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BOOK REVIEW

The Eight Levers of EdTech Transformation: A Field Guide to the New Future-Focused L&D

WRITTEN BY LORI NILES-HOFMANN

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Introduction

Across industries, leaders are confronting how digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping learning, work, and organisational sustainability. In *The Eight Levers of EdTech Transformation*, Lori Niles-Hofmann provides a practical field guide for aligning technology adoption with people-centred development within this evolving landscape.

Niles-Hofmann is a senior learning strategist with more than 20 years of experience in learning and development (L&D) across multiple sectors (e.g., banking, consulting, and marketing). She specialises in large-scale digital learning transformations and consults globally on change management and technology-enabled learning initiatives.

This book serves as a guide for learning professionals responsible for evaluating and redesigning their organisation's learning systems to strategically and effectively adopt new educational technologies (EdTech). Today, rapid technological advances are accelerating the rate at which employee skills become obsolete. Organisations that fail to upskill or reskill their workforce will be less competitive in their market, face reduced employee engagement, and struggle with a workforce unprepared for emerging demands. She argues that as AI and automation transform how people work, future employees will need to think, learn, and solve problems in new ways to remain relevant in a data-driven environment.

A central theme woven throughout the book is AI's role as both a catalyst and a disruptor in L&D. As a catalyst, AI accelerates data collection and analysis, enabling large-scale personalisation, faster feedback cycles, and more precise targeting of learning needs. As a disruptor, it automates routine tasks, changes how content is created, unsettles traditional instructional design workflows and role expectations, and raises new questions about data ethics and governance. Taken together, these dynamics position AI as both a powerful enabler of data-informed decision making and a force that challenges established instructional design models. Niles-Hofmann emphasises that learning professionals must adapt to new workflows, ethical standards, and role definitions that rely on AI to personalise learning experiences and predict future skill needs.

Another recurring theme in the book is that organisations must move beyond relying on stand-alone online courses and instead build connected learning ecosystems that weave continuous skill development into everyday work. Niles-Hofmann envisions AI and skills-intelligence platforms as the infrastructure for these ecosystems, supporting personalised and integrated approaches to workforce development. Her model emphasises mapping current capabilities, identifying skill gaps, and forecasting future needs so that organisations remain proactive rather than reactive in talent development. She argues that this transformation requires more than new systems or processes; it demands a cultural shift toward active, adaptive, and ongoing learning, sustained by committed leadership and adequate resources.

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Niles-Hofmann simplifies the complex process of digital transformation into eight practical levers that can guide decision-making and organisational strategy. The first four levers—The New Target Operating Model, Data, Content Strategy and Learning Experiences, and The Skills Revolution—focus on analysis, design, and the creation of engaging learning environments rooted in data-informed decisions. The remaining levers—Stakeholder Management, Knowledge Management and Marketing, Ecosystem Thinking, and Strategic Alignment with the Business—address collaboration, communication, and the alignment of learning with organisational goals. Together, these levers provide a roadmap for managing change and embedding technology into workplace learning systems.

Written in an accessible and practitioner-friendly tone, the book uses humour, analogies, and relatable examples to simplify complex systems thinking. This approachable style makes the text useful for L&D practitioners, managers, and organisational leaders who might not have formal training in learning theory but are responsible for implementing workforce transformation.

Overall, Niles-Hofmann offers a timely and pragmatic resource for organisations navigating the early stages of technological disruption. The book serves as a guide for assessing readiness, supporting employee adaptation, and developing confidence in applying technology to enhance learning and performance. By positioning her eight levers framework as interim guidance for a rapidly shifting digital environment, she provides leaders with a practical and encouraging perspective for shaping the future of learning at work.

Critical Analysis

Grounded in Human Performance Technology (HPT), systems thinking, ethical practice, and International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) Standards (ISPI, 2023; van Tiem et al., 2012), *The Eight Levers of EdTech Transformation* offers a cohesive, practitioner-ready framework for digital learning transformation. Her model operationalises performance analysis, cause analysis, and intervention design, while consistently demonstrating a commitment to stakeholder engagement and measurable outcomes. Although she does not formally outline an evaluation phase, her continuous references to data, feedback loops, and pilot testing reveal an implicit evaluative mindset that supports ongoing improvement.

Lever One: A New Target Operating Model

Lever One captures HPT's diagnostic rigour. She outlines the "Learning Triage Process," which provides a structured approach to prioritising L&D initiatives by strategic value, feasibility, and risk. This lever encourages practitioners to identify needs before designing solutions and to align decisions with organisational goals, reflecting HPT's front-end analysis.

Lever Two: Data

Lever Two expands the analytical depth of the framework. Niles-Hofmann's concept of Data-Driven Learning Design (DDLD) emphasises the collection and interpretation of multiple data sources to inform design decisions. The four DDLD phases (Discover, Insights, Monitor, and Respond) form an iterative process that aligns with HPT's feedback-oriented mindset by enabling practitioners to diagnose learner behaviour and refine interventions in real time. Her integration of AI in this second lever demonstrates how technology can enhance pattern recognition and data interpretation, supporting faster, more accurate decision-making across learning ecosystems. Empirical research supports this relationship between AI-enabled learning

systems, learner engagement, and behavioural change in organisational contexts (Bhatt & Muduli, 2024).

Lever Three: Content Strategy and Learning Experiences

Lever Three demonstrates ethical grounding and sophisticated instructional design. Niles-Hofmann positions accessibility as the first, non-negotiable requirement for content creation. This stance aligns with ISPI's ethical standards and the inclusive design principles central to HPT's systemic view of performance. She also highlights AI as a means of creating adaptive, personalised learning experiences, while acknowledging the need for transparency and ethical governance in its use.

Lever Four: The Skills Revolution

Lever Four aligns closely with HPT's cause analysis and intervention selection phases. Niles-Hofmann discusses what she calls "Right-Skilling" and shares a logical method for determining when to build, buy, or maintain human skill capabilities. By integrating cost-benefit reasoning and human-centred values, she reinforces HPT's balance between efficiency and ethical responsibility. Her vision of skills-based organisations that prioritise agility and equity aligns with ISPI's focus on results that benefit both individuals and organisations. Recent research further emphasises that identifying, measuring, and addressing skills gaps has become central to organisational competitiveness in 4IR environments (Rikala et al., 2024).

Levers Five and Six: Stakeholder Management; Knowledge Management and Marketing

Levers Five and Six extend the framework's systemic dimension. Niles-Hofmann demonstrates how stakeholder alignment, business-case communication, and marketing strategies reinforce performance improvement. She emphasises collaboration, transparency, and storytelling as tools to foster advocacy and engagement. Integrating learning and knowledge-management functions reflects HPT's view of performance as an ecosystem rather than an isolated event. Her attention to marketing within L&D also operationalises ISPI's call for sustaining change through reinforcement and communication.

Lever Seven: Ecosystem Thinking

Lever Seven synthesises earlier levers into an interconnected model that integrates learning management systems, talent marketplaces, and human-resource information systems. Niles-Hofmann's orchestration of these systems exemplifies HPT's holistic view of performance environments. By embedding AI within these systems, she envisions an adaptive ecosystem that delivers learning in the flow of work and uses predictive analytics to anticipate organisational skill needs. Her insistence that technology serve as a support for human decision-making aligns with the ethical practice of using technology to enhance rather than replace human performance.

Lever Eight: Strategic Alignment with the Business

Lever Eight grounds the entire model in organisational results. Niles-Hofmann highlights the importance of generating revenue, reducing costs, and mitigating risk as benchmarks for success. Her advocacy for product management principles, such as rapid prototyping, user feedback, and iterative design, aligns with HPT's formative and summative evaluation cycles. The concluding chapter (Selecting EdTech) applies these principles through clear steps for root-cause analysis, piloting, and ethical vendor selection.

Overall, The *Eight Levers of EdTech Transformation* demonstrates strong alignment with the HPT model and the ISPI Standards, both theoretically and practically. The framework translates performance-improvement theory into practical strategies that emphasise accessibility,

stakeholder collaboration, and systemic integration. Niles-Hofmann also highlights AI's role as a transformative force, integrating it across levers to improve data interpretation, adaptive learning, and ecosystem orchestration. She advances the conversation on ethical and evidence-based digital learning while modelling how practitioners can position L&D as a strategic partner in organisational success. Incorporating explicit evaluation metrics at the outset of technology initiatives would further enhance the model's ability to demonstrate measurable outcomes and sustain continuous improvement across learning ecosystems. Planning evaluation metrics during EdTech transformations should also facilitate continuous organisational improvement through data informed decisions. While the addition of explicit evaluation metrics would strengthen its practical utility, the framework, as presented, still represents a significant step toward operationalising HPT principles within ethically grounded digital transformation efforts, especially as the world learns how to work with AI.

Contribution to the Field

Niles-Hofmann's *The Eight Levers of EdTech Transformation* contributes to the field by bridging the gap between learning theory, organisational strategy, and technology-enabled performance improvement. Her framework translates complex systems concepts into easy-to-understand guidance for practitioners leading or supporting digital transformation initiatives. This contribution is significant because it situates learning and development within broader organisational processes rather than treating them as an isolated function.

The book's focus on systems thinking and stakeholder alignment demonstrates how performance improvement grounded in HPT principles can drive measurable organisational outcomes. Niles-Hofmann positions L&D professionals as strategic partners who diagnose performance needs, design integrated solutions, and sustain change through evidence-based decision making. This positioning advances the professional identity of learning practitioners by emphasising business acumen, collaboration, and continuous improvement as essential competencies.

Another important contribution is integrating ethics, accessibility, and inclusivity into the context of digital transformation. By prioritising accessibility and aligning design practices with organisational governance and compliance requirements, Niles-Hofmann connects performance improvement to equity and social responsibility. This perspective reinforces the field's growing attention to inclusive and sustainable learning ecosystems that extend beyond compliance toward genuine engagement and belonging.

While AI appears throughout the book as a tool for data-informed decision making, it functions primarily as one element within a larger system of change. Niles-Hofmann uses AI to illustrate how technology can enhance diagnostic precision, automate feedback loops, and support adaptive learning without diminishing human agency. Her approach models responsible technology integration by focusing on how practitioners can use emerging tools to reinforce, rather than replace, the human expertise central to effective learning design.

Finally, the book contributes to the scholarly and practical dialogue on how organisations can implement EdTech responsibly. It connects established performance-improvement methodologies with contemporary challenges such as agility, data literacy, and continuous upskilling. For researchers, the *Eight Levers* framework provides a basis for studying how L&D systems evolve in response to technological change. For practitioners, it provides a diagnostic structure that supports strategic alignment, stakeholder collaboration, and evidence-based implementation. Recent empirical studies confirm that successful transformation strategies

require simultaneous attention to human capability development, leadership agility, and ethical technology use (Bhatt & Muduli, 2024; Singaram et al., 2023).

Taken together, Niles-Hofmann's work enriches the field of L&D by uniting ethical design, systemic analysis, and organisational strategy into a practical model. It underscores that sustainable transformation depends as much on culture, governance, and leadership as it does on technology. Her book advances a shared understanding of how learning professionals can lead change, measure impact, and create environments where both people and technology contribute to continuous organisational improvement.

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Reviewer Notes:

LaKell Archer is an Instructional Technologist with Boise State University's Learning Technology Solutions (LTS) team, where she supports faculty and staff in implementing instructional technologies that enhance teaching and learning. She holds an MS in Organisational Performance and Workplace Learning and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Education (EdD) in Educational Technology at Boise State University. Her professional practice and research interests centre on educational technology (EdTech) adoption, EdTech-enabled leadership and expertise development, and performance improvement in higher education and healthcare contexts. With a professional background in dental hygiene and clinic management, she brings a multidisciplinary perspective to the intersection of learning, technology, and organisational performance. LaKell's work emphasises the ethical and human-centred integration of emerging technologies to strengthen instructional design and support continuous learning cultures in organisations. Email: lakellarcher@boisestate.edu (https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4592-3648)

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