



Creating Value and Impact through the Alternative Workforce

Cultivating an Environment of Continuous
Learning to Engage the Alternative Workforce

Preface

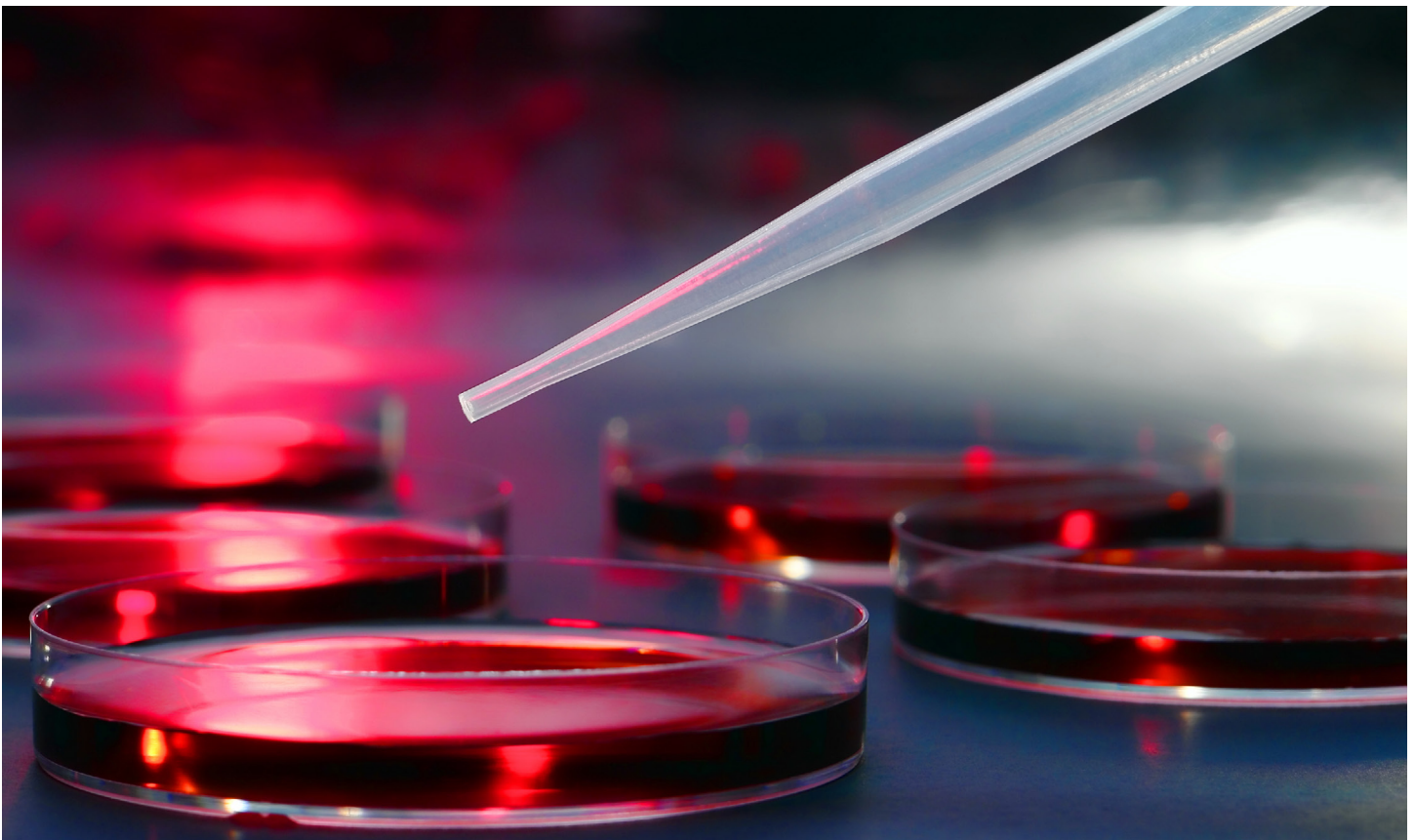
COVID-19 considerations for learning and development and the alternative workforce

With the sudden shift to virtual work caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations are faced with unprecedented challenges related to workforce needs. To keep the workforce engaged, one powerful strategy organizations are employing is leveraging the capabilities of digital learning technologies to enhance new ways of working and support business continuity. These technologies, including learning experience platforms and content delivery tools, can provide an engaging alternative to programs that would occur in person

under typical conditions. To optimize the use of these tools, organizations may consider developing simplified, personalized, and engaging virtual experiences that support the shift from in-person to virtual work where appropriate. For example, digital learning tools can be used to demonstrate execution of critical virtual tasks or to walk workers through the use of new virtual work tools.

More than ever, digitally enabled learning experiences, which range from virtual onboarding to training to inclusive online

team meetings, can be used to democratize the experience of the workforce at large. With all workers—both on- and off-balance-sheet—experiencing a similar shift to virtual work, digital learning experiences offer an increasingly viable means of distributing information and engaging virtual work across talent pools. Organizations that adapt their toolsets—including their digital learning tools—to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 crisis can position themselves to thrive in a more virtual, distributed “next normal.”



A photograph of two women in an office environment. The woman on the left, with long dark hair and a gold hoop earring, is smiling and looking towards the woman on the right. The woman on the right, with curly hair, is looking down and slightly towards the first woman. They appear to be in a collaborative work setting.

Learning and development: Going beyond training for your alternative workforce

The growth of the alternative workforce is largely responsible for shaping the evolution of the talent landscape. Many organizations are grappling with the rise of alternative workers and challenging their own orthodoxies around offering developmental opportunities to their off-balance-sheet talent. While these opportunities are often limited to training events, providing the workforce with access to a broader range of learning experiences can better engage both alternative talent and their on-balance-sheet counterparts, improving overall organizational performance and driving competitive advantage in the market.

As discussed extensively throughout this series, the growth of the alternative workforce—people outside of traditional full-time employment—has had a meteoric impact the world over. In the United States alone, the number of self-employed workers is projected to hit 42 million people this year,¹ and in Britain, the gig economy more than doubled from 2016 to 2019 to 4.7 million people.² Moreover, Deloitte's latest Millennial study found that 64 percent of full-time workers want to do "side hustles" to make extra money.³

As the size of the alternative workforce grows, companies are exploring better ways to engage their alternative workers. One area of focus that many organizations are considering to address this need is that of expanding learning and development ("L&D") opportunities, which, traditionally, has been seen as outside the purview of the contracting employer, both legally and financially.

In terms of legal considerations, historically, organizations have erred on the side of not providing the same levels or types of learning opportunities to alternative workers due to fear of potential co-employment implications. Of late, there is anecdotal evidence of more employers choosing to include alternative workers in the cultural life of the organization, including learning. This does not imply that the legal considerations concerning co-employment have been resolved, but that sourcing talent and providing comparable and equitable opportunities across talent models may be starting to outweigh other considerations. As such, many employers are realizing that providing L&D opportunities for alternative workers has the potential to yield many benefits for organizational performance.

Seventy-nine percent of organizations say fostering a sense of belonging in the workforce is important or very important for their success over the next 12 to 18 months, but only 13 percent say they are very ready to address this trend.

Deloitte 2020 Global Human Capital Trends Report



1. Deloitte, 2020 Global Human Capital Trends Report: Ethics and the future of work.

2. Deloitte, 2020 Global Human Capital Trends Report: Ethics and the future of work.

3. Deloitte, 2019 Global Human Capital Trends Report

Learning in the flow

Deloitte's point of view on learning is that it needs to be delivered in the context of a worker's daily activities. Learning can be broadly categorized into the "Four E's,"⁴ a model that promotes continuous, "in-the-flow" learning by facilitating a holistic approach to development across four learning paradigms (see Figure 2):

- **Education:** Formal training that has traditionally fallen under the umbrella of learning and development (for example, classroom training, e-learning, and simulations).
- **Experience:** Learning that generally occurs in the workplace as workers complete their jobs (for example, stretch assignments, job rotations, and special projects).

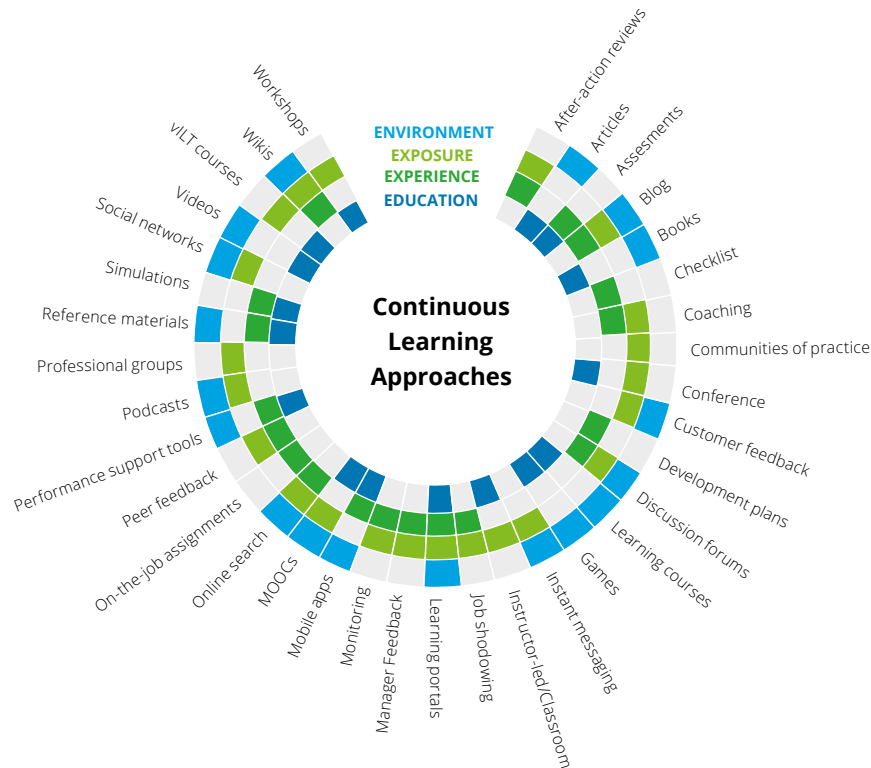
- **Exposure:** Learning that involves interaction and relationships in the course of work that help workers develop by building connections (for example, professional conferences and organizations, volunteer assignments in the community, communities of practice, and coaching and mentoring activities).
- **Environment:** Learning on tools and systems that workers use on the job to learn or to support them in their work (for example, information systems, search engines, job aids, performance support tools, and online asset libraries).

Continuous learning approaches align with evolving learner preferences and help businesses develop their workforces more rapidly (see Figure 1). L&D professionals, business leaders, managers, and learners

all play an important role in enabling continuous learning for all workers—both on and off the balance sheet.

Alternative workers stand to benefit from learning in the flow, much like the "traditional" on-balance-sheet workforce. However, studies show that alternative workers typically have only limited access to the learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities an organization provides. Deloitte's 2020 Global Human Capital Trends Report revealed that almost half of the study's global, cross-industry participants do not provide members of the alternative workforce access to knowledge-sharing tools and platforms and that only 16 percent see integrating knowledge management across off- and on-balance-sheet workers as a key factor to consider when developing

Figure 1. Learning Approaches and Continuous Learning



Source: Deloitte Research & Sensing

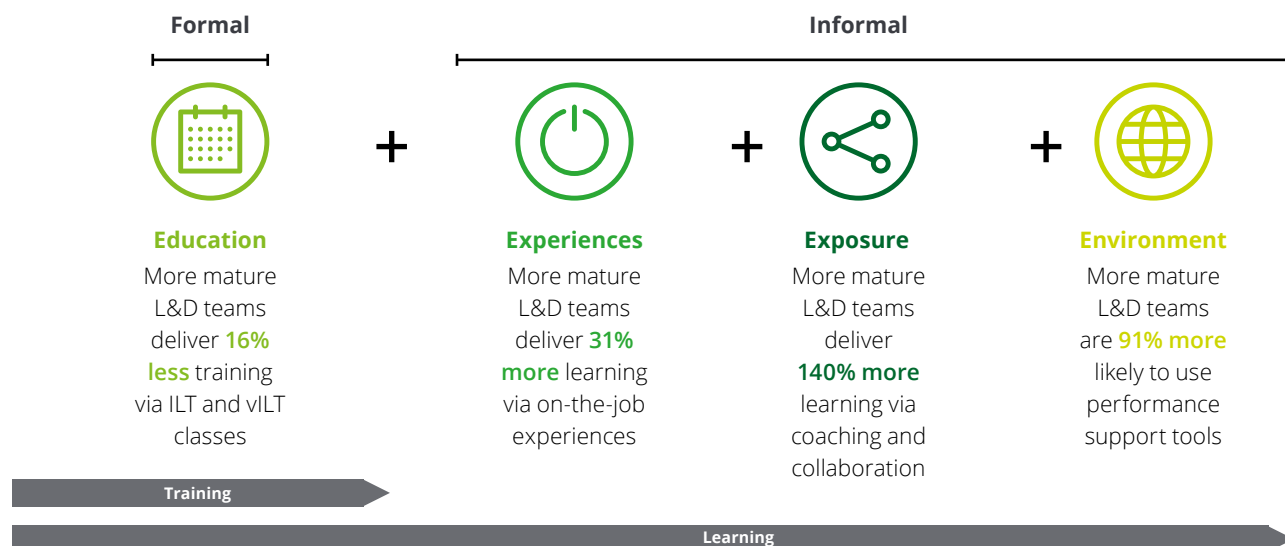
4. Bersin by Deloitte, "Continuous learning: A primer," 2015.

knowledge management strategies.⁵ In fact, the 2020 report revealed a critical concern that organizations may be failing

to recognize the importance of alternative workers as critical to a holistic and strategic approach to optimizing talent. So how can

organizations successfully adopt broader reaching practices when it comes to offering learning opportunities for alternative workers?

Figure 2. The Four E's of Learning



Note: While the stats above are based on analysis of teams composed of full-time employees, these results are likely to be consistent, or even more effective, for teams composed of various worker types

Source: Deloitte

Training versus learning

While the distinction may seem semantic, there is good reason to separate training from learning, especially when considering an organizational approach to developing alternative talent. Training tends to roll up under the first of the Four E's—Education (see Figure 2). It is generally delivered through formal channels (such as e-learning courses) and is often tied to compliance. Bearing this in mind, organizations should consider providing alternative workers with access to formal training opportunities in order to mitigate potential risks and to drive broad organizational compliance.

Even though it is certainly necessary, training tends to happen outside of the flow of work. In other words, a worker stops what they're doing, goes to take a class (a separate event), and then returns to work. Learning, however, when well-planned, can happen throughout the standard workday. Learning can be built into the workflow experience (such as a quick coaching session or a micro-video to help a worker accomplish a task) and doesn't necessarily require formal delivery modalities.⁶

While training may be important and, in some cases, mandatory, learning—when embedded in the flow of work—removes the barriers to entry that may have historically prevented alternative workers from engaging in common organizational practices and culture.

5. Deloitte, 2020 Global Human Capital Trends Report

6. <https://elearningindustry.com/learning-vs-training-workplace-differences>

Training: Mitigating risk, promoting compliance, and performing in role

Training programs typically focus on ways to reduce risk and liability and promote compliance across an organization. For an organization's new workers, training often includes onboarding information for job-related tasks and responsibilities.

Risk

- Most companies have comprehensive policies against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation and provide routine training to workers on these policies. Such training is essential for companies to avoid liability for alleged workplace harassment or retaliation. While most companies provide training on their policies to workers, fewer companies provide such training to short-term alternative workers.⁷ As companies engage an increasing number of alternative workers, they face the risk of increasing legal claims brought by alternative workers or arising out of the workplace behavior of alternative workers. Organizations may want to consider expanding common training on workplace policies to include alternative workers they engage even on a short-term basis.

Compliance

- There is also the issue of compliance. In highly regulated industries, all workers—traditional and nontraditional alike—must be comprehensively trained to meet regulatory requirements. As such, organizations in these industries should ensure they are ready for compliance audits at all times, part of which means making sure the workforce has been trained to meet all legal or regulatory requirements.⁸ By extending the opportunity for compliance training to their alternative workforce, organizations have the opportunity to further expand compliance across their workforce populations.

Responsibilities

- When being oriented to a new role, alternative workers first need to be trained in the technical and nontechnical aspects of the work just as much as a traditional worker. One differentiator, however, is that

training may be delivered in a condensed format or be task-specific to speed up an alternative worker's onboarding process. Organizations can look toward sourcing the requisite technology to achieve this goal, such as sourcing training platforms that are available in the market, designed to manage risk and compliance and on-the-job safety of the alternative workforce. Moreover, the functionality of these technologies can be extended to automate alternative worker information and onboarding processes, providing a more efficient training experience for each organization's alternative talent.

Learning: Driving business performance and workforce engagement

Traditional learning often falls under the category of Education, which frequently includes classroom-based learning, as well as virtual and e-learning courses. Experience, Exposure, and Environment, however, are the types of learning that don't have to be "formalized," but can often be enabled and extended to the alternative workforce to drive greater business performance through engagement of both on- and off-balance-sheet workers.

Many workers may not formally "belong" to the organization they work for—which can make it harder for them to feel a sense of belonging at work and can make it harder for people in traditional work arrangements to feel a sense of unity with them.

Deloitte 2020 Global Human Capital Trends Report

Consider a workgroup comprised of on-balance-sheet workers and contractors. Exposing these workers to differing levels of information, tools, and resources about how to get work done can have the effect of slowing the working momentum and performance of the team. It may also lead on-balance-sheet workers to feel obligated to "step up" to fill knowledge gaps. Today, with many organizations becoming increasingly proprietary and context-specific in the ways in which work gets done, limiting alternative workers' exposure to the resources needed to execute successfully may lead to reduced engagement and culture continuity challenges for all workers and—ultimately—to reduced organizational performance.

Experience

- Much of the learning that workers do occurs naturally as part of gaining experience doing their jobs in the workplace. Organizations can formalize and enhance this kind of experiential learning by offering stretch assignments, job rotations, and special projects. Many companies are exploring how to provide enhanced experiential learning for their alternative workforce. This includes leveraging external technologies, some of which provide an organization's alternative talent with access to learning platforms that parallel the learning experience and skill development opportunities of their most in-demand, full-time positions.⁹

Exposure

- Learning can open the door to expanding the social footprint of the organization beyond its four walls. In today's disrupted talent market, learning can take place via public and/or private partnerships with local universities, guilds, and affiliated resource chapters of talent development organizations—in other words, alternative learning opportunities can potentially address the needs and demands of the alternative workforce.
- Many companies are using massive online open courses ("MOOCs") as part of a blended-learning effort to train their entire workforce, including their alternative

7. <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/only-one-in-five-employers-training-contingent-workers>.

8. <http://spectrumdevelopment.ca/2016/05/19/907>.

9. "Training programs to upskill workers and create new pathways to better jobs, in the gig economy context," <https://techcrunch.com>.

workers. Some of these programs include opportunities for full-time and alternative workers to enroll in online degree programs, as well as offering cutting-edge learning technologies and approaches (for example, virtual reality, apps, and gamification) that simulate work experience and increase learning through exposure for the workforce.¹⁰

Environment

- The demand for learning is also coming from the bottom up. With the exponential increase of the alternative workforce and the rise of the individual, workers have come to demand consumer-grade experiences from the organizations for which they work. Each organization's L&D function may consider adjusting their strategies to work more cohesively with the alternative workforce by embedding learning tools directly in the workers' environment.
- Embedding learning in an alternative worker's environment requires organizations to architect systems of tools and digitally enabled assets. While past research has shown that investments to expand HR strategies to the alternative workforce are increasing, recent studies indicate that many organizations are still unprepared for shifting dynamics in the

workforce ecosystem. Case in point: In 2019, Deloitte's Human Capital Trends Survey results indicated that 31 percent of companies had learning and development plans for alternative workers.¹¹ Even though the importance of alternative workers remains evident, with one in five respondents from the latest 2020 survey stating "they expect alternative work models will have the greatest impact on HR models in the next 12–18 months," only 45 percent of companies said they were prepared for this shift.¹²

Given the disparity in action versus potential impact when it comes to the alternative workforce, organizations will likely need to focus more attention in this area to close the gap. Those that do will not only be better prepared from an operational standpoint, but will also be positioned to engage with and realize the full potential of using alternative talent. For instance, some tech companies that are continuing to leverage more and more alternative workers are exploring ways to match technical and professional skill sets with the organization's job needs. One large technology company that implemented a program of this type found that, on average, alternative workers returned to the organization seeking additional opportunities tailored to their

skill sets. Moreover, 87 percent of workers and external clients wanted a deeper relationship with the organization as a result of the program.¹³

In addition to expanding access to digital tools, organizations could benefit from considering alternative workers as a unique type of learner. Considering that alternative workers tend to stay in their roles for shorter periods of time than regular full-time workers, time to proficiency is critically important for this particular cohort. In addition, "[alternative] workers are often remote, transient, busy, and need information to be available to them anywhere, anytime they have a short bit of downtime."¹⁴ Because of this remote nature of learning, organizations could benefit from making learning engaging as well as flexible—the learning environment should extend to where alternative workers are, which may be physically distant or remote. Moreover, the reality of remote work may be heightened for alternative workers, but these are leading practices to adopt for the entire workforce, especially as organizations adapt new ways to deliver work in the current environment.



10. <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/walmart-s-workforce-of-the-future>.

11. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends/2019/alternative-workforce-gig-economy.html>

12. Deloitte, 2020 Global Human Capital Trends Report: Ethics and the future of work.

13. https://www-03.ibm.com/services/weblectures/dlv/Gate.wss?handler=Information&customer=meap&offering=meal&action=customer&content=Badges&language=en&from=short_url

14. <https://resources.deloitte.com/sites/LearningSolutionsUS/Shared%20Documents/ME%20-%20General/Workforce%20Dev%20and%20Learning%20Advisory/Training%20and%20Managing%20the%20Gig%20Workforce>

Getting started

As reliance on workers from alternative talent pools continues to rise, organizations that offer learning experiences to their entire workforce—both on- and off-balance-sheet—can take advantage of a variety of opportunities to drive business growth. While there are certain needs that can be addressed by formal learning, or “Education,” there are a host of other business benefits that can be driven through more informal learning across the paradigms of Experience, Exposure, and Environment. By tipping the balance in favor of continuous learning opportunities, including digitally enabled learning that happens “in the flow” of work and external learning opportunities that take advantage of institutional relationships, organizations can better engage alternative workers in the fabric of their broader workforce.

Here are some key considerations for organizations looking to offer training and continuous learning opportunities to engage their alternative workforce:



Engage and retain the alternative workforce

As an organization works to attract top talent, it's important not to lose sight of the talent they already have. Seven out of 10 people say that training and development opportunities influence their decision to stay with a company.¹⁵ Deloitte's research on "high-impact learning organizations," conducted in 2005, 2008, and 2011 (before, during, and after the last recession), showed each year that companies that "overinvest" in L&D (spending per worker) rated highest in worker retention, innovation, and customer service and outperformed their peers threefold in long-term profitability.¹⁶ This trend shows that investment in people matters during good times and bad.



Improve a team's (and, therefore, the organization's) ability to perform successfully

Research shows that the highest-performing teams tend to be those that received the greatest overall levels of support along with learning opportunities on how to be an effective team leader and team member. The difference is dramatic: 62 percent of top-performing teams reported that their organization provides a lot of support, which is 33 percentage points higher than the overall average of 29 percent.¹⁷



Demonstrate a commitment to the "human experience"

In the context of growing reliance on the alternative workforce, evolving work demands and skill requirements, and the shift to personalized learning integrated into a learner's work and life, it is increasingly important for organizations to consider the experience they are creating for workers. With this shift in worker needs and priorities, organizations have started to focus on elevating the human experience of full-time and alternative workers alike, first by asking, "What are the shared values and aspirations of the people in my ecosystem?" and then by creating experiences driven by those values, strengthening connectedness with the organization. Organizations that see the appeal in elevating the human experience understand that their opportunity lies in being able to influence and shape human expectations within their industry, driving competitive advantage for business growth and market impact.

15. <https://www.payscale.com/compensation-today/2018/05/learning-development-roi>.

16. Deloitte Insights, "A new model for employee engagement", <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/deloitte-review/issue-16/employee-engagement-strategies.html>

17. <https://trainingmag.com/trgmag-article/work-team-training-and-performance-gaps>.

Let's talk

If you'd like to learn more about creating a learning and development strategy to attract and engage your organization's alternative workforce, we'd welcome the opportunity to talk with you.

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