



HIRING FUTURE-READY EARLY TALENT

A research report

Alanna Harrington, Managing Research Consultant
Emily Goldsack, R&D Consultant



Contents

Introduction	3
Our research	5
Methodology	6
Findings:	7
Challenges faced by hiring managers in early career professional recruitment	
1 Defining the key competencies and skills required	9
What competencies are most important to assess?	10
How will these competencies prepare early career professionals for the future of work?	11
Key takeaways	12
2 Attracting early career professionals in a competitive environment	10
What factors attract early career professionals?	10
What factors stop early career professionals from applying?	15
Key takeaways	16
3 Assessing early career professionals in a relevant and engaging manner	17
Insights from early career professionals	12
Assessment length	22
Insights from managers	23
Key takeaways	24
Final reflections	25
References	27
Appendix 1	28
Appendix 2	32



Introduction

A clear strategy for hiring early career talent is essential for professional organisations.

The so-called 'Great Resignation' in many regions, the labour market has slowed. However, the Economist reports that in the United States, the 'war for talent' is far from over, with 70% of employers struggling to fill positions. In a recent survey of the talent landscape,² 74% of respondents from EU-based organisations said labour shortages were an enterprise-wide challenge.

Despite current economic challenges across much of the globe, it is likely that competition for talent will sustain in the long term, given the predicted global shortage of new entrants to the workforce and an aging working population. The US Bureau for Labor Statistics¹ reports that occupations typically requiring a bachelor's degree are expected to have an average of 3.3 million openings each year until 2032, with employment growth at the fastest rate of any occupation type. This is driven by a combination of new jobs created, individuals moving to different occupations, and exits from the labour force. To address shortages of labour and skills as a result of the retiring population, it is imperative to attract employees in the early stages of their careers to keep your talent pipeline flowing.

How we define early career professionals:



Individual contributors working in roles in professional settings with less than five years of experience and no line management responsibilities.



In recent years, the early talent landscape has transitioned. Factors such as demographic changes, rapid advancement of technology, and the move to hybrid working mean that the skills required for success in early career roles have shifted. As mentioned, organisations often face a very competitive recruiting environment. Candidates who are a good fit for the role are in high demand. This, coupled with the changing demographics of the workforce (by next year, Gen Z will make up 27% of workers⁴), means it's important to reconsider what factors attract early career talent to organisations and their roles.

To address these challenges, we explored the perspectives of candidates, current employees, and hiring managers for early career professional roles. Allowing us to compare and contrast these insights to provide a well-rounded understanding of the wants and needs of the early talent market. This research report highlights our findings across three critical areas:

- 1 Early careers success criteria:** Defining the key competencies and skills required to succeed in these roles.
- 2 Early talent attraction:** Attracting early talent in an increasingly competitive environment.
- 3 Early talent assessment:** Assessing early talent in a relevant and engaging manner.

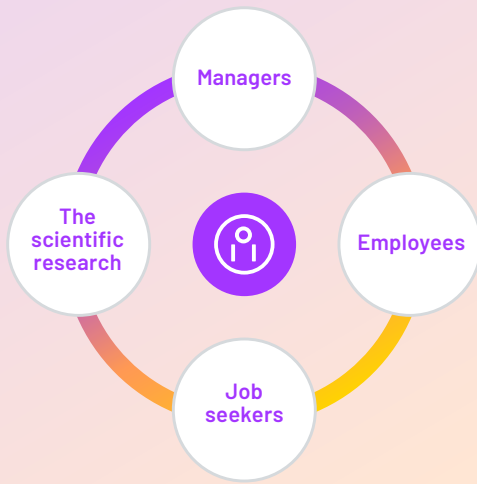
These areas are essential for designing a selection process that ensures employers find the right talent for early career professional roles and set organisations up for long-term success.



Our research

As part of our research, we combined two methods to ensure a well-rounded perspective, grounding our work in current research and capturing fresh, relevant data from real-world experiences:

- 1 We conducted an in-depth review of the latest scientific research on early career professional hiring and retention, looking at articles published between 2016 and 2024.



- 2 We undertook a global survey study with three different populations:

- **Managers** – We surveyed managers with previous experience in hiring for early career professional roles (N = 560, 18 countries represented). The sample included participants from various industries and organisations of different sizes.
- **Current employees** – This sample consisted of individuals currently employed in an early career professional role with less than five years of experience (N = 564, 15 countries represented). The mean age of respondents was 26 years. They worked in various industries, and organisations of different sizes.
- **Current job seekers** – We also surveyed recent graduates seeking employment in professional or white-collar roles (N = 138, 17 countries represented). The mean age of respondents was 25 years, and they were applying to roles in various industries.

Full details about the sample demographics are available in [Appendix 1](#).

The purpose was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the early talent hiring landscape and to explore the perspectives of both recruiters and applicants.

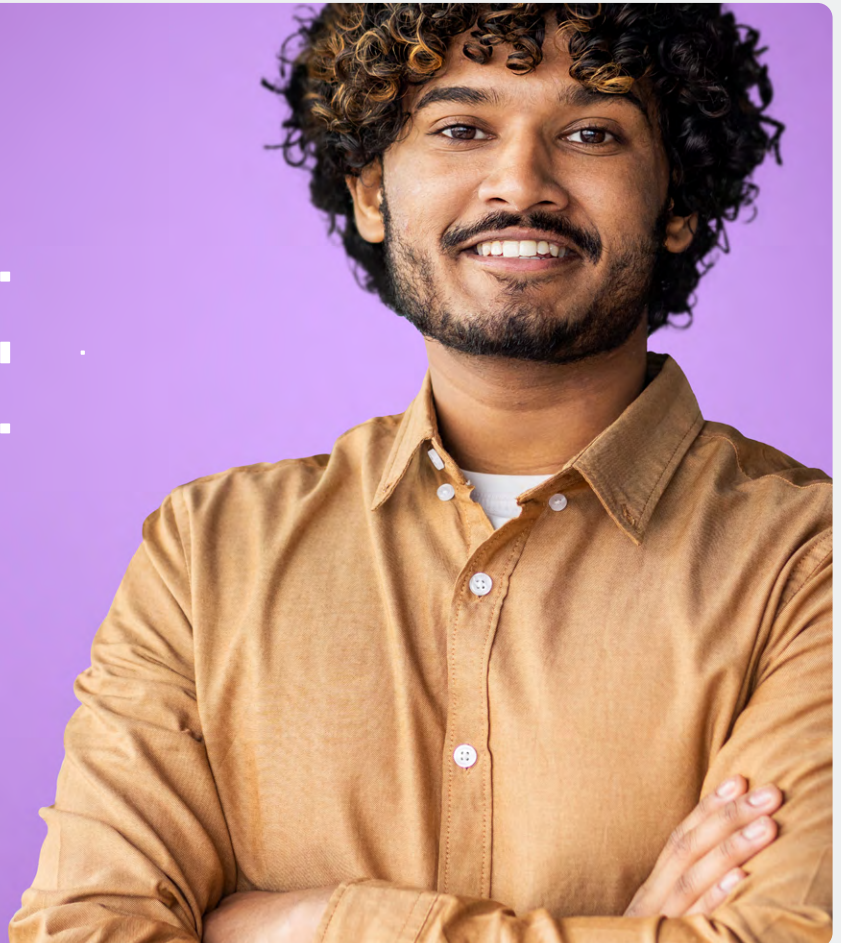
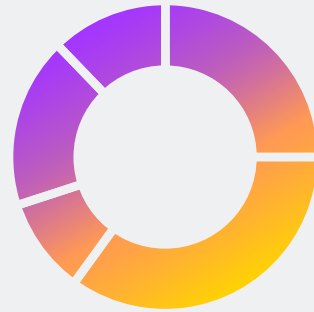
Regions covered by our research:



Methodology

The insights in this report have been drawn from quantitative and qualitative analysis of our survey results:

- Statistical analyses were conducted to examine frequency and distributions within the data, so that we could compare results across different samples and demographic groups.
- Topic modelling was used to analyse open text survey responses. This is a type of analysis that uses machine learning to identify clusters or themes within a collection of text.



Challenges faced by hiring managers in early career professional recruitment

When embarking on this research, we first sought to gain an understanding of the challenges experienced when hiring early career professionals. We asked hiring managers about the obstacles they typically encounter when hiring for these positions and identified some key themes:

1 Fit

Hiring managers experience difficulty when finding candidates who are an overall good fit, not only when looking at the skills and competencies required for the specific role, but also for the team and organisational culture.

“Ensuring that early career professionals fit into the company culture and work well with existing teams can be a challenge.”

“It can be difficult to ensure that early career candidates’ skills match the unique demands of the company.”

2 Experience

Given the nature of these roles, it is to be expected that most applicants have very little work experience. Hiring managers find it particularly challenging to evaluate and compare candidates with no prior job history. Although the pandemic was not mentioned by managers, it is reasonable to assume candidates for early career professional roles may have had less opportunity to gain work experience.

“One notable challenge is assessing candidates’ potential and aptitude rather than relying solely on past work experience, as many candidates may have limited professional backgrounds.”

3 Size of applicant pool/ market competition

Many hiring managers stated that they either are not receiving sufficient applications or receiving a large number with a very low proportion of those meeting the requirements for the role. Some attributed these challenges to increasing competition in the early talent space.

“Early career talent is in high demand, and many organisations compete for the same pool of candidates. Standing out with unique opportunities and a positive candidate experience is crucial.”

4 Salary expectations

Hiring managers noted that one of the key challenges they face is not being able to meet the salary expectations of candidates for early career professional roles. This extends beyond base compensation; early career professionals are also likely to have high expectations for their benefit packages, especially when it comes to time off and retirement/pension plans.

“Early career professionals are wanting higher salaries for junior roles which the company aren’t willing to pay for. The company also aren’t competitive enough in term of the package provided either, e.g. pension, holidays, etc. compared to others.”

Other themes

As experts in this space, we know that the potential use of generative AI for assistance in the hiring process is a rising concern. Interestingly, this did not emerge as a key theme from managers. However, when asked about it directly, almost 70% indicated they were at least somewhat concerned about this topic, although only 15% were very concerned. While this does indicate that this topic requires attention, it appears that it is not currently one of the most pressing challenges when it comes to early career hiring, and as such is not a main focus of this paper.

Although hiring managers were asked specifically about challenges relating to hiring early career professionals, some of the topics raised related more to challenges faced once talent is on-boarded. Managers frequently mentioned the level of training required and the time and resource investment that this results in. The degree of confidence exhibited by early career professionals was mentioned as a key challenge, interestingly both in terms of overconfidence and lack of confidence. While this is not a focus of the current report, Talogy will explore challenges related to early talent development in future research.

In the next sections, we discuss how to address the key challenges faced specifically in the hiring process. To do this, we focus on three key strategies:

- **Defining the key competencies and skills required for the role** and ensure your selection process adequately assesses these criteria.
- **Attracting the right early career talent in a competitive environment.**
- **Designing a relevant and engaging assessment process** to ensure you are retaining candidates throughout, enabling you to select the right talent.



1 Defining the key competencies and skills required

One of the most significant challenges identified was distinguishing between candidates with little work experience to evaluate or compare. One way to overcome this is to focus more on skills-based hiring, which assesses candidates based on their skills rather than on degrees or other, more conventional credentials. This approach has become prominent in recent years partly due to demand for talent and certain digital skills in particular. It can also be attributed to an increased uptake in higher education, meaning educational credentials become less useful as a screening criterion. Skills-based hiring can help to address talent gaps and is often used as a strategy for enhancing the diversity of the application pool, as it removes barriers to entry that may disproportionately impact certain demographic groups. This greater emphasis on competencies and skills makes it more important than ever to determine an effective approach for this part of your hiring process.

Before designing a selection process for early career roles, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the competencies required. This can be challenging for several reasons:

- 1 Hiring early career professionals is just the beginning of your talent pipeline. Many organisations aim to hire individuals who not only possess the right competencies and skills for their initial role, but also show potential for future success in the organisation.
- 2 Early career professionals are often hired into training schemes or programs where they might rotate between different roles and departments, thus requiring a broad skill set.
- 3 The rapid pace of technological advancements means that the competencies and skills required for these types of roles are changing frequently. In addition, the competencies and skills taught in higher education do not always keep pace with technological advancements and other developments in the world of work. Consequently, there may be a substantial disparity between the competencies required and those possessed by applicants.

NOTE

Although there is much discussion on the topic of skills-based hiring, at Talogy we believe that skills and competencies are not inherently different approaches. Skills are learned, applied abilities required to complete a task that may encompass both job-specific skills (e.g. coding, graphic design) and transferable skills (e.g. writing, influencing, critical thinking). In contrast, competencies are broader than skills – they are sets of behaviours that contribute to job performance, which are influenced by knowledge, skills, ability, personality and motivation). Both approaches focus on objectively identifying the right person for your organisation based on job-relevant criteria but adopt a slightly different lens. The core tenet of the skills-based hiring approach is to move away from screening based on traditional credentials towards a greater focus on capabilities.

With these challenges in mind, our research sought to understand which competencies are currently considered most important for success in these types of roles by current employees and their managers. This becomes even more prevalent as the workplace continues to change at an accelerated pace. Organisations need to ensure that the competencies they are using in recruitment measure the behaviours needed for success in an evolving world of work. It is equally important that early talent professionals understand what is expected of them as they start out in their careers and navigate a complex job market.⁵

What competencies are most important to assess?

To explore what competencies are currently deemed most important for early career professionals we sought input from employees of these roles, who are likely to be the most knowledgeable of the job requirements. We also surveyed supervisors who can have a broader perspective on how the requirements for the roles relate to organisational strategy.

They were asked to rate the importance of each competency, and to select 5-10 competencies that they deemed essential for the role from the list of competencies in the Talogy competency framework. See [Appendix 2](#) for a full list of these competencies with definitions.

EARLY CAREER PROFESSIONAL	RANK	MANAGER
Communication	1	Teamwork
Problem Solving	2	Communication
Teamwork	3	Problem Solving
Critical Thinking	4	Building Relationships
Building Relationships	5	Integrity
Adaptability	6	Critical Thinking
Learning Agility	7	Adaptability
Personal Development	8	Accountability
Quality Focus	9	Quality Focus
Integrity	10	Strategic Thinking

Employee sample (N=564) and manager sample (N=561)

We asked both groups:

Which of the following competencies do you think are the most important for successful performance in an early career professional role?

Early career professionals and managers ranked the same top three competencies as most important (Problem Solving, Communication, and Teamwork), although in a slightly different order. There is consensus that interpersonal and problem-solving skills are essential for these roles. We also investigated whether there are regional differences, and found that, overall, there is consistency across regions, with the same competencies being typically ranked as the most important.

This aligns with other research, which shows that effective teamwork, solving problems and communication tend to be seen as very important across regions, roles and industries.^{6,7}

How will these competencies prepare early career professionals for the future of work?

Our findings give a good indication of what competencies are important for success in an early career professional role right now. However, the world of work is one of constant change, so it's important to also consider how well these competencies will persevere in the future. According to the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs report,⁸ employers estimate that 44% of workers' skills will be disrupted in the next five years – meaning the competencies and skills required could fundamentally change. It's especially important to be forward-thinking when hiring early career professionals, as they provide your organisation with a talent pipeline to fill different roles in the future.

It's difficult for any type of research to identify the competencies that will be needed in the future accurately, but there is a small body of existing literature on the competencies and skills needed for the future of work. In our review of the recent research on this topic, several key themes emerged (see table below):

There is broad alignment between these themes and the competencies ranked as most important by both employees and managers in our research including:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Cognitive Skills (Critical Thinking, Problem Solving)
- Adaptability

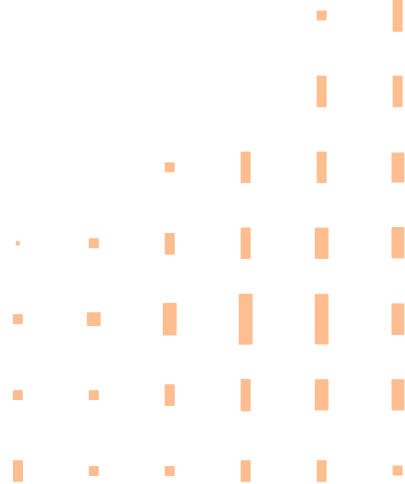
However, learning, while rated highly in importance by employees, with both Learning Agility and Personal Development featuring in the top 10, did not feature prominently in the manager's ranking. This may suggest that managers are focused more on what early career professionals are going to bring to their role right now and may not be thinking as much about the evolution of their roles over time.

It is notable that Digital Dexterity (our competency most aligned with Digital Competence/Skill) was not highly ranked in importance by either group of survey respondents.

When asked specifically about the skills gaps of the early talent population, managers did list technological competence as one of the key themes. There is a subtle distinction between digital dexterity and existing digital competence which may explain this – digital dexterity is the capacity to rapidly adopt new technologies, either through adeptly grasping their usage (where needed) or through understanding their impact and empowering others to use them as needed. Again, it may be that more value is placed on already acquired technology skills as opposed to the capacity to grasp them.

While the specific skills required for success may undergo significant change in the years to come, it's clear that there are competencies that have remained relatively stable over time, including communication and collaboration, that can provide early career professionals with a solid basis to expand upon. Competencies that are on the rise like critical thinking, creativity, learning agility, and adaptability are likely to further increase in importance.

THEME	STUDY
Communication	Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), ⁹ Chaka (2020) ¹⁰
Teamwork	Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), Kowal et al. (2022) ¹¹
Creativity	Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), Kowal et al. (2022), Chaka (2020)
Cognitive Skills	Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), Chaka (2020), World Economic Forum (2023)
Digital Competence/Skill	Kowal et al. (2022), World Economic Forum (2023)
Learning	Kowal et al. (2022), World Economic Forum (2023)
Adaptability	Li (2023), ¹² World Economic Forum (2023)



Key takeaways

Assess a broad range of competencies, across social and cognitive skills, and adaptability:

Incorporate a blend of soft skills, cognitive skills, and competencies that will help people to navigate a changing work environment in the assessment process. A well-rounded evaluation across these core areas is likely to predict success in a broad range of professional roles.

Consider both current and future needs:

Think about both the competencies and skills needed for success in the role right now and also what might be needed in the future. Ideally, early career hires would remain with the organisation and evolve to take on greater responsibilities.

Focus on trainability, not just immediate success:

Given the changing nature of work and technology, as well as the difficulty of finding sufficient time and resources for training, focus on criteria that indicates whether a candidate will have successful training outcomes.

REMEMBER

Before launching a selection process, it's still essential to conduct a job analysis to understand the requirements for that specific role. How to best approach this may differ depending on organisational context, but common methods include focus groups or surveys with subject matter experts.



2 Attracting early career professionals in a competitive environment

Once the competencies and skills required for the role have been identified, the next challenge to overcome is attracting a talent pool that possesses those qualities. Feedback from hiring managers highlighted that there is often tough competition to attract the best talent for these roles.

While organisations are evaluating candidates to ensure they are a good fit for the role, candidates also assess the organisation throughout the hiring process to evaluate if it's the right fit for them. We know from research that in the earliest stages of the hiring process, candidates primarily consider whether the organisation has good alignment with their priorities, before turning their attention to whether the role itself is a good fit in later stages of the process.

What factors attract early career professionals?

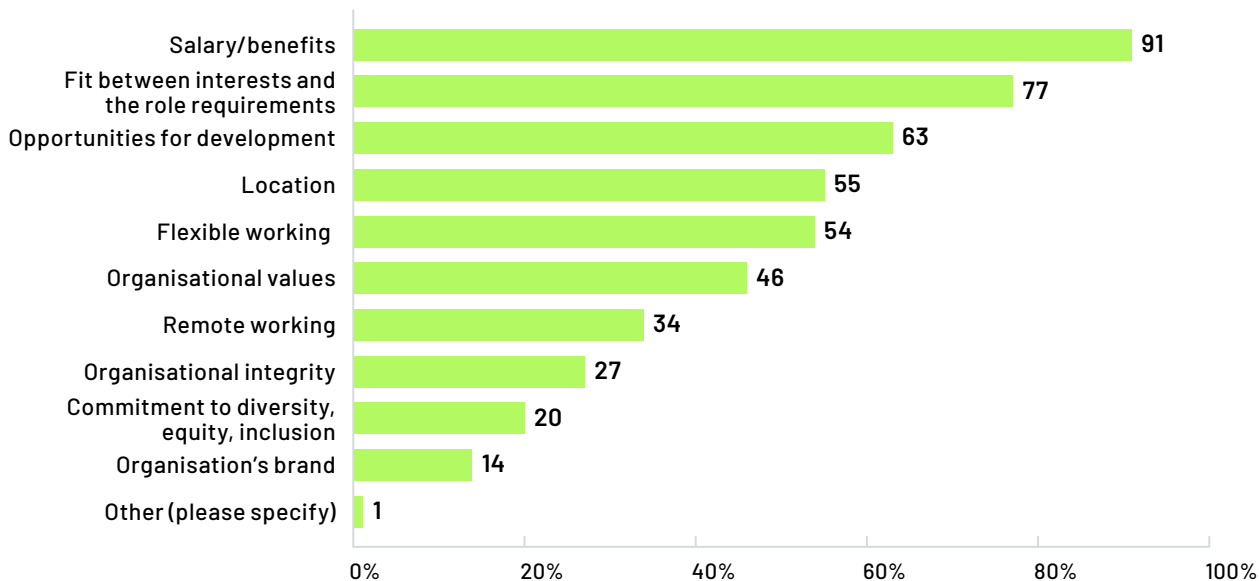
If organisations want to attract the right talent for future success, then they need to understand the priorities and motivations of today's early career professionals.

To explore this, we asked early career employees and job seekers:

//

Which of the following factors are the most important to you when applying to an organisation?* (select 5)

//



* Note that the employee and job seeker sample were combined for this analysis as they showed the same pattern of responses (N=702).

Unsurprisingly, compensation was almost universally considered a top factor. This is in line with a recent report¹³ that found that cost of living is the top concern for both Gen Z and Millennials currently.

Fit between interests and role requirements was also a key factor. We know from research that typically, fit with the organisation is a top priority when initially selecting a job, but when choosing to commit to an organisation, role fit becomes a key priority.¹⁴ It also increases in importance as applicants progress through the selection process, so it's valuable to provide a realistic job preview at all stages. This applies in both directions: managers also expressed that finding candidates with good organisation, role and team fit was a key challenge they faced when hiring for these roles.

Opportunities for development are also well established as a motivator for the current generation. To attract, and later retain your early talent hires, it's crucial to have a clearly outlined onboarding and ongoing development process. This is an area where some organisations may be lacking as, when asked about key challenges experienced by early career professionals, managers emphasised the difficulty of finding growth opportunities.

There has been much discussion in the media on the factors that motivate the job choices of Gen Z, who are likely to make up the bulk of applicants for early career professional roles in the coming years. To explore this in our research, we compared the responses of millennials versus Gen Z (classifying those born in 1997 and later as Gen Z). However, it's important to keep in mind that there isn't universal agreement on how to classify generations, or on a scientific approach to separating the effects of generation from other contributing factors such as age. In fact, reviews of existing research have found little consistent evidence of generational effects.¹⁵

There was considerable alignment, but Gen Z prioritised remote work far less than their Millennial counterparts (30% versus 42%). They also prioritised opportunities for development more highly (63% versus 57%). This suggests that there may not be as significant a difference in the factors influencing Gen Z's job choice decisions as one might expect. As mentioned, it's difficult to identify the impact of generation itself on these differences. It's just as likely that these differences are driven more by age and life stage than by generational identity – for example, it makes sense that Millennials, who are more likely to have families and a more suitable space to work from home, would prioritise remote working.

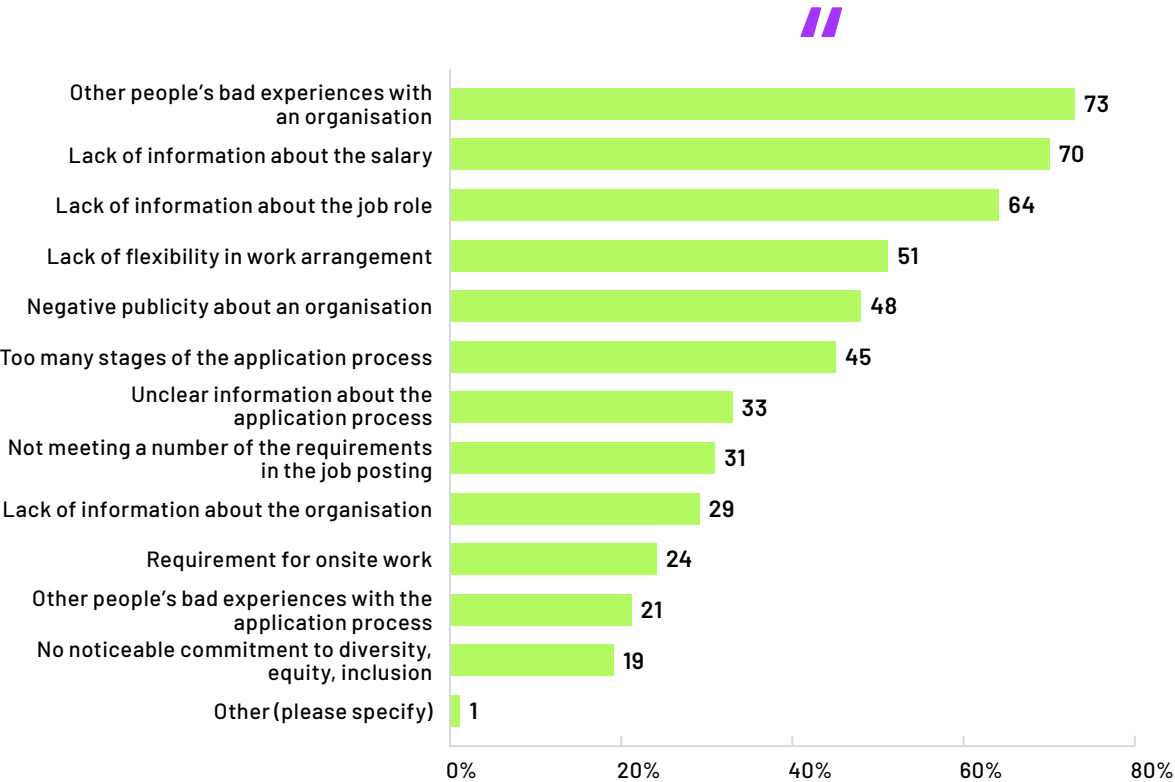


What factors stop early career professionals from applying?

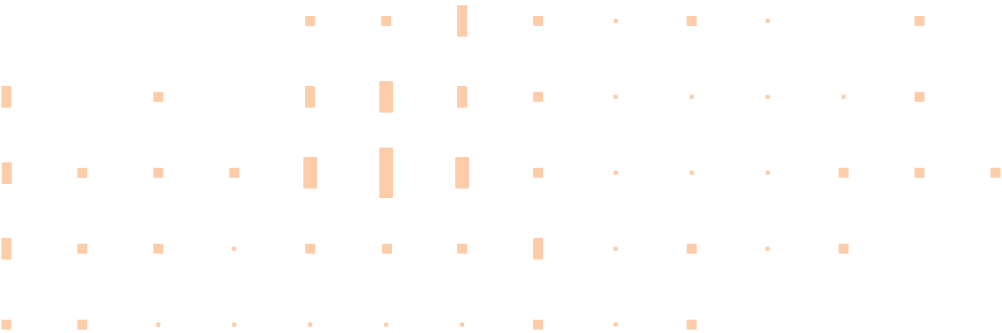
As much as it's important to identify what attracts candidates, it can also be useful to look at deterrents. We were also interested in what factors would potentially stop them from applying to an organisation.

To explore, this we asked the same sample of employees and job seekers (N=702):

Which of the following factors are the most likely to stop you from applying for a job at an organisation? (select 5)



While these largely correspond with the factors that would attract an individual to an organisation, reputation clearly also plays a key role in influencing job choice decisions. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure both accepted and rejected applicants come away with a positive impression of the organisation.





Key takeaways

Showcase commitment to developmental opportunities early:

Provide immediate feedback and development insights within the selection process. Follow this up with a clear onboarding and ongoing development plan – make this accessible to potential applicants.

Provide a realistic job preview at all stages of the process:

From the job description through to the interview, provide candidates with realistic insight into what the job entails. Take the opportunity to utilise each assessment phase to communicate with candidates about what to expect.

Measure fit early and objectively:

If possible, assess for culture or values fit early in the selection process, before you have met the candidate face-to-face. This could be done with a culture fit assessment.

Have a clear and fair flexible working policy:

It's clear that early career professionals expect some level of flexibility in their roles. Make sure you have a clearly outlined policy that's visible to them at the application stage.

Be transparent about salary:

Publish transparent salary bands to ensure neither you nor the candidate waste time in a selection process where expectations are misaligned.

Make a positive impression:

Highlight features that can help to set your organisation apart. Do this in an authentic way, as negative perceptions could result if applicants perceive dishonesty.¹⁶

3 Assessing early career professionals in a relevant and engaging manner

After successfully attracting early talent to apply, it's important to keep them engaged during the recruitment process to avoid unwanted attrition. Additionally, negative experiences with the assessment process can damage an organisation's reputation as a good employer and deter future applicants from applying.¹⁷ To prevent this, organisations must understand the perspectives of early career professionals, including what they like and dislike about recruitment assessments.

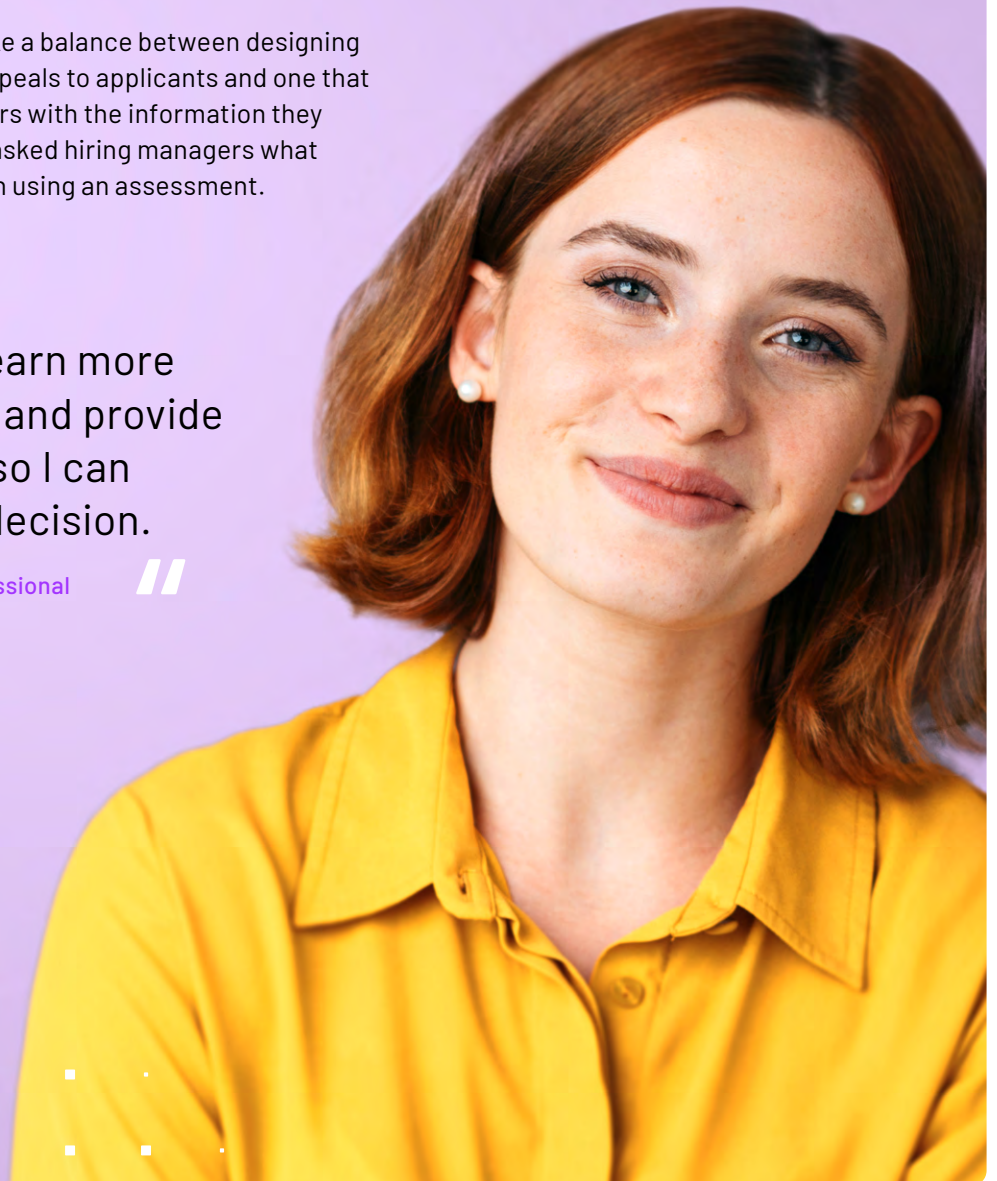
However, it is important to strike a balance between designing an assessment process that appeals to applicants and one that provides the key decision makers with the information they need. For that reason, we also asked hiring managers what is most important to them when using an assessment.

//

An opportunity to learn more about the company and provide ample information so I can make an informed decision.

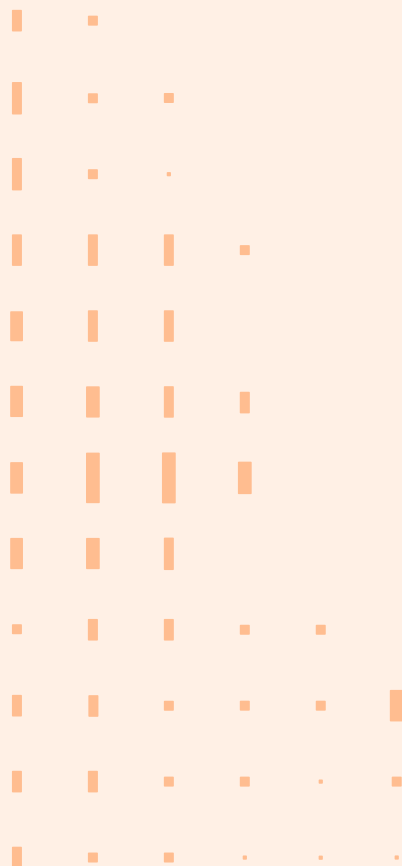
Feedback from early career professional

//



Insights from early career professionals

We asked early career professionals in our study what they **like most about the recruitment assessments they have completed**. The following themes were identified from the data.



Most liked aspects of recruitment assessments

Simple and straightforward

Sample quotes



They are straight forward and easy to understand.

You can do them in your own time in your own environment.

The instructions were clear and precise, and I knew what to do.

Personal connection

I like the fact that there is some human element so that you can have a conversation with the person which helps ease nerves.

Friendly atmosphere at the interview.

Personal communication with the people you will be working with.

Opportunity to demonstrate skills

I like that it helps me demonstrate my abilities.

Allows you to show your diverse skillset.

It gives me a chance to prove myself.

Role clarity

They provide more detail on the role and what skills will be needed so I am able to decide if I am suited to the role.

They have been relevant to the tasks I perform in the role.

I like that they give you an idea of what the role is going to involve.

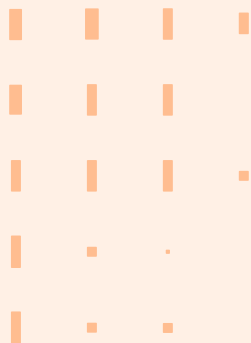
Organisational preview

It gives me some insight on the company I am applying for.

A glimpse into what the company does.

An opportunity to learn more about the company and provide ample information so I can make an informed decision.





Most liked aspects of recruitment assessments

Engagement and challenge

Feedback

Sample quotes



*They can be a fun challenge.
You always learn something as they are often very challenging.
I like when they are gamified.*

*Receiving feedback about how you performed.
Any feedback which can help me going forward.
Feedback mechanisms, I like to leave feedback.*



Due to sample size these results are only based on the responses from the employee sample (N=564).

Note: The themes are not presented in rank order.

These themes were further echoed in responses when we asked early career professionals what they **dislike about the recruitment assessments they have completed.**



Most disliked aspects of recruitment assessments

Length

Repetitive or generic questions

Impersonal

Sample quotes



*They can be time consuming.
They can be long and arduous to get through.
They always take way more time than it's worth.*

*Most of them are very repetitive and not engaging.
I dislike the monotony due to the repetitive nature of the tasks.
Answering generic questions feels like it generates cliché answers which I don't feel comfortable with.*

*The lack of human connection.
Mechanical and impersonal.
Sometimes it feels too soulless.*



Most disliked aspects of recruitment assessments

Inability to express oneself completely

Not job related

Stress inducing

Sample quotes

Doesn't fully represent me as a person.

No room for personality.

I feel that they can judge someone's personality and ability with too little information.

If they feel too distant or unrelated compared to the job requirements.

Seem unrelated to the work.

I dislike ones that ask about information unnecessary for the role.

The stress it gives you to give a wrong answer or to get judged.

Making people feel nervous and anxious.

Sometimes you have to think on the spot and when there are moments where you are unsure panic ensues.

Due to sample size these results are only based on the responses from the employee sample (N=564).

Note: The themes are not presented in rank order.

In summary, early career professionals prefer a swift and straightforward assessment process and are likely to disengage if it feels unnecessarily long or convoluted. They value assessments that are easy to complete at home and at their own pace, with clear instructions throughout the process.

Many report disliking repetitive and generic content, highlighting the need to keep assessment content engaging and varied. This is emphasised by the fact that early career job seekers can end up completing many assessments during their job search. In our sample, almost 20% of job seekers had completed more than five online assessments.

They also like assessments to provide a realistic insight into the role and organisation they are applying to. This helps them determine if the opportunity is the right fit and whether to self-select in or out of the process.

Given the recent rise in AI, it is notable that candidates reported disliking assessments that lack human connection. Many expressed that the assessment process can be stressful and nerve-wracking, and that incorporating human interaction throughout the process can help to ease nerves and keep early talent engaged.

Finally, feedback plays an important role in candidates' perceptions of the assessment process. They like receiving feedback about their performance after an assessment to help their development. They also value the opportunity to leave feedback and share their reactions post-assessment. Feedback promotes transparency and open communication in the hiring process, signalling respect for candidates. This contributes to more positive perceptions of the organisation and a better candidate experience.

We also asked them about specific features of recruitment assessments, as these are known to affect applicant reactions to the assessment process.¹⁸

The top five most important assessment features were:*

- 1 Feels relevant to the role
- 2 Gives realistic insight into the job tasks
- 3 Fairness for all candidates
- 4 Receiving feedback
- 5 Short completion time

*These results are based on the combined sample of job seekers and employees (N=702).

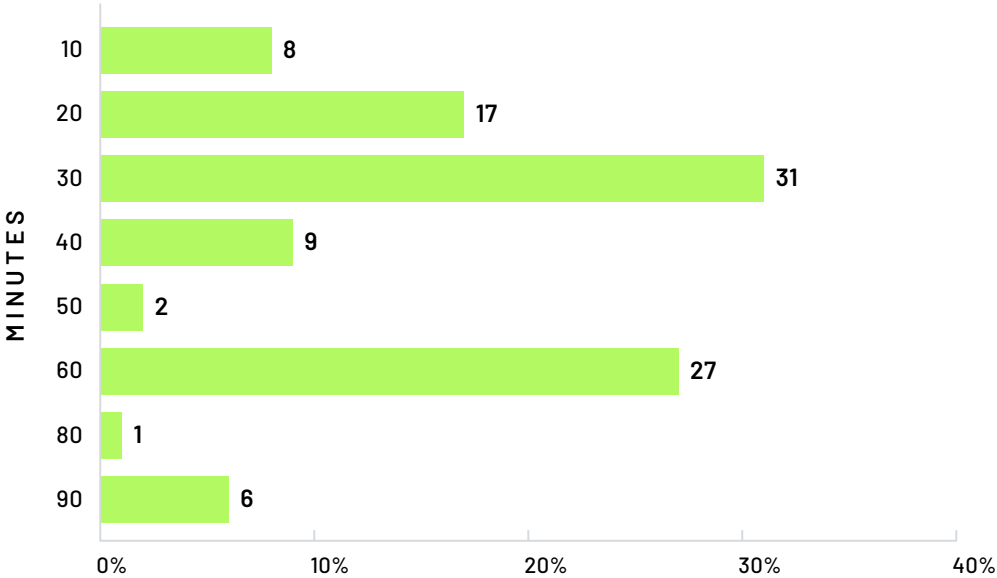
These results align with the previous responses showing that job relevance, role clarity and a short completion time are among the top most important assessment features for early career professionals.



Assessment length

Our results show that assessment length is an important consideration for early career professionals. When asked how long they would be willing to spend on online assessments as a stage of the recruitment process, there was generally a preference for shorter assessments.*

Time preferences for online assessments



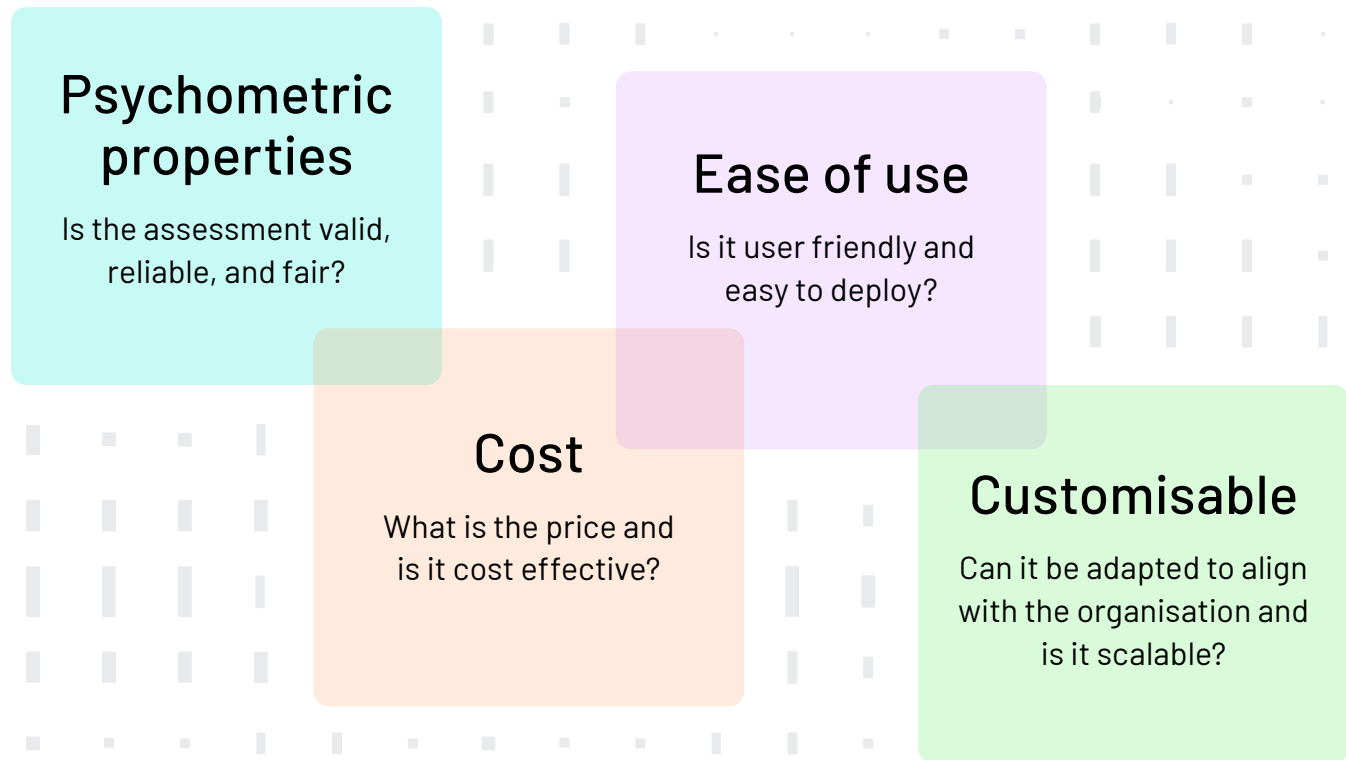
*These results are based on the combined sample of job seekers and employees (N=702).
Less than 1% selected the category 70 minutes so this was not included.

Nearly a third of respondents (31%) said they would only be willing to spend 30 minutes completing assessments. A quarter indicated a preference for shorter durations, with 8% willing to spend 10 minutes and 17% up to 20 minutes. However, 27% said they would be willing to spend up to 60 minutes completing online assessments. This suggests that while shorter assessments may be more desirable from a candidate perspective, there is still a tolerance for longer assessments among a significant proportion of candidates. Overall, assessments within the range of 20 to 60 minutes appear to be the most desirable for keeping early talent engaged.

It’s important to also acknowledge that if assessments are too short, applicants may feel they lack the opportunity to showcase their knowledge, skills and abilities.¹⁹ Our earlier findings showed that respondents have more favourable reactions to assessments that allow them to demonstrate their diverse skillsets and express themselves fully. Previous research also indicates that length doesn’t seem to have much influence over candidates’ likelihood to drop out, as most who do so will do it in the first 10 minutes, regardless of the total length.²⁰

Insights from managers

In comparison, we also asked managers what criteria they consider to be most important when purchasing an early talent assessment. Analysis of their responses revealed the following themes:



The themes show there is generally alignment between applicants' and managers' preferences. Both groups prioritise a simple and straightforward assessment experience, emphasising psychometric properties like validity and fairness. This highlights the need for organisations to balance candidate preferences for shorter assessments with the potential negative impact on test validity.²¹ Both applicants and managers also recognise the importance of the assessment providing an accurate reflection of the organisation. Clearly, continuing to prioritise these elements will be crucial for organisations to ensure an effective assessment process for early talent.

Additionally, managers are required to consider assessment features alongside practical factors such as cost effectiveness and ease of implementation within their specific organisation. Interestingly, the candidate experience wasn't a priority for managers, whereas it is relevant to many of the themes in the candidates' responses. When it comes to assessments, it seems that how easy they are to deploy and maintain is of greater importance, potentially due to practical and resource constraints.

In terms of the candidate experience, there appears to be a gap in perceptions regarding how daunting the assessment process can be. Early talent professionals mentioned feeling distressed and under pressure to perform, whereas this aspect may not be fully acknowledged by managers. Although managers cited ease of use as important for ensuring that the assessment is interpretable and understandable, they did not specifically mention how nerve-wracking this experience can be for candidates with limited experience of the job market.

This presents an opportunity for organisations to enhance the candidate experience by considering ways to reduce anxiety through assessment design. Our results indicate that adding more warmth into the process through a greater human focus, being clear about the process and expectations, and providing feedback and adequate time to prepare would all be effective mechanisms.



Key takeaways



Keep the process simple:

Ensure that assessments are easy and convenient for candidates to complete. Give clear instructions about the assessment's objectives and expectations of them throughout the process.

Create an engaging experience:

While length is an important factor, it's also key to keep the assessment experience engaging for candidates. Mixing up assessment formats and including gamified elements can help reduce feelings of monotony.

Make the assessment relevant:

Ensure the assessment accurately reflects the tasks they might encounter in the role and the organisational culture and values. Incorporating behavioural simulations, such as situational judgement tests, is an effective method for achieving this.

Maintain personal connection:

Early career professionals dislike assessments that are impersonal and lack a human touch. Aim to provide opportunities for them to engage in real conversations with interviewers, potential colleagues, and other candidates.

Give feedback about their performance:

Where possible, provide constructive feedback to early career professionals after assessments. Offering specific development tips gives candidates valuable insights and helps them prepare for future applications.

Request feedback about the assessment process:

Ask candidates to share their thoughts and experiences with the assessment process. Consider adding a section with questions or an option to leave open text feedback that can be completed after the assessment.

Final reflections

In this research, we sought to understand some of the key challenges faced when hiring early career talent and offer practical suggestions for how to overcome these.

We explored three key areas:

- 1 **Early careers success criteria:** Defining the key competencies and skills required to succeed in these roles.
- 2 **Early talent attraction:** Attracting early talent in an increasingly competitive environment.
- 3 **Early talent assessment:** Assessing early talent in a relevant and engaging manner.

1 While the success criteria for specific roles will vary, our findings indicated broad alignment on the types of competencies and skills required for early career professional roles. Generally, employees and managers are aligned on this, although employees place higher importance on the ability and motivation to learn on the job. There was also considerable overlap with existing research findings, although we did see some indications that immediate needs and already acquired skills are more important than future priorities. It's important to consider early talent hiring from a strategic standpoint so that these hires continue to add value to the organisation in the long term.

2 When it comes to attracting early talent, it's clear that despite economic weakening, there is still high demand.

Organisations struggle to find candidates with the right skill set, fit with the organisation, and alignment on salary and benefits. While salary remains a key factor, candidates are also seeking alignment with their interests, values and opportunities for development. Although there seems to be agreement between managers and candidates that fit is key, our findings suggest organisations may not always be able to provide the compensation and growth opportunities early career professionals are looking for. Organisations need to clearly define and communicate their employer value proposition accurately and effectively to potential applicants.

3 After the initial attraction, organisations need to continue to appeal to candidates throughout the hiring process.

We identify that candidates at this stage are still seeking to understand the role and organisation and how this aligns with their priorities. It's also worth noting that candidates may be completing several assessments, which can be time-consuming and stressful. In contradiction to this, managers did not place strong emphasis on candidate experience as a factor influencing their choice of assessment. But candidates appreciate the inclusion of more personal elements, the opportunity to give and receive feedback, and the opportunity to express themselves and demonstrate their skills, suggesting that organisations may need to place stronger focus on candidate experience. To stand out, organisations need to make sure their assessment process is simple and engaging.

Based on our overall findings, here are our top five suggestions for enhancing your early career hiring process and ensuring you are setting up your organisation for success:

- 1 Consider both current and future needs when defining job requirements
- 2 Give a realistic job preview throughout
- 3 Showcase what your organisation can offer applicants
- 4 Aim for a simple and engaging assessment experience
- 5 Include personal interaction with candidates



References

- 1 The Economist (2024, May 8). Is America Inc's war for talent over? www.economist.com/business/2024/05/08/is-america-incs-war-for-talent-over
- 2 A&O Shearman (2024, March 21). Accessing Europe's Talent. www.aoshearman.com/en/insights/global-business-in-a-changing-europe/accessing-europes-talent
- 3 US Bureau for Labor Statistics (2024, January). Education level and projected openings, 2022–32. www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2024/article/education-level-and-projected-openings.htm
- 4 World Economic Forum (2022, May 19). Gen Z and the end of work as we know it. www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/gen-z-don-t-want-to-work-for-you-here-s-how-to-change-their-mind
- 5 García-Álvarez, J., Vázquez-Rodríguez, A., Quiroga-Carrillo, A., and Priegue Caamaño, D. (2022). Transversal competencies for employability in university graduates: A systematic review from the employers' perspective. *Education Sciences*, 12(3), 1–37. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12030204>
- 6 Strong, M. H., Burkholder, G. J., Solberg, E. G., Stellmack, A., Presson, W. D., and Seitz, J. B. (2020). Development and Validation of a Global Competency Framework for Preparing New Graduates for Early Career Professional Roles. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 10(2), 67–115. <https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v10i2.1205>
- 7 Rios, J. A., Ling, G., Pugh, R., Becker, D., and Bacall, A. (2020). Identifying critical 21st-century skills for workplace success: A content analysis of job advertisements. *Educational Researcher*, 49(2), 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19890600>
- 8 World Economic Forum (2023, May). The Future of Jobs Report 2023. www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023
- 9 Thornhill-Miller, B., Camarda, A., Mercier, M., Burkhardt, J. M., Morisseau, T., Bourgeois-Bougrine, S., and Lubart, T. (2023). Creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration: assessment, certification, and promotion of 21st century skills for the future of work and education. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(3), 54. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11030054>
- 10 Chaka, C. (2020). Skills, competencies and literacies attributed to 4IR/Industry 4.0: Scoping review. *IFLA Journal*, 46(4), 369–399. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035219896376>
- 11 Kowal B, Włodarz D, Brzychczy E, Klepka A. (2022) Analysis of Employees' Competencies in the Context of Industry 4.0. *Energies*, 15(19):7142. <https://doi.org/10.3390/en15197142>
- 12 Li, Lan (2023). Adaptability in the digital workplace. AIS EIF Program Working Papers. 1. <https://aisel.aisnet.org/aiseifprogram/1>
- 13 Deloitte (2024). 2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey: Living and working with purpose in a transforming world. www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/content/genz-millennialsurvey.html
- 14 Vleugels, W., Verbruggen, M., De Cooman, R., and Billsberry, J. (2023). A systematic review of temporal person-environment fit research: Trends, developments, obstacles, and opportunities for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 44(2), 376–398. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2607>
- 15 Rudolph, C. W., Rauvola, R. S., Costanza, D. P., and Zacher, H. (2021). Generations and Generational Differences: Debunking Myths in Organizational Science and Practice and Paving New Paths Forward. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 36(6), 945. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-020-09715-2>
- 16 Wilton, L. S., Bell, A. N., Vahradyan, M., and Kaiser, C. R. (2020). Show don't tell: Diversity dishonesty harms racial/ethnic minorities at work. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 46(8), 1171–1185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167219897149>
- 17 Woods, S. A., Ahmed, S., Nikolaou, I., Costa, A. C., and Anderson, N. R. (2020). Personnel selection in the digital age: A review of validity and applicant reactions, and future research challenges. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 29(1), 64–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2019.1681401>
- 18 *ibid*
- 19 Speer, A. B., King, B. S., and Grossenbacher, M. (2016). Applicant reactions as a function of test length: Is there reason to fret over using longer tests? *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 15(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000145>
- 20 Kinney, T. and Delgado, K. (April, 2019). IGNITE panel with data: Myth vs. Reality in candidate reactions – What really matters. IGNITE session presented at the 34th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Washington, D.C.
- 21 Hardy III, J. H., Gibson, C., Sloan, M., and Carr, A. (2017). Are applicants more likely to quit longer assessments? Examining the effect of assessment length on applicant attrition behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(7), 1148. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000213>

Appendix 1

Managers

N=560

MANAGER JOB LEVEL	
First Line Management/Supervisor	38%
Middle Management	45.9%
Executive/Senior Management	15.7%
Other (please specify)	0.4%

ORGANISATION SIZE	
1-10	3.8%
11-50	13.2%
51-200	19.8%
201-500	14.1%
501-1000	11.6%
1001-5000	16.8%
5001-10000	6.4%
10001+	14.3%

ORGANISATION SECTOR	
Agriculture and fishing	0.4%
Banking and finance	9.6%
Business services	7.1%
Government and public services	14.3%
Information technology	17.5%
Manufacturing	10.2%
Media	2.5%
Oil, gas and mining	1.4%
Other	12.5%
Pharmaceuticals and healthcare	9.8%
Prefer not to say	1.1%
Retail and leisure	6.8%
Telecommunication	2.1%
Transport and distribution	3.9%
Utilities	0.7%

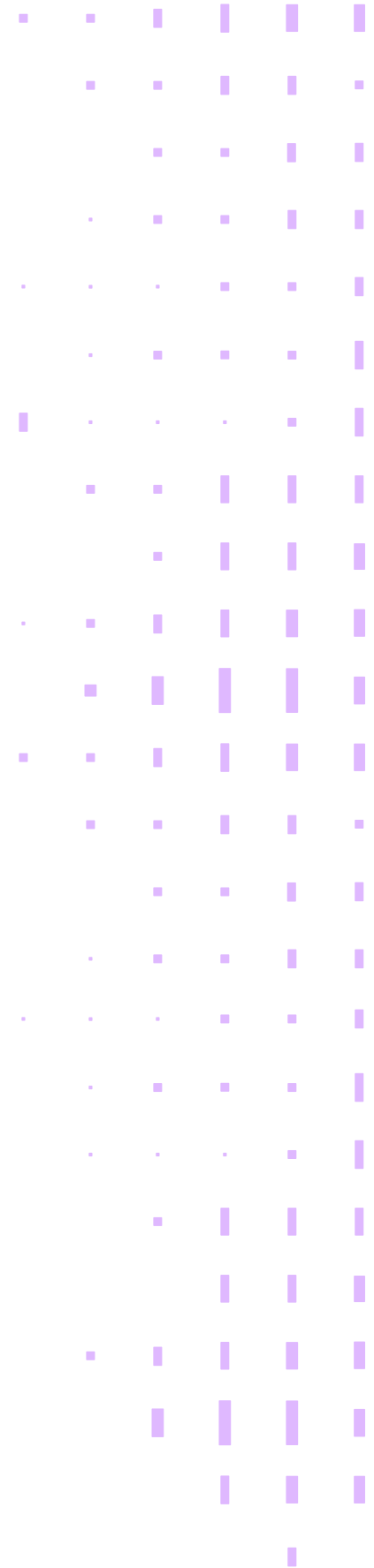
AGE	
19-25	6.8%
26-30	20.8%
31-35	24%
36-40	17.5%
41-45	12.2%
46-50	7.6%
51-55	4.1%
56-60	4.4%
61+	3.7%



GENDER OF LEADER	
Man	61.3%
Woman	37.7%
Non-binary or gender queer/fluid	0.5%
Other (please specify)	0.4%
Prefer not to say	0.2%

COUNTRY	
Australia	7.3%
Belgium	1.4%
Canada	7%
Denmark	0.9%
Finland	1.1%
France	4.5%
Germany	12.7%
Ghana	0.2%
Ireland	0.2%
Mexico	3.6%
Netherlands	6.4%
New Zealand	0.7%
Nigeria	0.4%
Norway	0.5%
Sweden	0.9%
Turkey	0.2%
United Kingdom	26.3%
United States	25.9%

CURRENT WORK ARRANGEMENT	
Fully remote	8.4%
Hybrid (combination of onsite and remote)	57.7%
Onsite (full-time)	33.9%



Employees

N=564

EDUCATION LEVEL	
Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)	59.8%
Graduate degree (MA/MSc/MPhil/other)	36.3%
Doctorate degree (PhD/other)	3.9%

ORGANISATION SECTOR	
Agriculture and fishing	0.5%
Banking and finance	8.5%
Business services	6.2%
Government and public services	13.1%
Information technology	17%
Manufacturing	5.9%
Media	3.5%
Oil, gas and mining	1.1%
Other	21.6%
Pharmaceuticals and healthcare	12.1%
Prefer not to say	1.4%
Retail and leisure	2.8%
Telecommunication	2.5%
Transport and distribution	2.3%
Utilities	1.4%

AGE	
19-25	43.3%
26-30	45.9%
31-35	8.9%
36-40	1.6%
41+	0.4%

GENDER	
Man	47.9%
Woman	50%
Non-binary or gender queer/fluid	2%
Other (please specify)	0.2%

COUNTRY	
Australia	7.3%
Belgium	1.4%
Canada	4.6%
Finland	1.1%
France	5.3%
Germany	12.8%
Greece	0.2%
Ireland	0.5%
Mexico	5.3%
Netherlands	7.1%
New Zealand	1.1%
Nigeria	0.2%
Sweden	0.5%
United Kingdom	24.5%
United States	28.2%

CURRENT WORK ARRANGEMENT	
Fully remote	19.3%
Hybrid (combination of onsite and remote)	48%
Onsite (full-time)	32.6%

EMPLOYMENT RELEVANCE TO DEGREE	
Yes	70%
No	29.4%
Prefer not to say	0.5%

Job seekers

N=138

EDUCATION LEVEL	
Doctorate degree (PhD/other)	2.9%
Graduate degree (MA/MSc/MPhil/other)	33.3%
Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)	63.8%

PREFERRED ORGANISATION SECTOR*	
Agriculture and fishing	5.1%
Banking and finance	10.1%
Business services	15.9%
Conglomerate	0.7%
Government and public services	21%
Information technology	19.6%
Manufacturing	8.7%
Media	21.7%
Oil, gas and mining	5.8%
Other	26.2%
Pharmaceuticals and healthcare	20.3%
Retail and leisure	9.4%
Telecommunication	10.1%
Transport and distribution	5.1%
Utilities	0.7%

*Note that respondents were able to select more than one preferred organisation sector

AGE	
19-25	61.6%
26-30	38.4%

GENDER	
Man	28.3%
Woman	69.6%
Non-binary or gender queer/fluid	2.2%

COUNTRY	
Australia	0.7%
Canada	1.4%
Chile	2.2%
France	2.2%
Germany	2.9%
Greece	0.7%
Hungary	1.4%
Israel	0.7%
Italy	6.5%
Mexico	9.4%
Netherlands	4.3%
New Zealand	0.7%
Poland	6.5%
Portugal	9.4%
South Africa	26.1%
United Kingdom	10.9%
United States	13.8%

HOW RECENTLY DID YOU GRADUATE?	
Less than 1 year ago	40.6%
1-2 years ago	25.4%
3-5 years ago	30.4%
+5 years ago	3.6%

FIRST FULL TIME ROLE?	
Yes	53.6%
No	46.4%

PREFERRED WORK ARRANGEMENT	
Fully remote	17.4%
Hybrid (combination of onsite and remote)	50.7%
Onsite (full-time)	31.9%

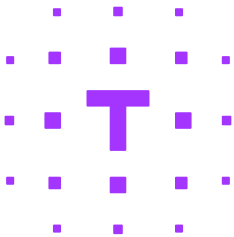
EMPLOYMENT RELEVANCE TO DEGREE	
Yes	70.3%
No	29.7%

Appendix 2

TALOGY COMPETENCY	DEFINITION
Building Relationships	Connects easily with others, gains trust quickly and builds and maintains effective relationships.
Concern for Others	Strives to understand others' feelings, shows genuine concern and empathy for people, and treats others with care, compassion, and respect.
Embracing Diversity	Respects and appreciates individual differences, cultures, lifestyles and traditions, actively includes diverse individuals and perspectives, and treats people fairly regardless of background.
Teamwork	Proactively shares useful information with others and cooperates effectively in the pursuit of common goals.
Integrity	Is open and honest with others while respecting confidentiality, seeks to do what is right and keeps to their promises.
Customer Focus	Actively seeks to understand customer needs, appreciates the customer perspective and strives provide a positive customer experience.
Communication	Communicates information in a clear and concise manner, tailors the message and approach to the purpose, context and audience, and checks understanding.
Demonstrating Confidence	Demonstrates presence and credibility, commands attention and talks with energy and enthusiasm.
Influencing	Expresses views assertively, presents compelling arguments that appeal to stakeholder interests and handles objections effectively.
Negotiating	Recognises the needs and objectives of different parties, looks for common ground, identifies bargaining points and seeks solutions that satisfies all parties.
Organisational Agility	Identifies key decision makers and influencers, successfully navigates the organisation's structure and communication channels, and leverages relationships across levels to achieve goals.
Breadth of Perspective	Considers the bigger picture, makes connections between different information, and develops theories, concepts and models to explain complex issues.
Creativity and Innovation	Identifies imaginative ways of approaching problems or tasks, challenges convention, generates a breadth of ideas and alternatives, and develops novel solutions.
Strategic Thinking	Builds a clear long-term vision of what could be achieved, formulates strategies to achieve the vision, and thinks broadly and with a future orientation.
Business Sense	Understands business and the marketplace and recognises business opportunities and ways to enhance competitive advantage.
Critical Thinking	Gathers and appraises information from a range of sources, identifies relevant from irrelevant information, and actively and objectively questions ideas, conclusions, and assumptions.
Problem Solving	Uses logic and systematic analysis to interpret underlying trends, core issues, and root causes, and identifies pragmatic and effective solutions.
Judgement	Evaluates data and courses of action using an unbiased and rational approach and makes decisions that are well-reasoned and effective.

TALOGY COMPETENCY	DEFINITION
Decisiveness	Makes timely decisions with conviction and takes calculated risks, even when situations are ambiguous or information is limited.
Learning Agility	Critically evaluates experiences, learns quickly from outcomes and feedback, and applies this learning in new situations to determine better approaches.
Accountability	Readily takes on ownership of tasks and objectives, takes obligations seriously, and takes responsibility for own actions, decisions and results.
Initiating Action	Proactively grasps opportunities and influences events.
Prioritising and Planning	Identifies priorities, creates plans and organises processes and resources to accomplish goals in a logical and efficient way.
Organisational Commitment	Places the organisation's goals ahead of individual or team interest, acts in line with organisation's values and expectations, and goes above and beyond their formal job remit to support the organisation's success.
Drive for Results	Demonstrates determination, persistence and focus on producing exceptional results.
Digital Dexterity	Rapidly adopts new technologies, either through adeptly grasping their usage (where needed) or through understanding their impact and empowering others to use them as needed.
Quality Focus	Follows best practice and ensures all aspects of work, no matter how small, are completed to a high standard of excellence."
Compliance	Attends to relevant rules, policies and procedures, and adheres consistently to formal codes of conduct and informal, yet widely accepted, social standards.
Safety Focus	Follows current safety procedures and standards rigorously, stays vigilant to potential hazards and risk and deals with incidents promptly.
Change Orientation	Maintains a positive attitude toward change and appreciates the opportunities that change presents.
Composure	Keeps calm and positive when dealing with challenging demands and situations, and demonstrates clear thinking and restraint under pressure.
Self-Awareness	Understands one's own strengths and limitations and consciously considers own thoughts and feelings.
Adaptability	Modifies behavior and attitude to best meet the demands of a given situation.
Resilience	Bounces back from setbacks, disappointments, and criticism.
Self-Sufficiency	Works alone comfortably, makes independent decisions when required and appropriate, and only consults or seeks help if it is necessary to complete objectives or obtain preferred outcomes.
Personal Development	Looks for opportunities to develop skills and/or competency, and actively seeks feedback and opportunities for self-enhancement.

Note: Participants were presented with 36 of the 44 competencies from the Talogy framework. All competencies were presented except for the Leading and Inspiring cluster, as previous research has indicated that management and leadership skills are not imperative for entry-level positions (Strong et al, 2020).



Talogy.com

