

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability
Classification Appeals Program

Dallas Field Services Group
Plaza of the Americas, North Tower
700 North Pearl Street, Suite 525
Dallas, TX 75201

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Human Resources Assistant
GS-203-8

Organization: Human Resources Management Team
Division of Business Resources
Office of State Director
[state name] State Office
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
[location]

OPM decision: Human Resources Assistant
(Employee Benefits)
GS-203-8

OPM decision number: C-0203-08-01

/s/ Kevin E. Mahoney

Kevin E. Mahoney
Deputy Associate Director
Center for Merit System Accountability

January 5, 2006

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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).

Since this decision changes the title of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of this decision (5 CFR 511.702). The servicing human resources office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

Decision sent to:

[appellant's name and address]

Human Resources Officer
[state name] State Office
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
[address]

Director of Personnel
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 5230
Washington, DC 20240

Introduction

The Dallas Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal on September 6, 2005, from [appellant]. The appellant's position is currently classified as a Human Resources (HR) Assistant, GS-203-8, but she believes her duties should be classified as an HR Specialist (Employee Benefits), GS-201, at either the GS-9 or GS-11 grade levels. The position is assigned to the HR Management Team, Division of Business Resources, Office of State Director, [state name] State Office, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), at [city and state]. We received the agency's administrative report on October 6, 2005. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

General issues

The appellant discusses the large amount of work she performs. She said additional responsibilities are tasked specifically to her since the quality of her work is exceptional. Volume and quality of work, however, cannot be considered in determining the grade of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5).

Position information

As a member of the HR Management Team, the appellant is responsible for delivering a wide range of HR services to approximately 860 employees located in 10 field offices within the State Office's four-state jurisdiction covering [names of four states]. The offices provide a broad range of programs and services focusing on rangeland management, cultural resources and American Indian relationships, mining law administration, cadastral surveys, caves, forestry, hazardous materials management, helium, law enforcement, recreation, and wilderness. Besides the appellant, the HR office is currently staffed with one GS-301-13, [name] Regional Recruiter; three GS-201-12, HR Specialist; and three GS-203-7, HR Assistant, positions. The appellant is supervised by the GS-201-13, Personnel Officer.

The appellant performs work in several areas including employee benefits, travel management, injury and unemployment claims, and personnel action processing. She and the supervisor agreed that the time spent by the appellant on these duties fluctuates throughout the year; e.g., the work on retirements increases sharply from September to December. Overall, they agreed the appellant, as the primary benefits and retirement counselor, spends 30 percent of her time on employee benefits work. The work entails providing information to employees and family members on retirement options under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), both regular and offset; calculating annuity computations; explaining health and life insurance options; and presenting, coordinating, and forwarding retirement actions and correspondence to OPM and other relevant offices. Prior to performing retirement calculations, the appellant reviews the employee's official personnel folder (OPF) to ensure the correctness of the service computation date (SCD); identify periods of part-time or intermittent service; and to verify potential errors in retirement service designations. The appellant also provides retirement and benefits information at employee orientations and

briefings, covering topics such as the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB), Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), and Federal Employee Group Life Insurance programs (FEGLI).

Another 30 percent of the appellant's time is spent on administering the travel management program, which involves advising on and executing actions related to expenses for temporary duty travel (TDY) and permanent change of station (PCS) moves. This involves determining and advising employees on eligibility for reimbursement entitlements; calculating travel costs related to per diem rates, shipment of household goods, and other miscellaneous expenses; and selecting and making arrangements with moving companies. The appellant also completes applicable forms, obtains required signatures, and forwards packages to DOI's National Business Center (NBC) for processing. This work is expected to change as DOI is currently implementing e-Travel and e-PCS, which are intended to automate and consolidate travel processes through self-service functions including travel planning, authorizations, reservations, payment of travel claims, and voucher reimbursement. The appellant, designated as the point of contact for these electronic initiatives, attends DOI implementation and training events.

The appellant spends 20 percent of her time on injury, occupational illness or disease, and unemployment claims. This entails receiving, processing, submitting, and maintaining claims with the Office of Workers' Compensation Program (OWCP); advising employees, supervisors, and medical offices on filing injury claims; and working collaboratively with OWCP claim representatives and agency officials to return injured employees to work or, if warranted, to remove them from the employment rolls. The appellant also represents the agency at telephonic unemployment hearings. The appellant spends the remaining 20 percent of her time on processing HR actions related to those programs for which she is responsible; i.e., benefits, OWCP administration, and travel management.

The appellant and immediate supervisor certified to the accuracy of the duties described in the position description (PD) of record, number [number]. This PD and other material of record furnish much more information about the appellant's duties and responsibilities and how they are performed and we incorporate it by reference into this decision. To help decide this appeal, we conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on November 21, 2005, a follow-up discussion with her on December 1, and a telephone interview with the immediate supervisor on November 21. In deciding this appeal, we carefully considered all of the information gained from these interviews, as well as written information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including the PD of record.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant disagrees with her agency's assignment of her position to the GS-203 series, which covers one-grade interval administrative support positions that supervise, lead, or perform HR assistance work requiring substantial knowledge of civilian and/or military HR terminology, requirements, procedures, operations, functions, and regulatory policy and procedural requirements applicable to HR transactions. The work does not require the broad knowledge of Federal HR systems or the depth of knowledge about HR concepts, principles and techniques. HR assistants provide support for HR specialists in using information systems and in delivering services in the various specialty areas of HR.

The appellant believes her work warrants classification to the GS-201 series, which covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, administer, advise on, or deliver HR management products or services. Since some tasks are common to both administrative and support occupations, it is not always easy to distinguish between assistants classified in one-grade interval administrative support occupations and specialists classified in two-grade interval administrative occupations. Both GS-201 and GS-203 standards discuss how to distinguish between specialist and assistant work. Guidance on distinguishing between administrative and support work is also contained in *The Classifier's Handbook*.

Support work usually involves proficiency in one or more functional areas or in certain limited phases of a specified program. Normally a support position can be identified with the mission of a particular organization or program. The work usually does not require knowledge of interrelationships among functional areas or organizations. Employees performing support work follow established methods and procedures. Specifically, HR assistants have boundaries that narrowly restrict their work. They use a limited variety of techniques, standards, or regulations. The problems HR assistants deal with are recurring and have precedents. These limitations impact the breadth and depth of knowledge required, the complexity of problem solving, the applicability of guidelines, and the closeness of supervisory controls.

On the other hand, administrative work primarily requires a high order of analytical ability combined with a comprehensive knowledge of (1) the functions, processes, theories, and principles of management, and (2) the methods used to gather, analyze, and evaluate information. Administrative work also requires skill in applying problem-solving techniques and skill in communicating both orally and in writing. Administrative positions do not require specialized education, but they do involve the types of skills typically gained through college-level education or through progressively responsible experience. In particular, full-performance HR specialists use broad HR management knowledge, concepts, and principles to perform a wide variety of work in one more HR specialty areas.

We examined the characteristics and requirements of the appellant's work, as well as management's intent in establishing the position, to decide the proper occupational series. We found the appellant's OWCP work requires an application of those skills; i.e., analysis, research, writing, and judgment, approaching those indicative of administrative positions. For example, the appellant follows up with injured employees on the long-term disability rolls. Due to her efforts, the agency terminated three employees after they declined positions within their physical limitations. The appellant calculated the agency's savings at 6.25 million dollars based on an estimate of compensation for individuals with the average life expectancy. Since one of the individuals removed was injured at a relatively young age, that termination accounted for a savings estimated at 3 million dollars. She accomplished this by doing extensive research on precedents available on-line by the Harvard Law Library; the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Employees' Compensation Appeals Board, who hears and decides cases originating from OWCP claims; and CyberFeds, which is a fee-based service providing a combination of practical guidance, case law, and handouts and manuals. This work goes beyond querying a Web site to determine if the information fits a particular situation. Instead, the appellant conducts research for precedents comparable to her situation; identifies any complicating factors; e.g., equal employment opportunity complaints, that may have weighed significantly enough in the

precedent's decision to render it inapplicable to the appellant's situation; and then determines a course of action consistent with potentially more than one precedent.

However, OWCP and unemployment duties *combined* occupy only 20 percent of the appellant's time. And since she also performs OWCP duties characteristic of HR assistant work; e.g., reviews, processes, and submits injury claims, the appellant's work spent on researching and interpreting precedents occupies significantly less than 20 percent. According to the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* (Introduction), only duties occupying at least 25 percent of an employee's time can affect the title, series, or grade of a position. Furthermore, there is no expectation of this workload increasing. On the contrary, the appellant said the implementation and maintenance of the e-Travel and e-PCS systems will increase significantly and may possibly consume upwards of 70 percent of her time. Since these initiatives are only now being implemented, neither the appellant nor the immediate supervisor is certain of what duties will be specifically assigned. The appellant speculates these duties, which are typical of HR assistant work, will involve maintaining the database by linking employee names to the correct supervisor, reviewing vouchers, and educating staff on the systems.

As the primary benefits counselor, the appellant refers to applicable laws and regulations, OPM handbooks and guides, and agency-specific procedures, if any, to advise employees, annuitants, and family members on a wide range of benefits-related matters. In addition to conducting Internet searches on the OPM and the Snow-Cap Agency, Incorporated, Web sites, she may also contact OPM or NBC for guidance. In contrast to administrative occupations, the appellant's benefits work does not require applying a high level of analysis or judgment to make the information gathered fit a particular situation. Due to the nature of the work, the appellant cannot make decisions based on her research; she is limited to sharing this information with her clients to assist them in making a more informed choice. Therefore, the collection of data is typically the end in itself rather than as a means to an end.

Although HR assistant duties may be similar to those of HR specialist trainees, a specialist-in-training is in a temporary stage of development and is performing assignments requiring progressively more judgment and analysis. We understand the appellant receives guidance from the immediate supervisor or HR specialists in fairly limited situations. For example, she will ask for guidance if the situation is unique or controversial. In all other situations, according to the immediate supervisor, the appellant acts fairly independently. If the appellant's position is developmental in nature with progressively more difficult assignments being made, the level of involvement between the HR specialists and the immediate supervisor with the appellant will increase as there will be a greater need to collaborate in dealing with the increasingly difficult HR work. In contrast, the record does not show this type or degree of interaction.

Consequently, the appellant's position is properly classified to the GS-203 series. We applied the grading criteria in the Job Family Position Classification Standard (JFS) for Assistance Work in the Human Resources Group, GS-200, to evaluate the appellant's work. The authorized title for the appellant's position is Human Resources Assistant. We find the appellant's grade controlling work is appropriately covered by the parenthetical designator (Employee Benefits), because she is primarily responsible for work involving support of employee guidance and

consultation to agencies, employees, former employees, annuitants, survivors, and eligible family members regarding retirement, insurance, health benefits, and injury compensation.

Grade determination

The GS-203 JFS is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are assigned for each of the nine factors. The total is converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table provided in the JFS. Under this system, each factor-level description demonstrates the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor-level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. Conversely, if a position factor is evaluated at above the highest factor level published in the classification standard, the factor is evaluated by reference to the Primary Standard, the FES's "standard-for-standards," in Appendix 3 of the Introduction.

Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that the employee must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, regulations, and principles) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

At Level 1-5, which is the highest level described in the JFS, the work requires knowledge of, and skill in applying, a comprehensive body of HR rules, procedures, and technical methods sufficient to carry out limited projects, analyze a variety of routine facts, research minor complaints or problems that are not readily understood, and summarize HR facts and issues. Examples of work at this level include making presentations following established lesson plans for routine administrative support subjects; conducting interviews to identify and organize pertinent facts of a situation; and providing advice to employees regarding minor problems of employee conduct, dissatisfaction, or poor work habits.

The appellant's benefits work meets but does not exceed Level 1-5. The JFS includes an illustration of work at Level 1-5 where the HR assistant applies knowledge of, and skill in applying, a comprehensive body of HR rules, procedures, and technical methods concerning employee benefits sufficient to research, identify, and explain complicated and in-depth employee benefit-related issues such as health benefits conversion and complicated annuity calculations. This is a match to the appellant's position. She also conducts interviews with retirement eligibles, gathers data to determine creditable service for retirement eligibility, identifies and researches potential issues, and prepares retirement estimates and packages to be forwarded to OPM. The appellant has completed and processed approximately 57 retirement packages this past calendar year, but this workload is expected to rise as 30 percent of the workforce is or will soon be eligible to retire. The appellant and immediate supervisor believe the work is increasing in difficulty, because (1) more individuals are being placed in an erroneous retirement system; (2) service histories are difficult to piece together due to missing, incorrect, or incomplete personnel actions in the OPF; and (3) the appellant is advising disabled employees on their available options ranging from being placed into a light duty position to applying for disability retirement. If the individual chooses a disability retirement, the appellant

will advise the employee on eligibility requirements, disability annuity estimates, and duration of annuity.

The appellant also provides information and advice to supervisors, employees, and their family members concerning a wide variety of benefits issues including FEHB, TSP, FEGLI, and Social Security. As described at Level 1-5, the appellant conducts Internet research to locate the policies and procedures being established for newer benefits initiatives; e.g., the Flexible Spending Account and the Federal Long-Term Health Care Insurance Program, at other Federal agencies, and then determines which of these procedures and policies may be adopted locally. Her recommendations are shared with the immediate supervisor and the second-level supervisor, the Deputy State Director for Business Resources.

As for her travel management work, we determined the knowledge required falls short of that required at Level 1-5. Consistent with Level 1-3, the appellant uses a thorough knowledge of guidelines for travel entitlements in order to verify eligibility for reimbursement of costs associated with PCS and TDY moves. Although each travel situation poses its own unique situation, she is not required to have knowledge of an extensive body of rules and procedures dealing with nonstandard work, which is typical at Level 1-4. Instead, her work is covered by standard procedures and rules; e.g., she must be knowledgeable of the Federal Travel Regulations and other guidelines covering travel entitlements to provide advice to employees and supervisors. She also makes necessary arrangements to relocate employees and their belongings. This aspect of her work; e.g., providing information, serving as contact point for the new electronic travel and PCS systems, and providing completed documents to the NBC for processing, does not involve the variety of issues and situations typical of Level 1-4.

The appellant's work requires knowledge of a variety of HR programs and the knowledge required to perform the employee benefits work, particularly those dealing with the most complex cases and programmatic development issues, is consistent with that required at Level 1-5 (750 points). This level is credited since that work occupies a sufficient portion of her work time to control the evaluation of this factor.

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work. Controls are exercised by the supervisor in the way assignments are made, instructions are given to the employee, priorities and deadlines are set, and objectives and boundaries are defined. Responsibility of the employee depends upon the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work; to modify or recommend changes to instructions; and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives.

At Level 2-3, which is the highest level identified in the JFS, HR assistants plan the work, carry out successive steps of assignments, resolve problems, and make adjustments using established practices and procedures. In addition, they recommend alternative actions to the supervisor; handle problems and/or deviations that arise in accordance with instructions, policies, and guidelines; and refer new or controversial issues to the supervisor for direction.

The appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 2-3. As at this level, the appellant plans her own work, resolves problems, and makes adjustments within established policy or overall objectives and priorities defined by the supervisor. The supervisor defines continuing assignments, provides information on new tasks, and assists with unusual or controversial problems with no clear precedents. The appellant's work does not receive a detailed review as these duties are handled largely in accordance with established instructions, policies, and guidelines. Her experience and knowledge of benefits work allows her to work independently with little or no day-to-day supervision. The appellant keeps the supervisor informed of any potential problems or issues that may adversely impact the State Office; e.g., the pending retirement of individuals in a high-level, critical, and/or hard-to-fill position. The appellant's second-level supervisor occasionally assigns work directly to her; e.g., to provide defensive driving classes and draft policy statements. The appellant has drafted policy statements related to HR programs for which she is responsible. This work is comparable to an illustration identified at Level 2-3, where HR assistants are responsible for job products such as drafting policy statements. The second-level supervisor also directly asks the appellant for a status on occupational disease claims, especially for those relating to asbestos or other "sick building" issues. The appellant's work is largely driven by customer demand, so, as at Level 2-3, the appellant uses initiative in carrying out these recurring assignments independently without specific instructions.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor considers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. The appellant believes her guidelines exceed Level 3-3, in that her OWCP work requires extensive research and interpretation of laws, regulations, and precedent decisions.

At Level 3-3, which is the highest level identified in the JFS, HR assistants use guidelines that have gaps in specificity and are not applicable to all work situations. The employee selects the most appropriate guideline and decides how to complete the various transactions. Assistants use judgment to devise more efficient methods for procedural processing, gather and organize information for inquiries, or resolve problems referred by others. In some situations, guidelines do not apply directly to assignments and require the employee to make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations.

At Level 3-4 in the Primary Standard, the employee has administrative policies and precedents that are applicable but stated in general terms. Guidelines for performing the work are scarce or of limited use. The employee uses initiative and resourcefulness in deviating from traditional methods or researching trends and patterns to develop new methods, criteria, or proposed new policies.

Level 3-3 is met. Available guidelines include the United States Code, Code of Federal Regulations, Federal Travel Regulations, agency-specific policies and procedures, various handbooks, and OPM's retirement manuals and tools. Additional guidelines are available online. The U.S. General Services Administration provides information on TDY and PCS moves

on its Web site; OPM on benefits and retirement; and DOL on OWCP and occupational disease claims. The appellant can also find guidance on the CyberFeds and Snow-Cap Agency Web sites, or by contacting officials at NBC, OPM, or DOL. Comparable to Level 3-3, the appellant's guidelines do not always apply directly to her assignments and require her to adapt to cover new work situations. For example, the appellant handles all benefits and retirement questions, which requires her to research and interpret laws and regulations. She advises employees and their family members of their various options. The appellant and immediate supervisor said that retirement issues are getting more complicated in that she is regularly dealing with individuals in the wrong retirement system or in reconstructing oftentimes complex and confusing service histories. According to the appellant, one retirement case took her two years to complete as it involved correcting 45 processing actions resulting from errors by another Federal agency. Although this case is not representative of the depth of problems typically encountered by the appellant, the work, as expected at Level 3-3, requires her to deal with resolving problems and issues by selecting the most appropriate guidelines, which often do not apply directly to the situation.

With regard to the appellant's OWCP work, as previously discussed, these duties do not constitute regular and recurring work occupying a sufficient portion of her time to be considered in determining the series or grade of the position. Even if we were to consider this work, the guidelines covering the appellant's OWCP work would not meet the intent of Level 3-4. Although applying initiative and resourcefulness to research trends and patterns, the appellant is not developing new methods, criteria, or proposed new policies as expected at Level 3-4. Moreover, the guidelines for the appellant's benefits and travel management work contrast with those depicted at Level 3-4 by being extensive, specific, and comprehensive.

Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

At Level 4-3, which is the highest level identified in the JFS, the work consists of different and unrelated steps in accomplishing HR assignments and processes. HR assistants at this level consider factual data, identify the scope and nature of the problems or issues, and determine the appropriate action from many alternatives. Assistants identify and analyze HR issues and/or problems to determine their interrelationships and to determine the appropriate methods and techniques needed to resolve them.

The complexity of the appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 4-3. Illustrative of this level, the appellant provides guidance to current and former employees, annuitants, survivors, and eligible family members regarding retirement, TSP, life insurance, and health benefits. The appellant determines creditable service for retirement purposes, determines if military service is creditable and for what purposes, computes annuity estimates, and completes all retirement paperwork. Her work routinely involves preparing complicated retirement

estimates and complex creditable service computations. Examples of problems typically handled by the appellant include those involving retired military service which is only creditable for leave and retirement purposes if there has been a military service deposit; erroneous retirement coverage; advising employees on the pros and cons of disability retirement; and reconstructing service histories when Standard Form 50s are missing, incorrect, or incomplete. These complicating factors are typical of the work described at this level. The appellant also resolves problems involving travel entitlements. Individual circumstances vary significantly, so the appellant must determine the most appropriate methods, guidelines, and any available resources for resolving travel entitlement issues, which is comparable to Level 4-3.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work; i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignments, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-3, which is the highest level identified in the JFS, the work involves treating a variety of routine problems, questions, or situations using established procedures, such as explaining benefits options available to employees based upon analysis of individual cases. The work has a direct effect on the quality and adequacy of employee records, program operations, and services provided through the HR office. Work also affects the social and economic well being of persons serviced through the HR office.

The appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 5-3. The PCS provides an illustration of Level 5-3, which includes work explaining benefit options available to employees based upon analysis of individual cases and processing claims that require identifying and substantiating relevant information. Work at this level affects the quality and adequacy of services the employee benefits program provides. This is a direct match for the appellant's position. The appellant works to resolve employee benefits issues and problems encountered. For example, she resolves problems with employees who have been placed into the wrong retirement system, or with correcting errors found in the calculation of SCDs due to an error based on military service record or improper credit given for non-qualifying appointments. She resolves technical problems in accordance with established criteria, guidelines, and/or practices. The appellant's work includes administering and providing assistance regarding FEHB, TSP, FEGLI, and several retirement options (e.g., CSRS, FERS, and disability retirement). The appellant assists employees and beneficiaries on retirement and benefit matters, prepares retirement estimates and paperwork, reviews all benefit forms, determines creditable Federal service, reviews OPFs for accuracy, and prepares for benefit open seasons. Like Level 5-3, the appellant's work has a direct effect on the quality and adequacy of employee records, program operations, and services provided through the HR office that includes a variety of employee benefit problems, questions, and situations, such as ensuring accurate and timely retirement calculations, and providing accurate and timely advice. Also similar to Level 5-3, the accuracy and adequacy of the appellant's travel management work facilitates the NBC's ability to process vouchers in a timely manner.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 6 and 7, Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts

Personal contacts include face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place. These factors are interdependent. The same contacts selected for crediting Factor 6 must be used to evaluate Factor 7. The appropriate level for personal contacts and the corresponding level for purpose of contacts are determined by applying the point assignment chart for Factors 6 and 7.

Personal Contacts

At Level 2, which is the highest level identified in the JFS, the HR assistant has contact with employees and managers in the agency, both inside and outside the immediate office or related units, as well as applicants, retirees, and/or the general public, in moderately structured settings. Contact with employees and managers may be from various levels within the agency, such as headquarters, regions, districts, field offices, or other operating offices at the same location. The appellant believes her contacts exceed this level. In her appeal request, the appellant stated, "I deal with contractors, other Federal agencies, survivors, retirees, judges, and managers at various levels."

At Level 3 in the Primary Standard, contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in a moderately unstructured setting. For example, the contacts are not established on a routine basis; the purpose and extent of each contact is different; and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact. Typical of contacts at this level are those with persons in their capacities as attorneys; contractors; or representatives of professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups.

The appellant has a variety of personal contacts needed to complete her assignments. The more routine are those with employees, supervisors, retirees, medical offices, and family members located at the State or field offices. The appellant's personal contacts also include OPM retirement specialists, NBC employees, and OWCP claim representatives. These contacts, which are comparable to Level 2, constitute a regular and recurring part of her job. We recognize the appellant has contact with judges and attorneys in moderately unstructured settings when representing the agency at unemployment hearings. The appellant has participated in three unemployment hearings this past year. However, the immediate supervisor said he foresees this duty eventually being assigned to the HR specialist (Employee Relations) position, which has recently been filled. The appellant's contacts with contractors are generally limited and directed primarily to moving and training vendors. These contacts cannot be considered; to be credited, the level of contacts must contribute to the successful performance of the work, have a demonstrable impact on the difficulty and responsibility of the position, require direct contact, and are a regular and recurring requirement. As a result, the appellant's personal contacts meet but do not exceed Level 2.

Purpose of Contacts

At Level b, which is the highest level identified in the JFS, the purpose of contacts is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts, or to resolve issues or operating problems by influencing or persuading people who are working toward mutual goals and have basically cooperative attitudes.

The appellant's position meets Level b, in that the purpose of her contacts ranges from exchanging factual information to resolving issues by persuading people typically working towards the same goals. Also similar to Level b, the appellant contacts officials with generally helpful attitudes to resolve issues relating to her benefits, travel management, and OWCP work. She may occasionally deal with an unresponsive OWCP claims representative, but this is not characteristic of her relationship with the significant majority of her contacts and, therefore, may not control the evaluation of this factor. The appellant may also deal with a reluctant supervisor in obtaining their cooperation in returning injured employees to a light-duty position. However, the appellant confronts a reluctant supervisor in only 15 percent of her cases, since most supervisors are generally cooperative with these efforts. Overall, the purpose of the appellant's contacts meet but does not exceed Level b.

Level 2b is credited for 75 points.

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignments.

At Level 8-1, which is the only level identified in the JFS, the work is primarily sedentary. Some work may require periods of standing at a counter. Employees frequently carry light items such as employee files or pamphlets. The work does not require any special physical effort. The appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 8-1, as her work is primarily sedentary and does not involve any special physical effort. Level 8-1 is credited for 5 points.

Factor 9, Work Environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required.

At Level 9-1, which is the only level identified in the JFS, the work environment consists of an area that is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated. The work environment involves everyday risks or discomforts requiring normal safety precautions. The appellant's work environment meets but does not exceed Level 9-1. Her work is conducted in an adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated office. Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-5	750
2. Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6. & 7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts	2-b	75
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total</i>		1,685

A total of 1,685 points falls within the GS-8 range (1,605 to 1,850 points) on the grade conversion table in the JFS.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Human Resources Assistant (Employee Benefits), GS-203-8.