pwc

Beyond the business case

Making the economics of AI work

Boards are asking their CFOs a reasonable question about AI - where is the return?



After several years of experimentation, rising technology investment and ambitious productivity claims, CFOs face a critical challenge: demonstrating where AI is creating economic value, how much of that value their organisations are capturing and what it costs to sustain.

PwC's 2026 AI Performance study reveals a striking divide in the value organisations are generating from AI. Just 20% of organisations account for 74% of the financial value created. These top-performing organisations - defined by PwC as AI leaders based on their AI-driven revenue and efficiency gains relative to industry peers - demonstrate what is possible when AI investment translates into measurable business outcomes.

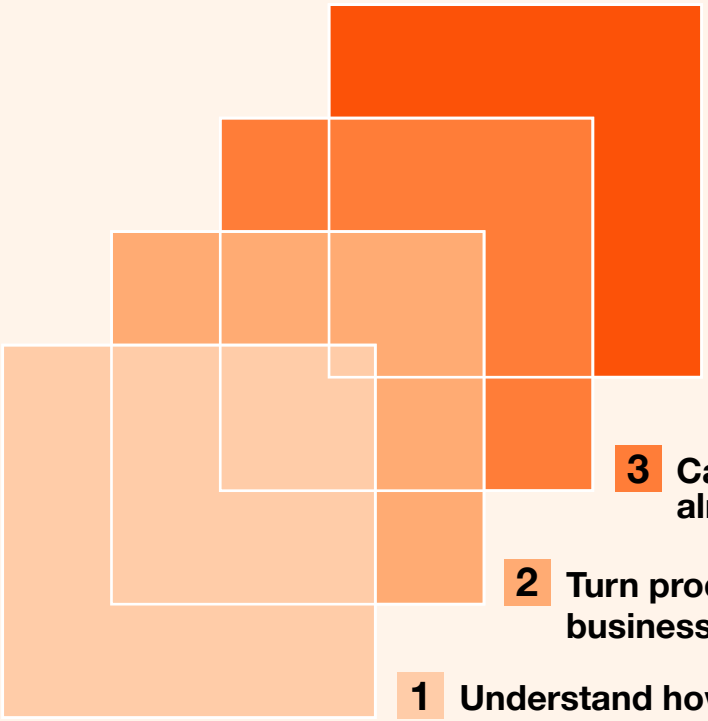
Traditional investment disciplines remain essential. But AI introduces new considerations: productivity gains don't automatically translate into financial savings, capabilities developed for one use case may create value across many others, and the cost of delivering AI-enabled outcomes continues to evolve as adoption scales and technology advances.

For CFOs, the opportunity is to look beyond the initial business case and take a more complete view of AI's economics - from the cost of individual tasks to the value created across the enterprise. This means extending, rather than replacing, established investment and benefits realisation disciplines.



Four interconnected lenses for understanding AI economics

To understand the full economic potential of AI, CFOs need to look at four interconnected dimensions. Collectively they provide a more complete view of how AI changes the cost of work, how productivity becomes realised value, how capabilities can generate returns across multiple applications, and how costs evolve as AI scales.



4 **Manage the economics as AI scales**

3 **Capture more value from capabilities already built**

2 **Turn productivity gains into measurable business value**

1 **Understand how AI changes the cost of work**

Together, these four dimensions provide a more complete view of AI economics - connecting productivity improvements to realised business value, reusable capability and the ongoing cost of operating AI at scale.

From AI efficiency to enterprise value

Technical disciplines such as token economics and AI FinOps are making AI consumption and operating costs more measurable. The enterprise economic question goes further: how do improvements in individual tasks translate into realised financial value, how can productive capabilities generate returns repeatedly, and how do those economics evolve in production?

But these measures only tell part of the story.

For CFOs, the more important question is how those improvements translate into enterprise performance. Where is AI creating incremental value? How much is being realised? Can the capability generate returns elsewhere in the business? And what will it cost to sustain and improve those returns over time?

Answering these questions requires organisations to distinguish between three things that are often treated as interchangeable: productivity created, financial value realised and the investment required to deliver it.

A practical example illustrates why that distinction matters.

On paper, that's a potential annual productivity improvement of $1.3 million. But does that mean the bank has generated $1.3 million in financial value? Not necessarily.

The answer depends on what happens next.

Does the bank reduce costs or redeploy employee capacity? Can it serve more customers, improve service quality or generate additional revenue? Can the AI capability be adapted for other workflows? And how will its operating costs change as demand grows?

These are the questions that take the investment case beyond a simple productivity calculation. The arithmetic looks familiar: a conventional productivity case. The economics become more interesting once the released capacity, reuse and ongoing cost of production are accounted for.

When productivity gains tell only part of the story

Consider a bank managing 100,000 customer service interactions each year.

At an average of 20 minutes per interaction and a loaded labour cost of $60 an hour, the annual labour cost is approximately $2 million.

The bank introduces an AI capability that reduces employee effort to five minutes per interaction, with an additional $2 in AI inference, tooling, monitoring and assurance costs.

The result is a reduction in the cost per interaction from approximately $20 to $7.



1. Understand the true economics of the task

The CFO question: What does a successful unit of work cost?

AI's economic impact begins at the level of the task. In our banking example, reducing the cost of a customer interaction from $20 to $7 creates a significant productivity opportunity. But the financial outcome depends on more than the headline cost reduction.

CFOs need visibility into the full cost of producing a successful outcome, including the human effort, AI consumption, tools, retries, controls and assurance required to deliver it at the expected quality. Tracking this cost over time provides a clearer picture of whether AI is genuinely improving operating economics as adoption increases and workflows evolve.

For Finance, the implication is straightforward: a positive business case is important, but understanding the economics of the underlying work is what makes the return measurable and manageable.

AI also introduces a different production dynamic. Unlike conventional processes, AI outputs can vary in quality and reliability. The cost of attempting a task is therefore less meaningful than the cost of producing a successful outcome - including retries, exceptions and human intervention.[3]

In our banking example, AI has created $1.3 million in potential productivity gains. The next question is how much of that becomes realised business value.

Traditional Business Case	**Task Economics**	Productivity Conversion	Reuse Economics	Consumption and Lifecycle	AI Economics
Assumes all productivity is saving	Potential improvement in task economics				
100k × ($20 – $7)	Same calc, different classification				
$1.3m p.a.	$1.3m				



2. Convert productivity gains into business value

The CFO question: How much of the productivity created becomes realised value?

Productivity gains don't automatically translate into financial returns. What matters is how organisations use the capacity released.

Consider the approximately 25,000 hours of employee capacity released in our banking example. Some of that capacity may translate into direct cost savings through reduced contractor expenditure, unfilled vacancies or lower workforce requirements. Some may enable the bank to handle more customer interactions without equivalent headcount growth.

Other benefits may come through improved performance - such as better handling of complex cases, stronger customer retention or more support for vulnerable customers. AI may also make previously uneconomic activities commercially viable. Each outcome creates value differently and needs to be measured accordingly.

The scale of the opportunity also depends on adoption, workflow redesign and output quality. Finance has a critical role in testing these assumptions and ensuring clear accountability for converting released capacity into measurable outcomes.

Suppose the bank realises $0.4 million in direct cost savings and uses much of the remaining capacity to increase customer interactions from 100,000 to 180,000 annually.

For illustration, assume those 80,000 additional interactions generate $10 in measured incremental contribution each through retention, revenue or avoided loss, creating a further $0.8 million in value.

AI consumption also increases with the additional volume. Total expenditure may therefore rise even as unit economics improve.

Finance needs to distinguish between productivity created and value realised, with clear attribution across cost savings, additional activity and performance improvements to avoid counting the same benefit more than once.

Now assume improved handling of the original interactions generates a further $0.4 million through stronger retention, fewer complaints, lower remediation costs or another measurable performance outcome.



Traditional Business Case	Task Economics	Productivity Conversion	Reuse Economics	Consumption and Lifecycle	AI Economics
Assumes all productivity is saving	Potential improvement in task economics	Value realised from cash, additional activity and performance			
100k × ($20 – $7)	Same calc, different classification	$0.4m cash + $0.8m activity + $0.4m performance			
$1.3m p.a.	$1.3m	$1.6m			

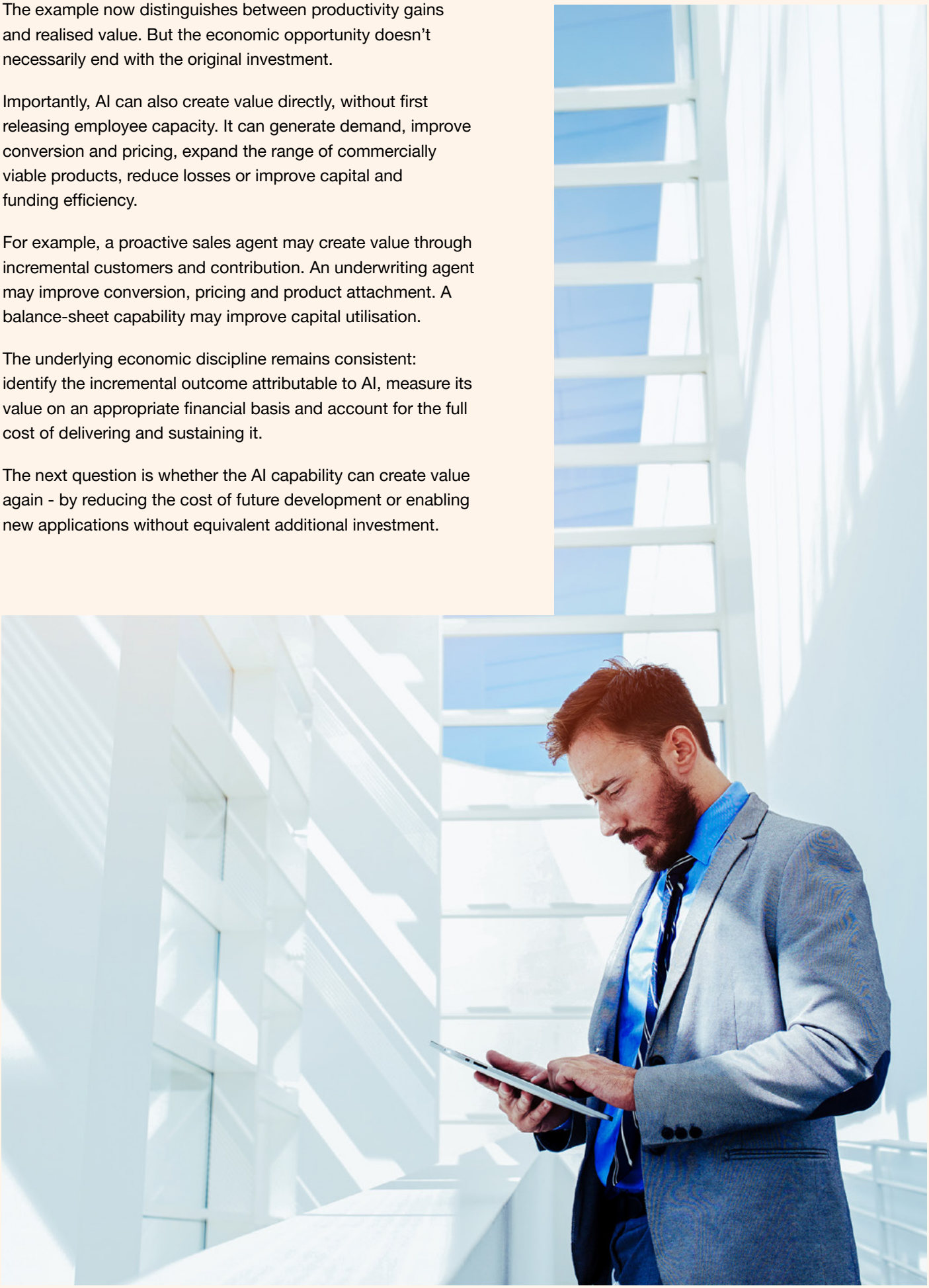
The example now distinguishes between productivity gains and realised value. But the economic opportunity doesn't necessarily end with the original investment.

Importantly, AI can also create value directly, without first releasing employee capacity. It can generate demand, improve conversion and pricing, expand the range of commercially viable products, reduce losses or improve capital and funding efficiency.

For example, a proactive sales agent may create value through incremental customers and contribution. An underwriting agent may improve conversion, pricing and product attachment. A balance-sheet capability may improve capital utilisation.

The underlying economic discipline remains consistent: identify the incremental outcome attributable to AI, measure its value on an appropriate financial basis and account for the full cost of delivering and sustaining it.

The next question is whether the AI capability can create value again - by reducing the cost of future development or enabling new applications without equivalent additional investment.



3. Unlock greater returns through reuse

The CFO question: Where else can this capability create value, and at what incremental cost?

One of AI's more distinctive economic characteristics is its potential to create value beyond the use case it was originally designed to support. This happens in two ways.

First, reusable components - including data access, enterprise knowledge, integrations, controls and evaluation capabilities - can reduce the time and investment needed to develop subsequent applications.

Second, productive AI capabilities, such as agents or skills, may be adapted and deployed across different tasks or business contexts where the underlying knowledge, actions and controls are sufficiently similar.[4]

For Australian businesses, this represents a significant opportunity. PwC's AI Performance study finds that just 7% of Australian business leaders report building reusable AI components, compared with 51% of global AI leaders. This is consistent with the broader global findings: AI leaders are 2.4 times as likely as other organisations to build reusable AI assets, reinforcing the importance of designing capabilities that can deliver value beyond their original use case.

For CFOs, the implication is to look beyond individual use cases and consider how each investment can create capabilities that deliver value across the enterprise. In our banking example, the data access, policy knowledge, tools and controls developed for customer servicing may also support complaints, collections or hardship management. Parts of the original AI agent may also be reusable. However, each additional deployment will still require appropriate adaptation, assurance and ongoing operation.

The opportunity is therefore not simply to build once and deploy everywhere, but to reuse what already works while accounting for the incremental investment needed in each new context.

Finance needs to distinguish between the economic benefits of reusable components and those of redeploying productive capabilities. Reusable components can avoid future development expenditure; redeployed agents or skills can support additional value streams with relatively little incremental development investment. That value should be recognised in the economics of the application using the capability, while the reuse benefit reflects the lower incremental investment required.

This raises an important portfolio question for CFOs: what should become cheaper, faster or unnecessary to build next time - and where else can existing AI capabilities create value?

Investment governance has a role to play. Individually attractive use cases can still duplicate integrations, controls and infrastructure already developed elsewhere. Equally, organisations can miss opportunities by treating an agent or skill as valuable only within the original use case.

Reuse in the AI era

Technology reuse isn't new. What makes AI different is that the reusable asset can include the capability to perform work.

Shared data, enterprise knowledge, tools, controls and evaluation frameworks remain important. But an AI agent or skill assembled from those components can itself become a reusable productive capability.

For example, a secure connection to customer data may support servicing, complaints, collections, fraud and relationship management. A governed enterprise skill may encode a process once and make it available to multiple agents.

The same principle applies to tools that retrieve records, initiate transactions or request approvals, and to controls that can be reused wherever those actions occur.

Consider an agent that retrieves trusted information, interprets a customer record, applies policy and recommends an action. Originally developed for customer servicing, much of that capability may also support complaints, collections, hardship or retention. Some applications will require additional integration or configuration; others may need relatively little modification. This creates an important economic opportunity.

The initial investment absorbs much of the development, integration and assurance cost. Subsequent deployments may generate additional value while requiring primarily incremental expenditure on configuration, consumption, change and operation.

As an organisation's reusable AI capabilities grow, a greater proportion of new solutions may be assembled from components that have already been built, tested and governed. Some productive capabilities may also be deployed directly into new contexts.

For Finance, reuse can create three economic benefits: avoided development expenditure, lower marginal costs and faster deployment into additional scenarios, and option value from making future applications easier to pursue.

The return on an AI investment may therefore extend well beyond the use case that originally justified it.

Traditional Business Case	**Task Economics**	**Productivity Conversion**	**Reuse Economics**	Consumption and Lifecycle	AI Economics
Assumes all productivity is saving	Potential improvement in task economics	Value realised from cash, additional activity and performance	Reusable capability value		
100k × ($20 – $7)	Same calc, different classification	$0.4m cash + $0.8m activity + $0.4m performance	$0.5m avoided build + capability into new workflows		
$1.3m p.a.	$1.3m	$1.6m	+$0.5m*		

**Only avoided build cost is added in this illustrative bridge. Business value created when an existing agent or skill is redeployed is recognised in the economics of the consuming application, avoiding double counting.*

The economics now extend beyond the original use case. The remaining question is how these returns and costs behave as AI consumption grows and as technology changes.

4. Manage the cost of AI as it scales

The CFO question: Are the full costs of producing and sustaining outcomes improving over time?

Unlike many traditional technology investments, AI introduces a variable cost of production that continues to evolve after deployment. Each additional task may consume inference, retrieval, tool calls and orchestration. A straightforward customer interaction might require a single model call and minimal oversight, while a complex complaint could involve multiple reasoning steps, systems, controls and human approvals. Both may be reported as AI-enabled interactions, but their underlying economics can be very different.

For CFOs, the more meaningful measure is the full cost of delivering a successful outcome. This includes model consumption, tools, failures and retries, human assurance and other operating resources needed to meet the required standard. Total AI expenditure may increase as demand grows, even when the cost of individual tasks is falling.[5]

Returning to our banking example, increasing customer interactions from 100,000 to 180,000 will increase AI consumption and platform expenditure. The question is whether the cost per successful interaction is improving - and whether the additional activity is generating sufficient value to justify that expenditure.

AI economics also change as technology evolves. Models improve, prices shift, workflows become more efficient and human review requirements may reduce as organisations build confidence in their AI capabilities.

At the same time, changes in data, policies, providers and control expectations can introduce new costs. This means AI investment needs ongoing evaluation and optimisation, not simply a one-off business case and benefits review.

CFOs should also consider the costs associated with changing models, providers or technology architectures. Maintaining flexibility may require additional investment in integrations, prompts, controls, testing and assurance.

A customer interaction costing $7 today might fall to $5 next year through model optimisation and workflow redesign. Alternatively, it might remain at $7 because a more capable model can resolve more complex enquiries and reduce costly escalations. Both outcomes could represent improved economics. The management question is whether AI continues to deliver the required business outcome in the most economically effective way available.

Traditional Business Case	Task Economics	Productivity Conversion	Reuse Economics	Consumption and Lifecycle	AI Economics
Assumes all productivity is saving	Potential improvement in task economics	Value realised from cash, additional activity and performance	Portfolio value from reusable capability	Additional ongoing cost of operating and evolving AI	
100k × ($20 – $7)	Same calc, different classification	$0.4m cash + $0.8m activity + $0.4m performance	$0.5m avoided build + capability into new workflows	$0.2m p.a. lifecycle costs outside $7/task	
$1.3m p.a.	$1.3m	$1.6m	+$0.5m*	-$0.2m	

Traditional benefits management asks whether an investment delivered the returns originally expected. AI adds a second discipline: whether today's technology can deliver the same outcome materially better, or at a lower cost.

Bringing the Economics Together

A conventional business case remains the starting point. But a more complete economic assessment needs to distinguish potential productivity from realised value, recognise the portfolio benefits of reusable capabilities and account for the ongoing cost of operating and improving AI-enabled work.

Together, the four economic lenses provide a more complete answer to the questions CFOs need to ask of AI investment: what does the work really cost, how much of the productivity created becomes realised value, where else can existing capabilities generate returns, and are the full economics improving as AI scales?

The result is a clearer distinction between potential productivity, realised business value, portfolio benefits and the ongoing costs of delivering and sustaining AI-enabled outcomes.

Traditional Business Case	Task Economics	Productivity Conversion	Reuse Economics	Consumption and Lifecycle	AI Economics
Assumes all productivity is saving	Potential improvement in task economics	Value realised from cash, additional activity and performance	Portfolio value from reusable capability	Additional ongoing cost of operating and evolving AI	Net annualised economic value
100k × ($20 – $7)	Same calc, different classification	$0.4m cash + $0.8m activity + $0.4m performance	$0.5m avoided build + capability into new workflows	$0.2m p.a. lifecycle costs outside $7/task	Full annualised economic answer
$1.3m p.a.	$1.3m	$1.6m	+$0.5m*	-$0.2m	$1.9m p.a.

Illustrative annual equivalents are used here only to compare different economic effects. Reuse assumes $1.5m of future build cost avoided over three years, shown as a $0.5m annual equivalent. Value created when an existing agent or skill is redeployed is attributed to the consuming application and is not added again. Formal investment decisions should model build costs, realised savings, avoided investment, consumption and lifecycle expenditure in the periods in which they occur and assess them through cash flow and NPV.

Economic value and accounting recognition answer different questions.

Management economics asks what investment creates value, how that value propagates across tasks and applications, and what it costs to produce and sustain. Financial reporting asks about recognition, control, capitalisation, amortisation and useful life. Standard setters are still considering how existing intangible-asset requirements apply to newer forms of digital and AI-related investment. Reusable AI capability can therefore have material economic value even when it is not recognised as a separate accounting asset.[6]

AI capabilities often combine hosted software, internally developed code, data, integrations, controls and implementation effort. Those components may have different accounting outcomes depending on their nature, who controls them and whether the relevant recognition requirements are met.

Accordingly, neither expenditure nor economic value should be assumed to map directly to a recognised accounting asset.

The result is still recognisable as an investment case. Finance simply needs greater visibility into how value and cost behave beneath it and across the portfolio.

Managing AI value across the enterprise

Understanding where AI creates value is only half the equation. CFOs also need to know how to manage that value - from enterprise investment priorities to individual AI-enabled outcomes. This requires connecting investment decisions, business outcomes, productive AI capabilities and the economics of individual executions.

Four levels of management provide a practical way to connect these decisions:

- **Strategy:** Where should the organisation direct AI investment to create the greatest value?
- **Outcomes:** Is AI changing business performance and delivering measurable returns?
- **Agents:** Are AI capabilities performing safely, effectively and economically?
- **Runtime:** Is each execution using the most economically effective combination of models, data, tools, infrastructure and controls?

These levels are interconnected: strategic choices determine where AI is applied, business outcomes establish what value is expected and whether it is being realised. Agents perform the work, while individual runs consume the resources required to produce it. Change at any level can affect the economics of the others.

Across the portfolio, each investment still needs a clear owner, measurable outcomes, understood unit economics and an explicit path from productivity improvements to realised value. Management also needs to know what each investment leaves behind, and where those capabilities could be applied next.

Shared components may reduce the cost, time and risk of future applications; developed agents and skills can sometimes be redeployed directly into additional workflows.

The strongest AI investments have the potential to create value repeatedly: through the work they first improve, the capabilities they leave behind and the additional contexts in which those capabilities can be reused.

For CFOs, the challenge is to understand whether investments are delivering their expected returns, what future development costs can be avoided, and where existing capabilities can create further value.



Strategically direct AI investment to where it matters most

AI creates more potential investment opportunities than most organisations can realistically fund or govern.

CFOs therefore have an important role in directing capital towards the areas of enterprise performance with the greatest economic potential and a credible path to value realisation. Strategic value pools provide a way to focus investment on opportunities with material economic headroom, clear alignment to business priorities and measurable outcomes. They also allow organisations to experiment within defined strategic boundaries, rather than spreading investment across disconnected use cases.

PwC's AI Performance study found that global AI leaders were 1.3 times as likely as other businesses to reallocate financial and human resources towards high-value AI projects as priorities shifted. The study also found that AI leaders were 80% more likely to systematically track the business impact of AI initiatives.

While these findings don't establish that these practices alone cause higher returns, they reinforce the importance of actively managing the AI investment portfolio - with clear accountability, measurable outcomes and the flexibility to redirect resources as priorities change.

Finance should therefore require an accountable business owner to review each material investment and recommend whether to scale, redesign, pause or stop. Decisions should reflect incremental value, future costs, capacity constraints, reuse potential and risk - rather than sunk costs or activity to date.

Reuse can strengthen an investment case where the capability developed reduces the cost, time or risk of subsequent applications.

Measure the business outcomes that matter

Ultimately, the economic case for AI needs to be demonstrated through business outcomes.

AI applications, agents and models are mechanisms for improving performance. What matters is whether they change the result that justified the investment. This requires a clear owner, an established baseline and measurable evidence of progress.

Task economics provides the underlying operating evidence, while productivity conversion shows how improvements translate into cost savings, additional activity or better performance.

The question for Finance is not simply whether AI is working, but whether the organisation is capturing the value it was designed to create.



Manage AI agents for performance, value and trust

As AI becomes increasingly agentic, individual agents will become an important unit of operational and economic management.

An agent can consume models, retrieve enterprise information, use tools, interact with systems and take actions across a workflow. Its performance can therefore directly influence operating costs, service quality, risk and customer outcomes. An agent workbench can bring those dimensions together in one management record.

For each agent, that record should establish its purpose, accountable owner, approved tasks, data access, tools and permissions, level of autonomy, human escalation requirements, evaluation standards and operating controls. This view should also track model versions, changes, incidents, exceptions and evidence of ongoing performance.

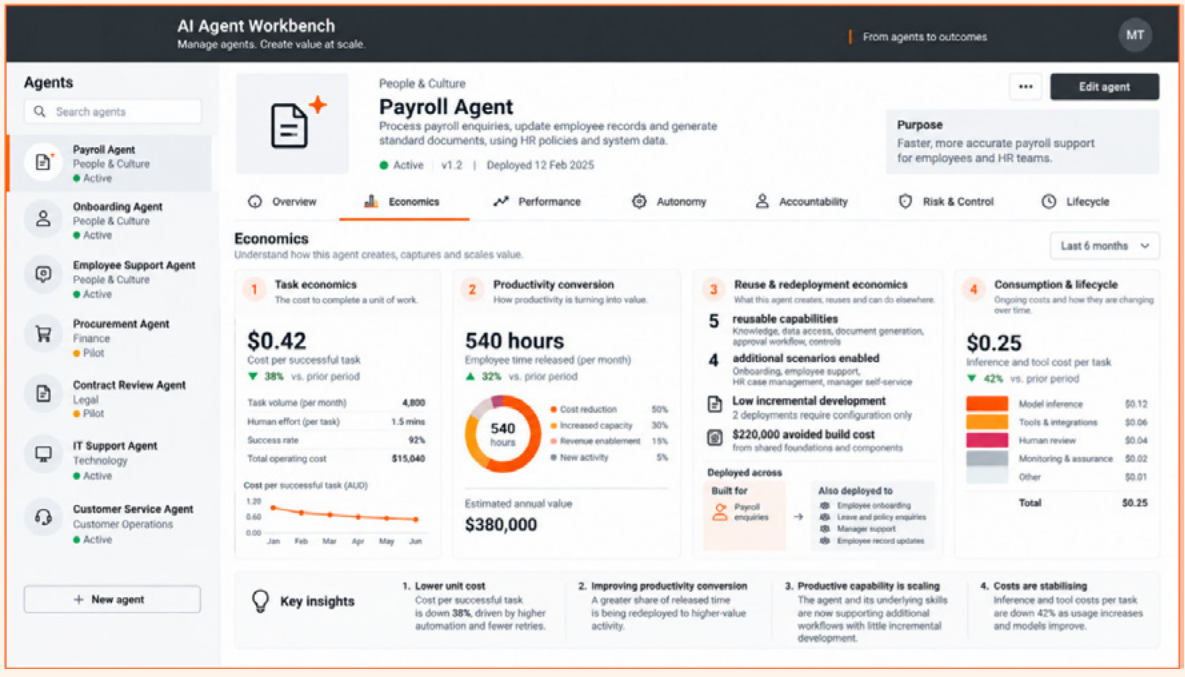
Importantly, economic performance should be managed alongside operational performance and risk. Relevant measures include task volumes, model and tool consumption, retry rates, human review requirements, cost per successful outcome and budget thresholds.

Together, these measures help organisations understand whether an agent is becoming more or less economically efficient as its workload, configuration or autonomy changes.

Optimisation should always be assessed in the context of performance and control. A lower-cost model may increase retries or human review. Greater autonomy may reduce labour requirements while introducing additional control requirements. A more capable model may reduce the total cost of delivering a successful outcome.

At the portfolio level, an agent workbench can also reveal opportunities for reuse. It can show which agents share data, tools, controls and evaluation patterns, and where existing agents or skills are already supporting multiple workflows.

Useful measures include the number of deployments supported, the value generated across those deployments, and incremental development required for each extension.



An illustrative management view connecting AI agent performance, economics, accountability and opportunities for reuse.

Optimise AI economics at the runtime level

As AI scales, organisations have more opportunities to optimise how individual tasks are performed. Model and technology choices no longer need to be fixed for an entire application; they can increasingly be tailored to individual tasks, and sometimes to specific steps within a task. For example, a routine request might be directed to a smaller, lower-cost model, while a more complex or ambiguous case is escalated to a more capable one.

Workloads can be routed across providers or infrastructure according to cost, speed and availability. Context, retrieval, caching, storage, tool use and human assurance can similarly vary according to the task. This means the most economically effective configuration may differ from one unit of work to the next.[7]

Runtime economics is about delivering each successful outcome using the most economically effective combination of AI resources, while meeting required standards for quality, speed, risk and control.

As routing and abstraction layers improve, more of those decisions may be made dynamically. At scale, even relatively small improvements can become significant. Incremental gains in model routing, context use, caching, retries, infrastructure utilisation and human review can compound across large volumes of AI-enabled work.

For CFOs, this means AI economics cannot be managed through investment approval alone; they also require continuous optimisation as technology, usage and operating conditions change.



Three priorities for CFOs

Existing business case and value management disciplines remain essential for strategic alignment, baselines, financial evaluation, and benefits realisation.

AI doesn't replace these disciplines. It extends them.

For Finance leaders, three practical priorities can help bring the full economics of AI into investment and performance management.

01

Establish the true economics of AI-enabled work

For priority AI investments, identify a meaningful unit of work and establish its baseline economics. Measure the full cost, quality, speed and volume of producing a successful AI-enabled outcome, including inference, tools, retries, human input and assurance. This gives Finance a consistent basis for understanding whether the underlying economics are improving as adoption increases.

02

Build a more complete investment case

Distinguish between productivity created and value realised. Establish how released capacity will translate into cost savings, additional activity or improved performance, with clear attribution to avoid double counting.

Identify opportunities to reuse existing components, agents and skills, and assess the incremental investment needed to apply them elsewhere. Include ongoing consumption and lifecycle costs so investment decisions reflect the full economics of delivering and sustaining value.

03

Manage AI value across the portfolio

Direct investment towards strategic value pools with clear economic potential. Track realised business outcomes, manage AI agents as productive capabilities and continually optimise operating economics as models, prices, workflows and technologies evolve. Across the portfolio, assess whether reusable capabilities are making subsequent applications faster, cheaper or less risky to deliver.

The CFO's opportunity: From AI investment to sustained value

For CFOs and Boards, the fundamental question remains familiar: what return is the organisation generating from its investment?

AI makes answering that question more complex - but also creates new opportunities to improve enterprise performance.

A complete view of AI economics connects the cost of work, the conversion of productivity into realised value, the potential to reuse productive capabilities and the ongoing cost of operating and optimising AI at scale. For CFOs, the opportunity is to bring these dimensions together through disciplined investment decisions, clear accountability and continuous performance management.

The organisations that capture the greatest value from AI won't necessarily be those that invest the most. They'll be those that understand where value is created, how to capture it and how to sustain it as AI scales.



Key References

Sources and companion thinking:

1. International Labour Organization (2026), The impact of GenAI on jobs, productivity and work organization: a review of the empirical evidence, **https://www.ilo.org/publications/impact-genai-jobs-productivity-and-work-organization-review-empirical**, 1 June 2026.

2. Baslandze, S. et al. (2026), Artificial Intelligence, Productivity, and the Workforce: Evidence from Corporate Executives, NBER Working Paper 34984, **https://www.nber.org/papers/w34984**, March 2026.

3. Anthropic (2026), Anthropic Economic Index: Economic primitives, **https://www.anthropic.com/economic-index**, Updated June 2026.

4. Microsoft (2026), Introducing business skills: Teach agents how your organization works, **https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/power-platform/blog/2026/05/01/business-skills/**, 1 May 2026.

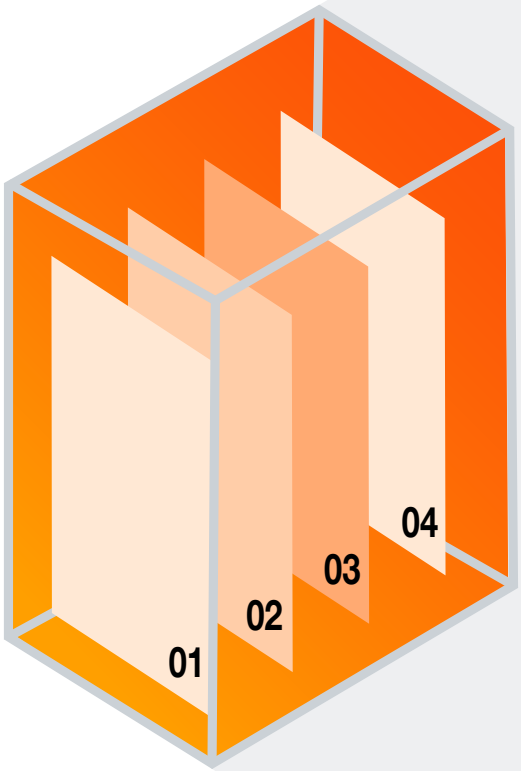
5. FinOps Foundation (2026), Token Economics: The Atomic Unit of AI Value, **https://www.finops.org/insights/token-economics-the-atomic-unit-of-ai-value/**, 10 May 2026.

6. IFRS Foundation / IASB (2026), Intangible Assets project and 2026 project updates on IAS 38, **https://www.ifrs.org/projects/work-plan/intangible-assets/**, Update September 2026.

7. NVIDIA (2026), Route AI Agent Workloads Across Models with NVIDIA NeMo Switchyard, 11 August 2026.

A fuller economic answer

Value from the work, the capability and its operation over time.



01 Task economics

What does a successful unit of work cost?

- Cost per successful task
- Quality and accuracy
- Speed and throughput
- Retries and human intervention
- Capacity released

Changes the economics of work

02 Productivity conversion

What happens to the capacity created?

- Lower cost
- Additional activity
- Improved performance
- New activity that was previously uneconomic

Turns potential into realised value

03 Reuse economics

How many times can the investment create value?

- **Component reuse** Reduce what needs to be built next
- **Productive capability reuse** Redeploy agents and skills into additional contexts with little incremental development

Creates portfolio economics

04 Consumption and lifecycle

How do the economics change in use and over time?

- Inference and model costs
- Tools, retrieval and storage
- Routing and assurance
- Optimisation as usage grows
- Technology improvement over time

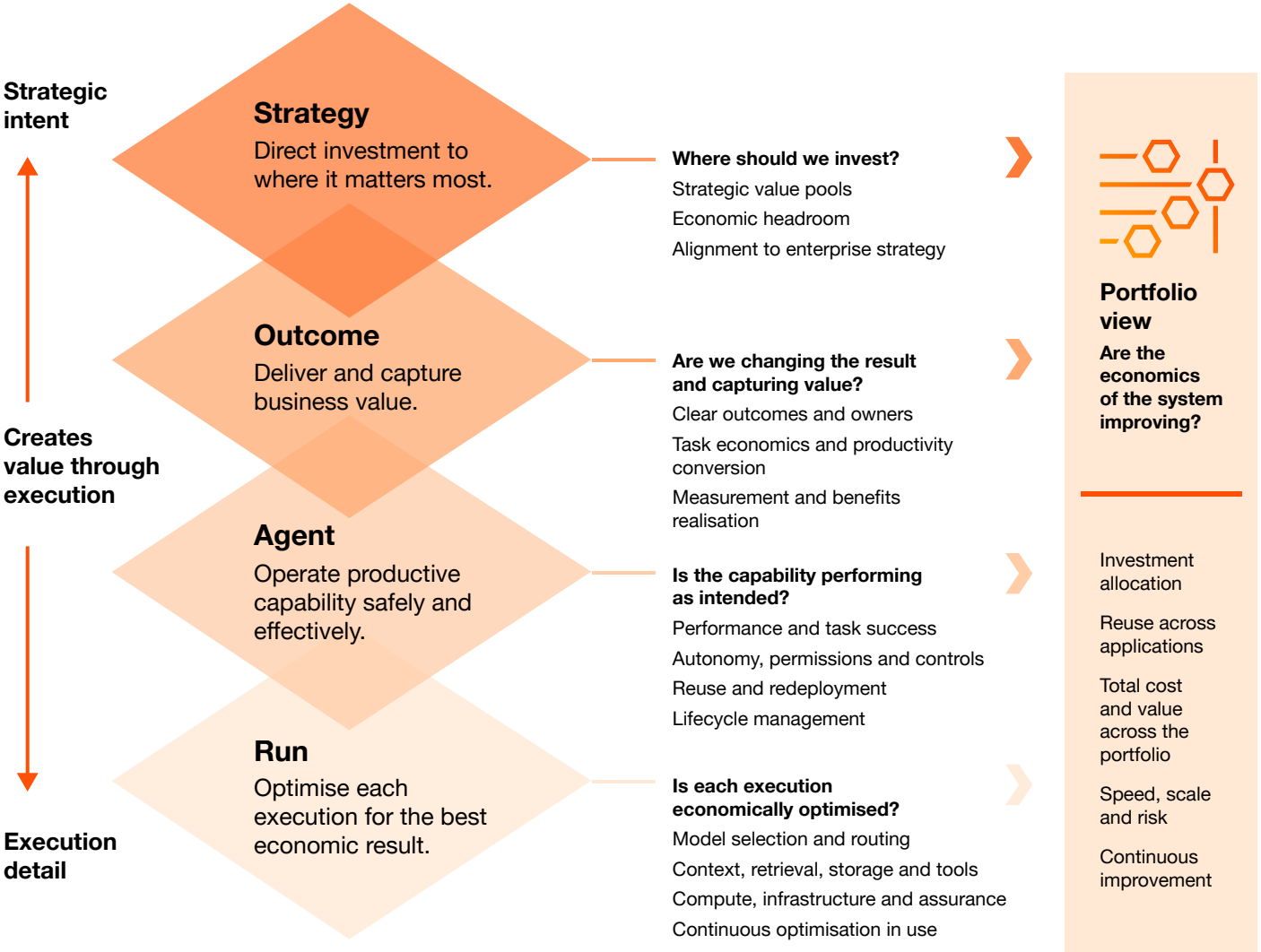
Adds an ongoing operating dimension

Connects the use case to the portfolio

From the work... ...to lasting value

Managing AI economics

From strategic choices to individual executions, connected. The economics of AI must be managed across four levels. Each level answers a different question, but they are connected – strategic choices determine where AI is applied, outcomes establish what value is expected, agents perform the work, and individual runs consume the resources required to produce it.



About the authors



Matthew Tutty
Partner, Advisory
PwC Australia
matthew.tutty@au.pwc.com

Contributors



Ben Meacock
Partner, Assurance
PwC Australia
ben.meacock@au.pwc.com



Mathea Beck
Partner, Advisory
PwC Australia
mathea.beck@au.pwc.com



Nicola Costello
Partner, Assurance
PwC Australia
nicola.costello@au.pwc.com

© 2026 PricewaterhouseCoopers. All rights reserved. PwC refers to the Australian member firm, and may sometimes refer to the PwC network. Each member firm is a separate legal entity. Please see www.pwc.com/structure for further details. This content is for general information purposes only, and should not be used as a substitute for consultation with professional advisors. Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.

At PwC Australia, we help clients build trust and reinvent so they can turn complexity into competitive advantage. We're a tech-forward, people-empowered network with more than 369,000 people in 135 countries. Across audit and assurance, tax and legal, deals and consulting, we help clients build, accelerate, and sustain momentum. Find out more at pwc.com.au

pwc.com.au