

Board Research  
2026 Planning Intelligence Report

# When Forecasts Fall Behind

What 300 CFOs, CIOs and COOs reveal about outdated data, AI value and decision-making under pressure in 2026

  
board

# Table of Contents

|                                                                    |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary .....                                            | 4  |
| The Findings at a Glance .....                                     | 4  |
| The Boardroom Cost of Outdated Forecasts .....                     | 5  |
| Outdated forecasts reach every function .....                      | 5  |
| Planning speed trails executive confidence .....                   | 6  |
| Data enters the plan too slowly .....                              | 6  |
| AI Investment Is Moving Ahead of Proven Value .....                | 8  |
| Spending continues despite uneven returns .....                    | 8  |
| External AI narratives often diverge from daily reality .....      | 9  |
| The clearest gains are appearing inside the planning process ..... | 9  |
| Agentic AI is moving into active use .....                         | 10 |
| AI Has Become a Leading Influence on Strategy .....                | 11 |
| LLMs are now a mainstream source of strategic input .....          | 11 |
| Executives retain the final call .....                             | 12 |
| Formal accountability remains limited .....                        | 12 |
| AI pressure holds as economic concerns ease .....                  | 13 |
| Where the C-Suite Diverges .....                                   | 14 |
| Cross-functional trust is most qualified in operations .....       | 14 |
| Each function sees a different AI business case .....              | 14 |
| Operations reports the greatest planning constraints .....         | 15 |
| Practical Agenda for Continuous Planning .....                     | 16 |
| The outcome: Keep the plan connected to execution .....            | 17 |
| Methodology .....                                                  | 17 |



# Executive Summary

**Eighty-three percent of enterprise executives say their board acted on a forecast they already knew was outdated. Forty percent report that the decision had significant business consequences.**

The finding captures a central challenge facing enterprise planning in 2026. Eighty-five percent of executives say pressure to make faster decisions has increased over the past year, while 36% say more than half of their planning decisions rely on data more than 30 days old. Only 27% can adjust a plan in real time. A forecast may be sound when it is produced and still fail to reflect the actual conditions leaders face when they are ready to act.

That helps explain why companies are looking to AI for an answer.

Sixty-one percent report faster, more accurate forecasting as a benefit they have experienced. The financial case remains uneven, however. Fifty-nine percent say their AI investment exceeds the value delivered so far, but 92% of that group still plan to increase spending over the next 12 months.

AI's influence also extends beyond forecasting. Sixty-one percent cite large language models among the external sources that most influence their strategic decisions, more than industry peers, technology vendors or analyst firms like Gartner. Governance has developed more slowly, with 39% reporting formal governance and escalation processes for AI-driven decisions.

The research also reveals meaningful differences across the C-suite. Sixty percent of CFOs fully trust the other two functions to make well-informed decisions under pressure, compared with 36% of COOs. CFOs, CIOs and COOs also report different levels of planning speed, AI adoption and realized value. Those differences matter when finance, technology and operations must respond to the same change together.

Board surveyed 300 C-suite executives, including 100 CFOs, 100 CIOs and 100 COOs, about enterprise planning, AI investment and decision-making under economic volatility. Their responses show where planning processes are most vulnerable as AI takes on a larger role. They also point to the conditions required for more dependable decisions: current information, clear accountability and closer alignment across the functions responsible for planning and execution.

## The Findings at a Glance

**83%**

say their board acted on a forecast known to be outdated. 40% report significant business consequences.

**59%**

say AI investment exceeds the value delivered so far. 92% of that group plans to spend more.

**61%**

cite LLMs among the external sources that most influence their strategic decisions.

**60% / 52% / 36%**

of CFOs, CIOs and COOs fully trust the other two functions to decide well under pressure.

# The Boardroom Cost of Outdated Forecasts

By the time a forecast reaches the board, it has usually passed through several systems, functions and rounds of review. That work is intended to strengthen confidence in the numbers, but it also creates time for the assumptions behind them to change. A shift in demand, pricing, costs, interest rates or trade policy can leave directors evaluating a carefully built forecast that no longer reflects the decision in front of them.

## Outdated forecasts reach every function

Eighty-eight percent of CFOs say their board has acted on a forecast known to be outdated. The same is true for 84% of COOs and 76% of CIOs.

The breadth of the finding matters because each function sits at a different point in the planning process. Finance consolidates the enterprise outlook, technology supports the systems and data behind it, and operations carries the plan into the business. When leaders across all three functions report that outdated forecasts are reaching the board, the problem extends beyond any one team or stage of the planning cycle.

CFOs report the most serious consequences. Forty-nine percent say a decision based on an outdated forecast had significant business consequences, compared with 40% of CIOs and 32% of COOs.

The issue persists even within finance teams that have confidence in the quality of their work. Of the 62 CFOs who describe their forecasts as very accurate, 84% have still seen the board act on one that was already out of date. Accuracy reflects how well a forecast was constructed from the information available. Its usefulness also depends on whether the underlying assumptions still hold when directors are asked to commit capital, approve hiring or change the company's operating plan.

**49% of CFOs say a board decision based on an outdated forecast had significant business consequences.**



Base: 100 respondents per function.

“Boards understand that a forecast is a point-in-time view. What they need from finance is a clear read on what has changed since it was produced, which assumptions are under the most strain, and how those changes affect the decision in front of them. A single number without that context can create a false sense of security, giving leaders more confidence than the underlying information deserves.”

Gordon Pothier - CFO, Board

## Planning speed trails executive confidence

Keeping a forecast relevant depends on how quickly planning teams can incorporate new information once assumptions begin to move. Nearly half of executives, 49%, are very confident in their organization's ability to adjust plans quickly. Only 27% can re-plan in real time. Most need hours or days, while 13% require weeks or longer.

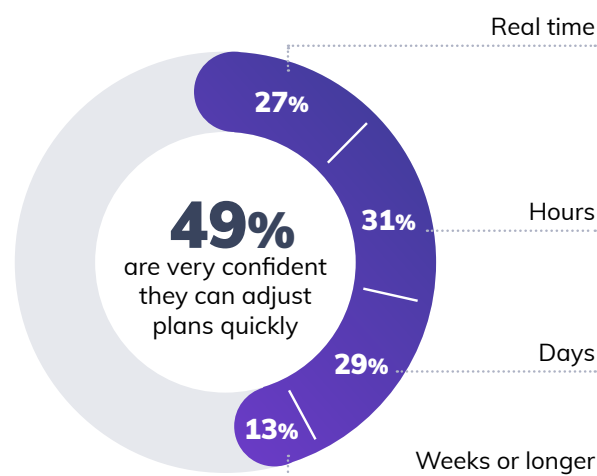
An urgent reforecast can create the appearance of agility without changing the process underneath it. Teams may respond by extracting data manually, reconciling conflicting inputs and working outside the normal planning cycle. That may produce an answer for the next meeting, but the same delays return as conditions continue to change.

The cost of that lag rises in an unsettled business environment.

Eighty-five percent of executives say they face more pressure to act quickly than they did a year ago.

Fifty-one percent believe the economy is already in recession or expect one within the next 12 months.

When assumptions are changing quickly, a planning cycle measured in days or weeks can affect when a company adjusts pricing, hiring, inventory or investment. Replanning speed shapes how quickly a strategic decision can reach the people responsible for carrying it out.



## Data enters the plan too slowly

Planning teams can update a forecast only as quickly as they can access and reconcile the information feeding it. Three-quarters of executives report that at least some of their planning decisions rely on data that is more than 30 days old. Thirty-six percent say data that old informs more than half of their decisions.

Internal performance data provides only part of the picture. Inflation, interest rates, trade policy and other external developments can materially change the assumptions behind revenue, costs and resource allocation. Yet 45% of executives have these signals fully incorporated into their planning models in real time.

Updating the plan also requires information to move across functions. Siloed data is the most-cited operational issue in the survey, selected by 46% of respondents. Among CFOs, 41% specifically identify data spread across finance, operations and technology as an obstacle to a real-time view of the business. When those inputs reside in separate systems, the planning process begins with reconciliation rather than analysis.

The range of primary planning approaches shows how uneven that capability remains. Sixteen percent of executives rely mainly on spreadsheets and manual processes, while 29% identify AI-powered planning tools as their primary approach. The value of more advanced technology will still depend on whether current information and consistent assumptions can reach the model in time to shape the decision.

### What keeps plans from reflecting current conditions?

**36%**

say more than half of decisions rely on data older than 30 days

**45%**

have external signals fully incorporated in real time

**46%**

cite siloed data as an operational issue

### A Closer Look: Manufacturing

Among manufacturing executives, 46% say more than half of their planning decisions rely on data older than 30 days, compared with 36% across the full sample. Eighty-nine percent say their board has acted on an outdated forecast, six percentage points above the overall result.

Base: Manufacturing executives, n=56.



# AI Investment Is Moving Ahead of Proven Value

**Fifty-nine percent of enterprise executives say their AI investment exceeds the value it delivers. Among that group, 92% plan to spend more.**

The weaknesses in current planning processes help explain why AI has attracted so much investment. Fifty-nine percent of enterprise executives say their AI investment exceeds the value delivered so far. Among that group, 92% still plan to spend more.

Companies are funding a capability they expect to become more valuable, even when current returns remain uneven. That choice places greater scrutiny on how AI performance is measured, which benefits count as meaningful progress and how accurately results are presented to boards.

## Spending continues despite uneven returns

The commitment is strongest even where the imbalance is most pronounced. Twenty-two percent of all respondents say AI investment significantly exceeds the value delivered; 97% of that group plans to increase spending over the next 12 months.

CFOs are the most likely to report that spending has moved ahead of results. Sixty-five percent say their AI investment exceeds its current value, including 30% who say it does so significantly. Yet 91% of those CFOs still expect investment to rise.

For finance leaders, the decision is rarely a simple comparison between this year's spending and this year's return. AI programs may be funded for capabilities that take time to scale across the enterprise. As those budgets grow, however, leaders will need to distinguish early signs of utility from improvements substantial enough to support continued investment.

## AI spending continues when value trails investment

**59%**

Investment exceeds value  
**92% plan to increase spending**

**22%**

Investment significantly exceeds value  
**97% plan to increase spending**

“Most companies already have access to AI. They are still working through how to connect it to the data, assumptions and business context behind a planning decision. Teams need to understand why a recommendation was made before they can decide how much weight it should carry in the plan.”

**David Marmer** - Chief Product Officer, Board

## External AI narratives often diverge from daily reality

When executives compare their organization's external AI narrative with daily reality, 46% say the two align. Thirty-one percent believe AI is delivering more than their organization communicates.

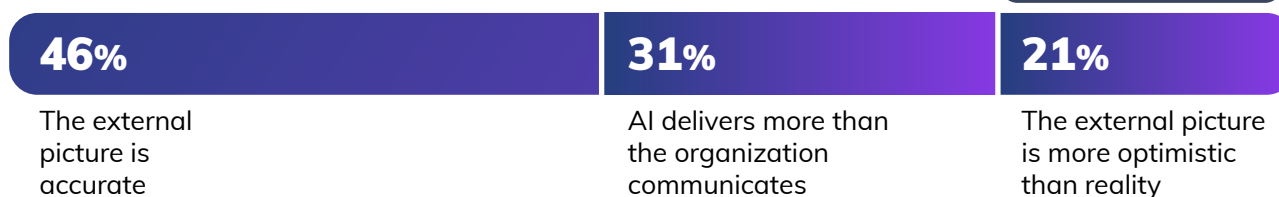
Another 21% say the picture presented to boards, investors and peers is more optimistic than current performance warrants. Two percent lack enough visibility to judge whether the account is accurate. In total, more than half of respondents see some difference between the external story and day-to-day results or cannot yet assess it confidently.

That variation reflects the difficulty of defining progress consistently. Broad employee use, a successful pilot and a measurable improvement in forecast accuracy may all be described as evidence that an AI program is working, even though they represent very different stages of value creation.

Twenty-six percent of CIOs say their organization presents a more optimistic picture of AI performance than day-to-day results warrant, compared with 23% of COOs and 13% of CFOs. CIOs also direct the greatest share of transformation spending toward AI: 64% allocate at least 10% of their budget to it, compared with 48% of CFOs and 43% of COOs. Their responsibility for both implementation and investment makes the evidence behind reported progress especially important.

### How the AI story compares with daily reality

CIOs 26%, COOs 23%, CFOs 13%



## The clearest gains are appearing inside the planning process

The uneven financial case should not obscure the benefits companies are already seeing. Sixty-one percent report faster, more accurate forecasting, making it the most common AI outcome in the survey. Fifty-four percent cite better real-time visibility into business performance, while 46% report less manual work and 43% report faster scenario modeling.

These improvements address several of the constraints identified earlier in the report. Better visibility can bring changing conditions into the plan sooner. Less manual work gives teams more time to assess what those changes mean. Faster scenario modeling allows leaders to compare potential responses before committing resources.

Only 3% say AI has produced no meaningful outcomes despite investment. The larger challenge is translating improvements in individual planning tasks into financial value that can be measured consistently across the enterprise.

### Planning benefits executives have experienced from AI



## Agentic AI is moving into active use

More than half of executives, 55%, say their organizations are actively using agentic AI in real business processes. Another 31% are testing it in limited use cases, while 13% are exploring potential applications. Only 1% say they are not pursuing it.

The maturity data indicates that agentic AI is no longer confined to early pilots at many organizations. Active use, however, does not guarantee that every function will experience the same value or apply the same standard of proof.

In a separate question, 65% of executives report clear, measurable ROI from agentic AI. The share reaches 73% among CIOs and 71% among CFOs, compared with 52% of COOs. Operations leaders are also the most likely to report no meaningful ROI, at 21%, versus 9% of CIOs and 7% of CFOs.

### Where organizations stand on agentic AI



### Reported agentic AI ROI varies by function



21% of COOs report no meaningful ROI, compared with 9% of CIOs and 7% of CFOs.

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in planning, its importance can no longer be assessed through investment and ROI alone. It is also beginning to shape the information executives use, the recommendations they consider and the decisions they ultimately make.

# AI Has Become a Leading Influence on Strategy

**Sixty-one percent of executives cite large language models among the external sources that most influence their strategic decisions. When an AI recommendation conflicts with their judgment, 31% follow it.**

As companies bring AI deeper into planning, executives are also using it to inform the choices those plans support. General-purpose tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Copilot have become a routine part of the information executives consult alongside professional networks, vendors and established advisers. Their reach extends across the C-suite, although finance, technology and operations differ considerably in the authority they give AI when its recommendation challenges their own experience.

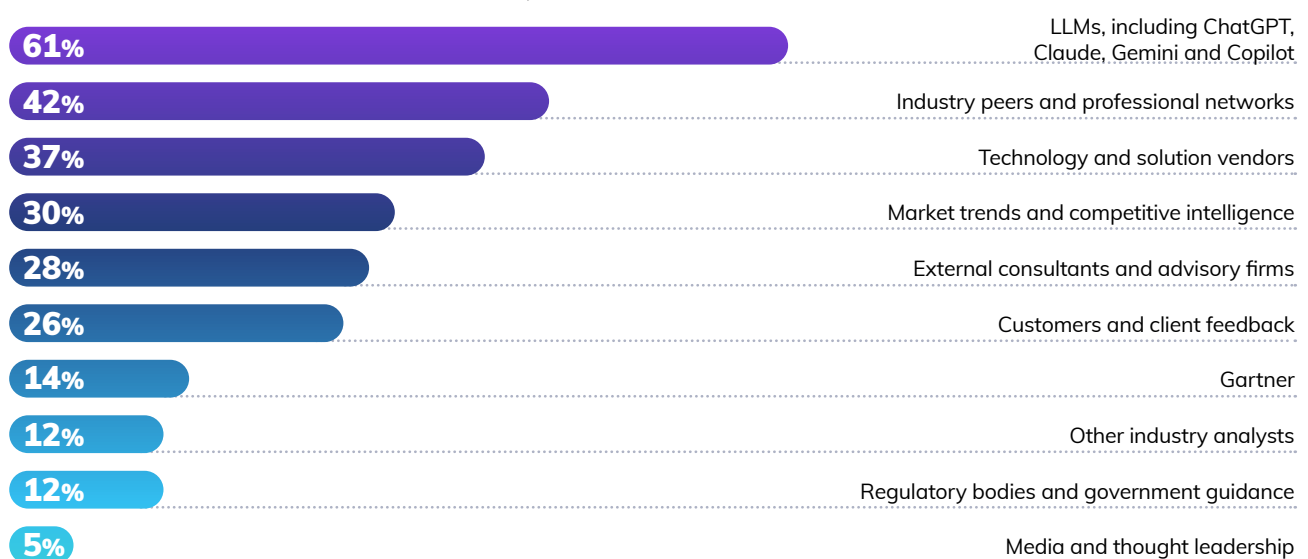
## LLMs are now a mainstream source of strategic input

Among the options presented, LLMs were cited by 61% of respondents, the highest share in the survey. Industry peers and professional networks followed at 42%, with technology vendors at 37%, market trends and competitive intelligence at 30%, and external consultants at 28%. Gartner was selected by 14%.

The pattern is broad rather than concentrated within technology leadership. Sixty-nine percent of CFOs include LLMs among their most influential external sources, compared with 58% of COOs and 56% of CIOs.

Respondents could choose up to three sources, so the figures show how widely each one is used rather than how much weight executives assign to it. Even with that distinction, a majority now includes LLMs in the small group of external inputs shaping strategy. That makes the quality of the surrounding decision process more important: leaders need to know where an AI response lacks company context, how its assumptions are tested and what role it should play alongside internal data and executive experience.

### What influences executive strategy?



Base: all respondents, n=300. Respondents could select up to three sources.

## Executives retain the final call

Most executives use AI as one input in a broader judgment process. When a recommendation conflicts with their instinct, 54% consider it but make the final decision themselves, while another 10% usually override it. Thirty-one percent follow the AI recommendation even when it conflicts with their judgment.

That choice varies considerably by function. When an AI recommendation conflicts with their own judgment, 48% of CFOs follow the AI recommendation, compared with 33% of CIOs and 11% of COOs.

Those differences have practical implications for cross-functional planning. A recommendation accepted by finance may receive greater scrutiny from the operations team responsible for putting it into practice. When functions apply different standards to the same AI input, leaders need a shared process for testing the assumptions, resolving disagreement and reaching a decision the organization can execute.

### When AI conflicts with executive judgment



Base: 100 respondents per function.

## Formal accountability remains limited

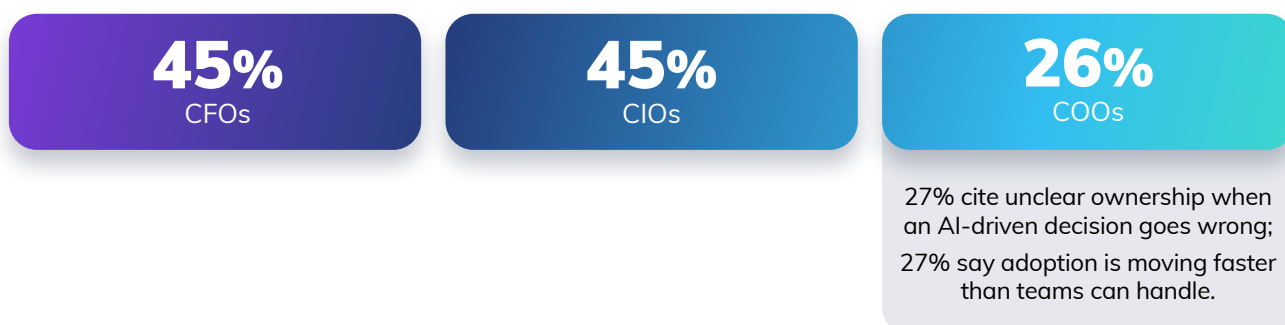
Those judgment calls require more than individual discretion. Organizations need to define when an AI recommendation can be followed, when it requires additional review and who owns the outcome. Yet only 39% of executives report having formal governance and escalation processes for AI-driven decisions.

Formal governance is least common in operations. Twenty-six percent of COOs report having these processes in place, compared with 45% of CFOs and CIOs. At the same time, 84% of COOs ultimately rely on their own judgment when AI conflicts with it, including 19% who usually override the recommendation.

Operations leaders are also the most direct about the risks created by unclear decision rights. Twenty-seven percent cite uncertainty over who is accountable when an AI-driven decision goes wrong as a leading source of hesitation. The same share say their organizations are adopting AI more quickly than their teams are equipped to handle.

Without established rules, decisions can depend too heavily on the confidence and experience of the individual executive reviewing the recommendation. Formal governance creates a repeatable way to challenge the output, document the reasoning and preserve accountability as AI becomes more embedded in planning.

### Formal AI governance by function



# AI pressure holds as economic concerns ease

Executives expect some economic pressures to become less prominent over the next 12 months. The share citing cost inflation and margin pressure falls from 54% to 46%, while economic slowdown or recession risk declines from 38% to 31%.

Concern about AI adoption follows a different pattern. The share citing pressure to adopt AI quickly and effectively moves only slightly, from 32% to 33%, but rises from the third most-cited challenge today to the second most-cited challenge for the year ahead as the economic concerns above it recede.

Executives also expect AI to assume greater responsibility within planning. By the end of 2028, 54% believe most enterprise planning decisions will remain human-led with AI support. Thirty percent anticipate AI-led planning with human oversight, while 6% expect fully autonomous decision-making. Only 10% believe planning will remain fully human-led.

Human involvement remains the prevailing expectation, but more than one-third of respondents foresee AI taking the lead. That view is held by 45% of CIOs, 38% of CFOs and 25% of COOs.

As AI moves from supporting analysis to directing more of the planning process, questions of authority and accountability will become part of the workflow itself. Companies will need to determine which decisions AI can lead, what evidence executives must review and when a recommendation requires escalation.

## AI rises among expected business challenges

| Challenge                                    | Today | In 12 months |
|----------------------------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Cost inflation and margin pressure           | 54%   | 46%          |
| Economic slowdown or recession risk          | 38%   | 31%          |
| Pressure to adopt AI quickly and effectively | 32%   | 33%          |

Respondents could select up to three challenges for each time period.

## How executives expect most planning decisions to be made by 2028



**45% of CIOs, 38% of CFOs and 25% of COOs** expect AI to lead most planning decisions. This combines “AI-led with human oversight” and “fully autonomous AI.”

# Where the C-Suite Diverges

Finance, technology and operations are entering the next phase of AI-enabled planning with different levels of trust, capability and confidence in the technology. Those differences shape how readily each function accepts an AI recommendation and how quickly a revised plan can move from analysis into execution.

## Cross-functional trust is most qualified in operations

Sixty percent of CFOs fully trust the other two functions to make well-informed decisions under pressure. The share falls to 52% among CIOs and 36% among COOs.

No COO reports limited or no trust in finance and technology, but 64% stop short of full confidence. That distinction matters when leaders must act before every assumption can be validated. A planning process can move only as quickly as the functions involved are willing to rely on the information, judgment and commitments of their counterparts.

## Each function sees a different AI business case

CIOs report the most active use of agentic AI, at 66%, followed by CFOs at 60% and COOs at 38%. Their assessments of value follow a similar pattern. Seventy-three percent of CIOs and 71% of CFOs report clear, measurable ROI, compared with 52% of COOs. Twenty-one percent of COOs say agentic AI has yet to deliver meaningful returns, versus 9% of CIOs and 7% of CFOs.

The functions are likely evaluating AI through different operating lenses. Technology leaders oversee implementation and scale. Finance leaders assess investment and enterprise value. Operations leaders must determine whether a recommendation can be carried out reliably within existing constraints. The survey does not measure the reasons behind their responses, but it makes clear that a single enterprise AI program can produce different judgments about readiness and value.



## Operations reports the greatest planning constraints

Only 15% of COOs can re-plan in real time, compared with 28% of CIOs and 37% of CFOs. Thirty-three percent are very confident in their planning agility, well below the 56% of CIOs and 59% of CFOs who say the same.

Their caution does not reflect a lack of interest in AI. Forty-one percent of COOs say the technology is delivering more than their organizations communicate, the highest share of any function, and 32% identify agentic AI as the most effective response to economic volatility.

The operating context is also different. Thirty-four percent of COOs cite supply chain disruption as a top external challenge, compared with 20% of CFOs and 14% of CIOs. A recommendation that appears sound at an enterprise level may still have to account for inventory already in motion, committed capacity, supplier constraints and customer obligations.

Across these measures, COOs appear to require stronger evidence, clearer context and firmer accountability before an AI recommendation moves into execution. Closing that distance will require more than broader adoption. Finance, technology and operations need to evaluate recommendations using shared assumptions and a common understanding of the tradeoffs involved.

### How planning and AI readiness differ across the C-suite

| Measure                                         | CFOs | CIOs | COOs |
|-------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Fully trust the other two functions             | 60%  | 52%  | 36%  |
| Can re-plan in real time                        | 37%  | 28%  | 15%  |
| Actively using agentic AI                       | 60%  | 66%  | 38%  |
| Report clear, measurable agentic AI ROI         | 71%  | 73%  | 52%  |
| Have formal AI governance                       | 45%  | 45%  | 26%  |
| Follow AI when it conflicts with their judgment | 48%  | 33%  | 11%  |

Base: 100 respondents per function. Adoption stage and ROI were measured in separate questions.

“By the time a planning decision reaches operations, inventory may already be moving, capacity may be committed and customers may be affected. COOs need to assess and evaluate the tradeoffs of the AI recommendation before they can put it into practice.”

Vijay Kurkal - COO, Board

# Practical Agenda for Continuous Planning

The research leaves leaders with a clear operating challenge. Decision cycles are shortening as AI takes on more responsibility, yet finance, technology and operations still need a current, shared view of the business. Six actions can strengthen the planning process.

## 1 Put a clock on forecast freshness

Every forecast presented to senior leadership or the board should show when its underlying data was last refreshed. It should also identify which assumptions have changed since the forecast was produced and where manual updates remain outstanding.

Making the age of a forecast visible allows leaders to judge whether it still reflects the decision in front of them. It also gives planning teams a practical measure they can improve over time.

## 2 Define what triggers a new plan

Faster planning depends on knowing when changing conditions warrant a response. Establish clear thresholds for material shifts in demand, cost, pricing, interest rates, supply availability and other factors that affect the business.

Each trigger should have an owner, an expected response time and a defined path into the forecast. This removes the need to rebuild the planning process every time conditions change.

## 3 Bring external conditions into the model

Internal performance data explains what has happened inside the business. Planning teams also need visibility into the economic, market and industry forces that could shape what happens next.

Identify the external indicators with the greatest bearing on revenue, cost, inventory, workforce and capacity. Incorporate them into the same models and scenarios used for financial and operational planning, then reassess their relevance as market conditions evolve.

## 4 Give the C-suite one set of assumptions

Finance, technology and operations may reach different conclusions. Those differences are easier to resolve when everyone can see the same data, assumptions and scenarios.

Create shared definitions for the measures that drive the plan. Make changes visible across functions and preserve the reasoning behind major adjustments. Leadership discussions can then focus on the decision itself rather than reconciling competing versions of the business.

## 5 Tie every AI investment to a decision

Evaluate AI according to the business decision it is expected to improve. Before deployment, establish the outcome that matters, the current baseline and the evidence required to demonstrate progress.

Measures may include forecast accuracy, planning time, working capital, margin, inventory, service levels or the speed of scenario analysis. Review results consistently and reconsider initiatives that do not produce a material improvement.

## 6 Establish decision rights before AI is used

Executives need to know how an AI recommendation was formed, which assumptions influenced it and where human review is required. Those expectations should be set before the recommendation reaches a consequential decision.

Define where AI can advise, where it can act and when escalation is required. Document who can challenge or override a recommendation and who remains accountable for the outcome. Governance works best when it is part of the planning workflow rather than a separate policy consulted after a problem occurs.

# The outcome: Keep the plan connected to execution

A revised forecast has limited value if the change does not reach the teams responsible for inventory, hiring, pricing, capacity and customer commitments.

Connect financial and operational plans so that a change in one area shows its implications across the business. Leaders should be able to see how a new assumption affects performance, evaluate the tradeoffs and coordinate the response before resources are committed.

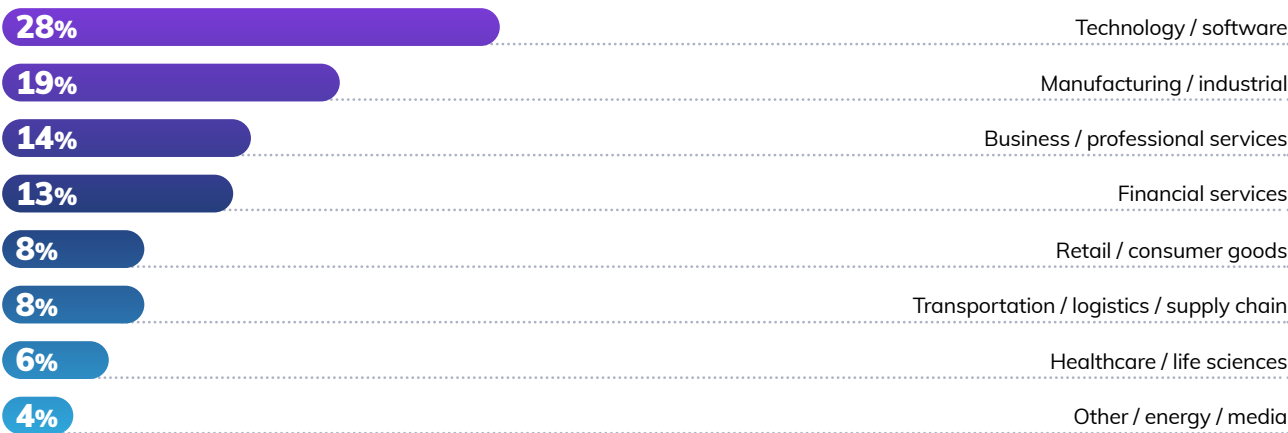
A more responsive planning process begins with current information, shared assumptions and clear accountability. With those foundations in place, AI can help leaders evaluate scenarios, understand what is driving the forecast and act sooner when conditions change. The result is a plan that remains connected to the business long after the annual planning cycle ends.

## Methodology

Board surveyed 300 U.S. C-suite executives in May and June 2026: 100 CFOs, 100 CIOs and 100 COOs at organizations with annual revenue of \$100 million or more. The survey was conducted online.

Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding. Questions that allowed multiple responses may total more than 100. Title-level findings use a base of 100 respondents per function. The manufacturing findings use a base of 56 respondents.

### Respondents by industry



### Respondents by annual revenue



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