PORTFOLIO · KEYNOTE, RESEARCHED AND SCRIPTED · DELIVERED MAY 2026

# The CFO as Detective

A 15-minute keynote for a room of chief financial officers at BW Businessworld's The Future Finance Office summit: fifteen drafts, two research packs, three Indian and global cases, one line to take home. Written for a professional speaker; delivered as written.

| 15 | 15 | 3 | 139 |
|---|---|---|---|
| MINUTES ON STAGE | DRAFTS TO FINAL | RESEARCHED BEATS | REACTIONS ON THE SPEAKER'S POST |

## THE BRIEF

The summit's set theme: "Seamlessly adapting in a multi-functional role." Fifteen minutes, an audience of CFOs from companies above Rs 2,000 crore, a speaker who is a brand strategist rather than a finance man. The talk had to say something a room of finance heads did not already know about themselves, and say it in their own numbers.

## THE ARGUMENT, IN ONE LINE

You were never a generalist. You are the detective who follows the money across every function, and AI has just turned your monthly snapshot into a live map. That is why one in three CFOs who left their role last year became CEO.

## HOW IT IS BUILT

### DEAD SLIDE

One statistic on screen while the room settles: one in three departing CFOs became CEO. The talk opens by reading it aloud.

### BRIDGE

The identity the room did not have a word for: the detective. Hindsight, insight, foresight; a monthly close becoming a day-and-a-half close.

### THREE BEATS

An accounts-payable function turned into an early-warning system; a Rs 20 crore fraud found through the financial thread; a global CFO who could quantify AI's value to a board.

### CLOSE

Back to one in three. Then the Monday-morning line, with a delivery note on where the silence goes: start with friction.

## WHAT WENT INTO IT

Two research packs, about 8,300 words, before a word of script: India-specific CFO stories and hiring trends, and the detective framing tested against the literature. Every figure on stage traces to a source in the pack; every executive quoted is quoted from the public record. Fifteen drafts, each cutting toward the three beats and the one line. Delivery notes in the script mark the four places the speaker should stop talking.

## AT A GLANCE

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|---|---|
| Client | **Professional speaker (anonymised)** |
| Event | **BW Businessworld, The Future Finance Office, 2nd edition** |
| Delivered | **Lucknow, May 2026** |
| Audience | **CFOs, large enterprises** |
| Length | **15 min, ~1,700 words** |
| Research base | **2 packs, ~8,300 words** |
| Role | **Research, argument, script, delivery notes** |

*A fifteen-minute keynote is a fifteen-word idea with proof attached. Everything cut across fifteen drafts was good material that did not serve the detective.*

## WHAT THE ROOM TOOK AWAY

After the event the speaker posted his own ten-point summary of the talk. It follows the script beat for beat, which is the test of a structure: it survived the stage and came back out in the speaker's words. The summary is reproduced overleaf beside the script's open and close.

**Role: research, argument, script, delivery notes.** Client delivers; I wrote the talk. Speaker identity withheld by agreement.

## THE CFO AS DETECTIVE · THE SCRIPT'S OPEN AND CLOSE, AND THE SPEAKER'S OWN SUMMARY OF WHAT LANDED

### FROM THE SCRIPT: THE OPEN (2 MINUTES)

DEAD SLIDE, ON SCREEN AS THE AUDIENCE SETTLES

> One in three CFOs who left their role last year became CEO.

One in three CFOs who left their role last year became CEO. Not retired. Not moved laterally. Became CEO. In India, 45% of CFOs who moved roles went to CEO or divisional CEO within the same organization. At the Fortune 500 level, 10.26% of sitting CEOs came directly from the CFO chair in 2025, the highest in a decade.

This is not a trend. This is a structural shift in what boards are looking for.

And the shift started in rooms like this one. The pandemic forced you into every function: supply chain, manufacturing, revenue, HR, technology. You had to keep the home fires burning while simultaneously reaching across the entire organization. And boards noticed something. The person who follows money across every function is the person who understands the whole business. Not in theory. In practice. Under pressure.

So now you have expanded. Boards are watching. The question is: what do you do with that expanded role? What has changed that you can leverage?

ONE WORD ON SCREEN

**AI.**

### FROM THE SCRIPT: THE CLOSE (2 MINUTES)

So let me bring this back to where we started. One in three. Not because you are good with numbers. Because you are the one who follows money across every function and sees what no one else can see. The pandemic gave you the scope. AI gives you the speed. The detective instinct, that is yours. It always was.

If you are wondering where to start, Jogendra Singh of Hero Enterprise put it simply at the FICCI CFO Summit earlier this year: use AI where there is friction in your P&L or balance sheet.

Start with friction. That is where the detective points the flashlight first.

> Delivery note: give "start with friction" a beat of silence. It is the Monday morning takeaway, the one line they will remember on the drive home.

**Seamlessly adapting in a multi-functional role does not mean becoming a busier generalist. It means becoming a better detective. And boards are paying attention.**

### THE SPEAKER'S PUBLIC SUMMARY, POSTED AFTER THE EVENT

1. The CFO to CEO pipeline is real. 10.26% of CEOs in large global companies come from CFO backgrounds; in India nearly 45% of finance leaders move into CEO or enterprise roles. A structural shift, not a trend.
2. The role has fundamentally changed. The pandemic made finance leaders liquidity guardians, crisis navigators, continuity planners, cross-functional strategists.
3. The modern CFO is the detective who follows the money. Marketing sees demand, HR sees people, operations sees efficiency; the CFO follows the thread connecting them.
4. The framework is changing: hindsight, insight, foresight. Finance spent decades on hindsight. AI enables insight. The future belongs to foresight.
5. DS Group turned accounts payable from a back-office function into an intelligence capability: anomalies, duplicate invoices, vendor behaviour. The payment trail is a cross-functional nervous system.
6. Mahindra showed real-time finance by shortening its close. The detective's board became a live map.
7. Dell Technologies connected telemetry, service, customer experience and forecasting into a single view. The CFO was connecting the dots.
8. Kajaria Ceramics' Operation Mathan found a Rs 20 crore fraud through unusual patterns in CWIP, vendor masters and payment flows. AI monitoring could have surfaced it earlier.
9. Leadership heft remains the differentiator: taking people along, building a compelling story, creating enterprise-wide direction.
10. The future belongs to finance leaders who combine detective instinct, business perspective, AI-enabled foresight, cross-functional fluency, storytelling and leadership heft.

Paraphrased from the speaker's LinkedIn post, May 2026 (139 reactions, 15 comments, 2 reposts). Points 1 to 8 are the script's open, bridge and three beats in order; 9 and 10 are the speaker's own additions from the stage.

### WHY THIS PAGE IS HERE

A speech is judged by what the room repeats. The summary is the speaker, unprompted, repeating the structure he was given: the same statistic first, the same identity second, the same three cases in the same order, and the same line at the end. That is what a script is for.