

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

BREAKING THE PLANNING MYTH: WHY EXCEL CAN'T POWER GROWTH

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Key Takeaways

1

Traditional Planning is Broken

Static, spreadsheet-based planning cycles are too slow and siloed to keep up with market volatility, resulting in missed targets, poor coordination, and a lack of real-time responsiveness.

2

Connected Planning is the New Standard

Organisations must shift to integrated platforms that unify finance, operations, HR, and risk, enabling faster scenario modelling, shared forecasts, and agile decision-making across departments.

3

Trust in Data is Fundamental

Data distrust remains a critical barrier. Building confidence in a single source of truth is essential for eliminating duplication and aligning strategy with execution.

4

Technology Alone Isn't Enough; Culture Must Evolve

Successful planning transformation requires leadership buy-in, cross-functional ownership, and a mindset shift that views planning as a strategic, organisation-wide responsibility, not just finance's job.

5

Planning Must Align with Broader Transformation Goals

Dynamic planning models can support ESG compliance, regulatory reporting, and strategic initiatives—making planning a lever not just for business growth, but for governance and impact.

When Planning Lags Behind Reality

In a collaborative effort between the ASEAN Fintech Forum, ASEAN Economic Forum and Sabio Research, a senior-level, cross industry research roundtable was held in Indonesia to discuss the use of AI in planning and forecasting in the manufacturing space.

The roundtable opened with a candid observation: planning cycles, whether annual or quarterly, are no match for the daily volatility faced by Indonesian enterprises. Inflation, energy shocks, political transitions, global trade tensions, and climate-driven disruptions have exposed just how brittle traditional planning methods are.

Many participants shared similar pain points: missed revenue targets due to outdated forecasts, supply-demand mismatches worsened by slow scenario response, and siloed decision-making causing internal friction. The planning process, in many cases, was described as manual, disconnected, and more focused on reporting than real decision support.

For Indonesian businesses navigating complex regulatory environments and decentralised operations, this gap between plan and reality has direct bottom-line implications.

From Disconnected Spreadsheets to Intelligence-Led Planning

Participants highlighted the urgent shift from reactive, Excel-heavy workflows to integrated platforms that can unify forecasting, operations, and execution. Several leaders shared frustrations over “data distrust”, where different departments operate on competing assumptions, leading to duplicated work and lack of alignment.

The group explored how Indonesian firms, especially those operating across multiple provinces and supply nodes, can benefit from planning tools that incorporate real-time market inputs, customer demand shifts, and operational constraints.

This isn't about discarding intuition, but about augmenting leadership judgement with actionable insights. Industry leaders emphasized the need for one unified model that finance, operations, HR, and risk teams can co-develop and co-own.



Connected Planning: A Fit for Indonesia's Dynamic Market

The idea of connected planning, where functions and business units collaborate on shared forecasts and flexible scenarios, resonated strongly. In Indonesia, where markets vary greatly from Java to Kalimantan, planning agility must go hand in hand with localization and data responsiveness.

- Examples shared included:
 - FMCG firms needing to rebalance stock across fast and slow-moving retail zones.
 - Banks adjusting their credit and branch strategies based on shifting economic activity and digital adoption.
 - Conglomerates creating dual-scenario plans for regional expansion in light of infrastructure delays or regulatory pivots.

In each case, planning is becoming an always-on function, not an annual box-ticking exercise.



The Human Side of Planning: Mindsets Matter

Technology alone cannot transform planning; it must be underpinned by cultural change. A recurring theme was the role of leadership in breaking functional silos and creating a common language around planning and performance.

CFOs and COOs at the session acknowledged that many teams still view planning as “finance’s job.” This mindset needs to evolve. Cross-functional buy-in, leadership modeling, and the right incentives are essential for embedding connected planning into day-to-day decision-making.

Leaders also stressed the importance of upskilling teams. With the right tools but the wrong user behaviors, even advanced platforms fall short. Building planning maturity means investing in both systems and skillsets.



Conclusion: Building a Planning Culture for a Future-Ready Indonesia

As economies digitize and mature, the ability to plan and re-plan is fast becoming a strategic differentiator. Organisations must move beyond static, siloed budgeting cycles and embrace planning as a continuous, collaborative, and integrated capability. From aligning ESG, compliance, and operational metrics through multi-scenario forecasting to supporting performance-based governance and real-time regulatory reporting, modern planning infrastructure plays a vital role in driving transparency, agility, and impact. Success demands more than just technology; it requires trust in shared data, cross-functional collaboration, and leadership-led cultural change. With the right tools, training, and mindset, planning transforms from a back-office task into the engine of growth, resilience, and market leadership.