



Quality beats speed as top hiring problem

54% of employers name quality as their biggest hiring challenge, above speed at 45% and cost at 39%.

Summary

A 2026 survey of more than a hundred organisations by Aptitude Research shows that 54% name quality as the biggest hiring challenge. 45% name speed and 39% name cost. Among employers that rate their automation as effective, 42% report higher quality of hire. But 61% of the 219 audited employers apply the same automation to frontline and knowledge worker roles, with no distinction by profile type. 64% measure automation usage well, but only 60% do so consistently across role types. The shift from speed to quality changes what a client expects from an agency.

The shift

Until recently the dominant question in hiring was: how fast. The market is moving. In 2026, Aptitude Research surveyed more than a hundred organisations on their hiring challenges.

54% name quality as top hiring challenge



Aptitude Research, Hiring Automation Survey 2026, n=100+ organisations.

54% name quality as the biggest challenge. 45% name speed. 39% name cost. Quality leads by nine percentage points over speed. The gap is not tight. It is large enough to call a change in priority.

What employers mean by quality

The report does not define quality as a better CV match but as the ability to make the right hire.

Organisations that rate their automation as effective report measurable improvements: 42% say quality of hire improved, 44% report fewer interview steps, and 42% report faster time to hire.

That sounds like three separate outcomes, but they are three sides of the same thing. Fewer steps means the process reaches a decision sooner, not that it is more superficial. Shorter time to hire means the candidate does not drop off. And higher quality is the result of both: a faster, sharper process produces a better hire than a long, sluggish one with more rounds.

Where current practice falls short

61% of the 219 audited employers apply the same automation to frontline and knowledge worker roles. The qualification process makes no distinction by the profile of the candidate. That is a problem when quality is the priority, because what makes a good hire differs fundamentally by role type.

For frontline roles, 85% sit in the lowest automation tier. For knowledge worker roles the figure is 93%. Frontline scores higher on 13 of the 15 measured capabilities. The approach is not only uniform but also weaker on the role type that most employers identify as their priority.

Measurement without distinction

64% of surveyed organisations say they measure automation usage well. But only 60% do so consistently across role types. The difference is small but telling: a substantial share measures the process without distinguishing between the types of vacancies the process handles.

19% report advanced, end-to-end automation. That is the group most likely to measure the difference between role types. The remaining 81% either do not measure or measure without differentiation.

What cuts against this

The shift from speed to quality could be a measurement artefact. When the labour market cools and vacancies need filling less urgently, attention shifts to quality, not because quality has become more important but because speed feels less pressing. The 45% that name speed have not disappeared. The gap is nine percentage points, not fifty.

The sample of more than a hundred organisations is also too small to treat the shift as representative of the full market. It is an indication, not a population estimate.

What this means in practice

- A client that ranks quality above speed expects a different conversation. The argument "we fill faster than the competition" loses force against "we select more sharply so your first hire is the right one."
- 61% use the same automation for all roles. An agency that tailors the qualification process to each vacancy profile does something the employer almost never does. That is a selling point when quality is the priority.
- 42% of employers with effective automation report better quality of hire. It pays to attach that outcome to your own proposition: which part of the process the agency takes over, and what the measurable difference is.
- The shift affects the entire fee conversation. An agency that sells on speed competes with technology. An agency that sells on quality competes with the client's own team. Those are two different positions with two different price discussions.

Method and sources

The priority figures come from the Aptitude Research survey of more than a hundred organisations, published as part of the State of Hiring Automation 2026 report. The automation figures come from the Phenom audit of 219 employers, conducted between December 2025 and February 2026.

The report combines a survey (self-reported priorities and outcomes) with an audit (observation of publicly visible processes). The two methods overlap in subject but measure different things: the survey measures what organisations say, the audit measures what their process shows.

The sample of more than a hundred organisations is small for population estimates. The results serve as an indication of the direction of the shift, not as precise market figures.

Phenom is the vendor of the platform that scores on the measured categories, and Aptitude Research conducted the survey in partnership with Phenom. The report is published at stateofha.phenom.com under the copyright of Phenom People, Inc.

Quality, Hiring, Strategy, Automation

Sources

- Phenom, State of Hiring Automation: 2026 Benchmark Report
- Aptitude Research, Hiring Automation Survey 2026