

AN INDUSTRY BRIEFING FROM GRAIL

What's Changing in the Book You Capitalise

Your next capital envelope. The fee-revenue forecast you sign. The enterprise-value thesis your sponsor underwrites. Three questions that look separate, but are actually one. A briefing for CFOs at European mid-market wealth-management and financial-advisory firms.

PREPARED BY

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FOR

European mid-market
wealth-management finance
leaders

DATE

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Thursday morning, partner group meeting next week

Every CFO at a mid-sized European wealth-management firm has had the same Thursday morning. Four things on the screen at 8:45. The head of the Stockholm desk has announced a Q3 2027 retirement; eleven of his top twenty clients have no secondary relationship anywhere else in the firm, and two have already called the office about the successor. Your Head of Technology forwarded you a planning-platform demo yesterday with a one-year, €900k licence figure attached. Your Head of Advisory has put a €2M senior-advisor retention package on your desk for three regional RMs the consolidator in town has been circling. Your sponsor's partner pinged you on Slack: curious about the succession plan and the valuation implications before next Monday.

You have signed fifteen fee-revenue forecasts for this board or this partner group. The pattern used to be simple. Hold the fee schedule, protect the book, grow with the market. Close the quarter clean. Keep the auditor happy. The firm was understandable.

Something changed. Your fee revenue is drifting and your team cannot reconstruct the client-level retention story. Your platform spend is running through the technology budget as a productivity line. Your AI-augmented competitors are serving more clients at higher quality with fewer people, and procurement conversations at your best institutional accounts are starting to mention it. Your Controllers are closing faster than they ever have, and the audit committee is asking about suitability traceability on the agentic tooling. The close is clean. The story underneath it is not.

The job has not changed in fifty years. The bar has risen on every measure of doing it, simultaneously, and the contradictions you have been navigating since you took the seat are suddenly re-openable. The CFOs who treat them as engineering problems run the offensive play. The ones who treat them as permanent trade-offs watch capital-allocation authority fragment across the partner group within eighteen months.

This briefing covers what is happening in your sector, what it means for the finance function you run, and the three questions your team should answer before the next partner group meeting.

Boutique wealth management just lost the equation that priced the sector for a decade

Every senior advisor in your firm spends roughly forty percent of the working week on production: research synthesis, portfolio construction, client reporting, planning-software outputs, regulatory paperwork. Not on the client conversation the firm actually gets paid for. Your AI-augmented competitors are not making this mistake. A senior RM at a firm that has inverted the split handles the production work with agents running underneath, and spends the reclaimed hours on the relationship depth that HNWI and UHNWI clients actually buy. Same senior advisor, same book, thirty to forty percent more capacity pointed at what clients value. Across your top tier the mechanical difference is three to six points of retention a year, and it is already showing up in the quarterly prints for firms that started the work in 2024.

Your competitors are not waiting. Söderberg is absorbing independent advisors across Nordic markets. Formue scaled via IK Partners. PE-backed platforms are buying retiring-founder boutiques as tuck-ins at cash flow multiples that already assume the founder will not be there. Some consolidators are migrating fee architecture on their top mandates from pure AUM-basis-points to retainer and outcome-share mechanics. A smaller set of the more patient ones are building the client-intelligence infrastructure that survives senior-advisor departure. They are the quiet compounders. The rest of the sector is running AUM-based fee schedules set in 2015 and wondering why margin compresses every year.

Your senior advisors' captured client value is rising. Your fee revenue on those accounts is not. The sales team cannot close that gap. Only the finance seat can, and most have not yet claimed the fee-architecture decision underneath it.

The sector is repricing underneath everyone at the same time. Passive and robo channels have already taken the low end. Only 23% of financial firms have moved past AI pilot. The Nordic boutique space is wide open for the first movers and closing fast for the ones who wait. The firms that treat this as a technology-procurement problem rather than a capital-allocation and fee-architecture problem are walking into a partner group conversation they will not win.

Your capital, your forecast, and your narrative are feeling it every day

Your capital allocation. The Head of Technology's platform licence, the Head of Advisory's senior-advisor retention packages, the CEO's tuck-in of a retiring-founder boutique, and the founding-partner succession package all arrive on your desk as separate requisitions on separate weeks. Five capital decisions, five conversations, five hurdle rates. The CFOs who keep capital-allocation authority for the next decade put all of them on one page at one hurdle, once a quarter. The ones who sign them one by one hand the authorship to whichever partner walked in that week.

Your forecast. The team built the annual plan on AUM growth and a stable fee margin. The Q3 print came in at 94% of fee-revenue plan. Your Head of FP&A cannot reconstruct the account-level retention story because the relationship signal lives in senior-advisor calendars and meeting notes, the flow signal lives in planning-software activity, and the margin-pressure signal lives in fee-schedule benchmarks her team has never had access to. The plan was not aggressive. The data architecture underneath it was built for AUM reporting, not for continuous reconstruction of the retention story, and that is what stands exposed when the quarter prints soft.

Your fee architecture. The partner group voted on a fee schedule that assumed planning intensity and portfolio complexity would price like AUM. They don't. Your AI-augmented competitors are running three pricing mechanics. You are running one. The AUM-basis-points schedule that ran clean from 2015 to 2022 is now the reason your net margin is compressing on the planning-heavy UHNWI tier where your senior advisors spend the most time. Fee architecture is not a product-marketing question. It is a capital-allocation question about where enterprise value accumulates.

Your controller and FP&A bench. The reconciliation, partner-comp allocation, regulatory-reporting production, and first-draft client-pack generation that used to train a junior controller into a Senior Controller into a VP Finance are now running on agents. The Q1 headcount win is real. The 2031 succession bench is empty. The finance function that cuts the junior layer without rebuilding the entry pathway has a cheaper quarter this year and no internal CFO candidate in five.

Your enterprise-value thesis. Your board has asked for the strategy-day preview. Your sponsor's partner has asked for an AI-and-succession note. Your chair has asked how the firm stays ahead of consolidators. Three audiences, three different documents, each drafted by a different team. None of them are anchored in the same data. The CFOs pulling ahead write the thesis once and let the three audiences draw from the same architecture. The ones behind them are editing three decks and hoping the numbers match.

You do not have three scorecard problems. You have one.

Your sector is repricing from below because AI-augmented competitors bring three fee mechanics to the table and the rest of the market is on one. Your finance function is stretched because the forecast credibility, the capital-allocation authority, and the enterprise-value thesis are each being managed as a separate programme, each drawing on a different data layer, each drafted by a different team. Same force, two altitudes. But there is a third thing happening that most mid-market wealth-management CFOs have not named yet, and it is the one that matters most.

Capital allocation without forecast credibility is guessing. Forecast credibility without a narrative is scorekeeping. A narrative without a data architecture underneath it is marketing. The finance seat that holds all three holds one integrated asset, not three separate programmes. Every capital-allocation question, every forecast-credibility gap, every narrative weakness is a symptom of the same missing layer: the client-intelligence infrastructure that feeds all three from the same data, the same governance, the same discipline.

This is the capital decision of this decade for wealth management. Every CFO in your cohort is making it right now, whether they see it or not. The ones who personally own it keep capital-allocation authority for the next decade. The ones who sign the platform licence because "that was a technology decision" watch the CIS take the strategic seat and the next CFO hire come from outside. The shape is the same. The asset under decision is different. The cost of getting it wrong in 2026 is compressed into eighteen months instead of five years.

The senior-advisor retention package the CEO wants you to sign is not a comp line. It is the largest single capital-allocation decision you will make this year, and the one place where the book you are protecting, the forecast you are signing, and the enterprise value the sponsor is underwriting are the same line on the same page.

You have twelve to eighteen months. The founding generation is retiring. The consolidators are circling. The CFOs who own this decision personally run the offensive play. The ones who do not become the CFO the board replaces when the sale multiple comes in two turns below plan.

What most firms are doing. What the winners are doing instead.

Every wealth-management CFO has had the AI conversation. Most are making the same four decisions; a smaller group is making different ones. Default looks cleaner for three quarters; winners compound from month fifteen.

THE DEFAULT PATH

Route platform spend through technology

Sign the licence as a productivity line. CIS owns the roadmap. Moat sits on the vendor stack.

Hold the AUM fee schedule

Senior-advisor-captured value rises thirty to sixty percent. Fee per AUM flat. Net margin compresses on the AI tier.

Run the forecast on a rolling spreadsheet

Monthly cadence. Three retention scenarios take a week. Below-plan quarters produce no client story until post-mortem.

Cut the junior layer for the Q1 win

Controller and FP&A bench down twenty percent. Empty succession bench in 2031. External hire the year after.

THE WINNERS' PATH

Route capital through one portfolio page

Platform, retention, tuck-ins, succession scored against the same hurdle. Five options, one choice.

Migrate fee architecture to three mechanics

Retainer on planning-heavy. Outcome-share on UHNWI. Performance-linked on discretionary. AI converts to margin.

Rebuild as a retention driver graph

Ten scenarios in an afternoon. Below-plan quarters produce the client-level story in the same meeting.

Redesign the junior pathway around judgment

New hires pair with agents on scenarios, capital exposure, governance. Bench rebuilds faster.

The default path shows a cleaner Q1. The winners' path has visible friction for three quarters and compounds from month fifteen. The difference is whether the CFO is authoring the capital or administering it.

Capital Allocation. Forecast Credibility. Value-Creation Narrative.

Three questions every wealth-management CFO is tracking. The first is the crux. The other two are how you earn the right to answer it.

01 · CAPITAL ALLOCATION

Where does the next capital envelope actually compound?

AI-augmented advisor infrastructure? Senior-advisor retention packages? Tuck-in of a retiring-founder boutique? Founding-partner succession buyout? Platform licence for the next tier? Today's default: each requisition arrives on a different week, gets signed, and the capital-allocation authority fragments across the partner group. The question is not which of them to fund. The question is whose decision this is.

02 · FORECAST CREDIBILITY

Why did fee revenue print below plan, and what is the client-level story?

Your partner group voted on fee-revenue growth. Your firm is printing below. Your Head of FP&A cannot walk the audit committee through the retention story because the relationship signal sits in advisor calendars, the flow signal sits in planning software, and the fee-margin signal sits in benchmarks the finance team has never seen. Three scenarios used to take a week. They now run in an afternoon. The bar has risen on what credible means.

03 · VALUE-CREATION NARRATIVE

What does this firm do that compounds faster than peers?

Your board wants the strategy-day preview. Your sponsor wants the AI-and-succession note. Your chair wants the how-we-stay-ahead answer. Three audiences, three documents, three teams, and the numbers underneath them do not match. The CFOs pulling ahead write the thesis once and refresh it continuously from the same data architecture that runs the forecast. The three audiences read excerpts of the same document.

What the firms winning this play are actually doing

Four concrete moves any wealth-management CFO can start this quarter. Each addresses one lever. Pulled together, they become one client-intelligence asset the firm runs on.

1

Capital: route every capital decision through one portfolio page, not five requisitions

The platform licence, the retention packages, the tuck-in, the founding-partner buyout, the new-market launch. All on one page. ROIC-scored against the same five-year horizon. Name what you are choosing not to fund to protect the thing you are funding. The partner group sees the trade-off once. That is the page that keeps capital-allocation authorship at the seat.

2

Forecast: rebuild fee revenue as a retention driver graph, not an AUM spreadsheet

Your forecast should draw from live advisor-client interaction data, live planning-tool activity, live life-event signals, and live fee-schedule benchmarks, as one graph rather than five spreadsheets stitched together. Three retention scenarios compress from a week to an afternoon. Below-plan quarters produce the client-level story in the same meeting, not in the post-mortem. The forecast stops being a deliverable on a cadence and becomes a live artefact the CFO invests in continuously.

3

Fee architecture: migrate from one mechanic to three over twelve to twenty-four months

Retainer ladder on planning-heavy clients where advisor time per year is decoupled from AUM. Outcome-share on complex UHNWI mandates where the firm measurably creates realised value (tax structure, succession, pre-liquidity-event prep). Performance-linked on discretionary mandates where portfolio outcomes are measurable. The AUM-basis-points schedule holds the base book. The three new mechanics capture the AI-augmentation uplift on top tiers. Finance authors the migration. Advisory implements.

4

Narrative: write the enterprise-value thesis once, refresh continuously

Three sentences on one page. What does this firm do that compounds faster than peers? What capital gets starved to protect it? What gets fed? Refresh the thesis continuously off the same driver graph that runs the forecast. Sponsor-monthly excerpts the thesis. Audit-committee prep excerpts the thesis. Strategy-day deck excerpts the thesis. Three audiences, one artefact, four registers. The CFO authors the narrative. The partner group recites it back.

The only firm that joins capital authorship to working infrastructure

The wealth-management CFO has four places to go. None can do what we do.

The big finance transformation practices will sell a twelve-to-twenty-four-month close-acceleration and regulatory-tightening programme staffed by partners and analysts billing hours. Their audit arm constrains their governance advice. Their billable-day model requires selling substrate that agents commoditise. They ship a tighter close, not authorship of the book.

The wealth-tech platform vendors will sell platform licences and a long implementation. Your client-intelligence infrastructure has to sit on firm-owned architecture or it becomes a vendor asset at renegotiation. The CFO who builds the moat on a vendor stack builds it for the vendor.

The planning and portfolio-tool specialists will sell a point solution for one layer: planning output, portfolio construction, reporting automation. None can run the capital-allocation-plus-narrative conversation the seat requires.

The AI-native advisor-augmentation startups will sell substrate tooling where depreciation is steepest. Buying them does not address who authors the capital-allocation decision or how founding-partner knowledge survives retirement.

The market offers four things you have already said no to. GRAIL is the fifth option.

WHAT YOU GET

Senior advisory that speaks board-room, not deck-room

Working infrastructure your team uses the same week

Custom agents built on your book, your advisors, your data

The start of a client-intelligence layer your FP&A owns

No vendor lock-in at any phase of the engagement

WHY IT MATTERS

Founded by operators who have carried CFO-adjacent seats

Business first, technology second

Three weeks from first meeting to working infrastructure

Your team keeps the infrastructure, you own the IP

Every next step earned by what just shipped, never assumed

Three sessions with your finance leadership. Working infrastructure from week one.

We start with your finance leadership team because the change cannot outrun the team's personal understanding of what is possible. Three workshops. Each delivers standalone value. Each earns the right to the next.

WORKSHOP 01

How to think

Walk through what is happening in your sector and inside your finance function. Build the first piece of infrastructure in the room: a live retention-driver agent running against your real book, your real advisor activity, and your real fee-margin data. Your leadership team leaves with a shared view of what to do next and the first piece of working infrastructure already in their hands.

WORKSHOP 02

Your finance infrastructure

A half-day build. Your Controller, Head of FP&A, Head of Operations, and Head of Advisory each leave with five to ten pieces of working infrastructure tuned to their function. Close-cycle agents. Retention-driven forecast. Fee-margin scenario generation. Regulatory-reporting agents. Board-pack narrative drafting. Infrastructure your team is using the same week, not decks about infrastructure.

WORKSHOP 03

Ready to run

Refined infrastructure based on real use. The rollout plan to the wider finance organisation. The capital-allocation thesis document for the next partner group meeting. The fee-architecture migration roadmap for the Advisory team. And the CEO and sponsor conversation with numbers they can check: ROIC alternatives, retention scenario ranges, enterprise-value measurement.

Three weeks. No IT project. No partner group approval needed to start. The infrastructure your finance function is already running on when we finish.

For your next partner group meeting

The questions where your finance leadership cannot agree on an answer are the ones worth an hour on the agenda. Ask these honestly.

Your Head of Technology wants €900k for a planning platform. Is it in the technology budget as a productivity line, or on the capital page as one option among five? If the former, what would it take to move it before the next partner group cycle?

Your partner group voted on a fee-revenue plan. Your print is below. Can your team walk the audit committee through the client-level retention story in the same meeting, or does it take a post-mortem? If the latter, what data architecture is missing?

Your AI-augmented competitors are quoting on two or three fee mechanics. You are on one. What is the twelve-to-twenty-four-month plan to migrate from AUM-basis-points to three, and who on your team is authoring it?

Your sponsor, your chair, and your CEO have each asked for a different AI-and-succession document in the last ninety days. Are they excerpting the same thesis, or are your teams drafting three documents that do not reconcile?

Of the junior controllers and FP&A analysts you are cutting to agents this year, how many are the people who would have made your 2031 succession bench? What are you doing instead to build that bench?

If any of these produces a disagreement in your finance leadership, that is the conversation worth having before the board asks.

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Three numbers your board reads. AI is rewriting all three in your industry.

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