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Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standard: [Fire Protection and Prevention Series, GS-0081](#) (September 1991)
Factor: N/A
Issue: Using the "assistant chief" concept for nonsupervisory positions

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in the reconsideration of a classification appeal decision issued by an Office of Personnel Management region. The position in question was a nonsupervisory fire protection specialist responsible for the training and safety programs of the fire department at a military base. The region determined that the position met the definition of an assistant chief (Section I of Part I of the standard) because the appellant was delegated overall program management responsibility for the fire department's training and safety programs, to include planning, developing, and implementing the base's activities for these programs. Accordingly, the region evaluated the position by applying the guidance in Section III of Part I of the GS-0081 standard, which directs that an assistant chief position that is not a full deputy be graded two grades below the grade of the fire chief.

The agency challenged the region's interpretation of the GS-0081 standard, arguing that Part I of the standard is applicable to supervisory positions *only*. Because the appellant's position had no supervisory responsibilities, the agency contended that the position should have been evaluated in accordance with the instructions in Part II of the standard covering Type B positions, i.e., positions with full-time staff responsibility for one phase of the total fire protection and prevention program. The instructions in the Organization of the Standard section state that Type B positions are to be evaluated by comparison to classification standards for related occupations involving work relating to the type of assignment with which the position is involved.

The issue to be resolved was: What is the difference between a Type B position covered by Part II of the standard and an assistant fire chief position covered by Part I of the standard?

Resolution

The Classification Appeals Office sought advice from the Office of Classification on distinguishing between the two types of positions. The Office of Classification advised:

The example of a Type B fire protection specialist on page 2 of the GS-0081 standard should be viewed as an employee who is responsible for developing and implementing training courses or a series of courses. The definition of an assistant chief on page 6 describes a position that is in charge of overall *program management* for *one or more* programs. This distinction is important in defining the difference between the two types of positions. The assistant chief (unlike Type B positions) exercises primary responsibility for planning, developing, implementing, reviewing, and evaluating a program.

The concept of "program management" has been discussed in previous Office of Personnel Management guidance. (See, for example, Digest No. 3, dated November 1983.) Typically, program management responsibilities include such activities as:

--planning and scheduling work to meet program goals and general objectives established by a higher organizational echelon;

--development of recommendations to higher level management on the level and mix of resources (staff, money, space, and equipment) needed;

--coordination of program activities with other staff offices and with line managers to achieve mutual objectives;

--systematic evaluation of program activities and functions to measure the effectiveness of program efforts;

--modification of program methods and approaches; and

--assessment of the applicability of current program objectives and recommending changes.

An additional indication of the existence of program management responsibility is the need to assign, direct, and review the work of other employees, including collaterally assigned employees who participate in carrying out program activities.

Applying this general guidance, the Office of Classification advised that the distinction between a Type B specialist and an assistant fire chief position does not rest on the presence or absence of supervisory duties. The Type B fire protection specialist is concerned only with the technical

aspects of a program and must be classified by using standards for related occupations. A position delegated *both* technical and program management responsibility, while still officially titled Fire Protection Specialist, is classified under the grading criteria for assistant fire chiefs, i.e., two grades below that of the fire chief.

In the instant case, the appellant performed both technical and program management duties. The Classification Appeals Office determined that the appellant carried out the majority of the specific program management activities listed above and spent most of his time planning, scheduling, implementing, and reviewing program activities for a fire department of 85 employees.

Additionally, the appellant was responsible for assigning, reviewing, monitoring, and evaluating the performance of 15 instructors who conducted training courses on two shifts.

The Classification Appeals Office determined that the appellant's duties were consistent with "program management" responsibility as it is intended to be credited to assistant chief positions in the GS-0081 series. The absence of one or two of the specific program management activities listed above was not considered of such significance to preclude crediting the appellant with overall responsibility for the assigned programs. The program management duties not performed were considered more indicative of the relatively limited scope of the appellant's programs than his level of delegated responsibility. Accordingly, the appellant's position was evaluated under the instructions in Section III of Part I of the GS-081 standard. Since the fire chief's position was evaluated at the GS-12 level, the appellant's position was evaluated two grades lower, at the GS-10 level.