Leading Through the Testing, Inspection, Certification and Compliance Industry's Dual AI Mandate

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As AI reshapes every sector, organizations are rapidly redefining their transformation agendas. The Testing, Inspection, Certification and Compliance (TICC) industry occupies a particularly consequential position in this transition. While TICC organizations must use AI to improve their own operations, services, and workflows, they are also responsible for independently assessing these same AI-enabled systems, products, and management practices developed by customers.

This is the industry's **dual AI mandate**: to become an effective adopter of AI and, at the same time, a credible arbiter of numerous AI tools' trustworthiness. The opportunity is substantial, but the risks are equally significant: the value of a TICC organization rests on independence, technical judgment, traceable evidence, and confidence in the integrity of its conclusions.

Given this unique position, there are still more questions than ready-made answers. While leaders can draw learnings from other sectors, no other industry shoulders quite the same responsibility.

Here, Russell Reynolds Associates explores the key questions TICC executives and boards are asking, the best practices we've observed across the industry so far, and our perspectives on how TICC leaders can approach the challenges ahead.

01 What does effective AI leadership look like in an industry built on trust?

For many organizations, AI transformation is often treated as a technology challenge. In TICC, because of the dual mandate to deliver AI capability for their own enterprises and for customers, that framing is too narrow. As a result, effective AI leadership cannot sit solely with the technology function, nor can it be delegated entirely to a single individual or department. It requires a connected leadership model, anchored by a CEO and executive team with enough AI fluency to lead both agendas in parallel.

We see digital and technology literacy increasingly make its way into the CEO and leadership team success profile, with leaders being measured against their ability to set AI-related ambitions, challenge ideas, allocate capital and resources, and determine where the organization may be moving either too slowly or too quickly. This matters because the consequences of getting AI wrong extend beyond productivity or efficiency. Poorly governed AI could affect the credibility and reputation of the organization itself, while moving too slowly could risk losing customers seeking expert partners for their own AI implementation.

The leadership question, therefore, is not simply "who owns AI?" or "how quickly can we implement AI?". In TICC, the more important question is how the organization creates a leadership team with a shared understanding of where AI can be used, where it must be governed carefully, and where human judgment remains essential.

02 How can TICC leaders responsibly scale AI?

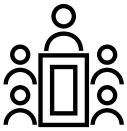
TICC organizations manage large volumes of technical, specialized, commercially sensitive, and sometimes safety-critical information across products, assets, processes, and customers. Before AI can scale, leaders need clarity on what data may be used, who owns it, how it is protected, how provenance is preserved, and how outputs will be validated.

In this context, data governance cannot be treated as an IT prerequisite, but rather as part of the chain of evidence. An AI-supported inspection or certification decision must be reproducible, auditable, and supported by records that explain what information was used, what the system produced, what limitations applied, and where qualified human judgment entered the process. Without strong controls around data quality, privacy, security, and traceability, even well-intended pilots may create risk.

03 What AI innovation approaches are emerging across the TICC industry?

Many TICC companies appear to take a more structured approach to AI experimentation. Large, global organizations are establishing AI labs, AI marketplaces, innovation hubs, centers of excellence, and other dedicated forums to identify, test, and prioritize AI use cases and offerings. These structures create space to test what is technically possible, commercially relevant, operationally scalable, and sufficiently trustworthy before moving toward broader deployment.

We are also seeing signs of active talent investment around these initiatives, with new leaders and contributors being brought in in recent years to support AI experimentation and scale.



TICC leaders are also establishing closer links between innovation teams and senior decision-makers. Companies are creating more direct pathways between innovation teams and key stakeholders, including the CEO, CFO, CIO/CTO/CDIO, business unit leaders, and relevant risk or governance leaders.

These pathways are likely not intended to bypass scrutiny or accelerate decisions without appropriate challenge.

Rather, they give innovation teams more direct access to timely feedback, practical input, and attention to the resource and capital allocation decisions required for innovation to progress.

04 How are client-facing AI assurance services taking shape?

AI assurance isn't one-size-fits-all. Some TICC organizations are focusing on management-system certification, particularly ISO/IEC 42001, the first international standard for AI management systems, which addresses responsible governance and continual improvement. Others are developing more technical assessment capabilities, including the evaluation of models, datasets, software, and AI-enabled systems. A third group is embedding AI assurance into adjacent services such as digital trust, cybersecurity, functional safety, autonomous systems, or sector-specific conformity assessment.

As customers' needs mature, these layers are likely to become increasingly connected. For TICC companies, the most differentiated propositions may be those that bring these elements together: combining governance, technical assessment, regulatory understanding, and sector-specific expertise into a more integrated view of AI risk and trustworthiness.

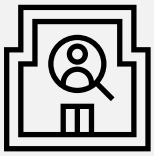
Leaders should also address the boundaries between advisory and independent assurance. The ability to help a client prepare for compliance can be commercially attractive, but the same organization must preserve the impartiality of any subsequent certification or conformity-assessment decision. This will require thoughtful service design, governance, and talent with a practical understanding of accreditation requirements.

05 Who needs to be on TICC boards to oversee AI appropriately?

Beyond the technology and AI profiles becoming relevant across industries, we believe several board profiles may be particularly important for TICC companies. The profiles below represent several types of board experience that may be especially valuable as TICC companies navigate the dual AI mandate.

The Voice of the Customer

Directors who are active operators or sitting executives within industries and geographies where the organization has significant customer exposure can help them maintain a pulse on the developments shaping customer needs, regulatory expectations, and future demand.



The Internal Regulatory Expert

Directors with experience navigating complex governance frameworks, regulatory environments, and risk management practices can help maintain the guardrails necessary to ensure AI is deployed in a manner that preserves traceability, accountability and appropriate human judgement.

The Standards and Academic Advisor

Directors with experience working across standards bodies, research institutes, and industry associations can help organizations stay close to the conversations shaping future requirements, contributes to the development of new principles, and translate emerging technologies into trusted standards and frameworks.

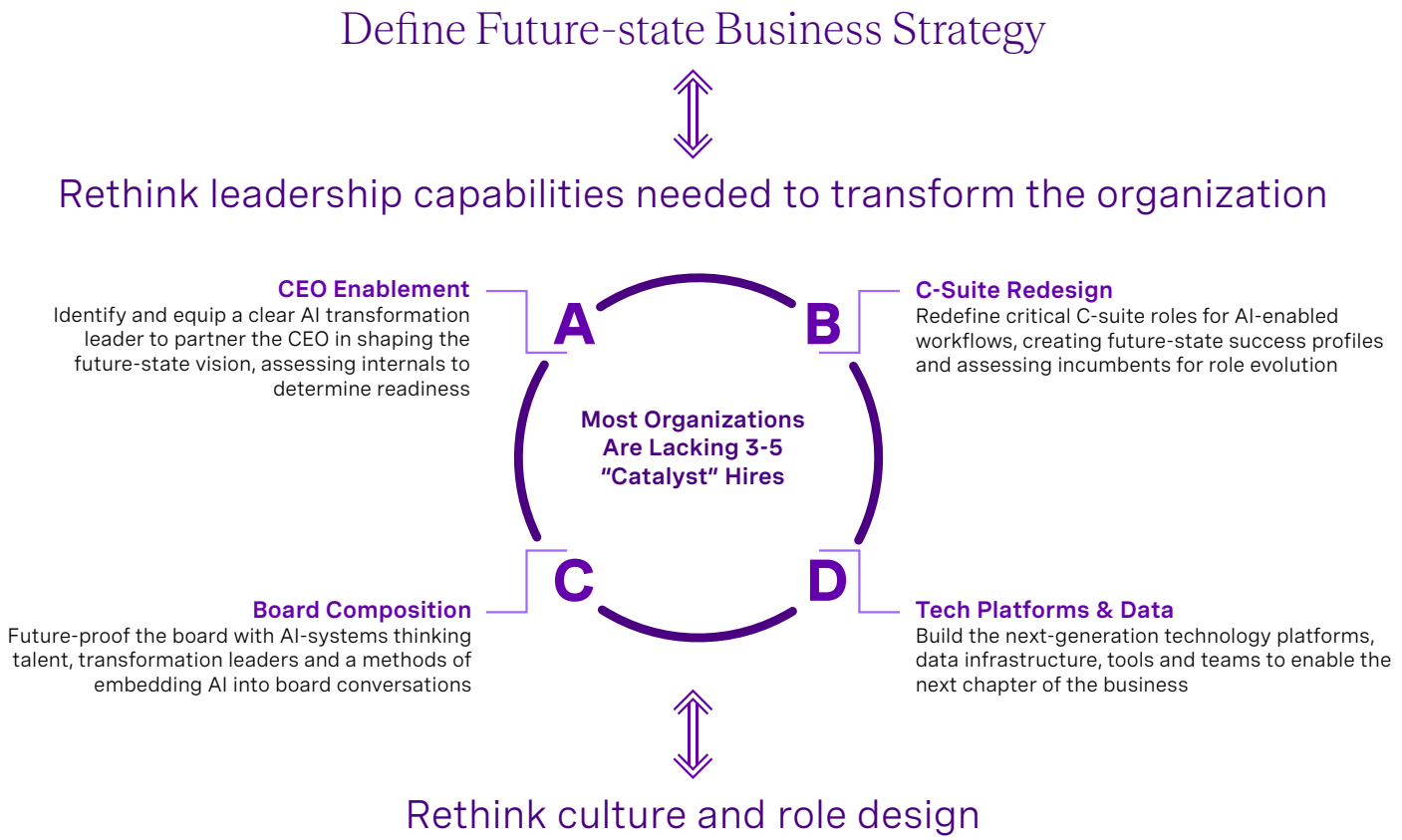
The TICC Veteran

Seasoned industry directors who have experienced previous waves of technological disruption firsthand bring valuable perspective on how to adopt today's AI technologies, respond to evolving customer needs, and navigate change while maintaining the principles that underpin trust and confidence in TICC services.

06 How can TICC companies build an AI-ready leadership model?

To build an AI-ready leadership model, TICC companies will need to connect technology adoption with strategic leadership. The organizations that make meaningful progress will be those that define a clear future-state business strategy, strengthen the data and technology foundations required to scale, and build leadership teams and boards with the judgment to know where AI can create value, where it must be governed carefully, and where human expertise remains essential.

In an industry built on trust, the differentiator will not be AI adoption alone, but the leadership, culture, and operating model required to deploy it responsibly.



01 Redesign every job

Translate AI ambition into concrete role implications, clarifying decision shifts and capability requirements and assessing those against the existing team.

02 Embed new leadership skills

Build leaders' capacity to operate under uncertainty—strengthening judgment, learning agility, and confidence working alongside AI.

03 Elevate those with an AI-first mindset

Support leaders to embed AI into daily decisions and ways of working; reinforcing behaviors that favor experimentation, adaptability, and learning.

04 Critically assess top leadership talent

Reframe assessment around forward-leaning skills, learning capacity, and systems thinking—ensuring future leaders meet the bar for AI-critical roles.

05 Upskill leadership and organization

Assess for practical AI literacy across leaders and teams—aligning decision principles, strengthening judgement, and protecting time for innovation and experimentation.

06 Drive organizational alignment

Align executives and boards around shared decision ownership, risk posture, and priorities to reduce fragmentation and accelerate AI-enabled change.

07 Nurture next generation culture

Reset leadership norms and incentives to legitimize learning, challenge, and experimentation.

Authors

Lucia Martinez leads Russell Reynolds Associates' Industrial Services practice in the Americas. She is based in Houston.

Kannitha Than is a member of Russell Reynolds Associates' Industrial and Natural Resources Commercial Strategy & Insight team. She is based in New York.

About Russell Reynolds Associates

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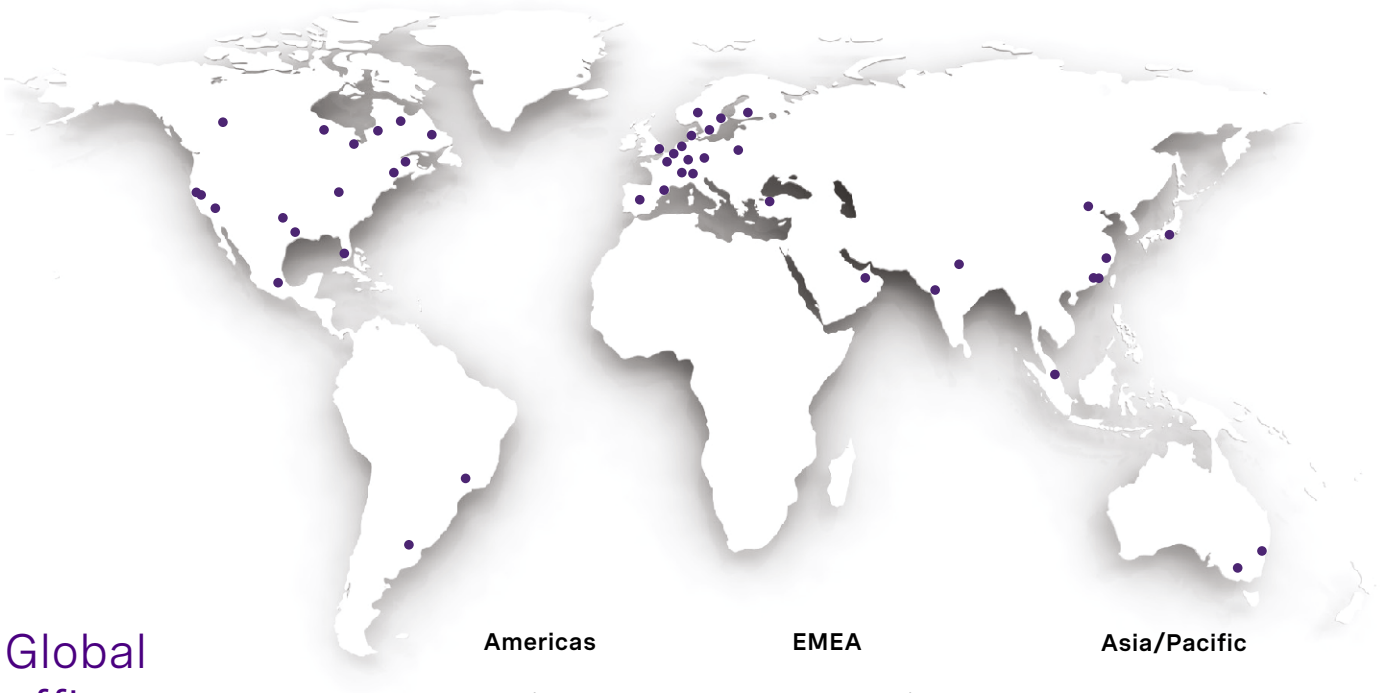

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