



The Procurement Imperative

A chief information officer perspective

Supported by

SAP Ariba

In 2026 procurement remains central to business decision-making. But the function is at a crossroads. Procurement teams are being asked to do more: cut costs, manage disruption and drive digital change. But confidence in their ability to deliver on that broader mandate, and in its alignment with wider corporate strategy, is slipping.

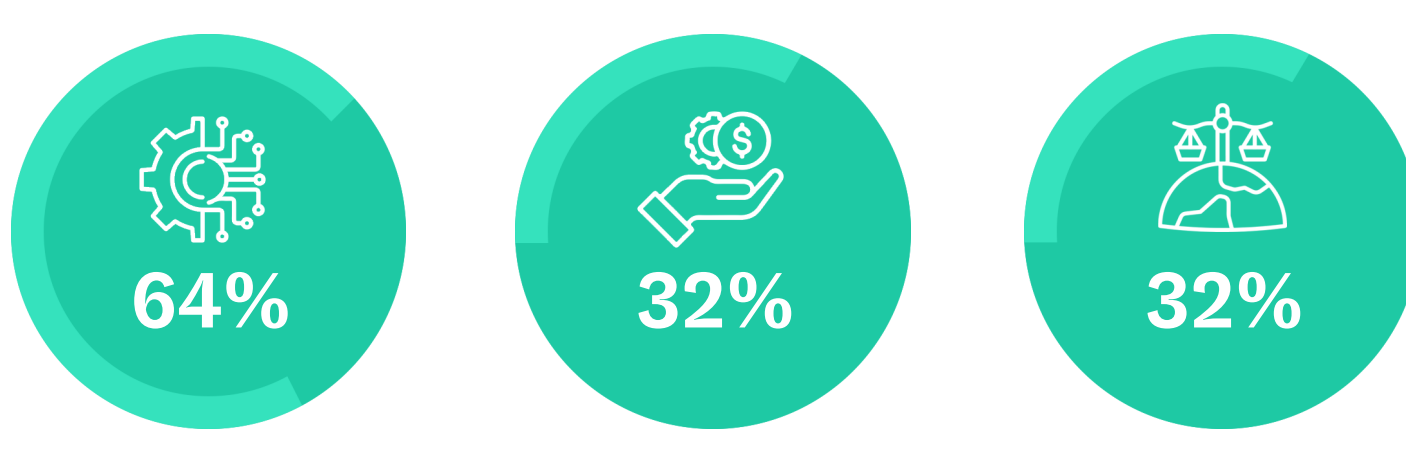


The latest iteration of Economist Enterprise's research takes the pulse of the C-suite on procurement's evolving role, tracking its transformation over the past five years. The findings are anchored in a survey of 2,648 C-suite executives across Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, the Nordics and North America, including **526 chief information officers (CIOs)**.

Artificial intelligence now shapes procurement's agenda

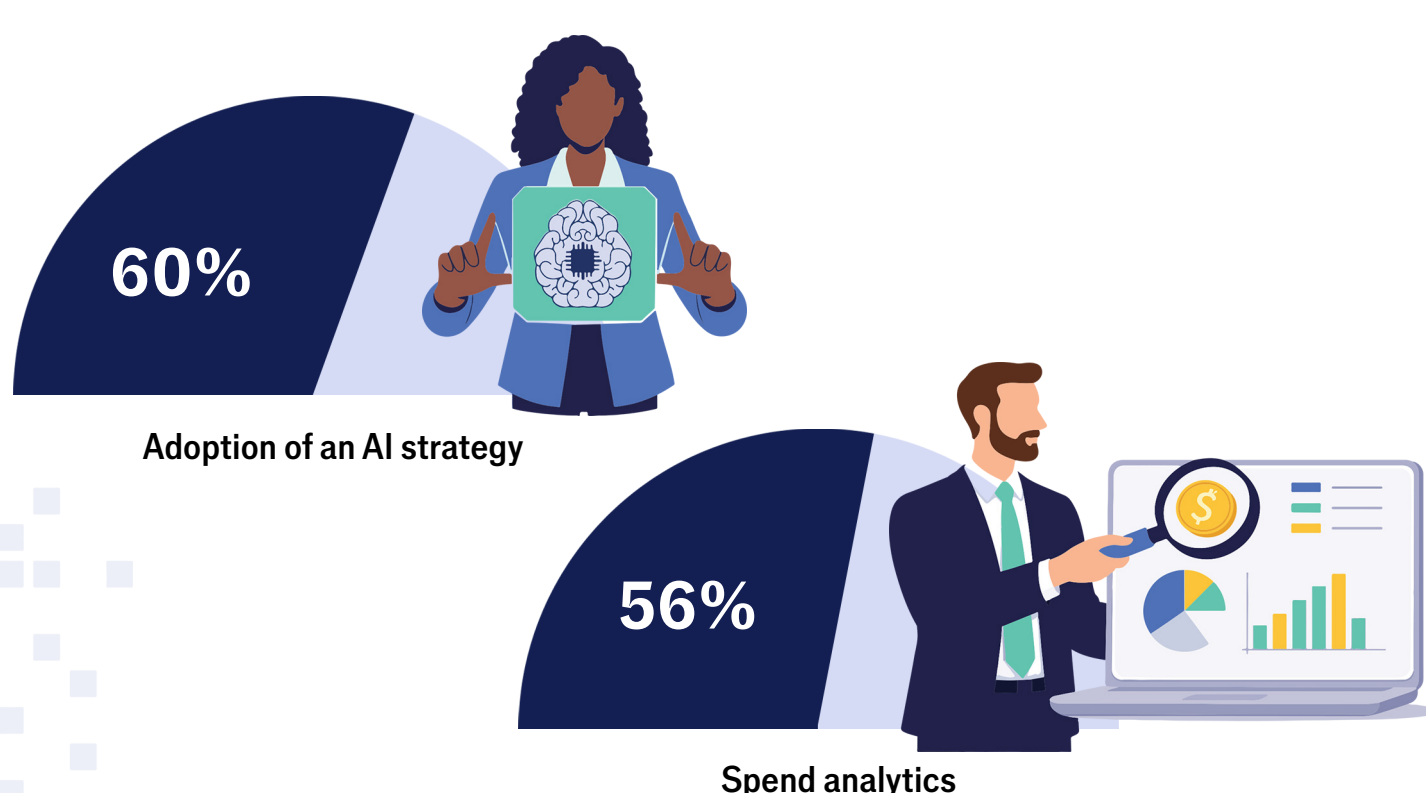
CIOs increasingly see procurement as a data-led function, with digital transformation topping procurement's short-term priorities.

Top short-term strategic priorities for procurement among CIOs



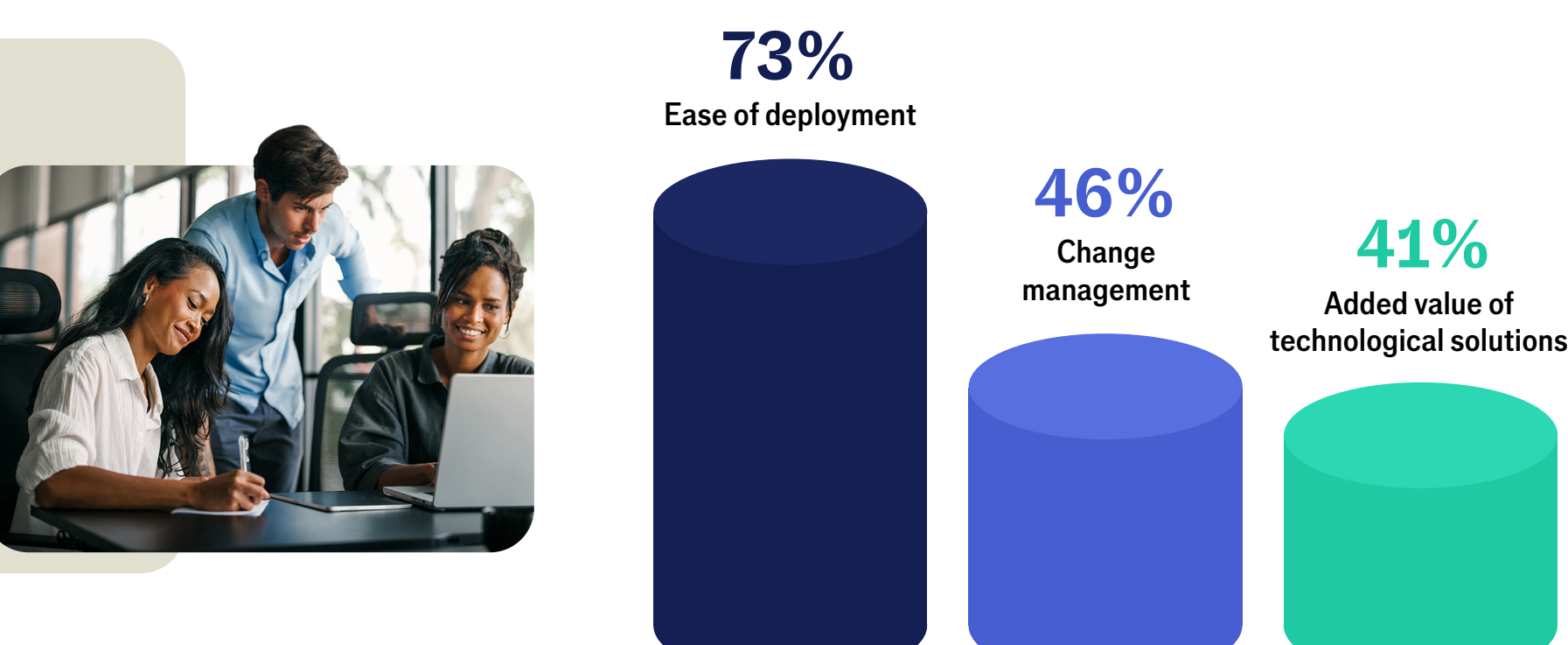
AI sits at the centre of this shift. The adoption of AI strategies and spend analytics are driving digital transformation, and agentic AI is emerging as the technology most likely to shape procurement's future.

Top drivers of digital transformation in procurement according to CIOs



But AI adoption has so far yielded mixed results and faces technical obstacles.

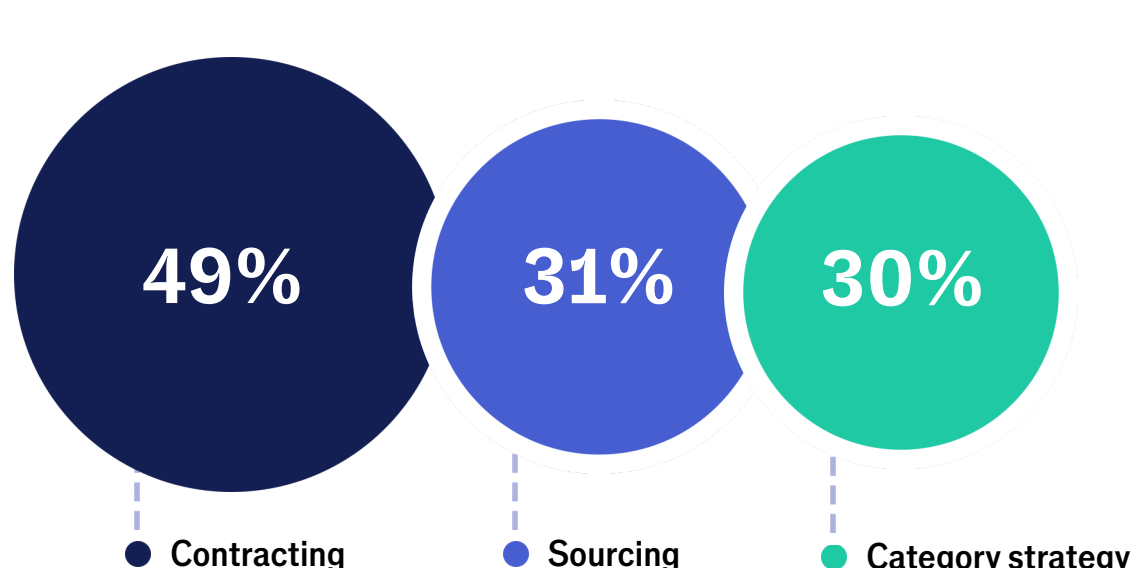
Top barriers to adopting or scaling AI according to CIOs



Procurement is aiming AI at its biggest bottlenecks

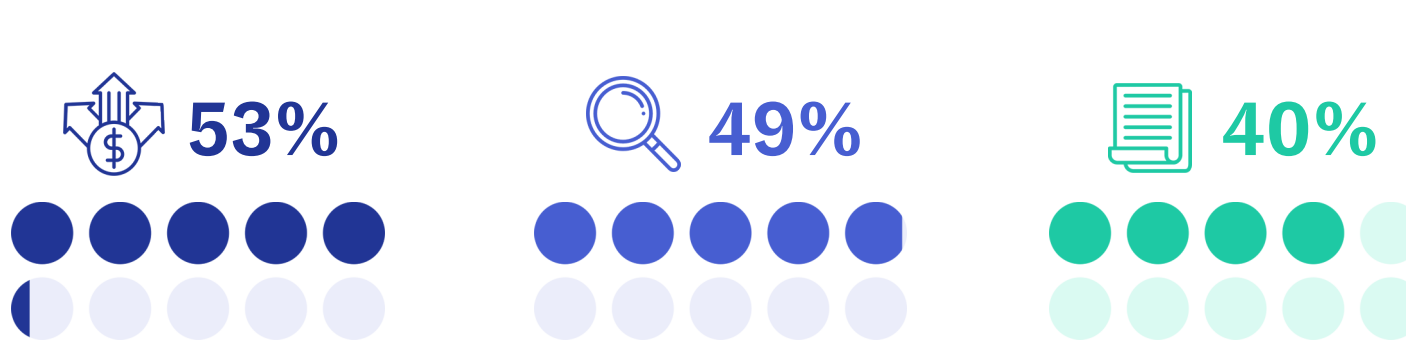
Even as AI climbs the agenda, several core processes remain stubborn sources of delay.

Areas experiencing the biggest delays in procurement processes according to CIOs



CIOs are pointing AI at these same pain points. The outlier is spend classification, which owes its prominence less to delay than to the data-led ambition behind digital transformation—echoing the strength of spend analytics as a driver above.

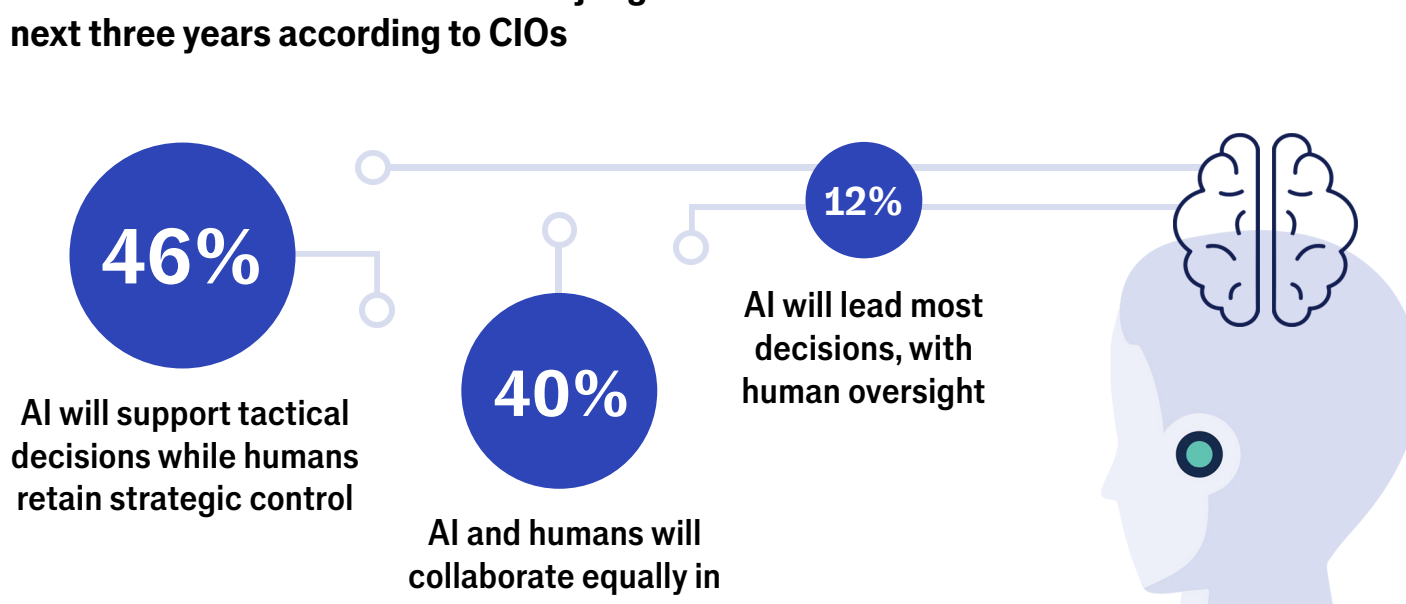
Procurement processes to be improved through the use of AI over the next 12 to 18 months according to CIOs



CIOs are building the foundations for a human-AI partnership

CIOs believe AI can only move from process automation to decision support if organisations address the fundamental challenge of fragmented data.

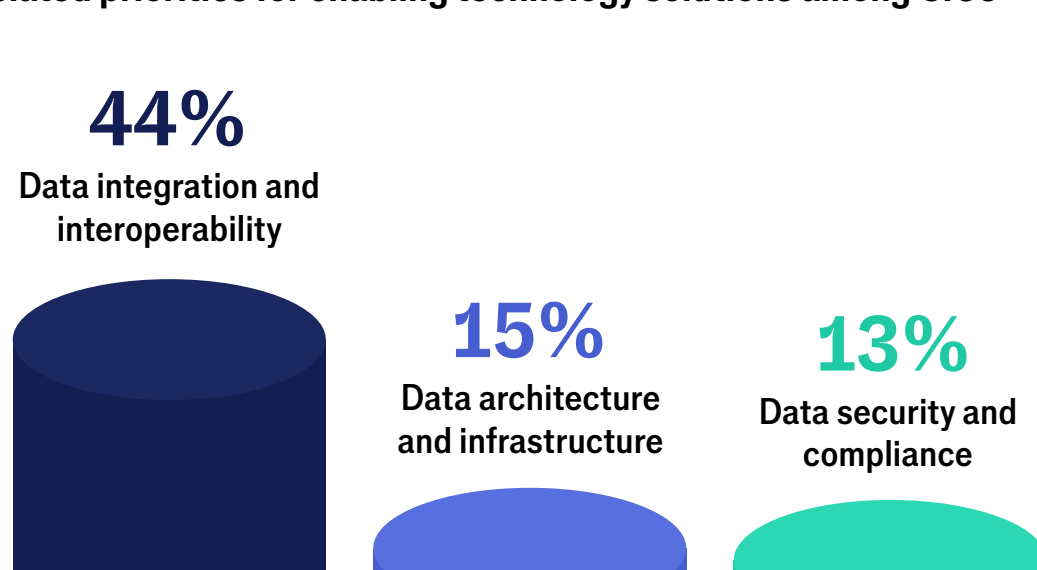
Preferred balance between human judgment and AI-driven recommendations over the next three years according to CIOs



This vision depends on stronger data foundations.

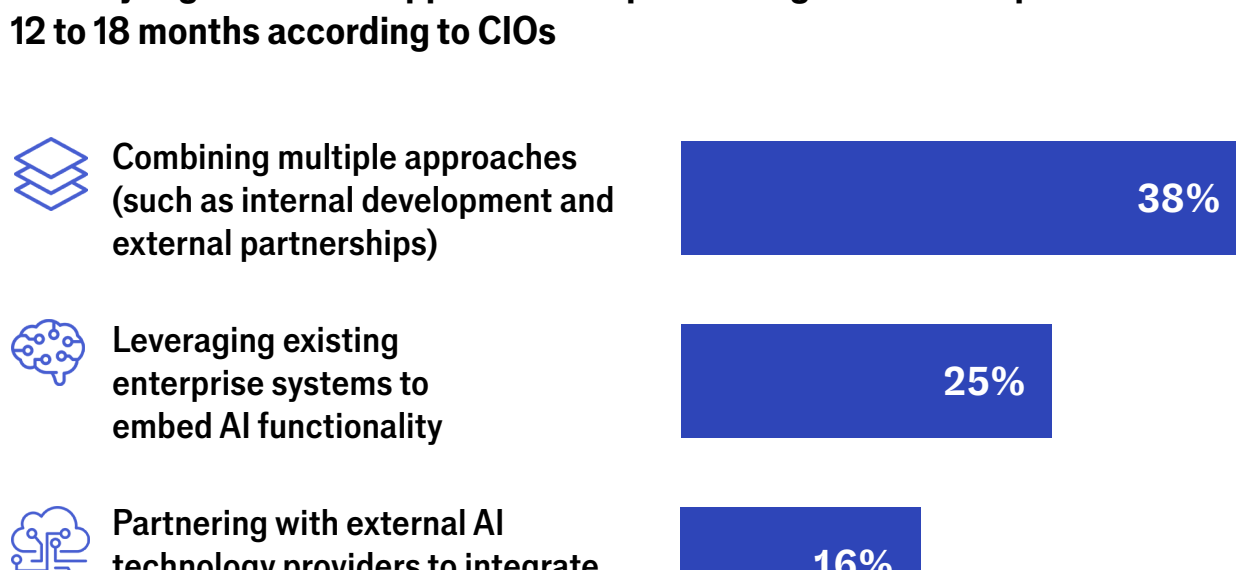
CIOs overwhelmingly identify data integration as the most important requirement for enabling technology solutions, far ahead of infrastructure, security or compliance priorities.

Top data-related priorities for enabling technology solutions among CIOs



To bridge the gap between current capabilities and future ambitions, CIOs are taking a pragmatic approach to implementation rather than relying on a single strategy.

Primary organisational approach to implementing AI-driven capabilities over the next 12 to 18 months according to CIOs



Find out more about how procurement is changing—and what it means for your organisation—in our [full analysis](#).

