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Is the Issue Really the Lack of Experience Among New Graduates?

The entry of new graduates into working life is becoming increasingly difficult due to expectations of experience. On job search platforms, apart from certain exceptions, the limited number of positions open to new graduates also makes this picture visible. Of course, companies have expectations regarding cost, efficiency, workload and rapid adaptation. Although these expectations are understandable, the first years of a career are still a period of learning, guidance and gaining experience. What is particularly striking is that the learning and development process expected in the first years of a career has today turned into an obstacle that many candidates must overcome at the point of entry into employment.

Therefore, it is not sufficient to ask the question only as “Are young people ready for work?” The individual preparation of new graduates, the learning infrastructure of universities, the experience-generating work environments of industry and the guiding role of public policies should be addressed together. The real issue is whether the transition from university to work has been designed as an integrated transition mechanism that complements one another among these actors.

Because experience does not arise on its own. It develops through education, internships, on-the-job learning, guidance, making mistakes and assuming responsibility. If the mechanisms that create this ground are weakening, explaining the problem only with the word “inexperience” remains incomplete.

From Competence to Corporate Value Creation

Competence is not a resource that companies can sustain only by hiring experienced employees from outside; it is an accumulation that must be produced, transferred and developed within the organisation over time. Today, one of the common complaints of many companies is the difficulty of finding experienced employees. However, this complaint points to a more fundamental contradiction in the labour market: while companies demand ready-made competence from the market, the first steps through which this competence will be formed are gradually narrowing.

In the past, a newly hired employee would enter not only a position, but also a learning environment and a company culture. They would learn through experience not only the written rules of the job, but also the unwritten rules, which were often more decisive: how a particular customer should be managed, which process does not work as it appears on paper, which mistake becomes costly, and which decision should be taken when. In corporate life, this learning often takes place through a good manager, an experienced team member and the opportunity to be involved in real business processes. Although it is not always named as such, this is the invisible master-apprentice relationship of modern working life. Today, however, this learning environment has become more limited in many organisations, and the systematic transfer of knowledge has gained greater importance. When this form of learning disappears, the company may limit not only its ability to train new graduates, but also its capacity to transfer its own culture, business memory and decision quality.

In recent years, institutionalisation, efficiency and measurement-oriented management approaches have divided work into smaller parts in many companies, standardised activities and brought the management of employee performance through measurable indicators to the fore. These tools were necessary for companies to grow, control processes and monitor performance. Over time, however, this structure has sometimes turned into a narrow framework in which the employee is evaluated only through defined tasks and targets. An employee whose area of authority narrows, who moves away from decision-making processes and whose contribution is limited only to measured outputs may lose the desire to go beyond defined responsibilities, develop themselves and add additional value to the organisation. The discussion of “quiet quitting”, which became visible in the post-pandemic period, is also one of the signs of this disengagement: the employee does not leave the job, but withdraws the willingness to go beyond the job description and make voluntary contributions. As a result, the company begins to lose not only employee engagement, but also its learning capacity and corporate knowledge.

For this reason, the issue is not only whether new graduates are hired. When the development, initiative-taking and knowledge-transfer areas of existing employees remain limited, it also becomes difficult for the experience accumulated internally to turn into corporate value. Experience turns into real value when it is transferred, developed and brought into contact with new employees within the organisation.

The new graduate is not merely someone the organisation will train. They have the opportunity to become familiar with the daily functioning, work discipline and decision-making habits of the organisation from the very beginning. In this respect, with proper guidance, they are an important human resource that can be shaped according to the competencies the organisation needs. In addition, the fresh perspective of a new graduate may more easily notice problems, deficiencies or areas for improvement in processes that have been carried out in the same way for a long time and have become invisible over time. When properly guided, the new graduate gains skills, responsibility and the capacity to create value over time and becomes part of the future talent pool. Therefore, the time allocated to a new graduate is not merely a training cost; it is an investment that can turn into corporate capacity and competitive advantage.

The issue here is not to see young people as entirely right and companies as entirely wrong. Of course, the new graduate must be determined, remain open to learning, acquire work discipline, and be willing to make an effort and assume responsibility. However, if the business world expects experience from young people, it must also consciously design the learning environment that will make this experience possible. The first job, the first mistake, the first report, the first contact with a customer, the first field visit and the first responsibility are steps in a career that are too critical to be left to chance.

The sentence "We cannot find experienced staff" should not remain only as a complaint directed at the labour market. It should also bring forward more fundamental questions that companies must ask by turning inward: Can we still produce competence? Do we have a learning structure that follows the development of an employee who has just joined the organisation, guides them and enables them to assume more responsibility over time? Or, while losing the human knowledge we accumulated in the past, are we also weakening, without realising it, the corporate value we will need in the future?

Jobs Are Changing, Learning Pathways Must Be Reconstructed

According to the World Economic Forum's The Future of Jobs Report 2025, the skills needed in the business world are expected to change significantly in the 2025–2030 period. Technological change, economic uncertainty, geoeconomic fragmentation, demographic transformation and the green transition are transforming both the nature of jobs and the need for skills.

Therefore, the discussion on new graduates should not be addressed only through choice of department, but also together with the up-to-dateness of university curricula.

While the skills needed by the business world and industry are changing rapidly, universities also need to adapt their learning content to this transformation more quickly. Digital literacy, working with data, professional use of artificial intelligence tools, digital content production and technology-supported analytical skills are becoming complementary elements not only of technical departments, but of almost every discipline.

This need becomes even more pronounced on the artificial intelligence side. According to ZipRecruiter's latest report, 47% of new graduates think that artificial intelligence is already affecting hiring in their fields; 50.6% of students who will graduate in 2026 believe that artificial intelligence will reduce the number of entry-level jobs. Despite this, the share of those who say they received comprehensive artificial intelligence training at school for professional use remains only 23% among new graduates and 29% among students who will graduate in 2026. This gap shows that, in addition to granting diplomas, universities are becoming more important as learning environments that support students' preparation for changing jobs.

The findings of Cengage Group's 2025 Graduate Employability Report also concretely reveal this disconnect. The report states that among 2025 graduates, the share of those who were able to secure full-time employment in their own field remained at 30%, while 48% of graduates did not feel sufficiently prepared even to apply for entry-level positions in their fields. The same study shows that employers prioritise practical and job-specific skills more, while educators place greater emphasis on general skills.

Another determining factor in graduates' transition to work is the work experience gained during university. The findings of ZipRecruiter's 2026 Annual Grad Report show this difference concretely. According to the report, the employment rate of new graduates who gained work experience during university is 81.6%, whereas this rate falls to 40.7% among those without such experience. When evaluated together with previous reports, it is seen that employers may relax the experience requirement in periods when the labour market is tight, while in more selective periods work experience again becomes a strong screening criterion. This shows that the expectation of "we want experience" is not a fixed criterion; it can turn into a screening criterion that hardens or softens according to market conditions.

Türkiye's data similarly show that graduates' transition to employment differs by field. According to TÜİK's 2024 Higher Education Employment Indicators, registered employment rates are higher in the fields of health and welfare, engineering/manufacturing/construction, and information and communication technologies, while they remain lower in arts and humanities

and in social sciences, journalism and information. The time required to find the first job also supports this difference: while graduates in health and welfare find employment on average in 8.9 months, this period rises to 18.1 months for graduates of social sciences, journalism and information, and to 18.7 months in the field of business/administration/law.

This picture shows that easy explanations which place the responsibility only on universities or young people remain insufficient. Yes, curricula must be updated, and students must be strengthened in terms of technology and work discipline. However, the transition from university to work is completed not only with knowledge acquired during education, but also with structures through which this knowledge can turn into experience in the work environment. Therefore, the issue is related not only to the alignment between the education system and the business world, but also to the extent to which companies are able to establish learning environments that will hire and develop young people.

On the other hand, recent steps taken in higher education in Türkiye show that this need has now become more visible. With the regulation published in the Official Gazette dated 6 February 2026, it was envisaged that vocational training in enterprises should be carried out for at least one semester in a real work environment, in line with the nature of the programme, the needs of the sector and learning outcomes. This regulation shows that, in young people's transition to working life, the diploma alone is not sufficient; structured work experience, mentoring and on-the-job learning processes have also become decisive.

Within this framework, it is not correct to attribute the skills and experience expected from young people only to their individual preparation. Experience and skills develop through education, internships, on-the-job learning, mentoring, encountering real problems and assuming responsibility. If companies expect both a diploma, skills and experience from new graduates, they must also contribute to the transition mechanism through which these elements will be formed.

Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Entry-Level Jobs

The most critical effect of artificial intelligence for new graduates is that it changes the nature of entry-level jobs. These roles are not merely simple starting tasks; they are the first steps in the transition from education to working life, becoming familiar with corporate culture, developing work discipline and learning to assume responsibility. The World Economic Forum and PwC's January 2026 study, *How AI is Changing Early Careers: A View from Entry-Level Workers*, also defines entry-level jobs as a critical bridge between education and employment. According to the report, while these roles provide employees with the opportunity to learn in a real work environment,

they also create daily value for employers in areas such as administrative tasks, analysis, research and operational support.

However, the structure of this bridge is changing. Tasks such as collecting data, preparing initial analyses, organising reports, classifying customer requests or following standard processes were previously areas in which new graduates learned the job. As these tasks are increasingly taken over by digital tools and artificial intelligence, the first steps of the learning ladder for newcomers are narrowing. Stanford Digital Economy Lab's Canaries in the Coal Mine? study also reveals that early-career employees feel employment pressure more significantly than experienced employees in occupations highly exposed to artificial intelligence.

The contradiction here is striking: while companies find new graduates inexperienced, they are also reducing the basic and observation-based work that provides experience. As routine tasks disappear, young people are expected from day one to analyse, exercise judgement, use technology and adapt to complex workflows. Therefore, the issue is not to oppose artificial intelligence. The real issue is to design artificial intelligence as part of a new learning architecture, rather than seeing it only as a cost-reduction tool. Otherwise, while technology provides efficiency in the short term, it may weaken the ground on which the experience that companies will need in the future is formed.

Corporate Memory Risk in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The discussion on artificial intelligence is often addressed through efficiency, speed and cost advantage. Of course, artificial intelligence can reduce repetitive work, increase analytical capacity and enable employees to focus on more complex areas. However, if the issue is seen only as doing more work with fewer people, the search for cost advantage may weaken companies' learning capacity.

MIT's The GenAI Divide: State of AI in Business 2025 report also offers a remarkable warning at this point. According to the report, although corporate GenAI investments have reached the level of 30–40 billion dollars, 95% of organisations have not yet achieved a measurable return. This finding shows that the problem cannot be explained only by access to technology or model quality; it is related to how artificial intelligence is integrated into business processes, feedback mechanisms and the corporate learning structure.

The AI Layoff Trap study gives an important warning at this point: when looked at individually, firms may see reducing labour costs as rational; however, when the same direction is followed on a broad scale, the decreasing purchasing power of employees who lose their jobs may weaken the aggregate demand on which firms depend. According to the article, this

creates a risk of over-automation that may negatively affect not only employees, but also the revenue and profit base of firms themselves in the long term. When we bring this argument inside the company, a similar question arises: Is the employee only a cost item, or also the carrier of experience, customer knowledge, process memory, problem-solving ability and the capacity to train new employees?

Therefore, in the age of artificial intelligence, the main question cannot remain limited to which jobs will be transferred to automation. The more important question is how companies will preserve the experience, process memory and decision quality accumulated within the organisation while using technology. If automation is pursued without transferring the knowledge of experienced employees into the system, without redesigning the learning pathways of new graduates and without preserving corporate memory, companies may gain efficiency while eroding their capacity to produce competence.

Conclusion and Assessment

Today, many companies prefer employees who are as ready, experienced and quickly contributive as possible in recruitment. This preference may appear understandable in the short term. Competition has increased, cost pressure has risen, business processes have accelerated and tolerance for error has decreased. However, a business world that focuses only on ready-made competence also narrows, without realising it, the talent pool it will need in the future.

This risk is not abstract. The business world has begun to see a similar result in the shortage of qualified blue-collar labour. The weakening of the master-apprentice relationship, the narrowing of on-the-job learning channels and the disruptions in the transfer of technical skills from generation to generation have made it difficult to find trained personnel in many sectors. The difficulties experienced in new graduates' entry into the business world also suggest that a similar competence gap may emerge in the future. When sufficient entry and development space is not opened for new graduates, today's recruitment problem is not merely postponed; the capacity to train tomorrow's experts, managers and carriers of corporate memory may also weaken.

What needs to be done in the age of artificial intelligence is not to leave young people outside the system, but to rethink how experience will be produced. Entry-level jobs are not only low-responsibility starting tasks; they are the first steps where corporate culture is learned, work discipline is acquired, decision-making processes are observed and corporate memory is transferred. When these steps disappear, companies may gain efficiency in the short term while weakening their own capacity to produce competence in the long term.

Therefore, the issue is not only young people finding jobs; it is the reconstruction of the mechanisms through which experience will be produced. The openness of young people to learning, the applied learning opportunities of universities, the experience-generating work environments of industry and the supportive role of regulations should be considered together. However, this framework should not remain merely a well-intentioned wish. It should turn into concrete mechanisms within companies, such as mentoring, on-the-job learning, pairing with experienced employees, gradually increasing responsibility and making technology part of the learning process.

Is the real problem that new graduates lack experience? Or is it that the ground on which experience is produced is gradually weakening?

Today, companies may get through the day by only searching for competent people. However, just as it is not possible to expect a harvest without sowing seeds, it is not possible to train the competent employees of the future without giving today's new graduates time, guidance and responsibility. The expert, manager and carrier of corporate memory of the future will grow out of today's new graduate who has been properly guided, given responsibility and invested in.



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