BCG

Executive Perspectives

AI-First Organizations Win the Future

Economic Affairs

April 2026

Introduction

We meet often with leaders of economic affairs government entities to discuss AI—a topic that is both captivating and rapidly changing. As AI capabilities continue to evolve, the conversation is shifting from experimentation to transformation. The question is no longer whether AI matters, **but how AI can help economic affairs government entities** move faster and make better-informed decisions.

The economic affairs landscape is also changing. Trade and regulatory rules are shifting faster, sector shocks are more frequent, and stakeholder expectations continue to rise. At the same time, AI's capability is expanding from generative analysis support to **agentic, end-to-end workflow support, helping leaders orchestrate work, accelerate action, and strengthen delivery.**

In this edition, we discuss the future of economic affairs and the role AI will play in helping leaders steer more effectively. We address key questions:

- How are leading economic affairs government entities creating value with AI?
- How can AI help leaders redesign economic affairs for the future?
- What level of ambition should leaders set—and what practical steps will turn that ambition into a scaled transformation?

This document is a guide for leaders of economic affairs to understand where AI creates value today—and what it will take to build the future of economic affairs.

In this BCG Executive Perspective, we outline how AI-first economic affairs entities can create value today and build for the future

Executive summary | Transforming economic affairs government entities into AI-first organizations

WHY
now is the right time to act

- Leaders of economic affairs currently face **faster-moving trade and regulatory change, frequent sector shocks, infrastructure delivery bottlenecks, and slow productivity diffusion,** making the conventional steering model increasingly insufficient
- AI capabilities have **matured from performing analysis to providing workflow support;** tool-connected copilots can pull evidence from source systems and produce structured options, while early agents can plan, run steps, and escalate, resetting the operating baseline
- **Private-sector AI leaders are already capturing measurable value** (2.4% to 4.6% in revenue uplift and 4.2% to 4.5% in cost reduction in 2024) and reinvesting early gains, **raising expectations for economic affairs government entities** to deliver faster decisions, clearer guidance, and stronger coordination in parallel as they enable private-sector growth and resilience

WHAT
an AI-first government entity looks like

- An AI-first economic affairs government entity **invests across three strategic plays** to deliver value and keep pace with the new baseline, starting from managing today's productivity and progressing to an end-to-end transformation, making **bureaucracy seamless**
  - **Deploy:** Embeds off-the-shelf and lightly configured AI tools to boost productivity and consistency without changing core processes
  - **Reshape:** Redesigns priority journeys with agents that run continuously, coordinating handoffs, exceptions, and decision packs across units and partners end to end
  - **Invent:** Orchestrates multiple agents to sense signals, simulate scenarios, conduct automated processes, and align actions, creating an always-on steering layer that escalates only key tradeoffs for leadership approval

HOW
to start the journey to transform into an AI-first entity

- Transformation can **start immediately with a practical path** that can be tailored by ambition level (deploy, reshape, or invent)
  - **Step 1:** Choose **priorities and ambition by** selecting a small set of high-value journeys tied to national outcomes, set ambition per journey, and confirm the owners, decision rights, KPIs, and a first-wave roadmap
  - **Step 2:** Build **capabilities and launch delivery** in parallel by rolling out approved copilots fast and delivering lighthouse outcomes, while standing up the secure foundation, governance, and operating rhythm needed to scale
- **Upskill and adopt** by embedding **AI literacy** in leadership and frontline roles, redesigning work for human-agent collaboration, and using **early wins** (including efficiency gains) to continue scaling

Sources: IBM: *The enterprise in 2030: Engineered for perpetual innovation*, 2026; BCG Build for the Future 2025 Global Study (n = 1,250); BCG analysis.

The domains for economic affairs are grouped into four portfolios—our lens for where AI matters most

Nine domains that are defined within economic affairs by OECD and the UN…

4.1	General economic, commercial, labor affairs
4.2	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing
4.3	Fuel, energy, and extractives
4.4	Mining, manufacturing, and construction
4.5	Transport
4.6	Communications
4.7	Other industries (e.g., tourism and services)
4.8	Economic affairs R&D
4.9	Economic affairs (not elsewhere classified)

…can be grouped into four economy-steering levers…

- Economy-wide rules, regulations, and oversight
- Sector competitiveness and resilience building
- Network assets, infrastructure, and service performance
- Innovation support, incentives, and diffusion

…to yield four portfolios to target for high-potential AI use

Markets and competitiveness

Productive sectors and industrial strategy

Infrastructure and connectivity

Innovation and productivity diffusion

Economic Affairs requires action within government entities and has implications for the broader economy; to provide sufficient depth, this document focuses on **AI adoption within Economic Affairs government entities**

Note: Treasury or financial and fiscal affairs (e.g., budgeting, taxation administration, and debt management) are not included in the economic affairs division of 04, as OECD classifies these under the general public services division of 01 (specifically, 01.1.2). UN = United Nations.
Sources: Classification of the Functions of Government, OECD; BCG analysis.

Policy volatility is raising the bar for leaders of economic affairs across all four portfolios

Complex policy agenda present in 2026 will have…	…implications for leaders of economic affairs
Markets and competitiveness	**Trade and regulatory rules** are **shifting faster,** increasing uncertainty for businesses, and slowing entry and cross-border activity	Move from cyclical reforms to **continuous market steering** with always-current guidance, clearer guardrails, and risk-led oversight
Productive sectors and industrial strategy	**Shocks are frequent** and **dependencies are more complex,** making it harder to secure supply, stabilize costs, and retarget support	Run more adaptive sector steering by **improving early-risk visibility** and coordinating faster, targeted interventions across agencies
Infrastructure and connectivity	**Demand for timely infrastructure delivery** is rising; approvals and execution remain bottlenecked, driving network disruptions	Move from **project-by-project delivery to portfolio delivery** and network reliability through bottleneck clearance, prioritization, and operation resilience
Innovation and productivity diffusion	Innovation is **not translating into broad productivity gains** fast enough, as diffusion barriers prevent solutions from scaling	Mobilize a **scalable adoption engine** across agencies and delivery partners, using AI-enabled toolkits and shared outcome evidence

Sources: IMF 2025-2026 macroeconomic reports; OECD; BCG analysis.

AI is shifting from performing analysis to providing decision support in economic affairs, resetting the speed and operating-model baseline

In the past five years

- **Prediction and simulation** capabilities were scaled, making forecasting, optimization, and anomaly detection practical
- GenAI **enabled large-scale synthesis,** rapidly summarizing, drafting, and retrieving insights across large text and knowledge bases

In the past 12 months

- **AI stepped up to a high-volume, mixed-format reality,** producing structured, decision-ready summaries
- **AI connected to enterprise tools,** pulling evidence from source systems and reducing manual effort
- **Early AI agents proved viable,** being able to plan, use tools, iterate, and escalate with human oversight—beyond simple chat responses

In the next three years

- **AI agents** will become an **always-on decision layer,** continuously sensing changes and refreshing recommendations
- **Decision cycles** will be **"living,"** with faster scenario updates, automated stress tests, and clearer tradeoffs
- **AI will serve as a virtual analyst bench,** running parallel analyses and producing short, evidence-linked options for approval
- **Coordinated AI agents** will reduce costs, working across teams and escalating only key decisions for human approval

What this changes for economic affairs policymaking? (example: policy consultation process)

GenAI has already proven its capability to synthesize over 50,000 consultation responses into themes and stakeholder positions in about two hours

Tool-connected copilots and AI-assisted channels can capture and structure inputs at scale, then turn evidence into decision-ready policy packs

Agentic AI will support the full consultation process, ingesting evidence, identifying stakeholder inputs, and proposing constraint-aware negotiation options for approval

Note: GenAI = generative AI.
Sources: Consult summaries, UK government; Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence; BCG analysis.

Stakeholders that interact with economic affairs entities are rapidly adopting AI, raising expectations for speed, clarity, and coordination

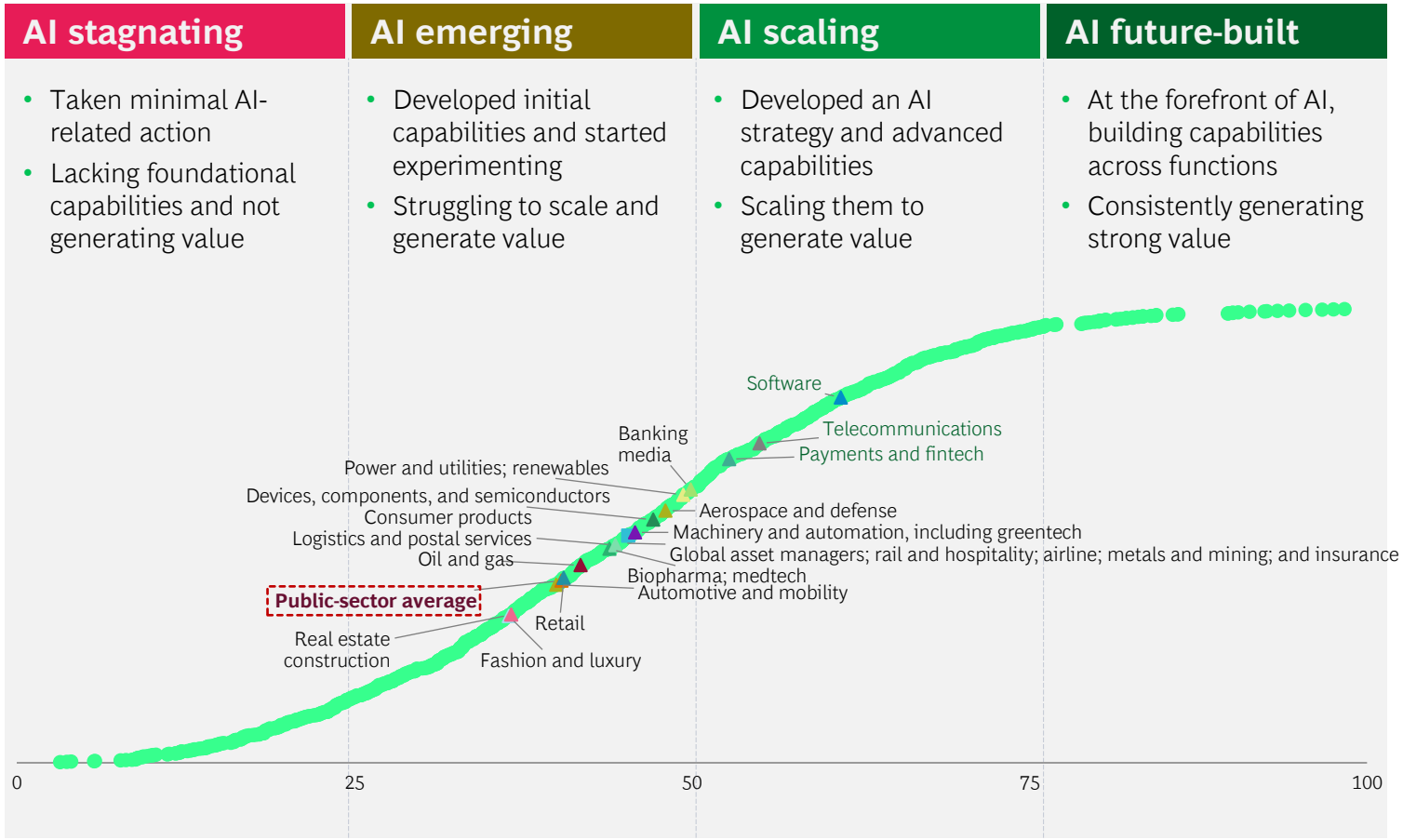
	Domestic stakeholders			External and international stakeholders		
	Businesses and investors	**Other government agencies**	**Citizens and consumers**	**Global investors and businesses**	**Peer economies and partners**	**International economic organizations**
Reason for adopting AI	Interpret rules, prepare submissions, and compare jurisdictions	Maintain service levels while operating with tighter budgets and talent pool constraints	Get clearer answers and faster resolutions without navigating complex processes	Scan requirements, tailor entry plans, and react to rule changes quickly	Speed up trade facilitation, policy design, and enforcement	Monitor risks, outcomes, and policy effectiveness in near real time
Expectation for economic affairs entities	Provide always-current guidance, efficient diffusion, and clear delivery timelines	Connect decisions by sharing signals and work seamlessly with AI-enabled agencies	Provide transparency and reliable delivery by avoiding slow updates and unclear accountability	Provide consistent guidance across channels and faster end-to-end decisions	Keep cross-border processes interoperable and coordinate faster on shared risk	Provide defensible performance metrics and coordinate swiftly during shocks

Net expectation: Faster end-to-end decisions, always-current guidance, transparent and traceable evidence, and rapid coordination

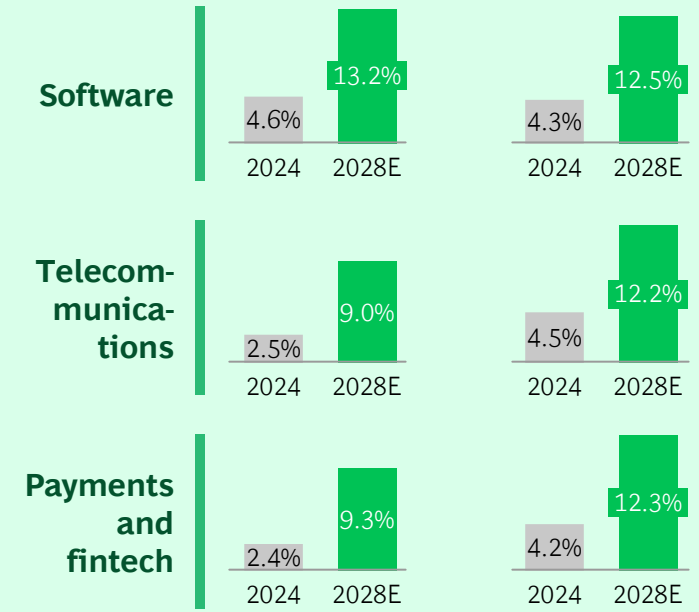
Source: BCG analysis.

Private-sector AI adoption and reinvestment of early gains are raising the baseline expectation—but public-sector maturity is not yet keeping pace

Average Build for the Future AI maturity score by sector
(assessed through 41 dimensions)



Value unlocked and expected
(top three AI-scaling private sectors)



Private-sector **leaders reinvest about 70% of AI** productivity gains in **AI-scaling;** the public sector can also ring-fence early efficiency gains to fund an AI foundation

Note: Value unlocked and expected (%) are derived from AI leaders within the top three AI-scaling sectors.
Sources: IBM: *The enterprise in 2030: Engineered for perpetual innovation*, 2026;
BCG Build for the Future 2025 Global Study (n = 1,250); BCG analysis.

Economic affairs entities can leverage AI by deploying tools, reshaping workflows, and reinventing ways of working

Deploy

Embed off-the-shelf copilots and lightly configured AI tools to boost productivity without changing existing processes

Reshape

Redesign existing processes with agents that run continuously, coordinating handoffs, exceptions, and decision packs

Invent

Combine multiple agents' capabilities to tackle complex current and future agendas by sensing signals, simulating scenarios, and aligning actions

Examples

	Deploy	Reshape	Invent
Markets and competitiveness	**Trade rules radar copilot** to surface updates, interpretations, and next steps	✓ **Always-on trade intelligence loop** to update scenarios or design next steps	✓ **Multiple layers of agents** with always-on signals and cross-portfolio action alignment to solve economic challenges
Productive sectors and industrial strategy	**Sector performance radar** to track signals and flag early stress in sectors	**Sector distress agent loop** to fuse signals, score risks, and draft options	
Infrastructure and connectivity	**Permit precheck and prefill copilot** to validate readiness and completeness	✓ **Permit and approval agent-guided journey** to support submission and compliance	
Innovation and productivity diffusion	✓ **Grant integrity screening copilot** to score risk and route targeted verification	**Grant life cycle agent** to combine award integrity with postaward compliance	

✓ Deep-dive examples in slides 11 through 18

Deploy | There are many examples of proven copilots and AI tools that are already boosting productivity in economic affairs entities worldwide (1/2)

Markets and competitiveness

Productive sectors and industrial strategy

	1 Market entry and business environment	2 Trade and cross-border competitiveness	3 Market conduct and labor regulations	4 Sector performance and resilience	5 Industrial investment enablement	6 Strategic supply security
Pain points	Entry pathways span multiple touch points; clarifications slow market entry and expansion	Trade rules shift rapidly; firms struggle to stay compliant and adjust quickly	Regulations are complex; constrained capacity drives slow, uneven oversight decisions	Sector signals arrive late; interventions stay reactive rather than anticipatory	Multiple agencies apply inconsistent requirements; rework loops delay starts and spending	Critical dependencies are unclear; shocks propagate faster than coordinated mitigation
Examples of AI solutions	**Guidance concierge** Clarifies entry requirements, routes application to the right unit the first time, and captures the context once	**Rule navigator** Surfaces applicable rules, latest updates, and next steps with source links	**Risk-based oversight** Prioritizes cases and inspections by risk and standardizes rationale trails	**Resilience warning** Identifies multisource signals to flag emerging sector disruptions early; surfaces likely drivers and affected value chains	**Approval pathway guide** Maps requirements across agencies; summarizes requirements across agencies and flags conflicts early	**Supply intelligence map** Links multitier supplier data to reveal dependencies and concentration risk
	Early trademark screening Helps trademark applicants identify errors and potential issues before filing	**Trade-ready pack** Detects context and rule changes early and translates them into clear, actionable steps	**Regulations discovery** Provides source-linked answers across official guidance to reduce contradictions	**Safety risk triage** Triages workplace safety risks to prioritize inspection and intervention; generates case summaries and recommended actions	**Bottleneck tracker** Monitors status across authorities, identifies stalls, and triggers escalation when required	**Mitigation playbook** Recommends contingency levers, identifies options, clarifies accountable owners with an audit trail
Typical impacts	**Faster decisions** Improved first-time-right routing and submissions **~50%-60%** Reduction of contact through self-service	**~60%–70%** Shorter search time for rules discovery **~5–10 days** Earlier surfacing for high-risk cases to intervene		**~95%–97%** Cost reduction per supply chain analysis *(UK government pilot)* **~2–5 months** Timeline drop in the supply chain investigation cycle	**~4x–12x** Benefit-cost return at scale **Faster reporting** Enabling a faster inspection process and intervention	

Note: No benchmark was available for some of the pain points identified (e.g., #5).
Sources: Ask Jamie and SmartAnswer, Singapore government; Chicago Human-Centered Forecasts Initiative; Global Supply Chains Intelligence Pilot, UK government; DAKI-FWS (a data- and AI-supported early warning system), German Bundestag; MoHRE's Smart Safety Tracker, United Arab Emirates government; BCG analysis.

Deploy | There are many examples of proven copilots and AI tools that are already boosting productivity in economic affairs entities worldwide (2/2)

Infrastructure and connectivity

Innovation and productivity diffusion

	7 Planning, investment prioritization	8 Permits, approvals, and delivery readiness	9 Network operations, disruption response	10 R&D tax incentives	11 Grant funding and review throughput	12 Diffusion and value for the money
Pain points	Planning cycles lag shifting demand; investment decisions miss emerging bottlenecks, dependencies	Application volume overwhelms reviewer capacity; awards slow and administrative costs rise	Incidents disrupt networks; manual coordination slows recovery and weakens service reliability	Eligibility is complex; verification is manual, inconsistent, and audit heavy	Application volume overwhelms reviewers; awards slow and administrative costs rise	Adoption is uneven; outcomes are hard to track, improve, and reallocate toward
Examples of AI solutions	**Bottleneck identifier** Fuses demand, land-use signals, and throughput to identify binding constraints and prioritize interventions	**Compliance precheck** Validates completeness against rules, flags missing evidence early, and reduces resubmissions	**Evaluation synthesis** Suggests playbooks for delays and outages, predicts knock-on impacts, and triggers escalations to experts	**Risk-based verification** Flags high-risk claims and supports audit-ready documentation	**Grant screening** Screens applications for integrity risks and flags high-risk cases only for human investigation *Deep dive next*	**Diffusion concierge** Builds adoption plans by firm and sector, tracks milestones, and coordinates support
	Investment prioritizer Ranks investment options to relieve constraints based on expected impact, urgency, cost, and feasibility	**Permit concierge** Clarifies requirements, assembles submissions, prefills forms, and routes exceptions to human reviewers	**Operational assistant** Simulates options and drafts recommendations for operator review	**Eligibility copilot** Guides rules and evidence; extracts eligible costs and technical narratives	**Panel decision support** Creates structured summaries, flags disagreements, and drafts rationale	**Evaluation synthesis** Links outcomes to programs and summarizes what worked for reallocations
Typical impacts	**Fewer disruptions** Improved maintenance operating rhythm **~10%–20%** Reduction in road network congestion	**~20x–40x** Faster digitization of planning records **~50,000** Responses synthesized in ~2 hours (vs. weeks)		**~95%–99%** Reduction in time to allocate grant assessors **~10%–16%** Fewer proposals routed for full peer review	**~95%–99%** Accuracy in matching applications to assessors **~70,000–80,000** Freed up staff-days per year for evidence synthesis	

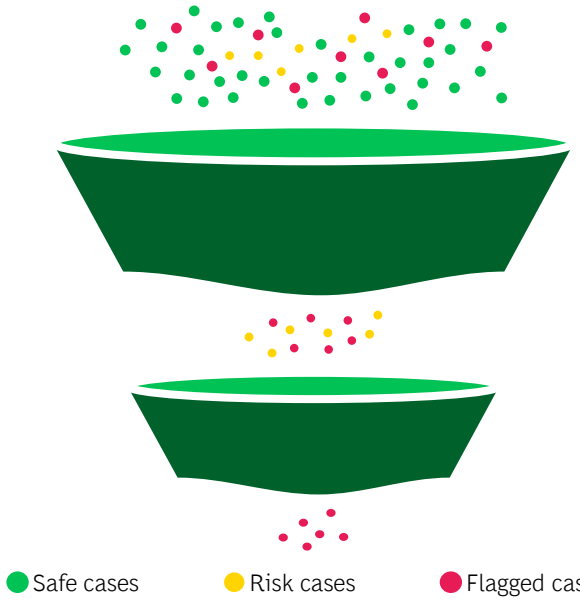
Note: No benchmark was available for some of the pain points identified (e.g., #12).
Sources: Dubai Roads and Transport Authority, 2030 AI Strategy; Extract tool for planning digitization, UK government; Consult summaries, UK government; Cobalt Grant Manager, GOV.UK; AI office initiatives, La Caixa Bank; BCG analysis.

Deploy deep dive | The integrity of innovation grants can be strengthened through AI-enabled screening and targeted verification

Challenges in grant and incentive funding

- **Ineligible and noncompliant submissions** can outpace manual reviewer capacity
- **Risk signals** are scattered across competitions, prior submissions, and assessor inputs
- **Pressure to decide fast** reduces traceability, consistency, and learning

Example: AI-enabled grant integrity platform at Innovate UK



Routes all applications through a single intake
Standardized workflow automates grant application checking and routes outputs to AI assessment

Screens applications and matches to an assessor
AI text analytics score similarity, detect anomalies, and rank suitable grant assessors based on topic fit

Performs targeted verification
Rule-based AI tool categorizes duplicates or resubmissions and flags cases for human investigation

Forwards for decisioning and remediation
Human grant assessors review applications and investigation outcomes, and then decide

99% Reduction in time to allocate grant assessors

97% Grant assessor-application matching accuracy

£55M Potential additional innovation funding unlocked[1]

1. Estimated based on £550 million core budget with 10% forecast error in conventional Innovate UK grant-screening process.
Sources: Cobalt Grant Manager, GOV.UK; Analytics Engines: Innovate UK Case Study; BCG analysis.

Reshape deep dive | An AI agent can turn permits and approvals into an end-to-end guided journey, making bureaucracy seamless

Context: John, a local logistics operator, wants to expand a distribution hub without getting lost in permits, approvals, and compliance

1 Need identification

John sees demand in a region and needs extra capacity quickly. He asks the permits journey agent for the fastest expansion route and what it will take to get operational

- Firm profile and site details on record
- Location context and basic constraints snapshot

2 Option search

The agent returns three clear pathways (expand an existing site, build a new hub, or lease and phase), each with expected timelines, rough cost ranges, and typical blockers

- Comparable case patterns and scenario templates
- Time and cost benchmarks, as well as typical blockers by pathway

3 First-time-right preparation

The agent turns the choice into one end-to-end plan—permits, utilities, inspections, and compliance—sequenced with what may run in parallel and what sits on critical path

- Cross-agency process map and dependencies
- Utilities and interconnection requirements, as well as inspection checklists, etc.

4 Journey creation

The agent assembles an application pack by prefilling forms, pulling reusable evidence, and flagging gaps early. John gets a checklist and only needs to provide what is not on record

- Reusable evidence vault and prefilled data fields
- Automated completeness and consistency checks

5 Submission and conditions preview

John submits once through a single front-door application. The agent keeps a live status view, translates requests into clear actions, and previews the likely approval conditions

- Single case identification and cross-agency status tracking
- Conditions templates and timeline forecast based on service level agreement

6 Postapproval guidance

After approval, the agent acts like a copilot for delivery. It reminds John of milestones, guides the “allowed use” of permits, and warns early of any compliance issues

- Conditions register, milestones, and reporting obligations
- Exception alerts from inspections, audits, and status changes

Source: BCG analysis.

Signals and reusable components employed by agent to deliver results

Reshape deep dive | Build an always-on trade intelligence AI agent that refreshes scenarios and proactively designs next steps

From a traditional cycle-bound response model . . .

Rework required as context shifts

Process	Scan trade signals and announcements	Pull inputs from agencies, firms, and missions	Reconcile data, assumptions, and impacts	Draft scenarios and negotiation stance	Align internally on assumptions and red lines	Publish internal brief and recommended stance
Illustration	Trade partner announces new tariff measure	Embassies and industry associates share early asks	Reconcile exposure, volumes, and substation options	Draft concession vs. retaliation vs. carve-out options	Interministry alignment on red lines and tradeoffs	Issue leadership brief and negotiation pack

Reactive, update driven

- Signals come in unevenly; teams chase updates across sources
- Time is lost reconciling data, assumptions, and baselines
- Scenarios are rebuilt each cycle as context shifts

Weeks to month

. . . to an AI-enabled always-on trade intelligence loop

1	**Sense and triage**	Continuously ingest policy, market, and partner signals and escalate only when thresholds that were initially set are breached
2	**Diagnose exposure**	Quantify exposure by sector and corridor and highlight first- and second-order impacts on trade balance and critical supply
3	**Simulate pathways**	Create and refresh multiple scenarios and estimate outcomes under different counterparty moves and domestic responses
4	**Design options**	Build negotiation and mitigation options with tradeoffs, red lines, and give-get bundles across core and noncore sectors
5	**Execute and learn**	Trigger guidance and tasks, track results and negotiation outcomes, and update playbooks by counterparty

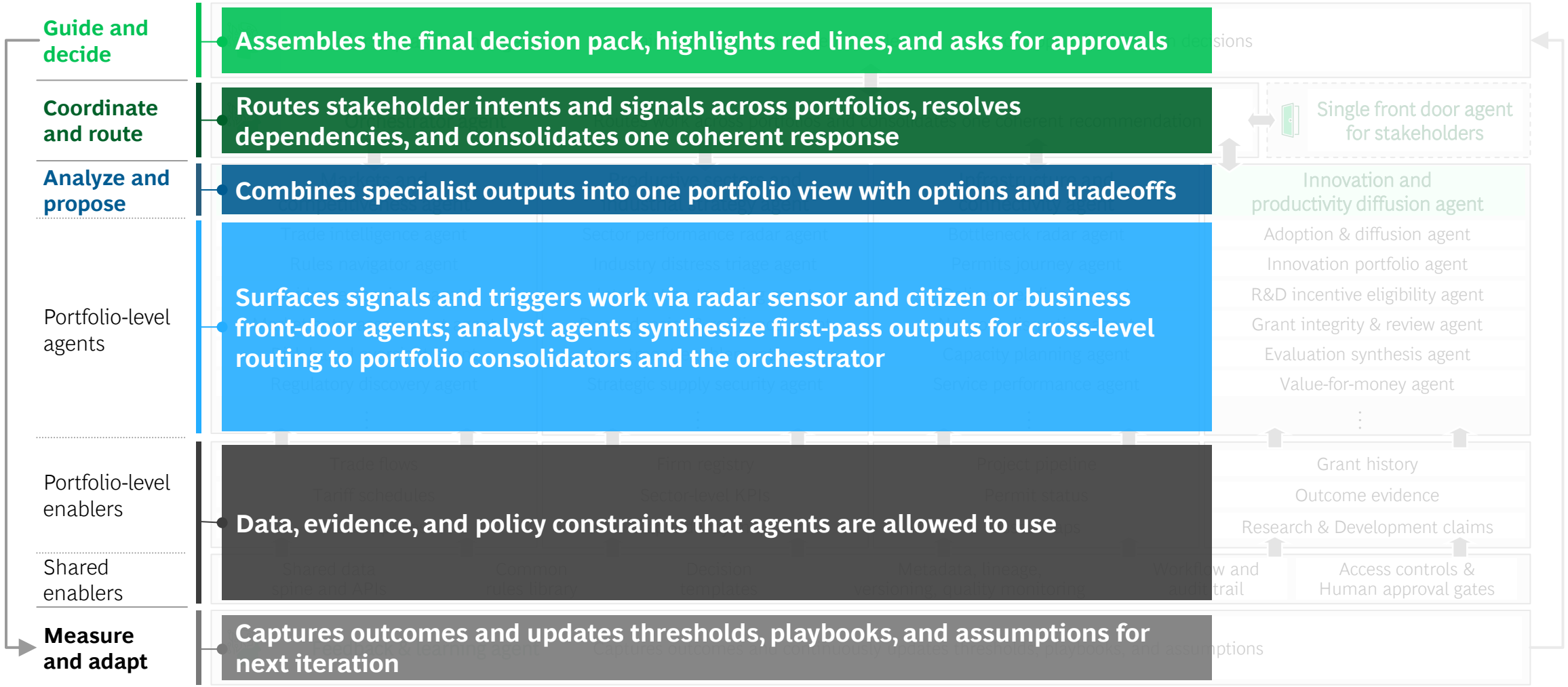
Proactive, scenario led

- Signals refresh continuously; exposure, scenarios, and options stay current
- Human time shifts to judgment on exceptions and red lines
- Decision packs update when thresholds move, not by calendar

Days to weeks

Source: BCG analysis.

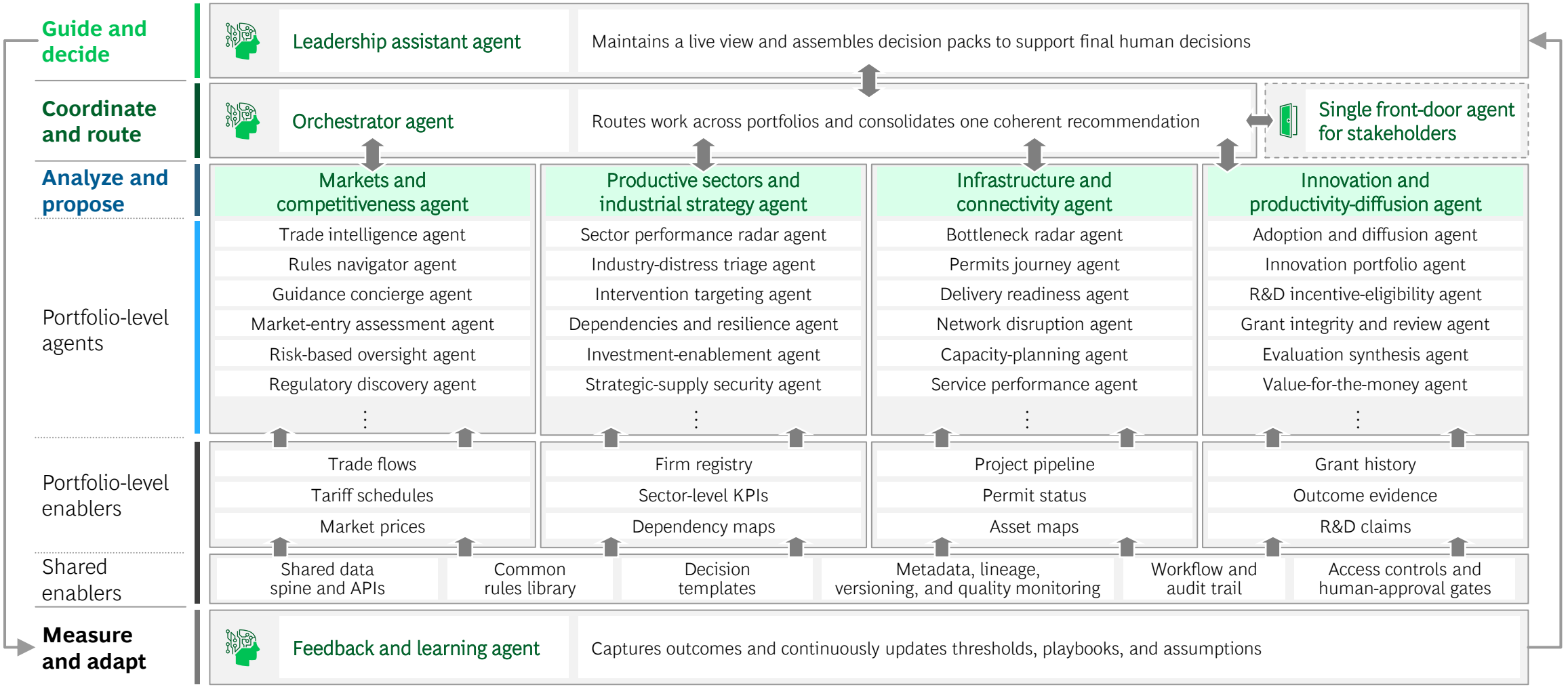
Invent deep dive | An AI-run economic affairs entity operates as an agent system that scales from priority portfolios to whole-economy steering (1/2)



Source: BCG analysis.

See illustrative iteration process in **slides 16 through 18**

Invent deep dive | An AI-run economic affairs entity orchestrates an agent system that scales from priority portfolios to whole-economy steering (2/2)



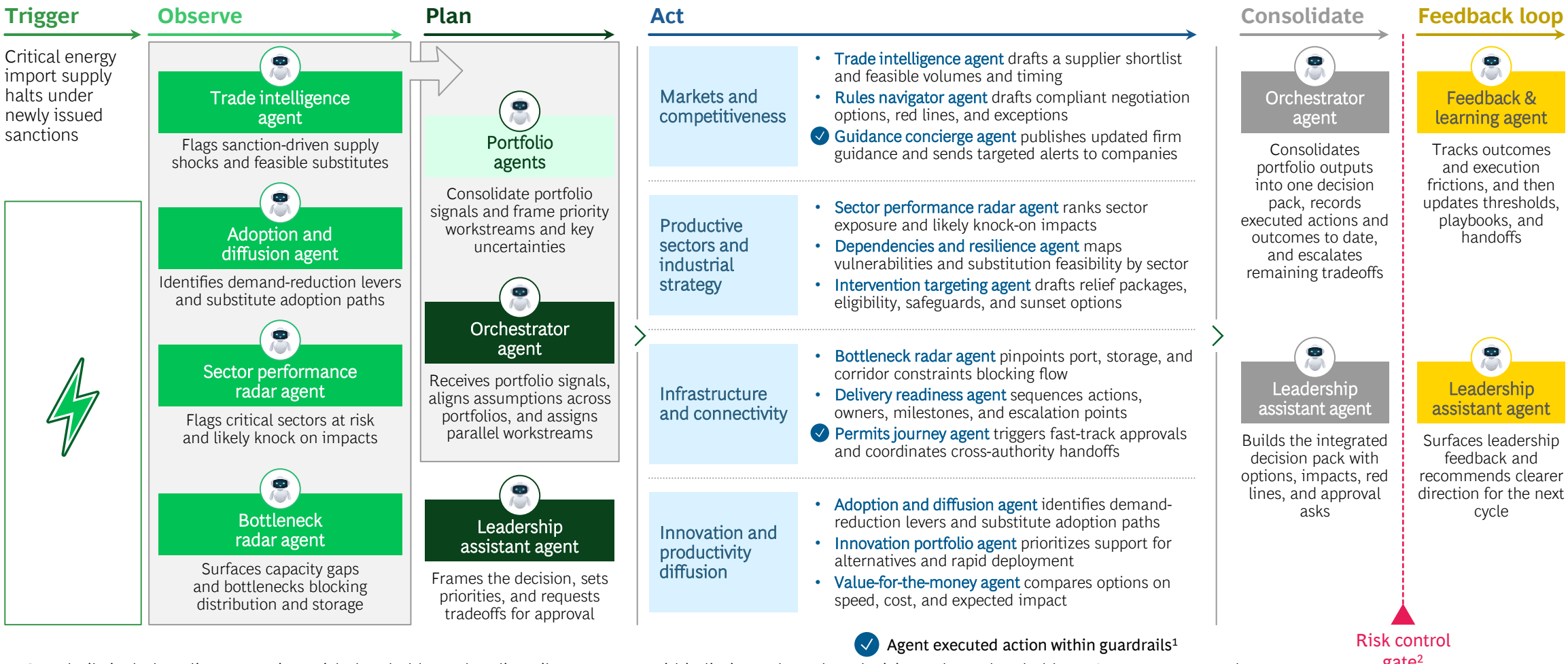
Scope of **invent** can expand from **one or two priority portfolios to whole-economy steering** as readiness and trust grow

Note: Single front-door can be a portal or concierge; it captures intent once and shares status, while the orchestrator routes work to portfolio agents and consolidates outputs into one response to be shared back to the single front door. API = application programming interface.
Source: BCG analysis.

Invent | Whole-economy steering agents turn supply disruption into coordinated countermeasures

Illustrative scenario

Cross-portfolio agents in action: Whole-economy steering senses the shock and mobilizes coordinated actions across all portfolios and critical functions



1. Guardrails include policy constraints, risk thresholds, and audit trails; agents act within limits and escalate decisions above thresholds. 2. Agents execute only within predefined policy guardrails and risk thresholds; actions above thresholds require human approval, with full audit trail and override.
Source: BCG analysis.

Invent | Whole-economy steering agents turn sector signals and consultations into incentive options and delivery plans

Illustrative scenario

Cross-portfolio agents in action: Whole-economy steering senses sector signals, runs consultation at scale, proposes incentive options, and coordinates delivery

Trigger

Pressure to act on productivity and competitive-ness, with calls for new R&D incentives in priority sectors

Observe

Sector performance radar agent
Flags candidate sectors and stress signals

Adoption and diffusion agent
Finds scale barriers and uptake levers

Bottleneck radar agent
Surfaces delivery constraints and dependencies

Trade intelligence agent
Tracks global subsidy moves and trade risk

Plan

Portfolio agents
Consolidate portfolio signals and frame priority workstreams and key uncertainties

Orchestrator agent
Receives portfolio signals, aligns assumptions across portfolios, and assigns parallel workstreams

Leadership assistant agent
Frames decision requests and guardrails, as well as clarifies evidence required for leadership approval

Act

Markets and competitiveness	✓ **Rules navigator agent** codifies eligibility rules, safeguards, and constraints ✓ **Guidance concierge agent** publishes updated firm guidance and sends targeted alerts to companies • **Risk-based oversight agent** defines verification triggers and evidence requirements
Productive sectors and industrial strategy	• **Sector performance radar agent** identifies candidate sectors and stress signals • **Intervention targeting agent** drafts sector and firm segments for targeting and tradeoffs • **Investment-enablement agent** shapes sequencing and cross-government coordination requests
Infrastructure and connectivity	• **Bottleneck radar agent** tests delivery constraints that would limit uptake or impact • **Capacity-planning agent** aligns enabling capacity actions with expected uptake ✓ **Permits journey agent** streamlines approvals required for supported investments (e.g., auto-routing)
Innovation and productivity diffusion	• **R&D incentive-eligibility agent** drafts parameters and eligibility tests ✓ **Grant integrity and review agent** sets intake, risk scoring, and targeted verification routing • **Evaluation synthesis agent** links outcomes to program adjustments and learning

Consolidate

Orchestrator agent
Consolidates portfolio outputs into one incentive package, records executed actions and early results, and escalates remaining tradeoffs

Leadership assistant agent
Builds the decision pack with options, impacts, red lines, and approval requests

Feedback loop

Feedback and learning agent
Tracks uptake, outcomes and integrity risks and then updates thresholds, playbooks, and handoffs

Leadership assistant agent
Surfaces delivery gaps and recommends adjustments to targeting, parameters, and guardrails

Risk control gate[2]

✓ Agent executed action within guardrails[1]

1. Guardrails include policy constraints, risk thresholds, and audit trails; agents act within limits and escalate decisions above thresholds. 2. Agents execute only within predefined policy guardrails and risk thresholds; actions above thresholds require human approval, with full audit trail and override.
Source: BCG analysis.

Invent | Whole-economy steering agents turn FDI intent into coordinated market-entry approvals and launch plans

Illustrative scenario

Cross-portfolio agents in action: The investor triggers the journey; agents coordinate licensing, permits, incentives, and delivery readiness end to end

Trigger

A global investor signals intent to enter the market and needs clarity on requirements, timelines, and support

Observe

Single front-door agent

Captures investor intent and constraints and produces a structured intake for orchestration under one case ID

Plan

Orchestrator agent

Aligns assumptions across portfolios, assigns parallel workstreams, and manages one timeline and dependencies

Leadership assistant agent

Activated selectively when leadership choices are required (major incentives, sensitive sectors, exceptions, or cross-agency tradeoffs)

Act

Markets and competitiveness	• **Rules navigator agent** generates the tailored compliance map (e.g., including registration, licenses, sector rules, and customs or trade requirements) ✓ **Guidance concierge agent** publishes a single investor-ready checklist and pushes targeted alerts as requirements change • **Trade intelligence agent** drafts import and export setup options (e.g., routes and risks) to reduce time to operate
Productive sectors and industrial strategy	• **Rules navigator agent** identifies eligible incentive schemes and drafts application-ready packs • **Sector performance radar agent** benchmarks sector conditions and highlights "what good looks like" • **Risk-based oversight agent** defines proportionate verification triggers (e.g., evidence requirements and audit conditions) for incentives
Infrastructure and connectivity	✓ **Permits journey agent** prechecks pathways, auto-routes to the right authority, and sequences approvals • **Bottleneck radar agent** flags capacity constraints (e.g., power, land, ports, or corridors) and proposes mitigations • **Delivery readiness agent** creates the integrated delivery plan (including owners, milestones, and escalation points)
Innovation and productivity diffusion	✓ **Adoption and diffusion agent** links the investor to skills and training pathways and SME supplier enablement programs where relevant

✓ Agent executed action within guardrails[1]

Consolidate

Orchestrator agent

Consolidates outputs into a single FDI launch pack (including submissions, incentive options, permit plan, and timeline) and maintains one end-to-end status view

Feedback loop

Feedback & learning agent

Tracks cycle times, drop-offs, and recurring blockers; updates templates, thresholds, and handoffs

Leadership assistant agent

Surfaces systemic friction (e.g., recurring constraints and slow licensing steps) and recommends policy and process fixes

Risk control gate[2]

1. Guardrails include policy constraints, risk thresholds, and audit trails; agents act within limits and escalate decisions above thresholds. 2. Agents execute only within predefined policy guardrails and risk thresholds; actions above thresholds require human approval, with full audit trail and override.
Note: FDI = foreign direct investment; SME = small and medium-sized enterprise.
Source: BCG analysis.

When workflows are reshaped and AI agents are orchestrated, economic affairs' processes can become faster, clearer, and more consistent

	From visible, established economic affairs' processes…	…to seamless bureaucracy enabled by AI capabilities
Internal (behind the scenes)	**Cross-agency coordination with economic affairs is slow** because of sequential handoffs and fragmented ownership across agencies	**Coordination becomes faster and autonomous** with AI routing work through shared case views, standard handoffs, and clear escalation paths
	Economic policy interventions stay reactive because signals arrive late and insights are not continuously refreshed into policy cycles	**Economic policy interventions become proactive** with always-on sensing surfacing emerging signals early and creating options
	Decisions are hard to explain consistently because evidence, assumptions, and rationale sit across programs	**Decisions become traceable by design** with outputs linked to sources, consistent rationale logs, and audit-ready decision records
External (stakeholder-facing)	**Stakeholders (e.g., citizens and businesses) face a fragmented journey,** with guidance and requirements spread across multiple front doors	**A single, hyperpersonalized front door** captures stakeholder intent once, routes work effortlessly, and reduces bureaucracy
	Status and guidance updates lag because changes are not pushed in time; stakeholders need to chase progress	**Updates become timely and targeted** because the service pushes status, requirements, and next steps as conditions change

Source: BCG analysis.

There is a practical path to becoming an AI-first economic affairs entity no matter the stage of AI maturity

Step 1
Choose priorities and ambition

Set the AI agenda and ambition level

- Select priority areas for AI adoption that are tied to key national objectives and value creation potential
- Set the ambition level (deploy, reshape, or invent)
- Confirm owners, decision rights, KPIs, and a strategic roadmap (including technology, data sets, operating model, and lighthouse pilots)

Step 2
Build capabilities and launch delivery in parallel

Launch light deployment and lighthouse delivery

- Roll out approved enterprise copilots and tools fast
- Launch lighthouse tools and products for focus group
- Centralize learning and guardrails to build momentum

Stand up required technical enablers

- Build a secure, reusable AI-platform backbone with governed data access and shared APIs
- Put data discipline and traceability through metadata standards and audit logging, scaled to a chosen ambition level
- Choose the right partner mix for core platforms and hosting

Shape the organization and operating model

- Assign accountable journey owners and codify cross-agency decision rights and escalation paths
- Stand up an AI-enablement function or workforce engine; make scaling the operating rhythm

Setting the AI agenda is a repeatable cycle of creating a short list of priorities, choosing the ambition, and committing to delivery

1

Build a candidate list

Create a long list of priority areas for AI adoption, inspired by national outcomes and potential value creation

2

Triage and filter

Narrow priorities to a short list, including developing quick-win lighthouse pilots using screening parameters, including:

- Utmost national-priority and public-value objectives
- Beneficiary impact and equity
- Feasibility, delivery risk, and time to impact

Early waves often move faster when multiple priorities sit within one portfolio, sharing data, rules, and workflow components

3

Validate and shape

Pressure test policy constraints, dependencies, and readiness for delivery, and then define the success KPI for each priority, such as:

- Speed
- Compliance
- Resilience
- Value for the money

4

Commit to an ambition and a delivery plan

Decide ambition level per area (deploy, reshape, or invent) and lock the first-wave plan, having identified the owners, decision rights, stage KPIs, and launch roadmap

Source: BCG analysis.

Launching lighthouse pilots can prove AI's value within weeks through a phased plan

	Phase 1 Mobilize and make safe	Phase 2 Focus on acceleration	Phase 3 Scale up lighthouse pilots
Workplan	**2–4 weeks** • Confirm approved copilot tools, data boundaries, and guardrails • Define success measures (e.g., adoption and usage, as well as time-saved proxy) • Stand up support and governance (e.g., lighthouse champions and a help route) for the rollout	**8–12 weeks** • Roll out to a small number of focus groups (or lighthouse teams) • Provide structured enablement (specifically, training and office hours) and feedback loops (e.g., surveys) • Publish reusable patterns (e.g., templates, approved sources, and evaluation checks)	**>3 months** • Expand to wider teams using standard playbook and measurement • Alternatively, evolve a selected lighthouse product into reshape and invent (for workflow integration and orchestration) • Institutionalize continuous improvement (by refreshing guardrails, updating patterns, and tracking value)
Output	Approved toolset and guardrails Measurement baseline Lighthouse teams and champions	Active usage in lighthouse teams Measured productivity uplift Playbook with reusable patterns	Scaling plan or roadmap for selected reshape or invent scenario Sustained governance cadence Next-step backlog and funding decisions

Sources: Cross-government experiment using Microsoft 365 Copilot, 2024, GOV.UK; BCG analysis.

Technical enablers that are required to scale AI in economic affairs entities responsibly

1 Responsible, secure, and governed AI use

Create safe conditions to use AI on sensitive government work without losing accountability

- Secure environment for approved tools and data
- Compliance controls (e.g., privacy, logging, and audit readiness)
- Autonomy controls (e.g., thresholds and approvals) for agent actions
- ☆ Public-recourse controls (e.g., appeals, contestations, and disclosures)

2 Trusted data and evidence

Ensure AI outputs are grounded in trusted data and can be defended as evidence

- Governed data access and clear ownership
- Data quality and traceability (e.g., data definitions and refresh discipline)
- Reusable evidence packs for decisions and reviews
- ☆ Sovereign-data controls (classification, data location, and sharing rules)

3 Workflow orchestration and integration

Make AI work end to end across systems, handoffs, exceptions, and write-backs

- Workflow orchestration and case tracking across steps
- System integration and write-backs (for status updates and actions)
- Reliability and safe changes (via testing, monitoring, and rollbacks)

4 Adoption and value measurement

Standardize usage so adoption scales beyond pilots and value is measurable

- Reusable templates and standard outputs for decision work
- Usage tracking (of adoption, who used what, and where it helped)
- Value signals (e.g., time saved, rework reduced, and quality flags)

☆ Extra controls specifically for public-sector accountability

Sources: NIST AI Risk Management Framework; EU AI Act: AI management system; Google Cloud Architecture Center: MLOps architecture guidance; BCG analysis.

A technical readiness checklist that indicates add-ons by ambition level

Shared technical foundation

Set up before scaling deploy, reshape, or invent as the ambition

1. IAM and secure environments, with activity logging
2. Security, privacy, and compliance controls for approved use and data protection
3. Data lake and data warehouse foundation, with ownership and access rules
4. Data and knowledge catalog, metadata, and lineage discipline, definitions, provenance, and refresh cadence
5. Data quality monitoring and issue management for critical fields
6. API standards and integration patterns, with audit trail for traceable inputs, outputs, and decisions

Deploy: technical add-ons

1. Prompt and template library for briefs, summaries, and questions and answers
2. Standard output formats for decision support (e.g., options, risks, rationale, and recommendations)
3. Usage telemetry (including who used what and on which data point)
4. Lightweight value instrumentation, time saved, rework, and quality flags

Reshape: technical add-ons

1. Workflow orchestration and case tracking end to end, status, handoffs, and SLAs
2. Rules engine and approval routing for workflow exceptions and human review gates
3. Evidence vault and reusable case packs with traceable sourcing
4. Write-back integration for journey execution and status updates
5. CI/CD and reliability monitoring for journey changes, safe releases, and rollbacks

Invent: technical add-ons

1. Cross-portfolio data spine, decision logic, and reusable decision templates
2. Orchestration layer to route work and consolidate portfolio outputs
3. Autonomy controls for agent-executed actions, policy constraints, thresholds, and approvals
4. Continuous-sensing and refresh loop so actions are triggered when conditions change

Invent requires at least one live and stable reshape agentic AI product

Readiness delivery can be **in-house or partner operated; requirements stay the same,** but ownership and controls should remain explicit

Note: IAM = identity and access management; SLA = service level agreement; CI/CD = continuous integration/continuous delivery. Some controls may apply at all levels; for example, higher-risk deploy cases may require reshape grade controls.
Sources: NIST AI Risk Management Framework; European Commission AI Act Service Desk, Articles 12 and 14; BCG analysis.

Economic affairs entities should codify clear accountability to enable AI delivery at scale

Imperatives to accelerate value delivery

1. **Nominate accountable owners**
   Clarify decision rights across policy, IT, data, and legal; set escalation paths
2. **Stand up a central AI-enablement function**
   Provide reusable playbooks, workflow support, and assurance; help teams "pull capability" at pace
3. **Build a workforce engine and delivery ecosystem**
   Scale skills through cross-agency training; codify data sharing and interoperability with partners[1]
4. **Make scaling the operating rhythm**
   Institutionalize inventories, compliance planning, and risk gates so AI becomes part of daily work

Example: US federal government scaling responsible AI across agencies

Leadership and accountability
Mandated agencies designate Chief AI Officers (CAIOs) with defined responsibilities and reporting expectations

Delivery governance
Set minimum AI risk-management expectations for higher-impact use cases and expanded agency reporting via AI use-case inventories and compliance planning

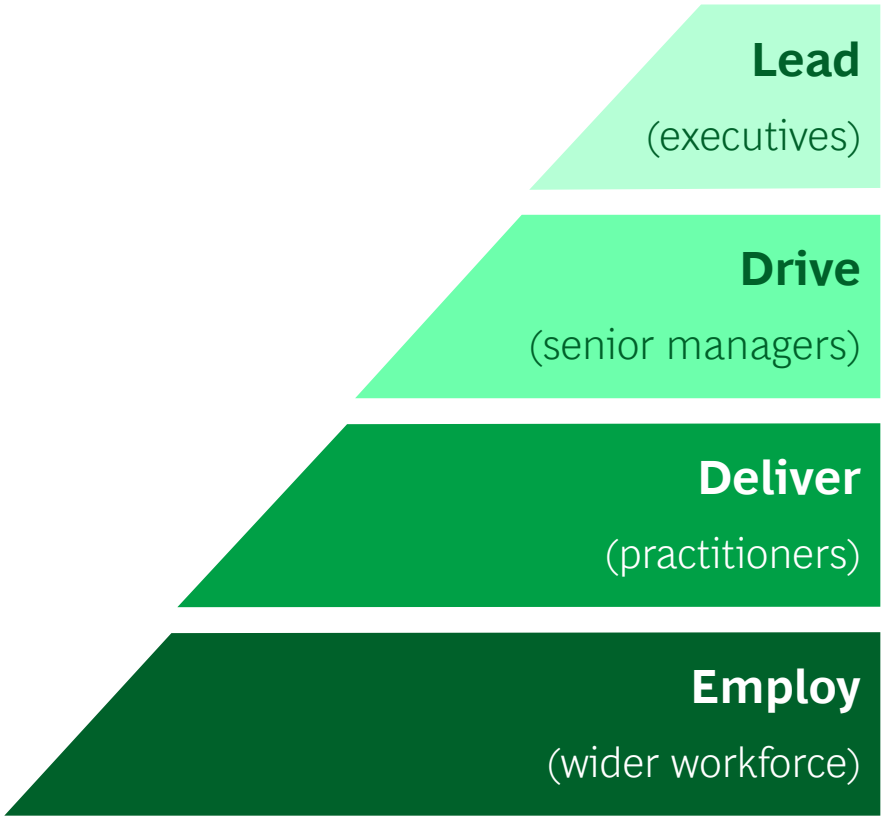
Technical capacity
Established shared enablement via the US GSA's AI Center of Excellence service offerings and training; advanced cross-agency data access and sharing through the Federal Data Strategy and Chief Data Officers Council's guidance

Diffusion and scaling
Used cross-agency forums, shared training, and standard governance artifacts to replicate patterns (vs. bespoke pilots)

1. Including academics, industry, and cross-national partners.
Note: GSA = General Services Administration.
Sources: Chief Data Officers Council; The White House; US GSA; BCG analysis.

Economic affairs entities should upskill talent to build AI capabilities across all levels to steer AI adoption responsibly

Representative layers across economic affairs government entities



Key capabilities to steer responsible AI adoption in economic affairs government entities

Examples

Lead (executives)

- **Strategic AI literacy:** Set ambition and interpret evidence for decisions
- **Governance literacy:** Set accountability, decision rights, and safe boundaries
- **Portfolio judgment:** Prioritize, stop, and reinvest based on measured outcomes[1]

Drive (senior managers)

- **Translation literacy:** Convert policy intent into outcomes, constraints, and KPIs
- **Cross-agency fluency:** Run decision rights, escalation, and operating cadence
- **Vendor and partner governance:** Test assumptions and ensure capability transfer

Deliver (practitioners)

- **Assurance literacy:** Maintain quality, auditable processes, and traceability
- **Operational delivery literacy:** Manage change, incidents, and exceptions
- **Reuse discipline and methods:** Standardize patterns to reduce reinvention

Employ (wider workforce)

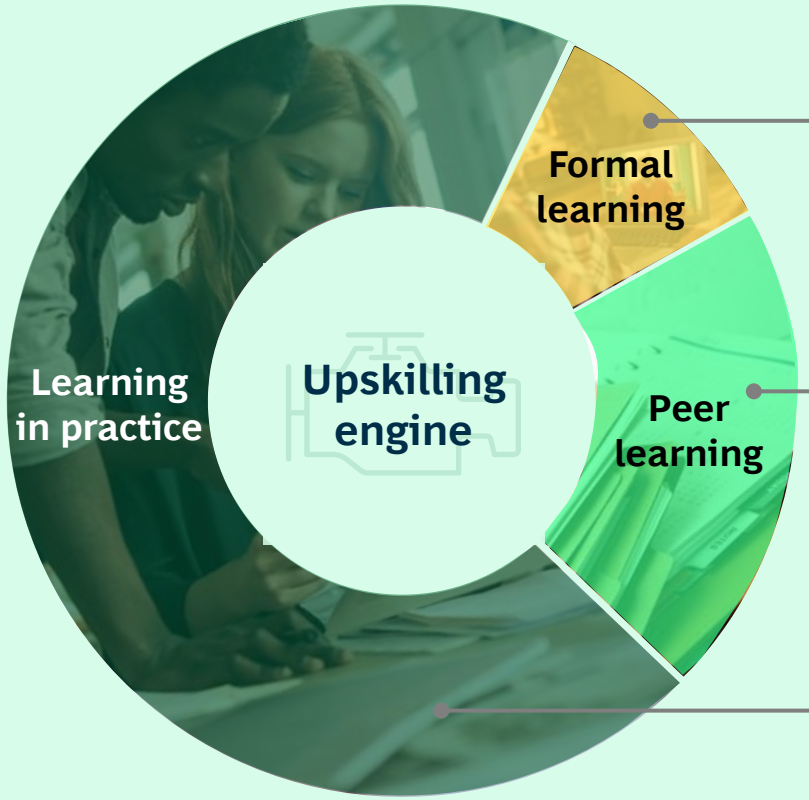
- **Baseline AI literacy:** Use approved tools responsibly in daily work
- **Verification habits:** Cite sources, spot gaps, and escalate uncertainty
- **Data discipline:** Protect sensitive information and follow approved use

1. E.g., timeline for response in policy design, shock response, and market projection.

Sources: GOV.UK; OECD *Bridging the AI skills gap*; US Department of Labor's Artificial Intelligence Literacy Framework; NIST's *Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework* (AI RMF 1.0); BCG analysis.

The 10-20-70 upskilling approach and learning model can help economic affairs entities build AI capabilities at scale

Approach to build capabilities at scale



10%

Formal learning

- Classes and workshops to build baseline AI literacy
- Role-based training courses for journey owners, builders, and assurance roles
- End-user training modules on safe habits, verification, and escalation routes

20%

Community learning

- Leadership forums to agree what becomes standard and what is prohibited
- Communities of practice with show-and-tell and peer review of decisions and guardrails
- Cross-agency sharing sessions to reuse patterns

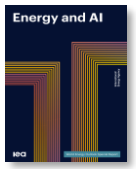
70%

On the job learning

- Immersion and shadowing through interactive visits with peers, regulators, industry, academia
- Shoulder-to-shoulder coaching on live priorities
- Office hours for practitioners and journey owners to review outputs and unblock work

Sources: Center for Creative Leadership, “The 70-20-10 Rule for Leadership”; CIPD, Learning value and social learning; US Department of Labor’s Artificial Intelligence Literacy Framework; BCG analysis.

More information | AI's implications are shaping the future of economic affairs

Economic affairs portfolios	Future-facing implications	Further reading materials
Markets and competitiveness	**AI could redefine competitiveness** across peers and trade partners, with IMF modeling showing that the growth impact in advanced economies could be **more than double** that in low-income countries	 **The Global Impact of AI: Mind the Gap** (IMF working paper, 2025)
Productive sectors and industrial strategy	GenAI exposure in white-collar work is **creating early workforce-pipeline pressure in exposed roles** (e.g., programmers), raising the stakes for sector transition and skills policy	 **Labor market impacts of AI: A new measure and early evidence** (Anthropic, 2026)
Infrastructure and connectivity	**AI is driving a power-system constraint**—data center electricity use is set to more than double to roughly 945 terawatt hours by 2030, and about one-fifth of the planned buildout is at risk of delay due to grid bottlenecks	 **Energy and AI** (IEA, 2025)
Innovation and productivity diffusion	**AI investment is scaling fast and concentrating;** global corporate AI investment reached $252 billion in 2024, (about three times climate change adaptation spending), **raising hard allocation tradeoffs** for innovation and diffusion funding	 **Technology and Innovation report:** AI at the technology frontier (UN Conference on Trade and Development, 2025)

Sources: IMF, *The Global Impact of AI: Mind the Gap* (working paper), 2025; Anthropic, *Labor market impacts of AI: A new measure and early evidence,* 2026; IEA, *Energy and AI*, 2025; UN Conference on Trade and Development, *2025 Technology and Innovation Report: Inclusive Artificial Intelligence for Development,* 2025; BCG analysis.

More information | Read more about BCG's insights in the public sector

Collection

AI in the Public Sector

Article

How AI Can Cut Through Bureaucracy, Boost Efficiency, and Build Trust in Government

White Paper

Meeting the Moment: Reimagining Government for the Digital Future

Article

What Will AI Do for Government?

Article

Which Economies Are Ready for AI?

Article

Beyond GDP: A Shared Opportunity for Growth and Job Creation

Article

Playbook for National AI Strategy and Implementation

Article

Sovereign Clouds Are Reshaping National Data Security

Source: BCG.

BCG experts | Key public-sector contacts for AI transformation

Americas

Steven Mills
Managing Director and Partner

Ashwin Bhave
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Heidi Kim
Managing Director and Partner, BCG X

Erin Boyland
Managing Director and Partner

Eran Koren
Managing Director and Partner

Adi Zolotov
Managing Director and Partner

Europe, Middle East, and Africa

Christopher Daniel
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Joerg Hildebrandt
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Christian Schwärzler
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Frank Felden
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Lars Littig
Managing Director and Partner

Akram Awad
Managing Director and Partner

Richard Sargeant
Managing Director and Partner

Louis Watt
Managing Director and Partner

Asia-Pacific

Miguel Carrasco
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Yoshihisa Niwa
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Aparna Bharadwaj
Managing Director and Senior Partner

Masahiro Nakagawa
Managing Director and Partner


BCG