

# Global Planning Survey '24

The race to continuous planning is on.  
Are you ready?

The logo for 'board' features a stylized lowercase 'b' with three horizontal bars above it, followed by the lowercase word 'board' in a clean, sans-serif font.

# Foreword

In last year's inaugural report, Board took the initiative to survey planning experts across 3 industries. The objective was simple and clear: to better understand market dynamics and identify trends likely to make an impact. We wanted to provide leaders with the best possible information so they could plan with greater confidence in pursuit of strategic goals.

*The Global Planning Survey 2023 was a success. So, we did it again this year. But even better.*

Our 2024 report is more than a snapshot. It's a compass. The data story reveals progress to date, what comes next, and—importantly—who among us is ahead of the curve. From the rise of AI to the renewed focus on ESG, our findings highlight forces in play that demand your attention. It is my hope that it sparks conversations, fosters collaboration, and inspires actions for bold initiatives.

Thank you to our team members who contributed valuable insights and analysis. The story we tell in the following pages is valuable and beneficial for all.

**Jeff Casale**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Board

# Transformation is more than *‘buzzword of the year.’*

The Cambridge Dictionary defines transformation as a complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved. It's an interesting summary of the word. When we talk about transformation in a business sense, and especially when it comes to planning, the second part of that definition is most critical.

Transformation is about improvement and evolution. It's about refining processes and activities, so they are more agile, efficient, effective, and, ultimately, profitable for the organization.

The problem we see is that the term 'transformation' is so widely used its true meaning has become diluted. Digital transformation, for example, has been a buzzword used by planning solution vendors for some time now.

So, in this report, let's return to the true meaning of transformation and discuss it as it should be. It's not just a buzzword, it's a process that most businesses must go through to realize actual beneficial change. We'll explore the trends collected from 1,500 professionals working in a wide number of industries and roles, wrapping their insights and knowledge around a single thought:

**how can your business transform planning and achieve greater success?**

# What does the planning scene look like today?

Recent years have been...challenging. Global events have changed our perspective on how we plan and operate. The gold standard of 'continuous planning agility' is no longer a luxury—it's a necessity.

For the most proactive and forward-looking businesses, this need is firmly in the spotlight. Navigating challenges requires a new approach. And a new approach requires transformation. Today, we're seeing how powerful a sentiment this is, and how organizations are making strides to plan with greater agility and insight.

Strategic and operational planning, which we can define as long-term (typically 3 to 5 years) and short-term (typically yearly, quarterly, or monthly) respectively, is met with more positivity than previous years.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents from this year's survey state their businesses feel equipped for agile strategic and operational planning. Likewise,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents also confirm they are on-track to meet long-term objectives.

Interestingly, when asked 'how much more or less seriously has planning transformation been taken in the business since the recent series of globally significant events' the number of responses for 'more' has decreased from 84% last year to 71% this year. This drop suggests enterprises today are deeper into their transformative journeys to move forward with more agility and insight across decision-making activities.



**Fewer businesses prioritize planning transformation year-on-year.**

**¾ of respondents state their businesses feel equipped for agile strategic and operational planning. The same percentage also confirms they are on-track to meet long-term objectives.**



# How are businesses approaching planning transformation?

Transforming your business is a complex process. We'd love to say that it could be as simple as, say, purchasing a planning tool and letting it do all the work. The reality, of course, is that true, enterprise-wide transformation takes time and resources to implement. The results, though? Worth every effort.

The current planning landscape is fraught with challenges. The top frustrations identified by respondents include:

## Susceptibility to human error 44%



## Compromised data security 32%



## Managing increasing volumes of data 28%



## Poor collaboration 28%



## Limited data visualizations 26%



Additional areas of concern include:



Lack of integration with  
data tools



Inability to translate  
data into insights



Data is unavailable in  
real time

Data concerns play a part in most of these challenges. It brings to mind the popular tech adage: data is the lifeblood of any organization.

For many, we're in the middle of an accelerated period of change called the fourth industrial revolution (4IR)\*. At the heart of 4IR are tools and skills that revolve around data. To move forward businesses must manage, understand, and utilize data with greater capability. AI and automation and ensuring the workforce is upskilled and reskilled to use these tools are all critical.

The data shows a significant shift in organizations identifying the trend and putting plans in place to stay ahead of the curve. From our survey respondents, when asked to evaluate transformation efforts undertaken in 2023 to change how their business approaches planning, 78% note successful results.

It's an encouraging statistic bolstering the notion that revolutionary planning transformation is a priority.

**\*4IR:** McKinsey & Company. "What are Industry 4.0, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and 4IR?" August 17, 2022, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-are-industry-4-0-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-and-4ir>.

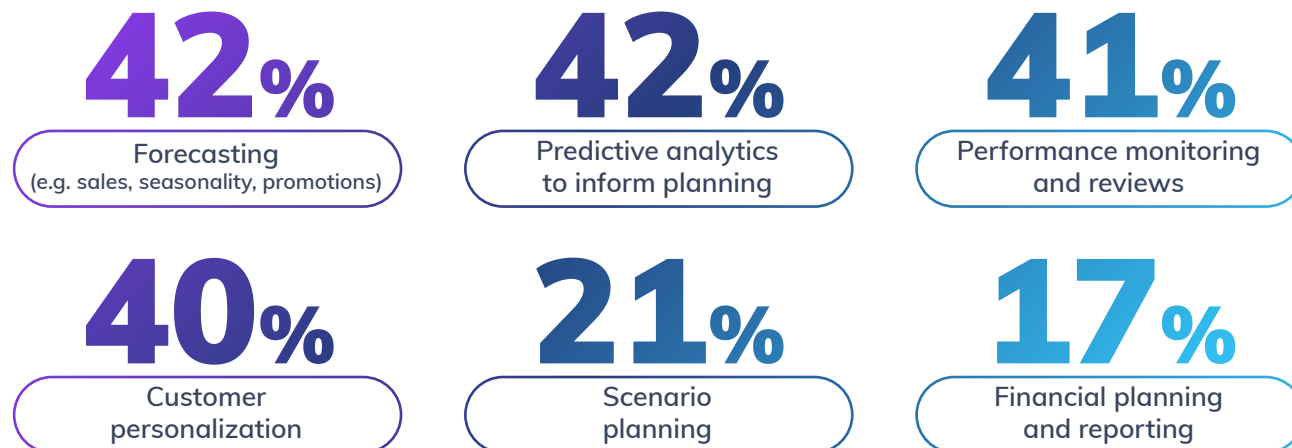
# Is AI the catalyst for change?

Time to address the elephant in the room! AI is a topic we've all seen and likely discussed over the past few years. It raises plenty of interesting topics, particularly around:

- who or what will it replace?
- procedure (how do we use it?), safeguarding (is our data safe?), and compliance (what rules need to be in place?)
- does it offer value, and can it be trusted?

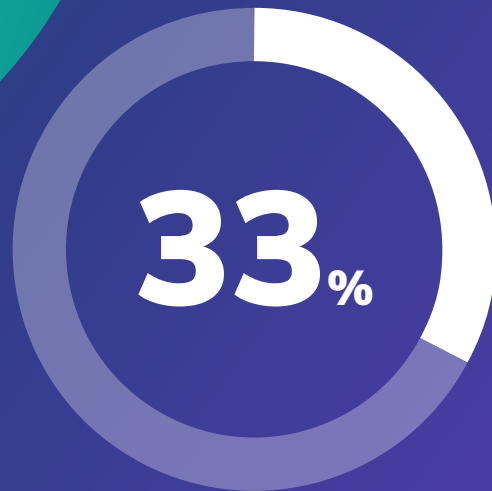
While many of these topics will be discussed for some time, we're still in the true rise of AI (generative AI in this case), and it's predicted use in a professional setting. From our survey, 100% of respondents use AI in some form to augment business activities. With popularity skyrocketing in a short time frame, we've seen generative image AI models go from producing realistic pictures with clear defects to a quality near indistinguishable from real life.

**Likewise, as AI continues to proliferate in other areas, organizations are adding its capability to critical business planning activities, including:**

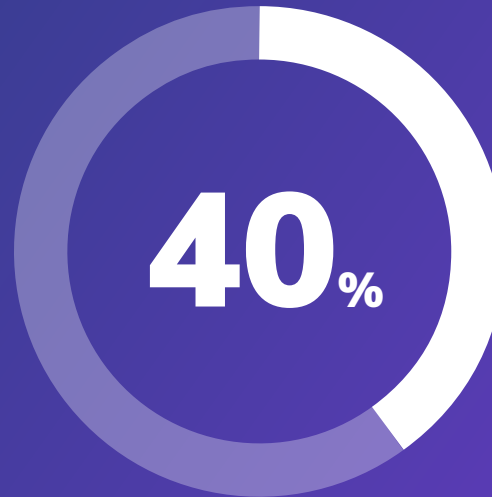




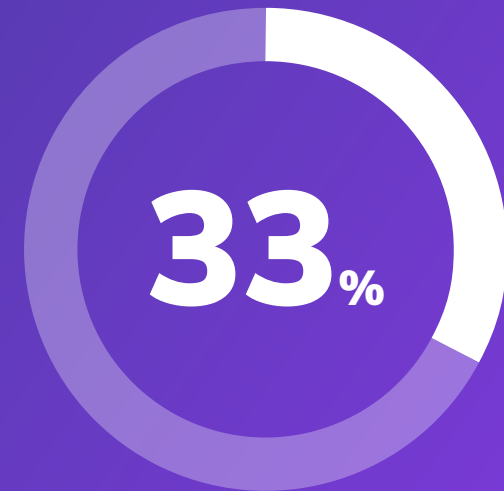
Here are the top 3 areas respondents are expecting AI to expand to:



**It will help facilitate more effective business planning**



**It will improve how senior decision makers can access and understand planning scenarios that I present to them**



**It will lead to improved scenario planning and modelling**

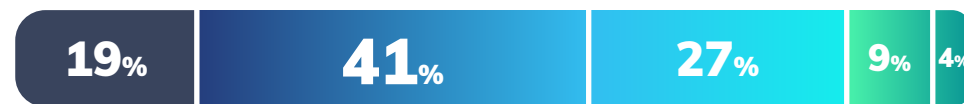
Undeniably, AI is a critical element for businesses ready to move forward. We fully expect the use of it to grow in line with planning solution advancements and evolving industry best practice approaches.

# Time to zero in on ESG compliance

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting has become critical for businesses. Governing countries and bodies are working hard to make sustainability reporting clearer, such as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

This law is in place to ensure all large and all listed (European) companies disclose information on the risks and opportunities they identify in social and environmental issues and what impact their activities have on people and the environment. It's a call for transparency so investors, civil society organizations, consumers, and other stakeholders can effectively evaluate the sustainability performance of companies. Even as an EU directive, US and other non-EU based companies will be impacted by the CSRD if they meet certain scoping criteria.

## What, if anything, best describes your organization's efforts to comply with ESG reporting requirements?



- My organization is not on track to meet the requirements
- My organization is on track to meet the requirements
- My organization plans to exceed mandatory reporting requirements
- N/A I am not involved in this / have no visibility
- N/A My organization does not need to comply with CSRD

We're also seeing initiatives such as Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions reporting flying to the top of the priority pile, as more demand is placed on categorizing and measuring the different kinds of carbon emissions companies create in their operations and wider value chains. While Scope is not (currently) a globally used metric, we can expect it to be in use in major markets, including the US, by the end of 2024. Is your business ready?

While meeting reporting requirements is essential, a forward-thinking approach goes beyond compliance. Here's why:

**Data collection is more efficient:** Tracking ESG data at an operational level simplifies data collection for future reports. This eliminates last-minute scrambling and ensures the accuracy of reported information.

**Planning is led by data:** ESG data provides valuable insights for strategic planning. By understanding environmental footprints and social impact, companies can identify areas for improvement and implement targeted initiatives that reduce emissions, optimize resource usage, and enhance social responsibility.

**Operational costs are reduced:** Many ESG initiatives, like investing in energy-efficient systems, directly contribute to cost savings. Additionally, proactive waste reduction can minimize the costs associated with excess inventory and improper disposal.

However, our survey revealed that over half of our respondents are either discussing or haven't started measuring Scope 3 emissions, which make up a significant portion of a company's carbon footprint. In fact, Deloitte notes that, "For many businesses, Scope 3 emissions account for more than 70% of their carbon footprint." They're harder for businesses to quantify and, more importantly, control.

### **To what extent, if at all, are you currently measuring Scope 3 emissions?**

**40% - We are actively measuring and managing**

**47% - We are discussing, but not actively measuring and managing**

**10% - We are not currently measuring and managing**

Proactive companies that begin tracking these emissions are better positioned to capitalize off this data. Per a recently published Forbes article, "Companies that start tracking carbon emissions at an operational level will, in turn, save time when it comes to collecting data for reporting and can more easily factor this data into their planning. This ultimately reduces pesky drivers of emissions like excess inventory."

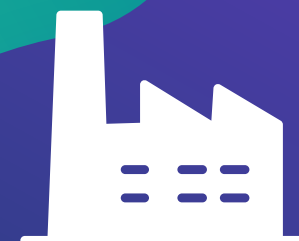
The growing importance of ESG compliance cannot be overstated. Initiatives like the EU's CSRD highlight a global shift towards transparency and accountability in business practices. While most companies are making strides towards meeting these requirements, many are still in the discussion phase. Regulations will continue to evolve, and stakeholder expectations will rise. Businesses must prioritize ESG compliance to ensure long-term viability and responsible growth.

Most importantly, though, ESG reporting and planning are not about additional burdens but about building a stronger, more resilient business. By leveraging data-driven insights, companies can make informed decisions that benefit the environment, society, and their bottom line.

**40%**

**47%**

**10%**



# What's next? Survey says...

Supported by the lessons learned from our respondents, we've identified 5 key areas to focus on when undertaking business transformation.

## 1. Planning for success starts at the top

*Close to a third of our respondents cite a lack of C-suite buy-in as the principal factor for failed transformation projects in 2023. The imperative here is to ensure leadership knows, understands, and agrees with the intent.*

The C-suite are the enterprises' visionaries—key figures constantly analyzing the business with a more expansive view that always looks ahead to achieving long-term success. Their buy-in will inevitably be something that enters every milestone of the transformative journey, so any initiative must align with the company 'vision' and destination.

It's on this bedrock you can effectively begin to plan the project.

Just as any successful expedition requires a clear understanding of the destination, securing C-suite buy-in hinges on matching their objectives. Imagine embarking on a journey without the destination in mind. It would be aimless and lacking the focus needed for success. The C-suite, as the company's visionaries, know what the destination is, so your ideas and recommendations must map a clear path that leads them towards the desired outcome.

## 2. Business objectives need precision alignment

For any large business, there is a constant struggle in gearing every department toward the same objectives, set at the enterprise level. Why? Because traditional planning models typically create silos.

It might sound easy to say everyone must work to the beat of the same drum, but the reality is that the finance department will have different approaches to their planning than the sales department.

With the right technology and approaches in place, however, teams can begin to work in a far more collaborative manner. It all boils down to a couple of important elements:

- one source of high-quality data, available in real time
- transparency that spans the entire company

77% of respondents agree! When asked to highlight the main barriers preventing organizations from improving overall decision-making capabilities, both 'limited collaboration and transparency across business units' and 'poor data quality and governance' were flagged.

### 3. The right tool unifies and futureproofs

At the heart of all transformative efforts is the right technology. Put simply, business planning cannot move forward without capabilities enabled by modern solutions and tools. Artificial intelligence and machine learning will undoubtedly form the foundation of these changes, offering businesses the ability to automate activities, reduce errors, interact more easily with solutions, and cut through the noise of the inordinate amounts of data most enterprises have at their fingertips.

In fact, and unsurprisingly, when questioned what approaches do you plan to adopt in the next 12-18 months to support the decision-making processes in your organization 100% of the answers allude to something that requires technological intervention to make happen. Answers include:

- data integration
- workflow automation
- adoption or expansion of business intelligence tools to inform and guide decision-making
- inclusion of machine learning to augment decision making with predictive capabilities
- use of generative AI tools to enhance the decision-making process
- incorporation of specialized decision support or decision intelligence tools

***There are powerful decision-making platforms available from leading vendors that will do these in one architecture. Imagine the potential this offers to the enterprise. No more disparate tools that require linking. Just one place for all users and planners across the enterprise to perform important activities.***



## 4. Your people are ready to upskill and reskill

What use is new technology if no one can use it?

While new planning tools are (largely thanks to AI innovation) becoming easier to use, they still require staff to not only understand how they work but to also want to use them. Buy-in and adoption of new technology can often be met with trepidation. It's understandable; we're all human after all, and sometimes change can be scary. But organizations must move forward regardless of staff sentiment. Increasing the headcount of tech-enabled workers.

Businesses are recognizing this need.

***As part of the 'successful' 2023 transformation efforts made, a majority 46% of survey respondents say they have actively increased headcount in the planning function and 18% say they have increased staff training to improve planning. Interestingly, 46% have also implemented new planning software.***

New software and increased staff ability can certainly be said to go together for successful planning transformations.

## 5. Spreadsheets are no longer an asset (they're a liability)

Static spreadsheet-based planning is limiting. It stifles collaboration, data-management, and real-time insight while slowing down planning capabilities. Performing important activities like scenario-planning is far more challenging when it relies on data based in spreadsheets. It takes time and human resources to perform, and most organizations will struggle to undertake it with enough regularity to keep up with market change.

***Despite these facts, we know that planning primarily guided by spreadsheet-based data is unlikely to change anytime soon. 100% of businesses perform at least some planning and decision-making activities based on information stored and managed on spreadsheets (with over 50% doing more than half of their planning in this way).***

It's such a recognized and established format that businesses are rarely looking to move away from it. Pushing aside the extreme of putting all spreadsheet-led planning models to bed once and for all, we need to consider what to do.

The answer, in short, is to adopt planning solutions that can tackle all the challenges outlined above. With the right tool in place, important information held in spreadsheets benefits from:

- centralization in one platform (a single version of truth)
- automation that manages data at a much faster rate while mitigating the risk of human error
- the ability to work and collaborate on the same data in near real time
- data visualization that's comprehensible across the enterprise, all the way to the C-suite

This focus on improvement, not eradication, paves the way for a more dynamic and data-driven planning future.



# What does it all mean?

Our survey results offer positive news: businesses are making significant strides in planning transformation. But don't take a victory lap just yet. There's still room for improvement to focus on areas like these...

**Spreadsheets:** Spreadsheets remain a mainstay, but their limitations are clear. Static spreadsheet-based planning hinders collaboration, data management, and real-time insights. Businesses should explore solutions that can overcome these limitations and empower a more dynamic planning approach.

**Continuous agile planning:** An interesting disconnect emerges between reported capabilities and prioritization. Despite 72% agreeing their business is equipped for agile planning, only a low number (just 16%) engage in continuous agile planning that can respond to changing market conditions. The prioritization of continuous agility, the gold standard of planning, is crucial for a business to fully realize complete planning transformation.

So, what's the bottom line? Survey findings suggest a need for a cultural shift towards continuous planning agility. Businesses must move beyond simply acquiring new software and focus on building a foundation for ongoing improvement. Here are some key areas to consider:

**Building a culture of continuous improvement:** Planning is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Regular review and adaptation are essential for navigating a dynamic market.

**Data-driven decision making:** Data analytics and AI offer deeper insights and support scenario planning. Leveraging data empowers businesses to be more proactive and adaptable.

**Transformation success metrics:** While increasing headcount in the planning function is a positive step, it shouldn't be the sole metric for success. A focus solely on headcount expansion can overshadow other crucial aspects of transformation.

**Planning horizons:** These remain concerningly short-term. Again, there is a strong disconnect where nearly half of all respondents do not look beyond a 2-year planning horizon, yet 72% of businesses claim to be 'on track to meet its long-term (3-5 years) objectives.' A misalignment between short-term planning activities and long-term goals is evident and needs to be reconciled.

**Collaboration is king:** Breaking down silos and fostering collaboration between departments is essential for effective planning. When all departments work together with a shared vision, planning becomes more comprehensive and strategic.

By embracing these practices, businesses can unlock the true potential of planning transformation and achieve long-term success.

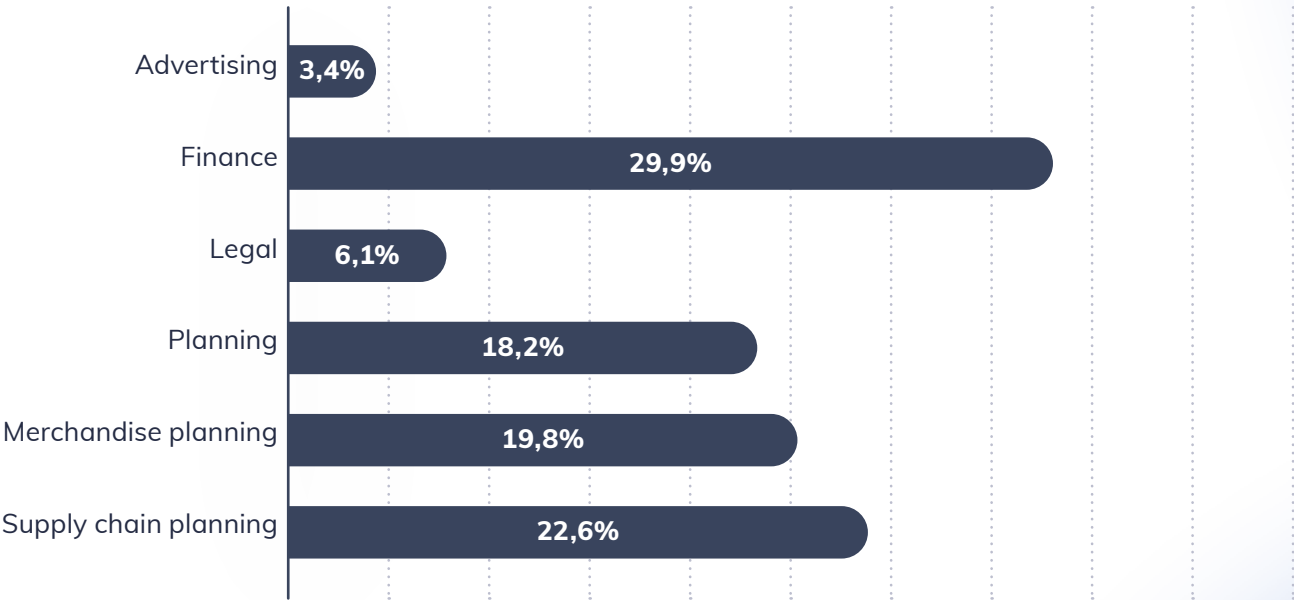
# Methodology

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the planning challenges facing businesses, Board surveyed 1,500 decision-makers primarily working in finance, planning, merchandise planning, and supply chain planning roles from enterprise businesses; only data from organizations with more than 500 employees has been included to ensure consistency across all results.

This report represents a wide business perspective, with participants from organizations in the UK, the US, Germany, France, and Italy.

All questions were asked, and results collated by Fight or Flight, a creative communications agency based in London, UK, and corroborated by Censuswide. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

## Industry breakdown



# About Board

Board's Intelligent Planning Platform delivers solutions that help over 2,000 organizations worldwide plan smarter — enabling actionable insights and better outcomes. Board helps leading enterprises discover crucial insights which drive business decisions and unify strategy, finance and operations through more integrated and intelligent planning to achieve full control of performance. Partnering with Board, global enterprises such as H&M, BASF, Burberry, Toyota, Coca-Cola, KPMG, and HSBC have digitally transformed their planning processes.

Founded in 1994, and now with 25 offices worldwide, Board International is recognized by leading analysts including BARC, Gartner, and IDC.

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