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The Requisition Is the Failure Point

What the evidence shows about inflated job requirements, automated screening, and who is accountable for what a filter removes

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July 2026

A note on where I am standing

I wrote the requirements that became job requisitions when I was a hiring manager. I am also on the applicant side of the process right now. Both vantage points inform this analysis, and I will state plainly that I am close enough to the subject to carry bias. Where I offer an opinion, I label it. Where I make a factual claim, the source is named and the limits of that source are stated.

This is not an argument that hiring managers are careless or that recruiters are the problem. It is an argument that the job requisition, the document almost nobody treats as consequential, is the point at which the modern hiring process most often fails, and that no one currently owns the result.

Count the bullets

Open any job posting and count the requirements. There will usually be ten or more. My own experience, across postings I have written and postings I have applied to, is that roughly half of them describe the work the person will actually perform. The rest describe an ideal.

That is an observation, not a measurement. The measured version is more damaging.

Harvard Business School and Accenture surveyed 2,275 executives and 8,720 workers across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Reflecting on hiring between January 2017 and January 2020, 47 percent of business leaders reported that only half or fewer of their middle-skills hires met all of the requirements listed in their own job postings. For high-skills roles, only 21 percent reported that all of their hires over the previous three years met every listed requirement (Fuller et al., 2021).

Employers are routinely hiring people who do not meet the requirements those same employers published. The posting is not a description of the job. It is a description of a preference.

Who writes the requirement

The reason inflated requirements persist is not that the people writing them are indifferent. It is that they are frequently distant from the work.

In the same study, only about a third of employers reported drawing on the hiring manager when creating or updating job descriptions, at 35 percent for middle-skills roles and 31 percent for high-skills roles. Input from a recruiter was reported at 33 percent for both, and input from an employee currently doing

the work at 32 percent and 29 percent. The authors observe that responsibility for revising job descriptions typically sits with recruiters, while hiring managers and incumbent workers are seldom engaged (Fuller et al., 2021).

This matters because listing what is preferred is easy. Anyone can generate preferences. Knowing what is genuinely required takes proximity to the work. Absent that proximity, padding is the safer choice. Overstating a requirement carries no visible penalty. Understating one risks a hire that does not work out and a decision someone can point to later.

What actually gets written

Requirements are rarely built. They are inherited.

A majority of employers, 72 percent, reported that when creating a new posting for a middle-skills role they used the existing posting or modified it slightly. Only 8 percent created a new description. For high-skills roles, 38 percent used the same template or modified it slightly and 25 percent created a new description. Twenty-six percent reported pulling a template from online job postings, meaning postings published by other companies for other roles (Fuller et al., 2021).

The authors describe the cumulative effect directly: requirements come to resemble the rings on a tree trunk, with new ones added to those already accumulated. Nothing is removed, because removing a requirement means defending the removal, and no one is asked to defend an addition.

Who writes it now

The Hidden Workers study was published in 2021. What has changed since is who drafts the document.

The Society for Human Resource Management surveyed 2,040 HR professionals in February 2025. Recruiting was the practice area where organizations reported the most AI use, at 51 percent. Among those organizations, the most common application of AI was not resume screening. It was writing job descriptions, at 66 percent, ahead of screening resumes at 44 percent, automating candidate searches at 32 percent, customizing job postings at 31 percent, and communicating with applicants at 29 percent (Society for Human Resource Management, 2025).

The single most automated task in recruiting is the drafting of the document that defines who gets screened out.

This is my opinion rather than a finding: a requirement generated from other postings, for other companies, describing other jobs, and published without anyone verifying that it reflects this role is unvalidated information governing a consequential decision. The document is not wrong because a model wrote it. It is wrong because nobody checked it against the work.

What happens to the requirement once it is written

The requisition does not sit in a drawer. It is executed.

An open-source assessment of automated hiring systems that I published in July 2026 examined five enterprise applicant tracking platforms, multiple AI screening tools, and nine named employers. Every major platform examined publicly documents at least one employer-configurable function capable of

rejecting, disqualifying, qualifying, ranking, or prioritizing applicants. Across all platforms and tools examined, the criteria, thresholds, questions, and workflow rules that determine automated disposition are configured by the employer or its authorized users, not imposed by the vendor as a fixed default (The Collective Risk Intelligence, 2026).

That finding is the reason this analysis is about requisitions rather than about software. The platform is not the author of the criteria. It is the enforcement mechanism. Whatever the requisition says, at scale and without fatigue, the system does.

What it looks like when a rule is wrong

The clearest documented case involves no vendor at all. In 2023, iTutorGroup settled an enforcement action brought by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for 365,000 dollars. The agency alleged that the employer programmed its online application software to automatically reject female applicants aged 55 or older and male applicants aged 60 or older, rejecting more than 200 qualified applicants (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2023).

No default setting produced that outcome. A person defined a criterion, the criterion entered a system, and the system applied it to every applicant who met it. That is the mechanism this analysis describes, in its most legible and most unlawful form.

Employers already know

The most striking element of the Hidden Workers research is not that qualified candidates are screened out. It is that employers say so themselves.

More than 90 percent of surveyed employers reported using a recruitment management system to initially filter or rank candidates, at 94 percent for middle-skills roles and 92 percent for high-skills roles. A large majority, 88 percent, agreed that qualified high-skills candidates were vetted out of the process because they did not match the exact criteria established by the job description. That figure rose to 94 percent for middle-skills workers. The researchers estimate the resulting population at more than 27 million people in the United States (Fuller et al., 2021).

There is corroborating evidence that stated requirements are frequently negotiable in practice. Analysis of more than 51 million job postings found that between 2017 and 2019, employers loosened degree requirements for 46 percent of middle-skill and 31 percent of high-skill occupations, and that 63 percent of those shifts began before the pandemic rather than in response to it (The Burning Glass Institute, 2022). The jobs did not change. The stated requirement did.

A follow-up study is worth citing alongside it, because it cuts against easy optimism. Examining 11,300 roles at large firms, researchers found that removing a degree requirement raised the share of hires without a bachelor's degree by only 3.5 percentage points, amounting to roughly 97,000 workers out of 77 million annual hires, or fewer than 1 in 700. Nearly all of the change was concentrated in the 37 percent of firms that altered their actual hiring mechanics rather than only their posting language (Sigelman et al., 2024).

What cannot be established

Anyone writing on this subject should state where the evidence stops, and a great deal of what circulates about automated hiring is not supportable.

- The widely repeated claim that a fixed percentage of resumes is automatically rejected by applicant tracking systems has no verifiable primary source and should not be used.
- A grade or score distribution produced by an AI prioritization tool is not a rejection rate. Prioritization and rejection are different actions, and public disclosures report the former, not the latter (The Collective Risk Intelligence, 2026).
- Public funnel data confirms steep contraction between application and interview, but it cannot attribute that contraction to automation rather than to applicant volume, qualification mismatch, or recruiter judgment.

The most consequential gap is narrower and more troubling than any of these. No public source connects AI prioritization output with downstream recruiter review and applicant outcomes at the requisition level. No private employer examined publishes evidence of how many applications a human actually opens before disposition, or at what score or grade review effectively stops (The Collective Risk Intelligence, 2026).

The question is not whether filtering happens. At volume it must. The question is whether anyone can say what the filter removed, and at present, from public sources, no one can.

What would fix most of it

The following is my recommendation rather than a research finding, though it aligns closely with what the Hidden Workers authors propose.

- Build the requisition with the people doing the work, not about them. Proximity is the only reliable way to separate what is required from what is preferred.
- Require a justification for every requirement, not for every omission. If no one can explain why a criterion exists, it is not a requirement. Remove it.
- Rebuild descriptions rather than amending them. Amendment is how a posting accumulates a decade of legacy preferences.
- Configure filters to identify candidates who have the core capabilities rather than to exclude candidates who lack a proxy for them.
- Spend the interview on how a person works and how they think. The resume already answered whether they can perform the tasks.
- Audit what the filter removed. Sample the rejected pool periodically and read it. If that exercise is uncomfortable, it is measuring something real.

The Hidden Workers authors reach similar conclusions, recommending that companies re-evaluate job descriptions from scratch rather than adding to them, and shift from negative filters that exclude on the absence of a proxy toward affirmative logic that identifies applicants with the skills the role genuinely requires (Fuller et al., 2021). Workers surveyed in the same study ranked aligning the job title to the actual tasks at 71 percent, limiting skills requirements to the essentials at 64 percent, limiting jargon at 62

percent, and limiting academic requirements to the essentials at 61 percent as the changes that would most improve their prospects.

The question

Organizations invest heavily in validating the systems that govern their operations, their supply chains, and their financial reporting. The requisition governs who is permitted to be considered, it is executed automatically at scale, and in most organizations it is reviewed by no one after it is published.

So the question for hiring managers and talent leaders is not rhetorical. It is a documented gap in the public record, and it can be answered internally by anyone willing to look.

When was the last time anyone in your organization checked what your filter removed?

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The Collective Risk Intelligence provides analyst-led investigative intelligence, due diligence, and risk analysis for business, legal, investment, and high-stakes decision environments.

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