The Future of Planning, Budgeting and Forecasting

Survey 2016

Insights from the FSN Modern Finance Forum on LinkedIn

FSN®
The Modern Finance Forum

ONESTREAM
GET BACK TO BUSINESS

Letter from CEO, Tom Shea

Tom Shea
CEO OneStream Software

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank all of the members of the FSN Modern Finance Forum that contributed to the "Future of Planning, Budgeting and Forecasting " (PBF) 2016 survey, building on the success of their June 2016 research into the Future of the Finance Function.

The detailed survey was completed by more than 955 senior finance members from across the globe, making it one of the largest and most authoritative studies of its kind. And it confirms once again that wherever finance professionals happen to be situated in the world and no matter what industries they serve, they all share the same ambitions and hurdles.

The ability to deliver dependable business forecasts, optimize the allocation of resources and steer the business to new heights of performance is key to future success of the enterprise. Yet more than 50% still struggle to forecast beyond 6 months and more than 60% still can't forecast revenue to within plus or minus 5% and almost half take more than a week to reforecast earnings.

This survey shines a light on the way forward, namely;

- making better use of non-financial data and forward looking indicators
- developing greater specialization and expertise in FP&A along with the enabling tools (i.e. incorporating machine-learning based applications for greater predictive analytics)
- placing greater emphasis on process redesign before deploying in the cloud
- transitioning to a culture of continuous planning
- widening the net of PBF to include more stakeholders from other business functions.

I hope you find the study interesting and informative.

Tom Shea

Tom Shea

Executive Summary

Planning, budgeting and forecasting (PBF) is one of the only corners of finance where the future is as important as the present, and it plays a crucial role in underpinning the outlook and direction of the business. As the entire finance function goes through a seismic evolution, the planning, budgeting and forecasting role is also in a state of flux

The changes within PBF are evident. Technology has enabled more stakeholders to participate in the process, advanced software has expanded the complexity and scope of forecasts, and finance professionals are rebalancing their skills as the requirements of their job changes before them.

But the PBF journey is only just beginning. This survey identified several instances where the function has not reached its potential to contribute fully to the future of the business. For example, the benefits of non-financial data have been widely overlooked, dedicated FP&A capability is still in its infancy, cloud deployment has been patchy and larger more complex models are not necessarily delivering commensurately more benefit.

Non-financial data holds impressive latent potential

The survey revealed that the most pronounced shortcoming is in the dearth of non-financial data being used in planning, budgeting and forecasting, despite non-financial data being a crucial component of improved outcomes. By any measure, organizations that draw on this rich seam of corporate intelligence perform better, and generate more accurate, faster forecasts and plans. As a result, these plans are more widely appreciated and accepted within the business giving rise to higher levels of trust and confidence.

Yet despite the obvious benefits of leveraging non-financial data to provide a more well-rounded corporate view of the future, finance professionals put very little emphasis on it, preferring to focus on traditional "lagging" financial measures. Non-financial measures languish at the bottom of the CFO's list of top 5 priorities for enhancing the planning process.

Figure 1: CFOs rank the importance of non-financial data capture as their lowest priority.

FP&A in the ascendency

With cloud deployments on the rise, it is imperative that an organizations corporate performance management solution be scalable and flexible without compromising performance and capability. Errors of inadequacy with fragmented on-premise solutions are only replicated in the cloud, diminishing initial cost savings as valuable time and money would be expended in integrating multiple solution silos.

One of the surprise findings of the survey was the markedly different perspectives of specialist FP&A professionals compared to their more 'generalist' colleagues in the finance function.

FP&A professionals see the need for specialisation so that finance professionals can make the fullest contribution to the strategic direction of their organisations. The survey detects a degree of frustration and, for example, FP&A professionals are seeking their own separate identity within their organization. They also firmly believe that the existing professional bodies are failing to provide the skills and resources needed for the future.

In broad terms FP&A professionals seem to be more tech-savvy and are more inclined to invest in technology than their contemporaries. They are also more likely to stretch the boundaries of business modelling by placing greater store by computer simulation and scenario planning – techniques which they believe can deliver deeper and more telling insights.

Cloud progress is very worthwhile but patchy

It seems that few organizations have reached what this report calls cloud "Utopia", i.e. implementing a single shared business model across the enterprise in the cloud, from a single vendor and with all relevant stakeholders connected. In the main, those that have migrated to the cloud appear to have replicated the limitations of the processes they had on-premise, with partial implementations in the cloud and different business models in different parts of the business.

Yet despite the incompleteness of implementation this report records tangible benefits to using cloud software, not least the speed, collaboration and complex data analysis possible to facilitate effective planning, budgeting and forecasting. But there is much more that can be achieved if cloud implementation is coupled with an in-depth overhaul of PBF processes and business modelling. This could truly transform the PBF process.

On the other hand, organisations that haven't yet started the cloud journey are struggling to improve their visibility. Over half of all organisations are unable to forecast beyond six months.

Continuous planning is on the rise

Growing business uncertainty coupled with an inability to look out much beyond a six-month time horizon raises considerable concerns for the accuracy and integrity of business planning. The only way around this is to reforecast more frequently and indeed 73% percent of organizations have reported a move to a culture of continuous planning over the last 3 years.

Organizations that have embraced this mode of working are seen to reforecast more quickly and accurately and are therefore in better position to respond to market change. They also tend to leverage non-financial data more effectively and involve more stakeholders.

Continuous planning is an increasingly important tool in the PBF arsenal, and organisations that haven't yet evolved their budget process from the traditional annual plan, run the risk of falling behind competitors with a more agile view of the future.

Technology is less of a limitation

Technology has enabled enormous strides in PBF which means it is now feasible to build much more granular and complex business models that involve a greater number of participants and stakeholders in the planning process. But adding stakeholders or producing bigger models doesn't always equate to better outcomes. Without the right stakeholders, the best use of data and a sophisticated approach to modelling, PBF practitioners achieve little better than their less inclusive counterparts. For example, 38% of businesses get within plus or minus 5% of forecasts whether they reported more stakeholder engagement or not. The key to better accuracy appears to be involving the 'right' stakeholders, yet almost 25% of businesses fail to engage with stakeholders outside of the finance function.

Planning, budgeting and forecasting has a substantial contribution to make to both the finance function and the executive function. With a shift in perspective and a boost to resources, the future will become much clearer.

The ability to combine data elements from relational collections, cube and external sources is a key ingredient to the ability to offer a continuous planning cycle. XF Relational Blending offers this unique ability to integrate, collect and analyse relational, external and cube data in a single application.

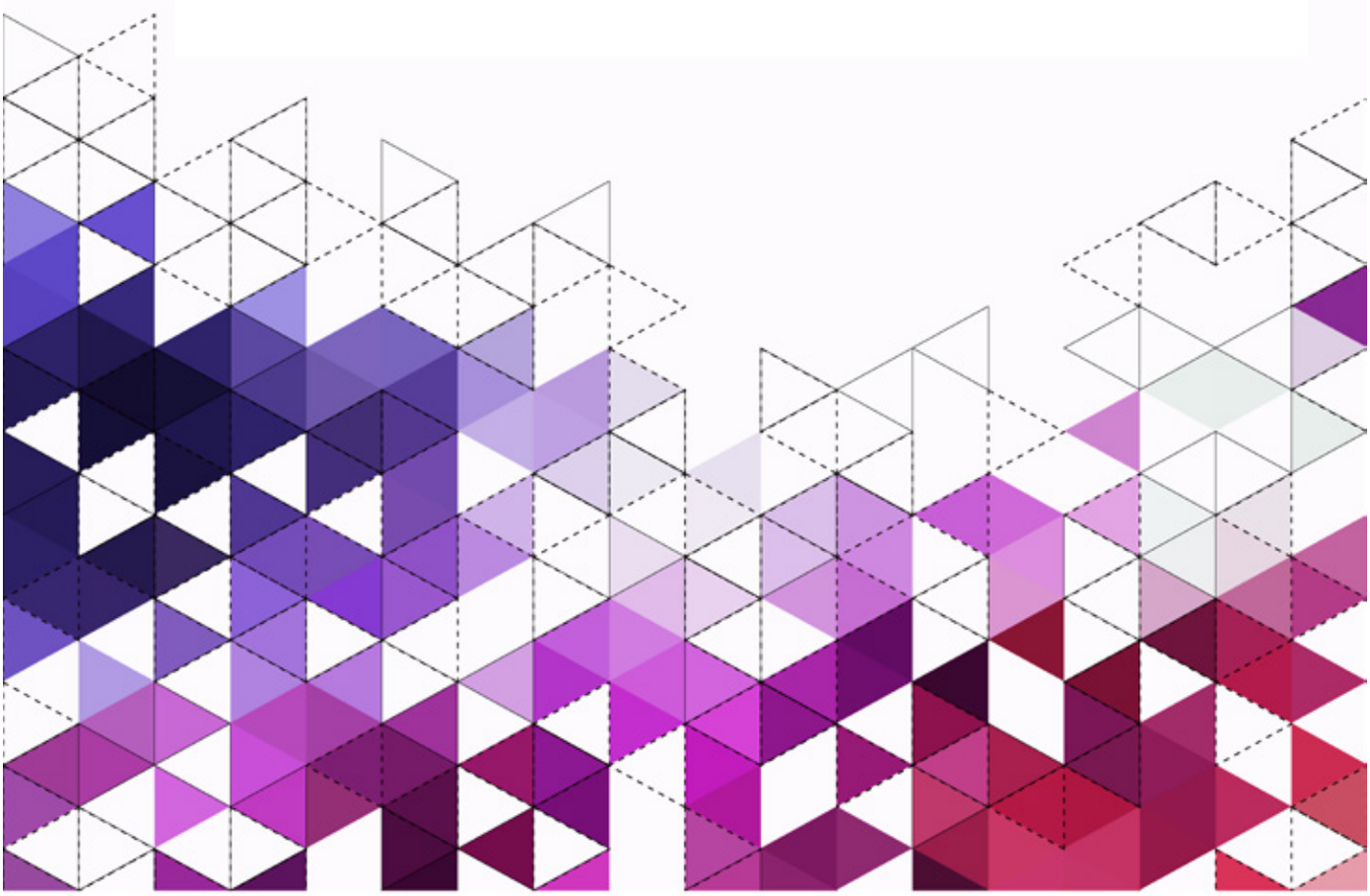
OneStream Response

"Effective and successful analysis of financial and non-financial data is dependent upon adopting a unified CPM platform that can provide up to date details in a single model versus working with multiple application silos, interfaces and disparate systems that can produce inaccurate results as well as inefficient processes."

Non-Financial Data

The Forecasting Game Changer

"Compared to traditional forecasting, machine learning-based forecasting provides more accurate forecasts leveraging detailed historical data collected, internally and externally, for use in multiple processes across the organization."



Financial indicators are a good start, but the ability to consume and organize non-financial indicators will enrich the data set with information that offers a new level of predictability. The systems ability to combine these data sets into a model that can be understood will be critical to forecasting and predictive modelling success.

Non-Financial Data - the Forecasting Game Changer

Financial indicators have long been the backbone of forecasting models. What has gone before is assumed to be a reasonable indicator of what is to come. And when that was the only source of corporate information on which to plan, it was enough. But times have changed. The volume and variety of non-financial data is being driven by business complexity, growing consumer choice and channels to market, as well as the Internet of Things which is daily expanding the connections between man and machine. These connections are feeding a trove of data filled with future performance indicators that can be invaluable to forecasters, if identified and used effectively.

What are non-financial indicators?

Although specific to each industry, most businesses will have a few non-financial metrics that are key leading indicators, which will ultimately manifest in their P&L. Web analytics will indicate the most popular item being browsed online long before sales data reflects high demand. Customer satisfaction surveys will indicate the effectiveness of the customer experience long before the company sees an uptick, or downturn, in trade. And a significant change in headcount may portend supply or back office issues long before profit suffers.

By putting in place tools and applications to monitor and model the impact of non-financial data, companies gain much-needed agility, accuracy and responsiveness, as the survey reveals.

Governments, regulators and investors are also latching onto the importance of non-financial indicators. A balance of financial and non-financial reporting provides shareholders and other stakeholders with a meaningful, comprehensive view of the position and performance of companies that financial information alone cannot provide.

The new EU Non-Financial Reporting Directive (2014/95/EU) aims to bring the quality of non-financial reporting across the EU up to the high standards exemplified by the best European businesses. The Directive, which applies to large Public Interest Entities (PIEs) with more than 500 employees provides for consistency and conformity across Europe in relation to disclosure requirements- providing investors and other stakeholders with a comprehensive picture of a company's performance.

The impact on time to re-forecast

Our research shows that senior executives who make better use of non-financial data are more than twice as likely to be able to turn around their forecasts within 24 hours, with almost 25% achieving this target. They are also two and a half times more likely to agree that over the last three years they have been able to respond more quickly to market changes.

ABLE TO RESPOND MORE QUICKLY TO MARKET CHANGE

2.5x

Those organizations that make better use of non-finanical data are more likley to be able to respond quickly to market change.

Both quick forecasting and responsiveness provide a vital competitive advantage, which can be a game-changer for businesses competing with nimble upstarts and disruptor brands. And it follows that if companies are making better use of forward indicators that specifically impact their business, they are also able to bring more accuracy to their forecasting.

Over half of CFOs and senior executives who make better use of non-financial data are able to forecast with 0-5% accuracy. This compares with 29% of respondents who have not increased their use of non-financial data in the last three years.

Non-financial data improves visibility & confidence

ABLE TO FORECAST WITH MORE ACCURACY

1.7x

Those organizations that make better use of non-finanical data are more likely to be able to forecast earnings within +/- 0-5%

ABLE TO FORECAST BEYOND 12 MONTHS

2x

Those organizations that make better use of non-finanical data are more likely to be able to forecast beyond the 12 month horizon.

In addition, responsiveness and accuracy are further enhanced by foresight. Finance professionals and forecasters who make better use of non-financial data are more than twice as likely to be able to forecast beyond the 12-month horizon compared with those that are not harnessing this resource effectively.

Harvesting non-financial data and analyzing it through a wide range of predictive, forward-looking managerial tools gives forecasters a competitive edge that translates into a business advantage. Yet while executives are aware that financial indicators alone cannot adequately capture the strengths and weaknesses of their company, improving or taking control of non-financial data is very low on their priority list. Respondents ranked non-financial data capture fifth on a scale of five priorities for the future of planning.

Yet CFOs who take better advantage of non-financial data are twice as likely to report a greater degree of confidence in the planning, budgeting and forecasting process (88% expressed an increase in confidence in PBF over the last three years).

Making effective use of non-financial indicators requires a clear understanding of the best metrics for the business, a proven method of analysis and a clear presentation of the outcomes of these KPIs. Companies that have a strong grasp of these measures and are using them effectively are often those that are already further along the modern finance journey.

In our previous research The Future of the Finance Function Survey 2016, automation and standardization emerged as key facilitators in the evolution of an effective modern finance function (which includes new methods of planning, budgeting and forecasting). Ultimately CFOs can't deliver a modern finance function without the use of technology. Standardisation, automation and front-to-back office interconnection all require effective technology, and if properly implemented will free up valuable time to spend on business partnering and strategic advice.

The PBF survey showed that respondents who made more use of non-financial data were 50% less likely to report that automation and standardization are obstacles to process improvement. This implies that the companies which focus on non-financial data already subscribe to a technologically innovative approach, and are further along the PBF journey. They are able to generate the sort of non-financial data that can truly enhance their forecasting, improve visibility and help promote agile business practices.

For this benefit, the capture of non-financial data deserves to move further up the finance function's priority list.

The ability to consume and normalize the internet of things and make use of this non-financial data alongside financial data is a core capability of OneStream XF. All of this information lives together in one application giving OneStream a unique advantage in capitalizing on this information for better predictive results.

OneStream Response

"Predictive analytics will drastically improve organizations in every aspect of running the business including product development, marketing and sales and help them provide more agility to deal with external forces that can impact the business both positively and negatively. While most CPM platforms will be attempting to analyse summarized data, OneStream XF's unique ability to leverage more detailed information with machine learning provides an organization with superior and legitimate predictive capabilities not currently seen on the market. The OneStream XF "Stage" engine collects and verifies data at a lower level of granularity than the summary data typically provided to Analytic systems. This clean stage data is then delivered into the Microsoft Machine Learning predictive modelling solution, revised and then loaded back into OneStream for a final adjustment for anomalies (I.e. acquisitions or divestures). By starting with this detailed data, we allow the ML tools to learn more thus producing a higher level of accuracy."

CASE STUDY 1: Large Financial Institution Machine Learning

A Fortune 500 company offering a broad array of financial products and services to consumers, small businesses and commercial clients was looking to leverage econometric data alongside financial data for enhanced predictive analytics and statistical-based forecasting.

Core requirements revolved around replacing a legacy-based platform, incapable of machine learning-based forecasting, with one unified platform for improved corporate performance management including enriched predictive analytics using both traditional financial information and non-traditional external information for a greater insight into their business.

OneStream XF Machine Learning Solution

OneStream was able to consume external website econometric data for key statistical information including the history and trends for data such as unemployment information, gas prices, inflation rates, etc. OneStream was able to prepare and organize this non-financial information and combine it with the historical financial information in the OneStream relational “Stage” engine. OneStream was then able to leverage this complete and detailed (non-cube and non-summarized) information through the data science engine of the Microsoft Machine Learning solution. Finally, OneStream was able to consume this data back into OneStream for analysis. Using OneStream's complete loop of 1 – data preparation for financial and non-financial data, 2- Machine Learning/ Statistical Forecasting 3- Data Analysis - by pulling the predictive results data back into OneStream for analysis, the financial services firm can leverage a 360-degree repeatable solution that will allow the Office of Finance to focus on the analytics rather than the mechanics of integrating, preparing and moving data.

CFOs and Heads of FP&A at Loggerheads

The data needed to start and compare the forecast process and the accuracy of the FP&A team needs to live and work together with a common and unified system. We believe these teams will diverge in skill sets with more data science becoming prevalent in the FP&A function and Finance with a more traditional accounting skill set, however, they need to be leveraging data from one another and offering common comparison points for this data to have relevance to running the business.

CFOs and Heads of FP&A at Loggerheads

FP&A is looking for its own identiy

Presently, across the entire 48,000 finance professionals in the FSN Modern Finance Forum on Linkedin "Heads of FP&A" represent around 1% of the membership. But this survey finds that where organizations have a Head of FP&A (financial planning and analysis), their views on the future of the role can be markedly at odds with the rest of the finance function.

In the main, only large organisations can afford to, or find the need to, separate out FP&A duties. In some organizations, especially smaller enterprises, the role is not always differentiated, may go by another name, or be subsumed into a general management accounting role. This is reflected in the relatively modest number (6%) of survey respondents who identified themselves as Head of FP&A.

It is a niche field, and accounts for only a small percentage of senior finance professionals, but as the finance function of the future grows increasingly complex, demand is growing for these specialized practitioners.

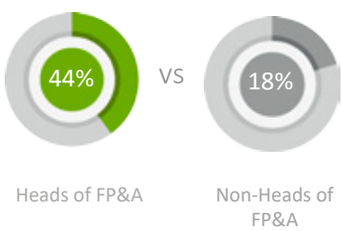
In an ideal finance scenario, the head of financial planning and analysis would report directly to the CFO, build forecasts from both financial and key non-financial data, and use their analysis to underpin the strategic direction of the business. Crucially, they should be the repository for a diverse array of performance data that goes well beyond a company's historical financial figures, and be able to present a view of the future, rather than just review the past.

In truth that's not always the case. Too often the FP&A function is consigned to basic budgeting duties, which merely stagnates the potential of the finance function as a whole. Meanwhile FP&A straddles both the financial and management accounting disciplines, and they see themselves as a different class of accountant.

FP&A in a class of its own?

According to the survey, the heads of FP&A firmly believe that their role will become a separate discipline from the accounting function. 44% of FP&A heads strongly agree financial planning and analysis will become a separate discipline, compared with 18% of non-FP&A respondents. Including the survey respondents who both agree and strongly agree the ratio rises to 76% for FP&A professionals, compared with 64% for the remaining finance executives surveyed.

FP&A heads looking to break away: 44% of FP&A heads strongly agree financial planning and analysis will become a separate discipline, compared with 18% of non-FP&A respondents.

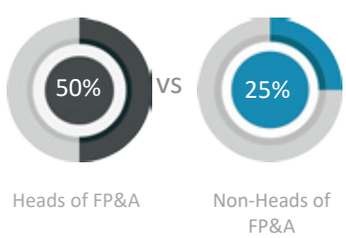


Although there is majority agreement amongst all finance professionals that the FP&A function should be recognized for its role and position in the organization through a separation from the accounting function, the call is louder from within.

29% of heads of FP&A strongly agree that the financial planning and accounting function will become a separately recognized function with its own professional accounting body, compared with just 11% of non-FP&A heads.

This result may stem from the belief that current accounting bodies are not producing the specialists in the FP&A field that the future finance function requires. Almost half within the discipline agree with this, compared with just a quarter of executives in other roles within the finance function.

FP&A heads do not think the accounting bodies are doing enough: 50% of Heads of FP&A do not believe accounting bodies are producing the FP&A specialists for the future

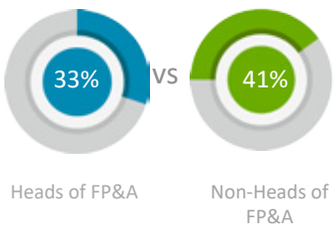


FP&A professionals rely more on tech

Still, despite a clear view on the lack of qualified FP&A professionals, only a third of FP&A heads expected to be investing more in analytical skills rather than technology in the next three years, compared with 41% of the remaining respondents.

This focus on technology likely arises because FP&A practitioners recognize that technology is the essential enabler. In order to extract the most useful, predictive, forward looking data, FP&A needs more

FP&A heads are more focused on technology: 33% of FP&A heads expected to be investing more in analytical skills rather than technology in the next three years, compared with 41% of the remaining respondents.



complex analytics, more complex technology and more innovative applications. Once armed with the right technology, an FP&A Head with the right analytical skillset will be able to distil this into usable strategic information.

Unfortunately, this skillset is not being provided by the standard accounting bodies, and in some cases is not being nurtured by the remainder of the finance function either.

This will only come when the finance function recognises the value of FP&A in providing insight that is progressive and predictive rather than historical and backward-looking. Within the finance function, FP&A is the only discipline that can present a picture of the future from which an organisation can build their strategy.

The survey did show that the heads of FP&A and their non-FP&A counterparts were broadly in agreement on their priorities for the future of planning, budgeting and forecasting, although the former put slightly more emphasis on the need for greater simulation and scenario planning.

The gulf between the finance executives who contribute to and use the plans, budgets and forecasts, and the FP&A professionals who generate them, is wide but not insurmountable. The finance function is evolving and technology is changing the way financial executives make decisions. The role of the FP&A expert is expanding to encompass a wider range of data, more complex analysis and a more demanding C-suite. If senior executives recognize the change within the finance function, it behooves them to bring the planning, budgeting and forecasting function along for the journey.

OneStream Response

Although the skill sets of the FP&A and Finance function might diverge, the driver will be the enabling technology of machine learning that is now available to FP&A. This advanced data science solution will force the FP&A function to utilize data science as a tool for forecasting the future. That said, this will be half science and half art as a true understanding of the external factors that impact the business will be critical to successfully guiding the business in the correct path.

CASE STUDY 2:

JOHNSON OUTDOORS is a leading global outdoor recreation company that designs, manufactures and markets a portfolio of winning, consumer-preferred brands across four categories: Watercraft, Marine Electronics, Diving and Outdoor Gear.

They was looking to maximize a single investment in a global finance platform that would improve multiple finance processes such as consolidation, reporting, SOX, budgeting, data submission process, audit support and cash flow reporting. It was imperative that it was owned by Corporate Finance. Consolidated operational and sales reporting was extremely time consuming and painful and multiple systems were needed to provide consolidated reporting and the details behind the reporting. They needed to be able to provide detailed reporting capability to the business unit controllers in order to deliver an integrated global system that met both business and corporate needs.

Core requirements revolved around improving financial close and planning processes for data collection, consolidation, reporting, budgeting and forecasting however, there was also a significant need for more extensive and more detailed consolidated operational and sales reporting and a completely revamped budgeting, forecasting and planning process.

The OneStream XF solution

Johnson Outdoors implemented OneStream XF for financial consolidation and reporting, forecasting, budgeting and data quality management (data collection). Workflow approval levels give group controllers immediate access to their data, i.e. no more waiting for corporate to run the consolidation process. Users can use OneStream XF to drill back to details in JDE warehouse directly from their workflow process when they need to investigate transactional details. Budgeting was delivered in under 2 months due to the system's ability to leverage itself. OneStream XF delivers more detailed reporting and analytics in one unified product and application.

"The OneStream XF platform allowed us to deliver global financial consolidation, management reporting, Guided Workflows and a robust planning solution all in one product and one application. The modern platform gives us the ability to adapt more quickly to business changes and deliver more value to the business."—Lori Strangberg, Corporate Controller, Johnson Outdoors

Financial consolidation and reporting results

Owned by Corporate Finance, OneStream delivers powerful management and ad hoc reporting for corporate HQ and business users. "With Enterprise, consolidations was a corporate process, with OneStream, we are able to put the power of the guided workflow- self-service data load, data validation and report capabilities in our end users hands. It's not just for corporate anymore. The level of detail we can get reporting on now is unbelievable. We can now produce information and reports quickly and at a moment's notice for the CFO and the Board. The improvements in data collection, workflow, submission approvals and full audit capabilities back to data sources and JDE data warehouse has transformed our processes." said Lori Strangberg, Corporate Controller, Johnson Outdoors.."

Budgeting and forecasting results

Johnson Outdoors was able to leverage their standard data model by using extensible dimensionality to add depth to certain accounts while also adding additional dimensions specifically for budget to quickly deliver traditional 12 month budgeting with automation and driver-based calculations. OneStream was able to load the Excel spreadsheet models already being used so there was very little impact to the budget modeling tools and processes the end users had been relying on. They started with annual amounts and used automated spreading across brands to apply a seasonality profile to produce the monthly budget. They also used key sales drivers to automatically update expenses that were directly related to sales like commission, warranty, etc. The ability to leverage the same workflows, reports and system allowed them to quickly deliver a full budget solution from design, build, test and go live in 2 months. They never had to build any data integration, validation and reconciliation between multiple products or applications as data can instantly variance between actual and budget at every level of commonality. In addition, budget can be maintained and updated without having to worry about affecting the actuals. Johnson Outdoors leveraged much of this budget

functionality to build a forecasting solution that users would already know how to use. They drew upon financial information from their existing actual results and budget to provide a base for the forecast and then gave users a dimension to capture the adjustment layers that built up to a monthly forecast. This gave HQ and business unit controllers the visibility to deviations from budget and what incremental performance was needed to achieve the forecast.

Sales and operational reporting

Johnson Outdoors, wanted to give business unit controllers more details around sales and operational performance including reporting by products, customers and regions OneStream XF's capability to accommodate location unique requirements and corporate standard requirements in the same system is key to delivering improved sales and operational reporting to the line of business and to corporate.

Cloud Uptake is Rising but Outdated Processes Remain Unchallenged

"Financial consolidations, reporting and planning must have truly scalable processing power for maximum performance when it matters the most."

Cloud Uptake is Rising but Outdated Processes Remain Unchallenged

As more and more organisational services move to the cloud, planning, budgeting and forecasting is being swept along the same tide. Yet even as uptake is gradually rising, the real benefits are often lagging.

Only 11% of respondents have deployed cloud solutions across all their business units

In a utopia of cloud-based planning, budgeting and forecasting, there should be seamless information flow, inclusive communication with all relevant stakeholders, and open discussions that lead to a perfectly refined forecast. The theory is that deploying a centralised cloud solution for PBF has the power to radically change the processes and outcomes of the discipline.

But the reality is that uptake is still low (only 11% of respondents have deployed cloud solutions across all their business units), and those that have begun the journey are a long way from achieving the full benefits.

Cloud utopia remains elusive

Instead of the utopia of a unified solution, more than a third of cloud users still use multiple software vendors for planning, budgeting and forecasting. And only half agreed to using one model shared by the whole enterprise, the same percentage as those that had yet to move to the cloud. Meanwhile the same percentage of cloud and non-cloud users (36%) responded that each major part of the business has its own standalone model, which invariably creates issues when trying to collate and unify these disparate models.

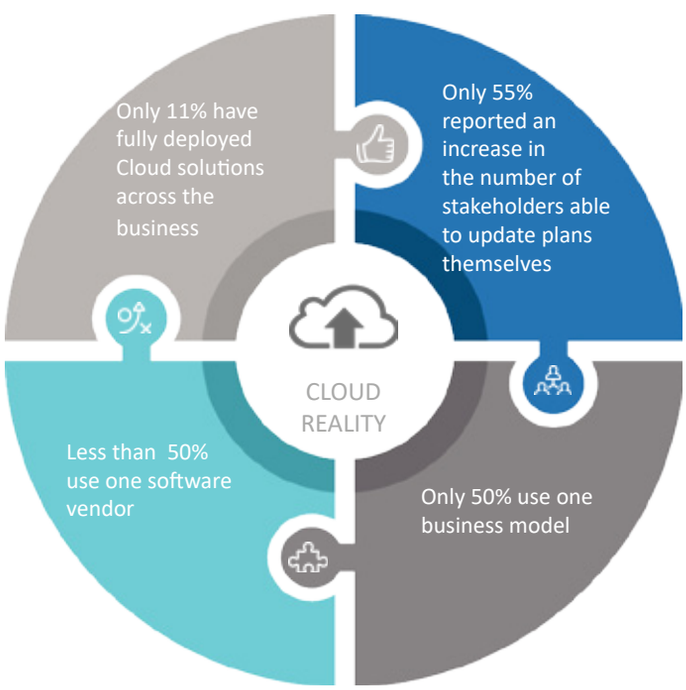
It is inevitable that business functions will argue that by their very difference they need models specific to them. But when a central cloud solution is implemented, retaining this disparate model structure immediately reduces the potential benefits of a centralised system. Re-engineering the models to allow for differences under a unified cloud is the next logical step to making the most out of a cloud investment.

"OneStream XF Cloud, on Microsoft Azure, provides a scalable and flexible solution for our organization and has put the power of Corporate Performance Management in our hands." - Rick Oswald, Corporate Controller, Solenis

Cloud users were also equally as likely to find cross-business collaboration difficult. This despite the expectation that cloud services should bring and bind business areas together under a software umbrella accessible from anywhere. Instead 34% of respondents said they found it difficult to collaborate across functional areas, the same as those yet to implement the cloud, whilst 28% still struggle to collaborate across business units.

Figure 2:

Organizations are failing to fully embrace the move to the Cloud.



Cloud implementations often mirror the on-premise limitations

This echoes the problem of lack of progression within the planning, budgeting and forecasting process. When cloud solutions are implemented, the opportunity to investigate and improve processes is missed. Instead they are merely substituted into the existing framework, replicating the processes already in place.

That said, even those companies that have yet to take full advantage of the cloud are reaping some of the rewards that the agile cloud offers. Those that have started on the cloud journey are over one and a half times more likely to be able to reforecast earnings for the organisation within 24 hours and a third more likely to get the forecast right to within 5%.

This highlights one of the key selling points of cloud software, the ability to quickly and comprehensively draw data from numerous locations and stakeholders for immediate analysis, thereby producing timely, and accurate reports.

The process of implementation will invariably also encompass a wider range of stakeholders, by the very nature of its connectivity. Cloud adopters are more than twice as likely to strongly agree they have more stakeholders involved in the process compared with three years ago.

Their plans are also more integrated between different business functions, with 78% in agreement compared with 60% for non-cloud users. Cloud adopters are also more than twice as likely to agree that all users have visibility of changes in real time, and the centre has improved visibility too (more than one and a half times the number of cloud-based respondents agreed).

The upshot is that the cloud brings connectivity and collaboration to the planning, budgeting and forecasting process. And this is critical for companies that need all their functions and divisions to be working towards a common financial goal. Too often departments

The benefits of the cloud include:

Quicker at reforecasting

More accurate forecasting

More stakeholders connected

Ability to connect more easily to new sources of data and podiuce larger and more detailed plans

work in silos to generate plans and forecasts that aren't holistic, and would offer little in the way of strategic input.

Unsurprisingly for a new technology, cloud adopters were almost 50% more likely to have reported an improved ability to connect more easily with new sources of data, and 20% more likely to be able to produce larger plans.

Cloud adopters are more process-savvy

Cloud can be used as a proof of concept tool and is often used as a method to overcome the hurdle of seeking investment from the Board of Directors

Cloud users tend to include the early technology adopters that have recognised the financial advantages of improved business processes. Respondents who had already implemented cloud PBF solutions were a third less likely to see automation as an obstacle to process improvement, and a fifth less likely to view standardisation as an obstacle either.

Tellingly those using the cloud were also 17% less likely to see the Board as an obstacle to seeking investment, possibly because their implementation of the cloud could be used as a proof of concept tool.

The benefits of unifying the planning, budgeting and forecasting process under a single cloud solution are significant even without a re-engineering of BPF processes. Combine both the technology and the business process improvements, and the cloud utopia is very achievable and vastly beneficial.

OneStream Response

"The benefits of moving to a cloud-based solution can be numerous. A completely virtualized and scalable environment can simplify and reduce IT dependencies and maintenance as well as provide a total lower cost of deployment."

CFOs Who Ignore Continuous Planning May be Putting Their Business at Risk

"Enterprises that execute what-if scenarios, analyse trends and integrate continuous planning can increase profits significantly by reducing inefficiencies and quickly adjusting to business fluctuations."

CFOs Who Ignore Continuous Planning May be Putting Their Business at Risk

"OneStream Unified Financial Intelligence and Extensible Model allows Melrose to deliver maximum value to corporate reporting along with operational value to each diverse business unit. OneStream's Guided Workflows and powerful consolidation and reporting engine offer a turn-key solution to business users and a lower TCO for group reporting." — Jason Care, Group Systems Manager, Melrose PLC

The central plank of the planning, budgeting and forecasting cycle has historically been the annual budget. Preparations can start several months before it is due, data is sourced, forecasts are submitted and after intensive negotiations and discussions a budget is agreed, frequently forming the basis on which bonuses are paid and strategic decisions are made.

Unfortunately this process is entirely out-dated. Organizations, sectors and markets move increasingly quickly, and no sooner has the budget been agreed, than it is no longer relevant because the assumptions on which it is based have changed. Making decisions based on stale information can put businesses at risk of competitive pressure and the failure to respond timeously to market changes.

To be fair, many CFOs are all too aware that annual budgets are archaic and ineffective in a competitive market, but not everyone has managed to evolve their planning, budgeting and forecasting programmes into something more effective.

It starts with the recognition that budgets or forecasts developed with the most up-to-date information will invariably provide the most accurate picture of the future. This means shortening the time between budget preparation and approval, and the climax of this approach is being able to budget, plan or forecast almost immediately, whenever assumptions or data changes.

Continuous planning is increasingly important in a volatile market. Over half of executives surveyed said their company could forecast no further than six months into the future. To alleviate this short-sightedness, companies are turning to continuous planning. 73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they now have more of a culture of continuous planning.

Continuous planning improves agility and accuracy

The organizations that strongly agreed (16.7%) are one and a half times more likely to be able to reforecast within one week, and are almost four times more likely to be able to respond more quickly to market change.

The move to continuous planning also improves accuracy, with organizations being almost twice as likely to be able to forecast within 5% of earnings compared with companies that remain wedded to static forecasts.

Clear visibility from continuous planning also means organizations are three times more likely to report that the business as a whole has more confidence in the planning process.

Significantly, organizations which implement a continuous planning process are almost twice as likely to engage more stakeholders in the process and two times as likely to make more use of non-financial data.

It makes sense that when a company looks to improve their visibility they do so by including in their models and forecasts more of the data that they need to plan accurately. Non-financial data has already been shown to be crucial to the accuracy and horizon of the forecasting process, and organizations that have moved towards continuous planning are more likely to have recognised this. This implies they are further along the journey to future-proofing their planning, budgeting and forecasting process. Despite non-financial data use being the lowest ranked priority on the survey list, organizations that use continuous data have recognised the limitations of annual budgeting and the advantages of incorporating non-financial data into these rolling forecasts.

ABLE TO REFORECAST MORE QUICKLY

1.5x organizations that have moved to continuous planning are 1.5 times more likely to be able to reforecast within 1 week

ABLE TO RESPOND MORE QUICKLY TO MARKET CHANGE

4x organizations that have moved to continuous planning are 4 times as likley to be able to respond quickly to market change.

ABLE TO FORECAST WITH MORE ACCURACY

1.7x organizations that have moved to continuous planning are almost twice as likely to be able to forecast earnings between +/- 0-5%

With the added granularity of non-financial data, continuous planners are almost twice as likely to agree that they can now produce much larger and more complex models, with better visibility of the process for all users.

The annual budgeting process is slowly becoming obsolete, as organizations recognise the limitations of developing strategies based on out-of-date assumptions. But implementing a truly effective continuous planning process requires buy-in from all business functions, not just the finance core. If an organization is going to overhaul their planning and budgeting process, they must broaden the inputs to include non-financial data. This brings an accuracy and agility to forecasting that will adequately prepare organisations for their fast-paced future.

OneStream Response

Scenario gaming capabilities are critical to achieving a successful continuous planning capability within the organization. What if modelling relies on the ability to instantly seed, revise, analyse and repeat to achieve the optimal process and model. OneStream XF's unique model where all data and metadata live together in a single application makes this possible without the extra burden of integration and validation of data between applications just for comparison.

CASE STUDY 4:

Cleaver-Brooks manufactures multiple distinctive product types that each require unique accounting, budgeting, and reporting needs. Their financial close process for reporting, budgeting and analysis was painstakingly slow and needed improvement. Additionally, they needed a solution that was owned and managed by the office of finance.

Cleaver-Brooks was looking for a CPM solution that could streamline their financial processes as well as automate their cash flow and balance sheet budget. It was imperative that it was owned by the office of Finance but allow each business unit to work autonomously using a standard set of reports.

The OneStream XF solution

Cleaver-Brooks implemented OneStream XF for financial consolidation and reporting, budgeting, forecasting and analysis. OneStream has provided them with a multi-faceted solution in one easy to manage and use model. Each business unit now has the ability to view, close and run their consolidation process independently. The budgeting and forecasting solutions live together and leverage a similar but different dimensional model with a single point of maintenance for all shared dimensions. The budget and forecast is driver based and uses spreading and allocations to speed up the process of producing the budgets and weekly forecasts. With People Planning, Cleaver-Brooks is now able to calculate payroll expenses and calculate labor hours, overtime, etc. per employee. Additionally, reporting used to take an hour now takes only minutes allowing Cleaver Brooks to have more time to deliver value added analytics to the business.

"People Planning, one of OneStream's free downloadable specialty planning solutions, gave us the ability to budget headcount and payroll costs. By specifically tailoring this solution, we can accurately budget for our manufacturing needs and correctly match the required capacity with our anticipated production. Plant Controllers are able to enter Labor and Production drivers and OneStream calculates manufacturing absorption and labor variances. Best of all, our reporting process is now much faster and easier. What once took 45 minutes to an hour now takes only minutes to complete." — Michael Barfuss, Corporate Controller, Cleaver-Brooks

Financial consolidation and reporting results

"We reviewed OneStream Software alongside other CPM providers but quickly realized that other vendors did not have the same functionality that OneStream could provide," said Michael Barfuss, Corporate Controller, Cleaver-Brooks. "We needed something we could manage within our own financial group instead of relying solely on IT. OneStream XF gives us complete autonomy as well as transparency, visibility and drill back capabilities into transactional data. OneStream's tailored solution has allowed each business unit the ability to take control of their own consolidation, reporting, analysis and close process, a key requirement in our corporation."

Bigger Models and More Stakeholders Don't Make for Better Business Modelling

"Planning at an extremely detailed level can be counterproductive, however, the ability to collect, aggregate and drill back to detailed transactions are critical to understanding the quality of the process."

Bigger Models and More Stakeholders Don't Make for Better Business Modelling

OneStream's Extensible Dimensionality™ allows for a standard corporate chart of accounts and dimensions that can be extended both for actuals, to allow for more detailed management reporting, and then again for budget, to allow for a more relevant budgeting process, all in the same application. Because our corporate structure always remains intact, there is no concern when a business unit extends an account or dimension because corporate actuals are never impacted.

The goal of an effective business planning process is to build a business plan that underpins an organization's strategy while also evolving as circumstances change. Historically it has been a largely linear process, with input from departments and business units that are discussed, distilled and finally delivered into the plan.

But the nature of business modeling and the process of planning has changed in tandem with the evolution of the finance function. There is now far more data, many more stakeholders and increasingly complex modeling applications from which to develop plans. And while this should theoretically lead to better planning this isn't always the case as the survey reveals.

On the face of it, survey respondents believe they are doing a better job than three years ago, with two-thirds saying the organization has more confidence in the planning process. But if that's the case how do we reconcile the fact that more than half still struggle to forecast out beyond six months, a quarter still can't forecast revenue to within 10%, and almost half take more than a week to reforecast earnings?

CFOs and their finance executives appear to be in denial about how efficacious their planning, budgeting and forecasting really is. The issue may lie in the flawed idea that bigger is necessarily more accurate.

Building complexity

These days the finance function has access to tools that allow it to process more data and develop more complex models, and this certainly comes with some advantages.

60% of respondents said they could handle more complexity and build much more granular plans compared with three years ago. Those planning in more detail are almost twice as likely to be able

to forecast more quickly, with 23% reforecasting within 24 hours compared with 12% for the remaining respondents.

Planning in more detail doesn't necessarily mean increased accuracy

The executives who are building larger models are also two and a half times more likely to react more quickly to market change, with 80% in agreement. In addition, those that are forecasting in more detail also appear to be able to forecast further into the future. They are twice as likely to be able to forecast out 12 months, with over a quarter claiming this is achievable.

But more detail doesn't always translate into increased accuracy. Of the respondents who were forecasting in more detail and those who weren't, a similar percentage (38% and 39%) were able to forecast within 5% of earnings. They were better at forecasting revenue (40% more organizations with detailed planning were able to forecast within 5%), but seemed unable to follow through to more accurate earnings forecasts.

Adding voices

As organizations increasingly recognize the need to incorporate more data and detail into their planning process, so the number of people engaged in the process has risen. But involving more stakeholders in the process doesn't necessarily translate into richer forecasts, although it does improve acceptance of plans and the ability of the organization to react more quickly to market change.

Perhaps counter intuitively, involving more stakeholders doesn't produce better earnings forecasts. 38% of businesses with more stakeholders were able to forecast within 5%, compared with 35% who still have a similar number of people inputting into their plans.

The effect on speed of reforecasting was similarly comparable. 57% of those involving more stakeholders in the process reported being able to reforecast in under a week, compared with 52%.

While the impact on actual forecasting times and accuracy was small, there was a very tangible increase in cross-organizational

acceptance of the plans that resulted, which is a laudable objective in itself.

Where an increased number of stakeholders (not just finance) were inputting into the business modeling process, these organizations were two and a half times more likely to report that their process is perceived more positively by other functions now compared with three years ago. And these organizations were almost twice as likely to have responded that they have more confidence in their planning process.

They were also twice as likely to believe that all business functions feel they have adequate input into the process, 20% less likely to feel that planning, budgeting and forecasting created conflict, and 30% more likely to trust the operational data provided to them.

Crucially, with more stakeholders engaged and looking out on the horizon, these organizations were almost twice as likely to have an improved ability to react more quickly to market change.

While there may be some advantages to building bigger plans or involving more stakeholders, it isn't the panacea of business modeling. The plans (big or small) need to be the right ones and the people involved need to be the most effective stakeholders in the business.

Prioritizing the right voices

63% of respondents say they now engage with more stakeholder in the PBF process, but almost 25% of businesses fail to involve stakeholders outside of the finance function

While 63% of respondents now have more users engaged in the planning process, almost a quarter of businesses fail to involve stakeholders outside of the finance function. Their input, on non-financial data, is crucial to ensuring a complete picture, and vision, of the organization, rather than one blinkered by the narrow confines of financial results. Luckily this is at least on the agenda as a top three priority for finance executives in the survey.

Involving more stakeholders does require the use of specialist planning, budgeting and forecasting tools to be able to coordinate

the process. Similarly, being able to build larger and more detailed plans is usually facilitated by more specialized technology. Respondents building more detailed plans are 20% less reliant on spreadsheets, three times more likely to be using cloud software across all their business units and twice as likely to be using on-premise software.

There is a quiet revolution going on in the finance function, and it is spreading to planning, budgeting and forecasting. With many more data or stakeholder inputs into increasingly complex plans, finance professionals can be forgiven for believing they are getting better outcomes. But the survey shows that earnings forecasts are similarly constrained, whatever the detail and size of plans or number of stakeholders.

Instead executives must work smarter rather than larger. Involving the right stakeholders (especially non-financial executives) while ensuring visibility of plans and timely updating of real-time information, is worth more than just another voice in the crowd. Linking stakeholders through cross-departmental cloud software can help keep the data updated, improving the accuracy of the plans and ultimately the accuracy of the forecasts.

"OneStream's Extensible Dimensionality™ provides us with the ability to run both budget and actuals in one model and allows us to reconcile between US GAAP and IFRS at any point in time and for historical reference, a necessity for our global corporation."
— John Ruther, Director of Finance, Motus Integrated Technologies

OneStream Response

The combination of a scalable and powerful analytic model, stage engine and relational blending lets customers have a new level of choice in where the data should be belong. We no longer require all details to be loaded into the cube to leverage them for planning. XF Relational Blend lets the data live where it belongs and no longer forces an update to the model for every new transaction that could affect the forecast. This gives the FP&A team a more agile approach to collecting and revising the plan while simultaneously reducing the burden on the analytic model to be inundated with details that simply don't belong there.

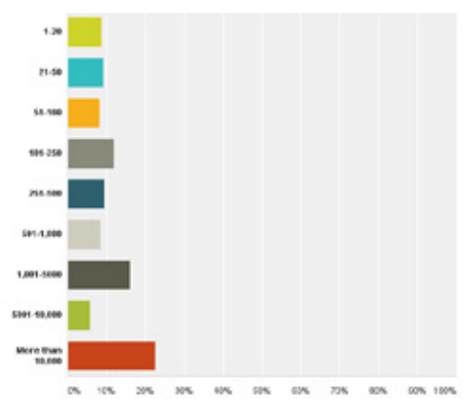
Methodology

METHODOLOGY

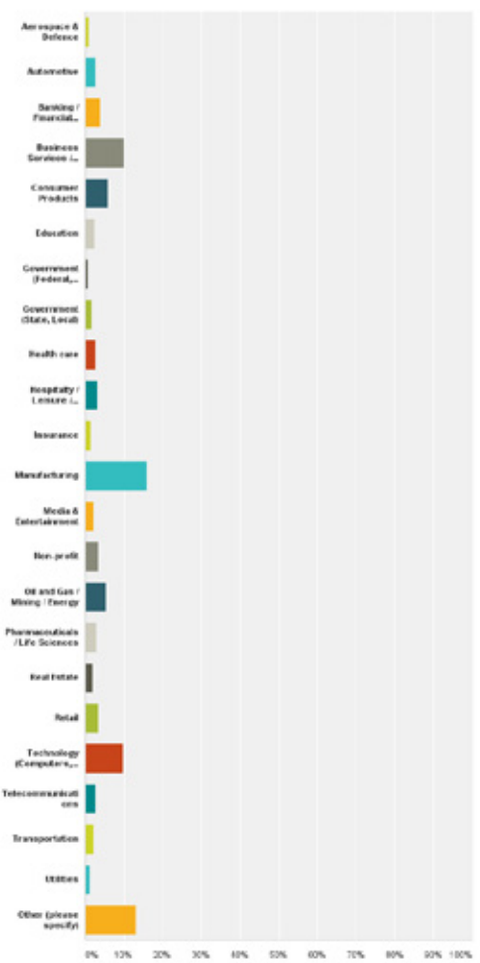
The survey drew responses from 955 international senior finance professionals from our 48,000 strong FSN Modern Finance Forum on LinkedIn.

This survey covered finance professionals across 23 different industries. 81% of which were considered to have senior job titles and above.

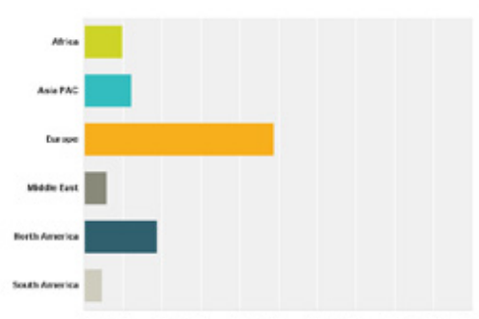
Orgaizational Size- Number of employees



Industry of Respondents



Geography of Respondents



ABOUT OneStream

OneStream Software is a privately held software company created by the same team that invented the leading financial solutions of the last decade. We provide a unified Corporate Performance Management (CPM) platform which enables the enterprise to simplify financial consolidation, reporting, budgeting and forecasting for complex organizations. Powerful extensibility enables the enterprise to deliver additional analytic solutions without adding any technical complexity. By delivering multiple solutions in one application, we offer increased capabilities for financial reporting and analysis while reducing the risk, complexity and total cost of ownership for our customers. We are driven by our mission statement that every customer must be a reference and success.

Contact:

OneStream Software
362 South Street
Rochester, MI 48307
+1.248.650.1430

ABOUT FSN

FSN is a global publisher of thought leadership, research and "must-have" content for CFOs and senior finance professionals around the world. FSN's highly popular and active Modern Finance Forum on LinkedIn has a membership of more than 48,000 readers in more than 23 countries and across every major industry segment. It is also the publisher of the popular www.fsn.co.uk and www.fsnelite.com websites and regularly holds, networking dinners and events for its members.

Contact:

Gary Simon, CEO: gary.simon@fsn.co.uk

Michelle Fabian: michelle.fabian@fsn.co.uk

HQ Office in United Kingdom
Clarendon House
125, Shenley Road,
Borehamwood,
Herts, WD6 1AG

Switchboard: +44 (0)20 84452688

https://fsnelite.com

The Modern Finance Forum LinkedIn

http://www.fsn.co.uk

FSN®
The Modern Finance Forum