

AI is no longer a technology initiative. It's a capital allocation decision with governance, risk, and competitive consequences — and it sits squarely on the CFO's desk.

AI-Driven Growth: The CFO & CIO Mandate

The CFO's AI job isn't to understand the technology. It's to govern the capital, manage the risk, and make the investment count.

The performance metrics emerging from leading AI deployments are extraordinary enough to reshape competitive dynamics. Any competitor that successfully applies even a fraction of AI's demonstrated capability could quickly restructure your market. The question for CFOs is not whether AI matters — it's whether you're governing it as a capital decision or drifting toward it as a technology experiment.

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Leading AI adopters have doubled production capacity in existing facilities and reduced cycle times from eight hours to under two. These are not incremental improvements — they represent a complete rethinking of service delivery and cost structure. Most enterprises face a specific governance gap: employees are already spending 30–60 minutes per day experimenting with AI tools independently, with no governance, no data policy, and no visibility from IT or finance.

The Funding Model That Actually Works

Instead of dispersing budgets across siloed teams or piloting isolated tools, high-performing organizations centralize AI infrastructure investment upfront. Fund the core systems, compute power, and data platforms first, then enable every team to build on that common foundation. This shifts from cost-center thinking to platform investment thinking: invest once, unlock shared capacity. The ROI comes from reusability — one successful model trained in marketing can be repurposed for customer service or product analytics.

"The difference between organizations that capture AI's potential and those that are damaged by it comes down to governance architecture, not enthusiasm."

Governance: Critical, Layered, and CFO-Led

As AI becomes embedded in decision-making, customer engagement, and operational execution, governance is no longer just an IT issue — it's a boardroom imperative. The critical questions are not technical: Are there regulatory risks? How do you defend exceptions to regulators? Do you have controls for human review, labeling, and disclosure? For agentic AI deployed autonomously — what is your threshold for human override?

The CFO-CIO Partnership for AI Success

While CFOs focus on ROI, risk, and governance, CIOs drive architecture, agility, and execution. Aligning AI with business strategy requires explicit answers: How much capital should be allocated to AI infrastructure and tools? Which functions or business units should receive prioritization? What are the target metrics? What are the early indicators to double down or cut losses?

The organizations that answer these questions deliberately will allocate capital efficiently. The ones that don't will fund enthusiasm and call it investment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- AI is a capital allocation decision with governance, risk, and competitive consequences — not a technology experiment to be delegated.
- Centralize AI infrastructure investment upfront, then enable every team to build on that common foundation. Invest once, unlock shared capacity.
- Collaborative AI labs — not centers of excellence — are the governance model that avoids bottlenecks and mandates knowledge sharing.
- The CFO-CIO partnership is the competitive advantage: CFO capital discipline and CIO technical leadership must run the same play.
- Organizations that answer the capital allocation questions for AI deliberately will outperform those funding enthusiasm and calling it investment.

PLATEAU STRATEGY

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Authored by
Allan Salek

Four continents. Multiple capital cycles. I've watched brilliant CFOs get blindsided — by vendors selling certainty, by organizations caught in politics, by leaders advancing careers ahead of the balance sheet.

We work alongside CFOs so they walk into every room ready for the conversation that defines whether they keep the seat.

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allan.salek@plateaustategy.com

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