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THE AGENTIC FINANCE LAYER

From the Books to the Boardroom

A field guide for accountants stepping into FP&A.

CATEGORY

Field Guide · Accounting to FP&A

BY

Cube

FOREWORD

You Just Inherited FP&A

You are not expected to become a full-time analyst overnight. You are expected to keep the core processes running.

Most accountants land in FP&A the same way. Someone left and there is no backfill yet. There has never been a dedicated FP&A hire. Leadership needs finance answers now, not next quarter. So the forecasting, the variance, and the board prep quietly become your job on top of the close you already run.

This guide is for that moment. It assumes you are fluent in the general ledger and disciplined about the close, and that no one has handed you a formal FP&A playbook. Whether you are the first finance hire at a Series A startup or an accountant absorbing FP&A at a company that lost its analyst, the principles here apply. The scale changes. The substance does not.

Here is the good news. You already own the hardest part of this work: the discipline. GL fluency, month-end rigor, and an instinct to reconcile against the source are the exact foundation FP&A is built on. What changes is the direction you point that discipline. Accounting protects the past. FP&A shapes the next decision.

What follows is the full arc: the shift and why it matters, the data principle that keeps everything clean, the core processes, how to run them at a sustainable pace, and your first ninety days. **The switch is a set of habits. This guide shows you how to build them.**

> "
> **Accounting asks whether a number is correct. FP&A asks what it means, and what happens next.**
>
> Cube · FP&A Foundations

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CHAPTER 01

Two Jobs, One Foundation

Accounting and FP&A are two different jobs that share more common ground than most people expect.

The switch to FP&A is a change in the question you are paid to answer. The close asks whether a number is correct. FP&A asks what that number means for the plan, and what to do about it.

That single reframe reorganizes everything. Accounting looks backward and is driven by compliance: GAAP, the close, the audit. Its core question is whether the books are right, and it owns the chart of accounts, journal entries, and the general ledger. FP&A looks forward and is driven by decisions: forecasting, planning, and scenarios. Its core question is what the numbers mean and what happens next, and it owns budgets, forecasts, variance, and board reporting.

	Accounting	FP&A
Time horizon	Backward-looking	Forward-looking
Driven by	Compliance: GAAP, close, audit	Decisions: forecasting, planning, scenarios
Core question	Is it correct?	What does it mean, and what happens next?
Owns	Close, chart of accounts, GL	Budgets, forecasts, variance, board reporting

The foundation you already own

The reason an accountant can step into FP&A is that the two jobs sit on a shared base. Sort the work into three columns and the head start becomes obvious. On one side, accounting keeps the record: transaction recording, journal entries, and audit-trail integrity. On the other, FP&A adds new muscle: assumptions and drivers, forward scenarios, and cross-department narratives. Between them is a foundation you already live in every day.

ACCOUNTING-ONLY

The record

Transaction recording, journal entries, and audit-trail integrity. This stays with the close.

SHARED FOUNDATION

Your head start

GL fluency, chart of accounts, month-end discipline, and data-accuracy standards. You already own this.

FP&A-ONLY

The new muscle

Assumptions and drivers, forward scenarios, and cross-department narratives. This is what you build next.

BEST PRACTICE

Do not try to learn FP&A as a brand-new discipline. Learn it as your existing discipline pointed forward. The reconciliation instinct that keeps your close clean is the same instinct that makes a forecast trustworthy.

CHAPTER 02

Why FP&A Earns Its Seat

FP&A is what turns the general ledger into decisions leadership can act on. When it is missing, the gaps show up as expensive surprises.

Accounting keeps the record accurate. FP&A connects that record to the decisions leadership has to make. Without it, a company runs on numbers that are correct but late, and late numbers cost real money.

Good FP&A produces a small, predictable set of outputs: budgets and rolling forecasts, variance analysis, board and investor reporting, and scenario planning. Each one has a direct counterpart in what breaks when it goes missing.

What good FP&A produces	What happens when it is missing
Budgets and rolling forecasts	Leadership flying blind
Variance analysis, budget vs. actual	No early warning on burn or runway
Board and investor reporting	Slow, manual, error-prone board prep
Scenario planning	Decisions made on stale numbers

What missing FP&A costs in practice

These are not abstract risks. They are the three failures every under-resourced finance function eventually hits. Burn gets discovered too late to act on. Headcount gets approved without a funded plan behind it. And manual, error-prone decks quietly erode the board's trust in finance.

COST 01

Cash surprises

Burn is discovered too late to act. By the time it is visible, the runway is already shorter than the plan assumed.

COST 02

Missed hiring plans

Headcount gets approved without a funded plan behind it, opening budget gaps that surface mid-quarter.

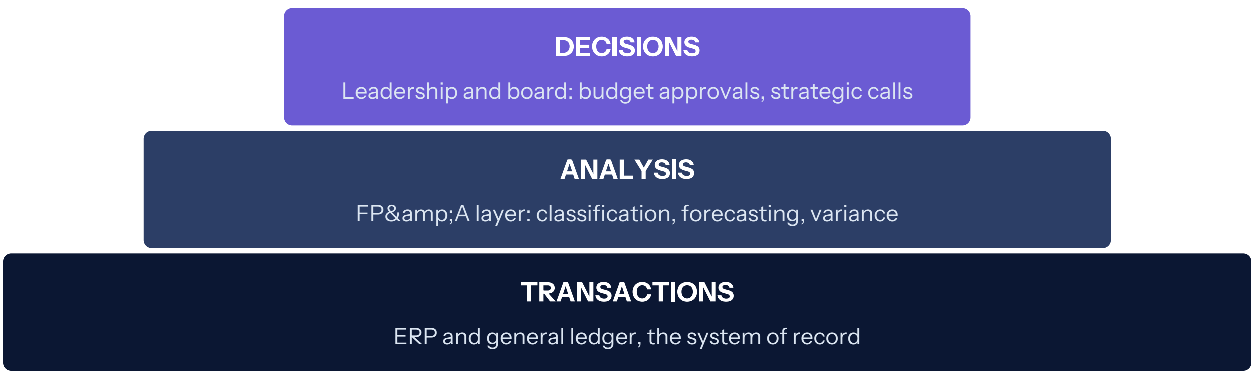
COST 03

Board confidence

Manual, error-prone decks erode trust in finance. That invites more scrutiny, not less.

The finance stack

It helps to picture the whole function as three layers. Transactions sit at the base: the ERP and general ledger, the system of record. Analysis sits in the middle: the FP&A layer that classifies, forecasts, and explains. Decisions sit at the top: the budget approvals and strategic calls leadership makes. Accounting keeps the base accurate. FP&A is the connective tissue that carries it upward.



DATA PRINCIPLE

Accounting keeps layer one accurate. FP&A is what connects it to layer three. That connection is the entire job, and it is now yours to run.

CHAPTER 03

The Books-to-Boardroom Principle

One rule keeps FP&A reporting clean and trustworthy: never duplicate or override the ERP. Enrich it downstream.

Before you build a single forecast, adopt the principle that governs all of it. The general ledger stays the system of record for transactions. Everything downstream enriches and reclassifies that truth into a view leadership can decide from.

This will feel natural to you, because it is the same discipline that keeps your close defensible. You do not retype the ledger into a new tool and start editing. You carry it forward and add structure on top: classification, allocation, and consolidation logic that turns raw transactions into a decision-ready read. The path runs in three stages.

STAGE 01

ERP

The system of record for transactions. Never duplicated, never overridden. This is where truth lives.

STAGE 02

The FP&A layer

Classification, allocation, and consolidation logic applied downstream. The GL is enriched, not replaced.

STAGE 03

Boardroom

Investor-grade, decision-ready reporting. The same transactions, now legible to leadership.

Hold to this and two problems disappear before they start. Your numbers never drift from the source, because the source is never copied. And when the ERP changes, your reporting survives it, because the reporting was built as a layer on top rather than a fragile duplicate beside it.

> **DATA PRINCIPLE**
> Guiding principle: enrich and reclassify ERP data downstream, never override it. The ERP stays the source of truth for transactions. The FP&A layer is what turns that truth into a decision-ready view.

CHAPTER 04

Plan, Forecast, Explain

Three of the six processes you now own form one loop: set the plan, compare it to reality, and explain the gap.

FP&A is a set of recurring processes, not a one-time project. Learn the cadence of the planning loop and the rest of the calendar falls into place around it.

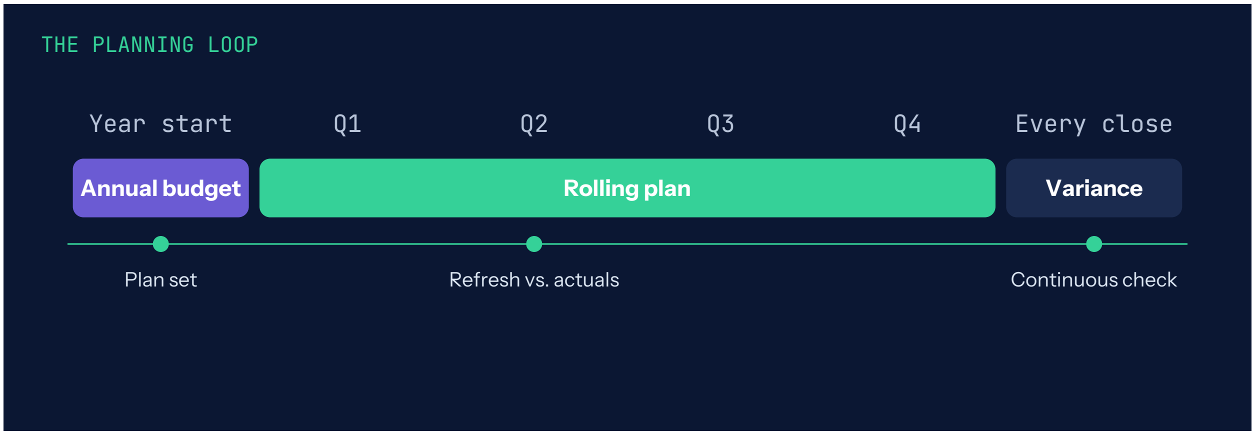
Six workflows now sit on your desk: budgeting and annual planning, rolling forecasts, variance analysis, multi-entity consolidated reporting, board and investor packages, and the mechanics of headcount, multi-currency, and allocations. This chapter covers the three that run on a monthly rhythm. The next covers reporting them out.

Core process	What it delivers
Budgeting and annual planning	The plan for the year, by department
Rolling forecasts	A moving picture updated against actuals
Variance analysis	The explained gap between plan and reality
Multi-entity, consolidated reporting	One trusted group-level view across entities
Board and investor packages	Decision-ready reporting for leadership
Headcount, multi-currency, allocations	The mechanics behind an accurate plan

Budgeting and the rolling forecast

The annual budget sets the plan for the year, by department. The rolling forecast updates it monthly or quarterly against actuals. The discipline that makes both work is keeping them on the same dimensional model as your actuals, so the plan and reality never live in separate spreadsheets that have to be stitched together later. A budget keeps spending aligned to business reality. A rolling forecast turns a static snapshot into a moving picture, and it flags cash runway issues early, not at year-end when the options are already gone.

The three activities are one continuous loop, not three separate projects. Set the plan once at the start of the year, refresh the forecast on a cadence, and check variance every close.



Turning variance into a narrative

Variance analysis compares actuals to budget or forecast and explains the why behind the gap. Computing the number is the easy part. The value you add is the explanation, and a good variance note answers three questions in order: what moved and by how much, why it moved, and whether it changes the forecast. The driver matters, because a timing difference, a one-off item, a missed assumption, and a real trend shift each demand a different response.

- **What moved, and by how much?** Name the line and the exact size of the gap against plan. Precise, not directional.
- **Why did it move?** Timing difference, one-off item, a missed assumption, or a genuine trend shift. Pick the true driver.
- **Does it change the forecast?** If the driver persists, it feeds straight into the next forecast update and the board commentary.

The output is a flux view where every line carries its own explanation, ready to lift straight into the board package.

MONTH-END FLUX · OPEX BY DEPARTMENT ($K) · ILLUSTRATIVE

A	B	C	D	E
Department	**Actual**	**Plan**	**Var**	**Commentary**
Sales	1,840	1,500	+340	One-time event spend, does not recur next quarter
Marketing	920	880	+40	Timing on a campaign that lands in Q3
R and D	2,150	2,300	-150	Two open roles unfilled, forecast adjusted down
G and A	610	600	+10	In line, no action needed

EVERY FIGURE TRACES BACK TO THE GL

BEST PRACTICE

A variance explanation without a forward-looking implication is a history lesson, not finance leadership. Always close the note with what it means for the next forecast.

CHAPTER 05

Report to the Board

A board package is a standard set of views. Learn the anatomy once, and every cycle gets faster.

Board reporting feels high-stakes because the audience is, but the artifact itself is repeatable. It is the same set of views each cycle, refreshed with new numbers.

A typical board package answers five questions in sequence: how did the period land, where did reality diverge from the plan, how long can the current burn run, what do the operating metrics say, and what does the outlook look like now. Build the template once and each cycle becomes an update rather than a rebuild.

In the board package	Why it is there
P and L summary	The headline read on the period
Budget vs. actual variance	Where reality diverged from the plan, and the why
Cash position and runway	How long the current burn can run
KPI dashboard	The operating metrics behind the financials
Forward outlook	What the next few quarters look like now

Consolidating a multi-entity view

If the company runs more than one entity, consolidation happens before any group-level number can be trusted. Three things have to be handled consistently every period. Currency has to convert on the same rules across entities. Intercompany transactions have to be eliminated so the group is not counting itself twice. And entity-level data has to roll up into a single consolidated view. Get these right and the group numbers are safe to present. Skip any one and the board is looking at a number that does not mean what it appears to.

CONSOLIDATION

FX conversion

Currency converted consistently across every entity, on the same rules each period.

CONSOLIDATION

Intercompany eliminations

Internal transactions removed so the group is not double-counting itself.

CONSOLIDATION

Roll-up to one view

Entity-level data rolls up to a single consolidated, board-ready number.

WATCH OUT

Consolidation is where a board number quietly goes wrong. An unadjusted FX rate or a missed elimination does not throw an error. It just produces a confident, incorrect total. Reconcile the consolidated view against the entities before it leaves your hands.

CHAPTER 06

Running It Without Drowning

The processes are the job. The question is how to run them at a sustainable pace on a lean team, without a weekend of copy-paste before every deadline.

Everything so far is the discipline. This chapter is about the machinery: how the right tooling carries the repetitive load so your time goes to judgment instead of assembly.

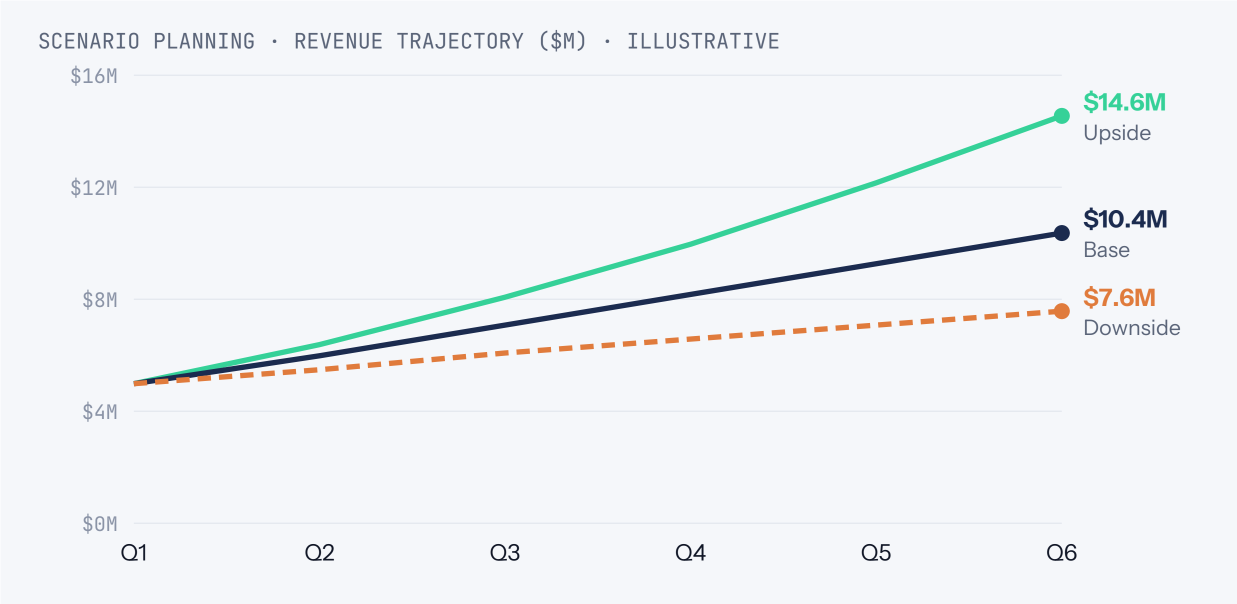
Three shifts do most of the work. First, automate the data plumbing. Connect your source systems once, define how accounts roll up once, and build each metric once. After that the data flows on its own, reports refresh as new data lands, and a chart-of-accounts change no longer means rebuilding every report by hand.

Second, make reporting a refresh, not a rebuild. Build a report a single time, in the spreadsheet or on the web, formatted the way stakeholders expect. Then refresh it for each new period with one click, and let board visuals redraw from live data instead of being rebuilt chart by chart. Board prep goes from days to minutes, always tied to the latest actuals.

Task	The hard way	The one-click way
Variance write-up	Hours from a blank page	First-pass draft surfaced for you
Board deck visuals	Rebuilt chart by chart	Redrawn from live actuals on refresh
A new reporting period	A weekend of copy-paste	One click to refresh
Answering leadership	Wait for the next export	Current whenever they ask

Plan in scenarios, not single numbers

The third shift changes what you bring to leadership. Instead of one forecast, model several. Create budgets, forecasts, and what-ifs as separate scenarios, run unlimited passes without overwriting your baseline, and keep the forecast honest by pushing each period's actuals into it as the period closes. Presented well, scenarios turn a single guess into a set of choices leadership can weigh. The purpose of a forecast is not to be right. It is to be useful.



> **CUBE**
>
> This is what Cube, the Agentic Finance Layer, is built to do. Bi-directional connectivity keeps a single source of truth in sync with your source systems, reports refresh as new data lands, and mappings survive an ERP change without a rebuild. You keep working in the spreadsheet you already know while the assembly work happens underneath it.

CHAPTER 07

Trust Every Number

The habit that makes you effective in FP&A is the same one that makes you a good accountant: every number traces back to the transaction behind it.

This is the chapter where your instincts pay off most. FP&A shares its foundation with the close, and the reflex to trace a number to its source is exactly what earns trust with auditors and leadership alike.

Three habits carry straight over from accounting. The audit-trail instinct becomes trace to the source: every report cell should drill to the underlying GL transaction. The reconciliation reflex becomes an in-workbook tie-out habit, checking the reported value against the source GL rather than an intermediate file. And multi-entity consolidation, with its FX, eliminations, and roll-ups, moves out of manual spreadsheets and into a repeatable layer.

FAMILIAR

Trace to the source

Every report cell drills to the underlying GL transaction. The audit-trail instinct you already have, built into reporting.

FAMILIAR

Reconciliation habits

In-workbook tie-out indicators and a standing habit of reconciling against the source GL, not an intermediate file.

FAMILIAR

Multi-entity consolidation

FX, eliminations, and roll-ups handled downstream instead of by hand in a spreadsheet.

The month-end tie-out habit

The single most common miss at month-end is reconciling against the wrong thing. Compare the reported value against the source GL, not the intermediate upload file. Set tie-out indicators on your key reports so a mismatch is visible at a glance, investigate any flagged row against the source, and fix the mapping rule or reload the period before you move on. Built into a short routine, this protects every number that follows.

WATCH OUT

Good to know: this does not replace your close. Reporting and analysis tooling picks up after the books close. Dedicated close and account-reconciliation tools still own that part of the workflow.

Why traceability makes AI safe

Traceability is also what lets you use AI without giving up control. Because every figure maps back to the GL, an answer generated in plain language carries the same audit trail your close relies on. You can ask a question in plain English, get a narrated answer with the contributing rows, and even bring live data into the AI tools you already use through a standard connection. The point is a faster first pass, not a black box.

CLAUDE + CUBE MCP, LIVE

How did Q2 opex land against plan, and does it change the forecast?

CLAUDE

Q2 opex closed at 6.2M vs a 5.8M plan. The 0.4M overage is one-time event spend in Sales, so it does not recur. I have left the base forecast unchanged and flagged the line for the board note.

CUBE · GL 6000-6900 | Q2 ACTUALS VS PLAN | TRACED TO SOURCE

CUBE

Cube's FP&Agents are finance-grade AI, built on this same principle: every insight maps back to the GL. Because the data traces to the source, an answer from The Analyst or The Business Partner carries the audit trail you would demand of any number you present.

CHAPTER 08

Your First Ninety Days

You do not need to master everything at once. Here is an honest read on where you sit today and a plan for the first stretch.

The switch from the books to the boardroom is a progression, not a single leap. Most accountants stepping into FP&A start in the same place, and the goal is deliberate movement, one habit at a time.

Place yourself honestly on the ladder below. Tier one is keeping the books: backward-looking and manual, with board prep that turns into a fire drill. Tier two is running the core: a budget and a rolling forecast are live, variance carries a narrative, and the board package is repeatable. Tier three is driving decisions: scenario planning informs strategy, teams self-serve from dashboards, every number traces to the source, and AI drafts the first pass.

TIER 3 · DRIVING DECISIONS

Scenarios, self-serve dashboards, full traceability, AI first pass

TIER 2 · RUNNING THE CORE

Budget and rolling forecast live, variance narrated, repeatable board pack

TIER 1 · KEEPING THE BOOKS

Backward-looking and manual, board prep is a fire drill

Start here: your first week

Put the concepts into practice with four small tasks that map directly to the chapters you just read. Navigate a workbook and find an existing report. Pull a variance report, actual versus budget. Take one number and drill it back to its source transaction. Then ask a plain-English question and see the answer grounded in real data. Note anything unclear as you go, because that is exactly what the help resources are for.

TRY 1

Navigate a workbook

Open the environment and locate an existing report. Get comfortable moving around before you build anything.

TRY 2

Pull a variance report

Run an actual vs. budget view. This is Chapter 4 in its simplest form.

TRY 3

Drill to source

Take one number and trace it back to its source transaction. This is Chapter 7, and it will feel familiar.

TRY 4

Ask a question

Ask a plain-English question and see the answer grounded in real data.

The five things to remember

- **Accounting and FP&A are different jobs, but share a foundation you already have.** Your discipline transfers directly.
- **FP&A turns GL data into decisions leadership can act on.** That connection is the whole job.
- **The right tooling keeps you spreadsheet-native while automating the heavy lifting.** You keep the interface, you lose the busywork.
- **Every number you report can be traced back to its source.** That is what earns trust, and what makes AI safe to use.
- **You know where to go for help.** The Help Center, your CSM, and this guide are all a click away.

CUBE

Cube keeps you working in the spreadsheet you already know while it automates the exports, the mapping, the rollups, and the first-pass commentary. The switch from the books to the boardroom is a set of habits. Cube is what makes them sustainable on a lean team.

About Cube

The Agentic Finance Layer, built by a three-time CFO, for finance teams.

Cube is the Agentic Finance Layer for high-performance finance teams. We make financial data decision-ready across every FP&A tool and workflow, unifying data from every source system into a centralized command center for planning, reporting, and analysis.

Founded by Christina Ross, a three-time CFO, Cube was built on a simple conviction: finance professionals are too capable to spend most of their time pulling data. The platform connects every source system through bi-directional connectivity, maintains a single source of truth across every tool your team uses, and deploys a suite of FP&Agents purpose-built for the finance function. Every insight maps back to the GL, so you can always trace a number to the transaction behind it.

What Cube does

Bi-directional connectivity to every source system. Real-time planning, scenario, and headcount modeling. Automated variance analysis and board package generation. Spreadsheet flexibility with enterprise-grade data governance.

Who uses Cube

Thousands of finance professionals at high-growth companies, from Series A to public. If your team is the financial backbone of a data-driven company, Cube was built for you.

The FP&Agent suite	What it does
The Data Manager	GL integration, reconciliation, data-quality governance, and trace to the transaction
The Analyst	Ad hoc analysis, trend detection, anomaly flagging, and instant report generation
The Planner	Planning cycles, rolling forecasts, scenario modeling, and variance tracking
The Business Partner	Board decks, investor narratives, and cross-functional financial communication

From the books to the boardroom.

Cube is the Agentic Finance Layer built for teams who are serious about FP&A.

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THE AGENTIC FINANCE LAYER