

The Procurement Imperative

A chief supply chain officer perspective

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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 **528 chief supply chain officers (CSCOs)**.

Artificial intelligence now shapes procurement's agenda

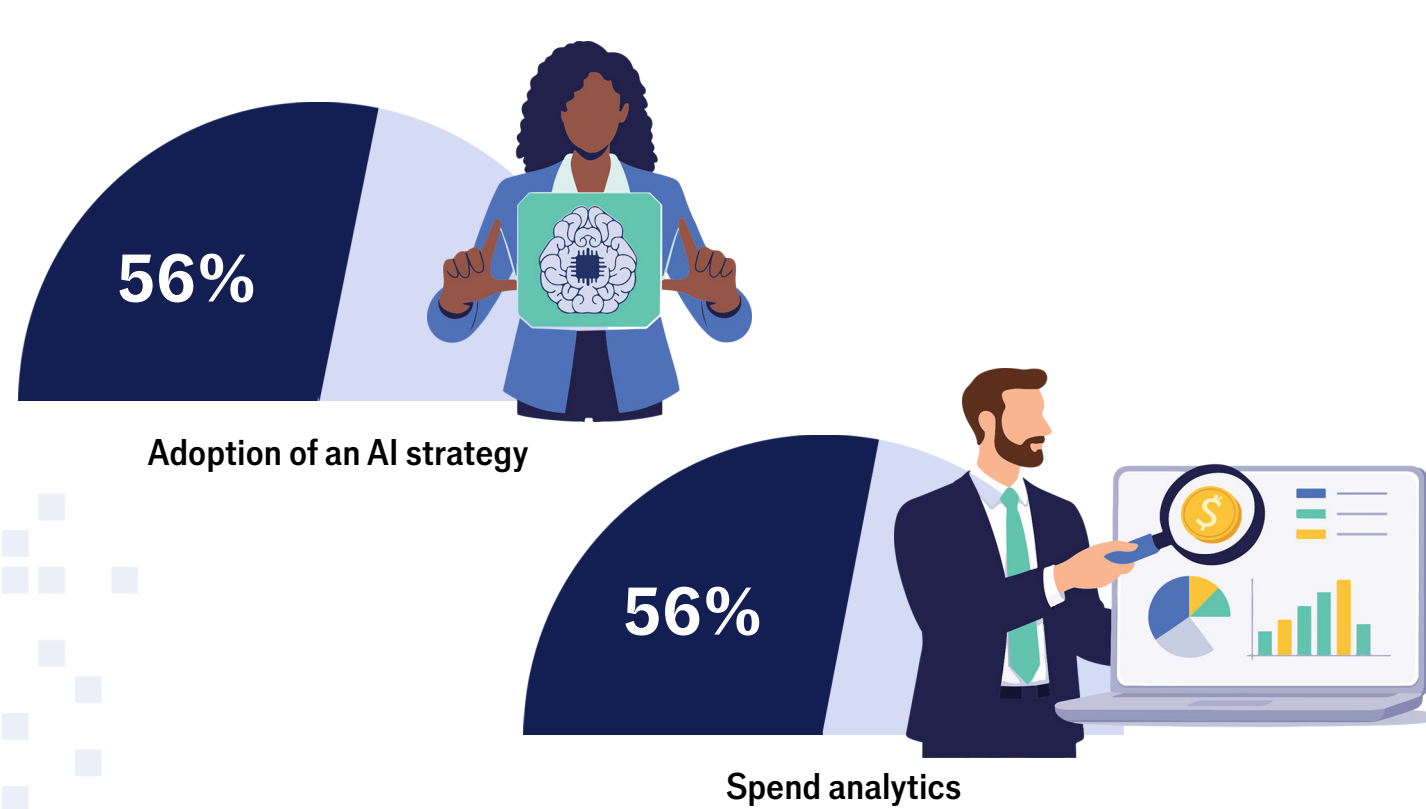
CSCOs increasingly see procurement as a data-led function, with digital transformation topping procurement's short-term priorities.

Top short-term strategic priorities for procurement among CSCOs



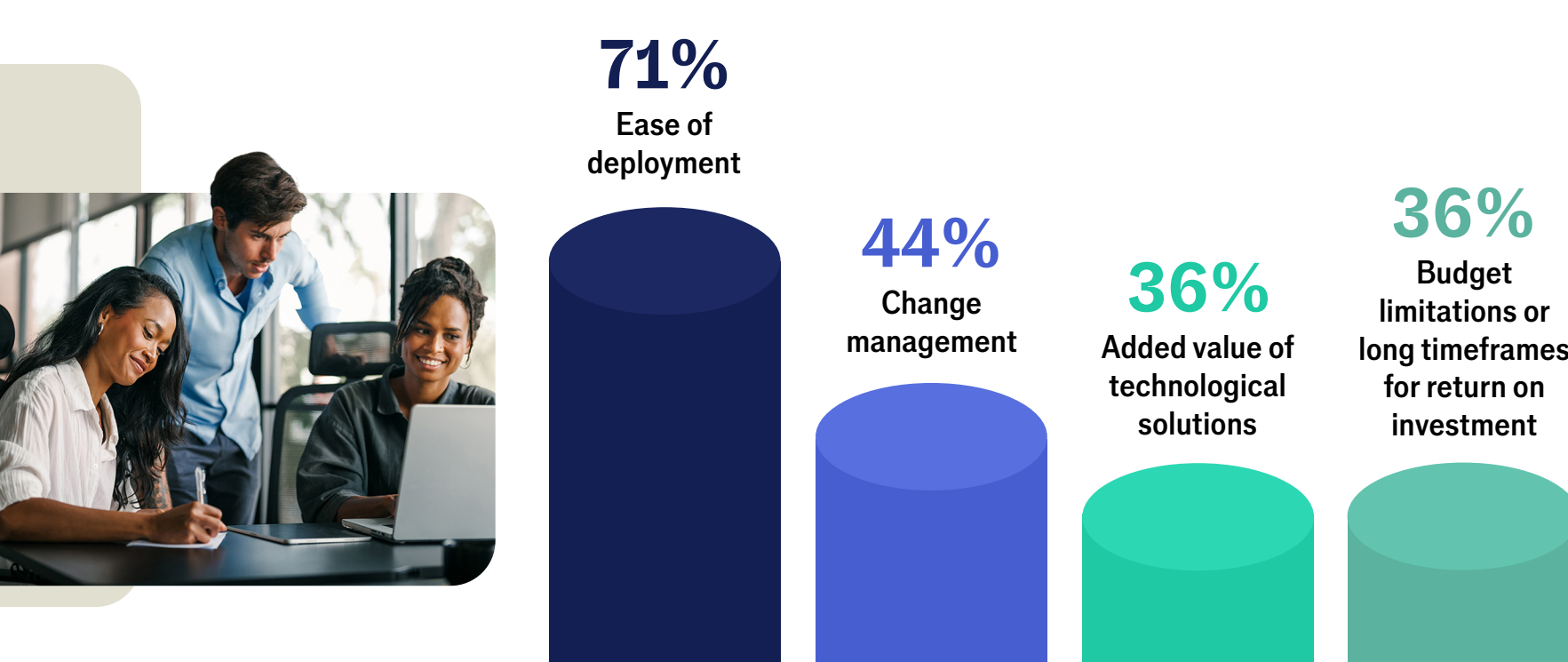
AI sits at the centre of this shift. The adoption of AI strategies and spend analytics are driving digital transformation, and agentic AI is emerging as the technology most likely to shape procurement's future.

Top drivers of digital transformation in procurement according to CSCOs



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

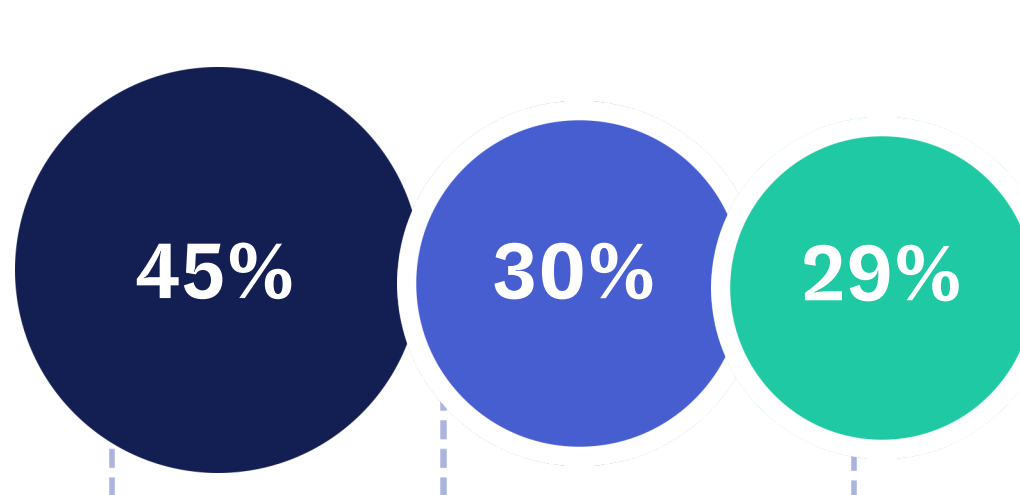
Top barriers to adopting or scaling AI according to CSCOs



Procurement is aiming AI at its biggest bottlenecks

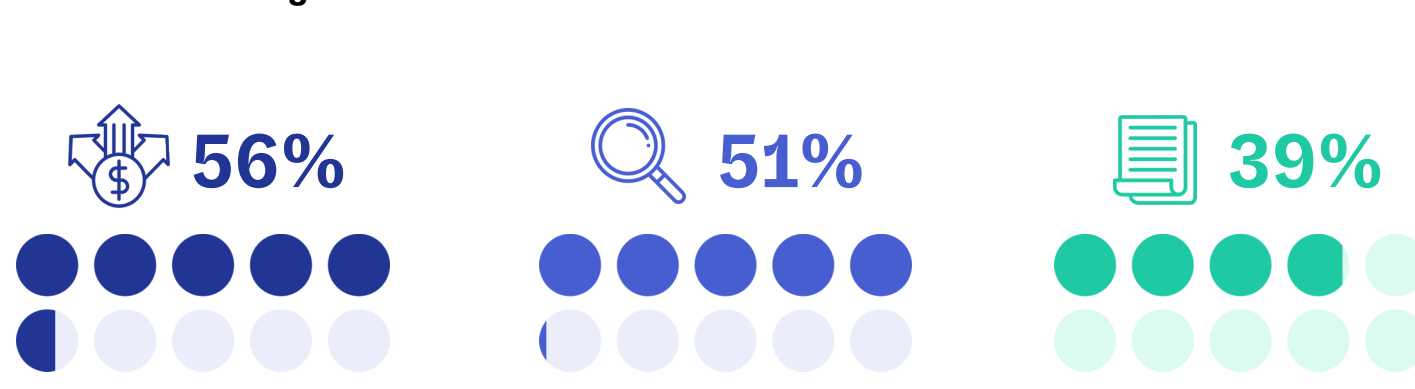
Even as AI climbs the agenda, several core processes remain stubborn sources of delay.

Areas experiencing the biggest delays in procurement processes according to CSCOs



CSCOs 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.

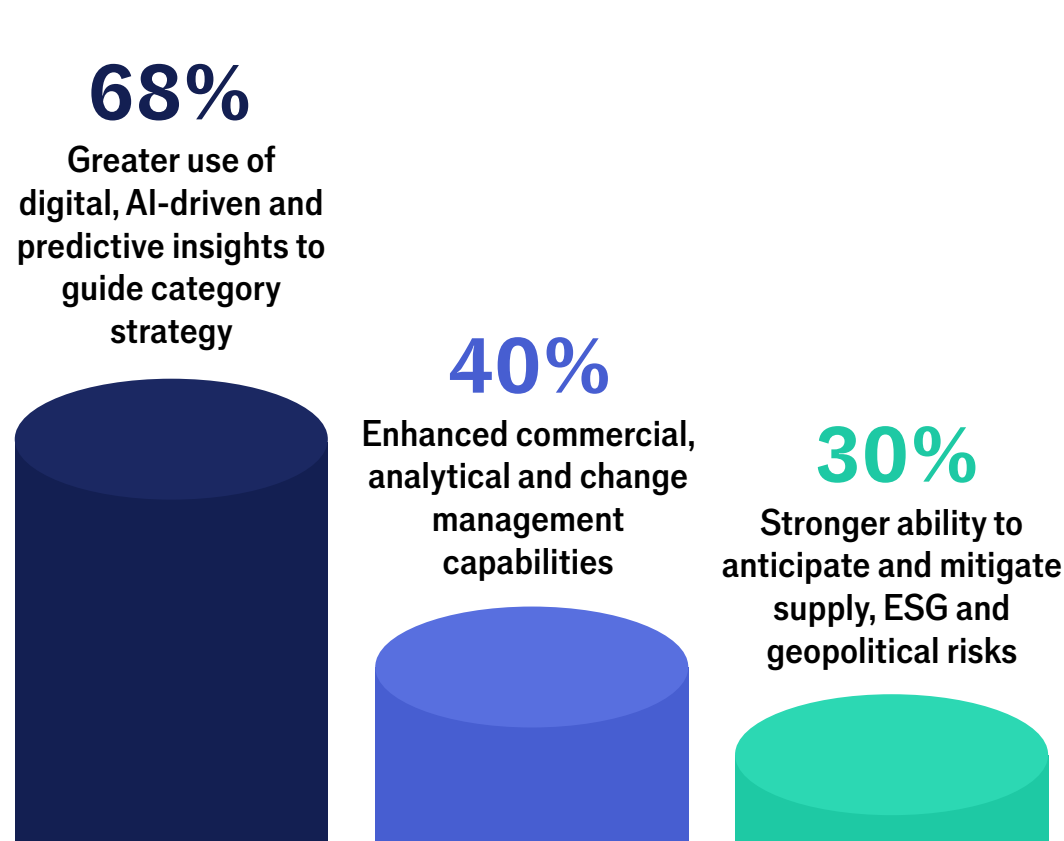
Procurement processes to be improved through the use of AI over the next 12 to 18 months according to CSCOs



Procurement is investing in better category decisions

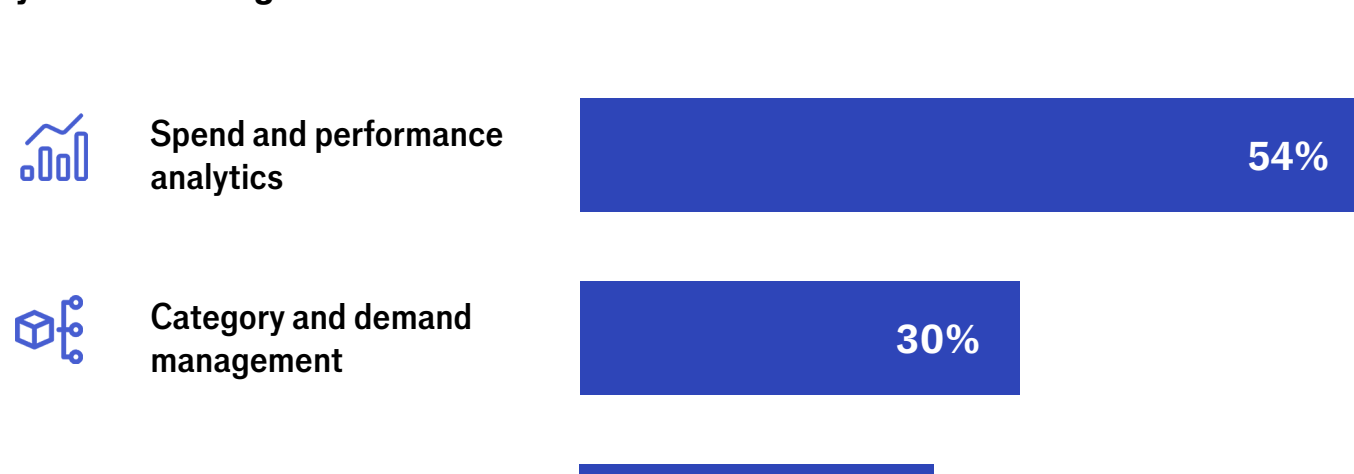
Organisations are focusing on the tools, data and skills needed to make category decisions faster and more effective.

Requirements to improve category management according to CSCOs



These priorities are shaping investment plans. Rather than pursuing technology for its own sake, organisations are directing spending towards tools that strengthen category management and improve visibility into procurement performance.

Areas of procurement set to receive the most digital investment over the next three years according to CSCOs



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

