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A CFO's Guide to AI-Enhanced Finance

Key Areas Where Finance Leaders
Harness Artificial Intelligence



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A CFO's Guide to AI-Enhanced Finance

Key Areas Where Finance Leaders Harness Artificial Intelligence

AI-Driven Finance Is Here

CFOs have spent the last few years hurtling from one macroeconomic challenge to the next. COVID-19 triggered the largest global economic crisis since the Great Depression. Then the pandemic's aftermath, with its supply chain disruptions and surging inflation, tested leaders' abilities to forge long-term plans, mitigate risk, and strategically align the finance function with the larger goals of the business. And now, tariff swings and trade wars look to be injecting new volatility into global logistics networks. Inflation is still a looming concern, and geopolitical tensions seem like an enduring sign of the times.

These forces—and knock-on effects like currency fluctuations, rising material costs, shrinking export markets, and tightening lending practices—are making many business leaders hesitant to invest. CFOs of midmarket firms in particular are inclined to tighten their belts and prioritize managing risk, according to Nick Araco Jr., CEO and founder of [the CFO Alliance](#).

“A disciplined return to the fundamentals” is the predominant ethos among the organization's 9,000 finance leader members, Araco said. “They're making smart defensive moves to protect any profitability and liquidity they have.”

But countering wariness are game-changing technological advances, some of which promise to help CFOs navigate economic shocks while spurring growth and competitiveness.

“Waiting is not a strategy in the midmarket” when it comes to investing in new technology, Araco said. Rather, these CFOs, and their colleagues in emerging enterprises, are thinking about how to strike the right balance between conservative fiscal stewardship and ambitious digital transformation.

Artificial intelligence is often the instigator of these strategy sessions thanks to the technology's proven and rapidly improving ability to forecast financial results, surface insights buried in corporate data, and help model strategic responses to diverse economic scenarios. AI has already entrenched itself as an essential tool in a business landscape marked by rapidly shifting market dynamics and unpredictable policy swings. And generative AI, powered by large language models (LLMs), continues to find use cases in the finance function, including easing workflows with natural language interfaces and intelligent automation.

“There’s no denying the impact it’s going to have,” Araco said of the AI products hitting the market. CFOs he speaks with are on board but are struggling to figure out which accounting and finance use cases to tackle first.

These debates are playing out amid a rising tide of negativity that has focused the attention of many businesses on preparing for worst-case scenarios. In fact, most CFOs responding to a recent [CNBC CFO Council Survey](#) described themselves as “pessimistic” about the overall state of the US economy. And the current administration’s policies, a whopping 95% said, are impacting their ability to make business decisions because of an approach to trade that’s too chaotic and disruptive to effectively navigate. Sixty percent of those surveyed by CNBC expect a recession in the second

half of the year, with an additional 15% predicting a downturn in 2026. And many respondents said they’re already deferring capital investments because of economic uncertainty resulting from chaotic policy.

That’s not to say everything is doom and gloom. The result of all these economic indicators is a mixed bag of expectations for long-term financial stability and growth.

CFOs are not a “pessimistic crew,” Araco said. “They’re chief reality officers. They take what they get, they process it, and they apply it. They’ve always walked the tightrope of attempting to seize the opportunity while mitigating the risk.”

High on that opportunity list are AI-driven advances.



The diagram illustrates the layout of a book's chapters, organized into a grid-like structure with varying widths and heights. Each chapter is represented by a box containing the chapter number, title, and page number.

- Chapter 1:** Introduction, Page 2
- Chapter 2:** New Challenges, (Mostly) Same Skills, Page 5
- Chapter 3:** Priority: Forecasting and Scenario Planning to Support Decision-Making, Page 7
- Chapter 4:** Priority: Digital Transformation, Finance Edition, Page 9
- Chapter 5:** Priority: Collaboration and Communication, Page 10
- Chapter 6:** Tech to the Rescue, Page 11
- Chapter 7:** The Bottom Line, Page 13

New Challenges, (Mostly) Same Skills

CFOs have always been much more than chief accountants. But over the last decade, they've evolved their financial leadership approach as CEOs and corporate boards increasingly turn to finance leads to set and support the organization's strategic vision. The explosion of GenAI in business will supercharge that.

Fortunately, finance teams have become proficient at practicing data-driven decision-making to improve operations, optimize resources, and make capital investments. They've also become comfortable with AI-enabled forecasting and scenario planning tools that help them anticipate and strategically plan for foreseeable market eventualities. The current moment demands even more powerful decision-making and forecasting tools—ones that execute larger models, evaluate a greater range of scenarios, and calculate deeper into the future.

CFOs have also prioritized better ways to communicate and collaborate within their teams across the organization and with boards of directors. Increasingly, they want tools that facilitate this communication to help position the finance function as the central hub of corporate information.

Three Finance AI Use Cases to Consider

These are popular areas where finance teams are using AI to improve decision-making, efficiency, and the bottom line.

1. Financial forecasting and planning:

Predictive analytics helps identify trends, correlations, and causation using data, statistical algorithms, and machine learning to forecast future outcomes based on analysis of historical data and existing trends. AI-driven forecasts can recalibrate based on new data, helping keep plans relevant and accurate. [Learn more](#)

2. Collaboration and communication: At the center of effective collaboration is integrated software, including ERP, HR, and CRM systems, that let all departments work from the same shared, accurate, and up-to-date data. AI can, for example, analyze supply chain data from the ERP to predict a shipping delay, cross-reference with the CRM to identify high-value customers that will be affected, and make sure a representative proactively reaches out. [Learn more](#)

To get the capabilities they need, and avoid paying for ones they don't, CFOs are working to learn about AI and advanced analytics use cases in finance, grappling with the pitfalls of certain approaches to adopting those cutting-edge technologies, and wrapping their heads around a mind-boggling assortment of solutions that have come to market in just the last year. Let's look at some AI technologies that are aligned with the skills and priorities Araco and other experts see as critical for CFOs now.

Three Finance AI Use Cases to Consider (Continued)

3. Gradual business process automation:
AI can help automate a range of finance processes in the order that makes sense for your organization. CFOs generally start with jobs that are particularly time-consuming and/or error-prone; AP and AR are popular early automation targets as part of a more encompassing plan. The process starts with analysis to outline the manual steps and should end with an ongoing impact assessment.
[Learn more](#)

AI vs. GenAI vs. ML: Key Differences		
	What Is It?	What Does It Do?
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	It's the overall term for a broad discipline of computer science going back decades.	It solves problems that are traditionally addressable by humans but difficult for computers.
Generative AI (GenAI)	It uses large neural networks and extensive training to create models that generate new content. Text generators are known as large language models or LLMs.	It can write text and create images and sounds that appear to be created by humans.
Machine Learning (ML)	It uses smaller neural networks and curated, categorized data to learn to perform a single function.	It can spot patterns and make predictions when provided simple or moderately complex data.
AI Agents	They use powerful LLMs to understand and complete complex tasks for humans. Agents use tools and external data and can improve as they complete more tasks.	They autonomously provide services for humans. Tasks performed include first-level customer support and HR benefits support.

AI lets computer systems perform tasks that previously only humans could do and encompasses a wide variety of technologies.

Priority: Forecasting and Scenario Planning to Support Decision-Making



CEOs and corporate boards lean heavily on advice from their CFOs when making big decisions: Invest for growth or keep cash on hand? Diversify suppliers and logistics networks or localize? Seek outside investment or pursue M&A opportunities?

Finance leaders are accustomed to supporting these choices. But making them quickly enough to keep pace with external factors related to government policy, such as a shifting tariff regime, proposed tax code changes, signs of resurgent inflation, and emerging regulatory frameworks around critical data technologies—well, data shows that’s where CFOs are shouting from the rooftops for help.

Scenario planning systems driven by AI and integrated with ERP suites provide the rapid evaluation of conditions that leaders crave. ERP systems form the hub of business data and when ecommerce, CRM, project management, inventory, and supply chain systems are integrated, AI-driven scenario planning is fast, accurate, and easy to use. Further, scenario models developed by AI can consider many more variables than traditional planning would allow, producing more nuanced analysis in seconds.

Need a crash course on the fundamentals of scenario analysis? [Check out our primer](#), complete with a six-step approach and examples.

The ability to peer over the horizon—beyond the next fiscal quarter or year, perhaps even further into the future—gives financial leaders a significant and highly coveted edge. But many CFOs are finding that current economic realities are fogging up their crystal balls. Basic financial forecasting extrapolates future results based on historical data, current trends, and market analysis. In the current business environment, that approach alone isn't instilling a lot of confidence. Finance leaders realize they need forecasts that continually update and models that assess the impact of unpredictable external forces. And they understand that planning and budgeting tools, many powered by AI, can get them both.

In FTI Consulting's Global CFO Report, 85% of 655 responding senior finance executives see forecasting accuracy as a primary area they need to improve on. And the CFO Alliance's April 2025 Pulse Survey of more than 9,000 CFOs reported 40% of finance teams say improving scenario planning and financial modeling is now their top priority when it comes to upgrading operations.

Many financial planners have already implemented rolling forecasts and scenario analysis and planning strategies that allow them to lean on their experience and intuition to anticipate events beyond their control, such as interest rate fluctuations and trade shocks, and then evaluate impact on revenue, expenses, and overall financial performance. Those sophisticated forecasting methods demand a constant flow of high-quality data to reliably predict outcomes when performance figures

NetSuite Planning and Budgeting offers machine learning models to inform strategic planning decisions. The solution executes multivariable forecasts analyzing how related business factors—such as sales projections, marketing spend, and inventory stocks—interact over time rather than looking at single trends or drivers in isolation. Planning and Budgeting also identifies the best forecasting model for the unique business requirements of every NetSuite customer.

[Learn more](#)

suddenly shift and new scenarios need to be modeled—data best supplied by a system that centralizes sales, fulfillment, and finance operations and intelligently surfaces the right information.

Just about three-quarters of CFOs polled by CFO Leadership Council cited regular reforecasting and scenario planning as a strategy they either already, or might soon, employ to navigate the current business environment—more than any alternative. That's likely because those strategies allow them to devise playbooks to adeptly react to different eventualities. They can consider and script responses to best- and worst-case scenarios and a range of "what-ifs" in between.

The accuracy with which financial leaders can predict the outcomes of destabilizing shifts in market conditions, perhaps more than anything else, determines how effectively they can strike a balance between caution and ambition. In that sense, scenario planning is not only essential to mitigating risk but also for prioritizing capital investments.

Priority: Digital Transformation, Finance Edition

For CFOs accustomed to selecting and procuring their departments' finance applications, digital transformation and AI initiatives change the calculation. The best approach to selecting advanced systems for finance and other interconnected departments—ERP, CRM, SCM, HR—is collaborative, in partnership with IT leaders.

Using cutting-edge digital tools to analyze data, forecast various outcomes, and gain meaningful business insights was never easy. But deciding what technologies to adopt to achieve those goals—especially with the new AI-infused solutions on the market—poses a different sort of challenge. Point products might serve a specialized function very well, but if they're unable to easily integrate with the core suite, they can limit an organization's capacity for effective data analysis. Finance and IT leaders who work together to choose a system with a single data source achieve better, more democratized analytics and greater bang for their buck.

CFOs bring a clear vision of the capabilities their teams need and how the latest tools might help craft and execute financial strategies. That contributes to a short list of platforms that can integrate with one another and existing systems and help identify the short- and long-term investments that will best realize operational goals. So no surprise, CFOs are dedicating much of their focus to digital transformation projects. The FTI Consulting survey reported 84% of respondents are prioritizing efforts to obtain finance technology and automation solutions that simplify financial processes, and 86% said they're actively investing in technologies, including AI and automation, that enhance finance operations. They're especially interested in tools that could boost the accuracy of financial forecasts and help make data-driven decisions.

NetSuite SuiteAnalytics analytics and reporting capabilities provide real-time visibility into company operational and financial performance across all business functions. Prebuilt and easily customizable, these reports and analyses make it easy to get the data you need, while role-based dashboards and key performance indicators (KPIs) help you keep an eye on business performance. Analyze NetSuite and non-NetSuite data from a central platform to make better, faster, more transformative decisions.

"Ask Oracle" is a generative AI assistant for NetSuite that lets users ask business questions in plain language. It works with SuiteAnalytics by translating natural language queries into real-time analytics, pulling data, and presenting insights instantly—no technical skills needed. This speeds reporting and decision-making.

[Learn more](#)

At the same time, some CFOs are attenuating these efforts because of external business realities. Almost a quarter of respondents to the FTI survey said they were reducing their focus on digital transformation initiatives from the prior year because of budget constraints and shortages of skilled technology professionals.

Almost half, 44%, of the business executives polled in the PwC Pulse survey said AI and data regulation are driving short-term strategy shifts within their organizations.

Priority: Collaboration and Communication

CFOs consistently cite as a top priority the need to better communicate within their teams and across all departments. Being able to make and implement decisions fast enough to meet shifting market dynamics means not having to wait for everyone to get on the same page—there's no time for miscommunication and the confusion it causes.

Eighty percent of CFOs polled by FTI Consulting said their units can improve in business partnering and other areas that depend on effective cross-functional collaboration. And better engagement with other operational leaders would likely yield more accurate forecasts, the FTI report notes, because those forecasts would be informed by a broader range of insights and consider more facets of the business. For that reason, finance leaders are looking to implement structured methods of collaborating with other operational teams, as well as setting the tone within their own. Priorities include maintaining open lines of communication with other department chiefs to constructively share ideas, scheduling regular cross-functional meetings at which leaders from different departments align forecasts with operational realities, and elevating and incorporating diverse perspectives and a wide range of professional expertise.

CFOs can be stewards of these conversations, as finance is the connective tissue that unifies all other operations across the enterprise.

“They are trying to increase communications around functional lines so they are at the center of everything—sales, marketing, HR, supply chain,” Araco said. “They want all the data to flow through them. They would like finance to be and remain a central source of truth.”

NetSuite ERP is an integrated suite that offers applications to manage accounting, order processing, inventory, production, project management, supply chain, and warehouse operations. By consolidating those processes within a unified system, NetSuite centralizes all financial and operational data, enabling in-depth, multivariate analysis with advanced analytic tools and artificial intelligence. Integration of processes and data also promotes true cross-functional collaboration between finance and all other business divisions—NetSuite helps build dashboards for leaders of different departments to share crucial information specific to their responsibilities.

[Learn more](#)

One twist: A new generation of finance professionals who have recently stepped into top positions at many midsize companies and emerging enterprises are much more comfortable than their predecessors in sharing information—especially on the topic of technology adoption. They talk freely with peers at other companies about solutions they've implemented, best practices, benchmarking, pitfalls to avoid, recommendations for use cases they've tackled, and what the results have been, Araco added.

Tech to the Rescue

We've seen a profusion of data technologies hitting the market that offer superior and, in some cases, entirely new capabilities compared with what was available just a few years ago. That's one reason most finance leaders are now actively working with their organizations' tech teams to better understand the latest financial management solutions and how to go about obtaining and deploying them to meet current demands. AI takes center stage in many of these discussions. The technology, however, has branched into so many subtypes, facilitating such diverse use cases, that narrowing the scope is challenging.

Machine learning-powered forecasting was a game-changing capability when introduced to finance professionals not so long ago, for example. And the ability of AI to anticipate outcomes based on a holistic analysis of historical data and multiple trends continues to improve at a rapid clip. The underlying models that power forecasting engines are being trained on increasingly larger data sets and can consider more variables and delve deeper into various scenarios to find hidden patterns and improve the accuracy of their predictions. AI can even help you select the machine learning model that's best suited to forecasting outcomes for your organization.

But it's the promise of generative and [agentic AI](#) that's really captivated the attention of business leaders of all stripes.



The ability of LLMs to understand queries and create responses in natural language, exhibit advanced reasoning, and autonomously take actions has motivated CFOs to explore different applications of GenAI across the finance function. Capabilities are enhanced by emerging methods, such as [Model Context Protocol \(MCP\)](#) and [retrieval-augmented generation \(RAG\)](#), that allow LLMs to securely access enterprise databases to enrich results while protecting proprietary data.

Meanwhile, virtual assistants powered by LLMs excel at providing insights into financial data through visualizations and natural language prompts. When embedded in your CRM, they can answer questions, quickly share relevant metrics, and clearly present key trends from large datasets, such as important attributes of your largest accounts or most productive sales regions.

GenAI also continues to boost the efficacy of real-time translation tools, making them more useful in supporting communication and collaboration among coworkers, customers, and partners, even those who may speak different languages. The same underlying technology can be applied to understanding the content of documents, such as audits, reports, or contracts, by extracting relevant data from them in a structured form or simply summarizing their contents. These AI tools can then answer nuanced questions regarding those documents—and even suggest next steps.

As for agents, think of them as AI assistants that can handle repetitive tasks, which helps increase accuracy, speed up work, and free employees to focus on other, more value-added functions. As we've seen, most finance leaders are eager to see capabilities added to their existing tools that can help them improve decision-making and productivity. AI agents deliver using natural language processing, machine learning capabilities, the ability to gather data by querying other tools and systems, and continuous learning.

MCP, meanwhile, provides a standardized “bridge” to connect AI agents and applications to external data, tools, and systems in a governed and structured way.

GenAI's ability to detect subtle patterns buried within massive data sets and flag relationships within that data that humans could hardly hope to detect is a goldmine for CFOs. Those insights can help make strategic financial decisions and evaluate how scenarios are likely to play out even as market turmoil and unpredictable policies continue to force us to change course faster than we would like.

More than any other advance in memory, AI is motivating today's CFOs to involve themselves in technology acquisition processes at a more inceptual and foundational phase, even championing or getting involved in an [AI Center of Excellence](#).

The Bottom Line

Many CFOs today are highly competent data analysts, well-informed buyers, and knowledgeable proponents of emerging technologies, including AI. They're relying on cutting-edge planning and forecasting tools to decide what moves to make if tariffs go into effect, to project sales in case of a sudden spike in inflation or an economic downturn, to help reorganize supply chains and relocate manufacturing in response to emerging trade realities, and to provide data-driven insights into managing maturing debt and evaluating private equity deals. And they want more: more data analytics, more robust digital infrastructure, and more AI to inform difficult decisions and drive operational efficiency.

At the same time, "they don't want to be futurists; they don't want to talk hype," said CFO Alliance Founder Nick Araco. "Given all the uncertainty, the risk profile in the office of the CFO is really low."

Being who they are, CFOs want to see firsthand the potential to generate a return on investment.

NetSuite Is Here to Help

The right system can give CFOs clear visibility into their financial data and tighter control over the business—what they need to react to market disruptions with timely,

sound decisions that yield meaningful returns. NetSuite embeds AI directly within the suite, an approach that allows CFOs to incorporate cutting-edge technology into their workflows while avoiding the extra expense and clunky integration associated with bolt-on solutions. And they can be confident they always have the latest capabilities at their fingertips through regular updates.

NetSuite's AI helps automate core processes and unearth insights into financial performance that can ease the burden of accounting and financial management. NetSuite has also incorporated GenAI that generates text and visualizations illustrating unique attributes of and comparative insights from large datasets. AI-powered features include digital assistants, such as NetSuite Bill Capture and NetSuite Text Enhance, that automate repetitive tasks. And AI advisors, such as data discovery in NetSuite Analytics Warehouse, deliver faster, better insights and analysis to finance leaders.

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