Scaling AI in the finance function: six leading practices for CFOs

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For CFOs building a future-ready finance function, the imperative is clear: Adopt AI or fall behind. Finance organizations are already starting to move beyond isolated proof of concepts (POCs) and beginning to implement AI at scale. Around 70% of the CFOs at a recent EY roundtable are running pilot initiatives, and nearly 30% indicated that they have already achieved moderate integration across multiple finance processes.[1]

Despite this momentum, many organizations still struggle to convert promising pilots into enterprise-wide value, while others have yet to embark on their AI journey at all. Many CFOs cite barriers such as change resistance (60%), budget constraints (60%), legacy systems (55%) and talent gaps (55%) as impediments to progress.[2]

To accelerate measurable impact while upholding the integrity, reliability and trust that are fundamental to the finance function, CFOs can adopt six practices:

1 Lead with AI sponsorship, stakeholder engagement and access to tools

AI adoption begins with people. The first step is to educate and empower employees with core AI tools such as copilots and identify change champions within each group who can accelerate peer-to-peer learning. While many leaders have already mandated AI use and set clear expectations, visible sponsorship by CFOs remains critical. At the same time, CFOs need to articulate the vision for how AI adoption supports finance priorities and implement a clear change management plan.

CFOs can also support boards of directors in overseeing the broader organization's AI activities. Because CFOs play a central role in determining strategic fit, capital allocation, third-party dependencies, cyber and privacy risks, model governance and workforce implications, they can facilitate the board's much-needed engagement in these critical areas. While the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD) reports that more than 62% of directors now allocate agenda time for AI, only 23% of boards have assessed its strategic impact, and just over 11% have approved an annual budget for AI projects.[3]

2 Treat AI as a transformational technology, not a solution for a specific use case

Although organizations often begin with POCs, AI is not simply a tool to address isolated problems. CFOs need to understand the transformational benefits that the enterprise and finance function can achieve. They should sponsor the program, define the vision, develop the plan and execute it like any large-scale transformation initiative. The case for change should identify expected outcomes and business priorities, such as improving forecasting accuracy, accelerating the close, decreasing cost to serve and reducing working capital.

An effective transformation will require changes to major elements of the operating model, not just to technology. This means that CFOs must engage the right stakeholders and collaborate across functions, including business, IT and human resources. CFOs also should anticipate how AI-driven changes across other parts of the business will impact finance processes. For example, an AI-driven procurement process where an AI agent places replenishment orders without any human interventions will require redesigned controls.

[1] Juan Uro, "How CFOs scrutinize AI cost and talent implications as they scale up," EY, April 22, 2026, https://www.ey.com/en_us/ey-center-for-executive-leadership/cfos-scrutinize-cost-and-talent-implications-of-ai.

[2] "New Research Reveals CFOs Evolving into Strategic Architects Amid AI Transformation," Financial Executives International, April 7, 2026, https://www.financialexecutives.org/About-FEI/For-the-Press/2026/evolution-of-the-finance-function-cfo-strategy-ai.aspx.

[3] Sandlin, Dylan, Ludwig, Helmuth, and van Giffen, Benjamin, "Director Essentials: Implementing AI Governance," NACD, https://www.nacdonline.org/all-governance/governance-resources/governance-research/director-faqs-and-essentials/implementing-ai-governance.

3 Reimagine end-to-end processes with humans in the loop

The strongest results come when organizations take an AI-first approach to reimagining end-to-end processes rather than layering AI onto existing workflows. For example, redesigning billing and billing support may require ERP configuration changes, improved integration with contract management systems and AI-driven customer portals. Stakeholders such as tax and internal audit should be engaged early and in parallel. In most cases, the new design will impact existing controls and require additional controls to oversee AI activities. Equally important is designing processes that keep humans in the loop at the right decision and control points. For instance, in a billing dispute scenario, a billing manager should review and approve AI-generated responses for nonstandard inquiries.

4 Prioritize data readiness and governance as the most important enabler for scale

While pilots can proceed without robust data layers, scaling AI requires harmonized, well-governed data. In fact, 77% of finance teams who struggle to scale AI lack effective data governance.[4] Reinforcing its importance, the NACD advises boards to prioritize scalable data architecture, data lineage, metadata, interoperability and cross-functional governance for reliable AI.

Most large firms operate multiple ERPs and applications without unified data governance. However, organizations do not need to wait for every entity or business unit to be on a single ERP. EY teams have supported multiple Fortune 500 companies by deploying finance data appliances that integrate data from over 50 systems, enabling AI-driven reconciliations and insights seamlessly across business units.

Finance functions that struggle with data vs. those that are effective

Finance functions THAT STRUGGLE

1. **94%** Data silos in many locations (e.g., data located on local hard drives)
2. **77%** Lack of effective data governance processes (e.g., data standards)
3. **60%** Inability to get the right kind of information for decision-making (e.g., by product, geography, cost center)

Total respondents: n = 500
27% (133) report struggling

Finance functions THAT ARE EFFECTIVE

1. **92%** Data is centrally organized, and tax function has access to data
2. **88%** Data is tax sensitized and readily available from source systems
3. **75%** Technology solutions are integrated (e.g., not focused on point solutions)

Total respondents: n = 500
73% (367) do not report struggling

Source: 2025 EY Tax and Finance Operations Survey.

Note: Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents in each group who selected the factor as one of their top three responses.

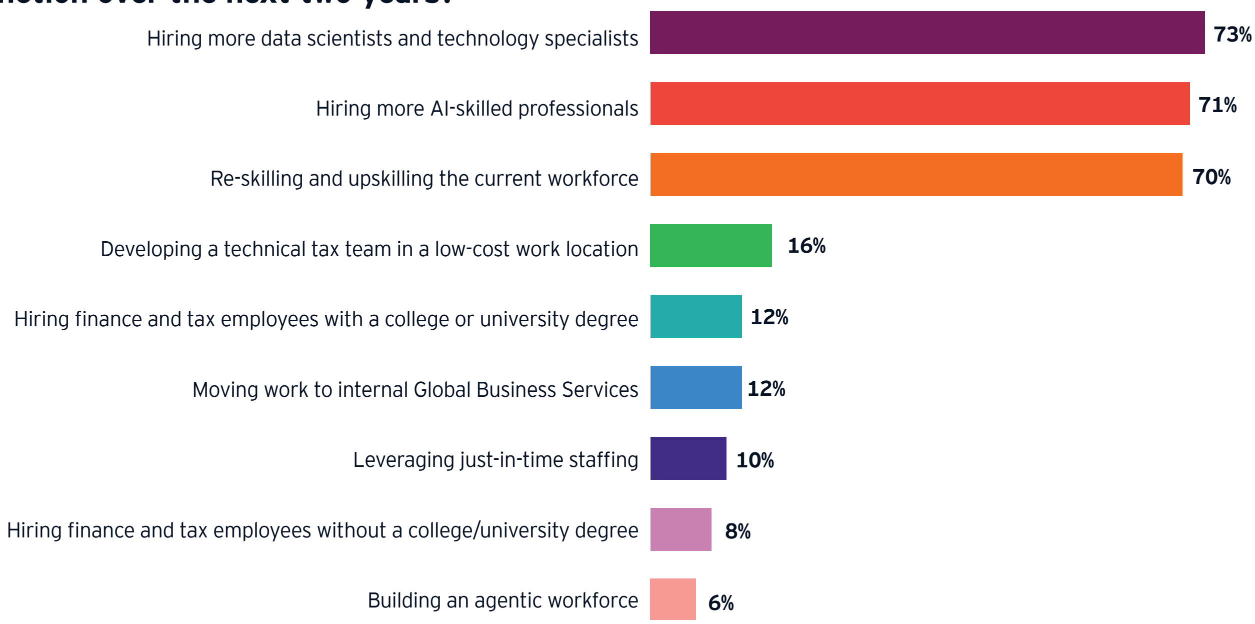
4 "2025 EY Tax and Finance Operations survey," EY, https://www.ey.com/content/dam/ey-unified-site/ey-com/en-gl/services/tax/documents/ey-gl-tax-and-finance-survey-report-11-2025.pdf.

5 Mobilize the right resources and talent

The success of AI in finance depends as much on workforce readiness and role clarity as on technology. The 2025 EY Tax and Finance Operations survey indicates that future-ready finance and tax teams need more than technical knowledge; they increasingly require data and technology skills, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and strategic problem-solving.[5] According to the survey, 30% of leaders identify talent strategy as the biggest barrier to AI transformation. CFOs should therefore focus on re-skilling current teams, selectively hiring AI-skilled data and technology talent and redesigning roles.

Given the size and importance of AI across enterprise functions, prioritizing projects for workforce allocation is also critical for CFOs. In most cases, leaders prioritize business AI projects over finance AI projects. Since AI resources are limited, it's important for CFOs to assess their own needs in consultation with other leaders and find ways to mobilize the resources needed, either internal or external, for finance AI projects.

How important are the following talent strategies to the success of your finance function over the next two years?



n=1600. Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who selected the factor as very important.
Source: 2025 EY Tax and Finance Operations survey.

6 Engage external partners for proven use cases and ideas.

Today, AI companies and service providers have identified and built many strong use cases in finance. CFOs should understand what is available, find partners who can help them, and then leverage their experience. This will also help CFOs build and scale internal capabilities. Companies are setting up AI centers of excellence (COEs) internally or with partners to accelerate AI deployment — rather than function-specific ones — to share skills across multiple business functions.

A winning strategy for CFOs is to start with high-volume, rules-based processes, define KPIs up front, prove value quickly and scale selectively where outcomes are repeatable, governed and measurable. According to a November 18, 2025 Gartner® press release, "Knowledge management – helping organizations organize, retrieve, and leverage information for better decision-making – is the most common AI use case (49%) in finance organizations, followed by accounts payable process automation (37%) and error and anomaly detection (34%)."[6]

AI in finance will help improve the performance of the finance functions, enhance its relationship with business partners, and provide insights that were previously out of reach. The winners will not be the organizations running the most pilots, but those that connect AI to finance priorities, build the right data and control foundations, and invest in talent as deliberately as they invest in technology. For CFOs, that is the path from experimentation to durable enterprise value.

5 "2025 EY Tax and Finance Operations survey."
6 "Gartner Survey Shows Finance AI Adoption Remains Steady in 2025," Gartner press release, https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2025-11-18-gartner-survey-shows-finance-ai-adoption-remains-steady-in-2025. GARTNER is a trademark of Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates.

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