

Chief financial officers who reap true, meaningful personal and professional satisfaction from their role undoubtedly will be the ones who lead the business in adapting to whatever changes lie ahead.

PwC not only understands the tremendous burden of this mandate, but we also can provide experienced guidance on getting there. Our recommendations include:

Assessing your readiness

When it comes to getting things done, a good manager knows his/her capabilities, priorities and the balance of the two. In the steward and strategist roles, this means being confident that your finance function is equipped to meet the deliverables of today and tomorrow and is positioned to build shareholder value continually. But in the business partner role, this calculus is more nuanced. How do you know that your plan is adequate to execute growth and innovation both within the finance department and outside it? (See the sidebar, “Assessing your readiness,” for our self-assessment questions.)

Investing in people

A leading CFO uses key personnel within the organization as leaders of transformation, and he/she equips them with the training and tools needed to understand his/her agenda and rally support for it throughout the company. The CFO requires a highly skilled, engaged finance team at a time when the number of highly disengaged employees has more than doubled over the past two years.⁵ Do what it takes to acquire, develop and retain exceptional staff.

Providing tools to support smart work

Not only will your key personnel marshal support for your agenda, but they will also be called upon to help model a “work smarter” attitude in the finance organization.

This model often requires an environment supported by performance management and business intelligence tools. When the going gets very tough, longer hours alone will not solve the problem.

Leading improvement

Learn the lessons of companies that don’t plan and manage continuous improvement and end up with partial or total failures of much-needed initiatives. People’s attitudes, fears and preparedness are critical variables that must be predicted and managed.

These are challenging times in which to be a CFO—at any company. But those CFOs who reap true, meaningful personal and professional satisfaction from this role undoubtedly will be the ones who lead the business in adapting to whatever changes lie ahead. No one else, save the CEO, has the full complement of critical insights that can drive the business in the right direction.

⁵ The Corporate Executive Board, Executive Guidance for 2009, November 2008.

Assessing your readiness

Careful attention to the compliance steward, pragmatic strategist and business partner roles is mandatory for true success as a CFO in the months and years to come. Your responses to the following questions can illuminate areas where you should consider sharpening your focus:

Are you adequately prepared for the worst challenges that may come your way in the steward role? Ask yourself:

- Do you respond proactively to changing compliance requirements?
- Do you leverage new compliance requirements as a platform to drive improvements in underlying processes?
- Have your investments in control and compliance (e.g., Sarbanes-Oxley) improved your insight and ability to manage the business?
- Are you constantly evaluating your performance in the delivery model for your core financial services (i.e., transaction processing, accounting and reporting, planning, analysis) and implementing improvements to deliver them better, faster and cheaper?

Is your strategy for adding value to the corporation thorough enough to hold up under volatile market forces? Ask yourself:

- Do you maintain a valuation model of your business, and do you plan key business initiatives based on their effect on shareholder value?
- Are you improving each element of working capital?
- Are the value drivers of the business linked to performance measures, goals or incentives?
- Is finance engaged with the business units in driving product, service, sales and other planning investment and profitability modeling?
- For major initiatives within finance and across the enterprise, do you establish and monitor performance against specific financial objectives and regularly evaluate and report on progress on both costs incurred and benefits realized from them?

Have you planned the future of your organization so thoroughly—yet with such built-in agility—that the core business is continually enhanced and never hindered by finance processes and capabilities? Ask yourself:

- Do you have and communicate a clear and compelling vision of how finance will operate in three to five years, as compared to today?
- Have you defined a roadmap for investments beyond current improvement projects?
- Do you have a consistent approach for identifying and planning for future business models, goals and initiatives?
- Do you maintain a prioritized portfolio of projects, and do you revisit this prioritization frequently as business conditions change?
- Does your improvement portfolio have explicit initiatives encompassing your core processes, technologies and continuing investments in your people?
- Have you evaluated the risk of not completing some projects because of limited resources, and do you have a contingency plan to mitigate any adverse effects?

To have a deeper conversation about any of the issues in this paper, please contact:

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