The New Qualified Technology Executive: Redefining Board-Level Technology Expertise in 2026

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Since RRA's publication of The Rise of the Qualified Technology Executive in 2016, expectations and responsibilities surrounding technology oversight have expanded significantly. Then, only a minority of Fortune 500 companies had a qualified tech expert (QTE) on boards, and most approached technology predominantly as a risk issue. Today, tech influences nearly every dimension of enterprise performance, from AI-enabled operations to data governance, cybersecurity, and long-term competitive positioning.

This paper kicks off RRA's Technology and Governance Series, which examines how boards can strengthen their oversight and strategic decision-making as technology becomes increasingly central to enterprise performance.

The next paper in the series, Why Tech Q Alone Isn't Enough: Bringing the Right Technology Expertise into the Boardroom , turns to the individual director lens and explores how tech depth and boardroom effectiveness come together in the most impactful appointments. This series aims to provide a practical roadmap for boards aiming to strengthen governance as technology reshapes competitive dynamics and organizational performance.

What is a QTE?

A QTE is a senior leader who has:

- Led a core technology function (e.g., CIO, CTO, VP Engineering), or
- Managed a major business or P&L inside a technology company.

QTEs understand how technology decisions drive performance, risk, and value creation.

Unlike financial expertise, which is codified through regulation, there is not a rule that requires boards to include directors with tech experience. Yet as tech decisions increasingly shape performance and risk, every board now faces an implicit obligation to build that capability.

As these demands have increased, boards have begun to add directors with tech experience—yet the mix, depth, and deployment of this expertise varies widely. Many boards have a tech voice, but far fewer have the combination of perspectives needed to confidently engage in decisions that carry enterprise-wide implications.

This paper examines how tech capability on boards has evolved since 2016, drawing on our analysis of 398 public company boards. It is the first installment in the **RRA Technology and Governance** series, which will explore multiple dimensions of board readiness as technology becomes increasingly central to strategy, performance, and governance.

Read on to learn where QTE adoption has accelerated, where gaps remain, and how boards can build the right configuration of tech-related experience for effective oversight in 2026 and beyond.

What's changed in the last decade

Technology oversight has expanded from risk management to enterprise strategy.

In 2016, most boards were only beginning to treat technology as a strategic question, rather than an item on their risk agenda. Digital transformation was gathering speed, but tech discussion remained anchored in risk management and cost control. Few directors had the depth of experience to link emerging digital capabilities to growth, innovation, or long-term competitive edge.

Today, technology is inseparable from strategy. AI now shapes product development, service delivery, and operating models. Cloud systems and data tools now sit at the center of how companies run and scale. Cyber threats have become persistent and data governance carries legal and reputational consequences. These shifts require boards to engage with technology as a core governance capability, not a technical issue.

As the technology landscape has changed, so have expectations for the QTE. Boards no longer look for a single digital director or former CIO. They need leaders who can connect tech fluency with enterprise value, ensuring technology choices strengthen both performance and business resilience.

The result is a fundamental shift. Technology expertise is no longer optional or narrowly defined. It is now a core component of board effectiveness, with **significantly more specialized and multidimensional expertise required.**

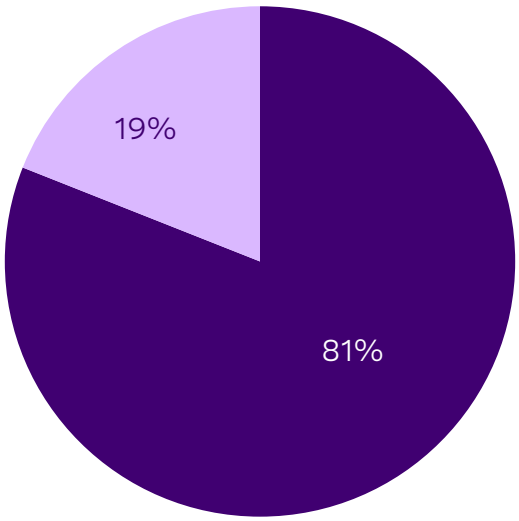
What our analysis of 398 public company boards reveals about technology expertise today*

QTE presence is high, but depth and deployment vary sharply across regions, industries, and board sizes.

Our research shows that, while most boards have added technology experience in some form, the depth of that expertise and where it sits varies widely. These differences shape how prepared boards are to oversee the tech challenge and opportunity.

Figure 1 - QTE presence on public boards across industries and global regions

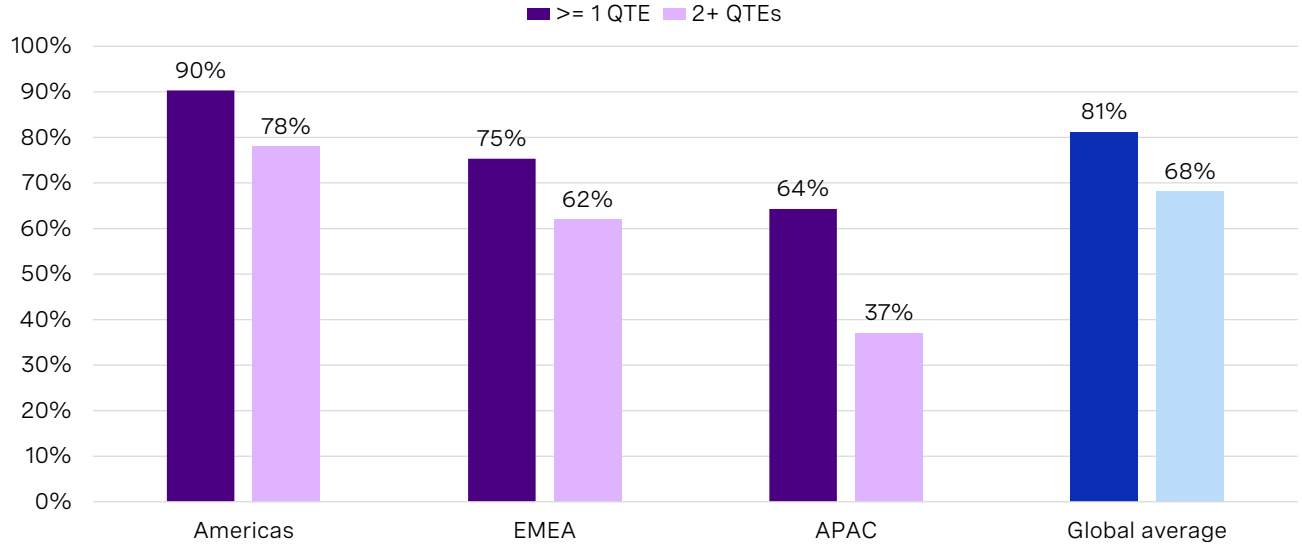
Public company boards with tech expertise



Source: RRA proprietary analysis of tech director talent, n = 398 public company boards & 3,400 directors

Figure 2 - Regional patterns: The Americas lead in depth of tech expertise

Depth of QTE representation by region



Source: RRA proprietary analysis of tech director talent, n = 398 public company boards & 3,400 directors

Across all companies analyzed, 81% of boards include at least one QTE; however, the regional pictures look very different (Figure 1).

Boards in the **Americas** have the highest concentration of QTEs: 90% include at least one and more than 75% have two or more (Figure 2). The region also benefits from a broad technology talent pool, expanding both the range of candidates and their professional exposure. Whether this reflects recognition of value or more access to tech talent is open to debate; regardless, Americas boards show the strongest overall technology representation.

EMEA has broad adoption but shallower depth, with 75% of boards including one QTE; however, fewer combine operational and technical backgrounds. In many companies, a single digital or transformation leader carries the full technology brief.

APAC remains the least progressed. Only 64% of boards include a QTE, and fewer than 40% include two or more. In several markets, the board has not yet institutionalized technology oversight—even when the companies themselves are technologically advanced.

These regional differences reflect structural variation in how boards are building technology oversight. Some have achieved deeper, more diverse representation; others are constrained by the availability of qualified talent, rather than by intent.

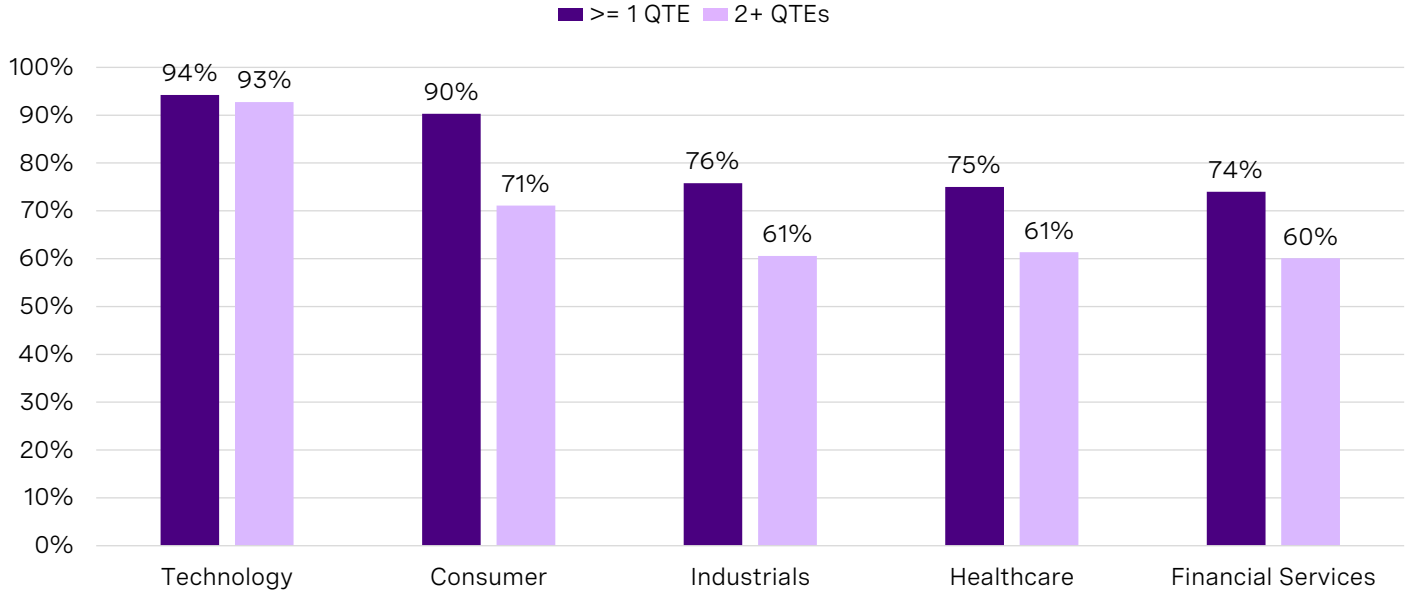
Sector variation: Technology sets the benchmark while Financial Services and Healthcare carry the highest risk

Unsurprisingly, boards in the technology sector are the most advanced in their approach to technology and governance. Nearly all include multiple QTEs, and more than half combine deep technical experience with management backgrounds. These boards have the range needed to capture the opportunity of technology.

Other sectors are slower to evolve, like financial services and healthcare . Both sectors face significant regulatory, cyber, and data governance demands, but fewer than half of boards include a former technology leader and only a small minority have multiple QTEs. As AI reshapes core business models and decision processes, **limited technical oversight creates material governance risk.**

Figure 3 - How QTE presence and depth varies across sectors

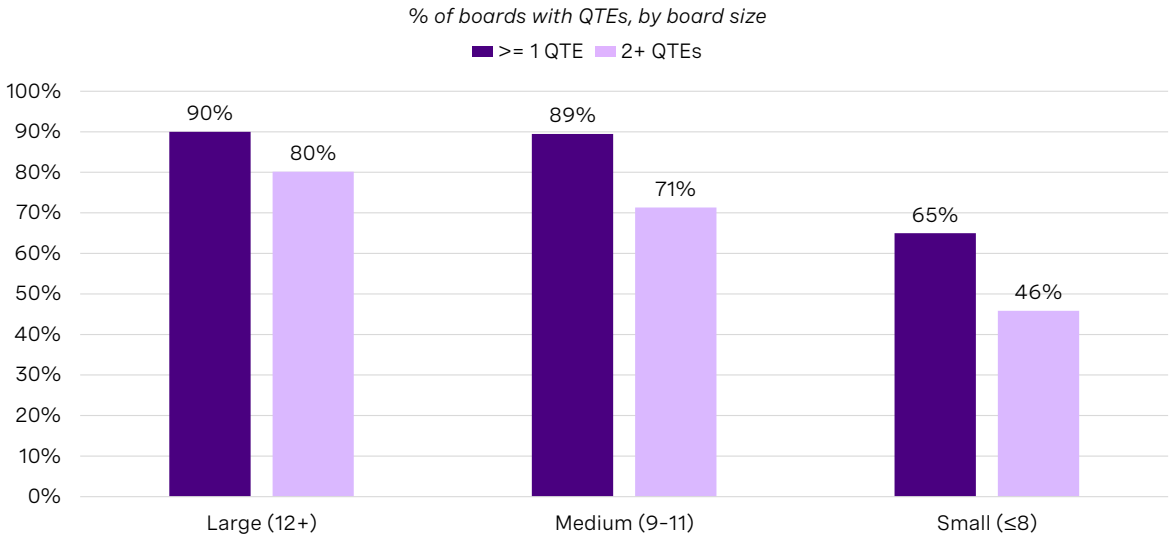
% of boards with QTEs, by sector



Source: RRA proprietary analysis of tech director talent, n = 398 public company boards & 3,400 directors

Board size: Tech expertise appears to be a luxury of scale

Figure 4: How QTE presence and depth varies by board size



Source: RRA proprietary analysis of tech director talent, n = 398 public company boards & 3,400 directors

Board size is one of the strongest predictors of technology oversight maturity, as 80% of **large boards** (12 or more directors) have at least two QTEs (Figure 4). Many also include both technical and operational backgrounds. This gives them the ability to distribute technology oversight across committees and decision areas.

Mid-sized boards behave similarly. Nearly 90% include a QTE and over 70% include two or more (Figure 4). These companies have made technology governance a core part of their board design.

Small boards, however, face limitations. Only 65% includes QTEs and less than half include more than one (Figure 4). With limited seats and competing priorities, tech expertise is often deprioritized. Without depth, boards may struggle to challenge management on system resilience, cyber preparedness, or the strategic implications of AI and data use.

The message here is straightforward: companies with smaller boards may need to rethink how they structure their governance if they want to keep pace with technology's evolution. **Presence alone is no longer enough: depth, breadth, and diversity of expertise matter.**

Why depth and deployment matter more than presence

Many boards have tech experience, but few have the mix of capabilities needed for effective oversight

Many boards have added directors with technology exposure, but the expertise represented is often narrow. A single QTE may know a specific function, but board-level oversight requires an understanding of how technology interacts with commercial priorities and the ability to assess tradeoffs. Without this broader capability, technology discussions remain at a high level and boards risk relying too heavily on management's framing.

Technology oversight also benefits from multiple vantage points. No single director can cover the full range of technology considerations that influence performance, resilience, or innovation. **Boards that rely on one QTE often miss the range of perspectives needed to pressure test decisions or identify where risks and opportunities intersect across functions.**

Committee placement further influences effectiveness. Our analysis shows that technology expertise is often concentrated in audit or risk committees, and less frequently positioned in strategy or other forward-looking committees. When tech expertise sits mostly in oversight committees, the board has fewer chances to use that perspective in longer-term decisions.

The implication

Boards should assess not just whether technology expertise is present, but whether it is **sufficiently broad, complementary, and positioned to inform strategic dialogue.** As technology becomes more integral to business decisions, effective governance requires more than a single expert and more than technical knowledge alone.

How boards can build the right technology expertise for 2026

A practical roadmap for strengthening technology governance and board readiness.

It's hard to think of a business today without an operational dependency on technology. Amid rapidly emerging threats and opportunities, technology now sits at the center of business strategy. Yet the pace of innovation—especially in AI—makes it increasingly difficult to keep up. Forward-facing executives can stay current through daily exposure, peer learning, and formal development, but boards are a step removed and have far fewer such opportunities.

Our analysis shows that only one in four boards in our study have both a former tech functional leader and a leader with tech management experience. This complementary oversight enables boards to truly understand management's assumptions, interpret tradeoffs, and challenge where necessary.

Our leadership advisors see this gap in practice. Many boards initially seek a tech director, only to discover that their real need is more specific: recently, we've been asked to consider and assess talent with skills that include consumer digital, ecommerce, agentic AI, and cyber. Boards that clarify these needs early make more effective appointments and avoid placing directors in situations where their expertise is only adjacent.

Committee structure further shapes impact. Boards that position at least one tech-oriented director on a forward-looking committee gain earlier visibility into tech implications and hold more robust investment discussions.

Beyond committee placement, many boards are now recognizing that one technology voice on the board is likely no longer enough. Many companies now face a dual challenge: rapidly evolving customer expectations driven by tech and rising disruption within their own operations. In response, organizations embracing accelerated AI adoption, large-scale modernization, or integrated data dependencies often outgrow the single-director model. Our advisors frequently see boards add a second technology-oriented director after recognizing gaps in coverage for areas such as cyber architecture, cloud operations, or platform design. These additions strengthen oversight by providing complementary vantage points.

Questions nomination & governance committees should ask in 2026:

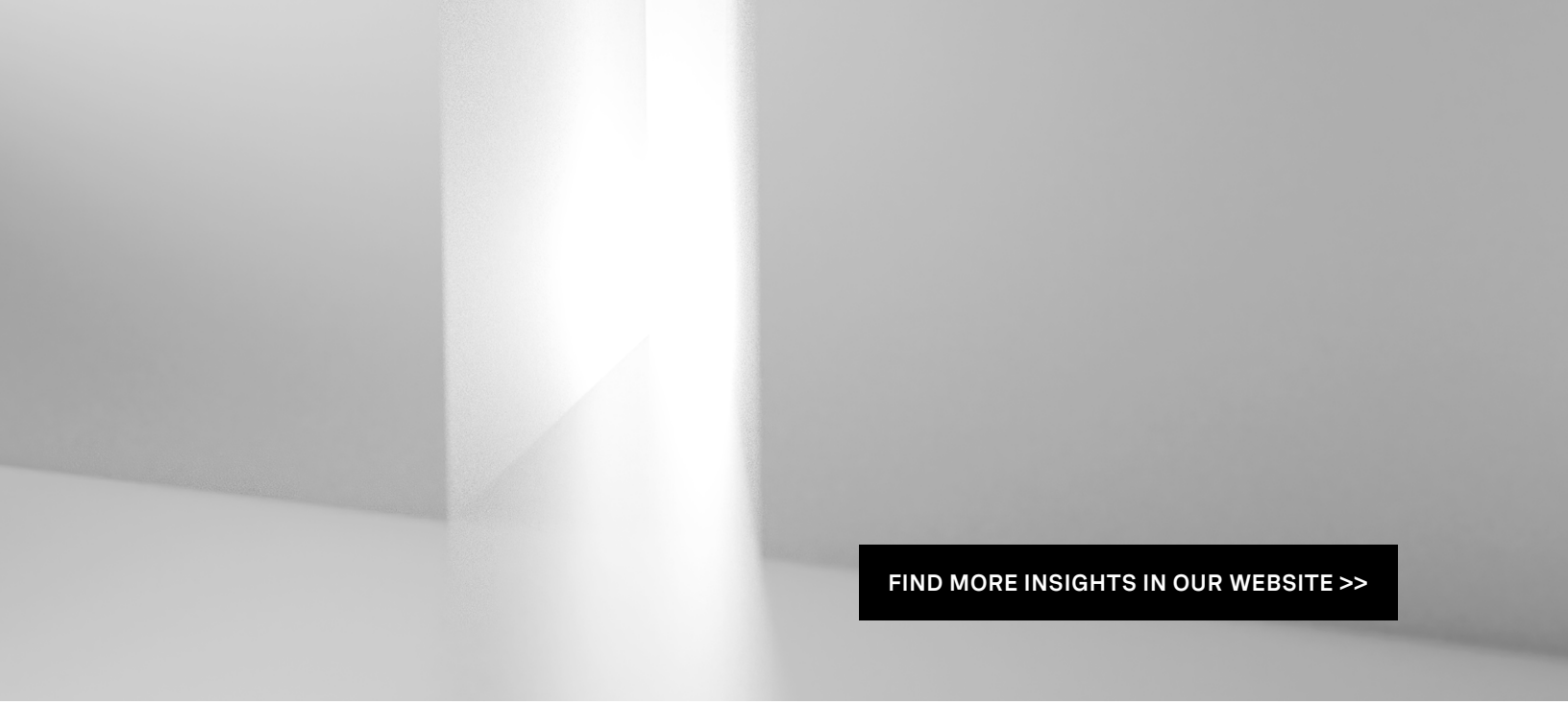
Boards can use these questions to guide a conversation around how technology is driving strategy and where new risks might emerge.

1. Do we know which specific capabilities matter most for our strategy? Architecture, data, AI, security, digital operations, and platform integration may be high on the list.
2. Do we have more than one director with tech-related experience?
3. Do our tech-oriented directors bring different perspectives?
4. Is our expertise positioned where strategic decisions originate? QTEs are twice as likely to sit on audit/risk vs. strategy committees.
5. Are we relying on a director whose expertise is adjacent (versus directly relevant)?
6. If our tech footprint is expanding, when do we add additional tech perspectives to the board?
7. What decisions today would benefit from earlier tech input?

Boards that take a structured approach to strengthening their tech capability will be better prepared for the decisions ahead.

The implication

Tech capability is now central to board effectiveness. For directors, two questions increasingly shape effective oversight: How is our strategy enabled by technology, and what new risks does that create? Boards that bring the right perspectives to these questions, engage early and challenge constructively, and continually revisit how tech insight is used and built will be better positioned for the decisions that define the future of enterprise strategy.



Authors

Tristan Jervis leads Russell Reynolds Associates' global Technology sector. He is based in London.

Sean Roberts is a senior member of Russell Reynolds Associates' Board and CEO Advisory Partners and Technology practices. He is based in London.

David Finke is a senior member of Russell Reynolds Associates' Board and CEO Advisory Partners and Technology practices. He is based in Palo Alto.

Ravenna Stafford is a member of the Russell Reynolds Associates' Commercial Strategy & Insights team. She is based in New York.

Footnotes

*RRA analyzed 398 public company boards across major industries and regions in 2025 to assess the presence of technology expertise, defined as both management experience and functional leadership. In total, more than 3,400 directors were mapped.

About Russell Reynolds Associates

Russell Reynolds Associates is a global leadership advisory firm. Our 500+ consultants in 47 offices work with public, private, and nonprofit organizations across all industries and regions. We help our clients build teams of transformational leaders who can meet today's challenges and anticipate the digital, economic, sustainability, and political trends that are reshaping the global business environment. From helping boards with their structure, culture, and effectiveness to identifying, assessing and defining the best leadership for organizations, our teams bring their decades of expertise to help clients address their most complex leadership issues. We exist to improve the way the world is led

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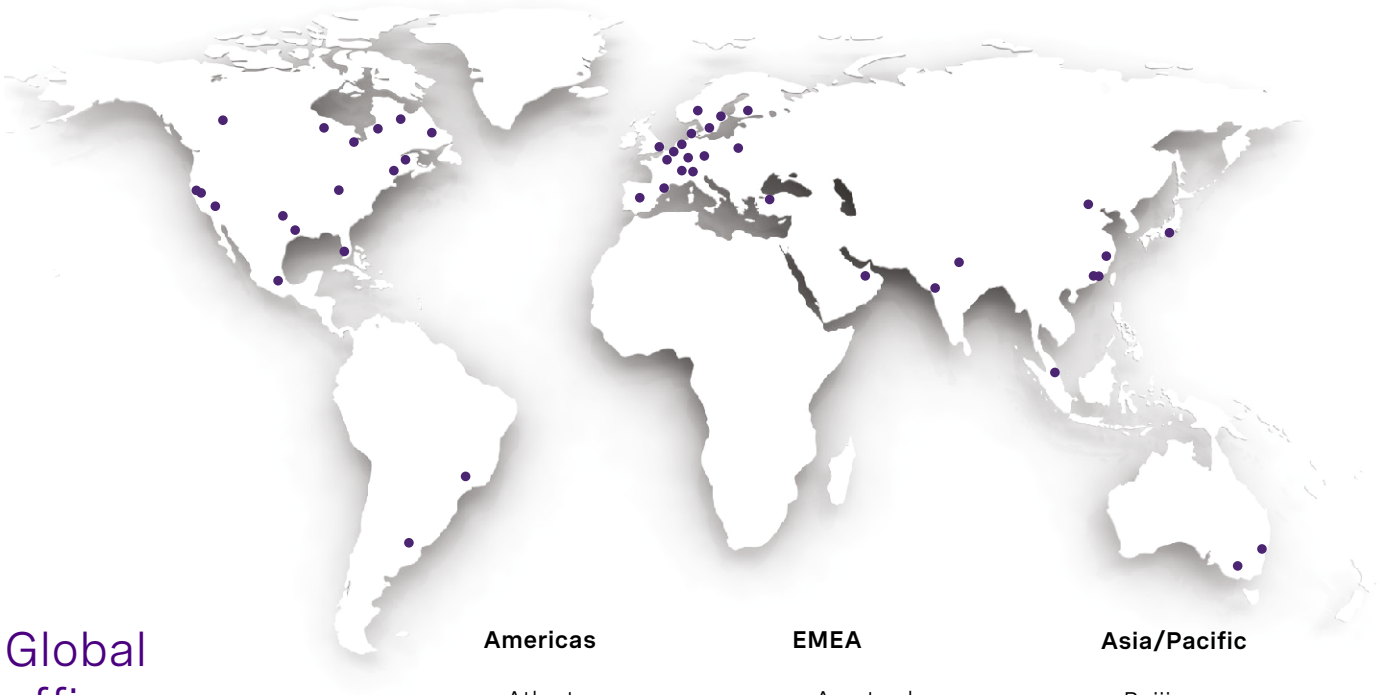

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