



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. 25-06

Standard: [Grade Level Guide for Aid and Technical Work in the Biological Sciences, GS-400 \(Guide\) \(November 1991\)](#)

Factor: Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

Issues: Distinguishing between Levels 1-5 and 1-6

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellant's primary duties were to provide forestry technician support for reforestation and timber stand improvement (TSI) projects for the northernmost part of the District. His reforestation efforts included determining planting needs, site preparation, plantation and cultivation, and seedling survival. Work associated with TSI projects included exams and treatments such as precommercial thinning, pruning, and aerial fertilization. Once decisions were made on how to proceed with reforestation and TSI efforts, much of the fieldwork was contracted out. The appellant served as the Contracting Officer's Representative on these contracts, especially those involving helicopter usage due to his expertise as a helicopter manager. In addition, he used PC and IBM computer programs and databases to collect information regarding the District's activities and accomplishments. At issue was whether these functions and the knowledge they required met Level 1-6.

Resolution

The appellant's rationale was that he was an expert, as defined at Level 1-6, in a narrow specialty area of a scientific field and administrative responsibilities over a block of technical work. The GS-400 Guide, however, explains that *all* technician positions cannot realistically be structured to reach Level 1-6 because of a variety of organizational reasons, including the amount and type of high level work available in the organization; the organization's willingness to delegate authority and controls for programs and projects; the availability, number, and/or assigned responsibilities of on-site professional

workers, technician supervisors, or work leaders; ability of the technician; and other such limiting factors.

OPM found that the appellant's position required knowledge of the technical methods and procedures, management practices, agency policies and programs, as well as an extensive familiarity with the methods and practices of silviculture and forest management. This knowledge was used to schedule, organize, and execute projects relating to the reforestation and TSI efforts within the District and to administer projects through database management, contract management, and an expertise in helicopter management for aerial fertilization efforts.

Although the appellant's vast experience allowed him to provide valuable support to the District's reforestation and TSI efforts, the presence of a Silviculture Technician, GS-9, within the same organization limited the appellant's program functions. The GS-9 position served as a project manager and was responsible for the effective planning and overall performance of all reforestation, timber stand protection, and TSI activities for the District. This was substantiated by the supervisor who said that the appellant and another Silviculture Technician, GS-7, worked on portions of the District's programs. However, the GS-9 coordinated their portions into the larger overall program. Therefore, the appellant was responsible for design, coordination, and execution of projects typical of Level 1-5. Although the appellant worked on projects independently and reported to the Assistant District Ranger, the supervisor relied on the Silviculture Technician, GS-9, to coordinate the appellant's work with other work in the organizational unit. In turn, the appellant's supervisor used knowledge of management practices and the agency's policies and programs to serve as the final authority for the District's reforestation and TSI programs. OPM credited Level 1-5.

“Back to the Basics”

This decision illustrates that classification standards must be applied in an internally consistent manner. Even when positions in an organization are assigned responsible and demanding work, all cannot be credited at the expert level. The existence of a higher level technician with program responsibility for most of the appellant's more complex assignments, coupled with the program controls exercised by the appellant's immediate supervisor, precluded crediting the position at Level 1-6.

Link to [C-0462-07-03](#)