



Executive
Perspectives

The CEO's Dilemma

Building Resilience Through Competitive Cost Position

November 2022



Introduction to this document

COVID-19, followed by the war in Ukraine, has brought general changes in customer demand (from services to products, for example), commodity price growth, inconsistent supply due to supply chain distress, and the highest inflation since the 1970s crisis.

It is therefore imperative for businesses to optimize their cost position to stay afloat or create competitive advantage.

The best organizations know how to turn uncertainty into opportunity. This document focuses on how organizations can build a playbook that drives cost reduction through operational and organizational lenses.

In this BCG Executive Perspectives edition, we address how to respond to uncertainty and build resilience through competitive cost advantage

Executive Summary | Building resilience through competitive cost position

The time to act is now

Recent global disruptions have brought **general uncertainty**, testing companies' ability to handle labor shortages, high inflation, eroding demand, broken supply chains, and surging commodity prices.

Our global economy makes **instability contagious across borders**, so adaptability is vital for any company, regardless of financial position and industry condition.

Our research shows "winners" must **programmatically reduce cost to preserve margin/flexibility** while investing freed funds to transform, build capabilities, and develop more agile teams. **Reducing costs now frees resources and reorients companies** for any uncertain future, creating opportunities from instability.

Options to achieve and sustain value

By understanding their strategic starting point and objectives through **rapid assessments**, organizations can diagnose inefficiencies and gauge savings potential. These evaluations guide organizations to levers for achieving a competitively advantaged cost position. While companies may employ different sets of levers, our research suggests they are **typically combined in one of four common pathways**:

- 1 **Organizational streamlining**: Simplifying structure and reducing overhead cost.
- 2 **Direct/indirect materials optimization**: Reducing costs and cost variance through improved procurement.
- 3 **Operating model and process redesign**: Holistically optimizing work, processes, and organization.
- 4 **Full strategic operations transformation**: Processing end-to-end value chain looking at inefficiencies in each step of the process.

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AGENDA

- ✓ **A view of the world**
- ✓ The time to act is now
- ✓ Options to achieve and sustain value

Inflation and volatility are becoming the “new reality” across the globe



Drop in demand and general uncertainty

-25 pp. (from 83% to 58%) drop in consumer sentiment index¹

+8.6% estimated to be global inflation in 2022²

Layoffs and hiring freezes are being announced³



Supply chain distress

111 days (+34% y/y) new freight time to US from China

+25% rise in ocean freight price index



Volatility in global markets

~2 times higher S&P 500 volatility than in 2021

~15-35% drop in major global stock market indexes including US, Germany, and China

Up to 40% commodity price growth (mostly energy, metals, and agrifoods)



Central banks fight with consequences

Investors expect central banks to raise global monetary-policy rates to almost **4% through 2023**⁴

Nearly 4 dozen countries (e.g., US, UK, Saudi Arabia, India) have **raised rates ranging from 0.5% to 4%** in the last 6 months⁵



Varying government support for COVID-19

Removal of foreclosure and eviction moratoriums, rental assistance, and stimulus payments in the US

New **wave of government lockdowns** imposed in China affecting millions, including labor markets

Despite **increasing infections** in Europe, major central banks withdrawing stimulus packages

Global macro update | Economic snapshot for October

1 Global growth outlook

GDP forecasts¹ (Real GDP YoY)

	2021A	2022E	2023E	2024E
US	5.9%	1.7%	0.4%	1.4%
Eurozone	5.3%	3.0%	-0.1%	1.5%
Global	6.0%	2.9%	2.3%	2.9%

2 Commodity prices and inflation

Commodity prices²

	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22	Change ¹⁰
Brent oil	98.6	89.6	79.5	-11.2%
Natural gas				
US	8.2	9.1	6.8	-25.9%
Eurozone	194.7	228.9	165.0	-27.9%

Consumer price inflation (YoY)³

	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22	Change ¹⁰
US	8.5%	8.3%	8.2%	-0.1ppts
Eurozone	8.9%	9.1%	9.9%	+0.8ppts

3 Financial markets

Equity market performance (YTD change)⁷

	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22
S&P 500	-13.3%	-17.0%	-24.8%
Eurostoxx 50	-13.7%	-18.2%	-22.8%

Corporate spreads (High Yield)⁸

	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22	Change ¹⁰
US	4.69%	4.84%	5.52%	+68bps
Eurozone	5.90%	5.60%	6.31%	+71bps

4 Monetary policy

Monetary policy rates⁶

	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22	Change ¹⁰
US	2.5%	2.5%	3.25%	+75bps
Eurozone	0.5%	0.5%	1.25%	+75bps

5 Labor market

Job openings rate⁴

	Q1 '22	Q2 '22	Q3 '22	Change ¹⁰
US	7.3%	6.8%	6.5%	-0.3ppts
Eurozone	3.1%	3.2%	-	+0.1ppts

Unemployment rate⁵

	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22	Change ¹⁰
US	3.5%	3.7%	3.5%	-0.2ppts
Germany	3.0%	3.0%	-	0ppts
France	7.4%	7.3%	-	-0.1ppts

6 Manufacturing

PMI manufacturing (<50 = contraction)⁹

	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22	Change ¹⁰
US	52.8	52.8	50.9	-3.6%
Eurozone	49.8	49.6	48.4	-2.4%

1. Bloomberg, data as of 11/01/2022. 2. Data presented as end of month figures. Brent oil in \$/bbl; US Natural gas (Henry Hub) in \$/MMBtu; Dutch Natural gas (TTF front month future) in EUR/MWh. 3. CPI monthly seasonally adjusted data from Bureau of Labor Statistics; HICP monthly data for Eurozone from Eurostat. 4. Seasonally adjusted rates; Bureau of Labor Statistics for US; Job vacancy rate from Eurostat for Eurozone. 5. Bureau of Labor Statistics for US; Eurostat for Eurozone. 6. Federal Reserve for US; ECB for Eurozone (main refinancing rate). 7. Bloomberg. 8. Bloomberg US Corporate High Yield Average OAS; Bloomberg Pan-European High Yield Average OAS. 9. ISM manufacturing PMI for US; S&P Global Eurozone Manufacturing PMI from Markit for Eurozone. 10. Change Sep vs Aug 11. Change Q1 '22 vs Q2 '22. Note: All displayed numbers are based on end of month figures, and changes represent incremental changes vs. previous months.

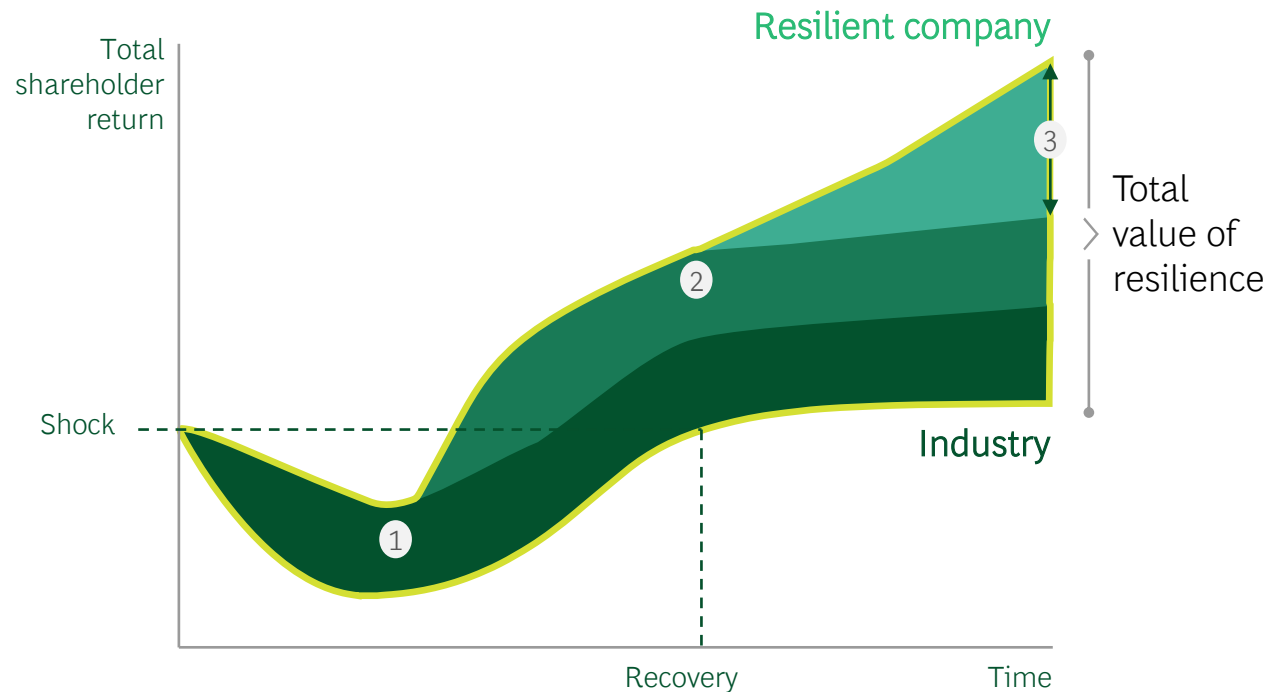
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- ✓ A view of the world
- ✓ **The time to act is now**
- ✓ Options to achieve and sustain value

The time to act is now | Companies that build resilience rapidly in changing environments have a much higher chance of success

Developing resilience is a key way for companies to create significant long-term value by increasing preparedness to hedge against external shocks and disruptions



Building resilience creates competitive advantages and allows companies to rise above their peers:

- 1 Rapid execution of no-regret actions to absorb the shock
- 2 Adapt to new circumstances and ensure a high-speed recovery
- 3 Reimagine their business to the new circumstances in the 12 months following the shock

Transformations improved performance¹ by...

+25pp

For top quartile
of resilience built

-20pp

For bottom quartile
of resilience built

1. Performance relative to industry in response to future crises, i.e., successful resilient transformations enhance company performance by 25%; Source: Press; BCG Henderson analysis

Cost pressure is increasing globally, exacerbated by an unprecedented labor market disruption

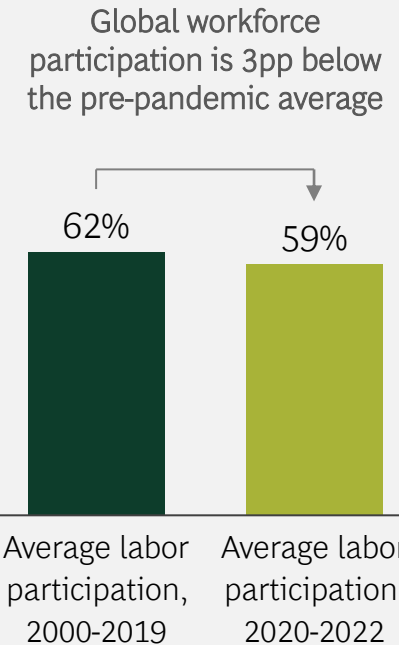
Evolving skill needs leave talent shortages in key areas



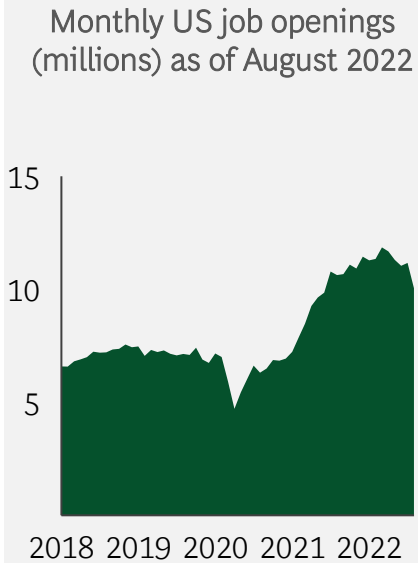
Existing employees are looking for new opportunities...



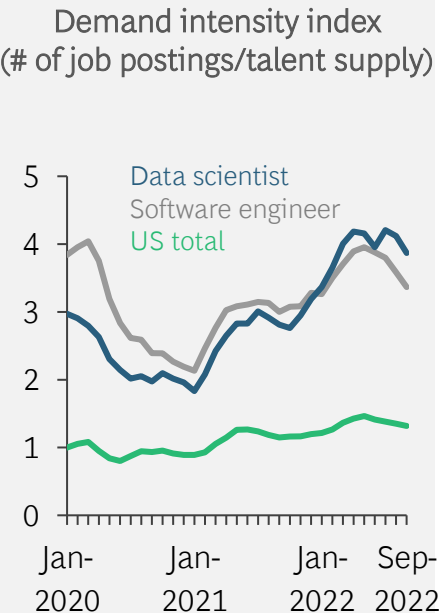
...and some have left the workforce altogether



... culminating in labor bottlenecks as demand outpaces supply, recruiting struggles



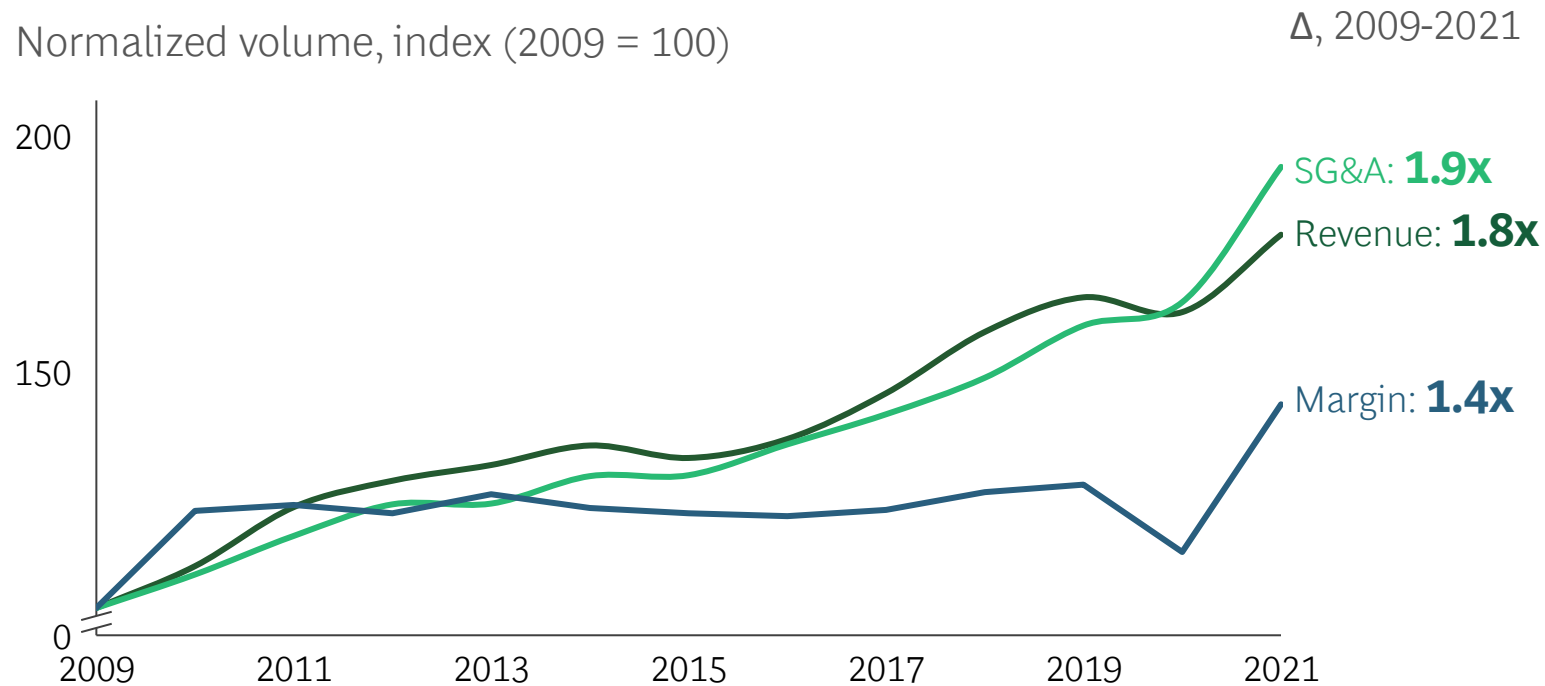
Talent shortage is especially pronounced in digital roles



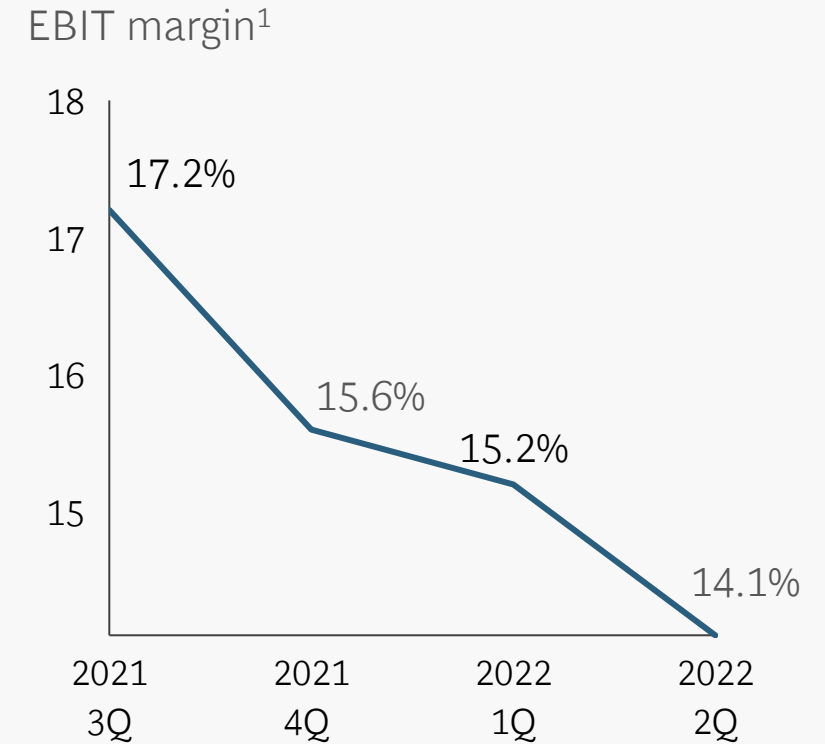
Sources: Job switch data from Future Forum Pulse Survey, conducted January 27-February 12, 2022. Number of respondents = 10,818 knowledge workers across US, Australia, Germany, Japan, France, and the UK; For labor force quits, participation and job openings: International Labour Organization, BLS, BHI Center for Macroeconomic, Federal Reserve, press search; Quit rates are computed by dividing number of quits by employment and multiplying that quotient by 100; includes non-farm industries

Companies have ~doubled their SG&A costs since last crisis and successfully passed it to consumers; that will no longer be possible in a recession

SG&A¹ costs have grown 1.9x since 2009; that didn't affect margin due to price increases



But over the past 4 quarters, we see much higher margin pressure



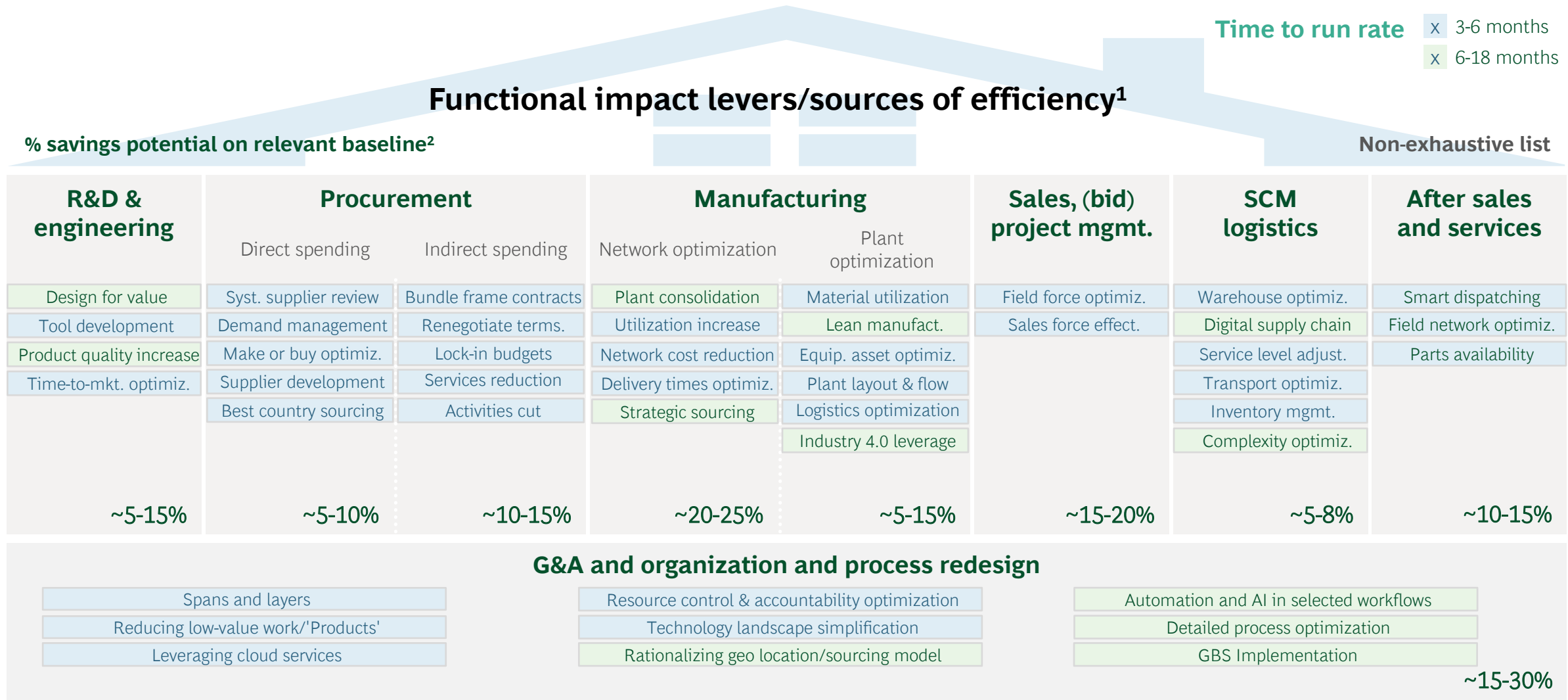
1. S&P 500 companies. Note: SG&A and revenue values were turned into indexes; 2009 value equals 100%
Source: S&P Capital IQ; Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis; Social Security Administration

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Contributors to cost are numerous and complex – companies must pull various levers to achieve a competitively advantaged cost position



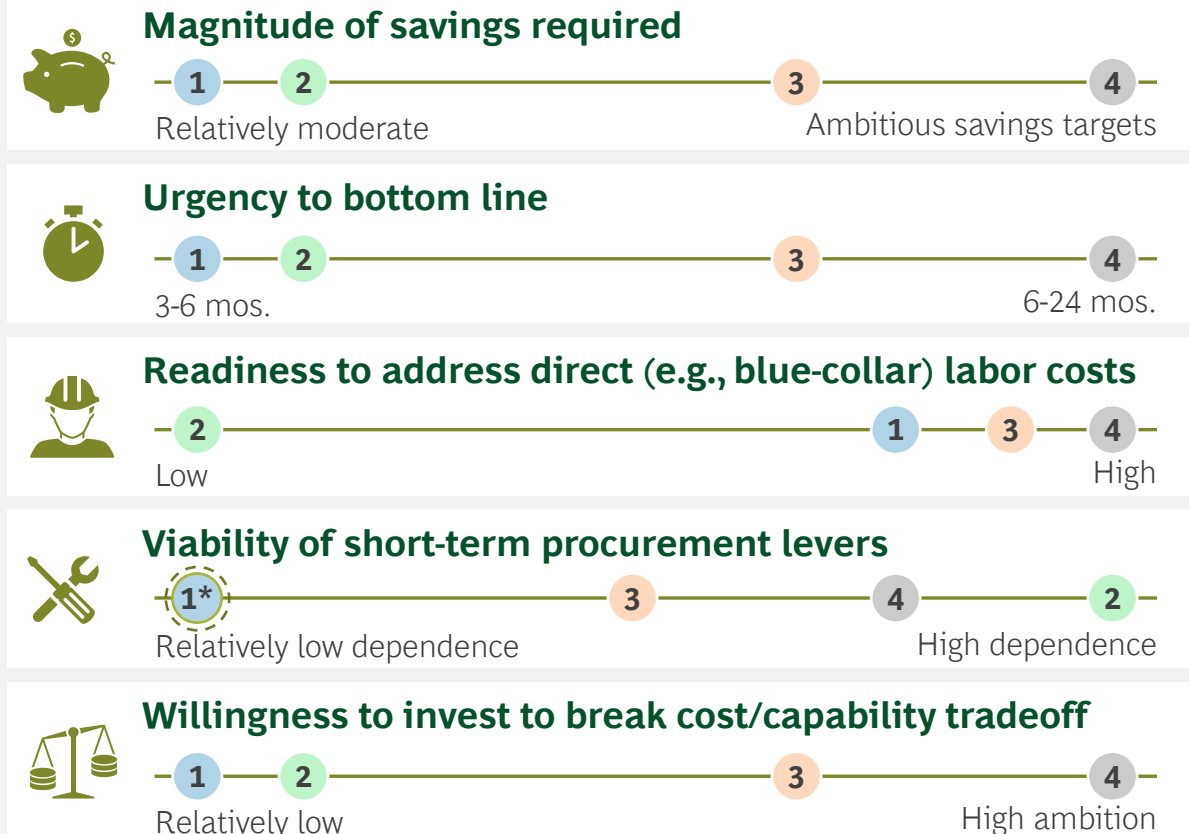
1.Leverage advanced analytics and software tools to rapidly size opportunity; 2. Savings potential based on BCG experience
Note: Percentages refer to savings on relevant baseline. Savings levers are not additive yet interlinked

Organizations should consider their strategic and immediate needs and pull a set of levers that fit one of four common cost transformation pathways

In deciding which cost transformation pathway to pursue...

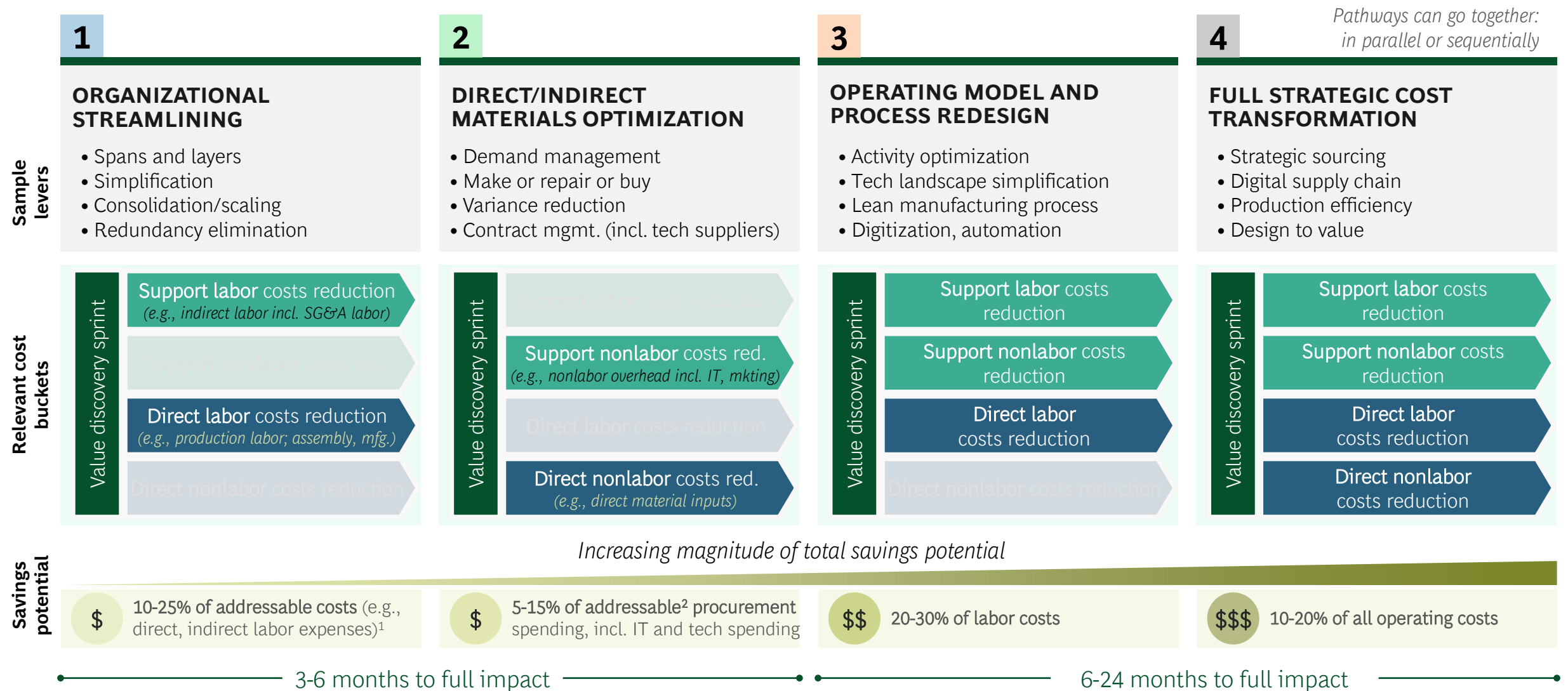
1	Organizational streamlining	Company needs to secure significant labor savings and enhance organizational effectiveness, fast
2	Direct/indirect materials optimization	Company intends to quickly reduce outside spending and improve procurement processes , without meaningful organization changes
3	Operating model and process redesign	Company with very ambitious savings goals enhances operating model and optimizes processes to significantly improve capabilities and cost posture
4	Full strategic cost transformation	Company is prioritizing longer-term impacts across all strategic dimensions (labor, direct and indirect procurement)

... organizations should consider their needs across these strategic dimensions



*Procurement levers not relevant

These four common pathways employ levers designed to address different cost buckets and savings potentials



1. G&A, sales, all managers across enterprise; 2. 25-55% of operating costs, procurement spending includes IT and tech costs

Pathway 1 | Organizational streamlining helps US-based airline reduce costs while improving effectiveness

Example of network airline streamlining white-collar employees

An airline committed to a major restructuring, **redesigning the organization** for improved accountability and customer service while significantly reducing costs and creating a talent-selection process that improved overall talent levels



Leading to significant impact

15-20% reduced costs from white-collar jobs

2 layers removed, improved median span of control by 1

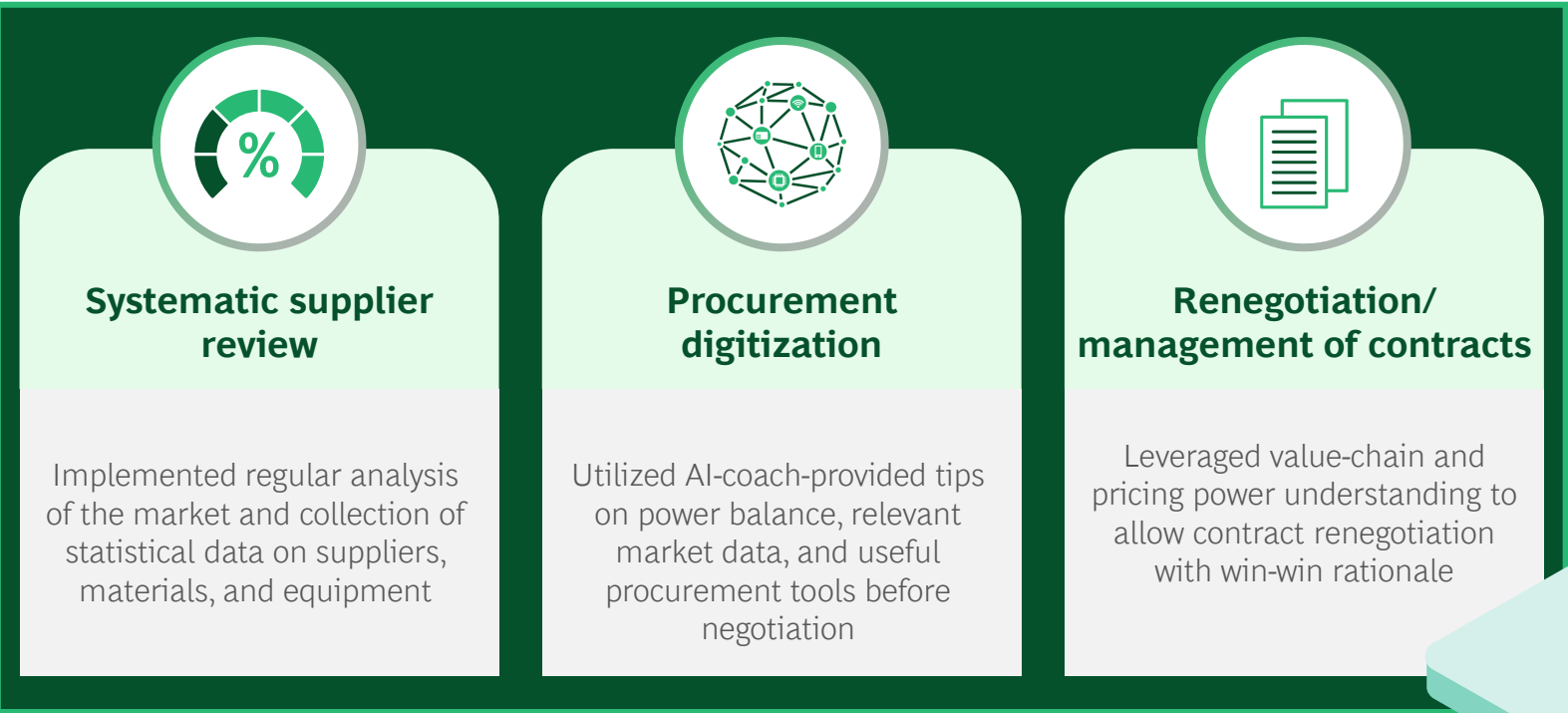
Improved overall talent profile
>5% of team members promoted or staffed in new functions



Pathway 2 | Direct cost optimization for a global automotive original equipment manufacturer

Example of auto equipment manufacturer improving procurement

After a successful launch of a new project portfolio, the international auto equipment manufacturer set ambitious goals for **material cost optimization**, hoping to cut spending through procurement optimization without sacrificing input quality.



Leading to significant impact

~12% direct product cost improvement, boosting margins

~2000 measures successfully implemented and safeguarded

Cross-functional team enabled and anchored in the organization

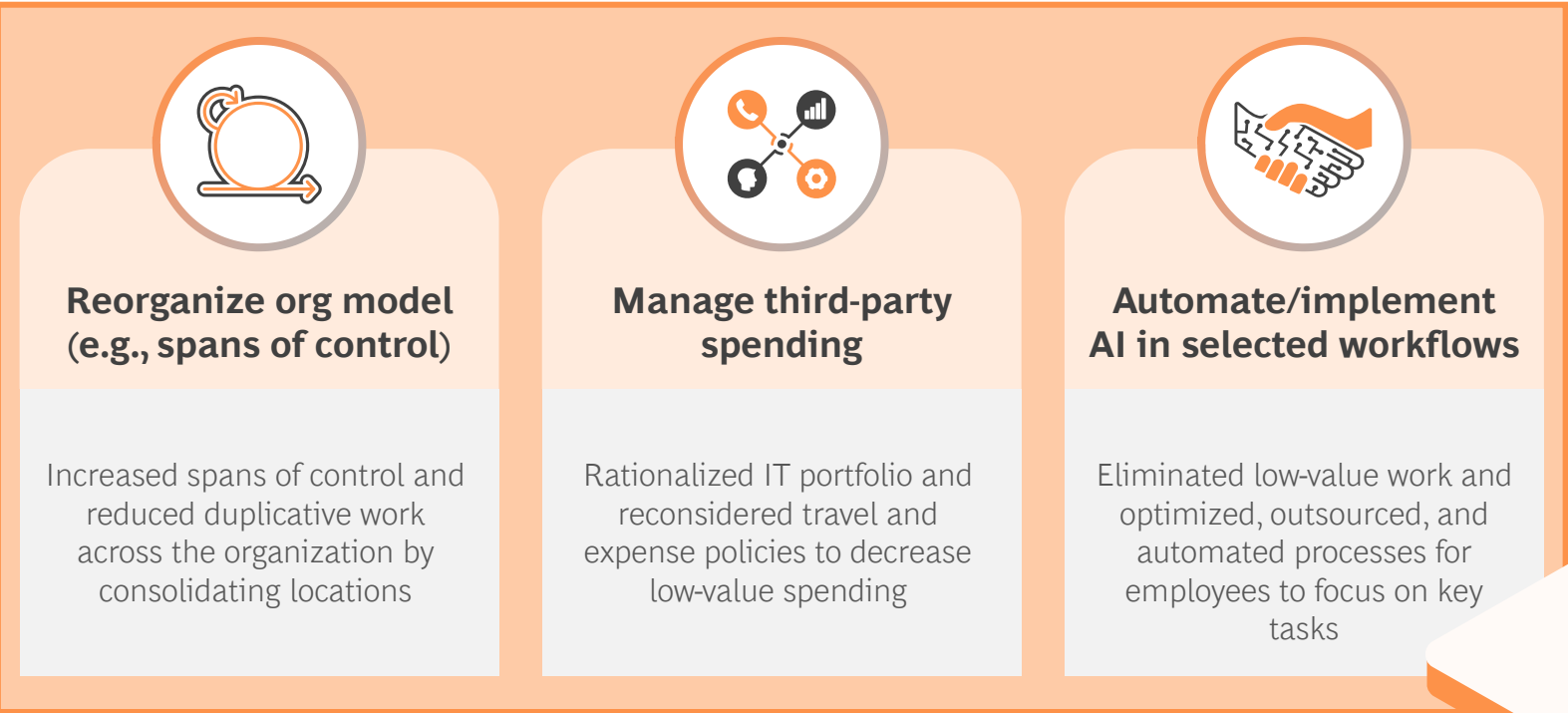


Pathway 3 | Reorganization of a leading health care company facing slow growth and rapidly rising coverage costs

Note: Pathway 3 builds on Pathway 1

Example of health care company rewiring operating model and processes

After struggling to hit growth targets and earnings goals, a leading health care company required a major cost restructuring focused on increasing efficiency while cutting costs to free up resources for investments in products, marketing, and sales.



Leading to significant impact

~\$1.25B in total costs cut within 9 months

~\$350M reduction in spending with third-party vendors

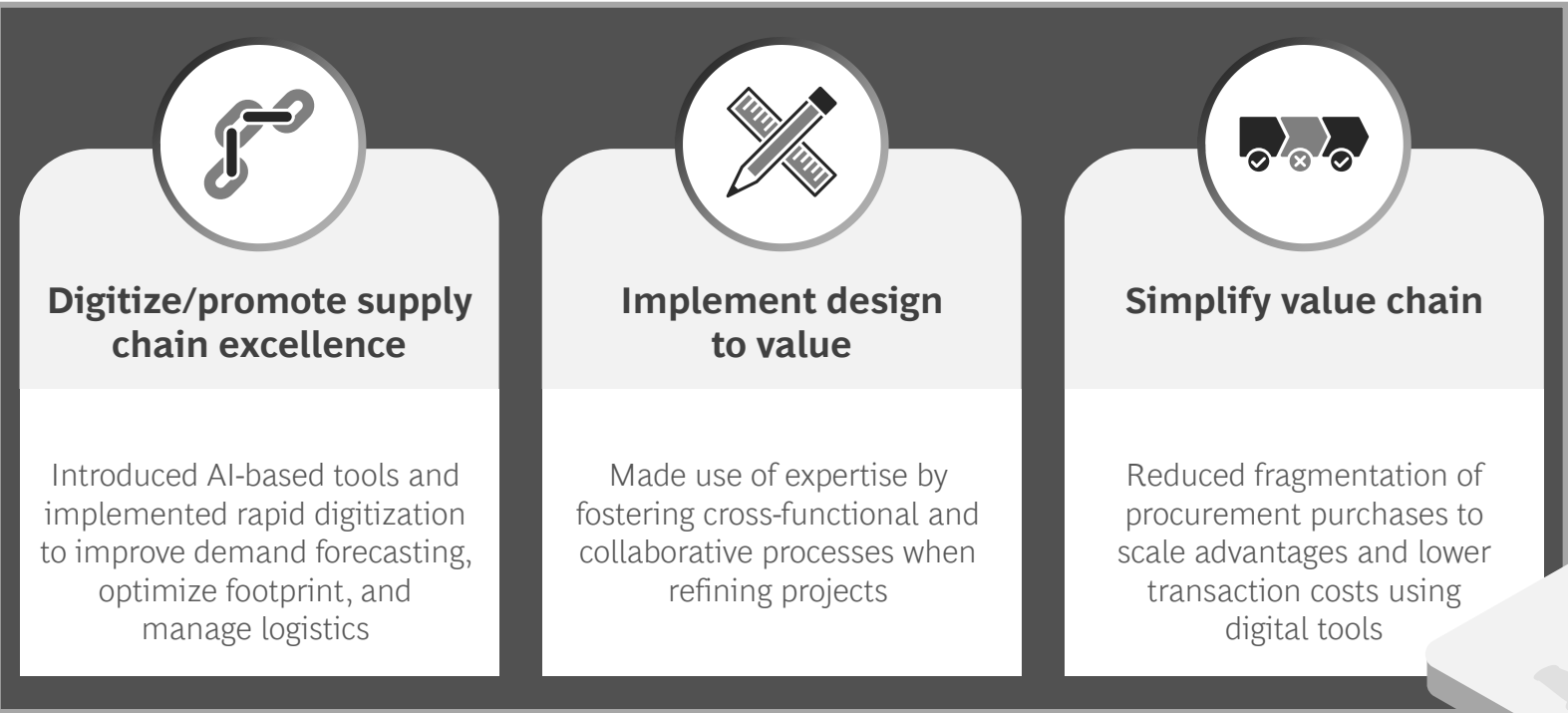
Exited low-value businesses, using savings to invest in better projects



Pathway 4 | Complete strategic operations transformation at a European beverage company

Example of European beverage company transforming value chain

The beverage industry faced challenges due to a highly volatile market, increasing commodity prices, and evolving consumer tastes. A major beverage company that struggled to match its competitors in overall equipment effectiveness committed to a **transformation of its strategic operations**.



Leading to significant impact

~\$500M of estimated impact from cost transformation program

~10% reduction in total supply chain costs from deep dives

Aligned site plans with financial targets and incentives to reduce conflicts



Prior to pursuing a cost transformation, companies can use a rapid assessment to shape their approach



Organization setup, benchmarks, first hypothesis



Identification of largest opportunities



Quick wins and opportunity charters



Recommendations on cost transformation pathway and roadmap forward

Organization	Groundwork for success established: Resources committed for the change mgmt. program	Largest opportunities related to functional structure pinpointed: Org baseline (e.g., volume, locations, FTE, performance) identified, analyzed	High-level design principles drafted: Support functions / shared services externally benchmarked with long-term strategic focus	Roadmap built to achieve savings: Includes cascade-cycles, timeline, and finalized org design criteria with maximum savings based on high-level estimate of full potential
	Analysis-based change in progress: Internal data collected, including industry benchmarks for talent and material spending	Resources focused on biggest priorities: Cost value drivers analysis complete & bottlenecks in planning, sourcing, mfg., warehousing, etc., evaluated	Size, root causes, and feasibility of opportunities identified: Loss levers analyzed (e.g., procurement, contract services, labor productivity) and bottlenecks identified	Findings validated; senior leaders aligned on path forward

Learnings reveal imperatives for how to come out on top of today's supply and demand mismatches despite the challenges



Anticipate evolving geopolitical and macro-economic uncertainty by creating resilience within organization



Support growth by engaging your supplier ecosystem and by "owning" value chains and product life cycles



Act now while flexibility to maneuver exists, and there is still freedom to invest



Prioritize sustainable cost reduction where capabilities are built – cut for short-term survival and build capabilities for the longer term



Don't take a business-as-usual approach because the macroeconomic context requires transformation deep within the org



Be transparent with employees to build trust, generate respect, strengthen cohesion, and create a sense of ownership



Emphasize getting the right people in roles to make best use of capable and respected employees regardless of original position in organization



Address employee value proposition and actively brand the program to reduce worry and effectively compete for prospective talent

Connect with our Operations, People & Organization, and Tech & Digital Advantage leadership team with any questions

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An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road through rolling hills at dusk. The sky is dark with some clouds, and the hills are covered in green grass and some trees. The road curves through the landscape, and a small car is visible in the distance.

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