A Function Paper from GRAIL

What does an AI-augmented finance department look like?

Finance department

Where finance is heading in the next two to three years, and what GRAIL believes it takes to get there first.

"The numbers stay current. Judgment stays accountable."

01 What are you still discovering after the month has ended?

02 Where is your controller's judgment wasted producing routine reports?

03 Which managers act too late because your numbers arrive late?

WHAT DOES AN AI-AUGMENTED FINANCE DEPARTMENT LOOK LIKE?

Where finance is heading in the next two to three years, and what GRAIL believes it takes to get there first.

Finance still learns too much at month-end, after the window for action has narrowed. **The change that matters is that financial attention becomes continuous and available to every operating manager.** Agents assemble the evidence, maintain the view and prepare the questions. Accountable people still choose the assumptions, interventions and commitments.

THE FINANCE MONTH

01

Daily transactions

Ingests invoices, remittances, bank activity, expenses and payroll changes.

02

Weekly briefings

Prepares unit briefs covering plan, material changes, cash and margin risks.

03

Before month-end

Surfaces open reconciliations, cut-off issues, unusual entries and missing evidence.

04

Certification

Assembles draft postings, reconciliations, control evidence and follow-up actions.

05

Decisions

Tests cash and margin effects while finance challenges assumptions.

The numbers stay current. Judgment stays accountable.

GRAIL's view, from building AI-augmented work inside operating companies. A position, not a survey.

THE FUNCTION TODAY

Finance discovers too much after the *decision*

A typical Nordic mid-market finance function has 4 to 15 people. The core team includes a CFO or Ekonomichef, financial accountants, accounts payable and receivable staff, business controllers and sometimes a payroll administrator. Group structures add consolidation, treasury, tax and shared-service responsibilities. Payroll often sits with an external provider or a Nordic payroll platform.

Finance protects cash, control, compliance and the bottom line. It also shapes pricing, customer credit, forecasts, investment choices and the support available to unit managers.

Eight processes

01	Procure-to-pay	05	Business controlling and reporting
02	Order-to-cash	06	Budgeting, rolling forecasts and scenarios
03	Payroll control and posting	07	Cash, liquidity, debt and covenant management
04	Record-to-report	08	Commercial finance

The information is spread across the ERP, payroll system, bank portals, CRM, procurement tools, expense software, BI reports, shared drives, email and spreadsheets. Reporting definitions may be documented. The reasons behind adjustments, customer exceptions, forecast assumptions and management judgments often remain in controllers' heads.

Finance is rich in records and poor in continuous attention. The team spends the period assembling the view, then explains the result after much of the operating response should already have happened.

Gartner reports that 59% of finance leaders were using some form of AI, while 91% described the initial impact as low or moderate. Adoption has started. The operating model has not caught up.

WHAT CHANGES STRUCTURALLY

Financial attention becomes *continuous*

The function changes along two connected dimensions.

Finance moves from periodic reporting to continuous steering. Transactions, reconciliations, cash movements, operational drivers and exceptions are monitored throughout the period. Month-end remains a control checkpoint, but it stops being the first moment when the company learns what happened. Managers receive current guidance while there is still time to act.

Controller capacity stops being scarce in the same way. Every branch or business-unit manager can receive a short briefing tailored to that unit. Agents assemble the evidence, compare performance with plan, trace likely causes and prepare questions. Controllers validate material issues, challenge assumptions and coach the managers who need intervention.

Bounded transaction work changes fastest. Clean matches, reconciliations, cash application and standard reporting can run with people concentrated on exceptions and release points. Forward-looking work retains a different boundary. Finance may produce more scenarios, but accountable people still decide which assumptions deserve belief and which forecast becomes the company commitment.

> The promise is not a finance team that withdraws from the business. It is current numbers during the month, a finance-informed conversation with every operating manager, and decision-ready scenarios while the decision is still live.

> WHERE IT IS WEAKEST prediction without operational context. A model can expose a movement, assemble possible causes and test assumptions. It cannot own the commercial judgment, accounting position or capital commitment that follows.

THE 2028 OPERATING PICTURE

A day, a week, a *month*

A finance function that invests now still has accountants, controllers and a CFO in 2028. Its month no longer has a quiet period followed by a close crisis. Transaction work becomes continuous. Human attention moves toward exceptions, assumptions, operating choices and certification.

The day

MORNING

Transaction agents ingest supplier invoices, remittances, bank activity, expense claims and approved payroll changes. Clean matches follow established rules. Exceptions enter queues ordered by value, risk, age and deadline. The team sees liabilities, overdue receivables and unusual movements as they form.

BEFORE AND DURING

Reconciliation agents compare bank, subledger and general-ledger positions. The cash forecast refreshes when payments, collections, orders or staffing assumptions change. A manager can test the cash and margin effect of an operating choice during the conversation. Finance challenges the assumptions before anyone acts.

AFTER

Draft postings, reconciliations, control evidence and follow-up actions appear for review. People approve supplier changes, unusual coding, disputed receivables, judgmental journals and payment release. The record shows the source, the proposed action, the decision and the final system response.

THE WEEK Every unit manager receives a short brief covering performance against plan, material changes, cash or margin risks and actions requiring attention. Each statement links to source transactions. Controllers review high-value or low-confidence findings and spend their time with managers whose performance needs intervention.

THE MONTH The close becomes certification of work already performed. Open reconciliations, cut-off issues, unusual entries, missing evidence and intercompany differences are visible before period-end. Accountants own policy, estimates, materiality and certification. Controllers translate accepted numbers into operational choices. The CFO owns the external narrative and forecast commitment.

Current numbers for every manager, continuous control across the period, and scenarios available inside the decision. What used to depend on a controller finding time becomes the standard rhythm of finance.

PROCESS BY PROCESS

What runs, and what stays with the *person*

PROCESS	WHAT THE AGENT DOES	WHAT STAYS WITH THE PERSON
Procure-to-pay	Monitors the invoice mailbox, extracts fields, identifies suppliers, matches orders and receipts, proposes coding, checks duplicates and policy, and creates drafts	Resolving exceptions, approving supplier-bank changes, releasing payments
Order-to-cash	Matches remittances, identifies likely deductions, prioritises accounts, drafts reminders and recommends escalation	Handling disputes and strategic customers, changing credit limits, choosing legal escalation
Payroll control and posting	Compares changes with contracts, prior periods and policy, explains unusual movements, and prepares postings and control evidence	Approving the payroll run and separately authorising payment release
Record-to-report	Runs reconciliations throughout the month, flags unexplained differences, assembles evidence, proposes routine entries and tracks close dependencies	Provisions, impairments, revenue recognition, material reclassifications and final certification
Business controlling and reporting	Prepares weekly unit briefs with material variances, likely drivers, cash or margin implications and questions; drafts board material and likely questions	Verifying significant findings, coaching managers and owning the external narrative
Budgeting, forecasting and scenarios	Refreshes drivers, detects assumption drift, maintains a baseline and generates approved what-if cases	Choosing scenarios, challenging causal logic and committing the company to a forecast
Cash and liquidity	Maintains the cash position, refreshes the rolling forecast, stress-tests covenants and proposes transfers or funding actions	Authorising transfers, borrowing, hedging and changes to counterparty exposure
Commercial finance	Calculates contribution margin and cash implications, checks policy, compares similar deals, and proposes conditions or counteroffers	Strategic pricing, low-margin exceptions, customer credit and unusual contract terms

The right-hand column is the point. It contains policy, materiality, trust, commitment and authority. The left-hand column exists to place better evidence in front of those judgments while there is still time to use it.

DATA AND CONNECTIONS

Four stages, and the ERP *position* today

A sensible path has four stages on GRAIL's Access Ladder. Finance begins with governed reads, then proposes changes. Independent action remains reversible, low-value and clear under policy.

01 READ-ONLY ERP, BANK AND REPORTING DATA · THE ACCESS LADDER: READ ACCESS

Reconciliations, cash visibility, variance analysis and weekly briefs need no changes to books or payments. Finance identifies trusted records and definitions.

02 CONNECTED OPERATING DATA · THE ACCESS LADDER: READ ACCESS

CRM, purchasing, payroll and operating systems explain results through pipeline, orders, time, staffing, production, inventory and delivery data.

03 RESTRICTED WRITE ACCESS · THE ACCESS LADDER: READ AND ACT WITH APPROVAL

Agents draft comments, tasks, reconciliations and journals. Existing workflows govern posting and release, with people checking sources before approval.

04 BOUNDED AUTONOMOUS ACTION · THE ACCESS LADDER: BOUNDED AUTONOMOUS ACTION

Only reversible, low-value, policy-clear actions proceed without review. Standard reminders or preapproved entries below a threshold may run. Payments, material entries and commitments keep named approval.

The ERP position, as of September 2026

Visma Net ERP	Mature REST APIs support reads and controlled changes. Webhooks cover key supplier, customer, order, invoice and journal events.
Fortnox	The REST API and official event streams support connected finance. Because resource scopes combine read and write rights, middleware must enforce read-only boundaries.
Business Central	A hosted MCP server is read-only by default. Administrators can expose selected actions through existing identities, permissions and telemetry.
SAP Business One	The Service Layer exposes business objects and actions through OData. Where direct agent tooling is unavailable, use a governed gateway.
IFS Cloud	OData APIs and events provide the path. A governed wrapper limits agent objects, actions and permissions.
Monitor ERP G5	Confirm agent and command-validation capabilities against API documentation and tested tenant behavior.

Controlling spans entities, snapshots, CRM signals and workforce drivers. A lake or warehouse harmonizes transactions, dimensions, lineage and plan versions. A governed semantic layer defines revenue, margin, workforce capacity, pipeline and cash.

GRAIL'S THESIS

Six things we believe, from building *this*

Finance will not become valuable by producing the same reports faster. Its value rises when current evidence changes an operating decision, control attention reaches the right exception, and controller judgment reaches more managers. Six beliefs follow.

01 The close becomes certification, not discovery.

Reconciliations and evidence should accumulate throughout the month. Period-end remains a serious control point, but it should confirm work already performed rather than reveal the business to itself.

02 The scarce thing is controller judgment, not report production.

A tailored weekly brief can reach every operating manager. Controllers should spend their time validating material issues, challenging assumptions and coaching action, not rebuilding the same view for each unit.

03 Current numbers matter only when they change the conversation.

More commentary is not better steering. Every briefing needs an agreed action cadence, a clear owner and a route from the financial signal to the operating decision.

04 Bound the transactions. Keep commitments human.

Clean matching, reconciliation and draft creation can proceed inside defined rules. Accounting estimates, strategic pricing, liquidity choices, external narratives and forecast commitments remain with accountable professionals.

05 The operating layer needs an owner inside finance.

Someone must understand permissions, system logs, data lineage, evaluation results and failure handling. Finance data and agent operations become an explicit responsibility, sometimes shared with IT but never left between functions.

06 Protect the path to judgment.

Routine work historically taught account behaviour, operational causality and professional scepticism. Junior people now need deliberate exposure to exception review, close certification, forecast challenge, manager meetings and audit support.

These beliefs do not prescribe a software position. They describe what finance is for: trusted records, earlier intervention, wider access to financial judgment and clear human accountability for every material commitment.

WHAT IT ASKS OF PEOPLE

Roles, rhythm, and where it *fails*

Accounts-payable and receivables staff become exception owners, supplier or customer problem-solvers, and process-control specialists. Accountants supervise continuous reconciliations and investigate patterns instead of assembling every schedule manually. Controllers challenge assumptions, coach managers and steward models. The CFO owns decision rights, investment choices and external credibility.

The team needs accounting judgment, data literacy, process design, control testing and the ability to challenge generated analysis. At least one person must understand permissions, system logs, lineage, evaluation results and failure handling. Junior staff need a designed curriculum because repetitive assembly can no longer be trusted to teach the profession by accident.

The rhythm

FOUR TO TWELVE WEEKS
One bounded workflow changes the team's daily rhythm

SEVERAL REPORTING CYCLES
Connected workflows settle into a dependable review and approval cadence

CONNECTED MULTI-PROCESS MODEL
Transaction, reporting and operating signals form one current view

ROLE AND CURRICULUM REDESIGN
Exception ownership, controller coaching and junior development become standard

The sequence is governed by data quality, integration, control testing, training and changed management routines. Model capability is rarely the part that determines whether the new rhythm holds.

> **WHERE IT FAILS** Poor master data. Inconsistent dimensions. Unclear metric definitions. Excessive access. A broken process reproduced in a new interface. Weak exception ownership. Licences counted instead of changed decisions. More commentary without an agreed action cadence. Review work added on top of the old process rather than replacing it.

The finance team must learn to inspect sources, challenge recommendations and recognise where approval carries real responsibility. The company must also protect how its next controllers learn. Continuous finance needs a stronger training path, not the disappearance of one.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT THIS?

Twelve questions for the finance *leader*

1 Every branch manager could receive a weekly finance briefing showing what changed, why it matters and where to act before month-end. Could every manager have that level of support?

2 Reconciliations and their evidence trails could build every day, leaving month-end for judgment and certification. What would the company decide earlier if the numbers were already clean?

3 Supplier invoices could be matched and coded before staff open the queue, leaving people to handle the exceptions. Where would you reinvest the released capacity?

4 Collections could prioritise customers by value, payment behaviour and dispute status, then prepare the right follow-up. How much cash is delayed because every overdue account receives the same treatment?

5 The cash forecast could refresh whenever a major order, payment, hiring decision or delivery delay changes. Which liquidity surprises would that prevent?

6 Every forecast assumption could carry its source, owner and last challenge date. How many current assumptions continue only because nobody has revisited them?

7 Management could test the cash and margin effect of a pricing or hiring decision during the meeting, while every quote receives a consistent finance review. Which decisions wait because finance cannot rebuild and review the case in time?

8 Board materials could be drafted from governed numbers, with likely questions and inconsistent statements flagged for review. What would the CFO do with the preparation time released?

9 Controllers could spend their week with underperforming units instead of assembling reports for every unit. Which managers would benefit most from that attention?

10 Junior controllers could learn through exception review, forecast challenges and manager meetings instead of years of copying numbers. What training path will produce the next finance leader?

11 The ERP could remain the controlled ledger while staff work through briefings and approval queues instead of navigating screens. Which ERP interactions genuinely require a person today?

12 Finance could track whether its recommendations changed an operating decision, not only whether a report was delivered. Which decisions should become part of the function's scorecard?

These are the questions the programme is built to answer with the people who run finance, using their own records, decisions and operating rhythms rather than a generic model from outside.