Building Capabilities to Assure Operational Outcomes.

An Integrated Framework for Commissioning, Operational Readiness, and Artificial Intelligence in Capital-Intensive Industries

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Abstract:

The transition from capital-project execution to stable operations is a high-risk value-realization window in asset-intensive industries. Conventional project governance typically emphasizes scope, cost, schedule, quality, mechanical completion, and handover; however, these indicators do not by themselves demonstrate that a newly delivered asset can achieve safe, reliable, maintainable, and economically sustainable operation. This conceptual research article develops an Integrated Operational Outcome Assurance Framework (IOOAF) in which Commissioning (Cx), Operational Readiness (OR), data readiness and governance, human capability, organizational integration, and artificial intelligence (AI) operate as mutually reinforcing capabilities. Commissioning provides technical assurance that systems perform as intended. Operational Readiness extends assurance to the people, processes, maintenance systems, supply chain, information, governance, and organizational arrangements required to operate the asset. AI provides a decision-support and predictive layer through machine learning, natural-language processing, digital twins, knowledge graphs, and related analytics. Drawing on dynamic capabilities theory, socio-technical systems theory, organizational learning, and contemporary research on virtual commissioning, digital twins, predictive maintenance, industrial knowledge graphs, and human-AI interaction, the paper proposes six testable propositions and a five-level capability maturity model: Fragmented, Integrated, Predictive, Adaptive, and Continuous Assurance. The central argument is that AI creates operational value only when embedded in reliable engineering data, validated asset models, competent human oversight, and cross-functional governance. The framework shifts readiness from a late-project checklist toward a lifecycle capability beginning during concept development and continuing through engineering, construction, commissioning, startup, ramp-up, steady-state operation, and organizational learning. The paper contributes an integrative theoretical architecture and a measurement agenda for subsequent expert validation and empirical testing in capital-intensive industries.

Keywords: commissioning; operational readiness; artificial intelligence; digital twin; predictive maintenance; capital projects; asset management; operational excellence; knowledge graphs; Industry 4.0.

1. Introduction:

1.1 Background and context

Capital-intensive projects create value only when the delivered asset performs in operation. This apparently simple proposition exposes a persistent weakness in conventional project governance: project delivery metrics and operational performance metrics are related but not identical. A project can satisfy engineering completion, cost, schedule, and handover requirements while the operating organization still faces unstable startup, delayed ramp-up, maintenance backlogs, incomplete procedures, inadequate spares, competency gaps, fragmented information, or control-system defects. Empirical capital-project research has long treated operability as an outcome distinct from cost and schedule, demonstrating that organizational and project-team factors affect all three dimensions (Scott-Young & Samson, 2008).

The source concept paper underpinning this article frames the project-to-operations transition as a capability problem. It distinguishes Commissioning (Cx) as technical verification, Operational Readiness (OR) as preparation of the workforce, supply chain, systems, and organization, and AI as an enabling layer capable of connecting and exploiting Cx and OR data. That framing is retained here but extended into a theoretically grounded, testable research model. The objective is not to treat AI as a technological add-on; rather, the paper asks how technical assurance, organizational assurance, data governance, human capability, and intelligent decision support can be configured as one lifecycle system.

The distinction is important because mechanical completion answers whether the asset has been built, commissioning asks whether it functions according to defined requirements, and operational readiness asks whether the organization can safely and sustainably operate it. AI can then improve prediction, prioritization, retrieval, simulation, diagnosis, and learning, provided that data quality, context, validation, and human oversight are adequate. The resulting research premise is therefore that project delivery success is necessary but insufficient for operational outcome success.

1.2 Problem statement

Commissioning, operational readiness, maintenance preparation, digital engineering, information management, and AI initiatives are frequently governed through different organizational structures, data environments, and assurance processes. Engineering and construction teams optimize technical delivery; commissioning teams verify systems, operations teams prepare people and procedures, maintenance teams configure asset strategies and spares, and digital teams implement data platforms, analytics, digital twins, or AI. Functional specialization is necessary, but fragmentation at the transition interface can create information discontinuities and accountability gaps.

The research problem addressed in this paper is therefore: How can Commissioning, Operational Readiness, and Artificial Intelligence be integrated as lifecycle capabilities to improve the predictability and sustainability of operational outcomes in capital-intensive industrial projects?

1.3 Research aim and objectives

The aim is to develop an integrated capability framework that combines technical assurance, organizational readiness, data readiness, human capability, organizational integration, and AI-enabled decision support to strengthen operational outcome assurance across the asset lifecycle. The specific objectives are to:

- examine the theoretical relationship between commissioning capability and early-life operational performance.
- explain how early Operational Readiness can influence startup, ramp-up, and sustained performance.
- identify how AI, digital twins, predictive analytics, natural-language processing, and knowledge graphs can strengthen Cx and OR.
- identify the data, governance, workforce, and organizational conditions required for credible AI-enabled assurance.
- develop the Integrated Operational Outcome Assurance Framework (IOOAF) and a five-level maturity model.
- formulate testable propositions and measurable constructs for future empirical validation.

1.4 Research questions

- RQ1. How does integrated Cx-OR-AI capability influence operational outcome assurance in capital-intensive projects?
- RQ2. Through what mechanisms do commissioning maturity and early Operational Readiness influence startup and ramp-up performance?
- RQ3. Which AI-enabled capabilities are most relevant to predictive commissioning, operational knowledge, and maintenance decision support?
- RQ4. How do data governance, human capability, and organizational integration condition the effectiveness of AI-enabled assurance?
- RQ5. How can the proposed framework be operationalized and empirically tested?

2. Theoretical Foundation:

2.1 Dynamic capabilities perspective

Dynamic capabilities theory explains how firms integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences in changing environments (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). The project-to-operations transition is a temporary but consequential reconfiguration problem: resources, knowledge, authority, information, and routines must move from a project organization toward a stable operating system. Operational readiness can therefore be interpreted as a dynamic organizational capability rather than a terminal checklist. This view is consistent with emerging conceptual work that frames OR as the organizational capability that converts project success into sustainable operational performance (Tain, 2026).

2.2 Socio-technical systems perspective

Socio-technical systems theory emphasizes joint consideration of technical and social subsystems rather than optimization of technology in isolation (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). This is particularly relevant to commissioning and startup: a technically functional asset may still underperform if staffing, competency, work processes, decision rights, maintenance systems, or information access are inadequate. Conversely, a highly prepared organization cannot compensate indefinitely for unresolved design, construction, control, or reliability defects. IOOAF therefore treats operational capability as a coupled socio-technical outcome.

2.3 Organizational learning perspective

Organizational learning theory provides the logic for converting project and operating experience into reusable knowledge (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Commissioning generates high-value evidence about system behavior, defects, workarounds, control logic, vendor constraints, and actual configuration. If this knowledge is lost during handover, the organization repeats diagnostic effort and weakens future project design. The framework therefore includes a closed learning loop from operations and maintenance back to future engineering and project definition.

2.4 Digital-twin and intelligent decision-support perspective

Digital twins provide a bridge between physical assets, virtual representations, data, and analytics. Fuller et al. (2020) emphasize bidirectional integration between physical and virtual systems and identify IoT, analytics, and AI as enabling technologies. Jones et al. (2020), through a systematic review of 92 publications, identified lifecycle use, data ownership, integration, and implementation as continuing knowledge gaps. These findings are important for commissioning because virtual models can migrate from design and control testing into operational decision support if model fidelity, configuration, and data interfaces are maintained.

3. Structured Integrative Review Method:

3.1 Review design

This paper uses a structured integrative review to synthesize research streams that are usually examined separately: commissioning and virtual commissioning, Operational Readiness and project-to-operations transition, digital twins, predictive maintenance and AI, knowledge graphs, and human-AI interaction in safety-critical settings. The reporting logic is informed by PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021), but the manuscript does not claim completed PRISMA database counts because final Scopus, Web of Science, and IEEE Xplore exports and deduplication were not supplied. This protects the integrity and reproducibility of the publication record.

3.2 Search protocol for final submission

Element	Protocol
Databases	Scopus; Web of Science Core Collection; IEEE Xplore; ScienceDirect as a supplementary publisher platform.
Indicative period	2000-2026 for digital/commissioning literature; foundational theory retained irrespective of date.
Core search blocks	("commissioning" OR "virtual commissioning") AND ("operational readiness" OR startup OR ramp-up); ("digital twin" AND commissioning); (AI OR "machine learning" OR "generative AI") AND (commissioning OR maintenance OR operations); ("knowledge graph" AND industrial maintenance).
Inclusion	Peer-reviewed English-language journal/conference studies directly addressing industrial assets, commissioning, project-to-operations readiness, digital twins, predictive maintenance, knowledge systems, or safety-critical human-AI interaction.
Exclusion	Purely consumer AI; non-industrial digital twins without transferable lifecycle implications; commentary lacking methodological or conceptual contribution, duplicates.
Screening	Title/abstract screening followed by full-text eligibility; reasons for full-text exclusion recorded.
Synthesis	Thematic coding by capability domain, mechanism, outcome, enabling condition, and research gap.

4. Literature Review and Concept Development:

4.1 Commissioning as technical assurance

Commissioning is the structured transition from constructed equipment and systems toward verified functional performance. It includes static inspection, loop and logic testing, dynamic testing, integrated system verification, defect closure, documentation, and performance demonstration. The source concept paper emphasizes systemic inspection, dynamic loop testing, and handover

documentation. This paper extends that view by treating commissioning evidence as a digital asset that should remain usable after startup.

Virtual commissioning strengthens the possibility of earlier assurance. Striffler and Voigt (2023) define virtual commissioning around connecting a control system, at software or hardware level, to a simulation model that behaves sufficiently like the real plant. Their comprehensive review highlights model creation, lifecycle-wide reuse, and progression toward simulation-based digital twins. More recent work demonstrates explicit reuse of virtual commissioning models as digital-twin foundations, supporting continuity from engineering validation into operations (Ferle et al., 2025). The research implication is that commissioning maturity is not only a function of test execution, it increasingly depends on model quality, configuration control, interface fidelity, and data continuity.

Traditional commissioning can be reactive when defects become visible only during physical testing. Virtual and predictive approaches move selected failure discovery earlier, but they do not eliminate physical verification. Instead, they allow risk-based prioritization, high-risk logic, interfaces, operating envelopes, and failure scenarios can be explored before or alongside physical tests. The appropriate research construct is therefore commissioning capability maturity rather than the mere presence of a commissioning plan.

4.2 Operational Readiness as organizational assurance

Operational Readiness concerns the capability of the operating organization to assume responsibility for the asset. Its scope extends beyond equipment to people, processes, systems, maintenance, supply chain, spares, vendor support, safety arrangements, emergency response, governance, information, and decision rights. Industry-oriented project-readiness research similarly distinguishes project execution, operational readiness, commissioning/ramp-up, and operations while emphasizing their overlap (Mackenzie, 2024). Emerging conceptual scholarship goes further by defining **OR** as a dynamic organizational capability that matures through project development rather than appearing at the end of construction (Tain, 2026).

This interpretation resolves a common governance problem. If **OR** begins too late, important operating requirements are discovered when design is frozen, procurement is complete, contracts are closing, and training time is compressed. Early **OR** allows maintainability, staffing, competency, asset hierarchy, spare-parts philosophy, procedure requirements, and information needs to influence design and procurement. It also creates a structured transition team in which project and operations personnel share accountability for readiness evidence.

4.3 Artificial intelligence and predictive maintenance

AI can act as a force multiplier when reliable technical and organizational data already exist. Applications relevant to operational assurance include anomaly detection, predictive maintenance, defect prioritization, document classification, information extraction, natural-language retrieval, image-based inspection, simulation support, and scenario generation. A 2024 systematic review of AI-enabled predictive maintenance found strong potential for maintenance recommendations but identified insufficient data as a leading implementation barrier (Carvalho et al., 2024). This finding is central to IOOAF: AI capability cannot be separated from data readiness.

Recent reviews broaden the predictive-maintenance landscape to include IIoT, explainable AI, generative AI, and digital twins, while continuing to identify integration and evaluation gaps (Kaur, Chopra, & Tripathy, 2026). In high-risk process industries, AI research increasingly emphasizes interpretability, uncertainty awareness, lifecycle validation, cybersecurity, data governance, and human supervision as conditions for credible deployment. Consequently, the appropriate role of AI in the proposed framework is decision augmentation and predictive assurance, not unqualified autonomous authority.

4.4 Digital twins and lifecycle continuity

Digital-twin research provides the technological architecture for linking engineering models and operational data. Lu et al. (2020) proposed a reference model for digital-twin-driven smart manufacturing comprising information models, data processing, and industrial communication. Fuller et al. (2020) similarly identify IoT and analytics as enabling technologies, while Jones et al. (2020) highlight lifecycle integration and data ownership as unresolved issues. A systematic review of digital twins in industrial operations found applications concentrated in production and predictive maintenance, with implementation challenges still limiting realization (Kritzinger-related operational review literature; see Aheleroff et al. and cited reviews).

For commissioning, the most important implication is continuity. A model created for design or virtual commissioning has greater lifecycle value when its assumptions, asset identifiers, interfaces, and configuration are maintained so that it can evolve into an operational digital representation. Ferle et al. (2025) explicitly explore this VC-to-DT reuse. The source concept paper's recommendation for a digital-twin commissioning module is therefore theoretically consistent with current research, but the framework adds governance, model validity, data provenance, configuration status, and human interpretation must be controlled.

4.5 Knowledge graphs and operational knowledge continuity

Industrial projects generate heterogeneous knowledge across drawings, datasheets, test packs, vendor manuals, procedures, work orders, alarms, maintenance history, and lessons learned. Document repositories preserve files but do not necessarily preserve semantic relationships among equipment, failure modes, causes, tests, procedures, and actions. Knowledge graphs can represent those relationships and support structured querying and reasoning.

Kang et al. (2026) systematically reviewed 270 Scopus records and closely examined 76 studies on knowledge graphs in operational maintenance. They identify querying, reasoning, and enhancement of other algorithms as major use patterns, with most applications concentrated in fault diagnosis and fewer studies addressing action identification or maintenance organization. This is directly relevant to IOOAF, the operational knowledge layer should not be reduced to search. Its long-term value lies in linking engineering configuration, commissioning evidence, maintenance logic, and operational experience in a reusable knowledge structure.

The integration of large language models and knowledge graphs is also emerging. Razaq et al. (2026) identify LLM-augmented knowledge graphs, KG-enhanced LLMs, and synchronized approaches, while noting continuing explainability and industry-coverage gaps. For safety-critical use, grounding generative systems in controlled asset knowledge can reduce unsupported responses, but it does not remove the need for verification and accountability.

4.6 Human-AI interaction and safety-critical governance

Industrial AI is a socio-technical intervention. A systematic review of human-AI interaction in safety-critical industries found fragmented terminology and identified user characteristics, expectations, interface features, output quality, explainability, and context of use as important influences on interaction quality (2024 IEEE Access review). The implication for commissioning and operations is that workforce AI literacy must include more than tool usage. Personnel must understand the limits of models, confidence and uncertainty, escalation rules, validation requirements, and circumstances in which human engineering judgment overrides automated recommendations.

Accordingly, IOOAF adopts a governance principle: AI recommendations do not automatically constitute engineering authority. Safety-critical decisions require defined accountability, validated models, traceable evidence, and competent human oversight. This principle prevents technological capability from outrunning organizational assurance.

5. Research Gap:

The literature is mature enough to establish the value of several individual components but remains fragmented at their intersection. Virtual commissioning research focuses on simulation, controls, model fidelity, and lifecycle reuse. Operational Readiness research focuses on organizational capability, people, systems, and transition. Predictive-maintenance research focuses on algorithms, sensor data, and failure prediction. Digital-twin research focuses on physical-virtual integration and lifecycle information. Knowledge-graph research focuses on semantic representation and maintenance decision support. Human-AI research focuses on trust, explainability, interaction, and safety.

What is insufficiently developed is an integrated capability model explaining how these streams jointly contribute to operational outcome assurance during the project-to-operations transition. In particular, the literature does not yet provide a widely accepted model in which commissioning maturity, OR maturity, data governance, human capability, organizational integration, and AI-enabled assurance are explicitly linked to startup stability, ramp-up predictability, reliability, availability, safety, and value realization. IOOAF addresses this integrative gap.

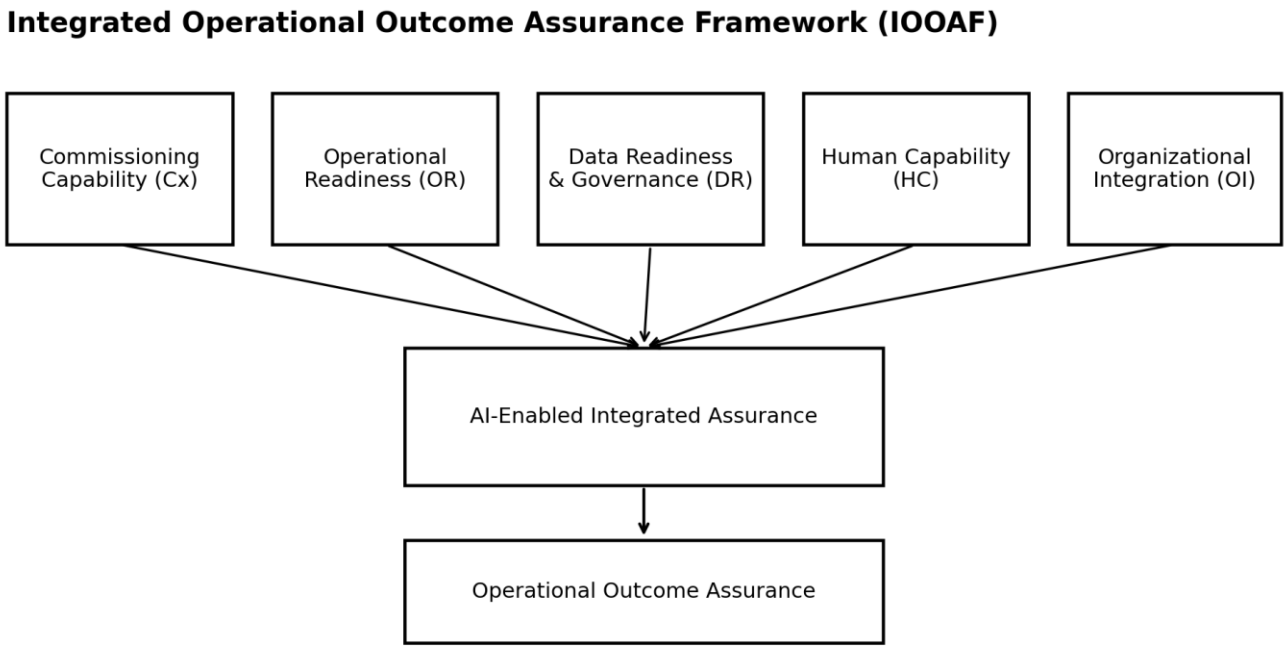


Figure 1. Integrated Operational Outcome Assurance Framework (IOOAF).

6. Integrated Operational Outcome Assurance Framework (IOOAF):

6.1 Core constructs

The framework contains five antecedent capability domains and one mediating/enabling assurance domain. Commissioning Capability (Cx) captures the maturity of technical verification, integrated testing, defect management, configuration control, and commissioning evidence. Operational Readiness (OR) captures workforce, procedures, maintenance, spares, systems, governance, and organizational preparedness. Data Readiness and Governance (DR) captures asset hierarchy, tagging, data quality, interoperability, provenance, cybersecurity, and controlled information. Human Capability (HC) captures technical competency, digital literacy, AI literacy, judgment, and escalation capability. Organizational Integration (OI) captures cross-functional governance, early operations involvement, shared decision rights, and information exchange. AI-Enabled Integrated Assurance describes the use of predictive analytics, digital twins, NLP, knowledge graphs, computer vision, and decision-support systems to identify, prioritize, simulate, retrieve, and learn from operational risk.

6.2 Operational outcome assurance

Operational Outcome Assurance (OOA) is the dependent construct. It is not a single KPI, it represents the degree to which the asset and operating organization can predictably achieve intended safety, reliability, availability, production, quality, maintainability, startup, and ramp-up outcomes. This avoids the conceptual error of equating readiness with completion of deliverables. Readiness is demonstrated by capability and evidence, while outcomes are demonstrated by performance.

6.3 Lifecycle architecture:

The lifecycle model begins at concept because operational requirements should influence decisions while change remains feasible. Engineering converts requirements into design and data structures; construction creates the physical asset; commissioning verifies function; startup and ramp-up expose the system to real operating conditions; steady-state operations generate performance evidence; and organizational learning feeds experience back into future design. The model therefore replaces linear handover with a closed learning loop.

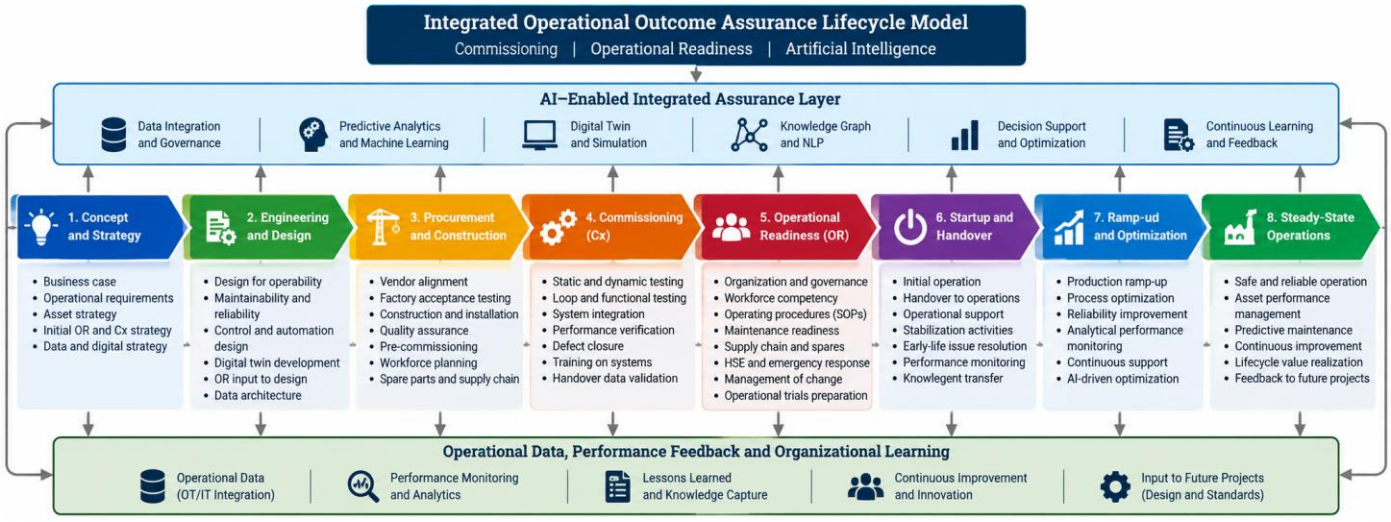


Figure 2. Lifecycle Operational Outcome Assurance and learning loop (generated by AI).

7. Research Propositions:

The conceptual model yields six propositions suitable for later empirical testing:

- P1. Higher commissioning capability maturity is positively associated with startup reliability and early-life operational performance.
- P2. Earlier and more mature Operational Readiness is positively associated with ramp-up predictability and sustained operational performance.
- P3. The positive relationship between commissioning capability and operational outcomes is strengthened when commissioning and OR information is digitally integrated and governed.
- P4. AI-enabled integrated assurance improves the identification, prioritization, and treatment of commissioning and readiness risks when data quality, contextual integrity, and model validity are sufficient.
- P5. Human capability and organizational integration positively moderate the relationship between AI-enabled assurance and operational outcomes.
- P6. Integrated Cx-OR-DR-HC-OI capability is more strongly associated with Operational Outcome Assurance than isolated maturity in any single capability domain.

8. Capability Maturity Model:

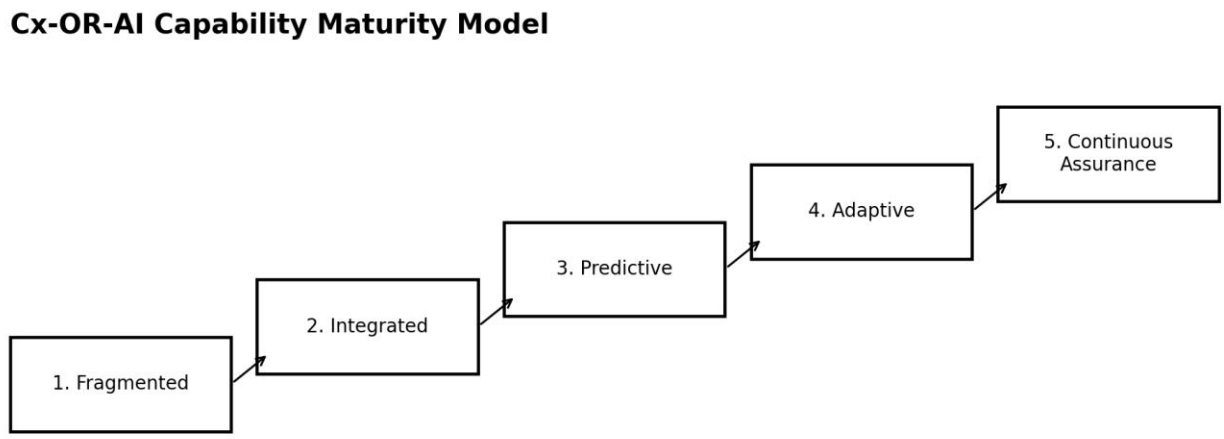


Figure 3. Five-level Cx-OR-AI capability maturity model.

Level	Characteristics	Dominant risk
1. Fragmented	Cx, OR, operations, maintenance, and digital teams use separate processes and repositories; readiness is checklist-driven.	Late discovery, information loss, unclear accountability.
2. Integrated	Common asset hierarchy, cross-functional transition governance, aligned Cx/OR plans, controlled handover data.	Integration quality and inconsistent adoption.
3. Predictive	Risk analytics, virtual commissioning, digital twins, anomaly detection, predictive maintenance, prioritized defect closure.	Model/data quality; false confidence.
4. Adaptive	Context-aware decision support, knowledge graphs, field assistance, rapid learning loops, dynamic procedures where controlled.	Human-AI calibration, explainability, cyber and change control.
5. Continuous Assurance	Operational evidence continuously informs maintenance, optimization, future projects, and design standards under formal governance.	Governance complexity and lifecycle model assurance.

9. Operationalization and Measurement:

A future empirical study can operationalize IOOAF as a multidimensional latent-variable model. Measurement items should be developed from the literature and refined through expert interviews, content-validity assessment, pilot testing, and psychometric evaluation. Example indicators are provided below.

Construct	Illustrative indicators	Possible evidence
Commissioning Capability	test completeness; integrated testing; defect closure discipline; configuration control; quality of commissioning records	test packs, punch lists, system completion database, acceptance records
Operational Readiness	competency; SOP readiness; maintenance readiness; spares; EAM/CMMS readiness; emergency preparedness	training matrices, procedures, maintenance plans, spares status, readiness gates
Data Readiness & Governance	tag consistency; master-data quality; interoperability; provenance; access control; cybersecurity	data-quality audits, asset hierarchy, integration architecture, governance records
Human Capability	technical competency; digital literacy; AI literacy; ability to challenge/verify recommendations	assessments, certification, simulation performance, training records

Organizational Integration	early operations involvement; transition-team effectiveness; shared governance; information flow	RACI, meeting decisions, gate reviews, interface registers
AI-Enabled Assurance	predictive analytics; digital-twin use; knowledge retrieval; anomaly detection; decision support	model validation, alerts, prediction logs, digital-twin usage, KG/LLM records
Operational Outcomes	startup duration; ramp-up stability; reliability; availability; safety; production attainment; early-life failures	production historian, reliability KPIs, incident data, downtime, startup curves

10. Proposed Empirical Validation Design:

10.1 Phase 1: expert qualitative validation

The first empirical phase should use approximately 15-25 purposively selected experts with substantial experience in commissioning, operations, maintenance, project management, asset management, digital transformation, or industrial AI. Semi-structured interviews should test construct definitions, causal mechanisms, industry terminology, missing variables, and practical feasibility. Thematic analysis can refine the framework before survey development.

10.2 Phase 2: instrument development and pilot

Survey items should be written as reflective or formative indicators according to the conceptual nature of each construct, reviewed for content validity, and pilot-tested with a smaller practitioner sample. Common-method bias controls should include procedural separation of predictor/outcome blocks, neutral wording, anonymity, and statistical diagnostics.

10.3 Phase 3: quantitative validation

A cross-sectional multi-industry survey of approximately 200-300 qualified practitioners would provide an initial test. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is a plausible method when the objective is prediction-oriented theory development involving multiple latent constructs and potentially formative measurement. Method selection should follow current PLS-SEM guidance rather than treating the technique as universally appropriate (Sarstedt, Hair, & Ringle, 2022). Reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, collinearity, structural paths, effect sizes, predictive relevance, and out-of-sample prediction should be reported as appropriate.

10.4 Phase 4: longitudinal/case validation

Because startup and ramp-up unfold over time, the strongest later validation would compare project readiness measures before startup with actual post-startup performance. Longitudinal case studies could test whether higher IOOAF maturity predicts fewer early-life failures, shorter stabilization time, higher availability, or faster production attainment. This would move the framework from perceived capability to demonstrated operational effect.

11. Strategic Implementation Architecture

The source concept paper proposed three phases: breaking down silos, adding an AI intelligence layer, and progressing toward autonomous or continuous assurance. IOOAF preserves that logic but adds two prerequisites: governance and human capability. Implementation should therefore begin with a common asset/data architecture and cross-functional transition governance, not with AI procurement.

Stage A - Foundation: Establish asset hierarchy, tagging standards, data ownership, controlled engineering information, commissioning/OR governance, transition team, readiness gates, and competency requirements.

Stage B - Integration: Connect commissioning records to maintenance plans, EAM/CMMS master data, spares, procedures, training requirements, and handover evidence. Create one controlled digital thread across project and operations.

Stage C - Intelligence: Apply risk analytics, virtual commissioning, anomaly detection, NLP, computer vision, and predictive maintenance to selected high-value use cases. Validate models against known engineering and operating evidence.

Stage D - Adaptive assurance: Introduce knowledge graphs, contextual field assistance, scenario simulation, and controlled generative-AI support with traceability and human verification.

Stage E - Continuous assurance: Feed operational outcomes, failure learning, maintenance history, and model performance back into engineering standards, future projects, readiness plans, and digital-twin updates.

12. Discussion:

12.1 Theoretical contribution

The first contribution is the integration of project-to-operations transition with dynamic capabilities. Commissioning and OR are not treated as parallel checklists; they are mechanisms through which the organization configures technical and organizational capability for a new operating context. The second contribution is socio-technical, the framework makes technical assurance, human capability, governance, and intelligent systems jointly necessary rather than substitutable. The third contribution is informational: commissioning evidence is conceptualized as lifecycle knowledge rather than a handover archive. The fourth contribution is the positioning of AI as an assurance multiplier whose effect depends on data, context, human competence, and organizational integration.

12.2 Managerial contribution

For executives, IOOAF changes the governance question from “Is the project complete?” to “Is the asset-operating system capable of achieving the intended outcomes, and what evidence demonstrates that capability?” This encourages readiness metrics in stage-gate governance, earlier operations involvement, explicit data-quality criteria, and ownership of transition risk. For commissioning

leaders, it broadens success from test completion toward reusable operational evidence. For operations and maintenance leaders, it creates earlier influence over design, data, procedures, spares, and competency. For digital leaders, it prevents AI programs from being disconnected from asset configuration, engineering authority, and operational workflows.

12.3 Why the model is multiplicative in practice

Although the empirical model should estimate relationships rather than assume a literal mathematical product, the managerial logic is approximately multiplicative, severe weakness in one foundational capability can constrain the value of the others. Excellent AI cannot compensate for corrupted asset tags; excellent training cannot compensate for unresolved control defects; a sophisticated digital twin cannot compensate for uncontrolled configuration; and perfect commissioning records do not create operational capability if the workforce, spares, maintenance system, and procedures are unready. The framework therefore emphasizes balanced capability development.

13. AI Governance, Ethics, and Human Oversight

AI in capital-intensive and safety-critical operations must be governed according to consequence. Low-consequence uses such as document classification can tolerate different controls from safety-critical recommendations affecting process conditions, protection systems, or maintenance deferral. Governance should therefore define model ownership, validation, approved use, data provenance, cybersecurity, change control, confidence thresholds, escalation, logging, auditability, and human authority.

Explainability is especially important when AI influences fault diagnosis or operational response. Razaq et al. (2026) identify explainability as an unresolved challenge in LLM-KG fault diagnosis, and the broader safety-critical human-AI literature similarly emphasizes interpretability, user expectations, and context. The principle adopted here is simple: AI may recommend, prioritize, simulate, summarize, or retrieve, but accountable engineering and operating authorities remain responsible for decisions unless a formally engineered and validated autonomous safety function has been approved under the applicable regulatory and functional-safety regime.

14. Limitations:

This article is conceptual and does not report original field data. Causal relationships are therefore propositioning rather than demonstrated effects. The constructs are intentionally broad so that the framework can span oil and gas, energy, mining, process industries, infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing, sector-specific validation may reveal different weights or additional variables. The structured review integrates verified literature but is not presented as a completed PRISMA systematic review because final database exports, deduplication, dual screening, and quality appraisal have not yet been performed. Finally, rapid advances in generative AI and industrial digital twins mean that technology-specific implementation guidance will require continuing update.

15. Future Research:

Future research should prioritize five directions. First, validate the construct structure and measurement instrument through expert panels and multi-industry surveys. Second, conduct longitudinal studies linking pre-startup readiness maturity to post-startup reliability, safety, and ramp-up performance. Third, compare sectors to determine whether the same capability architecture applies across process, energy, mining, and manufacturing contexts. Fourth, investigate how knowledge graphs and grounded generative AI can preserve commissioning knowledge without creating unacceptable hallucination or authority risks. Fifth, develop economic models that connect IOOAF maturity to avoided startup delay, reduced early-life failure, lower maintenance cost, and faster value realization.

16. Conclusion:

Capital projects do not create their intended value at mechanical completion; they create value when the delivered asset and the operating organization can repeatedly produce safe, reliable, and economically sustainable outcomes. Commissioning provides technical assurance, Operational Readiness provides organizational assurance, data governance creates a trustworthy information foundation, human capability provides judgment and accountable action, organizational integration connects project and operations, and AI can amplify prediction, retrieval, diagnosis, simulation, and learning.

The Integrated Operational Outcome Assurance Framework reframes project-to-operations transition from a handover event into a lifecycle capability. It proposes that readiness begins during concept development, matures through engineering and construction, is demonstrated through commissioning and startup, and continues through ramp-up, steady-state operation, and organizational learning. AI is most valuable when embedded in this architecture rather than introduced as an isolated technology program.

The central contribution can be summarized as a shift from commissioning an asset to engineering operational capability. Future empirical research should test whether organizations with higher integrated Cx-OR-data-human-integration maturity achieve more predictable startup, faster stabilization, stronger reliability, and more sustainable lifecycle performance.

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Appendix A. Suggested Expert Interview Domains

- How is operational readiness defined and governed in your organization?
- At what project stage do operations and maintenance personnel gain meaningful influence over design?
- Which commissioning records are most valuable after startup, and which are commonly lost or difficult to retrieve?
- What data-quality problems most constrain predictive analytics or AI?
- Which AI-supported decisions would you permit, require human verification for, or prohibit?
- Which measures best demonstrate that an asset is operationally ready rather than merely mechanically complete?
- What evidence would convince you that integrated Cx-OR-AI capability improves startup or lifecycle outcomes?