

Protecting Against Competition
through
Organizational Agility

Where the Firm of Tomorrow **Invests**



A Key Investment for the Firm of Tomorrow

The accounting profession stands at an inflection point. The firms that will lead the industry in the next three years are making critical investment decisions today. After consultation with the world's leading public accounting networks, a clear picture has emerged. Agility, the ability to absorb change rapidly and deploy new capabilities across the network in months rather than years, is becoming a defining competitive advantage.

This white paper is the third in Kingland's Firm of Tomorrow series, following [*The Firm of Tomorrow: A Framework for Public Accounting Investment*](#) and [*Seamless Process Integration*](#). Where Seamless Process Integration examined how firms can eliminate the silos and manual handoffs that slow down day-to-day operations, this paper addresses a more fundamental question:

how quickly can your firm implement change?



Follow the QR code to read
The Firm of Tomorrow

A network with seamlessly integrated processes has laid an important foundation, but integration alone does not determine how quickly that network can change. Building on that foundation, the organizationally agile firm develops the capacity to absorb and deploy change rapidly, moving from kickoff to business deployment in months rather than years. In a profession shaped by the pace of AI advancement and an intensifying competitive environment, the ability to change quickly has become a defining differentiator.

Why Agility Is Now Essential

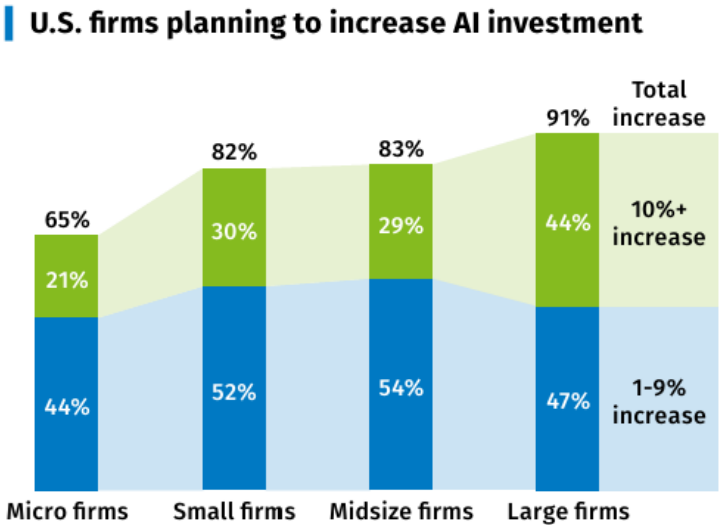
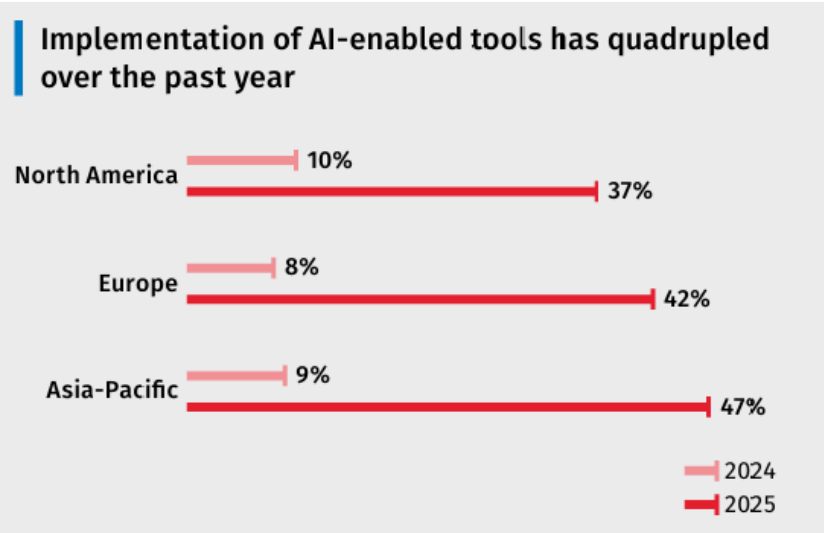
The pressures reshaping public accounting firms today are well documented in Kingland's white paper, [*The Firm of Tomorrow*](#). This paper builds on that foundation to address how rapidly those forces are intensifying. The window firms have to respond to competitive, technological, and regulatory pressures is compressing. As AI agentic technology has dramatically reshaped how business can be done in the past year alone, understanding the pace of this change is essential to understanding why organizational agility is now a strategic priority.

The Competitive Landscape is Moving Faster

AI Timeline Compression

Artificial intelligence is fundamentally altering the timeline for competitive advantage. What once took years to develop can now take months, shifting efforts by orders of magnitude just like how innovation in transportation enabled people to cross farther distances in the same time. What once took two hours to walk into town, turned into two hours to drive to the next town over, turned into two hours to fly across oceans. Firms that cannot rapidly integrate new capabilities, particularly agentic AI tools for quality monitoring, data aggregation and analysis, and assisting professionals in their engagements will find themselves serving clients with outdated processes while competitors deliver faster, higher quality results.

[Wolters Kluwer’s 2025 Future Ready Accountant report](#) found that AI technology is driving change across accounting firms of all sizes. “From tax research to predictive insights and compliance monitoring, 70% of firms use AI at least weekly, and 78% plan to increase investments in the next three years”. Smaller firms can expect to see higher revenue growth rates with AI adoption, while larger firms can expect to see higher profit growth when AI technology is applied. It is important to clarify; these findings are from 2025. The impact of more recent foundation models and growing capabilities to customize more powerful open-weight models is accelerating the pace of change and investment.



Charts referenced from Wolters Kluwers’s 2025 Future Ready Accountant report

The Competitive Landscape is Moving Faster

Private Equity Is Accelerating the Pace

In 2025 alone, each PE investment in a public accounting firm resulted in an average of 7.6 additional roll-up transactions, a consolidation index that has increased four-fold since 2021, [according to IFAC](#). The Baker Tilly and Moss Adams merger created a firm generating more than \$3 billion annually with roughly 11,500 people, placing it at [number 6](#) in the top 10 US firms overnight. PE-backed platforms like Ascend, Sorren, and Crete are executing multi-deal rollup strategies that add scale rapidly. These firms are not building incrementally. They are assembling at speed, with capital specifically earmarked for technology modernization and operational standardization to ensure their organizations can manage the growth.

Clients Expect the Pace of Other Industries

Clients increasingly expect real-time insights rather than retrospective analysis. They see AI transforming other professional services they engage in, legal, consulting, software development, and expect their accounting firms to match that pace. Firms that require years to implement process improvements to serve their clients more efficiently risk looking slow in comparison to the firm's competition.

Regulators Require Continuous Monitoring

Quality management standards such as QC 1000 and ISQM 1 require continuous monitoring and rapid response capabilities. Firms must be able to show how their processes and controls sufficiently monitor, detect, and prevent quality issues in real time. As regulators increasingly examine the implications of PE ownership structures on audit quality and independence, firms need systems that can demonstrate compliance dynamically as ownership structures, not just at a point in time.

The Internal Cost of Slowness

Business Deployment Delays Compound

When process improvements take many months to roll out across a network, member firms operate with the older process, or both processes simultaneously, for much of that year. Quality issues persist, efficiency gains remain unrealized, and professionals become frustrated with the processes. Each delayed business deployment of an important change that will improve the firm's process execution widens the gap to realizing other initiatives in the future. If a network-wide process transformation takes three years to complete from the kickoff meeting to the final member firm onboarding, there are three years of AI and other technology advancements to consider next for improvement.

Technology Outpaces Organizational Structure

AI tools for automated data collection, intelligent document analysis, and process monitoring exist today and are delivering real value for firms that have deployed them. However, firms that approach transformation one system at a time, without a coordinated view across data, process, and technology, cannot make the sweeping changes required to capitalize on these tools simultaneously. Doing things right the first time, with sound data governance and well-engineered processes, is far more cost-effective than deploying monitoring to catch and fix errors after the fact. The technology is ready; for many firms, the organizational agility to capitalize on it is not. The firms that treat agility as a strategic initiative will be the ones that realize the value of AI tools today and the breakthroughs yet to come.

Member Firm Process Differentiation Halts Global Standardization

Networks where member firms operate on different systems amplify this problem significantly. When each member firm has built its own workflows, tools, and approval processes over years of independent operation, global standardization does not just take effort; it takes negotiation. A network attempting to roll out a unified conflict checking process discovers that a third of its member firms have carved out unique steps, exception handling procedures, or legacy system dependencies that must be accommodated before the global process can go live. Each carve-out requires its own design, testing, and sign-off cycle, compounding the timeline and diluting the consistency of the global process.



The Four Marks of Organizational Agility

Agility in this context is about the deliberate investment in professionals, processes, and technologies that enable networks to implement change in a matter of months from kickoff to business deployment completion. Based on Kingland's consultation with many of the largest accounting firms and networks, the following should be considered north stars for firms to reach a level of organizational agility to be considered a competitive advantage.

1. Trusted & Streamlined Decisioning

In an agile organization, decision-making authority is placed with a focused group: service line leadership, risk, and budget authority, empowered to act. Limiting the stakeholder set is not about excluding input; it is about ensuring the people with authority to move forward are the ones driving the decision.

Too often, organizational change stalls because the team empowered to push change forward is restricted by dozens of member firms, global and member firm leadership, and internal IT. We have seen this play out firsthand. A network-wide proposal spent 18 months in deliberation before a single step of the 3-month implementation began. The system change itself was never the hard part. Deciding to make it was.

What did those 15 extra months cost? Slower service to clients, delayed risk mitigation, and a team that had the answer long before it had the authority to act on it. That gap between insight and action is where value quietly disappears.

To be clear, this is not a case for moving fast and breaking things. It is not about making rash decisions. It is about building a decisioning structure that can move as quickly as the organization needs it to, once the right people are in the room. Speed and rigor are not opposites; the goal is simply to stop confusing consensus with diligence.

The goal is to move at the pace of business, not the pace of bureaucracy.

2. Integrated & Configurable Agentic AI

Process improvement is driven less by standing up and integrating new systems and more by reconfiguring the systems, AI models, and agents already sitting on a shared orchestration platform. That platform, a centralized layer already connected to the firm's data sources and downstream systems, is a key enabler.

The advantage is not that the platform exists, it is that it is configurable. Because the foundation is already built and already connected, firms can reconfigure what runs on top of it, whether that is a new AI model, a new agent, or a new workflow, without rearchitecting the backend each time. The system moves at the pace it needs to because it was built to flex, not to be rebuilt. That agility is what lets technology keep pace with the business, rather than the business waiting on the technology.

3. Process First Improvement

Many organizational changes falter because the core business process that is intended to be improved is put to the side in order to focus on other technical details. When decision-makers get enamored by a specific technology, system, or report, instead of a specific process goal, decisions get made in service of the former instead of the latter. In an agile organization, the desired process is the lens that all decisions are made through.

4. Governed Quality Data

Agile organizations cannot make fast, confident decisions on data they do not trust. Without deliberate governance over how data enters a firm's ecosystem, how it is validated, and how its quality is maintained over time, even the most robust processes within the firm will produce unreliable outputs. In an agile organization, data governance is not a periodic audit function but a continuous discipline, with clear ownership, defined standards, and automated quality controls that catch issues at the point of ingestion and throughout the data lifecycle. This foundation is what allows leadership to make decisions quickly.

The Agile Approach

Improving organizational agility requires process engineering before technology deployment. Technology alone cannot overcome structural barriers to rapid change. The firms making the most progress are applying deliberate design principles to their organizational infrastructure.

Assess Your Firm's Organizational Agility

1. Decisioning

- How many stakeholders are involved in a network-wide process or technology change?
- How long did the last transformation take to complete from kickoff to business deployment complete?
- How often do initiatives stall due to conflicting priorities across member firms or leadership groups?
- How often do initiatives stall due to lack of budget?

2. Technology

- Does your firm have a centralized, consistent approach for deploying AI models and agents across the network?
- Does your firm share a common platform for key functions across member firms, or do member firms operate on independent systems?
- How long does it take to move from identifying a new technology-enabled process improvement to deploying it in production?
- Are new capabilities typically delivered through configuration of existing systems, or through new system builds and integrations?
- To what extent are your core systems already integrated and accessible for real-time data use?

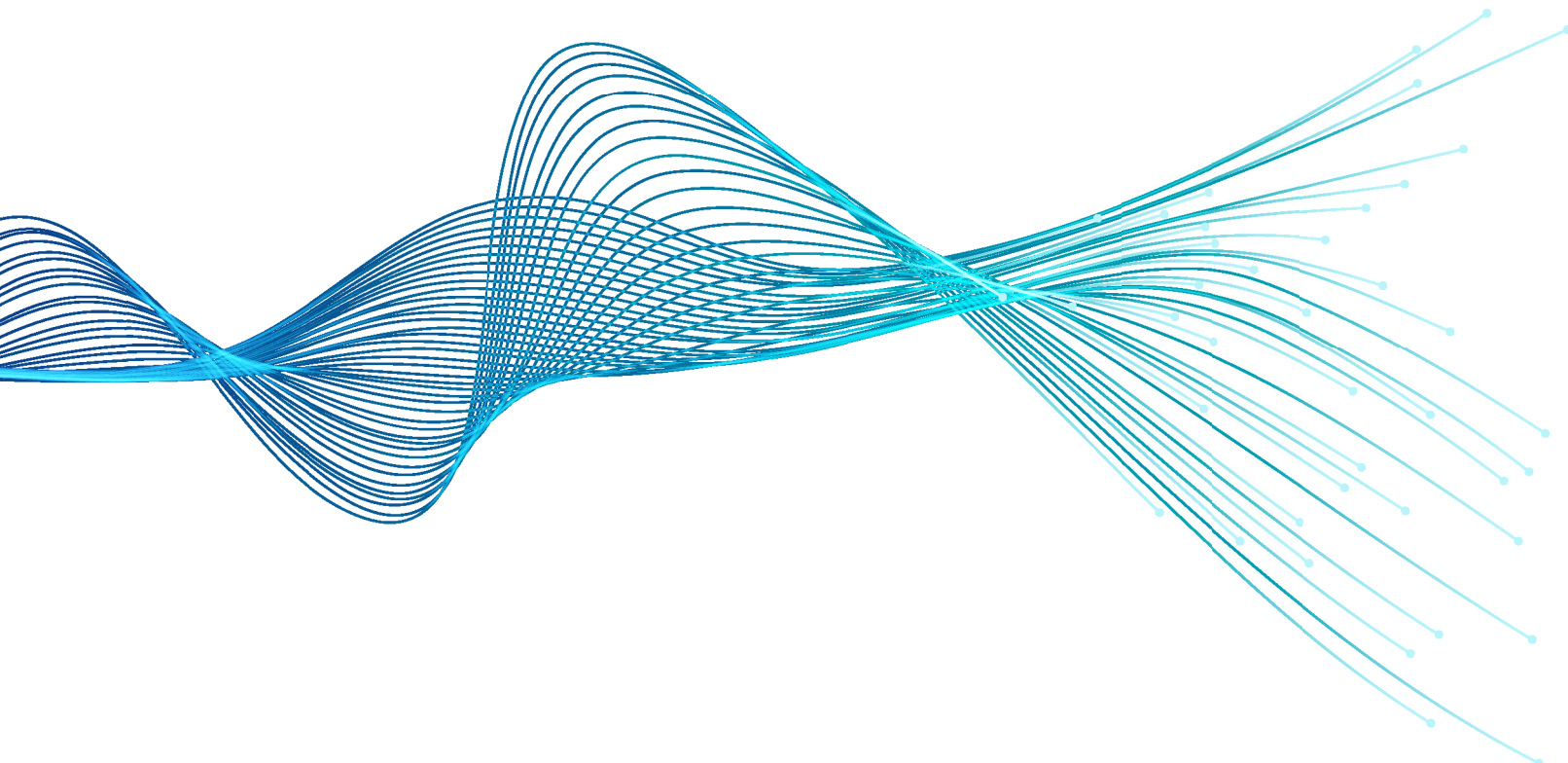
The Agile Approach - continued

Improving organizational agility requires process engineering before technology deployment. Technology alone cannot overcome structural barriers to rapid change. The firms making the most progress are applying deliberate design principles to their organizational infrastructure.

Assess Your Firm's Organizational Agility

3. Process Design

- What percentage of business process between the global network and its member firms are standardized? How many firms have unique process considerations?
- Do process improvement initiatives begin with clearly defined business outcomes, or are they driven by specific technology or vendor preferences?
- How frequently are processes updated or improved once deployed?
- During rollouts, do firms operate on legacy and new processes simultaneously for extended periods?



Conclusion

Kingland partners with many of the world's largest accounting networks to help build the organizational agility required to compete in a rapidly evolving landscape through our solutions and consulting. Our solutions enable faster decisioning and integrated AI orchestration, while our transformation consulting always drives towards a process-first approach, empowering firms to deploy change in months, not years, while maintaining the highest standards of quality.

We understand the accelerating pressures of AI adoption, the competitive landscape, and evolving regulatory expectations. The firms that will lead are those that can continuously adapt, integrate new capabilities, and demonstrate real-time quality management across their networks. Email outreach@kingland.com today to start the conversation.



Alex Olson
Partner, Executive Vice President
Alex.Olson@Kingland.com





Colin Ward
Senior Specialist
Colin.Ward@Kingland.com





Rich Huesken
Profession Strategy & Consultation
Rich.Huesken@Kingland.com

