



Your People  
are Your Path to  
**Adaptability and Resilience**

April 2023





Everywhere you look—from the physical world in which we live, the societies and communities that connect us, to the technologies that push us forward, and the most basic assumptions we make about what it means to do work and to be a worker<sup>1</sup>—there is uncertainty and change. To live and work today is to make an endless series of bets—each decision an experiment<sup>2</sup>, each step forward an exploration of a future that no amount of new AI-driven technologies seems able to clarify.

In this highly dynamic world, organizations need adaptability<sup>3</sup>, to be able to shift speeds and directions quickly, to invent and reinvent as conditions warrant. And they need resilience<sup>4</sup> to remain focused, always able to find and remain faithful to their True North despite the tumult. Where and how, then, do leaders of organizations today find stable ground? Where is the foundation for this adaptability and resilience?

The 3600+ global executives in a recent Deloitte survey have the answer: **their people**. As the COVID-19 pandemic swirled around us, more than 70 percent of global executives identified “the ability of their people to adapt, reskill, and assume new roles” as the top-ranked item to navigate future disruption.<sup>5</sup> As environments change, so do business priorities, and effective organizations will position their people to adapt to meet them.

Unlocking the capacity of your workers to grow and reinvent is far more than a question of training or content or programs. The underlying needs are more complex, the scale and scope of the problem more systemic. The dynamic nature of work today demands not just ever-shifting skills, but also innovation, entrepreneurship, and other forms of creativity that are powered by enduring human capabilities.<sup>6</sup> Organizations are under pressure to evolve their underlying business models to leverage enduring human capabilities as the means to capitalize on what is an age of *imagination* as much as disruption.



**72%**

of executives identified “the ability of their people to adapt, reskill, and assume new roles” as the top-ranked item to navigate future disruptions.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *New fundamentals for a boundaryless world*, Deloitte Insights, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Designing for Adaptability: Encourage Workforce Growth and Mobility*, Deloitte LLP, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> *The social enterprise in a world disrupted: Leading the shift from survive to thrive*, Deloitte Insights, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> *New fundamentals for a boundaryless world*, Deloitte Insights, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> *Skills change, but capabilities endure*, Deloitte Insights, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> *The social enterprise in a world disrupted: Leading the shift from survive to thrive*, Deloitte Insights, 2020.

Cultivating such adaptability and resilience requires a tangible, *always-on* support for the people in the organization to lean into their innate capacities to explore, grow, be curious, and create. The workforce needs time, resources, and encouragement—and a reliable place to understand both the choices available and the implications of those choices now and in the future.

In the rest of this article, we will explore what that looks like by focusing on **three primary questions**:

- Why should organizations invest in the capacity of their people to grow?
- How do organizations do this effectively?
- How can technology accelerate those efforts?

## Building the case

**Investing in the workforce pays dividends in multiple ways, but at a foundational level, it's simply sound business practice.** High-performing organizations in Deloitte's High-Impact Workforce research were 3.9 times more likely to provide compelling opportunities for development and growth and 7 times more likely to invest in workforce development as the primary method of meeting needs for skills and capabilities than were lower-performing ones.<sup>8</sup>

In return, these same organizations were:

- 3.5x more likely to provide a positive workforce experience
- 4.5x more likely to meet talent needs, putting the right people in the right roles
- 5x more likely to engage the workforce

Of course, the proof is in the business results. These organizations were also:

- 1.7x more likely to meet their financial targets
- 2.8x more likely to innovate compared to competitors
- 4.9x more likely to manage change effectively

They demonstrated higher performance now—and the capabilities to continue to thrive in the future.

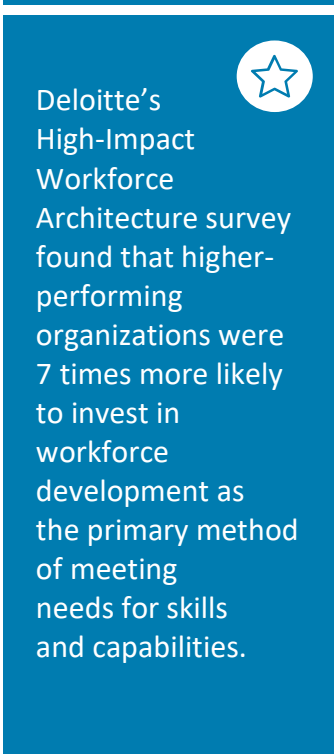
Deloitte's High-Impact Organization Design research confirmed these same conclusions—and found that the highest-performing organizations made this commitment to unleashing workforce potential part of their DNA. This research showed that high-performing organizations view the growth and empowerment of their people as an essential part of their business strategies.<sup>9, 10</sup> Far more than a learning or talent issue, they make organization design decisions with an eye toward enhancing human capabilities and enabling workforce mobility, and they adopt new ways of working that foster their workforce's passion to explore.

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<sup>8</sup> *High-Impact Workforce research*, Deloitte LLP, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> *High-Impact Organization Design research*, Deloitte LLP, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> *High-Impact Workforce research*, Deloitte LLP, 2020.



Deloitte's High-Impact Workforce Architecture survey found that higher-performing organizations were 7 times more likely to invest in workforce development as the primary method of meeting needs for skills and capabilities.

The graphic is a blue rectangular box with a white star icon in the top right corner. The text is white and reads: "Deloitte's High-Impact Workforce Architecture survey found that higher-performing organizations were 7 times more likely to invest in workforce development as the primary method of meeting needs for skills and capabilities."

**There's more to be gained than just near-term results, though. An investment in scaling the workforce's capacity to develop is also an investment in the future,** both for the workforce and the organization as a whole.<sup>11</sup> When workers are encouraged to invent and to explore, they help future-proof themselves and the organization for challenges not yet encountered or even understood. When talent can flow where it's needed, the organization and its people can more effectively address disruptions as they emerge—regardless of time, place, or context.

**Perhaps most importantly, investing in the potential of the workforce to grow is what the workforce expects and demands.** Today's workforce has greater influence and agency than ever before—a fact accelerated by the pandemic and one that is showing little sign of dissipating despite changing economic conditions.<sup>12</sup> More workers *expect* their employers to help them grow. Amidst hiring constraints and labor shortages, organizations need to deliver on those expectations:

- Millennial and Gen Z workers cited growth and development as a top priority in choosing an employer—higher than salary or culture.<sup>13</sup>
- 68 percent of respondents to Deloitte's Ways of Working survey believe that the ability to learn on the job is a very important component for creating an optimal working environment.<sup>14</sup>
- 64 percent of surveyed workers say they'd be more attracted to an employer that creates value for them as human beings.<sup>15</sup>



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Is the long-term growth and viability of the worker the responsibility of the organization? According to 73 percent of respondents to Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends survey<sup>17</sup>, the answer is yes—more than the responsibility of workers themselves, and far beyond that of educational institutions, governments, or professional associations and unions. Deloitte's High-Impact Workforce research found that higher-performing organizations agree. In fact, these organizations were 37 times more likely to help workers achieve their own personal, long-term career goals. They believe in the value of supporting that growth—whether it is directly in service of the organizations' needs or not.<sup>18</sup> And they demonstrate that belief in real, tangible ways, giving workers the resources and guidance necessary to move further down their chosen path—creating new leaders and advocates in the process.

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<sup>11</sup> *The social enterprise at work: Paradox as a path forward*, Deloitte Insights, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> *New fundamentals for a boundaryless world*, Deloitte Insights, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> *Striving for balance, advocating for change: The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z & Millennial Survey*, Deloitte LLP, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> *2021 Global Ways of Working study*, Deloitte LLP, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> *The skills-based organization: A new operating model for work and the workforce*, Deloitte Insights, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> *Striving for balance, advocating for change: The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z & Millennial Survey*, Deloitte LLP, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> *The social enterprise at work: Paradox as a path forward*, Deloitte Insights, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> *High-Impact Workforce research*, Deloitte LLP, 2020.

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The lion’s share of that responsibility tends to fall on managers. As the individuals closest to the workers, they have the opportunity and perspective to provide direction and feedback that fosters growth—for both current roles and aspirational ones. Organizational support should account for that reality. Helping the manager surface opportunities (e.g., stretch assignments) and provide feedback that clarifies and personalizes areas for growth can pay dividends across the business.<sup>20</sup>

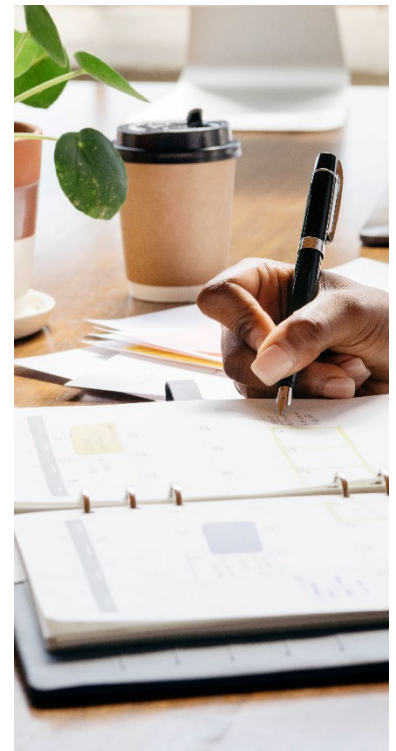
## Setting the stage

Many organizations proudly state that they empower workers to “own their careers.” While laudable in concept, the practical reality often leaves much to be desired. In many cases, employees are given access to expansive libraries of content and programs with little personalized guidance or time afforded to engage.

**Workers want and need agency, and they need compelling developmental resources and opportunities. However, it is at least as important that the organization invests time and thought into their personal growth, beyond just providing access to self-service content.** Workers need practical guidance and guardrails, well-organized and clearly presented, that help them understand what possibilities are available, how to best take advantage of them, and how they align to both worker and organizational needs and aspirations, now and in the future.

**The support provided by the organization should be broad, yet intentional in its curation—supporting continuous learning in modes and contexts.**

Deloitte’s High-Impact Learning Organization research finds that higher-performing organizations take a design-thinking approach, carefully choosing resources and opportunities based on a deep understanding of work and worker.<sup>21</sup> They clearly align opportunities to organizational and worker needs using categories and vocabularies that are meaningful to workers, not just HR. These efforts pay off in multiple ways: organizations who provide employees with the tools, knowledge, and guidance to continuously improve their performance were three times more like to realize both strong business outcomes and strong learner experience outcomes than other organizations.<sup>22</sup>







<sup>19</sup> *High-Impact Workforce research*, Deloitte LLP, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> *Lead Roles in a Continuous Learning Model*, Deloitte LLP, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> *High-Impact Learning Organization research*, Deloitte LLP, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> *High-Impact Learning Organization Maturity Model: An Introduction*, Deloitte LLP, 2017.

These higher-performing organizations recognize that effective development support is continuous—it helps workers perform today and grow in their current roles, and opens possibilities for future paths. That type of continuous learning occurs across four modes<sup>23</sup>:

-  **Education**—traditional, structured learning events or content
-  **Experience**—stretch assignments, job rotations, and other intentional moments that accelerate the acquisition of experience and demonstrate the *need* to grow
-  **Exposure**—connections and interactions with colleagues and leaders who can demonstrate paths forward and help provide the means, guidance, and sponsorship to get there
-  **Environment**—tools and systems that support performance and facilitate individual learning in and as part of the work

Organizations should be careful not to weight the balance of overall approaches to workforce development too far in the direction of traditional *Education*, with a less thoughtful or organized approach to the other three Es. A less-than-healthy trend in the space of corporate learning and development over the past decade has been the conflation of entertaining content with impactful development support. Content consumption is not learning.

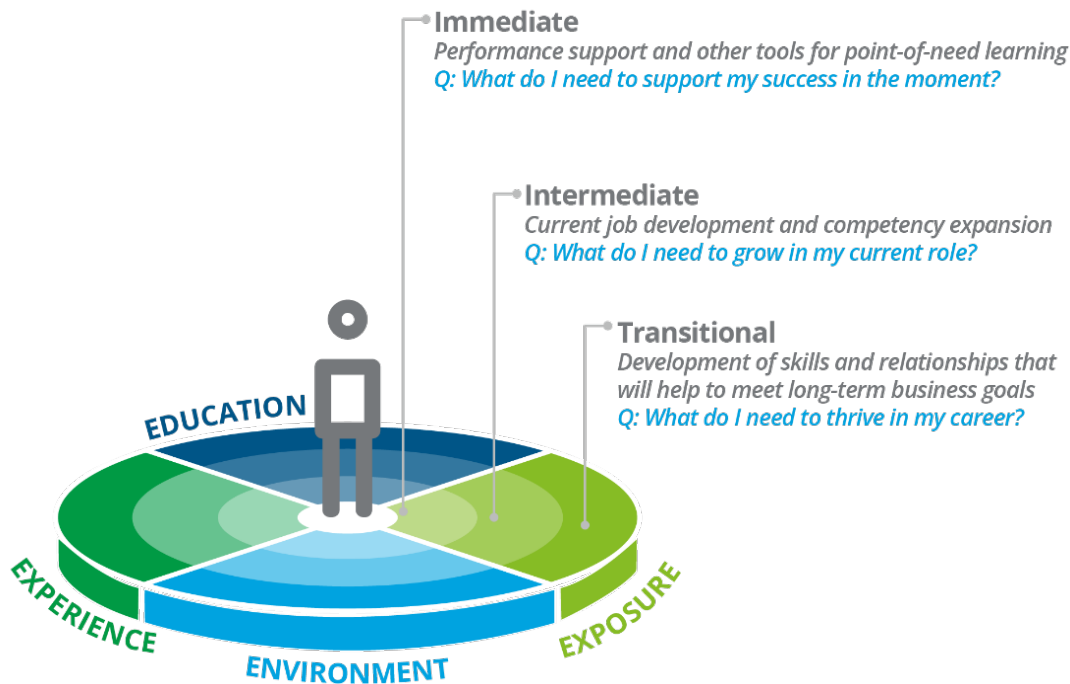
When leveraged effectively, continuous learning forms a mutually beneficial relationship with adaptability: not only does heightened opportunity and access to learning drive adaptability in workers, but more adaptable workers are better able to leverage that learning for their own benefit.



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<sup>23</sup> *The Continuous Learning Model in Review*, Deloitte LLP, 2019.

## The Continuous Learning Model



Source: Deloitte LLP, 2020.

**All development choices are also, ultimately, career choices—and vice versa.** The dynamic nature of work is causing high-performing organizations to adopt flexible and open career approaches<sup>24</sup> over more traditional, structured career paths, and to use work-role related opportunities explicitly for development.<sup>25</sup> This includes:

- Flexible career frameworks that “push” workers toward opportunities inside the organization based on skills, yet afford them choices within the structure<sup>26</sup>
- Open frameworks that organize work by project or mission, often in teams, providing more opportunities for internal mobility, team collaboration, and learning in the flow of work<sup>27</sup>
- Talent or opportunity marketplaces<sup>28</sup> which match worker expertise and aspiration with organizational needs, empowering workers to evaluate and act on opportunities

All of the above also demonstrate a commitment to internal mobility, an important part of investing in the potential of the workforce to grow. Internal mobility does more than just improve engagement and retention rates<sup>29</sup>; it helps create a culture of belonging. It ties the worker’s long-term goals to the organization’s objectives and performance. As one progresses, so should the other.

<sup>24</sup> *Designing for Adaptability: Encourage Workforce Growth and Mobility*, Deloitte LLP, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> *Opportunity Marketplaces Aligning Workforce Investment and Value Creation in the Digital Enterprise*, Deloitte Insights, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> *Are you overlooking your greatest source of talent?*, Deloitte Insights, 2018.

## Thoughtful technology to inspire and accelerate

**Given a world changing at this rate and work that is increasingly dynamic, organizations will need technology to help make connections and create experiences.** More than 90 percent of business leaders in Deloitte’s 2023 Human Capital Trends survey believe technology is very important to improve work outcomes and team performance.<sup>30</sup> After all, “pushing” workers to new opportunities doesn’t mean leaving them to explore the wilderness; effective organizations give them the tools to find their way.

Many organizations have at least some of the components in place to realize the vision so far described in this article. However, they tend to fall down for a few common reasons, including:

- The organizing frameworks and vocabularies used to describe the work (i.e., the job description or position description), the worker (i.e., the C.V. or resume), and the developmental opportunities (i.e., competency frameworks and career paths) have tended to be too large, too complex, and too static to be regularly useful to workers and managers.<sup>31</sup>
- Related HR, talent, and learning technologies, while often in place, are rarely woven together into singular, compelling experiences for workers, making it easy to see both the big picture and the many underlying threads.

We will take these two issues in reverse order.

**Just as workers need the organization to curate possible developmental opportunities, they need the many related tools and technologies rationalized into a similarly coherent experience.** Leaders in the HR function know how underlying talent processes such as talent acquisition, learning, performance management, and career development connect, but rarely are those connections thoughtfully conveyed to the individual worker in actionable ways. An effective way to start unifying processes and experiences is by reducing the complexity that often results from disparate technologies; having a single, unified, and natively built HCM platform can serve as a differentiator here.

A common challenge to curation in both developmental opportunities and related technologies is the language used to categorize and connect. Traditional approaches to job architectures, such as the job description and the competency framework, are increasingly no longer fit-for-purpose. Dynamic work needs a common vocabulary that is more granular, capable of mapping more closely to where and how workers bring and create value.

**In response, many forward-thinking organizations are beginning to use skills as the foundation of their decisions about work and the workforce.**<sup>32</sup> As part of operationalizing such an approach, they are implementing “skills hubs”—technology-enabled engines of skills data that better matches the value need in the work with what the worker can bring. This data becomes the scaffolding for organizational decisions and worker development, ultimately supporting a fundamentally new operating model for talent.

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<sup>30</sup> *New fundamentals for a boundaryless world*, Deloitte Insights, 2023.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *The skills-based organization: A new operating model for work and the workforce*, Deloitte Insights, 2022.



**This technology-enabled skills hub is the foundation of unleashing the developmental potential of the workforce into the future.** Skills hubs and skills data, because they can help an organization make sense of unstructured, real-world data (both from inside and outside the organization), are how organizations can keep pace with the evolution of work. For example:

- AI and ML tools can build and maintain the mapping between workers, developmental needs, developmental opportunities, and current or future roles.
- AI can identify shifting relationships between skills, helping to surface when needs are changing.
- AI can sense the work people *actually* do, creating dynamic “work” charts and organizational network analyses instead of job-based org charts.<sup>33</sup>
- AI can improve the personalization of guidance for individual workers, suggesting opportunities, paths, and even roles via internal job portals and talent marketplaces (or *opportunity* marketplaces).<sup>34</sup>

This data is becoming the fuel for leaps in innovation in workforce-related analytics, planning, and decision-making. New applications using this data run the gamut from AI-powered skills assessment and inference to portable skills passports or stackable credentials.<sup>35</sup> Having not only the right analytics tools, but also the right capabilities, will help organizations understand their emerging needs and how their people can grow to address them.

## Moving forward: Where will you start?

Both organizations and workers need resilience and adaptability to thrive in today’s world. Leaders see these capabilities as critical to the organization’s future. Similarly, workers have made known their own desires to be able to constantly expand and renew their skills as a means of remaining viable for and finding meaning in work. Unlocking the potential of workers to grow and develop is in everyone’s interests. Moving forward on this path requires thoughtfully developed technology and data strategies founded on the what and the why of the organizational vision and target outcomes. The tools organizations implement as part of this strategy should follow suit—potential solutions should merge learning and development with worker mobility, using accurate, real-time data around the work employees actually do and the goals they visualize.

The question, then, isn’t whether to invest in the tools to enable growth: it’s how, and how soon.



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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *From Great Resignation to Great Reimagination*, Deloitte LLP, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> *The skills-based organization: A new operating model for work and the workforce*, Deloitte Insights, 2022.



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