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The Talent Acquisition Frontline

State of the Recruitment Sector Report

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After a period of **unprecedented change**, what do the lives of **talent acquisition professionals** look like and what keeps them up at night?

Organisations have experienced a seismic shift in the way they work over the last two years. A global pandemic, the rapid shift to remote working, then the so called Great Resignation. Much has been written about the impact that the changing workplace will have on businesses and candidates - but one group that is all too often overlooked is those who work in talent acquisition.

Indeed, it's HR professionals and recruiters who have borne the brunt of many of these challenges, adding to a workload that was already strained as a result of the growing demands of ED&I and pressures of one-click applications.

With that in mind, it's perhaps no surprise then that our State of the Recruitment Sector report paints a worrying picture of life on the frontlines of talent acquisition. The statistics reveal an industry facing unprecendented challenges: stress, workloads and lack of support are pushing some professionals to breaking point.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Our survey of more than 500 talent acquisition professionals also shows us how much good these teams are achieving for their organisations, and for society as a whole.

As a company, Tribepad was born out of a desire to help recruiters tackle the challenges they face each and every day. We've spent years working closely with talent acquisition teams, and we've witnessed firsthand the mounting pressure they have faced to deliver for their organisations.

Over the coming pages we will reveal a sector that is reaching a tipping point, one where the potential for positive change is at risk of being eclipsed by the toll that growing demands is taking on those attempting to bring it about.

Some of our findings make for worrying reading. The purpose of this report is not to scold organisations, but to create a roadmap for decision-makers to invest in the tools, technologies and resources their teams need to make a genuine impact.

Where are all the quality candidates?

While the dual levers of technology and a growing trend in remote working has levelled the playing field for candidates, it has also led to a rise in 'application spam' that talent acquisition professionals are being forced to contend with.

More than half (59%) of those questioned as part of our State of the Sector report revealed that they had seen a noticeable decrease in the quality of applications within the past year.

Those numbers were even more pronounced in regions such as the East of England (74%) North West (70%), Scotland (69%) and Yorkshire and Humberside (67%) - suggesting that the UK is experiencing a clear regional divide when it comes to application quality in the current market.
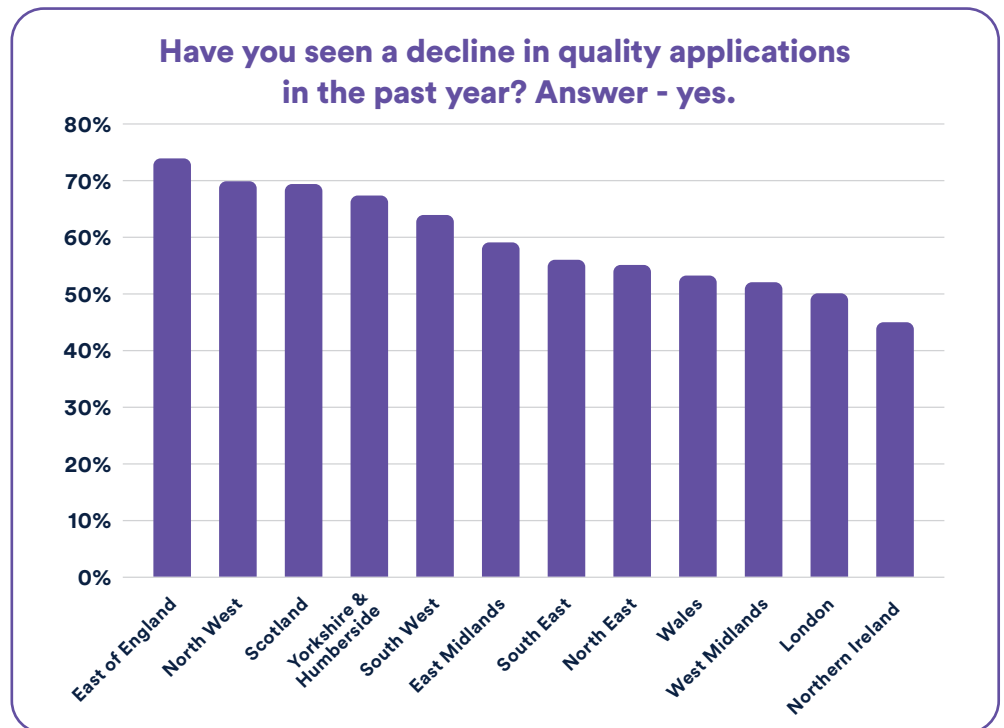
The ease with which candidates can now submit applications or send CVs using one click portals is one of the key drivers of this trend. The end result is a numbers game where candidates perhaps focus on the quantity of applications they are sending out, rather than the quality. This means employers are overwhelmed with applications from candidates who are simply unsuitable or unqualified for the vacancy they applied for.

Far more than a simple annoyance, this applicant spam creates a significant drain on resources - creating an unmanageable workload for professionals to contend with. This administrative burden shifts their time away from strategic priorities.

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Unfortunately candidates are only adding to the pressure that HR professionals are currently experiencing. Application spam is a growing issue for recruiters who are simply being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of CVs they're receiving, many of which are coming from people who are either unsuitable or unqualified for the role they're applying for.

Dean Sadler, CEO, Tribepad

Have you seen a decline in quality applications in the past year? Answer - yes.

Region	Percentage
East of England	~74%
North West	~70%
Scotland	~69%
Yorkshire & Humberside	~67%
South West	~64%
East Midlands	~59%
South East	~56%
North East	~55%
Wales	~53%
West Midlands	~52%
London	~50%
Northern Ireland	~45%

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What does **success** look like?

With so much emphasis on recruitment and retention in the current climate, it's interesting to see what success looks like across different organisations. To find out we asked respondents what indicators they use to measure performance.

Given the current talent crisis it will come as no surprise to see that retention rates (59%) and quality of hire (52%) were amongst the most popular responses, as organisations place greater emphasis on finding and holding onto the best candidates. We believe that talent acquisition teams are best aligned into broader HR so that recruitment of the best candidates is valued and the pipeline through to retention and career progression is streamlined.
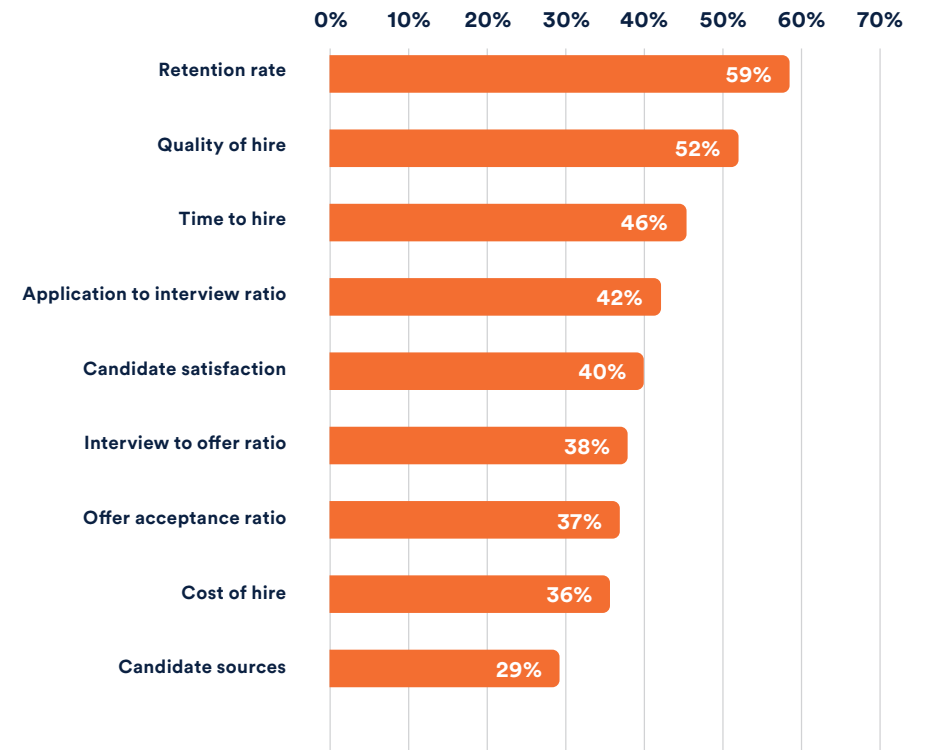
Close behind were metrics such as time to hire (46%), application to interview ratio (42%), interview to offer ratios (38%) and cost to hire (36%). These responses reveal a growing appetite for data as organisations attempt to quantify the efforts of their talent acquisition teams. They also point to a need to make things more efficient in the face of increasing workloads.

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This is where technology can help. Whether it's automation to help filter through thousands of applications or access to granular data that enables organisations to measure their success, technology can give talent acquisition teams the tools they need to overcome many of the challenges they're currently faced with.

Dean Sadler, CEO, Tribepad

Which performance indicators do you measure?

Indicator	Percentage
Retention rate	59%
Quality of hire	52%
Time to hire	46%
Application to interview ratio	42%
Candidate satisfaction	40%
Interview to offer ratio	38%
Offer acceptance ratio	37%
Cost of hire	36%
Candidate sources	29%

The strategic importance of **talent teams**

While talent acquisition teams are currently struggling under the pressure that's being placed on them, our report reveals that there is at least some light at the end of the tunnel.

That's because the vast majority (84%) of professionals believed that their departments were viewed as strategically important by the organisations that they worked in.

In total 35% of people we spoke to felt that they were "highly valued" and seen as a "critical" part of the business' success, while a further 25% believed that their work was viewed positively. In contrast, only a minority of respondents believed that their work was undervalued (14%) or seen as a cost centre (3%).
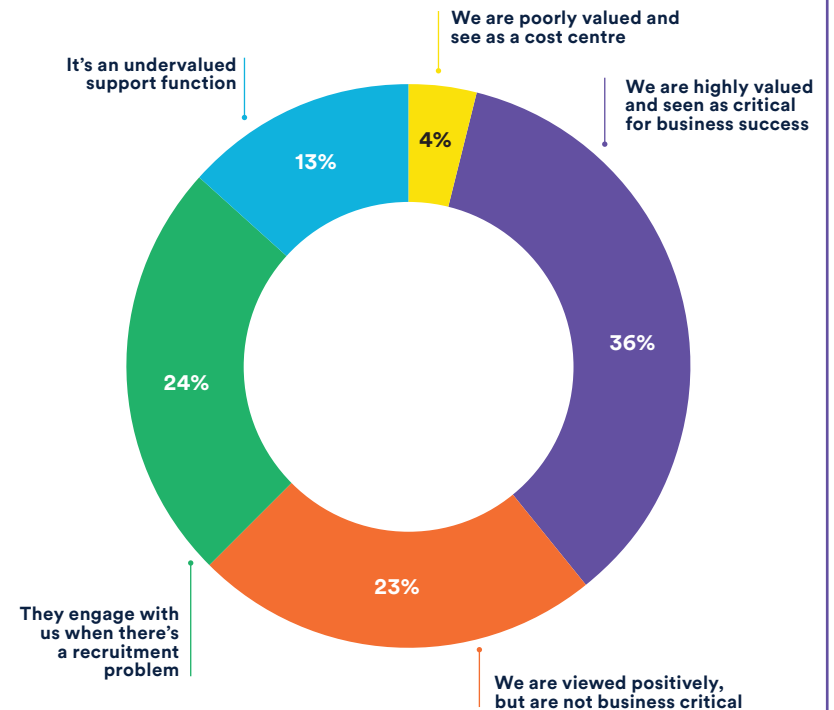
Encouragingly, the findings show that talent acquisition is clearly valued by organisations who rightfully understand the critical role that these teams play to their overall success. There was one notable caveat however. It seems that as organisations grow, the value they place on talent acquisition teams diminishes. Indeed our research showed a notable drop off between companies of between 250-1000 employees (41%) and those with 1000+ employees (30%). This is surprising, as employees are essential to business growth, so why overlook the teams responsible for hiring them, and supporting to retain them? The wrong hire results in poor productivity, poor morale, and impacts the bottom line - so getting it right is essential.

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Talent acquisition is often seen as key to growth, so it's perhaps no wonder that mid-weight organisations are more likely to value its impact. But talent doesn't stop being critical just because you've reached a certain headcount. If anything it becomes even more critical.

Dean Sadler, CEO, Tribepad

How do you feel talent aquisition is viewed in your organisation?

- We are poorly valued and see as a cost centre — 4%
- It's an undervalued support function — 13%
- We are highly valued and seen as critical for business success — 36%
- They engage with us when there's a recruitment problem — 24%
- We are viewed positively, but are not business critical — 23%

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Finding **fulfilment**

Given the challenges that they are currently faced with, those who have embarked on a career in talent acquisition would be forgiven for questioning their decision. However our survey suggests that the reality is that the majority of professionals are happy in their roles and find fulfilment within their day-to-day working lives.

Some 13% of respondents said that their career had exceeded expectations, with men (16%) outnumbering women (10%) when it came to this statement. Interestingly that trend was reversed at the other end of the satisfaction spectrum. Of the 13% of respondents who were "generally disappointed" or "highly unsatisfied" with their roles, there were more than twice as many women than men. Given that the HR function is key when it comes to ED&I, the fact that female recruiters are more likely to be unhappy than men is concerning. Women are more likely than men to be personally passionate about addressing bias (60% vs 47%), which could reflect their own experiences in the workplace.

While there are clear signs of discontent, the good news is that the stresses revealed within our research aren't having a significant impact on people's prospects. In total nearly three quarters of people we questioned (74%) believed that their career had met expectations.

Is your career in recruitment as personally rewarding as you hoped it would be?

Legend: Total (purple), Male (orange), Female (yellow)
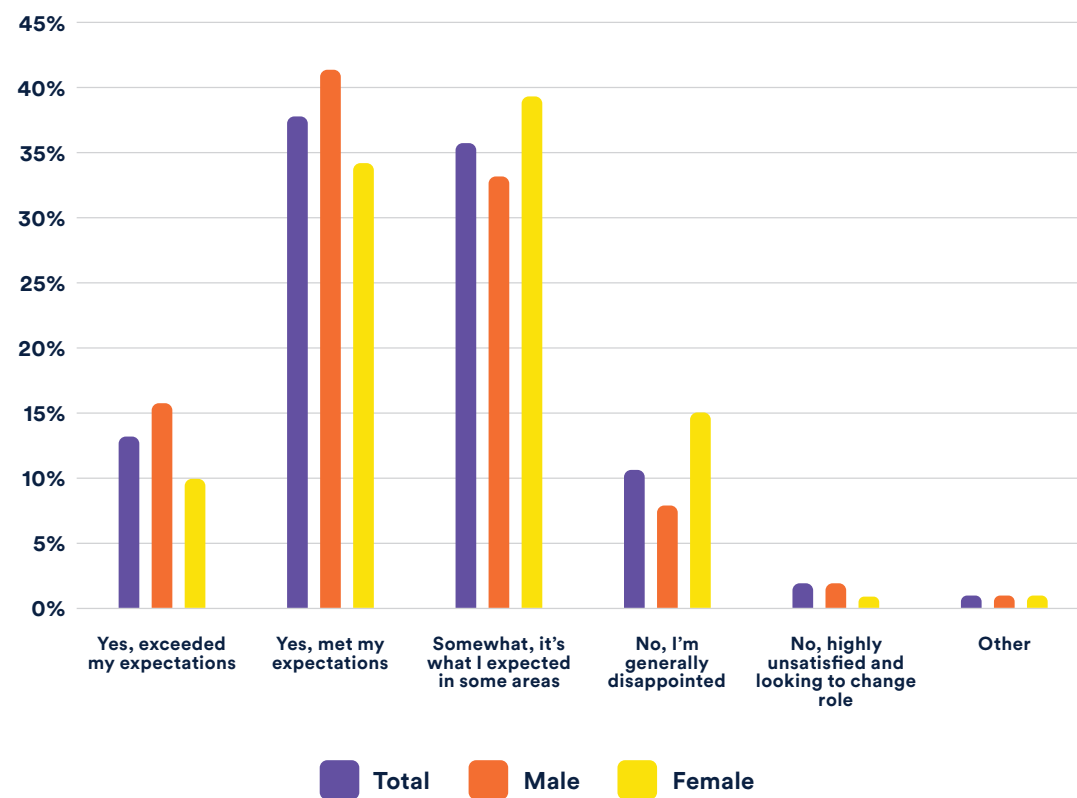
Gender not identified too small to count

What **matters most**

While it's good to see that professionals are finding fulfilment within their careers it's perhaps even more heartening to discover that they're also finding purpose.

Those we spoke to were passionate about driving positive change within their organisations and creating a better environment for candidates. Indeed the overwhelming majority (90%) of people said that addressing bias was a priority for them right now, with women more focused on gender, race and disability than men. Training staff on subconscious or conscious bias was being used (69%) or considered (27%) by organisations more than other ways of addressing bias, such as blind applications (39%) or removing the CV (27%).

When asked what aspects of potential bias they were looking to address race (58%), gender (54%), disability (45%) and age (43%) were among the most popular responses. They were followed by issues such as parental status (21%), accentism (14%) and mental health (33%).
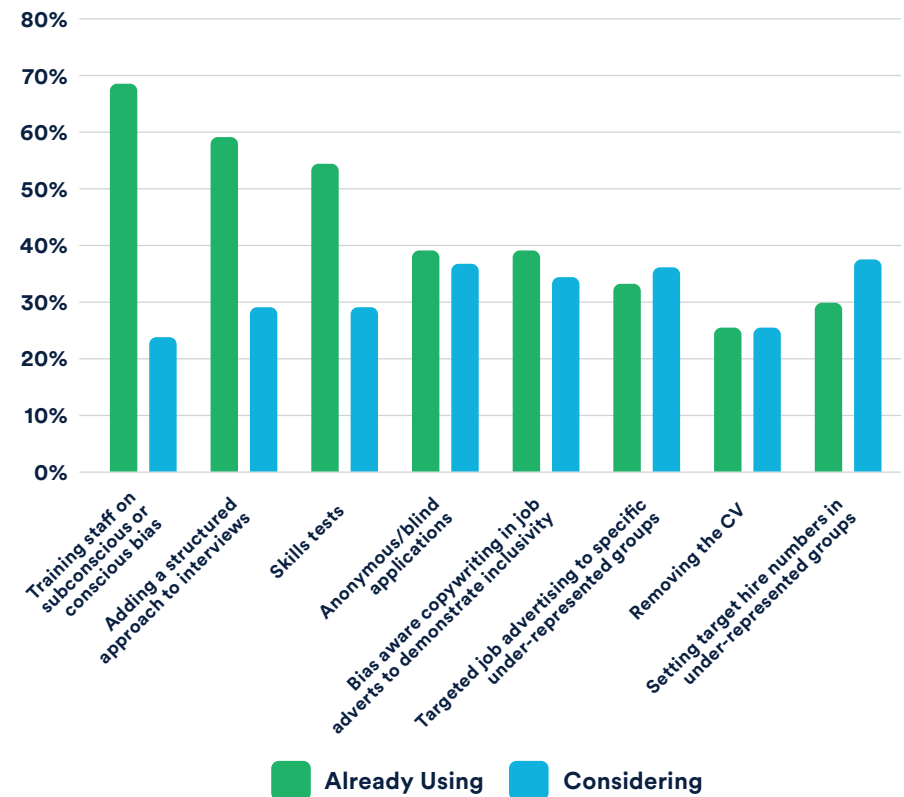
What's interesting for those of us here at Tribepad is how these responses match up with candidates' concerns, which we explored in depth as part of our Stop the Bias report when it was published earlier this year. In particular only 44% of respondents use diversity data to investigate and instigate change, and 40% to spot trends. 13% openly say it is used for compliance needs only.

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Despite the challenges they're currently faced with, it's incredible to see how driven talent acquisition teams are to level the playing field and eliminate bias within recruitment. It's incredibly encouraging to see that organisations aren't just listening to candidates' concerns, they are taking direct action to address them.

Dean Sadler, CEO, Tribepad

Which of the following methods do you use to reduce bias?

Categories (x-axis): Training staff on subconscious or conscious bias; Adding a structured approach to interviews; Skills tests; Anonymous/blind applications; Bias aware copywriting in job adverts to demonstrate inclusivity; Targeted job advertising to specific under-represented groups; Removing the CV; Setting target hire numbers in under-represented groups

Legend: ■ Already Using ■ Considering

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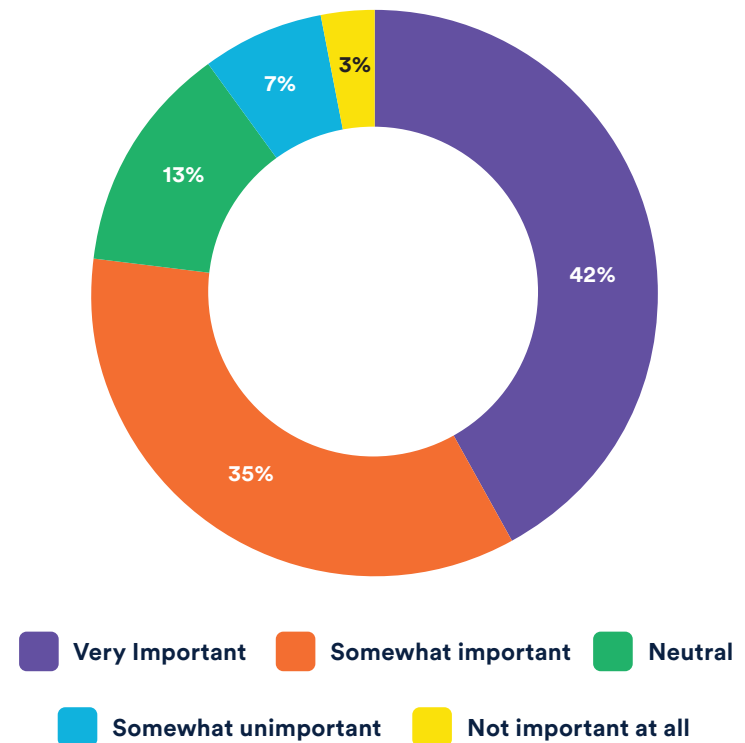
An end to **ghosting**

Following on from our End Ghosting Report, which explored the issue of candidate ghosting in recruitment, we wanted to ask talent acquisition professionals how they viewed this practice and what their teams were doing to combat it.

After placing an industry-wide call to end the practice, the good news is that more than three quarters (77%) of people we spoke to said that minimising ghosting was an important priority within their organisation. The issue was also important on a personal level with more than half of respondents (56%) admitting they were concerned or very concerned about ghosting.

As for what they thought was the key driver behind candidate ghosting, 34% blamed process or system failures, 23% said responsibility lies with recruitment agencies and 21% said it was the fault of department hiring managers.

Interestingly almost one-in-five respondents said that increasing time pressures were to blame for candidates being ghosted, demonstrating another impact that growing demands is having on talent acquisition teams. Reducing the time pressures and more efficient processes, often through technology, is the only way to ensure that ghosting of candidates ends.

How much of a priority is minimising the ghosting of candidates in your organisation?

- 3%
- 7%
- 13%
- 42%
- 35%

Legend:
- Very Important
- Somewhat important
- Neutral
- Somewhat unimportant
- Not important at all

Struggling to cope

One of the biggest workplace shifts that we have seen in the wake of the pandemic is the shift in power from employers to candidates. A buoyant candidate driven market is positive for those seeking jobs, but it is challenging for those doing the hiring. While its impact on organisations and candidates have been well-publicised, the personal toll it is taking on talent acquisition teams has so far flown under the radar.

Our research shows that the additional demands being placed on these teams is pushing people to breaking point. Overall a quarter of people we spoke to are struggling to cope with their stress levels, with some (3%) admitting that the current situation is pushing them to break point.

Only one in three (32%) of the 528 people we spoke with believed that their work-related stress levels were manageable, with even fewer, 6% revealing that their careers aren't stressful at all.

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It's vital that companies act now to ease their teams' workload, otherwise we'll soon be talking about a generation of recruiters who are burning out as a result of the strain that's being put upon them.

Dean Sadler, CEO, Tribepad

How would you describe your work-related stress levels?

Legend: Total, Male, Female

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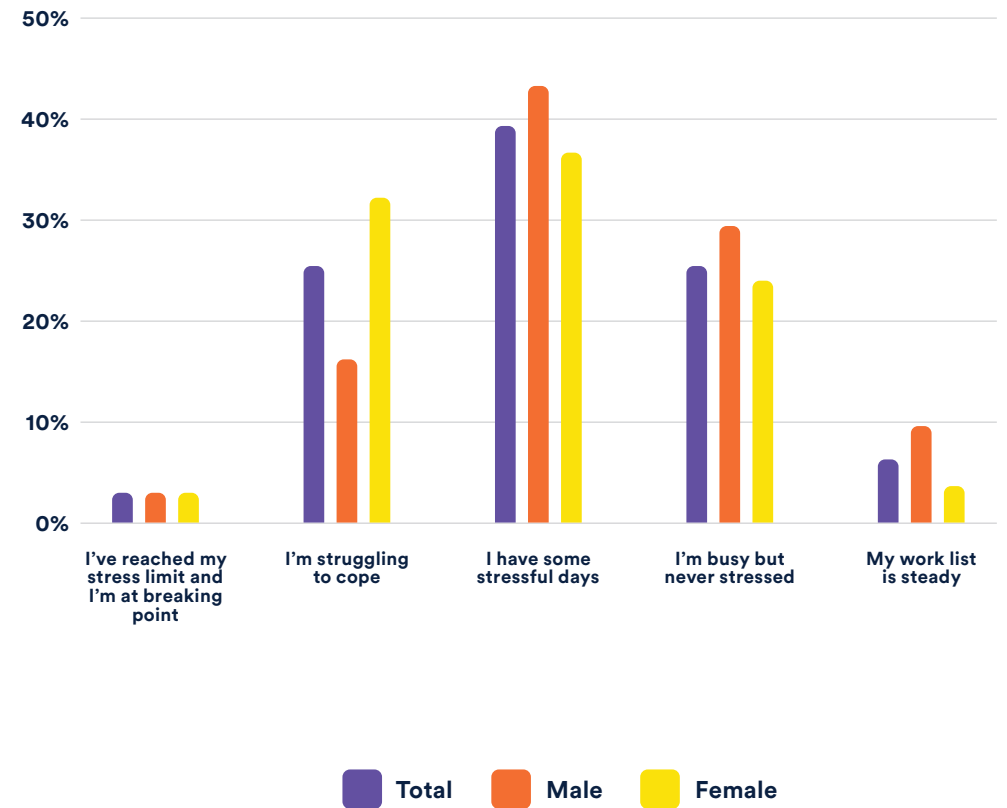
What is causing **workplace stress?**

Our findings reveal an industry that's struggling to cope with the pressures they face during their day-to-day work lives. So what's causing the stress that's pushing talent acquisition teams to breaking point?

Ironically the number one cause of stress for teams right now is a lack of staff within their own departments. Indeed one in four (25%) of respondents listed resourcing as their principal concern, which shows the impact that changes in the job market have had on every area of our working lives.

After a decline in the recruitment industry during the peak of the pandemic, demands are rising, and vacancies in the UK are far outstripping unemployment rates. In the first quarter of this year job vacancies reached a record high of 1.3m, at the same time as the unemployment rate fell to its lowest level in almost half a century. According to a new PwC report, almost one in five UK workers say they are likely to change jobs in the next 12 months as they seek better pay and job satisfaction, suggesting this burden will only increase. This means that hiring managers and talent acquisition teams will have an additional task of communicating the employee value proposition to candidates who will have the pick of the jobs, with the pressure to attract the most talented and experienced candidates being even harder. For the first time in many years, candidates have the upper hand, and talent acquisition managers will have to work even harder to convince them that their company is right for them. HR teams will need to work closely with senior leadership teams and marketing teams to effectively communicate why their company is the best place to work.
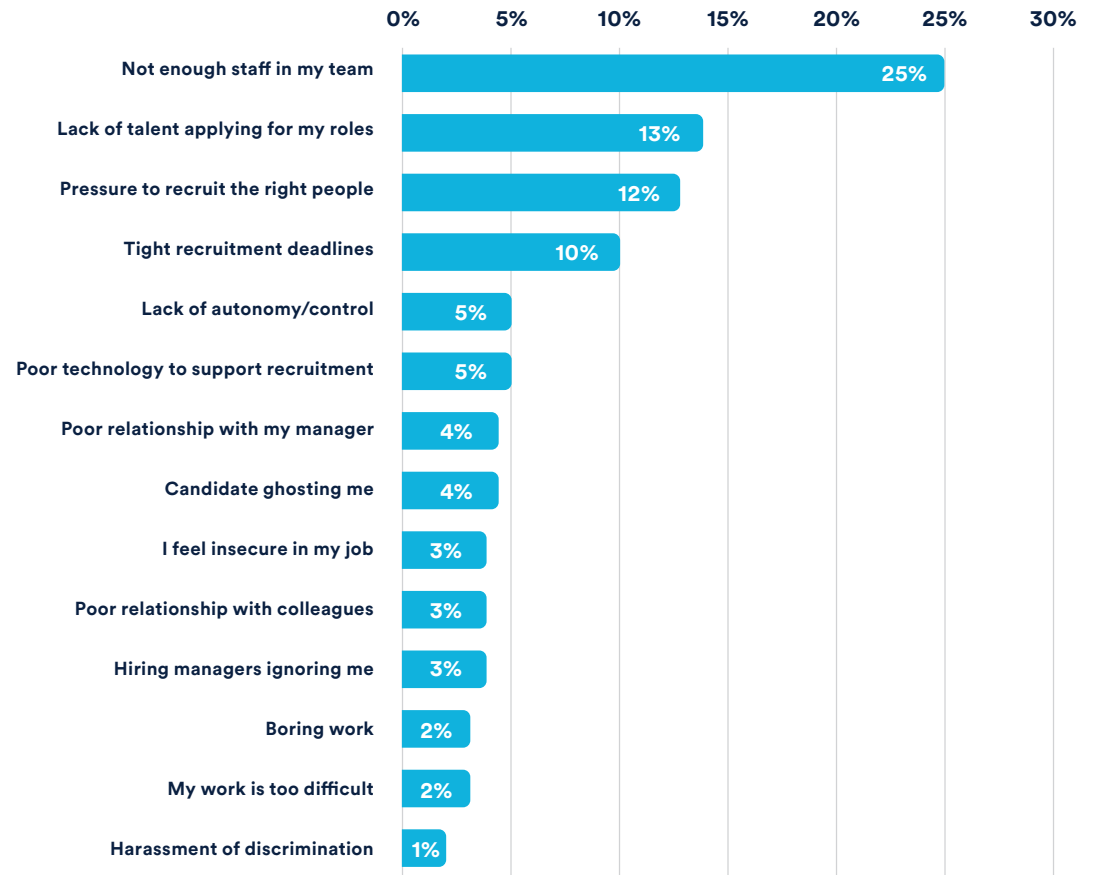
Organisational pressure to recruit the right people (12%) and perform to tight deadlines (10%) were also among the most common stress triggers for those we spoke to. Concerns around inadequate technology (5%) and a lack of autonomy (5%) were also common. Recruiting the right people has always been the focus of talent acquisition, and isn't a demand that will fade. Technology, that is not only adequate but designed for HR teams, can help reduce the burden and make recruiting the right talent more efficient and more effective in the long term.

Candidates too are contributing to the stresses faced by talent acquisition teams. 13% of people we spoke to pointed to a lack of talent applying for roles as their number one pressure, while a further 4% revealed that being ghosted by candidates was a common trigger and frustration.

The overall picture is of a sector that's trapped between the growing demands of their organisations and an increasingly challenging culture among candidates. It's a proverbial rock and a hard place that's only exacerbated by a lack of investment in the tools and technologies they need to meet these challenges. Recruitment has long been an industry that focuses on relationships, and while this continues to be important, technology can help release some of the burden of administrative tasks to alleviate pressure.

What are causes work related stress?

Cause	%
Not enough staff in my team	25%
Lack of talent applying for my roles	13%
Pressure to recruit the right people	12%
Tight recruitment deadlines	10%
Lack of autonomy/control	5%
Poor technology to support recruitment	5%
Poor relationship with my manager	4%
Candidate ghosting me	4%
I feel insecure in my job	3%
Poor relationship with colleagues	3%
Hiring managers ignoring me	3%
Boring work	2%
My work is too difficult	2%
Harassment of discrimination	1%

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The time for **action is now**

It's vital that organisations act now to support their talent acquisition teams. Our research clearly shows that businesses value the contribution of their acquisition teams. But given the levels of stress that those on the frontlines of the talent crisis are facing, there's a clear disconnect between their sentiment and their actions.

Organisations must invest in the tools, technology and resources talent acquisition teams need to perform their roles - or risk an even greater resignation as professionals reach their tipping point.

Find out how we can help you revolutionise your recruitment

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Methodology

Information for the **Tribepad State of the Sector Report** was gathered through an independent online survey of a representative sample of 528 adults working in in-house recruitment from across the UK. Fieldwork took place in April 2022, the results were then indexed and compared to produce the final report.

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