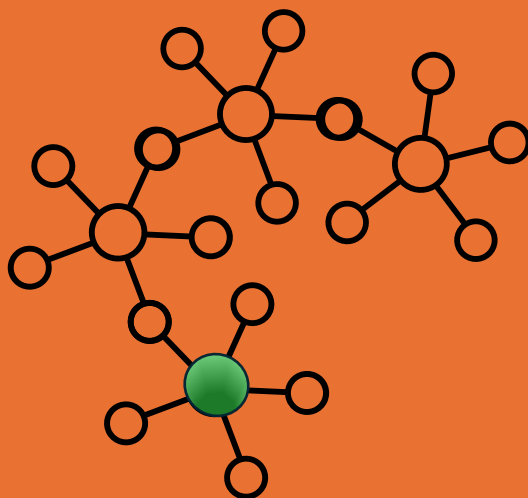


The Modern Association Playbook

Reimagining Strategy, Governance, and Value Creation



Sean M Johnson

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For Nancy and Chasely

Preface

This book is the result of years of work, hard-won insight, and a belief that associations deserve more than inherited structures, tired strategies, and static governance. It is written for leaders who know their organisation holds more potential than it is currently realising.

The Modern Association Playbook brings together some of the most powerful ideas in economics and governance. It draws on theories such as platform economics, transaction cost theory, institutional design, and the economics of the commons. These models have shaped how businesses think and operate for decades, yet their application to associations has remained limited, often hidden behind academic language or confined to commercial contexts.

This book changes that. It translates those theories into practical tools for associations. It is both diagnostic and directional. It helps leaders understand where they are and supports them in navigating toward something stronger, more adaptive, and more relevant.

Above all, this is a response to what I have heard across boardrooms. A shared frustration with models that no longer match the complexity or ambition of the world around us. I have written this for association Chairs and CEOs, for Company Secretaries, for governance professionals, and for anyone shaping policy, services, and member value in an era defined by uncertainty and increasing demands.

This is a playbook in the truest sense. It is not prescriptive. It is practical. It offers strategy without jargon, governance without inertia, and a vision of leadership that is bold, future-focused, and grounded in purpose.

If you are ready to challenge convention and design something better, this book is your invitation.

Sean M Johnson

Disclosure

This book reflects the synthesis of extensive professional experience, original intellectual frameworks, and a commitment to supporting associations as they navigate change. The author acknowledges the support of a range of digital research and writing tools that assisted in shaping, editing, and refining the manuscript. These include artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT (OpenAI), and Perplexity based AI models, which were used under human supervision to support research collation, enhance clarity, and streamline editing processes and generate pictures.

All ideas, analysis, and frameworks presented in this book remain the intellectual property of the author. No generative tool was used to substitute for professional judgement, theoretical development, or the original articulation of concepts central to this work. Care has been taken to critically assess, adapt, and validate any content derived from digital assistance to ensure it reflects the strategic, legal, and governance standards expected of a professional publication.

Where third-party material or references have been used, they have been cited in the Bibliography. All case studies are either based on publicly available information, used with permission, or anonymised and adapted for illustrative purposes.

This book was independently published by Lakefield Drive Pty Ltd, with editorial direction and publication design overseen by the author.

Note on Sources

This playbook synthesises concepts from a wide range of governance, economic, and platform design literature. While the text is original, it draws conceptually on the work of authors such as Elinor Ostrom, Oliver Williamson, Ronald Coase, Jean Tirole, ISO 37000 governance standards, and others. A complete reference list is provided at the end of the book. Specific diagnostic tools and strategic models have been developed by the author unless otherwise stated.

Structure of the Book

From Membership to Orchestration

Associations stand at a crossroads. Once central to professional development and sector coordination, many now face a stark choice: evolve or risk irrelevance.

The traditional model, built on annual dues, fixed benefits, and scheduled events, was designed for a time of institutional authority and limited information. That time has passed. Today, professionals engage in real time through decentralised, peer-driven platforms that offer value without formal membership.

This is not a temporary disruption. It reflects deeper structural change. As outlined in *Chapter 0*, associations are being reshaped by forces such as declining trust, skills disruption, distributed innovation, and the collapse of information scarcity.

The question is no longer whether associations matter, but how they stay relevant in a platform-enabled world.

Why Platform Thinking?

This playbook introduces platform thinking as a strategic response. It positions associations not just as service providers, but as value enablers, hosting ecosystems of learning, collaboration, and innovation.

This shift is structural and philosophical:

- From services to **orchestration**
- From internal delivery to **ecosystem impact**
- From static models to **networked participation**

At its heart is a generative question:

What if an association's primary role was to enable others to create value, ethically, inclusively, and at scale?

The Role of the APSF

The **Association Platform Success Framework** anchors this playbook. It integrates three core pillars:

1. **Data, Technology, and Security**, Build trust, insight, and interoperability
2. **Strategic Pathways**, Align participation, revenue, and service design
3. **Governance and Leadership**, Support complexity, inclusion, and adaptive decision-making

Each chapter unpacks these pillars with applied tools for transformation.

Book Structure

Part	Title	Core Focus
I	The Shift	Structural drivers of change and the case for platform thinking
II	The Case for Platform Thinking	Reframing associations as orchestrators of value
III	The Roadmap to Becoming a Platform-Based Association	Tools for business models, participation, and monetisation
IV	Digital Transformation and Governance	Infrastructure, insight, and agile governance
V	Implementation and Capability	Building strategic culture and leadership readiness
VI	Implementation and Measuring Success	Metrics, scorecards, and ecosystem evaluation
VII	Tools for Change	Diagnostic tools, implementation guides, and scenario frameworks

A Method, Not a Model

This playbook offers a **method**, not a formula, designed to help associations design, govern, and evolve with clarity and purpose in an era of complexity.

About the Author

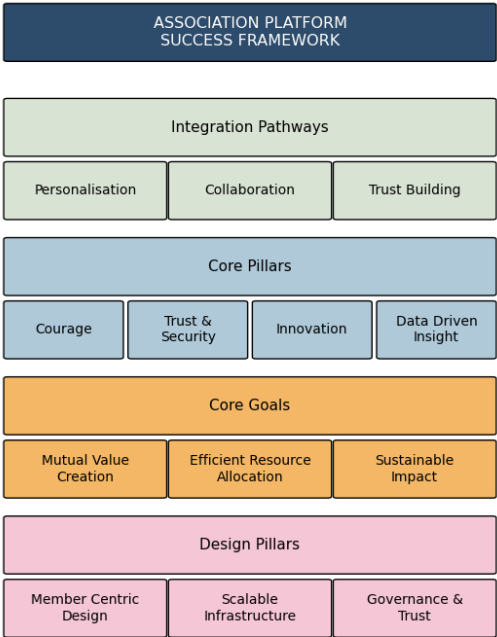
Sean M Johnson is a governance advisor, strategy consultant and researcher, with an extensive career spanning law, policy, education, and digital transformation. He has worked with national associations, not-for-profit boards, professional bodies, regulators and industry peak organisations to rethink governance, develop future-focused strategy, and implement change with impact.

A Fellow of the Governance Institute of Australia, Sean combines practical boardroom experience with deep expertise in risk, regulation, and strategic innovation. His approach is grounded in a wide theory lens, grounded in systems thinking, complex adaptive systems thinking and informed by real-world practice.

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Figure 1.1 The Association Platform Success Framework



Part I. The Shift

The journey to platform-driven success begins with understanding the shifting landscape in which associations operate. In this section we outline some of the macro level drivers of transformation. These lay the base for why associations should be commencing a strategic journey of transformation.

Chapter 1. Shift Happens when Structures Change

Associations are not dying; they are being reborn. But only those who transform from institutions of provision to engines of participation will thrive in the platform era.

Standing at the Inflection Point

The associations of today are approaching a strategic inflection point. For decades, many associations have operated on relatively stable institutional models, member lists, committee structures, conferences, journals, and a blend of advocacy and service delivery. But those foundations are shifting.

The evidence is mounting across technological disruption, workplace decentralisation, societal re-prioritisation, and an evolving skills economy that are reshaping the assumptions upon which associations were built. This chapter lays out seven structural shifts transforming the environment in which associations must operate, what can be referred to as the *Platform Era Shifts*. These shifts are not temporary, they represent the new ground upon which all future strategy must be constructed.

The changes:

1. From Belonging to Utility (and Back Again)
2. The Collapse of Information Scarcity
3. Innovation is Now Distributed
4. The Skills Economy is Fracturing
5. Work is Decentralising
6. Ecosystem Value is the New Competitive Advantage
7. Trust Must Be Rebuilt from Within.

From Belonging to Utility (and Back Again)

The social contract between members and associations is evolving. The historical rationale, professional solidarity, shared norms, and status through affiliation, is being nudged towards more instrumental logics of value. Members are asking:

- *What do I get for my fee?*
- *Can I access what I need when I need it?*
- *Is this community actively helping me grow?*

Yet at the same time, the need for belonging is resurging, especially post-COVID. The pandemic accelerated not only digital transformation but also a widespread re-evaluation of human connection and community. As physical isolation, remote work, and digital fatigue set in, individuals began to seek out more meaningful and values-aligned spaces where they could feel part of something bigger than themselves. This has reignited interest in trusted

communities of practice, cause-oriented affiliations, and networks that offer psychological safety and shared purpose.

Associations, long positioned as stewards of professional identity and sector-wide coherence, are uniquely placed to meet this renewed appetite for connection, but only if they adapt. Belonging can no longer be assumed; it must be actively cultivated through inclusive governance, co-designed experiences, and engagement structures that reflect the lived realities of members. The future of belonging is participatory, contextual, and dynamic.

Associations must now straddle both demands:

- Relational depth and transactional clarity,
- Shared identity and personalised services.

This is not a pendulum, it's a continuum of engagement logic.

The 2024 Member Value Studies (e.g. MCI, ASAE) show rising member churn among younger cohorts unless continuous, visible value is delivered. Generational research (McCrindle, Deloitte) indicates trust in traditional institutions is waning, but affinity for peer networks and causes is increasing.

The Collapse of Information Scarcity

Information is no longer a scarce asset. Platforms, AI, and open access tools have driven search and discovery costs toward zero. This fundamentally undermines the historical value proposition of many associations built around:

- Journals and gated publications,
- Expert lists,
- Exclusive access to updates or tools.

Curation, interpretation, and community validation now matter more than ownership of content. Associations must become context enablers, not just content distributors.

The 2023 World Economic Forum data show 80% of professionals use generative AI for knowledge tasks, with accelerating uptake in legal, education, and health sectors. The rise of Stack Overflow, Substack, and LinkedIn Learning as real-time, networked knowledge systems reflects this shift.

Innovation disrupted

Innovation has decentralised. It no longer relies solely on startups or top-down institutional breakthroughs. According to Eric von Hippel's theory of user innovation, solutions are increasingly co-created by frontline users, peers, and micro-networks.

Associations that historically defined themselves as solution providers must now become solution enablers. The role is to foster:

- Open collaboration,
- Shared infrastructure,
- Supportive IP frameworks,
- Participatory experimentation.

There are numerous case studies from open science, global health (e.g. COVID-19 research consortia), and citizen-led innovation (e.g. maker labs, design jams, policy labs) supporting these shifts. The research from MIT Sloan and the OECD confirms increasing returns from participatory design vs centralised R&D in professional fields.

The Skills Economy is Fracturing

By 2030, now less than five years away, the majority of core workplace skills will have shifted. The World Economic Forum, LinkedIn, and McKinsey all forecast skill obsolescence of 30–50% across most knowledge jobs.

Core 2030 skills include:

- AI and big data,
- Systems thinking,
- Emotional intelligence,
- Curiosity and lifelong learning,
- Resilience, flexibility, and ethical reasoning.

Associations must act now to become the platform through which skills are developed, refreshed, and recognised, not in siloes, but across networks.

Figure 1.1 The WEF *Future of Jobs Report* (2024) shows recent and well publicised shifts expected in the work requirements through to 2030. 44% of workers' core skills expected to change by 2028. Lepaya and McKinsey studies warn organisations that fail to embed continuous learning risk losing productivity and innovation capability.

Work Is Decentralising

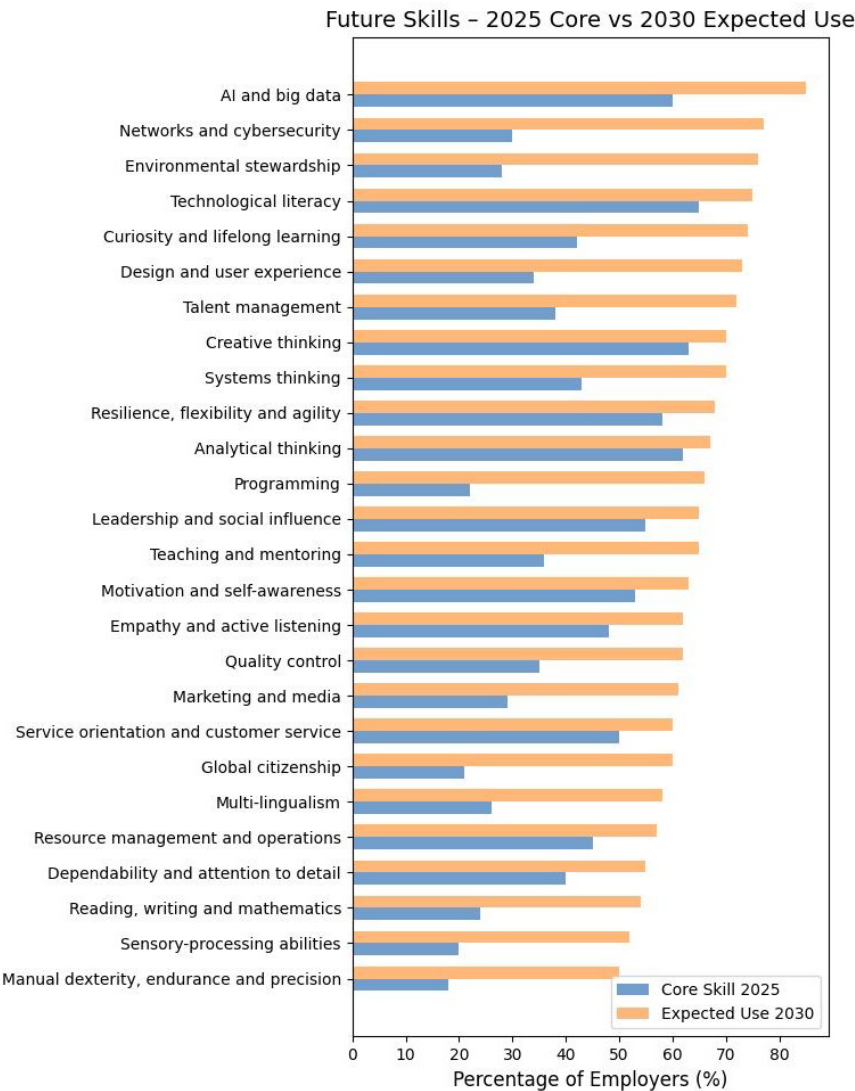
We are moving from workplace to work-networks. The rigid, centralised office model is giving way to:

- Hybrid collaboration,
- Autonomous project teams,
- Peer-led initiatives.

Governance, culture, and strategic leadership models must adapt. Associations should model networked governance internally to maintain legitimacy and relevance externally.

The Accenture and PwC research finds that over 60% of knowledge workers prefer hybrid or distributed work models. Academic studies (Oxford, Cambridge, Washington) confirm self-managed teams outperform traditional ones in engagement, retention, and innovation.

Figure 1.1 *Share Of Employers Considering as a Core Skill - 2025 v 2030 (%)*



Data Source: World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Survey 2024.

The message is pretty clear, what we have been doing is not good for the future.

Ecosystem Value is the New Competitive Advantage

Organisations are shifting from siloed competition to ecosystem collaboration. Association relevance is increasingly determined not by what it owns or controls, but by:

- The partnerships it sustains,
- The value it enables,
- The problems it convenes people to solve.

This demands new operating models, value metrics, and trust infrastructure.

Deloitte (2023) found that 71% of CEOs see ecosystem collaboration as critical to long-term growth. Australian Red Cross, ACFID, Engineers Australia all demonstrate high-impact, ecosystem-enabled transformation.

Trust Must Be Rebuilt from Within

In an era of declining institutional trust, legitimacy is no longer conferred by status, it must be earned through behaviour. Associations can no longer rely on historical credibility or sectoral dominance. Instead, trust must be continually renewed through transparency, reciprocity, and responsiveness.

This demands that associations actively:

- Govern data ethically and with clear consent frameworks;
- Embed participatory practices in policy development, program design, and governance;
- Reframe power and representation to reflect the lived realities and diverse voices of their evolving membership.

Strategic governance is now a matter of legitimacy stewardship.

The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer showed that while NGOs and professional bodies continued to score above business and government in overall trust, this standing was fragile among Gen Z and young professionals, who increasingly seek demonstrable values alignment, ethical purpose, and accountability beyond rhetoric.

By 2025, the global picture had darkened further. Edelman reported a broad collapse in trust, with the global average falling below 50 and 70% of people believing that business, government, and media leaders actively mislead the public. Australia slipped into the “distrust” category, with more than 60% of respondents expressing grievance-based disaffection, believing institutions serve the powerful rather than the public. This represents not just a reputational risk, it is a governance crisis in the making.

Against this backdrop, the guidance embedded in ISO 37000 (Governance of Organisations) becomes even more urgent. It identifies:

- Ethical purpose,
- Stakeholder inclusion, and
- Adaptive accountability as cornerstones of governance fit for the complexity and pluralism of modern institutions.

Associations must reorient their governance frameworks to build trust by design, through inclusive decision-making, open reporting, and ethical infrastructure that aligns with both community expectations and organisational integrity.

Conclusion: The Strategic Mandate for Associations

To respond effectively, associations must:

- Rethink identity: from provider to platform
- Reframe governance: from compliance to strategic stewardship
- Rebuild infrastructure: from siloed systems to interoperable networks
- Redefine value: from internal delivery to ecosystem impact

This is not about following trends. It is about future-proofing purpose.

The question is no longer *whether* change is needed. It is *how* associations will lead it.

Chapter 1 begins that journey by tracing the evolution from Association 1.0 to 2.0, and setting the stage for bold, deliberate, and platform-enabled transformation.

Part II: The Case for Platform Thinking

The journey toward platform-enabled success begins with understanding the changing environment in which associations now operate. This section provides the strategic foundation for what follows, exploring the rise of platform models and their growing influence across every sector, from learning and advocacy to commerce and professional services.

Platform thinking offers associations a new way to organise value, foster engagement, and build sustainable impact. It reframes the association's role, not simply as a service provider, but as a convener and enabler of ecosystems.

In these chapters, we examine the key drivers of digital transformation, the evolution of member expectations, and the shifting economics of participation. Together, they establish why platform thinking is not just relevant, but essential.

This section sets the stage for the introduction of the *Association Platform Success Framework* and provides the context leaders need to rethink their strategy, structure, and purpose in a platform-shaped world.

Chapter 2.

From Legacy to Leverage

Example 1. The Wake-Up Call¹

Following the board's strategy retreat and with the review of the Edelman Trust data, the urgency of change felt real. This morning, Claire Evans, CEO of the Professional Network Association, gathered her executive team for a focused conversation.

"We're doing everything we've always done, and better, so we think - networking events, quarterly magazines, even the annual conference - but the members want more," the CEO, Claire Evans begins.

Heads nod around the table.

The marketing director adds, "We've tried to launch a community app, but uptake is slow. Our website can't keep pace with the tools people are used to. Every pivot feels like patchwork."

Beneath the surface, a shared anxiety lingers; how to meet evolving member expectations in a digital-first world. The challenge isn't just technology; it's fundamentally rethinking how value is delivered. And time is running out.

The Strategic Imperative for Change

As outlined in Chapter 1, associations today stand at the convergence of multiple structural shifts, from the collapse of information scarcity to the decentralisation of work and the erosion of institutional trust. These are not transient disruptions; they are foundational reconfigurations of the environment in which associations operate. The assumptions that once made the traditional association model stable and successful have eroded. What worked reliably in the 20th century, centralised service delivery, exclusive content, and uniform membership tiers, now delivers diminishing returns in a world of digital abundance, diversified professional identities, and dynamic ecosystems.

The challenge facing association boards and executives is no longer *whether* to change, but *how quickly* they can lead that change, and in which direction.

This chapter marks the shift from diagnosis to strategy. Where Chapter 1 explored the forces reshaping the terrain, this chapter begins to define the strategic response: a decisive

¹ Throughout the book we use fictional vignettes to demonstrate application of concepts. Most are based on real cases and some are developed to demonstrate the concepts.

pivot from Association 1.0, built for predictability and control, to Association 2.0, designed for adaptability, co-creation, and ecosystem enablement.

In this new landscape, members are not passive recipients of benefits, they are collaborators, contributors, and co-creators. They do not compare their experience to other associations, but to the seamless personalisation of Netflix, the relevance of LinkedIn, and the immediacy of Slack. Associations that meet these expectations are not merely digitising services; they are reimagining value creation altogether.

The strategic imperative, then, is clear: to move beyond legacy models and embrace a platform-based approach that enables interaction, participation, and sustained relevance.

Association 2.0 is not a technology upgrade or a communications refresh. It is a transformation in how associations think, operate, and govern, anchored in platform economics, adaptive governance, and shared value. The remainder of this chapter sets out the contours of this new model and introduces the mindset and design principles needed to realise it.

Association 1.0

The word “association” in this context refers to a broad spectrum of professional bodies, industry groups, community-based organisations, unions, and not-for-profits organisations. Each entity has a distinct history and purpose, yet they share a foundational goal: to serve their members or their target client base, through services, professional support, advocacy, and network-building.

Over the decades, many associations have embodied what we might call “Association 1.0.” This traditional model, though it continues to evolve, was built for stability. Its governance structures are largely hierarchical and top-down, with decision-making resting in boards or committees that convene periodically. Services follow a transactional pattern, offering a bundle of benefits, annual conferences, printed journals, and professional certifications, in a one-size-fits-all manner.

Predictability is the hallmark of Association 1.0. Membership often defined by little more than paying dues and receiving a set of standard entitlements. Engagement, rather than being continuous, revolves around an annual cycle of digital newsletters, events, and limited networking opportunities. Members rely on their association as gatekeepers to industry knowledge and career development.

Financial sustainability under Association 1.0 hinges heavily on membership fees, supplemented by sponsorships, advertising revenue, and event income. This approach was effective when members had few alternatives, and associations enjoyed considerable influence. However, with the advent of online platforms, open-access research, and digital professional networks, these ‘bread and butter’ revenue streams face intense pressure.

Another characteristic of Association 1.0 is its insular design. Traditionally, such organisations were built around discipline-focused silos, with minimal external partnerships. While this created strong professional identities, it also made them slow to adapt to broader shifts, be they technological, economic, or societal. In a landscape where professionals can easily access global knowledge and communities, relying on loyalty purely due to a shared

professional identity is no longer sufficient. Today, people expect immediate relevance, responsiveness, and the ability to form meaningful connections within and across industries.

Although the model of Association 1.0 once provided stability and structure, it increasingly lags behind what the modern professional demands. Shifting to an “Association 2.0” framework does not require abandoning past strengths. Rather, it involves building on that heritage while embracing more dynamic, collaborative, and innovative practices, ensuring ongoing influence and sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

What Is Association 2.0?

Association 2.0 is not a communications refresh or technology upgrade. It is a fundamental redefinition of how associations operate, create value, and deliver impact. Instead of acting as service providers delivering a fixed bundle of member benefits, Association 2.0 organisations become platforms, enabling interaction, collaboration, and innovation across their ecosystems.

This shift builds on the best of traditional associations: purpose-driven identity, professional stewardship, and member trust. But it adapts those strengths to meet new expectations for personalisation, participation, and co-creation. Members are no longer passive recipients of services. They are active contributors, collaborators, and value creators in their own right.

To succeed in this environment, associations must reimagine how they engage members, structure their teams, generate income, and design services. Table 2.1 outlines the core characteristics of the Association 2.0 model.

Table 2.1 Key Characteristics of Association 2.0

Key Characteristic	Description
Platform Thinking	Associations evolve from being service providers to enablers of interaction between members, stakeholders, and external partners.
Personalised Engagement	AI-driven insights allow tailored experiences, shifting from mass communication to meaningful, individualised interactions.
Diverse Revenue Streams	Moving beyond dues-based funding to data monetisation, partnerships, sponsorships, and premium digital services. Perhaps whole new offerings.
Agility & Innovation	Adopting emerging technologies (AI, blockchain, VR) to streamline operations and enhance member experience.

Key Characteristic	Description
Inclusivity & Sustainability	Ensuring equitable access and fostering cross-sector partnerships to address societal challenges.
Rethink Membership	Opening membership up to new classes of members who would add to and receive value from being in a networked ecosystem.

From Association 1.0 to 2.0: A Strategic Shift

The transition to Association 2.0 is more than digitising legacy systems. It involves redesigning purpose, structure, and engagement logic. Where Association 1.0 models were built for centralised control and predictable services, Association 2.0 enables dynamic interaction and shared value creation.

This shift affects every part of the organisation, from governance to technology, from finance to culture. Table 1.2 outlines how these shifts play out across key dimensions.

Table 2.2 Evolution Map

Dimension	Association 1.0	Association 2.0
Purpose	Serving members through centralised services.	Empowering ecosystems through shared value creation.
Structure	Hierarchical, siloed departments and committees.	Networked, modular teams with flexible governance.
Value Creation	Organisation as producer and distributor of benefits.	Platform as enabler of value co-creation among members and partners.
Revenue Model	Subscription dues and event sponsorship.	Diversified revenue: digital products, data services, partnerships, marketplaces.
Engagement	Periodic engagement via newsletters and events.	Continuous, dynamic engagement via platforms, apps, and AI-driven content.
Technology	AMS-centric, limited integration or interoperability.	API-first, interoperable tech stack with real-time data and automation.

Dimension	Association 1.0	Association 2.0
Governance Mindset	Compliance-focused, risk-averse, slow decision-making.	Adaptive governance: responsive, risk-informed, innovation-oriented.

Platform Thinking as the New Strategic Logic

Associations that adopt the Association 2.0 model do not abandon tradition. They build on it with modern tools, networked governance, and participatory logic that meet the moment.

This model repositions associations as:

- Orchestrators of value, not gatekeepers
- Enablers of ecosystems, not siloed service hubs
- Drivers of shared outcomes, not only institutional outputs.

The next chapter introduces the *Association Platform Success Framework*. A structured roadmap that brings this model to life.

Association 2.0 is not about incremental improvements, it is about redefining how associations create and sustain value. By adopting these key characteristics, associations shift from transactional service providers to ecosystems that thrive on collaborative value creation.

Members increasingly want to shape their own networks and professional journeys, and they’re willing to do so in communities that share control and insight. This underscores why Association 2.0 isn’t just an upgrade, but a fundamental redefinition.

Example 2.

Real-World Example: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

The CIPD has shifted its focus from static member benefits to sector-wide influence by deploying a content platform strategy. It now offers digitally personalised learning journeys, public access to research, and peer mentoring, effectively scaling its impact across both paying members and non-members (CIPD, 2022).²

This approach exemplifies Association 2.0 thinking, expanding the association’s value beyond membership walls and embracing platform dynamics of co-creation and open access.

² Case studies and examples of elements will be introduced through out the book, including hypothetical examples to demonstrate what is possible.

The Shift from Association 1.0 to 2.0

Associations that successfully transition to a modern, platform-based model tend to shift on three fundamental levels: their *purpose*, their *structure*, and their understanding of *success*. These shifts are not surface-level transformations, but deep operating system changes that reposition the association from a membership institution to an *ecosystem* enabler.

Moving from Association 1.0 to 2.0 isn't just a matter of bringing in fancy technology or digitising events. It's a strategic overhaul of what associations do, how they govern, and how they define success. In this environment, governance morphs from top-down control to a networked collaboration approach; communication migrates from one-off bursts of updates to continuous, real-time interaction. And success is measured not simply by headcounts or retention, but by the depth of engagement, the strength of networks, and actual industry or community impact.

Sector commentary suggests that associations investing in interactive learning portals, year-round digital engagement, and member-led initiatives report increased member satisfaction and broader reach. Those slow to adapt risk falling behind amid the growth of alternative digital communities and on-demand learning platforms.

The shift from Association 1.0 to 2.0 involves a fundamental reimagining of purpose, structure, and strategy. The following high-level comparison sets the scene for the practical transitions outlined in the above Table.

Rethinking Purpose: From Serving Members to Empowering Ecosystems

Traditional associations were often established to serve their members through representation, professional development, and access to exclusive benefits. While these remain important, they are no longer sufficient. Associations must now ask: *What is our systemic contribution?* and *Whom do we enable beyond our membership base?*

A compelling illustration of this mindset shift is the *American College of Cardiology* (ACC), which repositioned its purpose from serving members to transforming cardiovascular care. This redefinition led to significant investments in health system registries, research data infrastructure, and policy co-creation with external partners. The ACC's purpose now centres on *ecosystem stewardship* rather than institutional preservation, enabling it to engage beyond traditional boundaries and deliver measurable sectoral impact (ACC, 2023).

Consider also a national arts association that once focused solely on member events and awards. Under the Association 2.0 lens, it could evolve into an innovation platform: running digital grant-writing workshops open to all creatives, curating a public mentorship exchange, and hosting cross-sector labs with funders and producers. The value shifts from internal membership servicing to enabling broad, systemic value creation.

This approach aligns with global trends identified by bodies like the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) and McKinsey & Company, which both emphasise the importance of real-time, interactive communities in driving sustainable engagement. ASAE's 2022 initiative to create the Association Insight Center and McKinsey's work on radical engagement illustrate the pivot from transactional to participatory strategies.

Redesigning Structure: From Hierarchical to Networked

Association 1.0 governance is often centralised, slow, and protective of legacy norms. Association 2.0 requires more responsive, distributed structures that push decision-making closer to members and partners. This shift does not mean abandoning coordination or strategic direction. Instead, it requires enabling localised value creation within a shared framework.

Engineers Australia (EA) has embraced this model, empowering technical societies and regional groups through digital infrastructure and governance redesign. EA invested in member platforms, local advisory structures, and greater autonomy, enabling relevance and responsiveness at the network's edge while maintaining national coherence (Engineers Australia, 2022).

Imagine a national sporting body or a disciplinary peak body moving from top-down planning to orchestrated autonomy. Regional chapters could run their own events, manage data dashboards, and co-fund pilot programs. This is not tokenism with a brief to drive membership recruitment but enabling. Empowering hubs to act as a facilitator, curating insights, setting shared standards, and enabling interoperability across the system.

Redefining Metrics of Success: From Static to Dynamic Impact

In Association 1.0, success is typically measured by internal indicators, membership growth, event attendance, CPD hours. While these are still useful, they do not reflect external impact or ecosystem influence.

A modern association should assess value through the lens of contribution, not just consumption. This may include:

- Uptake of shared tools or data by non-members.
- Number of innovations co-developed through member collaboration.
- Policy outcomes enabled by cross-sector partnerships.
- Improved outcomes for communities or industries served.

Consider a health association that moves from measuring CPD volume to tracking how its open data tools are used in state health planning, or how many co-designed service models emerge from member-partner collaborations.

In this new paradigm, relevance is not assumed by size or tradition. It is earned through systemic utility and measurable contribution to shared challenges.

A Call to Action: Embracing Association 2.0

The future of associations, in Australia and globally, demands urgent, strategic transformation. Reliance on older models with minimal digital interactivity, single-source revenue, and slow-moving governance is untenable in a world where professionals can easily find more dynamic communities online. Recent research from the Governance Institute of Australia also underscores how boards and executives are embracing agile risk management, data analytics, and AI, factors that associations should consider a master to remain credible in members' eyes.

This book presents a comprehensive framework for orchestrating that evolution. Over the coming chapters, we'll explore how to:

- Redesign membership and engagement for true collaboration.
- Build multiple revenue streams beyond dues and conventional sponsorships.
- Develop a modern governance structure that is transparent, responsive, and member-centric.
- Adopt technology and data-driven strategies to sustain relevance and impact.

Now is the time for decisive action. Simply updating a membership platform or adding a mobile app will not suffice. Adopting a platform-oriented mindset is no longer optional, it's central to the association's survival and future prosperity. The chapters ahead introduce an *Association Platform Success Framework* that will help associations not only navigate these changes but flourish in the digital era.

The Pressures on Traditional Association Models

The structural forces reshaping the operating environment for associations are many. These macro-level shifts inform the design principles and strategic frameworks that underpin this playbook, and help explain the shifts already occurring across the association landscape.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the core functions once monopolised by associations, including industry knowledge, credentialing, and member connection, are being rapidly disintermediated. Professionals can now access real-time insights, peer networks, and learning pathways without relying on institutional gatekeepers.

The traditional value proposition, anchored in exclusive publications, periodic events, and a fixed bundle of member benefits, is increasingly misaligned with the expectations of modern professionals. Static membership tiers and slow-moving service models can no longer compete with dynamic, user-driven alternatives like LinkedIn, Coursera, or Slack.

Recent research (Moore, 2024) reinforces what many association leaders already sense that the threat is not competition from within the sector, but the digital-native behaviours of their own members.

The implications are clear; without urgent and strategic change, associations risk becoming peripheral, relevant only by tradition, not by impact. Retaining the traditionalists and losing the new wave of potential members.

These structural shifts are not just background context, they are the drivers of urgency and relevance for every strategic conversation happening in association boardrooms today. The old logic of service delivery, static metrics, and top-down governance no longer matches the pace or complexity of the external environment.

To stay relevant, associations must move from awareness to alignment, from recognising these shifts to actively reshaping their organisations in response. That is the work of Association 2.0.

The remainder of this book will guide that transition, starting with the introduction of the *Association Platform Success Framework* in Chapter 3, a strategic model designed to help associations navigate complexity, enable participation, and design for impact.

Table 2.3 Structural Shifts and Strategic Implications

Structural Shift	Strategic Implication
From Belonging to Utility (and Back Again)	Membership models must offer both personalised utility and emotionally resonant, participatory community experiences.
Collapse of Information Scarcity	Associations must evolve from content gatekeepers to trusted curators and sensemakers, enabling context, not just delivering content.
Innovation is Now Distributed	Position the association as a facilitator of member-led experimentation by investing in open platforms, shared IP infrastructure, and participatory innovation frameworks.
The Skills Economy is Fracturing	Become a central node in skills development ecosystems, offering modular, stackable, and cross-sector learning aligned with future-of-work demands.
Work Is Decentralising	Shift internal governance and service delivery toward more agile, distributed, and member-empowered models that reflect post-hierarchical work realities.
Ecosystem Value is the New Competitive Advantage	Redesign organisational value propositions around convening power, partnership enablement, and ecosystem impact rather than siloed service delivery.
Trust Must Be Rebuilt from Within	Rebuild institutional trust through ethical governance, stakeholder inclusion, transparent practices, and values-led leadership.

A Declining Value Proposition

Professionals no longer ask “Which association should I join?” but increasingly “Do I need to join one at all?”

Where once associations offered privileged access to curated knowledge and networks, members can now access both through open digital platforms, peer-led communities, and on-demand media. This has eroded many of the perceived benefits of dues-based membership.

Platforms such as LinkedIn Learning, Substack, and MeetUp provide fluid alternatives to structured CPD programs and networking calendars. Associations that cannot clearly demonstrate personalised value, relevance, and opportunity for influence will see continued drops in retention, especially among younger cohorts.

The Fragmentation of Professional Development

The monopoly associations once held over CPD is dissolving. Learners now pursue diverse, portable learning opportunities, from microcredentials to AI-enhanced upskilling, offered by vendors, platforms, and employers themselves.

MOOCs (Coursera, edX), vendor certifications (AWS, Microsoft), and peer-driven learning communities are redefining what counts as legitimate professional development. In contrast, association-run CPD programs are often perceived as static, inflexible, or out of touch.

To remain relevant, associations must become learning ecosystems, brokering partnerships, curating agile learning pathways, and embedding CPD within everyday practice.

The Risks of Maintaining the Status Quo

Associations that fail to adapt face more than stagnation, they risk strategic irrelevance. The traditional model is under pressure from the three converging risk domains below:

Financial Instability

As dependence on dues, event income, and sponsorships becomes more fragile, the absence of diversified, digitally-enabled revenue streams exposes associations to volatility. Burritt, Guthrie, and Evans (2016) anticipated this shift nearly a decade ago, warning that business models built on knowledge control would erode in the face of digital democratisation. Their insights are proving prescient.

To survive future shocks, associations must explore new commercial models, data-driven services, subscription platforms, ecosystem partnerships, and more.

Declining Member Engagement

Static engagement models no longer resonate. Members, especially younger ones, expect interaction, visibility, and influence. Research confirms generational shifts in value expectations, from tangible benefits to symbolic recognition, purpose, and networked opportunity.

Without adaptive strategies, associations will see declining relevance not because their mission is flawed, but because their engagement logic no longer aligns with how people learn, work, and connect.

Governance and Reputational Risk

Legacy governance structures often inhibit rather than enable responsiveness. Slow decisions, poor digital governance, and opaque processes undermine member trust, especially in an era of growing concern over data ethics and institutional transparency.

Rebuilding legitimacy requires more than compliance. It demands participatory governance, ethical infrastructure, and open accountability aligned with ISO 37000 and public expectations.

Unless associations act boldly to realign their business models, engagement strategies, and governance practices, they risk drifting into irrelevance, not because their purpose has disappeared, but because their structure can no longer support it.

The Shift to Platform Thinking

As associations face declining membership engagement and increased competition from digital alternatives, a shift in strategic thinking is required. Traditional associations have operated using a service-based model, where value is delivered through static benefits, such as conferences, newsletters, and exclusive industry reports. However, the emergence of digital-first professional communities, AI-driven learning platforms, and peer-to-peer networking spaces has disrupted this model. Many associations are launching digital engagement models, but they often digitise traditional media and models.

As Moore (2024) highlights, digital transformation is no longer optional for associations seeking to remain relevant. The adoption of virtual events, personalised content, and interactive online engagement has proven essential in meeting the evolving expectations of members. Associations that fail to adapt risk losing members to more dynamic, user-driven platforms that offer on-demand professional development, niche networking, and collaborative knowledge sharing.

While digital transformation enhances engagement, it is only part of the solution. To achieve long-term sustainability, associations must move beyond digital tools and adopt a platform-based ecosystem approach. Unlike the traditional model, where associations act as service providers, a platform-based association facilitates interactions between members, industry partners, and other stakeholders, creating a scalable and adaptive environment. This shift mirrors trends seen in the broader economy, where industries are transitioning from linear service delivery models to multi-sided platforms that enable value co-creation.

In a platform-based association, members are no longer passive consumers of content, they become active contributors, co-creators, and collaborators within the professional ecosystem. This model fosters continuous engagement, diversified revenue streams, and stronger industry influence. While Moore (2024) emphasises the importance of customisation and digital engagement, this book expands on that foundation by introducing a structured roadmap for platform-driven transformation, integrating governance agility, AI-driven decision-making, and financial sustainability strategies.

For associations to successfully embrace Association 2.0, they must not only implement digital engagement tools but also reimagine their role as facilitators of dynamic industry

ecosystems. The next chapter introduces the *Association Platform Success Framework*, a structured model designed to help associations make this transition effectively.

Rise of Platforms

In response to evolving member expectations, financial pressures, and digital disruption, forward-thinking associations are moving away from static, transactional membership models. Instead, they are embracing platform-based ecosystems that foster continuous engagement, innovation, and scalable value creation.

A platform-based association is more than just a digital extension of traditional services, it represents a fundamental shift in how associations interact with members and stakeholders. This approach enables:

- **Dynamic, real-time interactions** between members, partners, and industry stakeholders.
- **Scalable value creation** through digital engagement, on-demand services, and network effects.
- **New revenue streams** beyond membership fees, leveraging digital products, data insights, and strategic partnerships.

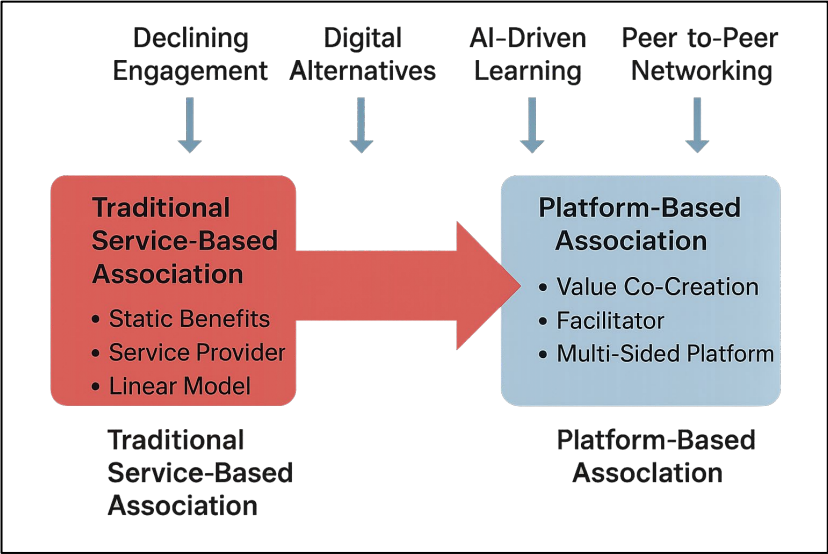
Rather than simply delivering services, platform-based associations act as facilitators, enabling continuous collaboration, professional development, and industry advancement. This shift ensures long-term sustainability, growth, and relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Key Characteristics of Platform-Based Associations:

1. **Network Effects:** Value increases as more members engage, strengthening the association's influence and reach.
2. **Monetisation Beyond Memberships:** Digital tools, data-driven insights, and virtual or hybrid events provide additional revenue opportunities.
3. **Agile Governance:** Flexible decision-making structures allow associations to respond quickly to emerging industry trends and member needs.

Many leading associations have already started adopting platform-based models, leveraging technology and data to drive deeper engagement and long-term financial resilience. Those that fail to evolve risk declining member relevance, financial instability, and reduced industry influence.

Figure 2.1 Strategic Drivers for Platform Thinking



This transformation is not an incremental improvement, it is a strategic necessity for associations aiming to thrive in the digital era.

While the shift to platform-based ecosystems offers significant advantages, there will always be a place for more traditional, slow-evolving association models. Some industries, particularly those with deeply established professional traditions, regulatory requirements, or long-standing governance structures, may continue to operate effectively within conventional membership frameworks. These associations provide stability, trusted expertise, and institutional continuity, which remain highly valued by certain member segments.

However, even these organisations must consider gradual adaptations to remain relevant. Incorporating selective digital enhancements, fostering stronger peer-to-peer connections, and exploring hybrid engagement models can help traditional associations bridge the gap between legacy structures and emerging expectations, ensuring they continue to serve their members effectively in a changing landscape.

**Example 3. *The American Institute of Architects (AIA):
Digital Engagement & Ecosystem Building***

The AIA has transitioned from a traditional membership association to a digital-first professional hub for architects, offering multiple ways for engagement beyond static membership benefits.

Platform-Based Transformation:

- **Dynamic Interaction:** The AIA launched a Knowledge Communities platform, where members, firms, and industry partners engage in ongoing discussions, share research, and co-develop resources.
- **Scalable Value Creation:** Its AI-powered continuing education (CE) platform personalises recommendations for architects based on their career stage, interests, and state licensing requirements.
- **Revenue Diversification:** Beyond dues, AIA generates income through sponsored webinars, digital learning subscriptions, industry partnerships, and AI-driven member data insights.

Instead of simply delivering services, the AIA now facilitates collaboration among professionals, fostering an ecosystem where members continuously contribute and benefit.

Australian Cases

**Example 4. *OpenLearning: Social Online Learning
Platform***

OpenLearning is an Australian educational technology company that offers a social online learning platform, facilitating Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), short courses, and online degrees.

- **Dynamic Interactions:** OpenLearning enables educators and learners to engage in interactive and collaborative online learning experiences, fostering a community-driven approach to education.
- **Scalable Value Creation:** The platform supports a wide range of courses from various educational institutions, providing learners with diverse learning opportunities and pathways.
- **Revenue Diversification:** OpenLearning operates on a software-as-a-service model, partnering with universities and colleges to offer its

platform for delivering online education, thereby creating multiple revenue streams.

By focusing on social learning and collaboration, OpenLearning enhances the educational experience and expands its reach within the educational sector.

What Platform-Based Associations Have in Common

Across these examples, successful associations have made three fundamental shifts:

From Passive Memberships to Continuous Engagement

Instead of periodic engagement through newsletters or events, platform-based associations enable ongoing, interactive participation through AI-driven platforms, digital communities, and knowledge-sharing networks.

From Limited Revenue Models to Diversified Income Streams

They have moved beyond membership dues to monetise data, create tiered digital services, and develop strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders.

From Static Services to Ecosystem-Oriented Facilitation

Rather than simply offering services, associations now orchestrate collaboration between members, external experts, and corporate partners, fostering scalable knowledge-sharing and innovation.

Example 5. Case Study: From Annual Conferences to Year-Round Engagement³

The Challenge: Declining Relevance of Annual Events⁴

A national industry association, traditionally known for its high-profile annual conference, faced a growing problem - declining attendance, shrinking sponsorship revenue, and disengaged members. Once a flagship event that attracted thousands, the conference was struggling to compete with on-demand digital learning, corporate-led training programs, and online networking platforms.

³ The case studies are learning exercises designed to demonstrate how the concepts can be adopted or integrated.

⁴ This is not a novel problem and others like Moore (2024) have discussed the challenge as well.

Members, particularly younger professionals, expressed frustration that waiting a full year for networking and professional development no longer aligned with their needs. The association realised that to stay relevant, it needed to transition from a once-a-year touchpoint to a continuous engagement model.

The Transformation: Building a Year-Round Engagement Ecosystem

To modernise engagement, the association launched a multi-channel digital strategy aimed at keeping members actively connected throughout the year:

1. **Virtual Networking Communities:** Instead of relying solely on in-person events, the association introduced always-on digital communities where members could participate in discussion forums, peer mentoring, and real-time industry Q&As.
2. **On-Demand Learning & Micro-Events:** The annual conference was reimagined as a continuous experience, offering monthly webinars, interactive workshops, and exclusive virtual roundtables to keep conversations alive year-round.
3. **Personalised Engagement via AI:** AI-driven member profiling enabled the association to recommend relevant content, connect professionals with similar interests, and tailor CPD opportunities.
4. **Hybrid Event Strategy:** The flagship annual conference remained but was integrated into a broader year-long engagement strategy, with pre-event networking, digital content previews, and post-event follow-ups extending its impact.

The Results: A More Engaged and Sustainable Community

Within two years, the association expects a 35% increase in year-round member engagement, a 20% rise in virtual event attendance, and stronger sponsor interest due to expanded digital touchpoints. Instead of being a single annual transaction, engagement became a continuous cycle, ensuring members felt connected, informed, and supported throughout the year.

This transformation highlights a critical lesson for associations: relying solely on annual conferences is no longer enough. In an era where professionals expect on-demand, interactive, and personalised engagement, associations should consider a shift to platform-driven ecosystems that foster ongoing connections and value creation.

Be challenged.

The Future of Platform-Based Associations

The future of associations depends on decisive action. Organisations that cling to outdated models will be outpaced by digital-first, network-driven alternatives.

This book provides a structured framework for transformation, helping associations build resilient, future-ready ecosystems. Through practical strategies, governance insights, and case studies, it offers association leaders a roadmap to:

- Redesign membership and engagement models to align with digital expectations.
- Diversify revenue streams beyond dues and sponsorships.
- Strengthen governance and digital strategies to support a platform-based approach.
- Implement change management strategies to drive organisational transformation.

The Legacy Model is No Longer Enough

Traditional associations, built on the 20th-century model of service delivery, were successful in their time. Annual dues provided reliable revenue, conferences delivered professional development, and newsletters kept members informed. Yet, these mechanisms were optimised for scarcity, of information, access, and infrastructure.

In a world of digital abundance, they are no longer fit for purpose.

Members now compare their experiences not to other associations, but to best-in-class platforms, LinkedIn for networking, Coursera for learning, YouTube for knowledge, Slack for collaboration. These platforms are not competitors in mission, but they *are* competitors for attention and engagement.

The risk isn't obsolescence overnight, it's *irrelevance by degrees*.

A New Model Emerges

Association 2.0 reframes the role of the association. It's no longer the provider of all value but the *orchestrator* of value exchange. It doesn't lock knowledge behind membership, it facilitates discovery, co-creation, and scalable engagement. It doesn't gatekeep community, it curates ecosystems of trust and shared purpose.

This is more than digital transformation. It is a strategic redefinition of what associations *are*.

This new model allows associations to:

- **Engage beyond membership** through open, value-driven participation.
- **Monetise through interaction**, not just access.
- **Scale their mission**, not just their services.

And it is already happening, in pockets of innovation across the sector. But to achieve systemic impact, we need a structured, strategic model. In the next chapter we introduce the model.

From Structural Shift to Strategic Play

The world in which associations operate has fundamentally changed. The seven structural shifts outlined in Chapter 1, from collapsing trust to decentralised work, from the loss of content scarcity to the demands of ecosystem thinking, are not future risks. They are current realities.

To respond, associations must not only adapt, they must reorient. The shift to Association 2.0 is not a trend; it is a transformation of how associations govern, engage, deliver value, and define success.

This chapter has explored that imperative. It has challenged the assumptions of Association 1.0 and introduced the foundational architecture of Association 2.0. Yet transformation is not an end in itself. It is a strategic act, a deliberate repositioning to meet member needs, generate sustainable impact, and steward legitimacy in complex environments.

To close this chapter, the following table links each structural shift to a specific strategic response. These are not theoretical ideas, they are practical signals of where boards and executive teams must focus attention in the journey ahead.

The table below summarises the most significant contrasts between a traditional, “1.0” approach and the more flexible, platform-driven “2.0” approach:

Table 2.4 Key Transformations

From...	To...
Serving Members	Empowering Ecosystems
Hierarchical Structures	Networked, Agile Governance
One-Way Delivery	Member-Driven Co-Creation
Static Metrics (e.g. Retention)	Dynamic KPIs (e.g. Engagement, Impact)

Glossary

Adaptive Governance: A governance approach that enables rapid, insight-informed decision-making in complex and changing environments. Emphasises learning, agility, and cultural responsiveness. *See also: Agile Governance; Governance Capability*

Agile Governance: A model of governance that prioritises responsiveness, transparency, and ethical oversight. It replaces rigid oversight structures with dynamic mechanisms for real-time risk management and participatory input. *See also: Governance Maturity; Trust Infrastructure*

APPS Scorecard: The Association Platform Performance Scorecard is a diagnostic tool for assessing an association's platform maturity across core domains: infrastructure, insight, governance, and engagement. *See also: Platform Readiness; Diagnostic Tools*

Association Platform Success Framework: A foundational model introduced in Chapter 2 that integrates five design pillars: scalable infrastructure, data insight, modular experience, participation strategy, and governance/trust. *See also: Platform Thinking; Enabling Layers*

Behavioural Governance: Focuses on how decisions are made, examining trust, board dynamics, values, and leadership culture. One of the three governance capability domains. *See also: Governance Capability; Culture Maturity*

Boardroom Capability: Refers to the skills, digital fluency, and adaptive leadership required at board level to govern complex, platform-based associations. *See also: Capability Domain; Governance Maturity*

Business Model Innovation: The process of reimagining how value is created, delivered, and captured. In platform-based associations, this includes transitioning to multi-sided models and non-linear revenue flows. *See also: Monetisation Models; Platform Economics*

Capability Domain: One of the three governance capability domains. Focuses on the skills, confidence, and digital readiness of the board and executive team. *See also: Structure Domain; Behavioural Governance*

Co-Design: A participatory design method where members, users, and stakeholders collaborate in developing services, policies, or platforms. *See also: Participation Strategy; Member Experience Lab*

Crowd Contribution: Value generated through user input, peer learning, co-creation, or member-generated content. A key feature of scalable platform engagement. *See also: Marketplace Model; Network Effects*

Data-Driven Insight: The use of analytics, segmentation, and predictive modelling to inform strategy and improve member experiences. One of the APSF pillars. *See also: Insight Maturity; Strategic Data Capability*

Diagnostic Continuum: The tool for assessing Governance Friction, from Harmony through Friction to Conflict and Collapse. Supports early intervention and realignment. *See also: Governance Friction; Adaptive Governance*

Digital Risk Threshold: A governance mechanism that defines acceptable risk boundaries for digital tools, AI systems, and data practices. *See also: Ethical AI; Scenario Testing*

Dynamic Risk Intelligence: A real-time, adaptive capability that enables organisations to sense, interpret, and respond to emerging risks across complex systems and digital environments. It integrates predictive analytics, scenario modelling, and human judgment to anticipate friction points, detect weak signals, and enable timely governance interventions. Supports decision-making under uncertainty by fusing structured data with contextual insight. *See also: Diagnostic Continuum; Scenario Testing; Adaptive Governance*

Ecosystem

A dynamic network of interconnected organisations, individuals, platforms, and resources that collaboratively create and exchange value. In the context of associations, ecosystems extend beyond traditional member-service models to include partners, platforms, funders, beneficiaries, and data contributors, often operating under shared governance or aligned purpose. Well-designed ecosystems enable adaptability, co-creation, and scale by leveraging network effects and shared infrastructure. *See also: Ecosystem Leverage; Platform Orchestration; Participation Strategy*

Ecosystem Leverage: Using partnerships, networks, and third-party contributors to scale impact and value creation. Central to the platform mindset. *See also: Platform Orchestration; Multi-Sided Models*

Enabling Layers: Refers to the infrastructure, governance frameworks, and technical capabilities that allow platform associations to scale responsibly. *See also: Enabling Capabilities; Strategic Infrastructure*

Ethical AI: The design and governance of artificial intelligence systems that align with ethical standards, transparency, and human oversight. *See also: ISO 42001; Trust Infrastructure*

Foresight Capability: A board's ability to anticipate emerging risks, opportunities, and signals through scenario planning and horizon scanning. *See also: Future Readiness; Strategic Risk Intelligence*

Freemium Model: A monetisation strategy that offers free baseline access with optional paid upgrades. Common in content, CPD, and community platforms. *See also: Monetisation Pathways; Subscription Models*

Future Readiness Radar: A visual diagnostic tool for assessing preparedness across digital, economic, and governance dimensions. *See also: APPS Scorecard; Scenario Testing*

Governance Capability: A multi-dimensional measure of a board's ability to govern effectively. Includes structure, behaviour, and capability. *See also: ISO 37004; Governance Maturity*

Governance Friction: The tension or misalignment that emerges when governance structures are no longer fit-for-purpose in changing environments. *See also: Diagnostic Continuum; Friction-to-Function Model*

Governance Maturity: The evolution of governance systems from compliance-based to strategic and adaptive. Often measured using tools like the Maturity Matrix. *See also: Agile Governance; Capability Domains*

Insight Maturity: Describes an association's capacity to turn raw data into decision-ready insight. A key enabler of strategic agility. *See also: Strategic Data Capability; Dashboards*

ISO 37000 Series: A suite of international standards on governance, including ISO 37000 (principles), ISO 37004 (maturity models), and ISO 37005 (governance indicators). *See also: Capability Domains; Governance Assessment*

Marketplace Model: A business model in which the association acts as a platform enabling transactions between users (e.g. CPD courses, services, mentoring). *See also: Multi-Sided Revenue; Platform Ecosystem*

Member Experience Lab: A method for involving members in the co-design and testing of new services and engagement strategies. *See also: Co-Design; Participation Architecture*

Modular Design: Designing content, services, and systems in flexible, customisable units that can be recombined or scaled across use cases. *See also: Product Strategy; Freemium Models*

Monetisation Pathways: The range of strategies available for generating revenue, direct and indirect, member- and partner-based. *See also: Platform Revenue Model Matrix; Business Model Innovation*

Multi-Sided Revenue: Income derived from multiple sources beyond members, such as sponsors, advertisers, partners, and data clients. *See also: Network Effects; Platform Economics*

Network Effects: The phenomenon where the value of a platform increases as more users participate. Includes both direct and indirect effects. *See also: Platform Economics; Ecosystem Leverage*

Participation Strategy: A deliberate approach to designing how members and stakeholders engage, contribute, and create value within the platform. *See also: Ecosystem Participation; Value Co-Creation*

Platform Economics: An economic model where value is co-created by users, marginal costs decline with scale, and growth is driven by network effects. *See also: Multi-Sided Revenue; Value Multiplication*

Platform Orchestration: The strategic role of an association in enabling and managing multi-party interactions within an ecosystem. *See also: Ecosystem Leverage; Governance and Trust*

Platform Posture: An association's overall orientation to platform strategy, including how it designs for value exchange, openness, and strategic growth. *See also: APSF; Business Model Transformation*

Risk Appetite: The amount and type of risk an organisation is willing to accept in pursuit of its goals. It guides decision-making and sets boundaries for strategic and operational risk-taking. *See also: Governance Capability; Risk Management Framework*

Risk Management Framework: A structured approach to identifying, assessing, mitigating, and monitoring risks across an organisation. It ensures risk is managed consistently and transparently in line with strategic objectives.: See also: *Governance Maturity; Scenario Testing*

Scenario Testing: A practice used by boards to explore future risks and decisions through hypothetical but plausible situations. *See also: Risk Intelligence; Simulation Tools*

Trust Infrastructure: The frameworks, policies, and behaviours that ensure ethical oversight, data integrity, and reciprocal value exchange. *See also: Governance and Trust; Ethical AI*

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The Modern Association Playbook:

Reimagining Strategy, Governance, and Value Creation

What if your association could lead transformation and not just respond to it?

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The Modern Association Playbook equips boards, executives, and association professionals with the tools and frameworks to build future-ready organisations. Grounded in real-world advisory experience and written for practical boardroom use, it combines platform thinking, economic insight, and agile governance into a roadmap for relevance and renewal.

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About the Author

Sean Johnson is a governance strategist, board advisor, lawyer, and executive leader with deep expertise across associations, not-for-profits, and platform ecosystems. He is a recognised thought leader in translating good governance and risk analysis in to bold strategic adaptation.



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