

THE CHALLENGES IN LEVERAGING AI FROM
ADOPTION TO SCALING IT EFFECTIVELY

From 'Pilot Purgatory' to the Fluid Network.

Why AI pilots are failing inside marketing organisations and the new operating model enabling Brands to turn experimentation into performance.

// The dominant barrier to AI ROI isn't the technology. It's old operating systems and organisational models with AI sprinkled on top.

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Introduction

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For too long, the conversation about AI in marketing and production has been framed as a technology question. In reality, the harder question is structural:

Is our approach to organising, governing, and connecting work fit for an era that demands speed, flexibility, and continuous adaptation?

The tools are advancing quickly, but too many organisations are still asking them to operate inside systems designed for a different era.

That is the gap this paper explores. It reflects a simple point of view: the next competitive advantage will not come from piling more tools on top of old workflows, but from redesigning the operating model so that people, process, and technology can work in harmony.

At MurphyCobb, we see this every day across the industry. The opportunity is not just to adopt AI, but to build the conditions in which AI can genuinely create value, with clearer governance, more fluid collaboration, and a model that is adaptable by design rather than brittle by default.

The Fluid Network is our response to that challenge. It is a new operating model for orchestrating modern production ecosystems, enabling brands to connect the right talent, vendors, data, platforms and AI capabilities around each brief, market and moment, with greater speed, governance, confidence and control.

95%

of generative AI pilots fail to deliver any appreciable impact on P&L.

MIT REPORT · JULY 2025

#1

barrier is organisational design, not the technology. “Legacy organisational models and brittle workflows” are the cause.

MIT REPORT · JULY 2025

3 of 3

top CEO concerns relate to people, process & culture — not AI capability itself.

PWC 2026 GLOBAL CEO SURVEY

An industry-wide failure pattern and it's not about the tools.

AI promises a step-change in marketing and advertising: faster creative cycles, smarter production decisions, and personalised content at scale across every platform.

The MIT report published in July 2025 is unambiguous: **only 5% of generative AI pilots are having any appreciable impact on profit and loss.** The remaining 95% fail to deliver a return. This is not a technology problem. The tools are increasingly capable. The models are improving quarterly. The critical failure is that organisations are bolting AI on top of old organisational models and legacy operating systems that were never designed for agility, speed and scale, and expecting it to perform.

The MIT report identifies the dominant barrier as **organisational design**: the way companies are structured, how workflows are governed, where decisions are made, and whether the people closest to the work have genuine agency to adopt and adapt.

The **PwC 2026 Global CEO Survey** reinforces this from the C-suite. When CEOs articulate their biggest AI transformation challenges, three barriers dominate, none of them technical.

01 · PEOPLE

Resistance to change

...particularly where human workflows and roles must evolve.

02 · CAPABILITY

Skills & talent shortages

...limiting effective implementation even when tools are in place.

03 · CONTROL

Insufficient governance

...to manage AI risk and performance at operational scale.

The pattern is consistent across markets and sectors: organisations are acquiring tools, announcing pilots, running proof-of-concepts, and then **watching them stall when they encounter the actual organisation**. The capability to embed AI into the operational fabric of a business is absent. Budget is wasted. Teams are frustrated. And a growing cynicism sets in about whether AI can actually transform how marketing content gets made.

It can. But only if the courage to review, and redesign the operating model sits at the core of such transformation.

Three structural challenges that define the failure pattern.

Across industries and with particular intensity in creative and marketing sectors, the same three organisational barriers surface repeatedly. They interact and amplify one another, compounding the ROI gap at every stage.

01

Resistance to Change

AI is dissolving the established phases of content production strategy, creative, production, performance, distribution, into fluid, overlapping activities. Roles built around discrete phases feel structurally threatened. Without deliberate change management addressing the human dimension alongside the technical one, adoption stalls at the pilot stage and never reaches operational scale.

02

Skills & Talent Gaps

Effective AI adoption in production requires cross-functional teams and a culture of collaboration: creatives working alongside data analysts, technologists, producers and directors. Most organisations lack both the internal talent and a structured programme to develop it. Tools are purchased; the genuine capability to leverage them is never built alongside the investment. The gap between tool procurement and tool utilisation grows wider.

03

Brittle Workflows & Governance Gaps

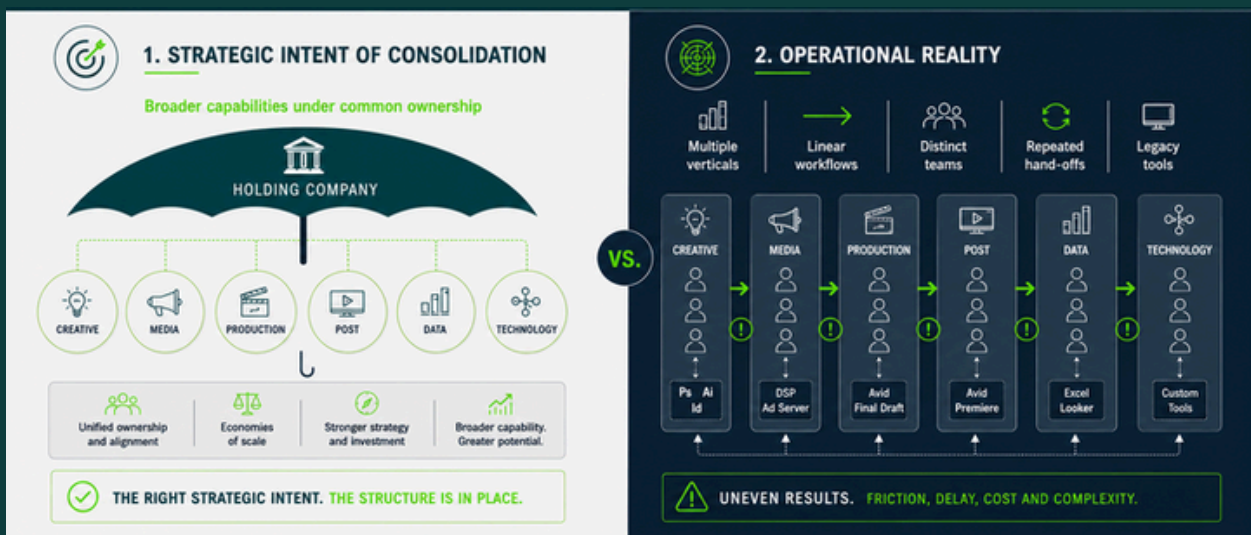
Legacy production workflows were not designed for AI augmentation. When new tools are inserted into rigid, siloed processes, the "sprinkling" pattern, friction is enormous and value is minimal. Without governance frameworks to manage AI performance, risk and quality, organisations cannot scale what works, correct what fails, or connect their pilot results back to their P&L.

Agency consolidation was supposed to simplify. **Instead, it deepened the paradox.**

Bain & Company's research on agency consolidation highlights a structural tension at the heart of the AI adoption challenge. The strategic intent behind consolidation was sound: to bring broader capabilities together within fewer holding companies and create a more simplified and integrated model for clients. In practice, however, the results have been uneven.

Consolidation Created Scale **Operations Remain Siloed**

STRATEGIC INTENT ACHIEVED. OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION STILL ELUDES



INTENT · SIMPLIFY

REALITY · LOCK IN

While consolidation has successfully assembled a wider range of services under common ownership, many organisations continue to operate through multiple verticals consisting of linear sequential workflows, distinct teams, and multiple hand-offs across disciplines, often involving legacy tools and technologies.

Consequently, agility may be constrained, innovation can take longer to scale, and clients may still bear a meaningful share of the integration effort across the ecosystem. **In the age of AI, this level of friction is no longer acceptable**, as competitive advantage now depends on the ability to absorb new capabilities quickly, integrate them seamlessly, and respond at pace to constant change.

The questions CMOs are asking that **today's model cannot answer.**

"Who do I trust to guide this transformation?"

"How do I stay flexible and avoid being locked into the wrong model?"

"How do I scale AI safely across my production ecosystem?"

"How do I orchestrate specialist capabilities without surrendering control?"

"How do I build real governance over a a landscape of too many vendors and tools?"

"How do I reduce cost without killing creativity?"

These are not questions that consolidated holding companies, traditional consultancies, or pure AI vendors are architecturally positioned to answer. **They require a neutral, expert partner operating at the orchestration layer**, one with no stake in any particular vendor, agency, or technology, and every stake in designing solutions that solve the client's specific challenges and requirements.

Built over 20 years to help brands move from fragmented production to fluid orchestration.

Founded in 2006 and now active in over 60 countries, MurphyCobb stands at the centre of the global marketing ecosystem as the leading Strategic Advertising Production Consultancy. We exist to help brands overcome the organisational and operational barriers that so often derail the adoption of AI and other transformative emerging technologies.

MurphyCobb's approach unites strategic insight, senior production consultants with deep operational expertise, and creative technologists who reimagine content production ecosystems from the inside out, while connecting the best talent, data, and technology from across the world. With clients including **Reckitt, Mars, Coty, Toyota, L'Oréal, Heineken, Mondelēz, and Colgate-Palmolive**, MurphyCobb operates at the critical intersection where emerging technologies such as AI and Virtual Production dissolve traditional boundaries, demanding redesigned workflows and governance frameworks that are built in from the start, not retrofitted afterwards.

60

Countries of active operation worldwide.

100+

Production consultants connected globally, with local knowledge and unrivalled industry expertise.

20

Years in operation, challenging the norm and bringing new ideas to the market.

Solving the organisational design problem directly.

MurphyCobb doesn't deploy solutions, systems or software, and walk away. It partners with organisations to redesign production operating models, restructuring how creative, production, data, and technology functions relate to one another so that AI tools have a coherent system to land in, rather than a legacy process to fight against.

This is the intervention that MIT identifies as decisive, and it is the discipline MurphyCobb has refined over two decades.

THE INTERVENTION

Redesign the operating model first. Tools plug in to serve it, not the other way around.

WHAT WE DO – AND DON'T DO

- + Redesign production operating models
- + Build governance from day one
- + Embed change management alongside technology
- + Connect best-in-class capabilities globally
- Deploy software and walk away
- Take stakes in any vendor or agency

The Fluid Network — modular, agile, and built for the AI era.

The Fluid Network is MurphyCobb's breakthrough response to two defining challenges of modern marketing: the AI adoption crisis and the agency consolidation paradox. It's not a technology platform, a consulting framework, or another agency layer, it's an architectural operating model designed for a new era of production.



The Fluid Network is a composable, vendor-agnostic system that replaces consolidation—fewer suppliers, slow handoffs, rigid integration—with orchestration: dynamically coordinating best-in-class, modular capabilities around each brand’s needs.

Where traditional models tried to simplify by merging, **The Fluid Network** simplifies by design, through architectural clarity. It replaces fixed vendor relationships and monolithic tech stacks with agile capability pods that reconfigure seamlessly around specific markets, briefs, or brand objectives.

From industrial integration to controlled decentralisation.

– THE TRADITIONAL LEGACY MODEL

Industrial integration.

- Long, fixed vendor contracts
- Long, linear planning cycles
- Fixed silos with slow, linear handoffs
- Closed, non-interoperable tech stacks
- Vendor lock-in, technology lock-in, data lock-in
- AI bolted onto legacy systems and workflows
- Opaque costs and fragmented governance
- Talent dilution and innovation slowdown
- Rigidity masquerading as efficiency

+ THE FLUID NETWORK

Controlled decentralisation.

- + Orchestration of capabilities around brand needs
- + Modular creative collaborative pods, dynamically assembled
- + Vendor-agnostic, composable architecture
- + AI-native content infrastructure by design
- + Frontline prosumers empowered to drive adoption
- + Best-in-class creatives: agencies, boutiques, AI-native studios
- + Flexibility, dynamism and optionality restored

The four pillars of the model.



A

Orchestration Over Consolidation

Rather than forcing capabilities under a single fixed structure, the Fluid Network orchestrates best-in-class players dynamically: large agencies, boutiques, AI-native studios, regional expert hubs, independent innovation labs, technology vendors and startups, without owning or being owned by any of them. Restoring the optionality that consolidation eroded, while maintaining strategic coherence through a neutral architectural layer.



B

Composable System Architecture

Instead of "too many tools and no logic," the Fluid Network introduces a governance layer, a selection framework, interoperability logic, and modular plug-and-play architecture that gives brands a composable system. CMOs get the right AI technology, creative automation platforms, production partners, performance, data and analytics solutions, and personalisation engines, selected, managed and coordinated through intelligent orchestration rather than drowned in fragmentation.



C

Protection Against the Risks of Consolidation

Agency consolidation creates reduced differentiation, talent drain, cultural clashes, and innovation slowdown. The Fluid Network provides access to the best capabilities across the ecosystem, including resources from a holding group, but without the strategic, operational, and financial risks of being owned by any single structure. Bain's prescription for stronger orchestration and greater transparency is operationalised through this model.



D

Data Feedback Loops & Continuous Optimisation

The Fluid Network is not a static architecture. It generates and organises data through ecosystem-wide production intelligence that feeds back into the Brand's owned ecosystem, where decisions about sourcing, spend, creative quality, and carbon impact are made. The feedback loop makes each iteration smarter, and governance ensures the learning is captured and applied at scale.

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Agency consolidation was designed to bring coherence and simplicity, but the results have been uneven: creating new layers of complexity and lock-in across vendors, technology, data, and strategy.

The Fluid Network offers a different path: applying strategic and architectural logic to orchestrate capabilities dynamically, giving organisations a modular, adaptable operating system that integrates AI from the start.

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Every barrier, mapped to a Fluid Network response.

Every structural barrier identified in the research from MIT, PwC, and Bain maps directly to a core dimension of MurphyCobb's consulting model and the Fluid Network architecture. This is not coincidental, it is the result of two decades of working directly with brands, helping them solve production challenges at a global scale.

THE CHALLENGE	THE CONSEQUENCE	THE FLUID NETWORK
AI sprinkled on old operating systems	No systemic change; pilots don't scale or link to P&L	Replaces the operating model, not just tools; architecture-first transformation
Agency consolidation driving complexity and lock-in	CMOs locked into vendors, tech, data and strategy with low flexibility	Controlled decentralisation with modular orchestration and clear governance
Brittle workflows that don't fit day-to-day operations	AI pilots work in isolation but fail in real-world operations	Modular architecture makes new tech and workflows adaptive, neither stagnant nor rigid.
Centralised AI decisions with no frontline empowerment	Tools misaligned with reality; adoption stalls at rollout	Autonomises frontline 'prosumers' and production leads to own the model.
Too many vendors, tools and tech stacks, no architectural logic	CMOs drowned in fragmentation; no governance or interoperability	Composable architecture: governance layer, selection logic, interoperability
Skills and talent shortages limiting AI implementation	Tools underused; capability gap between investment and impact widens	100+ embedded specialists providing AI and production tech guidance
Weak governance for AI risk and performance	No way to measure, correct or scale; pilots never become BAU	Foundational governance ensures rapid pilots scale into permanent operating models
Resistance to change in workflows and roles	Acquisition without adoption; ROI eroded by workarounds	Inherent change management; modular design enables continuous evolution

The strategic opportunity is in the gap everyone else is avoiding.

The evidence from MIT, PwC, and Bain converges on a single diagnosis from different angles: **AI transformation in marketing production is not failing because the tools are flawed, but because they are being deployed into the wrong organisational models and operating systems.**

Agency consolidation was intended to simplify, yet it has often generated deeper, more entrenched complexity and lock in. And organisations that respond by layering on more tools, locking into fixed vendor setups, or ring-fencing AI in centralised, isolated labs are not breaking the pattern, they are accelerating it.

The Fluid Network is MurphyCobb's answer to this problem. It is not a framework, a deck, or a report, but a real operating model: modular, data-driven, vendor-agnostic, and built on the principle that **architecture comes first and tools plug in to serve it.**

It makes controlled decentralisation a strategic discipline, prioritising orchestration over consolidation, and governance over fragmentation.

MurphyCobb's positioning at this moment is the result of 20 years of building toward exactly this convergence. The company is the neutral architect and orchestrator of the brand content ecosystem, working alongside the CMO and the team, placing the brand at the centre, and ensuring that the ecosystem serves the client's outcomes rather than the interests of any single holding company, partner network or technology platform. Ensuring that every partner, platform, workflow and technology decision is aligned to the client's objectives, not to legacy structures, supplier incentives or proprietary agendas.

This is what distinguishes MurphyCobb from every other entity attempting to advise on AI transformation in marketing: it is not competing with outdated consolidated environments. It is offering the modular, composable, operating system that makes the whole ecosystem perform.

THE NEW QUESTION

For CMOs, marketing operations leaders, and procurement directors navigating the AI era, the question is no longer whether to invest in AI, but **whether the operating model can make that investment perform—and whether the partner designing it has the independence, expertise, and architectural intelligence to deliver it effectively.**

GET IN TOUCH

Let's design the operating model that makes your AI investment perform and deliver content at speed and at scale.

The Fluid Network is in motion. We are working with brands across the globe to reimagine how content is planned, produced, governed and scaled — designing the operating models needed to deliver content that performs in the AI era.

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