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TAX PROFESSIONALS **2022 REPORT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past couple of years, tax professionals have been riding a rollercoaster of events and emotions. In early 2020, firms were primed to bring in new clients, broaden their services, hire new people, and grow, grow, grow. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the economy contracted, and most tax firms went into survival mode along with many of their clients.

Vaccine availability in early 2021 held out hope for a swift economic rebound, but the Delta variant, supply-chain issues, inflation, and a host of other issues have complicated economic recoveries in the U.S. and around the world.

Throughout this period, tax professionals have been helping their clients navigate the pandemic's many pitfalls, and in the process have learned that their services are more valued — and valuable — than ever before. Further, the ability for firms to deliver those services was actually improved by the sudden acceptance and availability of remote working options, as was many a tax advisor's job satisfaction. Firms that adapted during the pandemic by investing in their technological infrastructure, process re-engineering, and supportive training should now be in an excellent position to take advantage of a myriad of opportunities arising from ongoing economic recoveries around the world.

A shift in priorities

Having absorbed the lessons of the pandemic, tax professionals are now heading into 2022 with a sense of optimism similar to that of early 2020. The difference is that the pandemic itself forced an industry-wide re-calculation of priorities.

Prior to the pandemic, growth was the top priority at most firms. But in September 2021, when our annual survey of global tax professionals was conducted, hiring and developing top-quality talent emerged as the top strategic priority heading into 2022.

An accounting firm is only as good as its people, of course, so this re-emphasis on human capital in the overall business equation bodes well for both the industry and those who work in it. Growth still matters, obviously, and tax advisors are still being asked to find efficiencies and provide more business advisory services for clients; but now, firms can see that the key to making it all work is employing smart, dedicated tax professionals, especially those who know how to make the best possible use of today's advanced tax technologies.

Room to improve

When it comes to employees and managing the day-to-day pressures of a tax career, however, there is plenty of room for improvement.

In this year's survey, we asked a number of important questions about the legendarily long hours that tax professionals log, especially during tax season, and the toll this workload takes on their physical and mental health. We also asked what tax pros like (and don't) about their jobs, what changes could be implemented to improve their overall health and well-being, and what skills are currently in demand for aspiring tax professionals. And finally, for the first time, we tried to determine the extent to which environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) principles — often seen as a new litmus test for socially conscious businesses and investors — are impacting tax practitioners and their clients.

These are all important factors to consider as new recruits are hired and a firm's most productive employees are being asked to provide an ever more expansive range of client services. Younger people entering the profession are demanding to be treated with fairness and respect in the workplace, and they expect a certain amount of scheduling flexibility. Taking their concerns into consideration goes a long way toward securing their loyalty, strengthening a firm's culture, and creating the kind of *esprit de corps* that can sustain a firm through even the most turbulent of business climates.

As tax professionals head into 2022, there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the future. The post-pandemic recovery is likely to continue and demand for tax and business advisory services of all kinds is expanding, which means ample opportunities for firms to diversify and grow.

Methodology

The sample population for this year’s survey included more than 500 employees from tax firms in countries all over the world. Almost half (49%) were from the U.S., and the rest were from Australia, Canada, the U.K., Latin America, and elsewhere.

Respondent roles were divided into three categories:

- Owner/solo proprietor
- Non-owner leadership role (e.g., partner, director, manager)
- Non-leadership role (e.g., administrator)

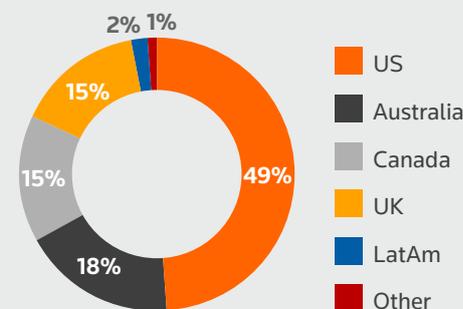
Overall, 60% of respondents were owner/solo proprietors, but in firms with 30 or more employees, 15% were owners, and the rest were split evenly between non-owner/managers and administrative staff.

As for their roles within the organization, day-to-day job responsibilities in order of frequency included:

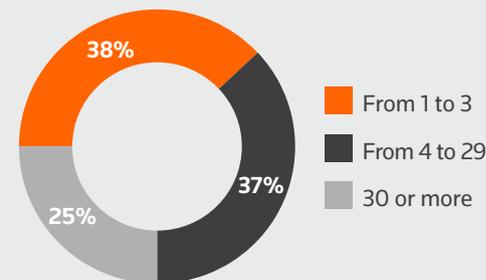
- Individual tax return preparation
- Business tax return preparation
- Accounting/bookkeeping
- Financial statement preparation
- Other advisory services
- Payroll
- Financial planning
- Business consulting
- Decision support
- International tax advice
- Auditing
- Other

Survey respondent data

LOCATION



FIRM SIZE



ROLE SPECIALIZATION



Base: [Role] Overall (543); Specialization (434).
Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

SECTION 1: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

At the start of 2021, tax professionals were emerging from the pandemic survival mode and hoping the new year would allow them to return to some semblance of normalcy. After all, most accounting firms had adapted quite well to remote work, and expectations were that the economy would start to recover in 2021.

Interestingly, as 2021 progressed and tax professionals grew more accustomed to working hybrid schedules, their priorities shifted. Prior to the pandemic, tax leaders were focused primarily on growing their businesses. In September, however, while respondents were still focused on growth, it had been overtaken in priority by a concern about recruiting and training of new and existing talent. Personnel development was especially important in firms with four or more people, but that desire also extended to individuals eager to improve their own skills.

Going into the last three months of 2021, the strategic priorities for tax advisors were centered around these general themes:

1. **Talent** — attracting and recruiting new people; developing and retaining existing talent
2. **Growth** — increasing revenue and attracting new clients
3. **Efficiency**— streamlining processes and leveraging technology to increase productivity
4. **Client Service** — offering more strategic business advice, better response times, and more effective communication

In this year's survey, differences of emphasis will of course depend upon the size of a firm and the actual roles respondents play in their organizations. Continued growth did bounce back as a strategic priority after dipping somewhat during the pandemic, and squeezing more efficiency out of processes and technologies is never far from management's mind. Further, uncertainties exposed by the pandemic appear to have prompted a re-dedication to both excellence in client services and tax planning.

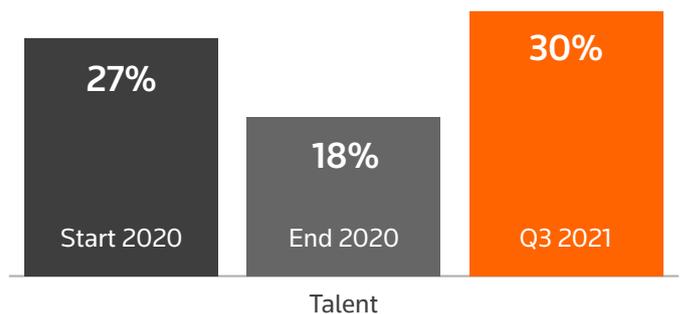
Priority 1: Talent

During most of 2020 and into early 2021, talent recruitment and development were pushed to the back burner while tax and accounting firms scrambled to adapt to the changing circumstances brought on by the pandemic. By the third quarter of 2021, however, the need for skilled tax professionals reasserted itself and, in our survey, almost one-third of firms with more than four employees cited the search for — and development of — quality talent as their top priority.

While the need for skilled workers was a common concern, the reasons behind it depended largely on whether the respondent had a leadership role in the firm or not.

For example, non-owner/managers with a leadership role mainly wanted highly skilled people to support development of their team. On the other hand, those in non-leadership roles expressed a strong desire to continue their own learning and development — to “be the best I can be” — presumably to bring more value to the enterprise, raise their stature in the firm, and make more money. Meanwhile, firm owners and solo practitioners were less concerned about developing their own skills than they were about applying those skills to provide better service for their clients.

TALENT-FOCUSED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Base: Start 2020 (139); End 2020 (131); Sep 2021 (410)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

Recruitment

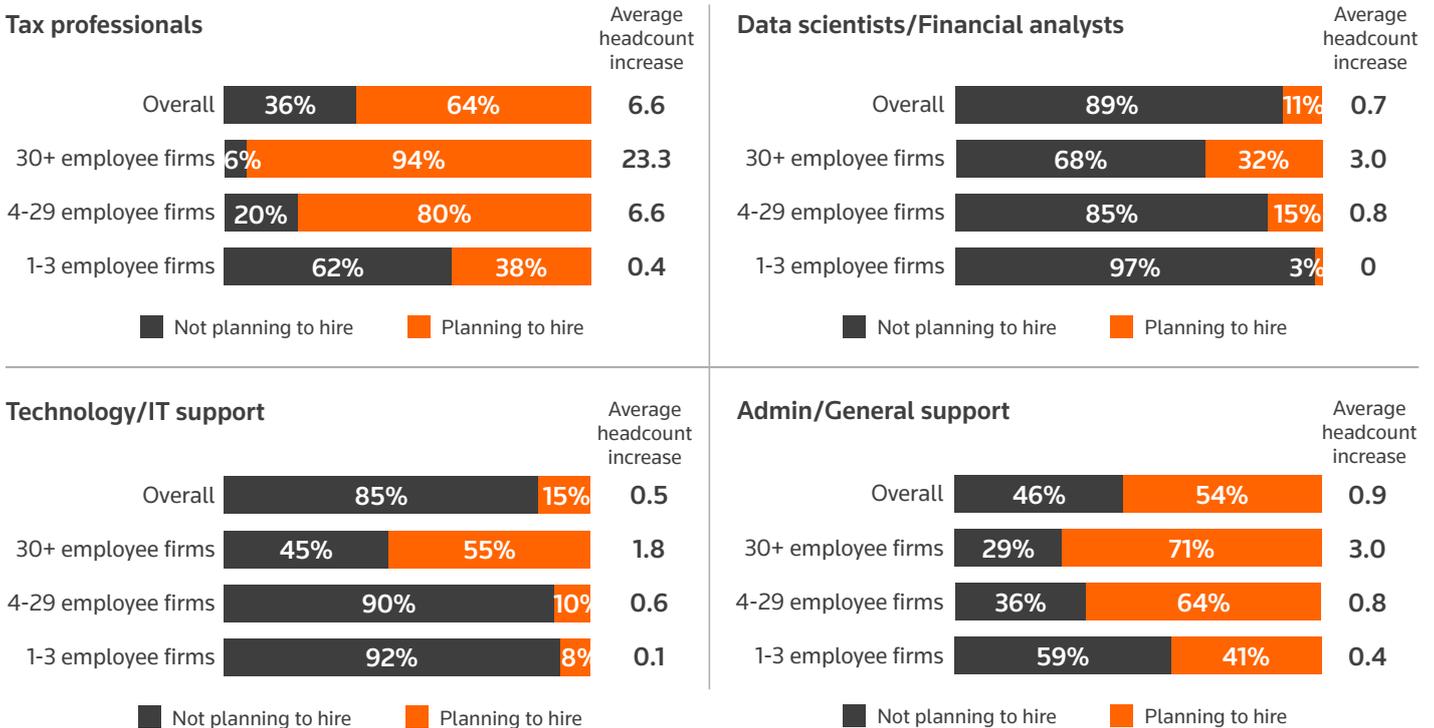
In the hunt for talent, finding people with the right skillset is never easy, but our survey revealed that some skills are much more in demand at the moment than others.

In general, the need for tax professionals and administrative support far outweighed the need for data scientists, financial analysts, and IT support. Overall, 64% of firms said they intended to hire tax professionals in the coming year, with an average headcount increase of 6.6 tax professionals. In firms with 30 or more employees, however, a whopping 94% said they planned to hire an average of 23.3 additional tax professionals. And 80% of firms with between 4 and 29 employees said tax professionals were at the top of their hiring wish list, while even 38% of the smallest firms — those with between 1 and 3 employees — said adding another tax pro was part of their plan.

General administrative support is another area in high demand, our survey showed, as 71% of firms employing more than 30 employees said they plan to hire an average of three new administrators, and 64% of firms with between 4 and 29 employees indicated a desire to add at least one more person to their support staff.

At the other end of the spectrum, it appears that data scientists, financial analysts, and IT personnel are going to be fighting over a relatively small number of jobs at the larger firms. More than half (55%) of firms with 30 or more employees said they intended to add an average of one or two people to their IT support staff, while less than one-third of the same firms said adding a few data/financial analysts was in the cards.

WHO IS GETTING HIRED?



Base: Tax prof. (297); Analysts (246); Tech (255); Admin (293)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

Skills development

Closely related to the search for talent is the development of skills for new and existing tax professionals. The question becomes then, which combination of personal qualities and professional skills do tax firms find most desirable? And which qualities and skills should people focus on improving if they want to advance their careers?

As for the personal qualities, an aspiring tax advisor should cultivate and firms should seek to develop, business knowledge and tax expertise, both of which were ranked the highest in our survey, followed by dedication to client service and overall communication skills.

In order of importance, the top 10 qualities of a *standout tax advisor* were identified as:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Knowledge/expertise | 6. Timeliness/dependability |
| 2. Commitment to client service | 7. Social skills |
| 3. Communication skills | 8. Ability/inclination to be proactive |
| 4. Top quality work | 9. Responsiveness |
| 5. Dedication to the client's success | 10. Ability to speak/write in plain language |

In terms of skills that are *increasingly* important for a top tax advisor to have in today's changing world, our survey respondents most commonly identified technology as increasing in importance, followed by keeping up-to-date with tax changes and, again, communication.

In order of importance, the range of skills necessary to be a *superior tax advisor* are:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Technology skills (e.g., ERP/tax software, data analysis) | 5. Soft skills/EQ/leadership |
| 2. Staying current with changes in the tax code | 6. Scouting/horizon scanning |
| 3. Communication (oral, written, and interpersonal) | 7. Risk management |
| 4. Overall tax knowledge | 8. Adaptability |
| | 9. Specialist expertise (e.g., audit, forensics, international) |
| | 10. Business partner/team player |

The ideal tax advisor

Yet, if you combine the personal attributes and skills necessary to be a top tax advisor, you get an *ideal tax advisor*, which is someone who:

- has demonstrable knowledge and experience
- pays attention to changes in the tax code
- knows how to use tax technology to be more productive, accurate, and efficient
- is dedicated to serving client needs
- has the communication skills to explain tax strategies to clients
- can interact productively with colleagues
- delivers high-quality work in a timely manner

In general, these attributes reflect a shift in emphasis from metrics of pure productivity to a more well-rounded approach that puts the client front and center. In fact, when firm leaders were asked about the standout qualities that they are looking for in a tax advisor, more than four-times as many people rated “client service” as a desired key quality in 2021 than in 2020, and more than twice as many cited “social skills.”

Engagement and job satisfaction

While it is important to understand what companies are looking for in a competent tax professional, it is equally important to understand what those professionals working in the tax field value in their employers, their jobs, and the tax profession in general. This information is important to employers as well because job satisfaction is a key component of employee retention, which itself is essential for building a strong company culture.

We asked three types of tax professionals to identify the aspects of their jobs that they like the most, and which parts they would like to change or improve in order to increase their job satisfaction.

The three job categories were:

- Solo practitioners and firm owners
- Management positions with a leadership role
- Employees in a firm with a non-leadership role

Interestingly, all had different ideas about what was most important to them, and what could be done to make their working lives more enjoyable and rewarding.

Solo practitioners/owners

Tax professionals who own their firm or work alone greatly value the ability to work for themselves — to be their own boss — and the flexibility to work when and how they want. However, long hours and a relentless workload often put their work/life balance at the top of their list of aspects of their job that they'd like to see improve. Firm owners would also like to recruit and attract higher-quality talent, and all agree that more investment in better technology would (or at least could) make their jobs more manageable.

Managers/leaders

Those with leadership roles in a firm setting said they value their company culture and colleagues, but also enjoy interacting with clients, as well as the personal flexibility and decision-making power that comes with a leadership position. However, non-owner leaders also work the longest hours — an average of more than 60 hours per week in the U.S. — so they too harbor a desire for more work/life balance.

Leaders also say their jobs could be improved by recruiting and attracting more quality talent, which would result in a stronger team and, presumably, better performance and the ability to gain higher quality work. Better internal communication is also on their job-improvement wish list, as is additional investment in more robust technology. Confidence in the firm's overall leadership and direction was also cited as a strong driver of job satisfaction.

Non-leaders

Tax advisors and administrators without a leadership role tend to like the people they work with and value their company culture. Confidence in the firm's leadership and direction are also important factors. When they are treated with respect and given opportunities to grow professionally, nonleaders tend to register relatively high in job satisfaction. For the most part, non-leaders also value having a more favorable work/life balance than some of their more stressed-out leaders, but they also indicate that their work/life balance is far from ideal, especially during tax season. Better pay and more capable colleagues would also help make their lives more enjoyable.

Work/life balance and well-being

Given that tax professionals at all levels in our survey say they would enjoy their careers more if they had a better work/life balance, we asked tax advisors to share how many hours they are really working, and whether their long hours have resulted in any significant physical or mental health issues.

These results are particularly important for firm leaders and human resources managers, because over-worked employees may boost productivity in the short term, but they can also cost a company in several other ways. Physically and mentally unhealthy employees not only drive up health-insurance costs, they are more likely to make mistakes on the job, feel resentment toward their employers, experience low morale and/or burnout, and quit or leave their jobs.

By contrast, a healthy company culture drives productivity by maximizing “good” hours, providing ample recovery time, offering opportunities for personal and professional growth, and creating a general atmosphere of support and respect for all employees.

Hours behind the desk

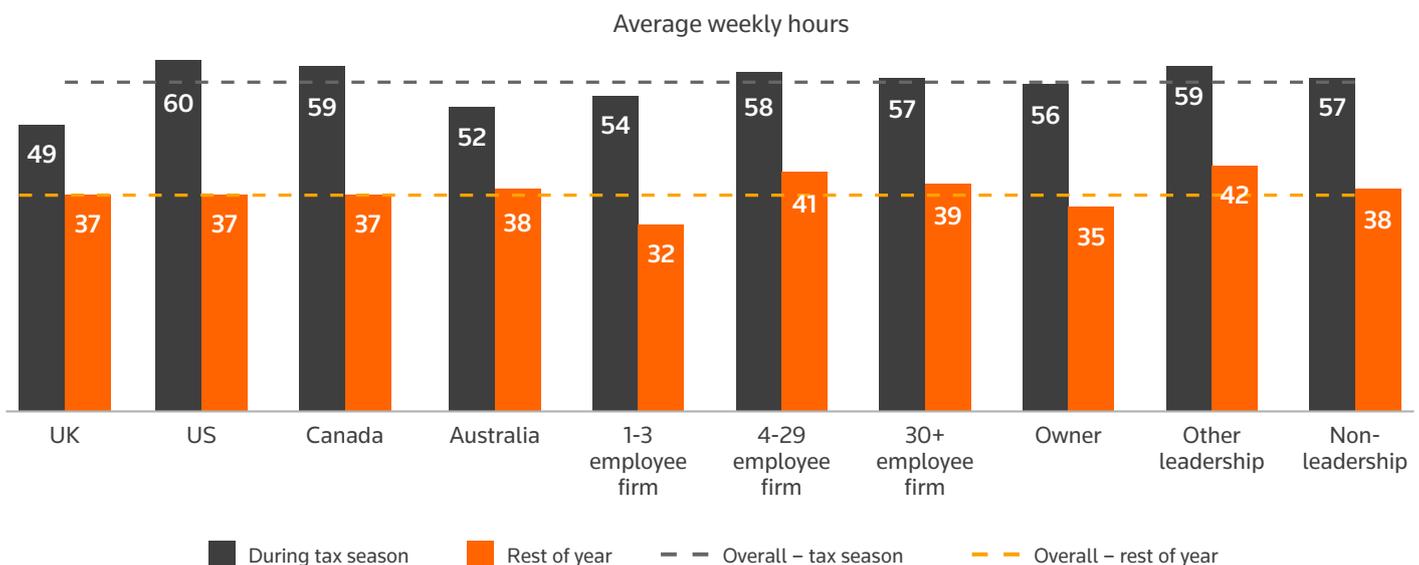
In the U.S., “tax season” – traditionally, from January 1 to April 15 – is when tax professionals grit their teeth and log an average of 60 hours or more per week on the job, with many working 70 or more hours. Tax advisors in Canada experience a similar spike in hours logged, but in both countries their workload the rest of the year returns to a more manageable average of 37 hours per week (39 hours per week in firms with 30 or more employees; 41 hours per week in firms with between 4 and 29 employees; and a relatively leisurely 32 hours per week in firms with 1 to 3 employees).

Interestingly, tax advisors in the U.K. and Australia report working roughly the same number of regular hours as their U.S. and Canadian counterparts, but their workload during tax season only spikes to an average of 49 and 52 hours respectively, due most likely to different work cultures as well as different timescales for filing taxes

In all countries, owners and solo proprietors tend to work the least number of hours (56 hours per week during tax season, 35 hours the rest of year), although the variance is wide because some owner/solo proprietors choose to work part time, and some do in fact work longer hours.

Non-owner manager/leaders tend to work the most hours (59 hours or more during tax season, 42 hours the rest of year), and non-leaders land somewhere in between (57 hours during tax season, and 38 the rest of year).

HOURS LOGGED



Base: Overall (534-537); US (266-268); Canada (77-78); UK (78-79); Australia (99); 1-3 (201-203); 4-29 (200); 30+ (133-134); Owner (319-322); Other leadership (107-108); Non-leadership (105-106)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

Impact on physical/mental health

Many factors can affect a person’s physical or mental health, of course, but long hours in the tax profession can certainly take a significant toll. During tax season, almost one-third (32%) of workers who logged 50 to 70 hours per week reported experiencing health issues at least some of the time, and 15% were affected by one health issue or another “often” or “always.”

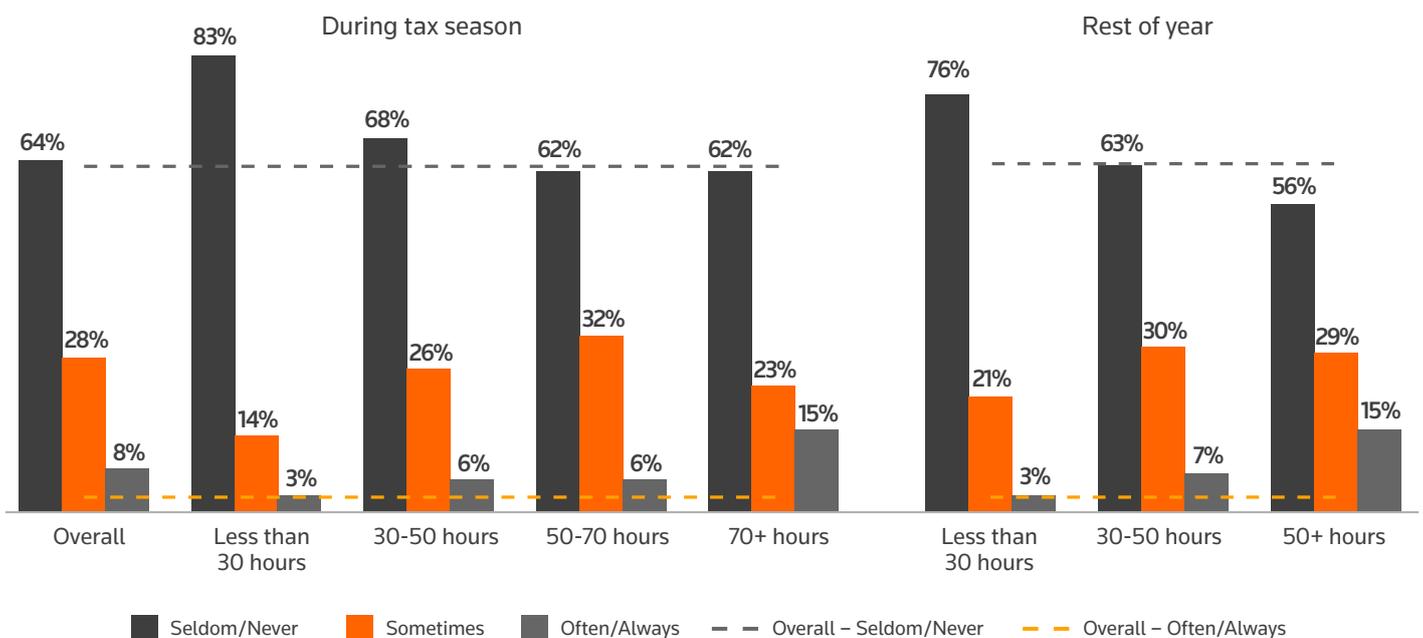
Tax season *per se* isn’t necessarily the culprit behind ill health, but because people who said they work 50 or more hours the rest of the year reported almost identical levels of illness.

Further, those who work 30 to 50 hours per week and those who put in 50 to 70 hours experienced roughly the same number of health issues, with 6% saying that full-time hours almost always had a negative impact on their health, and roughly one-third saying it occasionally affected them.

During tax season or not, the only cohort that reported relatively few health-related performance issues were those who worked less than 30 hours per week, with 83% of these part-timers saying they seldom or never have health issues that affect their performance, and only 3% reported a constant or recurring health issue related to work.

A SICK TREND?

Performance affected by illness, by weekly hours worked



Base: [Tax season] <30 (29); 30-50 (103); 50-70 (294); 70+ (111); [Rest of year] <30 (99); 30-50 (331); 50+ (104) LOW BASE

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

Country

The country in which you happen to work in also makes a difference, although not always in the ways one might expect. For example, 39% of tax advisors in the U.K. said health issues sometimes affect their work performance. 10% of U.S. tax professionals report being frequently or always affected by some sort of physical or mental illness, and 22% said they were “sometimes” affected.

In Canada, fewer workers (5%) said their performance was affected by health issues “often or always,” but more (31%) had occasional problems. Whereas in Australia, almost one-third (32%) of respondents said they sometimes experienced work-impairing health issues.

Firm size

The size of one's firm may also be a health factor for some. Overall, firms with between 4 and 29 employees reported having the most health problems, with 32% "sometimes" experiencing health issues, and 11% experiencing them "often or always." In firms with 30 or more employees, however, the "often/always" group dropped to 4%. And again, manager/leaders — the clear workhorses of the accounting profession — experienced the highest number of health-related issues at 9%.

Still, for most tax pros there's no getting around extra hours during tax season. Tax professionals work an average of 37 hours per week most of the year, but crank it up to 57 hours — or 20 additional hours per week, or roughly a 55% increase in hours worked — during tax season.

Summing up the work situation in all too many firms, one of our survey respondents noted: "Public accounting firms need the *right* staff and the right *amount* of staff. The days of 70-plus-hour weeks should be a thing of the past... If we staff and schedule correctly, everyone should be able to drop their hours significantly."

Priority 2: Growth

Growth slipped somewhat as a priority during the pandemic, but by September 2021 the need to increase revenue and attract new clients reasserted itself as an even higher priority than it was before the pandemic. However, the term "growth" and the reasons for pursuing it were different depending on firms' organisational goals and motivations.

For example, owners and solo practitioners were more concerned about growth than established accounting firms, perhaps because the pandemic hit smaller offices harder. Those in the process of starting or building their business were especially eager to attract new clients.

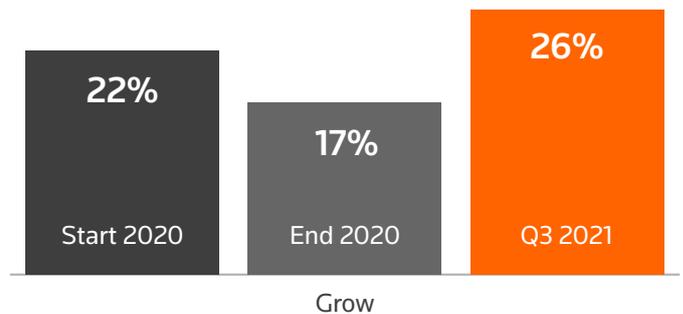
Leaders of established firms said they were seeking to "develop new channels" and "broaden services," particularly in the areas of tax planning and business advisory services. Others sought to grow their client roster through mergers and/or acquisitions. And at least one firm said they were targeting "regional and service line growth" by using technology to offer a broader range of services.

Owners and solo proprietors were more likely to be concerned about growing the business in order to leave a lasting legacy or create a strong, profitable firm that they could someday leave to one of their children.

What do clients want?

In any case, firms and practitioners seeking growth are more likely to find it if they understand what their clients are looking for in a tax advisor. The majority of respondents to this year's survey work in firms with fewer than 30 employees, and those firms tend to work with more individuals and smaller businesses than larger firms, so their client priorities are different.

GROWTH-FOCUSED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Base: Start 2020 (139); End 2020 (131); Sep 2021 (410)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

In order of overall importance, these are the strategic priorities that clients at companies with less than \$50 million revenue say they are concerned about:

- Managing the implications of tax reform and rule changes (e.g., MTD)
- Creating a workstream specifically for taxes
- Utilising new tech/automation
- Reducing their tax liability
- Improving efficiency and processes
- Handling post-acquisition integration
- Dealing with macro-changes in the economy and politics
- Coping with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Keeping up with changes in business
- Enabling effective remote working

One of the most notable things about this list is that coping with the global COVID-19 pandemic and ironing out the logistics of remote work are near the bottom of the list, suggesting that many clients have absorbed the biggest shocks of the pandemic and are now focusing on more pragmatic tax matters.

Priority 3: Efficiency

At the start of 2020, before the pandemic hit, the top strategic priority for tax leaders, particularly at firms employing more than 30 people was driving operational efficiency. By September of 2021, however, other priorities — namely talent and growth — had pushed efficiency down to the number three slot.

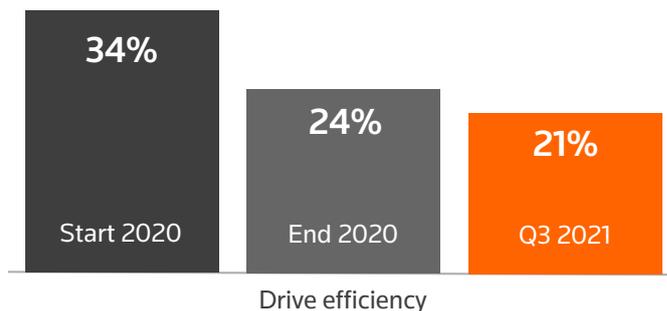
Prior to the pandemic, in fact, more than one-third (34%) of accounting firms rated improving efficiency as their top priority. That number dipped to 24% during the pandemic, then dipped *even further* by September 2021, when only 21% of firms rated efficiency as their top concern — yet another indication of how the pandemic has affected tax priorities.

Nonetheless, improving efficiency remains a top priority for most firms. Progress in this area requires an individual or group of individuals to take responsibility for driving the agenda — unfortunately, our research shows this may be lacking at many firms. While leaders at all levels identify improving internal efficiency as one of their firm's strategic priorities, few individuals at the owner, manager/director, or non-leadership levels see the efficiency drive as a motivator for them personally. As a result, firms that lack people keen to own the efficiency agenda risk making limited progress toward their goals. And at firms where this gap exists, recruiters may be wise to look not only for technology skills but also for those individuals who demonstrate a real drive to improve operational efficiency.

Technology or training?

Efficiency can be improved in a number of different ways, including making investments in the latest technology or simply training employees to make better use of the technology they already have.

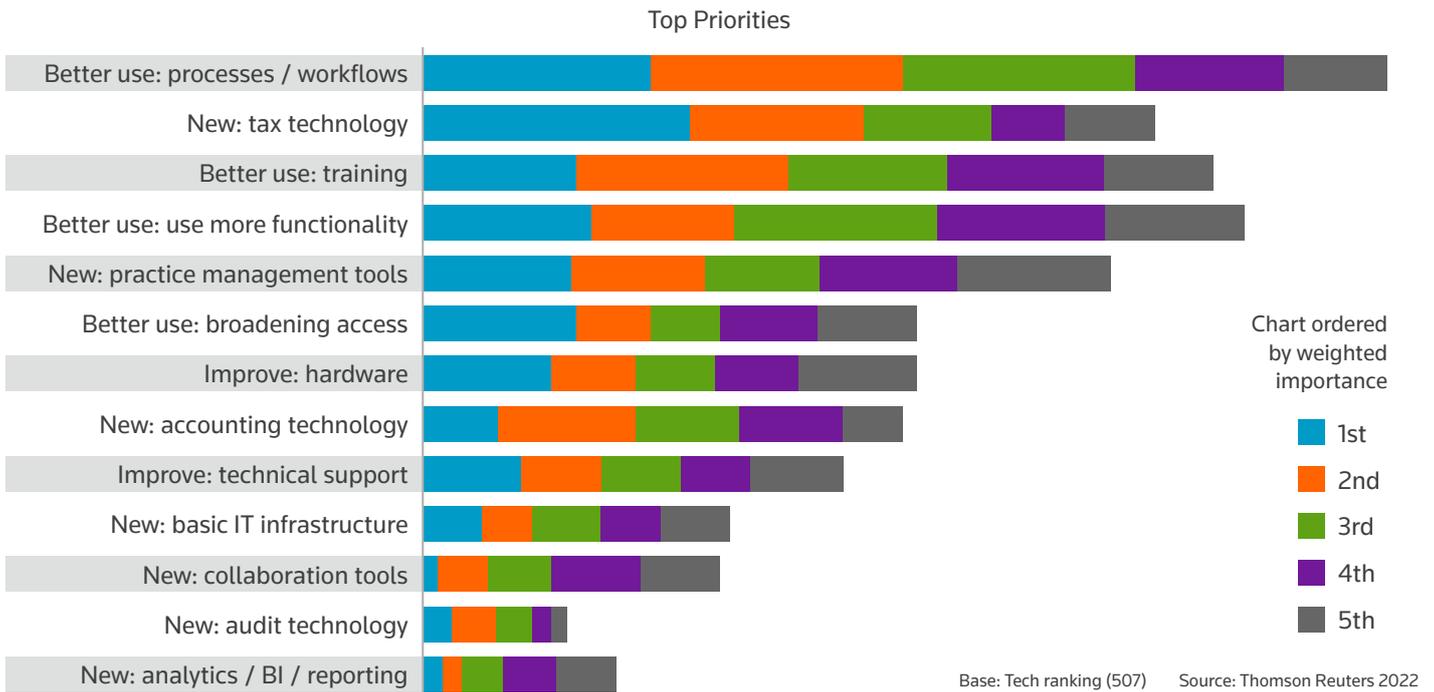
EFFICIENCY-FOCUSED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Base: Start 2020 (139); End 2020 (131); Sep 2021 (410)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

PATHS TO GREATER EFFICIENCY



In firms with more than 30 employees, investing in new tax technologies is the preferred route to greater efficiency. For leaders in larger firms, new analytics tools and auditing technologies are also at the top of their technological wish list, followed by new practice-management tools, accounting software, and general improvements in the firm’s basic IT infrastructure and technical support.

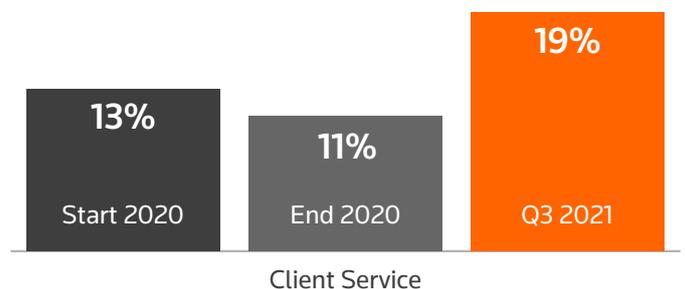
Overall, however, firms with fewer than 30 employees are seeking to find efficiencies by training people to make more knowledgeable use of the technologies the firm already uses, and by improving their teams’ processes and workflows.

Priority 4: Client service

Though it technically ranked fourth as a strategic priority in this year’s survey (as compared to last year’s survey), a re-commitment to client service actually surged back stronger in September 2021 than any other priority. And when personal motivations are taken into account, helping clients and providing better service were the highest-rated concerns of individuals at every level, be it owners/solo proprietors, managers/leaders, or those in non-leadership positions.

Clients asking for more business advisory services from their accountants has been a growing trend for years, of course, but the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and other world events appears to have kicked this trend into overdrive.

CLIENT SERVICE-FOCUSED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

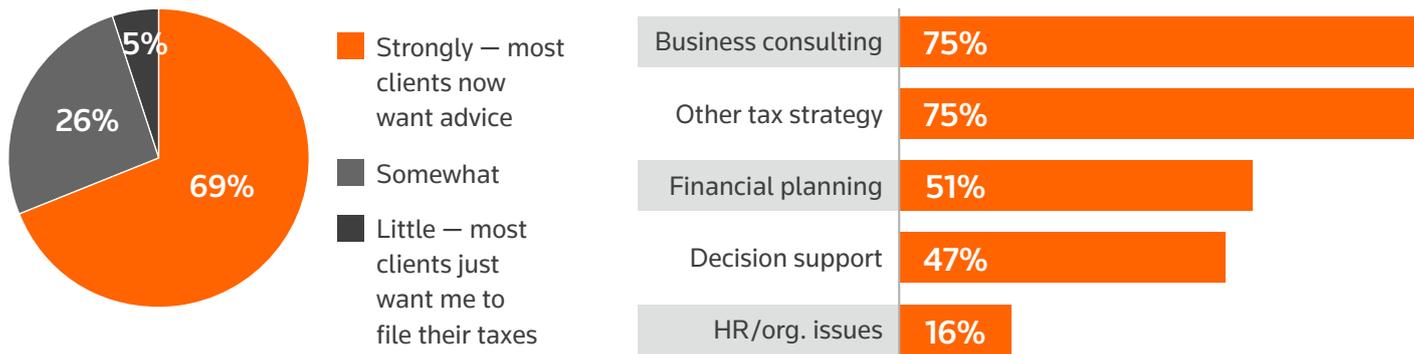


Base: Start 2020 (139); End 2020 (131); Sep 2021 (410)
Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

What services do clients want?

According to the accounting firms we surveyed, 95% say their clients want more business advisory services to help them navigate the unfamiliar territory confronting all businesses now, with 69% expressing a “strong” desire for such help. Of the additional services for which clients are looking, 75% want business consulting advice and guidance on tax strategies, 51% want help with financial planning, and 47% want decision-making support.

CLIENTS WANT BUSINESS ADVICE



Base: Firm offering (540); Clients desire advice (545); Advise desired (476)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

To be fair, almost all the largest accounting firms already offer a wide range of business advisory services. This year’s survey, however, focused primarily on small to midsize firms, where there appears to be plenty of room for service expansion.

When it comes to service offerings above and beyond basic tax-return preparation and accounting/bookkeeping, only a little more than one-half of small to midsize firms offer business consulting services, help with financial planning services, or decision-making support. Fewer still offer auditing services (38%), and less than one-third (29%) offer international tax advice.

Opportunity is knocking

While it makes little sense to offer services for which clients aren’t asking, opportunities abound for those firms that are willing to take on a more active business advisory role for their current and future clients. Pivoting in this way can be uncomfortable for some tax professionals — which is understandable, but not for the reasons you might think. Past surveys have suggested that many firms and their tax advisors already have the knowledge and experience necessary to be effective business advisors, but what they lack is confidence, mainly in their own communication skills and the ultimate value of their advice.

But confidence is a skill that can be learned, like any other, and data shows that businesses of all sizes are in need of a financial helping hand from the people who know their numbers best. Whether businesses are going to get it or not is the question — one many tax practitioners are no doubt going to have to answer in the coming years.

Environment, social and corporate governance (ESG)

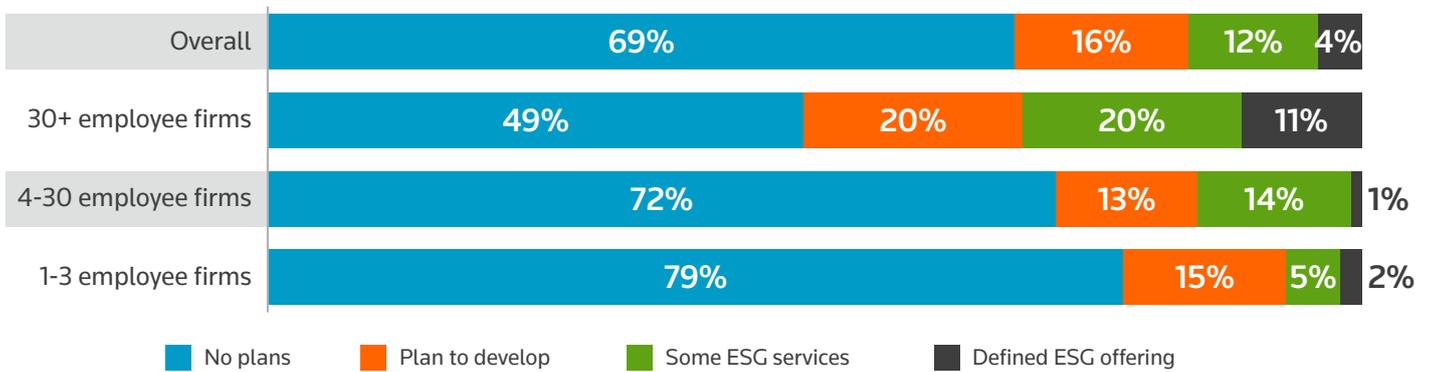
Another emerging area of service in business accounting is connected to increasingly popular ESG initiatives — that is, policies and programmes that companies initiate to establish sustainability, reduce their environmental impact, demonstrate their commitment to the community, and generally convince investors and the public that they are socially responsible organisations.

Where ESG and tax management intersect is in corporate financial performance. Companies that commit themselves to ESG standards also want to be able to demonstrate that this commitment is not only the right thing to do, but it also adds value to the organisation and makes for a more resilient, competitive company.

For example, if a company commits to net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, it may want to demonstrate that it has saved money by using wind and solar energy. Or, having committed to ESG targets, the company may want to prove that its ESG commitment is paying off in the form of increased investment in the company, or access to government subsidies.

The point is, a range of accounting and business services can be organised around ESG, which is why the larger accounting firms are already offering these services. At firms with 30 or more employees included in this survey, however, only 31% currently offer ESG services of any kind, although 20% more say they are “planning to develop” these services. In firms with between 4 and 29 employees, only 15% offer ESG services, and 72% have no plans to offer them. And at firms with 1 to 3 employees, only 7% offer ESG services, and 79% simply aren’t interested.

FIRMS OFFERING ESG SERVICES



Base: Overall (545); 1-3 (206); 4-29 (202); 30+ (137)

Source: Thomson Reuters 2022

How important is ESG?

The larger the firm, then the more likely it is that ESG is on its radar. However, size isn’t the only factor. According to our research, a firm’s own commitment to ESG principles is becoming increasingly important to employees and new hires. Almost half (46%) of respondents to this year’s survey said their firm’s approach to ESG was important to them, with 20% saying it was “very important.”

Women and technology innovators were more likely to attach importance to their firm’s approach to ESG, with their top concerns being the firm’s ability to work with ESG clients, its efforts to reduce waste (e.g., paper, energy), and its community involvement and sustainability.

Clients, too, are starting to seek out external accounting firms that offer ESG services, though respondents to our survey said only 30% of their clients currently care about ESG services, and only 10% consider it “very important.”

CONCLUSION

As economies around the world slowly recover from the pandemic's persistent shock waves, tax professionals are well-positioned to provide the range of services and guidance their clients will need in 2022 and beyond. Wisely, tax leaders are taking this opportunity to reassess their priorities and remind themselves that investing in top-quality talent and supporting the professional growth of their employees is essential to the health and well-being of both the business and its workers.

The pandemic appears to have prompted a long-overdue re-evaluation of what it means to be an effective tax advisor and how important a loyal, well-trained team of tax professionals is to a firm's overall resilience and viability. It may be a bit too early to call this a revolution, but a renewed emphasis on recruiting and developing a firm's human capital suggests that at least some tax leaders recognize the inescapable connection between people and profit, and are taking steps to show valued employees that they are not — and should not be — taken for granted.

Though most of the work at small to midsize accounting firms still involves processing tax returns for individuals and businesses, the trend toward offering a broader range of business advisory services is taking hold at all levels, primarily because clients are begging for it. A whopping 95% of this survey's respondents said their clients are asking for more tax planning, business, and financial advice, and that means that the door of opportunity is wide open for those firms that are willing to walk through it.





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