

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeal and FLSA Programs

San Francisco Oversight Division
120 Howard Street, Room 760
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

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

Appellant: [The appellant]

Agency classification: Telecommunications Specialist
GS-391-9

Organization: [The appellant's organization]
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

OPM decision: Telecommunications Specialist
GS-391-9

OPM decision number: C-0391-09-03

Carlos A. Torrico
Classification Appeals Officer

May 15, 2000
Date

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

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[The appellant's address]

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Introduction

On November 8, 1999, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. The appellant's position is currently classified as Telecommunications Specialist, GS-391-9. However, he believes his duties warrant upgrading to the GS-11 level. The appealed position is assigned to the [appellant's organization and installation], U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). We have accepted and decided this appeal under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

In his appeal, the appellant makes various statements about his agency and its evaluation of his position. He also discusses the large amount of work that he performs. However, volume of work cannot be considered in determining the grade of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5). Moreover, in adjudicating this appeal our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

This appeal decision is based on a thorough review of all information submitted by both the appellant and his agency. In addition, an OPM representative conducted telephone interviews with the appellant, his supervisor, and the installation's Telecommunications Manager to gain more information about the duties and responsibilities of the position. The appellant's supervisor has certified to the accuracy of the appellant's official position description (PD) number 6611212. However, the appellant believes his PD does not fully reflect his duties and responsibilities and has been unable to resolve this issue within his agency. In such cases it is OPM policy to decide the appeal based on the actual duties that management has assigned and that the appellant performs. In doing that, we noted that the PD does not accurately reflect the supervisory controls over the position discussed under Factor 2. Therefore, the agency should correct the PD to comply with our findings discussed under Factor 2 in this evaluation.

Position information

The appellant serves as a Telecommunications Specialist within the [appellant's organization] Forest. In that capacity, he provides assistance to the Forest Computer Specialist and Telecommunications Manager in the planning, design, evaluation, repair, security, maintenance and installation of radio and telecommunications systems and networks on the Forest. As mentioned in his PD, the appellant provides technical guidance and support for the [appellant's installation] Forest in telecommunications systems and networks including service to other team members and subunits; performs or directs complex troubleshooting of various telecommunications systems and networks; performs wide area network (WAN) and local area network (LAN) management, analysis and testing for data; radio and voice circuits; documents and maintains network configurations and links; identifies network faults and error activity; compiles and records data for Forest wide telecommunications networks; investigates and keeps

abreast of new technological developments in telecommunications; consults with local telephone companies, regulated common carriers, Forest, Region, State and other Federal communications managers and personnel; and conducts sizing analysis, technical evaluations, and site preparation studies for new and installed telecommunications systems and networks. In conversations with the appellant and his supervisor, a percentage of time was given for each of the appellant's major duties as follows:

- Radio – 40%
- Facilities – 20%
- WAN/LAN management – 20%
- Telephone – 10%
- Data – 10%

The appellant's PD, results of our interviews, and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency has classified the appellant's position in the Telecommunications Series, GS-391, and he does not disagree. We concur with the agency's determination. As specified in the classification standard for the GS-391 series (dated March 1990), work in that series involves (1) technical and analytical work pertaining to the planning, development, acquisition, testing, integration, installation, utilization, or modification of telecommunications systems, facilities, services, and procedures; (2) managerial and staff work in the planning, implementation, or program management of telecommunications programs, systems, and services or, (3) line supervision over communications operations, when such work includes responsibility for management functions such as planning, recommending changes and determining organizational structure, staffing, training, and budgetary requirements.

The appellant's work involves the technical and analytical aspects described in number one above. He provides assistance in technical work in developing specifications and planning telecommunications programs and projects, including gathering materials, testing equipment, services, and software for performance acceptability, and related work connected with the acquisition, technical acceptance, installation, testing, modification, and replacement of telecommunications equipment, services, and systems. The GS-391 classification standard contains grading criteria to evaluate such work that we have applied to the appellant's position.

Positions like the appellant's which are engaged in technical work planning telecommunications programs and projects involving the gathering of materials, testing equipment and services, and related work connected with the acquisition, technical acceptance, installation, testing, and replacement of telecommunications equipment are titled *Telecommunications Specialist*.

Grade determination

The GS-391 standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES), which employs nine factors. Under the FES, each factor level description in a standard describes 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, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

The appellant does not disagree with his agency's evaluation of Factors 7, 8, and 9. We have reviewed the agency determination for Factor Levels 7, 8, and 9 and concur with their findings. We will therefore discuss those factors briefly, while discussing factors 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 more thoroughly. Our evaluation with respect to the nine factors follows.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position, Level 1-6, 950 points

This factor measures the nature and extent of knowledge, e.g., concepts, policies, procedures, and rules, needed to perform the position's duties and responsibilities. The agency credited this factor at Level 1-6 (described on pages 13-14 of the standard), but the appellant believes that a higher level (i.e., Level 1-7, described on pages 14-16 of the standard) is warranted.

At Level 1-6, employees apply a practical knowledge of commonly applied telecommunications principles, concepts, and methodologies in performing independent work involving specified segments of large projects, or taking full responsibility for well-defined projects requiring knowledge of standardized telecommunications approaches, methods, and techniques. They apply skill in weighing the impact of variables such as cost, variations in electronic and other equipment characteristics, equipment availability, and the kinds of communications required such as voice, text, and/or data. Knowledge of standardized telecommunications equipment, services, and processes or established variations is used to review existing contractual relationships for equipment and services, network requirements, compatibility with established long distance commercial telephone systems, protocol requirements, and on-line security protection.

At Level 1-7, employees use knowledge of a wide range of communications concepts, principles, and practices or in-depth knowledge in a particular functional area of telecommunications (transmission media, data transfer, ground to ground radio, switching systems, or other very specific aspects of telecommunications) to accomplish work processes through the use of telecommunications devices, methods, services, and facilities. It is also used to review, analyze, and resolve difficult and complex telecommunications problems. At this level the employee applies knowledge of either a broad range or in-depth specialized knowledge of some or all of telecommunications operating techniques, digital and analog communications requirements (sometimes including video), local and wide area networking, and procedures used by Federal and industry organizations. Also required is knowledge of agency policy and, in some cases, policies and practices of other agencies and knowledge of sources of technical data necessary to evaluate alternative approaches for satisfying communications requirements. Some employees use an in-depth knowledge of contracting procedures and legal requirements to develop wording

for proposals and contracts, review proposals for technical adequacy and vendor ability to perform, and/or to monitor vendor performance in fulfilling contractual requirements for equipment and services.

The appellant's position meets Level 1-6. Comparable to Level 1-6, he utilizes a practical knowledge of telecommunications concepts, principles, and practices to provide technical assistance and guidance to telecommunications system and network users on the Forest. His assignments involve either segments of large projects, or taking full responsibility for well-defined projects. The appellant reviews and certifies telecommunications requirements, controls usage and access to networks, provides installation and technical advice including cost and the variety of equipment available, and advises on the kind of equipment needed to achieve the technical objectives. He sometimes prepares a cost analysis of proposed new systems or additions to existing systems and other functions to ensure the most efficient use of available telecommunications resources on the Forest. He makes recommendations to his supervisor and the Telecommunications Manager on systems implementation, including the kinds of communications required (e.g., voice, text, and/or data), and follows through with the implementation of the decision. During the implementation phases of installing or modifying systems, the appellant performs traffic analysis, facility design, system layouts and coordinates actions required for carrying out projects. Projected needs are analyzed in terms of policies and objectives for acquiring, expanding, improving, or integrating telecommunications systems. For example, as telecommunications project coordinator in the effort to modernize the [specific District name] Ranger District wiring, the appellant planned the acquisition and installation of the contracted communication wiring plant and drew the physical footprint for the communications room on the construction blue print.

Similar to Level 1-6, the appellant applies a basic knowledge of electronics theory and operating principles, as well as the application of existing and planned technology to telecommunications requirements. His duties require knowledge of the performance characteristics of telecommunications equipment, systems, networks, services and transmission media. The position requires the knowledge to move communications media of all types, and the ability to facilitate systems integration. Like Level 1-6, the appellant uses his knowledge of operating characteristics to perform evaluations and analysis of proposed and current communications transmissions facilities, and network management systems for compatibility and interoperability. For instance, in the current planning for the replacement of the solar powered radio equipment on the Forest, the appellant is performing research to provide the best advice to his supervisor on the available options, cost efficiency, and alternatives for replacing the solar panels, voltage regulators, batteries and perhaps towers, at the four remote mountain top locations. The appellant will apply his knowledge of the operational and technical characteristics of the communications-electronic equipment, radio compatibility, and power needs as it relates to solar power.

Indicative of Level 1-6, the appellant applies knowledge of laws, standards, procedures, methods, regulations, practices, and criteria of specialties under the telecommunication umbrella. As illustrated in Level 1-6, he sometimes functions as a team member conducting telecommunications surveys, in planning and implementing specific assignments that comprise part of an overall telecommunications system plan for the installation of new systems or services.

The appellant uses his knowledge of data processing equipment and software communications and related applications to track performance problems, configuration of the circuits, and optimization and utilization of the circuits, that carry voice data and radio analog signals, and that tie into government and/or commercial services and facilities.

Like Level 1-6, the appellant's assignments require the application of standardized telecommunications approaches, methods and techniques. His radio/frequency assignments mostly consist of hardware installation, modification, troubleshooting and maintenance. For example, he is currently troubleshooting a radio frequency problem on the Forest where an unknown civilian radio station is bleeding over onto the Forest's radio frequency, which is impacting on four communication stations and across three Ranger Districts.

The position does not meet Level 1-7. Unlike that level, the appellant's work does not require knowledge of a wide range of communications concepts, principles, and practices or in-depth knowledge in a particular functional area of telecommunications (e.g. transmission media, data transfer, ground to ground radio, switching systems, or other very specific aspects of telecommunications) to accomplish work processes through the use of telecommunications devices, methods, services, and facilities. Our fact-finding disclosed that knowledge required at Level 1-7 is generally found in higher graded positions and/or at higher levels within the Forest Service such as at the Regional Office or Headquarters. As previously mentioned, work at Level 1-7 entails knowledge of either a broad range or in-depth specialized knowledge of some or all of telecommunications operating techniques, digital and analog communications requirements (sometimes including video), local and wide area networking (LAN/WAN), and procedures used by Federal and industry organizations. The appellant's work does not extend beyond the local Forest level, and does not fully meet the broad range of knowledge envisioned at Level 1-7. Although the communication capabilities of the end-users go beyond the Forest, the responsibilities of the appellant do not. In addition, while the appellant is sufficiently knowledgeable of contractual relationships to provide technical input to contracts and proposals, his duties do not require in-depth knowledge of contracting procedures and legal requirements as described at Level 1-7.

Further, the in-depth specialized knowledge in a particular area of telecommunications discussed at Level 1-7 is not needed in the appellant's work. Such knowledge is exercised by the Telecommunications Manager at the installation who is responsible for program planning and development. Unlike a key illustration in Level 1-7, the appellant does not interpret policy originating from higher organizational levels on his own initiative, develop local policy and implementing instructions, or provide guidance to higher management officials. Such duties are found in the Telecommunications Manager position.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-6 and 950 points are assigned.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls, Level 2-3, 275 points

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. The agency has credited the appellant's supervisory controls with Level 2-4 (described on page 18 of the standard) but the

appellant believes that a higher level (i.e. Level 2-5, described on page 19 of the standard) is warranted. However, the record and our fact-finding determined that the supervisory controls placed on the appellant are similar to those identified in Level 2-3 (described on page 18 of the standard).

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the employee's scope of responsibilities and the objectives, priorities, and deadlines. The employee is provided assistance in unusual situations that do not have clear precedents. The employee plans and carries out the successive steps involved and handles problems and deviations in accordance with agency standards, previous training, established practices, or system controls as appropriate in the assignment or specialty area. Work is reviewed for technical aspects such as efficiency of equipment compatibility, network specifications, whether documentation complies with agency guidelines, or whether the equipment or service specifications adequately set forth technical telecommunications and acquisition requirements.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives and, in consultation with the employee, determines time frames and possible shifts in staff or other resources required. The employee, having developed expertise in a particular telecommunications specialty area, e.g., transmission media, and terminal equipment compatibility or in general telecommunications requirements, is responsible for planning and carrying out the work, resolving most of the conflicts that arise, integrating and coordinating the work of others as necessary, and interpreting policy on own initiative in terms of established objectives. The supervisor is kept informed of progress, potentially controversial matters or unusual conditions with far-reaching implications. Completed work is reviewed from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or achieving expected results.

At Level 2-5, the supervisor provides administrative direction with assignments in terms of broadly defined missions or objectives. Within these broad areas of direction the employee has responsibility for planning, designing, and carrying out major studies or projects, and for coordinating with experts both within and outside the organizations. Results of the work are considered technically authoritative and are normally accepted without change. If work is reviewed, the review is concerned with matters such as fulfillment of objectives, effect of advice on the overall requirements, or precedents which might apply to other programs.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-3. Like Level 2-3, the appellant's supervisor defines the scope of responsibilities and the objectives, priorities, and deadlines in work assignments. Work assignments for the appellant come directly from the supervisor either verbally or in the form of digital messages. The appellant also receives work assignments directly and indirectly from the Telecommunications Manager, who provides him with some direction when projects are assigned. Similar to Level 2-3, the appellant plans and carries out the steps of assignments, performing them within defined goals, priorities and deadlines. Like Level 2-3, he consults with the supervisor and Telecommunications Manager, if needed, on projects with unusual situations, those not having clear precedents, or when he must deviate from standard practices. Comparable to Level 2-3, the supervisor and Telecommunications Manager perform a technical review on the appellant's work by checking progress, quality, effectiveness, compatibility with other work and

equipment, meeting customer or user requirements, within policy, meeting assignment objectives and the appropriateness of recommendations.

Level 2-4 is not met. Although the appellant provides limited input on resources required and timeframes, and has developed proficiency in some particular telecommunications specialties (i.e., radio transmission, area networks), he does not independently plan and carry out his tasks to the degree envisioned at Level 2-4. Problems, potentially controversial matters or unusual conditions with far-reaching implications are referred to the supervisor and Telecommunications Manager, but unlike Level 2-4 he does not interpret policy on his own initiative in terms of the established program objectives. The appellant's completed work is reviewed more than from an overall standpoint of feasibility, compatibility or effectiveness. Level 2-4 involves a high degree of independence and technical responsibility that the appellant's position does not meet due to the presence of two levels of technical review.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 2-5 because work done at that level is performed with the supervisor only providing administrative direction in terms of broadly defined missions or objectives. As previously discussed, the appellant receives more extensive supervisory direction when assignments are made. Unlike Level 2-5, the appellant does not have full responsibility for planning, designing, and carrying out major studies or projects, and he does not have final technical authority. Further, the involvement of the appellant's supervisor and Telecommunications Manager in telecommunications program planning, implementation, and review of work on the Forest preclude the crediting of Level 2-5 to his position.

Level 2-3 is assigned with a value of 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines, Level 3-3, 275 points

This factor measures the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency has credited the appellant's guidelines with Level 3-3 (described on page 19 of the standard) but the appellant believes that a higher level (i.e. Level 3-4, described on pages 19-20 of the standard) is warranted.

At Level 3-3, guidelines available and regularly used in the work are in the form of agency policies and implementing directives, manuals, handbooks, and locally developed supplements to such guides, such as site plans, equipment specifications, software characteristics, and detailed work procedures and directives that supplement agency directions. The guidelines are not always applicable to specific conditions or there are gaps in specificity in application to specific telecommunications requirements. This level also includes work situations in which the employee must interpret and apply a number of subject-matter policies and regulations such as those that apply to access to and protection of LAN terminals and data bases. The employee uses judgment in interpreting, adapting, and applying guidelines, such as instructions for using particular versions of software, security requirements, or variations in available hardware. The employee independently resolves gaps or conflicts in guidelines according to project requirements, consistent with telecommunications program objectives.

At Level 3-4, guidelines provide a general outline of the concepts, methods, and goals of telecommunications programs. Those guidelines regularly applied at this level are not specific in how they are to be defined, applied, and monitored. Sometimes available guidelines have been purposely left open to local interpretation to allow for variations in local and remote environmental conditions that affect the nature of communications systems designed to satisfy overall policy direction. Also included at this level are broad guidelines issued by other agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission. Due to the lack of specificity, the guidelines are often insufficient to accomplish particular objectives. The employee uses initiative and resourcefulness in researching trends and patterns, to deviate from traditional methods, and to implement new and improved communications methods and procedures. The employee establishes criteria for identifying and analyzing developments in telecommunications objectives and goals. Assignments at this level may also include responsibility for developing guides for use by telecommunications specialists at the same and lower levels in the organization.

Level 3-3 is met. The appellant uses specific guidelines and procedures, and the interpretive demands flowing from them are comparable to those found at Level 3-3. Like Level 3-3, the guidelines used by the appellant are agency standards, Forest Service Telecommunications Handbook, Federal Communication Commission (FCC) regulations, National Electrical Code (NEC) Handbook, Telecommunications Industry Association/Electronic Industries Association ((TIA/EIA) telecommunications building wiring standards), IRAC regulations, [name of State] State building code, technical journals, manufacturers' technical bulletins, various engineering guides, equipment instruction manuals, and established procedures. Most of these guidelines cover a majority of the standard procedures for telecommunications systems and network tasks performed by the appellant. Similar to Level 3-3, some guidelines used by the appellant are not always applicable to specific conditions. Thus, in order to apply them to a specific location and type of problem or need, the appellant must use some judgment to adapt and interpret them, with final direction being provided by the supervisor and/or Telecommunications Manager. The appellant selects the appropriate guide depending on the situation, based on the direction he receives.

Level 3-4 is not met. The guidelines used at this level are less specific in how they are to be defined, applied, and monitored than those typical of Level 3-3. Neither the record nor our fact-finding provided any evidence that the guidelines regularly applied by the appellant consisted of just a general outline of the concepts, methods, and goals of telecommunications' programs. We found no indication that the guidelines are purposely left open to local interpretation to allow for variations in local and remote environmental conditions affecting the nature of communications systems designed to satisfy overall policy direction, e.g., NEC, FCC. Although the appellant uses initiative and resourcefulness in his work, the record does not show that he deviates from traditional methods or establishes criteria for identifying and analyzing developments in telecommunications technologies, and for measuring organizational effectiveness in achieving telecommunications objectives and goals envisioned at Level 3-4.

Level 3-3 is assigned and 275 points are credited.

Factor 4, Complexity, Level 4-3, 150 points

This factor measures the nature and variety of methods in the work performed and the kinds of decisions made to accomplish the work. The agency has credited the complexity of the appellant's position with Level 4-3 (described on pages 21-22 of the standard) but the appellant believes that a higher level (i.e., Level 4-4, described on page 22 of the standard) is warranted.

At Level 4-3, employees perform various duties requiring the application of different and unrelated processes, methods, practices, techniques, or criteria. Assignments characteristic of this level include: developing alternate telecommunications plans for a facility by describing options in levels of available services, equipment operating features, and the costs involved. Employees compile, analyze, and summarize information relating to the designated telecommunications requirements; develop plans for approaches that may be undertaken; define the level of risk involved for each plan; develop the costs for implementing each of several options; and recommend a course of action to meet assignment objectives. Employees make decisions about how to do the work based on relationships among organizational needs and objectives, costs, requirements defined by telecommunications guides, and related information such as mission statements, levels and kinds of service requested, lead times required, and supplemental equipment needed to tie in to Government and/or commercial services and facilities.

At Level 4-4, employees perform assignments consisting of a variety of telecommunications duties involving many different and unrelated processes and methods applicable to well-established areas of telecommunications installation, operations, planning, and administration. Typically, such assignments involve broad telecommunications program requirements or a specialized area, requiring analysis and testing of a variety of established techniques and methods to evaluate alternatives and arrive at decisions, conclusions, or recommendations. Programs and projects may be funded by or under the cognizance of organizations with differing telecommunications requirements or variations in ability to fund system implementation. In deciding what is to be done, the employee typically assesses situations complicated by conflicting or insufficient data which must be analyzed to determine the applicability of established methods, the need to digress from normal methods and techniques, the need to waive particular standards, or whether specific kinds of operating waivers can be justified.

Level 4-3 is met. Similar to Level 4-3, the appellant performs development, installation, testing, maintenance, material control and training for the radio and frequency, telephone, and data telecommunications systems and networks on the Forest. Planning and coordination of this work centers on installation, modification, and upgrading of planned or existing systems using standardized technology. In the design phase of a project the appellant often has to come up with technical solutions involving a level of creativity to meet program objectives. The appellant has to research and investigate new ways of delivering the services needed for the maintenance and implementation of telecommunications systems and networks on the Forest.

Similar to Level 4-3, recommendations by the appellant to his supervisor on projects involve implementation of specific telecommunications systems, i.e., data, voice, radio frequency and

facilities. The appellant's work requires planning, designing and development for future telecommunications systems, subsystems and networks in several telecommunications fields where proposals are based on funding, regulatory requirements, and the range of acceptable systems available. For example, during the planning phase for the Department of Labor [name of center] Jobs Corps Automated Data Processing (ADP) effort, the appellant and an engineer were requested to provide an analysis for placing a fiber optic backbone for the 25 building Job Corps Center on the Forest. Comparable to Level 4-3, the design was to include design criteria, specifications, costs proposals, technical diagrams, drawings, and results of research on type, footage, measurement and route for buried empty conduit to be placed on the campus. The facilities to be covered in the project included educational, vocational, administration, and housing. The telecommunications systems and networks affected included voice, data, paging, fire alarms and security.

The appellant maintains service records, equipment databases, network configurations and links, network faults and error activity for determination of network effectiveness. The work that the appellant does in network management requires managing an area network involving several contract service providers, i.e., US West, Pioneer Telephone Company, Sprint, GTE, and AT&T. Like Level 4-3, the appellant runs software applications that track performance problems, configuration of the circuits, and optimization and utilization of the three 24 channel T-1 circuits, that carry voice data and radio analog signals that tie into government and/or commercial services and facilities.

Level 4-4 is not met. The appellant's work consists of a limited variety of telecommunications duties and not to the degree envisioned at Level 4-4. His assignments do not include work typified by cross-organizational funding and by situations complicated by conflicting or insufficient data, resulting in a digression from normal methods and techniques, or in the need to waive particular standards. The appellant does on occasion coordinate with other organizations such as contracted service providers and vendors to provide linkage and ensure system support. However, coordination between different agencies and telecommunications systems to assure compatibility with existing and planned systems and demands on available resources is the responsibility of the Telecommunications Manager.

Level 4-3, is assigned with a value of 150 points.

Factor 5, Scope and effect, Level 5-3, 150 points

This factor measures the purpose of the work and its effect both within and outside the organization. The agency has credited the scope and effect of the appellant's position with Level 5-3 (described on pages 24-25 of the standard), but the appellant believes that a higher level (i.e., Level 5-4, described on page 25 of the standard) is warranted.

At Level 5-3, the work involves resolving a variety of conventional telecommunications problems, questions, or situations, such as those where the employee is responsible for monitoring established communications systems and programs, or performing independent reviews and recommending actions involving well-established criteria, methods, techniques, and procedures. The employee's work products, advice, and assistance affect the efficiency and

operational effectiveness of established telecommunications systems, and contribute to the effectiveness of newly introduced programs and facilities requiring telecommunications support.

At Level 5-4, the work involves investigating and analyzing a variety of unusual telecommunications problems, questions, or conditions associated with formulating projects or studies to substantially alter major telecommunications systems, or establishing criteria in an assigned area of specialization (e.g., establishing telecommunications operating instructions for wide area computer networks in a number of different locations), or evaluating the effectiveness of existing voice, data, and/or video systems. The work affects telecommunications operations, installation, and maintenance practices in a number of different functional operations within the organization and, to a lesser extent, in vendor operations. It contributes to developing solutions to telecommunications problems and questions, and in developing alternatives and options to meet requirements in a variety of physical and environmental circumstances. Program and project proposals frequently cut across component or geographic lines within the agency (e.g., across bureaus, commands, regions) and may also affect the budgets, programs, and interests of other Federal agencies or private industrial firms.

Level 5-3 is met. Similar to Level 5-3, the appellant performs the full range of tasks described at this level and his work directly affects the efficiency and operational effectiveness of established and planned telecommunications systems and networks on the Forest. Like Level 5-3, the effect of the work is primarily local in nature, although some systems may be part of multifacility networks with interlocking telecommunications requirements.

Level 5-4 is not met. Although the appellant investigates and analyzes telecommunications systems and networks that involve voice and data systems, that work falls short of the wide variety of unusual telecommunications problems or questions discussed at Level 5-4. Unlike Level 5-4, the appellant's work does not involve formulating projects or studies to substantially alter major telecommunications systems, or establishing criteria in an assigned area of specialization. We find that the Forest telecommunications system is not comparable to those described at Level 5-4.

Level 5-3 is assigned and 150 points are credited.

Factors 6 & 7, Personal Contacts/ Purpose of Contacts, Levels 6-2 and 7-b, 75 points

Factors 6 and 7 measure the type of personal contacts that occur in the work and the purpose of those contacts. The agency found that the appellant's personal contacts were comparable to Level 6-2 (described on page 27 of the standard) but the appellant believes that a higher level is warranted, (i.e., Level 6-3, described on page 27 of the standard). Both the agency and the appellant agree that the purpose of his contacts is comparable to Level 7-b (described on page 28 of the standard).

At Level 6-2, contacts are in the same agency, but outside the immediate organization or with the general public, as individual or groups in a moderately structured setting. Persons contacted are engaged in different functions, missions and kinds of work (e.g., representatives from various levels within the agency such as headquarters, regional, district, or field offices, or other offices

in the immediate installations). The contacts are generally established on a routine basis, usually at the employee's work place; the exact purpose of the contact and the role and authority of other participants may be unclear to one or more of the parties.

At Level 6-3, contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency, in a moderately unstructured setting, e.g., the contacts are not established on a routine basis, the purpose and extent of each contact is different, and the role of each party is identified and developed during the contact. Typical contacts are with telecommunications specialists and managers from other agencies, contractors, or technical level representatives of foreign governments, or members of professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups.

The appellant's position meets Level 6-2, but does not fully meet Level 6-3. Like Level 6-2, the appellant's personal contacts are with persons in his agency outside his immediate organization including Forest staff, end users, procurement and technical personnel in the Regional Office, Supervisor's Office, and Ranger Districts. Similar to Level 6-3, the appellant also has occasional contact with telecommunications technicians from various other State, local and Federal Government agencies, private companies and contractors, various manufacturers, vendors of equipment and utility representatives. However, unlike Level 6-3 these contacts are made in a moderately structured setting and on a routine basis, and at times the exact purpose of the contact may be unclear at first. In most cases it is the Telecommunications Manager who makes contacts with persons outside the employing agency. The Telecommunications Manager is responsible for making outside contacts in situations that would impact the whole Forest or with far-reaching implications, i.e., telecommunications specialists and managers from other agencies, contractors.

At Level 7-b, the purpose of contacts is to plan, coordinate work, or advise on efforts and resolve operating problems by influencing or motivating individuals or groups who are working toward mutual goals and who have basically cooperative attitudes.

At Level 7-c, the purpose of contacts is to influence, motivate, interrogate, or control persons or groups. At this level the persons contacted may be fearful, skeptical, uncooperative, or dangerous.

Level 7-b is met. The record and our fact-finding disclosed that the appellant's contacts are usually for the purpose of planning and coordinating work, and providing guidance and technical assistance to resolve operating problems in the implementation and execution of the Forest's telecommunication network. Like Level 7-b, individuals or groups dealt with have basically cooperative attitudes and are working toward mutual goals.

Level 7-c is not met. The purpose of contacts by the appellant falls short of Level 7-c in that his contacts are not made to influence, motivate, interrogate, or control persons or groups, and the persons he contacts are not fearful, skeptical, uncooperative, or dangerous.

Factor Levels 6-2 and 7-b are assigned with a total value of 75 points.

Factors 8 & 9, Physical demands/Work environment, Levels 8-2 and 9-b, 40 points

These factors measure the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment and the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings. Both the agency and the appellant agree that the appellant's level of physical demands is comparable to Level 8-2 (described on page 29 of the standard), and that the appellant's work environment meets Level 9-b (described on page 29 of the standard). We concur with the levels assigned to both factors.

At Level 8-1 (page 29), the work requires no special physical demands. It is sedentary, performed in a comfortable posture. It may involve some walking, standing, bending, or carrying of light items.

At Level 8-2, the work requires some physical exertion such as long periods of standing, walking over rough or uneven surfaces, recurring bending, crouching, stooping, stretching, reaching, and recurring lifting of moderately heavy items.

Level 8-2 is met, which is the highest level for this factor described in the standard. Like Level 8-2, the appellant's work requires him to bend to look for problems at board level or circuit level, climbing towers, moving and lifting power supplies and batteries for systems, stooping, climbing in attics, and long periods of walking over rugged terrain to get to communications sites. Although some of the appellant's work is sedentary, performed in a comfortable posture as in Level 8-1, the regular physical demands required of the appellant overall is comparable to Level 8-2.

At Level 9-a (page 29), the work is performed in an office or similar setting involving everyday risks or discomforts, which require normal safety precautions. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

At Level 9-b the work is performed around moving parts, carts, or machines; at construction or other work sites where equipment is being installed and/or removed, requiring the wearing of hardhats, safety shoes, or similar situations involving moderate risks or discomforts which require special safety precautions such as wearing protective clothing or gear such as masks, boots, goggles, gloves, or shields.

Level 9-b is met, which is the highest level for this factor described in the standard. The appellant's work is performed in both an office and outdoor setting. He regularly performs his work around machinery and at construction and telecommunications sites where equipment is being installed. Such situations present moderate risks or discomforts requiring special safety precautions and wearing protective equipment. The work the appellant performs in winter conditions requires him to use extreme caution. The hazard of electrical shock is present in some of the appellant's work situations, and his work on towers may involve heights in excess of 50 feet, in which extra care needs to be taken.

Factor Levels 8-2 and 9-b are assigned with a total value of 40 points.

Summary

In summary, the appellant's telecommunications work is evaluated as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-6	950 Points
2. Supervisory Controls	2-3	275 Points
3. Guidelines	3-3	275 Points
4. Complexity	4-3	150 Points
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150 Points
6 & 7. Personal Contacts/Purpose of Contacts	6-2/7-b	75 Points
8 & 9. Physical Demands/Work Environment	8-2/9-b	40 Points
Total points:		1915 Points

The appellant's position warrants 1915 total points, which falls within the GS-9 range (1855-2100). Therefore, in accordance with the grade conversion table on page 12 of the standard, the position is properly graded at GS-9.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as a Telecommunications Specialist, GS-391-9.