

The CFO's Toolkit

Analytics, Planning, and Insights
in Dynamics 365



This ebook is for

CFOs and finance team members who want to understand how modern planning, insights, and analytics tools powered by AI can help meet evolving challenges and expectations.



Estimated reading time:
8 minutes

Contents

A photograph of a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. He is looking off-camera to the right with a slight smile. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office setting with windows.

01 / The shifting role of finance



79%

of finance leaders believe that playing a vital role in owning business model innovation and empowering organizational transformation is a top priority to meet future needs.¹

Rather than just crunching historical numbers, modern CFOs and finance teams increasingly shape the future. That means dedicating more focus to forecasting, identifying growth opportunities, and guiding business strategy. However, finance departments face numerous challenges in making the shift.²

Increased volatility and unpredictability:

Finance teams work to navigate a complex landscape, as 70 percent report feeling pressure from inflation, economic disruptions, and recession risk.

Outpacing disruption:

CFOs see the need for rapid change, with 72 percent believing they need to rethink processes and operating models for better resilience.

Demands of a global economy:

Navigating international markets, CFOs deal with challenges like currency risks and complex regulatory environments, requiring strategic foresight.

Hiring and scaling productivity:

Talent acquisition grows increasingly complex, with 84 percent of finance leaders agreeing that their teams struggle to find the skills needed for future demands.

¹ <https://info.microsoft.com/ww-landing-future-of-finance-report.html?lcid=en-us>

² <https://info.microsoft.com/ww-landing-future-of-finance-report.html?lcid=en-us>

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Barriers to insight



Finance using outdated ERP systems find it challenging to collect, integrate, and analyze data. These solutions are rigid and complex to learn and lack automation and AI for robust analytics and reporting. Teams end up relying on scarce data science and IT resources to pick up where the software leaves off—leading to inefficiency and added costs.

Disparate data sources hamper timely forecasting, especially when finance professionals have to transfer data manually between systems. This reduces the organization's ability to anticipate and take advantage of market shifts and opportunities quickly. To make the necessary shift to a strategic role, finance teams need unified data and easy-to-use analytics for smarter decision-making and planning.





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Transforming strategic capabilities with Dynamics 365 Finance

With Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance, your team gains an end-to-end solution that sharpens financial decision-making and adapts to changing business conditions. The platform provides robust analytics, insights, and planning features, turning data into actionable steps for boosting business performance. Built on a unified data model, it offers an always-updated, organization-wide view, enabling a collaborative and connected approach to financial management.

Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance stands out for AI-driven insights seamlessly woven into your work processes. Through integration with familiar tools like Power BI and Excel, the platform makes secure, cloud-based reporting and analysis straightforward for a more agile financial management approach.

Advanced features for seamless data unification and optimized data models built on Microsoft Dataverse ensure data connectivity to support in-depth strategic insights. Teams inside and outside of finance gain secure cloud access through tools they already know, significantly cutting down on manual tasks and reducing the need for specialized technical assistance.

With integration between traditional financial tools and advanced AI capabilities, Dynamics 365 Finance automates the detection of trends and anomalies. It offers predictive insights—so you can anticipate the unexpected and shape the future of success.



How Microsoft Dynamics 365 delivers on the potential of unified data

Dynamics 365 Finance merges timely business data with Dataverse, employing a star schema data model that helps to simplify the extraction of insights and facilitate AI analysis.

This data model serves as the backbone for various Dynamics 365 solutions, including HR, Sales, Supply Chain, and Project Operations. This unified approach facilitates easy collaboration by offering every team the same up-to-date data, creating an environment conducive to innovation.

Built to facilitate smooth integration with third-party systems, the data model ensures comprehensive and consistent data across your operation. You can use the tools and applications that fit your existing workflow while gaining an integrated view of all organizational information.

Dynamics 365 provides near-real-time data access, eliminating the need for manual data gathering and enabling faster responses to market changes. This timely data delivery means you get crucial information to make decisions when they matter most.



04 / Planning, analytics, and insights for modern financial strategy



Three core elements help you succeed in the new strategic role of CFO: analytics, insights, and planning. As part of a holistic, unified platform like Dynamics 365 Finance, these components amplify each other's value, offering a holistic approach to financial management.

- **Analytics** provide real-time, unified data that shortens decision cycles and adjustments.
- **Insights** deliver proactive recommendations to improve business performance shaped by artificial intelligence and machine learning.
- **Planning** tools generate accurate predictions and facilitate scenario-based decision-making.

Let's examine how Dynamics 365 Finance delivers modern capabilities in each of these areas.





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Analytics: Empowering everyone to find meaning in data

Traditionally

In the past, finance teams focused on historical data, providing retrospective insights with uncertain relevance to the future. The reliance on data scientists and inefficient processes hindered efficiency and business effectiveness.

Today

In today's dynamic business environment, where CFOs take on the role of strategic partners, leaders demand daily, detailed financial metrics. Finance teams need to navigate market volatility and proactively highlight risks and opportunities. That makes self-service analytics crucial for both speed and cost savings.

Enabling analytics for all

By consolidating and enhancing disparate enterprise data into a centralized reporting hub, Dynamics 365 Finance enables easy, secure, and near-real-time data delivery in familiar tools such as Excel and Power BI. The transition to analytics for all, regardless of technical expertise, enables finance teams to harness the power of data to make informed, timely decisions that drive business success.

- **Gain a complete view across business systems and processes:** Integrate data from various departments and systems into a centralized hub for full transparency.
- **Lay the foundation for advanced planning, analytics, and AI:** Optimize data models and centralize data to facilitate advanced analytics, proactive insight detection, and more effective planning.
- **Deliver seamlessly through familiar and customizable tools like Excel and Power BI:** Use Excel and Power BI for data analytics, taking advantage of their cloud-hosted reports and ease of use compared to rigid ERP tools.
- **Enable collaboration:** Utilize a centralized reporting hub to securely create, share, and save reports while maintaining consistency and leveraging Microsoft Cloud security.
- **Make decisions with data in near-real time:** Refresh and access data much faster than with legacy ERPs, making your finance team more agile and responsive to business needs.



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Insights: Enriching decisions with predictive knowledge

Traditionally

Before advanced learning tools like AI and machine learning, finance teams worked within assumptions and limitations built into legacy ERPs. This slowed the process of putting data to use, leading businesses to miss foreseeable risks and lose out on opportunities.

Today

Finance departments using AI can achieve a new level of efficiency and agility with predictive insights delivered automatically. Automated data transformation alone eliminates the hours of manual work. More significantly, AI provides proactive direction to drive tangible improvements in both financial and operational performance.

Driving insights across finance and the business using AI

With cutting-edge AI technology that automates insights, finance professionals become more agile and strategic, focusing on action rather than labor-intensive analysis.

- **Accelerate an optimized data foundation:** Clean, enriched, and standardized data lays the groundwork for high-quality insights.
- **Boost business performance through automation:** Automated analytics deliver precise financial forecasts. Features like real-time cash flow predictions and budget variance analysis equip teams to manage finances proactively.
- **Deliver executive insights:** Highlight critical areas such as cost-saving opportunities and compliance risks automatically without sorting through vast data sets.
- **Stay ahead with proactive alerts:** View anomalies and risks before they escalate for better control and reduced disruption.
- **Elevate spend and risk management:** Transform spend analysis and procurement functions into strategic assets. For example, AI can identify consistent late shipments from a supplier, allowing you to reevaluate partnerships before a problem escalates.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blazer over a striped shirt, is smiling and looking towards the right. She is in an office environment with wooden pillars and a blurred background. A semi-transparent purple and blue gradient box is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing text.

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Planning: Meeting the future with confidence

Traditionally

Conventional financial planning and data analytics tools (FP&A) paved the way for predictive analysis and forecasting models. However, because FP&A focuses narrowly on financial data, it limits the ability of CFOs to see the bigger strategic picture.

Today

Finance leaders need a planning solution that incorporates insights from across the business. Practical and comprehensive planning requires fresh, unified data and automated tools for strategic analysis and forecasting.

Maximize the power of planning

Advanced technology transforms the accuracy and utility of financial planning. Dynamics 365 Finance business performance planning offers near-real-time, AI-assisted experiences that make planning for the future more accurate and accessible.

Business performance planning fulfills the core FP&A requirements that finance teams rely on in a more accurate and agile way, basing forecasting on complete, timely organizational data. It also extends planning oversight to other business domains, going beyond traditional boundaries from finance to supply chain and sales, and seamlessly integrates with familiar collaboration and productivity tools.

- **Gain a holistic organizational view:** Extend data scope beyond finance to include cross-domain datasets like supply chain and HR, enabling a comprehensive view for informed decisions.
- **Empower finance users with planning tools:** Use familiar platforms like Power BI and Excel while eliminating the need for data extraction and transformation.
- **Increase collaboration:** Connect people and data in a unified collaboration environment for secure, timely data access and sharing.
- **Dynamic financial planning:** Use AI-driven tools and analytics for scenario planning and proactive risk and outcome adjustments.

Transform financial leadership with Dynamics 365 Finance analytics, insights, and planning

Explore Dynamics 365

Success as a CFO in this ever-changing market landscape requires advanced analytics, insights, and planning tools. These resources position you to play a pivotal role in shaping your organization's future.

Central to this change stands a unified, timely data model. Integrating all your financial and enterprise data into one source drives informed strategic action. Such a robust data model supports predictive analysis and broadens planning scope beyond just FP&A. Innovative tools and automation streamline processes and reveal fresh paths to success and growth.

Agile and armed with actionable intelligence, finance teams contribute more than ever. Discover how Dynamics 365 Finance enhances your financial performance through its top-tier business analytics.

