

# The Artificial Applicant: How Hiring *Changed* the Candidate



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We believe technology should make hiring more human, not less. In today's fast-moving labour market, hiring can feel like a trade-off between speed and quality. Employers are under pressure to move quickly, while still making high-stakes decisions about people, potential, and performance.

Indeed is designed to support both, combining powerful technology with human insight to help you find, attract, and connect with the right talent. Visit [au.indeed.com/hire](https://au.indeed.com/hire) to discover how Indeed can help you hire with clarity and confidence.



<sup>1</sup>Comscore, Total Visits, March 2025

<sup>2</sup>Indeed data (worldwide), job seeker accounts that have a unique, verified email address

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## Methodology

The Australian Job Seeker Survey was commissioned by Indeed and conducted online by YouGov between 19th and 24th March 2026.

This research provides a comprehensive view of the Australian labour market, surveying 1,034 workers nationwide, including both employed individuals and jobseekers (unemployed but actively seeking work), excluding self-employed workers from both categories.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this report, respondents are referred to collectively as 'workers'.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 64, capturing perspectives across early, mid, and late career stages.<sup>4</sup> The sample was designed to be nationally representative, enabling robust insights into workforce sentiment, job search behaviour, and employment trends across Australia.

The questionnaire was designed by YouGov in collaboration with Indeed and That Comms Co. Following the completion of fieldwork, the data was weighted by age, gender, and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates of Australian workers and jobseekers. Statistical significance has been reported at the 95% confidence level.<sup>5</sup>

This study was conducted in accordance with ISO 20252:2019 standards, to which YouGov is accredited.



<sup>3-5</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

# Executive Summary: Decoding the *hiring* matrix

In Australia, hiring hasn't just gone digital – it has turned into a **human-AI production line**, whether employers realise it or not. AI is now the corporate baseline, the findings in Deloitte's *The State of AI in Enterprise* report show that AI is no longer a futuristic experiment for organisations, with over 54% expected to reach production vs pilot stage in the next 3-6 months.<sup>6</sup> However, while employers were focused on automating their internal workflows, the candidate was evolving to survive them.

This is not another feel-good story about AI productivity or HR efficiency. The market is already flooded with those. This is about something more uncomfortable: a system that has fundamentally changed the shape of the modern applicant – and is now churning through candidates at scale.

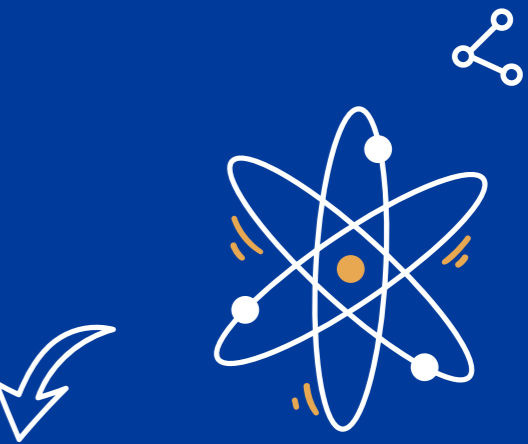
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*In the iconic 1999 film **The Matrix**, the red pill–blue pill choice is really a choice between staying comfortable and getting honest. The blue pill keeps you in a smooth, scripted illusion. The red pill shows you the wiring underneath.*

Modern hiring has become its own version of the simulation, governed by an invisible logic of filters, rankings and rules that candidates never see. For years, job seekers effectively took the blue pill. They believed that if they sweated over cover letters, tuned every line of their resume and showed up for round after round of interviews, there was a human on the other side doing the same work.

Then the mask slipped. Ghosting became normal. Salary stayed hidden in ads. The hiring process quietly decided who made it through and who never even got seen. The perception for Australian workers is clear: hiring feels unfair – and it's the responsibility of Talent acquisition managers to help close that gap and start rebuilding trust in the system.

The **Artificial Applicant** is the job seeker who has taken the red pill. They no longer assume the system is human, fair, or even paying attention. Instead, they learn how it works and adapt to it: using AI to write, refine and mass-submit applications, to rehearse answers for algorithmic interviews, and, in some cases, to send AI-generated versions of themselves into the process. They have stopped trusting the simulation and started playing directly with its code.



The system they are walking into looks less like a talent pipeline and more like a **candidate farm**. Thousands of applications go in at one end and most candidates never hear a word back.

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*Their time, effort and hope are treated as expendable inputs in a high-volume sorting machine.*

The human entering your funnel is not just a job seeker anymore. They are a hybrid of human intent and machine assistance, optimised for survival inside a system that treats them as data first and human second. While the industry has spent years arguing about whether employers should use AI in hiring, the more urgent question now is: what happens when candidates do?

<sup>6</sup> Deloitte | *The State of AI in the Enterprise 2026*

Because they already are. Workers are learning to use the same tools that already screen, score and shape their applications:

- AI is a job-search staple, with 41% using it to write applications and 4 in 10 (38%) relying on it to research roles;
- AI now steps into the interview room, with 60% using AI-generated representations - an AI voice, avatar or automated response tool - during virtual hiring and it's paying off, with more than 1 in 3 jobseekers saying it helped them land a job offer;
- Transparency has become a one-way street. While 52% of jobseekers say employers should openly disclose when they use AI in recruitment, 37% believe candidates *shouldn't* have to reveal their own use of AI.<sup>7</sup>

Employers are not only flying blind about who — or what — is actually in front of them; they are also at risk of losing nearly half the market. When asked how workers would react if they knew a company was using AI in hiring, **48% of jobseekers say they would only continue if human interaction was clearly part of the process.**<sup>8</sup>

When trust breaks down, the impact is immediate and measurable: fewer completed applications, higher drop-off rates, more defensive, volume-based applying, and a rise in AI-polished but less meaningful submissions - all of which make screening harder and erode employer brand trust. When trust collapses, candidates don't just complain. They change how they behave, and that changes the quality, volume and meaning of every application employers receive.

The struggle to win talent is very real. If employers want motivated humans who actually do the work, they can't keep leaning on a **post-and-pray model**; it's already failing.

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***Hiring in 2026 rewards organisations that move faster, show up earlier and treat candidates like they have choices.***

You are now hiring into a reality where every application is co-authored with AI and where trust is no longer assumed; it's something you have to earn at every stage of the process.



<sup>7-8</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

## PART 1

# The system is gaming candidates. Candidates are gaming it *back*.

Nearly six in ten job seekers say they're reshaping their applications just to get noticed – tweaking job titles, shifting employment dates and trying multiple channels to improve their chances of progressing.<sup>9</sup>

The **Artificial Applicant** did not appear out of nowhere. They are not the cause of the friction in modern hiring; they are the consequence of it.

Talent acquisition managers set the criteria, but the decision-making process itself is largely invisible to candidates. The filters are hidden, the rankings unclear, and the “why” behind a yes or no is rarely explained. Faced with a system they don't understand, many job seekers feel they have no choice but to get creative.

This distinction matters. It is easy to frame today's worker behaviours as opportunistic, impatient or overly optimised. It is harder and more accurate to recognise them as survival tactics. When people feel they are entering a process that is opaque, inconsistent and stacked against them, they do not keep showing up the same way.

## Signal 1: Ghosting as the default

The clearest sign of that breakdown is ghosting. In 2025, 88% of job seekers said they had applied for a role and heard nothing back.<sup>10</sup> In 2026, that number has worsened to 90%.<sup>11</sup>

That is not a marginal process flaw. It is the dominant candidate experience. Silence after applying or interviewing

is now the most frustrating part of job hunting, cited by 45% of workers, up from 39% the year before.<sup>12</sup> Workers are not complaining about a single bad recruiter or one unfortunate hiring manager. They are describing the new normal. And the message coming through in the qualitative responses is blunt:

“Don't say you're screaming for highly qualified professionals and then don't respond when they apply.”

“Unsuccessful candidates are humans. They have put effort in to apply. You owe them feedback.”

“My message to employers would be this: please design the hiring process with the same care and respect that you expect from candidates.”

“If I had to send a message to employers in 2026, it would be summed up in one word: respect. The recruitment process is not just an administrative procedure; it's the first point of contact with your brand and a fundamental human interaction.”<sup>13</sup>

These are not requests for a premium experience. They are requests for basic acknowledgment.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

<sup>10, 12</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2025. Total N=1027 job seekers.

<sup>11, 13</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

## Signal 2: The application slog

The second signal is the sheer volume of effort now required just to get noticed.

**Job searches are dragging on, with nearly 1 in 6 workers (16%) stuck looking for six months or more.<sup>14</sup>**

While 54% of candidates manage to secure an interview within their first five applications, nearly half, 46% must submit six or more.<sup>15</sup> A further 6% submit more than 20 applications before landing a single interview.<sup>16</sup> And that's no guarantee of even landing the job.

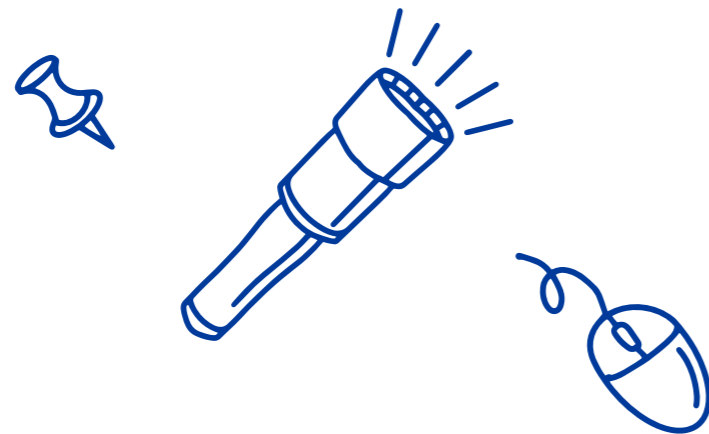
That is not a healthy funnel. It is a pressure cooker. Breaking through is harder than ever, with almost half (46%) of candidates applying repeatedly before securing interviews.<sup>17</sup>

This system tells candidates that effort does not reliably correlate with outcome, and that quality alone is no guarantee of visibility.

In that kind of system, people stop behaving like traditional applicants and start behaving like operators. They:

- batch applications
- optimise for the system
- automate wherever they can

They stop assuming one careful application will be treated with care in return.



<sup>14-17</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

## Signal 3: Trust collapse

The third signal is trust – or more accurately, the collapse of it. **Only 7% of Australian workers say they are very confident that most hiring processes are fair and unbiased.<sup>18</sup>** That means:

- 93% are not fully confident;
- nearly one quarter are actively unconfident;
- a further third sit in the middle, unconvinced.<sup>19</sup>

That trust deficit should be treated as a structural warning, not a momentary emotion. When confidence in fairness falls this low, the process itself starts to lose legitimacy. Workers no longer believe they are stepping into a system that will assess them clearly, fairly or even consistently. And once legitimacy breaks, compliance goes with it.

## How the market trained the Artificial Applicant

This is the context in which the **Artificial Applicant** emerges. Not from arrogance. Not from laziness. Not from some cultural decline in professional standards. But from repeated exposure to a process that asks for effort, time and vulnerability while offering less and less clarity in return.

The market has trained workers to think defensively:

- If job ads are vague, they tailor harder;
- If ATS systems filter by keyword, they optimise for machine logic;
- If interview processes are long, they look for ways to save time;

- If silence is common, they hedge their bets and apply more broadly.

That is why the phrase at the heart of this report matters:

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***You changed the rules, so I changed the player.***

It captures the emotional and strategic shift at the same time. Workers are no longer entering the process as passive participants hoping to be judged fairly. They are entering as people who assume the system has already made the first move.

<sup>18-19</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

## Why optimisation is self-defence, not cheating

The hiring process now contains all the ingredients that push people toward optimisation: long applications, hidden salary, vague role expectations, too many interview rounds, delayed follow-up and low transparency around decision-making.

Workers say the most important elements in an application process are salary transparency, a fair and bias-free interview process, and clear communication throughout.<sup>20</sup> That ranking matters because it reveals what is missing. They are telling employers, very plainly, that the basics are broken.

They also know where employers are getting it wrong. The top failures candidates point to are unclear salary, benefits or role expectations during offer negotiation, followed by frustrating or overly complex applications, lack of post-interview follow-up and poor initial communication about the role.<sup>21</sup> Workers are particularly unforgiving on pay.

**85% agree that companies hiding salary will miss out on applications, and a significant share will simply ignore the ad altogether rather than waste their time.<sup>22</sup>**

In other words, the black box is no longer invisible to candidates.

Workers repeatedly call for practical, skills-based assessment instead of rigid filtering, honest communication instead of silence, and clearer expectations instead of procedural drag.<sup>23</sup> One response cuts straight to the heart of it:

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***Focus less on filtering people out and more on bringing the right ones in.<sup>24</sup>***

Once workers stop trusting the process, they stop behaving in the ways the old hiring playbook assumes. They stop waiting patiently. They stop treating every job ad as a genuine invitation. They stop believing that authenticity alone will get them through.

Instead, they become more strategic. More sceptical. More protective of their time. That is why 71% of workers say they have walked away from a job application process after starting it.<sup>25</sup> The top reasons are telling: the process took too long, they received a better offer, or employer communication was poor.<sup>26</sup>

This is not candidate flakiness. It is a market response to friction. When a process feels slow, vague or one-sided, candidates increasingly see leaving not as a loss, but as self-preservation.



<sup>20-26</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers



**Time has become its own form of currency** and there's a growing gap between expectation and reality. Candidates expect speed: two weeks from application to offer feels reasonable, and 64% say three or more interview rounds is excessive.<sup>27</sup> But on the other side, talent acquisition teams are overwhelmed, sorting through hundreds of equally strong, often AI-enhanced applications. The result is friction. Every extra stage, delayed update, or unclear next step isn't just an inconvenience, it's a withdrawal from trust.

This is why optimisation has become the new survival instinct. In a system that behaves like a sorting machine, workers increasingly behave like people trying to beat one.

The **Artificial Applicant** is not simply "using AI." They are responding to the fact that hiring already feels machine-led on the employer side. If the system scans, scores, filters and ranks, candidates will learn to do the same in reverse: rewrite themselves for relevance, sharpen signals, increase volume and reduce wasted effort.

That does not mean candidates have become less human. In fact, the opposite is true. The more dehumanised the process feels, the more strongly they demand respect, clarity and recognition from employers.<sup>28</sup> The system trained them to optimise, but it did not erase what they need.

And that is the tension employers need to sit with. The job seeker has changed because the process changed first.

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***Employers created a hiring environment where invisibility is common, effort is expensive and trust is fragile.***

The optimised applicant is what that environment produces.

The real story, then, is not that workers are gaming the system. It is that the system has taught them they would be foolish not to.

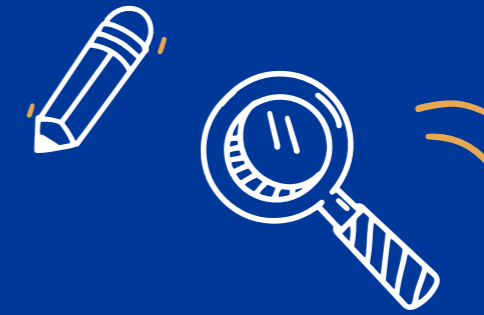
<sup>27-28</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

PART 2

# The application is a co-production

The modern job application is no longer a solo act. It is a **human-machine co-production**, where candidates and AI tools work together to produce what lands in an employer’s inbox. Hiring didn’t just digitise the process; it quietly changed the shape of the person who shows up inside it.

Instead of a single, linear effort – “write a CV, draft a cover letter, hit apply” – the application has become an iterative build between human intent and machine support. Workers are still the authors of their stories, but they are increasingly using AI as an editor, researcher, script partner and, in some cases, stand-in performer.



## How job seekers are co-creating their applications

For many workers, AI is now part of the basic toolkit of getting in the door. They are not using it for novelty; they are using it to keep up.



### Writing and research, on tap

41%

of workers use AI to write or refine their cover letters and application responses;

38%

use AI to research companies or roles before applying, treating it as a fast filter for culture, expectations and fit;

37%

use AI to write or update their résumés and CVs, tightening language, structure and impact.<sup>29</sup>

In practice, this looks less like outsourcing and more like co-design. Workers bring the raw material – their history, skills, context and intentions. AI brings structure, phrasing, pattern recognition and speed. Together, they iterate until the application “fits” what they believe the system is looking for.

<sup>29</sup>Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers



### Hacking the ATS logic

The black box of Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) has become a design brief in its own right.

29% of workers who use AI say they do so specifically to optimise their CV for ATS filters – aligning keywords, job titles and phrasing to match what the algorithm is likely to reward.<sup>30</sup>

This is co-production in a very literal sense. The application is being shaped not just by what a candidate has done, but by what they think the machine will recognise as valuable. AI becomes the translator between lived experience and system logic.



### Mass automation and portfolio plays

For a growing minority, AI is also a volume engine.

17% of workers now use AI tools to automatically generate and submit multiple applications simultaneously.<sup>31</sup>

Where a traditional applicant might carefully craft a handful of tailored applications, the **Artificial Applicant** can run a portfolio strategy: dozens of AI-assisted variations, tuned to different roles, companies or ATS rules. The “one CV, one cover letter” era is being replaced by a many-to-many co-designed output.



<sup>30-31</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

## Co-design principles: the application as a joint artifact

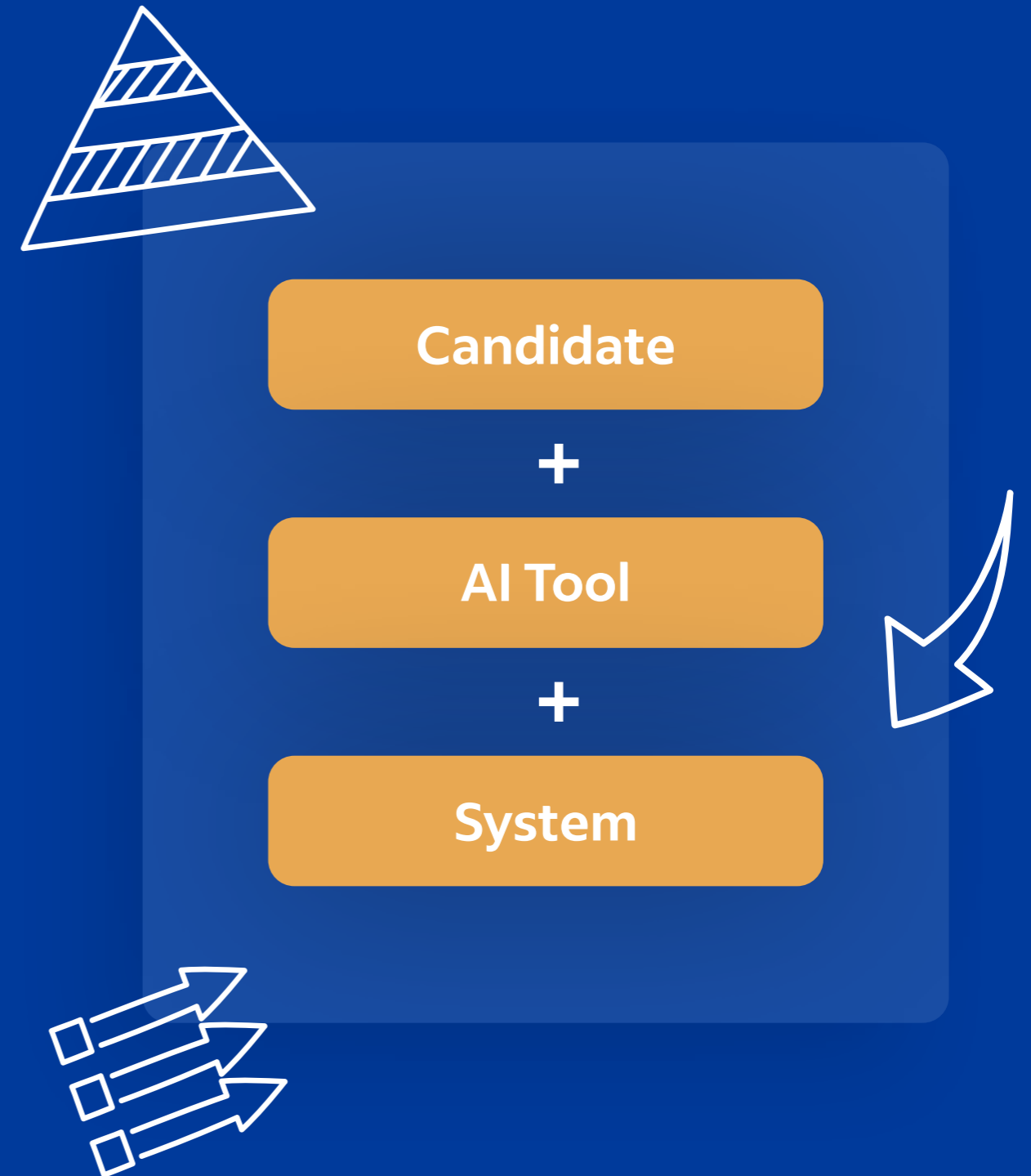
Seen through a co-design lens, the modern application is no longer a static document created by one person for another. It is an artefact produced by three forces working together:

- the **candidate**, bringing intent, history, values and constraints;
- the **AI tools**, bringing patterning, language shaping, speed and system awareness;
- the **hiring system**, with its filters, criteria and implicit design signals.

Co-design asks a simple question: who gets a say in how the thing is made, and whose needs is it designed to serve? Right now, workers are using AI to pull more of that design power back towards themselves. They are:

- adapting their materials to better meet the requirements the system has implied but never clearly stated;
- testing and iterating faster, rather than burning hours manually rewriting every detail;
- reducing the personal cost of entering a process that may never acknowledge them.

From their perspective, this is not cheating; it is levelling the field. If employers design hiring journeys around the needs of systems – speed, volume, screening – candidates will design their applications around the same logic.





## What this means for employers

Once the application becomes a co-production, three things change for employers:

### 1. Surface polish is less reliable as a signal.

A beautifully written cover letter may be partly or fully generated. A tightly tuned CV may reflect an understanding of ATS logic more than innate communication skill. Employers who rely too heavily on surface polish risk confusing AI fluency with role fit or skill.

### 2. The “real” candidate moves further upstream.

The authentic human signal is still there, but it is increasingly expressed in how people think, solve, interact and respond in real contexts – not just in how they write about those things. This strengthens the case for practical, skills-based tasks and structured conversations.

### 3. Process design becomes a shared responsibility.

If candidates are already co-designing their side of the interaction with AI, employers have a choice: pretend they are not, or acknowledge it and design hiring journeys that account for it. That might mean:

- being explicit about what is actually being assessed at each stage;
- focusing more on judgement, collaboration and problem-solving than on prose alone;
- building assessments that are robust enough to handle AI-assisted inputs without collapsing in value.

The modern application is no longer just **what someone wrote; it has become a mirror of how the system behaves.** The more hiring feels like a machine, the more the application will be co-produced with one. The real question for employers is not whether they approve of that shift, but whether they are prepared to hire well inside it. As one worker put it, too many

processes focus on filtering people out, turning hiring into **“an obstacle course designed to eliminate candidates rather than discover their strengths.”**<sup>32</sup> If the system is this powerful at screening people out, what might be possible if we rebuilt it to find worker’s strengths first?

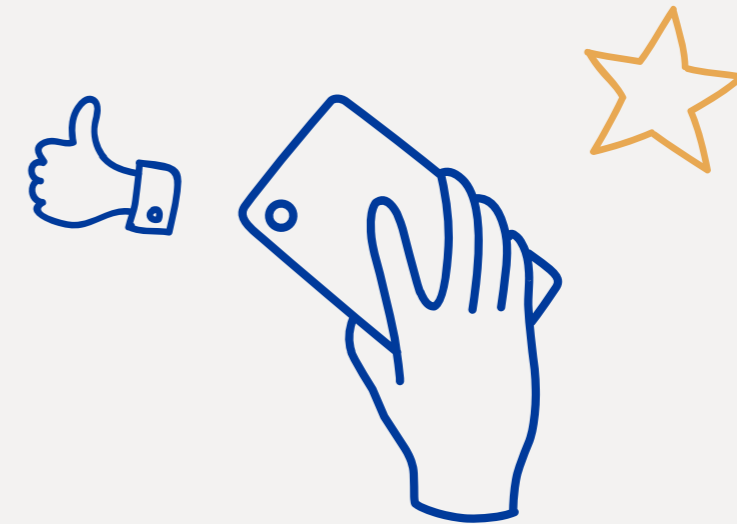
Here’s what workers said about how they would design the future of work:

**“I would scrap CVs and replace them with anonymous skill auditions. Because a CV shows where you’ve been, not what you can actually do”**

**“I’d swap those dusty CVs for blind auditions. Think of it like The Voice, but for office work or trades”**

**“My CV is an archive; my work is a solution. Give me your biggest challenge, and I’ll show you how I solve it today”**

**“Stop hiring degrees, start hiring adaptability”**<sup>33</sup>



Taken together, these messages are not a plea for gimmicks; they are a brief for a different kind of system, one that treats hiring as a search for capability and potential, rather than a contest in who can best survive the obstacle course.

(29%).<sup>35</sup> A quarter of workers say rigid office mandates and out-of-hours availability belong in the past, and 86% would trade a five-day week for four days if they could keep their pay.<sup>36</sup>

The same pattern shows up in how people think about the future of work. Purpose still leads, but financial reality is catching up, with a quarter of workers now prioritising paying bills and funding their lifestyle - up 5% since last year.<sup>33</sup> Work-life balance is the top reason to stay long-term (23%), while being overworked and underpaid remains the biggest trigger for leaving

**Nearly three in five (58%) say AI has already improved their job search experience.**

Put simply: workers want systems – in hiring and in work – that respect their time, recognise their reality and reward what they can actually do, not just where they have been.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32-33</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

<sup>34</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2025. Total N=1027 job seekers

<sup>35-37</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

## PART 3

# Not every applicant looks the *same*

Not every applicant looks the same and the data makes that impossible to ignore. Age, gender and industry are pulling workers in very different directions, especially when it comes to AI, risk, and what “good work” looks like.

## The Artificial Applicant is a spectrum

The **Artificial Applicant** is not one archetype; it is a spectrum of behaviours shaped by context. Younger candidates are far more willing to push AI to the edges of what feels acceptable – optimising résumés for ATS, trialling AI-generated representations in interviews, and using automation to scale applications – while older workers move more cautiously and remain more focused on stability, security and human signals.

Industry adds another layer. Some sectors lean into AI and career acceleration; others still anchor around job security, human connection and traditional hiring cues. Gender differences cut through as well, especially around flexibility, culture and comfort with technology. For employers, treating the *job seeker* as a single, predictable persona is now a liability.





## Gender: same salary expectations, different deal-breakers

On salary transparency, men and women are almost perfectly aligned: both sit around 93–94% agreement that knowing pay upfront is essential, and both see hidden salary as a major red flag.<sup>38</sup>

Alongside that reputation damage and negative reviews turn workers off, for both men and women, with over half citing them as deal-breakers. Beyond that, the paths diverge:



### Right to disconnect

Women are significantly more likely to want the expectation of answering emails outside work hours gone for good (29% vs 18% of men).<sup>39</sup> For them, boundaries are not a nice-to-have; they are a marker of respect.



### Walking away from the interview process

Men are more likely to say they have walked away from a process because it took too long or was too slow (30% vs 21%) or because the salary wasn't competitive (23% vs 17%).<sup>40</sup>



### Leave and flexibility

Women lean more heavily towards hybrid work (61% of women vs 56% of men) and are far more likely to treat leave allowances as a top perk (40% vs 31%).<sup>41</sup> Time, recovery and flexibility are core parts of the value proposition.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

<sup>39-41</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers



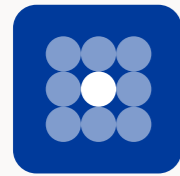
### AI comfort and trust

Men are noticeably more comfortable with employers using AI in hiring (48% vs 38% of women) and more likely to say AI-led interviews feel less stressful than traditional ones (45% vs 37%).<sup>42</sup> Women are more likely to have never used or encountered AI in the process at all.



### Clear communication

Men are more likely than women to rate clear communication as one of the most important aspects of the application process (53% vs 46%) and to find poor recruiter communication one of the most frustrating parts of job search (34% vs 22%).<sup>43</sup>



### Fair hiring

Fair hiring has a trust problem: 89% of men and 96% of women aren't convinced the process is unbiased.<sup>44</sup>



### Human interaction

Men are more likely than women to expect human interaction later in the process – after completing assessments (33% vs 23%) and once they progress to later-stage interviews (19% vs 10%).<sup>45</sup>

Underneath the numbers is a simple truth: women are calibrating their careers around trust, culture and sustainable working conditions, while men, on average, show slightly higher tolerance for AI and place more weight on growth signals and leadership strength.

<sup>42-45</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers





## Age: three different job markets in one

Age is where the spectrum of the **Artificial Applicant** really stretches. Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X/Baby Boomers are not experiencing the same market or reacting to it in the same way.



### Search activity and risk appetite

Gen Z are the most likely to be searching and applying for a new job (58% vs 43% of Millennials and 32% of Baby Boomers).<sup>46</sup> They are also more likely to say they will search again in the next six months and more likely to walk away when processes feel slow, unclear or disrespectful.



### What work is “about”

Younger workers are far more likely to say work is about building a career they love or learning and growing (Gen Z 17%; Millennials 16% vs just 4% for older workers).<sup>47</sup> Older generations lean more heavily towards job security and just paying the bills.



### Retention vs exit triggers

Older workers prioritise feeling valued and recognised as their top reason to stay (19% vs 9% Gen Z and 13% Millennials), and are more likely to leave because of a lack of appreciation or a bad manager.<sup>48</sup> Younger workers are more likely to leave for more flexibility or fresh growth.



### Red flags and reviews

Gen X/Baby Boomers are harsher on reputation and turnover, with 67% citing poor reputation and 66% citing high turnover as trust-breaking red flags (vs 46% and 32% for Gen Z and 51% and 43% for Millennials).<sup>49</sup> They are also more likely to say they have been ghosted frequently and more likely to call long or slow hiring processes a top frustration.



### AI adoption and attitudes

AI is where the generational gap is most striking. Around 72% of Gen Z and Millennials say AI has improved the job search and hiring process for them, compared to just 30% of older workers.<sup>50</sup> Over two in five Gen X/Baby Boomers have never used or encountered AI in hiring at all, vs 12% of Gen Z and 18% of Millennials.<sup>51</sup> Younger candidates are also more likely to:

- use AI across more stages of the search (research, prep, CVs, comms);
- trust AI to make fair decisions (65% vs 28% for older workers);
- describe AI-led interviews as less stressful and just as effective as traditional ones.<sup>52</sup>

Older candidates, by contrast, tend to accept AI in narrow, administrative roles, if at all, and push harder for human oversight and full transparency.

The result: Gen Z and Millennials are much closer to the **Artificial Applicant** edge of the spectrum, while Gen X/Baby Boomers still expect strongly human-centric, stability-led experiences.

<sup>49-52</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers





## Industry: different sectors, different Artificial Applicants

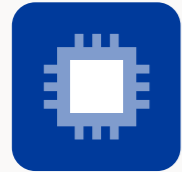
The Artificial Applicant also looks very different depending on where they work. Industry doesn't just shape skills; it shapes attitudes to risk, AI and what it takes to move.



### Construction & Trade: security first, AI cautiously

- **Pre-application priority:** Job security is the standout, cited by 64% of workers as the key perk they look for before applying.<sup>53</sup>
- **Staying vs leaving:** Long-term retention is split evenly between job security (20%) and good work-life balance and flexibility (20%), showing that stability and balance share top billing.<sup>54</sup>
- **Price of jumping ship:** Construction & Trade workers require the highest salary increase to move, at 19.22% – above the 16.9% average.<sup>55</sup>
- **AI comfort:** Comfort with AI in hiring sits at 49% – not as high as tech, but notably higher than many human-centric sectors.<sup>56</sup>

This produces a candidate profile that is financially cautious, security-driven, slowly warming to AI and unlikely to jump for marginal offers. Employers in this sector need strong job security stories and credible flexibility, not just pay bumps.



### IT, Media & Communications: growth-and-AI natives

- **Pre-application priority:** This is a growth-first sector. Career growth and development is the top perk for 77%, far outranking job security.<sup>57</sup>
- **Retention driver:** Career growth remains the number one reason to stay long-term (27%).<sup>58</sup>
- **Price of moving:** The required salary increase to switch is high at 18.94%, just behind Construction & Trade.<sup>59</sup>
- **AI comfort:** AI comfort peaks here, with 63% saying they are comfortable with employers using AI in recruitment – the highest of any industry.<sup>60</sup>

Here, the **Artificial Applicant** is at full strength: AI-literate, ambitious, and deeply focused on growth. These candidates will expect sophisticated, fast, and tech-enabled hiring journeys – and are likely to be the most advanced co-producers of AI-shaped applications.

<sup>57-60</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers



### Human-centred sectors: wary of AI, hungry for trust

At the other end of the spectrum are sectors where the work itself is grounded in human connection and the discomfort with AI is much sharper:

- **Education:** 43% comfortable with AI in hiring;
- **Health:** 34% comfortable;
- **Hospitality:** 36% comfortable;
- **Retail:** 30% comfortable;
- **Wholesale, Transport & Distribution:** 30% comfortable;
- **Personal Services:** just 27% comfortable.<sup>61</sup>

In these sectors, candidates are more likely to see heavy AI use as dehumanising. They are also more likely to place strong emphasis on culture, stability and fairness. Hospitality is a good example: 39% of workers there rate a diverse and inclusive workplace culture as a top perk, compared to only 18% of professional services and 11% of IT/Media professionals.<sup>62</sup>

In other words: the closer the job is to human care and contact, the more skeptical candidates become of algorithmic gatekeeping and the more they judge employers on how people are treated.

<sup>61-62</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

## The AI arms race looks different, depending on who you are

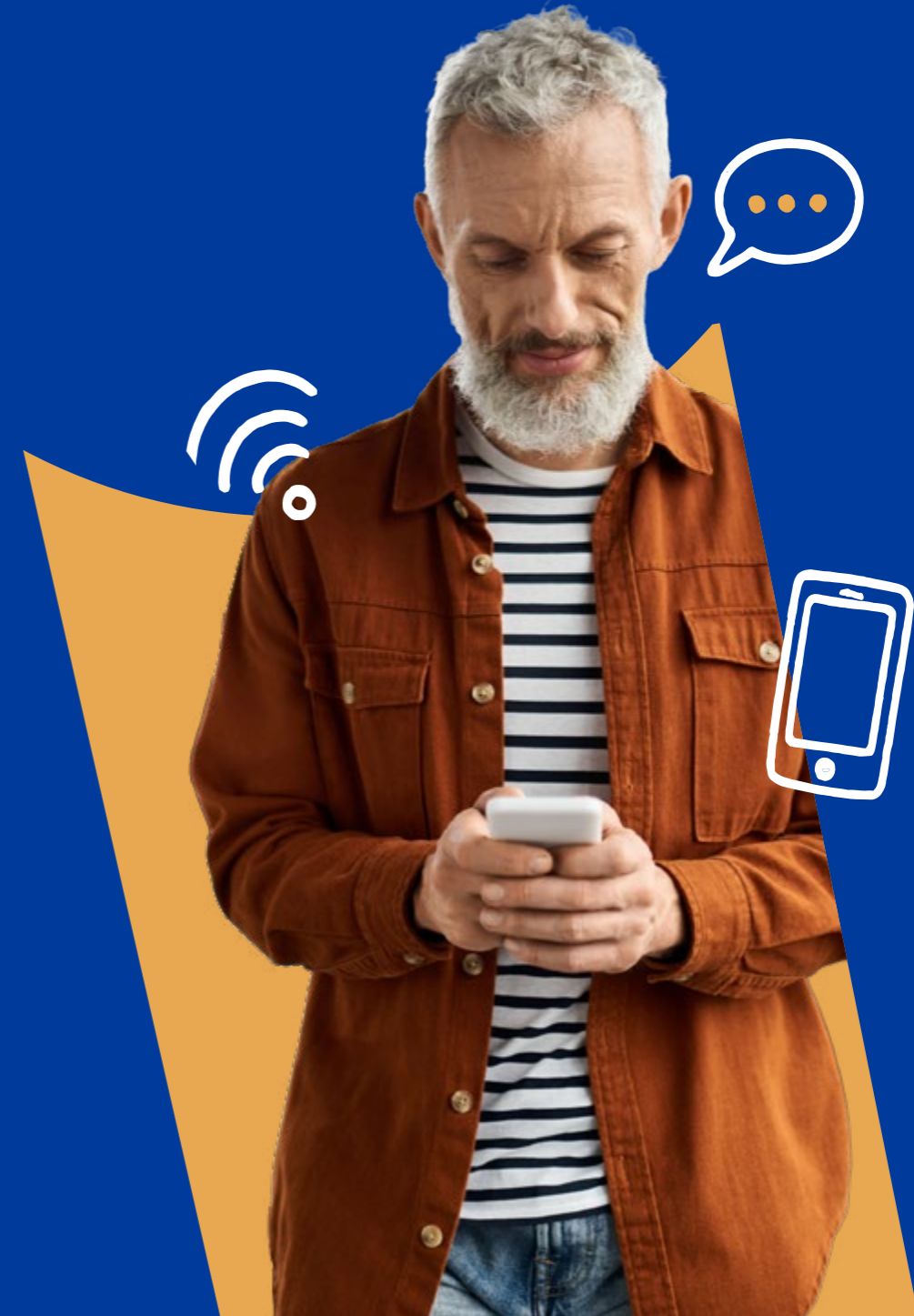
The same AI toolkit lands very differently across these groups:

- Younger candidates and those in tech-heavy sectors are comfortable using AI to stretch what “the applicant” can be, from optimised CVs to AI-generated interview personas.
- Older workers, women, and those in human-centric industries are more likely to focus on stability, respect, culture and human oversight and more likely to walk when processes feel cold, confusing or opaque.

That is why the **Artificial Applicant** cannot be treated as a single persona. It is a spectrum of responses to the same system, shaped by age, gender and industry context.

For employers, the risk is clear: design hiring as if every candidate looks like a tech-savvy twenty-something and you will lose the experienced, risk-aware and relationship-driven talent you also need. Design solely for the most cautious, and you will miss where the future of work is already headed.

So the real question is not “do we want AI-assisted candidates?” It is: **which version of the Artificial Applicant are we designing for?**





## PART 4

# How can Indeed *help*?

The old playbook assumed jobs were scarce and attention was cheap. You wrote a job ad, posted it, and waited. Candidates came to you, lined up in a long digital queue, and the main challenge was sorting the stack. That world is gone.

*Today's market rewards employers who move faster, show up earlier, and get in front of the right people before they drift off, drop out or get snapped up elsewhere.*

In a landscape where 71% of workers have walked away from an application mid-process and 90% have been ghosted before, post and pray is not just inefficient, it is actively leaking talent.<sup>63</sup>

**This is the shift from posting to matching.**

## Why posting is no longer enough

The **Artificial Applicant** has changed the dynamics of supply and demand. Workers are searching across multiple platforms, mass applying with AI support, and dropping out the moment a process feels slow, vague or disrespectful. They are not sitting on a single job board, patiently refreshing one listing.

At the same time, employers are competing in a feed where every job ad looks similar, salary is often still hidden, and attention spans are measured in seconds. Visibility alone is not the differentiator it used to be. Relevance, speed and direct connection are.

In this environment, waiting for the *right* candidate to stumble across a static job post is the hiring equivalent of hanging a 'Help Wanted' sign in a back alley. If the **Artificial Applicant** is a symptom of a process that feels slow, opaque and impersonal, the answer isn't more automation. It's smarter platforms that enable better matching and make human connection visible from the start.

<sup>63</sup> Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total N=1034 workers

 **Premium Sponsored Jobs: built for a selective, impatient market**

Premium Sponsored Jobs is built for this new reality. They're not just boosted posts, they're high-precision matching engines with visibility built in.


They help employers:


- **Stand out where it matters**  
Premium Sponsored roles are prioritised in search results and can carry branded elements and "Urgently hiring" labels, making them easier to recognise in a crowded scroll.
- **Reach the right candidates, not just more candidates**  
Advanced targeting and network reach mean roles are shown to people with the right skills, credentials and locations, and amplified across relevant industry sites where specific talent actually spends time.



**Registered Nurse**  
Sydney, Australia

 **Premium Sponsored Job benefits**

 \$60.00 daily average, excl. GST

 1 Mar 2026 - 15 Mar 2026

- **Move from waiting to inviting**  
Instead of hoping the right person finds the listing, employers can proactively surface matched candidates from Indeed's talent pool and invite them to apply, combining AI-powered matching with human judgement on who to engage.
- **Create momentum earlier in the funnel**  
Time-saving AI features highlight why a candidate might be a fit and support fast, personalised outreach, helping teams progress from interest to conversation without losing days to manual follow-up.

For a market that is more selective, less patient and harder to win with passive visibility alone, **Premium Sponsored Jobs** are effectively a fast lane designed around matching, not just posting. **Premium Sponsored Job Ads will appear in the top three search results 2.5x more often than standard sponsored jobs.**<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Indeed data (AU)



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## OpenAI: meeting job seekers where they already search

Job seekers now explore careers across tabs, feeds and AI chats – they research roles, ask questions and plan next steps inside conversational tools. Indeed's collaboration with OpenAI brings your jobs directly into that space.

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*Real roles and real employers appear at the exact moment candidates are thinking about what comes next.*

With the [Indeed experience embedded in ChatGPT](#), people can launch an Indeed-powered search from the Apps menu or by mentioning **@Indeed**, connect their Indeed profile, see tailored roles based on their skills and history, and view job and company details without leaving the chat. When they are ready, they tap through to apply on Indeed.

For employers, the value is clear: this isn't just another posting channel, it is an expansion of your reach into a **high-intent environment**. Your roles can be surfaced to more of the right candidates, earlier in their thinking, powered by the depth of Indeed's profiles and matching rather than generic keyword search. As job seekers become even more AI-assisted in how they navigate their careers, Indeed helps ensure your opportunities – and their profiles – can meet each other wherever the conversation starts.



## Indeed Career Scout: AI-prepared candidates, better matches for employers

Career Scout doesn't just support job seekers; it responds to the **Artificial Applicant**.

The AI-assisted job seeker is already using tools to research, optimise and prepare. Career Scout channels that behaviour in a direction that is more useful for employers: instead of random optimisation and mass applications, it nudges candidates toward roles that genuinely fit their skills and goals, and helps them present that fit clearly. In other words, it takes the same AI instinct driving the Artificial Applicant and points it toward better alignment, not just better gaming.

For employers, that means the AI-assisted applicant who reaches you via Career Scout is:

- **Better matched:** steered toward roles that actually match their profile.
- **Better prepared:** using AI to understand the role, refine their story and show relevant strengths, rather than simply generating generic content.
- **Less random:** applying in ways that reflect considered fit, not just volume for volume's sake.

And early data suggests this matters: job seekers who use [Career Scout](#) are significantly **38% more likely to get hired** than those who do not, reflecting the power of guided matching over raw searching.<sup>65</sup>

## Matching is the new baseline

Put together, Premium Sponsored Jobs, Indeed app for ChatGPT and Career Scout show where the market is heading: away from static job posts and towards a continuous, two-sided matching system.

Candidates are no longer just applying; they are being guided, filtered and coached towards roles that match their skills, interests and goals.

Employers are no longer just advertising; they are being encouraged to target, invite and engage the right people faster, with AI doing the heavy lifting on pattern-matching and priority.

Indeed's role in this landscape is not simply to respond to the **Artificial Applicant**, but to continue to **build for them**, creating tools that respect how candidates now search, apply and prepare, while helping employers cut through noise and move decisively.

The question for employers is whether they will keep acting like posting is enough, or step into a world where matching — the right person, right moment, right message — becomes the centre of how they hire.



<sup>65</sup> Indeed data (AU)

