality, real-time information that will irreversibly change the role of the finance professional.

> 'Why do we need anyone doing routine back office processes? The objective should be to create straight through-processing, lights out for all the back office. When you have exceptions, change the business rules and get rid of them.'
>
> PETER MOLLER, DELOITTE

Shell's George Connell does not fault the role of technology, but thinks that the failure to use it is a result of behaviours and non-standard implementation of ERP platforms. 'There are many reasons why we're not optimising technology, and it's not, per se, due to the availability of technology itself'.

For leaders, 'lights-out finance' is a vision worth pursuing even if it is not viewed as fully achievable. For example, Shell reduced its 1700 purchase-to-pay jobs to 350 by not only applying available technology but also, more importantly, eliminating non-compliance through new business rules.

Finance leaders believe the template for the new finance organisation is more or less set even though 'lights-out' finance delivery is still elusive. In their view, finance organisations have already undergone major change by bi-furcating the finance function into so-called 'retained team' and the team with transactional delivery responsibility. Now they are focusing on eliminating as much of that transactional work as possible.

5. What value, if any, will application of the SMAC pack create for finance?

Do finance departments sufficiently understand the SMAC pack: Social, Mobile, Analytics and Cloud technologies? Are they keeping pace with the rate of adoption among other corporate functions – sales, marketing, and even human resources? Is there a bright future for the SMAC pack in finance? Are there benefits from the implementation of SMAC that finance leaders do not appreciate? Is implementation of SMAC a step too far for finance? Or are all aspects of SMAC simply not relevant to the finance remit?

Finance leaders believe that few among them fully embrace the SMAC potential. When it comes to social and mobile technologies, they point to the greater imperative of investing to enhance customer-facing functions such as sales and marketing rather than back-office functions.

The potential for risk in using the Cloud makes some finance leaders nervous. Concerns about software-as-a-service for many finance applications are exemplified by perceived (or real) security issues, even including the physical location of servers. The inability (or refusal) to adopt the standardisation that is the Cloud's core value proposition hampers implementation. These concerns obscure the greater returns in cost, time and flexibility that the Cloud has given other functions.

Is the reticence to embrace SMAC a more fundamental leadership issue that goes beyond concerns about risk? Are finance leaders by nature followers rather than innovators? Fundamentally, leaders see social and mobile applications as having an impact on communicating with and managing finance staff, particularly the 'millennials' who are now populating the finance workforce. Chazey Partners' Anirvan Sen sums it up by asking 'Will LinkedIn or Facebook affect the way I do accounting? Probably not. But will this method may help me attract the kind of people I want to work in my company? Absolutely.'

SMAC will probably be adopted unevenly in finance operations over the next few years, with a focus on analytics and the Cloud, if finance leaders can understand the benefits and risks. Finance leaders admit that they do not focus on – or perhaps understand – the application of social and mobile technologies beyond efficient communication with their teams, but know that these technologies could eventually affect finance processes themselves – once they can work out how to use them.

'Finance needs to ask the question: Is there anything in social and mobile that delivers to finance rather than delivering to the people who are working in finance?'

LIZ DITCHBURN, KIMBERLY-CLARK

6. Will broader adoption of automation technology impact today's finance delivery models?

Many finance leaders have experienced an extremely large amount of model change over the last few years, and this has been very disruptive. Most are still establishing their delivery models, aligning their retained teams to partner with the business, and dealing with scope expansion from process, business line and geography standpoints, while others have not yet reached the business-as-usual stage.

The unspoken question remains: are finance leaders too heavily tied to their existing staff-intensive models to move to using streamlining technologies?

Conceptually, the value proposition for technology could turn prevailing finance delivery models upside down. Successful, more aggressive implementation of so-called BPaaS (business-process-as-a-service) could eliminate the need for service centres (whether managed internally or outsourced), moving a bit further towards true 'lights-out finance'. Alternatively, implementation of a supposed new breed of technologies, variously branded 'cognitive' or 'robotic', which purport to affect the economics of offshoring finance operations profoundly by supposedly eliminating labour arbitrage, may transform the situation. What is the likely scenario?

Today, shared services and outsourcing models are pervasive as a finance delivery model, not only processing the 15% of finance that experts deem exceptional, but also acting as a manual integrator in corporate environments with a plethora of ERP instances.

Is the shared services/outsourcing model a stop-gap until finance functions master the new technologies? Will finance eventually move to 'lights-out' through finely honed business rules and the implementation of more evolved process-enabling technologies, almost completely eliminating the need for service centres to process exceptions? Is it rational to conceive of finance service delivery centres not as large numbers of staff sitting in service centres near- or offshore, but rather as control rooms staffed with a few skilled finance 'engineers' controlling and modifying rules through root-cause analysis, and pushing continuous improvement?

Although finance leaders credit technology with reducing the labour component of finance delivery, they believe that there is more to be done to refine delivery models. Finance professionals using shared services models complain about the need for staff to navigate too many instances of ERP, and the lack of investment funds available for transformative applications. At the same time, those deploying outsourcing solutions sometimes complain that their providers do not really understand technology beyond elementary applications such as workflow and document management, or that they have not made the effort to link disparate applications. Is it reasonable to ask whether some business process outsourcers invest too heavily in labour arbitrage rather than technology?

Finance leaders have diverse views about the implications of technology for sourcing models. John Lewis's Simon Newton believes that labour-based models will not substantially change in light of the pursuit of efficiency, saying that, 'the paybacks from technology implementation aren't as big as they were two, three, five years ago'. Shell's George Connell adds, 'sometimes it's cheaper to deliver finance activities with a group of people than through a more mature technology solution'. In sum, these leaders believe that sourcing models require a comprehensive approach to determining ROI, even for efficiency

Finance leaders do not think that their sourcing models will be profoundly affected by the implementation of so-called 'collaborative' or 'robotic' technologies either. Although such technologies are purported to eliminate both the need for substantial labour and the need to move work offshore, leaders believe that the evolution of business rules themselves, rather than application of key-stroke technologies, has greater potential for eliminating work content. They believe that much transaction processing has already been eliminated in finance, and that applications that perform similar functions (such as optical character recognition) are already in use. Further, they perceive that the challenges that finance has yet to overcome, such as navigating across multiple instances of ERPs, will not be solved by these applications.

'I struggle with the concept. I think it's marketing hype. We are dealing with data and payments, so I just don't see a role for a robot. We should be focusing on getting rid of processes.'

LIZ DITCHBURN, RELATIONSHIP MANAGER, KIMBERLY-CLARK

Perhaps this is due to the current state of adoption in finance functions. As stated earlier, finance leaders by nature can be conservative, usually looking to their peers for best practice confirmation before making major changes. Without a readily accessible proof source – or strong, embedded finance intellectual property (IP) that can be bought off-the-shelf – adoption may be slow.

'I just can't see a big application threat, at the moment, to the status quo.'

SIMON NEWTON, FINANCE DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIP SERVICES, JOHN LEWIS)

Perhaps finance directors are not ready to take a leap of faith. They tend to implement bespoke tools, such as workflow and e-invoicing, where the payback is obvious. For applied technologies that have the potential to be really transformative, the business case is not as clear because finance leaders may not understand how these technologies should be used, how or where they could interact with these technologies, and what their impact will be on costs and profits. When organisations are striving to keep up with the investment and effort required to implement revolutionary customer-facing technology, investment for back-office enablement is not deemed a priority.

'I think there's a harsh, unfortunate reality that whenever you look to invest in technology, efficiency usually has a very hard payback and [is] very clear. But with effectiveness and growth insight you've got to take a leap of faith. So most finance directors, 8 times out of 10, will choose the hard payback, which is part of the reason finance is behind. Most of us need to drive short-term payback and aren't going to take a leap of faith.'

SIMON NEWTON, FINANCE DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIP SERVICES, JOHN LEWIS

7: What's the role of the finance professional in technology?

The capability of finance technology is evolving. On one hand, the finance function is now seeing the acceleration of appointment of global process leaders – seasoned experts who are responsible for the development and application of business rules and who should be capable of articulating a vision for technology whereby processes achieve a higher level of sophistication. Yet, all too often, they focus on process excellence rather than on using technology to drive insight.

At the same time, the IT function in many organisations may still focus too closely upon ERP systems implementation to the detriment of the selection and implementation of newer, more niche applications. These two issues highlight the Finance – IT relationship and beg the question: must finance professionals become technology experts to effect a transformation in finance?

Historically, finance leaders have relied on their technology colleagues, rather than members of their own teams, to plan their technology 'roadmaps'. Yet today, the CIO's team is either consumed with implementing the latest version of ERP, or with identifying and installing the newest customer-facing social and mobile technology. As a result, the technology needs of enabling functions such as finance get little attention; without sufficient embedded understanding of technology within the finance team, or how social and mobile technologies can be effectively applied, transforming finance through technology may be left aside.

Experts believe that global process owners must now take more responsibility for technology deployment, resulting in a new duality in the relationship between finance and technology. In short, they believe that finance must create the vision and set the requirements. At the same time, finance professionals should work very closely with technology experts who understand the capabilities and the enterprise environment and can drive innovative thinking about deploying applications. Kimberly-Clark's Liz Ditchburn sums it up: 'the people who are best placed to work out the requirements and the opportunities are the finance people. The people best equipped to understand what technology can do are the technology people. It's about collaboration and innovative thinking.' As a result, more and more global process leaders will be required to expand their capability to include a working and up-to-date knowledge of technology. Ditchburn also warns finance professionals against going it alone: 'I see too many enthusiastic amateurs dabbling in the IT space, and that gets a bit scary'.

Chazey Partners' Anirvan Sen agrees, saying that finance professionals must now take more responsibility. 'It's no longer people with pure tech backgrounds who must make the call. Cross-functional business knowledge is critical.' A basic understanding of the business, finance and technology is now essential for any transformational initiative.

Finance leaders admit that the function does not have to develop its own technology centre of excellence, but must focus on working more closely with technology colleagues.

'Collaboration is key. Traditionally, it was up to the CIO to bring technology acumen. But none of what we do in the future is going to be pure technology. Today, there is such an incredible mix of business with technology that it's going to be hard to draw the line.'

JULIE SPILLANE, MANAGING DIRECTOR, ACCENTURE GLOBAL SERVICES

8. What other challenges does finance face in reaching tech nirvana?

The technology industry itself may also be timid about changing finance services provision by liberally applying technology. Perhaps a number of factors prevent the industry from making it easy for finance leaders to adopt transformative technologies:

ERP FOCUS, FATIGUE AND FRAGMENTATION

When finance organisations have been subject to years of ERP implementation and upgrades, an aversion to implementing other transformative technologies can result. Coupling ERP fatigue with what for most companies is a very fragmented, multifarious ERP landscape, encourages finance leaders to look for efficiencies and potential value creation through better deployment of people and processes rather than use of technology. In addition, there are massive 'sunk costs' in existing ERP technologies that many companies have taken on. Shell's George Connell sums it up: 'The good news is that we have ERPs. The bad news is that we have ERPs.'

SOLUTION SALES TARGET THE CIO, NOT FINANCE

Open up most finance technology solutions' websites or collateral, and the first thing that will strike a reader is the sales focus on technology experts, not on functional or process owners. Pronouncements that a given technology is an SAP or Microsoft partner may impress a CIO's team, but may mean nothing to the process expert. Do BPaaS technology-solution providers always know how to sell to the business they are enabling – in this case finance? Or do they revert to selling to the technologists?. Until providers talk about business value and ROI in terms finance leaders can understand and relate to their business, their sales could be slow.

THE APPLICATIONS LANDSCAPE IS DOTTED WITH 'POINT SOLUTIONS'

Finance leaders look at the growing universe of finance-process management technology, and easily become confused about which technology does what. Going to an industry event and coming away with a better understanding of how finance processes can be linked end-to-end becomes difficult when this depends on connecting the plethora of point solutions. Until someone develops and maintains a current technology applications 'roadmap', or, even better, puts a prototype in place, the finance buyer is may be challenged to understand how these applications can, working together, promote more efficiency or even transform operations.

THERE ARE PROVIDER DISINCENTIVES TO OPTIMISING TECHNOLOGY

When they outsource, finance leaders tend to place the onus for technological innovation upon their providers rather than themselves. In fact, many finance departments say that the ability to tap into innovation is one of the reasons for outsourcing. Yet the providers are in the main tied to their current infrastructure in people and process; this becomes a disincentive to exploiting business process management technologies that eliminate the need for large teams and supporting facilities, in effect changing the basis upon which they obtain revenue and margin. This is especially true when labour automation tools are implemented; they allegedly reduce cost by as much as 60 to 90% when compared with the traditional offshore labour savings of 15–30% (source: ISG).

THERE IS LIMITED FINANCE IP IN 'DISRUPTIVE' TECHNOLOGIES

It is difficult to embrace some of the more 'disruptive' technologies, such as so-called automation technologies, when they are brought to market as generic tools rather than as a complete suite of activities. Placing the onus on the finance team to commit time to mastering the technology may be too demanding for an already capacity- and capability-challenged team, especially when the organisation is global. In a profession such as finance, which is tightly governed by standard rules, finance leaders may expect that much of the heavy lifting is already complete.

9. Conclusion: what's the upshot for finance?

Today, finance must grapple with technology from two perspectives: the need to add more value to the finance function and the need to link finance outcomes to other parts of the business to add value. In short, the move to adopt technology no longer affects only finance. New technology must be designed to satisfy process, functional and business needs – particularly if moves to global business service models are to fulfil their promise.

Finance leaders, by their own admission, are not using technology effectively to change even their own functional finance activities. John Lewis Partnership's Simon Newton ponders, 'I'm just wondering whether there is a lack of imagination across the finance community'. Perhaps there is a fundamental lack of understanding of what technology can do. Deloitte's Peter Moller adds: 'what surprises me is the speed of and interest in adoption. There have been technology solutions that are a lot better than the ones in use right now.'

There may be pressure for too much sequential and often simultaneous transformation. The finance function has had to deal variously with the change wrought by ERP system implementation, changes in delivery models introduced by shared services and/or outsourcing, a greater focus on adding value to the business through the formation of business insights, new capabilities occasioned by pressure to become a better business partner, increasing regulatory and controls scrutiny, and now, for some, a move to a GBS (global business services) model. Although technology can help achieve transformation, perhaps finance leaders are at a point where dealing with fewer variables – in this case processes and people – is manageable. Maybe a 'breather' is in order.

Perhaps the crux of the issues is this: finance professionals have not yet produced a vision for finance services which fully leverages technology. Deloitte's' Peter Moller succinctly describes the situation: 'in finance maybe no one is saying, "all right, we need to have life cycle processing, we should have no one doing routine transaction processing". Maybe no one set the goal and said this is where we need to get to, so we're playing an incremental game rather than a game where the profession is saying, "this is clearly the vision, this is where we need to get to, now how are we going to get there?" Maybe finance simply isn't pushing technology hard enough.' John Lewis Partnership's Simon Newton would like to see a world where finance takes a predictive, not a retrospective role: 'finance has our eyes mostly on the rear view mirror, only occasionally looking forward to seeing where we are going. I'd like to see us change that.'

In practice, finance leaders remain sceptical about the application and value of some emerging technologies, believing that changing business rules to eliminate processes has greater transformational potential than any extant technology. Chazey Partners' Anirvan Sen sums up this view: 'if you have rule weaknesses your technology will not be able to deliver what finance wants. On the other hand, if you've defined strong business rules, then technology can deliver.' Shell's George Connell concurs, stressing that: 'getting the best out of technology is not down to the availability of the technology itself – it has a lot to do with behaviours, adherence to business rules, and preventing people [from] finding workarounds.' This begs the question: should we be asking whether business rules define technology, or whether technology can shed new light on the relevance of the rules?

So is it going too far to assert that technology will be a game changer for finance over time? Although this is unlikely to happen overnight, perhaps emerging technology will, nonetheless, begin to prompt some fundamental questions on the role of the finance function within the organisation. If, through technology, finance is able to rebalance its preoccupation with processes – and their elimination – by using technologies that mine financial data for patterns, the function will be better placed to meet its aspirations to create business value. The advent of new social and mobile tools in finance service delivery could also enable the function to develop a different relationship with the business, and change the way finance and its people operate and communicate. It may help finance integrate better into future business operations, and it will almost certainly affect future finance careers.

Technology adoption may be an issue of leadership, culture and vision, rather than one of technology availability. Rapid changes in functionality may require the finance function to consider solutions with an emphasis on technology rather than primarily on people – the opposite of current practice. For forward-thinking finance leaders, the impact of technology could be profound, affecting the following areas.

CHANGING FINANCE'S VALUE FROM PROSCRIPTIVE TO PREDICTIVE

If, through technology, finance is able to put its preoccupation with processes—and their elimination—by harnessing technologies that mine its data for patterns, the function can become a game changer not only for the profession of finance, but more importantly, for the business.

MOVING CLOSER TO SELF-SERVICE, 'LIGHTS-OUT' FINANCE

The aim of 'self-service' finance could be achieved by using not only game-changing tool suites and automation, but also social and mobile applications to develop a different relationship with the business – without the intervention of people.

CHANGING THE WAY FINANCE OPERATES

The infusion of social and mobile technologies may make finance more responsive to both the firm's employees and its customers. By changing the way people work and communicate, finance may be able to integrate better into enterprise business processes and practices.

EVOLVING FINANCE CAREERS

The application of technology has the potential to change further what a finance career means. If technology takes out the remaining 15% of transactional finance and is able to mine insights at the same time, it will change the definition of a 'finance professional'.

Kimberly-Clark's Liz Ditchburn sums up the state of technology in finance in just a few words: 'There has been a lot of progress over the last 10 years. Now where do we want to go?'

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Deborah Kops is the founder and managing principal of Sourcing Change. Formerly a founding partner of one of the first global business processing outsourcing (BPO) units, the chief marketing officer of a leading offshore BPO, managing director of FleetBoston's Services Group (now Bank of America Services Group), managing director of global sourcing transformation for Deutsche Bank and a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers and Arthur Andersen, Deborah now works with leading companies to manage globalisation challenges. She is also programme director focusing on global business services for the eminent US-based research organisation The Conference Board, a research fellow for award-winning analyst firm HfS Research, and a member of the editorial board of the industry-leading publication *Outsource Magazine*.

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The ACCA finance transformation, shared services and outsourcing advisory group

The ACCA finance transformation, shared services and outsourcing advisory group supports ACCA's global research and insight work.

Bringing together a panel of leading industry experts, it provides unique perspectives on the key issues affecting organisations seeking to transform their finance and business operations.

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George is an accountant by profession having worked for Grand Metropolitan, Avon Cosmetics, Britoil and Whitman Corporation in a variety of finance and general management roles before joining Shell in 1998 to help establish the first of their shared service centres in Glasgow. He is currently responsible for Shell's global finance shared service strategy, migration delivery and double hats as finance centre lead for the Glasgow centre.

LEO CURRAN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, HEAD UK/EUROPE, EXL
Leo leads EXL's UK/European team and brings deep experience of the business process solutions industry across a number of industry sectors. He has first-hand experience of large-scale sourcing change-programmes across Europe and beyond, and is currently working with his teams to realign their approach in response to the developing trend of global business services in Europe.

LEIGHTON DAVIES, DIRECTOR OF THE FINANCE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE, BBC
Leighton Davies currently leads the Finance Centre of Excellence for the BBC and brings significant finance and business transformation experience and understanding. Prior to joining the BBC Leighton held senior finance positions with Network Rail and was finance director for GE Aviation. He started his career training as an accountant with Ernst & Young and then moved his career into corporate finance at Deloittes. He is currently transforming the BBC Finance Centre of Excellence and embedding new ways of working built on the premise of open and honest communication, continuous improvement and problem-solving lean principles.

LIZ DITCHBURN, RELATIONSHIP LEADER, KIMBERLY CLARK
Liz has built an excellent partnership with Genpact who provide F&A shared services and procurement. She also heads up an outsourcing centre of excellence covering the five outsourced functions across Kimberly-Clark. Liz has over 15 years of making outsourcing work in global organisations from the client side, and has successfully created organisations to deliver through onshore and offshore operations.

CHRIS GUNNING, VICE PRESIDENT GLOBAL SHARED SERVICES, UNISYS
Chris Gunning is vice president of global shared services at Unisys. The shared services organization comprises a mix of larger operational transaction processing centres (TPCs) and smaller-sized footprints of regional front desk service delivery centres operating from seven main locations across the globe. Historically seen as 'traditional' finance SSC covering typical A2R, P2P and OTC functions, the portfolio has expanded to take on board many support operations for sales, supply chain and procurement, human resources, facilities, and commercial functions in recent years, to provide strategic value add expertise activity and support.

GARY HOBBS, CEO, AVIVA GLOBAL SERVICES
Gary joined Aviva in 2004, prior to that he spent 15 years as a management consultant with KPMG and Ernst & Young, primarily specialising within the financial services sector. Gary is currently responsible for all of Aviva's BPO operations in India and Sri Lanka and has been at the forefront of the development of Aviva's strategy in this arena. Gary drove the initial outsourcing plans across Aviva's finance and actuarial team and is now responsible for all aspects of BPO including Insurance administration, finance, actuarial, procurement, MI and analytics. Gary has significant experience in all aspects of outsourcing, offshoring and shared service development.

PASCAL HENSSEN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND CFO EUROPE, GENPACT

Pascal joined Genpact in 2009 as COO Europe, with responsibility for leading its Romania, Hungary, Poland and Morocco centres – as the company was building on its original mission as a part of GE to become a global leader in transforming and running business processes and operations. During Pascal's tenure, and also thanks to his leadership in Europe, Genpact grew to 60,000 staff and 700+ clients including over 100 of the Fortune Global 500. Prior to joining Genpact, Pascal spent 14 years with General Electric, and served as European COO in corporate financial services, GM for GE's shared services in EMEA, and as CFO of various business units in GE Plastics.

SANDY KHANNA, GLOBAL F&A AND SCM PRACTICE LEADER, VICE PRESIDENT, IBM GLOBAL PROCESS SERVICES

Sandy has worked in the business processing outsourcing industry since 1996. In that time he has led and delivered several multimillion dollar complex deals, with hands on experience in all aspects of the SSC and BPO business. Sandy has held various leadership roles including engagement and major deal leader and F&A practice leader, leader of the EMEA solutions and offerings team, and European strategy and market development leader. In 2013, Sandy assumed responsibility for IBM's global F&A and SCM practice and is a member of IBM's global leadership team for global process services.

DILESH MAGDANI, HEAD OF FINANCE SHARED SERVICES, SPECSAVERS

Dilesh joined Specsavers in 2010 to lead their shared service centre team to award winning status. Prior to this he led other large teams in a variety of industries developing, implementing and transforming shared service centre and outsourcing operations for Stella Travel Group, Premier Foods plc and held various finance roles within National Grid plc.

JAMES MEADER, PARTNER, ERNST & YOUNG.

James is a partner in Ernst and Young's advisory services practices, specialising in financial and performance management. He has over 17 years' experience, focusing on back office transformation, process design, including shared services and performance management, as well as project and programme management.

PETER MOLLER, PARTNER, DELOITTE CONSULTING

Peter leads Deloitte's shared services and BPO advisory team in Europe. Since 1990, he has worked in finance transformation, shared services and outsourcing/offshoring advisory roles, advising both private and public sector clients. He has organised and spoken at a number of conferences on these topics and has been quoted in management journals and the national press.

SIMON NEWTON, FINANCE DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIP SERVICES, JOHN LEWIS

Simon leads the operational finance, procurement and personnel teams in John Lewis' business support service division and is responsible for full finance support for this organisational unit. Before this he was responsible for Kimberly-Clark's shared service development particularly in North America and Europe Simon has a wealth of experience in M&A and has also worked at ICI and Rowntree Mackintosh. He is also currently a non-executive director of UK Shared Business Services serving public sector organisations.

JULIE SPILLANE, MANAGING DIRECTOR – ACCENTURE GLOBAL SERVICES

Julie is managing director for Accenture Global Services, global director of finance excellence and the EMEA Accenture business services director. Julie is a member of the Institute of Directors and completed her diploma in corporate governance in 2010. She is also a Fellow of ACCA (FCCA). Julie graduated from National University of Ireland, Galway with a degree in electronic engineering, followed by a postgraduate diploma in business studies.

ANIRVAN SEN, PARTNER, CHAZEY PARTNERS

Anirvan has over 20 years experience in technology, LEAN six-sigma, talent management, shared services, IT and sales. Prior to his current role with Chazey Partners, Anirvan has spent 15 years in GE, running the quality organisation for GE's EMEA operations of shared services, developing global delivery models for BPO vendors, initiating strategy for shared services in the Middle East and Africa region. Anirvan holds LEAN six-sigma master black belt and Bachelor of Engineering in instrumentation and control engineering.

ABOUT NORTH HIGHLAND

North Highland is a global consulting company with a proven record of enabling great returns on our clients' investment. Our high-calibre consultants offer deep experience and expertise across diverse industries and service areas. We specialise in solving tough business challenges, pride ourselves on being easy to work with, and nurturing long-standing relationships with the most recognisable brands in the world. Ask any of our clients and they'll tell you. Our CFO Services practice team helps finance executives and their people improve performance delivering efficient financial management and value-enhancing solutions. Working with us will change the way you think about consulting.

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