

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and ELSA Programs



Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 972
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Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code

Appellants: [appellants' names]

Agency classification: Mechanical Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

Organization: Recurring Work Management Branch
Facility Engineering Division
Facility Management Department
Navy Public Works Center
[city, state]

OPM decision: Mechanical Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

OPM decision number: C-0802-09-27

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer
2/13/98

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellants' representative]

[name]

Director, Human Resources Office

Naval Base

[address]

Mr. William Duffy

Chief, Classification Branch

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Introduction

On July 8, 1997, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted an appeal from a group of employees for the position of Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9, in the Recurring Work Management Branch, Facility Engineering Division, Facility Management Department, Navy Public Works Center, [city, state]. The appellants are requesting that their position be changed to Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

General issues

These appellants are part of a group appeal from engineering technicians at the Navy Public Works Center who perform work in various specializations. Information furnished with the group appeal compares their GS-9 positions with other engineering technician positions at the same location whom they believe are performing the equivalent work or below but are classified at a higher grade. Copies of position descriptions were provided for two Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, positions; one Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, position; and one Electronics Engineering Technician, GS-856-11, position. Although the GS-11 position descriptions are certified by a management official, none have a classification certification or a position description number on the Optional Form 8. A certification by a management official certifies the accuracy of the position description which represents the official record of the duties and responsibilities assigned to a position. However, a classification certification indicates the position description has been placed in its proper class, title and grade in accordance with the OPM classification standards and guidelines by a person delegated classification authority. Since the GS-11 position descriptions lack a classification certification, the duties and responsibilities are not an official record of duties and responsibilities, have not been properly classified, and are neither reviewable nor appealable under the classification appeal process. Additionally, by law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellants' positions to others as a basis for deciding their appeal.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellants, the appellants' representative, and the agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellants and their supervisor.

Position information

The appellants are assigned to Position Numbers 7L135, 7L136, and 7L137. The appellants, supervisor, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position descriptions. The appellants report to the same supervisor and all agree that the primary duties and responsibilities are identical for all three position descriptions. The difference in position numbers stems from the differing

security clearances of the appellants and the collateral duty as safety coordinator for the appellant assigned to position number 7L136. These differences do not affect the major duties and responsibilities performed by the appellants; therefore, all three position descriptions will be addressed by this decision.

The primary purpose of the appellants' position is managing preventive maintenance service contracts for their customers and providing their customers with estimates on replacing old equipment. The type of systems and equipment covered by the preventive maintenance programs includes: heating and air conditioning chillers, condensing units, compressors, air handling units, ventilation, oil/water separators, fire pumps (electric and diesel), boilers, cooling towers, steam converters, sprinkler systems, emergency generators, swinging/rolling/sliding doors, and the various subsystems of piping, backflow prevention, ducts, and pneumatic controls, electric controls, and direct digital control systems. Supervision is currently provided by the Supervisory Engineering Technician, GS-802-11. Unusual problems may be discussed by the appellants and the supervisor. The appellants determine the technical requirements of the job plans, construction plans, methods, components/materials, and cost estimates. The supervisor provides minimal technical assistance and completed work is reviewed for quality, timeliness, and adherence with instructions, guidelines, and policy.

According to the appellants' position descriptions, 15 percent of the time is spent on initial assessment, planning, and estimating; 15 percent is spent on cost estimating and workplan development; 25 percent is spent on inspection, investigation, and quality assurance; 10 percent is spent on contract administration; 15 percent is spent on coordination and safety; 10 percent is spent on specification development; and the remaining 10 percent is spent on mechanical system adjustment.

Standards determination

Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, June 1969.

Series determination

The agency placed the position in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802. The appellants do not contest the occupational series.

The GS-802 series includes technical positions that require primarily application of a practical knowledge of (a) the methods and techniques of engineering or architecture; and (b) the construction, application, properties, operation, and limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials. The positions do not require professional knowledges and abilities for full performance and, therefore, do not require training equivalent in type and scope to that represented by the completion of a professional curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in engineering or architecture. The appellants' position is properly placed in the GS-802 series.

Title determination

The title Mechanical Engineering Technician applies to positions that involve work concerned with systems, plants, machines, equipment, and instruments for the generation, transmission, measurement or utilization of heat or mechanical power. Included are steam and internal combustion powerplants, automotive and ordnance equipment and components, heating and air conditioning, piping, machine tools, and instruments and controls. The appellants' work involves managing preventive maintenance service contracts and providing estimates on replacing old equipment. The types of systems and equipment they deal with are covered by the mechanical specialization, therefore, the position is properly titled Mechanical Engineering Technician.

Grade determination

The grading criteria in the GS-802 standard is written in the narrative format. Grade levels are discussed in terms of two factors: (1) Nature of Assignment, and (2) Level of Responsibility. The position is evaluated as follows:

Nature of Assignment

This factor considers the scope and difficulty of the project, and the skills and knowledge required to complete the assignment.

At the GS-9 level, engineering technicians typically perform a variety of work relating to an area of specialization that requires the application of a considerable number of different basic but established methods, procedures, and techniques. Assignments usually involve independent responsibility for the planning and conduct of a block of work which is a complete conventional project of relatively limited scope, or a portion of a larger and more diverse project. Assignments require study, analysis, and consideration of several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs, and selection of the most appropriate. This generally requires consideration of numerous precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. Often changes or deviations must be made during the progress of an assignment to incorporate additional factors requested after commencement of the project or to adjust to findings and conclusions which could not be predicted accurately in the original plans. The GS-9 assignments typically require coordination of several parts, each requiring independent analysis and solution. When phases or details of the project are performed by other groups or personnel outside the organizational unit, the technician reviews, analyzes, and integrates their work. In addition, assignments at this level require a good understanding of the effect that recommendations made or other results of the assignment may have on an item, system, or process and its end-use application.

The appellants write contracts (e.g., preventive maintenance service, minor works, specific work orders, small purchase, quickline) for their customers as requested via "TF-1" work request documents. Using their trades background and experience, RS Mean cost estimating, PWC and NAVFAC instructions and design manuals, technical directives and Engineer Performance Standards

(EPS), etc., they determine the required trades, tasks, frequencies, labor hours, and materials to prepare a reliable and realistic job plan or contract. Personal contacts include shop management (e.g., supervisors, general foremen, superintendents), vendors, contractors, engineers, facility managers, shop mechanics, and military personnel. As the customers' representatives, the appellants work with the contracts department to clarify the work desired; assist in reviewing contract specifications; and attend bid openings, the awarding of the contract, and pre-construction conferences to answer contractor's questions. While the contract is in progress, they inspect the work and report back to the customer and facility managers on the status of the work. They continue as the customer's representative until the completion of the contract.

The workplan objectives for the appellants confirm the work described in the position description. The workplan lists the following five elements: (1) perform quality assurance inspections of equipment to determine the condition, confirm quality and quantity of scheduled preventive maintenance, report results of inspections, and indicate corrections required to assure efficient operation of the equipment in the time frame assigned; (2) assure computerized inventories of equipment are current based on field visits, quality assurance reports, shop reports, and repair/replace work orders; (3) assure immediate action is taken on special reports within eight hours of receipt . . .; (4) prepare work orders and estimates using computer system to apply trade practices based on EPS, manufacturers' manuals and equipment utilization, to develop effective preventive maintenance tasks to assure efficient operation of equipment within assigned time; and (5) provide the support, cooperation, and team work necessary to accomplish the task assigned and assist others in accomplishing the transformation to mainsaver with the safety standards of PWCNORVAINST 5100.33B.

Following are some examples provided by the appellants in writing and during telephone interviews of the work they actually perform:

- Two of the appellants are currently administering the preventive maintenance contract at the Naval Medical Center in Portsmouth. This involves providing the Public Works shops with detailed preventive maintenance procedures and performing quality assurance inspections on the shops' work for the customers. In addition, the appellants administer the open funded portion of the contract that allows them to write small and large repair work orders. They prepare cost estimates for equipment that needs replacing and when the work is funded, they write the job plan and order materials and equipment. They attend monthly meetings with the customers concerning the preventive maintenance and repair contracts and discuss budgetary matters. Their current task is inventorying a new acute care facility and developing a preventive maintenance contract for this facility. According to the appellants, this contract will cover approximately 15,000 pieces of air conditioning, heating, ventilation, electrical, and utilities equipment and systems when the project is completed.
- Another appellant summarizes his work as managing in excess of \$1,490,000 of preventive maintenance and repair contracts for all air conditioning, heating, and ventilation systems for eight commands with 85 buildings. One of the specific jobs he was responsible for involved

the retro-fit of one of three 500 ton centrifugal chillers in a building. He requested the work to be performed through the contracting department and requested a specific contractor to perform the work. He reviewed and accepted the contract specifications and inspected the work done by the contractor to observe the workmanship and make sure work was on schedule. Additional, unrelated problems were found as the work progressed, and the appellant had to decide if the contractor or PWC personnel would perform the repairs. He approved the contractor to make the repairs and issued a repair work order from the maintenance contract to add additional funds for the repairs. After the retro-fit was completed and the chiller became operational, the appellant, contractor, and contract inspector completed all inspections and the appellant signed off on the job as being satisfactorily completed.

As a result of their experience, the appellants are able to apply sound engineering practices to accomplish the work. They do not routinely have to develop extensive new or extremely complex procedures nor are they required to make highly unique or unusual modifications. Navy instructions, manufacturers' specifications and directives, along with national and local codes for different disciplines, engineering drawings, sketches and files of similar projects, and previous contract information are available in most situations. In those situations necessitating changes in design, e.g., when replacing old equipment with newer and more technologically advanced equipment, applicable precedents are usually available, and the appellant is able to choose an appropriate means of accomplishing the work from these existing bodies of knowledge. According to the supervisor, this group of employees is unique in that the supervisor does not normally assign work. Rather, work assignments come through customer contact within the appellants' geographically assigned zones. The appellants' assignments are comparable to the GS-9 level.

At the GS-11 level, engineering technicians perform work of broad scope and complexity that requires application of (1) demonstrated ability to interpret, select, adapt, and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering principles and practices related to the area of specialization; and (2) some knowledge of related scientific and engineering fields. GS-11 technicians plan and accomplish complete projects or studies of a conventional nature requiring independent adaptation of a general fund of background data and information, and interpretation and use of precedents. They are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. Other related interests must often be considered, entailing frequent coordination with personnel in the fields concerned. There is a continuing requirement for contact work. Initiative, resourcefulness, and sound judgment are needed in planning and coordinating phases of assignments and in selecting which of several sound alternatives is to be used in arriving at acceptable engineering compromises. Ingenuity and creative thinking are required in devising ways of accomplishing objectives, and in adapting existing equipment or current techniques to new uses.

By comparison, technicians at lower levels receive assignments which are usually segments or phases of the type independently carried out at grade GS-11 or which involve less complex systems and facilities requiring design adaptation. GS-9 technicians apply standard engineering methods and

techniques whereas GS-11 technicians are typically required to be creative in devising ways to accomplish the work. Assignments typically found at the GS-11 level include: (1) Develops cost estimates for competitive bidding for a variety of multiple-use construction projects. Determines (a) construction operations and methods involved and the time required to complete each phase or feature, (b) various types and capacities of construction equipment required and cost of operation and maintenance, (c) material types and quantities, and (d) overhead, tax, and other costs; or, (2) Prepares designs and specifications for various utility systems such as heating, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilating, pumping, gas supply, and pneumatic control systems. Assignments characteristically involve utility systems for office buildings, pumping stations, and flood control facilities, where the complexity or nonconventional nature of the buildings and facilities entails design problems requiring considerable adaptation of precedents or design of features for which precedents are not directly applicable. Performs technical review of contractor-prepared designs and specifications for such systems.

The appellants do not meet the GS-11 level. The appellants' assignments deal primarily with the mechanical aspects of conventional systems for portions or complete buildings or facilities. While the buildings and systems being worked on are typically older, there are established national, local, industrial, and manufacturer codes, specifications, and engineering principles which the appellants can use. In addition, there are contract specifications and files of previous work available which they can reference in order to help them accomplish their projects. The appellants do not generally deal with a variety of multiple-use construction projects nor do they develop new procedures/systems as is envisioned at this level.

GS-10 level assignments are not specifically described in the standard. The appellants' assignments do not in any way regularly exceed those described at the GS-9 level. Therefore, their assignments cannot properly be classified at the GS-10 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Nature of Assignment.

Level of Responsibility

This factor considers the nature and purpose of person-to-person work relationships, and the supervision received in terms of intensity of review of work and of guidance received during the course of the work cycle.

At the GS-9 level, the supervisor provides information on any related work being performed and furnishes general instruction as to the scope of objectives, time limitations, priorities, and similar aspects. The supervisor is available for consultation and advice where significant deviations from standard engineering practices must be made. The supervisor observes the work for progress and for coordination with work performed by other employees or other sections and for adherence to completion and cost schedules. Standard methods employed are seldom reviewed, but review is made for adequacy and for conformance with established policies, precedents and sound engineering concepts and usage. Personal work contacts typically are more frequent and demanding and are

primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate the work with that of personnel in related activities. Some contacts are made with using agencies for whom work is done, and with contractors and architecture-engineer firms. The contacts are made to clear up doubtful points, to advise as to discrepancies found in meeting contract terms, to consider recommendations for acceptable substitutes, and to promote adherence to agency standards and concepts of good engineering.

Comparable to the GS-9 level, the appellants operate in an independent manner with very little “in process” supervision. However, technical advice and guidance are readily available. Unusual or controversial problems or policy questions arising in the course of a project may be discussed with the supervisor, but technical supervisory assistance is infrequently sought or required. The appellants have regular contact with other engineering technicians, engineers, requesting officials, and contractors. These contacts are to gather information, to define the scope of the requested work, to clarify policy issues, etc.

At the GS-11 level, technicians have considerable freedom in planning work and carrying out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of the major objectives, providing background information and advice on specific unusual problems which are anticipated or on matters requiring coordination with other groups. Unusual or controversial problems, or policy questions arising in the course of a project, may be discussed with the supervisor, but technical supervisory assistance is infrequently sought or required. The supervisor is usually informally advised regarding progress but there is little review during progress of typical assignments. Completed work in the form of recommendations, plans, designs, reports, or correspondence is reviewed for general adequacy, conformity to purpose of the assignment, and sound engineering judgment. Contacts in the course of his work are with the same groups of individuals at lower grade levels and the purpose of the contacts is similar. Because of the increased scope of GS-11 assignments, these contacts tend to become more extensive than at lower levels. Contacts with contractors and other personnel regarding complex engineering and administrative problems are carried out without close supervision. However, the technician generally discusses with the supervisor the approach to be taken.

Although the appellants work independently under general supervision, the intent of the GS-11 level is not met. They may recommend a course of action, but the appellants seek technical advice on unusual problems and policy issues. The GS-11 level of responsibility assumes that the employee is performing assignments equivalent to the GS-11 level and would, therefore, have responsibility for adapting a general font of knowledge and interpreting precedents to handle complex assignments requiring the exercise of considerable judgment. In comparison, the appellants apply conventional engineering practices and a knowledge of the codes, specifications, and regulations to their projects. They exercise some judgment in determining the applicability of the specifications, codes, and engineering principles to the specific project, but consult with the supervisor on difficult problems or situations. This level of responsibility does not meet the intent of the GS-11 level.

The GS-10 level is not specifically described in the standard. To be appropriately classified at the GS-10 level, the technician’s Level of Responsibility would have to regularly and clearly exceed the

level described at grade GS-9. The appellants' position does not regularly require them to perform at a level that exceeds the GS-9 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Level of Responsibility.

Summary

Both factors are evaluated at the GS-9 level.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.