

The Procurement Imperative

A view from chief procurement officers in Europe

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. **Within Europe, 122 chief procurement officers (CPOs) were surveyed.**¹

¹The survey polled executives in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

Artificial intelligence now shapes procurement's agenda

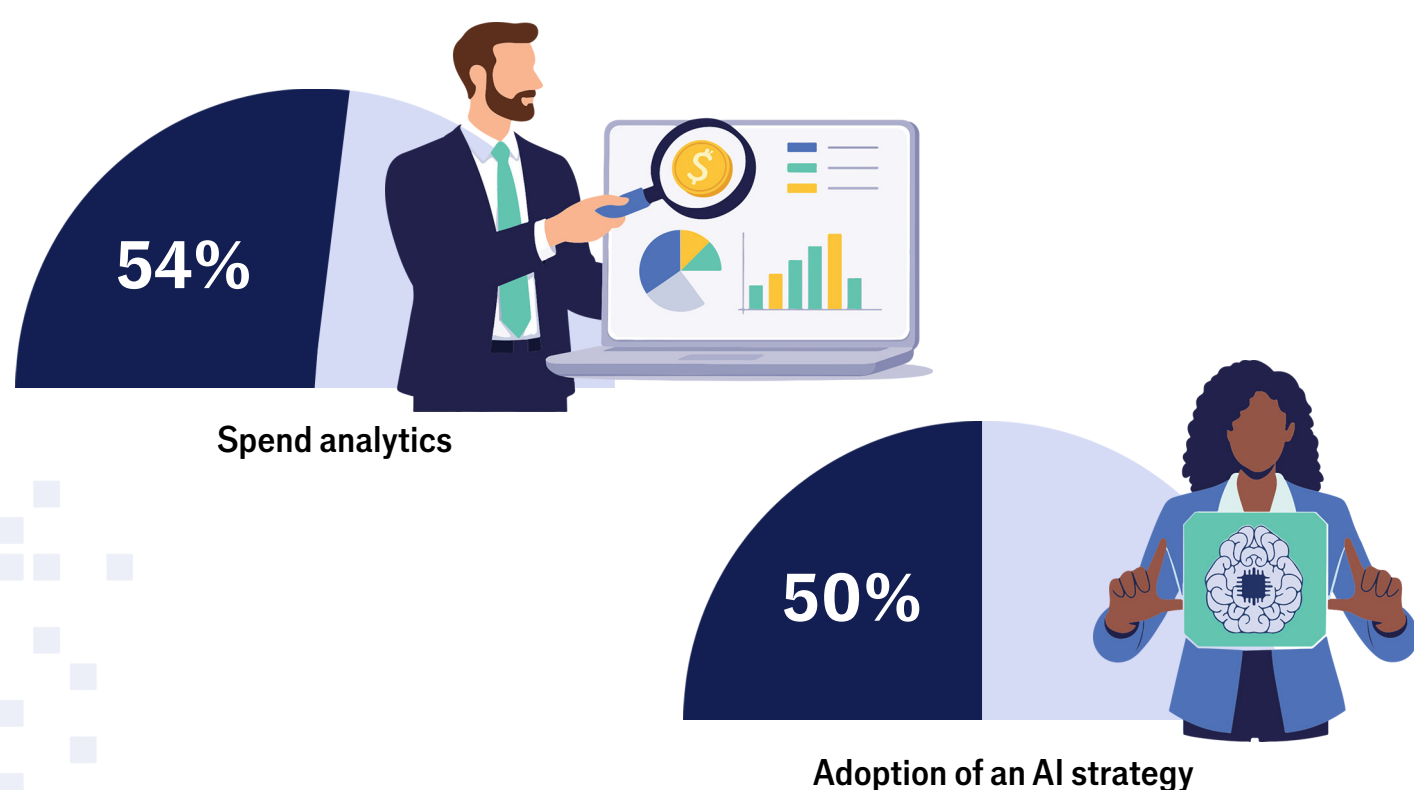
CPOs in Europe increasingly see procurement as a data-led function, with digital transformation topping procurement's short-term priorities.

Top short-term strategic priorities for procurement among CPOs in Europe



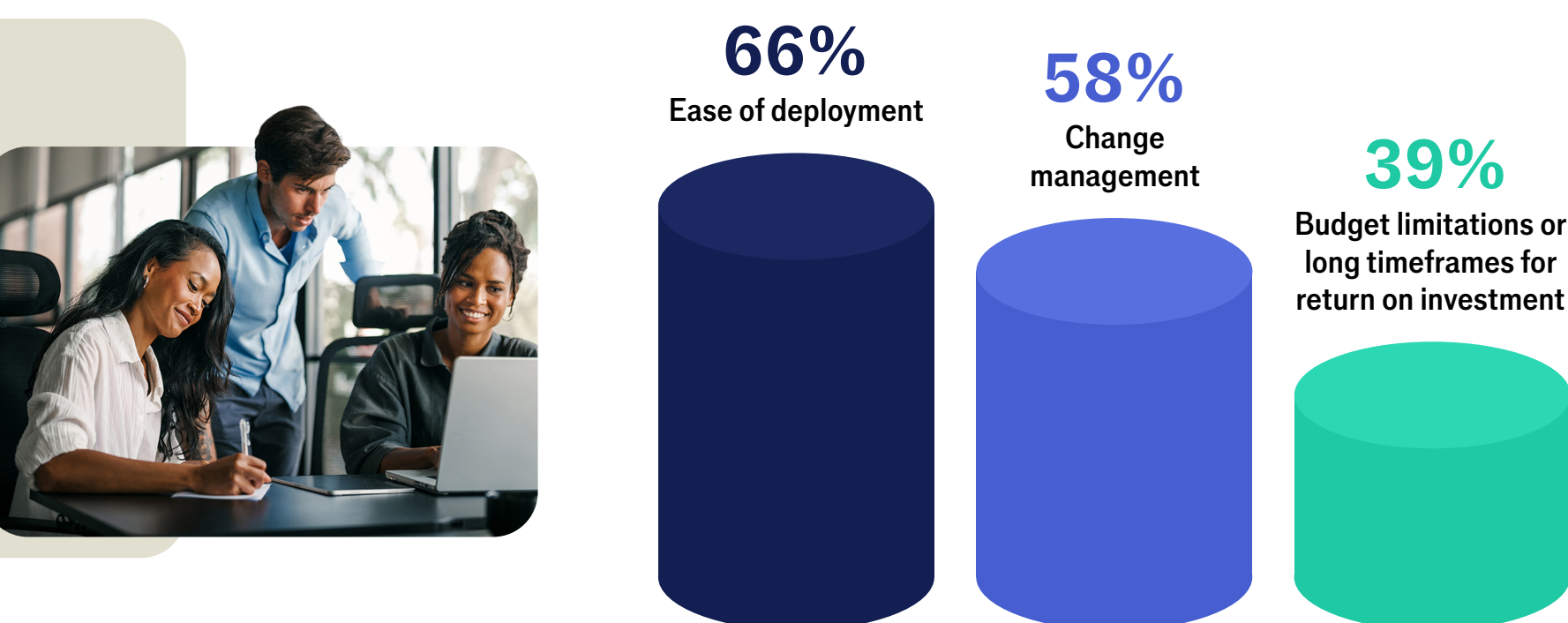
AI sits at the centre of this shift. The adoption of AI strategies and spend analytics are driving digital transformation, and agentic AI is emerging as the technology most likely to shape procurement's future in Europe.

Top drivers of digital transformation in procurement according to CPOs in Europe



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

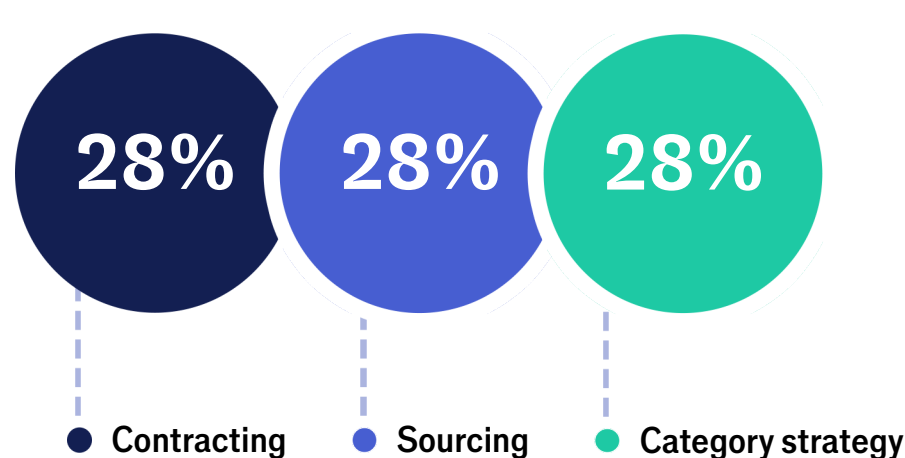
Top barriers to adopting or scaling AI according to CPOs in Europe



Procurement is aiming AI at its biggest bottlenecks

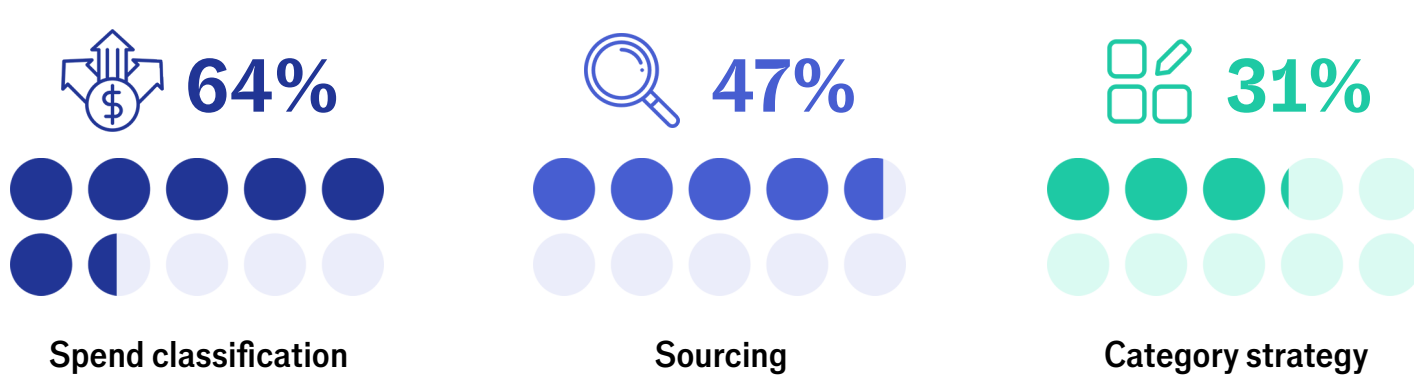
Even as AI climbs the agenda, several core processes remain stubborn sources of delay in Europe.

Areas experiencing the biggest delays in procurement processes according to CPOs in Europe



CPOs in Europe are pointing AI at these same pain points.

Procurement processes to be improved through the use of AI over the next 12 to 18 months in Europe



The outlier is spend classification. For CPOs in Europe, the path to digital transformation starts with better visibility into spending. While contracting, sourcing and category strategy all create delays, CPOs are directing AI first towards spend classification, recognising that accurate and consistent spend data underpins many other procurement activities.



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

