STRANDS
Transforming schools in the digital era

Schools in Transformation with Readiness, Adaptations and Nurturing Digital Skills

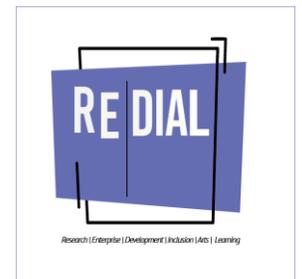## Guidelines for Digital Leaders

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Contents

The purpose of this document

We already have vast amounts of information literally at our fingertips. Because of that, there's no moment more important than now to learn tools and techniques that guide people how to find, organize and store information effectively. In the context of project STRANDS, ambassadors are the people who are on the very front of that learning process. Their role is to support both teachers and students in growing and learning how to get the most out of the STRANDS community platform.

The guidelines in this document are meant to serve the ambassadors in successfully navigating through the learning process and growth of others in their educational institution.

AMBASSADOR: the STRANDS Digital Leader

Ambassadors are the digital leaders of change in their respective institutions. As such, there are two main qualities that put them in this position.

1. THEY EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

They are open to change, follow the evolving digital trends, and they are active in exploring how these may boost or hinder the development of their institution. Because of that, ambassadors also have a certain level of digital fluency under their belt.

2. THEY ARE LEADERS

What a digital leader and a traditional leader have in common is that in the end - they are both leaders. As such, they share certain leadership qualities. The ability to listen, collaborate, and communicate, both through words and actions they are valuable regardless of technology.

In other words, the technology component is just as important as the human element. And ambassadors are people who not only understand that, but are also already capable of working and moving towards both.

Digital Skills and their importance for the STRANDS community

Digital education is already an essential component of education. Reportedly, students recognize that too and request greater support from instructors. In order for instructors to be able to provide the needed guidance, they have to recognize, address and manage the following core of digital skills.

1. USE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY SAFELY

Most students currently have unrestricted internet access, and it is critical that they can navigate these online settings safely. By teaching online safety, you are not only assisting your students in becoming more alert about their personal safety, but you are also assisting them in becoming better internet users.

2. FIND, ORGANIZE, AND STORE INFORMATION

Information management has two main goals. The long-term goal is safety, while short-term is accessibility. We already have vast amounts of information literally at our fingertips. Because of that, there's no moment more important than now to learn tools and techniques that guide students and other teachers on how to find, organize and store information effectively.

3. CREATE DIGITAL CONTENT

Modern educational standards already have certain aspects of digital literacy as part of their requirements for students to be considered capable and competent. This is why the classroom becomes an important place for students to learn the skills to create and communicate content through the means of digital technology.

4. VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

With the shift from attending classes in-person to participating online, now is the moment to focus on cultivating online communication skills. While online learning is different from the in-class experience, it can still offer a lot and sometimes unique benefits.

This is why it is absolutely crucial to learn how to successfully translate live-face-to-face training into live-virtual or asynchronous online experiences that may be just as successful.

Leadership Style and importance for STRANDS community

Effective leaders are continuously aware and attuned to their environment. They realize that change is natural, constant. With time, experienced leaders learn to accept that and they lean into what each unique situation requires.

This is a fundamental principle of the situational leadership model - there's no single "best" leadership style. Rather, most successful leaders are those who effectively adapt their approach, considering both the situation and the people involved.

Based on that, there are two fundamental concepts that dictate the styles of archetypal leadership behavior articulated in the model.

CATEGORIES OF READINESS

Each leadership style is related to one of four behavioral categories. These behavioral categories may vary in their nomenclature, but follow the same distinction in their meaning. All four categories are built around to principle characteristics, namely: competence and commitment. Based on these two characteristics the behavioral categories are as follows.

Unable & Unwilling
People with this profile lack the necessary skills and knowledge to perform tasks on their own. They also lack the confidence and/or motivation to take on tasks.

Unable & Willing
People with this profile also lack the necessary skills and knowledge to perform tasks on their own. However, they do have the motivation and willingness to take on a task try to accomplish it.

Able & Unwilling
People with this profile are knowledgeable and capable of working on their own. However, they are unwilling to perform a task. The reasons are primarily two. They either don't feel confident to perform on their own or they lack the motivation to do so.

Able & Willing

People with this profile are both skillful and capable to work on their own, and they also have the motivation and confidence to perform a given task.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Each leadership style is related to one of four behavioral categories. These behavioral categories may vary in their nomenclature, but categorically follow the same deviation.

Telling/Directing

This is most relevant when people are unable and unwilling to act. Leaders tell people what to do and how to do it. This approach is suitable for detailed specific guidance tasks. Take people step-by-step through what needs to get done, how it should be done, and when and why it needs to be completed.

Selling/Coaching

This is where people aren't able to execute tasks yet but are willing to put in the work and learn how to do so. Because of that, leaders are to focus on building the skills of people that would allow them to perform the desired tasks. That said, motivation and confidence is also to be considered. The reason being that people may feel discouraged when they see their skills not serving them as expected.

Particicapting/Supporting

This style is most relevant for people who are able but unwilling to act. In this case, while people may have the necessary skills to complete a task, they may either lack the confidence or motivation to act. Because of that, while leaders may still offer technical guidance, they should put more energy and focus on providing encouragement, motivation, and feedback.

Delegating

This final style is most suitable for people who are both capable and willing to do things. Because of that, it allows leaders to leave things more in the hands of people, knowing that they are going to carry on moving forward with their tasks more autonomously. And while the leader is still supposed to be able to provide support whenever needed, the way this happens is by intervening only when needed. In order for this to happen, a leader needs to establish ways for observing and monitoring (albeit from a distance) the work of those people.

Ambassador role and activities on the platform

As both the heralds and leaders in technological advancement, ambassadors are to be capable of all the things listed below for supporters and moderators. In addition to that however, they should also be able to pick the people who are ready to share the responsibility of building, maintaining and developing the community.

Here are some guidelines for that:

- Look for people who provide feedback. That said, make sure that those are people, whose comments are constructive, not just chronically complaining.

- Look for people who are willing to engage in a dialogue and have the agency to fix things themselves

- Whenever you pick a champion, make sure that you let them know the exact reasons for that. The additional administrative or moderator responsibilities are rarely lucrative. Because of that, it is valuable to provide people with the necessary recognition for their work and why they've been chosen in the first place.

- Remember that building your relationship with your champions may take time. This is why it is always better to underpromise and overdeliver with regards to both expectations and commitments.

- Once you establish your initial team of champions, one of the better ways to start expanding it is to ask by asking them for their recommendations and observations.

Who works with the AMBASSADOR

In the context of STRANDS, a good team is one that fosters and promotes the platform as a welcoming, encouraging and community building environment. In order for this to

happen, the ambassadors need to find the people that would together make the best team to achieve exactly that.

Following the results from the self-assessment that each member of the platform goes through, there are two types of team mates that the ambassadors should be on the look for.

SUPPORTER

In the context of the STRANDS community platform, people who received the supporter badge are those who scored high regarding technology and digital technical ability in their self-assessment. As such, they can provide technical support to new and existing users of the platform. In the context of the community-platform lingo, they resemble administrators the closest. As such, here are the following number of activities that an ambassador may consider delegating to their fellow supporters:

- Configure discussion topics and categories

- Manage user profiles

- Regulate access and permissions

- Set up integrations

PROMOTER

In contrast to supporters, promoters are the people who scored high on leadership, without being particularly tech-savvy. Because of that, they are a lot more close to what could be described as the community platform moderators. Unlike the administrators, whose primary concern is the technical management of the platform, moderators (in our case "promoters") are more focused on overseeing the communication activities on the platform. They are the ones who make decisions regarding the topics of discussion, the permission of content, language use and overall wellbeing of people who are taking part in threads. Here are some of the key activities that you can delegate to your promoters:

- Invite, add or remove members

- Manage email correspondence

- Monitor the contents of discussions

- Allow or delete posts and comments

FOLLOWER

In the context of STRANDS, the FOLLOWER can be considered the main target group of the platform and of the digital skills engagement and reinforcement actions carried out by the Ambassador, Support and Promoter. But at the same time, the FOLLOWER is a member of the team made up of the staff of the home schools (or more generally,

educational institutions). It follows that the Ambassador works to help the FOLLOWER but also works together with the FOLLOWER.

The goal is twofold:

- to reinforce digital and leadership skills and thus spur and help the FOLLOWER to become a Supporter, Promoter or even Ambassador;
- to contribute actively in projecting their home institution to a Digital dimension (which is the main goal of the STRANDS project).