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OFFICE OF THE CFO

FULL THROTTLE:

How Finance Functions Unlock Value Creation Speed



Momentum is the return in high-growth, sponsor-backed environments — lose it, and value does not disappear, it just ends up in someone else's pocket. Everyone knows this going in. That is why the checks get written early: value creation plans, add-ons, growth capital. What is rarely understood is where the friction actually lives. In the most effective companies, speed does not come from pushing harder through obstacles. It comes from removing the constraints that limit performance. When the finance function provides a timely, reliable, and universally accepted view of the business and its performance, priorities align across functions and stakeholders, decisions are made faster, and execution compounds sooner.

Picture a powerboat. When the boat first accelerates, it “plows” through the water; the hull sits deep, drag is high, and it takes significant energy just to build speed. As speed increases, the boat reaches a transition point where it rises up and gets “on plane.” Drag drops sharply, resistance falls away, and the same engine power and fuel usage suddenly produces much greater speed and efficiency.

The engine did not change. The fuel consumption did not change. The water did not change. What changed was the removal of the drag holding it back.

Most finance functions are still plowing. Without consistent, timely, and trusted information, companies remain in that high-drag mode, expending energy to reconcile, validate, and align rather than to act. When finance connects performance across the business into one trusted picture, it removes that limiter. The result is faster, more efficient, and more sustainable execution.

Finance Does Not Slow You Down. Bad Finance Does.

At its best, finance is not a constraint on execution. It's what lets a well-informed team run at full speed.

By aligning financial and operational metrics around one set of numbers everyone accepts, and delivering insight on a cadence leadership can count on, finance eliminates the uncertainty that slows companies down. It allows leadership teams to clearly see the results of their initiatives sooner, act more confidently and quickly to optimize, and keep pace through periods of growth and change.

The opportunity is not to add more reporting. It is to build a finance operating layer that connects data, reporting, and decision-making. When done well, this layer does more than improve visibility. It unlocks execution by removing structural limits and information lags. Without those constraints, companies move as fast as they are actually capable of.

When Ambiguity Becomes Expensive

Across transactions, transformations, and scaled growth environments, a consistent pattern emerges. Companies rarely lack data. What they lack is a coherent structure that allows that data to be trusted, compared, and acted upon in real time.

Many companies operate with multiple reporting streams, inconsistent data sources, unclear key performance indicator (KPI) definitions, and fragmented systems that require significant manual effort to reconcile competing versions of the truth. These conditions create a subtle but persistent form of drag. Teams spend time sourcing information, calculating KPIs, comparing, reconciling, and aligning numbers instead of acting immediately. Leadership discussions focus more effort on validating results than they do on driving outcomes.

The risk is not always visible in steady state. Workarounds develop, reporting continues, and the business moves forward.

The difference becomes apparent when the pace of the business accelerates, greater stress develops, and more urgency is applied from the auditors, lenders, sponsors, or the multitude of other parties involved with transactions.

At inflection points such as transaction readiness, going public, acquisition integration, carve-outs, or even rapid organic expansion, the tolerance for ambiguity disappears. Leadership requires faster close cycles, more consistent reporting, and clearer linkage between operational activity and financial outcomes. At this point, the underlying finance structure is no longer a background issue. It determines how fast the organization can move.

When Clarity Accelerates Value Creation

Companies with a finance function that quickly presents, with relevant commentary, one version of the numbers that holds up under scrutiny, supported by consistent KPI definitions and connected to underlying data, can operate at a faster pace. Reporting is reliable. Metrics are comparable. The conversation shifts from “Are the numbers right?” to “What do we need to do next?”

Importantly, this acceleration does not come from simply working faster or layering in more tools. It comes from removing friction within the finance operating model.

Long close cycles, for example, are rarely the root problem. They are symptoms. Manual rework, unclear ownership, inconsistent processes, and fragmented data flows drive delay. When these are addressed through process redesign, role clarity, and standardized reporting, companies often achieve meaningful improvements in speed and reliability without relying solely on new technology.

The same principle applies to performance visibility. Many companies track a large number of metrics but lack a structured linkage between financial results and operational drivers. Without that connection, reporting provides output but not insight to the management team and other stakeholders.

Establishing a clear KPI framework, supported by consistent definitions and tied to source data, changes that dynamic. It allows companies and their stakeholders to move beyond reading results to understanding what is driving them. Leadership teams can identify issues earlier, prioritize actions more effectively, and manage performance with greater precision. Stakeholders get clarity instead of confusion. That frees up their time for higher-level discussions instead of questioning the numbers.

In this environment, finance shifts from reporting the business to helping run it.

What follows is not just better visibility. It is a company that keeps its speed through the next inflection point.

Finance does not create the strategy or execute every initiative. But it defines how clearly the company and stakeholders can see, how quickly they can respond, and how consistently they can operate. When that foundation is strong, execution accelerates. When it is fragmented, even the best strategies encounter friction.

Finance shifts from reporting the business to helping run it.

What This Means for Leadership, Sponsors, Lenders

- **The fastest companies** are not those with the most data, but those with the most clarity.
- **A single source of truth** is not a reporting objective. It removes structural limits on speed and alignment.
- **Finance keeps the business moving** when it translates activity into consistent, decision-driving insight.
- **Acquisitions, carve-outs, and transaction readiness** are where hidden constraints get exposed.
- **Speed to insight** comes from eliminating rework, ambiguity, and fragmentation, not compressing flawed processes.
- **Linking financial results** to operational drivers is the key for meaningful performance visibility.
- **Finance plays a central role** in value creation by supporting prioritization, accountability, and execution-tracking.
- **Improvements** only last if the process, not a person, owns them.
- **The most effective finance teams** allow leadership and other stakeholders to spend less time validating information and more time acting on it.
- **Technology can enhance speed and scale**, but clarity, consistency, and discipline remain the true enablers.

The Real Question

If a lender or sponsor called this week and asked for one number by Friday, would there be one answer — or three people arguing over whose number is right? If you're not sure, that's a problem to find on your own terms, not theirs.

This is the gap Ankura OCFO® is built to close. We work inside finance functions to redesign the close, standardize KPI definitions, and connect financial results to what's actually driving them — the same operating layer this article describes. Get started with the Ankura Quality of Finance®, a rapid diagnostic that shows you exactly where the drag is coming from before a lender, sponsor, or acquirer finds it for you.



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John Kahn is a Senior Managing Director in Ankura's Office of the CFO® practice. A strategic CFO and value creation executive, he has helped private equity sponsors, boards, lenders, and management teams navigate more than 60 acquisitions, carve-outs, integrations, turnarounds, financings, refinancings, and portfolio company exits. John has deep experience across a diverse range of industries and specializes in applying proven value creation and execution disciplines to complex situations and critical inflection points.

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