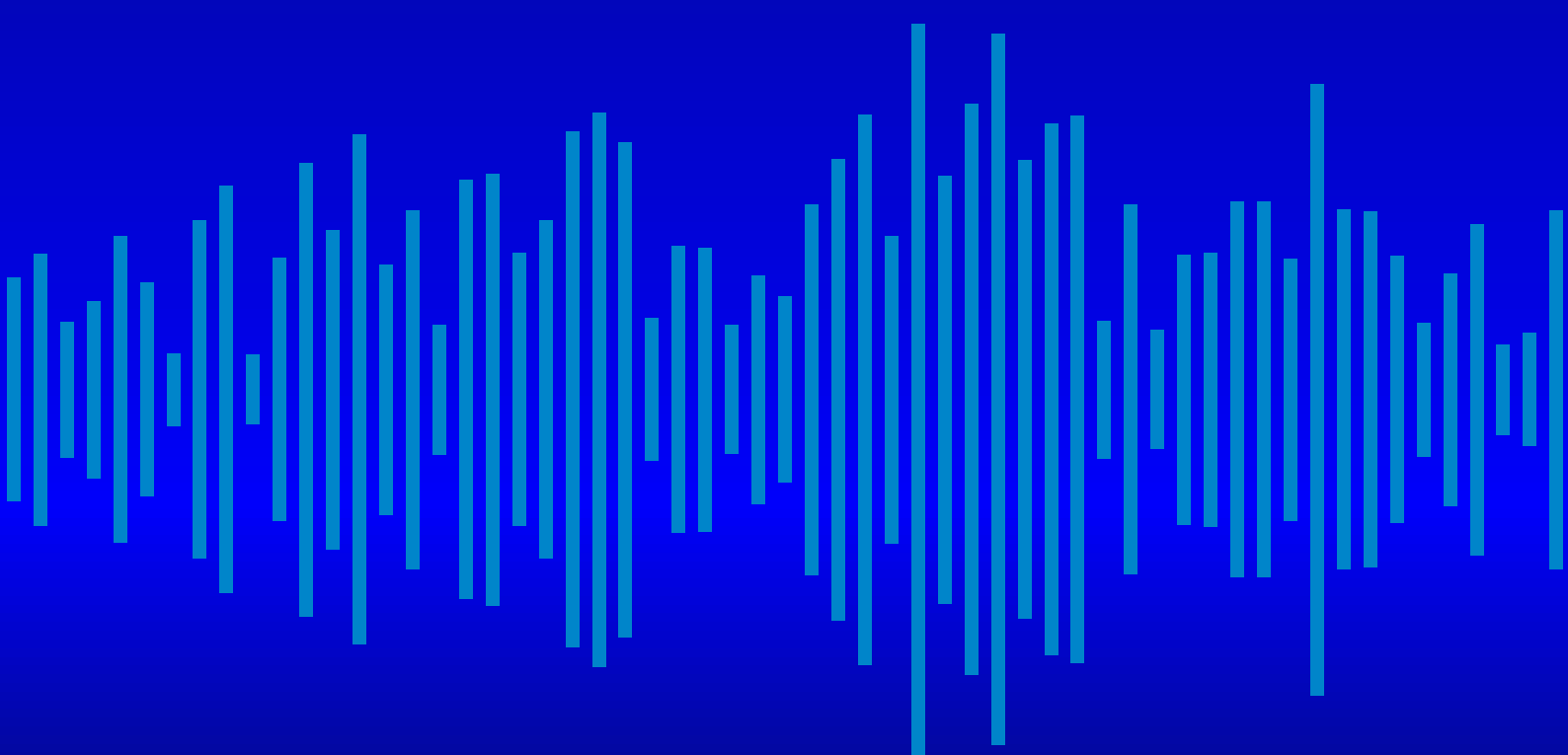




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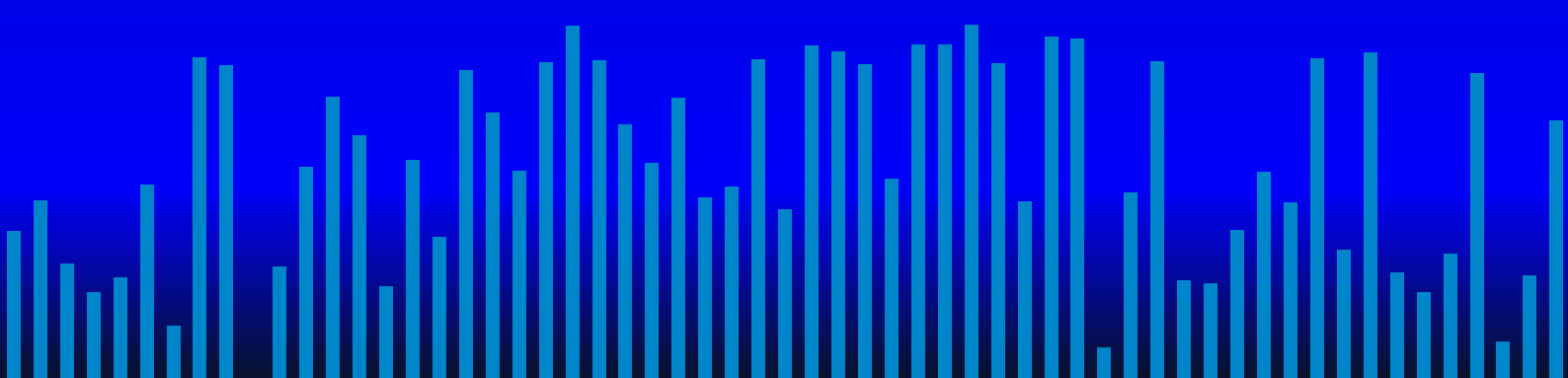
The CFO of 2030: Architect of Value in PE-Backed Businesses



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As private equity expectations accelerate, the CFO of 2030 will be defined by how they embed EBITDA, cash and exit readiness into the business.

By Christina Barakett



The role of the CFO in PE-backed businesses is changing. Traditionally, finance leaders were judged primarily on the timeliness and reliability of a company's financial reporting, forecasting and controls. But expectations that CFOs should play a more strategic role in maximising exit value mean that these foundations are no longer sufficient to set them up for success.

This evolution demands a different kind of financial leader. The CFO of 2030 isn't a reporter of performance, but an architect of value, responsible for the systems that support transparency and drive accountability for financial value creation across the business.

FROM REPORTING PERFORMANCE TO DESIGNING OUTCOMES

This evolution reflects a deeper shift in how value is created in modern portfolio companies. Operational excellence has replaced financial engineering as the key driver of value creation, placing EBITDA and cash improvements at the centre of the equity story.

"What I've witnessed is a profound shift toward CFOs who can be genuine change agents, capable of orchestrating complex business model transformations and ensuring executive management alignment while maintaining the financial discipline to fuel long-term innovation," says Dr. Matthias Heiden, Chief Financial Officer at IFS, a PE-owned enterprise software business.

Best-in-class CFOs are therefore focusing less on monitoring performance and more on actively shaping it. They do so by owning EBITDA and cash as systems, not outcomes; and by connecting the operational indicators managed day-to-day by the business to the financial results that matter to investors.

In that model, the finance function no longer sits at the end of the process. It is involved early, at the point where commercial, operational and supply-chain decisions are made, so that financial implications are understood and managed from the start, at the enterprise-level.

FIXING THE FINANCE OPERATING MODEL, NOT JUST THE CFO

Most PE sponsors talk about the need for stronger CFO capabilities, but in many cases the real issue is the financial operating model around them.

To challenge that, the CFO of 2030 is focused on FP&A but with a business partnering and transformation mindset, where finance systematically drives EBITDA, cash, and exit readiness. They run the finance function as a scalable platform, allowing the business to grow without adding unnecessary complexity. Routine activities across order-to-cash and procure-to-pay are increasingly automated and standardized, freeing up talent and attention. At the core sits a strong FP&A capability, oriented around insight generation rather than budget production. This team focuses on understanding what

drives performance, stress-testing scenarios and helping the leadership make decisions based on clear and timely data.

Crucially, this platform operates with a single version of the truth. Consistent KPI definitions, standardized data and robust analytics allow decisions to be taken faster and with greater confidence at an enterprise level. This is not about dashboards for their own sake; it is about enabling management teams to act decisively on the levers that create value.

PERPETUAL EXIT READINESS AND THE ROAD TO 2030

Another key characteristic of the CFO of 2030 is a relentless focus on exit readiness. In PE-backed businesses, value is only fully realized if it can be clearly articulated, evidenced and trusted by the next owner. That requires clean, credible data on value creation levers, reliable forecasting across both cash and P&L, and a finance leader who is the primary storyteller of value to investors and the board. The storytelling should not significantly change for an exit process; it should be a natural evolution of how the business already looks at its operations.

Sponsors increasingly expect CFOs to operate in this “future-state” model, yet CFOs and PE owners are not always aligned on what that model looks like or on the steps required to get there. This misalignment helps explain why the CFO role in PE is in flux, with turnover far higher than in public companies.

“In our investments, the CFO is not just the head of finance – he or she is often the true ‘number two’ and a core driver of value creation. It is an exceptionally demanding role. Leverage, pace, governance intensity and exit pressure leave little room for approximation. Expectations are high – structurally high. The fundamentals are non-negotiable: cash discipline, fast close, forecasting accuracy,” says Pierre Chaboussant, Managing Director, Operational Support Group, Bridgepoint.

“But that’s only the baseline,” he adds. “The real mandate is to build a finance function that is predictive, not reactive – one that creates visibility, underwrites M&A, protects covenant headroom and prepares the business for its next inflection point, whether AI, international expansion, or exit. When the roadmap is unclear, or when the CFO is not equipped early with the right capabilities, execution risk rises – and volatility follows.”

A well-defined, practical roadmap can bridge that gap. The plan typically starts with establishing control over value creation levers and cash optimisation through a rapid finance and data diagnostic tied directly to the value creation plan. From there, attention turns to building a finance function that supports growth and decision-making.

This includes five priorities:

- Redesign the finance operating model so the team spends more time on supporting decision-making and less time processing transactions
- Standardize data, KPIs and performance definitions across the business
- Develop forecasting tools that are directly linked to key operational metrics underpinning the value creation story
- Accelerate working capital across order-to-cash, procure-to-pay and inventory
- Speed up the close and reporting cycle, supported by automation.

The final step is to hardwire EBITDA and cash ownership into the organisation. CFOs should work closely with commercial and operational leaders, who can act as “embedded finance business partners” aligned to the key value creation levers. Ownership also comes from integrating cash forecasting and establishing a cross-functional working capital cadence that keeps financial outcomes visible and actively managed.

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