

# The paradox of choice for CFOs

*A guide for enterprise reinvention in the age of complexity*



# About the authors



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## Aneel Delawalla

Managing Director  
Strategy  
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Aneel is a Managing Director with Accenture Strategy and holds global leadership roles in the company's CFO & Enterprise Value and Zero-Based Transformation practices. Based in Atlanta, Aneel works with management teams and the boards of directors of publicly traded and privately held companies to create enterprise value at the intersection of growth strategies, operating model transformation, and the employee experience. Aneel also co-chairs the Accenture CFO Summit in partnership with Harvard University.



## Cherene Powell

Managing Director  
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Cherene is a Managing Director with Accenture Strategy and leads the CFO & Enterprise Value thought leadership program. Based in Minneapolis, Cherene is a dedicated leader and brings her 20 years of experience to helping Fortune 1000 companies transform their operating models, cost structure, and technology strategy to provide fuel to their growth ambitions and operational efficiency goals. Her current focus is working with CFOs to define the future of their finance function including assessing the impact of globalization, digitization, and the evolution of culture, leadership and workforce reinvention.



## Michela Coppola

Senior Manager  
Research

Michela is a Senior Manager with Accenture Research. She has more than 15 years of research experience focused on understanding how companies and individuals adapt to long-term trends. Her research work spans across different areas, covering the needs and challenges of finance executives. She has a Ph.D. in economics, and as a post-doctoral researcher was head of the research unit at the University of Mannheim and at the Max-Planck Institute for social law and social policy.

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# The era of enterprise reinvention is here

As the speed of business increases, so does complexity. Yesterday's organization isn't built for the pace of change today, and leaders know it.

In a recent Accenture survey, 90% of C-suite executives said their organizations are undergoing an accelerated digital transformation.<sup>1</sup> Leading organizations are using technology, data and artificial intelligence (AI) to transform every aspect of the enterprise, optimizing operations and fueling growth.

And who is often driving these sweeping reinventions? The CFO.

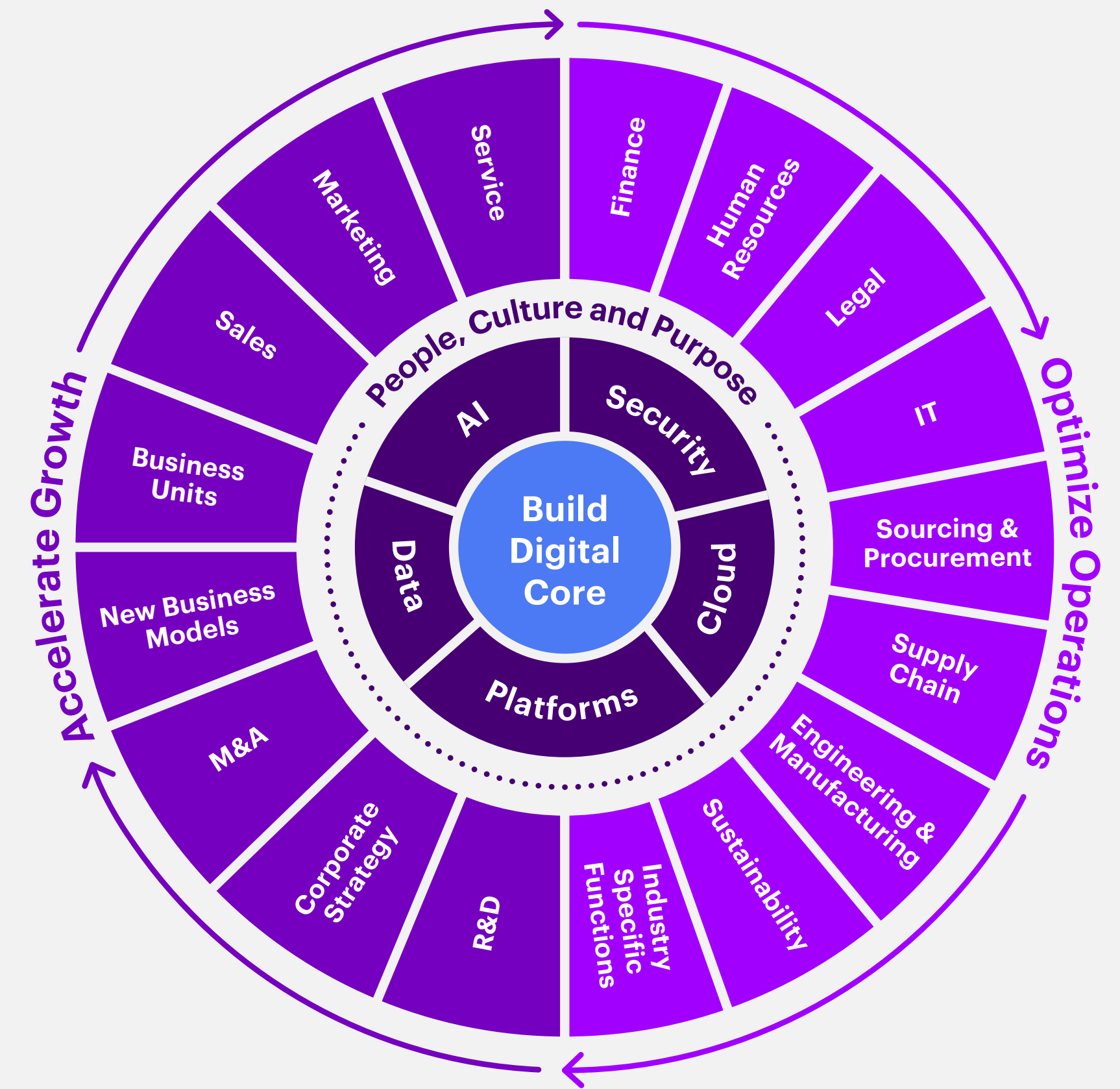
Understanding what's needed to accelerate interconnected transformations is key to successful enterprise reinvention and a critical skillset for modern CFOs.

93%

of CFOs agree the responsibility they've been entrusted with today feels much greater than in the past.<sup>2</sup>

9 out of 10

call the shots on business-critical decisions that impact the entire organization, not just finance.<sup>3</sup>

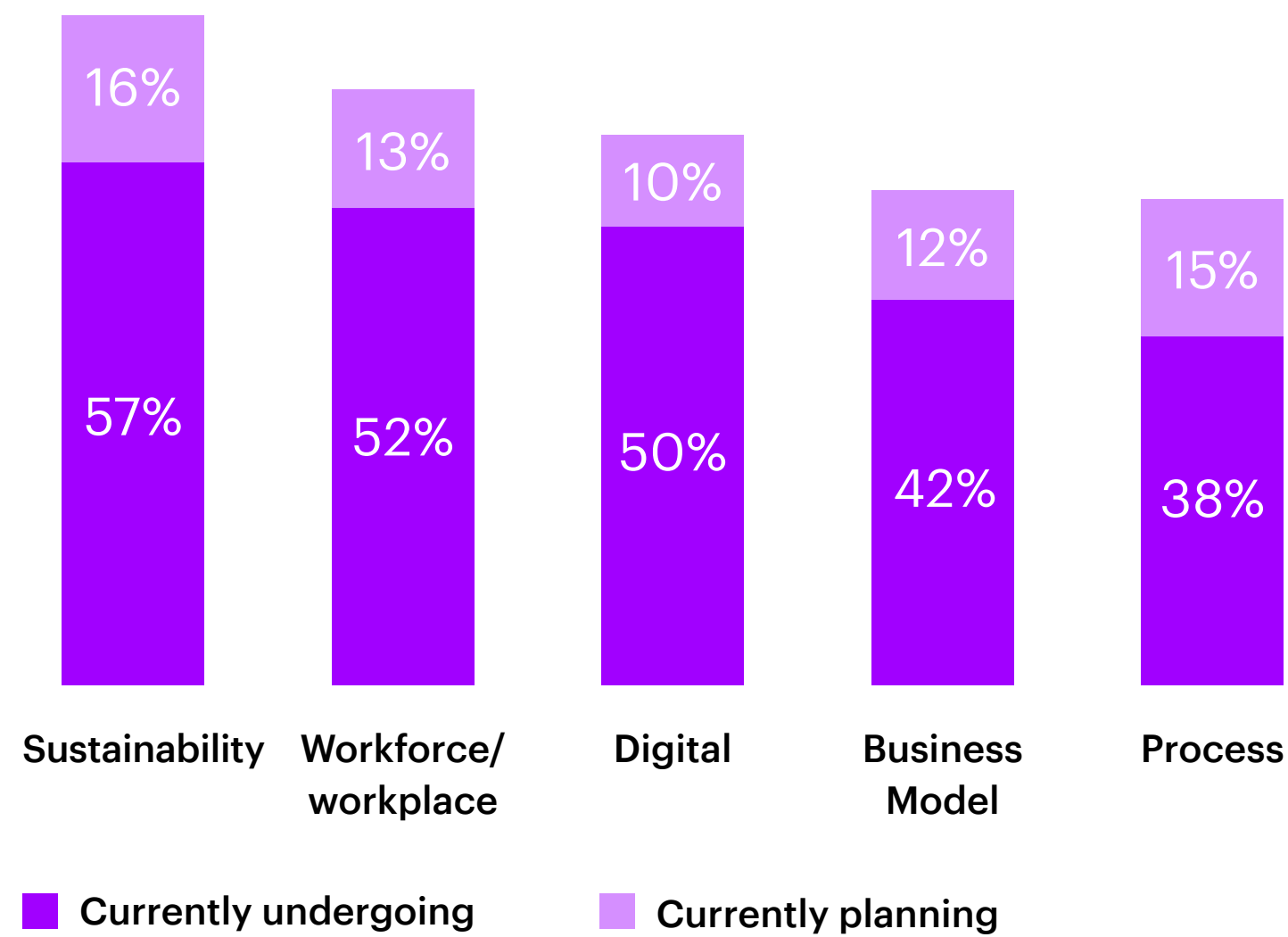


Total enterprise reinvention:  
the path to greater value

# CFOs are architects of reinvention

Effective reinvention means making complicated, interrelated decisions at speed. This complexity can drive greater value, along with greater risk, putting CFOs under more pressure than ever before to make the right call.

## Types of transformation CFOs are leading



Source: Accenture CFO Decision-Making Survey, August 2022



68%

of CFOs say their organizations are focused on three or more transformation initiatives in parallel.<sup>4</sup>

86%

say the speed of strategic decision-making has increased.<sup>5</sup>

# The paradox of choice

CFOs today have a unique vantage point. Their responsibility for financial discipline, coupled with modern analytics, gives them cross-enterprise visibility and allows them to connect the dots in ways their C-suite partners can't. As a result, CFOs hold more decision-making power than previous generations.

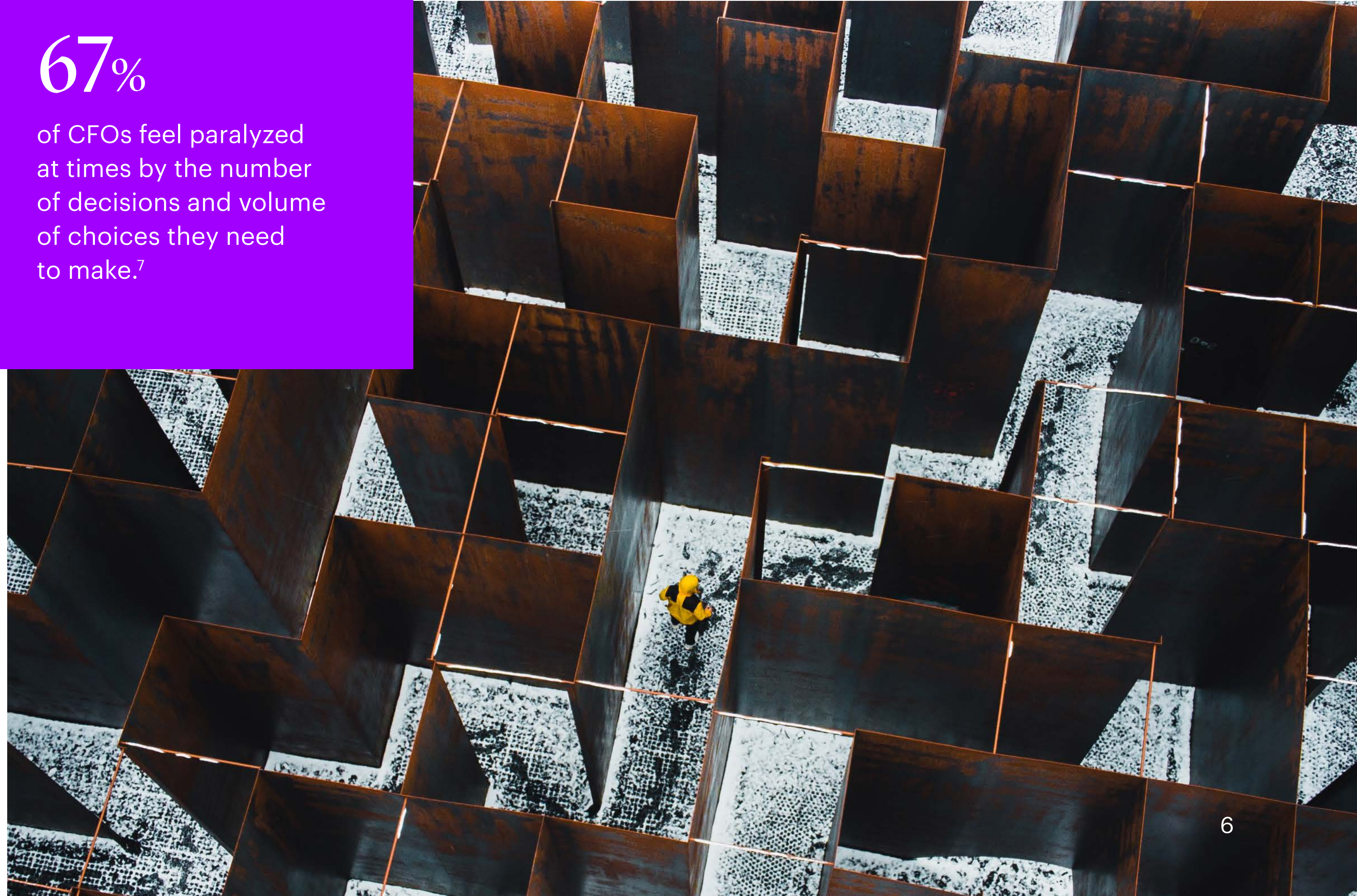
They face an extraordinary number of decisions on a compressed timeline. Each one carries cascading consequences in our constantly shifting world.

This puts CFOs at the center of the “paradox of choice.”<sup>6</sup> The volume of options, and their interconnected nature, often hinders more than it helps, slowing decisions down rather than accelerating them. The challenge to effective leadership is extraordinary.

**This is the dilemma many CFOs face today.**

67%

of CFOs feel paralyzed at times by the number of decisions and volume of choices they need to make.<sup>7</sup>



# What this means for CFOs and what they need to do now

**1**

**Run and reinvent in parallel**

Every CFO, no matter their industry or geography, needs to prioritize between business-as-usual responsibilities and working on transformation.

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**Creating balance and empowering a talented team is essential.**

**2**

**Understand how your style helps or hinders decision-making**

Based on our work with companies across the globe, what makes CFOs effective and successful is the way they make decisions and generate buy-in among colleagues.

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**Assess how your organization activates change and adjust your approach.**

**3**

**Focus on relentless execution**

Organizational complexity can bog down reinvention. Breaking down barriers and nurturing commitment are mission critical.

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**Stay focused on delivering measurable results from each strategic decision.**

# 1

## Run and reinvent in parallel

### Key actions:

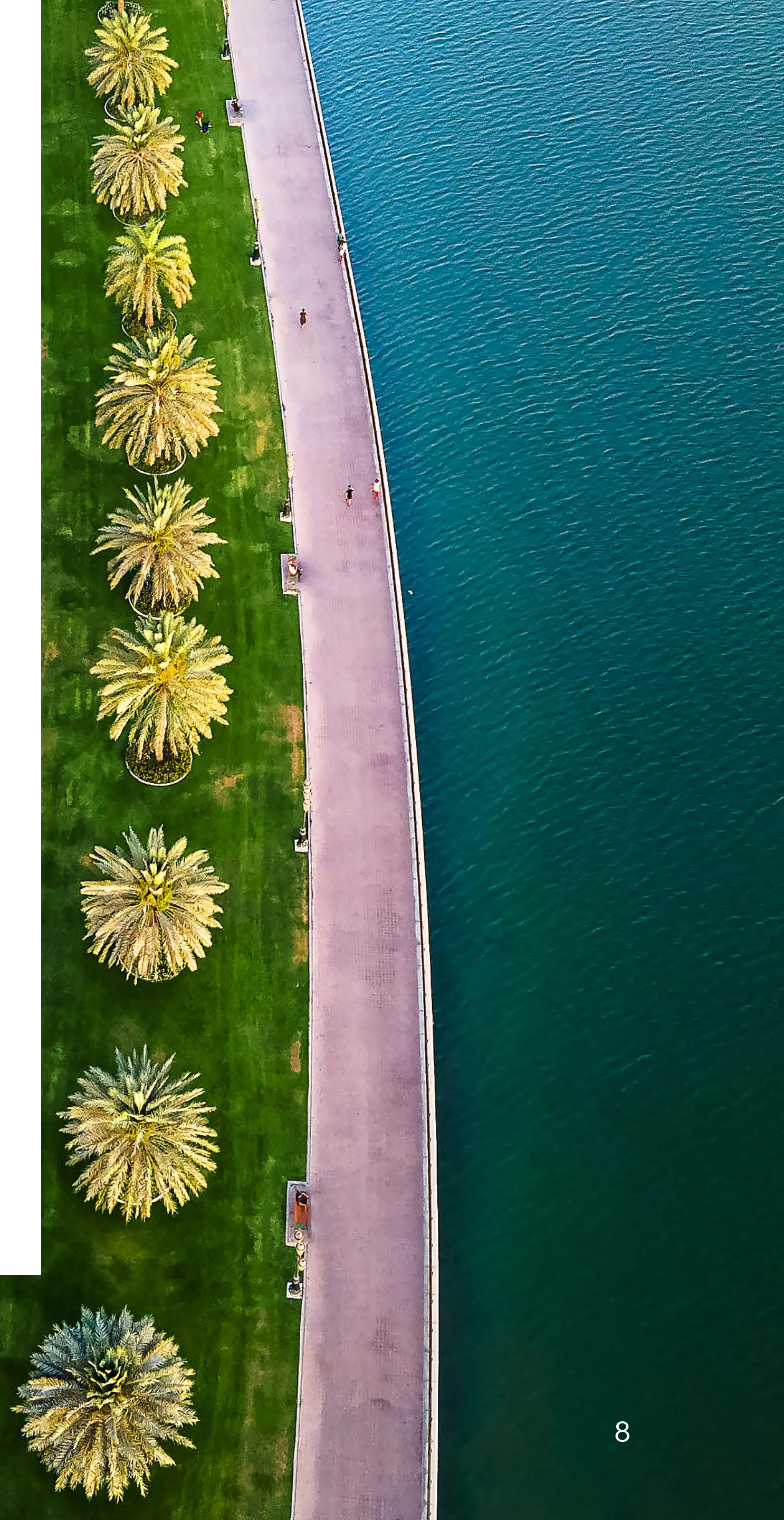
- Balance your time between leading reinvention, communicating with external stakeholders and running the finance function
- Invest in internal relationships to align on what success looks like
- Prioritize your biggest bets and put your best people on them
- Set board and investor expectations on the sequence and pace of each transformation initiative—you may need to slow down in some areas to go faster in others

### Bringing it to life

**Each CFO sets priorities based on the criticality of decisions to be made and the complexity of their business. The strength of the team and volume of decisions to be made also comes into play.**

For one global retail CFO, leading reinvention means reconfiguring his focus. He now spends 50% of his time on activities driving transformation, freed up by focusing the other half on developing talent to run business as usual.

Alternatively, an energy CFO we work with prefers to split his time in thirds among the finance function, external stakeholders and enterprise reinvention.







## 2

# Understand how your style helps or hinders decision-making

### Key actions:

- Be introspective: Evaluate your strengths and build a complementary team that solves for your blind spots
- Dismantle siloes that slow decision-making and execution
- Deconstruct how decisions are made and how change is accepted and implemented throughout the organization—flex your personal style to suit the culture
- Frame your decisions in terms of how they'll strengthen your competitive position
- Choose which decisions and actions you'll drive vs. delegate

### Bringing it to life

**Every situation is different. Your style may need to flex to drive success.**

An industrial products CFO is driving value across finance and the enterprise by reconciling ambitious reinvention board mandates with the company's more consensus-oriented culture.

A high-tech CFO was unable to achieve sustainable outcomes when the organization's culture pivoted from slower, incremental change to a private equity-led mindset.

# 3

## Focus on relentless execution

### Key actions:

- Promote buy-in by identifying the key stakeholders' most important outcome, incorporating it into the strategic plan and communicating it broadly
- Avoid distractions—if you can't measure the value, don't do it
- Create a "[transformation office](#)" for day-to-day steering, visibility and collaboration
- Systematically update your plans: Revisit and revise decisions against evolving business context
- Encourage input and discussion, but then make a decision. Don't allow the same topic to be rehashed over and over again.

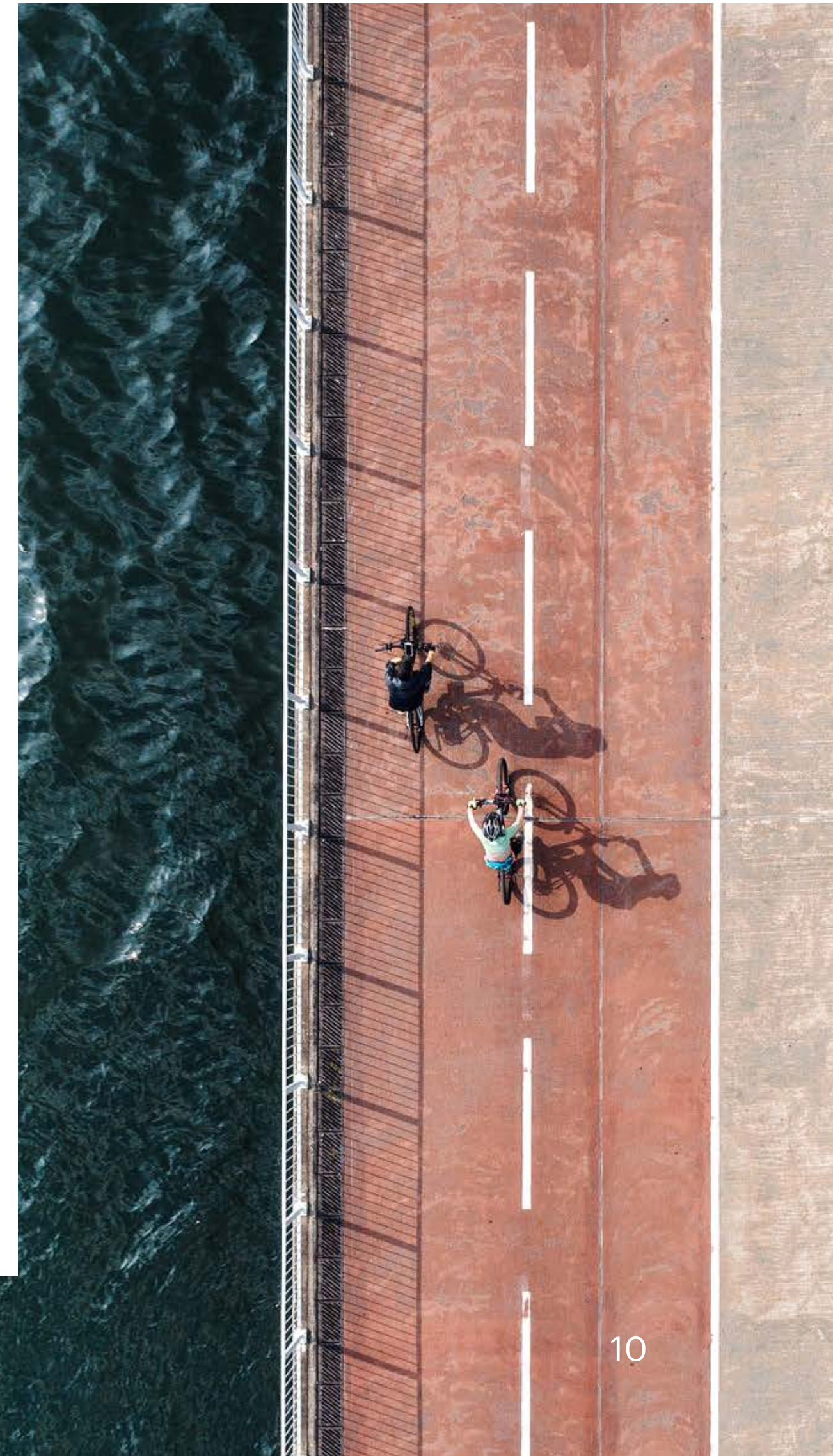
### Bringing it to life

**Focus is key—the ability to avoid distractions is one of the “secrets” successful CFOs employ.**

A financial services CFO is leading reinvention by focusing on key operating model capabilities that drive the fastest return on investment (ROI), setting up a financial “flywheel” to fund broader transformation.

A CFO of an energy company undergoing a large merger is funding transformation cost-effectively by redesigning the operating model, using managed services and streamlining processes.

The CFO of a global retailer is future proofing the enterprise with enhanced planning and analytics capabilities to drive agility and speed in responding to the ever-shifting consumer landscape.



# With great pressure comes great reward

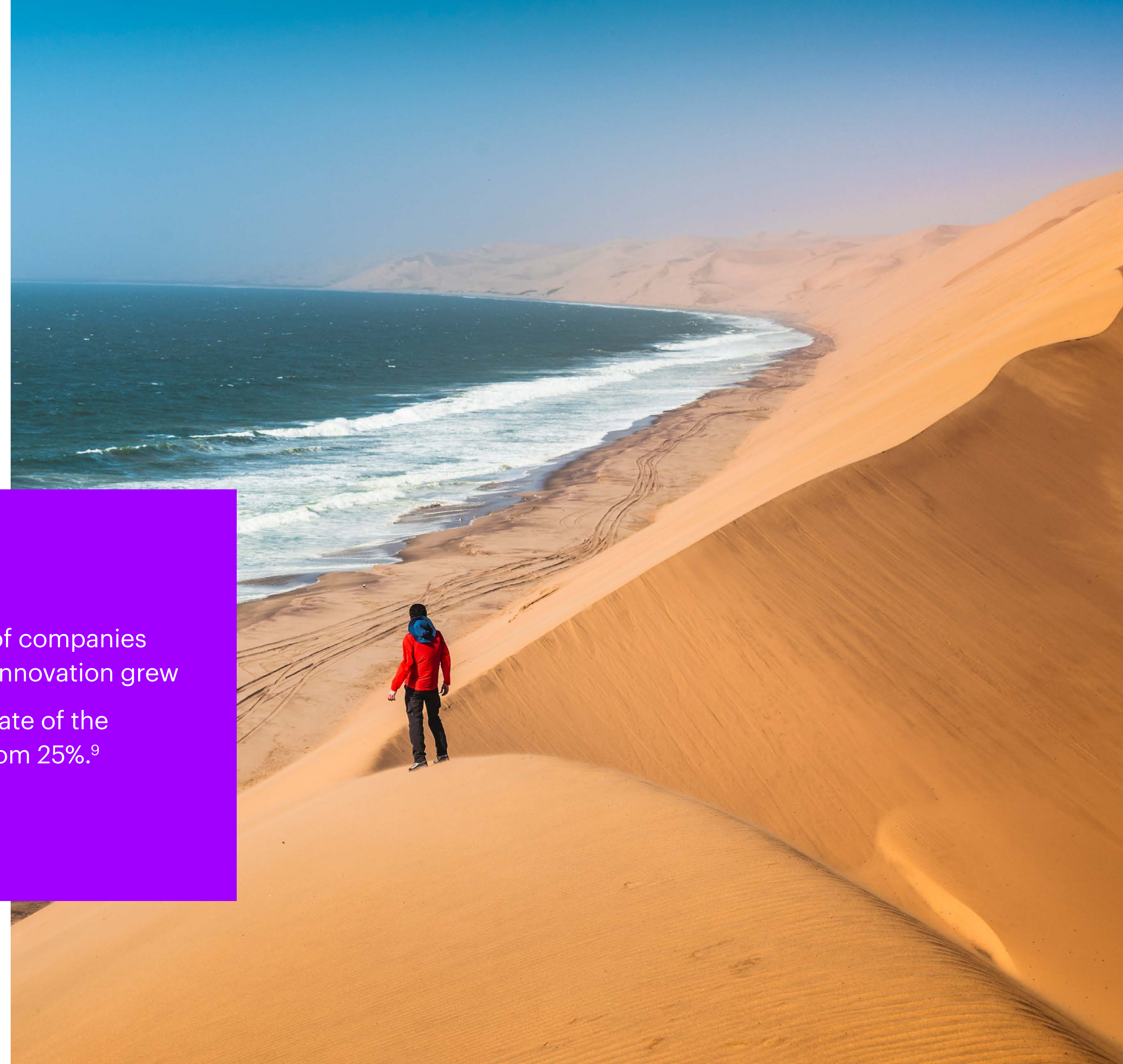
There's no doubt that enterprise reinvention places new demands on CFOs. If you feel the stress, you're not alone.

But for many, the added pressure breeds potential: According to consulting firm Spencer Stuart, 20% of the outgoing Fortune 500 CFOs in 2019 either became CEOs or were promoted to general management positions.<sup>8</sup>

**In the section that follows, we offer a checklist of actions that can help you overcome the paradox of choice, accelerating decision-making and unlocking greater value from your business's reinvention agenda.**

The top 10% of companies leading tech innovation grew

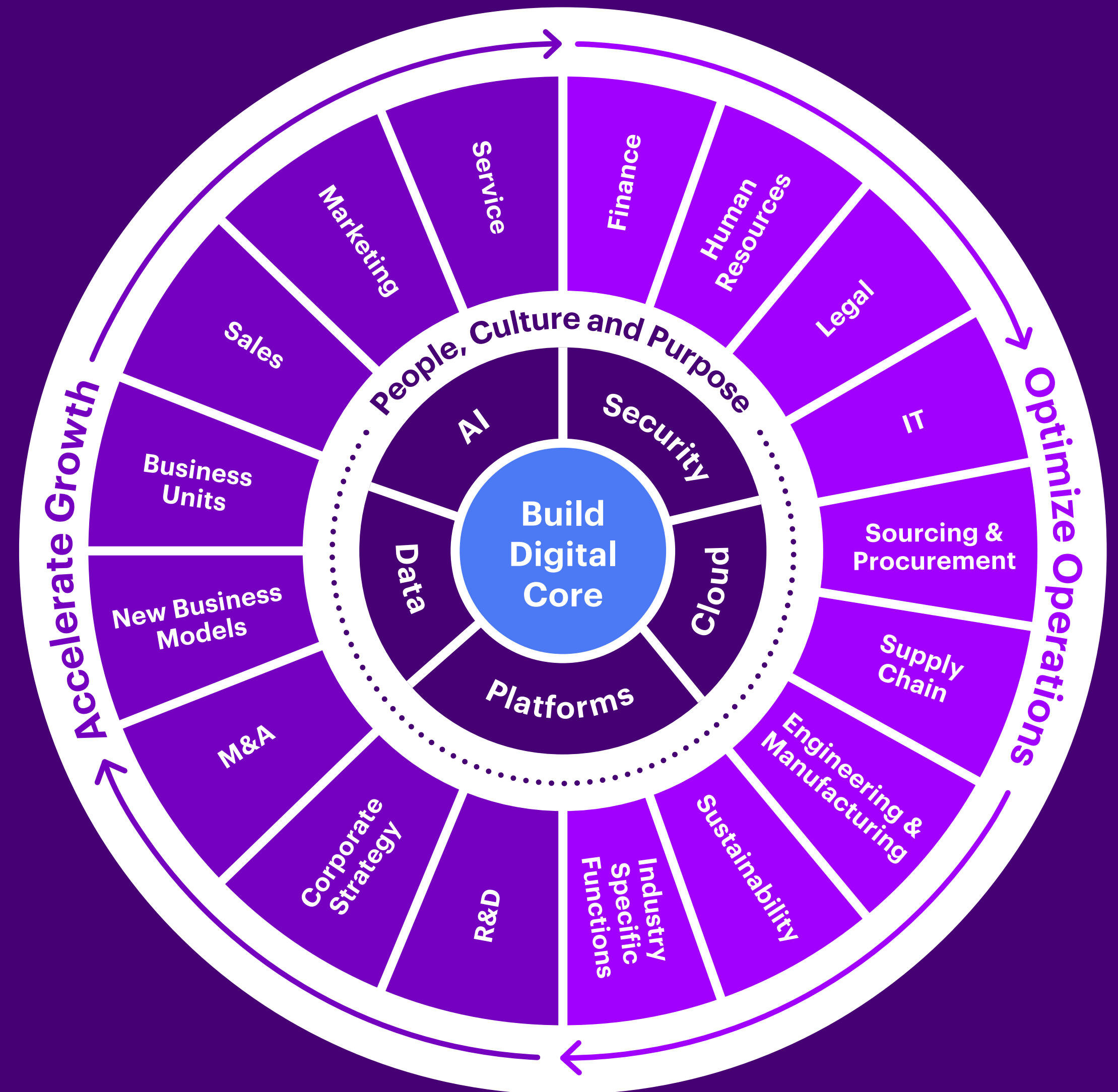
**5X** the rate of the bottom 25%.<sup>9</sup>



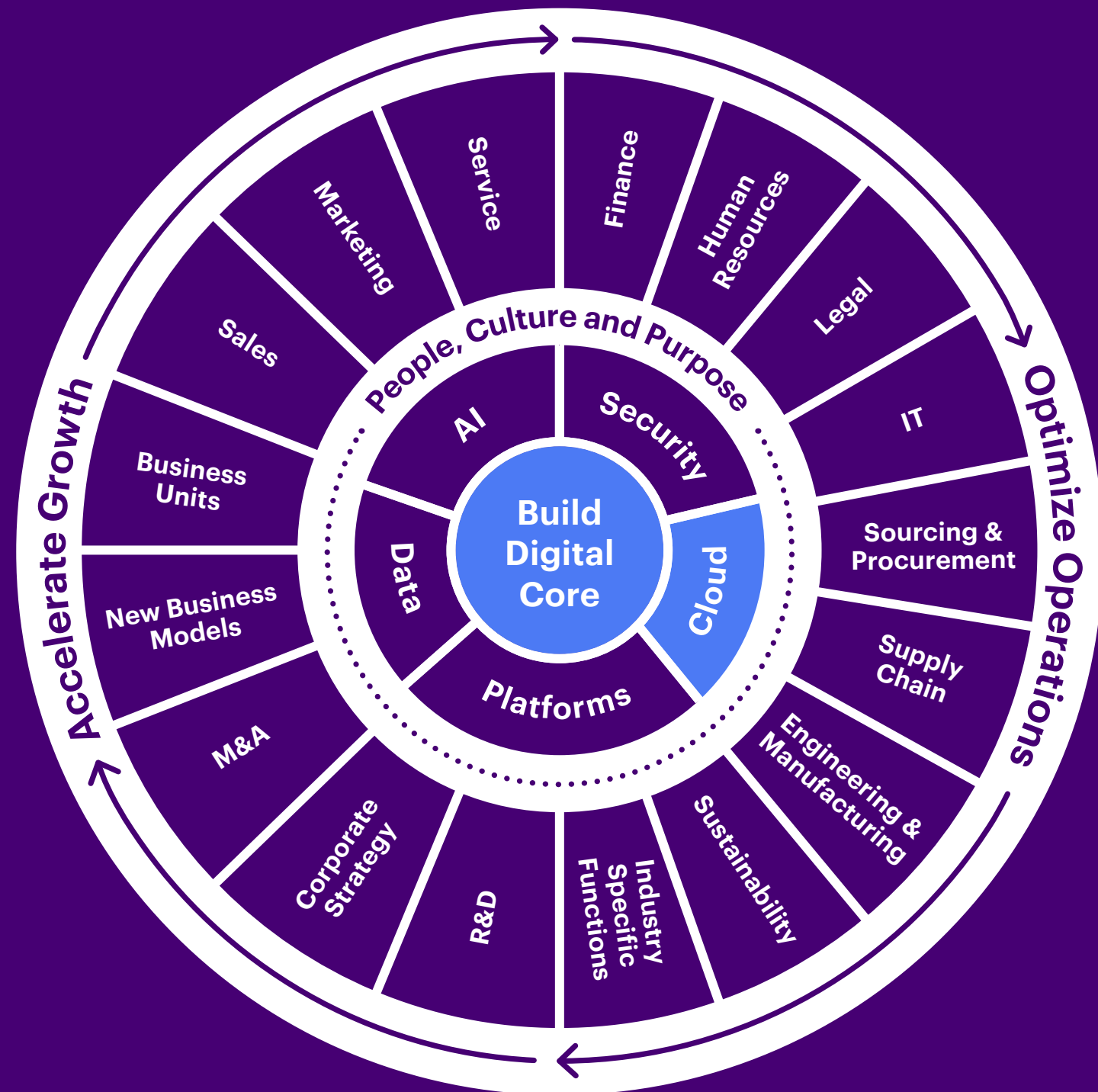
# Enterprise reinvention: a CFO checklist

Enterprise reinvention isn't a one-and-done deal. Rapid change requires continual renewal, and the skills you need to lead it will continue to evolve. Even the most savvy CFOs can learn something new.

Where to start? At the core of reinvention is digitization. From there, your next step is using a host of technologies—cloud, platforms, security, AI and data—to rethink each aspect of your business.



# Cloud



## Do

Act as the architect of value, cosponsoring an enterprise-wide cloud strategy along with your IT lead.

Approach the cloud journey as a strong enabler—fostering speed and agility while optimizing risk and efficiency.

Adopt new economic models and processes for funding, chargebacks, utilization and tracking portfolio management.

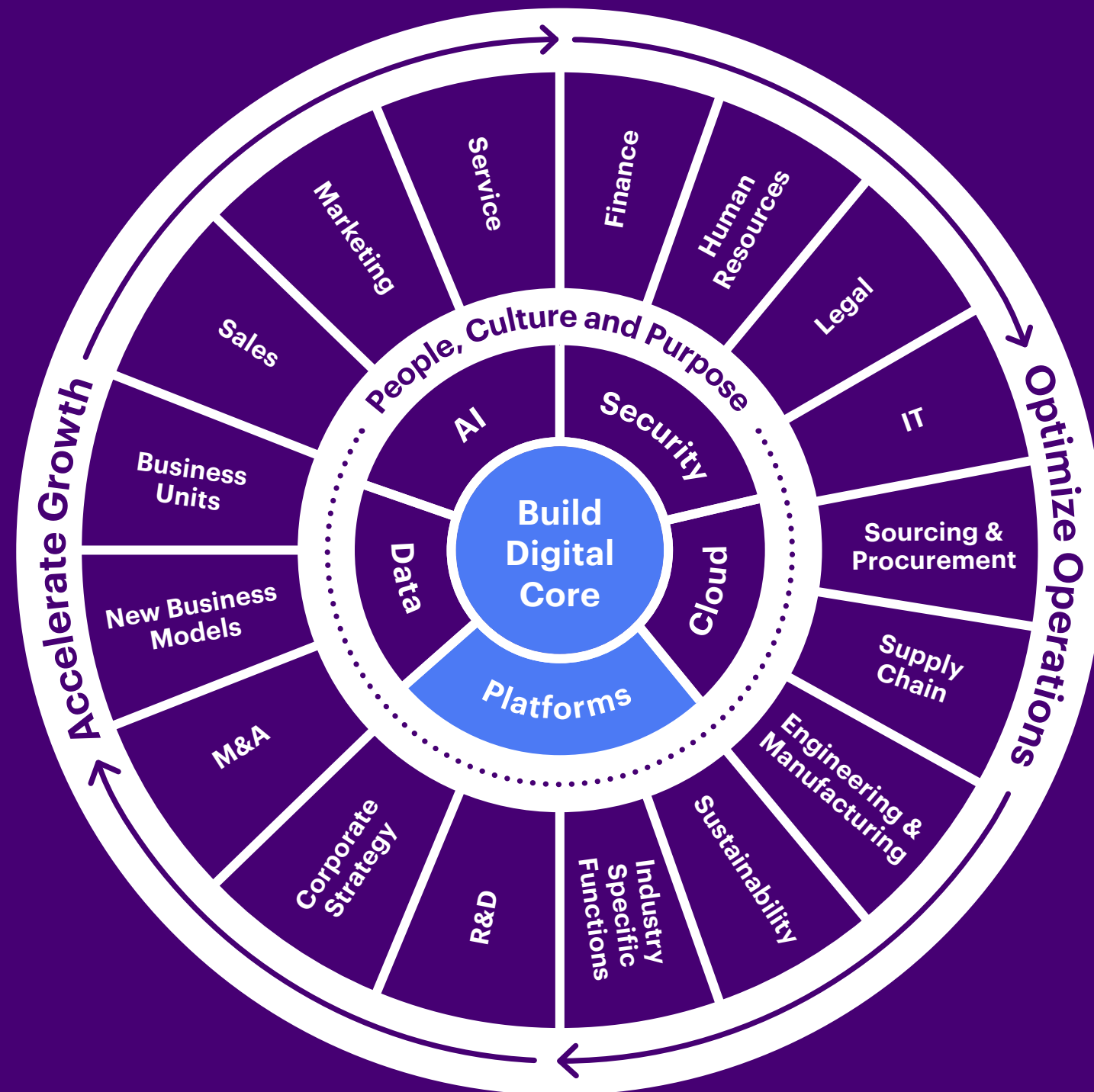
## Don't

Leave IT or business leaders to drive the cloud journey alone.

Look at cloud solely through a cost optimization lens.

Use yesterday's methods in a world that changes day to day.

# Platforms



## Do

Establish a multiyear technology strategy with cloud-based enterprise resource planning (ERP) as the foundation.

Approach cloud-based ERP as mission critical: Reevaluate your operating model in addition to all end-to-end processes.

Define outcomes and sources of value early and assign accountability for value realization.

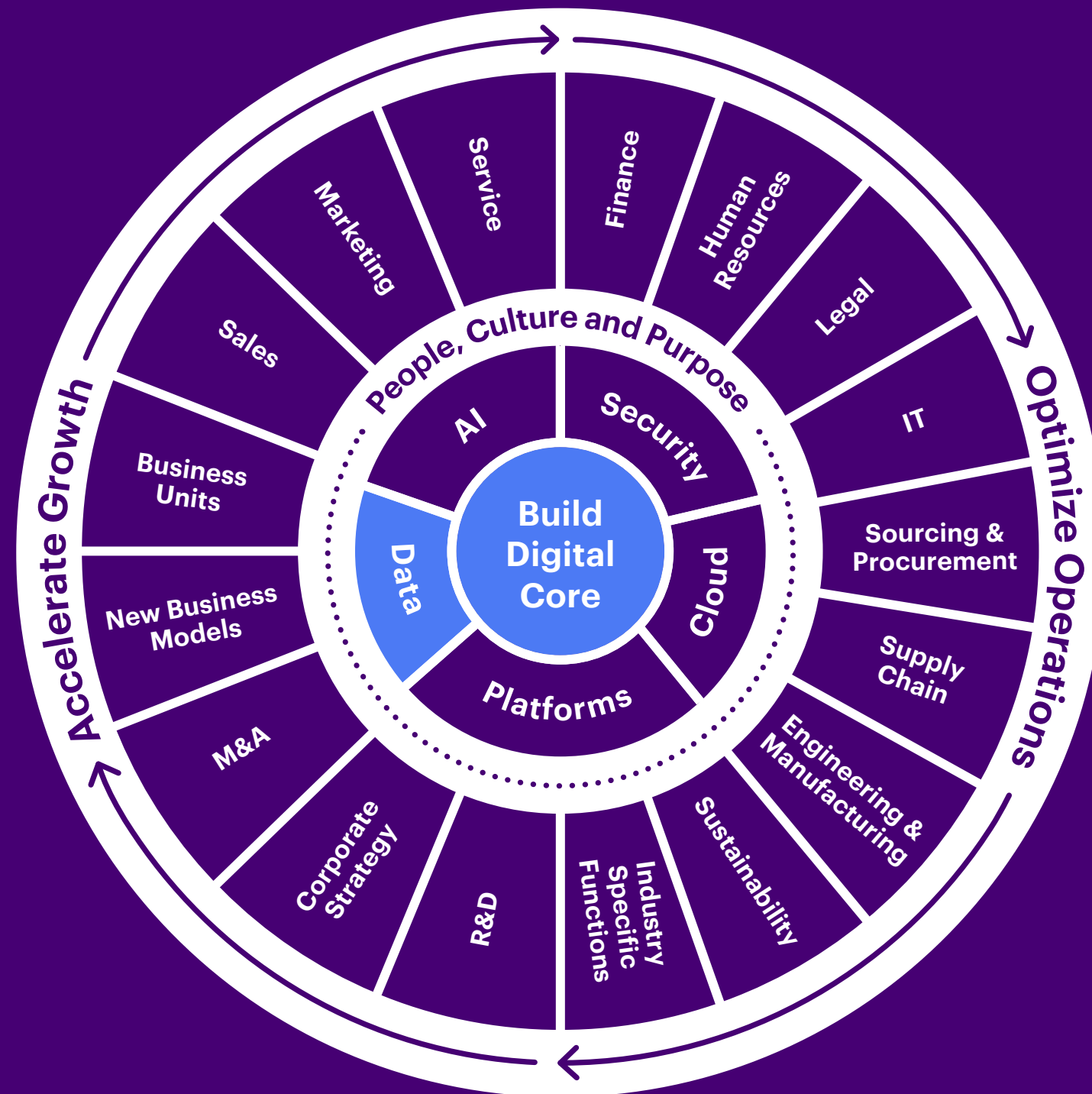
## Don't

Put off decisions and delay necessary investments. Costs will likely increase over time.

Expect a version upgrade to drive meaningful value.

Approach value solely from a direct or cause-effect lens; consider financial and non-financial benefits.

# Data



## Do

Clean up your data practices and address problems at the source.

Adopt a central data marketplace that follows agile delivery models. This may include cross-functional “pods” aligned to business units, with clear accountability across the data lifecycle.

Build in data transparency end-to-end and use it to understand drivers of business value and reinvention, including growth and profitability.

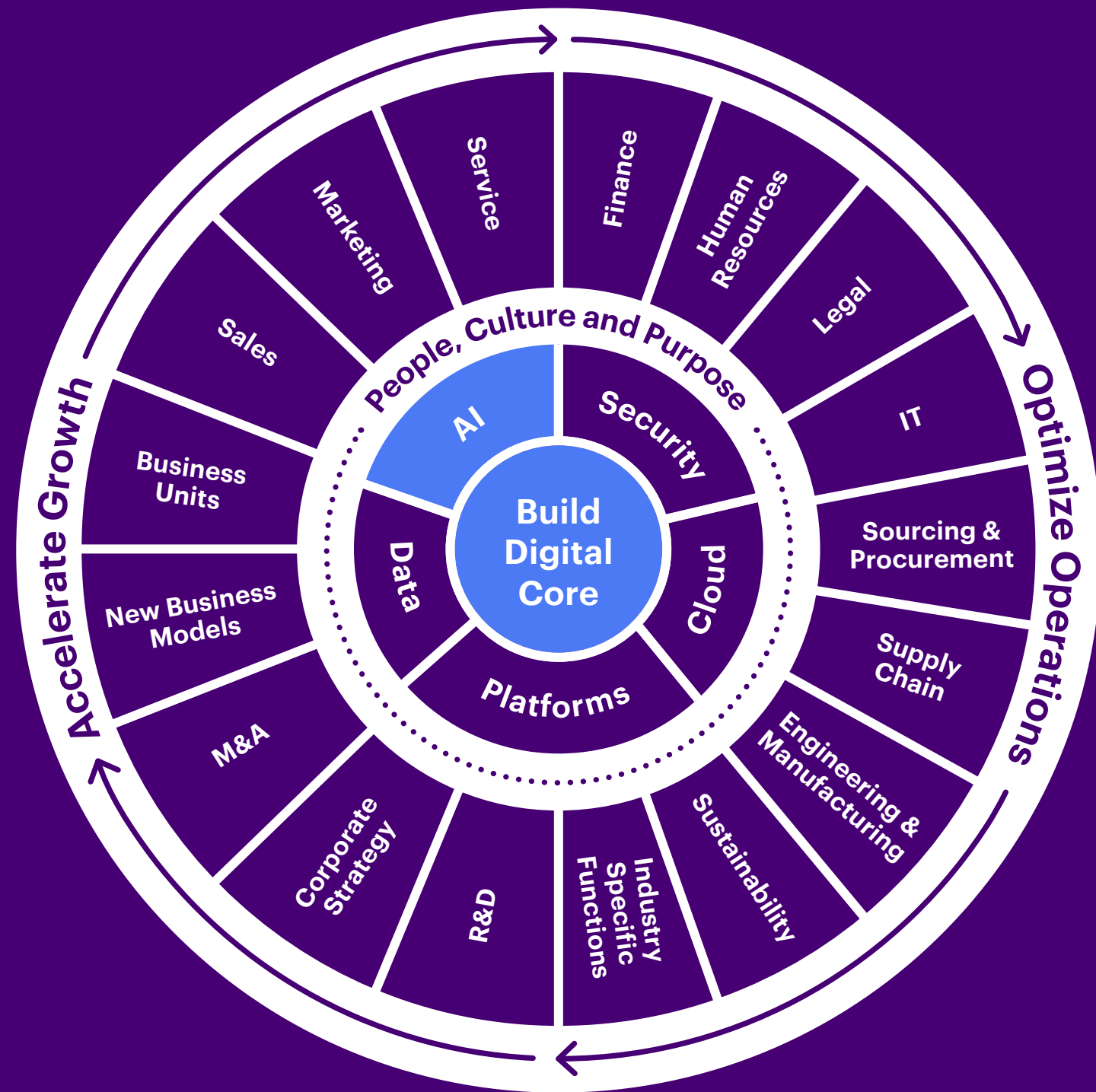
## Don't

Deprioritize data investments. Bad data is a competitive disadvantage and opens your business up to risk.

Make do with isolated analytics platforms and fragmented data ownership.

Support point-to-point integrations that create multiple versions of data, preventing everyone from collaborating over a single source of truth.

# AI



## Do

Embrace AI and the impact it can have on growth, competitive differentiation and operations.

Move toward an AI-based operating model.

Use your ecosystem to scale AI. Look for vendors and partners with mature capabilities.

Set targets to scale digitization, including adoption targets for customers and employees.

## Don't

Position AI as a side project, separated from core business strategy and enterprise reinvention.

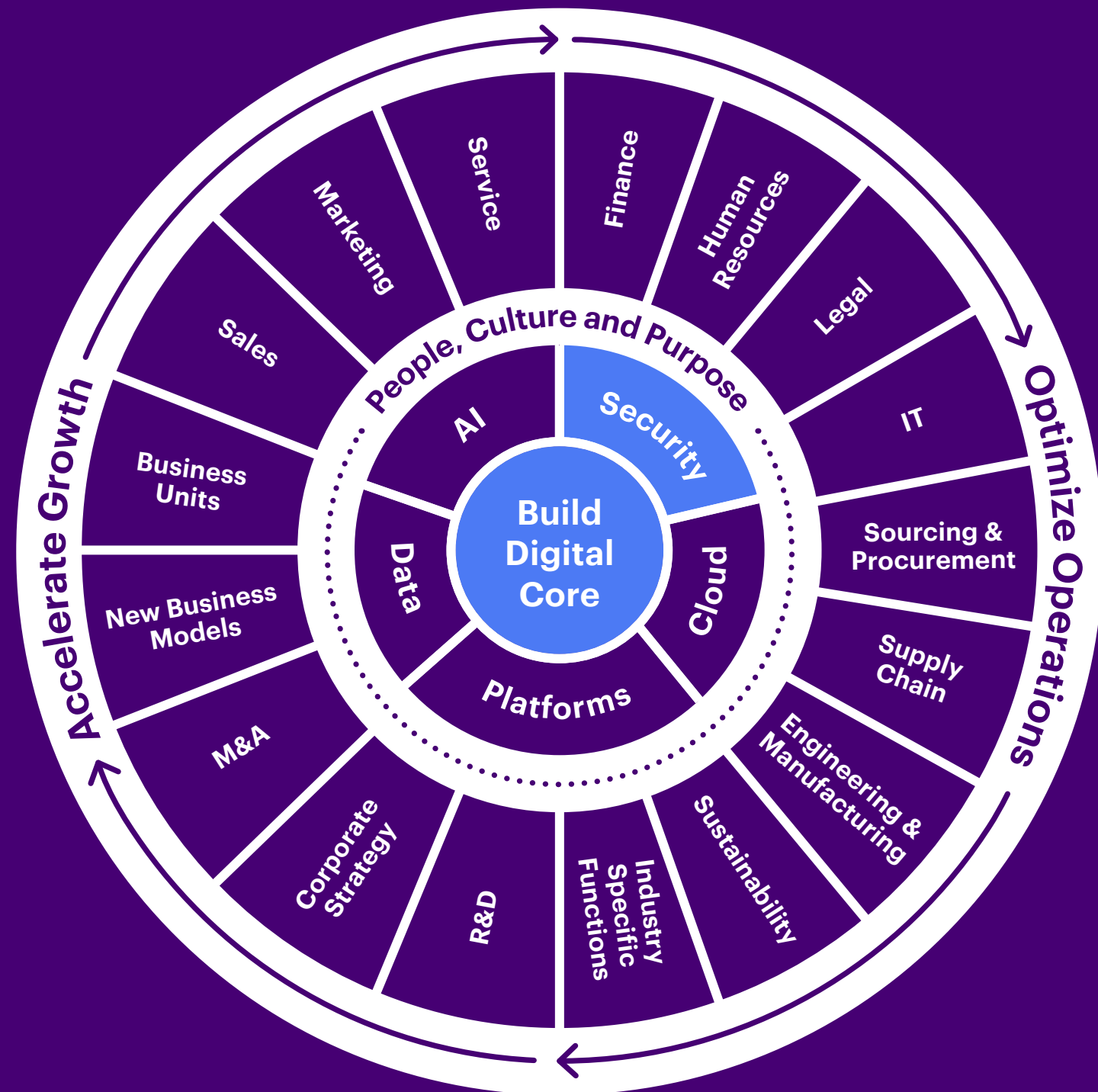
Allow AI silos to form in your organization—integrate it across the enterprise.

Try to go it alone.

Normalize experimentation (pilots, proofs of concept, etc.) that stops short of utilization. See implementation through to value.



# Security



## Do

Take an enterprise-wide approach to managing security and risk.

Anchor your strategy on a solid understanding of threats, including financial and non-financial implications.

Proactively assign and incent accountability across your organization.

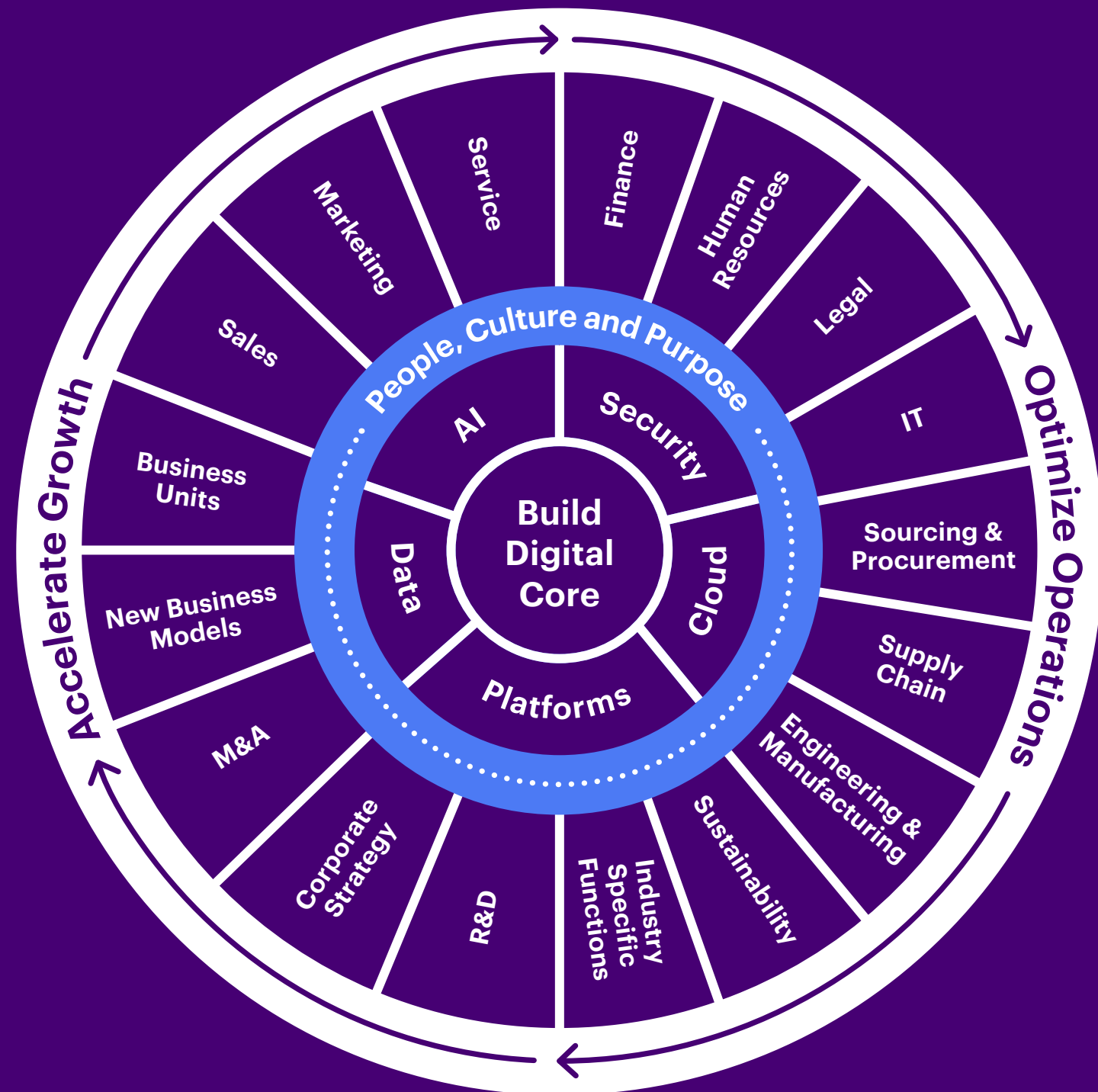
## Don't

Choose a siloed approach.

Treat security and risk management as costs—they are integral aspects of reinvention.

Make cyber-resilience the responsibility of a small, specialized team.

# People, culture and purpose



## Do

Collaborate to identify sources of value, complexity and hidden obstacles. Build relationships with internal and external stakeholders to maximize influence and impact.

Take the time to define the right ROI, mission, leadership and team for lasting, enterprise-wide success.

Encourage diversity of thought and a culture of psychological safety. All talent should feel comfortable raising ideas and taking risks. Create a culture that's open to new opportunities as they come.

Understand the new mindsets and behaviors you need to cultivate to execute your strategy.

## Don't

Allow value to remain trapped in business unit siloes.

Engage in "transformation theater"—the illusion of a commitment to change, without the behaviors needed to follow it through.

Limit the voices in the room or halt ideas in their tracks. Adopt a mindset of abundance so that "no" is not your first instinct.

Assume adoption will happen without strong communication and employee buy-in—make sure your people understand why you're reinventing.

## About the research

Accenture surveyed 100 CFOs from across Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States, between July and August of 2022. Participants were sourced from the following sectors: automotive; banking; capital markets; chemicals; communications and media; consumer goods and services; high tech; industrial equipment; insurance; mining and natural resources; oil and gas; retail; software and platforms; travel and hospitality; and utilities. Forty-two percent of survey respondents were from companies with over \$10 billion in revenues. Twenty-three percent of respondents were from companies between \$5 billion to \$9.9 billion in revenue. The remaining companies had over \$1 billion in revenue or greater.

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7. "CFO Decision-Making Survey," August 2022.
8. "[Looking Ahead to Your Next Fortune 500 CFO?](#)," Spenser Stuart, October 2020.
9. "[Make the leap, take the lead](#)," Accenture, April 2021.

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