



# The Rise of Forerunners

# Get ready for the society of the future

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Business needs to change with it.

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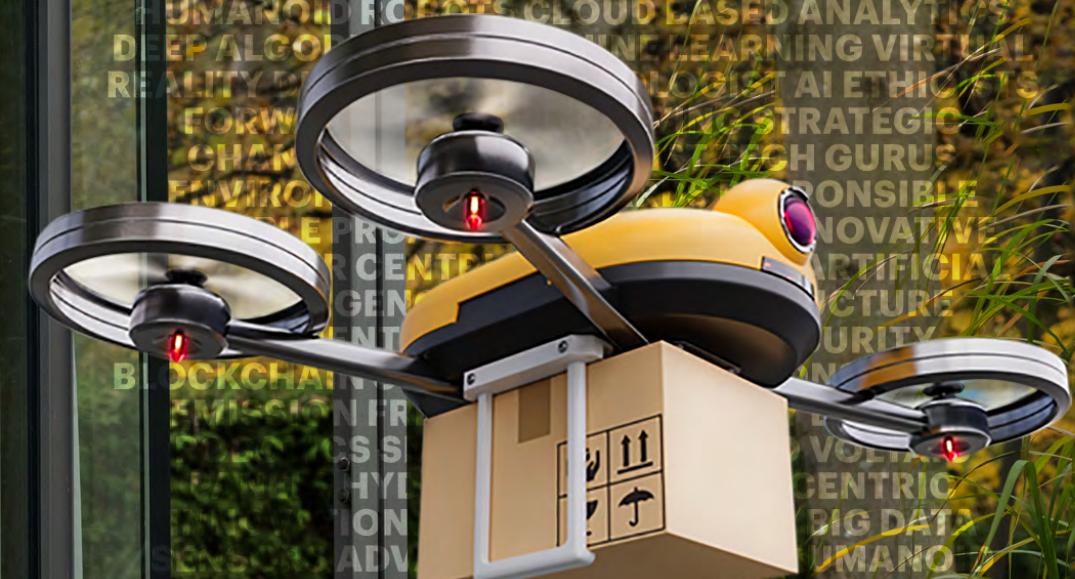
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A photograph showing a person from the side, wearing a light-colored shirt and trousers, standing in front of a glass door or window. The view through the glass shows a lush green garden with various plants and trees. The lighting suggests it might be late afternoon or early evening.

**Society is  
changing fast.  
Business needs to  
change with it.**



A collage of various green technology and innovation concepts, including Blockchain, Emission Free, Sensors, Robots, Cloud Computing, Big Data, Machine Learning, Virtual Reality, and more, overlaid on images of a drone carrying a package, a wind turbine, and a solar panel.



Investors and consumers are joining a chorus of voices calling out for a new mandate for the business world: Lead the way in efforts around social inclusivity and environmental sustainability.

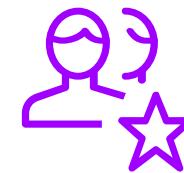
Many of the societal shifts that pre-dated the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated in the last year, as reflected in Accenture's study titled "*Society Disrupted. Now What?*" Consumers are expecting greater transparency about the origins of goods. Citizens are awaiting digital health passports so they can travel again. City dwellers are demanding more sustainable, smart neighborhoods that can be navigated with e-bikes and e-scooters. We believe that these emerging lifestyle demands will present new business opportunities that cannot be captured with pre-crisis strategies. Companies must prepare for the society of the future.

Accenture surveyed 1,500 senior executives in 12 countries and 10 industries to see how (or if) companies intend to adapt to these shifts in the medium term. And we discovered a wide gap between recognition of the opportunity and readiness to tap into it.

Almost two-thirds of senior executives expect these lifestyle shifts to become the new norm in the next five years. Yet 60% admit their companies are not yet preparing to meet the evolving societal needs.

**Our study identified a small group—162 companies—that is well ahead of the curve in taking bold steps to embrace change. We call these companies Forerunners.**

Forerunners recognize that most of the emerging lifestyle shifts will impact business, whether they're ready for it or not. And they've accelerated efforts to meet the moment and contend with the challenges of a shifting society. Here's how:



## **Target versatile talent**

As automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) become commonplace, companies must attract and hire new leaders who can chart a different course. Forerunners go beyond improving digital fluency of the current workforce, by attracting tech-savvy talent in all spheres of work/life, as well as niche skills needed for new roles in businesses of the future, such as digital anthropologists and AI ethicists.



## **Create sustainable solutions**

While many companies have taken steps to reduce their carbon footprint, Forerunners have stepped up efforts to infuse sustainability in every aspect of business, from the way they operate, to how they produce and go to market, to how they design and build smart infrastructure and habitats.



## **Invest in human care**

The pandemic has made it imperative for companies outside of healthcare to realign their innovation capabilities to be more centered on individual as well as collective health and well-being. Forerunners are transforming their business portfolios to meet the complex needs of a health-minded society and explore new opportunities in highly personalized "fringe markets."



## **Use technology responsibly**

Society's expectations around data privacy and protection are rising fast. Companies must meet and surpass those expectations as they continue to leverage big data, sensors, advanced analytics and AI throughout customer interactions and in their back-office operations.

Forerunners represent a small fraction—just 11%—of companies surveyed: This means 9 out of 10 companies urgently need to step up, or risk being left behind.

# Key attributes of a changing society

AUTOMATION ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE  
SMART INFRASTRUCTURE AUGMENTED REALITY  
CYBERSECURITY BLOCKCHAIN SUSTAINABLE  
SOLUTIONS CARBON MISSION FREE PLANET  
FRIENDLY EFFORTS HYDROponics  
PHOTO VOLTAIC CLOUD COMPUTING  
HUMAN COMPUTER INTERACTION SMART HOMES  
ANALYTICS LEARNING  
ANALYST THINKERS  
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT  
ENVIRONMENTAL FLEXIBLE PROFESSIONALS  
CUSTOMER CARE INTELLIGENT  
INTELLIGENCE AUGMENTED  
BLOCKCHAIN CARBON  
CARBON EFFORTS  
VOLTAIC DATA  
DATA VISION  
VISION AND STRATEGY  
RESPONSIBILITY  
INNOVATION AUTOMATION  
SMART INFRASTRUCTURE CYBERSPACE  
SOLUTIONS FRIENDLY

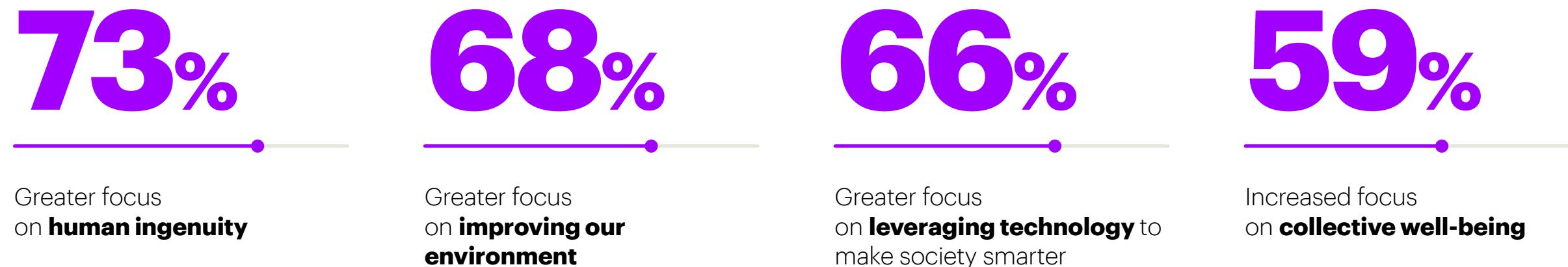


**Which attributes will define society in 2030?** None of us has a crystal ball, but a vast majority of the senior executives we surveyed said they expect this future society to be defined by human ingenuity,<sup>1</sup> improving our environment, leveraging technology to make society smarter and collective well-being (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: What's essential to a thriving society in 2030?**

**Prominent attributes of a future society (by 2030)**

Percentage of respondents who selected "to a very large extent" or "to a large extent" on a five-point scale



Total sample; n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

We also sought senior executives' perspectives on the individual lifestyle trends they foresee emerging in the future. In the first phase of our study "Society Disrupted. Now What?",<sup>2</sup> we provided a peek into five such lifestyles that we believe will become prevalent by 2030.

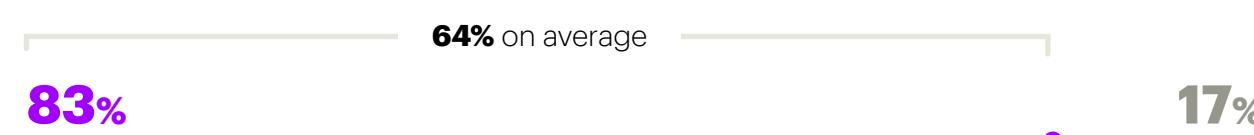
As part of our current research, we found that, in fact, senior executives expect these changes to arrive much faster—in the next five years (Figure 2). Is this accelerating the cadence of organizational change? For many companies, the answer is "no."

## Figure 2: 64% of senior executives expect emerging new lifestyles to arrive within five years.

### How long will it take for following lifestyles to become the new norm?

Percentage of respondents

For the **state of health** to influence where we can travel (e.g., rise of the digital passport)



For **responsible denizens** to fuel stronger local economies (e.g., rise in smart tracing of goods)

For **affordable technology** to increase economic self-sufficiency (e.g., rise of the micro-entrepreneur)

For **environmental concerns** to drive new modes of transport (e.g., rise of micro-mobility)

For **smarter habitats** to inspire more connected living (e.g., rise in sustainable physical spaces)

Total sample; n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

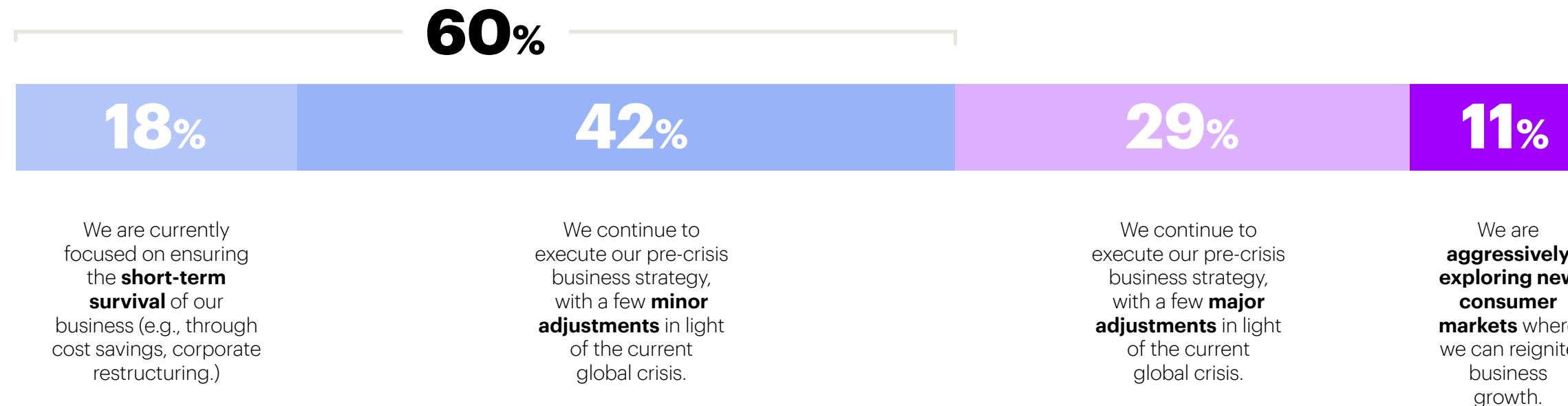
■ 1 to 5 years ■ 6 to 10 years

Senior executives see what's ahead, but their companies haven't taken bold steps to prepare. **In fact, 60% of our survey respondents say their companies are not proactively reshaping their pre-crisis strategies** (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Many companies are at risk of falling behind the changing times.**

**Business focus today**

Percentage of respondents



Total sample; n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

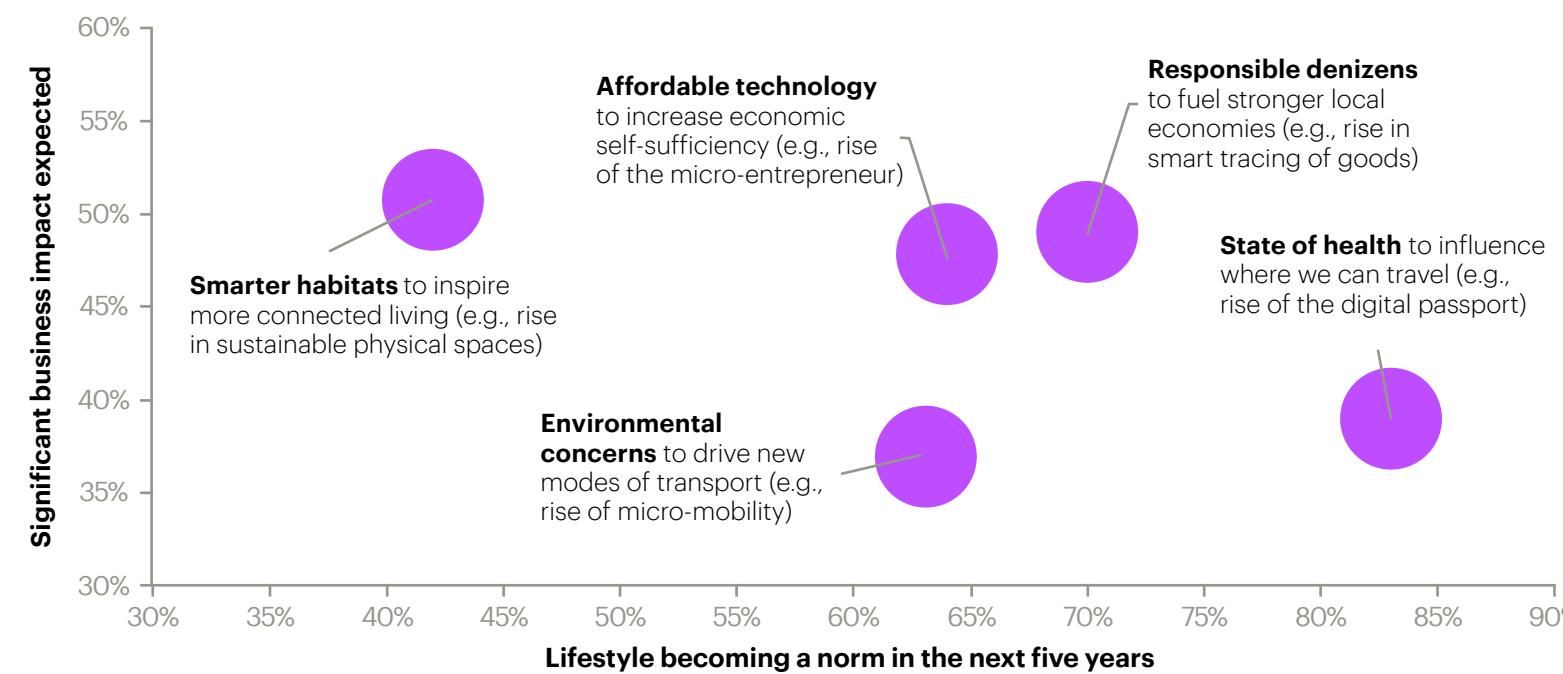
What's holding companies back? Why aren't they seizing the new growth opportunities presented by emerging lifestyles?

Our research found that many senior executives have yet to recognize the extent to which individual lifestyle choices will impact their future business (Figure 4). For example, while the pandemic has heightened awareness of health and environmental concerns in the society, fewer than 40% of senior executives say they are expecting a significant impact on business.

#### **Figure 4: High awareness of societal shifts is not translating into a sense of urgency.**

##### **Expected business impact from emerging lifestyles of the future**

Percentage of respondents



Total sample; n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

**Companies see a different future emerging, but they aren't adapting their strategies rapidly enough to capture new market opportunities.**



# Forerunners





For companies to thrive in the next decade, they must not only recognize the changes that are coming, but also reshape their growth strategies in bolder ways. And a few companies are doing just that.

By interviewing thought leaders across different sectors and geographies, and drawing on our experience with companies of varying sizes and locations, we identified four priority areas where companies must intensify change to meet the needs of a rapidly shifting society. These are:

**Prepare the workforce for a more automated, AI-powered future.**

**Put sustainability at the center of their business.**

**Master innovations that focus on human care.**

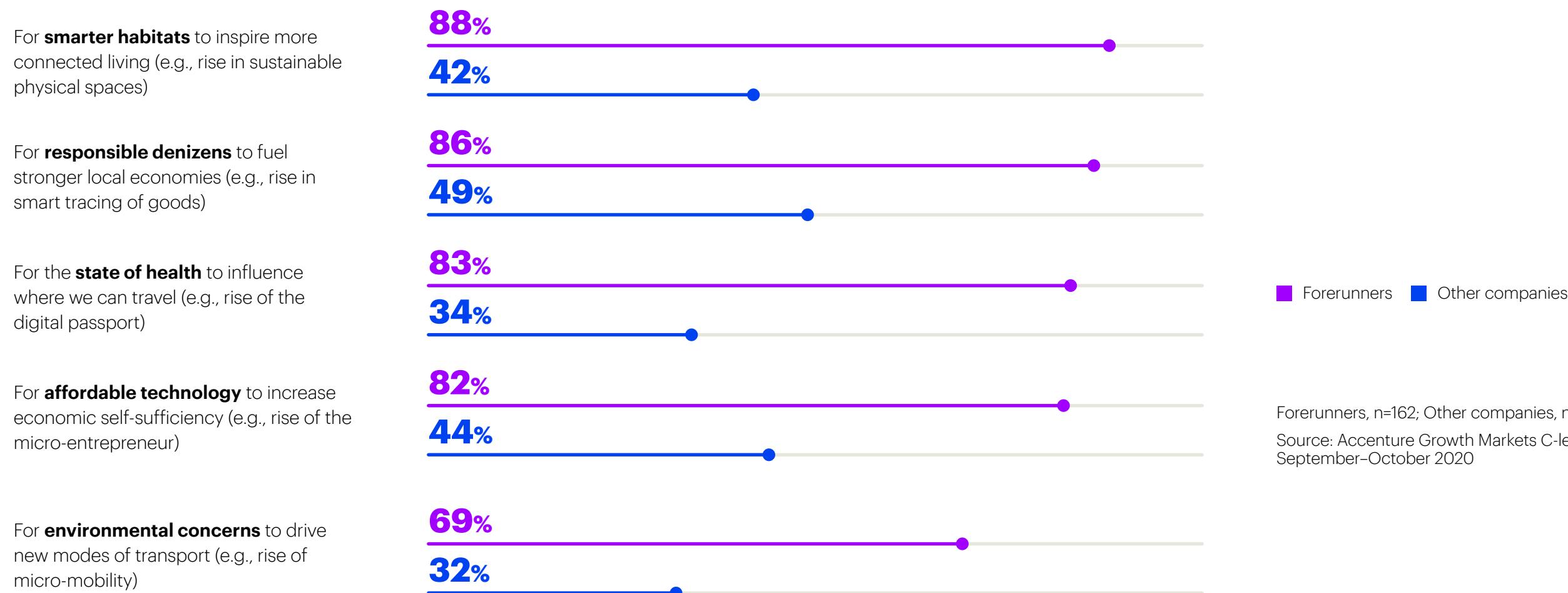
**Deploy technology in a more responsible manner.**

Forerunners—the 162 companies leading the way in preparing for this future society—expect to be significantly impacted by most of the emerging lifestyles (Figure 5) and exhibit a higher sense of urgency, taking bold steps to address these shifts (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Forerunners (11% of companies in our sample) expect significant business impact from most of the emerging lifestyles by 2030.**

**Expected business impact from emerging lifestyles of the future – Forerunners**

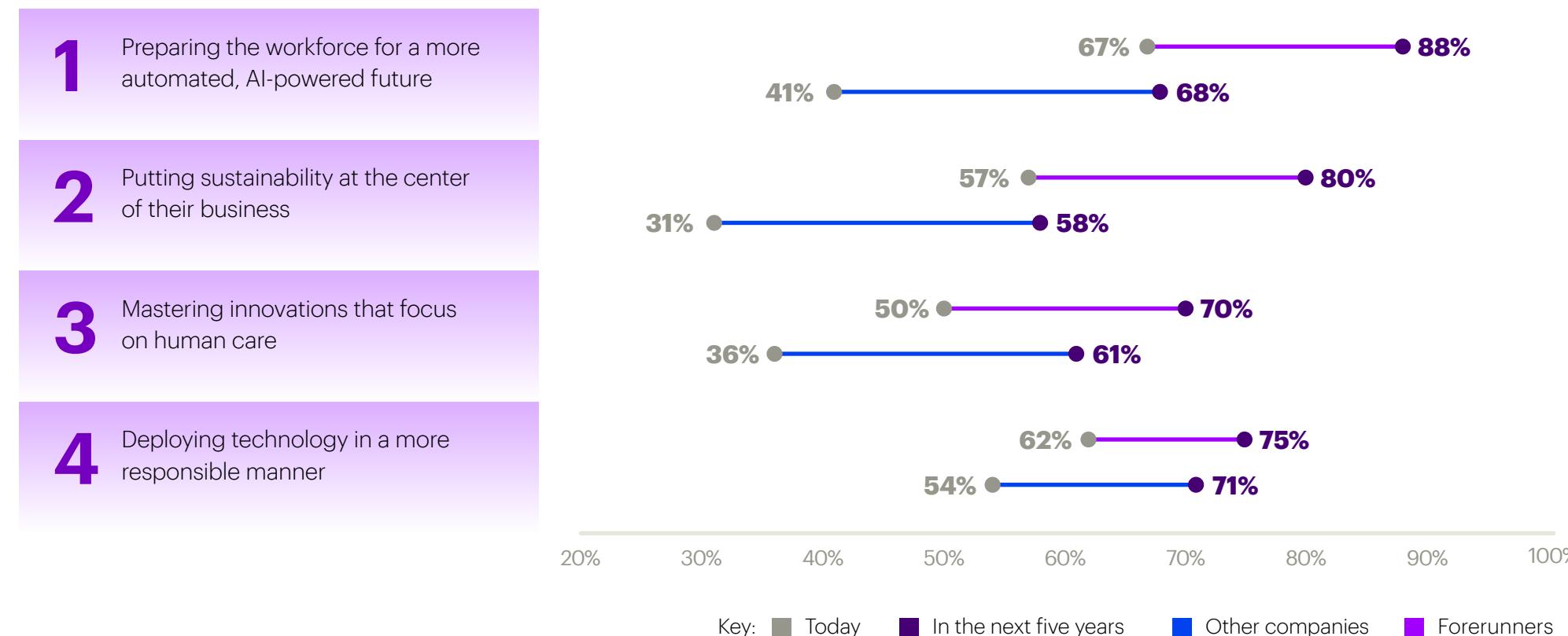
Percentage of respondents who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



**Figure 6: Forerunners are expected to maintain their strong lead in four priority areas to better serve the needs of the future society.**

**Business priorities today and in the next five years**

Percentage of respondents who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



Forerunners, n=162; Other companies, n=1,338

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

Forerunners, with their forward thinking and strategic business positioning, are taking concrete steps to meet the challenges and opportunities that are arriving at a furious pace. These companies stand out in the business priorities they choose to focus on, over time.

Other companies need to follow suit, embracing change with more urgency within the constraints of their specific industry contexts.

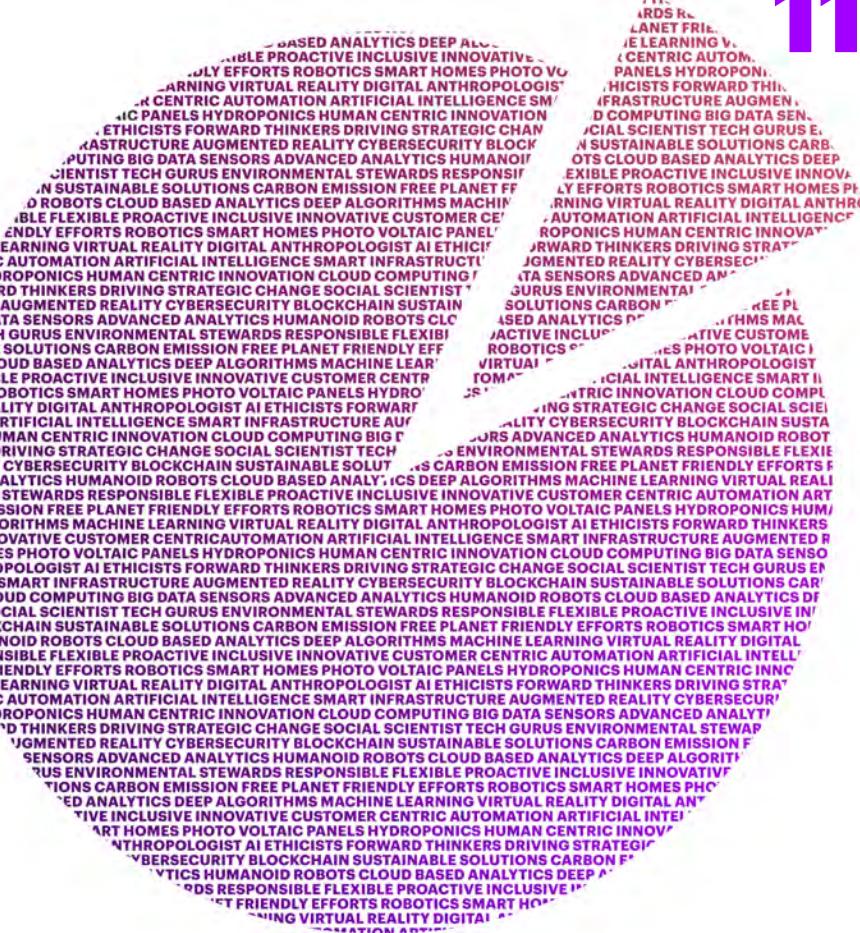
A small group of companies that anticipate impact from new lifestyles, are also more intentional in driving strategic change.

## In our study, we found a small group of companies (11%)—whom we call the Forerunners.

These companies are **expecting significant business impact** from most of the lifestyles which will arrive much faster, in the next four to six years.

These companies are also planning to continue **embracing bolder strategic moves** we formulated in the next five years.

11%



Total sample; n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

**Forerunners** (162 companies)

# Four ways to thrive in the society of the future



The background features a grid of text labels in white and blue, including: NET REV, INNOVATION, FLEXIBILITY, HIGH THINKERS, TECH GUT US, FLEXIBLE PRO-CENTRIC AUT, INFRASTRUCTURE, BLOCKCHAIN SUS, FREE PLANE, PHOTO VOLTAIC, INNOVATION, ADVANCED AN, ANALYTICS, REALITY C, THINKERS, TECH, FLEXI, CENT, SNFR, BLOCK, FRE, AD, ANA, REA, THI, T, F, M, LEARNING, VIRTUAL, ETICISTS FORWARD, C CHANGE SOCIAL SCIENTIST, STEWARDS RESPONSIBLE, INNOVATIVE CUSTOMER, ILL INTELLIGENCE SMART, REALITY CYBERSECUR, CARBON EMISSION, ROBOTICS SMART HOMES, ONICS HUMAN CENTRIC, BIG DATA SENSORS, ROBOTS CLOUD BASED, SHINE LEARNING VIRTUAL, ETICISTS FORWARD, C CHANGE SOCIAL SCIENTIST, STEWARDS RESPONSIBLE, INNOVATIVE CUSTOMER.

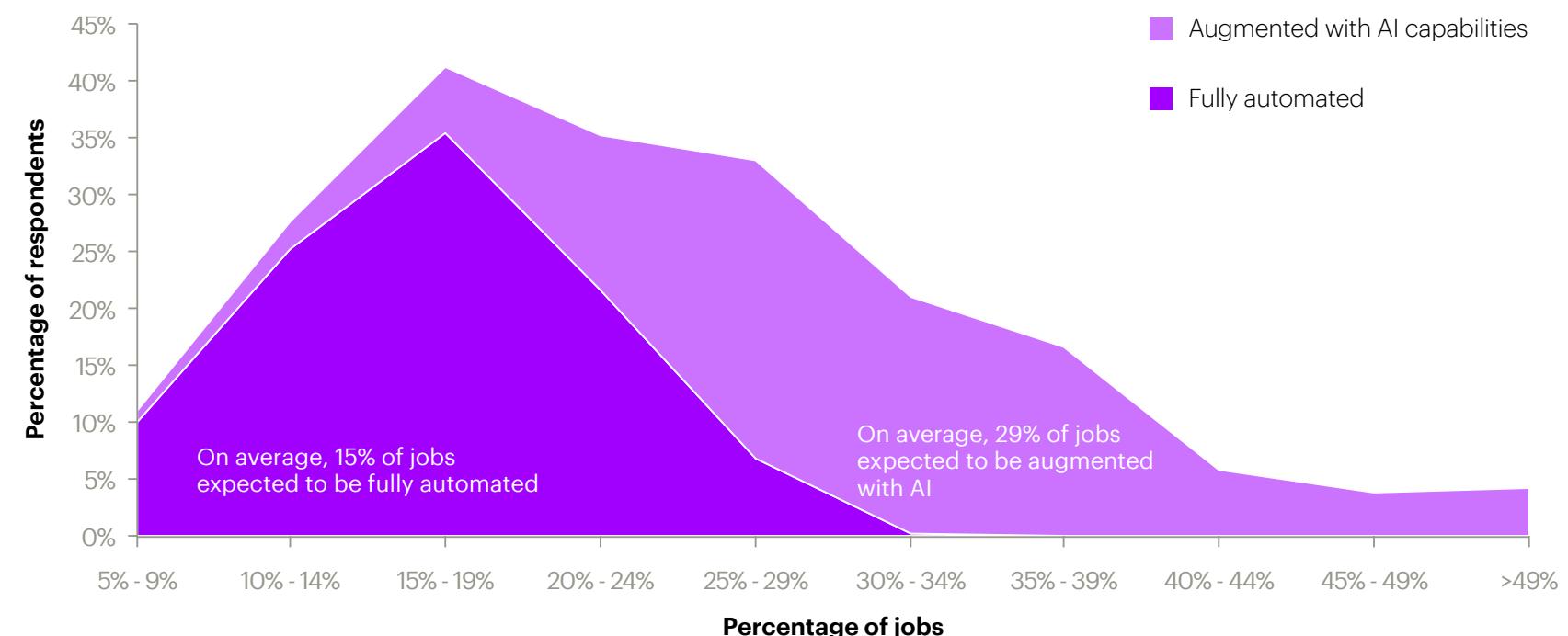
# 01 Target versatile talent

Our research revealed that senior executives expect **15% of jobs to be fully automated and 29% to be AI-augmented**, on average, in the next five years (Figure 7). This will require companies to invest in new foundational capabilities (such as, data, analytics and AI) as well as prepare their workforce to operate and succeed in a very different future.

But are they preparing their people enough for this journey? The answer is, only some are.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 7: Senior executives expect nearly a third of jobs (on average) to be AI-augmented in the next five years.**

**Proportion of jobs to become fully automated or augmented with AI capabilities in the next five years**  
Percentage of jobs



Total sample; n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020



**In addition to upskilling their existing talent, Forerunners are setting the stage for the impact of AI augmentation in the next five years: hiring new leaders into instrumental positions, using talent partners to tap into niche skills and investing early in both STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and HESS (humanities, education, social sciences) skills (Figure 8).**

When it comes to leadership, companies need to focus on finding and attracting individuals who are capable of seamlessly flexing between being social scientists and tech-gurus.

When **Naver**—the South Korean technology giant—appointed its first non-engineer CEO, Han Seong-Sook, in 2017, her success challenged long-held assumptions about what skills are needed to lead a tech company. After graduating with a degree in English

Literature, Han started her career in tech journalism before co-founding Empas, a database search company that would go on to become one of the most popular portals in South Korea. The company has committed 500 billion won to developing AI, automated driving and other advanced technologies while stepping up efforts to better connect creators and small business owners through its new platform.<sup>4</sup> Han's efforts have been rewarded by the market: Naver's stock price doubled between 2018 and 2020.<sup>5</sup>

Different leaders are needed to steer businesses for a different future, and we are seeing new C-level positions emerge to accelerate this transition. For example, rising concerns over inappropriate use of AI resulted in the creation of new roles such as Chief AI Ethics Officer, Chief Trust Officer and Chief Empathy Officer to reinstate customer and employee trust.



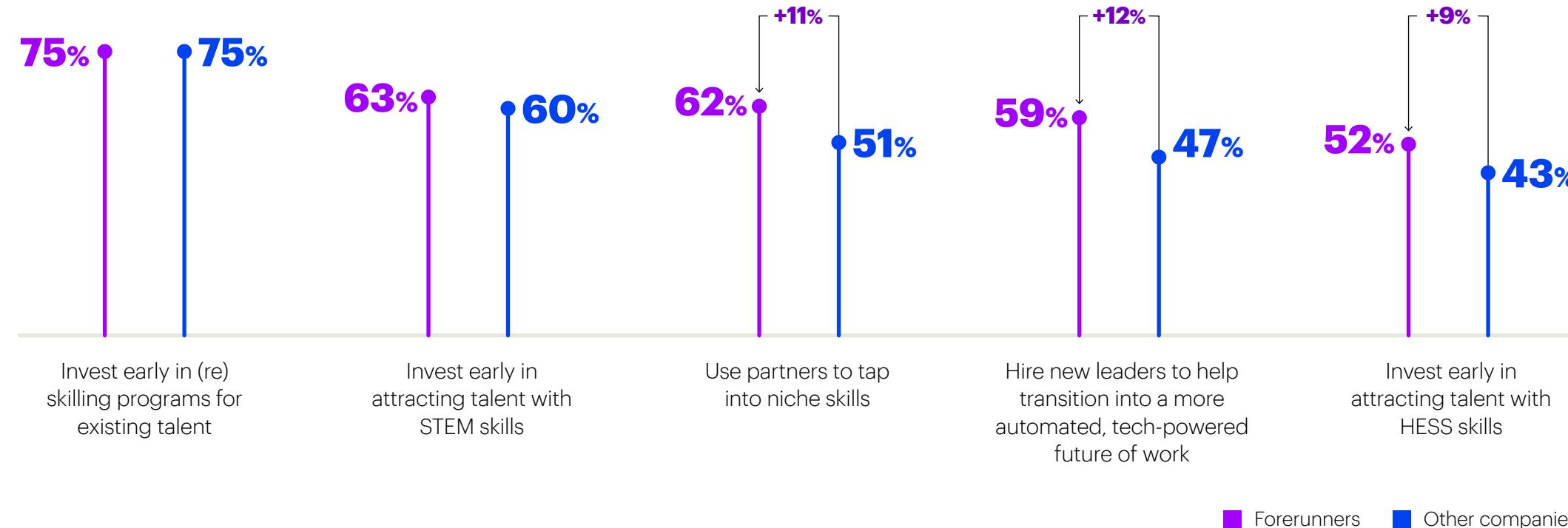
As the workplace becomes more tech-powered, Forerunners are also embedding softer skills in the talent pool to prepare them for new jobs. Imagine being an augmented reality life designer<sup>6</sup> helping customers discover unique experiences that match their desired lifestyles. Or working as a “Robot Whisperer”<sup>7</sup> in a restaurant, keeping an eye on robotic chefs and service staff interactions with customers to ensure safety. The digital anthropologist has also been identified as a much-needed role to help companies understand how people interact with technology in an increasingly data-centric world.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, companies will need to go beyond traditional recruitment strategies to fill talent gaps, especially those with niche skills. **For instance, the Alliance Innovation Lab Tel Aviv (formed by Nissan, Renault and Mitsubishi in 2019),<sup>9</sup> collaborated with Israeli cybersecurity startups to make the future of smart mobility safer and more secure. One of these partners is Cybellum,<sup>10</sup> whose software is able to holistically assess cybersecurity risks in cars, providing an efficient and faster method of analyzing vulnerabilities.**

**Figure 8: Forerunners are more proactive in hiring new leaders, partnering to tap into niche skills and investing early in new talent, especially with HESS skills.**

**Talent strategies to adopt in the next five years**

Percentage of respondents who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



Companies that prioritize preparing future workforce in the next five years - (Forerunners, n=143; Other companies, n=907)

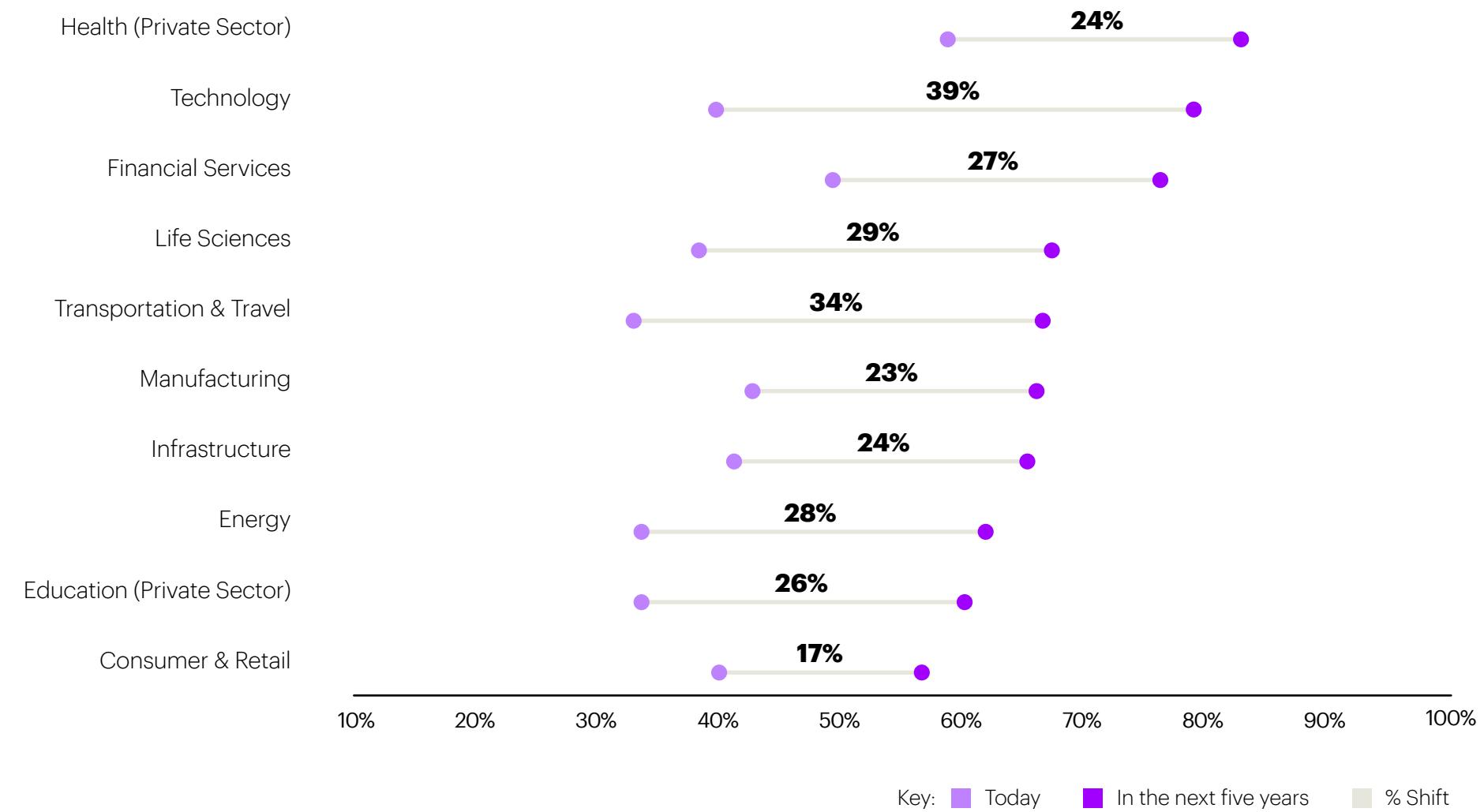
Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

As governments accelerate the shift toward a fourth industrial revolution (4IR) economy, a recent Asian Development Bank (ADB) study<sup>11</sup> in Southeast Asia calls for a stronger focus on skills development to enable the transition. Companies play a critical role here in investing in new talent and strengthening workforce readiness for the jobs of tomorrow.

Health, technology and financial services are among the top industries accelerating efforts in the next five years to prepare their workforce for an automated and AI-driven future.

### **Preparing the workforce for a more automated, AI-powered future, today and in the next five years**

Percentage of Other companies who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



Other companies; n=1,338

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

# Getting workforce up to speed

Accenture continues to invest in its entire workforce, from back office to frontline, to meet clients' needs in an increasingly automated and AI-powered future.

**Amid the pandemic, Accenture restructured its global training programs and rolled out a learning series—Technology Quotient (TQ)—to equip every employee with conversation-ready knowledge of technology topics, such as Cloud, Blockchain, AI and Security. By the end of Q1 2020, 72% of Accenture's employees had engaged with TQ.**

Accenture is also integrating global talent with specialized skill sets (e.g., economists and innovation strategists) through the strategic acquisition of firms such as AlphaBeta<sup>12</sup> in Australia and ?What If!<sup>13</sup> in the United Kingdom.

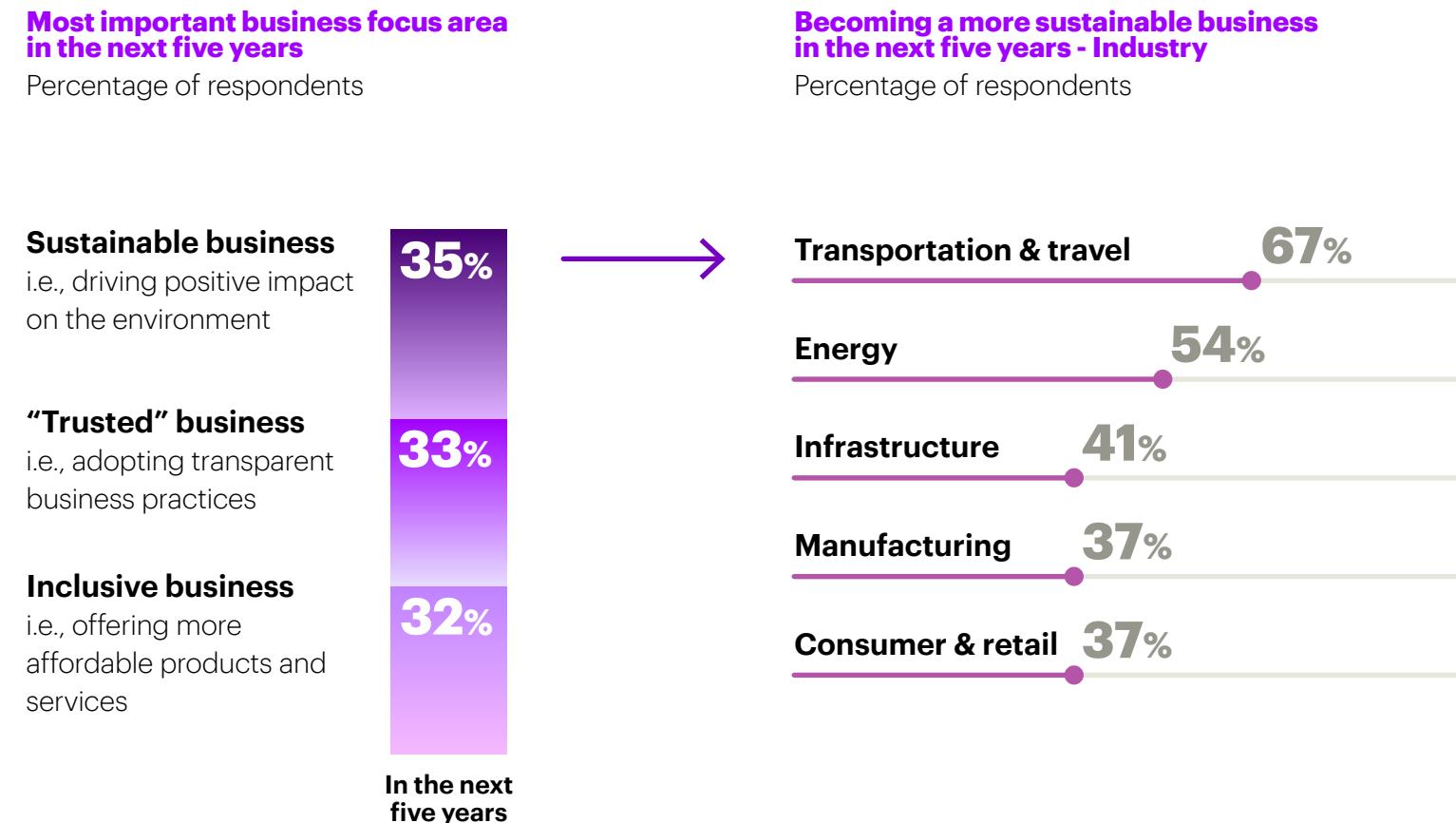


## 02 Create sustainable solutions

With climate concerns on the rise, senior executives have signaled a commitment to change. But now many are transitioning from talk to action, not only because of the external pressures, but because of the commercial potential.

Across the 12 countries we surveyed, we found that for **35% of companies, becoming a more sustainable business will be the most important area of focus in the next five years**. Businesses in industries that had not always managed natural capital carefully, such as transportation and energy, are now seeking solutions to stop, or at least reduce, ecological degradation (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: More than a third of senior executives said sustainability will be their top business focus in the next five years.**



Total sample: n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020



As companies turn ambition into action and invest in sustainable solutions, they will inevitably become new job creators. A variety of green jobs are expected to emerge as countries such as Australia, Singapore<sup>14</sup> and South Korea<sup>15</sup> push for sustainable development. Notably, in the Australian Clean Jobs Plan,<sup>16</sup> modeling by Accenture suggests that 15,000 jobs can be created to help with installing utility-scale renewable energy, including solar and wind farms and transmission infrastructure.

**Accenture believes that in the coming years, companies must commit to creating new sustainable infrastructure and solutions, ranging from building greenfield concept cities to transforming existing living spaces.**

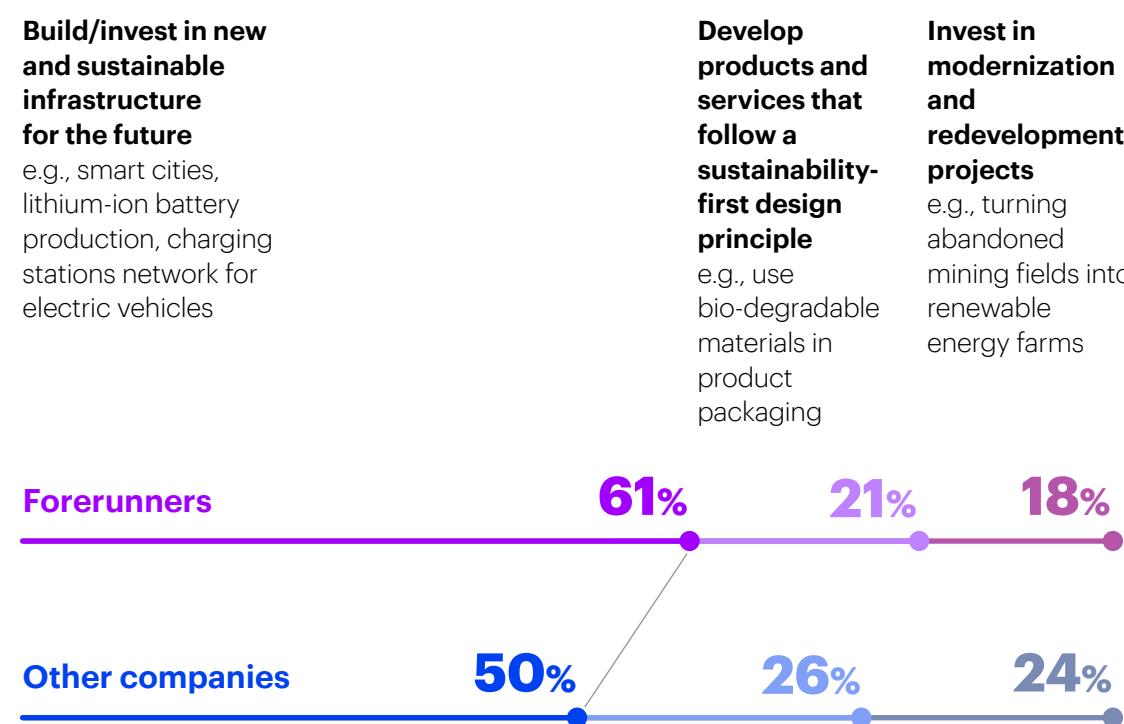
Our research shows Forerunners recognize their stepped-up role as environmental stewards (Figure 10) and believe in building and investing in sustainable infrastructure for the future.

For instance, China's industrial giant **BYD** is paving the way for a new electric vehicle (EV) standard to realize its vision of making all fossil fuel-powered vehicles electrified in China.<sup>17</sup> As the world's biggest EV company, BYD's fleet of electric buses, forklifts, utility vans, street sweepers and garbage trucks run exclusively on batteries the company manufactures itself.<sup>18</sup> It has since created a new business model through the establishment of five new subsidiary companies, grouped under the brand Fudi, to sell power batteries and EV parts to other EV manufacturers at scale.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 10: Forerunners are attracted to building and investing in sustainable infrastructure for the future.**

**Most attractive opportunity in environment-friendly solutions**

Percentage of respondents who selected top ranked



Companies that prioritize environment-friendly solutions in the next five years (Forerunners, n=127; Other companies, n=765)

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

Others see a business opportunity in infusing sustainability into how they design, create and bring products or services to the market.

A prime illustration of how Forerunner take others on the journey towards a sustainable future is **Aramco**. The oil giant is partnering with Mitsubishi Corporation (trading house), JGC Corporation (engineering company) and Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to build a clean energy supply chain.<sup>20</sup> In 2020, the company produced and transported 40 tons of "carbon-emissions-free" ammonia (a compound of hydrogen and nitrogen that can be burned in power stations without emitting carbon dioxide) to energy-scarce Japan.

Aramco's chief technology officer, Ahmad Al Khawaiter, said, "While the ammonia shipment demonstration was a 'one-off test shipment,' it showed for the first time [that] hydrogen is transportable and is becoming a tradable commodity. Aramco continues to work with partners across the world in the deployment of a breakthrough technology to produce low-carbon energy."

In fact, every company can amplify its planet-friendly efforts by making better choices in R&D, supply chain and other core functions.

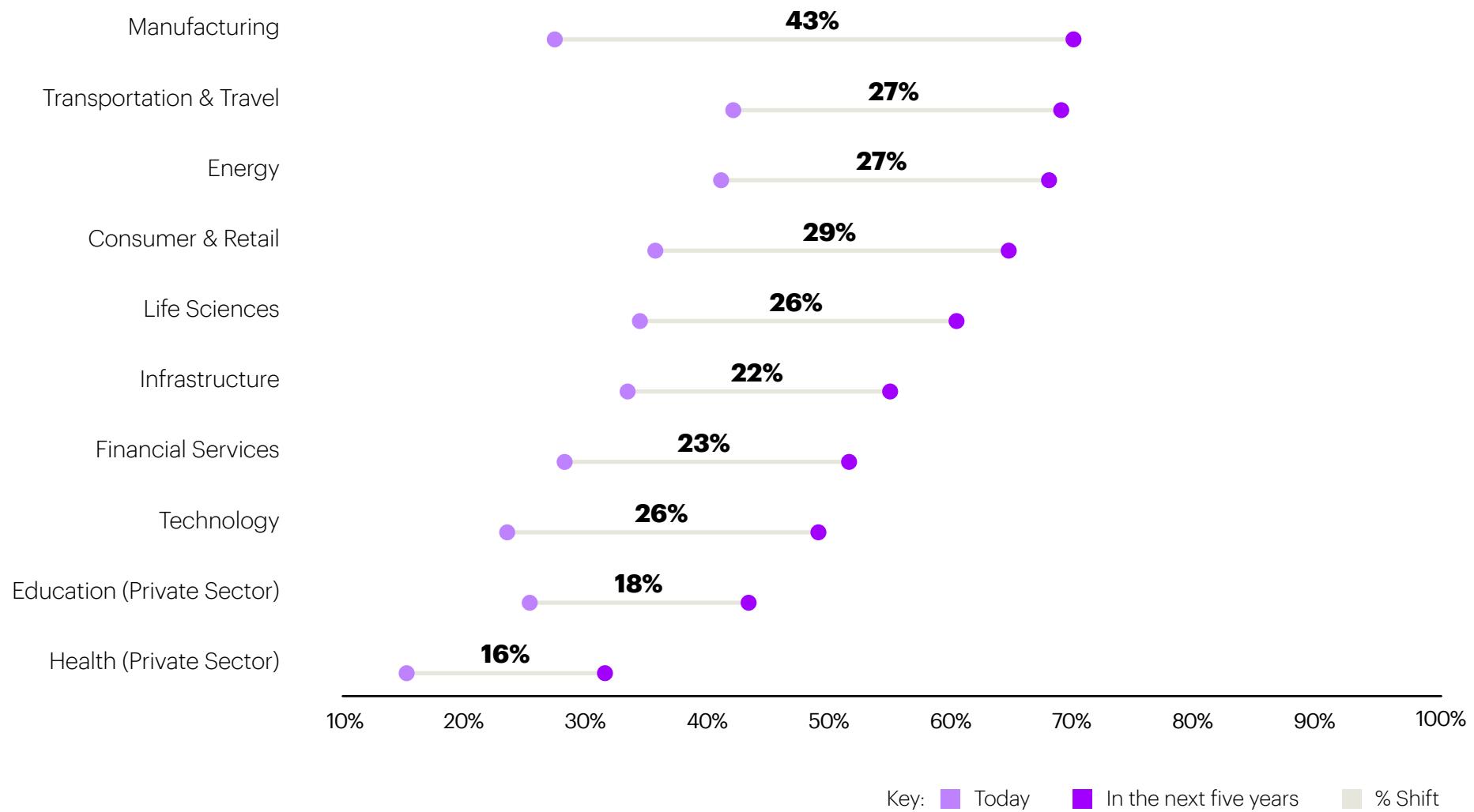
"For a more sustainable society, [we] need a systemic change, not just one actor or one sector," said Elba Fuster,<sup>21</sup> a smart city and digitalization expert from the UNDP Singapore. "If corporations see there is a challenge in the future, say in how data is managed, or how waste management is implemented, or the problem with plastics... they [must] begin to innovate and find solution by themselves before being asked by society or by government. This proactive role can change the way corporations interact with society."

We see encouraging signs of companies taking an important step forward in their commitment to creating long-term value for all stakeholders.<sup>22</sup> **To make true progress, companies need to take accountability by embracing these new standards of broad-based value creation, and stronger collaboration with governments and ecosystem partners.**

Manufacturing, transportation & travel and energy industries are prioritizing efforts in the next five years to infuse sustainability into their business.

**Putting sustainability at the center of their business, today and in the next five years**

Percentage of Other companies who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



Other companies; n=1,338

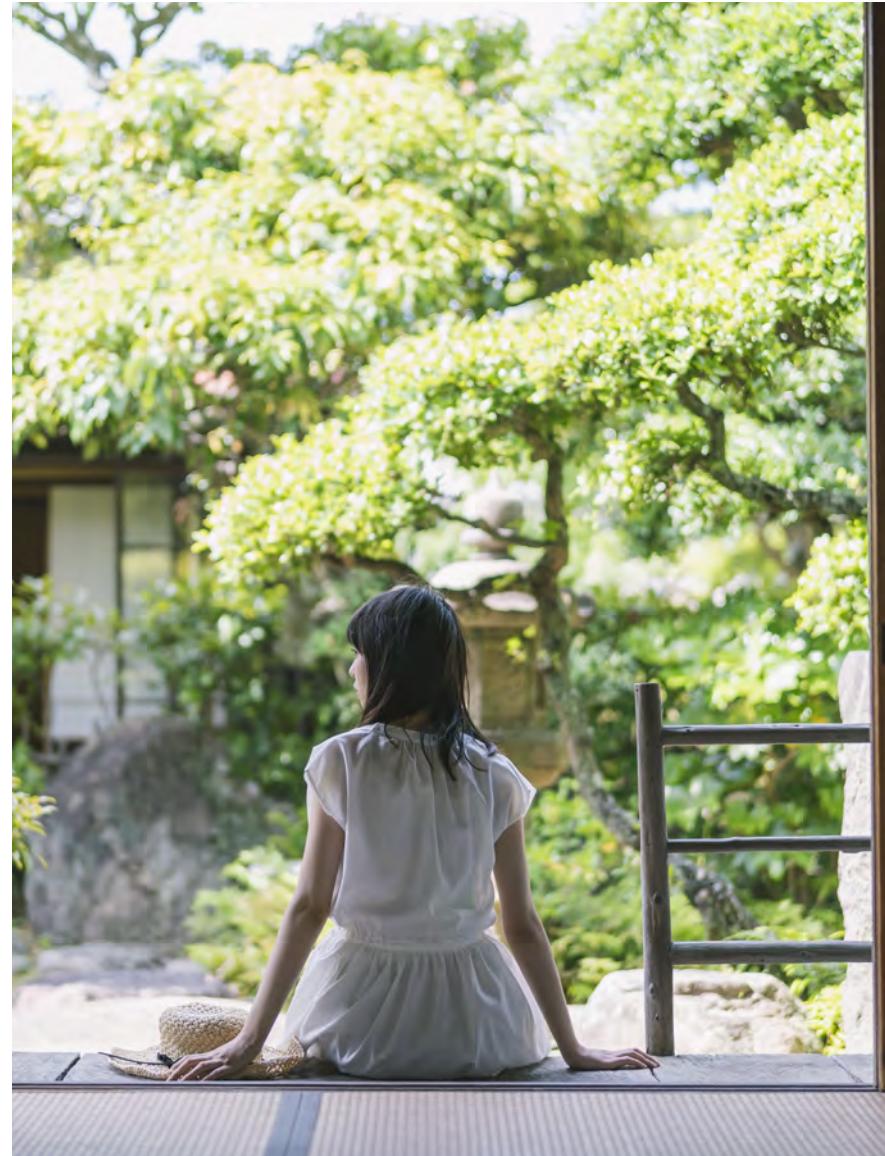
Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

# Toyota's plan for a green city

The “Woven City” plan of Toyota envisions the creation of a fully connected ecosystem that will become a “living laboratory” to explore future technologies for a greener future. **Toyota officially broke ground on this futuristic city in February 2021,<sup>23</sup> on the 175-acre site of a former Toyota plant at the base of Mt. Fuji.** Partnering with Danish architect company Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), the city is intended to improve mobility, robotics, smart homes, AI and sustainable infrastructure.

An urban prototype that will pave the way for future smart cities, the Woven City will run on hydrogen fuel cells and use wooden construction materials for buildings. Photo-voltaic panels installed on rooftops will generate solar power while a road network for autonomous delivery of goods takes place underground. Reprogramming the structure of streets, it will feature separate paths for autonomous vehicles, micro-mobility and pedestrians as it resets the balance between people, mobility and nature.

Toyota CEO Akio Toyoda calls the project “a city from the ground up ... [that] allows us to build an infrastructure of the future that is connected, digital and sustainable.”<sup>24</sup>





## 03 Invest in human care

The pandemic has brought health and wellness to the forefront across all consumer segments. And when it comes to developing new offerings for individuals and communities, the opportunity isn't limited to the healthcare sector.

In fact, some companies in sectors as wide-ranging as financial services and consumer goods & services have embraced opportunities in human well-being.

**In the food industry, for example, the growing popularity of plant-based diets has resulted in tremendous growth for the global meat substitutes market,<sup>25</sup> which is projected to grow from \$1.6 billion in 2019 to \$3.5 billion by 2026.** For instance, the UAE-based **Al Islami Foods** (known for frozen meat, seafood, vegetables and fruits) has made a move into the plant-based market by launching its first vegan burger in early 2021. Made from a combination of sunflower, pea protein and fava beans,



This image is for illustrative purposes only.

the plant-based burger involved eight months of R&D and testing. The company plans to expand its frozen plant-based range beyond the new burger at affordable price points to promote and accelerate sustainable change in consumer eating habits.<sup>26</sup>

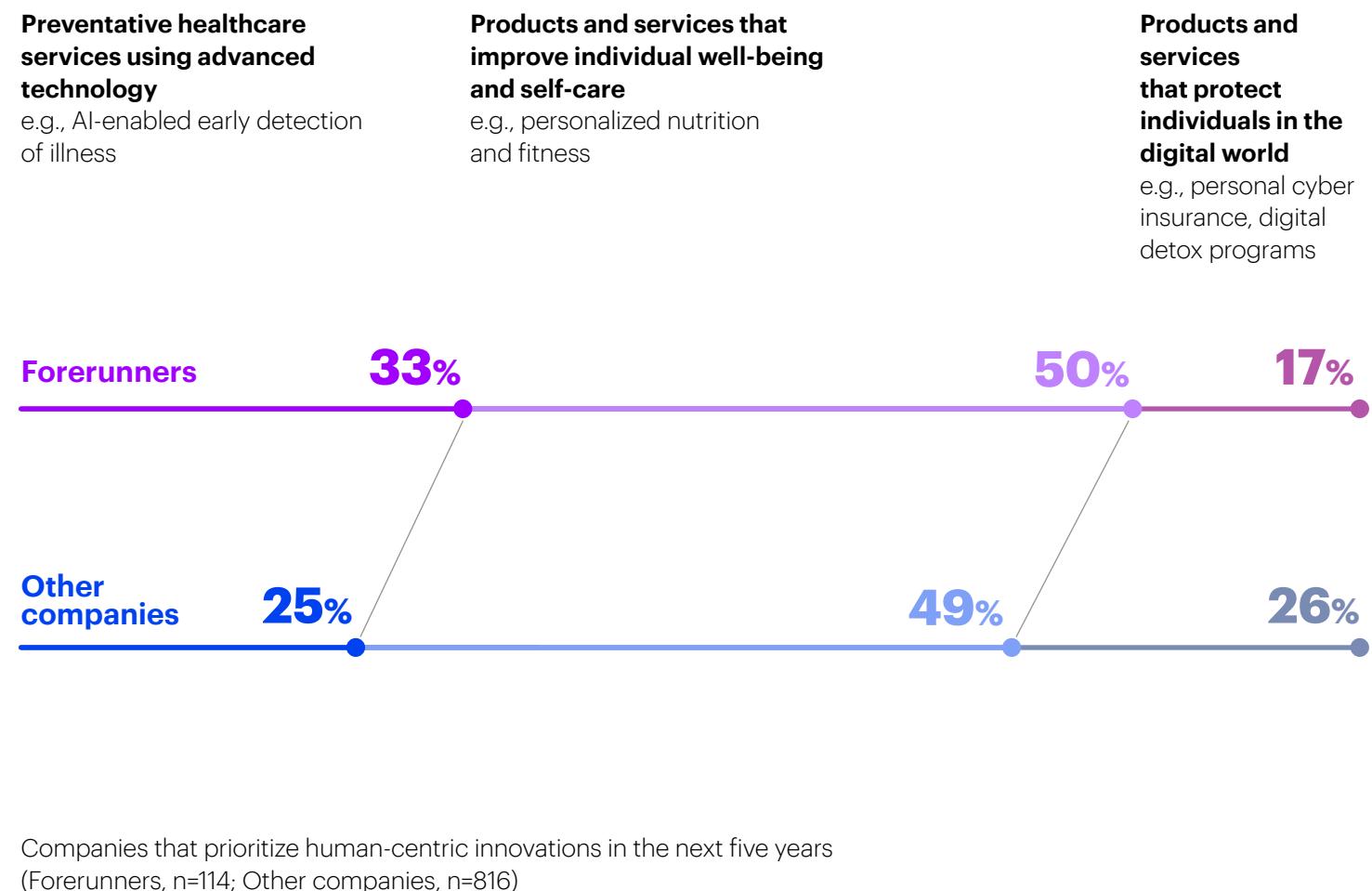
**In another example, Honda recently debuted an “antiviral mask”<sup>27</sup> for cars. The Japanese car maker introduced a new filter in its vehicles’ climate control systems that promises to clean more than 99.8% of airborne particles in cars’ cabins within 15 minutes.** This was initially designed as part of a project to develop a vehicle that can safely transport COVID-19 patients without infecting the driver; now Honda plans to expand the accessory rollout to other models in the near future.

“We want to make drivers feel safe and comfortable even when they keep their car windows closed in cold weather,” said Takaharu Echigo, who is in charge of the product development.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 11: Forerunners are attracted to opportunities related to improving preventative healthcare and individual well-being.**

**Most attractive opportunity in human-centric innovations**

Percentage of respondents who selected top ranked



Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

Mastering innovation that spotlights well-being isn't easy. Forerunners in our study set themselves apart by:

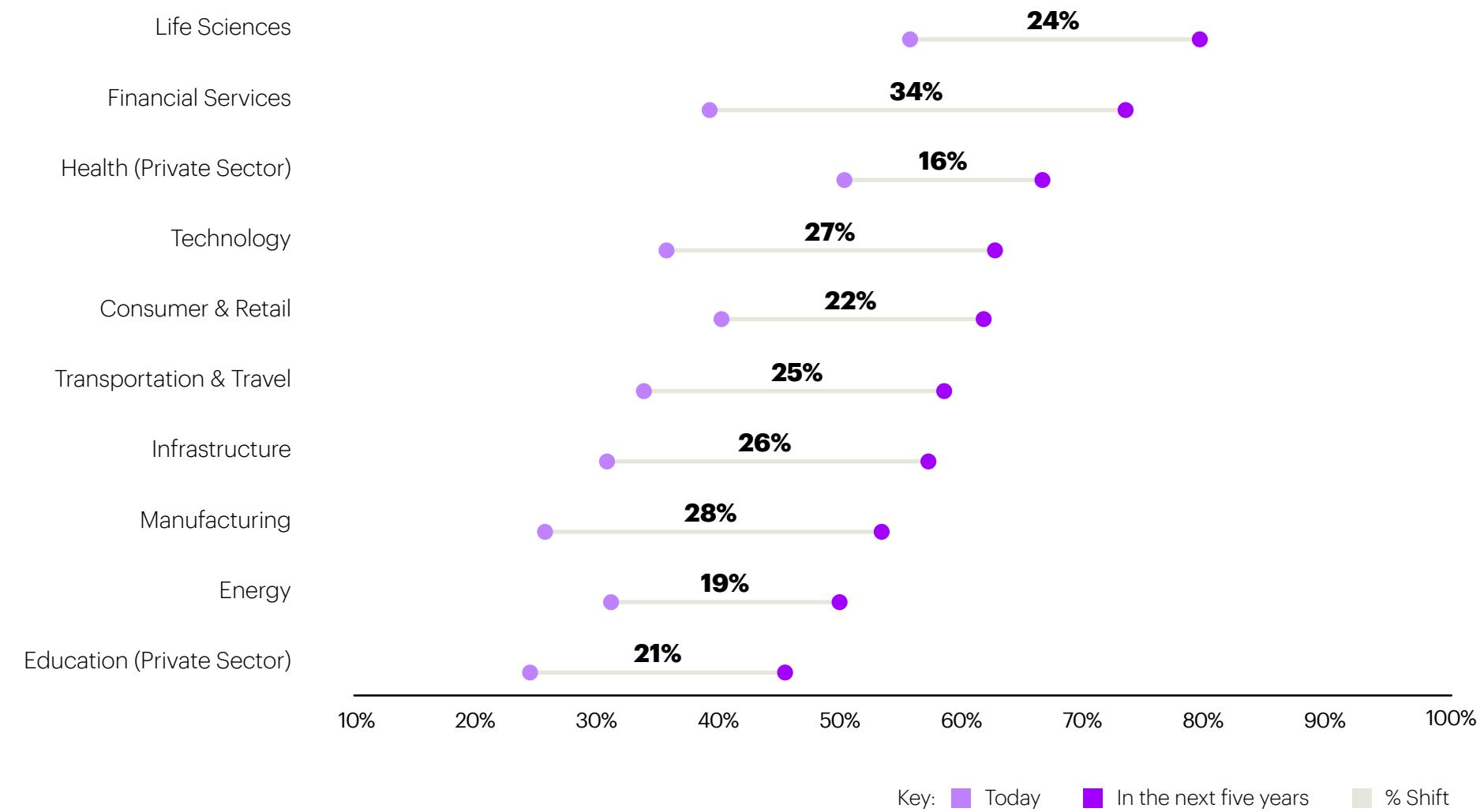
- Thinking more than their peers about **preventing illnesses**, rather than focusing only on inventing cures. With the help of advanced technology, 83% of Forerunners are planning to invest in early disease detection and personal well-being services (Figure 11).
- Creating new business models specifically designed to **respond to new market demands**. For example, 49% of Forerunners, as compared to 29% of others, plan to launch new business models to seize future opportunities related to individual well-being.

A large diagnostic medicine group in Latin America has set up a new technology company, to develop an open health platform. The platform, not only facilitates individuals' access to health products and telemedicine services, but also allows them to manage their medical records in a single location. It integrates chronic disease prevention services which, along with predictive and health analysis algorithms, will help assess patients' risk and offer personalized treatments—improving clinical outcomes and reducing costs for many.

Life Sciences,  
Financial Services  
and Health  
industries are  
leading others in  
their efforts to  
innovate with  
consumer  
well-being  
in mind.

### **Mastering innovations that focus on human care today and in the next five years**

Percentage of Other companies who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



Other companies; n=1,338

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

# Banking gets into health

OCBC Bank appears to be one of the first non-traditional players to enter the telehealth services space. The Singapore-based bank saw more than 25,000 downloads within the first month of its HealthPass<sup>29</sup> app launch in June 2020.

**In partnership with seven medical groups, OCBC created an app that allows consumers to access telehealth services, past medical history and results from more than 100 general practitioners (GPs) and specialists.**

In addition, the bank partners with CXA, an employee benefits insurtech startup to offer third-party merchants' wellness products such as dental packages and preventive health services (e.g., health screenings) directly via the app.

The bank believes that helping individuals across their various healthcare needs and reaching a diagnosis early is a key component of financial wellness.<sup>30</sup>



This image is for illustrative purposes only.



## 04 Use technology responsibly

Technology will continue to play an important role in accelerating new business model development in the next five years. Those companies that commit to using technology to make products and services safer and smarter will be better positioned for the society of the future.

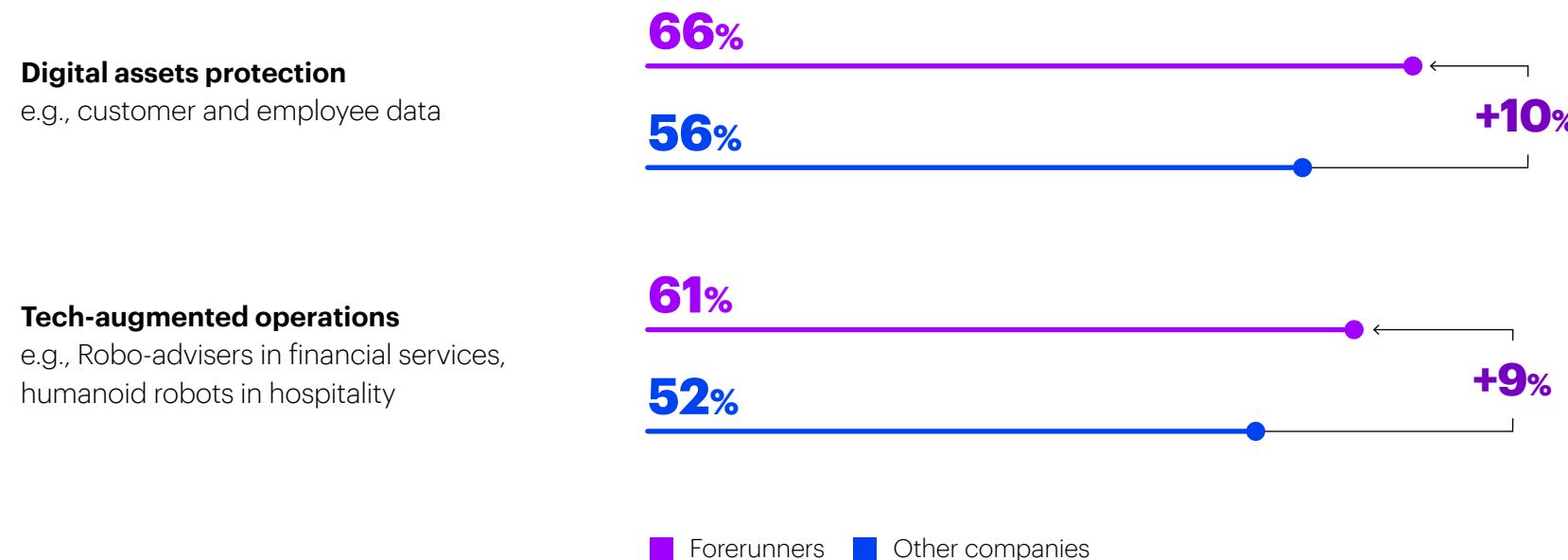
Cloud computing, smart sensors, advanced analytics and AI will continue to be infused throughout value chains. But the biggest transformation will be how companies embrace a fair and ethical use of technology. This may require business leaders to make the tough calls about terminating some services that do not meet the high standards of consumers. Notably, **Sony** has committed to start screening all its AI-infused products (e.g., Aibo robotic dog) for ethical risks. The company has incorporated AI ethics criteria such as privacy protection into its quality control process and is prepared to modify or drop any development that is found to be ethically deficient.<sup>31</sup>

Forerunners are ahead of their peers in focusing on digital asset protection (customer and employee data) and building tech-augmented, smarter operations (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Forerunners recognize that more technology will necessitate enhanced capabilities especially around data privacy, and smartly augmented services.**

**Tech-related capabilities that need to be enhanced to succeed in the future**

Percentage of respondents who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



Forerunners, n=162; Other companies, n=1,338

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020



Take **Origin Energy**. The company is leveraging emerging technologies to create smarter ways for customers to take control of energy consumption in their homes. **In a recent trial with smart controller manufacturer, Sensibo Sky, Origin Energy offered customers the option to monitor and control their air conditioners remotely via mobile phone.**

The technology also enabled Origin Energy to remotely adjust air conditioners' temperature for customers (with prior permission), during peak demand in return for an account credit. This type of demand response program reduces pressure on the grid, and it helps encourage responsible use of energy among consumers.<sup>32</sup>

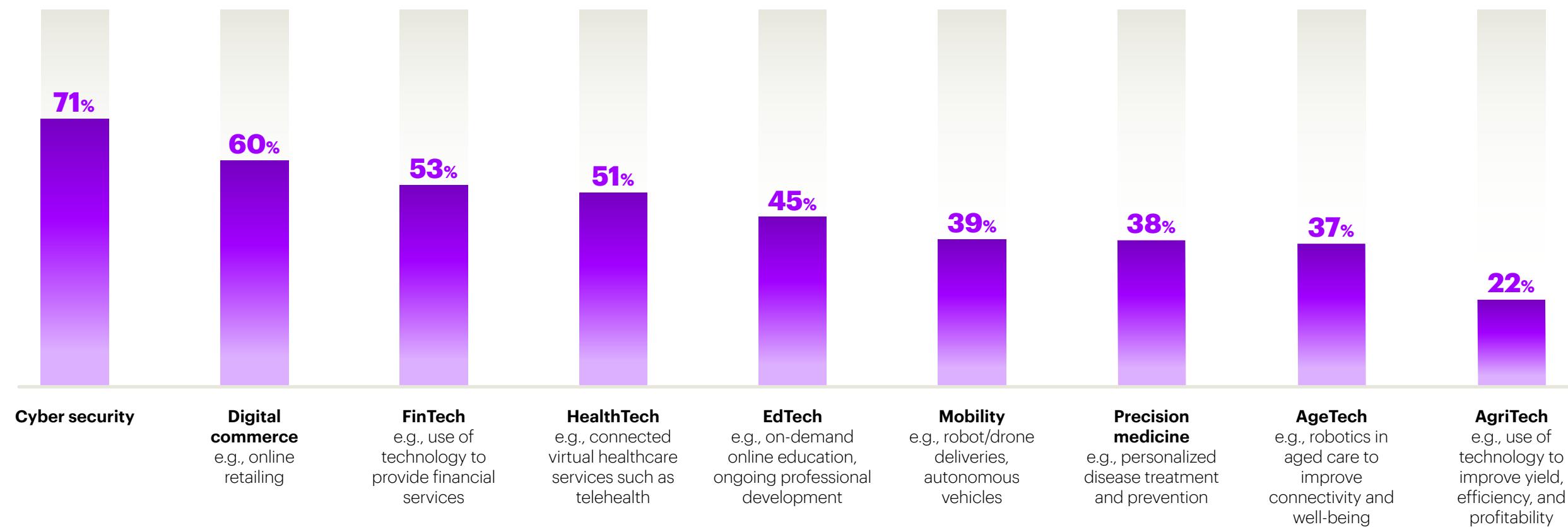
According to Sami Mahroum,<sup>33</sup> a professor at Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management, "technology is a resource to unlock other resources. Without access to technology, you will not be able to participate fully in life or society."

Most senior executives see an opportunity to develop technology-powered services to meet future demand. New opportunities in cybersecurity, digital commerce and digital access to financial and healthcare services are expected to increase in the next five years (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Senior executives expect increased future demand for cybersecurity, digital commerce, financial and health-tech services.**

**Increased demand for tech-enabled services in the next five years**

Percentage of respondents who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



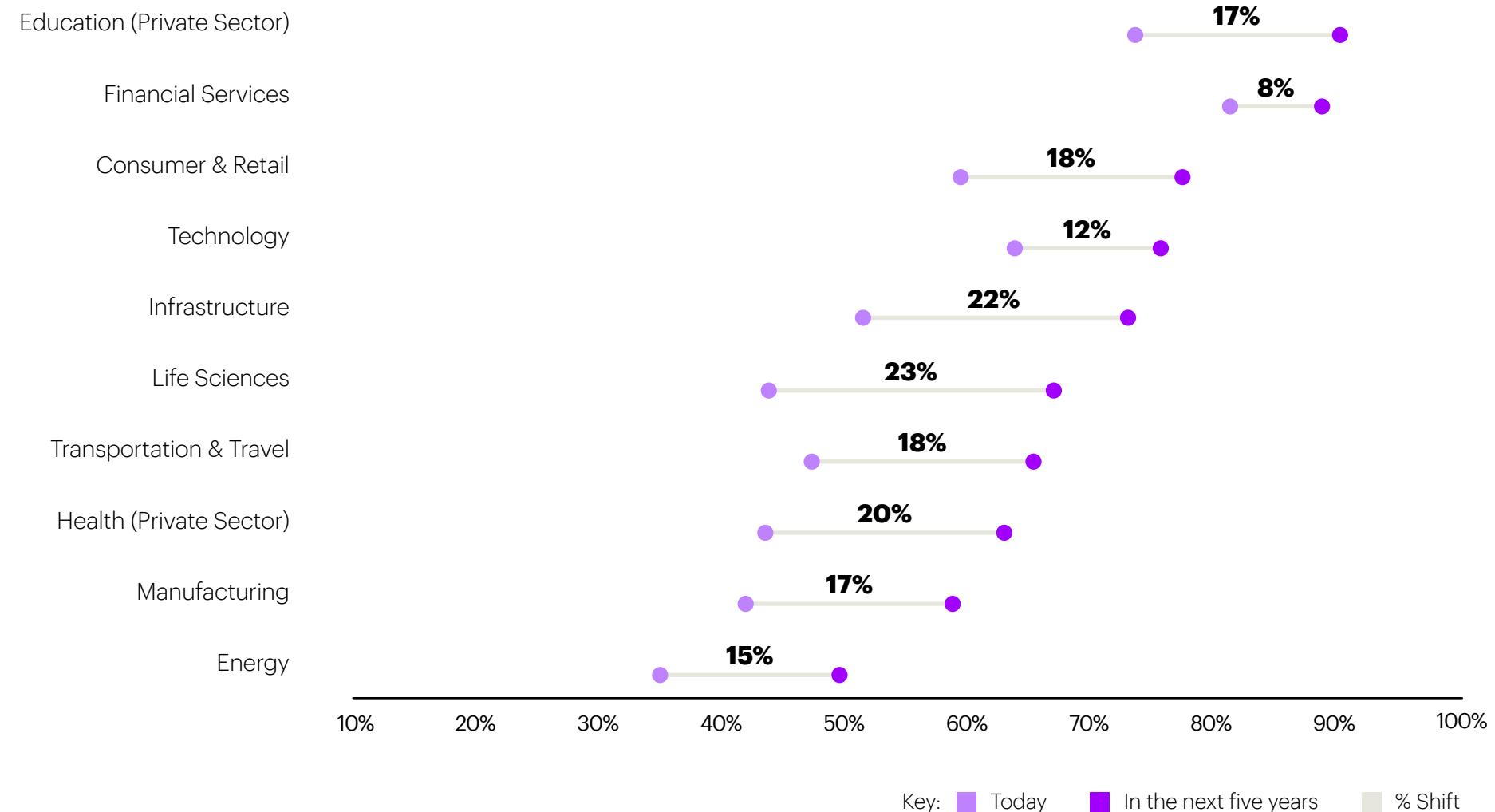
Total sample, n=1,500

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

In the next five years, the Education and Financial Services industries are stepping up to create safer and smarter products and services.

### **Deploying technology in a more responsible manner today and in the next five years**

Percentage of Other companies who selected “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” on a five-point scale



Other companies; n=1,338

Source: Accenture Growth Markets C-level Survey, September–October 2020

## Personalizing learning with smarter tech

BYJU'S, a leading online learning platform in India, uses<sup>34</sup> big data, cloud-based analytics and deep algorithms to provide a smart and personalized learning experience for students. **Its original content, delivered on a learning app, is crafted for individual students, as the system automatically adjusts difficulty, pace and topics to suit their needs.**

BYJU'S has also invested in AI through its recent acquisition of Osmo, an educational games company, which houses experts in AI and machine learning. With these new capabilities, the firm is looking to experiment with augmented reality and virtual reality to further enhance learner-student experience in 2021.

BYJU'S chief product officer Ranjit Radhakrishnan said, "with technology as an enabler, we focus on developing learning programs that will cater to the unique requirements of every student in India and abroad."





Calls are growing for companies to step up and play a prominent role in creating a society that is better for all. Many senior executives are trying to emerge from the pandemic unscathed while, at the same time, having to prepare for the impact emanating from emerging lifestyles.

While most senior executives recognize that the future will not be an extension of the past, they have more work to do in accelerating the necessary changes within their organizations.

What is clear is that the future market opportunities cannot be captured with pre-crisis strategies. **Forerunners in our study have shown that the bold steps they are taking in the areas of new talent, sustainability solutions, human-centric innovation and responsible technology are necessary to lay the foundation for a better future in the long term. Not only for their own business success, but also for the benefit of their employees, customers, partners and communities.**

**This is a tall order—but one that we believe is achievable as Forerunners in our study demonstrate.**

## About the research

Our study is focused on how radical uncertainty is reshaping society and business priorities across 12 countries, including Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates.

To better understand where business leaders expect society to be in 2030 and how companies can embrace change in order to thrive, we conducted our research in two phases:

### 1. Exploratory interviews

First, we conducted in-depth interviews with six representatives from multilateral organizations, an academic institution and a research institute, to better understand contemporary perspectives on features of future societies in Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Middle East. Some of the experts we interviewed include the Director of the Policy Support Unit at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Secretariat; the Chairperson of W20, one of the G20 engagement groups; a technical expert in smart cities at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Global Centre for Technology, Innovation and Sustainable Development in Singapore; a professor at Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management, and the Chairman of an Asia focused think tank and advisory service.

### 2. C-level executive survey

We conducted an extensive phone-based survey with 1,500 senior business leaders in Strategy, Innovation, Technology, Marketing, Finance, Supply Chain and Operations roles (Figure 14). Each respondent represented a company at or larger than US\$250 million annual revenues. The companies were based in 12 geographic markets and 10 industries (Figure 15).

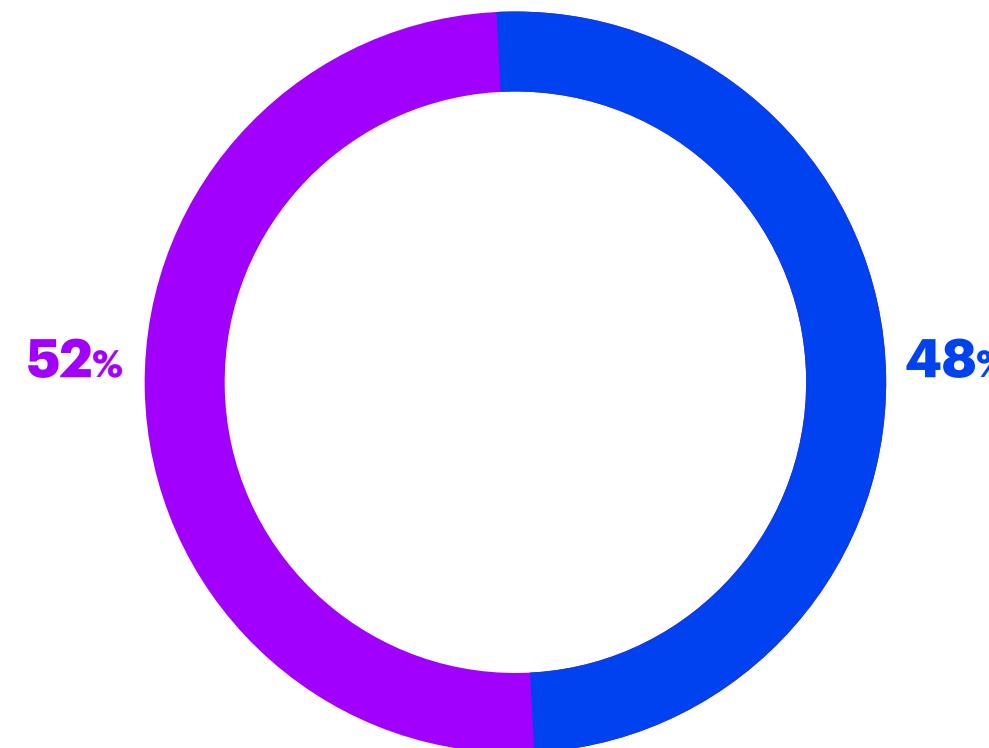
**Identifying Forerunners:** As part of our survey analysis, we used a variety of approaches when interrogating the quantitative data to find a cluster of companies that exhibits significantly different behaviours compared to the rest.

We adopted a clustering approach based on questions relating to the emergence of five new lifestyles. We identified a **small group of companies (that is, those we call Forerunners) that expect significant business impact from most of the five lifestyles we tested.** We also found these companies to exhibit significantly different behaviour in relation to the speed at which they have already adopted new business priorities across four areas, when compared to the rest of sample.

**Figure 14: C-level executive survey 2020 – Respondent Demographics**

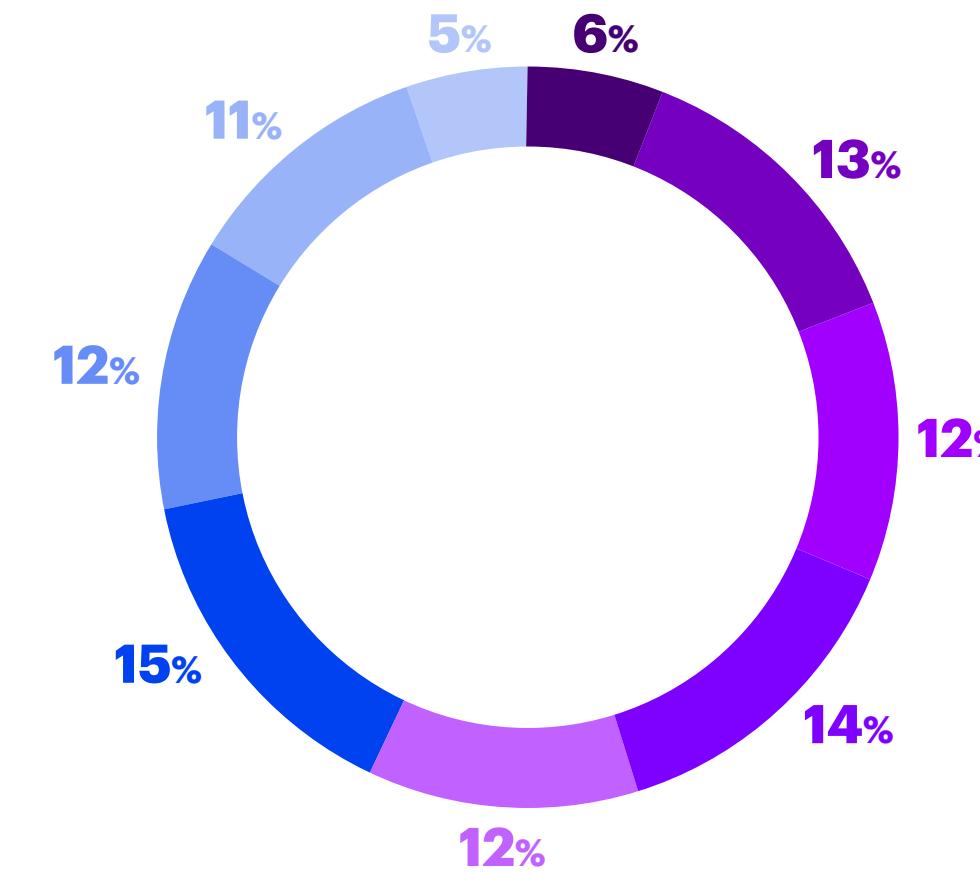
**Organizational level**

- C-suite
- Vice President/Director

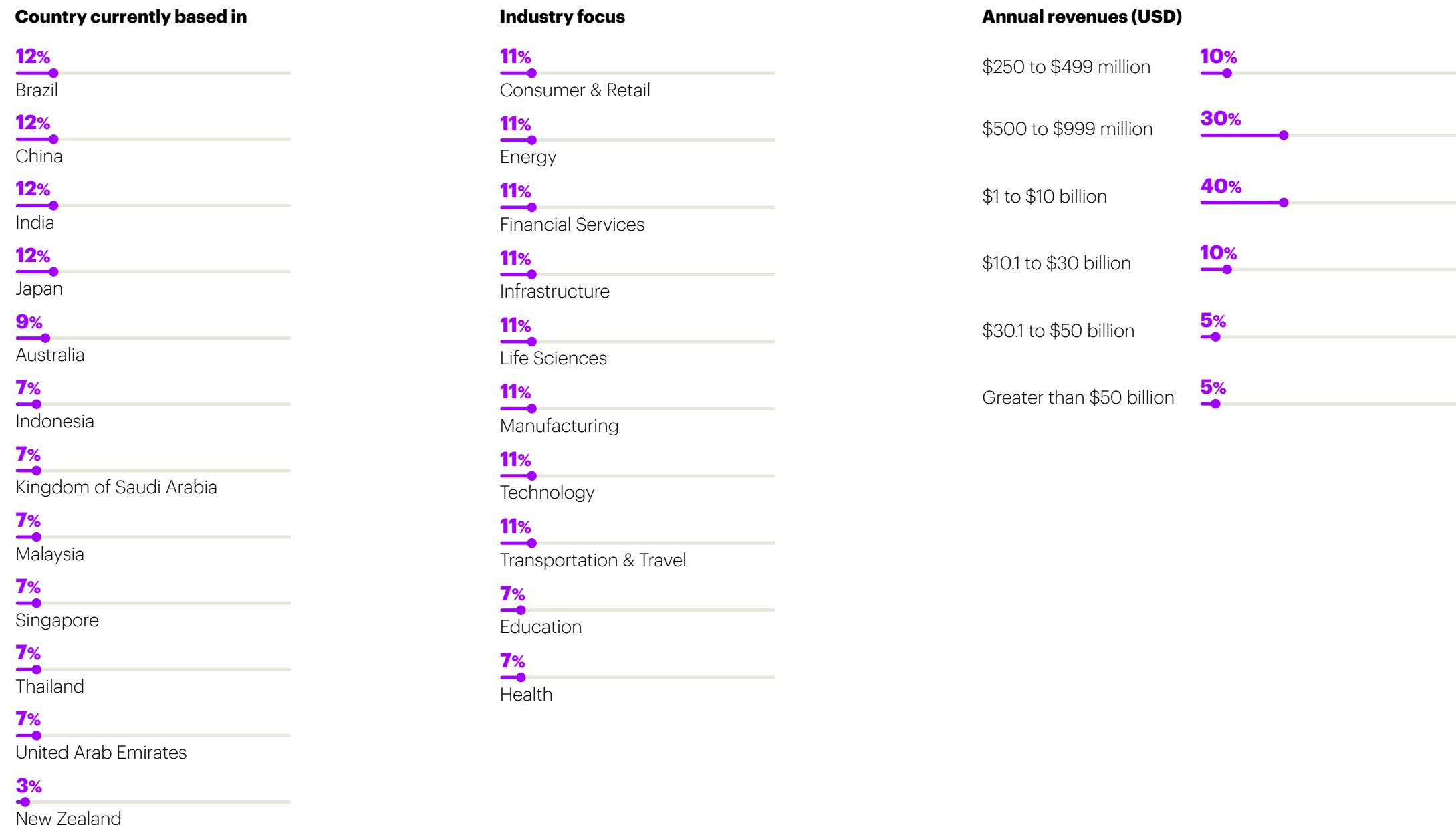


**Functional area**

- Chief executive officer
- Strategy
- Innovation
- Operations
- Technology
- Marketing
- Finance
- Supply chain
- Research & development



**Figure 15: C-level executive survey 2020 – Company Demographics**



Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## About the authors



### Gianfranco Casati

Chief Executive Officer,  
Growth Markets

Gianfranco Casati is the chief executive officer of Accenture in Growth Markets, with management oversight for all industries and services of Accenture's business in Asia Pacific, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. He is also a member of Accenture's Global Management Committee.

Gianfranco has helmed his current role since 2014. Prior to this role, Gianfranco was group chief executive of Accenture's Products group, which served clients in the air, freight & travel services; automotive; consumer goods and services; industrial equipment; infrastructure and transportation services; life sciences; and retail industries.



### Dr. Vedrana Savic

Managing Director,  
Thought Leadership,  
Accenture Research

Vedrana is a global thought leader and published author in top business and academic journals. Her work is focused on portfolio innovation strategy, industry disruption, value creation in the post-digital age, and organizational renewal. She has extensive experience in corporate strategy and management consulting and has advised executive teams of large companies across Asia Pacific, US and Europe.



### Valentin de Miguel

Senior Managing Director and  
Strategy & Consulting Lead,  
Growth Markets

Valentin de Miguel leads Accenture Strategy & Consulting for Growth Markets—in the market units of Asia Pacific, Africa, Middle East and Latin America. In this role, he is focused on helping C-suite executives develop strategies to transform and reimagine their organizations to enable continuous innovation, from idea to execution.



### Trevor Gruzin

Senior Managing Director,  
Growth & Strategy,  
Growth Markets

Trevor Gruzin is the Senior Managing Director responsible for Growth & Strategy for Growth Markets. His role focuses on advising companies and governments on strategy (Business, IT, Digital), innovation applied to business and operating models, and transformation. His specific focus is on how technology can disrupt companies and industries. He is a member of the Accenture Global Leadership Council as well as the Accenture Strategy Leadership Team and the Growth Markets Leadership team.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Amy Chng, Koteswara Ivaturi, Michelle Ganchinho, Lydia Pretty, Jenni Lai, Gargi Chakrabarty, and David Light for their contributions to this report.

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