

MASTERING A CAREER IN FINANCE SYSTEMS



CFO DIVE

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Exposure to finance systems and transformation opens doors for those seeking career avenues that impact business strategy and performance. What do these career paths look like, and how can you be a success?"

PIERS REID, GROUP CEO AT SYSTEMSACCOUNTANTS



A GUIDE CREATED BY INDUSTRY EXPERTS

Finance is changing fast. It's an increasingly technology-enabled function where successful professionals can make an impact across entire organisations. Roles are well-compensated, fast-paced, and diverse. They're also in high demand. 92% of CFOs in the UK struggle to recruit the finance talent they need.¹

The rapid advance of finance systems and automation is streamlining processes and redefining responsibilities. Beyond technology, management roles within the sector also require a new approach to leadership. No matter which stage you're at, you'll need excellent attention to detail, critical thinking, and a willingness to adapt and learn.

This guide has been designed by industry experts and leading specialists to help you excel in a career in finance systems. We've taken knowledge gained from years of headhunting in the industry to map this thriving field, and provide crucial information for professionals at different stages of their journey.

¹ [Avalara Survey Finds Majority of CFOs Face Significant Talent Shortage.](#)
Data source, Avalara, Oct 2023.



1 THE VALUE OF A CAREER IN FINANCE SYSTEMS

Technology has fundamentally changed the way accounting operations are conducted. While finance functions were once concerned with bookkeeping and reporting, advances in software driven by data analytics – and increasingly emerging tech such as artificial intelligence and machine learning – have introduced digital systems that can track every transaction, and generate actionable insights from the data.

This is why finance systems professionals are in such high demand. They possess the expertise to

implement, operate, and administer systems that form the cornerstone of their organisation.

Because these platforms often represent a business's primary digital transformation initiative, finance systems experts are also valued as key drivers preparing it for the future. This makes it a dynamic and exciting career to enter. On offer are a range of benefits that make it an attractive choice for many professionals:

WHAT A FINANCE SYSTEMS CAREER OFFERS



POSITIONS AT THE LEADING EDGE OF CHANGE

As businesses increasingly recognise the importance of securing skill sets in both finance and technology, individuals possessing a combination of both can also command a premium.



FREEDOM TO MAP YOUR OWN PATH

Finance systems professionals can have an impact within the industry in multiple ways. The more technically minded can develop expertise in the systems' back end, or in implementation. Those who find the accounting side fulfilling can leverage the software to increase their efficiency and accuracy, or drive continuous organisational improvements.



POTENTIAL FOR STRATEGIC IMPACT

While a balance of digital and accounting expertise forms the bedrock of most finance systems careers, there's also scope for those who see themselves as leaders with strategic vision. Systems implementation is not only about efficiency gains but also empowers finance professionals to focus on higher-value activities like strategic planning, data-driven decision-making, and supporting business innovation.



COMPETITIVE SALARIES

Finance systems professionals combine two in-demand skillsets: Accounting and software expertise. Other factors – such as experience and location – being equal, this dual value brings finance systems salaries above those of pure finance or IT roles.



JOB SECURITY

So critical is the role of the finance office and the technology underpinning it to modern business, the lights often need to stay on, even during challenging times. Finance systems roles can offer greater than average job security during periods of economic disruption.



2 BUILDING A CAREER —THREE KEY ROUTES

There are three typical routes that can bring people to a career in finance systems.

ROUTE 1 — FINANCE BACKGROUNDS

The route into finance systems often begins with a foundation in accounting qualifications such as CIMA, ACA, or ACCA. Professionals typically start their journey in roles like Financial Controllers, Auditors, or Financial Planning & Analysis (FP&A).

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Because of the way digital technology is coming to the forefront, finance professionals often experience a eureka moment, where they realise there is a career which isn't just about the month-end close.”

**DAVID HAMMEL, UK MANAGING DIRECTOR OF
SYSTEMSACCOUNTANTS**





However, the turning point often comes during digital transformations when individuals may find themselves seconded onto an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system implementation or similar transformation initiative. This can open the individual to new roles such as Systems Accountants, Finance Systems Managers, or Finance Systems Analysts. The large consulting firms also offer experienced finance consultants and newly qualified ACA graduates a route into management consulting and system transformation.

“These professionals can quickly become subject matter experts, and even eventually evolve into implementation consultants,” says David Hammel, UK Managing Director of SystemsAccountants. “It starts with the technical skills, but there’s also a big emphasis on business-side skills, client-facing, and stakeholder engagement skills, where an individual can lead an implementation and strike up a strong relationship with the customer.”



ROUTE 2 — TECHNOLOGY SPECIALISTS

Away from the numbers, individuals with a deep understanding of how ERP and Enterprise Performance Management (EPM) systems operate can also quickly climb the ladder given their enormous value to the finance office.

These digital technology career paths often start with the systems vendors themselves. Professionals progress through various stages, starting with implementation and system management, system maintenance, and project management. The most technically proficient individuals may eventually become solutions architects, creating bespoke digital solutions for clients. This requires a deep

understanding of the technology and its potential, but also a strategic awareness that can fuse this technical knowledge with business objectives.

“Big software vendors also have graduate schemes, and will offer different kinds of fast-track careers, whether via sales, finance, or services,” says David Hammel. “They can quickly become subject matter experts, and even eventually evolve into implementation consultants. It starts with the technical skills, but there’s also a big emphasis on business-side skills, and soft skills, where an individual can lead an implementation and strike up a strong relationship with the customer.”

ROUTE 3 — THE CONSULTANCY ROUTE

Management consulting firms assemble large teams with diverse skillsets to advise businesses on digital transformation. These teams are likely to include professionals from an accounting background, as well as technology specialists who advise their clients on how to implement systems to modernise their finance function and broader operations.

These management consultants' careers will develop in different ways. Some will become senior at Big Four professional services firms and go on to lead teams driving massive enterprise-wide transformations. Others will take their expertise and pursue the contract route as independent consultants. A third group will leverage what they have learned in management consulting to work for the businesses that had previously been their clients as internal Systems Administrators or Finance Systems Managers.



3 WHAT YOU NEED FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

Careers in finance systems are ultimately built on a specialisation in at least one of two areas: Deep knowledge of the digital systems themselves, and accountancy. Beyond these building blocks, however, other strengths may be needed.



Being a Senior Finance Systems Consultant requires patience. Beyond day-to-day administration, you're often engaged in changing a complex organisation. This means you'll need to stay focused on the end goal while being willing to repeat yourself. This requires perseverance, and a willingness to adapt to circumstances."

VICKI WISE, HEAD OF FINANCE SYSTEMS AT THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND



FINANCE EXPERTISE

While not mandatory for every role, having some level of accounting knowledge is always beneficial, while for some roles accredited expertise are required. Even as the finance function adopts more strategic importance, it still needs to guarantee compliance and accuracy. “Whatever level you’re at you’ll need to understand the bookkeeping fundamentals,” says Vicki Wise, Head of Finance Systems at The Church of England. Even if you’re primarily focused on technology or strategy, understanding the financial purpose of the system can enhance your ability to extract its full potential.

“Within EPM, for example, if you’re not a very good accountant you’re going to struggle with consolidation, because you won’t know how to naturally understand the process of building a set of accounts to consolidate. It’s not an easy thing to do,” says Piers Reid, Group CEO at SystemsAccountants. “On the other hand, if you’re working in FP&A, which is also usually part of EPM, you don’t always have to have certified in-depth accountancy knowledge.”

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A finance systems professional today tends to be hybrid. Someone who has accountancy in their wheelhouse, but is more interested in the technology sitting behind finance and how to best utilise that.”

ODETTE JANSEN, EPM LEAD AT ITV



TECHNOLOGY EXPERTISE

Understanding the technology that underpins finance systems and synthesising this with accountancy principles is what defines professionals in this sector. This involves a deep understanding of EPM and ERP, data management skills, and staying current with system functionality and the latest releases. Platform-specific IT skills are integral to building the processes that make a financial system function. Often, more than one system will be in use, so proficiency with integration can also be an important responsibility.

Certain roles might be well-fitted to those who feel more comfortable working with the software:

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Being able to talk about finance rules and accounting processes to non-finance people, and conversely, being able to translate IT requirements in a non technical way to finance people is an extremely valuable skill. There is a real art in demystifying and explaining matters in an end-to-end process. It's about finding a universal business language so finance & IT people can align and understand common objectives.”

**DAVID HAMMEL, UK MANAGING DIRECTOR OF
SYSTEMSACCOUNTANTS**

FINANCIAL SOFTWARE DEVELOPER

Primarily focused on creating and modifying software applications related to finance. High emphasis on programming, project implementation, and technology.

FINANCE SYSTEMS ARCHITECT

Involves designing and developing complex financial systems, requiring deep technical knowledge, along with organisational and/or process design.

FINANCE SYSTEMS ANALYST

Needs in-depth technical understanding of financial software, databases, and programming languages. Understanding the architecture of ERP systems, familiarity with databases like SQL, and proficiency in using financial modelling tools are vital.

ERP ANALYST

Specialises in ERP systems integration, which requires a strong understanding of technology and how it applies to business processes.

EPM ADMINISTRATOR

Involves a blend of finance process understanding with technical scripting like VB or SQL, application enhancement, and report writing.

FINANCE SYSTEMS MANAGER

Oversees and optimises the finance system, ensuring efficient functioning and compliance. Collaborate with finance and IT teams, road map strategy and troubleshoot issues.



ADDITIONAL SKILLS FOR A FINANCE SYSTEMS CAREER

COMMUNICATION

“Accountants are by nature very good with numbers, but their interest in or abilities to articulate information and drive insight vary widely, as they do in other careers,” says Piers Reid. “Communication, presentation, and being able to articulate a message, often becomes important for people wishing to move up.”

As the resident expert, finance systems leaders have to synthesise multiple, often conflicting objectives. “You’re an anchor point for many different inputs,” Vicki Wise says, “so you need to interpret and deliver information in a way that’s digestible to different stakeholders.”

STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership responsibilities often fall organically to finance systems professionals. There are two main reasons for this. First, their expertise is rare, and even when they are not technically in a leadership role they must identify pitfalls and design solutions proactively and independently. Secondly, the systems they oversee are often the spearhead of major transformation initiatives that require a strategic vision and appreciation of business goals to effectively realise.

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We speak to senior people from all different types of backgrounds who have not specifically thought about the transition into finance transformation, yet they have the ideal skillset by experience. Some are becoming digital transformation experts with 20-25 years experience as a Financial Director or similar; they have that strategic mindset and operational knowledge to put to good use.”

**PIERS REID, GROUP CEO AT
SYSTEMSACCOUNTANTS**

“As finance systems professionals gain more experience they need to master interacting with people and leading teams,” says Mariana van Bloemvallei, Head of Financial Systems and Analytics at OCI N.V., an international chemicals company based in the Netherlands. “There are a few key qualities that must be developed here – a solution-orientated approach, an absence of ego, personnel management, and conflict resolution. Whether or not you perfect these skills will decide if you stay at a specialist level or elevate to a leadership position.”

Challenging the status quo and actively seeking systems and process improvements over time require strong people skills and the ability to win over stakeholders up and down the chain.

ACTIVELY SEEK OUT HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

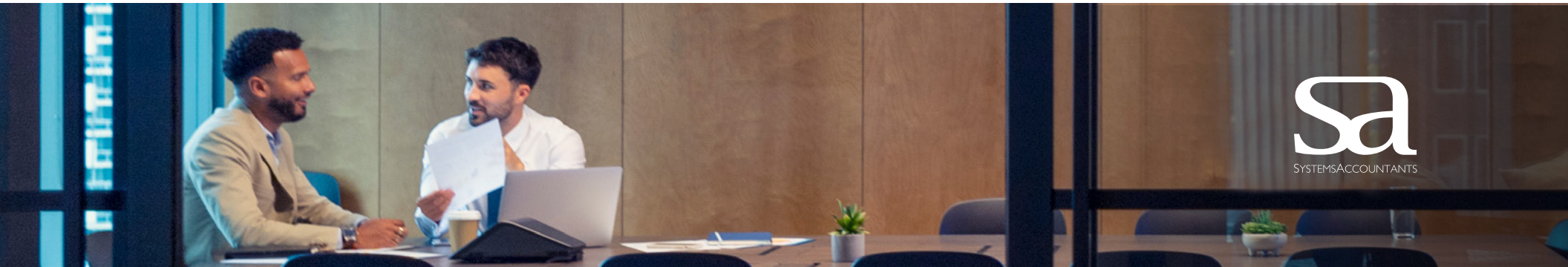
While finance systems skills must be learned, the process of implementing and administering a system is highly practical and can't be mastered academically. Those who have had opportunities to work both as end-users and as drivers of implementation are some of the most valuable assets for any business considering a digital transformation. "I recommend you actively seek out hands-on digital systems experience," says Odette Jansen, EPM Lead at ITV. "You must have enthusiasm for the technology, be inquisitive, willing to iterate, and learn from those around you."

The majority of large transformation projects, statistically, are likely to fail.² Professionals with experience can better navigate pitfalls, troubleshoot

issues, and make informed decisions that will give their organisation a much better chance of success.

"Someone who is able to ask the right types of questions and explain it when you are putting business cases together will quickly advance their career," says David Hammel. "A Finance Systems Administrator may be more support or user ticket focussed at first, learning the basics, but they can soon become systems champions, the EPM or ERP owner. Because of their end-user experience, they know the technology inside out but if they also have a curious mindset for continuous improvement and ask the 'why' they will be quickly known within the business as the go-to person, and that can lead into senior, more strategic digital finance systems roles."

2. [Perspectives on Transformation](#). McKinsey & Co. December 2022.



As a highly specialised recruiting & staffing consultancy, SystemsAccountants has been providing Financial Systems experts to organisations across the UK, USA and Europe for over 25 years. We're a global leader, bridging the gap between Finance & IT to help companies run, scale, and grow through back-office operations and maximise their investments for Financial Systems, ERP, EPM, Analytics, Process Automation and Finance Transformation projects.

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