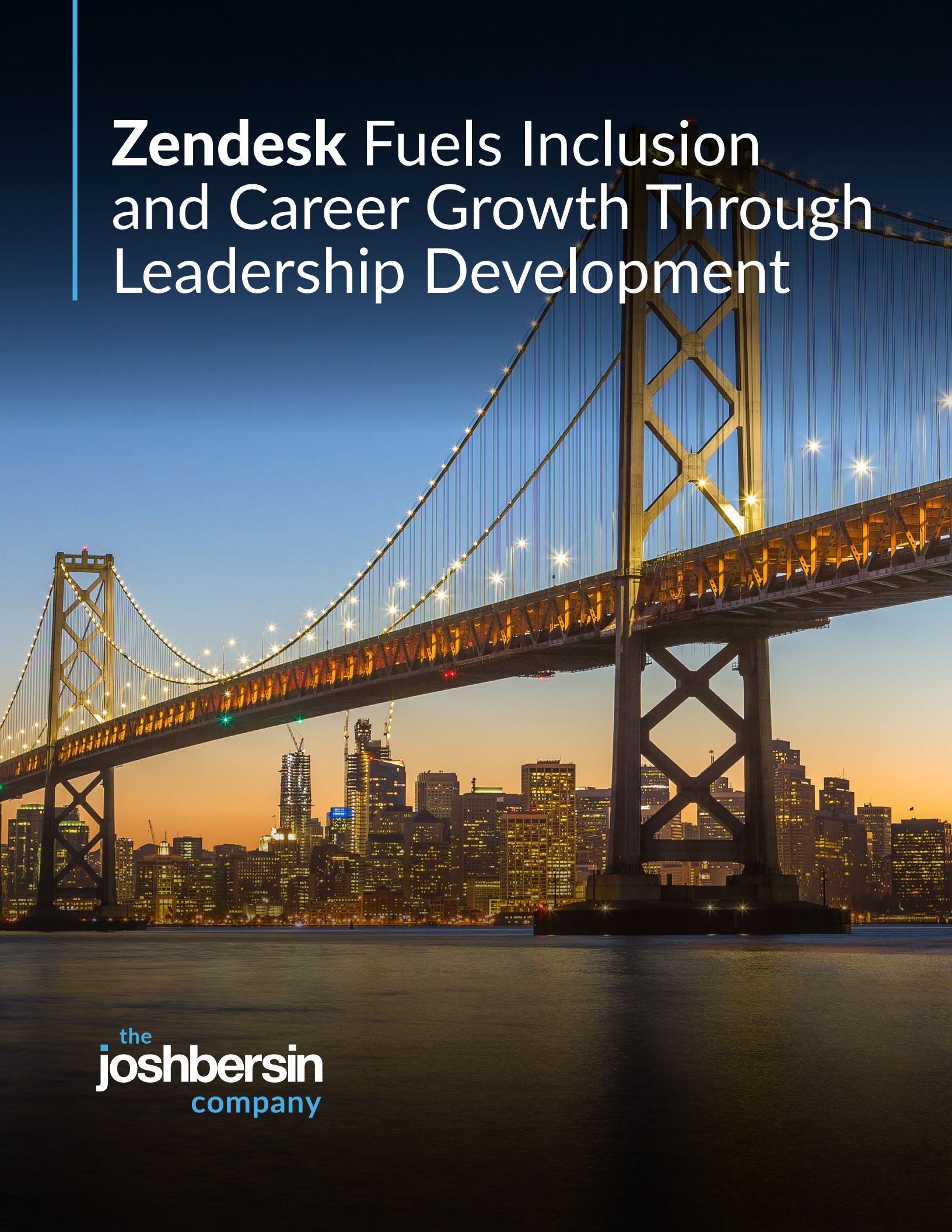




Zendesk Fuels Inclusion and Career Growth Through Leadership Development

the
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company

A Customer Support Software Company

Zendesk is a customer service software company with support and sales products designed to improve customer relationships. The company makes it easier for customer service agents and their leadership to understand customers' concerns, respond to and manage communications, and view and analyze data around customer relationships.

Founded in Denmark in 2007, the company is now headquartered in San Francisco, California, with offices in 13 countries. Zendesk has more than 5,000 employees supporting customers across 160 countries.

Summary

Challenge

- Developing leaders who can grow and engage talent and accelerate DEI.
- Illuminating a strong focus on leaders and on leadership development as a driver for advancing other strategic priorities.
- Building the skill set and mindset necessary for leading effectively in different situations and career stages.

Solution

- Launched a series of leadership development programs offering customized development opportunities for unique audiences.
- Launched the Ignite leadership development program in partnership with [Torch](#), with a goal to enable inclusion and career growth for underrepresented talent through mentoring, group coaching, and online learning.
- The Ignite program offers mentoring to provide experiential learning journeys for underrepresented talent and a parallel manager experience to support managers of underrepresented talent through group coaching sessions and learning pathways.

Results

- Approximately 100 employees and more than 50 managers have gone through the Ignite program.
- The large majority, 95%, of employees reported high satisfaction, and 91% saw an increase in their motivation to take on more responsibility and own their careers.
- Through a strategic focus on leadership as a driver of DEI and business success, Zendesk develops leaders who lead with empathy and efficacy.

Zendesk's Strategic Imperatives: Leadership as a Key Driver

Zendesk leans on its 1,300+ people leaders to deliver the employee and customer experiences integral to its success. Zendesk's people priorities focus heavily on how talent, particularly leadership talent and diverse talent, can thrive at the company. Its three strategic imperatives are:

1. **Enable and build the next generation of effective leaders.** Scale leadership development and establish leadership expectations across the organization. This includes providing career pathing, experiential learning opportunities, development programs, always-on leadership assessments, and coaching of a diverse group of leaders.
2. **Grow and engage talent within an inclusive performance culture.** Optimize performance feedback and outcomes to develop, reward, recognize, and retain talent in an inclusive, bias-free manner. Identify critical skills, close skill gaps, and hone in on practices that differentiate Zendesk's career development approach.
3. **Accelerate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) progress.** Continue to invest in practices, policies, programs, and offerings that accelerate the company's DEI goals. Diversify the company's talent pipeline; cultivate psychological safety, inclusion, and belonging; and champion and support underrepresented groups.

The first strategic imperative focuses solely on leadership development, while the subsequent imperatives lean heavily on leaders as the linchpin for creating an environment where they enable career growth, engage talent, and foster DEI among employees. Zendesk's strategic imperatives reinforce its focus on leaders and leadership development as a key strategic priority and as a driver for advancing other strategic priorities.

Leadership Development at Zendesk: A Holistic Approach

At Zendesk, leadership is defined by three capabilities—how you lead yourself, how you lead the team, and how you lead the business. Within each of these capabilities, leaders

at all levels—whether a new-to-role leader or a seasoned executive—are expected to demonstrate behaviors and actions that are reflective of the organization’s culture, focus on inclusivity, and shared values.

To develop leaders who embody the values and expectations pivotal to the company’s culture, Zendesk offers a wide spectrum of leadership development programs. These programs take a holistic approach to building the knowledge, skills, and mindset leaders need to lead effectively in different situations and at all career levels. This approach helps inculcate behaviors and manifest actions that define what it means to lead at Zendesk.

Zendesk’s Leadership Development Programs

Zendesk runs several leadership development programs, ranging from broad-based programs to customized development opportunities for unique audiences. Each program is customized for the needs and requirements of the target audience (see Figure 1).

In addition to the programs listed in Figure 1, Zendesk also offers personalized experiential onboarding to newly hired leaders. The onboarding experience focuses on what they need to know to be successful in their roles. This onboarding is supplemental to the asynchronous leadership development learning resources available through the company’s learning management system. Furthermore, leaders who are hired at or promoted to senior levels can take an external assessment to guide their developmental journey.

A Closer Look at Ignite: Leadership Development for Underrepresented Talent

The “Ignite” leadership development program at Zendesk is powered by Torch—a people development platform that provides coaching and mentoring, leadership development content, and assessments. This program trains participants and their managers to address the unique challenges experienced by underrepresented talent in the workplace.

Figure 1: Leadership Development Programs at Zendesk

Program Name	Audience	Scope
Illuminate	Early career leaders: newly hired and promoted people managers	Adopting a leadership mindset while making the shift to people management. This program covers management fundamentals and the basics of coaching and feedback.
Accelerate	Mid- to senior-level leaders: directors and senior directors	Enabling managers of managers to lead themselves, their teams, and the business through hyperchange and hypergrowth.
Elevate	Senior-level leaders	Empowering C-suite leaders with the mindset and skills needed to elevate business performance and accelerate growth.
Leadership Coaching	High-performing employees/managers and employee community leaders	Customizing leadership development as an investment in high-performing employees who demonstrate agility and excellence in day-to-day work.
Ignite	Underrepresented talent	Providing employees with the knowledge and skills needed to push through challenges and the resilience to navigate the organization.
Leadership Sprints	All leaders	Focusing learning on a specific topic within a quarter, including group coaching and individual asynchronous learnings on the topic.

Source: The Josh Bersin Company, 2022

The program was first conceived to support women in their career development and provide them with one-to-one mentoring. However, in late 2021, Zendesk expanded the program to any employee who identifies as underrepresented talent. The program was redesigned and rebranded as “Ignite,” with a goal of enabling inclusion and career growth for all underrepresented talent through leadership development.

The desire to create the Ignite program was driven by the company’s strategic imperatives around building a diverse slate of leaders, driving equitable growth and creating development opportunities for all employees, and fostering an inclusive and safe environment where everyone can thrive.

Program Timeline

The Ignite program spans eight months and comprises asynchronous online trainings, one-to-one mentoring, group coaching sessions for participants and their managers, and fireside chats and interactions with executives at Zendesk. A typical program timeline is shown in Figure 2.

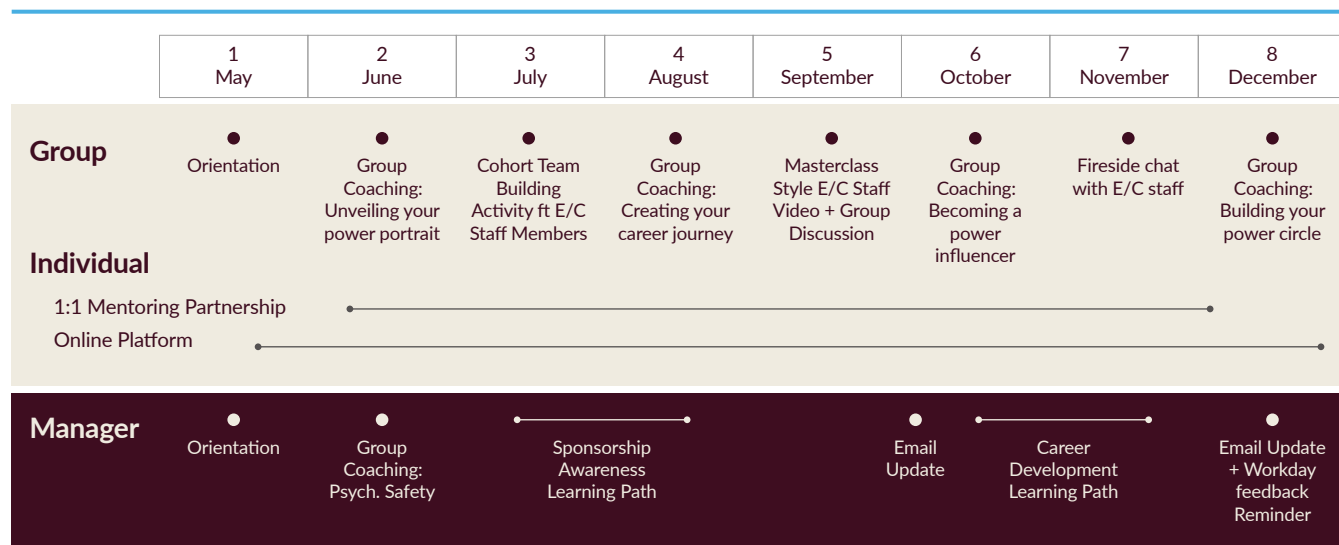
Key Program Elements

The Ignite program combines multiple modalities, including mentoring, group coaching, and online learning, and it is supplemented with C-suite engagements such as fireside

chats and masterclasses. The program is designed and managed in Zendesk’s Torch people development platform. The programs comprise five key elements:

1. **1:1 External Mentoring:** Structured and guided mentoring experiences where employees are paired with a Torch community mentor for a one-on-one personalized development opportunity. These mentors are experienced operating leaders, typically two or more career levels above the matched mentee, who can provide unique perspectives and experience-based learnings.
2. **Manager Support:** Managers of participants in the program commit to attending group coaching sessions to cultivate awareness and skills to better support underrepresented talent.
3. **Supporting Elements:** Leaders add a personalized and fun Zendesk flavor into the program through fireside chats—where employees can interact and ask questions—and masterclass-style videos.
4. **Group Coaching:** Participants engage in dedicated coaching sessions led by Torch on predetermined themes aimed at empowering underrepresented talent. Themes include:
 - Unveiling your power portrait
 - Creating your career journey
 - Becoming a power influencer
 - Building your power circle
5. **Group Learning Paths:** Custom learning paths with resources specifically designed for the Ignite experience.

Figure 2: Ignite Program Timeline



Source: Zendesk, 2021

Role of the Manager

Zendesk recognizes that the manager relationship is a critical success factor for underrepresented employees. The program includes a parallel manager experience to support their managers through Torch-led group coaching sessions and learning pathways. This gives managers an opportunity to see the world through the underrepresented employees' eyes and visualize the additional challenges these employees often face. It helps build empathy and accountability between them and strengthens their relationships. The intent here is to ensure managers are also heavily invested in the program, so underrepresented employees do not have to navigate career growth alone.

Results and Next Steps

Approximately 100 employees and more than 50 managers have gone through the first iteration of the redesigned Ignite program. The program is halfway through as of early 2022, and the midpoint results have been outstanding. In fact, 95% of employees who participated in the program reported high satisfaction with their mentor pairing and mentoring experience, and 91% saw an increase in their motivation to take on more responsibility and own their careers. More than 80% of managers found the group coaching sessions useful and engaging.

On most metrics, Zendesk participants who participated in the Ignite program scored better than Torch's industry benchmark data, as seen in Figure 3. And, overall, the sentiment around

belonging and inclusion among the participants was high, making the program a huge success.

As next steps, Zendesk will continue to ensure underrepresented talent can envision themselves in senior leadership positions, understand the career paths they need to take to get there, leverage opportunities for growth, and build a long-term career at the company. Zendesk has also launched a revised career architecture for helping people understand career levels, professional paths, and leadership paths at the organization. In alignment with its strategic imperative around optimizing performance and career growth, Zendesk will continue to encourage leaders to provide regular, effective, and inclusive feedback on performance and career development on at least a quarterly basis.

Zendesk's holistic approach permeates all its leadership programs, particularly the Ignite program, by combining both the skill set and the mindset needed to lead the way to business success. This approach motivates participants to take ownership of their career journeys and build agility to face challenges in the workplace. The parallel focus on managers of underrepresented talent helps employees receive the support and empathy they need from their managers. Ensuring distinct focused leadership development opportunities for underrepresented talent through coaching and mentoring helps foster equitable career growth opportunities and amplifies inclusion and belonging among these employees. Through a strategic focus on leadership as a driver of people and business success, Zendesk develops leaders who lead with compassion and efficacy.

Figure 3: Midpoint Results of the Ignite Leadership Development Program

Key Area of Measurement	Description of Area Measured	Zendesk's Score	vs. Benchmark
Participation	Participants enrolled in the program	98%	+13%
Engagement	Participants engaged in the program and connecting with their mentors	93%	At par
Value	Participants getting something out of the program	93%	+2%
Behavior Change	Participants reporting a change in behavior that supports a business impact	93%	+4%

Source: The Josh Bersin Company, 2022

About the Authors



Josh Bersin

Josh founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. He expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership and became a recognized expert in the talent market. Josh sold the company to Deloitte in 2012 and was a partner in Bersin by Deloitte up until 2018.

In 2019, Josh founded the Josh Bersin Academy, a professional development academy that has become the "home for HR." In 2020, he put together a team of analysts and advisors who are now working with him to support and guide HR organizations from around the world under the umbrella of The Josh Bersin Company. He is frequently featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *HR Executive*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *CLO Magazine*. He is a popular blogger and has more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.



Nehal Nangia

Nehal is the senior manager for research at The Josh Bersin Company. In this role, Nehal drives empirical research on key workforce-related topics and the development of actionable insights and powerful stories for today's talent executives. Nehal has almost 15 years of professional experience in human capital, with a focus on performance management; employment value proposition; workforce transformation; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Prior to joining The Josh Bersin Company, Nehal was a global advisor for clients at Deloitte and published several studies on pertinent topics such as DEI, performance management, and bias. Nehal lives and works in India and has a master's degree in psychology.

The Josh Bersin Company Membership

The Josh Bersin Company provides a wide range of research and advisory services to help HR leaders and professionals tackle the ever-evolving challenges and needs of today's workforce. We cover all topics in HR, talent, and L&D, including diversity, equity, and inclusion; employee experience; remote and hybrid work; wellbeing; HR strategy and capabilities; learning and career mobility; HR technology; organization design and development; and talent acquisition and mobility.

As a corporate member, you and your HR team get exclusive access to research reports, case studies, definitive guides, playbooks, tech market studies, as well as a variety of tools (including assessments, strategy guides, maturity models, and frameworks). To help you apply insights to your own environment, you'll also get executive briefings and thought leadership sessions as well as personalized advisory support. For deeper relationships and action-oriented learning, you'll be invited to participate in community events, interactive discussions, exclusive webinars, conferences, and interactive learning opportunities.

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