

The Future Talent Barometer

SUMMER SIGNALS 2026

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WONDER • WORKS



Understanding how Future Talent actually think

The generation currently entering the world of work has lived in a world defined by chronic instability. During times of great upheaval, it feels as though the world holds its breath, waiting to see where the chips will fall. Organisations tighten budgets and restrict hiring. Senior employees cling to jobs and defer retirement. Major projects move to the backburner.

However, while organisations may feel frozen by uncertainty, a new generation of talent is navigating formative experiences that will permanently shape their perceptions of work, career longevity, and employer loyalty. Employers may view this period as adaptation and growing pains, but for young talent, it's their first impression.

And that first impression is worse than many may fully grasp it to be: we saw young talent disenchanted, fearful, and outright angry at employers. Our highly automated, hyper-competitive environment isn't just letting some talent slip through the cracks. For the nearly 4,000 voices we surveyed – and in similar rates across countries, genders, and levels of education – the cracks are features, not bugs, and they're built to catch nearly everyone.

As employers revisit (or entirely reprogram) their early careers strategies, data on surface-level symptoms isn't enough to make the right decisions. To build resilient talent pipelines, organisations must understand the root causes of candidate behaviour: their underlying emotions, anxieties, and perceptions of employers.

The Future Talent Barometer is a longitudinal research initiative, led by Tonic, tracking the shifting mindsets of 18-to-24-year-olds across key global markets. In a technical and cultural revolution that changes day by day, we keep our finger on the pulse of early careers talent – surveying approximately 4,000 voices each quarter to give employers the clarity they need to act.

4000

VOICES

8

KEY MARKETS: UK, US, GERMANY, FINLAND, NORWAY, DENMARK, SWEDEN, AUSTRALIA

APAC

STARTING WITH OUR FALL SIGNALS REPORT

18-24

YEARS OLD

Recruitment has never been more efficient. It's rarely felt less transparent.

When we published our **Spring Signals** report, it was clear that this new generation was far more pragmatic than the headlines would have us believe.

Often they're described as entitled, impatient or expecting too much from employers. Spring Signals found almost the opposite; an understanding that the market was difficult, competition for roles was expected, an acceptance that finding a first job will take resilience.

With that in mind, and reading this next report, Summer Signals, I found myself reaching a different understanding of how talented young people are thinking.

**They don't think recruitment is difficult.
They think it's opaque.**

Nobody expects employers to manually review thousands of applications. Nobody expects AI to disappear. Nobody expects every application to end in an interview. What they do expect is to understand how the system works. They want to know what employers are really looking for, how decisions are being made, and what success actually looks like. Too often, they're left to fill in the gaps themselves.

They say that nature abhors a vacuum. So do people. When employers don't explain, candidates invent. They assume the process is unfair. They assume nobody is reading applications. They assume AI has replaced judgement. Whether those assumptions are true almost becomes irrelevant. They shape behaviour all the same.

That's why I think transparency is becoming one of the defining characteristics of a strong emerging talent recruitment brand, and an effective, risk-reduced recruitment process. Not transparency as a communications exercise, but as a principle.

It's clear that emerging talent wants us to explain; the process, the technology, the job. Explain what good looks like. Because in a world where almost every organisation is investing in making recruitment faster, the organisations that stand out may simply be those that make it easier to understand.

If this research encourages more employers to do that, then I think it will have served its purpose.

Tom Chesterton
Chief Executive
Tonic

The 6 signals

When we surveyed early talent for the 2026 Spring Signals report, we asked intentionally broad, open-ended questions to identify the signals buzzing below the popular conversations about early careers at this technological crossroads.

Our six Spring Signals indicated a major shift as this generation enters the workforce: talent is seeking reassurance, not aspirations, to enter the workforce and thrive.

As we embarked on that journey again, and as we'll do for each coming season, we used what we previously uncovered as a compass to navigate the ever-changing landscape. We checked back in on some of the same questions to set strong foundations for longitudinal insights, but also introduced new questions to dive deeper and be responsive to the litany of current events they're living through.

1,

The Confidence Crisis

Self-doubt permeates the psyche of the next generation. Young talent are less worried about getting a job than whether they will succeed once they do. Self-doubt is emerging as a bigger doubt than market conditions.

2,

Gaming a system they don't respect

36.7% of respondents have a negative view of AI in the hiring process, whilst only 21.9% have an overtly positive view – but candidates largely embrace AI as the only way to compete in highly automated and competitive hiring processes.

3,

AI is replacing careers advice before it replaces jobs

This may be the first generation where the 'first advisor' that they turn to is no longer a person. Respondents were nearly twice as likely to use AI for career exploration than interview preparation.

4,

The act of applying has been devalued

Candidates feel like it's a numbers game, and they're right. Future talent are put off by slow, vague and complex hiring processes.

5,

Human interaction is now a premium experience

Automation is scaling. Human interaction is shrinking. And scarcity is increasing its value. 42.8% said human interaction matters most after an unsuccessful application.

6,

Connection is craved but feared

Future talent are eager to seize the social opportunities that work offers, but many feel under-prepared for the interpersonal realities of work. Social and interpersonal concerns ranked as the second biggest source of anxiety when early talent thinks about entering the workforce.

2026 Summer Signals

Highly automated hiring has left a vacuum where human conversations about hiring, employers’ priorities, and feedback, used to bridge the gap between employers and applicants.

It’s clear that disconnection isn’t just an inevitable annoyance of hiring in 2026. Lack of communication has created an echo chamber where the cultural narratives around employers and their ethics are written from the ghost stories of hurt, scared young talent.

- 1,

Personality over perfection.

For a hyper-connected, honest generation, the challenges of a role are the full picture. Rosy depictions feel suspicious, not enticing. **About 1 in 3 wish employers would communicate the experience after hire better**, and with a loud demand for the true ins and outs of the role, team, and company.
- 2,

Fairness feels like a fantasy.

Amid hundreds of applications with similar levels of experience, being the candidate that lands an entry-level role feels a lot more like a lottery than a hiring process. **64%** of respondents couldn’t agree that when they submit a job application, they trust that it will get a fair shot at review and consideration. Without any insight into how companies are sifting through seas of talent, they’re drawing their own conclusions on what helps candidates get across the finish line.
- 3,

Disappointment fades. Betrayal doesn’t.

It’s never fun to lose out on a role you’re excited for – sadness and struggle are expected when you’re looking for your first job. But **2.6x** more respondents were most frustrated by the futility of perceived bad faith processes than the sheer volume and effort the modern job hunt requires. The sadness of rejection is quickly turning to resentment across an entire generation

- 4,

Failure feels permanent.

The most popular anxieties about external threats to career plans – **41%** worried most about potential AI obsolescence or rising cost of living – are cyclical. If you don’t get a job now as AI seems to take over more roles every minute, or secure a high enough salary to stay on top of growing expenses, how will you get back on track? How can you think about crafting your career when you see the door closing on anything else you’d want in life, like being able to afford supporting a family?
- 5,

Respect me? Speak my language.

1 in 4 early talent use AI to understand a specific job they want to apply to, making it as popular as using AI to tweak their CV or resume. Jargon sends potential candidates to AI, not employers, to translate their JDs – and LLMs are happy to speak in plain language without judgement. Talent with less access to career resources are more likely to turn to AI to decode a specific role.
- 6,

Forced to play without a rulebook.

Employers are the gatekeepers to the workforce, and therefore are the ones writing the rules on how to enter. While everyone acknowledges that market uncertainty, widespread access to AI, and intense competition for roles bring us into a new frontier of work, keyword parsers and increasing requirements for entry level roles are nothing new. **1 in 3 early talent want employers to share more about who they’re really looking for and how their hiring systems identify the best hire**. They feel employers have written rules for hiring in 2026, but only want to share outdated playbooks for success.

Signal 1:

Personality over perfection

The generation that made oversharing mundane – that made picking up your phone and venting on video so natural that a pause before speaking immediately aged you – is used to the full picture. Performing a perfectly manicured persona feels out-of-touch. What prior generations may have seen as glossy and aspirational feel dishonest.

That content style has taken on in the work niche. Any young person today has watched hundreds of “Day in the Life”, and, more likely rewarded by social algorithms, “Why I Quit” videos from dream jobs at household name companies by the time they’re applying for work. They’ll have more perspective on what life is like for more people, in more roles, anywhere in the world, than ever before.

When they see a job advertisement or hear the company spiel in an interview, this attuned radar for performance kicks in. They know no job is perfect, so when employers focus on the positives and don’t recognise the challenges it’s not putting their best foot forward, it’s weird.

29.1%

OF RESPONDENTS SAID EMPLOYERS SHOULD COMMUNICATE THE EXPERIENCE AFTER HIRE BETTER.

If a candidate is reading a social post, evaluating a job ad, or getting the – increasingly rare – chance to connect human-to-human in a hiring process, they want the challenges below the value proposition. They know, likely better than any generation before them, that no job is perfect. What they’re looking for is the opportunity to see the road bumps ahead and decide for themselves if they’re up for the challenge.

“I wish I could get a feel for the [experience] to know for a fact if I’m good for the job and save time and energy for everyone.”

-US, 21 years old



“[I wish they would] mention the hardest part of their role and give more in-depth personal experience of how the job is for them.”

-US, 22 years old

For most organisations, this is either too intimidating to consider, or an idea that sounds nice in theory, but can't make it to execution. But right past every “no” is a conversation that could open doors to more direct, honest communications. If we're not interested in showing a balanced look at a role, what are we afraid of happening when we do? If there are reputational concerns, chances are, whatever challenges that would be included are referenced on social and employee review sites – why should those be the only perspectives candidates find on what the job is really like?

Infusing more honest insights can start small: encouraging recruiters and hiring managers to think about what they wish they had known about the work, team, or company before they joined can let your organisation experiment and become more comfortable with transparency on the individual candidate level first.



“I wish they communicated their thoughts on the company better instead of sugar-coating.”

-US, 18 years old

Signal 2:

Fairness feels like a fantasy.

Organisations pride themselves on, and follow legislation mandating, their fair, equal opportunity hiring processes. The idea that organisations are made up of the best people and potential for the job enables trust from customers, communities, partners, and markets.

Changing practices and perceptions of hiring threaten that bedrock: only 36% of respondents agreed that when they submit a job application, they trust that it will get a fair shot at review and consideration.

That means that almost

**2 IN 3
YOUNG PEOPLE**

CAN'T TRUST THAT ANY PARTICULAR HIRING PROCESS IS FAIR.

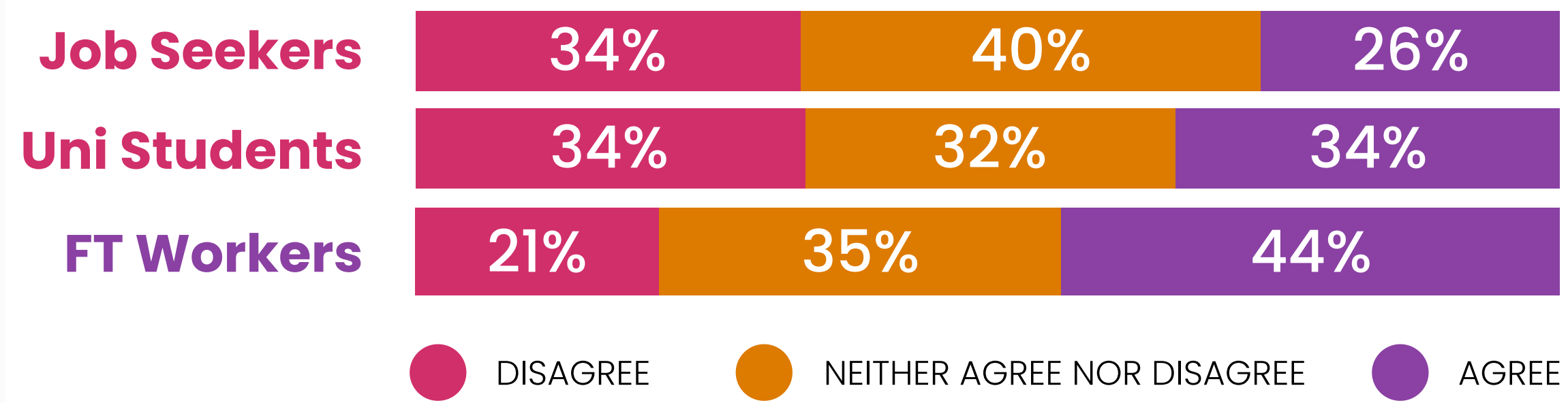
But what is a meritocratic process when roles receive nearly 280 applications on average? When early talent is up against a field of candidates with similarly little professional experience? When the bulk of those applications come in perfectly keyword-optimised to please a machine, because the reality behind ballooning applications is that it isn't possible for most organisations to review hundreds of applications and value what humanity an applicant could inject into their CV?

While employers may very well use a range of tactics to build fairness into that process, young talent rarely – if ever – hear about them. Toxic narratives proliferate in the silence left by automated systems, especially among those further from the workforce: job seekers and university students were most likely to outright disagree that their applications had a fair shot, while full-time workers and students working part-time were most likely to agree they could trust in fair hiring processes.

“Jobs are filled based on the people you know.”

–Finland, 24 years old

When I submit a job application, I trust that it will get a fair shot for review and consideration.



Without any insight into how employers ensure fairness, young talent are forced to develop their own conclusions about organisations’ ethics, values, and practices. Respondents described pay-to-play, nepotism-driven systems where one’s CV and potential barely make a difference.

If this belief has become so pervasive, it’s because it’s so difficult to find even a glimpse into how employers are building meritocracy into their hiring systems. You can find product demos for just about any software in the world on YouTube, but not leading ATS. There’s a massive opportunity to show up as one of the only employers – if not the only – in your market that candidates can confidently say has fair hiring practices by showing where you’ve considered fairness in your tech stack and candidate journey.

It’s easy to talk about AI as a mystical black box, but it’s essential to be curious about the algorithms that hold the first steps of your hiring process. Recruiters should know how their ATS decides which candidates are poor, good, and great fits for the role. They should know what criteria their one-way interview system uses to determine the best interviewees.

While they may have a general sense, your teams should be able to say more about how their systems make decisions than how any common LLM tool does. If it’s embedded into your hiring practices, you should be able to explain how it made its decisions like a human being on your team could explain their own.

“Thousands of people apply for a single job, and if you don’t pay for premium, you don’t have a shot.”

-UK, 24 years old

Signal 3:

Disappointment fades. Betrayal doesn't.

Young talent is sending out hundreds of applications as they watch their peers submit just as many. They understand the simple math: recruiters have to use some tool to help manage the volume of applications, and statistically, most of their applications have to end in rejection.

It's always difficult to lose an opportunity you were excited about, and while there's a compounding emotional toll after months of searching, individual rejections are expected when you cast a net over hundreds of roles. Sadness and struggle are expected in the journey to your first job.

**Disappointment fades.
What lingers, and shape reputations, is betrayal.**

This generation doesn't expect the impossible, but they assume a base psychological contract, largely based on their experiences thus far outside of the workforce. When they try out for a school play, they expect to show up to the same audition as everyone else, have the effort they spent practicing reciprocated with a human being judging their audition, and learn if they made the cast when the decision is made, not after opening night.

For young people across generations, initial trust is cheap. Employers have inherent authority and credibility, and they assume certain ways that credible organisations should engage with them after they've invested effort into applying: their application will get an equal opportunity for the employer's – not its technology's – attention as all other applicants, and that the employer will let them know what choice they've made when they've made it.

But that feeble trust is easily broken. We saw a strong thread connecting unexpected steps or outcomes with leading applicants, evoking feelings of betrayal and resentment. By far, early talent said the most frustrating part of job hunting that employers were ignoring was what felt like bad faith application processes, like ghosting after applications or interviews, job ads for roles that were already filled or would never be, or opaque automation that seems to entirely replace human review and judgement. The futility of working with those systems was cited 2.6 times more than the sheer volume of effort and rejections.

“No one replies anymore, not even to say I didn't get the job. I don't think they even look at the applications”

–UK, 23 years old



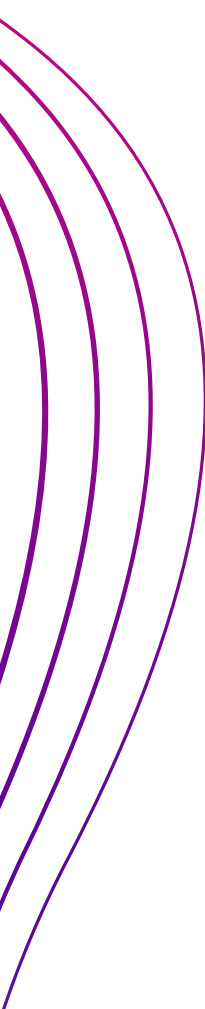
When we asked how different AI-driven hiring tools reflect upon an organisation, early talent was most ambivalent about chatbots on career sites. They're an additional resource layer where humans wouldn't otherwise be there to help, but they're not unique in 2026.

“People aren’t statistics, so at least send out a rejection letter rather than completely wasting our time and ignoring us.”

–US, 23 years old

Automated application responses leaned negative, as the lack of feedback is frustrating, but had a more even distribution of ambivalence and positivity. Our Spring Signals showed that, if an applicant doesn't have a chance at the role, an automatic rejection is better than waiting weeks or months for the same decision. Further, keyword parsers appeared in hiring in the mid-2000s, so we don't expect a human to reach out at that stage anymore.

The tool that reflected worst upon organisations was one-way interviews, where applicants speak to their camera or an AI avatar. The interview stage is exactly where we expect to meet someone at the organisation and engage with equal effort. While we uncovered how applying has been devalued in our Spring Signals, interviews cannot be automated like customising a CV or resume can, so the candidate's investment in that step feels disproportionately higher than the employer's.



For many employers, one-way interviews are reviewed by a human – but if the reasoning and process behind it isn't laid out when employers ask candidates to complete one, it's yet another black box to form narratives around. If they don't know if that recording goes through AI or a human, they feel set up to fail because those different channels grade those interviews in fundamentally different ways – and that the contract of good faith is broken.

AI should enhance relationships, not replace or objectify them. When AI is used in the hiring process, employers should explain where it comes into play and how it helps them make decisions. When candidates have to move through processes without that context, they assume employers don't care whether or not they could be a great candidate if they won't provide the details needed to succeed, so they play into the numbers game.



“The use of AI in the process of screening for potential employers makes job hunting extremely difficult because it forces people to focus on what the AI wants to hear rather than just focusing on displaying their resume in an authentic way that a human would have no difficulty recognizing the quality of.”

-US, 22 years old

Signal 4:

Failure feels permanent.

In our Spring Signals report, we shined the spotlight on this generation's confidence crisis: when our respondents thought about what made them most anxious about joining the workforce,

26.6%

FEARED FAILURE DUE TO THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE OR COMPETENCE.

Now, we're seeing how the structural changes happening around them contribute to that fear.

AI feels like the first tech revolution in the history of our species with no real end in sight. It promises, especially if you're listening to those companies flirting with IPOs, to get smarter and smarter by the day. Silicon Valley is gripped by the idea that AI will create a permanent underclass of perpetual unemployment, and that this is your golden window to escape it — and depending on what echo chamber algorithms have assigned them to, students either see that term in memes or are urged to take advantage of this window. Either way, it's on their feeds. What does failure mean when permanent underclass is trending?

For the Summer Signals report, in addition to asking what they feared most about entering the workforce, we asked what external events they were most concerned about.

41%

OF RESPONDENTS CITED CYCLICAL CONCERNS LIKE THE THREAT OF TECH OBSOLESCENCE AND THEIR ABILITY TO FIND WORK THAT KEEPS UP WITH THE RISING COST OF LIVING.

If you don't get a job now to build professional skills and establish a sufficient salary, when will you jump back on the wagon? As one respondent put it, they're "racing to find stability under a constantly ticking clock".

Respondents further connected competition with fear and heartbreak in these dire circumstances: competing against friends for roles and watching bright peers fail. If there are few roles available, what will your friends do who don't get that opportunity? What does it mean for you when the smartest kid you know can't break through?

No young person can write their most authentic CV, conduct their best interview, or execute their best work after hire under that kind of pressure. Celebrating stories of failure can assure young talent that mistakes are expected and valued for their learnings.

However, promoting that narrative before they enter an organisation or team where mistakes are shamed and reflect upon an employee's work ethic or ability is worse than no assurance. This generation needs managers who have worked through their own perfectionism and fear of failure.

Building psychological safety and growth mindsets into your management training is a win-win for your entire organisation, from your youngest hires to your C-suite.

Signal 5:

If you respect me, you'll speak my language

In our last report, we uncovered something that surprised us: that as young talent were told to use LLMs as tool and thought partner to prepare for interviews over the few years since Gen AI was released to the general public, about twice as many respondents were using it for research and exploration during their job search than for interview preparation and advice.

The next question to explore, then, was that if young people are turning to AI for research, what are they missing from employers that sends them looking for answers in LLMs?

Again, we heard respondents asking for clarity, but not to understand hidden requirements – they were clamouring for less jargon and simpler, straightforward language in the requirements on the page.

**1 IN 4
YOUNG TALENT**

REPORTED USING AI TO RESEARCH A SPECIFIC JOB THEY WANTED TO APPLY TO, THE SAME PROPORTION AS RESPONDENTS WHO USED AI TO OPTIMISE OR CORRECT THEIR CVs OR RESUMES.

While hyper-optimised CVs have dominated discussion about how this generation is responding to modern hiring systems, recruiters have missed this equally popular and alarming behaviour.

This was highest (34.1%) among respondents who did not complete GCSEs, high school, or another global equivalent – groups that have less access to career resources and visibility to opportunities than their peers who go on to university or other education.

The most popular jargon across job advertisements* is so embedded in work language that it feels like everyday, accessible speech to many, but in reality, they're fairly unique to the workplace dialect. What one organisation means by dynamic will differ from the next.

LLMs, however, are rooted in Natural Language Processing: a branch of computer science focused on giving computers the ability to "understand" human language.

"Their wording is often very vague and similar to what other employers say, but they somehow mean entirely different things and it's very confusing. I'd like more details."

-UK, 20 years old

Before an LLM reads a sentence, it breaks the words down into smaller pieces called tokens (often syllables or parts of words). Common words usually equal one token, while more complex or context-dependent words are fragmented into multiple tokens, forcing the model to do extra computational math. Simpler vocabulary keeps the tokenisation clean and efficient, so models prefer to take information and speak in common language.

And whether or not an LLM accurately defines what a particular organisation means by “dynamic”, it doesn’t judge the user for asking. For early career talent, especially those with less exposure to career preparation and resources, not understanding what an employer clearly assumes to be shared language feels like a sign that this isn’t the role for them – and maybe a one that employer put up intentionally.



However, as simple as that sounds, organisations that are deeply immersed in corporate dialects often swap jargon for synonyms that read similarly to outsiders. Consider setting aside dedicated time with business and talent teams to walk through what they’re really hunting for beneath common jargon. While “what do you mean by dynamic?” could fit into an email thread, it could also start a rich dialogue about what’s valued in your organisation and the different types of talent that could bring those traits and skills.

“Employers often underexplain things to a point where less experienced people might have a problem catching on. I often have to ask for things multiple times before I get the help I need.”

-US, 19 years old

Signal 6:

Forced to play without a rulebook.

Entry-level jobs have eroded from two directions, now leaving us with a paralysed early careers market: gradually since 2008 through chronic economic crises that have continually ramped up competition by forcing more experienced hires to look for entry-level roles, and rapidly from the integration of AI that executes previously entry-level tasks.

The reality in 2026 is that, for many roles, the theoretical qualifications may be low, but the competitive qualifications are not. Someone could do well in the job with 0-1 years of experience and limited exposure to certain skills or tools. But that job will get an average of nearly 280 applicants, often with more CVs than recruiters can read bringing 2-3 years of experience, and at least a full interview slate of talent pre-skilled and trained in that workplace's tools of choice.

What do you wish employers communicated better throughout their application or hiring processes?

Experience after hire	29.1%
What they're looking for in a candidate	21.2%
How the hiring process works	19.6%
Contractual information (e.g., salary, hours)	19.1%

As young talent sifts through inboxes full of rejections for entry-level roles that regret to inform them that the position was filled by a better fit or someone with more relevant experience, they're frustrated. They have no context on what made other candidates competitive, not just eligible, and no idea how an organisation's hiring process identifies who was competitive. But if someone was ultimately selected, it's clear to the rejected applicants that those unwritten rules existed somewhere out of reach.

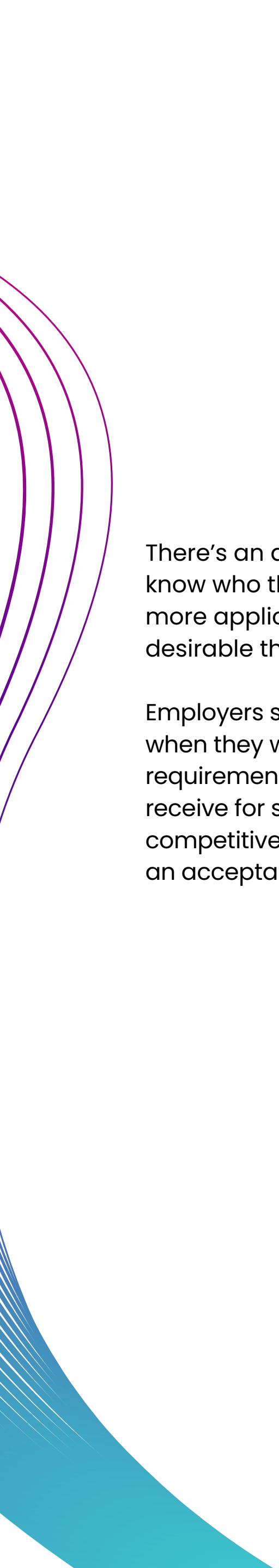
We've already touched on the biggest thing early talent wish employers would communicate better: the experience after hire. But the top 3 are rounded out by what feels opaque in the hiring process: what employers are actually looking for and how the hiring process really works to identify the strongest candidate.

1 IN 3

RESPONDENTS WERE LOOKING FOR MORE TRANSPARENCY
IN EITHER OR BOTH OF THOSE AREAS.

"I wish they would communicate more about what they want for that role... I applied to a job that I thought I was a great candidate for, due to the job description, to then be rejected as I wasn't applicable."

-UK, 19 years old



There's an alarming, prevalent narrative growing that companies know who they'd want to hire, but don't disclose that to encourage more applicants to hand over their personal data or boost how desirable their organisation looks in the market.

Employers should take a 360 degree look at their talent ecosystems when they write a job advertisement, beyond what the base requirements should be – how many applicants do they typically receive for similar roles? And where does the line between viable and competitive typically sit? Any insight into an ideal candidate, not just an acceptable one, would be valued by this exhausted generation.

“[I wish employers communicated] what type of requirements an applicant would need to get a simple ‘thank you for applying’... times are hard, and sure, many may be desperate, but exploiting that is not right.”

-UK, 19 years old

Leadership Brief

For talent acquisition teams working with early talent, the unprecedented times we entered years ago have only mutated into an unprecedented paradox. Teams face lean budgets and immense pressure from senior leadership to prove ROI amidst soaring application volumes. But as this generation leans into harmful narratives to make sense of the broken system between them and their first career steps, employers can't afford to wait to see if other organisations or vendors find the magic key to fix it.

There's good news for employers that are ready to seek their own solutions: even small steps towards transparency and acknowledgement of what this generation has to navigate goes a long way in a hiring ecosystem that's serving them radio silence.

Signal	Impact to employers	What to do next
Personality over perfection. Candidates see glossy depictions as intentionally incomplete. 1 in 3 young talent wish employers communicated the experience after hire better.	Hidden road bumps drive attrition. Challenges are inevitable, but visible signage is the difference between road bumps that make you slow down and ones that send you to the mechanic.	De-gloss your candidate messaging. Encourage interviewers to share what they wish they had known before joining. Embed challenges into candidate communications and own the narratives that employee reviews are writing for you.
Fairness feels like a fantasy. 2 in 3 can't trust that any individual job application has a fair shot at review and consideration.	Toxicity thrives in the silence left by automation. Meritocracy sounds like a talking point when candidates only see mass rejection without any context. An entire generation is accepting the worst – that employers engage in unfair, pay-to-play practices – as fact.	Demystify your tech stack. Know precisely how the system ranks candidates, and explore how your organisation could give a peek behind that curtain to help the best truly rise to the top.

Signal	Impact to employers	What to do next
Disappointment fades. Betrayal doesn't. Sadness is an expected step in the journey to their first job, but many common hiring practices feel like bad faith engagement. 2.6x more cited that futility as the biggest pain point than the volume and effort of the modern job hunt.	AI is a tool – but what's helpful becomes harmful without instructions. One-way interviews reflect worst on organisations because they replace where we still expect to have human interaction. How can a company say they want you to succeed if they won't tell you if a human or robot is reviewing that video? And if they don't want you to succeed, what else do they want from you?	Use AI to enhance, not objectify, relationships. If utilising tools like asynchronous video interviews, explain why it's used, what or who is reviewing it, and what rubric it's using.
Failure feels permanent. 41% worry most about cyclical external threats like AI and cost of living, so mistakes feel like they cost them their only chances at success.	Fear paralyses performance. Candidates and new hires who work under extreme anxiety cannot perform at their best, let alone at perfection. Results suffer when organisations don't relax those fears.	Operationalise psychological safety. Integrate growth mindsets and embracing the learnings after failure into management training. Promote stories of mistakes and resilience from leaders that have grown through it all.

Signal	Impact to employers	What to do next
Respect me? Speak my language. 1 in 4 turn to LLMs to decode what job descriptions actually mean – as many as those who use it to optimise or correct their CV.	Jargon causes candidates – and the AI tools they use – to move on and look elsewhere. Candidates, especially those with less access to career advice, view jargon as deliberate gatekeeping. LLMs also speak in natural language, so if it can't immediately process jargon, it will cite the competitor that speaks more clearly.	Uncover the plain language truths beneath the jargon your organisation uses. Meet with business teams to strip legacy jargon from listings. Replace abstract words with clear, common language that humans and machines alike can understand.
Forced to play without a rulebook. Early talent feel employers are hiding the modern rules of engagement: 1 in 3 wish employers told them more about what they're really looking for and how their processes actually work to find that persona.	Vague, baseline requirements clog the system. Listing low base requirements while hiring applicants with more experience and skills creates anger and fuels the cycle of spamming CVs.	Identify the personas that are likely to be hired. Look at your holistic hiring trends and determine the level of experience and skills that consistently make it to the finish line.

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Visit our **Future Talent Barometer site**
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more about Tonic.

