

BESPOKE EXECUTIVE VENTURES

AI FOR FINANCE PROFESSIONALS SERIES • BOOK TWO

AI FOR FINANCE PROFESSIONALS

**ADVANCED AUTOMATION &
FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE**

*Building Connected Workflows, AI Agents
& Decision Systems for Finance*



IMPLEMENTATION-HEAVY ADVANCED PLAYBOOK

KANDI THEOBALD

Made to order. Never off the rack.

BOOK TWO • 2026

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Advanced Automation & Financial Intelligence

Building Connected Workflows, AI Agents & Decision Systems for Finance

BOOK TWO OF THE BEV AI FOR FINANCE PROFESSIONALS SERIES

Kandi Theobald

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AI systems can produce inaccurate, incomplete, biased, fabricated, or contextually inappropriate outputs. Material finance work should remain traceable to authoritative source records, subject to defined controls, and reviewed by accountable humans before it affects books and records, payments, forecasts, external reporting, or business decisions.

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Book Two • 2026

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The BEV AI for Finance Professionals Series

This three-book series is designed as a progression: use AI well, build with AI, then lead with AI.

Book	Primary Question	Outcome
Book 1 – The Practical Playbook	How do I use AI responsibly in finance?	Controlled individual and team use.
Book 2 – Advanced Automation & Financial Intelligence	How do I redesign finance processes around AI?	Connected workflows, agents, intelligence, and measurable automation.
Book 3 – The AI-Enabled Finance Leader	How do I lead an AI-enabled finance organization?	Operating model, governance, talent, technology, and enterprise transformation.

Book Two assumes the reader already understands the foundational ideas introduced in **Book One**: AI is an assistant rather than a source of record; prompts must be grounded in source data and constraints; human review remains accountable; and **BEV CONTROL™** provides a disciplined structure for finance prompting. This book moves beyond the single prompt and into the operating system.

Preface: From Prompts to Operating Systems

Finance teams do not create value by producing more prompts. They create value when reliable information moves through a controlled process quickly enough to improve a decision. That difference is the focus of this book.

Book One established the foundation: how to use generative AI without handing professional judgment to a model, how to structure prompts, how to protect confidential data, and how to apply AI to recurring finance work. The next step is harder. It requires redesigning the work itself.

A modern finance process often crosses multiple systems and people. Revenue may originate in a CRM or billing platform, flow into an ERP, move through a warehouse or transformation layer, appear in Power BI, and then become part of a forecast, board package, cash decision, or operating review. AI can sit inside that chain, but it should not float above it. It needs defined inputs, permissions, logic, evidence, reviewers, escalation rules, and measurable outcomes.

The practical question is no longer, “What can AI write for me?” It is, “Where can intelligence be inserted into a finance workflow so the process becomes faster, more consistent, more decision-useful, and at least as controlled as it was before?”

This book is implementation-heavy by design. You will map processes, define data contracts, build agent charters, design human-review points, create financial-intelligence workflows, specify Power BI validation rules, estimate ROI, and practice moving from a one-off AI interaction to a repeatable finance operating capability.

The standard remains the same throughout: speed is useful only when it preserves trust. A workflow that produces an answer faster but makes the source less traceable, the approval less clear, or the control less reliable is not an improvement. The goal is better finance—not merely more automation.

Operating principle: automate movement, classification, drafting, summarization, and exception surfacing aggressively; automate authority, approval, posting, payment, and external representation cautiously.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter is designed to produce an implementation artifact. Do not treat the chapters as reading only. Build the workflow maps, tables, charters, test plans, and scorecards as you go.

1. Choose one real process. Use a recurring finance process with known pain: close, collections, forecast, management reporting, cash, audit support, or profitability analysis.

2. Establish the source of truth. Identify authoritative systems, owners, periods, dimensions, and tie-out points before involving AI.

3. Apply BEV DECIDE™. Define Data, Evidence, Controls, Intelligence, Decision Review, and Execution & Measurement.

4. Design the human review. Specify who validates the output, what they check, and what blocks the workflow from progressing.

5. Test on known cases. Use historical periods and known outcomes to identify failure modes before production use.

6. Measure business value. Track hours, rework, cycle time, exceptions, cash impact, decision latency, and adoption.

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PART I

Designing the AI-Enabled Finance Operating System

Move from isolated AI use to controlled process architecture.

CHAPTER 1

From Prompt User to Finance Process Architect

The next maturity level is not better prompting. It is redesigning how work moves.

The first wave of generative AI adoption in finance is usually individual. A controller asks for a variance narrative. An analyst asks for a formula. An accountant asks for a reconciliation checklist. These uses can save time, but the value plateaus quickly because the surrounding process remains unchanged. The same files still have to be exported, reconciled, renamed, routed, reviewed, revised, approved, and archived.

Process architecture begins when finance stops treating the model as a destination and starts treating intelligence as one controlled step inside a larger workflow. The question changes from “What should I ask AI?” to “What information should move, under what conditions, through which systems and reviewers, to produce a decision-ready output?”

1.1 Task Automation vs. Workflow Redesign

Task automation makes one activity faster. Workflow redesign changes the sequence, handoffs, evidence, ownership, and decision points around the activity. A task-level improvement may save ten minutes. A workflow-level improvement can remove days of waiting, duplicated review, and repeated explanation.

Task-Level Use	Workflow-Level Design
Draft a variance explanation	Detect material variances, generate investigation questions, route items to owners, collect evidence, draft commentary, require controller review, and publish approved narrative.
Summarize an AR aging	Refresh aging, segment risk, prioritize work queue, draft customer-specific follow-ups, capture collector disposition, and update expected-cash assumptions.
Write a DAX measure	Define metric, source fields, data-quality tests, DAX logic, tie-out, exception thresholds, and production ownership.
Summarize a contract	Extract defined finance terms, compare to policy, flag exceptions, route tax/legal/security questions, and retain source references.

1.2 The Five Layers of a Finance Workflow

Source layer: ERP, CRM, payroll, bank, operational systems, spreadsheets, policies, contracts, and approved manual inputs.

Transformation layer: Cleaning, mapping, joins, calculations, business rules, dimensional modeling, and reconciliations.

Intelligence layer: Classification, summarization, anomaly detection, scenario generation, explanation, and recommendation support.

Control layer: Permissions, thresholds, segregation of duties, human validation, evidence retention, and escalation.

Action layer: Management reporting, collections, forecast changes, task routing, decisions, approvals, and monitored follow-through.

Architecture rule: AI should never hide the source layer or bypass the control layer. If a reviewer cannot trace the output back to authoritative data and understand how it moved through the process, the workflow is not production-ready.

1.3 Design for Exceptions, Not the Happy Path

Finance processes fail in the exceptions: a missing file, a late approval, a new account, an unmatched intercompany balance, a customer dispute, a negative inventory balance, a stale forecast assumption, or a policy conflict. Advanced automation therefore begins by defining what happens when the process is not normal. Every workflow should specify stop conditions, escalation paths, timeouts, fallback owners, and required evidence for exception resolution.

1.4 What the Process Architect Owns

- Define the business objective before selecting the tool.
- Identify authoritative inputs and reconciliation points.
- Separate deterministic calculations from probabilistic AI tasks.
- Design human review around financial impact and reversibility.
- Specify evidence retention and version control.
- Measure value using finance outcomes, not model activity.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

1. Choose one recurring finance process that currently requires at least three handoffs.
2. Draw the current-state process from source data to final action.
3. Circle every point where work waits for someone, gets reformatted, or is re-explained.
4. Mark which steps are deterministic, judgment-heavy, or language/analysis-heavy.
5. Identify one step that AI could improve without changing final authority.

CHAPTER 2

Map the Finance Function Before You Automate It

The best automation opportunities are discovered in process maps, not vendor demos.

Automation conversations often start with a tool. Finance leaders see a new feature, attend a demonstration, or hear that another company is using agents. The result is a search for a problem that matches the technology. A stronger approach starts with the operating model and asks where skilled finance time is being consumed without adding proportional judgment or value.

2.1 Build the Finance Process Inventory

Create a process inventory across the entire finance function. The purpose is not documentation for its own sake. The inventory becomes the portfolio from which automation opportunities are selected and prioritized.

Process Family	Examples
Record to report	Close calendar, reconciliations, accruals, journal entries, consolidations, flux analysis, management reporting.
Order to cash	Billing, cash application, AR aging, collections, dispute management, revenue analytics.
Procure to pay	Vendor onboarding, invoice processing, coding, approvals, payment runs, AP aging.
Plan to perform	Budgeting, rolling forecasts, headcount plans, scenario analysis, performance reviews.
Treasury	Cash positioning, 13-week forecast, debt, covenant monitoring, liquidity, bank administration.
Governance & assurance	Controls, audit requests, policy management, evidence retention, compliance reporting.
Decision support	Pricing, margin, customer profitability, job/site economics, capital allocation, board reporting.

2.2 Score the Opportunity

A good candidate for AI-enabled redesign has repeatable inputs, meaningful volume, expensive handoffs, identifiable review points, and measurable business value. A poor candidate has unclear source data, unstable policy, infrequent occurrence, irreversible actions, or a need for professional judgment that cannot be bounded.

Scoring Dimension	Question
Frequency	How often does the process occur?
Manual effort	How many hours are spent extracting, formatting, chasing, summarizing, or re-keying?
Decision latency	How much waiting occurs before management receives usable information?
Error/rework	How frequently is the output corrected or sent back?
Data readiness	Are inputs structured, accessible, and reconcilable?
Control risk	What could go wrong if the output is wrong or acted on too early?
Business impact	Would improvement affect cash, margin, close speed, reporting quality, or management capacity?

2.3 Create an Automation Heat Map

Plot process value against implementation difficulty. High-value, lower-complexity items become the first wave. High-value, high-complexity items become designed pilots. Low-value automation should be resisted even when technically easy; automation has ongoing ownership, security, testing, and maintenance costs.

A process should earn the right to be automated. “We can automate it” is not a business case.

2.4 Role-Based Mapping

Map the work by role as well as process. This reveals where senior finance talent is being consumed by transformation rather than judgment. A CFO spending two hours assembling a board summary has a workflow problem. A controller manually chasing twenty close-status emails has an orchestration problem. An analyst rebuilding the same data-cleaning steps every month has a data-engineering problem.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- Inventory at least 25 recurring finance processes across record-to-report, order-to-cash, procure-to-pay, planning, treasury, and decision support.
- Score each process 1–5 for effort, frequency, decision latency, data readiness, control risk, and business impact.
- Identify the top five opportunities where value is high and control design is feasible.

9. Choose one pilot that can be tested using historical data without changing production authority.

CHAPTER 3

The BEV DECIDE™ Finance Workflow Framework

A six-stage method for building AI-enabled finance workflows that remain explainable and controlled.

Book One introduced BEV CONTROL™ as a prompt framework. Book Two needs a framework for the workflow around the prompt. BEV DECIDE™ is designed for that purpose. It turns an AI idea into a finance operating process that can be tested, reviewed, and measured.

3.1 The Six Stages

Stage	Design Question
D — Data & Sources	What authoritative information enters the workflow, who owns it, and what period/entity scope applies?
E — Evidence & Validation	How is completeness and accuracy established before AI is allowed to interpret the data?
C — Controls & Constraints	What policies, thresholds, permissions, prohibited actions, and segregation-of-duties requirements apply?
I — Intelligence & Analysis	What should AI classify, summarize, compare, explain, draft, or simulate?
D — Decision Review	Who validates the work product, what evidence must they inspect, and what conditions require escalation?
E — Execution & Measurement	What approved action follows, what is retained, and how is value measured over time?

3.2 D — Data & Sources

Start with a source register. Every material field used by the workflow should have an authoritative source, owner, refresh timing, data type, and known limitations. A workflow that mixes exported ERP data, manually edited spreadsheets, and CRM attributes without defining precedence will eventually produce a reconciliation problem disguised as an AI problem.

3.3 E — Evidence & Validation

Validation should occur before interpretation. That means row counts, control totals, period coverage, entity scope, currency, duplicate detection, missing keys, and reconciliation to source reports where applicable. The system should know whether the input is fit for analysis before producing polished language about it.

3.4 C — Controls & Constraints

Controls tell the workflow what it may do, what it may not do, and when it must stop. Examples include materiality thresholds, approved output audiences, restricted data classes, dual approval requirements, no-post/no-pay boundaries, and mandatory source citations for higher-risk analysis.

3.5 I — Intelligence & Analysis

The intelligence step is where generative AI, machine learning, rules, or statistical methods add leverage. Keep deterministic calculations deterministic. Let the ledger or model calculate the number; use AI to interpret patterns, organize exceptions, draft questions, summarize evidence, or generate scenario narratives.

3.6 D — Decision Review

Human review should be designed, not implied. Name the reviewer role, required checks, turnaround expectation, and escalation path. A controller reviewing a close exception needs different evidence than a CFO reviewing a scenario memo. Review design should scale with financial impact, external exposure, and reversibility.

3.7 E — Execution & Measurement

A workflow is complete only when an approved action occurs and the result is measured. The action may be publishing a management report, updating a forecast, assigning a collection task, requesting support, or escalating a control issue. Track what happened next so the workflow can learn operationally even if the AI model itself does not “learn” from the event.

BEV DECIDE™ rule: no AI step should exist without a defined input, a control boundary, an accountable reviewer, and a measurable downstream outcome.

3.8 Example: Monthly Margin Review

DECIDE Stage	Monthly Margin Review Example
Data & Sources	GL revenue/cost, sales detail, labor, returns, customer/product/location dimensions.
Evidence & Validation	Tie revenue and COGS to GL; test return completeness; validate mapping and period.
Controls & Constraints	Materiality threshold; no invented causes; confidential data only in approved environment.
Intelligence & Analysis	Identify material margin movements, rank plausible drivers, generate questions and segment views.

DECIDE Stage	Monthly Margin Review Example
Decision Review	FP&A validates calculations; Controller reviews material items; operating owners confirm causes.
Execution & Measurement	Publish approved narrative; assign corrective actions; track margin recovery and investigation cycle time.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

10. Apply BEV DECIDE™ to the pilot process selected in Chapter 2.
11. Document at least three validation checks before the AI step.
12. Define at least three actions the workflow is prohibited from taking.
13. Name the accountable human reviewer and the evidence they must inspect.
14. Define two operational or financial metrics that will prove the workflow is useful.

CHAPTER 4

Data Architecture, Data Contracts, and the Finance Semantic Layer

AI becomes reliable when finance definitions are explicit and reusable.

Advanced finance automation is often constrained less by AI capability than by inconsistent definitions. “Revenue,” “active customer,” “gross margin,” “headcount,” “bookings,” and “cash” can mean different things across systems and teams. If the workflow does not know which definition is authoritative, the model can produce a coherent answer to the wrong question.

4.1 The Finance Semantic Layer

A semantic layer is the set of standardized business definitions, calculations, dimensions, and relationships that sit between raw system data and decision-making. In Power BI this may be expressed through a governed data model and measures. In a warehouse it may include curated tables and metrics. In a smaller company it may begin as a controlled data dictionary and mapping workbook. The technology can vary; the discipline cannot.

4.2 Build Data Contracts

A data contract defines what a workflow expects from an upstream source. For each input, specify the fields, types, grain, owner, refresh timing, valid values, reconciliation total, and response when the contract is broken. This prevents silent data drift from becoming silent decision drift.

Contract Element	Example
Dataset	AR Aging Extract
Grain	One row per open invoice
Required keys	Entity, customer, invoice number, invoice date
Measures	Open amount, original amount, days past due
Refresh	Daily by 6:00 AM local time
Control total	Open amount must tie to AR subledger
Failure response	Stop prioritization workflow and notify AR owner if variance exceeds tolerance

4.3 Separate Facts, Metrics, and Narrative

Facts are source fields. Metrics are defined calculations. Narrative is interpretation. Keeping these layers separate reduces hallucination risk and makes testing possible. For example, the fact may be invoice open amount; the metric may be DSO; the narrative may explain that collection risk is concentrated in a set of disputed accounts. AI belongs primarily in the narrative and classification layer unless calculations are independently validated.

4.4 Design for Dimensional Consistency

Financial intelligence becomes powerful when the same dimensions connect finance and operations: entity, location, department, customer, product, job, channel, salesperson, vendor, project, and time. These dimensions enable margin bridges, unit economics, location comparisons, labor productivity, and scenario models without rebuilding logic for every question.

4.5 Data Lineage for Finance

For every executive metric, finance should be able to answer: where did the number originate, what transformations occurred, what filters apply, who owns the definition, when was it refreshed, and what reconciliations prove completeness? AI-generated explanations should inherit that lineage rather than obscure it.

If a metric cannot be defined in one sentence and tied to a source, it is not ready to become an automated decision signal.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

15. Choose five executive metrics used in management decisions.
16. Write the authoritative definition, formula, dimensions, source system, and owner for each metric.
17. Document a data contract for one recurring dataset used by your pilot workflow.
18. Define what the workflow should do when the data contract is violated.

PART II

Accounting Operations and the Intelligent Close

Use AI to focus accounting attention on exceptions while preserving posting authority and evidence.

CHAPTER 5

AI-Enabled Close Orchestration

Redesign the close as a coordinated exception-management system.

A close calendar is necessary, but a truly intelligent close operates more like a control tower. It knows what is due, what is blocked, what evidence is missing, which balances are unusual, what dependencies remain, and where reviewer attention is most valuable. AI can improve the close when it helps accounting move from status chasing and formatting to exception resolution and judgment.

5.1 Design the Close Control Tower

- Task status and dependency tracking
- Evidence completeness
- Reconciliation exception summary
- Material flux detection
- Unposted or late upstream activity
- Reviewer queues
- Entity and consolidation readiness
- Management-reporting readiness

The workflow should not merely report that “cash reconciliation is incomplete.” It should identify the blocking item, age, amount, owner, required evidence, next action, and whether the issue affects consolidated reporting.

5.2 Close Agent Inputs

Input	Control Requirement
Close calendar	Approved task list, owners, due dates, dependencies.
Reconciliation status	System-generated or controlled tracker; no free-form status without owner.
Trial balance	Period/entity validated and tied to ERP.
Flux thresholds	Approved materiality logic by account class.
Evidence links	Stable file/version references where possible.
Issue log	Unique issue ID, owner, status, aging, impact.

5.3 Exception-First Review

A strong close workflow routes normal items through standard evidence checks and elevates exceptions. AI can classify reconciling items, summarize aging, draft reviewer questions, and group recurring root causes. The accountant still determines whether an adjustment is required and the approver still owns the journal entry.

5.4 Management Commentary in the Close

Do not wait until every narrative is written manually after the books are closed. Once reconciled actuals and approved thresholds are available, the workflow can identify material movements and prepare first-draft questions. Operating owners supply factual explanations, finance validates them, and AI compresses the evidence into decision-useful commentary.

5.5 Close KPIs

Metric	Why It Matters
Days to close	Primary cycle-time outcome.
Tasks completed on time	Measures orchestration reliability.
Reviewer comments per account	Signals workpaper quality and standardization.
Reconciliation exceptions >30/60/90 days	Measures unresolved balance-sheet risk.
Late journal entries	Indicates upstream process weakness.
Time to management package	Measures decision latency, not just ledger completion.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

19. Map your current close by day and dependency.
20. Identify five status messages or reports that could be generated automatically from source systems.
21. Define the exception attributes required for a close-review queue.
22. Create a stop rule for any account or entity that should block management reporting.
23. Choose two close KPIs to baseline before automation.

CHAPTER 6

Reconciliation Intelligence

Use AI to classify, prioritize, and explain exceptions—not to manufacture agreement.

Reconciliation is one of the clearest examples of where deterministic finance logic and probabilistic AI should be separated. The mathematical comparison belongs to rules, queries, or reconciliation software. AI adds value after the difference is known: classifying the exception, summarizing evidence, identifying recurring patterns, drafting follow-up questions, and prioritizing reviewer attention.

6.1 Build an Exception Taxonomy

A taxonomy makes reconciliation intelligence reusable. Categories might include timing difference, missing source, duplicate, mapping issue, stale item, intercompany mismatch, cut-off issue, unidentified cash, unsupported manual entry, expected reversal, and potential write-off. Each category should have a standard owner, evidence requirement, and escalation rule.

6.2 Risk-Based Prioritization

Not every reconciling item deserves the same urgency. Rank exceptions using amount, age, account risk, external-reporting significance, recurrence, reversibility, and proximity to a reporting deadline. AI can help classify and summarize, but the ranking logic should be transparent enough for finance to defend.

Risk Signal	Example Rule
Dollar value	Flag >\$25,000 or account-specific threshold.
Age	Escalate >60 days; critical >90 days.
Account sensitivity	Cash, revenue, payroll, tax, and intercompany receive higher weighting.
Recurrence	Same exception root cause appears three consecutive periods.
Evidence gap	No source support attached by review deadline.
External impact	Could affect covenant, lender, investor, or regulatory reporting.

6.3 Pattern Detection Across Periods

The biggest opportunity is not resolving the same exception faster each month. It is identifying why the exception keeps occurring and changing the upstream process. Use historical exception logs to find repeated vendors, accounts, entities, integration failures, cutoff problems, and manual workarounds.

6.4 Reviewer Work Product

A reconciliation-intelligence workflow should produce a reviewer packet containing the control total, unresolved exceptions, aging, largest items, recurring patterns, evidence gaps, preparer conclusion, AI-generated questions, and reviewer disposition. The output should make the review faster without making it less accountable.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

24. Define a reconciliation exception taxonomy for your five highest-risk balance-sheet accounts.
25. Create a risk score using amount, age, account sensitivity, recurrence, and evidence status.
26. Test the classification on three historical months and compare AI categories to human resolution.
27. Identify one recurring exception that should become a process-improvement project rather than a monthly close task.

CHAPTER 7

Accruals, Journal Entries, and Accounting Memo Workflows

Accelerate preparation and documentation while keeping accounting conclusions with qualified humans.

Accruals and journal entries sit near the center of accounting authority. That makes them poor candidates for autonomous execution and excellent candidates for controlled assistance. AI can organize source schedules, identify missing support, draft narratives, compare entries to historical patterns, and prepare accounting questions. It should not invent amounts, select accounting treatment without qualified review, or post entries on its own.

7.1 Accrual Workflow Design

Start with a deterministic accrual model where possible. Inputs may include open purchase orders, unbilled receipts, payroll cutoffs, contract schedules, recurring invoices, project progress, and prior-month reversals. AI can help classify incomplete items and generate follow-up questions, but the accrual basis must remain traceable to evidence.

7.2 Journal Entry Support Packet

Component	Minimum Standard
Purpose	Why the entry is needed and what period it affects.
Accounts/entities	Defined debit/credit scope and entity.
Calculation	Source schedule, formula, and sign convention.
Evidence	Invoices, contract, subledger, model, or approved estimate.
Policy basis	Relevant accounting policy or established practice.
Preparer/reviewer	Named accountable roles.
Reversal logic	Automatic/manual reversal date where applicable.

7.3 Anomaly Review

A workflow can compare proposed entries against historical patterns: unusual account combinations, weekend postings, late-period timing, uncommon users, round-dollar amounts, or

new manual entries to sensitive accounts. These signals do not prove an error or misconduct. They create a prioritized review queue.

7.4 Accounting Memo Assistant

For technical accounting or unusual transactions, AI can organize facts, list open questions, map issues to internal policy, create a memo outline, and identify evidence that a qualified accountant should obtain. When authoritative literature is required, use approved research sources and retain citations. The model should never fabricate references or substitute for technical review.

Accounting authority rule: the more directly a workflow can change books and records, the more deterministic the logic, explicit the evidence, and accountable the approval must become.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

28. Design a standard journal-entry support packet.
29. List the journal entry attributes that should trigger enhanced review.
30. Choose one recurring accrual and separate deterministic calculation steps from AI-assisted documentation steps.
31. Define the exact point at which human approval is required before posting.

CHAPTER 8

Multi-Entity and Intercompany Intelligence

Use structured matching and exception analysis to reduce consolidation friction.

Multi-entity finance creates complexity through timing, currency, mapping, ownership, and inconsistent local processes. Intercompany activity is especially suited to exception intelligence because the desired end state is clear: counterparties should agree on defined balances and transactions after valid timing and currency differences are considered.

8.1 Standardize the Intercompany Data Model

Every intercompany record should include legal entity, counterparty, account, transaction type, currency, document/reference, period, amount, and settlement status. Without a common structure, AI will spend effort inferring relationships that the data model should express directly.

8.2 Matching Before Explaining

Use deterministic matching rules first: exact reference, invoice number, amount/currency, date tolerance, counterparty pair, or approved fuzzy logic. Once unmatched items remain, AI can group them by likely cause and draft questions for entity owners.

8.3 Consolidation Readiness Dashboard

- Entity close status
- Intercompany unmatched balance
- Currency translation readiness
- Late local adjustments
- Unmapped accounts
- Consolidation eliminations
- Material entity-level fluxes
- Reviewer sign-off

The dashboard should prioritize what prevents consolidation rather than simply display every metric. A useful executive view answers: Which entity is blocking the close, why, how material is the issue, who owns it, and when will it be resolved?

8.4 Root-Cause Analytics

Repeated intercompany mismatches often signal process design issues: inconsistent cutoff, invoice creation timing, currency-rate differences, local chart-of-accounts mapping, or ownership ambiguity. Track root causes by entity pair and period so the organization can eliminate recurring failure modes.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

32. Define the minimum common fields required for intercompany matching.
33. List deterministic matching rules in priority order.
34. Define the categories an AI classifier may assign to unmatched items.
35. Create a consolidation-readiness score that highlights blockers rather than volume.

CHAPTER 9

AP, AR, Expense, and Transaction Automation

Automate communication and routing aggressively; automate money movement conservatively.

Transaction workflows contain high volumes of structured events and repetitive communication, making them strong automation candidates. They also contain fraud, privacy, payment, and vendor-master risk. The design objective is therefore to remove administrative friction while preserving independent verification for financially consequential actions.

9.1 Accounts Payable

AI can classify invoice exceptions, draft vendor questions, explain policy, summarize payment-run anomalies, and prepare coding suggestions based on approved rules. High-risk actions—new vendor setup, banking changes, payment release, and override of approval limits—should remain inside controlled ERP, procurement, and banking workflows with independent verification.

9.2 Accounts Receivable and Collections

Collections is ideal for a prioritized work-queue design. Segment open invoices using age, amount, dispute status, promise-to-pay date, customer importance, recent activity, and historical payment behavior. AI can draft outreach in the appropriate tone, summarize account history, and identify missing information before the collector engages.

9.3 Expense and Corporate Card Review

AI can explain policy, classify receipts, surface missing documentation, and group exceptions. It should not infer misconduct or make disciplinary decisions from ambiguous data. Use it to identify what requires a human review, not to decide intent.

9.4 Transaction-Workflow Metrics

Workflow	Useful Measures
AP	Touchless rate, exception rate, cycle time, duplicate-like flags, late-payment fees, discounts captured.
AR	DSO, past-due %, promise-to-pay kept %, disputes aging, collector touches, cash collected.
Expense	Receipt completeness, policy-exception rate, review cycle time, repeat exception categories.

Workflow	Useful Measures
Vendor master	Change requests, verification completion, failed verification, time to approved update.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

36. Choose one transaction process and define the standard work queue fields.
37. Identify which communications can be drafted automatically and which actions require explicit approval.
38. Define fraud-sensitive stop rules for vendor or payment changes.
39. Choose one cash or cycle-time metric that the redesigned workflow should improve.

PART III

Advanced Planning and Financial Intelligence

Move from reporting what happened to explaining drivers, testing scenarios, and focusing management attention.

CHAPTER 10

Advanced Variance Intelligence and Price-Volume-Mix

Turn variances into driver trees, investigation queues, and decisions.

A useful variance process is not a list of unfavorable percentages. It is a disciplined bridge between financial outcomes and operating drivers. Advanced AI can help finance structure the investigation, compare segments, prioritize material changes, and prepare management questions—but the arithmetic bridge should remain deterministic and reproducible.

10.1 Build the Variance Hierarchy

Start at the executive level and drill toward operational drivers. Revenue may decompose into price, volume, mix, customer count, churn, locations, utilization, or conversion. Gross margin may decompose into price, material input, labor, freight, discounts, yield, mix, and capacity absorption. The model should know which driver tree applies before generating narrative.

10.2 Price-Volume-Mix

Price-volume-mix analysis is powerful because it separates whether revenue changed due to selling more units, charging different prices, or changing the composition of what was sold. In complex businesses, the exact method matters. Finance should calculate the bridge using a defined methodology, then allow AI to summarize the largest contributors and ask the next questions.

10.3 Variance Investigation Queue

Field	Purpose
Metric/segment	Defines what changed.
Actual vs benchmark	Quantifies amount and percent.
Materiality flag	Applies approved threshold.
Known facts	Separates evidence from speculation.
Likely driver categories	Creates structured hypotheses.
Additional data needed	Defines what would confirm or reject each hypothesis.
Owner	Assigns operational accountability.

Field	Purpose
Decision deadline	Prevents open-ended analysis.

10.4 Narrative Discipline

Advanced commentary should identify what changed, the size, the supported driver, what remains unknown, and the required decision or follow-up. Avoid language that turns correlation into cause. If labor cost increased at the same time margin fell, the workflow should not state that labor caused the decline unless the bridge and operational data support it.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

40. Choose one major P&L line and build a driver tree beneath it.
41. Define deterministic calculations for the bridge.
42. Create a variance investigation table with known facts and missing data.
43. Test AI narrative on a historical period and compare it to management's documented explanation.

CHAPTER 11

Driver-Based Forecasting and Scenario Engines

Build forecasts around operational drivers, then use AI to challenge assumptions and communicate implications.

A forecast is a set of assumptions expressed financially. The more directly those assumptions connect to observable business drivers, the more useful the forecast becomes for decision-making. AI adds value when it helps structure driver trees, detect inconsistent assumptions, generate scenarios, summarize sensitivities, and prepare questions for owners.

11.1 Forecast Architecture

- Driver definitions
- Owner and source
- Baseline assumption
- Update frequency
- Relationship to financial line
- Leading indicator
- Sensitivity range
- Approval status

A forecast should make clear which assumptions are operational facts, management decisions, estimates, or scenario variables. That distinction prevents a polished forecast from hiding uncertainty.

11.2 Scenario Engine

A scenario engine should allow finance to vary the small set of drivers that meaningfully change cash, EBITDA, covenant headroom, or capacity. Examples include sales volume, price, labor rate, utilization, hiring timing, churn, capex, payment timing, and customer concentration. AI can translate scenario outputs into decision language once the model performs the calculations.

11.3 Forecast Challenge Agent

A challenge agent does not create the forecast. It asks disciplined questions: Which assumptions changed without evidence? Which cost lines are inconsistent with volume? Where does the plan exceed capacity? Which dependencies must occur for revenue to materialize? Which assumption explains most of the downside? What is the earliest leading indicator that the forecast is off track?

11.4 Forecast Confidence

Consider assigning confidence bands or assumption-risk ratings. A contractual backlog item may have higher confidence than an uncommitted pipeline conversion. A known payroll schedule may

have higher confidence than a variable bonus estimate. The goal is not false mathematical precision; it is visibility into which assumptions deserve management attention.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

44. Identify the ten drivers that explain most of revenue, gross margin, operating expense, and cash.
45. Assign each driver an owner, source, update frequency, and confidence level.
46. Define base, upside, and downside ranges for the five most material drivers.
47. Use AI to generate challenge questions—not values—for the next forecast review.

CHAPTER 12

Profitability Intelligence: Customer, Product, Job, and Location

Move beyond consolidated margin to the economics underneath the business.

Consolidated financial statements can look healthy while specific customers, jobs, products, or locations destroy value. Profitability intelligence combines finance and operational data so management can see where revenue converts into contribution and where hidden costs absorb it.

12.1 Define the Unit of Profitability

Choose the economic unit before building the analysis: customer, contract, job, product, SKU, location, service line, channel, project, or transaction. Then define revenue, direct cost, variable cost, allocated cost, and contribution at that level. Poor allocation design can create more confusion than insight, so distinguish directly attributable cost from managerial allocation.

12.2 Customer Profitability

Customer profitability can include price, discounts, returns, service hours, freight, commissions, support burden, payment behavior, and working-capital cost. AI can identify patterns such as high revenue combined with low contribution or recurring service burden, then prepare questions for sales and operations.

12.3 Job and Project Profitability

For job-based businesses, combine budget, committed cost, actual cost, labor hours, change orders, billing, retainage, and estimate-to-complete. AI can help summarize jobs at risk and generate investigation questions, while the underlying percent-complete or cost-to-complete logic remains controlled.

12.4 Location Economics

Multi-location businesses should normalize for operating days, volume, capacity, local labor, rent, utilities, and market maturity before comparing sites. AI can help segment locations into performance clusters and summarize driver differences, but finance should define the normalization rules.

12.5 Profitability Decision System

The goal is not a profitability dashboard. The goal is a decision system that leads to pricing changes, customer renegotiation, process improvement, labor redesign, capacity shifts, location action

plans, or portfolio decisions. Every material insight should end with an owner and an action question.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

48. Choose one profitability dimension and define contribution margin at that level.
49. List which costs are directly attributable and which are allocated.
50. Identify three operational drivers needed to explain low profitability.
51. Define the management action that should follow when an item crosses a threshold.

CHAPTER 13

Cash, Treasury, and Working-Capital Intelligence

Turn liquidity analysis into an operating rhythm across AR, AP, payroll, debt, and commitments.

Cash forecasting is where timing becomes strategy. A strong working-capital process connects AR collections, AP commitments, payroll, tax, debt service, capex, inventory, and operating decisions. AI can help focus attention on the timing assumptions and exceptions that most affect liquidity.

13.1 The 13-Week Cash Workflow

Design the forecast around dated expected receipts and payments rather than monthly P&L percentages. Each material line should have an owner, source, confidence, and variance explanation. Compare prior forecast to actual cash movement weekly so the process improves through operational feedback.

13.2 Collections Intelligence

Segment AR by amount, age, dispute, payment history, promise-to-pay, strategic value, and expected cash date. The workflow should prioritize accounts based on likely cash impact and required action, not simply oldest invoice first.

13.3 AP and Payment Concentration

Summarize upcoming payments by due date, vendor criticality, contractual commitment, discount opportunity, and operational risk. AI can prepare decision questions, but payment timing changes should follow approved treasury and vendor-management policies.

13.4 Cash Bridge Commentary

A profit-to-cash bridge should reconcile from net income or EBITDA through working capital, capex, debt, tax, and other material balance-sheet movements. AI can explain the bridge after finance has reconciled the numbers. The language should distinguish timing effects from economic deterioration.

13.5 Treasury Guardrails

- No credentials or authentication secrets in general AI tools.
- No autonomous release of wires, ACH, or checks without separately engineered controls.
- Independent verification for bank-account changes.
- Dual approval preserved where required.
- Model-generated payment instructions treated as untrusted until validated.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- 52. Build a weekly cash-forecast variance table comparing prior forecast to actual.
- 53. Identify the five assumptions that most often create forecast error.
- 54. Define a collections-priority score tied to expected cash impact.
- 55. Create a treasury stop rule for any action involving new or changed payment instructions.

CHAPTER 14

Labor Productivity, Capacity, and Operating Leverage

Connect payroll and staffing decisions to revenue capacity and margin.

Labor is often the largest controllable cost in a service business and one of the hardest drivers to interpret. Payroll totals alone do not tell management whether labor is productive, underutilized, constrained, or misaligned with demand. Financial intelligence should connect labor hours, rates, overtime, staffing mix, utilization, throughput, and capacity to the revenue and service model.

14.1 Build the Labor Driver Tree

- Headcount and role mix
- Scheduled hours
- Paid hours
- Productive/billable hours
- Overtime
- Average hourly or salary cost
- Revenue or units per labor hour
- Capacity utilization
- Vacancy and hiring timing

14.2 Separate Rate, Volume, and Efficiency

Labor cost can rise because rates increased, more hours were worked, overtime increased, mix shifted toward higher-cost roles, or productivity fell. An intelligent workflow should decompose the change rather than label payroll “over budget.”

14.3 Capacity Economics

Capacity models translate people and assets into potential revenue. For example, a field-service business may model technicians × available hours × utilization × jobs per hour × average revenue per job. AI can challenge assumptions and explain scenario outputs, while finance owns the driver model.

14.4 Headcount Decision Support

Before approving new positions, evaluate demand signal, revenue dependency, ramp time, vacancy risk, fully loaded cost, cash timing, and the downside scenario. A CFO briefing agent can summarize these factors into a one-page decision memo, but management makes the decision.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- 56. Build a labor-cost bridge separating rate, hours, overtime, and mix.
- 57. Define one productivity metric that connects labor to output or revenue.
- 58. Estimate practical capacity and compare it to current demand.
- 59. Create a headcount decision template that includes cash impact and downside assumptions.

PART IV

Power BI, Data, and Decision Systems

Connect accounting systems, operational data, BI, and AI without losing reconciliation or ownership.

CHAPTER 15

ERP → Data Transformation → Power BI → AI

A reference architecture for financial intelligence.

Finance technology should be designed as a chain of responsibility rather than a collection of tools. The ERP is typically the accounting system of record. Operational platforms supply drivers and activity. A transformation layer standardizes the data. Power BI organizes measures and decision views. AI interprets approved outputs, drafts questions, and accelerates communication. Management acts on the result.

15.1 Reference Architecture

QuickBooks / NetSuite / ERP + CRM / Payroll / Operations → Data extraction and transformation → Governed finance model → Power BI → AI interpretation → Human decision → Approved action

The exact products can change. The architecture principle is stable: calculations and definitions should live as close as practical to governed data; AI should consume validated outputs rather than raw, ambiguous exports whenever possible.

15.2 What Belongs Where

Layer	Primary Responsibility
Source systems	Transactions, master data, operational events.
Transformation	Cleaning, mapping, joins, standardization, historical logic.
Semantic/model layer	Measures, dimensions, relationships, definitions.
Power BI/reporting	Visualization, filters, drill paths, management views.
AI layer	Narrative, classification, question generation, scenario explanation, summarization.
Workflow/orchestration	Triggers, routing, approvals, notifications, evidence retention.
Management	Decision, accountability, action, escalation.

15.3 Avoid the “AI Calculates Everything” Trap

If a metric can be calculated deterministically in SQL, Power Query, DAX, the ERP, or a controlled model, calculate it there. Asking a generative model to perform repeated financial arithmetic inside

narrative prompts increases variability and makes reconciliation harder. Give AI the calculated result and ask it to interpret within constraints.

15.4 Refresh and Version Discipline

Every management view should disclose refresh time, period coverage, entity scope, known exclusions, and whether the data is final or preliminary. AI-generated narratives should inherit the same version context. A narrative generated from yesterday's data should not be presented beside a dashboard refreshed five minutes ago without clear labeling.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

60. Draw your current finance data architecture from source systems to executive reporting.
61. Identify calculations currently performed in spreadsheets that should move into a governed model.
62. Define where AI will consume validated outputs instead of raw data.
63. Add refresh timestamp and version status to one decision-critical report.

CHAPTER 16

Building an Executive Financial Intelligence System

Design the management view around decisions, not around charts.

An executive financial intelligence system is not simply a dashboard with more pages. It combines financial results, operational drivers, forecasts, cash, exceptions, and decision cues in a way that helps management act. The system should shorten the distance between a change in the business and an informed management response.

16.1 Executive Questions First

- Are we on plan?
- What changed materially?
- Why did it change?
- What is likely to happen next?
- What does this mean for cash?
- Where are margin or capacity risks?
- Which actions need executive attention now?

Design pages and narratives around these questions. If a metric does not support a decision or diagnostic path, it may not belong in the executive layer.

16.2 Core Pages

Page	Purpose
Executive overview	Revenue, margin, EBITDA, cash, forecast, top risks, top decisions.
P&L and variance	Budget/forecast/prior comparisons with material drivers.
Cash and working capital	Liquidity, AR, AP, cash forecast, collections concentration.
Profitability	Customer/product/job/location contribution and outliers.
Operations	Volume, capacity, labor productivity, service or production KPIs.
Forecast and scenarios	Base/upside/downside, sensitivities, leading indicators.
Exceptions and actions	Open issues, owners, aging, financial impact, next decision.

16.3 AI-Generated Executive Narrative

Narrative should be generated from a controlled set of measures and approved operational facts. A strong output leads with the three to five issues that most affect cash, EBITDA, risk, or strategic execution. It distinguishes confirmed cause from investigation question and links every material statement to the underlying metric or source note.

16.4 Mobile and Meeting Design

Executives often consume information during meetings and on mobile devices. Prioritize a small number of decision signals, use drill-through for detail, and avoid requiring a leader to interpret dense visualizations under time pressure. The AI layer can help compress detail into a short meeting brief while preserving links to the underlying evidence.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

64. List the seven questions your CEO or owner asks most often about performance.
65. Map each question to the metrics, drivers, and source systems required to answer it.
66. Design an executive overview containing no more than ten primary signals.
67. Define the rules for which issues appear in the executive exception list.

CHAPTER 17

Data Quality, Reconciliation, and Dashboard Trust

A decision system is only as credible as its ability to tie back to source records.

A visually impressive dashboard can become dangerous when management trusts it more than finance has validated it. Data quality must therefore be part of the reporting product, not an afterthought performed only when someone questions a number.

17.1 The Validation Ladder

- 68. Source completeness.
- 69. Row-count and period coverage.
- 70. Entity/currency scope.
- 71. Mapping and relationship integrity.
- 72. Transformation tests.
- 73. Metric reconciliation.
- 74. Filter/drill behavior.
- 75. Security and row-level access.
- 76. Refresh monitoring.
- 77. Exception and incident logging.

17.2 Control Totals

Define control totals at each layer. Source extracts may tie to ERP reports. Transformed tables may tie by entity and period. Power BI measures should reconcile to the governed model. AI-generated commentary should quote measures from the validated output, not recalculate them.

17.3 Automated QA

Automated tests can detect missing periods, duplicate keys, unexpected nulls, dimension drift, sign reversals, broken relationships, stale refreshes, and large unexplained reconciliation differences. AI can summarize the failures for the owner, but deterministic tests should decide whether the data pipeline is healthy enough to publish.

17.4 Incident Response

When a decision-critical report is wrong, the response should include containment, correction, impact assessment, root cause, communication, and prevention. Track the incident like a finance-control issue. The organization should know which decisions may have relied on the incorrect output and whether follow-up is required.

Trust is a feature. Build reconciliation, freshness, version, and exception status into the user experience.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- 78. Create control totals for one Power BI dataset at source, transformed, and report layers.
- 79. Define five automated data-quality tests.
- 80. Write the stop-publish condition when a validation fails.
- 81. Design an incident log for decision-critical reporting errors.

CHAPTER 18

Decision Briefs and Management Action Loops

Convert analysis into accountable decisions and measurable follow-through.

Finance creates influence when analysis changes what management does. Too many reporting processes end with a presentation rather than an action. A decision system should capture the issue, evidence, decision, owner, timing, expected financial effect, and actual outcome.

18.1 The Decision Brief

Section	Content
Decision required	What management must decide now.
Financial impact	Revenue, margin, cash, capex, or risk exposure.
Evidence	Validated metrics and known facts.
Assumptions	What must be true for the analysis to hold.
Alternatives	Realistic options and trade-offs.
Downside	What could go wrong and leading indicators.
Recommendation	Finance-supported option for discussion.
Owner/timing	Who acts and when outcome will be reviewed.

18.2 Close the Loop

After the decision, capture what happened. Did the price increase improve margin? Did hiring increase capacity? Did a collection initiative reduce past due AR? Did the location action plan change profitability? This creates a feedback loop between analysis and operating reality.

18.3 AI as Decision Memory

With appropriate controls and approved knowledge sources, AI can help summarize prior decisions, assumptions, and outcomes for management. This reduces repeated debates and helps finance identify where prior forecasts were accurate or where assumptions repeatedly failed.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- 82. Convert one recurring management report into a one-page decision brief.
- 83. Add a decision log with owner, expected outcome, review date, and actual result.
- 84. Choose one historical decision and compare the original assumptions to actual outcome.

PART V

AI Agents for Finance

Use agents to coordinate multi-step work under explicit permissions, controls, and human authority.

CHAPTER 19

Agent Design: From Assistant to Controlled Operator

An agent is valuable when it can plan or execute defined steps with tools—without escaping governance.

An AI assistant responds. An AI agent can often plan, call tools, retrieve information, update workflow state, or trigger actions within granted permissions. That capability makes agents useful for finance orchestration and dangerous when permissions are broader than controls.

19.1 The Agent Charter

Every finance agent should have a charter before it receives production access. The charter defines purpose, users, allowed tools, data scope, prohibited actions, human approvals, evidence retained, escalation conditions, performance metrics, and an owner who is accountable for changes.

19.2 Permission Design

Permission Type	Finance Standard
Read	Limit to approved sources and minimum necessary data.
Draft	May prepare text, classifications, or proposed actions for review.
Route	May assign tasks or notify owners under defined rules.
Write non-financial status	May update workflow metadata if reversible and logged.
Post/accounting entry	Generally requires explicit human approval and controlled ERP action.
Payment/money movement	Do not grant without separately engineered bank-grade controls and formal authorization.
External communication	Use approval for material financial, legal, audit, lender, or investor communications.

19.3 Agent Memory and Context

Long-lived agents need governed memory. Distinguish approved reference knowledge from temporary working context. Avoid allowing an agent to accumulate sensitive information without retention rules, source identifiers, and access controls. For finance, “remembering” should often mean retrieving from a controlled repository rather than storing unstructured model memory.

19.4 Agent Testing

- Known-good cases
- Known-bad cases
- Missing-data cases
- Conflicting-source cases
- Permission-boundary tests
- Prompt-injection or malicious-content tests
- Timeout/failure recovery
- Audit-log completeness
- Human override

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

85. Draft an agent charter for one finance use case.
86. List the minimum tools and permissions required.
87. List five prohibited actions.
88. Design three test cases where the correct behavior is to stop and ask for human review.

CHAPTER 20

The Close Agent

Coordinate tasks, exceptions, evidence, and review without becoming the controller.

A close agent is best designed as an orchestrator. It watches status, gathers approved evidence, summarizes blockers, drafts questions, and routes work. It does not decide material accounting treatment, approve reconciliations, or post entries without explicit human authorization.

20.1 Close Agent Responsibilities

- Read close calendar and task state
- Detect overdue tasks and dependencies
- Summarize missing evidence
- Collect reconciliation exception lists
- Generate reviewer questions
- Prepare entity readiness summary
- Draft management variance questions
- Escalate blockers according to rules

20.2 Example Workflow

At 8:00 AM the agent refreshes close status. It identifies three overdue reconciliations and one entity blocked by an intercompany mismatch. It retrieves the approved exception summaries, groups the issues by owner and impact, drafts targeted follow-up questions, and prepares a controller brief. The controller reviews the brief, assigns priority, and decides whether the issue affects reporting timing. The agent updates status only after the human disposition is recorded.

20.3 Stop Conditions

- Trial balance not tied to ERP control total
- Source file period mismatch
- Material unsupported reconciling item
- Proposed entry above approval threshold
- Unresolved policy question
- Missing required reviewer

20.4 Close Agent Metrics

Measure reduction in status-chasing time, overdue tasks, review cycle, unresolved exceptions, and time from ledger close to management package. Do not measure success by number of messages generated or tasks touched.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- 89. Write the close agent's daily run schedule.
- 90. Define the source systems or trackers it can read.
- 91. Define what status it may update automatically.
- 92. Create an exception brief template for the controller.

CHAPTER 21

The Collections Agent

Prioritize cash impact, prepare context, and support collectors without damaging customer relationships.

A collections agent should make a human collector more effective. It can segment accounts, summarize history, identify disputes, draft outreach, schedule follow-ups, and update non-financial workflow status. It should not threaten legal action, change customer credit terms, waive balances, or commit to concessions without authorized human involvement.

21.1 Inputs

- AR aging
- Customer master and strategic tier
- Payment history
- Dispute status
- Promise-to-pay date
- Recent notes or communications
- Open credits
- Sales/account-owner information

21.2 Prioritization

A useful score combines expected cash impact with collectability and urgency. A \$250,000 disputed strategic account may deserve a different action than a \$5,000 invoice 120 days past due. Make the score transparent enough that collectors understand why an account is prioritized.

21.3 Human-Centered Outreach

Use AI to adapt tone and context, not to create pressure indiscriminately. The agent can prepare a concise account summary and draft a message referencing invoice, due date, current status, and requested next step. The collector reviews and sends according to company policy.

21.4 Feedback to Forecast

The most valuable integration is linking collection disposition to the cash forecast. A confirmed promise-to-pay, active dispute, broken promise, or customer credit issue should update expected cash timing under controlled rules. This connects AR activity to treasury visibility.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

93. Create a collections prioritization score using five transparent factors.
94. Define three outreach templates by customer situation.
95. Define which collector dispositions should update the cash forecast.
96. List actions the agent may never take without approval.

CHAPTER 22

The FP&A Agent

Maintain assumptions, challenge drivers, prepare scenarios, and accelerate management review.

An FP&A agent can become the connective layer between operating assumptions and finance review. Its strongest role is not inventing forecasts. It is maintaining structured assumptions, identifying changes, challenging inconsistencies, running approved scenario inputs through controlled models, and preparing concise management narratives.

22.1 Assumption Registry

Create a registry for material assumptions: name, owner, source, current value, prior value, update date, confidence, scenario sensitivity, and approval status. The agent can detect stale assumptions and prepare owner questions before the forecast cycle begins.

22.2 Forecast Review

- Compare current assumptions to prior cycle
- Flag missing updates
- Identify internal inconsistencies
- Rank drivers by EBITDA and cash sensitivity
- Prepare questions for department owners
- Summarize base/upside/downside results
- Document changes approved in review

22.3 Management Narrative

Once finance validates the model output, the agent can draft a narrative focused on decision relevance: what changed, why the change is supported, what is uncertain, what leading indicators management should watch, and what decisions may be required.

22.4 Forecast Governance

The agent should not overwrite approved assumptions silently. Changes should have version, owner, rationale, and approval. The system should preserve prior forecasts so finance can evaluate forecast accuracy rather than constantly replacing history.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- 97. Build a forecast assumption registry.
- 98. Define rules for stale or unapproved assumptions.
- 99. List the five sensitivity outputs the FP&A agent should prepare for management.
- 100. Define the approval workflow for changing a material assumption.

CHAPTER 23

The CFO Briefing Agent

Convert validated finance information into concise executive preparation and decision support.

A CFO briefing agent should reduce preparation time without becoming an unfiltered narrator of the business. Its source set should be deliberately curated: approved management reports, forecast outputs, cash views, decision logs, risk registers, and defined operational KPIs.

23.1 Daily or Weekly Brief

- Material financial movements
- Cash and working-capital changes
- Forecast or scenario changes
- Top operational exceptions
- Decisions due
- Overdue actions
- External deadlines
- Questions requiring CFO judgment

23.2 Meeting Preparation

For a meeting with sales, operations, the CEO, or a lender, the agent can prepare a one-page brief containing relevant financial results, prior commitments, open questions, scenario exposure, and decisions required. It should cite the underlying reports or records used to construct the brief.

23.3 Board and Investor Support

Use heightened controls for external audiences. The agent may organize approved facts and draft narrative, but finance leadership must validate every material statement and ensure consistency with official reporting. External communication is an authority boundary, not simply a writing task.

23.4 Decision Memory

Link the briefing agent to a controlled decision log. Before a recurring discussion, it can summarize what management decided last time, which assumptions were used, what follow-up was assigned, and whether the expected outcome occurred.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

101. Define the approved source set for a CFO briefing agent.

102. Create a one-page weekly brief template.
103. Define which external-use drafts require enhanced review.
104. Connect the briefing template to a decision log and action register.

CHAPTER 24

Audit-Request and Contract-Review Agents

Use agents to organize evidence and terms without manufacturing support or legal conclusions.

Audit and contract workflows involve large volumes of documents, repeated questions, and cross-functional routing. Agents can create meaningful capacity when they organize what exists. They create risk when they invent what is missing.

24.1 Audit-Request Agent

An audit agent can ingest the PBC list, assign owners, track due dates, identify dependencies, compare submitted evidence to request descriptions, draft status updates, and flag overdue or incomplete items. It should never create evidence, alter source documents, or represent that a control operated when support is missing.

24.2 Contract-Review Agent

A finance contract agent can extract commercial and accounting-relevant terms such as price, billing, renewal, termination, rebates, variable consideration, performance obligations, payment timing, currency, indemnity references, or service-level penalties. It can compare extracted terms to a checklist and route open questions to legal, tax, security, sales, or accounting.

24.3 Grounding and Citations

Document agents should preserve page, section, or clause references so reviewers can verify every extracted term. A summary without traceable source location is not sufficient for decision-critical contract or audit work.

24.4 Permission and Confidentiality

Contracts and audit evidence may contain confidential or privileged material. Use approved environments, role-based access, and minimum necessary data. Restrict cross-client or cross-entity retrieval in environments where separation is required.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

105. Create a standard PBC tracker schema and completeness checklist.
106. Define the contract fields finance most often needs extracted.
107. Require source location for every material extracted term.
108. List the categories that must route to legal, tax, security, or technical accounting rather than being concluded by the agent.

PART VI

Automation Architecture, Governance, and ROI

Engineer repeatable workflows, prove business value, and scale only what remains controlled.

CHAPTER 25

Workflow Automation Architecture

Choose triggers, orchestration, tools, approvals, and failure recovery deliberately.

A production workflow is more than an AI prompt connected to an automation platform. It is an event-driven system with dependencies, permissions, logging, retries, human approvals, and exception handling. The architecture should make failure visible rather than silently moving bad information downstream.

25.1 Core Components

Trigger: Schedule, file arrival, close task completion, threshold breach, new invoice, new forecast version, or human request.

Orchestrator: Coordinates sequence, tool calls, status, retries, and approvals.

Data services: Retrieve source data, apply transformations, and return governed metrics.

AI service: Classifies, summarizes, drafts, or analyzes within defined context.

Human gate: Required review or approval before higher-risk actions.

Action connector: Updates workflow status, publishes report, creates task, or sends approved communication.

Audit log: Records inputs, outputs, versions, approvals, errors, and actions.

25.2 Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Workflows

Not every process should wait for an immediate response. Close, audit, and collections workflows often benefit from asynchronous orchestration: create work, wait for evidence or human review, then resume. Design timeouts and reminders explicitly so the process does not disappear between systems.

25.3 Idempotency and Duplicate Protection

Finance automation must avoid performing the same action twice when a workflow retries. Use unique transaction or workflow IDs, status checks, and deterministic safeguards before writing back to systems. Duplicate protection is especially important around task creation, external communication, and any financial action.

25.4 Failure Recovery

Define what happens when a source system is unavailable, a file is malformed, the model times out, a reviewer does not respond, or a downstream connector fails. The safe default for finance is usually stop, preserve state, notify owner, and require confirmed recovery before progressing.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

- 109. Draw the trigger-to-action architecture for your pilot workflow.
- 110. Identify every external system or connector involved.
- 111. Define retry rules and duplicate-protection logic.
- 112. Define the safe failure state for each critical dependency.

CHAPTER 26

Security, Governance, and Failure Modes

Advanced automation requires stronger governance because errors can propagate faster.

The risk profile changes when AI moves from drafting to orchestration. A wrong paragraph can be corrected. A wrong classification routed through thousands of items can create operational disruption. An agent with excessive permissions can create a control failure at machine speed. Governance must scale with capability.

26.1 Threat and Failure Categories

Category	Examples
Data exposure	Restricted finance data sent to unapproved tool, over-broad retrieval, excessive retention.
Model error	Fabricated facts, unsupported cause, omitted exception, false confidence.
Automation error	Wrong trigger, duplicate action, stale file, failed dependency.
Permission failure	Agent can modify data or act beyond approved scope.
Control bypass	Human gate skipped, segregation of duties collapsed.
Prompt/content attack	Malicious document attempts to redirect agent behavior or expose data.
Monitoring failure	Workflow breaks silently and output continues to publish.

26.2 Layered Controls

Use multiple control layers rather than relying on a single prompt. Access controls protect data. Deterministic validation protects inputs. Prompt constraints shape output. Human review protects judgment. Approval systems protect authority. Logging supports auditability. Monitoring detects failure. No single layer is sufficient by itself.

26.3 Change Management

Treat material workflow changes like system changes. Document owner, purpose, test evidence, version, approval, rollback plan, and production date. A small prompt edit can materially change classification or narrative behavior; it should not bypass change control simply because it is “just text.”

26.4 Periodic Review

Reassess workflows as business processes, policies, vendor capabilities, and risk levels change. Track incidents, override rates, false positives, reviewer corrections, and drift in source data. Retire automations that no longer create value or cannot be governed adequately.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

113. Create a failure-mode register for the pilot workflow.
114. Assign preventive and detective controls to each high-risk failure.
115. Define change-control requirements for prompts, rules, data mappings, and permissions.
116. Set a periodic review cadence and owner.

CHAPTER 27

Finance AI ROI and the Business Case

Measure outcomes that matter to finance: time, quality, cash, margin, risk, and decision latency.

Finance AI projects are easy to overstate because vendors and teams may count every generated message as productivity. A credible business case ties the workflow to measurable operating outcomes. Some benefits are hard-dollar; others create capacity, control improvement, or faster decisions. Keep the categories separate.

27.1 Benefit Categories

Category	Examples
Labor capacity	Hours removed from extraction, formatting, chasing, summarizing, or repetitive drafting.
Cycle time	Faster close, forecast, audit response, collections follow-up, or management reporting.
Cash	Lower DSO, improved forecast accuracy, fewer late fees, better working-capital action.
Margin	Pricing improvement, profitability visibility, labor productivity, reduced leakage.
Quality	Fewer corrections, lower rework, improved evidence completeness, consistent narratives.
Risk/control	Earlier exception detection, preserved approvals, better audit trail, reduced manual workaround.
Decision latency	Time from data availability to management decision or action.

27.2 Capacity vs. Cost Savings

Saving ten hours does not automatically reduce cost. Distinguish capacity released from actual spend eliminated. Capacity may still be extremely valuable if finance can redirect it to analysis, business partnership, control review, or growth support. State the benefit honestly.

27.3 ROI Formula

A practical annual business case includes recurring benefit minus recurring operating cost, compared with implementation cost. Include software, integration, testing, governance, training, and ongoing ownership. For higher-risk workflows, include the cost of required controls rather than treating governance as free.

27.4 Pilot Scorecard

Metric	Baseline / Target Example
Hours per cycle	18 -> 8
Days to management package	Day 8 -> Day 5
Reviewer corrections	12 -> 5
Past-due AR over 60 days	\$1.2M -> \$900K
Forecast MAE	12% -> 8%
Decision turnaround	5 days -> 2 days
Policy/control exceptions	Maintain at 0 critical

27.5 Value Realization

Measure after implementation, not only in the business case. Compare target to actual benefit, document adoption and exceptions, and decide whether to scale, redesign, or stop. A workflow that looks impressive but is not used or does not change outcomes has not created value.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

117. Estimate annual hours released and distinguish capacity from cash savings.
118. Identify one hard-dollar or working-capital metric connected to the workflow.
119. Estimate recurring operating and governance cost.
120. Create a 90-day value-realization scorecard.

CHAPTER 28

The 90-Day Advanced Implementation Roadmap

Move from controlled pilot to an operating capability that can scale.

Advanced AI adoption should progress through a sequence of design, pilot, evidence, and scale. The purpose of the first 90 days is not to automate everything. It is to prove one or two workflows can create measurable value without weakening data quality, controls, or accountability.

Days 1–30: Architect

- Select one high-value workflow from the process inventory.
- Create current-state map and baseline metrics.
- Apply BEV DECIDE™.
- Define data contract and control totals.
- Write agent/workflow charter.
- Define permissions and prohibited actions.
- Build test cases and known-good historical examples.
- Approve pilot scope and owners.

Days 31–60: Pilot

- Run in shadow mode alongside the existing process.
- Compare AI classifications and narratives to human outcomes.
- Track reviewer corrections and false positives.
- Test failure conditions and permission boundaries.
- Measure cycle time and hours.
- Refine thresholds, prompts, routing, and evidence requirements.
- Document incidents and lessons learned.

Days 61–90: Operationalize

- Approve production use for bounded steps.
- Implement monitoring and exception alerts.
- Establish change control and versioning.
- Train users and reviewers.
- Publish support and escalation process.
- Begin value-realization reporting.
- Select the next workflow only after the first has stable ownership.

28.1 Scale Criteria

Scale When	Do Not Scale When
Source data is reliable and monitored.	Inputs still require significant manual cleanup.
Control boundaries are explicit.	Permissions are broader than required.
Reviewer corrections are stable or declining.	Reviewers frequently rewrite or distrust outputs.
Value is measurable.	Benefits are anecdotal.
Ownership is assigned.	The workflow depends on one informal expert.
Failures are visible and recoverable.	Errors can propagate silently.

The fastest path to enterprise AI is not a bigger pilot. It is a small number of production workflows that people trust, use, measure, and can explain.

Implementation Lab

Complete this before moving to the next chapter. The goal is a usable work product, not a conceptual answer.

121. Build your own 90-day implementation calendar.
122. Name the executive sponsor, process owner, technical owner, and reviewer roles.
123. Define production-readiness criteria before the pilot begins.
124. Choose the evidence you will present to leadership at Day 90.

APPENDICES

Implementation Templates and Advanced Toolkits

Use these as working artifacts for real finance automation projects.

CHAPTER A

BEV DECIDE™ Workflow Canvas

A one-page design template for any AI-enabled finance workflow.

Data & Sources

List source systems, datasets, owners, periods, entities, dimensions, and refresh timing.

Working Question	Your Design
List source systems, datasets, owners, periods, entities, dimensions, and refresh timing.	
Key risk	
Owner	Due/Review: _____

Evidence & Validation

List control totals, completeness checks, row-count checks, reconciliations, and data-quality tests.

Working Question	Your Design
List control totals, completeness checks, row-count checks, reconciliations, and data-quality tests.	
Key risk	
Owner	Due/Review: _____

Controls & Constraints

List approvals, materiality, policy rules, prohibited actions, restricted data, and segregation-of-duties requirements.

Working Question	Your Design
List approvals, materiality, policy rules, prohibited actions, restricted data, and segregation-of-duties requirements.	

Working Question	Your Design
Key risk	
Owner	Due/Review: _____

Intelligence & Analysis

Describe exactly what AI will classify, summarize, compare, draft, or simulate.

Working Question	Your Design
Describe exactly what AI will classify, summarize, compare, draft, or simulate.	
Key risk	
Owner	Due/Review: _____

Decision Review

Name reviewer role, required evidence, escalation conditions, and review turnaround.

Working Question	Your Design
Name reviewer role, required evidence, escalation conditions, and review turnaround.	
Key risk	
Owner	Due/Review: _____

Execution & Measurement

Describe approved action, retained evidence, success metrics, and review cadence.

Working Question	Your Design
Describe approved action, retained evidence, success metrics, and review cadence.	
Key risk	

Working Question	Your Design
Owner	<div></div> Due/Review: <div></div>

CHAPTER B

Finance AI Agent Charter

Define the mission and boundaries before granting tools or data access.

Charter Field	Definition / Entry
Agent name and owner	
Business objective	
Primary users	
Approved data sources	
Approved tools/connectors	
Read permissions	
Write/status permissions	
Prohibited actions	
Human approval points	
Required evidence/logging	
Escalation conditions	
Performance metrics	
Change-control owner	
Review cadence	

Recommended approval: Process Owner + Finance Control Owner + Technology/Security Owner for any agent with connected-system access.

CHAPTER C

Finance Data Contract Template

Make upstream expectations explicit so downstream intelligence can be trusted.

Data Contract Field	Definition / Entry
Dataset name	
Business purpose	
System of record	
Owner	
Grain	
Required keys	
Required fields	
Refresh schedule	
Period/entity scope	
Currency	
Valid values	
Control total	
Tolerance	
Known exclusions	
Failure response	
Retention/version rule	

CHAPTER D

Testing and QA Checklist

Test data, logic, permissions, behavior, and failure recovery before production.

- ☐ Historical known-good case produces expected classification and narrative.
- ☐ Known-bad case is correctly stopped or escalated.
- ☐ Missing source data causes stop, not fabricated completion.
- ☐ Conflicting sources are surfaced rather than silently resolved.
- ☐ Control totals reconcile before intelligence step.
- ☐ Material calculations tie independently.
- ☐ Prompt/model output distinguishes fact from inference.
- ☐ Unauthorized data is inaccessible.
- ☐ Agent cannot perform prohibited write or payment action.
- ☐ Human approval cannot be bypassed.
- ☐ Duplicate-trigger test does not create duplicate action.
- ☐ Connector failure preserves workflow state and alerts owner.
- ☐ Timeout and retry behavior is documented.
- ☐ Audit log records source version, output, reviewer, and action.
- ☐ Rollback or disable process is tested.
- ☐ User training and escalation instructions are published.

CHAPTER E

Finance AI ROI Calculator

Build a credible business case and distinguish capacity from cash savings.

E.1 Baseline

Input	Value
Cycles per year	_____
People involved	_____
Hours per cycle	_____
Average loaded hourly cost	\$_____
Current error/rework hours	_____
Current cycle time	_____ days
Current cash/margin KPI	_____

E.2 Benefits

Benefit	Annual Estimate
Hours released	_____
Capacity value	\$_____
Direct spend avoided	\$_____
Working-capital benefit	\$_____
Margin/revenue benefit	\$_____
Risk/control benefit	Qualitative / \$_____ if defensible

E.3 Costs

Cost	Annual / One-Time
Software/licenses	\$_____

Cost	Annual / One-Time
Integration/build	\$_____
Testing and controls	\$_____
Training/change	\$_____
Ongoing ownership	\$_____
Security/governance	\$_____

E.4 Decision

Document payback period, year-one net benefit, annual recurring net benefit, key assumptions, and the conditions that would make the business case fail. Avoid counting the same benefit twice across labor, cycle time, and decision improvement.

CHAPTER F

Prompt Chains for Multi-Step Workflows

Examples that connect analysis steps without treating one long prompt as a workflow.

F.1 Variance Chain

- 125. Validate that the supplied table contains period, account/metric, actual, budget/forecast, and variance. Identify missing fields only.
- 126. Apply materiality thresholds and return a ranked exception table. Do not infer causes.
- 127. For each material item, generate investigation questions and the additional data needed to test each hypothesis.
- 128. After factual explanations are supplied by owners, draft an executive narrative separating facts, confirmed causes, open questions, and actions.
- 129. Run a final validation pass: list unsupported statements, calculations to check, and missing evidence.

F.2 Reconciliation Chain

- 130. Classify reconciling items into approved exception categories.
- 131. Rank by amount, age, account risk, and evidence status.
- 132. Draft owner questions for high-risk items.
- 133. After owner responses, summarize proposed resolution and identify items requiring accounting judgment.
- 134. Prepare reviewer packet without proposing unsupported entries.

F.3 Collections Chain

- 135. Validate aging data and identify missing customer/dispute fields.
- 136. Rank accounts using approved priority score.
- 137. Summarize account history and recent disposition.
- 138. Draft outreach for collector review.
- 139. Convert approved collector disposition into expected-cash timing update.

Chain design rule: every step should have a defined input/output schema and validation. A sequence of prompts is not a controlled workflow until handoffs, evidence, and authority are designed.

CHAPTER G

Power BI Validation Checklist

A finance-specific QA standard for decision-critical dashboards.

- ☐ Source files/tables cover expected periods and entities.
- ☐ Source control totals tie to accounting/operational systems.
- ☐ Dimensions map completely and consistently.
- ☐ Relationships are one-to-many/many-to-many only where intended.
- ☐ DAX measures use documented sign and period conventions.
- ☐ Budget/forecast versions are explicit.
- ☐ Currency conversion logic is documented.
- ☐ Returns/credits/voids are included correctly.
- ☐ Filters and slicers do not create misleading totals.
- ☐ Drill-through retains correct context.
- ☐ Row-level security is tested by role.
- ☐ Refresh date/time is visible.
- ☐ Stale refresh alerts are configured.
- ☐ Mobile layout is reviewed for executive pages.
- ☐ Dashboard totals reconcile to management package.
- ☐ Known exclusions are documented.
- ☐ AI narrative consumes validated measures rather than raw ambiguous data.

CHAPTER H

Automation Risk Matrix

Scale controls with financial impact, external exposure, and reversibility.

Risk Level	Typical Characteristics
Low	Internal drafting, non-sensitive data, easy to correct, normal review.
Moderate	Internal financial analysis, source tie-out required, human review before use.
High	Material accounting/forecasting, sensitive data, external or executive impact, formal evidence and qualified review.
Restricted	Posting, payment, credentials, bank changes, irreversible actions, or regulated data without separately engineered controls.

H.1 Control Escalation Questions

- Could an error change books and records?
- Could an error move money?
- Could the output reach an external stakeholder?
- Does the workflow use restricted or regulated data?
- Can the action be reversed easily?
- Is there an independent reviewer?
- Can every material statement be traced to evidence?
- Can the system stop safely when a dependency fails?

CHAPTER I

Executive Implementation Playbook

A concise operating checklist for finance leaders sponsoring advanced AI automation.

Strategy

- Select problems tied to cash, margin, cycle time, quality, or capacity.
- Prioritize a small portfolio rather than broad experimentation.
- Set measurable outcomes before selecting technology.

Data

- Name systems of record.
- Standardize definitions and dimensions.
- Create data contracts and control totals.

Controls

- Define prohibited actions and human gates.
- Preserve segregation of duties.
- Retain evidence, versions, and approvals.

Technology

- Keep calculations deterministic where practical.
- Use AI for interpretation, classification, drafting, and orchestration.
- Engineer monitoring, retry, duplicate protection, and safe failure.

People

- Train users and reviewers differently.
- Assign process and technology ownership.
- Build escalation and support into the operating model.

Value

- Baseline before implementation.
- Track adoption, rework, cycle time, cash/margin outcomes, and incidents.
- Scale only after value and control are demonstrated.

APPENDIX J — Advanced Case Studies and Build Labs

These cases are designed to test architecture, controls, analysis, agent behavior, and value measurement together. Each case requires more than a prompt. The reader should produce a workflow map, a BEV DECIDE™ design, a control plan, and a measurable implementation recommendation.

Case 1: The Close Is Faster—but Rework Is Rising

A six-entity services company reduced its close from nine business days to six after introducing automated status reminders, AI-drafted flux commentary, and reconciliation exception summaries. The CFO is pleased with the faster management package, but the controller sees a different pattern: reviewer comments have increased, several explanations are being rewritten after operating meetings, and two entities are completing tasks before all source reports are final. The close is faster, but finance is spending more time correcting and explaining the work after publication.

Your Assignment

140. Identify which problem is data readiness, which is workflow design, and which is review design.
141. Apply BEV DECIDE™ to the management-commentary workflow.
142. Define at least four production-readiness tests that should occur before narrative generation.
143. Design a reviewer queue that focuses attention on material and unsupported items.
144. Choose three KPIs that would show whether the redesigned close is truly improving.

Model Approach

Model approach: preserve the cycle-time gain but stop measuring the close only by days. Introduce a readiness gate requiring final source status, control-total reconciliation, approved materiality thresholds, and source completeness before AI commentary is produced. Separate numerical observation from operating explanation. Route material items to designated owners for factual cause confirmation, then require controller review for the final narrative. Add reviewer corrections, post-publication restatements, and time-to-approved-management-package to the scorecard. The goal is a faster approved work product, not merely a faster first draft.

Build Artifact

Produce a one-page current-state map, a BEV DECIDE™ workflow design, a control-and-permission matrix, a testing plan, and a 90-day value scorecard for this case. The exercise is complete only when the proposed automation can be explained to a controller, CFO, auditor, and technology owner in the same language.

Case 2: The Collections Agent Improves Activity but Not Cash

A distribution company deploys a collections agent that ranks overdue invoices and drafts customer emails. Collector activity increases sharply, and the agent sends more follow-up drafts than the team could previously produce. After two months, however, DSO is unchanged and past-due balances over 60 days are slightly higher. Management initially concludes that the AI initiative failed. A deeper review shows that many high-value accounts are in dispute, promised payment dates are not being captured consistently, and collectors are spending time on easy low-dollar accounts because those drafts are faster to approve.

Your Assignment

145. Redesign the prioritization score around expected cash impact rather than activity volume.
146. Define the disposition fields required after every collector touch.
147. Explain how dispute data should flow into the cash forecast.
148. Define which metrics should be removed from the success dashboard and which should be added.
149. Design a weekly management review using agent output without allowing the agent to make credit or concession decisions.

Model Approach

Model approach: replace “messages generated” and “accounts touched” with cash-oriented metrics such as dollars collected, promise-to-pay kept rate, reduction in >60-day balances, dispute aging, and forecast accuracy for expected receipts. Require collectors to record standardized dispositions. High-value disputes should route to cross-functional owners rather than remain in the general queue. The collections agent should support prioritization and preparation; management should own credit terms, write-offs, concessions, and legal escalation.

Build Artifact

Produce a one-page current-state map, a BEV DECIDE™ workflow design, a control-and-permission matrix, a testing plan, and a 90-day value scorecard for this case. The exercise is complete only when the proposed automation can be explained to a controller, CFO, auditor, and technology owner in the same language.

Case 3: A Power BI Margin Dashboard Disagrees With the General Ledger

A manufacturer launches a Power BI dashboard showing gross margin by product family, customer, and plant. Sales and operations begin using it for pricing decisions. Finance later discovers that a transformation step excluded certain credit memos and that one plant maps freight into operating expense while the others include it in cost of sales. The total company margin in the dashboard does not reconcile to the general ledger, although the visual trends appear plausible.

Your Assignment

150. Define the validation ladder that should have existed before production release.
151. Write the finance semantic definitions required for gross margin and freight treatment.
152. Create control totals by entity/plant and period.
153. Define the incident-response steps after discovering the error.
154. Explain what AI may assist with during remediation and what must remain deterministic.

Model Approach

Model approach: suspend decision-critical use until the dashboard reconciles. Establish a governed gross-margin definition, map freight treatment consistently, include credit/return logic, and create automated control totals at source, transformation, and model layers. Assess which management decisions relied on the incorrect view and communicate the impact. AI can help write test cases, summarize exceptions, and draft remediation documentation, but the corrected calculations and reconciliations must be deterministic and independently validated.

Build Artifact

Produce a one-page current-state map, a BEV DECIDE™ workflow design, a control-and-permission matrix, a testing plan, and a 90-day value scorecard for this case. The exercise is complete only when the proposed automation can be explained to a controller, CFO, auditor, and technology owner in the same language.

Case 4: The FP&A Agent Changes Assumptions Without Clear Approval

A SaaS company builds an FP&A agent to maintain forecast assumptions from department updates. The agent reads meeting notes and planning forms, then proposes changes to hiring dates, software spend, pipeline conversion, and churn assumptions. During a fast forecast cycle, several proposed changes are accepted in bulk. The forecast improves operationally, but later the CFO cannot tell which assumptions were management decisions, which came from department owners, and which were inferred from narrative context.

Your Assignment

155. Design an assumption registry with owner, source, confidence, and approval state.
156. Define which changes may be proposed automatically and which require individual approval.
157. Create version-control requirements for each forecast cycle.
158. Specify how the agent should handle conflicting statements in meeting notes and planning forms.
159. Design a CFO change summary that makes assumption movement reviewable.

Model Approach

Model approach: treat assumptions as governed data. Every material driver should have an owner, source, prior value, proposed value, reason, effective period, confidence, and approval status. The agent may suggest changes but should not overwrite approved assumptions silently. Conflicts should route to the owner. Preserve versions so forecast accuracy and decision history can be analyzed rather than erased by the next refresh.

Build Artifact

Produce a one-page current-state map, a BEV DECIDE™ workflow design, a control-and-permission matrix, a testing plan, and a 90-day value scorecard for this case. The exercise is complete only when the proposed automation can be explained to a controller, CFO, auditor, and technology owner in the same language.

Case 5: The CFO Briefing Agent Is Concise—but Too Confident

A multi-location healthcare-services company uses a CFO briefing agent to summarize weekly financial and operational performance. Leaders like the one-page format, but the agent begins attributing causes based on correlations: it states that overtime caused margin compression in two regions and that a marketing campaign drove volume growth, even though the underlying data only shows the events occurred at the same time. The CFO realizes that polished language is creating more confidence than the evidence supports.

Your Assignment

160. Rewrite the briefing standard to distinguish fact, supported cause, hypothesis, and open question.
161. Define the approved source set for the agent.
162. Create a rule for when a statement requires source citation or operational confirmation.
163. Design an executive format that preserves uncertainty without becoming unreadable.
164. Choose a reviewer role and required sign-off for external or board use.

Model Approach

Model approach: require the agent to label each statement as observed fact, confirmed driver, hypothesis, or unknown. A material causal statement should require evidence from a defined driver bridge or confirmation from an accountable operating owner. The briefing can remain concise by using a structured format: result, magnitude, evidence, implication, next question. External or board-facing use requires finance-leadership review of every material statement.

Build Artifact

Produce a one-page current-state map, a BEV DECIDE™ workflow design, a control-and-permission matrix, a testing plan, and a 90-day value scorecard for this case. The exercise is complete only when the proposed automation can be explained to a controller, CFO, auditor, and technology owner in the same language.

Case 6: An Agent Has More Permission Than the Process Needs

A company pilots a finance operations agent connected to the ERP, ticketing platform, shared drive, and email. To simplify setup, the implementation team grants broad write access so the agent can update tasks and attach evidence. During testing, the team discovers that the same credential technically allows the agent to edit vendor master records and create journal-entry drafts inside the ERP. The workflow does not require either capability, but the permissions exist.

Your Assignment

165. Apply least-privilege design to the agent charter.
166. Separate read, draft, route, and write permissions by system.
167. Define a permission-boundary test plan.
168. Design a response if a connector cannot provide sufficiently granular permissions.
169. Explain why “the prompt tells it not to” is not an adequate control.

Model Approach

Model approach: reduce permissions to the minimum needed for the defined workflow. If the connector cannot separate low-risk status updates from higher-risk financial writes, remove the write permission or introduce an intermediate controlled service. Prompts are behavioral instructions, not access controls. A secure architecture assumes the model may behave unexpectedly and uses technical permissions, approval gates, and monitoring to prevent prohibited actions.

Build Artifact

Produce a one-page current-state map, a BEV DECIDE™ workflow design, a control-and-permission matrix, a testing plan, and a 90-day value scorecard for this case. The exercise is complete only when the proposed automation can be explained to a controller, CFO, auditor, and technology owner in the same language.

APPENDIX K — Finance AI Automation Maturity

Scorecard

Use this scorecard to assess whether a finance function is ready to move from isolated AI use to connected automation and agents. Score each dimension from 1 (ad hoc) to 5 (managed and repeatable).

Process discipline

Recurring finance workflows have standard owners, steps, evidence, and escalation.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Data readiness

Authoritative sources, definitions, control totals, and refresh timing are documented.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Semantic consistency

Finance metrics and dimensions are governed across reporting and analysis.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Workflow architecture

Triggers, handoffs, retries, human gates, and safe-failure states are designed.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

AI controls

Approved tools, data rules, prompt/model constraints, and validation requirements are defined.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Agent permissions

Read/write access follows least privilege and prohibited actions are technically constrained.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Human review

Reviewer roles, evidence standards, turnaround, and escalation are explicit.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Testing

Known-good, known-bad, missing-data, failure, and permission-boundary tests are repeatable.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Monitoring

Data quality, workflow failure, incidents, override rates, and stale processes are monitored.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Value measurement

Hours, cycle time, cash, margin, quality, and decision-latency outcomes are measured.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Change control

Prompt, rule, mapping, model, and permission changes are versioned and approved.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Leadership ownership

Executive sponsor, process owner, control owner, and technical owner are named.

Score: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence / Gap: _____

Interpretation

48–60: strong foundation for scaling selected production workflows and agents. 36–47: capable pilot environment with targeted gaps to close before broader automation. 24–35: build data, process, permission, and monitoring discipline before granting agents meaningful connected-system access. Below 24: focus first on finance operating discipline and source-data reliability; advanced automation will amplify current inconsistency rather than solve it.

Executive Review Questions

- Which two maturity gaps create the greatest financial or control risk?
- Which workflow currently creates the strongest measurable business case?
- Where are permissions broader than business need?
- Which executive metric cannot yet be traced confidently to a governed source?
- Which automation would management stop immediately if a key control failed?
- What evidence will prove readiness to scale in the next 90 days?

About the Author

Kandi Theobald is a finance and accounting executive and the founder of Bespoke Executive Ventures LLC. Her background spans controller and CFO leadership, multi-entity accounting, financial reporting, finance transformation, business intelligence, ERP implementation, process redesign, and the practical application of artificial intelligence in finance workflows.

Through Bespoke Executive Ventures, Kandi helps organizations strengthen financial operations, improve reporting visibility, modernize systems, connect finance and operational data, and build decision processes that preserve accuracy and control while increasing speed.

About Bespoke Executive Ventures

Bespoke Executive Ventures LLC provides fractional CFO and controller support, accounting systems and business intelligence solutions, professional dashboards and financial intelligence platforms, and AI training for accounting and finance professionals. The firm's approach is built around a simple idea: financial systems should be tailored to the business they serve—made to order, never off the rack.

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Next in the Series

Book Three: AI for Finance Professionals — The AI-Enabled Finance Leader

Book Two focused on building connected workflows, AI agents, financial intelligence, automation architecture, and measurable operating value. Book Three moves to the executive level: designing the finance function of the future, leading teams through AI transformation, building enterprise governance, and using finance as the organization's strategic intelligence engine.

Book One: Use AI. Book Two: Build with AI. Book Three: Lead with AI.

For team training, finance transformation, Power BI and business intelligence solutions, or fractional CFO/controller support, contact Bespoke Executive Ventures LLC at bevexecutives.com.