TOPIC: EMPLOYEE REWARDS

When Structure Meets Strategy

How Job Architecture Helps Organizations Design for Growth and Change

Written By: Arron Dobson & Nicole Chernetz

Growth rarely breaks an organization all at once. It happens gradually.

A role expands to meet an urgent need. A new title is created to retain a critical employee. Another management layer is added because a team is under strain. An acquisition brings in a second set of levels, reporting relationships, and compensation practices.

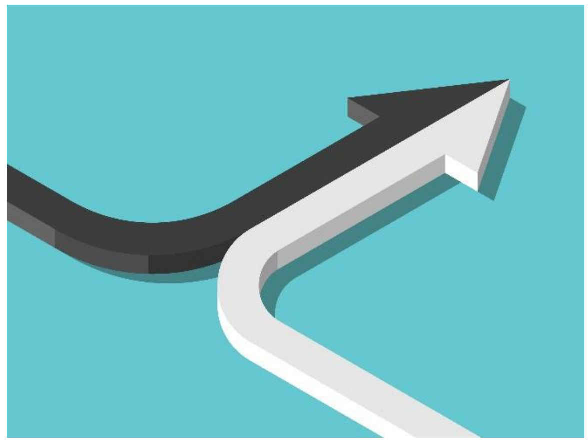
Each decision may be reasonable on its own. Together, they can create an organization that is larger, more complex, and more difficult to manage than anyone intended.

That is why growth and change are the real test of job architecture

When an organization is relatively stable, inconsistencies in titles, levels, accountabilities, and pay can remain hidden. Leaders find workarounds. Employees learn how decisions are made informally. Exceptions are managed one at a time.

At a strategic inflection point, those inconsistencies become operating problems.

Leaders need to determine which roles are genuinely comparable, where decisions should sit, how many leadership layers the business requires, and whether pay differences reflect meaningful differences in work. Employees want to understand where they fit, how they can



progress, and why similar looking roles may be treated differently.

Job architecture provides the structure for answering those questions consistently. It is not simply an HR framework. It is organizational infrastructure that connects work, accountability, career progression, and pay to the strategy the organization is trying to execute

When Growth Outpaces Structure

Organizations do not usually choose to operate with inconsistent roles or unclear levels. Those conditions accumulate.

A specialist role takes on additional projects and is reclassified as a manager, even though it has no ongoing people leadership. A regional leader receives a more senior title to reflect local market expectations. A temporary reporting relationship remains in place years after a restructuring. A new function builds its own career levels because the existing structure does not appear to fit.

Over time, the organization may end up with:

- Similar work positioned at different levels
- Different work carrying the same title
- Managers and individual contributors with unclear distinctions
- Salary ranges that no longer align with role scope
- Career paths that depend more on business unit practices than organizational standards
- Leadership layers that reflect history rather than the operating model

These are not merely administrative inconsistencies. They affect how quickly the organization can make decisions, deploy talent, control compensation costs, and adapt its workforce.

For example, when a newly created role is presented as a Director position, leaders need more than a market title to determine its level. Does the role set enterprise direction or execute within an established strategy? Does it lead a function, a region, or a team? Does it own significant decisions, or primarily influence them? Is the work more complex, or has the volume simply increased?

Without a common framework, the loudest argument, strongest incumbent, or most urgent business pressure can determine the answer.

With job architecture, leaders can assess the work against shared criteria such as accountability, scope, complexity, leadership, and organizational impact. The discussion shifts from “What title should this person have?” to “What does the organization require this role to accomplish?”

Integrating Work Through a Merger

Mergers and acquisitions expose structural inconsistency faster than almost any other event.

Two organizations may use the same titles for very different work, or different titles for substantially similar roles. One business may have several management layers, while the other operates with broader spans of control. Salary ranges, incentive eligibility, and career levels may have been built using entirely different philosophies.

Consider two Finance Directors entering the same organization after an acquisition.

One leads enterprise financial planning across several business units and advises the executive team on major investment decisions. The other manages regional accounting operations and ensures accurate financial reporting.

Both roles are important. Both may have been appropriately titled in their legacy organizations. But treating them as equivalent because they share a title would create problems for organization design, leadership accountability, career progression, and compensation.

The objective should not be to decide which legacy structure wins.

The more important question is: What structure best supports the combined organization?

Job architecture creates a neutral basis for answering that question. It allows leaders to compare the actual work, identify genuine equivalencies, and determine where responsibilities should be combined, separated, elevated, or redesigned.

That discipline can accelerate integration by giving leaders a clear structure for placing roles within the future organization. Decisions can be made against common levels, accountabilities, and career paths, rather than being driven by legacy titles or negotiated one role at a time. It also helps the organization manage the cost implications of harmonization. Existing compensation may need to be protected or transitioned, but future salary ranges, incentive eligibility, and pay progression can be aligned with the scope of the role in the combined organization rather than simply carrying forward legacy practices. Most importantly, job architecture helps move the organization beyond two companies sharing systems and branding towards one coherent organization with common expectations for roles, levels, leadership, and pay.

Maintaining Structure Through Rapid Growth

Rapid growth creates a different challenge.

As organizations add people, functions, and locations, they often need to make role decisions before a complete organization design is available. Leaders create positions quickly because the work must get done.

The risk is that every business unit solves the same problem differently.

One function creates Senior Manager roles to recognize technical expertise. Another reserves the title for significant people leadership. One business unit requires several years at a level before promotion. Another advances employees when responsibilities expand. One region pays a premium through base salary, while another uses allowances or incentives.

Initially, these differences may appear manageable. As the organization grows, they make talent and compensation decisions increasingly difficult.

Employees cannot see credible career paths across functions. Recruiters struggle to communicate role expectations consistently. Compensation teams spend more time managing exceptions. Managers use promotions to solve pay issues. Leaders have difficulty understanding whether headcount growth is adding necessary capability or simply adding layers.

A strong job architecture does not require every function to look identical. It provides common principles within which different functions can operate.

Technical, operational, professional, and leadership careers may follow different paths, but the organization should still be able to explain how levels compare, what progression means, and why compensation opportunities differ.

That consistency supports scale. New roles can be added without redesigning the structure each time. Emerging capabilities can be incorporated into existing families and levels. Employees can move across functions with a clearer understanding of how their experience transfers.

Balancing Global Consistency and Local Reality

Global expansion makes the balance between consistency and flexibility even more important.

Titles, reporting relationships, and pay practices may need to vary by country because of labour markets, regulatory requirements, language, or local operating models. A role that is difficult to recruit in one market may be widely available in another. Certain countries may expect titles that would imply a different level elsewhere. Local regulations may require accountabilities that do not exist in other regions.

The answer is not to force every market into an identical structure.

It is to distinguish intentional local variation from structural fragmentation.

A shared job architecture gives the organization a common reference point. Local titles may vary, but the underlying level and accountabilities remain clear. Compensation can reflect local market conditions without changing the relative value of the role. Career movement across countries becomes easier because employees and leaders understand how roles relate.

Without that foundation, local differences can quietly become organizational inconsistencies. A title granted for market reasons becomes evidence of seniority. A local pay premium becomes embedded in the global structure. Regional practices become precedents for the entire organization.

The goal is not uniformity. It is explainable variation.

Job Architecture as Decision Infrastructure

The most valuable feature of job architecture may not be the structure itself. It is the discipline it brings to decisions.

It creates a shared language for questions that otherwise become subjective:

- What has changed about the work?
- Does the role carry broader accountability, or has it simply become busier?
- Is another management layer required?
- Should expertise be recognized through a more senior individual contributor role rather than a people management title?
- Are pay differences supported by meaningful differences in scope, complexity, or market conditions?
- Is an exception temporary, or is it changing the organization permanently?

Leaders make these decisions continually as organizations change, but the rationale behind them is not always recorded. A consistent job architecture creates organizational memory by preserving not only what was decided, but why. A future leader should be able to understand why one role sits above another, why a local variation was approved, and why an exception was introduced. Without that context, historical decisions become difficult to challenge and even harder to reverse.

Temporary solutions then become permanent features of the organization. Similar roles drift apart, exceptions multiply, and decisions that were once made for a reason begin to shape broader practices. Over time leaders and HR teams must revisit the same questions without a consistent basis for resolving them.

Job architecture does not eliminate exceptions, nor should it. It ensures exceptions have a rationale, an accountable decision maker, and a point at which they will be reconsidered.

Testing the Architecture Before the Next Inflection Point

Organizations should not wait for a transaction or major restructuring to discover that their role structure no longer works.

Before the next period of growth or change, leaders should examine whether:

- Roles with similar titles carry reasonably comparable accountabilities
- Levels reflect differences in scope, complexity, and accountability rather than tenure, workload, or individual performance
- Management and individual contributor career paths are clearly distinguished
- Job families and levels can accommodate emerging roles and capabilities

- Salary ranges and incentive opportunities are align with role scope and level
- Employees can see credible career paths within and across functions
- Local and business unit differences are intentional and explainable
- Exceptions are documented and periodically reviewed

The purpose is not to create a perfect structure or eliminate management judgement. It is to give leaders a stronger basis for exercising that judgement.

Design for What Comes Next

Most organizations do not deliberately choose an unclear structure.

They inherit one, one reasonable decision at a time.

Growth then exposes the cumulative result. A merger forces roles to be compared. Rapid scaling multiplies inconsistent practices. Global expansion tests whether the organization can balance shared standards with local realities. Restructuring reveals reporting relationships and leadership layers that no longer fit.

At those moments, job architecture becomes more than a catalogue of jobs.

It becomes the infrastructure through which leaders decide how work should be organized, how accountability should be distributed, how careers should progress, and how people should be paid.

The question is not whether an organization has a job architecture on paper.

The question is whether that architecture is strong enough to support the organization it is becoming.