

# 'Job Families': Still relevant in the modern organisation?

Insights from Iain Kirkwood - Co-Founder, *These 3 Things*

## Definition & Key Drivers

A generally understood and commonly recognised definition of a job family is “**a group of jobs that involve similar work and require similar training, skills, knowledge and expertise**”.

The concept of 'Job Families' has been around for many years as a key component of broader Job Architecture. Since their introduction, their primary purpose has been to bring more structure, standardisation, and consistency on how jobs are defined and managed, their key drivers being as follows:

- **Compensation Management** – roles requiring similar skills, experience, and levels of responsibility could be broadly grouped to support more effective compensation management where jobs could be matched to standardised salary bands, promoting equity in pay within the organisation.
- **Career Development** – as part of a broader employee (or talent) value proposition, a clear job family within a career path framework provides structure and direction for employees seeking advancement, giving them visibility of the technical, behavioral, and leadership competencies required to progress to the next level. Not only does this support attracting new external talent to the organisation, but it also promotes improved retention and succession planning.
- **Organisational Complexity & Growth** – as companies grew and expanded into different business units and functions, a siloed approach to job design became increasingly complex. Through the effective use of job families, similar roles could be grouped together into career paths.

In recent years, however, changes that we were already starting to see in organisations, partly driven by technological advances (modern workplace, hybrid working, fluid workforce), have only been accelerated by external factors such as COVID-19. The knock-on effect in the job market has driven what we now know to be called the great resignation, followed by the great regret.

We have also seen quiet quitting and quiet hiring. What we once referred to as “the future of work” is already here and continuing to evolve. So, as we go into 2024 hoping to see some more stability, as CHROs continue to consider all opportunities to engage, motivate, and empower their changing workforce, perhaps now is the time to revisit the role and effectiveness of Job Families within their own organisations.

## Evolving to accommodate

As the needs of organisations and the demands of the workforce continue to change, it is clear that while the original intention of implementing job families remains valid, the nature of job families has evolved to accommodate such things as:

- **Flatter job structures** – as organisations strive to become more agile and responsive to client needs, workforce hierarchies are flattening, shifting the development and progression focus for employees from solely vertical (up the career ladder) to lateral career moves. Where an effective job family framework supports internal mobility/lateral moves, evidence shows that an individual who has progressed/advanced internally is 20% more likely to stay than one who hasn't.
- **Move to skills/competency models** - rather than rigidly defining narrow job specialities, where job families group roles based on shared skills, capabilities and competencies required to undertake a particular role. Looking ahead, we know that those skills which are increasingly in demand include digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and creativity. In addition, in terms of addressing the ongoing skills shortage, we are seeing organisations focus increasingly on aptitude to learn new skills and developing them internally, rather than filling roles based purely on past education or experience, enabling organisations to tap into those historically under-represented groups of resources. It is possible that organisations already possess these “in demand” skills, and they just don't know it.
- **Cross-functional integration** – in the past, job families were often siloed into specific corporate functions (finance, HR, IT). The trend now is towards a more matrix-styled approach to job families, allowing for mobility across functions as roles become more multi-disciplinary. A recent LinkedIn Workplace Learning report shows that 77% of Learning & Development professionals said their roles had become more cross-functional over the last year.
- **Enabling internal talent mobility** – making it easier for individuals to move across job families to work on new opportunities as required.
- **Compatible with the fluid/extended workforce** – as we see the evolution of the type of work that is undertaken, where and by whom, job families also need to be designed to work with the increasingly contingent workforce – contractors and interim staff, not just full-time employees.
- **Future proofing roles** – job families now need to be designed with future proofing in mind, anticipating any new roles that may be required and understanding those which will likely be displaced by automation and technology.

In short, whilst the original objectives of providing structure and consistency remain, the implementation of job families for the workforce of today (and the future) has become more holistic and agile, driven by the need for continual upskilling and redeployment. For job families to be an effective talent tool moving forward, they must become more agile, skills centric and predictive in nature. As we know, the future of work is unpredictable so job architecture needs to be able to dynamically adapt and equip the workforce for constant reinvention.

## Benefits

The benefits of an engaged workforce, driven partly by the influential job family and career path frameworks, are clear and well-known. When 73% of employees would consider leaving their jobs for the right offer (Business Insider), maintaining workforce engagement is paramount. Business teams with highly engaged employees have a 59% lower turnover rate than those with less engaged staff. (Thomas)

Ultimately, engaged employees are more likely to exceed performance expectations and less likely to leave their organisations. A highly engaged team will be more productive, and companies with strong career pathways are seeing employee retention increases of up to 33%. In addition to providing visibility into advancement opportunities, they also drive genuine improvements in loyalty.

# Consultant Profile



**Iain Kirkwood** | Co-Founder – These 3 Things  
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Iain is an experienced People and Organisational Change leader with over 25 years' experience in strategic and tactical HR consulting, working in global and European leadership roles for organisations such as PwC, DXC Technology, and CGI.

Much of his expertise aligns to the “People & Organisation” aspects of transformation, including organisation change management, operating models, organisation design, culture transformation, process optimisation, leadership development, high performing teams, workforce transformation, learning & development, talent strategy, health & wellbeing and the future of work.

Working across the CHRO agenda, he has considerable strategic HR experience covering additional areas such as dispute resolution, grievance, reward, succession planning, recruitment, retention, competency model design, career path framework development, Learning & Development, job sizing & banding, HR process optimisation, HR technology, HR transformation, payroll, talent strategy and a broad experience of related UK (and some international) employment law.

## Projects:

### Global Hotel Chain

- Developed and led a programme to re-engineer, consolidate and automate HR processes in this Global hotel chain. Directly engaged 67 key global HR, Business & IT stakeholders to assess current state processes and HR tech platforms and define target future transformed state.

### UK Government Services Organisation

- Operating model transformation for a government services organisation (11,000 employees), driving improvements in operational efficiency and effectiveness through improved engagement, new ways of working, process optimisation and rationalisation of technology and leading on all employee related matters with regards to new organisation design.

### National Aerospace Organisation

- Consulting lead working with the full executive board to define the corporate vision and mission and develop/implement a transformation & change programme across the whole organisation (driven by top 70 senior managers) across clients, organisation and operations

### Global Technology Services Organisation

- Led the development of a new Employee Value Proposition (comprising competency model framework, learning & development, reward strategy, performance management framework and promotion processes.

