

TOP TECHNOLOGY TREND

From Automation to Technology-Driven Autonomy

Pakistan's regulated and industrial sectors are the backbone of our economy, yet we remain dependent on manual effort and human vigilance to compete in a world that is rapidly shifting to machine intelligence. Global competitiveness depends on scaling decisions. While policy reforms open the door, the only way Pakistan's industrial sector can win the global race is by shifting from manual effort to machine intelligence at scale, making this a once-in-a-generation mandate.

From Automation to Autonomy

Enterprises have made progress in digitization. ERPs, dashboards, workflows, and RPA laid essential foundations, but automation was never the finish line, it was Version 1 of efficiency. Automation helped us do the same work faster, whereas Agentic AI helps us do the work differently, i.e., systems that understand business goals, detect friction and risk in real time, act autonomously, and continuously learn and self-improve.

Technology that supported humans now extends human capability. Emerging economies do not win by catching up, they win by skipping ahead. AI offers a leapfrogging opportunity, and Pakistan can move directly to intelligence-driven productivity.

The first wave of AI delivered predictions, but the next wave delivers decisions and execution through four core capabilities. Perception processes real-time data, video, and documents, which feeds into Reasoning to understand context and constraints. Action executes the

next operational step autonomously, and Learning compounds performance over time.

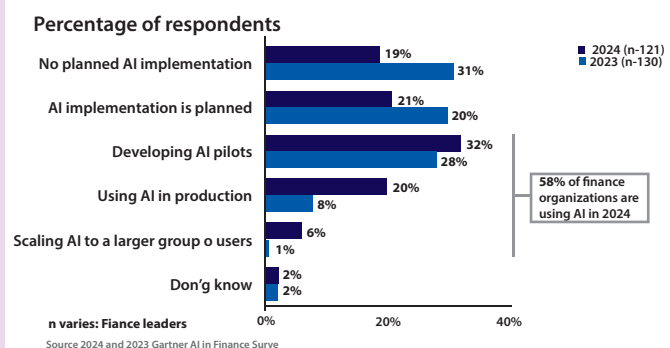
This transforms static processes into self-learning systems that boost output without expanding the cost base, reduce operational risk, maintain quality at scale, and keep the business moving when humans are stretched. Research from Accenture shows companies with AI-led processes achieved roughly 2.4x greater productivity and 2.5x higher revenue growth compared with peers.

Autonomy is the bridge between local productivity and global competitiveness, and Agentic AI transforms operations from being overseen to self-directed. This shift requires a new leadership model.

Why CFOs Must Lead the Autonomy Revolution

No leader sees the financial impact of inefficiency more clearly than the CFO. They understand where cash leaks, where delays destroy value, where risk lies hidden, and how manual work scales faster than profit. Autonomy is not a technology upgrade; it is a performance model for the business. Research from Gartner shows that 58% of finance functions were using AI in 2024, marking a significant leap toward autonomy in finance teams.

Figure 1: Current Levels of AI Use in Finance, 2023 vs 2024



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Organizations with fully modernized, AI-led process nearly doubled in a year

From 2023
9%
To 2024
16%

Performance compared to peers

3.3x

greater success at scaling high-value gen AI use cases

2.4x

greater improvements in productivity

2.5x

higher average revenue growth

Source: Accentor Report How reinvention ready companies are driving growth and relevance with gen AI

Executives who embrace autonomy today will define the companies that thrive. Using Agentic AI, CFOs can optimize working capital, drive EBITDA growth, strengthen controls, accelerate the financial close, reduce cost per transaction, and minimize regulatory risk, turning finance functions into a strategic engine for performance and resilience.

Autonomous Compliance

Pakistan's regulated sectors, including banks, pharmaceuticals, telecom, and oil & gas, have improved compliance significantly, yet most critical controls still rely on human vigilance and manual evidence trails. That is not a flaw, but a limit, and Agentic AI can overcome it.

Imagine compliance that watches workflows in real time, detects non-compliance immediately, automatically gathers evidence, fixes issues autonomously, and maintains clean audit trails effortlessly. A large AI implementation I led last year for a multi-billion-dollar US company showed the impact. We addressed manual auditing pain points using Computer Vision and Natural Language Processing to automate processes that once took months, required human effort, and caught issues too late.

The results were transformative: the organization became audit-ready at all times, achieving a 40% reduction in audit costs and freeing teams to focus on judgment rather than paperwork. This isn't replacing compliance officers; it equips them with superpowers. Autonomous operations turn compliance into an accelerator, not a cost.

Autonomous Factories

In industry, downtime, rework, and hidden defects cost billions each year. Agentic AI can predict breakdowns before they happen, optimize energy and throughput in real time, detect quality issues instantly, prevent unsafe actions continuously, and keep processes aligned to peak performance.

Industrial winners are shifting from manual detection to automated alerts to autonomous optimization. Countries adopting autonomous operations will secure export markets for the next decade. Pakistan can move from labor-driven production to intelligence-driven competitiveness. The advantage of the future will not be capacity, it will be intelligence.

The CFO Roadmap

Transformation can start small and scale fast. Here's a high-level roadmap:

- **90 Days: Discover & Prioritize**

- ☐ Pick 2–3 costly pain points in compliance or operations
- ☐ Measure leakage and cycle times
- ☐ Build a ROI-backed autonomy case

- **12 Months: Scale & Integrate**

- ☐ Extend autonomy across connected workflows
- ☐ Unlock working capital stuck in delays
- ☐ Improve accuracy and shorten cycle times

- **3 Years: Self-Advancing Enterprise**

- ☐ Continuous controls in mission-critical flows
- ☐ Workforce focused on innovation and growth
- ☐ Operational excellence becomes the default

This is how AI stops being a pilot project and becomes the engine of sustainable, long-term growth.

Governance First

Boards and CFOs ask: "Who stays responsible when AI makes decisions?" The answer is "Governance remains human." CFOs and compliance leaders decide when AI can act alone, which risks need human oversight, what evidence is recorded, and which controls remain non-negotiable. AI does not weaken governance; it enforces it.

With the right guardrails, transparency increases, risk is detected earlier, audits are cleaner, and decisions are faster. This is compliance designed for global markets.

The Window of Advantage

Pakistan has a unique opportunity. We are not held back by over-automation or legacy debt. We can leap directly into intelligent operations. Policy reforms and tariff shifts will help revive industry, but the fastest lever available to business leaders today is autonomy. Those adopting AI now are reducing costs where it matters, cutting delays to accelerate revenue realization, and scaling performance without increasing payroll. By doing so, they earn global trust and capture export market share.

Those who wait will spend the next decade catching up. Pakistan's next growth leap will be powered by businesses that teach their operations to run smarter. The question is no longer whether autonomy will reshape Pakistan's regulated and industrial sectors. It is who will lead this future, and when they will seize the advantage. The starting point is not another steering committee; it is a strategic Autonomy Readiness Assessment across key functions, starting this quarter. The clock is not just ticking—it is running out.

About the Author: Salman Kasbati, Founder and Managing Partner at Kaster Consulting, is an enterprise AI strategy and transformation advisor with deep experience across compliance and industrial operations, including energy, technology, and life sciences. He guides leadership teams in adopting AI by crafting robust strategies and driving execution. He is committed to advancing Pakistan's digital future through intelligence-driven enterprise performance.