Trends in Recruiter Productivity

An analysis of 14M applications and 80K jobs provides an inside look at rapidly shifting recruiter priorities.

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Topline recruiter productivity metrics would indicate that productivity is down – but there is a lot more to it.

1 Overall hiring is down and rate of hires per recruiter is lower than it has been since we started reporting on it – *2019*.

2 However, almost all other recruiting team activity metrics are going up:
- Number of applications
- Number of applicants interviewed
- Number of interviews
- Total number of interview hours

3 There appears to be more focus on quality and finding the right fit than we have seen before. While only anecdotal, this has been validated by conversations with customers who confirmed that internal scrutiny for offer extension has increased with the decline in total available head count for the team / organization.

4 Despite all of these changes within companies, candidate interview plans do not appear to have shifted:
- The candidate's interview process has about the same number of interviews and total time spent interviewing.
- The candidate time in process remains, on average, the same.

5 Time to fill new roles appears to be speeding up, although the uptick is too recent to be able to declare a trend at this stage.

6 Despite recruiting teams seeing dramatic cuts to team size, this data shows that they are working harder than ever.

Reviewing proprietary Ashby data from over 14 million applications and 80,000 jobs, we found that the rate of hires per recruiter has been trending down over time. As a blended average across all role types, the quarterly rate has gone down from a high of 7 hires per recruiter per quarter in Q2-2021 to an all-time low of around 4.5 hires in Q1 2023. In line with many other trends, this is about a ~36% reduction from the peak in 2021. While this trend may indicate to some that recruiter productivity is trending down, this report shows a more complete story, which is that the landscape for hiring and expectations from businesses has once again shifted.

The rate of hires per recruiter has decreased while application volume has increased.

As shown in the chart above, while the rate of hires per recruiter has decreased, we've seen a large increase in the average number of applications per hire. To bring this to life, from the baseline average applications per hire in 2021 we've seen a ~120% increase.

When we break this metric out by job function, we see that there's a higher average rate of business roles hired per month compared to technical roles, but that they both follow a similar downward trend starting in 2022.

The average rate of hires per recruiter has decreased across business and technical roles.
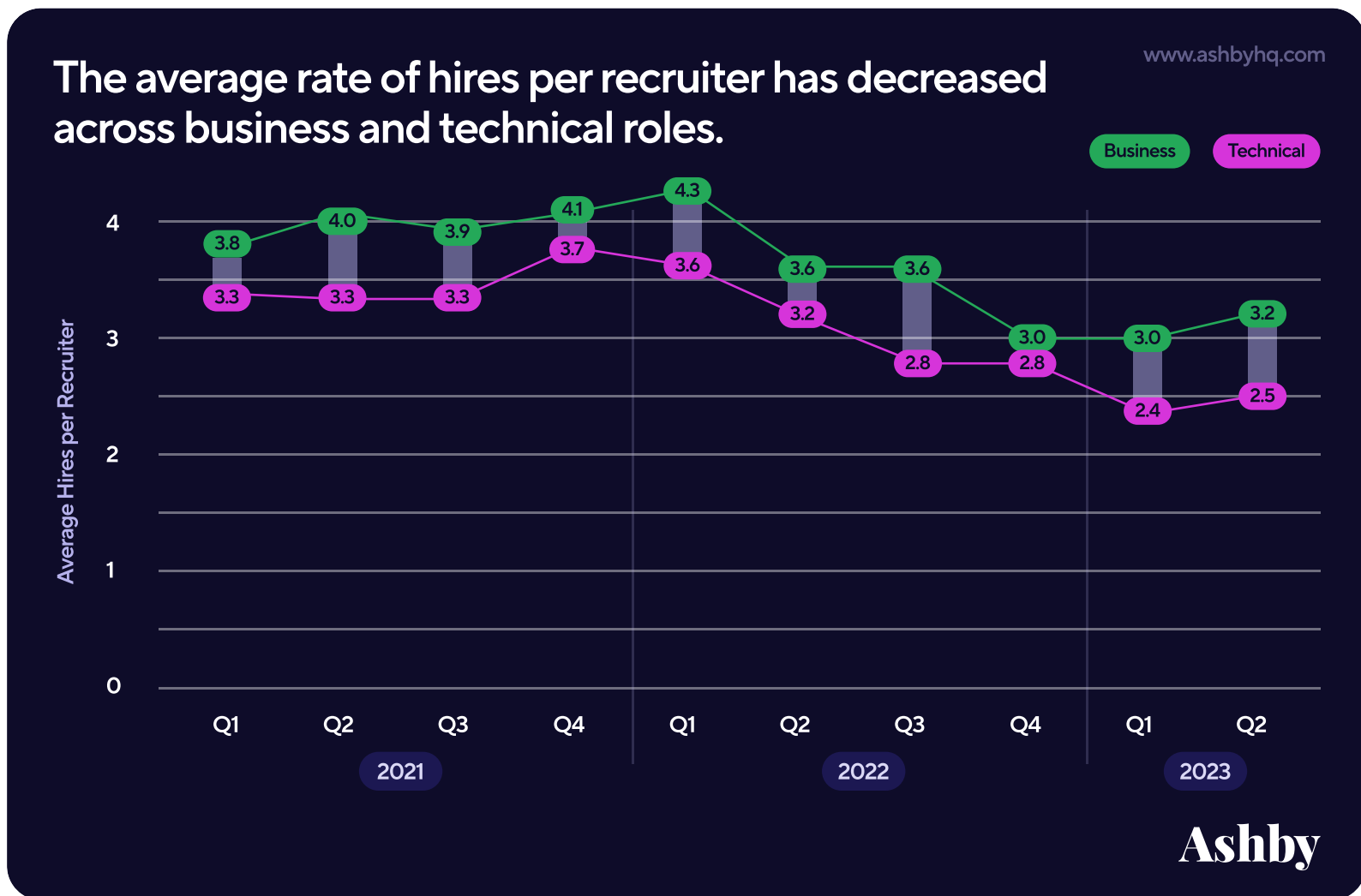
Although the trend in hires per recruiter is clearly trending down, this is a roll-up metric for an end-of-funnel outcome. As asserted above, recruiter productivity covers a lot more than hires, so let's take a look at the top of funnel, interview activity, and other metrics to form a more complete picture.

Note: When segmenting hires per recruiter by function, the **result no longer represents a recruiter's total potential capacity**. For example, a recruiter that makes 3 technical hires and 3 business hires will be measured as 3 hires/quarter within each function, but their total capacity is 6 hires/quarter. The total capacity is shown on the previous page, while the functional split here serves to show that the downward trend is common across role categories.

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Trends across the hiring cycle indicate that recruiters are having to do more for each incremental hire.
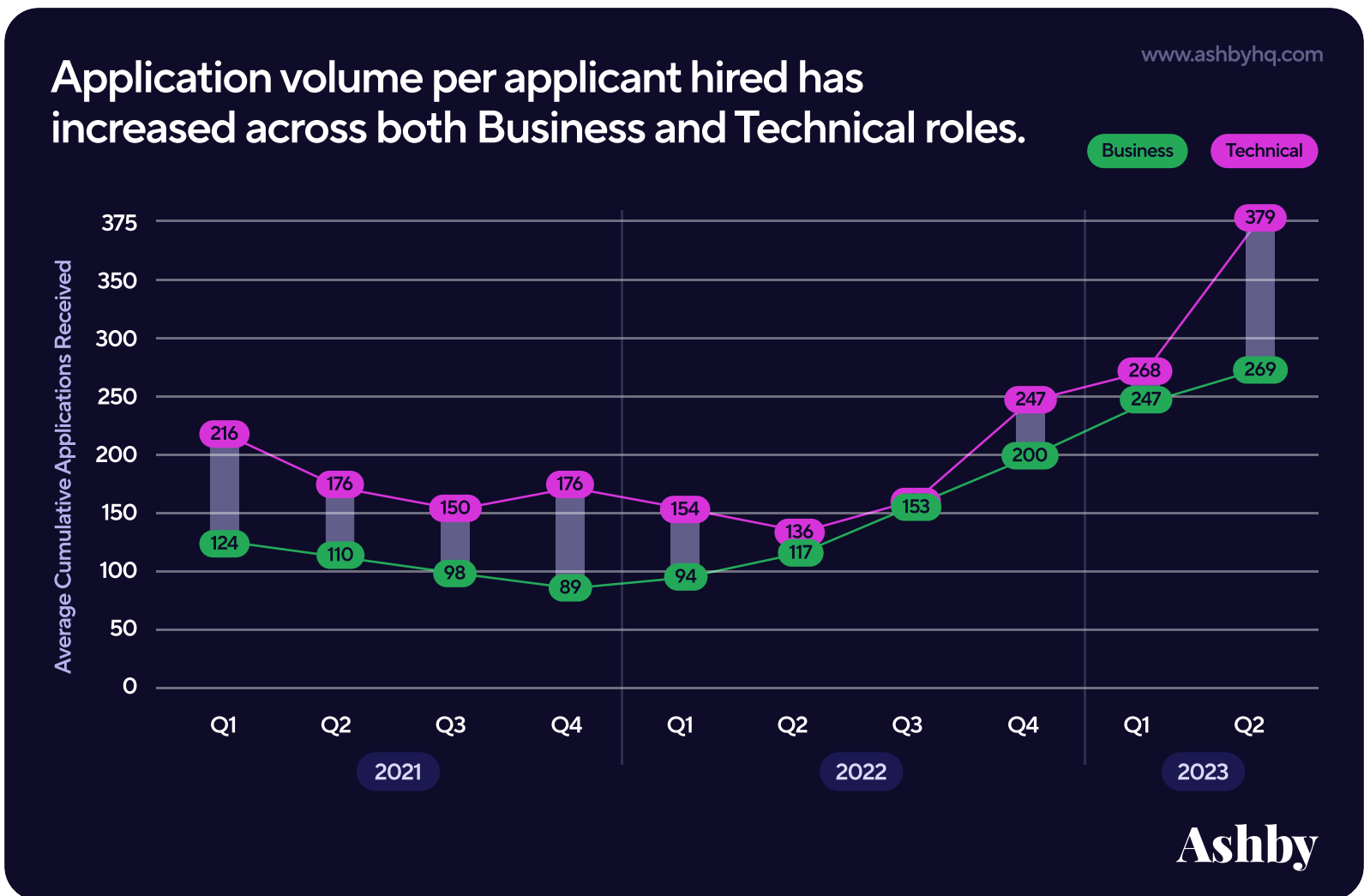
When reviewing Ashby customer data, we consistently saw large spikes in application volumes, interview hours and, generally speaking, a higher bar for candidate offers being made.

Candidate attraction – how has the top of the funnel changed?

Starting at the top of the funnel, we've seen the number of total applications per hire increase by 178% from a low of 99 in Q3 2021 to a high of 278 in Q2 2023. While this statistic includes all application channels, the largest driver of the increase has been inbound applications which tripled between 2021 and 2023. We have broken this out in more detail in our **applications per job analysis** report.

The implication of the increase in application volume is that recruiter focus has shifted from sourcing to application review.

The volume of applications per hire has increased 178%

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Average Application per Hire

Quarter	Value
Q1 2021	130.2
Q2 2021	110.4
Q3 2021	99.3
Q4 2021	114.5
Q1 2022	112.4
Q2 2022	116.9
Q3 2022	152.8
Q4 2022	219.6
Q1 2023	221.4
Q2 2023	278.0

Average Application per Hire

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Application volume per applicant hired has increased across both Business and Technical roles.

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Business | Technical

Average Cumulative Applications Received

2021: Q1 216 / 124, Q2 176 / 110, Q3 150 / 98, Q4 176 / 89
2022: Q1 154 / 94, Q2 136 / 117, Q3 153, Q4 247 / 200
2023: Q1 268 / 247, Q2 379 / 269

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Candidate evaluation: Are recruiters spending more aggregate time on interviews?

When considering the implications of the top of funnel two related questions come to mind:

1. Of all applicants, how many distinct candidates make at least one interview per hire?

2. What is the total interviewer time spent per-hire-made?
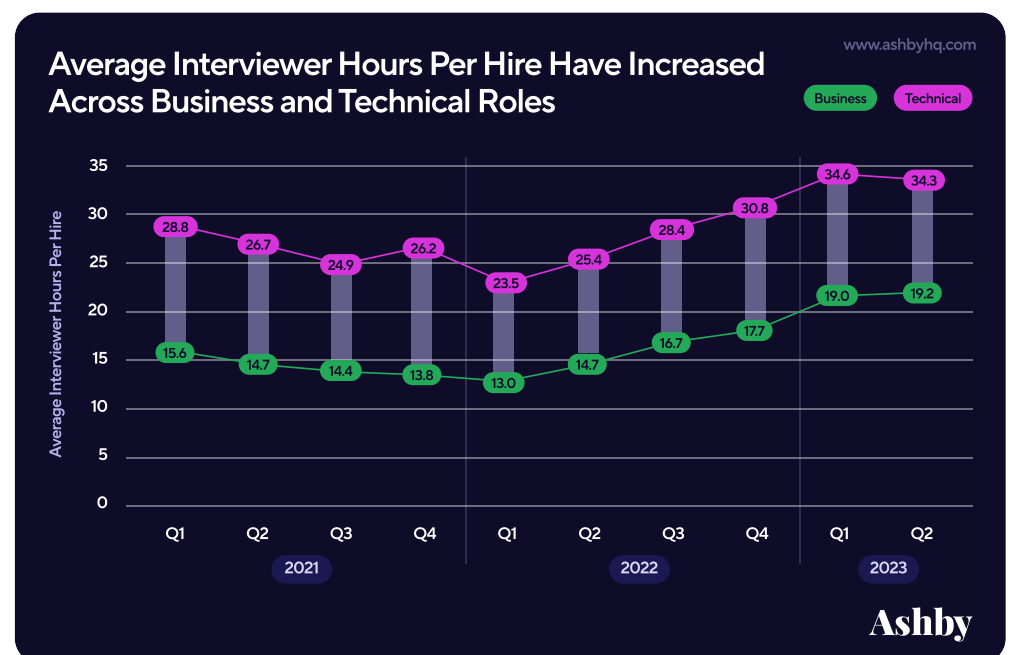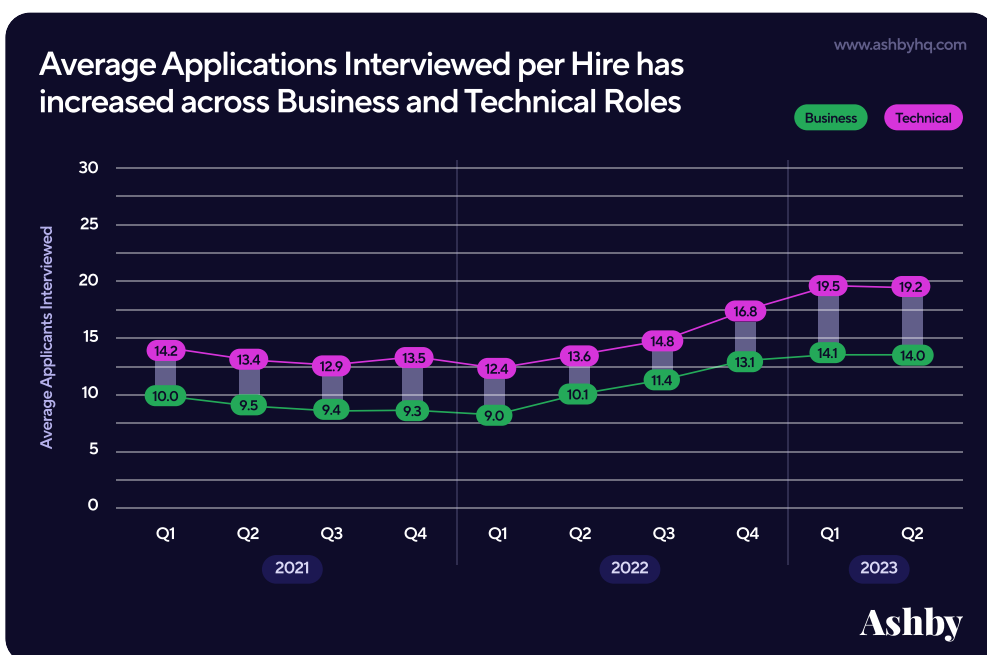
We can answer these questions side-by-side in the charts above. This comparison shows a lot of similarity, but there are a few noteworthy points to comment on:

1. Throughout 2021 there were relatively stable trends in terms of both the volume and hours spent interviewing, and at the beginning of 2022 we began to see an increase, which has continued.

2. The increase in both metrics has gone up significantly (~40% - 60% increases). In practical terms, teams are now spending between 5 and 10 more hours interviewing per hire.

3. There's a significant investment gap between functions. Tech roles interview more candidates per hire, and spend substantially more total interviewer hours per hire compared to business roles.

Looking at the below charts also paints an interesting picture. Even with more activity in application volume and hours interviewed, the percentage of candidates that get an interview has actually decreased over time. Furthermore, the percentage of candidates that reach the offer stage has also gone down.
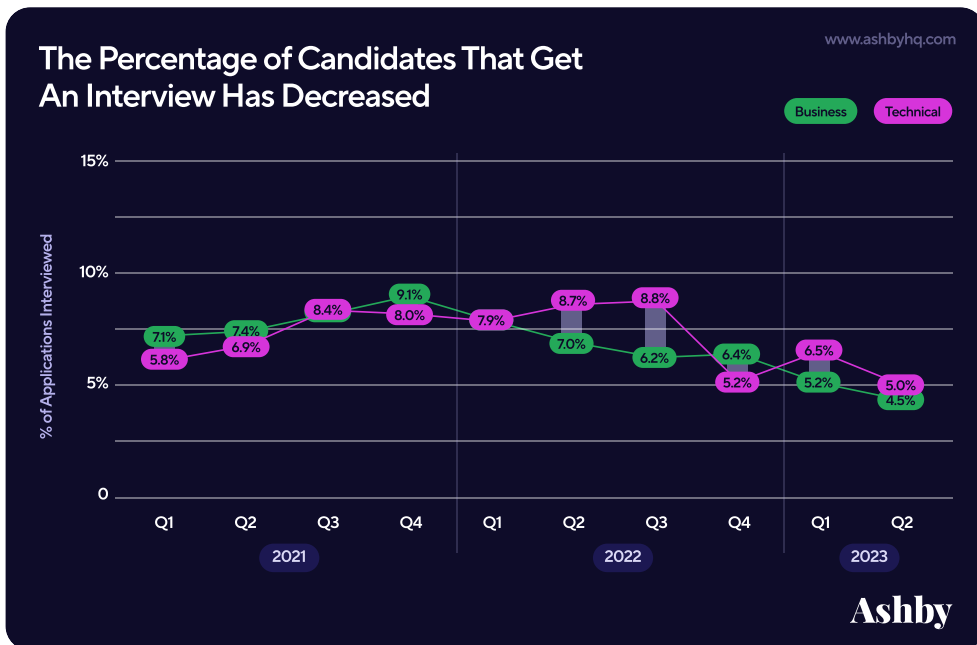
The above application-to-interview-rate by function chart also surfaces that the percentage of qualified candidates* has decreased. While there are many reasons this may have occurred, we believe it is likely due to capacity constraints caused by the increase in application volume, which is compounded by shrinking TA Teams. Additionally, the above interview to offer by job function chart reveals that making it to offer is trending down. We're now **at all-time lows with ~7% for tech (down from a ~12% peak), and ~9% for business (down from ~15% peak).**

* We have defined a 'qualified candidate' for the purposes of this analysis to be a candidate that applies and gets at least one scheduled interview. It is important to note however that this is imperfect as due to volume there are many candidates that meet the qualifications but are not receiving interviews.

In addition to increased application volume, total number of hours interviewed per role has increased.

Recruiters and talent teams are hiring less but more intensely focused on candidate selection than ever.

From the top of the funnel to the bottom, there are a lot of shifting trends, so let's try to summarize what we think is happening: We know the total hiring volume is trending down (see our **applications per job analysis)** and, per this post, we found that the rate of hires per recruiter is also trending down. However, we found that applications, the number of candidates interviewed, and the total number of interviewer hours have gone up dramatically.

How do we reconcile these trends? All signs suggest there's an increase in selectivity: We're, on average, in a slow headcount growth environment, so teams have to do their best to find the right candidates. This effort can be seen more at the top of the funnel than elsewhere in the hiring process.

Erika from WillowTree confirms this assumption as she reflects on the increased pressure being placed on the top of her funnel –

Erika Cober
Talent Acquisition Director @ WillowTree

"The macro economic environment has driven a really interesting dynamic. On the one hand there is more available quality talent than we have seen in several years, but at the same time the sheer increase in volume is slowing us down. In some cases we receive as many as 3,000 applications for a single role and because we want to deliver a great candidate experience (and protect our Glassdoor rating) we have to reject them personally. Managing this sort of volume distracts from high value work like getting offer letters out or nurturing active pipeline."

Streamlined Scheduling in Ashby

Scheduling volume has increased at the same time as recruiting team sizes have been decreasing. Ashby has advanced scheduling capabilities and automation that are built into our ATS, CRM & Sourcing, and Analytics. Having strong infrastructure to support high inbound volume, lean teams, and a tough hiring environment is critical. **Our customers love it.**

# Hiring trends by source and the role of inbound applications

Previously, we analyzed the overall offer acceptance rate trends and hiring trends by source type. In that analysis, we found that more and more hires were being made from direct applicants. The interpretation at the time was that with mass layoffs throughout the tech sector, more candidates were on the job market, thus increasing the size of the talent pool. At the same time, more costly hiring methods (e.g. agency efforts) may have met some budget constraints, resulting in an overall increase in direct applicants being hired. We decided to revisit that question to see what fraction of hires were coming from direct applicants, job boards, and agency sources (all other sources not shown here).

As the rate of hires from inbound applications to offer increases – agency and job boards remain primarily flat.

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Legend: Agency, Job Boards, Applied

% of Hires Made

	Q1 2021	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2022	Q1 2023	Q2 2023
Applied	30%	33%	32%	30%	31%	34%	35%	35%	39%	41%
Job Boards	11%	10%	11%	10%	10%	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%
Agency	6%	6%	7%	8%	6%	6%	6%	5%	4%	2%

*Hires from other source types are intentionally not shown in this chart.

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Through all of this, what is the candidate experience?

While overall interview hours have increased, the candidate experience has remained consistent.

The increase in interviewer hours per hire cannot be attributed to changes in the interview experience, which has remained consistent over time. We examined this by looking at how many cumulative hours a hired candidate undergoes and their total time in process. This latter metric is commonly known as time to hire: the time from application start to being marked hired. To break this down, in Q1 2022, the average number of interview hours per technical candidate was 3.5, and in Q1 2023, it was still 3.5. A similar consistency applies to business roles.
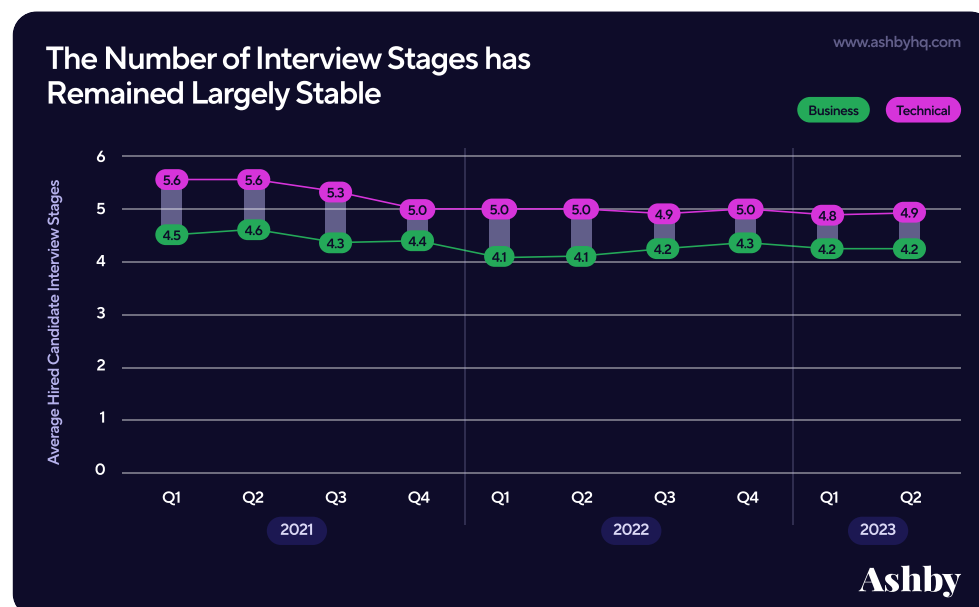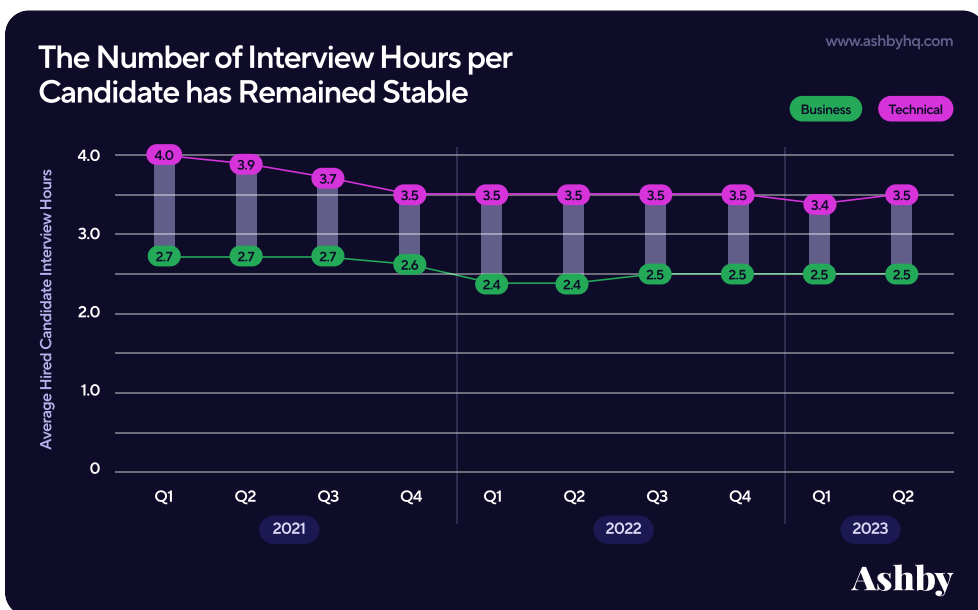
We did observe a slight decrease in candidate interview hours over 2021, but unlike other metrics covered in this post, there was an unexpected stability throughout 2022 and into 2023. Notably, candidates hired in technical roles tend to undergo about an hour of additional interviews on average.

Time to hire has also remained remarkably stable. However, this metric does deserve more commentary: the time to hire is notoriously skewed for various reasons. You can pause an effort, re-start it, create a new application to make a hire, and so on. All of this conspires to create some applications that are marked as being hired far faster than they actually took, as well as dragging some processes out for months when in fact there was an intermediate pause in the process. Similarly, the total time interviewing can vary per role and per candidate for a number of reasons (exceptions are made, role level, etc), resulting in a wide distribution of values.
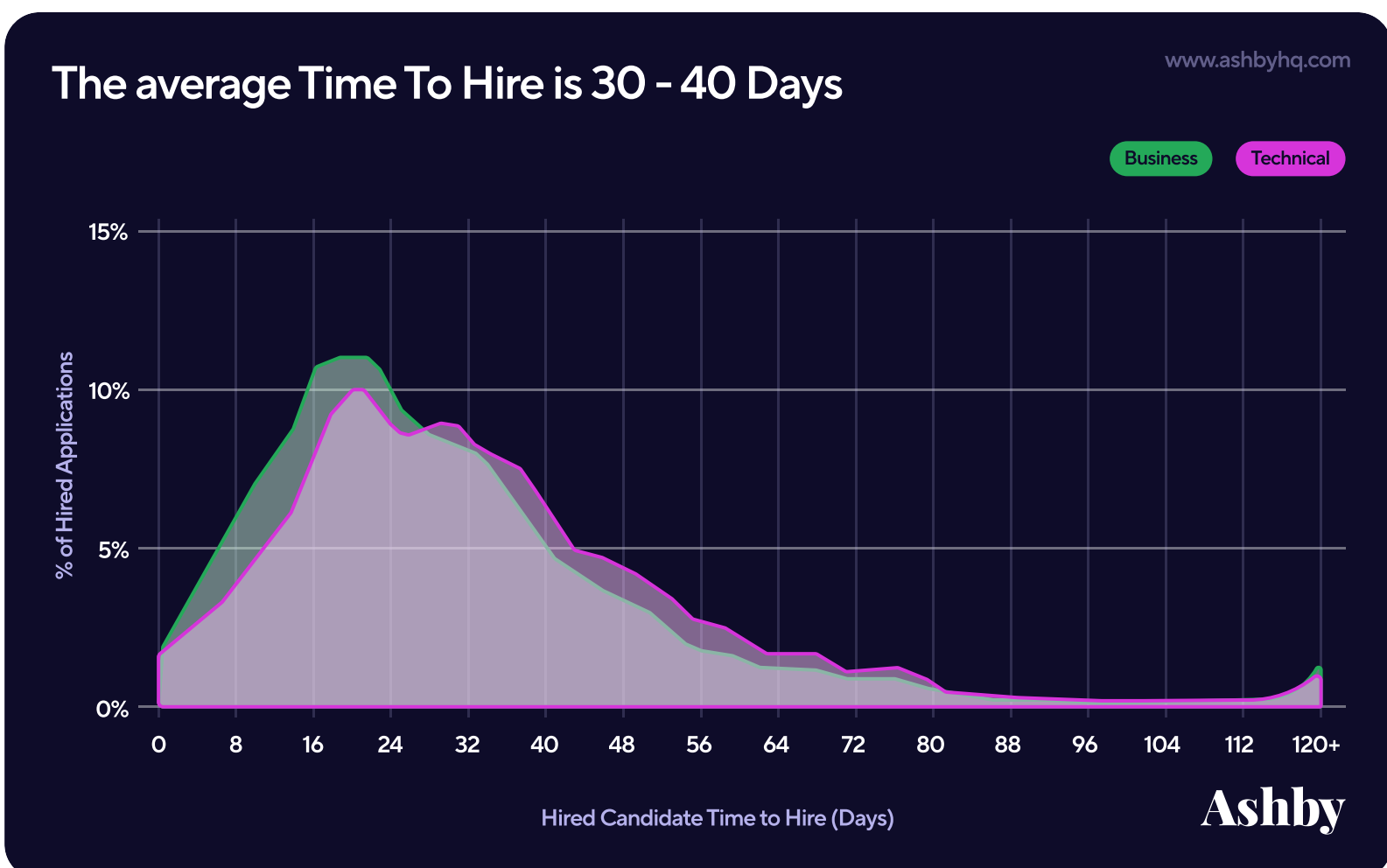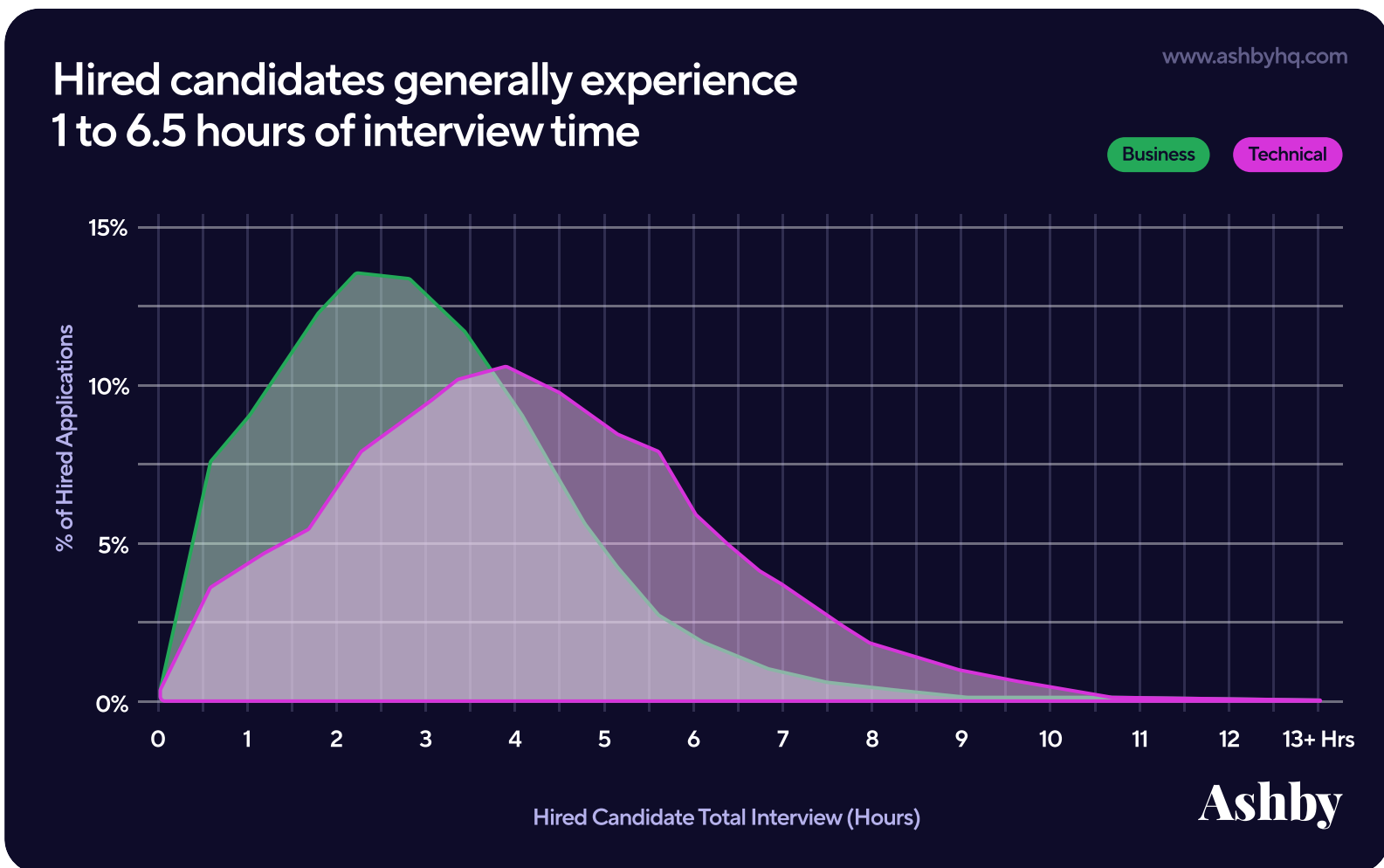
Taking a look at the candidate experience, we can conclude that the recruiting practice itself, as viewed through the lens of what an individual candidate experiences, has not changed radically.

Candidates experience between 4 and 5 scheduled interviews and an average of 2.5 and 3.5 hours of interviews for business and technical roles, respectively. The average process from start to finish takes about a month and a half. As these particular metrics have a long tail, it's recommended to look at the median and middle 50% range for a representative benchmark, which is provided below.

Time to hire Q2 '23	Median	Middle 50% Range
Technical	40 days	27 – 56 days
Business	36 days	24 – 51 days

Hired Candidate Interview Hours Q2 '23	Median	Middle 50% Range
Technical	3.5 hours	2.1 – 5.0 hours
Business	2.3 hours	1.3 – 3.5 hours

What does this mean for businesses filling roles?

Time to fill roles remained largely stable until Q2 2023 where a decrease appears to be forming, but it's still too soon to call it a trend.

Our analysis found that the Time to Fill (TTF) has decreased from an average of 104 days in tech roles and 82 days in business roles to 76 and 65 days, respectively. While TTF is a notoriously difficult metric to measure, as an initial estimate, we decided to look at the time to first fill, meaning the time from when a job was opened to when the first hire was made. This isn't a completely comprehensive metric, but it nevertheless can give a signal on what it may mean to open a new role for the first time and begin hiring efforts.

Time to First Fill Job Function

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Legend: Business, Technical

Median Time to First Hire (Days)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Business	68	67	69	70	73	79	83	70	76	65
Technical	94	80	89	88	93	87	104	97	99	76

2021 | 2022 | 2023

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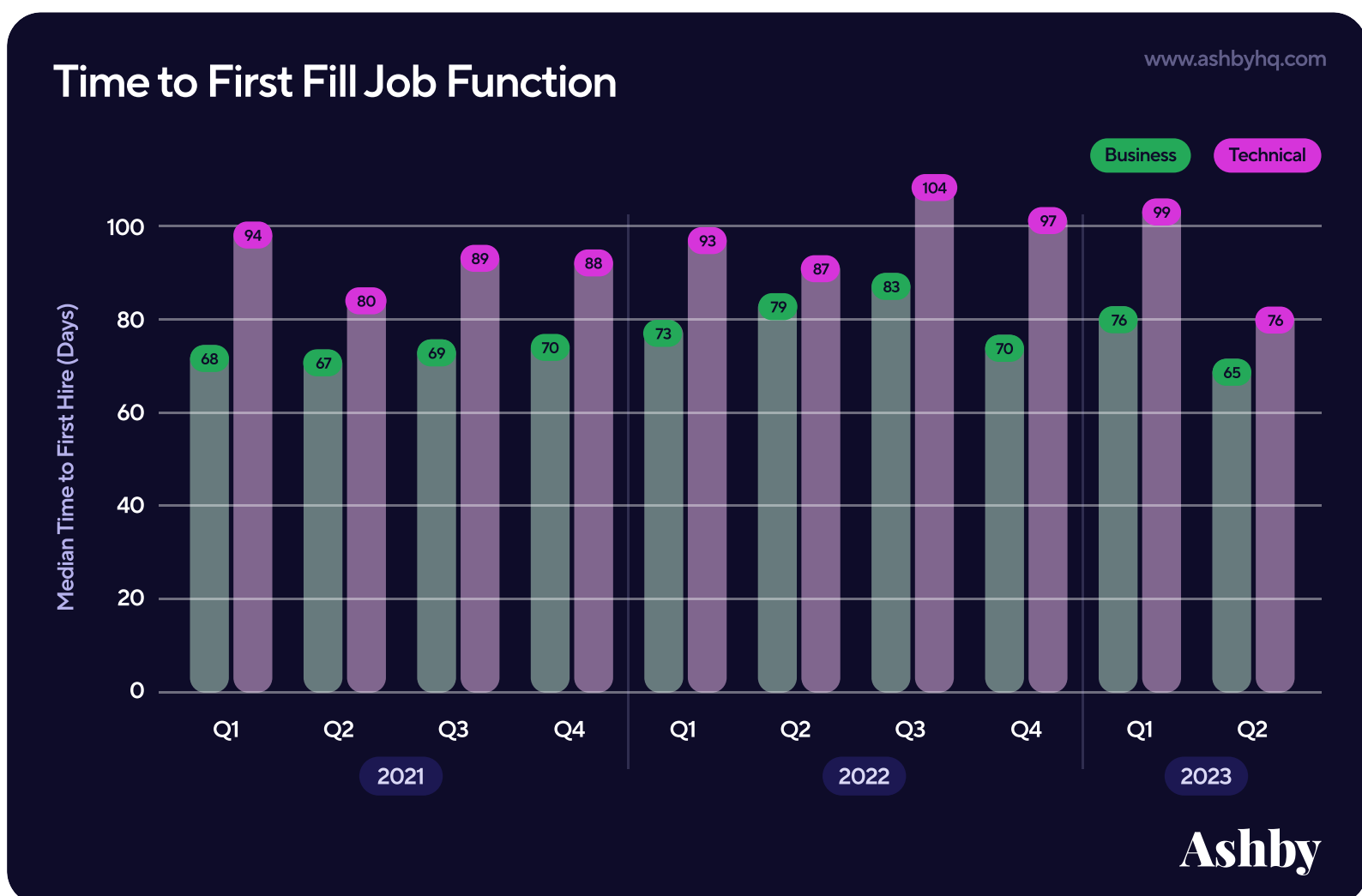
[2] The middle 50% range, i.e. the 25th to 75th percentile, is called the "interquartile range" and represents a middle sampling of a distribution, providing a range from the lower and upper ranks without going to the extremes.
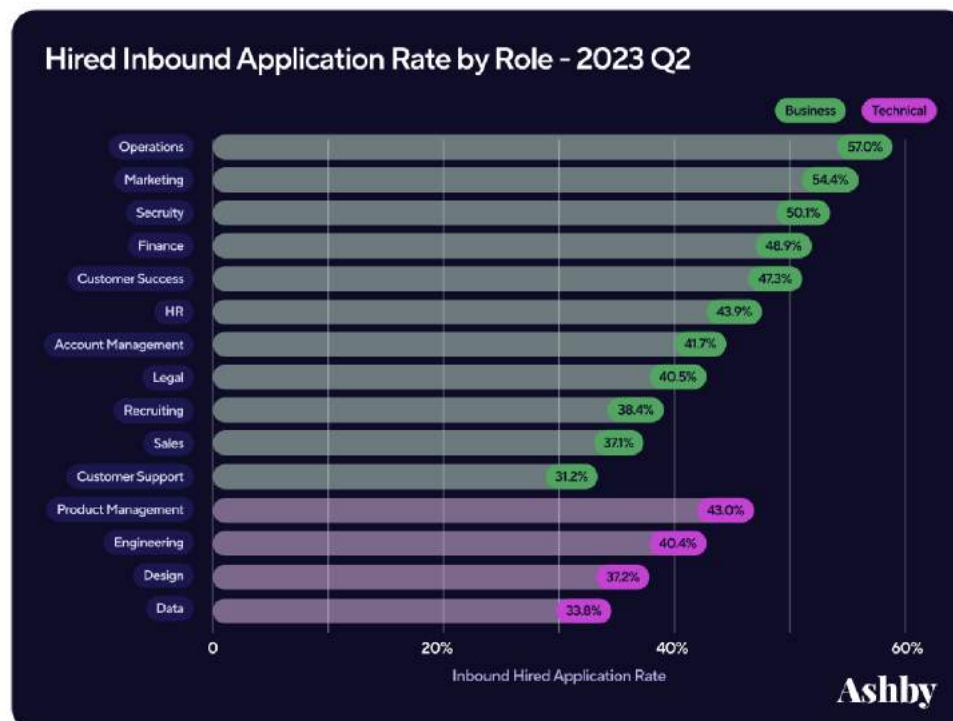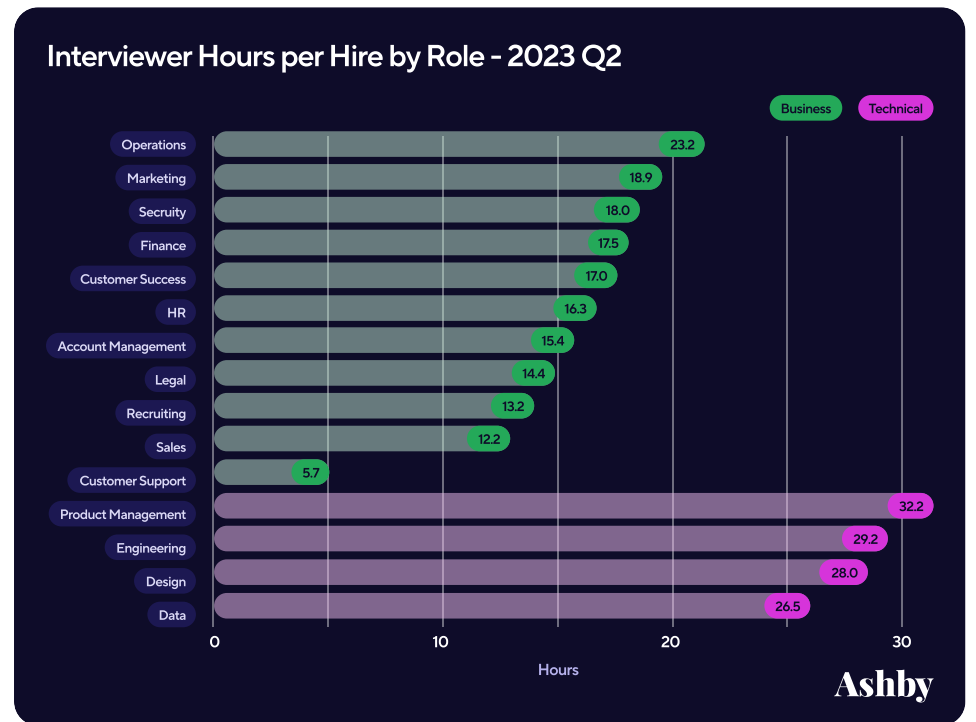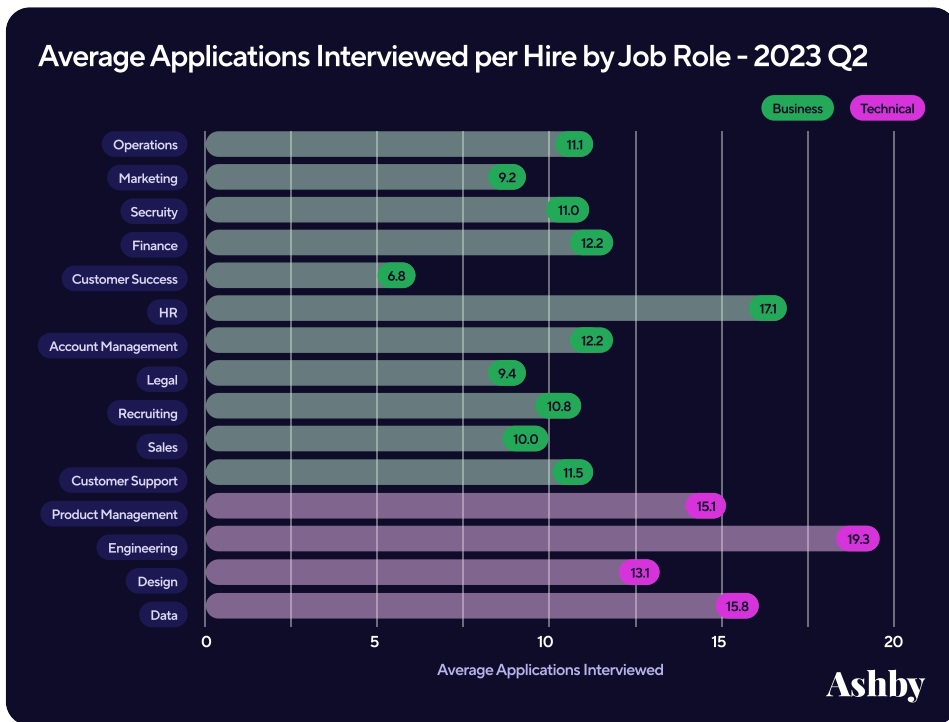
[3] Time To Fill (TTF) is notoriously difficult to measure well due to uncertainty around job opening dates, posting publication dates, evergreen roles and other underlying process factors.

The data suggests there is a potential trend towards a faster TTF in recent quarters, especially for business roles. That said, a salient feature relative to how other metrics have been changing is that of relative stability. Business roles tend to get filled about ~20 days faster than technical roles, but this gap may be closing in 2023. The overall long-term trend suggests we should wait and see how the next quarter or two proceed.

Analysis broken out by role type, Q2 2023 benchmarks

In each of our reports, we like to also break the data out by role to help teams identify role anomalies. The charts below identifies some interesting trends.

The following charts are the representative metrics per function split out by job role, taken over Q3 of 2023 to provide a most-recent benchmark reference.

Average Applications Interviewed per Hire by Job Role - 2023 Q2

Interviewer Hours per Hire by Role - 2023 Q2

Hired Inbound Application Rate by Role - 2023 Q2

Conclusions

In analyzing **over 14M applications and 80K jobs**, we ultimately found three insights to be interesting:

1 Hires per recruiter have declined.

2 Inbound application volume and hours of interview time to successful hire have spiked dramatically.

3 While many other metrics have shifted, candidate interview experience has remained largely stable.

We hope these insights provide valuable guidance for Talent Teams to adapt to evolving trends and thrive in a competitive talent landscape. By leveraging these findings and utilizing tools like Ashby, recruiters can streamline their workflows and achieve greater efficiency in the hiring process.

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