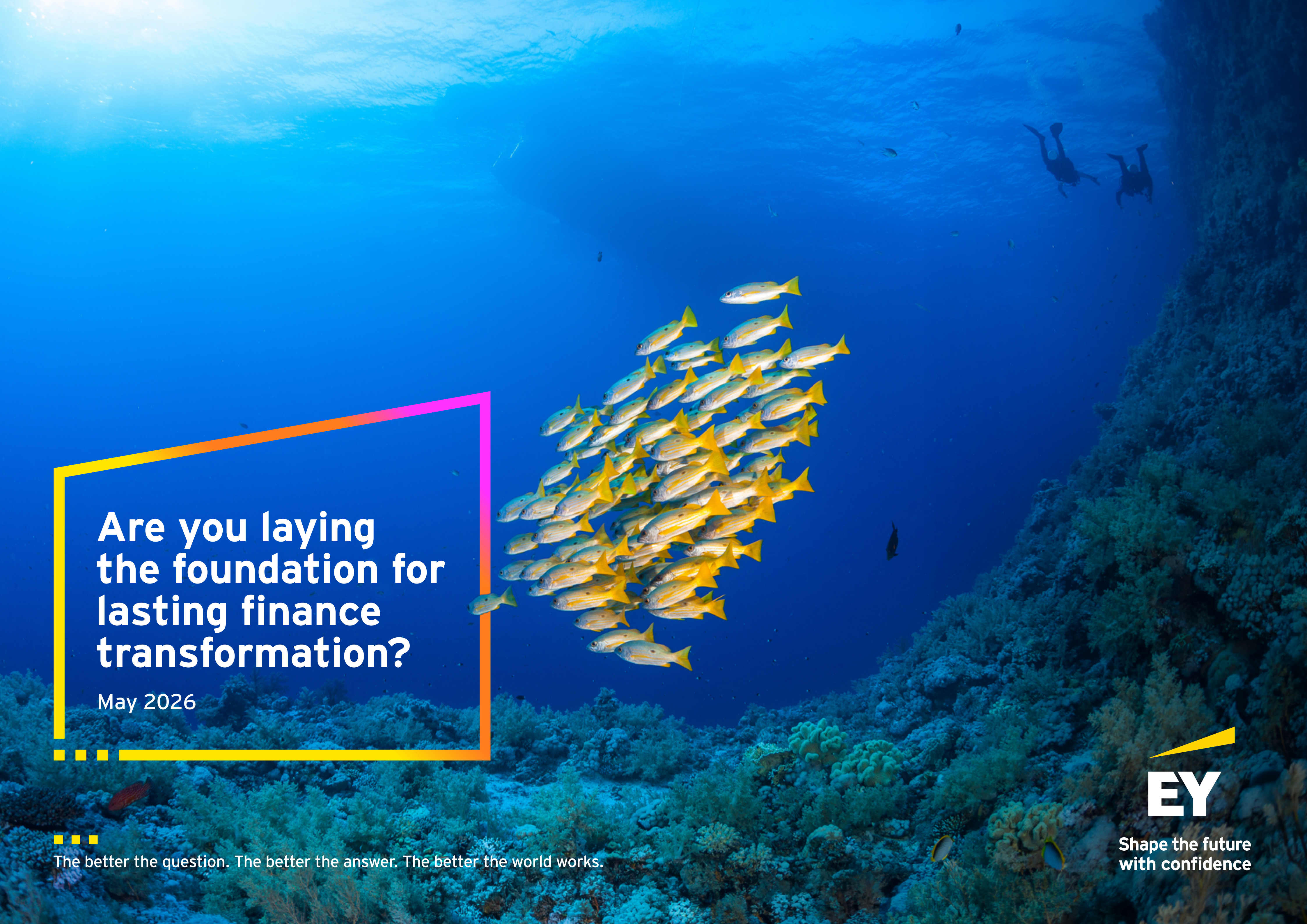

Are you laying the foundation for lasting finance transformation?

May 2026

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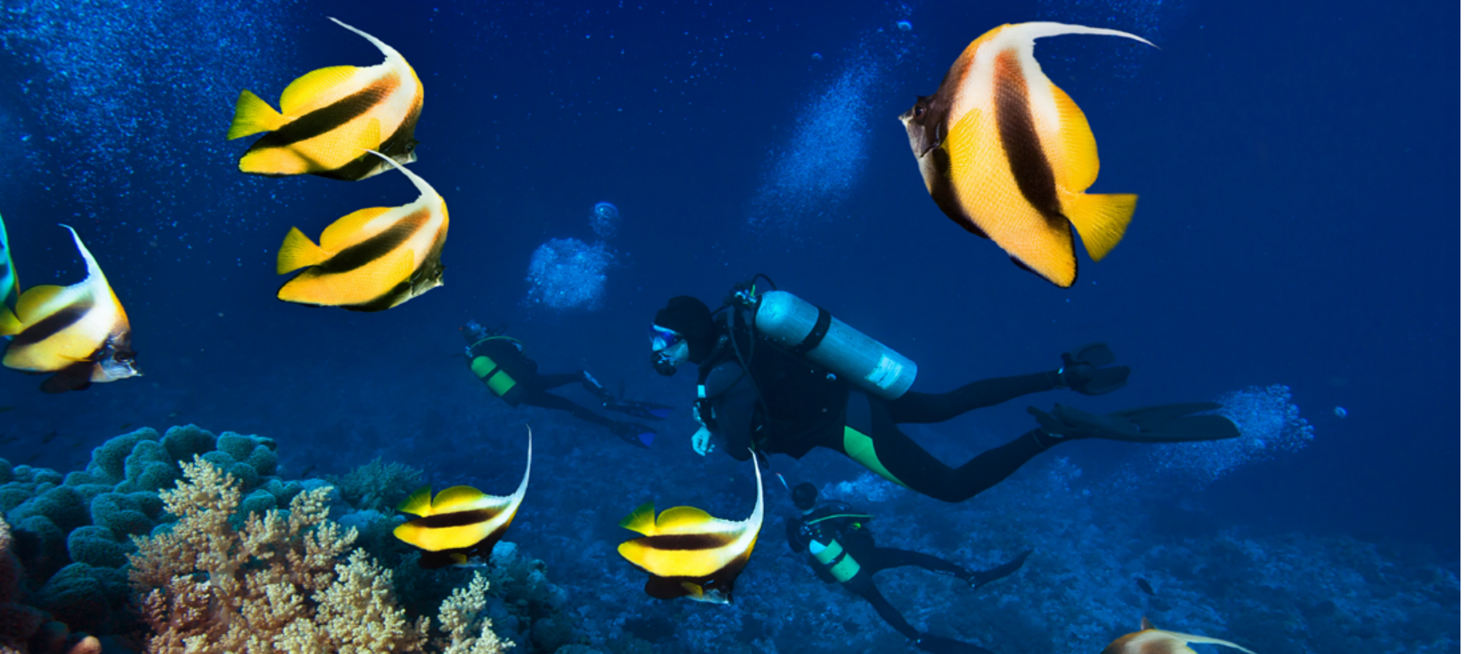
Automotive original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) are navigating one of the most consequential periods in the industry's history. This article explores how finance leaders can take control by planning for a data-driven transformation that can deliver lasting outcomes across the enterprise. The path forward is not about rushing into artificial intelligence (AI). It's about doing the foundational work first. Finance leaders who simplify, standardize and then automate are in the best position to truly transform finance for the realities of today.



Everything is in motion finance is the foundation

European automotive OEMs are making decisions that will define the business for the next decade. At the same time, markets are in flux, cost headwinds are strong and profitability dynamics are shifting. There are many complexities to manage - from developing multi-energy strategies to harmonizing operations and improving cost discipline. The finance function is at the center of it all. In addition to processing transactions, it must provide the single source of truth for the business to shape the future.

Finance transformation is not finished

This environment is putting finance transformation at the top of the CFO agenda.

Finance leaders know that they can't ask the rest of the organization to transform without leading by example. Given this, many OEMs have invested in finance transformation, moving to shared services models, modernizing ERP and prioritizing back-office efficiency initiatives. While there have been positive changes, legacy finance processes can sometimes impede market responsiveness. Everything around finance is moving fast, but finance processes don't.

Leaping into AI is not a transformation strategy

Not only does the business have big expectations for finance transformation, but AI and agentic technologies are redefining what "transformation" even means. There is so much hype around these technologies that leaders' first instinct is often to center transformation around them.

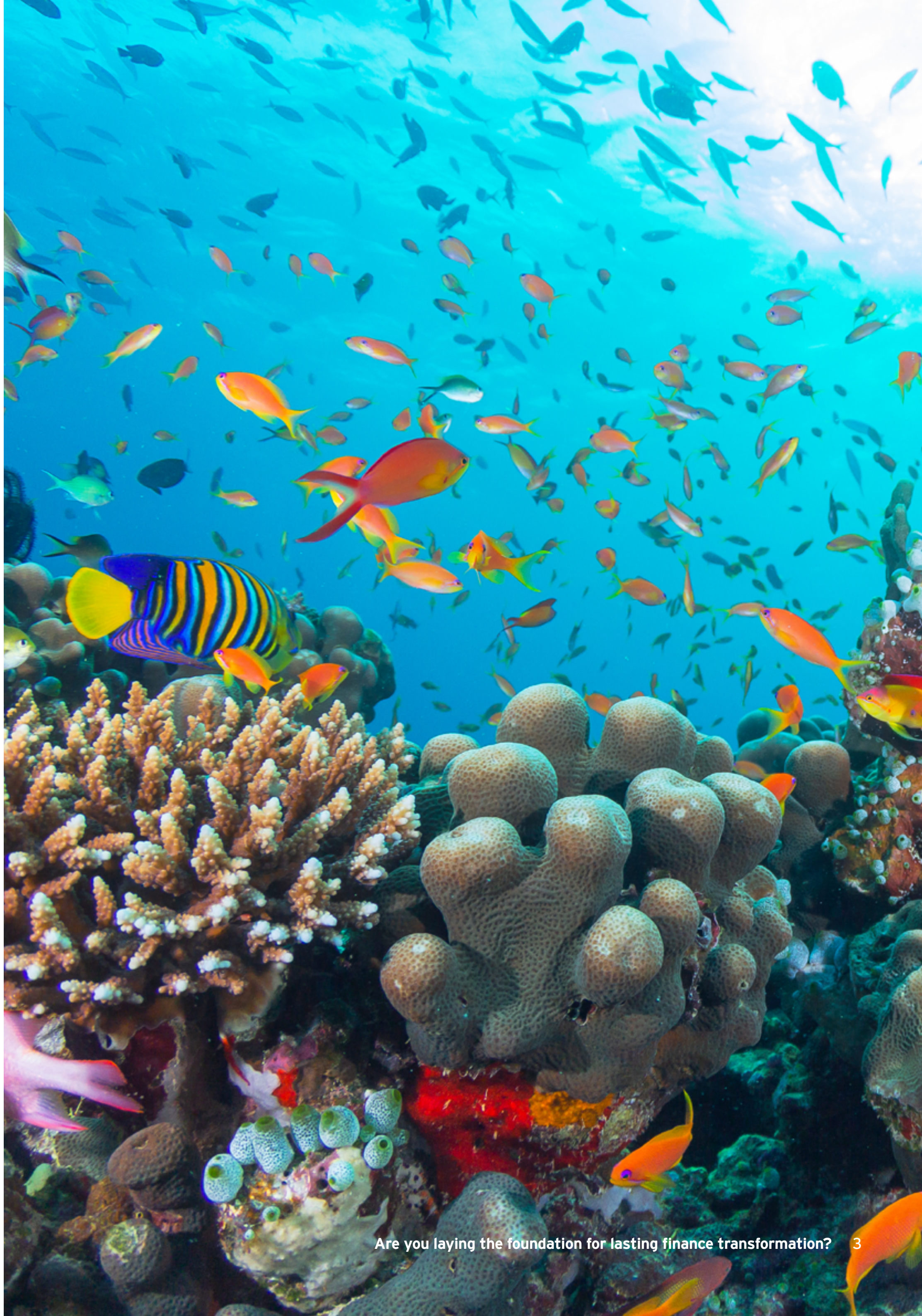
Taking this leap too fast skips the foundational work needed for finance to capitalize on AI and become more data-centric and agile. Rushing to AI and automation on top of inconsistent processes and non-standardized data doesn't create intelligence. It can magnify, or even worsen, existing problems.

86%

of tax and finance leaders rank data, AI and technology as a top priority, according to the EY 2025 Tax and Finance Operations survey.

Finance transformation that lasts: three key steps

While AI has a role in finance transformation, true finance transformation is planned more holistically and methodically to get the best returns.



The path forward requires three steps:

Step 1

Simplify: harmonizing processes

The first step is to rationalize finance processes, getting to the heart of how work is done daily. Process harmonization involves conducting as-is process reviews and assessments and developing the to-be state through blueprinting. All blueprinting should be grounded in change management so employees understand the new processes— and how they work and why they matter. This effort should harmonize work streams within finance and as they intersect with other business units and cross geographies.

Organizations don't have to address all processes at once. They can realize "quick wins" by targeting rationalization in one area or in one geography. This way, organizations can benefit from efficiency gains while laying the groundwork for the next process harmonization. For example, OEMs have typically added process nuances to address specific business unit needs that are no longer relevant. Reviewing these outdated processes is an excellent way to support leaner operations aligned with today's needs.

Step 2

Standardize: centralizing operations

The next step is to standardize ways of working so that finance operates consistently across geographies and business units.

Standardization is key because many organizations have been built with bolt-on functions or through acquisitions. Even after a successful integration, similar processes are sometimes disconnected despite sharing business content. Employees often miss these redundancies because they are so focused on the day-to-day. Global business services, or finance business services, centralize such mutualized processes, creating cost and efficiency savings and supporting continuous improvement.

Our experience shows that creating a blueprint that supports homogeneous, world-class process execution can lead to 15% to 20% in cost savings even before any optimization.

Step 3

Automate: building a data platform

With these steps completed, finance organizations can create a single, integrated data platform as a normalized foundation that connects IT and finance. This data platform supports leaner decision-making, lowers infrastructure costs and positions finance to get more return from AI investments. A well-built data platform eliminates the "garbage-in, garbage-out" dynamic with trusted data for agentic tools, advanced scenario planning and AI-driven insights.

Finance organizations should set AI governance that prioritizes projects, rationalizes investments, and monitors for new risks and exposures. Intentional governance like this is an important part of the AI roadmap. It is also important to align stakeholders around a common data framework so that insights are consistent and widely trusted. Doing this not only positions finance for a successful AI journey, but it also positions finance as a data-driven, strategic partner to the business.

Toward an AI-powered finance function

Finance transformation is very different than it was even five years ago. It's not only about completing processes differently.
It's about developing completely different processes.
This is how finance shifts from inputs and outputs to strategic outcomes, from completing transactions to driving value.
It's an exciting destination for finance, and for its role in the business.

Reaching this destination is not about plugging in AI as fast as possible. It is about doing the hard work of simplification and standardization first and *then* building the data infrastructure that intelligent technologies need to actually deliver.

Ask yourself

How close are we to a single source of truth for finance data?

Where could targeted process improvements deliver results quickly?

Is our data foundation strong enough to make the most of AI?

Contact us

We can guide you through finance transformation, providing meaningful outcomes from the first process harmonization to a fully realized data platform.

Guillaume Brunet-Moret
guillaume.brunet-moret@fr.ey.com

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