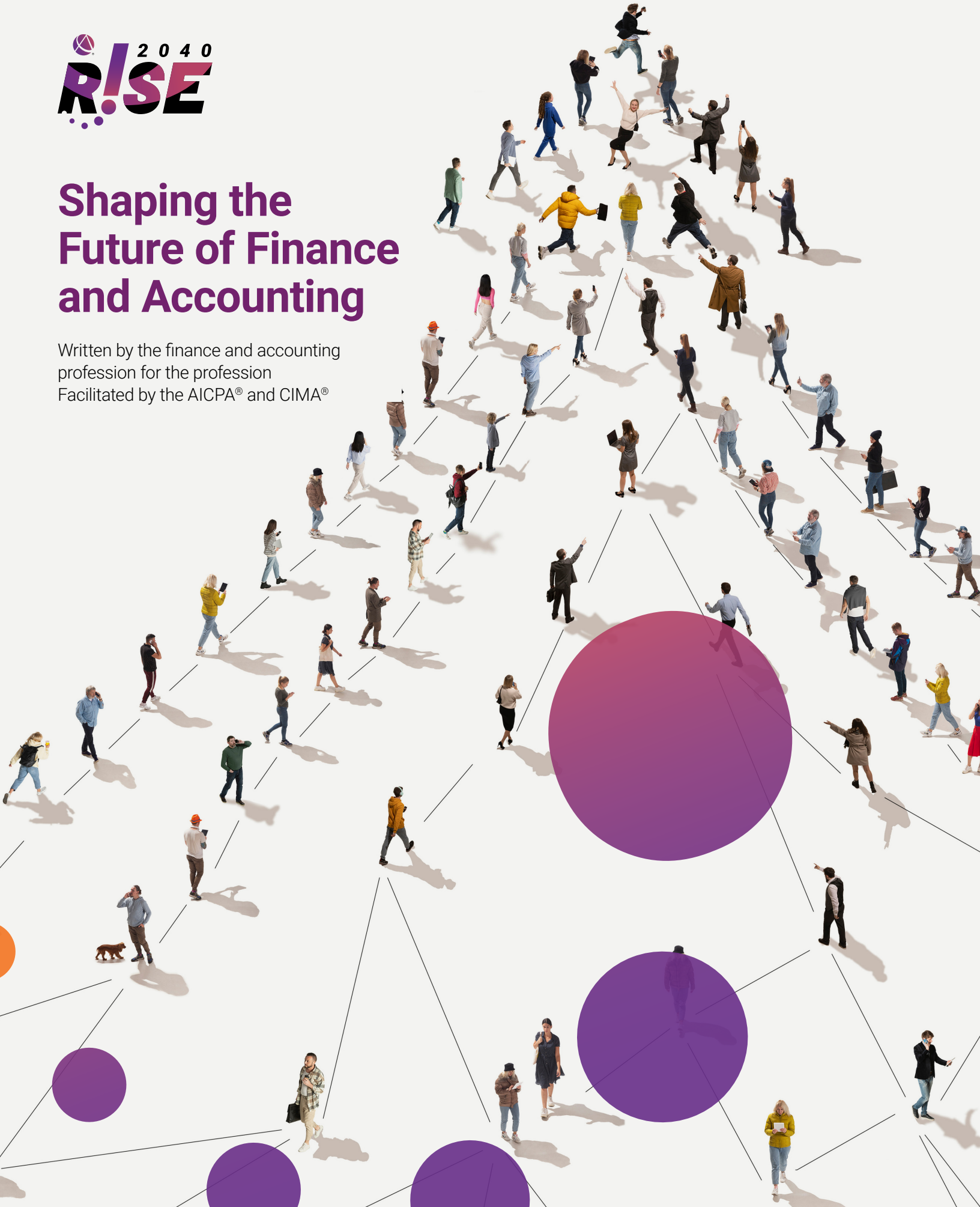
RISE 2040

# Shaping the Future of Finance and Accounting

Written by the finance and accounting profession for the profession
Facilitated by the AICPA® and CIMA®



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AICPA & CIMA
Together as the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants®

# Letter from the AICPA and CIMA leadership

For nearly three decades, our profession has come together at pivotal moments to define its future — from the CPA Vision Project to CPA Horizons 2025 and the combined forces of the AICPA and CIMA in *Rebooting Business: Valuing the Human Dimension*. Each effort reflected the realities of its time and helped guide us forward.

Today, we stand at another defining moment at the dawn of the age of artificial intelligence (AI).

Rise2040: Shaping the Future of Finance and Accounting is not a final answer. This initiative is a starting point, an ongoing, global process and platform designed to help us collectively explore, challenge, and shape what comes next for the profession.

Through Future Forums held across 25 countries and engaging more than 6,000 professionals, we have begun to gather a rich and diverse set of perspectives. These insights are being used to inform strategic discussions at the AICPA and CIMA, including our board priorities, future investments, and how we support members, firms, and organizations around the world.

Importantly, this work is not about predicting a single future with certainty. The year 2040 is not a fixed destination; it is a mechanism to help us look beyond the immediate horizon and think more expansively about the forces shaping our profession. There are, of course, unknowns and uncertainties ahead. But there are also clear signals — what futurist Daniel Burrus calls "Hard Trends" — that give us greater confidence about where change is heading and where opportunity lies.

What distinguishes Rise2040 is how we are approaching this work together.

Many organizations have produced valuable reports that describe the future of the profession and help their members prepare for change. Rise2040 builds on that tradition but takes an important step further. It is designed not only to describe the future, but to equip our profession to actively shape it through global co-creation, structured foresight, and an AI-enabled platform to capture a growing body of shared insights that will continue to evolve over time.

Several clear themes have already emerged.

Trust remains our foundation, but in a world shaped by AI, data proliferation, and increasing complexity, trust is becoming even more valuable. At the same time, technology is not simply changing how we work, it is redefining the role we play. As routine tasks are automated, the opportunity and expectation are for finance and accounting professionals to lead with insight, judgment, and foresight.

This points to an important shift: from a profession focused primarily on reporting what happened, to one that helps organizations anticipate what's next and make better decisions in real time.

That shift will not happen automatically. It will require continued investment in skills, technology, and new ways of working. It will also require us to navigate important tensions — between innovation and trust, speed and rigor, human judgment and machine intelligence. These are not problems to be solved once, but dynamics to be managed over time.

The purpose of Rise2040 is to help us do exactly that — together.

In the coming months, we will continue to expand this work: refining the insights, deepening engagement, and translating what we are learning into practical actions for our profession, our organizations, and our members. This includes informing strategy, shaping education and upskilling pathways, and strengthening the global voice and relevance of the CPA license and CGMA® qualification.

We invite you to engage with this work. Challenge it. Contribute to it. And help us shape what it becomes.

Because ultimately, the future of our profession will not be defined by the trends we observe, but by how intentionally we act on them.

Together, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure that finance and accounting continue to power trust, opportunity, and prosperity in a rapidly changing world.

Sincerely,

**Mark, Lexy, and John**



**Mark Koziel, CPA, CGMA**
President & CEO
AICPA and CIMA



**Lexy Kessler, CPA, CGMA**
Chair, Association
Chair, AICPA



**John Graham, FCMA, CGMA**
Co-Chair, Association
President, CIMA

# Executive summary

From June 2025 through January 2026, the AICPA and CIMA facilitated Rise2040 Future Forums. This structured, global dialogue about the future of the finance and accounting profession spanned 25 countries, drawing on more than 6,000 participants across roles and career stages. CPAs and CGMA professionals, globally recognized credentialed professionals, CFOs, controllers, educators, firm leaders, and emerging professionals, who together represent the evolving finance ecosystem, all participated. The entire audience contributed insights regarding what is changing and what must endure. And importantly, how the profession can move from reacting to disruption to anticipating it.

What emerged was not fear. It was optimism. It was clarity that judgment, interpretation, and leadership are increasing in value and are the profession's primary source of relevance.

Using Daniel Burrus's Anticipatory Organization® framework, participants distinguished between Hard Trends — future facts such as advancing AI capability, expanding data volumes, demographic shifts, and regulatory evolution — and Soft Trends, things that are likely to happen, often based on data-informed assumptions, that can be influenced by strategic choice. Then, participants looked for the opportunities that each trend presented. This discipline shifted the conversation from speculation to agency.

Across regions and roles, a consistent identity surfaced: the profession of 2040 and beyond will be defined not by tasks, but by trust.

Participants affirmed that ethics, integrity, and human judgment remain the profession's most enduring assets. In a world of accelerating automation and intelligent systems, trust does not diminish, it appreciates. As routine work becomes increasingly automated, occurring in the background, the value of discernment, foresight, and ethical stewardship rises.

Technology was not described as a threat, but as a force multiplier. AI and automation are expected to reshape compliance and reporting, freeing professionals to focus on strategic advisory, anticipatory and scenario planning, AI governance, and complex decision support. The opportunity is not to compete with machines, but to design, guide, and govern them responsibly.

At the same time, participants were candid about internal challenges. Resistance to change, business model evolution, and talent shifts surfaced as pressing areas requiring intentional redesign. Cultural inertia was frequently described as a greater risk than technological disruption.

Important tensions remain. The profession as a whole continues to wrestle with the pace of innovation versus prudence and with short-term pressure versus long-term stewardship. Rather than attempt to resolve these tensions prematurely, this report surfaces tensions transparently. The collective vision that emerged is both pragmatic and ambitious. By 2040, participants see a profession that blends finance and accounting expertise with data fluency, strategic insight, and human-centered leadership, a concept that was expressed as "Human in the Lead." They see a profession that protects confidence in markets while helping organizations navigate uncertainty. They see a profession that leads change rather than reacting to it.

Rise2040 does not prescribe a single road map. It reflects the dominant signals, recurring concerns, and shared aspirations voiced across the global conversations. The dataset revealed five distinct, non-overlapping drivers shaping the profession's future. These drivers are grounded in Hard Trends — future facts that will occur — and Soft Trends — areas influenced by choice.

1. Technology and data infrastructure
2. Value model transformation
3. Talent and workforce dynamics
4. Regulatory and trust architecture
5. Market and societal expectations

Together, these present a portfolio of opportunities that organizations can use to translate foresight into strategic action. The future is not defined by the trends themselves. **It is defined by how intentionally we act on the opportunities they create.**

Importantly, across all five drivers, one principle remains constant: **Trust is the integrating layer — anchoring technology, enabling value, sustaining governance, and defining the profession's identity.**

The choice before the profession is not whether to change, but how intentionally we choose to **RISE**.

## **Methodology** overview:

**1.** Standard framework

**2.** Disciplined facilitation

**3.** AI data synthesis

**4.** Human in the Lead

**5.** Data science review

## **Summary:** Rise2040 Global Engagement

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **6,263** total participants | **90** facilitators trained | **95** Future Forums held |
| **25** different countries | **11** executive committee Future Forums | **3** global webcasts |

From conversations to capability. From report to platform.



**"Profession":** For purposes of this report, "the profession" and "we" refer collectively to CPAs, CGMA professionals, chartered accountants, and all finance and accounting professionals operating across public practice, business, government, and education.



# The rise of Rise2040

## The initiative that let us speak for ourselves.

*Imagine an early-career CPA in Canada sitting in a virtual breakout room with a senior-leader CGMA professional in Malaysia. They have never met. They work on different continents, in different regulatory environments, at different stages of their careers. And yet, within 20 minutes, they are finishing each other's sentences about what the profession will become by 2040. The more senior participant speaks about flat organizations, about how "so much of what we older folks would have contributed at a higher level is now redundant." The early career participant speaks about AI coworkers and real-time data translation. They disagree on timelines. They agree on direction. And when they are asked what will not change, they say the same word at the same time: "trust."*

This scene, repeated in hundreds of conversations, captures the spirit of Rise2040. This was not a presentation to be consumed. It was a conversation to be joined. It was not a plan imposed from above. It was a collective act of imagination, grounded in intentional methodology, and fueled by the lived experience of practitioners who know this profession from the inside.

This report, *Rise2040: Shaping the Future of Finance and Accounting*, was written for us, and by us, synthesizing our collective intelligence into a shared view of 2040 that no single committee could have produced alone.

This report does not introduce new conclusions. It reflects patterns, tensions, and opportunities voiced

directly by participants. Where interpretation was required for clarity, it is grounded explicitly in the language and direction expressed across sessions.

Rise2040 began with an instinct. Not the instinct to wait, but the instinct to ask a better question. Not, "What might happen?" but "What *will* happen?" Not, "What should we fear?" but "What can we *know*?" In an uncertain world, what can we really be certain about?

Navigating the disruptive forces of today's world requires a new strategic posture. For decades, the dominant strategy has been agility — reacting as quickly as possible to problems after they occur. While still a necessary skill, this reactive stance is insufficient in an era of exponential change. The Rise2040 initiative was grounded in a more powerful methodology: anticipation. This framework provides a systematic way to find certainty in an uncertain world, enabling leaders to move from a defensive crouch to a confident, forward-leading posture.

That sounds incredibly optimistic, of course. But this is not optimism for its own sake. It is strategic discipline. As Daniel Burrus states, "When you are certain about something, you have the confidence to make a bold move. When you are uncertain, you hesitate, you defer, you commission another study."




But certainty, it turns out, is hiding in plain sight.

- *Population groups will get older every year; that cannot be changed.*
- *Innovation and disruption trigger regulatory response.*
- *AI will grow more capable; the trajectory is irreversible.*
- *Computing power will increase.*
- *Data will proliferate.*
- *Globalization will continue.*

These are not predictions. They are future facts, and there are many others. Once you identify a future fact, something remarkable happens: the fog of uncertainty begins to clear. Not entirely, not about everything, but enough. Enough to act. Enough to invest. Enough to build.

## From conversations to capability: The architecture behind Rise2040

### More than a report, this is an enduring foresight system.

As early planning discussions took shape in 2025, intentional thought was given to how the profession could move beyond episodic conversations about the future and instead build a repeatable foresight capability. Could we create a system to continuously capture, organize, and learn from insight at scale?

That design came into focus through planning discussions with global futurist Daniel Burrus, where the emphasis shifted from one-time events to structured insight capture. Pre-session surveys, facilitated workshops, and anticipation exercises were designed to surface Hard Trends and opportunity signals, label them consistently, and synthesize them into reports and leadership debriefs that could be reused over time and at different points in an organization's life cycle.

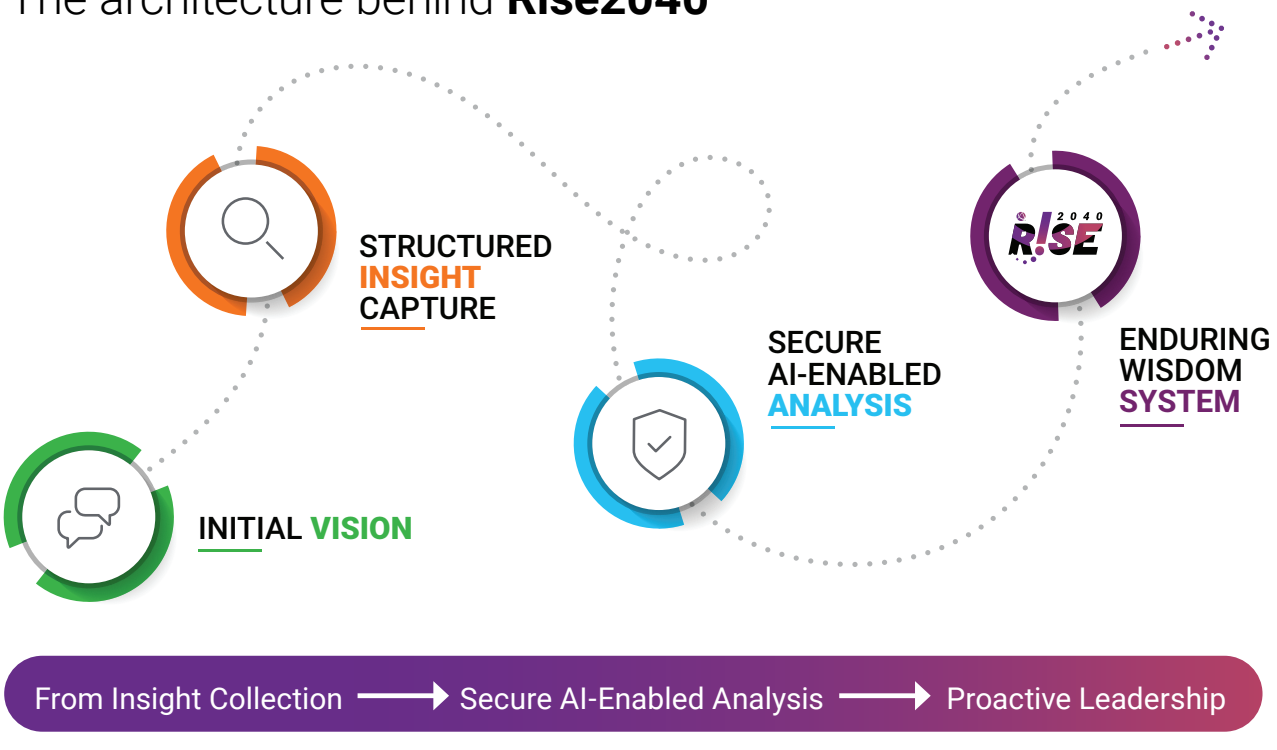



To scale this work responsibly and securely, Rise2040 leveraged the Association’s secure Microsoft Azure–based AI and Copilot platform, developed by our internal global AI team, to analyze large volumes of qualitative input, identify patterns, and support the synthesis of insights across geographies, sectors, and career stages. This approach enabled advanced analytics to augment — not replace — human judgment and foresight expertise, while ensuring enterprise-grade security, governance, and trust.

This architecture reflects a core principle of anticipatory leadership: insight has the greatest value when it is treated as data, not anecdote, and when it is organized into intelligence that informs decisions before change forces reaction.

Over time, this approach evolved into what Rise2040 now represents. This is more than a report; it is a platform that converts collective input into actionable intelligence and enables the profession to adapt, innovate, and actively shape its future toward 2040 and beyond.

## **From conversations to capability, from report to platform:** The architecture behind **Rise2040**




[1] **Source:** All quotes from Daniel Burrus in this report are from Burrus’s keynote addresses delivered as part of the Rise2040 initiative.

# Why now?

## The timing behind Rise2040

Rise2040 was commissioned at a pivotal inflection point for the profession. In 2025, Mark Koziel assumed leadership as the new global CEO of the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants. At the same time, the profession reached the endpoint of nearly three decades of formal visioning efforts (from the CPA Vision Project launched in 1997 through CPA Horizons 2025) and the conclusion of the initial vision for the AICPA and CIMA joint venture.

With those chapters complete, the board recognized that the moment called for not simply updating a plan, but for defining the next era. Rise2040 was commissioned to ensure the profession does not drift into its future, but deliberately shapes it.





# Key themes across global conversations

*Across more than 6,000 participants and multiple global forums, conversations revealed several clear and consistent themes. While perspectives varied by region, sector, and role, participants repeatedly returned to a common set of convictions about the profession's future.*

This section represents the distilled synthesis of those conversations. It reflects the themes that surfaced most frequently, carried the strongest energy in the room, and transcended geographic and organizational differences. These are not editorial conclusions. They are patterns observed across sessions — themes participants articulated in their own way as they described both what must endure and what must evolve. Together, these themes provide a concise view of how the profession understands the forces shaping it and where it believes focus is required as it looks toward 2040.

## FOUNDATIONAL THEMES:
These appeared consistently across sessions and geographies.

### 1. Trust, ethics, and integrity are non-negotiable anchors.

- The profession's permission to operate rests on trust.
- The profession's high standards of ethics remain a constant through 2040 and beyond.
- Quality and integrity will be the differentiator.
- Trust is seen as a competitive moat in an AI-saturated world.
- Public stewardship and capital markets protection remain core identity markers.

### 2. Technology and data as strategic imperatives

- AI seen as amplifier of judgment for accounting professionals, not a replacement.
- Shifts accountants from task executors to supervisors of intelligent systems.
- AI literacy framed as mission-critical leadership competency.
- AI adoption is urgent and uneven.
- "Embrace AI, not resist."
- "Be a disrupter to avoid being disrupted."
- "Humans in the Lead."

## Built on **trust**

Trust is not a new ambition for the finance and accounting profession. From the earliest systems of recorded commerce to modern global capital markets, the profession has existed to create confidence in financial information, in governance, and in ethical conduct. Professional standards, regulatory frameworks, and credential pathways were designed for technical precision as well as to ensure credibility.

Rise2040 does not redefine that foundation. It reaffirms it. Throughout the global conversations, trust emerged as the profession's enduring core, expressed across multiple reinforcing layers:

- **Trust** in the individual professional's ethical judgment
- **Trust** in organizational integrity
- **Trust** in capital markets and public reporting
- **Trust** in data and intelligent systems as they are governed

Participants consistently linked trust to accuracy, transparency, integrity, disciplined judgment, and stewardship. The principle remains constant. The context changes.

## Where do you place your organization's current use of AI?

(Responses from global webcast participants)

**Explorer**
Beginning to investigate AI apps and uses
**58.12%**

**Scaler**
Have successfully implemented AI and are expanding
**10.58%**

**Pilot**
Testing limited, controlled-scope AI solutions
**30.25%**

**Optimizer**
Advanced AI capabilities enterprise-wide
**1.04%**

### 3. Evolution from compliance-only to strategic adviser

- Advisory identity is increasingly central to professional relevance.
- Compliance will increasingly be automated, real-time, and embedded.
- Strong aspiration to move from historical reporting to forward-looking insight.
- "From number cruncher to strategic navigator" and "from scorekeeper to futurist."
- Data storytelling, anticipatory and scenario planning, decision enablement.
- "Moving up the value chain from bookkeeping to reporting, to budgeting and forecasting, to communication and decision support, requires taking agency and continuous upskilling."

### 4. Talent pipeline and workforce sustainability

- Maintaining attractiveness of the profession
- Changing workforce expectations
- Compensation competitiveness
- Mentorship and development redesign required

### 5. Human skills as future differentiator

- Strategic and critical thinking
- Emotional intelligence
- Relationship building
- Ethical judgment
- Human interpretation of AI output (both insight generation and storytelling)

### 6. Intergenerational stewardship

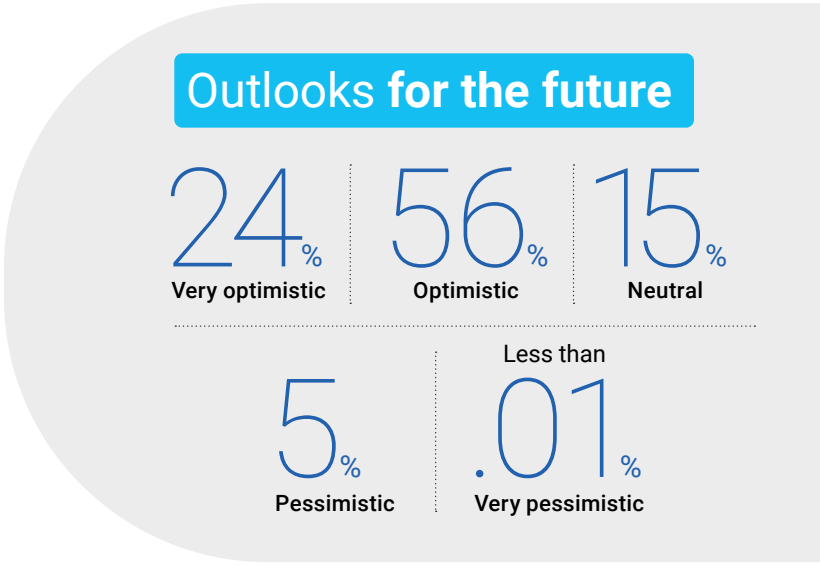
- Strong sense of responsibility to leave profession stronger.
- Legacy framing present across sessions.
- Future professionals are a motivating force.

### 7. Optimistic outlook

- A very positive view on the future of the profession

### 8. Resistance to change as primary internal threat

- "Ourselves" is the single most cited barrier, verbatim.
- "SALY" (same as last year) mindset cited repeatedly.
- Institutional rigidity seen as bigger threat than AI.



## The greatest barrier is ourselves

Within the Rise2040 forum discussions, one theme surfaced with striking consistency: the profession's greatest threat to relevance **is itself**. Conversations acknowledged that a reliance on familiar, legacy ways of working continues to anchor decision-making in a world that is rapidly changing.

What once signaled efficiency and consistency now reinforces outdated assumptions, slows innovation, and limits the profession's ability to evolve at the pace required for relevance.

The voices of Rise2040 were clear that this is not a capability issue. It is a behavioral one.

According to many participants, institutional rigidity, deeply embedded ways of working and thinking, and outdated ways of rewarding success have become a more immediate constraint than any external disruption, including AI. While companies and firms are actively **discussing** transformation, many remain structurally and culturally optimized to preserve the status quo.

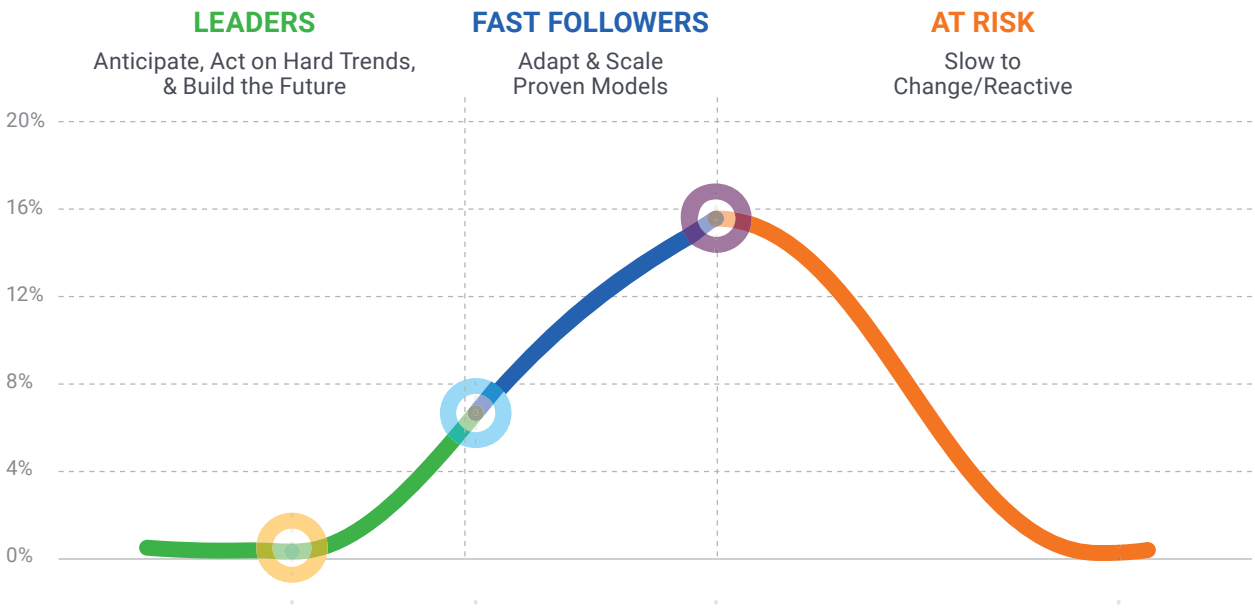
This reality is creating notable separation within the profession. Some organizations are emerging as **leaders**. They are actively challenging legacy models, investing in new capabilities, and making intentional choices to evolve.

Others are **fast followers**. They recognize the need for transformation and are beginning to move but often remain anchored in familiar patterns that slow progress.

And some are increasingly **at risk**. They continue to rely on past success as a predictor of future relevance, underestimating the speed and scale of change around them.

## **Rise2040:** Transformation Distribution Curve

"The future will not be evenly distributed."




The greatest barrier is not technology, but speed of change.
The future advantage goes to those who act first.

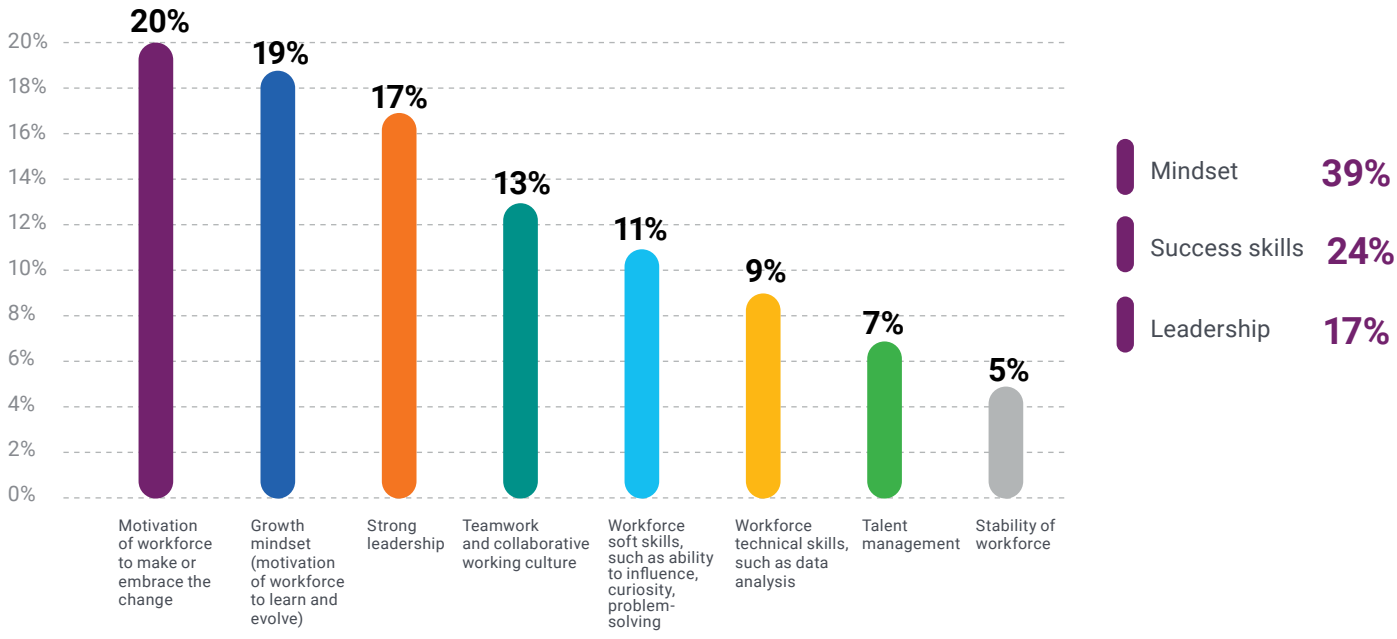
**The difference between these groups is not access to information or awareness of trends. It is the willingness to act.**

Dismantling cultural inertia requires more than acknowledgment. It requires intentional disruption of legacy habits. This includes challenging long-held assumptions about how work gets done, redefining what is rewarded and measured, and creating space for experimentation even when outcomes are uncertain.

Transformation will not occur simply because better tools exist or clearer insights are available. The future is not being held back by a lack of ideas. It is being held back by a reluctance to let go of the past.

One of Dan Burrus's keynotes cited the difference between change and transformation: **"Change always comes from the outside in, forcing you to put out fires and crisis manage. Transformation always comes from the inside out, giving you the ability to shape the future as an opportunity manager."**

## **80%** of transformation success is about ***people!***




Transformation success is not evenly distributed — it follows a curve defined by the speed of human adaptation. Our research shows that 80% of success is driven by people, led by mindset **(39%)**, followed by success skills **(24%)** and leadership **(17%)**. Organizations that anticipate change by building a growth mindset and continuously developing capabilities position themselves as leaders, while those slower to adapt fall behind. In this environment, the true differentiator is not technology but how quickly people learn, evolve, and act.

Source: Adapted from AICPA and CIMA/KPMG, *Finance Transformation: The Human Perspective*, 2020.



# The 2040 vision and the enduring core

**Who we will be. What we will do. What will endure.**

- *"Trusted advisers. Irreplaceable."*
- *"Ethical stewards of impact, balancing performance, people, and planet."*
- *"The dot connector of the company to leverage value creation."*
- *"People won't make a decision unless you're in the room."*

These are not slogans written by a marketing team. This is not conjecture. They are the words of working professionals, submitted in real time across multiple continents.

Armed with a framework for finding certainty, more than 6,000 professionals engaged in collective anticipation. The result is a rich, multifaceted vision of what the finance and accounting profession will become. This vision is not aspirational fantasy — it is a strategic destination grounded in the Hard Trends shaping our world. It describes a profession that has stopped defining itself by what it counts and started defining itself by what it makes possible.

## **The collective vision:** The trusted, anticipatory adviser

A clear and consistent identity emerged from every session, on every continent. The professional of 2040 is a forward-looking strategic business partner.

### Who we will be

The most consistent theme across all regions was identity transformation. Participants did not describe themselves as bookkeepers, tax preparers, or auditors. They described themselves as strategic advisers, technology-forward professionals, and ethical stewards. They used words like "dot-connectors" and "tech-enabled, insight-driven professionals." The future finance and accounting professional "blends accounting expertise with data science, strategic advising, and human-centered service delivery," wrote one Asia-Pacific participant.

### What we will do

Participants described a world where routine compliance work is handled by automation and AI agents in the background, while Humans in the Lead carry accountability for outcomes and final approvals.

Participants talked about sitting with leaders or clients in moments of uncertainty to help them see clearly. Examples surfaced of guiding families through complex transitions with steadiness and care and helping entrepreneurs take calculated risks. The participants saw themselves translating overwhelming streams of data into grounded decisions.

- *When markets fluctuate, we will provide perspective.*
- *When regulation shifts, we will provide stability.*
- *When technology accelerates, we will provide discernment.*
- *When data expands dramatically, assurance becomes more critical, not less.*

## What we will do in 2040

- **Strategic guidance:** Business modeling, anticipatory planning and multi-scenario planning, and resilient stress testing.
- **AI oversight:** Supervising teams of AI agents, auditing algorithmic systems, and setting ethical guidelines for autonomous processes. Even entry-level accountants of 2040 will lead AI bots capable of superhuman processing.
- **Data translation:** Using advanced analytics and predictive insights to find and tell the story in the data.
- **Human-centric advisory:** Providing the emotional intelligence, context, and trust that technology alone cannot deliver. AI handles the data and analysis. Humans provide the judgment, the interpretation, the relationship, and the trust.

### What we will create, have, and experience

Participants often envisioned "flat organizations" where AI levels the playing field. This is the previously predicted structural shift of moving "from a pyramid to a pentagon, a diamond middle." The experience of working in this profession will also transform, reflecting greater emphasis on "job satisfaction," "creative human leadership," and "quality of life," with those who make up the profession feeling "appreciated for its value and for the impact that it is making."

## The identity shift: From... to...

The transformation can be best understood as a series of fundamental shifts in three areas: identity, activity, and value proposition.

| From... | To... |
|---|---|
| **Historian:** Recording and reporting on past events | **Strategist:** Shaping future outcomes |
| **Compliance enforcer:** Checking boxes | **Anticipatory adviser:** Identifying opportunities and pre-solving problems with stakeholders |
| **Information reporter:** Delivering data | **Insight and trust leader:** Ensuring data integrity, interpreting data's meaning, and enabling confident decision-making |
| **Siloed technician:** Focused on accounting rules | **The dot connector:** Integrating finance with strategy, operations, and technology |
| **Reactive service provider:** Responding to requests | **Indispensable insights:** Proactively offering perspectives |

Beneath all these aspirations, one word appeared more than any other, in every region, every audience, every exercise: **Trust**.

## **The unchanging core:** Trust as an appreciating asset

When asked what will not change by 2040, professionals gave the same answers. Trust. Integrity. Quality. Accuracy. Then they added: human wisdom, critical thinking, relationship building, the need for accountability. And, with a smile that came through even in typed responses: ***death and taxes***.

A key insight from the entire Rise2040 initiative is the paradox of technology and trust: **The more the world is saturated with artificial intelligence, the more valuable human trust becomes**.

The profession is uniquely positioned to capitalize on this "trust scarcity." It does not need to build trust from scratch; it sits on an asset of extraordinary and appreciating value. The challenge is not merely to preserve this trust, but to actively extend it into new domains.

### The four constants: The profession's litmus test

Rise2040 participant insights distill into four anchors that can serve as the litmus test for every new technology, service, and strategy the profession adopts:

Trust • Integrity • Quality • Accuracy

Across all these anchors, participants were clear that the human element itself is the ultimate differentiator.




The concepts of human wisdom, critical thinking, professional judgment, and relationship building appeared in every session as the irreplaceable core of the profession. This leads to a principle that resounded for participants when imagining the profession in 2040: the future is not AI-first; it is human-first, with AI as a powerful amplifier.

The CPA with AI. The CGMA professional with AI. The human professional, amplified by technology but never replaced by it. The profession of 2040 has mastered technology to elevate, not eliminate, its most essential and enduring value.

### The central paradox

*The more technology can do, the more trust in humans matters. AI can hallucinate. It can generate erroneous outputs that look authoritative. Voices can now be cloned with nothing more than a brief "hello." As Burrus put it, "In the disinformation age, what I need is something I can trust." In this environment, the profession sits on an asset of extraordinary and appreciating value.*

As Daniel Burrus spoke at three of our global webcasts, he articulated the distinction between intelligence and wisdom in this succinct but memorable statement: "There is no such thing as artificial wisdom."

Wisdom is knowing when the data is telling you the wrong story. Wisdom is understanding what a client needs but has not articulated. Wisdom is the ethical judgment to say no when the numbers say yes.

Our constants should not merely be preserved but actively elevated. Trust is not just something to avoid losing. It is something participants saw as an opportunity to extend into new domains: data auditing; AI output verification; environmental, social, and governance (ESG) assurance; and digital transaction authentication; just to name a few. Our existing trust credentials will become the platform for an entirely new category of offerings and value.

## The reimagined profession

The Rise2040 conversations did more than identify forces and opportunities. Around the world, participants consistently moved beyond analysis into articulation. They were naming not only what is changing, but what the profession is **becoming**.




As the dataset was synthesized, it became clear that participants were describing more than strategic adjustments. They were describing identity. They were describing purpose. They were describing how they see themselves and the kind of profession they believe must emerge to remain relevant, credible, and indispensable in a world shaped by intelligent systems, demographic shifts, and regulatory complexity.

This section reflects that collective articulation. This is not introducing a new direction. Rather, it organizes the recurring themes voiced across sessions into four areas:

- **A clear purpose** — Clarifying why the profession exists beyond its functions
- **A shared mission** — Describing what the profession actively does in service of that purpose
- **A forward-looking vision** — Expressing how participants described the profession of 2040 and beyond
- **A set of non-negotiable core beliefs** — Identifying principles repeatedly referenced as enduring anchors even as the operating environment evolves

Although phrasing has been synthesized for clarity, each element reflects language and sentiments consistently expressed throughout the global conversations. Participants described a profession that is forward-looking, technology-fluent, ethically grounded, and strategically influential. They spoke of judgment elevated by data and intelligent systems, stewardship strengthened by transparency, and relevance sustained through adaptation. This is the distilled reflection of what thousands of participants articulated about their future and the profession they believe must rise to meet 2040 and beyond.

## How participants defined the profession's purpose

*We turn complexity into clarity, and clarity into trust, in a world that never stands still.*

## How participants defined the profession's global mission

*We anticipate what's next, master intelligent systems, and elevate human judgment, in order to shape standards, strategies, markets, and economies with trust and integrity.*

## How participants described who they will be in 2040

*By 2040, we have fully stepped into our next identity. We are the trusted Human in the Lead — an identity that is defined by perspective, discernment, and strategic influence. We are forward-looking business partners. We are dot-connectors. We are translators of complexity. We are technology-forward and insight-driven. We are ethical stewards in a world flooded with disinformation.*



*We blend finance and accounting expertise with data science, advising, and human-centered service delivery. We move fluidly between intelligent systems and human judgment. We do not compete with technology. Instead, we design it, govern it, and elevate it.*

*We are finally unleashing the superpower of the CPA and CGMA professional. Automation and AI handle structured, rules-based, repeatable work. Our work focuses on strategy development, guidance, insight analysis, foresight, and ethical judgment. We identify both challenges and solutions as we spend our time helping our organizations and clients make better decisions, anticipate risk, design resilient strategies, and navigate complexity with confidence.*

*Our organizations evolve alongside us. Hierarchies flatten. Technology levels the playing field. The traditional pyramid gives way to something more dynamic — a connected network of expertise where influence is driven by insight, not tenure.*

*The experience of being part of this profession transforms as well. We experience deeper job satisfaction. We build careers with quality of life and meaningful impact. We are appreciated not only for our technical competence, but also for the clarity, stability, and trust we bring to markets, organizations, and society.*

*By 2040, we are indispensable. Not because we resisted and withstood change. But because we led change and transformed. 2040 and beyond will undoubtedly bring new challenges and new opportunities, but we will remain known as a profession who chooses to RISE.*

## Non-negotiable core beliefs that emerged from the data

1. **Trust is timeless — its delivery is not.** We will modernize how trust is delivered without compromising why it exists.
2. **Technology augments and amplifies the profession.** AI is not the threat. Complacency is.
3. **Professional judgment is our strategic advantage.** In a world of infinite information, discernment is scarce.
4. **The future belongs to those who build it.** We are stewards of the profession and what the next generation inherits.
5. **Relevance requires reinvention.** The organization that thrives is the one that anticipates and transforms.



# Drivers shaping the future of the profession



*Immediate pressures on the profession are numerous and amplified by Hard Trends that will fundamentally reshape the profession's operating reality by 2040. During keynotes as part of the Rise2040 sessions, Daniel Burrus cited the following examples:*

### **Technological disruption:** The exponential productivity revolution

"AI is not an incremental change; it is an exponential force. Its capability growth is compressing the time required for routine cognitive tasks at a staggering rate. AI is just the beginning as more technological Hard Trends are on the horizon accelerating the rate of change, including quantum computing, digital twins, blockchains, and more."

### **Demographic certainty:** The great knowledge transfer

"The profession is at the peak of a generational shift. A wave of retirements is colliding with the arrival of a digitally native workforce, creating both a knowledge gap and a cultural imperative to change."

### Increasing Regulations: Navigating increasing complexity in a data-driven world.

"The volume and complexity of standards, reporting requirements, and oversight will continue to evolve. Even in periods of deregulation, systems are being redesigned rather than removed. This future fact is driven by expanding data, global interconnectedness, emerging technologies, and rising expectations for transparency and trust."

## **The implication:** If we aren't becoming more relevant, we're becoming less relevant.

The core activities that have defined the finance and accounting profession for a century — compliance, calculation, and historical reporting — are actively being automated. Participants often expressed concern that failure to pivot to higher-value roles could reduce perceived value.

A wide range of forces, ideas, and concerns were surfaced across the globe. While the language varied by region, organization type, firm size, and professional role, clear patterns emerged.

Before examining those patterns, it is important to note one foundational theme that consistently anchored the conversations: **trust endures**. Trust was not discussed as a nostalgic ideal. It was described as an appreciating asset — one that may become more valuable, not less, in a world shaped by AI, automation, and data proliferation. Participants consistently linked trust to ethics, to relationships, to stewardship, and to the profession's long-standing role in sustaining capital markets and organizational confidence.

With that context established, the dataset reveals five primary drivers where change is already unfolding. These drivers do not represent strategic mandates. They are organizing lenses — clusters of forces and opportunities that participants repeatedly identified across sessions.

Together with their opportunities, these drivers reflect how participants understand the profession's future:

- How technology and data are reshaping the operating environment
- How value creation is shifting beyond compliance
- How talent pathways and workforce models are being reimagined
- How governance and regulatory environments are evolving
- How professional identity and culture are adapting to new expectations from the market and society

Trust runs through each of these. It anchors technological integration. It differentiates advisory value. It underpins talent stewardship. It legitimizes governance structures. And it shapes the profession's evolving identity.

What follows is not a prescription for what the profession must become, but a structured reflection of what participants described. It aligns their insights into five drivers based on Hard and Soft Trends, the implications and predictable problems these drivers create, the opportunities they envision, and the tensions they acknowledge.

## A Framework for Certainty:
### The Anticipatory Organization® Methodology

Rise2040 was built on the anticipatory principles of Daniel Burrus, whose Anticipatory Organization methodology distinguishes between "Hard Trends" that will happen and "Soft Trends" that might happen. This framework guided every conversation — anchoring the profession's long-term vision in certainties while thoughtfully exploring areas of uncertainty and choice.

Importantly, the value of these trends is not in observing them, but in acting on the related opportunities they create. As Burrus emphasizes, anticipatory leaders use Hard Trends to identify game-changing opportunities before the competition does.

The methodology is built on two foundational concepts:

- **Hard Trends:** These trends are "future facts" based on measurable, tangible, and fully predictable forces. They will happen and cannot be changed. Examples include demographic shifts, the exponential growth of computing power, and the increasing complexity of regulation. Hard Trends allow you to see disruptions before they disrupt, turning disruption into a choice.
- **Soft Trends:** These are trends that might happen but can be influenced, changed, or reversed. They are based on assumptions. Examples include client adoption rates for a new service, the direction of the talent pipeline, or a firm's market share. If you don't like a Soft Trend, you can change it.

In addition to implications, using the Hard Trends, participants identified predictable problems — future challenges that can be anticipated and solved before they occur. These serve as the critical bridge between trends and opportunity.





# DRIVER 1:
## Technology and data infrastructure

**Hard Trends:** (1) AI-enabled profession (2) Trust and assurance expansion

1. AI will increasingly be embedded across all workflows.
2. Automation will increasingly eliminate routine work.
3. Real-time reporting will increasingly replace periodic cycles.
4. Data volumes will grow exponentially.
5. AI will increasingly be embedded in core platforms (ERPs, sales systems, etc.).
6. Agentic AI will increasingly execute end-to-end workflows.
7. Cloud technology will advance exponentially as the default infrastructure.
8. Cyber threats will increase.
9. AI adoption gaps will vary based on leadership and culture. (Soft Trend)

### Predictable problems:

- Overreliance on AI without validation erodes trust in outputs.
- Entry-level capability gaps widen as experiential learning disappears.
- Cyber and AI risk outpaces governance frameworks.
- Human decision-making lags behind machine-generated insights.

### Implications:

- Function shifts from execution to oversight and judgment.
- Compliance becomes "invisible" — taking place behind the scenes.
- Audit becomes continuous.
- Human processes cannot scale.
- Entry-level roles are redesigned.
- Decision-making becomes increasingly predictive.
- Overreliance on AI without validation creates trust risks.
- Risk shifts to AI and cyber.
- Financial integrity risk.

### Opportunities to pre-solve predictable problems:

**AI-enabled platforms**

- Provide real-time reporting and audit.

**Anomaly detection with AI detects errors and noncompliance areas**

- Provide this as a service.

**Autonomous finance function**

- Provide as a service linked to advisory.

**AI assurance frameworks**

- Provide AI-native audit (internal and external).

**Knowledge transformation**

- Implement AI knowledge capture (knowledge transfer bots).
- Create AI-driven institutional memory (wisdom database).
- Implement AI simulation training environments to replace hands-on training.

**Predictive intelligence**

- Develop a continuous foresight system.
- Prioritize both anticipatory and scenario modeling and forecasting.

**AI governance and trust expansions for AI assurance and validation**

- Provide as a service.

**Risk and fraud monitoring through continuous analytics**

- Provide as a service.

# DRIVER 2:
## Value and sustainability

**Hard Trends:** (1) Value and sustainability and (2) Profession repositioning

1. Automation reduces cost.
2. AI compresses time.
3. Wealth transfer underway.
4. Economic volatility persists.
5. Billable hour pressure as automation increases.
6. Clients expect more and demand greater insights.
7. Perception of profession affects demand and talent. (Soft Trend)

### Predictable problems:

- Revenue compression as compliance becomes fully commoditized
- Misalignment between pricing models and delivered value
- Firms competing on cost instead of insight
- Failure to articulate value leads to perceived irrelevance
- Firm business model sustainability in question

### Implications:

- Billable hour declines
- Margin pressure increases
- Traditional compliance commoditized
- Misaligned incentives and firm management
- Advisory becomes core
- Compliance commoditization

### Opportunities to pre-solve predictable problems:

**Pricing innovation**

- Implement value-based pricing.
- Implement subscription business models.

**Services expansion**

- Offer CFO-as-a-Service.
- Offer predictive tools and insight products.
- Offer comprehensive data governance.
- Develop new business models and KPIs.

**Wealth advisory**

- Offer family governance.

**Risk advisory**

- Offer both anticipatory and scenario modeling.

**New services around packaging insights and analytics for business improvements**

- Offer this as a service.



# DRIVER 3:
# Talent and workforce dynamics

**Hard Trends:** (1) Workforce reinvention and (2) AI-enabled profession

1. Aging workforce in many countries
2. Declining pipeline (Soft Trend)
3. Increasing digital-native workforce
4. AI increasingly reduces entry roles
5. Global mobility increases
6. Rise of gig/portfolio careers (Soft Trend)
7. Virtual work impacts human skill development (Soft Trend)
8. Increasing demand for flexibility
9. AI increasingly augments knowledge work

## Predictable problems:

- Breakdown of traditional training pathways
- Talent shortages worsen despite increased demand
- Loss of experiential learning pathways
- Skill gaps widen between AI-enabled and non-enabled professionals
- Loss of institutional knowledge from retiring workforce

## Implications:

- Entry paths must change
- Workforce inefficiency
- Skills shift to AI and advisory
- Workforce becomes even more global
- Expectations and knowledge base shift with each generation
- Representation gaps persist

## Opportunities to pre-solve predictable problems:

**Workforce redesign**

- Identify areas for AI-augmented roles.

**Learning innovation**

- Implement human-coupled-with-AI training models.

**Global talent models**

- Take advantage of an increasingly distributed workforce.
- Leverage global time zone locations for 24-7 services.

**Knowledge transfer**

- Implement AI capture systems.

**Intergenerational collaboration**

- Implement intergenerational training.
- Implement mentoring and reverse mentoring programs.
- Create a “wisdom database” for knowledge transfer.

**Pipeline expansion**

- Implement inclusion initiatives.
- Develop creative marketing campaigns.
- Develop early exposure initiatives.

# DRIVER 4:
## Trust and assurance architecture

**Hard Trends:** (1) Trust and assurance expansion and (2) AI-enabled profession

1. Regulation increases.
2. ESG expands.
3. AI governance tightens.
4. The need for transparency increases.
5. Real-time oversight emerges and expands.

### Predictable problems:

- Trust erosion due to lack of AI governance
- Regulation lags behind technological innovation
- Increased compliance burden without automation
- Fragmentation of global standards

### Implications:

- Trust becomes premium
- Assurance expands and manual processes fail
- Compliance burden increases
- Complexity increases
- Profession shapes regulation

### Opportunities to pre-solve predictable problems:

As complexity increases, the need for trusted professionals, ethical oversight, and high-quality standards increases alongside it. Expand trust and assurance across new data sources (HR, ESG, supply chain).

**Next-gen assurance**

- Implement AI and ESG assurance.
- Implement new trust-based advisory domain.
- Expand data assurance services.
- Develop trust score platforms.

**Real-time compliance**

- Implement automated reporting.
- Implement automated anomaly detection.

**Governance platforms**

- Implement integrated risk systems.
- Implement data governance.

**Regulatory leadership**

- Develop public-sector tools and transparency solutions.
- Develop AI-standards influencers.
- Implement cross-border compliance platforms.

# DRIVER 5:
## Global shifts and societal expectations

**Hard Trends:** (1) Profession repositioning and (2) Value model transformation

1. Transparency demand rises.
2. Globalization continues.
3. Stakeholder expectations expand.
4. Trust in information declines. (Soft Trend)
5. Career decisions shaped by digital influencers. (Soft Trend)
6. Internal resistance slows transformation efforts. (Soft Trend)

### Predictable problems:

- Declining relevance if profession fails to evolve narrative
- Talent avoidance due to outdated perception
- Increased competition from nontraditional entrants
- Trust gap in an era of misinformation

### Implications:

- Narrative must evolve and profession's story must shift to impact
- Clients expect real-time insight
- Reputation becomes more critical
- New competitors emerge
- Adoption varies by leadership

### Opportunities to pre-solve predictable problems:

**Repositioning**

- "Trust architect" identity.
- Talent branding to reframe profession.

**New advisory domains**

- Offer cyber and data integrity.
- Offer data governance beyond financial (HR, ESG, sales, suppliers).

**Client experience**

- Implement real-time insights.
- Develop multidisciplinary analysis.
- Implement both anticipatory and scenario planning.

**Global models**

- Implement scalable delivery.
- Implement cross-cultural capabilities.
- Make good use of "first mover" advantage based on future facts.

The **future is not defined by the trends** themselves.

It is **defined** by how intentionally we act on the opportunities they create.

**Rise2040** is not just one view of the future. **It is a system to build it. A starting point.**



# Tensions we choose to hold

## Where conversations diverged

*While strong patterns emerged across the contributions of more than 6,000 participants globally, the Rise2040 conversations were not uniform. They were thoughtful, candid, and at times divergent. Rather than smoothing these differences into artificial consensus, this report intentionally surfaces the areas where participants expressed disagreement. These tensions are not signs of fragmentation; they are evidence of a profession actively grappling with its future.*




### Scope of change: Reinvention and evolution

Across sessions, there was broad agreement that the profession is moving toward a more anticipatory, technology-enabled, advisory-centered future. Where opinions differed was on the scope and speed of change: how quickly transformation must occur and how far away that future really is.

Some described the moment as urgent and existential. Others framed it as evolutionary and manageable with thoughtful sequencing. This divergence reflects global diversity in regulatory environments, firm structures, and market maturity, as well as an organization's current position and previous choices.

For true innovators and leaders in the profession, the Rise2040 conversations were categorized as redundant and anticlimactic. For others, the discussions captured in this report were cited as true transformation. Your starting point will be uniquely yours and directly affects whether you are reinventing or evolving.

## AI: Liberation and risk

Participants consistently agreed that AI will reshape the profession. However, the tone of that reshaping varied.

Many described AI as a liberating force that automates repetitive work and frees professionals to focus on higher-order advisory, judgment, and strategy. Other voices raised concern about unintended consequences, including training gaps for early-career professionals, overreliance on automation, and the erosion of experiential learning.

There was broad agreement that AI should amplify, not replace, human judgment. The sentiment of Human in the Lead was strong across the conversations; yet, across geographies, firm sizes, and career stages, conversations reflected different levels of urgency, readiness, and comfort.

Overall, the profession acknowledges that AI will have an impact and is navigating how quickly and in what form it will be integrated.

## Feelings about the future: Optimism and anxiety

Participants expressed clear and measurable optimism about the future of the profession in these sessions. They consistently pointed to expanded opportunities, evolving roles, and the ability to create greater value through technology, insight, and advisory capabilities. At the same time, there was a noticeable undercurrent of anxiety, particularly among early-career professionals. Concerns about job displacement, changing skill requirements, and long-term career viability are shaping how the future is perceived, especially at the individual level. These two realities exist simultaneously. The profession is both expanding in possibility and new developments are creating uncertainty for those navigating their place within it.

Alongside those perspectives, a third sentiment emerged: a sense of stewardship and responsibility. Many participants expressed a belief that the future will not simply happen to the profession but will be shaped by the choices made today. This creates an important shift from passive observation to active ownership.

Together, these perspectives reflect a profession that is hopeful about where it is going, aware of the risks along the way, and increasingly accountable for what comes next.

## AI as the present focus and technology innovation as the broader reality

AI was the dominant thread across nearly every conversation. This is not surprising. Generative AI is highly visible, rapidly evolving, and already reshaping how work gets done. It is the most immediate and tangible example of change, which naturally made it the focal point for many participants. At the same time, there was recognition that this emphasis is a product of the current moment, not the full picture of what lies ahead. The broader reality is that the profession is being shaped by a continuous wave of technological advancement. What is being experienced today with generative AI and agentic AI will extend to quantum capabilities and innovations that have yet to emerge. The deeper conversation is not about any single technology, but about the profession's ability to continuously adapt. AI is the entry point, not the endpoint. The implication was that while AI appropriately features prominently in the current narrative, it must be framed within a larger context of ongoing technological transformation to ensure the insights remain relevant beyond the present moment.

## Transforming while performing

A persistent tension across the profession is the expectation to transform in the ways that Rise2040 describes while continuing to perform at a high level. Firms and companies are being asked to reimagine their business models, invest in new capabilities, and adopt emerging technologies, all while maintaining quality, meeting deadlines, and delivering consistent service. The reality is that transformation does not occur in a pause between deadlines. It happens alongside them.

This creates a strain on time, capacity, and leadership attention. Teams are often measured on current performance while being asked to build for a different future. Without intentional choices, transformation becomes something that is discussed but not meaningfully advanced.

Those making progress are not waiting for the perfect moment. They are making deliberate trade-offs. They are reallocating time, creating space for experimentation, and redefining what performance includes. In these environments, transformation is not treated as separate from the work. It becomes part of how the work is done. The tension remains. The profession must continue to deliver today while building what comes next.



## Role evolution: Workforce disruption and enduring demand

A clear tension emerged between concern over workforce displacement and confidence in the profession's long-term relevance. On one side, participants voiced real concern that advances in AI and automation will reduce the need for certain roles, particularly in traditional compliance work. These concerns were most pronounced among those earlier in their careers, who are questioning what their roles will look like and how to remain valuable in a rapidly changing environment. On the other side, there was strong conviction that the profession itself, and compliance more specifically, is not going away. Financial reporting, assurance, tax, and regulatory requirements will continue to exist and evolve. Most believe, however, that the nature of the work will change. Tasks may be automated, but the need for professional judgment, interpretation, and accountability remains. The prevailing perspective is not that the profession will do less but that it will do different things. This tension highlights a critical shift from task execution to higher-value contribution, where the future of the workforce is not eliminated but redefined.

There was also shared recognition that the efficiency intelligent systems create is only one of the elements supporting the profession's strategic relevance.

## Management accounting–specific notes

Some participants are already experiencing shifts in the roles of both CFO and controller to include more future-focused, value-added activities as transactions get automated. They expressed the value of forecasting and scenario modeling and new opportunities in financial planning and analysis (FP&A), made possible through good data and AI. More and more, opportunities exist for finance and accounting to be embedded in core functions across an organization (supply chain, sales, operations, and human relations). Others are not yet seeing this shift.

## Public accounting–specific notes

The compression of time required for compliance work prompted predictable reflection on pricing models and value propositions for public accounting firms. Some participants expressed confidence that advisory-led models and value-based pricing represent the natural evolution of the profession. Others noted that client expectations, regulatory structures, and firm economics may slow or complicate that transition.

## Private equity and ownership structures

The entrance of private equity capital generated mixed responses among the U.S. market participants. Some participants viewed new capital sources as an opportunity to accelerate investment in technology and innovation. Others raised questions about governance, independence, and the long-term protection of professional standards. The conversations reflected varying experiences with ownership models and differing assessments of risk and opportunity.

## Remote work and professional development

Remote and hybrid work models were widely discussed but not uniformly embraced. Participants acknowledged flexibility as a valuable advancement. At the same time, participants also underscored the value of face-to-face interactions with regard to mentorship, learning, and soft-skill development. The tension in the discussion was not between flexibility and individual professionals' discipline. It was about the unintended consequences that flexibility creates — and how to intentionally design the workplace to address these consequences.

## Workforce pipeline

In some sessions, participants expressed concern about the health of the talent pipeline. However, there was no singular view on how to address it.

Some advocated for alternative pathways into the profession, including apprenticeship models, experience-weighted CPA licensure, and earlier engagement. They noted that the cost and time required to enter the profession present structural barriers that must be reconsidered. They noted that the CGMA qualification has existing apprenticeship models in both the U.S. and UK that allow pathways from as early as high school and junior college to earn the qualification, making us the first global profession with apprenticeship pathways.

Others voiced strong caution against changing standards, emphasizing that the rigor of the credential underpins the profession's trust capital. For them, preserving quality and elevating compensation were essential to protecting long-term credibility.

Both perspectives were rooted in stewardship. The tension reflects a shared commitment to future sustainability, even as opinions differ on how to achieve it.



## Rise2040 Advisory Board commentary regarding tensions

### Aspirational profession vs. traditional profession

A clear tension exists between the what majority of the profession is today and what it aspires to become. The traditional model for finance and accounting is well understood. It is grounded in technical excellence, compliance, standardization, and proven ways of working that have sustained the profession for many decades. It prioritizes consistency, risk mitigation, and reliability, which remain essential to the profession's foundation and public trust.

At the same time, there is a growing vision of a more aspirational profession. One that is dynamic, technology-enabled, insight-driven, and more deeply embedded in strategic decision-making. This version of the profession expands beyond execution into influence. It redefines value, reimagines roles, and challenges long-standing assumptions about how work is delivered and measured.

These two realities are not mutually exclusive. Many firms and professionals are attempting to operate in both at once, maintaining traditional expectations while reaching toward a more expansive future. This creates tension in how success is defined, how time is allocated, and how talent is developed. The path forward is not about abandoning the traditional foundation, but about evolving it with intention. The profession must determine where to preserve what has made it trusted and where to transform in order to remain relevant.

The future of the profession will not be defined by choosing one over the other, the present over the future, but by how effectively it integrates the strengths of each. The greatest opportunity is the comprehensive and strategic alignment of these opportunities to elevate the profession's value and deliver on the trust it has been built on.

The future of the profession will not be defined by choosing one over the other, the present over the future, but by how **effectively it integrates the strengths of each**.



# Building the capabilities for 2040

*The data is clear: the defining capabilities of 2040 are not technical, they are human. The value of the finance and accounting professional shifts decisively toward judgment, insight, and influence. Participants in Rise2040 say the future will not be led by those who simply adopt technology, but by those who can apply it with discernment, translate it into meaning, and lead others through complexity with clarity and trust. The transformation to 2040 is not just a technology evolution. It is a human one.*

## The critical capabilities for 2040

The skills participants said were needed to thrive in 2040 fell into four capability categories.

### 1. Human capabilities

These are the capabilities that AI cannot replicate and are a sustainable competitive advantage.

- **Communication (vs. informing):** Moving from one-way, static report delivery to two-way, dynamic dialogue that creates movement
- **Storytelling:** Translating complex information and data into compelling narratives that drive action
- **Collaboration (vs. cooperating):** Shifting from transactional obligations to co-creative partnerships
- **Trust building:** Actively maintaining and elevating the profession's foundational asset rather than passively assuming it (both with clients and within teams)
- **Emotional intelligence:** Understanding and responding to human context, nuance, and unspoken needs
- **Strategic listening:** The ability to understand, through deep attention, what clients and stakeholders need, even when it has not been explicitly articulated, by interpreting context, emotion, and underlying intent

## 2. Insight and judgment capabilities

These are the capabilities that increase value across the profession.

- **Critical thinking:** The essential human filter for AI-generated outputs, enabling professionals to question assumptions and challenge data rather than merely processing it
- **Ethical reasoning:** Navigating the complex moral questions created by AI and automation to ensure the profession remains worthy of public trust
- **Strategic advisory and consulting:** Moving upstream from recording what happened to prescribing what should happen
- **Anticipatory mindset:** Identifying Hard Trends and using them to seize opportunities and pre-solve problems before they become crises
- **Systems thinking:** Seeing interconnections and anticipating the ripple effects of decisions across a complex organization

## 3. Leadership capabilities: Driving transformation, not just change

These capabilities directly affect whether the profession merely changes or truly transforms.

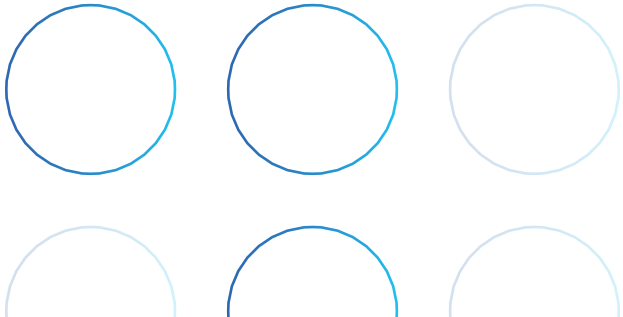
- **Transformation leadership:** Fundamentally rethinking roles, services, and value creation and casting a vision that inspires change
- **Innovation:** Applying systematic frameworks to create genuinely new value, moving beyond imitating best practices
- **Learning agility:** Being comfortable with continuous learning, unlearning, and relearning in a world of perpetual technological revolution

## 4. Technical and AI fluency capabilities: The foundation for an AI-augmented environment

Mastery is not about competing with AI's speed but about fluently partnering with its capabilities.

- **AI literacy:** Working effectively with intelligent systems as a collaborative partner. Polling showed the majority of professionals remain in the "explorer" stage
- **Data analytics:** Working with complex datasets to generate predictive insights and ensure data quality
- **Technological fluency:** Understanding, broadly, the current technology stack in enterprises as well as emerging technologies and related considerations including blockchain, the internet of things (IoT), and cybersecurity
- **Foundational accounting and finance:** Retaining a deep understanding of core accounting and finance principles — including audit, tax, and financial reporting — remains critical, even as AI performs much of the underlying work. Professionals must be able to interpret outputs, validate accuracy, apply standards in context, and exercise judgment in complex or ambiguous situations. Technical knowledge is not replaced, but it is repositioned as the foundation for oversight, accountability, and trust

The future belongs to professionals who can hold complexity, make sound judgments when answers are not obvious, and lead with both confidence and integrity. Technology will continue to advance. Data will continue to expand. But the profession's relevance will be determined by something far more enduring: the ability of its people to think critically, act ethically, and lead decisively. This is Human in the Lead, and it is the profession's most powerful and irreplaceable advantage.





# The road to 2040: From vision to action

## How to use this report

Rise2040 is not a mandate. **It is an invitation**.

The insights in this report are not theoretical. They are directional signals from the profession itself.

This report is not asking you to adopt everything. It **is** asking you not to ignore what is visible.

Different organizations will move at different speeds. Different regions will apply these insights in different ways. That diversity is a strength. What is not sustainable, however, is passive drift.

## What this report is *not*

Even with the sense of urgency that was felt in Rise2040 discussions, the participants did not suggest a fear-based future. Neither does the report. It does not say compliance disappears. It does not diminish the rigor of CPA or CGMA credentials. It does not predict one global structure.

It recognizes that delivery models will change, and the profession must change with them. The future, however, will not arrive fully formed. It will be shaped by decisions made before certainty is complete. Rise2040 exists to ensure the profession does not drift into 2040 by accident. This report is designed to help leaders move deliberately, with more empowerment, and with ownership over their futures.

## 4 immediate ways to use Rise2040

### 1. Use the report as a strategic mirror for your organization

Gather your board/executive team/leadership team/department. Read the executive summary together. Ask:

- Where are we already aligned with this future?
- Where are we exposed?
- What are we hoping will change on its own?

The goal is not consensus. The goal is clarity on where you align (or do not) about the future of your own organization.

### 2. Use it to pressure test your organization's vision

If you already have a strategic plan, compare it to the Rise2040 report.

- Does your current plan reflect similar insights or different ones?
- Are you making assumptions that are different from this report?
- Does your vision elevate judgment and strategy over routine and tasks?
- Does it account for AI-enabled efficiencies? (In your talent strategy? In your workflow and processes? In your technology investments? In your client value proposition?)
- Does it intentionally build trust in the future environment?
- Does it meet the needs and desires of your current and future workforce?

If you do not yet have a clearly articulated future state, use this report as a starting point. The cost of waiting for absolute certainty is increasing.

### 3. Use it to rethink talent and capability

The professional described in 2040 blends technical rigor, technological fluency, and human discernment.

- Are you actively developing that blend?
- Or are you still optimizing for yesterday's model?
- How are you talking about this blend with your staff/employees now?

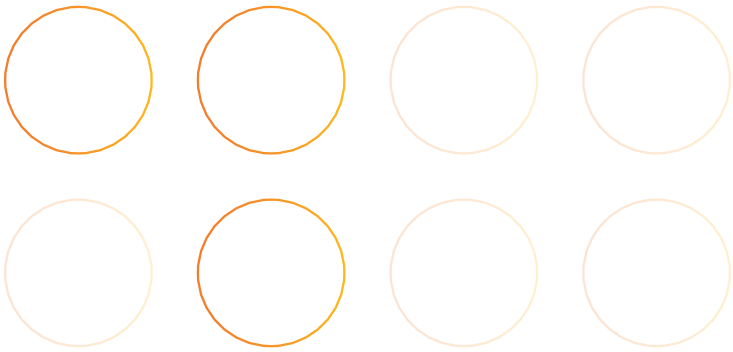
Small adjustments in curriculum, promotion and advancement criteria, and development/training priorities can compound quickly.

### 4. Use it to surface resistance

Transformation does not stall because of lack of intelligence. It stalls because of comfort. Use the Transformation Distribution Curve to identify where you or your organization are on the curve. Use the "Tensions we choose to hold" section to name what might get in your way:

- Fear of AI displacing roles
- Cultural inertia
- Attachment to legacy business models/department structures

Naming resistance reduces its power.



## If you do nothing else

Start here:

1. Share this report with your leadership team.
2. Identify one area where delay creates predictable risk.
3. Run one controlled experiment within the next 90 days.

Progress follows intention.

"Going forward, you will either be the disrupter or the disrupted, more relevant or less relevant. This report gives you a choice." — Daniel Burrus

## For individuals: Leading from where you are

This report is not just for organizational leaders. It is also a road map for your own relevance. As an individual contributor or emerging professional, use it to anticipate where the profession is going and intentionally build the skills, mindset, and experiences that align with that future.

Look for where expectations are shifting — from execution to insight, from task ownership to problem-solving — and begin to operate there now. Ask better questions. Leverage technology instead of competing with it. Seek opportunities to contribute beyond your defined role. You don't have to wait for authority to lead. Your relevance will be built through curiosity, adaptability, and the courage to step into what's next before you're asked.

## Rise2040 activation resources

Rise2040 will only be remembered as successful if we move beyond identifying the forces of change to defining the specific actions required to master them. Transformation is not a single event; it is a sequenced journey. To assist firms and finance organizations in navigating this complexity, visit www.aicpa-cima.com for tools and resources to apply these insights and ideas at a local level within your organization.

## The future we build together

The Rise2040 initiative began with Daniel Burrus's question: "In an uncertain world, what are we certain about?"

Six thousand voices across 25 countries have provided the answer. We are certain that trust is our most enduring asset. We are certain that human wisdom cannot be automated and Humans in the Lead remains a priority. We are certain that the future belongs not to the passive observer, but to the anticipatory leader. We are certain that we can find plenty of opportunities when we look for Hard and Soft Trends in the future.

The finance and accounting profession is not waiting for 2040 to happen. We are moving from the back office to the boardroom, from the historian's ledger to the futurist's road map. The transformation will be demanding, but the destination is clear: a profession that is more relevant, more trusted, and more indispensable than ever before.



## Methodology

Rise2040 was not developed as a single point of view, but as the result of a disciplined, global, and multilayered process designed to ensure both breadth of input and integrity of output. The methodology combined a standardized strategic framework, consistent facilitation practices, advanced data analysis, and multiple layers of human validation.

### 1. Standard framework: Hard Trends and opportunity thinking

At the foundation of the methodology is the work of futurist Daniel Burrus and his Anticipatory Organization framework. This approach distinguishes between:

- **Hard Trends** — Future certainties based on measurable, predictable forces (e.g., technology advancement, demographic shifts, regulatory evolution)
- **Soft Trends** — Assumptions about the future that may change and can be influenced

By anchoring discussions in Hard Trends, participants were able to move beyond speculation and ground their thinking in what is known to be coming. This shifted the conversation from reactive planning to anticipatory leadership.

Equally important, each trend was paired with opportunity identification. Participants were consistently prompted to translate trends into implications and predictable problems for the profession — ensuring that the process did not stop at awareness, but advanced toward action and value creation. As reinforced in the facilitation design, "a trend without an opportunity is incomplete thinking."

This framework created a shared global language and a forward-looking lens that was consistent across all sessions.

### 2. Disciplined facilitation process

To ensure consistency and comparability of input across geographies, a standardized facilitation process was deployed globally.

All Future Forums followed a common structure:

Review ➔ Reframe ➔ Reimagine ➔ Reflect

This structure ensured that each session:

- Honored the profession's past and current realities
- Expanded perspectives through trends and contextual forces
- Generated bold, future-oriented ideas
- Concluded with clear insights and takeaways

Critically, digital polling technology (Conferences iO) was used throughout each session to:

- Capture input in real time
- Ensure every participant — not just the most vocal — had a voice
- Standardize prompts and outputs across all sessions
- Produce structured, comparable datasets for synthesis

Facilitators were trained using a comprehensive global guide and toolkit, ensuring that prompts, timing, and outputs were consistent regardless of location or facilitator style.

The result was a highly scalable, repeatable process that generated both qualitative insight and quantitative data from thousands of participants worldwide.

### 3. AI-enabled data synthesis

Given the scale of the initiative, advanced analytics — including AI-supported techniques — were used to synthesize inputs across all sessions.

This analysis served multiple purposes:

- **Theme identification:** Detecting recurring patterns, priorities, and signals across global inputs
- **Novel insight detection:** Surfacing less frequent but high-potential ideas that may not emerge through traditional aggregation
- **Bias mitigation:** Providing an objective layer of analysis to validate human interpretation and reduce over-weighting of anecdotal or region-specific inputs

The combination of structured polling data and open-ended responses created a rich dataset that enabled both statistical analysis and narrative synthesis.

AI was not used to replace human judgment, but to enhance rigor, expand visibility, and challenge assumptions within the synthesis process.

### 4. Human in the Lead: Advisory board validation

While technology enabled scale and analytical depth, human judgment remained central to the methodology.

A global advisory board — composed of participants and leaders representing diverse sectors, geographies, and perspectives — was engaged to:

- Review synthesized findings
- Pressure test emerging themes and narratives
- Validate that outputs accurately reflected participant input
- Challenge assumptions and identify gaps

This step ensured that the emerging vision was not only data-informed, but also contextually grounded, practically relevant, and globally representative.

It also reinforced a core principle of the initiative: This vision was co-created with the profession, not generated for it.

### 5. Independent data science review

As a final layer of validation, the dataset and synthesized outputs were reviewed by data science professionals to ensure alignment between:

- The raw data collected
- The themes identified through analysis
- The conclusions presented in the final report

This independent review served as a quality assurance mechanism to:

- Confirm consistency between inputs and outputs
- Identify any discrepancies or over-interpretation
- Strengthen the defensibility and credibility of the final vision



## Summary

The Rise2040 methodology was intentionally designed to balance:

- Structure and flexibility
- Global scale and local voice
- Data-driven insight and human judgment

Through this approach, the final vision is not only aspirational — it is grounded in real input, rigorously tested, and collectively owned by the profession it represents.

Rise2040 is a joint initiative of the AICPA and CIMA.



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## The Rise2040 Advisory Board:

This initiative brought together leaders from across practice, industry, academia, and global regions to steward the integrity, clarity, and long-term relevance of the Rise2040 vision. Board members provided critical guidance throughout drafting, review, and validation of the report.

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