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Silent Running:

How GBS Leaders Are Turning AP Into a Strategic Advantage

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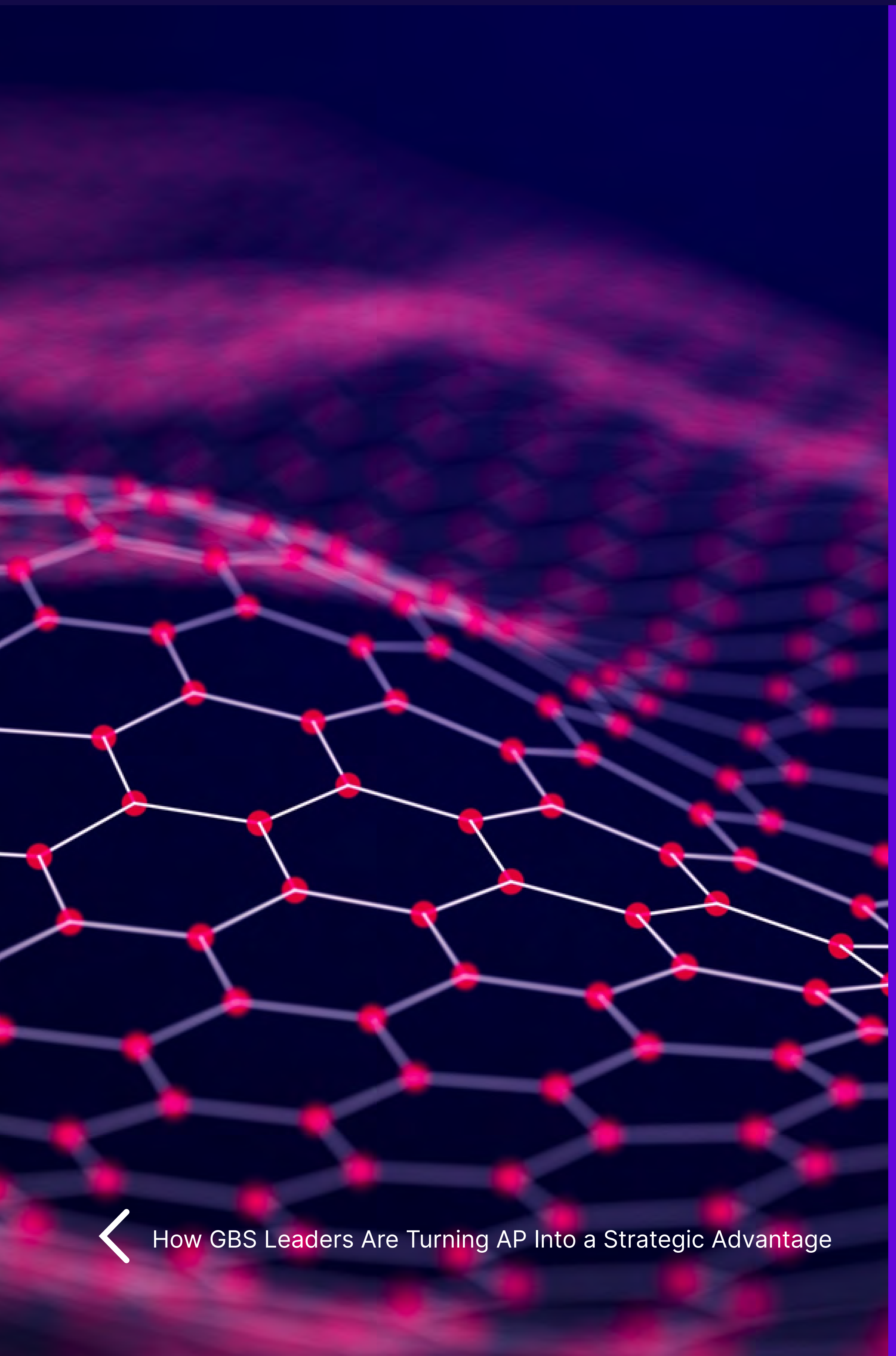


Executive summary

GBS leaders face ongoing demands to deliver more, with less time, budget and resources. Complex, multi-year ERP programs. Compliance mandates that arrive on inflexible yet ever-changing government timelines. Relentless cost pressures. And boards that expect their AI investments to show up in quarterly results, not future roadmaps. While the GBS model is proven, the operating conditions have fundamentally changed.

> ✓ **Most organizations are managing these pressures separately. But the reality is these challenges are undoubtedly linked through your accounts payable (AP). Connecting them is now a strategic imperative.**

AP has a more strategic, unifying role to play in unlocking value throughout GBS operations, driving enterprise efficiency, risk management, and the cross-functional visibility that GBS leaders are measured on.

GBS leaders are evaluated on outcomes that sit well beyond the AP function itself. Cost per transaction, working capital efficiency, compliance coverage, process standardization across markets, and the ability to generate real-time financial intelligence are all metrics that define GBS performance. AP modernization (done well) impacts all of them. It reduces per-transaction cost directly. It unlocks working capital by compressing payment cycles. It eliminates compliance exposure across every jurisdiction the organization operates in. And it creates the unified data layer that makes real-time visibility possible: the kind that makes GBS a credible strategic partner to the CFO, not just an operational cost center.

AP modernization has a stop-start history. It has been deferred, deprioritized, or tied to ERP timelines. But now the consequences of this delay are impossible to ignore: compliance penalties, fragmented and unscalable processes, and AI that stalls without unified invoice data.

The organizations that will succeed are those who treat this moment as an opportunity for structural reset. Now is the time to select complementary AP solutions that sit alongside your ERP: unifying invoice data and giving AI something worth working with.

Why now?

Pressures converging on GBS

With 85% of organizations already committed to a GBS model, the question now is which services to prioritize today, and what impact this will have across operations.

Three forces are converging on GBS right now, and at their intersection is AP. They do not operate independently: they amplify each other. Compliance deadlines create urgency that cannot be negotiated away. ERP programs open a structural window to redesign how AP works. And AI can only deliver at scale when invoice data is unified. Addressing any one in isolation means solving the wrong problem, which is why AP modernization keeps getting deferred, and why deferring it grows costlier by the year.

ERP transformation is already underway

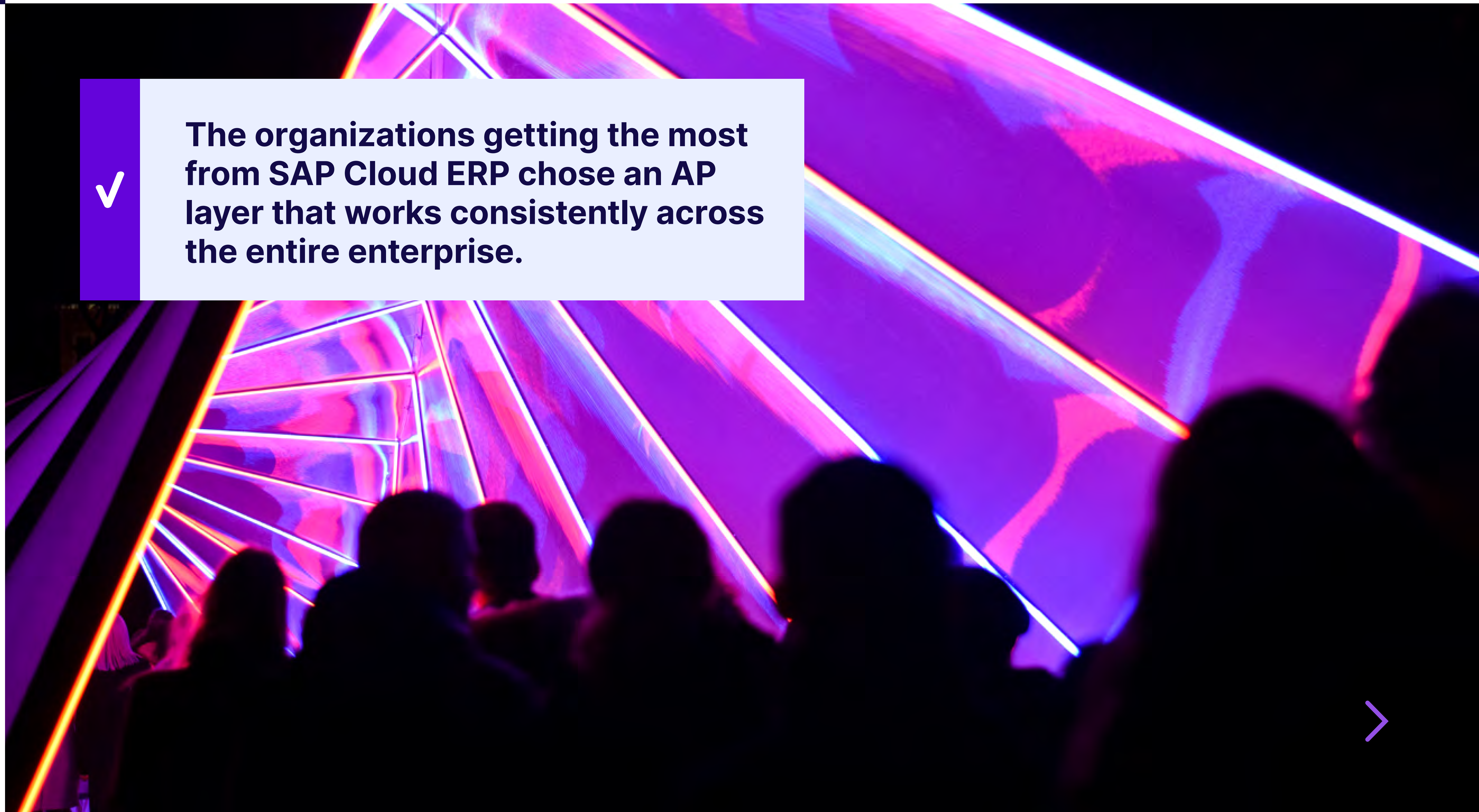
ERP transformation programs are running over in time and budget. AP complexity embedded inside the ERP is part of the reason why. The organizations moving fastest through migration selected complementary AP solutions that sit alongside the ERP, rather than embedding complexity within it.

For most large enterprises, that migration is to SAP Cloud ERP: a once-in-a-decade investment reshaping global finance and shared services.

The migration creates a window for AP modernization: a moment to redesign processes and reconsider data architecture, when the case for externalizing complexity is easier to make than at any other point in the ERP lifecycle.

The organizations accelerating their SAP Cloud ERP programs treated AP as a workstream to run in parallel, not in sequence. By deploying a specialist AP layer alongside SAP Cloud ERP, they captured savings and compliance coverage while migration was still underway and arrived at go-live with AP already performing. Most global enterprises also run mixed ERP landscapes. The organizations getting the most from SAP Cloud ERP chose an AP layer that works consistently across the entire enterprise, not just the entities already on SAP. That consistency is what makes AP a genuine enterprise advantage rather than a patchwork of local implementations.

Boards are not asking whether to invest in AI: they want to see what it has delivered this quarter. AP is where that question gets answered: high volume, structured data, repeatable processes. These are the precise conditions AI needs to work. Finance leaders know this: 72% identify AP as the most obvious starting point for agentic AI.



The organizations getting the most from SAP Cloud ERP chose an AP layer that works consistently across the entire enterprise.

And compliance mandates, unlike ERP programs or AI initiatives, arrive on government timelines. Whether your GBS organization is ready or not is irrelevant to these deadlines.

Process excellence adoption: 17% to 75% in two years.

Reporting and analytics: 13% to 73%.

Source: State of the Shared Services & Outsourcing Industry Global Market Report, SSON

These numbers tell a specific story. In two years, GBS organizations have moved from treating process excellence and analytics as aspirational to treating them as operational requirements. The investment is real, but the returns depend entirely on whether the underlying data is there to support them. For most organizations, AP fragmentation is why those investments underperform. You cannot mine processes that run differently in every market or build reliable analytics on invoice data that is not unified.

When adoption moves this fast, it exposes what is underneath. GBS organizations are investing heavily in visibility and intelligence, but those investments stall when the underlying AP data is fragmented or invisible across markets. The push for greater visibility across shared services has exposed the AP problem, and compliance mandates have underlined it.

AP fragmentation is well understood. What has changed is that compliance has moved from a known problem to one with fixed deadlines and real consequences. E-invoicing mandates are landing country by country, from Mumbai to Mexico City to Munich.

The e-invoicing wave is *already* here

44+

Mandate go-live events between now and 2030

30+

Countries with new or expanded requirements

90+

Countries with mandates in place or planned

Deadlines change: mandates are postponed for a year, then the postponement will be reduced by nine months. You go back and then go forward again; there's always something to keep an eye on."

Dirk Timmermans
VP Global Finance Transformation, Johnson Controls

AP x AI: where the opportunity accelerates

Why this combination delivers

Every finance leader is under pressure to show progress on AI. Most organizations are somewhere between running pilots that have not scaled and deploying tools that generate insight nobody acts on.

AP is where that changes. High volume, rules-based processes with structured data are precisely the conditions AI needs. That is why 72% of finance leaders identify AP as the most obvious starting point for agentic AI.

The distinction worth understanding is between AI that recommends and AI that acts. Most AI deployments in finance sit in the first category: they surface insights, flag anomalies, and generate summaries. Valuable, but rarely changing the P&L on its own. Agentic AI goes further: it executes work within defined boundaries, including validation, routing, escalation, and enrichment.

AP is the proving ground for this because the boundaries are clear, the outcomes are measurable, and the risk of autonomous action is manageable. When an AI agent routes an invoice to the wrong approver, you catch it and correct it: the stakes are recoverable. That is not true of every finance process, which is why AP consistently emerges as the place where agentic AI moves from experiment to operational reality.

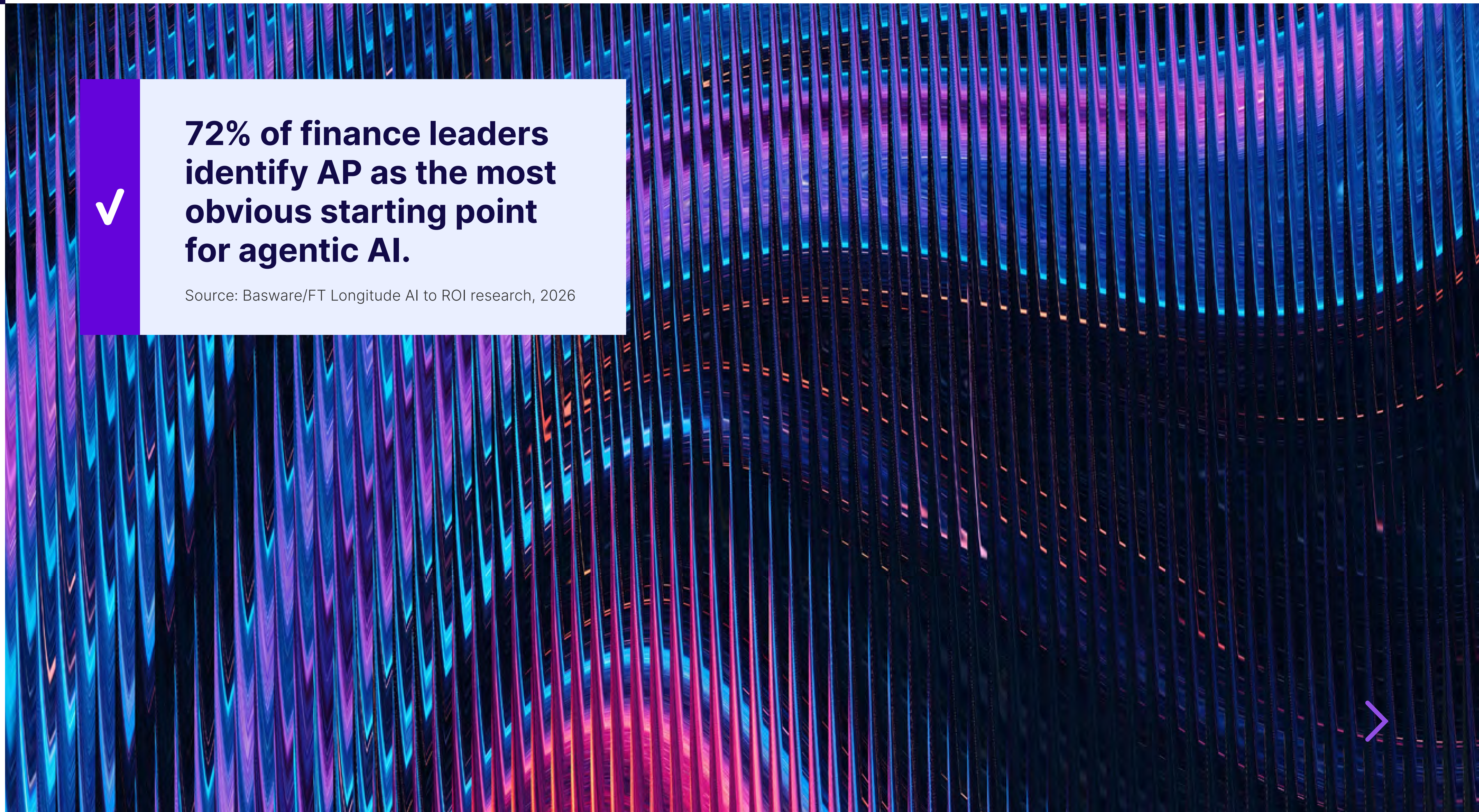
AI agents in AP today prioritize queues by payment risk, surface early-payment discount opportunities, predict working capital impact, and handle performance queries without manual report-building. These capabilities are available now, trained on invoice data at a scale no individual organization can replicate.

From pilots to progress

The organizations getting the strongest results from AI in AP share a common trait: they started narrow and specific. One process, clear governance, measurable outcome: not a broad AI transformation program, but a defined agent with defined boundaries and a defined way of knowing whether it is working.

The data supports this. Finance leaders achieving the highest ROI from agentic AI (per Basware's AI to ROI research with FT Longitude, 200 senior finance leaders, 2026) do so by starting small and building confidence in what the tools can do. Those still struggling have this in common: they are under pressure to do something with AI, but there is uncertainty about what agents can do and deployments are not specific enough.

For GBS leaders, the headline is that AP provides the conditions for AI to work. The invoice data is there. The process structure is there. The measurable outcomes (touchless rate, cycle time, discount capture, compliance coverage) are all there too.



✓ **72% of finance leaders identify AP as the most obvious starting point for agentic AI.**

Source: Basware/FT Longitude AI to ROI research, 2026

The real cost multiplier

Hidden costs of fragmented AP

Fragmented AP does not just create operational friction. It degrades earnings quality, locks up working capital, and concentrates financial and regulatory risk in ways that rarely appear on a single line of a budget report. The costs that do show up (multiple tool licenses, integration maintenance, exception overhead) are only the visible portion.

The CFO-level consequences are predictable: working capital trapped in slow payment cycles, fraud risk amplified by inconsistent controls, and earnings forecasts undermined by cash positions that cannot be seen clearly across markets.

The operational costs are real. Manual processing runs between $10 and $20 per invoice versus $2.36 with AI-enabled automation. But the strategic costs compound further: payment cycle times that strain supplier relationships, reconciliation overhead that makes it impossible to answer a CFO question without a manual data pull, and compliance exposure that grows with every market you add.

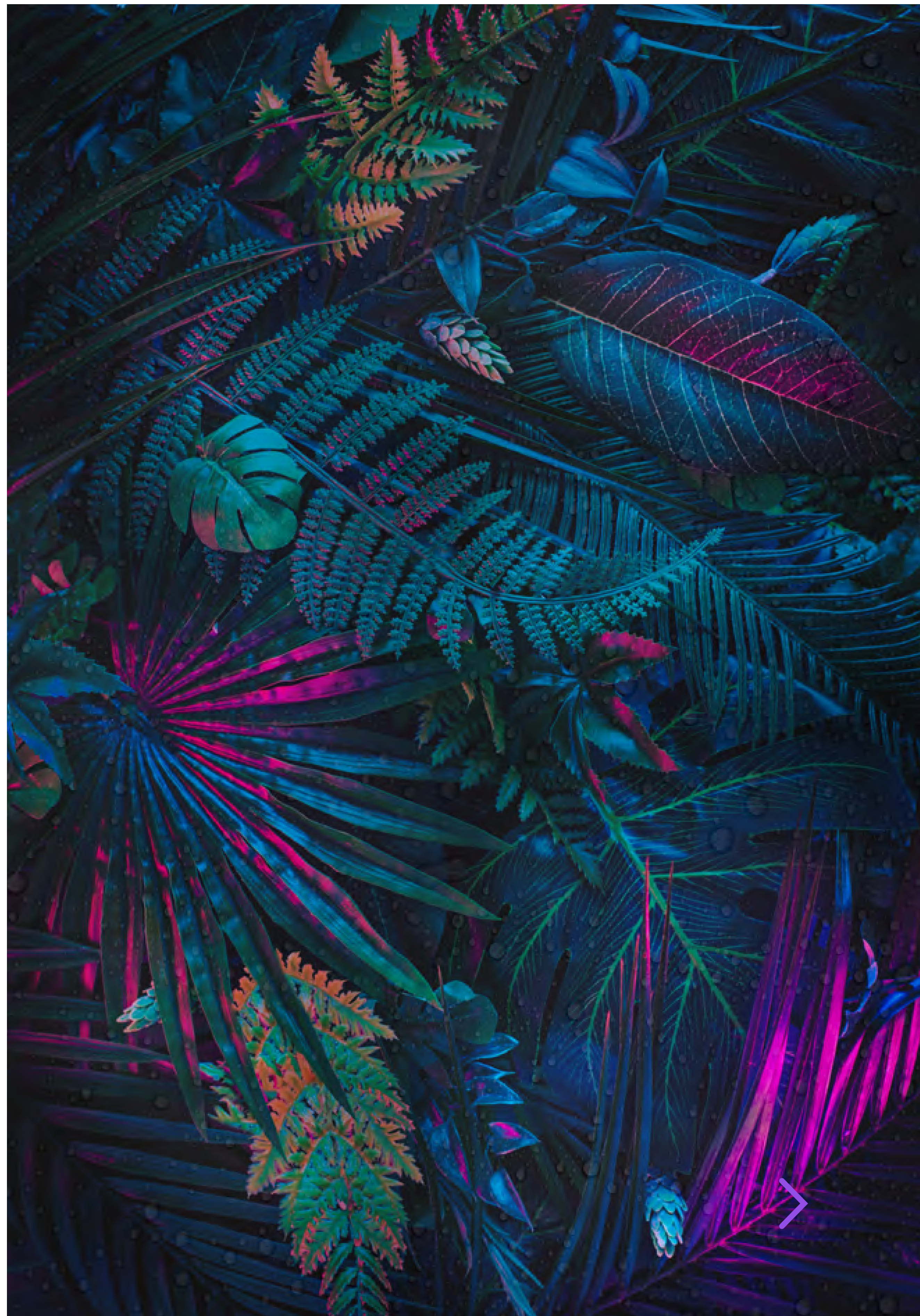
The hidden costs extend further: supplier portals proliferating across markets, local teams unable to learn from each other, and reporting that cannot be consolidated without manual effort. Fragmentation compounds this: one inefficient process becomes dozens, each with its own maintenance burden and exception patterns, with expertise trapped in people's heads rather than systems.

What fragmentation actually looks like

In a fragmented AP environment, each market or region typically runs its own version of the process. Invoice formats differ. Approval chains are configured differently. Supplier onboarding is handled locally, which means the same supplier may be onboarded four times across four markets, with four different contact records and payment terms. Compliance requirements are managed market by market, with no shared infrastructure and no consolidated view of exposure. When a new e-invoicing mandate arrives, the organization finds it has no single point of accountability and no shared playbook. Each market scrambles independently.

The ERP migration accelerates this problem. When an SAP Cloud ERP program rolls out entity by entity, each wave risks inheriting the AP complexity of the previous system rather than redesigning it. Without a consistent AP layer running across the whole enterprise, covering both migrated and not-yet-migrated entities, the migration creates a two-tier organization. The CFO cannot get a consolidated AP view, the GBS function cannot demonstrate enterprise-wide performance, and the business case for the next migration wave becomes harder to make, not easier.

Over a two-to-three-year horizon, the cost multiplier is significant. Talent attrition is a compounding factor: experienced AP staff are leaving because the work is manual, repetitive, and disconnected from anything the business actually values. The organizations that have addressed fragmentation directly report not just cost reduction, but a qualitative shift in what the AP function is capable of.



When compliance forces your hand

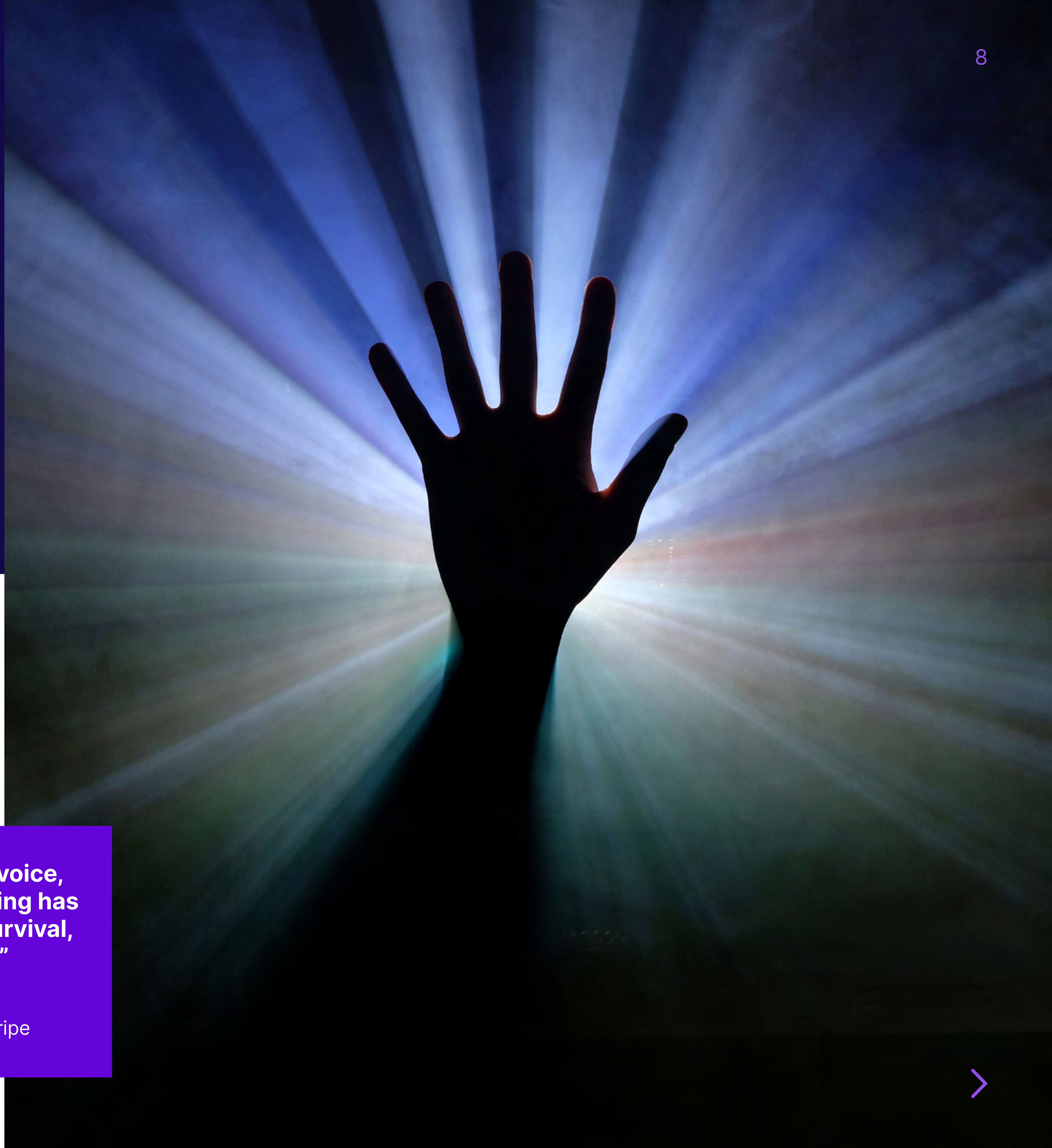
Continuous controls and deadlines

Of the three forces converging on GBS right now, compliance is the one that does not negotiate. ERP transformation has timelines you can influence. AI investment has strategies you can shape. Compliance mandates have deadlines you cannot move.

Continuous Transaction Controls (CTCs) are landing country by country, each with its own implementation requirements and none with flexibility for organizational readiness.

Open e-invoicing networks spanning 190+ countries and providing CTC mandate compliance across 60+ countries exist precisely for this reason. When evaluating solutions, coverage breadth matters: working backwards from 2030, most organizations should have started months ago.

> **If you can't issue a compliant invoice, you'll go out of business. Invoicing has become a matter of business survival, not just a matter of compliance."**
>
> **Aleksandra Bal**
> Global Indirect Tax Technology Lead, Stripe



CTCs demand something most compliance changes do not: real-time reporting. When you submit an invoice, the government validates it immediately. Incorrect VAT structure? Rejected. Missing mandatory fields? Rejected. There is no post-submission correction without formal amendments. The margin for error is zero and the consequences arrive fast.

Worth the Wait?

36%	paid regulatory fines or penalties.
37%	experienced reputational harm from compliance failure.
35%	experienced fraudulent activity related to invoicing.
56%	say missed deadlines impeded market expansion.
71%	believe insufficient visibility poses major risk to the CFO.

These figures reflect what happens when organizations treat compliance as a technical checkbox rather than an operating model decision. Reputational damage matters as much as the fines. When you cannot invoice properly in a market, suppliers notice, customers notice, and the organization spends executive time explaining problems instead of executing the strategy.

"How much should you invest in compliance? I'd counter with, 'How much do you invest in security?' You need to spend enough to mitigate risks, knowing that it's nearly impossible to eliminate all vulnerabilities in a constantly evolving landscape."

Jussi Erjanti
VP Product Management for Compliance, Basware

What best-in-class looks like

Industry averages vs best-in-class:

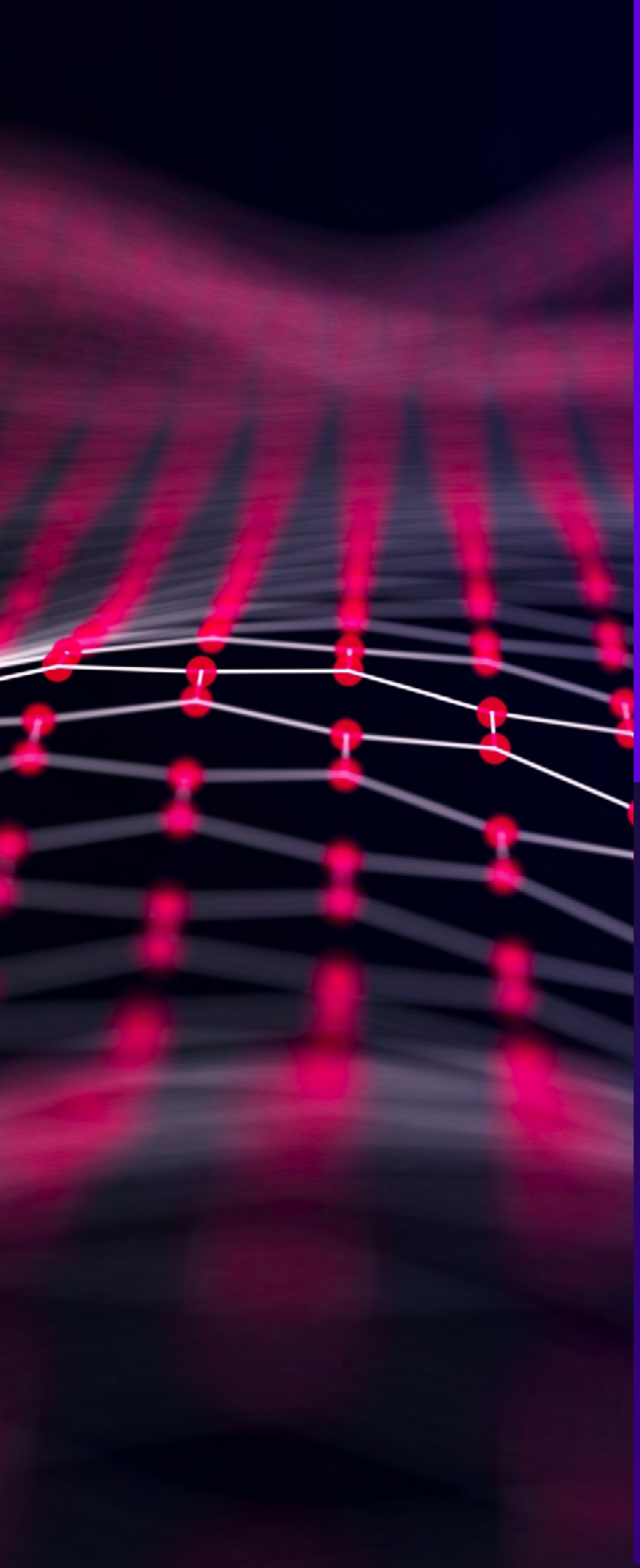
AP team productivity:	Touchless rate:	Invoice processing time:	E-invoicing rate:
8k–10k invoices/ FTE vs. 40k invoices/FTE.	32% vs. 95%.	10.1 days vs. under 1 day.	34% vs. 99.7%.

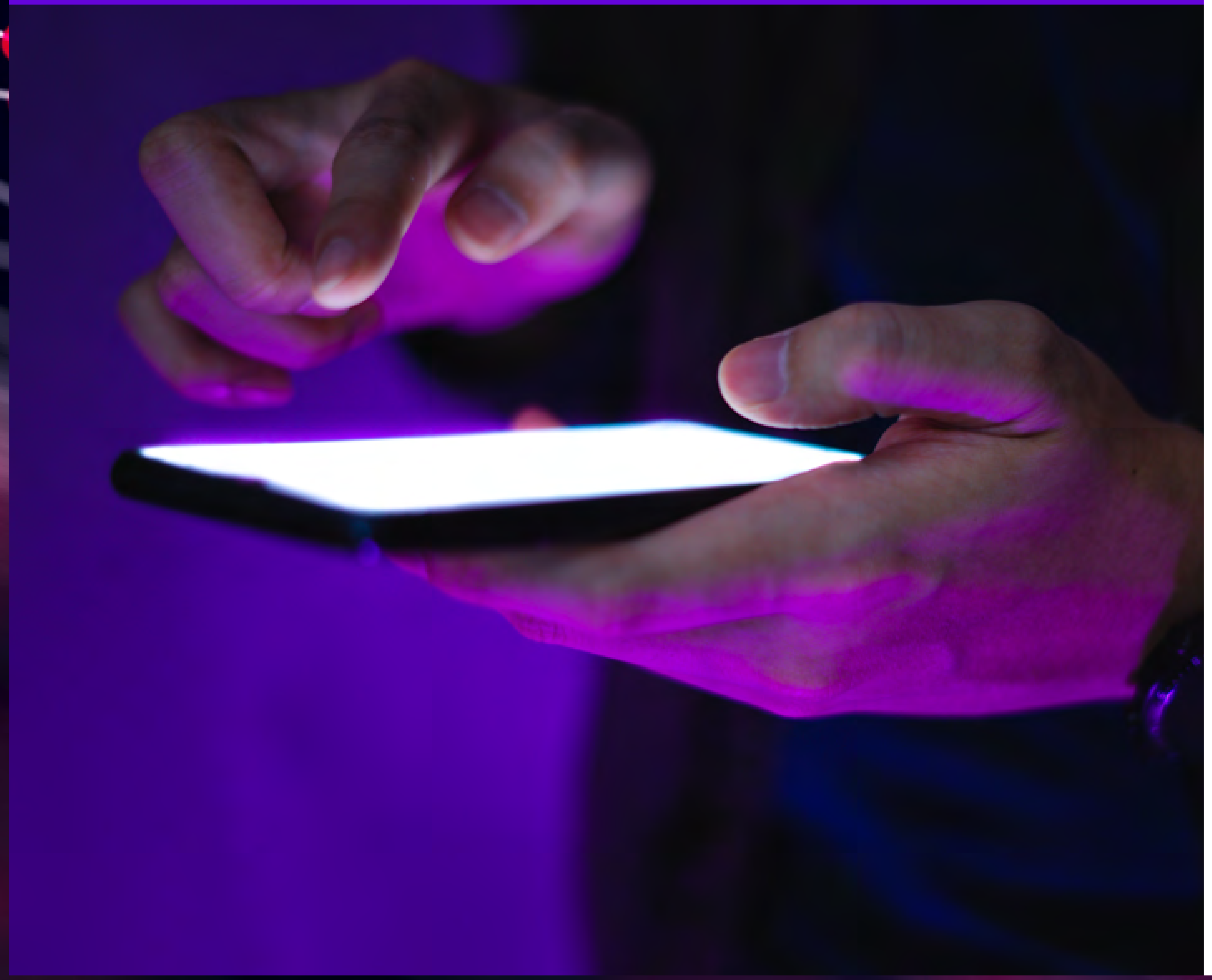
Source: industry benchmark data

Silent-running shared services

The ideal state for AP within GBS has not changed. Payments go out on time. Suppliers do not call. Compliance is handled. Costs track downward. Nothing escalates that should not. In shared services, this is sometimes called silent running: the function operates so reliably that it becomes invisible to the business. But what is required to get there has changed. Silent running used to mean efficiency. Now it means being unified, compliant across every jurisdiction you operate in, and capable of absorbing whatever regulatory or structural change arrives next, without triggering a near-crisis response.

The organizations that have reached this point did not wait for ERP to stabilise before modernising AP. They did the hard work upfront of defining global standards before implementation began, which meant deployment moved fast once it started. They separated AP complexity from their ERP core, giving themselves the flexibility to respond to new mandates, acquisitions, and system changes without rearchitecting everything. And they built the data foundation that is now letting them move from automated to autonomous.





The pattern across leading organizations is consistent: AP standardized globally in months rather than years, ERP programs simplified by separating invoice complexity from the core, and AI delivering measurable results from day one because the data foundation was already unified.

The strongest AP results are also reporting something beyond cost and compliance: AP teams doing more interesting work, which turns out to matter more than expected. Exception management, supplier financing, spend analytics, cash forecasting. This is work that makes the GBS function visible as a value driver. Teams doing that work are easier to recruit and retain, and more likely to generate the insights that justify continued investment in the function.

What separates best-in-class from average?

The benchmark gap between average and best-in-class AP is not a matter of incremental improvement. It reflects a fundamentally different approach to how AP is architected and governed.

Best-in-class organizations share a set of structural decisions that average organizations have not yet made. First, they standardized globally before optimizing locally. Rather than allowing each market to configure AP to its own preferences, they defined a global process standard upfront and held to it during implementation, even when local teams pushed for exceptions. That discipline is what made deployment fast: there was nothing to negotiate market by market. Second, they separated AP complexity from their ERP core. Whether running SAP Cloud ERP, a legacy ERP, or a mixed landscape, they chose to manage AP through a specialist layer that sits alongside the ERP rather than inside it. This is not a technical nuance; it is a strategic choice that determines how quickly the organization can respond to new mandates, absorb acquisitions, and extend modern AP to new markets without rearchitecting the ERP each time. Third, they invested in supplier connectivity early. High touchless rates are only possible when suppliers can submit invoices in the format that works for them (structured e-invoices, PDFs, EDI, or paper) and when that submission is validated, enriched, and matched automatically. Organizations that deferred supplier onboarding discovered that automation stalls at the supplier boundary: the process is only as touchless as the invoice data coming in.

The journey from average to best-in-class is not a single transformation program. It is a series of compounding decisions, each of which builds on the last. The organizations reporting 95% touchless rates and sub-day processing times did not get there in one go. They started with a defined scope: one region, one process, one measurable outcome, and built from there. What accelerated them was having the right foundation: a unified data layer that AI could work with from day one, compliance coverage that did not require rearchitecting with each new mandate, and a supplier network that grew without requiring manual outreach for every new vendor.

What to look for in an AP solution

For GBS leaders evaluating options, four questions cut through the noise quickly.

Does it work across your entire ERP landscape, not just the entities already on your target ERP? For organizations on an SAP Cloud ERP journey, this separates a short-term fix from a long-term advantage. A solution that only performs well within a single ERP environment means reimplementing with each migration wave. A solution that operates as a consistent AP layer across SAP Cloud ERP, legacy ECC environments, and any other ERPs in the landscape means the SAP Cloud ERP program gets simpler, not more complex, because AP is already handled.

Does it protect your clean core? SAP's clean core architecture is designed to keep ERP upgrades fast and predictable by externalizing customisations. An AP solution that embeds complexity inside the ERP undermines this. A specialist AP layer that manages compliance, supplier connectivity, and invoice processing outside the core, and returns enriched, validated data back into SAP, is the architecture clean core was designed to enable.

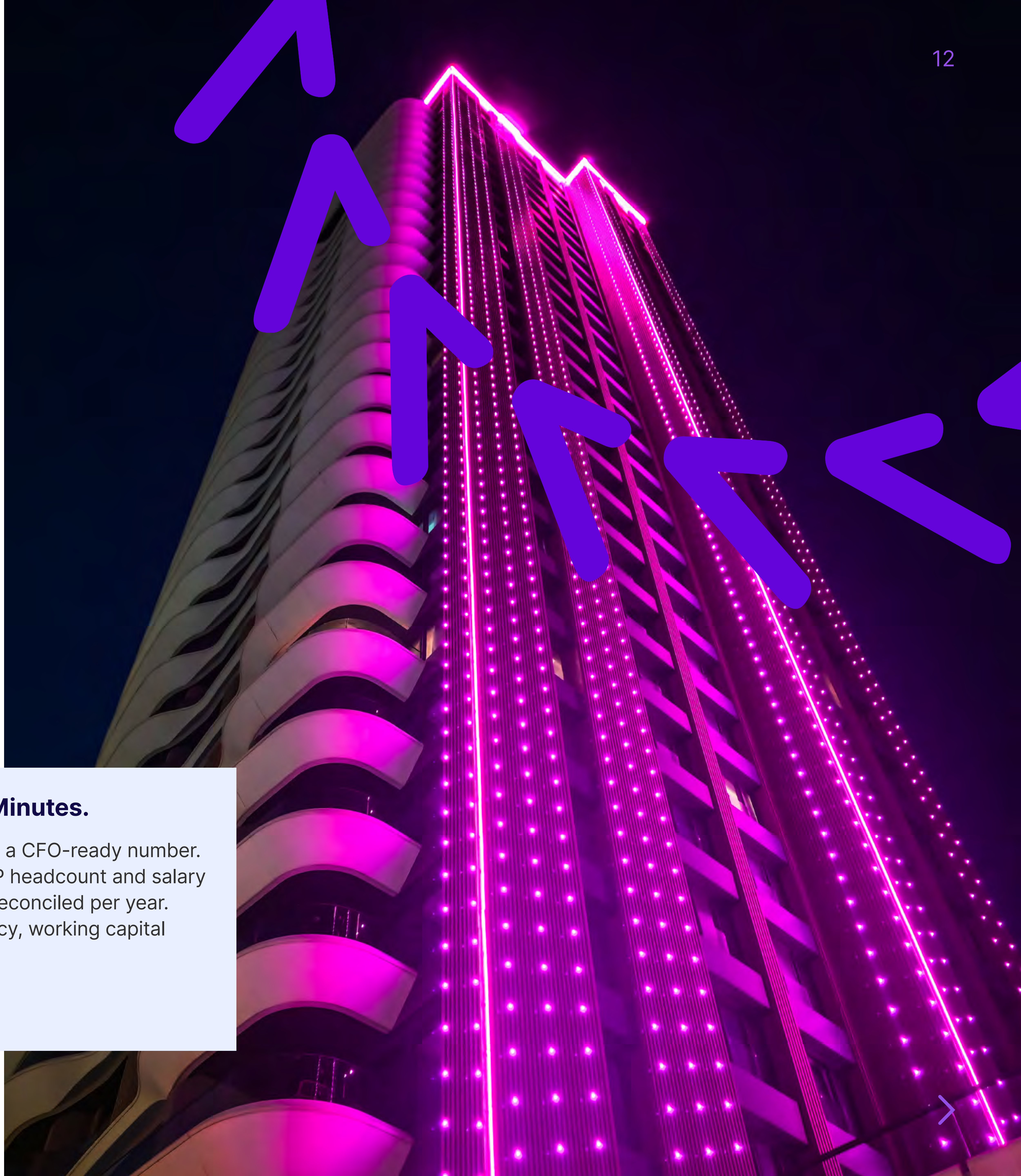
Does it have the compliance coverage you need? E-invoicing mandates now span 60+ countries and are accelerating. A solution that covers your current markets but requires separate compliance infrastructure for new ones will slow expansion and concentrate risk. Coverage needs to be built in, not bolted on.

And does it give you the data foundation that AI needs to work? Touchless rates in the 80–90% range are not achievable without AI trained at scale on real invoice data across formats, geographies, and edge cases. The AI underneath the automation matters as much as the automation itself.

Build Your AP Business Case in 5 Minutes.

Got 5 minutes? That's all it takes to generate a CFO-ready number. Simply enter your: Annual invoice volume, AP headcount and salary costs, annual revenue, supplier statements reconciled per year.
To see projected savings across: AP efficiency, working capital optimization, compliance and risk reduction.

Explore now



Conclusion: the open window

These pressures (AI, ERP changes, CTC mandates, talent expectations) are not slowing down.

The GBS organizations that see AP modernization as a strategic priority rather than a tech project to be deferred are reaping benefits that compound: cleaner ERP cores, global compliance coverage, AP teams doing higher-value work, and measurable results from AI.

The window for AP is open, but not indefinitely. Compliance mandates are fixed. ERP programs have momentum that is hard to redirect once the design phase is locked. And AI capability gaps are widening faster than most transformation timelines assume.

The practical question is where to start. Baseline your current AP touchless rate, cost per invoice, compliance coverage, and exception volume. Those numbers tell you where the opportunities are and give you a different kind of conversation with your CFO: not a transformation proposal, but a business case grounded in what AI can deliver right now.

AP has spent years explaining why suppliers did not get paid, mandates were missed, and costs kept rising. Leading organizations have flipped that story. AP is now how they demonstrate what GBS is capable of: not a function that reacts, but one that leads. That is what silent running makes possible.

For GBS leaders whose organizations are on an SAP Cloud ERP journey, the timing question is particularly sharp. The design phase of a major ERP program is the best moment to make a structural decision about AP, and the hardest to revisit once that phase is locked. Organizations that have used the SAP Cloud ERP migration as a catalyst for AP modernization have consistently reported faster program delivery, a cleaner ERP core, and AP teams that arrived at go-live already operating at modern standards. Those that deferred the AP decision found themselves reimplementing AP entity by entity, arriving at program completion with a finance function that is better on the ERP side but largely unchanged on the AP side. That window does not stay open indefinitely. If that decision has not been made, the time to make it is now.

✓ **Before your next leadership conversation, make time to discover: What is your current touchless rate, and what would a 10% improvement be worth? How many compliance mandates are you tracking, and how many are you ready for? If your board asked what you're doing with AI in finance, what would you say?**

Sources

State of the Shared Services & Outsourcing Industry Global Market Report, SSON, 2026

2025 Global Business Services Survey, Deloitte, 2025

Beyond the Checkbox: Compliance as Strategy, Basware/FT Longitude, 2025

AI to ROI: Unlock Value With AI Agents, Basware/FT Longitude, 2026

Basware case studies, 2026

Basware Business Case Calculator, Basware, 2026

Upcoming CTC Mandates

Live/already in force

Italy: B2B mandatory since 2019

Poland: KSeF real-time reporting, live for large taxpayers

Belgium: B2B PEPPOL-based mandate, 2026 (grace period in effect)

Malaysia: Mandatory for all taxpayers from January 2026

Saudi Arabia: CTC system live, phased by taxpayer size

2026

France: B2B mandatory September 2026, large and mid-sized companies first

Croatia: B2B mandatory 2026

UAE: Phased rollout begins 2026

Latvia: B2B reporting from 2026

2027

Germany: B2B mandatory January 2027 for large companies (turnover >800k)

Slovakia: Domestic B2B mandatory January 2027

UAE: Broader enforcement 2027

EU ViDA: Cross-border structured invoicing from 2027

2028

Germany: Extended to all remaining taxpayers 2028

Ireland: Large corporates by November 2028

2029–2030

Ireland: All businesses by July 2030

EU ViDA: Full intra-EU digital reporting by July 2030

Sweden: Legislation expected ahead of 2030 EU deadline

UK: B2B mandate expected 2029, details TBC

Source: https://www.vatupdate.com/2026/02/26/global-e-invoicing-e-reporting-regulatory-update-february-2026/

Ready to make AP your strategic advantage?

If you're navigating SAP Cloud ERP change, accelerating AI outcomes, or preparing for incoming CTC and e-invoicing mandates, now is the moment to take control of your AP data foundation.

Talk to Basware to benchmark your current performance, map your compliance timeline, and build a CFO-ready business case for modernization.

Contact us

About Basware

Basware is the global leader in accounts payable automation and e-invoicing. We help finance and GBS teams process invoices more efficiently, comply with e-invoicing mandates across 60+ countries, and build the data foundation that makes AI in finance a reality. Our open network connects buyers and suppliers across 190+ countries, processing hundreds of millions of invoices annually. The research was conducted independently with FT Longitude and SSON Analytics. To learn more or calculate your AP business case, visit www.basware.com. **With Basware, now it all just happens.**

Visit us: **Basware.com**

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