

The Talent Impostor Syndrome Helpbook.

You got the job. Now try not to look surprised. A practical, strategic and occasionally brutally honest guide for Talent leaders who are ready to make a difference.

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A note from the author



I have worked with recruitment, Talent and HR leaders for more than three decades.

During that time, I have watched a great many people arrive in new roles carrying an intriguing mixture of confidence, excitement, determination and mild terror.

Some arrived with a beautifully organised plan. Some arrived with a notebook and a strong instinct that something needed to change. Others arrived to discover that the role described during the interview bore only a passing resemblance to the situation waiting for them on Monday morning.

Almost all of them wanted to make a difference.

That is one of the most encouraging things about people who choose careers in Talent. Beneath the process maps, dashboards, platforms, campaigns, policy debates and conversations about time to hire, most are trying to do something fundamentally worthwhile. They want to help their organisation find good people. They want candidates to be treated properly. They want managers to make better decisions. They want recruitment to feel less wasteful, less biased, less frustrating and more human.

Then reality introduces itself.

The ATS may have been selected by somebody who left three years ago. The careers website may have been commissioned by the corporate communications team and designed primarily to satisfy brand guidelines. The employer value proposition may pre-date the latest merger, restructure, cultural reset or chief executive.

The recruitment team may have developed a series of ingenious workarounds because the official process does not quite work. Hiring managers may want better candidates while taking twelve days to provide interview feedback. Candidate communications may be technically automated but emotionally absent. Onboarding may begin with a contract, continue with a request for bank details and then enter a period of contemplative silence until day one.

Somewhere in the organisation, there will almost certainly be a spreadsheet performing work that several expensive systems were purchased to do.

None of this means you have joined a bad organisation.

It means you have joined an organisation.

Recruitment operations do not emerge fully formed from a strategy document. They accumulate. Technology is added. Suppliers change. Processes are adjusted. New requirements appear. Teams restructure. Someone invents a workaround. The workaround becomes standard practice. The reason for the original decision disappears, but the decision itself remains.

By the time a new leader arrives, what looks like a recruitment process is often an ecosystem of technology, habits, contracts, compromises, relationships and good intentions.

Your first task is not to sweep it away.

Your first task is to understand it.

Because when you are new in role, you possess something extraordinarily valuable: permission.

You have permission to ask why. You can look at a familiar process without yet being familiar enough to accept it. You can ask whether an arrangement still makes sense without being blamed for creating it. You can notice contradictions that other people have learned to navigate. You can connect parts of the candidate journey that have been managed separately for years.

You do not need to arrive with every answer.

You need curiosity, judgement and the confidence to ask better questions.

This guide is designed to help.

It will not tell you that every supplier needs replacing, every system needs rebuilding or every inherited idea belongs in a ceremonial skip. Some of what you inherit may be excellent. Some relationships may be valuable. Some knowledge may be irreplaceable.

The job is to distinguish what is established because it works from what remains because nobody has challenged it.

You have landed the role.

You are here.

Now let us work out **where you are going.**

Russell Dalton
Creative Founder, Genius

Congratulations! No pressure.

You got the job.

After the interviews, presentations, personality questionnaires and several days of pretending not to refresh your inbox, somebody finally called.

They would be delighted if you joined them.

You accepted calmly, thanked them professionally and then immediately told everyone within a five-mile radius.

Now it is day one.

You have a new title, a laptop and either a carefully planned induction programme or a temporary security pass that stops opening doors shortly after lunch.

Your new colleagues are pleased to see you.

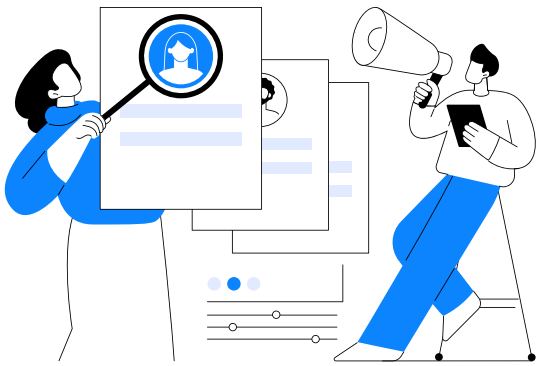
They are also carrying a list.

Recruitment wants a better system. Hiring managers want better candidates. Finance wants lower agency expenditure. Marketing wants everything on brand. IT wants to discuss integrations and information security. The executive team wants Talent to become more strategic.

Candidates would quite like somebody to answer their emails.

And everyone appears to believe that your arrival is the moment when these things will finally be fixed.

Welcome to the dream job.



Meanwhile, a small voice in your head is wondering whether everybody else knows something you do not.

Perhaps your predecessor seemed to understand every system, supplier and acronym. Perhaps the organisation expects you to arrive with a fully formed strategy. Perhaps you have already attended a meeting in which people discussed a process you had never heard of while you nodded with what you hoped looked like professional curiosity.

This is the peculiar reality of being new in a senior Talent role. You have been hired because the organisation wants change, but everyone has a different idea of what that change should be.

One person wants a new ATS. Another insists the existing system merely needs configuring properly. Marketing wants an employer-brand campaign. Employees want the organisation to fix the things the campaign would promise. Hiring managers want more applicants in one area and fewer in another. Leadership wants innovation without disruption, transformation without unnecessary cost and measurable progress by the next board meeting.

The temptation is to respond with activity.

A supplier review. A new dashboard. A refreshed EVP. An AI pilot. A careers-site project. A presentation featuring several arrows and the word “transformation” in a very large font.

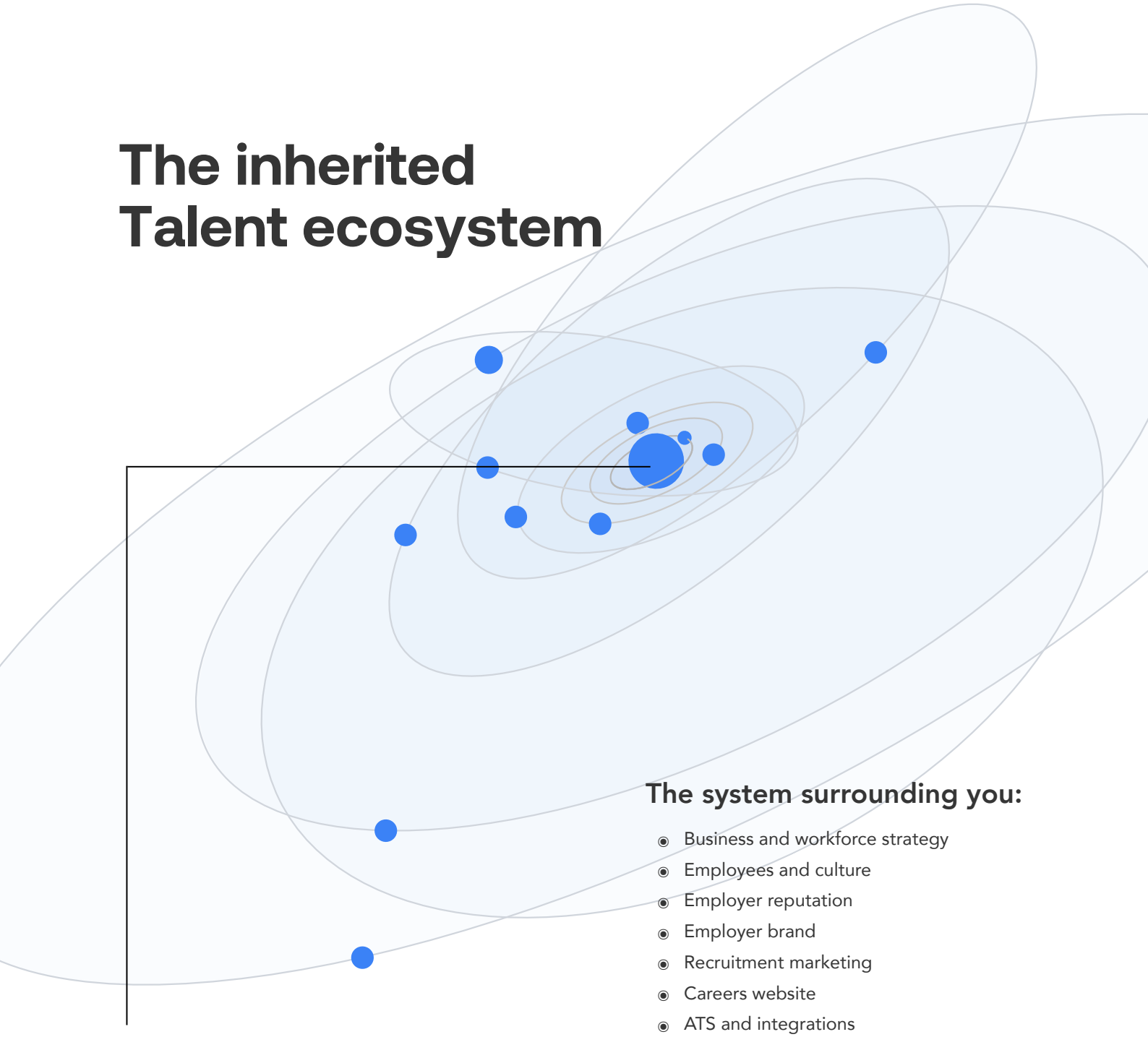
Any of those things may eventually be right.

But speed and progress are not the same thing.

Your first strategic act is not to **announce the answer**.

It is to understand the **question**.

The inherited Talent ecosystem



You are here

You have not inherited a recruitment process.

You have inherited an ecosystem.

Each part affects the others, whether the organisation manages them that way or not.

The system surrounding you:

- Business and workforce strategy
- Employees and culture
- Employer reputation
- Employer brand
- Recruitment marketing
- Careers website
- ATS and integrations
- Candidate communications
- Assessment and selection
- Hiring managers
- Recruitment team
- Suppliers and contracts
- Data and reporting
- Onboarding
- Internal mobility
- Retention
- Governance, fairness and accessibility

The curious power of being new

There is an advantage to not yet knowing where everything is kept.

You notice things.

You notice that candidates must create an account before they can properly explore the job. You notice that the careers website describes a culture nobody mentioned during your induction. You notice that a vacancy has received 800 applications, although nobody can say how many were remotely suitable.

You notice that the ATS contains a candidate score, but nobody in the room is completely certain what the score means.

You notice that the company talks about being agile while requiring seven approvals to advertise a replacement role. You notice that interview feedback is expected within 48 hours but routinely takes ten days. You notice that the new-starter experience contains plenty of information but very little warmth.

People who have worked inside the system for years may not notice these things in the same way. They are not negligent. They have *adapted*.

Human beings are extremely good at learning to work around inconvenience. A recruiter develops a private spreadsheet because the report is unreliable. A hiring manager messages a favoured recruiter directly because the formal request process takes too long. A candidate communications template is abandoned because it contains the wrong wording. A coordinator manually checks every workflow because nobody trusts the automation.

Eventually, the workaround becomes part of the job.

New leaders can see the workaround before it becomes normal to them.

That is useful.

But fresh eyes can also become overconfident eyes.

It is easy to arrive, identify an apparently irrational process and assume everyone before you simply failed to notice. Usually, somebody noticed. There may be a regulatory requirement, an integration dependency, a difficult stakeholder history, an unusual business need or a procurement decision sitting behind it.

Sometimes the explanation is perfectly reasonable.

Sometimes it is magnificently unreasonable.

You will not know until you ask.

Being new gives you permission to examine everything. It does not give you enough evidence to condemn everything.

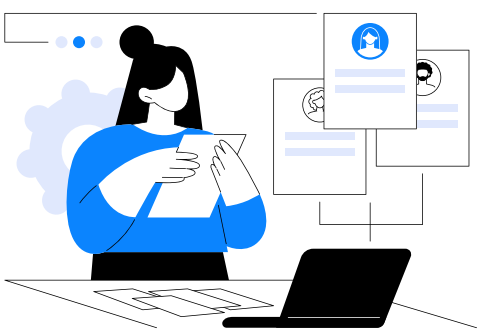
That distinction matters.

A new leader who changes too quickly may destroy knowledge, trust and useful relationships. A leader who waits too long may become absorbed into the system they were hired to improve.

The aim is neither immediate revolution nor polite observation.

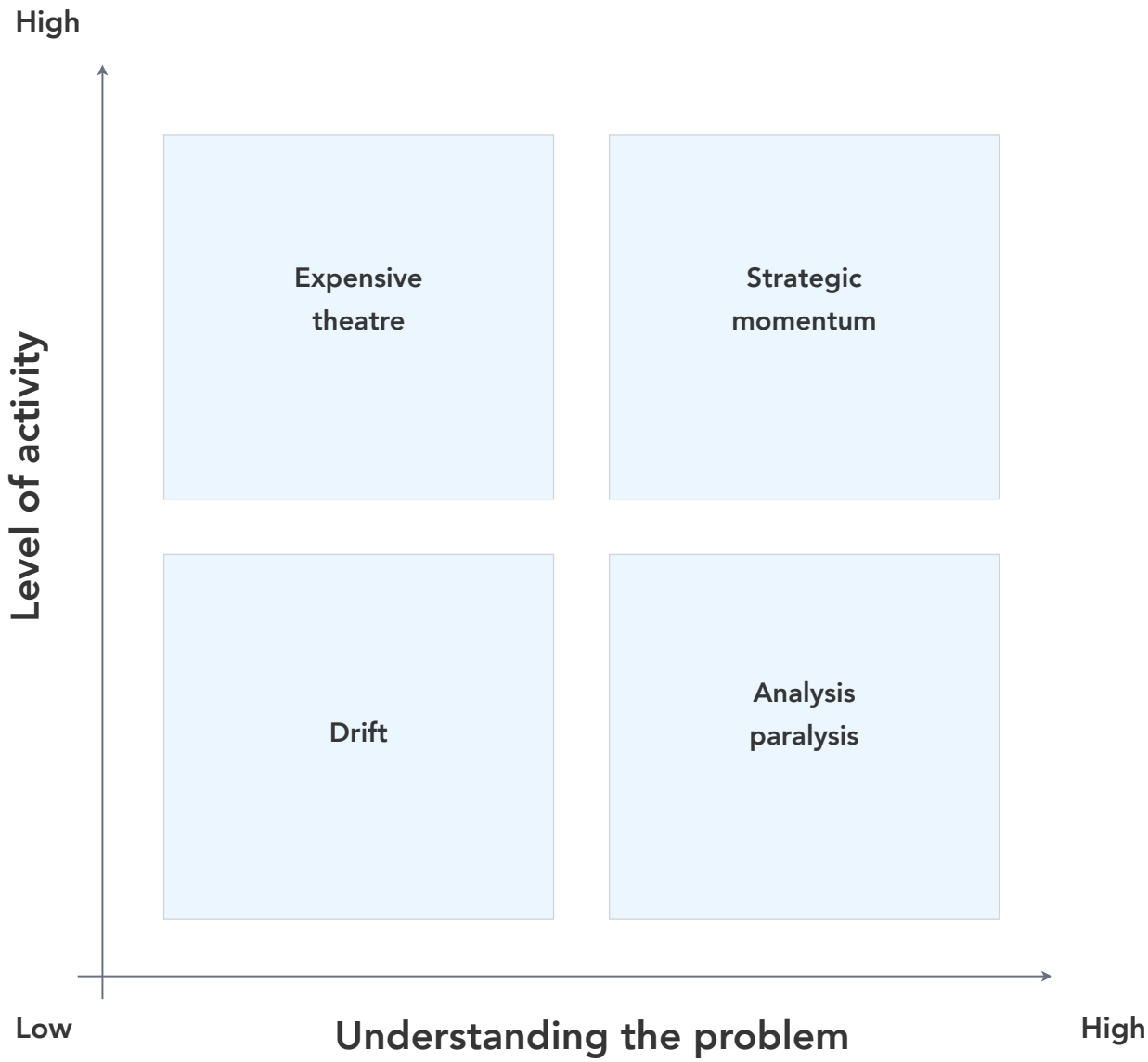
It is informed momentum.

A new broom should not sweep indiscriminately. It should first establish what is valuable, what is broken and what is simply covered in dust.



Activity is not always progress

The goal is not to move fastest. It is to create confidence that the organisation is moving in the right direction.



Before you sweep, look around

Many new leaders feel pressure to demonstrate authority quickly.

They want their team to see direction. Their manager wants priorities. The board wants a plan. Suppliers are arranging introductory meetings. People begin asking questions that sound friendly but are really attempts to understand what might change.

> "So, what are your early thoughts?"
>
> "Have you had a chance to look at the ATS?"
>
> "Are you planning to review the agency roster?"
>
> "What is your view on AI?"

These questions arrive long before you have enough context to answer them properly.

There is nothing wrong with having early instincts. Fresh observation is valuable. The danger begins when an instinct is dressed up as a conclusion.

A new careers website may be needed, but it will not repair an unconvincing employment proposition.

A refreshed employer brand may be useful, but it cannot turn aspiration into lived experience by itself.

A new ATS may improve usability, but it will not cure slow decision-making, unclear ownership or poor hiring-manager behaviour.

More recruitment advertising may increase response, but it will not solve a badly designed role or an unattractive offer.

AI may remove administration, but it cannot make weak selection criteria stronger simply by applying them more quickly.

The organisation may genuinely need all of these things. The point is not to avoid action. It is to resist beginning with the output.

Begin with the **outcome**.

What is the organisation trying to achieve?

What is preventing it?

What does success look like to the business, the hiring manager, the recruitment team and the candidate?

What evidence would show that the situation had improved?

Those questions sound obvious. They are asked less often than they should be.

A surprising amount of recruitment transformation begins with somebody saying, "We need a new system," when what they really mean is, "We no longer trust the process."

> Or, "We need a new employer brand," when the real issue is, "The market does not understand why anyone would work here."
>
> Or, "We need more applications," when the organisation actually needs five more appointable people, not 500 more CVs.

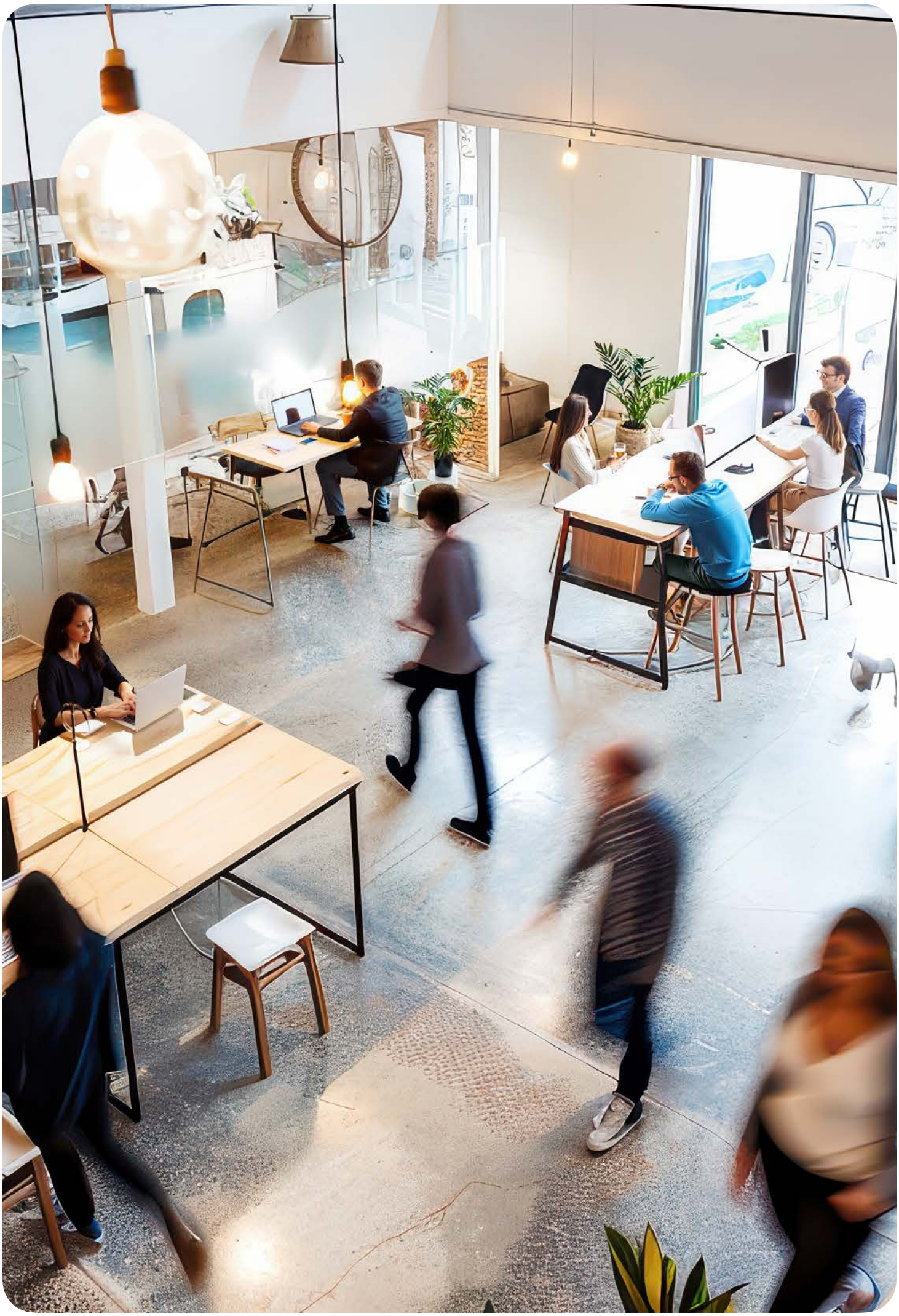
The output becomes much easier to choose once the real problem is visible.

WHAT YOU MAY HEAR

"We know what the problems are. We just need somebody to fix them."

WHAT IT MAY REALLY MEAN

Different people know different parts of the problem, but nobody has yet assembled the complete picture. What looks like a single issue may be the combined effect of reputation, process, technology, behaviour and communication.



Listen for the truth, not the presentation

Your first significant piece of work should probably not be a strategy deck.

It should be a **listening** exercise.

Not a tour of polite introductory meetings where everyone explains their remit and confirms how pleased they are that you have joined. A genuine investigation into how recruitment is experienced by the people who deliver it, depend on it and pass through it.

Speak to the recruitment team, but do not only speak to the leadership team.

Speak to coordinators, recruiters and administrators who know which processes work in theory and which work on a wet Tuesday afternoon when 200 applications arrive and three hiring managers change the interview dates.

Speak to hiring managers, including the difficult ones. Especially the difficult ones.

Speak to recent hires while they can still remember the recruitment journey. Ask what reassured them, what confused them and what nearly caused them to withdraw.

Speak to people who joined and left quickly. Their experience may reveal a gap between what recruitment promised and what the role delivered.

Speak to Marketing, Communications, IT, Procurement, HR operations, learning and development, employee networks and senior leaders. Each will see a different part of the system.

Do not ask only what is wrong.

Ask what works **unusually well.**

Ask what people are proud of. Ask what the organisation must not lose. Ask which teams recruit successfully despite the process rather than because of it. Ask where the most useful knowledge sits. Ask what employees understand about the culture that external candidates never see.

Then listen for stories.

Values language is easy to repeat. Stories are harder to manufacture.

Someone may say, "We are very collaborative," because that is one of the organisation's values.

Ask for an example.

They may pause and then tell you about a manager who rearranged an entire shift pattern so a colleague could care for a parent. They may tell you about the team that rallied around a new starter after a difficult first week. They may tell you that people are generous with knowledge but terrible at documenting anything.

That is texture.

That is the organisation becoming visible.

The Employer Branding: The Truth* paper describes good research as the moment the lights come on: the organisation stops admiring its desired reflection and begins looking at the actual room. Good research does not only identify problems. It uncovers the specific, human details that make an employer distinctive.

A proper listening exercise has a different energy from a conventional workshop. People hesitate before answering. They contradict each other. They say things that do not fit neatly into a values framework.

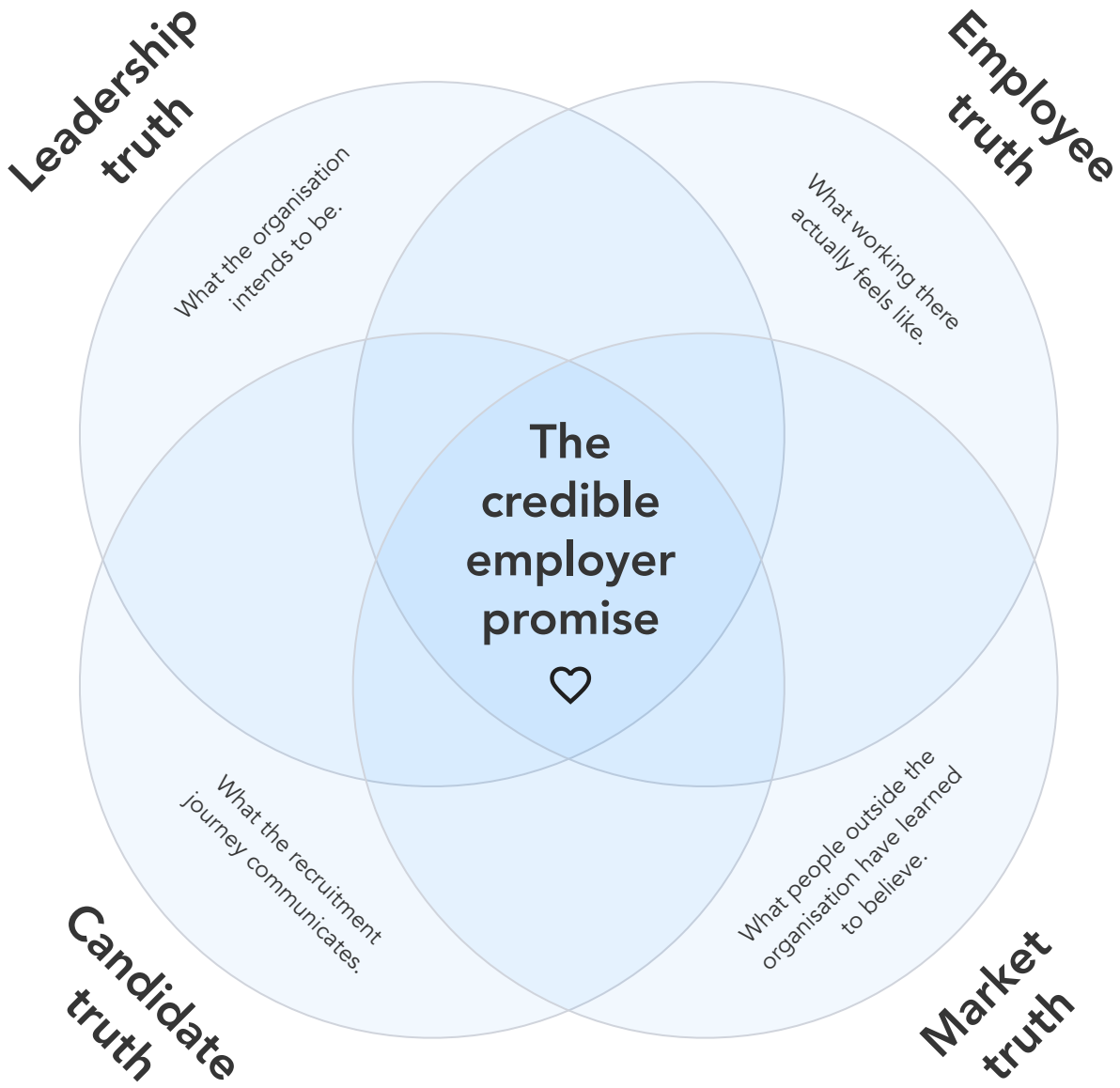
> "We are brilliant in a crisis and terrible at planning."
>
> "The work is hard, but I have never felt more trusted."
>
> "People stay because of the team, not because of the company."
>
> "We say we empower managers, but every decision still comes back to the centre."

These are not awkward interruptions to the strategy.

They are the **beginning** of it.

*Downloadable from www.genius.online/white-papers-compliance

The four versions of the truth



YOUR MONDAY MORNING ACTION

Invite three recent hires for coffee.

Ask them to describe the recruitment process in five words. Do not explain why. Do not defend anything. Write the words down.

Patterns will appear surprisingly quickly.

Work out what you have inherited

Once you have listened, you need to map the current reality.

This is where the work becomes less glamorous and more useful.

You need to know what the organisation recruits, where it recruits, how often it recruits, how much it spends, what technology it uses, what suppliers it depends on, where candidates drop out, how managers behave, what is measured and which information is missing.

You will probably discover that the data is distributed across several systems that disagree with one another.

The ATS records one source of hire. The media platform records another. Finance records a cost that does not match either. The careers-site analytics describe traffic, but not necessarily whether that traffic became a suitable candidate. The onboarding system begins counting after the offer. The HR system becomes authoritative when the person starts.

Between them sits the candidate, moving through an experience the organisation has divided into administrative categories.

Even familiar measures may not mean what you think.

> **"Time to hire"** may begin when a vacancy is approved, when it is advertised, when the first application arrives or when somebody remembers to change the requisition status.
>
> **"Cost per hire"** may include media but exclude recruiter time, technology, agency fees or the cost of vacancies remaining open.
>
> **"Candidate satisfaction"** may reflect only the people who completed the process, excluding those who abandoned it in frustration.
>
> **"Application volume"** may be celebrated without anyone asking whether the applicants were remotely appointable.

Do not wait for perfect data. You may be waiting for a long time.

Instead, create three categories:

> **What we know.**
> Reliable information supported by consistent evidence.
>
> **What we believe.**
> A reasonable working view that still needs testing.
>
> **What we cannot currently see.**
> Important questions the existing systems and processes do not answer.

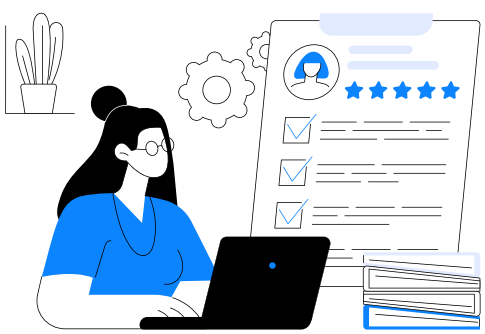
That final category is not a failure. It is a finding.

A mature Talent function does not pretend to possess certainty it does not have. It improves its ability to learn.

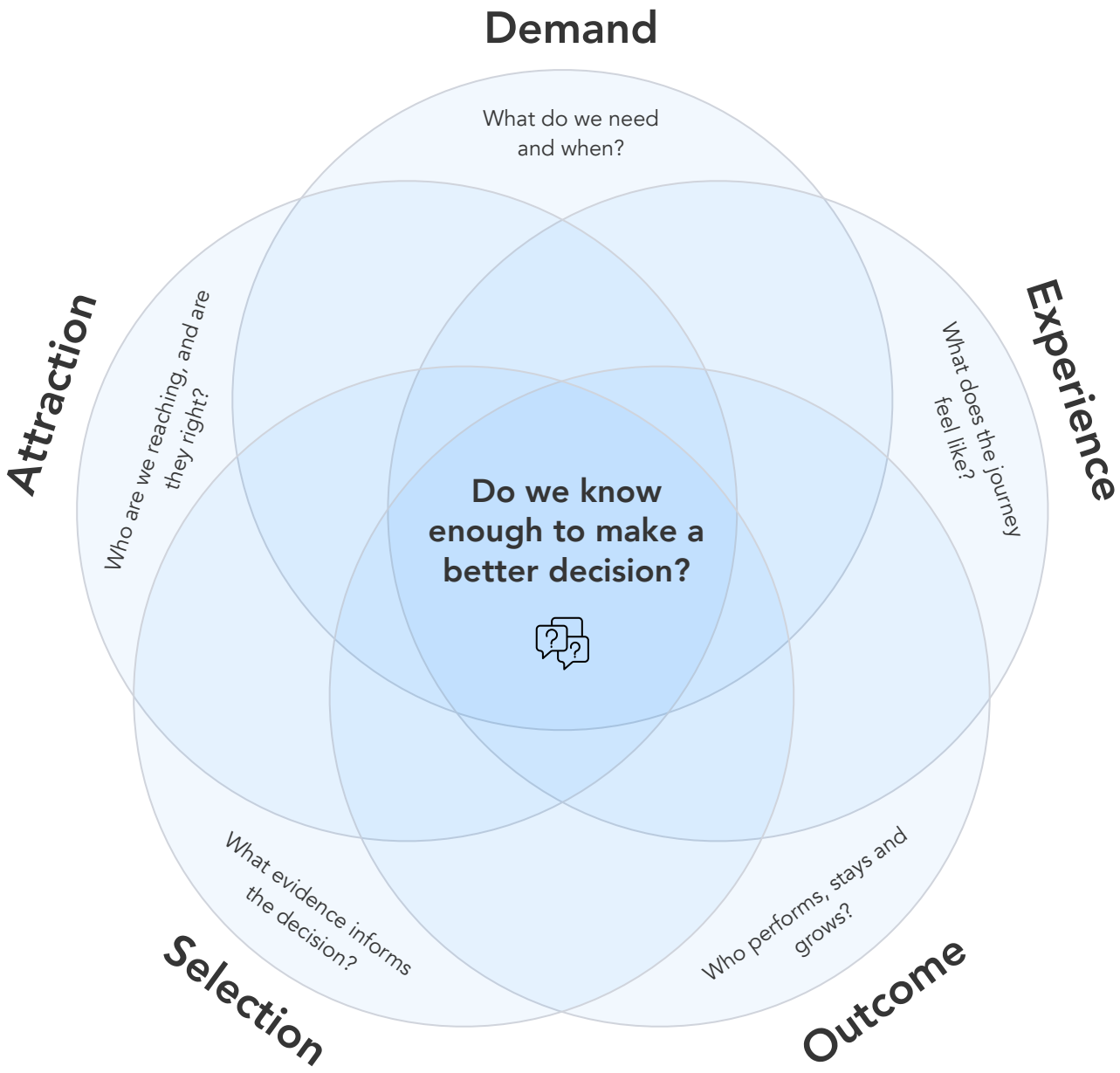
The objective is not to create a dashboard full of numbers. It is to develop a working theory of the system.

- Where does demand come from?
- Which roles are genuinely difficult to fill?
- Where is recruitment spend being used to compensate for a weak offer or unclear message?
- Where do good candidates leave?
- Which managers appoint successfully?
- Which suppliers deliver outcomes rather than activity?
- What does early attrition tell you about expectation, selection and onboarding?
- Which parts of the operation create confidence, and which create friction?

Those questions begin to turn data into **strategy**.



The Talent Baseline



Apply for one of your own jobs

There are few exercises more revealing than attempting to become one of your own employees.

Take out your phone.

Do not begin on the careers-site homepage. Real candidates rarely begin where an organisational chart says the journey begins.

Start with a search engine, a social advert, a job board, a LinkedIn post or a recommendation from somebody who already works there.

Find a *live* role.

Read the advert properly.

> Can you understand what the person will spend their time doing? Is the salary clear? Is the working location clear? Does the copy sound like a human being explaining an opportunity, or a job description being read aloud by a committee?
>
> Does it tell you why the role matters?
>
> Does it help you imagine the environment?
>
> Does it explain what success looks like?
>
> Or does it begin with three paragraphs about the organisation before reluctantly acknowledging that the candidate may have questions of their own?

Then visit the careers website.

> Try to work out what is distinctive about the employer.
>
> Not what it claims to value. What would actually feel different about working there?
>
> Look at the photography. Read the employee stories. Examine the benefits. Search for information a cautious candidate might need: flexibility, accessibility, location, development, salary, process and expectations.

Then apply.

> Count the clicks.
>
> Count the fields.
>
> Time the process.
>
> Upload a CV from your phone. Leave and return. Try to request an adjustment. Read every instruction as though you have never seen the system before.

Then wait.

> Read the confirmation email. Notice the tone. Notice what it tells you, what it does not tell you and whether it makes you feel that a relationship has begun.

The experience may be excellent.

It may also be a humbling afternoon.

That is precisely why you should do it.

The candidate journey is one of the organisation's most credible forms of communication. If the employer says it is human, inclusive and innovative but the application is repetitive, inaccessible and silent, candidates will believe the process.

People believe behaviour before language.

The careers website matters enormously, but it cannot carry the entire relationship. As The Wallpaper Problem argues, too many careers websites are attractive containers for generic information rather than experiences built around a distinctive idea. The best do more than display content: they help the right people imagine themselves inside the organisation.

The same standard should apply to the whole journey.

An inspired campaign followed by an indifferent application process is not a connected experience. It is a promise followed by a correction.

The Candidate Confidence Curve



Every touchpoint either strengthens the employer promise or weakens it.

Candidates do not experience marketing, recruitment, HR operations and technology suppliers.
They experience one employer.

Your employer brand is tested at **every** touchpoint

Candidate confidence rises and falls throughout the recruitment journey. A strong advert builds interest. A distinctive careers site creates excitement. A difficult application or prolonged silence can quickly undo both.

Every interaction either supports the employer promise or contradicts it. Candidates do not experience separate agencies, systems and departments. They experience one organisation—and form one judgement.

The confidence curve is the employer brand becoming **real.**

WHAT YOU MAY HEAR

"Candidates do not complain about the application process."

WHAT IT MAY REALLY MEAN

Candidates who abandon a process rarely submit a formal report explaining why. Silence is not evidence of satisfaction. Sometimes it is simply the sound of somebody applying somewhere else.

Discover the employer you really are

Sooner or later, someone will ask whether the employer value proposition needs refreshing.

It is a reasonable question, but rarely the best starting point.

The better question is whether the organisation understands its existing employer reputation.

Every employer already has one. It exists in the stories employees tell, the reviews candidates read, the behaviour of managers, the experience of new starters, the reputation of the work, the treatment of people who leave and the quiet assumptions circulating in the external market.

An employer brand is not created when an agency writes a line.

It is expressed, interpreted and influenced—but it already exists.

That distinction changes the work.

Instead of beginning with "What do we want to say?", you begin with:

- What do people already believe?
- Why do good people join?
- Why do they stay?
- Why do they leave?
- Who thrives here?
- Who finds the environment difficult?
- What is genuinely unusual?
- What are people proud of that the organisation never communicates?
- Where is the external perception unfair or outdated?
- Where is it painfully accurate?
- What promises can be supported with evidence?
- What would need to change before a stronger promise became credible?

Candidates are not passive recipients of employer messaging. They investigate. They compare reviews, search LinkedIn, ask former colleagues, examine tenure patterns, look at leadership behaviour and read between the lines of the job advert. By the time they reach the official careers site, they may already have a working theory of the employer.

The role of employer communication is not to drown that theory in positivity.

It is to meet it with credible evidence.

> A candidate sees "flexible working" in the advert and then discovers that every interview slot is offered during the school run. Signal received.
>
> A graduate reads about belonging and then enters an assessment process that rewards confidence, polish and prior access to opportunity. Signal received.
>
> An experienced hire hears about an innovative culture and then waits four weeks for feedback because nobody can decide who owns the role. Signal received.

Employer brand is the pattern of these signals.

The strongest employer brand does not attempt to make the organisation sound universally attractive. It helps the right people recognise something meaningful and the wrong people make an informed decision not to join.

That is not a failure of attraction.

It is an improvement in fit.

As we argue in **Employer Branding: The Truth*,** the new discipline begins with evidence rather than adjectives. It treats employees as witnesses rather than props, distinguishes reality from aspiration and makes the employer brand operational across recruitment, onboarding, management and communication.

If the employer promise never affects how the organisation behaves, it is not a strategy.

It is a **presentation**.

*Downloadable from www.genius.online/white-papers-compliance

The Employer Brand Credibility Gap

The Promise

What candidates are told.

The Experience

What employees encounter.

The credibility gap

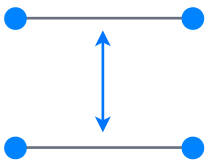
Small gap:
trust



Growing gap:
disappointment



Large gap:
cynicism, withdrawal and attrition



The strongest employer promise is not the most ambitious claim.

It is the most compelling promise the organisation can consistently keep.

Decide what your careers website is supposed to do

Most organisations can tell you what is on their careers website.

Far fewer can tell you what it is for.

It may contain information about culture, benefits, locations, early careers, inclusion, the recruitment process and available jobs. All useful. All expected.

But content is not **purpose**.

- Is the site there to build awareness among people who have not considered the organisation?
- Is it intended to help candidates understand the culture?
- Should it increase applications—or improve their quality?
- Should it support hard-to-fill audiences?
- Should it help people self-select?
- Should it reduce pressure on recruiters by answering practical questions?
- Should it introduce people to roles they did not know existed?
- Should it create enough confidence for somebody to begin an application?

It may need to do several of these things, but the priorities should be explicit.

A site designed purely to maximise application volume may succeed in creating considerably more work.

A beautiful site that tells candidates nothing specific may attract admiration without changing behaviour.

A functional site without a central idea may make every journey possible and none of them memorable.

The best careers websites combine usefulness with imagination.

They are clear, accessible and technically sound. They help candidates navigate. They work properly on mobile. They make job search simple. They answer difficult questions. They support different audiences without turning the navigation into an index of the entire organisation.

But they also have a thought.

A concept.

Something that belongs to this employer and could not be transferred to a competitor without anybody noticing.

As **The Wallpaper Problem*** puts it, the site should be a magnet, a filter, a storyteller, a persuader and a proof point. A concept-led careers website is not creative indulgence. It is recruitment strategy with better clothes.

The key question is not simply:

What should the site contain?

It is:

What should people understand, feel and remember after experiencing it?

The answer should shape everything else.



YOUR MONDAY MORNING ACTION

Open your careers website next to those of your three closest talent competitors.

Remove the logos mentally.

Could the words, imagery and claims be exchanged without anyone noticing?

Anything transferable is probably category convention rather than employer truth.

*Downloadable from www.genius.online/white-papers-compliance



Ask whether the technology still serves the strategy

The ATS is often the most politically delicate part of the inherited operation.

Someone selected it. Someone led the implementation. Someone owns the supplier relationship. Someone has spent years learning how to make it behave.

Someone will tell you that replacing it would be reckless.

Someone else will tell you that replacing it is the first sensible thing you can do.

Both may have evidence. Both may have scars.

The conversation becomes easier when you stop beginning with the system and return to the purpose.

A recruitment platform should help the organisation create and approve vacancies, attract candidates, manage applications, communicate clearly, support fair selection, involve hiring managers, maintain records, produce useful insight and reduce unnecessary administration.

It should make the experience better for candidates, recruiters and managers.

It should support the recruitment strategy the organisation wants to operate—not merely the process it inherited.

Start there.

> Then examine the difference between functionality and practical capability.
>
> The system may technically provide a feature nobody has configured.
>
> It may generate a report that requires specialist support and three days' notice.
>
> It may offer personalised communications built from templates nobody has reviewed since 2021.
>
> It may contain powerful functionality that poor implementation has buried.

Or it may genuinely belong to an earlier era of recruitment.

"The ATS can do that" is not the same as "the organisation can do that effectively through the ATS".

Technology capability, user adoption, process design, integration and internal ownership all matter.

Then ask the uncomfortable but clarifying question:

Knowing what we know now, if we were choosing today, would we choose this platform again?

A "no" does not automatically justify replacement. Cost, disruption, contract position, integration and implementation risk remain important.

But it does establish the strategic truth.

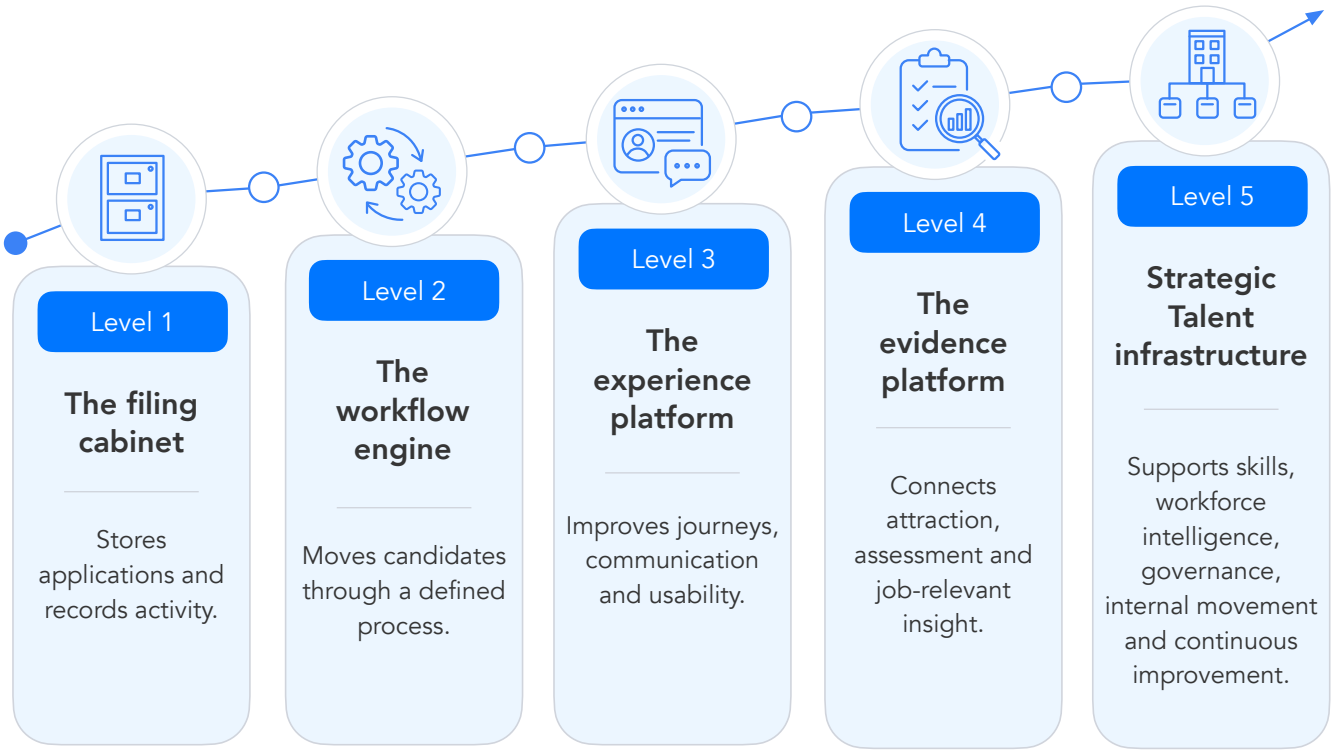
The wider market is moving from systems that merely manage applications towards platforms that help organisations gather better evidence about people. iQ, for example, has been built as a skills-first ATS: it combines enterprise recruitment workflows with job-relevant, scenario-based evidence and changes the selection question from "Who looks right on paper?" to "Who has shown they can do the job?"

Whether the eventual answer is iQ, another platform or significant improvement to the current system, the principle remains the same:

The technology should follow the hiring philosophy.

The hiring philosophy should not be dictated by the limitations of the technology.

The ATS Maturity Journey



The strategic question is no longer simply whether the ATS works. It is whether it supports the organisation you are trying to build.

Stop mistaking more applications for better recruitment

Recruitment has spent a long time celebrating volume.

Campaigns generate impressions, clicks and applications. Numbers rise. Dashboards turn green. A report announces that response increased by 62%.

Everyone feels encouraged until somebody has to review the applications.

Five hundred applications for ten roles may represent success.

It may also mean the targeting was poor, the advert was vague, the process made it too easy to apply without serious intent, or generative AI has allowed large numbers of candidates to submit polished applications with very little effort.

The number does not tell you which.

Volume is not inherently bad. Some organisations need significant candidate reach, particularly in high-volume, seasonal or distributed recruitment.

The problem is treating volume as the outcome rather than the raw material.

The recruitment team does not need more noise.

It needs better **signal**.

That means understanding not only how many people applied but:

- How many understood the role?
- How many met the real requirements?
- How many demonstrated relevant capability?
- How much recruiter time was consumed?
- Which sources produced appointable candidates?
- Which messages attracted people who stayed?
- How much media spend continued after sufficient demand had already been created?
- What happened after the hire?

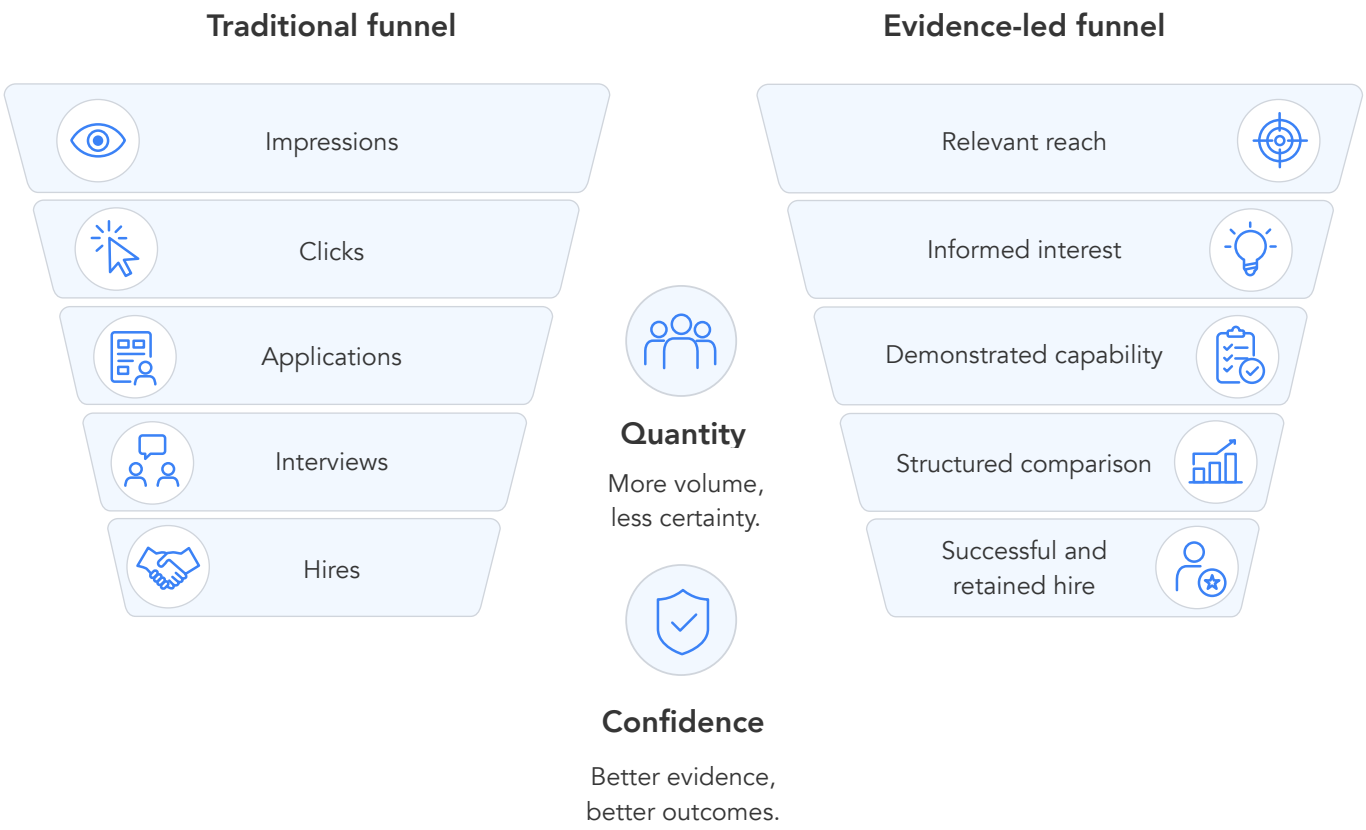
This changes recruitment advertising from a traffic exercise into a quality exercise.

The traditional funnel tells you that people moved.

A more strategic funnel tells you that confidence increased.



From Traffic Funnel to Evidence Funnel



WHAT YOU MAY HEAR

"We need more candidates."

WHAT IT MAY REALLY MEAN

The organisation may need more candidates, but it may instead need better targeting, a stronger proposition, a simpler journey, quicker decisions or more credible evidence. More people entering a weak process rarely improves the process.

Move beyond CVs, keywords and guesswork

The CV is not useless.

It provides context. It tells a career story. It can show experience, progression and achievement.

It was simply never designed to carry as much weight as recruitment has placed upon it.

A CV is self-reported. It rewards communication skill and access to advice. It favours familiar job titles, recognised employers and conventional career paths. It can obscure potential and overstate confidence.

Generative AI has made the problem more visible.

Candidates can now create polished, tailored and keyword-aligned applications in minutes. That is not necessarily dishonest. AI can help people explain their experience, overcome writing barriers and present themselves more clearly.

But it weakens the assumption that a strong written application provides strong evidence of capability.

When everyone can sound suitable, employers need better ways to understand who actually is.

Skills-based recruitment moves the evidence closer to the work.

> Instead of assuming someone can manage a difficult customer because their CV contains the phrase "stakeholder management", ask them to respond to a realistic situation.
>
> Instead of assuming somebody collaborates well because they describe themselves as a team player, explore how they would handle disagreement, pressure or shared accountability.
>
> Instead of using years of experience as a substitute for ability, identify the behaviours, knowledge and judgement the role genuinely requires.

The shift sounds simple:

Traditional recruitment asks who appears most qualified on paper.

Skills-based recruitment asks who has demonstrated the ability to succeed.

But the implications are significant.

It affects job design, essential criteria, attraction, application, assessment, interviewing, scoring, onboarding and development.

That is why skills-based recruitment should not be treated as a test added to an otherwise unchanged process. The existing skills guide makes this point clearly: if the organisation retains the same degree requirements, CV-led shortlisting, unstructured interviews and gut-feel decisions, adding an assessment in the middle changes very little.

Begin with success in the role.

- What does a strong performer actually do?
- How do they work with colleagues?
- Who do they create value for?
- How do they manage themselves?
- How do they respond to the organisation's environment and expectations?

The iQ framework groups these questions around four areas: Team, Customer, Self and Culture. They provide a practical way of exploring capability beyond technical experience alone.

Then create relevant **evidence**.

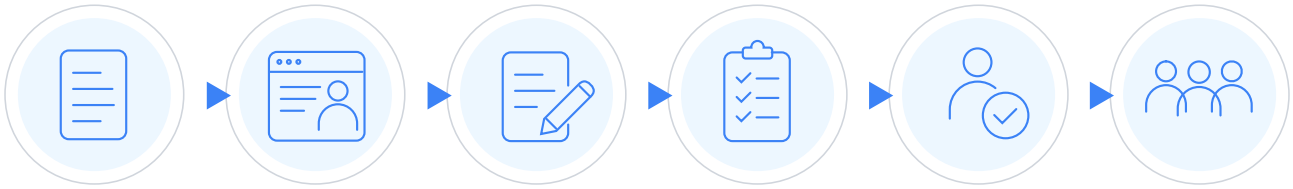
Not an obstacle course. Not a generic battery of tests assembled because they happen to be available. The closer the evidence is to the work, the more useful it becomes.

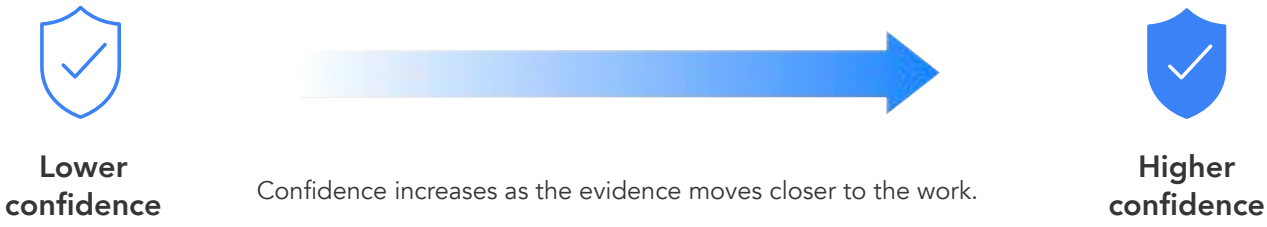
Start with one role.

Choose a role with regular demand, weak shortlisting outcomes or high early attrition. Define the few capabilities that matter most. Create realistic scenarios. Agree what good evidence looks like. Train the people interpreting it. Compare the result with the previous method.

Transformation becomes easier when people can see evidence that the new approach works.

From Proxy to Proof







Decide what AI should — and should not — do

At some point during your first few months, somebody will ask for your AI strategy.

> They may ask because the organisation genuinely needs one.
>
> They may ask because a competitor has announced something.
>
> They may ask because a software supplier has added the letters AI to a feature that previously had a different name.

The sensible response is not enthusiasm or resistance.

It is purpose.

What problem are we trying to **solve**?

AI can help Talent teams reduce administration, draft content, organise information, identify patterns, create scenarios, improve responsiveness and support accessibility.

It can help recruiters move away from blank pages. It can support the development of role-relevant assessment content and translate vague requirements such as "strong communicator" into observable behaviours. Used thoughtfully, it can help people produce and interpret better evidence.

The risk increases when AI begins to influence access to employment through methods the organisation cannot explain.

If a system ranks, recommends, filters or rejects candidates, the employer must understand what information is being used, why it is relevant, whether it could disadvantage particular groups, where human judgement remains and whether the outcome can be audited.

Discrimination does not have to be intentional to be real.

The question is whether the decision was fair, job-relevant and defensible.

The **Defensible Hiring paper** argues that employers should be able to show what was assessed, why it mattered, how candidates were compared, where people remained accountable and whether outcomes were monitored.

That is a useful basis for your AI position.

AI should support the decision.

It should not become the excuse for the decision.

Before introducing an AI-enabled recruitment tool, ask six questions:

- **What problem is it solving?**
- **What information is it using?**
- **Is that information genuinely relevant to success in the role?**
- **Could the method disadvantage particular candidates?**
- **Where does human judgement remain?**
- **Could we explain and defend the process later?**

If the organisation cannot answer those questions, it does not have an innovation problem.

It has a governance problem.

The future will not necessarily belong to the employers that automate the most.

It will belong to those that can **prove** the most.

*Downloadable from www.genius.online/white-papers-compliance



Find the changes people can feel

Once you understand the system, you need momentum.

Not activity for its own sake. Not a series of cosmetic changes designed to show that the new leader has arrived.

Credible progress.

The best early programme usually contains three types of change.

First, remove a frustration.

Find something candidates, recruiters or hiring managers encounter repeatedly. It might be an unnecessary application field, duplicated approval, confusing communication, unclear ownership or a recurring interview delay.

Removing friction creates immediate goodwill because people can feel the difference.

Second, improve an experience.

Rewrite the organisation's most important job advert. Improve the interview information. Create better candidate communications. Fix the careers-site page everyone avoids sending candidates to. Make the offer-stage contact more personal.

Third, prove part of the future.

Launch a contained strategic pilot: skills-based selection for one role, a new approach to media optimisation, a candidate-journey redesign or a more engaging preboarding experience.

The three work together.

> The removed frustration proves you listened.
>
> The improved experience demonstrates care.
>
> The strategic pilot shows direction.

This is much more powerful than announcing a transformation programme that will produce its first visible outcome in eighteen months.

People do not need every problem solved immediately.

They need evidence that change has begun **intelligently**.

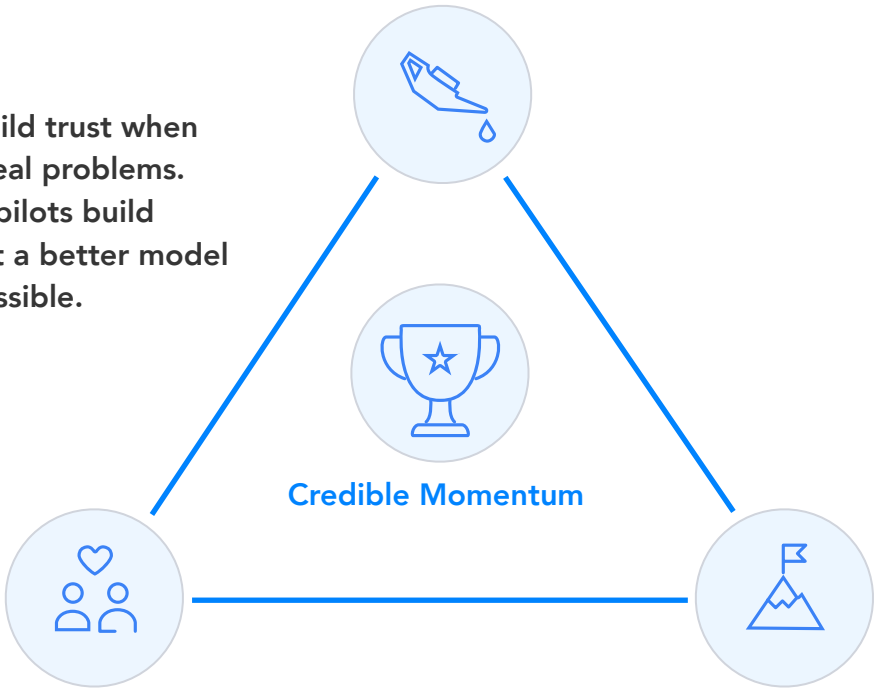


The Momentum Triangle

Remove friction

Simplify, automate and eliminate unnecessary barriers.

Early wins build trust when they solve real problems. Strategic pilots build confidence that a better model is possible.



Improve experience

Create journeys that are clear, considerate and engaging.

Prove the future

Use evidence to predict success and build the workforce you need next.

YOUR MONDAY MORNING ACTION

Ask every member of the recruitment team to complete this sentence anonymously:

"The one thing that wastes the most time in our current process is…"

Do not begin by purchasing anything. Begin by examining the pattern.

Build a coalition around the problem

Talent *transformation* cannot be delivered by Talent alone.

This becomes obvious the moment an apparently simple change crosses an organisational boundary.

> A job-advert standard involves recruiters, hiring managers, HR, legal and brand.
>
> A careers website involves Talent, Marketing, Communications, IT, accessibility, data protection and procurement.
>
> An ATS review may involve almost everybody, including several people who will discover strong opinions they did not previously know they had.
>
> A new leader therefore needs more than stakeholder management.

You need a **coalition**.

The distinction matters. Stakeholder management can become a polite process of keeping people informed while the project team attempts to move around them. A coalition gives people a meaningful interest in the outcome.

Different stakeholders need to hear the strategy in language they recognise.

The chief executive may care about growth, capability and reputation.

Finance may care about cost, productivity, vacancy impact and attrition.

Marketing may care about brand coherence, audience understanding and external reputation.

IT may care about resilience, integration, security and support.

Procurement may care about governance, supplier stability, contract value and risk.

Hiring managers may care about speed, quality and simplicity.

Recruiters may care about capacity, usability and candidate communication.

Candidates care about clarity, respect, fairness and whether anybody appears to remember they exist.

The strategy can be the same, but the value is different.

Do not **sell** Finance an ATS feature list.

Explain the operational cost of recruiter time being consumed by unsuitable applications.

Do not **sell** Marketing a recruitment process.

Explain how candidate experience affects reputation.

Do not **sell** hiring managers governance.

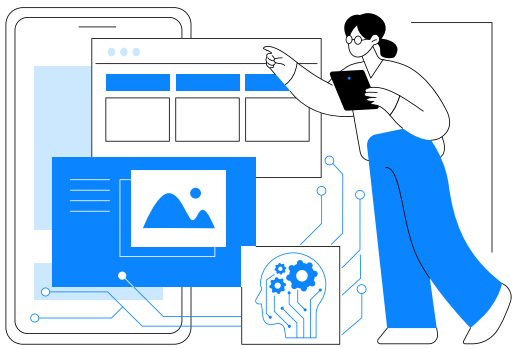
Explain how structured evidence will make shortlisting easier and decisions more confident.

Do not **tell** IT the new platform is intuitive.

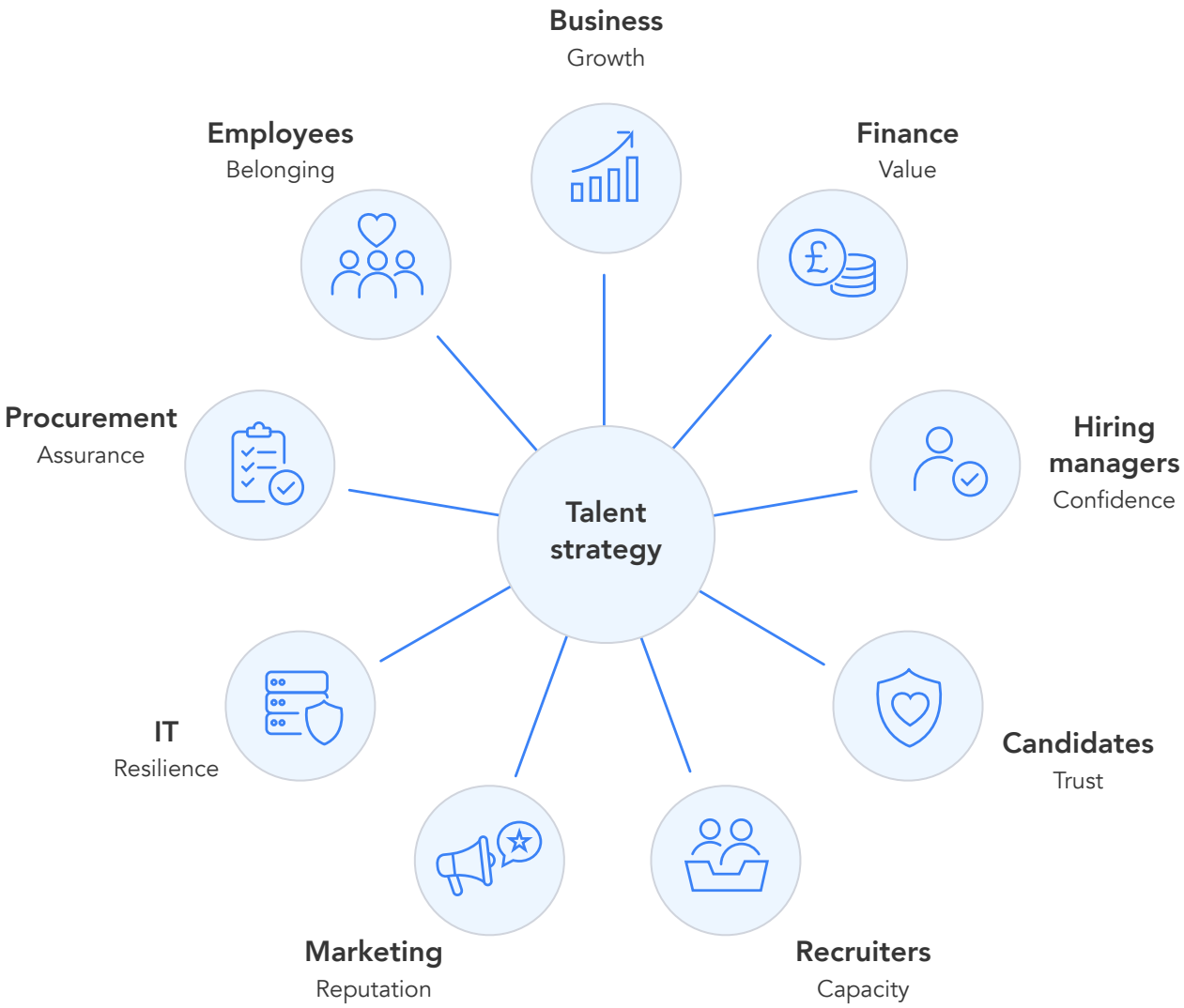
Explain what it needs to connect to, how data will be protected and who will support it.

This is not manipulation. It is **translation**.

A strategic Talent leader helps the organisation see that recruitment is not an isolated HR activity. It is a business system affecting growth, reputation, productivity and access to opportunity.



The Stakeholder Value Wheel



Strong Talent strategies solve one connected problem while creating recognisable value for different parts of the organisation.

Turn the strategy into a business case

Transformation proposals often begin in the wrong place.

They begin with what the new thing *contains*.

The platform has dashboards. The careers site will include audience journeys. The onboarding solution has personalisation. The agency will deliver workshops, research and creative routes.

All relevant.

But features are rarely the beginning of the business case.

Start with the consequences of leaving the current model unchanged:

- Strong candidates abandon a difficult process.
- Recruiters spend hours screening applications that offer little evidence of suitability.
- Agency expenditure compensates for weak direct attraction.
- Hiring managers make inconsistent decisions.
- Candidates receive one employer promise from the campaign and a very different message from the process.
- Early attrition reveals a mismatch only after recruitment, management and onboarding costs have already been incurred.
- An inaccessible process excludes people and creates risk.
- A weak offer-stage experience gives counter-offers time to succeed.
- A fragmented technology estate makes strategic reporting difficult.

These are operational and commercial consequences.

Once they are visible, the solution becomes easier to evaluate.

A good business case follows a simple chain:

> **The current problem**
>
> What is happening now?
>
> **The consequence**
>
> Who is affected and how?
>
> **The business impact**
>
> What does it cost in time, money, capacity, reputation, risk or lost opportunity?
>
> **The intervention**
>
> What specific change will address it?
>
> **The evidence**
>
> How will we know whether the change worked?

For example:

Poorly targeted advertising produces high volumes of unsuitable candidates. Recruiters spend more time screening and communication slows. Strong candidates experience delay. The organisation incurs media cost and operational cost without improving the shortlist.

The intervention may combine clearer role communication, better audience targeting, dynamic media management and skills-based evidence.

The measure is not merely fewer applications.

It is a higher proportion of appointable candidates, reduced screening effort, improved speed and better hiring outcomes.

That is a **business case**.

A feature list is a **product description.**

The business case chain



A strong business case does not begin with features. It begins with the consequences of the current model — and the measurable value of change.

Connect the journey from first impression to first day

One of the most persistent weaknesses in recruitment strategy is **fragmentation**.

> Employer brand is managed as communications.
>
> Recruitment marketing is managed as media.
>
> The careers website is managed as a digital project.
>
> The ATS is managed as technology.
>
> Assessment is managed as selection.
>
> Onboarding is managed as administration.

The candidate does not experience these **departments**.

They experience **one organisation**.

A job advert creates an impression. The careers site gives that impression meaning. The application process either respects or contradicts it. Assessment shows what the organisation values. The interview reveals how people behave. The waiting period demonstrates how seriously candidates are taken. The offer confirms trust. Onboarding either fulfils the promise or begins dismantling it.

Each stage changes how the previous one is understood.

> A brilliant campaign cannot permanently compensate for an indifferent process.
>
> A sophisticated ATS cannot rescue an unclear employer proposition.
>
> A warm recruitment experience followed by administrative silence before day one creates a particularly sharp sense of disappointment because expectations have already been raised.

This is why the work must **connect**.

Genius brings together capabilities that organisations often purchase separately: research through Genius Intel, employer brand, recruitment marketing, careers websites, candidate journey design, iQ recruitment technology, assessment and AndMe onboarding.

The value is not simply that all of these services exist. It is that they can be designed as **one coherent experience.**

The organisation should sound like itself from the first advert to the first morning.

The information should become more relevant as the relationship develops.

Evidence gathered during selection should not disappear after the hiring decision. Skills insight can help personalise onboarding and development, creating a bridge between selection and performance.

The offer should not be treated as the finish line.

It is the point at which confidence becomes commitment — and commitment still needs care.

A candidate who has accepted may be serving notice, handling a counter-offer, explaining the decision to family, worrying about the commute or wondering whether they made the right choice.

This is not an *administrative* gap.

It is one of the most emotionally exposed parts of the entire journey.

A good preboarding experience does not overwhelm somebody with policies.

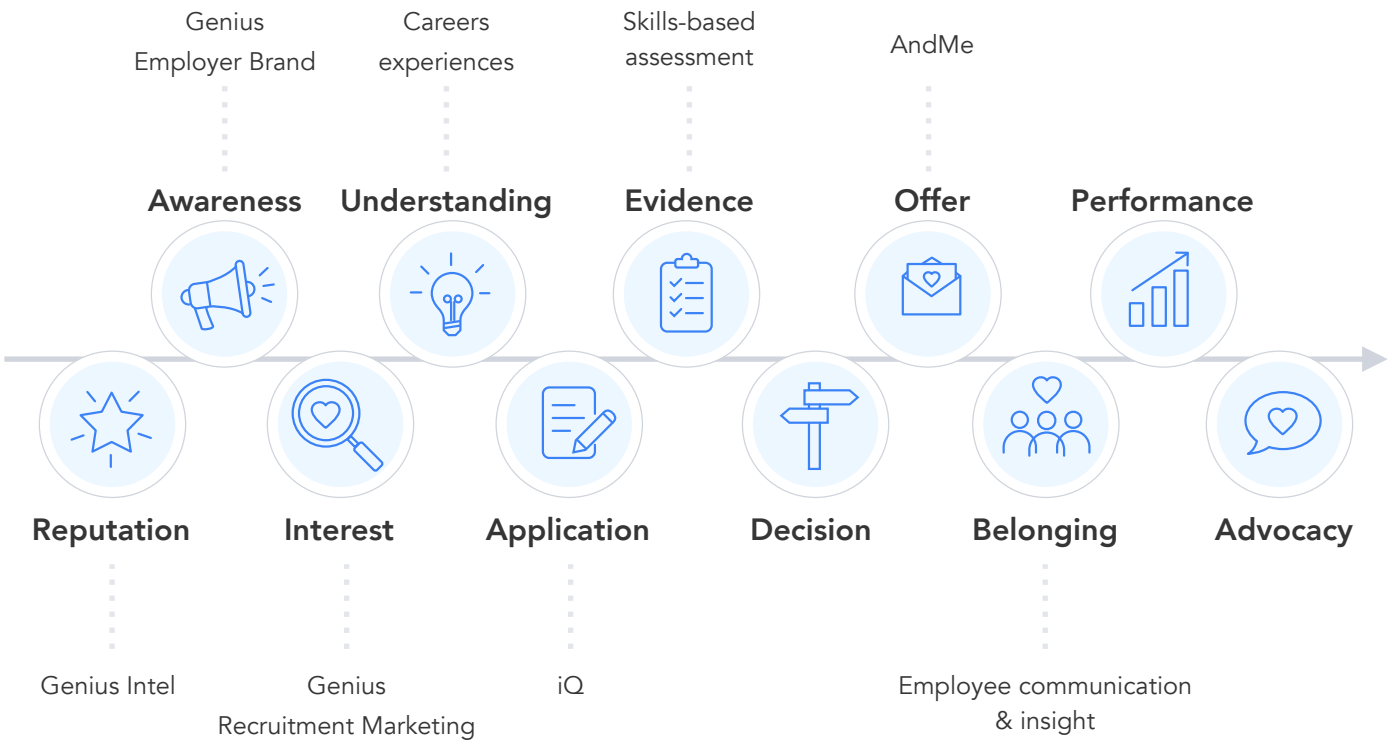
It reassures them that the organisation is **ready**.

A personal message from the manager. A clear picture of the first week. Useful location information. Introductions to the team. An opportunity to ask practical questions. Content that helps them understand the culture without sounding like an induction manual.

The question is simple:

Does our onboarding make someone feel expected, or merely processed?

The connected talent journey



A connected experience. Better decisions. Stronger relationships. Measurable impact

Your first 100 days

The **first 100 days** have acquired almost mythical status.

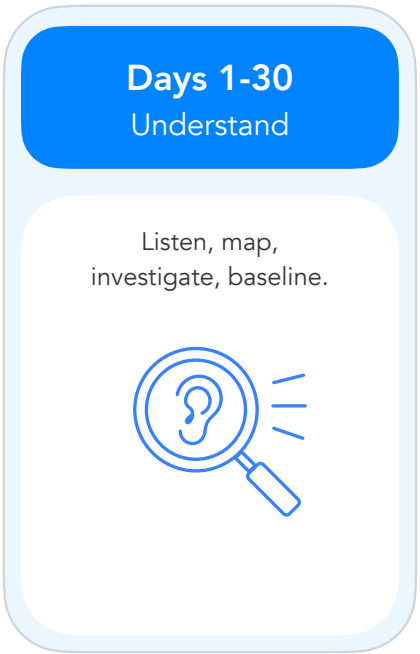
They are long enough to sound strategic and short enough to create urgency.

They are also just over fourteen weeks, several of which may disappear into induction, budget discussions, existing commitments and meetings whose titles reveal very little about their purpose.

You are not going to transform the entire Talent function in 100 days.

Nor should you try.

The aim is to understand the system, establish direction, create confidence and prove that thoughtful change has begun.



Days 1–30: Understand

The first month is about seeing **clearly**.

Build relationships, but do not mistake a full diary for insight.

Listen to the recruitment team. Meet hiring managers. Understand the business plan and workforce pressures. Review the technology, supplier contracts and current measures. Apply for your own jobs. Read candidate communications. Examine the careers experience. Speak to recent hires and, where possible, people who left early.

Look for the recurring patterns.

- Where does friction appear?
- Where does informal work compensate for formal process?
- Where are people proud?
- Where is the organisation over-promising?
- Where is it failing to communicate genuine strengths?
- Where does risk sit?

At the end of the first month, you should be able to describe what you have inherited without pretending you understand every detail.

Your outputs might include a current-state map, candidate-journey findings, a supplier and contract overview, an initial data baseline, a risk summary and the major themes from your listening exercise.

The most important question is:

What is really happening?

Your first 100 days

Days 31–60: Prioritise

The second month is about **choice**.

By now, more problems will be visible than you can solve immediately.

That is normal.

Strategy is partly the discipline of deciding what not to do yet.

Identify the issues with the greatest impact on business outcomes, candidate experience, recruiter capacity, fairness and reputation. Separate urgent risk from important transformation. Decide which existing strengths must be protected.

Set principles before selecting outputs.

For example:

- Candidates should understand the role before they apply.
- Recruitment decisions should be based on relevant evidence.
- Technology should support people rather than obscure accountability.
- The employer promise should be specific and credible.
- Every stage should be accessible.
- Attraction should optimise for quality rather than traffic alone.
- Onboarding should begin when commitment is made, not on the first morning.

These principles create consistency when individual projects begin.

This is also the point to form your coalition, agree measures, identify early changes and select one or two strategic pilots.

The key question becomes:

Where will change make the greatest difference?





Your first 100 days

Days 61–100: Prove

The third phase is where the strategy becomes **visible**.

Remove a meaningful frustration. Improve a candidate or hiring-manager experience. Launch a contained pilot that reflects the future approach.

You might simplify an application journey, rewrite a family of critical job adverts, introduce clearer candidate communication, test structured skills evidence for one role or redesign the offer-to-day-one experience.

Measure the **result**.

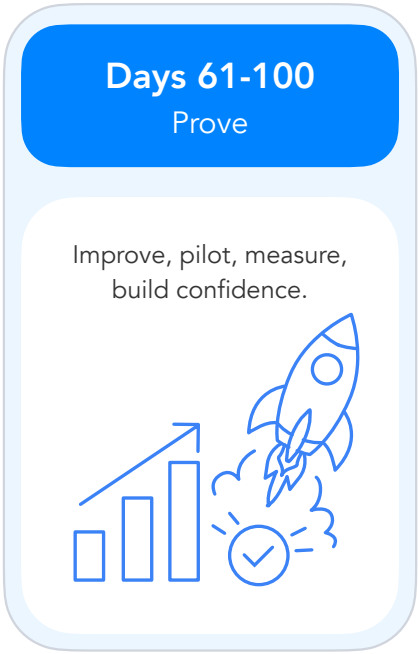
Not because a pilot must prove you were *right*, but because it should teach you something useful.

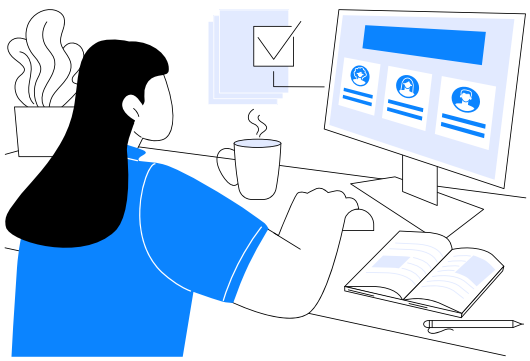
Present the wider roadmap with evidence from the first two months. Explain what needs immediate attention, what requires investment and what should be improved gradually.

Show the organisation that you have listened carefully, chosen deliberately and begun practically.

The central question is:

What evidence do we now have that a better model is possible?







The first year

Your first 100 days should establish the route.

The first year is where the organisation begins travelling it.

Depending on what you inherit, the roadmap may include employer-brand research, a new careers experience, ATS improvement or replacement, recruitment-media optimisation, skills-based selection, hiring-manager development, data improvement, AI governance and onboarding transformation.

The danger is allowing these to become independent projects.

The employer-brand project develops a promise. The careers-site project expresses it. The ATS project creates the application. The assessment project defines evidence. The onboarding project welcomes the person.

If each has a **separate** brief, separate supplier, separate owner and separate language, the organisation may complete five successful projects and still deliver one fragmented experience.

The strategy must remain visible above the projects.

- What are we trying to make candidates understand?
- What evidence do we need to make better decisions?
- What experience do we want people to have?
- What should managers be able to do more confidently?
- What will the organisation learn that it cannot see today?
- How will the employer promise appear in behaviour, not only in communication?
- How will recruitment insight inform onboarding, development and retention?

This is where Talent becomes more than a service responding to vacancies.

It becomes a source of **organisational intelligence.**

A skills-based approach, for example, can move beyond selection. It can help reveal internal capability, future skills gaps, development needs and potential career pathways. Instead of reporting only on applications and time to hire, Talent can begin discussing readiness, capability, risk and workforce agility.

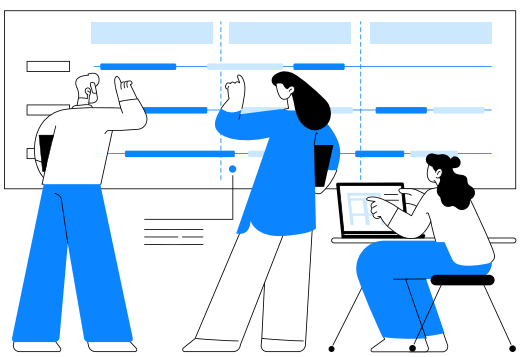
That is a much more strategic conversation.

> Not: "We received 4,000 applications."
>
> But: "We have strong response, but weak evidence of customer judgement in this location."
>
> Not: "This vacancy is hard to fill."
>
> But: "The essential criteria may be excluding people with transferable capability."
>
> Not: "Early attrition is increasing."
>
> But: "The evidence suggests a mismatch between the promise, the working environment and the support provided after appointment."

This is the **future opportunity** for Talent leaders.

Not simply to fill roles more efficiently.

To help the organisation understand the people, capability and experiences it needs to succeed.



The continuous improvement loop



Transformation is not a launch date. It is the organisation's ability to keep learning from evidence.

You do not have to become the agency

There is a moment in many new roles when responsibility begins quietly **expanding**.

> You are responsible for the Talent strategy, so perhaps you should also lead the research.
>
> You need an employer brand, so perhaps you should write the proposition.
>
> You need a careers site, so perhaps you should define the UX, brief the photography, manage the content and learn enough about technical integrations to become unusually interesting at dinner.
>
> You need better recruitment marketing, so perhaps you should also become a media strategist, campaign analyst and specialist in programmatic distribution.

Then there is the ATS, assessment design, candidate communications, data, onboarding, accessibility, video, reporting and implementation.

This is how strategic leaders accidentally become very tired project coordinators.

Your role is not to make every component personally.

Your role is to ensure that every component serves the **same strategy.**

That requires a capable internal team, clear ownership and the right external partners.

The most useful partner is not always the one offering a pre-packaged answer.

It is the one prepared to help establish the truth first.

Through **Genius Intel,** Genius can research candidate and employee behaviour, map journeys, examine reputation, test assumptions and identify where friction is affecting outcomes. That evidence can then inform the employer brand, careers experience, recruitment marketing, technology, selection and onboarding rather than becoming a report that is politely presented and quietly stored.

The work is connected because the problem is connected.

That does not mean replacing every current supplier or taking on every project at once.

It means beginning with the **whole picture**.

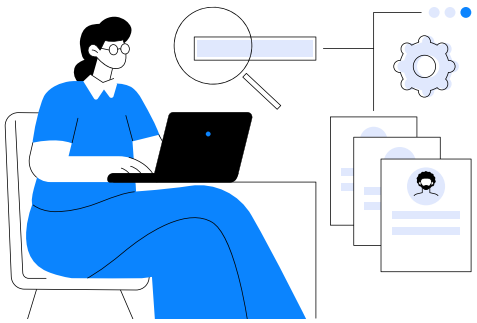
Understanding what is working, what is not, what the organisation needs next and where specialist help will make the greatest difference.

Not change for the sake of signalling change.

Change people can feel.

Change the organisation can measure.

Change that helps turn your new role into the success everybody hoped it would become.





You are not the impostor.
You are the person they chose.

A new role is a rare moment.

For a short period, you possess the clarity of an outsider and the authority of an insider.

Use both.

- Do not rush to replace everything simply because you *can*.
- Do not defend something simply because changing it feels *difficult*.
- Do not allow activity to masquerade as *progress*.
- Do not let the organisation's structure fragment the candidate's *experience*.
- Do not measure success only by the number of people *entering* the funnel.
- Do not create an employer promise the organisation has *not earned*.
- Do not allow technology to *influence* decisions nobody can explain.

And do not underestimate how much progress can begin with one thoughtful question:

Why do we do it this way?

- Listen properly.
- Establish the truth.
- Walk the candidate journey.
- Follow the evidence.
- Protect what is valuable.
- Remove what creates friction.
- Improve what people can feel.

Then build something **connected.**

The organisation did not hire you because it expected you to know everything on your first morning.

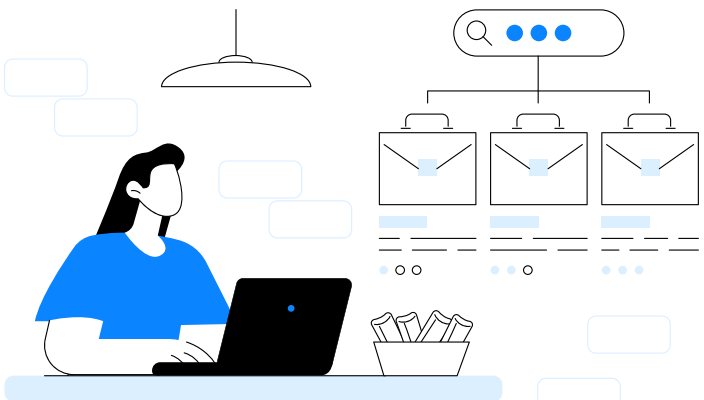
It hired you because it believed you could listen, understand, make good judgements and lead the organisation forward.

You do not need to perform certainty.

You need to create clarity.

You got the job.

Now go and become the reason things changed.





How Genius can help

Genius is a creative communications, recruitment technology and insight partner specialising in the complete candidate and employee journey.

Through **Genius Intel,** we help organisations understand audiences, candidate behaviour, recruitment performance, employer reputation and journey friction.

Through our **employer-brand and creative work**, we discover and articulate credible employer stories that people can recognise and believe.

We create careers websites and recruitment experiences that combine concept, storytelling, accessibility, clear UX and measurable performance.

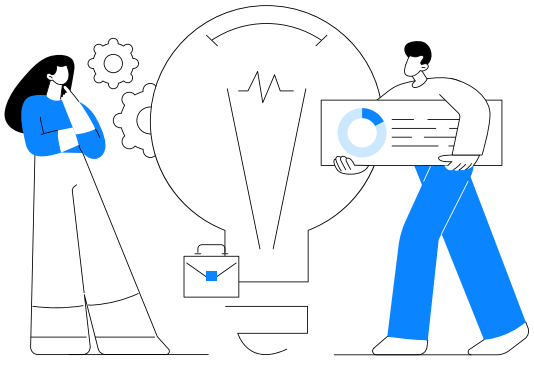
Through **iQ, our skills-first enterprise ATS**, we help organisations move beyond CV assumptions and towards evidence of capability, judgement and job readiness.

Through **AndMe**, we transform onboarding from administration into a personal experience that begins after the offer and builds confidence, connection and belonging before day one.

We do not believe Talent transformation starts with a product.

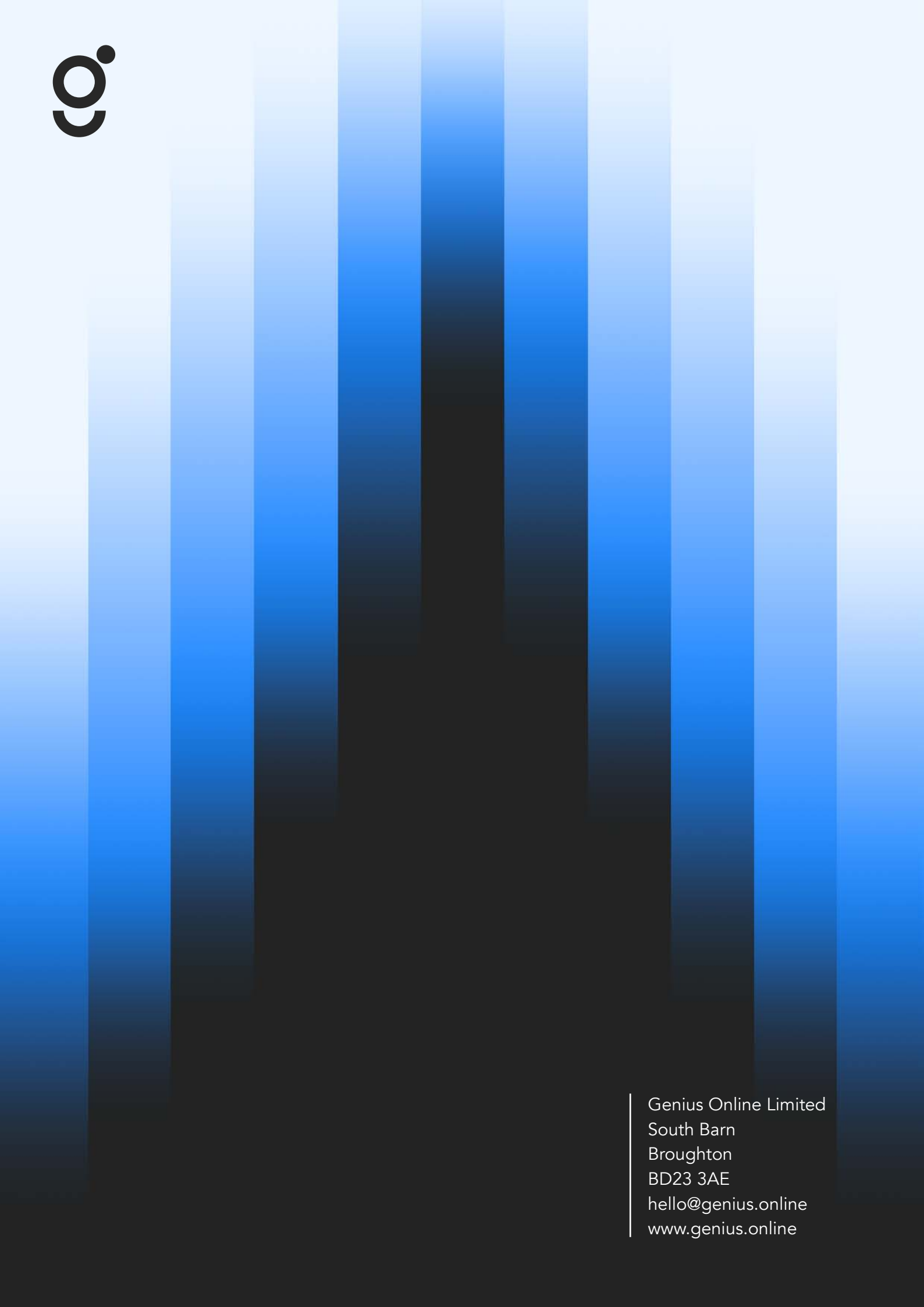
It starts with understanding where you are.

Then we help you get somewhere **better**.



Genius

Great communication connects people to purpose.



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