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How the modern CFO navigates volatility

Global turbulence is transforming finance leadership. New research reveals how eliminating manual processes and embracing collaboration can allow CFOs to balance resilient decision-making with strategic vision.



CFO top challenges

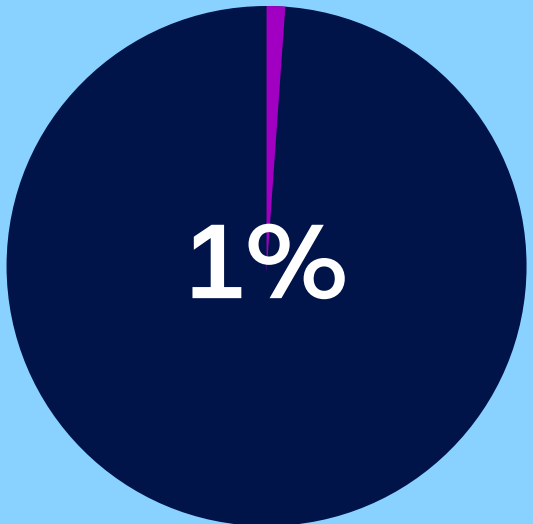
Even before the economic turbulence that has defined 2025, finance leaders were braced for heightened instability. The challenges that have since emerged have accelerated response strategies, fundamentally changing the chief financial officer role beyond traditional financial stewardship. Leaders must now navigate immediate market disruptions while advancing long-term strategic goals, as organisations grapple with an environment where geopolitical tensions can reshape business fundamentals overnight.

According to the March 2025 SAP [Concur CFO Insights report](#), geopolitical tensions are cited as a top three external challenge by 37 per cent of finance leaders, a marked increase from 11 per cent in 2024. As a result, 69 per cent of financial leaders are looking across their enterprise to identify cost optimisation

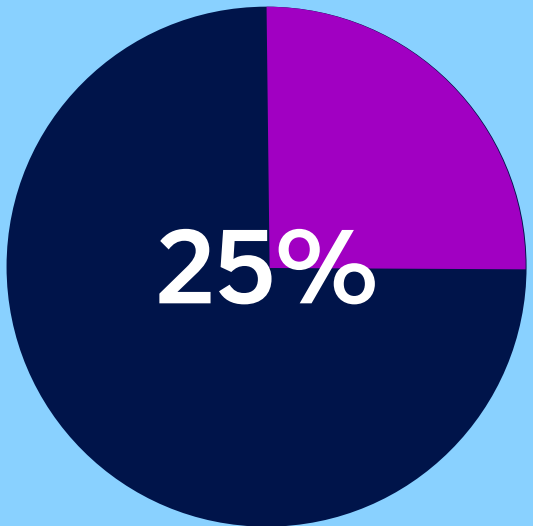
and efficiency savings. The ambition is twofold: to bolster the balance sheet in the short term and to establish a solid base for future growth.

Chris Juneau, Head of Product Marketing at SAP Concur, says CFOs are increasingly targeting manual processes, with 38 per cent viewing them as a major challenge, up from just 1 per cent in 2023. “Manual processes are seen as impediments to growth. It’s an outlook that directly ties into the increased investments in technology, and particularly artificial intelligence, and the results organisations are seeing. CFOs want to self-fund growth by using technology to reduce manual processes, achieving cost optimisation and efficiencies.”

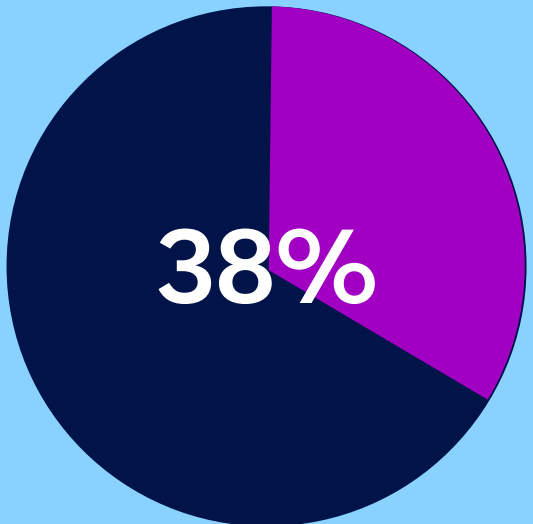
Percentage of CFOs viewing manual processes as a top challenge*



2023



2024



2024

* Source: SAP Concur CFO Insights Report, 2025

Technology as an enabler

The benefits of these technology investments are becoming clear across multiple areas of finance operations. The research has found that 94 per cent of finance leaders credit AI with improving their decision-making, while 73 per cent cite positive effects on cost and risk reduction. Areas showing particular improvement include general finance tasks, where 57 per cent of leaders now report benefits from the automation of activities such as email transcription and document summarisation.

AI investments are proving particularly valuable in scenario planning. “That is precisely the power of data. What is the data telling us? How can we become more informed and make better decisions based on the data?” asks Theo Lau, fintech expert and author. “You have the power to perform more advanced scenario planning, and update them more frequently to reflect the latest market development and to find the risks and opportunities.” This

enhanced capability is particularly valuable given current market volatility.

Increased reliance on technology brings new security challenges, which require strategic investment. The research shows that the majority of finance leaders plan to increase their cyber security budgets in response to growing threats, with more than a quarter of CFOs taking over cyber security responsibilities over the past two years. Yet only 20 per cent plan to enhance collaboration with chief information security officers on security initiatives. The disconnect suggests finance leaders are willing to fund security measures but may not be taking an active role in determining how those resources are deployed.

Vast majority of CFOs see **tangible benefits** from AI investments*

89%

of finance leaders report that AI has improved their decision-making

73%

cite positive impacts on cost and risk reduction

57%

say general finance tasks like creating emails and document summaries are highly automated by AI

* Source: SAP Concur CFO Insights Report, 2025

Breaking down silos

“As a CFO, you can’t be an expert in all areas, so you do need that collaboration across business functions.”

- Jamie Lyon, Head of Skills, Sectors and Technology at the Association of Chartered Certified

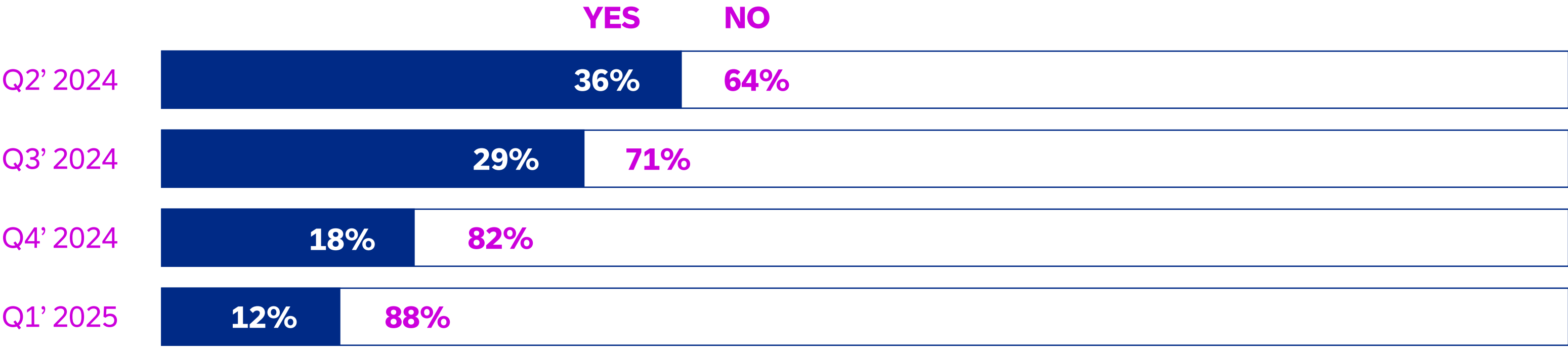
The vast majority (81 per cent) of CFOs see themselves as the prime driver of growth within their organisation. That means just one in five financial leaders believe responsibility for driving growth should be shared across the C-suite. Lau believes CFOs risk isolating themselves. “This is a chance for CFOs to get out of their corner office and collaborate with their C-suite peers,” she says. “Typically, CIOs control technology implementations, but CFOs have the data, so there is a clear opportunity to work together.”

Jamie Lyon, Head of Skills, Sectors and Technology at the Association of Chartered Certified Accounts believes the findings show CFOs want to lead from the front, but cautions against doing so in isolation. “Growth creation is changing, whether it’s around digital transformation, the value of data, or creating value from social impact,” he says. “As a CFO, you can’t be an expert in all areas, so you do need that collaboration across business functions.”

The data supports greater collaboration, with half of IT leaders wanting to work with finance on cost reduction and 50 per cent seeking a partnership on technology investment decisions. “The CFO’s peers want to be involved and be part of cross-departmental collaboration and greater integration,” says Juneau. “CFOs don’t have to do it all on their own, and we see in the most successful organisations that resilience and growth are a team game.”

CFOs are even less willing to take on risks

Percentage of CFOs who think now is a good time for greater risk on balance sheets**



** Source: Deloit CFO Survey, 2025

“**...what is happening globally with elections and continuing trade conflict... makes technology investments all the more important.**”

- Chris Juneau, Head of Product Marketing at SAP Concur



The current environment of heightened uncertainty appears set to continue, with implications that extend far beyond the current US administration. “I think it is the new normal, because of what is happening globally with elections and continuing trade conflict,” says Juneau. “That makes technology investments all the more important. How can CFOs best invest in AI and technology, adopt improved scenario planning and protect against bad actors intent on taking advantage of the chaos?”

Lau argues that simply avoiding risk is not effective risk management, and recommends CFOs work proactively with their colleagues across the

C-suite to create forward-looking organisations. “Volatility is here and it’s very real,” she says, but she advises, “Don’t hide away from it.” Juneau agrees that challenging market conditions can present opportunities. “Businesses that thrive during periods of uncertainty do four things really well. They simplify their complex processes, turn regulatory shifts into opportunities, make data-driven decisions, which enables them to respond to disruption.”

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