Future-Focused Business: Guiding Growing Businesses Towards 2026 Success

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A new wave of AI-driven digital transformation is reshaping how small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) and midmarket companies across Asia/Pacific operate, compete, and grow.

As they scale, these businesses face multiple technology challenges (see Figure 1) in modernising for greater agility, efficiency, and sustainable growth.

Figure 1

Top 5 digitalisation challenges for growing Asia/Pacific businesses (ranked):

Rank #	Challenge
1	Budget limitations due to shifting investment priorities
2	Shortage of skilled developers and digital talent
3	Complexity in managing multicloud and hybrid environments
4	Limited alignment between business and IT objectives
5	Governance gaps and integration challenges with artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML)

Source: *IDC's Asia/Pacific Software Survey,* 2025

Ongoing economic pressures, including tariffs, trade disputes, currency fluctuations, and supply chain disruptions, are driving businesses to rethink their modernisation strategies. By adopting intelligent technologies, companies can transform these challenges into opportunities to streamline operations, build resilience, and drive innovation.

Digitalisation across the Asia/Pacific is accelerating, fuelled by expanding digital ecosystems, supportive government policies, and rapid advances in AI. Mature markets like Australia and New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are leading in AI adoption, cloud migration, and intelligent automation. In contrast, the fast-growing ASEAN region is expanding its digital talent and mobile-first business models.

These market dynamics position the Asia/Pacific region as an innovation hub, where agility, automation, and strategic workforce planning are emerging as key drivers of sustained growth in the years ahead.

To maintain this momentum, companies must modernise core functions, particularly finance and HR, through AI-driven automation, workforce planning, and intuitive cloud-based platforms with low-code/no-code (LCNC) capabilities. These technologies enhance operational efficiency and agility, accelerate innovation, and help companies address ongoing talent shortages and integration challenges.

Technology: The engine of modern business growth

Across Asia/Pacific, SMBs and midmarket companies are recognising the need for cloud-based unified platforms to drive agility and scale. IDC's 2025 *Worldwide SMB Survey* shows that over four in 10 businesses report their existing cloud infrastructure and skills have eased AI adoption, accelerating the shift towards intelligent, data-driven operations.

As these businesses advance in their digital maturity, converging finance and HR on unified cloud platforms provides real-time visibility into costs, workforce capacity, and performance—reducing duplication, manual effort, and governance challenges.

AI-driven automation is a key enabler of this shift. Embedded intelligence improves forecasting, automates routine tasks, and enhances decision-making in budgeting, talent acquisition, and performance management. IDC's 2025 *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey* (Wave 4) finds that nearly 30% of companies plan to use embedded AI or AI agents built into their enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems to automate core business processes.

At the same time, intuitive LCNC capabilities are helping close skill gaps and accelerate innovation. LCNC has become a strategic enabler of agility and innovation, enabling business users to build and automate processes without extensive technical expertise or complex customisations. IDC's 2025 *Asia/Pacific Software Survey* highlights that 24% of businesses report IT-governed use of LCNC platforms, while 13% have advanced to AI-augmented LCNC adoption.

The path to 2026 and beyond

Success through 2026 will depend on building agility, intelligence, and resilience across core operations. By adopting unified, AI-enabled, and intuitive cloud-based platforms, businesses can turn transformation challenges into opportunities for sustained competitiveness. Such platforms can help:

- **Optimise investments and costs:** Cloud-based unified platforms can reduce technology overhead, simplify integration, and enable access to innovations such as AI without significant upfront costs.

- **Upskill and empower workforce:** AI-driven automation and LCNC tools enable non-technical employees to build and innovate,

reducing complex customisation needs and closing skill gaps.

- **Simplify complexity across systems:** Unifying finance, HR, and planning eliminates data silos and duplication, enabling transparency, consistency and faster decision-making.

- **Enhance business and IT alignment:** Cloud governance models and embedded intelligence in such platforms ensure data quality, security, and compliance. This enhances collaboration and helps align digital priorities with operational goals.

- **Strengthen compliance and control:** Such platforms with integrated data management and AI-enabled governance capabilities ensure transparency, consistency, and audit readiness across finance and HR functions.

For SMBs early in their digital journey, moving workloads to the cloud is essential to keep pace with market change and customer demands, an area that major ERP vendors are focusing on.[1] Adopting intelligent, intuitive cloud-based platforms with unified finance and HR capabilities enhances agility and resilience for long-term growth.

The way forward for business leaders

To build a future-ready business, companies must align their technology, talent, and financial strategies. Leaders are central to turning this alignment into action—driving agility, intelligence, and measurable growth.

Advice for IT leaders: Architects of intelligent, unified ecosystems

- **Unify data and systems** across finance, HR, and planning to enable connected operations and real-time decision-making.

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- **Embed AI and intuitive capabilities** within workflows to automate processes, improve integration, ease customisations, and accelerate digital innovation across business functions.

- **Adopt adaptive, secure architectures** that scale across regions and position IT to partner with business leaders as a strategic enabler of agility and innovation.

Advice to finance leaders: Leading growth with data-driven foresight

- **Adopt AI-embedded analytics** for real-time forecasting, anomaly detection, and intelligent scenario modelling.

- **Empower finance teams with intuitive dashboards, planning, and LCNC tools** to automate routine tasks, reduce customisation, and shift focus from transactions to strategic analysis.

- **Strengthen financial resilience** with embedded AI/ML models, built-in governance, and intelligent analytics for scenario planning and align financial decisions with business strategy.

Advice to HR leaders: Empowering a dynamic, data-driven workforce

- **Implement AI-powered workforce planning** to forecast talent needs, support strategic decision-making, and align resources with business goals.

- **Foster a culture of digital empowerment and adaptability** by enabling employees with intuitive tools, continuous learning, and AI-driven career mobility.

- **Leverage unified HR and finance insights** with predictive analytics to connect workforce productivity to financial performance, improving retention, engagement, and planning.

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