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**DIGEST OF SIGNIFICANT
CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS
AND OPINIONS**

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**Office of Merit Systems
Oversight and Effectiveness**

Preface

It is a great privilege to introduce the twenty-fifth issue of the *DIGEST OF SIGNIFICANT CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS AND OPINIONS (Digest)*. In recognition of this “silver” issue, I want to share with you my thoughts on the value of the *Digest*. I have served as a classification specialist at both the bureau and department levels. I always found the *Digest* to be an excellent resource in addressing the more complex classification issues. From professional versus administrative work to crediting one factor level over another, *Digest* articles have consistently helped to show the “virtual reality” behind OPM standards. I hope that this digest aids you – whether a classifier, a generalist, or someone with delegated classification authority -- in exercising judgment in your day-to-day work.

As always, the *Digest* presents summaries of decisions and opinions that we believe have Governmentwide applicability. The articles summarize significant interpretations that clarify the intent of the underlying classification or job grading standards. It is important to remember that *Digest* articles must be read in context with the standard as a whole, rather than in isolation. Because the *Digest* synopses may not reflect all relevant information bearing on a decision, good judgment in their application is essential. Some *Digest* synopses draw from several cases and/or related issues. Therefore, we have provided links to actual decisions. However, the facts in cases linked to the article may not coincide completely. For these reasons, *Digest* items do not supersede or supplement classification standards and do not constitute “case law”.

For your convenience, *Digest* issues are available on the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) website. The website address is <http://www.opm.gov/classapp>. The *Digest* can also be found on OPM’s CD-ROM entitled *General Schedule Position Classification and Federal Wage System Job Grading Standards*, which is issued by OPM’s Classification Programs Division (CPD). I encourage you to make suggestions for improving future issues of the *Digest* via E-mail to fedclass_appeals@opm.gov or fax at 202-606-2663. You may also write to me at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1900 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20415-6000 or call me at 202-606-2990.

Finally, I want to personally thank all those individuals who have participated in the compilation of the last 25 digests. Contributions for this issue were provided by the *Digest’s* editor, Mr. Robert Hendler (Philadelphia Oversight Division), Mr. Fred Boland (Chicago Oversight Division), Ms. Bonnie Brandon (Dallas Oversight Division), Ms. Kathy Day (Atlanta Oversight Division), Ms. Linda Kazinetz (Washington Oversight Division), and Mr. Carlos Torrico (San Francisco Oversight Division). I also want to recognize members of my staff and the CPD staff, who continually provide technical review and program assistance.

Working toward our “golden” issue

Melissa A. Drummond, *Director*
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs

Article No. 25-01

Standards: Management and Program Analysis, GS-343 (August 1990)
Management and Program Clerical and Assistance, GS-344 (May 1993)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Series coverage; support versus analytical administrative work

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellant supported a team of contracting officers and program pricers by administering a number of databases and assisting in the analysis and maintenance of a performance measurement and tracking system. About 45 percent of her work involved analyzing process data to determine whether process areas had met performance goals according to established performance metrics, extracting data from spreadsheets and databases, creating graphs and charts, and developing presentation slides. The appellant spent about 35 percent of her time updating a variety of databases. This included inputting status information and logging and tracking audits. When an audit was "reportable," the appellant established resolution and disposition dates. If she determined that an audit was "nonreportable," the audit was transferred to the appropriate administrative contracting officer for resolution and disposition. The rest of the appellant's work included retrieving data as requested and presenting the data in an acceptable format.

The appellant stated that her GS-344-7 position included some duties identical to work assigned to and performed by a co-worker who occupied a GS-343-12 position in the appellant's unit. The appellant believed her position should be classified as Management and Program Analyst, GS-343-9.

Resolution

The Management and Program Analysis Series, GS-343, includes positions that primarily serve as analysts and advisors to management on the evaluation of the effectiveness of government programs and operations, the productivity and efficiency of the management of Federal agencies, or both. GS-343 positions require knowledge of the substantive nature of agency programs and activities; agency missions, policies and objectives; management principles and processes; and the analytical and evaluative methods and techniques for assessing program development or execution and improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

In contrast, positions in the Management and Program Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-344, involve performing clerical and technical work in support of management and program analysis. This support work usually involves proficiency in one or more functional areas in certain limited phases of a specified program. Normally, a support position can be identified with the mission of a particular organization or program. Employees who perform support or assistance work follow established procedures, but these are typically related to the employee's assignment or work unit.

Support work can be based on practical knowledge of the purpose, operation, procedures, techniques, and guidelines of the specific program area or functional assignment. As was true in this case, some GS-344 positions perform complete limited, uncomplicated management or program analysis projects, or segments of larger analytical projects or studies under the direction of higher level employees.

OPM found that the appellant's position did not meet the nature of work and did not require the type or level of knowledge for positions assigned to the GS-343 series. The primary purpose of the appellant's position was to provide technical support to management and program analysts, contracting officers, and program pricers. In contrast to positions in the GS-343 series, the appellant's work did not require an in-depth knowledge of management principles and processes or the analytical and evaluative methods needed for assessing program development or execution in improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Although the appellant and a program improvement officer worked together in analyzing process performance, the program improvement officer was responsible for analyzing those processes that were more complex and required a greater degree of organizational knowledge. OPM concluded that the appellant's position was properly assigned to the GS-344 series.

“Back to the Basics”

The series determination decision in this case involves distinguishing between one-grade interval support work and two-grade interval administrative work. The decision illustrates that the primary purpose of a position, the knowledge required to perform the work, and management's intent in establishing the position must be considered when determining the appropriate series for single-grade interval positions that include some aspects of work similar to two-grade interval positions. Because the primary function of the position was to perform routine, procedural, or standard assignments that supported management or program analytical work, the position was excluded from the GS-343 series.

Link to [C-0344-07-01](#)

Article No. 25-02

Standard: Medical Instrument Technician, GS-649 (October 1990)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Series coverage; technician versus professional work

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellant assisted a physician in conducting electrophysiology studies in the Cardiology Section of a Medical Center. The appellant had a degree in biology, had conducted animal research, had passed an exam for allied professionals in electrophysiology, kept abreast of developments in her field, and trained interns rotating through the Cardiology Section. Because the work required a high degree of skill, care, and precision and included procedures and responsibilities not permitted registered nurses in the section, the appellant believed that it belonged in a two-grade interval technologist occupation, rather than a one-grade interval technician occupation.

Resolution

In determining whether the position required professional knowledge, such as that of a physician, nurse, engineer, or biologist, OPM examined the appellant's assignments along those dimensions where it most closely paralleled those of a professional. These dimensions would typically encompass defining and analyzing problems, evaluating technical practices, establishing standards, improving work methods, and developing skills. While some of the assignments were nominally similar to those of a professional, despite the appellant's credentials, none demanded professional insight.

For example, the appellant occasionally assisted in conducting trials, such as an auto pulse-width study, where she took weekly EKGs and had patients wear a Holter monitor to record heart signals. This and other such studies, however, were defined, planned, and directed by a physician or another professional, rather than by the appellant. Instead, her daily tasks of operating and monitoring equipment and collecting and interpreting data were consistent with technician assignments.

When monitoring equipment, the appellant recognized unanticipated reactions and deviations from the norm, but was not expected to analyze the results to determine the causes or possible significance of such reactions beyond the immediate. When writing protocols, such as an administrative procedure for tracking implantable devices or the steps for preparing equipment for surgical use, the appellant based the writing on practical considerations rather than electrophysiology theory and principles. When evaluating and recommending the adoption of new equipment or researching non-invasive blood pressure monitoring equipment, she did not explore its limits or verify its performance on the basis of theoretical considerations. Typical of technician

analysis, she arranged demonstrations and made recommendations based on less intensive reviews.

The appellant instructed interns and nurses on various aspects of electrophysiology. However, the purpose of the instruction was to acquaint professionals new to the field with electrophysiology techniques rather than to instruct them on theory. OPM found that the appellant's training responsibilities were consistent with the standard's expectation. Interns pursuing a specialization in electrophysiology gain their education from professionals in the field, supplemented by sessions with technicians in order to rapidly acquire the practical experience that lectures and books do not provide. As noted in the GS-649 standard, Medical Instrument Technicians may instruct physicians and nurses as well as other technicians in the use of equipment, sometimes within a classroom setting.

Keeping abreast of technical publications and advances is a common concern of both technicians and professionals. Technicians must maintain their specialized skills and keep current with new techniques. Professionals go beyond this and examine scholarly research for its potential value and fully analyze new developments, conducting tests of their own where no solutions have been established or formulas and guides developed. The appellant's position required only that she maintain technical skill as the field advanced. OPM concluded that the position was covered by the GS-649 series.

“Back to the Basics”

The series determination in this case involves distinguishing between one-grade interval technical work and two-grade interval professional work. Because the primary function of the position was to perform complex technical assignments that did not require professional insight, the position was excluded from placement in a professional series.

The experience and training requirements of a position, rather than the incumbent's personal qualifications, govern its classification. The level of knowledge reflected by the appellant's degree and successful examination for non-physicians by the North American Society of Pacing and Electrophysiology was creditable only to the extent that the position demanded them.

Link to [c-0649-08-01](#)

Article No. 25-03

Standards: General Biological Science, GS-401
General Physical Science, GS-1301 (August 1971)
Ecology, GS-408 (June 1977)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Interdisciplinary professional positions; series determination

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellant was a senior science and education advisor for an organization recognized as a leader in environmental research and management. The appellant administered a broad range of science and research initiatives relating to endangered species, biodiversity, wetlands restoration and banking, forest operations, short rotation woody crops, and phyto-remediation of wastes.

The agency determined that the position was an interdisciplinary professional position involving duties and responsibilities closely related to more than one professional occupation. The nature of the work was such that a person with education and experience in biological sciences (GS-401), physical sciences (GS-1301), or ecology (GS-408) would be considered equally well qualified. Because of the appellant's educational background, the agency placed the position in the GS-401 series. The appellant believed the position should be classified as Research Ecologist in the GS-408 series because of the nature of the work and the fact that the position had previously been classified in that series.

Resolution

An interdisciplinary professional position involves duties and responsibilities closely related to more than one *professional* occupation. Generally, they fall into one of two categories. The first is positions that involve a combination of knowledge characteristic of two or more professional series, i.e., some duties are characteristic of one profession and other duties are characteristic of another profession. The second is positions that involve knowledge characteristic of *either* of two or more professional series, i.e., the work is substantially identical to work performed in either of the professional occupations or academic disciplines involved.

In the case of an interdisciplinary professional position, the final classification of the position is determined by the qualifications of the person selected to fill it. While the position had previously been classified in the GS-408 series, that determination was made on the basis of the qualifications of the former incumbent. The appellant's education was in the fields of forest science, botany, tree physiology, and soil nutrition. The General Biological Sciences Series, GS-401, includes professional work in biology, agriculture, or related natural resource management. The agency determined that the GS-401 series was appropriate for the appellant's position based on his qualifications, and OPM agreed.

“Back to the Basics”

The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* limits the use of interdisciplinary positions to professional positions that can be filled by candidates with professional background in two or more professional occupations. While the position could have been placed in the GS-408 series, the appellant lacked the background for placement in that series. Final classification of the position had to be based on the qualifications of the current incumbent, resulting in its placement in the GS-401 series.

Link to [C-0401-11-01](#)

Article No. 25-04

Standards: Production Control, GS-1152 (April 1992)
Industrial Specialist, GS-1150 (February 1972)
Ship Surveying, GS-873 (April 1988)
Equipment Specialist, GS-1670 (November 1994)
Quality Assurance Specialist, GS-1910 (March 1983)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Series coverage

Identification of the Classification Issue

Two groups of appellants occupied positions classified as Shipbuilding Specialist (Industrial Repair Facility), GS-1101-11. The agency classified the position to the GS-1101 series because it involved a combination of Industrial Specialist, GS-1150, and Production Control, GS-1152, work. The appellants previously occupied Ship Surveyor, WD-8, jobs in the Federal Wage System production facilitating pay plan. They were placed in their current positions when their assignments changed from performing work in a single trade to working in multiple trades.

Based on reviewing position descriptions (PD's) from other Federal agencies, the appellants claimed that they were performing Ship Surveying, GS-873, work because they were responsible for planning functions in all disciplines (trades) and administering contracts at ship repair facilities. The appellants also said they performed Equipment Specialist Series, GS-1670, work when they developed lists of parts and equipment in performing their planning work. The PD further implied that the appellants performed Quality Assurance Specialist, GS-1910, functions.

Resolution

The GS-1150 series includes positions that primarily require a practical knowledge of the nature and operations of an industry or industries, and the materials, facilities, and methods employed. Work in the GS-1152 series requires similar skills and knowledge. GS-1152 functions include planning, estimating, scheduling, and expediting the use of labor, machines, and materials in specific manufacturing or remanufacturing operations. The GS-1152 standard states that some positions are involved in the preparation of contract bids that include the preproduction analysis of specific proposed work packages to determine workload capacity, labor, material, services, and machine requirements, to arrive at the most competitive bid.

The GS-1152 standard recognizes the close relationship between the two series, directing that positions responsible for planning, evaluating, and maintaining technical surveillance over Government production operations, either in contractor or Government-operated facilities, be classified in the GS-1150 series. Positions that have significant production control responsibilities

for contractor operations for analyzing, planning, and scheduling specific production operations or workload are to be classified in the GS-1152 series. OPM found that the appellants' work matched this second situation.

OPM responded to the appellants' other claims regarding series coverage.

- The Ship Surveying Series, GS-873, covers work involved in surveying vessels, including installed components, to determine the condition and need for an extent of work required to place the vessels in condition to meet specified requirements. Specifically excluded from the series is work primarily concerned with inspecting construction, assembly, modification, conversion, overhaul, or repair of vessels or inspections involved in the procurement of vessels chiefly to assure compliance with contracts, plans, and specifications.

Use of the term "specification" in the GS-873 series, however, is materially different from that proposed by the appellants. While the appellants had access to and used engineering manuals to estimate time and material costs, these decisions were primarily based on technically established maintenance and overhaul requirements. Work typical of the GS-873 occupation was instead assigned to and performed by the organization's engineering staff and/or the contract port engineer who orchestrated the maintenance and overhaul for an entire assigned vessel.

- Employees in several occupations develop parts and materials lists, including supply technicians and specialists. However, equipment specialists make similar recommendations based on such considerations as equipment operational characteristics, material composition, and the accessibility of the equipment components for repair. The record showed that other Detachment components and/or command-level engineering organizations made the technical decisions on material composition and similar issues covered by the GS-1670 occupation.
- OPM found that inspection was the purpose and function of the appellants' contractor quality surveillance work. In contrast, inspection is only one of a variety of techniques used by Quality Assurance Specialists, GS-1910, to develop objective evidence of the effectiveness of quality procedures and controls, identify potential problem areas or inherent weaknesses in the product itself, and determine the need to adjust surveillance or control over operations. These analytical quality assurance program functions were assigned to the Detachment's quality assurance staff.

OPM found that the appellants' primary and paramount work was fully covered by the GS-1152 series. It concluded that the appellants' other assignments were ancillary and integral to the position's primary and paramount GS-1152 functions. The variety of functions performed by each appellant; i.e., "multi-trading," was recognized in the established specialized title of "Ships." As a result, OPM classified the position as Production Controller (Ships), GS-1152.

“Back to the Basics”

The series determination decision in this case illustrates that closely related standards must be read in concert with each other to assure proper series allocation. The decision also illustrates that occupations do not always use terminology interchangeably. The definition of “specifications” in the GS-800 Group is materially different from that of the GS-1100 Group.

Duties and responsibilities assigned to positions are controlled by the mission assigned to the organization in which those positions are found. The positions created to perform an assigned mission must be considered in relation to one another; i.e., each position reflects only a part of the organization's work as a whole. The port engineer position undermined the appellants' claim that their work was covered by the GS-873 series. In addition, the appellants' proposal to classify their positions based on position-to-position comparison was precluded by law. The existence of the engineering and quality assurance staffs also prevented crediting the appellants' positions with the function assigned to those organizations.

Link to [C-1152-11-01](#), [C-1152-11-02](#)

Article No. 25-05

Standards: Electronics Mechanic, 2604 (August 1997)
Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic, 2610 (January 1972)
Aircraft Electrician, 2892 (June 1989)
Aircraft Mechanic, 8852 (January 1999)

Introduction to the Electronic Equipment Installation and Maintenance Family 2600 (1981)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Occupational coverage; definition of integrated system

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellants troubleshoot, inspected, installed, maintained, overhauled, repaired, and modified electronics and related systems on UH-60L Blackhawk utility helicopters. Used for transportation, these helicopters were not equipped with weapons systems. At issue was whether their work was covered by the Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic, 2610 occupation. The appellants worked on complete electronic systems. They claimed that the Automatic Flight Control System (AFCS) was an integrated system within the meaning of the 2610 occupation. The appellants also believed that the Command Instrument System (CIS) was, to a lesser extent, an integrated system.

Resolution

The 2610 Job Grading Standard (JGS), the 2604 JGS, and the Introduction to the Electronic Equipment Installation and Maintenance Family 2600 must be read together. The 2604 JGS covers equipment and systems that use digital microprocessors. The systems have linear system flow in which the signal moves from the input to the output without significant deviation or feedback looping. As discussed in the 2600 JGS, this includes an autopilot system:

which detects minute error signals from a stable platform and amplifies these to drive aileron or elevator servos in which the amount of displacement of the control surface is proportional to the amount of the error signal. This is a simple linear system. The addition of some control inputs to allow turns, climbs, etc., would not change the basic linear signal flow of an error sensing system. Such a system is covered by the Electronics Mechanic Series, 2604.

OPM found that the AFCS was that type of system. The compensating changes sent to the actuators from sensor signal flow were proportional to the amount of error signal. The linear nature of the system was exemplified by the AFCS automatic mode. Unlike a fully integrated electronic system covered by the 2610 JGS, the automatic mode would no longer work when an

error signal was generated if the positions did not agree. In contrast, a 2610 integrated system would process this information and use it to change actuator operation and use continuous feedback to monitor and further modify system operation. The CIS was excluded from 2610 coverage for similar reasons.

The level of maintenance and repair performed by the appellants also precluded coverage by the 2610 JGS. Program instructions; authorized tools, parts, and components; and program goals to limit aircraft down time limited the work the appellants performed. For example, the appellants were not permitted to work on the AFCS computer, the CIS processor, or other equivalent equipment below the major component level. Basic 2610 JGS coverage requires full system maintenance and repair so that errors can be isolated down to their origin. Therefore, the appealed job was excluded from the 2610 occupation.

OPM found that a majority of the appellants' work was covered by the Aircraft Electrician, 2892 JGS. The 2892 JGS covers installing, troubleshooting, adjusting, testing, modifying, calibrating, and repairing aircraft electrical systems and equipment on board conventional and non-conventional aircraft. The appellants' replacing of pedal and other switches and related electrical components was covered by this JGS. Their replacing of cyclic slew spring and trigger, and other mechanical equipment was covered by the Aircraft Mechanic, 8852 JGS.

The record showed that the appellants' 2604 work was the highest graded work that they performed on a regular and recurring basis for a sufficient amount of the time to control the grading of their jobs. Therefore, the appealed job was allocated as Electronics Mechanic, 2604, and that JGS was used for grade determination.

“Back to the Basics”

The occupational coverage determination in this case involved distinguishing between two closely related series. It required a detailed evaluation of the systems serviced. The presence of microprocessors in these systems did not change their fundamental operations from being linear in nature. Even if the systems had met 2610 occupational coverage, the level of maintenance and repair performed by the appellants precluded coverage by the 2610 JGS. This illustrates the basic job grading principle that it is the type of work performed on systems and/or equipment, in addition to the characteristics of the equipment and/or systems themselves, which determine both occupational coverage and level.

Link to [c-2604-11-01](#), [c-2604-11-02](#)

Article No. 25-06

Standard: Grade Level Guide for Aid and Technical Work in the Biological Sciences, GS-400 (Guide) (November 1991)

Factor: Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

Issues: Distinguishing between Levels 1-5 and 1-6

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellant's primary duties were to provide forestry technician support for reforestation and timber stand improvement (TSI) projects for the northernmost part of the District. His reforestation efforts included determining planting needs, site preparation, plantation and cultivation, and seedling survival. Work associated with TSI projects included exams and treatments such as precommercial thinning, pruning, and aerial fertilization. Once decisions were made on how to proceed with reforestation and TSI efforts, much of the fieldwork was contracted out. The appellant served as the Contracting Officer's Representative on these contracts, especially those involving helicopter usage due to his expertise as a helicopter manager. In addition, he used PC and IBM computer programs and databases to collect information regarding the District's activities and accomplishments. At issue was whether these functions and the knowledge they required met Level 1-6.

Resolution

The appellant's rationale was that he was an expert, as defined at Level 1-6, in a narrow specialty area of a scientific field and administrative responsibilities over a block of technical work. The GS-400 Guide, however, explains that *all* technician positions cannot realistically be structured to reach Level 1-6 because of a variety of organizational reasons, including the amount and type of high level work available in the organization; the organization's willingness to delegate authority and controls for programs and projects; the availability, number, and/or assigned responsibilities of on-site professional workers, technician supervisors, or work leaders; ability of the technician; and other such limiting factors.

OPM found that the appellant's position required knowledge of the technical methods and procedures, management practices, agency policies and programs, as well as an extensive familiarity with the methods and practices of silviculture and forest management. This knowledge was used to schedule, organize, and execute projects relating to the reforestation and TSI efforts within the District and to administer projects through database management, contract management, and an expertise in helicopter management for aerial fertilization efforts.

Although the appellant's vast experience allowed him to provide valuable support to the District's reforestation and TSI efforts, the presence of a Silviculture Technician, GS-9, within the same

organization limited the appellant's program functions. The GS-9 position served as a project manager and was responsible for the effective planning and overall performance of all reforestation, timber stand protection, and TSI activities for the District. This was substantiated by the supervisor who said that the appellant and another Silviculture Technician, GS-7, worked on portions of the District's programs. However, the GS-9 coordinated their portions into the larger overall program. Therefore, the appellant was responsible for design, coordination, and execution of projects typical of Level 1-5. Although the appellant worked on projects independently and reported to the Assistant District Ranger, the supervisor relied on the Silviculture Technician, GS-9, to coordinate the appellant's work with other work in the organizational unit. In turn, the appellant's supervisor used knowledge of management practices and the agency's policies and programs to serve as the final authority for the District's reforestation and TSI programs. OPM credited Level 1-5.

“Back to the Basics”

This decision illustrates that classification standards must be applied in an internally consistent manner. Even when positions in an organization are assigned responsible and demanding work, all cannot be credited at the expert level. The existence of a higher level technician with program responsibility for most of the appellant's more complex assignments, coupled with the program controls exercised by the appellant's immediate supervisor, precluded crediting the position at Level 1-6.

Link to [C-0462-07-03](#)

Article No. 25-07

Standard: Research Grade-Evaluation Guide (June 1964)

Factor: N/A

Issues: Distinguishing between Degrees C, D and E

Identification of the Classification Issue

Two appellants were each responsible for conducting research in their respective specializations. Their positions were evaluated by reference to the Research Grade-Evaluation Guide (Guide). The Guide defines three degrees – A, C, and E – with point values of 2, 6, and 10, respectively for the first three factors and point values of 4, 12, and 20, respectively for the fourth factor. The standard allows for intermediate point values for B and D when a factor is determined to fall between the defined degrees. In both cases, the appellants disagreed with the agency determination of Degree C and believed that Degree D or E should be credited for one or more of the factors.

Resolution

Across the factors, Degree C describes a technically responsible scientist researching complex problems that are difficult to define and require unconventional or novel approaches and sophisticated research techniques. The research results in publishable contributions that answer important questions in the field and open significant avenues for further research. The work requires a high degree of originality to define a complex or elusive problem, to develop new methods and techniques, and to relate the results to other research. The researcher is a mature, competent scientist, recognized as a significant contributor to the field.

Degree E is distinguished by research in an area that has previously been unyielding to analysis or the solutions represent advances of great significance. Technical supervision is nominal and consultative. The researcher is expected to explore the most fruitful areas of research within the framework of agency objectives and priorities, taking full responsibility for formulating all the research plans and interpreting the findings. The creative manner in which the scientist extends current theory or methodology or develops new theory or methodology is of marked importance to the scientific field, national economy, national defense, or health, etc.

The appellants believed that exceeding Degree C in any aspect merited credit for the factor at Degree D. However, OPM found that exceeding one of several aspects of Degree C was not sufficient to credit Degree D. Because one of the other criteria for the factor fell short of Degree C, OPM found this counterbalanced the one aspect that exceeded Degree C. Credit at Degree D could only be assigned when Degree E was approached but not entirely met and there were no other limiting aspects to consider. The decisions further explained that, while the Guide does not define “great significance,” such research would involve advances that go far beyond accounting

for previously unexplained phenomena, opening significant avenues for further study, or contributing in an important way to validating or modifying scientific theory, which are fully credited at Degree C.

“Back to the Basics”

These decisions illustrate that, when applying narrative classification standards, an intervening level may be assigned only when the next higher defined level is approached but not entirely met and there are no other limiting aspects to consider. This is based on the fact that narrative factor level descriptions do not describe the ceiling or floor for a factor level. A position must substantially exceed the level defined before crediting at the next higher level can be considered. In addition, when one aspect of a factor level exceeds the defined level but another equally important aspect falls short of the defined level, the factor level is not exceeded.

Link to [C-0470-13-01](#), [C-0413-13-01](#)

Article No. 25-08

Standard: General Schedule Supervisory Guide (April 1998)

Factor: Factor 3, Supervisory and Managerial Authority Exercised

Issue: Crediting Level 3-4b

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellant was the manager of a field unit staffed with about 70 employees. The employing agency credited the appellant's supervisory responsibilities at Level 3-4b on the basis that he exercised final authority for approving the full range of personnel actions and organization design proposals recommended by his subordinate supervisors.

Resolution

Before Level 3-4b may be considered, a position must first fully satisfy the managerial and supervisory authorities described at Level 3-3 under *both* paragraphs a and b of that level (See Digest 19). The basis for this requirement is that the various levels described under Factor 3 are not stand-alone criteria that may be viewed in isolation, but rather represent a continuum of progressively more responsible supervisory/managerial work. Each successively higher factor level description represents *additional* authorities beyond those expressed at the next lower level. Therefore, all of Level 3-3 *must* be met before Level 3-4 may be credited.

Level 3-3a describes a range of managerial authorities that include devising long-range work plans, responding to budget shortages, and planning for long-range staffing needs. Positions at this level are closely involved with high-level program officials (or comparable *agency level* staff personnel) in developing overall goals and objectives related to high levels of program management and development or formulation. The appeal decision noted that most field-level positions would not meet this level. These positions are usually involved in the delivery of basic program services or the execution of line program activities at the field level. Level 3-3a, in contrast, describes *program management* work normally delegated to higher levels in the organization, where the position is involved in making decisions related to broad staffing, budgetary, policy, and regulatory matters affecting the overall program on a *national* level.

Some decentralized agencies have delegated major programs and/or program segments to large field activities. However, in this case, the appellant's unit was not delegated this scope of program responsibility. The appellant provided input to higher levels of management on these basic program execution issues as they related to the resource requirements and working environment of his unit, e.g., commenting on proposed policy or regulatory changes. He occasionally served on task forces and working groups formed to explore new program initiatives or address continuing program issues or concerns. However, these were infrequent project

assignments intended to present a range of options to higher-level decision-making officials. The appellant had no independent authority to make the types of managerial decisions described above. Therefore, Level 3-3a was not met and, by extension, Level 3-4 could not be considered.

OPM found that the employing agency also misconstrued the requirements of Level 3-4b. That level requires the exercise of final authority for the full range of personnel actions and organizational design proposals recommended by subordinate supervisors. It presupposes that the organization and workload are of sufficient size and complexity to require and permit the exercise of these responsibilities on a recurring basis. The appellant's unit was segmented into seven functional divisions. None of these subordinate units were large enough to permit any significant flexibility in the way the work was structured and organized. The unit's mission and activities were stable and did not change substantially over time. The nature of the work performed by the largely specialized professional and skilled labor subordinate positions did not permit reassignment of duties among positions. This type of organizational environment does not allow the opportunity for recurring exercise of the full range of Level 3-4b authorities.

“Back to the Basics”

This decision illustrates that classification standards must be applied in an internally consistent manner. As a threshold standard, each successively higher factor level description represents *additional* authorities beyond those expressed at the next lower level. Therefore, Level 3-3 *must* be creditable in its entirety before Level 3-4 may be considered. The decision also makes clear that all independent field units are not large and complex enough to allow their managers to regularly exercise the full range of authorities required to credit Level 3-4.

Link to [C-0025-14-01](#)