

**Title:** Principals at the Crossroads: Innovation, Leadership, and AI

**Abstract:**

Now more than ever, school principals hold one of the most significant leadership roles in society. Unlike other executives, they operate in two realities. They must lead their schools through the practical adoption of artificial intelligence, making decisions about tools, training, equity, and ethics, while simultaneously preparing students for a world where AI is already reshaping every profession, industry, and community. This dual responsibility places principals at the heart of one of the most important transitions of our time.

The issues are pressing: heavy workloads, inequitable access to technology, uncertainty about ethics and governance, and the risk of leaders feeling underprepared or left behind. These challenges connect directly to the convention theme of *Innovation*, as principals explore how AI can become a partner in leadership practice rather than an external pressure or distraction.

This session introduces an original lens: AI as an enduring leadership collaborator in three roles — Consultant (surfacing evidence and options), Strategic Planner (mapping scenarios, drafting improvement plans, aligning resources), and Coach (testing assumptions, reframing challenges, and extending leadership thinking). By reframing AI in these roles, principals can see how innovation is not about replacing human judgment but amplifying it. Through live illustration and interactive discussion, participants will engage with practical examples of AI in action, reflect on how these uses could reduce cognitive load and free time for human connection, and consider how to integrate AI into their own leadership contexts.

**Key messages attendees will take away:**

- Principals can lead confidently in two spheres by treating AI as a trusted partner, not just a tool.
- Innovative use of AI can reduce workload, strengthen decision-making, and preserve space for relational leadership.
- Equity, ethics, and practical experimentation must underpin responsible adoption.
- The future of leadership lies in balancing human wisdom with AI-enabled capacity.

Participants will leave with a reflective framework and practical strategies for integrating AI into leadership practice, equipping them to navigate complexity today while preparing students to thrive in an AI-shaped future.