CFOs Double Down on AI and Cybersecurity as Tariffs Emerge as Major New Threat

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New Jefferson Wells survey finds CFOs navigating ongoing profitability challenges while accelerating adoption of AI and cybersecurity

MILWAUKEE, Oct. 28, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- Tariffs and trade barriers have surged to become a top-five concern for America's Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) in 2025, with 66% expecting negative impacts on their organizations; a dramatic new challenge that wasn't even measured as a distinct priority in 2024. This shift comes as profitability concerns intensify for a second consecutive year and CFOs accelerate technology adoption with renewed urgency, according to Jefferson Wells' **2025 CFO Priorities Annual Survey Report** released today.

The survey of U.S. CFOs, conducted in August-September 2025, reveals a striking evolution in financial leadership priorities.

"CFOs clearly expressed their increased focus on profitability in an environment of constant external change," said Michelle Search, national practice leader for Jefferson Wells. "They know effective use of AI, automation and talent management can differentiate their organizations from competitors, providing both stability and resilience in uncertain times."

Jefferson Wells, a leading professional services firm specializing in finance and accounting, internal audit, risk and compliance, and tax, and part of the ManpowerGroup (NYSE: MAN) family of brands, conducts this annual survey to track the evolving priorities of finance leaders.

Key Insights from the 2025 Survey

Profitability and Strategic Priorities

- Profitability remains the top concern for CFOs at 34%, holding nearly steady from 36% in 2024, followed by cybersecurity at 27%, economic uncertainty at 27%, and technology transformation at 24%.
- On board agendas, profitability dominates at 63%, while technology transformation at 38% and competitive advantage at 37% have displaced 2024's focus on digitalization and staff retention.

Tariffs Create New Complexity

- Two-thirds of CFOs expect negative impacts from tariffs and trade barriers; a major shift from 2024's inflation focus of 32%.
- Only 29% report having the skills and processes to comply with new tariff regulations, while 43% are still developing internal solutions.

Headcount Growth Returns

- Nearly half of CFOs (45%) plan to increase finance headcount in the next quarter, a 19% rise from 2024, and 65% expect growth over the next 12-24 months.
- The expanding role of finance at 63%, increased focus on risk management at 57%, and need to support transformation projects at 46% are driving hiring momentum.

AI Acceleration and the Shift to Execution

- AI has moved from exploration to execution, with 96% of organizations now engaging with AI.
- Forty-two percent are already using it operationally, and 59% plan to seek external support — a jump from just 17% in 2024.

Cybersecurity: Rising Engagement Amid Growing Threats

- Nearly three-quarters of CFOs (73%) are now involved in cyber strategy, with half deeply engaged in both strategy and response, reflecting heightened concern after cyber risks fell in priority during 2024.
- Confidence in cyber prevention and mitigation declined to 43% from 46% in 2024, as CFOs shift focus from prevention to response readiness amid unpredictable cyber threats.

From Fatigue to Forward Momentum
The 2025 survey shows the landscape has flipped. Finance leaders, weary just a year ago, are decisively moving beyond 2024 fatigue by actively embracing AI and automation, taking strategic ownership of cybersecurity, and preparing for tariff impacts. Headcount is expanding, partnerships are replacing solo efforts, and finance leaders are shifting from reactive transformation to deliberate, tech-driven growth, all while keeping profitability front and center.

Download the **2025 CFO Annual Priorities Survey Report** to explore detailed findings on how finance leaders are balancing profitability pressures with technology transformation and where they're seeking external expertise to stay ahead: www.jeffersonwells.com/en/2025-cfo-annual-priorities-survey

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