

WHITEPAPER

Separating Core vs. Surround: Part 2: The Way Forward for EdTech



Make sure to read: Part 1



KNOWLEDGE

SEMINAR

Building a sustainable EdTech business:

Separating core vs. surround

Over the last few decades, business leaders across industries have been following a process-centric approach while developing the best operating model for their organizations. They have been trying to identify the processes that they should run in-house vs. the processes that can be delivered better by a partner that specializes in those activities. Elements of the operating model that are core to their business strategy have traditionally been kept in-house (E.g., newsroom for a news organization, content planning and development for an EdTech organization) and surrounding elements that are ancillary in nature have been typically run through partners (E.g., finance and HR back office, tech infrastructure).

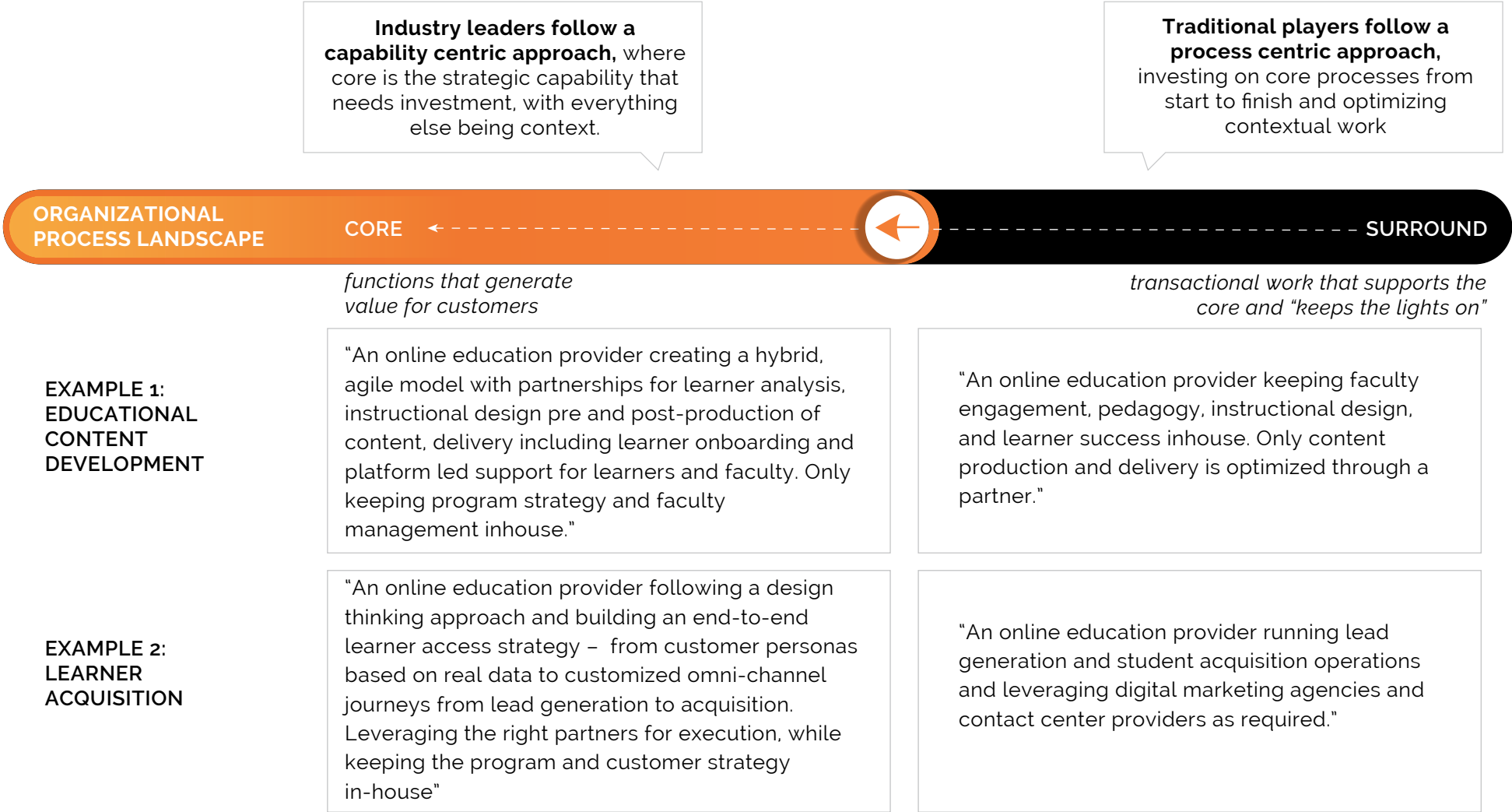
While this siloed approach worked in the first few decades of globalization, it has now reached the limits of its utility. Such approaches that used to be considered differentiators earlier are now essential. In the post-pandemic world, where talent is more geographically spread, technology has evolved to make remote working more efficient, and organizations are trying to identify new models of efficiencies, the definition of core vs. surround is changing.

In the new context, leading organizations are moving from a process-centric approach to a capability-centric approach – where they would like to focus all their energies on the core capabilities that constitute their unique value proposition and that which differentiates them from their competition. (E.g., investigative journalism, and editorial functions in a newsroom.) In this evolved understanding, everything that is execution-oriented should now be considered surround. (E.g., graphics design, metadata management, SEO functions in a newsroom.) This approach allows them to make higher investments in keeping their secret sauce ahead of their competition by acquiring the best talent and investing in innovation. At the same time, the execution is optimized through global partner teams specializing in high quality and efficient delivery. This approach also has less organizational friction and allows businesses to pivot to new operating models faster. For example, an organization that has set up a large student acquisition team that follows a calling-based model will find it more challenging to pivot to a persona-based omnichannel student acquisition approach as compared to one that had been leveraging a partner for the same function.

In the new context, leading organizations are moving from a process-centric approach to a capability-centric approach



Leading EdTech organizations are shifting the sliding scale that differentiates core capabilities vs. surrounding functions to the left.



A structured approach to building best-in-class learner experiences

In a highly competitive market, low entry barriers fueled by technology and constantly changing learner expectations necessitate a structured approach for rapidly designing measurable solutions that deliver a richer learner experience

DEFINE

Development of any operating process and technology ecosystem should always start at the learner and work backwards from there. **Any EdTech organization should aim to leverage all available information about their learner's background, behaviors and decision drivers as a first step before ideating any solutions.** Broad clarifications of learner segments based on traditional parameters like age, education level, income etc. need to be fine-tuned to include additional parameters like interest areas, past learning history, buying preferences etc. These insights should then be used to build step-by-step learner journeys. The learner journeys for the proposed outcomes enables visualization of learner feelings, expectations, pain points and opportunities for building a seamless experience. Subsequently, future state learner journeys should focus on delivering a seamless omnichannel learning experience, proactive interventions that anticipate learner queries and self-service to the extent possible (refer illustrative personas and learner journeys in Section 5).

DESIGN

The people, processes and technology elements required to deliver the learner journeys should be designed with an ideal envisioned future in mind. A mix of global locations that provide coverage for all language and skillset requirements can be organized in a hub-and-spoke structure, with hubs being locations where the high-volume activities (E.g., enrollment processing, student support) and program management layers reside and spokes being locations for niche services (E.g., localization services, AR / VR labs). Process maps aligned with learner journeys should focus on leveraging best-in-class tech enablers to automate transactional activities (E.g., OCR, ML based scoring, AI based associate assist, adaptive analytics) and leverage humans in cases where technology alone cannot solve the problems (E.g., student counseling, content creation). Apart from learner journeys, creation of associate or back-office journeys is also critical. The associate journeys can highlight the bottlenecks faced by support and back-office teams and enable the identification of the appropriate technology interventions to address them.

DEPLOY

Any new processes and systems developed need to be deployed in an iterative manner consisting of multiple feedback loops and constant fine tuning. Actual learner responses to a new process can be very different from expected outcomes, even if the design is based on the best market research and learner data points. Therefore, **any new release should first be launched in a set of test markets or learner segments and A/B tested against the current experience.** In case any key metrics show a negative trend, the root cause must be understood and course corrections made before the next round of A/B testing occurs. Phased deployments not only reduce risks but also ensure higher quality of the final release.

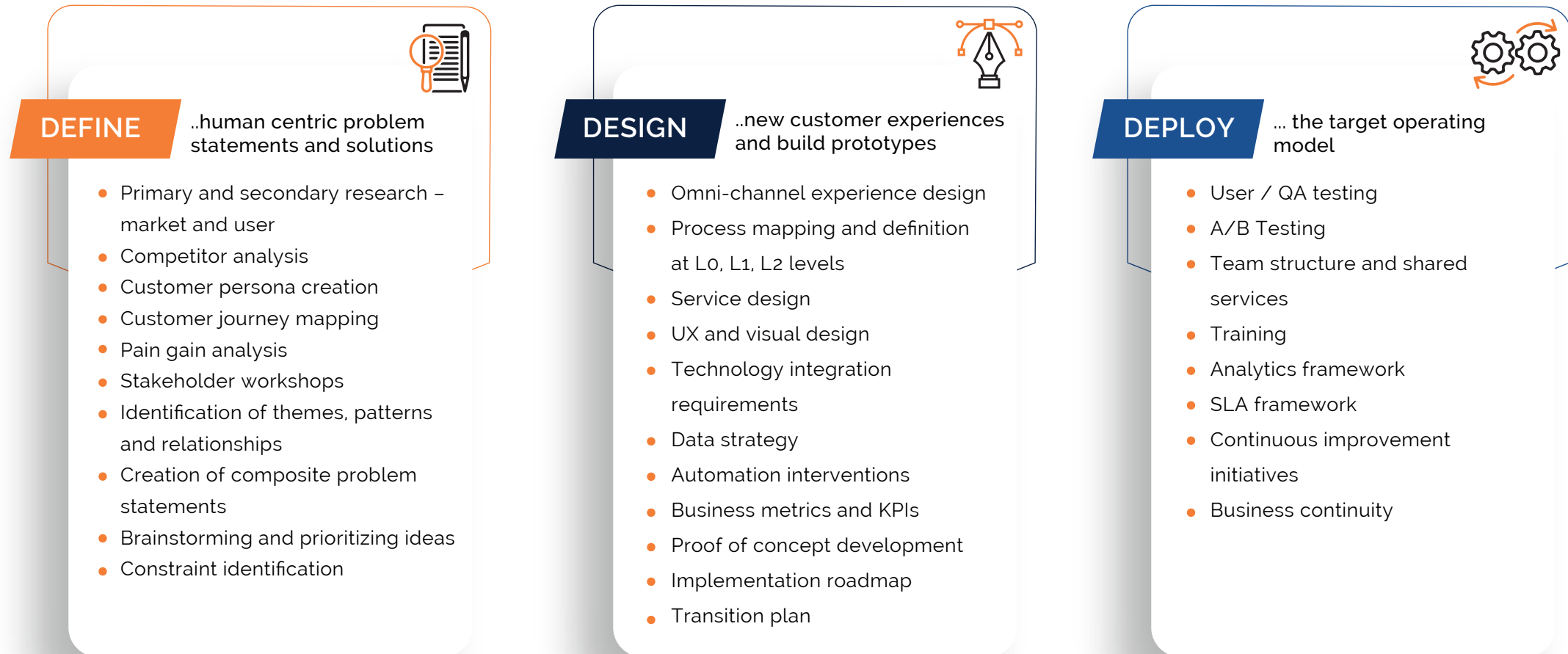


Figure 2: 3D framework for building best-in-class learner experiences

Best-in-class Student Journey

(Across Access, Experience, and Success)

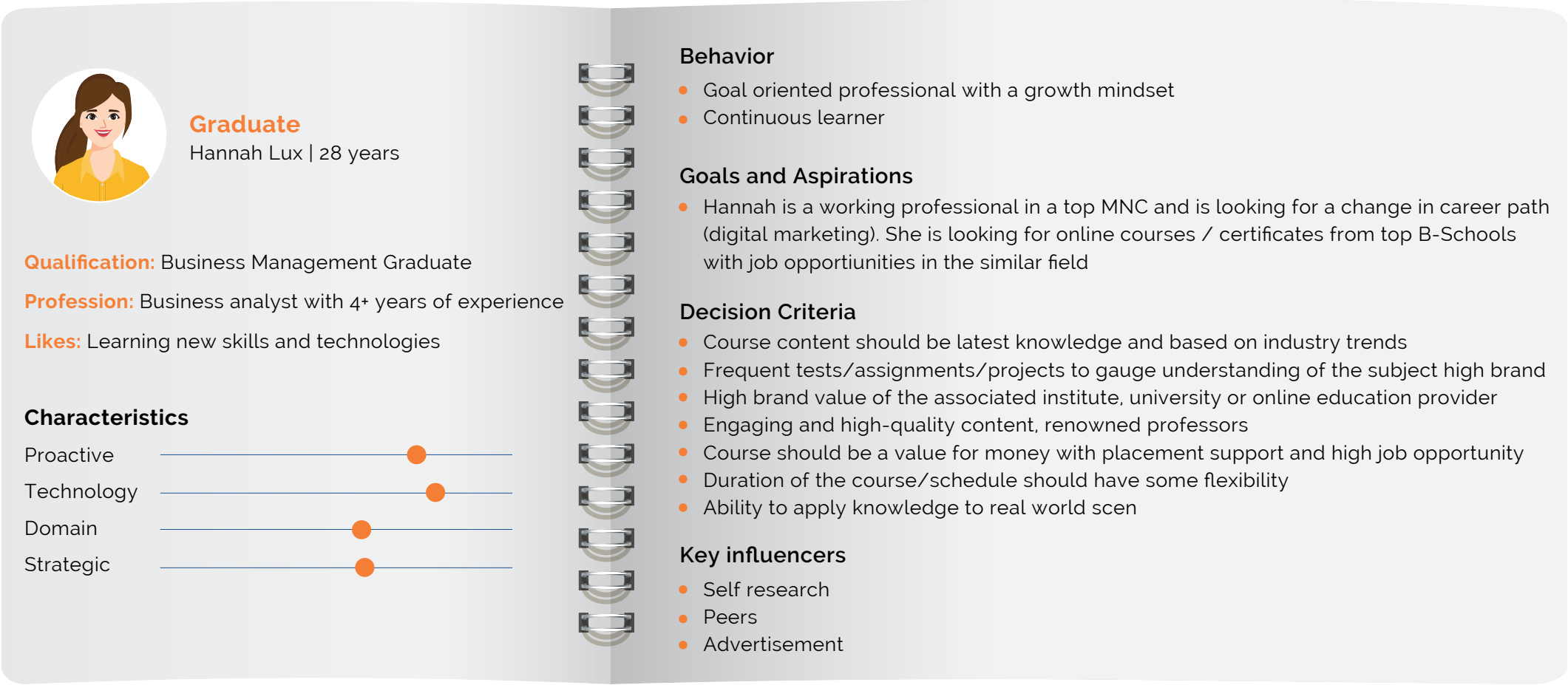


Figure 3: Sample learner persona

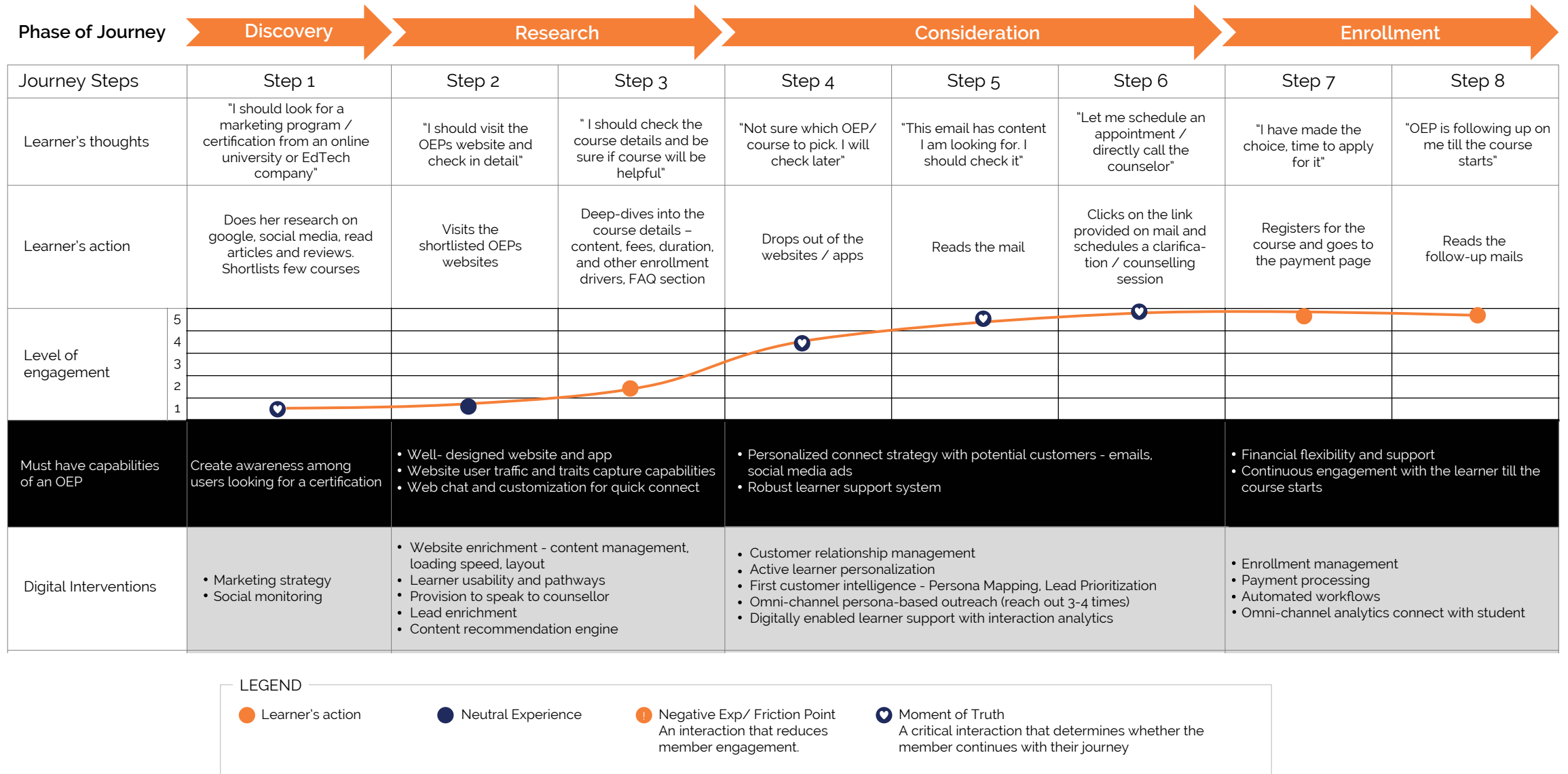
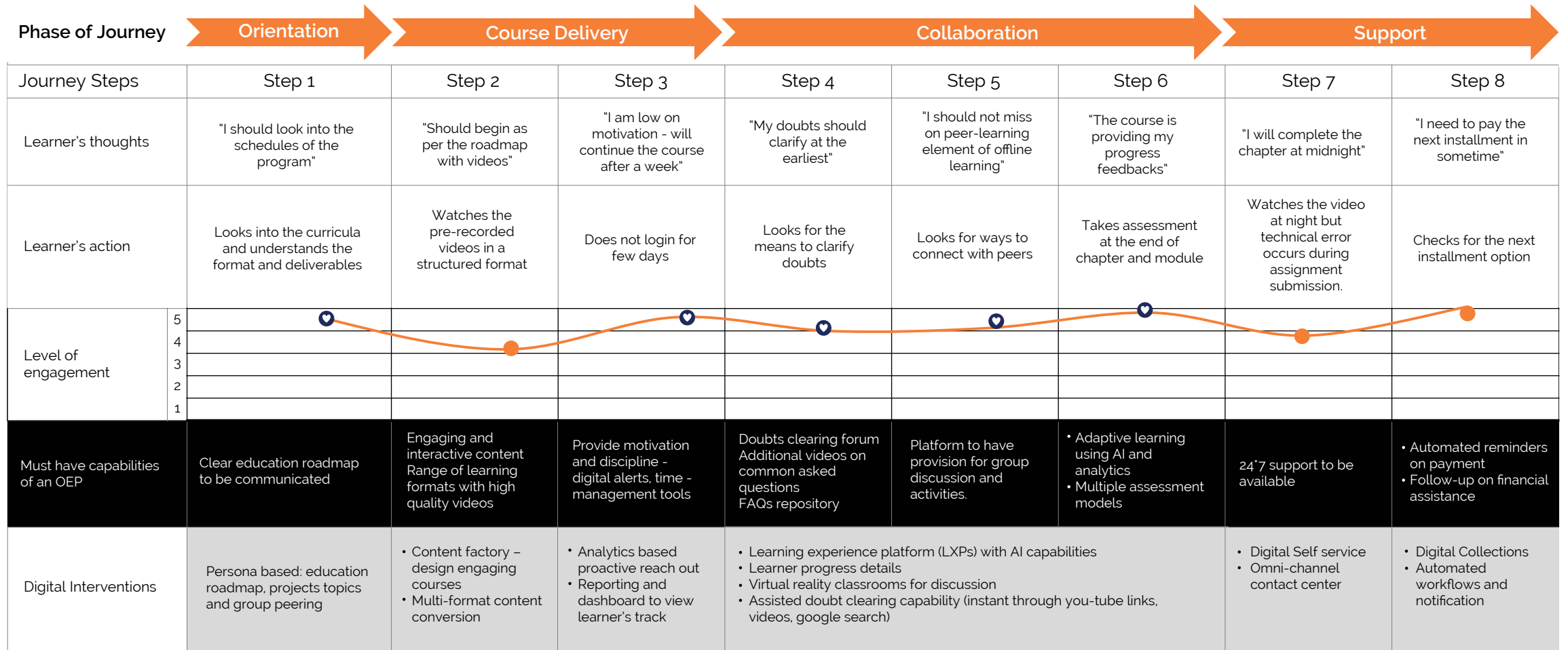


Figure 4: Sample learner journey – learner access



LEGEND

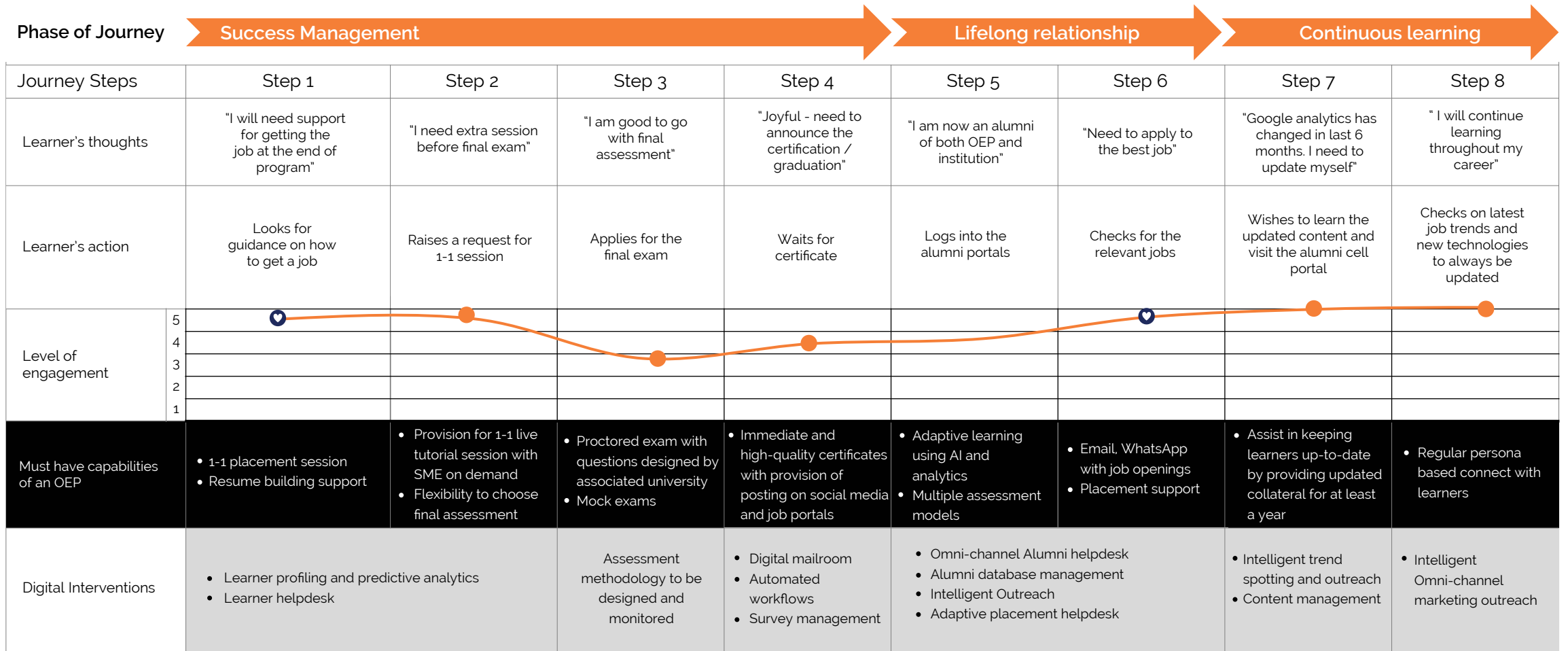
● Learner's action

● Neutral Experience

● Negative Exp/ Friction Point
An interaction that reduces member engagement.

● Moment of Truth
A critical interaction that determines whether the member continues with their journey

Figure 5: Sample learner journey – learner engagement



LEGEND

● Learner's action

● Neutral Experience

● Negative Exp/ Friction Point
An interaction that reduces member engagement.

● Moment of Truth
A critical interaction that determines whether the member continues with their journey

Figure 6: Sample learner journey – learner success

Conclusion

EdTech has the potential to showcase true confluence between content, technology, service delivery, and powerful outcomes at the user level. However, it is easy to underestimate the efforts needed to deal with the complexities of EdTech, as the nuances are different from any e-commerce or marketplace model.

Trends indicate that tailwinds for EdTech have settled in. The future will demand more methodological growth strategies among EdTech companies. From 2022 onwards, EdTech companies are set to truly challenge the status quo by learning from scaled business segments and with partnerships with businesses who can help them succeed with defined business metrics.

With investment pouring in after necessary due diligence from VCs into the sector, EdTech will learn best practices for defending the subscription base, remaining agile to deliver content at scale and partnering with service providers who can help them achieve customer delight. All this will happen with learners' journey and learning success as the core focus.

References:

¹ Holon IQ Global EdTech Reports – Link 1 and Link 2

² Gartner education hype cycle: Report on HE

About the Authors



Tij Nerurkar

Global Head - Education Practice

Tij brings 25+ years of experience in education domain. He has advised education institutions and EdTech companies on how to develop and implement digital strategies to transform their business models and reimagine learner experience.



Shubham Choudhury

Head – Insights, Design Experience and Advisory

Shubham has 17+ years of digital strategy and product management experience in Education, Media, Information Services and BFSI industries. His areas of expertise include design thinking, solution envisioning, go-to-market plans, and digital strategy across multiple industry segments.



Shantanu Mishra

Solution Lead – Education Practice

Shantanu Mishra is an EdTech, SaaS and MarTech professional with 15+ years of work experience, including scaling business functions ground up across APAC, and evolving early-stage teams into full stack function. Currently, responsible for designing business transformation solutions at Firstsource for EdTech vertical.



Noorie Khan

Senior Consultant (Insights, Design Experience and Advisory)

Noorie has 6+ years of experience in strategy, customer experience design and journey mapping. She has developed business solutions and designed operating models with a focus on digital transformation for leading education and banking institutions across U.S. and Europe

*Helping customers **stay ahead** of the curve through transformational technologies and capabilities*

Firstsource Solutions Limited, an RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group company, is a leading provider of transformational solutions and services spanning the customer lifecycle across Healthcare, Banking and Financial Services, Communications, Media and Technology and other industries.

Our 'Digital First, Digital Now' approach helps organizations reinvent operations and reimagine business models, enabling them to deliver moments that matter and build competitive advantage.

With an established presence in the US, the UK, India and the Philippines, we act as a trusted growth partner for over 100 leading global brands, including several Fortune 500 and FTSE 100 companies.

For more information, please visit www.firstsource.com