



Medius Financial Census 2026

An Accounting of Financial Professionals

A look at shallowfakes, late payments, AI trust, and the future of the finance workforce.

Global findings from 2,386 senior finance executives across the US, UK, Sweden, and France.

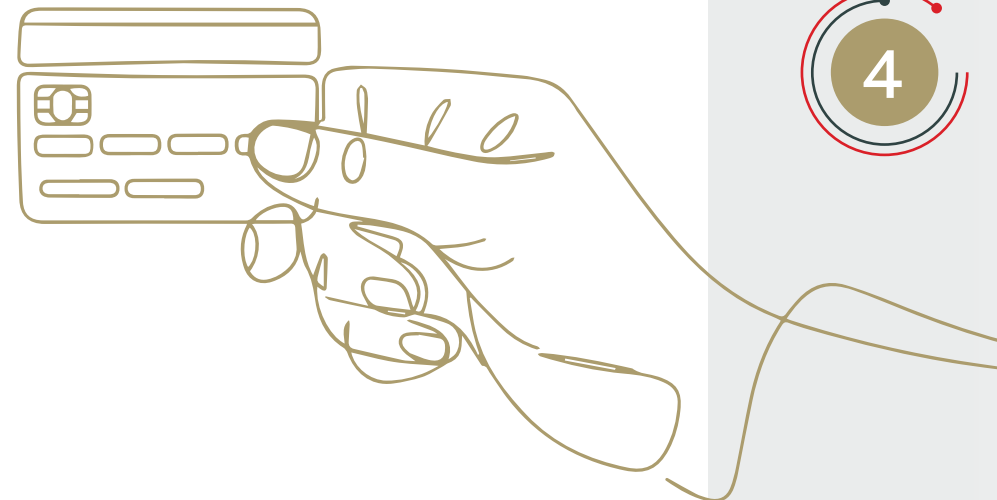


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As if there wasn't enough pressure on finance already.

The strain is coming from both inside and out. Fraud is no longer just an external threat. It's becoming normalized within organizations, and most finance professionals admit they'd overlook or rationalize small dishonest acts. Additionally, high rates of AP automation haven't lowered late-payment concerns, which continue to drive burnout and damage supplier relationships. Finally, AI adoption is accelerating, but trust is lagging behind. And as AI reshapes finance careers, professionals are feeling pressured to adapt faster than their organizations can support them.

At Medius, we believe managing AP and finance should be about strategy, not stress. The 2026 Census shows that technology alone isn't the answer. Organizations need governance, a supportive culture, and the right tools working together to tackle fraud, payment delays, and AI accountability head on.



Four things you need to know.



Fraud is being normalized.

87% of finance professionals have ignored a claim they suspected was fraudulent. **67%** would commit a minor dishonest expense act if coworkers did too. Small frauds are flying under the radar—at scale.



AP automation is up and running, but problems persist.

85% of finance teams have automated AP, yet late payments still cause burnout for **96%**. Approval bottlenecks, disputes, and cash flow gaps are the real culprits, not a lack of automation.



AI adoption is high, but trust has a governance gap.

90% of finance teams require human approval for AI decisions, and **46%** admit those rules aren't written down. If AI makes a mistake, nobody agrees on who owns it.



AI fluency is reshaping careers and driving burnout.

86% of finance professionals are now evaluated on AI usage. **75%** say AI has increased their fatigue. The pressure to adapt is outpacing the support available.



METHODOLOGY

A quick inquiry into the research.

To capture the challenges facing finance departments in 2026, Medius surveyed 2,386 senior finance executives across the US, UK, Sweden, and France—professionals who make financial decisions and/or hold final responsibility regarding financial matters in organizations with more than 50 employees (25+).

Companies with fewer than 50 employees or those processing fewer than 5,000 invoices annually were excluded, ensuring that findings reflect the reality of mid-to-large enterprise finance teams. In fact, the average organization in our sample processes more than 26,000 invoices annually.

Research was conducted by Censurwide, which operates under Market Research Society standards aligned with European Society for Opinion and Market Research principles.

CHAPTER 1

Fraud and Shallowfakes: The enemy within.

Fraud is coming from inside the organization. The 2026 Census reveals a growing normalization of small-scale financial dishonesty inside finance teams—what we’re calling “shallowfakes.” Most professionals can name common fraud types and say they’re worried about AI-generated threats. But the majority also admit they’d excuse or rationalize minor acts when the stakes feel low. So the biggest challenge isn’t recognizing fraud, it’s that small-scale fraud is being tolerated every day. And it adds up quickly.



87% of finance professionals have ignored a claim they suspected was fraudulent—and **67%** say they’d do it themselves if their coworkers did too.

The numbers that matter:

53% of finance professionals **call small expense exaggerations “acceptable”** when the dollar amount is minor.

57% would **round up an expense or mileage claim** if they believed it wouldn’t be noticed.

64% would **justify a small dishonest financial act** if they felt underpaid or undervalued.

67% would likely **engage in a minor dishonest expense claim** if it was common practice among coworkers.

74% believe small forms of fraud—**shallowfakes—are already common** in their workplace.

87% have **personally ignored a small expense, reimbursement, or claim** they believed was fraudulent.

93% say they’re **concerned about AI-generated fraud** over the next 12 months.



FRAUD AND SHALLOWFAKES

What do finance teams consider to be workplace fraud?

Finance executives identified the following as the most common forms of workplace fraud:

- Submitting an AI-edited or digitally altered receipt or invoice. (34%)
- Using a vendor invoice template to create a fictitious claim. (33%)
- Copying a legitimate invoice and changing payment details. (33%)
- Slightly inflating hours on a timesheet. (33%)
- Generating a realistic-looking invoice using AI tools. (32%)
- Using a company subscription or account for personal use. (32%)
- Rounding up mileage by a small amount on an expense claim. (31%)
- Submitting a receipt twice (29%)

“Recognizing fraud isn’t the biggest challenge—it’s the growing normalization of small frauds viewed as too minor to matter, even as they contribute to significant losses over time.”

How are teams detecting fraud?

- 51% use automated software to detect fraudulent invoices or manipulated documents.
- 48% use AI tools for fraud detection.
- 46% undergo manual review.
- 44% use third-party verification.



71% of legal professionals in the US would engage in a minor dishonest expense act if coworkers did (vs. 67% globally). 76% say shallowfakes are already common in their workplace. And the average financial loss per organization due to invoice fraud is **\$168,204**.



AI risk differentiation: In the US, generating a realistic AI invoice is among the least recognized fraud behaviors (30%). In Sweden, it ranks as the most recognized form of fraud (40%)—a striking contrast that reflects different threat awareness by market.

How to close the shallowfake gap:

- Deploy AI anomaly detection across all invoice types.
- Establish multistage authorization workflows.
- Build a culture where reporting suspicious activity is safe and encouraged.
- Validate supplier and vendor data automatically.
- Conduct regular, practical fraud-awareness training.
- Set clear, enforced expense policies with zero-tolerance thresholds.

CHAPTER 2

Late Payments: Automation's broken promise.

Finance departments report high satisfaction with their AP technology, yet nearly a third of invoices are paid late every single month. This is the AP perception gap: organizations believe their automation is working, but their suppliers and their own AP teams tell a different story. Unfortunately, the consequences are real—suppliers are tightening terms, cutting service levels and, in some cases, walking away.



85% of finance teams have automated AP—yet **96%** say late payments are still driving team burnout.

The numbers that matter:

28% of finance teams **call the burnout impact "significant or severe"**.

45% say 21–40% **of their invoices are paid late** in a typical month.

85% report some level of AP automation—yet **late payments remain widespread**.

90% **say they're satisfied** with their current AP technology.

95% say they're **satisfied with how long it currently takes to pay a supplier**—despite the late payment reality.

96% say managing late payments has **contributed to AP team stress or burnout**.



LATE PAYMENTS

Why are payments late? (Hint: it's not the technology.)

When finance professionals name the real causes of late payments, it's about process, not tools:

- Internal approval bottlenecks. (23%)
- Insufficient cash flow management. (21%)
- Disputed invoices or data mismatches. (21%)
- Under-resourced AP teams. (18%)
- Poor visibility on upcoming deadlines. (16%)

What are suppliers doing about it?

- 45% are imposing stricter payment terms upfront.
- 43% are ending client relationships.
- 42% are reducing service quality or speed.
- 42% are escalating to formal dispute or legal action.



“The AP perception gap is real. Organizations believe their automation is working—but their suppliers and their own AP teams tell a very different story.”

Internal approval bottlenecks are the #1 cause of late payments in the US (23%), followed by disputed invoices (22%).

Average late payment penalties are
\$23,808 per year.

And teams spend an average of
7.7 hours per week chasing approvals and resolving disputes.

Cash flow management is the #1 driver of late payments in the UK (24%)—different from the US where bottlenecks dominate. This reflects distinct operational and financial pressures across markets.

LATE PAYMENTS

There's a better way to spend your time.

If organizations could free up time currently spent managing late payments, they'd reinvest it in:

- Tech upgrades and digital transformation. (45%)
- Strategic financial planning and forecasting. (45%)
- Supplier relationship development. (43%)
- Hiring and retaining finance talent. (40%)

For these AI benefits to actually benefit your business, you first need to fix the process bottlenecks and organizational complexity that sit underneath the technology.

But there are barriers in the way.

- Complexity: too many systems in place. (22%)
- Competing priorities: other digital projects take precedence. (21%)
- Awareness: uncertainty about what solutions are available. (19%)
- Budget: there's no funding allocated. (19%)
- People: lack of internal champions or executive buy-in. (17%)



The good news: AI is making a difference.

57% of finance teams use AI to automate approvals.

55% use it to flag at-risk invoices.

55% use it to forecast cash flow.



CHAPTER 3

AI and Trust: The governance gap.

AI adoption is no longer an option. In finance, it's table stakes. But trust in AI is measured and conditional. Despite widespread use and growing enthusiasm for agentic AI, most organizations lack the governance frameworks to match their ambition. The accountability question remains unanswered. And that gap is the biggest obstacle to unlocking AI's full potential in finance.



Finance teams are acting on AI recommendations, but **90%** of them still require mandatory human approval. And nobody agrees who's accountable when AI gets it wrong.



The numbers that matter:

26% of finance professionals say their team **"almost always" acts on AI recommendations.**

38% **already have agentic AI** operating within some finance processes.

45% say their team often **acts on AI recommendations without human intervention.**

46% admit those **thresholds are "understood but not formally documented".**

50% are **planning to deploy agentic AI** within the next 12 months.

54% **expect 10-25% of finance decision-making to be fully autonomous** within three years.

69% of those expecting more AI autonomy **feel excited about it.**

90% **maintain a mandatory human-approval threshold** for AI decisions, regardless of AI accuracy.

AI and Trust

Who's accountable when AI gets it wrong?

If an AI system causes a financial loss or compliance issue, finance executives split the blame almost evenly:

- The IT or technology team that implemented the system. (28%)
- The finance leader who approved the AI use. (27%)
- The individual who acted on the AI recommendation. (27%)



The governance gap comes from a lack of clear accountability, and it's the reason 90% of organizations maintain human oversight thresholds even as they act on AI recommendations every day.

What would make finance teams trust AI more?

- Full explainability of how decisions are made. (35%)
- A clear regulatory or audit framework for AI decisions. (33%)
- Real-time human override capability at any point. (32%)
- Industry peers adopting similar levels of autonomy. (32%)
- A proven track record of accuracy over time. (31%)
- Board or CFO-level endorsement. (31%)
- Defined liability sitting with the AI vendor. (30%)



"Finance increasingly relies on AI, but doesn't fully trust it yet. The governance gap between AI adoption and AI accountability could become significant as autonomous systems take on greater responsibility."

AI and Trust

What are the biggest barriers to that trust?

- Concerns about data quality feeding the AI. (34%)
- Fear of accountability if something goes wrong. (33%)
- Leadership skepticism or lack of buy-in. (33%)
- Internal culture resistance to change. (33%)
- Lack of explainability in AI outputs. (29%)
- Unclear regulatory or compliance guidance. (29%)



US

Data quality concerns are the top barrier to AI adoption in the US (35%)—the only market where the technology itself is the biggest obstacle rather than people or accountability.



Sweden

Fear of accountability is the #1 AI trust barrier in Sweden (36%). In contrast to the US, Swedish finance professionals are less worried about the technology and more concerned about who owns the risk when it fails.



UK & France

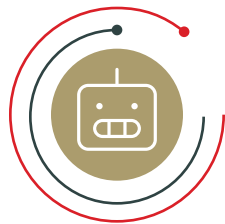
Internal culture resistance is the top barrier in both the UK and France—pointing to change management as the primary hurdle, not technology capability or governance frameworks.

23% of finance executives believe people in their organization are already using unapproved AI tools. That's a governance issue that can't wait. Organizations that invest now in clear, documented AI accountability frameworks will be far better positioned as autonomous AI takes on greater responsibility.

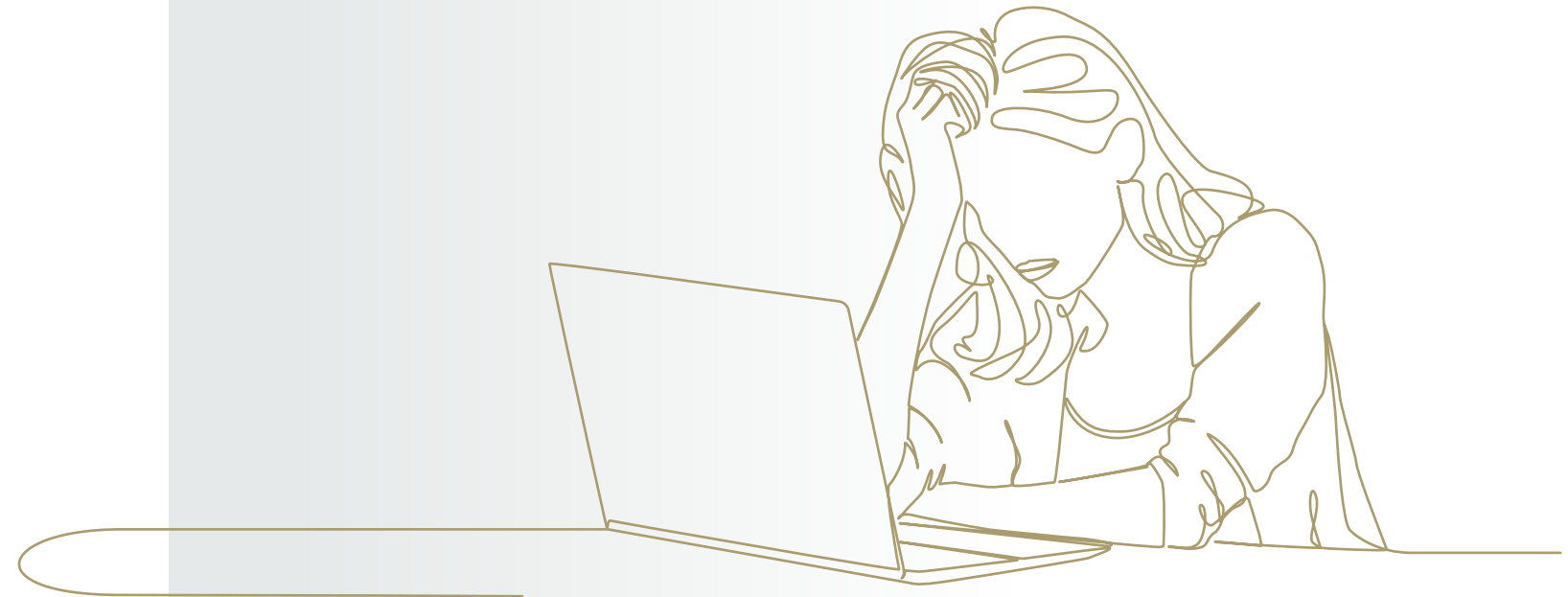
CHAPTER 4

The Next Generation: AI fluency is career currency.

AI is reshaping who gets hired, promoted, and valued in finance. Fluency in AI tools has become a meaningful differentiator at the hiring stage, and existing professionals are now being evaluated on how much they use AI. And mid-level roles—the analytical and reporting positions that define the career ladder—are most at risk of displacement. The pressure to adapt is real; the support to do it is, well, less apparent.



86% of finance professionals say AI usage now factors into performance evaluations, while **75%** say AI has increased their fatigue and burnout.



The numbers that matter:

30% say **AI fluency is now a core requirement**—not a nice-to-have—when evaluating candidates.

44% have seen **entry-level hiring increase** while mid-level hiring decreased.

46% foresee **mid-level professionals as most impacted** by AI displacement.

55% say **AI fluency has been a meaningful differentiator** in hiring over the last six months.

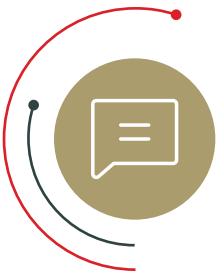
75% say AI usage has **increased their level of worker fatigue or burnout**.

86% believe their level of AI usage **has become a factor in their performance evaluation**.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Where is AI most integrated today?

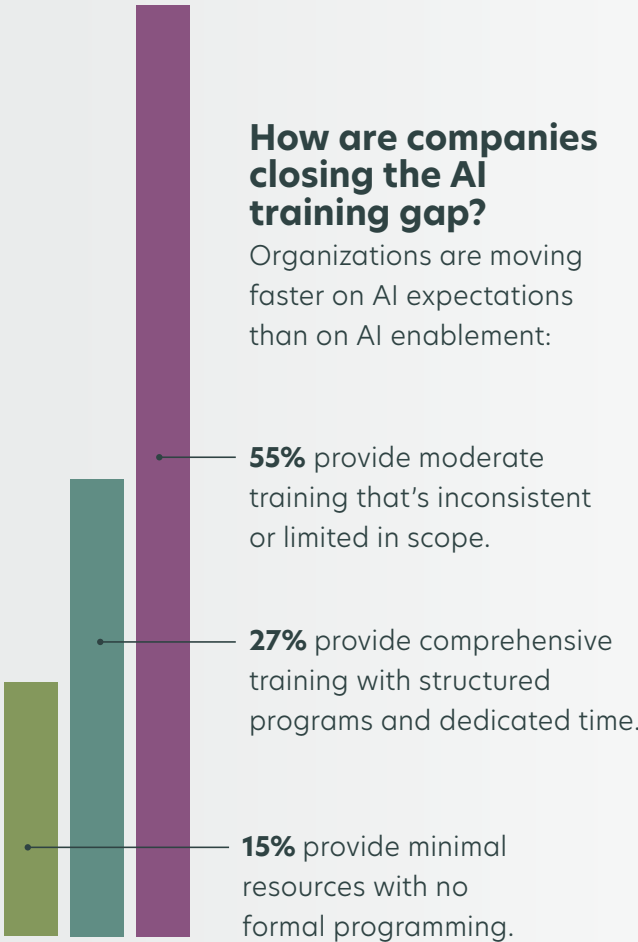
- Financial reporting and close. (40%)
- FP&A. (40%)
- Accounts payable/receivable. (35%)
- Procurement and vendor management. (33%)
- Treasury and cash management. (32%)
- Audit and compliance. (29%)



55% of US finance leaders say AI fluency is a meaningful differentiator in hiring (matching the global average). **30%** say it's now a core requirement. Accounting for 43% of respondents, US teams are the furthest along in integrating AI into financial reporting and FP&A.

How are companies closing the AI training gap?

Organizations are moving faster on AI expectations than on AI enablement:



"86% of finance professionals are being evaluated on AI usage. 75% say AI is burning them out. Only 27% are getting comprehensive training. Something has to give."

What do finance professionals expect AI to change?

When finance leaders were asked which roles/careers they expected AI to impact the most:



Careers being reshaped by AI is a 2026 reality. Organizations that invest in real training, clear career pathways, and genuine support for AI adoption will keep better people for longer.

THE PATH FORWARD

The future is autonomous, but it demands accountability.

The 2026 Census makes one thing clear: finance is at an inflection point. Fraud is as big of an issue internally as it is externally. Late payments persist despite automation. AI is embedded but ungoverned. And the workforce is being reshaped faster than training can keep pace.

The answer isn't more technology that creates more isolation. It's rethinking how technology, governance, and culture work together. Finance teams need AI that explains itself; approval frameworks that are documented in detail; a culture where reporting fraud is rewarded rather than punished; and automation that genuinely removes work versus merely digitizing it.

Implemented correctly, intelligent AP automation can:



Identify shallowfakes before they accumulate into significant losses.



Ensure invoices are paid on time without manual bottlenecks.



Deliver AI recommendations with full explainability and audit trails.



Free finance professionals to focus on strategy rather than process.





Ten AI capabilities that improve financial processes:

- 1 Data capture and extraction.
- 2 Invoice coding and categorization.
- 3 Approver identification.
- 4 2- and 3-way matching.
- 5 Fraud detection and anomaly alerts.
- 6 Compliance, tax and e-invoicing mandates.
- 7 Cash flow forecasting and analytics.
- 8 Supplier data validation.
- 9 Repetitive task automation via machine learning.
- 10 Balance sheet forecasts and predictive reporting.

“The real promise of AI in AP goes far beyond streamlining processes to eliminating them completely. Finance teams should never have to touch an invoice. Ever.”

About Medius.

By linking invoice capture, processing, and payments, Medius replaces the work and worry of AP management with calm and confidence. With one look at a demo, you'll see how Medius solutions turn endless email, PDF, and paper invoices into a simple, secure, automated process. But that's just the beginning.

Medius goes far beyond basic automation—putting artificial intelligence to work so invoices get coded, approved, and paid. Your business gets complete transparency into what's pending and what's paid, so you can trust your forecasts are spot-on and there's virtually no chance of fraud from fake invoices.

There are a lot of choices in AP automation. But to get beyond the basics—with a company rated equally high by customers and analysts—turn to Medius.

medius.com

