EXCELLENCE AT WORK
Podcast by Brandon Hall Group

Executive Interview

The Job Has Changed. Why Hasn't the Pay?

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Trainery HCM™



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About TraineryHCM

TraineryHCM provides HR consulting and technology solutions focused on helping organizations manage workforce structures and compensation. Its CompBldr platform draws on the firm's consulting experience to connect job descriptions, job architecture, evaluation, grading and compensation planning. In this interview, Mahesh Kumar discusses how those disciplines can help employers respond as roles evolve.

About Mahesh Kumar

Mahesh Kumar is Founder and Managing Director at TraineryHCM. He draws on approximately 15 years of work with organizations on HR technology, job evaluation and compensation processes. His consulting experience informed the development of CompBldr, a platform intended to help clients maintain and update compensation structures after consulting engagements conclude.

About Heidi Grecsek

This Executive Interview was moderated by **Heidi Grecsek**, Managing Director of Human Capital Management at Brandon Hall Group™. She brings an HCM leadership perspective to the discussion, examining the practical decisions and difficult conversations facing managers and employees as jobs and compensation evolve.

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Role Drift Happens Quietly

Q Heidi

When a person's responsibilities expand but their title, job description and pay remain unchanged, what is actually happening?

A Mahesh

Most of the time, the change does not happen in one dramatic moment. It accumulates quietly. There is a restructuring, a new product, new technology or an additional responsibility. Each change seems manageable on its own, but eventually the role has evolved into something different from the job description.

AI is accelerating that drift. Compensation analysis and job descriptions have not kept pace with what people are actually doing. An unchanged title does not mean an unchanged job. It can mean the organization has not examined the job closely enough. That is why employers come to us asking how to make their structures current. The difficulty is that each individual adjustment can appear minor. A team gets smaller, a new product launches or a technology changes how work is completed. By the time those changes are considered together, the organization may be asking for a very different level of contribution without having formally recognized it. This is not necessarily a question of changing the title first; it is a question of examining the work itself.

Each Individual Adjustment Can Appear Minor

By the time those changes are considered together, the organization may be asking for a very different level of contribution without having formally recognized it.

Q Heidi

How can a manager distinguish an employee who is simply doing more work from someone whose job has fundamentally grown?

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Examining the Work Itself

A Mahesh

We look at responsibility, not simply how busy the person has become. More volume does not automatically mean a bigger job. You have to ask whether accountability has increased. Has the person gained independence? Has the complexity, scope or impact of the role changed? Are there different supervisory responsibilities?

If those factors have not changed, you may have a workload problem that calls for redistributing work. If they have changed, you may have a role-evaluation problem. Those are different questions, and the distinction matters when you make compensation decisions.

For a manager, that distinction is essential. An employee may be processing more transactions or handling a heavier queue, which creates a real capacity concern. But job evaluation asks whether the person now makes decisions with greater independence, supervises a wider scope of work or carries consequences that were not previously part of the position. Those are the changes that should prompt a closer look at the role.

Busy Isn't the Same as Bigger

More volume does not automatically mean a bigger job.

Q Heidi

AI can eliminate routine tasks while leaving employees responsible for interpreting results, spotting errors and making consequential decisions. How should organizations value that shift?

A Mahesh

We are all learning how to address it. AI is creating a valuation problem that many traditional compensation frameworks were not designed to handle. If you continue to count tasks, you may miss the fact that fewer tasks can come with greater accountability for each decision.

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Valuing Judgment, Not Task Counts

The first step is to separate what has been automated from what the employee now owns. Someone who previously produced an output may now be responsible for validating an AI-generated analysis, interpreting it and deciding what happens next. Those judgment responsibilities may not appear anywhere in the existing job description.

The evaluation model has to evolve. In the client projects we have seen, job descriptions often have not yet caught up with these AI-related changes. Organizations are still figuring out what the new measures should be.

Consider what happens when AI takes over the production of a routine analysis. The employee may perform fewer steps, yet become the person responsible for determining whether the analysis is sound, detecting bias or errors and deciding what action the business should take. That is a shift from producing work to exercising judgment over its consequences. Counting the old tasks will not capture the new responsibility.

Q Heidi

When should an organization revisit compensation as these roles change?

What AI Leaves Employees Owning

That is a shift from producing work to exercising judgment over its consequences.

A Mahesh

Ideally, the compensation review should be connected to a broader review of the job description and the job family. If you change one element in isolation, you can create inconsistencies elsewhere.

Look across a job family at how responsibilities, titles, grades and reporting relationships have evolved. Some junior tasks may have been automated; some functions may be combined; entirely different roles may be emerging. That raises questions about the organization structure and career paths, not just one person's pay.

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Review the Whole Job Family

This is a change-management and organizational redesign conversation. It is bigger than updating a few job descriptions, and organizations need to recognize the scale of that work.

That analysis can also expose difficult structural questions. If automation removes portions of junior roles or combines functions that used to be separate, organizations have to decide what happens to those positions and how people move into new ones. Revising compensation without examining those dependencies risks creating a pay structure that no longer reflects the way the business operates.

Q Heidi

What if the employee, the manager and the written job description all describe the same role differently?

A Mahesh

That happens. Sometimes managers do not fully understand how the work has changed, particularly when technology is changing day-to-day responsibilities. We often use a position analysis questionnaire to gather information from the person doing the job, then discuss that information with the manager and others performing comparable work.

Bigger Than Job Descriptions

This is a change-management and organizational redesign conversation.

We want to understand the actual duties, the outputs and the outcomes expected. That conversation helps establish a consistent view of the position. We always come back to the job description as the starting point, because it drives job architecture and the decisions that follow. You cannot evaluate the role reliably until you understand what the employee is actually doing.

The employee's account is an important starting point because the person doing the work sees the changes firsthand. The manager can then validate expectations and compare them with colleagues

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Three Views of One Role

in similar positions. A position analysis questionnaire gives that conversation a consistent structure rather than allowing a job description to be rewritten from one perspective alone.

Q Heidi

How does CompBldr connect that understanding of work to a compensation decision?

A Mahesh

We start with the scope of the project. Some organizations want to examine a small group of roles; others need a broader review. Typically, we begin with job descriptions and use them to build job architecture. That architecture becomes a central repository for the organization's roles and supports job evaluation, grading and compensation decisions.

We evaluate the actual function and responsibility rather than relying on a title, which can be misleading. Our job-evaluation approach uses a model called JSAB, developed in 1985, that considers 15 factors. We have used that methodology in our consulting work to assess roles within an organizational framework.

Start With the Employee's Account

You cannot evaluate the role reliably until you understand what the employee is actually doing.

The purpose of a common architecture is to connect decisions that organizations often make separately. A revised job description should inform evaluation; evaluation should inform grading; and grading should provide a framework for compensation planning. That sequence makes it easier to revisit a position without rebuilding the logic behind every decision. It also helps an organization see where similar roles sit in relation to one another.

I think of the sequence as description, structure and evaluation. That gives you a foundation for deciding whether and how compensation needs to be realigned.

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From Job Description to Pay Decision

Q Heidi

How do you prevent employees with the most vocal managers from receiving attention while comparable employees are overlooked?

A Mahesh

That is an internal equity issue. Advocacy can be useful because it brings a situation to someone's attention, but evidence should determine the outcome, not who makes the loudest request.

Organizations need common triggers for review, such as restructuring, expanded responsibilities or absorbing a vacant position. They also need consistent documentation of changes in scope, authority and accountability. HR should compare similar roles across departments before approving an adjustment rather than evaluating every manager's request in isolation.

A Foundation for Compensation

I think of the sequence as description, structure and evaluation.

Consistent grading and role mapping also support career paths across job families. Periodic audits of titles, grades, job scope and responsibilities help keep the system current. A third-party review can sometimes provide another perspective. The goal is a process employees can see as fair and consistent.

This is also why a review should not stop at the boundaries of a single department. Two employees may have comparable responsibility even if their titles and functions differ. If one manager advocates aggressively and another does not, reviewing requests one at a time can produce inequitable outcomes. Common evidence and cross-functional comparisons make the decision more defensible and give employees a clearer sense of how advancement works.

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Evidence Over the Loudest Voice

Q Heidi

Suppose the organization agrees that a job has grown but does not have the budget to correct the pay immediately. What should HR do?

A Mahesh

That is common. At the end of a compensation project, the cost of bringing everyone to the desired position is often greater than the available budget. You need a methodology for making decisions rather than responding to the people who complain most.

One approach is to identify who is furthest from the organization's target market position and prioritize those gaps. Another is to phase adjustments over 12, 18 or 24 months, or longer if necessary. The target might be the market median or another percentile the organization has chosen.

A Process Employees See as Fair

The goal is a process employees can see as fair and consistent.

What matters is having a disciplined plan, tracking progress and being able to explain the approach. You may not be able to make everyone whole immediately, but you can tell employees what you are working toward and why the process will take time.

A market-based approach can show who is furthest below the organization's chosen target, whether that target is the median, the 75th percentile or another point. Leadership can then model what it would cost to close those gaps immediately versus over several budget cycles. The organization may still face uncomfortable conversations, but a documented path is more credible than an unexplained delay or a series of exceptions.

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A Documented Path, Not Exceptions

Q Heidi

How should employers handle employees who are not developing new skills that an evolving role now requires?

A Mahesh

I would separate skill development from pay progression. They are connected, but they are different problems and may call for different remedies. First establish which capabilities are genuinely required and communicate those expectations clearly. Only then can you evaluate whether a gap exists.

Next, diagnose the reason for the gap. Is the employee unwilling to learn, or has the organization provided insufficient training, access or clarity? You should not assume the problem sits with the employee. Provide support, establish a development plan and set measurable expectations. Then you can assess performance against those expectations and determine what it means for progression.

That diagnosis matters particularly when AI changes the skill requirements of a job. An employee may lack access to training, may not understand what proficiency looks like or may be reluctant to adopt the new tools. Those situations should not automatically receive the same response. First define the capabilities the job requires, then give employees a fair opportunity to demonstrate them against measurable expectations.

Separate Skills From Pay

I would separate skill development from pay progression.

Q Heidi

For an HR leader whose job descriptions and pay structures are falling behind, what would you prioritize in the next 30 days?

Make It a Business Case

A **Mahesh**

Do not try to rebuild the entire program in 30 days. That is likely to fail. Choose a small set of roles where you suspect the work has changed significantly. Compare yesterday's responsibilities with today's, including the effects of growth, restructuring, market conditions and AI adoption.

Next, analyze those roles against the market and identify both structural problems and compensation gaps. Use the findings to create a prioritized plan with the changes required, the likely cost and the consequences of doing nothing. Then bring that plan to leadership as a business case, not merely an HR request.

Start Small in 30 Days

Do not try to rebuild the entire program in 30 days.

The first 30 days are a proof of concept, not the destination. You are demonstrating a disciplined way to examine the problem and decide what to do next. You cannot fix what you have not examined. For that pilot, select roles where change is visible enough to study but the scope is manageable. Document the differences between the old and current work, evaluate how those differences affect the role and compare the findings with the market. Present leadership with options, including the resources required and the potential business impact of leaving the problems unresolved. The objective is not to finish the entire transformation in a month; it is to prove that the organization has a practical way to make decisions.

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