

Ranks, evaluation, and pay

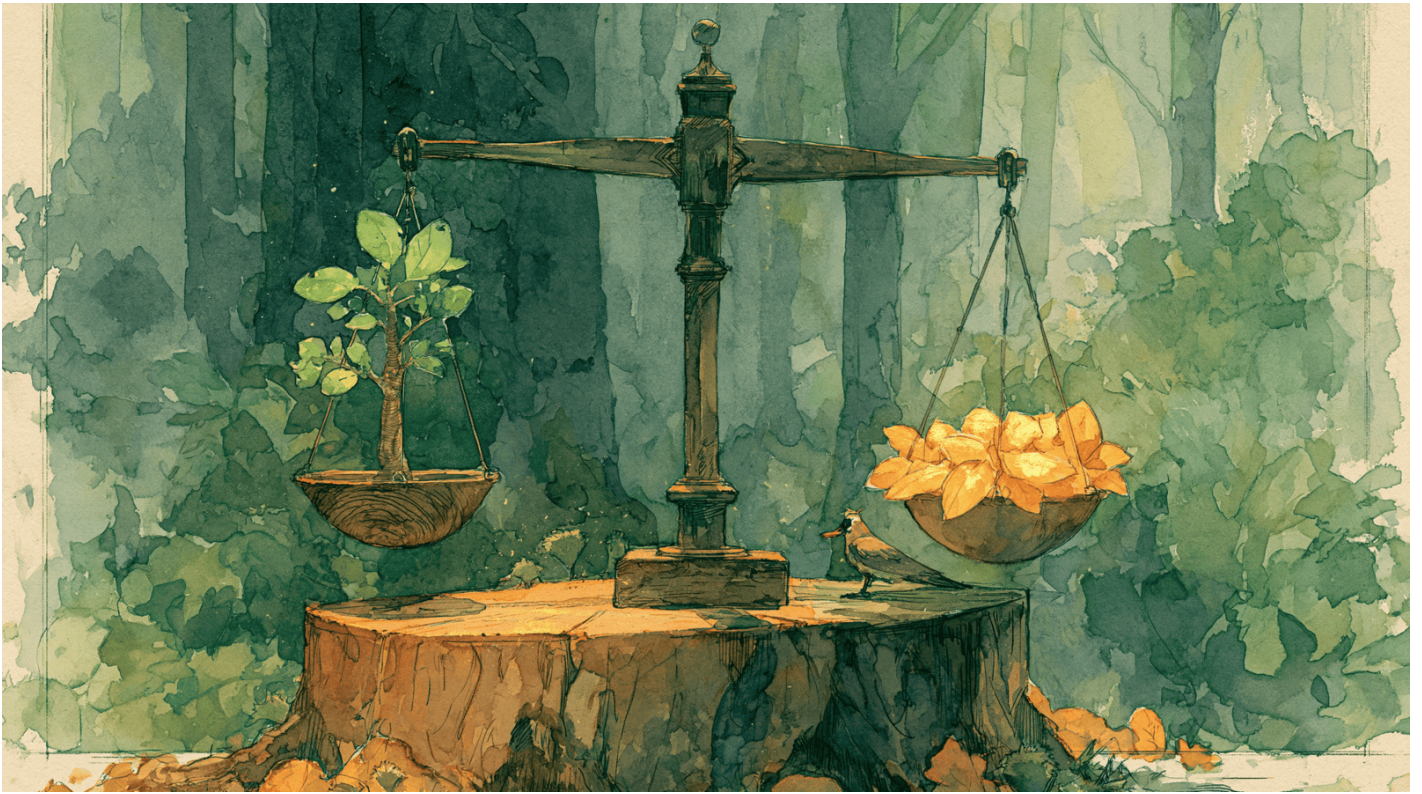
Connecting the forest to evaluation — and eventually money — is where the method carries the most weight and deserves the most care. Three principles.

Anchor reviews on levels and ranks, not adjectives. "Moved three skills to confident, holds the mid-rank set" is comparable year over year, across managers, across teams. Adjective-based reviews aren't just vague — they're *incomparable*, which makes every calibration meeting a negotiation between writing styles. Levels give the organisation one currency of progress.

Connect ranks to bands deliberately. The tempting shortcut — pay scales with skill count — fails quickly: a raw count rarely maps cleanly to value, and it incentivises collecting cheap skills over deepening critical ones. Instead, decide *which* skills and ranks matter for *which* band, and **write it down** so it's consistent across managers. The forest gives you honest inputs; the compensation design is still a human decision — the method just makes it explicit instead of folklore.

Keep assessment honest under pressure. The predictable failure: once levels touch pay, they inflate — self-ratings and manager ratings alike; not from dishonesty, but because incentives lean on the scale. The counterweights from chapter 5 stop being optional at this point: **peer validation** (a claimed level is one colleague confirms) and **skill champions** (each critical skill has a reference person who validates assessments). An organisation that ties pay to levels without standing up validation first is scheduling its own credibility crisis.

Sequencing advice hides in that last line: let the forest prove itself in reviews and development *first*, then connect money. A map the org already trusts can bear the weight; a brand-new one can't.



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