



Is Your Organization Built for How Work Is Changing?

From Structure to Strategic Workforce Intelligence

Job Architecture and Workforce Governance Middle East Report 2026



Preface



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Work is changing faster than traditional job structures can keep pace. Business strategy, AI, technology, skills and evolving workforce expectations are continually reshaping how work gets done. An agile job architecture enables organizations to adapt, keeping roles, levels, skills and rewards aligned with changing business needs, while creating greater clarity and consistency for employees.

The [World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025](#) found that employers expect 39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030. In the Middle East and Turkey, the shift is already underway. According to Korn Ferry's Job Architecture and Workforce Governance Middle East Report 2026, only 23% of organizations across the region are refreshing and improving an existing approach to job architecture.

This report explores the forces reshaping workforce structures, how mature organizations are today, the outcomes organizations are seeking, the barriers holding them back, and what it will take to build organizations ready for what comes next.

How we did it



Survey base 171 organizations.

Fieldwork Online survey conducted in June and July 2026.

Markets United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Türkiye.

Size 500 to more than 20,000 employees.

Industries Industries represented included Automotive, Banking, Chemicals, Conglomerates, Construction & Building Materials, Financial Services & Insurance, FMCG, High Technology, Industrial Goods, Oil & Gas and Energy, Pharma & Healthcare, Real Estate, Retail, Telecommunications, and Transportation & Logistics.

Content

Leaders make structural decisions every day. What a role is worth. Who is ready for the next level. Which jobs a new operating model needs, and which ones it quietly retires.

Read on for what is driving the change, where organizations actually stand, and what it takes to build an architecture that survives the next restructuring instead of describing the last one.

We dive into:

What's Driving Change?

The forces reshaping roles and workforce structures.

PAGE 6

Where Are Organizations Today?

The current state of maturity.

PAGE 8

What Is Job Architecture Solving?

The business outcomes organizations are seeking.

PAGE 10

What's Getting in the Way?

The barriers limiting job architecture effectiveness.

PAGE 12

From Framework to Impact

What it takes to make job architecture work.

PAGE 14



What's Driving Change?

The forces reshaping roles and workforce structures

Too Reactive, Not Strategic Enough

We asked organizations which business changes are creating the greatest pressure to review roles, levels, and workforce structure. The most frequently cited drivers are organizational restructuring (50%) and cost optimization and productivity initiatives (48%). Only (4%) report no significant pressure to revisit workforce design. Other common drivers include growth and market expansion (33%), digital and AI transformation (29%), and operating model change (21%).

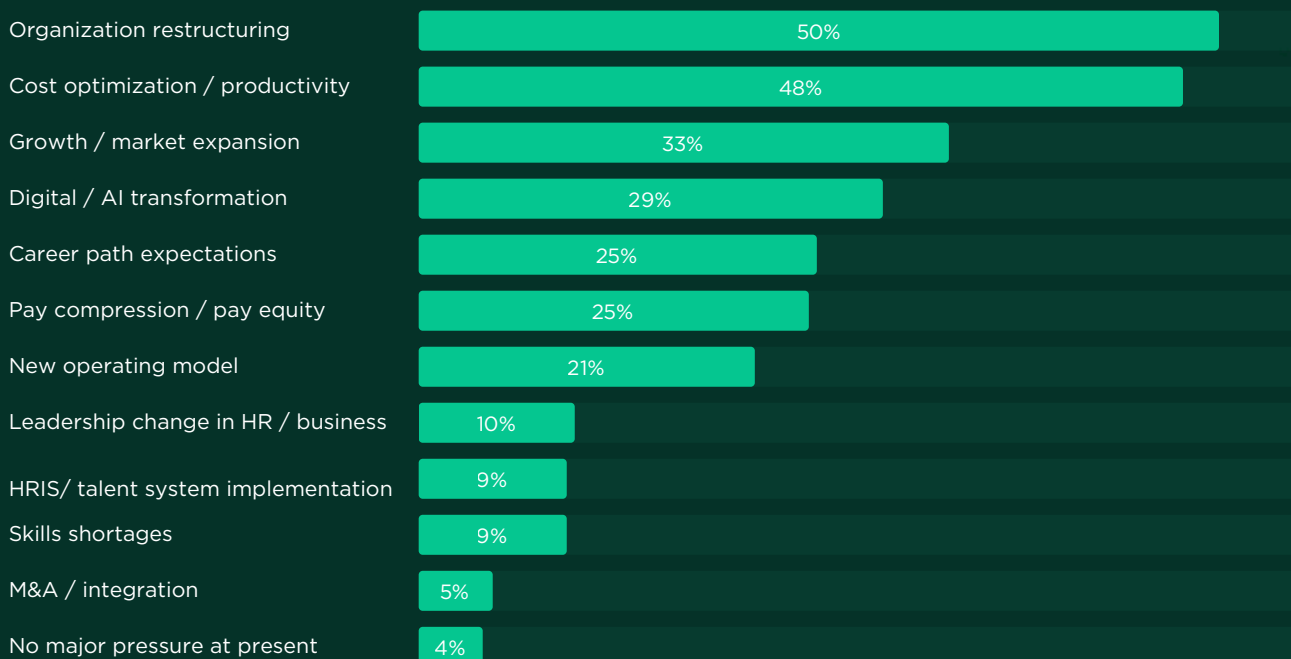
The distinction matters because these pressures often shape the sequence of decision-making. Restructuring and cost initiatives are typically led at board and executive level, with decisions about organizational shape made before HR is asked to define how roles, levels, and career frameworks should support the new direction.

The risk is building for the moment, not what comes next.

When job architecture is triggered by restructuring, the focus can become mapping the new organization rather than defining the work, capabilities, and career paths it will need next. The result is an architecture designed around a single event—and one that can quickly become outdated as the business changes.

That may explain why so many organizations end up redesigning their architecture with each new wave of change.

But the trigger itself is not the problem. Restructuring can create the sponsorship, urgency, and funding needed to do work that might otherwise stay on the sidelines. The real question is whether that opportunity is used to build an architecture that can outlast the restructure.



When asked: Which of the following business changes are creating the greatest pressure to review roles, levels, or workforce structure? Select up to 3

What Leaders Are Missing

Most organizations only revisit their job architecture when a restructure forces them to. By then, leadership has already decided the new shape of the organization, and HR is left to fit roles and levels around it.

The result is an architecture that mirrors today's org chart instead of defining the work, skills and career paths the business will need next. It goes out of date as soon as the business changes again, so companies end up redesigning it over and over, spending time and money without ever building something that lasts.

CHRO Implication

If HR isn't in the room when restructuring is decided, architecture becomes rationalization, not design.

CEO Implication

Sequencing HR into the transformation calendar — not after it — is a speed and cost decision, not a courtesy.

Where the Opportunity Lies

- Attach the architecture review to the transformation calendar.
- Establish a governance model that defines in advance which business changes automatically trigger a role review: a new operating model, a shared services move, a market entry, a cost target.
- Define roles by the work and the skills they require, not by the headcount they carry, so that structures survive the next reorganization.



Vijay Gandhi

Regional Director, Korn Ferry Digital, EMEA
Korn Ferry

"The question is not whether restructuring or cost pressure starts the conversation. It is whether the architecture that emerges is designed for what comes next, or only for what just happened."



Where Are Organizations Today?

Job architecture maturity and governance

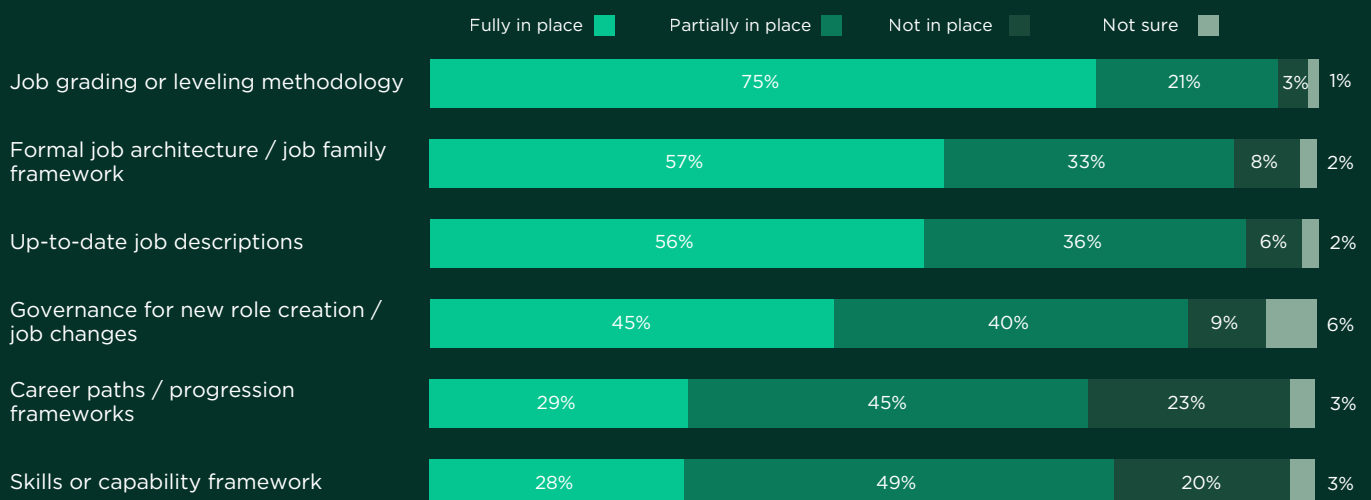
Are you Future-Ready?

Most organizations have built the parts of a job architecture that describe their current structure. Three-quarters have a grading or leveling methodology fully in place. Around 60% have a formal job family framework and up to date job descriptions. Governance for new role creation sits just under half. These organizations can tell you what every job is, what level it sits at, and what it is worth.

The parts they lack are the ones that handle work changing. Only (29%) have career paths fully in place, and the same proportion have a skills or capability framework. Both are more commonly described as partial than fully established, while roughly one in five organizations have neither in place at all.

That gap matters more than it appears. Career paths, skills frameworks and role governance are the infrastructure an organization uses to change without starting over. They determine how a person moves into a new role, what capabilities the business is building or losing, and who decides when a job appears that nobody planned for. Without them, every restructure, new operating model or AI driven shift in work becomes a project rather than an adjustment.

The data bears this out. Organizations facing the most pressure to change are no better prepared than anyone else. Among those naming restructuring or digital transformation as the main force reshaping their workforce, the change related elements are in place at almost exactly the same rate as in the rest of the sample. The pressure to change has not translated into readiness for change. Most organizations in the region have built a good record of their current structure and very little of the infrastructure required to change it.



When asked: For each element below, how would you describe its current status in your organization?

What Leaders Are Missing

Career paths, skills frameworks and role governance are often treated as what comes after job architecture. In reality, they are the reason job architecture exists.

A structure that cannot say how someone moves, what the organization is becoming, or who signs off an unplanned role needs rebuilding to absorb any change, and rebuilding is the opposite of fast.

CHRO Implication

Grading maturity looks strong, but career paths and skills, the parts that handle change sit under 30%.

CEO Implication

Any transformation the business plans will move at the speed of the weakest layer, not the strongest.

Where the Opportunity Lies

- Judge the architecture on what it does when work changes, not on how well it describes work today.
- Treat "partially in place" as not in place. Partial is what employees experience as absent.
- Build career paths, skills and role governance into the initial programme of work, rather than treating them as add-ons once the framework is complete.



Rabih Asmar

Senior Client Partner
Korn Ferry

“Being future-ready isn’t about predicting what’s next it’s about building an organization that can adapt when it arrives.”



What Is Job Architecture Solving?

The business outcomes organizations are seeking

Right priority, wrong Plan?

Ask leaders what would create the most value in the next 12 months, and the answer is not compliance. It is greater clarity about how people grow and progress within the organization.

The highest-ranked priority is clearer career paths and growth visibility (44%), followed by pay governance (39%) and succession visibility (37%). The same pattern appears when organizations are asked what they hope to achieve: with clearer career progression (40%), more effective workforce planning (38%), and stronger pay governance (36%) leading the response.

Yet the work currently underway tells a different story.

The most common architecture activities are job grading and leveling (56%) and job description refreshes (54%). Both are foundational, providing the structure and consistency on which broader workforce decisions depend.

Career paths (48%), role benchmarking (47%) and pay structure alignment (45%) follow, while skills and capability frameworks (38%) remain lower on the agenda despite underpinning many workforce planning, mobility and future-of-work priorities.

The pattern suggests that organizations understand where value lies. The challenge is not a lack of direction, but the time required to move from building the foundations of job architecture to realizing the workforce outcomes those foundations are intended to support.



When asked: Which outcomes would create the greatest value for your organization if achieved in the next 12 months?

What Leaders Are Missing

The outcomes organizations want are clear: career growth, succession visibility and workforce planning. The challenge is that much of the effort remains focused on building the framework rather than activating its value.

What many leaders miss is that grading, job descriptions and benchmarking are enablers, not outcomes. Their value is realized only when they support career pathways, talent mobility and workforce decisions.

CHRO Implication

Treat job architecture as a workforce outcome, not a framework project: start with the talent decisions you want to improve, then invest accordingly.

CEO Implication

The value of job architecture is not the framework itself. It is the organization's ability to deploy talent, support growth and adapt to change more effectively.

Where the Opportunity Lies

- Be clear about the outcome before defining the work. Job architecture delivers value when it improves career growth, workforce planning and talent decisions.
- Publish career paths alongside the grade structure. Employees experience job architecture through career progression, not grading logic.
- Track the outcomes that matter most. Internal fill rate, promotion velocity and career-path coverage provide a clearer measure of value than framework completion.



Spyro Dimou

Senior Client Partner
Korn Ferry

“Job architecture should do more than define where people are today—it should create a clear path for where the organization needs to go next.”



What's Getting in the Way?

The barriers limiting job architecture effectiveness

Every exception is another crack in the foundation

The most commonly reported challenge is not designing the structure. It is sustaining consistency once the structure is in place.

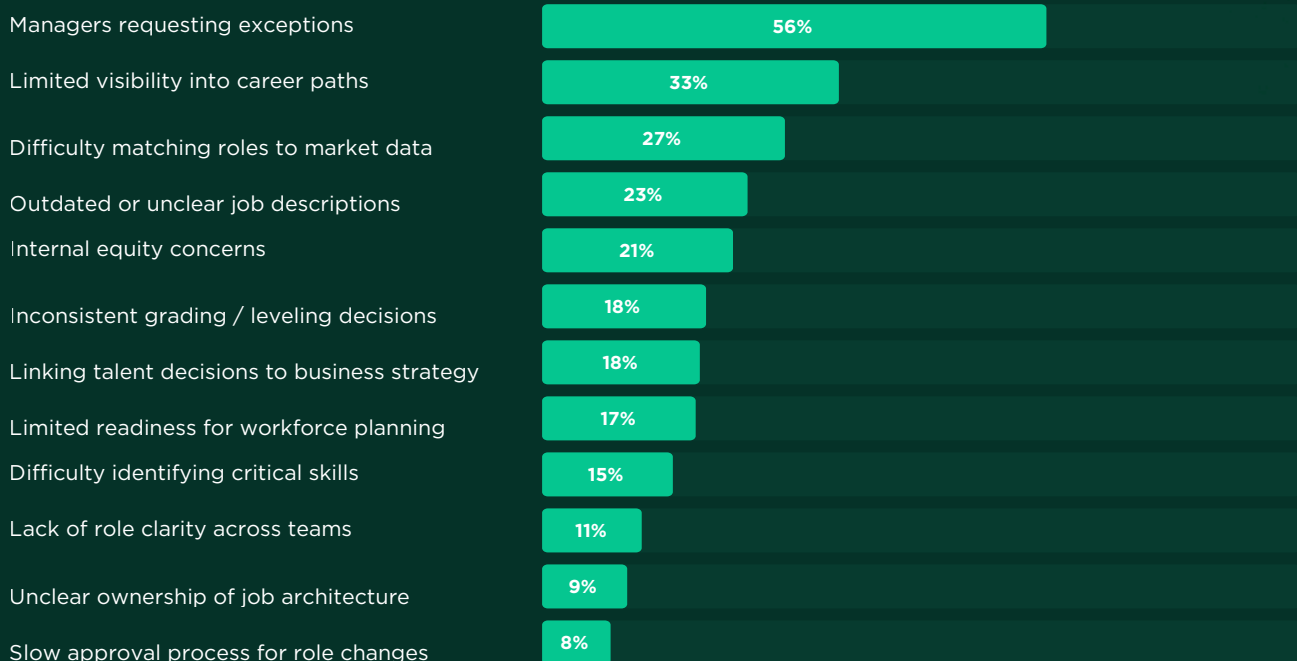
Nearly 60% of organizations with grading structure fully in place report managers requesting exceptions.

Structure without governance creates consistency on paper, but not always in practice.

The biggest execution barrier is business ownership (45%), followed by building clear career paths (41%) and aligning stakeholders (33%). With 57% of organizations housing job architecture within OD or Total Rewards, the need for broader ownership and governance is clear.

The challenge is not primarily technical. Organizations know how to build frameworks. The harder task is embedding them into everyday hiring, promotion, pay, and workforce decisions.

Without strong governance, exceptions become the operating model. Over time, confidence in the architecture erodes—and so does its value.



When asked: Where do you face the greatest challenges today? (Select up to 3)

What Leaders Are Missing

Many leaders assume job architecture creates value once the framework is built. In practice, its value depends on whether managers see it as helping them make better workforce decisions.

When architecture is viewed as an HR process rather than a business tool, exceptions become easier to justify. One exception appears harmless; the challenge is what happens when they accumulate.

CHRO Implication

Exceptions persist when accountability sits with HR but decision-making sits with the business. The fix is stronger ownership and governance, not another redesign.

CEO Implication

Every exception changes the structure, whether intentionally or not. Monitoring exception levels can provide an early warning of governance and workforce risk.

Where the Opportunity Lies

- Give business leaders real decision rights inside the framework, and real accountability for using them.
- Create a standing role governance forum with a defined route for genuine exceptions.
- Measure the exception rate and report it to the executive team monthly. What is not counted cannot be governed.
- Are exceptions concentrated in roles where job size is genuinely ambiguous, or in cases where a manager is protecting a title or salary to retain someone?



Anis Abdeljawad

Partner
Korn Ferry

"Governance isn't a document you write. It's a decision someone is willing to defend on a Tuesday afternoon when a good manager asks for an exception."

Framework to Impact

What it takes to make job architecture work

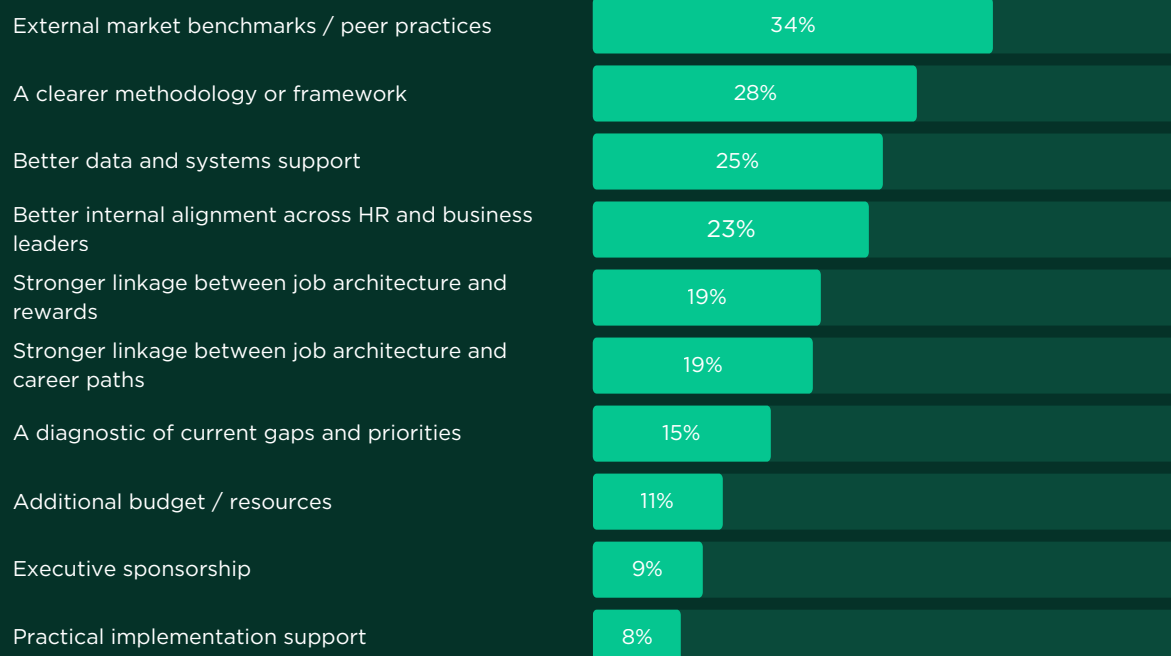
Where the framework starts delivering

When asked what would help most, organizations give surprisingly practical answers. They aren't looking for bigger budgets or backing from the top. They want evidence to guide their decisions and better alignment with the business. External market benchmarks and peer practices lead the list at (34%), followed by a clearer methodology 28%, better data and systems (25%) and stronger alignment between HR and the business (23%).

Throughout this study, organizations highlighted a consistent set of priorities: stronger governance, clearer career pathways, better workforce visibility, and greater confidence in workforce decisions.

Korn Ferry Architect® helps organizations build these capabilities by connecting roles, levels, skills and career frameworks within a single job architecture model. Built on Korn Ferry's Hay Method® and research-backed Success Profiles, it brings structure and consistency to how work is defined, valued and developed.

The result is stronger career pathways, better workforce planning, greater talent mobility, and more consistent workforce decisions across the enterprise.



When asked: What would help your organization make the most progress in this area over the next 12 months? Select up to 2

What Leaders Are Missing

Sponsorship and budget are already in place for most organizations. What is often missing is confidence: a credible external reference for how roles should be leveled, where the market sits, and a shared language between HR and the business.

These are practical challenges. Organizations are looking for better evidence, clearer methodology and stronger alignment to support workforce decisions.

The challenge is turning that evidence into a consistent framework that managers can trust and apply. When expectations are clear, decisions become faster, more defensible and less dependent on individual judgement.

CHRO Implication

The challenge is no longer securing sponsorship. It is creating a trusted reference point and a shared language for workforce decisions

CEO Implication

With 36% expecting further restructuring within the next 12 months, the opportunity is to build decision consistency before the next wave of change arrives.

Where the Opportunity Lies

- Ownership must sit with the business. HR can shape the framework, but line leaders should be accountable for the decisions made within it, just as they are for budgets and headcount.
- Anchor the architecture externally. Benchmarks provide a defensible market reference point and reduce the debate that often slows workforce decisions.
- Build for the next change, not this one. With 64% already changing how and where work is delivered, architecture should absorb change, not be rebuilt because of it.



Arjun Nath

Client lient Success Manager
Korn Ferry

“When the rules are clear, decisions become faster, more defensible, and less dependent on individual judgment.”





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