

Career Frameworks: Your Most Important HR Tool for the Era of Increased Transparency

The human resources function is stuck between a rock and a hard place. Designing approaches that fit the needs of a multi-generational workforce and an emerging job market adds tremendous pressure to HR strategies. Companies are attracting and retaining talent by using more customization and adaptability in their role profiles and job descriptions. However, having so much customization, and ultimately so many unique job profiles, doesn't necessarily lend itself to addressing the current industry-wide need for more transparency. And often, the result can be a lack of clarity into what career paths are available within your organization.

How do you retain a fluid job architecture that can adapt to unique roles, while highlighting your firm's commitment to appropriate transparency and governance? Is it possible to achieve both objectives without creating an overly burdensome catalog of job profiles that are customized to each employee in the firm?

When speaking with clients, we typically ask them to think about the following questions:

- How do you define what your people are doing?
- How would your employees define the opportunities for their career in your firm?
- Does this career path adapt to both internal and external considerations?
- What level of accountability must employees, managers, and HR staff have in order to ensure the career framework is working?
- What approach are you taking to update your organization's career framework to meet future needs?

Below we highlight ways to achieve a solid job architecture to get the most out of this fundamental resource.

Foundational elements of job architecture are key

To ensure your career framework meets all your needs in both compensation and job profile management, start with a solid foundation. As organizations increasingly seek customized and transparent career frameworks for their employees, establishing and updating baseline elements of your job architecture will help your firm strike the right balance between structure and flexibility. Core elements of a successful job architecture that promote talent management and tailored career paths include:

- **Job Families:** A validated set of jobs that is specific enough for purposes of talent deployment, training, compliance, and recruiting, but not so specific that each person has a unique job and title.

- **Career Levels:** A sufficient hierarchy of career opportunities within a given field that reflects the flexible nature of career ladders. For example, having technical experts who are not required to manage staff, but still have a path to grow in the organization.
- **Leveling Criteria:** Defined criteria for how roles are distinct and how an employee can advance in an organization, laying out progressive responsibilities, job duties, rewards, and perks for successfully attaining each level.
- **Job Titles:** Titles that employees and outside groups, such as clients, industry peers, trade associations, and regulatory bodies, can rely on to understand who they are interacting with and their level of responsibility.

Keeping your job architecture framework relevant

Like a piece of gym equipment that sits in a corner collecting dust, a firm's role profiles and promotional criteria are fundamental HR tools that won't retain value unless they are appropriately used and properly maintained. How, then, do you motivate executives, managers, and employees to consistently use a job architecture system? Will they become susceptible to disengagement if the job architecture lacks transparency, efficient administration, or if it appears to be outdated? Without the correct balance of transparency and utility, leaders are more likely to avoid the process altogether, which could potentially lead employees to deem the system unfair and disengaging.

Career frameworks are not one-size fits all and should be designed and maintained as an integral part of your long-term people strategy. Your job architecture should grow and change alongside your firm. When done right, the result will be an effective tool to help improve transparency in pay and career progression, while reducing inefficiencies and risks. Some guiding principles to keep in mind when designing your job architecture include:

Lead by example: As with most firmwide programs, adoption and dedication must start from the top. If your leaders do not support the framework, your employees will not either.

Actively engage your leadership team to develop the role criteria and opine on the critical skills, culture, and behaviors that they are trying to motivate. They should be responsible for assessing the talent in their roles against the framework and work with each other to determine a firm-wide view.

Keep it simple: An overly complex or burdensome framework will quickly become too daunting to maintain, reducing its value to managers and employees.

A straightforward evaluation system and career framework will allow all current and future roles to be clearly organized and serve as a resource for colleagues to evaluate where they sit within the structure.

Review the framework each year: Make your framework a priority. To stay ahead of an increasingly competitive labor market, don't put off to tomorrow what you can and should do today.

Initiate conversations with managers and employees to determine how well they understand the current job architecture and career paths. Obtain insight on where any gaps exist (promotion criteria, job catalogs, recognition) and focus your attention on them. Then create a long-term strategy to keep these programs refreshed in managers' and employees' minds.

To achieve success, all levels of the organization must be familiar with these tools, requiring coaching from HR to help leaders understand the power of career frameworks. Feedback is essential and it's important that HR remains

the catalyst for these programs, not the owner. The positive outcomes will become clear when employee engagement improves, turnover rates are lower, and clearer succession plans are created.

To learn more about job architecture and establishing a strong career framework at your firm, please [contact our team](#).

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