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Centers Of Excellence As A Business Enabler In The Era Of Millennials



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If you're reading this article, there is a very high chance you are a millennial. And if you're not, the person who sits next to you in the office, on the train or in a stadium likely is.

According to [research](#) by Brookings, millennials account for one-third of the world's workforce, and their representation in the labor market is expected to increase to 75% by 2025. The millennial generation is the main driver of innovation and development in technology, too. This age bracket needs to be understood in order for us to know what the future of the workplace will look like and exploit this generation's potential.

Millennials are often considered the [most knowledgeable and educated generation](#) in human history. They are hard-wired for innovation, and many are in leadership roles. This new breed has proven to be less risk-averse than older generations. They are more open to ongoing learning opportunities in order to adapt to changing technologies and new realities, and they want feedback two times more often than other generations. This means they are willing to learn and be coached.

Furthermore, they view their managers as a direct source of enhancement of their personal development. However, only [46%](#) of millennials said they feel like they receive appropriate guidance from their managers. As a result, there is considerable necessity for change by the top management of modern businesses in order to facilitate further business growth and development.

Many millennials also prefer crowdsourcing and working in teams rather than independently. Their approach to IT is singular: They not only drive digital transformation in organizations but also prefer meaningful work that has positive social impact. Millennials strive to realize their personal and professional potential. This is the driving factor for the natural transition from I-shaped to T-shaped specialization.

The T- and I-shaped concept was first used by [McKinsey & Company](#) as a learning and knowledge acquisition method in its centers of excellence (CoE) model. A person with I-shaped skills possesses excellent knowledge and abilities in a specific area. A person with T-shaped skills is also fairly capable in many other related areas and possesses various extra skills.

This extended skill set makes T-shaped professionals extremely valuable. They are also good at collaborating with others and adapting to varying demands: They are excellent communicators and embrace flexibility through human adaptability. In comparison with I-shaped specialists, fewer T-shaped specialists are needed to do the same amount of work, or the same number of people can get more work done.

As T-shaped specialists, millennials have a competitive advantage that helps them deliver superior value to their organization. As such, forward-looking companies understand the importance of and promote a favorable environment for personal and professional development.

Cash-rich tech giants like Salesforce and Google, for example, provide their employees with creative platforms and time to work on projects of their choice, helping them develop personal skills, feel more engaged and boost innovation within the company. CoEs have proven to satisfy both necessities in business innovation and advancement and millennials' demands for skills and professional fulfillment.

The CoE is a specialized team that develops and provides leadership, best practices, research, support and training for a focus area. This enables organizations to address their innovation and transformation agenda, gain a competitive advantage and secure continuous success. CoEs benefit everyone from stakeholders to employees to customers.

With substantial resources to invest in their CoE, bigger companies are better equipped to choose the technologies and domains that are of interest to them and their employees. Employees are allowed and even encouraged to spend their work time participating in CoEs. But what can smaller companies do with their tiny research and development budgets?

At Intetics, our company leadership acknowledges the importance of CoEs and the value they add to smaller IT businesses. Our team has enabled employees to establish a dozen CoEs based on their — not the company's — technology preferences and interests. It's no surprise that these CoEs cover some of the world's most innovative technologies, including artificial intelligence/machine learning, the cloud, IoT, geospatial, drones, robotic process automation, big data, etc.

Based on our experience at Intetics, there's a lot you can do for your CoE participants, whether it's providing marketing support, offering specialized books and materials, inviting external experts to hold workshops and training sessions, procuring access to external cloud environments, etc.

In short, you should provide full support for your employees' journeys to specialized knowledge and out-of-the-box thinking, but not regular enumeration or work time allocation. The CoE environment also encourages experimentation and enables people to go that extra mile. You may also want to give additional monetary benefits to employees who help the company score a new business deal as a result of unique knowledge gained through the CoE.

One question that frequently surfaces regarding such a “voluntary” CoE strategy is about (lack of) business development strategy. Well, if you are a service organization, would it make a big difference if your next big client was interested in an AI or an IoT product? A company with wide technological expertise will benefit in either case, and companies with the versatile knowledge of T-shaped specialists are best placed to do so.

Over the last decade, CoEs have proven to be a catalyst for innovation and business growth and a mechanism to help employees achieve their personal development goals. As we continue to see businesses in the technology world managed by millennials, the need to embrace a workplace medium that encourages self-development is becoming increasingly critical. And one of the best ways to facilitate crew and business growth, even at a small company, is to provide a platform that supports integral features of centers of excellence.



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Boris Kontsevoi is a founder and President of Intetics Inc., a leading global software engineering and digital transformation company. Under his leadership, a group of software engineers developed into a truly global technology company with multiple professional certifications and industry awards, including the Global Outsourcing 100, Software 500, and Global Sourcing Association best of class company.

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