

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

Dallas Field Services Group
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Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Secretary (OA)
GS-318-5

Organization: Quality Management Division
Deputy Commander for Clinical Services
[name] Army Community Hospital
U.S. Army Medical Department Activity
[location]

OPM decision: Secretary (OA)
GS-318-5

OPM decision number: C-0318-05-11

Marta Brito Pérez
Associate Director
Human Capital Leadership
and Merit System Accountability

March 3, 2005

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:

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Introduction

On August 23, 2004, the Dallas Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant]. The appellant's position is currently classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-5. She believes the increase in her responsibilities because of additional duties warrant an increase in grade level. The position is assigned to the Quality Management Division (QMD), Deputy Commander for Clinical Services of the [name] Army Community Hospital, U.S. Army Medical Department Activity, in [location]. We received the agency's administrative report on September 20, 2004. We have accepted and decided this appeal under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant indicates that after her assignment to the QMD, the agency reviewed her position description (PD) and additional duties were added. Management has the authority and responsibility to assign work to positions to accomplish the work of the organization (5 U.S.C. 5102(a)(3) and 7106). Issues such as volume of work are not considered in determining the grade level of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, Chapter 5). By law, OPM must make classification determinations solely by comparing the current duties and responsibilities of the position to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, 5112). Since comparison to standards, not other positions, is the intended and exclusive method for classifying positions, we may not consider the classification of other positions as a basis for deciding an appeal.

Position information

The mission of the QMD is to establish policies and procedures concerning the administration of the hospital's quality management program. The staff coordinates the hospital-wide monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure the quality and appropriateness of care. The appellant serves as the secretary to the Chief of QMD and provides administrative, clerical, and office automation support to the QMD staff. That staff includes the appellant and five employees who occupy the following positions: a Supervisory Health System Specialist, GS-671-12; one GS-671-9; two Health System Assistants, a GS-303-5 and a GS-303-7; and one Patient Safety Officer, GS-601-11..

The PD of record indicates the appellant coordinates the administrative and clerical functions of the QMD, receiving direction from the Chief who assigns work and provides general instructions. The appellant plans and carries out her own assignments independently, referring only unusual problems to the supervisor. Work is reviewed by the supervisor for conformance to policy and adequacy in handling situations. The appellant receives and screens all telephone calls, visitors, and incoming mail and serves as mail distribution clerk. She composes correspondence for the QMD based on personal knowledge and instructions. The appellant serves as records coordinator, establishing and maintaining files, performs annual file inventory, maintains QMD alert roster, and maintains time and attendance cards. She prepares in final form all documents, forms, and reports which may involve medical terminology. She uses a variety of office automation software in automating reports and tracking training records. The appellant

must stay abreast of directives pertaining to administrative matters, providing guidance to QMD staff as required. She serves as fire and safety coordinator and security officer. She requisitions office supplies and services. The appellant attends staff meetings and takes meeting notes for three meetings: the Hospital Quality Improvement Council (HQIC), Risk Management (RM) Team, and the Patient Safety Program (PSP). These notes are prepared in draft for review by the supervisor and in final form with supplemental materials assembled for the approval/signature of the Chairperson of the HQIC and the Executive Committee for signature of the Commander. The position requires skill in using a personal computer and use of Microsoft Office including Word, Excel, Access, Power Point, and Outlook e-mail.

The appellant believes that her position description does not recognize that she: (1) is responsible for taking three sets of minutes; Risk Management (RM), Patient Safety Program (PSP), and the Hospital Quality Improvement Council (HQIC); (2) is responsible for composing, preparing, and presenting these minutes in an official written format using her stenography skills; (3) performs travel clerk duties; (4) is the only secretary responsible for three sets of meeting minutes; (5) schedules employees for the joint committee student network; (6) updates ARAM, the new filing system; and (7) performs supply clerk duties. In her September 7, 2004, written statement, the appellant stressed that her position description does not describe in depth the duties she performs. On the same date, the supervisor certified the position as accurate with the exception of travel clerk duties that were added on August 25, 2004.

The nature of clerical and administrative support work such as the appellant's typically involves a wide variety of recurring and sometimes one-time projects/assignments to support the manager and meet the organization's needs. We find the PD is generally inclusive of the above duties. Although travel clerk duties are not specifically noted in the PD, they may be included within the major duty of serving as principal clerical and administration support. The travel duties do not constitute a significant portion of time, and are comparable to the 5 percent credited for supply work. The PD does reflect the requirement for skill in use of a personal computer and a qualified typist. However, it does not indicate a requirement for skill in the use of stenography. The record shows that meeting minutes are taken by notes and the transcription of voice recordings. Although the appellant may possess stenography skills and uses those skills as her personal preference, stenography is not a requirement for the position.

To help decide this appeal, we conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on October 22, 2004, and interviewed her immediate supervisor on October 21, 2004. In reaching our decision, we have considered the information obtained from these interviews and all material of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including the appellant's official PD, number [number]. We find the PD contains the major duties and responsibilities assigned to and performed by the appellant and we have hereby incorporated it by reference into this decision

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency has classified the position to the GS-318 series and titled Secretary (Office Automation). The appellant does not disagree and, based on careful analysis of the record, we concur

The position classification standard for the GS-318 Secretary Series is used to evaluate the grade level of the position's office support work. The office automation work is evaluated by comparison with the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG).

Grade determination

The GS-318 Secretary standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which uses nine factors. Each factor is evaluated separately and is assigned a point value consistent with factor level definitions described in the standard. The total number of points for all nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the standard's grade conversion table. Under the FES, each factor level description 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 the next lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at the higher level.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts, which the secretary must understand to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of skills needed to apply that knowledge. Along with measuring this element, Factor 1 examines the work situation itself. It considers the complexity of the organization served, which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operation, and priorities the secretary must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization.

Knowledge Type III positions require knowledge of an extensive body of rules, procedures, or operations applied to clerical assignments; knowledge of the organization and functions of the office; and knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform non-routine assignments. Secretaries at this level are fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with other offices and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances.

At Knowledge Type IV, in addition to the knowledge's and skills required at lower levels, the employee must have a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles, and practices sufficient to perform independently such duties as eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures, determining when new procedures are needed, and studying and recommending restructuring of clerical activities of the office and subordinate offices. This level also requires a comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization.

The knowledge required by the appellant's position meets the intent of Knowledge Type III. To perform her assigned duties and responsibilities, the appellant must apply a thorough knowledge of QMD policies, procedures, operations, functions, and organization. She must have knowledge of agency policies and functional knowledge of the QMD in order to provide information to her supervisor and coworkers. As in Knowledge Type III, the appellant must use her knowledge of office procedures to receive and refer telephone calls and visitors, maintain control over the calendar of meetings for the supervisor and other staff, record and prepare team meeting minutes, process time and attendance information, maintain training records and process training requests,

and provide administrative support to the supervisor in the execution of personnel and budget management responsibilities.

The appellant's position does not meet Knowledge Type IV as described in the standard. The appellant works in a small organization and there is little, if any, opportunity for the independent performance of duties similar to those found at this level. There are no subordinate organizations or other clerical staff necessitating the analysis of extensive office procedures or restructuring of clerical activities as envisioned at this level.

In Work Situation A, the organization is small and of limited complexity. The supervisor directs the staff primarily through face-to-face meetings, and internal procedural and administrative controls are simple and informal. In Work Situation B, the staff is organized into subordinate segments that may in turn be further divided. The subordinate groups differ in many ways that place demands on the secretary, which are significantly greater than in Work Situation A. There is a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls, and a formal production or progress reporting system. Coordination among subordinate units is sufficiently complex to require continuous attention. Organizations described at Work Situation A in terms of internal coordination meet Work Situation B when they have extensive responsibilities for coordinating work outside the organization that require procedures and administrative controls equivalent to that described in Work Situation B.

Typical of Work Situation A, the QMD has 6 staff members and administrative controls that are simple and informal. The supervisor directs her staff through frequent face-to-face meetings and electronic mail communications. The mission and functions of the organization do not involve the extensive internal or external coordination demands, and the procedures and controls to manage those demands, found in Work Situation B. Therefore, the appellant's position is credited with Work Situation A.

The combination of Knowledge Type III and Work Situation A equates to Level 1-3 and is credited at 350 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor measures the nature and extent of supervision exercised over the position. Controls measured by this factor include the way assignments are made, the way priorities and deadlines are set, and the way work is reviewed.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work in the office. The secretary plans and carries out the work of the office and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions; priorities, policies, commitments, and program goals of the supervisor; and accepted practices in the occupation. At this level, completed work is evaluated for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives of the work. The secretary and the supervisor, in consultation, develop the guidelines and the work to be done. At this level, the secretary handles a variety of situations and conflicts requiring the use of initiative to determine

the approach to be taken or methods used. This level is most likely to be found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise that cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor. Completed work is reviewed only for overall effectiveness.

The appellant works with the independence described at Level 2-3. She handles problems and deviations without close supervision from the Chief of the QMD. Like Level 2-3, she normally establishes her own daily priorities in a manner that is consistent with program goals communicated to her periodically by her supervisor. The supervisor is available for guidance in situations involving unusual situations or lack of precedents, and is kept informed by the appellant of matters that may have possible impact or significance to the QMD. Her work is reviewed primarily for effectiveness.

Although the appellant works with considerable freedom and handles most problems, the limited size and structure of her organization preclude her from encountering the scope of complex problems envisioned at Level 2-4 on a regular or recurring basis. Any unusual or complex situations or questions are referred to the supervisor.

Level 2-3 (275 points) is credited for this factor.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor measures the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. Guides include reference materials such as dictionaries and style manuals, agency instructions concerning correspondence, and operating procedures of the organization served.

At Level 3-2, guidelines typically include dictionaries, style manuals, agency instructions concerning correspondence, and operating policies of the supervisor or organization served. The secretary locates and selects the appropriate guidelines, references, and procedures for application to specific cases. The secretary refers to the supervisor significant proposed deviations or situations to which existing guidelines cannot be applied.

At Level 3-3, guidelines include a large body of unwritten policies, precedents, and practices, which are not completely applicable to the work or are not specific and deal with matters relating to judgment, efficiency, and relative priorities rather than procedural concerns. The secretary may apply and adapt guidelines, such as regulations or the supervisor's policies, to specific problems for which the guidelines are not clearly applicable.

Comparable to Level 3-2, the appellant has Army and Medical Command directives and instructions in addition to standard and medical dictionaries, correspondence manuals, etc. for use. Although the appellant is expected to make judgments and interpret guidelines, they are well established, usually relatively specific, easily available, and can be applied without substantial deviation. The guidelines used and the judgment required for the appellant's position meet and do not exceed Level 3-2.

Level 3-2 (125 points) is credited.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor measures 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 in performing the work.

At Level 4-2, the secretary's duties involve various related steps, processes, or methods and include a full range of procedural duties in support of the office. Decisions at this level involve various choices requiring the secretary to recognize the existence of and differences among clearly recognizable situations. Decisions are based on knowledge of the procedural requirements of the work coupled with an awareness of the specific functions and staff assignments of the office.

At Level 4-3, the work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods. Decisions regarding what needs to be done and how it should be done are based on the secretary's knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff. Decisions involve analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment. The chosen courses of action are selected from many alternatives.

The complexity of the appellant's position meets Level 4-2. The work involves a full range of clerical and administrative duties and responsibilities that support the QMD supervisor and her staff. The appellant's work comprises various related processes and methods that require her to make decisions based on choices among recognizable situations, procedural requirements, and the functions of the QMD. Like Level 4-2, the appellant requisitions supplies, assists with travel orders and reimbursements, is responsible for the file system, prepares a variety of documents, and prepares meeting minutes.

The appellant's work does not meet the complexity of Level 4-3. While the appellant performs a variety of duties in QMD, there is minimal need for the analysis of issues and subjects described at Level 4-3. While her work is varied, it is procedural. The situations she encounters and choices to be made do not require the analysis of issues and number of alternatives typical of Level 4-3.

This factor is credited at Level 4-2 (75 points).

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor measures the relationship between the nature of the work, as measured by the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-2, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of further processes. Duties typical of this level include serving as a liaison between the supervisor and subordinate units, consolidating reports submitted by subordinate units, and arranging meetings involving staff from outside the immediate office.

At Level 5-3, the secretary serves offices that clearly and directly affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or large segments of the public. Positions at this level

work in the context of situations outside the organization, and the work regularly requires the secretary to modify usual office methods in ways that consistently and directly affect the organization's mission accomplishment.

The scope and effect of the position meet Level 5-2. The purpose of the position is to provide clerical and administrative support to the Chief of the QMD and her staff. The appellant assists in the work of other QMD staff and relieves the Chief of the clerical and administrative procedures and requirements. She prepares and reviews correspondence as instructed, distributes mail and faxes, serves as travel clerk, and serves as the timekeeper for the QMD. Comparable to Level 5-2, she serves as recorder for the meetings of three hospital committees where the supervisor is a major participant. The appellant's work affects the efficiency and reliability of processes within the QMD.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 5-3. Her work does not directly affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or a large segment of the public or business community, typical at that level. Her work does not require her to modify and devise methods and procedures that significantly affect the mission of the QMD.

Level 5-2 (75 points) is credited for this factor.

Factor 6, Personal contacts

This factor is based on what is required to make the initial contact, difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place. This factor does not cover persons within the supervisory chain.

At Level 6-2, contacts include employees in the same agency but outside the immediate organization who are generally engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work than the secretary's immediate organization. Contacts also include members of the general public in a moderately structured setting.

At Level 6-3, contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in moderately unstructured settings. The purpose and extent of each contact may be different, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact. These contacts are not established on a routine basis. Typical contacts might include attorneys, contractors, the news media, or public action groups.

The appellant's personal contacts meet Level 6-2. Her primary contacts are with the QMD office staff. She also has regular contacts with officer, enlisted, and civilian staff in the hospital facility and staff elements within and outside the command. Like Level 6-2, contacts may include members of the general public seeking information.

The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 6-3. Her major contacts are within the agency and are on a routine basis. They are more structured and do not require her to identify and develop the role and authority of each party as typical of Level 6-3.

Level 6-2 (25 points) is credited for this factor.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

The purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, and objectives. The personal contacts that serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the contacts that are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

The purpose of contacts at Level 7-2 is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or to resolve operating problems. Typical duties include insuring that reports and responses to correspondence are submitted timely and in proper format, making travel arrangements, and scheduling conferences. This is the highest level defined in the standard.

Comparable to Level 7-2, the appellant's personal contacts are typically made with a variety of people to plan, coordinate, and carry out her work for the QMD... She provides administrative support to the QMD supervisor and staff and is frequently involved in resolving administrative problems and operating issues relevant to the Division.

This factor is credited at Level 7-2 (50 points).

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor measures the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. It includes the physical characteristics and abilities as well as the physical exertion involved in the work

At Level 8-1, the work is sedentary with some walking and standing. No special physical demands are required to perform the work. The physical demands on the appellant meet Level 8-1. Her work is primarily sedentary and may involve some walking, standing, bending, and carrying light items. The appellant's work does not require physical exertion as described at higher levels.

Level 8-1 (5 points) is credited.

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor measures the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. The work environment at Level 9-1 includes the minimal risks and discomforts normally found in offices.

The appellant's work is performed in an office environment or conference room as described in Level 9-1.

Level 9-1 (5 points) is credited.

Summary

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-3	350
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts and	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
Total		985

The point total for the nine factors is 985. When compared to the grade conversion table in the GS-318 standard, this total converts to the GS-5 grade level (point range of 855-1,100).

The appellant's OA duties cannot be higher graded than her secretarial duties since they do not routinely involve a wide variety of non-standard automation problems or assignments requiring knowledge of *advanced* functions of more than one type of software, e.g., developing methods for automating complex administrative reports, including the detailed functional procedures needed to automate the data. The appellant uses a variety of standard software functions, resulting in evaluation of her OA work at a lower grade level than the GS-318 work. Therefore, her OA work does not impact the final grade level worth of the position.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-5.