

## Hey! What's New? 2024-127

### How CFOs Can Elevate Finance Business Partnering

A recent article in *CFO*, written by Edwin Ang, says that “many finance teams still struggle to transition from traditional scorekeepers to true strategic partners. The good news is that, with the right approach, CFOs can transform their finance functions into powerhouses of insight and innovation.”

First, he suggests, we need to shift our mindset. “Finance business partnering isn’t about telling other departments what they can’t do — it’s about collaborating to find solutions that drive business growth. This means developing a deep understanding of each business unit’s objectives, challenges and opportunities.”

To achieve this, Ang advises implementing a rotation program that embeds finance professionals within different departments. “This firsthand experience is invaluable for building cross-functional knowledge and relationships.”

Next, he says, focus on upskilling your team. “While technical finance skills remain critical, soft skills like communication, problem-solving and strategic thinking are equally important for effective business partnering. Invest in training programs that develop these competencies.”

Ang points out that data literacy is another crucial area. “Your finance team should be adept at not just analyzing data, but translating it into actionable insights. Encourage the use of data visualization tools and storytelling techniques to make financial information more accessible and impactful for non-finance stakeholders.”

He also believes that it is essential to automate routine tasks “to free up your team’s time for more strategic activities. As CFOs, we must actively create space for our teams to engage in meaningful business partnering. Too often, finance professionals get bogged down in day-to-day transactional work, leaving little room for strategic thinking and collaboration.”

One often overlooked yet powerful tool in elevating finance business partnering is executive coaching and team mentoring. And notes that, “as CFOs, we can leverage these approaches to accelerate the development of our teams and ourselves. For our teams, structured mentoring programs can be transformative. Pair experienced finance professionals either external or internal with up-and-coming talent to transfer knowledge, share best practices in business partnering and provide guidance on navigating complex stakeholder relationships. This not only accelerates skill development but also helps retain top talent by demonstrating a commitment to their growth.”

For Ang, “external mentoring brings a fresh perspective that can be game-changing. Engage mentors from different industries or functions to provide your finance team with diverse insights and innovative approaches to business partnering. These external relationships can challenge conventional thinking, introduce new methodologies, and help your team stay ahead of industry trends.”

He also advises that “executive coaching can provide CFOs with personalized guidance on leadership skills crucial for driving change and fostering a culture of business partnering. “It offers a confidential space to explore challenges, refine communication strategies and develop

a vision for the finance function that aligns with broader organizational goals. By investing in mentoring and coaching, CFOs can cultivate a finance team that's not just technically proficient, but also emotionally intelligent, strategically minded and well-equipped to partner effectively across the organization."

Finally, Ang concludes, "as CFOs, we must lead by example. Our interactions with other C-suite executives and department heads set the tone for finance business partnering. Demonstrate how finance can add value beyond traditional controlling and reporting functions."