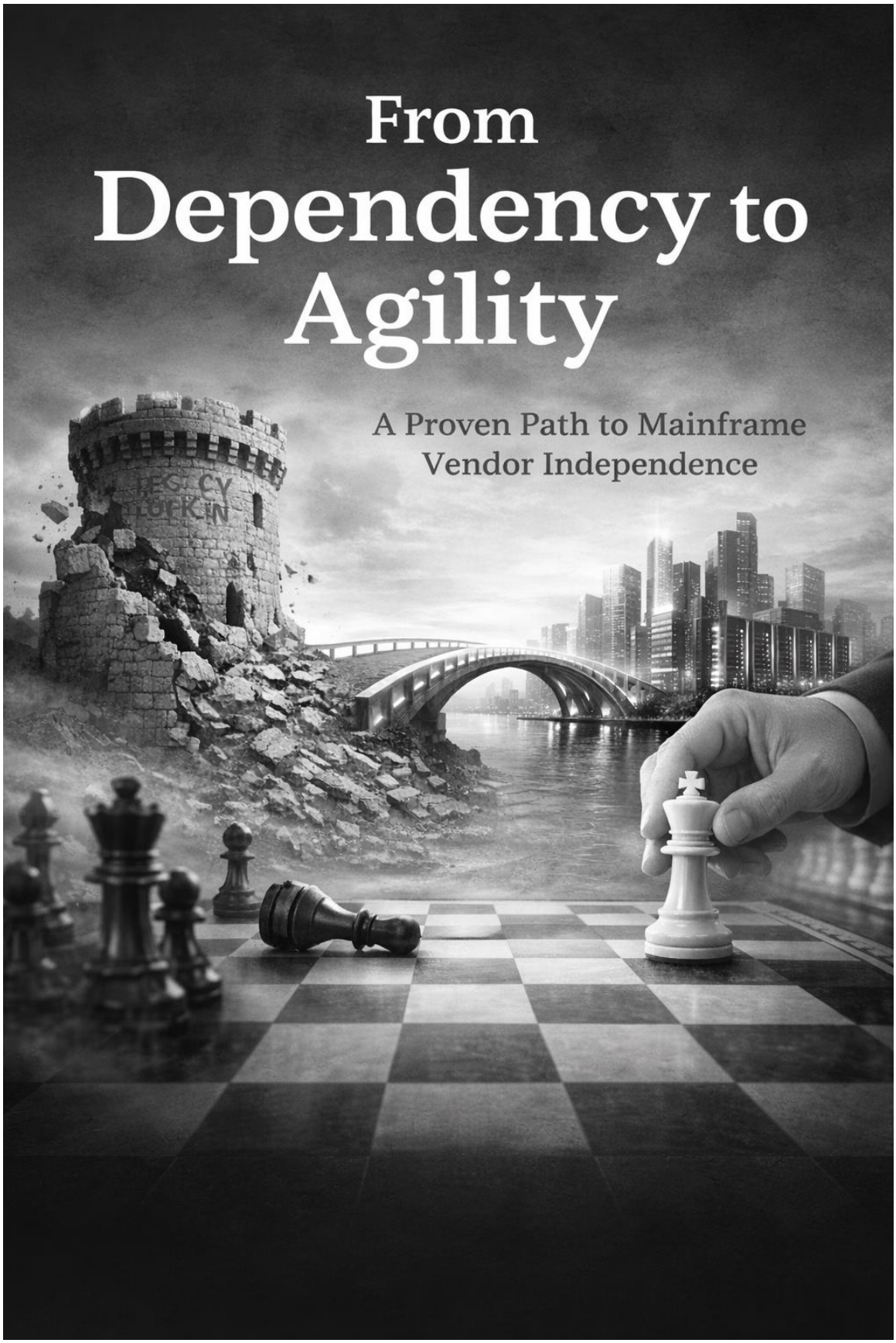
From Dependency to Agility

A Proven Path to Mainframe Vendor Independence



FROM DEPENDENCY TO AGILITY: A PROVEN PATH TO MAINFRAME VENDOR INDEPENDENCE

Strategies, lessons learned and execution models to help organizations modernize with confidence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the enterprise landscape, organizations are re-evaluating long-standing technology dependencies that can limit flexibility, increase costs and slow strategic change. Mainframe environments are no exception.

Despite common assumptions that legacy portfolios are too entrenched to transform quickly, our experience proves otherwise. By applying disciplined governance, clear prioritization and a speed-focused execution model, we successfully modernized a complex mainframe ecosystem on an accelerated timeline with minimal operational disruption.

This white paper presents the practical framework and measurable results that other organizations can apply to achieve similar results.

THE MARKET PROBLEM

Based on our observations across the enterprise market, some mainframe software vendors—not all—appear to be operating with a short-horizon pricing strategy. Rather than positioning for long-term customer growth on the platform, pricing models often seem designed to maximize near-term revenue, reflecting an assumption that the role of the mainframe may diminish over the next five to seven years.

As a result, rather than encouraging expanded usage, innovation and workload retention, this approach to pricing and product positioning can incentivize reduction, migration, or accelerated platform exit strategies, which manifest as risk for the customer in the form of the following:

- Overdependence on a single vendor
- Escalating costs
- Limited flexibility
- Complex product integrations

For customers, this creates a significant strategic tension, as many continue to rely on the mainframe for highly resilient, secure and business-critical workloads.

Increasingly, the question is no longer just about technology capability, it is about whether vendor economics align with the future customers are trying to build.

This dynamic is becoming a catalyst for change: enterprises are seeking partners, platforms and pricing structures that reward modernization rather than penalize it.

WHY ORGANIZATIONS DELAY CHANGE

Concern Over Outages and Stability

For many organizations, the mainframe remains the operational backbone of the enterprise, supporting critical business functions where downtime is unacceptable. As a result, even modest changes to core tooling can trigger significant concern from operational leaders, application teams and executive stakeholders. Organizations often worry that replacing deeply integrated software products could introduce instability, disrupt production workloads or create unforeseen operational risk. In highly regulated industries, these concerns are further amplified by compliance requirements and strict service-level expectations.

While those concerns are understandable, they frequently lead organizations to overestimate migration risk and underestimate the maturity of modern transition methodologies, testing frameworks and phased deployment approaches that can substantially reduce disruption.

Belief That Migrations Always Take Years

Many enterprises assume that large-scale mainframe product replacement initiatives inevitably require multi-year programs with high cost, complexity and organizational fatigue. This perception is often shaped by historical modernization efforts that lacked clear prioritization, executive alignment and repeatable execution models. As a result, organizations frequently delay action because the scope appears too daunting to begin.

In practice, however, focused transformation programs, supported by disciplined governance and well-defined migration factories, can progress far more rapidly than traditional assumptions suggest. By sequencing quick wins, standardizing conversion activities and removing decision bottlenecks early, organizations can significantly compress timelines while maintaining operational control.

Lack of Internal Bandwidth

Even when leadership recognizes the need for change, many organizations struggle to dedicate the internal resources required to drive transformation effort. Mainframe teams are often operating at full capacity, balancing production support, audits, upgrades and ongoing operational demands. Subject matter experts frequently carry decades of institutional knowledge with limited redundancy, making it difficult to reallocate them to strategic initiatives.

As a result, transformation programs are often deprioritized in favor of immediate operational needs.

Successful organizations address this challenge by establishing dedicated workstreams, augmenting internal teams with specialized expertise where necessary, and implementing governance models that protect transformation resources from routine operational interruption.

Unclear Dependencies

Over time, mainframe environments often evolve into highly interconnected ecosystems, with thousands of jobs, scripts, integrations, automation routines and application dependencies spanning multiple business units. In many organizations, documentation is incomplete, outdated or fragmented across teams. This creates uncertainty around which products are actively used, how they are integrated and what downstream impacts a replacement effort might introduce.

The fear of “unknown unknowns” can become a significant barrier to action. However, organizations that invest early in discovery, dependency mapping and usage analysis often find their environments are more manageable than initially assumed. A structured assessment phase can quickly transform uncertainty into actionable insights, enabling more confident and informed planning.

Renewal Appears Easier Than Transformation

At renewal time, organizations are often faced with a difficult choice: undertake a transformation initiative or renew existing agreements and defer change. In the short term, renewal can appear operationally safer, organizationally simpler and easier to justify under pressure. Transformation requires planning, coordination and executive sponsorship, while renewal offers immediate continuity with minimal disruption.

However, repeated deferrals can compound long-term cost, deepen vendor dependency and limit strategic flexibility over time. Many organizations ultimately recognize that while renewal addresses the immediate challenge, it often postpones – rather than resolves – the underlying business problem.

Fear of Change
Beyond technical considerations, organizational change itself can become a significant barrier. Teams may be concerned about learning new tools, adjusting operational processes or disrupting long-established workflows that have been stable for years. Leadership may also anticipate stakeholder resistance or apprehension from business units that depend on existing systems. In some cases, prior transformation failures contribute to institutional skepticism toward large-scale modernization efforts.

These human factors are often underestimated yet they can materially influence program momentum and outcomes. Organizations that successfully navigate transformation typically address change management as a core workstream, emphasizing clear communication, targeted training, executive visibility and measurable milestones that build confidence and alignment throughout the journey.

DOES THIS APPLY TO YOU

Many organizations recognize the need for change well before formally launching a transformation initiative. In some cases, the trigger is financial. In others, it stems from a need for greater operational flexibility, pressure to modernize or concern about long-term alignment with strategic vendors. Regardless of the starting point, organizations evaluating their future mainframe strategy often encounter a common set of warning signs.

Concerned About Renewal Costs?
For many enterprises, software renewal cycles have become increasingly difficult to forecast and justify. Rising licensing costs, evolving pricing models, and limited commercial flexibility can put significant pressure on already constrained technology budgets. As a result, organizations are allocating an increasing share of their operational budgets to maintaining existing tools rather than investing in modernization, automation or innovation initiatives.

If renewal discussions are consistently expanding into broader strategic conversations within your organization, it may be time to evaluate whether the current commercial model aligns with your long-term objectives.

Too Dependent on One Supplier?
Vendor concentration risk is an increasing concern across enterprise technology environments, including the mainframe. When a significant portion of operational tooling, such as automation, observability, scheduling or security functions, rely heavily on a single supplier, organizations can lose flexibility in both technology direction and commercial negotiations.

Overdependence may also limit agility when responding to evolving business priorities or modernization initiatives. As a result, many organizations are prioritizing more balanced ecosystems that provide greater optionality, stronger competitive leverage and the ability to evolve their environments on their own terms.

Need Budget Savings?
Technology leaders face constant pressure to optimize spending while maintaining support for mission-critical operations. As a result, many organizations are reassessing long-standing software portfolios to identify opportunities for consolidation, rationalization or replacement.

In some environments, overlapping capabilities, underutilized tooling and legacy licensing structures present clear opportunities for cost optimization without compromising operational stability. Organizations that take a strategic approach to transformation often discover that modernization and cost reduction can be achieved simultaneously, rather than treated as competing priorities.

Need Faster Modernization?

Business expectations around speed, automation and service delivery continue to accelerate, placing increased pressure on infrastructure and operations teams to modernize faster than traditional enterprise timelines once allowed. However, organizations constrained by rigid tooling models or highly complex vendor ecosystems may struggle to keep pace with evolving business demands.

Accelerating modernization is no longer solely about technology replacement—it is about enabling faster decision-making, reducing operational friction and creating an environment that can continuously adapt. Organizations seeking greater agility are increasingly re-evaluating whether their current software ecosystems support, or hinder, that objective.

OUR TRANSFORMATION STORY

Our transformation initiative began within one of the most complex operational environments in the industry: three large-scale enterprise mainframe environments exceeding 25,000 million instruction per second and supporting approximately 75,000 end users, including the nation's largest claim processing operation.

Over time, these environments developed extensive operational dependencies on CA/Broadcom product suites, including significant automation, scheduling, operational integration and supporting workflows deeply embedded across the enterprise. Like many organizations, we initially encountered industry assumptions that replacing such a broad and interconnected product footprint would require an 18-to-24-month effort, along with substantial operational risk.

Despite those assumptions, we believed a different outcome was possible.

Rather than approaching the effort as a traditional, long-duration modernization program, we structured the initiative around accelerated execution, disciplined governance and clear operational prioritization. The focus extended beyond simple product replacement to include continuity of service, preserving critical business operations and maintaining confidence among both technical and executive stakeholders throughout the process.

The scope of the effort included fully replacing major portions of the legacy CA/Broadcom software ecosystem with alternative vendor solutions across multiple operational domains. This required coordinated migration of automation processes, integration points, operational procedures and supporting workflows that had evolved over many years within highly complex production environments.

Through strong executive sponsorship, rigorous program management, dedicated engineering alignment and aggressive decision velocity, the organization successfully completed full environmental migration in less than seven months—dramatically faster than prevailing industry expectations. Importantly, this accelerated timeline was achieved with minimal operational disruption and without compromising the stability of mission-critical workloads.

The outcomes extended well beyond timeline acceleration. The replacement platforms delivered capabilities that met or exceeded those of the prior environment while also improving operational flexibility and better positioning the organization for future modernization initiatives.

In addition, the transformation generated significant financial impact, with projected cost reductions approaching $100 million through licensing optimization, vendor diversification and long-term operational efficiencies.

Most importantly, the initiative demonstrated that large-scale mainframe software transformation does not need to follow the traditional assumptions of multi-year timelines, excessive disruption or unavoidable operational risk. With the right execution model, governance structure and organizational alignment, enterprises can move significantly faster than the industry often believes possible.

Results Achieved

- All CA/Broadcom products replaced
- Cost reduction of approximately $100 million
- Accelerated timeline
- Zero severity 1 incidents
- Reduced vendor concentration and dependency

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

One of the most common assumptions surrounding large-scale mainframe product replacement initiatives is that they inherently require 18–24 months, or longer, to execute successfully. Our experience proved otherwise.

By combining disciplined governance, focused execution and strong organizational alignment, we accelerated a highly complex transformation into an approximately six-to-seven-month delivery window while maintaining operational stability. The following factors were instrumental to that success.

Executive Sponsorship
Transformation efforts of this scale require visible, sustained executive sponsorship. Strong leadership alignment ensured that the initiative remained a clear strategic priority across organizational boundaries and prevented competing operational demands from slowing momentum. Executive engagement also accelerated issue resolution, reinforced accountability and created the organizational confidence necessary to move quickly. Without this level of sponsorship, transformation programs often lose speed as priorities shift and critical decisions are delayed.

Strong Project Management Office (PMO) Discipline
A highly disciplined program management structure was critical to maintaining execution velocity. The initiative operated with clearly defined milestones, explicit ownership, aggressive issue tracking and continuous status visibility across all workstreams. Rather than allowing activities to progress in silos, the PMO established a centralized operational cadence that maintained alignment and ensured dependencies remained transparent. This level of coordination enabled rapid escalation and resolution of issues before they could materially impact timelines.

Accurate Inventory
A successful transformation begins with a detailed understanding of the environment. Establishing a comprehensive inventory of products, integrations, automation routines, dependencies and business owners provided the foundation for informed decision-making and effective migration sequencing. Early investment in discovery activities significantly reduced uncertainty later in the program and allowed teams to prioritize high-impact areas with greater precision. While organizations often delay transformation due to perceived environmental complexity, disciplined inventory analysis can quickly translate that complexity into structured, manageable execution plans.

Subject Matter Expert (SME) Alignment
SME alignment across infrastructure, operations, application support, security and engineering teams was essential to maintaining speed and stability. Transformation initiatives frequently stall when SMEs operate in silos or when responsibilities are unclear. Our approach emphasized early engagement, clearly defined ownership and continuous collaboration between technical teams and program leadership. This alignment reduced rework, accelerated troubleshooting and increased confidence throughout the migration process.

Fast Decisions
Speed requires decision velocity. One of the primary sources of delay in enterprise transformation programs is prolonged decision-making around architecture, prioritization, risk acceptance and execution sequencing. Establishing clear governance structures and empowered leadership teams enabled rapid decision cycles throughout the program. Decisions that might traditionally take weeks were often resolved within days, or even hours, allowing execution teams to maintain momentum and avoid operational stagnation.

Testing Rigor
Accelerated delivery does not eliminate the need for rigorous testing. In fact, compressed timelines increases the importance of structured validation processes. Comprehensive testing strategies, including parallel validation, automation where possible, regression testing and operational simulation, were critical to reducing risk during migration activities. Testing was treated as a continuous operational discipline rather than a final project phase, enabling issues to be identified and resolved early, before broader deployment.

Communication Plan
Consistent communication across executive leadership, operational teams, application owners and stakeholders played a major role in maintaining organizational alignment throughout the initiative. Transparent communication reduced uncertainty, reinforced confidence in the program and minimized resistance to change. Regular status reporting, clearly defined escalation channels, migration readiness reviews and ongoing stakeholder updates ensured that all parties understood timelines, risks, responsibilities and progress. Ultimately, effective communication transformed the effort from an isolated technical initiative into a coordinated enterprise-wide program.

BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY FROM DEPENDENCY TO AGILITY

Organizations no longer need to assume that mainframe transformation must take years, introduce excessive operational risk or remain financially out of reach. With the right strategy, governance model and execution approach, enterprises can modernize their mainframe software ecosystem more quickly and safely than many believe possible.

Our experience shows that successful transformation is not simply about replacing products, it is about restoring flexibility, improving commercial alignment, reducing concentration risk and enabling the mainframe to remain a strategic platform for the future.

We help enterprises assess, prioritize and execute accelerated mainframe vendor transformation initiatives with a disciplined focus on operational stability, governance and measurable business outcomes. From portfolio assessments and migration planning to execution management and stabilization, we provide practical, experience-based guidance built from real-world delivery.

Whether your organization is preparing for a renewal cycle, evaluating modernization opportunities or seeking greater vendor flexibility, now is the time to build a strategy aligned to your future, not your constraints.

Contact Us for a Mainframe Independence Assessment

A Mainframe Independence Assessment can help your organization:

- Identify areas of vendor concentration risk.
- Evaluate modernization and replacement opportunities.
- Prioritize high-value transformation initiatives.
- Develop an actionable migration roadmap.
- Establish a governance and execution framework designed for speed and stability.

The journey from dependency to agility begins with understanding your options.