



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Article No. 28-02

Standard: [Administrative Work in the Human Resources Management Group](#)
(December 2000)

Factor: Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

Issue: Requirements for meeting Level 1-9

Identification of the Classification Issue

An agency requested classification guidance in determining threshold requirements for assigning Level 1-9 to a position. The position served at the agency headquarters level. The agency consisted of approximately 30,000 employees. Approximately half were in the headquarters office. The rest were in ten major and several smaller subordinate field organizations at various sites throughout the country.

The incumbent advised top management and human resources (HR) technical experts throughout the agency on compensation issues. The position was responsible for devising new methods and policy for compensating employees who were covered by several different titles under United States Code. Regulations governing compensation for some positions were virtually nonexistent, but could be developed based on existing compensation systems for other positions. The incumbent believed that Level 1-9 could be satisfied if the position met any of the four listed criteria. The agency, however, maintained that Level 1-9 defined two separate work situations. It held that the first criterion stood alone since it is separated from the rest of the criteria by “or.” Since the three remaining criteria are joined by “and,” the agency said that all three remaining criteria had to be met to credit Level 1-9 for that work situation.

Resolution

OPM agreed with the agency that Level 1-9 identifies two situations. The first situation is a conceptual expert who is generating new concepts, principles, and methods to achieve HR goals. A position must substantially exceed Level 1-8 before this first situation at Level 1-9 can be considered. Level 1-8 describes applying a mastery of advanced HR management principles, concepts, regulations, and practices to resolve problems not susceptible to treatment by standard methods. One JFS illustration at Level 1-8 describes a staff-level advisor on compensation issues, who develops and provides policy guidance on a wide range of compensation programs, analyzes proposed legislation and regulations for impact on agency policies and programs, and develops broad policies and programs to implement these major changes. In contrast, Level 1-9 positions conceptualize new methods, principles and concepts to resolve broader systemic HR problems. These problems typically exist within the agency or are shared among agencies, and the new concepts and methods have broad impact within and possibly beyond the agency. Such concept development and methods implementation may require new legislation and considerable resources.

The second situation is that of a functional program expert who conceives, plans, and manages broad, emerging, or critical large-scale agency programs; serves as an expert and consultant to top agency management officials; and advises other HR experts throughout the agency on major program issues. In order to exceed the Level 1-8 criteria and meet the second situation at Level 1-9, positions must possess all three of the identified characteristics since they are all inherent in positions serving HR programs which have the difficulty and breadth intended for that level. At Level 1-9, the program is nationwide or broader in scope. Issues are demanding because of intense Congressional interest, unprecedented factual concerns, the need to balance conflicting interests of extreme intensity involving future application of the program's product or results, or because the extreme magnitude of the program ultimately affects the Nation's economy or foreign economies. The position in question had agency-wide responsibility (for approximately 30,000 employees) but did not routinely handle the large-scale and demanding issues found at Level 1-9. Therefore, OPM advised that the position was properly credited at Level 1-8.