Reviving Professional Development: A New Approach for Millennials

By Julie Clugage

Professional development in corporate America is under scrutiny. As companies intensify efforts to retain talented employees and instill the leadership qualities essential to competitive advantage, a growing body of research questions the effectiveness of traditional, classroom-style teaching. Meanwhile, millennials, who place a premium on professional development, are signaling that they want to learn by doing, in a real-world environment. This Giving Thoughts article explores an emerging model to help companies solve this dilemma, focused on purpose-driven, service-based leadership learning that also supports corporate social impact.
The Challenge

Classroom learning is not doing the job

There is little doubt that companies recognize the value of attracting and developing the next generation of leaders and are committed to developing top talent. In a survey of more than 1,000 C-suite executives by The Conference Board, CEOs said they are “focused on ‘democratizing’ development; not only improving leadership development programs but enhancing employee skill training and development at all levels of the organization.”¹ And they are investing heavily in such programs. According to Brandon Hall Group’s 2016 Training Benchmarking Study, large companies of 10,000+ employees have an average training budget of $13 million. The same report found that classroom learning is still the predominant way that learning is delivered. The report said: “On a five-point rating scale where 1 is 0 percent of total training and 5 is more than 75 percent, instructor-led classroom rates a 3.4—21 percent more than even eLearning modules, which rated a 2.8.”²

But are the outcomes for companies and individuals worth the investment? Offsite and university-style programs give participants the opportunity to step away from the demands of their day job and focus on gaining new knowledge. Yet, according to McKinsey, adults typically retain just 10 percent of what they hear in the classroom, compared to nearly two-thirds of information received when they learn by doing.³ What’s more, the authors argued, “burgeoning leaders, no matter how talented, often struggle to transfer even their most powerful off-site experiences into changed behavior on the [workplace] front line.”

According to George Hallenbeck of the Center for Creative Leadership: “People really need to get out of their comfort zone to develop in a deep and meaningful way. It gives them the freedom and opportunity to take risks, to step beyond what they would normally do.”⁴

Company leaders are increasingly aware of these shortcomings. According to Harvard Business Publishing, only 7 percent of organizations believe their leadership development programs are best in class.⁵

Millennials seek purpose, not just a paycheck

These failings in traditional, classroom-based leadership development are magnified by the attitudes of millennials. Tomorrow’s leaders, millennials (born between 1980 and 2000), already make up 25 percent of the US workforce and are projected to constitute the majority by 2020.⁶ To be successful in the battle to recruit top talent to build for the future, companies must recognize that this generation embraces a different philosophy toward life and work than its predecessors.

Collectively, millennials are more interested in working not just for a paycheck but for a purpose, using their talent to make a positive impact on the world. According to a 2014 report for the Case Foundation, more than half of millennials were influenced to accept a job based on a company’s involvement with causes—programs and initiatives that help people and communities.⁷ Overall, young professionals ranked a company’s involvement with causes as the third-most important factor when applying for a job, ahead of office environment and diversity programs.⁸
Once on the job, millennials want a reason to stay and a chance to develop. According to a recent Deloitte study, millennials value training and development as the most coveted job benefit, over flexible hours, cash bonuses, vacation time, and retirement funding. Instead, they often become frustrated and disengaged. Gallup’s 2016 report, How Millennials Want to Work and Live, found that employee engagement—an emotional and behavioral connection to their job and company—is lowest among millennials, at 55 percent. But the report concluded that this was not due to indifference about work: “[T]he reality is that they just want a job that feels worthwhile—and they will keep looking until they find it. Purpose and development drive this generation.”

As a result of this mindset, millennials are more prone to changing jobs than their predecessors when they lack learning opportunities. In the Gallup survey, 21 percent of millennials reported changing jobs in the previous year—three times more than non-millennials—costing the US economy an estimated $30.5 billion.

**Millennial retention: a costly challenge**

A 2013 survey of several hundred HR professionals across US industries by research consultancy Millennium Branding and career development consultancy Beyond.com found that:

- 30 percent of companies surveyed lost 15 percent of their millennial workforce in one year
- 60 percent of millennials left their company in less than three years
- 87 percent of HR professionals surveyed cited costs of $15,000-$25,000 to replace each millennial worker they lose
- 56 percent of HR professionals surveyed said it takes three to seven weeks to hire a fully productive millennial in a new role.


Research also shows that millennials walk the talk—they actively volunteer, suggesting that corporate service learning opportunities can boost both retention and engagement. The Case Foundation’s 2015 Millennial Impact Report found that 70 percent of young people surveyed spent at least one hour volunteering in 2014, including 45 percent involved with efforts offered or promoted by their company. Of these, 77 percent said they were more likely to volunteer because of the opportunity to use their skills or expertise to benefit a cause.

Moreover, millennials also place a premium on how and where they volunteer. Almost eight in ten say they prefer to work in teams, while seven in ten expect and want to pursue an overseas assignment during their career.

Needless to say, these are not goals and needs that can be met solely in a traditional classroom-based learning environment.
The Solution

If current approaches aren’t meeting millennial needs, what does effective leadership development look like? How can corporations meet the need for professional development while attracting and retaining the next generation of leaders? One answer attracting significant corporate attention is international service learning (ISL), also known as international corporate volunteerism, which empowers young professionals to stretch their capabilities in a project-based, purpose-driven learning environment.

ISL: the new professional training ground

ISL is a 21st-Century solution that can deliver returns for companies not only in leadership development and employee engagement but also in marketing, business development and social impact. For volunteer employees, it can fulfill the desire to do work with a purpose, while gaining new leadership skills and absorbing new cultures. And for communities in underserved parts of the world, it brings the opportunity to learn, and benefit from, information technology and other 21st-Century skills.

International corporate volunteering programs have been found to be more effective in leadership development than elite, classroom-based models. According to Taproot Foundation research, experiential learning has become the most effective way to build critical leadership skills like empathy, humility and resilience. In a 2016 report, Emerging World found that 51 percent of employees positively impacted their organization’s business as a result of insights and lessons from an ISL program. Those programs also delivered cost savings. Tuition for classroom-based executive education programs at Harvard and Stanford average $12,000 to $15,000 per week, whereas a 10- to 12-week program with ISL provider Team4Tech costs about $6,000 per employee.

These types of pro-bono programs have also been shown to have a significant positive effect on employee engagement. According to a 2016 employee engagement study, 88 percent of employees feel their job is more fulfilling when they are provided opportunities to make a positive impact on social or environmental issues. Similarly, 75 percent of employees who participated in a corporate ISL program returned motivated to contribute more than their job requires. These benefits can translate into real productivity gains—according to a recent Fast Company article, an engaged employee is 44 percent more productive than a satisfied worker, but an employee who feels inspired at work is nearly 125 percent more productive than a satisfied one.

An annual benchmarking survey by Washington, D.C.-based PYXERA Global, formerly CDC Development Solutions, shows steady growth in corporate adoption of ISL. In the past three years, the number of program teams visiting Africa has doubled and visiting Asia has grown almost 700 percent.
One early adopter is the German enterprise software manufacturer SAP, which includes employee engagement as one of four strategic goals, along with growth, profitability and customer loyalty. In 2014, the company expanded its Social Sabbatical program, which sends high-performing employees from around the world to emerging markets, where they collaborate with social enterprises and entrepreneurs on month-long projects to solve a pressing business challenge. Employee engagement from the program runs at 93 percent, compared to 79 percent for the company’s overall results. The company has found that each percentage point increase in employee engagement improves its operating margin by approximately $40 million.

Silicon Valley social enterprise Team4Tech, a pioneer in the ISL field, works to improve education in developing countries by connecting technology professionals with impactful, local nonprofits. Working in underserved communities around the world, Team4Tech’s goal is to use technology to build 21st Century skills for teachers and students, which in turn enhance educational outcomes and promote economic success in its partner communities. Volunteers from companies including Adobe, Intel and VMware spend six to eight weeks preparing for the pro bono consulting projects, and an average of two weeks in-country, building and gaining skills in the five areas shown above.

In 2016, 90 percent of Team4Tech volunteers reported a growth in global mindset, and 94 percent of volunteers reported a growth in leadership development. The following case study from its Orphan Impact project in Vietnam illustrates how companies can rethink and expand their professional development programs with modern service learning opportunities that support retention and reputation while benefiting underserved communities.

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**Figure 1**

**Team4Tech Leadership Competencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Mindset</th>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Extreme Collaboration</th>
<th>Creative Problem Solving</th>
<th>Effective Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of emerging markets</td>
<td>Bold decision making</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Human-centered design</td>
<td>Influence without authority</td>
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<td>Open-mindedness</td>
<td>Comfort with ambiguity</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Inspiration to others</td>
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<td>Appreciation of diversity</td>
<td>Prototyping and experimentation</td>
<td>Negotiation and conflict resolution</td>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>Intercultural communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Synthesis of divergent ideas</td>
<td>Change management</td>
<td>Effective questioning</td>
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<td>Cross-border management</td>
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Source: Team4Tech, 2014
CASE STUDY

Purpose-Driven Learning in Action

While precise, up-to-date statistics are difficult to find, Vietnam’s government estimated in 2010 that 4.3 million Vietnamese children were living in “special circumstances,” either disabled, abandoned or abused. Given challenging national obstacles to pursuing higher education and securing skilled employment, most of these disadvantaged children do not have the opportunity to attend university or obtain stable jobs.

Seeking to reverse this bleak outlook, nonprofit Orphan Impact helps prepare parentless children for the workplace by teaching them digital literacy skills including word processing and online research. Established in 2009, the organization currently offers weekend computer classes for 1,145 students at 20 orphanages across Vietnam.

Team4Tech has partnered with Orphan Impact since March 2014, supplying volunteers on four projects to train the organization’s teaching staff and help them evolve their thinking and curriculum. Each project has included both teacher workshops and time in the classroom to pilot the new concepts and lessons with students.

In 2014, a team of VMware volunteers helped equip computer labs in five new facilities. A year later, volunteers from Box, Facebook and Visa introduced the Orphan Impact staff to the concept of design thinking—a process of creating new and innovative ideas to solve problems. Today, Orphan Impact applies design thinking across all its curriculum. In 2016, Team4Tech volunteers from Adobe, Facebook and Pearson provided career planning and entrepreneurship workshops for students aged 15 to 18. This led Orphan Impact to launch its Leadership Curriculum, a six-month pilot program teaching entrepreneurial skills to 22 graduates and students. Most recently, Team4Tech volunteers from Pure Storage helped Orphan Impact expand curriculum around the maker movement, teaching a variety of hands-on, creative uses of technology such as robotics and circuit boards, with 440 students and 26 teachers expected to benefit from the enhanced curriculum.

Source: Team4Tech, 2017
In 2016, 12 of the 28 Orphan Impact students who graduated that year went on to pursue university, and many other students have used their training to land skilled jobs. These include Huu, who interviewed for a job at Biddis, a prestigious Vietnamese shoe company, hoping to work in the factory. Asked whether he had any computer skills, Huu shared his digital projects portfolio and was offered a position in the company’s design program, earning triple what he would have been paid in factory wages.

The experience of working with Orphan Impact has been almost as life-changing for the tech company volunteers. “I got much more out of this trip than I ever thought was possible and I saw things that I never knew existed,” reported Josh Impey from Pure Storage. “I loved seeing how our journey has not only impacted the children, but also the Orphan Impact staff, the Pure Storage team and our Team4Tech leader. It has been an incredible experience.”
Conclusion

With millennials clamoring for more purpose-driven and experience-based learning, international service learning offers a new approach that can complement traditional leadership development.

Corporations benefit by attracting, retaining and developing leaders of the future. Volunteers gain insight by working in new environments, and learn leadership skills while fulfilling their desire to do good in the world. Developing country communities benefit from the skills passed on by volunteer trainers and mentors. When implemented with an understanding of and appreciation for the unique perspectives and needs of the various stakeholders, international service learning can benefit everyone involved, and create far-reaching value.
ENDNOTES

2 Training Budget Benchmarks and Optimizations for 2017, Litmos and Brandon Hall Group, 2016.
6 Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017.
10 How Millennials Want To Work And Live, Gallup, 2016.
11 How Millennials Want To Work And Live, 2016.
19 2016 Cone Communications Employee Engagement Study, Cone Communications, 2016.
About Team4Tech

Team4Tech was founded 2012 in Redwood City, California, by two former Intel employees. Its immersive service learning projects seek to create better education for teachers, learners, and nonprofits, better leaders in the technology industry, and better leadership development practices for technology companies. To date, employee volunteers from corporate partners—including Adobe, Autodesk, Box, Intel and VMware—have donated $7.2 million of skilled consulting services, reaching over 30,000 teachers and students in 12 countries and supporting 18 local nonprofit education organizations with 40 service learning projects.

Most Team4Tech collaborations are designed to be implemented over three to five years, with at least one team of pro bono technology volunteers spending an average of two weeks per year onsite with the nonprofit partner. Team4Tech works closely with nonprofit partners to identify goals and success metrics for a lengthy, three-phase collaboration (shown below). A typical project may start with a team of volunteers installing Wi-Fi routers and building servers for a network of schools; a second team may continue that work by teaching workshops to teachers and school administrators on relevant educational software. Projects build from this foundation to meet the partner nonprofit organizations’ specific learning objectives (e.g., improved literacy or math outcomes). The final phase emphasizes student-centered teaching and learning, with capacity-building workshops for teachers focused on project-based learning and other 21st Century learning activities, such as robotics or coding.

Team4Tech Solution Roadmap

**Figure 2**

Team4Tech supports NPOs in developing IT & teacher training to support...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASE I</th>
<th>PHASE II</th>
<th>PHASE III</th>
<th>PHASE IV</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STUDENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>TEACHER</strong></td>
<td><strong>SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td><strong>SYSTEM</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Literacy</td>
<td>Technology as Educational Resource</td>
<td>Foundational Infrastructure</td>
<td>Build support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Foundations</td>
<td>Technology Integration</td>
<td>Emerging Digital Classrooms</td>
<td>Invite broader participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Mastery</td>
<td>21st Century Skills &amp; Mindsets</td>
<td>School-wide Digital Learning</td>
<td>Showcase emerging successes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Team4Tech, 2017
About the Author

Julie Clugage is responsible for growing Team4Tech’s partnerships with tech companies and non-profits around the world. She brings more than 20 years of experience in the world of education, technology and economic development. Before founding Team4Tech, she served as Chief of Staff for Intel Corporation’s Corporate Affairs Group and as Global Operations Manager for Intel’s Education Market Platforms Group. While at Intel, Julie launched the Intel Education Service Corps, a service and career-development program that links Intel technology and 100 employees per year with non-profit organizations working to improve educational quality in developing countries. This successful program served as a tested model for Team4Tech. Before joining Intel, Julie worked in international development for seven years at the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, USAID, and a teacher training high school in rural Guatemala. She is the mother of three girls and holds an MPA from Princeton University, an MBA from UC Berkeley, and an AB from Dartmouth College.

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