



# Voice of the CFO

A recurring conversation with CFOs  
on finance-related issues



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# Leading the AI value chain

The role of the chief financial officer (CFO) is changing at a critical moment. Once defined by reporting and control, the modern CFO must now navigate a landscape that is being fundamentally reshaped by artificial intelligence (AI). Recent conversations with finance leaders reveal a major mind shift is underway. The dialogue is no longer about incremental efficiency; it's about achieving stunning 50%–70% productivity gains through strategic AI implementation. CFOs are witnesses and participants in this transformation. Conversation delved

into the practical AI use cases delivering eye-popping returns, the critical need to modernize data and reengineer processes, as well as the evolution of the CFO role. As automation handles routine tasks of information gathering and generating insights, the finance function's value shifts to influence with strategic partners. This wide-ranging discussion offered a clear roadmap for CFOs aiming to thrive in the emerging agentic era and tasked with building the finance team of the future.

## On the CFO agenda

### Transformative AI

Use cases deliver productivity and profitability

### Modernizing data and processes

From data complexity to process reengineering

### The CFO's evolving role

A meaningful shift is underway

# Transformative AI

## Use cases deliver productivity and profitability

The conversation with CFOs delved into how their companies are leveraging AI within finance or accelerating organizational processes. Several use cases were discussed, including querying travel expenses, automating accounts payable (AP), and enhancing financial planning and analysis. However, some CFOs are prioritizing revenue-generating over cost-saving.

Call centers are a key area where companies are gaining a foothold with using AI to generate results. An insurance company CFO noted: “We reduced our call volumes by 20 percent and saved over \$80 million on a run rate basis.”

While chief information officers (CIOs) fret over tech debt, CFOs are concerned with the impact of tech debt on the bottom line. A win saves money and innovates. A financial services company CFO recounted their company’s win.

“We have a fee billing platform built with Cobal but runs fees on trillions of assets. It would take forever to rebuild it on a modern platform. An AI tool lit up all the connection points. It was amazing both in terms of efficiency gain and risk reduction.”

The biggest change detected with CFOs is a mind shift, from optimistic gains from AI to the coming realization that AI

could produce eye-popping returns. It’s enough to make a CFO blush. A CFO for a retail investment company shared aloud what other CFOs have mostly kept to themselves.

“We’re targeting friction areas and bringing everyone involved together. We’re not looking at an incremental 10 percent gain. It’s now 50 to 70 percent. It’s the art of the possible, and it’s changed the ambition setting to say otherwise.”

Could AI have the same type of surprising impact on finance operations? Sanjay Sehgal thinks so. “We started to see a big shift in agentic finance three or

four months ago. The question now is, how do we choose the right model and structure, and deploy agents effectively in finance?”

That means moving beyond ad hoc experimentation and developing a comprehensive AI strategy that aligns with your organization’s goals. This strategy should address governance, data management, and scalability. While it’s fine to start with low-hanging fruit, the goal should be to drive revenue, achieve cost savings, or deliver a strategic advantage.

“We believe that 60 to 70 percent of finance transactional activities will become automated with AI.”

—Sanjay Sehgal, KPMG Partner, Advisory

# Modernizing data and processes

## From data complexity to process reengineering

A comprehensive AI strategy calls for modernizing data and reengineering processes. A modernized data platform makes data AI-ready. For example, the CFO for a financial services company is using data mirroring to advance their AI program by putting fresh, consistent operational data where AI workflows can safely and efficiently use it without interfering with production systems.

“We’re mirroring a proprietary ERP database in a data lake environment. The goal is to get all our data into one place.”

Company processes also need to be reengineered for AI. As the central, strategic architect of the company’s

AI-powered transformation, CFOs need to authorize and champion a holistic redesign of entire processes, as well as help break down traditional functional silos.

“We’re in the midst of a three-year program with updating our processes,” remarked an insurance company CFO. “It’s hard to do with internal talent that sits in those seats, so we created SWAT teams to reengineer process and mindsets.”

Once a company has updated its processes and prepared structured and unstructured data for AI, it unlocks a vast array of transformative AI capabilities. Importance will then shift to an AI

readiness assessment that offers a clear roadmap for agent adoption. Some CFOs are further along with semantic data and autonomous decision-making by agents, leading to gains in productivity and profitability.

An industrial manufacturer CFO put it this way: “We called for 30 percent productivity gains and three-year targets around profitability. People thought it would be hard to do. We listed everything in finance, HR, customer care, the whole bit.”

“The most interesting thing we’re doing with agents is automating SOX controls. We’re able to automate

a third of the testing, and it looks good,” communicated the CFO for a semiconductor industry firm.

How will productivity gains and process changes impact talent and culture? CFOs are concerned about it. The CFO with an insurance brokerage company spoke for the group.

“To us, it’s not like mass layoffs. It’s about bending the hiring curve, so we can do more and add more scale with the same number of people or fewer resources. It’s less scary that way.”

“Focus on outcomes, not the tech path to get there.”

—CFO for a retail company

# The CFO's evolving role

A meaningful shift is underway

The shift in the CFO role is not new, but the need to accelerate it has never been greater. As finance leaders move beyond information gathering and reporting, the emphasis is increasingly on delivering strategic insight and influence. This requires spending less time on routine tasks such as financial due diligence and more time alongside the CEO—allocating capital, setting direction, and driving execution. As one CFO described it:

“I tell CFOs that we operate in a pyramid—the bottom foundation is information, the middle layer is insights, and at the top is influence. We should spend virtually zero time in

information gathering while AI fits the bill on generating insights. The CFO should be working with their business partners, helping them figure out what the business strategy is and delivering against that.”

With an expansive view of AI, CFOs and other members of the C-suite see value in prioritization. That is the assessment of one CFO with an energy company. “Our AP department is the lowest cost, so the return with AI would be great, but the overall magnitude would be tiny. We’re focused on areas where we can generate new revenue or achieve substantial cost savings.”

Sanjay Sehgal encouraged CFOs to envision the future and consider what it means for finance. “In two years, most finance processes will be automated. The question is, as the elder group retires or departs and you’re left with less experienced staff, how will you get them trained?”

Nobody knows with certainty what is going to happen with AI transforming company operations. The CFO for a semiconductor industry offered a counter narrative.

Maybe the learning rate of new employees will be much faster, so you won’t have a training issue. Whatever

problem you’re working on, you’ll be able to have AI diagnose the entire ecosystem. How does this work? What is the connection? Who are the people I need to contact? You can do all that in one hour where now it takes a whole job rotation to learn it.”

Managed services may play a role in filling the experience gap. By outsourcing the routine, transactional work, a company can redefine the roles of in-house employees, including new, less experienced ones.

“The CFO is the CEO’s right hand, executing the company’s strategy perspective.”

—Semiconductor industry firm CFO

# Key considerations

- Pivot to AI projects that offer larger revenue opportunities or deliver substantial cost savings. The big to-do: start with end-to-end process transformation and data optimized for AI.
- Focus on outcomes, not technology. Avoid the trap of adopting AI for AI's sake. Temper CIO enthusiasm with the reality of defining a business problem or desired outcome first.
- Articulate the finance team's future. Champion redesigning talent development with new training models. Consider project rotations, reverse mentoring, or leverage managed services.

# Additional resources

[KPMG AI Quarterly Pulse Survey](#)

[2026 US Technology Survey report](#)

[Agentic AI untangled](#)

[Sophisticated AI collaboration: An inside look at high-impact use](#)



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