JANUARY 2024

The State of Ed-tech Leadership Development:
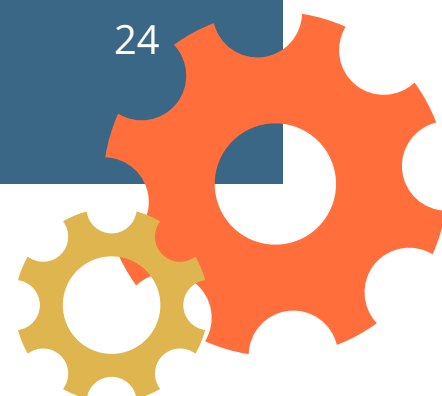
Executives' Insights Regarding the Challenges of Business Growth

Table of Contents

Introduction

In recent years, the K–12 ed-tech market has experienced tremendous growth and evolution, driven heavily by the infusion of Federal ESSER funding as well as private equity investment. Now, as the ESSER wave subsides and investor enthusiasm has cooled, the industry faces its next set of challenges.

District purchasing processes now come with a heightened level of scrutiny, requiring ed-tech products and services to meet a higher burden of proof and requiring sales, marketing, and customer success teams to navigate an even more challenging buying process. However, the aggressive growth targets set by many ed-tech companies have not changed.

Economic and political uncertainties have the industry on edge, which is causing many ed-tech companies to pull back on investments and conduct layoffs. Meanwhile, as remote and hybrid work environments become the norm, leaders are dealing with a range of variables they haven't previously encountered when trying to focus and motivate their teams to accomplish company goals.

Ed-tech companies are finding that the complexity of these circumstances has put pressure on leaders at every level of the organization. Their jobs are more demanding than ever and their ability to lead, communicate, and collaborate has become a critical success factor.

However, many executives and managers find themselves in unfamiliar territory, lacking experience, and unable to step up to the challenges facing them. As this report will illustrate, many of the challenges that ed-tech companies face are related to a lack of leadership development. Although most companies are aware that gaps in leadership development exist, they are often unsure of why those gaps occur and how to remedy them.

In order to gain further insight into the gaps in leadership depth as well as business risks and employee pain points, the Ed-tech Leadership Collective conducted its second annual national State of Ed-tech Leadership Development survey. This report highlights the results of that survey and provides comparisons to the data gathered in the first survey, conducted one year ago.

About the Survey

In December 2023, the Ed-tech Leadership Collective developed and sent a survey to individuals in managerial roles at ed-tech companies. All respondents were based in the United States and work at companies providing products and services related to teaching and learning in the U.S. K–12 market. Respondents were asked to complete a survey regarding "leadership development within educational technology companies."

**In total, there were 157 survey respondents who fall into the following categories:**

C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES — This group included CEOs, C-level Executives, as well as those who reported directly to the CEO as part of the executive team. This group represented 24% of the respondents.

DEPARTMENT HEADS — This group included Vice Presidents and Senior Directors who were the head of a department (such as Sales, Marketing, Product, Engineering, Customer Success, HR, etc.), but were not a part of the executive management team. This group represented 26% of the respondents.

FUNCTIONAL LEADERS — This group included Directors and Senior Managers who led a functional team within a major department but were not the department head. (For example, a Product Marketing Director who was not the Head of Marketing). This group represented 27% of the respondents.

PEOPLE MANAGERS — Individuals who are managers but did not fit any of the descriptions above. This group represented 8% of the respondents.

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS — Individuals who did not have any direct reports. This group represented 15% of the respondents.

24%
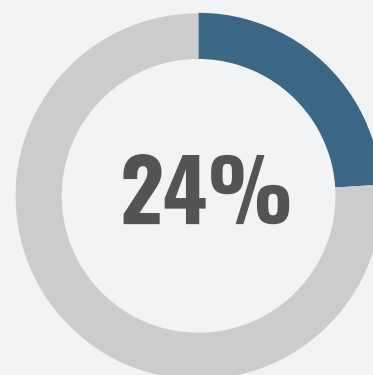
of all respondents identified as a member of a historically marginalized population. This percentage was similar across all job categories.

87%
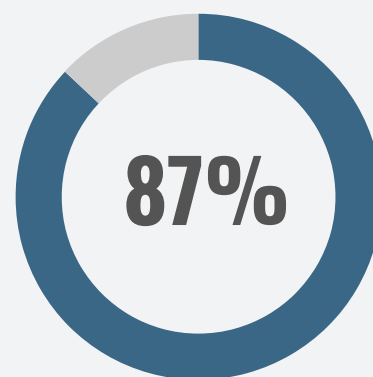
of respondents had at least 10 years of professional experience.

The majority (87%) of respondents had more than 10 years of professional experience, with nearly half (42%) bringing more than 20 years of experience.

Respondents were mostly (57%) from companies with 51–500 employees.

More than half (58%) of respondents work at companies that are fully remote and less than 1% are at companies that are fully in-person. Almost a quarter (23%) are employed by companies with a blended work environment in which some employees work in-office while a small percentage of employees are fully remote. The rest are employed at companies with a hybrid work environment where employees work remotely but are required to be physically in the office for some portion of the time.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Fully remote — 58%
Blended — 23%
Hybrid — 18%
Fully in-person — <1%

COMPANY SIZE

1–50 employees — 20%
51–200 employees — 33%
201–500 employees — 24%
501–1,000 employees — 10%
More than 1,000 employees — 13%

YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

20+ — 42%
16–20 — 24%
11–15 — 21%
6–10 — 11%
3–5 — 2%
Less than 3 — 0%
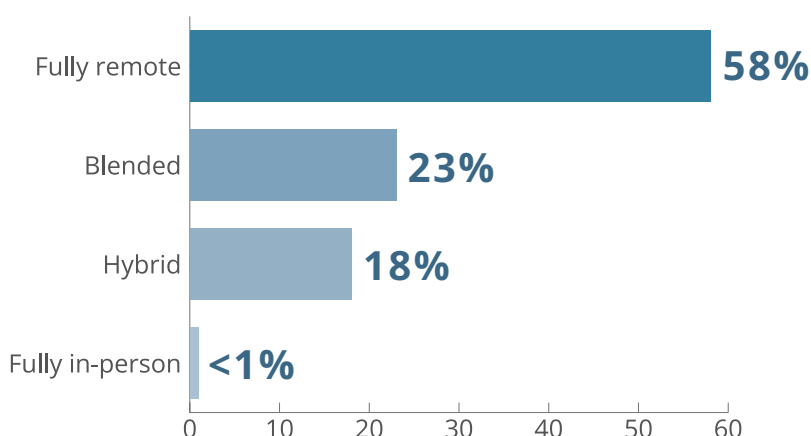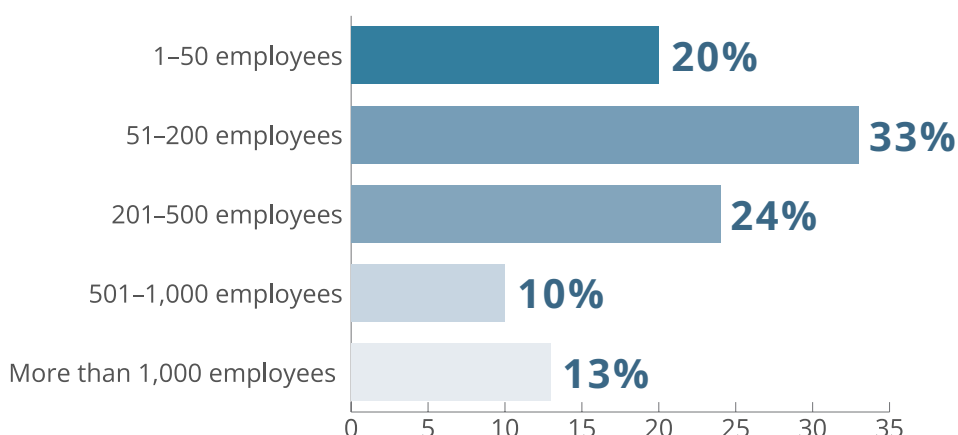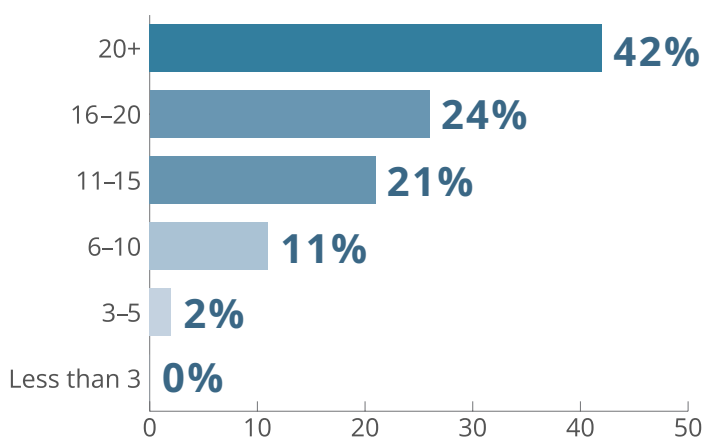
Executive Summary

This analysis looks closely at the perceptions of C-level Executives relative to their Department Heads, Functional Leaders, and People Managers* regarding the major aspects and implications of leadership development in the K–12 ed-tech industry. Where appropriate, this report compares data in our most recent survey with the results of the survey conducted one year ago.

Highlights of the 2024 findings include:

▸ Very few C-level Executives (9%) feel confident that they can hire from within for executive team vacancies. However, more than half (58%) of Department Heads feel they are ready to advance to the executive-team level.

▸ The path to advancement is unclear for most aspiring leaders. Only 15% of respondents said their manager provided clear guidance and support to help them reach the next level.

▸ Only 28% of C-level Executives felt that their high-potential employees are receiving the mentoring and support they need in order to reach their full potential.

▸ Nearly two-thirds (61%) of non-executive leaders are out of their depth and face challenges they've never encountered before.

▸ Half (49%) of C-level Executives reported that their non-executive leaders lacked sufficient experience scaling a business and most (83%) felt their team's experience gap is having a negative impact on the company's ability to grow.

* Note: Department Heads, Functional Leaders, and People Managers will sometimes be referred to collectively as "non-executive leaders."

9%
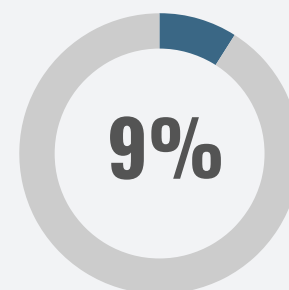
of C-level Executives feel confident that they can hire from within for executive team vacancies.
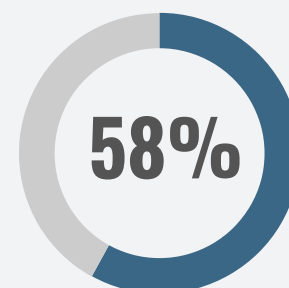
58%

of Department Heads feel they are ready to advance to the executive-team level.

83%
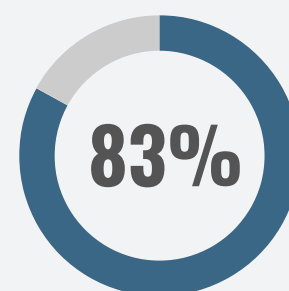
of C-level Executives felt their team's experience gap is having a negative impact on the company's ability to grow.

- The prevalence of hybrid, blended, and fully remote work environments has had a very limited impact on companies' ability to provide mentoring and coaching.

- Less than a third (30%) of employees from historically marginalized populations felt that their company's talent development programs adequately supported their needs.

- Approximately half (54%) of respondents said their company experienced layoffs during the last 12 months. More than two-thirds of those respondents are being asked to take on a larger workload or do more with less.

- More than a third (37%) of respondents said that the pressure and high expectations of their role are a source of frequent or constant stress, anxiety, or isolation. Nearly half (48%) of all respondents reported themselves as being at a high risk of burnout.

- Almost all C-level Executives (94%) indicated they are likely to invest in leadership development training. Most are choosing to do so in an effort to support new leaders, improve company performance, and retain key talent.
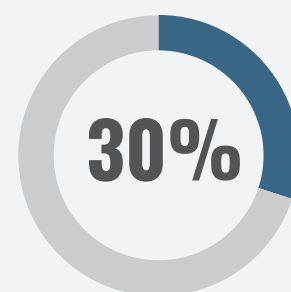
30%

of employees from historically marginalized populations felt that their company's talent development programs adequately supported their needs.

48%

of all respondents reported themselves as being at a high risk of burnout.

94%
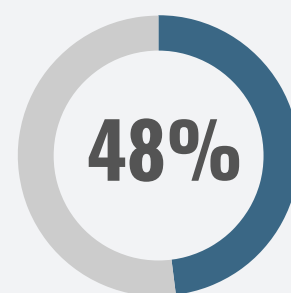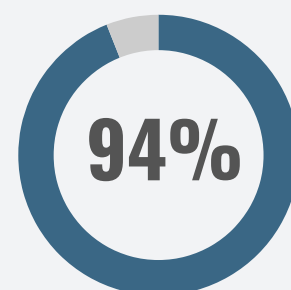
of C-level Executives indicated they are likely to invest in leadership development training.

Key Findings

A Troubling Confidence Gap in Leadership Depth

The ability to promote from within is a key indicator of how effectively an organization has developed its leadership depth. However, when managers' and employees' expectations regarding potential advancement are misaligned, more complex and concerning underlying factors likely exist.

C-level Executives were asked whether they had capable internal candidates to succeed current executive team members in the event of an unexpected vacancy. Only 9% were confident they had sufficient leadership depth to fill a seat on their executive team. This is a significant drop from last year's survey, where a mere 18% of C-level Executives felt confident in their company's leadership depth.

58%

9%

C-level Executives Confident They Can Hire from Within for Executive Team Vacancies

Department Heads Confident They are Ready to Advance to the Executive-team
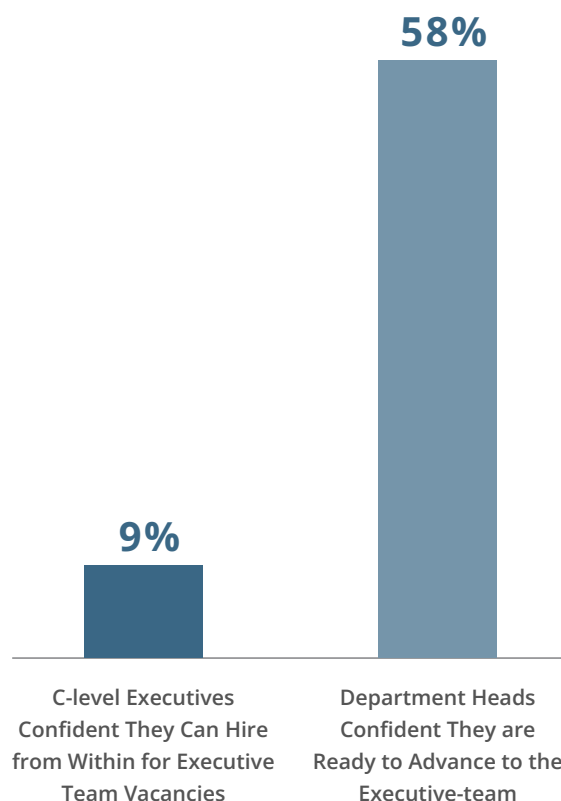
As in last year's survey, there was a dramatic disconnect between manager and employee perception regarding readiness for promotion. More than half (58%) of Department Heads were confident or very confident that they were ready to be promoted to the executive team. This nearly 50-point gap in confidence between C-level Executives and Department Heads mirrors the prior year's findings and is a red flag.

According to C-level Executives, when Department Heads are not yet ready to step up to the next level, half of the time (56%) it is because they lack sufficient managerial expertise. About one-third (32%) of the time, it is due to a gap in functional expertise, and 12% of the time, it is because they lack K–12 domain expertise.

SKILL GAPS PREVENTING DEPARTMENT HEADS FROM BEING PROMOTED

Managerial Expertise **56%**

Functional Expertise **32%**

Domain Expertise **12%**
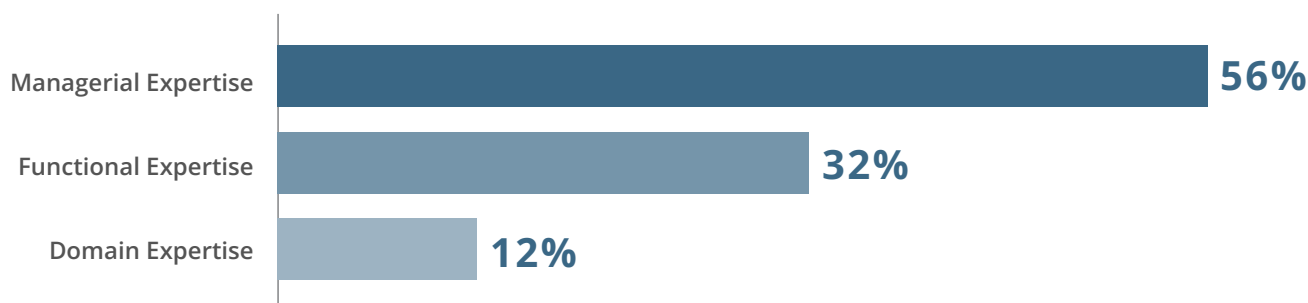
Functional Leaders and People Managers were slightly less confident (48%) in their ability to step up to the Department Head level; a number that was much lower compared to the previous year's results (63%). However, this still represents a scenario in which one out of two non-executive leaders believe they are ready to be promoted, which is sharply at odds with the perception from the C-suite.

Fundamentally, the confidence gap in executive leadership depth is one that can affect many other mission-critical aspects of the business, which we will explore later in this report.

A significant confidence gap in executive leadership depth is an indicator of:

Lack of clarity and communication between managers and employees regarding the skills and competencies required at the next level

Failure to support emerging leaders with mentoring or formal leadership development programs

Insufficient support systems to help ensure newly hired or newly promoted employees succeed in their new roles

Most Non-executive Leaders Are Out of Their Depth

One of the common obstacles facing C-level Executives is that their key leaders are experiencing challenges they've never encountered before. For the second year in a row, nearly two-thirds (61%) of C-level Executives and Department Heads indicated that at least half of their non-executive leaders were in the "biggest job of their life." For some leaders, this problem is even more severe, with a third (33%) of C-level Executives reporting that at least 75% of their non-executive leaders were in the biggest job of their life.

When non-executive leaders find themselves in unfamiliar territory, they oftentimes rely on their C-level manager for support. This can result in the C-suite dealing with too many tactical aspects of the business and jeopardizes their ability to lead the business forward.

Department Heads and Functional Leaders are aware of their own inexperience. Nearly two-thirds (62%) indicated again this year that they were in the biggest job of their life. Despite the alignment between C-level Executives and non-executive leaders on the scope of this challenge, there doesn't seem to be sufficient progress being made to address the experience gap, as detailed in this report.
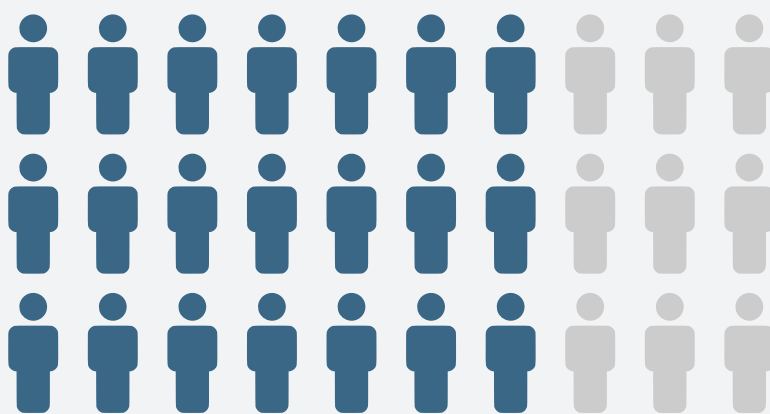
Two-thirds of non-executive leaders are

in the biggest job of their life.

Experience Gap Continues to Create Obstacles to Company Growth

As K–12 ed-tech companies look to maintain a strong growth trajectory, most are limited by their teams' depth of experience. Only half (51%) of C-level Executives felt that their non-executive leaders had enough prior experience scaling a business. While this percentage is significantly higher than last year's report (25%), respondents were much more pessimistic about the impact of the overall lack of expertise. A surprising 83% of C-level Executives characterized their team's experience gap as having a negative impact on their ability to scale their business. This is up dramatically from 57% the prior year.

Strategic Risks Associated with Breakdowns in Leadership

In most companies, the non-executive leaders bear significant responsibility for carrying out the mission-critical work of the business. This, however, can create vulnerabilities if those team members were to struggle. C-level Executives continue to be concerned about this risk, with more than three-quarters (78%) indicating that the amount of mission-critical work in the hands of non-executives would create a business risk for their company if those employees were to struggle.

When non-executive leaders struggle, the impact can be widespread. C-level Executives and Department Heads are primarily concerned about the potential impact on customers and on company strategic goals, but they may be overlooking some important underlying risk factors. When non-executive leaders' struggles result in their team experiencing poor productivity or employee turnover, this will quickly have an impact on the company's ability to support customers. Additionally, when C-suite leaders need to spend time conducting damage control for struggling managers, they have less time to lead the business forward and meet strategic objectives.

C-level Executives should take a more holistic view of the potential repercussions when their non-executive leaders struggle and should explore ways to proactively provide support in order to avoid breakdowns occurring.

C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES' TOP CONCERNS WHEN NON-EXECUTIVE LEADERS STRUGGLE

Concern	Percentage
Disruption to company strategic goals	57%
Impact on customers (product quality, customer satisfaction, missed sales opportunities)	60%
Cross-departmental disruption	44%
Turnover on the team they manage	43%
Poor productivity on the team they manage	37%
Time required from their manager (support / damage control)	32%

## Emerging Leaders Not Receiving the Mentoring They Need

Despite the acknowledged risks and impact of leadership gaps, C-level Executives find that their companies continue to fall short on providing mentoring for their high-potential employees. Only 28% felt that their high-potential employees are receiving the necessary mentoring and support to reach their full potential. Although this number is double the previous year's figure, C-level Executives are still expressing troublingly low levels of confidence in their leadership depth, which has dropped from 18% to 9% this year.

Non-executive leaders have noticed that mentoring and support is lacking. Only 35% felt that their manager dedicates the amount of mentoring time necessary for them to advance as a leader. The common sentiment among managers and employees is that mentoring and coaching needs to increase. However, there also needs to be further investigation into the factors affecting the quality of those interactions in order to have the desired outcome. The next several sections of this report explore these aspects.

The Impact of Work Environments on Employee Development

As the traditional in-person work environment becomes increasingly rare, questions arise regarding how hybrid, blended, and fully remote work environments may affect mentoring and employee development. Two-thirds (66%) of C-level Executives, Department Heads, and Functional Leaders felt that their work environment did not have a meaningful impact on their company's ability to provide mentoring and coaching to high-potential employees. In fully remote environments, there was an equal number of respondents who felt their work setting had a positive (16%) or negative (16%) impact on employee development.

Leaders' sentiment regarding hybrid and blended environments was not as favorable. More than a quarter (27%) of respondents in hybrid environments and nearly a third (30%) in blended environments felt that their work environment had a negative impact on employee development. This negative perception could be related to the influence of employees' remote or in-office status on the consistency with which they can engage with their mentors. In a fully remote environment, all employees work within the same dynamic all the time, so there are less likely to be inequities or biases towards those who can get in-person facetime more frequently.
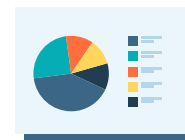
Manager Feedback Misses the Mark

This year's survey showed an encouraging improvement in the percentage of Functional Leaders who receive constructive feedback from their manager on a regular basis. Nearly half (49%) of Functional Leaders receive constructive feedback on a monthly or weekly basis, a significant increase from last year (37%).

FREQUENCY OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED BY FUNCTIONAL LEADERS

- ● At least weekly — **13%**
- ● Monthly — **36%**
- ● A few times per year — **28%**
- ● Annually — **18%**
- ● Never — **5%**
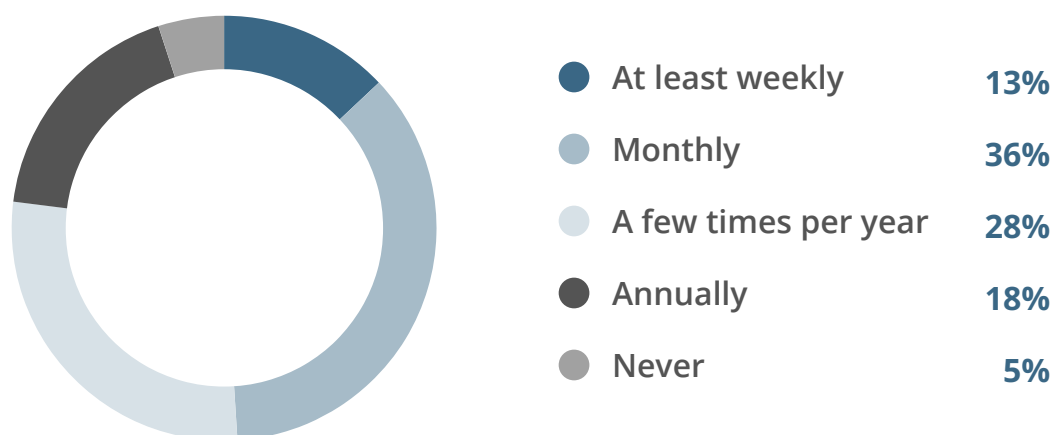
However, while the frequency of feedback has improved, the quality of that feedback continues to miss the mark. Only about half (49%) of respondents felt that the feedback they received was helpful, with Functional Leaders citing the same reasons as they did last year:

"Feedback was given too infrequently"

"My manager lacks knowledge or authority on the matter"

"I'm not sure how to put the feedback into practice"

"Feedback was inconsistent with goals and expectations"

Functional Leaders not only want greater frequency of constructive feedback, but they also want more support when putting that feedback into practice and contextualizing the guidance within company goals and job expectations.

Functional Leaders Crave Feedback and Outside Perspective

In addition to wanting greater frequency and quality of feedback from their managers, Functional Leaders are also seeking more feedback from their peers. Three-quarters of Functional Leaders (77%) said that they receive constructive feedback from their colleagues only a few times per year or less. However, despite the low frequency of feedback, 61% said that they found the feedback to be helpful or very helpful. When that percentage is compared to the 51% of respondents who felt their manager's feedback was helpful, it suggests that companies should pursue additional opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration.

Leading a functional team within a department can be an isolating experience, especially for those with a specialized area of expertise. Functional Leaders continue to show a very high level of interest in engaging with peers who perform the same job at other companies. Nearly three-quarters (72%) said they would find it helpful to engage with peers at other companies. Industry peer groups of this kind not only provide functionally specific feedback, but also create opportunities for learning best practices, broadening members' perspectives, and improving analytical and problem-solving skills.

Siloing Continues to Create Cross-departmental Challenges

For a second consecutive year, 86% of C-level Executives, Department Heads and Functional Leaders indicated that siloing is an obstacle to success. More than a third (38%) of respondents characterize the cross-departmental siloing as a "major obstacle" to company success.

Interestingly, these results are similar across various work environments. Hybrid environments have a slightly higher frequency of siloing becoming an obstacle (92% of respondents). A slightly lower percent of respondents (79%) who work in a blended environment reported this as an obstacle.

When asked how their work environment affected employees' ability to collaborate, the results were fairly neutral. Approximately 50% of all respondents felt that their work environment did not have a meaningful impact on their ability to collaborate cross-departmentally. The other 50% of respondents were evenly split between viewing their work environment as either a positive or negative factor. Employees in hybrid work environments were the one exception, with nearly half (48%) stating that their work environment had a negative impact.

Given that work environments do not appear to be a contributing factor to cross-departmental barriers, it is likely that communication, strategic clarity, and leaders' ability to effectively manage across within the organization are significant contributing factors to what remains a troubling degree (86%) of siloing in the K–12 ed-tech space.
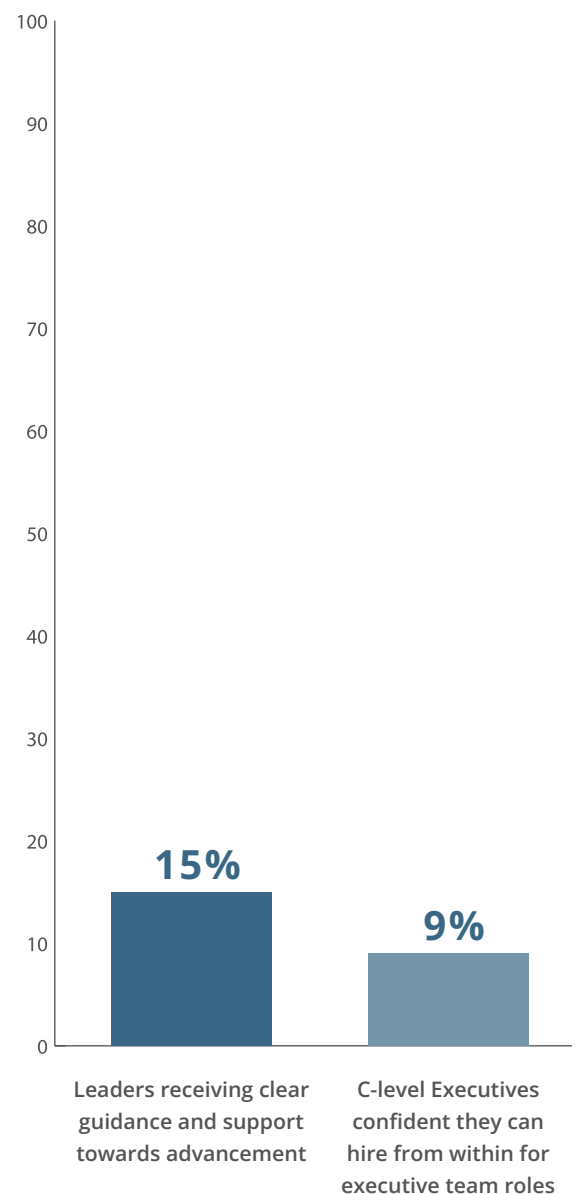
Paths for Advancement Are Unclear

Managers play a key role in helping team members advance in their careers and can either serve as an advocate or an obstacle along the way. Among the 83% of non-executive leaders who aspire to reach higher levels of leadership, very few are getting the guidance they need from their manager. More than half (55%) of respondents indicated that their manager is supportive but has offered no guidance on how to advance to the next level. An additional 30% received vague guidance at best on how to advance to the next level. Only 15% said they received clear guidance and support, and an equal number received no guidance and no support at all.

When comparing these data to the earlier findings on leadership depth, there is a concerning disconnect in executives' attitudes and actions. As described earlier in this report, approximately half of non-executive leaders feel they are ready to advance to the next level of leadership, yet only 9% of C-level Executives are confident about their ability to hire from within for key roles. These statistics, while alarming, should not be surprising when considering that 85% of non-executive leaders are getting only vague guidance at best when it comes to their desire to advance as leaders. Leadership depth will continue to be a vulnerability unless organizations become more intentional about how they prepare their high-potential leaders for advancement.

C-level Executive teams should take a closer look at how they are explicitly articulating the paths for advancement in their organization and should establish support systems and accountability for managers to more effectively guide their high-potential employees to grow as leaders.

> **Leadership depth will continue to be a vulnerability unless organizations become more intentional about how they prepare their high-potential leaders for advancement.**


Bar chart:
- Leaders receiving clear guidance and support towards advancement: **15%**
- C-level Executives confident they can hire from within for executive team roles: **9%**

Equitable Support for Leadership Growth Falls Short

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) is an important part of company values for many K–12 ed-tech organizations. However, most companies continue to struggle to create an environment that is supportive for historically marginalized populations.

Approximately a quarter (24%) of respondents identified as members of a historically marginalized population. Among these leaders, only 30% found that their company's talent development practices effectively supported their needs. This is a slight improvement over the previous year (25%). For those who indicated they are not a member of a historically marginalized population or chose not to respond, 33% felt that their company supported the needs of those who identify as a member of a historically marginalized population. This suggests that the failure to meet the needs of employees from historically marginalized populations might be recognized somewhat broadly; it is likely a need that isn't receiving the attention and investment necessary.
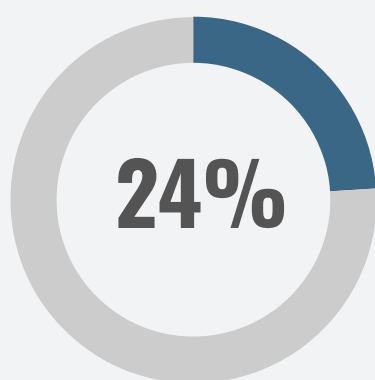
24% of respondents identified as members of a historically marginalized population.

Effectively meeting the needs of those from historically marginalized populations and delivering on the company's commitments to DEIB requires a greater level of focus and intentionality. impacting certain important segments of employees and warrants an improved, equitable approach.
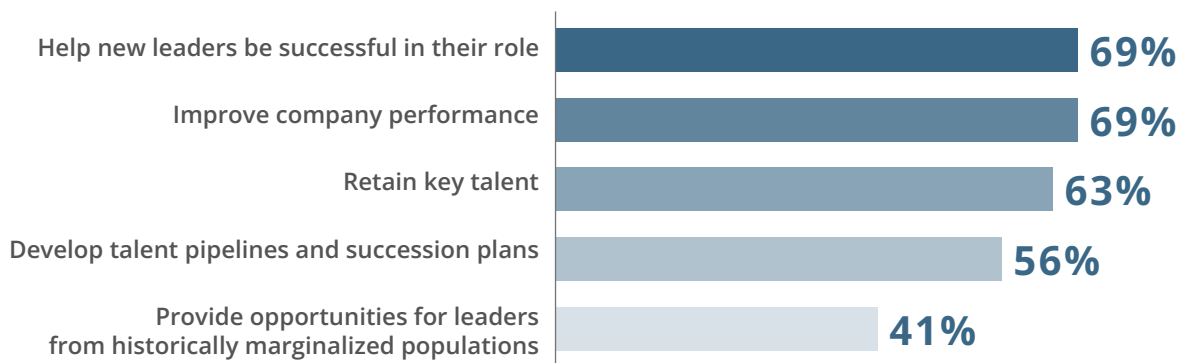
Companies Prioritize Investments in Leadership Training

Amid the challenges regarding leadership depth, companies continue to see the importance of professional development within their organization. Almost all C-level Executives (94%) indicated they are likely to invest in leadership development training.

The five most common reasons are to:

Reason	Percentage
Help new leaders be successful in their role	69%
Improve company performance	69%
Retain key talent	63%
Develop talent pipelines and succession plans	56%
Provide opportunities for leaders from historically marginalized populations	41%

This may prove to be an ongoing area of emphasis for many K–12 ed-tech companies, especially given the extremely low levels of confidence (28%) in their current ability to mentor their high-potential employees and the low level of confidence (9%) in leadership depth.
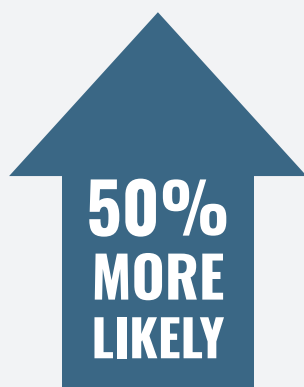
50% MORE LIKELY

Respondents are 50% more likely to invest in supporting new leaders or key talent than they are to invest specifically in programs for historically marginalized populations.

K–12 ed-tech companies should also explore further investment in programs to support leaders from historically marginalized populations. It is concerning that respondents are 50% more likely to invest in supporting new leaders or key talent than they are to invest specifically in programs for historically marginalized populations. With the widely recognized shortfall in support for this group of leaders, executives should re-examine how to increase their investments in leadership development to align with their DEIB goals.
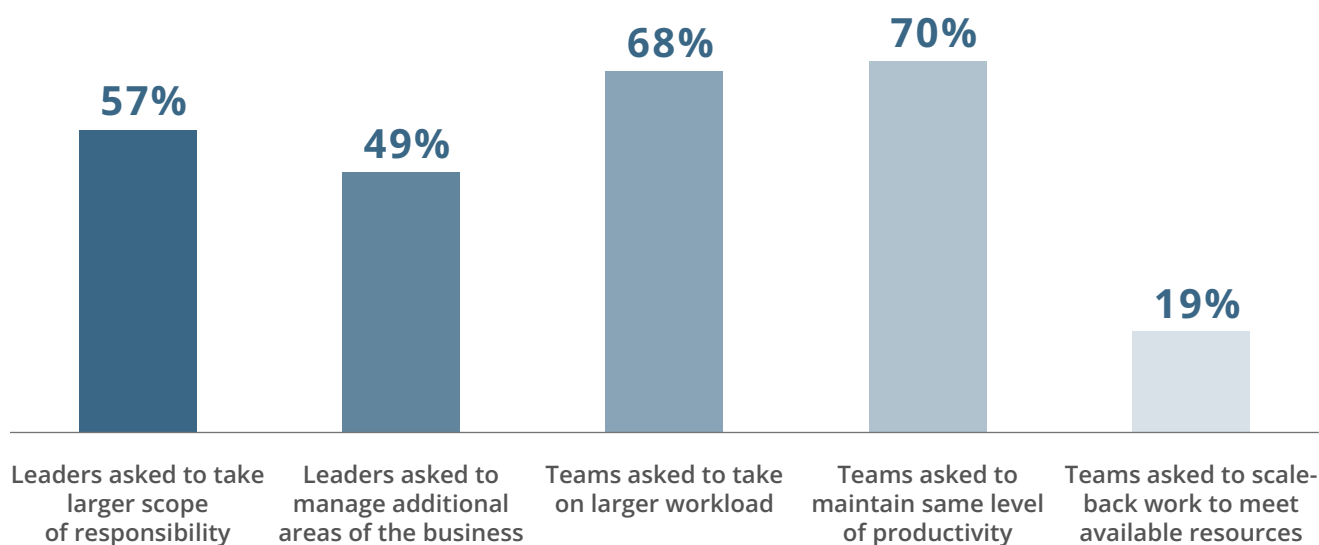
Layoffs and Reorganizations Are Affecting Most Companies

K–12 ed-tech companies have been challenged not only by the macro-economic environment, but also the aftereffects of the ESSER funding wave cresting. Many companies that had aggressively increased staff in an effort to chase multiple years of double-digit growth have found themselves overextended. Throughout 2023, the industry was bracing itself for potential layoffs, which proved to be fairly common among survey respondents.

More than half (54%) of respondents indicated that their company had experienced layoffs in the past 12 months. Among those companies conducting layoffs, two-thirds (67%) have also undergone a reorganization. Amidst the economic headwinds and reduced headcount, the leaders and individual contributors within K–12 ed-tech companies are shouldering a heavy burden.

As companies reorganize their management teams, 57% of leaders are being asked to take on a larger scope of responsibility, and almost half (49%) are being asked to manage additional areas of the business. With two-thirds of leaders already in the biggest job of their life—many of whom are lacking sufficient managerial and functional expertise—an expanded scope of responsibility represents a potentially large area of risk for many companies.

The burden of financial constraints is also being acutely felt among non-executive people managers and individual contributors. More than two-thirds (68%) of respondents indicated that individual contributors on their teams are being asked to take on a larger workload. "Doing more with less" seems to be the name of the game; 70% of teams are being asked to maintain the same level of productivity with fewer people. Meanwhile, only 19% of teams are being asked to scale back their work to align with available resources. With teams being stretched to their limits, ed-tech companies should closely monitor the potential for employee burnout and turnover.

IMPACT OF ED-TECH LAYOFFS

Leaders asked to take larger scope of responsibility	Leaders asked to manage additional areas of the business	Teams asked to take on larger workload	Teams asked to maintain same level of productivity	Teams asked to scale-back work to meet available resources
57%	49%	68%	70%	19%

Leveraging AI Amidst Resource Constraints

Companies are asking employees to maintain productivity levels with fewer resources, and some are exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to help them accomplish their goals. Approximately a quarter (23%) of respondents indicated they were using AI in a meaningful way to drive core aspects of their business. Another 19% reported using AI in a very rudimentary or exploratory manner.

Overall, the 42% of K–12 ed-tech respondents using AI in their business compares favorably to the IBM Global AI Adoption Index (2023), which noted that 35% of businesses across all industries report using AI in their operations.

Respondents' use of AI focuses on:

Product development and product functionality

Responding to product support tickets

Developing business correspondence and documentation

Completing basic marketing tasks

Pressure and High Expectations Are Taking a Toll

Leadership is a lonely job, especially for the approximately two-thirds of non-executive leaders who are in the biggest job of their life. Department Heads, Functional Leaders, and People Managers were asked about the extent to which the pressure and high expectations associated with their role as a leader or manager cause stress, anxiety, or isolation. More than a third (37%) of respondents said that the pressure and high expectations are a source of frequent or constant stress, anxiety, or isolation. Almost all respondents (93%) said that the pressure and high expectations are sometimes a source of stress, anxiety, or isolation.

Leaders from historically marginalized populations often face additional obstacles in their leadership journey, and nearly half (45%) of these individuals said they frequently or constantly feel stress, anxiety, or isolation because of the pressure and high expectations of their role. This, again, serves as a reminder regarding the importance of leadership development and mentoring for leaders from historically marginalized populations.

Stress Levels are Leading to Burnout

The market dynamics and organizational changes impacting employees are likely adding to the level of stress experienced by most. All respondents were asked several questions regarding the risk of burnout within their company using a scale of 1-10. Scores between 7-10 were considered "high risk" of burnout. Those scoring between 4-6 were considered "moderate risk," and those scoring between 0-3 were considered "low risk."

When asked about their own risk of burnout, the average score was 5.94, which indicates a moderate level of risk. However, nearly half (48%) of all respondents reported themselves as being at a high risk of burnout. Even more troubling, 70% of respondents who identify as part of a historically marginalized population are at a high risk of burnout.

RISK OF EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

48% HIGH **34% MODERATE** **18% LOW**
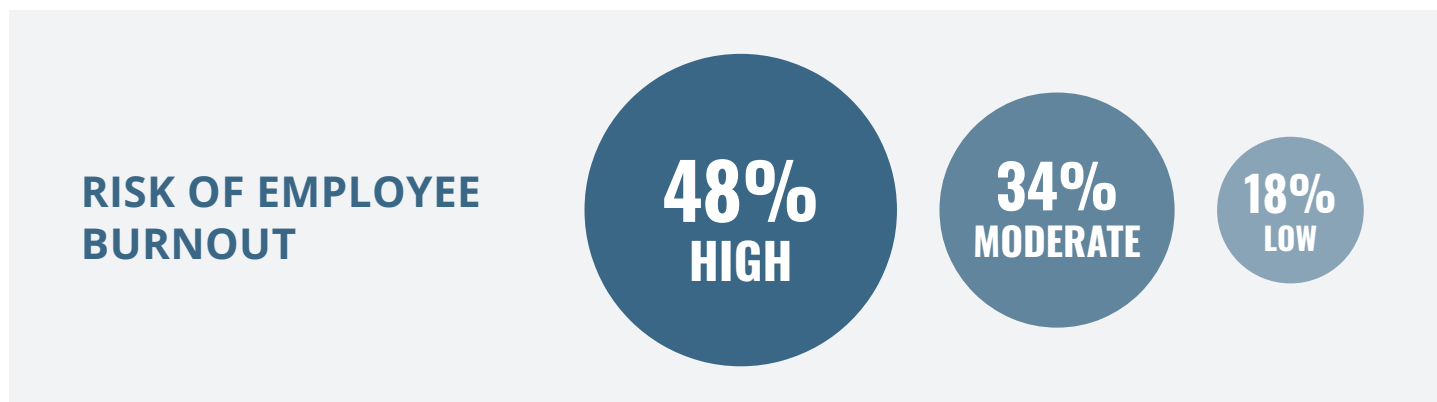
In terms of specific roles, 60% of C-level Executives reported themselves as high risk compared to 38% of Department heads and 43% of Functional Leaders. The functional areas with the most employees at high risk of burnout are Product Management (75%), Curriculum (68%) and Executive Management (61%), followed by Sales (44%), Marketing (41%) and Customer Success (35%).

Respondents were also asked to estimate the risk of burnout for those who they manage. More than a third (36%) of managers felt their team members were at a high risk of burnout. Managers rated their team members' risk slightly lower (8%) than their own risk of burnout. The one exception was C-level Executives. They felt their direct reports were at a 17% lower risk of burnout compared to their own burnout risk. For the most part, managers' estimates of burnout risk for those at lower levels in the organization were fairly accurate and tended to mirror the self-reported risk levels by employees in those roles.

Work environments had only a moderate impact on employee burnout. The percent of respondents working in a fully remote environment who reported themselves as being at high risk of burnout (45%) was slightly lower than the overall average. Those in hybrid environments (52%) and blended environments (54%) were slightly above the average. In terms of the managers' assessment of their team's risk of burnout, there was no meaningful difference across the various work environments.

Leaders' Top-of-Mind Concerns

Respondents were provided with an open-ended question about their most significant concern regarding leadership capacity within their organization. The answers yielded some interesting insights.

The most common area of focus was on leadership depth and growth, with more than a third (35%) of respondents identifying it as a top concern. Common themes included executives and non-executive leaders lacking sufficient experience in their roles, as well as lack of leadership depth and professional development for leaders. Some of the comments included:

Too many people in leadership positions at our company don't have managerial training and don't know how to support teams and customers."

VICE PRESIDENT / DEPARTMENT HEAD

Our organization has grown so much over the past three years, and most leaders (especially the executives) have never worked anywhere else. I think they need more support in scaling and expanding the organization."

PEOPLE MANAGER

My biggest concern is the inability for our executive team to pour into mid-level managers as much as they need. We really need help to ensure we're doing what's right by our employees."

C-LEVEL EXECUTIVE

Strategic planning and executive management were a concern for 19% of respondents. Many of the comments focused on a lack of alignment on the company vision and goals, a sense of tactical urgency undermining a strategic approach to work, and founders and CEOs not staying focused on the top priorities. Examples of how respondents summarized their situation included:

There is a general lack of organization and decisive leadership which leads to confusion and misalignment across mid-level leaders."

DIRECTOR / FUNCTIONAL LEADER

My biggest concern is the inability of my team to proactively undertake activities to scale without my explicit direction and involvement."

C-LEVEL EXECUTIVE

Burnout was top of mind for 14% of respondents. Most of the comments were focused on not having the resources to do the work at hand. Leaders are being spread too thin. Many are being asked to lead the business forward strategically while still being required to fill some of the tactical needs of the business. One respondent summarized the situation in this way:

> **Burnout is my most significant concern. Leaders, especially tenured ones, are being asked to do too much without support, feedback, or coaching."**
>
> **DIRECTOR / FUNCTIONAL LEADER**

There was a somewhat wide range of organizational management challenges that comprised 21% of the responses.

The most common themes included:

There was a somewhat wide range of organizational management challenges that comprised 21% of the responses. The most common themes included: a lack of diversity on leadership teams; struggles with top-heavy or multi-layer organization structures; an inability to manage through the transition from a founder-led organization; and inadequate organizational practices.

> **We don't have enough representation from minorities or diverse thinkers at the manager or leadership tiers. Significant issues could be avoided if we pulled together a group of people with diverse backgrounds in terms of personal and work experience."**
>
> **DIRECTOR / FUNCTIONAL LEADER**

Overall, there was strong alignment regarding the importance of leadership depth and providing teams with the clarity and focus required to execute on the company's strategic plans and meet goals.

Conclusion

The K–12 ed-tech industry continues to face many ongoing challenges regarding leadership development. However, economic shifts and evolving work environments have introduced new levels of complexity that make the challenge of supporting leadership development more difficult.

Leadership depth remains a gating factor to company growth, and organizations must continue to cultivate talent who can lead, communicate, and collaborate. While C-level Executives' confidence level in their leadership depth remains alarmingly low, they also acknowledge that they are not doing enough to mentor their high-potential employees.

Clearly, managers at every level need to be doing more to support advancement. This includes improving the frequency and quality of constructive feedback, as well as providing clear guidance and support regarding what's required at the next level.

Companies must do a better job of supporting employees from historically marginalized populations. Fostering a diverse leadership team and workforce not only fulfills companies' mission-based commitment to DEIB, but the strategic benefits and positive business outcomes of a diverse leadership team are well documented. K–12 ed-tech companies need to prioritize this effort, or they will continue to fall short.

Layoffs and corporate restructuring were prevalent across the industry during 2023. Companies must be careful when requiring their teams to take on larger workloads and do more with less. Workplace anxiety and stress has led to a high risk of burnout for nearly half of employees.

Considering all those factors, it is encouraging that investing in leadership development training has become a key tactic for supporting new leaders, improving company performance and retaining key talent. This needs to continue—and increase—if companies hope to improve their overall level of leadership depth and mitigate risk to the business.

Despite the range and complexity of challenges facing the ed-tech industry, it is imperative that leaders from all companies maintain focus on our shared mission. Our ability to help achieve meaningful, lasting improvement in student outcomes begins with our work to establish and foster high-performing teams. Our mission and our goals are only as strong as our ability to execute on those objectives.

Ed-tech Leadership Collective

About the Ed-tech Leadership Collective

This survey report was developed by the Ed-tech Leadership Collective, a membership organization established to accelerate leadership capacity development in K–12 ed-tech companies.

The Ed-tech Leadership Collective is focused solely on the educational technology market and currently supports dozens of leaders from some of the most esteemed companies in the industry. We leverage deep industry expertise and a wide network of professionals to create a supportive community for professional growth. Using a structured approach, the organization helps high-potential employees develop the leadership skills and contextual knowledge necessary to step up and contribute amidst increasingly high expectations.

The Ed-tech Leadership Collective's members and executive coaches bring sophisticated understanding of the nuances of the K–12 market and a deep understanding of the ed-tech vernacular. The organization's rigorous program framework creates an environment that uncovers gaps and blind spots, embraces critical feedback, while scaffolding and celebrating success.

To learn more about the Ed-tech Leadership Collective, please visit www.edtechcollective.org or call 617-388-6061