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3 Top Leadership Competencies for Instructional Designers

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A successful instructional designer not only needs to be excelling in design and development, but also needs to be a leader, a change agent, and a strategist. Within higher education organizations, instructional design leaders are in demand because they are uniquely qualified to envision the future of education, give critical and strategic direction to others, and ultimately provide an organization with the leadership necessary to move institutions deeper into the 21st century and beyond (Shaw, 2012). However, both International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI , 2012) competency standards and the ATD (2014) competency model put strong emphasis on the design competencies but focus much less on the leadership competencies. In this blog, I will share the top three leadership competencies for instructional design leaders.

1. Be a Strategist and Visionary

Instructional designers recognize innovation, see the big picture, and respond to a continuously rapidly changing environment. We design for future trends in delivering education, such as games, mobile technologies, or augmented reality. We implement transformational methods in our design. Instructional design leaders will develop strategic, proactive plans for the future, engage others in design process and sustain the engagement, collaborate for best possible solutions to current and unforeseen problems and challenges, and make the right connections in a network of colleagues and technology (Scott et al, 2008; Sims, 2006). Literature also suggest that continuing domain-specific research to advance field knowledge and incorporating and disseminating best practices are important for a strategic and visionary instructional design leader (Asbaugh, 2013).

2. Be a Change Agent

Instructional designers deal with changes every day. We develop learning experiences with the end in mind. What is the desired performance and how do we get from the current state to the desired state? The solutions we design should provide the results we anticipate. To be a successful change agent, we need to consider creating an influence strategy. Yes, we are back to strategy again. This strategy may include identifying a change team, inviting a champion, and setting up the ground rules (Palmer, 2003).

3. Be a Great Communicator

We all know that communication is an extremely important competency for any leader and an instructional designer. We are not talking about verbal communication only. Written and visual communication skills are just as important as verbal communication skills. We need to be able to listen and observe, ask the right questions, write concisely and articulatory, edit other people's work, and present our ideas. We often forgot the importance of observation and neglect the subtle non-verbal cues. When we do this, we miss out what our user or audience really needs and what they really meant.

These are the top three leadership competencies for instructional designers. Many other leadership competencies are also important for a successful instructional design leader, including management skills, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, coaching and mentoring skills, and organizational and planning skills. I will continue address these skills and

competencies in future posts.

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