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Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standard: [Telecommunications Series, GS-0391](#) (March 1990)
Factor: Factor 1 - Knowledge Required by the Position
Issue: Interpretation of mastery requirement (Level 1-8)

Identification of the Classification Issue

The issue arose in the adjudication of an appeal remanded to an Office of Personnel Management region. In its original decision, the Region evaluated Factor 1 of the appellant's position at Level 1-7. The appellant, in a request for reconsideration, stated that his position of Telecommunications Manager for a Federal installation should be evaluated at Level 1-8. He felt that the work he performed demonstrated a mastery of general telecommunications policy, technology, and programs by successfully incorporating all communications into a totally integrated system. He believed that the system, which included radio, telephone, data, and microwave systems, required in-depth expertise as a specialization in itself and should carry as much weight as any of the examples of specializations mentioned in the classification standard.

Resolution

Level 1-8 in the GS-0391 standard defines a mastery requirement as one sufficient to function as an expert and technical authority in a specialty area. The standard provides illustrations at this level. While these illustrations do not have the import of factor level descriptions, which describe minimum requirements, they do provide specific situations which have knowledge requirements that have been rated by the standard at Level 1-8. These situations typically represent significant numbers of positions within the occupation as a whole. Although the absence of a work situation from the illustrations does not preclude evaluation of the knowledge required in the situation at Level 1-8, the illustrations do help to clarify the overall intent of the factor level description. Illustrations, therefore, should be used in interpreting the factor level descriptions.

An audit of the appellant's position showed that the telephone, data and radio systems were primarily limited to the appellant's activity. Because it was linked to two other microwave systems that were administered by two different activities, the microwave system of the appellant's activity affected power transmission switching capability, data transmission, and law enforcement radio communications of those two organizations. The telecommunications equipment required for the appellant's activity ranged in age from 12 years old to state-of-the-art. The appellant's contacts primarily consisted of activity managers, telecommunications specialists and users of the other two systems. The work did not require him to apply new theories, concepts, or developments to communications problems not susceptible to treatment by accepted methods, technology, or procedures. Nor was he required to make decisions or recommendations significantly to change, interpret, or develop policies or programs. Thus, his work fell short of the technical authority role and did not require mastery of a specialty area as described in the factor level description at Level 1-8.

One of the illustrations at Level 1-8 describes a telecommunications specialist who plans, organizes, and directs studies to develop long-range (e.g., 5+ years) studies and forecasts and advises top level agency telecommunications and subject-matter managers on applying new developments and advances in the specialty area. Another illustration describes a specialist who makes decisions and develops policies in very difficult assignments such as planning for significantly new or far-reaching telecommunications program requirements, or leading or participating as a technical expert in interagency groups for resolving problems in existing telecommunications systems and programs requiring innovative solutions.

These illustrations clearly show that at Level 1-8, a technical authority role requiring a mastery of an area reflects broad expertise in the specialization or a comprehensive knowledge of telecommunications policy requirements rather than expertise in a specific integrated system or policy requirements at a local or regional level. A Level 1-8 specialist might be someone who regularly provides guidance to operating level telecommunications managers like the appellant on matters such as the application of new technology to specific activity systems. In addition to failing to match Level 1-8 as presented in the factor level description, the appellant's work did not compare with any of the illustrations at this level. Thus, his position was evaluated at Level 1-7.