

## Hey! What's New? 2025-104

### Soft Power in Finance — Why Influence Matters More than Accuracy

An opinion piece in *CFO*, written by Oreoluwa Onabowale, reveals why accuracy falls short without the crucial skill of translating numbers into influential insights that drive key business decisions. “Accuracy is overrated in finance. Influence is what changes outcomes. I did not always believe that, but experience taught me otherwise.”

Onabowale says he has delivered forecasts that proved correct down to the decimal, yet leadership pressed forward in a different direction. “By the time results landed as I had warned, the moment to act had passed. Accuracy earned me credibility, but it did not change the decision. The lesson was clear: Numbers rarely speak for themselves. Translation, timing and diplomacy often matter more.”

He notes that, another time, he raised a warning about margin erosion from a discount strategy. “The model was solid, the assumptions tested, the math bulletproof. But I brought it up in the middle of a crowded review. Commercial leaders were focused on closing year-end deals, the CFO was pushing to hit revenue targets and my point landed with a polite nod before the room moved on. Three months later, margins fell exactly as projected. I was right, but I had not influenced the outcome.”

Contrast that with a moment a few years later, he says. “Operations was proud of the new throughput gains, but I could see that product mix would eat away most of the benefit. Instead of waiting for the meeting, I sat down with the ops lead a week early. We walked through the numbers together and aligned on the story before it reached the table. When the review came, I did not raise the concern alone. The ops lead reinforced it in their own words, and leadership adjusted course immediately. The numbers had not changed, but the outcome had.”

The same principle plays out at the board level, Onabowale goes on to say. “I have been in reviews where the data clearly showed risk ahead, but the room did not need another model. It needed finance to frame the issue in an actionable way: ‘If we stay on this path, margins compress by 200 basis points, but if we accelerate sourcing negotiations, we recover half within the year.’ That framing turned a line item into a decision. Influence changed the direction of the conversation.”

According to Onabowale, influence is the real currency. “Soft power in finance does not mean bending the truth. It means ensuring the truth is understood and acted upon.” It comes down to three things:

1. **Translation.** “Every function speaks a different language: sales in bookings, ops in throughput, sourcing in inflation, product in mix.”
2. **Timing.** “Even the best analysis will be ignored if delivered in the wrong moment.”
3. **Diplomacy.** “Telling a leader that ‘Your plan will not work’ creates defensiveness, while asking ‘How will this affect sourcing savings?’ invites collaboration.”

Forecasting is also more political than we like to admit, Onabowale says. “Sales leans toward optimism, ops prefers conservatism and marketing pushes for spend. Everyone negotiates in numbers, and FP&A sits at the intersection. Rely on accuracy alone and finance becomes the referee, calling fouls but not shaping the game. Use influence, and finance becomes the coach, guiding assumptions, testing logic and helping the business balance ambition with realism.”

Read the article at [Soft power in finance — Why influence matters more than accuracy | CFO.com](#).