



accenture

Hidden Workers, Untapped Talent

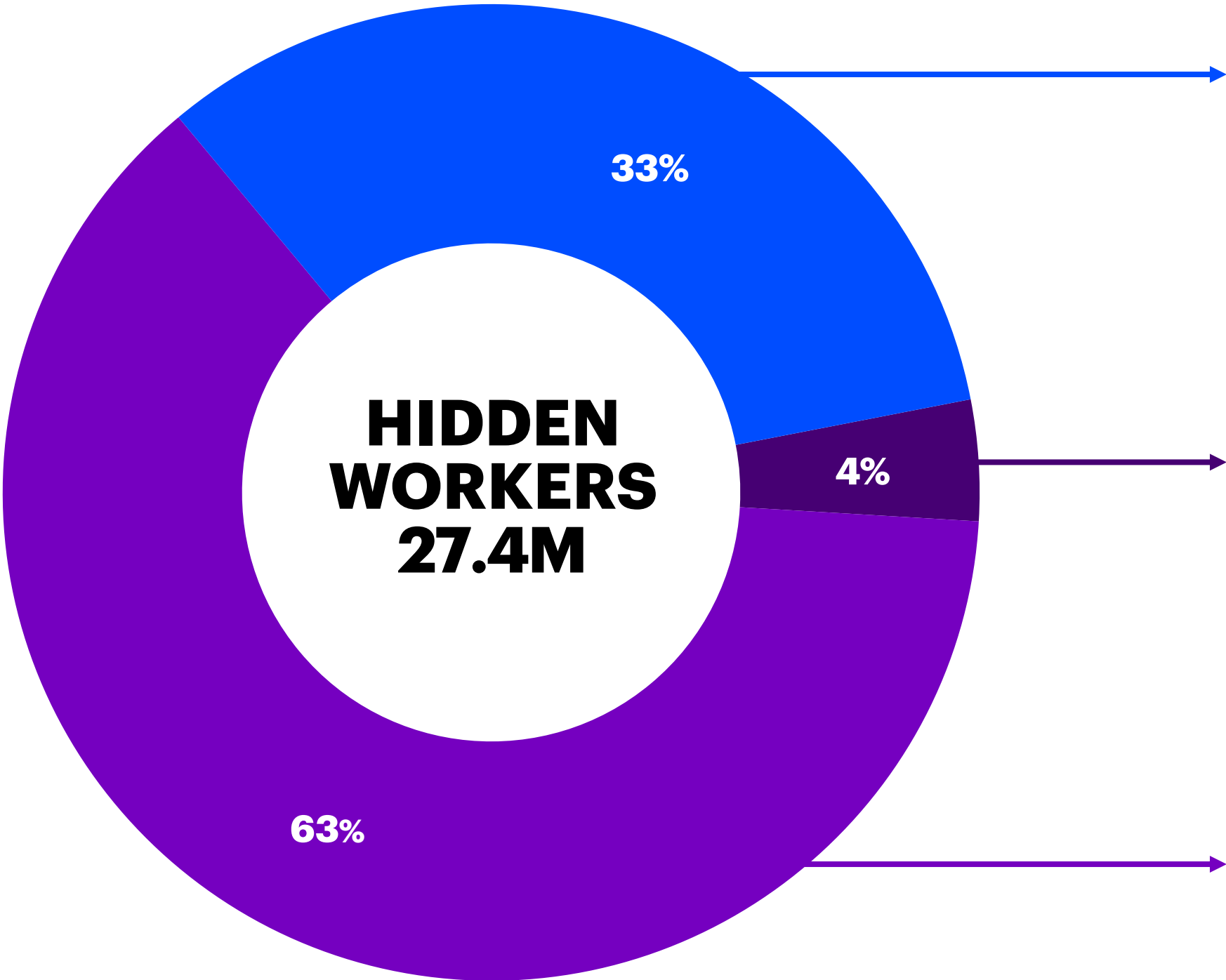
What leaders can do to uncover missed talent pools, close skill gaps and improve diversity—building better companies in the process

New research from Accenture and the Harvard Business School's Project on Managing the Future of Work explores the phenomenon of **“hidden workers:”** millions of people who are eager to work and possess—or could develop—the skills employers seek, if only those employers could find them.

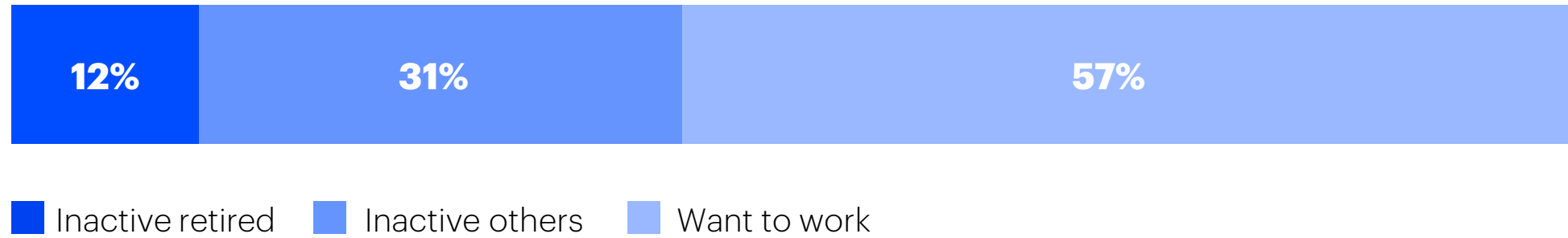
Automated talent systems often miss the perfectly capable. What can leaders do to improve hiring practices and uncover **overlooked talent pools**?



Composition of the **hidden workforce** in the US.



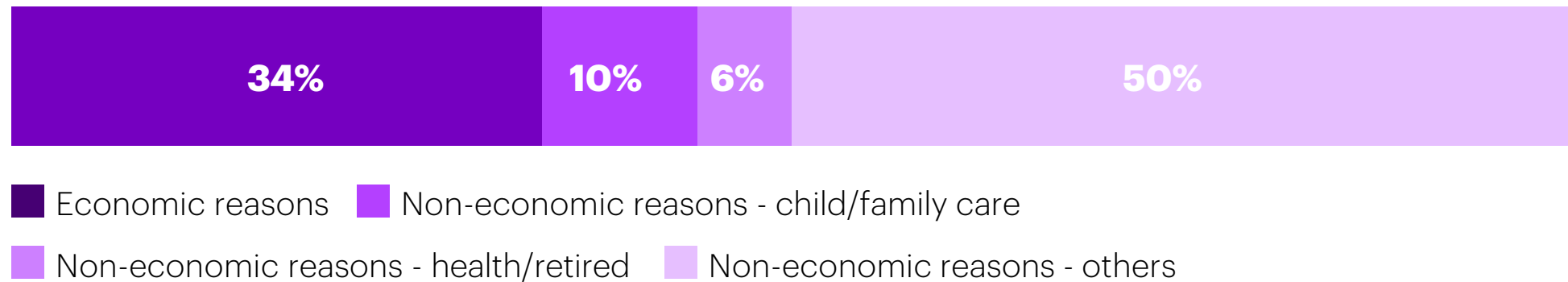
Missing from workforce

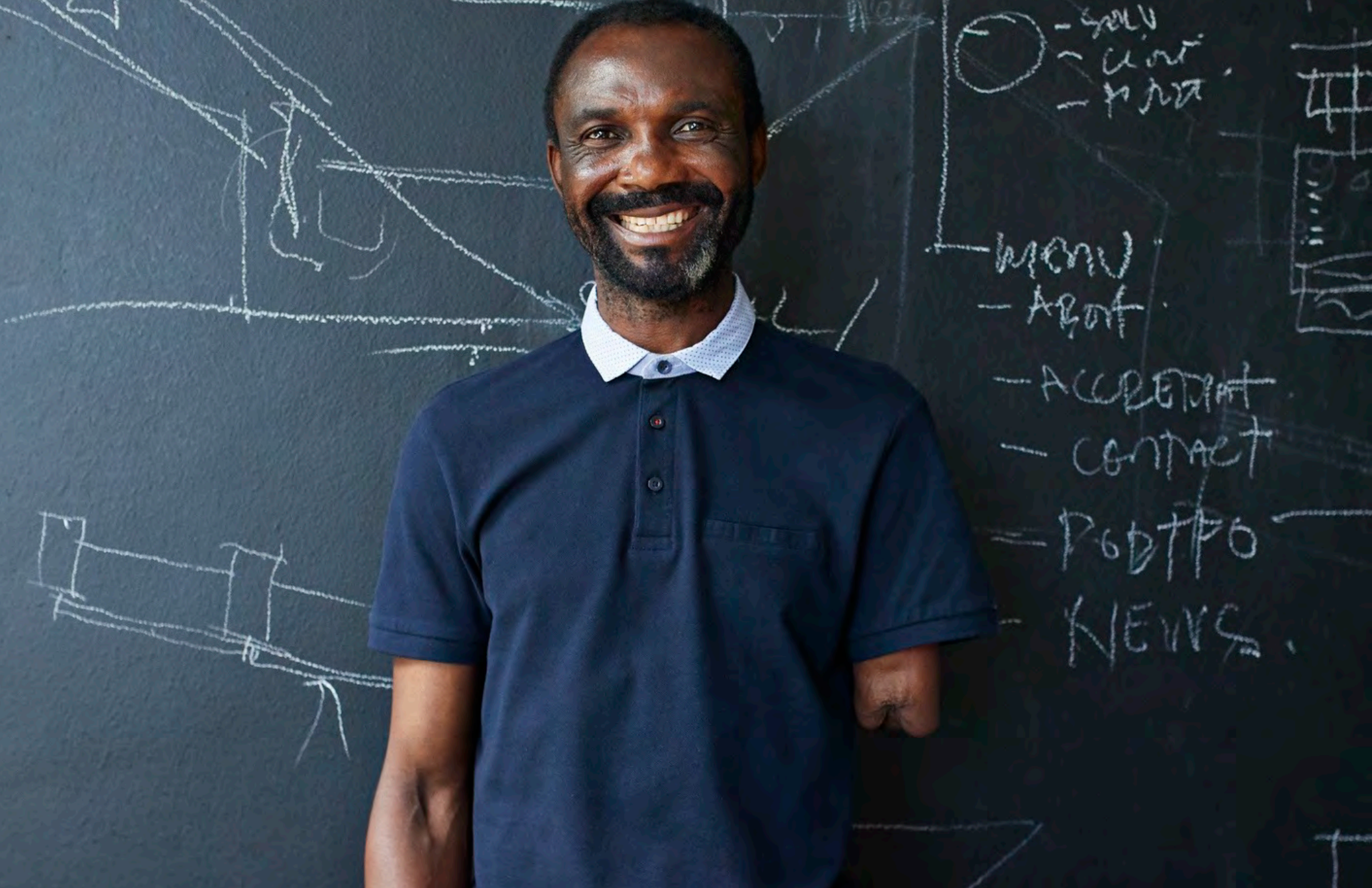


Missing from work



Missing hours





Our research identified **several categories** of people who became hidden workers, including people who have:

- **Health issues**
physical, mental or developmental/neurodiversity challenges, a history of substance abuse
- **Gaps in employment histories**
long-term unemployed or previously incarcerated
- **Family care responsibilities**
caretakers of children or adults/older people
- **Few formal qualifications**
no school qualifications or below a degree-level education
- **Required relocation**
veterans, immigrants and those moving locations
- **Disadvantaged backgrounds**
raised in a care home or had unemployed parents/caregivers

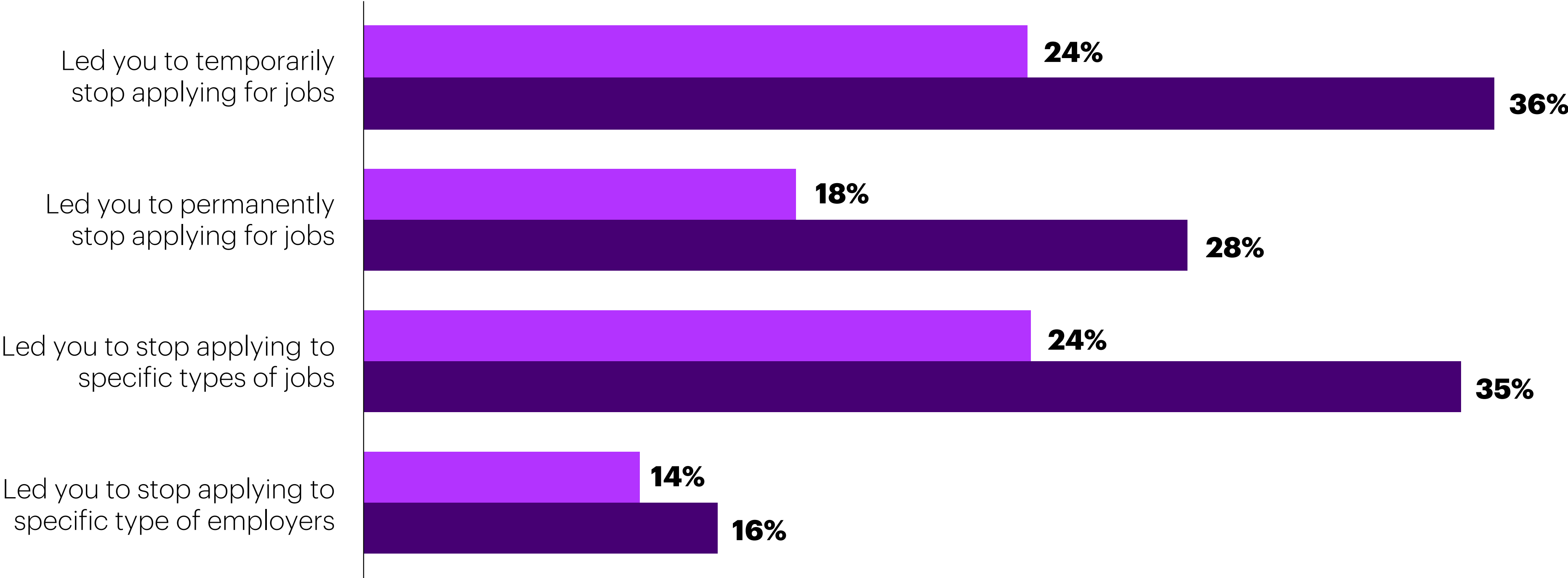


A woman with long brown hair and black-rimmed glasses is smiling broadly. She is wearing a black turtleneck sweater and holding a bright yellow folder. The background is a blurred office environment with other people and computer monitors. The text is overlaid on the lower part of the image.

Technology and culture
contribute to keeping workers hidden.

Hidden workers are **discouraged by** the job application process.

In your experience, has the job application process ever:



■ Middle skills workers (with more than a high school diploma/secondary education certificate, but incomplete formal higher education)

■ High skills workers (formal higher education degree completed)

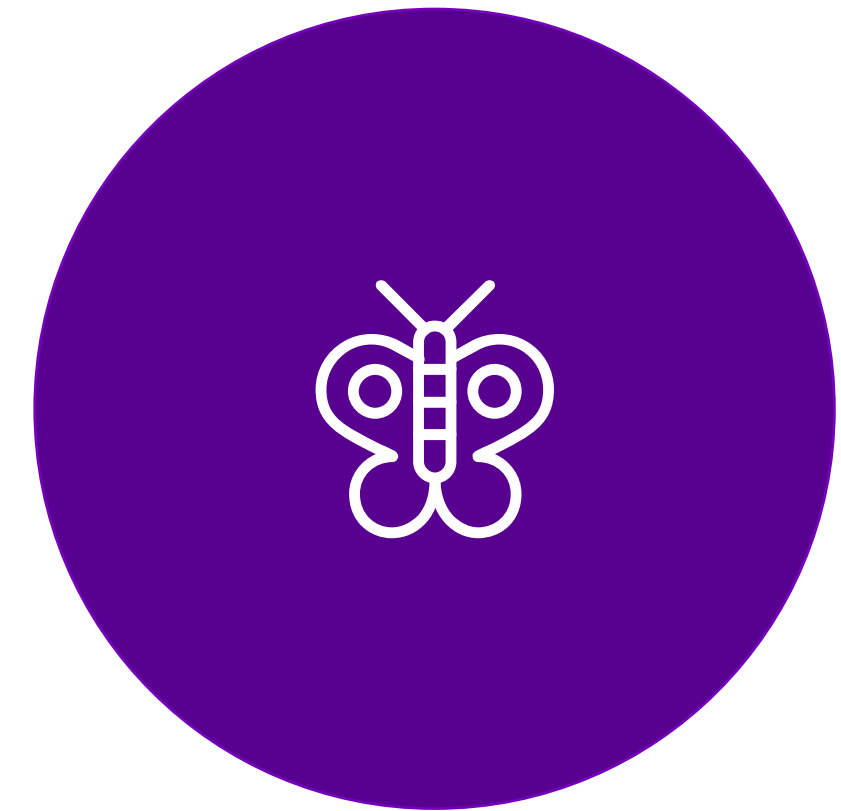
How to hire **hidden workers**:



**Prioritize
potential**



**Filter in,
not out**



**Transform
the culture**

Prioritize potential:

The single most common reason executives cited for hiring hidden workers was that it helped them close a skills gap.

Companies that hire hidden workers **were 36% less likely** to face talent and skills shortages compared to companies that do not. Furthermore:

38%

less likely to face challenges finding workers with the necessary experience

44%

less likely to face challenges finding workers with the necessary skills

36%

more likely to find candidates who have the right attitude/motivation

35%

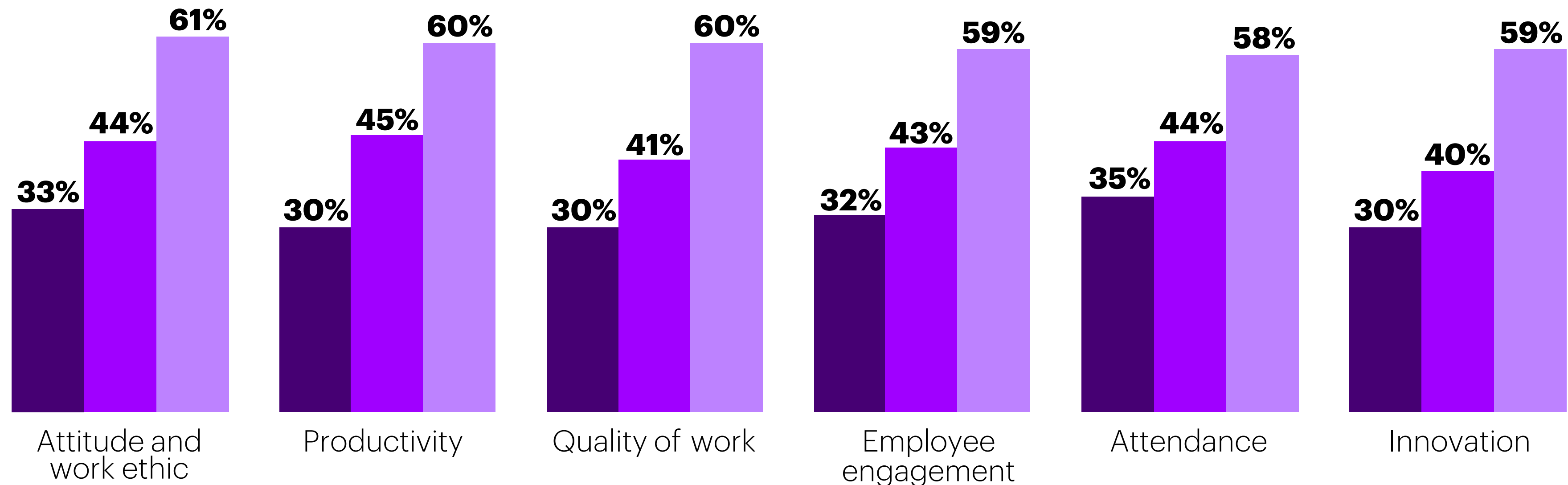
less likely to face challenges meeting diversity quotas

Employers report **high performance** of hidden workers.

■ Companies that **do not hire** hidden workers

■ Companies **that hire few** hidden workers

■ Companies that **hire many** hidden workers



*Percent of respondents selecting that the performance of hidden workers is "Significantly better" or "Better" than traditional sources of talent

A photograph of an older male worker in a yellow hard hat and safety glasses, focused on operating a drill press in a factory. He is wearing a blue denim work shirt and a dark apron. The background shows industrial machinery and a red wall.

Filter in, not out:

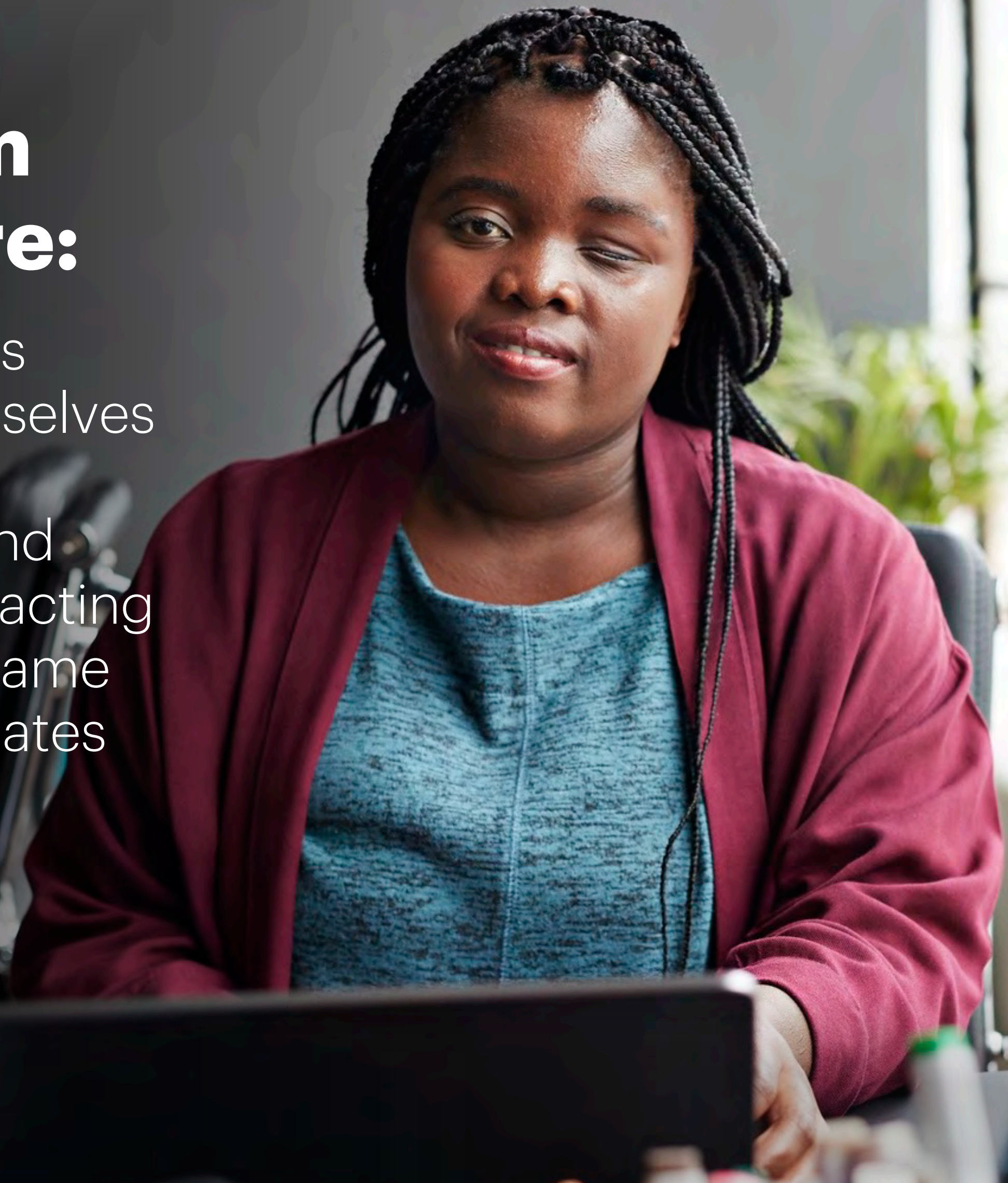
Technological advances in talent recruitment bring many benefits, but our research found that automated hiring practices can also contribute to keeping workers hidden.

When employers add more requirements to job postings, they narrow the applicant pool.

Rather than focusing on “the one thing” that filters out applicants, employers should pick six to eight “**minimum**” skills that filter more applicants in.

Transform the culture:

Even companies that pride themselves on a culture of inclusiveness find themselves attracting and hiring the same types of candidates over and over.



For previously hidden workers, the most important factor contributing to returning to work was supportive employer practices.

RANK	PREVIOUS MISSING HOURS	PREVIOUS MISSING FROM WORK	PREVIOUS MISSING FROM WORKFORCE
1	Supportive employer practices 28%	Supportive employer practices 31%	Supportive employer practices 34%
2	Change in my outlook/expectations 21%	Supportive government policies 23%	Supportive government policies 23%
	Supportive government policies 21%	Change in economic outlook 23%	
3	Change in economic outlook 20%	Change in my outlook/expectations 17%	Change in economic outlook 20%
		Mental health improved 17%	

Case Study: Goodwill

- **Project Overcome:** An innovative virtual experience helps people impacted by the criminal justice system enter the workforce.
- The project uses virtual reality to create a 3D-immersive experience, including a mock interview and a coaching session.
- Developed in partnership with Accenture's Skills to Succeed initiative, Project Overcome helps people speak comfortably about their incarceration during the job-hunting process.
- Each year, more than **82,000 people** impacted by the criminal justice system achieve their education and employment goals through Goodwill organizations

“This program offers the possibility for the trajectory of their lives to change and allows them to re-establish themselves as contributing members to their communities.”

— **Steven C. Preston**
President and CEO of Goodwill
Industries International

Case Study: CVS Health

- The unemployment rate for Americans with disabilities is twice the overall US rate.
- CVS Health's **Abilities In Abundance program** provides workers with a variety of disabilities access to rewarding work experiences.
- The program works to break down the barriers these workers face, including limited training opportunities, by partnering with vocational agencies, non-profits and schools to provide job coaching, support and mentoring.
- Abilities In Abundance creates job opportunities for workers, while also creating a talent pipeline to meet the company's workforce needs.



Case Study: JPMorgan Chase

- As many as one in three working-age Americans possess a criminal record.*
- Formerly incarcerated individuals have an unemployment rate above 27%.*
- **The Second Chance Business Coalition** is a cross-sector initiative for private sector firms—including JPMorgan Chase—that are committed to removing hiring barriers for these workers.
- JPMorgan Chase changed its internal hiring practices and works with its ecosystem partners to support this talent pool and promote public policy and legislative changes.
- JPMorgan Chase has hired approximately **2,100 individuals** with criminal histories each year since 2018, representing 10% of new US hires.

*Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)

“Business has an important role to play in making it easier for people with criminal backgrounds to get back on their feet.”

— **Jamie Dimon**

Chairman and CEO, JPMorgan Chase



Rethinking best practices in hiring and rewiring human and technology processes will be a steep challenge. Staying the course will require **courage**, as well as **conviction**. But it will pay off in the end.

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Inclusion, Diversity & Equity Global Lead



JOSEPH B. FULLER

Professor of Management Practice
Harvard Business School
Co-lead Managing the Future of Work

Harvard Business School Research Team

Manjari Raman (Lead), Bailey McAfee

Accenture Research Team

Sarah Berger, Jonathan Thomas,
Ladan Davarzani

Marketing Content Lead

Courtney Bonanno

Project Team

Alex Aizenberg, Marjorie Arnold, Robin Boggs, Wendy Cambor, Justin Chatigny, Beca Driscoll, Caroline Dudley, Kelly Flammia, Steven Flynn, Michelle Ganchinho, Takiyah Harrell, Francis Hintermann, Mary Kate Morley Ryan, Noelani Kimura, Dominic King, Marta Lajmi, Whitney Langston, Julia Malinska, Regina Maruca, Melissa Moloney, Katie Morison, Sotirios Papoutsis, Tchicaya Robertson, Karen Saverino, Tracey Seward, Nardos Sium, Heather Spring, Laura Stef Praun, Julia Tamulewicz, Paige Walker, Christine Yiannakis, Dwain Young, Group SJR and Harvard Business School.

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About the Research

This research was conducted in partnership with Harvard Business School. It focuses on quantifying the business case and mechanisms by which individuals who are often restricted from realizing their full potential in the workplace, such as people with disabilities, family care commitments, veterans and ex-offenders, can increase and deepen their participation. The research is based on both official labor market data, as well as proprietary 2019-2020 surveys of over 2000 employers and 8000 employees in Germany, UK and the US.

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