

# Building Efficiency, Targeting Growth

How integrated travel and expense and automated accounts payable software is driving business forward



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# Executive summary



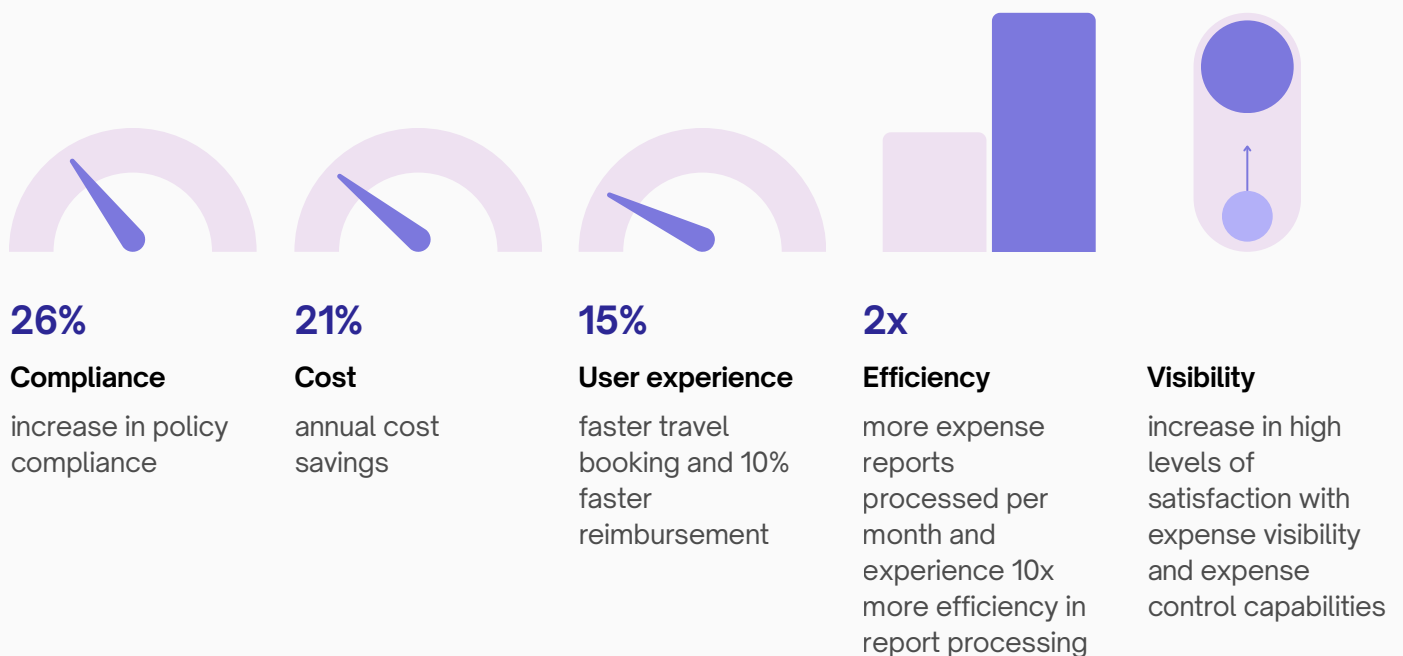
Today, finance and accounting teams are playing a critical role in the stabilization and successful expansion of brands.

With businesses on the rebound from several years of economic disruption and geopolitical uncertainty, what steps are finance teams taking to propel the growth of their organizations, while keeping a weather eye on costs?

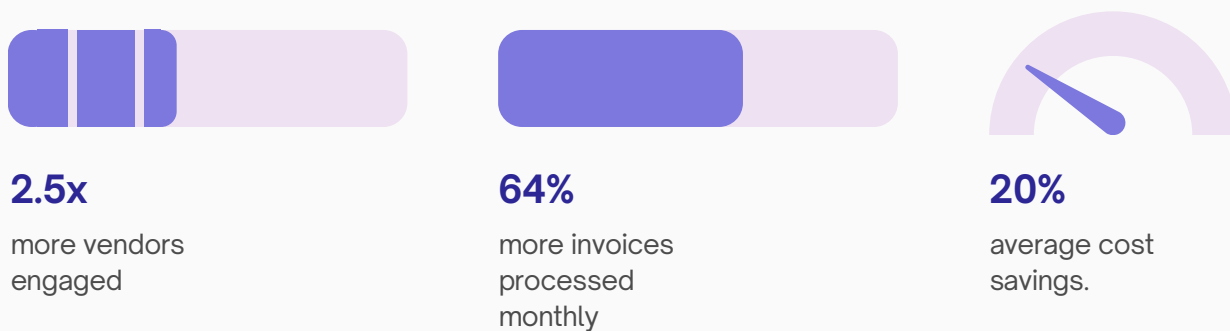
The digitization of operations has become central to business resilience, and the right software can generate big savings in some of the most routine back-office tasks. We conducted global research to find out how much impact integrated travel, expenses, and invoicing solutions are having on the bottom line.

## Here's what we found:

Those using an integrated travel and expense (T&E) platform see significant benefits:



Adding in automated accounts payable (AP) solutions builds even stronger results:



# Foreword

Christopher Juneau, SVP - Head of Product Marketing, SAP Concur

## The world may still be uncertain, but business is moving forward.

As the global economic outlook continues to brighten and finance teams take new responsibility for their company’s future, more than half of CFOs<sup>1</sup> are investing heavily for growth and preparing to take advantage of improving fiscal conditions.

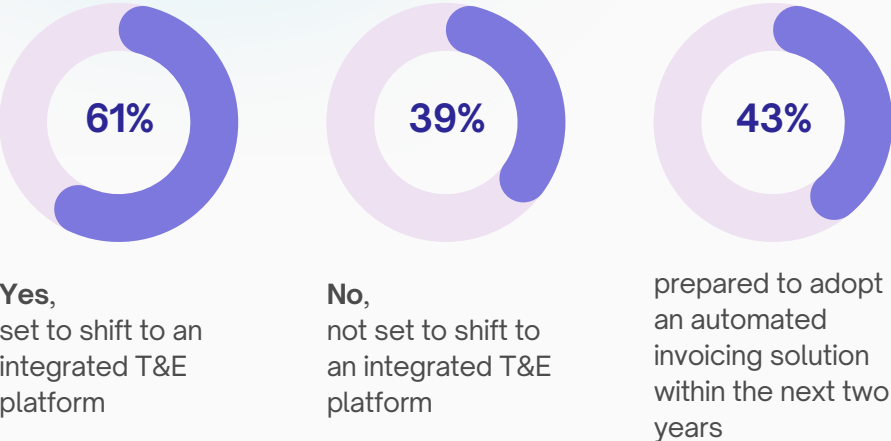
Still, cost control remains a key issue, with inaccurate forecasting being a particular concern for finance leaders. As they grapple with tight budgets, a shortage of qualified employees<sup>2</sup>, and the long-term implications of the shift to hybrid working, how can they build a resilient future in a cost-effective way?

We know that technology plays a critical role here. In speaking to finance leaders, we’ve learned that 63% of CFOs are funding cutting-edge technology – 30% more than in 2023, with AI playing an essential role in managing the unexpected. In 2024, 51% are investing in AI – an increase of 36% over the previous year<sup>3</sup>.

Software that is difficult to use is a significant challenge in maintaining cost control, with a lack of integration and data visibility being the greatest obstacles<sup>4</sup>. As our latest research shows, using integrated T&E management solutions that connect and automate back-office functions can help finance, travel and accounting teams increase ROI with improved efficiency, lower cost, more informed decision-making and better user experience.

Better cost control and reporting capabilities were the top reasons for the 61% of surveyed organizations not currently using an integrated T&E platform to switch within the next two years – and with 43% of those not using an automated invoicing solution also preparing to switch, this report demonstrates the impact of business-critical benefits that are helping to make finance an engine of growth.

**Figure 1:** Do you see your organization moving to an integrated travel and expense (T&E) solution in the next 2 years?



<sup>1</sup> [“Repositioning for Growth”](#) - CFO Insights Report, SAP Concur, March 2024  
<sup>2</sup> [Finance leaders say there’s an accounting talent shortage \(cfobrew.com\)](#)  
<sup>3</sup> [“Repositioning for Growth”](#) - CFO Insights Report, SAP Concur, March 2024  
<sup>4</sup> [“Repositioning for Growth”](#) - CFO Insights Report, SAP Concur, March 2024

# Spend wisely

While the global growth outlook is stabilizing, inflation and elevated interest rates remain challenging.

And with trade tensions and geopolitical uncertainties also on the rise, CFOs are more focused than ever on spend management and maximized productivity.

In an unpredictable climate, how can companies reach their growth potential without jeopardizing the balance sheet? That's where integrated T&E software can be a game changer.

Fifty-eight percent of those not using integrated T&E software cite a lack of integration between their booking and expense processing platforms as their biggest challenge. Those who are using integrated T&E software report impressive annual cost savings of 21%, creating a much leaner and more efficient operation.

**With integrated T&E, finance teams have also seen:**

**8%**

increase in **high levels of satisfaction** with **expense visibility**

**6%**

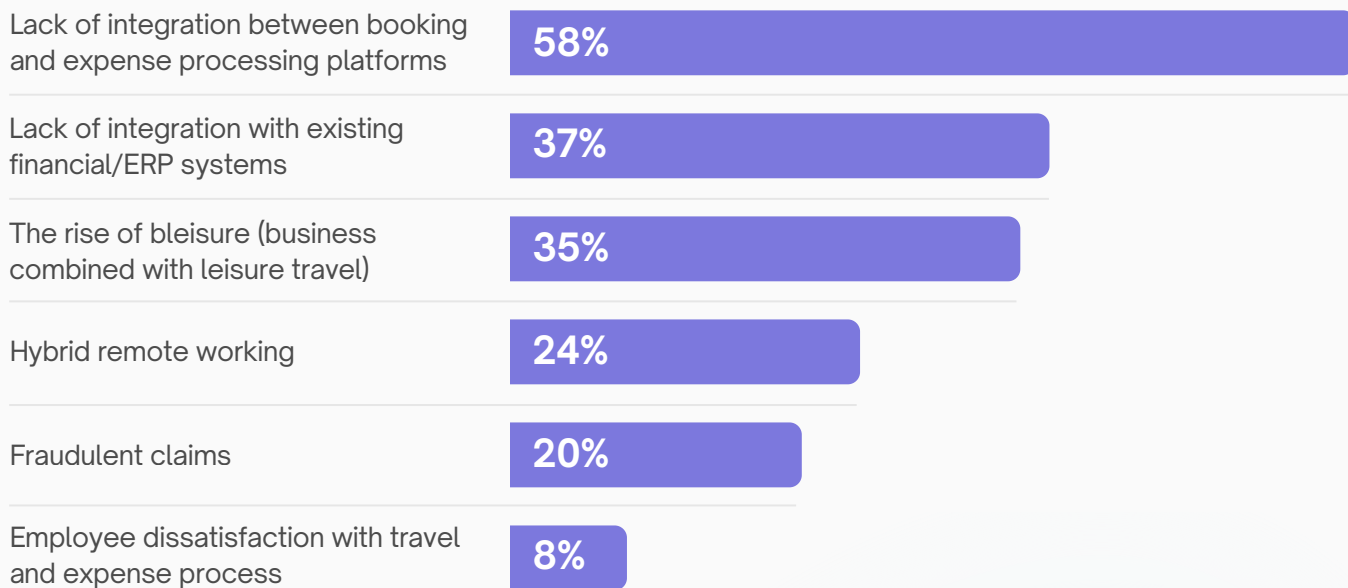
increase in high levels of satisfaction with **expense control capabilities**, enabling more **effective budgetary planning**

**66%**

of companies report that their integrated travel and expense (T&E) systems, enhanced with AI functionality, have **improved their ability to detect expense-related fraud**.

Today's integrated T&E solutions are beginning to incorporate AI much earlier in the spend process, by providing intelligent cost estimates for trip planning, reminding employees of preferred modes of travel, and alerting them to specific receipt requirements for expenses.

**Figure 2:** Which of these are your biggest challenges in managing T&E?



In applying AI as transactions are made, integrated T&E solutions guide users toward greater compliance and more accuracy in expense entries in real time. For example, optical character recognition (OCR) and machine learning can automatically capture receipt data. This enables AI algorithms to categorize expenses, minimizing errors and saving time for employees.

Products like [Concur Request](#) simplify spend requests and approvals with automation and generative AI. AI embedded in pre-trip requests enables employees to effortlessly submit estimated trip costs and options within policy and gives approvers and budget owners enhanced visibility and cost controls.

# Productivity soars with integrated T&E

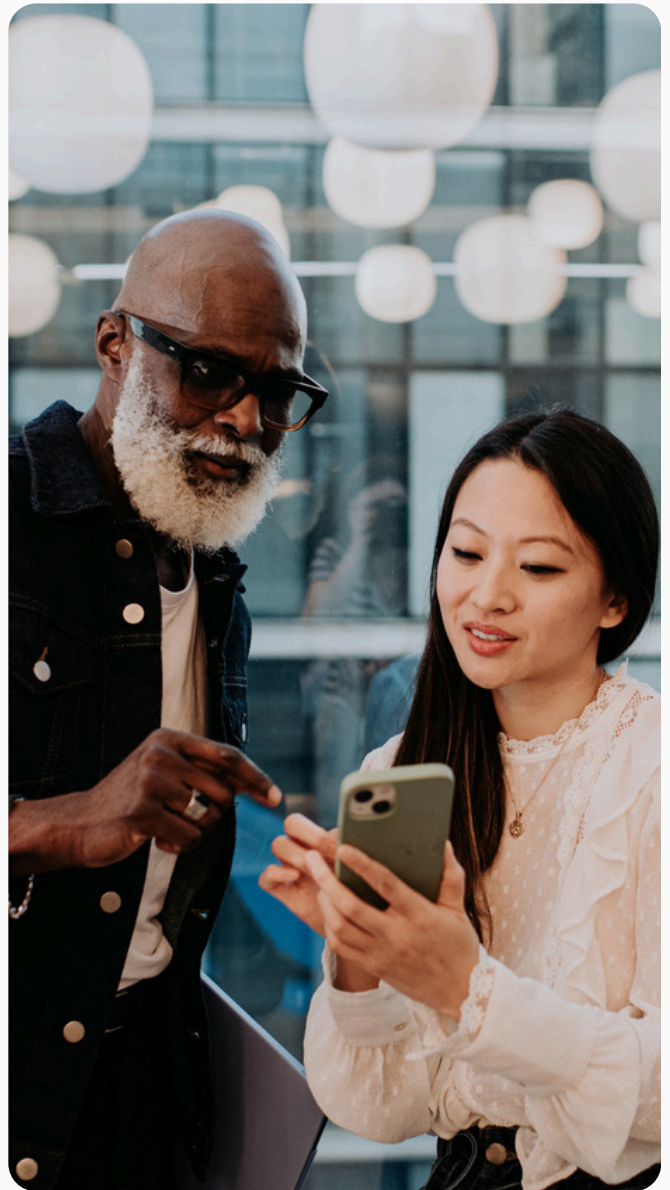
Integrated T&E management solutions are helping companies achieve impressive productivity rates: with twice as many expense reports processed per month, integrated users are 10 times more efficient. By handling more volume, an integrated system can free up time for finance teams to focus on the most important work.

As a finance transformation manager in the energy sector observes: “In terms of operational efficiency, it has helped us to have everything at the same point. Our finance process was quite complicated and cumbersome. Integration has brought transparency and data analytics. Previously, we were doing all the manual work, but now, in one platform, you can see everything. With a push of a button, it’s all done.”



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- Finance transformation manager,  
energy sector



## Travel smarter

Global business travel is expected to surge in the coming year. Ninety percent of travel decision-makers believe business travel is still critical for growth, and more than half expect to spend more than \$1 billion on travel in 2025 – an 11% increase on pre-pandemic levels<sup>6</sup>. How can travel decision-makers balance this demand with cost management – not just in terms of travel costs, but also in resourcing?

“You have to see what levers you pull for your organization’s travelers based on the needs of your organization,” says Jason Grunin, Principal Value Delivery Consultant at SAP Concur, “from growth, from timing, from cost, from employee well-being, from spend governance, from audit. Where are those dials that you need to home in on to fine tune your travel program, to take advantage of all the different platform options that are available to your travelers?”

Integrated T&E software is a key part of that journey, bringing diverse component parts together into a single, seamless experience.

“It’s extremely useful and helpful to provide budget holders and travel management professionals with the ability to manage the entire end-to-end cost of travel,” says a travel manager for a global bank. “By integrating booking platforms – both online and offline – into a comprehensive financial system, you gain a complete, accurate picture of the total true cost of travel. This integration offers significant benefits, as it allows for better cost management and more informed decision-making.”



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- Travel manager, global bank



# The AI-driven experience

Many companies are introducing new policies on expense reimbursement and travel booking to better manage costs.

It's a move that is finding resistance among those spending for business engagement: 42% of business travelers feel their company is prioritizing cost-cutting over flexibility, while 92% would back out of a business trip that they felt was compromising their safety or work-life balance.<sup>6</sup>

Against this backdrop, it's vital that organizations minimize any friction around employee business spend. As a travel manager working in financial services puts it: "We've got people dealing with huge deals out there. We don't want them worrying about trivial back-office administrative tasks. We want people to really focus on organizational core goals. So making sure that we have systems, technologies and processes that eliminate that stress for our employees is a big priority for us."

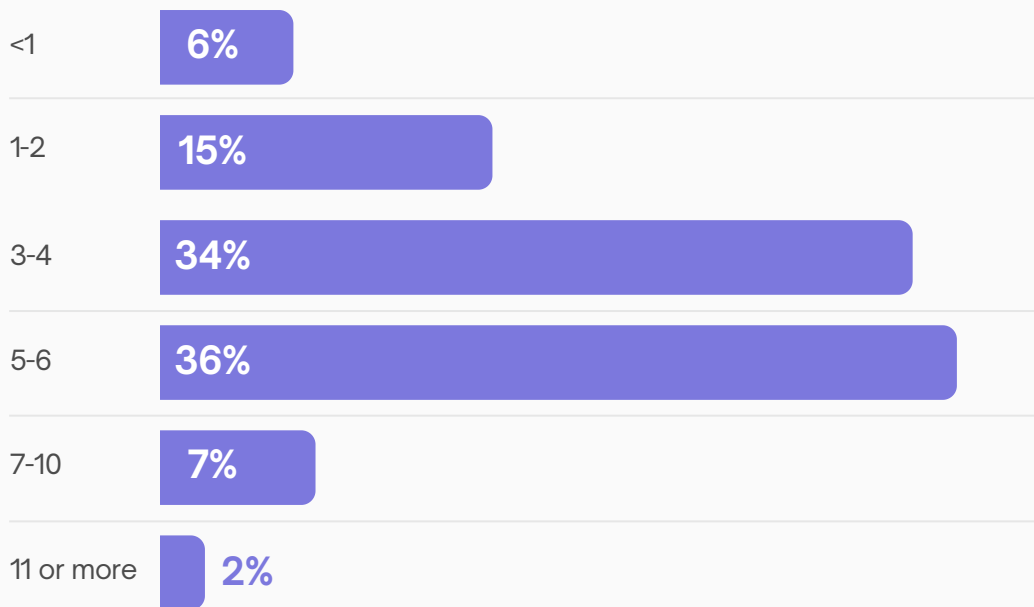
That includes expediting the approvals process for business trips – something the executives we contacted cited as a drag on business travel efficiency: "It's a back and forth with the manager and the traveler," says one. "The booking process takes less than 15 minutes, but the decision itself is what takes longer."



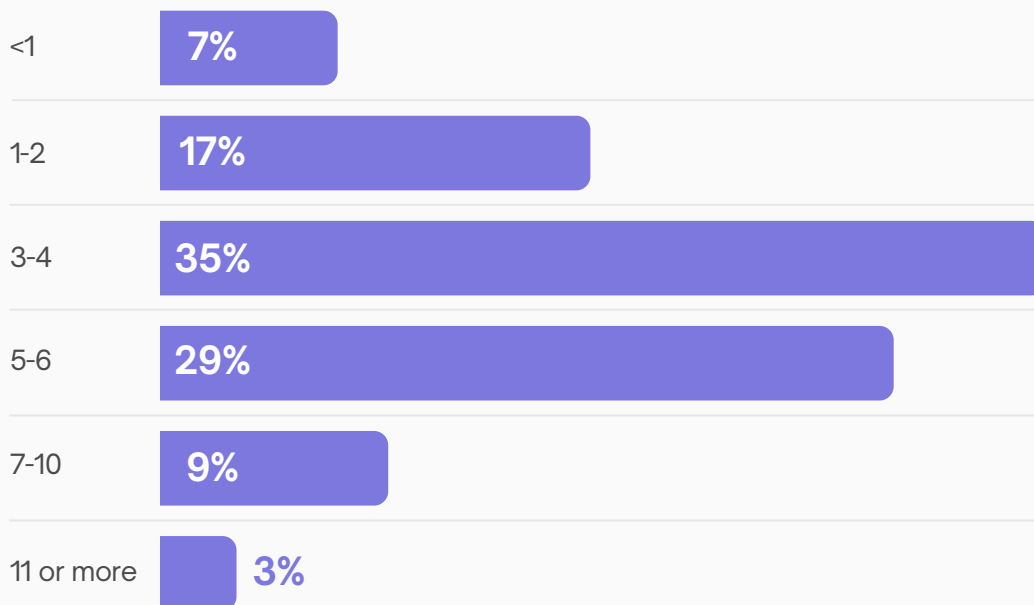
We've got people dealing with huge deals out there. We don't want them worrying about trivial back-office administrative tasks.

- *Travel manager, financial services*

**Figure 3:** On average, how many days does it take for an employee in your organization to book a business trip?



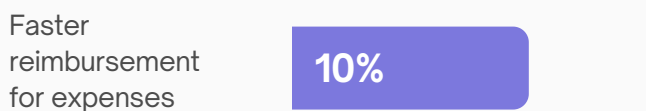
**Figure 4:** On average, how many days does it take for an employee in your organization to file an expense report?



Generative AI can provide clear, accurate price ranges based on trip requirements, enabling a detailed prediction of the cost before any budget is spent, making it much easier for managers to approve. It can even compare costs based on a range of dates, allowing employees who can be flexible with their itinerary to save even more.

Another benefit of an integrated T&E platform is that, using historical travel and expense data, it can gather insights on a company's spending policies and preferences and then use generative AI to connect that information to real-world points of reference – such as hotel prices in a specific city – to deliver relevant, personalized experiences. Those recommendations are also linked to corporate spending policies to make compliance as easy as possible.

**Using an integrated T&E solution means:**



Nearly one in five business travelers would prefer an AI-curated list of business travel options based on their preferences and needs instead of taking a DIY approach or getting recommendations from a travel agent or their colleagues.<sup>7</sup>

“AI can learn your habits,” says a finance transformation manager in the energy sector. “If I have the same pattern, same trend, then AI can suggest something: ‘Oh, I realized for the last two years, you’ve been traveling to those countries for this meeting, up to this duration, this is the hotel you stayed at; this is the flight you were taking. Based on that, I made this package, and this is the most carbon efficient, the most economical, the fastest.’”



AI can learn your habits. If I have the same pattern, the same trend, then AI can suggest something.

- Finance transformation manager, energy sector



<sup>7</sup> 6th Annual Global Business Travelers' Report, Wakefield and SAP Concur, 2024

# Keeping it on the straight and narrow



Integrated T&E software is being used to combat fraud – which remains a significant threat to business.

It includes claiming personal expenses as business costs, filing the same claim multiple times, and inflating the amount of reimbursement due. Nearly 70% of firms say their fraud-related losses have increased,<sup>8</sup> eradicating 5% of revenue per year, at an annual global cost of \$5 trillion<sup>9</sup>.

Cost-of-living pressures driven by inflation may be driving dishonest behavior, as employees try to make ends meet<sup>10</sup>.

Hybrid working – including working from abroad – has also made it harder for companies to monitor and verify expenses, leading to more mistakes in

expense reporting and sometimes, even deliberate fraud. And with finance teams struggling to find talented back-office staff, it's not surprising that 32% of occupational fraud is a result of insufficient internal controls.<sup>11</sup>

“Organizations need to be using every technology to validate and verify what employees are doing,” says Jason Grunin. “But as a workforce, leaders are overwhelmed; employees are overwhelmed. I think this is where I would say artificial intelligence and machine learning come into play.”

<sup>8</sup> [Fraud Trends 2024, Experian](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Occupational Fraud 2024: A Report to the Nations, ACFE, 2024](#)

<sup>10</sup> [“How to Overcome Fraud and Uncertainty and Be Future-Ready”, SAP Concur, April 2024](#)

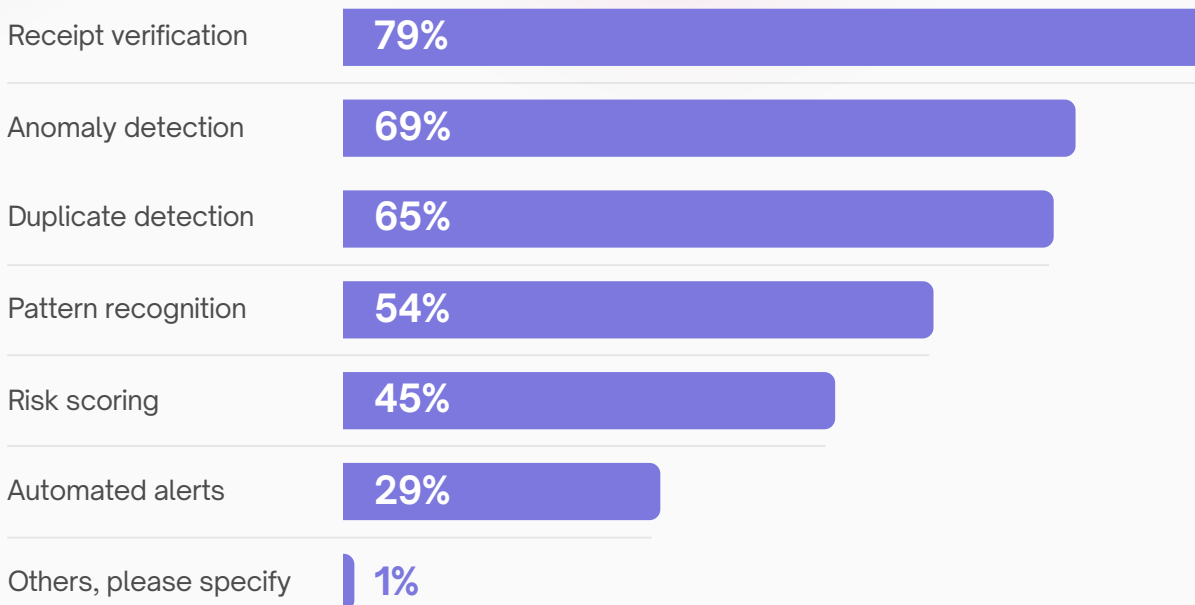
<sup>11</sup> [Occupational Fraud 2024: A Report to the Nations, ACFE, 2024](#)



As a workforce, leaders are overwhelmed; employees are overwhelmed. I think this is where I would say artificial intelligence and machine learning come into play.

- Jason Grunin, Principal Value Delivery Consultant at SAP

**Figure 5:** Which of the following is true of your integrated T&E solution's use of AI for fraud detection and migration?



Integrated T&E can help identify inaccurate claims and prevent company losses by leveraging AI for fraud detection and risk mitigation – for example, flagging unusual expenses for further review.

Data analysis can shine a light on discrepancies in the system. Seventy-nine percent of those we spoke to said that their integrated T&E solution used AI for receipt verification; 69% for anomaly detection, and 65% for duplicate detection.

Investigating expense reporting is expedited by T&E integration, as well. Large organizations with over 1,000 employees have been able to complete report auditing 6% faster.

Of course, companies are also subject to losses from any non-compliant spending, which, while not intentional fraud, does veer from corporate policies that have been established to maximize value for money.

Companies using an integrated T&E solution saw a 26% increase in policy compliance – an uplift that undoubtedly contributes to productivity. The less time finance and travel teams need to spend chasing non-compliant individuals, the more they can focus on strategic and forward-looking activities to drive business outcomes.

# Automation driving efficiency

In a competitive market, businesses are increasingly investing in leading-edge technology like AI and automation to navigate and drive change.

In 2024, two-thirds of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) were planning to increase technology spending to automate and streamline operations<sup>10</sup>, with integration capability a key factor in solution evaluation.

**Our research shows that users of automated AP solutions:**

**2.5x**

more vendors engaged

**64%**

more invoices processed monthly

**20%**

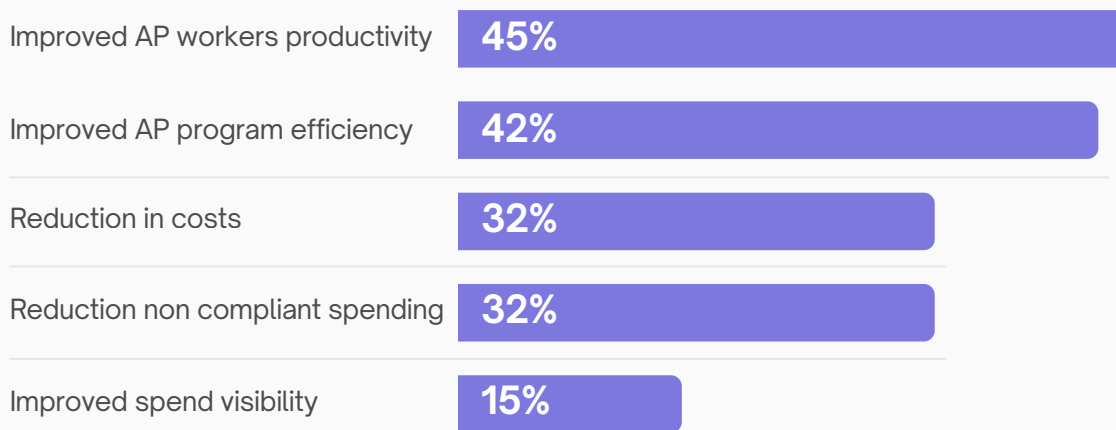
average cost savings.

Automation enables companies to turn diverse data sets into usable information that allows for more accurate forecasting, as well as cost savings through more effective vendor negotiations and early payment opportunities. Our research shows that 43% of those not already using an automated solution said they were likely to switch within the next two years – and those using automated AP are more likely to be satisfied with their solution. Among the primary reasons for switching are better integration with ERP systems and better support of international operations.

<sup>10</sup> ["How to Overcome Fraud and Uncertainty and Be Future-Ready", SAP Concur, April 2024](#)

For 45% of organizations, improved workforce productivity is the most important driver for adopting an automated AP system, with 42% citing improved efficiency and more than a third noting cost reduction and a reduction in non-compliant spending. Cost reduction was particularly notable for small organizations.

**Figure 6:** Which of the following in your opinion are the top 2 drivers for automating invoicing/accounts payable?

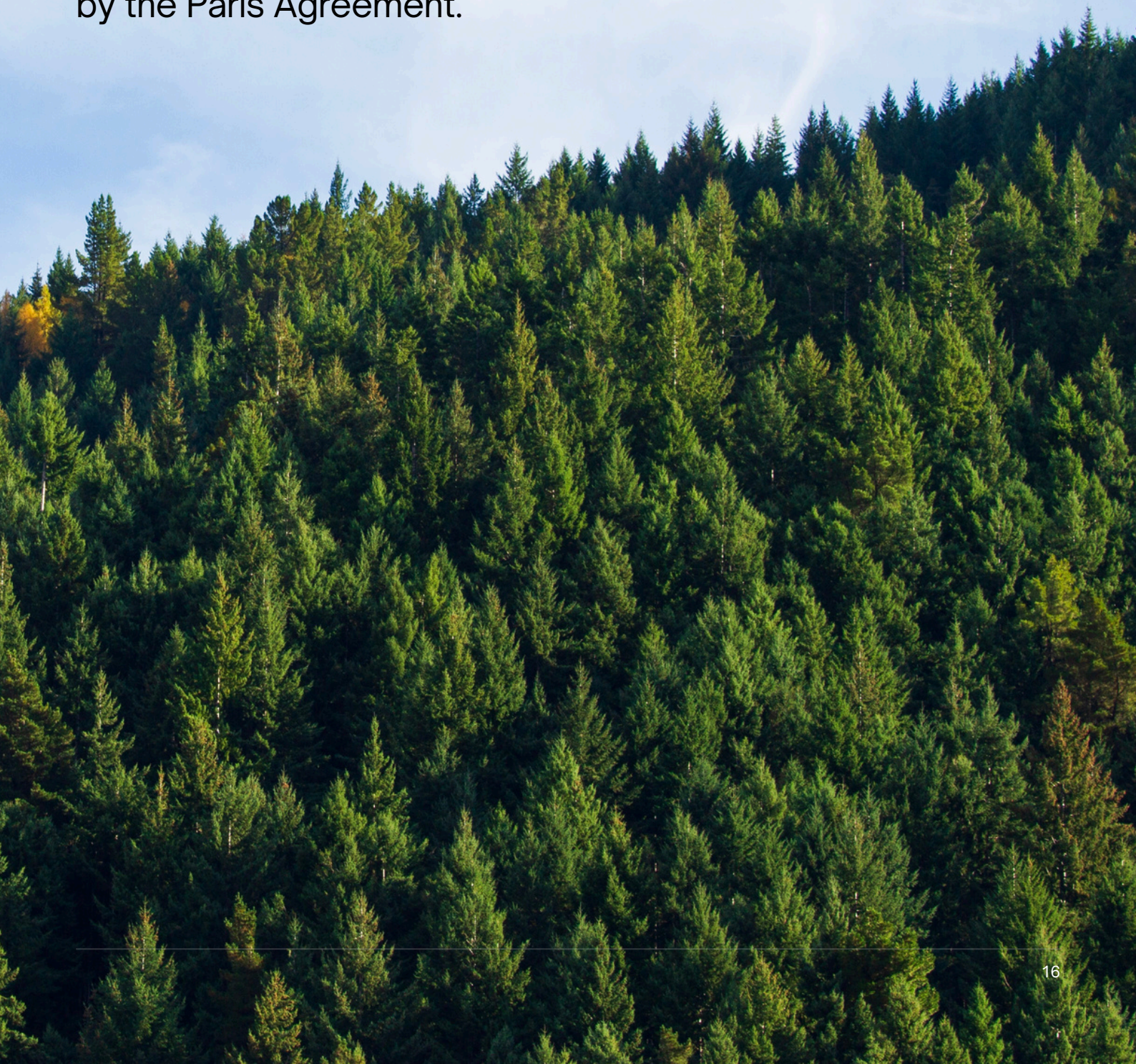


As a business process owner in the pharmaceuticals sector puts it: “In an ideal world, you would have an invoice come in and then no human has to touch it. We would use optical character recognition so it could read the invoice, and if it matches the purchase order, then it should just be automatically queued for payment without anybody having to look at it.”

With the opportunity to bring the finance function together on a single platform, AI tools can also ensure the seamless integration of travel, expense, and invoice data, providing consistency and accuracy across the whole process. Combining AP and expense report data gives an immediate view of overall spending in a way that enables accurate forecasts and informed budget decisions.

# Environmental influence

Improving sustainability is a key focus for companies as consumers demand more sustainable operations, particularly against a highly regulatory backdrop and the fast-approaching carbon reduction deadlines set by the Paris Agreement.



More than half of global travel managers are being asked to reduce Scope 3 emissions – those generated outside of a company, but within its supply chain<sup>12</sup> – amid growing concerns around both planet and brand reputation.

“When we make a travel decision, it's always based on how economical or environmentally friendly it is,” said one finance transformation manager from the energy sector. “For example, if there are four people going to a meeting, we don't ask everybody to take their cars. We say, ‘OK, somebody take their car, and then this person can have those expenses for fuel or parking’. Then, everybody would share.”



When we make a travel decision, it's always based on how economical or environmentally friendly it is.

- Finance transformation manager,  
energy sector

More than a quarter of business travelers believe that sustainable travel options are a priority for their company, and almost as many say recommendations for reducing carbon emissions are a critical part of their company's travel booking tool.<sup>13</sup>

Managing expectations can help align corporate and individual priorities, particularly with support from the right software. An integrated T&E system can help companies nudge their teams in the right direction and make business travel more sustainable by identifying the greenhouse gas emissions of each flight segment, as well as rail and car rental options, and letting users browse hotel providers by emissions, certifications, and sustainability scores.

“If an individual employee doesn't weigh climate as a direct impact to them, it's not going to weigh on their business travel decisions unless the organization has communicated it from the top down and said, ‘This is important,’” says Grunin.

Business leaders have identified a lack of transparent data, lack of measurement and accounting standards for emissions, and a lack of sustainability features within booking tools as barriers to furthering sustainability.<sup>14</sup>

Data reporting from an integrated T&E platform with machine learning capabilities can provide insights that allow companies to make more informed decisions around route, mode of travel, and vendor emissions.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [“The State of Climate Action in Business Travel”, GBTA, June 2023](#)

<sup>13</sup> [6th Annual Global Business Travelers Report, Wakefield and SAP Concur, 2024](#)

<sup>14</sup> [“The State of Climate Action in Business Travel”, GBTA, June 2023](#)

<sup>15</sup> [“Five Ways to Build Sustainability into Your Travel Program,” SAP Concur, 2021](#)

# Conclusion: Integration underpinning growth

In today's corporate landscape, senior finance leaders play an increasingly important role in driving business change. Setting new standards and raising expectations for what travel, expense, and invoice processes deliver means they can take a stronger leadership position in their organizations. It's about increasing the pace of progress – about equipping finance, travel, IT, HR, and other leaders to bring more to the business by delivering more impact in less time.

Finance leaders may still be worried about rising costs, the talent crunch, increasing geopolitical tensions, growing cybersecurity risks, and new travel disruptions, but they're also looking at a brighter economic outlook and the potential for innovation and growth across their businesses.

The improved productivity and efficiency arising from smart and innovative T&E and automated AP software are giving finance executives a chance to lead from the front, demonstrating how their teams can generate faster, better business value.

# Methodology

In July 2024, SAP Concur engaged Phronesis Partners to survey more than 1800 respondents from 11 countries in North and South America, Europe, Japan, and the Asia Pacific region.

Participants were sourced from 10 industry sectors and held mid-level to senior and C-suite positions in small, mid-sized, and large firms.

This was supplemented by a series of qualitative interviews with mid-to senior-level subject matter experts from the travel and expenses, accounting, and business process functions in the US and Europe.



# About SAP Concur



SAP® Concur® is the world's leading brand for integrated travel, expense, and invoice management. Driven by a relentless pursuit to simplify and automate everyday processes, the solutions guide employees through business trips, move authorized charges directly into expense reports, and automate invoice approvals. By integrating near real-time data and using AI to analyze transactions, businesses can see what they're spending, improve compliance, and avoid possible blind spots in the budget. SAP Concur is imagining a world where travel and expenses practically manage themselves, helping businesses run at their best every day.

**#1**

IN 2023 MARKET SHARE  
FOR TRAVEL AND  
EXPENSE MANAGEMENT  
SOFTWARE<sup>16</sup>

**700 +**

PARTNERS IN THE  
PARTNER ECOSYSTEM

**92 M**

END USERS

**83%**

OF SAP CONCUR USERS RATE  
4 OUT OF 5 STARS ON G2

**46,000 +**

CUSTOMERS

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<https://www.concur.com/en-us/travel-expense>

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<sup>16</sup> [Worldwide Travel and Expense Management Software Market Shares, 2023: Resurgence of Business Travel Heralds a New Chapter in Travel and Expense Software \(idc.com\)](#)