



# United States Office of Personnel Management

**Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness**  
*Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions*  
April 2002  
Article No. 28-03

**Standard:** [Medical Technologist, GS-644](#) (May 1984)

**Factor:** Factors 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**Issue:** Evaluating testing and laboratory operation responsibilities

## **Identification of the Classification Issue**

The appellants' positions were classified as Medical Technologists, GS-644-9. They were located in a medical center laboratory that also provided area referral services to other medical facilities. The appellants served as technical experts in their specialized areas and were responsible for all day-to-day operations in a laboratory section. The operations included handling and ensuring the integrity of specimens, performing clinical tests, verifying and reporting results, maintaining equipment, ensuring quality control, correlating data, advising hospital staff, and training employees. The appellants disagreed with the agency's evaluation of Factors 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

## **Resolution**

The appellants conducted a full range of routine and specialized or nonroutine tests, which required a series of complex steps. They also evaluated new procedures, systems, and equipment and ensured quality control for the operating program. On the surface, the work appeared to meet Factor Level 1-7, where positions solve very complex problems; revise standard methods to improve or extend test systems; or evaluate, modify, or adapt new methods. The appellants, however, were not required to make significant departures from previously established approaches, and there was a limit to the modifications they could make in order to protect the integrity of the tests they performed. Instead of developing tests as found at Level 1-7, they used available tests and adapted or modified them to meet their needs.

The appellants worked in components of a major program area -- the pathology department. They worked independently, made day-to-day decisions on what procedures needed to be performed for the work, seldom had their work reviewed, and had significant responsibilities for conducting the work in their laboratories. However, the department's Laboratory Officer established the overall priorities and objectives of the department and determined the available resources. Therefore, the appellants' positions failed to fully meet Level 2-4 since they did not have the full range of responsibilities associated with carrying out a major program.

The appellants used sound professional judgment in interpreting and adapting instructions and protocols for new tests being introduced in the laboratory in accordance with established policies and accepted practices. However, because of the need for test and quality control integrity, there was a limit to how much the appellants could deviate from accepted practices and guidelines. Unlike Level 3-4, they did not develop new procedures and methods nor substantially modify guidelines to resolve technical problems.

Because of cost, the laboratory seldom purchased state-of-the-art equipment. The manufacturers' representatives normally provided training on using new equipment. Because of limits on deviating from accepted practices and guidelines, the appellants did not frequently develop new methods, test new equipment, develop assays or quality control procedures for tests, nor perform equivalent functions found at Level 4-4.

The appellants' work affected the outcome of the tests performed, the diagnosis and treatment of patients, and the operation of the laboratory. The work did not meet Level 5-4 since it did not involve problems that were systemic in nature involving major testing or quality assurance systems and processes, and it did not affect total laboratory systems/programs related to the operation of other laboratories, e.g., developing reference methods.

In evaluating the positions, OPM found that the positions were limited by the nature of the tests, the extent of modification and adaptation permitted, and the overall direction provided by the department supervisor. OPM agreed with the agency's crediting of Levels 1-6, 2-3, 3-3, 4-3 and 5-3.

### **“Back to the Basics”**

The total environment in which a position operates and the limitations imposed by oversight of other positions and guidelines or regulatory requirements must be considered when evaluating a position. In this situation, test and quality control standards limited the opportunity for more difficult testing and development of new procedures in the laboratories where the appellants worked.

**Link to [C-0644-09-01](#)**