

FRAMEWORKS
SERIES

The 5L Job Architecture & Leveling Framework

A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO BUILDING
CONSISTENT JOB LEVELS, TITLES, AND
CAREER PATHS ACROSS AN ORGANIZATION



LANDSCAPE



LEVEL



LADDER



LINK



LAUNCH



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WHY THIS FRAMEWORK EXISTS

Structure Turns Job Titles Into a Real Career Path.

Every organization has roles. Great organizations can explain how they connect.

The 5L Job Architecture & Leveling Framework was created to close the gap between how roles are titled and what they actually require — the inconsistency where trust in the system quietly breaks down.

Too often, job titles grow through negotiation and precedent instead of a defined structure, until no one can say with confidence what separates one level from the next. The 5L Framework treats leveling as something to define deliberately, not inherit from history.

Whether standardizing a single job family or rebuilding architecture across an entire organization, a credible structure begins with a clear, consistent method — assessing what exists, defining what each level means, and connecting it to how people are paid and promoted.

Landscape what exists. Level with clear criteria. Ladder the path forward. Link it to pay. Launch it with governance.



THE 5L JOB ARCHITECTURE & LEVELING FRAMEWORK



What Job Architecture Solves

Structure & Leveling

Without a defined structure, titles drift, pay becomes inconsistent, and employees can't see a credible path forward – clear leveling gives every role a defensible place and every person a visible way up.

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Why Job Architecture Matters

Job architecture is the backbone of nearly every people decision an organization makes — pay, promotion, hiring, and career growth all rely on knowing where a role sits and what it takes to move up. Without a consistent structure, titles inflate, pay becomes inequitable, and employees can't see a credible path forward. Organizations that invest in a clear, well-governed leveling framework give both managers and employees a shared, defensible language for talking about roles and growth.

58%

of employees say unclear career paths are a top reason for leaving

31%

of organizations report inconsistent title usage across departments

2x

the internal mobility rate among orgs with a defined leveling structure

The 5L Job Architecture & Leveling Framework gives HR and business leaders a repeatable structure for building job levels — from assessing the current state, to launching a structure the whole organization can trust.

The 5L Framework At A Glance





Start From Where You Are

Assess the current state before designing anything new.

Key Actions

- Inventory all existing job titles, descriptions, and reporting relationships.
- Identify title inflation, duplicate roles, and inconsistent naming across departments.
- Gather leadership input on the strategic priorities the structure needs to support.
- Benchmark against external market data for comparable roles and levels.

STAGE OUTPUT

A current-state job architecture assessment with documented gaps.





Establish Level Criteria

Define the criteria that will consistently separate one level from the next.

Key Actions

- Establish core leveling factors: scope, complexity, autonomy, impact, and people leadership.
- Define distinct job levels with clear, written differentiators between each one.
- Separate individual contributor (IC) and management career tracks.
- Validate leveling criteria with a cross-functional panel of leaders.

STAGE OUTPUT

An approved leveling framework with clear criteria for every level.



Clearly Define Associated Criteria

Turn leveling criteria into concrete job families and career paths.

Key Actions

- Group roles into job families based on function and required skill sets.
- Map each family's ladder from entry level through senior or executive level.
- Write standardized job descriptions and title conventions for every level.
- Identify lateral and vertical movement paths within and across families.

STAGE OUTPUT

Complete career ladders and standardized job descriptions for every family.





Make Connections

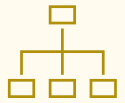
Connect the leveling framework to compensation and talent processes.

Key Actions

- Map each level to a corresponding pay band or range.
- Align performance criteria and promotion requirements to level definitions.
- Integrate leveling into recruiting, job postings, and interview calibration.
- Partner with Compensation and Finance to validate market competitiveness by level.

STAGE OUTPUT

A leveling structure fully integrated with pay bands and talent processes.



Documentation is Key

Roll out the framework organization-wide and keep it from drifting.

Key Actions

- Communicate the new structure, rationale, and timeline to the organization.
- Train managers on how to apply leveling criteria and discuss it with employees.
- Map existing employees to their new levels and titles.
- Establish a governance process for reviewing and updating levels over time.

STAGE OUTPUT

A fully implemented job architecture with a governance plan for maintenance.



Roles & Responsibilities

Role	Primary Responsibility
Executive Sponsor	Approves the framework's scope and champions adoption across the organization.
HR / Compensation	Owns the framework, defines leveling criteria, and maintains it going forward.
People Manager	Applies leveling criteria to their team and explains placements to employees.
Talent Acquisition	Uses the framework to level new job postings and calibrate offers.
Employee	Understands their current level and the criteria for advancing to the next.

Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1

Weeks 1-2

Landscape

Inventory current titles and structure; gather leadership input and benchmarks.

Phase 2

Weeks 3-5

Level & Ladder

Define leveling criteria and build career ladders for each job family.

Phase 3

Weeks 6-9

Link

Map levels to pay bands and integrate into talent processes.

Phase 4

Ongoing

Launch & Govern

Communicate, map employees to new levels, and review annually.

Leveling Criteria Scorecard

Use the criteria below to score each role from 1 (low) to 5 (high) against each factor. The combined profile determines the appropriate level.

Business Impact

How broad is the reach of this role's decisions; team, function, or company?

Score: ____

Specialized Knowledge

How ambiguous or technically demanding is the work this role performs?

Score: ____

Backfill Difficulty

How much independent judgment does this role exercise day-to-day?

Score: ____

Flight Risk

Does this role manage people, projects, or neither, and at what scale?

Score: ____

Bench Depth

How deep and specialized is the expertise this role requires?

Score: ____

The Five Core Leveling Factors

Entry level in the architecture should be differentiated by these factors – not by tenure, title history, or negotiation.

01**Scope**

How wide a reach this role's decisions and work products have.

02**Complexity**

How ambiguous, technical, or multidimensional the work is.

03**Autonomy**

How much independent judgment is expected versus direct guidance.

04**Impact**

How directly the role's output affects business or team outcomes.

05**People Leadership**

Whether and how much the role manages people or projects.

Job Description Components

1. Title & Level

The standardized title and the level it maps to within its job family.

2. Scope Statement

A concise description of the role's reach, from individual tasks to org-wide impact.

3. Core Responsibilities

The primary duties that differentiate this level from the levels above and/or below.

4. Required Competencies

The skills, knowledge, and experience expected at this level.

5. Career Path Note

Where this role can lead next, both laterally and upward.

Common Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

PITFALL**Leveling based on tenure instead of scope**

Fix: Base level on scope, complexity, and impact – not years of service.

PITFALL**Title inflation is used in place of pay increases**

Fix: Separate title decisions from pay decisions; align both to the framework.

PITFALL**No distinction between IC and management tracks**

Fix: Build parallel tracks so individual contributors can grow without managing people.

PITFALL**Framework built in isolation from Compensation**

Fix: Partner with Compensation from the start so bands and levels align.

PITFALL**No governance after launch**

Fix: Establish an ongoing review process to prevent drift back to the old system.

Metrics & KPIs to Track

Leveling Consistency Rate

Percentage of roles matching leveling criteria without exception overrides.

Time-to-Level

Average time to assign or update a level for a new or changed role.

Internal Mobility Rate

Percentage of employee moves that follow ladder-defined career paths.

Pay Band Compliance

Percentage of employees paid within their assigned level's band.

Manager Confidence

Survey score on managers' ability to explain leveling to their teams.

Title Standardization

Reduction in duplicate or inconsistent titles after launch.

Sample Scenario

A tech company applies the 5L Framework to standardize engineering titles across three products acquired via M&A.

LANDSCAPE

HR audits 40 unique engineering titles across three legacy companies for comparable work.

LEVEL

A 6-level IC ladder and a 4-level management ladder are defined using scope and complexity criteria.

LADDER

The engineering job family is mapped end-to-end with standardized descriptions per level.

LINK

Levels are mapped to updated pay bands, validated against current market data.

LAUNCH

All 400 engineers are mapped into the new structure; managers are trained to explain placements.



Key Takeaways



1

Leveling should reflect scope, complexity, and impact — not tenure or title inflation.

2

Individual contributor and management tracks need to be equally valid paths for growth.

3

A leveling framework only works if the whole organization applies it consistently.

4

Governance after launch prevents the structure from drifting back into inconsistency.

QUICK-REFERENCE CHECKLIST

The 5L Framework, One Page

- ☐ Current-state job titles and structure fully inventoried
- ☐ Leveling criteria defined across scope, complexity, autonomy, and leadership
- ☐ IC and management tracks built as parallel, equally valid paths
- ☐ Career ladders and standardized job descriptions completed per family
- ☐ Levels mapped to compensation bands with Comp/Finance sign-off
- ☐ Leveling integrated into recruiting, promotions, and performance criteria
- ☐ Employees mapped to new levels and communication plan executed
- ☐ Governance process established for ongoing review



Bring the 5L Job Architecture & Leveraging Framework to Your Team

Readiness isn't a document. It's a habit.

- **Strategize** – name the roles that would hurt most to lose
- **Spot** – assess successors on evidence, not gut feel
- **Strengthen** – pair every successor with a plan and a mentor
- **Sustain** – revisit the bench on a set schedule, not after a resignation letter

Most succession plans are built once, filed away, and rediscovered only when someone walks out the door. By then, it's too late to develop anyone — you're left hiring under pressure and hoping for the best.

The 5S Framework exists to break that pattern. It gives leaders a structured way to know, at any point in time, who's ready to step up and who still needs runway — before a departure forces the question.

A strong bench doesn't happen by accident. It's the result of asking the right questions on a regular rhythm: which roles matter most, who's prepared for them, and what's still missing to get there.



Sheila Mayoral

STRATEGIST • AUTHOR • DESIGNER

"I help organizations turn good intentions into structured, repeatable systems that drive clarity, alignment, and measurable results".

Bringing Structure to Complexity. Turning Strategy into Results.

Sheila Mayoral is a strategist, author, and designer who works at the intersection of HR, learning and development, and organizational operations. With more than 15 years of cross-functional experience, she partners with leaders to simplify complexity, strengthen performance, and build systems that scale.

Her work spans strategic operations, HR technology, project management, organizational effectiveness, process optimization, learning and development, and change enablement—across industries that include commercial real estate, healthcare, manufacturing, government, insurance, financial services, education, and professional services.

Sheila created the Cognitif Design Framework Series to share practical, results-driven resources that help leaders think clearly, make confident decisions, and create lasting impact.

WHAT I BRING TO THE TABLE



STRATEGIC THINKING

Aligning people, process, technology, and strategy to move organizations forward.



PRACTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Creating simple, repeatable models that leaders can apply immediately.



EXECUTION FOCUS

Bringing structure, accountability, and clarity to turn ideas into measurable results.



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Helping teams learn, adapt, and build better systems over time.

“ Good intentions start the conversation. Structured systems create the change. ”



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Technology. Learning. Execution. Impact.



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