

Report

**BUILDING IN CONTROL:**  
**THE 2026**  
**CONSTRUCTION**  
**CFO PLAYBOOK**



Sage

# Contents

## **Page 3**

Introduction

## **Page 4**

The strategic evolution of the CFO

## **Page 5**

Burgeoning leadership ambitions

## **Page 6**

Construction CFOs:  
Resourceful strategists

## **Page 9**

The high-performance action plan

## **Page 13**

Conclusion

## **Page 14**

Sage's capabilities for  
the construction industry

# Introduction

The pressure is mounting. Finance leaders in construction and real estate are having to find ways to maintain financial stability in an increasingly volatile environment.

Material prices have soared, supply chain disruption, and global uncertainty. Costs fluctuate frequently, making them difficult to predict and manage. Labour shortages are compounding the issue, slowing project timelines and disrupting team momentum. With margins already shrinking, even minor delays or inefficiencies can quickly erode profitability.

In response, many finance leaders are broadening their remit, taking a more active role in shaping operational strategy and driving business performance. As their responsibilities expand, they're expected to bring clarity to complex decisions, support smarter planning, and help their organisations adapt to shifting project demands.

According to the Sage 2025 CFO Growth Code research, construction finance leaders are eager to step up to the task. More than nine in 10 (93%) believe they could do more to impact business growth, and 27% say it's a significant aspiration to become a more prominent business partner to their operational leaders in the next two years.

To realise that ambition, many are looking for ways to work more efficiently, make faster decisions, and respond with greater confidence. The Sage research data reveals a cohort of high-performing leaders using automation and AI-powered insights to work more efficiently, reduce revenue leakage, and improve project profitability—without disrupting existing workflows. By embracing the right tools and strategies, these CFOs are moving beyond reactive problem-solving to build stronger, more resilient businesses. That resilience is powered by improvements like faster month-end close, real-time cash visibility, accurate change order capture, and more reliable billing. Each of these enhancements helps finance teams stay ahead of risk and drive better outcomes.



This report draws on new research from Sage and the Financial Times—The 2025 CFO Growth Code—which surveyed 500 senior UK finance leaders across industries including financial services, insurance, hospitality, software, healthcare, construction, real estate, and not-for-profit. All participants work in organisations with more than 20 and less than 500 employees.

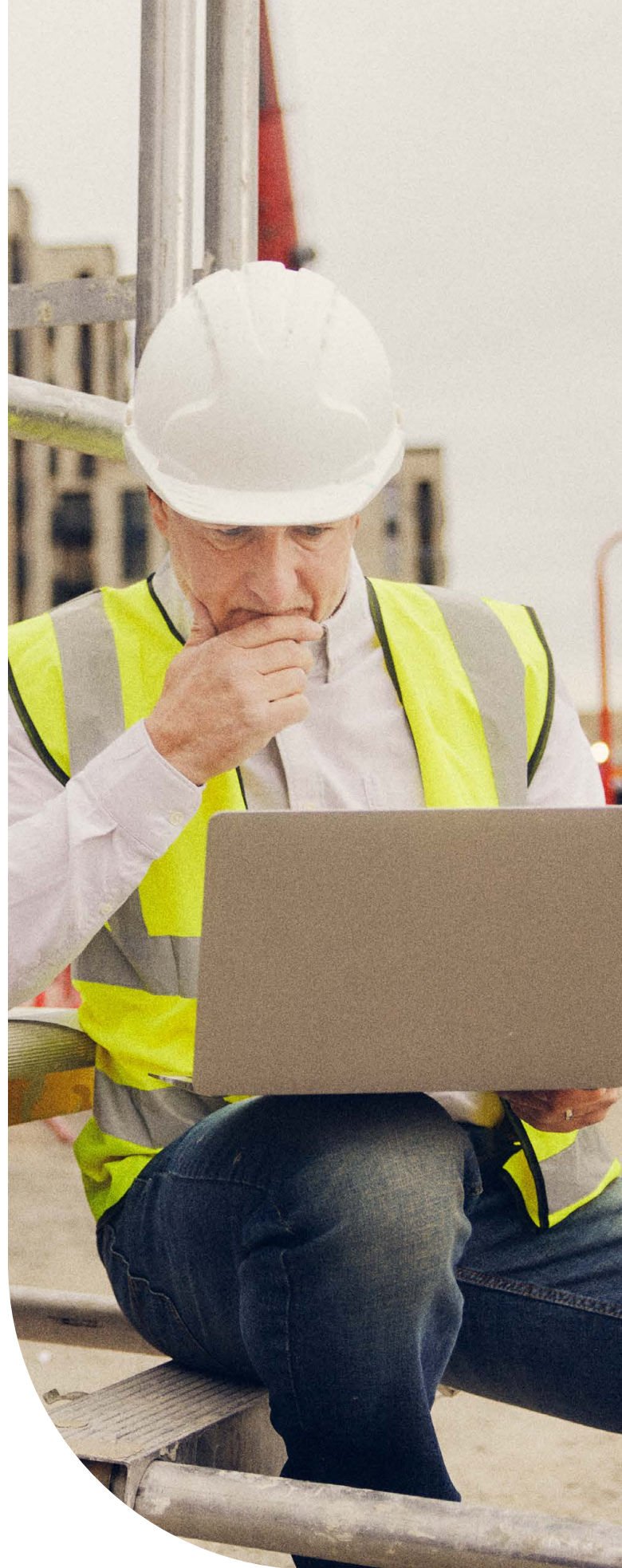
# The strategic evolution of the CFO

To understand the bigger picture, Sage and the Financial Times conducted research into CFOs' experience across a range of industries. It revealed that the transformation of the finance lead role isn't exclusive to the construction sector, but part of a broader shift happening across the business landscape.

In just two years, 87% of finance leaders say their role has undergone significant changes, and almost all (96%) think it will continue to evolve. Across all industries, CFOs are taking on more responsibilities and having input in areas as diverse as workforce planning, cybersecurity, operations, shareholder and investor relations, and risk management.

The findings from the 2025 CFO Growth Code make it clear that rapid technological change is also transforming the finance function, breaking down silos, and ushering in a new era of strategic integration. Half of all finance leaders say they collaborate more with the leadership team compared to two years ago—including the CTO, CEO, and the board.

This collaboration is ultimately a sign that organisations are becoming more data driven. Finance teams are expected to give strategic direction beyond merely reporting on current or past numbers. High-performance CFOs are leading their organisations to make better use of data and insights, spotting opportunities, predicting needs, and building greater agility and resilience for the future—whether that's in hiring decisions or technology investments.



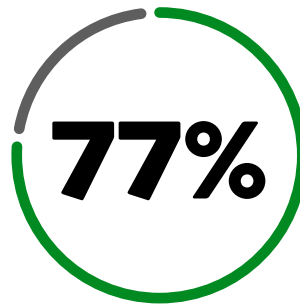


# Burgeoning Leadership ambitions

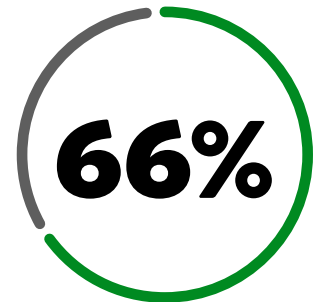
Ambitious and successful, CFOs are excited about the future. Nine in 10 aspire to take on a more strategic leadership role, be a more prominent business partner to operational leaders, and eventually become the CEO of an organisation.

They also know just how to get there. Almost all (86%) of respondents say they want to drive innovation in financial processes and technologies. Meanwhile, most finance leaders believe further AI implementation would enable them to make a greater impact, improve collaboration with their peers, and boost their business' overall finance function. With the right skills, mindset, and tools, finance leaders will be able to achieve their own personal performance ambitions, as well as further those of their organisations.

The CFO's expanding role:



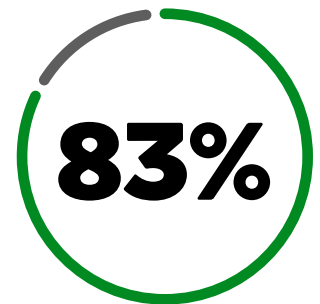
say they play a leading role in driving profitable growth.



say they play a leading role in strategic planning.



say the rapid pace of technological change has already reshaped their role.



say it will become even more vital to introduce new technologies to save time and costs in finance.

# Construction CFOs: Resourceful strategists

Construction finance leaders are being pulled in different directions. Faced with rising costs, talent shortages, and tight timelines, there's a real urgency to solve immediate operational challenges to keep projects moving and budgets intact.

Sage research shows that, compared to peers from other industries, construction CFOs are more likely to struggle with economic volatility (27% vs. 16%) and talent retention (23% vs. 12%).

In particular, talent remains one of the most persistent challenges across the industry. According to the CSN Industry Outlook report 2024-2028\*, released by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) 251,500 extra workers will be required to meet UK construction output by 2028.

Meeting this rising demand will present significant opportunities but will also require resources that many firms are already struggling to secure—talent being chief among them.

## From overstretched to optimised

While construction CFOs are acutely aware of the need to tackle day-to-day project pressure points, they're also being tasked with broader strategic responsibilities that extend well beyond traditional finance.

73% of construction finance leaders say their role has expanded into non-traditional finance responsibilities in the past year, such as digital transformation, HR collaboration, and strategic planning.

Being stretched thin is taking a toll on construction finance leaders, and nearly one in three (30%) say they feel burned out in their role. Compared to other sectors, they're more likely to feel worried about the future of their profession, with 27% expressing concern (versus a 19% average across other industries).

# Bridging the gap between ambition and adoption

While most finance leaders surveyed express an interest in modernising finance operations, construction CFOs are approaching new technology with more caution than their peers. Just 69% say they aspire to invest in new tools, compared to 95% across other industries. Similarly, only 61% are looking to improve their current tech stack, versus a cross-sector average of 77%.

This may signal a more measured, pragmatic approach—one shaped not just by a preference for proven solutions, but by caution around technology investment during uncertain times. Construction finance leaders need confidence that new solutions will deliver clear ROI and meaningful impact, without causing unnecessary disruption.

Despite anxieties around investments, desire to improve current processes remains strong. According to Sage research, 76% of construction finance leaders want to improve their financial processes and technologies—particularly in areas

like AI, automation, outlier detection, and reporting. The good news is construction CFOs are motivated to adopt this kind of technology. Almost two thirds (63%) feel responsible for leading digital transformation, and 76% want to drive innovation in financial processes and technology.

Yet nearly half (45%) say they aren't using AI to its full potential. Barriers like security concerns (41%), leadership resistance (37%), and lack of AI skills and expertise (30%) continue to hold them back. Almost one in three (32%) also fear being held accountable if AI doesn't deliver results.

This highlights the need for trusted, user-friendly tools that make AI-powered innovation feel both achievable and worthwhile. To move forward with confidence, construction finance leaders need solutions built for the realities of their industry. That means tools that integrate with existing systems, unlock meaningful ROI, and drive efficiency without adding risk or complexity.

Armed with the right technology, construction CFOs and operational leaders are well positioned to guide their firms toward greater control, stronger performance, and long-term resilience.

## Quotes from construction and real estate finance leaders in Sage research:



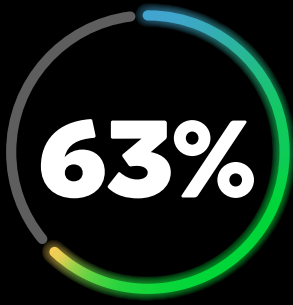
“Closing the books involves multiple complex factors and challenges, requiring sufficient resources and effort to establish effective management processes and systems.”

“I find it challenging to identify and invest in the right technology for our finance function due to the overwhelming pace of innovation and the difficulty in evaluating ROI.”

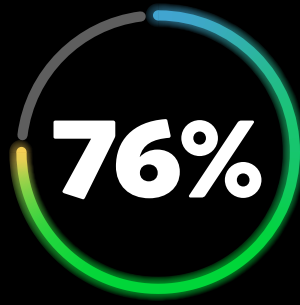
“Staying compliant with industry regulations and ensuring that financial statements are accurate and meet reporting standards can be time-consuming.”

“There are so many software solutions on the market, but none have every feature we need, unless we spend a lot on customisation.”

**Construction CFO technology use and attitudes**

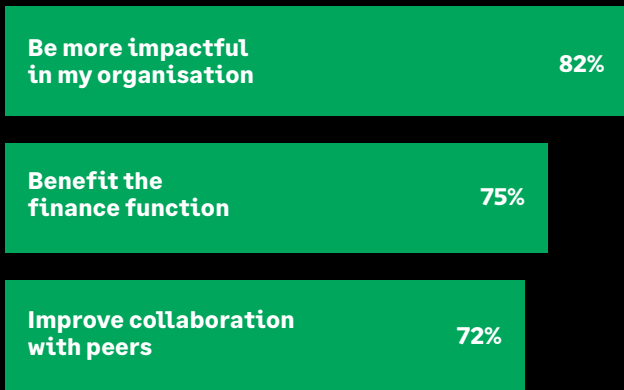


feel responsible for leading digital transformation.

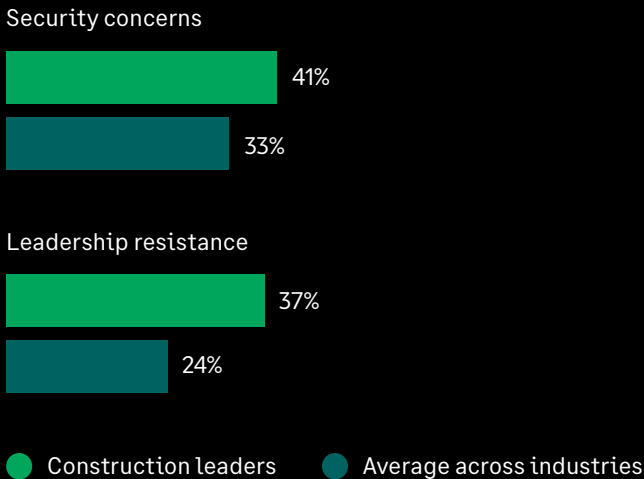


want to drive innovation in financial processes and technology.

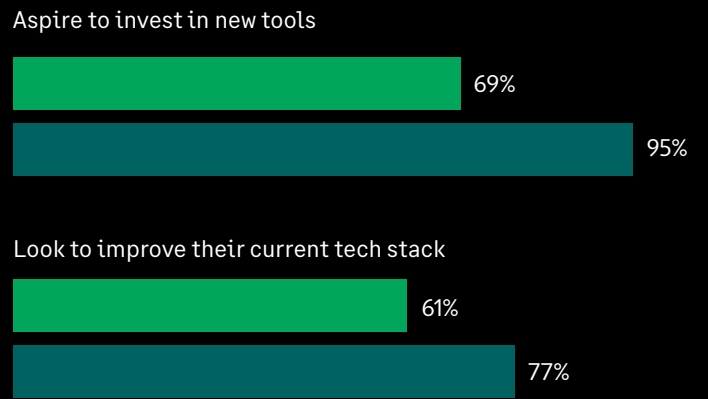
**AI would allow me to:**



**Obstacles to AI investment:**



**Construction CFOs are more cautious about technology than their peers:**



# The high-performance action plan

Sage research has identified a cohort dubbed the “high-performance finance leaders.” These CFOs take action to drive innovation, fuel sustainable growth, and build robust organisational resilience. They typically demonstrate four behaviours:



Maximising their use of AI and automation, so they have the time to focus on strategy.



Ensuring data drives their decision making.

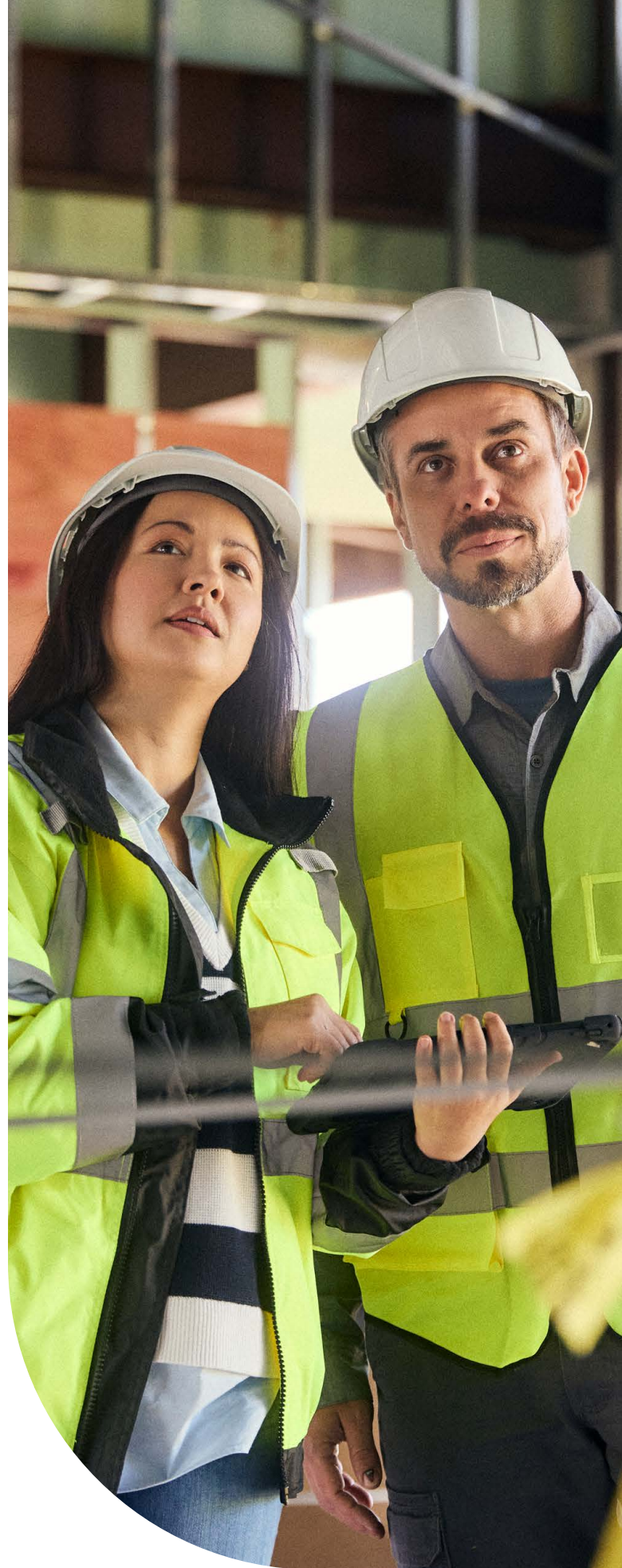


Extending their influence beyond finance to a wider internal and external audience.



Working to get on top of compliance issues to anticipate and avoid future risks.

Construction CFOs have a clear opportunity to set the pace around technology, with 39% holding sole responsibility for leading digital transformation (compared to an overall average of 29%). By unlocking practical, performance-driven change, they can reduce pressure on their finance team, build capacity, and guide their organisations toward greater control, resilience, and long-term growth.





Based on these high-performance behaviours, here are five steps for construction finance leaders to take:

## 1 Use automation to unlock workforce capacity

As labour shortages continue to challenge the construction industry CFOs are under pressure to do more with less. Automation is a key opportunity for leaders looking to boost workforce capacity. By automating time-consuming tasks such as data entry, reconciliations, and invoice or payment application processing, finance teams can operate more efficiently, and CFOs can redirect their focus to higher-value work.

Modernising the finance tech stack allows construction leaders to move away from disconnected systems and manual workarounds toward integrated, cloud-based tools that support smarter, faster decision-making. With real-time visibility, streamlined workflows, and more accurate reporting (without adding unnecessary complexity), teams will be more likely to support whatever comes next.

Such tools also help create a more agile and attractive working environment, where finance teams can scale their impact, reduce burnout, and focus on strategic priorities. In a competitive labour market, this kind of future-ready infrastructure is key to retaining top talent and building long-term resilience.

## 2 Empower teams with real-time visibility

Two-thirds (66%) of construction CFOs want better financial analysis and reporting technology. But without the right systems in place, that goal remains out of reach. Disconnected workflows and outdated tools often result in siloed, inconsistent data that's difficult to access and even harder to act upon. As a result, finance leaders and project teams are left reacting to issues rather than anticipating them and minimising their impact.

With a single source of truth and user-specific dashboards, construction finance leaders can unlock real-time visibility across the organisation. Project leads gain instant access to performance data, cost tracking, and budget status without relying on spreadsheets or chasing manual updates. This empowers them to make faster, more informed decisions on the ground.

For CFOs, that same visibility enables a shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive planning. It supports stronger financial control, better alignment across departments, and more confident decision-making at every level. When everyone is working from the same data, collaboration improves, risks are easier to spot, and strategic goals (like improving cash flow, reducing budget variance, and increasing forecast accuracy) become easier to achieve.

### 3 Take stock before you scale

Construction CFOs are the most worried about the future of their profession compared to peers from other sectors (27% vs 19% cross-vertical average). This may be due to everyday firefighting, which means they lack the time or space to prepare for the future. Tight margins are a consistent source of stress in construction, and they leave no room for error. Mistakes such as a missed change order or delayed billing can have a big financial impact.

Many construction and real estate finance leaders are ambitious. They want to lead with greater clarity and make a meaningful impact on their organisations. But the disconnect between intent and capacity often leaves them stuck in reactive mode. The first step is to pause and assess the overall health of the business. Where are the biggest challenges? Where would improvements have the most impact?

Talking to the team can help uncover bottlenecks and identify areas where change would be most valuable. Focusing on a few high-impact areas can help finance leaders demonstrate tangible improvements.

### 4 Start small and track ROI

Technology investment decisions are complex, especially in today's uncertain economic climate. Every new investment must deliver clear value—whether through time savings, cost reduction, or improved decision-making. For example, recurring journal entries can reduce month-end close time by up to five days. These kinds of measurable outcomes help finance leaders justify investment and simplify the decision-making process.

Given the caution many construction CFOs feel around digital innovation (especially in the face of leadership resistance), it's important to start with manageable, low-risk initiatives. Modular, cloud-based solutions offer a flexible path forward, allowing teams to prove value early and scale as confidence grows.

Construction finance leaders should set measurable ROI goals and track benefits to drive support from the business before scaling up to other areas. Starting small also creates a foundation for broader transformation. As confidence grows, finance leaders can expand capabilities across budgeting, forecasting, and strategic planning—without disrupting day-to-day operations.

#### Checklist for CFOs:



Are billing processes consistently accurate and timely?



Is cost data captured reliably across projects?



Where are the biggest delays or bottlenecks in financial workflows?



Do field teams have the financial insights they need to operate effectively?



Are current tools and systems supporting long-term scalability?

5

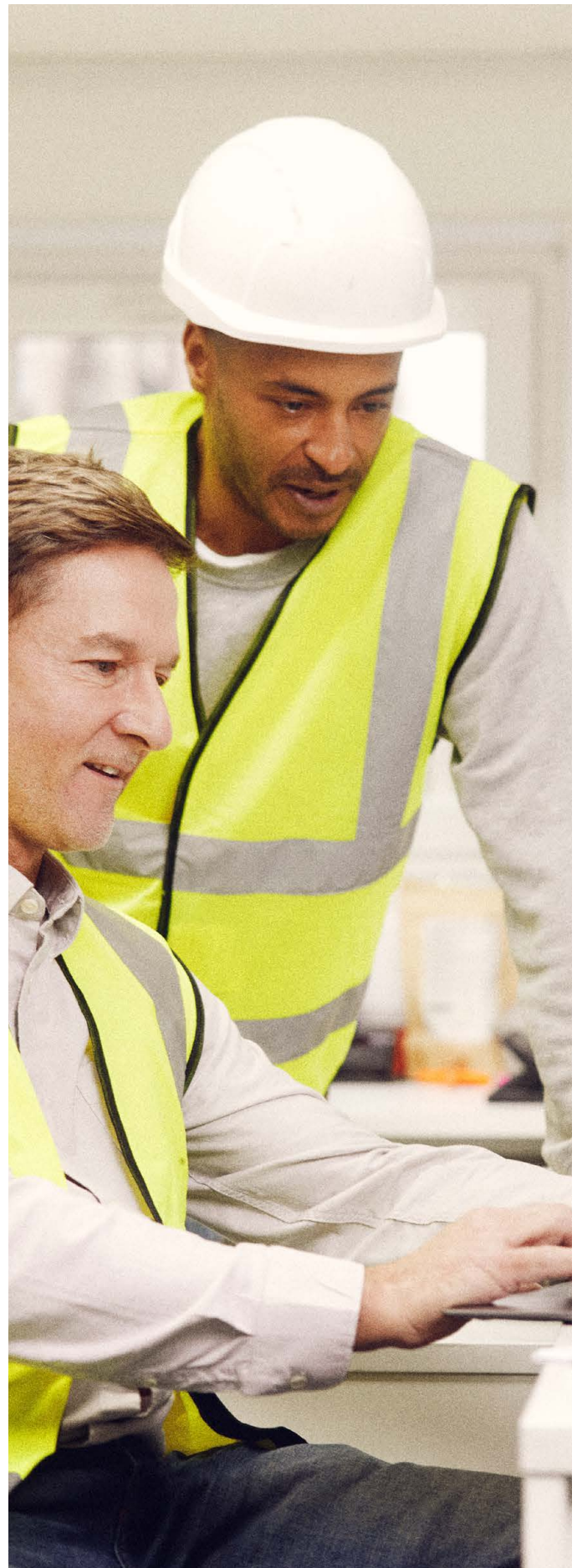
## Plan for the future with tools that integrate and scale

The right technology investment will enable construction finance leaders to do more with less, without disrupting existing workflows.

Modernising the finance function often means replacing outdated systems, but that doesn't have to create unnecessary friction. Construction finance leaders are right to be cautious about tools with steep learning curves or disruptive rollouts. The right construction-specific solutions integrate seamlessly, support familiar processes, and deliver value quickly—without overwhelming teams or slowing down operations.

The key is choosing a platform that works with essential tools like those for estimating and bidding work, managing field teams, or collecting payment applications. It should align with current workflows and offer the flexibility to scale as the business grows. This approach helps reduce disruption, demonstrate early wins, and build confidence across the organisation.

As technology continues to evolve, construction finance leaders need to prioritise solutions that meet today's needs and provide a secure, scalable foundation for the future. With the right tools in place, construction CFOs can lead transformation with clarity, control, and measurable impact.



# Conclusion

Construction finance leaders are no longer just managing budgets. Faced with rising costs, talent shortages, and economic volatility, they are guiding transformation and stepping up to lead with clarity and strategic intent.

But becoming a high-performance CFO means more than just improving efficiency. It involves enabling smarter decisions, unlocking capacity, and driving innovation across the business. With the right tools, finance leaders can move beyond reactive problem-solving to become proactive partners in growth.

The opportunity is clear. By embracing automation, improving visibility, and investing in scalable, integrated technology, construction CFOs can reduce the pressure they are feeling, improve project performance, and build long-term business resilience. In this high-stakes environment, they have the experience and ambition to lead. Now they need the support to match.



# Sage capabilities for the construction industry



Up to 50% faster month-end close with automated journal entries and reconciliations.\*



Significant time savings in AP/AR through automated invoice processing and payment workflows.



Multi-entity consolidations completed in minutes, eliminating manual spreadsheets and reducing errors.



Improved visibility and control with real-time dashboards for project costs, cash flow, and profitability.



Recognised as a Leader in Project-Based ERP Software by G2.



Trusted by thousands of construction businesses and recognised as the first and only preferred provider of the AICPA.

## What Sage customers say:



“This was the sixth or seventh accounting software implementation I’ve been through, and the Sage Partner team was the best I’ve ever worked with.”

**Morgan Schweitzer**  
Controller, Lunar Companies.

“With Sage Intacct we can drill down into each project and allocate resources really effectively.”

**Christopher Murray**  
Chief Financial Officer, ACT Construction

“Sage is already known as the leader in construction software, but on top of that, the multi-entity consolidation is extremely helpful for us.”

**Thomas Cochran**  
CFO, Orion Companies

To read the full research report into the current outlook for CFOs across industries, read The CFO Growth Code:  
[The 4 habits of high-performing CFOs →](#)



[sage.com](https://www.sage.com)



Sage

©2025 The Sage Group plc or its licensors. Sage, Sage logos, Sage product and service names mentioned herein are the trademarks of The Sage Group plc or its licensors. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.