

The Biggest Obstacles in Implementing FP&A Solutions

Takeaways and tips from FP&A leaders
and hundreds of finance professionals



Introduction

The world of FP&A is changing. While every aspect and department in organizations has been making the switch to digital transformation over the last few decades, financial planning has been forced to accelerate this transformation. Covid-19 disrupted the way business is conducted across the board, which was followed by supply chain shocks, and more recently the war in Ukraine.

CFOs and FP&A teams face the brunt of this, as changing strategies and evolving realities not only affect the immediate numbers, but also require long term strategies for navigating the turmoil and driving company growth.

A March 29 webinar hosted two panelists with extensive FP&A experience at leading companies, who discussed the challenges and opportunities involved in financial planning. The interactive webinar led by FP&A solution company DataRails, included multiple polls and a Q&A session. The combination of professional expertise, personal experiences, and feedback from like minded CFOs and finance leaders provided many highlights and learning opportunities.



Meet the panelists



Christian Wattig

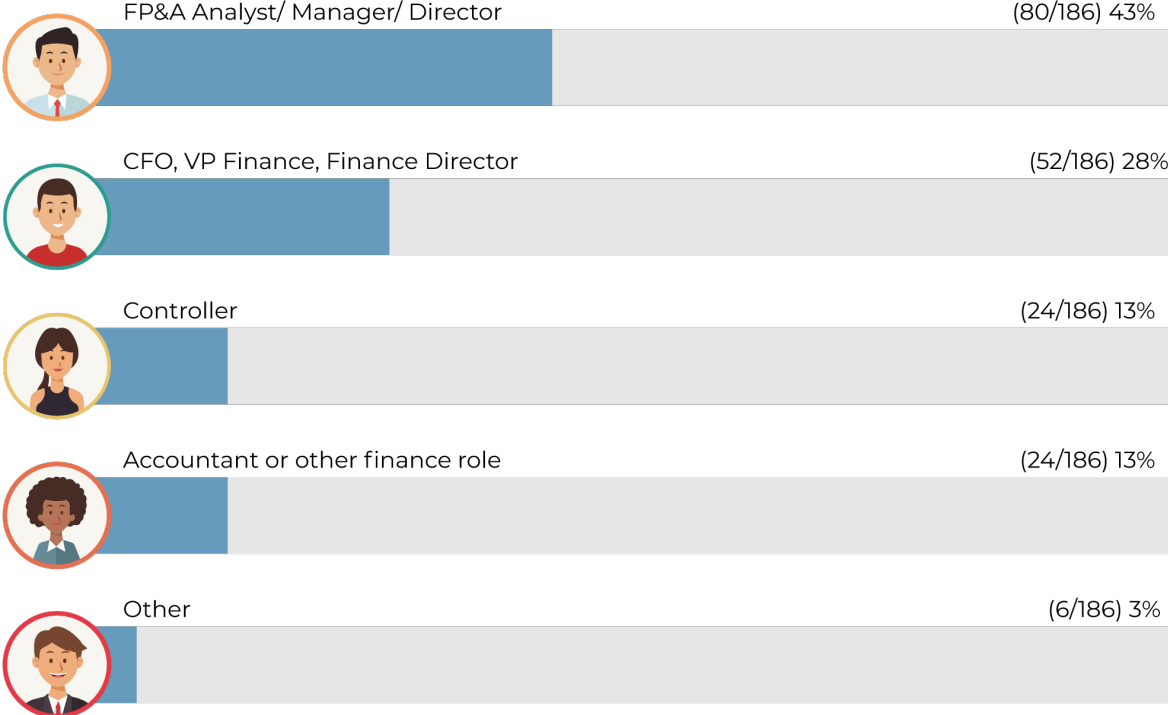
Senior FP&A leader with experience at Proctor and Gamble, Unilever and Squarespace and founder of a leading FP&A course, FP&A Bootcamp.



Tasha Tolliver

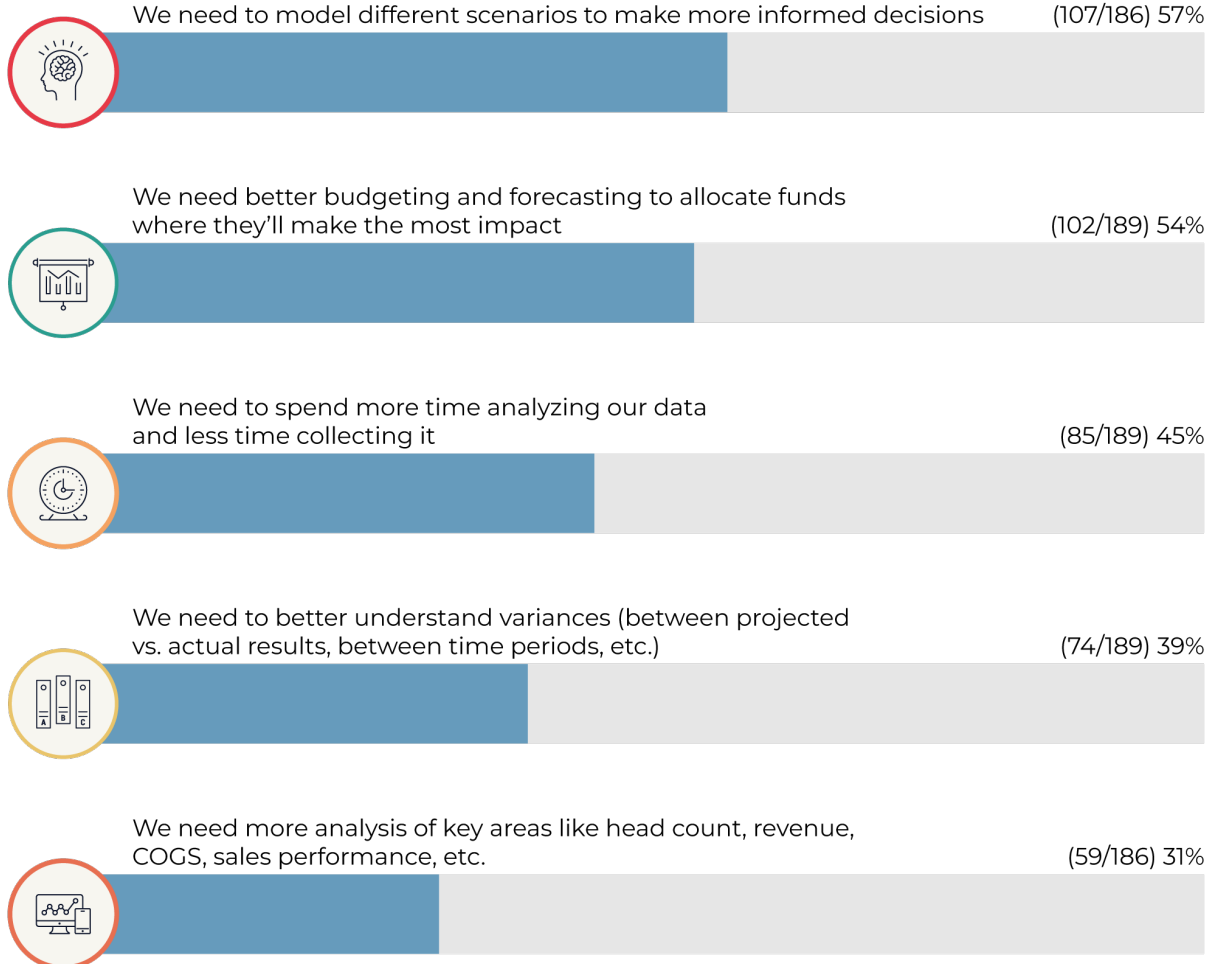
Senior Finance Manager at Tenneco, a Fortune 500 automotive component manufacturer.

Meet the Attendees



Poll #1 Why is FP&A Important?

(Multiple Choice)



“FP&A is a tool. It strives to tell you what the future could look like based on what happened in the past”



“Good FP&A leaders challenge the crossfunctional team to grow more sustainably and keep an eye on margin. Not just by producing a large number of P&Ls, tables and numbers but really by connecting the vision of the company, the strategy, the action plans, and KPIs that can be tracked.”

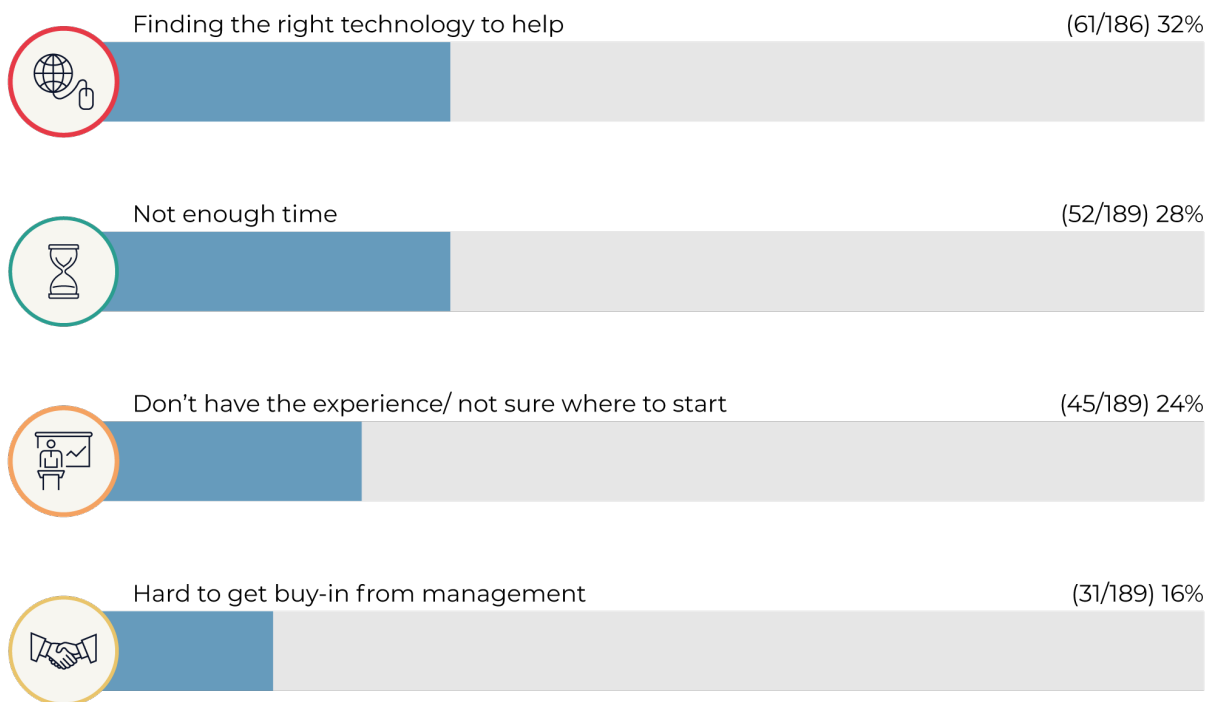
Attendee takeaways

From both webinar panelists as well as the poll answers and feedback, the most overwhelming words that keep coming up are “future” and “planning”. This is what separates FP&A from other company departments: The unique combination of control over current data, the critical long term outlook and goals, and the firm grasp of the broader company picture that ties it all together.

FP&A is important because it supports an organization’s financial health using planning and budgeting, integrated financial planning, performance reporting, and forecasting and modeling. No matter what size the company is, all of these aspects are critical for sustainable growth.

Poll #2 What is the biggest obstacle you've faced when it comes to FP&A?

(Single Choice)



“One of the biggest obstacles I faced is putting a well thought out plan and forecast and bringing it to leadership and they say ‘it isn’t enough- we need to sell more’. Forecast is a tool that strives to tell you a little about what the future could look like based on the past, but if leadership isn’t buying what you’re selling, then it almost doesn’t matter what you submit.”



“I realized that we needed to make a change from our multiple Excel sheets with many tabs and manual consolidation but our CFO didn't really believe in [making the change to FP&A technology] at the beginning so we weren't sure if we would be able to get the budget. In addition we were getting pushback from the marketing team because they were very used to the way things were run and didn't want to learn a new process or do things differently.”

Attendee takeaways

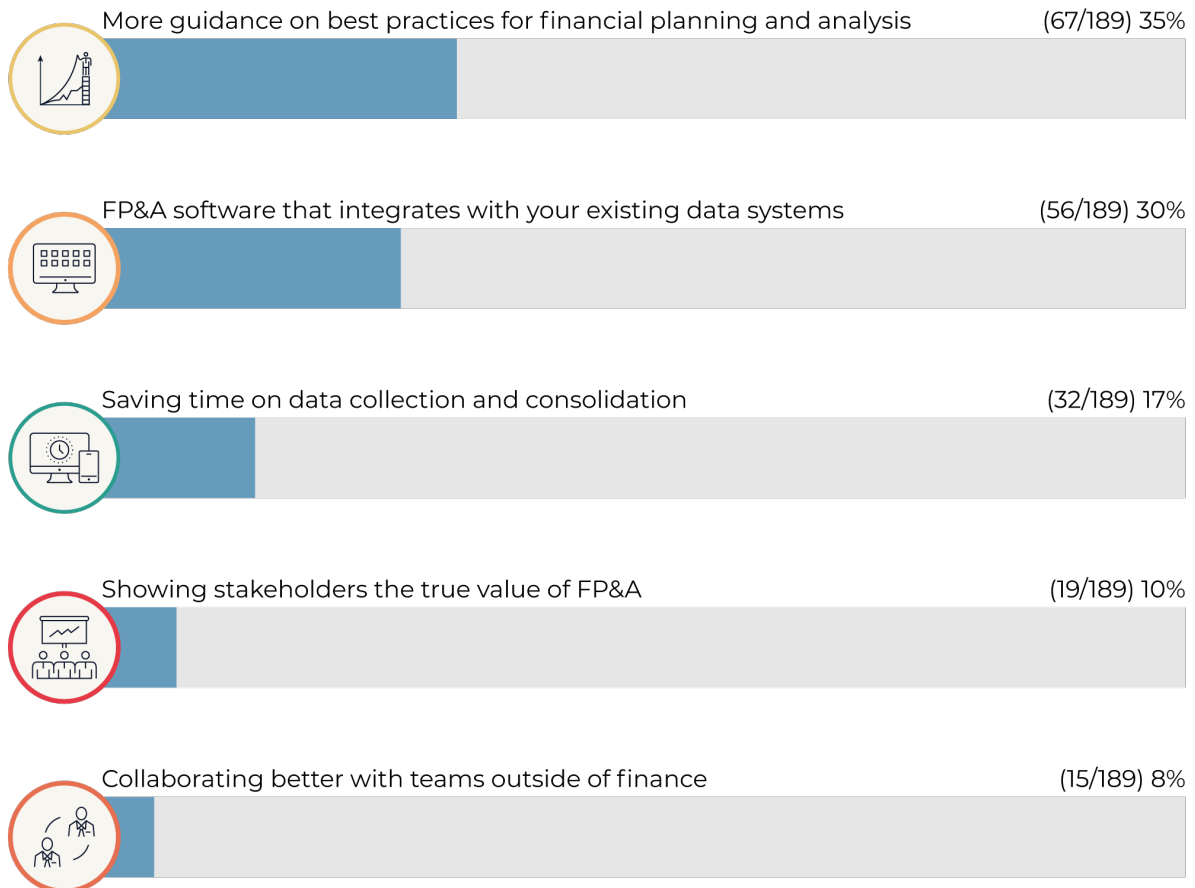
There are a huge array of obstacles involved in FP&A, and unlike the importance of FP&A which is more universal, obstacles are more industry and company specific. Among the poll results, finding the time and the right technology are the biggest obstacles. These problems are directly connected to each other, as the financial teams who find the right FP&A technology for their company tend to be those who are able to free up the crucial time for analysis, forecasting, and digging deeper into the data.

Companies who have not yet implemented FP&A solutions, or those who have but didn't chose one that fits their company for whatever reason, (not a native Excel platform, doesn't integrate with all of the solutions they need, etc.) will have a very difficult time using all of the FP&A tools to produce the results that the company needs.

The biggest obstacles that the webinar panelists faced in their professional careers were slightly different. Both Tolliver and Wattig described their biggest challenges as inter-department communication. CFOs and executives not understanding the benefits of implementing FP&A solutions and not having full cooperation from other departments were two of the biggest obstacles they faced. Whether it be time, finding the right FP&A solution, cooperation, experience, or money, there are many obstacles that companies struggle with on their way to creating the most efficient FP&A process.

Poll #3 What would most help you move forward with FP&A?

(Single Choice)



“There’s a lot of different systems that you can implement, but the things that I was looking for were low cost, short implementation times, and a platform where the majority of the manipulation can be done if you know how to use Excel. The important thing for me is usability- If you know how to use excel you know how to use DataRails. Just keep it simple and find a team that you want to work with for implementation.”



“A high level decision that you need to make before choosing a tool is do you want to replace Excel or do you want to build on top of it and expand the functionality of it? It's a big debate between FP&A experts but I firmly believe that Excel will stay and won't go away because it's just so easy to use, there are so many resources available to learn, and it's super flexible. I will firmly argue- look for a tool that builds on top of Excel that allows you to keep using what you're used to and keep all the benefits of it.”

Attendee takeaways

The poll respondents overwhelmingly believe that there are two ways that will be most useful in moving forward with an FP&A strategy: 1) More guidance, expertise, and leadership and 2) using an FP&A software that integrates with your existing data.

The panelists echoed these sentiments as well. Finding a low cost solution with a high level of interface usability, and most importantly a native Excel platform, will help finance teams move forward with FP&A. Adopting the right FP&A solution will solve the problem of guidance at the same time, as finance experts and high level customer support specialists are part of FP&A softwares.

Key takeaways



Forecasting, scenario planning, and grasping a deeper analysis of the data **have become the most important aspects to FP&A teams today.** This seems to stem from the market volatility of the past few years, although a second survey and deeper analysis of the reasons behind it would be **useful for helping FP&A teams more efficiently.**



Almost everyone agrees that implementing more efficient **FP&A processes and technologies would be extremely useful to the company,** but the abundance of obstacles are holding them back. Even veteran finance professionals at large companies run into issues such as getting management on board and sifting through the abundance of FP&A solutions to find the one that best fits. **Working through these obstacles on a company wide scale is critical for a smooth and efficient transition.**



Finance teams that can identify what would most help **them move forward with their FP&A goals** are in great shape for improving the company's FP&A output. Whether it be outside professional guidance, or making a list of qualities that are needed before going shopping for a solution, **coming to management with an in-depth plan will greatly improve the chance of getting everyone on board.**

About Datarails

Datarails is a financial planning and analysis platform for Excel users. It automates data consolidation, reporting and planning, while enabling finance teams to continue using their own Excel spreadsheets and financial models.