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Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standard: [FWS JGS for Supervisors](#) (December 1992)
Factor: N/A
Issue: Exclusion of Small Shop Chief Jobs From Coverage

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in the adjudication of job grading appeals by several OPM oversight divisions. The appellants occupied small shop chief (SSC) jobs in various trades, including Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic, WG-2610, Aircraft Electrician, WG-2892, Sheet Metal Mechanic, WG-3806, and Aircraft Pneudraulic Systems Mechanic, WG-8268. Each appellant supervised two or three subordinates performing the journey-level work of the trade and performed work in the same trade that they supervised. The appellants claimed that they spent sufficient time supervising the work of their shop to warrant grading of their jobs by application of the Federal Wage System (FWS) Job Grading Standard (JGS) for Supervisors. The appellants put forth several rationales for coverage by the FWS JGS for Supervisors, including that they performed supervisory duties more than 50 percent of the time and that they worked with and along-side their subordinates performing the journey-level work of their organization. One appellant also claimed the 85 percent threshold was too stringent and, instead, referred to the 25 percent threshold used in the General Schedule system.

The appellants' claims were based on a job grading advisory issued by the OPM Classification Programs Division on the coverage of the FWS JGS for Supervisors and the related FWS JGS for Leader, which stated:

The central coverage criteria for both standards, i.e., the ongoing requirement that supervisors and leaders perform supervisory/leader duties on a substantially full-time and continuing basis is stringent . . . substantially full-time means performing supervisory/leader duties to such an extent that, for all intents and

purposes, it is considered to be comparable to full-time or 100 percent. Consequently, positions that perform supervisory/leader duties on less than a substantially full-time basis (i.e., less than 85 percent) do not meet the basic criteria for coverage and should not be evaluated under these standards. . . .

Working supervisors meet the "substantially full-time" requirement under the FWS supervisory job grading standard. . . . They perform the full-range of first-level supervisory duties in tandem with the journey-level work of the organization -- the supervisory responsibility continues to be exercised even when mingled with journey-level work assignments. Because the supervisory responsibility is continuous, and is performed on a substantially full-time basis, percentage of time is not a factor. . . .

Unlike working supervisors/leaders who routinely work with and alongside their journey-level counterparts, small shop chiefs function in a totally different manner. In addition to their program responsibility work, they perform nonsupervisory work independently from and unrelated to the journey-level work performed by the other individuals in their small shops. The similarities that occasionally exist between small shop chiefs and working supervisors/leaders are surface similarities at best.

Resolution

OPM found that the positions did not meet the threshold for job grading coverage by the FWS JGS for Supervisors. Discussions with the appellants and their immediate supervisors confirmed that the subordinates' identical additional PD's were current and accurate, reflecting the need for very little supervision. The journey level concept within the FWS presumes that occupants of such jobs are delegated significant work planning responsibilities. For example, Electronics Integrated Systems Mechanic, WG-2610-12 employees make decisions and judgments regarding troubleshooting techniques, modification and repair procedures; plan the sequence of work, and select the tools needed; determine the nature of repairs necessary to correct faults; and exercise primary responsibility for checking out the complete integrated systems. Aircraft Electrician, WG-2892-10 workers perform the same type of duties, but as they relate to the aircraft wiring system for which they are responsible.

OPM found that if the appellants were to exercise the breadth and depth of supervision necessary to occupy the amount of time claimed in their appeal rationales, the subordinate jobs could not sustain their grading at the journey-level. While the appellants might spend a significant amount of time on administrative functions to support their immediate supervisor, e.g., providing for shop facility and other support needs including property accountability, their technical supervision over journey-level work should be minimal. Furthermore, with only two or three civilian journey-level subordinates, limited turnover, and no disciplinary problems, very little time

would be spent on such activities as advising employees on performance issues, handling disciplinary problems, recruiting, and investigating complaints.

Responding to the cases in which the appellants claimed that they were working supervisors who worked side-by-side with their subordinates on two- or three-person team assignments, OPM stated that the FWS permits only one of those people to be credited with performing the journey level work of the assignment. For example, while two or three journey level carpenters may be sent out on a project, only one of them may be credited as exercising the work planning and control functions inherent in journey-level work. In each of these cases, the appellant's supervisor confirmed that most of the time the senior person on the team was responsible for writing up and signing off on the work orders. OPM determined that if the appellant was out on a team as the senior shop person, the appellant would be the final authority on all forms. Thus, when the appellant functioned as the team lead, OPM concluded that the supporting subordinate(s) could not be construed as performing the same kind and level of work as the appellant. As a result, the appellant was not functioning as a working supervisor within the meaning of the FWS JGS for Supervisors.

For the foregoing reasons, OPM was persuaded that the appellants' jobs clearly fell short of coverage by the FWS JGS for Supervisors.

“Back to the Basics”

Although not directly addressed in these decisions, OPM found the appellants' rationale evidenced some confusion as to the differences between FWS job grading principles and practices and General Schedule (GS) classification principles and practices. In the GS system, both nonsupervisory and supervisory positions are evaluated against the same grade level criteria defined in law. These grades are linked to a unified pay scale. As discussed in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, the highest level of work performed on a regular and recurring basis for 25 percent or more of the work time typically controls the grade level of a GS position.

In contrast, the FWS system uses key rank jobs to establish grading relationships for nonsupervisory jobs. The FWS JGS's for Supervisors and Leader are used as pay setting instruments to establish appropriate pay relationships between the level of work led or supervised based on the relative breadth and depth of responsibility and authority vested in the job.

Therefore, FWS supervisory jobs with limited work planning, direction, and related authority over the work controlled receive a lower pay differential than those with long-term work planning, direction, and administrative authorities. Because of the significant pay differentials provided by applying these JGS's, their thresholds for coverage are stringent.

The threshold for evaluation as a working supervisor is dependent upon both the work situation and the trade or craft involved. For example, the Motor Vehicle Operator, WG-5703 occupation,

in which journey-level workers typically drive alone, does not lend itself to having supervisors work with and alongside their journey-level staff. Therefore, it would be atypical to have a working supervisor in a WG-5703 occupation. In contrast, some occupations and their typical work settings provide for working supervisor situations. For example, a Materials Handler Supervisor, WS-6907 may function as a working supervisor over a large warehouse, performing the same journey-level work as those performed by five or six subordinates. In smaller warehouse situations, however, limited work direction and control functions typically are vested in a senior Materials Handler job as discussed in the WG-6907 JGS.

Overall, when evaluating positions, OPM has observed that duties and responsibilities assigned to a job flow from the mission assigned to the organization in which those jobs are found. The positions created to perform that assigned mission must be considered in relation to one another; i.e., each job reflects only a part of the organization's work as a whole. Therefore, the duties and responsibilities assigned to a position and performed by the employee should not be considered in a vacuum.