Power, Capital and Governance: Leadership in a Fragmented World

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Foreword

Power, Capital and Governance: Leadership in a Fragmented World Whitepaper

Every era believes its disruptions are temporary. This time might be different.

The inaugural Stratos Global CEO Forum and Executive Symposium was conceived in that spirit. It was designed not merely as a conference, but as a genuine convening: a space where the leaders navigating these shifts could sit alongside the academics studying them, and where candour was valued over consensus. Over two days at Cambridge Judge Business School, that ambition was fully realised.

The partnership between Cambridge Judge and Bain & Company is not a conventional one: it brings together Bain's deep industry perspective with Cambridge Judge's world-class thought leadership. This combination of rigorous analysis and strategic operational immediacy is precisely what the complexity of this moment demands. Both perspectives are required to create the space for global leaders to step back together, challenge orthodoxies and redefine what growth and leadership should look like in the next era.

The Stratos Forum is built to be a continuing conversation. While this paper captures the insights and provocations from our first gathering, our broader ambition is to foster a community of leaders willing to test their assumptions, share their front-line observations, and act on what they learn. The challenges ahead are too systemic for any single institution, sector, or discipline to address in isolation.

We are deeply grateful to every speaker and participant who contributed with such openness, and to the centres and programmes across Cambridge Judge whose expertise shaped this analysis. We trust this marks the beginning of a long and fruitful collaboration.

Gishan Dissanaike
Dean & Adam Smith Professor of Corporate Governance and Finance, Cambridge Judge Business School

Christophe De Vusser
Worldwide Managing Partner, Bain & Company

Introduction

In 2026, Bain & Company and Cambridge Judge Business School announced a new partnership, running an inaugural two-day Stratos Global CEO Forum and Executive Symposium at Cambridge Judge Business School on 23-24 April 2026.

In this report, we share key insights from contributors to the symposium – CEOs in the financial sector, academics and practitioners – to provide an assessment of five critical shifts redefining the global financial landscape that CEOs and senior management can use to govern wisely at a time of systemic complexity to seize the opportunities presented.

The report has been co-authored by centres and programmes at Cambridge Judge Business School, including the Executive MBA programmes team, the Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance and the Wo+Men's Leadership Centre.

Executive summary

This paper is for leaders who recognise that the rules of global finance are being rewritten, and who understand that the decisions made in the next few years will define the decade ahead. It draws on insights from financial sector CEOs, academics, and practitioners from the two-day Stratos Global CEO Forum and Executive Symposium at Cambridge Judge Business School. The paper aims to offer a clear assessment of the forces reshaping global finance, and the leadership imperatives they demand.

The global financial system is undergoing a profound structural transformation. The old rules no longer apply. What once appeared as cyclical volatility has evolved into a sustained condition of complexity, contestation and structural uncertainty. Geopolitics, artificial intelligence (AI) and shifting economic power are redefining how financial institutions operate, compete and govern themselves. The institutions that recognise this now will lead in the future. The competitive advantage of the next decade will not be information – it will be judgement.

The Cambridge symposium distilled these macro changes into five critical shifts redefining the financial landscape:

- **global order:** shifting away from traditional Western centres to a multipolar ecosystem
- **markets:** repricing away from sheer scale towards resilience and strategic flexibility
- **technology:** advancing through exponential AI deployment that consistently outstrips internal institutional oversight
- **information:** becoming a contested domain weaponised by targeted disinformation
- **trust:** emerging as the ultimate competitive advantage in a high-stress system

These shifts are already visible in market data. Unprecedented levels of global sovereign debt are severely restricting fiscal flexibility, while capital markets face highly elevated AI valuations. Concurrently, the banking sector is losing traditional ground to Asia's private credit markets, which are compounding systemic complexity by growing at roughly 20% each year. Initial public offering (IPO) gravity is moving rapidly eastward, with India and Hong Kong together outpacing the US in 2025. For CEOs, these are not abstract trends – they are actively reshaping how capital is raised, how risk is priced, and where competitive advantage will reside.

To help leaders navigate this terrain, this paper introduces a strategic framework (Figure 1) that maps these forces by urgency. These five critical shifts ultimately crystallise into three core provocations: **power** (driven by shifts in the global order); **capital** (driven by changing markets); and **governance** (driven by the intersection of technology, information, and trust). For the decade ahead, we translate this into **three leadership imperatives:**

1. **Governing the invisible:** managing opaque risks, from AI black boxes to private credit markets where regulatory frameworks are struggling to keep pace.
2. **Multipolar positioning:** recalibrating institutional footprints for a fragmented geopolitical landscape.
3. **Amplifying human judgement:** doubling down on the cognitive and ethical qualities that no algorithm can replicate.

For CEOs, the challenge is no longer how to compete within the system – it is how to shape the system.

Power, Capital and Governance

Leaders face an unprecedented challenge: governing systems they do not fully see or understand in a fragmented geopolitical landscape.

Plan strategically	Adapt urgently	Adapt urgently	Act now	Plan strategically
Global Order: Geopolitical Fragmentation	**Markets:** Capital and the repricing of risk	**Technology:** Opportunity, risk and governance of AI	**Information:** Cognitive warfare and narrative power	**Trust:** Productivity, inequality and political disconnect
A complex, contested and multipolar global system where power shifts, international order strains and new economic centres in Asia and the Middle East reshape global influence.	The logic of capital allocation is changing. Resilience and flexibility replace efficiency as primary investment drivers. Traditional market structures are becoming more complex and connected, private credit grows and money moves faster, creating both opportunity and systemic risk.	AI is a structural force already reshaping decision-making, market and power distribution. Adoption accelerates in financial services, but governance, accountability and explainability struggle to keep pace.	Organisations operate in an environment of deliberate cognitive disruption. Disinformation targets the foundations of reality and traditional responses like fact-checking often fail to update beliefs. Leaders must develop new skills in narrative power, emotional intelligence and network influence.	Systemic economic stress, deepening political disconnect and the growing opacity of automated financial systems are actively eroding public and institutional trust. In a landscape where traditional anchors fail, trust is no longer a given – it must be intentionally engineered.

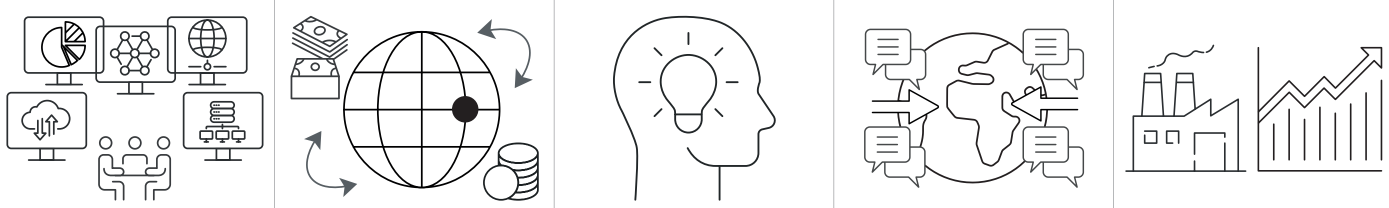
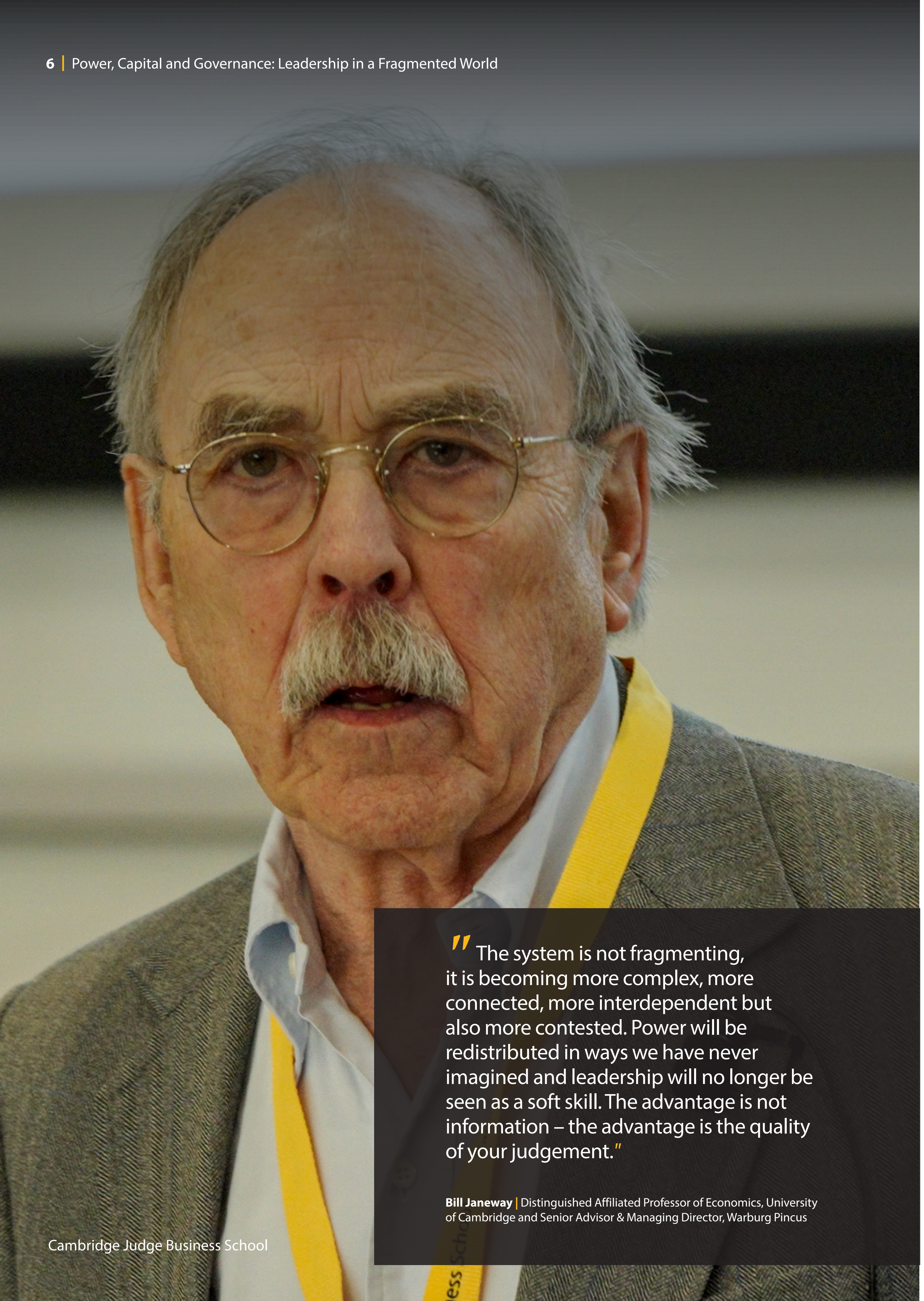


Figure 1: Five critical shifts reshaping global finance, organised by strategic urgency. **Plan Strategically** denotes long-horizon priorities; **Adapt Urgently** signals near-term repositioning; **Act Now** requires immediate leadership action. Source: *Stratos Global CEO Forum & Executive Symposium, Cambridge Judge Business School, 2026.*



> "The system is not fragmenting, it is becoming more complex, more connected, more interdependent but also more contested. Power will be redistributed in ways we have never imagined and leadership will no longer be seen as a soft skill. The advantage is not information – the advantage is the quality of your judgement."

Bill Janeway | Distinguished Affiliated Professor of Economics, University of Cambridge and Senior Advisor & Managing Director, Warburg Pincus

The changing nature of global power

The contemporary global financial order is undergoing a profound transformation – but it is not a simple story of fragmentation. As Bill Janeway, Distinguished Affiliated Professor of Economics, University of Cambridge and Senior Advisor & Managing Director, Warburg Pincus stated, *"the system is not fragmenting – it is becoming more complex, more connected, more interdependent but also more contested."*

Expanding on this nuance, Nishma Gosrani OBE observed that, while fragmentation implies a system breaking apart, what we are actually witnessing is structurally different: *"A system that is becoming simultaneously more connected and more contested. More integrated at the infrastructure level, more conflicted at the political and regulatory level."*

The historical Western axis is no longer the sole author of the 'rules of the game'. Instead, those rules are being actively renegotiated within a plural, multipolar context.

The monetary symptom: structural dedollarisation

This contested interdependence is most visible in the gradual reconfigurations within the global monetary system. While complete dedollarisation remains a distant prospect, the rise of alternative currency architectures points to a slow shift in traditional currency hierarchies.

Professor Meredith Crowley, International Trade and Policy Expert at the University of Cambridge, offered a telling illustration of this shift: in Argentina, in 2023, 50% of imports from China were transacted in renminbi, supported by Chinese state-owned banks and banks with limited dollar-lending operating in Argentina. This is no longer just a macroeconomic theory – it is a practical re-anchoring of market behaviour away from a single dominant currency.

From peripheral risk to boardroom strategy

These shifts are fundamentally altering institutional governance. As Professor Gishan Dissanaike, Dean of Cambridge Judge Business School, observed, *"decisions that once looked technical and operational are now looking more board-level."*

Matters that were once delegated to peripheral risk departments – such as currency exposure, regulatory fragmentation and geopolitical alignment – have decoupled from traditional playbooks. Today, they sit at the absolute centre of corporate strategy, requiring financial leaders to possess not just technical competence, but geopolitical foresight.

Capital, markets and the repricing of risk

These macro-level shifts are mirrored by a fundamental restructuring of capital and financial architecture, reshaping how capital circulates, where it is allocated, and who controls it. Financial infrastructure has graduated from a back-office technical backbone into a primary arena of geopolitical and commercial competition. Accelerated settlement speeds and the increasing importance of payments and clearing systems are redefining both efficiency and strategic advantage.

Consequently, the pricing of capital has been fundamentally recalibrated: resilience, operational flexibility, and strategic risk management are now prioritised alongside – and often above – pure efficiency. This reflects a broader reorientation towards navigating uncertainty within an increasingly volatile global environment.

The changing nature of global power | continues

The structural transformation of asset management

The structural transformation of asset management is vividly illustrated by two simultaneous shifts in market dynamics:

- The passive tsunami: The shift from active to passive investment strategies is fundamentally altering price discovery. As capital automates into index-tracking vehicles, market behaviour becomes more correlated, occasionally distorting valuations and compounding systemic vulnerabilities during market shocks.
- The rise of private credit: Credit intermediation is increasingly expanding beyond traditional bank lending into private credit markets, reshaping how capital is provided to businesses. While this evolution has broadened financing options and increased flexibility for borrowers, it also presents new challenges for regulators and market participants seeking greater transparency into leverage, interconnectedness and potential sources of systemic risk.

The widening innovation delta

In parallel, the boundaries of capital markets are being redrawn by digital acceleration. Tokenisation, distributed ledger infrastructure, programmable settlement, AI-driven investment strategies and the growing integration of private and public markets are beginning to reshape how assets are issued, traded, valued, settled and supervised. While emerging digital frameworks seek to bring real-world assets into more efficient, transparent and interoperable market architectures, technological change is moving faster than the supervisory systems designed to oversee it.

The result is a widening innovation delta between market innovation and regulatory capacity. Capital markets are increasingly operating at machine speed, shaped by algorithmic trading, AI-assisted valuation, automated portfolio construction, synthetic exposures and new forms of digital market infrastructure. Yet regulatory and supervisory frameworks often remain anchored in periodic disclosure, institution-based oversight and post-event market surveillance. This creates a dual-speed reality: markets are pricing technological transformation in real time, while authorities must assess its implications through tools, mandates and data systems that were largely designed for a slower, more intermediated financial system.

The consequences are significant. Elevated AI-driven valuations, concentrated technology exposures, complex tokenised instruments and increasingly automated market behaviour may create new channels for procyclicality, herding, liquidity stress, operational dependency and cross-market contagion. The central question is no longer whether regulation can keep pace with innovation, but whether capital market oversight can evolve quickly enough to preserve market integrity, financial stability and investor protection while still enabling competitiveness, efficiency and productive innovation. This requires new rules, but also more adaptive, data-enabled and technologically capable regulatory systems.

The new architecture of finance

Together these dynamics point to a broad-based transformation across financial actors, activities, assets and architecture. New participants are entering the system, traditional roles are being reconfigured, novel assets are emerging, and the underlying structures of finance are being reconstituted. Also, the geographic gravity of capital is relocating – as seen in 2025 when India and Hong Kong together outpaced the US in IPO volumes.

This transformation is neither linear nor uniformly beneficial. Rather, it reflects an increasingly interconnected yet contested system that challenges existing theoretical frameworks and policy approaches. What is needed is a more nuanced understanding of global finance in an era defined by heightened uncertainty and structural change.

Technology and the geographical rebalancing of financial power

The architectural restructuring of global markets is increasingly dictated by technological capabilities rather than traditional asset scale. As capital recalibrates towards systemic resilience, the primary catalyst for structural velocity has shifted to advanced digital infrastructures. At the core of this transition is AI, which is rapidly evolving from a backend optimisation tool into the central framework governing modern market architecture. As Tiina Lee CBE, CEO of Citi UK, noted, *"money is moving faster and assets are being settled quicker."* But this can only function sustainably within an environment of trusted infrastructure.

The AI governance mandate: algorithms vs judgement

Rather than functioning as a discrete application, AI operates as a systemic orchestration layer – automating and co-ordinating complex financial activities across legacy institutions, markets and platforms. However, as AI becomes a horizontal infrastructural layer across finance and the wider economy, its rapid integration is outpacing existing regulatory and supervisory frameworks that remain largely sector-specific, mandate-bound and vertically organised. In capital markets, this shifts power beyond access to raw data towards control over the proprietary models, algorithms and analytical architectures that increasingly shape valuation, trading, risk management and market behaviour.

This shifting locus of control demands a fundamental rethink of leadership accountability:

- **Non-delegable responsibility:** Professor Eilis Ferran FBA, Professor of Company and Securities Law and Director of Research at Cambridge's Faculty of Law: *"Responsibility cannot be delegated to algorithms. The obligation to understand, supervise, and account for AI-driven decisions rests unambiguously with human leadership."*
- **The insurability frontier:** Professor Bill Janeway pushed the strategic horizon further, identifying the ultimate operational hurdle: *"Which implementations of AI are actually insurable? That is going to be one of the most important research questions of the next decade."*
- **Human-in-the-loop advantage:** Success belongs to institutions that view AI as a partner to, rather than a substitute for, human cognition. In an AI-driven world, a premium sits on critical thinking and the ability to act decisively under conditions of ambiguity. As Amanda Blanc DBE, Group CEO Aviva summarised: *"We need to simplify complex global organisations and empower everyone through this technology transformation process, ensuring strategic clarity, in order to achieve growth during these times of uncertainty."*

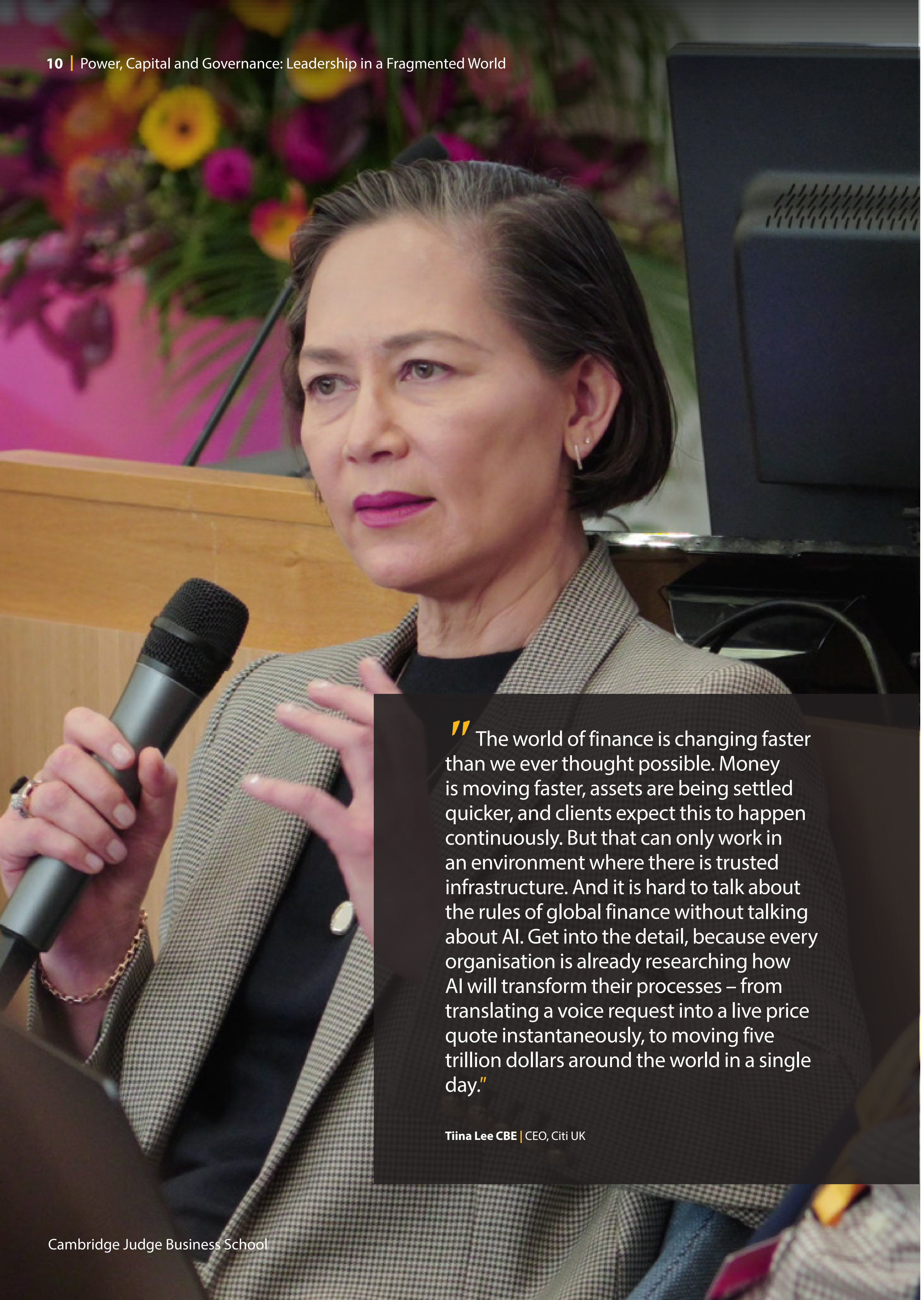
The spatial realignment: multi-nodal financial geography

These technological shifts are accelerating a profound geographical rebalancing of financial power. Emerging markets across Asia and the Middle East are leapfrogging traditional Western legacy systems by developing advanced digital ecosystems that challenge the historically Western-centric geography of finance.

Asia now hosts several of the world's largest financial institutions, supported by advanced digital ecosystems characterised by super-apps and seamless cross-border transactions. As Seow-Chien Chew, Partner and APAC Head of Banking, Bain & Company noted, *"Asia has really championed the instant cross-border payments system",* with the region experiencing rapid wealth expansion and the emergence of private credit as a significant growth market.

India serves as the premier global case study for state-backed infrastructure transformation.

Similarly, fintech innovations in parts of Africa have enabled unprecedented levels of financial integration, with digital platforms facilitating a substantial share of economic activity.



"The world of finance is changing faster than we ever thought possible. Money is moving faster, assets are being settled quicker, and clients expect this to happen continuously. But that can only work in an environment where there is trusted infrastructure. And it is hard to talk about the rules of global finance without talking about AI. Get into the detail, because every organisation is already researching how AI will transform their processes – from translating a voice request into a live price quote instantaneously, to moving five trillion dollars around the world in a single day."

Tiina Lee CBE | CEO, Citi UK

Technology and the geographical rebalancing of financial power | continues

The Middle East is also positioning itself as a central node in the emerging financial landscape. Hayat Sindi, Former member of Shura Council, noted that *"the question is no longer whether sovereign capital shapes markets, the question is whether you are positioned to move with it."* Through co-ordinated strategies combining sovereign investment, regulatory reform and market liberalisation, the region is actively developing globally competitive financial hubs. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund alone is driving six integrated domestic ecosystems spanning healthcare, mining, manufacturing, and renewable energy, while the Saudi Stock Exchange Tadawul has become the largest in the Middle East, significantly reducing barriers to foreign access.

Strategic imperatives for the new frontier

Collectively, these developments mark the definitive end of a unipolar financial world. A distributed, multinodal architecture enhances systemic resilience and expands regional growth pools. It also introduces unprecedented friction in global co-ordination, regulation and cross-border governance.

Firms and policymakers must therefore revisit inherited frameworks, recognising that historical patterns of globalisation, capital allocation and institutional authority may no longer provide a reliable guide to future conditions. The competitive advantage of the next decade belongs to institutions that possess the operational agility to integrate AI, and the strategic clarity to follow capital to its new geographical centres.

Risks, pressures and instabilities that require immediate action

The current phase of financial transformation is accompanied by a set of immediate and interrelated risks. As financial systems grow more dependent on interconnected platforms, vulnerabilities in widely used software take on systemic significance, with the potential to cascade rapidly. If vulnerabilities fall into the wrong hands, there will be no time to respond.

Vector 1: Technological fragility and the algorithmic governance gap

Unlike previous technological transitions, the governance gap is not a temporary lag. It is becoming structural, with material consequences for financial stability, accountability and systemic risk. Boards are routinely being asked to govern systems they cannot fully understand or see – opaque cyber threats, algorithmic black boxes and autonomous behaviours.

- **The accountability mandate:** Professor Eilis Ferran FBA reinforced the view that operational blindness is no longer a legal defence for the C-suite: *"It does feel like we are in a period where technology advances are going beyond our capabilities. But not knowing what is happening in your company is not a response. It is your responsibility."*
- **The 'orchestra of violins' paradox:** Regulators are actively focusing on board composition to ensure that technological literacy keeps pace with adoption. As the symposium emphasised: an orchestra full of violins is entirely unsuited to manage multiple, asymmetric risks. Consequently, embedding diverse skills and perspectives around the board table remains an absolute baseline requirement for navigating this landscape.
- **Agentic supervision:** Traditional, backward-looking supervisory models are increasingly insufficient for this new frontier. As firms deploy AI agents across decision-making, trading, risk management and operational processes, public authorities will need to consider how agentic regulatory and supervisory capabilities can be used to monitor, assess and govern these systems in more dynamic ways. The operational challenge is not simply technical: it lies in designing automated supervisory systems that are trusted by public authorities to augment, rather than replace, human judgement. It must also be trusted by private institutions to interact safely with sensitive data, proprietary models and increasingly elongated software supply chains.

Vector 2: Macro-financial and geopolitical fractures

Beyond algorithmic fragility, traditional financial markets are showing mounting structural strain, actively aggravated by the weaponisation of trade and statecraft.

- **Sovereign debt and overvaluation:** Historically elevated global sovereign debt levels are severely constricting fiscal flexibility, sharply reducing the capacity for state intervention during the next crisis. Concurrently, capital markets are grappling with elevated technology valuations, while parts of the private capital ecosystem face ongoing liquidity and exit challenges.
- **Geopolitical spillovers and street volatility:** Markets have become dangerously detached from geopolitical realities. Suzanne Raine MBE, Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge and former Director of Counter-Terrorism, warned of highly localised trigger points cascading into global macroeconomic shocks: *"There may be a set of consequences of what is happening in the Gulf which will affect Asia, where the cost of fuel, particularly in summer months, may increase street-level unrest."*

Risks, pressures and instabilities that require immediate action | continues

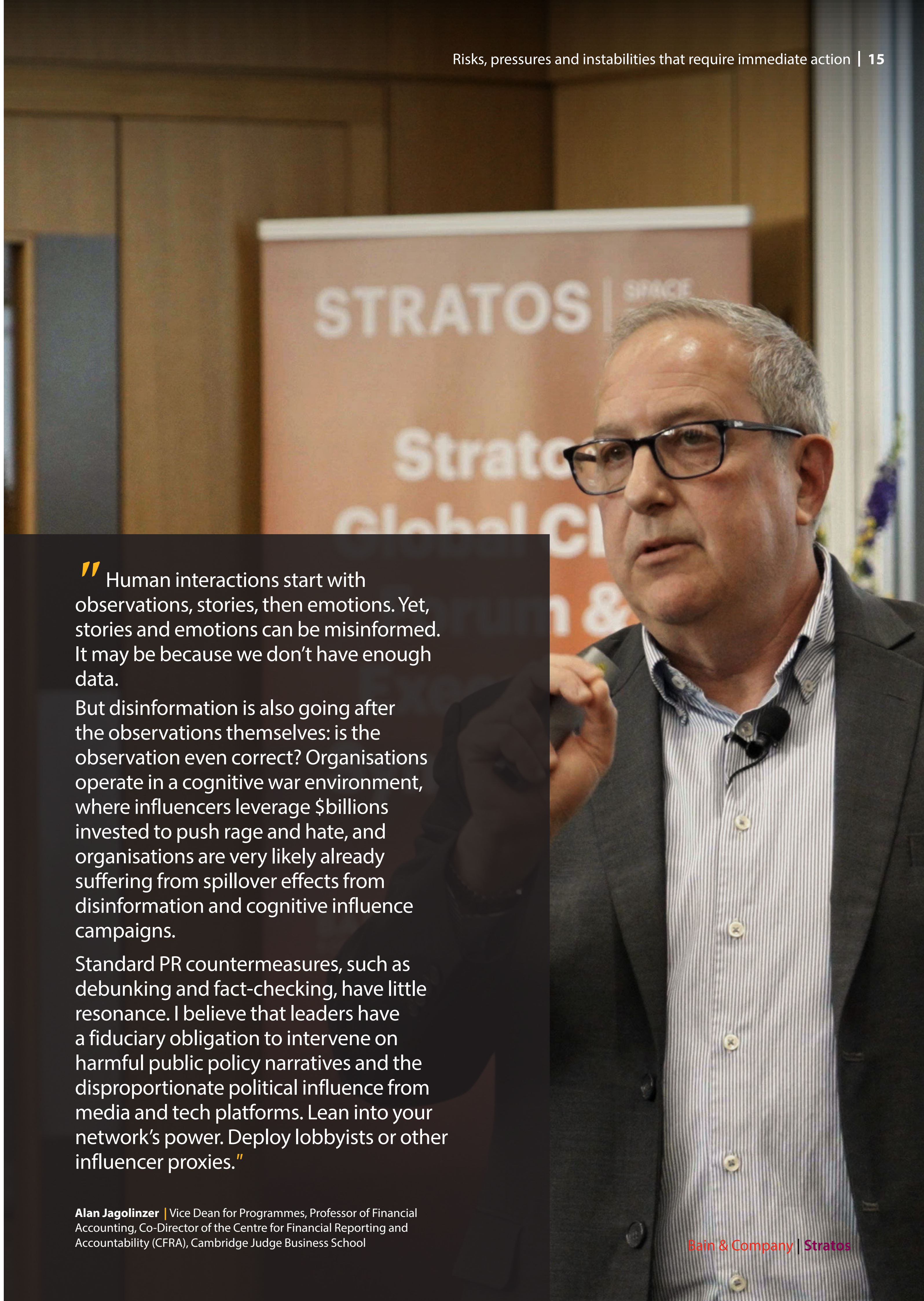
- **The reversal of trade liberalisation:** The aggressive deployment of tariffs, targeted sanctions and economic statecraft is actively reshaping market power. Professor Meredith Crowley observed immediate structural consequences on market contestability: *"Smaller firms are exiting the US market, giving more power to foreign incumbent firms and to domestic firms that no longer face that competition."* This insulation encourages rent-seeking behaviour among domestic firms, unintentionally distorts innovation incentives, and reallocates market power in ways that undermine long-term productivity and global knowledge production.

Vector 3: Cognitive warfare and information integrity

Compounding these tangible financial and geopolitical pressures is a less visible threat: the systematic destruction of the shared information environment. Professor Alan Jagolinzer of Cambridge Judge Business School warned that modern corporate entities are entirely unprepared for the deliberate poisoning of corporate discourse: "*Organisations operate in a cognitive war environment, where influencers leverage $billions invested to push rage and hate, and organisations are very likely already suffering from spillover effects from disinformation and cognitive influence campaigns."*

The weaponisation of disinformation has evolved beyond simple public relations crises – it now targets the very basis of empirical observation. Within organisations, it creates cognitive overload and decision paralysis, entirely compromising a leadership team's ability to distinguish genuine market signals from engineered noise.

Consequently, addressing this threat is moving from a marketing function to a core governance duty. As Alan Jagolinzer concluded, to protect institutional asset value and market trust, *"I believe that leaders have a fiduciary obligation to intervene on harmful public policy narratives and the disproportionate political influence from media and tech platforms."*



"Human interactions start with observations, stories, then emotions. Yet, stories and emotions can be misinformed. It may be because we don't have enough data.

But disinformation is also going after the observations themselves: is the observation even correct? Organisations operate in a cognitive war environment, where influencers leverage $billions invested to push rage and hate, and organisations are very likely already suffering from spillover effects from disinformation and cognitive influence campaigns.

Standard PR countermeasures, such as debunking and fact-checking, have little resonance. I believe that leaders have a fiduciary obligation to intervene on harmful public policy narratives and the disproportionate political influence from media and tech platforms. Lean into your network's power. Deploy lobbyists or other influencer proxies."

Alan Jagolinzer | Vice Dean for Programmes, Professor of Financial Accounting, Co-Director of the Centre for Financial Reporting and Accountability (CFRA), Cambridge Judge Business School

Long-term strategic challenges shaping the decade ahead

The structural transformation of global finance extends far beyond immediate risk management. Over the next decade, short-term volatility will deepen into permanent structural shifts, challenging the foundational playbooks of institutional governance, productivity and globalisation.

The deepening AI governance crisis: the erasure of process clarity

The long-term challenge of AI is not how boards can monitor what is currently operating within their firms, but whether human leaders can maintain meaningful fiduciary oversight of increasingly opaque systems.

As algorithmic processes become more deeply embedded across financial and organisational structures, questions of accountability intensify rather than diminish. In the near term, the concern is whether boards can see and govern what is already operating within their institutions. Over the longer term, the challenge becomes more fundamental: whether decision-makers fully understand how outcomes are generated, and whether fiduciary and ethical obligations can be meaningfully upheld in systems of growing complexity and opacity. The concentration of AI capabilities within a small number of institutions introduces structural imbalances of power that will compound over time. This reinforces the enduring need for judgement, contextual reasoning and probabilistic thinking. These are human attributes that no algorithm can replicate, and their value will grow as automation advances.

The stagnation paradox: productivity vs distribution

Parallel to the governance challenges is a deepening structural imbalance between economic growth and its distribution. Michael Kitson of Cambridge Judge Business School was direct in his diagnosis: *"Productivity is the primary determinant of wages, profits and taxes."* Yet, in many advanced economies, productivity growth has stagnated over the past two decades, while the gains from economic expansion have accrued disproportionately to capital relative to labour. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), if the labour share had remained at its 2004 level, labour income would have been larger by $2.4 trillion in 2024 alone. This divergence has deep institutional consequences:

- **Erosion of trust:** The growing disconnect between corporate equity performance and lived economic experience fuels political volatility and populist movements.
- **Fragmented innovation:** Geopolitical polarisation is actively choking off trade channels, reducing cross-border competition, and slowing the global diffusion of innovation. This threatens to activate a self-reinforcing cycle of lower long-term growth.

Second-order structural pressures

These macro-financial strains are further complicated by three compounding long-term pressures that challenge legacy organisational frameworks:

- **Knowledge-sector labour substitution:** Advances in cognitive automation are moving beyond routine task execution towards the outright substitution of white-collar labour in knowledge-intensive sectors. This is upending historical assumptions about employment and economic participation.
- **The computational energy crisis:** The exponential expansion of AI training models and data infrastructure is driving massive, unprecedented surges in power consumption, which places severe structural strain on already fragile, transitioning energy grids.
- **Demographic fiscal strain:** Rapidly ageing populations across key financial markets are driving up the structural cost of healthcare and social infrastructure. This is severely intensifying long-term fiscal pressures on sovereign balance sheets.

These shifts are exposing the limitations of existing educational and institutional frameworks, which remain insufficiently adapted to the requirements of an increasingly digital and AI-enabled economy.

The post-globalisation strategic landscape

Underlying all of these pressures is a broader shift in the international environment. The gradual erosion of the rules-based international order introduces sustained uncertainty into the global economic environment. Clare Gordon, Managing Partner of UK & Ireland, Bain & Company emphasised the blind spot currently facing the C-suite: *"CEOs are presuming globalisation as their underpinning strategy, but their context of our experience is not necessarily the context of the future."* Echoing this warning, Christophe De Vusser, Worldwide Managing Partner of Bain & Company captured the strategic implications plainly: *"What we have lived through is not what we will be living through."* And yet many firms continue to operate on inherited assumptions.

This shift challenges longstanding assumptions about globalisation as a stable foundation for growth and strategic planning. Firms and policymakers must increasingly operate in an environment defined by competing national priorities, evolving regulatory regimes, and structurally higher inflationary pressures. For financial institutions, this rewritten landscape is no longer just a macroeconomic backdrop – it is an entirely new strategic environment, demanding that leaders completely discard inherited assumptions about stable global markets, throwing out old playbooks to actively shape the multinodal system ahead.

"Since 2020, resilience has replaced efficiency as the defining virtue. Supply chains, capital markets and regulatory frameworks have all been stress-tested, and the institutions that survived did so because they had invested in the right capabilities before the crisis hit.

Despite increasing de-globalisation, cross border activity has remained high and boards have continued to think globally while managing local regulators for deal approvals.

The shift from active to passive and the emphasis on scale has reduced the number of public companies and made mid-market PE monetisations anemic. Outside of AI, IPO gravity is shifting, with India and Hong Kong together outpacing the US in 2025.

Strategic activity remains high with cultural fit and preparation being the highest determinants of success, rather than valuation."

Anu Aiyengar | Global Chair of Investment Banking, J.P. Morgan

From disruption to opportunity: strategic pathways in global finance

Amid heightened complexity and uncertainty, the restructuring of the global financial architecture is opening up four distinct areas of opportunity. These pathways will reward organisations that possess deep capability, strategic foresight and institutional adaptability.

Pathway 1: The premium on judgement and trust

The locus of competitive advantage is shifting away from access to abundant information to the quality of judgement applied to that information. In an environment of excess and ambiguous information, the ability to interpret weak signals and act with calibrated conviction becomes decisive. Trust assumes renewed significance as a durable and differentiating asset, underpinning market confidence and long-term relationships. Organisations that can demonstrate credibility, resilience and an ability to absorb shocks while adapting intelligently are more likely to attract a premium in capital allocation and stakeholder support. As Michael Kitson emphasised at the symposium: *"Trust increases when economies deliver sustained growth and when the gains from growth are widely shared across society."* This is a principle that applies as much to institutions as it does to nations.

Pathway 2: Systemic AI orchestration and co-regulation

AI is fundamentally changing how financial services are delivered. Innovators driven by AI are iterating on a daily basis – this model is as powerful as it is unsettling, because it is increasing rapidly. For any CEO or board member, clarity has become the most precious commodity in an environment defined by financial innovation and disruption. The widening gap between regulators and innovators is not a problem that any single institution can solve alone. The organisations that will define the next era of global finance will be those that move beyond competition to help shape the system – through networks, public-private partnerships, and collaborative governance frameworks that match the scale and complexity of the challenges ahead.

AI's rapid adoption and exponential innovation is already yielding tangible results. As AI applications move beyond experimental deployment into core business functions, they are beginning to reshape front-office operations, automate complex processes, and unlock previously inaccessible efficiencies. Agent-based systems are emerging that are capable of interacting, learning and executing tasks autonomously. This signals a shift towards highly dynamic and responsive financial ecosystems. At the same time, effective governance of these technologies, through explainability, oversight, and risk management, is creating new avenues for differentiation. Beyond finance, AI's potential to accelerate scientific discovery, reduce development costs, and compress innovation cycles highlights its capacity to generate cross-sectoral value. This suggests that its strategic importance extends far beyond the operational gains currently in focus.

Pathway 3: Navigating the eastward capital migration

The geographical rebalancing of global financial power represents an historic diversification opportunity for global asset managers and institutions. The expansion of private wealth, state-backed digital networks and demographic momentum across Asia and the Middle East has fundamentally realigned global demand. The metrics of this eastward shift are definitive:

- **The wealth explosion:** Seow-Chien Chew noted that Asia is set to add 50 million new millionaires by 2030. Private credit markets in the region are still nascent but growing rapidly. In Singapore, the private credit market grew by 20% in 2024 alone, and six of the world's 10 largest digital banks are now based in Asia.
- **The primary market pivot:** Anu Aiyengar observed that *"in 2025, more IPOs were completed in India and Hong Kong together than in the US"*, signalling a meaningful reorientation of capital market activity.

From disruption to opportunity: strategic pathways in global finance | continues

These high-growth economies are no longer merely sites of consumption – they are the primary incubators for digital payments, cross-border infrastructure, and financial inclusion models. Capturing this advantage, however, requires immediate parallel corporate investments in localised human capital, deep cross-border compliance agility, and workforce reskilling.

Pathway 4: Systemic reform through institutional networks
Complex, cross-border challenges – ranging from infrastructure development to technological governance – are unlikely to be addressed effectively through isolated efforts. Public-private partnerships, institutional networks and robust governance frameworks are becoming central to sustaining growth and stability. Efforts to enhance transparency in emerging financial segments, broaden access to technological advancements, and promote measurable progress on inclusion are not merely standard goals: they are integral components of a more resilient system. In this sense, the capacity to balance innovation with inclusivity, and competition with co-operation, may ultimately define advantage in the next phase of global financial development.

The view from the business leader: strategic response to the system shifts

As Charlotte Jones, Group CFO of Aviva, reflected: "*For the leaders running these institutions, the harder question is not how the system is changing, but what strategic response they are prepared to be held accountable for as it does. The responses described here resolve, at the level of the individual firm, into the critical commitments that the executive and board will need to make.*

The first is protecting the core. As advantage moves from scale to control of data, infrastructure and customer interfaces, the discipline is to be clear about which assets genuinely constitute a moat and to defend them deliberately, rather than allowing them to erode through dependency on systems the firm does not own.

The second is treating trust as an operating asset rather than a value statement. In a market where customers can move at the speed of a single interaction, trust is built or lost in the quality and consistency of everyday execution, and it has to be guarded as preciously as capital.

The third, and perhaps the most underestimated, is culture. Technology only delivers if the workforce can and wants to embrace it, and that is a question of leadership and culture long before it is a question of tools. Without suggesting that the technology is straightforward, it is often the easier part. The real work lies in simplifying the organisation, its processes, and its data, and in creating the conditions in which people trust the future direction and feel sufficiently supported to learn and change how they work. AI delivers nothing if the culture will not embrace it, and that ultimately is about leadership, not technology.

The leaders who navigate the decade well will not be those who waited for certainty before acting. They will be the ones who translated a fragmenting system into a few clear strategic commitments, on moats, on trust, on culture, and then measured progress on delivery. They continue to watch for signals of new changes to the system, are dynamic and nimble adjusting to keep course as needed – and always holding themselves to account."

Power, capital, and governance: three provocations for the decade ahead

Turbulence destroys advantage – and redistributes it. Those who read the shifts early and act decisively will define the next era.

To anchor the leadership playbooks required for this frontier, Professor Gishan Dissanaike framed the decade ahead with three core provocations:

- **Power is shifting beneath the surface:** Advantage in finance is moving away from scale alone and into underlying architecture, data, cloud infrastructure, and control of customer interfaces. Many institutions will find themselves dependent on systems they do not fully control.
- **Capital will reprice resilience:** Efficiency has been the dominant virtue, but the next decade will reward institutions that can absorb shocks, adapt quickly and maintain trust in unstable conditions.
- **Governance will be tested by opacity:** As AI, complex vendor ecosystems and automated decision-making expand, boards must govern systems they cannot fully see or fully understand.

The three leadership imperatives

Translating these provocations into action requires global leaders to abandon linear assumptions of market stability. As mapped out in our strategic framework (Figure 1), navigating this change requires sorting these macro forces across a spectrum of strategic urgency. Leaders must address immediate technological and geopolitical exposures while operationalising their long-term corporate strategies across three core imperatives:

1. Governing the invisible

Institutions must learn to govern what they cannot fully see. This demands a radical upgrade in board level technological literacy, rigorous algorithmic and data asset governance, and an unyielding framework for ethical boundaries. For senior leaders, the ultimate fiduciary test will be whether they can state – with evidence and transparency – exactly how critical, automated decisions are being generated within their organisations.

2. Multipolar positioning

Leaders must strategically position their institutions in a fragmented, multinodal world. Rather than freezing execution while waiting for macroeconomic certainty, winners must place early, high-conviction bets on regional partnerships, sovereign technology stacks, and localised talent pipelines. This requires aligning capital allocation and risk appetite with an emerging global architecture where no single geographic hub dominates.

3. Amplifying human judgement

Organisations must invest deliberately in the human qualities that no algorithm can replicate. As cognitive automation transforms into a commodity, attributes such as contextual reasoning, cross-cultural empathy, and the courage to act decisively under conditions of intense ambiguity will become the market's scarcest assets. Executive teams must intentionally design corporate cultures and incentive structures that cultivate these human capabilities, rather than assume that they will emerge organically.

Power, Capital and Governance

Leaders face an unprecedented challenge: governing systems they do not fully see or understand in a fragmented geopolitical landscape.

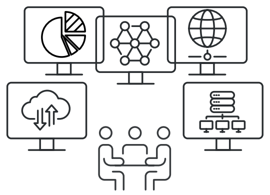
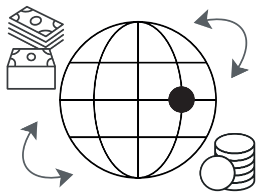
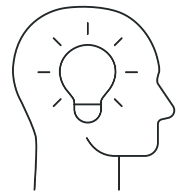
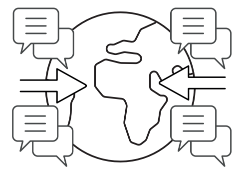
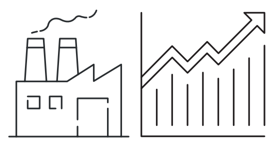
Plan strategically	Adapt urgently	Adapt urgently	Act now	Plan strategically
Global Order: Geopolitical Fragmentation	**Markets:** Capital and the repricing of risk	**Technology:** Opportunity, risk and governance of AI	**Information:** Cognitive warfare and narrative power	**Trust:** Productivity, inequality and political disconnect
				
A complex, contested and multipolar global system where power shifts, international order strains and new economic centres in Asia and the Middle East reshape global influence.	The logic of capital allocation is changing. Resilience and flexibility replace efficiency as primary investment drivers. Traditional market structures are becoming more complex and connected, private credit grows and money moves faster, creating both opportunity and systemic risk.	AI is a structural force already reshaping decision-making, market and power distribution. Adoption accelerates in financial services, but governance, accountability and explainability struggle to keep pace.	Organisations operate in an environment of deliberate cognitive disruption. Disinformation targets the foundations of reality and traditional responses like fact-checking often fail to update beliefs. Leaders must develop new skills in narrative power, emotional intelligence and network influence.	Systemic economic stress, deepening political disconnect and the growing opacity of automated financial systems are actively eroding public and institutional trust. In a landscape where traditional anchors fail, trust is no longer a given – it must be intentionally engineered.

Figure 1: Five critical shifts reshaping global finance, organised by strategic urgency. **Plan Strategically** denotes long-horizon priorities; **Adapt Urgently** signals near-term repositioning; **Act Now** requires immediate leadership action. Source: *Stratos Global CEO Forum & Executive Symposium, Cambridge Judge Business School, 2026.*

Final reflection

The shifts explored in this paper are not converging towards a new equilibrium. They are defining a permanent, baseline condition of systemic complexity, geopolitical contestation and structural change. Within this volatile environment lies immense opportunity – but only for those with the clarity to see it, and the conviction to move ahead of the market.

What connects the redistribution of power, repricing of capital, acceleration of AI, the weaponisation of information and erosion of trust, is a single, definitive insight: in the new reality, the definitive anchor for leadership remains human choice. As Gishan Dissanaike said at the symposium: *"Leaders of tomorrow will need to be both technologically fluent and deeply human in their understanding – comfortable with frontier science and innovation, but equally knowledgeable about human behaviour, institutions and power. That is the kind of leadership this moment demands."*

In an automated world of abundant data and algorithmic systems, the rarest and most decisive asset remains human judgement. The coming decade will not reward institutions that pause to wait for a return to traditional patterns of globalisation. Progress on power, capital and governance cannot rely on vague corporate sentiment – it must be audited, tracked and held to account. As the saying goes, *"what gets measured gets done."*

The capacity to engage constructively with this transformation, to balance innovation with responsibility, and competition with collaboration, will determine individual corporate performance, and also the broader trajectory of the global financial order. As Nishma Gosrani OBE concluded, the ultimate objective for executives is to *"leave with sharper conviction about how you make judgements"* – because in the decade ahead, judgement is the definitive source of competitive advantage.

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