

# MARKET REPORT 2025

## KEY TRENDS

# Chief Financial Officer

Digital Future is a global acting executive search boutique with focus on digital business. We place C-level, VP and Director roles in leading international unicorns and scale-ups, transforming mid-sized companies and Fortune 500 / DAX 40 enterprises.



# THE CFO'S EVOLUTION: FROM FINANCIAL STEWARD TO STRATEGIC BUSINESS CATALYST

**82%** of CFOs now rank driving business transformation as their top priority

The modern CFO is no longer defined by spreadsheets, but by strategy.

## From Steward to Strategist:

- The role of the CFO has undergone a profound transformation. Once viewed primarily as a financial steward focused on reporting, compliance, and cost control, today's CFO is increasingly at the center of business strategy and corporate transformation.

## Broader Expectations:

- With technology reshaping finance, sustainability reporting gaining momentum, and investors demanding both transparency and long-term vision, the modern CFO has become a strategic business partner to the CEO and a visible leader across the organization.

## Shaping the Future:

- The CFO role is no longer confined to numbers — it is about navigating uncertainty, shaping strategy, and building resilience for the future.

## Talent & Team Leadership:

- With increasing responsibilities in data, AI, and finance transformation, CFOs must attract, retain, and develop top talent, ensuring their teams can execute strategy effectively.

# THE EXPANDING ROLE OF THE CFO

The role of the Chief Financial Officer has shifted far beyond traditional finance. Once seen primarily as the company's "numbers guardian," the CFO today operates as a strategic architect, transformation driver, and trusted sparring partner for the CEO. This evolution reflects both external pressures — global volatility, investor demands, sustainability regulations — and internal changes, such as automation in finance functions and the growing importance of data and AI. CFOs now stand at the intersection of strategy, finance, and operations:

## Strategic Leadership

- The CFO is increasingly recognized as the CEO's co-pilot, shaping long-term planning, scenario modeling, and business resilience strategies that align with growth ambitions.

## Technology & Data-Driven Finance

- With routine processes automated and AI enabling predictive analytics, CFOs are expected to go beyond reporting to deliver forward-looking insights and scenario-based decision support.

## Investor & Stakeholder Engagement

- Modern CFOs act as the face of financial credibility. They build investor trust, communicate strategic priorities, and balance rigorous financial discipline with a compelling growth story.

# KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MODERN CFO

The modern CFO wears multiple hats — balancing financial stewardship, strategic foresight, and operational leadership. CFOs today are expected to go beyond traditional accounting and reporting. Their responsibilities span strategy, technology, compliance, and business partnering:

## **Driving Financial Strategy & Long-Term Value Creation**

- CFOs define corporate financial direction, optimize capital allocation, and ensure sustainable growth while aligning with the company's long-term vision.

## **Ensuring Compliance, Risk & Governance**

- Beyond regulatory adherence, CFOs assess and mitigate operational, financial, and strategic risks, safeguarding the company's reputation and resilience.

## **Leveraging Technology, Automation & AI in Finance**

- From predictive analytics to process automation, CFOs use digital tools to enhance decision-making, reduce costs, and increase agility.

## **Bridging Finance & Business Strategy**

- Acting as a strategic partner to the CEO and business units, CFOs translate numbers into actionable insights, enabling smarter investments and operational decisions.

# KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL CFO

The evolving role of the CFO demands a unique blend of hard and soft skills. Beyond technical financial knowledge, successful CFOs demonstrate leadership, vision, and adaptability in a fast-changing business environment.

Today's CFOs are not just stewards of the company's finances — they are strategic partners to the CEO, guiding corporate decisions, shaping business strategy, and influencing organizational culture.

Stakeholder  
Oriented

Business  
Partner

Tech-Savvy &  
Data-Driven

Strategic  
Thinker

Curiosity

Excellent  
Communicator

Resilient &  
Adaptable

Innovation-  
Driven

Analytical

Customer-  
Centric

# SUSTAINABILITY & ESG REPORTING

Sustainability is no longer a peripheral concern — it has become a core component of corporate strategy, and CFOs are at the forefront of ensuring financial performance aligns with environmental and social responsibilities.

## Driving ESG Integration

CFOs oversee the measurement, reporting, and management of ESG metrics, translating sustainability goals into actionable business outcomes.

## Aligning Finance & Purpose

Decisions around investments, capital allocation, and operational priorities increasingly factor in environmental and social impact, ensuring long-term resilience and corporate reputation.

## Investor & Stakeholder Trust

Investors now demand transparency on ESG performance. CFOs act as the interface between internal operations and external stakeholders, providing reliable and auditable ESG data.

68%

of CFOs report direct involvement in ESG reporting & sustainability strategy



# CFO AS STRATEGIC BUSINESS PARTNER

With automation handling routine reporting and analytics tools enabling predictive insights, CFOs can focus on steering the business forward.

## **Strategic Advisory to the CEO**

- CFOs actively collaborate with the CEO on long-term planning, capital allocation, and growth initiatives, providing critical insights that shape corporate strategy.

## **Scenario Planning & Decision Support**

- By leading financial forecasting and predictive modeling, CFOs help the organization anticipate challenges and evaluate strategic options before committing resources.

## **Cross-Functional Influence**

- Modern CFOs bridge finance, operations, and business units, ensuring alignment between strategic goals and execution without managing day-to-day accounting tasks.

## **Investor & Board Communication**

- Acting as the voice of financial credibility, CFOs translate complex data into clear narratives for investors, analysts, and the board, fostering trust while supporting the CEO's vision.

# LEADING TEAMS AND DRIVING TRANSFORMATION

CFOs today are increasingly responsible for building high-performing finance teams, fostering collaboration across departments, and leading change initiatives that impact the entire organization.

## People Management & Talent Development

- CFOs oversee teams that require a mix of financial, analytical, and strategic skills. Attracting, retaining, and mentoring top talent is essential to execute company strategy effectively.

## Embedding Data-Driven Decision-Making

- Modern CFOs embed data-driven decision-making into corporate culture and encourage cross-functional collaboration, driving innovation and operational efficiency.

## War for Finance & AI Talent

- As finance increasingly intersects with technology, CFOs compete for talent skilled in analytics, AI, and digital transformation, making recruitment and retention a strategic priority.

## Guiding Teams Through Transformation

- Many finance departments include long-tenured employees who may struggle with automation and AI adoption. CFOs must combine empathy with guidance, providing training, support, and clear communication to ensure a smooth transformation.

# SALARY STANDARDS

As CFOs increasingly drive strategy, culture, and digital transformation, their compensation packages have evolved to match their expanded roles. Compensation for CFOs scales dramatically with company size and listing status. While U.S. packages often include larger equity components, DACH compensation models are more focused on fixed salary and performance-based bonuses. Below is an overview of current salary standards:

Average Base Salary US  
\$397,000

Start-Ups Average Base Salary: \$220,000

SME Average Base Salary: \$350,000–\$600,000

Publicly listed Companies Average Base Salary  
starting from \$810,000

Average Base Salary DACH  
€270,000

Start-Ups Average Base Salary: €150,000

SME Average Base Salary: €270,000 – €520,000

Publicly listed Companies Average Base Salary  
starting from €700,000

## THE FUTURE OUTLOOK: CFO 2030

Looking ahead, the CFO role will continue to broaden in scope, blending finance with strategy, sustainability, and technology. The shift will demand both hard financial acumen and forward-looking leadership.

- 80%** AI-driven finance: By 2030, over 80% of routine finance processes will be automated (McKinsey, 2024), enabling CFOs to focus on forecasting, strategy, and value creation.
- 70%** Strategic leadership: More than 70% of CEOs expect their CFOs to be their closest sparring partner on strategic decision-making (Deloitte CFO Insights, 2025).
- 65%** Sustainability-linked finance: 65% of investors already consider ESG performance as critical in investment decisions (EY Global Investor Survey 2024), positioning CFOs as custodians of non-financial metrics.
- 30%** Talent shift: By 2030, finance functions will require 30–40% fewer transactional roles but significantly more analytical and data science talent (Gartner, 2024).

## VOICES OF THE MARKET

### **CFO, DAX30 Company**

*“Our biggest challenge is talent – finance teams must adapt to analytics and automation, not just accounting.”*

### **CFO, U.S. Tech Scale-Up**

*“The board expects me to act as a sparring partner to the CEO, not just the keeper of the books.”*

### **CFO, Private Equity Portfolio Company**

*“We have become the face of the company towards investors – trust is now as important as technical accuracy.”*

### **Partner, Global Strategy Firm**

*“The CFO is no longer the guardian of the past, but the architect of the future business model.”*

### **CFO, Global Consumer Brand**

*“Leading a finance function today means leading transformation and culture change – numbers are just the beginning.”*

## SUMMARY

The role of the CFO is undergoing one of the most profound transformations in corporate history. No longer confined to financial stewardship, today's CFO is a strategist, change leader, and communicator who bridges the gap between numbers and narrative.

- CFOs now balance financial rigor with strategic foresight.
- Their responsibilities increasingly include sustainability, digital transformation, and people leadership.
- Automation is freeing capacity but demands upskilling and empathy for teams.
- With investors, boards, and CEOs relying on their guidance, CFOs have become indispensable sparring partners for long-term business success.



## RECENTLY COMPLETED ENGAGEMENTS

**SaaS Scale-Up**  
CFO

**DAX40 Company**  
Head of FP&A

**PE-Owned Buy & Build Case**  
Group CFO

**PE-Owned Manufacturing  
Company**  
CFO

**Mid-Sized Tech-Company**  
CFO

**PE-Owner IT Services  
Company**  
Group CFO



## KEY CONTACTS

# Lucas Bechtle

MANAGING PARTNER

As managing partner, Lucas assists you in your top-level executive search endeavors and is the first point of contact for our clients. After studying law and business administration, Lucas has already gained experience in various personnel consultancies and in a large start-up incubator. His passion for digitization topics and experience in classic executive search consulting have led him to found Digital Future as a specialized boutique consultancy.



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Nikolas brings extended experience in Executive Search for high-level positions. He has established himself as a trusted partner for large corporations and Hidden Champions during their transformation. With a strong focus on the sector of Digital and IT Leadership, Nikolas has built an active and unique candidate network, allowing him to connect organizations with top-tier talent in this rapidly evolving field.



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