



SHI®

Leadership in action: Strategic AI planning and implementation

It's a leadership imperative. But what should a vision for success look like, and how do you help your people make it real?

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Introduction: Overcoming AI anxiety with actionable strategy

Business leaders face an urgent dilemma: implement AI strategically or risk falling behind in a rapidly evolving market. The challenge is harnessing AI's transformative potential while managing its complexity and risk.

Competitors aren't waiting. While some organizations deliberate budgets and talent strategies, others are already embedding generative AI into day-to-day operations — from optimizing supply chains to improving customer engagement and data analysis. IDCA's Q1 2025 industry survey shows that 87 percent of companies identify AI as a top business priority, 76 percent are actively using AI, and 69 percent have deployed generative AI in at least one business function.¹

Anxiety is justified. The divide is no longer about experimentation — it's about execution. PwC's AI Predictions emphasize that organizations pulling ahead are those making focused, leadership-driven bets on where AI can deliver real business impact, rather than spreading efforts thin across isolated initiatives.² In this environment, AI planning decisions shape not just near-term results, but long-term competitiveness.

This makes strategic AI planning a leadership imperative. Success starts with leadership, a clear vision, sound guardrails and processes, and trust in people to execute.

"AI is unlocking possibilities we could only imagine a few years ago. At SHI, our mission is to ensure customers don't just keep up with this transformation — they lead it. By providing the tools, expertise, and partnerships to innovate with confidence, we are helping organizations turn bold ideas into real outcomes."
- Thai Lee, SHI President and CEO

¹ IDCA, ["Q1 2025 Industry Survey on AI Adoption"](#), 2025

² PwC, ["2026 AI Business Predictions"](#), 2025

Strategic planning foundations: Building the blueprint for success

Winning organizations align early — bringing executives, IT, data, security, and business leaders together around shared goals. Just as important: elevating physical and infrastructure readiness to the same level of urgency. For on-prem or hybrid AI deployments, foundational questions around power capacity, cooling, data-center design, and operational scalability must be addressed upfront. When infrastructure planning comes too late, execution stalls.

Before the first model ever goes live, leadership must agree on what success looks like. The most effective AI strategies start by answering two simple questions:

Where will AI drive measurable revenue, cost savings, or risk reduction the fastest?

How will that value be proven within the first 90 days?

Strong programs resist the urge to tackle everything at once. Instead, they begin with a focused “beachhead” use case — one that delivers visible impact, builds confidence, and creates momentum for broader adoption.

“Trying to solve the billion-dollar problem first almost always stalls progress,” says Jacob Hoeft, product manager at SHI. “Quick wins create believers and free up budget.”

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At SHI, we help organizations address both digital and physical readiness. Our experts help organizations establish the necessary guardrails across policy, workforce education, monitoring, and enterprise-ready technology while also assessing infrastructure requirements for secure, scalable AI. We align vendor guarantees to your risk tolerance, regulatory obligations, and business goals -so you can move forward with confidence.

We also assess AI vendor guarantees against your risk tolerance, regulatory obligations, and business requirements. The result is a clear, actionable path to adopt AI with confidence — without slowing innovation.

Our AI Readiness Workshop turns ambition into a clear, actionable blueprint

The most effective AI strategies begin with strong fundamentals:

Clearly defined business outcomes to prioritize use cases by value and readiness. Leading organizations anchor AI initiatives to measurable business goals and outcomes, enabling use cases to be ranked by impact, risk, and data readiness.

They **focus on targeted and aligned opportunities where AI can deliver near-term value**, supported by cross-functional governance and change management, often via an AI council that aligns IT, security, legal, HR, and business owners to guide decisions and investment.

Leaders establish ROI metrics from day one, with each prototype tied to a single headline KPI.

An iterative delivery culture that operates in a disciplined “Plan » Prototype » Scale » Optimize” loop, with go / no-go checkpoints reviewed by the AI Council.

Assessing organizational skills and competitors, including auditing your AI/data talent and toolsets, benchmarking them against industry leaders, then closing the biggest gaps with hiring, upskilling, or partnerships.

SHI's AI and Data Readiness Workshops help establish this foundation with clarity and confidence.

Security and data readiness: Fortifying your digital frontlines

Your risks will materialize faster than your opportunities, partly because individual employees can “innovate” faster — by sending your data to non-secure chatbots for their productivity benefit — than you can reengineer your processes. Meanwhile, the most enterprising hackers will quickly weaponize AI tools against you. So, start with a rock-solid defense: Protecting your data and intellectual property must outrank every other AI priority.

SHI's AI advisory experts provide an AI Readiness Workshop to put you on the path to successful AI adoption. During the session, we'll evaluate your infrastructure, security, data, and business processes to help you build a clear AI strategy.

Watch this webinar to gain more insights on 'AI Readiness: Assessing Your Starting Point'

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You can't simply outlaw broad categories of AI tools — doing so often pushes usage underground. When organizations take a hard-line approach, employees find workarounds, turning to unsanctioned tools or personal devices. A more effective strategy is to offer a sanctioned path instead — one that's easier, safer, and more accessible than the rogue alternative.

At the technical level, generative AI introduces threats beyond classic cybersecurity concerns: data poisoning, model manipulation, prompt injection, and bias amplification. Meet them with next-gen controls — zero trust architecture, continuous monitoring, and AI-driven threat detection — backed by rigorous ethics and regulatory compliance (GDPR, CCPA, sector rules).

Review your existing security posture and decide how best to extend it. It's important to build trust by proving you can innovate without violating privacy or governance mandates.

But security is only half the equation; readiness is the other. Model output quality is chained to input quality. “Garbage in, garbage out” is now “garbage in, hallucination out.” Reassess and elevate data quality through formal governance frameworks, disciplined data-cleaning techniques, robust integration pipelines, and controlled accessibility. Even outside of AI, those upgrades pay dividends across the business.

Human and technical readiness: Bridging people and technology

Another priority is creating an environment in which your people feel safe to experiment — and inspired to do so. Clear guardrails tell employees what's risky, what's forbidden, and what's fair game. This empowers their curiosity as they test, iterate, and share.

The human dimension of AI implementation is often underestimated. Embracing AI demands a cultural shift — fostering a mindset of innovation, encouraging experimentation, and rewarding employees who share both successes and lessons learned. Nearly half of workers want more formal training, according to McKinsey.³ Yet most organizations still treat enablement as an afterthought.

Leading organizations flip that script. The BCG research referenced earlier shows that successful AI adopters invest 70 percent of their resources in people and processes, versus only 10 percent in algorithms and 20 percent in technology and data. Extensive new research from Harvard, Wharton, and Procter and Gamble⁴ on the benefits of adding AI “teammates” to business teams echoes the findings. In short, combined teams delivered bigger wins, higher productivity, better interdisciplinary thinking, and were happier.

³ McKinsey, [“Superagency in the workplace: Empowering people to unlock AI’s full potential”](#), 2025

An SHI AI Readiness Workshop and our AI & Cyber Labs can help you bring together IT, data, security, and line-of-business leaders to prioritize use cases, map required data assets, and define your first quick-win prototype — complete with success metrics and an action plan.

[Explore SHI AI & Cyber Labs](#)

Expect different patterns of collaboration between IT and businesspeople for leading-edge AI applications, compared to traditional non-AI software or older machine learning techniques. Today’s LLMs are so capable that applications can be simpler — think ChatGPT versus legacy ERP customization.

Accordingly, division of labor shifts: Domain experts craft prompts; IT secures data pipelines; the AI Council approves reuse. Beyond being smart, today's AI is also more like a person than traditional software. It can't balance your checkbook, but it can provide useful advice about raising kids. Businesspeople often have a better sense of how to apply these new capabilities than do technologists.

This is not to say that AI applications aren't technology-intensive — they absolutely are. Consider your organization's capabilities, resources, and requirements when making build-versus-buy decisions. Brian O'Connor, Solution Architect at SHI, advises, "Start with the needs and goals. Do you have the in-house expertise to support this and build it out? Consider the level of customization and control required, along with long-term implications."

For organizations just beginning their AI journey, cloud-based solutions typically offer the fastest path to implementation. Larger enterprises with dedicated resources may find building their own solutions more cost-effective in the long run. In either case, working with an experienced partner — one that has guided dozens of AI deployments — mitigates early missteps and accelerates time-to-value.

IDC recommends leveraging a "leading technology solutions provider, offering customers a wide range of products, solutions, and services spanning IT and datacenter infrastructure, cybersecurity, workplace productivity tools, and IT cost optimization" when deploying AI solutions.⁵

⁴ Dell'Acqua, et al, "[Working Paper 25-043 The Cybernetic Teammate: A Field Experiment on Generative AI Reshaping Teamwork and Expertise](#)", 2025.

⁵ IDC, "[The Role of a Partner in Deploying AI Use Cases into Production](#)", 2025

The right partner can make all the difference in helping guide you in choosing the right platform. SHI's experts can guide your AI implementation and **bring your AI strategy to life** by helping you navigate complexity, reduce risk, and unlock real business value.



Implementation approach

A phased implementation approach turns AI ambition into measurable progress.

Leading organizations manage risk and build momentum by starting with high-value, lower-complexity use cases that deliver quick wins while strengthening skills, data discipline, and governance for what comes next.

“A critical but often missed factor is that AI is inherently iterative; the solution deployed today evolves and matures and therefore expands beyond their initial scope, making it essential to plan for projected outcomes, future scale, and downstream impact from the start.” Rami Douenias, Sr. Director - Solutions Engineering - AI Platforms, SHI

In fast-moving AI environments, long roadmaps stall momentum; rapid, outcome-driven cycles create it. Don't expect positive ROI initially – view early projects as learning investments.

Value compounds over time: improved AI literacy, faster decision cycles, higher employee engagement, and cleaner data pipelines lay the groundwork for sustained impact.

SHI recommends a proven five-phase framework that keeps AI initiatives aligned to business goals and helps organizations move from experimentation to secure, scalable, value-driven adoption.

- 1 Discover:** Educate your team on AI capabilities, brainstorm potential use cases, and link each idea to explicit business goals
- 2 Prioritize:** Score each use case based on business impact and technical feasibility.
- 3 Design:** Map AI solutions to desired outcomes and establish success metrics.
- 4 Build:** Deploy secure infrastructure and develop AI applications.
- 5 Empower:** Train administrators and frontline workers on effective AI use.

Sustained AI success depends on continuous improvement.

As organizations progress, leading teams adopt agile methods — iterative development, rapid prototyping, and continuous feedback — to refine models, prompts, and guardrails with every sprint. Solutions are designed to scale from day one, using flexible architectures that adapt as demand grows and new models emerge. This disciplined cycle of innovation, measurement, and adjustment is what turns pilots into enterprise impact.

IDC projects \$1 trillion in productivity gains from generative AI and automation by 2026 — but only for organizations that implement AI systematically.

⁶ IDC, ["The Role of a Partner in Deploying AI Use Cases into Production"](#), 2025



Wherever you are in your journey, [SHI's AI Readiness and AI Use Case Workshops](#) help turn strategy into execution.

Outcomes: Turning AI ambition into business impact

Organizations that succeed with AI get aligned early. Strategy, stakeholders, and success metrics move together – grounding AI initiatives in clear business goals from day one. Instead of experimentation for experimentation's sake, each use case connects back to measurable outcomes like revenue growth, cost containment, or risk reduction.

That alignment extends across the business. IT, data, security, legal, and business leaders work from the same playbook, ensuring AI is embedded responsibly into everyday operations – not deployed in isolation.

Building readiness across people and technology

Strong outcomes start with strong foundations. Teams are empowered to test and innovate within defined guardrails, supported by AI literacy, role clarity, and human-in-the-loop oversight. At the same time, organizations strengthen the technology backbone – improving data quality, security posture, and operational discipline – so AI can scale without introducing unnecessary risk.

Business impact: Strategy that delivers

When AI planning is intentional, impact follows. High-value use cases rise to the top. Early wins build executive confidence. ROI metrics guide smarter investment decisions over time.

Productivity gains compound through faster decision-making, cleaner data pipelines, and stronger workforce engagement, with AI enhancing human expertise rather than replacing it. Governance led by leadership helps balance speed and safety, enabling progress through phased delivery and continuous refinement.

Why this matters now

AI adoption is accelerating faster than traditional planning models can keep up. While some organizations hesitate, others are already putting AI to work across daily operations. Strategic AI planning provides a clear path forward – defining where to act, how to manage risk, and how to scale value with confidence.

Bottom line:

Strategic AI planning turns disconnected AI efforts into a secure, scalable, KPI-driven business capability – delivering value today and a competitive advantage tomorrow.

Next steps — and how SHI can help

Embarking on AI governance can feel overwhelming, but SHI provides a clear path forward. Focus on practical actions delivering immediate value. SHI's [AI Readiness Workshop](#) offers a structured approach, meeting you where you are and guiding you toward comprehensive, confident AI adoption. Here's how SHI helps you take those crucial first steps:



Step 1

Develop an AI governance charter. SHI facilitates focused executive workshops to secure senior sponsorship that clarifies roles, responsibilities, and decision rights — laying the foundation for your AI governance



Step 2

Implement a use case capture system. SHI works with you to establish and enable your AI Council, implement a use case capture system, and develop a mature ROI analysis process to support innovation.



Step 3

Establish a data strategy. SHI's experts work with your teams to create a data governance plan that enables innovation while protecting sensitive information.



Step 4

Create an AI literacy program. [SHI can help you](#) implement frameworks like the META AI Literacy Scale to ensure employees understand safe and effective AI use.⁷



Step 5

Inventory current AI usage and implement technical guardrails. We use specialized tools and our own proprietary methodology to help you uncover both sanctioned and shadow AI, across all departments, to identify any existing governance gaps. SHI helps select and implement essential controls around approved AI tools, including DLP and access management, that balance security with productivity.

⁷ SHI AI Literacy Blog, ["Here's why AI literacy is easily the best thing you're not doing."](#) 2024

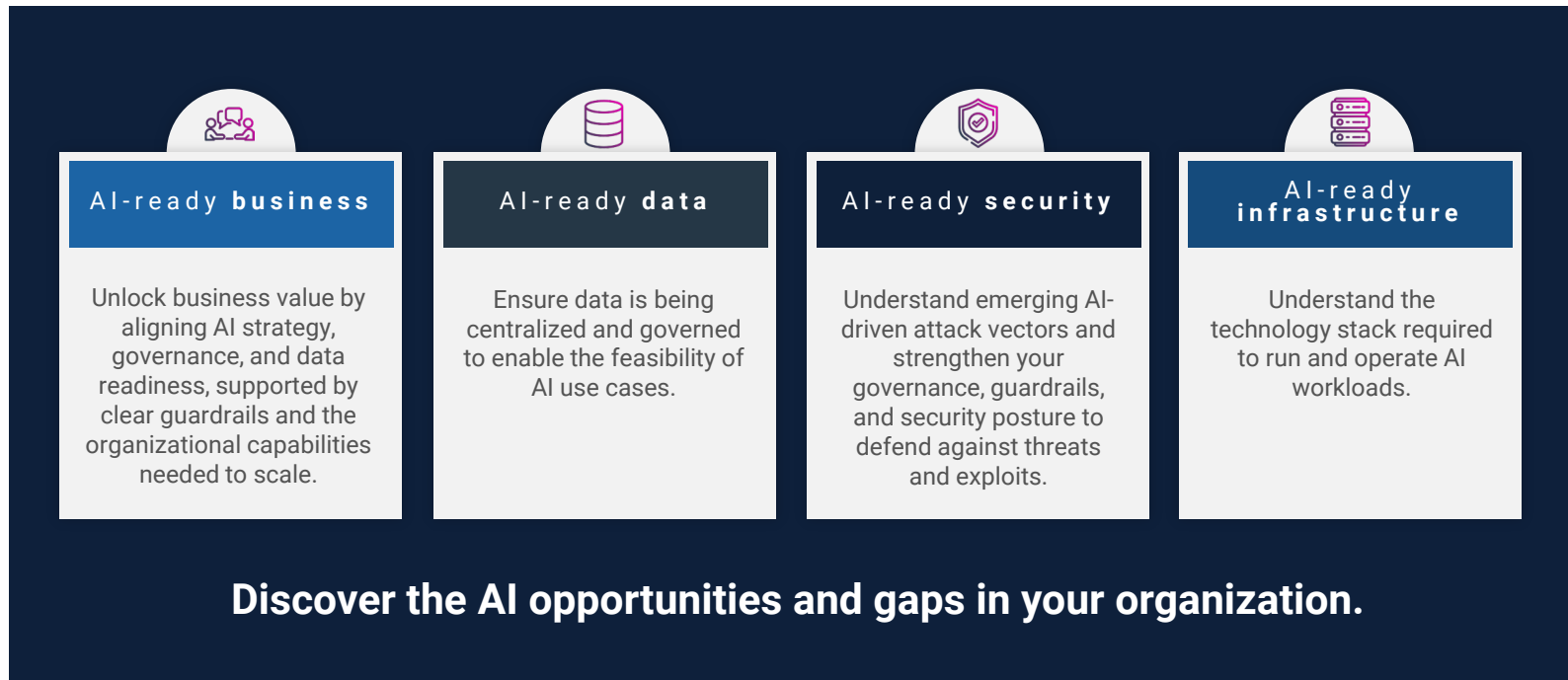
SHI also offers expertise and implementation capability to support an enterprise's entire AI journey. This can begin with an AI Readiness Workshop that evaluates an organization's security posture, data readiness, and infrastructure capabilities. Workshops bring together key stakeholders to develop tailored frameworks that align with specific business objectives. "Most organizations stumble on where to start," says Aaron Richmond, senior solutions architect and AI governance expert at SHI. "They need help writing policies, putting together comprehensive plans, and selecting the right vendors for their needs."

To dig deeper, [SHI's AI & Cyber Labs experience](#) is an excellent next resource.

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AI Readiness - Evaluate your capabilities across four pillars



These fundamentals provide a strong starting point for organizations. Turning these into a fully integrated, enterprise-grade AI capability requires deeper assessment and hands-on execution.

SHI works with organizations to move beyond concepts and point solutions, delivering end-to-end advisory and implementation that connects people, process, technology, and governance. Through structured workshops, technical assessments, and ongoing guidance, SHI helps organizations operationalize AI at scale, aligning strategy to outcomes, managing risk, and accelerating value in a way that is secure, repeatable, and built to evolve.

Proven frameworks can provide additional guidance, such as Mitre's ATLAS (Adversarial Threat Landscape for Artificial-Intelligence Systems),⁹ the Open Worldwide Application Security Project's (OWASP's) top 10 AI risks and mitigations,¹⁰ and Google's Secure AI Framework, (SAIF),¹¹

⁹ Mitre, "[Navigate threats to AI systems through real-world insights](#)", 2025

¹⁰ OWASP, "[OWASP Top 10 for LLM Applications 2025](#)", 2025

¹¹ Google, "[Google's Secure AI Framework \(SAIF\)](#)", 2025

About SHI's AI Readiness Workshop

Over the past two years, our experts have successfully deployed generative AI at leading Fortune 1000 organizations. Through this journey, SHI has learned invaluable lessons on achieving success and avoiding major setbacks.

SHI's AI Readiness Workshop is a two-hour, expert-led strategic workshop that benchmarks your technical and business readiness. We evaluate your current systems, data, infrastructure, and business alignment across four critical pillars: security, data, infrastructure, and business.

Our AI experts identify gaps, prioritize quick wins, and deliver a tailored strategic roadmap to enterprise AI adoption. We can assist your teams in AI adoption and increase AI literacy based on our own AI journey and hands-on experience.

Start planning and implementing your AI journey with us

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About SHI

SHI is not just a global IT solutions provider; we are your AI transformation partner. Our AI Lab infrastructure, in partnership with NVIDIA, is purpose-built for enterprise-grade ideation, experimentation, and adoption. This aligns directly with our strategic approach: Imagine, experiment, adopt, and scale. We empower organizations to imagine what's possible with AI, experiment in secure, scalable environments designed for rapid prototyping and production rollout, and adopt solutions with confidence — backed by our deep expertise in infrastructure, data governance, and enterprise AI.

SHI brings the technical depth and operational rigor needed to succeed. We help you navigate complexity, reduce risk, and unlock real business value.

Take your AI journey with us.

Connect with an SHI AI expert at AI@SHI.com.

www.SHI.com/AI

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