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Signature Edtech Leadership
Crafting an Authentic, Influential, and Innovative Approach

As a Savvy Edtech Leader, you likely already realize that navigating the dynamic world of K–12 education today requires a multifaceted approach. Begin by crafting a road map that guides through and reflects on both successes and failures. Dive into the data, observe, actively listen, and communicate with intention. Embrace innovative thinking and glean insights from every experience, whether positive or negative. Savvy Edtech Leaders scrutinize the outcomes of previous choices and explore multiple pathways to successful resolutions.

Effective Edtech Leaders aren't just managers and leaders; they are talent discoverers. Armed with courage, they unearth hidden potential in others (Brown, 2018). Striking a balance between authority and empowerment, they invest time in forging authentic connections, understanding their team, and nurturing mutual commitment and trust. Research has found that organizations need leaders who are accomplished at motivating employees so that the employees can demonstrate positive behaviors to

maintain stability and benefit the organization, especially when those behaviors are not officially stated as part of the job description (Yamak and Eyupoglu, 2021).

As you synthesize the insights and strategies in this chapter, establish clear goals and actionable steps to set the stage for progress. Continuous evaluation and adjustment are the essence of effective leadership, ensuring the path toward success remains illuminated and attainable.

THE ISTE STANDARDS

Chapter 4 explores several aspects of the ISTE Education Leader Standards, particularly focusing on the **Visionary Planner Standard (3.2)**, the **Empowering Leader Standard (3.3)**, and the **Systems Designer Standard (3.4)**. Aligning with Standard 3.2, this chapter provides practical guidance on crafting a road map, prioritizing resources wisely, and continuously evaluating and adjusting strategies. These actions mirror the process of engaging stakeholders in establishing a shared vision (3.2.a), collaboratively creating a strategic plan (3.2.b), and evaluating progress on the plan while making course corrections (3.2.c).

Additionally, the chapter content aligns with Standard 3.3 by emphasizing the importance of empowering educators, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration, and supporting educators in using technology to meet diverse learning needs. This resonates with empowering educators to exercise professional agency (3.3.a), inspiring a culture of innovation (3.3.c), and supporting educators in using technology to advance learning (3.3.d).

Furthermore, the chapter reflects aspects of Standard 3.4 by emphasizing the need for effective communication, talent discovery, and continuous evaluation and adjustment. This corresponds to leading teams to establish robust infrastructure and systems (3.4.a), ensuring sufficient resources for supporting effective use of technology (3.4.b), and continually improving operations through partnerships (3.4.d).

Build the Skill of Reflection

Have you seen people repeatedly follow the same unsuccessful process, hoping for a better outcome each time they do it? Perhaps you have felt stuck in a similar loop and don't know how to get out. Conversely, you might know others who can somehow take all incoming information from a less-than-optimal situation and create a flaw-free "cleanup" that magically turns everything around and saves the project. How does that happen?

A highly effective Edtech Leader exercises the art of reflection. They can remove themselves from the situation they are mired in and reflect impassively on the issues, without making excuses. Because they are good reflectors, they get things done.

KEY STRATEGIES

- Step back and review your actions, decisions, and outcomes. By reviewing your decision-making process and the results, you can identify areas of strength and any need for improvements.

- Learn from your positive and negative experiences. Lessons and insights from a certain project may apply to other issues you are dealing with.

- Use the art of reflection to learn about your leadership style, decision making, and critical-thinking skills. Use the reflective process to learn how you approach problems and clarify your values and beliefs.

- Reflection helps you explore your communication style and the impact your communication has as it supports the goals you are trying to achieve.

- Teach others how to be thoughtful reflectors. Doing a "talk-about" (when you talk through your reasoning), modeling reflection, and building reflective sessions into your team meetings helps to grow the art of reflection in others.

Here are some questions Savvy Edtech Leaders may ask themselves when they use their reflective muscle:

- *What worked well in the process?*
- *What didn't work well? Why didn't it?*

- *What were the factors that could have been changed?*

- *If somebody had altered them, would we have gotten closer to success?*

- *What are optimal conditions for success?*

- *What has worked well in the past, and how can I apply those successes to this situation?*

Once they have reviewed the issue, a great Edtech Leader will ask themselves: *What was my part in this situation that went poorly? What was my role in the success? What could I have done to help make the outcome better?* This part of the reflection takes great maturity, in that before we look at the external factors that may not have gone as well as we had planned, we first must look inside and hold ourselves accountable.

While there are many external factors that we cannot control, like weather, time, and other people's actions, what can we impact for the better? Is it cleaner and more transparent communication to all groups involved, or is it expectation management? Is it looking ahead and then working to mitigate the level of risk involved, or is it gathering more information from your stakeholders to better tailor your solution? Is it helping people name their fears so that you can help them build resiliency strategies? Or is it a simple rearrangement in the order of operations to get a more concise outcome?

A SAFE SPACE

I like to call areas of deficit the "gaps." When we use that word, we do not blame others; we just identify a gap between where something ended up and where we needed it to be. When we intentionally do not name the people involved and what they did wrong in the process, we provide a safe environment where team members can collaborate without feeling like they must be accurate one hundred percent of the time. We are human and sometimes do not get things right the first, second, or third time. You gain another nugget of knowledge every time you take the opportunity to try a new or innovative solution. What worked well? What didn't work well?

I often modeled the skill of continuous learning by talking through my lessons learned when working with my staff. While I made myself vulnerable, I wanted to model how to reflect and learn from past actions. I hoped others would pick up on the reflective method, learn to talk through problems, and collaborate to devise better solutions. By using this technique, I eventually saw others lower their aversion to risk, try new and innovative approaches, and then reflect upon them for a more well-rounded solution.

—DIANE DOERSCH

It may be human nature to shift accountability over to others for tasks or projects that did not go as planned. An astute Edtech Leader rises above the human instinct to place blame on individuals and instead uses their reflective skills and curiosity to home in on where the project may have started to go off track. They do not focus on what the team members did to cause the disconnect. Instead, they dig deep into the issue to discover the root causes. What was the cause of the problem? How could it have gone better?

Many times, things will go differently than planned, and there will be times when the outcomes turn out differently than you had hoped. Some might label the incident as a failure. As difficult as the word failure feels to a leader, it is a necessary opportunity to learn and grow. In reflection, one must accelerate the collection of information to establish best practices. For every "what didn't work," there is a "what will work." Identifying paths toward success often comes from the information learned from failures.

Helping Others Become Good Reflectors

Guiding others in the reflective process is one of the more complex tasks you may take on. Your modeling and "talk-abouts" will be essential in assisting others in developing their reflective skills. In fostering the growth of good reflectors, a Savvy Edtech Leader will be willing to step back and listen without creating conclusions or solutions for your thought partner. They must ask their own questions to help deepen their reflective processes.

Help your thought partner avoid defensiveness and excuses around where things went wrong. They need to remove themselves from the problem and work to identify root causes before they can see possible solutions. Modeling accountability for your actions and not naming others when discussing gaps helps keep focus on the problem, not the person.

Building Blocks for the Art of Reflection

Lead by example. Demonstrate the importance of reflection by engaging in reflective practices yourself. Share your learning experiences and do a talk-about to show your thought processes. Talk about how the art of reflection adds to your personal and professional development.

Set clear expectations. Let your team know that you expect large and small topic reflections as a part of daily work. They should be prepared to discuss those reflections with you as part of how your department does business.

Create a safe and supportive environment for review. Establish a culture where staff members can be open and honest in their reflections. Allowing your colleagues to voice their thoughts without defensiveness or judgment encourages an environment for collaboration.

Provide time for reflection. Reflection does not come naturally to all people. That is why modeling it, setting the expectation that examination will occur, and allowing thought to happen without judgment is essential. Be intentional about providing time for review so that people can dedicate their energy to their best thinking in the reflective process. They should think of the wins in their latest work, the challenges, and the lessons learned.

Hold regular meetings to provide feedback and guidance. Now that your team members have analyzed and successfully reflected, they need an opportunity to share their reflections. Create a time for sharing so people may share their thoughts and the lessons learned. It will help you understand what further support is needed and identify learning opportunities.

Encourage documentation. Encourage team members to document their reflections in writing. They can serve as historical markers and help them track growth in their thinking. With the creator's permission, they can be shared documents that can help further everybody's journey.

Building a standard procedure after small projects can also assist your colleagues in practicing the art of reflection. It doesn't have to be a long and complicated process; it could initially occur asynchronously and digitally. Have project participants fill out a shared plus/minus chart while everything is fresh in their memories. When you have time to talk in person, you may want to ask:

- Do you see any commonalities in the responses?
- What surprised you about the positives?
- Does anybody have more to share about them?
- Did anything surprise you about the negatives? (Watch here for people taking responsibility for shortcomings vs. blaming others.)
- Next time, what things would have to change?
- Was there more information we should have gathered or different perspectives to include?

- Is there data available that will help inform your decision?

- How could we have prevented some of the shortcomings?

- Do we have consistent patterns that lead to imperfections?

- Could we have used a different approach to our problem-solving methods?

- Were you able to effectively communicate your project to your audience?

- What should we have in place for people to succeed the next time we do a project?

While the art of reflection is important for you and your team, don't be too hard on yourselves! Acknowledging where the missteps took place and building a plan for what to do to prevent those unfortunate circumstances in the future is all you can do. Look at every gap as an opportunity to learn. Sometimes, success feels elusive, and you could get lost in your self-deprecating reflection. A Savvy Edtech Leader will know when to put the topic to rest.

Embrace Innovation

Innovation in edtech involves seeking unique ideas and solutions in technology's instructional, operational, or administrative uses in a K–12 environment. These innovative technology solutions should engage, assist, or challenge students and staff in new and more effective ways. Savvy Edtech Leaders can connect the dots in ways others may not see!

A creative person may think of a new way of doing something, but an innovator puts the idea into action. Authentic innovations require some failures along the way. You cannot innovate if you fear change. Calculated risks are required. Scary? Yes!

KEY STRATEGIES

- Ensure innovative solutions are for problems or challenges that need solving.

- Do your homework and build from the ideas of others. Involve other department leaders, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the process.

- Create and communicate a road map and picture of success.

- Pilot the innovation within a smaller environment.

- Learn from mistakes that prevented initial success and take action to correct them.

Problems That Need Solving

Target innovative efforts at areas where conventional methods fall short or where new approaches could significantly enhance efficiency or effectiveness. The pursuit of innovation must be guided by a clear understanding of the challenge at hand, ensuring that resources, creativity, and expertise are channeled appropriately. Gather data and dig deep into the underlying causes of the problem. Talk to those actually affected.

Time and money are limited. Make a list of problems that require solutions. Use the information below to create a prioritized list that channels resources and expertise appropriately.

- Determine the time and human capital that you can allot to each problem.

- Determine the financial resources available.

- Work with an applicable team to determine which solutions will significantly impact the organization's stated goals.

- Narrow the list further by the level of urgency.

Know the difference between fact and opinion. In the edtech world, there are many opinions concerning what needs fixing.

Build from the Ideas of Others

Build off of the knowledge and experiences of others, including all stakeholders. Integrate various perspectives into the overall innovative solution. Talk with colleagues in your area, state, and country. Saving time saves money, and when you can build from an existing idea or process, it minimizes planning and startup time. Brainstorm with your team and encourage them to think outside the box and look at the challenge through different lenses. Don't think about only "what is" but lean into "what can be."

When we diligently research and gather information, we tap into a vast pool of knowledge accumulated by others. This enables us to build on their ideas, harness their experiences, and integrate various perspectives. Someone else's idea will often spark your creative and innovative juices.

A Road Map and Picture of Success

Many folks at any organization fear change and are comfortable with the familiar, even when the status quo is not efficient or effective. Edtech Leaders must cultivate buy-in. Envision the path ahead and vividly illustrate it to your team and others involved. Engage them in the creation, process, implementation, and evaluation of any innovations. Answer questions honestly.

Once a draft of the road map or plan has been determined, have a sample of stakeholders review the plan to make sure it is clear, concise, and doesn't have gaps in thinking. Develop a plan for communicating throughout the implementation.

Pilot the Innovation within a Smaller Environment

Piloting an innovative solution highlights potential issues with the advantages of limited exposure and minimal funds. A pilot ensures that any need for adjustments is exposed as the process unfolds. A smaller test environment simplifies the change process and allows for quick data collection to inform the need for ongoing tweaks or changes.

- Select a pilot group that reflects the larger environment where the innovation will be scaled.

- Communicate the road map and desired outcome to the pilot group.

- Solicit ongoing feedback.

- Make adjustments as needed.

- Provide ready support.

By implementing the innovation in a controlled and manageable setting, organizations can closely monitor its impact and performance without being overwhelmed by the complexities of a larger scale. This approach allows for real-time adjustments, quick identification of any challenges or bottlenecks, and fine-tuning processes.

Learn from Mistakes

Monitor progress throughout the implementation. With innovations, there will likely be mistakes or unintended consequences. Analyzing our errors paves the way for improvement. Mistakes provide us with invaluable lessons, offering insights into what went wrong and how to prevent similar mistakes in the future.

Edtech Leaders know there is no feeling more exhilarating than being presented with a challenge, seeing something others may not see, thinking through the idea, creating a plan, implementing the plan, and seeing positive results. Remember, every use of technology today was someone's innovative idea in the past.

Build Your Leadership Influence

Why does it matter if an Edtech Leader has leadership influence or builds it? Well, individuals are free to determine the dedication they bring to their work every day. Accomplished leaders comprehend that they must not rely solely on directive approaches to achieve effectiveness. The outdated "command and control" leadership style rarely yields success and often elicits resistance. As respected author, speaker, and leadership guru Kenneth Blanchard notes, "The pivotal element for prosperous leadership in today's world is influence, rather than authority."

🔑 *KEY STRATEGIES*

- Embrace ambition on behalf of others. Influential Edtech Leaders foster ambitious goals for their employees, identifying and nurturing talents that individuals may not recognize in themselves. A key objective for an effective Edtech Leader is to help others achieve their highest potential.

- Blend autonomy and authority. Influential Edtech Leaders cultivate respect and motivation by balancing personal connection with their teams and encouraging their development through trust in their work quality, time management, and resourcefulness. Encouraging autonomy not only empowers individuals and teams but also fuels creativity, enhancing motivation and inspiration.

- Invest time in getting to know your team members. To effectively influence and align leaders with your vision, invest time in discovering their interests beyond work and building genuine connections.

- Establish trust and commitment with your team. To establish trust and commitment, Edtech Leaders must genuinely care for their employees, understand their key goals and values, and align them with the organizational vision.

- Build positive relationships with your employees. Building positive relationships with your team is crucial for effective leadership, even if it doesn't mean becoming best friends. By showing genuine interest, initiating conversations, and understanding your coworkers, you can enhance your leadership influence and improve workplace dynamics.

Gaining influence over an organization and its employees is not automatically bestowed upon acquiring a specific title, reaching a certain level of leadership or authority, or occupying a particular office. Genuine leadership lies in the power to influence, rather than relying solely on authority. Being a good Edtech Leader means being able to change the way others think and act. But this doesn't mean controlling or manipulating them. It's about understanding what makes your team want to do their best. How much your team trusts you is a big part of how much you can influence them. The more they trust you, the more you can shape their thoughts and actions. There are several ways great Edtech Leaders build that trust and influence.

Proving you're trustworthy is an excellent place to start. To earn people's trust, you need to show them you're a good person who knows what they're doing. Educator and author Stephen Covey noted there are four important parts to this:

- Honesty
- Making your motives clear
- Having the skills for your job
- Delivering on your promises

Covey also said that trust starts with trusting yourself and showing others they can trust you too. Once people see you're reliable, they'll begin to trust you, and you'll be able to influence them more.

Get others involved and make connections to help build your leadership influence. Being a leader isn't about doing everything yourself. Your team must be part of the process if you want to influence them. Get their opinions on big decisions that will

impact them. Involve them early on when changes are being made. Try to understand what's important to them. If they see you care about their interests, they'll be more willing to follow your lead.

Be clear about what you expect, and hold people accountable. If you want your team to deliver outstanding results, you must tell them precisely what you expect and ensure everyone does their part. If you don't, your team won't trust you. This makes it harder for you to influence them positively.

Show your excitement. Being passionate about your work will energize your team. Passion is contagious and can't be faked. If you don't care about what you're doing, why should anyone else? People admire Edtech Leaders who can look ahead and get others excited about their vision. When you share your enthusiasm, you can influence your team to get behind your ideas.

Be open to others' influence. Influence should go both ways. One of the best ways to increase your influence is to show that you're willing to be influenced by others. Listen to their ideas, consider different viewpoints, and use their skills. When you show openness, your team will respect and trust you more, increasing your influence.

To inspire your employees to follow your guidance, showcasing your proficiency and demonstrating competence is crucial. Keep advancing your expertise and understanding in your field, and then share it with your team members to influence and empower them.

To sum it up, leadership is about positively influencing others. A Savvy Edtech Leader doesn't force their team to do things. Instead, they inspire their team to believe in the leader's vision and goals. When used correctly, influence can bring

LEADER CREATES LEADERS

When Sheryl Abshire made the leap from elementary librarianship to principalship, she had no previous administrative experience. As she began her lengthy leadership journey, she was determined to support other teachers who dreamed of a leadership journey of their own. As she observed and worked with teams of talented teachers, she knew that part of her role was to inspire these potential leaders to rise up and become the leaders they were destined to be. In her district more than twenty teachers she worked with became exceptional educational leaders in schools and at the district level. Her leadership influence continues today as she facilitates, coaches, and mentors hundreds of aspiring Edtech Leaders as a facilitator and leader in the CoSN Early Career K12 CTO Academy.

significant changes, as everyone works together towards the same goal. An Edtech Leader who can positively influence their team builds trust and pushes everyone toward excellence.

Influence a Winning Team

One of the main reasons people get hired for leadership roles is so they can build and influence a winning team. When Diane Doersch hired leaders for her department, she often asked candidates to provide examples of their leadership in their current or past job. Sometimes people would confuse being assigned additional tasks by their supervisor with being a leader. While something within them may have made them a good candidate for the extra tasks, doing additional work does not necessarily constitute leadership. Other candidates could talk about how they could identify talents on their team, focus on the project's goals, and help move all efforts in the same direction to complete the project. Those candidates displayed leadership. Leadership in your field involves effectively guiding and inspiring people to achieve your shared goals.

🔑 *KEY STRATEGIES*

- Before striving to influence others, you must feel confident and competent as a leader. Start from within to build your leadership skills.

- Others are watching you and your leadership style. Welcome discourse and take in different perspectives. There is nothing wrong with a leader changing their mind after gaining further information.

- Model integrity and competence confidently so others can see what they want to become.

- Your positive attitude is contagious, even during the most difficult of times. More than knowledge or power, your positive energy will be what is remembered and may serve as the critical factor that helps get your team to the finish line.

- Take time to celebrate, not just at the end of a project but along the way as well. When people feel appreciated, they will recommit to their goals and find the energy to get things done.

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Influential Edtech Leaders who can inspire a winning team have qualities that set them apart. They may have a way of looking toward the future. They understand what it takes to improve the organization and move toward the vision. They can share the vision with their team to inspire the group to work in that direction. They foster a positive work environment where everybody's voice and viewpoints are considered.

How can you be an influential leader? The first thing is to examine yourself and your leadership skills before you can work to be effective.

Do a self-assessment of your leadership skills. What are your strengths, and where do you see gaps? You could seek colleagues' feedback or seek professional development on leadership to gain insight into your leadership style.

Ensure that you are always learning. What are the latest trends in your field? What's going on outside your field and what dots might you connect? What are other leaders concerned about, and what are they placing on the back burner? Attending conferences, participating in webinars, and reading trade publications can help build your general knowledge in and outside your field.

Seek out a thought partner. Discussing the challenges of your profession with this thought partner, someone with whom you can exchange ideas and who can help you navigate a situation, will help to grow your perspectives and understand more deeply the intricacies of the leadership landscape. Regularly talking with the thought partner will ensure that you hit timely topics as they arise in your work environment.

Build a robust collaborative network. Join professional associations, attend industry conferences, and participate in collaborative opportunities within your network. Being a contributing team member within your professional circles helps you to build your brand and reputation as a go-to leader.

Embrace new challenges. Working in the IT field means things change rapidly. It is essential to keep up with the latest trends. Avoiding these challenges will not help your department advance.

Take leadership training. Home in on the specific topics where you notice gaps in your leadership. Such training could include team building, change management, effective communication, making data-informed decisions, and problem-solving.

Reflect and adapt. Build the art of reflection into everything you do, and help your team learn to reflect as well. What worked well? Where did you notice gaps? What will your team do next time to avoid those gaps from happening?

Take on a positive outlook. Displaying loyalty to others and taking the "glass half full" approach in the direst of circumstances can provide hope and a rejuvenation of efforts to get the job done. Celebrating the small steps, being grateful for the efforts to get a project to its current state, and being unwavering in meeting goals will be contagious.

Lead by example. Your team is watching what you do. Demonstrate the leadership skills you would like to see in your collaborative cadre, and remember that no work is beneath you. You should not ask others to do things that you would not do. Show integrity, professionalism, and a positive attitude at all times.

> **LEAD BY EXAMPLE**
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> I recall handling a challenging, emotionally-charged IT team meeting. Afterward, one of our department members followed me to my office and wanted to discuss how I handled the situation. When the time for difficult conversations came in the meeting, she reviewed what she would do if she were in a leadership situation. The curious staff member said, "You handled it calmly and didn't get rattled. What made you do and say the things you did?" I noted that this was a highly observant employee who watches, learns, applies, and reflects. It reminded me that our teams learn from their leaders every day, good or bad; they are always watching. Leading by example lets you influence your winning team.
>
> — DIANE DOERSCH

Following are some other things can you do to influence your team:

Develop a clear vision. Always work to help your team understand the why. Develop a clear vision for your team so they know what is expected. Ensure that you support your team, and let them know your expectation of what a completed project looks like. Tie the department goal to your organization's purpose, so your team understands that their work advances your whole organization.

Encourage individual growth. Support your team members' requests for professional learning for personal development. Creating a learning culture will lower the barriers to your staff asking for learning opportunities. Build new knowledge into your monthly meetings, so your team learns something new monthly, and share external learning opportunities with them. Model your professional learning and admit where you see growth areas in yourself.

Foster teamwork. We are all better together. Encourage collaboration and the sharing of knowledge so that everybody improves. Model teamwork with other departments and build partnerships into your expectations for your entire department. Bring organizational values forward, such as transparency, commitment to the team and goals, and continuous improvement. Cross-training prevents bottlenecks in tasks so that when one person is not present at work, your department's business can continue.

Provide feedback and recognition. Regularly providing feedback is a very impactful way of influencing your team members. You can influence your managers by regularly meeting with them individually, by serving as a thought partner, and by understanding the barriers to their projects so that you can help remove them. Encourage innovation and creativity in their work. Having tough conversations about any gaps you see becomes easier when you have regular check-ins. Trust will be built, and vulnerabilities will be uncovered. Those are all ingredients for a trusting relationship that lends itself to friendly feedback and continuous improvement.

Delegate and empower. As team members grow their competencies, there will be opportunities for them to receive delegated work. Provide a safe space for your staff with new delegations to ask questions and receive frequent feedback so that they feel confident that they are on track. Empower them with the tools and resources needed to complete the new task, and give them a clear picture of a completed project.

Manage conflicts effectively. Always encourage people with disagreements to speak to each other first before raising the issue to a supervisor's level. Team members must take the opportunity to work conflict out themselves first. If you need to intervene, encourage diplomatic honesty, and always focus on the goals and not the people. Using this approach will assist in guiding team members through conflict. Do not allow people to run from tough conversations; instead, thoughtfully provide them the support they need to work through disagreements.

Celebrate successes. Your team members need to know they are making progress. Use your regular meeting to celebrate individual achievements. Build a culture of praise and sharing so that team members report to you when they or their colleagues have accomplished a goal. A Savvy Edtech Leader always gets permission before highlighting individual accomplishments in front of others. Not everybody celebrates the same. Some employees may want their names

announced out loud, while others may appreciate a personal acknowledgment of a job well done through a handwritten note or encouraging email.

Influencing a winning team means that you have consistently built your leadership skills and can now support and impact your team purposefully.

Proceed with Intention and Navigate with Purpose

Proceeding with intention as a department or organization's Edtech Leader requires establishing a long-term vision that aligns with the organization's goals and core values, and developing a strategic plan. As Edtech Leaders, we develop strategic plans for procuring, managing, securing, and using technology resources, always planning with equity and sustainability in mind.

This process requires the engagement of a cross section of stakeholders. Collaboration with these stakeholders ensures that their perspectives and needs are considered when setting goals and objectives. It is critical that Edtech Leaders collaborate both horizontally and vertically within the K–12 ecosystem to meet the needs and understand the challenges of everyone we serve.

The contents of a strategic plan include goals and objectives, strategies to reach the goal, professional development needs, and resource allocations. An evaluation process to measure progress toward achieving the goals must be established. Each new initiative or planned action should be tied to one or more of the established goals as a strategy for an objective. Include preliminary documents, charts, rubrics, evaluation instruments, and other data sources in the appendixes if appropriate.

🗝 *KEY STRATEGIES*

- Collect data from various sources. Evaluate what you have to determine what you need. Use qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively understand the current situation.

- Engage a cross section of stakeholders. Work with all district departments as well as representatives from schools, student bodies, and the communities served.

- Develop the Strategic Plan with major goals and measurable and time-bound objectives.

- Evaluate and make adjustments as needed.

Collect Data from Various Sources

Data sources include surveys, inventories, interviews, focus groups, research, existing documents or reports, and internal data analysis. Familiarize yourself with any organization and department procedures and policies that can affect your work.

A needs assessment is crucial to understanding the specific requirements and challenges of the organization and the technology resources needed. This assessment helps identify areas where modifications or changes can positively impact and inform the goals and objectives in the plan. Look at the results of any needs assessment through multiple lenses. After reviewing the needs assessments and other available data, do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. Identify strengths and weaknesses (S-W) and broader opportunities and threats (O-T).

Previous budgets or financial printouts often show trends and cycles for spending. Note patterns and be prepared to move quickly when funds are available.

Secure current and comprehensive inventories of available staff and resources.

Edtech Leaders are often caught between internal and external factors. We often must rely on external workers, vendors, and stakeholders. Yet, our practices, systems, and processes are designed for those working within the organization. Reconciling the two is an ongoing challenge, and both must be considered when developing a strategic plan. Create an inventory of everyone who must be considered in your planning.

Look for gaps between the current state and desired outcomes. This analysis will help determine the most critical areas to address in the strategic plan. Involve stakeholders in the needs assessment process to ensure their perspectives are considered. Engagement fosters buy-in for the strategic plan.

Develop the Strategic Plan

A strategic plan should be a living document. Write it so that it will not be outdated before you can share it! Your goals and objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Add action steps, timelines, and resource allocations. The following steps are a simplified guide for a first draft.

The needs assessment will have identified areas for improvement in services, access, safety, learning, and other aspects for current and potential future

stakeholders. The results should be used to develop more effective action plans. Start by establishing benchmarks. Using your SWOT analysis, formulate specific statements that keep track of your advancement in reaching your goals and objectives. For instance, perhaps the current status shows that eighty percent of all users can access digital resources both onsite and from home. If your objective is one hundred percent access, you can track the percentage of users without access and easily report progress.

When developing a strategic plan, it is crucial to effectively utilize goals, objectives, actions, resource allocation, and data sources. The following nine tips are not all-inclusive but can serve as a guide to get started.

1. Create SMART goals to provide your strategic plan's overarching direction and purpose. They represent the broad outcomes your department aims to achieve.

2. Write objectives as specific and measurable targets that contribute to accomplishing the established goals. Objectives help break down the goals into actionable steps.

3. Develop actions or concrete tasks or initiatives that will be implemented to achieve the objectives. They should be clearly defined, time-bound, and assigned to responsible individuals or teams.

4. Determine and allocate resources, such as budget, personnel, and equipment, to support implementation of the actions. This step requires careful consideration of priorities and ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively. If funding is not currently available, but the actions are necessary for success, note the actions as "Unfunded." This documentation can serve as a "need" when funding becomes available, or it can entice other departments to shift funds to support an objective that is beneficial to their department.

5. Document the data sources that support the why. for actions. These sources include internal data from surveys, evaluations, observations, stakeholder feedback, industry trends, and best practices.

6. Professional development may be an integral piece of your strategic plan as it is crucial in enhancing your team's knowledge, skills, and competencies. By investing in professional development initiatives, you ensure that your people remain current with industry trends, best practices, and emerging technologies while fostering continuous learning and growth. Professional

development initiatives can encompass a wide range of activities, including training programs, workshops, conferences, mentoring, coaching, and educational opportunities.

7. Appendixes are like friendly companions providing organized documents to support your strategy. Appendixes help clarify the information in the rest of the plan, so you don't have to go on a side trip to find credentials and evidence. To make your strategic plan concise and easy to read and understand, avoid taking a detour into the weeds in the body of the plan. In the digital version, link to documents in the appendixes when applicable.

8. A budget summary should be included in the plan. Often a comprehensive budget is part of the appendixes. The budget may include quantities, descriptions, unit costs, totals, funding numbers, and funding sources.

9. An executive summary provides a quick overview of your entire plan. Its purpose is to provide a snapshot of the key elements and highlights of the strategic plan in a clear and engaging manner. Include a brief description of the department's mission, vision, and goals, along with the leading strategies and initiatives or actions that will be implemented to achieve them. You may also include a summary of the landscape and key elements from the SWOT analysis.

Evaluate and Make Adjustments

Set benchmarks, monitor progress, and communicate successes. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness and impact of your department's work. Establish metrics and evaluation frameworks to assess the progress toward reaching goals and meeting objectives. Make data-driven decisions to refine strategies.

Staying informed about emerging technologies, research, and best practices is essential to leading with intention. By following these key strategies and developing a comprehensive data-driven strategic plan, you can lead intentionally, ensuring your direction is purposeful, effective, equitable, and sustainable.