

Beyond the balance sheet:

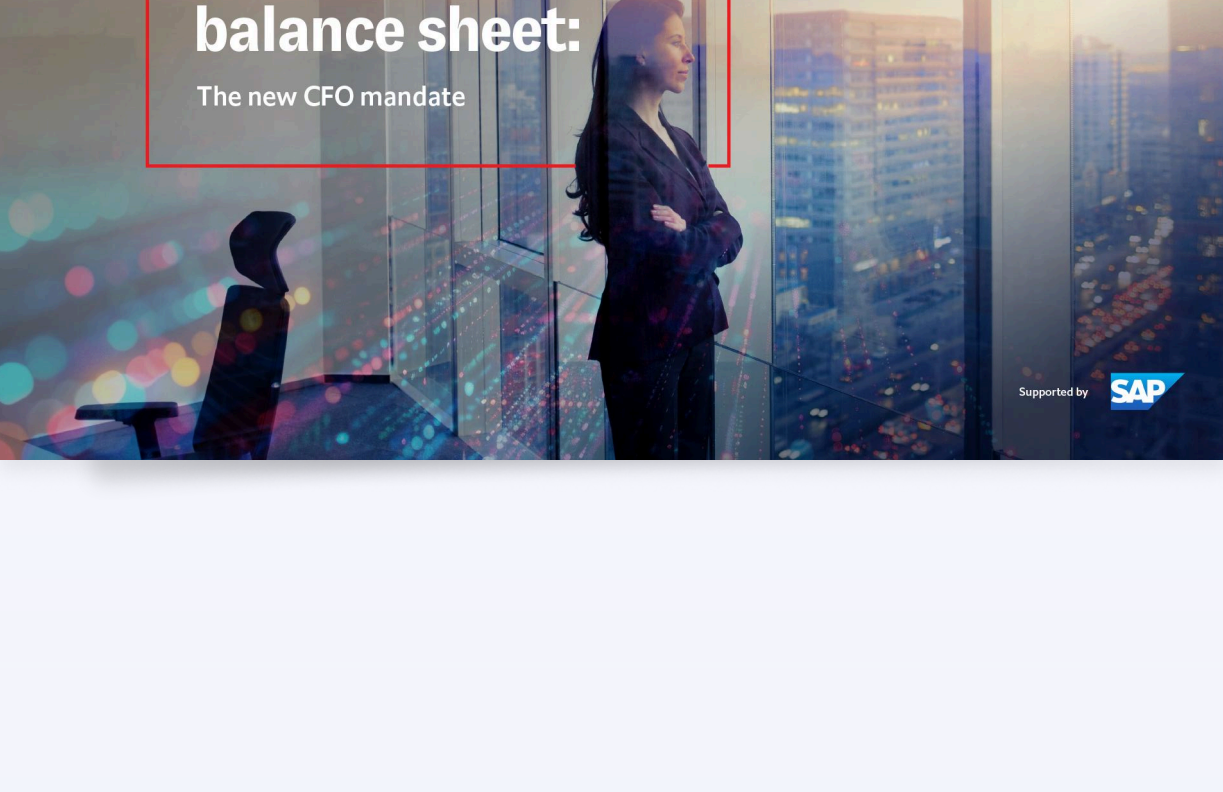
The new CFO mandate

Supported by **SAP**

Beyond the balance sheet: The new CFO mandate is an Economist Impact report sponsored by SAP. It explores how CFOs are stepping beyond finance to manage risk, lead digital transformation and shape the future of AI.

Insights are based on a global survey of 480 CFOs across Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas, conducted in July and August 2025.

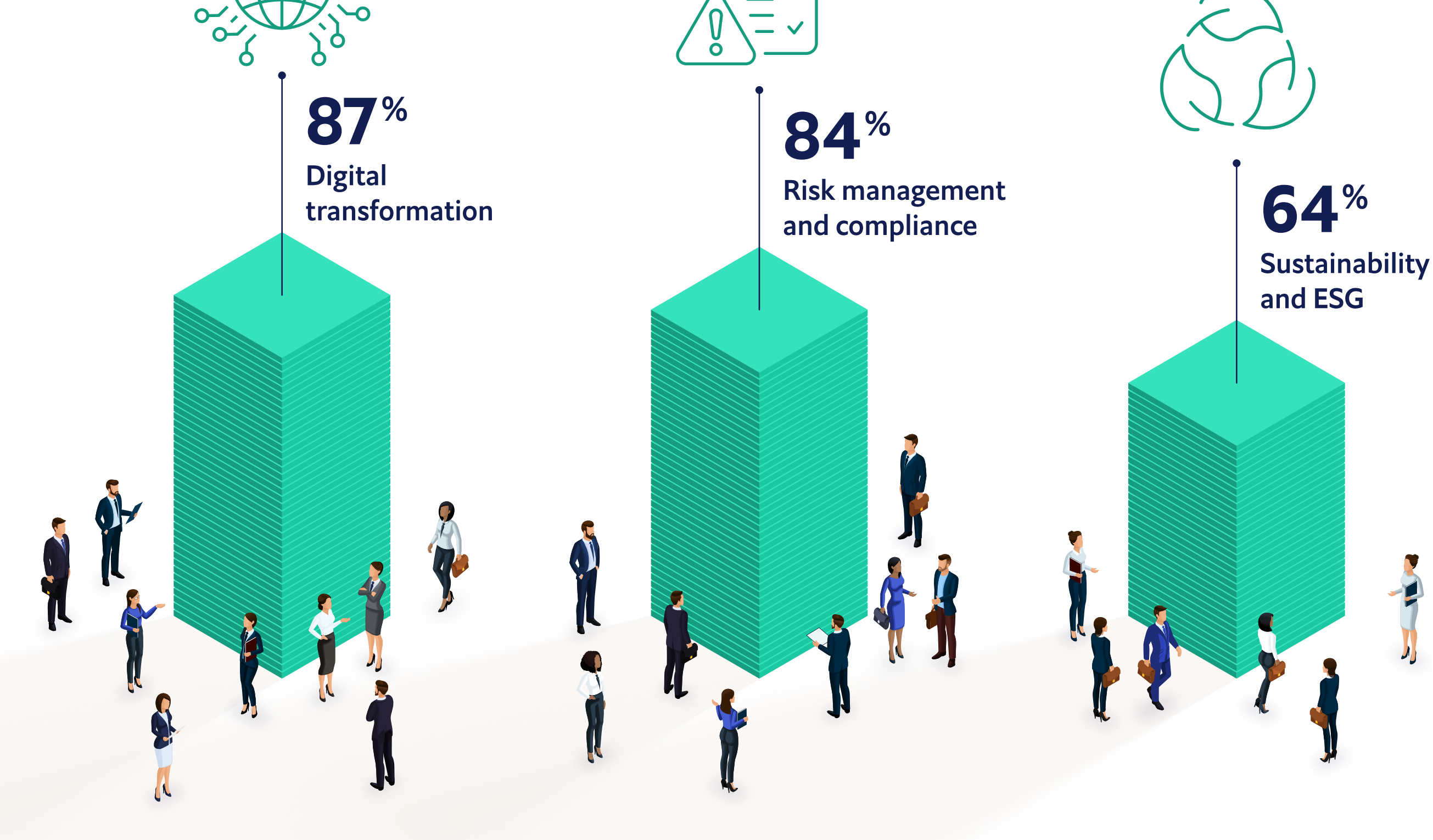
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The CFO evolution

CFOs are becoming drivers of change, focusing on internal strategy and organisational resilience.

% who say they are more involved than three years ago in the following areas



The risk radar

CFOs are navigating a highly risk-laden environment.

% of CFOs that identify issue as a top risk

Top risks



Eroding confidence in meeting liquidity targets *Making compliance a top priority for advanced tech adoption* *Making capital allocation challenging, particularly in product-based industries*

Risk blindspot?

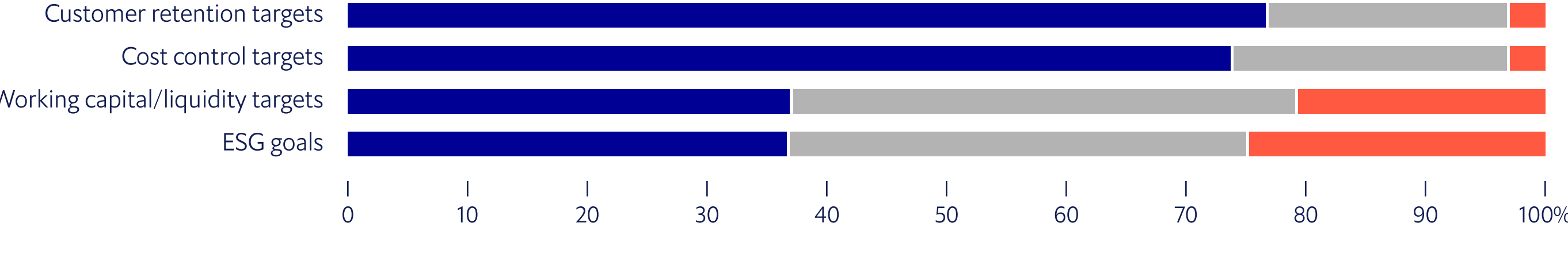


So although ESG responsibilities are expanding, the focus is increasingly overshadowed by urgent economic and geopolitical challenges.

Sphere of control

Uncertainty in the external environment is eroding confidence in liquidity targets, but not in core financial metrics.

Confidence in achieving targets in the next 12 months, % of CFOs



To minimise uncertainty, CFOs are embedding risk management into daily operations, using AI-driven scenario planning and controlling costs.

← Least sensitive to budget cuts Most sensitive to budget cuts →

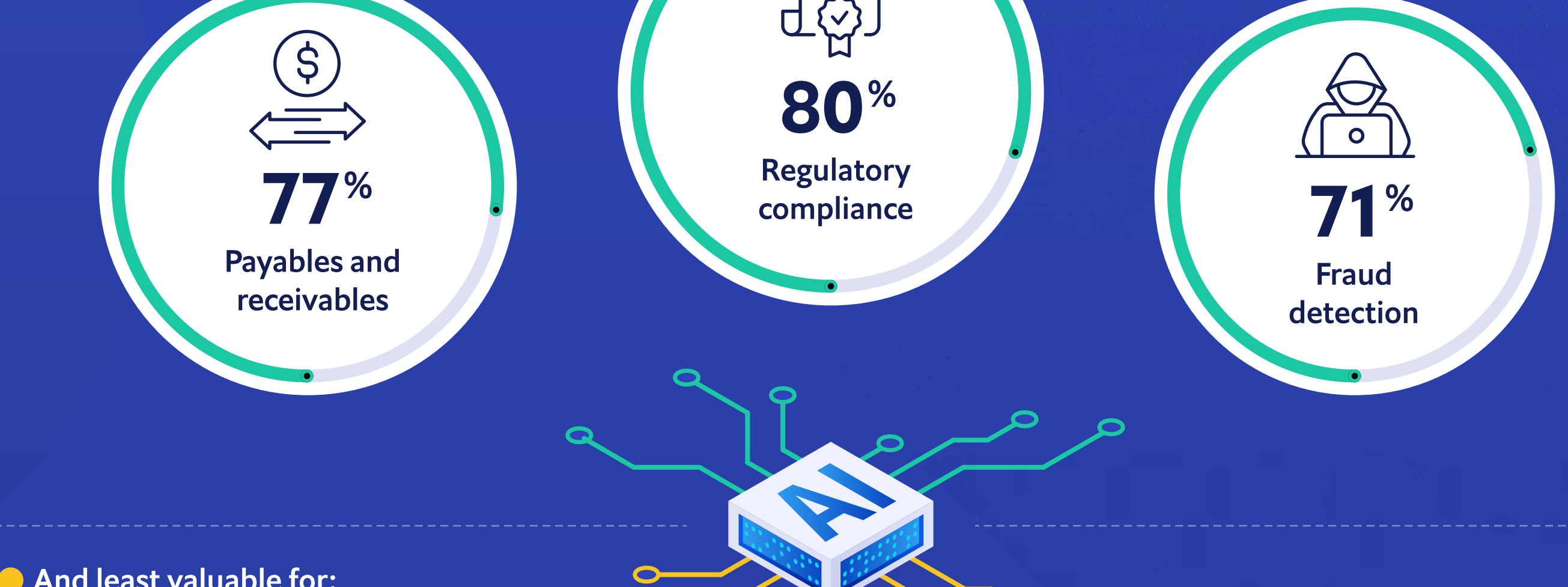


AI transformation of the finance function

CFOs prioritise AI differently depending on its application.

% of CFOs who believe AI is valuable in the following areas

● CFOs find AI most valuable for:



● And least valuable for:



Tech troubles

But executing digital transformation under cost pressures is the most difficult activity facing CFOs. More than 60% identify upskilling existing staff to adapt to AI as the most pressing talent-related challenge.

Other challenges include:

% of CFOs identifying issue as a top challenge in effectively using data to support strategic decision-making

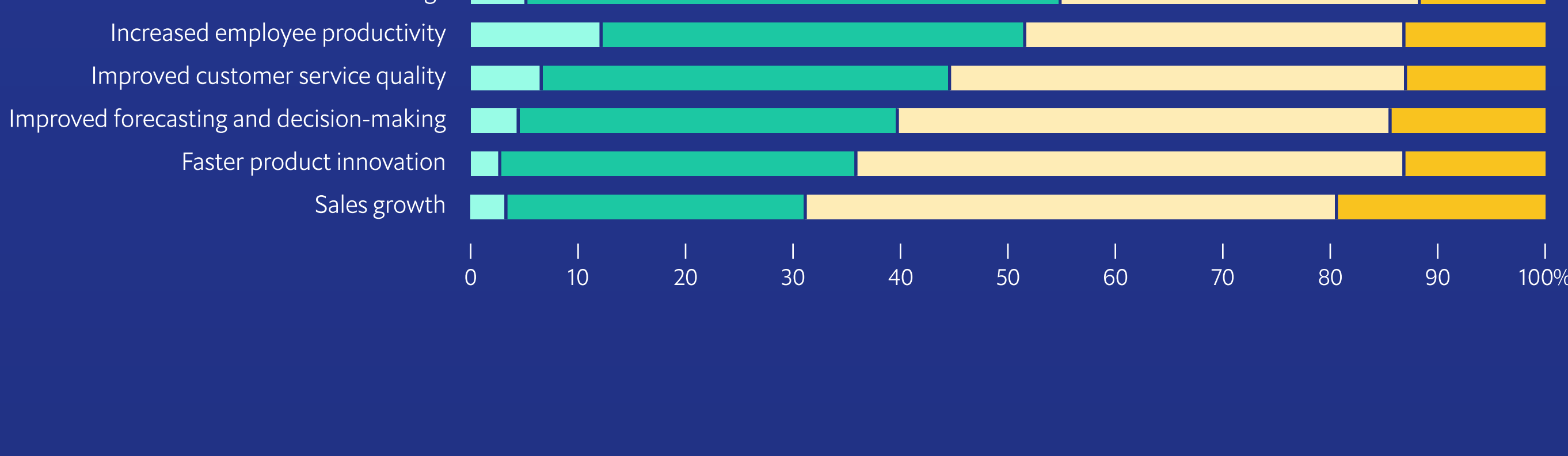


The ROI clock

CFOs are tasked with evaluating the return on investment of AI projects across the business. The demand for quick results is acute: 83% need returns within 12 months to justify continued spending.

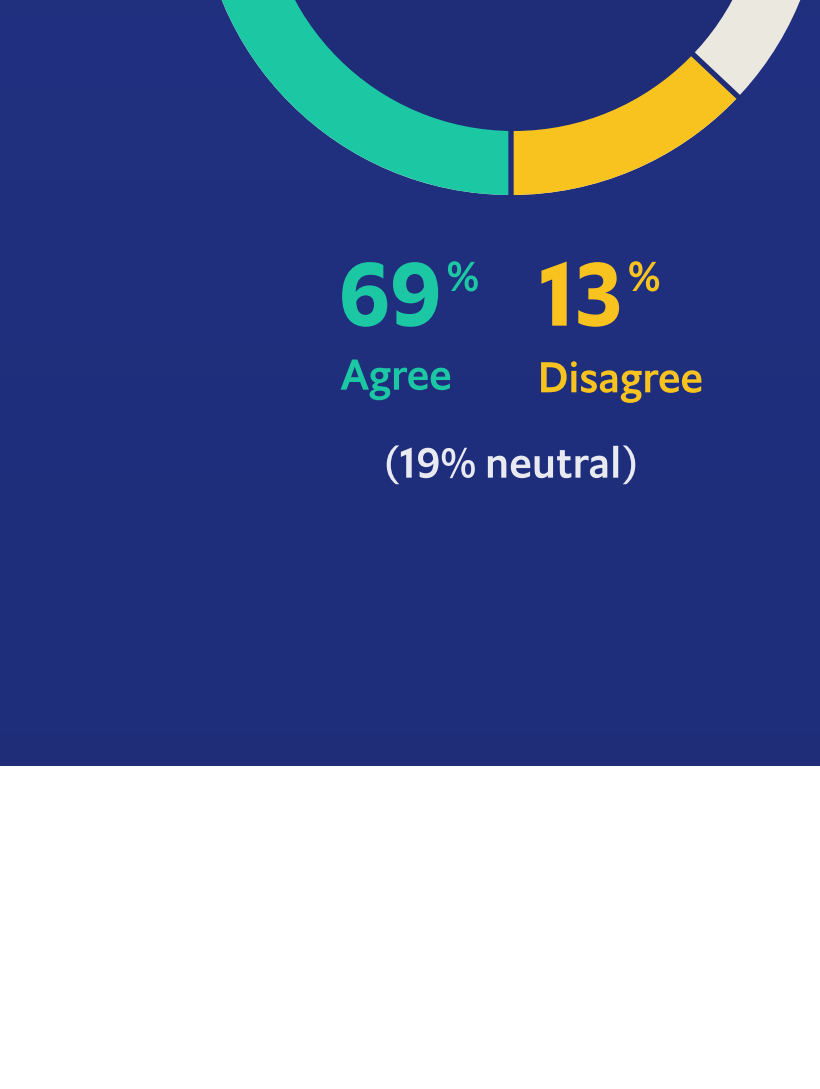
But generating value on more sophisticated metrics will take time.

Expected time to realise measurable benefits from AI investments in the following areas, % of CFOs

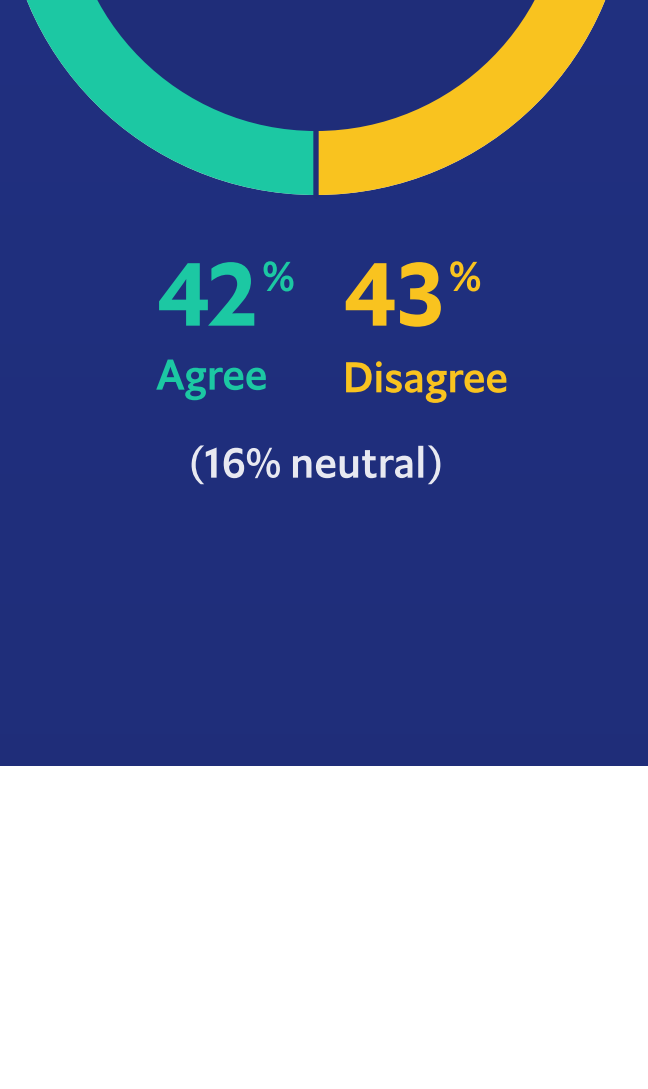
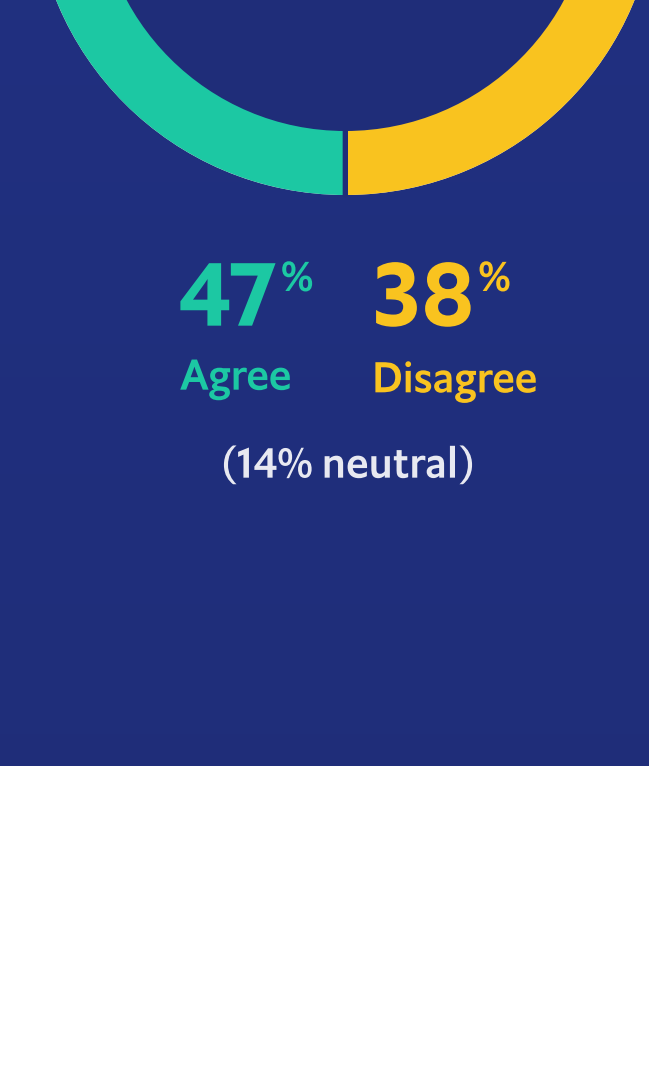


Man vs machine: the hiring conundrum

Most CFOs agree that:



But CFOs are split on:



The modern CFO is no longer just the guardian of current value—but the architect of future value.

Explore the full insights in our report *Beyond the balance sheet: The new CFO mandate*.

[Read the report](#)

