

The execution gap

Why talent
leaders see
challenges
but cannot
solve them



What does ‘better work’ actually require – and why are so many organisations falling short?

At global Indeed FutureWorks events, we ran a brief survey of HR leaders, recruiters and business executives to get a read on the big issues they are facing today. Across regions, their answers on everything from employee pay to AI in hiring were remarkably consistent. But the problem is turning that shared vision into reality.

Read on for a closer look at what more than 1,000 talent leaders in nine countries told us, plus tips from our specialists and customers on how to deliver on the promise of better work.¹

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¹Methodology, p. 8

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Key takeaway

Talent leaders know what matters. But their organisations struggle to deliver it.

The vision for better work is clear, but internal friction and inertia are getting in the way. This gap shows up across the entire hiring experience:

- Organisations emphasise their culture, while knowing that candidates' top need is better pay.
- Talent leaders believe in the promise of AI in hiring, but concerns regarding privacy and a lack of internal expertise are stalling adoption.
- Polished employer branding is falling flat. Candidates crave the truth of real employee stories.
- Ultimately, the biggest hurdles are outdated internal systems and resistance to change.

At Indeed FutureWorks events worldwide, talent leaders came together to share perspectives.



Melbourne, Australia



Paris, France



Bangalore, India



Milan, Italy



Mexico City, Mexico



New Orleans, United States

Gap #1

Talent leaders know pay matters most, but they are trying to compensate with culture

Nearly half of talent leaders say leadership and culture are the most important keys to “better work”.

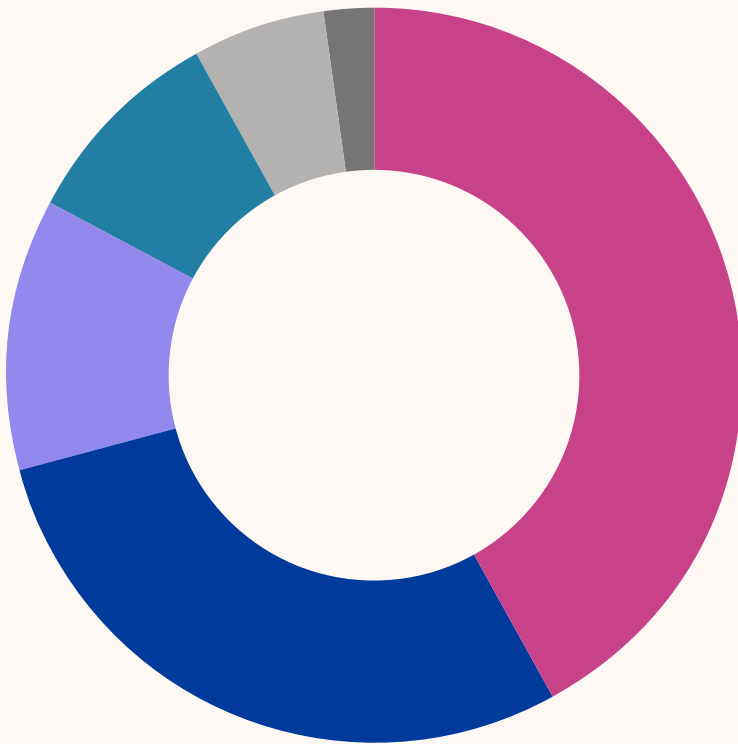
As for pay and benefits? That ranked fourth – even lower than other cultural drivers like flexibility and purpose.

And yet, more than 40% of talent leaders cite salary and benefits as the main reason their job offers fall short. That tracks with Indeed’s [annual Smarter Hiring report](#), which found that job seekers prioritise salary far more than culture.

“Job seekers want great leaders, but not at the expense of strong pay and flexible work.”
— Lauren Anderson, Indeed Senior Talent Strategy Advisor, Australia

This tension surfaced repeatedly in conversations with employers. “Salaries are limited,” as one healthcare HR leader says, “so we have to become the employer of choice by ensuring our leaders create the right culture and values.” It is a sound strategy. But ultimately, employers need to examine pay to succeed long-term.

Question: Where do you see the biggest gap between what candidates want and what companies offer?



- Salary and benefits: 42%
- Flexibility and work-life integration: 29%
- Career growth and development: 12%
- Communication and transparency: 9%
- Purpose and meaningful work: 6%
- Inclusion and belonging: 2%

In-app survey, global FutureWorks, 2025–26.

Our specialist’s take: Talent leaders need a say on pay

Hiring managers often say they have no power over compensation. If that is true, it is an issue, says Gianluca Bonacchi, Indeed Senior Talent Strategy Advisor. HR *should* help shape pay decisions.

Bonacchi’s tips for talent leaders:

- Do not make salary someone else’s problem**
So you cannot double pay overnight? Gain more influence by being active in strategic discussions with the C-suite about compensation.
- Use data to influence leadership decisions**
How do your company’s starting salaries stack up to the market? What risks do you face if you lose the talent war? How will a better hire boost the bottom line? Resources like Indeed Hiring Lab and [Hiring Insights](#) help make your case.
- Do not reduce compensation to salary alone**
When budgets will not budge, consider providing additional flexibility and other tangible benefits. Make them explicit and credible in job offers.



– Gianluca Bonacchi,
Indeed Senior Talent Strategy
Advisor, Italy

Gap #2

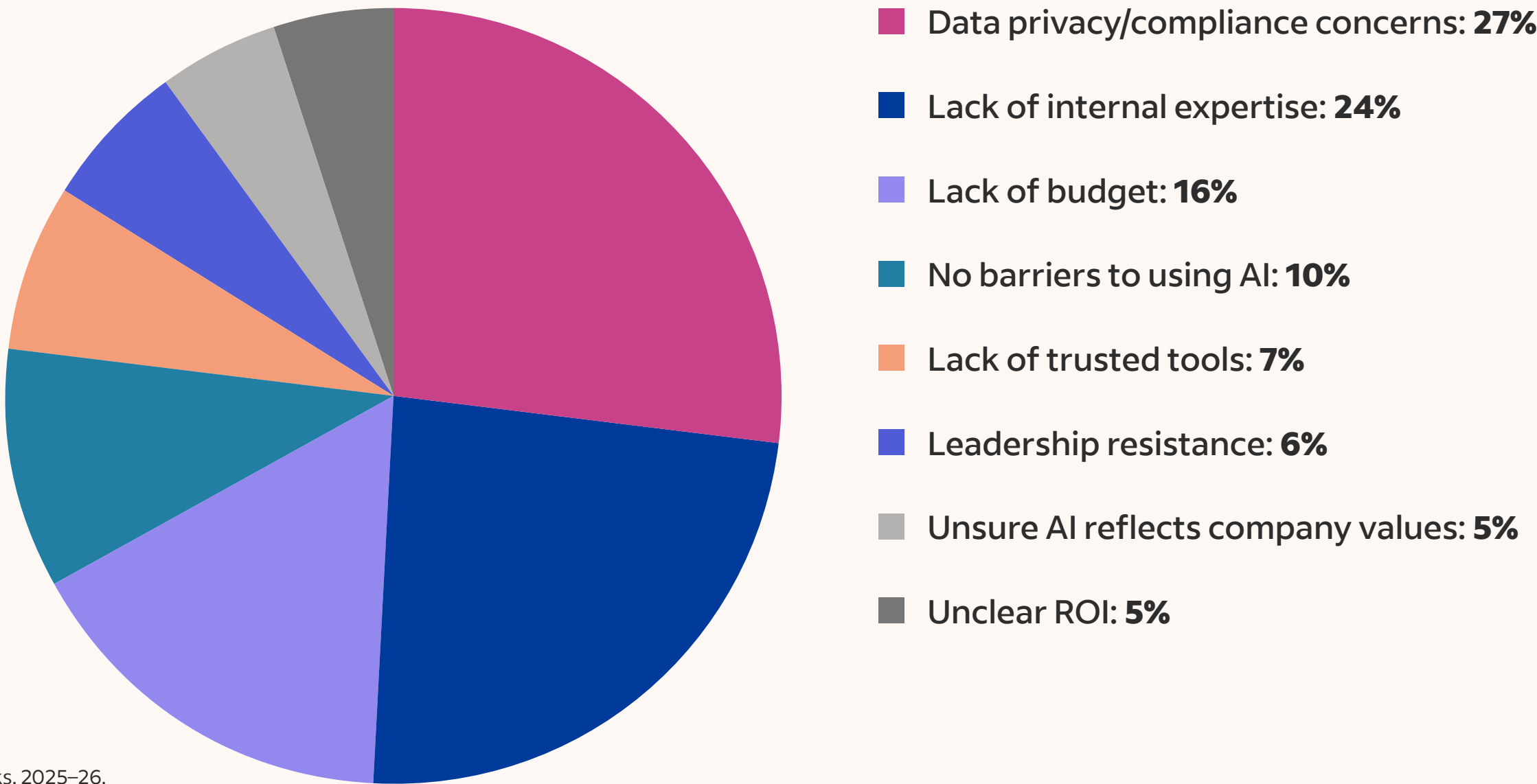
Companies believe in AI’s benefits but are concerned about compliance

There is a lot of talk about the ROI of AI, but FutureWorks attendees already believe in its value. Only 5% say unclear ROI is the biggest barrier to using AI in the hiring process.

The execution gap here is not about a lack of faith but a lack of readiness. Talent leaders say their main blockers are concerns about privacy and compliance (27%) and a lack of internal expertise (24%).

When companies proceed deliberately with AI, the rewards can be substantial. At windshield repair company **Safelite**, manual administrative processes were slowing hiring down, according to Dennis Kaps, Vice President of People and Talent Acquisition. After the company began integrating AI, including automated texts to schedule interviews, Safelite shortened its time to hire and reduced cost per hire by 3x. “We have really fundamentally changed the expectations for what a talent acquisition professional does,” Kaps says.

Question: What is your biggest barrier to using AI in your hiring practices?



In-app survey, global FutureWorks, 2025–26.

Our specialist’s take: Start with the processes, not the technology

Concerns about AI privacy and trust are legitimate. But do not let them distract from a deeper problem: flawed hiring processes, says Ute Neher, Talent Strategy Director at Indeed. Many organisations try to automate hiring processes that are n-t well designed or equitable to begin with. Adding AI compounds errors, as it scales flaws rather than improving them.

Neher’s tips for talent leaders:

- **Analyse your internal processes first**
Take a hard look at how your hiring works today. If the process is not candidate-friendly, efficient and effective, automating it will only make it worse.
- **Define the problem before selecting the solution**
Be explicit about what you expect AI to improve and why.
- **Demand transparency**
Ask your vendor if they have a responsible AI team or ways to learn about what informs their models.



— Ute Neher,
Indeed Talent Strategy
Director

Gap #3

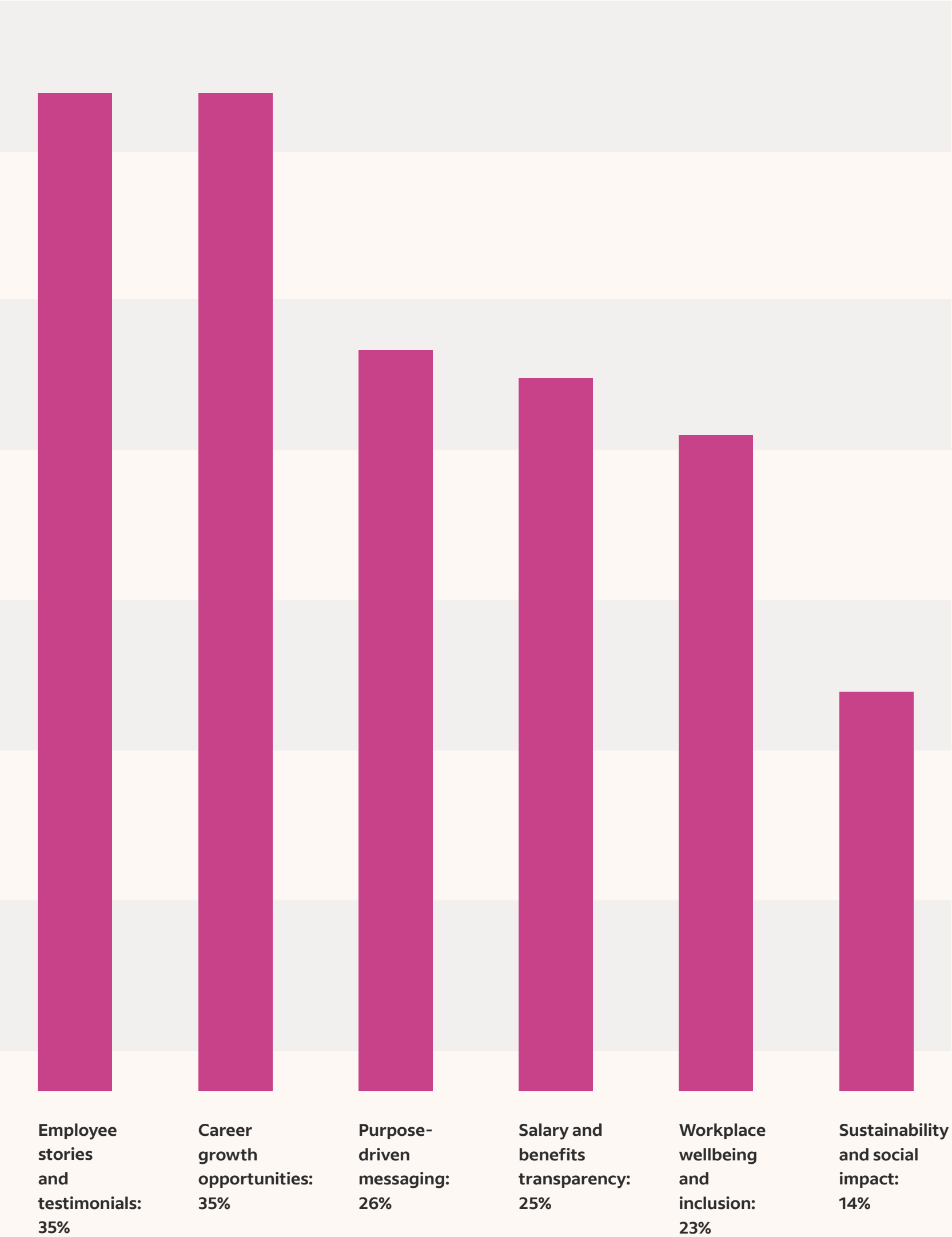
Employee stories matter more than messaging

Job seekers want to know how they are going to be treated at your company, and they want to hear about it firsthand.

Employers often devote massive resources to purpose-driven messaging to build their brand, but talent leaders told us that real employee stories matter more to today’s applicants. Someone’s personal truth beats a polished pitch.

France’s Groupe BPCE — parent company of banks **Banque Populaire** and **Caisse d’Epargne** — deploys employee “ambassadors” to speak directly with talent. Rather than relying on corporate scripts, the banks empower staff to share first-hand perspectives on culture and growth. David Marchal, the banks’ HR Director, emphasises that while they provide public speaking support, the stories remain authentic. “We do not tell them what to say; we support them in speaking up,” Marchal says.

Question: What makes your employer brand resonate most with today’s talent?



In-app survey, global FutureWorks, 2025–26. Multiple responses allowed.

Our specialist’s take: You cannot buy your reputation

A credible employer brand is not built on messaging. It is earned through the experiences your employees live every day, says Eric Gras, Indeed Senior Talent Strategy Manager.

Gras’s tips for talent leaders:

- **Make employer branding everyone’s job**
Marketing does not own your company’s reputation. Neither does the leadership team or HR. Reputation can be built (or damaged) by the entire organisation.
- **Replace claims about career growth with actual proof**
Cite real stories and real numbers that illustrate how your employees thrive.
- **If morale is low, fix that first**
Be honest. Internally, acknowledge your flaws and what you are doing to solve them. Authenticity is key.



— Eric Gras,
Indeed Senior Talent Strategy
Manager, France

Gap #4

External pressures are real, but the biggest barriers are internal

The dominant narrative among HR leaders suggests that talent shortages, a widening skills gap and broad economic uncertainty are the biggest hurdles to hiring. But talent leaders at FutureWorks say they are mainly struggling with internal challenges.

Globally, the top three barriers to better work are all operational roadblocks: budget constraints, outdated systems and processes, and resistance to change. Closing this gap starts with facing those roadblocks head-on.

When Iñaki Ereño took over as CEO of global healthcare company Bupa during the pandemic, he called the 70-plus-year-old firm a “sleeping elephant”. Ereño implemented a strategy to replace outdated processes with a digital-first approach. For the hiring team, this meant leaning into modern recruitment tools to boost candidate conversions. Meagan Michaels, Head of Employer Brand and Experience at Bupa Australia, says that having a clear, company-wide strategy was critical to overcoming internal inertia. “We spent three years waking ourselves up,” she says.

Question: What’s your biggest challenge in making the world of work better today?



In-app survey, global FutureWorks, 2025–26.

Our specialists’ take: Connect the dots

Too often, employers view budget constraints as obstacles to solving problems. Indeed talent strategy advisors Lauren Anderson and Rohan Sylvester say employers need to shift their mindset: Ignoring problems like outdated systems and cultural issues creates inefficiencies that cost companies in the end.

Here are their tips for overcoming internal constraints:

- **Build one case, not two**
Instead of asking for both new tools and more budget, Anderson says talent leaders need to connect the dots between the two requests. Outdated systems cost time and, ultimately, money. Fixing them will reduce costs and free up resources.
- **Budget constraints are real, but they are not the whole story**
Do not let budgets become an excuse for inaction. As Sylvester notes, many of the most persistent workplace challenges, like distrust and lack of transparency, are not budget problems at all, but rather issues of how organisations operate and communicate.



— Lauren Anderson, Indeed Senior Talent Strategy Advisor, Australia



— Rohan Sylvester, Indeed Talent Strategy Advisor, India

Conclusion

From intention to action: What to do next

Across pay, technology and employer branding, the data shows that organisations around the world already know what candidates want, but internal barriers and misaligned priorities are preventing meaningful progress. Closing this gap requires shifting from intention to action.

Consider these next steps:

- **Audit your compensation:** Check market benchmarks and partner with leadership to address gaps — do not rely on culture to compensate for uncompetitive offers.
- **Fix hiring processes before scaling AI:** Review your current workflows, identify inefficiencies or bias, and introduce AI tools only after clearly defining outcomes.

- **Let your employees speak for themselves:** Ensure that you make space for real employee stories rather than over-engineering a polished corporate image. (For inspiration, search online for “Staples Baddie.”)
- **Build a business case that connects upgrades to cost and performance:** Quantify how outdated systems, slow processes and poor hiring outcomes impact revenue and productivity, and use that data to help secure leadership buy-in for change.

Go deeper

Download the 2026 [Indeed Smarter Hiring Insights report](#)

Methodology

The insights presented here come from app-based live polling conducted with hundreds of hiring professionals during Indeed FutureWorks events in late 2025 and early 2026 across Australia, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands and the United States. Total participation peaked globally at 1,010 hiring leaders.

The polling provides a quick, directional snapshot of audience perspectives in real time during these sessions. This report is not intended to serve as an exhaustive or statistically representative study. Rather, it serves as a “pulse check” on the key themes, aspirations and challenges defining the future of work as expressed by participants in the moment.

When referencing this research, please use the following citation: **Indeed FuturePulse Survey through Vevox. FutureWorks global events, 2025–2026**

About Indeed

Indeed is the No. 1 job site in the world² with over 665M Job Seeker Profiles³ and 370M sourceable Profiles.⁴ Indeed strives to put job seekers first, while providing quality matches for employers, fast, to support their hiring needs.

Every day we connect millions of people to better work to create better lives, combining the latest in AI technology and the power of human judgment and connection.

²Comscore, Total Visits, March 2026
³Indeed data (worldwide), job seeker accounts that have a unique, verified email address.
⁴Indeed data (worldwide), job seeker accounts set to public that have a unique, verified email address.

The most revealing findings

At a global level, clear patterns emerge around pay, AI readiness and employer trust. At a country level, those patterns are more nuanced. Here are the most surprising differences among the nine countries surveyed:

Australia: Mission matters, but so does legitimacy

Unlike peers in other markets, Australian talent leaders believe corporate messaging is a key driver for job seekers. A leading 44% of respondents say purpose-driven messaging is the single most effective way an employer brand can resonate with candidates.

France: Credibility comes from employee voices

An overwhelming 54% of French respondents — higher than the global average — say employee stories and testimonials make employer brands resonate most. Rather than focusing on corporate purpose-driven messaging, French talent leaders say candidates heavily prioritise peer experiences.

Germany: Leadership and culture are key

Germany stands out for its emphasis on leadership. Nearly 3 out of 5 German respondents (58%) say better leadership and culture are the keys to better work – one of the highest shares across all countries.

India: Leading the way on AI

In India, more than 60% of employers expressed being confident or very confident about using AI to improve hiring outcomes — far more than the 48% global average. Yet more than half cite data privacy as a barrier to adoption, the top concern across countries.

Ireland: Wary of AI adoption

Ireland appears the least confident about adopting AI, with just over a quarter (26%) of talent leaders saying they are confident about using it to improve hiring. Why? Data privacy and compliance concerns top their list of worries.

Italy: The employer brand reality gap

Talent leaders in Italy gave themselves the lowest scores when it came to whether their company’s public employer brand matched reality. (Note: Italy-specific data is directional, as the small sample size of 39 respondents may limit comparability with other markets.)

Mexico: Flexibility matters

In most countries, salary represents the biggest gap between what employers offer and what job seekers want. But in Mexico, more than half (54%) of respondents say it is flexibility. They also cited flexibility as the top key to better work, suggesting that, on this issue at least, talent leaders and job seekers see eye to eye.

“Job seekers do not expect companies to be perfect. What they want is honesty.”
— Rohan Sylvester, Indeed Talent Strategy Advisor, India

Netherlands: Balancing purpose and pay

Talent leaders in the Netherlands say a stronger sense of purpose (51%) is a top key to “better work”. But pay and benefits also come in at 51%, suggesting that for Dutch companies, talent attraction requires a delicate balance of highly meaningful work and competitive compensation.

United States: Driven by mission and meaning

The US market is uniquely fixated on mission and meaning compared to other markets. While 41% of global respondents define ‘better work’ as having a strong sense of purpose, that figure jumps to 65% in the U.S.

While mission matters, Australian job seekers also understand the difference between optics and substance. Laying it on too thick can be a turnoff. “People will see through it.”
— Lauren Anderson, Indeed Senior Talent Strategy Advisor, Australia

“In a competitive market, purpose helps brands differentiate themselves.”
— Alvera Lubbers, Indeed Talent Strategy Advisor, the Netherlands



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