



# A New Era of Instructional Design Leadership

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Q: What inspired you to undertake this study on leadership competencies for instructional designers?

A: My decision to explore leadership competencies for instructional designers stemmed from a notable gap in existing literature. While the field is replete with standard instructional design competencies, a marked absence of leadership skills in industry benchmarks like the IBSTPI and AECT caught my attention. This gap was compounded by a clear misalignment between the competencies taught in instructional design academic programs and those utilized in the workplace. This discrepancy sparked my interest in investigating the interplay between industry standards, philosophical underpinnings and practical application. My study aims to bridge this divide, offering vital insights for both current and aspiring instructional designers to emerge as leaders and exemplars in the educational arena.

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Q: Could you elaborate on the key leadership competencies you identified as essential for instructional designers? How do these competencies differ from traditional instructional design leadership skills?

A: In exploring the leadership competencies critical for instructional designers, my research unearthed

a fascinating intersection between transformational leadership and the dynamic role of IDs in online education. Through a phenomenological qualitative analysis, ten key themes emerged, deeply rooted in the transformational leadership model, particularly resonating with Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. These themes encompass 'Modeling the Way' through aligning shared values and guiding the design process, 'Inspiring a Shared Vision' by envisioning future goals and promoting shared aspirations, 'Challenging the Process' with innovation and continuous improvement, 'Enabling Others to Act' by fostering collaboration and empowerment, and 'Encouraging the Heart' through appreciation and community building.

This paradigm shift from traditional instructional design leadership, which predominantly focuses on management skills as outlined by the IBSTPI and AECT taxonomies, to a more holistic approach, underscores the transformative impact of IDs. They are not just passively developing course content and managing routine design processes but they can drive inspirational, innovative and ethical leadership in educational settings. This comprehensive perspective highlights the potential of IDs as transformative leaders capable of significantly influencing learning experiences to create environments that are not only forward-thinking but also inspiring and more inclusive.

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Q: Your study indicated that instructional designers often learn leadership competencies through on-the-job experience. How can organizations facilitate this learning process more effectively or quickly?

A: In my study, the role of on-the-job experience emerged as a dominant theme. Participants unanimously acknowledged that their most substantial training occurred in the workplace. However, they highlighted a crucial distinction: this training largely focused on management skills rather than leadership development. A notable gap was identified in their institutions – a lack of sustained leadership initiatives. This absence underscores an urgent need for dedicated programs to nurture well-rounded, adept leaders in the field of instructional design.

Organizations can expedite the development of leadership skills in instructional designers by blending structured learning with practical experiences and fostering a culture of continuous feedback and self-reflection. Key to this approach are structured mentorship programs where IDs are paired with seasoned mentors possessing robust leadership qualities. Mentorship creates a dynamic space for exchanging insights, receiving tailored feedback and navigating complex challenges. Such personalized, one-on-one interactions enable IDs to directly apply leadership

principles in their everyday tasks.

IDs should be encouraged to engage in cross-functional projects and job rotation programs where they collaborate with professionals from other departments and have exposure to a range of leadership styles, operational challenges and diverse organizational perspectives. This approach not only broadens their professional horizons but also pushes them beyond their comfort zones and helps foster a more integrated and versatile workforce.

Investing in instructional designers' growth through professional networks and conferences yields substantial organizational advantages. It sharpens IDs' skills and fosters innovation by immersing them in the latest industry trends and practices. Networking at professional events offers IDs access to a wealth of collaborative opportunities and potential partnerships that can significantly enhance their professional growth. Such professional enrichment not only elevates the quality of their work but also enhances the organization's reputation in the educational sector, helps attract top talent and bolsters employee morale.

Encouraging instructional designers to adopt continuous reflective practices is crucial. By analyzing their behavioral patterns and leadership experiences at work through journals, discussions, or coaching sessions IDs can gain profound insights into their character. Integrating these reflections into performance reviews

and regular supervisor meetings enhances their professional growth.

Celebrating IDs' initiatives, innovation and successful project leadership is key to fostering a culture of recognition and growth. Recognition programs, incentives for professional development and an environment that values experimentation and learning from failures are instrumental in nurturing this culture.

To propel instructional designers' leadership growth, L&D and HR departments must strategically invest in leadership development programs and support further educational pursuits. Specialized workshops with a focus on transformational leadership in instructional design and educational technology alongside funding for digital certifications in soft skills topics such as communication, problem-solving, cultural awareness and sensitivity, teamwork and collaboration, decision-making and emotional intelligence are crucial.

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Q: Given the gap between academic training and practical workplace demands you've identified, what changes would you recommend in instructional design education to better prepare graduates for real-world challenges?

A: To bridge the gap between academic training and practical workplace demands in instructional design, a

multifaceted approach is essential. First, integrating soft skills like effective communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability, teamwork and project management into the curriculum is crucial. These skills are key for collaboration, innovation and navigating the ever-changing educational landscape. Incorporating empathy and learner-centric thinking will enable graduates to design more engaging and relevant learning experiences.

Secondly, emphasizing practical skills and project-based learning is paramount. This hands-on approach equips graduates with the technical proficiency needed for real-world scenarios and allows them to apply theoretical knowledge in real or simulated environments. This strategy not only deepens knowledge of instructional design tools, methodologies and best practices but also boosts employability and ensures immediate effectiveness at the start of their professional journeys.

Additionally, academic programs need to encompass training on a comprehensive suite of the latest industry tools and platforms. This includes not only learning management systems and e-learning authoring tools but also extends to immersive technologies like virtual or augmented reality, interactive multimedia software and advanced analytics tools.

Understanding the business aspects of instructional design, including budgeting, ROI, and aligning projects with organizational goals, is equally

important. The training curriculum should offer interdisciplinary project opportunities, blending fields like psychology, marketing, business and technology with instructional design. This will help broaden students' perspectives and comprehension of how instructional design integrates with other sectors.

Fostering collaborations with industry professionals through guest lectures, mentorship programs and practical project partnerships is invaluable. Such interactions provide insights into current trends, expectations and real-world challenges and help better prepare learners for the dynamic nature of the field.

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Q: How do you see these modern leadership competencies impacting the quality of online education, particularly in terms of course design and student engagement?

A: Incorporating the transformational leadership competencies identified in my study into existing or new industry standards has the potential of greatly enhancing the quality of online education, especially in terms of course design and student engagement.

Instructional designers who align course designs with shared values and goals not only set a quality benchmark but also create content that resonates with both educators and learners. Such alignment ensures courses are pedagogically robust, user-friendly, and closely linked to learning

objectives – which are key ingredients to boosting student retention and satisfaction.

In an era where online education is rapidly evolving, instructional designers play a central role by envisioning future educational goals and promoting shared aspirations. Their foresight in integrating cutting-edge technologies and pedagogies transforms course design, making it more engaging and relevant for the digital age. This approach not only enhances the quality of online education but also actively fosters student engagement. IDs' ability to anticipate and adapt to future educational needs ensures that online learning environments remain dynamic, immersive and aligned with both contemporary and future learning paradigms.

By embracing calculated risks, instructional designers pave the way for discovery of groundbreaking methodologies in online learning. However, this desire to be risk-takers needs to be powered by a steady pursuit of learning excellence and adherence to best practices in instructional design for online learning. This approach will help ensure courses remain cutting-edge, engaging and in perfect sync with both learner preferences and authentic performance measurement strategies. Such an approach is vital in maintaining the vibrancy and effectiveness of online learning and keeping it at the forefront of educational innovation.

When IDs collaborate, they create a rich blend of insights, capturing the intricacies of design and the diverse viewpoints of stakeholders. This synergy leads to astute decisions and deeply enriching learning experiences. Courses crafted in these collaborative crucibles resonate closely with student needs and help elevate satisfaction and engagement levels. This type of collaborative approach is not just a strategy but a cornerstone in shaping the future of effective and interactive online education.

By actively acknowledging and celebrating their peers' achievements, IDs help foster a culture brimming with positivity and innovation. This culture of appreciation and communal support echoes through their course designs and results in educational experiences that are not only thoughtful but also deeply learner-centered. Such a nurturing environment is instrumental in crafting online courses that resonate more deeply with students.

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**Q: Considering the rapid evolution of online education, what strategies should instructional designers adopt to continuously develop their leadership competencies?**

**A:** As change agents in education, IDs should make an uncompromising commitment to lifelong learning. They must stay abreast of the latest trends, technologies and methodologies in online education and leadership.

Actively participate in professional communities, forums, and conferences. Network and engage with peers in diverse online and offline communities. Join professional associations and participate in online forums and discussions to gain exposure to new ideas and insights.

Seek mentorship from experienced leaders in the field and offer mentorship to others. Focus on developing emotional intelligence, self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills.

Develop the ability to think strategically about the future of online education and how to innovate within the field. A clear vision helps in guiding teams and projects effectively. In an increasingly global online environment, understanding and respecting cultural differences is crucial.

Cultivate skills to effectively communicate and lead in diverse cultural settings. Demonstrate commitment, adaptability, integrity, professionalism and a passion for online education. Leading by example will inspire and motivate others.

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**Q: How do you envision the role of instructional designers evolving in the next decade, especially in light of emerging technologies and learning theory trends?**

**A:** I think in the next decade, instructional designers are set to become pivotal architects of learning, blending advanced



technologies like AI, VR/AR and adaptive systems to create deeply personalized and immersive educational experiences. Emphasizing data-driven designs, they will harness analytics to customize learning to individual styles and needs.

As the world grows more interconnected, IDs will be increasingly challenged to design for global audience while remaining mindful of cultural nuances and inclusivity.

Lifelong learning and microlearning will be at the forefront, with IDs developing more concise, skill-focused content for continuous learning. They will need to rapidly innovate by integrating emerging learning theories with technology and creating more holistic learning environments.

Collaboration with AI and automation will greatly accelerate and streamline content curation and significantly help raise productivity. This will in turn free up space for IDs to concentrate on the more creative and strategic elements of design. Soft skills training will gain prominence, with a focus on refined communication, emotional intelligence, critical thinking and adaptability. The shift towards skills-based or competency-based education will see IDs crafting progressively flexible, personalized learning paths.

Sustainability and social responsibility will increasingly influence course design and shed more light on ethical practices and global concerns.

I also think the role of IDs in change management will expand as they guide organizations and learners through transitions to new technologies and methods. As educational paradigms shift, IDs will be at the heart of these transformations, shaping learning experiences that are innovative, inclusive and aligned with the evolving digital landscape.

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**Q: While your study focused on online universities, how might its findings be applicable to instructional designers in other settings, such as corporate learning environments or traditional educational institutions?**

**A:** The findings from my study on transformational leadership competencies offer valuable perspectives for instructional designers operating in a variety of learning contexts, encompassing corporate sectors, private institutions and traditional educational environments.

Across all settings, modeling the way and guiding the design process effectively is vital. IDs must create high quality learning materials that are pedagogically sound and that meet both the learners' needs, business objectives and organizational goals.

In the corporate realm, instructional designers focus on creating training frameworks that not only meet the needs of current clients but that allow educators

to anticipate and prepare for future market skill demands. In academia, this translates to aligning curricula with the school's educational philosophy and the specific needs of students, predicting educational trends and preparing learners for real-life challenges and opportunities.

Promoting enthusiasm for shared aspirations and envisioning future goals is essential in every context. IDs need to communicate the value and impact of their work compellingly and generate a sense of excitement and commitment among all stakeholders irrespective of hierarchy.

Innovation is crucial in all realms of instructional design. Corporate instructional designers must embrace experimentation with emerging training technologies and agile methodologies. Meanwhile, those in traditional educational settings should concentrate on pioneering innovative teaching strategies and interdisciplinary approaches. Across all sectors, the drive for continuous improvement, fueled by consistent feedback and rigorous effectiveness evaluations, is essential for success.

In corporate environments, IDs should build collaborative bridges across departments to help ensure training decisions are well-rounded, market-aligned and continuously exceeding client expectations. In academic settings, this means collaboration with faculty, key administrative teams like Enrollment and Delivery, and most importantly, the students. In any design setting, the principle

of treating people with respect and empathy, coupled with the effort to forge meaningful partnerships and empower team members, goes a long way at positioning instructional designers as agents of change and transformation.

Acknowledging and valuing the contributions of all involved, whether in a corporate or educational context, enhances morale and engagement. Building a supportive learning community is equally important, whether it involves creating professional networks in corporate settings or nurturing a collaborative atmosphere in educational institutions.

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### Q: What are your views on AI?

A: AI stands poised to transform the educational landscape. It heralds a new era of customized learning, adapting to individual styles and needs and potentially revolutionizing engagement and outcomes. Its power to democratize education is significant especially as it relates to bringing high quality educational resources to underprivileged areas and leveling the playing field across socio-economic divides.

The role of AI in facilitating lifelong learning is becoming undoubtedly increasingly important, especially with the rapid evolution of job markets. It supports ongoing skill development and helps individuals maintain career relevance. Additionally, AI plays a vital role in enhancing accessibility by offering tools



like real-time translation and personalized learning aids, which are instrumental in overcoming learning barriers for individuals with disabilities.

When utilized effectively, AI has the potential to foster a more informed society, characterized by heightened civic engagement and robust democratic processes. Yet, realizing this potential comes with significant ethical obligations, including ensuring data privacy, security and addressing algorithmic bias to guarantee the responsible use of AI.

A critical concern is the potential widening of the digital divide. Areas with limited technology access might lag resulting in deepening educational inequalities. Therefore, the future of learning must embrace a human-AI type of collaboration – in other words, leveraging AI's strengths while retaining the irreplaceable human elements of mentorship and emotional support.

In the era of AI-driven transformation, education must shift its focus to cultivating distinctly human abilities such as critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence. Equipping students for a world intertwined with AI extends past mere technical knowledge; it requires a deep comprehension of collaborative synergy with AI and an awareness of its broader societal impact. The objective is to leverage AI as a tool that amplifies human potential and fine-tunes educational methodologies rather than replacing the inherent human touch found in

conventional educational practices.

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**Q: If you could go back in time and give your younger self career advice – what would that be?**

**A: I would tell her:**

Cherish the unique journey that is yours alone. Make decisions that resonate with your core values. Integrity is the steadfast anchor that holds firm amidst turbulent waters and that guides your boat steadily towards a brighter future. Let your focus be on the waves of change you set in motion which go far beyond mere titles or reflections in the mirror. Remember, the truest barometer of success is the impact you make – how you, in your own special way, bring transformation to the world around you.

Find a rhythm that is uniquely yours – a balance that sings to your soul. Be gentle with yourself. Perfection is a myth. Rather than tirelessly spinning plates until you are on the brink of burnout, gracefully intertwine your personal and professional worlds. Let this beautiful fusion not just satisfy you but also breathe fresh energy into your life and the lives of your colleagues.

Allow the genuine essence of who you are to radiate through your work. Each piece of your journey, with its hues and textures, contributes to a deeper self-awareness that enables you to nurture, uplift and empower others in a meaningful way. It is

your authenticity that paves the way for  
creating spaces brimming with inclusivity  
and care – spaces where every voice is  
heard and every story is valued.

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