

Using a **job architecture** to navigate workforce challenges

A job architecture is a framework for aligning jobs within an organization based on the type of work performed. With new business models requiring greater workplace flexibility, many organizations question whether their job architecture frameworks are too rigid and complex. However, not having them can lead to pay inequities and lack of transparency regarding career development opportunities for employees.

Now, many higher-performing organizations have realized that they can design an employee-focused job architecture to give them the foundation they need to meet today's compensation and talent challenges. "You need a job architecture...[it's] a way for employees to identify and assess their interests, a way for the company to publish its strategic career and skills needs, and a way for people to fulfill their personal mission at work," [says HR analyst, Josh Bersin](#).

Even if it's just aligning levels or mapping levels to job titles, a basic job architecture sets the foundation for pay strategies, the pricing of jobs, salary decisions, and equitable pay practices. It's the framework that allows HR leaders to make agile decisions as they compare across job families, career paths, and job levels.

According to CBPR 2024 respondents:

57%

said they have a job architecture

20%

said they don't have one, but are working on it

19%

said they don't have one, and are not working on it

4%

said they are unsure

Source: 2024 Compensation Best Practices Report

Job architecture informs agile comp strategies

It's widely accepted that in the coming years, organizations will continue to face significant changes and challenges in the workforce. They must have systems in place to navigate these workforce challenges resulting from a competitive talent market and employee burnout.

To prepare for the future, HR and comp pros need to think strategically about what skills are required for the organization to function, how members of the organization develop, and how pay is communicated both internally and externally. Job architecture is crucial in addressing all of these.



Skill gap analysis

Recruiting and retaining talent with specialized skills has become even more necessary in the digital era. With a job architecture in place, HR, leaders, and managers can determine which positions are required. This framework is also used to identify the skills and capabilities for each role and the functional and hierarchical alignment in the organization. Once the jobs and expertise required to meet business objectives have been identified, it's possible to recruit, hire, or upskill for any skill gaps.

Employee retention

One thing we've learned from "quiet quitting" is that today's employees want jobs that offer career development and mobility. Regardless of position, people want to understand the path for their career. Without that clarity, employees are more likely to leave. A job architecture establishes career paths and possibilities that can assist all employees and managers in mapping out how they can stay with the organization. In addition to the more common vertical career paths, employees can use the job architecture framework to understand horizontal paths and even gain clarity about options for new careers. The framework helps illustrate the breadth and depth of options available. Furthermore, high-performing companies can address employees' changing needs by continuing to review job titles, reward programs, and career paths.

Pay transparency legislation

With pay transparency regulations on the rise, HR teams are under pressure to provide pay ranges and demonstrate their commitment to pay equity. Data from CBPR indicates that 25 percent of organizations say they aren't prepared to do a pay equity analysis "due to lack of pay structures." Unfortunately, without a job architecture, it is hard to explain why employees are paid as they are and where new roles will fit into the organization.

Practitioner perspectives

Reaping the benefits of a job architecture

While creating a job architecture may seem overwhelming, compensation professionals stress the benefits. With a framework in place, organizations have a map to share with leaders, managers, and employees that provides clarity and bolsters engagement.

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Build a stronger HR strategy

“I see so many wins for our clients after they implement job architecture. Pay transparency compliance and pay equity analysis both become easier. The HR administrative burden is also significantly reduced. Ultimately, the clarity gained from a job architecture helps organizations build a stronger HR strategy and business.”

Marc Mullis

Founder/CEO, Payformance Partners

Create more meaningful manager-employee conversations

“There are numerous benefits when organizations have a job architecture in place. It creates more meaningful conversations between managers and their employees when it comes to career progression and enables consistency across the organization with respect to titles and compensation. For employees, there’s added clarity around options for mobility as the company grows.”

Jennifer Phillips, CCP

Director of Compensation

Establish consistent processes and practices for sustainable fair pay

“Pay equity requires that you understand how jobs can be grouped together as comparable and of equal worth. Having a job architecture makes this much easier and enables you to develop consistent processes and practices over time. This ensures that you can have sustainable fair pay.”

Vicky Peakman

Director of Social Impact

Five compensation best practices for creating an effective job architecture

At its core, a job architecture should reflect the levels of contribution and pay structures within an organization. It should also have the flexibility to be adjusted to dynamic compensation data and changing business outcomes. Here are five best practices to help you in the process of creating one.

Once this process is complete, the job architecture will be ready to serve as a framework when implementing HR and compensation strategies.

Learn how job description management tools support a strong job architecture.

Learn more



1

Take inventory.

Review the current and future state of the organization's job catalog. What jobs do employees currently hold? What jobs are being actively recruited? What jobs are going to be added in the future? Be sure you have an inventory of what jobs are required now — and in the near future — to support business goals.

2

Identify job levels.

Using the list of jobs, you can identify and define the number of job levels that exist in the organization. How many variations of complexity and scope of responsibility exist across independent contributors? Across management roles? This will highlight whether the existing organization is relatively flat or hierarchical.

3

Determine job families and career paths.

Job families are larger groups of jobs (vertical segments) that are in similar functional areas. An organization's complexity and size will affect the number of job families it has. Often job families are sub-divided into career paths. For example, a smaller organization might be able to create an overarching Business Support job family, with career paths for HR, Finance, etc. But larger organizations might need to create specific functional job families such as HR, with career paths for benefits, compensation, or employee relations. Once you have job families and career paths, you can determine how many roles are within each job level (horizontal segments). Some job families and career paths will have roles at every level, while others won't.

4

Review job descriptions.

Once you determine how you define each job level in terms of responsibility, skill level, and experience, you can be consistent in your job descriptions. All job descriptions in a job level should have similar requirements. A job architecture makes writing job descriptions easier and makes them more uniform. The "requirements" in a job description are based heavily on the essentials as established for specific job levels, job families, and career paths.

5

Finalize the job architecture and create pay structures.

To create pay structures, review your salary benchmark matches and ask questions to refine as needed:

- Are jobs in the same career path matched to the same survey job group?
- Are jobs in the same internal job level matched to the same survey job level?
- Do career paths within a job family progress in a logical, predictable manner?
- At what levels will you create pay structures for each career path / job level combination, each job family / job level, and for each job level? Usually, the higher the level, the wider the pay structure.
- Are career paths present and clear across the job architecture? Do managers and employees know how to use them as a source when planning for development?



About Payscale

As the industry leader in compensation management, Payscale is on a mission to help job seekers, employees, and businesses get pay right and make sustainable fair pay a reality. Empowering more than 50% of the Fortune 500 in 198 countries, Payscale provides a combination of diverse and dynamic data sources, compensation services, and scalable software to enable organizations such as Angel City Football Club, Perry Ellis International, United Healthcare, Vista, and The Washington Post to make fair and appropriate pay decisions.

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