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The data advantage

The CFO's roadmap for winning with AI-first finance

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We thank the following executives for their time and insights:

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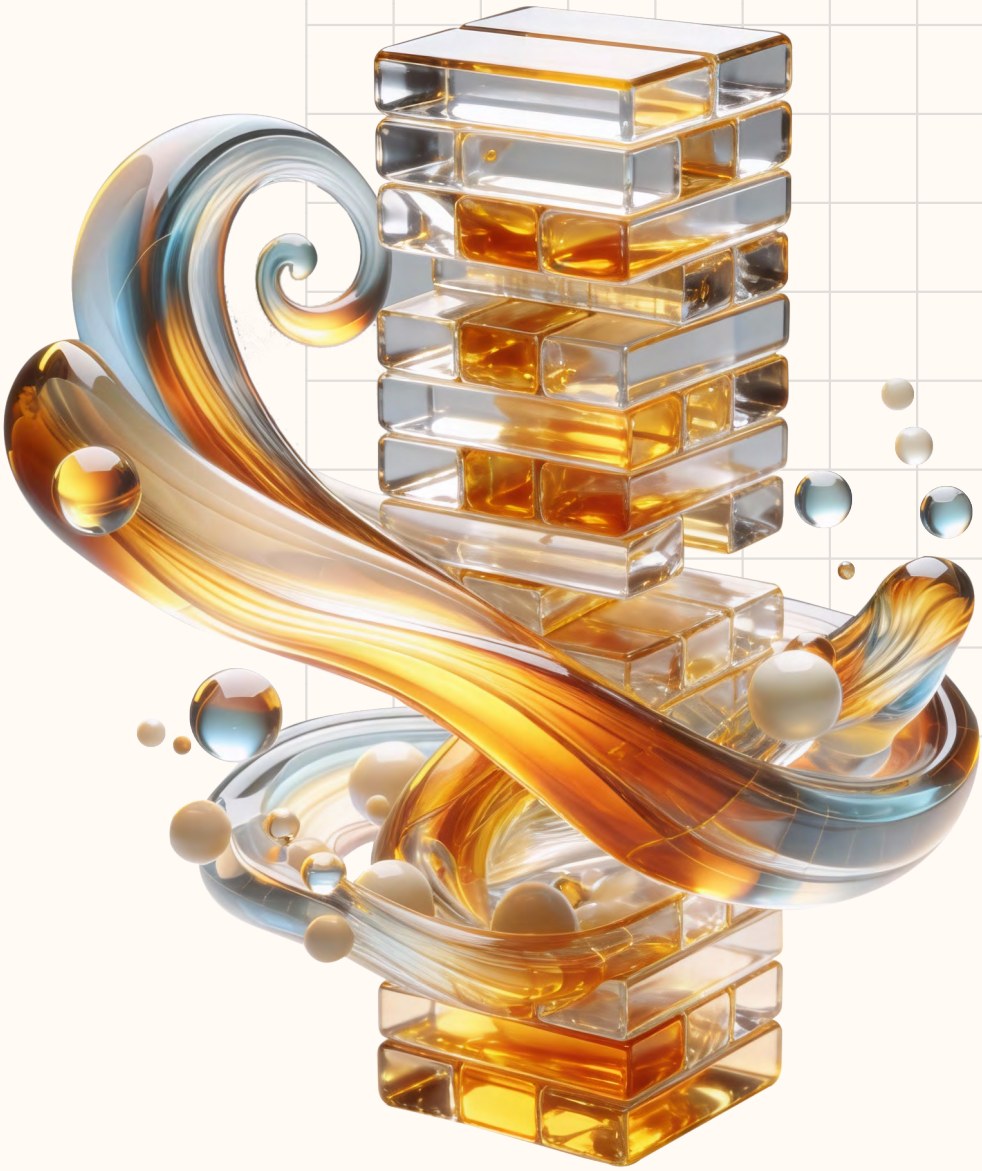

Executive **summary**

There's a quiet revolution underway in the world of finance. You'll hear it in the hum of new algorithms, the click of dashboards updating in real time, and the conversations in boardrooms where CFOs are no longer just guardians of the ledger, but architects of enterprise value. The catalyst? Artificial intelligence (AI). With the rise of AI and agentic AI, finance teams are now equipped with the ability to predict market shifts, mitigate risks, and make decisions with unparalleled speed and accuracy.

But here's the thing: the real power of AI in finance depends on one crucial ingredient: rock-solid data. If your data isn't consistent, reliable, and unified, even the smartest AI tools will come up short. Think of AI as a high-performance engine – it can only go as far and as fast as the fuel you put in. Without quality data, you're risking missteps, missed opportunities, and decisions based on shaky ground. This report offers a roadmap for fundamental business transformation, drawn from the proven strategies of finance and data leaders at leading enterprises. You'll learn strategies to harness data and AI to cut through uncertainty, predict what's next, and make decisions with speed and precision to leave competitors in the dust.

Key recommendations:

01

Build your data fortress

Enable a single reliable source of truth for all your financial and operational data

02

Get your team a crystal ball

Offer self-service analytics, predictive insights, simulations, and advanced scenario planning built on the data fortress to spot opportunities (or trouble) before they arrive

03

Let AI do the heavy lifting

Use autonomous AI agents to handle data at scale, speed, and complexity, so humans can focus on judgment and strategy

04

Make finance and data best friends

Close partnerships between finance and data teams to drive the outcomes that matter

It's time to reimagine what's possible in finance and claim your place as a true strategic partner to the business. Let's get started.

The next era of finance: Smarter, faster, more autonomous

Picture this: instead of spending hours reconciling spreadsheets or chasing down anomalies, your finance team is working side-by-side with AI agents that:

- Complete complex, multi-step processes independently
- Simulate business scenarios on demand ("What happens if tariffs go up by 5% in Mexico?")
- Spot compliance risks instantly
- Alert you to price variances before they bite
- Recommend actions based on predictive analytics

This is the world of AI-first finance. It's proactive, predictive, and self-optimizing. And it's already starting to happen in leading organizations, paving the path to autonomous finance.

This shift distinguishes between two types of agents:

They take on the grunt work by automating process-oriented, high-effort tasks and workflows like data extraction, three-way matching of invoices, journal entries, and report writing

Autonomous agents

Cognitive agents

They dig into the numbers, analyzing vast datasets to identify trends, run what-if scenarios and simulations, and recommend actions. Soon they'll be able to take actions based on decisions, giving your team more time for strategic moves

The implications of this are huge for finance. While traditionally, AI took care of time-consuming tasks and delivered powerful insights, with agentic AI, they're going a step further – from automation toward autonomy. As AI agents get smarter, they're handling multi-step processes such as accounts payable, accounts receivable, and audits with minimal human intervention, learning and adapting in real time to drive goals (See Figure 1 for key agentic AI use cases). The result: near-touchless finance processes that deliver speed and precision.

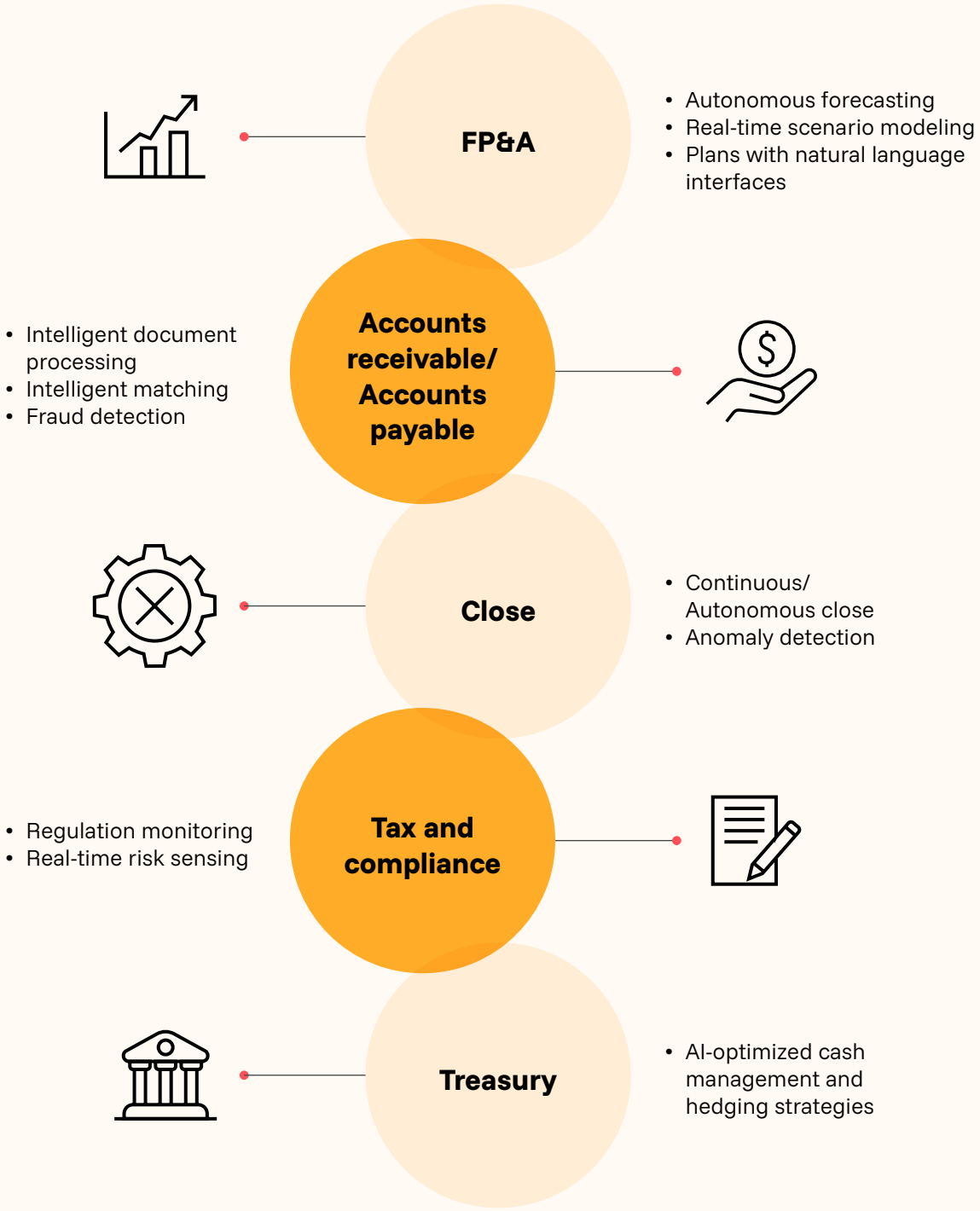

Figure 1: Key use cases for agentic AI in finance and risk

Monday Ogbobi, Head of Finance at Amazon Business – Amazon's online marketplace for businesses – crystalizes the opportunity: **"Traditional finance was around P&L management, governance, closing the books month end, etc., AI will level up the playing field in terms of how those things can be automated."**

“One example of how we are using AI is to detect where our processes and mechanisms need change. For instance, AI recently identified an opportunity for us to change our training processes. We know that when customers onboard with us, the first 100 days are critical to maintaining adoption and to extending the customer lifetime value. So, we’ve changed our processes to have the most senior sales team interacting with those customers in the first 100 days. It’s an example of how the finance team has been able to use AI and data to drive the business,” he adds.

Similarly, the head of data science at a Fortune 500 consumer packaged goods company is excited about how AI can democratize data analytics: **“Rather than one person owning something, what you will see is more of a collective mind because the accessibility to insights via natural language will be much, much easier.”**

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>
> **Head of Data Science,** Fortune 500 consumer packaged goods company

But while it’s clear that AI holds incredible promise, its success hinges on the quality of the data fueling it. The adage “garbage in, garbage out” is spot-on when it comes to AI, especially when you’re working with opaque algorithms.

And as AI agents are deployed across the organization, systems need to be designed intentionally to allow them to interact productively and securely. Ogbobi highlights the importance of this shift: “When I think about agentic, AI, it’s around ‘how do we use the systems to intelligently make decisions?’… (But) this is no longer a human talking to another human. This is an agent talking to another agent… The immediate step is rearchitecting the existing frameworks and databases and connecting them to make sure that these agents are intelligently speaking to each other before we trust them to go out and drive business value.” This where orchestration comes in. Like instruments in an orchestra, each agent will play its part. But they will need a conductor – a platform – to sing in tune.

> **The immediate step is rearchitecting the existing frameworks and databases and connecting them to make sure that these agents are intelligently speaking to each other before we trust them to go out and drive business value."**

Monday Ogbobi,
Head of Finance, Amazon Business

In short, to unlock AI's full potential and turn finance into a true insights engine, organizations need to focus on building a rock-solid data architecture – one that delivers a single source of truth.

Case in point

See how a leading global financial institution is turning AP challenges into opportunities with agentic AI-powered solutions from the Genpact AP Suite, using advanced agentic AI to extract data effectively from invoices and automatically classifying and enriching the information. The impact? Manual work cut by up to 99% and leakages curbed by up to 30%.

Read the case study

The data transformation opportunity in finance

Every finance win – from cost control to market-beating forecasts – depends on data. Get it right, and the line between reporting and strategy blurs.

Gaurav Mehrotra, former head of data and analytics at Capital One, a leading US bank, emphasizes that foresight is an essential superpower for CFOs today. ‘‘To predict the future – that’s the Holy Grail, so that CFOs can invest in that future.’’

Alberto Attar, CFO at Chiquita – A leading global banana producer and distributor – too is upbeat about the potential for data in finance: **‘‘I like to make a separation between ‘data backward’ and ‘data forward’… I think that over the years, CFOs have been much more comfortable with the controllership element than forward-looking FP&A… (But) I feel that the big data that we need to take decisions is now there.’’**

Yet, many CFOs find that their ability to tap into data is blocked by fundamental barriers. Modernization programs, including a move to SaaS-based enterprise performance management (EPM) platforms, can often fail to deliver on their promise of connected, enterprise-wide planning because they don't tackle fundamental data challenges.

Ogbobi pinpoints a problem his team is working on. Ogbobi highlights a problem his team is working on. "(A few years back) the issue was 'How do we build the workflows?' We're now doing that at speed and scale with AI. The challenge today goes back to re-architecting the original sources intelligently. **From all the data that you've got, how do you figure out what is the most important data to support the business, to drive it in the next two to three years?** So, a lot of the work that we're doing right now is on rearchitecting that source data versus the workflows, to connect them all together."

The head of data science at a Fortune 500 consumer packaged goods company calls out another key barrier: **"(The lack of) Flexible data pipelines and faster data access have always been significant limiters to insights.** It's always been a challenge getting to the data in a way that's meaningful and that doesn't require exponential amounts of effort."

Mehrotra points to the common wisdom that governance is the central focus in data architecture: **"Eighty percent of the work is on data governance, data quality, and data engineering. Twenty percent is building the models."**

Joydeep Saha, Head of Data Platform & Engineering at Diageo, a global beverage leader, echoes the view: "You need to use the technology in the right way. Machine learning (ML) capabilities that help detect anomalies in the data early are a significant step toward ensuring that you have trustworthy data."

Mehrotra is blunt about what happens without rigorous data governance: "No matter how advanced or impressive your new AI model appears, if you can't trust the underlying data, the decisions you make for multi-million-dollar investments will be fundamentally flawed."

> **No matter how sexy your new AI model is, if you can't trust the data, the decisions you will make for your multi-million-dollar investments will be wrong."**
>
> **Gaurav Mehrotra,** Former Head of Data and Analytics, Capital One

To sum up, hurdles to data modernization include:

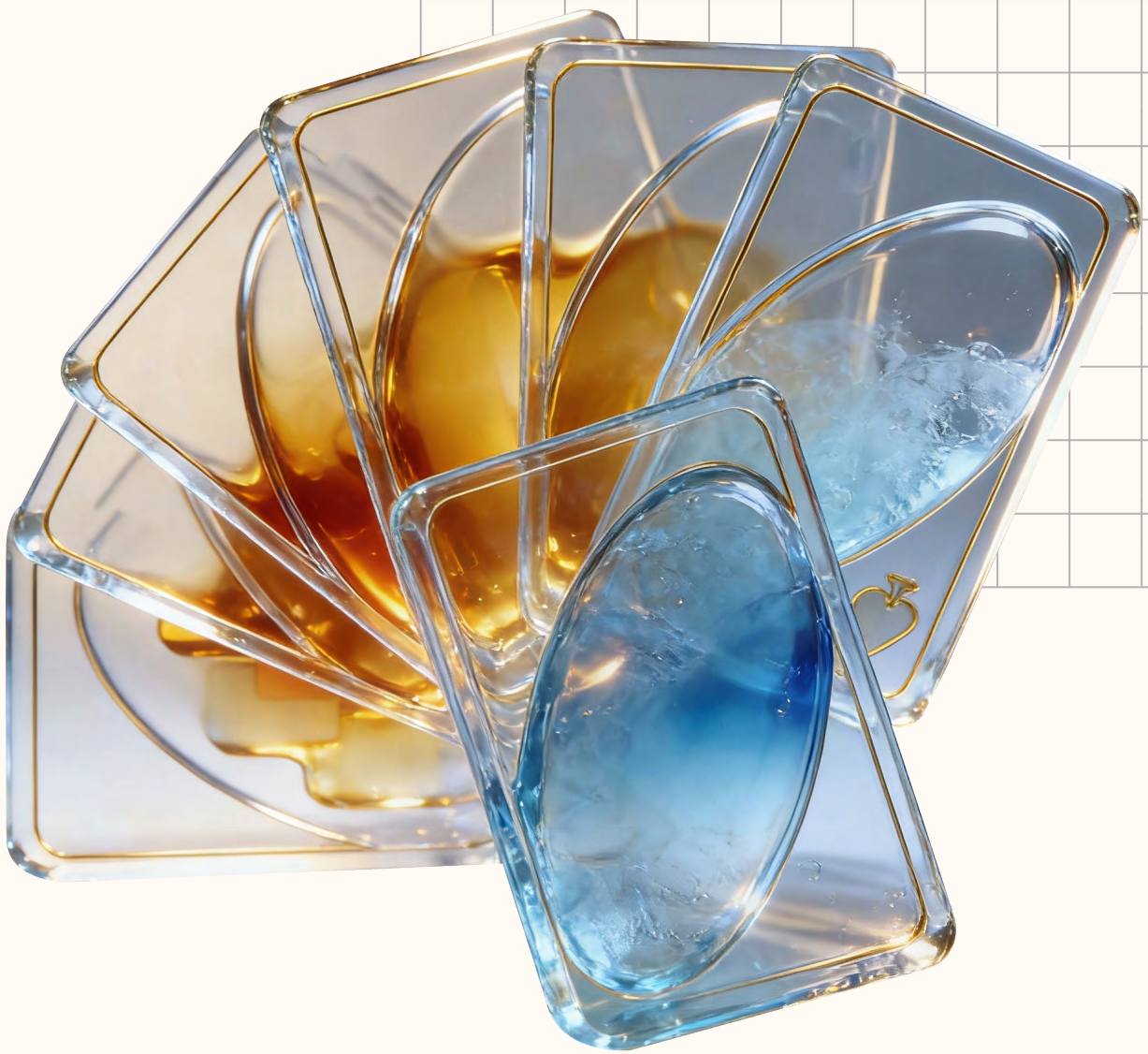
- **Integration problems:** Bringing different platforms together can require considerable work from finance teams and data experts
- **Data silos:** With data scattered across multiple ERPs, spreadsheets, and offline tools, teams can lack a single source of truth, lowering trust in the data , slowing AI adoption, and causing repeated reconciliations and delays
- **Legacy architecture:** Many data sources are still built on the architectural principles of 1990s-era multidimensional OLAP (online analytical processing) cubes that are pre-built with fixed dimensions and hierarchies that make them slow to adapt to changing business needs or add new data sources without significant rework
- **Lack of governance:** With fragmented systems, data governance is often limited or ad hoc

So how can organizations build a trusted, unified data foundation that enables consistency, transparency, and true enterprise-wide collaboration?

Case in point

A global media conglomerate reimagined financial planning data pipelines for sharper forecasts and superior decision-making, cutting planning time from 20 to 25 days to just three to five days.

Read the case study



Creating a single source of truth for the enterprise

Successful data modernization requires moving beyond traditional EPM architecture and building on a **unified semantic model** – a layer that connects your complex data to the people who need it, making it easier to access insights, generate reliable reports, and make smarter decisions across your tech ecosystem. It helps create a unified view of data, allowing planning as well as analytics and reporting to occur within the same model.

Unlike rigid cubes, semantic layers allow for adaptable structures, faster performance, and direct connections to your data. You can even update data right in this system, cutting out extra copies and costly integrations.

At the core of this approach is the **enterprise ledger** – a centralized record of all transactions and balances – that serves as the financial spine for data across functions. This ledger adheres to key accounting principles and captures data at a granular level, making it easier to analyze what's driving performance, model scenarios, and streamline closing activities – all while maintaining compliance and operational integrity. When this ledger is connected to a unified model, teams across the company can plan, analyze, and report using the same trustworthy information.

The enterprise ledger is more than a database; it's a flexible foundation that unlocks significant efficiencies. For instance:

- Connecting a tool like Blackline directly allows for posting consolidation entries, enabling a faster financial close
- Companies can perform complex intercompany profit elimination across a multi-ERP landscape directly on this single source of truth
- Plugging statutory reporting software directly into the enterprise ledger streamlines compliance
- Companies executing M&As gain a flexible data foundation to more easily integrate data from new entities

The result:

One data model

Actuals and plans coexist, eliminating reconciliation

One set of definitions

Business logic and hierarchies are defined once and used everywhere

One governance framework

Security, audit trails, and quality rules apply consistently

Case in point

Learn how a specialty chemicals company on an acquisition spree accelerated integration and improved FP&A reporting time by 40% by unifying data from siloed ERPs.

Read more

Additional strategies for building advanced data systems include:

- **Enable high-quality data:** High-quality, semantically consistent data is a non-negotiable prerequisite. Build trust in your data products by establishing strong governance and security – implementing clear frameworks for security, controls, and compliance. Use trust scores and accuracy metrics to give stakeholders confidence in AI-driven decisions. As Saha asks, "How can you really unify across markets… and get a single pattern through which you can consume the data?"
- **Focus on signal, not just data volume:** Be intentional about the data you collect and analyze, prioritizing meaningful, actionable data over sheer volume. Ogbobi says, "I use the 'signal to noise' philosophy. We want high signal from that data set. The more data you introduce, the more data points you choose, the more attributes introduced, the more potential for noise."
- **Scale with the right infrastructure:** Use cloud-based AI infrastructure to handle advanced analytics and agentic frameworks at scale. This can help your systems grow with your ambitions and support increasingly complex use cases. Consider using data lakehouses, which merge the flexible data storage of lakes with warehouse-level analytics to enable machine learning and AI. "The combination of data lakes and compute unlocks the scalability of AI platforms," says Saha.

Case in point

A global sportswear brand unlocked about $450 million in cash-flow benefits by redesigning data and analytics on AWS.

Learn more

CFOs and CDOs: Partnering for progress

A CFO who wishes to see into the future must become best friends with the CDO and CTO. This collaboration enables businesses to harness the full value of their data, enabling data-driven decisions and helping align technology investments with organizational goals.

Chiquita's Attar says, "It will be difficult for a business to have a solid strategy and implement it without significant participation from the data leader, from the CTO, and from the finance leader. You need a partnership."

Saha, Diageo's head of data, too recognizes the advantages of close CDO and CFO collaboration. **"The gap between the business and technology has really come down to a thin line. Hence, the engagement between the CDO and a CFO is even more important."**

Ogbobi calls out a key issue. **"The way I see my partnership with our finance tech leaders is that they understand how to deliver, but they don't necessarily know what to deliver."**

Meanwhile, Amit Agarwal, a segment CFO at a $7 billion global manufacturer, points out that "(Harnessing data) requires a finance team who is capable of mining the data and a CTO/ CDO team that can help to stitch the pieces together to make meaningful analytics occur."

"The way I see my partnership with our finance tech leaders is that they understand how to deliver, but they don't necessarily know what to deliver."

Monday Ogbobi,
Head of Finance, Amazon Business

The solution?

Finance leaders must build their knowledge of data, AI, and ML and close any gaps that may be hindering CDO-CFO collaboration. Saha says, "Find out the most optimized way of bridging those gaps in your organization and bring the two parts closer to each other. I think once that is done, there is a massive opportunity for every organization."

Strategies for CFOs and CDOs to build a powerful partnership:

01 **Translate business expectations into data priorities:** The CFO's team provides context, while the CDO provides the means

02 **Rethink organizational structures:** A critical success factor is creating a finance data and AI leader role within the finance team or establishing a CDO function that is independent of IT. This techno-functional leader can bridge the gap between business needs and technical execution

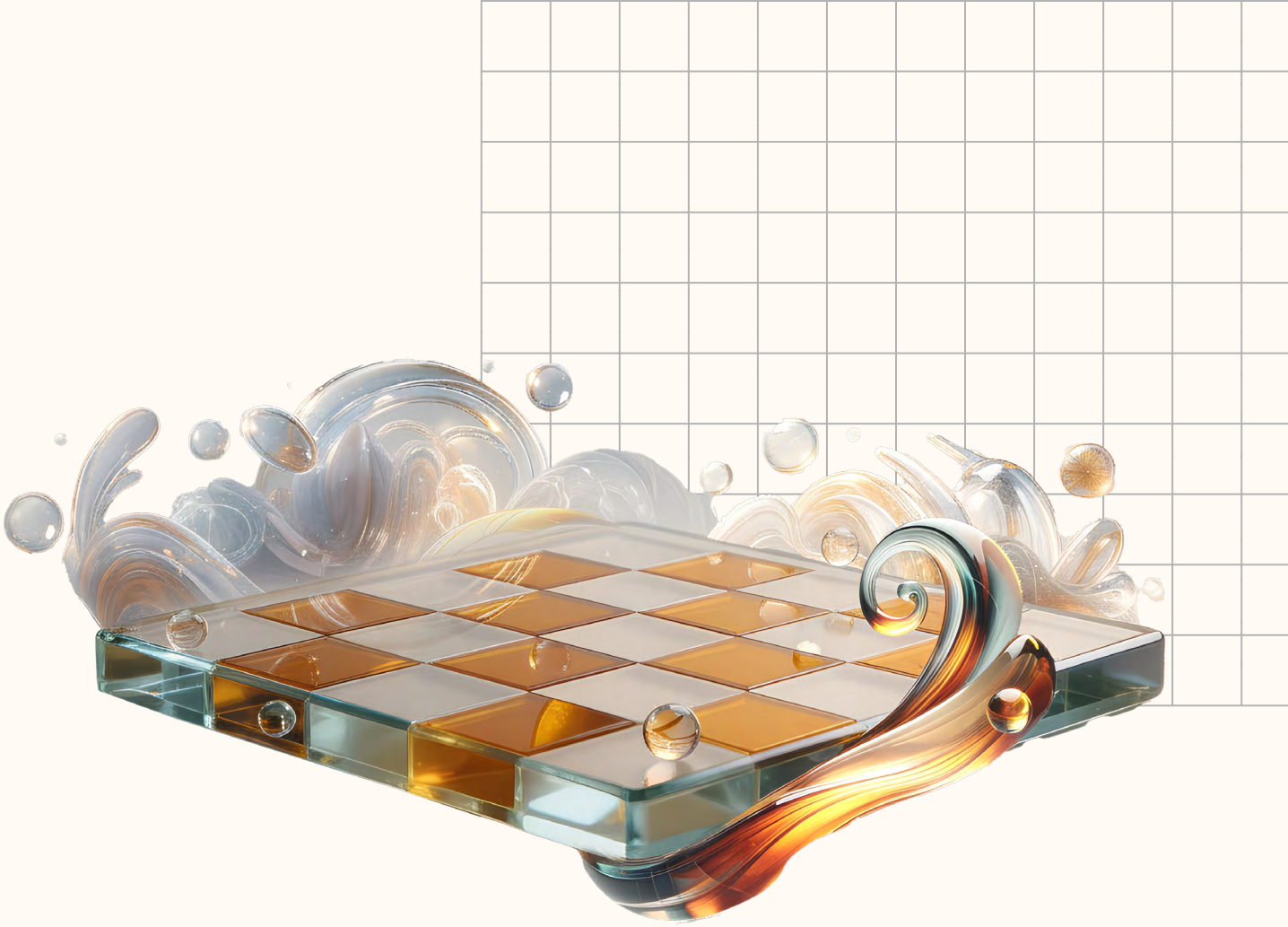
03 **Adopt a "data as a product" mindset:** This approach treats data as a curated, governed asset delivered to users with clear ownership and quality standards. Managing data like a product helps meet specific business needs and drives tangible value

04 **Establish the role of a data product owner (DPO):** The DPO ensures that financial and operational data is managed with a defined user base, value proposition, and lifecycle

Case in point

At GE Lighting, a Savant company, finance and data teams collaborated to reinvent collections and cut past-due accounts receivable by 75% and recover $3.8 million of deductions in 2.5 years.

Learn more



The data transformation roadmap: From insights to autonomous action

To truly capitalize on the power of data, organizations must establish a transformation roadmap. This starts with identifying the key business questions that data must answer, followed by building scalable infrastructure to collect, process, and analyze it. Alongside, finance leaders must embed data literacy and AI skills across the organization.

Phase 1

Build the foundation

- **Form a value council:** Assemble a cross-functional group of senior leaders from finance, data, technology, and the business to prioritize 2-3 high-impact use cases
- **Assess your data maturity:** How many ERPs feed your reporting? Do you have a single, governed finance data model? How automated are your data refresh and reconciliation processes? Use a scoring model to benchmark your current state and identify gaps
- **Define your metrics:** Tie every data product to cross-functional metrics and strategic outcomes
- **Build your first data product:** Focus on a single, minimum viable product, such as standardizing a semantic layer for a key business area. Publicize this early win to build momentum

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Phase 2

Enhance with intelligence

- **Launch self-service reporting:** Build persona-based reports and dashboards on your new, trusted data source
- **Introduce conversational insights:** Deploy chatbot-like experiences that allow users to ask questions in natural language
- **Deploy predictive models:** Implement ML models for high-impact use cases like sales forecasting or collections risk, leveraging your unified semantic model

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Phase 3

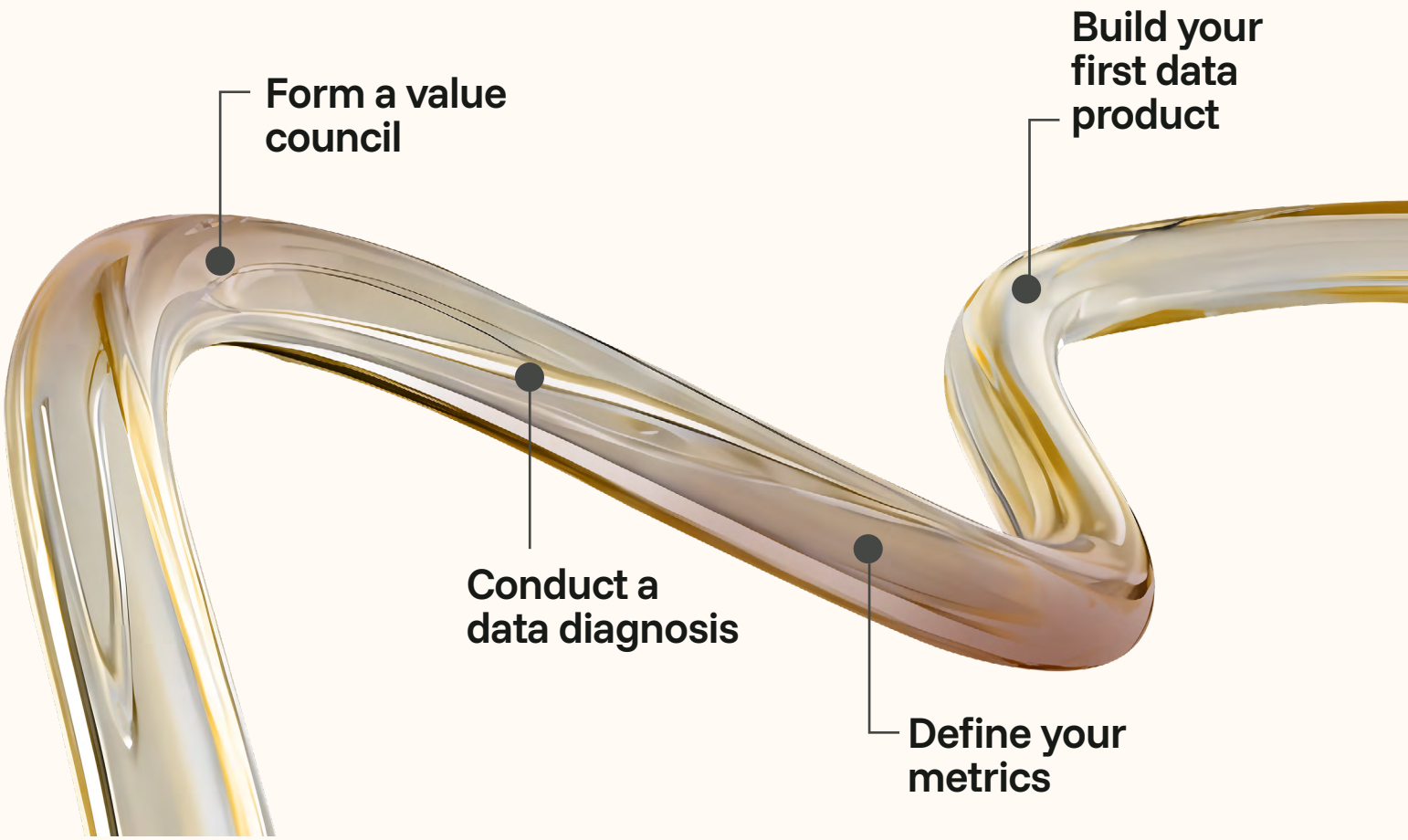
Scale with agentic AI

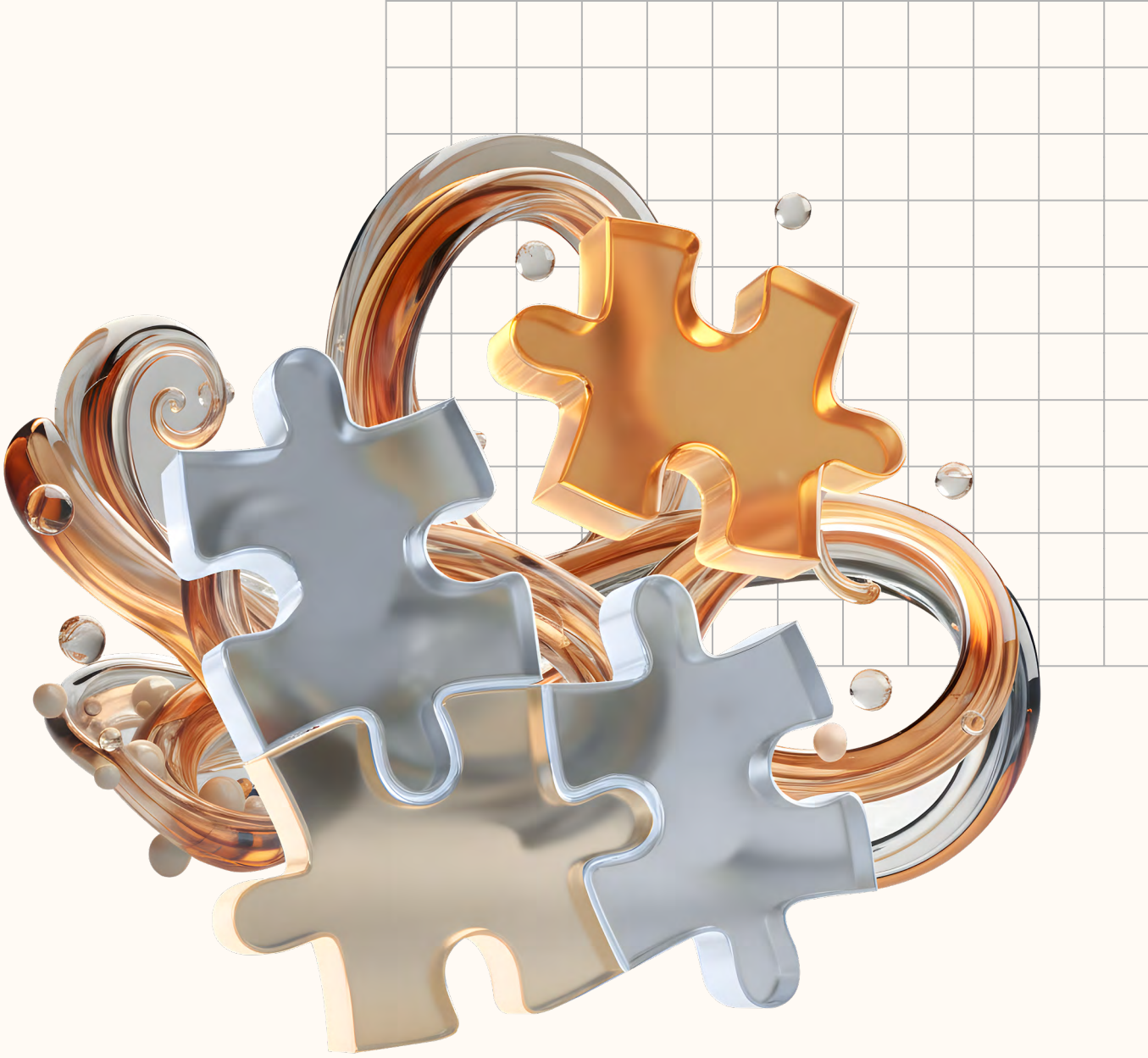
- **Roll out agentic-AI-powered automation:** Deploy AI agents to automate high effort workflows such as accounts payable and record to report
- **Support with change management and data literacy:** Drive change management, improve data literacy, and invest in the right technology and skills to scale.

This is not all about faster data access. You can build a great system where data can be self-served by different user personas in a day. But you also need to have robust data literacy. Otherwise, you may not be able to reach the end users."

Joydeep Saha,
Head of Data, Diageo

The first 90 days: Taking action





The end game: Finance as a strategic advisor

In a world where AI agents serve as a powerful extension of the finance team, the CFO's remit is broader than ever, spanning financial and data stewardship, enterprise risk, digital transformation, and value creation.

“A lot of what we talk about within finance today is value creation to time, while five or ten years ago, it was around cost management and financial discipline. Today, what we’re looking at understanding is: how do we leverage our intellectual property to deliver value back to the business?” says Ogbobi. “I would go further than ‘enabler’, I would say it is the driver, at this point,” he adds. “I say that because **we don’t just consume the information today, we’ve become the bridge across different functions that transforms data into true business insight, and even beyond that: a true business decision.** Finance is usually the bearer of bad news. We’re at the end of the funnel where we ingest all kinds of different business information to deliver a recommendation. [Because of that] we are maybe the most qualified to offer what needs to happen at the top of the funnel to make sure that we’re driving the business in the right way.”

Attar says, “Ultimately, I think finance has a wider responsibility – a fiduciary responsibility. I do think that it is in the right place for finance to take a leadership role.”

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>
> **Alberto Attar,**
> Group CFO, Chiquita

To step into its new role, the CFO must champion a new operating model where finance is the primary owner and product manager of its data while collaborating with data and tech teams.

The path is clear. The solutions are available. It’s time to build the future of finance.

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