

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a
Master's degree in Management from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

Scenario Analysis for the Future of Audit in the European Union

—

Strategic Recommendations for Deloitte

—

Scenario 1: Sky is the Limit – Narrative, Strategy, and Early Indicator

Sven Henrik Thiergard (58102)

Work project carried out under the supervision of:

Professor António Alvarenga

17/12/2024

Abstract

This project examines the future of the audit industry in the European Union using the *Intuitive-Logics School* of scenario planning, centering around the intensive collaboration with experts from Deloitte. The aim is to address uncertainties, explore plausible future events, and develop effective strategies to navigate the evolving audit landscape. Based on the two key uncertainties, *Level of talent availability* and *Extent of AI regulations*, four different scenarios were developed. Moreover, the project provides specific strategic insights and offers actionable strategies to manage potential futures and improve Deloitte's resilience in a rapidly changing environment.

Key Words: Strategic Foresight; Scenario Planning; Uncertainties; Management; Strategy; Auditing

Acknowledgment: The research team would like to thank Deloitte for their valuable collaboration and expert insights throughout the project. Many thanks go to Dr. Florian Klein, Andreas Wermelt, Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann, and other industry experts who supported the entire process. Their expertise and feedback were crucial for the project development. A special thank you to Professor António Alvarenga for his constant assistance and support.

This work used infrastructure and resources funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (UID/ECO/00124/2013, UID/ECO/00124/2019 and Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209), POR Lisboa (LISBOA-01-0145-FEDER-007722 and Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209) and POR Norte (Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209).

Table of Content

- 1. Introduction 2**
 - 1.1 Audit Industry Overview 3
 - 1.2 Introduction to Deloitte 4
- 2. Literature Review 6**
 - 2.1 Scenario Planning: Origin and Conceptualization 6
 - 2.2 Scenario Planning: Approaches 8
- 3. Methodology 11**
- 4. Phase I: Framing & Scoping 15**
 - 4.1 Focal Issue 15
 - 4.2 Time Horizon 17
- 5. Phase II: Explore 19**
 - 5.1 Megatrends & Trends 19
 - 5.2 Megatrend I: Digital Transformation 20
 - 5.2.1 *Trend: Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning* 20
 - 5.2.2 *Trend: RegTech* 20
 - 5.2.3 *Trend: Public Trust in Technology* 20
 - 5.3 Megatrend II: Demographic Change 20
 - 5.3.1 *Trend: Skillset Development* 20
 - 5.3.2 *Trend: Changed Work Environment* 20
 - 5.4 Megatrend III: Climate Change 21
 - 5.4.1 *Trend: Sustainability and ESG Reporting* 22
 - 5.4.2 *Trend: Issues of Greenwashing* 24
 - 5.5 Identification of Uncertainties 26
- 6. Phase III: Synthesize 27**
 - 6.1 Evaluation and Mapping of Uncertainties 27
 - 6.2 Grouping Uncertainties 29
 - 6.3 Identification of Key Uncertainties 30
 - 6.4 Selected Key Uncertainties 31
 - 6.5 Development of Scenario Matrix 34
 - 6.6 Scenario Narratives 35
 - 6.6.1 *Scenario 1: Sky is the Limit* 36
 - 6.6.2 *Scenario 2: People in Control* 42
 - 6.6.3 *Scenario 3: Bottleneck Audit* 42
 - 6.6.4 *Scenario 4: Automation Overload* 42
 - 6.7 Scenario Analysis and Comparison 43
- 7. Phase IV: Act 45**
 - 7.1 Business-Level Strategy of Deloitte Audit & Assurance 45
 - 7.2 Deloitte’s identified Strengths and Weaknesses 46
 - 7.3 TOWS Analysis and Resulting Strategic Recommendations 50
 - 7.3.1 *Scenario 1: Sky is the Limit* 50

7.3.2	<i>Scenario 2: People in Control</i>	53
7.3.3	<i>Scenario 3: Bottleneck Audit</i>	53
7.3.4	<i>Scenario 4: Automation Overload</i>	53
7.4	Strategic Prioritization Matrix	54
8.	Phase V: Monitor	55
8.1	Early Indicators.....	55
8.1.1	<i>Scenario 1: Sky is the Limit</i>	56
8.1.2	<i>Scenario 2: People in Control</i>	57
8.1.3	<i>Scenario 3: Bottleneck Audit</i>	57
8.1.4	<i>Scenario 4: Automation Overload</i>	57
9.	Limitations and Further Research	58
10.	Conclusion	59
11.	Bibliography	61
12.	Appendix	120

Table of Figures

Figure 1 - Scenario Planning Process (Own illustration).....	11
Figure 2 - PESTEL Framework of all Drivers of Change (Own illustration).....	19
Figure 3 - Uncertainties with Configurations (Own illustration).....	26
Figure 4 - Survey Results for Uncertainties (Own illustration)	28
Figure 5 - Grouped Uncertainties and Identified Key Uncertainties (Own illustration).....	31
Figure 6 - Scenario Matrix (Own illustration)	35
Figure 7 - Scenario Comparison (Own illustration).....	43
Figure 8 - TOWS Matrix for Scenario ‘Sky is the Limit’ (Own illustration)	50
Figure 9 - Strategic Prioritization Matrix (Own illustration)	54
Figure 10 - Early Indicator Overview (Own illustration)	55
Figure 11 - Project Timeline (Own illustration).....	122
Figure 12 - The Adaption of ESRS and CSRD (O’Connell 2023)	155
Figure 13 - Survey Excerpt (Own illustration).....	171
Figure 14 - Audit Experience of Survey Respondents (Own illustration)	171
Figure 15 - Economies by Share of Global GDP (Own illustration, based on (Lu 2024))	172
Figure 16 - Workshop Participants (Own illustration).....	173
Figure 17 - Miro Board from Workshop (Own illustration)	174
Figure 18 - Involvement of Deloitte (Own illustration).....	183

Table of Equations

Equation 1 - Standardization of Survey Results.....	27
---	----

1. Introduction

Arthur Edward Andersen, founder of the audit company ‘Arthur Andersen LLP’, stated in the 1920s: “The thoroughly trained accountant must have a sound understanding of the principles of economics, of finance, and of organization.” (Moore and Crampton 2000), advocating a broader understanding of the auditor’s role. He argues that a public accountant’s duty should begin, not conclude, with the certification of balance sheets and statements of earnings (Moore and Crampton 2000). As a highly respected and sought-after authority in the accounting field, he was the first to strive for more insight into business operations and processes beyond merely auditing balance sheet figures to provide added value to clients (Moore and Crampton 2000).

Today, digitalization fundamentally reshapes society and the economy (Van Veldhoven and Vanthienen 2022). Consequently, it has also triggered a technological transformation in auditing (Accountancy Europe 2024). As Andersen realized a long time ago, traditional audits and mere compliance with legal requirements no longer meet business requirements, certainly not in today’s era of big data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Knechel 2021). Reliable, timely, and audited data is key to efficient capital markets and corporate decision-making. Providing more comprehensive and certified information, including non-traditional financial metrics and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors, reduces the risk of errors or manipulation, thereby ensuring trust in the market (Knechel 2021).

Thus, the digital transformation of the audit industry in the wake of technological advancements and the ever-increasing flood of information poses both a challenge and an opportunity requiring continuous adaptation and enhancement of the audit approach to „the increasing expectations of audit quality, timely reporting, and business value-creation” (Elliott and Duan 2022) to remain competitive. This project analyzes scenarios for the future of audit in the European Union (EU) and derives strategic recommendations for Deloitte while addressing the

key question: ‘How can Deloitte continue to be the leading audit firm amidst disruptive technological advancements, regulatory changes, and demographic shift?’.

The *Intuitive-Logics School’s* scenario planning methodology will be applied to explore plausible futures and their implications for auditors, clients, and employees. By analyzing these scenarios in depth, Deloitte will gain strategic insights and recommendations to remain agile and forward-looking in the face of a transformative landscape.

As van der Heijden (1997) emphasizes, strategic thinking goes beyond traditional analysis by asking fundamental “what do we do if...?” questions. This creative approach considers several futures while alleviating cognitive biases inherent in any strategic decision-making process (Meißner and Wulf 2013). Scenario planning enables dynamic and proactive decision-making in the face of uncertainty while responding flexibly to shifting market parameters (Van der Heijden 1997).

1.1 Audit Industry Overview

Auditing is the independent review and verification of a company’s financial statements, internal controls, business processes, and other operations to provide assurance of a company’s information (Tuovila 2024a). Enhancing accurate financial reporting, regulatory compliance, fraud detection, and risk management, independent Audit & Assurance services ensure the integrity and reliability of financial and other corporate information, which is essential for market transparency and stakeholder confidence (Tuovila 2024a). The global audit market is dominated by the so-called ‘Big Four’, namely the market leader Deloitte, Ernst & Young (EY), Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG), and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (Bohne 2023). The rest of the market is served by medium-sized companies and smaller local players, primarily offering personalized assurance services to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Fiolleau, et al. 2024).

The global audit industry reported revenue of around US Dollars (USD) 227 billion in 2023 and is expected to grow at an estimated Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 4.2% to USD 302.6 billion by 2030 (Global Industry Analysts, Inc. 2024).

The dynamic growth in demand for auditing services is primarily driven by stricter regulatory requirements for transparency and compliance in financial reporting as a response to financial scandals such as Wirecard. Additionally, the increasing relevance of non-financial advisory services and audits, particularly in relation to ESG reporting, is further fueling this demand (IBISWorld 2024).

Integrating technological innovations into auditing is a game changer for performing financial audits. Technologies, such as AI or Machine Learning (ML), enable the analysis of large volumes of data and non-traditional audit evidence with a focus on high-risk and complex issues, thereby increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the audit (Elliott and Duan 2022). As a result, companies benefit not only from increased transparency and accuracy in financial reporting but also from valuable insights into business risks and opportunities. In the ongoing digital transformation, the auditor's role is evolving from merely ticking and tying numbers to becoming a valued strategic advisor (Elliott and Duan 2022).

1.2 Introduction to Deloitte

Founded in 1845 by William Welch, Deloitte is a multinational network of independent professional services firms around the world that are members of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (also referred to as 'Deloitte Global'), a London-based private company limited by guarantee (Deloitte n.d.d). Organic growth and strategic acquisitions have made Deloitte the world's leading professional services provider, with currently over 450,000 employees (Deloitte 2024c). Deloitte provides a wide range of services, including Audit & Assurance, Consulting, Tax & Legal, and Risk Advisory in more than 150 countries, with nearly 90% of the Fortune 500 companies as clients (Deloitte 2024c). For the financial year 2024, the company

reports revenue of USD 67.2 billion globally, corresponding to a 3.6 % increase in USD compared to the 2023 financial year (Deloitte 2024c). Audit & Assurance services strongly drive revenue with a 4.1% increase to over USD 20 billion across all regions, making Deloitte the leader in the global Audit & Assurance market (Deloitte 2024c).

One of Deloitte's most innovative departments is the Center for the Long View (CLV), which advises decision-makers on forward-looking and agile strategies based on strategic foresight and scenario planning (Deloitte n.d.a). Inspired by the success of Pierre Wack - the so-called father of scenario planning - at Royal Dutch Shell in the 1970s (Deloitte n.d.a), one of his students, Peter Schwartz, set up a consulting firm called Global Business Network in 1987. This company, which specialized in scenario planning as a business tool, was bought in 2000 by Monitor (Deloitte n.d.a), a Cambridge-based consulting firm founded by strategy expert and Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter (Healy 2012). Recognizing the potential of Schwartz's method, Deloitte acquired Monitor in 2013 and integrated scenario planning by establishing what is now called the Center of Long View in 2015 (Deloitte n.d.a).

While the approach developed by Wack focused on anticipating shifts in the global oil market, Deloitte's CLV extended the proven methodologies with state-of-the-art technologies and its global expert network (Deloitte n.d.a).

Strategic foresight is one of the cornerstones of Deloitte's continued success in assisting clients navigate an uncertain future. Focusing on innovation and resilience, Deloitte's global reach and thought leadership set the standard in auditing, enabling clients to thrive in an increasingly complex and transformative world (Deloitte 2024c).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Scenario Planning: Origin and Conceptualization

Scenario planning is a strategic tool that fosters forward-thinking and helps organizations anticipate multiple future possibilities to explore their implications (Bradfield, et al. 2005). Rather than predicting ‘the right future’, identifying the key drivers of change, and outlining a set of possible and plausible scenarios that challenge the prevailing status quo is exceedingly more important (Shoemaker 1995). Herman Khan, a pioneer of scenario planning, defined it as a “set of hypothetical events set in the future constructed to clarify a possible chain of causal events as well as their decision points” (Amer, Daim and Jetter 2013).

The systematic use of scenarios for thinking about alternative futures started after World War II when the United States (US) Department of Defense utilized it as a method for planning military strategies in the 1950s (Wack 1985). Subsequently, scenario planning has been used for societal forecasting, public analyses, and decision-making by diverse groups, including academics, politicians, professional futurology institutes, and educational institutions (Wack 1985). Corporations began adopting scenario planning techniques during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Wack 1985), with Shell being an extraordinary example of this application. By taking into account the planners’ assessments of the global business landscape that would exist by 2000, Shell’s management was prepared to navigate effectively through the 1973 oil crisis (Wack 1985). This demonstrates the value of scenario planning in preparing for significant market disruptions amid uncertainties (Shoemaker 1995).

Nowadays, scenario planning serves as a valuable strategic tool that organizations use in various fields such as healthcare, management, and social systems (Cordova-Pozo and Rouwette 2023). By applying this method, organizations prepare for uncertainties and thus improve flexibility and adaptability (Amer, Daim and Jetter 2013).

Scenario planning facilitates decision-making by presenting multiple potential futures (Bradfield, et al. 2005), encouraging strategic thinking that focuses more on long-term impacts rather than immediate challenges (Schwartz 1996). Comparing the various implications and challenges that arise in the created future scenarios provides a possibility to identify risks and opportunities (Amer, Daim and Jetter 2013). Moreover, scenario planning extends beyond conventional planning methods and is a significant pedagogical tool (Lindgren and Bandhold 2003). Engaging with scenarios facilitates a comprehensive understanding of development logic and identifies driving forces as well as key determinants (Lindgren and Bandhold 2003). Notably, scenario techniques can be an inspiration for generating opinions or a filter through which new ideas and projects can pass (Lindgren and Bandhold 2003).

Scenario planning serves four distinct purposes: strategic development, innovation, scenario learning, and evaluation. It is a key driver of strategic growth, enabling organizations to envision a range of potential futures and to experiment with various strategic responses (Schwartz 1996). In addition, scenario building promotes innovation by encouraging the development of novel ideas and concepts (Lindgren and Bandhold 2003) while improving organizational learning through a deeper understanding of the complex and uncertain external environment (Shoemaker 1995). Besides, scenario planning helps to evaluate the resilience of strategic decisions in response to diverse scenarios and conditions (Wilson 2000). As the scenario building process involves numerous stakeholders in dialogues across different organizational levels, adaptive behavior is decisively fostered (Shoemaker 1995). Identifying vulnerabilities in future scenarios further helps to develop contingency plans to address potential disruptions (Wack 1985). Therefore, scenario planning is valuable in industries where risk mitigation is critical for operational continuity as it enables institutions to prepare in advance by considering diverse scenarios and maintaining flexibility in their strategic focus (Shoemaker 1995).

2.2 Scenario Planning: Approaches

There is no standardized approach to scenario planning; instead, there are several different methodologies for generating scenarios (Amer, Daim and Jetter 2013). Therefore, some authors describe scenario planning as "methodological chaos" (Amer, Daim and Jetter 2013).

The three main approaches to scenario planning are the US-American *Intuitive-Logics School*, the *Probabilities Modified Trends* - which emerged in the UK -, and the French approach *La Prospective* (Amer, Daim and Jetter 2013).

The *Intuitive-Logics School* received most of the attention in the scenario planning literature (Bradfield, et al. 2005). This approach was first suggested by Herman Khan and later used by Pierre Wack (Bradfield, et al. 2005). According to the *Intuitive-Logics School*, most business decisions are founded on the interconnection of political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors (Wright, Bradfield and Cairns 2013). This methodology relies on expert judgment and narrative thinking to explore a range of plausible future environments, allowing decision-makers to prepare for various contingencies (Wright, Bradfield and Cairns 2013). In contrast to more data-driven approaches, such as the *Probabilistic Modified Trends (PMT)*, the focus is on qualitative insights rather than statistical predictions (Bradfield, et al. 2005). Therefore, the methodology is particularly useful when quantitative data is scarce, which is a common challenge in long-term planning (Ntsime 2024). The *Intuitive-Logics School* is implemented through a structured, yet flexible process designed to help organizations anticipate and navigate future uncertainties (Bradfield, et al. 2005). After determining the focal issue and a specific time horizon, the school identifies the drivers of change and uncertainties that could impact the organization (Wack 1985). In addition to evaluating key uncertainties, the process progresses to creating multiple scenarios, which leads to the development of divergent narratives that explore different future environments (Wulf, Brands and Meißner 2011).

The process further involves identifying the strategic implications for each constructed scenario and establishing early indicators to understand better in which direction the future is evolving (Bradfield, et al. 2005). Throughout this process, the *Intuitive-Logics School* promotes dialogues and shares knowledge among stakeholders, fostering strategic conversations that help align organizational goals with potential future conditions (Wright and Goodwin 2009).

However, this approach has faced criticism. The reliance on subjective judgment and qualitative data can lead to overconfidence in decision-making, potentially overlooking quantitative data and limiting the approach's effectiveness in environments where detailed data is crucial (Wright and Goodwin 2009).

Despite these challenges, this method remains a versatile tool as it encourages adaptability within the organization (Bradfield, et al. 2005), making it especially useful in today's rapidly changing business environments.

The *PMT*, in contrast to the *Intuitive-Logics School*, uses a more quantitative and statistical approach. *PMT* primarily focuses on projecting existing trends into the future and assigning probabilities to possible outcomes, offering a more predictive view of future scenarios (Bradfield, et al. 2005). This scenario planning method combines two distinct methods: the *Trend Impact Analysis (TIA)* and the *Cross Impact Analysis (CIA)* (Bradfield, et al. 2005).

By relying on the projection of historical data and considering the effects of future unprecedented events, the *TIA* responds to the limitations of traditional forecasting methods (Gordon 1994). The *CIA* analyzes how different variables might interact with each other and evaluates changes in the possibility of occurrence (Gordon 1994). Although the *CIA* began as a probabilistic forecasting tool accepting expert-given probabilities, it also calculates conditional or proportional probabilities of event pairs, which allows for adjustment from initial to corrected probabilities (Godet 1987).

Due to its focus on quantitative data, the *PMT* framework tends to be over-reliant on past trends, potentially missing disruptive events or changes in patterns that do not align with historical data (Bradfield, et al. 2005).

La Prospective methodology, initially developed by a French philosopher from the 20th century named Gaston Berger, is a method for scenario planning that goes beyond simply extrapolating from past trends to predict the future (Godet, Durance and Gerber 2008).

This methodology emphasizes understanding the fundamental drivers and underlying forces that shape multiple possible futures, considering alternative scenarios to explore a range of outcomes, and considering unexpected changes, societal shifts, and human intentions (Godet 1986). Berger's work inspired the French economist and futurist Michel Godet to add a mathematical and computational probabilistic dimension to *La Prospective*, integrating tools such as the morphological analysis for scenario building, and Micmac for identifying key variables and pinpointing critical factors (Bradfield, et al. 2005). The French school focuses on creating normative scenarios, and its application is employed mainly in the public sector, guiding policymakers and stakeholders in decision-making (Godet and Durance 2011).

La Prospective is organized around four key concepts: the 'Base', an in-depth analysis of the current state, the 'External Context', which examines the surrounding environment impacting the system, the 'Progression', a historical simulation that, through current dynamics. Lastly, 'Images', projects future changes and images, which are detailed scenarios depicting possible future realities (Godet and Durance 2011). This approach incorporates certain features of the *Intuitive-Logics School*, as both scenario planning approaches use descriptive and normative scenario perspectives and consider similar time horizons between three and twenty years (Bradfield, et al. 2005). However, the process is less intuitive because it relies heavily on computer-based mathematical models, making it more complex to apply and less flexible to social changes and emerging trends (Bradfield, et al. 2005).

3. Methodology

This project used a qualitative approach based on the methodology of the *Intuitive-Logics School*. This approach was applied due to the school's ability to effectively address complex, uncertain future developments by building structured, plausible scenarios that explore the "limits of possibility" for the future, using expert input and analyzing "environmental driving forces" in detail (Wright, Bradfield and Cairns 2013). The specific application of scenarios was chosen as it provides "narratives of alternative environments", allowing for better comprehension of how today's decisions could unfold in various futures (Ogilvy and Schwartz 1997). This makes it highly suitable for tackling uncertainties and exploring external disruptions affecting the audit industry. The project's structured methodology was divided into five distinct phases: *Framing & Scoping*, *Explore*, *Synthesize*, *Act*, and *Monitor*. Figure 1 illustrates the specific activities undertaken in each phase, the tools employed, and Deloitte's level of involvement.

Scenario Planning Process					
	01 Framing & Scoping	02 Explore	03 Synthesize	04 Act	05 Monitor
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the perimeter of the project in form of the focal issue and time horizon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepen the understanding of the context Explore patterns of change as part of the environmental scanning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct the framework of scenario narratives Build alternative futures and images of the future based on two key uncertainties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define current business-level strategy of Deloitte Assess strengths and weaknesses for Deloitte Identify strategic options for each scenario 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify early indicators
Tools & Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team research and collaboration Expert interview with Andreas Wermelt (Deloitte) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PESTEL Analysis Semi-structured meeting with Dr. Florian Klein (Deloitte) Implementation of survey Expert interview with Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann (Deloitte) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey results Scenario matrix 2 working sessions with Dr. Florian Klein (Deloitte) for mapping if uncertainties and optimization of scenario narratives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop (Deloitte) using Miro to identify strategic implications for Deloitte TOWS matrix Strategic Prioritization Matrix 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early indicator selection Provide monitor source for early indicators

Figure 1 - Scenario Planning Process (Own illustration)

Even though the audit sector is traditionally stable, the unpredictability of external factors and potential disruptions, such as compliance requirements, advancements in technology, and changing expectations from stakeholders, could considerably influence the future direction of the audit industry (Choo, et al. 2021).

By examining these evolving influences, Deloitte can prepare for various plausible scenarios and adapt to changes that may disrupt the industry's longstanding stability. Involving industry experts from Deloitte through interviews and working sessions, as well as conducting a survey and a workshop, allowed the project to address the future challenges and opportunities of the audit sector.

The first phase, *Framing & Scoping*, was of central importance as it defined the parameters for the entire scope of the project (Wulf, Meißner and Stubner 2010). Thus, it laid the foundation for the upcoming scenario planning process by establishing the focal issue and determining the appropriate time horizon for the project (Wright and Cairns 2011). Based on extensive research and an interview discussion with expert Andreas Wermelt, the Audit & Assurance Transformation Leader at Deloitte (Appendix 3), the key topics surrounding the future of audit were explored to define several supporting questions that examined the focal issue. A time horizon until 2035 was set to capture the major changes surrounding the audit industry and to examine both emerging trends and significant long-term developments.

The *Explore* phase aimed to deepen understanding of the audit industry's external environment. In this phase, several drivers of change were identified through environmental scanning, providing insights into emerging trends and shifts that may impact the future audit profession. As part of the *Intuitive-Logics School*, this research utilized the PESTEL framework as an initial step to systematically categorize macro-environmental factors, acknowledging its limitations in capturing the complex interdependencies and dynamics influencing industries (Burt, et al. 2006). This framework allowed gathering insights into political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal dimensions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of external forces, which are critical for identifying patterns of change in the evolving audit landscape (Burt, et al. 2006). A comprehensive semi-structured meeting was held with

Dr. Florian Klein, Managing Director and Head of the Center for the Long View at Deloitte, to evaluate and validate the identified drivers of change. An additional expert interview with Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann, partner at Deloitte and Audit Sector Leader in power, utilities, and renewables, was utilized for assessing the identified trends and uncertainties (Appendix 4). Based on these insights, a subsequent survey was set up and sent out to more than 100 industry experts from Deloitte to evaluate the identified uncertainties regarding their level of impact and uncertainty (Appendix 7).

The *Synthesize* phase focused on constructing detailed scenarios using two key uncertainties based on the industry experts' survey results. To achieve that, the survey data was first standardized for accurate comparison, resulting in an uncertainty-impact matrix. The uncertainties in this matrix's upper right corner were characterized by high impact and high uncertainty and were, therefore, of great interest to the scenario building process. Thus, these uncertainties were categorized into thematic groups based on their interdependencies. Finally, two independent key uncertainties were selected from this pool of uncertainties to create the scenario matrix. These key uncertainties were selected based on three crucial criteria: high impact on the focal issue, high level of uncertainty regarding their occurrence, and sufficient independence between each other (Wright and Cairns 2011).

After selecting the key uncertainties, a deductive scenario development approach was chosen to construct the scenarios. This structured approach effectively examined key uncertainties and their potential impacts, providing a clear framework to explore how their combinations could shape plausible futures (Van der Heijden 1996). The scenario matrix was created by intersecting these two key uncertainties, leading to four different quadrants, each representing a plausible and distinct future scenario (Wulf, Brands and Meißner 2011). Every scenario presented a unique narrative with its own set of key challenges and contrasting dynamics, offering valuable insights how different drivers could shape the future of the audit industry (Shoemaker 1995).

In the *Act* phase, the established scenario narratives were used to derive actionable strategic recommendations for Deloitte. Therefore, a TOWS matrix was used to align external threats and opportunities identified in each scenario with Deloitte's weaknesses and strengths. By systematically combining these variables, the TOWS matrix facilitated the development of clear strategies that leverage the strengths to capitalize on opportunities, counteract threats, and overcome weaknesses regarding the internal and external world (Wehrich 1982). Serving as a vital component to this phase, the strategic implications of each scenario were examined in detail upon conducting a workshop in collaboration with five Deloitte Audit partners. A Miro board was utilized during the workshop to visually present the scenario matrix and narratives, facilitating a clear and interactive discussion framework (Appendix 9). Using Deloitte's internal knowledge and the team's analysis, the collectively developed strategies serve as informed suggestions rather than concrete instructions. To further evaluate and prioritize these strategic options, a Strategic Prioritization Matrix was introduced. This matrix categorized the strategy recommendations into three clusters: 'No Regret', Real Option', and 'Big Bets', giving Deloitte an initial sense of each strategy's priority.

In the *Monitor* phase, early indicators were identified for each scenario, enabling Deloitte to observe and anticipate potential signs of change. Monitoring sources allows Deloitte to track the early indicators' development over time. As a result, Deloitte can adapt strategies accordingly to ensure the company remains prepared for potential changes in the future.

Overall, Deloitte's close overall involvement, highlighted in Figure 18 (Appendix 11), and expertise throughout the project ensured a structured and informed approach. Integrating the company's insights during every phase allowed the scenario planning process to consistently align with Deloitte's perspectives while ensuring practical relevance.

4. Phase I: Framing & Scoping

The scenario planning process starts with the essential steps of identifying the focal issue and determining a suitable time horizon (Wright and Cairns 2011). These decisions set the strategic scope and direction for the entire project. The focal issue should align with Deloitte's core objectives, while the time horizon must be sufficiently forward-looking to account for potential disruptions and trends (Wright and Cairns 2011).

4.1 Focal Issue

The auditing profession is continuously evolving due to emerging technologies, changing regulatory landscapes (Farrell and Paquette 2023), and an increased focus on sustainability reporting (Tanguy 2024). This project explores how Deloitte can effectively navigate the future of auditing by addressing the challenges and opportunities brought by digital transformation, European regulations, and talent availability. Through the *Intuitive-Logics School* approach, this project will develop future scenarios to assess the impact of these forces on the audit industry. The focal issue guiding this scenario building process is articulated as follows:

'The Future of the Audit Industry in the EU by 2035'

Bierstaker, Burnaby, and Thibodeau anticipated audits would become predominantly paperless as early as 2001, with digital technologies - such as electronic data interchange and file transfer - revolutionizing traditional audit processes, allowing auditors to concentrate on more advanced tasks such as evaluating risks and gaining an understanding of the client's business (Bierstaker, Burnaby and Thibodeau 2001).

Today, the audit profession actively adopts advanced technologies to enhance the quality and efficiency of services (Elliott and Duan 2022). ML-powered tools, like Deloitte's Argus, rapidly process hundreds of documents and identify critical areas of interest far more efficiently than the technologies available a decade ago (Deloitte 2018). Similarly, PwC's 'Halo' tool uses ML to analyze journal entries, detect unauthorized or suspicious patterns, and enhance the speed

and quality of audit testing by focusing on high-risk outliers (Kokina and Davenport 2017). ‘KPMG Clara’, a cloud-based platform, combines data science, audit automation, and data visualization to provide real-time insights and enhance interactions between auditors and clients (KPMG n.d.c). Moreover, EY leverages the use of ‘EY Helix’ to collect and analyze large volumes of auditing data to gain deeper insights into clients’ financial operations (EY n.d.b). To ensure that the audit profession continues to provide value in a world characterized by digital transformation, demographic change, and climate change, it is critical to gain a clear understanding of the future of audit (Elliott and Duan 2022). Failing to address any upcoming challenges, sticking to traditional roles, or progressing too slowly will lead to the audit profession becoming obsolete in a rapidly changing global landscape (Forbes Insights 2017). To further guide the scenario building process, several supporting questions were identified for the focal issue:

- What are the potential impacts of AI and ML within digital transformation on the future of the audit industry?
- How can public trust in technology be maintained and enhanced within the audit sector?
- How does the European Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) affect audit practices, and how can audit firms adapt to the increasing importance of sustainability and ESG reporting?
- What technological advancements are expected to have the most significant impact on the audit industry by 2035?
- What skills will be most critical for auditors in the future to meet the industry’s evolving demands?
- How will demographic shifts in the EU affect the labor market for audit firms?
- How will the growing data security and privacy need impact audit methodologies and practices?

4.2 Time Horizon

When developing scenarios, selecting an appropriate time horizon is essential, as it enables broader thinking, encourages consideration of diverse possibilities, and helps unpack assumptions about the future. A well-chosen time horizon fosters the mental freedom to explore changes and challenges beyond immediate planning cycles, ensuring stakeholders can navigate future uncertainties with greater clarity and purpose (Swanson 2019).

The time horizon serves as a frame of reference that shapes understanding the plausible future. While a long-time horizon might lead to speculative scenarios with limited practical relevance, a short-time horizon might overlook emerging disruption and, therefore, focus too much on immediate concerns (Wright and Cairns 2011). Consequently, it is vital to balance the strategic foresight process by aligning the focus of the time horizon with the objectives of the challenge while ensuring that scenarios provoke forward-thinking insights and guide actionable decisions (Bowers 2022).

In the strategic analysis for the audit industry, a time horizon extending to **2035** was selected. By 2035, the rise of generative AI and other technologies is expected to drive significant digital advancements (Anderson and Rainie 2023). As repetitive, time-consuming tasks can be automated, new tools and capabilities offer the audit industry the opportunity to improve efficiency and effectiveness and to ultimately strengthen confidence in the financial system (Friedlich 2024). Consequently, the audit profession must tackle ethical concerns regarding the use of these technologies as well as associated potential risks like cybersecurity emerging from extensive technology use (Rathi and Rozenblum 2022). Additionally, as technology becomes fundamental to auditing, professional standards and regulations are evolving, eventually leading to greater oversight (Friedlich 2024).

The evolving workforce dynamics, including the integration of digital natives who have grown up with and are inherently comfortable using technology (Hoyland n.d.), will further influence

the future of work (Colbert, Yee and George 2016), making forward-looking strategies that extend into the mid-2030s even more critical to successfully navigating audit's future. By 2030, tech-savvy millennials will account for 75% of the EU's workforce (European Commission 2018) and will consequently shape the future of work in the audit industry.

Lastly, the regulatory environment will likely change significantly, particularly in response to the growing importance of sustainability and ESG reporting. All 27 Member States of the EU have pledged to achieve climate neutrality within the EU by 2050 (European Commission n.d.d). As part of this goal, they have committed to reducing emissions by a minimum of 55% by 2030, compared to the levels recorded in 1990 (European Commission n.d.d). Therefore, the EU has legally binding climate targets that include all major sectors of the economy (European Commission n.d.d).

Consequently, the chosen time horizon until 2035 captures substantial shifts while allowing the development of realistic, actionable scenarios for the EU's audit industry. This allows audit companies to anticipate change, seize opportunities, and adapt their strategies effectively. It also empowers leaders to make forward-looking decisions aligned with a long-term projection, responding dynamically to the evolving audit landscape.

5. Phase II: Explore

The *Explore* phase focuses on investigating megatrends, trends, and uncertainties surrounding the focal issue. These factors have an external origin and signal change within the broader environment. Various drivers, which directly and indirectly influence the focal issue and are related to the industry's development and its surrounding nature, are scanned and identified for further examination. This approach involves using the PESTEL framework to identify and categorize the drivers of change. Figure 2 highlights the mapping of these six critical areas along the identified drivers of change that could shape the audit industry in the coming years.

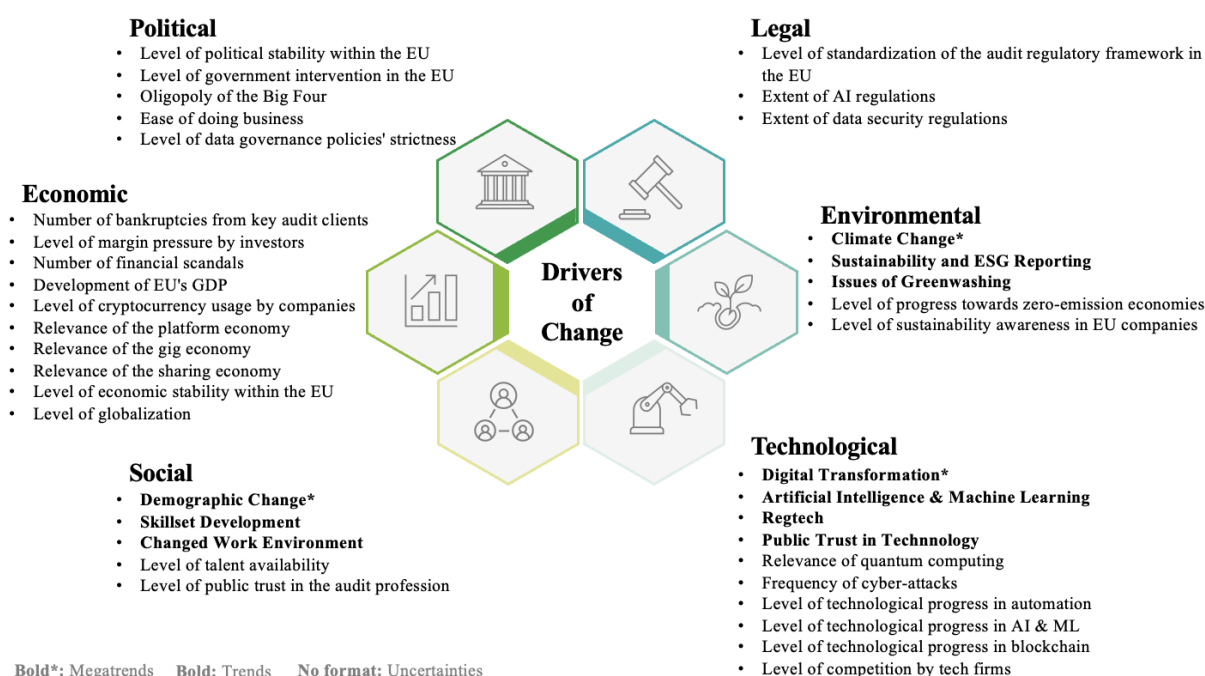


Figure 2 - PESTEL Framework of all Drivers of Change (Own illustration)

5.1 Megatrends & Trends

Megatrends and trends are two defining terms when it comes to assessing possible future developments in an industry. Megatrends are broad-based, long-term transformation processes that have a lasting impact on various aspects of society, the economy, and industry (Zukunftsinstitut 2023). These changes are generally irreversible and shape the entire development of markets and institutions (Zukunftsinstitut 2023).

5.2 Megatrend I: Digital Transformation

Individual Part – Jakob Rinschen

5.2.1 Trend: Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning

5.2.2 Trend: RegTech

Individual Part – Miguel Oliveira da Silva Justino

5.2.3 Trend: Public Trust in Technology

Individual Part – Alexander Thomas Schmitt

5.3 Megatrend II: Demographic Change

5.3.1 Trend: Skillset Development

5.3.2 Trend: Changed Work Environment

5.4 Megatrend III: Climate Change

Today, global temperatures are on average 1.15°C warmer than in pre-industrial times. Without significant greenhouse gas reductions, global warming will reach a critical level of 1.5°C by 2030, and more than 5°C by 2100, resulting in devastating consequences for life on the planet (IPCC 2023). Additionally, rising sea levels pose a threat to cities that lack adequate coastal defense, such as Amsterdam and Venice, which are projected to be partially flooded by 2030. Almost half of the world's population will face severe water stress, driving climate migration (PwC 2024). The effects of climate change go far beyond these direct environmental consequences that are already reshaping all aspects of human life – “how we move around, feed ourselves, build, produce, and power things” (PwC 2024).

The climate crisis poses political, economic, and social consequences at a high cost, affecting the regulatory environment, economic stability, and business strategies. Society and experts are demanding more accountability from governments to adopt strategies and measures to promote sustainable development and mitigate the already tangible effects of climate change (PwC 2024). Thus, governments advanced climate policy with the 2016 Paris Agreement, the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and the 2019 Green Deal, targeting greenhouse gas neutrality by 2050 and significant reductions in CO₂ emissions (European Parliament 2023).

The legislative packages under the Green Deal relate to various areas such as finance and trade, and they are intended to incentivize investments in more climate-friendly energy supply and production processes (European Commission 2019). Moreover, consumers' evolving environmental awareness, and purchasing behavior are additional triggers for companies' efforts to become greener (PwC 2024). More effective companies' management of climate risks is even gaining traction with investors, who are pushing for the disclosure and assessment of these risks along the entire value chain (PwC 2024). Tackling the climate crisis requires joint

efforts from politics, the economy, and society to drive rapid and far-reaching transformation (IPCC 2023).

5.4.1 Trend: Sustainability and ESG Reporting

Companies and investors play a key role in addressing climate change (Watts 2024). According to the ‘Carbon Majors Database’, just 57 corporations worldwide, including well-known players such as ExxonMobil and Shell, have been responsible for 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions since the 2016 Paris Agreement (Watts 2024). These findings underline the need to hold corporations more accountable through stricter regulations or targeted investments in sustainable technologies and to focus more on ESG issues in the economy (Watts 2024).

The EU responded to the growing awareness of ESG issues with extensive efforts to emphasize the relevance of responsible corporate behavior. As part of the Green Deal set of measures, the European CSRD was adopted in 2023, requiring European companies to provide information on sustainability-related impacts, risks, and opportunities in addition to their financial statements (European Commission 2021). The main objective of the directive is a more comprehensive and standardized reporting for companies operating in the EU, which enables shareholders and stakeholders to better evaluate and compare sustainability-related information as a basis for investment decisions (European Commission 2021). The CSRD defines specific requirements and standards, to ensure uniform reporting (Figure 12 in **Error! Reference source not found.**). These so-called European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) comprise over 1,000 data points with two overarching standards and a variety of numerical and narrative data points that are required to be reported for a complete picture of all non-financial topics. Around 60% of these data points are considered mandatory and are subject to a materiality assessment (PlanA n.d.). A key principle of the directive is dual materiality, requiring companies to report on their impact on society and the environment as well as on the significance of these issues for the company itself (PlanA n.d.).

With ESG reporting, disclosure of non-financial company information is more transparent, and stakeholders are better informed about a company's contribution to sustainability (Hannay 2023). The broader approach to assessing a company's performance, covering financial reporting and ESG impact (Bloomberg Professional Services n.d.), aims to build trust and reputation among stakeholders. In the longer term, ESG reporting is intended to steer financial flows within the EU toward sustainable projects while discouraging greenwashing (Tanguy 2024). According to a 2023 survey by software company Workiva, 90% of professionals surveyed believe that ESG reporting "will play a prominent role in driving competitiveness for their organization" (Hannay 2023).

Due to the increasing focus on ESG issues and stricter ESG reporting regulations, the auditing profession must place more emphasis on ESG factors (KPMG 2020a) in addition to climate-related disclosures, risk assessments, and compliance with increasingly stringent environmental regulations (EY n.d.a). To verify the compliance of ESG reports with recognized frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (Global Reporting Initiative 2023), auditors are mandated to audit both financial and non-financial information. Interview partner Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann explained how these adaptations pose new challenges to auditors: "The challenge is identifying what is truly significant and ensuring the information provided is concise and to the point, rather than overwhelming. We are talking about adding 60 to 80 additional pages to the annual report, which is a lot." (Appendix 4). As of 2024, the European Commission requires limited assurance for sustainability reports with severe penalties for non-compliance under the CSRD (Global Reporting Initiative 2023).

In the future, sustainability disclosures will be on par with financial reporting, requiring audits with the same depth and comprehensive understanding of ESG metrics, including greenhouse gas emission intensity and reduction. Assessing these disclosures that span a range of sustainability topics such as environmental protection or social responsibility, calls for

cross-functional teams as well as new approaches and tools (European Commission 2021). Given the growing complexity of sustainability reporting, the Big Four, in particular, are increasingly harnessing state-of-the-art technology such as AI or blockchain to analyze and validate vast amounts of non-financial data (Deliu 2024).

5.4.2 Trend: Issues of Greenwashing

In 2009, Volkswagen introduced an extensive marketing campaign to promote their new "clean diesel" vehicles (Lindwall 2023). However, these cars were not as clean as the company advertised (Lindwall 2023). A few years later, the US Environmental Protection Agency exposed Volkswagen for falsifying over 11 million emission tests and illegally producing nitrogen oxide emissions (Lindwall 2023). The well-publicized 'Dieselgate' scandal, still reverberating today, is just one example of 'greenwashing' (Lindwall 2023). The term 'greenwashing' was coined in 1986 and refers to the "act of making false or misleading statements about the environmental benefits of a product or practice" (Lindwall 2023). Greenwashing strategies, found across industries, target either the overall corporate image or specific aspects such as manufacturing, supply chains, or working conditions exploiting the growing demand for fair, sustainable, and green practices through deliberate misrepresentation (OECD n.d.). Sustainable products increase sales, partly because 'greener' products can be marketed at a higher price on account of their favorable image (OECD n.d.). The Competition and Markets Authority conducted a global review of randomly selected websites in 2021, revealing that 40% of green claims made online are misleading (Moran, Flynn and O'Rourke 2024). The CSRD's comprehensive reporting obligations for non-financial company information have the potential to expose discrepancies between audited climate-related information and claims made in the press or in advertising thereby hampering greenwashing in the future (Moran, Flynn and O'Rourke 2024). Together with the explicit sustainability criteria of the EU Taxonomy Regulation and the requirements of the Sustainable Finance Disclosure

Regulation, the CSRD is a key element against greenwashing. Since becoming effective, the external audit of sustainability information has become mandatory for companies with over 750 employees (Vaessen 2023).

Auditing with limited assurance and, in the medium term, with reasonable assurance extends the audit scope, while increasing the reliability of sustainability information. Reporting on ESG and sustainability thus exposes companies to closer scrutiny and possible criticism (KPMG n.d.a). The audits ensure that sustainability reports are not merely marketing but reflect a genuine commitment to sustainability targets. Thus, the proper and credible review of these reports - namely the measurement of progress and assessment of sustainability performance - is key to building trust in sustainability reporting (PwC 2022). Misleading marketing claims as well as false reporting and technically incorrect claims could result in greenwashing allegations, with potentially fatal consequences such as reputational damage, loss of customers, or even legal disputes (PwC 2022).

5.5 Identification of Uncertainties

The final drivers of change to be examined in this project are uncertainties, which are elements with unpredictable outcomes (Van der Heijden 1996). Unlike trends or megatrends, uncertainties are inherently unpredictable and can shape different futures rather than indicating a single direction (Scarce and Fulton 2023). This makes them central to constructing multiple plausible futures, as their evolution can significantly influence the focal issue (Van der Heijden 1996). To derive relevant uncertainties, a thorough analysis of the audit industry and its external environment based on the PESTEL categories was undertaken.

The findings were discussed, refined, and consolidated in several team meetings to create a holistic list of uncertainties shaping the audit industry in 2035. Moreover, the research findings were discussed and validated in extensive consultation with Dr. Florian Klein. The final list of the 28 uncertainties and their extreme points are displayed below in Figure 3.

Additionally, **Error! Reference source not found.** provides a detailed explanation of all identified uncertainties.

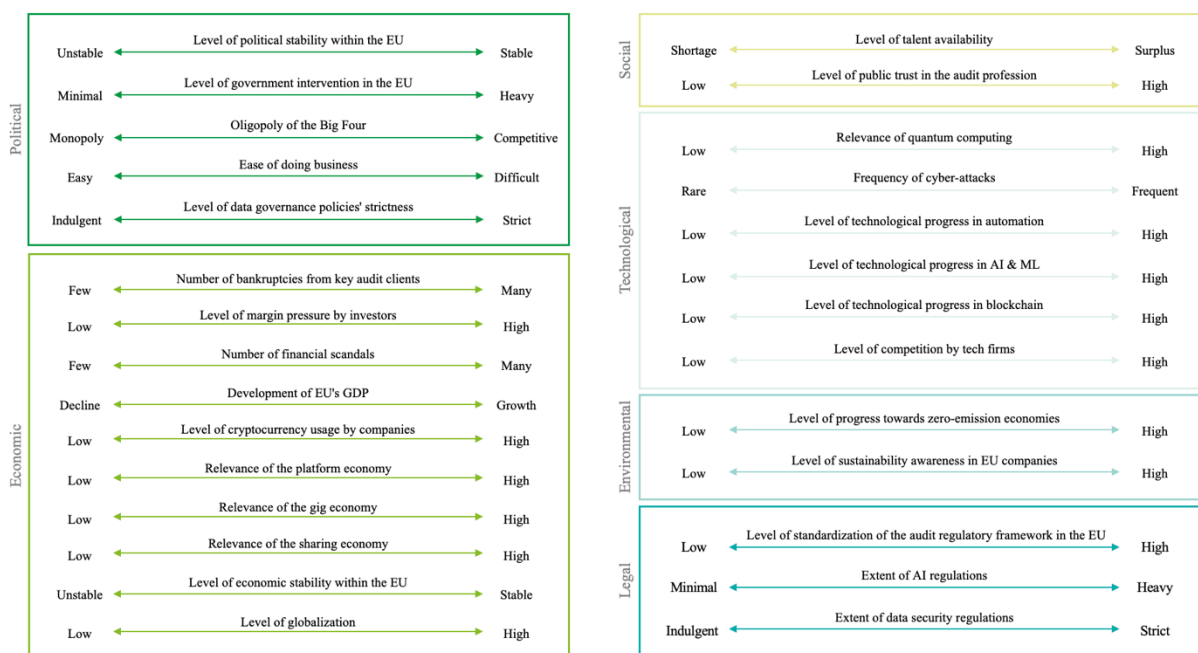


Figure 3 - Uncertainties with Configurations (Own illustration)

6. Phase III: Synthesize

The *Synthesize* phase focuses on identifying the two uncertainties with the greatest unpredictability and impact on the focal issue while being sufficiently independent from each other (Scarce and Fulton 2023). Aligned with the deductive scenario developing approach, these key uncertainties form a scenario matrix, resulting in four distinct scenarios with unique implications for the audit industry (Wright and Cairns 2011).

6.1 Evaluation and Mapping of Uncertainties

The methodological process started with a structured survey to gather insights from audit professionals and experts. In this survey, the participants were asked to rate all 28 pre-assessed uncertainties on a scale from 0 to 3 across two dimensions: level of uncertainty (from ‘not uncertain at all’ to ‘very uncertain’) and level of impact (from ‘very low impact’ to ‘very high impact’) (Figure 13 in Appendix 7). On September 26, 2024, the survey was emailed to 106 Deloitte audit professionals - out of which 32 were Partners, 51 Directors, and 23 Senior Managers. After closing the survey on October 4, 2024, 81 responses were collected, reflecting a remarkably high response rate of 76.42%. Additionally, the fact that 94% of the respondents had at least five years of experience in the audit industry (with 79% having more than ten years of auditing experience) further increased the survey result’s reliability (Figure 14 in Appendix 7). After closing the survey, all responses were standardized across both dimensions - impact, and uncertainty – using Equation 1. This resulted in a weighted score between 0 and 3 across the dimensions for each uncertainty, enabling a more accurate comparison and analysis of their impact on the audit industry.

$$X'_{ij} = \left[\frac{X_{ij} - \min_i}{R_i} * 2.9 \right] + 0.1$$

Where X'_{ij} is the scaled final value of uncertainty X on dimension i ;

X_{ij} is the average score of uncertainty X on dimension i ;

\min_i is the minimum value for dimension i ;

R_i is the range of dimension i

Equation 1 - Standardization of Survey Results

In the next step, the axes were positioned at the median values for both impact and uncertainty to construct the uncertainty-impact matrix, ensuring that each side of the axis represented 50% of the data points while effectively splitting the dataset into quadrants for more precise analysis. Consequently, the positions of all uncertainties within this uncertainty-impact matrix can be determined, as shown in Figure 4:

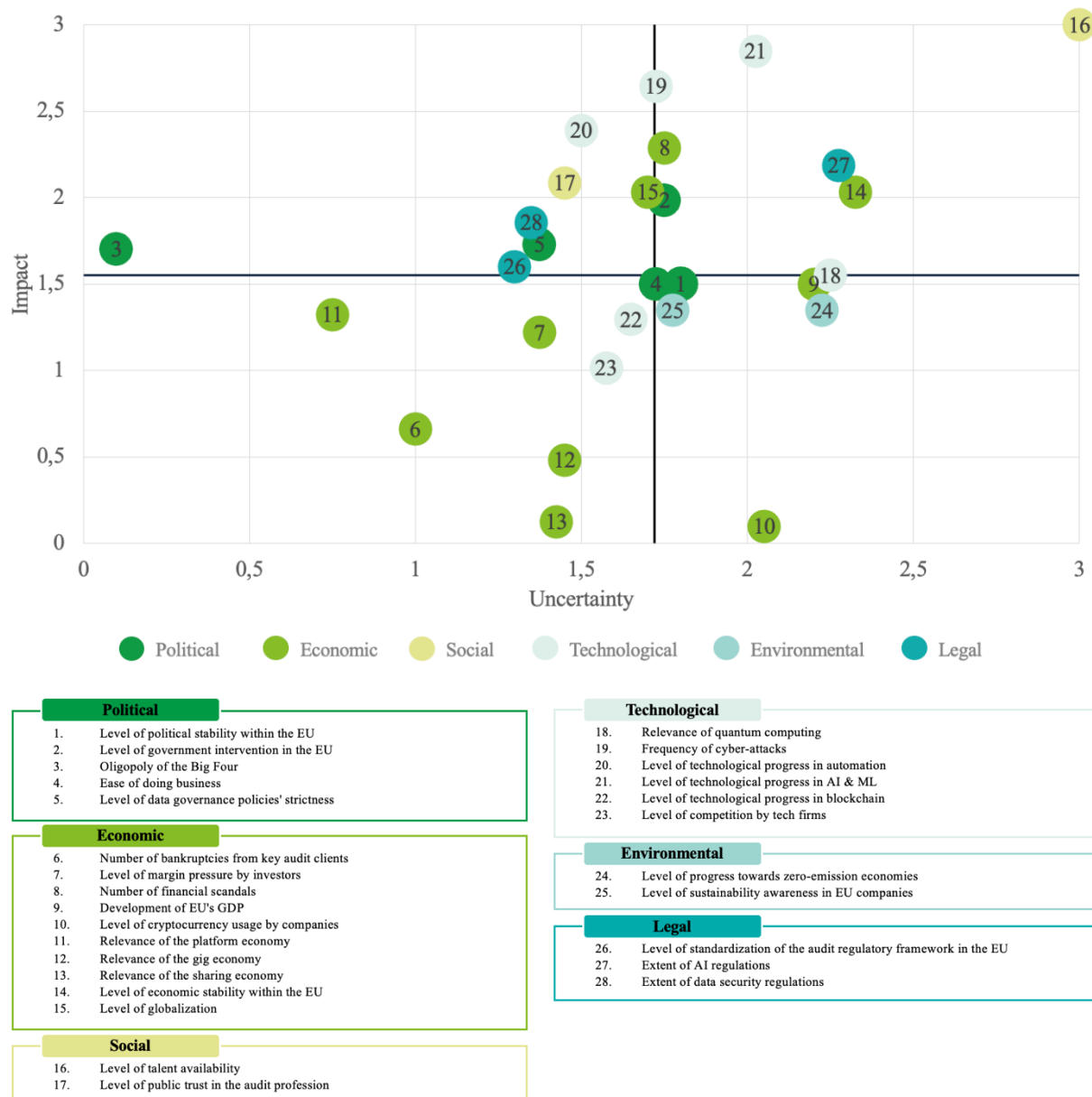


Figure 4 - Survey Results for Uncertainties (Own illustration)

The following uncertainties surpass both median thresholds and are therefore of highest strategic relevance for the scenario building process:

- *Extent of AI regulations*
- *Level of economic stability within the EU*
- *Frequency of cyber-attacks*
- *Level of government intervention in the EU*
- *Level of talent availability*
- *Level of technological progress in AI & ML*
- *Number of financial scandals*
- *Relevance of quantum computing*

6.2 Grouping Uncertainties

These uncertainties located in the upper right quadrant of the matrix were further examined for interdependencies and possible correlations (Figure 5). The goal was to aim for intercorrelated relationships by grouping the uncertainties into pools while ensuring sufficient independence between these pools. Two of the presented uncertainties focus on the economic area while demonstrating a high dependency level and can therefore be grouped together:

- *Level of government intervention in the EU*
- *Number of financial scandals*

Financial scandals frequently lead to heightened government intervention. A notable example is the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, which was introduced in the US following significant financial scandals in the early 2000s involving publicly traded companies such as Enron Corporation, Tyco International plc, and WorldCom (Kenton 2024). This legislation aimed to safeguard investors from fraudulent financial reporting by corporations and improve the accuracy and reliability of corporate disclosures (Kenton 2024).

Additionally, the following technology-focused uncertainties presented in the upper right quadrant show interdependencies and can therefore be grouped together:

- *Extent of AI regulations*
- *Frequency of cyber-attacks*
- *Level of technological progress in AI & ML*

With the surge in digital transactions and cloud-based services, the vulnerability to cyber-attacks is expected to rise (St. John 2024). Thus, the *Frequency of cyber-attacks* can determine the *Extent of AI regulations*. Also, the *Level of technological progress in AI & ML* will continue to transform the audit industry by enhancing data analysis, anomaly detection, and risk assessment capabilities, subsequently influencing the *Extent of AI regulations* within the industry (Caseware Staff 2024).

6.3 Identification of Key Uncertainties

After this grouping process, two non-correlated key uncertainties were identified to create and develop the scenario matrix containing four unique scenarios.

Key uncertainties are fundamental to understanding the future dynamics of the focal issue as they represent factors with a very high degree of unpredictability. Those uncertainties have a significant impact and potentially lead to major changes in the industry (Jester strategy n.d.). Moreover, the key uncertainties form the basis for scenario development and help define possible future outcomes (Jester strategy n.d.). To be effective, the key uncertainties must be sufficiently independent of each other to ensure that they represent different influences that shape the future in distinct ways (Jester strategy n.d.).

Level of talent availability emerged as the most prominent key uncertainty, positioned in the far upper right quadrant (Figure 5). It was logically chosen because the experts ranked it as the most impactful and uncertain driving factor.

Subsequently, an uncertainty that is independent of talent availability had to be selected as the second key uncertainty. *Relevance of quantum computing* had a low impact compared to the other uncertainties in this quadrant, and the identified group of uncertainties centering around the economy had a comparably low level of uncertainty. Moreover, as economic conditions significantly influence workforce mobility and employment opportunities (Smit, et al. 2020),

the *Level of economic stability within the EU* is not sufficiently independent of the *Level of talent availability*.

Consequently, the established group centered around technology was chosen as the second key uncertainty for the scenario matrix. Within this group, the *Extent of AI regulations* was selected as the driving force of the technological advancement pool with the highest independence to the *Level of talent availability*. Although the technological progress of AI can indirectly influence the availability of talent due to the possibility of AI replacing many jobs and reducing the need for human workers (Hazan, et al. 2024), the focus on AI regulations within that pool results in the necessary independence of these two key uncertainties.

Therefore, two distinct key uncertainties were identified: One key uncertainty is the *Level of talent availability*, while the other key uncertainty is the group centered around the *Extent of AI regulations*, *Frequency of cyber-attacks*, and *Level of technological progress in AI & ML*.

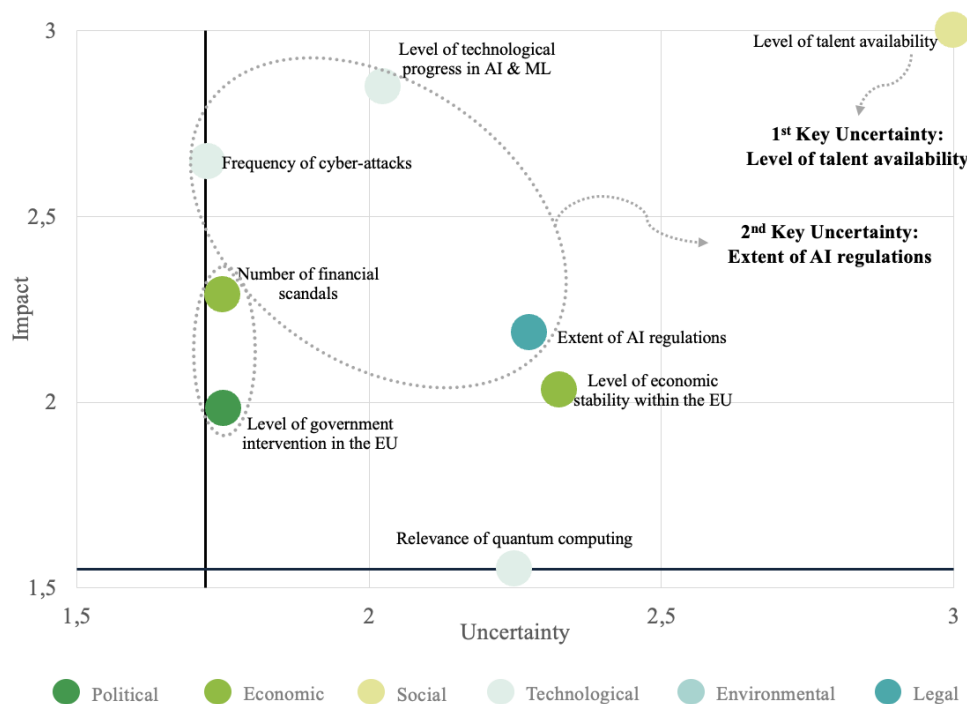


Figure 5 - Grouped Uncertainties and Identified Key Uncertainties (Own illustration)

6.4 Selected Key Uncertainties

The selected key uncertainties, the *Level of talent availability*, and the *Extent of AI regulations* emerged as pivotal factors and are further examined and deepened in the following section.

1st Key Uncertainty: Level of Talent Availability

The audit industry experiences major transformations driven by heightened client expectations, changing regulations, and the rise of AI (Thomson Reuters 2024a). Therefore, the *Level of talent availability* within the audit sector impacts the capacity of audit firms to adapt to the industry's ongoing revenue growth of 4.2% to USD 302.6 billion by 2030 (Global Industry Analysts, Inc. 2024), leading to the need to attract top talent skilled in new key areas (Thomson Reuters 2024a).

Several factors, such as a decline in college graduates or the complex certification requirements, have driven a talent shortage. The audit profession is now seen as less attractive, innovative, and exciting (Tomazin 2023). As a shortage of skilled auditors compromises the audit quality and efficiency, firms may assign inexperienced staff to complex audits, raising concerns about maintaining financial reporting standards and accountability (Mason n.d). Additionally, upskilling is vital for auditors as their required skills constantly change due to technological advancements and the increase of ESG reporting. A study conducted by Forbes Insights backs this as it shows that the need for technology skills for auditors rose from 40% in 2014 to 67% in 2016, communication skills increased from 41% to 60%, critical thinking from 52% to 65%, and investigative financial skills rose moderately from 52% to 59% (Forbes Insights 2017).

Moreover, standardized tasks with a focus on bookkeeping and data entry are expected to decline (Thomson Reuters 2024b), with 65% of information and data processing to be performed by machines by 2027 (Di Battista, et al. 2023), showcasing the ongoing evolution of the audit profession toward automation (Brown, et al. 2018).

The population within the EU is forecasted to peak in 2026 before gradually starting to decrease (Eurostat 2023a). This demographic shift will likely reduce the available workforce, making lifelong learning opportunities inevitable to increase talent levels (Scheijgrond and Donovan 2024). Therefore, these transformational processes in the job market demand a workforce able to leverage technology and perform more complex tasks. However, as of 2023, 44% of

EU citizens aged 16-74 lack basic digital skills. This is concerning since nine out of ten jobs will require digital competency skills (Teigland 2020).

2nd Key Uncertainty: Extent of AI Regulations

The *Extent of AI regulations* significantly impact the audit industry in the EU and will determine how companies adopt, deploy, and monitor AI technologies (European Court of Auditors 2024). The EU AI Act set standards for transparency, data security, ethics, and accountability (European Commission n.d.b). This regulation shapes the development of AI-driven tools, defines the scope of automation, and establishes the compliance processes that audit firms are required to follow (Adelakun 2022). These requirements have far-reaching implications for operational efficiency, as automation streamlines audits but requires robust oversight to ensure accuracy and reliability (Adelakun 2022). At the same time, the EU's restrictive AI policy harbors the risk of overregulation and high compliance costs, potentially jeopardizing innovation. Furthermore, the scope for interpretation of many provisions of the new act, along with potential further AI regulatory constraints, creates considerable uncertainty for companies (Deloitte 2024d). Additionally, the European Commission is promoting organizations' volunteer adoption of the AI Acts' standards through the AI Pact (European Commission 2024a). Over 130 companies have already joined it, to prepare for the implementation of the AI Act (SAS 2024). Conversely, limited regulations could enable AI's rapid adoption but increase privacy and ethics risks (Bird, et al. 2020). Thus, the balance of AI regulation impacts not only operational practices but also customer trust, public perception, and the long-term resilience of the industry in a technology-driven landscape (Mökander 2023). The *Level of technological progress in AI & ML* further complicates this challenge. As AI and ML capabilities advance quickly, auditing firms must continuously update their knowledge and tools to correctly assess these increasingly sophisticated systems (Mökander 2023).

The high uncertainty surrounding AI regulations presents a major challenge as the regulatory environment is still evolving, with unclear details regarding implementation and enforcement (Walter 2024). Audit firms face uncertainty both as users of AI in their processes and as providers of assurance on their clients' AI systems. The *Frequency of cyber-attacks* adds to this uncertainty, since the integration of AI increases the risk of cyber threats, putting additional pressure on compliance and security (Weitzman 2023). Auditors must assess the resilience of AI systems to cyber threats while adapting their methods to a dynamic regulatory landscape. This unpredictability, combined with fluctuations in industry-specific AI adoption and potential regulatory revisions (EY Global 2024), underscores the high level of uncertainty.

6.5 Development of Scenario Matrix

By intersecting the two key uncertainties *Level of talent availability* and *Extent of AI regulations*, the scenario matrix was created. The matrix, whose axes are each divided into two opposing configurations, leads to the conceptualizing of four distinct and plausible future scenarios for the audit industry in the EU by 2035 (Figure 6).

Crucially, creating the scenarios goes beyond just the intersection of two key uncertainties, incorporating external factors such as the identified megatrends, trends, and uncertainties, while offering a comprehensive view of forces shaping the industry's future. The deliberate focus on four scenarios ensures a balanced exploration of diverse futures. This approach ensures sufficient depth without the complexity that arises from managing an excessive number of scenarios. Furthermore, it enables extensive stakeholder engagement, fostering meaningful discussions and collaboration. In contrast, handling numerous scenarios would rely on a data-driven approach requiring computational resources, which can hinder strategic dialogue.

For the first axis, *Level of talent availability*, the 'Surplus of Talent' configuration represents an excess of highly skilled professionals, particularly in areas such as AI, data analytics, and ESG. This suggests that companies have access to the expertise required to meet the

technological and operational needs of the industry. In contrast, the ‘Shortage of Talent’ configuration indicates a lack of available professionals with the required skills, suggesting a more constrained talent market that could make it more difficult for companies to meet their evolving needs. On the second axis, *Extent of AI regulations*, the ‘Heavily Regulated’ configuration suggests a landscape where AI is governed by strict regulatory frameworks emphasizing control, transparency, and safety standards. On the other hand, ‘Minimal Regulated’ implies a more permissive environment with fewer restrictions, allowing for greater flexibility in the development and use of AI technologies without extensive oversight. Consequently, the scenario matrix was set up (Figure 6), leading to the following four scenarios: *Sky is the Limit*, *People in Control*, *Bottleneck Audit*, and *Automation Overload*. These scenarios showcase various unique relationships and interconnections of external and internal factors within the audit industry. Although the scenarios portray extreme and divergent worlds, they are nevertheless plausible and explicitly centered around the focal issue.

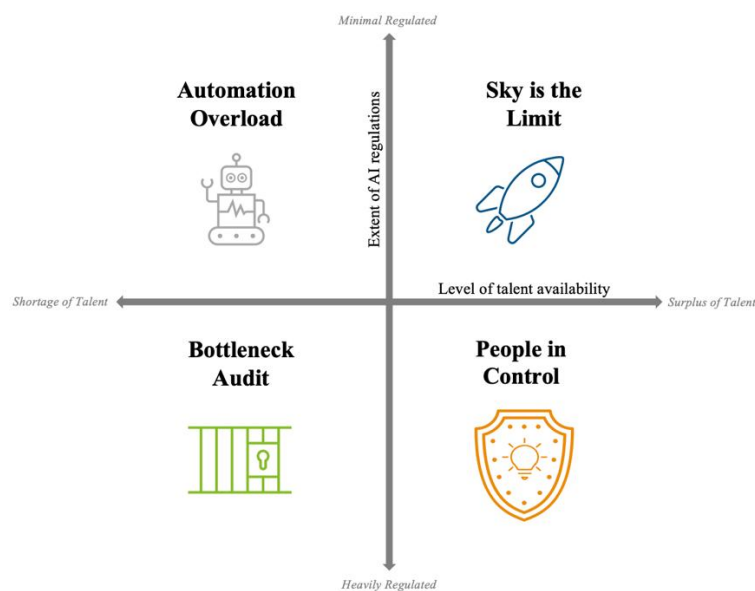


Figure 6 - Scenario Matrix (Own illustration)

6.6 Scenario Narratives

Based on this scenario matrix, a clear storyline, divided into a contextual and transactional analysis, was established for each of the four scenarios to provide clarity and depth.

The previously identified megatrends - digital transformation, demographic change, and climate change - along with the associated trends, are crucial for constructing coherent scenario narratives as they serve as foundational forces shaping each scenario's contextual and transactional dimensions. The contextual part of each narrative involves analyzing the six external PESTEL factors, while the transactional part focuses on the audit industry, its workforce, and clients. This structured approach resulted in four distinct scenario narratives, offering critical insights essential for strategic recommendations and informed decision-making.

Individual Part – Sven Henrik Thiergard

6.6.1 Scenario 1: Sky is the Limit

This is a world in which the EU thrives in a stable, innovative environment fueled by minimal AI regulation and significant investment in advanced technologies. The key to tech-driven economic growth is a surplus of skilled talent, AI-enabled automation, occupational transitions, and labor migration policies. The Big Four lead the audit industry with AI-powered efficiency and responsible AI governance, providing assurance to stakeholders, thus building trust in innovative technologies.

Contextual Analysis:

In this world, political and economic stability are fostered by digital transformation actively shaped by the EU and its member states. In the 2020s, a conservative EU agreed on a market-oriented policy for dynamic growth, prioritizing economic freedom and technological progress with less digital regulation to promote creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation (Letta 2024). This common economic policy also contributes to political stability, promoting greater unity not only in security, trade, and technological policy but also in political issues. The digital transition is proactively driven by EU investment in innovative progress, the promotion of public-private partnerships, and effective labor migration programs, enabling

companies to remain competitive in the global market (Creighton and Riedenstein 2024). To accelerate technology adoption, the EU is heavily investing in digital infrastructure, education, and research. AI-driven automation and consistent occupational transitions are counteracting the demographic shift. Specifically, AI now performs many routine and repetitive tasks, increasing the demand for workers in STEM-related (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and other high-skill professions (Hazan, et al. 2024). Additionally, the EU's innovation-focused economic policy attracts non-European investment, fueling dynamic growth and amplifying the EU's economic and political dominance.

In the race with other economic powers, the European economy benefits from minimal AI regulations and a deep talent pool (Csernatonni 2024). The EU's gross domestic product (GDP), both in absolute terms and relative to the rest of the world, has recovered from the downturn in the mid-2020s and has been growing steadily since then. This recovery is driven by significant progress in productivity, investment in digital infrastructure, and foreign direct investment (FDI). Moreover, the EU's investment-friendly and tech-advanced market attracts private capital, which incentivizes the founding, retention, and attraction of foreign high-tech companies that help evolve domestic innovation hubs. Major European players also relocate or even expand their operations in the region, while joint European funding initiatives as well as cross-border exchange and cross-sector alliances spur research projects. In this world, the EU plays a prominent role in adopting clean technologies and promoting the semiconductor industry (Giordano, et al. 2024). Furthermore, the EU successfully completed the Capital Markets Union as part of its common economic policy, with AI-driven market volatility fueling demand for risk management and compliance (Letta 2024). Occupational shifts driven by digital transformation have temporarily led to short-term labor disruptions and higher unemployment. However, effective upskilling and retraining initiatives are facilitating the re-employment of displaced workers into more value-adding roles. Complementing these efforts,

efficient labor migration policies prioritize the recruitment of top talent from Asia to drive technological innovation, which is supported by flexible labor market policies that promote entrepreneurship and business dynamics (Nath 2023).

Minimal AI regulation and human capital augmentation foster positive social outcomes in a stable, growing economy. Stricter immigration policies tackled the migration crisis of the mid-2020s, while effective labor migration strategies drew highly skilled talent to the EU (Deutsche Welle 2024). Low unemployment and high labor mobility are driving both social and job satisfaction and advances in technology are enhancing social services, enabling automated solutions such as “robot care” (Klein 2019). Tech-oriented education is the bedrock of digital literacy for Gen Z, representing most of the workforce, while corporate upskilling strategies have been established to adapt older workers to evolving skill requirements. A digitized workforce and advanced infrastructure drive digital mobility and remote working, fostering flexibility and better talent retention. As a result of social progress and mobility, there is a growing general approval of digitalization and AI, while attracting highly sought-after foreign talent (Klein 2019). Ethical concerns about AI have diminished due to the democratization of the digital ecosystem and increasing technological literacy among society. Moreover, the EU addresses cybersecurity risks with mandatory AI auditing by independent auditors (Mökander 2023).

Frontier technologies like AI are transforming the technology landscape, seamlessly integrating into both business and daily life. In this evolving environment, the EU’s digital ecosystem grows into a unified, data-driven single market, fostering innovation and accessibility. By converging AI and blockchain, digital processes become more secure and transparent, offering significant advantages to consumers and businesses (Renda 2024). The distributed ledger technology of blockchain serves as the backbone for a digital public infrastructure that supports digital identities and wallets, enabling consumers to monetize their personal data within a

thriving market for data commerce (The Future Laboratory 2023). Additionally, the secure and decentralized ecosystem supports direct-to-consumer commerce while curbing the dominance of Big Tech, paving the way for an open and collaborative AI landscape (Chynoweth 2024). Minimal AI regulations under the AI Act - focused on data protection, transparency, and integrity, streamlined approvals, and a decentralized ecosystem sustain Europe's competitiveness (Yee 2024).

As the environmental effects of global warming intensified dramatically in the 2020s (L. Cohen 2024), European governments stepped up their climate action efforts by leveraging advanced technologies to bolster their strategies. Backed by innovation-friendly legislation and government initiatives, the tech-based green transition not only contributes to climate protection but also to economic growth in establishing new industries, markets, and products (University of Cambridge 2023). Furthermore, AI drives sustainability by optimizing energy management, balancing supply and demand on the grid, and monitoring and reducing greenhouse emissions across various sectors: industry, agriculture, and transportation (Sandalow, et al. 2023). Despite the benefits, AI's energy footprint threatens to jeopardize the positive impact on the climate due to the soaring energy and cooling water demand of data centers.

The legal landscape is characterized by a regulatory framework receptive to innovation with minimal bureaucracy that allows companies more risk-taking and flexibility. These less restrictive regulations along with efficient approval procedures drive AI innovation and integration in diverse industries while attracting more risk-seeking investment (Giordano, et al. 2024). The EU AI Act evolved to urge a participatory approach to transparency and open-source AI, creating trust while reducing the administrative and financial burden for companies (Williams and O'Donnell 2024). AI and its standardization have opened the audit market to big tech companies. Voluntarily engaging trusted and independent auditors is not only key to

ensuring compliance with AI regulations and ethical standards but also informs stakeholders that a company is proactively and effectively managing AI risks (Zaidan and Ibrahim 2024).

Transactional Analysis

Industry: The audit industry is experiencing an era of dynamic growth and disruptive innovation dominated by the Big Four who bring the resources and skills to pioneer technological advances (Fiolleau, et al. 2024). By harnessing the power of AI, a deep talent pool, and the flexibility afforded by minimal AI regulations, audit firms are not just meeting traditional expectations, but are positioned to be an essential partner in business transformation. Since the entrepreneurial and tech-forward European market attracts foreign capital and preserves domestic companies in the region, the audit industry's growth within the EU is fueled by such heightened economic activity (Giordano, et al. 2024).

Market growth is driven not only by traditional financial audits but also by the demand for new services, such as continuous auditing or AI audits. Real-time financial information based on innovative blockchain auditing complements and ultimately replaces static audits, providing more future-oriented insights (Fiolleau, et al. 2024). The evolving AI audits - still voluntary but planned by EU policymakers as a mandatory AI governance mechanism - are based on best practices in financial auditing. To mitigate AI-related risks and build trust, both the EU and respective companies call for assurance by auditors as independent third parties (Mökander 2023). Big Tech is pushing into the audit market with low-cost automated audits for low-value clients such as SMEs, which were previously underserved, as regulatory barriers have been gradually lowered. However, AI-streamlined routine tasks and enhanced professional judgment allow auditors to focus on strategic insights, therefore hindering new market entrants that lack comparable superior audit quality (Fiolleau, et al. 2024). As technological progress accelerates, the demand for employing and retaining diverse, innovative talent escalates. To mitigate talent

turnover, the Big Four press for standardized EU-wide exams with a focus on the tech skills that are essential in the digital transformation (Thomson Reuters 2024b).

Employees: In 2035, the auditing workforce is characterized by technological expertise and a keen awareness of ESG-related topics (Thomson Reuters 2024b). To develop skilled employees, universities' business programs have adapted their instruction to encompass the teaching of the expertise required in the transformed skills environment.

In addition to the necessary technical capabilities, soft skills - such as creativity - are in high demand and serve as a key differentiator to prompt companies to also look for talent from non-business disciplines. Working with cutting-edge innovative technologies and employee mobility options attract tech-savvy talent to the industry. Employees value continuous learning as essential for career growth and job security, while older professionals often face occupational shifts or extensive upskilling and retraining to adapt to technological challenges (Farrell and Paquette 2023). Digital transformation has resulted in remote work and virtual teamwork becoming standard practice in the auditing industry, enhancing both productivity and job satisfaction. In addition to flexible working arrangements, innovative engagement strategies and career mobility attract top talent while strengthening employee retention (Hasson, Bagley and Eller 2023). To further ensure a low talent turnover, the auditor exam was revised to a more tech-oriented focus in response to the transformed economic landscape.

Clients: Against the backdrop of the disruptive digital transition, audit firms promote trust and transparency by providing assurance, enhancing quality and efficiency, and delivering added value to clients. In response to client needs beyond the traditional financial audit, audit firms redefine and expand their services to offer clients more relevant, forward-looking data to inform strategic decision-making. Continuous audits yield real-time insights, which, when integrated with Big Data analytics, enable more effective and timely identification of deficiencies and risks, helping clients to optimize their business processes (Knechel 2021). With heightened

awareness of AI risks, there is a strong demand for AI audits to assess model design, robustness, fairness, and ethical operation, addressing ethical concerns and threats such as cyber-attacks. Amid digital transformation, the Big Four drive innovation in partnership with large tech firms, focusing on tech-savvy, high-value clients. Smaller clients, lacking technical sophistication, do not widely deploy either AI or blockchain technology nor provide data amenable to sophisticated audits. With lower regulatory barriers, new players like Big Tech offer cost-effective, fully automated audit solutions for these low-value mandates (Fiolleau, et al. 2024).

Individual Part – Miguel Oliveira da Silva Justino

6.6.2 Scenario 2: People in Control

Individual Part – Alexander Thomas Schmitt

6.6.3 Scenario 3: Bottleneck Audit

Individual Part – Jakob Rinschen

6.6.4 Scenario 4: Automation Overload

6.7 Scenario Analysis and Comparison

A scenario comparison was created based on relevant assessment categories regarding the audit industry. These results, shown in Figure 7, were discussed and validated within the conducted workshop (Appendix 9).

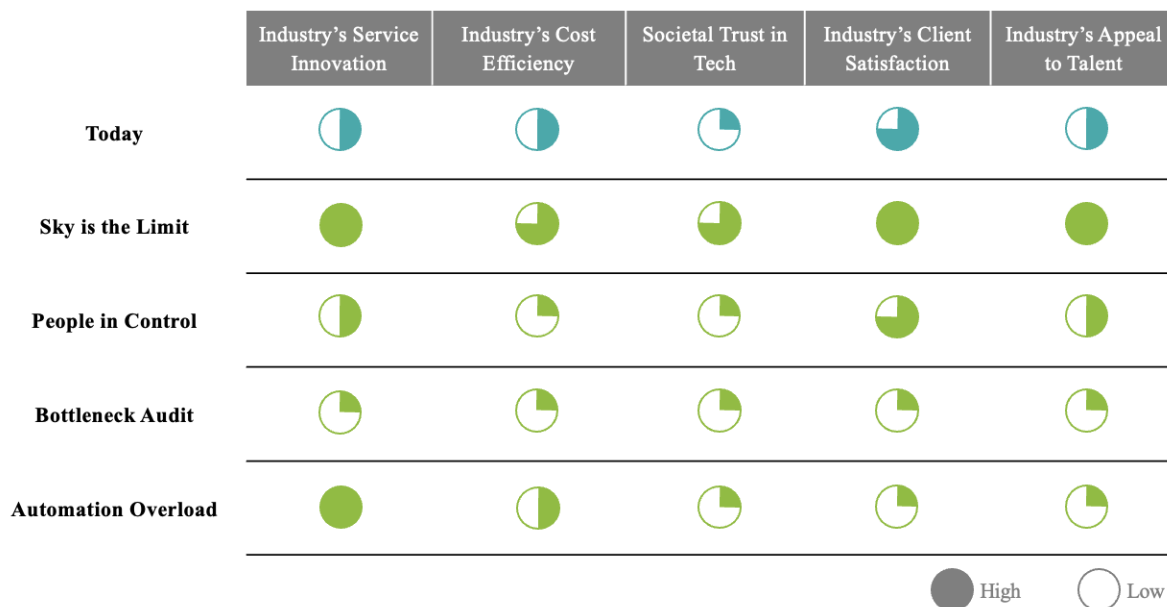


Figure 7 - Scenario Comparison (Own illustration)

This comparison enables several key findings. Firstly, service innovation and the industry's cost efficiency are expected to thrive in scenarios characterized by high levels of technological advancement and less extensive AI regulations. These conditions foster an environment conducive to disruptive innovation, marking a significant departure from today's more constrained landscape. Societal trust in technology, however, remains a persistent challenge as trust levels are projected to stay low, reflecting a continuation of current concerns and highlighting a need to address this early on.

Client satisfaction and the industry's appeal to talent appear to be closely tied to talent availability. If there is a surplus of talent, client satisfaction levels and the industry's appeal to talent are relatively high, consistent with today's standards. Conversely, scenarios with low talent availability show lower levels of client satisfaction and a lower industry's appeal to talent.

Assessing the most plausible trajectory for 2035, a scanning of recent events was used to understand ongoing dynamics: Recently, many European players across different industries announced major staff layoffs (Reuters 2024b). For example, Volkswagen plans to close plants in Germany – for the first time ever (Johnson 2024). Moreover, they announced implementing mass layoffs and cutting pay by 10% as they struggle with declining market share and profits due to mounting competition from low-cost Chinese electric vehicle makers (Johnson 2024).

Figure 15 in Appendix 8 shows the relative GDP development of China, the EU, India, and the US between 1980 and 2024. It highlights that the EU's share has experienced a gradual decline, decreasing from 28.6% in 1980 to a projected 17.3% in 2024. While China's economic ascent is notable, with its share of global GDP rising from a mere 2.7% in 1980 to an estimated 16.9% in 2024, India is experiencing a steady rise (Lu 2024). These projections are further exemplified by the ongoing demographic change, as a declining population and shrinking workforce (European Union 2023) are set to strain economic productivity further.

Amid worsening economic projections, nationalistic movements are surging (Green 2024).

Moreover, the recent development of AI technology is changing our future in an unprecedented way (Meier and Spichiger 2024). To ensure the trustworthy use of these systems, the EU has demonstrated its willingness to apply a stricter regulatory framework on AI. In August 2024 the EU Act's was emitted, ensuring extensive rules are being implemented prohibiting the use of AI, which it says poses an unacceptable risk. The European Commission is also promoting organizations' volunteer adoption of these standards through the AI Pact (European Commission 2024a). Over 130 companies have already joined the pact, helping stakeholders prepare for the implementation of the AI Act (SAS 2024). This showcases the EU's position on restricting the use of AI.

These pressures collectively point toward economic decline, political fragmentation, and a growing inability to address structural challenges, making scenario 3, *Bottleneck Audit*, the most plausible for 2035.

7. Phase IV: Act

In the *Act* phase, the scenario narratives' implications of the previous phase were converted into strategic recommendations for Deloitte (Luther and Ali 2022). After outlining the company's current business-level strategy, its strengths and weaknesses were examined in detail, followed by the development of recommendations for each scenario through a TOWS matrix, which considers external threats and opportunities arising in 2035 for each scenario. A workshop with Deloitte experts further refined these strategies, leveraging their industry expertise to craft tailored recommendations for emerging challenges and opportunities (Appendix 9).

7.1 Business-Level Strategy of Deloitte Audit & Assurance

As the world's largest professional services network (Deloitte 2024c), Deloitte aims to become the global "scale and growth leader" (Deloitte n.d.h) in all Deloitte businesses, strengthening its global market position through sustainable organic growth and strategic acquisitions, primarily in tech companies (Tracxn 2024). The Deloitte Audit & Assurance business pursues quality leadership, focusing on the highest audit quality and technology innovation through alliance and technology relationships with leading tech companies such as Google, AWS, and NVIDIA to build an AI-powered organization (Deloitte 2024c). Committed "to maximize the value of tech-driven transformation" and responsible business practices, the company's emphasis is on high-quality, customized services that prioritize quality over pricing, positioning the firm as a premium provider in auditing (Deloitte 2024c). Deloitte has built a reputation for delivering sustainable, long-term value through "advanced technologies, sector depth, and expertise in critical business functions" to serve clients and society (Deloitte 2024c). Moreover, the company takes a 'think global, act local' approach by aligning its service standards and technological solutions globally, while tailoring strategies to the unique demands of regional markets (Deloitte n.d.d).

To simplify its go-to-market strategy and reduce costs, Deloitte is undergoing a significant reorganization process in the 2025 financial year, cutting its business units from five to four (Foy and Foley 2024). The new structure is designed to better tailor its “market-leading multidisciplinary capabilities” to clients’ strategic issues and counteract potential silo thinking. Consequently, the company is able to better respond to client needs and market changes, while maintaining its commitment to exceptional quality (Deloitte 2024c).

7.2 Deloitte’s identified Strengths and Weaknesses

As the largest service company in the world (Deloitte n.d.g), Deloitte has a very specific footprint in terms of geography and technology. Consequently, its strengths and weaknesses vary from scenario to scenario. This section highlights the key strengths and weaknesses of the SWOT analysis, which serves as the basis for developing the TOWS matrixes in the next stage. The TOWS matrix builds on the SWOT results by aligning Deloitte’s internal strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats, enabling the framing of targeted strategic recommendations for Deloitte.

Strengths:

Attractive to tech-oriented top talent: Deloitte emphasizes and invests heavily in its own talents, recognizing the necessity of skillful and culture-driven people. Due to current transformation processes in the audit industry, mainly driven by digital transformation, Deloitte sets itself apart by making its audit departments attractive to tech-savvy talents. This is underlined by the establishment of the Deloitte Technology Academy and the creation of the Deloitte University (Deloitte 2023). It is a vital strength in the scenario *Sky is the Limit*, as Deloitte aims to recruit top talent from the highly skilled surplus in tech-related fields.

Cutting-edge technological infrastructure and innovation capabilities: Deloitte excels in its quality of audits with its innovative mindset. Emerging technologies such as generative AI and

'Omnia', the first end-to-end data-driven globally integrated audit platform, are already implemented into their systems and methodology (Deloitte 2023). This strength is impactful in two of the scenarios, *Sky is the Limit* and *Automation Overload*, as both scenarios are driven by minimal AI regulations, allowing Deloitte to innovate and invest more freely.

Diverse portfolio of service offerings: Deloitte offers a rich portfolio of services, including Audit & Assurance, Consulting, Tax & Legal, and Risk Advisory, allowing them to serve various industries and clients while diversifying through different revenue streams (Deloitte n.d.j). Consequently, this enables them to continue investing and innovating in new emerging fields such as cybersecurity, AI audits, and continuous auditing in the future (Deloitte n.d.j). This strength is relevant in the *People in Control* scenario, where Deloitte capitalizes on the abundant talent pool, drawing on the availability of skilled professionals across diverse fields.

Extensive capabilities and expertise to handle diverse regulations: Deloitte saw recent success in more effectively leveraging amounts of data “for enhancing business process efficiency” and thus “ensuring regulatory and legal compliance” (Wheeler 2024). By utilizing its expertise and financial resources, Deloitte demonstrates a mindset and capabilities that allow it to navigate flawlessly through the dynamic regulatory landscape. This is a relevant strength for Deloitte in *People in Control* and *Bottleneck Audit*, as the audit industry faces a strict regulatory landscape.

Strong global reputation for audit quality and integrity: Deloitte describes its global reputation as one of the “most cherished assets” (Deloitte 2023), and is known for its high audit quality with its clients. Performing these quality audits requires independence and integrity, which Deloitte highlights at the forefront of its core values (Deloitte 2023). This strength is prevalent in every scenario and is undoubtedly the essence of Deloitte's identity.

Substantial financial resources: Deloitte has established itself as the global service leader and has developed substantial financial resources over the years. This allows them to continuously innovate and invest in new talents and improved processes, such as the Project 120 portfolio, where USD 1.4 billion is strategically invested into new projects and initiatives that will reshape and transform the audit industry (Deloitte 2023). For the *Bottleneck Audit* scenario, this is a significant strength, as a strong financial foundation provides a critical ‘safety net’, enabling strategic investments and the attraction of rare talent in an unstable world.

Weaknesses:

Company structure at issue over not splitting audit and consulting: Deloitte recently announced not to split up its audit and consulting businesses (Foy and Foley 2024). While Deloitte argues that its unified structure strengthens client offerings (Accountancy Age 2023), a conflict of interest persists, potentially limiting the ability to serve audit and consulting needs for the same client. This leads to a weakness in the innovation-driven scenario *Sky is the Limit*.

Cost-intensive audit offerings for SME clients: Deloitte’s cost-intensive audit offerings are only conditionally suitable for the SME market, where affordability, flexibility, and personalized service are key priorities (Hattersley 2022). This misalignment limits Deloitte’s ability to build long-term relationships with smaller clients (Huck 2016) and capitalize on their growth potential (Hattersley 2022). This is especially a weakness in the *Bottleneck Audit* scenario as it hinders increased business activities with SME clients, even though this activity would be needed to ensure stable business in an unstable, declining economy.

High cybersecurity risk due to accelerating tech-related external data handling: Deloitte faces significant challenges in managing complex ESG and digital security compliance across jurisdictions, which is both resource-intensive and demanding for an organization of its scale. As a service provider to nearly 90% of the Fortune Global 500 (Deloitte n.d.g), its extensive

global operations and significant client engagement highlight its recognition of exposure to cyber threats and vulnerabilities (Deloitte 2022). As the worlds around *Sky is the Limit* and *Automation Overload* are tech-driven, this presents a significant weakness for Deloitte there.

High operational and compliance costs: Deloitte's extensive global operations, with over 450,000 employees across 150+ countries (Deloitte 2024c) demand substantial expenses in people and infrastructure. In *People in Control*, resource strain and reliance on manual processes limit flexibility in adapting to regional compliance demands. In *Bottleneck Audit*, high operational costs hinder flexible adaptability to external disruptions in a volatile environment. Moreover, in *Automation Overload*, Deloitte's position as the largest professional service provider with a vast workforce significantly burdens efficiency and automation efforts.

High talent turnover: Deloitte, like the entire public accounting sector, faces high employee turnover due to factors such as extensive working hours (Nickerson 2024). In *Sky is the Limit*, this is a weakness tied to the profession's 'boring' image, limited internal mobility, and negative views of the certification exam. In *People in Control*, it hinders retention, increases recruiting and onboarding costs, and risks brain drain. In *Bottleneck Audit*, talent shortages challenge Deloitte's ability to maintain workforce consistency and service quality.

Limited data handling capabilities: Deloitte traditionally relies on human input for data analysis. However, data handling capabilities are constrained by the data volume that humans can process (Artsyl Technologies n.d.). This is a weakness, especially in the *People in Control* scenario, which emphasizes a preference for human labor over automation due to strict regulatory oversight. The reliance on manual data processing increases the chance of errors and inefficiencies, especially in the audit industry that evolves to analyze high volumes of data.

7.3 TOWS Analysis and Resulting Strategic Recommendations

7.3.1 Scenario 1: Sky is the Limit

Talent surplus and minimal AI regulations are the two outcomes of the key uncertainties that frame this scenario in 2035. The following strategic recommendations are derived from the insights gained from the scenario narrative to address the challenges under these scenario conditions.

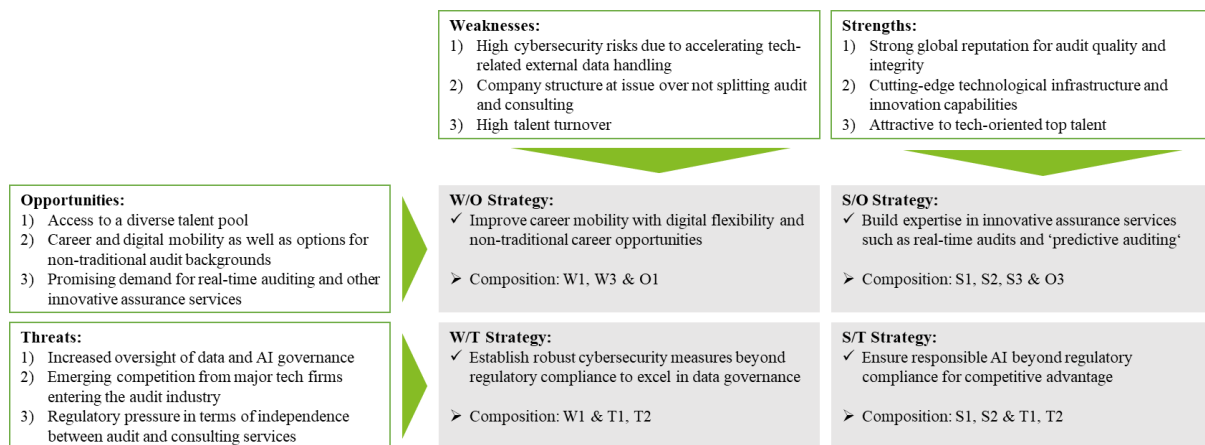


Figure 8 - TOWS Matrix for Scenario 'Sky is the Limit' (Own illustration)

S/O Strategy: With its excellent global reputation for audit quality and integrity and its cutting-edge technological capabilities, Deloitte is well positioned to take a lead in promising innovative assurance services, in particular in connection with blockchain technology, such as in real-time audits or 'predictive auditing'. Capitalizing on its infrastructure, integrating blockchain and AI is key to establishing a coherent continuous audit ecosystem that supports smart audit practices. Furthermore, the seamless integration of cloud-based platforms into the client's IT environment provides real-time blockchain data for analysis using predictive Big Data analytics and AI. 'Predictive auditing' enables robust, evidence-based assurance through blockchain, as well as projections of future business dynamics with meaningful insights for clients' strategic decision-making.

Moreover, the increasing adoption of blockchain technology for financial reporting presents Deloitte with the opportunity to further expand its portfolio of assurance services, such as by

“auditing the technical integrity of a blockchain network and the logic behind a smart contract.”
(Kontozis 2022).

S/T Strategy: Deloitte’s strengths in audit quality and integrity make it uniquely equipped to address responsible AI and its governance, bolstering trust in the firm and strengthening its competitive edge. In addition to establishing clear guidelines beyond regulatory compliance, Deloitte should leverage the potential of integrating AI and blockchain technologies from a security perspective. The convergence of AI and blockchain facilitates the mastery of issues such as data security and transparency, as the integrity of the underlying data is ensured by the blockchain.

Deloitte’s proactive approach to responsible AI not only reassures the public and oversight bodies of its commitment to integrity but also provides a competitive advantage over Big Tech that are seeking to enter the audit sector. While these companies are focused on tech innovation, their approach tends to lack sufficient attention to audit rigor and AI governance.

W/T Strategy: In response to accelerating cybersecurity threats, Deloitte needs to prioritize investments in robust cybersecurity measures beyond compliance to safeguard sensitive client data, because of AI’s growing prevalence in business operations. AI has inherent vulnerabilities due to its reliance on extensive data access and processing, often via open or closed APIs connecting disparate applications and systems. In the absence of adequate safeguards, this configuration heightens the risk of data breaches and misuse, specifically in a multi-client context where AI models process data from diverse sources (Deloitte AI Institute 2023). Strict access control mechanisms, robust encryption protocols, and continuous monitoring are of paramount importance for detecting and preventing unauthorized data access. In addition, model isolation practices ensure that client data remains secure in isolated environments to mitigate the risk of cross-client contamination.

Transparent communication of its cybersecurity measures serves to reinforce stakeholder trust while positioning the company as a reliable and security-conscious key player within the audit industry.

By ensuring compliance with its rigorous governance standards, Deloitte may also mitigate the risk of heightened regulatory scrutiny concerning the mandatory independence of its audit and consulting services. Nonetheless, Deloitte should strategically plan ahead for a mandated structural split, which remains a looming threat.

W/O Strategy: Providing flexible and engaging career options is crucial to retaining qualified professionals. Rotation programs across diverse service groups allow employees to gain additional experience in consulting or technology services and have the potential to boost job satisfaction. Dynamic career options not only serve to reduce turnover but also appeal to those seeking non-traditional career paths within the audit industry. A revised, technology-focused standardized examination that Deloitte and other Big Four firms endorse would also attract more technically proficient candidates and retain them in the profession. High-achieving students should be actively engaged early in their careers, for instance, by collaborating with universities to develop unique learning tools such as ‘digital audit case studies’ for interactive practice in class. Students’ experiences of innovative audit practices should be complemented by specific internship shortcuts for high performers.

In addition to career mobility, digital labor mobility is a critical aspect of talent retention. Its advanced technology infrastructure enables Deloitte to offer flexible remote and hybrid work arrangements expanding across borders, providing employees with a more optimal work-life balance. Lastly, virtual collaboration and digital training platforms facilitate career advancement outside of conventional office environments to foster a flexible, supportive working culture.

7.3.2 Scenario 2: People in Control

7.3.3 Scenario 3: Bottleneck Audit

7.3.4 Scenario 4: Automation Overload

7.4 Strategic Prioritization Matrix

The final step of the *Synthesize* phase is to evaluate and categorize the derived strategic recommendations based on their risk and utilization level (Schühly, et al. 2019). This evaluation relies on well-educated guesses and workshop insights, as detailed in the in-depth justification of strategies in Appendix 10.

To implement strategy under uncertainty, three types of moves are relevant: ‘No Regret’ moves, ‘Real Options’, and ‘Big Bets’. Consequently, these recommendations were plotted accordingly in the Strategic Prioritization Matrix, which is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**

‘No Regret’ moves are actions that deliver value regardless of how the future unfolds. ‘Real Options’ allow for flexibility, enabling companies to scale investments based on market developments while balancing risks and rewards. ‘Big Bets’ involve large commitments with significant potential payoffs or losses depending on the scenario (Courtney, et al. 1997). This process enables Deloitte to make informed decisions about which strategies should be prioritized, and which require future developments to determine their applicability. Given the frameworks’ dynamic approach, Deloitte should reassess ‘Real Options’ and ‘Big Bets’ as they can dynamically change categorization depending on how critical uncertainties unfold in the future.

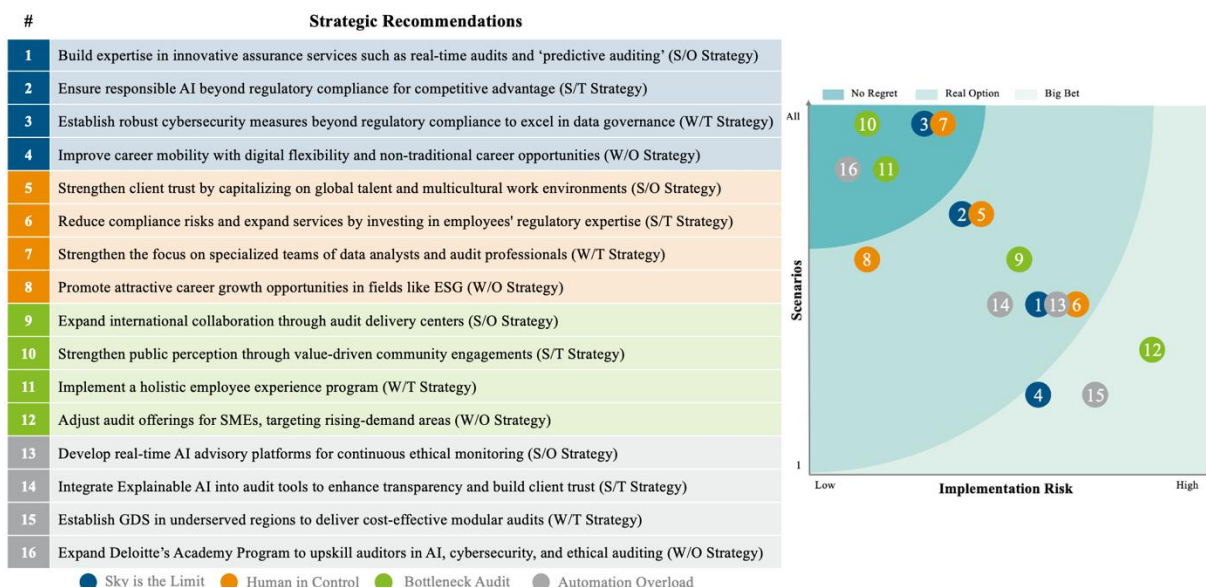


Figure 9 - Strategic Prioritization Matrix (Own illustration)

8. Phase V: Monitor

The monitoring phase is a vital part of the *Intuitive-Logics School*. It is crucial to assess the progression of the elaborated scenarios by identifying early indicators. Establishing early indicators for each scenario enables organizations to detect, ahead of competitors, the direction in which the future is unfolding (Shoemaker 1995). By identifying these early signals, Deloitte can put strategies in place to effectively respond to emerging realities (Searce and Fulton 2023).

8.1 Early Indicators

Early indicators are often described as the ‘first signs’ of significant upcoming changes that could potentially influence the trajectory of the world toward one emerging scenario (Ogilvy 2022). Systematically monitoring these indicators allows Deloitte to take flexible and proactive steps in anticipation of substantial shifts in the market. The swift and agile implementation of previously identified strategies affords the company a decisive competitive advantage (Rosenberg 2019). Figure 10 displays each scenario’s identified early indicators, their status quo, and sources for monitoring future developments.

Scenario	Early Indicator	Status Quo	Monitor Source
Sky is the Limit	Expansion of EU investment program (InvestEU)	USD 372 billion until 2027	InvestEU Indicators
	Revision of the EU AI Act	Initial Adoption	Global AI Law and Policy Tracker
	Increase in ratio of EU Venture Capital investment	USD 57.3 out of USD 312.3 billion (18.35%) in 2023	Dealroom.co (VC Investments)
People in Control	Increase of bilateral migration agreements	Increasing	European Migration Network
	EU Blue Card issuance growth	89.037 documents issued in 2023	Eurostat database
	Increase in EU AI Act compliance rates	Initial Adoption	EU law tracker
Bottleneck Audit	Decrease in the EU’s relative GDP	USD 18,590.72 billion (17.50%) in 2023	World Bank Group
	Decrease in FDI inflow	USD 58,645 million in 2023	World Investment Report
	Decrease in EU countries’ IMD World Competitiveness Ranking	Average ranking: 33.19 (out of 67) in 2024	IMD World Competitiveness Booklet
	Decrease of EU unicorns’ ratio	107 out of 1,227 (8.72%) in December 2024	World Population Review
Automation Overload	Increase in EU’s adoption rate of AI systems	33% in 2023	World Economic Forum
	Increase in EU’s government spending on AI and automation	Around €4 billion until 2027	European Commission Reports
	Increase in EU’s market size of AI-powered tools	€42.83 billion in 2024	Statista database
	Increase in deployment of autonomous systems in audit	Increasing	IFAC Reports; Big Four Reports

Figure 10 - Early Indicator Overview (Own illustration)

8.1.1 Scenario 1: Sky is the Limit

Changes in the following early indicators anticipate shifts in the business environment towards the defined scenario. An **expansion of the EU investment program (InvestEU)** would indicate that the EU has recognized the growth potential of an innovation ecosystem. Under the InvestEU program, the EU is funding sustainable infrastructure and digital innovations until 2027, mobilizing around €372 billion in investments with a €26.2 billion budget guarantee (Verbeek and Lundqvist 2021). A significant boost and extension of EU investments in technological innovation, such as quadrupling the guarantee for another 10 years, and a comprehensive reform for tech-oriented education would be definite indicators of a trajectory towards a tech-driven industry.

The **revision of the EU AI Act** (Directorate-General for Communication 2024) would indicate a shift towards an innovative regulatory framework. Previous amendments to legislation, such as to the Digital Services Act, underline the EU's willingness to revise regulations (European Commission 2024b). A gradual relaxation of the AI Act, which initially imposes significant constraints on AI development processes and entails extensive administrative requirements, would reduce the regulatory burden on companies, thereby enhancing innovation and competitiveness.

A substantial **increase in the ratio of EU Venture Capital investment** would be another strong indicator of real progress towards a European innovation ecosystem. The completion of a fully functioning Capital Markets Union requires concerted efforts by EU leaders to address persistent structural issues and harmonize national regulatory and fiscal policies. A single set of rules with concrete steps towards a deep, integrated capital market would remove cross-border barriers for investors and mobilize the private investment needed for high-tech start-ups. A rise in venture capital investment in the EU would serve as an indicator of a successful strengthening of the venture capital sector, thereby laying the groundwork for a European innovation powerhouse (Mack and Lindner 2024).

8.1.2 Scenario 2: People in Control

8.1.3 Scenario 3: Bottleneck Audit

8.1.4 Scenario 4: Automation Overload

9. Limitations and Further Research

This project was carried out in close partnership with Deloitte and provided valuable insights into the audit industry in the EU by 2035. However, it has limitations, and further research is suggested to overcome these. While choosing the *Intuitive-Logics School*, it is recommended to consider other scenario planning approaches to broaden the analytical scope.

Only two key uncertainties were selected in the scenario building process. This approach ensured a concrete focus on the four resulting future scenarios and allowed for an extensive collaboration with Deloitte experts, providing a more comprehensive yet manageable analysis.

While the project focused on analyzing megatrends, trends, and uncertainties, as they were deemed most relevant to understanding the forces shaping the industry's future, other elements were not considered in scanning the external environment. Wildcards, being low-probability but high-impact events, were excluded as the project focused on more tangible drivers. Predetermined elements were omitted because they generally provide less room for strategic innovation due to their inevitable outcomes. While valuable for detecting emerging trends, weak signals were excluded due to their speculative nature and the challenge of integrating them into actionable insights within the project's time frame.

Additionally, the project derives strategic implications for Deloitte by focusing exclusively on its internal perspective without incorporating insights from other audit firms that could enrich the analysis. This approach was chosen deliberately as Deloitte is the audit industry's largest player, making its expertise and insights particularly relevant.

Moreover, the analysis focuses solely on the EU, treating it as a unified entity and not accounting for regulatory or cultural differences across EU member states. Specific national regulations and social nuances were not detailed, and financial projections specific to Deloitte in the EU were not feasible due to its EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa) structure, which complicates isolating EU-specific financial data.

10. Conclusion

The audit industry in the EU is undergoing profound changes driven by technological advancements, evolving regulatory frameworks, and demographic shifts. This project has aimed to address these shifts by leveraging the *Intuitive-Logics School* of scenario planning, creating plausible futures that inform Deloitte's strategic decision-making. By identifying and analyzing two key uncertainties – *Level of talent availability* and *Extent of AI regulations* - the project presents a framework for understanding the forces that will significantly influence the industry's evolution by 2035 and offers strategic recommendations to strengthen Deloitte's market leadership.

Technological advancements, particularly in AI and ML, are poised to redefine the audit profession. These innovations promise to enhance the speed and accuracy of audits while enabling real-time data analysis and anomaly detection. However, integrating these technologies introduces new challenges, including the ethical use of AI, regulatory compliance, and the need to maintain public trust in automated systems. The industry's ability to navigate these complexities will depend on its capacity to integrate new technologies while maintaining the highest standards of transparency and accountability.

Demographic changes further complicate the future of auditing. As the European workforce ages, the industry faces a dual challenge of attracting younger talent while retaining the institutional knowledge of seasoned professionals. This requires a focus on creating flexible work environments, fostering cross-generational collaboration, and investing in upskilling initiatives to address the growing demand for a blend of technical and interpersonal skills. Moreover, the industry must adapt to the changing expectations of the next-generation workforce, which prioritizes flexibility, purpose-driven work, and technological integration.

The regulatory landscape is also shifting, with a heightened focus on sustainability and ESG reporting. The EU's CSRD exemplifies the increasing demand for transparency in

non-financial metrics. Auditors are now tasked with verifying ESG-related disclosures, which include complex datasets such as carbon emissions, diversity metrics, and supply chain sustainability. This shift represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Firms that adapt quickly by building expertise in ESG metrics and employing advanced technologies to streamline analysis will meet regulatory requirements and enhance their value proposition to clients.

A central element of this study was a comprehensive survey conducted with Deloitte's audit professionals. Its results led to the identification of the two key uncertainties and ultimately, the development of four plausible scenarios that offer a structured way for Deloitte to prepare for diverse plausible futures. Each scenario highlights unique challenges and opportunities. The strategic recommendations derived from the TOWS analysis emphasize the importance of aligning internal strengths with external opportunities while mitigating weaknesses and threats. This project also categorizes recommendations into actionable clusters by employing a Strategic Prioritization Matrix, ensuring that Deloitte can make informed and impactful decisions across all scenarios, prioritizing identified 'No Regret' moves.

A critical component of Deloitte's success will be its ability to anticipate and respond to early indicators of change. These indicators, identified for each scenario, provide a practical tool for constantly monitoring changes and dynamically adjusting strategies. This proactive approach enhances Deloitte's resilience and positions it as a forward-thinking leader in the audit industry. In conclusion, the audit industry's transformation is inevitable, but its trajectory will depend on today's strategic decisions. By embracing digital transformation, adapting to regulatory demands, and addressing demographic challenges, Deloitte can continue to lead the industry with innovation and resilience. The recommendations and insights provided in this thesis equip Deloitte with the tools to navigate the complexities of the future, ensuring it remains a trusted and forward-thinking partner for its clients in an increasingly dynamic and uncertain environment.

11. Bibliography

- Abdelaziz, Hamdy. 2019. *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Curriculum Systems: Towards an Orbit-Shifting Dialogue*. In-Progress Reflection, UNESCO, International Bureau of Education. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371258>.
- Abnett, Kate. 2023. *EU warns countries are off track for 2030 climate goal*. December 18. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/eu-warns-countries-are-off-track-2030-climate-goal-2023-12-18/>.
- Abramson, Karen. 2024. *Five Trends Shaping the Future of ESG Reporting*. February 2. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.esginvestor.net/five-trends-shaping-the-future-of-esg-reporting/>.
- Accountancy Age. 2023. *To split or not to split, that is the question*. November 17. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.accountancyage.com/2023/11/17/to-split-or-not-to-split-that-is-the-question/>.
- Accountancy Europe. 2024. *Demystifying technology's impact on auditing: What do experts say?* May 24. Accessed December 7, 2024. <https://accountancyeurope.eu/publications/demystifying-technologys-impact-on-auditing-what-do-experts-say/>.
- Adelakun, Beatrice Oyinkansola. 2022. "Ethical Considerations in the Use of AI for Auditing: Balancing Innovation and Integrity." *European Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Finance Research* 10 (12): 91-108. Accessed November 7, 2024. <https://ejournals.org/ejaifr/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2024/06/Ethical-Considerations.pdf>.
- Agarwal, Nikita, Abhishek Shirali, Paul Welti, and Edward Woodcock. 2022. *What matters: How to scale advanced analytics in corporate functions*. November 21. Accessed

- December 16, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/what-matters-how-to-scale-advanced-analytics-in-corporate-functions>.
- Akbar, Muhammad Azeem, Arif Ali Khan, and Sami Hyrynsalmi. 2024. "Role of quantum computing in shaping the future of 6 G technology." *Information and Software Technology* 170. Accessed October 5, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infsof.2024.107454>.
- Akhtar, Mohammad Amir Khusru, Mohit Kumar, and Anand Nayyar. 2024. *Socially Responsible Applications of Explainable AI*. Vol. 551, in *Towards Ethical and Socially Responsible Explainable AI*, by Mohammad Amir Khusru Akhtar, Mohit Kumar and Anand Nayyar, 261-350. Springer Cham. Accessed December 4, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66489-2_9.
- Ali, Sajid, Tamer Abuhmed, Shaker El-Sappagh, Khan Muhammad, Jose M. Alonso-Moral, Roberto Confalonieri, Riccardo Guidotti, Javier Del Ser, Natalia Díaz-Rodríguez, and Francisco Herrera. 2023. "Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI): What we know and what is left to attain Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence." *Information Fusion* 99. Accessed December 2, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.inffus.2023.101805>.
- Alles, Michael G., Alexander Kogan, and Miklos A. Vasarhelyi. 2008. *Audit Automation for Implementing Continuous Auditing: Principles and Problems*. Department of Accounting, Business Ethics & Information Systems, Rutgers Business School, Newark, NJ 07102: Rutgers Business School. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://raw.rutgers.edu/MiklosVasarhelyi/Resume%20Articles/RESEARCH%20&%20WORKING%20PAPERS/audit%20automation.pdf>.
- Alonso, Cristian, Siddharth Kothari, and Sidra Rehman. 2020. *How Artificial Intelligence Could Widen the Gap Between Rich and Poor Nations*. December 2. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2020/12/02/blog-how-artificial-intelligence-could-widen-the-gap-between-rich-and-poor-nations>.

- Al-Sayyed, Saleh Mohammed, Shaher Falah Al-Aroud, and Lena Mustafa Zayed. 2021. "The effect of artificial intelligence technologies on audit evidence." *Accounting 7*: 281-288. Accessed September 29, 2024. doi:10.5267/j.ac.2020.12.003.
- Altman, Steven A., and Caroline R. Bastian. 2023. *The State of Globalization in 2023*. July 11. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://hbr.org/2023/07/the-state-of-globalization-in-2023>.
- Amer, Muhammad, Tugrul U. Daim, and Antonie Jetter. 2013. "A review of scenario planning." *Futures* 46: 23-40. Accessed October 7, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2012.10.003>.
- Anderson, Janna, and Lee Rainie. 2023. *As AI Spreads, Experts Predict the Best and Worst Changes in Digital Life by 2035*. Pew Research Center. Accessed September 26, 2024. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/06/PI_2023.06.21_Best-Worst-Digital-Life_2035_FINAL.pdf.
- Ardelean, Alexandra. 2013. "Auditors' Ethics and their Impact on Public Trust." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 92: 55-60. Accessed November 7, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.08.637>.
- Artsyl Technologies. n.d. *The Human vs. Machine Showdown - Can AI Really Conquer Data Processing?* Accessed December 7, 2024. <https://www.artsyltech.com/blog/the-human-vs-machine-showdown-can-ai-really-conquer-data-processing>.
- ATD Research. 2022. *2022 State of the Industry*. ATD Research. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.td.org/product/p/192207>.
- Aura Intelligence. 2024. *AI Startups Targeted by Big Tech: How Google, Microsoft, and Amazon Are Securing Top AI Talent*. November 26. Accessed November 29, 2024. <https://blog.getaura.ai/ai-startups-targeted-by-big-tech>.
- Banholzer, Matt, Ben Fletcher, Laura LaBerge, and Jon McClain. 2023. *Companies with innovative cultures have a big edge with generative AI*. August 31. Accessed October

- 11, 2023. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/companies-with-innovative-cultures-have-a-big-edge-with-generative-ai>.
- Bannister, Catherine, and Deborah Golden. 2020. *Ethical technology and trust*. Deloitte. January 15. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/tech-trends/2020/ethical-technology-and-brand-trust.html>.
- Barker, Sean. 2022. *Why Community Engagement Is A Crucial Piece Of A Thriving Company Culture*. January 27. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2022/01/26/why-community-engagement-is-a-crucial-piece-of-a-thriving-company-culture/>.
- Barrett, Philip, and Sophia Chen. 2021. *The Economics of Social Unrest*. August. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2021/08/economics-of-social-unrest-imf-barrett-chen.htm>.
- Bassett, Jack. 2023. *Cyberattacks: a growing threat for accountancy firms*. May 1. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://global.lockton.com/gb/en/news-insights/cyberattacks-a-growing-threat-for-accountancy-firms>.
- Bauman, Charles. 2024. *Peering through the fog: How businesses can turn geopolitical risk into opportunity*. February 23. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://cicero-group.com/insights-business-geopolitical-risks-into-opportunity/>.
- BDO Deutschland. n.d. *Regulierung der Abschlussprüfung*. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://www.bdo.de/de-de/themen/fisg/fisg/regulierung-der-abschlussprüfung>.
- Bell, Dr. Matthew. 2021. *Why ESG performance is growing in importance for investors*. March 9. Accessed December 16, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_gl/insights/assurance/why-esg-performance-is-growing-in-importance-for-investors.
- Bernardo, Vítor. 2023. *TechDispatch - Explainable artificial intelligence*. Technology and Privacy Unit of the European Data Protection Supervisor, European Union, Publications

- Office of the European Union. Accessed December 16, 2024. https://www.edps.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/23-11-16_techdispatch_xai_en.pdf.
- Biehler, Nadine, David Kipp, and Anne Koch. 2024. *The Potential of Bilateral Migration Agreements*. Comment, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. Accessed November 22, 2024. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2024C47_BilateralMigrationAgreements.pdf.
- Bierstaker, James L., Priscilla Burnaby, and Jay Thibodeau. 2001. "The impact of information technology on the audit process: an assessment of the state of the art and implications for the future." *Managerial Auditing Journal* 16 (3): 159-164. Accessed August 29, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02686900110385489>.
- Bird, Eleanor, Jasmin Fox-Skelly, Nicola Jenner, Ruth Larbey, Emma Weitkamp, and Alan Winfield. 2020. *The ethics of artificial intelligence: Issues and initiatives*. Study, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, Brussels: European Parliament. Accessed November 19, 2024. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/6644>.
- Bloom, David E. 2020. *Population 2020*. March. Accessed October 6, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/03/changing-demographics-and-economic-growth-bloom>.
- Bloomberg Professional Services. n.d. *Climate and Nature Solutions*. Accessed October 4, 2024. https://www.bloomberg.com/professional/solutions/sustainable-finance/natural-climate-solutions/?utm_medium=Adwords_SEM&utm_source=pdsrch&utm_content=EMEA_ESGClimate_2024&utm_campaign=834340&tactic=834340&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwxsm3BhDrARIsAMtVz6P_Cy7t.
- Bohne, Raphael. 2023. *Combined revenue of the Big Four accounting/audit firms worldwide from 2009 to 2023*. December 13. Accessed December 5, 2024.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/473959/big-four-accounting-firms-global-combined-revenue/>.

Bohne, Raphael. 2024. *Value of the global sharing economy 2021 and 2023, with 2027 and 2031 forecast*. April 11. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/830986/value-of-the-global-sharing-economy/>.

Bowers, Ashley. 2022. *Follow Your Futures Compass: How to Identify and Frame Focal Issues*. May 2. Accessed September 26, 2024. <https://tfsx.com/2022/05/follow-your-futures-compass-how-to-identify-and-frame-focal-issues/>.

Bradfield, Ron, George Wright, George Burt, George Cairns, and Kees van der Heijden. 2005. "The origins and evolution of scenario techniques in long range business planning." *Futures* 37 (8): 795-812. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2005.01.003>.

Brown, Justine, Tom Gosling, Bhushan Sethi, Blair Sheppard, Carol Stubbings, John Sviokla, Jon Williams, Daria Zarubina, and Liz Fisher. 2018. *Workforce of the future: The competing forces shaping 2030*. PwC. Accessed October 14, 2024. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/services/people-organisation/workforce-of-the-future/workforce-of-the-future-the-competing-forces-shaping-2030-pwc.pdf>.

Bughin, Jacques, Eric Hazan, Sree Ramaswamy, Michael Chui, Tera Allas, Peter Dahlström, Nicolaus Henke, and Monica Trench. 2017. *Artificial intelligence: The next digital frontier?* Discussion Paper, McKinsey Global Institute. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/advanced%20electronics/our%20insights/how%20artificial%20intelligence%20can%20deliver%20real%20value%20to%20companies/mgi-artificial-intelligence-discussion-paper.ashx>Google.

Bughin, Jacques, Jeongmin Seong, James Manyika, Lari Hämäläinen, Eckart Windhagen, and Eric Hazan. 2019. *Notes from the AI frontier*. Discussion Paper, McKinsey & Company. Accessed October 31, 2024.

https://www.mckinsey.de/~ /media/mckinsey/locations/europe%20and%20middle%20east/deutschland/news/presse/2019/2019-02-11%20ai%20in%20europe%20mgi/mgi_tackling%20europes%20gap%20in%20digital%20and%20ai_feb%202019.ashx.

Burt, George, George Wright, Ron Bradfield, George Cairns, and Kees van der Heijden. 2006. "The Role of Scenario Planning in Exploring the Environment in View of the Limitations of PEST and Its Derivatives." *International Studies of Management & Organization* 36 (3): 50-76. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2753/IMO0020-8825360303>.

Camebridge Dictionary. n.d. *Government intervention*. Accessed December 3, 2024. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/government-intervention>.

Camfferman, Kees, and Jacco L. Wielhouwer. 2019. "21st century scandals: towards a risk approach to financial reporting scandals." *Accounting and Business Research* 49 (5). Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00014788.2019.1614267>.

Canadian Accountant. 2019. *Is Big Tech a threat to Big Four Audit?* February 16. Accessed October 11, 2024. <https://www.canadian-accountant.com/content/business/is-big-tech-a-threat-to-big-four-audit>.

Cantor, Shannon. 2024. *Big 4 vs mid-tier accounting firms: Which path is right for your career?* June 12. Accessed November 8, 2024. <https://www.becker.com/blog/career/big-4-vs-mid-tier-accounting-firms-which-path-is-right-for-your-career>.

Caselli, Francesca, Huidan Lin, Frederik Toscani, and Jiaxiong Yao. 2024. *Migration into the EU: Stocktaking of Recent Developments and Macroeconomic Implications*. Working Paper, International Monetary Fund. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400289552.001>.

- Caseware Staff. 2024. *The Impact of AI on Auditing and Financial Reporting*. June 26. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.caseware.com/au/resources/blog/the-impact-of-ai-on-auditing-and-financial-reporting/>.
- Cassels, Wade, Jane Traub, Kevin Alvero, and Jessica Fernandez. 2019. "The Pain of Automation." *ISACA Journal* 4: 14-18. Accessed September 28, 2024. https://www.isaca.org/-/media/files/isacadp/project/isaca/articles/journal/2019/volume-4/the-pain-of-automation_joa_eng_0719b.pdf.
- Cavaciuti-Wishart, Elissa, Sophie Heading, Kevin Kohler, and Saadia Zahidi. 2024. *The Global Risks Report 2024*. Insight report, World Economic Forum, Cologny/Geneva: World Economic Forum. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/>.
- Cave, Dan. 2023. *Audit sector can tackle Big Four dominance through collaboration, experts say*. October 4. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://www.accountancyage.com/2023/10/04/audit-sector-can-tackle-big-four-dominance-through-collaboration-experts-say/>.
- Certa. 2024. *Challenges and Solutions in AI-Driven Compliance*. June 11. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.certa.ai/blogs/challenges-and-solutions-in-ai-driven-compliance>.
- Chakravorti, Bhaskar. 2024. *AI's Trust Problem*. May 3. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://hbr.org/2024/05/ais-trust-problem>.
- Chang, Matthew. 2024. *Navigating Talent Acquisition and Retention in the Era of Remote and Hybrid Work*. June 10. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.btiexecutivesearch.com/navigating-talent-acquisition-and-retention-in-the-era-of-remote-and-hybrid-work/>.

- Chen, James. 2024a. *BRICS: Acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa*. August 11. Accessed December 12, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brics.asp>.
- Chen, James. 2024b. *Unicorn: What It Means in Investing, With Examples*. July 19. Accessed November 11, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/u/unicorn.asp>.
- Choo, Seah Gek, Junne Koh, El'fred Boo, Low Kin Yew, Premila Gowri Shankar, and Tong Yen Hee. 2021. *The Future of Audit - An evolving financial reporting ecosystem in Singapore*. Centre for Corporate Governance, Deloitte. Accessed September 1, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sg/Documents/cxo-programs/sg-cxo-future-of-audit.pdf>.
- Chynoweth, Victoria. 2024. *Web3 Meets AI: Blockchain Technology Revolutionizes The AI Landscape*. May 8. Accessed October 24, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/digital-assets/2024/05/08/web3-meets-ai-blockchain-technology-revolutionizes-the-ai-landscape/>.
- Cilingir, Dilek. 2024. *The evolution of audit skills in an era of complex regulation, disclosure and increasing transparency*. July 15. Accessed September 22, 2024. <https://www.accountancyage.com/2024/07/15/the-evolution-of-audit-skills-in-an-era-of-complex-regulation-disclosure-and-increasing-transparency/>.
- Cisco. 2024. *Privacy as an Enabler of Customer Trust*. Cisco 2024 Data Privacy Benchmark Study, Cisco. Accessed November 24, 2024. https://www.cisco.com/c/dam/en_us/about/doing_business/trust-center/docs/cisco-privacy-benchmark-study-2024.pdf.
- Cleartax. 2023. *Ease of doing business*. December 18. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://cleartax.in/glossary/ease-of-doing-business>.

- Cohen, Diana. n.d. *The True Cost of Not Providing Employee Training*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/the-true-cost-of-not-providing-employee-training>.
- Cohen, Li. 2024. *Global climate disaster inevitable if emissions aren't drastically reduced by 2035, U.N. warns*. October 25. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/climate-change-un-report-disaster-emissions-future/>.
- Coi, Giovanna. 2024. *Mapped: Europe's rapidly rising right*. May 24. Accessed October 13, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/mapped-europe-far-right-government-power-politics-eu-italy-finalnd-hungary-parties-elections-polling/>.
- Colaert, Veerle A. 2018. "RegTech as a Response to Regulatory Expansion in the Financial Sector." Accessed September 30, 2024. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2677116>.
- Colbert, Amy, Nick Yee, and Gerard George. 2016. "The Digital Workforce and the Workplace of the Future." *Academy of Management Journal* 59 (3). Accessed December 7, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4003>.
- Cong, Yu, Hui Du, and Miklos A. Vasarhelyi. 2018. "Technological Disruption in Accounting and Auditing." *Journal of Emerging Technologies in Accounting* 15 (2): 1-10. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2308/jeta-10640>.
- Consultancy.eu. 2022. *European companies increasingly moving to reshore Asia production*. March 2. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://www.consultancy.eu/news/7430/european-companies-increasingly-moving-to-reshore-asia-production>.
- Cook, Jennifer. 2024. *Will Baby Boomers Bankrupt Social Security?* May 8. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/022516/will-baby-boomers-bankrupt-social-security.asp>.
- Cooper, Dan, Lisa Peets, Marty Hansen, Sam Jungyun Choi, and Marianna Drake. 2024. *European Commission Announces New Package of AI Measures*. February 14.

- Accessed December 8, 2024. <https://www.insideprivacy.com/artificial-intelligence/european-commission-announces-new-package-of-ai-measures/>.
- Cordova-Pozo, Kathya, and Étienne A.J.A. Rouwette. 2023. "Types of scenario planning and their effectiveness: A review of reviews." *Futures* 149. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2023.103153>.
- CPA Credits. 2021. *Can You Be an Accountant Without a CPA?* February 25. Accessed November 8, 2024. <https://cpacredits.com/resources/accountant-without-a-cpa/#:~:text=If%20you%20are%20interested%20in,limiting%20in%20the%20long%20run.>
- Credly Team. 2023. *The Cost of Non-Compliance for Training Providers in Highly Regulated Industries*. June 28. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://learn.credly.com/blog/the-cost-of-non-compliance-for-training-providers-in-highly-regulated-industries>.
- Creighton, Lucinda, and Clara Riedenstein. 2024. *Boosting Europe's Digital Leaders: A New Momentum for the D9+*. April 18. Accessed October 23, 2024. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/boosting-europes-digital-leaders-a-new-momentum-for-the-d9/>.
- Crypto.com. 2024. *What Is Cryptocurrency? A Comprehensive Guide for Beginners*. August 21. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://crypto.com/university/what-is-cryptocurrency>.
- Csernaton, Raluca. 2024. *Charting the Geopolitics and European Governance of Artificial Intelligence*. March 6. Accessed October 23, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/03/charting-the-geopolitics-and-european-governance-of-artificial-intelligence?lang=en>.
- Daly, Kevin, and Tadas Gedminas. 2022. *The Path to 2075 - Slower Global Growth, But Convergence Remains Intact*. Global Economics Paper, Goldman Sachs. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/pdfs/insights/pages/gs->

research/the-path-to-2075-slower-global-growth-but-convergence-remains-intact/report.pdf.

- D'Aprile, Paolo, Hauke Engel, Stefan Helmcke, Solveigh Hieronimus, Tomas Nauclér, Dickon Pinner, Godart van Gendt, Daan Walter, and Maaïke Witteveen. 2020. *How the European Union could achieve net-zero emissions at net-zero cost*. December 3. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/sustainability/our-insights/how-the-european-union-could-achieve-net-zero-emissions-at-net-zero-cost>.
- Davenport, Thomas H., and Nitin Mittal. 2023. *All-in on AI*. Harvard Business Review Press. Accessed December 4, 2024.
- Day, Amanda. 2024. *Beyond boundaries: How remote work benefits employers*. January 11. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://remote.com/blog/remote-work-benefits-for-employers>.
- De Vries, Gijs. 2023. *Accounting for Net Zero: The Role of Audit Institutions*. March 13. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://blog-pfm.imf.org/en/pfmblog/2023/03/accounting-for-net-zero-the-role-of-audit-institutions>.
- De Waal, Beatrice. 2023. *The EU Blue Card: a tool for demand-driven immigration*. February 10. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.europeangeneration.eu/single-post/the-eu-blue-card-a-tool-for-demand-driven-immigration>.
- Delarue, Marie-Laure. 2021. *How can a high-quality audit help provide certainty in uncertain times?* December 1. Accessed December 3, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_ps/insights/assurance/high-quality-audits-bring-confidence-to-capital-markets.
- Delechat, Corinne C., Giovanni Melina, Monique Newiak, Chris Papageorgiou, Ke Wang, and Nikola Spatafora. 2024. *Economic Diversification in Developing Countries – Lessons from Country Experiences with Broad-Based and Industrial Policies*. Departmental

- Paper, International Monetary Fund. Accessed December 16, 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400240201.087>.
- Deliu, Delia. 2024. "Sustaining the Sustainable Sustainability": Leveraging Digitalization and Emerging Technologies by the Auditor in Providing Assurance on Sustainability Reporting." *Audit Financiar* 22 (174): 301-319. Accessed November 29, 2024.
doi:10.20869/AUDITF/2024/174/009.
- Deloitte. 2016. *New EU audit legislation*. Deloitte. Accessed October 3, 2024.
[https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/dk/Documents/governance-risk-compliance/Revisionsudvalg_New_EU_legislation_eng\(005\).pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/dk/Documents/governance-risk-compliance/Revisionsudvalg_New_EU_legislation_eng(005).pdf).
- Deloitte. 2018. *The Auditor Of The Future Isn't Who You Think*. December 14. Accessed August 29, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deloitte/2017/12/20/the-auditor-of-the-future-isnt-who-you-think/>.
- Deloitte. 2019. *Deloitte Academy: From knowledge to excellence*. Deloitte. Accessed December 16, 2024.
<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/az/Documents/academy/Deloitte%20Academy.pdf>.
- Deloitte. 2022. *Quarterly Financial Reporting Brief*. Deloitte. Accessed November 21, 2024.
<https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-zone2/ie/en/docs/services/audit-assurance/2023/quarterly-financial-reporting-brief-01102022.pdf>.
- Deloitte. 2023. *Deloitte US 2023 Audit Quality Report*. 2023 Audit Quality Report, Deloitte. Accessed November 22, 2024.
<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/audit/us-2023-audit-quality-report.pdf>.

- Deloitte. 2024a. *2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey*. Deloitte. Accessed September 25, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/docs/campaigns/2024/deloitte-2024-genz-millennial-survey.pdf?dlva=1>.
- Deloitte. 2024b. *Deloitte 2024 CxO Sustainability Report: Signs of a shift in business climate action*. Sustainability Report, Deloitte. Accessed November 29, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/docs/about/2024/deloitte-2024-cxo-sustainability-report.pdf>.
- Deloitte. 2024c. *Deloitte reports FY2024 revenue*. September 12. Accessed September 13, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/about/press-room/global-revenue-announcement.html>.
- Deloitte. 2024d. *Deloitte Survey: Scepticism towards EU AI Act*. September. Accessed December 6, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/dl/en/pages/legal/articles/survey-ai-act.html>.
- Deloitte. 2024e. *Future of Financial Crime*. January 30. Accessed October 7, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/services/financial-advisory/perspectives/future-of-financial-crime.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.a. *About us*. Accessed September 23, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/de/de/services/consulting/services/about-center-for-the-long-view.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.b. *Andreas Wermelt*. Accessed September 3, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/de/de/profiles/awermelt.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.c. *Deloitte Analytics*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/gr/en/pages/deloitte-analytics/solutions/audit.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.d. *Deloitte organizational structure*. Accessed December 8, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/about/governance/network-brand-alliances.html>.

- Deloitte. n.d.e. *Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann*. Accessed September 27, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/de/de/about/people/profiles.benedikt-brueggemann+39f33a2b.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.f. *Learning and development*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/cn/en/pages/careers/articles/Learning-and-developmentIgraduatesILife-At-Deloitte.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.g. *Our heritage*. Accessed October 5, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/about/story/purpose-values/our-history.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.h. *Risk and opportunity management*. Accessed December 8, 2024. https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/about/governance/global-impact-report/risk-management.html?icid=gir24_riskopp.
- Deloitte. n.d.i. *The impact of blockchain technology on audit*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/audit/articles/impact-of-blockchain-in-accounting.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.j. *Vast services. Rich experience. Real results*. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/services.html>.
- Deloitte. n.d.k. *Community involvement*. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://www.deloitte.com/ng/en/about/people/social-responsibility/community-involvement.html>.
- Deloitte AI Institute. 2023. *A new frontier in artificial intelligence*. Deloitte AI Institute. Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-us-ai-institute-generative-artificial-intelligence.pdf>.
- DeMars, Cheryl. n.d. *The Power of Inclusive Benefits: Driving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Workplace*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://the-alliance.org/blog/the->

power-of-inclusive-benefits-driving-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei-in-the-workplace/.

Deutsche Welle. 2024. *European Parliament agrees on stricter EU migration rules*. April 10. Accessed October 23, 2024. <https://www.dw.com/en/european-parliament-agrees-on-stricter-eu-migration-rules/a-68782568>.

Dhar, Julia. 2024. *Gen Z: They Want To Work Remotely And In The Office*. September 18. Accessed September 25, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juliadhar/2024/09/18/gen-z-they-want-to-work-remotely-and-in-the-office/>.

Di Battista, Attilio, Sam Grayling, Elsebet Hasselaar, Till Leopold, Ricky Li, Mark Rayner, and Saadia Zahidi. 2023. *Future of Jobs Report 2023*. Insight Report, Cologny/Geneva: World Economic Forum. Accessed October 16, 2024. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2023.pdf.

Directorate-General for Communication. 2024. *AI Act enters into force*. August 1. Accessed November 11, 2024. https://commission.europa.eu/news/ai-act-enters-force-2024-08-01_en.

Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs. 2017. *Ease of doing business in the euro area*. Quarterly Report on the Euro Area (QREA), Vol. 16, No. 2, European Commission, European Commission, 21-29. Accessed October 7, 2024. https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2017-10/ip060_en_ii_ease_business.pdf.

Dixon-Fyle, Sundiatu, Kevin Dolan, Dame Vivian Hunt, and Sara Prince. 2020. *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*. McKinsey & Company. Accessed December 16, 2024. https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters#/.

Dollard, Matt, Mike Graziano, Katie Landy, and Brian Winne. 2023. *Margin pressure requires shift from 'grow at all costs' to profitability*. July 25. Accessed October 1, 2024.

<https://rsmus.com/insights/economics/margin-pressure-requires-shift-from-grow-at-all-costs-to-profitability.html>.

Donegan, Thomas, David Wakeling, Hilary Sunghee Seo, Brice Henry, Sandy Collins, Laurie-Anne Ancenys, Karishma Brahmhatt, et al. 2024. *Zooming in on AI - #5: AI under financial regulations in the U.S., EU and U.K. – a comparative assessment of the current state of play: part 1*. September 23. Accessed December 6, 2024. <https://www.aoshearman.com/en/insights/ao-shearman-on-tech/zooming-in-5-ai-under-financial-regulations-in-the-us-eu-and-uk-a-comparative-assessment-part-1>.

DPO Centre. 2024. *How data protection builds customer trust and loyalty*. October 28. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.dpocentre.com/how-data-protection-builds-customer-trust-and-loyalty/>.

Durand-Hayes, Sabine, Myles Gooding, and Brian Crane. 2024. *PwC's Voice of the Consumer Survey 2024: Shrinking the consumer trust deficit*. May 15. Accessed November 29, 2024. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/c-suite-insights/voice-of-the-consumer-survey.html>.

Edelman, Margot. 2024. *Technology's tipping point: Why now is the time to earn trust in AI*. March 21. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/03/technology-tipping-point-earn-trust-ai/>.

Ehret, Todd. 2023. *Where AI will play an important role in governance, risk & compliance programs*. August 24. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/corporates/ai-governance-risk-compliance-programs/>.

Elliott, Robert, and Huijue Kelly Duan. 2022. "The Future of Auditing: An Interview with Robert Elliot." *Journal of Emerging Technologies in Accounting* 19 (2): 23-27. Accessed August 29, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2308/jeta-10823>.

- Elommal, Najoua, and Riadh Manita. 2022. "How Blockchain Innovation could affect the Audit Profession: A Qualitative Study." *Journal of Innovation Economics & Management* 37 (1): 37-63. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.3917/jie.pr1.0103>.
- Espinoza, Javier. 2024. *EU ministers approve 'status quo' rules for gig economy workers*. March 11. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/97bda226-c200-4240-bd8e-ba1924d8c613>.
- EU Blue Card. n.d. *Directive EU Blue Card (EU 2021/1883) repealing the 'previous' EU Directive 2009/50/EG on the EU Blue Card*. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.eubluecard.nl/new-eu-blue-card/>.
- Euronews. 2024. *Disruptive attacks double in EU in recent months, cybersecurity chief says*. May 29. Accessed October 11, 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/next/2024/05/29/disruptive-attacks-double-in-eu-in-recent-months-cybersecurity-chief-says>.
- European Commission. 2018. *Workforce generational changes*. October 12. Accessed September 25, 2024. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/topic/changing-nature-work/hyper-connected-tech-savvy-millennials-workforce-rises-2030_en.
- European Commission. 2019. *The European Green Deal sets out how to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, boosting the economy, improving people's health and quality of life, caring for nature, and leaving no one behind*. December 11. Accessed December 3, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_6691.
- European Commission. 2020. *Business and industry*. Directorate-General for Communication, European Commission, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessed October 7, 2024. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/685613>.

- European Commission. 2021. *Questions and Answers: Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive proposal*. April 21. Accessed September 30, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_1806.
- European Commission. 2022. *Study on the Audit Directive (Directive 2006/43/EC as amended by Directive 2014/56/EU) and the Audit Regulation (Regulation (EU) 537/2014)*. Final Report, European Commission, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/study-on-the-audit-directive-directive-200643ec-as-EV0120603ENN.pdf>.
- European Commission. 2024a. *AI Pact*. December 13. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-pact>.
- European Commission. 2024b. *Questions and answers on the Digital Services Act*. February 23. Accessed November 11, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_2348.
- European Commission. 2024c. *Report from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank and the European Systemic Risk Board*. European Union, Brussels: European Commission. Accessed December 3, 2024. https://finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-03/240305-report-eu-market-statutory-audit-services%20_en.pdf.
- European Commission. n.d.a. *2050 long-term strategy*. Accessed November 20, 2024. https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2050-long-term-strategy_en.
- European Commission. n.d.b. *AI Act*. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai>.

- European Commission. n.d.c. *Auditing of companies' financial statements*. Accessed December 4, 2024. https://finance.ec.europa.eu/capital-markets-union-and-financial-markets/company-reporting-and-auditing/auditing-companies-financial-statements_en.
- European Commission. n.d.d. *Delivering the European Green Deal*. Accessed October 6, 2024. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en.
- European Commission. n.d.e. *Foreign Direct Investments (FDI)*. Accessed December 8, 2024. https://single-market-scoreboard.ec.europa.eu/integration_market_openness/foreign-direct-investments-fdi_en.
- European Commission. n.d.f. *The impact of demographic change in Europe*. Accessed September 20, 2024. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/impact-demographic-change-europe_en#demographic-trends.
- European Council. 2024a. *Cybersecurity: How the EU tackles cyber threats*. November 27. Accessed November 30, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/cybersecurity/>.
- European Council. 2024b. *EU rules on platform work*. October 16. Accessed November 30, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/platform-work-eu/>.
- European Council. 2024c. *The EU's platform economy*. March 23. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/platform-economy/#:~:text=The%20EU%27s%20platform%20economy%20The%20EU%27s%20platform%20economy,customer%20and%20creating%20opportunities%20for%20businesses%20and%20people>.
- European Court of Auditors. 2014. *Gaps, overlaps and challenges: a landscape review of EU accountability and public audit arrangements*. Publications Office of the European

- Union, European Union, Luxembourg: European Union. Accessed October 2, 2024.
https://eca.europa.eu/lists/ecadocuments/lr14_01/qj0214776enc.pdf.
- European Court of Auditors. 2024. *EU Artificial intelligence ambition*. Special Report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessed December 12, 2024. doi:10.2865/923687.
- European Institute of Management & Finance. n.d. *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence in Environmental, Social and Governance Reporting*. Accessed October 31, 2024.
<https://eimf.eu/the-impact-of-artificial-intelligence-in-environmental-social-and-governance-reporting/>.
- European Parliament. 2023. *EU and the Paris agreement: towards climate neutrality*. December 7. Accessed October 5, 2024.
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20191115STO66603/eu-and-the-paris-agreement-towards-climate-neutrality>.
- European Parliament. 2024. *EU AI Act: first regulation on artificial intelligence*. June 18. Accessed October 30, 2024.
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20230601STO93804/eu-ai-act-first-regulation-on-artificial-intelligence>.
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. 2014a. *Directive 2014/56/EU of the european parliament and of the council*. Directive, Strasbourg: European Union. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014L0056>.
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. 2014b. *Regulation (EU) No 537/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council*. Strasbourg: European Union. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0537>.

European Strategy and Policy Analysis System. n.d. *Welcome to 2030: The Mega-trends*. Accessed December 3, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/epsc/pages/espas/chapter1.html>.

European Union. 2023. *Demographic change in Europe*. October. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3112>.

European Union. 2024. *Regulation (EU) 2024/1735 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on establishing a framework of measures for strengthening Europe's net-zero technology manufacturing ecosystem and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1724*. European Union. Accessed November 29, 2024. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401735.

Eurostat. 2021. *Which EU countries had the highest GDP in 2020?* December 20. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20211220-1>.

Eurostat. 2022. *Rise in EU population working from home*. November 8. Accessed September 22, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20221108-1>.

Eurostat. 2023a. *Population projections in the EU*. March. Accessed September 20, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_projections_in_the_EU.

Eurostat. 2023b. *Q2 2023: Business bankruptcies at highest level since 2015*. August 17. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230817-1>.

Eurostat. 2024a. *Fertility statistics*. February. Accessed September 20, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Fertility_statistics#Almost_2_times_fewer_children_born_in_the_EU_in_2022_than_6_decades_ago.

- Eurostat. 2024b. *National accounts and GDP*. June. Accessed September 28, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=National_accounts_and_GDP.
- Eurostat. 2024c. *Q2 2024: bankruptcies go up, registrations decrease*. August 16. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240816-2>.
- Eurostat. 2024d. *Skills for the digital age*. April. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=627685>.
- Eurostat. n.d. *GDP - What is gross domestic product (GDP)?* Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=426966>.
- EY. 2019. *Regulatory technology (RegTech)*. EY. Accessed October 1, 2024. https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_us/topics/financial-services/ey-regulatory-technology-regtech.pdf.
- EY. n.d.a. *Climate change and sustainability services*. Accessed September 17, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_gl/services/climate-change-sustainability-services.
- EY. n.d.b. *EY Helix*. Accessed November 26, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_gl/services/audit/technology/helix.
- EY Global. 2024. *How to navigate global trends in Artificial Intelligence regulation*. January 12. Accessed December 12, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_gl/insights/ai/how-to-navigate-global-trends-in-artificial-intelligence-regulation.
- Fagan, Doreen. 2022. *What Is GDP, and Why Is It Important?* March 23. Accessed October 14, 2024. <https://www.stlouisfed.org/open-vault/2019/march/what-is-gdp-why-important>.
- Farrell, John, and Heather Paquette. 2023. *Get Ready for the Future of Auditing*. March 31. Accessed September 23, 2024. <https://www.cpajournal.com/2023/03/31/get-ready-for-the-future-of-auditing/>.

Federal Office for Information Security. n.d. *Ransomware - Facts and defensive strategies*. Accessed September 27, 2024. https://www.bsi.bund.de/EN/Themen/Unternehmen-und-Organisationen/Cyber-Sicherheitslage/Analysen-und-Prognosen/Ransomware-Angriffe/ransomware-angriffe_node.html.

Fenwick, Cody. 2024. *The case for taking your technical expertise to the field of AI policy*. March 1. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://80000hours.org/2024/03/the-case-for-taking-your-technical-expertise-to-the-field-of-ai-policy/>.

Fernando, Jason. 2024. *Globalization in Business With History and Pros and Cons*. June 27. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/globalization.asp>.

Ferrera, Maurizio, and Carlo Burelli. 2019. "Cross-National Solidarity and Political Sustainability in the EU after the Crisis." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 57 (1): 94-110. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12812>.

Financial Times. n.d. *Could AI be crypto's greatest ally?* Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.ft.com/partnercontent/binance/could-ai-be-cryptos-greatest-ally.html>.

Fiolleau, Krista, Carolyn MacTavish, Errol Osecki, and Linda Thorne. 2024. "An Exploration of Technological Innovations in the Audit Industry: Disruption Theory Applied to a Regulated Industry." *Accounting Perspectives* 23 (3): 403-445. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1911-3838.12367>.

Forbes Insights. 2017. *The Future Is Now*. Jersey City: Forbes Insights. Accessed September 23, 2024. https://i.forbesimg.com/forbesinsights/kpmg_audit2025/KPMG_Audit_2025.pdf.

Forbes Technology Council. 2023. *AI & Machine Learning: Identifying Opportunities & Challenges*. July 28. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://councils.forbes.com/blog/ai-and-machine-learning>.

- Foy, Simon, and Stephen Foley. 2024. *Deloitte launches biggest reorganisation in a decade to cut costs*. March 18. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/a90683ac-8939-41d3-9eca-8e3e9a16b789>.
- Friedlich, Mark. 2024. *Audit's digital revolution: how technology is reshaping the industry*. March 12. Accessed September 26, 2024. <https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/expert-insights/audits-digital-revolution-how-technology-is-reshaping-the-industry>.
- Gadient, Austin. 2023. *The Hidden Costs Of Cybersecurity*. May 31. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2023/05/08/the-hidden-costs-of-cybersecurity/>.
- Galis, Meiran. 2024. *Blockchain And Data Privacy: The Future Of Technology Compliance*. February 15. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2024/02/15/blockchain-and-data-privacy-the-future-of-technology-compliance/>.
- German Chamber of Commerce and Industry. 2024. *The GDPR still harbors significant legal uncertainties*. February 27. Accessed December 7, 2024. <https://www.dihk.de/en/the-gdpr-still-harbors-significant-legal-uncertainties-115260>.
- Gill, Joanna. 2023. *Can new EU rules make gig work fairer?* February 7. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/eu-rules-gig-work/>.
- Giordano, Massimo, Solveigh Hieronimus, Sven Smit, Marc-Antoine de la Chevasnerie, Jan Mischke, Efi Koulouridi, Guillaume Dagorret, and Nicole Brunetti. 2024. *Accelerating Europe: Competitiveness for a new era*. January 16. Accessed October 25, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/our-research/accelerating-europe-competitiveness-for-a-new-era>.
- Giovine, Carlo, Roger Roberts, Mara Pometti, and Medha Bankhwal. 2024. *Building AI trust: The key role of explainability*. November 26. Accessed December 16, 2024.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/building-ai-trust-the-key-role-of-explainability>.

Global Industry Analysts, Inc. 2024. *Auditing Services - Global Strategic Business Report*.

December. Accessed December 5, 2024.

<https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5140428/auditing-services-global-strategic->

[business?srsIid=AfmBOooi8IbY0AmURcJG0GuB_MWDv1ApE45CAJ2_1KqyqqQ5ijYEwmNv](https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5140428/auditing-services-global-strategic-business?srsIid=AfmBOooi8IbY0AmURcJG0GuB_MWDv1ApE45CAJ2_1KqyqqQ5ijYEwmNv).

Global Reporting Initiative. 2023. *A Short Introduction to the GRI Standards*. Amsterdam:

Global Reporting Initiative. Accessed December 2, 2024.

<https://www.globalreporting.org/media/wtaf14tw/a-short-introduction-to-the-gri-standards.pdf>.

Godet, Michel. 1986. "Introduction to la prospective: Seven key ideas and one scenario method." *Futures* 18 (2): 134-157. Accessed October 4, 2024.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(86\)90094-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(86)90094-7).

Godet, Michel. 1987. *Scenarios and strategic management*. London: Butterworths. Accessed December 3, 2024.

Godet, Michel, and Philippe Durance. 2011. *Strategic foresight: for corporate and regional development*. Paris: Unesco. Accessed December 3, 2024.

Godet, Michel, Philippe Durance, and Adam Gerber. 2008. *Strategic foresight - La Prospective*.

Research Working Paper, Paris: LIPSOR. Accessed October 6, 2024.

https://forschungsnetzwerk.ams.at/dam/jcr:3e32623a-187a-4eb4-baed-2fdceb6083f9/LIPSOR___Strategic_Foresight.pdf.

Gökoğlan, Kadir, Sakine Cetin, and Abdulkadir Bilen. 2022. "Blockchain technology and its impact on audit activities." *Journal of Economics, Finance and Accounting* 9 (2): 72-81. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.17261/Pressacademia.2022.1567>.

- Gordon, Theodore Jay. 1994. "Trend Impact Analysis." *Futures Research Methodology*. Accessed December 3, 2024. <https://www.foresight.pl/assets/downloads/publications/Gordon1994-Trendimpact.pdf>.
- Goto, Masashi. 2022. "Accepting the future as ever-changing: professionals' sensemaking about artificial intelligence." *Journal of Professions and Organization* 9 (1): 77–99. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/joab022>.
- GOV.UK. 2024. *Cyber security risks to artificial intelligence*. May 15. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-on-the-cyber-security-of-ai/cyber-security-risks-to-artificial-intelligence>.
- Grand View Research. 2024. *Cryptocurrency Market Size & Trends*. Accessed November 25, 2024. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/cryptocurrency-market-report/methodology>.
- Green, Ruth. 2024. *The year of elections: The rise of Europe's far right*. September 30. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://www.ibanet.org/The-year-of-elections-The-rise-of-Europes-far-right>.
- Gros, Daniel. 2018. *Global Trends to 2035 - Economy and Society*. Directorate–General for Parliamentary Research Services, European Parliament, Brussels: Global Trends Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value. Accessed October 31, 2024. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/627126/EPRS_STU\(2018\)627126_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/627126/EPRS_STU(2018)627126_EN.pdf).
- Grumbach, Gary. 2024. *Trump won the presidency. Here's what he's said he'll do*. November 7. Accessed November 16, 2024. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/trump-won-presidency-said-rcna178837>.
- Haeck, Pieter. 2021. *5 things to know about the EU's gig worker plans*. December 9. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/5-things-about-eu-gig-economy-plan/>.

- Haeck, Pieter, and Mathieu Pollet. 2024. *Meta, Apple snub EU's AI Pact*. September 25. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/meta-apple-snub-eus-voluntary-ai-pledge/>.
- Haelle, Tara. 2024. *Global Fertility Rate Continues To Fall: How Governments Could Prepare*. March 20. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/global-fertility-rate-continues-fall-how-governments-could-prepare>.
- Hagi, Andrei, and Julian Wright. 2015. "Marketplace or Reseller?" *Management Science* 61 (1): 184-203. Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2014.2042>.
- Hall, Aaron. n.d. *Remote Work Policies: Legal Implications and Risk Management*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://aaronhall.com/remote-work-policies-legal-implications-and-risk-management/>.
- Ham, Charles, Rebecca N. Hann, MaryJane Rabier, and Wenfeng Wang. 2024. "Auditor Skill Demands and Audit Quality: Evidence from Job Postings." *Management Science*. Accessed December 6, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2022.01640>.
- Hannay, James. 2023. *Majority of businesses see benefits from ESG reporting, despite challenges*. August 23. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://sustainability-news.net/esg/majority-of-businesses-see-benefits-from-esg-reporting-despite-challenges/>.
- Harter, James K., Corey E. Tatel, Anthony Blue, Stephanie K. Plowman, Jim Asplund, Sabrina Yu, and Andy Kemp. 2024. *The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes*. Q12® Meta-Analysis: 11th Edition, Washington, D.C.: Gallup. Accessed December 12, 2024. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/321725/gallup-q12-meta-analysis-report.aspx>.
- Hasson, Brian K., Pennie L. Bagley, and C. Kevin Eller. 2023. *How remote work affected early-career auditors*. March 30. Accessed November 8, 2024.

<https://www.journalofaccountancy.com/issues/2023/apr/how-remote-work-affected-early-caree-auditors.html>.

Hattersley, Richard. 2022. *Deloitte sells small business unit Propel to Jeffreys Henry Group*. October 10. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.accountingweb.co.uk/practice/general-practice/deloitte-sells-small-business-unit-propel-to-jeffreys-henry-group>.

Hazan, Eric, Anu Madgavkar, Michael Chui, Sven Smit, Dana Maor, Gurneet Singh Dandona, and Roland Huyghues-Despointes. 2024. *A new future of work: The race to deploy AI and raise skills in Europe and beyond*. McKinsey Global Institute. Accessed December 16, 2024. https://www.mckinsey.de/~ /media/mckinsey/locations/europe%20and%20middle%20east/deutschland/news/presse/2024/2024%20-%202005%20-%202023%20mgi%20genai%20future%20of%20work/mgi%20report_a-new-future-of-work-the-race-to-deploy-ai.pdf.

Healy, Beth. 2012. *Monitor Group, founded by Harvard's Michael Porter, files for bankruptcy and plans merger*. November 8. Accessed December 14, 2024. <https://www.boston.com/uncategorized/noprimarytagmatch/2012/11/08/monitor-group-founded-by-harvards-michael-porter-files-for-bankruptcy-and-plans-merger/>.

Heavin, Ciara, and Daniel J. Power. 2018. "Challenges for digital transformation – towards a conceptual decision support guide for managers." *Journal of Decision Systems* 27: 38-45. Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12460125.2018.1468697>.

Hivenet. n.d. *Quantum encryption: the future of data security or just another buzzword?* Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.hivenet.com/post/quantum-encryption-the-future-of-data-security-or-just-another-buzzword>.

- Hoffmann, Julia, and Dev Mehta. 2024. *Artificial Intelligence: in-depth market analysis*. Market Insights report, Statista. Accessed September 26, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/study/50485/in-depth-report-artificial-intelligence/>.
- Hoyland, Nicky. n.d. *Who Are Digital Natives And What Do They Want From The Workplace?* Accessed December 12, 2024. <https://huler.io/blog/who-are-digital-natives>.
- Huck, Vincent. 2016. *Analysis: Are the Big Four 'big enough' for the SME market*. June 21. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.internationalaccountingbulletin.com/news/newsanalysis-are-the-big-four-big-enough-for-the-smes-4929377/?cf-view>.
- IAPP. n.d. *IAPP Certification*. Accessed November 28, 2024. <https://iapp.org/certify/cippe/>.
- IBISWorld. 2024. *Accounting & Auditing in Europe - Market Size, Industry Analysis, Trends and Forecasts (2024-2029)*. March. Accessed November 24, 2024. <https://www.ibisworld.com/europe/industry/accounting-auditing/200284/#IndustryStatisticsAndTrends>.
- IBM. n.d. *What is automation?* Accessed October 11, 2024. <https://www.ibm.com/topics/automation>.
- ICAEW. 2023. *Enhancing interconnectedness for audit teams and clients*. June 6. Accessed October 6, 2024. <https://www.icaew.com/technical/audit-and-assurance/audit-and-technology/enhancing-interconnectedness-for-audit-teams-and-clients>.
- Innovature BPO. 2024. *Top 10 Outsourcing Countries to Watch in 2024*. April 24. Accessed November 23, 2024. <https://innovatureinc.com/top-outsourcing-countries-to-watch/>.
- International Institute for Management Development. 2024. *IMD World Competitiveness Booklet 2024*. Booklet, International Institute for Management Development, Lausanne: International Institute for Management Development. Accessed November 20, 2024. https://imd.widen.net/content/rjlc6fl2jl/pdf/booklet_wcy_2024.pdf.

- International Labour Organization. 2016. *Non-Standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects*. Geneva: International Labour Organization. Accessed October 31, 2024. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/%40publ/documents/publication/wcms_534326.pdf.
- International Monetary Fund. 2024. *World Economic Outlook - Steady but Slow: Resilience amid Divergence*. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/WEO/2024/April/English/text.ashx>.
- IPCC. 2023. *Climate Change 2023. Synthesis Report*, Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC. Accessed September 25, 2024. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf.
- Jang-Jaccard, Julian, and Surya Nepal. 2014. "A survey of emerging threats in cybersecurity." *Journal of Computer and System Sciences* 80 (5): 973-993. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcss.2014.02.005>.
- Jester strategy. n.d. "Identify key uncertainties." *Jester strategy*. Accessed October 17, 2024. <https://jesterstrategy.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EN-3-Identify-Key-Uncertainties-1.pdf>.
- Johansson, Ellinor, Konsta Sutinen, Julius Lassila, Valter Lang, Minna Martikainen, and Othmar M. Lehner. 2019. "Regtech - A necessary Tool to keep up with Compliance and Regulatory Changes?" *ACRN Journal of Finance and Risk Perspectives* 8: 71-85. Accessed September 29, 2024. https://www.acrn-journals.eu/resources/SI08_2019f.pdf.
- Johnson, Peter. 2024. *Volkswagen warns mass layoffs, historic plant closures are coming*. October 28. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://electrek.co/2024/10/28/volkswagen-warns-mass-layoffs-historic-plant-closures->

<https://venturebeat.com/programming-development/71-of-leaders-prefer-hiring-candidates-with-ai-skills-over-those-with-the-relevant-industry-experience/>.

Kenton, Will. 2024. *Sarbanes-Oxley Act: What It Does to Protect Investors*. June 27. Accessed November 18, 2024.

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/sarbanesoxleyact.asp#:~:text=The%20Sarbanes-Oxley%20Act%20of%202002%20is%20a%20law,regulations%20and%20imposed%20tough%20new%20penalties%20on%20lawbreakers.>

Kenyon, Tilly. 2021. *What causes the most damage, losing data or trust?* June 22. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://cybermagazine.com/cyber-security/what-causes-most-damage-losing-data-or-trust>.

Khalid, Nazish, Adnan Qayyum, Muhammad Bilal, Ala Al-Fuqaha, and Junaid Qadir. 2023. "Privacy-preserving artificial intelligence in healthcare: Techniques and applications." *Computers in Biology and Medicine* 158. Accessed November 8, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compbiomed.2023.106848>.

Khan, Ahmed Sarwar, Maryam Yousefi Nejad, Tahani Ali Hakami, Aza Azlina Md Kassim, and Jaizah Othman. 2023. "The Effect of Audit Quality on Fraud Reduction." *International Business and Accounting Research Journal* 7 (2): 123-135. Accessed December 1, 2024. doi:10.35474/ibarj.v7i2.256.

Kirka, Danica. 2024. *The world faces a 'dangerous decade' as instability and military spending rise, a new report says*. February 13. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-world-faces-a-dangerous-decade-as-instability-and-military-spending-rise-a-new-report-says>.

Klein, Florian Dr. 2019. *Digital Transformation in the EU 2035 - A Glimpse into the Future*. Center for the Long View, Monitor Deloitte. Accessed October 19, 2024.

<https://www.deloitte.com/de/de/services/consulting/perspectives/future-of-digital-transformation-eu-2035.html>.

Knechel, W. Robert. 2021. "The Future of Assurance in Capital Markets: Reclaiming the Economic Imperative of the Auditing Profession." *Accounting Horizons* 35 (1): 133-151. Accessed October 16, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2308/HORIZONS-19-182>.

Kokina, Julia, and Thomas H. Davenport. 2017. "The Emergence of Artificial Intelligence: How Automation is Changing Auditing." *Journal of Emerging Technologies in Accounting* 14 (1): 115-122. Accessed August 29, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2308/jeta-51730>.

Kontozis, Nikolas. 2022. *The dynamics of blockchain in modern businesses and the audit of their financial statements*. Accessed December 12, 2024. <https://www.pwc.com.cy/en/press-room/article-2022/blockchain-by-nikolas-kontozis.html>.

KPMG. 2020a. *European Union Audit Legislation*. KPMG. Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2017/07/shedding-light-on-eu-audit-legislation.pdf>.

KPMG. 2020b. *Transforming Compliance in financial services*. KPMG. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2019/06/transforming-compliance-in-financial-services.pdf>.

KPMG. 2023a. *AI in Audit Survey*. Survey Report, KPMG. Accessed October 7, 2024. <https://kpmg.com/kpmg-us/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2023/kpmg-ai-in-audit-survey-report-october-2023.pdf>.

KPMG. 2023b. *Unlocking the potential of RegTech*. KPMG. Accessed September 29, 2024. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/ie/pdf/2023/02/ie-regtech-potential.pdf>.

KPMG. n.d.a. *ESG Governance & Reporting*. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://kpmg.com/de/en/home/insights/overview/esg/esg-audit.html>.

- KPMG. n.d.b. *Quantum is coming - and bringing new cybersecurity threats with it*. Accessed September 27, 2024. <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/our-insights/ai-and-technology/quantum-and-cybersecurity.html>.
- KPMG. n.d.c. *KPMG Clara*. Accessed August 29, 2024. <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/home/services/audit/kpmg-clara.html>.
- KPMG International. 2024. *AI in financial reporting and audit: Navigating the new era*. KPMG International. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2024/04/ai-in-financial-reporting-and-audit-web.pdf>.
- KPMG Switzerland. n.d. *Automating the auditor*. Accessed November 24, 2024. <https://kpmg.com/ch/en/insights/technology/audit-transformation.html>.
- Krakowczyk, Tomasz. 2024. *The Role of AI and Cybersecurity in the Financial Sector*. September 19. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://softwaremind.com/blog/the-role-of-ai-and-cybersecurity-in-the-financial-sector/>.
- Kraus, Sascha, Susanne Durst, João J. Ferreira, Pedro Veiga, Norbert Kailer, and Alexandra Weinmann. 2022. "Digital transformation in business and management research: An overview of the current status quo." *International Journal of Information Management* 63. Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102466>.
- Krishna, Venni V. 2024. "AI and contemporary challenges: The good, bad and the scary." *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity* 10 (1). Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2023.100178>.
- Kurniawan, Dwitama Heryadi, Yova Ruldeviyani, Mohammad Rizky Adrian, Sutia Handayani, M. Rizky Pohan, and T. Rani Khairunnisa. 2019. "Data Governance Maturity Assessment: A Case Study in IT Bureau of Audit Board." *4th International Conference on Information Management and Technology, ICIMTech 2019*. Jakarta/ Bali: Institute

- of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Inc. 629-634. Accessed October 7, 2024. doi:10.1109/ICIMTech.2019.8843742.
- Lawcode. 2024. *Greenwashing: recognizing fake sustainability in companies*. May 27. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://www.lawcode.eu/en/blog/greenwashing/>.
- Letta, Enrico. 2024. *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity*. Consilium Europa. Accessed October 23, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>.
- Li, Cathy. 2024. *Over a third of EU companies adopt AI, and other digital technology stories you need to know*. September 10. Accessed December 8, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/02/ai-regulation-digital-software-news-february-2024/>.
- Li, Nan, and Daa Noureldin. 2024. *World Must Prioritize Productivity Reforms to Revive Medium-Term Growth*. April 10. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/04/10/world-must-prioritize-productivity-reforms-to-revive-medium-term-growth>.
- Lindgren, Mats, and Hans Bandhold. 2003. *Scenario Planning: The Link Between Future and Strategy*. Palgrave Macmillan. Accessed October 10, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230511620>.
- Lindsey, Rebecca. 2023. *Climate Change: Global Sea Level*. August 22. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level>.
- Lindwall, Courtney. 2023. *What is Greenwashing?* February 9. Accessed November 28, 2024. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-greenwashing>.
- Löber, Martin. n.d. *Human judgment and technology as cornerstones for trust*. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://kpmg.com/ch/en/insights/reporting/future-of-audit/audit-client-trust-future.html>.

- Lomba, Niombo, Lenka Jančová, and Meenakshi Fernandes. 2022. *Digital transformation. Study*, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, Brussels: European Added Value Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment. Accessed October 31, 2024. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/699475/EPRS_STU\(2022\)699475_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/699475/EPRS_STU(2022)699475_EN.pdf).
- Lombardi, Danielle, Rebecca Bloch, and Miklos A. Vasarhelyi. 2014. "The Future of Audit." *Journal of Information Systems and Technology Management* 11 (1): 21-32. Accessed October 15, 2024. doi:10.4301/S1807-17752014000100002.
- Lowell, Briant Lindsay, and Allan Findlay. 2001. *Migration of highly skilled persons from developing countries: impact and policy responses*. Draft Synthesis Report, Department for International Development, UK, International Labour Office, International Labour Office. Accessed October 31, 2024. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237112464_Migration_of_highly_skilled_persons_from_developing_countries_impact_and_policy_responses.
- Lu, Marcus. 2024. *Ranked: The Top 6 Economies by Share of Global GDP (1980-2024)*. May 14. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/ranked-the-top-6-economies-by-share-of-global-gdp-1980-2024/>.
- Luther, David, and Rami Ali. 2022. *Scenario Planning: Strategy, Steps and Practical Examples*. August 25. Accessed October 28, 2024. <https://www.netsuite.com/portal/resource/articles/financial-management/scenario-planning.shtml>.
- Mack, Sebastian. 2022. *Give us the tools and we'll finish the job: How Europe can fix the broken audit market*. Policy Paper, Berlin: Hertie School, Jacques Delors Centre. Accessed October 7, 2024. https://www.delorscentre.eu/fileadmin/2_Research/1_About_our_research/2_Research

_centres/6_Jacques_Delors_Centre/Publications/20220814_S.Mack_AuditMarketRulesEU.pdf.

Mack, Sebastian, and Johannes Lindner. 2024. *Capital Markets Union: Europe must stop beating around the bush*. July 11. Accessed November 24, 2024. <https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/publications/detail/publication/capital-markets-union>.

Manyika, James, Michael Chui, Mehdi Miremadi, Jacques Bughin, Katy George, Paul Willmott, and Martin Dewhurst. 2017. *A future that works: Automation, employment, and productivity*. January 12. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/digital-disruption/harnessing-automation-for-a-future-that-works/de-de>.

Marchant, Natalie. 2021. *This is how climate change could impact the global economy*. June 28. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/impact-climate-change-global-gdp/>.

Marcos, Marina. 2023. *The European Commission presents the Green Deal Industrial Plan for a net-zero industry*. February 2. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://grants.fingroup.com/ec-presents-green-deal-industrial-plan/>.

Market Business News. n.d. *What is Economic Stability?* Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://marketbusinessnews.com/financial-glossary/economic-stability/>.

Martill, Benjamin, and Lisa ten Brinke. 2020. *Europe in a Multipolar World*. Strategic Update, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London: LSE IDEAS. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/updates/LSE-IDEAS-Europe-in-a-Multipolar-World.pdf>.

Mason, Leah. n.d. *The Looming Crisis: Shortage of Audit Candidates in the Recruitment Market*. Accessed October 14, 2024. <https://www.ipsfinance.com/2024/05/02/the-looming-crisis-shortage-of-audit-candidates-in-the-recruitment-market/>.

- Masterson, Victoria. 2022. *GDP: What is it and why does it matter?* May 19. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/what-is-gdp-economic-growth-matters/>.
- McKinsey & Company. 2024. *What is Gen Z?* August 28. Accessed September 25, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z>.
- Meier, Konrad, and Roger Spichiger. 2024. *The EU AI Act: What it means for your business*. March 15. Accessed November 21, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_ch/insights/forensic-integrity-services/the-eu-ai-act-what-it-means-for-your-business.
- Meißner, Philip, and Torsten Wulf. 2013. "Cognitive benefits of scenario planning: Its impact on biases and decision quality." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 80 (4): 801-814. Accessed December 13, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2012.09.011>.
- Moffitt, Kevin C., Andrea M. Rozario, and Miklos A. Vasarhelyi. 2018. "Robotic Process Automation for Auditing." *Journal of Emerging Technologies in Accounting* 15 (1): 1-10. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2308/jeta-10589>.
- Mökander, Jakob. 2023. "Auditing of AI: Legal, Ethical and Technical Approaches." *Digital Society* 2 (49). Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44206-023-00074-y>.
- Mooldijk, Silke, Frederic Hans, Louise Jeffery, Niklas Höhne, Claire Fyson, Claire Stockwell, Bill Hare, Cindy Baxter, Dilara Arslan, and Matt Beer. 2021. *Evaluation methodology for national net zero targets*. Climate Action Tracker. Accessed October 5, 2024. https://climateactiontracker.org/documents/859/CAT_Evaluation-methodology-for-national-net-zero-targets.pdf.
- Moore, Mary Virginia, and John Crampton. 2000. "Challenging the status quo." *Journal of Business Leadership* 11. Accessed December 1, 2024. https://anbhf.org/Journal%202000/moore_crampton.pdf.

- Moran, Aoiffe, Liam Flynn, and Joanne O'Rourke. 2024. *Greenwashing and the Role of Auditors*. May 1. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.mhc.ie/latest/insights/greenwashing-and-the-role-of-auditors>.
- Morandini, Sofia, Federico Fraboni, Marco De Angelis, Gabriele Puzzo, Davide Giusino, and Luca Pietrantoni. 2024. "The impact of Artificial Intelligence on Workers' Skills: Upskilling and Reskilling in Organisations." *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline* 26: 39-68. Accessed November 25, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.28945/5078>.
- Mui, Ricky. 2024. *How embracing ESG principles can attract top talent*. April 30. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.robertwalters.com.hk/insights/hiring-advice/blog/how-embracing-ESG-principles-can-attract-top-talent.html>.
- Munich Re. 2024. *Cyber Insurance*. April 4. Accessed September 27, 2024. <https://www.munichre.com/en/insights/cyber/cyber-insurance-risks-and-trends-2024.html>.
- Murillo, David, Heloise Buckland, and Esther Val. 2017. "When the sharing economy becomes neoliberalism on steroids: Unravelling the controversies." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 125: 66-76. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2017.05.024>.
- Myers, Marie, Carol Brace, and Lila Carden. 2022. *Intelligent Automation: Bridging the Gap between Business and Academia*. New York: Chapman & Hall. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003276128>.
- Nath, Thomas. 2023. *How Labor Mobility Affects the Economy and Workers*. January 19. Accessed October 23, 2024. <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/kenan-insight/how-labor-mobility-affects-the-economy-and-workers/>.
- National Grid. 2023. *What is net zero?* February 23. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://www.nationalgrid.com/stories/energy-explained/what-is-net-zero>.

- National Whistleblower Center. n.d. *High Risk of Fraud in Auditing and Accounting Firms*. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://www.whistleblowers.org/high-risk-of-fraud-in-auditing-and-accounting-firms/>.
- Nickerson, Mark A. 2024. *The Conflict Surrounding Work-Life Balance in Public Accounting Firms*. February. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.cpajournal.com/2024/02/12/the-conflict-surrounding-work-life-balance-in-public-accounting-firms/>.
- Nissim, Gadi, and Tomer Simon. 2021. "The future of labor unions in the age of automation and at the dawn of AI." *Technology in Society* 67. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2021.101732>.
- Ntsime, Lesego. 2024. *Scenario Planning: Strategies and Processes for Management*. August 2. Accessed November 6, 2024. <https://intuendi.com/resource-center/scenario-planning/>.
- O'Connell, Ruby. 2023. *EFRAG's ESRS Finalised Data Points*. October 26. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.nossadata.com/blog/efrag-1-esrs-data-points>.
- OECD. 2023. *OECD Employment Outlook 2023: Artificial Intelligence and the Labour Market*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1787/08785bba-en>.
- OECD. n.d. *Sustainable, green, and inclusive business*. Accessed September 25, 2024. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/sustainable-green-and-inclusive-business.html>.
- Ogilvy, Jay. 2022. *Scenario Planning and Strategic Forecasting*. April 14. Accessed November 6, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2015/01/08/scenario-planning-and-strategic-forecasting/>.
- Ogilvy, Jay, and Peter Schwartz. 1997. "Plotting Your Scenarios." In *Learning from the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios*, by Liam Fahey and Robert M. Randall. Wiley.

- Accessed December 12, 2024. https://adaptknowledge.com/wp-content/uploads/rapidintake/PI_CL/media/gbn_Plotting_Scenarios.pdf.
- Olaiya, Omolara Patricia, Temitayo Oluwadamilola Adesoga, Kenneth Pieteron, Omotoyosi Qazeem Obani, John Odunayo Adebayo, and Olajumoke Oluwagbemisola Ajayi. 2024. "RegTech Solutions: Enhancing compliance and risk management in the financial industry." *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews* 20 (2): 8-15. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2024.20.2.0295>.
- Olawale, Olufunke, Funmilayo Aribidesi Ajayi, Chioma Ann Udeh, and Opeyemi Abayomi Odejide. 2024. "RegTech innovations streamlining compliance, reducing costs in the financial sector." *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews* 19 (1): 114-131. Accessed November 20, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2024.19.1.0146>.
- Ormiston, Charles. 2022. *Southeast Asia's Pursuit of the Emerging Markets Growth Crown*. Angsana Council and Bain & Company, Inc. Accessed December 10, 2024. https://www.bain.com/globalassets/noindex/2022/bain_report-southeast_asias_pursuit_of_the_emerging_markets_growth_crown.pdf.
- Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban, Diana Beltekian, and Max Roser. 2024. *Trade and Globalization*. April. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://ourworldindata.org/trade-and-globalization#trade-expanded-in-two-waves>.
- Oweis, Khaled Adnan. 2022. "Automation of audit processes, and what to expect in the future." *Journal of Management Information and Decision Sciences* 25 (S4): 1-9. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://www.abacademies.org/articles/automation-of-audit-processes-and-what-to-expect-in-the-future.pdf>.
- Palmer, Asha. 2024. *5 Steps to Prepare Your Workforce for AI Compliance*. October 1. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://builtin.com/artificial-intelligence/AI-regulatory-compliance>.

- Pangavhane, Parth, Shivam Kolve, Parimal Avhad, Tushar Gadekar, N.K. Darwante, and S.V. Chaudhari. 2023. "Transforming Finance Through Automation Using AI-Driven Personal Finance Advisors." *4th International Conference on Computation, Automation and Knowledge Management (ICCAKM)*. Dubai, United Arab Emirates: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. 1-5. Accessed December 7, 2024. doi:10.1109/ICCAKM58659.2023.10449538.
- Pástor, Luboš, and Pietro Veronesi. 2013. "Political uncertainty and risk premia." *Journal of Financial Economics* 110 (3): 520-545. Accessed November 28, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfineco.2013.08.007>.
- Patel, Rajesh, Fatima Khan, Buddhika Silva, and Jakhongir Shaturaev. 2023. "Unleashing the Potential of Artificial Intelligence in Auditing: A Comprehensive Exploration of its Multifaceted Impact." *Journal of Artificial Research* 4 (35): 41-57. Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/id/eprint/119616>.
- Payne, Daniel. 2024. *The Trump agenda: Here's what to expect from his second term*. November 6. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/11/06/donald-trump-second-term-policies-00187157>.
- Persakis, Antonios, and Ioannis Tsakalos. 2024. "Navigating the Storm: How Economic Uncertainty Shapes Audit Quality in BRICS Nations Amid CEO Power Dynamics." *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* 17 (7). Accessed October 14, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm17070307>.
- PlanA. n.d. *European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS)*. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://plana.earth/policy/esrs-european-sustainability-reporting-standards>.
- ProEdge team. 2022. *Upskilling the next-generation of risk, compliance and audit officers*. January 20. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://proedge.pwc.com/blog/upskilling-the-next-generation-of-risk-compliance-and-audit-officers>.

- PwC. 2022. *Fake sustainability harbours risks - Greenwashing*. March 24. Accessed October 3, 2024. <https://www.pwc.de/en/forensic-services/esg-fraud/greenwashing.html>.
- PwC. 2024. *Megatrends: Five global shifts reshaping the world we live in*. PwC. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/assets/pdf/pwc-megatrends-september-2024.pdf>.
- PwC. n.d. *Harnessing the power of AI to transform the detection of fraud and error*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/about/stories-from-across-the-world/harnessing-the-power-of-ai-to-transform-the-detection-of-fraud-and-error.html>.
- Qatawneh, Adel M. 2024. "The role of artificial intelligence in auditing and fraud detection in accounting information systems: moderating role of natural language processing." *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-03-2024-4389>.
- Qualtrics. 2022. *Beyond Engagement: A simple guide to designing a world-class employee experience program*. Qualtrics. Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://www.qualtrics.com/m/assets/au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Designing-a-world-class-EX-program-that-attracts-and-retains-talent.pdf>.
- Qualtrics. n.d.a. *Make candidate experience your competitive advantage*. Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://www.qualtrics.com/people/lifecycle/candidate-experience/>.
- Qualtrics. n.d.b. *Power to your people - at every level*. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://www.qualtrics.com/en-gb/people/>.
- Qualtrics. n.d.c. *Your ultimate guide to 360-degree feedback*. Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/employee/360-degree-feedback/>.
- Rashid, Adib Bin, and Ashfakul Karim Kausik. 2024. "AI revolutionizing industries worldwide: A comprehensive overview of its diverse applications." *Hybrid Advances 7*. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hybadv.2024.100277>.

- Rathi, Vineet, and Doron Rozenblum. 2022. *Audit and technology: the benefits and risks*. October 18. Accessed November 5, 2024. <https://www.kreston.com/article/audit-technology-benefits-risks/>.
- Reddy, Narayan. 2024. *The Future of CPA and AI's Impact on Auditing in the Gig Economy*. July 27. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://blog.wistle.net/the-future-of-cpa-and-ai-impact-on-auditing-in-the-gig-economy/>.
- Reguerra, Ezra. 2022. *85% of merchants see crypto payments as a way to reach new customers: Survey*. July 6. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://cointelegraph.com/news/85-of-merchants-see-crypto-payments-as-a-way-to-reach-new-customers-survey>.
- Renda, Andrea. 2024. *Europe's digital future is brighter than we think – we just need to fight for it*. June 4. Accessed October 25, 2024. <https://www.ceps.eu/europes-digital-future-is-brighter-than-we-think-we-just-need-to-fight-for-it/>.
- Reuters. 2024a. *Europe needs greater political stability, EY says*. June 19. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/586038>.
- Reuters. 2024b. *European companies cut jobs as economy sputters*. March 28. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/european-companies-cut-jobs-economy-sputters-2023-08-31/>.
- Riahi-Belkaoui, Ahmed. 2004. *Are You Being Fooled? Audit Quality and Quality of Government*. Department of Accounting, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.485764>.
- Rosenberg, Jamie. 2019. *Using Scenario Planning for Strategic Early Warning*. December 12. Accessed November 6, 2024. <https://www.mintel.com/insights/advertising-and-marketing/using-scenario-planning-for-strategic-early-warning/>.
- Runde, Daniel F., Romina Bandura, and Madeleine McLean. 2023. *Investing in Quality Education for Economic Development, Peace, and Stability*. Center for Strategic &

- International Studies. Accessed October 31, 2024. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-12/231220_Runde_Investing_Education.pdf.
- Rusli, Ganda Raharja, and Anestia Hayubriandini Fermay. 2024. "Digital Financial Services Effort in Enforcing Anti-Money Laundering (AML) through Open Banking Optimization." *AML/CFT Journal: The Journal of Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism* 2 (2): 159-174. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.59593/amlcft.2024.v2i2.158>.
- Rybska, Agata, Louise Breusch Rasmussen, Boleslaw Lasocki, Charlotte Eugenie Yvette Bawol, Olga Sawczuk, and Radhika Anilkumar. 2024. *European companies cut jobs as economy sputters*. September 24. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://sweetcrudereports.com/european-companies-cut-jobs-as-economy-sputters-2/>.
- Sabol, Maja, and Giacomo Loi. 2024. *EU economic developments and projections*. Briefing, Economic Governance and EMU Scrutiny Unit, European Parliament, Economic Governance and EMU Scrutiny Unit. Accessed December 2, 2024. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/645716/IPOL_BRI\(2020\)645716_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/645716/IPOL_BRI(2020)645716_EN.pdf).
- Saif, Irfan, and Beena Ammanath. 2020. *'Trustworthy AI' is a framework to help manage unique risk*. March 25. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/03/25/950291/trustworthy-ai-is-a-framework-to-help-manage-unique-risk/>.
- Sandalow, David, Colin McCormick, Alp Kucukelbir, Julio Friedmann, Trishna Nagrani, Zhiyuan Fan, Antoine Halff, et al. 2023. *Artificial Intelligence for Climate Change Mitigation Roadmap*. ICEF Innovation Roadmap Project, Innovation for Cool Earth Forum, Innovation for Cool Earth Forum. Accessed November 3, 2024.

- <https://www.icef.go.jp/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/AI-Climate-Roadmap-ICEF-Dec-1-2023.pdf>.
- SAS. 2024. *SAS signs European Commission's AI Pact*. November 18. Accessed December 15, 2024. https://www.sas.com/pt_pt/news/press-releases/2024/november/eu-ai-pact.html.
- SASB Standards. n.d. *Is there an educational credential related to the SASB Standards?* Accessed December 1, 2024. <https://help.sasb.org/hc/en-us/articles/360052454791-Is-there-an-educational-credential-related-to-the-SASB-Standards>.
- Scearce, Diana, and Katherine Fulton. 2023. *What If? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits: The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits*. Emeryville: Global Business Network. Accessed November 1, 2014. https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/monitor-institute/us-monitor-institute-what_if.pdf.
- Scheijgrond, Jan-Willem, and Paul Donovan. 2024. *Demographic shifts: How to steer towards economic growth*. October 15. Accessed December 9, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/10/demographic-shifts-ageing-population-economic-growth/>.
- Schneider, Josh, and Ian Smalley. 2024. *What is quantum computing?* August 5. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://www.ibm.com/topics/quantum-computing>.
- Schühly, Andreas, Julia Weiß, Niclas Vieten, and Sina Niggeloh. 2019. *Braving the wind of change - resilient portfolio strategy*. Monitor Deloitte. Accessed December 9, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Mergers-and-Acquisitions/gx-resilient-portfolio-strategy.pdf>.
- Schwartz, Peter. 1996. *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World*. New York: Crown Currency. Accessed December 4, 2024.

- Shabani, Arbërie. 2022. *EU Companies Keep 'Business Inside' as 77% of Them Outsource Jobs Inside the Zone*. October 6. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://schengen.news/eu-companies-keep-business-inside-as-77-of-them-outsource-jobs-inside-the-zone/>.
- Sherif, Ahmed. 2024. *Digital transformation spending worldwide 2017-2027*. November 11. Accessed December 1, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/870924/worldwide-digital-transformation-market-size/>.
- Shoabjareh, Azamsadat Hosseini, Milad Ghasri, Tom Roberts, Andrew Lapworth, Ned Dobos, and Christine Boshuijzen-van Burken. 2024. "The role of trust and distrust in technology usage: An in-depth investigation of traffic information apps usage for mandatory and non-mandatory trips." *Travel Behaviour and Society* 37. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tbs.2024.100816>.
- Shoemaker, Paul J.H. 1995. "Scenario Planning: A Tool for Strategic Thinking." *Sloan Management Review* 36 (2): 25-40. Accessed November 28, 2024. <https://shop.sloanreview.mit.edu/store/scenario-planning-a-tool-for-strategic-thinking>.
- SimpleAccounts. 2024. *The Impact of Regulatory Changes on Accounting Audits*. February 13. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://www.simpleaccounts.io/blogs/the-impact-of-regulatory-changes-on-accounting-audits/>.
- Simpson, Fraser. 2016. *Deloitte propels into SME market with £2.5m accounting services investment*. June 22. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://www.accountancyage.com/2016/06/22/deloitte-propels-into-sme-market-with-2-5m-accounting-services-investment/>.
- Sinha, Shristi. 2024. *Gen Z's influence on the growth of remote work culture*. July 8. Accessed October 24, 2024. <https://www.getoutofoffice.com/resources/gen-zs-influence-on-the-growth-of-remote-work-culture>.

- Slack. 2023. *State of Work 2023*. Salesforce. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://d34u8crftukxnk.cloudfront.net/slackpress/prod/sites/6/State-Work-Report.en-US.pdf>.
- Smit, Sven, Tilman Tacke, Susan Lund, James Manyika, and Lea Thiel. 2020. *The future of work in Europe*. Discussion Paper, McKinsey Global Institute. Accessed November 16, 2024. https://www.mckinsey.com/~/_/media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/future%20of%20organizations/the%20future%20of%20work%20in%20europe/mgi-the-future-of-work-in-europe-discussion-paper.pdf.
- Solomons, Mike, and Alina Polonskaia. n.d. *How Diverse Teams Increase Innovation and Growth*. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/featured-topics/diversity-equity-inclusion/how-diverse-teams-increase-innovation-and-growth>.
- Spence, A. Michael. 2016. *Economic decline is leading to political instability. What's the solution?* March 24. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2016/03/economic-decline-is-leading-to-political-instability-whats-the-solution/>.
- St. John, Mariah. 2024. *Cybersecurity stats: facts and figures you should know*. August 28. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/education/it-and-tech/cybersecurity-statistics/>.
- Stanmore School of Business. 2024. *The Impact of Globalization on Accounting Practices*. August 24. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://blog.stanmoreuk.org/the-impact-of-globalization-on-accounting-practices/>.
- Statista. n.d. *Artificial Intelligence - Europe*. Accessed December 8, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/tmo/artificial-intelligence/europe>.
- Stevenson, Rick. 2023. *85 Compliance Statistics You Need To Know in 2023*. July 14. Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://drata.com/blog/compliance-statistics>.

- Stobierski, Tim. 2021. *What Is GDP & Why Is It Important?* June 8. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/why-is-gdp-important>.
- Sullivan, Morgan. 2023. *Understanding Data Classification: Enhance Security & Efficiency*. December 8. Accessed November 20, 2024. <https://transcend.io/blog/data-classification>.
- Surkov, Alexey, Val Srinivas, and Jill Gregorie. 2022. *Unleashing the power of machine learning models in banking through explainable artificial intelligence (XAI)*. May 17. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/financial-services/explainable-ai-in-banking.html>.
- Susanto, Perengki, Mohammad Enamul Hoque, Taslima Jannat, Bamy Emely, Mega Asri Zona, and Md Asadul Islam. 2022. "Work-Life Balance, Job Satisfaction, and Job Performance of SMEs Employees: The Moderating Role of Family-Supportive Supervisor Behaviors." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.906876>.
- Swanson, Jason. 2019. *When You Think About the Future, What's Your Time Horizon?* January 14. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/future-time-horizon/>.
- Swascan. 2023. *The Ransomware Landscape in Europe*. Milano: European Digital SME Alliance. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://www.digitalsme.eu/digital/uploads/Report-H1-Europa-ENG.pdf>.
- Takamizawa, Laura. 2024. *Leveraging the Transformative Power of AI to Drive Innovation*. October 31. Accessed December 8, 2024. <https://www.ifac.org/knowledge-gateway/discussion/leveraging-transformative-power-ai-drive-innovation>.
- Talin, Benjamin. 2023. *Platform Economy – Definition and Explanation the Future of the Digital World*. August 7. Accessed October 2, 2024.

<https://morethandigital.info/en/platforms-and-platform-economy-explained/#:~:text=The%20platform%20economy%20is%20a%20new%20economic%20paradigm,Internet%20and%20the%20adoption%20of%20different%20digital%20technologies.>

Tanguy, Clementine. 2024. *The rise of ESG: sustainability reporting's integration into auditing.* February 28. Accessed September 23, 2024. <https://www.deepki.com/blog/esg-audit/>.

Teichmann, Fabian, Sonia Boticiu, and Bruno S. Sergi. 2023. "RegTech – Potential benefits and challenges for businesses." *Technology in Society* 72. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2022.102150>.

Teigland, Julie. 2020. *How can talent become the biggest source of growth for Europe?* February 10. Accessed October 2, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_hr/foreign-direct-investment-surveys/how-can-talent-become-the-biggest-source-of-growth-for-europe.

Testa, Giuseppina, Ramón Compañó, Ana Correia, and Eva Rückert. 2022. *In search of EU unicorns - What do we know about them?* JRC Technical Report, European Union, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessed December 8, 2024. doi:10.2760/843368.

The Federal Government. n.d. *EU Blue Card.* Accessed November 21, 2024. <https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/visa-residence/types/eu-blue-card>.

The Future Laboratory. 2023. *Digital Engagement: A Social Future.* March 16. Accessed October 24, 2024. <https://www.thefuturelaboratory.com/blog/digital-engagement-a-social-future#report>.

The Institute of Internal Auditors. 2020. *Data Governance - Providing assurance regarding data risk management.* Financial Services Knowledge Brief, The Institute of Internal Auditors, Lake Mary: The Institute of Internal Auditors. Accessed October 7, 2024.

<https://www.theiia.org/globalassets/site/content/articles/industry-knowledge-brief/2020/data-governance/data-governance.pdf>.

The Investopedia Team. 2024a. *Sharing Economy: Model Defined, Criticisms, and How It's Evolving*. January 29. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/sharing-economy.asp>.

The Investopedia Team. 2024b. *What Is a Gig Economy?* July 22. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gig-economy.asp>.

The Ohio Society of Certified Public Accountants. 2024. *Cryptocurrency audits and challenges*. April 8. Accessed October 14, 2024. <https://ohiocpa.com/for-the-public/news/2024/04/09/cryptocurrency-audits-and-challenges>.

Thomson Reuters. 2024a. *3 keys to the future of audit*. White Paper, Thomson Reuters. Accessed December 13, 2024. <https://tax.thomsonreuters.com/en/insights/white-papers/3-keys-to-the-future-of-audit/form?gatedContent=%252Fcontent%252Fwp-marketing-websites%252Ftax%252Fgl%252Fen%252Finsights%252Fwhite-papers%252F3-keys-to-the-future-of-audit&form=thankyou&gatedContent>.

Thomson Reuters. 2024b. "The future of audit talent." *Thomson Reuters Tax & Accounting*. August 14. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://tax.thomsonreuters.com/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/tax/en/pdf/infographics/the-future-of-audit-talent-tr2939738.pdf>.

Tiberius, Victor, and Stefanie Hirth. 2019. "Impacts of digitization on auditing: A Delphi study for Germany." *Journal of International Accounting, Auditing and Taxation* 37. Accessed October 15, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intaccaudtax.2019.100288>.

Timmons, Matt, Hannah Harris, and Marieke de Wal. 2024. *EU member state transposition of CSRD - status update*. October 16. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/services/legal-business-solutions/esg-legal/csrd-transposition.html>.

- Tomazin, Bill. 2023. *Why the talent shortage in auditing will have dire consequences*. May 12. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://www.businessage.com/post/why-the-talent-shortage-in-auditing-will-have-dire-consequences>.
- Tracxn. 2024. *Acquisitions by Deloitte*. October 4. Accessed December 8, 2024. https://tracxn.com/d/acquisitions/acquisitions-by-deloitte/__gs-isLtiroF-Z0Vvay1L5uCbdMIEQ7ezBOwWoWwRGCo#list-of-acquisitions.
- Tuovila, Alicia. 2024a. *Audit: Meaning in Finance and Accounting and 3 Main Types*. June 2. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/audit.asp>.
- Tuovila, Alicia. 2024b. *Bankruptcy Explained: Types and How it Works*. October 28. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bankruptcy.asp>.
- UiPath. n.d. *Robotic Process Automation (RPA)*. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.uipath.com/rpa/robotic-process-automation>.
- Ünal, Seven. 2022. "Finance, talent and income inequality: Cross-country evidence." *Borsa Istanbul Review* 22 (1): 57-68. Accessed November 28, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bir.2021.01.003>.
- United Nations. 2019. *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York: United Nations. Accessed October 6, 2024. https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf.
- United Nations. 2022. *World population to reach 8 billion this year, as growth rate slows*. July 11. Accessed October 6, 2024. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1122272>.
- United Nations. 2024. *World investment report 2024*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations, Geneva: United Nations. Accessed November 11, 2024. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wir2024_overview_en.pdf.
- University of Cambridge. 2023. *Green Growth Summit 2023: The green transition goes in the right direction - now it's all about speed*. October 19. Accessed November 3, 2024.

- <https://www.corporateleadersgroup.com/news/green-growth-summit-2023-green-transition-goes-right-direction-now-its-all-about-speed>.
- Vaessen, Mark. 2023. *First set of ESRs is now out!* September 27. Accessed October 16, 2024. <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/our-insights/ifrg/2024/european-sustainability-reporting-standards-eu-esrs.html>.
- Van der Heijden, Kees. 1996. *Scenarios: The art of strategic conversation*. John Wiley & Sons. Accessed December 1, 2024.
- Van der Heijden, Kees. 1997. *Scenarios, Strategy, and the Strategy Process*. Emeryville: Global Business Network. Accessed December 13, 2024. http://maureen.ohara.net/WASC/GBN_scenarios_strategy_keesvdh.pdf.
- Van Rij, Armida, Prof. Tim Benton, Creon Butler, and Dr. Patrick Schröder. 2024. *How will gains by the far right affect the European Parliament and EU?* June 11. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/06/how-will-gains-far-right-affect-european-parliament-and-eu>.
- Van Veldhoven, Ziboud, and Jan Vanthienen. 2022. "Digital transformation as an interaction-driven perspective between business, society, and technology." *Electronic Markets* 32: 629–644. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-021-00464-5>.
- Velte, Patrick, and Markus Stiglbauer. 2012. "Audit Market Concentration and Its Influence on Audit Quality." *International Business Research* 5 (11): 146-161. Accessed October 7, 2024. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v5n11p146>.
- Verbeek, Arnold, and Maria Lundqvist. 2021. *Artificial intelligence, blockchain and the future of Europe: How disruptive technologies create opportunities for a green and digital economy*. Innovation Finance Advisory, European Commission, Luxembourg: European Investment Bank. Accessed November 11, 2024. https://www.eib.org/attachments/thematic/artificial_intelligence_blockchain_and_the_future_of_europe_report_en.pdf.

- Vernhes, Romane. 2024. *The EU's AI Act: How companies turn compliance into competitive edge*. September 16. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://www.soprasteria.com/insights/details/the-eu-s-ai-act-how-companies-turn-compliance-into-competitive-edge>.
- Vial, Gregory. 2019. "Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda." *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems* 28 (2): 118-144. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2019.01.003>.
- Wack, Pierre. 1985. *Scenarios: Uncharted Waters Ahead*. September. Accessed December 2, 2024. <https://hbr.org/1985/09/scenarios-uncharted-waters-ahead>.
- Walter, Yoshija. 2024. "Managing the race to the moon: Global policy and governance in Artificial Intelligence regulation - A contemporary overview and an analysis of socioeconomic consequences." *Discover Artificial Intelligence* 4 (14). Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44163-024-00109-4>.
- Warren, Olly. 2023. *Sustainability awareness increasing amongst European consumers*. March 3. Accessed November 20, 2024. <https://savanta.com/eu/knowledge-centre/view/sustainability-awareness-increasing-amongst-european-consumers/>.
- Washington State University. n.d. *How The Sharing Economy Is Transforming Business*. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://onlinemba.wsu.edu/blog/how-the-sharing-economy-is-transforming-business>.
- Watts, Jonathan. 2024. *Just 57 companies linked to 80% of greenhouse gas emissions since 2016*. April 4. Accessed October 10, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/04/just-57-companies-linked-to-80-of-greenhouse-gas-emissions-since-2016>.
- Wehrich, Heinz. 1982. "The TOWS matrix - A tool for situational analysis." *Long Range Planning* 15 (2): 54-66. Accessed October 3, 2024. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301\(82\)90120-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(82)90120-0).

- Weitzman, Tyler. 2023. *Understanding The Benefits And Risks Of Using AI In Business*. March 1. Accessed October 1, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/03/01/understanding-the-benefits-and-risks-of-using-ai-in-business/>.
- Westerman, George, Didier Bonnet, and Andrew McAfee. 2014. *Leading Digital: Turning Technology into Business Transformation*. Harvard University Press. Accessed October 4, 2024.
- Wheeler, Kitty. 2024. *Deloitte: How Chief Data Officers are Navigating AI*. November 18. Accessed November 22, 2024. <https://technologymagazine.com/articles/deloitte-how-chief-data-officers-are-navigating-ai>.
- Williams, Rhiannon, and James O'Donnell. 2024. *We finally have a definition for open-source AI*. August 22. Accessed October 28, 2024. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2024/08/22/1097224/we-finally-have-a-definition-for-open-source-ai/>.
- Wilson, Ian. 2000. "From Scenario Thinking to Strategic Action." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 65 (1): 23-29. Accessed December 13, 2024. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-1625\(99\)00122-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-1625(99)00122-5).
- Wolford, Ben. n.d. *What is GDPR, the EU's new data protection law?* Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/>.
- Woolard, Christopher, Marc Saidenberg, and Eugène Goyne. 2023. *8 areas of change for financial services regulatory policy in 2023*. January 18. Accessed December 16, 2024. https://www.ey.com/en_gl/insights/financial-services/regulatory-outlook.
- World Bank. 2019. *Audit Oversight to Enhance Trust and Transparency in Corporate Financial Statements: Challenges in Developing Countries*. Centre for Financial Reporting Reform, The World Bank, Washington: World Bank Group. Accessed October 2, 2024. <https://cfrr.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2019->

11/Audit%20Oversight%20to%20Enhance%20Trust%20and%20Transparency%20in
%20Corporate%20Financial%20Statements%20Challenges%20in%20Developing%2
0Countries%20%28%20APPROVED-FINAL%20129%29.pdf.

World Bank Group. 2020. *Doing Business 2020*. World Bank Group, World Bank Group.
Accessed October 7, 2024.

<https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Profiles/Regional/DB2020/EU.pdf>.

World Bank Group. n.d. *GDP (current US\$) - European Union, World*. Accessed September 28, 2024. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=EU-1W&most_recent_value_desc=true.

World Population Review. 2024. *Unicorns by Country 2024*. Accessed November 11, 2024.
<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/unicorns-by-country>.

World Population Review. n.d. *Carbon-Negative Countries 2024*. Accessed November 29, 2024. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/carbon-negative-countries>.

Wright, George, and George Cairns. 2011. *Scenario Thinking: Practical Approaches to the Future*. Palgrave Macmillan. Accessed October 4, 2024.

Wright, George, and Paul Goodwin. 2009. "Decision Making and Planning Under Low Levels of Predictability: Enhancing the Scenario Method." *International Journal of Forecasting* 25 (4): 813-825. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijforecast.2009.05.019>.

Wright, George, Ron Bradfield, and George Cairns. 2013. "Does the intuitive logics method - and its recent enhancements - produce "effective" scenarios?" *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 80 (4): 631-642. Accessed December 1, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2012.09.003>.

Wulf, Prof. Dr. Torsten, Christian Brands, and Philip Meißner. 2011. *A Scenario-based Approach to Strategic Planning – Tool Description – Scenario Matrix*. Working Paper,

Lehrstuhl für Strategisches Management und Organisation , HHL – Leipzig Graduate School of Management, Leipzig: HHL – Leipzig Graduate School of Management. Accessed December 7, 2024. <https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/fb02/professuren/bwl/strategy/forschung/publikationen-1/ap-no-12-tool-description-scenario-matrix.pdf>.

Wulf, Prof. Dr. Torsten, Philip Meißner, and Stephan Dr. Stubner. 2010. *A Scenario-based Approach to Strategic Planning – Integrating Planning and Process Perspective of Strategy*. Working Paper, Chair of Strategic Management and Organization, HHL – Leipzig Graduate School of Management, Leipzig: HHL – Leipzig Graduate School of Management. Accessed October 4, 2024. <https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/fb02/professuren/bwl/strategy/forschung/publikationen-1/ap-no-6-scenario-based-approach-to-strategic-planning.pdf>.

Wycliffe, Muia. 2024. *Germany to welcome Kenyans in labour deal*. September 14. Accessed November 3, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gegkkg14ko>.

Yang, Jiaqi, Yvette Blount, and Alireza Amrollahi. 2024. "Artificial intelligence adoption in a professional service industry: A multiple case study." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 201. Accessed October 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2024.123251>.

Yee, Lareina. 2024. *Keeping artificial intelligence real*. October 11. Accessed October 24, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/keeping-artificial-intelligence-real>.

Zaidan, Esmat, and Imad Antoine Ibrahim. 2024. "AI Governance in a Complex and Rapidly Changing Regulatory Landscape: A Global Perspective." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11 (1121). Accessed November 4, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03560-x>.

- Zemankova, Aneta. 2019. "Artificial Intelligence in Audit and Accounting: Development, Current Trends, Opportunities and Threats - Literature Review." *International Conference on Control, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics & Optimization (ICCAIRO)*. Athens, Greece. 148-154. Accessed October 3, 2024. doi:10.1109/ICCAIRO47923.2019.00031.
- Zukunftsinstitut. 2023. *The Megatrends*. December 19. Accessed September 9, 2024. <https://www.zukunftsinstitut.de/zukunftsthemen/dossier/megatrends-en>.
- Zweers, Wouter, Dr. Isabelle Ioannides, Zoran Nechev, and Nikola Dimitrov. 2024. *Unblocking decision-making in EU enlargement*. Policy Brief, Clingendael Institute. Accessed October 31, 2024. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/PB_Unblocking_decision-making_in_EU_enlargement.pdf.

12. Appendix

Table of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Glossary	121
Appendix 2 – Project Timeline	122
Appendix 3 – Expert Interview (Andreas Wermelt)	123
Appendix 4 – Expert Interview (Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann)	141
Appendix 5 – Climate Change	155
Appendix 6 – Uncertainties	156
Appendix 7 – Survey	171
Appendix 8 – Justification Bottleneck Scenario	172
Appendix 9 – Workshop	173
Appendix 10 – Justification for Prioritization Categorization	175
Appendix 11 – Involvement of Deloitte.....	183

Appendix 1 – Glossary

AI	Artificial Intelligence
Big Four	The four largest accounting firms globally, commonly referred to as audit firms or professional services networks, are Deloitte, EY, KPMG, and PwC. These Big Four firms command a significant share of the industry (Bohne 2023).
BRICS	BRICS is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. This group of countries functions as an organization aimed at promoting economic cooperation among its members and enhancing their economic and political influence globally (Chen 2024a)
CAGR	Compound Annual Growth Rate
CIA	Cross Impact Analysis
CLV	Center for the Long View
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
ESG	Environmental, Social, Governance
ESRS	European Sustainability Reporting Standards
EU	European Union
EX	Employee Experience
EY	Ernst & Young
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FinTech	Financial Technology
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GDS	Global Delivery Services
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
KPMG	Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler
ML	Machine Learning
PESTEL	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal
PMT	Probabilistic Modified Trends
PwC	Pricewaterhouse Coopers
RegTech	Regulatory Technology
RPA	Robotic Process Automation
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TIA	Trend Impact Analysis
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USD	US Dollars
XAI	Explainable AI

Appendix 2 – Project Timeline

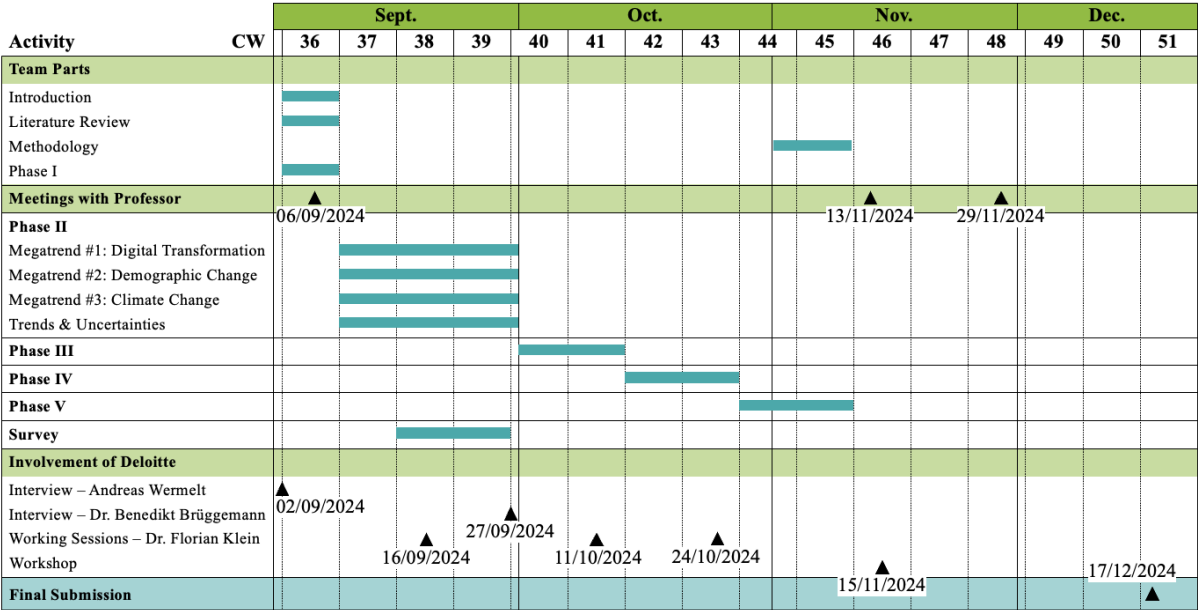


Figure 11 - Project Timeline (Own illustration)

Appendix 3 – Expert Interview (Andreas Wermelt)

Proclamation:

All transcripts have been slightly edited for clarity and readability. These changes include removing repeated words, incomplete sentences, and filler words. It is important to note that no substantive changes have been made to the script. The adjustments were made solely to improve the flow and comprehension of the dialogue and to ensure that the essence of the respondents' answers was preserved.

Interview Date: 02.09.2024

Context: Person and Background

Name: Andreas Wermelt

Position: Audit & Assurance Transformation Leader @ Deloitte

Background Information: Andreas Wermelt is responsible for all activities relating to the transformation of Deloitte's audit business and is the Audit Analytics Leader in Germany. He has more than 25 years of experience in consulting and auditing internal control, risk and compliance management systems, both for listed and owner-managed companies in various industries. Andreas Wermelt is a member of various working groups of the Institute of Public Auditors in Germany and the author of various publications on issues relating to the design and audit of corporate governance systems (Deloitte n.d.b).

Key Takeaways

In this interview with **Andreas Wermelt**, Transformation Leader for Europe in Audit at Deloitte, key insights into the future of the audit profession until 2035 were discussed. Wermelt highlighted the critical role of emerging technologies, particularly the integration of a comprehensive “technology stack” and AI, which are transforming audit processes by increasing efficiency and accuracy. Generative AI, in particular, is expected to automate routine tasks, such as drafting accounting memos and populating checklists, allowing auditors to focus on higher-level reviews. However, Wermelt emphasized that while the tools and processes may evolve, the core purpose of audit—ensuring trust in financial numbers—remains unchanged. He also addressed significant trends like sustainability and the EU’s CSRD, which will require auditors to expand their competencies beyond financial metrics to areas like CO2 emissions and biodiversity. Moreover, the shift to virtual work environments post-pandemic and the use of global audit delivery centers were identified as essential efficiency drivers. Despite technological advancements, Wermelt highlighted ongoing challenges such as talent acquisition, regulatory adaptation, and maintaining public trust in the audit profession.

Transcript

Group: Hello Andreas, thank you for taking the time, we really appreciate it. We 4 are doing our master thesis right now at Nova SBE about the topic of the future of audit until 2035 in Europe and implications for Deloitte. And we thought it would be perfect to start the interview with you. It will be the first interview to get your insights and your knowledge. Whatever you have to share will be appreciated.

Did you get the e-mail with the pre-read with the questions already? Do you have any questions? Does it make sense?

Andreas Wermelt: No, that's alright.

Group: Perfect. OK. Then we can just get started if there are no other questions. So first would be interesting to hear your opinion about the vision of audit in general. What kind of leading transformations at Deloitte are you working with right now, how will that be in the future, and how do you personally think audit will look like 10 years from now? That would be interesting to start with.

Andreas Wermelt: Alright, so let me start with the key transformation initiatives that we have on the way here at Deloitte. The most important transformation is implementing what we call a "technology stack" to be used in the audit, something like the Enterprise Resource Planning system for doing an audit. That is something we are currently building, or we are in the midst of rolling out.

What's that? Doing an audit is a series of checks of procedures and you can organize that like a workflow with a lot of people being part of that workflow. You have to observe professional standards, and you have to do these things in a certain sequence. And to organize that in that

specific sequence in accordance with what the client needs and using the data of the client is a very, very complicated piece of software. And that is something we are currently rolling out. And we're not only doing it for the big ones, but we're also doing it for the very small audits as well. Which is a little bit different. However, we're implementing a huge technology stack. And that is what I'm leading from a German perspective, but also from a continent Europe perspective. So that is the key transformation initiative. That comes with using AI and all this stuff for sure.

That's the first part of the question. The second part of the question is you're asking, "How does the audit profession evolve over the next 10 years?"

I think the audit profession itself does not really change in a huge way, because if you're looking back ten years ago and you compare the odd profession 10 years ago with the odd profession today, these guys are still doing the same things. However, they are using different means to do that. They are becoming more efficient, and the setting of the audit itself is a little bit different as they are using audit delivery centers somewhere in the world. They are more sophisticated than using data from the client and external data. But in the end, the way the audit is performed doesn't really change. The idea of what an audit is doesn't really change. However, the technical means change.

So, looking ahead in 10 years, we will probably have a lot more generative AI being infused into the way we do the audit. We probably are in an area where the connection with the client is a lot more sophisticated than it is today as in, we have our data pipelines into the systems of the client and certainly, data analytics will do a lot of tricks infused by AI as well. So that's it, but I do not expect drones flying around and doing the job [laughs].

Group: Thank you very much for your explanations. It's very helpful for us to get the vision of audit, especially from an expert like you. We were starting our master thesis with some

research, of course, just to figure out what are the key trends that we see and that we saw in the past few years. And of course, we listed some of them in the pre-read. First of all, obviously digital transformation with all the specific sub-trends that we have. But we also recognize a change in work environments as well as the greater importance of sustainability and global responsibility. Therefore, we would like to ask if, according to your opinion, these are the most significant trends influencing the audit industry, or if there are other trends or megatrends that you foresee will play a key role.

Andreas Wermelt: You said sustainability, right?

Group: Yes.

Andreas Wermelt: Yes. OK. You heard about the CSRD right?

Group: Yes, yes.

Andreas Wermelt: The CSRD will have a huge impact on what we are auditing. It will enlarge the focus points. The audit of non-financial reporting isn't really different to the audit of financial reporting. However, it enlarges the footprint. So, sustainability has a huge impact on the audit profession, but not in a way that the audit profession itself changes. But it's more work, right, more stuff to do, and certainly it will ask for new competencies. Now it's not only about numbers as in dollars, but also in CO2 emissions, biodiversity impacts et cetera. So certainly, you need some other competencies of course.

When it comes to the workplace of the future: The Corona pandemic had a certain impact and that will last. During that pandemic, we figured out that a lot of work can be done virtually. We

used to be on site all the time, but nowadays you do a lot of work not being on site in a virtual setting or you gather the team in some area so that they're all together, but they're not really. They're still remote from the client, but you have them all in one place. And that has an impact on the way we organize our offices. We used to have these offices close to the proximity of the client, but that isn't that necessary anymore. Also, you are able to organize specialists in a different way. You used to have specialists in every office, and now as it becomes more obvious that you can work virtually you may have these specialists just in one place. That has an impact on the way we organize ourselves.

And when it comes to technology, AI is the big trick. That's the big thing and that is completely different, for instance, to blockchain. You got that in your pre-read. Blockchain is something which doesn't really play any role when it comes to what we audit or how we audit funnily [laughs]. A lot of talk about it, but it doesn't have any impact. As I said, technology, AI, and generative AI intelligence. I differentiate between these two. That is something which is really, really important.

Group: Do you think blockchain will play a role in 10 years or probably in the audit industry not at all?

Andreas Wermelt: Certainly not in the audit industry as in using blockchain to do audits. I don't know how that should work. There is no use case to do that. And when it comes to the client: The pharmaceutical companies in the US are using a blockchain to figure out where the pills are and who's actually having ownership of the pill in the middle of the supply chain. That might be an idea, but we haven't seen it yet. There are pilots and everybody's trying to do something with blockchain, but nothing really comes out of that, to be honest. We have not really seen that as a game-changer in our industry.

Group: OK and do you think it will require also in the future that the auditors will work more cross-functional with teams who are specialized in CSRD or do the auditors themselves have to gain more knowledge and skills about CSRD?

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, the auditors themselves have to gain the knowledge, or they have to build the knowledge or competence into their teams. If you do the audit on the impact of the company when it comes to biodiversity, you at least need to understand a bit of what the company's actually talking about. Either you know it by yourself, or you know somebody who knows it. And you have to integrate these specialists into the way you're doing the audit.

Group: Okay interesting. You said that if you compare the audit industry or the audit profession itself to the audit profession as it was 10 years ago, it didn't change that much. When we're talking about digital transformation now and we see that many different technologies are coming on the market at a faster pace than ever, would you say that creating a vision for the audit industry until 2035, so in 10 years, is a feasible time horizon, or would you say that these changes may come so fast and that in that we cannot really foresee what will happen in 10 years?

Andreas Wermelt: As I said, the change coming up for us which is maybe a bigger change than the changes we have seen in the past is the impact of AI, especially generative AI. That has a significant impact on the way we do our work. Let me explain how that works: So, for instance, in the past, you had to write up memos about some accounting questions. You had to explain why the client has accounted for in a specific situation and then you write that up. You explain why that is, et cetera, et cetera. That was labor-intensive, and you had to do some research on that. And now you use a GPT model being built on your knowledge libraries and

that thing actually produces the accounting memos. You need to review them, and you need to correct them. However, quite a lot of work can be substituted with this artificial and generative AI.

To give you other examples: When you're doing the audit work you have to check whether the notes being produced by the client as part of their financial statement are in compliance with some standards. We usually work with checklists. And what you can do now is upload the notes into that machine and then the machine is actually prepopulating the checklist. You have to do the review work. However, 70% of work being performed by professionals can be actually I wouldn't say replaced, but artificial generative AI can do a lot of that.

You could have interviews with the client explaining how processes work, and the AI is then translating that into scripts and then translates that into flow to flowcharts. That's another aspect. So generative AI is helping us do the regular work, let's call it that way.

Group: Yes, makes sense.

Andreas Wermelt: What else has a pretty big impact, to be honest, is utilizing data and looking into that data to see traces or using that data to a different extent than we probably have done in the past. I don't know whether you have heard about ESEF - European, single electronic format. Have you heard about that?

Group: I've heard about it but I'm not sure what it is exactly.

Andreas Wermelt: All the European companies with a certain size have to publish their financial statements in an electronic format and you can get hold of the data now and then you can use that data to train your AI thing, as in: Companies with a certain ratio of financial KPIs

went bust the next in the next two years, based on the data. You can use that and then it informs your risk assessment process. That's something we're working on.

Group: Interesting and probably also in terms of fraud detection, right?

Andreas Wermelt: It's a tricky one in terms of fraud detection because everybody's jumping on that and says "yes, of course, you can do something about the fraud detection". But the point is you need to understand how AI works because you have to explain to the algorithm what a fraud procedure has been. You need to have data or transactions being processed which were actually fraudulent. And then you have to tell the machine, hey, whenever something like that appears, then it's fraudulent. But you do not have that data. That data might exist, but you cannot use that to train the machine. Have you heard about Benford's law?

Group: Yes.

Andreas Wermelt: That is kind of what everybody's trying. But it's not that easy to train AI to identify fraudulent situations.

Group: OK. Interesting. And do you expect AI to evolve so that fraud detection will be possible in the future?

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, it depends on the data you have at hand. The more data you have, which actually describes a fraudulent situation, the more you can use that data to train the algorithms. But if you do not have that data on hand, you will get nowhere.

Group: Yes, makes sense. Fraud is an interesting topic.

We can then jump to the challenges and uncertainties. We would just be interested what you think are the main challenges and how does Deloitte try to prepare for these challenges and try to minimize any wrongdoings in these challenges that will occur of course with the fast-paced changing times we have right now?

Andreas Wermelt: When it comes to using AI, of course, the AI being used in performing an audit comes with some downsides. It is not always explainable and depends on the data being used. You probably have heard about hallucinations and all the downsides of using AI and of course, that holds true for us as auditors to use that as well. So, we need to make sure that the AI being used is actually quality assured, it works as it has to work, and the regulators have to tick that off as well. So that's one challenge, but that is something nice and easy.

The other challenge is people. On the one hand, we probably run out of people. We do not get the experts we would like to have. But then we probably have to train them in a completely different way than we used to train them in the past, because as I said in the past, the younger people wrote the accounting memos, and somebody was reviewing them and explaining "Hey, you need to do that way that way". And then by doing that, you learn it. But if we are getting into a situation where the machines are producing these memos, how do I train real human beings to review what the machine is producing? So that is something we need to think about as well. And then as I said, war of talent. We will disaggregate the audit work into audit delivery centers across the globe when we're talking about the big ones, the big audits. And then the real auditor of the future is somebody who is orchestrating a set of technology and a set of delivery centers and experts. But as you are orchestrating a set of specialists and technology and build it all together - How do you train the lead auditors of the future? And that is something we need

to get our arms around as well. How do we charge our clients in the future? In the past, it was quite easy because we were just ticking hours and then we were charging hours.

But today, we get into a situation where we're not charging hours anymore because we need to charge the technology being used and that is a different model as well. So that is some internal challenges we have.

Yes. Technology, people, and client interaction. These are the challenges.

Group: OK, because we can imagine closing the bridge between the client and the internal team is also probably a tough challenge. For example, explaining this complicated data that you found to the client so that it's understandable.

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, exactly. Using the client's data and external data for the purpose of the audit will be a challenge. Whoever is able to do that in the most efficient way will win the race.

Group: Do you guys or you personally with your teams in Deloitte have any initiatives or things in mind already for the future that will lead to being the most efficient so that Deloitte can also be the most efficient compared to the other audit firms and everything what is your idea there?

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, we have some workstreams here. On the one hand, we're investing very much in technology, audit technology, so that it is easy to use. Or not easy to use but so that it's a nice tool. Just to give you an idea of how much the Deloitte network on a global basis is investing in audit technology, that's something around \$350 million per year. That is quite extensive.

And then we certainly have started thinking about how talent transformation has to take place. What kind of people do we really need for an audit? Who's doing what? Where do these people sit? How do we orchestrate that? How does that all interplay? And that is that's something which has just started because people are the most important thing, and we want to be an attractive employer. And that means we need to build the way we do audits maybe in a different way so that it is an attractive exercise and not something like pushing buttons on a machine, right? Because to do the audit, you really need to understand the client. You really need to understand the business models. You need to understand the economics around that. It's not only looking at data, right, it is understanding the data. And having that background needs to be trained as well, and we can't do that with just people sitting in front of screens and pushing buttons. They need to be with the client and understand what's going on, and that is something we are currently thinking about how we improve.

Group: Do you think that should already happen at the university level or do you also, for example, see that the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam you take will change what they require in terms of more technology-based requirements, or do you think it's really up to the company to train these people more?

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, when you were talking about the Big Four, it is more the companies or the Big Fours who are more making sure that people get the right training because the official CPA exam and the content of that be sometimes lagging behind what is actually needed [laughs].

Group: OK, interesting. And maybe then last big topic: Talking in terms of uncertainties - what do you personally think could happen that maybe we'll see something completely else, and we

go back to maybe less technology or cases like Enron or Wirecard where the playing field changes and regulators. So maybe what you personally think might be some uncertainties that can really disrupt the advancements we might see.

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, you just said it. The purpose of an audit is to bridge this principal-agent problem: Making sure that capital markets work, and people trust numbers. That's the role of an auditor - whether he's using RPA or AI, nobody gives a shit. What they want to have is somebody saying, "You can trust these numbers".

And that is the most important thing. And if we are running into a situation where we are unable to live up to that trust being put into us as auditors, the regulators will react to that. And so, one or two more Wirecards down the road could have a significant impact on the audit. Not as in we're not doing any audits anymore, but as in more regulation. Maybe turning that into a state-owned agency whatsoever, I don't know what politicians are coming up with, but the disruption happens in that public perception. If the public perception goes down the drain, then the auditors have a problem.

Group: OK. Do you think there's a fear that at some point in the future, there will be too much technology, and AI will take over and we kind of lose the people's focus that there will still be needed, or do you think the balance will always be there?

Andreas Wermelt: No, I don't think that this is the risk because, to be honest, the technology itself is not as advanced as one might think. It helps in writing up stuff and doing let's say easy work faster. But the complex work, the thinking of the assessments, the evaluations, cannot be replaced with AI. It can be supported, that's not a problem. I think the problem is the regulator acting not fast enough or too fast. Not fast enough as in not understanding what technology can

and how technology can help us do a quality audit. Or too fast, as in overregulating what we're doing. And that's something where we are already. There is a tendency for the audit itself to become more of a tick-in-the-box exercise just to fulfil the compliance requirements and you forget about the real audit, let's call it that way. You're not auditing to make sure the numbers are correct; you're auditing to convince the regulator that you have done the right stuff and that is something where we really need to be cautious that we're not forgetting about what the purpose of the audit is in our communication with the regulator.

Group: And since it will help to support to be faster and more efficient, do you think that audits might happen more frequently? So that we're not having it only annually, but maybe we have all companies now doing it every six months or even more because all this long work is now being done by AI?

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, for the bigger or for the most relevant companies we have this kind of continuous auditing already. Because we're doing the quarterly reviews, we are there all year round. So that's something we have already implemented, to be honest, yes. When it comes to the smaller ones, maybe they do not want to see the auditor every day of the year [laughs].

Group: Probably not.

Andreas Wermelt: So, for the real companies where you have public interest entities of a decent size, they all are audited more or less on a continuous basis.

Group: OK. Interesting. Do you foresee that the legal framework might change even if the public perception doesn't change? Or would you consider it to be rather stable and foreseeable?

Andreas Wermelt: That has changed recently with the Fisk, at least in Germany, because we went through this Wirecard scandal. I would say that as long as we do not get any more scandals, it's stable.

Group: OK.

Andreas Wermelt: It always becomes unstable once you're running into these scandals. Now with the implementation of the CSRD, we have a lot of conversations on going on a European basis, which keeps us busy. But other than that, once that has been implemented and we're foreseeing no scandals down the road, I would say that it is stable.

Group: OK. Do you think there will be quite a difference between the different countries in Europe or will it become more standardized across all countries in the future?

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, as long as we're talking about the EU, we're actually more or less in the same legal frame. These EU directives usually come with options to implement alternatives. You get some alternatives to do something, and member states can use these alternatives, and then you've got some deviation in practice. But that is not that big. So, all in all, at least for the EU, we have some kind of a standardized frame. And when it comes to the Big Four companies, they make sure that their audit approach is more or less standardized across the globe.

Group: A couple of minutes ago you mentioned the setup of audit delivery centers as one big change. Could you please touch a bit on this regarding potential challenges that you want to overcome with this, what kind of impact it will have on your services and how you will benefit?

Andreas Wermelt: Having audit delivery centers in place is usually something I would call an efficiency play. Either you are getting the efficiency out of so-called economies of scale or Labor arbitrage. So, if you are operating in a very standardized way, then put all the accounts payable work into an audit delivery center, those people doing this might become a little bit faster because they're then trained to do only the accounts payment stuff. That's the old tailor principle. And then you can utilize people who are not that highly paid and you probably operate in low cost-countries. And then you get the Labor arbitrage as well. So, meaning an hour in India is less expensive than an hour here in Europe. So that's the idea behind that.

And then you operate on an extended team approach. Let me explain that: That is, you do not really change the way you do an audit, but you use the opportunity to virtually integrate low-cost people from low-cost countries virtually into the team. That is something that, for instance, Deloitte US has implemented very extensively. I would say that the US audit practice has about 20,000 people being based out of India and these people are virtually integrated into the audits they're doing in the US. So, when a US team is doing an audit on a US client, they usually have 20 to 30% of hours being served out of India. And these people doing the work are not anonymous. They are dedicated people, they know them and the only thing is that they are physically not in the US, they are physically in India. They are well trained, they have the best accounting and auditing knowledge you can get and what you're doing is that you're just tapping into that labor market of India and are utilizing highly skilled and highly trained people, but you do not pay them the prices you would pay for that in the US.

That's one approach and the other approach is then what we call a task-based approach and that is something where you as a team want to send out confirmations. And then you just buy, or you order the set of confirmations being performed out of a shared service center. You just ordered that task, and that task is performed for you. You do not know who's doing that. You have to deliver the information these guys need to know to send the confirmations, they send

the confirmation, receive them and send them back to you. You just outsource tasks. That comes with standardization. And it works well in situations where you have a very stable process with the client. Whenever you're running into hiccups in terms of "Hey, I just don't get the information I need", and you have booked the ticket in the US in the audit delivery center, then you get into organizational messy situations. But it works as long as you are in a stable environment. So that's basically what we're doing. You see all sorts of variants of that across the planet. But we're heavily moving down the road into the audit delivery centers.

Group: Thank you. That's very, very interesting. Would you say that this is common in the audit industry or will become more and more common? Or is Deloitte the first company to do this?

Andreas Wermelt: Yes, it is very common. It is very, very common. And I would say that from a global perspective, Deloitte is actually lagging behind. The others are a little bit faster than that from a global network perspective. Amongst the Deloitte member firms, the US is well advanced, but the rest of the network is not as advanced as the US and I would say on average the others are probably a little bit down the road. But that is standard play, nothing spectacular. Everybody's doing it.

Group: Interesting, thank you. There are no open questions from our side, we addressed all the points we wanted to. So, thank you so much already for helping us and we appreciate it. It was really a good insight into everything and get first-hand knowledge about that. So, we'll definitely implement that.

Andreas Wermelt: All right.

Group: Yes. Thank you so much for taking your time.

Andreas Wermelt: No problem.

Group: Do you have any other questions for us or anything?

Andreas Wermelt: No, just good luck [laughs].

Group: Thank you. Bye.

Appendix 4 – Expert Interview (Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann)

Proclamation:

All transcripts have been slightly edited for clarity and readability. These changes include removing repeated words, incomplete sentences, and filler words. It is important to note that no substantive changes have been made to the script. The adjustments were made solely to improve the flow and comprehension of the dialogue and to ensure that the essence of the respondents' answers was preserved.

Interview Date: 27.09.2024

Context: Person and Background

Name: Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann

Position: Partner Audit Sector Leader Power, Utilities & Renewables @ Deloitte

Background Information: Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann is a Partner at Deloitte Germany, where he serves as the Audit Sector Leader for Power, Utilities, and Renewables. His focus is on auditing International Financial Reporting Standards consolidated financial statements, with specialized expertise in complex accounting topics such as financial instruments and hedge accounting under International Financial Reporting Standards. Dr. Brüggemann also supports Mergers & Acquisitions transactions and helps companies navigate the intricacies of energy procurement and sustainability, particularly with emerging tools like Power Purchase Agreements. His professional journey includes positions in New York and Berlin; since 2013, he has been based in Düsseldorf (Deloitte n.d.e).

Key Takeaways

In this interview, **Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann**, a leader in the energy sector at Deloitte, discusses the evolving landscape of the audit profession with a focus on future challenges and opportunities. He highlights the impact of new regulations such as the CSRD, which adds complexity to audit processes by requiring audits of non-financial reports like CO2 emissions and biodiversity impacts. Dr. Brüggemann also emphasizes the increasing importance of digital transformation, particularly the use of AI, to improve audit efficiency, though he notes that human expertise will remain essential for strategic decision-making and complex assessments.

Furthermore, Dr. Brüggemann discusses challenges related to talent acquisition, particularly in Germany, where attracting skilled auditors is becoming more difficult. He notes the potential for international collaboration, particularly with teams in India, to enhance efficiency, while acknowledging the need to fully integrate these teams into audit processes. Dr. Brüggemann also touches on uncertainties around geopolitical stability, talent availability, and the future of investments in renewables, stressing that auditors will need to adapt to these trends in the coming years.

Transcript

Group: Hi Benedikt, thank you for joining us today. We appreciate your time. We've already discussed the general questions related to audit and now would love to hear your thoughts, particularly on your expertise within energy and sustainability. First, did you get the preview of the questions we sent over?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Yes, briefly, but let's go through them.

Group: OK. Perfect. Yeah, maybe we want to start kind of a little bit more broadly and kind of talk about the vision of the future in your personal opinion where auditing is heading the next 10 years, what you kind of see how the profession is going to look like, what it's going to change, maybe what kind of transformation initiatives you're leading at Deloitte with your team and how do you think they will shape the future? Maybe we can start a bit more broadly with your personal opinion just about audit and what you think it's going to look like in 10 years.

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Maybe as a starting point, I would say that the audit profession has changed significantly in recent years. One major driver was the external audit rotation requirement in Europe, which means we have to quickly understand new clients, their business, processes, and associated risks. On the one hand, this makes it riskier for us when taking over because we have to understand everything within a very short time frame. However, the positive aspect is that it makes the work much more interesting because we are not serving the same client for decades, which could become rather boring. Instead, we always work with new people and new companies. The company also benefits by having fresh perspectives from a new auditor. This has led to dramatic changes in Europe.

Another major driver is the CSRD reporting requirements. For the first time, this year, we are required to audit with limited assurance, which adds more complexity to our daily work. We need to find the right balance in determining what is significant from the company's perspective and whether the assessment is reasonable. This involves a lot of judgment, and it is currently a major topic. Looking to the next 10 years, the development of CSRD will be an important factor. Digitization is also crucial. Currently, when we look at the accounting systems of our clients, they are still fragmented. It is not easy to digitize an entire company comprehensively from one day to the next; it takes time. However, there are initiatives underway that will enable us to use more digital tools in the audit. We are also seeing increased demand for talent. In particular, in Germany, some clients are struggling to fill positions in their accounting departments, which brings pressure to optimize processes and work with a reduced workforce. This also puts pressure on centralization—determining what can be done centrally, which will impact how we perform audits.

Group: OK. Interesting. Do you think the problem with the new people coming into the industry is that it is not attractive enough or what do you think is the main problem regarding the workforce?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: I think the audit profession needs to work on its image. As I mentioned, there hasn't been enough focus on the external rotation requirements, which bring in new demands and require a very different skill set. From my perspective, this makes the profession much more attractive. Additionally, we are seeing fee levels increase, which also makes it more appealing. These are very positive developments, and we need to communicate this to young talent like yourselves so that these changes are recognized.

Group: Yep, for sure. OK. Thank you. And maybe also some initiatives you're leading right now in terms of your team, maybe also in terms of the energy sector, more related, how do you think the whole energy sector is going to be more integrated maybe in the audit process and how is this going to maybe change also in the next 10 years since that's a super dynamic industry?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: This helps, to be honest. When you compare the fluctuation rate in my team with that of the whole company, it's much lower in my team. This is because, in the energy sector, it's quite easy to communicate the purpose of our work. At Deloitte, our purpose is 'making an impact that matters.' We don't just work to make money. I don't wake up in the morning thinking about how much money I can make today. Instead, we think about how our work impacts stakeholders, society, and shareholders. In the energy industry, topics like climate change and globalization are key.

This has certain impacts on accounting, and new topics are constantly emerging. This makes the work interesting. You can really feel that what you're doing has an impact. It's not just routine work; you need to use your brain when assessing these questions.

Group: You already touched on some trends shaping the future, like digital transformation. In your opinion, are there any other major trends that have established themselves over the past few years and will likely continue to impact the auditing industry, especially looking toward 2035?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: One important topic is international collaboration, which has improved significantly over the past year. We started with shared service centers in Eastern Europe, and now we work much more closely with teams in Asia, particularly in India,

leveraging their skill sets. These colleagues are highly motivated, and a side benefit is the time zone difference. It's not 24 hours, but with the 8-hour difference, we can be more efficient and utilize our time better. From my perspective, auditing is one of the most international professions you can imagine, and this is an important factor that motivates me and makes my daily work life enjoyable.

Group: Ok. Maybe to that point, what do you think about the different laws and regulations, that of course differ in every country, especially in Asia? Do you think it will become more standardized across the globe, across Europe or how do you deal with these different regulations maybe also for subsidiaries and everything, how to audit them?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Yes, I mean, good point. You have the International Financial Reporting Standards, which are relevant for group financial statements. Then you have statutory requirements, which can vary. For instance, in India, the fiscal year always ends on March 31st, while in Germany and the rest of Europe, it's typically December 31st. In terms of regulations, data protection and data security are important topics, especially when working in the cloud. The hope is that we will see more international and standardized regulations, but I'm not convinced this will happen. The trend toward globalization is not as strong as it was 10 years ago, so it's not necessarily a success story.

Group: One quick question related to the workforce. You said that kind of the scarcity of talent may be a problem for the audit industry in the future and you also mentioned that due to globalization, you leverage the workforce in different countries or other countries for performing in the audit profession. We also talked to Andreas Wermelt, and he mentioned the audit delivery centers in India. So, we assume that this is a big topic. Therefore, we are

wondering how you see the skill sets: Which skills are needed in order to develop over time? So do you think that like for example, cross-cultural competencies may be more important in a couple of years than they were a couple of years back or are now or how do you see in general these competencies evolving also regarding ESG demands as well as digitization obviously.

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Yes, sure. All aspects are relevant. As mentioned, digitalization is something we need to keep track of, ensuring we have a solid understanding of what it means and what the company being audited is doing in terms of digitization. Often, it's just a buzzword, but we need to understand what is actually happening, what they are doing, and assess its impact on financial reporting—and consequently on the audit.

Regarding cross-cultural competencies, the trend is toward more integrated use of global teams. I wouldn't use the term "delivery center" as we had in Eastern Europe. Now, when we look at India, our goal is to have a fully integrated team. We don't see them as a separate delivery center; they are team members. It's important to give them challenging tasks, not just small pieces of work, but perhaps a whole field, and ask them to audit it. This is crucial for their motivation and for using their skill set to its full potential.

Group: And maybe also talking more about digitalization in terms of AI, how much do you think AI is going to take over in terms of tasks it can do, and do you think it's going to evolve a lot in the next 10 years? Or do you think people are still going to be the most important impactful factor for audit or how much do you think AI is actually going to replace some of the work people is doing right now?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Yes, AI will replace some repetitive tasks. It may mean fewer people are needed, but those we do need will require higher skills. The role will be more about

understanding the bigger picture and making strategic assessments and less about mundane work. This shift makes the profession more attractive for top talent, as it becomes more intellectually challenging.

Group: OK. Do you think that, with the help of AI, audits in general will become more efficient, be completed faster, and perhaps even be done more frequently? Since some of these administrative tasks could be handled by AI instead of people.

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: It's interesting. Sometimes people say, "Now that we have AI and digital tools, everything will be cheaper than before." I tell them that while we can certainly benefit from economies of scale and leverage our position as the largest company within the Big Four to develop innovative tools, we also need to invest in innovation. Additionally, when you need people with a better skill set, they will earn more. So, while you may need fewer people overall, those you do need will earn more, which creates a balance in terms of costs.

Group: Ok. Maybe one last topic about digital tools. We had an interesting talk with Andreas Wermelt about blockchain and its potential impact. During our research, we read a lot about blockchain and how it could make auditing more efficient. However, Andreas believes blockchain will not have any significant impact on auditing in the next 10 years. He was really on the opposite side of what we found in our research. It would be interesting to hear your perspective on how much blockchain could impact audits.

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: I wouldn't say blockchain has no impact at all, but it's hard to assess how significant it will be. Blockchain could improve transparency and collaboration

between different entities, which might be useful for auditing. However, I can't say for sure how big this impact might be.

Group: Interesting. It's good you mentioned a specific use case for blockchain because that was Andreas' (Wermelts) main concern. He sees blockchain as interesting but doesn't see any use cases for how it can be used in audit. So, thank you for mentioning that example. One quick question regarding CSRD reporting and the growing emphasis on ESG—would you say that the current laws are set in stone, or do you see any major changes coming in the next few years that could impact the audit industry, especially in terms of auditing non-financial aspects?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Regarding CSRD reporting, it's a challenging topic this year. We've had many discussions with C-level executives and supervisory boards about what is really needed and relevant to stakeholders. They are often interested in CO2 emissions, which seems to be their primary focus, while other topics are less important to them. The challenge is identifying what is truly significant and ensuring the information provided is concise and to the point, rather than overwhelming. We are talking about adding 60 to 80 additional pages to the annual report, which is a lot. There is also concern that reporting on certain minor aspects could prompt critical investors to raise even more questions during shareholder meetings. Sometimes, these questions come from small investors with very specific concerns, which may not always help move the company or society forward. There is a risk that this will become a bureaucratic exercise.

From a European perspective, we also need to ensure that these requirements don't lead to a competitive disadvantage compared to the US or Asian companies. In 2025, it will be interesting because we will have the actual reports from companies across Europe, allowing us

to compare what competitors are reporting on. My hope is that this will clear up some of the current uncertainty.

Group: Interesting. And one last question related to this, sorry, because we also read a lot of things about greenwashing of course which can be a topic for many companies. We were just wondering what are the ways you use at Deloitte in order to detect and prevent greenwashing initiatives from your clients?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: It's definitely a topic we are keeping an eye on. With my clients, I don't see a strong tendency towards greenwashing, to be honest. However, we do remain vigilant about it. For example, there are green certificates from China where it's questionable whether they are truly green or not. This makes the profession even more interesting. I would say that we, as a Big Four firm, have a unique position—not just Deloitte, but the others as well—to address the risk of greenwashing. We are global organizations, and we need to be present in all relevant locations to ensure a robust audit of these claims. From my perspective, it is also our duty and obligation towards society to make sure we address these issues properly.

Group: What about the risk of financial scandals like Wirecard? How does Deloitte aim to avoid these?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: It's essential to minimize the risk of financial scandals, and we do this through strong cooperation between competitors to improve standards and share best practices. There's no guarantee of avoiding scandals entirely, but we must work to mitigate the risk as much as possible. Public trust is crucial and maintaining that trust means being transparent and ensuring that we do quality audits.

Group: Understood. Yeah. Thank you very much. Maybe we can jump to the topic of uncertainties. For our master thesis and project, we need to set up scenarios, and for that, we need to identify uncertainties that could have a high impact on the future of the audit industry, as well as uncertainties regarding how these factors might develop over the next few years. To start with a more general question, what would you say are the key uncertainties that the audit industry needs to prepare for? You already mentioned the availability of talent as one factor. Do you see any other changes, such as in digitization, or a clear trend regarding technological progress? What are your key thoughts on this?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: You have to look at both aspects comprehensively. In the end, having the best talent is key, and we need to communicate that this is a great profession. I believe it will become easier to attract talent as earnings increase, which I'm quite confident about.

It's important to have people with the right skill sets to understand what's going on with our clients and to manage the data flow, which requires certain IT skills. We also need to ensure we always have the appropriate audit tools to perform a proper audit. From my perspective, this is the most important task for the future.

Group: Thank you. How would you consider external factors like economic and political stability within the EU? Would you say it's relatively stable, or do you see uncertainties that we need to prepare for in the future?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: [laughs] I wouldn't call it stable. When you look at the situation in Germany, having a three-party coalition may not be ideal, but it's also uncertain if a two-party coalition would be better. It's not a stable situation, and you see similar circumstances in

other European countries. This is a broader issue beyond just audits—we have topics like immigration affecting many European countries. My hope is that European countries come together to address these challenges because, from a German perspective alone, it's hard to solve. Stability is crucial, as instability leads to risks in financial statements, raising questions about impairments, budget reliability, and guidance for the coming year. It's always important to have a solid understanding of what is happening to determine the impact on financial reporting. For example, I had a discussion with the CEO of an energy client who has operations near areas of instability. We talked about the upcoming US elections and their potential impact on their activities in the US. While we cannot change the outcome, it's important to think about the potential consequences.

This is also one of the benefits of audit compared to advisory work. In audit, you have a very close relationship with C-level executives—you attend meetings regularly and have consistent discussions with them. This makes auditing a highly respected profession.

Group: Hmm ok, we also had a question regarding the uncertainty around financial scandals, like what we saw with Wirecard and its impact on EY. What do you think about the potential for similar incidents in the coming years? Do you think the frequency of these scandals might increase? And what initiatives does Deloitte have in place to try to avoid these situations to the greatest extent possible? These scandals, like Enron a long time ago and more recently Wirecard, have had a significant impact.

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: I think it's important, and I don't speak only for Deloitte. There is always the intention among all of us to ensure that major scandals are avoided—this goes without saying. Therefore, it's also important to cooperate with our competitors in certain

expert groups. I'm part of an expert group working with IDW, the German Institute of Chartered Accountants, where we discuss accounting and audit topics and how to improve them.

This work also involves developing international standards for auditing. As you may know from your father, it's about having debates with competitors and finding ways to continuously improve. There is a very strong focus on preventing scandals. Does this guarantee there won't be any in the future? Probably not. But we have to make sure we do everything possible to avoid them.

Group: Ok thank you. Do you think public trust in the audit industry is closely related to scandals like that? Do you think public trust will improve at some point, or is it always going to be an issue? Many people believe public trust in the audit industry is quite low. What are your thoughts on this?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Public trust is really important, and it's always been about the expectation gap—what the public expects versus what we can realistically deliver. This is especially relevant with CSRD. There might be an even higher risk of misunderstandings because it's a new exercise.

For CSRD, we are currently providing limited assurance. By 2028, it will probably change to reasonable assurance. Limited assurance involves a high-level investigation and inquiries without going into as much detail as a reasonable assurance audit, like the one we conduct for financial statements. This creates a risk of differing expectations, as we will have two different opinions—one for financial statements and another for CSRD—even though CSRD is integrated into the management report in Germany.

Group: Ok, interesting, maybe one last topic. We have a list of uncertainties that we identified from an environmental perspective. If you could briefly share your thoughts on each, it would be much appreciated. We identified the following: the importance of natural disaster risk auditing, the level of progress towards zero-emission economies, and the level of sustainable consciousness among EU companies. Could you share one or two thoughts on each of these topics from your perspective?

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: One important topic right now is the significant investments in renewables. The question is whether these investments will be worth it, or if we will see impairments in the future. This is an important consideration, especially as many companies are investing heavily. It's definitely something we have on our radar.

Group: Perfect, thank you so much!

Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann: Well, thank you guys and if you have any further questions feel free to reach out!

Group: Thank you so much! We highly appreciate you taking your time and sharing your insights!

Appendix 5 – Climate Change

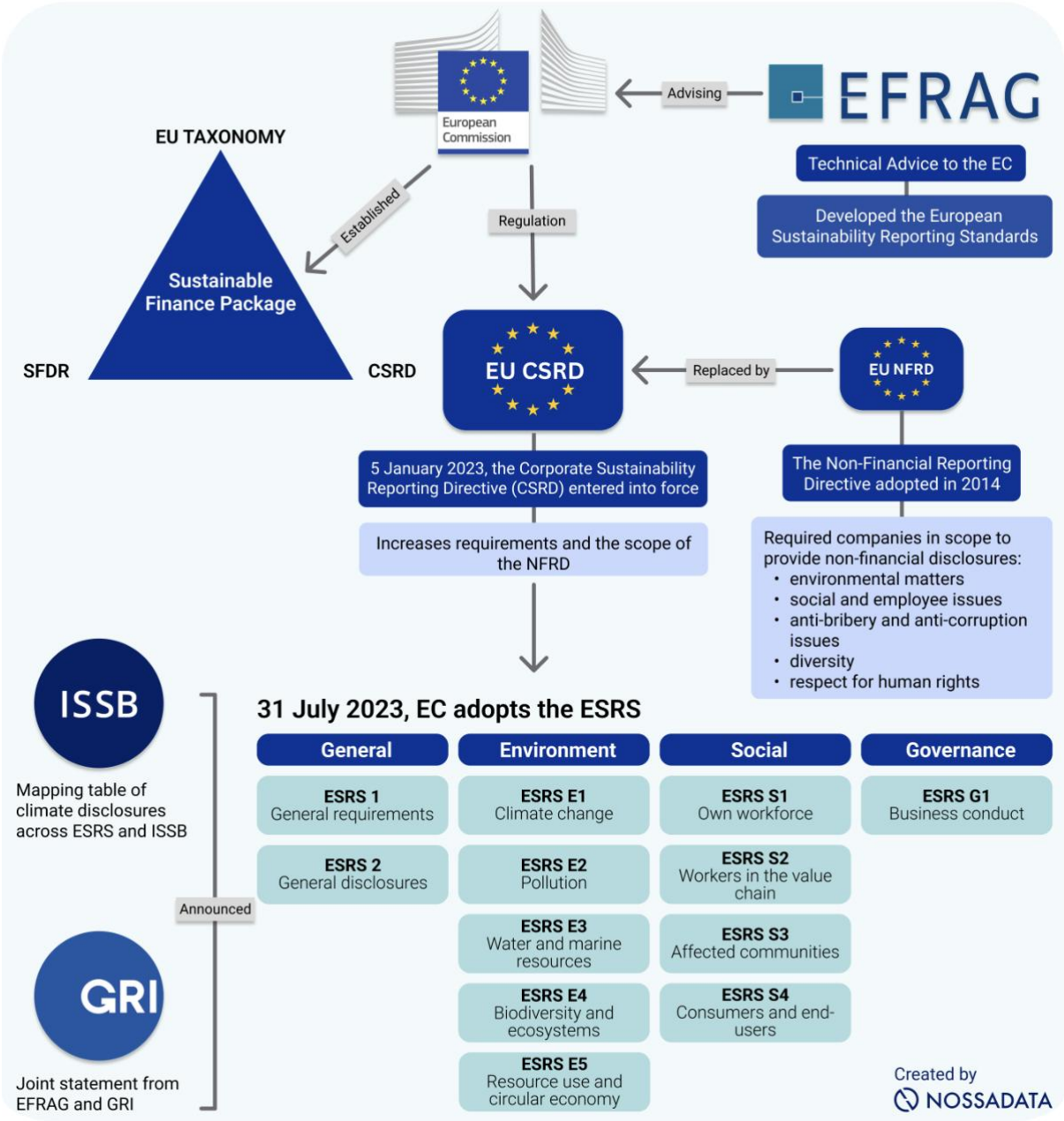


Figure 12 - The Adaption of ESRS and CSRD (O'Connell 2023)

Appendix 6 – Uncertainties

Political

<p><i>Level of political stability within the EU</i></p>	<p>The unpredictable shifts in government policies, driven by economic and non-economic motives, contribute to heightened risks such as governance irregularities and regulatory change (Pástor and Veronesi 2013). The emergence of populist parties, particularly those aligned with the right wing, has been notable in recent years. Currently, seven nations of the EU have far-right parties represented in their governments (Green 2024). This increase at the national level has the potential to enhance the influence that member states exert within the Council, thereby potentially impacting migration, climate, and EU enlargement policies (Coi 2024). Moreover, member states might intensify their efforts to prioritize national processes over the EU’s policy and legislative authority (Van Rij, et al. 2024).</p> <p>Political instability often leads to increased capital costs, as it reduces the collateral value of assets and increases the risk premiums demanded by investors due to their inability to gauge the impact of new policies (Pástor and Veronesi 2013).</p> <p>Additionally, as geopolitical and global trade tensions intensify, European policymakers must be ready to respond rapidly and decisively (Kalcher and Makaroff 2024). Member States must align on critical areas, such as which industries to protect and where the threats lie (Reuters 2024a).</p> <p>High audit quality is associated with improved government performance, including better political stability and governance metrics (Riahi-Belkaoui 2004).</p>
<p><i>Level of government intervention in the EU</i></p>	<p>Government intervention refers to regulatory actions implemented by the government aimed at bringing changes to the way financial markets or industries operate (Camebridge Dictionary n.d.).</p> <p>The EU AI Act of 2024 exemplifies government intervention, establishing harmonized regulations for the development and use of AI tools across the EU (European Parliament 2024).</p> <p>The level of government intervention in the audit industry is highlighted by the EU audit regulation 537/2014, which sets out several measures to emphasize the importance of the independence of auditors, including mandatory firm rotation, list of prohibited non-audit services, and new requirements for audit committees (Deloitte 2016).</p> <p>Stricter standards may increase costs and complexity for audit firms, possibly leading to consolidation in the industry. Conversely, increased transparency could improve audit quality and investor trust.</p> <p>Effectively managing these changes could enhance the competitiveness of audit firms, influencing their global standing and efficiency (SimpleAccounts 2024).</p>

<p><i>Oligopoly of the Big Four</i></p>	<p>The audit market’s increasing concentration, dominated by the Big Four, challenges the industry’s competitive dynamics (Cave 2023). This oligopolistic structure creates higher entry barriers for audit SMEs limiting their ability to compete and innovate within the market. It also allows the Big Four to exert a disproportionate influence on the development of international industry standards. This can skew practices in their favor at the expense of broader industry needs and integrity (Velte and Stiglbauer 2012). Choosing one of the major audit firms is linked to improved audit quality and reputation (Velte and Stiglbauer 2012). This connection, when reinforcing trust in the capital market, can positively influence the firm’s value (Velte and Stiglbauer 2012). The concentration of market power among the Big Four extends beyond market dynamics, complicating regulatory oversight and raising concerns about the quality and independence of financial reporting and audit services (Mack 2022). Recent reports suggest that the Big Four account for over 80% of the audit market share in several EU Member States, accounting for 86% of revenue from public interest entities’ statutory audits and 71% of revenue from statutory audits of other entities (European Commission 2024c). Proposals to introduce managed shared audits and joint audits are gaining traction to mitigate risks in the audit market. These reforms aim to reduce the Big Four’s market power, enhance competition, and improve audit quality while maintaining the credibility of the industry (Mack 2022).</p>
<p><i>Ease of doing business</i></p>	<p>The Ease of Doing Business index, published by the World Bank, measures key parameters that define how easy it is to do business in a country or region (Cleartax 2023). A high score means that the regulatory environment is conducive to doing business, while a low score reflects some constraints created by policies to business establishment (World Bank Group 2020). Countries with more conducive business environments have demonstrated more resilient economic recoveries, highlighting the critical role of effective public administration (Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs 2017). By November 2018, the European Fund for Strategic Investments had mobilized €360 billion worth of investments and provided guarantees in support of projects financed by the European Investment Bank, focusing on infrastructure, innovation, and SMEs (European Commission 2020). Around 850,000 of them are set to benefit from improved access to finance (European Commission 2020). Strict business regulations also make countries less attractive to foreign investors. The cost of enforcing contracts and the ease of paying taxes also matter. The empirical evidence points to a significant negative impact of business regulation and poor-quality public administration on FDI flows (Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs 2017).</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Level of data governance policies' strictness</i></p>	<p>Data governance involves the authority, control, planning, monitoring, and enforcement of policies for managing data assets (Kurniawan, et al. 2019). By ensuring that companies adhere to regulations, compliance functions can help mitigate legal and financial risks, enhancing the organization's ability to meet regulatory expectations and reduce operational errors (KPMG 2020b).</p> <p>The rapid growth of structured and unstructured data, coupled with advancements in storage, processing power, and analytic tools, has allowed big data to become a competitive advantage for top organizations, enabling them to uncover business opportunities and drive success (The Institute of Internal Auditors 2020). However, ignorance about data security and improper data governance practices can harm business organizations financially (Kurniawan, et al. 2019).</p> <p>Several key regulatory areas impacting data governance pose some uncertainty about the future strictness of data governance policies: The introduction of the GDPR sets a standard for organizations to provide data privacy and transparency on the way it is used, allowing users greater control over their information (DPO Centre 2024). Furthermore, the EU AI Act of May 2024 establishes standards for AI, safeguards general-purpose AI, restricts biometric identification, prohibits social scoring, and ensures consumer rights (European Parliament 2024).</p>

Economic

<p><i>Number of bankruptcies from key audit clients</i></p>	<p>Bankruptcy is a legal process that begins when an individual or business is unable to fulfill their outstanding debts or financial obligations (Tuovila 2024b). The number of bankruptcies among businesses in the EU has been steadily increasing, rising by 3.1% in Q2 of 2024. This goes in accordance with the previous years when bankruptcies reached in Q2 2023 the highest level since 2015 (Eurostat 2023b). Specific sectors, such as construction, financial activities, and trade, have been particularly impacted by this rise (Eurostat 2024c).</p> <p>Bankruptcies impact the audit profession as they determine auditing activities and highlight the growing financial instability that can complicate audit engagements and operational decision-making. An increase in the economic instability in the EU would pose some questions about the number of future bankruptcies. Furthermore, Europe's GDP per capita is expected to grow from \$37,800 to around \$50,950 in 2030 (European Strategy and Policy Analysis System n.d.). An analysis by the International Monetary Fund suggests that AI adoption can contribute as much as 0,8% to GDP growth, enhancing productivity (Li and Noureldin 2024), and diminishing the probability of bankruptcy occurrence. Consequently, the number of bankruptcies from key audit clients remains uncertain.</p>
<p><i>Level of margin pressure by investors</i></p>	<p>The level of margin pressure by investors refers to the increasing demand by shareholders and financial stakeholders for a higher profit margin despite economic challenges (Dollard, et al. 2023). In industries most affected by the escalating costs of materials and labor, middle-market businesses are urged to shift their strategic focus from the prevailing 'grow-at-any-cost' approach of the past decade to a more fundamental emphasis on achieving profitability (Dollard, et al. 2023). If margin pressure intensifies, more companies will reconsider their risk appetite, prioritize investments in projects that enhance productivity, and slowing down or delaying major investments with less defined returns (Dollard, et al. 2023). Organizations need to continue prioritizing innovation. Striking a balance between investing in core revenue-generating functions and focusing on operational efficiencies is crucial. Embracing new technology and being patient for returns is essential, even if it means accepting lower margins in the short term (Dollard, et al. 2023).</p> <p>Furthermore, high-quality audits improve stakeholder confidence in companies. This, in turn, drives investment and economic growth, creating long-term value for society (Delarue 2021). Therefore, the audit committee plays a crucial role on the board, utilizing net income, leverage, and firm value for strategic decisions to improve profit margins, while satisfying investors' appetite for higher returns (Delarue 2021).</p>

<p><i>Number of financial scandals</i></p>	<p>A financial scandal refers to an event or situation arising from the morally questionable use of financial resources, leading to significant consequences for third parties (Camfferman and Wielhouwer 2019). Since the early 2000s, several financial reporting scandals happened, including Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and Xerox (Camfferman and Wielhouwer 2019). These scandals led to an increase in regulatory requirements, such as the introduction of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act by the US to ensure transparency and reliability in data usage (Kenton 2024). Moreover, fraud is facilitated by digitization and technology (Deloitte 2024e). Some challenges to implementing new technologies include increased anonymity, which can lead to higher gains from cheating and make it easier for fraudsters to re-enter the market (Karpoff 2021). Exercising greater control and improving audit quality is essential to prevent companies from committing fraud (Khan, et al. 2023). Auditors are essential in guaranteeing the integrity of financial statements (Khan, et al. 2023). Research from 2019 shows that 20% of Deloitte audits examined were deemed inadequate, along with 23,6% at PWC, 27,3% at EY, and 50 % at KPMG (National Whistleblower Center n.d). This reduces confidence in those firms and the whole audit industry, as the occurrence of financial scandals is uncertain.</p>
<p><i>Development of EU's GDP</i></p>	<p>The most used indicator to measure an economy's overall size is the GDP (Eurostat 2024b). The term refers to the total market value or monetary worth of all completed goods and services produced within a country during a specific time frame (Stobierski 2021). It serves as an indicator of domestic production and is often used to assess a nation's economic health (Stobierski 2021). While rising GDP indicates economic growth, a recession is shown when the GDP decreases for two consecutive quarters (Masterson 2022). As policymakers consider GDP when making decisions about interest rates, tax policies, and trade regulations, the rate of economic growth influences business conditions, investment choices, and the availability of jobs for workers (Fagan 2022). Consequently, the development of the EU's GDP highly influences the demand for audit services. Also, non-governmental organizations and institutions frequently use GDP as an important metric to inform economic policies and investment decisions (Eurostat n.d.).</p> <p>In 2023, the EU's GDP was valued at USD 18,590,720.06 million, which accounts for 17.50% of the global economy (World Bank Group n.d.). Even though Goldman Sachs projects the global real GDP to grow to around USD 227.9 trillion in 2050 (Daly and Gedminas 2022), climate change poses, among other factors, a significant threat to the global economy, with potential losses of up to 18% of global GDP by 2050 if average global temperatures increase by 3.2°C (Marchant 2021).</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Level of cryptocurrency usage by companies</i></p>	<p>Cryptocurrency is a form of digital or virtual currency that utilizes cryptographic techniques to ensure security (Crypto.com 2024). Unlike government-issued currencies, cryptocurrencies function based on blockchain technology and are decentralized. This decentralization implies that no single authority, such as a central bank or government, has control over them (Crypto.com 2024).</p> <p>In 2024, the global cryptocurrency market was valued at approximately USD 5.7 billion, with forecasts predicting a CAGR of 13.1% from 2025 to 2030 (Grand View Research 2024). Companies' use of cryptocurrency introduces significant challenges for auditors, particularly regarding transparency, security, and regulatory compliance. The pseudonymous nature of transactions complicates the verification of ownership and authenticity, while the decentralized framework makes traditional audit procedures less effective (The Ohio Society of Certified Public Accountants 2024). A survey by PYMNTS and Bitpay found that 85% of businesses with \$1 billion in annual revenue are adopting crypto to reach new customers, while 82% of all surveyed merchants cited the removal of middlemen as a reason for accepting it (Reguerra 2022). Additionally, 77% of merchants are drawn to crypto's lower transaction fees, averaging around 1%, compared to the 1.5% to 3.5% fees of credit cards (Reguerra 2022). Despite the positive outlook, 68% of merchants not yet accepting crypto cited technical challenges at checkout as a barrier (Reguerra 2022). Therefore, the level of cryptocurrency usage by companies remains uncertain.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Relevance of the platform economy</i></p>	<p>The platform economy is a modern economic model driven by digital platforms that connect users like e.g., consumers, service providers, and developers (Talin 2023). Examples include Uber linking drivers and riders, Airbnb connecting hosts and guests, and Amazon matching sellers with buyers (Talin 2023).</p> <p>In 2022, over 28 million workers in the EU engaged in platform work, expected to rise to 43 million by 2025. Particularly assessing the employment status of platform workers (self-employed vs. employed) and ensuring compliance with evolving labor laws such as the transparent and predictable working conditions directive (European Council 2024b), introduces complexities for the audit industry. Revenues in the EU's platform economy have surged from around €3 billion in 2016 to €14 billion in 2020, reflecting significant growth in the sector (European Council 2024c). However, since the total EU economy had a GDP of €13,400 billion in that year (Eurostat 2021), it still accounts for only a minor share of the EU's overall economy. Since these platforms are often linked to rapid growth and the potential for market dominance, driven by winner-takes-all dynamics due to network effects between the supply and demand sides (Hagiu and Wright 2015), uncertainty about the relevance of the platform economy in 2035 is prevalent.</p>

<p><i>Relevance of the gig economy</i></p>	<p>The gig economy is a labor market focusing on short-term, flexible work arrangements (The Investopedia Team 2024a). In this model, workers earn income by offering services or completing tasks on demand. Individuals engage in temporary, freelance, or contract-based jobs rather than traditional full-time employment (The Investopedia Team 2024b). Jobs in the gig economy are diverse, encompassing activities such as managing short-term rentals, offering tutoring services, writing software, driving for ride-sharing platforms, delivering food, or creating freelance content (The Investopedia Team 2024b). It is estimated that there will be 43 million gig workers in the EU by 2025 (Gill 2023). These workers often juggle various sources of income, manage a wide range of expenses, and face regulatory requirements, which puts pressure on conventional auditing practices (Reddy 2024). The EU has implemented new regulations to provide clarity on the employment status of around 28 million workers in the gig economy (Espinoza 2024). However, each member state can implement these laws individually, and companies like Uber have raised concerns about potential cost increases which may result in higher service prices (Espinoza 2024). The future of the gig economy is uncertain, as these new regulations could change the employment status of millions of workers, potentially slowing the sector's growth. While EU officials aim to make the gig economy fairer, platforms fear impacts on their business models and increase costs (Haeck 2021).</p>
<p><i>Relevance of the sharing economy</i></p>	<p>The sharing economy is a peer-to-peer economic model in which individuals can acquire, provide, or share a wide range of goods and services (The Investopedia Team 2024a). Although this concept has existed throughout history, it has recently experienced a revival, primarily driven by the growth of online platforms that enable community-based exchanges (The Investopedia Team 2024a). The value of the worldwide sharing economy is estimated at approximately USD 150 billion and is forecasted to rise to USD 794 billion in 2031 with a CAGR of around 32% (Bohne 2024). Platform companies seek to reduce their responsibility toward providing social security benefits, such as health insurance and pensions for their workers (Murillo, Buckland and Val 2017). At the same time, they attempt to expand their control over workers' privacy through increased surveillance and monitoring (Murillo, Buckland and Val 2017). This leads to regulatory and tax challenges (Washington State University n.d.). As digital platforms expand, they often prompt the creation of new rules and regulations to address emerging issues. For instance, in October 2016, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo enacted a law enforcing penalties for advertising home rentals that violated the state's short-term rental regulations (Washington State University n.d.). As these changes can also happen in the EU, the importance of the sharing economy in the EU by 2035 remains uncertain.</p>

<p><i>Level of economic stability within the EU</i></p>	<p>Economic stability occurs when an economy experiences consistent growth, low levels of unemployment, and controlled inflation (Market Business News n.d.). In such a stable environment, businesses can plan with greater confidence, individuals feel secure in their employment, and governments can more accurately forecast tax revenues and allocate resources efficiently (Market Business News n.d.). Economic stability is closely linked to audit quality because, during periods of instability, auditors face challenges such as increased information asymmetry and the risk of financial misreporting (Persakis and Tsakalos 2024). There is growing uncertainty about the EU’s economic future due to several external factors, such as the ongoing conflicts near the EU and the instability in global politics, especially with elections on the horizon (Sabol and Loi 2024). According to the International Monetary Funds’ 2024 World Economic Outlook, inflation in some EU member states remains above target levels, creating challenges for economic recovery (International Monetary Fund 2024). However, inflation in the euro area is expected to decline gradually but still poses risks to growth and stability (International Monetary Fund 2024).</p>
<p><i>Level of globalization</i></p>	<p>Globalization describes the increasing interconnectedness of national economies, encompassing the cross-border exchange of financial products, goods, technology, information, employment opportunities, and cultural interactions (Fernando 2024). It significantly influences contemporary accounting practices by adding layers of complexity, necessitating expertise in international standards, and prioritizing transparency in financial reporting (Stanmore School of Business 2024). The ‘Trade Openness Index’ is a measure calculated by taking the sum of global exports and imports and dividing it by the world’s GDP (Ortiz-Ospina, Beltekian and Roser 2024). Thus, it reflects the extent to which the global economy is engaged in international trade. Over the past decades, the index rose from 24.98% in 1970 and 45.61% in 1998 to 62.56% in 2022, indicating increasing globalization (Ortiz-Ospina, Beltekian and Roser 2024). Recent trade data indicates economic decoupling between the US and China. However, flows from their geopolitical allies show no clear division into rival blocs (Altman and Bastian 2023). Still, growing nationalistic movements focusing more on the homebased economy rather than trading internationally make the level of globalization uncertain. During his campaign trail, Donald Trump has consistently stated that if he were elected, he would impose higher tariffs (Payne 2024). This would include a significant increase to 60% on Chinese exports to the US and a 10 to 20% surcharge on exports from other countries around the globe (Payne 2024). His reelection as president of the US (Grumbach 2024), therefore, poses additional uncertainty about the level of globalization in 2035.</p>

Social

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Level of talent availability</i></p>	<p>According to a study by the Thomson Reuters Institute, 58% of participants identified the industry-wide shortage of professionals as the most significant challenge currently faced by audit firms (Thomson Reuters 2024b). Contributing factors include a decline in qualified graduates, a more complex certification process, and reduced appeal of the profession compared to other industries (Tomazin 2023). As a result, many students are opting not to pursue auditing careers, viewing the field as less innovative or exciting (Tomazin 2023). Additionally, the number of working-aged people within the EU will decline (Eurostat 2023a), further strengthening the uncertainty related to talent availability over the next decades. As of 2023, 44% of EU citizens aged 16-74 do not have basic digital skills (Eurostat 2024d). This is especially alarming, as projections indicate that 9 out of 10 future jobs will demand individuals to have digital skills (Teigland 2020). Also, the audit industry is expected to become more and more digitized (Tiberius and Hirth 2019). To address this, the EU has set a target that at least 80% of its population have basic digital skills by 2030 (Eurostat 2024d). To address talent shortages, audit firms should enhance digital training, improve compensation and work conditions, and deepen business understanding. This will make the profession more appealing and relevant (Lombardi, Bloch and Vasarhelyi 2014). However, there is high uncertainty about the level of talent availability in the future, as expert Andreas Wermelt also pointed it out as one of the significant challenges that currently exist in the audit sector (Appendix 3).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Level of public trust in the audit profession</i></p>	<p>Public trust in auditing refers to the general confidence of the public, including investors and other stakeholders, in the integrity, objectivity, and reliability of the audit process (Ardelean 2013). Events such as the collapse of major firms, like Enron and WorldCom in the early 2000s in the US, due to insufficient auditing oversight have raised skepticism about the profession (World Bank 2019). This growing mistrust has increased regulatory scrutiny, with calls for greater transparency and accountability across the industry (European Court of Auditors 2014). Consequently, regulatory reforms and independent oversight bodies were introduced to address conflicts of interest and improve audit reliability (World Bank 2019). To restore confidence, audit firms must enhance quality and implement stricter standards, as public trust in financial reporting is crucial for transparency, investment, and economic stability. Expert Dr. Benedikt Brüggemann highlights: “Public trust is crucial and maintaining that trust means being transparent and ensuring that we do quality audits” (Appendix 4). Given the multidimensional complexity of the trust dimension, the level of public trust in the audit profession by 2035 remains uncertain.</p>

Technological

<p><i>Relevance of quantum computing</i></p>	<p>Quantum computing is a multidisciplinary field that integrates computer science, physics, and mathematics, and uses quantum mechanics to solve complex problems more efficiently than classical computers (Schneider and Smalley 2024). It has the potential to revolutionize data processing and security within the auditing industry, providing far greater speed and efficiency in handling large datasets (KPMG n.d.b).</p> <p>Currently, its ability to process vast amounts of information faster than traditional computing methods is still under development, but once mature, it could significantly enhance the accuracy and depth of audits (Akbar, Khan and Hyrynsalmi 2024).</p> <p>At the same time, quantum computing's capacity to break traditional encryption methods raises cybersecurity concerns, which could result in new regulatory demands (KPMG n.d.b). For instance, audit firms may need to implement entirely new security frameworks to protect financial data.</p> <p>The relevance of quantum computing in 2035 is uncertain as the timeline for its adoption remains unclear. Yet its arrival could disrupt established audit practices and introduce more stringent security measures (KPMG n.d.b).</p>
<p><i>Frequency of cyber-attacks</i></p>	<p>As the world becomes more connected and dependent on digital technologies, cybercrime is also rising (European Council 2024a). The EU's cybersecurity chief highlights a "significant increase" in disruptive cyber-attacks, particularly those traced to Russia-backed groups, with incidents doubling between late 2023 and early 2024 (Euronews 2024).</p> <p>Alongside traditional threats like ransomware, the agency identifies AI-enabled disinformation as an emerging risk, emphasizing the need for digital security to become an ingrained societal habit (Euronews 2024).</p> <p>An increasing frequency of cyber-attacks poses a growing threat to the audit industry, particularly as audit firms become more reliant on digital infrastructure and remote work (Jang-Jaccard and Nepal 2014). With the surge in digital transactions and cloud-based services, the vulnerability to cyber-attacks is expected to rise, putting client data at risk (Munich Re 2024).</p> <p>A notable example includes the growing threat of ransomware attacks, which could halt auditing processes and compromise sensitive financial information (Federal Office for Information Security n.d.). There is also a growing emphasis on cybersecurity, with firms focusing on protecting systems to limit the extent to which cyber-attacks can damage data (Bassett 2023). Any breach of client data not only damages reputations but also leads to potential legal and regulatory consequences (St. John 2024). Therefore, auditors must continuously adapt to evolving cybersecurity risks and update their knowledge and audit practices (Accountancy Europe 2024).</p>

<p><i>Level of technological progress in automation</i></p>	<p>Automation is the use of technology to automate workflows, processes, or systems (IBM n.d.). Advances in automation are revolutionizing industries, including the audit sector, which is increasingly using such technologies for efficiency and accuracy (Fioleau, et al. 2024).</p> <p>Automation is already streamlining tasks such as data entry and analysis, allowing auditors to focus on more complex areas (Cassels, et al. 2019). However, uncertainty remains regarding the pace and scope of advancements in AI and ML, which could lead to a further reduction in human involvement (Patel, et al. 2023).</p> <p>Future breakthroughs in automation may not only enhance the accuracy of audits by detecting anomalies and predicting trends but also transform audit practices altogether (KPMG Switzerland n.d.). This development would require organizations to invest in the continuous education of their employees to remain relevant and competitive (Alles, Kogan and Vasarhelyi 2008).</p> <p>At the same time, companies must adapt their internal processes to exploit the potential of automation fully, striking a balance between innovation and maintaining audit quality and ethical standards. The potential societal and ethical implications of heavy reliance on automated systems, such as transparency, avoidance of bias, and accountability, add to the complexity of this uncertainty (Bird, et al. 2020).</p>
<p><i>Level of technological progress in AI & ML</i></p>	<p>AI is a broad field that focuses on the development of technologies to create intelligent machines and computers, while ML, a subset of AI, enables systems to learn and adapt (Zemankova 2019).</p> <p>AI and ML continue to transform industries, including auditing, by improving data analysis, anomaly detection, and risk assessment capabilities (Zemankova 2019).</p> <p>These technologies may tackle even more complex tasks in the near future, such as analyzing large amounts of unstructured data or making strategic decisions based on predictive models (Patel, et al. 2023). For example, AI could be used to detect discrepancies in financial reports that human auditors could easily miss (Patel, et al. 2023).</p> <p>However, the pace of these advances is uncertain and will be influenced by factors such as regulatory frameworks, technological breakthroughs, and market adoption rates (Patel, et al. 2023), making it difficult for firms to predict the extent to which AI and ML will transform the auditing profession.</p> <p>The competitive landscape will also depend on how quickly the various stakeholders adopt and integrate these technologies, which may lead to a gap between top innovators and others (Banholzer, et al. 2023).</p> <p>In addition, ethical considerations, such as ensuring transparency and fairness in AI-driven audit processes, will play a crucial role in the development and use of these tools (Adelakun 2022).</p>

<p><i>Level of technological progress in blockchain</i></p>	<p>Blockchain is a specific technology for data storage in decentralized distributed networks, such as networks that are not managed by a central authority (Elommal and Manita 2022). Uncertainty about the degree of technological advancement in blockchain relates to its ability to evolve beyond its current functionality, such as creating transparent, immutable records of financial transactions and enabling sophisticated applications such as real-time audits (Gökoğlan, Cetin and Bilen 2022). Future advances could improve the efficiency, scalability, and integration of blockchain into audit tools. Furthermore, it could enable continuous monitoring and verification of transactions without periodic reviews (Elommal and Manita 2022). These developments could redefine audit processes, enabling automated anomaly detection and creating a dynamic audit ecosystem. Such progress would require audit firms to innovate significantly, transitioning from traditional practices to blockchain-driven systems and transforming the audit profession (Elommal and Manita 2022).</p>
<p><i>Level of competition by tech firms</i></p>	<p>Tech companies that might never have considered entering the audit market, will pay close attention to the significant ongoing changes (Canadian Accountant 2019). This uncertainty arises from multiple factors, including the ability of tech firms to penetrate the market by integrating advanced technologies with core audit processes, which have traditionally relied heavily on human expertise and professional judgment (Canadian Accountant 2019). These tech companies use advanced AI, ML, and data analytics to provide innovative, cost-effective, and highly automated audit solutions that could disrupt traditional business models. The Big Four’s capacity to swiftly adapt and incorporate cutting-edge tools into their services could mitigate the competitive threat (Canadian Accountant 2019). Furthermore, client preferences are a critical variable, while businesses increasingly value innovation, established relationships and concerns about risk may slow the adoption of technology firms as audit providers (Canadian Accountant 2019). The uncertainty lies in how quickly these technology companies will expand their offerings and penetrate deeper into the core areas of audit services. While technology companies attract top AI talent (Aura Intelligence 2024), established audit firms benefit from regulatory expertise, industry knowledge, and strong client trust (Mack 2022). Ultimately, it remains unclear whether technology firms will gain a substantial foothold in the industry or if traditional firms will leverage their expertise and reputation to sustain their dominance. Still, potential competition is relevant as tech firms’ continued expansion into financial services could disrupt the audit landscape, forcing traditional firms to invest heavily in innovation (Cong, Du and Vasarhelyi 2018).</p>

Environmental

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Level of progress towards zero-emission economies</i></p>	<p>Net zero is defined as the compensation of carbon emissions by absorbing an equivalent amount from the atmosphere (National Grid 2023). The global drive towards net-zero emission economies shows mixed effectiveness. While more than 100 countries proposed or are considering a net zero target, many lack the frameworks for genuine accountability (Mooldijk, et al. 2021). So far, eight small countries, but no EU member state, declared net zero, although many have announced ambitious targets (World Population Review n.d.). The EU has embedded efforts to promote sustainability within its overarching climate-neutrality goals (European Commission n.d.a). In June 2024, the Net Zero Industry Act was adopted, setting the regulatory framework for future low-carbon industrial production (European Union 2024). In addition, as part of ESG reporting, the CSRD requires companies to draw up a net-zero transition plan setting out a roadmap for decarbonization by 2050, for the company’s climate targets and for the corresponding milestones for achieving them. Without an effective external audit to ensure accountability, ambitious net zero pledges risk becoming empty promises, open to accusations of greenwashing (De Vries 2023). The effectiveness of EU efforts remains uncertain, as changes in government have the potential to reshape national and global climate programs significantly (Payne 2024).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Level of sustainability awareness in EU companies</i></p>	<p>Corporate responsibility for a sustainable future is increasingly urged by consumers, investors, and regulators alike. Despite the many global challenges, sustainability has moved into the mainstream and is a top priority for companies: 85% of companies have significantly stepped up their investments in sustainability and 70% foresee climate change affecting their strategic planning (Deloitte 2024b). Similarly, according to PwC’s 2024 Consumer Survey, 85% of consumers “report experiencing firsthand the disruptive effects of climate change” (Durand-Hayes, Gooding and Crane 2024). An issue with this growing interest in more sustainable consumption is the tendency of companies to market products as green, even if they are not, capitalizing on greenwashing (Warren 2023). Genuine, transformative sustainability, as opposed to mere cosmetic commitments, is driven not only by the constant tightening of regulatory requirements but also by companies’ own interests as a strategic imperative. Further-reaching transformation towards sustainability has the potential to create added value. In addition to strengthening the brand, many climate actions come with direct economic benefits, potentially increasing business resilience in the long term. In the uncertainty of an ever-changing world, companies are challenged to tackle the rapidly shifting conditions and seize the transformation towards sustainability as an opportunity (Deloitte 2024b).</p>

Legal

*Level of standardization
of the audit regulatory
framework in the EU*

In 2016, new EU audit legislation on statutory audits became effective. It aimed at enhancing “transparency by further harmonizing the legal minimum requirements” on audits and the independence of auditors, as well as opening the market for smaller audit firms (European Commission n.d.c). The new legislation stipulates mandatory firm rotations, prohibited non-audit services, and requirements for national audit committees (Deloitte 2016). Despite efforts towards harmonizing the EU regulatory audit framework, the various member state options in many key provisions lead to significant discrepancies in the national implementation of this legislation, such as in the reporting obligations of audited companies and the scope of audits. Thus, companies face compliance risks and growing complexity, posing challenges for auditing international, cross-border companies (European Commission 2022).

In addition to the potential withdrawal of originally exercised options of the audit legislation, such as in Germany through the Financial Market Integrity Strengthening Act (BDO Deutschland n.d.), the evolving regulatory framework under other recent EU legislation, such as the CSRD, adds further uncertainty for both companies and auditors. The CSRD also provides member states explicit flexibility in transposition into national law, allowing for adjustments to align with existing legislation and compliance frameworks, which may result in varying national provisions and additional compliance requirements for businesses operating across the EU (Timmons, Harris and de Wal 2024).

An in-depth study of the EU audit legislation by the Centre for European Policy Studies reveals that, given the regulatory complexity, almost all audit firms surveyed see the need “to increase EU-wide harmonization” (European Commission 2022). However, despite the EU audit reform, further harmonization of national frameworks remains uncertain on account of the different economic structures in the member states (European Commission 2022).

<p><i>Extent of AI regulations</i></p>	<p>The AI Act was approved in March 2024 and will be fully applicable by August 2026, promoting the development of human-centered and trustworthy AI while addressing the potential risks and unintended consequences of highly powerful AI systems (European Commission n.d.b). The world’s first comprehensive legal framework on AI establishes EU-wide harmonized regulations, applying to AI developers and users in the EU. It sets standards for transparency, data security, ethics, and accountability, focusing on high-risk AI systems with stringent compliance requirements across the value chain (European Commission n.d.b). However, the EU’s restrictive AI policy harbors the risk of overregulation and high compliance costs, potentially jeopardizing innovation (Deloitte 2024d). Furthermore, the interpretative scope of many provisions and potential additional AI regulations creates significant uncertainty for companies, including audit firms (Deloitte 2024d). Conversely, international companies are faced with the often-fragmented AI regulatory landscape of other countries, such as the common-law approach of the US and the UK, increasing complexity but also uncertainty as to the future development of legislation (Donegan, et al. 2024).</p> <p>The European Commission is promoting organizations' voluntary adoption of these standards through the AI Pact (European Commission 2024a). 130 companies have joined the pact, assisting stakeholders in preparing for the AI Act's implementation (SAS 2024). However, some major tech industry players declined to participate, leaving uncertainty about whether this stance will persist (Haeck and Pollet 2024).</p>
<p><i>Extent of data security regulations</i></p>	<p>Data is key to AI, and its breakthrough across the board involves large amounts of data, posing new challenges, especially in the handling and safeguarding of personal information (Sullivan 2023). In 2018, the GDPR came into effect as “one of the strictest privacy laws to date”, governing the processing and use of personal data with severe penalties for violations (Sullivan 2023). The GDPR requires a systematic classification of data in terms of sensitivity and relevance, with appropriate data security measures for the different categories of data (Sullivan 2023).</p> <p>However, the GDPR still entails significant regulatory uncertainties. Companies face diverging legal views from the respective data protection authorities and discrepancies between the GDPR and other EU data regulations. Moreover, the legal consequences of non-compliance, such as compensation claims, are still unresolved and thus hardly quantifiable for companies. In international business, missing EU adequacy decisions allowing data exchange with a third country hamper international data transfers in many parts of the world, potentially leading to liability risks and further legal uncertainty (German Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2024).</p>

Appendix 7 – Survey

Survey Setup and Distribution

Survey: Scenarios for the future of auditing in the EU by 2035 - Strategic implications for Deloitte

Dear participant,

We are a group of Master's students from Nova SBE in Lisbon and are currently writing our thesis about "The Future of Audit in the EU". We would kindly ask you to participate in this survey to help us identify and analyze key uncertainties to develop future scenarios for the audit industry.

The survey, designed to take approximately 10-15 minutes, consists of a list of factors to be rated according to their uncertainty and impact on the audit industry by 2035. Your responses are anonymous and will be used solely for academic purposes.

If you have any questions about the survey, feel free to contact us via email (60077@novasbe.pt). We greatly appreciate your time and contribution to this research. Thank you for sharing your expertise with us!

Alex, Jakob, Miguel & Sven

Assessing and rating key uncertainties for the audit industry

In this section, we will present a series of key uncertainties that may impact the future of the audit industry. For each uncertainty, you will be asked to evaluate both the perceived level of uncertainty and its impact.

Uncertainty Scale:

- 0: Not uncertain at all
- 1: Slightly uncertain
- 2: Uncertain
- 3: Very uncertain

Impact Scale:

- 0: Very low impact
- 1: Low impact
- 2: High impact
- 3: Very high impact

Example: Uncertainty Question

"On a scale of 0-3, how uncertain are you regarding the level of political stability within the EU by 2035?"

- If you strongly believe you can foresee the level of political stability within the EU by 2035, select 0 (regardless of whether you think stability will be high or low; we are only measuring your perceived uncertainty, not your prediction of stability itself).
- On the other hand, you should select 3 if you are very uncertain about what the level of political stability within the EU will be in 2035.

Example: Impact Question

You will then be asked to evaluate the level of impact that this uncertainty has on the audit industry 2035.

- If you believe the level of political stability has a very low impact on the future of the audit industry, select 0.
- Select 3 if you believe the level of political stability within the EU has a high impact on the audit industry 2035. Again, this assessment is about the general impact of the uncertainty itself, not whether you think stability will be high or low.

Political

This section will cover political uncertainties and their level of impact on the audit industry

Uncertainty: Level of political stability within the EU

How uncertain are you regarding the level of political stability within the EU by 2035?

0 1 2 3

Not uncertain at all ○ ○ ○ ○ Very uncertain

Impact: Level of political stability within the EU

0 1 2 3

Very low impact ○ ○ ○ ○ Very high impact

Uncertainty: Extent of government intervention

How uncertain are you regarding the extent of government intervention on audit processes within the EU by 2035?

0 1 2 3

Not uncertain at all ○ ○ ○ ○ Very uncertain

Impact: Extent of government intervention

0 1 2 3

Very low impact ○ ○ ○ ○ Very high impact

Figure 13 - Survey Excerpt (Own illustration)

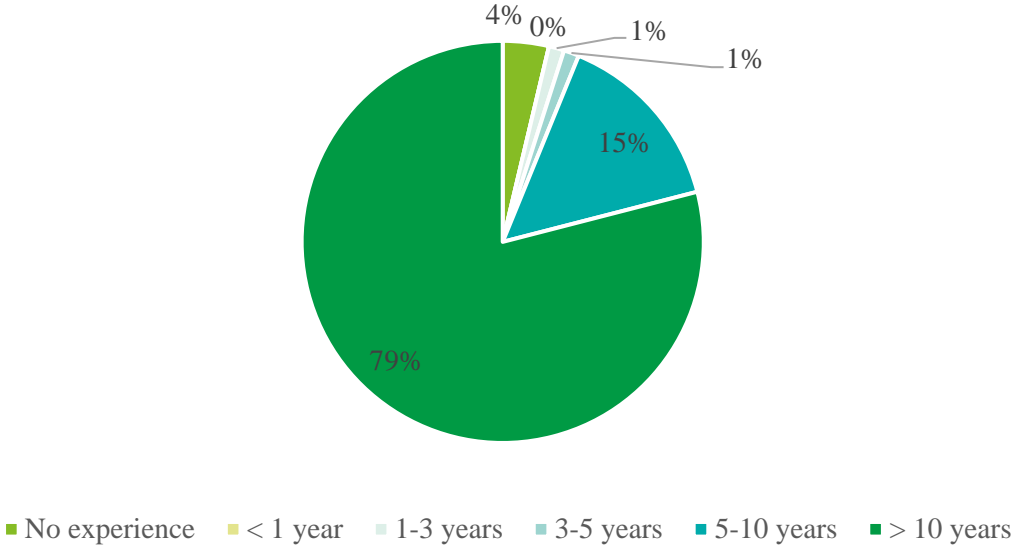


Figure 14 - Audit Experience of Survey Respondents (Own illustration)

Appendix 8 – Justification Bottleneck Scenario

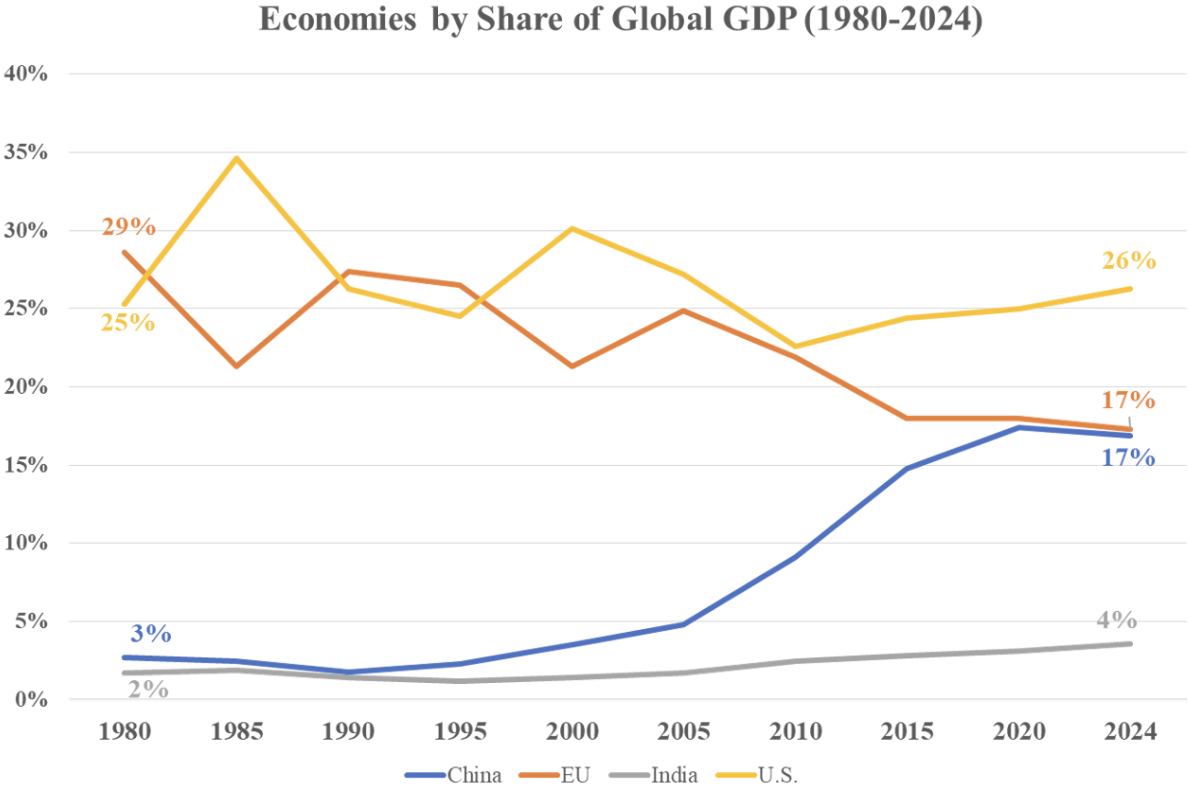


Figure 15 - Economies by Share of Global GDP (Own illustration, based on (Lu 2024))

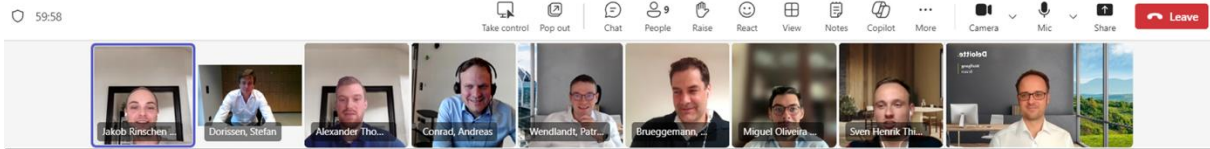
Appendix 9 – Workshop

Workshop Date: 15.11.2024

Name	First Name	Role
Braun	Wolfgang	Partner Audit & Assurance
Brüggemann	Dr. Benedikt	Partner Audit & Assurance Sector Leader Power, Utilities & Renewables
Conrad	Andreas	Partner Audit & Assurance
Dorissen	Stefan	Partner Audit & Assurance
Wendlandt	Patrick	Partner Audit & Assurance Audit Transformation
Oliveira da Silva Justino	Miguel	Nova SBE Work Project Team
Rinschen	Jakob	Nova SBE Work Project Team
Schmitt	Alexander Thomas	Nova SBE Work Project Team
Thiergard	Sven Henrik	Nova SBE Work Project Team

Figure 16 - Workshop Participants (Own illustration)

The workshop with Deloitte was conducted to discuss strategic options for Deloitte based on the four scenario narratives developed. By capitalizing on Deloitte’s extensive knowledge, the workshop facilitated the derivation of strategic recommendations tailored to address emerging threats and opportunities. This process ensured that the proposed strategies were practical and aligned with Deloitte’s operational realities and strategic outlook. In addition, the workshop served as a platform for validating the scenario analysis comparison and initial insights for the Strategic Prioritization Matrix to ensure consistency and robustness of the results. Figure 16 highlights the participants who contributed their insights during the workshop while Figure 17 illustrates the methodology used, showcasing the use of a Miro board to facilitate interactive discussions and collaborative brainstorming throughout the session.



Overview of scenario narratives for the audit industry in the EU by 2035

Boxes are only intended for reading and understanding purpose!
For new input of strategic options, please use sticky notes and add them to the corresponding scenarios!

Workshop - 16.11.2024

Minimal Regulated

Scenario 4 - Automation Overload

Scenario 1 - Sky is the limit

Level of AI Regulations

Level of Talent Availability

Scenario 3 - Bottleneck Audit

Scenario 2 - People in Control

Heavily Regulated

Shortage of Talent Pool

Surplus of Talent Pool

The Miro board contains four scenario narratives, each with a central 'Aspirations' box, 'Opportunities', and 'Threats' sections. The scenarios are: 1. Sky is the limit (Minimal Regulated), 2. People in Control (Heavily Regulated), 3. Bottleneck Audit (Heavily Regulated), and 4. Automation Overload (Minimal Regulated). The board also includes a central vertical axis for 'Level of AI Regulations' and 'Level of Talent Availability', and two side boxes for 'Shortage of Talent Pool' and 'Surplus of Talent Pool'. Each scenario box contains detailed text and smaller sticky notes with additional insights.

Figure 17 - Miro Board from Workshop (Own illustration)

Appendix 10 – Justification for Prioritization Categorization

#	Strategy	Justification for Categorization
1	<p>Build expertise in innovative assurance services such as real-time audits and ‘predictive auditing’ (S/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option, as it balances high growth potential with manageable implementation risks. Expertise in innovative assurance services, such as real-time audits and predictive auditing with blockchain integration, meets market demand for timely and forward-looking insights with evidence-based data security. Deloitte’s 2019 Global Blockchain Survey highlights that 53% of respondents prioritize blockchain, with 83% identifying compelling use cases (Deloitte n.d.i). As blockchain adoption gains momentum across industries, Deloitte has the opportunity to expand into additional assurance services, such as auditing the governance of blockchain and the underlying logic of smart contracts (Kontozis 2022). Direct competitors like PwC provide benchmarks with audit tools such as “GL.AI”, further driving the competition for innovative audit techniques (PwC n.d.). However, the strategy carries medium risk due to challenges such as lack of accounting standards, data privacy concerns, and adaptability issues, resulting in higher costs and delayed ROI.</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios characterized by advanced digitalization, minimal regulation, and a robust technology infrastructure.</p>
2	<p>Ensure responsible AI beyond regulatory compliance for competitive advantage (S/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option, as it balances growth potential with privacy and regulatory risks. By focusing on responsible AI governance and the integration of AI with blockchain technology, the strategy offers strong growth potential with a medium risk level. The global impact of AI and blockchain, projected to add USD 20 trillion to the economy by 2030, underscores the competitive pressure and resource demands (Financial Times n.d.). While addressing challenges like data security and transparency, the strategy involves compliance uncertainty and significant investment required to integrate AI and blockchain, delaying ROI (Kacker 2024). Privacy concerns, such as GDPR’s “right to be forgotten”, challenge blockchain’s transparency, but are mitigated by cryptographic techniques which allow for secure validation while concealing data (Galis 2024).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios of high AI adoption along with privacy concerns, with Deloitte standing out for its focus on responsible governance, trust building, and success in a digital, minimally regulated environment.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Establish robust cybersecurity measures beyond regulatory compliance to excel in data governance (W/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a No Regret move, as it addresses growing cybersecurity threats while enhancing stakeholder trust.</p> <p>The average cost of a data breach, amounting to USD 4.35 million in 2022, underscores the financial and reputational significance of prioritizing cybersecurity (Gadiant 2023). Deloitte’s proactive investment in measures such as strict access controls, encryption protocols, and model isolation leverage existing infrastructure and governance frameworks (Deloitte AI Institute 2023).</p> <p>By focusing on governance enhancements rather than developing or acquiring new technologies, the strategy is both low-risk and low-investment. This approach ensures manageable risks while adapting processes to meet heightened cybersecurity demands. Deloitte's proactive approach to responsible AI reassures both the public and regulators of its commitment to integrity, while reinforcing Deloitte's position as a security-focused industry leader.</p> <p>This strategy fits all plausible scenarios as a low-risk, high-priority initiative, as all scenarios require addressing AI adoption and cybersecurity concerns to varying degrees.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Improve career mobility with digital flexibility and non-traditional career opportunities (W/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Big Bet, as it requires significant investments in technology infrastructure and organizational adaptations to meet the growing demand for career mobility and workplace flexibility.</p> <p>A supportive, flexible work culture is favored by 60% of Generation Z, who will represent the majority of the workforce by 2035 (Sinha 2024). Initiatives such as rotational programs, technology-focused reviews and flexible remote work opportunities are designed to attract and retain top talent, including from non-traditional backgrounds, while relying on a robust digital infrastructure and inclusive corporate culture for effective implementation.</p> <p>These efforts involve non-traditional career opportunities such as freelance work within the company, skills-based project assignments and entrepreneurship incubators that address the shifting expectations of the workforce. The strategy carries a high level of risk due to financial and operational challenges, including managing a dispersed workforce, labor compliance and potential workflow disruptions (Hall n.d.).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with a scenario characterized by innovation and adaptability as well as sufficient financial resources.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strengthen client trust by capitalizing on global talent and multicultural work environments (S/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option, as leveraging global talent and fostering multicultural work environments balances moderate implementation risks with the potential for enhanced client trust and innovation benefits (DEMARS N.D.).</p> <p>The financial costs of recruiting global talent and fostering inclusive work environments are significant (DEMARS N.D.). However, the long-term benefits make the costs manageable. A report by McKinsey found that companies that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion outperformed companies that don't have this multicultural environment by 36% in profitability (DIXON-FYLE, ET AL. 2020). Furthermore, according to the latest statistics from Korn Ferry, 80% of the World's Most Admired Companies create diverse teams to improve creativity, making better decisions than homogenous teams 87% of the time and being 70% more likely to capture new markets (SOLOMONS AND POLONSKAIA N.D.).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios of increasing global connectivity and diversity acceptance, differentiating Deloitte through its commitment to multicultural work environments which fosters innovation and builds trust.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">6</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Reduce compliance risks and expand services by investing in employees' regulatory expertise (S/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option, addressing regulatory complexities with balanced investments in a heavily regulated environment to enhance compliance efficiency and adaptability.</p> <p>In 2021 organizations spent an average of USD 1,280 per employee on training and development initiatives (ATD Research 2022). Even with a significant initial investment in providing employees with regulatory expertise through certifications and tools to ensure compliance, the benefits of enrolling in these programs provide long-term benefits by minimizing risks of penalties and reputational damage (Palmer 2024). Training programs provided by specialized training providers (Credly Team 2023), should be carefully chosen to be aligned with the organizational needs. Organizations often struggles to maintain compliance due to misalignment between their staff training programs and changing regulations (Woolard, Saidenberg and Goyne 2023). This underlines the moderately high implementation risk due to the constantly changing environment of global regulations. Organizations can mitigate these risks with carefully chosen partnerships and ongoing monitoring (Bauman 2024).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios of increasing regulatory demands and stricter compliance standards, differentiating Deloitte by enhancing its regulatory expertise and adaptability.</p>

<p>7</p>	<p>Strengthen the focus on specialized teams of data analysts and audit professionals (W/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a No Regret move, as it addresses critical challenges that audit companies face when managing large-scale data and audit processes.</p> <p>The risk of this strategy is moderately low due to the industry's need to deal with larger data sets and provide more accurate audits. Deloitte is currently adopting data analytic solutions into audits amidst a more demanding environment (Deloitte n.d.c), diminishing the risk of strategy failure. Organizations with dedicated analytics teams demonstrate a 55% higher deployment of advanced analytics use cases compared to those without such teams (Agarwal, et al. 2022). Furthermore, 47% say that data and analytics have significantly or fundamentally changed the nature of competition in their industries in the past three years, highlighting the growing tendency towards the integration of data analytics into business processes. While this indicates we're still in the early days of the shift, it increased 38% since the previous survey (Agarwal, et al. 2022).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with all plausible scenarios due to the growing necessity for robust data management in the audit sector, setting Deloitte apart by enhancing its capabilities to handle large-scale data and improve audit accuracy.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Promote attractive career growth opportunities in fields like ESG (W/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option due to the potential to address Deloitte's challenges in retaining top talent while leveraging its existing leadership in ESG auditing.</p> <p>The implementation risk of this strategy is low because Deloitte already has a strong foundation in ESG auditing, established systems for employee development (Deloitte n.d.f) and a growing market demand with an increasing relevance for auditors (Bell 2021). Furthermore, this strategy involves moderate financial costs, with expenses including certifications in sustainability reporting, such as the Fundamental of Sustainability Accounting by the Standards Board certification, and career growth opportunities that require investment in, e.g., training programs. Adding to this, the cost of not investing in the growth and development of your employees far outweighs the cost of providing training opportunities (D. Cohen n.d.) yielding long term benefits. Furthermore, in today's workforce, employees seek purpose-driven roles, such as those in ESG, which create a workplace culture that fosters loyalty and dedication (Mui 2024).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios where high demand for ESG audits persists, distinguishing it by capitalizing on a market trend towards sustainability.</p>

<p>9</p>	<p>Expand international collaboration through audit delivery centers (S/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option, as it allows Deloitte to maintain flexibility and adapt its resource allocation based on how market and operational dynamics evolve.</p> <p>The experts highlighted, that by expanding international collaboration through audit delivery centers, Deloitte can reduce costs, enhance scalability, and access specialized talent pools in lower-cost regions, ensuring that it remains competitive while mitigating risks associated with fluctuating client demands. This process enables around 20-30% of audit hours to be performed remotely (Appendix 3). Even though Deloitte US already uses this model extensively, leading to sufficient internal knowledge on operating such delivery centers (Appendix 3), this strategy is associated with risk since opening a new location and establishing new networks requires sufficient financial and personnel resource as well as local market expertise. Therefore, establishing a new location is always connected to some risk.</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios, in which talent shortages in the EU persist. However, if this talent is sufficiently available, a strong focus on international delivery centers is not necessarily needed as Deloitte can deliver high quality audit service while relying on the local workforce.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Strengthen public perception through value-driven community engagements (S/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a No Regret move, as it strengthens Deloitte’s reputation, builds trust, and fosters meaningful stakeholder relationships, which are critical across all future scenarios.</p> <p>The associated risks are relatively low, as such initiatives require minimal financial, and personnel investments compared to other strategic recommendations (Barker 2022). At the same time, their outcomes - enhanced public perception, strengthened stakeholder connections, and increased goodwill - offer significant long-term benefits, irrespective of economic or market conditions (Barker 2022).</p> <p>Furthermore, this strategy enables Deloitte to mitigate reputational risks and showcase its commitment to societal progress, increasingly valued by stakeholders and the public. By aligning purpose-driven initiatives with core business goals, Deloitte strengthens stakeholder loyalty and maintains a positive global image (Deloitte n.d.k).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with all plausible scenarios, as it reinforces stakeholder loyalty, maintains a positive public view of the world’s largest professional services company, and delivers consistent value by creating goodwill, mitigating reputational risks, and demonstrating a tangible commitment to societal progress.</p>

<p>11</p>	<p>Implement a holistic employee experience program (W/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a No Regret move, as implementing a holistic employee experience program addresses fundamental organizational needs that lead to tangible benefits across all scenarios.</p> <p>A Gallup meta-analysis of 183,806 business units, encompassing over 3.3 million employees across 347 organizations, found a strong link between employee engagement and business performance. Business and work units in the top quartile of employee engagement significantly outperformed those in the bottom quartile. Top-quartile units had a 23% increase in profitability, and a 78% decrease in absenteeism (Harter, et al. 2024). Turnover rates also showed remarkable differences: high-turnover organizations (with over 40% annualized turnover) saw a 21% reduction, while low-turnover organizations (with 40% or less annualized turnover) experienced a 51% reduction (Harter, et al. 2024). Additionally, high engagement drove a 70% increase in employee wellbeing and a 22% rise in organizational citizenship (Harter, et al. 2024). Furthermore, top-quartile units achieved a 10% improvement in customer loyalty and engagement (Harter, et al. 2024) – critical success factors for any service provider.</p> <p>This strategy aligns with all plausible scenarios, as it allows Deloitte to stay at the forefront in the war of talent and attract and retain highly skilled professionals.</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>Adjust audit offerings for SMEs, targeting rising-demand areas (W/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Big Bet, as it relates to high risk. Deloitte's audit services are only partially aligned with the needs of the SME market, which prioritizes affordability, flexibility, and personalized service (Hattersley 2022). To counteract this, Deloitte entered in 2016 UK's SME market with a £2.5m investment in Propel, a cloud-based accounting and analytics service tailored to SMEs, offering real-time insights and a subscription model to meet the needs of small business owners (Simpson 2016). However, on 30 September 2022, Deloitte sold Propel to the Jeffreys Henry Group (Hattersley 2022). FinTech watcher Nick Levine commented on this business decision as follows: "For the Big Four, the brand is everything. So, in reality, I don't think any of the Big Four could really provide that high level of service at the very low price point they're going to market within." (Hattersley 2022).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with a scenario of declining economic activity among major EU players, enabling Deloitte to diversify revenue streams and reduce dependency on large, conventional clients. However, as the Propel example shows, the high risk of adjusting offerings for SMEs requires thorough preparation and careful examination of lessons learned to overcome launch hurdles successfully.</p>

<p>13</p>	<p>Develop real-time AI advisory platforms for continuous ethical monitoring (S/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option, as it positions Deloitte as a proactive compliance partner.</p> <p>KPMG’s report highlights that "the development of an AI-enabled auditing platform is not a distant future” and that over 60% of financial reporting leaders see a variety of benefits (KPMG International 2024). Those benefits include trend prediction, real-time risk insights, improved data-driven decisions, and enhanced data accuracy (KPMG International 2024).</p> <p>However, developing real-time AI advisory platforms requires substantial investment in advanced technologies to ensure ongoing assessments of fairness, transparency, and accountability in client systems (Bughin, Hazan, et al. 2017), while also navigating high implementation risks stemming from the complexity of AI development, regulatory compliance, and client concerns about privacy and bias (Certa 2024).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios where ethical AI and regulatory requirements are important, which further emphasize technological innovation and societal trust. However, in scenarios where non-technological approaches dominate, it may have limited relevance.</p>
<p>14</p>	<p>Integrate Explainable AI into audit tools to enhance transparency and build client trust (S/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Real Option, as it provides Deloitte with the flexibility to adapt to client requirements and regulatory changes.</p> <p>According to a McKinsey survey on the state of AI in 2024, 40% of respondents mentioned explainability as the main risk in the implementation of AI, while seeing trust as the foundation for it (Giovine, et al. 2024).</p> <p>However, the integration of XAI into audit tools requires significant financial efforts to ensure that AI-driven decisions are transparent, interpretable, and compliant with ethical standards (Bernardo 2023). Implementation risk emerges, as “they require considerable resources both in the development of the AI system and in the way it is interrogated in practice.” (Bernardo 2023). Further compliance with evolving regulations on AI transparency and dealing with potential client skepticism about AI-driven audits adds complexity.</p> <p>This strategy aligns with scenarios, where trust, transparency, and ethical AI usage are important. This flexibility in addressing transparency concerns in highly regulated markets, client demands for trustworthy AI, technology-driven industries, and heightened ethical expectations makes it a valuable option for Deloitte while being adaptable to changing industry dynamics.</p>

<p>15</p>	<p>Establish GDS in underserved regions to deliver cost-effective modular audits (W/T Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a Big Bet, as establishing GDS in underserved regions requires significant upfront investment in infrastructure, talent acquisition, and training programs.</p> <p>Very high implementation risk arises from the logistical challenges associated with setting up operations in underdeveloped regions, navigating local regulatory frameworks, and ensuring consistent quality standards across all regions (Delechat, et al. 2024). In addition, economic and political instability in some underserved areas may further complicate implementation and increase the risk of delays or inefficiencies (Spence 2016).</p> <p>This strategy aligns with a scenario, where expanding into underserved regions provides opportunities to leverage underdeveloped areas for operational efficiency, enabling Deloitte to optimize resource utilization while managing costs effectively. However, in the right circumstances - such as regions with stable political and economic conditions and supportive regulatory environments - this strategy offers transformative potential by extending Deloitte’s network and aligning with strategic goals for long-term growth.</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>Expand Deloitte’s Academy Program to upskill auditors in AI, cybersecurity, and ethical auditing (W/O Strategy)</p>	<p>This strategic recommendation is categorized as a No Regret move, as upskilling auditors in the areas of AI, cybersecurity and ethical auditing is a scalable and feasible initiative that directly addresses the evolving needs of the auditing profession (Accountancy Europe 2024).</p> <p>This is underlined by a PwC report, in which 46% of Chief Risk Officers see digital transformation as a key opportunity to train their existing staff on new digital technologies (ProEdge team 2022). The main challenge is to update the Academic Program to reflect new technologies and ensure broad auditor participation. The implementation risk is low due to Deloitte's existing infrastructure for professional development and training (Deloitte 2019). Deloitte Academy, supported by initiatives like Deloitte University, already provides a comprehensive framework for continuous learning, offering tailored programs that address evolving industry needs and equip professionals with cutting-edge skills (Deloitte 2023). For clients, this enhanced expertise among auditors translates into higher-quality insights, greater trust in audit outcomes.</p> <p>This strategy aligns with all plausible scenarios, as it responds to the general need for a future-ready workforce capable of dealing with technological advances, regulatory changes, and changing client expectations. Its relevance makes it a fundamental investment that improves operational efficiency, customer confidence, and overall adaptability in any future environment.</p>

Appendix 11 – Involvement of Deloitte

Name	First Name	Role at Deloitte	Involvement
Braun	Wolfgang	Partner Audit & Assurance	Survey & Workshop
Brüggemann	Dr. Benedikt	Partner Audit & Assurance Sector Leader Power, Utilities & Renewables	Expert Interview, Survey & Workshop
Conrad	Andreas	Partner Audit & Assurance	Survey & Workshop
Dorissen	Stefan	Partner Audit & Assurance	Survey & Workshop
Klein	Dr. Florian	Managing Director Head of Center for the Long View	Overall collaboration including participation in the survey and three working sessions
Wendlandt	Patrick	Partner Audit & Assurance Audit Transformation	Survey & Workshop
Wermelt	Andreas	Partner Audit & Assurance Transformation Leader	Expert Interview & Survey

Figure 18 - Involvement of Deloitte (Own illustration)