



Modernising the Mutual: Avoiding the £Million Mistake.

Building a mutual organisation that is fit for the future demands so much more than ‘plug and play’ technology.

In this paper we explore the vital steps required to avoid the pitfalls that often derail technology-led transformation efforts.



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Introduction: Avoiding the £Million Mistake

Slick sales presentations promise much and can add fuel to the burning platform that is legacy technology. They can sometimes give the impression that adoption and implementation is largely a matter of plug and play. Yet following such a path often leads to expensive mistakes.

In this whitepaper we outline two important steps that are often underplayed. By incorporating this thinking into transformational planning you ensure that the choices you make about technology are cost effective, sustainable and, crucially, strengthen (rather than undermine) the unique mutual brand customer relationship.

Step 1 - Shaping Your Change

What is right for your organisation? Getting to the heart of customer and colleague wants and needs demands a blend of business, technical and customer insight.

Technology-led transformation, if delivered with foresight and insight, promises to reinforce and redefine how a society delivers the mutual benefit to its members. But to navigate this complex path, leadership must move beyond the solution features list and towards a deeper alignment of operational intent and the art of the possible. Experience shows that two critical pillars of transformational success are frequently overlooked in the rush to transform.

By embedding these strategic lenses into your planning, you move from reactive purchasing to proactive design, ensuring investment in technology not only protects your bottom line but actively amplifies the unique mutual bond between your brand and its members.



Getting Close to the Core

There is an absolute imperative to get close to your customers and your colleagues. This isn't a superficial requirements gathering exercise; it is about understanding the art of the possible. Societies must scan the horizon for incoming technology – not just what is immediately available. They must also benchmark against the experiences members are having elsewhere across multiple service providers – not just those competitors within financial services.

This discovery phase is made significantly harder in the mutual sector because of the unique way in which the brand is viewed. Members don't just see you as a bank; they see a partnership and a heritage. Therefore, any new tech must enhance that bond, not erode it. The discovery process allows the organisation to understand what a new generation of customers expects from a mutual, building differentiation to support such expectations into the solution and future operating model.

Addressing the Human Technical Debt

Armed with this knowledge, attention must shift to the structural and cultural aspects of the transforming organisation. We often find that human technical debt – legacy thinking and a struggle to imagine life beyond the faster horse – is a greater barrier than the old COBOL code itself. Operational teams, often weighed down by day-to-day fixes, struggle to make time to think far enough ahead.

We believe that mutuals can bridge this gap by commissioning an independent, strategic, and future-focused view that is not tied to an existing provider. Someone that can deep-dive into the ghost in the machine i.e. those manual workarounds that staff have used for decades. By uncovering these, you ensure that you are not simply replicating old, redundant processes in a shiny new interface.



Success for mutuals is often hampered by 'human technical debt' — the cultural exhaustion that comes from years of managing legacy systems and over-stretched internal teams. When colleagues are forced to prioritise daily fixes over strategic modernisation, they naturally specify a 'faster horse' rather than a new way of working. Moving past this requires more than a software update; it demands a refresh of the organisation's strategic imagination.

By injecting independent, future-focused thinking, societies can move beyond 'replacing the plumbing' and start designing for the real benefits their members deserve. The worst case scenario is believing the customer will tolerate poor processes as long as they come wrapped in warm brand interactions.

IT colleagues, meanwhile, are often under-resourced or outsourced to the provider. This means there may be very little strategic focus. They have simply been cranking the handle and not driving a modernisation or transformation agenda, weighed down by day to day operational fixes.

With this in mind, attention must also be placed on training and empowering existing colleagues to embrace change, participate in it, and think more expansively beyond the old world of manual workaround.

A clear need exists to refresh and enhance the organisation's vision with an independent perspective to provide an unencumbered, strategic, future-focused view. This perspective then informs the scope and the shape of planned change.



Mapping Reality to Solution

With a combined knowledge of member expectations, colleague pain points and cultural readiness secured, possible solutions can then be mapped against wants, needs and realities.

This process also provides the opportunity to explore what the new generation of customers (and prospective customers) expect from a mutual relationship, ensuring that the requirements document doesn't become a theoretical wish list that no vendor can meet in practice.

Your selection must be grounded in implementation reality, ensuring that what is selected is actually buildable within the unique ecosystem of the UK mutual sector.

Buildability vs. Deliverability

While business change challenges are often well understood, the distinction between buildability and true deliverability is where we see many programmes falter.

There is no shortage of capable organisations that can design and build solutions, yet few of them take accountability for realising outcomes end-to-end, particularly where this extends beyond their core product development focus.

This accountability gap can often be the reason why transformation efforts lose momentum or fail to achieve their intended value. In Step 2 below, we set out the key components required to deliver end-to-end benefits from your transformation, ensuring that what is built is fully adopted, embedded, and realised in practice.



Step 2 - Getting Your Change Done

With clarity on customer and people wants, needs and expectations fully established, a cohesive and structured ecosystem of expertise must then be identified, assembled and orchestrated.

In discussions with organisations attempting technology-led transformation, we regularly hear reports of 'fragmentation fatigue' i.e. the challenge of knitting together multiple parties to get change done.

Each party's core activities are well understood, and expertise can on the face of it be easily found. Yet activities at the margins often create endless friction leading to delay, overspend and even failure.

Hiring an array of suppliers, with expertise in each component in isolation is therefore likely to lead to downstream challenges. Each may well provide glowing references and can clearly demonstrate 'paper' expertise. Yet the reality of getting efficient and effective change done demands something more; an ecosystem of suppliers, each comfortable with a partnership approach, orchestrated by a delivery partner embedded client-side.

Such a change ecosystem consists of four components:

Internal Expertise

Change cannot, and should never, be delivered entirely by external resources. Inside knowledge of what, how and who is a vital part of the change equation. It is also often the case that organisations have significant change expertise in-house. Assuming they can be freed up from delivering BAU and activities vital to keeping the lights on, they are crucial cogs in the change engine and should be factored into plans.



External Expertise

With up to 30 specific skills required to design, plan, deliver and land complex change, there will always be a need to fill gaps externally either through recruitment, engaging contractors or consultancy channels.

The 'Right Solution' and Vendor

In evaluating solutions, attention must be paid to the vendor as well as the product. It is important to identify a product that meets your needs, provided by a vendor who you can work with, without friction, for the long term.

Identifying the right product involves more than meets the eye. To what extent is the product's future roadmap identified? Is functionality real or promised? Will you, as purchaser, have any ability to influence future releases? Is the product likely to be phased out just over the horizon, or will it grow in a manner that makes future modification straightforward?

A Client-Side Delivery Partner

In this context, the term partner is used deliberately. Orchestrating each of the moving parts in the change engine requires a unique blend of skills, perspectives, and a relentless focus on delivering end-to-end benefits - not just building capability, but ensuring it translates into real, measurable outcomes.

In the mutual sector, where stakeholder alignment and member value are paramount, this responsibility becomes even more critical.



The relationship between the transforming organisation and the delivery partner must be truly 'shoulder to shoulder'. The partner's role is to hold the overarching, end-to-end view of value realisation, engaging the full range of stakeholders impacted by the change, aligning activity across the programme, and ensuring that what is built is effectively adopted, embedded, and sustained.

All of this requires clear accountability for outcomes, disciplined orchestration of dependencies, and consistent, honest communication such that the transforming organisation remains fully informed and confident that benefits will be realised in practice, not just designed on paper.

Conclusion: From Legacy Debt to Mutual Advantage

The path to transformation is paved with the risk of the '£million mistake', a trap set by the allure of plug-and-play promises and the gravity of legacy thinking. Avoiding this failure requires more than just a capital investment; it demands a fundamental shift in how change is approached.

Success is found at the intersection of technical foresight and human insight. By moving beyond superficial requirement-gathering, and investigating the 'ghost in the machine', organisations can strip away decades of manual workarounds and 'faster horse' mentalities. Only then can technology serve its true purpose: not merely replacing old solutions, but actively amplifying the unique, heritage-rich bond between a mutual brand and its members.

True differentiation in the financial services sector does not come from having the flashiest interface, but from ensuring that every digital touchpoint feels like a partnership. By addressing human technical debt, committing to a discovery phase that looks far beyond the horizon, and implementing right first time, you ensure your next investment is more than just a purchase; it is a sustainable foundation to serve the next generation of mutual members.



About Sagis and Partners in Change

This whitepaper has been written by Sagis Consulting and Partners in Change Consulting. Together, both organisations provide the suite of services and expertise necessary to help organisations design, plan, deliver and land change and transformation that is efficient, effective and sustainable.

Partners in Change Consulting



PiC is here to help organisations get change and transformation done. We work with many UK Financial Services brands, in particular in the Legacy Technology, Digital & Business Transformation, Assurance and Recovery spaces. We're proud of the feedback our customers give us and have been recognised by the Financial Times in both 2025 and 2026 as a leading consultancy.

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Sagis Consulting



Sagis bring a deep understanding of the mutual sector and the challenges it faces. We talk your language and assist in defining future solutions that allow you to focus your own specialist skills on creating value for your business. We create connections - connecting you with the right people and the right expertise, connecting you with the latest thinking and technical innovation. All with the clear aim of helping you to make the most of your business potential.

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