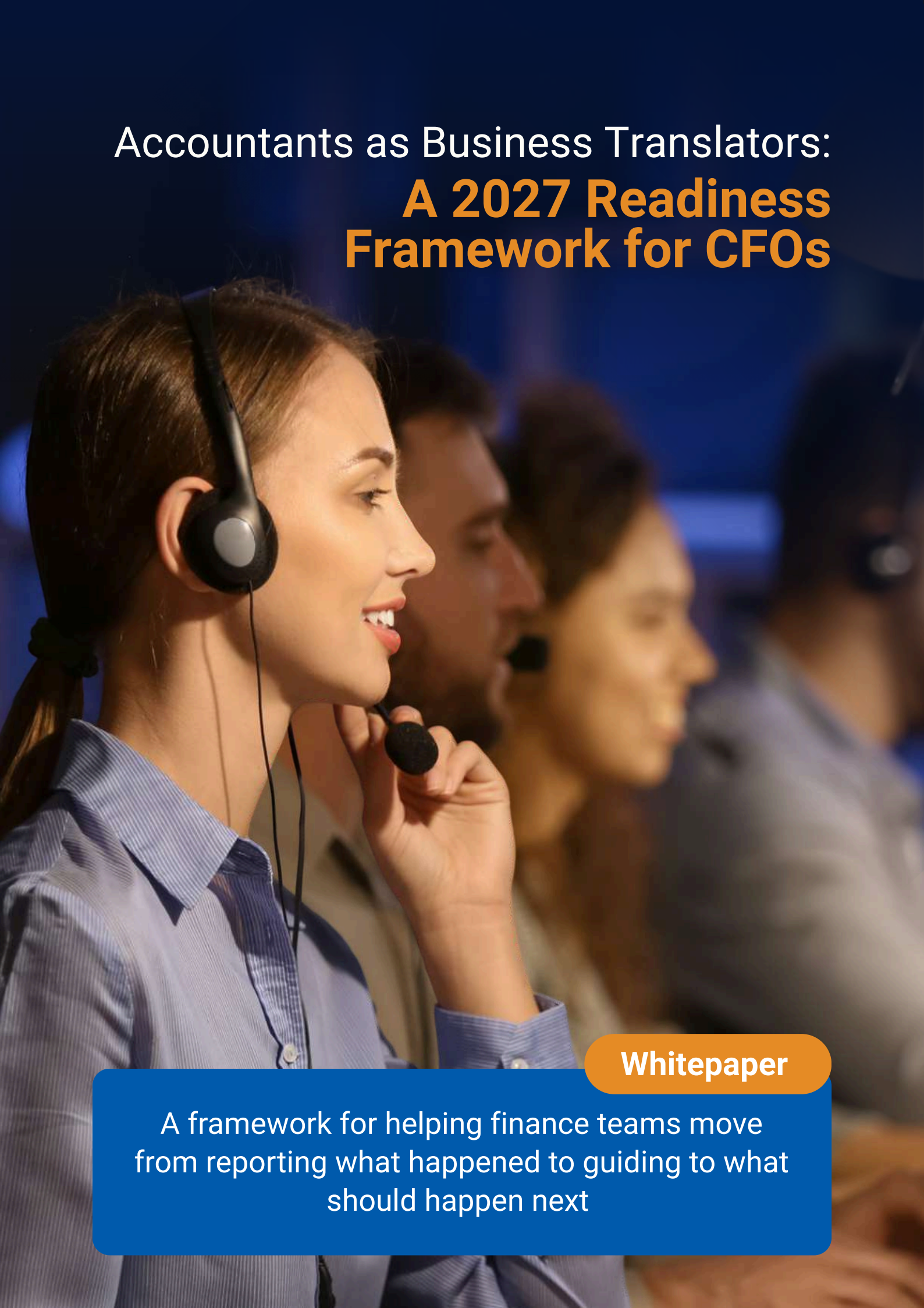
Accountants as Business Translators:
A 2027 Readiness Framework for CFOs



Whitepaper

A framework for helping finance teams move from reporting what happened to guiding to what should happen next

Content Table

1. Executive Summary

2. Why the Accountant's Role Is Changing

- How AI Is Reshaping Accounting Responsibilities
- The Growing Need for Communication and Business Partnering Skills
- Why Technical Accuracy Alone Is No Longer Enough

3. Methodology

- Research Approach
- Framework Development Process
- Evaluation Criteria

4. The Business Translator Framework

- From Reporting Numbers to Translating Business Impact
- Core Accounting Skills and Translation Capabilities

5. Framework Categories in Detail

- Reporting & Close
- Variance Analysis
- Planning & Forecasting
- Systems & Data
- Communication
- Controls & Compliance
- Performance Management
- Business Partnership

6. Applying the Framework

- Building the Framework Into Team Discussions
- Assessing Finance Team Readiness
- Identifying Capability Gaps
- Maintaining Continuous Development

7. Skills & Readiness Checklist

8. How Connext Helps Finance Teams Build Business Translator Capabilities

9. Frequently Asked Questions

10. Conclusion

Executive Summary

Most finance teams already have people who can explain the numbers. What they lack is the time. Close, reconciliations, and data cleanup still fill the week, so the analysis a CFO needs arrives late or not at all.

AI is shifting that balance, but not on its own. Automation speeds up transactional work, and someone still has to review the output, handle exceptions, and explain what the results mean. In the **Connext Global 2026 AI Oversight Report,** only 37% of daily AI users said AI is right without fixes most of the time. Explaining results is also where finance teams feel least ready. In AICPA & CIMA's **Future-Ready Finance survey** of 1,446 finance leaders, significant gaps showed up in communication, influencing, and critical thinking (33%) and business partnering (32%).

This paper gives finance leaders an eight-point framework to test where their team stands. Each point pairs a core accounting skill with the translation capability that turns it into a decision. The readiness assessment then separates two different problems. A skill gap calls for training. A time gap calls for capacity.



Why the Accountant's Role Is Changing

AI now takes the first pass at reconciliations, invoice matching, and preliminary reporting. It doesn't take the last pass. Someone still has to check the output, explain what changed, and tell leadership what to do about it. That work belongs to accountants.

Several developments explain this shift:

AI is changing accountants' responsibilities. Automation increasingly handles transactional work, including reconciliations, invoice matching, and preliminary reporting. Research from Harvard Business School and the University of California, Berkeley emphasizes the importance of human judgment and experience alongside AI. For accountants, this creates opportunities to focus more on interpretation, analysis, and decision-making.

Finance teams need stronger communication and business partnering skills. A 2026 AICPA and CIMA report identified significant skills gap in communication, influencing, and critical thinking (33%), as well as business partnering (32%). As accountants move beyond traditional reporting, their ability to explain financial insights and influence business decisions is becoming increasingly important.

Business skills are becoming essential. ACCA's 2026 research Identifies business acumen, strategic thinking, risk management, and storytelling among the critical skills accountants need for future career success. As their responsibilities evolve, finance professionals must go beyond technical expertise to interpret financial insights, understand business challenges, and support strategic decision-making.

Technical accuracy alone is no longer enough. Accountants must translate complex financial information into insights that business leaders can understand and act on. Their value increasingly lies in explaining what happened, why it happened, and what the business should do next. The hours for that work are scarce. FP&A teams still spend 46% of their time collecting and validating data rather than analyzing it, according to the 2025 FP&A Trends Survey.

Despite the impressive abilities of AI, it still lacks human judgement and experience that only accountants can provide.

"AI can accelerate output, but most teams are still responsible for making it accurate, complete and ready for real-world use."- **Tim Mobley, President and Founder of Connext.**



As finance teams adopt AI-enabled workflows, the role of accounting professionals increasingly shifts toward validation, interpretation, and exception handling. **Connext's AI-embedded workforce model** combines automation with finance professionals who apply judgment where context and accountability matter most.

What skills will future accountants need beyond technical accounting?

As AI and automation take on more routine accounting tasks, future accountants will need to develop skills beyond technical accuracy. Their role will increasingly focus on interpreting information, communicating insights, and supporting better business decisions.

Key skills include:

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Business acumen and strategic thinking: Understanding how financial results connect to business goals and operational decisions.

Communication and storytelling: Translating complex financial data into clear insights for non-finance stakeholders.





Technology and AI fluency: Using digital tools effectively while understanding data quality, automation, and AI outputs.

Critical thinking and judgment: Evaluating information, identifying root causes, and making informed recommendations.





Collaboration and business partnership: Working closely with operations and leadership teams to support decision-making.

Adaptability and continuous learning: Building new capabilities as technology and business needs continue to evolve.



Biggest Challenges in Customer Service Operations

The framework has eight rows. Each one pairs a core accounting skill with the translation capability that turns it into a decision, and gives a test you can run against last month's work. The shift is the same in every row: from "What happened?" to "Why did it happen, and what should we do next?"

Category	Core Skill	Translation Capability	How to Assess (look for)
Reporting & Close	Financial close and reporting	Executive insights and narrative	Reports lead with what changed, why, and what it means, in a few sentences
Variance Analysis	Budget-to-actual analysis	Root-cause analysis	Every variance over a set threshold, even a small percentage has an explained driver
Planning & Forecasting	Budgeting, forecasting, modeling	Scenario analysis	Forecasts include at least 2-3 scenarios and the levers that move them
Systems & Data	Accounting systems and data accuracy	Reporting design	Other departments answer common questions from dashboards without asking finance
Communication	Financial reports and documentation	Clear storytelling	A non-finance reader can restate the takeaway in their own words
Controls & Compliance	Controls, policies, compliance review	Risk-based recommendations	Every concern comes with a compliant alternative
Performance Management	Historical reporting	Forward-looking insights	Reports include a trend-based view of the next period, with caveats
Business Partnership	Technical expertise	Cross-functional collaboration	Regular contact with operations and sales outside close and budget cycles

At Connext, AI is viewed as an enhancement to finance operations, not a replacement for accounting expertise. Finance professionals can use AI to support tasks such as data processing, reporting workflows, and quality checks, while human teams remain responsible for reviewing outputs, handling exceptions, and applying business judgment.



Framework Categories in Detail

The table above pairs each core skill with a translation capability. This section explains what each technical skill alone can and cannot deliver.

Reporting & Close

An accurate close show what happened, not what it means. Translation turns the numbers into a few sentences: what changed, why it matters, and what it means for the reader's plan.

Variance Analysis

A report can show costs are over budget, but not whether the cause is pricing, volume, a one-time vendor issue, or a new trend. Finding the driver requires understanding the operations behind the number.

Planning & Forecasting

A single forecast gives one future to plan around. Scenario analysis shows several futures and which levers matter most.

Systems & Data

Accurate data helps only when people can use it. Reporting that operations and sales can check themselves moves finance from gatekeeper to designer of how information flows.

Communication

Jargon-heavy explanations are hard for non-finance readers to use. Choose the few numbers that matter and lead with the takeaway.

Controls & Compliance

Controls prevent bad outcomes, and that isn't optional. Pair each finding with an alternative that achieves a similar outcome within policy.

Performance Management

Historical reporting covers closed periods, while decisions concern future ones. Use patterns like seasonality, churn, and cost creep to say what's likely next, with caveats about uncertainty.

Business Partnership

Relationships with operations and sales help accountants deliver more actionable recommendations. This model keeps finance leaders in control while adding capacity for reporting, reconciliations, budgeting, forecasting, and finance operations support.

Applying the Framework

Having the framework is only half the job. This section covers how to use it as a team exercise, how to score readiness, which signals suggest a team is falling behind, and how to keep using it.

Building It into the Team

Work through the eight categories as a team exercise, not an individual performance review. Take a recent close or variance and walk through the table for it: what was reported, and what was translated for the audience that received it. Use the "How to Assess" column as a test for each row.

Assessing Readiness

Score each row on a three-point scale.

- **Not Yet Developed:** the technical skill exists, but no translation happens.
- **Practiced Inconsistently:** it happens but depends on who handles the work.
- **Demonstrated Consistently:** it happens routinely, whoever is on the account.

If fewer than half the rows are "Demonstrated Consistently," address it as a training and process gap rather than leaving it to individual initiative. Time gaps also have a cost. In a Gartner survey of 497 accountants, a third said they make several financial errors a week, and Gartner linked the pattern to capacity constraints.

Signals a Team May Be Falling Behind

- Operations or sales find finance reports hard to use.
- Finance joins the close review but not the planning meeting.
- Concerns are raised without a compliant alternative.
- Reports explain what happened but not why.
- Dashboards need a live walkthrough from finance.

Using This as an Ongoing Practice

Reapply the assessment at year-end planning, after a significant forecast miss, or when someone joins the team. Treat it as a standing development tool, not a one-time checklist.

Skills & Readiness Checklist

Use these questions in a team retro, one-on-one, or planning session.

- Does our variance report explain the operational reason behind the number?
- Can someone outside finance explain what our last forecast means for their plan?
- When we flag a concern, do we offer an alternative path?
- How often do we meet with operations or sales outside scheduled reporting cycles?
- If our strongest analyst left, would the translation of their work leave too?
- Can other departments answer their own questions from our dashboards?

How Connext Helps Finance Teams Build Business Translator Capabilities

Most CFOs don't need more translators. They need the ones they already have to stop spending the week on close.

Connext builds **dedicated finance and accounting teams** in the **Philippines**, **Colombia**, **Mexico**, and **India** that take on the work in the framework's Core Skill column: reconciliations, close support, reporting prep, and variance data. Your in-house team keeps the Translation column: the narrative, the judgment, and the seat in the planning meeting.

Three things keep that split working:

- **Recruit right.** You interview and approve every hire, so the team fits your systems and standards, not a generic job post.
- **Retain right.** Competitive pay, full benefits, and a **culture people want to stay in** mean the person who learns your close in month one is still there in month twelve.
- **Manage right.** A Connext in-country team manager oversees daily performance and QA, so your controllers review work instead of supervising it. (35:1 manager to employee ratio)

Your team keeps ownership of decisions, reporting standards, and financial compliance. Connext supplies the people, the in-country management, and the infrastructure. The team works in your ERP and with the **AI tools you choose.**



Signals a Team May Be Falling Behind

A Hawaii-based supermarket chain had a familiar problem. Its local accounting staff spent the month on accounts payable and receivable, bank reconciliations, and invoicing. Hawaii's labor market couldn't supply the accounting specialists it needed to do more.

The company **built a dedicated Connext accounting team** to take on that core work. Its local finance staff moved to financial analysis and strategic planning, the Translation column of this framework.



	Before	After
AP/AR, bank reconciliations, invoicing	Handled by local accounting staff	Handled by a dedicated Connext accounting team
Local finance team's focus	Transaction processing	Financial analysis and strategic planning
Access to accounting talent	Limited to the local market	Specialists not available in Hawaii
Framework columns	Both columns on one stretched team	Core Skill offshore, Translation in-house

A CFO's Month, Before and After

Point in the month	Before	After
Close	Controller and analysts buried in reconciliations and journal entries	Offshore team prepares reconciliations and entries; in-house team reviews and signs off
Reporting	Numbers go out with little narrative	The report leads with what changed, why, and what to do next
Rest of the month	Catching up on AP backlog and data cleanup	Scenario forecasts, variance root causes, and time with operations

Methodology

This framework was developed by reviewing industry research, professional competency frameworks, and finance operating practices to **understand how AI, automation, and evolving business expectations are changing the role of finance professionals.**

The research examined insights from organizations including Harvard Business School, the University of California, Berkeley, AICPA & CIMA, and ACCA to identify the skills accountants need beyond technical accuracy.

The framework also incorporates **Connext's experience supporting finance and accounting teams,** where professionals work within client workflows, reporting structures, and standards while applying accounting expertise, technology, and business judgment. It maps traditional accounting capabilities with business translation skills to help teams move from reporting what happened to explaining why it happened and what actions should follow.



Conclusion

The future accountant is not defined only by the ability to produce accurate financial information. As automation continues to handle more repetitive processes, finance professionals will increasingly create value by interpreting results, explaining business impact, and helping leaders make informed decisions.

The Business Translator Framework provides a practical way for finance teams to evaluate this shift. Strong accounting foundations remain essential, but the next stage of finance effectiveness depends on connecting technical expertise with communication, judgment, and business understanding.

Organizations that develop these capabilities can create finance teams that do more than explain what happened. They can help leaders understand why it happened, what options exist, and what actions should follow.

At Connext, this approach aligns with building AI-enabled dedicated finance and accounting teams that combine technology with human expertise. Finance professionals support reporting, reconciliations, budgeting, forecasting, and finance operations while applying judgment, reviewing outputs, and working within the client's existing workflows and standards.

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