



United States
Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
November 1983
No. 03-10

Standards: N/A
Factors: N/A
Issue: Grading deputy or assistant chief positions

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose from an agency request for an opinion regarding the grading of deputy chief positions. Determining the proper grade of a deputy chief position (hereinafter also means assistant chief position) has not posed a problem in most instances in which the total supervisory responsibility was of such a scope that there was a real need for such position *and* the deputy chief participated to a very large measure in helping to carry out virtually the full scope of the responsibility. As provided in the Supervisory Grade-Evaluation Guide, such deputy chief position is usually classified one normal grade level below the proper grade for the chief position. However, the determination should never be made mechanically, but on the basis of sound judgment.

A question recurringly asked of the Office of Personnel Management is: May a deputy chief position be classified at the same grade as a chief position? This is the issue.

Resolution

In addition to examining the supervisory responsibility of the deputy chief position, it is always necessary to examine the nonsupervisory responsibility (as measured by a nonsupervisory standard), because the nonsupervisory responsibility could conceivably warrant the same grade as the chief position.

The argument that some agencies offer for classifying a deputy chief position at the same grade as the chief position is that there is an equal sharing of the total supervisory responsibility.

Illustrative of the conditions believed to evidence equal sharing are the following:

--The deputy chief exercises full associate authority concurrently with the chief and is neither subordinate to nor shares authority with another deputy chief.

--The chief must frequently be absent from the organization, thus frequently requiring the deputy chief unilaterally to make major decisions or commitments of a binding nature.

--The deputy chief has full authority to supervise the units and subordinate personnel of the organization.

--The deputy chief has interchangeable status with the chief in serving on boards, committees, etc., and dealing with high-ranking officials outside the organization.

Essential to the proper examination of the issue is the fact that the most important supervisory decisions (e.g., broad policy or operational decisions affecting the organization on a relatively long-term basis) have the most effect on grade determination by application of the governing supervisory guide or standard.

There are two main arguments against the equality concept.

First, the indicators of equality (e.g., those itemized above) are largely illusory, describing situations that cannot exist on a continuing basis. Equality is predicated either on (1) full, continuous agreement and harmony between the chief and deputy chief and equality in decision impacts or (2) in the absence of such agreement and harmony, a carefully developed and followed arrangement for decision-making that ensures that the deputy chief is not guided or restricted by the views or decisions of the chief any more than the chief is guided or restricted by the views or decisions of the deputy chief, *and* equality of their decision impacts. Type (1) equality would be phenomenal. Type (2) equality would tend to be unstable, vanishing if either the chief or the deputy chief ever unilaterally made important decisions that the other could not countermand or balance with equally important decisions. The result of maintaining equality would be organizational instability and chaos, stagnation, or some combination of both.

Second, if there were equality, the total responsibility and authority of the chief position would be so diluted that it would not warrant the grade normally warranted for such responsibility and authority. Thus, while the grade for the chief and deputy chief positions might be the same, the grade, especially of the chief position, would be anomalistic and likely unacceptable, i.e., one or two grades lower than normal chief positions in comparable organizations.

The two above arguments apply as well when the chief position is filled by a member of the military. This situation demands especially careful examination because of the frequent seemingly titular role of such member.

In conclusion, we anticipate that the situations in which a deputy chief position could warrant the same grade as the chief position would be extremely rare, on the basis of supervisory responsibilities, and, if existing, would almost surely restrict or lower the grade of the chief position.