

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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:

[name and address of three original appellants]

[name and address of representative]

[name and address of servicing HR office]

Deputy Director
Human Resources Directorate
Defense Finance and Accounting Service
1931 Jefferson Davis Highway, Room 312
Arlington, VA 22240-5291

Chief, Classification Appeals Adjudication Section
U.S. Department of Defense
Civilian Personnel Management Service
1400 Key Boulevard, Suite B-200
Arlington, VA 22209-5144

Introduction

On October 20, 2006, the Dallas Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [name] and [second name], through their union representative. The appellants occupy identical additional positions currently classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7, which they believe should be classified at the GS-9 level. The appellants work in the Operations Directorate, Finance Operations, Military Pay Operations, Defense Military Pay Office (DMPO), Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), in [installation]. Each appellant assists different DMPO users, but they perform essentially identical duties and are assigned to the same official position description (PD), number [number]. Therefore, we have processed this case as a group appeal. We received the agency's administrative report on December 14, 2006, and the appellants' comments on that report on January 8, 2007. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

Background and general issues

The appellants and another co-worker, [third name] previously occupied identical additional Financial Systems Assistant, GS-503-7, positions (hereinafter referred to as "position"). They requested a review of the position from the human resources (HR) office at DFAS's Military Pay Office in [city and state], on December 9, 2004. The findings, dated April 18, 2005, determined their positions were appropriately classified as GS-503-7.

The appellants and [third name], through their union representative, sent an appeal request to OPM on September 15, 2006, which indicated disagreement with both the series and grade of their position, stating their duties should be classified at a higher grade using the criteria in the Job Family Standard (JFS) for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200. In response to OPM's request for the agency's appeal administrative report, the servicing HR office again reviewed and reclassified their position as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7. A new PD, number [number], and its evaluation statement, dated December 12, 2006, were developed and signed by their immediate supervisor as accurate. Meanwhile, [third name] was selected for and placed in another position. Since an employee can only appeal the classification of his/her current, official position, [third name]'s appeal request must be cancelled as she is no longer assigned to the appealed position.

The appellants and [third name] asked if they are entitled to back pay should the appeal result favorably for them. The U.S. Comptroller General states that an "...employee is entitled only to the salary of the position to which he is actually appointed, regardless of the duties performed. When an employee performs the duties of a higher grade level, no entitlement to the salary of the higher grade exists until such time as the individual is actually promoted. . . . Consequently, backpay is not available as a remedy for misassignments to higher level duties or improper classifications" (Comptroller General decision B-232695, December 15, 1989).

Position information

The appellants' position supports the local DMPO, whose mission is to provide military and travel pay entitlement support to the 46,000 to 51,000 soldiers assigned to [installation]. The appellants' position is supervised by the incumbent of a Supervisory Financial Management Specialist, GS-501-12, who manages military pay operations with approximately 164 employees including a mix of nonsupervisory, supervisory, and lead GS-545, military pay technicians; GS-503, financial technicians; and a GS-303, office assistant.

The appellants' major duties and responsibilities include providing technical support on computer hardware and software to DMPO employees located in three buildings with an estimated 300 desktop computers, 15 laptops, three servers, and related peripheral equipment. Prior to [third name] departure, each was assigned to manage a server located at each of the three DMPO buildings and assist the connected employees. The supervisor indicated the vacant position is not likely to be filled, so [third name]'s work was divided equally between the appellants. They manage servers by backing up the programs daily; monitoring and researching anomalies with the events log to detect attempted access by unauthorized personnel; maintaining and implementing an active directory of resources, services, and users; applying and updating hardware and software packages from DFAS and [installation]'s Directorate of Information Management (DOIM); manually updating patches; and connecting equipment to the local area network (LAN) and the appropriate server.

The appellants set up and maintain workstations. Before employees are given computer privileges, the appellants ensure employees pass a test administered by the Department of the Army (DA) on computer do's and don'ts. The appellants then request new user accounts after being notified by DOIM when individuals complete the test. They train new employees on a variety of topics including, but not limited to, security requirements and how to use computers, software, and the common access card (CAC). The appellants, in addition to installing CAC readers, also train employees on using the "smart card" to access their computer systems. Indicative of their work, the DMPO received approximately 80 new computers to replace those aged and/or corrupted, requiring the appellants to ship them to DOIM for loading the basic software, Microsoft Office 2003 Professional and Windows 2003 Professional Operating System. Afterwards, the appellants retrieve computers to load appropriate pay and travel software, install, set up, and map the users with the appropriate network and server. They also maintain hand receipts, which is DA's accounting and tracking method for property and equipment.

The appellants respond to user-reported problems and issues on a daily basis. They work with users to identify the origin of the problem, troubleshoot hardware and software problems, and ensure the problem is resolved. They deal with a wide range of technical problems but most commonly involve network access, printers, e-mails, etc. They make recommendations for replacing older and slower equipment, and then determine where new equipment will be installed. The appellants also issue information bulletins to users regarding hardware and software problems that are usually triggered by notices from DOIM, DFAS, or DOD. They also serve as System Administrators (SA) and Information Assurance (IA) Security Officers (IASO), which require obtaining proper certification and completing training and refresher courses. In

addition to SA and IASO duties discussed previously, they also include providing staff with quarterly computer security briefings, monitoring and enforcing compliance with security requirements, reporting and/or resolving security violations, ensuring systems or networks are accredited, unlocking user accounts, resetting passwords, etc. The appellants also assist the constantly shifting finance battalion personnel with various problems including those involving the pay software. They also provide one-day classes, three times a year, to designated battalion staff on the server and specifically how to install finance software.

The appellants' PD and other material of record furnish much more information about their duties and responsibilities and how they are performed. The PD is adequate for classification purposes, and we incorporate it by reference into this decision. To help decide this appeal, we conducted telephone audits with the appellants and [third name] on February 26, 2007, and March 28, 2007. We also conducted telephone interviews with the immediate supervisor on March 15, 2007, and DOIM's Information Assurance Manager (IAM) on March 28, 2007. In reaching our decision, we carefully considered all of the information gained from these interviews, as well as the written information furnished by the appellants and the agency.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency assigned the appellants' position to the GS-335, Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, titled it Computer Assistant, and used the GS-335 position classification standard (PCS) to determine the grade of their position. In their initial request, the appellants indicated disagreement first with the GS-503 series and, subsequently, the GS-335 series by describing what they considered similarities between their duties and responsibilities to GS-2210, Information Technology Management work. However, during the telephone audit, the appellants said they did not disagree with the GS-335 series. After careful review of the record, we concur.

Grade determination

The GS-335 PCS uses the Factor Evaluation System format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are assigned for each of the nine factors. The total is converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table in the standard. Under this system, each factor-level description demonstrates the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. If a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor-level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level.

Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that employees must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

At Level 1-4, employees perform a wide range of preparing, advising, assisting, coding, and procedure-related problem-solving duties using knowledge of computer procedures and processing methods. Work at this level involves knowledge of one or more of the following: at least one programming language; system control language; system hardware, software, and

program capabilities for multi-programming systems operating in more than two partitions; terminology, codes, abbreviations, and graphics for preparing systems documentation or programs; program data contents and methods for defining and retrieving non-standard data and reports. These knowledges are used to assist programmers or other users.

At Level 1-5, employees carry out limited specialized projects using knowledge of fundamental data processing methods, practices, and techniques in work involving the development, test, implementation, and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. Work at this level involves using knowledge as the basis for analysis and decision-making in several fundamental settings.

The appellants' position meets Level 1-4. As at this level, they perform a wide range of duties including solving hardware and software problems requiring knowledge of hardware, software, and program capabilities and limitations. They perform a wide range of duties associated with using computer hardware, software, and the peripheral equipment in a network environment, so they must be knowledgeable of the computer operating systems and of the system peripherals such as printers, scanners, and fax machines. The appellants assist DMPO and finance battalion users by advising them on system capabilities and how to meet their data needs. They also apply knowledge of computer components, applications, and operating systems to install DFAS-approved software, recover from network interruptions, train new users, and provide fundamental technical guidance to users when serving as a help desk consultant (e.g., resolving routine printer or e-mail problems, identifying the source of problems when users cannot connect to the network, and resetting passwords). Similar to Level 1-4, most of the problems encountered by the appellants are recurring in nature and are generally resolved by applying their experience and knowledge of the systems, equipment, and programs involved.

The appellants' position does not meet Level 1-5, where assignments involve developing, testing, implementing, *and* modifying computer programs and operating procedures. Employees at this level prepare programs or write new program documentation and operating procedures. In contrast, the appellants' regular and recurring work supports use of software that is not modified. Their work also does not involve responsibility for program development. Similarly, their hardware work is based on applying knowledge of directly applicable manufacturer's installation, maintenance, and repair procedures. Any work equivalent to the development and modification of program and procedures (or analogous decisions on system hardware) are assigned to higher graded employees. For example, the appellants, along with the other approximately 580 [installation] SAs and IASOs, attend quarterly conferences at DOIM's Information Management Security Council and other IAM-chaired meetings. They discuss policy guidance, actions to be taken against potential threats, tightening security measures, and other DOD- or DA-issued command instructions. The duties and responsibilities to be performed by the appellants (i.e., communicating information to users, implementing plans, prioritizing work, etc.) require an understanding of various hardware and software programs, but the work does not require the in-depth knowledge of systems and programs indicative of Level 1-5 and common to the conception rather than the execution stages of the program planning process.

The appellants play a significant role in ensuring DMPO staff complies with computer security requirements, which involves taking immediate steps to resolve instances of non-compliance, and reporting them, if severe enough, to higher level officials like the supervisor or DOIM. Security issues range from unintentionally using the CAC improperly to visiting inappropriate Web sites. They also prepare the office for IA inspections conducted by DFAS and [installation] personnel by ensuring compliance with agency directives, regulations, and instructions. These and other examples characteristic of the appellants' work assignments do not require knowledge to develop, test, implement, or modify computer programs and operating procedures expected at Level 1-5.

Level 1-4 is credited for 550 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct and indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the degree to which work is reviewed by the supervisor.

At Level 2-3, which is the highest level described in the PCS, the supervisor provides direction on objectives and priorities for new work, deadlines, and deadline changes for new and established work. The employee identifies the work to be done, plans and carries out the steps required, and submits completed work to users without supervisory review. The employee independently deviates from instructions to provide for lower or higher priorities and other changes based on past experience and flexibility within processing specification. The employee commonly adapts or develops new work procedures and instructions for application by self and others, but he or she will seek supervisory assistance and discuss work problems such as when processing requests appear to exceed system capacity or could have an adverse effect on other processing requirements. Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices on the basis of responses from technical and functional users regarding the quality and accuracy of work products. Work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring common pattern of problems develops.

The appellants' supervisory controls meet but do not exceed Level 2-3. Comparable to this level, the appellants are responsible for determining the approaches to be taken and the methodology to be used in accomplishing assignments such as providing computer support to avoid work stoppages in military pay processing caused by hardware or software problems. As a GS-503 Financial Management Specialist, the supervisor provides minimal technical supervision, allowing the appellants significant latitude to independently plan and carry out their assignments; interpret policies, procedures, and practices based on established objectives; and resolve the majority of conflicts that arise. Their work assignments are derived through problems that arise, the normal course of planning and carrying out the work to be done, or inquiries received by DMPO or finance battalion customers. The appellants use initiative in carrying out recurring assignments independently without specific instructions; however, unusual, sensitive, or potentially controversial situations are referred to the supervisor and/or sources of technical direction like the IAM or the DOIM and DFAS help desk operators. For example, when identifying security breaches or instances of improper computer usage, the

appellants are responsible for reporting the situation to the supervisor and IAM. The supervisor said he completes a cursory review of the appellants' work in that work performance is measured based on whether computer systems and networks are working well. Similar to Level 2-3, the supervisor also reviews completed work in terms of adequacy based on feedback from DMPO users about the quality and accuracy of the work.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

Level 3-3, the highest level described in the PCS, includes employees working with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidelines are available. The employee uses judgment in adjusting the most appropriate guidelines to fit new processing requirements or develop new methods for accomplishing the work. Guidelines may require modification to provide for adding new forms of input, allowing for flexible as opposed to fixed scheduling, adjusting to new or conflicting requirements, or adapting to a new hardware or software capability.

The appellants' guidelines meet but do not exceed Level 3-3. Their guidelines consist of various agency regulations, instructions, and directives issued by DOD, DA, DFAS, and DOIM. Information technology security compliance responsibilities are described in Army Regulation 25-1 (Army Knowledge Management and Information Technology Management) and 25-2 (IA), as well as the DOD 8500.1 directive and 8500.2 instructions on IA. Guidance also includes user manuals, training books, and procedural manuals typically provided by hardware and software vendors and supplemented by information on their Web sites. Much of the guidance is specific in nature, but the appellants use judgment to interpret, adapt, and apply this guidance, as at Level 3-3, to determine which is more appropriate for resolving local problems relating to computer workstations/system operations and to integrate new hardware and software into existing systems while maintaining compatibility and accomplishing work.

Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers 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 involved in performing the work.

At Level 4-3, the employee performs a variety of tasks involving discrete methods and procedures, or a variety of related tasks requiring a sequence of actions involving differing methods and procedures. The decision regarding what is to be done results from studying each assignment or processing problem situation.

The highest level described in the PCS is Level 4-4, which is distinguished from Level 4-3 by (1) the variety and complexity of operating systems monitored, (2) the nature and variety of problems encountered and resolved, *and* (3) the nature of independent decisions made by the employee. Employees at this level perform problem-solving duties involving a wide range of problem or error conditions in equipment, program data, and processing methods and procedures. This diagnosis and resolution of problems involves equipment configurations with different operating characteristics, a variety of data and programs, and many different processes and methods to arrive at solutions or develop new procedures. Decisions regarding what needs to be done include assessing unusual circumstances or conditions, developing variations in approach to fit the specific problems, or dealing with incomplete or conflicting data.

Level 4-3 is met. Similar to this level, the appellants' work objectives are normally clear; but the means to accomplish them is determined through consideration of customer desires, established hardware or software logic, and system constraints. Their determination of actions to take in resolving problems is based on the results of a series of standard, sequenced diagnostic procedures to isolate and identify the problem. After identifying the problem, the appellants determine if a resolution can be accomplished through using routine or standard corrective procedures and selecting the one most appropriate for the situation. When problems are beyond their capabilities, the appellants seek assistance from the IAM, DOIM and DFAS help desk operators, base peers, hardware and software manufacturers, vendors, or various informational Web sites.

Level 4-4 is not met. The appellants' work involves responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the [installation] DMPO network and server. However, DOIM, as the primary information management liaison between [installation] and DA, maintains overall responsibility for network management. DOIM ensures SAs and IASOs are properly certified and aware of DOD's and DA's information management priorities and mandates. DOIM is responsible for managing around 18,000 computer users (as estimated by e-mail accounts) and 30,000 computers located in 800 buildings throughout [installation]. The appellants serve as the liaison between DOIM and DMPO by providing hands-on automation support for the organization's network and three servers. This environment does not equate to Level 4-4, where the employee works with major systems containing multiple processors, a variety of underlying operating systems, and programs that are a mixture of independent and interdependent applications. The appellants resolve a variety of problems or error conditions related to the networked system, but the problems encountered are not of the unusual nature, magnitude, or complexity as those typically found in major computer systems. Responsibility for issues of this nature is not vested in the appellants' organization or their positions.

All DMPO computers include a Microsoft package, Adobe Acrobat Reader, WinZip, Pure Edge for forms automation, and an array of security software from Tumbleweed, Symantec, and McAfee Active Client. DFAS has approximately 10 pay and travel software programs, and the appellants decide which programs to load based on where computers are assigned. For example, the appellants load the Integrated Automated Travel System for Windows on computers assigned to the in/out processing and travel sections, DynaComm/Elite and Cognos's Operational Data Store for the travel and disbursing sections, Offline to the military pay section, etc. The appellants are typically not called upon to resolve problems with program content, setup, or

functions. Instead, they regularly resolve problems related to installing the more cumbersome software and losing network connectivity, which typically requires contact with the DOIM help desk which can temporarily provide full administrator rights to allow them to load programs directly from the server. DOIM, in monitoring the DMPO network, will automatically disable network connectivity if they detect any unauthorized users in the system. When DMPO users are unable to access programs due to these disruptions, the appellants take necessary steps to determine, first, why the connection was lost and, second, how to resume program operations. Unlike Level 4-4, the appellants' decisions do not require assessing unusual circumstances or conditions (e.g., identifying an anomaly in network scans); developing variations in approach to fit specific problems (e.g., taking steps to ensure network security after choosing the best course of action from many alternatives); *and* dealing with incomplete or conflicting data (e.g., conducting investigations into the identity of and reason for the unauthorized user and how the network was breached).

DOIM automatically installs hardware and software patches onto the DMPO network. Should installation problems occur, DOIM notifies the appellants to manually install the "fix" to each workstation. The appellants' role is essential in this process, but this and other examples characteristic of their work do not involve the level of variety and complexity of operating systems and the nature of independent decisions typical at Level 4-4. The appellants' position is comparable to Level 4-3 in that their work assists and supports the organization by setting up and maintaining users' software and hardware components.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work (e.g., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment) and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

Level 5-3, which is the highest level described in the PCS, is distinguished from Level 5-2 by the addition of requirements for solving problems and answering technical questions about control, scheduling, and/or direct support functions. The problems and error conditions encountered are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established or standardized procedures. Work results affect the efficiency of processing services, adequacy of products used in subsequent activities, and processing procedures and methods.

The appellants' work meets but does not exceed Level 5-3. Similar to Level 5-3, their duties involve resolving a range of problems in accordance with established criteria, answering technical questions, and maintaining hardware and software capabilities. Their work directly affects the [installation] DMPO's processing procedures and methods, and ultimately the efficiency of their military pay processing operation.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 6, Personal Contacts

This factor considers face-to-face and telephone contacts with people not in the supervisory chain.

The appellants' contacts meet but do not exceed Level 6-2, which is the highest level described in the PCS. At Level 6-2, contacts are with specialists and recipients of services who are employees of the same agency but outside the immediate organization, employees of other agencies who use the facility, or contractors' representatives such as vendor repair technicians. Contacts are structured and routine where the role of each participant is readily determined. This matches the appellants' contacts, which include primarily DMPO employees, finance battalion staff, DOIM and DFAS help desk operators, the IAM, other base Computer Assistants, hardware and software vendors, and equipment repair technicians. Their contacts usually take place in a moderately structured setting similar to the Level 6-2 description.

Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of Personal Contacts

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

The appellants' position meets but does not exceed Level 7-2, which is the highest level described in the PCS. As at Level 7-2, the appellants' contacts are for the purpose of coordinating work, resolving hardware and software problems, providing technical advice and assistance to users, and training new and existing users on a range of hardware- and software-related issues.

Level 7-2 is credited for 50 points.

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignments.

The appellants' position meets Level 8-2, where work requires extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, stooping, or carrying equipment weighing as much as 45 pounds. The appellants regularly carry heavy equipment when transporting computer equipment to DOIM, which is approximately one mile away, for imaging of basic software or repair. They also set up computer systems at mobilization (MOB) and demobilization (DMOB) sites staged at gymnasiums throughout the base with laptops, printers, etc. Moving equipment to and from computer workstations requires stooping, bending, crouching, and kneeling, as at Level 8-2, to disconnect and reinstall equipment or position peripheral equipment like printers or fax machines.

The appellants' position does not meet Level 8-3, since their work does not require the regular and recurring lifting and carrying of objects weighing over 50 pounds and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier objects expected at this level. Level 8-2 is credited for 20 points.

Factor 9, Work Environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required.

The agency credited the appellants' position at Level 9-2, but we found the position meets Level 9-1. As at Level 9-1, the appellants' work involves common risks or discomforts requiring normal safety precautions typical of offices. The appellants observe common electrical safety practices when setting up workstations or installing computer equipment at MOB and DMOB sites. Similar to Level 9-1, the work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

In contrast to Level 9-2, the appellants' work does not involve moderate risks requiring exercising safety precautions when operating or working around equipment with exposed moving parts similar to those found in decollators, bursters, etc. The appellants' work environment does not involve this level of risk nor does it require special clothing or protective equipment as expected at Level 9-2. Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6. Personal Contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of Personal Contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical Demands	8-2	20
9. Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total</i>		1,500

A total of 1,500 points falls within the GS-7 range (1,355 to 1,600) on the grade conversion table in the standard.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7.