Procol KEARNEY

From Cost Centre to Strategic Value

Why CFOs must rethink procurement, governance, and ROI in the age of agentic AI

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About the CFO Dinner Circle

The CFO Dinner Circle is a global, invite-only forum that has brought together 500+ finance and procurement leaders across major hubs, including Houston, Chicago, New York, Mumbai, New Delhi, and Dubai. Designed exclusively for senior executives, the series convenes leaders who are shaping the future of finance and procurement.

Beyond a forum, the CFO Dinner Circle is an ever-growing community, built for CFOs, finance leaders, and procurement heads who are driving transformation in their organisations. It provides a trusted space where leaders can exchange knowledge, share new ideas, and challenge traditional approaches. Members benefit from meaningful peer interactions, actionable insights, and a collective intelligence that strengthens decision-making at the highest level.

In today's increasingly complex and fast-moving environment, the Dinner Circle enables executives to benchmark practices, uncover innovative solutions, and navigate uncertainty with greater clarity. The platform encourages real conversations on governance, cost optimisation, AI adoption, risk resilience, and long-term financial strategy, helping leaders steer their organisations with confidence and conviction.

This edition marks a significant milestone, as it is the first time we are collaborating with a strategic partner, Kearney. Together, we aim to deepen the quality of insights and the conversations and bring a richer, research-backed perspective to the community. This partnership strengthens the platform's mission of creating a high-impact ecosystem where finance and procurement leaders can learn, collaborate, and shape the next era of enterprise performance.

About the Moderators

Gaurav Baheti
Founder & CEO, Procol

Gaurav is an ex-Google engineer in New York and a Forbes 30 Under 30 honouree. He leads Procol's vision and growth, bringing deep experience in building large-scale, technology-led enterprise solutions.

Vijay Kasi
Senior Partner, Kearney

Vijay is a senior partner at Kearney who advises leading organisations on operations, supply chain strategy, transformation, and drives end-to-end operational excellence.

Executive Summary

The CFO Dinner Circle Index 2026 captures the priorities shaping today's finance leaders. Executives are shifting from process optimisation to intelligence-led operations built on unified data, real-time visibility, and stronger financial discipline. A consistent insight emerges: the most significant impact occurs when finance and procurement operate together through shared systems and AI-driven decisioning. Leaders are focusing on predictive planning, automated controls, and proactive risk management to reduce leakage and improve working-capital performance.

According to a survey by Kearney, 69% of CFOs now expect higher ROI from transformation initiatives than from conventional investments; the momentum behind AI-enabled operating models is accelerating. The Index also reveals a growing divide; organisations adopting AI at scale are unlocking faster cycles, better compliance, and superior financial outcomes, while others risk falling behind.

Industry Context: The Competitive Landscape

Across industries, finance leaders recognise AI's potential, but adoption remains uneven. A clear divide is emerging between organisations that have embedded AI into forecasting, sourcing, and governance, and those still operating with fragmented data and manual controls. Early movers are realising tangible financial gains, including reduced leakage, stronger working- capital cycles, faster decision-making, and improved compliance and risk visibility.

Many enterprises, however, remain stuck in pilot mode due to siloed systems, limited data maturity, and unclear ownership between finance and procurement.

As AI shifts from experimentation to core operating infrastructure, competitive advantage will increasingly favour companies that scale adoption, unify data, and redesign processes around intelligence-led execution.

The landscape is evolving quickly. AI is moving from individual use cases to enterprise-level operating models where continuous monitoring, predictive insights, and automated governance shape everyday decisions. Competitive advantage will increasingly favour companies that modernise their data architecture, eliminate process fragmentation, and embed intelligence across sourcing, contracts, payments, and financial planning.

Agenda: AI as the Bridge Between Finance & Procurement

This report examines why finance and procurement must advance AI jointly, beginning with the current innovation gap and the imperative for a single source of truth across spend, suppliers, and workflows. It details how AI is reshaping core operational levers, forecasting, cash-flow planning, risk oversight, and spend governance, while enabling data-driven procurement that eliminates functional silos.

The agenda outlines how AI enhances controls, strengthens compliance, and boosts decision-making cycles through intelligent, increasingly autonomous processes. It highlights measurable impact in working capital efficiency, cost optimisation, and risk mitigation, followed by the macro trends that will define 2026.

Talking Points & Insights

1. AI is accelerating digital transformation across finance and procurement

Leaders are moving from traditional systems to AI-embedded platforms, with real estate and housing finance firms using AI models to improve forecasting accuracy, automate routine tasks (such as invoice processing and payment reconciliation), and strengthen financial governance through continuous monitoring and real-time alerts.

2. Credit underwriting and loan origination are becoming AI-driven

Enabling faster decision cycles, better risk segmentation, automated customer acquisition that reduces costs, and improved portfolio quality via continuous monitoring. CFOs view these upgrades as essential for reducing operational costs and improving accuracy under regulatory pressure.

80%

Faster accounts payable processing, improving cash conversion cycles

50%

Faster requisition processing, enabling finance teams to respond to business needs quickly

100%

Completion of due diligence checks significantly reduces compliance penalties

3. Data-led procurement is gaining momentum

By combining internal spend data with external market intelligence, organizations are shortening RFP cycles, improving supplier evaluation, and achieving superior commercial outcomes through data-backed negotiations powered by real-time market pricing.

40-70%

Shorter sourcing cycles, allowing teams to handle more requests without adding headcount

4. AI is strengthening pricing and contract governance

By analyzing unstructured data (contracts, SKUs, clauses, rate cards, commodity indices), AI identifies pricing deviations, leaks, and non-compliance, helping CFOs enforce discipline through automated monitoring & correlate pricing with market standards.

8-12%

Additional cost savings from identifying pricing leaks and non-compliance

5. Autonomous procurement is emerging as a realistic operating model

AI-powered negotiation bots are negotiating with suppliers, generating savings, and reducing human dependency on tactical processes. This allows finance and procurement teams to focus on strategic planning, category transformation, and risk mitigation, the common thread across all use cases: better visibility, stronger controls, and faster decisions. AI is reducing cycle times, improving accuracy, and providing a 360° view of spend, suppliers, and risks, directly supporting CFO priorities around cost, governance, and agility.

40-70%

Reduction in procurement cycle times, freeing teams for strategic work

Top 3 Takeaways

AI is moving beyond experimentation and proving its value across the lending and procurement ecosystem. CFOs and business leaders are seeing tangible improvements in speed, accuracy, and financial discipline as AI tackles long-standing bottlenecks, from fragmented data and unmanaged risks to slow, manual negotiation cycles. Here, the top three takeaways highlight the real scenarios where AI is delivering impact and why enterprises are accelerating adoption.

1. AI Is accelerating strategic decisions where traditional data falls short

Scenario: Real estate and housing finance companies often struggle with fragmented internal data and slow access to external market intelligence, which delays credit decisions, supplier evaluations, and RFP cycles.

Takeaway: AI models that unify internal and external datasets are helping leaders make faster, more accurate decisions across underwriting, sourcing, and procurement.

2. AI-driven insights are strengthening controls and reducing financial risk

Scenario: Organisations manage large volumes of unstructured data (contracts, SKUs, commodity price updates) where deviations often go unnoticed, leading to cost overruns and supply risks.

Takeaway: Advanced AI engines can now detect pricing mismatches, identify risk patterns, and correlate cost changes in real time, helping companies tighten spend control and improve risk visibility.

3. Autonomous Supplier Negotiations Are Becoming a Reality

Scenario: Procurement teams often spend weeks coordinating negotiations, comparing supplier quotes, drafting counteroffers, and running multiple rounds of conversations. This slows down sourcing cycles and stretches already lean teams.

Takeaway: AI negotiation bots using large language models can now autonomously engage suppliers, compare proposals, and drive multi-round negotiations. This accelerates sourcing timelines, improves pricing outcomes, and frees up procurement teams to focus on strategic categories rather than repetitive negotiation tasks.

Key Trends for 2026

92% of CFOs plan to increase investment, the year ahead signals a decisive shift toward intelligent, automated operations across finance and procurement. Leaders are moving beyond experimentation to embed AI deeply into controls, planning, and execution. As organisations scale these investments, the operating model will increasingly revolve around unified data, real-time visibility, and proactive financial governance.

1. **Autonomous Operations:** AI handles routine processing, validations, and sourcing tasks, freeing strategic capacity for category transformation and supplier relationship management.
2. **Real-Time Visibility:** Continuous monitoring of budgets, commitments, and risks replaces periodic reporting, enabling proactive rather than reactive financial stewardship.
3. **Predictive Decisioning:** Forecasting demand, prices, and supplier risk to act proactively becomes standard practice, moving procurement from transactional to strategic.
4. **Automated Governance:** Always-on contract, pricing, and policy compliance eliminates manual audits while strengthening the control environment and reducing risk.
5. **Integrated Finance-Procurement Models:** Shared data, aligned KPIs, faster decisions break down traditional silos and enable true collaboration between functions.
6. **Digital Supplier Ecosystems:** AI-led onboarding, performance tracking, and risk signals transform supplier management from an administrative burden to a competitive advantage.
7. **Value-Led Tech Investments:** CFOs prioritise RoI-driven platforms over point solutions, seeking comprehensive systems that deliver measurable financial returns rather than functional tools that optimize isolated processes.

Conclusion

AI is emerging as a core driver of financial and operational performance, transforming how finance and procurement functions create value. It enables faster, more accurate decisions, tighter controls, and improved visibility across cash flow, supplier performance, and cost drivers. By embedding AI into forecasting, sourcing, contract governance, and risk management, organisations can reduce leakage, shorten cycle times, and strengthen compliance, all while operating with leaner teams.

The real advantage lies in moving from reactive processes to proactive, data-led operations, where insights drive decisions, automated workflows free strategic capacity, and predictive intelligence anticipates risks before they impact outcomes. Organisations that integrate AI at the core of finance and procurement gain agility, operational discipline, and measurable financial returns.

About Procol

Procol is an AI-powered enterprise procurement platform, built in India and trusted by leading organisations worldwide. Founded in 2018, Procol helps businesses move beyond paper-driven processes, spreadsheets, and siloed systems toward a unified, intelligence-led procurement environment.

Today, **Procol powers procurement for 200+ enterprises across 10+ countries, managing $20B in annual spend.** The platform is designed to enhance financial governance across the procurement lifecycle, improving spend visibility, strengthening controls, and reducing operational and compliance risks.

With advanced analytics, automated workflows, and continuous product innovation, Procol helps organisations achieve measurable cost savings and operational consistency at scale.

Recognised as a leader in sourcing and procurement software by G2 and featured in Gartner's list of best strategic sourcing solutions, Procol supports some of the largest enterprises in managing procurement with accuracy, audit readiness, and process discipline.

About Kearney

Kearney is a global management consulting firm known for its deep expertise in strategy, operations, and transformation. With a presence in more than 40 countries, Kearney partners with business and government leaders to address their most critical challenges, ranging from cost and productivity to supply chain resilience, digital acceleration, and organisational performance.

The firm combines rigorous analytical capabilities with practical implementation experience, helping organisations achieve measurable, sustainable impact.

Kearney’s work with CFOs and finance leaders spans operating model redesign, cost optimisation, digital procurement, and enterprise-wide transformation.

For over nine decades, Kearney has been recognised for its collaborative working style, industry insights, and commitment to delivering outcomes that advance long-term competitiveness.

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