



Strengthening Your CFO Leadership Capabilities

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Meet Your Presenters

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What You Will Leave With

01 — Understand the evidence

Recognize leadership behaviors linked to decision quality, teamwork, and learning.

02 — Increase self-awareness

Name how your style, strengths, values, and pressure patterns affect others.

03 — Practice visible moves

Strengthen authenticity, emotional intelligence, and self-management in real conversations.

04 — Choose a growth priority

Leave with one 30-day leadership experiment that is specific enough to practice.



Reflect: When CFO Leadership Is Tested

Think of a recent moment when the numbers were right, but alignment was hard.

01

Identify the moment and why it became a leadership challenge.

02

Share the situation without naming people or agencies.

03

Name the leadership capability the moment required.



Child Welfare Financing in a VUCA World

Volatility

Rapid changes in funding, policy, and demand

Uncertainty

Limited ability to predict future needs or resources

Complexity

Multiple funding streams and system interactions

Ambiguity

Unclear guidance and evolving expectations

Finance leaders must shift from static planning to adaptive, informed decision-making.



Two Sides of CFO Leadership

The finance, compliance, and oversight work remains essential. The differentiator is how you lead people through complexity.

Technical Leadership

Budget accuracy

Compliance and controls

Financial reporting

Audit readiness

Cost allocation expertise

People Leadership

Translate tradeoffs

Build trust across silos

Clarify decision owners

Align resources to outcomes

Lead learning under pressure

Leadership capability is the bridge between fiscal facts and collective action.



Effective leadership is less about one style and more about repeatable behaviors.



Psychological safety

Make it safe to flag forecasting risk, compliance concerns, and data quality issues early.

Inclusive leadership

Reduce program-fiscal siloing and improve handoffs across functions.

Experiential development

Use practice, feedback, coaching, goal setting, and 360 input.

Adaptive capacity

Keep teams aligned as mandates, revenues, and service constraints shift.

Clear governance

Define who decides, recommends, provides input, and must be informed.

Evidence basis: leadership reviews on psychological safety, inclusive leadership, public-sector leadership development, adaptive leadership, and governance clarity.



Assess: CFO Leadership Self-Awareness

Use the handout to rate your typical behavior over the past 4 to 8 weeks.

Then identify 1 or 2 growth priorities.



Assessment Debrief

What do colleagues already rely on you for?

Where does your current pattern create delay, friction, or rework?

When stakes rise, what gets louder? What disappears?

Which one behavior would make the biggest difference over the next 2–4 weeks?



Psychological safety

Make it safe to flag forecasting risk, compliance concerns, and data quality issues early.

Safe to speak:

Feel secure sharing bold thoughts.

Safe to try:

Experiment without fear of blame.

Safe to fail:

Mistakes are treated as data.

Safe to learn:

Asking questions is always welcome.



Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leaders create environments where diverse perspectives are heard and valued.

- Build trust across program and fiscal teams
- Improve collaboration and handoffs
- Increase engagement and retention
- Surface better ideas and solutions
- Strengthen psychological safety

CFO application: Reduce siloing across budget, grants, procurement, and analytics functions.



Experiential Development

Leadership skills improve through practice, feedback, and reflection.

- Learn by applying skills in real situations
- Use coaching and mentoring to reinforce growth
- Set specific development goals
- Seek regular feedback
- Build habits over time, not through one-time training

CFO application: Pair leadership development with real-world practice, such as budget hearings, legislative communication, and negotiation.



Adaptive Capacity

Effective leaders help teams navigate change and uncertainty.

- Shift from rigid planning to continuous learning
- Empower teams to make decisions closer to the work
- Encourage diverse perspectives
- Build systems that can absorb disruption
- Adjust quickly when conditions change

CFO application: Balance competing mandates, changing revenues, and operational constraints while keeping teams aligned.



Commit: Choose Your 30-Day Leadership Experiment

Use your self-assessment focus domain. One behavior practiced consistently has more impact than a broad intention.

01 Capability to Strengthen

Example: cross-functional trust

02 Behavior to Practice

Example: ask for dissent before deciding

03 Conversation Where It Matters

Example: monthly forecast review

04 Evidence I Will Look For

Example: risks surfaced earlier

Pair share: “For the next 30 days, I will practice __ in __ context so that __ will improve.”



Stronger CFO Leadership Shows Up in Small Moments

01
Surface risk early

02
Invite voice

03
Decide clearly

04
Close loops



Selected Sources and Evidence Basis

Deloitte Center for Health Solutions	2025 U.S. Health Care CFO Survey; finance leaders' concerns about external conditions, revenue growth, and profitability.
Urban Institute	Nonprofit Leaders' Top Concerns Entering 2025; analysis of financial instability, demand, and workforce concerns.
CMS Medicaid resources	Data Analytics to Support Program Operations; analytics for evaluation, improvement, transparency, and accountability.
Leadership research summaries	Psychological safety, inclusive leadership, adaptive leadership, and public-sector leadership development.
Gerhardt, Bauwens & van Woerkom	Review of emotional intelligence and leader outcomes; leader EQ is associated with relational leadership and effectiveness outcomes.
Course storyboard	Public Knowledge®: Strengthening your CFO Leadership Capabilities, May 2026.

Note: The self-assessment and practice scenarios are workshop tools, not validated diagnostic instruments.



Thank You

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