

The background features a view of Earth from space, with a network of glowing blue and purple lines overlaid, representing a global digital network. The Accenture logo is in the top left corner.

accenture

A new legacy of payments growth

How banks can reinvent payments with a strong digital core

Banks can unlock a \$55 billion opportunity in payments

Embracing a reinvention strategy and investing to build a strong digital core can help banks gain market share—unlocking a \$55 billion opportunity—even amid the relentless rise of alternative payment providers.



About the research

Modernizing payments represents a major avenue for growth for banks. Our Payments Technology Reinvention survey covered 326 bank executives across 18 countries and the fieldwork was executed between July and August 2024. Our sample represented 51% of the global banking industry in terms of total assets. The survey aimed to uncover opportunities and challenges banks face on the path to payment modernization and reinvention.

Based on the survey results, Accenture identified 'leading banks'—the top 25% with the highest maturity across all seven components of a digital core. The results were further enriched with our proprietary payments revenue model, which estimates the size and growth of the global payments market (in revenue terms) across both consumer and commercial segments. We used the same model to calculate the operating profit opportunity, which was based on a cost-to-income ratio of 60% for banks. The opportunity presented is based on the average projected outcomes of leading banks, which may vary by individual bank, assuming all other factors are equal.

Our global payments revenue model leverages a combination of both bottom-up and top-down approaches, drawing on secondary data provided by GlobalData, the World Bank, the European Central Bank, Juniper Research and numerous external and internal expert interviews. The model includes forecasts extending to 2028.

Note: Consumer and domestic payments revenues in our model do include interest income and account fees.

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The payments world continues to evolve at speed. Consumers are abandoning checks and cash in favor of digital payments at a rapid rate, with digital wallet usage soaring from 56% in 2022¹ to 85% in 2024². Simultaneously, 55% of commercial clients are turning to fintech solutions³. This rapid adoption is fueled by the seamless payment solutions delivered by nimble, digital-first fintech and tech giants—forces reshaping the way the world transacts.

The issue: Most banks aren't adapting fast enough to compete. Historically, banks have prioritized modernizing the client-facing, retail side of their business over payments⁴. And last year, [our research](#) revealed a serious disconnect between what banks consider important for commercial customers and what those customers want in payment services. We found two out of five commercial customers turning to fintechs and bigtechs over banks for value-added services such as advanced customer insights, loyalty and rewards, biometric payments and automated invoicing⁵.

Moreover, competition is expanding from fintechs and bigtechs to a wide variety of new entrants. Nearly any business can now become a payments provider. Retailers, central banks and telecoms companies, among others, are leveraging their large customer bases, strong brands and advanced technology to launch payment services, expanding their reach and impact in the process. Think Amazon One (USA), PixPay (Brazil), UPI (India) and M-Pesa (Kenya). All vying for their share.

Banking leaders need to respond in kind, with bold, forward-looking payments strategies tied to their core banking vision. Doing so can help them protect their ground and expand their own market share, creating a new legacy of growth. The estimated opportunity: \$55 billion through innovative solutions and operational efficiency gains, according to our research.



Leading banks are already reaping the benefits of investing in their digital core, collectively capturing

\$14 billion.

To help banks navigate the path forward, we surveyed 326 bank executives across 18 countries, uncovering opportunities and strategies shaping payments modernization in today's complex market landscape. Our findings suggest four key actions: **moving from one-off investments to continuous modernizations; investing in strengthening the digital core for payments; tackling technical debt in payments; and leveraging generative AI to accelerate payments reinvention.**

Leading banks (25% of our study group that ranked highest in digital core maturity) are already reaping the benefits of investing in their digital core, collectively capturing \$14 billion from 2023 to 2025 as a result. And some are already accelerating new payment offerings—launching in months what would previously have taken years⁶.

Banking revenues are slowing from recent highs due to global economic shifts and interest rate cuts⁷—prompting efforts to streamline costs and expand product portfolios. The time is ripe to take advantage of the opportunity in payments. In the rest of this report, we'll examine each action in turn.

What do we mean by reinvention and a digital core?

Reinvention is a deliberate strategy that aims to set a new performance frontier for companies—and in many cases, the industries they operate in.

A **digital core** is the critical technology capability that can create and empower an organization's unique reinvention ambition⁸.



Navigate a path to payments reinvention

To help banks create a new legacy of growth, we analyzed how leading banks shape their payments modernization strategy and technology investments, seeking the best paths forward. Our findings suggest that four key actions can open up a world of potential growth and profit:

01

Move from one-off investments to continuous modernization

Moving from one-off investments to a long-term, company-wide strategy that opens the door to incremental innovation and new payment offerings.

02

Invest in strengthening the digital core for payments

Leading banks benefit from a more advanced digital core. It allows them to deploy new payment features based on demand and quickly react to product feedback and regulatory changes.

03

Tackle technical debt in payments

Prioritizing investments in payments areas burdened by the highest levels of tech debt ensures alignment with future growth strategies.

04

Leverage generative AI to accelerate payments reinvention

Using generative AI to automate tasks, improve operational efficiency, enable hyper-personalized payment experiences, uncover new revenue streams and strengthen fraud detection.



Move from one-off investments to continuous modernization

The first critical step toward payment reinvention is shifting from reactive, tactical, “one-off” investments driven by regulatory and business demands to a proactive, long-term, company-wide approach.





57%

of leading banks leverage regulatory investments to create new business offerings. Only 38% of other banks do this.

A banks' payment modernization strategy should have a clear purpose: delivering payment solutions that exceed client expectations and building lasting relationships. It engages all stakeholders across the organization through a focused, long-term transformation roadmap that prioritizes agility and innovation.

Organizations embracing a strategy of reinvention outperform the market both financially and non-financially⁹. Their executives are focused on success over the long term. Among the banks we analyzed,

51% of leading banks opted for a long-term, incremental approach to payments modernization, compared to just 37% of other banks taking this approach. The majority (63%) of other banks take a one-off, specific purpose investment approach to modernization, primarily to meet regulatory requirements, with occasional investments aimed at select enhancements in payment technology. These "break-fix" investments make it difficult to prioritize longer-term tech investments and restrict broader modernization across the tech stack.

Leading banks also emphasize long-term growth with a client-oriented approach, while others tend to be more reactive, often prioritizing compliance over client-focused innovation. And even when their investments reflect the need to meet regulatory requirements, 57% of leading banks are also leveraging those investments to create new business offerings. By comparison, 38% of other banks do this. For leading banks, the focus is on technology investments to develop new products, while other banks are driven by regulatory requirements, clearly highlighting a difference in strategy.



Case study

Nationwide races into the payments future

Nationwide Building Society (Nationwide) offers an example how investing in a future-ready technology environment drives growth. Its leaders recognized the rapid shift among customers toward cashless payments but were struggling to scale the bank's operations to meet this demand, especially with payment volumes projected to grow by 20% annually¹⁰. The solution was modernizing their payments infrastructure with a cloud-native platform, specifically Form3's account-to-account platform, hosted on AWS, to align with ISO 20022 standards.

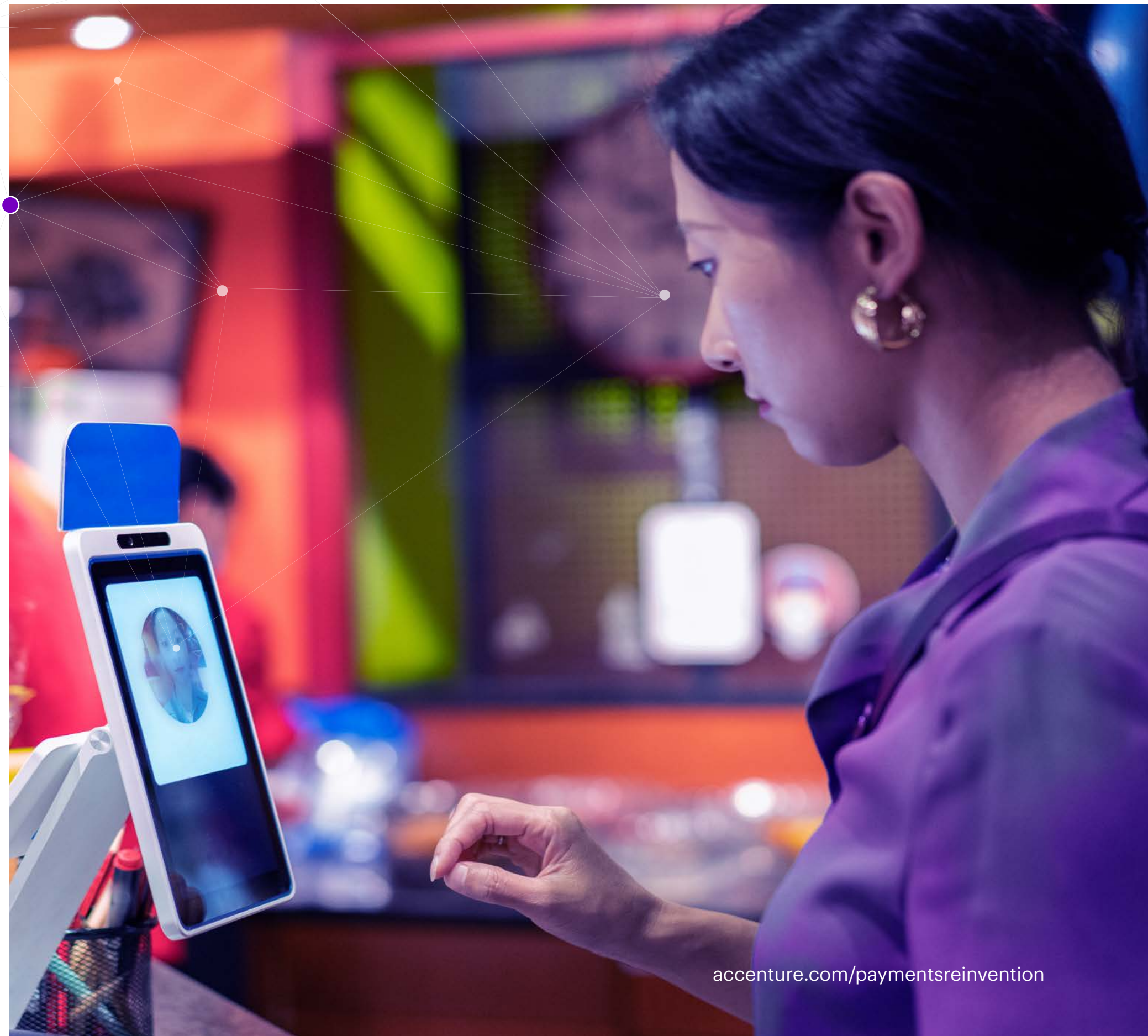
Nationwide completed its first cloud-based payment integration with Faster Payments and Form3 in just five months. The bank is now migrating its inbound immediate payments to the Form3 cloud, ensuring service continuity and regulatory compliance.

With a forward-looking approach, Nationwide could replace its outdated, complex payments infrastructure with a cloud-native, real-time account-to-account platform. The Form3 solution simplified payment management by automatically handling infrastructure updates, scheme rule changes and regulatory compliance—all of which are embedded into the platform.



Invest in strengthening the digital core for payments

Groundbreaking technologies, such as generative AI, will put payment businesses on the path to reinvention. Most of the banks we surveyed (86%) cite technology as the primary driver of their payments reinvention strategy. The key to success, however, is not only adopting new technologies, but also building a digital core to support them—one that meets current technological demands and ensures an infrastructure that's ready to support future technologies as well.



A digital core enables organizations to outpace the competition by leveraging the right mix of cloud infrastructure for agility and innovation, data and AI for differentiation, applications and platforms to drive growth and next-gen experiences alongside optimized operations—all with security by design at every level.

Indeed, banks that have more mature digital cores outperform others in the payments space with their superior agility and innovation. For example, in the digital platforms pillar, 75% of leading banks rapidly respond to market demand with new payment features and make swift adjustments based on product and service feedback. Only 20% of other banks have achieved that level of agility. Meanwhile, 80% of the executives of leading banks in our study agree that their payments applications enable seamless innovation, while just 26% of the rest also agreed.

Here's why. Consider the key components that form a digital core: digital platforms, the data and AI backbone and the digital foundation. From a payments perspective, all three components contribute uniquely—and powerfully—to payment innovation and execution (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The three groups of distinct but constantly interacting technologies that comprise the digital core, each contributing to payments innovation and execution.

Digital platforms

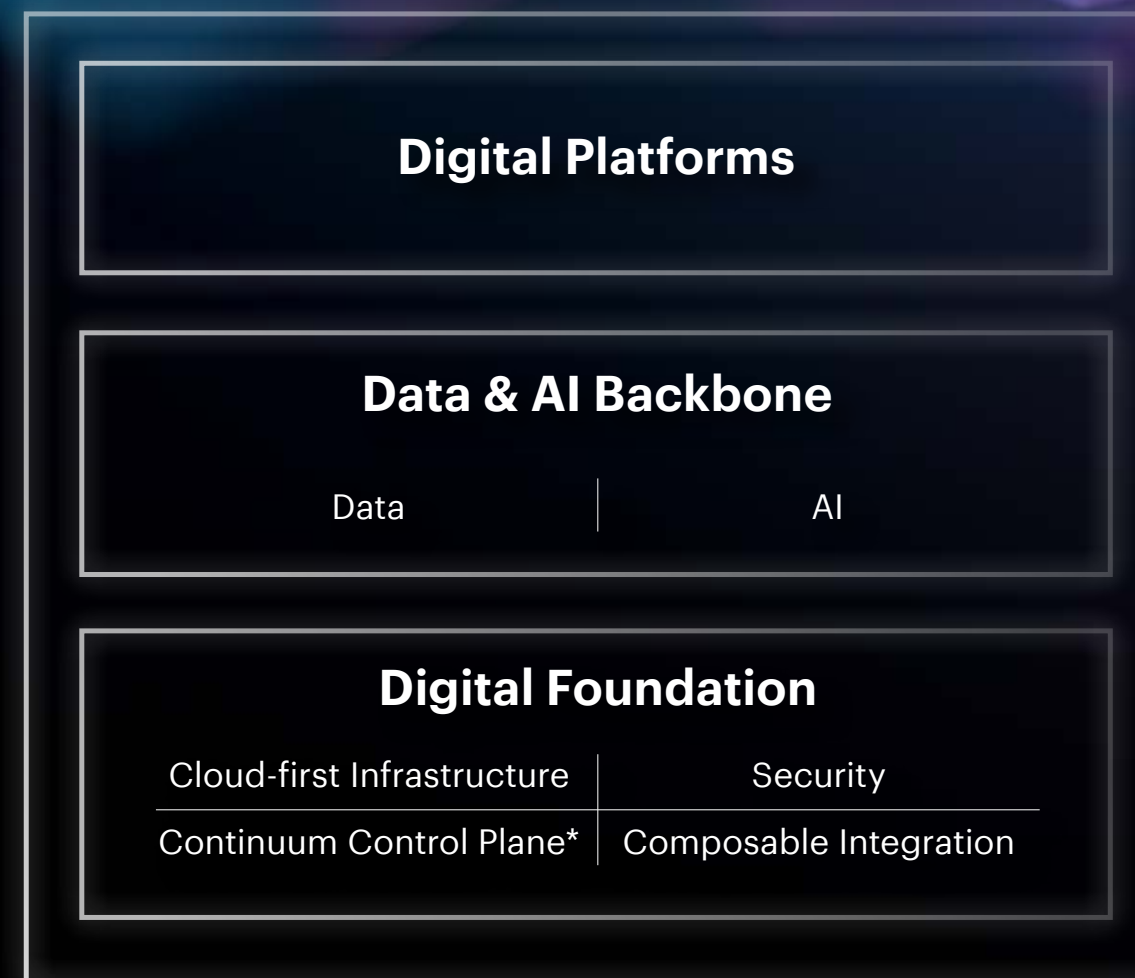
Payments applications and platforms that facilitate the flow of funds between parties, including domestic current account payments, international payments, merchant services, card payments and more.

Data and AI backbone

Powers efficient, personalized payments products and services, enabling cross-sell and upsell opportunities across client and ecosystem environments.

Digital foundation

A strong digital foundation is essential for securely running a bank's payments function and ensuring seamless integration across a multi-vendor ecosystem. Beyond composable integration and a cloud-first infrastructure, it includes a *Payments Control Tower (derived from a Continuum Control Plane) that provides real-time visibility into the performance of the payments application stack.



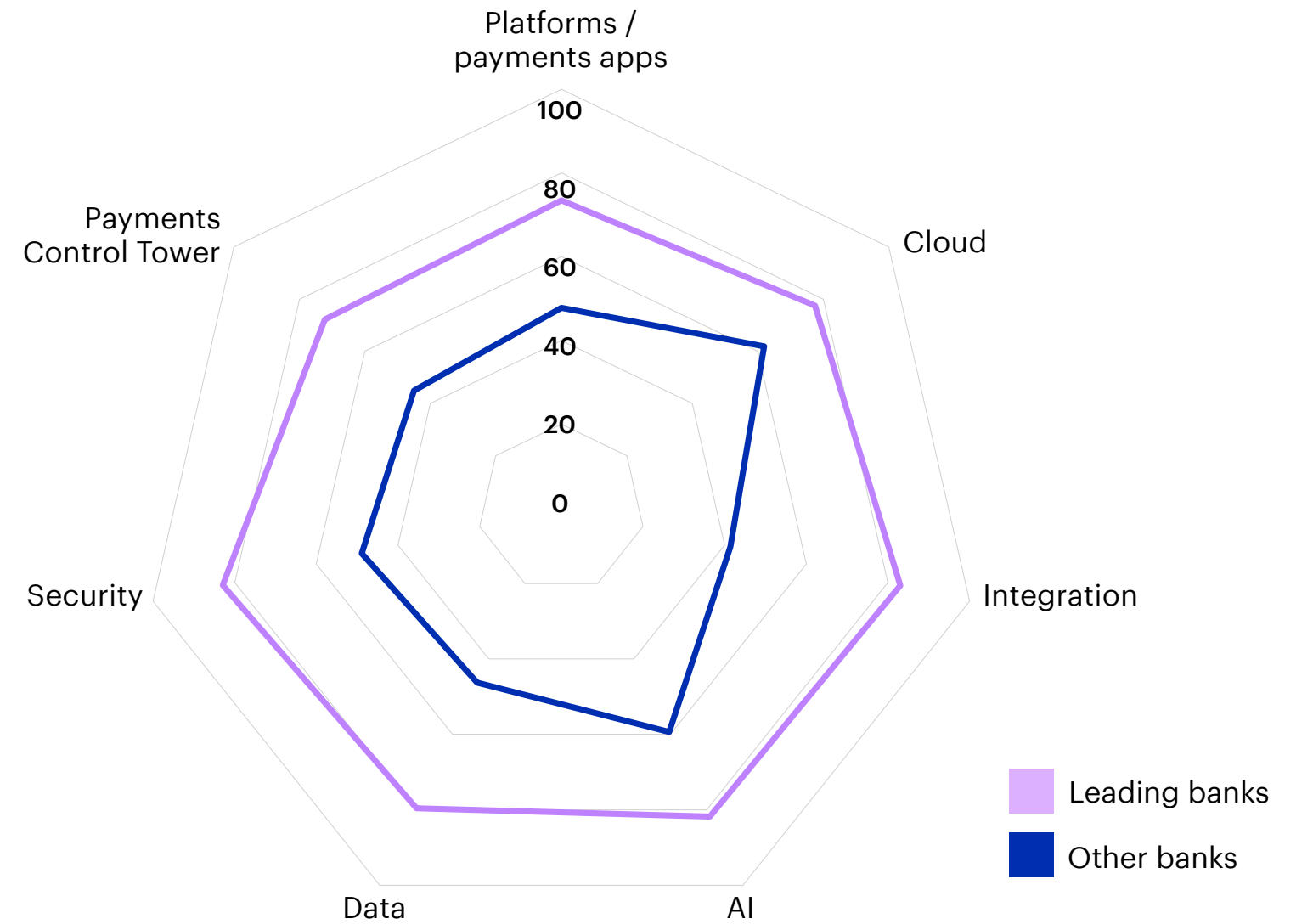
Leading banks are much stronger in the integration pillar compared to other banks.

68%

of leading banks' systems are fully interoperable. Only 8% of other banks have achieved this level of interoperability.

Most banks invest in a few select areas, such as cloud and AI. These banks still have outdated integration layers which limit their ability to adopt new technologies and meet evolving business demands. Leading banks, however, focus on building all components of a digital core equally, resulting in the development of industry-leading infrastructure. Their strengths stand out in particular on application integration (see Figure 2). In fact, 68% of leaders' systems are fully interoperable, minimizing redundancy, streamlining the application landscape, improving operational efficiency and reducing costs. Only 8% of other banks have achieved this level of interoperability.

Figure 2: Digital core maturity of leading banks versus other banks.



Source: Accenture Payments Technology Reinvention Study, 2024

A new legacy of payments growth

On intelligent integration practices, 85% of leading banks use AI, automation and dynamic orchestration for their payments applications, something only 18% of other banks do. We do, however, see increasing numbers of banks beginning the journey to consolidate their application programming interfaces (APIs) to streamline client interactions, aiming for a single payment API. This unified approach enables a full payment stack to connect seamlessly with modern digital channels through direct client connections. These platforms feature smart routing capabilities based on payment parameters like local instant, overnight, scheduled and international payments. They also provide end-to-end visibility into the payment journey across complex send-receive value chains. In commercial banking, these platforms are accessible to users such as treasurers, finance teams and accounts payable or receivable departments through either the bank's platform or the organization's enterprise resource planning or operating systems.

As Figure 2 shows, leading banks also hold a significant edge in other areas as well, including digital platforms, payments data and the payments control tower.

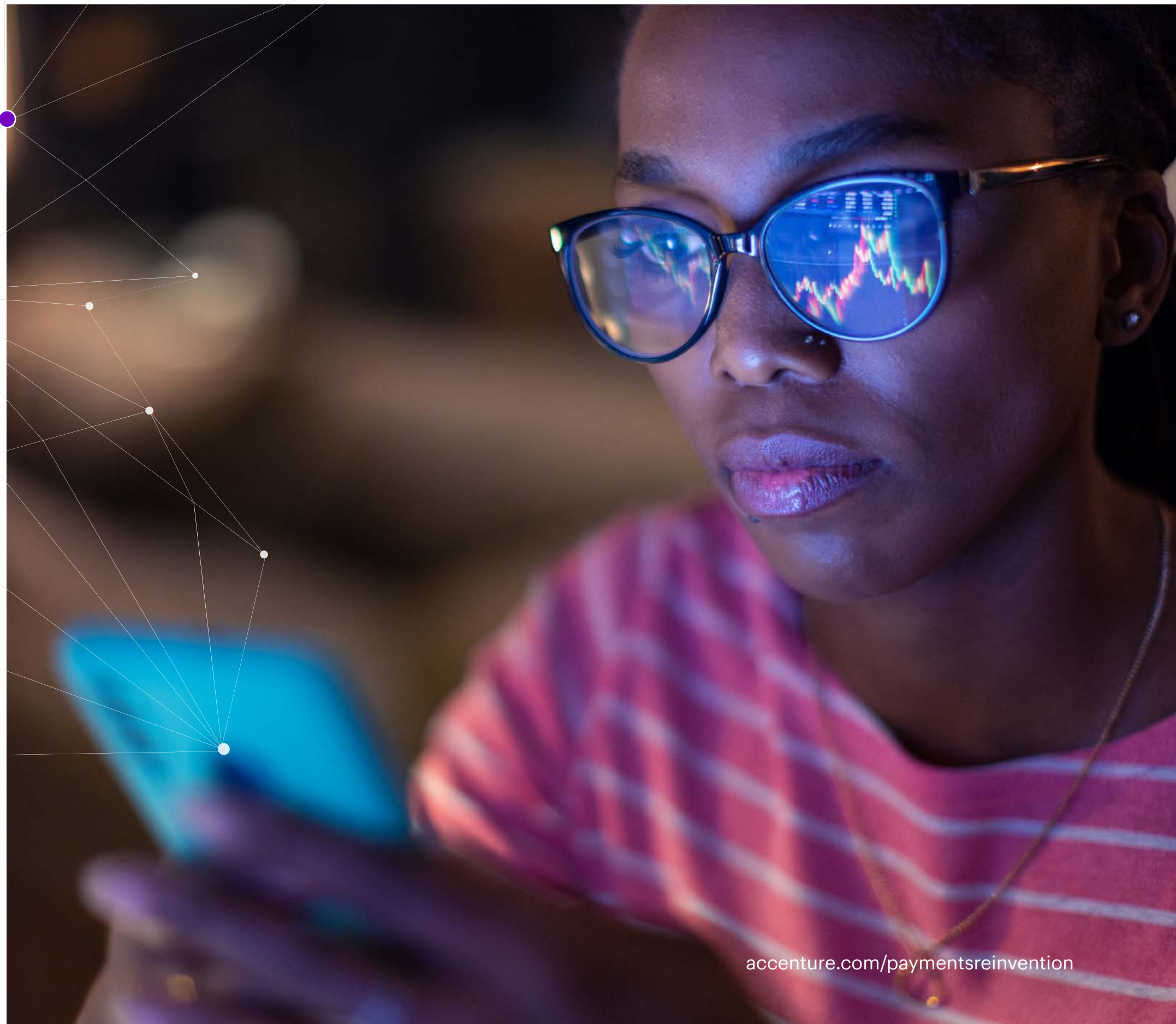
85%
of leading banks use AI, automation and dynamic orchestration for their payment applications. Only 18% of other banks do the same.

Digital platforms: Payments platform and applications	Payments data	Payments control tower
A significant majority (63%) of leading banks have fully standardized their applications across all locations, compared to 34% of other banks.	A large majority (74%) of leading banks have created a data mesh architecture to enable more decentralized data ownership and control, and they can manage their metadata across systems/clouds/partners. Only 22% of other banks have achieved this level of mesh architecture.	Investments in the payments control tower have enabled 43% of leading banks to optimize risk controls with less than 10% being manual. In comparison, only 9% of other banks have achieved this.
Leaders have a lower failure rate, with 52% reporting no major outages of key payment applications. Only 23% of the other banks have reached this level of application stability.	Data ownership is decentralized at 56% of leading banks, compared to 16% of other banks.	More than half (52%) of leading banks have almost full visibility of all their payments applications through their payments control tower, something only 13% of other banks have achieved.



Tackle technical debt in payments

More than half of the banks we surveyed (59%) face challenges with legacy payments systems and infrastructure, hindering their ability to deliver next-generation solutions.



Reduced to its essentials, tech debt is the cost—both financial and operational—required to keep a company’s IT systems up-to-date and aligned with business needs¹¹.

It can stem from a variety of sources, including legacy and buggy code, outdated programming languages, insufficient documentation and obsolete technologies and infrastructure. And it can severely impact operational efficiency and drive costs up, especially where debt is already high and maintenance is expensive.

In the payments technology stack, the application integration layer has the highest levels of tech debt, we found, affecting more than half of the banks in our study (see Figure 3). Core payments platforms follow closely, with 44% of our respondents identifying them as an area of concern.

Within payments applications, consumer and commercial domestic payments, followed by cross-border payments, are the key areas burdened by technical debt (see Figure 3). In more detail:

- **Consumer and commercial payments platforms** are deeply integrated into the bank’s core systems and have a material impact on critical areas such as customer data, compliance and security—all of which have evolved significantly in recent years. Investments in technology driven by regulatory requirements—such as ISO 20022, PSD 2/3 and GDPR—along with real-time payments and fraud management, have significantly contributed to tech debt.

- **Cross-border and international payments** are complex, requiring 30 to 40 apps to support the workflow. This area faces heavy regulatory and compliance scrutiny, hindering the strategic investment needed to balance out technical debt. Many banks rely on commercial software—much of which is outdated or approaching obsolescence—but upgrade schedules are often delayed due to regulatory priorities.
- **Cash management and trade finance** exhibit lower levels of technical debt to date, as these offerings have not yet undergone extensive modernization and remain less complex. However, these areas are ripe for technology modernization because of their high level of manual processes.

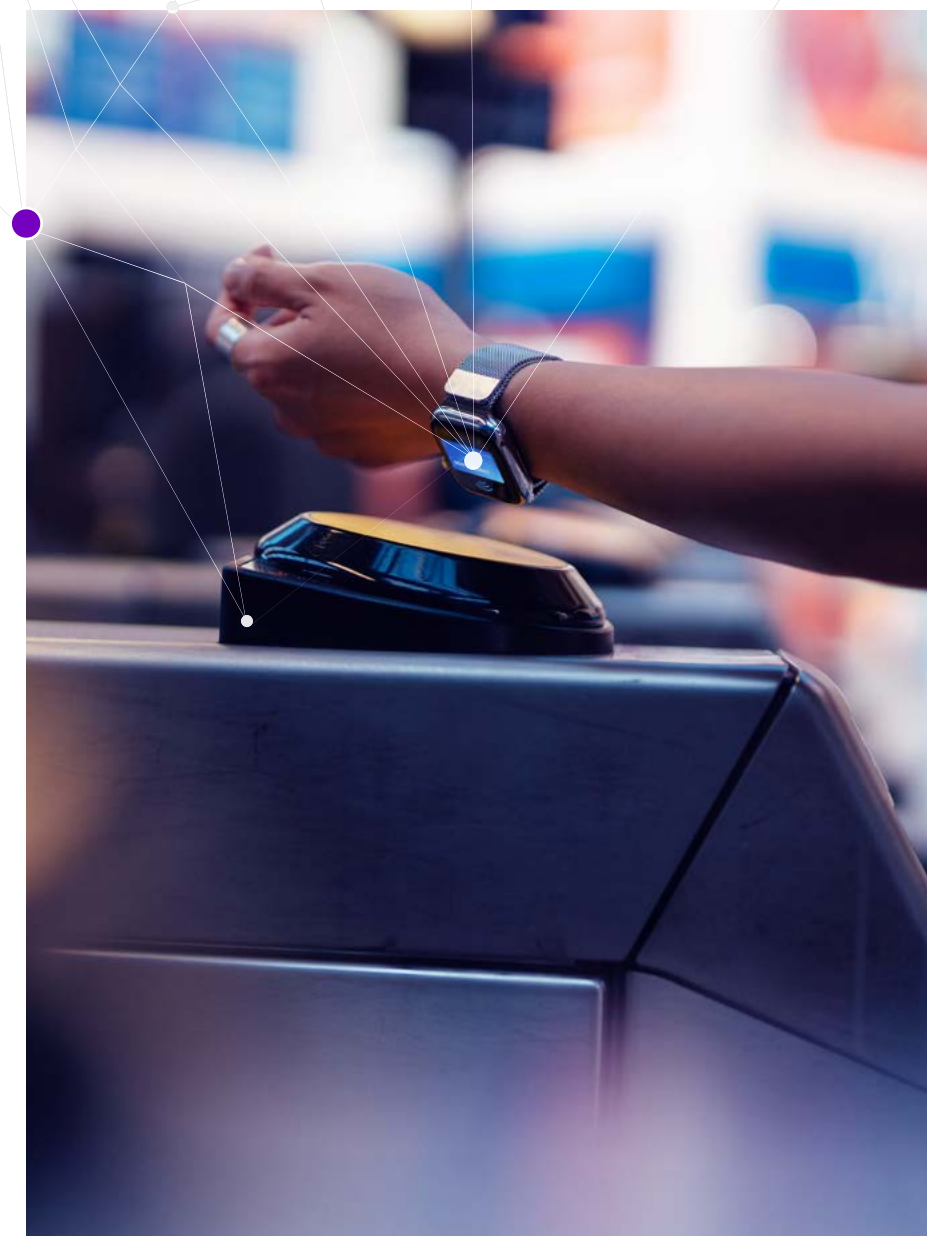
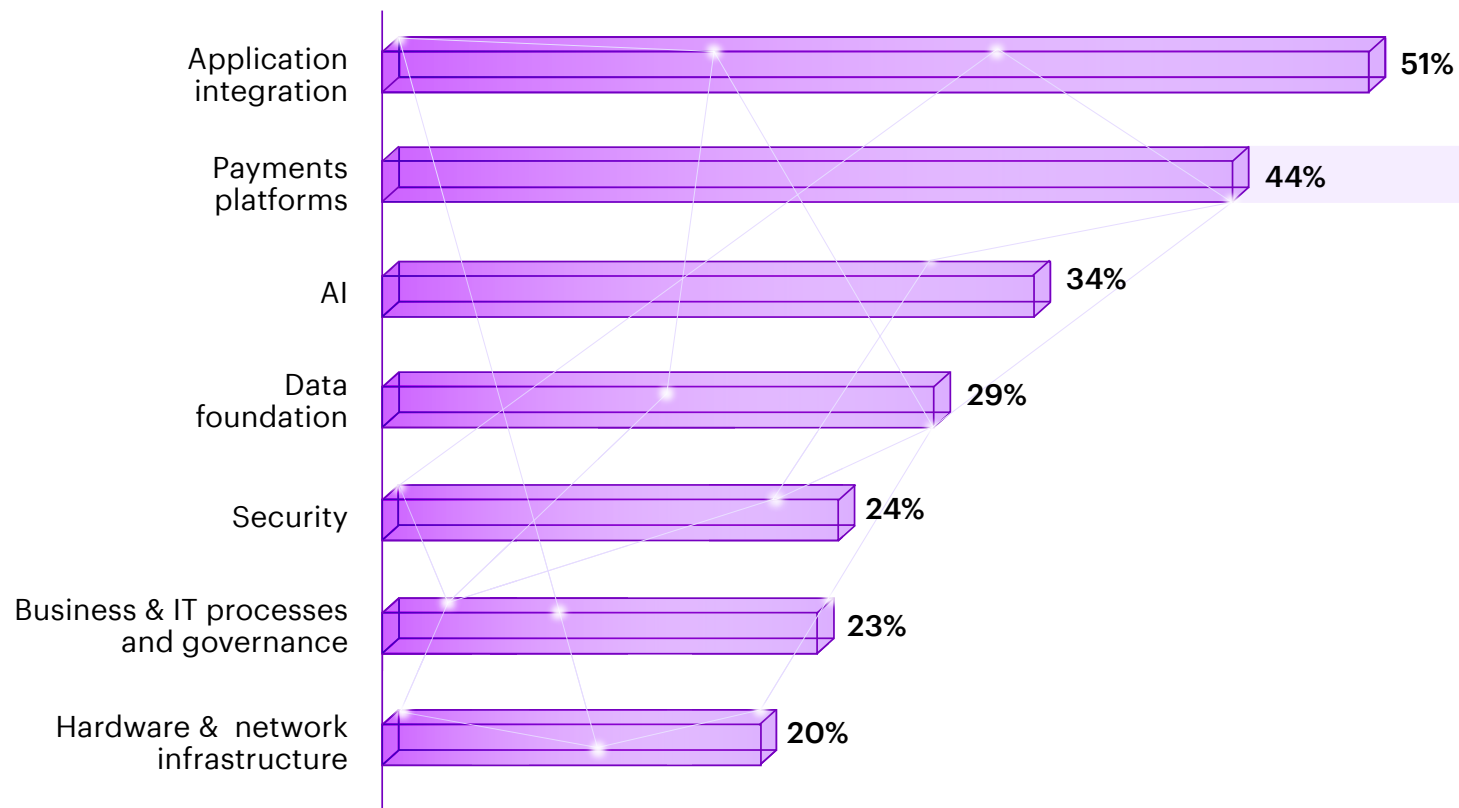
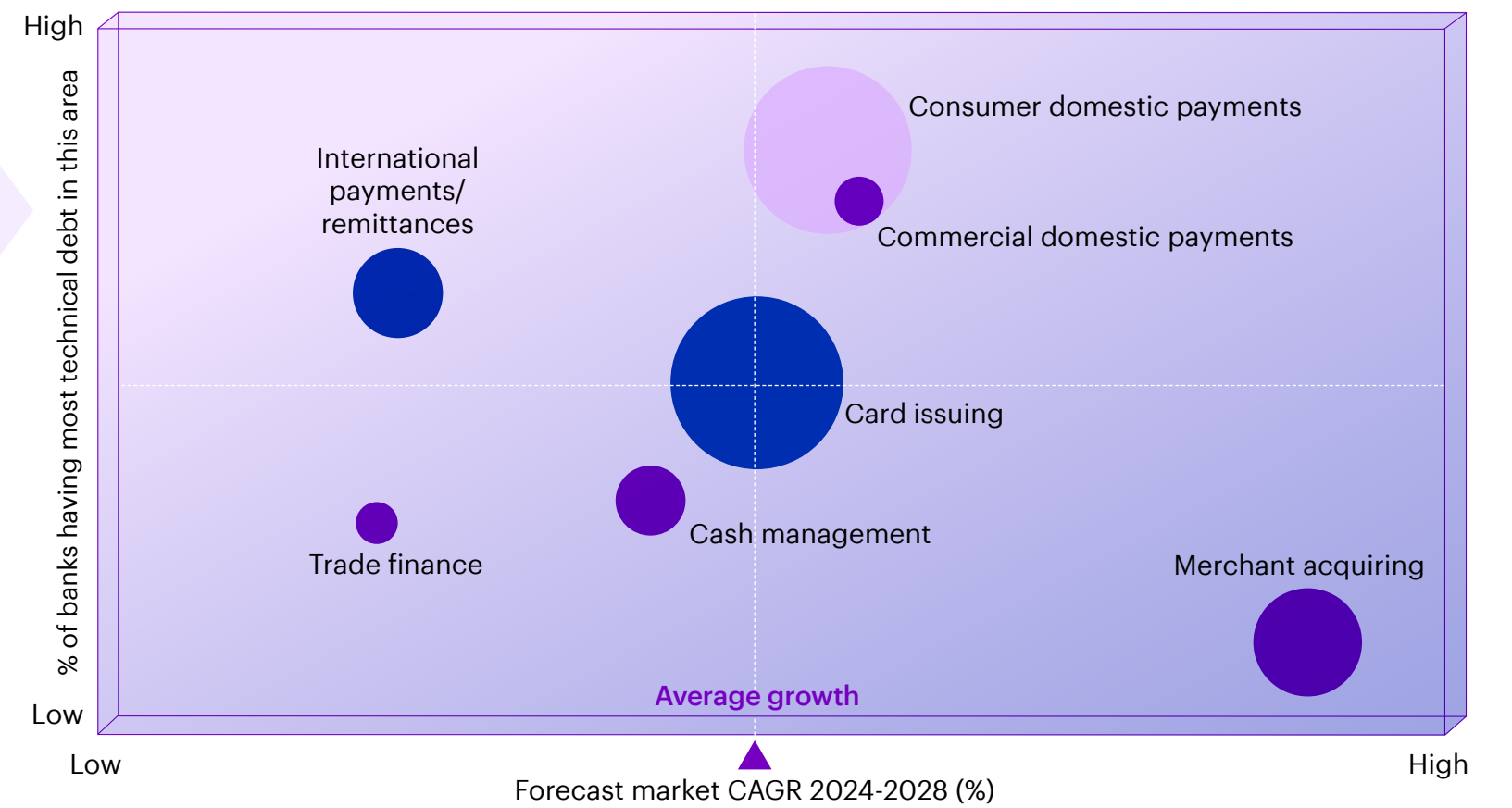


Figure 3: Areas of highest technical debt in the payments core.

Percentage of banks that ranked each area of payments tech stack as having the most technical debt



Level of technical debt in each area of payments



■ Consumer
 ■ Commercial
 ■ Consumer and Commercial

Circle size: Payments revenue

Source: Accenture Payments Technology Reinvention Study, 2024



Maintaining a certain level of tech debt can be beneficial for the balance sheet. The key word, however, is balance. Allocating 15% of the IT budget toward tech debt remediation yields the greatest returns on investments, [our research](#) has found¹¹. This approach balances debt reduction with a focus on future strategic innovations.

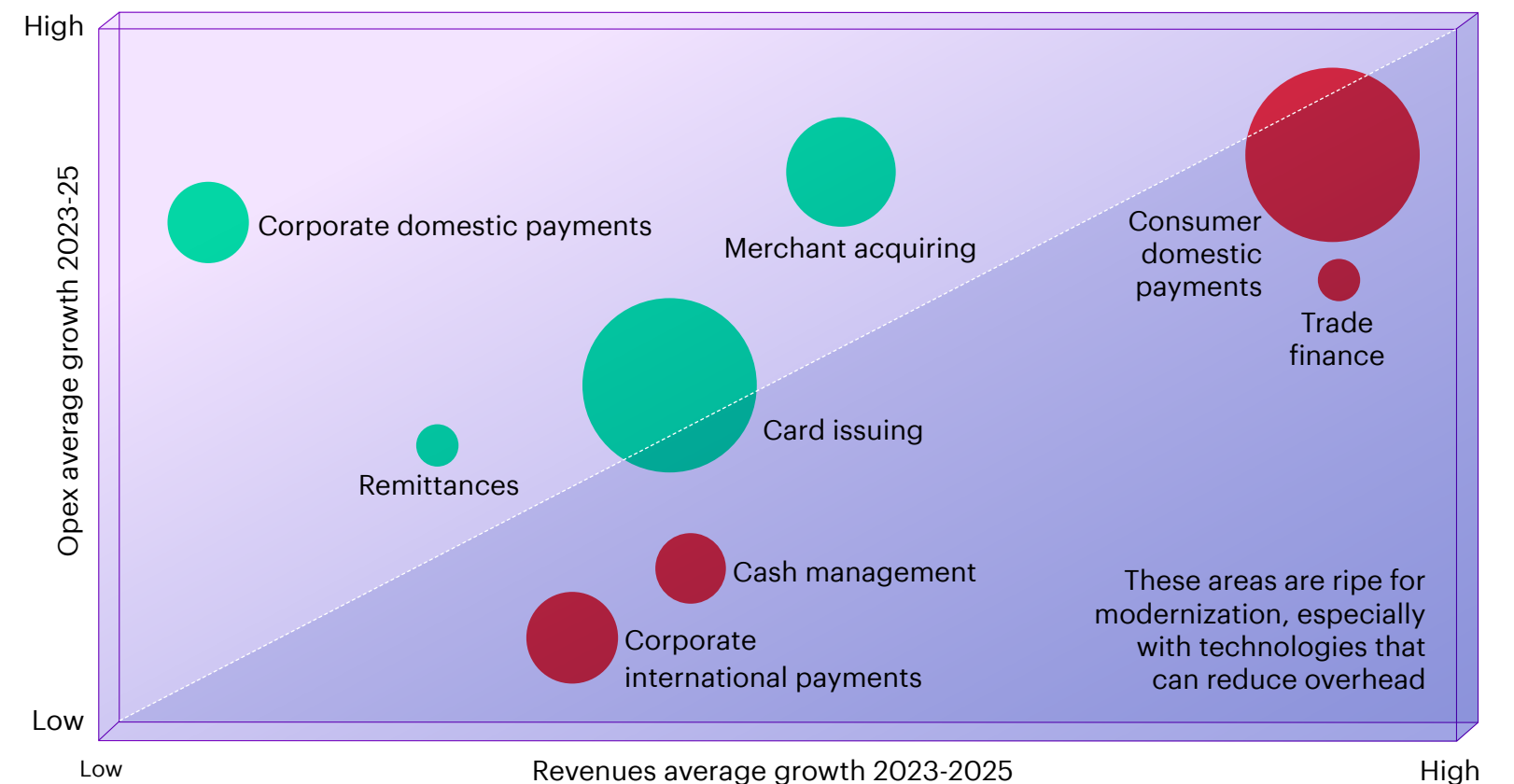
And as we found, banks plan to increase overall IT spending for payments by 6% in 2025, with leading banks taking a more aggressive approach, raising their budget by 7%. Critically, leading banks are also focusing more on business enablement, innovation and problem-solving over tactical tasks such as legacy system maintenance. On average, these banks dedicate 200 additional hours per IT employee annually—equivalent to five

weeks—toward innovation and business enablement initiatives compared to other banks.

Technical debt can also impact operational efficiency and drive up costs, especially in high debt areas that are expensive to maintain. Even areas with lower levels of tech debt may face inefficiencies when operating expenses (Opex) grow faster than revenue, pressurizing profitability.

Looking ahead, our analysis of operational efficiency across key payment areas reveals that banks expect lower growth in consumer domestic payments, corporate international payments, cash management and trade finance compared to their expected revenue growth (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Banks' expectation of revenue and operating expense (Opex) growth from 2023 to 2025

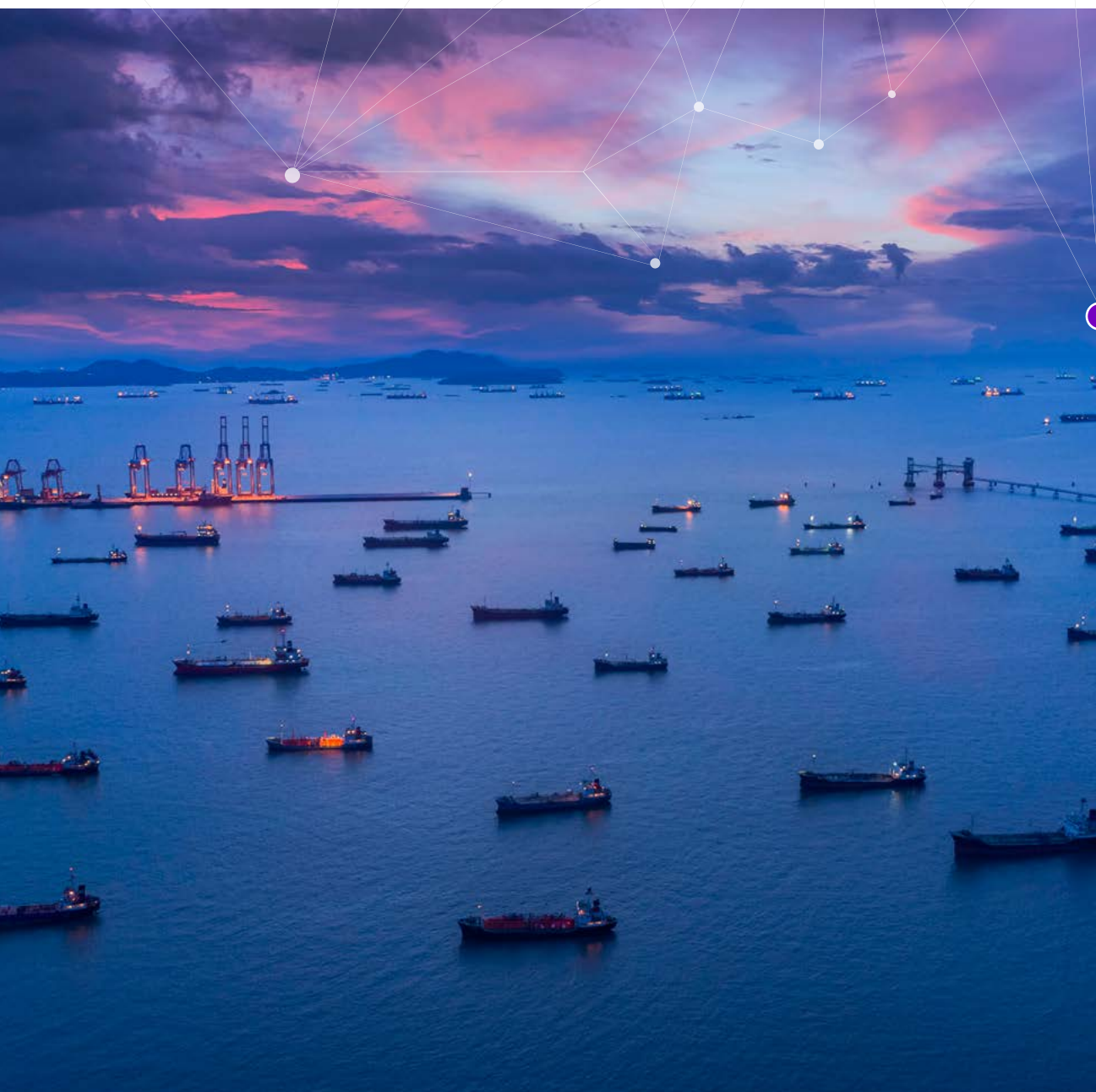


- Positive Opex ratio**
Operating expenses are likely to grow at a lower rate compared to expected revenue growth
- Negative Opex ratio**
Operating expenses are likely to grow at a higher rate compared to expected revenue growth

Circle size: Payments revenue

Source: Accenture Payments Technology Reinvention Study, 2024





The reasons for cost inefficiencies vary based on payment area:

- **Consumer domestic payments:**
Outdated technology and evolving consumer preferences are key cost drivers, adding complexity and contributing to tech debt in existing systems.
- **Corporate international payments:**
Existing infrastructure often can't be repurposed, necessitating separate payments software, application customization or even the implementation of a new payments hub. Adopting real-time payments requires significant capital investment.

- **Cash management and trade finance:**
These areas rely on manual, paper-based processes such as letters of credit and bills of lading, which are costly to operate. Technologies including AI and machine learning can help automate these processes to reduce operational costs.

Data generated from payment transactions is also a significant source of tech debt for one-third of banks surveyed. Several banks in our study reported that they're struggling in particular with their data architecture, which could lead to increased tech debt in their future.

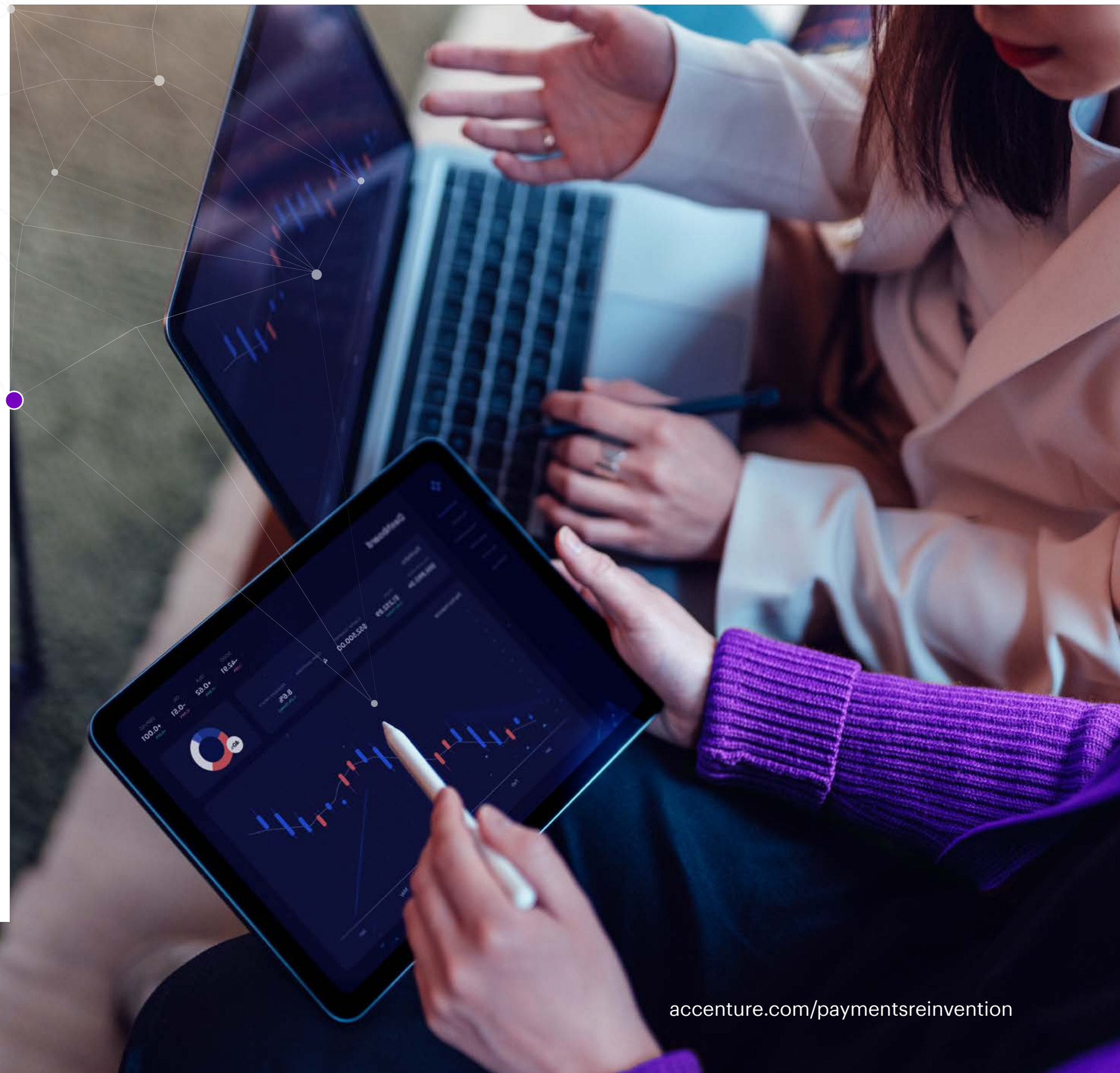


Case study

DBS invests to reduce unnecessary tech debt

Leading banks are investing heavily in data and AI to build a strong digital core that is reinvention ready. Singapore-based DBS offers an example. Like many of its peers, DBS has a highly complex data landscape. It includes a mix of on-premises, hybrid and multiple cloud providers, various platforms (both open source and commercial) and a wide range of old and new technologies. Additionally, it needs to manage country-specific regulations across its markets.

DBS has created hundreds of data use cases to drive business value, such as fraud detection, customer insights for cross-selling and upselling and personalized banking guidance. This drove the bank towards a mesh data architecture and to manage the complexity and costs, DBS leveraged Unravel—an AI-driven data observability and actionability platform. This helped identify inefficiencies across tens of thousands of data jobs, reducing unnecessary tech debt, improving operational efficiencies and leading to significant savings¹².



Leverage generative AI to accelerate payments reinvention

Generative AI can help modernize payments businesses in a host of ways. Automation may be the first that comes to mind, but banks can deploy this technology to great effect in the areas of fraud detection, hyper-personalization of payment experiences and more.



What's important when leveraging generative AI is keeping the bigger picture in mind throughout, mapping the ways individual improvements might affect each other, and considering how cultivating those connections could advance the business overall.

More than half (60%) of banks face challenges with essential technology skills in their payments business, impacting their outcomes. Generative AI can bridge this gap by optimizing workforce capacity and resources—by automating repetitive manual tasks and enhancing human efforts through augmentation. Leading banks have already automated 40% of manual tasks and augmented 39% of human tasks in payments (see Figure 5).

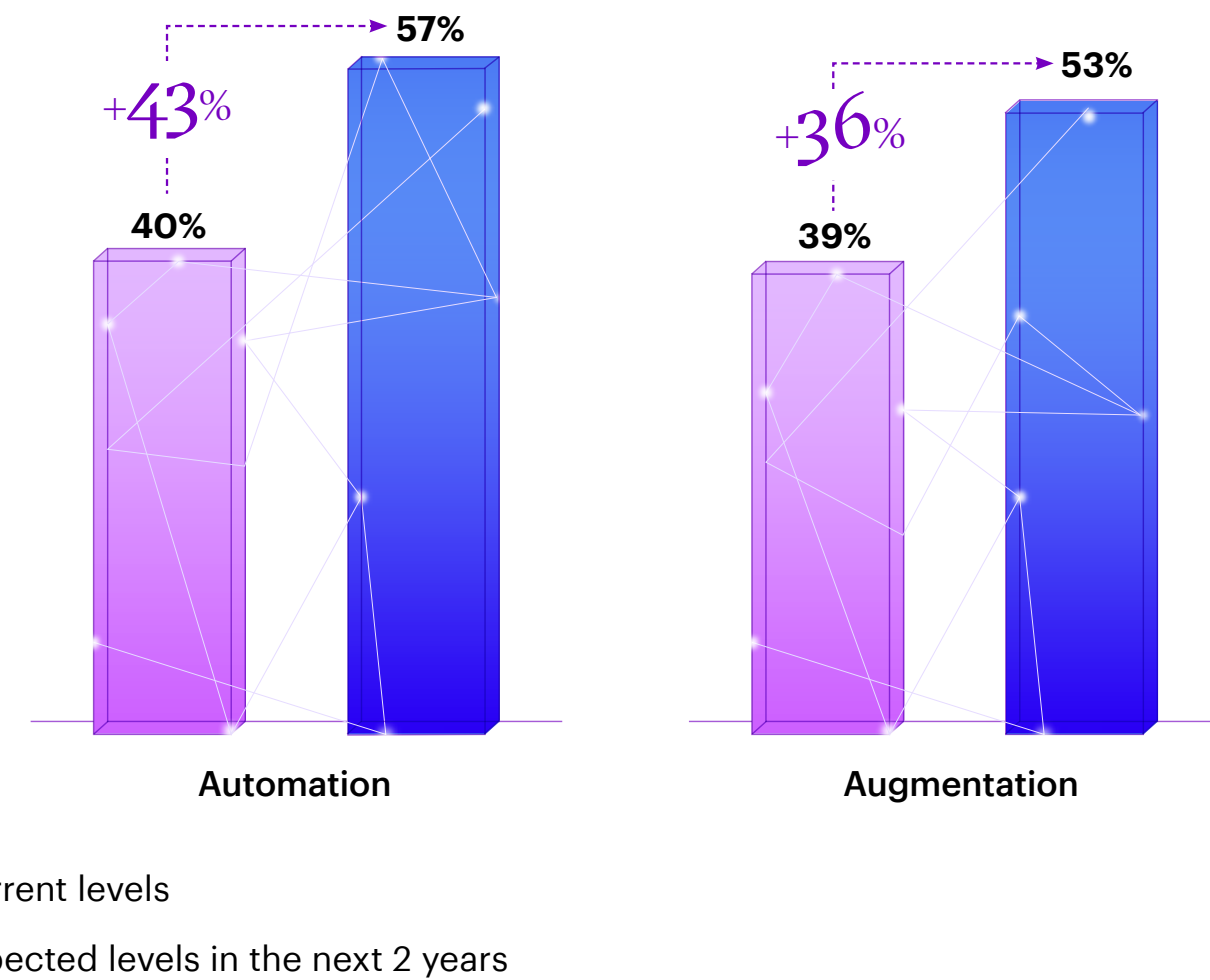
Importantly, those improvements feed into the bigger picture and bank executives should be asking how each improvement can help create a more powerful whole. They should also be prioritizing their investments

in kind. Leading banks do this; they strategically invest in generative AI more than others, focusing first on prioritizing key payment areas such as consumer domestic payments, commercial domestic payments and international commercial payments (see Figure 6).

Their top use cases? Securing payment data (60%) enhancing fraud detection (57%), creating more authentic and engaging customer experiences (54%) and delivering personalized payment experiences (41%).

Industry leaders are also using generative AI to speed up engineering tasks within the payment technology division, with 42% of leading banks using it to reengineer legacy systems and fast-track transformation efforts. For example, one bank initially projected a three-year timeline to modernize its payment system, but now anticipates completing the project in just three months thanks to generative AI.

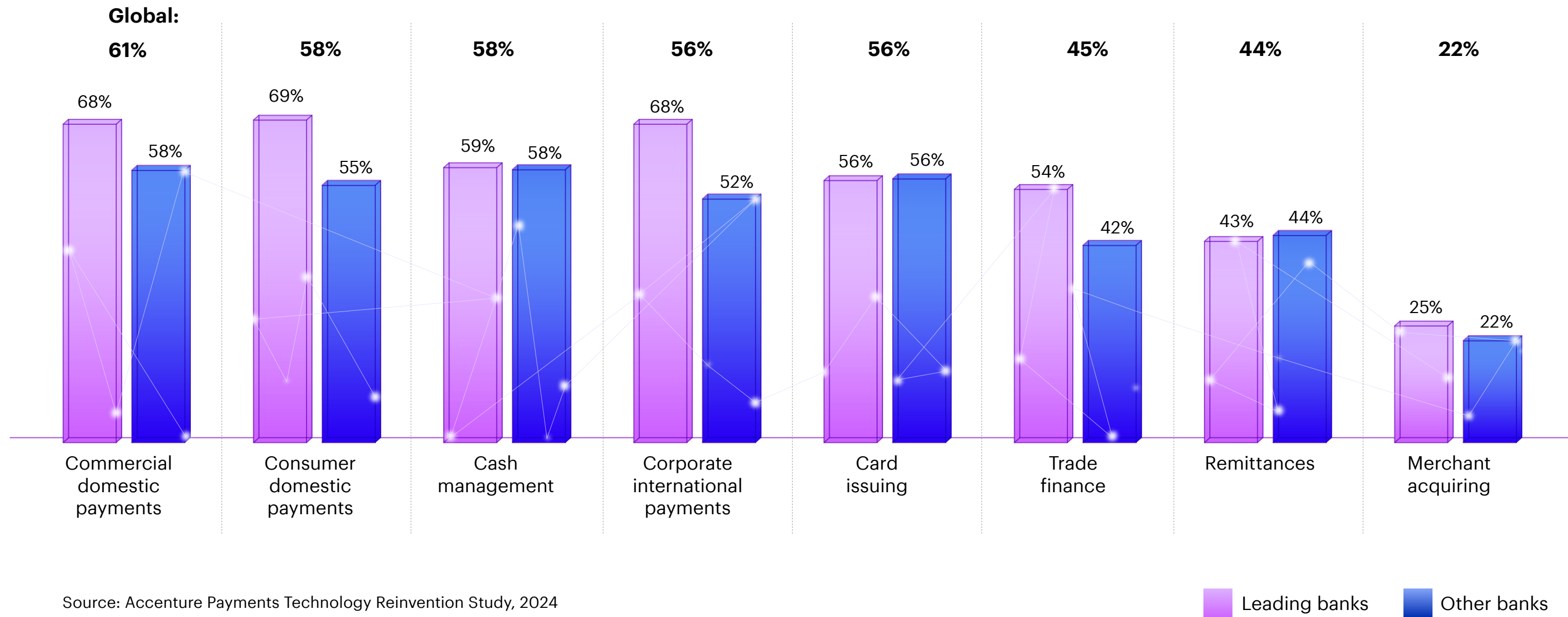
Figure 5: Current and expected level of automation and augmentation among leading banks.



Source: Accenture Payments Technology Reinvention Study, 2024



Figure 6: Percentage of banks planning to use generative AI to reinvent operations across payment areas.



Source: Accenture Payments Technology Reinvention Study, 2024



Case study

VeloBank's AI-Driven Transformation

VeloBank in Poland had a bold vision to become an industry leading digital powered bank. This required a strategy where technology became central to all aspects of the bank.

VeloBank made a conscious decision to double down investments in generative AI to drive efficiency. Their strategy includes a portfolio of more than 60 generative AI projects, covering areas such as customer service, credit evaluation and fraud detection. Through these projects, the bank streamlined operations and improved processes.

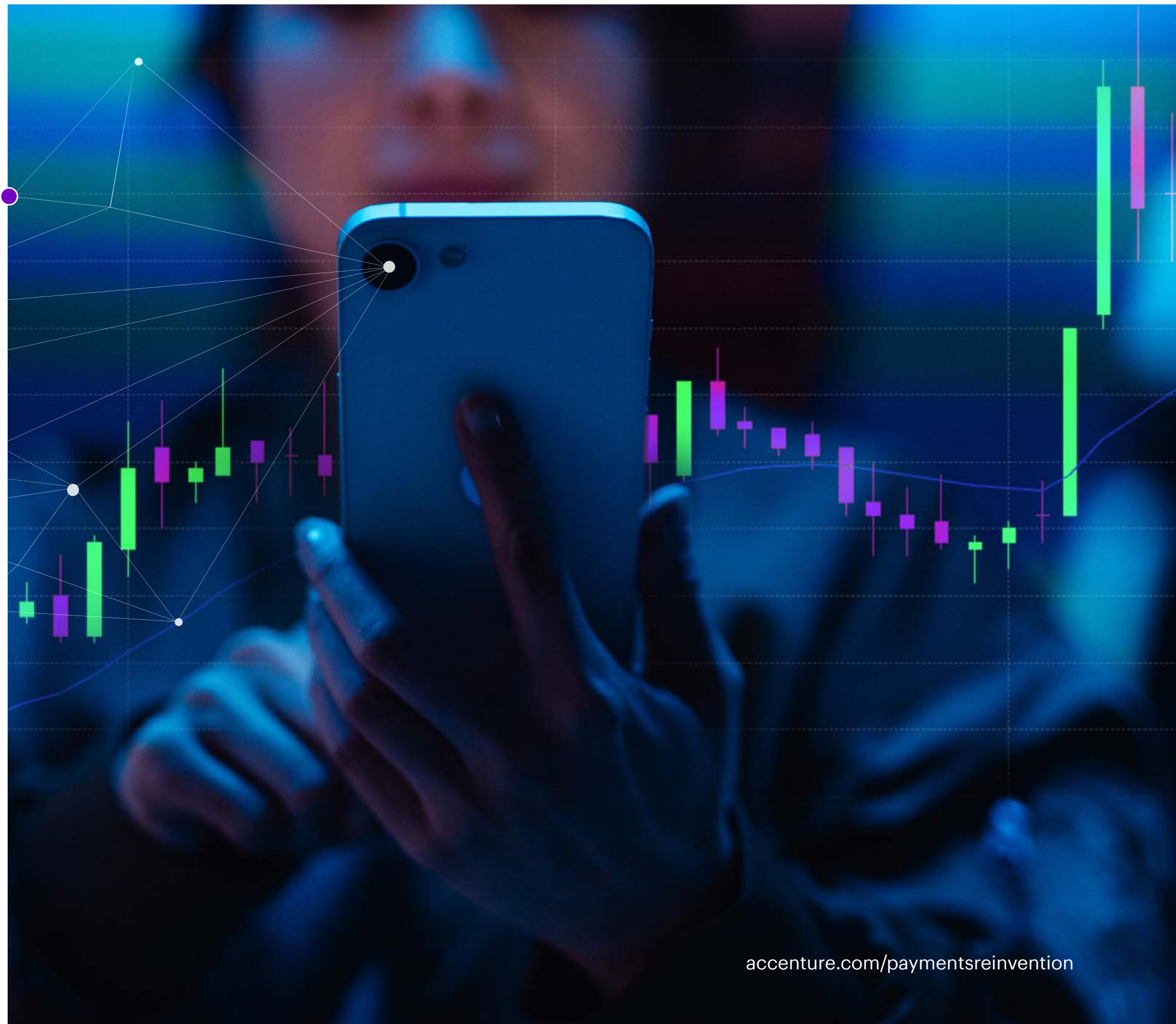
Generative AI-driven chatbots now assist advisors and enhance customer interactions, while internal processes, such as ESG compliance verification of products uploaded to the VeloMarket platform, have been automated.

As a result, VeloBank predicts a 10-15% reduction in operational costs and plans to further expand AI applications across all its services, marking a significant digital transformation. Human tasks supplemented with generative AI support are estimated to drive productivity gains of up to 50% while achieving significant annual savings of \$20 million for the bank¹³.



Why it pays to reinvent

Leading banks are already reaping \$14 billion in benefits from their investments in reinvention readiness.



A new legacy of payments growth

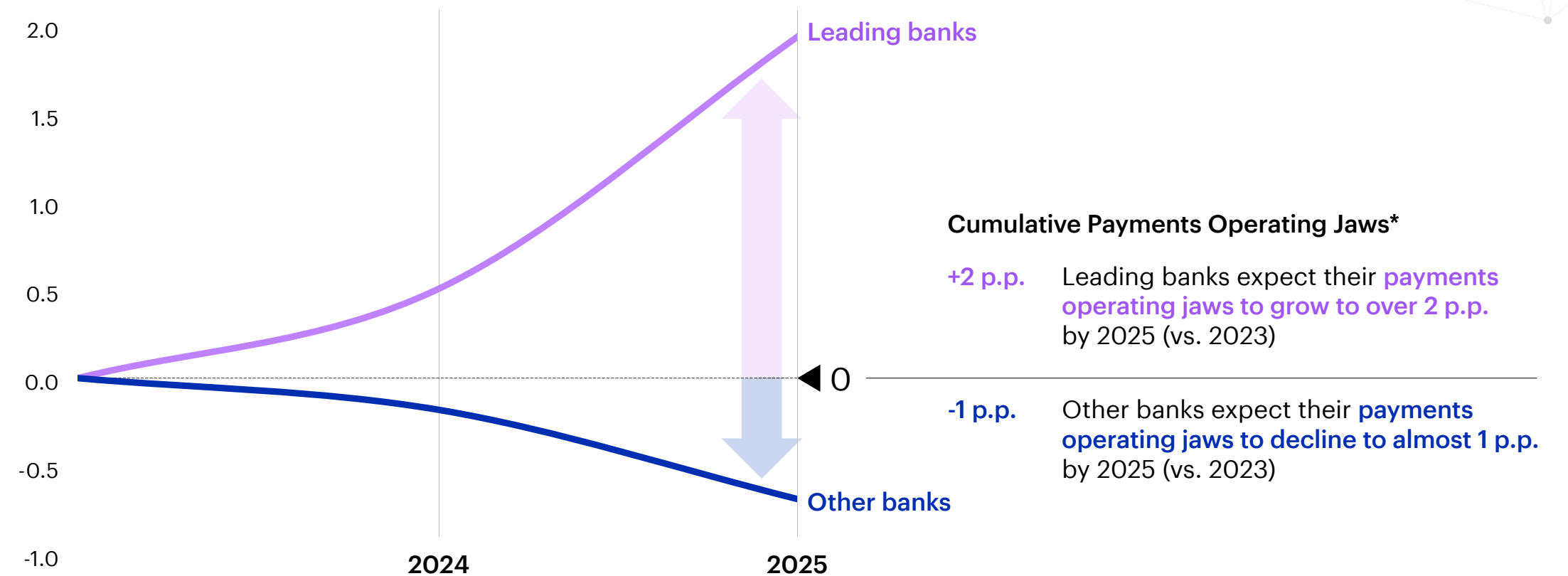
There is a strong correlation between digital core maturity and the operating jaws of a payments business.

Our financial analysis of leading banks reveals a 2% increase in their ‘payments operating jaws’—the difference between payments revenue growth and operational costs growth¹⁴—between 2023 and 2025, enabling them to capture benefits worth \$14 billion (25% of the \$55 billion opportunity). This improvement enables these banks to extract more profit from their infrastructure.

Banks that are lagging in digital core maturity, on the flip side, expect negative operating jaws of 1% due to tech debt and operational inefficiencies. However, these banks do hold the potential to unlock their part of the overall \$55 billion opportunity as well, by driving operational efficiency and developing innovative payment solutions (see Figure 7). It’s time to get started.

Figure 7: Leading banks anticipate a 2% increase in profitability through 2025 to the amount of \$14 billion, by outperforming other banks.

We used our proprietary global payments revenue model and survey results to calculate the operating profit opportunity, which was based on a cost-to-income ratio of 60% for banks.



Source: Accenture Global Payments Revenue Model and Payments Technology Reinvention Study, 2024



Key learnings from leaders

Leading banks that embrace a continuous reinvention strategy and invest to build a mature digital core have demonstrated better financial returns and a competitive edge. Their experiences suggest that these practices hold the key to creating a new legacy of growth:

- **Strategic integration of payments reinvention:** Leading banks seamlessly embed their payments reinvention plans into their broader strategy, ensuring that payments innovations align with the bank's long-term goals and vision.
- **Customer-first approach:** Leading banks adopt a proactive approach to disruption, addressing both current and future needs of their customers. Their investments are incremental yet consistent, with every decision focused on enhancing customer payment experiences.
- **Exploiting regulatory requirements:** When new payments regulations or business requirements arise, leading banks adopt a long-term perspective, leveraging these investments to uncover new business opportunities and turn regulatory changes to their advantage.
- **A balanced approach to strengthening the digital core:** Leading banks dedicate equal attention, effort and investment to every part of their digital core. This balanced approach enables seamless integration of new technologies, such as generative AI, to accelerate the deployment of new payment features in response to market demands.
- **Prioritizing payments and data:** Leading banks place payments at the heart of their business, with data at the core of their payment strategies. This enables them to leverage data insights to enhance cross-selling and upselling across their client base.
- **Strategic approach to tech debt remediation:** Tech debt remediation is a core component to banks' long-term strategies. Leading banks carefully assess investments in new technology to prevent unnecessary debt creation.
- **Advanced technology adoption:** Advanced technologies such as generative AI help augment the payments workforce, freeing up capacity for innovation and enabling a stronger focus on customers' needs. Adopting new technologies requires understanding the organization's existing skills and investing in reskilling. More leading banks prioritize reskilling as part of their modernization strategy versus other banks.



How Accenture can help

We help banks transform and reinvent every aspect of their enterprise through digital core services. Through strategic planning and roadmapping, we support them in optimizing their operations, accelerating revenue growth and improving the customer experience.

For payments, we offer a unique global perspective on payments services, unparalleled capabilities and deep experience in formulating and executing payment modernization programs.

- **End-to-end transformation:** From vision to execution and beyond, we have capability to support banks across the entire lifecycle of their payments reinvention journey.
- **Talent and change:** We combine our expertise in payments, talent and change, using AI to expedite and de-risk talent decisions. We help organizations assess current skills, identify required competencies, detect gaps and strategize talent acquisition and development.
- **Ability to drive industry-level changes:** We have been at the forefront of shaping global payment standards through close collaboration with regulators and industry bodies.

- **Strong portfolio of assets:** To stay ahead, we've created a variety of assets that deliver valuable insights to clients and accelerate our work. These include resources such as our ISO20022 guide, Request to Pay tool and payment systems information—each supported by data, analytics or cutting-edge technologies like generative AI.
- **Best-in-class ecosystem partners:** Our robust alliances empower large and complex projects by delivering the technology needed to achieve our clients' goals.

We can help banks accelerate their transformation and bring innovative payment solutions to market faster, streamline operational expenses and scale your payment infrastructure to meet evolving business needs and customer demands.

How to start?

Our Payments Digital Core Maturity Diagnostic will tell you the current state of your payments business and technology. We can then assist you in creating a blueprint and defining priorities to build a reinvention-ready digital core for payments. By understanding the gaps in your current capabilities, we can collaborate to elevate them to an industry-leading level.



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14. Accenture analysis from Payments Technology Reinvention survey and Accenture Global Payments Revenue Model

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