Navigator

EXECUTION INTELLIGENCE FOR EDTECH STARTUPS

Turning startup activity into evidence of progress

An insight report for founders, coaches, programme teams, investors, funders, educational institutions, accelerators and EdTech ecosystem partners

DOHE Navigator Insight Report

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Executive Summary

Early-stage EdTech startups often appear active before they can demonstrate meaningful progress. Products may be built, pilots launched and users engaged, but these activities alone do not show whether users are achieving real value. DOHE Navigator is designed to make this distinction clearer by converting startup activity into structured evidence against Key Objectives, Cases (the recurring activities through which startups pursue objectives), and Standards of Completion.

As an initial test of the methodology, this analysis focuses on one of Navigator's 25 Key Objectives: helping first users achieve real results. Within this objective, startups were generally better evidenced in MVP development and user engagement than in structured testing, systematic iteration and securing payment commitment. The early implication is clear: effective EdTech acceleration should focus less on generating activity and more on generating evidence of progress.

Introduction
Why activity is not enough

Early-stage EdTech startups often generate visible activity before they can evidence progress. Founders may build products, run pilots, speak to users and report traction, but these activities do not, by themselves, show whether users are achieving meaningful value.

This is the execution problem DOHE Navigator is designed to address.

The challenge is interpretation. A startup may have built a product, spoken to users or launched a pilot, but still lack evidence that the right problem has been tested, success has been defined, feedback has informed decisions or users are achieving the intended outcome.

In accelerator environments, this creates risk for multiple stakeholders. Coaches may see effort without a consistent evidence standard. Investors and funders may see traction claims without knowing whether they reflect execution quality. Schools and institutions may see promising products without clear evidence of user value.

Navigator is intended to shift assessment away from activity and founder narrative toward evidence and execution quality. It gives stakeholders a shared way to ask a more disciplined question:

Is this startup generating evidence that it is moving closer to a meaningful execution objective?

The underlying White Paper (June 2026) applied this methodology to Key Objective (2.4) — Helping First Users Achieve Real Results. This objective captures a critical transition in early-stage EdTech venture development: the move from building products, accessing users and running pilots toward evidence that first users are achieving meaningful value.

The first analysis indicated an early pattern. In the available evidence, startups appeared more strongly evidenced around visible product and user-facing activity, particularly Build MVP and Observe

Engagement on MVP. They appeared less strongly evidenced around structured validation, including Plan User Testing, Iterate MVP and Test Interest in Payment.

This should not be read as evidence that startups were failing. Rather, it suggests that EdTech accelerators may need a more reliable way to distinguish activity that signals effort from evidence that indicates progress.

The blue-line plot below illustrates how Navigator makes this distinction visible.

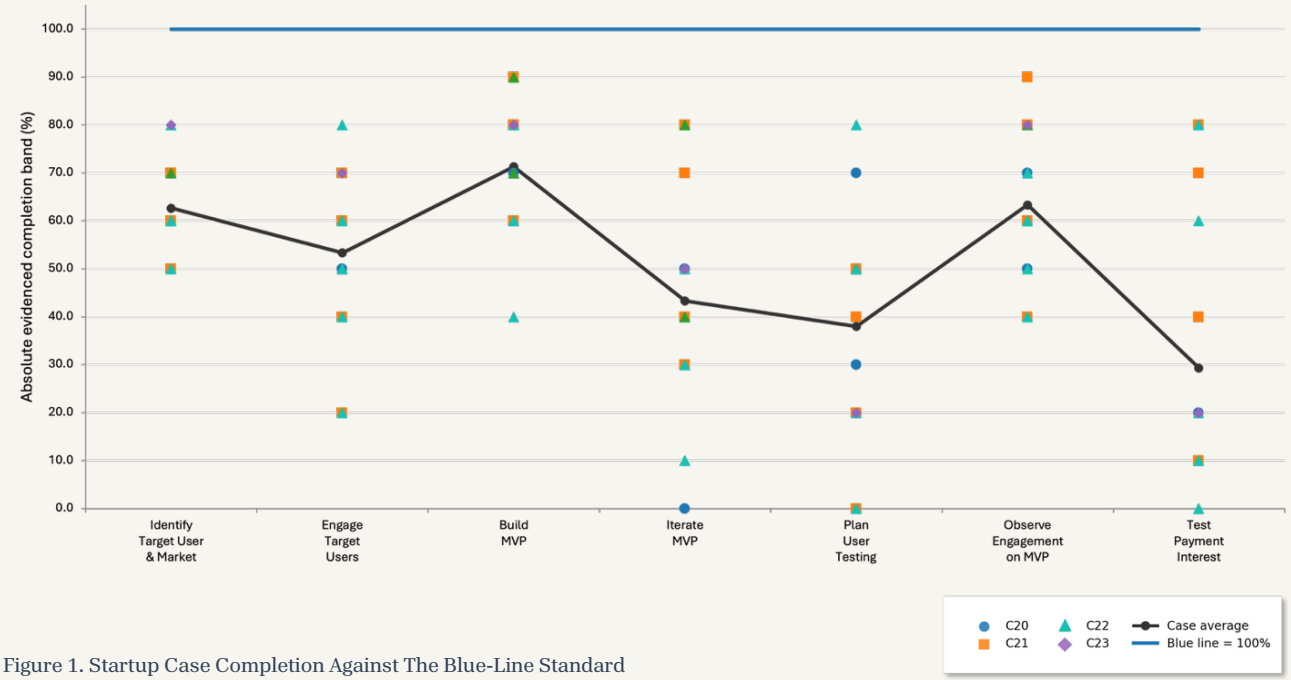

Figure 1. Startup Case Completion Against The Blue-Line Standard

Each point represents a startup's evidenced completion score for a Case. The blue line represents the 100% Standard of Completion. Points below the blue line indicate the gap between documented progress and full Case completion. Figure 1 indicates that the sampled startups were active across the Case framework, but that available evidence did not consistently reach the standard required for full completion.

How to Read the Blue-Line Evidence

The blue-line analysis should be read as an evidence view, not as a final judgement on startup quality. A startup below the blue line may still be learning, improving or progressing outside the recorded information in our Coach Reporting System (CRS) evidence. The plot shows only what has been documented strongly enough to count against the relevant Standard of Completion.

The blue line is therefore a diagnostic standard. It makes incompletion visible, separates partial progress from full completion, and helps identify where support may be needed. The key issue is not whether startups are active, but whether the available evidence is strong enough to indicate progress toward user value.

Three Preliminary Findings From the First Navigator Analysis

The first application of the Phase 1 analysis indicated an early portfolio-level pattern. In the available CRS evidence, startups appeared more strongly evidenced around visible, product-oriented and user-facing activity. They appeared less strongly evidenced around the activities that convert product use into structured learning, outcome evidence and commitment.

The stronger evidenced areas were Build MVP, Identify Target User and Market, and Observe Engagement on MVP. The weaker evidenced areas were Plan User

Testing, Iterate MVP, and Test Interest in Payment. This suggests that the issue is not simply whether startups are active. Many are building, engaging users and collecting feedback. The issue is whether that activity is being converted into structured evidence of progress.

Figures 2 and 3 show this pattern from two perspectives: startup-by-startup variation and the average gap to the blue-line Standard of Completion.

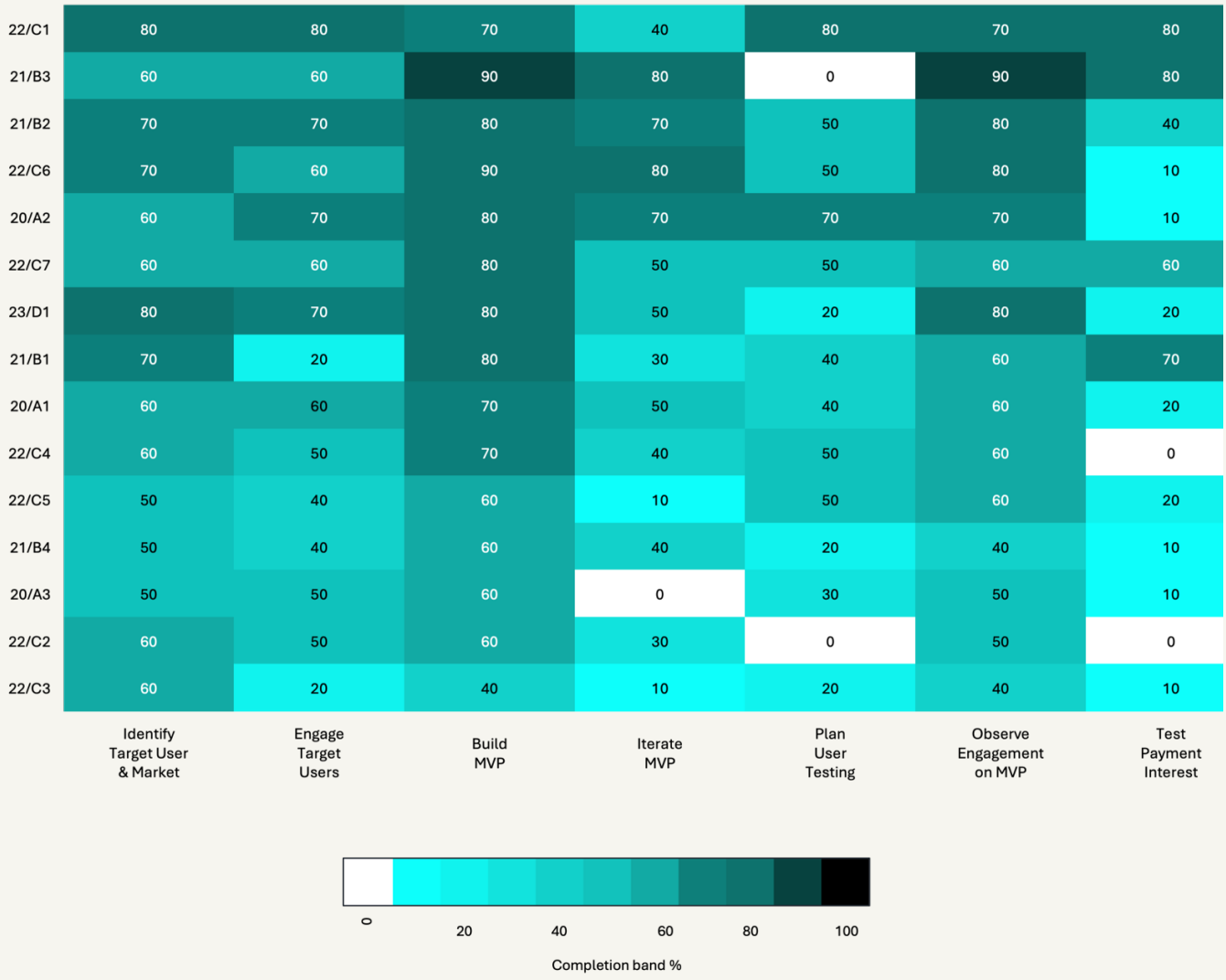

Figure 2. Startup x Case Completion Heatmap

Each row represents a startup and each column represents a Case for Key Objective 2.4. The heatmap indicates that evidenced progress varied across startups and Cases: stronger evidence in one Case often coexisted with gaps in another. The figure should be read as a diagnostic view of available evidence, not as a performance ranking.

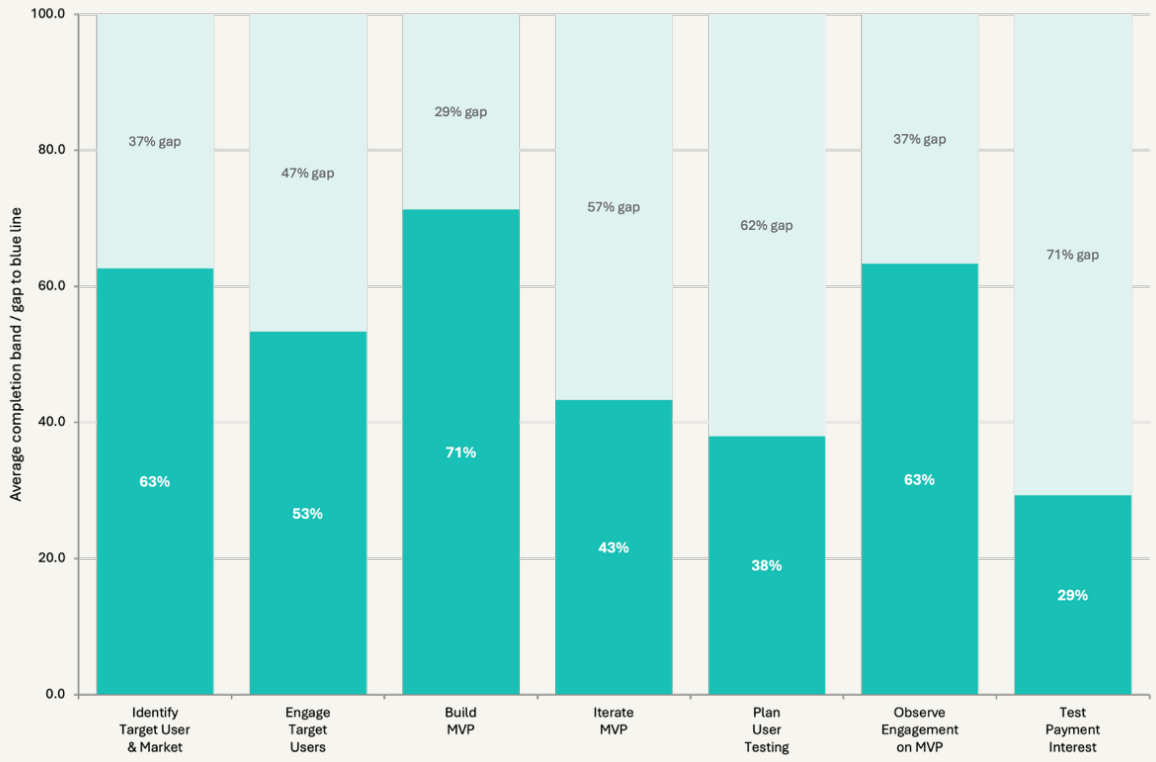

Figure 3. Average Completion Band and Remaining Gap to Blue-Line Standard By Case

Bars show the average evidenced completion band for each Case, with the remaining distance to the blue-line Standard of Completion shown as the gap. The pattern indicates stronger evidence around product-building and engagement, and weaker evidence around test planning, iteration and payment commitment.

Finding 1: Product-Building Is Visible, but Not Sufficient

Build MVP appeared more strongly evidenced than Test Interest in Payment in the available CRS evidence. This matters because product-building is often one of the most visible signs of startup activity. Founders can show a product, describe features and report usage.

However, an MVP does not by itself evidence that users are achieving meaningful value. Its value depends on what it helps the startup learn: which assumption it tests, how users respond, what friction appears and whether the product is moving users toward the intended outcome.

For coaches, the practical question is not only “Has the MVP been built?” but “What is the MVP designed to test, and what evidence would show that it worked?” For investors and funders, the implication is similar: product milestones should not be overinterpreted unless they are connected to evidence of user value, learning or commitment.

Finding 2: Engagement Evidence Needs Clearer Test Conditions

The available evidence suggests that startups may be more likely to document engagement than to document formal user-test planning. Engagement can be useful, but without clear test conditions it is harder to interpret as evidence of progress.

A test plan defines the target user, the problem being tested, the expected result, the success condition, the evidence to collect and the decision that will follow. Without this structure, founders may collect feedback or usage data without knowing whether it indicates meaningful progress.

This is especially important in EdTech, where

engagement does not always equal value. A product may increase usage without improving learning, reduce teacher workload without improving student outcomes, or be liked by users without being valued by buyers.

The practical implication is that user engagement should be designed, not only observed. Founders should define what they are testing before they interpret whether engagement is meaningful.

Finding 3: The Build-Observe Gap Limits Evidence of Progress

The analysis suggests a potential build–observe gap. Startups appeared more strongly evidenced around building MVPs and observing engagement, but less strongly evidenced around the middle activities that make observation useful: planning tests and iterating systematically.

This gap matters because learning does not automatically follow from exposure. A startup can put a product in front of users and still fail to learn if it has not defined what evidence to capture or how feedback will inform decisions.

Navigator helps make this gap visible by separating Build MVP, Plan User Testing, Observe Engagement on MVP and Iterate MVP. This allows coaches and programme teams to identify where the learning process is incomplete.

The practical implication is that support should match the specific gap. A startup with a strong MVP but weak test planning may need help defining success conditions. A startup with engagement evidence but weak iteration may need support translating feedback into product decisions.

Across all three findings, the core implication is that activity needs to be converted into interpretable evidence before it can be treated as progress.

Why Evidence Quality Matters

The preliminary findings point to a practical issue for EdTech acceleration: activity can create the appearance of momentum before it produces reliable evidence of progress. A startup may have an MVP, a pilot, user feedback and stakeholder interest, while still lacking a clear test plan, a feedback-to-decision process or evidence of customer commitment.

The core implication is simple: evidence volume is not the same as progress.

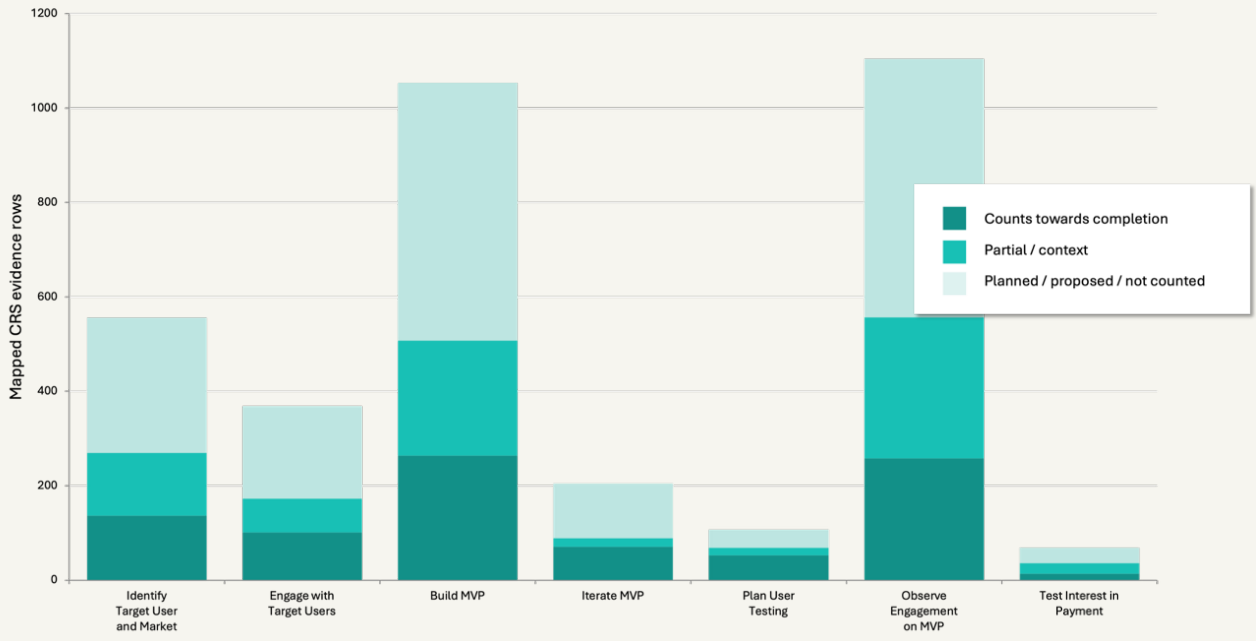

Figure 4. Evidence Mapping Composition by Case

The bars show CRS evidence rows mapped to each Case, separated into evidence that counted toward completion, partial or contextual evidence, and planned or proposed evidence that was not counted. The chart indicates that some Cases, such as Build MVP and Observe Engagement on MVP, generated substantial evidence volume, but not all of that evidence demonstrated completion against the relevant Standard of Completion.

This distinction is central to how Navigator is intended to work. The framework does not treat activity as progress simply because it is visible or frequently discussed. It asks whether the available evidence is strong enough to indicate progress against a defined standard.

The practical priority is to help founders convert product-building into learning, engagement into testable evidence, and observations into decisions.

The early implication for EdTech acceleration is that the next step is not simply more activity. It is better conversion of activity into interpretable evidence. Navigator's intended value is to help stakeholders identify where progress remains incomplete, what evidence is missing and what type of support may be needed next.

From Diagnosis to Targeted Support

Once a startup's position is plotted against the blue-line standard, Navigator can help identify what support may be appropriate, while recognising that intervention effectiveness still needs to be tested.

The support logic is simple: diagnose the Case-level gap, review the incomplete Action Points, identify the founder's next required action, and select the lowest sufficient support layer. A startup below the standard for Plan User Testing may need a testing-plan template or workshop. A startup below the standard for Iterate MVP may need support translating feedback into product decisions. A startup below the standard for Test Interest in Payment may need help with pricing, buyer identification or willingness-to-pay conversations.

Support should be proportionate to the gap. The default principle is to begin with the lowest sufficient support layer, then escalate only where lighter support is unlikely to close the gap.

Box 1. The Gated Support Pathway

Support layer	Used when
Learning Materials	The founder needs a guide, template, worksheet, checklist or prompt.
Webinar	The gap is conceptual or common across several startups.
Workshop	Founders need to produce an applied output, such as a test plan, feedback loop or pricing script.
Consultant	The gap is technical, commercial, measurement-heavy or highly startup-specific.
Networking	The blocker is access to users, buyers, partners, peers or experts.

Core principle is to recommend the lowest sufficient support layer first, then escalate where lighter support is unlikely to close the gap.

Receiving support is not progress. A founder does not move closer to the blue line by reading a guide, attending a webinar or speaking with a consultant. Progress is evidenced only when the founder uses that support to complete an action, produce an artefact, generate user or customer evidence, or make a clearer execution decision.

Portfolio-Level Support Needs

Navigator can also reveal recurring support needs across a cohort. In the first analysis, priority support needs appeared to concentrate around Plan User Testing, Iterate MVP and Test Interest in Payment. This suggests that support may be needed less around basic product construction and more around the activities that turn product and user activity into interpretable evidence: test plans, feedback-to-decision loops and evidence of commitment.

This matters for programme design. If one startup is weak in Plan User Testing, the response may be individual coaching. If many startups show the same gap, the accelerator may need a cohort-level workshop, template or earlier coaching prompt.

Navigator as a Complex Adaptive System

Navigator is not a static reporting tool. Each cohort can produce evidence about how startups pursue Key Objectives, where gaps emerge and which forms of support appear useful.

Over time, this evidence may be used to refine Case structures, recalibrate Standards of Completion and strengthen intervention design. Each intervention becomes a support hypothesis: if a startup has this type of gap, then this resource or support mechanism may help it move closer to completion.

At this stage, Navigator should be read as a diagnostic and support-targeting methodology, not as a validated intervention-effectiveness model. The first analysis can help identify where evidence gaps appear and what support may be appropriate. Future analysis should test whether recommended support actually helps startups close those gaps and generate stronger evidence of user value.

What This Means for Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Potential Practical Value
Founders	Clearer view of what evidence is missing and what action is needed next.
Coaches	Sharper diagnostic questions and a clearer basis for challenging founder updates.
Programme teams and accelerators	Better visibility of potential recurring cohort-level support needs.
Investors, funders and impact organisations	More disciplined interpretation of execution risk and early progress claims.
Educational institutions	Better questions for assessing pilots, adoption decisions and evidence of user value.

Box 2. Across these groups, Navigator is intended to support this shift by helping stakeholders interpret early evidence, identify gaps and target support more precisely.

Methodology Box:
Approach For This Analysis

Navigator assesses startup activity against defined Key Objectives, Cases and Standards of Completion, converting activity into structured evidence of progress. In the first application, Navigator focused on Key Objective 2.4 — Helping First Users Achieve Real Results — because this captures the transition from product-building and pilot activity toward evidence that first users are achieving meaningful value.

Each Key Objective is broken into Cases: recurring activity areas through which startups pursue the objective. For Key Objective 2.4, the seven Cases were: Identify Target User and Market; Engage with Target Users; Build MVP; Iterate MVP; Plan User Testing; Observe Engagement on MVP; Test Interest in Payment.

Navigator then applies the Contribution Gate, which tests whether an observed Case contributes to the Key Objective. This prevents activity from being converted into recommended practice too quickly.

Each Case has a Standard of Completion, represented by the blue line. This defines what must be true for the Case to be treated as complete and marks the 100% completion benchmark.

Startup progress is assessed using CRS evidence, which captures actions, results, challenges, feedback, decisions, next steps and reported outcomes from coaching interactions. The analysis is conservative: planned activity and expected future results are not counted unless the evidence shows that the activity has taken place.

Figure 5. How Navigator Can Turn Activity into Evidence-Led Intervention

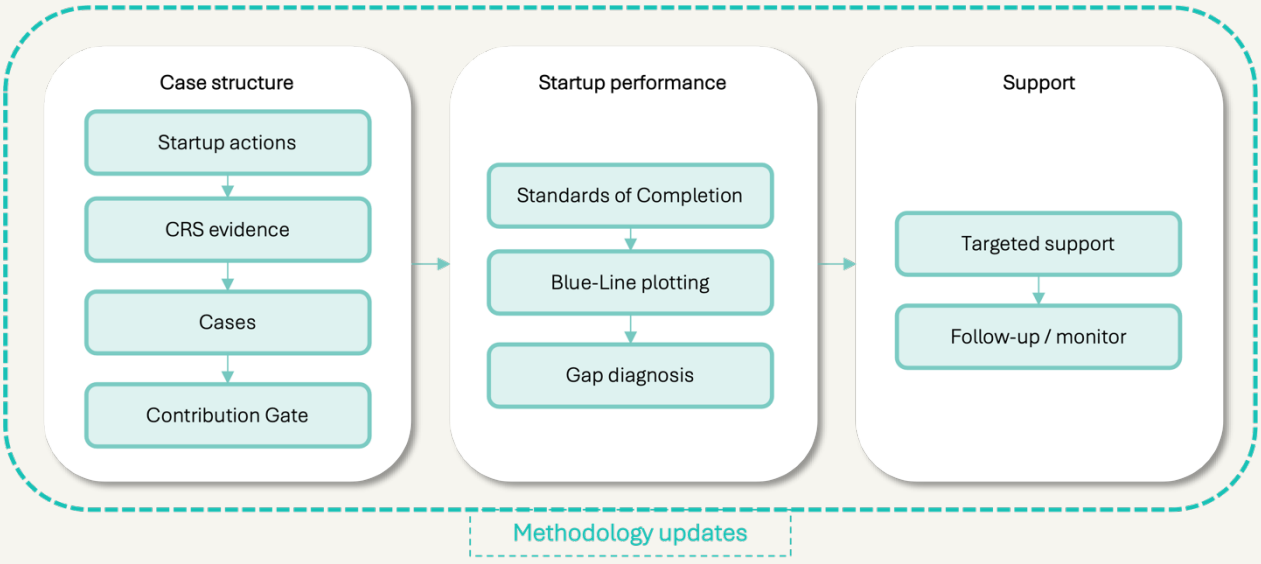

Figure note. Navigator converts startup activity into structured evidence. Activity is captured through CRS, mapped to Cases, tested through the Contribution Gate, assessed against Standards of Completion and plotted against the blue line. The gap to the blue line then informs targeted support. Follow-up evidence shows whether the startup moved closer to completion. Over time, this evidence improves the methodology itself.

Conclusion:
from activity to evidence

Early-stage EdTech startups do not need less support. They need more precise support. The first Navigator analysis suggests that the sampled startups were often active — building products, engaging users, running pilots and collecting feedback — but that this activity did not always translate into structured evidence of progress.

The early pattern is not conclusive, but it is useful: product-building and user-facing activity appeared more visible than structured testing, systematic iteration and payment commitment. The next priority for EdTech acceleration may therefore be better evidence, not simply more activity.

Navigator is intended to support this shift by helping stakeholders identify early evidence, identify gaps, and target support more precisely.

The shift is simple:

- from activity to evidence;
- from generic support to targeted intervention;
- from startup reporting to execution learning;
- and from isolated cohorts toward a cumulative learning system.

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About Navigator

Navigator is DOHE's Data and Insights function, focused on strengthening how EdTech startups are diagnosed, coached and supported through evidence-led learning.

Using real startup evidence from coaching interactions, programme delivery and the wider EdTech ecosystem, Navigator develops structured methodologies that help founders, coaches and accelerators better understand what meaningful progress looks like in practice.

Rather than relying solely on founder narrative, activity volume or isolated traction signals, Navigator seeks to identify:

- the objectives startups are genuinely trying to achieve
- the recurring execution patterns associated with those objectives
- the evidence required to demonstrate progress
- and the support interventions most likely to improve outcomes

This report forms part of that wider work.

The analysis presented here is not intended as a final judgement on startup quality or long-term potential. Instead, it represents an early application of the Navigator methodology to one specific objective within startup development.

Helping First Users Achieve Real Results

The purpose of this project was to explore whether startup activity could be converted into a more structured evidence framework capable of:

- improving diagnosis
- strengthening coaching conversations
- informing targeted support
- and generating cumulative ecosystem learning over time

This is part of a broader ambition:

Building the methodology for EdTech startup success.

As Navigator develops, future applications will continue refining how startup progress is understood across different stages of venture development, helping the ecosystem move:

- from activity to evidence
- from intuition to structured learning
- and from generic acceleration to more precise and adaptive support systems.

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by Navigator for research, learning, and informational purposes only. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented reflect Navigator's analysis of the evidence available at the time of publication and should not be regarded as financial, legal, investment, or other professional advice.

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The Navigator methodology continues to evolve through ongoing research, testing, and application. As such, interpretations, frameworks, and conclusions may be refined over time as further evidence becomes available.