

**Question:** We hear a lot about broad banding our classifications, but we are unsure if it will work in our organization. What is a broad banded classification and how does it work in real life?

**CompDoctor™:** Narrow or broad, which is better? It really depends on the organization and if the culture of the organization can support the changes that will take place if you broad band your classifications.

Let us first clarify one item—the difference between the broad banding of a pay system and the broadening of the classification structure. Technically, broad banding refers to the pay system. Under that type of system, salary ranges or grades are broadened substantially. However, we don't think that is your issue. You are talking about classification consolidations and broadening your classification structure. We think many people confuse these two issues and want to make sure we are talking about the same thing.

As far as your classification system is concerned, think of it this way. Are you spending most of your time reviewing classification requests from employees or department heads who have added one or two responsibilities to their job and now want you to move it to a new pay range? Do you see any real differences in the level of work that the newly defined job is doing from the old job? Oh, sure, the tasks are different or maybe slightly different, but are the levels of responsibility and difficulty of the job different? Usually, the answer is no.

If that is your answer, then how can you justify moving the job to a higher (and it is almost always higher, hardly ever lower) pay range? Are the skills and knowledges significantly different from the previous job?

The real issue is how much of a difference makes a difference. There is no answer to that question, but let us put it to you in a different way. Take the number of classifications that you have and divide it into the number of employees that you have. What is the number? If it less than 10, you have a narrowly defined classification structure. That means in real life that you are probably spending a lot of your time reviewing classifications for pay upgrades when the jobs have not changed significantly. If you have more than 15 employees per classification, it does not mean that you have a broad structure, but the chances are that you have a broader classification structure than most.

By Jim Fox and Bruce Lawson,  
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# Comp Doctor™

A broad classification structure starts with the premise that the nature and character of the work is similar in many respects. What are those respects? They are that the general knowledge, skills, abilities and qualifications of the job are similar, and that the job tasks, while they may be somewhat different, are substantially similar and they

an eighth grade education and ability to follow simple verbal and written instructions and understand standard safety requirements. They have different tasks and responsibilities, but are they that different?

Look at the Table 1 to see if you can tell the difference between the two.

can probably guess how it got there from your own experiences.

If the organization called them all laborers or some other title, they would have made a step toward eliminating one title to keep track of, to have applicant registers for and classification descriptions to maintain.

Once they did that, they could move employees around from department to department when there were openings, give the employees some variety to their work and provide them with an opportunity to move to a higher-level classification when the time is right. It would free up HR time in recruiting, hiring, and in reclassification reviews and in job description writing, and in labor market surveys. Fewer job titles equals more flexibility, more time for HR and reduced workload.

While this is a small example and easy to see the similarities, what would happen to if you could reduce the number of job titles from 500 to 250? Or 1,000 to 500? You would free up time to focus on the more strategic HR issues facing your organization, such as employee development, competency measurement and compensation analysis. You would spend less time on administrative "policing."

But what are the disadvantages? There are some, just as in any change. First off is that it changes the status quo. That is always scary and many managers and employees fear such change. They do not see how they can hire, promote or evaluate performance of an employee when the job description is more generic. These things can be done. Lots of organizations have done it but it does require a change in some other procedures.

Another is that when you do market surveys other organizations will not see the jobs in the same broad fashion, so the quality of the market data many not be what you are used to. Keep this in mind when you market price a job; you only need to match about 70 percent of

**Table 1**

Laborer	Waste Attendant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Eighth grade</li> <li>■ Six months experience performing manual labor.</li> <li>■ Light and heavy manual laboring</li> <li>■ Duties include the occasional operation of small engine equipment.</li> <li>■ Sweeps walkways and removes refuse and debris from grounds and buildings and parking lots.</li> <li>■ Sprays and trims foliage; cuts grass, pulls weeds, rakes leaves and edges walkways and trims hedges.</li> <li>■ Some knowledge of simple hand tools.</li> <li>■ Ability to understand and follow verbal or written instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Eighth grade</li> <li>■ Three months experience as a general laborer</li> <li>■ Manual work involving limited skills in maintenance and refuse collection tasks.</li> <li>■ Work involves the use of hand tools and power tools.</li> <li>■ Uses brooms, pitchforks, rakes, shovels and similar hand tools in order to pick up refuse and trash.</li> <li>■ Prunes, waters and cares for landscaping at the trash transfer stations; cuts grass, trims foliage and rakes trimmings; polices surrounding areas.</li> <li>■ Skill in the operation of hand tools and power tools.</li> <li>■ Ability to understand and follow oral and written instructions.</li> </ul>

require similar knowledge, skills and abilities. What does that mean?

Let's take an example of two straightforward jobs: a laborer in the parks and recreation department and a waste attendant at the refuse facility. Let's say that the job in the parks and recreations department requires the employees to use hand tools (rakes, blowers, trimmers, shovels and lawn mowers.) This job requires the employee to have a minimal level of education (eighth grade or high school), be able to follow simple verbal and written instructions, and understand standard safety requirements. Now let's look at the waste attendant at the refuse facility. This job also requires

From our perspective, we don't see much of difference between the two. In fact, the recruiting pool for these jobs is the same. Yet, in this organization, they had these two jobs distinctly classified and they were in different pay ranges. Why? Probably because someone said the jobs are doing different things. Well, yes, they are doing different things, but are the differences that different? Our guess is that you could move the laborer over to the refuse facility and vice versa and the employee could pick up the essential functions of the job in about a week's time, if not less. Why does this organization have two different classifications? There is no good answer, but I am sure that you

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# Recruiter Service

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and services. The Personnel Commission's staff of more than 160 administrative technical and support employees and a pool of 20 hearing officers provides a full spectrum of merit system human resources services to meet the enumerable Classified employment needs for the 32,000+ Classified employees and more than 1,000 schools and offices across the District. These services include: classification and compensation administration, recruitment, selection, employee assignments, districtwide staff development programs, examination appeals, discipline appeals and hearings, and research and analysis of data in preparation for labor contract negotiations.

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(and a bachelor's degree) of administrative or managerial experience in professional personnel work with a school district with an average daily attendance of 40,000 or more or with a governmental agency or a private firm with over 10,000 employees including supervision of professional and clerical support employees. The ideal candidate will possess an IPMA-CP Certification and/or SHRM Certification and will be actively participating in national and local professional human resources organizations.

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the job. You will never get an exact match, even for the most routine jobs. So, even with a narrowly defined class structure, the best you are doing with market pricing a job is obtaining a reasonable representation of the job's price in the market place. You will never get an exact number.

Finally, it will require your managers to actually manage employee pay. With a broader classification structure, managers will have more freedom to change responsibilities and reward employees for taking on new responsibilities. They will not have to use (or blame) the classification system for their lack of managerial skills.

For many organizations, broadening their classification structure has opened up entirely new opportunities to change the organization from a centrally controlled system to one where managers in departments are responsible for the management of their departments. Many organiza-

tions want this to happen, but do not know how to get there. When managers are held accountable for the management of 60 percent of their budget (their employees) then they can be held accountable for the results that they produce.

While broad classifications are not for everyone, we have found that it is worth the effort to reexamine your classification structure and simplify it.

*The Comp Doctor™ is the team of Jim Fox and Bruce Lawson of Fox Lawson & Associates LLC, a compensation and human resources consulting firm that specializes in assisting governments in fixing their compensation and classification systems. They are seriously irreverent about their specialty. You may find them on the Web at [www.foxlawson.com](http://www.foxlawson.com). If you have a question you would like to have them answer, please write to them at [jfox@foxlawson.com](mailto:jfox@foxlawson.com) or [blawson@foxlawson.com](mailto:blawson@foxlawson.com). They will try to include it in the next issue of Comp Doctor™.* —*N*

# Calendar of Events

- October 6** Audioconference: Personnel Legal Update  
Contact: Carrie Hoover, [choover@ipma-hr.org](mailto:choover@ipma-hr.org), or for more information, go online to: <http://www.ipma-hr.org/index.cfm?navid=254>.
- October 15-19** IPMA-HR International Training Conference  
*Adam's Mark Hotel*  
*Dallas, Texas*  
Contact: [meetings@ipma-hr.org](mailto:meetings@ipma-hr.org)  
To download the conference registration form, go online to: <http://www.ipma-hr.org/conference/documents/intlconfregform.pdf>.
- November 10** Audioconference: Benefit-Cost Containment Strategies  
Contact: Carrie Hoover, [choover@ipma-hr.org](mailto:choover@ipma-hr.org), or for more information, go online to: <http://www.ipma-hr.org/index.cfm?navid=254>.
- November 29-30** Annual Federal Section Conference  
*The George Washington Univ. Cafritz Conference Center*  
*Washington, DC*  
Contact: Carrie Hoover, [choover@ipma-hr.org](mailto:choover@ipma-hr.org), or for more information, go online to: <http://www.ipma-hr.org/conference/display.cfm?confid=8&bid=1>.

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