

### WHITEPAPER

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

# SEMINAR

02

Make sure to read: Part 1

## 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.

Industry leaders follow a capability centric approach, where core is the strategic capability that needs investment, with everything else being context. Traditional players follow a process centric approach, investing on core processes from start to finish and optimizing contextual work

#### ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS LANDSCAPE

functions that generate value for customers

CORE

#### EXAMPLE 1: EDUCATIONAL CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

"An online education provider creating a hybrid, agile model with partnerships for learner analysis, instructional design pre and post-production of content, delivery including learner onboarding and platform led support for learners and faculty. Only keeping program strategy and faculty management inhouse."

EXAMPLE 2: LEARNER ACQUISITION "An online education provider following a design thinking approach and building an end-to-end learner access strategy – from customer personas based on real data to customized omni-channel journeys from lead generation to acquisition. Leveraging the right partners for execution, while keeping the program and customer strategy in-house" transactional work that supports the core and "keeps the lights on"

SURROUND

"An online education provider keeping faculty engagement, pedagogy, instructional design, and learner success inhouse. Only content production and delivery is optimized through a partner."

"An online education provider running lead generation and student acquisition operations and leveraging digital marketing agencies and contact center providers as required."

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

### 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).

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

### 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.

#### DEFINE



- Primary and secondary research market and user
- Competitor analysis
- Customer persona creation
- Customer journey mapping
- Pain gain analysis
- Stakeholder workshops
- Identification of themes, patterns and relationships
- Creation of composite problem statements
- Brainstorming and prioritizing ideas
- Constraint identification

### DESIGN ...new customer experiences and build prototypes

- Omni-channel experience design
- Process mapping and definition
- at L0, L1, L2 levels
- Service design
- UX and visual design
- Technology integration
   requirements
- Data strategy
- Automation interventions
- Business metrics and KPIs
- Proof of concept development
- Implementation roadmap
- Transition plan



services

- Training
- Analytics framework
- SLA framework
- Continuous improvement

initiatives

• Business continuity

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

## Best-in-class Student Journey

### (Across Access, Experience, and Success)

**Graduate** Hannah Lux | 28 years

Qualification: Business Management Graduate Profession: Business analyst with 4+ years of experience Likes: Learning new skills and technologies



#### Behavior

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- Goal oriented professional with a growth mindset
- Continuous learner

#### **Goals and Aspirations**

• Hannah is a working professional in a top MNC and is looking for a change in career path (digital marketing). She is looking for online courses / certificates from top B-Schools with job opportiunities in the similar field

#### **Decision** Criteria

- Course content should be latest knowledge and based on industry trends
- Frequent tests/assignments/projects to gauge understanding of the subject high brand
- High brand value of the associated institute, university or online education provider
- Engaging and high-quality content, renowned professors
- Course should be a value for money with placement support and high job opportunity
- Duration of the course/schedule should have some flexibility
- Ability to apply knowledge to real world scen

#### Key influencers

- Self research
- Peers
- Advertisement

Figure 3: Sample learner persona

Phase of Journe	y D	iscovery	Research		Consideration			Enrollment	
Journey Steps		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8
Learner's thoughts	marke certificati univer	buld look for a eting program / ion from an online rsity or EdTech company"	"I should visit the OEPs website and check in detail"	" I should check the course details and be sure if course will be helpful"	"Not sure which OEP/ course to pick. I will check later"	"This email has content I am looking for. I should check it"	"Let me schedule an appointment / directly call the counselor"	"I have made the choice, time to apply for it"	"OEP is following up me till the course starts"
Learner's action	google, articl	her research on social media, read les and reviews. lists few courses	Visits the shortlisted OEPs websites	Deep-dives into the course details – content, fees, duration, and other enrollment drivers, FAQ section	Drops out of the websites / apps	Reads the mail	Clicks on the link provided on mail and schedules a clarifica- tion / counselling session	Registers for the course and goes to the payment page	Reads the follow-up mails
	5					0	0		
Level of	4				0				
engagement	2								
	1	0							
Must have capabilities of an OEP	s Create awa users looki	<ul> <li>Well- designed website and app</li> <li>Website user traffic and traits capture capabilities</li> <li>Web chat and customization for quick connect</li> </ul>		<ul> <li>Personalized connect strategy with potential customers - emails, social media ads</li> <li>Robust learner support system</li> </ul>			<ul> <li>Financial flexibility and support</li> <li>Continuous engagement with the learner till the course starts</li> </ul>		
<ul> <li>Digital Interventions</li> <li>Marketing strategy</li> <li>Social monitoring</li> </ul>			<ul> <li>Website enrichment - content management, loading speed, layout</li> <li>Learner usability and pathways</li> <li>Provision to speak to counsellor</li> <li>Lead enrichment</li> <li>Content recommendation engine</li> </ul>		<ul> <li>Customer relationship management</li> <li>Active learner personalization</li> <li>First customer intelligence - Persona Mapping, Lead Prioritization</li> <li>Omni-channel persona-based outreach (reach out 3-4 times)</li> <li>Digitally enabled learner support with interaction analytics</li> </ul>			<ul> <li>Enrollment management</li> <li>Payment processing</li> <li>Automated workflows</li> <li>Omni-channel analytics connect with student</li> </ul>	

1	Neutral Experience	INEGATIVE EXP/ Friction Point	
	-	An interaction that reduces	A critical interaction that determines whether the
		member engagement.	member continues with their journey

Phase of Journey	Orientation	Course Delivery		Collaboration			Support	
Journey Steps	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8
Learner's thoughts	"I should look into the schedules of the program"	"Should begin as per the roadmap with videos"	"I am low on motivation - will continue the course after a week"	"My doubts should clarify at the earliest"	"I should not miss on peer-learning element of offline learning"	"The course is providing my progress feedbacks"	"I will complete the chapter at midnight"	"I need to pay the next installment in sometime"
Learner's action	Looks into the curricula and understands the format and deliverables	Watches the pre-recorded videos in a structured format	Does not login for few days	Looks for the means to clarify doubts	Looks for ways to connect with peers	Takes assessment at the end of chapter and module	Watches the video at night but technical error occurs during assignment submission.	Checks for the next installment option
5	0		0	0	0	0		
Level of 3								
engagement 2 1								
Must have capabilities of an OEP	Clear education roadmap to be communicated	Engaging and interactive content Range of learning formats with high quality videos	Provide motivation and discipline - digital alerts, time - management tools	Doubts clearing forum Additional videos on common asked questions FAQs repository	Platform to have provision for group discussion and activities.	<ul> <li>Adaptive learning using AI and analytics</li> <li>Multiple assessment models</li> </ul>	24`7 support to be available	<ul> <li>Automated reminder on payment</li> <li>Follow-up on financia assistance</li> </ul>
Digital Interventions	Persona based: education roadmap, projects topics and group peering	<ul> <li>Content factory – design engaging courses</li> <li>Multi-format content conversion</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Analytics based proactive reach out</li> <li>Reporting and dashboard to view learner's track</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Learning experience platform (LXPs) with AI capabilities</li> <li>Learner progress details</li> <li>Virtual reality classrooms for discussion</li> <li>Assisted doubt clearing capability (instant through you-tube links, videos, google search)</li> </ul>			<ul> <li>Digital Self service</li> <li>Omni-channel contact center</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Digital Collections</li> <li>Automated workflows and notification</li> </ul>



Phase of Journey	Success Management				Lifelong relationship		Continuous learning	
Journey Steps	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8
Learner's thoughts	"I will need support for getting the job at the end of program"	"I need extra session before final exam"	"I am good to go with final assessment"	"Joyful - need to announce the certification / graduation"	"I am now an alumni of both OEP and institution"	"Need to apply to the best job"	"Google analytics has changed in last 6 months. I need to update myself"	" I will continue learning throughout my career"
Learner's action	Looks for guidance on how to get a job	Raises a request for 1-1 session	Applies for the final exam	Waits for certificate	Logs into the alumni portals	Checks for the relevant jobs	Wishes to learn the updated content and visit the alumni cell portal	Checks on latest job trends and new technologies to always be updated
	5 0					0	•	
	4							
Level of engagement	3							
	1							
Must have capabilities of an OEP	<ul> <li>1-1 placement session</li> <li>Resume building support</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Provision for 1-1 live tutorial session with SME on demand</li> <li>Flexibility to choose final assessment</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Proctored exam with questions designed by associated university</li> <li>Mock exams</li> </ul>	high-quality certificates with provision of	<ul> <li>Adaptive learning using AI and analytics</li> <li>Multiple assessment models</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Email, WhatsApp with job openings</li> <li>Placement support</li> </ul>	Assist in keeping learners up-to-date by providing updated collateral for at least a year	<ul> <li>Regular persona based connect with learners</li> </ul>
Digital Interventions	<ul><li>Learner profiling and predictive analytics</li><li>Learner helpdesk</li></ul>		Assessment methodology to be designed and monitored	<ul> <li>Digital mailroom</li> <li>Automated workflows</li> <li>Survey management</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Omni-channel Alumni helpdesk</li> <li>Alumni database management</li> <li>Intelligent Outreach</li> <li>Adaptive placement helpdesk</li> </ul>		<ul> <li>Intelligent trend spotting and outreach</li> <li>Content management</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Intelligent Omni-channel marketing outreach</li> </ul>



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:

<sup>1</sup> Holon IQ Global EdTech Reports – Link 1 and Link 2 <sup>2</sup> Gartner education hype cycle: Report on HE

## About the Authors

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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.



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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.



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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.



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