
RSI
RETHINK
SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES
THE
BIG
SHIFT
RSI EXECUTIVE PLAYBOOK | 2025
AI, Sustainability and
Constant Change

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Report Team

Chief Strategist
Yasmin Glanville

Writers & Editors:
Pamela Snively, Chief Data & Trust Officer, TELUS

Dr. Cindy Gordon, Founder and CEO, SalesChoice Inc.

Tim Weber, Co-founder and CEO, Diverso Energy

Editor:
Rick Spence

Designers:
Shyine Makin

Event Planning Team:
Yasmin Glanville

Jayden Kuzdak

Irene Lam

Madelyn Webb

Moderator:
Yasmin Glanville

Photography & Videography:
Jason MacFarlane

Cathy Ord

"The built environment isn't just where we live and work —it's where we create our future."

THE BIG SHIFT: AI, SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSTANT CHANGE

Rethink Sustainability Initiatives (RSI), the publisher of this report, is a trusted business transition partner. The event upon which this report is based supports our mission to engage with leaders, organizations, and communities to navigate uncertainty toward a flourishing and resilient future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The April edition of RSI's BIG SHIFT series, **AI, Sustainability and Constant Change,** explored how artificial intelligence and clean technology are reshaping business and society. A common theme emerged: disruption is not an isolated challenge but a catalyst for transformation. Artificial intelligence illustrates this duality—capable of driving productivity, insight, and innovation while raising urgent concerns around governance, ethics, and societal impact. At the same time, low-carbon solutions such as geothermal energy show how data-driven design, financial innovation, and workforce development can scale sustainability in practical ways.

Trust was identified as the essential foundation. Without public confidence in how data is used, how ethical frameworks are applied, and how technologies are governed, both AI and clean technologies risk resistance. Leaders must adopt a whole-systems mindset that embeds human-centric values into innovation, communicating them transparently, and collaborating across sectors to ensure progress benefits all.

Together, AI and sustainability stand as twin imperatives of our time. When guided responsibly, they can accelerate resilience, equity, and long-term value creation, transforming constant change into lasting opportunity. This report distills the themes of the April roundtable, offering readers a clear perspective on how AI and sustainability intersect, and what it takes to navigate disruption with foresight and purpose.

PART I:

THE BIG SHIFT: AI, SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSTANT CHANGE

Yasmin Glanville

The best solution to disruption is collaboration

By Yasmin Glanville,
Founder, RSI

From world trade to the climate and technology, business leaders are facing a hailstorm of disruptions that are transforming every status quo. We can view the disruptions as isolated problems to fix with incremental changes. Or we can adopt a whole-systems mindset to navigate the complexity of interconnected challenges and turn them into opportunities and catalysts for change.

To survive and win amidst exponential change, leaders, too, have to change. ChatGPT and Grok can analyze any conditions you give them and come up with a plan of action: to survive, leaders must know good information from bad, embed trust, energy and effort in their teams, and maximize all the resources – capital, talent, experience, data and partnerships – available to them.

To help Canadian business leaders in this journey, RSI created the "BIG SHIFT" roundtable series for leaders and experts to share ideas on the changing business landscape – and managing accelerating change. In February 2025 we explored disruptions, and how to take advantage of them. In March, we examined "big shifts" in the built environment. And in April, we explored innovation, trust and collaboration in the age of artificial intelligence – an event summarized in this special publication.

The BIG SHIFT series isn't just about experts. It's about sparking discussion, building relationships and connecting all the dots. We can all learn from each others' journeys. When the future is hard to read and coming at us fast, we all need to talk more, share experiences, ask for feedback, indentify common interests, and work together to create the future we want.

We hope you enjoy this special report. We'd be delighted to hear and explore your thoughts on these subjects, too. Feel free to contact us anytime at communications@rethinksustainability.ca.

PART II:

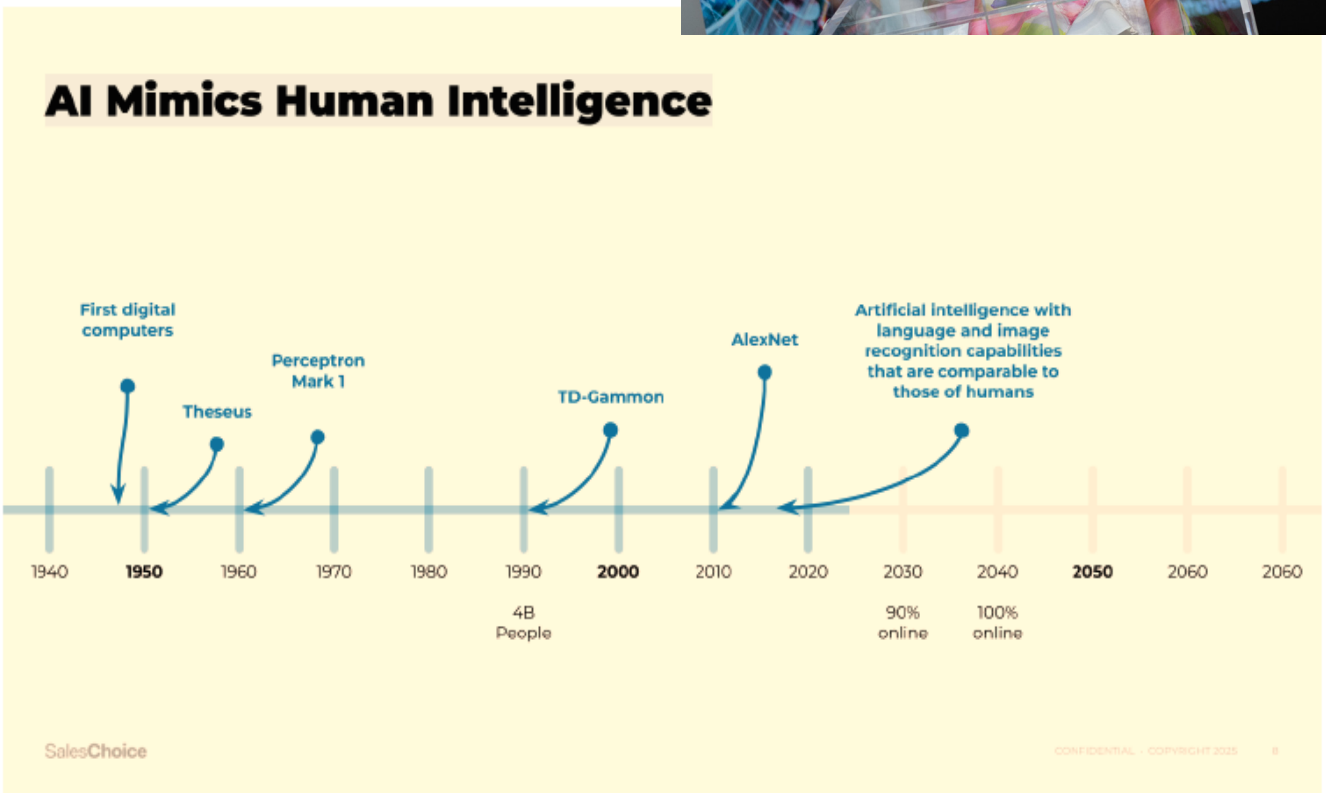
THE BIG SHIFT THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF AI TODAY

Dr. Cindy Gordon

By Dr. Cindy Gordon,
Founder and CEO, SalesChoice Inc.

AI - THE GOOD

AI has demonstrated enormous value in boosting efficiency and productivity, improving decision-making, enhancing customer experiences, and reducing human error. It is a technology that automates repetitive tasks, facilitates unbiased analysis, and supports all industries. With the rise of generative AI and Large Language Models (LLMs), trained on vast amounts of data, AI use is experiencing unprecedented growth.



PART II:

THE BIG SHIFT THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF AI TODAY

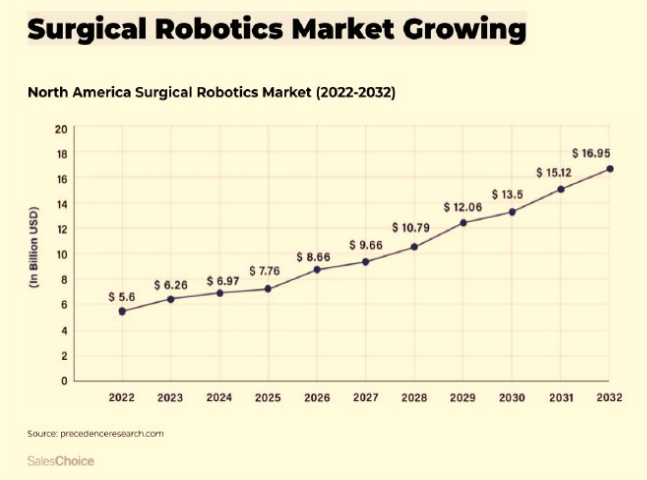
Dr. Cindy Gordon

By Dr. Cindy Gordon,
Founder and CEO, SalesChoice Inc.

A few statistics to help illustrate AI's global growth:

- The global AI market is valued at about $391 billion
- The AI industry is projected to increase in value by five times over the next 5 years
- 83% of companies claim AI is a top priority in their business plans
- 48% of businesses use some form of AI to utilize big data effectively.
- Netflix makes $1 billion annually from automated personalized recommendations.

AI is leading tremendous change in healthcare, where its benefits include improved diagnostic accuracy, accelerated drug discovery, personalized treatment plans, and better patient care. AI can also assist with data management, automate tasks, and predict potential health risks. Meanwhile, robots driven by AI and advanced imaging technologies are revolutionizing surgical practices, improving productivity and patient care.



Every industry can benefit from "Good" AI. Here are a few examples:

FINANCIAL SERVICES:

AI is used extensively in predictive analytics, which are used for fraud detection, risk management, automated trading, and customer service. AI-powered chatbots can offer customers personalized financial advice.

MANUFACTURING:

Applications using AI are everywhere, in automation, predictive maintenance, and supply-chain optimization. AI can also be used to control robots, improving efficiency and worker safety.

RETAIL:

AI can analyze customer data to recommend products, personalize promotions, and create tailored shopping experiences. More commonly, retailers are using AI-powered chatbots to provide customers with personalized support and product recommendations.

TRANSPORTATION:

AI is at the heart of self-driving cars, and it's managing traffic flow, reducing congestion, and enabling drones and robots to deliver goods more efficiently.

AGRICULTURE:

AI can help farmers optimize irrigation, predict crop yields, and improve pest control.

PART II:

THE BIG SHIFT THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF AI TODAY

Dr. Cindy Gordon

By Dr. Cindy Gordon,
Founder and CEO, SalesChoice Inc.

ENERGY:

AI can improve energy efficiency, predict energy demand, and optimize energy distribution.

EDUCATION:

AI can personalize learning experiences, provide tutoring services, and automate administrative tasks.

GOVERNMENT:

AI can improve government services, such as call centres, crime prevention, fraud detection, and disaster response.

AI - THE BAD

Although AI is showing tremendous promise across all industries, the major problems are generally rooted in organizations that lack robust Responsible AI governance frameworks. With limited government guidelines in place in Canada and the U.S., technological innovation has largely run ahead of effective regulation. We are in a situation where the EU has now legislated its AI legal position, which favours public safety and imposes stiff regulatory burdens on developers, while many other countries, such as the U.S. and China, have staked out pro-innovation positions, minimizing protective measures for managing risk and testing new AI models.

With these varying approaches, supply chain complexities increase as moving products and services into different global nations without aligned AI ethical and legal foundations just adds more uncertainty and fragmentation.

Although the variances prevail, there are signs of growing disenchantment amongst global leaders. In July, China proposed a global AI governance framework, calling for greater multilateral co-operation and warning against fragmented national strategies. Regulating AI's growing risks was a concern raised by Premier Li Qiang last month when he told the annual World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai:

"We should strengthen coordination to form a global AI governance framework that has broad consensus as soon as possible."

These concerns highlight the importance of educating board directors and C-level executives. In my own practice, I am spending much of my time guiding executives to use AI responsibly, and building stronger AI strategies and AI use cases. With over 75% of AI projects failing to demonstrate positive ROI, there is much for organizations to do to get the foundations right.

Senior leaders are advised to improve their AI investments by speeding up AI adoption and developing a "learn fast/fail fast" mantra. AI is a long-term game, and many organizations are not ready. Many of my clients have found that conducting AI Readiness Assessments can increase the odds of success.

PART II:

THE BIG SHIFT THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF AI TODAY

Dr. Cindy Gordon

By Dr. Cindy Gordon,
Founder and CEO, SalesChoice Inc.

AI - THE UGLY

While AI looks very promising, major challenges and potential harms must be addressed. Some of the challenges include environmental risks, due to high energy consumption; data privacy risks; potential for biased programming; and the risk of AI being used maliciously, whether for cyberattacks or to displace human workers.

Concerns also exist about AI's lack of transparency and its potential to generate misinformation, such as "deep fakes" or harmful content. AI can also perpetuate existing inequalities and prejudices, and create more harm through its potential to spread misinformation or produce discriminatory outcomes in areas such as hiring, loan applications, and criminal justice. Another big worry is job displacement: AI has been predicted to affect 25% to 30% of jobs over the next five years.

Other concerns include people's increasing dependence on AI, impacting our critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Research indicates that cognitive skills are already declining, as people prefer to solve problems with ChatGPT vs. investing time to think more critically.

CONCLUSION

Mastering AI requires a deep understanding of the requirements needed to develop robust AI governance and operational frameworks. Dr. Gordon stressed the importance of working with trusted and certified advisors. As AI exceeds human intelligence, executives need to take AI seriously to ensure they are building successful strategies and roadmaps for the future.

Cindy Gordon is a global thought leader, recently recognized as the top CEO in North America for advancing AI and Ethics. She can be reached at cindy@saleschoice.com.

RSI
RETHINK
SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

PART III:

BUILDING TRUST IN THE AI ERA: A BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

Pamela Snively

Low public trust is slowing the public acceptance of AI, and other new technologies

By Pamela Snively,
Chief Data & Trust Officer, TELUS

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, trust has become more than a nice-to-have – it's a fundamental business imperative. I believe that embracing human-centric practices will be crucial for fostering trust and driving purposeful adoption in the AI space.

We face a crisis of trust in society today, fueled by increasing polarization, weaponization of data, and the growing proliferation of misinformation. This erosion of trust is significantly impacting public acceptance of AI and other emerging technologies.

Recent TELUS research reveals that 80% of people agree that data privacy matters more now than ever before. Similarly, 86% of people say that having trust in a company increases their likelihood of buying its products or using its services. As organizations innovate with AI, it's important to understand the critical link between trust and business success.

THE PATH FORWARD: HUMAN-CENTRIC INNOVATION

To navigate this landscape, businesses must prioritize human-centric practices in their AI development. TELUS' approach, which has placed us in the top 10% of organizations globally for AI maturity, focuses on three key building blocks:

1. DATA AND AI LITERACY:
Invest in upskilling your workforce, from entry-level employees to top executives. TELUS' data literacy program, launched in 2021, has been expanded to include AI literacy, empowering team members to responsibly explore AI capabilities.

2. RISK MANAGEMENT:
Redefine risk assessment to consider the proportionality of benefits to risks, and, importantly, the likely impacts on individuals, organizations and society. TELUS' innovative "purple teaming" approach combines adversarial testing with collaborative problem-solving to identify and address vulnerabilities in AI systems.

3. DATA GOVERNANCE:
Implement effective, agile data governance practices to ensure efficient data sharing while maintaining security and privacy. TELUS' data stewardship program has created more than 525 stewards across the organization -- strengthening data governance and fostering a data-driven culture.

PART III:

BUILDING TRUST IN THE AI ERA: A BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

Pamela Snively

Low public trust is slowing the public acceptance of AI, and other new technologies

By Pamela Snively,
Chief Data & Trust Officer, TELUS

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR TRUSTWORTHY AI

Embracing these practices isn't just about mitigating risks – it's about unlocking business value. Organizations that prioritize trust and human-centricity in their AI initiatives can:

- Gain broader customer engagement with (or support for) their digital, data or AI products or services
- Win customer consent to use more data, and for broader purposes
- Reduce the likelihood of restrictive regulatory environments
- Drive innovation and improve customer experience.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

1. Don’t wait for regulation. Proactively implement trustworthy data practices and AI governance because it’s good for business
2. Embed ethical frameworks into your data governance program
3. Communicate your commitment to responsible AI -- loudly and repeatedly
4. Adhere to recognized standards (e.g., National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), International Standards Organization (ISO) to demonstrate trustworthiness.

By building a culture of responsible innovation and embedding ethical principles into your organization's DNA, you’re not just protecting your brand—you’re positioning your business for success in the AI-driven future.

PART IV:

GEOTHERMAL ENERGY IS TAKING CENTRE STAGE

How data and collaboration are key to green innovation

Tim Weber

By Tim Weber,
Co-founder and CEO, Diverso Energy

As Canada accelerates its shift away from fossil fuels, demand is surging for low-carbon heating and cooling solutions. But to lead Canada's clean energy transition, the building sector needs scalable and resilient solutions.

Geothermal energy—supported by skilled labour, innovative financial models, and collaboration with policymakers—offers a clear path forward. And its development could offer a model for other industries embarking on the green revolution.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: TAKING A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

Tapping geothermal energy – heat and cold already present in the earth – has emerged as a "table stakes" way to dramatically reduce the carbon intensity of buildings, especially multi-unit developments. But geothermal systems are not off-the-shelf equipment—they are critical infrastructure, comparable to a building's foundation. The borefield beneath a project is directly tied to its mechanical systems and performance. Long-term efficiency depends on precise engineering.

At Diverso Energy, data-informed design is at our core. Our in-house engineering design firm relies on a database containing years of operational data from buildings across Ontario—detailing how they respond to shifting demands such as weather and occupancy behaviors—to support predictive modeling for future projects. Real-world data is key to ensuring the "next generation" of geothermal buildings is technically sound and financially viable for developers.

DE-RISKING CLEAN TECH THROUGH ENERGY-AS-A-SERVICE (EAAS)

Once seen as too capital-intensive, geothermal has become more accessible through financial innovation. Geothermal Energy-as-a-Service (EaaS) models remove upfront costs and ownership, offering developers a fixed-rate, risk-free heating and cooling solution. This approach mirrors traditional utility models, while insulating developers from escalating energy costs and regulatory shifts—making geothermal more practical and predictable.

PART IV:

GEOTHERMAL ENERGY IS TAKING CENTRE STAGE

How data and collaboration are key to green innovation

Tim Weber

By Tim Weber,
Co-founder and CEO, Diverso Energy

BUILDING THE WORKFORCE TO MEET THE MOMENT

Canada's clean energy shift relies not just on technology and market-ready models, but on scaling up the supply of skilled personnel. Diverso is addressing this head-on through a partnership with Fleming College, supporting its one-of-a-kind Resources Drilling Technician program. Through direct funding, scholarships, and educational seminars, we are helping to upskill a new generation of technical talent.

FROM POLICY TO IMPLEMENTATION

Programs like the Toronto Green Standard (TGS) continue to set ambitious energy and carbon performance targets, leaving developers with important (and often daunting) decisions to make about how to comply. Geothermal providers can play a key role in closing the gap. As an industry, we can collaborate with municipal leaders and sustainability consultants to interpret these evolving standards and clarify developers' path to compliance and success.

RSI
RETHINK
SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

PART V:
RSI AND YOU: LET'S RETHINK WHAT'S POSSIBLE

At RSI, we believe real transformation happens when insight meets intention. When people are empowered to act, not just observe.

The ideas, challenges, and momentum surfaced in this report are just the beginning. As a trusted knowledge-exchange partner, RSI is focused on advancing true sustainability by co-developing applied research projects, publishing practical "executive playbooks", and connecting communities of interest to share challenges and launch joint initiatives—especially in areas like emissions reduction, climate resilience and community revitalization.

If you're ready to move beyond the status quo, we invite you to reach out. Join us as we build the strategies and collaborations needed to shape a future where sustainability isn't an add-on - it's the foundation.

Have ideas or challenges you're eager to explore?

Reach out directly to our Chair at alec@rethinksustainability.ca.

Interested in becoming part of our growing community?
Visit rethinksustainability.ca/membership to explore the benefits of joining RSI.

RSI
RETHINK
SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

PART VI:

RSI 2025 BIG SHIFT PARTNERS & SPONSORS

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

TELUS · ctr · SalesChoice · ener3 · Daniels (love where you live)

QUANTUM Lifecycle Partners · Southern Harbour · Colonia Treuhand · Sweeny&Co Architects · SIX

VIKONT · food mamba · ORD mary media · Assignment TV · CLEAR

RSA · theMINDSUITE.com · Diversso energy · HTS (Delivering Real Success)

ABOUT RSI

RSI is a trusted think-do accelerator that uses foresight, collaboration, and systems thinking to shape a thriving future. We bring together leaders and experts from business, institutions, and communities to discover and use scalable sustainability and resiliency solutions.
We convene and partner with leaders and experts across all sectors, to rethink, discover, and use innovative and scalable strategies and actions for shaping a more positive, sustainable, and resilient future, together.

RSI is a not-for-profit organization, incorporated in 2011 to discover, unlock, and shape scalable solutions to the sustainability and resilience challenges facing our world. **www.rethinksustainability.ca**

RSI
RETHINK
SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

THANK YOU