



*EST10's Quarterly Industry News keeping you up-to-date,
with your finger on the employment market pulse.*

EST10 Industry News

At the start of 2026, the economic landscape felt like a careful balancing act. Businesses and individuals alike seemed to be closely examining signals before making decisions. Employers were evaluating hiring plans more carefully. And candidates, while still interested in new opportunities, seemed less inclined to move unless the role clearly improved their position.

The year also had a slower start than previous years. The usual pick-up post Australia Day slid into February. Perhaps this was a lag from a tough and complex 2025. Certainly, speaking with clients at the end of last year, the upcoming holiday period was a well-anticipated and welcome break.

Then came March, and with it, a shift. Escalating tensions in the Middle East, paired with a sharp rise in oil and petrol prices, have started to find their way into everyday business decisions.

We're seeing organisations slow their pace just enough to reconsider. Budgets are being revisited, hires are more deliberately challenged, and roles are expected to justify their existence in a way that I have never witnessed before.

Candidates, in turn, are adjusting their lens. Stability, leadership, and the long-term shape of a business are beginning to outweigh short-term financial upside. Ambition remains, though it's now tempered by a clearer view of the downside if a move doesn't land as expected.

The result is a market that continues to move, but with an even more considered, measured pace. Few organisations appear to be retreating entirely, but many are choosing to move forward with caution, when it comes to headcount decisions.

We shouldn't be surprised; it makes sense; this behaviour reflects a familiar dynamic. When economic conditions become more complex, organisations rarely stop hiring entirely. Instead, they slow down the decision-making process.

In practice, this often results in a labour market that remains active while simultaneously feeling more restrained.

In March, the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) raised the cash rate to 4.10%, up from 3.85% in February. The most recent inflation indicators suggest consumer prices are still growing at around 3.7% annually, remaining above the RBA's long-term target band. This figure from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), of course, hasn't considered recent increases in fuel prices and their flow-on effects in all areas.

Labour Market

Australia's unemployment rate increased to 4.30% in February from 4.1% in January, while labour force participation held at 66.7%, close to historic highs.

Job advertisements also show signs of stabilisation after declining through parts of 2025. Data from employment platforms such as SEEK suggests hiring demand has begun to level out, and in some sectors has even improved modestly.

However, labour markets are not defined only by the number of available jobs. They are equally shaped by how organisations approach the hiring process. There is one interesting pattern we are observing, particularly since the beginning of the year. Recruitment timelines appear to be stretching.

Employers are taking additional steps before making a final decision. Interview processes are longer, approval structures are more layered, and budget discussions are more prominent.

For job seekers, the situation can feel a bit contradictory: there are still plenty of opportunities out there, but landing one often takes a lot more time and patience than you might expect.

Workplace Trends: 4 days a week and more

While economic forces shape hiring decisions, broader social conversations continue to influence how people think about work itself.

One idea gaining increasing attention globally is the concept of the four-day working week. Pilot programs in several countries have produced promising results, with advocates arguing that reducing working hours can improve productivity, employee well-being, and retention.

In Australia, the discussion has moved from theory into public debate. Some organisations are experimenting with trial models or compressed work-weeks, while policymakers and commentators are increasingly examining whether such arrangements could become more widely adopted.

Yet workplace structures rarely change without challenge and tension.

What sits underneath the four-day week conversation is a deeper shift that is harder to implement than it first appears. It requires organisations to move away from measuring presence, hours, and visibility, and toward something far less comfortable: output. For many leaders, this is where the tension sits. It is still easier to manage who is at their desk than to define what a meaningful contribution looks like.

And for many businesses, particularly smaller organisations, the central question is not philosophical but operational. Maintaining service levels, managing customer expectations, and coordinating teams across different schedules introduces complexities that cannot always be solved simply by reducing hours.

Alongside the four-day work week debate, there have also been discussions around expanding annual leave entitlements to five weeks, again raising important questions about how businesses can balance flexibility with productivity.

These debates reflect a broader shift in how work is being reconsidered. Flexibility remains highly valued by employees, but organisations are increasingly asking a pragmatic question: how do new working models function in practice, not just in principle.

Client Behaviour: A return to deliberate hiring

If the past few years were characterised by more speed in hiring, the early months of 2026 suggest a subtle shift toward deliberation. Employers are more selective about when and how they expand their teams. Recruitment processes increasingly involve additional stakeholders, more detailed role definitions, and greater scrutiny around long-term fit.

Salary expectations have also become an area of closer discussion. After several years of accelerated wage growth in certain sectors, employers are reassessing where sustainable salary levels sit.

In some cases, this reflects budget discipline. In others, it reflects a natural recalibration following an unusually competitive hiring period. Importantly, this does not necessarily indicate reduced demand for talent. Rather, it suggests organisations are becoming more intentional about how they deploy it.

In markets like these, the difference between successful and unsuccessful hiring decisions often lies not in speed, but in clarity, clarity about the role, the expectations, and the value the organisation hopes to create.

Candidate Sentiment: Opportunity balanced with stability

One of the more interesting developments this quarter is the tone emerging from candidate conversations.

Professionals remain open to hearing about new opportunities. However, many appear less inclined to make immediate moves unless the role obviously improves their circumstances. Stability seems to be carrying greater weight in decision-making than it did during the height of the hiring surge several years ago.

This shift may reflect several overlapping influences.

Interest rates are elevated, household budgets continue to face pressure from living costs, and of course, global geo-economic developments have introduced an additional layer of uncertainty into long-term planning.

When the future feels less predictable, individuals often reassess the trade-offs associated with career change. This threshold for change is higher.

For employers, this has practical implications. Attracting the right talent goes beyond just offering a good salary. It's important to provide a clear picture of the job's stability, opportunities for growth, and its long-term significance. People want to feel that their work has purpose and a promising future.

In The Media

Television

Victoria is facing a backlash against a proposed change to WFH rights! I joined Sarah Abo on The Today Show to give my thoughts! [Watch it here!](#)

Articles

Do you know the difference between burnout and boredom? I was delighted to write [this article](#) for Fast Company on this hot topic.

I was thrilled to write for the Sydney Morning Herald about working from home traps this summer, [read more here!](#)

How to get your CV seen, you have 30 seconds! [Click here](#) to read my latest article for The Age to make sure you stand out!

Interviews and Quotes

Would you fire someone over text? I gave my thoughts on the matter to News.com.au. [Read more here!](#)

Video interview technology is on the rise, but are we ready for it? I spoke to yahoo!finance to give my opinions. [Read it here!](#)

A multi-generational team is one of the strongest assets you can have! I was delighted to speak to News.com.au on this important topic. [Find out more here!](#)

Thinking of asking someone to do a work trial as part of the selection process? You might want to rethink! I gave my thoughts to yahoo!finance, [read it here!](#)

Podcasts

I joined Gemma Mitchell on the Risk Finance podcast to discuss 'The million-dollar formula: Small moves, big impact'. [Listen here!](#)

[Listen here](#) to my conversation with Grace Jennings-Edquist from the Business Essentials podcasts, where we discuss why AI has many uses, but not in networking

What's New?

Our 2026 Salary Guide is out! If you want to know who earns \$100,000 in bonuses, [download here](#).

Earning Power: Breaking Barriers and Building Wealth for Women. Ok, it's not that new, however, this time last year was our launch, and THAT'S worth mentioning!

To catch a glimpse of the night, check out our short video [HERE](#). And if you want to increase your earning potential, you can buy this incredible book [HERE](#).

Who Wants to Be Coached?

My coaching business has three offerings:

OPTION 1. Individual and one-off advice and coaching on the following:

- ◇ Salary negotiations
- ◇ Interview preparation
- ◇ CV and job application guidance
- ◇ Graduate job readiness
- ◇ Market reality
- ◇ Promotion ready
- ◇ Should you stay or go – analysis

Please reach out for more information. Typically, these conversations are resolved in one to two focused 45-minute sessions.

OPTION 2. Corporate coaching:

I work with organisations to strengthen capability, judgment, and performance across teams, particularly in roles where expectations are high, environments are fast-moving, and the margin for error is small.

This includes:

- Career and employability capability across teams
- High-performance Executive Assistants and business support teams
- Early-career and graduate development

OPTION 3. Keynotes and workshops:

- Earning Power- Close Your Gender Pay Gap
- Employable- Assure Your Future
- Graduate Job readiness

Our programs are grounded in what we see every day, how hiring decisions are actually made, what gets rewarded, and where people unintentionally hold themselves back.

For an insight into my coaching, mentoring and keynote business, please go to our website roxannecalder.com.au OR follow me on Instagram for daily thoughts, reels and inspo!



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